FREDERICK MACMONNIES, AMERICA'S YOUNGEST PROMINENT SCULPTOR

FREDERICK MACMONNIES.

Rapid Rise to Fame of an Artist of Whom Even Greater Things Are Expected by Many Competent Critics.

No career in recent times has been more closely and hopefully followed by artists and those who take an exalted pleasure in lofty conceptions of the beautiful than that of Frederick MacMonnies, the American sculptor, who has won such triumphs abroad. The honors which have come to him are regarded more as national than personal; hence the widespread interest in what he has accomplished.

It has long been recognized by those who pursue art for art's sake that those things which give the greatest pleasure to the most gifted minds and most cultivated intellects are the factors that count for most in a nation's history. That elusive quality known as genius most frequently manifests itself in the higher forms of art, and in no form more conspicuously than in sculpture. There is, then, no mystery as to the reason for the acclaim which has greeted Frederick MacMonnies, for it arises from the world's instant recognition of a genius. And geniuses are not so numerous, even at the beginning of the twentieth century.

American sculpture is an infant hardly a hundred years old. One who was called its "pioneer" died scarcely more than a quarter century ago, and to show how recent has been its development it is only necessary to quote what an authority once said of the sculptor Crawford (born 1814, died 1857): "When he began his professional career, sculpture as an American pursuit was almost as rare as painting at the time of Benjamin West's advent in Rome; to excel therein was a national distinction."

Six of America's oldest sculptors are living yet—Palmer, Ball, MacDonald, Ward, Rogers and Hosmer—and all were born well within this century, the first in 1817 and the last named in 1830. Succeeding them and still alive have come Bissell, Kemeys, Taft, French, St. Gaudens, MacMonnies and others to the number of a hundred or more; but it seems to have been written on the scroll of fame that the last and youngest should by no means be considered least, for Frederick MacMonnies was born so recently as 1863, and hence is only in his thirty-ninth year. He came honestly by his exceptional talent, for his mother is a niece of one of America's most famous painters, Benjamin West. His father was a Scotchman belonging to a famous clan, and from Mr. MacMonnies probably he inherited the tenacity of purpose and ardent love of work that characterized him.

Born in Brooklyn, and with no particular career marked out for him, young MacMonnies went to work as clerk in a jewelry store, but when about seventeen years old found congenial employment in the studio of Augustus St. Gaudens, even then eminent in his profession.

St. Gaudens himself was born of an Irish mother and a French father, removing with his family while yet a youth from Dublin to Boston and thence to New York, where this young American with a Gallic cognomen grew up with Gotham. After serving an apprenticeship to a cameo cutter, in 1867 St. Gaudens went to Paris, settled down for awhile in 1870 in Rome and in 1880 returned to New York, with which city he has long been identified, although his work is and has been in every sense cosmopolitan. The works for which he is well known and even famous are comparatively numerous and in this connection need not be mentioned, he himself being brought in here merely to show the influence that he exerted upon MacMonnies, who has always been ready to acknowledge his indebtedness to his brother sculptor.

It was in 1880 that MacMonnies was admitted to the St. Gaudens studio, when he was only seventeen years old, and he worked hard not only there, but in the night classes of the Art Students' league and the Academy of Design. These preliminary years in the best studio of America, says one who knew him well when in Paris, had been of incalculable value to him. "St. Gaudens, whose interest in beginners is so well known, had never looked upon him as a mere 'prentice. Indeed, he once told me that since guiding MacMonnies' progress almost from childhood he had come to feel toward him as though he were his own boy."

All those fortunate enough to be intimately acquainted with MacMonnies testify to his genial, happy disposition, his freedom from affectation and the many admirable qualities that make him one of the most beloved and lovable of friends. He has had the most wonderful success, but it has never turned his head; he has been petted and admired by the greatest men and women of Europe and America, but has not been spoiled a particle. He is the same frank and unaffected boy that he was when toiling hard for honors in Paris and sharing lodgings with other poor students like himself.

