



Commodore John Barry

Date

1926

Primary Maker

Andrew O'Connor

Medium

Bronze

Dimensions

52.5 x 19 x 19 cm

Description

After a competition open to sculptors of Irish descent O'Connor won the commission for a monument to Commodore John Barry, 'the Father of the American Navy' for Washington DC. The commission was later withdrawn. (1) The competition probably took place in 1909 although a cast from the maquette is dated 1906. The commission

may have been withdrawn on either of two counts: the group purporting to represent 'Exiles from Ireland' was considered too shocking in its depiction of three naked Irish emigrants (2), or the Barry family 'preferred to think of their ancestor as a gentleman and O'Connor made him into a sailor, a rather rough old salt'.(3) O'Connor's design consisted of a free-standing statue of Barry on a pedestal placed in front of a pool. Behind the pool stretched a frieze with free-standing groups at either extremity. Because Barry was born in County Wexford and had emigrated to America the theme of the monument was the sufferings of Ireland and the consequent emigration of her people. The frieze illustrates various episodes from Ireland's history, and the two free-standing groups represent 'Exile from Ireland' and, with a seated female figure of the Motherland surrounded by her sons, 'The Genius of Ireland'. This is a free-standing statuette. It is the second version of the Barry statue, and that which O'Connor exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1926 as 'Barry: un marin'. (1) 'Politics and Art', Collier's Weekly, 7-10 May 1910. (2) Joseph, E. (ed.), Dictionnaire Biographique des Artistes Contemporains (1910-1930), Paris, 1934, p. 85. (3) Du Bois, G., 'Andrew O'Connor and his Sculpture', International Studio, Vol. 86, January 1927, p. 56. (Homan Potterton, 'Andrew O'Connor - A complementary catalogue to the exhibition marking the centenary of the sculptor's birth', Trinity College, Dublin, September 1974, p. 33.)