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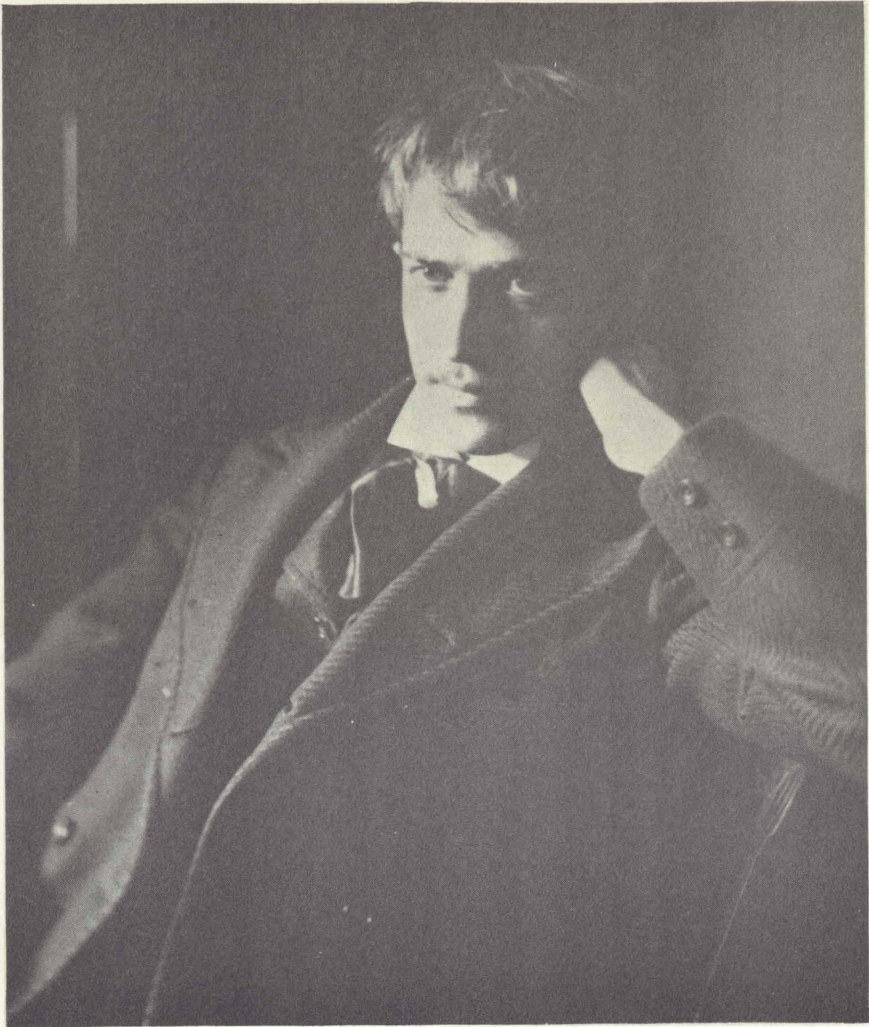


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Stephen Crane in 1893. Photograph by Corwin Knapp Linson, artist, friend of Crane, and author of *My Stephen Crane* (Syracuse University Press, 1958). From the Stephen Crane Papers, George Arents Research Library.

THE COURIER

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Harriet Whitney Frishmuth, American Sculptor

Sculptor Harriet Whitney Frishmuth, in her 91st year, was awarded the Silver Medal of the National Sculpture Society for her bronze "Laughing Waters," exhibited in the Society's 38th Annual Exhibition in New York, April 1971. Over a fifty-year period before her retirement in 1953, memorials, portrait busts, fountains and decorative bronzes have been created by Miss Frishmuth, winning for her such awards as the Helen Foster Barnett prize, 1915; the National Arts Club gold medal, 1921; the Watrous gold medal at the National Academy of Design, 1922; the Julia A. Shaw memorial prize, 1923; the American Garden Club gold medal, 1928; and the Irving T. Bush prize, 1928. In 1966 her bronze, "Sweet Grapes," won the first award of the Council of American Artist Societies.

