

19th and 20th Century American and European Figurative Bronze Sculpture



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Intersections in 19th and 20th Century American and European Figurative Bronzes

19th and 20th Century American and European Figurative Bronze Sculpture brings together a rich sampling of the diverse subjects addressed by bronze sculpture produced between 1850 and 1950, from mythological and allegorical themes to those inspired by dance and sports. Some works are pure formal explorations of the human body, while others grapple with issues of national identity and modernization. The exhibition includes important but less familiar professional sculptors such as Jean-Alexandre-Joseph Falguière, Ernst Moritz Geyger, and Max Kalish, as well as others who have not been adequately studied. Its specific focus on reduced versions of monumental works, many of which were produced in extended editions, highlights the increasing prominence of small-scale bronze sculpture in America as affordable domestic ornamentation in the early decades of the twentieth century—a function that continues to resonate with present-day collectors.

Although by the nineteenth century bronze had enjoyed a long tradition in the European sculptural tradition, it was a relatively new medium for America, where specialized foundries for sculpture only came into existence after 1850. Bronze foundries had existed in the United States prior to that, but only for the casting of cannons and utilitarian objects. By 1900, with the development of foundries specializing in the lost-wax casting process, such as Roman Bronze Works in New York and Gorham Manufacturing Company in Providence, Rhode Island (Gorham later opened a facility in New York City), fewer and fewer works were sent abroad to be cast (although American artists continued to train in Europe). The lost-wax method, though more complex than the French sand-casting process that had dominated American-made bronzes between 1850 and 1900, enabled American bronze casting to reach new heights. Lost-wax casting, which depends on a gelatin mold, allowed for more precise replication of texture and greater experimentation with complex compositions. Most importantly, a sculpture could be cast as a single piece rather than as parts requiring assembly. This brought about larger editions and more affordable prices for the middle-class homeowner. Fountain and parlor pieces such as Frederick MacMonnies's *Pan of Rohallion* could be purchased through a variety of venues, from dealers, from bronze showrooms, and, of course, from the foundries and sculptors.

A special strength of this exhibition is the spotlight it casts on the work of three pioneering but largely overlooked American female sculptors of the early twentieth century: Nanna Matthews Bryant, Abastenia St. Leger Eberle, and Harriet Whitney Frishmuth. Bryant was a painter turned sculptor. Like most of Bryant's work exploring the female nude, *Nude Woman Washing Her Hair* (1920) is intimate in size and demonstrates her familiarity with the work of Auguste Rodin. Eberle, who is represented in the exhibition by the exuberant *Hurdy-Gurdy* (1909) and tender *Woman with Child* (1920), was a pivotal figure in the women's suffrage movement. She raised funds for the movement, marched under the sculptors' banner in suffrage parades, and was a tireless advocate for the working class and immigrants. Eberle's artistic practice and progressive social concerns were inseparable, and both works in the exhibition demonstrate her commitment to representing the strength and dignity of the urban poor, among whom she lived as a resident of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Whether depicting a tender moment between an exhausted mother and her freshly washed babe, or the unrestrained joy of an immigrant child dancing to the tunes of a street musician, Eberle was eager to show moments of beauty hidden behind the shabby facade of her working-class urban neighborhood.

The liberating power of dance was also central to the sensual, dynamic, and technically complex work of Frishmuth, but her approach to the subject was based on a keen interest in the human body and movement. She studied anatomy for two years at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. Frishmuth was hugely inspired by the ballet, and she often employed professional dancers as her models. Two members of the Fokine Ballet, Desha Delteil and Leon Bartè, served as models for the two counterbalancing figures controlling the bacchic frenzy of *The Dancers* (1921). Desha also posed for the sensual and technically exquisite

Allegra (1929), which was one of the many sculptures of dancing women produced in great numbers in the early twentieth century, inspired in part by the increasing popularity of professional dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Anna Pavlova. Frishmuth's works were enormously popular in her lifetime.

