

Memorial Union

title ***Fountain of the Four Seasons***

artist **Christian Petersen**

Location:
Memorial Union (North patio)

Material:
**Bedford limestone
and terra cotta**

Date:
1941

Rededication:
1998



About the Sculpture

Four Americans Indian women sit around a circular fountain representing an ancient Osage prayer or chant of thanksgiving.

The four Indian women face north, south, east and west each demonstrating a line of the prayer: The first plants 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 fourth nurses her newborn babe - "Lo, there is joy in my house." The sculptures are carved from bedford limestone placed around a circular base made of terra cotta decorated with corn designs. 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 lifegiving rains . . . the calmness of the Indians in the face of the turbulence. . . tranquil water . . . tranquility of the Indians. . . much water symbolizes elemental turbulence.

August Bang, a poet and essayist, traveled to Ames specifically to see the fountain. He praised Petersen's work and honored the sculptures with this essay:

Here he has with his love of truth and aliveness and deep understanding given expression to the peace and happiness which Mother Earth gives to her children . . . Here he has with his love of truth and thoroughness in the project, illustrated the national American in the figures of the four Indian women which sit around the fountain. Three of them are working with the earth. They are planting maize, America's original bread corn . . . the fourth and last sits with her first born in her mother's arms and her song is in the full deep note "Lo, there is joy in my house." A quiet complete life cycle--tenderness, Godliness, work, and reward is here . . . there is a holy peace

and quiet over these four figures; they listened, the two first to the heartbeat of the earth, they kneel as though in worship. The third sits with the harvest in her arms. What shall she do with more than enough for herself? Her glance takes on a dreamy look, whereas that of the younger mother is introspective and rests on her child.

The *Fountain of the Four Seasons* was recently restored and reinstalled on campus after a two year absence. The sculptures were damaged from salt, mineral deposits and other bacteria that collected over the years. Conservation Technical Associates of Connecticut soaked the sculptures in a chemical bath and repaired various cracks. In addition, a new stainless steel plumbing system was installed. The funding for this \$250,000 restoration project came from private donations as well as the ISU classes of 1946, 1947, 1948, and 1998. The rededication ceremony took place at the Memorial Union on June 6, 1998. ISU President Martin Jischke had this to say at the rededication ceremony:

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 students who come here to study. This fountain is a wonderful representation of a way of life and culture through artistic expression--a 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. And as such, it is one of Iowa State's earliest expressions of multiculturalism. Christian Petersen, an immigrant from Denmark, loved the Native American people and cultures and he saw this project as an opportunity to celebrate the Native American culture in Iowa. . . . Petersen's creation accomplishes everything he sought out to do. It brings tranquility. It brings understanding. It brings inspiration. And it is indeed beautiful--beautiful to all the senses. Over the past 57 years, countless thousands of people--students, faculty and staff, alumni and visitors--have received its benefits. Gazing at the beautiful serenity of the four Indian maidens welcoming all to 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

Petersen's career advanced during a transitional stage in American sculpture when styles moved from heroic to realistic. He emigrated to America from Denmark with his family in 1894. After attending several different art schools, beginning a die-cutting career, and receiving some sculpture commissions, Petersen moved to the Midwest. There he was invited to join the Iowa Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) 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 the fountain and bas-reliefs in the Dairy Industry Building courtyard. One semester turned into 21 years, and from 1934-1955 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 numerous works, including twelve major public art sculptures, which can be viewed throughout the campus.

Fountain of the Four Seasons

U88.69

Additional information about the Christian Petersen sculptures, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office, 290 Scheman Building, (2nd Floor) 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. At no time should this sheet be used as a substitute for experiencing the art in person!