

title***Three Athletes*****artist****Christian Petersen****Location**

State Gym, North entrance

Material

Terra cotta

Size

6.1 x 2.8 x 1 feet

Date

1936

About the Work of Art

The *Three Athletes* bas relief was the second project Christian Petersen created for the Iowa State campus. A new staircase was being added to State Gym in 1935 during remodeling to accommodate large basketball crowds. The three reliefs, depict a football player, basketball player and a track star. Petersen designed the reliefs so they would fit the full length of the kiln. He put fine details into the athletes, sculpting muscle, bone and tendon contours and included the spikes and cleats on their shoes. The result is a mural that perfectly captures the athletes in focused practice.

About the Artist

Christian Petersen, (American, 1885-1961) practiced his art during a transitional stage in American sculpture when styles moved from the heroic to realistic. He immigrated to the United States from Denmark with his family in 1894. After attending several different art schools, beginning a die-cutting career, and receiving comparative public sculpture commissions, Petersen moved to the Midwest. It was here that he was invited to join the Iowa Public Works of Art Project under the direction of Grant Wood in Iowa City.

University Museums - Art on Campus Program

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

In 1934, Iowa State President Raymond Hughes offered Petersen a one-semester residency to create the fountain and bas-reliefs in the Dairy Industry Building courtyard. One semester turned into 21 years, and from 1934 to 1955, Petersen served as Iowa State's sculptor-in-residence. At the time, he was the only sculptor-in-residence at any college or university in the United States, for which he earned \$25 per week. Petersen created 12 major public art sculptures on the Iowa State campus.



About the Art on Campus Collection

Iowa State University is home to one of the largest campus public art programs in the United States. Over 2000 works of public art, including selection 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 Program that codifies acquisition, education, and care and conservation of the campus public art collection.

The foundations of the contemporary Art on Campus Program began during the Depression in the 1930s when Iowa State College'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 involved faculty, students, and staff in the commissioning and acquisition processes.

State Gym

Three Athletes

Art on Campus accession number U88.75abc

Additional information on public art, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office, 290 Scheman Building, (515) 294-3342, or visit us online 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.**