Dance was not a subject limited to female artists. It enjoyed widespread appeal at the turn of the century and into the early decades of the twentieth century and was taken up by both American and European artists ready to engage with the sculptural challenges of representing strenuous ballet positions such as the arabesque and en pointe. From Falguière's *Vainquer* (1870) to Giuseppe Renda's *Dancing Boy* (1900) and MacMonnies's *Bacchante and Infant Faun* (1900) to Franz Iffland's *L'Arrivee* (1930)—all of which showcase figures supported on the toes of one leg—we see the art of cast bronze conquering moments of doubtful balance.

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sculptural engagement with dynamic movement and technically challenging compositions also manifests in those pieces related to the rise of modern sport. Hugo Lederer's *Der Fechter* (*The Fencer*) (1910) and Julius Schmidt-Felling's *Testing the Foil* (1910) bear witness to the increasing professionalization of fencing. The first regularized fencing competition was held at the inaugural Grand Military Tournament and Assault at Arms in 1880, held at the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington outside London. The sport was subsequently recognized at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, and it continues to feature in every summer Olympics. In Marshall Frederick's *Neck Shot* (*The Polo Player*) (1931), an intrepid polo player is preparing to hit the ball under the horse's neck. First introduced to the United States in 1876, polo achieved tremendous popularity over the next fifty years. By the 1930s, soccer strategies had been integrated into the sport, which made passing the dominant feature of the game. The full gallop of the horse and the intense focus of its rider illustrate polo's transformation into a high-speed sport. Ernst Moritz Geyger's *The Archer* brilliantly harnesses the tension of that split second before the release of the archer's bow. This iconic composition, first conceived in monumental form in 1895 and subsequently circulated in cast bronze reductions, of which this is one, predated archery's first Olympic appearance in 1900. The sport of archery would feature regularly in the Olympics until 1920.

Sentimental longing for the pre-industrial past is embodied in Charles-Octave Levy's *Faneur* (*Haymaker*) (1880), Ferdinand Lugerth's *Rock Mover* (1910), and Alexandre Kéléty's *Le Semeur* (*The Sower*) (1930). From the relaxed contrapposto stance of Levy's haymaker to the lithe naked body of Lugerth's rock mover and the lunging, spiraling body of Kéléty's sower, physical labor is dissolved in the graceful beauty of the movements and the patina of the surfaces.

Lastly, Carl Kauba's *American Indian* (1900) and Cyrus Edwin Dallin's *Appeal to the Great Spirit* (1920) convey the importance of Western themes, most notably the American Indian, at the time. This was a subject matter favored by painters and sculptors alike. While nostalgia played a large role for many American artists seeking to depict the Old West, imperial and ethnographic aspirations motivated European artists, many of whom like Kauba, never set foot on American soil but instead relied on received information (for example, novels, movies) to generate their images. Dallin's dignified mounted chief, whose arms are spread wide in a moment of individual communion with a higher power, sharply contrasts with Kauba's ferocious fantasy of a gun-wielding American Indian. Dallin's sculpture represents one of over four hundred authorized bronzes that were cast in three different sizes, attesting to the commercial popularity of American West-themed bronzes.

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Abastenia St. Leger Eberle (1878–1942)

Abastenia St. Leger Eberle was born in Iowa but raised in Canton, Ohio. Her father was a doctor, and she received her first artistic training from a local sculptor who was one of his patients. In 1899, she moved to New York City to attend the Art Students League. Her first piece to win public attention was a large sculpture, *Men and Bull*, made in collaboration with Anna Vaughan Hyatt (Anna Hyatt Huntington; 1876–1973). The work was highly praised when it appeared in a Society of American Artists exhibition and was awarded a bronze medal at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition. In 1907, Eberle traveled to Naples, in order to cast some of her works in bronze more cheaply than she could in the United States. After returning to New York, she opened a studio on the Lower East Side in order to be close to the subjects she rendered. Eberle was interested in urban life and often sculpted the tenement children of immigrants in the poor areas of the city. She worked in a realistic style and explored social themes in works such as *White Slavery* (1913), *You Dare Touch My Child* (c. 1915), and *Woman Picking up Coal* (1907). In 1920, a heart condition began to affect her ability to create sculpture, and her productivity declined over the next twenty years, although she continued to win prizes for her work until her death in 1942.

