

Park's Stolen Bronzes Found After 20 Years

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Things disappear in New York City, things that are nailed down and things that are not. Often, they are reported missing. Rarely do they reappear.

But sometimes things turn up again, as happened recently when two 40-pound bronze sculptures that vanished 20 years ago from Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens were recovered.

The sculptures by the late Paul Manship, valued at \$50,000, were found in a Manhattan penthouse and a Long Island home and were returned to the Department of Parks and Recreation on Tuesday.

"The recovery was luck — museum curators doing the right thing and good detective work tracing the sculpture back through four pairs of hands," said Adrian Benepe, director of art and antiquities at the Parks Department.

From the World's Fair

The case began around 1970 — officials are not even sure of the year — when Manship's "Aries the Ram" and "Taurus the Bull," each nearly two feet high, were stolen. The two sculptures were part of "Armillary Sphere," a mammoth creation depicting the 12 signs of the zodiac. The work had been created for the 1964-65 World's Fair in Flushing, and had stood in a reflecting pool near the Unisphere, the skeletal globe that was the fair's symbol.

In the early 1970's, 8 of the 12 zodiac sculptures were stolen. Then on Sept. 25, 1980, the bronze bands that held the original 12 sculptures, as well as the constellations and figures of an old man and a boy, were also taken. The Parks Department made duplicates of seven of the missing zodiac sculptures from Manship's plaster castings in 1973, but the originals were never found.

"We never expected to see the Manship sculptures again," said Betsy Gotbaum, the Parks Commissioner.

Indeed, the case was closed and all but forgotten until early last year, when Helen Harrison, a curator at Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, L.I., was asked by a Manhattan art



Dith Pran/The New York Times

Two 40-pound bronze sculptures by Paul Manship stolen 20 years ago from Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens have been recovered.

collector to identify a sculpture that she believed was from the 1964-65 World's Fair. When Ms. Harrison saw a photograph of the work, she recognized it from the days when she worked at the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Park.

Ms. Harrison wrote to Gloria Kittleson, a Manship expert with the Minnesota Museum of Art in St. Paul, who in turn forwarded the photograph to the sculptor's son, John. He contacted the Parks Department, confirming that the work was by his father, and the case was turned over to the city's Department of Investigation.

The Plumber's Neighbor

Investigators went to the collector's penthouse apartment in lower Manhattan on June 12 and found the missing "Taurus" hanging on a terrace wall.

The investigators learned that "Taurus" had found its way there via a city employee moonlighting as a plumber. The city worker told investigators that he had gotten two sculptures from a neighbor, who gave him

the works in the early 1970's in exchange for plumbing services. According to the city worker, the neighbor said that he had acquired the art while doing demolition work in Flushing Meadows Park.

The city worker later gave "Aries" to his brother on Long Island, keeping "Taurus" to decorate his own home. After years of protests from his wife, who intensely disliked the sculpture, the worker gave it to the Manhattan collector, for whom he did plumbing work, in the mid-1980's.

Investigators said there was no evidence that either the art collector or the city worker knew that the sculptures had been stolen.

Mrs. Gotbaum, the Parks Commissioner, and Mr. Manship, the sculptor's son, said that they hoped the remaining pieces of "Armillary Sphere" will be recovered, and that the works will be restored and returned to the park or the Queens Museum.

Investigators have not been able to track down the man who reportedly stole the sculptures in the first place.