

Lagomarcino Hall

**title** *Madonna of the Prairie*

**artist** **Christian Petersen**

Location:  
**Lagomarcino Hall,  
Quadrangle**

Materials:  
**Limestone**

Date:  
**1940**

Size:  
**69" h**



## About the Sculpture

This limestone sculpture is a life size, full figure portraying a young pioneer mother tenderly carrying a small child in her arms. Both are gazing out on the tall grass prairie where their homestead will be established. The long cloak-like garment and her unbound hair are more suggestive of traditional images of the Madonna than of an American pioneer woman. This sculpture was purchased by the College of Education in 1982 and placed in the courtyard of Lagomarcino Hall.

## About the Artist

Christian Petersen, (American, 1885-1961) by 1940, had already completed several sculptures on the campus of Iowa State College, including the *History of Dairying Mural*, the *Veterinary Medicine Mural*, the *Three Athletes* and the *Reclining Nudes*. The early 1940s marked a time in Petersen's life when he took up the theme of memorials due to the outbreak of World War II, but continued to portray campus life at Iowa State College. In 1941 Petersen completed the war memorial *Man of Two Wars* and in 1942 the *Marriage Ring*, was installed in front of MacKay Hall. Another shift in Petersen's themes occurred with the end of World War II, when many of his sculptures took on spiritual ideas. In 1946 he completed his first major religious sculpture *Madonna of the Schools* for St. Cecilia School in Ames. In 1955 he completed his final campus sculpture *Conversations* before retiring that same year. Petersen authorized the casting of his final sculpture *A Dedication to the Future* in 1961 and four days later, on April 4th, died at Mary Greeley Hospital in Ames.

***Madonna of the Prairie***

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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) 515/294/3342, 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.