MOUNT RUSHMORE SCULPTOR GUTZON BORGLUM

Gutzon Borglum was 58 years old when he began designing Mount Rushmore in 1925. Although he is primarily known for this great artistic feat, he had been a successful sculptor for decades before this memorial was conceived.

The son of Danish immigrants, Borglum was reared in the Western frontier of America at the end of the nineteenth century. It was a time of great national confidence and expansion, two characteristics that often found expression in Borglum’s work. He was an outspoken man given to immersing himself in any cause to which he thought he could contribute.

In addition to his successful career as an artist, Borglum also fancied himself as a statesman, speaking out and writing about topics from aeronautics to flood control. He was actively involved in national politics and international political affairs. He also was concerned with local community issues. His friends included many prominent people in the arts, politics, science, and law.

Borglum was born John Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum on March 25, 1867, to Danish immigrants in the frontier wilderness of Idaho. He was the second eldest of what were eventually to be nine children. The family moved to Utah and St. Louis before settling in Nebraska, where Gutzon’s father practiced medicine. Gutzon ran away from home several times in his youth and finally at age 17 he left permanently for California to study art. At age 22 he married his teacher who was 40. This marriage ended 20 years later and he married Mary Montgomery who became dedicated to him and his work. They had two children, Lincoln and Mary Ellis, to whom he was absolutely devoted.

Borglum determined to leave his mark on the world. He became involved in many organizations and causes on local, national and international scenes, while continually producing art. He participated in arts and civic groups, often in founding or leadership positions. He was an aviation enthusiast who exposed corruption in the aeronautics industry during World War I. He established a training camp for the Czechoslovakian Exiled Army on his estate. Borglum had direct access to United States Presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He was active in many of their campaigns, supporting some and opposing others. They often consulted with him on major issues and he sought their support for his political and artistic activities. Outspoken on a wide range of issues, he maintained an active nationwide lecture schedule.

Borglum had strong opinions on many subjects, including politics, art, government, world affairs, urban planning, aviation, transportation, athletics, architecture, history, philosophy, and social issues. He actively corresponded with presidents, congressmen, world leaders, artists. He wrote numerous articles on a variety of topics.

A constant traveler, Borglum was always available for comment to reporters inevitably gathered at train stations awaiting his arrival. Borglum maintained a demanding pace on the nationwide lecture circuit. His speeches were popular with the general public who came to expect a dynamic, eloquent and humorous speech no matter what the subject. They were never disappointed. His lecture series allowed him to voice his opinion and was lucrative, which helped to ease his financial difficulties.
Gutzon Borglum was an established sculptor long before he began Mount Rushmore. Deciding on a career as an artist at age 14, he began his studies in California at 17. He studied in Paris, and lived and worked in London and New York City. He began as a painter but quickly turned to sculpture. It was not long before he established himself as a monumental sculptor of note, completing more than 30 public commissions worldwide during his lifetime.

In 1902 Borglum moved to New York City where he sculpted *Mares of Diomedes*, which was the first work by an American sculptor to enter the collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art and *I Have Piped*, later placed at Forest Lawn Cemetery, California, where Gutzon and Mary are buried.

Borglum’s 1907 bust of Abraham Lincoln established him as an accomplished sculptor. Based on the success of the Lincoln bust, Borglum won a commission for a Lincoln sculpture in Newark, New Jersey.

In 1916 Borglum began plans to execute carving a panorama of Southern military heroes of marching men, stamping horses and rolling guns across a mountainside at Stone Mountain in Georgia. Borglum never completed this work. In 1919 he began work on the *Wars of America* memorial for Newark, which has 42 figures including portraits of the artist and his son. After moving to San Antonio, Texas in 1925, he was commissioned to design the *Texas Trail Drivers’ Memorial* and in 1928, the *North Carolina Memorial* at Gettysburg. He sculpted a statue of President Wilson for Poznan, Poland that was unveiled in 1931, but subsequently destroyed on orders from Hitler when he invaded Poland in 1939.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Portrait of Borglum 1925

Caption for photo