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# MONUMENTS & MYTHS

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and Daniel Chester French





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Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907) and Daniel Chester French (1850–1931) were the leading American sculptors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As friendly rivals, they transformed the nation's sculpture in what was, for some, an age of massive economic growth fueled by booming steel and railroad industries, resulting in new forms of cultural patronage. With an aesthetic of remarkable formal elegance, they produced many of the nation's best-known monuments, contributing to the creation of a national identity rooted in conceptions of liberty, grandeur, and common cause.

The narratives of a rising America conveyed by their works reflect only a partial vision of the nation, however. Dependent on commissions from those in political or cultural power, Saint-Gaudens and French often produced sculptures that told a privileged story—one that, whether intentionally or not, overlooked growing social inequities. Beyond their abilities to tell stories about our past, the works on view here have the potential for multiple interpretations in relation to contested histories,

encouraging us to question the stories that public art tells and to explore what—and whose—histories remain hidden from view.

Drawn primarily from the collections of the artists' historic homes and studios, *Monuments and Myths* is the first exhibition to bring together Saint-Gaudens and French in this way, probing their intersecting biographies and examining the affinities that made them leaders in their field. As we collectively refocus our attention on the role and meaning of historic monuments, it is a timely moment to ponder the continuing power of these artists' sculpture and to examine how it has shaped—and continues to inform—our understanding of the United States.

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**Cover:** Daniel Chester French. *Brooklyn* (model for the Manhattan Bridge), 1915. Plaster; 36 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 22 3/4 in. Chesterwood, Stockbridge, MA, Gift of the Daniel Chester French Foundation, NT 69.38.77. Courtesy American Federation of Arts

**Left:** Augustus Saint-Gaudens. *Abraham Lincoln: The Man*, 1887, cast 1912. Bronze; 45 6/8 x 16 1/8 x 28 3/8 in. Saint-Gaudens National Historical Park, Cornish, NH, SAGA 879. Courtesy American Federation of Arts