

# SCENES FROM AMERICA'S PAST THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN ROGERS

NOVEMBER 28, 2000 - MAY 13, 2001

## O B J E C T   G U I D E

### GALLERY XII

#### 1) **The Traveling Magician**

1877

*The Traveling Magician* is a study in youthful innocence. While the magician pulls the same old rabbit out of the same old hat, his sleepy assistant dozes off, knowing full well what the outcome will be. The customers, however, a boy and his father, are rapt with attention.

#### 2) **Checkers Up At the Farm**

1875

A well-dressed older gentleman intensely studies the board as a young farmer triumphantly points to his winning move. Rogers' wife, Hattie, was the model for the elegantly dressed woman who holds her toddler while observing the game.

#### 3) **Country Post Office: News From the Army**

1864

A cobbler, who apparently also serves as the town postmaster, interrupts work at his bench to check for a letter for a young woman, who like so many girlfriends and wives of the day, was anxious to hear news of the war.

#### 4) **Weighing the Baby**

1876

A concerned mother and her mischievous son watch as the doctor weighs the baby. The boy pulls on the baby's blanket, giving the baby a big weight gain and bewildering the doctor.

#### 5) **The Watch on the Santa Maria**

1892

The last Rogers group "published," *The Watch on the*

*Santa Maria*, was released to honor Christopher Columbus on the 400th anniversary of his discovery of America.

#### 6) **"Ha! I Like Not That!"**

1882

Character and action are conveyed in Act III, Scene III, of Shakespeare's play, *Othello*. The sculpture illustrates the scene in which Cassio is hurriedly retreating from his meeting with Desdemona, and Iago, spying him, alerts Othello by shouting, "Ha! I like not that!"

#### 7) **"Is It So Nominated In the Bond?"**

1880

In one of Rogers' most popular works, Antonio, Bassanio, Portia (disguised as a lawyer), and Shylock are shown in the trial scene

from Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. The group's title is drawn from a line about the bond in which Antonio has agreed he will give a pound of flesh to Shylock if he does not repay the money he has borrowed.

**8) "Madam, Your Mother Craves a Word With You"**

1886

From Act I, Scene V of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo, in disguise, has lifted his mask to admire Juliet. As the nurse draws her away, whispering "Madam, your mother craves a word with you," Romeo takes the privilege of the character he has assumed and kisses Juliet's hand.

**9) Fetching the Doctor**

1881

A young boy has been sent to fetch the doctor. The doctor holds his hat, and the boy leans forward urgently as he races his horse back to the one needing care. According to Rogers family members, their doctor tasted medicines to make sure he was giving the right ones.

**10) Private Theatricals**

1878

Although only moderately successful, *Private Theatricals* succeeds in its marvelous detail of the thespian's life. In costume, presumably just before the curtain rises, the actors review lines and perfect their makeup.

**11) The Town Pump**

1862

A young woman stops at the town pump with her bucket, passing time pleasantly with a uniformed soldier on his way to camp. *The Town Pump*, also known as *En Route for the War*, was one of the most admired works of art in the National Academy of Design exhibition of April 1862.

**12) Taking the Oath and Drawing Rations**

1866

A soldier has respectfully removed his cap and holds a Bible in one hand while a young mother, in order to provide food for her child, relinquishes her pride and solemnly affirms support of the Union in an oath of allegiance. A young black boy leans on a barrel with great interest.

**13) The Picket Guard**

1862

Picket guards were the advance contingent for a large force of an army's main encampment. Made up of a lieutenant, sergeants, corporals and privates, their position was the most hazardous work of the infantry. There is tension and intensity on the faces of the soldiers, but there's also humor in the scene. A stolen chicken has been hurriedly stuffed into one of the soldier's bags.

**14) Wounded to the Rear: One More Shot**

1865

One of two wounded soldiers ordered to the rear during battle takes out a cartridge to load up again, determined to have one more shot before leaving. *Wounded to the Rear*, a favorite gift for veterans, was popular throughout Rogers' career.

**15) Returned Volunteer: How the Fort Was Taken**

1864

Facial expressions tell the whole story in *Returned Volunteer*. A busy blacksmith stops work to listen respectfully to a returning soldier's tale of battle.

**16) The Elder's Daughter**

1887

In tongue-in-cheek seriousness, a church elder on horseback studies his Bible while a young man distracts his daughter with an apple. The stern father is not amused, as the young man's actions are considered a desecration the Sabbath.

