Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture.
By Vernon Gay and Marilyn Evert.


The major northeastern cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia certainly each have more public sculptures than Pittsburgh, and generally, their sculptures were produced by better known artists. What Pittsburgh may now claim, however, is the best book on a city's public sculptures, namely, "Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture," with text by Marilyn Evert and photographs by Vernon Gay. This 450-page book with hundreds of photographs is the definitive work on our public sculptures.

No matter how well the reader is acquainted with Pittsburgh and its treasures, he or she will be astounded by the number of sculptures which are ferreted out, described and photographed. For each sculpture, there is a small photograph which heads the text, which in turn gives pertinent and thoroughly interesting details on the sculpture itself, its artist, the reason and date of erection, and other tidbits, plus the references which were consulted. The sculptures are segregated into six geographical areas of the city and its surroundings, and for each of the six divisions, larger and up to full-page photographs of all sculptures are shown grouped together, after the text with its smaller photos.

The above arrangement allows the reader to either just look at photos without being bothered by the text, or alternatively, to peruse the detailed descriptive data without leafing through all the photos. Those interested in the text will be astounded by the wealth of information unearthed by Marilyn Evert on even the many rather minor monuments produced by relatively obscure artists, artists active primarily in the Pittsburgh area.

For those who want to dig still deeper, the book includes a separate section with biographies of all the artists and again the references consulted. Also included is a glossary of sculpture terms, and finally a very complete index which thoroughly facilitates reference work. If
one knows the name of the artist, or the name of the monument, or just the area of the city where the sculpture is located, one should have no difficulty in rapidly locating its description and photographs.

In the descriptive texts and the biographies, data on the many lesser known artists and their works, for example, such artists as Giuseppe Moretti and Frank Vittor, who both produced many Pittsburgh monuments, are of interest particularly to aficionados of sculpture such as this reviewer, because the standard references give little or no information on the more obscure artists.

The quality of Vernon Gay's photographs and their printing is excellent. The sculptures are generally shown in frontal, non-"arty" photographs taken with standard or short telephoto lenses. Exceptions are sculptures on some of the buildings where long-focus lenses are a must. Sculptures are shown in full, in black and white, and sometimes with onlookers or locals to add interest and give a better idea of the size.

The fallout or at least influence of the book appears to have already been beneficial. A number of public sculptures such as Saint-Gaudens' Magee Memorial, Rhind's bronzes in front and on the roof of The Carnegie, and the Westinghouse Memorial in Schenley Park have recently been or are being refurbished and treated to delay further deterioration. The large George Westinghouse relief by Lorado Taft, formerly crated and forgotten, is now displayed in the Westinghouse Headquarters lobby. The Anderson Monument by French is being restored. Possibly, this just-kindled interest in restoration, relocation, refurbishing and conservation of our public sculpture might have occurred even without the recent publication of the subject book, but also without doubt, the book aroused public interest in our sculptural and fast deteriorating heritage, and hence in the need for preserving our treasures for future generations.

This reviewer's only criticism is that cemetery sculpture was not included. Pittsburgh has a wealth of significant funerary sculptures and, for example, two of these, located only a few feet from each other, are of particular interest. One is possibly the tallest bronze figure in this area, and the other may be the earliest still standing bronze public sculpture cast in the United States. Maybe this omission of cemetery sculpture could be corrected in a revised and expanded edition of "Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture."

If you are interested in the area's public sculpture, then it's easy to highly recommend this fine book as there is no other book on the subject, nor is there any likelihood that another will be published
in the foreseeable future. If you are interested in Pittsburgh, its history and its culture, then this book belongs in your library.

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By Franklin Toker.


The urban historian Sam Bass Warner regards the contemporary city as an artifact. To Warner, the urban built environment of streets, alleys, buildings, railroad tracks, sewers, and subdivisions mirrors an historical process called urbanization. The cityscape represents the culmination, that is, of the thousands of often tiny decisions that city builders have made about the purpose and goals of urban life.

In Pittsburgh, Franklin Toker ignores the process of urbanization, while clearly illuminating the outcome of those thousands of decisions about how to best use urban space. But, the author is not exploring the city-building process. Instead, as the title indicates, this is a "portrait" of contemporary Pittsburgh. Here Toker uses his abundant knowledge of city history to add greater meaning to his interpretation of the urban landscape as a work of art. Consequently, while Warner decries the unplanned mottle bequeathed by the city builders of Boston and Philadelphia, Toker revels at what Pittsburgh builders wrought. Therefore, much of Toker's book amounts to a paean to the Pittsburgh city-building process. Indeed, if there is a thesis informing this book it is that man and nature orchestrated a masterpiece at the confluence of the Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio rivers. This is by no means meant as a criticism of Toker's book for it is extremely informative, well written, and entertaining.

In terms of scope, Pittsburgh ranges far and wide across and through time. Toker even explores the antediluvian roots of the cityscape by examining the glacial origins of the Monongahela plateau. Yet, Toker spurns the conventional chronological delivery of urban history. After a terse overview of two centuries of Pittsburgh history