In 1964 Miss Frishmuth graciously presented her papers to Syracuse University for perpetual care, making them available for research by reputable scholars. The collection consists of professional correspondence, photographs of works, scrapbooks, memorabilia and plaster casts. Also in the collection is a series of tape recordings made in 1964 by Miss Frishmuth, in which she informally reminisces about her life and work and provides descriptions and comments relative to a few of her outstanding sculptures. Gleanings from the Syracuse tapes, with Miss Frishmuth's own comments on the pictured works, have been brought together by Miss Ruth Talcott, companion-secretary to Miss Frishmuth, and appear below.

Harriet Frishmuth was born in Philadelphia on September 17, 1880. At an early age she was taken to Europe by her mother, with her two older sisters, Dora and Bertha. For six years they lived and attended school in Paris during the winters and spent the summers in Switzerland. Two years of school in Dresden followed, then the family returned to the United States to

Miss Frishmuth is now retired and living at Heritage Village, Southbury, Connecticut. The article was taken almost entirely from Miss Frishmuth's tape recordings in the Frishmuth Collection. However, the editor is most grateful to Miss Ruth Talcott, companion and secretary to Miss Frishmuth, for editing the material where necessary and adding some details not mentioned by Miss Frishmuth on the tapes.

live with Harriet's grandmother in Mt. Airy, Pennsylvania. After the marriage of Harriet's elder sister, Bertha, Mrs. Frishmuth took her two younger daughters back to Dresden. Dora soon returned to Philadelphia, while Harriet and her mother went on to Vienna. From there they started for Italy, expecting to spend a winter in Rome, but Mrs. Frishmuth became ill and they decided to return to Switzerland where they knew a very fine doctor.

Miss Frishmuth says, "While there (Switzerland) I met a Mrs. Hinton who was a sculptor's wife and I think she was a sculptor herself. She came up to me one evening and said, 'What do you do? You look as though you ought to play the violin.' I laughed and said, 'I don't know one tune from another but I always had a yearning to model but have never had a chance to try it.' She replied, 'Come on up to my room. I have some plasteline and we'll see what you can do with it.' So I went up to her room and she handed me a lump of plasteline and I started playing with it and modeled from memory a relief of my mother who was downstairs in bed. Mrs. Hinton was very encouraging and decided to give me lessons. We wrote to Italy for some plasteline and I started a bust of my mother built up on a bottle. It turned out to be quite like her. I was very enthusiastic.

"When my mother was better we returned to Paris and lived for three or four years in a *pension* on rue Valette near the Pantheon. There were young architects, painters, students at the Beaux Arts. We had a very good time on very little money. One of the young architects was Carl Collins who later was called 'America's greatest Gothic architect.' He was responsible for the buildings at the University of Chicago, The Cloisters and Riverside Church in New York.

"Mother and I inquired about various art schools but as I was barely nineteen she did not want me in a mixed class. The only women's class I could find was Rodin's and there I landed. The master came into class about twice a week and judged our work by pulling out what he considered the best piece. At the end of the first month he took mine out front and praised it mightily. He asked me if I understood him and I replied 'yes' and ran home across the Luxembourg gardens and threw my hat at my mother. Rodin had said to be sure and cast the piece in plaster but we had no money for such things and I thought 'if my first piece is so good, my second will be wonderful.' It took me two years to get over that praise and realize I knew next to nothing!" Although her time with Rodin was brief, Miss Frishmuth pays tribute to his influence and speaks of two things particularly that he taught her and which she incorporated so brilliantly in her work. "First, always look at the silhouette of a subject and be guided by it; second, remember that movement is the transition from one attitude to another. It is a bit of what was and a bit of what is to be."

In Paris Miss Frishmuth studied also under Gauquier and Injalbert, then worked for two years in Berlin as an assistant to Professor Cuno von Euchtritz. Back home, she studied with Hermon MacNeil and Gutzon

Borglum at the Art Students League where the young sculptor won the St. Gaudens prize. It was Borglum finally who sent her away to “establish your own studio, your own expression, you’ve studied enough!” She continued to help Borglum and also worked with Karl Bitter in Weehauken, New Jersey, for a year. She also dissected once a week for two years at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York.

