



THE CHARLES HOSMER
MORSE MUSEUM
of American Art

**Exhibition of John Rogers Sculptures
Opens at the Morse Museum on Nov. 28**

WINTER PARK, Fla. (November 1, 2000) – John Rogers, the post Civil War artist whose beloved sculptures reflected the politics, pleasures and ideals of a changing America, is the subject of a special exhibition that opens in the museum on Nov. 28.

More than 30 of Rogers' works, all from the Morse permanent collection, have been prepared for "Scenes from America's Past: The Sculpture of John Rogers." The exhibition runs through May 13, 2001.

The selected Rogers sculptures date from 1864 to 1892. They were chosen from the museum's large collection of 62 Rogers sculptures to represent the predominant themes of the artist's work: daily life, literature, theatre and the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Although Rogers' sculptures were on display in tens of thousands of homes more than a century ago, today the opportunity to see them is rare, said Museum Director Laurence Ruggiero. With this exhibition, the Morse pays tribute to Rogers for his unique place in the history of American art and in the American experience.

Rogers (1829-1904) was of the generation of American sculptors who abandoned the classical style and instead pursued realism. But in Rogers' case, this formal academic context is secondary to his special position as the "People's Sculptor."

"Rogers' images of everyday life in the 19th century are fascinating not only for their charm and their heartwarming qualities, but also for the role they played in the formation of a national identity," Dr. Ruggiero said.

In the social and political upheaval following the Civil War, ordinary Americans without particularly literary or classical education for the first time had in Rogers an artist who gave prominence to a world of experiences of which they had intimate knowledge.

Sales of his plaster groups exceeded 80,000 pieces in the 30-year period spanning from 1863 to 1893. From his New York

studio, he sold about 1,700 units per year at an affordable average price of \$14.25 each.

In terms of sheer cubic inches it would not be surprising to find -- if such a thing could be found -- that Rogers' sculptural groups occupied more space in American living rooms than the work of any sculptor before or since. Rogers' sculptures were known as "groups" because they almost always showed the practical, playful and humorous interrelationships between several persons or at least one person and some other living thing.

His most popular work, for example, "Coming to the Parson," with a young couple bashfully approaching the minister with news of their love, sold 8,000 copies, roughly one tenth of the artist's work. His second most popular work, "Checkers Up at the Farm," depicts a farmer in a good-natured game of checkers with his farmhand, while wife and baby look on. This piece, also represented in this exhibition, sold about 5,000 copies.

These "genre" scenes depicted Americans the way Americans wanted to be seen: happy, healthy, independent and honest. Rogers' archetypal Americans are the less well known but equally important contributions to a tradition that in the 20th century has been ably represented by the celebrated illustrator Norman Rockwell.

Rogers consciously or unconsciously showed great sensitivity to his culture. The nation that sought to heal itself found commonality in the people John Rogers called forth from stories, history, popular entertainment, and a recent pastoral past of family values. This great mythical vision became for later industrial and post-industrial America a part of the identity of many Americans.

Rogers, born in Salem, Mass., began his remarkable career somewhat belatedly. A man of conservative bent who had embarked on a career as a machinist after high school but who took his private joy in the hobby of modeling clay, Rogers was propelled into the life of an artist by a nationwide recession in 1857 that left him jobless. He studied briefly in Paris and Rome under sculptors of classical training. It was enough for him to confirm his talent and to hasten him home to America for to launch a uniquely American, highly entrepreneurial approach to a classical art.

When his groups began eventually to lose popularity, Rogers began producing large-scale works, including a life-size Lincoln in 1892, for which he won a bronze medal at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. But these works were never as popular as his domestic scaled groups and in 1893 Rogers retired to New Canaan, where a creeping paralysis eventually deprived the once deft sculptor of movement in his arms and legs. He died in 1904 at the age of 74.

Of other sculptors of his era, Augustus St. Gaudens (1848-1907) may have surpassed Rogers from a purely aesthetic point of view and Frederick Remington (1861-1909) may be far better known today. But Rogers' achievement was not superficial and his current reputation is still far short of what he deserves.

Regular admission to the museum is \$3 for adults, \$1 for students and no charge for children under 12. Admission is free on Friday evenings during extended hours from 4-8 p.m. Regular hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

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