Artist-Entrepreneurs

Saint Gaudens, MacMonnies, and Parrish

Dianne Durante

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COVER

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Introduction

When I start researching a new project, there's always a giddy period when I read massive amounts and search for every possible related image. It's selfish fun to gather and sort and integrate all that data. But eventually, if I'm planning to share the knowledge with others (another selfish pleasure!), I have to settle down and decide what point I want to make.

The point I decided to make in this book was that Saint Gaudens, MacMonnies, and Parrish were not only great artists, but great businessmen. They produced beautiful, innovative works, and they were also hard-working and profit-minded.

The eldest of the three was Augustus Saint Gaudens. (He pronounced it "GAWdenz".) Saint Gaudens was the son of poor immigrants. By his thirties, he was one of America's best and most famous sculptors. From 1880 to 1907, he created thirty-five important public monuments and dozens of smaller works, all of them carefully thought out and original.

Our second artist is Frederick MacMonnies. Fifteen years younger than Saint Gaudens, he was another talented sculptor who produced inspiring work and profited from it. In the mid-1890s, his annual income was about $300,000—three million in today's dollars. But

Illustration 1

MacMonnies's story has a very different ending from Saint Gaudens's, partly due to his personality and partly due to his times.

Our third artist is Maxfield Parrish. Parrish was twenty-two years younger than Saint Gaudens. Like Saint Gaudens and MacMonnies, he worked to learn his craft, developed a distinctive style, and earned a substantial income. In the early 1920s, one out of every four homes in the United States had a print of Parrish's *Daybreak.*

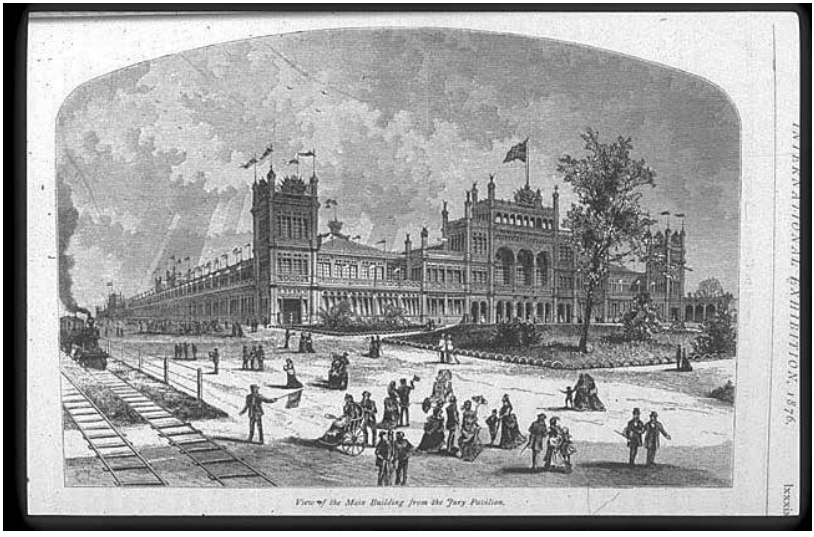
In this book, we'll first glance at the historical and artistic context of the 1880s to 1910s, when Saint Gaudens, MacMonnies, and Parrish were all at work. Then we'll look at each of the three artists: their lives, how they learned their skills, some of their major works, how they became wealthy, and what was distinctive and innovative about their works and their style.

CHAPTER 1
Context

THE STATE OF AMERICA CIRCA 1880-1910

The Civil War ended in 1865, with 600,000 Americans dead: some 2.5% of the population—mostly young men. Saint Gaudens was old enough to remember seeing Lincoln as a teenager, but not old enough to fight in the war. MacMonnies and Parrish didn't live through a major conflict until the United States entered World War I in 1917. There were plenty of horrible ways to die in the late nineteenth century, of course, but when these men were young, they had no images of massive death and destruction burned into their brains from newspapers or magazines, much less television or the Net.

