

title ***Fountain of the Four Seasons*****artist** **Christian Petersen****Location**

Memorial Union, North Entrance

Materials

Bedford limestone and terra cotta

Date

1941

About the Work of Art

Placed around a circular fountain, the four seated American Indian women represent an Osage chant of thanksgiving. The four women face north, south, east and west, each demonstrating a line of the prayer. The first woman is planting the seed, "Lo, I come to the tender planting." The second bends close to the earth, "Lo, a tender shoot breaks forth." The third holds a harvest basket of maize, "Lo, I collect the golden harvest." The

forth nurses her newborn baby, "Lo, there is joy in my house." These four sculptures are carved from bedford limestone and are placed around a circular base of terra cotta which is sculpted with a corn relief. Artist Christian Petersen took these notes during the sculpture's early stages:

"Full water display symbolizes the fullness of the elements... arch of the sky... the life giving rains... the calmness of the Indians in the face of the turbulence... tranquil water... tranquility of the Indians... much water symbolizes elemental turbulence."

The *Fountain of the Four Seasons* was conserved and reinstalled in 1998 after a two year absence. The sculptures were damaged from salt, mineral deposits and other bacteria that had collected over the years. Conservation Technical Associates of Connecticut undertook the restoration project and in addition a new stainless steel plumbing system for the fountain was installed. The funding for this restoration project came from private donations as well as the Iowa State University Classes of 1946, 1947, 1948 and 1998.

University Museums - Art on Campus Program

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

About the Work of Art (continued)

The rededication ceremony of *The Fountain of the Four Seasons* took place at the Memorial Union on June 6, 1998. At the ceremony, Iowa State University President Martin Jischke said:

"This fountain represents why President Hughes brought Christian Petersen to this campus and why we continue to use the arts today not only to make this campus more beautiful and enjoyable but to enhance the education of the students who come here to study. This fountain is a wonderful representation of a way of life and culture through artistic expressions, way of life and culture that are different from the one that most of us know - but one that is an essential part of the history of this state and nation... Gazing at the beautiful serenity of the four Indian maidens welcoming all of the campus; relaxing or studying to the gentle sound of running water; and feeling the cool spray of water on windy days."

About the Artist

Christian Petersen (Danish-American, 1885-1961) emigrated from Denmark. As a young man, Petersen went to the Newark Technical School to study die cutting. In 1920, he became the apprentice of Boston artist Henry Hudson Kiston, who trained Petersen in a narrative and symbolic sculptural style, often used for historic monuments. In the aftermath of World War I, demand for such specialized styles were high. In 1928, Petersen moved to the Midwest with the regionalist notion that it was becoming the cultural center of the United States. He settled in Chicago, with the intent of pursuing sculptural commissions full-time. The crippling blow of the Great Depression necessitated his return to commercial die cutting. By the 1940s, Petersen had moved again, this time to Iowa State University at the request of Grant Wood. There, Petersen began his legendary 21-year tenure as one of the University's most revered professors and the nation's first permanent artist-in-residence. In 1955, Petersen retired, but left a legacy of signature sculptures; the nucleus of Iowa State's expansive public art collection.

About the Art on Campus Collection

Iowa State University is home to one of the largest campus public art collections in the United States. Over 2,000 works of public art, including many by significant regional, national and international artists, are located across campus in buildings, courtyards, open spaces and offices. In 1982, the University Museums created the Art on Campus Collection and Program that codifies acquisition, education and care and conservation of the campus public art collection.

The foundation of the contemporary Art on Campus Collection and Program began during the Depression in the 1930s, when Iowa State's President Hughes envisioned that, "The arts would enrich and provide substantial intellectual exploration into our college curricula." In 1978, Iowa passed the Iowa Art in State Buildings legislation, which requires .5 percent of new construction or remodeling funds to be used to acquire public art. Since 1978, Iowa State has completed Art in State Building projects, commissioned or acquired public works of art, and has involved faculty, students and staff in the commissioning and acquisition process.

Memorial Union

Fountain of the Four Seasons

Art on Campus accession number U88.69



Additional information on public art, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the Christian Petersen Art Museum, 1017 Morrill Hall, (515) 294-9500, or visit us at www.museums.iastate.edu

This information sheet is intended to be used in addition to viewing the Art on Campus Collection. At no time should this sheet be used as a substitute for experiencing the art in person.