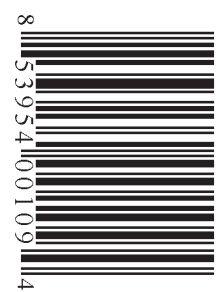
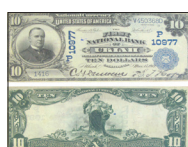


\$1.50



Letter found on body of a
Titanic passenger: \$166,000
– National, p. 1



Saddle up for Holabird's
Western Americana sale
– National, p. 1

AntiqueWeek

THE WEEKLY ANTIQUE AUCTION & COLLECTING NEWSPAPER

EASTERN EDITION

VOL. 48, ISSUE No. 2516

WWW.ANTIQUEWEEK.COM

NOVEMBER 27, 2017

Fred Press – an artist in a class by himself

BY CAROLE DEUTSCH

Chances are you have passed by the design work of Fred Press every time you enter an antique shop. His 1950s and '60s glassware is everywhere it seems as are his figures of animals. Press wanted to share his art with the masses at affordable prices. Yet few people know who he was.

Press (American, 1919-2012) categorized himself as a sculptor, but he was a multi-faceted artist who received high acclaim, not only as an outstanding sculptor, but also as a painter, glass designer, author, illustrator, and commercial artist.

Press did not engage in self-promotion; he was an unassuming man who came from a humble background. He had no desire to create new technological advances. However, he did engage in inventive ways of approaching his art, but preferred to work with what was available with methods that were already in play. His desire was not to recreate the art world but rather to have his art reflect the heartfelt moments of his life, not the bright shining star moments, but rather the simple pleasures in his modest life.

He was the son of Rose and Samuel Press, Russian immigrants who lived in a poor neighborhood on the West End of Boston. The apartment building had a pigeon coop on the roof and young Fred first learned a love of animals from that perspective. Later a Boston philanthropist with a heart for under-privileged children arranged for those with special talents to enjoy country living by offering them a free vacation for the entire summer at his estate in Ipswich, where he provided counselors as teachers. This was the root of the artist's love for horses and the reason so many of his works are illustrative of equine activities in so many forms, even though he never actually owned one. He started doing sketches and drawings with paper and pencil to preserve his memories of the horses and other animal life at the farm, as well as landscapes, and this ignited his natural artistic ability.

He began sculpting in order to enter the Annual Procter and Gamble Soap Sculpture Contest, which the company introduced in the 1920s with the objective of getting kids to like soap. The first competition had 23 million entries. The event was not exactly child's play; it demanded a serious approach to art and the stakes were high. In the 1930s, as a teenager, Press won the contest four years in a row and was asked by the committee not to enter again because they felt he would continue to win and wanted other promising talents to be able to compete. The judges were famous artists, distinguished museum representatives, and industry leaders. Not only did this achievement establish Press as a sculptor in prestigious standing, but the generous cash awards afforded him the opportunity to enter the Vesper George School of Art.

In the late 1930s he and his brother founded Contemporary Arts, Inc. The firm reproduced and distributed Fred's sculptures, which were made in plaster. He first sketched the subject and translated it to a wire frame where it became a clay figure that was placed in a rubber mold. It was then filled with gypsum plaster, cured at 120°F for 24 hours, and removed to be hand finished and hand painted. He later manufactured and produced his busts in cast metal and bronze.

At the onset of World War II Press was assigned to the Army Air Corp and as a technical sergeant stationed in Panama he became the managing editor of *The Caribbean Breeze*, the official publication of the Sixth Air Force. He wrote articles for the magazine and illustrated all of the covers.

After the war he returned to Boston and became a teacher at the Vesper George School of Art. It was at this time he got to have something he wanted all his life — an animal of his own, two in fact. They were Cocker Spaniels named Rodney and

Judge and his interaction with his dogs was a further inspiration for his art. Fred's animal depictions are amazingly expressive and one of his most sought-after subjects.

In 1946, inspired by his wife Alice, he started to paint and began with still life subjects. He then searched his extensive collection of sketches he drew when he was in Panama. It was at this time that his paintings began to appear in local galleries, and then in major museums. Press gained world class recognition as an outstanding painter and illustrator, as well as a renowned sculptor.

He began painting in oil on canvas and switched to casein on hardboard, possibly to reduce the wait time between layers of oil. Eventually he changed to the use of acrylic when it became available, but still used the hardboard foundation. Press also made all his own frames.