What is the hurdy-gurdy? Some women of German ancestry danced and performed for primarily male audiences in the late 1800s. They were very respectable women and often made a living by dancing and were known as the hurdy-gurdy girls.

Resource: <http://unusualhistoricals.blogspot.com/2011/06/entertainers-hurdy-gurdy-girls.html>

This sculpture shows a young girl dancing. Her appearance is that of a working-class immigrant child dancing to street music. The style of sculpting is referred to as Impressionist because the texture has a slight rougher surface and stylized.

The sculpture was sculpted in 1909 in New York. As mentioned in her above biography, she was interested in sculpting tenement children of immigrants in the poorer areas of New York City.

What is an immigrant? These were people that moved from one country to another. In the late 1800s, many people immigrated to the United States from other countries.

Why did they immigrate to the United States? These people were looking for personal freedom and relief from political and religion persecution. They wanted to raise their families in a better environment and enjoy better opportunities. Resource: www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/immigrants/



What is a well known place located in New York where many immigrants entered the country? Because of the large amount of immigrants coming to the United States, in 1892 the government opened up Ellis Island in New York to process new immigrants. Today Ellis Island is a museum. Visit the Ellis Island site at: www.libertyellisfoundation.org/

“When the Island opened in September of 1990 — two years ahead of schedule — it unveiled the world-class Ellis Island Immigration Museum, where many rooms appeared as they had during the height of immigrant processing. Other areas housed theaters, libraries, an oral history recording studio, and exhibits that told the story of The Peopling of America® “

***Hurdy-Gurdy*, 1909**

Bronze

14 3/8 x 6 x 6 inches

Collection of Alden B Dow Home and Studio

Harriet Whitney Frishmuth (1880–1980)

Born in Philadelphia, Harriet Whitney Frishmuth was known for her works in bronze. She studied briefly with Auguste Rodin at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, then for two years in Berlin, as well as at the Art Students League of New York under Gutzon Borglum (1867–1941) and Hermon Atkins MacNeil (1866–1947). While in New York she worked as an assistant to the sculptor Karl Bitter (1867–1915). Her career grew steadily and she became well known for her beautiful renderings of females in bronze, particularly dancers (Desha Delteil frequently modeled for her). Her small bronzes were sought after by private collectors and by museums, and her large bronzes often found a central place in elaborate garden settings. Her work was exhibited at the National Academy of Design, the Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, the Salon in Paris, the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939–40) and the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors. Although she remained active in the art world for decades afterwards, the Great Depression affected her livelihood; she closed her New York studio in the 1930s and returned to Philadelphia. A proponent of the Beaux Arts style—Frishmuth was exceptionally critical of modern art, often calling it "spiritless"—her works can now be seen in some of the world's leading museums and collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Dallas Museum of Art, and Ohio University's Kennedy Museum of Art.



What is unique about many of the sculptures in this exhibition? The artworks in this exhibition focus on movement. Many of them are in stop motion movement which is the fourth dimension. 4-D artwork either actually moves, insinuates movement or shows the progression of time. Ms. Frishmuth was interested in the human body and movement and dancing was a powerful theme with many of her sculptures.

Are these two dancers actual people? Yes, they were two members of the Fokine Ballet, Desha Delteil and Leon Bartè. They both posed for Ms. Frishmuth for this sculpture. Desha also posed for another sculpture in this exhibition, *Allegra*. At the time this sculpture was made many other artists also portrayed the theme of dance in both 2 and 3-D artwork.

What type of balance does this sculpture portray? This photo of the sculpture shows the two figures, male and female, in profile as they lean back in a dance pose. As it appears in the photo, it is referred to as symmetrical balance. Symmetrical balance is when the balance is equal on both sides almost as if it's a mirror image. If it was a mirror image on both sides, then this is called bilateral symmetry.

