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## A Work in Progress

Artist carves a mark into Tulsa art scenery, and TYPros launches annual exhibit

BY LIBBY WILLIAMS

Tulsans will have the opportunity to meet Smithsonian taxidermist turned sculptor, Paul D. Rhymer on Saturday, July 31 at Lovett's Gallery, 6528 E. 51st St.

This Maryland-based artist will be creating a sculpture on-site for visitors to ask questions and witness his process of creating a bronze-caste sculpture between 10am and 6pm. This event is a part of Lovett's Gallery's "Meet the Artist" programming in which the gallery's represented artists travel to Tulsa to connect with Tulsans and promote interest in their work.

Rhymer began working for the Smithsonian performing taxidermy and model-making 25 years ago. This profession gave him a unique understanding of nature and the anatomy of animals. Ten years ago, Rhymer began translating his impressions of wildlife and nature into his own sculptures.

His basic training in model making and taxidermy was an unconventional yet perfect fitting stepping stone for him to begin a career as a fine artist making work inspired by the subject matter with which he had become so familiar. Rhymer created his first sculptor caste in bronze in 1999 and since has developed a prolific body of work including all walks of life from birds and mammals to site specific garden sculptures.

Rhymer's work is beautifully crafted and through the unique surface textures he develops, Rhymer is able to leave his mark as the artist and creator of each piece. The pieces range in size from two inches to six feet. In the past, Rhymer's work has been created specifically for table top surfaces, but recently he has become interested in pursuing garden sculptures that allow each piece to become a part of nature.

In a piece titled, "Free Ride," Rhymer created a life-size hippo seen swimming under water so that only its head and back are visible. Resting on the hippo's back is a small water bird. Both are exchanging quizzical looks regarding their situation. The bird is surprised that the "rock" it landed on is not in fact a rock but a moving animal, and the hippo is at the moment of discovering it has a passenger aboard its back.

This humorous exchange serves as a mechanism to keep the viewer's eye moving around the sculpture and creates an engaging narrative between the two animals. "Free Ride" was recently installed at the National Zoo in Washington D.C.

In addition to "Free Ride," Rhymer has many other works installed at the Denver Zoo, the Smithsonian and numerous public spaces across the county.

The body of Rhymer's work on display at Lovett's Gallery includes 12 sculptures created throughout the past three years. The majority of the animals depicted are birds but include animals native to all parts of world including Africa and North America.

The process by which Rhymer creates his work involves spending time contemplating it more than physically creating it. He is often working on multiple pieces at the same time coming back to each piece every few months with fresh eyes. "Thinking about the work is a very important part of the process," Rhymer said. "If it rushed, the piece will suffer." More information about Paul Rhymer's work is available at [rhymerstudio.com](http://rhymerstudio.com) and [lovettsgallery.com](http://lovettsgallery.com).

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*Bronzed Over. Paul Rhymer's work has been created specifically for table top surfaces, but recently he has become interested in pursuing garden sculptures that allow each piece to become a part of nature. Shown is "In Back (Bison)."*

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