

# CONNER·ROSENKRANZ

19th & 20th Century American Sculpture

L.L.C.



## Paul Howard Manship (1885-1966)

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For nearly a hundred years, Paul Manship has been a dazzling presence in the history of American sculpture. One of the first Americans to abandon the prevailing Beaux-Arts style for a more abstract idiom, Manship played the past against the present, using his lively understanding of antiquity to invigorate the vocabulary of contemporary art. Manship aspired “to reconcile the passage of time with permanence,” and he expressed this desire with unrivalled refinement in figures arrested dramatically in motion. Manship fused thematic ambition and formal resourcefulness with a perfectionist’s insistence on craft and technique. He was exquisitely sensitive to highlights and patinas, which were crucial to the elegance of his surfaces. He used superior foundries, and kept in close touch with them during the casting and finishing of his bronzes. As John Manship has written of his father’s sculpture, “Every form was considered and perfected, polished almost like jewelry.”

Among the sculptures on view, *Diana and Actaeon* (1921-1924; these casts 1925) and the *Celestial Sphere* (1934), have not been exhibited publicly for more than half a century. They and the *Indian Hunter* and *Pronghorn Antelope* (1914) represent a collection of important images that encapsulate the most innovative phases of Manship’s spectacular career. These examples of Manship’s sculpture are equally satisfying for the caliber of their casts. *Indian Hunter* and *Pronghorn Antelope* was made by Gorham Company Founders, an American firm renowned for its skills in mold-making, chasing, and finishing by the time Manship



*ORIENTAL DANCER VASE*, 1913, bronze, 14 3/8 inches high, private collection.

came on the scene. The family foundry of Alexis Rudier in Paris, who cast *Diana* and *Actaeon*, was famous for its long association with Auguste Rodin. *Celestial Sphere* was produced by Priessman Bauer Co., Munich, another foundry of high repute.

Manship was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1905 he moved to New York, where he studied with or assisted such prominent sculptors as Hermon Atkins MacNeil, Solon Borglum, and Isidore Konti. Four years later, Manship won a competition for a three-year fellowship to the American Academy in Rome. The prize was the making of the young artist, who immersed himself in Italian culture and visited London, Paris, and Greece. Manship’s encounter with early Greek sculpture catalyzed his imagination. Just as the European modernists were analyzing African and Pacific sculpture for inspiration, Manship adopted the simplicity and directness of archaic Greek carving to his own formal purposes.

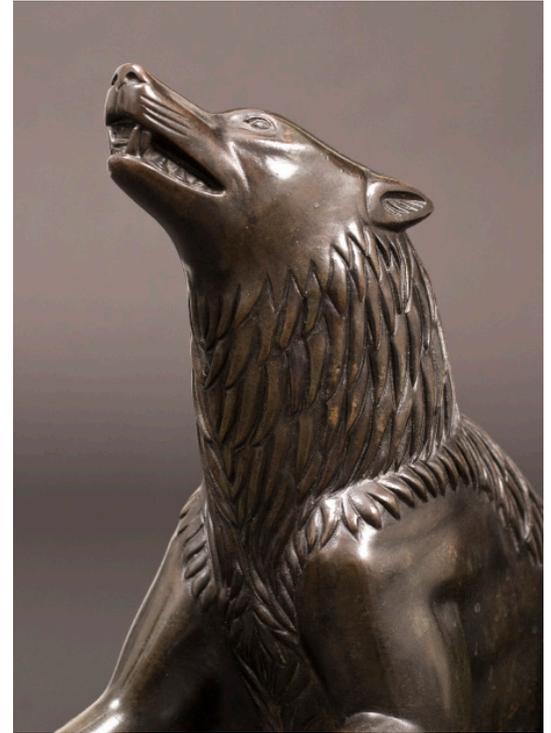


*DIANA and ACTAEON*, 1925, bronze with gilding, Diana, 62 1/8 inches high, Actaeon 47 inches high. North Carolina Museum of Art.

Manship returned to New York in the autumn of 1912, and in February 1913 he had the first of three triumphant exhibitions occurring that year. An influential critic heralded the arrival of “a new and genuine talent,” and Manship’s remarkable career was born. One of the most lyrical works from this *annus mirabilis* of 1913 was *Oriental Dancer Vase*, the first sculpture that showed another crucial aesthetic influence—East Indian and Chinese art. The vase is delicately executed in low relief and animated by subtle rhythms, the dancer’s hair, headdress, necklace, and garment are adeptly detailed. The vase’s sensuous form is offset by griffin head handles, their tongues attaching to the neck of the vase, creating a joyful amalgam of the useful and the beautiful.