Nearly six feet tall, slender and shapely, with fair hair tumbling in profusion about a delicate, sensitive face nearly always illumined with a cheery smile, eyes deep and earnest, a classically chiseled mouth shaded by a light mustache—such is MacMonnies the sculptor as we find him today. "Mac" his student friends used to call him; but, though they were wont to rally and chaff him after the manner of the Quartier Latin, no one ever ventured beyond a certain limit of reserve. "Mac" was always ready for fun and frolic after work was done and recreation was in order; he would sail with his gay friends on the Seine, indulge in merry pranks and join in boisterous song, but during the hours he allotted to labor none was more diligent than this young sculptor from New York, who won the admiration of his French confreres by the readiness and dexterity with which at the outset he entered upon his work.

If ever there was a born sculptor, it is certainly MacMonnies, and yet there are some who predict for him a greater career, if possible, as a painter. He went to Paris in 1881, but had not been there long before an outbreak of cholera drove him to Munich, where he put in his time at a school of painting. He developed such a passion for pigments that an authority on sculpture remarked of him not long after: "Successful as MacMonnies is as a sculptor, he is a born painter. He is really today a painter with a chisel. His idea of color seems instinctive. In truth, what less could one expect from a relative of Benjamin West than that he should have an intuitive feeling for color?"

But the announcement in 1900 of MacMonnies' resolve to lay down the chisel and take up the painter's brush came almost as a shock to those who had lovingly followed the successive steps by which he had risen to the top notch of his profession as a sculptor. They argued that it would be impossible for one trained as a sculptor all his life to achieve success as a painter. But these protests were only from those who were unacquainted with his earlier years at the brush, for the fact is that he is more imbued with the "color" of his subjects than any other sculptor who ever took a prize in Paris salons. A student artist who was with him in France says that the key of his success was revealed after he had taken a first prize in the exhibit of drawings which he made at that time—"such drawings as no other sculptor perhaps had ever shown at the Beaux Arts. Gerome's boys and the painters of the other ateliers swarmed about them and acknowledged with frank admiration that not one of their own number could equal them. Others might finish more and 'lick' to greater smoothness, but here was a man who hit the character every time and drew it with unflinching accuracy, yet with a mighty swing like an old master. The exhibition was a revelation to us all."

Whether in Paris or in Munich, MacMonnies was always working hard toward the one end he had in view—success. After he had won that at sculpture, as has been said, he concluded to try a change of work. In relation to this he himself remarked at the time of his return to this country, a few weeks since: "Two years ago I became ill and had to stop for a rest. I painted some portraits in Paris and am going to do a little of that work here before I do anything more as a sculptor. It is well for a man to stop once in awhile to look at what he has done with a critical eye and get a clearer view of things before going on. That's what I am doing now. I had been indoors too much, and so I got outdoors and painted. One summer was spent at a little town in Normandy—Bois Jerome. There I painted portraits of Abbe Toussaint of the little cathedral at Bois Jerome and Miss May Palmer, now Mrs. Chauncey M. Depew. For backgrounds of the abbe I took the altar screen in the cathedral, but Miss Palmer's portrait was made out of doors."

These paintings are to be exhibited at the Royal academy, London, and at the Paris salon, so that, while the furore still exists over the MacMonnies marbles not only in this country, but in Europe, the modest sculptor will be on view in the galleries abroad in his initial attempts at portraiture. The "magician of the chisel" may yet become the "wizard of the brush," for it has been admitted by all his critics that no marbles were ever more surely endowed with the coloring of life than those which he has produced in the past few years. That he has good reason for the faith which is in him is shown by the fact that he received "honorable mention" last year for a portrait he exhibited anonymously as a test.

After this digression, illustrative of the man's versatility, it is interesting to trace MacMonnies' course through the Paris art schools, in which he seemed to outstrip all competitors. It has been the custom to deride the necessity for Americans to go to Italy or to Paris for either inspiration or instruction. This is an opinion, however, that might not be subscribed to at this day, now that so many laurels have been garnered by Americans who studied abroad and there received invaluable assistance, even though they did not get there the original impulse and inspirations. Some of them, like Miss Hosmer, Powers and Crawford, have lived more perhaps in Italy than in the United States, but still their honors are shared by all Americans. It has been urged that such of our artists as have lived long abroad finally lose their claim to be called distinctively American, but there are few such. Most of them, like MacMonnies, St. Gaudens, French and Taft, eventually return to the land of their birth or adoption and settle down for life.

