

Art From San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition



Jewel City

By Stephen May

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. — The 1906 earthquake and resulting fires that devastated San Francisco did not derail the city's plans, begun in 1904, to host a World's Fair that would showcase American and European art and celebrate the projected completion of the Panama Canal.

Held in 1915, the event was formally called the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE). The onset of World War I presented challenges for many European nations, which, with the notable exception of France, were forced to bow out. Nevertheless, the fair was described as "a stunning success."

Robert Ingersoll Aitken's "Xoros (Dancing Bacchante)," circa 1910, is an animated, classical sculpture. Private Collection.

Page Above: California artist Arthur Frank Mathews painted "Victory of Culture over Force (Victorious Spirit)," 1914, measuring 119 by 238 inches. San Francisco War Memorial.



A new exhibition revisiting the exposition on the occasion of its 100th anniversary, "Jewel City: Art From San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition," was organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco under the leadership of curator James A. Ganz. It is on view at the de Young Museum through January 10.

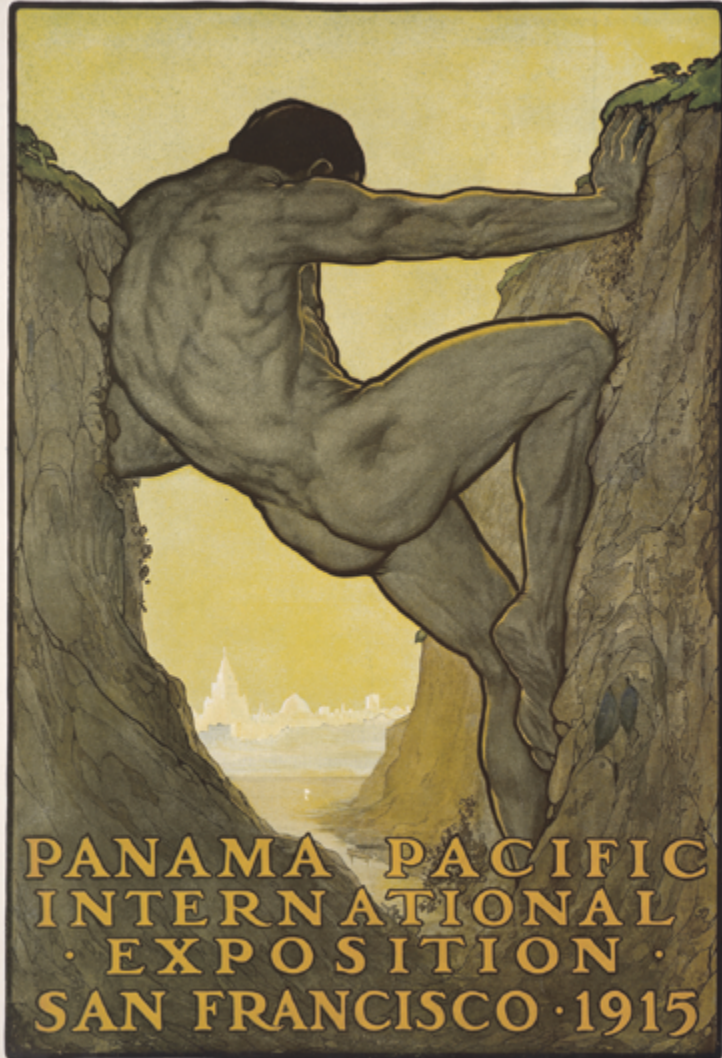
The artistic goals of the PPIE were ambitious and wide ranging, featuring an array of public murals spread throughout the grounds; the Palace of Fine Arts and its nearby Annex, which together comprised 150 galleries of paintings, sculptures and prints; and the French Pavilion devoted to French and Belgian art.

Cecilia Beaux was represented by seven much admired works, including her expressive portrait of her brother-in-law, "Man with the Cat (Henry Sturgis Drinker)," 1898. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.



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An impressive 19 million visitors visited PPIE, which featured more than 10,000 works of art that ranged from the classically beautiful to the shockingly modern.

PPIE's 635 acres of colorful attractions celebrated science, technology, industry, culture and education, and included a grand display of architectural and horticultural splendors. They were described as “dazzling, color-coordinated” — and were marketed as the “Jewel City.” In addition to artworks selected by the exposition's regional juries, the Palace of Fine Arts surveyed American painting from the Eighteenth Century to 1915.

The official poster by Perham William Nahl shows “The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules,” a color lithograph in which Hercules appears to muscle apart two solid rocks, opening up a view of the distant PPIE.

Perham Nahl's "The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules," 1913-14, served as the official poster for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Collection of Donna Ewald Huggins.

The centerpiece of the buildings on the grounds was the Palace of Fine Arts, designed by California architect Bernard Maybank on the edge of a lagoon. The massive octagonal rotunda was flanked by two huge, detached colonnades and was particularly spectacular when lit at night. The domed structure was festooned with sculptured niches, Roman urns and Corinthian columns. The structure cost a then-astounding \$15 million...

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This daytime view of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, by an anonymous photographer, suggests the vast grounds and dramatic setting of the fair. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

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