

Basic Detail Report



Title: Sioux Indian Buffalo Dance

Date: 1902

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3dea1

Medium: sculpture; Bronze, brown patina

Description: This sculpture was made after Borglum and his wife, Emma, spent the summer of 1899 at the Sioux reservation at Crow Creek, South Dakota. Emma expressed their attitude toward the native Americans: "One can hardly believe when one lives in the middle of this population so quiet, so polite, so dignified in its movements that they could have been as cruel as history tells us. One forgets, generally, to relate the bad treatment, the unjust acts, and the treacheries which whites used to supplant the Indians on American soil." (1) Contemporary critics appreciated Borglum's understanding of the Sioux as expressed in his sculpture. He studied the Indian, one author wrote, "not alone from without but from within, entering with sympathy into his interests and his occupations, and learning to know him through genuine friendly and human companionship." (2) One of the most memorable events of the summer was the performance of the Indian buffalo dance.

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As the native women imitated the neighing of horses, medicine men took the roles of the buffalo in flight, pursued by the other men of the reservation. Four years after seeing this ritual, the sculptor produced "The Sioux Indian Buffalo Dance", based on small models of the figures that he had made on the spot in South Dakota. (3) The work was conceived as part of a series of four sculptures (with "The Pioneer in a Storm", "Cowboy at Rest", and "Steps Toward Civilization") on the theme of civilization moving west. The four works were cast in staff (plaster mixed with straw) at life size and displayed in 1903 in Saint Louis Plaza, the main launch landing at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. (4) Augustus Saint-Gaudens had recommended Borglum to Frederick W. Ruckstull, the organizer and curator of the various installations of sculpture at the fair who commissioned the work. Evidently impressed by Borglum's talent, Ruckstull authorized a substantial advance, which allowed Borglum to bring his family back to America from Paris in summer 1902. (5) Smaller casts of the figures were displayed at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland, Oregon, in 1905; and at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. The works consistently received positive critical notice, even in the European press. (6) In its asymmetrical composition, "Sioux Indian Buffalo Dance" is typical of Borglum's style, as is the suggestion of the environment in which the event is taking place and the careful attention to costume and accessories rendered with historical accuracy. While certain passages in the sculpture are modeled rather impressionistically, Borglum shows an academic knowledge of human anatomy. These features of his style sometimes led critics to compare him to Auguste Rodin. (7) The New Britain cast of this sculpture is one of three made by the Roman Bronze Works, New York, in the 1960s to mark the centennial of the sculptor's birth. The castings were done under the auspices of Borglum's descendants for the Solon H. Borglum Sculpture and Education Fund, Wilton, Connecticut. The first two casts, made in 1964 and 1967 respectively, were sold to private collections in Chicago and San Francisco. DBD Bibliography: Lorado Taft, "The History of American Sculpture" (New York: Macmillan, 1903), pp. 478-83; Charles H. Caffin, "American Masters of Sculpture" (Garden City and New York: Doubleday, Page, 1903), pp. 149-162; Frank Sewall, "A Sculptor of the Prairie, Solon H. Borglum," "Century Magazine" 68 (June 1904): 247-51; Selene Ayer Armstrong, "Solon H. Borglum: Sculptor of American Life: An Artists Who Knows the Value of `Our Incomparable Materials'", "Craftsman 12" (1907): 382-89; Gutzon Borglum, "Solon H. Borglum," "American Magazine of Art 13" (November 1922): 471-75; A. Mervyn Davies, Solon H. Borglum: "A Man Who Stands Alone" (Chester, Conn.: Pequot Press, 1974). Notes: 1. Quoted in Davies, Solon H. Borglum, p. 71. 2. Sewall, "Sculptor of the Prairie," p. 250. 3. Davies, Solon H. Borglum, p. 71. 4. Ibid. Augustus Saint-Gaudens had urged Borglum to participate in the fair. Besides the four large works, Borglum was also represented by nine small bronzes shown in the fine arts exhibition. One of these, Snowdrift, won a gold medal. 5. Ibid., p. 90. 6. Ibid., p. 96. 7. For example, see Caffin, American Masters, p. 158.

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Dimensions: 37 x 51 1/2 x 20d in.