

## **Malvina Hoffman**

By Luana Luconi Winner

***“Malvina was dedicated, passionate, and tough. She coupled her talents with an intelligence and work ethic. It is important to remember she developed as a sculptor in a field dominated by men.”***

**- Everett Raymond Kinstler**

The daughter of prominent pianist, Richard Hoffman, Malvina Hoffman's early childhood was filled with visiting musicians and artists at her family's New York home. She entered the Art Students League by age 14. When, at age 21, she became dissatisfied with her oil portrait of her ill father, she turned to clay and marble, with guidance from Mount Rushmore sculptor, Gutzon Borglum. The marble was immediately accepted into the Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design.

Following her father's death, Malvina Hoffman and her mother sought the continuance of her art education in Europe with Auguste Rodin. Appearing outside Rodin's studio for five consecutive days, letter of recommendation in hand, Hoffman finally managed to gain admission to Rodin's studio. Rodin became a close friend and profound influence in Hoffman's work and encouraged her to study dissections and practice her art through drawing. "Michelangelo never made a sketch," Rodin told Hoffman, "He only made drawings." After five years in Paris she established her own foundry, became a master founder, and wrote her book, *Sculpture Inside and Out*, on bronze technique.

Traveling the world for five years for the famed Field Museum commission, she and her husband, the Classical violinist Samuel Grimson, encountered numerous cultures and made many friends as they traversed continents, carting over 27 hermetically sealed cases of materials and supplies. When finished, Hoffman had created 104 life-sized figures, busts, and heads in bronze and stone "Head Hunting for the Field Museum of Chicago" The commission for the "Races of the World" Hall of Man at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair became her crowning contribution to the art world and combined knowledge of anthropology, art history, ethnicity and modern culture.

Through the years, Malvina Hoffman collected many interesting friends and acquaintances and executed many notable, monumental works. Hoffman created a large oeuvre based on her friend, the famed Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova. Her bas-relief frieze of Russian dancers became legend. Other large scale works included a memorial group in Harvard's War Memorial Chapel for Robert Bacon, Ambassador to France, and the heroic stone figures and an altar for the entrance to Bush House in London.

Hoffman's commitment to capturing the individual spirit of every subject was intensely evident in her work: "To understand the submerged passion that burns in the human eye, to read the hieroglyphs of suffering etched in the lines of a human face...to watch the gesture of a hand or listen for the false notes and the true in a human voice, these were the mysteries that I found I must delve into and try to unravel when I made a portrait."

## Bibliography for Malvina Hoffman

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