

SEEING AMERICA: Thomas Ridgeway Gould's *The West Wind*, 1876

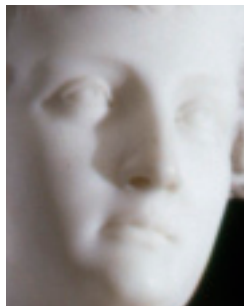
The West Wind personifies the confidence of Americans as they celebrated the nation's one hundredth birthday in 1876.



Thomas Ridgeway Gould (1818 – 1881)
The West Wind, 1876
Marble
Gift of the Isaac Gordon estate through the
Lincoln Rochester Trust Company, 66.18
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester

The Art

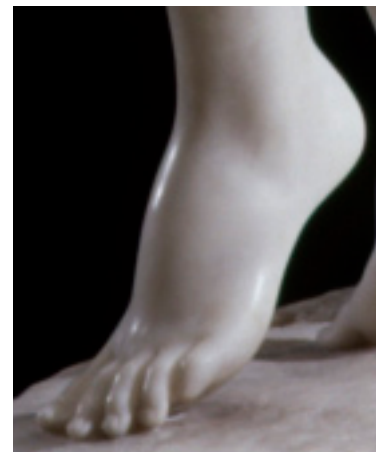
The West Wind is one of seven very similar statues carved in the 1870s by Thomas Ridgeway Gould at his studio in Florence, Italy. One of these seven neo-classical statues—all gleaming white marble, larger than life size—was prominently displayed at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.



Gould has created a nineteenth-century example of the ancient classical Greek aesthetic ideal, casting the body in a classical counterbalanced pose. The figure's head is turned in one direction, the left arm and right foot in another, and the left leg thrust forward as she balances on the balls of her feet.

Yet, though the pose is dynamic, the effect is of a temporary stillness. The woman seems only momentarily motionless; the twisted pose, the glance over her shoulder, the billowing skirt all suggest her movement forward. Furthermore, by resting the flowing drapery on the up-thrust portion of the base, Gould has created a counterweight that gives the impression of the figure leaning forward.

The thirty-two stars on her belt probably represent the States of the Union, fitting symbols for a sculpture commissioned by American patrons. With her wind-blown hair, billowy drapery, and confident, heroic posture, the statue was the very embodiment of America's westward movement and sense of **Manifest Destiny**.



Glossary

Manifest Destiny: 19th century self-proclaimed belief that the United States was divinely ordained to expand across the North American continent.

The Artist



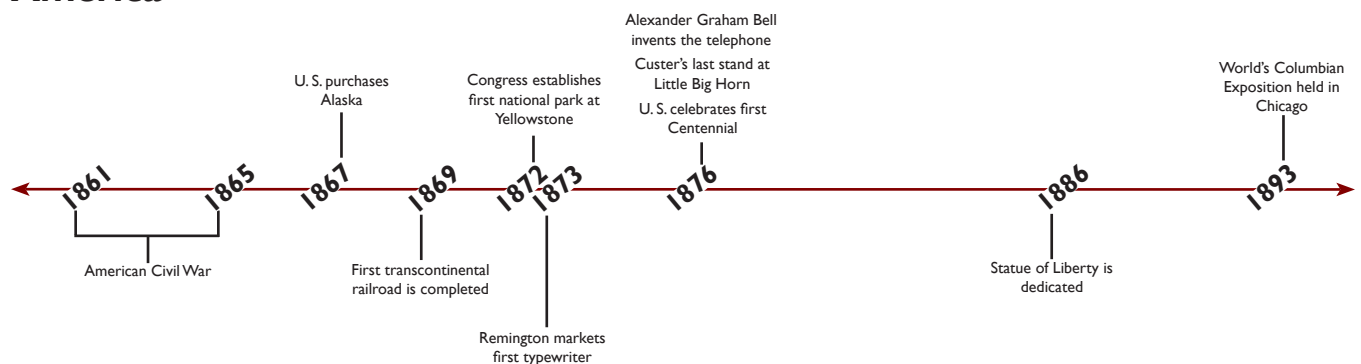
Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1818, Thomas Ridgeway Gould spent his early professional life in the dry goods business with his brother. Although little is known of his formal training, apparently he did study with New England artist Seth Cheney in 1851. He did not devote himself to artistic pursuits until later in life, but by 1863, two large busts, *Christ* and *Satan*, were being displayed at the Boston Athenaeum, a library, museum and art gallery founded in 1807. He was active in the Boston Chapter of the Mercantile Library Association, so it is noteworthy that another, almost identical version of *The West Wind* is owned by the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association.

