

**United Arts'
 Arts and Culture Access Grant**

Organization name	The Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens
Lesson title	Exploring the Gilded Age of Sculpture
Length of lesson	1-3 class
Grade levels	9-12
Lesson type (pre/during/post)	Pre/during visit and/post

Objectives
 Students will visually evaluate the works of art found in the Polasek Historic Home and apply the Gilded Age concepts they have learned to understand which works fall into this aesthetic movement and historical time period. They will then create drawings based on this new knowledge and conduct research on their own. To prepare for your visit, we suggest you review the following vocabulary terms and opt to further engage students with a post activity.

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS)
 VA.912.C.1.1- Integrate curiosity, range of interests, attentiveness, complexity, and artistic intention in the art-making process to demonstrate self-expression.
 VA.912.C.1.6- Identify rationale for aesthetic choices in recording visual media.
 VA.912.C.2.4- Classify artworks, using accurate art vocabulary and knowledge of art history to identify and categorize movements, styles, techniques, and materials.
 VA.912.C.3.3- Examine relationships among social, historical, literary, and/or other references to explain how they are assimilated into artworks.
 VA.912.C.3.5- Make connections between timelines in other content areas and timelines in the visual arts.
 VA.912.H.1.3- Examine the significance placed on art forms over time by various groups or cultures compared to current views on aesthetics.

Key vocabulary and definitions
Gilded Age - historical time period:
 The Gilded Age is defined as the time between the Civil War and World War I during which the U.S. population and economy grew quickly, there was a lot of political corruption and corporate financial misdealing and many wealthy people lived very fancy lives. However, the Gilded Age was also an era of abject poverty and inequality as millions of immigrants—many from impoverished European nations (Albin Polasek for one!)—poured into the United States, and the high concentration of wealth became more visible and contentious.
Gilded Age - of Sculpture:
 Refers to the largely figurative, monumental, and decorative bronze sculpture that resulted from America’s showy industrialized wealth and European tastes during Reconstruction period through WWI (1870s-1917).
Art Movement:
 An art movement is a tendency or style in art with a specific common philosophy or goal, followed by a group of artists during a specific period of time.
Tycoon/ industrialist:
 A tycoon, business magnate, or industrialist refers to an entrepreneur of great influence/ importance. The

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term characteristically refers to a wealthy entrepreneur or investor who controls through personal business ownership or dominant position in an industry whose goods, products, or services are widely consumed. The word magnate derives from the Latin magnates, meaning "a great man" or "great nobleman".

Patron/Patroness:

Patronage is the support, encouragement, privilege, or financial aid that an organization or individual bestows to another. In the history of art, arts patronage refers to the support that kings, popes and the wealthy have provided to artists such as musicians, painters, and sculptors. The word "patron" derives from the Latin: 'patronus' ("patron"), one who gives benefits to his client's as in ancient Rome.

Commission:

In art, a commission is the hiring and payment for the creation of a piece of art. Artwork may be commissioned by private individuals, by the government, or businesses. Throughout history, it has been common for rulers and governments to commission public art as a means of demonstrating power and wealth (as seen in the Gilded Age), or even for specific propaganda purposes.

Portrait bust:

A bust is a sculpted or cast representation of the upper part of the human figure, depicting a person's head and neck, as well as a variable portion of the chest and shoulders. The piece is normally supported by a base or plinth. These forms recreate the likeness of an individual. These may be of any medium used for sculpture, such as marble, bronze, terracotta or wood.

Materials needed

Drawing pencils/charcoal
Clipboard or portable drawing surface
Sketch pad or drawing paper

School must provide (equipment/materials; be sure to ask for this in advance)

Art Materials are available upon request, and may be included into group tour pricing. Please inquire about art activity fees.

Background information

The Gilded Age, with regards sculpture, refers to a specific era in American history and also a specific style of artwork or art movement, that rose from this period of industrialized growth and lavish wealth. This period lasted from roughly from the end of the Civil War to World War I (1870s-1917). Affluent Americans of the Gilded Age associated a lush and romantic style with European aristocracy, which they often strove to emulate. Refined, elegant art flourished, including costly bronze sculpture. It is an era known for its forceful capitalism, showy wealth and shallow materialism of the ruling class. But material riches, as the title of the era suggests, were a thin veneer: a large, poor working class supported the incredible fortunes of tycoons like Andrew Carnegie, and corruption was rampant. Still, much of the art produced during the era was truly gold! These tycoons had the fortunes to commission expensive bronze sculptures in the style of Italian Renaissance masters from Gilded Age artists, such as Albin Polasek. If you were an artist, it was a fine time to seek a wealthy patron or patroness, and cultivate connections and friendship among this elite circle. Many of the decorative sculptures in the Polasek Historic Home and Studio can be considered works from this period and were often times commissioned pieces. Albin Polasek (1879-1965) was born at the right moment to have grown up in, and receive his formal art training during this pivotal

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artistic time period. His early works as a student and the beginning of his professional career coincides with this pre-war period.

Lesson process

Pre Activity: Read the background information to your students and have them conduct research on famous American **tycoons/ industrialists** from the Gilded Era period from 1870s-1917. Have them identify how they acquired their vast fortunes, and in what ways did they contribute to the community? Were they patrons of the arts? If so, what public arts projects or commissions did they fund? Have a discussion about what art/philanthropic foundations, schools, libraries, and museums were created as a results of the patronage of wealthy tycoons.

