

Charles Marega

The Wounded Soldier, 1919

terracotta

38.0 cm x 43.5 cm x 28.5 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery,
Founders' Fund

VAG 32.14



Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

Charles Marega

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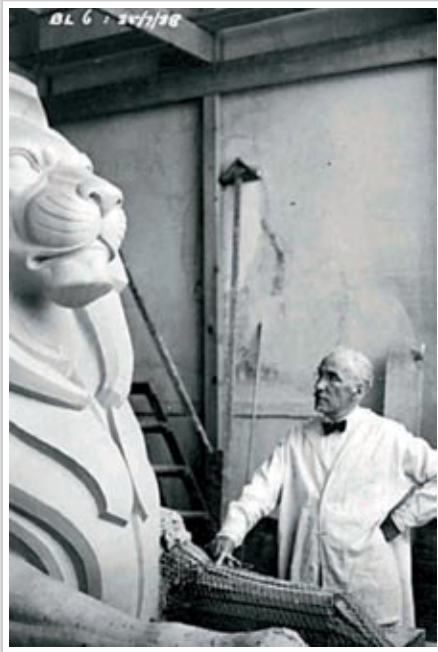


Image source: City of Vancouver Archives: CVA 1399-399

Artist's Biography

Nationality: Italian-born Canadian

Born: 1871-09-24, Lucinico, Italy

Died: 1939-03-27

One of British Columbia's most prolific sculptors, Charles Marega (he changed his name from Carlos in the 1920s when he became a Canadian citizen) was born September 24, 1871 in Lucinico, in the commune of Gorizia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He received his technical training in plaster work in Mariano, Italy and studied in Venice and Zurich. In Zurich he worked under Herman Panitz, marrying Panitz's widow Berta (nee Schellenberg) in 1899.

The Maregas arrived in Vancouver in October 1909 en route to California. When they woke up the following day they could see, beneath a brilliant blue sky, a frosting of snow on the mountains across Burrard Inlet. The scene reminded Berta of her beloved Switzerland. They decided to stay.

The timing was excellent: the newspaper announced a memorial gate to be built at the entrance to Stanley Park to honor the late David Oppenheimer, Vancouver's second mayor. The artist approached would be the famous American, Augustus St. Gaudens. Two weeks later the embarrassed committee announced they had learned St. Gaudens had died two years earlier. But they were still willing to spend \$40,000 (in 1909 dollars, remember) on the monument.

By the time Marega won the commission in early 1910 the plans were reduced to a bronze bust. Marega was paid \$3,000—with a little extra for the granite pedestal. Next the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire commissioned a fountain in tribute to King Edward VII, who died May 6, 1910. The fountain, bearing a bas-relief of the King's face, now sits on the Hornby Street side of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

His next major commission was in Victoria, where architect F.M. Rattenbury was designing the parliament buildings. Rattenbury's plan for the library wing included 14 statues of famous figures from British Columbia's past. Marega worked on them until 1914, modeling three-foot maquettes which were sent to Victoria where a stone carver turned them into figures nine feet tall.

Marega's training in plaster work drew commissions for ceiling and fire place ornamentation for Shaughnessy's finest homes. Still visible is the ceiling ornamentation in Alvo Von Alvensleben's mansion, today's Crofton House School for Girls.

During World War I there were no commissions, but Marega busied himself creating small sculptures which he could not sell. He found inspiration in the Canadian soldier and local native people, works which did not appeal to Vancouver's newly rich, who preferred idealized or Grecian style sculpture.

After the war Marega provided the now-lost plaster work for the Capitol and Strand theatres. After two years in Switzerland, the Maregas returned to Vancouver and rejoined the city's art circles: The Studio Club, British Columbia Society of Fine Art and the British Columbia Art League formed to promote the idea of an art school and gallery. Both Charles and Berta served on committees to set professional standards in exhibitions. The Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts opened in 1925, eventually becoming the Vancouver School of Art (today it's the Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design.) Marega was the sculpture teacher, a part-time position he held until his death.

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The late 1920s were busy years for Marega with commissions for the President Warren Harding Memorial in Stanley Park, the Joe Fortes Memorial Fountain at English Bay, ornamental work at the Orpheum Theatre and the plaster work at the lavish Reifel mansion, *Shannon*, at 57th and Granville. He sculpted many of the motifs for the Marine Building.

The Vancouver Art Gallery opened at its Georgia Street location in 1931. Marega was commissioned to create large busts of Michelangelo and DaVinci to flank the entrance, and a frieze of medallions of famous artists. When the gallery moved, and the old building was demolished, the busts and medallions were sent to a garbage dump. Luckily they were rescued. The busts now rest with a private collector in the Fraser Valley. The medallions are in gallery storage.