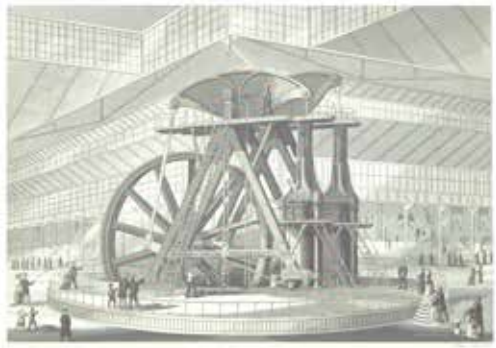
In 1876, eleven years after the Civil War ended, the Centennial Exposition was held in Philadelphia to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence (Ill. 2). It was the first event



Ill. 2: Main building at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Image: Wikipedia

in the United States that drew Americans from across the country. The Exposition was a summary of progress in science and technology. It boasted exhibitions of agriculture, education, horticulture, machinery, manufactures, and mining (Ill. 3).

Among the exhibits was the exuberant Bryant Vase, whose medallions were designed by the young Augustus Saint Gaudens (Ill. 5 and Ill. 21-23). The arm of the *Statue of Liberty* was on exhibition as part



At the Centennial Exposition of 1876. Ill. 3: Corliss engine (Wikipedia). Ill. 4: arm of the Statue of Liberty (Wikipedia). Ill. 5: Bryant Vase at Metropolitan Museum of Art (Photo copyright © 2019 Dianne L. Durante)

Ill. 6: Thomas Eakins, The Gross Clinic, 1875. Ill. 7: Eakins, The Agnew Clinic, 1889. Both images: Wikipedia

of a fund-raising drive (Ill. 4): the French were donating the sculpture, but the Americans had promised to raise money for its pedestal. On the whole, though, little art was on display at the Exposition. Few artists had been trained and were working in America.

The quarter century following the Exposition was a period of tremendous progress. By 1890, only a few territories within the continental United States had not yet achieved statehood. The country's population was growing through immigration, and Americans were living longer. Life expectancy in 1800 was thirty or forty years. By 1900, it was fifty-something. That may not sound like much, but it's a 25% increase over a century earlier.

What caused that increase? In 1800, infectious disease was a leading cause of death in America. Over the course of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of Americans died of cholera, typhus, yellow fever, diphtheria, dysentery, and whooping cough. By the mid-nineteenth century, clean water was being piped into cities and sewage was being channeled away from residential areas and drinking-water sources. By 1900, not one of those dread diseases was among the leading causes of death in New York City. Science, technology, and industrial progress had begun to wipe them out. Today most of us don't even recognize their symptoms.

During the 1880s, physicians began adopting asepsis—sterilizing hands and instruments and wearing scrupulously clean clothing. In two Eakins paintings of operating theaters, one from 1875 and one from 1889, the difference is startling (Ill. 6-7). Due to the adoption of asepsis, a person treated by a physician in 1900 was far less likely to die from any of the diseases that afflicted the last few patients he'd visited.

The rate of mothers' deaths in childbirth dropped by half over the course of the nineteenth century. Infant mortality also dropped by half.

Not only was the population larger, healthier, and living longer: it was (to use a modern term) flourishing. By 1900, science and technology had dramatically increased the productivity of farmers. In 1800, 75% of Americans were farmers. By 1900, only 40% needed to be. Others could make a living with a typewriter or a sewing machine, by fixing plumbing or digging subways.

Quality of life was improving too. By 1900, many cities had electric power. Over half a million Americans had telephones. By 1910, half a million owned cars.

Ill. 8: Auditorium Building, Chicago, 1890. Wikipedia. Ill. 9: Carson Pirie Scott, Chicago, 1899; photo copyright © 2019 Dianne L. Durante. Ill. 10: Frank Lloyd Wright Studio, Chicago, 1909. Zol87 / Wikipedia. Ill. 11: Marble House, Newport, RI, 1892. Daderot / Wikipedia. Ill. 12: Biltmore, Asheville, NC, 1895. Carptrash / Wikipedia.