During Your Visit:

When you book your group or school tour, please notify the Polasek Tour Coordinator that you selected this particular lesson, and your docent will tailor your tour to included Gilded Age works of art. With your students, read aloud the characteristics of Gilded Age sculpture and then see if you can identify some of Polasek's works that fit this aesthetic in the Historic Home/Studio (images of sculpture examples below).

Characteristics of Gilded Age Aesthetics:

Idealized beauty: Artists often strove to make their paintings more appealing than reality. They offered beautified versions of their subjects. (Find Polasek's *Young Eve* sculpture and discuss the backstory and idolized forms of womanhood. There are two versions of this piece, compare and contrast *Young Eve* with *Fantasy*.)

Exoticism: And both artists and their patrons traveled and studied widely, fueling the exoticism seen in the art. Although not Polasek's works, the Salon room is filled with art and decorative objects from Polasek's European travels: the Greek Icon on the Wall, the *Roman Head* on the table, the Moroccan Oil Lamp hanging from the center of the room all represent this Gilded Age trend of Exoticism and a penchant for European travel.

Increased demand for high-society portraits: *The Bust of Francis Millet*. This commission bust of Mr. Millet is a perfect example of how beneficial Gilded Age patronage was for aspiring artists. The portrait was young Albin Polasek's first professional commission while he was as student studying abroad in Rome. Millet was not only a wealthy patron, but was also one of the founders for the American Academy in Rome, the organization that was funding young Ablin's travels and studies. After Mr. Millet perished on the Titanic in 1912, other organizations, schools, and other wealthy patrons ordered castings from Polasek to honor this important man and patron of the arts community.

Portrait Bust of Francis D. Millet, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1912

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Refined Elegance/ European Style:

As Mr. Polasek was trained in “classical sculpture” many of his decorative works created during the Gilded Age show this European taste for elegance and classical themes and form. Both artists and patrons wanted to show an America that had matured beyond its early provincialism and could equal Europe's culture and grace. Therefore, the subject matter of these works encompass music, Greek mythology, religion, romance, and, beauty of form and allegory.

Now locate more examples of Polasek’s Gilded Age Sculpture!

Locate these works and try to describe what makes them Gilded Age works? Discuss the date, title, their decorative attributes, and subject matter to find clues!

Polasek’s Gilded Age works were small decorative works that were commissioned as art objects for lavish tabletop centerpieces, adornments for mantelpieces and fireplaces, library bookends, portrait busts, fountain pieces, decorative figurines for studies, parlors, and bedrooms, and embellishments for interior/exterior architectural features.



Butterfly, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1915

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Eternal Moment, Albin Polasek, Marble 1909



Maternal Love, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1914



Spirit of the Woods, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1915



The Sower, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1911

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Aspiration, Albin Polasek, Bronze 1914 (And *Bubble*, the companion piece, 1918)

Once your students have located and discussed Polasek's Gilded Age sculpture, have each student pick their favorite work of art and sketch the sculpture, with special attention to the elegant details. They may take a picture of the sculpture using their smart phone to act as a reference back at school. (Optional - discuss perspective with advanced-level art students and anatomical proportion.)

Post Activity: To complete this assignment, have your students finish their Polasek drawing and then create an additional drawing of another Gilded Age sculpture. To find the inspiration for their second drawing students may use the internet to research other sculptors, Polasek's contemporaries who lived and sculpted during this time period in America (1876 to 1917). Many famous American sculptors took part in this lavish artistic movement. Famous among them; Daniel Chester French, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Frederick MacMonnies, John Quincy Adams Ward, and Anna Hyatt Huntington. Let your students discover a whole era of American sculpture! See what they come up with, and instruct them to draw another sketch based on their research. Each drawing should come with a paragraph description, analyzing what makes the sculptures they chose fit into the "Gilded Age" and have them compare and contrast the two works of art. What are the commonalities between these two Gilded Age works regarding themes and form, and how does each artistic differ in interpreting this particular artist movement?

21st Century Skills to Increase Rigor

Internet research proficiency
Writing Skills
Analyzing visual interpretations

Assessment

Tangible product will be 2 sketches or drawings created by the student as well as a written description of their sketch "Gilded Age" features. The paper should also include a compare and contrast component of the two works of Gilded Age art by the two artists; one by Albin Polasek and one by another Gilded Age artists of their choice.

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Reflection/follow-up activities

Have your students discuss the following topics and encourage further exploratory research:

- In addition to Gilded Age sculpture, what other types of artistic movements/periods are there in American sculpture? Does the Gilded Age overlap other sculpture movements (Realism, Romanticism, Academy, etc.)?
- What features characterize some of these other periods and styles?
- How does this differ from Gilded Age sculpture? Are there any similarities?
- Discuss the chronology of artist periods. Create a visual timeline of American Art Movements, time period, and famous artists with the genre.
- For a literature component, read Mark Twain's 1873 novel, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. The title of this book quickly became the name for the era and art movement. Consider how this novel relates to the period in American history referred to as the Gilded Age. Then have your students take a modern work of music or fiction and create a drawing or sculpture inspired by the author as Gilded Age artists often did.

Additional resources (online, print, etc.)

The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today