



HISTORIC
MASTERS

BY DANA PILSON

“WRITE IT LARGE ON THE WALL!”

THE SCULPTORS EVELYN BEATRICE LONGMAN AND DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH

In December 1900, Evelyn Beatrice Longman (1874–1954) arrived at the New York City studio of sculptor Daniel Chester French (1850–1931). She was clasping letters of introduction, including one from French’s older brother, William, first director of the Art Institute of Chicago. “She wore a grey hat with a curling feather down over her ear which, with the dark eyes beneath, took Mr. French’s eye, quite as much as the reputation she had already acquired as to talent,” recalled Mary Adams French in her 1928 *Memories of a Sculptor’s Wife*.

French wrote his brother immediately, praising Longman as “a very attractive young woman.” Born in Ohio, she was inspired to study sculpture after visiting the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago; “I could do such things if I had the chance,” she thought.¹ Longman proceeded to take sculpture classes with Lorado Taft at the Art Institute, graduating from its four-year program in just over two. After moving to New York, she worked with Hermon Atkins MacNeil and Isadore Konti on sculptural decorations for the upcoming 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo before presenting herself to French.

While Longman’s appearance may have caught French’s eye, it was her talent and willingness to take on difficult challenges that endeared her to him. “I saw some of her work ... the other day and it entirely vindicates your recommendation,” French wrote his brother. He sent for Longman to help with the lettering on the bronze doors he was creating for the Boston Public Library, a task he disliked. “She

did it beautifully and stayed on to do more,” recalled the sculptor’s daughter, Margaret French Cresson.² Thus French and Longman began their collaboration, which evolved into a mutually beneficial professional relationship as well as a deep personal friendship. She would become his only female studio assistant and a beloved member of his extended family.

Longman worked at Chesterwood, French’s summer home and studio in western Massachusetts, from 1901 to 1904. There she modeled a portrait of his niece Louise in 1902 (the 1910 marble version is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and his daughter, Margaret, the following summer (the plaster is at Chesterwood). Longman later recalled, “One day ... he came in (I was doing the bust of Louise French) and said, ‘Make the concaves bigger’ – ‘Write it large on the wall!’ That moment I think I saw real sculpture for the first time – and my work changed from that moment, technically.”³

These two early busts recall Italian Renaissance portraiture in the manner of Donatello and Verrocchio. Also influential was the contemporary American sculptor Herbert Adams; Longman surely admired his polychromed version of the Renaissance-style *La Jeunesse* (1894) at Chesterwood. French grew to treasure Longman’s portrait of his daughter and displayed it in his Manhattan townhouse and at Chesterwood. For her second depiction in 1912, *Peggy (Portrait of Margaret French)*, she adopted a more active and realistic style to capture the girl’s fun-loving spirit.⁴



Longman at work on her bronze doors for the library at Wellesley College, 1911



Relief from the Memorial to Laura Gamble Thomson (1853–1913), Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati; photo: A.B. Bogart, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

French employed Longman as a studio assistant to perform various tasks such as “finishing the wax” for his statuette of *Narcissa*.⁵ He also recommended her for commissions, treading carefully so as not to be accused of favoritism. Along with Augustus Saint-Gaudens and John Quincy Adams Ward, French served in 1904 on the National Sculpture Society’s committee to commission the design of a medal commemorating Thomas Edison’s invention of the incandescent light bulb. Longman was among the three finalists, and French wrote to Ward, “Don’t you think my Miss Longman is pretty smart? Her design was so different from anything that she had ever done before that I did not recognize it at all.” He told Saint-Gaudens: “As Miss Longman [is] an assistant of mine, [I] shall probably be accused of favoritism. In any case, somehow the enemy overlooks the fact that we are interested in these people because of their extraordinary talent.”

In return for his encouragement, French sought Longman’s honest advice. As early as 1904, he thanked her: “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate the kind things you say about the ‘Alma Mater’ and the Carnegie figure.... It was very sweet of you to reassure me,—and



Peggy (Portrait of Margaret French), 1912, bronze, 27 1/2 x 12 x 10 1/2 in., National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay, 1986.205, photo: Lee Stalsworth

I needed it.” Even after she took her own studio, he continued seeking her input; in 1907 French wrote to her, “I have lots of things to show you and I want your criticism on my summer’s work. I am counting on your liking some of it.”

