

CONNER • ROSENKRANZ

19th & 20th Century American Sculpture



George Bridgman (1864-1943)

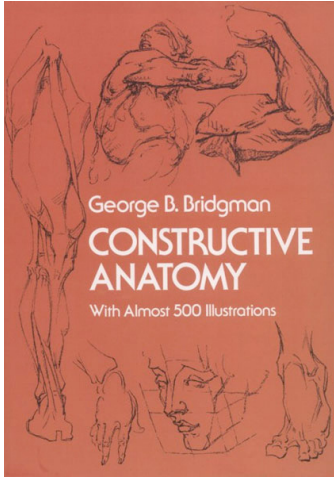
George Bridgman, most widely known for his profound contribution to the academic fields of anatomy and figure drawing, is arguably one of the most influential figures in 20th century American art history. For nearly forty-five years he lectured and taught at the Art Students League of New York, influencing tens of thousands of students, including noted artists Norman Rockwell, Gifford Beal, Robert Beverly Hale, Paul Manship, Mark Rothko, and Lee Krasner. He created a unique language around anatomical drawing that explained how to capture human anatomy and gesture by dividing the figure into geometric forms. Bridgman published six books that included his anatomical drawings as well as his lectures. His book *Constructive Anatomy*, originally published in 1920, is a standard in the field today.

Born in Bing County, Canada in 1864, Bridgman followed in the footsteps of his father Wesley Bridgman, a renowned portrait artist. He spent his early years in Paris studying under Jean-Léon Gérôme at the École des Beaux-Arts and then with figure painter Gustave Boulanger. Bridgman later moved to New York and began his lengthy teaching career at the Art Students League. According to the 1943-44 Art Students League catalogue, up until his death in 1943, Bridgman was teaching morning and afternoon sessions six days a week.

Bridgman had a vivacious and magnetic personality that kept his students fighting for his attention. A typical class would begin with Bridgman rolling out a large sheet of drawing paper at the front of the classroom.



FIGURE STUDIES I & II, c. 1920, charcoal, 60 x 58 inches,
Conner • Rosenkranz



He would stand in the front of it, chewing on a cigar, and preach about the importance of mastering anatomy while he excitedly sketched the model. He was a highly critical teacher and walked around the classroom correcting his students, drawing directly on their works. He encouraged them to draw from observation while simultaneously pulling from a deeper understanding of the architecture of the figure. His speech was always vivid and descriptive, "The foot has strength to support the weight of the body. It also has flexibility, elasticity and beauty of form. Its construction is the envy of the bridge builders. The arrangements of its tendons and ligaments as they bind, pass round and through slits is akin with the belt, straps and ropes of the machine." At the end of every class he would select a student's work as number one, creating a spirited competitive environment. Norman Rockwell who began studying with Bridgman at the Art Students League in 1911 wrote in his 1960 autobiography, *My Adventures as an Illustrator*, "We worshipped George Bridgman."



MALE TORSO, c. 1920, charcoal, 40 ½ x 16 ½ inches, Conner • Rosenkranz



George Bridgman at The Art Students League, NY, n.d.

In the summers from 1906 until 1922 Bridgman would lecture at the League's summer school of painting in Woodstock, New York. All of his lectures involved demonstrations on large format drawing paper rolled out and pinned to the front of the room, and almost always the lecture demos were taken down and trashed at the end of class. However in Woodstock several of Bridgman's sketches were neatly rolled and stored at the school and forgotten, until they were discovered in the late 1990's. Apart from his published books, these demonstration sketches are the rare visual proof of his tremendous talent in his field.

Copyright © 2013 Conner • Rosenkranz LLC