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December 20, 2018

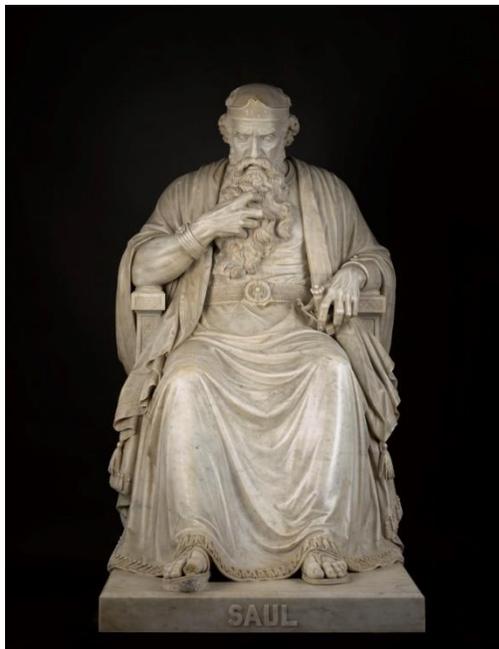
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North Carolina Museum of Art Acquires American Artist William Wetmore Story's Monumental Statue *Saul under the Influence of the Evil Spirit*

Visitors can now view public conservation work of iconic statue in East Building before it goes on view in 2019

Raleigh, N.C.— The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) has acquired a long-lost masterpiece of American sculpture, *Saul under the Influence of the Evil Spirit* by William Wetmore Story. The statue was completed in Rome in 1865 and was exhibited that same year in Dublin at the behest of Pope Pius IX. Bought by an English aristocrat for his country house in Gloucestershire, the statue disappeared for 150 years. The house later became Rendcomb College, a private boarding school, which sold the statue to the NCMA earlier this year.

The acquisition fills an important gap in the Museum's American art collection, adding a monumental neoclassical marble figure to the collection. Its pursuit became something of an obsession for John Coffey, who has served as the NCMA curator of American and modern art for 30 years.



"I have been after this statue for more than seven years," said Coffey. "Our American galleries have cried out for a monumental marble of a dramatic subject, and you cannot get more monumental or dramatic than King Saul of the Bible." According to the Bible, Saul, the first king of Israel, disobeyed God and was thereafter afflicted with an evil spirit.

Raised on its original marble base, the statue projects an alarming presence. The artist once explained that he "represented [Saul] at the moment when the evil spirit is upon him, and David is called in to play to him. The action is all interior—the struggle of a half-demented soul, one hand clutching his beard and one fumbling at his dagger."

Before *Saul under the Influence of the Evil Spirit* is installed in the Museum's free permanent collection, it will undergo a thorough cleaning and repair of its right big toe. The public is invited to observe this cleaning process by NCMA objects conservator Corey Riley. The statue is now on view in Studio 4 on the entrance level of the Museum's East Building. Through the spring of 2019, Riley will be working on the statue most weekday mornings, Tuesday

through Friday from 10 am to noon. This is an opportunity for a behind-the-scenes look at what happens in the NCMA's conservation laboratory.

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"*Saul* has received very little previous conservation treatment," said Riley. "This is a unique opportunity for the public to be exposed to the field of conservation and learn more about how marble sculptures in museum collections are cleaned and prepared to go on view."

Funding for this acquisition was provided by Anne Faircloth and Frederick Beaujeu-Dufour, of Clinton, N.C.

"Without the generous support of Anne and Fred, this magnificent sculpture, which will distinguish our American art holdings and enrich the collection, would not be here in Raleigh," said Museum Director Valerie Hillings, Ph.D. "Acquiring masterful, anchor artworks such as William Wetmore Story's *Saul* can only happen when the Museum's friends step forward and make it happen."

Born in 1819, the artist was the preeminent American sculptor in Rome during the second half of the 19th century. The son of a U.S. Supreme Court justice and educated at Harvard, Story abandoned a brilliant law career to study sculpture in Rome. His larger-than-life sculptures of heroes and villains from biblical and classical antiquity won him an international reputation alongside artist and writer friends Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James. His statues of Medea, Cleopatra, and the Libyan Sibyl are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"Fred and I are thrilled to be able to help bring *Saul* to the NCMA," said Faircloth, an NCMA Board of Trustees member. "Our collection has lacked significant pieces from American sculptors, so this statue represents a step toward deepening that. Most importantly, we are glad this gift will honor John Coffey and his great career at the museum."

Saul arrived at *Rendcomb College* in 1920, where it presided over the entry hall to the school. Over the decades, the statue became a beloved mascot, undergoing elaborate costumes of Gandalf, Santa Claus, and even Satan for the school's end-of-term Christmas party. Despite these student hijinks, the only notable damage is to the king's right big toe, reportedly broken in the 1940s when a student idly tapped it with a sledge hammer. The NCMA purchased *Saul* from *Rendcomb College* in 2018.

"Students, teachers, parents, and all those who have visited *Rendcomb College*, have had the pleasure of *Saul*'s presence for almost 100 years," Head of [Rendcomb College](#) Rob Jones said. "Frederick Noel Hamilton Wills purchased *Rendcomb Park* and founded the school in 1920, acquiring the impressive sculpture which remained in the entrance of the mansion house until he was collected earlier this year. We are delighted that, while we have had the pleasure of *Saul*'s residence at *Rendcomb* for so long, he is going to a wonderful new home at the NCMA where he will be lovingly restored and put on public display."



This will be the first time the public can view a sculpture undergoing conservation at the NCMA. In 2017 conservator of paintings Noelle Ocon received a [Governor's Award for Excellence](#) for her work in [Actual State](#), an exhibition showing the conservation of the painting *The Pentecost*, by a follower of Bernard van Orley. After conservation work is complete, *Saul* is expected to go on view in the center of the Grand Portrait Gallery of the Museum's West Building in late 2019.

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About the Acquisition:

Gift of Anne Faircloth and Frederick Beaujeu-Dufour.

Image captions (top to bottom):

William Wetmore Story, *Saul under the Influence of the Evil Spirit*, modeled 1858–63; carved 1864–65, marble with original marble base in three sections, H. 64 x W. 34 x D. 64 1/2 in; base: H. 34 1/2 x W. 39 1/4 x D. 68 3/4 in., North Carolina Museum of Art, Gift of Anne Faircloth and Frederick Beaujeu-Dufour in honor of John W. Coffey

Objects conservators Marianne Schmeisser (left) and Corey Riley (right) cleaning the base of the statue *Saul under the Influence of the Evil Spirit*.

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Valerie Hillings, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.