MENTORSHIP’S BENEFITS

Longman executed a number of works under French’s supervision, such as the *Slocum Memorial* (1909, Forest Hills Cemetery, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts). Recalling French’s *Melvin Memorial* (1906–08) in nearby Concord, it features an angel cut in shallow relief emerging from a block of granite. French also supervised Longman’s 1906 memorial for Louisa Wells, a Massachusetts millworker who had died 20 years earlier (Lowell Cemetery). The commission had been granted to French, but he passed it to Longman, who carved the 15-foot-tall composition herself in his studio. He reminded the Lowell committee, “You understand that Miss Longman gets all the credit pecuniarily and otherwise of this monument. It has been a great pleasure to me to do what I could to aid and abet her.” Longman’s

The Spirit of Communication, 1916, gold leaf over bronze,
24 ft. high, AT&T Discovery District, Dallas



1913 relief for the grave of Laura Gamble Thomson features a shrouded woman emerging from deep relief; the allegorical figure also pays tribute to her mentor's *Melvin Memorial*.

In 1908 French recommended Longman to Frank A. Faxon of Kansas City to sculpt a portrait of his young daughter, Frances: "I really know of no one man or woman in the country who would be likely to give you as satisfactory a result..." French retained two photographs of Longman working on the portrait while the well-behaved sitter plays with a makeshift doll. The completed marble is now in a private collection, and the tinted plaster is at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

In a blind competition, Longman was selected from 32 entrants to create a set of doors for the chapel at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Although French chaired the selection committee, he had no prior knowledge of Longman's submission, as she had covered up her model when he visited her studio. He attested afterward, "I did not even recognize Miss Longman's work myself, though I am very familiar with it."⁶ The donor of funds for the doors sent Longman to Italy so she could learn more about bronze casting. As she set off, French wished her "the best time you ever had in your life." He continued, "And you have earned the right to your enjoyment. You have been the 'industrious apprentice', sure enough, and you merit all you have won of honor and fortune and happiness and as much more as can be showered upon you ... The fact is that I have come to lean on you so hard, to trust to your judgment about my work so much and, more than all, your high ideals and aspirations and your buoyant enthusiasm are such an inspiration to me ... help me, as I will try to help you, up to the top of *Parnassus*."

Indeed, French guided Longman through the steps of the Annapolis commission, traveling with her to Providence to inspect the bronze casts being made by the Gorham Company. He told the chapel's architect, Ernest Flagg, that he was "impressed by the great beauty of the work that Miss Longman has done." By 1909 he could remind Flagg: "It is amazing that so slight a little woman should have been able to achieve so brilliant a success with so large a work." In this design, Longman paid tribute to Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling figures of the prophet Jeremiah and the Delphic Sybil with her own *Science* and *Patriotism*. Her first collaboration with French had been on the bronze doors for the Boston Public Library; now she was completing the Annapolis doors on her



(ABOVE) Daniel Chester French in the Chesterwood studio with the full-size clay model of *Spirit of Life* for the Spencer Trask Memorial (Saratoga Springs, New York), 1914, Chesterwood Archives, Chapin Library, Williams College, Gift of the National Trust for Historic Preservation ■ (ABOVE RIGHT) Longman in her Chiselhurst-on-Farmington studio working on the full-size model of *Spirit of Victory* for Hartford's Spanish-American War Memorial, c. 1926; photo: Loomis Chaffee School Archives, Windsor, Connecticut



own, establishing her professional reputation. Close on the heels of the Annapolis commission, she was asked to design a set of bronze doors for the library at Wellesley College.⁷

French often sat on committees that awarded Longman commissions. In a blind competition, French and two other judges chose Longman's proposal for a figure on what became the AT&T Building in lower Manhattan. Her winning design was a 24-foot male figure wrapped in electric cables and grasping lightning bolts. Completed in 1916, this work, now called *The Spirit of Communication* (and informally known as the *Golden Boy*), is a triumph of youthful energy and swirling lines. It towered over the neighborhood until the 1980s, and was recently installed in AT&T's new Discovery District in Dallas.