Also by 1900, many Americans had money and time for "luxuries" such as art. New York City had operas, orchestras, museums, and libraries. Middle-class homes had pianos. Bachelors had player pianos. ("Wanna come hear my Chopin?")

Who was responsible for this rising standard of living? The businessmen who brought science and technology to their customers.

In 1900, the wealthiest Americans living included John D. Rockefeller (oil), Andrew Carnegie (steel), J.P. Morgan (banking), and the grandsons of Cornelius Vanderbilt (railroads). By that time, the United States was the world's leading producer of steel, coal, and oil. It was also home to many industries aimed at consumers: ready-to-wear garments, publishing, food, chemicals, drugs.

True, some reaction was beginning to stir against big business. In 1890, the first anti-trust law was passed. In 1909 came the first corporate income tax, a whopping 1%. But to most Americans, these were clouds on a distant horizon. In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, the United States came as close to capitalism as it ever did. Entrepreneurs were admired—including artist-entrepreneurs. It was expected that artists would make money if they produced a very desirable product. We'll see in the course of this book how they did that.

THE ARTS IN AMERICA CIRCA 1880-1910

What was the state of the arts in the United States at this time?

The first true skyscraper—all of twelve stories high—was erected in Chicago in 1885. In 1890, the first skyscraper taller than Trinity Church (twenty stories!) was built in New York. In 1912 the Woolworth Building topped out at sixty stories.

Many architectural styles were popular around 1900. Adler and Sullivan used elaborately beautiful decorative ornament (Ill. 8-9). Outside Chicago, Frank Lloyd Wright was creating his first Prairie Houses (Ill. 10). The homes of industrialists and other wealthy Americans might have ornament in the gothic or classical style, or have French mansard roofs (Ill. 11-12). But the period was dominated by classical architecture—and that was largely due to the Columbian Exposition.

The Columbian Exposition of 1893-1894, held in Chicago, celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus (Ill. 13-15). It also celebrated the United States: its arts, culture, science, technology, and manufacturing.

Columbian Exposition, 1893. Ill. 13: French's Republic and the Administration Building, 1893. Ill. 14A: Ferris Wheel. Ill. 14B: Ticket to Exposition. Ill. 15: Theodore Robinson, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893. All images: Wikipedia

Much of the Columbian Exposition looked forward. It offered vast displays of manufactured goods and technology. New forms of entertainment appeared, including the original Ferris Wheel, which was so large that each car held sixty people *and* a lunch counter (Ill. 14A). A whole building was devoted to women's achievements. After a fierce court battle, Sunday admission was allowed.

But the architecture of the Columbian Exposition looked back to classical models. The buildings were in the Greek and Roman style, with domes, arches, pediments, and columns. All of them were temporary, made of wood covered with plaster of Paris and hemp, then painted white to imitate marble. The fairgrounds became known as the "White City".

A year after the Exposition closed, fire ripped through the fairgrounds. Today nothing is left there. But twenty million visitors from across the country took home the memory of those shining buildings. Photos allowed millions more to view them. For the next thirty years, the "City Beautiful" movement dominated architecture. Domes, arches, columns, and pediments were the mark of state capitols, libraries, banks, railroad stations, and other important buildings across the United States (Ill. 16-17).

The centerpieces of the Columbian Exposition were sculptures in the classical style, to match its buildings. Daniel Chester French created the seventy-five-foot tall *Republic* (Ill. 13). Frederick MacMonnies created the *Ship of State* (Ill. 96-97).

We'll glance at American painting in this period when we come to Parrish. But for now, on to the eldest of our artists, Saint Gaudens.

Ill. 16: New York Public Library, ca. 1908. Wikipedia.
Ill. 17: Concourse of Grand Central Terminal, New York. Metropolitan Transportation Authority of the State of New York / Wikipedia.

Ill. 18: Saint Gaudens at his cameo lathe, 1865. National Parks Service.

Ill. 19-20: Saint Gaudens, cameo portraits of Hannah Rohr Tuffs, 1872, and John Tuffs, ca. 1861. MetMuseum.org.