In the early 1950s he moved to New York City and became the leading designer and Executive Vice President of Rubel and Company, a posh New York City company located on Fifth Ave, that produced high quality decorative household items. He remained in the position for 30 years and in that time revolutionized the giftware industry, predominantly through his exotic glassware. He took an ordinary form of glass and turned it into a sensational work of art through his imaginative eye-catching designs using a brilliant combination of color, texture, and artistic perfection. His commercial



Fred Press produced numerous dog figurines which are popular with collectors. This German Shepherd figure is stamped "copyright Fred Press." Most of the dog figures (as well as his other animals) are priced under \$100 making them affordable.



Above: The work for which Fred Press is best known is his bronze plaque of John Paul Jones that is on permanent display at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. Image courtesy of the U.S. Navy Memorial.

SEE FRED PRESS ON PAGE 16

SCOTT ANTIQUE MARKETS
WHERE ONLINE SELLERS GO TO BUY
740.569.2800 | www.scottantiquemarkets.com
America's Favorite Treasure Hunts!

Atlanta Expo Centers
Atlanta, GA
2nd Weekend Every Month
3,500 Booths!
Dec 7-10 Jan 11-14
Feb 8-11



Antique Extravaganza
Washington Court House, OH
★ 50 Acre Event! ★
Apr 27-29 Aug 24-26
Jun 22-24 Sep 28-30

Ohio Expo Center
Columbus, OH
800 - 1200 Booths!
Nov 25-26 Jan 20-21
Dec 16-17 Feb 24-25
Mar 24-25

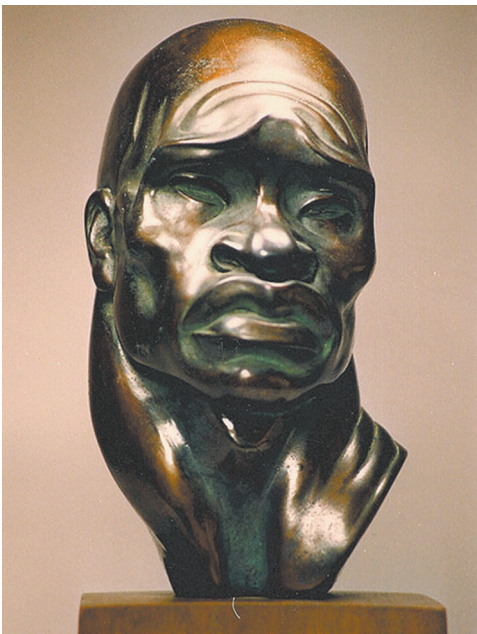
Fred Press

FROM FRONT PAGE

designs for Rubel also included sculptures and functional houseware accessories with a fresh decorative flair.

When the long awaited Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. was finally built in the 1980s, Fred Press was commissioned to sculpt two out of the 24 bronze wall sculptural plaques in honor of our nation's heroes and landmark moments in our U.S. history. One of his plaques depicted the 1950 Battle of Inchon, South Korea, in which the Navy launched a surprise attack which resulted in the recapture of the Korean capital, Seoul. The plaque portrays Marines debarking a boat using ladders to climb to land. The central figure is wearing his helmet with the throat-latch unhooked and a cartridge belt across his waist. The other plaque honors John Paul Jones, one of the Navy's greatest heroes, as he gives his crew onboard the *USS Ranger* the command to fire a cannon in a battle with the *HMS Drake* in the Irish Sea.

Harvey Schneider, Fred Press's nephew, shared his commentary on the historical plaques. "Of all my uncle's work it is these two sculptures that most define him as an artist and a person. The subject matter of the dogged warriors was not unlike the man himself. He let nothing overcome him and he would not back down. Uncle Fred

