

Christian Petersen

In 1958, Ames sculptor Christian Petersen modeled a portrait of Marshalltown industrialist J. William Fisher in the Central Iowa Art Association studio at the Fisher Community Center. The Fisher Foundation had built and opened the building that spring to house the cultural, social, and civic organizations of the community.

After their lively conversations during the sittings, they agreed that the new building needed a sculpture symbolizing its activities and ideals. The businessman granted the sculptor full artistic license to design an appropriate work. Three years later, Bill Fisher unveiled “A Dedication to the Future,” Christian Petersen’s final, personally heroic achievement. Fisher’s generosity was a dream come true for the noted Danish American sculptor, who had never executed a major work in the classic and costly medium of bronze. The commission culminated a career spanning nearly sixty years, beginning when Petersen was a young medallion engraver in a Massachusetts jewelry factory and continuing for decades as a sculptor on the east coast and in the midwest. He was artist-in-residence at Iowa State University in Ames for 21 years, from 1934 until his retirement in 1955.

Christian Petersen had prepared himself for “Dedication” by pursuing a lifelong interest in designing sculpture fountains as enhancements for architecture. His craftsmanship won him the commission, but he completed it by virtue of his courage.

After starting work on “Dedication,” Petersen learned he had a terminal illness. He and his wife, Charlotte, prayed for time enough to finish the job. Twice his work was interrupted by hospitalization, but he rallied from each attack to return to the towering figure taking shape in his Iowa State studio. Assistants carried buckets of clay and stood by the seventy-six-year old artist, whose legs faltered even as his shoulders, arms, and hands—strengthened by fifty years of molding and chiseling—imbued the clay with life.

Hospitalized on Good Friday in March of 1961, the artist inspected the last foundry molds for the bronze castings and pronounced them perfect. He signed his work in a bold script. Three days later he died.

“A Dedication to the Future” was cast in New York that summer. Bill Fisher unveiled it in September, with Charlotte Petersen as the honored guest.

Following Christian Petersen’s death, the Central Iowa Art Association acquired two memorials from his studio collection. Martha-Ellen Fisher Tye donated “War,” a stone figure of a mother protecting her child from Hitler’s blitzkrieg through Europe and sculpture students from Marshalltown studying under Petersen bought “Mountain Mother,” sculpted circa 1938 after the Peteresens witnessed the ravages of Kentucky floods in 1936. Both works are typical of Petersen’s oeuvre: compassion carved from Bedford limestone. He lived and died as he worked, extracting tenderness and courage from stone and clay.



Sculptural Works
at the Fisher Community Center
and Martha-Ellen Tye Theatre
(A self-guided walking tour)

Sculpture at the Fisher Community Center

Christian Petersen
(1885-1961)

Dedication to the Future

Bronze 1961

Petersen's final work, commissioned by J.W. Fisher to embody the programs and purpose of the Fisher Community Center. It stands thirteen feet above the reflecting pond. "We lift up our young to see beyond that which we can see."—Christian Petersen



1

Georges Oudot



5

Four Seasons

Bronze 1965

Commissioned by J.W. Fisher for the reflecting pond of the Fisher Community Center to depict the four seasons of nature.

Portrait of J.W. Fisher

Bronze 1959

Originally modeled in clay as a demonstration for the Central Iowa Art Association, this bronze casting was a gift of Mrs. F. Edna ("Gramma") Fisher, J.W. Fisher's mother, to the Fisher Community Center.



2

Antoine Bourdelle
(1861-1929)



6

Les Tetes Hurlantes (The Howling Heads)

Bronze

A memorial to the French defenders of 1870-71, the time of the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the Third French Republic.

War

Bedford Limestone c. 1940

Given to the Central Iowa Art Association in 1961 by Martha-Ellen Tye. A stone figure of a mother protecting her child from Hitler's blitzkrieg through Europe.



3

Raphael Romanelli

Rebecca at the Well

Marble

Presented to J.W. Fisher in 1961 by the C.H. McMahon family.



7

Mountain Mother

Bedford Limestone c. 1939

Purchased from the sculptor's studio in 1961 by his students at Central Iowa Art Association as a memorial to their friend and teacher. Sculpted after seeing Kentuckians flooded out of their homes in 1939.