Ill. 21-23: Bryant Vase at Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photos copyright © 2019 Dianne L. Durante.

CHAPTER 2
Augustus Saint Gaudens

EARLY LIFE

Saint Gaudens was born in Dublin in 1848, the son of a bootmaker. Six months later his family immigrated to New York City. Augustus quit school at age thirteen to help support his family, spending the next three years as a cameo cutter (Ill. 18).

At his ten-hour-a-day, six-days-a-week job, Saint Gaudens learned to do exquisite portraits in low relief (Ill. 19-20). For two of those years, he also took courses at the Cooper Union: another six nights per week, several hours per night. His assignments included drawing plaster casts of ancient sculpture and drawing from live models.

In 1867, at age nineteen, Saint Gaudens scraped together enough money to study in Paris and Rome for several years. Why? Because America had very little sculpture. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art did not open until 1872, and then with a very limited collection. To study great sculpture, one had to travel to Europe.

While Saint Gaudens was studying in Europe, he cut cameos to supplement his income. He also had a few small-scale commissions, such as the six reliefs on the Bryant Vase, which went on display at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 (Ill. 21-23; see p. 8).

As a result of long hours of study, by the 1870s Saint Gaudens had a solid knowledge of ancient and modern sculpture, of drawing, and of carving in low relief.

FARRAGUT, 1880

Saint Gaudens's big break was the *Farragut Monument* (Ill. 24, 27-29, 31). It was unveiled in 1880, when he was thirty-two. *Farragut*

Ill. 24: Saint Gaudens, Farragut, 1880.
Ill. 25: Greenough, Washington as Jupiter, 1840. Wikipedia / Wknight94.
Ill. 26: Ward, 7th Regiment Memorial, 1869. Ill. 24 & 26:
Photos copyright © 2019 Dianne L. Durante

is a larger-than-life-size bronze figure on a pedestal fifteen feet wide and seven feet high. The monument stands in New York's Madison Square, at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-Sixth Street.

First of all: who is David Glasgow Farragut? Answer: a hero. He was the most celebrated naval commander of the Civil War, which had ended fifteen years before this work was dedicated. Farragut captured New Orleans and won the Battle of Mobile Bay. At Mobile Bay, he had himself lashed to the rigging so he could see the course of the fighting. When one of his ships hit an underwater mine (also known as a torpedo), he shouted to his men, "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!"

Farragut is a man on a wall, and at first sight, he's not very exciting. We need to understand what made this sculpture such a great success, or the rest of Saint Gaudens's career will be incomprehensible. So let's step back for a moment and look at the context: the type of portrait sculptures normal at this time.

The first common style of sculpture was Neoclassical, imitating Greek and Roman works. Hence we have representations of the Founding Fathers in classical garb (Ill. 25).

The second common style is illustrated in the works of John Quincy Adams Ward, America's leading sculptor by 1880, when *Farragut* was dedicated. Among many others, Ward had created *Indian Hunter,* the *Seventh Regiment Memorial* (Ill. 26), and *Shakespeare* (Ill. 32), all of which stand in Central Park. As opposed to the Neoclassicists, Ward stressed that Americans should look like Americans. His portrait sculptures have great physical likenesses and beautifully executed details.

When the *Farragut* commission came up, every American sculptor wanted it. It was given to Ward, but he had many other commissions at the time, so he recommended Saint Gaudens, who was eighteen years his junior.

Saint Gaudens introduced several innovations in *Farragut*. First of all, *Farragut* is standing as if on the deck of his flagship, guiding his men, looking for the enemy. How do we know? Because he's holding binoculars, and his coat is blowing open (Ill. 27). *Farragut* wears a U.S. Navy uniform, meticulously represented (Ill. 27-28, 30).

In short: *Farragut* is shown going about his business. The figure reveals his character and actions. It reminds us why he's honored with a sculpture. Think of the difference between doing a portrait of me with my hands demurely folded, or one with my hands gesturing and pointing, which they usually are. Saint Gaudens has shown not just a