Miss Frishmuth’s first studio was on the fourth floor of the home of her uncle, Dr. T. Passmore Berens, with whom she and her mother lived in New York. In 1913 Miss Frishmuth and her mother bought No. 6 Sniffen Court; it was there that Harriet Frishmuth’s career came to fruition and the lovely, vital figures for which she became renowned were created.

Miss Frishmuth tells the story of her most notable model, Desha, who was a famous dancer. “Desha was sent to me by Miss Frances Grimes, a sculptor whose work I admired. It was in 1916 that Desha knocked at my studio door in Sniffen Court and asked if I could use her. I liked her attitude right away but I didn’t have any time just then. I took her name and address and told her I would let her know when I could work her in. When we had finished our little chat she went out skipping, half dancing and singing through the courtyard to the street. That was the beginning of a very pleasant relationship between Desha and me. She posed for me for years and is the model in ninety per cent of my more important work. At first I used her for my class of five or six pupils. Then one week I had her pose just for me and as neither of us knew exactly what we wanted I put a record on the victrola. It was *L’Extase* by Scriabin. Desha started dancing and one pose intrigued me. I carried it out and called the finished bronze ‘Extase’ after the music.¹

“This work started a long series of interesting things that I did from Desha; poses and figures that we had an awfully good time doing. I called one of my small bronzes ‘Desha’ for it was so like her, gay and vital and full of joie de vivre, and a companion piece I called ‘Allegra.’ Then there was ‘The Dancers’ where she posed with one of Pavlova’s partners, Leon Barté, who had gorgeous physique. I used to tell Desha stories while she posed. I remember telling her the story of *David Copperfield* and also of *A Tale of Two Cities*. She would be so interested she would forget and stand and watch me. At first, when she posed for the back I had a great time because she kept turning around to watch me model. I would say ‘Turn and let me have the back view.’ One day I solved the problem by putting up a large mirror where she could see herself. During rest periods, instead of sitting down quietly, she used to take all kinds of poses and make faces at herself and other amusing things. One day she said, ‘Look, Miss Frishmuth, don’t I look drunk?’ I looked and she had a pose that was fascinating. The bronze from it is called ‘Wild Grapes’ for it is a bacchante. It is a limited edition of three: one in The Hermitage, Mrs. Sloan’s home in Norfolk, Virginia, now a museum; one in the

¹It is interesting to note that John Cranko of the Stuttgart Ballet choreographed a ballet for Margot Fonteyn during the past winter using the same music.

collection of Mr. Charles N. Aronson, Arcade, New York; and one in my own collection.

“Desha was an unusually interesting model and simply perfect for my work. She could take exactly the same pose from one day to another with no variation. This is a remarkable quality in a model and especially valuable for me in creating dancing figures. While working for me, she met and became the partner of Jean Delteil, whose stage name is Myrio. After a year or so she married him and the wedding reception was held in my studio. She has had a fascinating life, danced all over the world, and lived in France during the German occupation in World War II. She and her husband have a lovely home in the south of France and for years she has taught and directed her own dancing school.”

Miss Frishmuth moved from Philadelphia to New York and back during her career. Finally she moved to Connecticut where she injured her arm and shoulder and was forced to retire. At present she is living in Heritage Village, Southbury, Connecticut with a friend, Ruth Talcott, whom she describes as invaluable to her in the roles of friend and secretary. Miss Talcott, says Miss Frishmuth, has “kept my work going since I am no longer able to arrange for the showing and sale of my bronzes.”

Miss Frishmuth believes that the trend in taste is again toward the traditional and classical in art. She finds there is a distinct renaissance of interest in her own work these past fifteen years. “It is so easy to do the ugly and distort beauty. Eccentricity and caprice are no substitute for style and mastery in modeling. Beauty is everywhere in this world, it always has been. Maybe today eyes have not been trained to *see* for if the artist has an appreciation and understanding of nature, he cannot go far afield from truth and beauty which are the pillars of great art.”