4

Ray Frederick

Horse

Bronze

Originally wrought in clay by Frederick in 1948 while a graduate student in sculpture, "Horse" was cast in bronze in 1974 by the Central Iowa Art Association. This statue is one of an edition of twelve.



8

Sculpture at the Martha-Ellen Tye Playhouse

Leonard DeLonga

History of Drama

Marble 1968

Commissioned by J.W. Fisher for the opening of the Martha Ellen Tye Playhouse in 1969.



9

Raoul de Gontaut Biron

Promone, or Spirit of the Grapes

Bronze

Presented to the Playhouse in 1948 by Martha-Ellen Tye.



10

Boy with Goat

Memorial to Kenneth R.D. Wolfe (1904-1981)

Given by his son Robert K. Wolfe, and his grandchildren, Jennifer Wolfe Kennelly and Bradford K. W. Wolfe 2005.



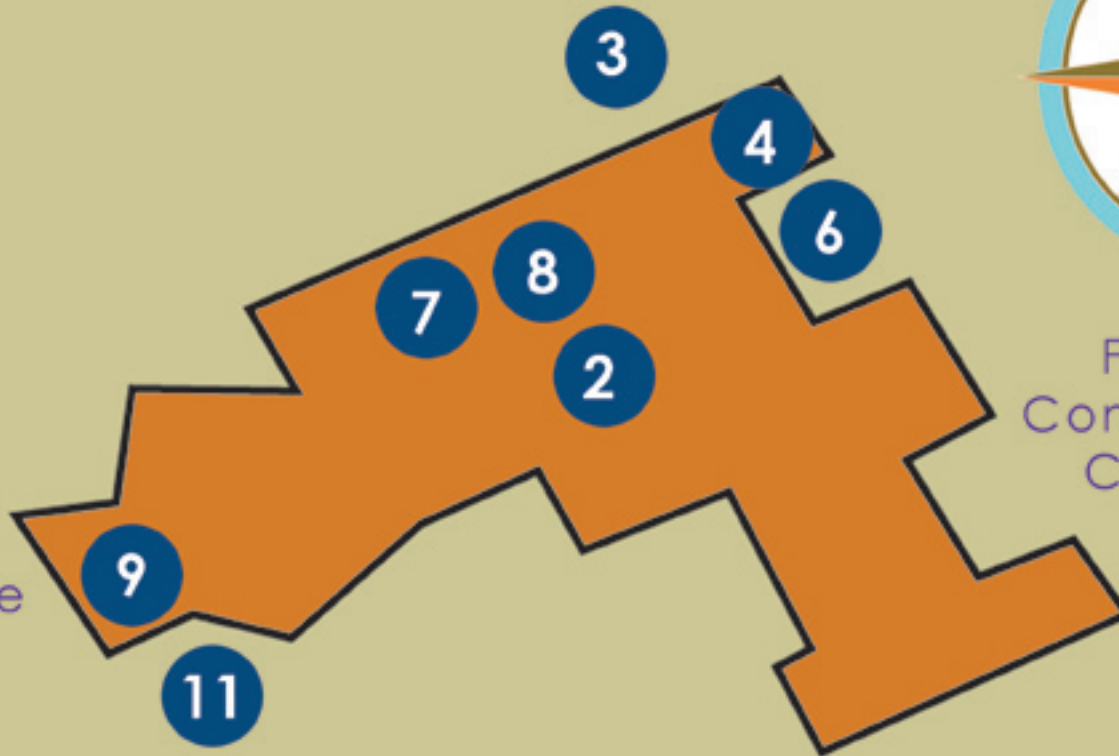
11

1. Dedication to the Future
2. Portrait of J.W. Fisher
3. War
4. Mountain Mother
5. Four Seasons
6. Les Tetes Hurlantes (The Howling Heads)
7. Rebecca at the Well
8. Horse
9. History of Drama
10. Promone, or Spirit of the Grapes
11. Boy with Goat



Fisher
Community
Center

Center St.



Martha-Ellen Tye
Playhouse



Pond

Anson St.