In 1868 he settled permanently with his family in Florence, Italy, and opened his studio. Exposure to Greek, Roman, and Renaissance antiquities influenced his work. Particularly well-respected examples of Gould's work include a bust of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Harvard University library, a statue of John Hancock in the Lexington, Massachusetts town hall, and three bronze castings of a sculpture of the Hawaiian King Kamehameha I, one of which is placed in the United States Capitol. Gould's work was very popular with American buyers who admired the neo-classical themes and style. He died in Florence in 1881.



Thomas Ridgeway Gould (1818 – 1881)
Kamehameha, 1879
 Bronze
 Given in 1969 by State of Hawaii
 National Statuary Hall

America



In 1873, thanks to Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner who co-authored *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, the term, “Gilded Age” came to describe the last third of the nineteenth century. These decades were marked by grandeur and opulence as American railroad, steel, oil, mining, machinery, and ranching industries produced immense profits. But underneath the thin veneer of great wealth amassed by the very few were widespread disorder and poverty, as the country was struggling with its transition to a unified nationhood following the trauma of the Civil War. One of the greatest challenges of the

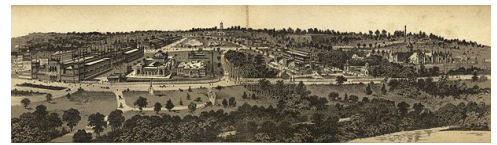
age was the need to absorb the former slaves into the country's social and political fabric.

In 1876 the United States celebrated its one hundredth birthday, and despite the challenges facing the country, optimism prevailed as America was poised to join the ranks of first-class nations. Progress, economic power, pride and confidence in the future were all on display at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1876. Among the products displayed for the first time were Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, Remington's typewriter, Heinz ketchup, Hire's root beer, and the Corliss Steam Engine. The many paintings and statues exhibited represented an equal outpouring of aesthetic creativity, much of it in a neo-classical style. Thomas Ridgeway Gould's sculpture represented the classical roots of American ideas and the exuberance of her accomplishments. Like *The West Wind*, Americans were moving forward.

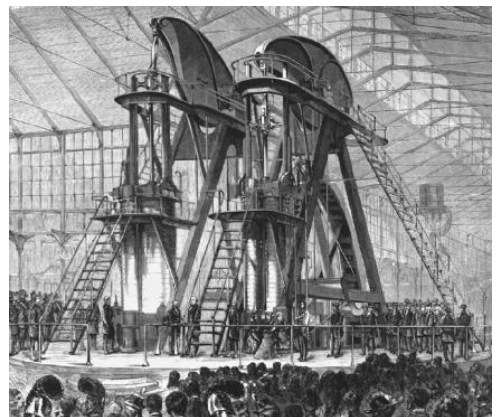
See also Cynthia L. Culbert, "Thomas Ridgeway Gould: *The West Wind* (1876)," in Marjorie B. Searl, ed., *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 92–95.



Total Abstinence Fountain, 1876
Print from Centennial Souvenir Booklet
Herman Kirn, designer
National Gallery of Art © 2009



Panorama of the United States Centennial International Exhibition
National Gallery of Art © 2009



Print of Corliss Steam Engine on exhibit at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, 1876
Library of Congress

Classroom Activities: Seeing America Through Artists' Eyes

Observing Detail

Classical Greek sculpture portrayed the philosophical ideals of perfect balance and harmony, and this 19th-century neo-classical statue illustrates the enduring appeal of those ideals.

How does the artist achieve balance and harmony?

What other characteristics of classical sculpture can you find here?

How does knowing the title, *The West Wind*, shape the meaning in this work of art?