Miss Frishmuth concludes her tape recordings with the following: “On the 17th of September, 1964, my 84th birthday, I received a letter from Syracuse University which was a big surprise and a wonderful present. The University said it wanted very much to have all my plasters, photographs, sketches, newspaper clippings, fan mail and anything that pertained to my work and life. The material was to be put in their library in perpetual care. This thrilled me no end and I was very much honored. I am more than delighted to accept their invitation to establish a Harriet Whitney Frishmuth collection at Syracuse.”²

Miss Frishmuth is an academician of The National Academy of Design, a Fellow of the National Sculpture Society, a Life Member of The National Arts Club, a member of the Architectural League, the Municipal Arts Society, Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club and a life member of the Festival of Arts in Laguna Beach.

The comments accompanying the photographs are for the most part from Miss Frishmuth's tape recording.

² Miss Frishmuth's private collection of bronzes has been willed to the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Va.



Call of the Sea

Bottom of casting to top of hand 46", pedestal front to back 20".

Edition of 18. Brookgreen Gardens, South Carolina;

Canajoharie Art Gallery, Canajoharie, New York.

This fountain was designed for the edge of a swimming pool. At the other end of the pool was Edward McCartan's "Pan" and I felt that my youngster was calling to Pan to "come over—come on in." The idea of the whole thing produced a feeling of calling, the way the ocean has always called to me. The model who posed for the bronze was a charming little girl, a ballet student. She grew into a lovely young lady and posed for my "Play Days" a few years later.



The Vine

Large size overall 7'2". Awarded the Julia A. Shaw Memorial prize at the National Academy, 1923. Edition of five. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Los Angeles Museum of Art, California; University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and private collections. **Small size, 12"**. Edition 350, 1921.

One of the most popular small bronzes by an American sculptor.

The Vine

The small Vine originated in my studio in a class I had. There were six pupils and Desha took the pose for them. It intrigued me very much so I started modeling along with the girls. I thought it would be a good thing for them to see *me* working a little bit too! So as I worked along with them I said, "I'm going to put my figure up on her toes and then I'm going to bend her back further, get a little more action into it, and I think I'll put some grapevines in her hands because it's exactly the composition I've seen so many times passing the vineyards along the Hudson." The little Vine was successful and sold from the very beginning.

The large size originated in a very interesting way. I was on the Council of the National Sculpture Society and at a meeting we were discussing the possibility—really the necessity—of having a large exhibition of sculpture. We talked over all aspects and finally one member spoke up and said, "There are twenty of us here. If we each promise to make a life size figure, we could have the nucleus of an interesting show." So it was decided we would, but then the question arose, who would finance the exhibition and where? I don't know exactly how it came about but Archer Milton Huntington heard of the project and volunteered to finance it which was a wonderful thing for all of us. On the jury to select the sculpture was Anna Hyatt and it was during this time she met Mr. Huntington and a delightful romance followed.³ For my part I made the small Vine life size and had a wonderful time doing it, except in life size she bent backward so far that I had to model the face upside down, which wasn't easy to accomplish. After this show I sent the bronze to the National Academy of Design exhibition where it won the Julia A. Shaw Memorial Prize for the finest piece of work done by an American woman. It was from this show that the Institute of Architects bought the first casting and presented it to the Los Angeles Museum.

