

PIONEER IMAGES OF UTAH

ARTIST: Mahonri Macintosh Young (1877-1957) SLC, Utah/New York, NY
TITLE: *Frontier Scout* c. 1932
MEDIA: Bronze cast
SIZE: 19" x 19" x 7"

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Mahonri Young was born August 9, 1877, twenty days before the death of his grandfather, Brigham Young. Mahonri was the last grandchild born before Brigham's death. Legend has it that Brigham's last words were, "How is the new grandson?"

Mahonri's Salt Lake high school experience was notably short--it lasted one day! He claimed he had "more important things to do." The more important things were repairing the family furniture and modeling figures. He was asked to mold the figure of a woman in butter for the creamery exhibit at the Utah State Fair. Completed and set in place, this work of art was as short lived as his high school education--someone forgot to shut the refrigerator door.

However, in 1897, determined to satisfy his interest in art, Mahonri took a job at a bicycle repair and stationery shop in order to pay J. T. Harwood \$2.50 a week for art lessons. Describing his study of art, Mahonri said, "I have always drawn, and since I was

18 have consciously tried to learn to draw. I have loved and studied all the great draftsmen, but have always gone to nature for my material. I have tried to make good drawings, not drawings that look good."

Mahonri learned about the national art scene by reading Harpers and Scribners magazines, and he worked in the Salt Lake Tribune's graphic department to earn enough money to study in New York City. In 1899, Young left Utah to attend the Art Student's League in New York City. Once there, Mahonri studied under the academic muralist Kenyon Cox, learning his approach to representational art. The New York experience was an eye opener for Salt Lake-born Mahonri. However, in 1901, Young was forced to return to Salt Lake City for financial reasons.

Back in Utah, Young took a job with the Salt Lake Herald as a photo-engraver, for \$18 a week. His dream was to save enough money to travel to Paris. Within that year, he saved \$750 in earnings which he added to a belated inheritance of \$280 from his grandfather Brigham's estate, for a total of \$1,020. With the addition of a small loan, he left Utah for the center of the World.

Once in Paris, Young's time was full of academic study. His real education, however, took place in the classrooms of nature, the studio, and the museum gallery. As he studied, Young became aware that he tended to paint linear action studies that related more to sculpture than to painting. For this reason, he shifted his study to sculpture; however, throughout his career he was highly respected and won national prizes in watercolor, etching, and oil painting. Although Young experimented in contemporary approaches to form, he always returned to realistic expression to pursue his interest in capturing the human figure in motion.

A stylizing Social Realist, Young was the winner of numerous awards and commissions on both local and national levels. Two of his best known Utah works are the *Seagull Monument*, and the *This is the Place Monument*. During his life, he completed approximately 120 sculptures, 300 etchings, 1500 watercolors, more than 100 oil paintings, and thousands of sketches, which he drew on any available surface including paper sacks, napkins, and menus.

No other American sculptor has better represented strength in action and motion. Young depicted the worker, the blacksmith, the scrub woman, and the cowboy as bone, brawn, and sweat--as heroes.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

TITLE: *Frontier Scout* c. 1932

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SIZE: 19" x 19" x 7"

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What is this art work made of? What would this sculpture be like if Mahonri Young had used other kinds of materials? What if the artist had made this art work larger, would larger size increase its effectiveness? What do the materials of this sculpture reveal as to how old it is? What are some other clues as to how old this sculpture is? Where might you find someone wearing the type of clothing portrayed in this sculpture? Why might a person be wearing this type of clothing? What kind of skills would this person have?

ACTIVITIES

Art

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of how to capture movement in drawings by making gesture drawings.

Show the students *Frontier Scout* and read the section from the biography about Young's action drawing. Explain to the students that one quick way to capture a feeling of movement is to make gesture drawings. In gesture drawings the whole figure is not drawn, only a few quick lines that show the feeling of movement rather than an outline of the figure. Give each student a piece of charcoal or chalk and several large sheets of newsprint. Have the students take turns being models, striking action poses. Force the students to do quick drawings by using time limits for each drawing. Start with two five-minute drawings, then one-minute drawings, and finally thirty-second drawings.

Display the drawings, and have the students pick out successful drawingsóthose that best capture a feeling of movement. This activity can be repeated several times and a

shortened version can be an effective warmup for a longer, more complex drawing assignment.

Resources for the teacher include art textbooks, art specialists, advanced students, or art teachers in your district.

Art

Objective: The students will show an understanding of the gesture of movement and action by creating wire sculptures.

Have the students use pipe cleaner wire or some other easily bent wire to form wire figures that capture the gesture of movement. Have the students refer to their drawings from the previous activity. The main idea is to get the feel of movement using simple lines that demonstrate the main thrust of the gesture.

A good resource for this type of wire sculpture is books about Alexander Calder. Check your local libraries.

Extension or Variation: Gesture sculptures can also be made out of clay. A very interesting book that combines the making of pinch pots (a simple method of creating pots that invites experimentation) with movement is Finding One's Way With Clay, written by a dancer turned artist. The book is available in the BYU library and may be available through library loans.

Science

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of the properties of different kinds of metals by recording the results of experiments and sharing their findings with the class.

Show *Frontier Scout* or other sculptures to the class and ask the students what the sculptures are made of. Help the students, if necessary, to come up with a reasonable conclusion. Ask them what kinds of metals might not make good sculptures. They should consider cost of materials, durability, strength, etc. Expand the discussion to include other metal objects. Either bring objects yourself or have the students bring metal objects from home or both. Examine the various objects and discuss why specific metals are used for different objects.

Perform simple experiments to test various metal objects. These must be objects that you do not mind being damaged or that will not be damaged. Some examples of simple experiments are as follows:

1. Wet a piece of stainless steel and a piece of iron. Check daily for rust.
2. Compare the force needed to smash different kinds of metal cans--aluminum, steel, etc.

3. Compare the durability of different thickness of some metals such as aluminum pop cans verses sturdy aluminum cooking pots.
4. Scratch resistance. If possible, have some gold to compare with harder metals. A jewelry class may be able to loan you a gold sample as well as some thin copper the students can try scratching or shaping with pointed objects and hammers.
5. Weigh some similar-sized metal objects and discuss why they don't weigh the same.

Look in resource books for other simple experiments. You may want to include research to determine relative costs of various metals.

Have the students keep simple notes on each experiment and share them with the class.

History

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of Frontier Scouts in the development of the Old West through role playing, and by planning and mapping the progress of a simulated expedition in the Old West.

Show the class the slide of *Frontier Scout* as an introduction to this lesson. (You may want to include the slide of *Sacajawea* from the *Who is Cyrus Dallin?*, Nov. 13, 1996 packet, since she acted as a guide for the Lewis and Clark Expedition) Ask the students what a frontier scout was. What did the scouts do?

Divide the class into groups. Have the groups choose an area to explore. Establish different roles. Have the students research the responsibilities of each role and create job descriptions. Then assign roles for each student, with some of the students being frontier scouts.

You may wish to provide maps or have the students make imaginary maps. Have the scouts look for the best routes to travel. Locate water sources, campsites, shelter, protection, food, and inhabited areas. You may wish to give the students problems to solve, obstacles to avoid, or other situations to deal with.

After the activity, discuss what each group learned. Have the groups share how dependant each expedition was on the frontier scouts and why.