There is, however, no denying the fact that in Paris more than in any other city in the world there are strong influences concentrated toward making

"BACCHANTE."
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

sculpture predominant. It is all very well to talk of native genius needing no spur and of the art influences in various cities of America, but nowhere else can the student find so much to stimulate him as in Paris. It is not fortuitously that Paris has acquired her leadership in the world of art, but owing to the long directed and persistent efforts of artists and teachers. The Ecole des Beaux Arts is one of the oldest schools of its kind, and today students flock thither from all parts of the world and spend years and fortunes in pursuit of fame. Some achieve it, while many more, however, fall by the wayside and sink out of sight. In such a gathering of the greatest workers in art the student to succeed in any particular must needs exert himself to the utmost. The weaklings are soon weeded out, mediocrity promptly finds its level, but the gifted one eventually asserts his supremacy. Young MacMonnies achieved his supremacy, but did not assert it, for there was no need. From the first his work bespoke the master sculptor. Two years in succession he carried off the "prix d'atelier," the highest award for which foreigners may compete.

Some of MacMonnies' student friends yet speak with glee of the high tribute paid by the eminent Falguiere, in whose studio he labored for two years, until told to leave, as there was nothing more he could teach him. Falgdiere was noted for his predilection for Dianas, which were his forte, so to speak, and when on one occasion he entered his former student's atelier and found there a beautiful goddess of the chase modeled by the young American he was delighted. This particular Diana had been for months "on the stocks" and was approaching a perfection measurably satisfactory to the sculptor himself. What then was his delight to hear the master praise it and suggest certain improvements? Falguiere became so absorbed in the work before him as to momentarily forget that it was not his own. He began to twist and pull the dainty limbs of Diana this way and that, to punch her in the ribs, turn her queenly head (for she was then only in clay, of course, and susceptible to impressions), until at last he had produced the very pose he desired. "Voila, mon ami! J'aime mieux ca!" ("There, my friend! I like her better so"), he cried and skipped out of the studio. He had really intended to do MacMonnies a favor and had indeed paid him the greatest compliment of which he was capable, but poor "Mac" was in distress, for on comparing the remodeled Diana with a photograph of his master's statue of the same character he found he had unconsciously made a practical replica of the other. MacMonnies, though he had a deep reverence for his master, fortunately had also some reverence for his own genius and did not rest until he had restored his statue to its original pose. He worked hard for many hours, as he had already worked for months, and she won him "honorable mention" at the salon of 1889.

The sculptor's first commission also came to him that year. It consisted of three life size angels in bronze for St. Paul's church, New York, and the statue of Nathan Hale now standing in City Hall park, in the same city, on the traditional spot on which the patriot spy was executed.

There are stories of a period of MacMonnies' life in Paris when, through absorption in his work and neglect of the "loaves and fishes," he was on the verge of poverty. He finally heeded the monitions of prudence and contracted for mechanical reductions in plaster of two of his figures. These were to be sold as "pot boilers." They say it took his last franc to pay for the reproductions, but the hungry sculptor did not care, as he had orders in advance. He placed the plaster casts on a shelf in his studio and went home for the night. In the morning he found the costly statuettes in heaps on the floor, a cat having tipped the shelf over and totally ruined his casts. It is said that this mishap brought the usually light hearted sculptor nearer than he had ever come to actual despair, for the loss of a few francs was then a serious matter to this man who since has had orders amounting to more than $500,000 in a year.

After his "Diana" came one of the daintiest conceptions that ever assumed concrete shape in a sculptor's hands in the fairylike "Pan of Rohallion," which was followed by other work various and wonderful. The range of this sculptor's imagination and the excellence of his art, the fecundity of his brain to conceive and the cunning skill of his hands to form are shown in the long list of his works, the important ones being more than twenty in number.