What were the names of some other dancers portrayed in other artworks by other artists? Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Anna Pavlova. Other sculptures in this exhibition that portray dance are *Hurdy-Gurdy*, *Dancing Boy*, *Dancing Gypsy with a Goat*, *Danseur au Napolitain (Neapolitan Dancer)*, and *Danseur au Tambourin (Tamborine Dancer)*.



***The Dancers.* C. 1921**

Bronze

18 x 27 x 7 inches

Foundry: Gorham Manufacturing Co., New York, NY

Collection of Alden B. Dow Home and Studio



Frederick William MacMonnies (1863–1937)

Frederick William MacMonnies was an American sculptor and painter. During his apprenticeship in New York (1880–84) with Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), who discovered and encouraged his talent, he rose from menial helper to assistant, studying in the evenings at Cooper Union and the National Academy of Design. Through Saint-Gaudens he met two architects who later became invaluable colleagues: Stanford White and Charles F. McKim, who lent him money in 1884 to go to Paris. He studied drawing at the Académie Colarossi, then went to Munich, where he attended drawing and portrait classes at the Akademie (1884–85); he worked for Saint-Gaudens again in 1885–86. Success brought MacMonnies American commissions and the independence to open his own studio. He created his first fanciful life-size fountain figures, including *Pan of Rohallion* and *Young Faun with Heron*, for country estates. These buoyant mythological creatures with vibrant surfaces in the Art Nouveau style introduced fountain sculpture as a new genre in America and inspired a whole generation of sculptors, many of whom were his students.

What is mythology? According to Merriam-Webster dictionary myths are ideas that are believed by many people but that are not true. Mythological characters and themes in art have been popular in nearly every country and culture for centuries. Some sculptures in this exhibition are based on Ancient Greek or Roman mythology.

What mythology character does MacMonnies sculpture portray? Bacchante and Infant Faun. Dionysus is another name for this Ancient Greek god.

What is the story of these two Greek Mythology figures? Bacchante is the god of wine and he holds grapes in a dancing pose while holding infant faun and taunts him with them. Grapes are an attribute of wine.

Why was this sculpture controversial when MacMonnies sculpted it? At the time it was sculpted, a dancing nude figure was shocking and indecent, especially an intoxicated one. It was offered as a gift to the Boston Public Library, but the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was outraged by it and refused it as a gift. It therefore was gifted to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it is still there today. You can read more about this on www.bronze-gallery.com/sculptors/item.cfm?itemID=486



What does Fredericks MacMonnies and Marshall Fredericks have in common? Both artists created sculptures for Worlds Fairs, of course different times and states. MacMonnies created *Columbian Fountain* for the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and Fredericks created the *Baboon Fountain* for the 1939 World's Fair and *Freedom of the Human Spirit* for the 1964 World's Fair both held in Flushing Meadow-Corona Park, NY. Fredericks Freedom Sculpture is still located there.

***Bacchante and Infant Faun*, 1894**

Bronze

33 1/2 x 11 x 15 inches

Foundry: Roman Bronze Works, New York, NY

Collection of David Spear and Stuart Barbier



Carl Milles (1875–1955)

Born Carl Emil Wilhelm Andersson near Uppsala, Sweden, sculptor Carl Milles began his artistic career as more of a craftsman than an artist in the traditional sense. Upon leaving school in 1892, Milles began an apprenticeship with a cabinetmaker and carpenter. Before long, he was pursuing carving and modeling in his studies as well, and in 1897, he won a prize from the Swedish Society of Arts and Crafts. By 1899, his work had been admitted to the Salon in Paris, in which city he had been living and working for about two years. While in Paris, Milles spent time assisting Auguste Rodin. The first years of the twentieth century found Milles traveling throughout Europe and continuing to study sculpture. During the period between 1901 and 1908, Milles visited Belgium, Holland, and Germany, settling in Munich for a time after 1904. Milles returned to Sweden in 1908, where he went to work completing major public commissions. Although he continued to exhibit throughout Europe during the 1920s, including at the Tate Gallery in London, Milles moved to the United States after accepting a teaching position as head of the Department of Sculpture at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, in 1931. Both he and his wife became United States citizens in 1945, and the couple resided here until retiring to Rome, where the American Academy had offered Milles a studio, in 1952.

