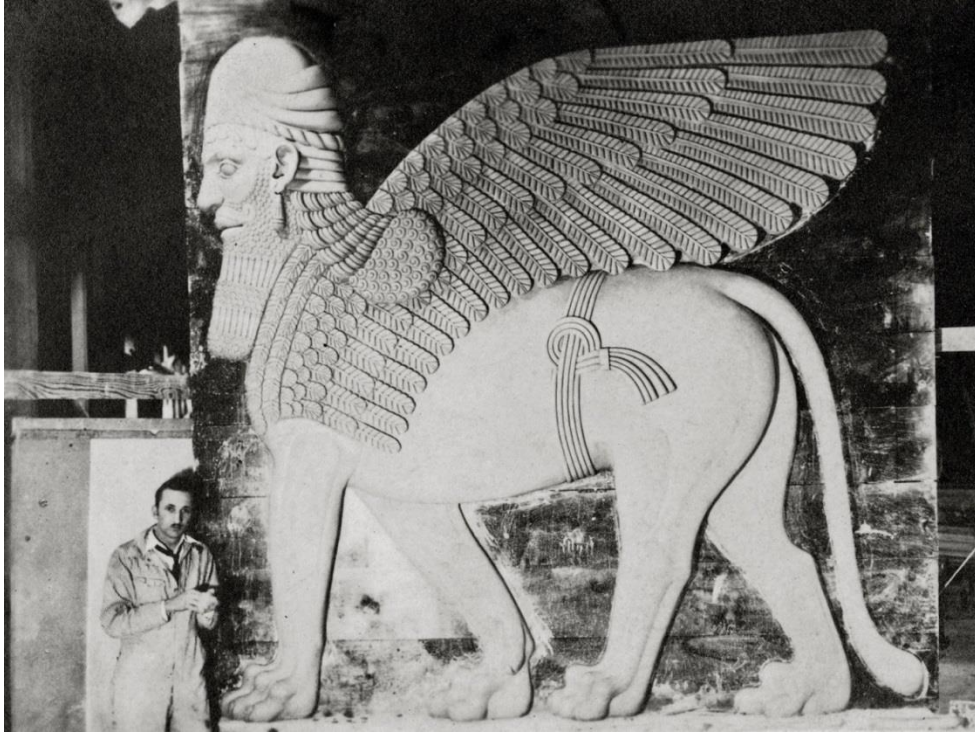


Waylande Gregory



Waylande Gregory putting the finishing touches on one of the Lamassu (an Assyrian protective deity) that grace each side of the Missouri Theater stage.

Waylande Gregory provided the inspiration and perspiration for all the ornamental plasterwork found in the 1927 Missouri Theater. Though just 20, he was both designer and sculptor, supervising a team of 20 to 30. Prior to his work on the theater he sent a letter to a Mr. Habecker at the St. Joseph Gazette in 1926. The letter read in part:

You have asked me to describe the new Missouri Theatre - I am of course limited to the information of the proposed plans and to my own active imagination. First I must credit Mr. Boller - the architect for his liberal point of view in allowing me the necessary freedom in designing the sculptural detail to combine the complex influence of styles selected, including the Hittite, Assyrian, Persian and Arabian into a creation of original ornamentation - it has been my aim to blend the desirable qualities of each of these styles into a decorative embellishment in harmony with the spirit of the architecture.

If that observer is a student of history or art there will be some attempt to analyze its style - it will be found to be something new and yet quite old. -- The Assyrian and Persian arts date from a period of about four thousand years ago.

The interior of the theatre will represent an open air play house with all the atmospheric splendor of a royal palace of one of the ancient kings - it will be richly colored with reds - blues and sun baked yellows.

Over the top will be stretched a huge, gloriously decorated, tented canopy upon which fall the hot rays of the eastern desert sun. Along the sides will be massive columns surmounted by the kneeling calves. These columns will create wide window like spaces. A distant view of a barren landscape will be conveyed by oil paintings. Toward the stage and beneath these on either side will be a large carved figure of the sacred winged bull bearing the head of a glorified dignitary of the royal house.

Above the stage will be a border of phallic gods fertilizing the female tree of life. I have endeavored to carry this same symbolism throughout the decorative carving. Frieze around the sides will represent sacrificial goats kneeling before the tree of mystery with another frieze in the uppermost cornice with opposing archers.

It is fortunate the architect has possessed the acute mental vision to delve into history and bring to St Joseph a building so unique - one wonders why American architects have not before appreciated ancient Assyrian architecture. May this set a standard for St. Joseph's future courage in building and give it a place in the regard of the art world - I hope this will give some sort of a vision as to what is happening in the instance of the Missouri Theatre.



Waylande Gregory with the one of the bird men panels featured along the ceiling above the orchestra pit in the Missouri Theater.