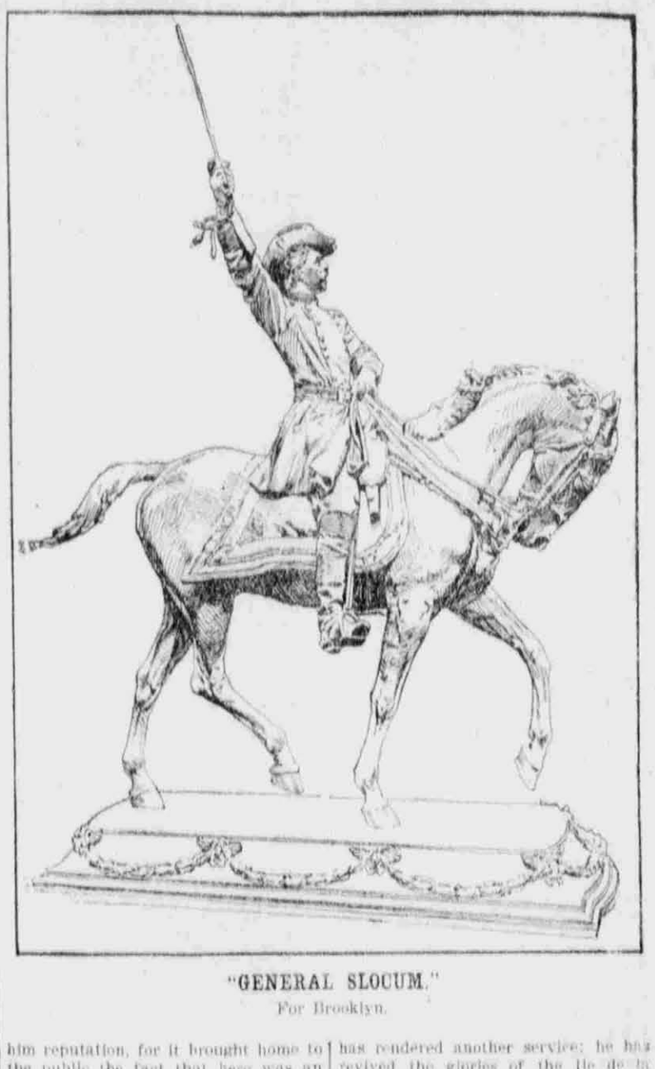
During the formative period of his art, while MacMonnies was studying, he was also observing. He rarely rested; he worked at a white heat almost all the time. Some of his best work came as an inspiration, some again only after painful toil. Like Crawford, he has an inventive mind that would have won him distinction in mechanics. He has persistence and energy in a marked degree, and these qualities, combined with his genius for surmounting obstacles, have given him his success.

They say in Paris that MacMonnies was the first sculptor to find out what to do with the tall hat so persistently worn by all great men of modern times who have no regard for the contingency of being done up in marble when they are dead. What an awfully hideous thing it really is only appears when attempts are made to reproduce it in marble, and it has been the despair of sculptors for years. But MacMonnies, fertile in expedient, deftly got around the difficulty by having the subject he was treating hold the hat carelessly in his hand in such a manner that it was not in the least obtrusive for a high hat. This was done in his noble Stranahan statue, which won him a gold medal and was subsequently placed in Brooklyn's Prospect park. The figure itself is commanding and impressive, despite the realism of modern costume, which is bravely and skillfully handled, without the palliative even of a flowing cloak or toga.

There is a wide distance—not in art, but in treatment—between the Stranahan statue and the festive "Bacchante," one being fully clothed and the other not at all. This "Bacchante" was considered one of MacMonnies' best works and won the instant appreciation of the French connoisseurs, and while an exhibition at the salon of 1894 was bought by the French government for the Luxembourg gallery. Such a tribute few American sculptors have received, and yet the replica ordered for the court of Boston's Public library was rejected.

This "Bacchante" is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, where it is one of the most admired of works in the nude. There is an inimitable winsomeness in the little naked baby perched upon the arm of the lightly poised maenad, who holds a bunch of grapes so tantalizingly just out of the youngster's reach, and there is a deep lesson to be conveyed to those who see the figures through the artist's eyes. Both are the perfection of grace—the perfection of art—and some have called the group "one of the consummate flowers of modern sculpture." No objection is raised to Powers' "Greek Slave," yet it is nude; but the difference between that masterpiece and the more recent work, the "Bacchante," is that one is cold and inanimate, a snow sculpture, the other seemingly pulsing with life. The same may be said of MacMonnies' "Venus and Adonis," "Boy With Heron" and "Pan of Rohallion," all studies in the nude, yet enveloped in an atmosphere of purity, since nudity, as the artist views it, is purity.

The work that brought MacMonnies into prominence in the United States—for he was well known abroad before his countrymen became acquainted with him as the coming sculptor of the age—was the magnificent Columbian fountain at the World's fair in Chicago, 1893. Practical people wondered when told that MacMonnies received for that colossal group of classic females the sum of $50,000, but those who know the sculptor say he lost rather than made money on the work. But it won him reputation, for it brought home to the public the fact that here was an artist who could handle the "heroic" as well as any sculptor of ancient times.



"GENERAL SLOCUM."
For Brooklyn.

Of the millions at the Chicago World's fair there are few who will ever forget that strange craft crowded with colossal beauties fifteen feet in height. It was made of base material, too—of the plastic "staff," not marble, as it should have been—and perished soon after the closing of the exposition.

Secure in his fame for ten years past, MacMonnies has since given the world his fine "Shakespeare" and the beautiful bronze doors now in the Congressional library at Washington, his "Sir Harry Vane" in the Boston Public library, his magnificent "Athlete and Horses" in Prospect park, his "General Woodford," his bronze groups for the Soldiers' and Sailors' monument and his latest, "General Slocum," all for Brooklyn, which delights to honor its great son; his bronze "Victory" for the Battle monument at West Point and other notable works.

It is only thirteen years since MacMonnies won "honorable mention" and received his first commission, yet he has risen to surpassing heights in that short time and has been showered with honors, including the Legion of Honor in 1896, the cross of the Order of St. Michael of Bavaria, the grand prize of honor at the Paris exposition of 1900, a decoration by the German government and at least twenty gold medals.

FREDERICK A. OBER.

"SHAKESPEARE."
Congressional Library, Washington.

A MODERN D'ARTAGNAN.

M. Diraison, the subilieutenant of the French navy who recently wrote the book "Les Maritimes," bids fair to become a modern D'Artagnan. He has already fought several duels with various people who were mentioned or who thought they were mentioned in that work and has been wounded with monotonous regularity. The word wounded is, of course, to be understood in the strictly French meaning of the word when duels are in question. This means he has many times been slightly pricked with the point of a dueling sword. One curious result of his dueling experience has been that he is beginning to learn to fence.

When Diraison began his career as a duelist, he knew little or nothing about that art, but by the time he had fought his fifth duel he showed remarkable improvement, so much so that no fewer than sixteen rounds were required before his opponent, Lieutenant Vidal, inflicted the inevitable pin prick. As M. Diraison has about twenty more affairs in prospect he will probably be an expert fencer when he is through. He has rendered another service; he has revived the glories of the Ile de la Grande Jatte as the rendezvous for affairs of honor. For many years that island in the Seine enjoyed a monopoly. There was hardly a day that the landlord of the cafe on the island did not receive the visit of a couple of gentlemen desirous of settling some difference with swords or pistols. The fact that he philosophically got the meat ready for both combatants and their seconds was the best commentary on the harmlessness of the French duel.

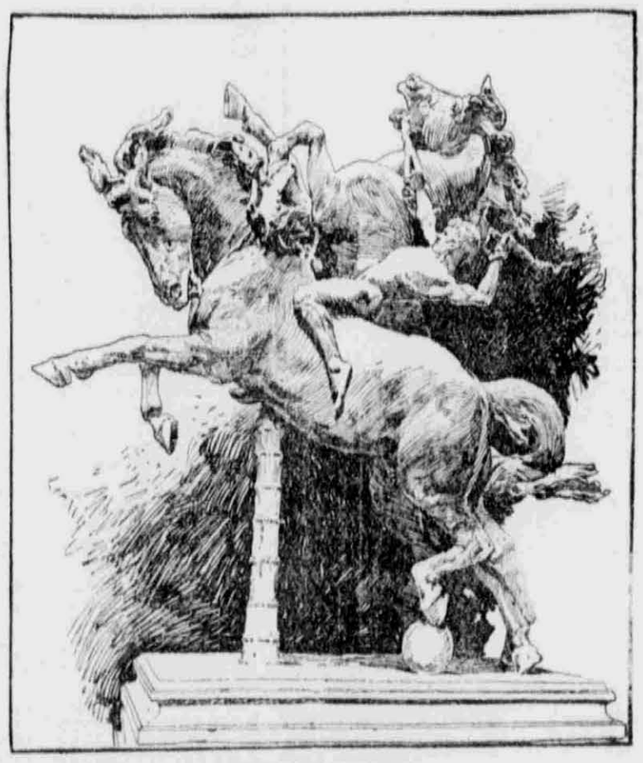
Of course that has not always been the case. From time to time a French duelist gets shot dead or run through. This fact alone keeps the institution alive; otherwise it would be drowned in an ocean of ridicule. The ballroom of the Ile de la Grande Jatte, where the encounters take place in bad weather, has already been the scene of several tragedies, the most notable being those of Captain Meyer, killed by the Marquis de Mores, and Mr. Percher, the journalist, better known by his nom de plume of "Any Allis," who was killed by an ex-captain of the army after a newspaper dispute on some question of colonial policy.