**17 and 18) "Why Don't You Speak for Yourself, John?"**

1885

This sculpture is based on probably the most famous line from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1858 poem, "The Courtship of Miles Standish." Admiral Standish, too shy to speak to his beloved Priscilla Mullins himself, asks the handsome John Alden to pursue the maiden on his behalf. To the dismay of Standish, Priscilla falls in love with the messenger. So she asks, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

**19) Rip Van Winkle on the Mountain**

1871

This sculpture, one of a series of three based on the Washington Irving story, depicts the action preceding Rip Van Winkle's famous 20-year sleep. A ragged Rip holds his hunting rifle while

looking down at a craggy-faced gnome. The models for the characters were Joseph Jefferson as Rip and William Seymour as the gnome, actors then playing the same roles in a popular dramatization of the story.

**20) Faust and Marguerite: Their First Meeting**

1890

Faust – the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's dramatic character who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for power and worldly experience – gallantly offers his arm to Marguerite, attempting to flatter her by calling her "fair lady." Disdainful of his offer, Marguerite replies, "I am no lady, am not fair, can without escort home repair." In 1859, *Faust* was popularized in an opera by French composer Charles Francois Gounod.

**21) Uncle Ned's School**

1866

*Uncle Ned's School* – an inspiring scene depicting a black man who interrupts his chores to answer a girl's question from a book – was considered a powerful commentary on the freed slaves' determination to better their people's position in life through such efforts as home education.

**22) The Favored Scholar**

1873

A schoolmaster gazes with obvious pride at a bright young schoolgirl taking in his lesson. A small boy seated on a low stool in front of the schoolmaster's desk wonders at the teacher's demeanor toward the girl.

**23) The Peddler at the Fair**

1878

In a countryside scene familiar to many people at the time, a traveling stranger on horseback peddles his wares. A woman, taken with a trinket, has won her begrudging husband's support in the purchase.

**24) School Days**

1877

A young boy is amazed at an organ grinder's monkey that has snatched his hat, but the little girl, mesmerized by the figures in the entertainer's shadowbox, does not seem to notice. Two of Rogers' children modeled for the sculpture. Though the press predicted this work would be hugely popular, a superstitious feeling about monkeys was later said to have negatively influenced the group's sales.

### 25) The First Ride

1888

A delighted young boy is perched on the back of a grazing horse. A farmhand, also holding the horse's bridle, and a well-dressed mother stand on either side of the horse keeping the child safe on his mount. The man appears to have provided his coat to use as the horse's blanket.

### 26) A Matter of Opinion

1884

Two physicians are in heated dispute on a diagnosis for an invalid patient. The group was considered to be "suitable for physician's offices" by the journal *The Medical Record*.

### 27) Coming to the Parson

1870

This sculpture, the most popular of the Rogers' groups, enjoyed immediate and long-lived success. Here a young couple bashfully approach the minister with news of their love. Appropriate as a wedding gift, the group sold more than 8,000 copies – a tenth of the artist's lifetime production.

### GALLERY XIV

### 28) Parting Promise

1870 and c. 1894

Overtly sentimental, *Parting Promise* shows a departing young man promising a faithful return to his beloved. It was not one of Rogers' most successful groups commercially. There are two versions of the composition with the basic differences being man with mustache and man without mustache, and the tilt of the head of the girl.

### 29) Phrenology at the Fancy Ball

1886

This sculpture humorously reflects the era's infatuation with the reputedly scientific study of the skull's shape as an indicator of personality and character. The masquerading phrenologist is delighted with the discoveries his hand reveals. His subject, dressed as Poo Bah from the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *Mikado*, shows an expression of pure amusement.

### 30) The Referee

1880

Not realizing what he may be getting into, a helpful bystander has offered to referee the true height of two young women who have disagreed on which one is taller.

### GALLERY XVII

(HALLWAY TO SHOP)

### 31) The Council of War

1868, 1877

A favorite memorial of the war, this group shows President Abraham Lincoln flanked by General Ulysses S. Grant on his right and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton on his left. The seated Lincoln closely scrutinizes the scroll containing Grant's plan of operations. Robert Todd Lincoln said "his family had always regarded this John Rogers group as the most lifelike portrait of his father in sculpture."