

The Sculpture of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, "American Michelangelo," Comes to Colorado Springs

The first major traveling exhibit of works by the American Renaissance sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens will open at the American Numismatic Association Money Museum and neighboring Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center on August 28 as part of an 11-city United States tour.

Organized by the Trust for Museum Exhibitions (TME), "Augustus Saint-Gaudens: American Sculptor of the Gilded Age" features 75 of the sculptor's most famous works--including reductions of major outdoor commissions, full-sized works cast in bronze, marble and plaster, portrait reliefs, decorative objects and coins--an outstanding retrospective of the master's work.

From massive bronze sculptures that honor famous people and events to gold coins that set the standard for U.S. circulating coinage, Saint-Gaudens is credited with revitalizing American sculpture with a new spirit inspired by classical tradition.

"Power and beauty resonate from each piece in this exhibit," says Money Museum Curator Lawrence J. Lee. "His masterful skills can be seen throughout the exhibit, from the six-and-a-half-foot bronze sculpture Diana to the \$10 and \$20 gold pieces he created just before his death in 1907."

Saint-Gaudens has been described as the "American Michelangelo" and was a superb craftsman who became a brilliant player in America's Gilded Age. Brought to this country as an infant, he was educated here and abroad, but it was his training in Paris that clarified his conception of ideal beauty, which relied heavily upon French and Italian Renaissance art.

"While millions of people have admired his bust of President Abraham Lincoln, low-relief bronze sculpture of writer Robert Louis Stevenson and statue of Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, coin collectors have been ardent followers of Saint-Gaudens creations for many years, recognizing his influence on the small sculptures we carry in our pockets every day--coins," Lee says.

At the urging of President Theodore Roosevelt, Saint-Gaudens created two of the most beautiful U.S. gold coins--the double eagle (\$20) and eagle (\$10). The Liberty design for the \$20 was adapted by the United States Mint in 1987 for its American Eagle gold bullion coin. The coins that followed Saint-Gaudens' lead include the Lincoln cent in 1909; Buffalo nickel in 1913; "Mercury" dime, Standing Liberty quarter and Walking Liberty half dollar in 1916; and the Peace dollar in 1921.

Born in Ireland in 1848, Saint-Gaudens came to New York City with his French shoemaker father and Irish mother when he was only 6 months old. At the age of 13, he entered the art world as an apprentice cameo-cutter. During this time, he studied at the Cooper Union and the National Academy of Design.

Recognizing his talent, Saint-Gaudens' parents sacrificed their savings to send their 19-year-old son to study in Paris, where he became acquainted with many other artists, among them architect Stanford White. It was a friendship and collaboration that bore fruit in more than 20 cooperative projects, and brought about a significant change in American monumental sculpture. Their careful attention to siting, landscaping and a monument's architectural features, produced a majestic and integrated whole.

All of Saint-Gaudens' major projects are represented in this exhibition, including perhaps the most famous collaboration with White, the haunting Adams Memorial, installed in 1892 in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C. But it was through his monuments dedicated to the Civil War and its heroes that Saint-Gaudens acquired a national reputation. His memorial to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, situated in Boston Common, is considered one of his finest achievements. This exhibition will feature seven other major projects, including his Abraham Lincoln bust, the Sherman Monument, The Puritan, and Diana (for the weather vane at Madison Square Garden designed by Stanford White).

The exhibition opens August 28, 2003, at the American Numismatic Association Money Museum, 818 North Cascade Avenue and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, 30 West Dale Street, and runs through October 26. Visit both locations to view the entire exhibit.

The Money Museum is operated by the American Numismatic Association, which was founded in 1891 and is chartered by Congress as an educational organization for collectors of coins, paper money, tokens and medals. Its Museum is free and open to the public, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; and Sunday, noon-4 p.m. For further information or to arrange group tours, call 719-632-2646 or e-mail ana@money.org.

The Fine Arts Center is open Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors 62 and older, \$2 for children 6 to 16, and free for children under 6. For further information, call 719-634-5581 or e-mail info@csfineartscenter.org.

Subsequent venues include Allentown Art Museum (Pennsylvania), November 20 - January 18, 2004; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester (New York), February 12 - April 11; Frick Art and Historical Center (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), May 6 - July 4; Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia (Athens), July 29 - September 26; Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (Alabama), October 21- January 2, 2005; Smith College Museum of Art (Northampton, Massachusetts), January 26 - March 20; Wichita Art Museum (Kansas), April 15 - June 12; Center for the Arts (Vero Beach, Florida), July 7 - September 5; and Munson-William Proctor Museum of Art (Utica, New York), September 29 - November 27.

Most of the works in the exhibition are on loan from the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in Cornish, New Hampshire, which is the first National Historic Site dedicated to the work of an American artist and part of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Trust for Museum Exhibitions is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit service organization committed to providing the finest in exhibition and technical support to museums and cultural centers throughout the United States and abroad. For further information, visit the TME website at www.tme.org.

The American Numismatic Association is a congressionally chartered nonprofit educational organization dedicated to encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. The ANA helps its 28,000 members and the public discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of education and outreach programs, as well as its museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars. For more information, call 719-632-2646 or go to www.money.org.