What questions would you ask the artist?



Comparing and Contrasting

Each sculpture combines the traditional qualities of classical sculpture with specific details that give the viewer clues to familiar stories. What sculptural characteristics do these statues have in common? In what ways are they different? What details link each statue to familiar 19th-century narratives?



Randolph Rogers (1825 – 1892)

Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii, after 1855

Marble

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 93.24

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



Thomas Ridgeway Gould (1818 – 1881)

The West Wind, 1876

Marble

Gift of the Isaac Gordon Estate through the Lincoln Rochester Trust
Company, 66.18

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

Exploring the Context/Drawing Conclusions

19th-century artists gave Americans their first views of the recently explored and settled western areas of the country. What would Americans learn about the West from these works of art?



Albert Bierstadt (1830 – 1902)

The Sierras Near Lake Tahoe, California, 1865

Oil on panel

Clara and Edwin Strassenburgh Fund and

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 92.78

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



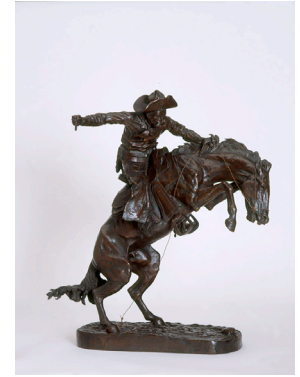
Mortimer Smith (1840 – 1896)

Home Late, 1866

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 75.139

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



Frederic Remington (1861 – 1909)

The Broncho Buster, 1895

Bronze

Gift of a friend of the Gallery, 55.3

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery
of the University of Rochester

Making Interpretations

In Greek mythology the west wind is a masculine god, Zephyrus, who brings light spring and early summer breezes. In Thomas Ridgeway Gould's sculpture, *The West Wind* is feminine, like the personification of American progress shown in John Gast's 1872 *American Progress*. These artists are using the west wind as a metaphor for a larger idea or sentiment. What do you think these artists are saying to the viewer?



John Gast

American Progress, 1872

Museum of the American West

Autry National Center for the American West,

Los Angeles; 92.126.1



Thomas Ridgeway Gould (1818 – 1881)

The West Wind, 1876

Marble

Gift of the Isaac Gordon Estate through the

Lincoln Rochester Trust Company, 66.18

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

Exploring the Context

Artists are keen observers and commentators on the world in which they live. Use *The Artist and America* timelines to consider the effect of American history and art history as reflected in their artwork. In what ways did the artist capture or reflect the events, mood and/or values of his/her America? In what ways did the artist continue or transform the American art traditions he/she would have seen?

Categorizing and Organizing/Drawing Conclusions

Compare *The West Wind* with the 1910 sculpture, *Windy Doorstep*, by Mary Abastenia St. Leger Eberle. American sculpture ranges from public art to personal expression, from grand to intimate scale, and stylistically from abstraction to realism. How are these two sculptures similar and how do they differ? Consider the statue's size, subject, pose, materials, purpose and artistic style.



Mary Abastenia St. Leger Eberle (1878 – 1942)
Windy Doorstep, 1910
Bronze
13 3/4 in. (34.93 cm)
Maurice R. and Maxine B. Forman Fund, 2004.14
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



Thomas Ridgeway Gould (1818 – 1881)
The West Wind, 1876
Marble
70 1/2 in. x 23 in. x 33 1/4 in. (179.07 cm x 58.42 cm x 84.46 cm)
Gift of the Isaac Gordon Estate through the Lincoln Rochester Trust
Company, 66.18
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester

We are grateful for the generous support of this project from the Anne and Vincent DeClue family and our School Program sponsors: Dominion, Bank of America, the Mary W. Clark Trust and two anonymous donors. Additional support is provided by Thomson Reuters, the Chester and Dorris Carlson Charitable Trust, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. Judson Jr., Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation, Hammer Packaging, the estate of Estelle B. Goldman and an anonymous donor for the McPherson Director of Education.



Thomas Ridgeway Gould
The West Wind, 1876

**Gift of the Isaac Gordon Estate through the
Lincoln Rochester Trust Company, 66.18
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester**