



Statues of *Contemplation of Justice* and *Authority of Law*

INFORMATION SHEET

At the suggestion of architect Cass Gilbert, the United States Supreme Court Building Commission selected James Earle Fraser to sculpt the two statues beside the steps of the monumental entrance to the Supreme Court Building. While developing his design, Fraser wrote to Gilbert, “I think...the figures must have a meaning, and not be perfunctory and purely decorative, and after seeing the grandeur and simplicity of the Supreme Court room, I feel more than ever that the figures in front of it should symbolize that feeling and be a prelude to the spirit of the building.”



*Set atop nearly fifty-ton marble blocks are James Earle Fraser’s statues
Contemplation of Justice (above left) and Authority of Law (above right).*



Contemplation of Justice

Fraser described the female figure to the left of the main steps as “a realistic conception of what I consider a heroic type of person with a head and body expressive of the beauty and intelligence of justice.” A book of laws supports her left arm and a figure of blindfolded Justice is in her right hand.



Authority of Law

Also called the Guardian or Executor of Law, Fraser described the male figure to the right of the steps as “powerful, erect, and vigilant. He waits with concentrated attention, holding in his left hand the tablet of laws, backed by the sheathed sword, symbolic of enforcement through law.” The Latin word for law, LEX, is inscribed on the tablet.

Fraser was awarded the contract on June 20, 1932, to “furnish services for the modeling and carving” of the two statues for \$90,000. Preliminary models were completed by April 1933, at which point he met with Gilbert to discuss the design. Over the next year, Fraser continued to hone his work, but his concern over the proper scale of the statues led to full-size models being placed in front of the unfinished building so he could see them in place. Due to these delays, the completed statues were not installed until November 1935, a month after the building opened.

The Sculptor

Born in Winona, Minnesota, in 1876, Fraser studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. After several years working under the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Fraser opened his own studio in 1902. His most recognized work may be the 1913 five-cent coin known as the “Buffalo Nickel.” He died in 1953.



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James Earle Fraser puts his finishing touch on Contemplation of Justice.