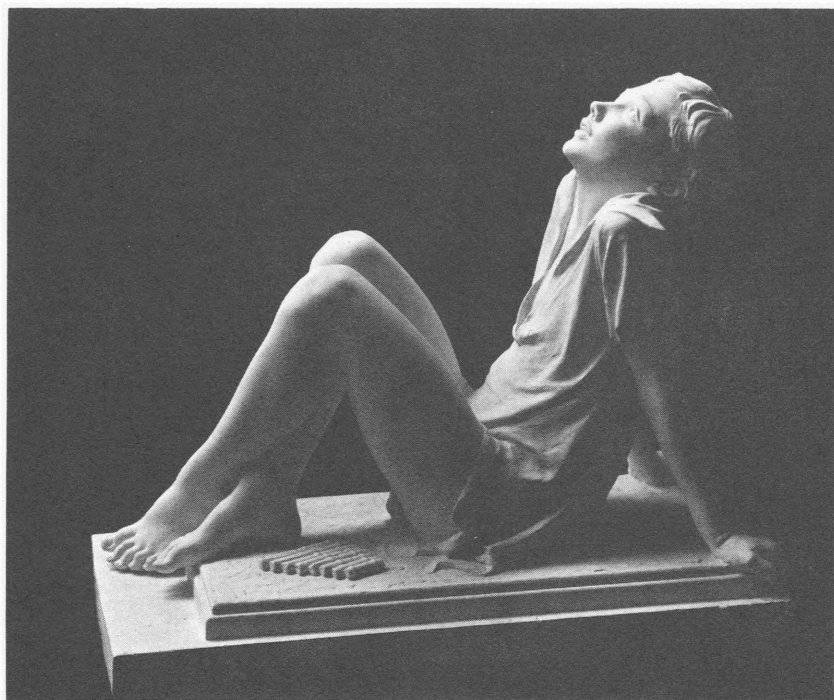
The Vine was very nicely placed in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and when World War II came along it was sent to a large estate on the Philadelphia Main Line for safe keeping. After the war it was returned to the Metropolitan but *avant garde* had taken over the art world and it was lodged three floors below the street. There it stayed until Mr. Robert Moses, President of the New York World's Fair Corporation 1964-65, had it placed at the Fair. It caused a great deal of comment and I've had many letters from people who enjoyed it. It was then on view in the American Wing of the Metropolitan and I understand it is to be permanently placed in a new gallery that is to be devoted to American sculpture.

³The George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University holds substantial collections of the papers of both Archer Milton Huntington and Anna Hyatt Huntington. Archer Huntington was the son of Arabella, second wife of Collis P. Huntington, about whom an article appeared in the last issue of *The Courier*.



Portrait of Desha
Life size, unique.

This is the model who posed for ninety per cent of the decorative figures I have made. When she married, I gave her a bronze casting of this portrait bust which she now has in her home at Bergerac in the Dordogne. Syracuse University has the plaster cast and this piece is, of course, unique, there being just the one casting for Desha.



Peter Pan

Length 26" by 20½". Edition of 6.

A cousin of mine whom I never met always wanted one of my pieces. After her death, her husband, Dr. Craig, came to the studio and asked me if I could make a Peter Pan to place between her grave and his in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, as she had an affinity for Peter Pan and hated being "grown up." I told the little boy who posed for the piece the story of Peter Pan and said to him, "If you were out in the dark, in the woods, and you looked up at the stars for the very first time, what position would you take?" He looked at me with his eyes bright and said, "I'd take this pose" and sat right down on the model table in the pose of my Peter Pan.

