

Paul Manship: THE DYNAMICS *of Family and Design*

American sculptor and “semi-official medalist-laureate” Paul Manship created art that influenced a generation.

by Douglas Manship Jr. ANA214023

MAYBE THERE'S such a thing as a coin gene . . .

I first became interested in coin collecting, particularly commemorative pieces, when I was a teenager. I came across a 1925 Stone Mountain Memorial half dollar and was told by a family member (wrongly, it turned out) that it was designed by great American sculptor and medallist Paul Manship (1885-1966), who was my great-great-uncle.

“Wow!” I thought, “How cool to have a coin designed by a relative.” I was excited. I learned only recently that the commemorative was not designed by Manship—but by artist Gutzon Borglum, who also created the Stone Mountain Memorial in Georgia. Proceeds from the sale of the coin were supposed to help defray the cost of the majestic monument. (See Howard and Audrey Shaff's arti-

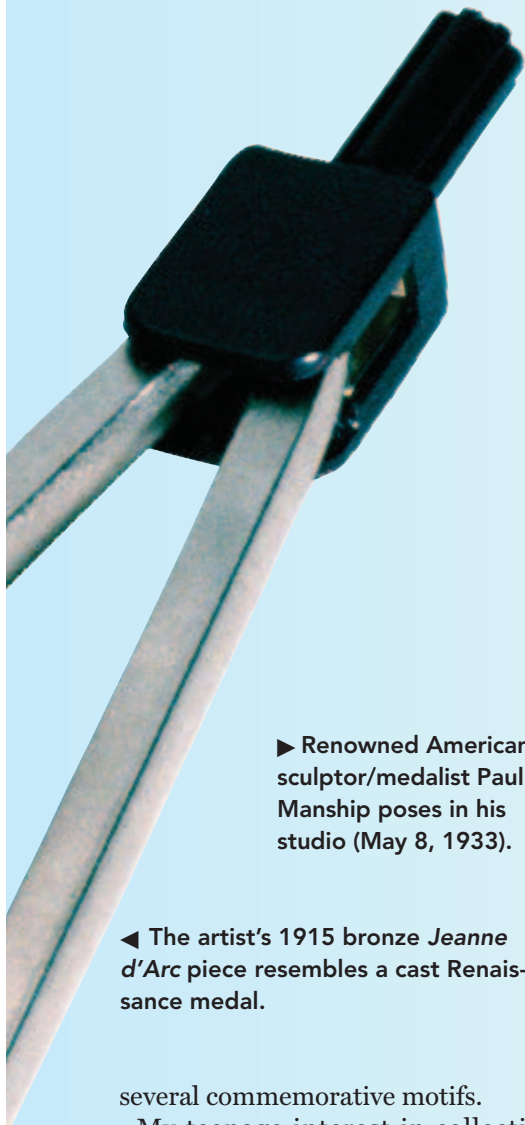
cle “The Coin that Destroyed a Mountain” in the July 2004 issue of *Numismatist*, page 66.)

Unfortunately, Manship's future as a coin designer was ruined by bureaucratic infighting in the United States, and at least partially by gambling concerns in Ireland. But he did influence



MEDAL PHOTOS: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

For more than 50 years, Paul Manship enjoyed an international reputation as one of America's finest sculptors.



► Renowned American sculptor/medalist Paul Manship poses in his studio (May 8, 1933).

◀ The artist's 1915 bronze *Jeanne d'Arc* piece resembles a cast Renaissance medal.

