



KENTUCKIANA'S ART MAGAZINE



FEATURED ARTIST

ENID YANDELL

The female sculptor
who molded history.



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Her name may be unfamiliar to most Louisvillians but certainly not her works of sculpture. Those entering Cherokee Park from the east are greeted by her nine-foot bronze rendition of frontiersman Daniel Boone. And from high atop the park, at Hogan's Fountain, her creation of Pan, the Greek god of rustic nature, surveys the surrounding hillsides.

Louisville native Enid Yandell (1869 – 1934) became nationally known for her sculptures, her philanthropy and her humanitarian endeavors. She was the first woman allowed into the prestigious National Sculpture Society, helping to break the gender barriers for future female sculptors.

Yandell displayed at an early age her astonishing prowess as an artisan. According to the February 1895 issue of *The Southern Magazine*, while other children were making mud pies resembling nothing more than clods, Yandell was creating “grace, form and outline.”

By the age of 12, the young Yandell was studying under the tutelage of woodcarver and educator Benn Pittman. Although woodcarving was not Yandell's favored medium, what works she did produce showed the influence of her early teacher Pittman. In 1887 she enrolled in the Cincinnati Art Academy, completing the four-year course of study in an extraordinary two years and in the process winning top honors in the senior exhibition.

In 1889, she embarked on a six-week tour of Europe with her family that further influenced her aptitude. Upon Yandell's return, she began her sculpting career in earnest. This was no small task in the world of sculpture dominated by men. Her first commissioned work was a bust of

then Filson Club president Reuben Durrett, which remains her earliest surviving work. She continued on to also sculpt busts of the first

Governor of Kentucky, Isaac Shelby, commissioned by the Lexington Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and busts of other prominent early Kentuckians. Several of these busts are on display at the Kentucky Historical Society.

Yandell's greatest early commission opportunity came when she was selected along with other female sculptors to create the Women's Building in Chicago scheduled to open in 1893 as part of the World's Columbian Exposition. This structure was truly exceptional in that it was the first major architectural project designed and decorated by women alone. She was commissioned to create the caryatids adorning 24 pillars surrounding the roof garden on the attic story. It was at this time she also became primary assistant to the Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft, who was commissioned to work on several of the buildings for the exhibition.

An interesting anecdote concerning this period is that after Chief of Construction Daniel Burnham told Taft he could hire white rabbits to assist him if they got the job done, Taft requested women assistants. Thus, Yandell and five other women sculptors were dubbed “The White Rabbits.” They proved

more than proficient toward the task at hand; in fact, these “white rabbits” earned five dollars per day – the same as the men's pay.

In late 1894, Yandell returned to Europe and Paris to continue to refine her skills and expertise. She joined a group of the White Rabbits studying with Fredrick MacMonnies, one of the few American sculptors



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in Paris who permitted female students. Some of her private studies were also with the renowned Auguste Rodin. In her first years in Paris, Yandell was also commissioned by the Board of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition to create in staff – a mixture of plaster, hemp and cement – a monumental figure representing the Greek goddess Pallas Athena for the 1897 exposition in Nashville. The sculpture was 40 foot tall, counting its base, and was created in three sections for transporting from Paris to Nashville. This colossal sculpture was never cast in bronze and due to that fact has long since deteriorated.

Yandell's “Palla Athena” was classical in style and subject. But she was progressively more influenced by a new style of art form in Paris,

Art Nouveau, which prompted her to create the “Kiss Tankard,” or also known as “The Fisher Boy and Mermaid.” This piece was unique in that when the tankard lid was open the boy and mermaid embraced in a kiss. It was originally cast in bronze and given by Yandell to her sister as a birthday gift. Interestingly enough, Tiffany and company tried to copy this work in silver but could never quite succeed in the composition so as to have the boy and mermaid line up for the passionate kiss.v

Although Yandell produced many works on a small scale she was also interested in the creation of monumental sculpture. Her aplomb for receiving commissions for her work was matched only by a few other women sculptors. In 1899 Yandell became involved with a project she considered the greatest of her career. She was chosen over 17 men to create a memorial for an Italian diplomat to honor his dead wife. The

