



## Whitney, Anne (1821-1915)

by Carla Williams

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Hailing from a wealthy, liberal Unitarian Boston family, sculptor Anne Whitney was politically active in support of abolition and women's equality. Her choice of subjects--abolitionists, feminists, and blacks--reflected her political and social beliefs.

As a woman artist in a male-dominated field, Whitney experienced her own struggles for equality: in 1875, having been a sculptor for nearly twenty years, she entered a national competition for a sculpture of the abolitionist Charles Sumner. Whitney won the commission, only to be denied the job when it was realized that she was a woman.

It was "publicly decreed that a woman could not accurately sculpt a man's legs." Outraged all the more because the abolitionist subject was dear to her heart, and determined that such discrimination would not happen to her again, she never entered another competition. She did, however, decide to produce the statue anyway. It now stands outside Harvard Law School.

Prior to becoming a sculptor, Whitney, who was born on September 2, 1821, ran a small school in Salem, Massachusetts from 1846 to 1848. During that time she began to write verse and became a published author, with work in *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* magazines. She became well known as a poet, and her collected poems were published in 1859.

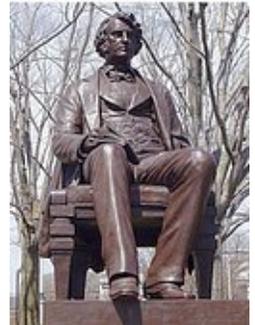
By that time, however, she had begun to model sculptures. Her earliest known work is a portrait bust of a young girl, *Laura Brown* (1859; National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution). She also sculpted members of her family and the painter Abby Adeline Manning, with whom Whitney is said to have had a "Boston marriage."

Manning's work has since fallen into obscurity, and she is remembered now primarily as Whitney's longtime companion.

Having been previously educated at home and at a girls' school in Maine, but eager to learn her craft, in 1862 Whitney took a studio next door to and began studying with Boston sculptor William Rimmer.

During this time she modeled what is believed to be the first male nude by an American woman artist. She later reworked the plaster piece into her sculpture *The Lotus Eater* (Newark Museum). Her first life-sized work was *Lady Godiva* (private collection), whom she depicted disrobing in an act of protest against taxation of the poor.

During this time in Boston, Whitney befriended women sculptors Harriet Hosmer (1820-1908), her neighbor, and Mary Edmonia Lewis (1844-1909), who had recently relocated to Boston from Ohio and whom Whitney



**Top:** Anne Whitney.  
**Above:** A statue of American statesman Charles Sumner in Harvard Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts by Anne Whitney. Photograph of Anne Whitney courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. The photograph of Anne Whitney's sculpture of Charles Sumner by Wikimedia Commons contributor Daderot appears under the GNU Free Documentation License.

briefly instructed.

Like Hosmer and Lewis before her, Whitney went to Rome in 1866, seeking to broaden her skills. Years later Henry James dubbed lesbians Hosmer, Whitney, Lewis, and Emma Stebbins (along with non-lesbians Louisa Lander, Margaret Foley, Florence Freeman, and Vinnie Ream Hoxie) "that strange sisterhood of American 'lady sculptors' who at one time settled upon the seven hills [of Rome] in a white, marmorean flock," referring to their preference for the fine white marble quarried near Rome.

All of these artists worked primarily in the neoclassical style, producing monumental sculptures of historical and allegorical female subjects. During her time in Rome, Whitney created *Roma* (1869), an unidealized image of an old peasant woman, her dress hemmed with small medallions of famous Italian artworks as a symbol of the poverty and decay of the ancient city. Due to its critical content, however, Roman authorities banned it and she had to sneak it out of the country.

Upon her return to the United States in 1871, Whitney received a commission for the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., to create a sculpture of Revolutionary War hero Samuel Adams. Before it was sent to Washington it was displayed at the Boston Athenaeum; Bostonians liked it so much they commissioned a bronze copy, which stands in Adams Square in front of Faneuil Hall.

In 1876 Whitney established her four-story studio at 92 Mount Vernon Street on Beacon Hill in Boston, where she worked for eighteen years.

In 1893, she executed a portrait bust of her friend, feminist Lucy Stone, which was commissioned for the Woman's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and is now in the Boston Public Library.

Although Whitney protested the segregation of women's art, she was eager to memorialize Stone, whom Whitney met while raising money with feminist Elizabeth Blackwell to establish a women's hospital. Stone was the first Massachusetts woman to earn a college degree; and she kept her name when she married, inspiring later feminists to dub themselves "Lucy Stoners."

An early conservationist, Whitney purchased a 225-acre farm in Shelburne, Vermont, where she and Manning spent their summers. Whitney later taught at Wellesley College, and in 1902, righting a twenty-five-year injustice, a bronze she cast from a reworked model of Sumner was erected near Harvard Square in Cambridge. Her Mount Vernon Street studio is now a featured stop on a walking tour of Beacon Hill in Boston.

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## **About the Author**

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