

# Brents Carlton

1903 – 1962

## **Biography:**

In 1924 Brents Carlton left his large family in a small Arkansas town to study at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. He became accomplished in every medium offered in the course of study: color theory, design and composition, drawing, painting, fresco, printing, and sculpture. At the completion of his course of study at the CSFA, Brents went to New York on a year's scholarship to The Art Students' League. During all his art student days, he also worked as a pharmacy assistant and studied for his pharmacy license concurrently with his art training. Upon returning to San Francisco in 1929 he established his first studio at 2430 Polk Street. Two years he became a licensed pharmacist in California. For his entire life he would divide his time between these two very different, highly disciplined pursuits.

Although he initially intended to become a painter, within a short time he discovered sculpture to be the medium through which he could most profoundly express his vision. His output was amazing considering that most of his works were carved in dense exotic woods and stone and represented untold hours of labor to achieve his signature highly refined work with grain and texture. He participated in all the San Francisco Art Association Annual exhibits, winning a number of awards and distinctions both there and at the other major Bay Area museums. He also exhibited two large marble pieces in New York; one at the Architecture League's 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Exhibition and another in a group sculpture exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

In 1937 he moved his studio to 730 Montgomery Street ushering in a period of intensive work on four pieces commissioned by the Golden Gate International Exposition for the Fair held in 1939 – 1940 on Treasure Island. Working with the famed architect Timothy Pfleuger, Brents Carlton created two monumental Polynesian figures for the Court of Pacifica. Simultaneously, he was preparing drawings and maquettes for two eighteen foot bas-reliefs for the facades of a pair of buildings on Treasure Island. During this period he also executed a privately commissioned bas-relief for a Telegraph Hill home.

His distinctive style of chunky and contorted nudes in stone and exotic woods' terra cotta and bronze prompted the noted art critic, Alfred Frankenstein writing for the San Francisco Chronicle to frequently praise his work. In one review he noted *"Although (Carlton) seems to run almost invariably to works of small size, there is nothing small about the range of his expressive gifts and nothing small either about the range of his technical adroitness and his mastery of materials."*

In the mid-forties, Brents relocated his studio to the loft above the pharmacy at 2567 Mission Street where he was working at the time. Escalating rents in the area surrounding the "Monkey Block" prompted this move. By now, he was also married and

### ***Biography continued:***

a father and was unable to devote as many hours to work in his studio as previously. He did continue to execute works of delicacy and beauty until declining health made sculpting too arduous. He left some sculptures incomplete and switched from chisel and mallet to more work in clay and other media. He died of cancer on September 6, 1962 at the age of 58.

### ***Selected Solo Exhibitions:***

- 1933 – 1937 Art Center Gallery (730 Montgomery Street, S.F.) Harriet Wheaton was the coordinator of this co-op gallery. One man's: 2/33, 11/35
- 1936 – 1945 Amberg-Hirth Galleries (165 Post Street, later 453 Post Street, S.F.) Ernst Amberg & Hugh Hirth were his regular agents during this period. One man's: Summer 1941, Fall, 1942, Fall, 1943.
- 1936 – 1945 Oakland Museum – exhibited extensively during this period (for further details see Awards section). Carlton sculpture: 8/37 with painter Clarence Hinkle, 9/41 with painter Peter Blos.
- 1934 – 1946 San Francisco Museum (now SFMOMA) exhibited extensively during this period and possibly beyond. One man's: 5/41, 6/43.
- Sept. 1938 California Palace of the Legion of Honor – with painter Rinaldo Cuneo.
- Feb. 1938 Sacramento Junior College (now Sacramento State University) Organized by Walter Murray, Professor of Art.
- May 1940 Garden Court, Palace Hotel, S.F. (now Sheraton Palace Hotel)
- Nov. 1983 Atelier Doré Gallery, S.F. – Retrospective Exhibition

### ***Selected Group Exhibitions:***

- April 1930 Architecture League of New York – 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Exhibition. (Catalogue printed.)
- April 1940 The Whitney Museum, New York – Sculpture Festival of the National Sculpture Society, Invited Sculptor. (Catalogue printed.)
- 1935 – 1950 San Francisco Museum (now SFMOMA)  
1/35 - 55<sup>th</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual & Opening of SF Museum of Art., 6/35  
Thirty Years of Sculpture in California, 3/37 Contemporary American  
Ceramics, 3/37 - 57<sup>th</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual, 9/37 Sculpture Show, 8/38  
First Annual California Ceramics Exhibition (traveling), 4/39 – 59<sup>th</sup> S.F. Art

***Selected Group Exhibitions continued:***

Assoc. Annual, 9/40 – 60<sup>th</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual, 9/41 – 61<sup>st</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual, 10/41 American Sculpture Today (aka Contemporary American Sculptors), 10/41 First CSFA Alumni Show, 10/42 – 62<sup>nd</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual, 1/45 – 65<sup>th</sup> S.F. Art Assoc. Annual (Painting & Sculpture in the Bay Region), 1/46 Bay Region Sculpture Show, 1/50 Fifteenth Anniversary Bay Region Sculpture Show

- 1936 – 1950 Oakland Museum (now Oakland Museum of California)  
1936-1938 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sculpture Exhibitions, 1940-1943 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Sculpture Annuals, 1945 10<sup>th</sup> Sculpture Annual, 1950 15<sup>th</sup> Sculpture Annual.
- 1930 – 1938 California Palace of the Legion of Honor  
3/33 Art Center Exhibition, 11/34 California Artists Series, 3/39 San Francisco Artists Show.
- 1930 – 1940 Golden Gate International Exposition  
1939 Decorative Arts Exhibition, 1940 Fine Arts Exhibition (both held in the Fine Arts Palace, Treasure Island). (Catalogue printed)
- March 1938 Los Angeles Museum (now LACMA)  
First California Ceramics Exhibition
- 1932 – 1937 Art Center Gallery - Exhibitions of Recent Sculpture & Decorative Art by Local Artists; 1932, 1934, 1936 (twice in latter year)
- Oct. 1936 Amberg-Hirth Galleries  
Small Sculpture by Brents Carlton with Jewelry by Margaret De Patta.
- 1930 – 1946 San Francisco Art Association Annuals  
(may have participated after 1946, but lack documentation) See detail of some of these in Awards section.
- 1935 & 1943 Gump's Gallery, S.F. (and Gump's Honolulu)
- Oct. 1936 Emporium Gallery, San Francisco
- Oct. 1938 Foundation of Western Art, L.A.
- Nov. 1940 Palace Hotel, S.F. – National Art Week Show
- Mar/Nov '41 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> San Francisco Open Air Art Shows  
Hoteling Place
- Sept. 1951 Rotunda Gallery, City of Paris (now Neiman Marcus), S.F.

***Selected Group Exhibitions continued:***

- Apr-Aug '93 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
*Early Modern Textiles: From Arts and Crafts to Art Deco*
- 10/95-2/96 American Craft Museum, New York  
*Craft in the Machine Age: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft 1920-1945*
- 8/97-8/98 University of California, San Francisco  
*From Tradition to Modernity: Sculpture from 1915 - 1940*
- June 1999 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
*Drawn to Design*
- Oct-Dec. '03 Spencer Jon Helfen Fine Arts, Beverly Hills  
*Trends in Northern California Modernism*
- Nov 2004-  
Feb 2005 Spencer Jon Helfen Fine Arts, Beverly Hills  
*The Figure in California Modernism*
- Aug 2007-  
Nov 2007 Spencer Jon Helfen Fine Arts, Beverly Hills  
*The Nude in California Modernism*
- June 2008-  
Sep 2008 Spencer Jon Helfen Fine Arts, Beverly Hills  
*Figurative Art in California During the Modern Period*

***Awards/Honors:***

- 1936 Third Prize in Oakland Museum's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Sculpture Show
- 1937 Gold Medal of First Prize for Sculpture – 57<sup>th</sup> Annual SF Art Association Annual
- 1937 First Prize in Oakland Museum's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sculpture Show
- 1938 Guest of Honor Oakland Museum's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sculpture Show
- 1942 First Prize in Oakland Museum's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Sculpture Show
- 1943 Guest of Honor Oakland Museum's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Sculpture Show
- 2012 Artist Honoree at Art Deco Society of California's annual Gala

**Commissions:**

Burlingame Country Club, Hillsborough, CA - 1928  
Four Polo Themed Murals – no longer extant

Two sculptures to be located outside the Coit Memorial to complement the frescos within – phases I and II funded by the Public Works of Art Project, 1934. Subsequently cancelled during controversy over content of some Coit Tower frescos.

Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island – 1937  
Two 9' – 10' figures in cast stone for Court of Pacifica (still extant)

Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island – 1937  
Two 18' bas-relief figures, one each for the façade of the California State Building and the Shasta-Cascade Bldg. (both demolished, 1940)

Wall installation for private home, Telegraph Hill  
Maple bas-relief (still extant)

**Public Collections:**

The Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts  
The Archives of American Art  
Cooper-Hewitt Museum  
The Crocker Art Museum  
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
The Oakland Museum of California  
San Francisco History Archives (SF Main Library)  
The Treasure Island Museum  
The Wolfsonian Museum, Miami Beach

**Member:** San Francisco Art Association 1934 – 1956  
Executive Council, Alumni Association – CSFA 1937-1939

**Juror for Selection of Sculpture Awards:**

58<sup>th</sup> Annual SF Art Association Annual, 1938  
Third Annual Sculpture Show, Oakland Museum, 1938  
59<sup>th</sup> Annual SF Art Association Annual, 1939  
61<sup>st</sup> Annual SF Art Association Annual, 1941  
65<sup>th</sup> Annual SF Art Association Annual, 1945

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Art Index, Vol. 3 (1935-1938), Vol. 4 (1938-1941)  
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The Art of Treasure Island, Eugen Neuhaus, Berkeley: UC Press, 1939.
- Artists and People, Yvonne Greer Thiel, The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959.  
Artists' Bluebook, AskArt.com, 2001  
Artists of California 1786-1940, Edan Milton Hughes, Braun-Brumfield, Inc., 1986  
California Artist 1935-1956, Dewitt Clinton McCall, III.  
Craft in the Machine Age: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft 1920-1945, Janet Kardon, Editor, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995  
The Crocker Art Museum Collection Unveiled, Crocker Art Museum, 2010  
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Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform Persuasion 1885-1945, Selections from the Wolfsonian Institution, edited by Wendy Kaplan, Thames and Hudson Inc., NY, NY, 1995  
Early Modern Textiles: From Arts and Crafts to Art Deco, Marianne Carlano and Nicola J. Shilliam, MFA, Boston, 1993.  
Index of Artists, Daniel Trowbridge Mallett, 1948.  
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The Meaning of the Courts of the Golden Gate International Exposition 1939, Juliet James.  
National Sculpture Society Exhibition Catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art, April-May, 1940.  
The San Francisco Fair: Treasure Island 1930-1940 edited by Patricia Carpenter and Paul Totah, 1988  
San Francisco Museum of Art - Catalogue: Opening of The Museum of the San Francisco Art Association, January 19, 1935 (55<sup>th</sup> Annual)  
20<sup>th</sup> Century Decorating, Architecture & Gardening: 80 Years of Ideas & Pleasure From House & Garden edited by Mary Jane Pool, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, NY, 1980  
Two San Francisco Artists and their Contemporaries, 1920-1975, Ruth Cravath, Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath, An Interview Conducted by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun, Regional Oral History Office, San Francisco Artists Series, The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1977.  
Who Was Who in American Art 1898-1947, Peter Hastings Falk, 1985.  
Who Was Who in American Art 1564-1975, Peter Hastings Falk, 1999  
Who's Who in American Art, Vol 2, 1937, and Vol 3, 1940.

### **Periodicals:**

American Magazine of Art – 1/37, 3/39  
The American Home – 3/39  
Architectural Forum – 5/38  
The Archives of American Art *Journal* – Vol. 31, Number 2, 1991  
The Argonaut Magazine (SF) – 2/10/33, 11/01/35  
The Berkeley Daily Gazette – 2/02/33  
The Art Digest – 3/15/33, 6/01/37, 7/01/37, 6/01/38, 3/15/39  
California Arts and Architecture – 1/39, 11/41  
California Art Association Bulletin – Oct. 1938  
The Coast Magazine – 10/38  
Hillsborough Quarterly – 2/09  
House & Garden – 2/39  
The Journal of Management History, article “*Viewing Work Historically Through Incorporating the Visual Arts into Organizational Studies.*”  
Vol. 12, Issue 2, 2006  
Life Magazine – 12/05/38 *photo of Polynesian Girl taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt*  
The Los Angeles Times – 11/21/38  
The New York Times – 4/24/38  
The Oakland Tribune – 3/06/32, 6/20/37, 9/05/37, 9/12/37, 5/15/38, 6/08/41, 9/07/41, 5/17/42, 3/18/45, 2/21/60  
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The San Francisco Call Bulletin – 2/04/33, 8/17/35  
The San Francisco Chronicle – 1/20/35, 8/18/35, 10/27/35, 6/07/36, 4/01/37, 4/03/37, 5/16/37, 6/06/37, 6/20/37, 8/14/37, 5/15/38, 9/25/38, 1/22/39, 5/22/40, 6/08/41, 9/07/41, 5/17/42, 6/27/43, 1/21/45, 2/04/45, 9/08/62  
The San Francisco Examiner – 2/12/33, 10/27/35, 4/01/37, 9/25/38, 3/19/09  
San Francisco Life (Magazine) – 9/38, 1/39  
The San Francisco News – 10/26/35, 4/03/37, 10/01/38  
Standard Oil Bulletin - 1st Quarter 1939  
Sunset Magazine – 5/38  
Treasure Island Tides – December 2012, Number Four  
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Vogue Magazine – 2/01/39  
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