THE PROTÉGÉ'S INSIGHTS

As Longman achieved greater success, French continued to rely on her help and advice. In 1914, they stood in a field near his Chesterwood studio examining the final working model of his *Spirit of Life* for the Spencer Trask Memorial (Saratoga Springs, New York), which had been wheeled outdoors on a railroad track. French had written to Katrina Trask just days before, saying "The statue is entirely finished in plaster;—I really mean that the casting of the statue is entirely finished; I have still some work to do on it, here and there." He was most likely awaiting Longman's opinion before declaring it complete.

In 1916, while working on his seated figure for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., French begged Longman, "Listen to me! I need you and I want you, not because (this time,) you are a charming lady, but because you are a sculptor. Now,—I have sawed Lincoln in two and I have been trying him with different lengths of body and I find I can't decide what is best, by myself. In fact, as I have

said, I need your critical eye to help me to a decision and the decision must be before Monday."

Longman also advised architect Henry Bacon on designs for the Lincoln Memorial itself, and she contributed sculpted eagles, double wreaths, and inscriptions of the late President's speeches to the building project. She accompanied French and Bacon on trips to view its progress, and following the 1922 dedication she came along to inspect changes to its lighting. In 1927 French felt badly that Longman had taken ill after one journey, so he wrote her, "Although it was a heavy price to pay for it, I hope it will eventually give you some satisfaction to know that you did me so great a service and that your knowledge and your advice and your *thoroughness* gave me the backing and the brace to get things right ... I am sure it will be a source of pleasure, too, to have had a hand in saving the life of my statue, for that is about what the new lighting has done for it!"

As most of Longman's relatives lived in the Midwest and Canada, she considered the Frenches her adopted family. She attended their Christmas Eve dinners in Manhattan, during which poems were recited, melodies sung, and gifts exchanged. One year, French penned this verse: "Sweet Evelyn had a flock of geese / -or ganders – all in tow / And everywhere that Evelyn went / The ganders went also. They follow you too often dear / These geese in human shape / For if their mates 'catch on,' you'll see / Sweet Evelyn wearing crepe."

Of her Christmastime stays, Longman wrote: "What a festive place it was, and how beautifully French and Peggy decorated the studio and the big table!" Even after establishing her own studio, she continued visiting Chesterwood in the summer, and its guest books are filled with records of her extended stays. In 1919, Margaret French wrote about Longman as if she were her sister in a letter to her future husband, William "Penn" Cresson: "Beatrice Longman was here with her fiancé, she is so happy, and he really seems pure gold. He has gone back, but she still stays on, and her enthusiasm is contagious; it is such fun suggesting and planning the details of her wedding..." As those nuptials approached, Margaret visited Longman, who, she told Penn, "got out all her trousseaux, all her pretty lingerie and things, and tried everything on. If any one could have seen us capering around in pink silk



pajamas and yellow crêpe de chine chemises they would have thought we'd gone mad."

In 1919, Longman became the first woman sculptor elected to full membership in the prestigious National Academy of Design. French had backed her candidacy and had solicited the support of other members. The following year, Longman married Nathaniel Horton Batchelder, headmaster of what is now the Loomis Chaffee School (Windsor, Connecticut); they had met when he commissioned her to design a marble portrait relief of his late wife. Mr. and Mrs. French issued the invitations



(LEFT) DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH (1850–1931), *Evelyn Beatrice Longman*, 1918, marble on a marble plinth with gold leaf, 21 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/8 in., Davis Museum, Wellesley College, Massachusetts, gift of Nathaniel H. Batchelder, Jr. in memory of his beloved wife, Elizabeth Burnquist Batchelder (Class of 1939) ■ (ABOVE) *Daniel Chester French*, 1926, bronze, 50 x 61 in., National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; transfer from Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the artist, 1936

to the wedding and hosted it at Chesterwood, where Margaret served as maid of honor.

Longman built her own studio, much like Chesterwood, on the Loomis property and named it Chiselhurst-on-Farmington, where she continued sculpting. In 1921, en route to Boston after a winter in Europe and Egypt, French told Longman that he was “crazy to see you to tell you of the wonderful Egyptian Madonna I am going to make (!) and of the wonderful and foolish things I have done and to enthuse over your new studio and all the things you will have to show me!”

