

CHARLES MARION
RUSSELL
(1864-1926)



→ *To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man* ←

Bronze
4 1/2" H x 8" L x 7 1/4" D
Inscribed on base:
CM Russell 1908, with artist's cipher (skull)

Provenance:

Private collection, Europe

Literature:

Rick Stewart, *Charles M. Russell, Sculptor* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1994)

Charles Marion Russell needs little introduction. Over time the "cowboy artist's" work has become synonymous with Western art. His commitment to portraying the nitty gritty of the real American cowboy and the relationship between that character and the landscape, native peoples, flora and fauna, of the western United States has resulted in his acceptance into the cannon of global art history.

To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man was first molded by Charlie Russell in 1920. Executed in the style of his ashtray bronzes, it is one of the few works by Russell that bears the inscription of its title. The bronze was first produced by the Roman Bronze Works of New York City and exhibited at the Kanst Art Galleries in Los Angeles in 1922. Production of *To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man* later transferred to California Art Bronze Foundry. To this date there are just 14 examples of this bronze known to exist; seven of which are confirmed to be executed by Roman Bronze Works and three of which were completed by the California Art Bronze Foundry, including that in the collection of the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX.¹

To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man attracted particular attention at the time of its creation in relation to two separate culturally and socially charged issues. In 1920, the same year Russell completed his bronze, the United States Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, making the sale, manufacturing, and transportation of alcoholic beverages illegal. The juxtaposition of an empty bottle in *To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man* did not go unnoticed by collectors and critical commentators of the day. Although by this time Russell had quit drinking for his own reasons, he was by no means a supporter of Prohibition. The bronze ruffled the feathers of at least one collector, the prominent Russell patron Dr. Philip Cole, who promptly returned the work stating; "Frankly I do not care for the flask appearing in it."²

In addition to its subtle relevance to Prohibition, *To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man* touched a more obvious note relating to the growingly complex relationship between man and being. As Americans expanded westward and became increasingly in contact with western wildlife, there developed harsh conflict between human rights and animal rights. While many campaigned for the complete eradication of the wolf, Russell, with his free range ideals, was not likely one of them. By contrast, he has displayed here the natural instinct of the wolf to recoil and display trepidation towards signs of human beings, a trait that was often attributed with the animal's impressive resiliency.

Uniquely, Charlie Russell's bronze *To Noses That Read, A Smell That Spells Man* remains as relevant and poignant today as it did almost 100 years ago. While the work doubtlessly documents the complexities of life in the early west, it continues to hold important commentary on the continuing struggle between human expansion and wildlife preservation, particularly relating to the contested issues surrounding the fate of the wild Gray Wolf.

Other Examples:

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX
Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE
National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, OK
The Rockwell Museum, Corning, NY

¹ Rick Stewart, *Charles M. Russell, Sculptor* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1994), pg. 247

² Ibid. pg. 246



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