

Antonio Salemme (1892-1995)

Born in 1892 in Gaeta, Italy, Antonio Salemme moved with his family to Newton, Massachusetts in 1904 after the death of his mother. At the age of thirteen, he began his studies at the Eric Pape Art School, and later at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, studying with George L. Noyes. While in Boston, he began to study sculpture, and in 1910 he went on a study tour of Spain and France with Professor R. R. Goodell of Simmons College in Boston. He continued his study in Spain and France but later in 1912 he studied in Rome, where he was sent by his patron, William A. Read of New York as a protégé of Angelo Zanelli and studied the Masters in the museums.

From 1915 to 1919, Salemme served in the Italian Army spending 31 months at the front. During this time he did sculpture portraits of two of his generals, and a bronze relief honoring a lieutenant who was killed on a dangerous mission. He returned to the United States at the end of the war.

In 1926 Salemme made a very beautiful, life-size nude statue of Paul Robeson. He considered it his greatest work to that date. A full length nude statue of a black man was very controversial at the time, and I have been told that the statue was hidden for many years. I don't know what has since happened to it. A photograph of it appeared in the November 20, 1926 issue of the "Pittsburgh Courier".

Salemme also made death masks for Sacco & Vanzetti in 1927, and for Florence Mills in the same year. The latter was in preparation for a statue he was to make of Florence Mills but it was never made due to lack of funds.

He worked exclusively as a sculptor until the 1930's, at which time he again took up painting in addition to sculpting. He received the Guggenheim Fellowship for sculpture in 1932 and 1936. During his first fellowship, Salemme studied for two years in Paris, and at the Salon des Tuilleries exhibited his "Negro Spiritual" for which the renowned actor Paul Robeson posed. French sculptor, Despeau deemed the work a "superior work of art." During the 1920's and 1930's Salemme taught painting and sculpting and was the Director of the WPA Mural Project in 1935.

Salemme's works have been exhibited over the last seventy years mainly in New York and Paris. Most of his exhibits were during the 1920's and 1930's. Salemme is known to have visited Bermuda at least once in 1954 and to have painted there at this time. A resurgence of his gallery exhibits occurred in the 1960's.

His bronze portraits of famous Americans are permanent collection pieces in major museums and universities along the East Coast. His busts of John F. Kennedy are exhibited at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston.

He exhibited in the following national exhibitions: The National Academy of Design in the 1920's; The National Sculpture Society in 1929; The Art Institute of Chicago in 1930; The Palace of Legion of Honor, San Francisco in 1928; The Whitney Museum, New York City in the 1930's; in 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935 at the Salon d'Automne, Salon des Tuileries and Gallerie Zac in Paris, France; The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from Philadelphia in 1930- 1950 and also in 1950 at The Metropolitan Museum of New York.

His one man shows include: 1931, Sculpture, Ferargil Gallery in New York; 1935, Sculpture and drawings. Ehrich-Newhouse Gallery in New York; 1937, Sculpture and drawings. Findlay Gallery in New York ;1939, Sculpture and drawings. Wakefield Bookshop Gallery in New York ;1950, Sculpture, paintings, and drawings, Wellons Gallery in New York ;1961, Paintings, Sagittarius Gallery in New York ;1964, Sculpture and drawings. Robert Schoelkopf Gallery in New York ;1972, Paintings, sculpture and drawings. Historical Cultural Center in Gaeta, Italy ;1972, Paintings, sculpture, and drawings. Fahlnaes Gallery, International Trade Fair in Gothenburg, Sweden;1979, Paintings and sculpture. Edward-Dean Museum of Decorative Arts in Cherry Valley, California and in 1980, Paintings and Sculpture. The Yellow Box Gallery in New York

He had numerous exhibitions of 2 or more artists and is represented in many permanent collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Newark Museum, Newark, N.J.; Bronze portrait of Ethel Waters at Yale University; Bronze portrait of Pres. Dwight D Eisenhower at Columbia University, National Headquarters of the Republican Party, Washington D.C., USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, CVN 89; Bronze portrait of Vilhjalmur Steffansson, Manitoba Centnial Center, Winnipeg, Canada; Bronze portrait of Paul Robeson, Fine Arts Collection, Rutgers University; and many private collections.

In 1962, Salemme, with his wife Martha, moved to the countryside of Easton, Pennsylvania, where he continued to paint and sculpt until his death at the age of 101 in 1995.