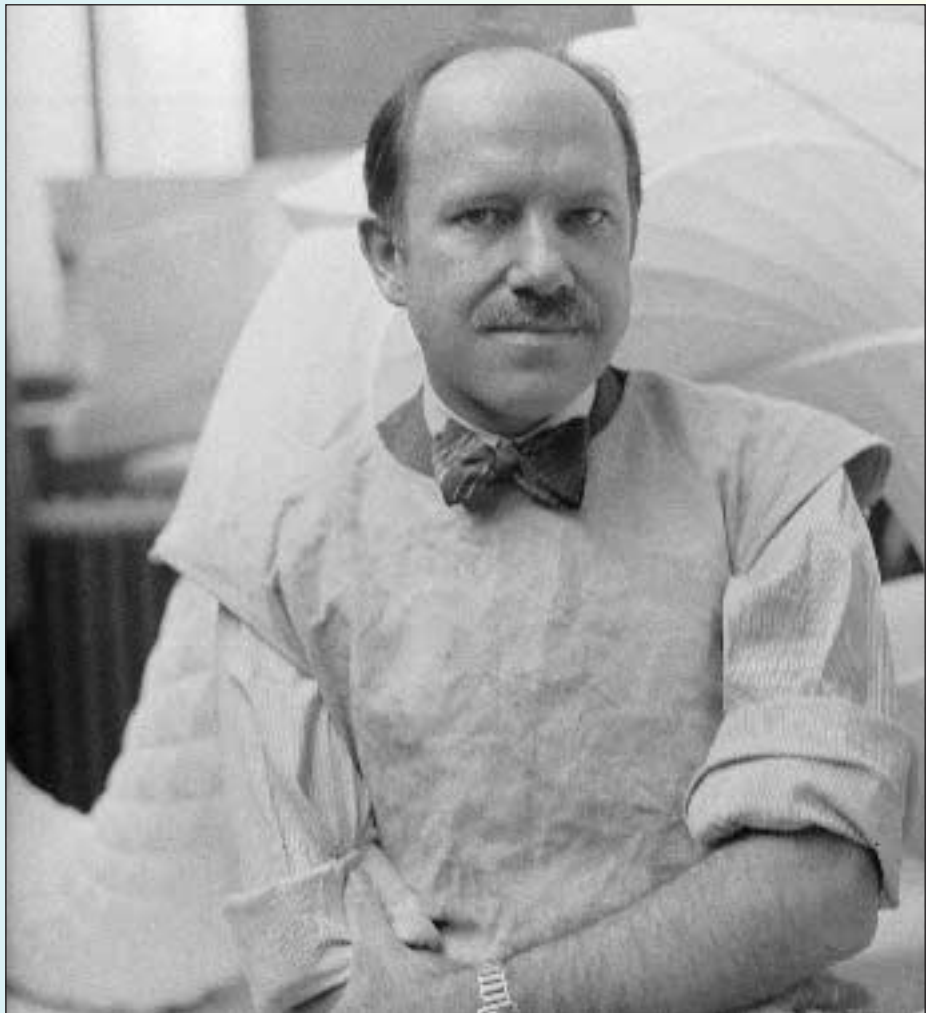


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several commemorative motifs.

My teenage interest in collecting commemoratives—or any other coins, for that matter—didn't stick back then. I briefly was intrigued with Irish coins for no particular reason that I can recall other than I thought they might be valuable someday. (I'm still waiting.) Ironically, at that time I did not know of my famous relative's connection to Irish coinage or other numismatic pieces.

Family Ties

As time passed, I discovered more about Manship. I never got to meet

him, but I learned about his life as an artist. For more than 50 years, he enjoyed an international reputation as one of America's finest sculptors. Of course, I'd heard of his most famous and popular work—*Prometheus* in New York City's Rockefeller Plaza—but there was so much more.

Artistic talent appears to have run in Paul's family. His grandfather Charles Henry Manship had an interior design business in Jackson, Mississippi, before the Civil War. His brother Luther taught art, and another brother, Albert, was a poet. Paul's son, John, became a painter.

Manship was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on Christmas Eve, 1885, and studied art at the St. Paul Institute. When he discovered he was color blind, he decided to concentrate on sculpture. He traveled to New York City to study at the Art Students League and also attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. While in New York, he served as an assistant to sculptor Solon Borglum, the brother of Gutzon, which may explain the Stone Mountain coin confusion in my family.

In 1909, at age 24, Manship won the prestigious Prix de Rome prize, which granted him three years of ©

When Manship returned to United States, he was hailed as a major new talent.

PHOTOS: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



PHOTOS: AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



▲ The New York Tercentenary medal (top) is my favorite Manship piece. Below it is an example of his 1930 Southern Railway System Centennial commemorative.

all-expense-paid study at Rome's American Academy. While there, he focused on Renaissance sculpture and ancient Greek art, which heavily influenced his work throughout his career. His graceful, classical approach was more conservative than that of many of his contemporaries, but quite powerful and popular.

When Manship returned to the United States, he was hailed as a major new talent. At his first exhibition, he sold all 96 bronzes. Over the years, he received a number of important commissions. Besides *Prometheus*, his best-known works include the en-

trance gates for New York's Bronx and Central Park Zoos; *Group of Bears* at Central Park's Friedman Playground; and sculptures *Moods of Time* and *Time and the Fates Sundial* at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City.

Early in his career, Manship became attracted to animal sculptures and showed a great interest in mythical stories and characters. He became known for his freely modeled forms and dramatic gestures. "I like to express movement in my figures. It's a fascinating problem which I'm always trying to solve," he said. "I'm not especially interested in anatomy, though

naturally I've studied it. And, although I approve generally of normally correct proportions, what matters is the spirit which the artist puts into his creation—the vitality, the rhythm, the emotional effect."