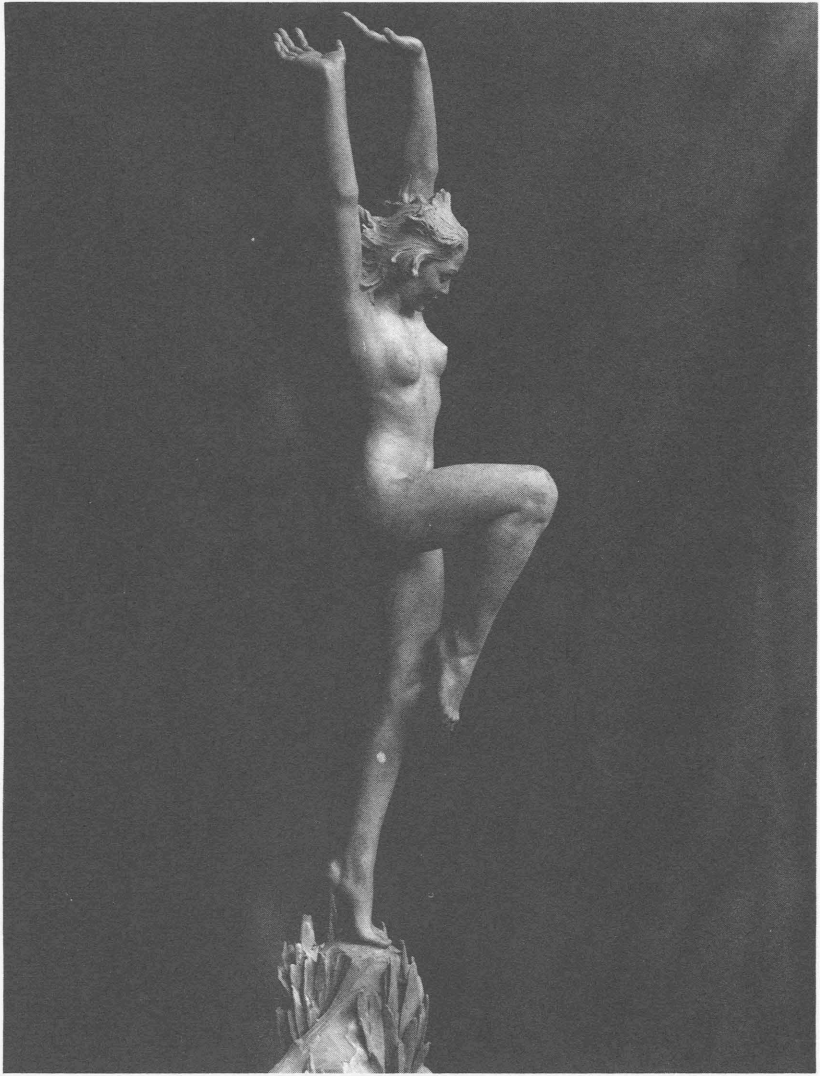
President Wilson

This was the most important portrait bust for which I ever received a commission. It was a very interesting experience all the way through. The person who was responsible for my getting the commission was a patient of my uncle, Dr. T. Passmore Berens of New York. She had seen the portrait that I had made of my uncle and told the Committee of Selection for the Wilson commission that she would finance the whole thing if Miss Frishmuth were given the work. They agreed. This necessitated my going to Washington to see Mrs. Wilson and she showed me all the portraits of President Wilson and permitted me to take photographs as well as his death mask back to my studio in New York. I had literally several hundred photographs and the interesting part, the difficult part, too, was that they were either three-quarters or one profile, I think it was the right side, but no profile of the left side of his face. When Mrs. Wilson saw my portrait for the first time she was moved to tears. But the Committee gave me considerable trouble. They didn't like the way I had finished the cloak or the base; they didn't say anything about the likeness, they left that to Mrs. Wilson, but they thought the base and cloak too fussy. So I changed and simplified it considerably and then they came after me and said, "Why did you change the coat?" I told them, "Because you asked me to!" In one of their meetings one member had said, "Harriet Frishmuth is a good sculptor, she can do decorative figures, but she can't do a portrait." So to satisfy himself and the Committee he came up from Washington to see the portrait as it was being cut in marble over on Staten Island. As soon as he saw it he had no more criticisms and there was no more trouble and the portrait was finished and erected in the Hall of Presidents at Richmond, Virginia. It is in marble and the plaster cast is in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.



President Woodrow Wilson

Life size, unique.



Joy of the Waters

Large size 5'4". Edition of 65. Atlanta, Georgia; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia; Botanical Gardens, St. Paul, Minnesota; Collection of Charles N. Aronson, Arcade, New York. Small size 45". Edition of 45. Museum of Fine Arts, Dayton, Ohio; John Herron Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana.

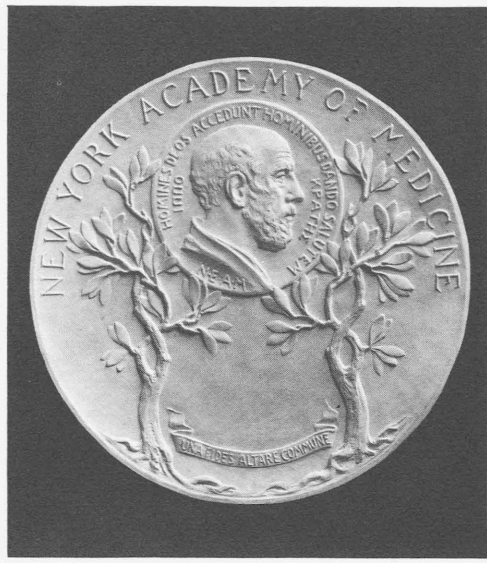
This bronze was the result of a lull in commissions. "Desha, what would you do if you were standing barefoot on a rock and a little cold ripple hit your foot?" "Ooh, this," and the Joy was on its way.