The Burrard Street bridge, opened in 1932, is decorated with Marega's sculpture (the busts of George Vancouver and Harry Burrard; the city's coat of arms). In 1934 his beloved Berta died. From that time, regardless of his commissions and work, life drained from him. The statue of Captain Vancouver in front of City Hall, and the lions at the Stanley Park entrance to the Lions Gate Bridge were both unveiled during the last year of his life. The lions, his most famous work, ironically represent a discouraging low point in his life. Marega wished to have them cast in bronze, but the builders wanted a cheaper version in concrete.

Marega was 68 when he died March 27, 1939 after teaching a class at the Vancouver School of Art. As was said at his funeral, "There is no need to build him a monument—because of his sculpture he will never be forgotten."

Source: Davis, Chuck. *The Greater Vancouver Book: An Urban Encyclopedia*. Surrey: Linkman Press, 1997: 223.

Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian

Group: 20th century

Peers: Charles H. Scott; John Vanderpant

Subject: monuments; memorials

Provenance: purchased from the artist in 1932

Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Charles Marega
Thomas Fripp, 1931
bronze
Gift of Pacific Northwest Academy of Arts Vancouver Unit
VAG 31.88

Charles Marega
Rubens, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.1

Charles Marega

The Wounded Soldier, 1919

Charles Marega
Lorain, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.2

Charles Marega
Velasquez, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.3

Charles Marega
Durer, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.4

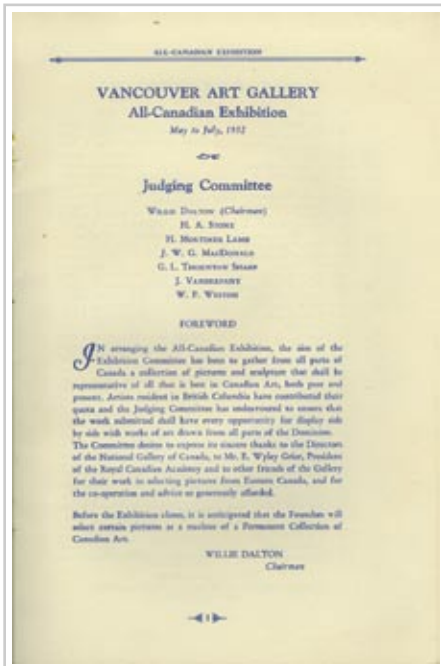
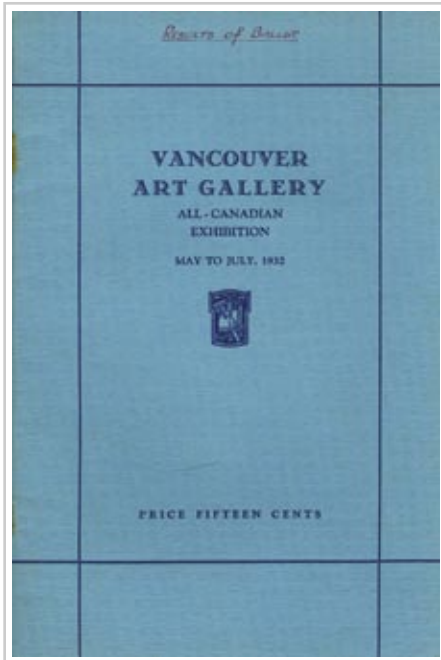
Charles Marega
Reynolds, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.5

Charles Marega
Rembrandt, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.6

Charles Marega
Phidias, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.7

Charles Marega
Giotto, 1931
copper
Commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery
VAG 31.148.8

Charles Marega
The Wounded Soldier, 1919



Bibliography

Vancouver Art Gallery: All-Canadian Exhibition

Publication
1932

[transcription of excerpt]

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

ALL CANADIAN EXHIBITION

MAY TO JULY, 1932

Price 15 Cents

Vancouver Art Gallery
All-Canadian Exhibition
May to July 1932

Judging Committee

Willie Dalton (Chairman)
H.A. Stone
H. Mortimer Lamb
J.W.G MacDonald
G.L. Thornton Sharp
J. Vanderpant
W.P. Weston

FOREWARD

In arranging the All-Canadian Exhibition, the aim of the Exhibition committee has been to gather from all parts of Canada a collection of pictures and sculpture that shall be representative of all that is best in Canadian Art, both past and present. Artists resident in British Columbia have contributed their quota and the Judging committee has endeavored to ensure that the work submitted shall have every opportunity for display side by side with works of art drawn from all parts of the Dominion. The Committee desires to express its sincere thanks to the Directors of the National Gallery of Canada, to Mr. E. Wyley Grier, President of the Royal Canadian Academy and to the other friends of the Gallery for their work in selecting pictures from Eastern Canada, and for the co-operation and advice so generously afforded.

Before the Exhibition closes, it is anticipated that the Founders will select certain pictures as a nucleus of a Permanent Collection of Canadian Art.

Willie Dalton
Chairman

Charles Marega

The Wounded Soldier, 1919



Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia.

