

The Art of Intention: Adelaide Johnson's Monumental Decisions

Objective:

To present the virtues and moral energy of sculptor Adelaide Johnson (1859-1955) in her conscious decisions as an artist. Her philosophy of art expresses a commitment to virtue and moral development, especially with respect to women. Further, three of her decisions demonstrate her commitment to this vision: 1) sculpting a bust of Susan B. Anthony for the 1893 World fair; 2) starting a Gallery of Eminent Women in her home; and 3) creating the *Portrait Monument (Woman Suffrage Statue)* for the US Capitol.

I. Adelaide Johnson's Philosophy of Art

Quote #1: “**The purpose in sculpture**...is to suggest the virtues, reveal the potentiality of the human soul, and record human life and its experiences in art forms. **The motive of sculpture** is to exalt and uplift the beholder to contemplation of the virtues. To lead to aspiration of the divine qualities and attributes. To aid growth by lessons from the recorded past.”

Quote #2: “**The chief function of Art is that of recorder of all human achievement**, which it does ... after a great wave of spiritual impulsing has impressed itself in some vital form upon humanity. Therefore, the most important record that can be made, the greatest thing in Art that can be done, is that of making masterly portraits of the stupendous personalities who have as leaders of humanity been appointed to usher in the new age.”

II. Adelaide Johnson's Conscious Decisions in Artistic Creation

- Perfection --- Her slogan of life is: “Perfection at any cost or sacrifice.” She cannot do the trickery of the day, in art, nor in life. No detail or duty of life is too small to fulfill perfectly.
- Only white marble --- pure, white substance and reflects light from far under the surface (it lives!).
- Only portraits of distinguished living persons, particularly women.

III. Art and the “Woman Movement”

Johnson saw a need for testament to women's achievements. Why?

- as a tribute to those who had “blossomed in this wonderful age.” “Not one person in a million has a conscious purpose. The majority drift along in the currents of destiny.”
- as inspiration and education for those serving the woman's cause



Left: *Portrait Monument to Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* in Rotunda of US Capitol. Right: *Portrait Busts in Gallery of Honor in Women's Building at World Fair in Chicago, 1893*

Quote #3: "I could not stand it, to think that when Miss Anthony had worked for forty years for women, her bust would be made by a man."

Quote #4: Her idea was to present **"the living spirit of these women** so lifelike and so full of the soul of womankind" that the statue would go down through the ages "telling the story" of the struggles these women endured **for women all over the world.**

Quote #5: Yajima, the champion of women's rights in Japan for 40 years, radiated spiritual intelligence. Johnson. was especially touched when "Yajima walked to the statue and placed both her hands on it as if, and I believe consciously, reaching to receive its message."

IV. Adelaide Johnson's Decisions in creating the Portrait Monument

Quote #6:

"The swift answer of my soul was it must be done."



Adelaide Johnson with 8-ton block of marble, Carrara, Italy, 1920.

Quote #7:

"No, as to going to Mr. Paul Bartlett's studio."

Quote #8:

"A statue weighing seven and one-half tons sat stiffly and coldly upon the steps of the Capitol tonight **because it had nowhere else to go.** Its great white marble base and the figures of three women atop of it glistened under the electric lights, while a policeman and the sculptor, a woman, kept vigil to see that no one carried it away."

--- The New York Sun

Quote #9:

"This monument was not made for entertainment, but as an immortal record of **the mightiest thing in the evolution of humanity** that has taken place since the dawn of mind in the brute, for the revolution embodied in the woman movement represents the potentiality if not yet **the dawn of ethics in the human race.**"



Draft horses hauled the crated monument to the Capitol and unloaded it on the east front plaza. Adelaide Johnson observed.

Question: How does the inscription on the *Portrait Monument* reflect Adelaide Johnson's *Art of Intention*?