

**title*****The Marriage Ring*** [Wedding Ring or Ring of Life]**artist****Christian Petersen****Location**

South entrance, MacKay Hall  
(reproduction can be seen on MacKay lawn)

**Material**

Terra cotta

**Size**

37 x 117 x 16 1/2 inches

**Date**

1942

**About the Work of Art**

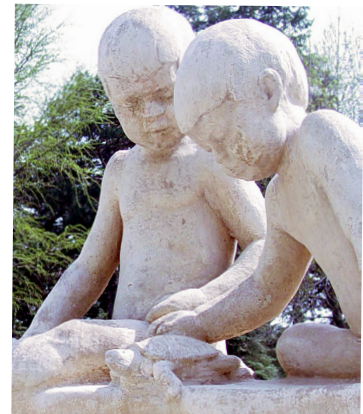
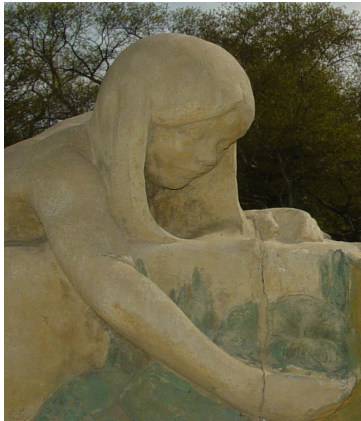
This playful scene depicts three children, sculpted to approximately life-sized, at the edge of a circular pool. A young girl leans over the edge to gently cup a water lily. Two boys are seen sitting on the edge of the pool intently studying a turtle. The children are oblivious to their surroundings and are utterly absorbed in the moment. The circular fountain basin represents a wedding ring and the valuable gems of the ring are symbolized by the three children, considered by Petersen the jewels of marriage. Around the outside of the pool are words from the poem *The Hired Man's Faith in Children* by James Whitcomb Riley. "I believe all children's good/If they are only understood/even bad ones seems to me/jest as good as they can be." The composition of the three children is asymmetrical and unique in relationship to Petersen's earlier works of art produced for the Iowa State campus. This design suggests a captured moment of children at play. He uses a stylized plant motif that links the sculpture and pool to its surroundings. Green glazed blade-like plants and grasses flank the children and are repeated both inside and outside of the ring reinforcing the sculpture's connection with marriage. This fountain is also known as *Wedding Ring* or *Ring of Life*. The original terra cotta sculptures suffered from vandalism three times, and were cast in reinforced concrete in 1991. The original was conserved and is located in the south foyer of MacKay Hall.

University Museums - Art on Campus Program

Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

## 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. 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.

### Mackay Hall

#### *Wedding Ring*

Art on Campus accession number U88.66

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](http://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.**

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IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

# Art on Campus Poetry Collection

## The Jewels

by Michael Carey

(inspired by *Marriage Ring* by Christian Petersen)

Water, they say  
we are mostly  
water and air  
surrounded by  
a few ounces  
of minerals:  
calcium, phosphorus,  
potassium, salt,  
the tiniest amount  
of iron and zinc and copper.

Oh, but what  
a fine mixture!  
See these childre  
sitting and lying in the sun  
by the low tangle of green bushes.  
Such tender lumps of clay!  
Such beautiful bags of water!  
Bright jewels  
on the wedding ring  
of their parents!  
staring at themselves  
in the lily, in the turtle,  
the frog and the surface  
of the bubbling strea.  
See the soft curves on the gentle girl  
and her two  
plump brothers.  
Nothing but skin and love  
and a quiet curiosity  
between their souls  
and the heavens,  
their hearts  
and the sky and  
the maze of students  
walking by-  
their busy brains  
already reeling  
about the tedious  
contours of their  
next day's assignment.

Commissioned by University Museums, Iowa State University, 1999