

ARTY Cats

Anton Van Wouw, South Africa

By Greg Balagian

The establishment of a Western sculptural tradition in South Africa can largely be attributed to the work of Anton van Wouw (1862-1945).

Born in Driebergen in the province of Utrecht, Holland, van Wouw was educated at the Rotterdam Academy of Art. He originally concentrated on sketching and drawing, but later concentrated on sculpture.

After his emigration to South Africa, he quickly established himself as the foremost sculptor of both monumental public works and smaller bronze sculptures, often with a brown patina; he also worked in stone.

He used live models for his subjects rather than relying on sketches or photographs and is known for his "precise planning and good craftsmanship."*

Van Wouw sculpted many of the heraldic shields, leonine-head keystones, lion fountain heads and other sculptural elements for the Union Buildings, the official seat of the South African government and one of the most important landmarks in Pretoria.

South Africa Post commemorated the centenary of the Union Buildings on December 12, 2014 with two sheets of ten stamps each showing views of the campus.

One sheet includes van Wouw's lion's head sculpture (Scott 1518j). [See the front cover.]

Information about the stamp is included in the detailed inscription: vertically on the upper left side, "Stone carved Lion's head" [sic]; top left, "Relief by Anton van Wouw"; bottom left,

"Anande Notling [designer] 2013; and vertically along the right side, "Union Buildings, Standard Postage, South Africa"†

With closed eyes and open mouth, van Wouw's lion relief has an intricately sculpted mane and facial details shown in the close-up photo on the stamp.

The beautiful pinky-white sandstone used for facing of the sculptures comes from the Balmoral Quarries north of Pretoria and contributes to the overall unified effect of all the works of art.

"The lion which Van Wouw made and which appears on the stamp, is ... on the side of the bridge across the fountain."**

In 1906, he had originally sculpted a pair of the lion heads for Meischke Company on the Trans-vaalsche Bank en Handels Vereeniging Building in Johannesburg.

Van Wouw was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria in 1936 and a Medal of Honor for sculpture by the South African Academy for Science and Art in 1937.

The sculptures at the Union Buildings are a must-see for tourists, especially those by Anton van Wouw.♣

Notes

*Borman, Johans. "Fine Art: Anton van Wouw (1862-1945)."

**Duffey, Alexander E. "Anton van Wouw's Sculptures on Buildings in Pretoria."

Chief Curator, Arts, University of Pretoria.

†In March, the standard domestic rate was raised to 3 ZAR, approximately \$0.28 USD.

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Visit Greg's website:

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