

90
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

371011 - 33
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE

The opening of the Exhibition of Sculpture by William Edmondson has been advanced one week. Instead of October 27, the exhibition will open to the public Wednesday, October 20. It will be on view through Wednesday, December 1.

10/18/37 - 34
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

71
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art announces an Exhibition of Sculpture by William Edmondson to open to the public Wednesday, October 20, and continue through Wednesday, December 1, at the Museum's temporary galleries, 14 West 49 Street, Concourse Level.

Mr. Edmondson, a Negro of Nashville, Tennessee, has had no art training and very little education. He was a hospital orderly for years and a worker at odd jobs. Four or five years ago he became a tombstone cutter and developed an interest in sculpture, which he claims to fashion at God's command.

Mr. Edmondson's sculpture comes within the category loosely called "modern primitive." Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum of Modern Art, says of his work: "Recognition of the achievements of naive or self-taught artists is one of the discoveries of contemporary taste. Usually the naive artist works in the easier medium of painting. Edmondson, however, has chosen to work in limestone, which he attacks with extraordinary courage and directness to carve out simple, emphatic forms. The spirit of his work does not betray the inspiration which he believes to be his active guide."

The Edmondson sculpture to be exhibited is roughly carved from limestone and averages from 1½ feet to 3 feet in height. Among the pieces to be shown are: "Mary and Martha," "Large Angel," "Rams," "Preacher," "Lawyer," "Lady with Bustle," "Bird Bath" and "Crucifixion."

Opening at the same time will be a small architecture exhibition, "The Town of Tomorrow--1937 and 1927," composed of photographs of architects' renderings of houses to be built as part of the Town of Tomorrow section of the New York World's Fair, 1939. With these will be shown an equal number of photographs of the Exposition at Stuttgart, Germany, in 1927, which was the first time modern architecture was shown in a large group. An entire community, full-sized, was built under the direction of the Werkbund, a cooperative society of architects, painters and furniture and industrial designers. The city of Stuttgart defrayed a large share of the expenses. The houses, designed by Gropius,

92
Miës
A van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Oud, and a dozen others, are still occupied and form a suburb of Stuttgart. These architectural designs of ten years ago offer an interesting comparison with the work projected for the World's Fair here in 1939, where the community project for the Town of Tomorrow involves a similar co-operation of architects and industrial designers.

WILLIAM EDMONDSON

William Edmondson is about fifty years old. For years he was a hospital orderly and worked at odd jobs. He is prosperous for a Negro, owns his own home and has a vegetable garden, selling to the neighbors. His life in Nashville has been that of the average Negro of his generation in the South. He is simple, almost illiterate, entirely unspoiled, and happy in his work. Four or five years ago this simple old Negro became "converted," the call came to him, and he knew that henceforth he would have to preach. He was changed from a jack-of-all trades to a tombstone cutter, a worker in stone who fashions sculpture at God's command--preaching "sermons in stone." He sees visions in the sky and fixes them in his carvings. His visions are not for the eyes of ordinary mortals; they are reserved for him alone.

He has probably never seen a piece of sculpture not his own, and his tools are simple ones borrowed from the building trades. His front yard is littered with tombstones, most of them blank, but some of them crudely lettered and awaiting the stray customer who gave the order and never returned. His tombstone customers are rare and they haven't much money to spend for Edmondson's wares. His pieces are small because he has never been able to buy a large piece of stone, but somehow his vision materializes out of whatever he has at hand.

All of Edmondson's pieces are symbolic and they stem from the only book with which he is familiar: the Bible. His favorites are Mary and Martha, the Lamb of God, doves, preachers, etc. His preacher always wears a morning coat; in less formal attire the figure becomes a lawyer. One day his sister said to him, "William, how come you ain't never made no angel? You done made ever'thing else, how come you ain't made no angel?" So William made an angel; he made several angels. His sister had only prompted him, it was God who commanded.

Serious though his work is, there is nothing of the missionary

in William Edmondson. He is pleased at praise, but as far as his work is concerned you can take it or leave it. He scrupulously avoids all profanity, but he regards his work with a high good humor, and the doing of it pleases him mightily.

From William Edmondson's conversation:

"Dis here stone n' all those out there in de yard - come from God. It's de word in Jesus speakin' his mind in my mind. I mus' be one of his 'ciples. These here is Mikels (miracles) I can do. Cain't nobody do these but me.

"I had a vision. Yes, sir, I wuz jus' a little boy 'bout 13, 14 years old, doin' in de corn fields. I saw in de east world, I saw in de west world, I saw de flood. I ain't never read no books nor no Bible and I saw de water come. It come up over de rocks, covered up de rocks and went over de mountains. God, he jus' showed me how.

"I see these things in de sky. You cain't see 'em but I can see 'em.

"Martha and Mary, the preacher man and that bird - no that ain't no pigeon, that's a big old sea bird. All them things I saw in the sky - right up there just like you see them clouds.

"God give me this thing."

A New York photographer, Louise Dahl-Wolfe (Mrs. Meyer Dahl-Wolfe) discovered the work of Edmondson about a year ago when visiting in Nashville. It was called to her attention by a friend of her husband, a native of Nashville. Mrs. Dahl-Wolfe bought some of the pieces and made many photographs both of Edmondson and his work. She later interested The Museum of Modern Art in the sculpture.