

Artwork



One of the highlights for many of the people who visit Hoover Dam each year is the artwork they find. While most people are impressed by these works, they often ask the question, "What do they mean?"

Much of the sculpture is the work of Norwegian-born, naturalized American Oskar J.W. Hansen. Mr. Hansen fielded many questions about his work while it was being installed at the dam. In response to those questions, he later wrote about his interpretation of his sculptures.

Hoover Dam, said Hansen, represented for him the building genius of America, "a monument to collective genius exerting itself in community efforts around a common need or ideal." He compared the dam to such works as the great pyramids of Egypt, and said that, when viewing these man-made structures, the viewer often asks of their builders, "What manner of men were these?"

The sculptor, according to Hansen, tries to answer this question objectively, by "interpreting man to other men in the terms of the man himself." "In each of these monuments," he said, "can be read the characteristics of these men, and on a larger scale, the community of which they are part. Thus, mankind itself is the subject of the sculptures at Hoover Dam."

Hansen's principal work at Hoover Dam is the monument of dedication on the Nevada side of the dam. Here, rising from a black, polished base, is a 142-foot flagpole flanked by two winged figures, which Hansen calls the Winged Figures of the Republic. They express "the immutable calm of intellectual resolution, and the enormous power of trained physical strength, equally enthroned in placid triumph of scientific accomplishment."

"The building of Hoover Dam belongs to the sagas of the daring. The winged bronzes which guard the flag, therefore, wear the look of eagles. To them also was given the vital upward thrust of an aspirational gesture; to symbolize the readiness for defense of our institutions and keeping of our spiritual eagles ever ready to be on the wing."

The winged figures are 30 feet high. Their shells are 5/8-inch thick, and contain more than 4 tons of statuary bronze. The figures were formed from sand molds weighing 492 tons. The bronze that forms the shells was heated to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit, and poured into the molds in one continuous, molten stream.

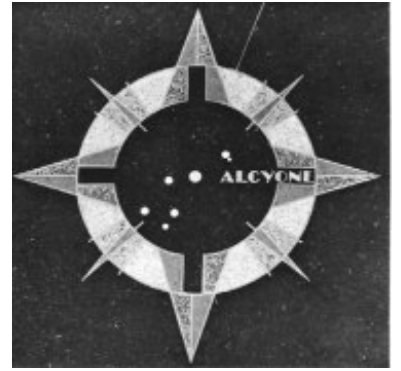
The figures rest on a base of black diorite, an igneous rock. In order to place the blocks without marring their highly polished finish, they were centered on blocks of ice, and guided precisely into place as the ice melted. After the blocks were in place, the flagpole was dropped through a hole in the center block into a predrilled hole in the mountain.



Surrounding the base is a terrazzo floor, inlaid with a star chart, or celestial map. The chart preserves for future generations the date on which President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated Hoover Dam, September 30, 1935.

The apparent magnitudes of stars on the chart are shown as they would appear to the naked eye at a distance of about 190 trillion miles from earth. In reality, the distance to most of the stars is more than 950 trillion miles.

In this celestial map, the bodies of the solar system are placed so exactly that those versed in astronomy could calculate the precession (progressively earlier occurrence) of the Pole Star for approximately the next 14,000 years. Conversely, future generations could look upon this monument and determine, if no other means were available, the exact date on which Hoover Dam was dedicated.



Near the figures and elevated above the floor is a compass, framed by the signs of the zodiac.

Hansen also designed the plaque commemorating the 96 men who officially died during the construction of Hoover Dam, as well as the bas-relief series on both the Nevada and Arizona elevator towers. The plaque, originally set into the canyon wall on the Arizona side of the dam, is now located near the winged figures. It reads:



"They died to make the desert bloom. The United States of America will continue to remember that many who toiled here found their final rest while engaged in the building of this dam. The United States of America will continue to remember the services of all who labored to clothe with substance the plans of those who first visioned the building of this dam."

There are four towers sticking up from the top of the dam. The middle two are elevators and they are decorated with bas-relief.

The five bas-reliefs on the Nevada elevator tower, done in concrete, show the multipurpose benefits of Hoover Dam: flood control, navigation, irrigation, water storage, and power. (shown at left)

On the Arizona elevator tower is a series of five bas-reliefs, also in concrete, depicting "the visages of those Indian tribes who have inhabited mountains and plains from ages distant." Accompanying the illustrations is the inscription, "Since primordial times, American Indian tribes and Nations lifted their hands to the Great Spirit from these ranges and plains. We now with them in peace buildeth again a Nation."





During the construction of Hoover Dam there were few jobs that equaled the high visibility of the high scaler. A man hanging hundreds of feet in the air on the side of a deep canyon, knocking away loose rock and setting dynamite charges with a jackhammer sparked romantic images of courage and daring.

In 1995, local sculptor Steven Liguori and Hoover Dam Spillway House concessionaire Bert Hansen decided to create a bronze high scaler statue in the likeness of Joe Kine, one of the last surviving high scalers who worked on the Hoover Dam project. A clear picture of Joe Kine existed showing him in his working environment and was used as a guide to create the bronze figure. Upon completion the statue was presented to Joe on September 30, 1995, Hoover Dam's sixtieth anniversary.



In 1998, Steven Liguori and Bert Hansen discussed the construction of a High Scaler monument dedicated to the builders of Hoover Dam. The undertaking of such a project seemed impossible. However, the blind vendors who participate in the Nevada State Business Enterprise Program (BEP) felt their sponsorship of this project would be a great opportunity to pay tribute to those men, and at the same time, express their gratitude for the years of involvement at Hoover Dam through concessions at the Arizona Lookout, Hoover Dam Spillway House (formerly Snacketeria), Hoover Dam Store, and High Scaler Cafe.

Once the decision was made to proceed with the project Steven set to work making a bigger than life statue. The statue was placed near the dam's new concession facility, "The High Scaler Cafe".