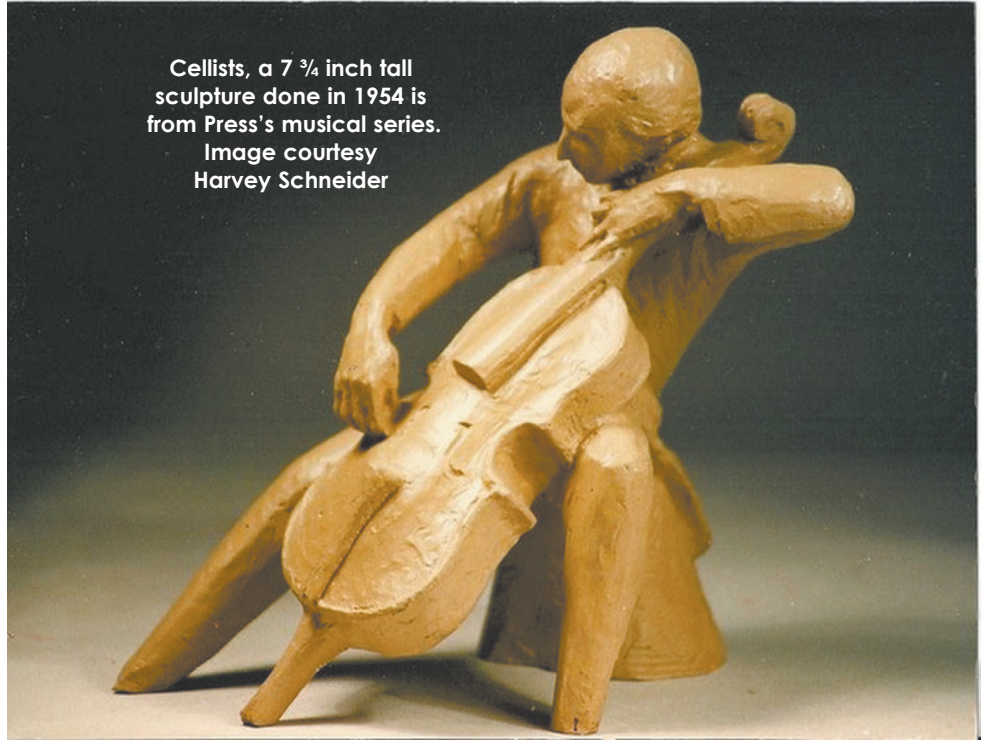


Above: Press won first prize for his sculpture, titled *Slave*, at the Delgado Museum of Art in 1946. It is one of his most popular sculptures. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider

approached everything with this mindset. When he took on a new project he learned all he could about his subject matter and spent many hours in exhaustive research and then translated what he learned to his art. This can best be seen in "Battle of Inchon." It was critical to him that he represented the marines in precise detail right down to the boot chaps they wore to keep their pants from getting hooked on the ladder. All of his art had that kind of in-depth accuracy. He did so much research on John Paul Jones that he became an authority on the subject and ultimately wrote a book about him. Jones refused to acknowledge defeat against insurmountable odds. My uncle had the same life philosophy of staying with something until he conquered it –



Left: *Riding*, a 1946 oil on panel is illustrative of Fred's early love of riding horses as a child in Ipswich, Mass. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider



Cellists, a 7 3/4 inch tall sculpture done in 1954 is from Press's musical series. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider



Fred Press signed Mid-Century turquoise and 22-karat gold seahorse tall Collins glasses. The set of five was priced \$225 and marked sold by Retro Solstice, www.retrostolstice.com.

no plan B. He went from abject poverty to overwhelming success in everything he put his hand to and everything he made went to support his family members. He succeeded in a world that thrives on the spotlight in spite of the fact that he abhorred publicity and shunned the limelight. You might say he was the Clark Kent of the art world and he was my hero." Press was also known as an accomplished writer. He authored *Sculpture at Your Fingertips*, *Remembering the Caribbean Breeze* and *The Ranger and John Paul Jones*. He also wrote for art and literary publications, including the *American Artist Magazine*, and also contributed to the *Christian Science Monitor* in Boston. Although Fred Press is highly acclaimed in the art world, his work does not command high market prices in the collectibles arena today. This is

largely due to Press's initiative in establishing Contemporary Arts in that he wanted to make quality art available to the general public. After winning a first prize award at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, he mass produced the piece and sold it for \$4.25, today's equivalent of approximately \$40. He refused to sell through galleries due to their pricing structure. The majority of his paintings were given to family and friends after they had been exhibited. Fred Press started his artistic career with a pencil and some paper given to him by his sister Eva, who had to sacrifice to do so. Although he avoided notoriety his multi-dimensional art is among the most respected, in each of its genres, across the nation. For an in-depth look at the work of Fred Press visit www.fredpressartwork.com. Thank you to Harvey Schneider for his insight into his uncle.



Above: This sketch was used to create one of his Racehorse glassware designs. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider

Below: *Teammates*, depicting teakwood farming in Thailand, is one of Press's paintings that he did from sketches he made while on a trip to the Far East. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider



Above: This catalog was published by Rubel and Company to illustrate the variety of designs of Fred Press's famous glassware. Image courtesy Harvey Schneider