

Peter Pan

SIR GEORGE FRAMPTON (English, 1860-1926)

Sir George James Frampton was born in London in 1860, the son of James Frampton – a wood and stone carver. At the age of 18, confident of the experience gained in his father's workshop, the artist moved to Paris to work on the building site of the Hôtel de Ville. He returned to London shortly after, studying at the Lambeth School of Art under W.S. Frith and then at the Royal Academy from 1881 to 1887.

Having exhibited at the RA for the first time in 1884, Frampton went on to win a gold medal and a travelling scholarship in 1887. Part of his travels took him to Paris, where he enrolled in the studio of one of the most successful sculptors in France, Antonin Mercié (1845-1916).

Mercié's work had been the inspiration for many of the English 'New' sculptors, and particularly for the early work of Alfred Gilbert. During Frampton's apprenticeship, Mercié was instrumental for introducing the artist to the French Romantic movement, as well as to the intricacies of Symbolism, which were to become a key feature of the artist's later work.

Upon his return to England, Frampton became the leader of the Arts and Crafts movement and was appointed joint head of the London Central School of Art, a post he led throughout the 1890s. His mastery of mixed media sculpture is best shown by his polychromed plaster of *Mysteriarch* of 1892, now part of the Walker Art Gallery collection, Liverpool. The sculpture is representative of Frampton's mature, Symbolist aesthetic: never before that time in Britain had a bust been so filled with evocative power and devoid of its traditional function as a portrait. Frampton's contribution to the movement was not limited to the United Kingdom, as the artist participated in the first show of the Symbolist group *La Libre Esthétique* in Brussels in 1894.

Frampton was knighted in 1908, marking the importance of his contribution to the development of English sculpture in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period.

Frampton is however best known for his statue of *Peter Pan* in Kensington Gardens. Commissioned by the character's creator Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1907). This was erected in 1912 at night, so that the public might think it appeared by magic.

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

The statue in Kensington Gardens depicts Peter Pan in a very natural and childlike pose, playing his pipes. He is standing on a large “pedestal” which on close inspection is actually made up of fairies, personages, and woodland animals, in a very organic and magical way. It remains not only one of Frampton’s most well-loved works, but also one of London’s - it has been voted as the city’s most popular statue. The wonderfully lifelike representation of Peter Pan is whole-heartedly in the style of the Romantic era (1880s). This is in contrast to the starker, more hard-edged and avant-garde movements in vogue when this piece was sculpted.

This particular version of Peter Pan is a reduction of the original in Kensington Gardens, without the “woodland” pedestal. Instead, he is standing on an oval base. It was cast in 1911 and has the initials PP (standing for Peter Pan) and the artist’s monogram GF inscribed on the base of the bronze. He has the delicate poise of a woodland sprite, and is happily playing his pipes, one arm outstretched, one foot forward, as though he is dancing to the sounds of his magical music.

Other casts of the sculpture occupy prominent public locations in Liverpool, Brussels, Camden (New Jersey), Toronto (Ontario), St John’s (Newfoundland) and Perth (Western Australia).



Sir George Frampton, *Peter Pan*, 1912, bronze, Kensington Gardens.

BOWMAN SCULPTURE

Literature

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