The Coin Connection

Over the past several years, I have renewed my interest in coin collecting, particularly early and modern commemoratives. As a result, I've learned what Manship did and did not design.

Through John Hayes' informative website about Irish currency (www.geocities.com/eirecoins), I discovered Manship was invited by the committee headed by poet and ardent Irishman W.B. Yeats to prepare designs for the Irish Free State coinage of 1928. Although Manship submitted designs, those of sculptor Percy Metcalfe ultimately were selected.

In the beginning, Yeats said he thought it would be possible to mix designs from "three or four different artists." Had the Irish government simply decided to invite designs from either the well-known Manship or famed Italian sculptor Publio Morbiducci, it would have been lucky to get such work as theirs, Yeats noted. "Manship's Ram and Morbiducci's Bull are magnificent, Manship's an entirely new creation, Morbiducci's a re-creation of the Bull on the Greek coin we had sent him as an example," he added.

Oh yes, about the gambling interests I mentioned earlier . . . In his notes, Yeats wrote that Greek coins are "the most famous and beautiful." He said the committee sent photographs to the artists invited to submit designs. However, he added (with his tongue perhaps slightly in his cheek), "The Greek coins have two advantages that ours could not have, one idea need not balance the other, and the other

Manship enjoyed greater success as a medalist; 79 of his works are at the Smithsonian Institution.

PHOTOS: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



◀ Paul Manship's family portraits regularly included both his biological children and his creative offspring—his sculpture.

could be stamped in high relief, whereas ours must pitch and spin to please the gambler, and pack into rolls to please the banker." Although outstanding, Manship's designs were more along the lines of ancient Greek coins, and apparently did not fit the needs of Irish gamblers and bankers!

Manship originally was selected to design the U.S. Panama-Pacific International Exposition half dollar. However, according to researchers

Anthony Swiatek and Walter Breen in their book *The Encyclopedia of United States Silver and Gold Commemorative Coins, 1892-1954*, Treasury Secretary William McAdoo decided to have U.S. Mint Chief Engraver Charles Barber design the piece.

An Amazing Medalist

Manship enjoyed greater success as a medalist. The Smithsonian Institution's American Art Museum has 79

of his works, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural medal and that of President John F. Kennedy (1961).

According to Harry Rand's comprehensive book *Paul Manship*, published by Smithsonian Institution Press, Manship and his wife, Isabel, became friends with Roosevelt during the latter's service as Secretary of the Navy. FDR consulted Manship about a redesign of the U.S. Navy's Medal of ©

PHOTOS: AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



◀ The Society of Medallists' 1903 issue *Hail to Dionysus Who First Discovered the Magic of the Grape* reflects the artist's love of classicism.



▲ Manship's 1933 Franklin Delano Roosevelt (top) and 1961 John F. Kennedy inaugural medals.

Honor. When he became Commander in Chief, “the furiously occupied president-elect gave the sculptor only two sittings” to model the inaugural medal, comments Rand. Roosevelt later appointed Manship to the federal Commission of Fine Arts, where—according to Swiatek and Breen—he had input on several commemorative coins, including the Antietam, Connecticut and Gettysburg half dollars.

“Manship’s semi-official status as America’s medalist-laureate continued

nearly to his death,” Rand notes. His final medal was Kennedy’s inaugural piece. “The president-elect’s wife, Jacqueline, had written a college term paper on Paul Manship’s sculpture, and she suggested Manship to the inaugural committee.”

Other Manship medals at the Smithsonian include a 1915 *Jeanne d’Arc* medal, several military medals, the Carnegie Corporation medal, the National Sculpture Society Medal of Honor and the New York Tercentenary medal. I consider the latter’s design to be

altogether magnificent. I’m not alone. Rand notes, “The enthroned woman, who represents New York . . . is possessed of a presence and gravity altogether beyond her actual size.”

None of Paul Manship’s coin designs may have been minted, but he obviously influenced several commemoratives, and was a successful

and highly regarded medal designer. Although collecting medals does not hold the same attraction for me as collecting commemoratives, I do think I’ll see if I can pick up a couple of his works . . . Maybe there’s a *medal gene*. ©

Learn More . . .

Rand, Harry. *Paul Manship*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. (ANA Library Catalog No. RM35.M3R3)

Swiatek, Anthony, and Walter Breen. *The Encyclopedia of United States Silver and Gold Commemorative Coins, 1892-1954*. Wolfeboro, NH: Bowers and Merena Galleries, Inc., 1990. (ANA Library Catalog No. GB40.S9)



▲ Detail of *Time and the Fates Sundial* at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York.

PHOTOS: ANA MUSEUM/BRAD ARMSTRONG

PHOTO: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS