

November 5, 2018

Contact: (304) 529-2701

HMA ACQUIRES IMPORTANT SCULPTURE BY NOTED ARTIST CHAIM GROSS

The Huntington Museum of Art is pleased to announce the acquisition of an important sculpture by noted American artist Chaim Gross (1904-1991). The sculpture depicts two women holding up a wounded man and was meant to honor the sacrifice of Colin Purdie Kelly Jr. (1915-1941), one of the first American heroes of World War II.

The sculpture, titled "In Memorium of Captain Colin Kelly," is made of plaster and wood and was designed as a maquette for a large bronze memorial to the pilot, whose plane was the first American B-17 to be shot down in combat. In 1941, just days after Pearl Harbor, Kelly sacrificed his own life so that his crew could escape their burning plane before it eventually exploded, killing Kelly in the process. "It is an amazing piece of sculpture," said Geoffrey K. Fleming, HMA's Executive Director. "We are very lucky to have acquired it for our collection."

The story of the sculpture is somewhat mysterious. Not long after its completion, it was exhibited on the rooftop deck of Rockefeller Center in New York City as part of the Sculptors Guild Fourth Annual Outdoor Show, which took place from September 15-October 15, 1942. Following that show, the work disappeared, having never been used to create a permanent memorial to Kelly. At one point it was recorded as being in the possession of well-known New York art dealer Alfredo Valente (1899-1973).

Decades went by before it was rediscovered in 2016 in the garage of Valente's weekend retreat in Sea Cliff, New York. The Gold family, who acquired the work from Valente's estate, approached Fleming about the possibility of donating it to the Museum. "When it was found, the sculpture had been sitting in a damp environment for many years and needed to be conserved," stated Fleming, "but we were certain it could be saved and relished the challenge it presented."

HMA staff picked up the sculpture in April of 2018 and delivered it to the Collector's Art Group (CAG) conservation studios located in Cincinnati, Ohio. There, it underwent a careful examination and seven-month long conservation and restoration process, which was aided by a period photograph of the sculpture when it was exhibited in 1942.

"The work that needed to be completed was time-consuming, but due to the subject and size of the sculpture, it was necessary to get the work done correctly so the artist's original intentions could be restored and presented," said Fleming. The Museum staff retrieved the sculpture in October of 2018 and brought it to its new home at HMA where it will go on display just in time for the observation of Veterans Day.

HMA hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. General admission is free on Tuesdays thanks to the generous sponsorship of Macy's and \$5 per adult on other days. HMA general admission is also free to Museum Members, children younger than 18, veterans and their immediate families, and active

duty military and their immediate families. For more information on HMA, visit www.hmoa.org or call (304) 529-2701. HMA is fully accessible.

West Virginia residents may obtain a summary of the registration and financial documents from the Secretary of State, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305. Registration does not imply endorsement.