Slavonic Dancer

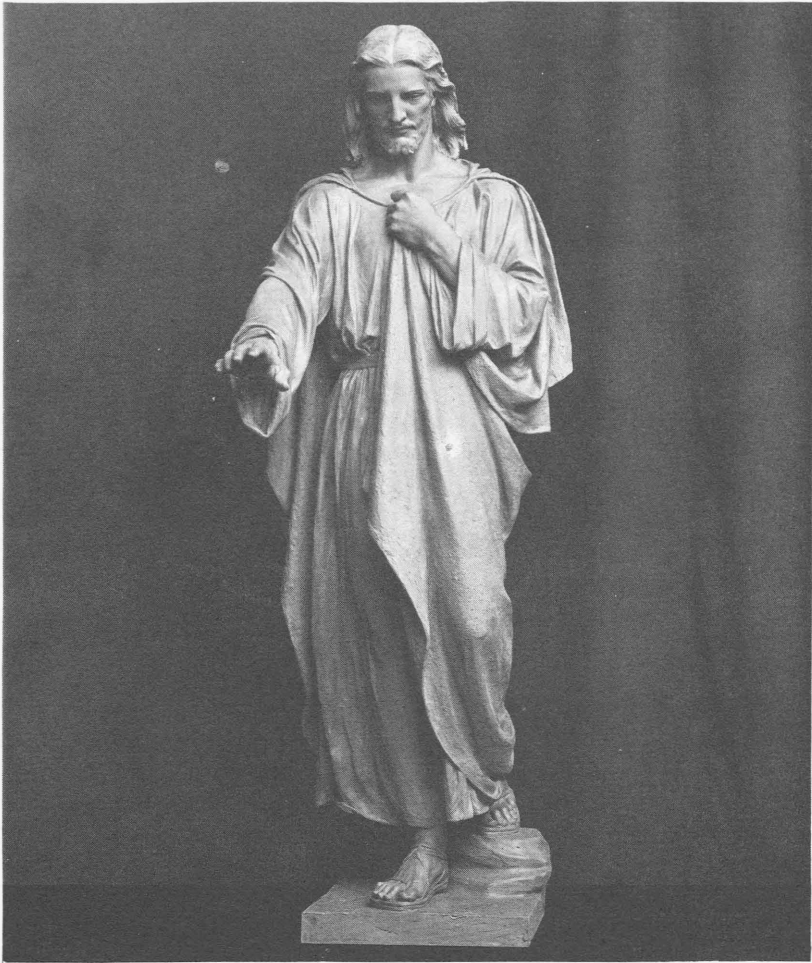
13". Edition of 10. The Metropolitan Museum of New York; Wadsworth
Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut; and collection of
Charles N. Aronson, Arcade, New York.

Leon Barté posed for this piece. I had used his beautiful dancer's figure
in other work and wanted to do a male dancing figure. He took this pose,
among others, and I liked it. It was not a commission, it was just something I
wanted to do.



New York Academy of Medicine Medal

One side—I can't remember the name of the old Greek fellow who was the father of medicine but it's supposed to be his portrait—and I have living, growing laurels surrounding him. The other side is the figure of Nature removing her veil before Science. That turned out very well. The model who posed had a lovely figure.



The Christ
Life size, unique.

Mr. John K. Mullen, Denver, Colorado, commissioned this figure which was emotionally the most taxing piece I ever did. Mr. Mullen had very definite ideas and I wasn't able to do it exactly the way I wanted but I tried to get the strength of the Man and in the pose I tried to convey His desire for the world to be quiet and listen to His teaching. I asked that it be mounted on a very simple, modest pedestal so that the figure, I hoped, might carry its message. Years after Mr. Mullen's death a dealer in Denver sent me a snapshot of the memorial and I was shocked. It had been mounted before an overpowering marble background and the whole simplicity and the message of the figure is completely spoiled for me.