Of late years the cycle track at Parc de Princes at Auteuil has dethroned the Ile de la Grande Jatte from its former position. It can be reached by railway, which makes things more comfortable for the crowd of spectators who now usually witness a French duel, and the dressing rooms of the cyclists are convenient for the combatants. The keepers of the cafes, both at the Ile de la Grande Jatte and the Parc des Princes, are probably partisans of the duel with a gallery. The combat and the inevitable discussion which follows provoke thirst, and the cafetier reaps a harvest.

BRITISH CENTENARIANS.

A London newspaper has published an interesting list giving the names and ages of all persons in Great Britain and Ireland who are known to have reached 100 years and upward. Being the census year, the list is longer than usual and includes twenty men and thirty-three women. Again, the proportion of two men to three women is noted as a curious fact. Mrs. Margaret Neve of Guernsey is, wonderful to relate, still living at the age of 109. She had but one recorded compeer in Mrs. Elizabeth Hanbury, who died at this age in October last. From 1892 to 1901 just 402 centenarians have been traced —152 men and 250 women.

Pennsylvania still retains a poll tax of 50 cents as a condition of suffrage.



EQUESTRIAN GROUP.
Prospect Park, Brooklyn.

BRIGHT AND NEWSY.

Nome's population is estimated at about 2,000, which is 1,500 less than was the case a year ago.

Of the bodies of people who died in New York last year more than 10 per cent found their way to the morgue.

Russian experts believe that opium might be produced successfully in the Caucasus and many regions of southern Russia.

The Polynesian islands are scattered over 11,000,000 square miles of sea, but comprise altogether only 170,000 square miles of land.

The average depth of the Texas spouting oil wells is a few feet more than a thousand, and the height to which the oil is ejected 60 to 200 feet.

Some Chinese medicine consisting of monkeys' toes boiled down and hardened by being buried underground for a number of years figured in a police court case at Shanghai recently.

M. de Witte, the Russian minister of finance, has drawn up a decree making the metric system obligatory in Russia. The decree is now under the consideration of the imperial council.

An official statement from the British Cycle and Motor Trades association puts the average profit on a bicycle at $2.16 and the number of persons employed in the cycle trade at 100,000.

In Russia the average acre of land, because of bad cultivation, produced but one-fifth the amount produced by an acre in America. This is the official statement of her minister of finance.

The experience in Edinburgh, Scotland, is that wooden pavements, even when made from the creosote bearing Australian jarrah wood, last on busy streets but ten years, while granite blocks, if reset once or twice, will last thirty years.

Under the direction of the scientific committee of the Aero club, Paris, special balloon cars will be equipped as operating rooms and important surgical experiments will be made at various levels to show the effect of altitude on the circulation of animals.

The joint capital of the six largest manufacturers of coal tar colors in Germany amounts to $12,500,000. They employ together about 500 chemists, 350 engineers and other technologists, 1,360 business managers, clerks, travelers, etc., and more than 1,800 workpeople.

Smelting promises in a few years to become one of the most notable industries in California. Many millions have already been invested in the business, and plans have been already formed which will involve the expenditure of many millions more in the near future.