When you look at Milles sculpture what do you notice that is similar or different than Harriet Frishmuth's *Dancers*? Milles' figures are not as heavily detailed as Frishmuth's. The figures are more simplified and stylized. They appear to have caricature-like facial features.

Who is the well-known artist that Carl Milles studied with? He studied under Auguste Rodin.

Who is an artist that studied and worked with Milles at Cranbrook? Marshall Fredericks

What do you think that Milles meant when he sculpted his *Boy and Girl Running* sculpture? Both figurative forms relate to each other in size and slight differentiation of male and female characteristics. The figures are slightly elongated, a character of Milles figures, including stylization. Have students express their ideas of what these figures are doing.

Milles taught at Cranbrook Art Institute. What do you know about Cranbrook? The Cranbrook Educational Community, located in Bloomfield Hills, has a beautiful campus with a school for boys and girls, an art Institute and Museum of Art and Science. The grounds also have historical buildings. Visit their website at www.cranbrook.edu



Contrast and compare Milles' sculpture to Marshall Fredericks *Two Sisters (Mother and Child)* in this exhibition.

Marshall M. Fredericks
Two Sisters (Mother and Child)
 Bronze
 19 x 6 x 5 1/2 inches



***Boy and Girl Running*, 1942-52**
 Bronze
 24 1/2 x 13 x 9 inches
 Foundry: Antioch Foundry, Yellow Springs, Ohio
 Collection of Delta College



Marshall M. Fredericks (1908-1998)

One of the most prolific sculptors of the twentieth century, Marshall M. Fredericks is known in America and abroad for his monumental figurative sculpture, public memorials and fountains, portraits, and animal figures. Upon his graduation from the Cleveland School of Art in 1930, Fredericks journeyed to Sweden on a fellowship to study with sculptor Carl Milles. After some months, he studied in other academies and private studios in Denmark, Germany, France and Italy, and traveled extensively in Europe and North Africa.

In 1932, Carl Milles invited Fredericks to join the staff of Cranbrook Academy of Art, Cranbrook and Kingswood Schools in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan where he taught until he enlisted in the armed forces in 1942. After the war, he worked continuously on numerous commissions for fountains, memorials, free-standing sculptures, reliefs, and portraits in bronze and other materials.

His sculptures can be found in more than 150 public and corporate locations throughout the United States, Denmark, England, Freeport Grand Bahama Island, Finland, Japan, Norway, and

Sweden. Fredericks resided in Birmingham, Michigan until his death in April 1998.

What is Polo? A sport in which a person rides a horse and uses a long mallet to strike a small ball. The objective is to get more points than an opposing team.

Where did polo originate? In central Asia, possibly Persia from 1st century BCE to 6th century CE.

What is the only thing that's holding the horse to the base in this sculpture? The left front hoof.

When a horse is running is there anytime all four feet are off the ground? Yes. In fact, Eadweard Muybridge, a photographer in the late 1800s (died 1904) solved a bet by photographing a running horse. He took a succession of photos as a horse galloped on a track and some of those photos showed all four feet off the ground. The succession of photos led to the invention of the moving picture or movies.

Why did Marshall Fredericks sculpt *The Polo Player*? This was sculpted in 1931 and polo playing was a very popular theme. Fredericks portrayed his version of a polo player; many other artists have done the same. Have students do research on 10 popular themes in art and discuss them.



***Neck Shot (The Polo Player)*, 1931**

Bronze

10 x 15 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches

Foundry: Unknown

Collection of Estate of Theodore Spangler

Photographs

Michael Randolph

Resources

www.libertyellisfoundation.org/

<http://unusualhistoricals.blogspot.com/2011/06/entertainers-hurdy-gurdy-girls.html>

www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/immigrants/

www.bronze-gallery.com/sculptors/item.cfm?itemID=486