Established as a success, Manship continued to experiment. He undertook a familiar American subject – that of the Native American – in a linear, streamlined treatment that was fresh and individualized. *Indian Hunter* and *Pronghorn Antelope* of 1914 was originally composed for Manship’s personal pleasure: the first pair of these tautly linked bronzes on separate marble bases was intended for his own mantelpiece. The composition is precisely devised: the unseen flight of the arrow ties the interlocking shapes of hunter and prey together. The S line of the antelope, climaxing in the backward arch of the animal’s neck and head, conveys the animal’s shock at being wounded, in acute contrast to the unwavering fixity and follow-through of the hunter’s body. The curving of the antelope’s form toward its pursuer emphasizes the balletic nature of the sculpture. The two are fixed in a pas-de-deux of doom.

In 1921 Manship moved to Paris, where he produced his celebrated mythological sculptures. The dynamic *Diana and Actaeon* are the apotheosis of the artist’s passion for the tragic dramas of classical world. Manship frequently explored the fleeting struggle of



*INDIAN HUNTER AND HIS DOG*, 1926, bronze on original marble base, 23 1/8 inches high, private collection.

human frailty and human appetites through the use of classical archetypes. Indeed, it was the great theme of his career. But never was his composition so complex in its integration of solids and voids or so astonishing in its frontality.

Manship had first conceived of a *Diana* in 1915, but ultimately *Diana* was completed in 1921 and *Actaeon* in 1923. In classical mythology, *Diana*, the goddess of the hunt, was seen bathing by *Actaeon*, a hunter. To punish him for staring at her nakedness, *Diana* transformed *Actaeon* into a stag. His own hounds, not recognizing their master, tore him apart.

Because of their powerful volumes, Manship's later sculptures are imbued with a more intense physicality than his earlier, more feminized works. (This new direction may reflect the artist's study of Romanesque carvings when he was in France. In Romanesque sculpture, ornamentation is

severely subordinated to mass, although Manship offset the smoother surfaces of *Diana* and *Actaeon* with vigorous patterning on the hounds' ruffs and tails.) *Diana* is all motion, speed, and twist, her tunic streaming in one direction, her body moving in another. The sculpture fulfills the sculptor's wish to defy gravity; *Diana's* levitation is echoed by a companion dog racing in rhythm beside her. *Actaeon* is heavier and earthbound, symbolizing the futility of his plight and the pain of mortality. He too is fleeing. His naturalistically defined torso, legs, and left arm strain upward in a forceful diagonal away from *Diana*, but it is too late. *Actaeon* is a figure on the cusp of radical change, encompassing the drama of suspended movement and the budding of a new form within the old. The precise moment of metamorphosis has begun: *Actaeon* sprouts a stag's horns and ears, and his dogs are snapping and about to attack. Even they have changed, evolving from comrades

into avengers – another metamorphosis that up-ends the relationship between hunter and hunted. *Diana* and *Actaeon* are an unforgettable pair of silhouettes, and Manship was never more eloquent in his orchestration of forms or command of space.

A corollary to the motif of classical mythology—the ancient explanations of the earth and sky—that fascinated Manship throughout the 1920s and 1930s was the visual expression of the shape of the cosmos. He was enamored of spheres, the constellations, and the signs of the zodiac. This imagery was especially suited to Manship’s public and architectural commissions, which flourished after he returned to New York in 1926.

Manship composed a notable armillary sphere (an instrument in the shape of a hoop used by ancient ancient astronomers) for the campus of Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, in 1928. Whereas the armillary spheres are open forms, Manship wanted to add an enclosed one—a celestial sphere—to the school’s grounds, but his proposal was rejected. Undaunted, Manship persevered and the first *Celestial Sphere* was five feet in diameter. It was cast in 1934 and shown in his Tate Gallery exhibition in 1935. This pierced orb was the sculptor’s interpretation of the iconography of the heavens. Manship, a devoted stargazer, plotted the arrangement and accurate disposition of sixty-six constellations. The cast bronze model is gilded and studded with white metal stars. Covered in entwined figures and animals, the globe on its axis is encircled by both a meridian and an equator. The constellations are identified by their Latin names. The concept is a tour-de-force of harmonious design and gleaming details. In addition, Manship had five small versions of *Celestial Sphere* made in 1934. The example on view remained in his own collection.

Manship was so fervent about the bond



*CELESTIAL SPHERE*, 1934, gilt bronze, white metal on original quartz base, 25 7/8 inches high, incl. base, private collection.

between spheres and unity that he executed a variant on the 1934 sphere as a memorial honoring Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations. Installed in August 1939 in Geneva, the hope for international peace that *Celestial Sphere* symbolized was shortly to dissolve in a world calamity. Nevertheless, whether it was public or private, intimate or large in scale, Paul Manship’s sculpture consistently expressed the heroic ideals of his times.



*INDIAN AND PRONGHORN ANTELOPE*, 1914, bronze  
 Indian: 12 ¾ inches high, Antelope: 12 ½ inches high, R.W.  
 Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, LA

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