

**Flight of Night**

**Paul Manship**

**1916**

**G359**

**Accession Number 82.15**

## **Biography**

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Paul Manship attended the Institute of Art there from 1892 to 1903. Then he enrolled in the Art Students League, where he assisted Solon Borglum in stone carving projects before transferring to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1909, he entered the competition for, and won, the highly sought-after Prix de Rome and shortly thereafter decamped for Rome where he attended the American Academy from 1909 until 1912. While in Europe he became increasingly interested in Archaic art, his own work began to take on some archaic features, and he became more and more attracted to classical subjects. He also developed an interest in classical sculpture of India, and traces of that influence can be observed in his work (*Dancer and Gazelles*\*). Manship was one of the first artists to become aware of the vast scope of art history being newly excavated at the time and became intensely interested in Egyptian, Assyrian and pre-classical Greek sculpture.

In America, he became one of the most sought after sculptor of public commissions including the "Prometheus" in Rockefeller Center\*\*.

Manship found that his style was attractive to both modernists and conservatives. His simplification of line and detail appealed to those who wished to move beyond the Beaux-Arts classical realism prevalent in the day. Also, his view of and use of a more traditional "beauty" as well as an avoidance of the more radical and abstract trends in art made his works attractive to more conservative art collectors. Manship's work is often considered to be a major precursor to Art Deco.

Manship produced over 700 works. Although not known as a portraitist, he did produce statues and busts of Theodore Roosevelt, John D. Rockefeller and Robert Frost, among others. Manship was very adept at low relief and used these skills to produce a large number of coins and medals, one of his later ones being the John F. Kennedy inaugural medal.

Manship served on the board of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and chaired the board. Manship's extensive papers, maquettes and sculptures are housed in the museum's archives. In 2004 the Smithsonian mounted a

retrospective of Manship's career, which resulted in a reappraisal of the sculptor's work.

There is a gallery dedicated to the display of Manship's work at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### **Flight of Night-1916**



*Flight of Night* is characteristic of Manship's bronze sculptures. It has a decisive frontal viewing angle and focuses on an allegorical figure derived from Classical mythology. This sculpture depicts the Roman moon goddess, Diana, flying over an orb. The elegance of the flowing drapery and the positioning of Diana's arms create a crescent shape, mimicking her relationship with the moon, which is represented by the orb below her. *Flight of Night* shows Diana glancing backwards, most likely at the sun guided by her twin brother Apollo. Despite the disparate narratives, the goddess is positioned with her left knee raised, her right leg reaching back, and her head turned over her shoulder in both statues. This composition and the theme of levitation were elements that Manship used over and over again in many of his most famous works. In *Flight of Night*, he depicts Diana as a powerful goddess who is both beautiful and serene as she glides through the air and brings on nightfall.

Paul Manship often used a flying figure to symbolize the passage of time.

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### **Dancer and the Gazelles**

The dancer's headscarf and gauzy costume suggest that she might be from India. She has trained the gazelles to dance alongside her in response to her hand signals. The statue captures a moment in which she restrains one and coaxes the other with her gestures.

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*Prometheus at Rockefeller Center*

This 18-foot-tall, 8-ton sculpture became a fixture in one of the more heavily visited tourist sites and in 2001 was covered with a protective box so that the statue could be re-gilded, coated in double weight 23 and one-quarter karat gold leaf.