

title

Three Athletes

artist

Christian Petersen

Location
**North entrance
State Gym**

Material
Terra cotta

Date
1936

Size
6.1'h x 2.8'w x 1'd



About the Sculpture

The *Three Athletes* bas relief was the second project Christian Petersen created for the Iowa State campus. A new staircase was being added in 1935 during remodeling to accommodate large basketball crowds. The three reliefs, depicting a football player, basketball player and a track star, each are divided into five, separate horizontal sections. Petersen designed them so they would fit the full length of the kiln in which they were fired. Petersen put fine details into the athletes, sculpting reliefs that depict their muscle, bone and tendon contours and include the spikes and cleats on their shoes. The result is a mural that perfectly captures the athletes in motion.

About the Artist

Christian Petersen, (American, 1885-1961) was a very prolific fine art sculptor by the mid-1930s. Besides creating the *Three Athletes* for the State Gym entrance, Petersen also worked on sculptures such as the *Reclining Nudes* at Roberts Hall, the *Veterinary Medicine Mural*, and many smaller portrait busts for such campus leaders as Dean Charles H. Stange and Charles E. Friley. At this time Petersen was also involved with illustrating a children's book about the Meskwaki Indians of Tama, titled *Cha-Ki-Shi*. In 1934 Petersen was added to Iowa State's payroll and he began to actively teach applied art in the Home Economics department. His classes were only open to female students until 1939 when men were allowed to enroll in his classes. Petersen became one of the most admired teachers on campus and his classes were always overflowing with eager students who wanted to learn. As a sculptor and teacher, Petersen changed the face of campus aesthetically and academically, establishing a visual legacy at Iowa State University.

Three Athletes

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Additional information about the Art on Campus Program, other Art on Campus information sheets and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office, 290 Scheman Building (2nd floor) 515/2994/3342, or visit us online at <http://www.museums.iastate.edu/>.

University Museums/Art on Campus Program

What is public art?

This contemporary term refers to ancient and contemporary objects, landscapes, and architecture located in places accessible to the public. The Pyramids, the Eiffel Tower, the St. Louis Arch, the Statue of Liberty, and the ISU Campanile are examples of architectural public art. The White House's Rose Garden, New York City's Central Park, ISU's central campus, and ISU's Reiman Gardens are examples of public art as landscapes. Lady Liberty on the capitol dome in Washington D.C., the *Umbrella* in Des Moines, and *Left-Sided Angel* at Iowa State University Library are examples of aesthetic objects as public art.

Public art:

- defines a specific and unique place
- expresses diverse qualities, beliefs and values of various cultures and artists
- is physically and intellectually accessible
- serves as a vehicle for inspiring and understanding change as presented in our contemporary society

What is Art on Campus?

Iowa State's Art on Campus Collection (public art collection) spans over a century, beginning with the design of central campus by Adonijah Welch, Iowa State's first president. Since the 1930s, Iowa State has commissioned, purchased, and received gifts of art that form the Art on Campus Collection. At the height of the Depression, Iowa State College President Raymond Hughes envisioned that the "arts would enrich and provide substantial intellectual exploration into our college curricula." Hughes then offered Christian Petersen a one-semester sculpture residency to create the fountain and bas reliefs in the now Food Sciences Building. In 1955, 21 years later, Petersen retired having created 12 major sculptures for the campus including the *Fountain of the Four Seasons*, *The Gentle Doctor*, *Wedding Ring*, and *Conversations*.

From 1955 to 1978, public art at Iowa State and around the country experienced lean years. However, following the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts and Art in Public Places programs, public art gained nation-wide momentum. In 1978, Iowa passed the Iowa Art in State Buildings law, which today allows for the acquisition of public works of art for the campus. Private and class gifts also continue to be used to purchase public art.

What is the Art in State Buildings Program?

The Art in State Buildings law requires that one-half of one percent of new construction funds be used to acquire public art. Since 1978, Iowa State has completed more than 35 Art in State Buildings projects, commissioned or acquired more than 167 works of public art, and involved more than 350 faculty, students and staff members in the commissioning process. University Museums administers the Art on Campus Program and the Art in State Buildings Program of Iowa State University. Today there are more than 400 major works of art in the University's Art on Campus Collection. These works of public art are located across campus in buildings, courtyards, open spaces and offices.