

C. Edgar Patience

1906 - 1972

HISTORICAL ERA: 20th CENTURY

Born on August 27, 1906, C. Edgar Patience eventually became an internationally acclaimed sculptor using coal as his unique medium. The grandson of a slave, Patience grew up in West Pittston. His father worked as a breaker boy in the collieries near the town. He taught himself how to carve coal. He opened a souvenir business and taught his five sons how to use the coal to supply his business.

In her book, *Bridging Change*, author Sally Teller Lottick writes: "By the time he had reached his early forties, Patience knew that he wanted to take the leap from the hard working but more secure souvenir business into the equally hard working but very insecure life of an artist. This meant abandoning the production of numerous small objects carved from coal whose marketability was predictable throughout the coal regions of the state. It also meant trading a regular income for a period of no income that might or might not eventually become productive." (p. 214, Lottick) His wife, Alice, made this possible by working at Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania for five years."

Lottick continues, "Self-taught artist that he was, Patience studied the work of many sculptors, traveling to museums and special exhibitions whenever possible...He particularly admired Henry Moore and made many trips to Museum of Modern Art in New York. He continued to experiment with the interaction of coal - with its unique properties of blackness, density, matte finish, satiny gleam, and vivid iridescence - and the wide varieties of form it could assume as he transformed it from pressed carbon to a work of art."



Historical Significance:

Students will learn about sculpture and the work of this internationally acclaimed coal sculptor.

Related Vocabulary:

sculpture
colliery
breaker boy
matte finish
satiny
iridescence

"Congressman Dan Flood purchased and presented coal pieces to every president of the United States from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Richard M. Nixon," continues Lottick. Other recipients have included: Queen Juliana of the Netherlands, Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon Johnson, Wendell Wilkie. He was also commissioned to make the official seal of Barbados when that nation became independent from Great Britain. In addition, he was asked to make a head of John F. Kennedy as well as present his sculpture at exhibitions for the Canadian Prime Minister at the 1971 Canada Expo in Montreal. His "Coaltown, USA" can be seen in Harrisburg at the William Penn Museum. This particular work took fifteen to eighteen years to do. Lottick states, "It portrays a mining town of a generation ago with homes, streets, breakers, coal cars, miners, and company store. In contrast is a monolith on permanent exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., a highly polished three and a half ton chunk of coal, and the coal altar to be found in the chapel of King's College, Wilkes-Barre, weighing nearly four tons. As the Afro-American Museum catalogue states, 'Edgar Patience's anthracite coal sculptures are among the [world's] most unusual and moving works of art.'" (p. 216, Lottick) Find out more in *Bridging Change* by Sally Teller Lottick.

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Our
History

Suggested Activity:

Talk with students about why people make sculptures. Bring out the difference between a sculpture and a memorial. They can be one and the same, but not always. Have them think about some sculptures they have seen while traveling or in their town. Then show pictures of some of the works of Edgar Patience. Your students may also enjoy a “clay day” whereby they use clay to create their own sculptures.

CD/DVD References:

1. PA Academic Standards
2. Available materials in print compiled for GPHS.

Related Themes:

- Art/Sculpture
- Mining
- Official Seals
- Black History



Sources:

Secondary Sources:

Bridging Change by Sally Teller Lottick

Additional Online Sources:

www.wilkes-barre.org/pages/livinghere/famousfirsts.html