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Seeing *Youth Triumphant* Again for the First Time

Often, a community's creative spirit can be gauged by its public sculptures. Sculptures reflect values that are particularly prized, they showcase the artistic pulse of the day, and they often represent a significant commitment of funds. The 3 "gateway" sculptures in Barre are a rarity in New England because of their massive stature and outstanding artistic qualities; each sculpture provides a glimpse into the psyche of our small community.

Barre's gateway sculptures reflect values that stand up well over time: the Robert Burns Memorial honors the 100th anniversary of the death of the renowned Scottish poet; *Youth Triumphant* is a young warrior pleading for world peace; and the Italian Monument reflects cultural pride with its portrait of Carlo Abate, Barre's first art teacher.

Many people walk or drive by these 3 massive sculptures without giving thought to what they are, who designed them, who made them, and what they may mean. In some cases, the sculptures even disappear from view, much like a stack of papers on your desk that has occupied the same corner for some time.

With the reconstruction of the base of *Youth Triumphant* in progress, funded by local philanthropist Charles Semprebob, this wonderful sculpture comes prominently into clear view. Known widely as "the naked guy" and other similar nicknames, *Youth Triumphant* is a sculpture that earnestly describes the artist's and our community's values. The sculpture honors the contributions of our military forces and, at the same time, urges future peace.

The artist who designed *Youth Triumphant*, C. Paul Jennewein, was at an early stage of his expansive career in 1921 when he entered and won the national competition to commemorate the youth who fought in World War I, a competition organized by Barre businessmen led by William Murray. Jennewein had just recently won the prestigious international Prix de Rome award for sculpture. Jennewein selected architect John Mead Howells (see sidebar) to design the setting in which *Youth Triumphant* would be placed, a Greek amphitheatre setting that is referred to as the "whispering wall" because of its unusual acoustics. The 50-ton monument was cut in Barre by Gino Tosi, Enrico Mori, and John Del Monte.

Jennewein described his inspiration for the sculpture as, "American Youth in arms who returned victorious, but supplicating even in victory for peace as our national desire." His original inscription on his model for *Youth Triumphant* stated simply, "The Spirit of the American Armies Victorious, Salutes Peace." Later, the inscription was changed to lines from a poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Voluntaries."

Barre took its role as a leader in public sculpture very seriously. Consider this: In 1920, New York City had a population of 5,620,048; Philadelphia had a population of 1,823,779; and Washington, D.C., had a population of 437,571. Tiny Barre City with a population of 10,000 in 1920 commissioned Jennewein to create this major work of art, *Youth Triumphant*, for display in the heart its downtown district.

Not surprisingly, the cities with massively larger populations and financial riches later became the focus of Jennewein's artwork. He went on to create: 50 sculptures for the Department of Justice (DOJ) in Washington D.C.; 2 massive sculptures, "Spirit of Justice" and "Majesty of Law" at the Rayburn Building (U.S. House of Representatives) in Washington D.C. (these sculptures could be cousins to *Youth Triumphant*); the pediment of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among a roster of prominent sculptural works (see sidebar). The catalog published after Jennewein's posthumous retrospective in 1980 at the Tampa Museum of Fine Art listed "Youth Triumphant" as one of his "Major Works."

The subject for *Youth Triumphant* is naked for a reason. At that point in our nation's history, war monuments commonly depicted a male in traditional military uniform with every detail in plain sight, including the buttons on the jacket of the uniform. Jennewein set out to create a sculpture that would show the true spirit of patriotism, uncovered by heavy fabric, and the vulnerability of a young man in the service of his country. (Incidentally, the "Spirit of Justice" is a partially nude sculpture in the Grand Hall of the DOJ that was covered by a curtain in the "Drapegate" incident (2002-05) by then Attorney General John Ashcroft. "Spirit of Justice" was created by Jennewein in the commission to create all of the sculptures for the DOJ headquarters.)

Jennewein was influenced by his travels to Italy, Greece, and Egypt; his artistic style was a dominant influence in Neo-Classical and Art Deco sculpture in our country. Looking back over time at the vast artistic contributions of Jennewein to the American built environment, one could conclude that *Youth Triumphant* is one of the most important sculptures in our region. Recently, the avenue in the Bronx on which the artist's studio stood was renamed "Jennewein Avenue."

At the conclusion of the project, architect Howells wrote to city leadership, "I still feel as I did when I saw Mr. Jennewein's first model that this is a simple and splendid piece of work, and I cannot look even at a photograph of the first model without feeling its simplicity and inspiration. I believe that Barre has got something really distinguished and dignified, owing to Mr. Jennewein's genius, and I hope and feel that every stranger passing through town will feel something of this."

The reinvestment in repairs to the setting for *Youth Triumphant* via philanthropist Charles Semprebon is a grand gesture for a grand monument. We are fortunate to live in a community that values these cultural assets and has the will to continue making essential investments in public art.

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Side Bar:

C. Paul Jennewein (1890-1978)

Darlington Memorial, Judiciary Park, WA, D.C. (1920-23)

Youth Triumphant, Barre, VT (1921-24)

Pediment, Philadelphia Museum of Art (1926-33)

Indian and Eagle, Bronze Tours Memorial, France (1928-31)

Endicott Memorial, Boston (1935-37)

Industries of the British Empire, Rockefeller Center, NYC (1932-33)
All Sculptures, Department of Justice, WA, D.C. (1932-34)
The Creation of Scientific Knowledge, Mellon Institute, Pittsburgh, PA (1936)
Entrance, Brooklyn Public Library, The Evolution of the Arts and Sciences (1938-39)
Relief panels inside the White House, WA, D.C. (1954)
Spirit of Justice, Majesty of Law, Rayburn House Office Bldg., WA, D.C. (1960)

John Mead Howells (1869-1959)

St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University (1904-7)
Youth Triumphant, Barre, VT (1921-24)
Tribune Tower, Chicago (1922-25)
Beekman Tower, NYC (1929)
Daily News Bldg., NYC (1930)