Publication
2000

[transcription]

Although visual artists have a difficult time making ends meet, sculptors have an even greater challenge, because sculpture is neither widely collected nor easily accommodated in a domestic setting. Therefore, it is surprising that Charles Marega's long and successful sculpting career was spent largely inside the mainstream of art in British Columbia. Despite his numerous commissions and the fact that he taught at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, helping to form a number of younger sculptors, today his chief visual presence in the community consists of the two lions that flank either side of the south entrance to the Lions Gate Bridge. Ironically, in many ways these highly stylized concrete figures are quite an exception, as Marega's imagery is generally more realistic and more closely detailed than the lions would suggest. Among his public monuments, the Harding Memorial in Stanley Park and the King Edward fountain on Hornby Street are more typical of his work.

The cost of realizing sculpture in permanent materials such as stone, bronze or concrete is considerable, so much of Marega's work was executed in the cheaper material of plaster. Plaster has the advantage of being easily available and simple to work with; its surface can also be treated to resemble many other materials.

At the height of his career, Marega produced a number of images whose emotional depth and fine modeling display his strengths as an artist. One of these notable works is the model of *The Wounded Soldier*. Little of the history of this piece is known, except that it entered the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1932, purchased by the gallery's founders. Apparently unconnected to any of Marega's exciting monuments, it may be the initial design for a war memorial. In the model, made in the final year of the First World War, Marega depicts a weakened and dispirited soldier resting on a small hammock. The man's body language suggests resignation and defeat, rather than defiance and victory. Although small in scale, the composition is an elegant one, a solidly based spiral triangle, and the turning of the figure encourages viewers to look at the sculpture in the round. While not monumental, *The Wounded Soldier*, is a remarkably poignant reminder of the futility of war and its human cost.



Further Reading

Davis, Chuck. "Marega, Charles," *The Greater Vancouver Book: An Urban Encyclopedia*. Surrey: Linkman Press, 1997: 213.

MacDonald, Colin S. "Marega Charles," *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists, Volume 4*. Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1967.

Charles Marega
The Wounded Soldier, 1919

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

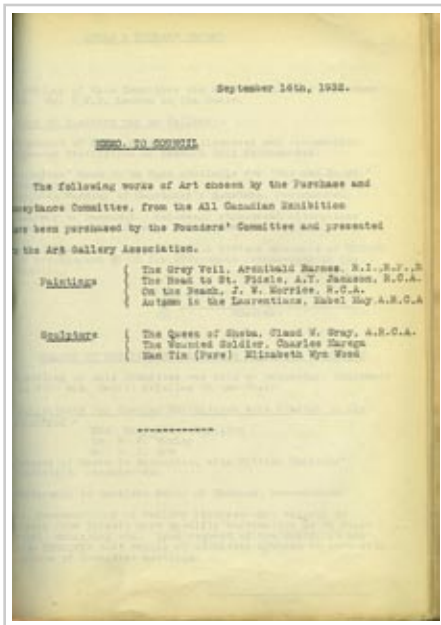
All-Canadian Exhibition. May - July, 1932.

Art in British Columbia. January 1, 1995 - December 31, 1995.

Face to Face: Four Centuries of Portraits. June 19, 1999 - September 26, 1999.

The Rhetoric of Utopia: John Vanderpant and his Contemporaries. August 21, 1999 - February 13, 2000.

75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.



Archival History

Council Memo

Acquisition Record
1932-09-13

[transcription]

September 16th, 1932.

Memo to Council

The following works of Art chosen by the Purchase and Acceptance Committee, from the All Canadian Exhibition have been purchased by the Founders' Committee and presented to the Art Gallery Association.

Paintings:

The Grey Veil, Archibald Barnes, R.I.R.P.R.
The Road to St. Fidele, A.Y. Jackson, R.C.A.
On the Beach, J.W. Morrice, R.C.A.
Autumn in the Laurentians, Mabel May, A.R.C.A.

Sculpture:

The Queen of Sheba, Claud W. Gray, A.R.C.A.
The Wounded Soldier, Charles Marega
Man Tin (Pure) Elizabeth Wyn Wood

Charles Marega

The Wounded Soldier, 1919



Council Minutes

Acquisition Record

1933-05-08

[transcription of excerpt]

Minutes from Acquisitions Committee Meetings:
Report of Purchase and Acceptance Committee
Annual Meeting of the Vancouver Art Gallery Association
Monday May 8 1933

2.

From the All-Canadian Exhibition held last Spring the Founders purchased 4 pictures and 3 pieces of sculpture.

Eight purchases have also been made by the Founders from the recent Exhibition of British prints—These purchases are not yet on view.

On the recommendation of its representatives in Eastern Canada the Founders have also purchased one oil painting by Robert Gagen.

Following is a full list of all works acquired by the Gallery during the year—

PURCHASES

Sculpture
TITLE: Wounded Soldier
ARTIST: Charles Marega
PURCHASED BY FOUNDERS

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