

PIONEER IMAGES OF UTAH

ARTIST: John Gutzon Borglum (1867-1941) Bear Lake

TITLE: The Missionary 1895

MEDIA: oil on canvas

SIZE: 28" x 36"

COLLECTION: Private Collection

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum was born in St. Charles, near Bear Lake, Idaho Territory, on March 25, 1867. His parents were both from Denmark, and Borglum may have developed his love of sculpting by watching his father work as a woodcutter. He also had a younger brother, Solon, who followed in his footsteps and became an artist.

Gutzon Borglum studied art in a variety of places including San Francisco, California, and Paris, France. While in Paris, Borglum was greatly influenced by the sculpture of Auguste Rodin. Borglum's place of study in France was the Academie Julian, where he studied the academic approach to sculpting from 1890-1893.

Although Borglum studied abroad for a time, his greatest interest remained the subjects he found in the United States. As a boy, Borglum developed his love for the West in particular, preferring to create images of horses and American Indians over other subjects.

In 1901, Gutzon moved to New York where he was commissioned to create a sculpture of the apostles for the St. John the Divine Cathedral. By now involved in "almost exclusively" sculpture, Gutzon's work combined his own peculiar western-born exuberance with a Rodin "sketch-like intensity," the result of his years of study in Paris. One excellent example of this powerful combination is his piece Mares of Diomedes, described as a "foaming 'Wild West' stampede in rather transparent mythological 'clothing.'" When the Mares of Diomedes became the first American sculpture to be purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Borglum's growing fame was officially sealed.

During his adult life, Gutzon Borglum created many sculptures that epitomize the great figures of American democracy. He completed several sculptures depicting United States'

President Abraham Lincoln, including one using a six-ton block of marble to depict the head of President Lincoln. This Head of Lincoln can be found at the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. He also completed sculptures of Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Paine. However, while creating his giant sculpture of Lincoln, Borglum became fascinated with art that was larger than life.

Borglum was inventive in creating massive works. He even created new methods for successfully displaying a human figure at many times its actual size. Borglum's greatest challenge was completing the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota. This work required Borglum to create the faces of four former United States' presidents. Yet the faces were not merely double or triple the size of the actual human face, but each face was 60 feet high. Borglum worked on the Monument for 14 summers, but died before it was finished. His son, Lincoln, also a sculptor, finished the work seven months later.

Borglum's personality was said to be "outspoken" and at times "egotistical." This type of behavior may have been provoked by Borglum's own need to be the best at what he did, which caused him to be critical of anyone who did not share his high ideals in art. Borglum is quoted as saying about his art

And I remember very distinctly that beauty and form and the making of things seemed to be a very idle kind of pastime until I myself formed some definite ideals for my own life, quite apart from my own work, and then the work shaped itself to fulfill that life.

Gutzon Borglum created as many as 170 statues and monuments during his lifetime. His work ranges from Western inspired pieces, to classical works, to those that honor and glorify the ideals and heroes of American society.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What is the main subject of this painting? How do you know? What kind of action or motion is shown in this painting? Does the title help you to understand the meaning of this painting? Do you consider this painting a landscape, portrait, or still-life? Justify

your answer. Do you think the artist painted this painting in a studio or out in the wild? Why? What do you suppose the purpose of this painting to be? In what year, approximately, does this painting look as though it were painted? Do you feel that this painting has an appropriate title? What would you call it? Can you guess the artist's personality by observing this painting?

ACTIVITIES

Art Criticism

Objective: Students will recognize the artistic principle of emphasis/focal point through the means of placement.

Emphasis is a principle of art and can be achieved in many ways. The emphasis or focal point in a work of art is what you notice first in the art work. For example, in Borglum's *The Missionary*, the emphasis is the horse and rider. The horse and rider are also in a landscape, but the landscape is not as important at first observation. How did the artist emphasize the horse and rider so we would notice them first? By *placement*. Borglum placed the horse and rider in the very middle of the painting without any distractions that might have taken your eye away to more interesting or complicated places within the painting. Often, an artist will place the emphasis in another location other than the middle by drawing your eye to the emphasis using leading lines that all point in the direction of the emphasis. See the following examples from the museum's collection:

- Sam Wilson's *Crow Crowded, or I Myself* emphasizes the standing crow's head. This is achieved by isolating it from the background, (other parts of the painting are complicated, but the area behind the crow's head is white), and by placing the head so the other crows' heads are all facing the emphasized crow's head. There are also several leading lines (actual lines, the pieces of tape, the geometric shapes, the edge of a table, etc.) which point our eye toward the crow's head.
- A. D. Shaw's *Ego Trip: Self-Portrait* emphasizes the artist's cartoon drawing of himself. It is emphasized by the artist's hand that is pointing to the cartoon as he is drawing it. There are also leading lines coming from the ceiling above and below the easel, books, and paint stand below. (Both artworks can be found in **A National View**, Mar. 1995, pkt)

Practice identifying the emphasis of other art works. Remember, the emphasis is easy to spot because it is where your eye is drawn to first. Once you locate the emphasis, try and decide the reason for the emphasis as a class.

Note: Other techniques which are used to create a focal point/emphasis are contrast (of value, color, texture, etc.) and isolation. See Lauer's book entitled *Design Basics* for more information and see other artworks from previous Educator Evening packets for examples.

Art History

Objective: Students will learn of the significant artistic accomplishments of Gutzon Borglum.

(See Biography of John Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum for more information) Borglum's main accomplishments are the following:

- *Stone Mountain* in Georgia
 - *Lincoln's head* in the Capitol Rotunda
 - *Mares of Diomedes*--first American sculpture to be purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art: it won a gold medal at the St. Louis Exposition
 - *Mount Rushmore* in S. Dakota
- Studied in Paris

U.S. History/Government

Objective: Students will increase their understanding of political decision making by studying the politics surrounding the making of Mt. Rushmore (see Gilbert C. Fite's book *Mt. Rushmore*)

The following list contains topics related to the decision making process:

- Government funding (Federal only. So. Dakota refused to provide any of the funding, but Mt. Rushmore is now the state's most toured location.)
- The Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. The entire Black Hills area is officially Indian territory. How do Native Americans feel about Mt. Rushmore? What are the politics and ethics of breaking a treaty? What are the ethical implications of the decision to deface a sacred spot of the Sioux and Lakota Indians with the faces of white men who had conquered them?
- What were the politics involved in choosing whose heads would be carved on the mountain (especially Roosevelt)?

Geology/Engineering

Objective: Students will learn about the qualities and formation of granite.

Present and discuss information about granite. When the lesson is finished, students should be able to answer the following questions:

- How is granite formed?
- What is meant by *grain* in granite?
- How does grain affect the cutting of granite?
- How are cracks and fissures formed in granite?
- How was it determined that "it [granite] would erode at a rate not faster than an inch in 100,000 years" by geologists? (as stated in *American Heritage*, June 1977 p. 20, American Heritage Publishing Company, "Carving the American Colossus", E. M. Halliday, pp. 18-27).

- How is granite cut using drills and dynamite?

Physical Education/Recess Activity

Have the students pretend they are horses. Gee-up!

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