DEVOTED COLLEAGUES

Perhaps the most evocative evidence of their close relationship are the portraits that French and Longman sculpted of each other. His 1918 marble of her portrays an attractive young woman: her eyes are closed, her expression serene and mildly seductive. There is no indication of her identity as a sculptor. French gave it to Longman as a wedding present; it is now at Wellesley College's Davis Museum, and two plaster versions are in Chesterwood's collection. Longman's own marble *Elizabeth* (sold at Christie's in 2011) resembles French's portrait of her, as the girl's solemn expression and downcast eyes exude a similar modesty.

At first French protested Longman's desire to make a portrait relief of him. “Why spend your strength upon rendering me immortal?” he wrote her in 1924. “Keep it for better things.” Having initially sent photographs of himself, he finally agreed to pose in Longman's studio. The resulting profile includes bas-relief renderings of French's greatest works: *Benediction*, *Abraham Lincoln*, the Melvin and Milmore Memorials, *Immortal Love*, *Africa* (from the Four Continents adorning Manhattan's U.S. Custom House), and *The Minute Man*. While French's portrait of Longman lovingly focuses on her goddess-like beauty and facial features, her relief depicts her mentor as an enthroned god surveying his creations.

In his roles as a trustee at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and chair of its sculpture committee, French requested the loan of Longman's early portrait of his niece *Louise* for the museum's 1918 exhibition of American sculpture. Two years later, the Met purchased it from Longman. French also oversaw the acquisition of two of her works evoking Hellenistic precedents: her earliest noteworthy accomplishment, a bronze figure of *Victory* (1903, cast 1908) that had surmounted a dome at

the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in Saint Louis and earned her a silver medal, and also *Torso of a Woman* (cast 1911; Chesterwood also owns a bronze version), which was perhaps inspired by his own *Artemis*.

French relied on Longman's advice for the rest of his life. In 1930 he wrote her about his monumental *Andromeda*. "Now I am daily expecting from New York an enlargement of *Andromeda*—do you recall the sketch? . . . It seems rather absurd for an old thing like me to be making such an ambitious image..." He continued to work on it until his death in 1931, and it remains in the Chesterwood studio.

In 1945, as Margaret French Cresson was working on a biography of her father, Longman sent a package of French's letters prefaced with her own thoughts: "He saw so clearly what was good in both the work and character of his fellow-men that his own beautiful soul magnified it." French and Longman's correspondence, like their aesthetic exchange through sculpture, reveals a platonic love story, filled with lofty ideals and illustrated through tactile clay. Longman had arrived at French's doorstep penniless and emerged as one of America's foremost sculptors, following in the footsteps of her mentor, colleague, and friend. She flourished under his wing, and when she left the nest, she was ably prepared to soar on her own, to "write it large on the wall." ●

Information: *Chesterwood* is a National Trust Historic Site located in Stockbridge, Massachusetts: chesterwood.org. All illustrations are by Evelyn Beatrice Longman unless noted otherwise.

DANA PILSON is a curatorial researcher at Chesterwood. Her article on French's daughter, Margaret French Cresson, appeared in the October 2019 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*. She recently curated an online exhibition about Cresson's life and art, available at chesterwood.org. Her online exhibition focused on Longman and French's relationship, illustrated with objects from Chesterwood's collections and archives, will be launched this month. She thanks Donna Hassler, Pat Hoerth, and Thayer Tolles for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Endnotes

- 1 Adeline Adams, "Evelyn Beatrice Longman," *American Magazine of Art*, May 1928, 239.
 - 2 Margaret French Cresson, *Journey into Fame*, Harvard University Press, 1947, 210.
 - 3 Longman to Margaret French Cresson, c. 1945, Chesterwood Archives.
 - 4 Versions in bronze, plaster, and marble are at Chesterwood. Additional bronze casts are in various museums, including the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey and the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.).
 - 5 French to patron John Gellatly, 14 May 1903.
 - 6 *New York Tribune*, 29 March 1906.
 - 7 In 1920, Longman sculpted a bust of Alice Freeman Palmer (1855–1902) for the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, an outdoor sculpture gallery in New York City designed by architect Stanford White. Palmer was president of Wellesley College from 1881 to 1887 and an early advocate of higher education for women. French was commissioned to create a memorial to her for Wellesley's Houghton Chapel (1908–09).
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Torso of a Woman, 1911, bronze, 13 1/4 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4 in., Chesterwood, gift of the Daniel Chester French Foundation, NT 69.38.567

