

MackKay Hall

title

Wedding Ring

artist

Christian Petersen

Location:
**South entrance,
MackKay Hall**
Material:
reinforced concrete
Date:
1942



About the Sculpture

This playful scene depicts three children, sculpted approximately life-sized, at the edge of a pool. A young girl leans over the edge to gently cup a water lily. Two boys are seen sitting on the edge of the fountain intently studying a turtle. The circular fountain basin represents a wedding ring and the valuable gems of the ring are symbolized by the three children, who are the jewels of the marriage. Around the outside of the pool are the words explaining the theme of the fountain. The quote is 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/s jest as good as they can be." This fountain is also known as *The Marriage Ring*. The original terra cotta sculptures suffered from vandalism three times, and were cast in reinforced concrete in 1991. The original was repaired and is located in the south foyer of MackKay Hall.

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 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.

The Wedding Ring

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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 <http://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!

University Museums Art on Campus Program

What is public art?

This contemporary term represents ancient to 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 new Rieman Gardens are examples of public art as landscape. *Lady Liberty* on the Capitol Dome in Washington DC, the *Umbrella* in Des Moines, and *Left-Sided Angel* at Parks 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. Through the years Iowa State has commissioned, purchased, and received gifts of art that form the Art on Campus Collection. The traditional public art program began in the 1930s. At the height of the Depression, ISC President Raymond Hughes envisioned that the "arts would enrich and provide substantial intellectual exploration into our college curricula." Hughes invited Grant Wood to create the Library's agricultural murals that speak to the founding of Iowa and Iowa State College and Model Farm. Hughes then offered Christian Petersen a one-semester sculpture residency to create the fountain and bas reliefs at the Dairy Industry 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*, the *Wedding Ring*, and *Conversations*.

There were lean years for public art at Iowa State and, indeed, the country, from 1955 to 1978. 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 legislation, which today allows for the acquisition of public works of art for the campus. Private and class gifts also continue to be used for public art acquisition.

What is the Art in State Buildings Program?

The Art in State Buildings legislation 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 27 Art in State Buildings projects, commissioned or acquired more than 135 works of public art, and involved more than 300 faculty, students and staff in the commissioning process. University Museums administers the Art on Campus Program and the Art in State Buildings Program for Iowa State University. Today there are over 200 major works of public 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.