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For Two Collectors, a Weekend Getaway to the 1939 World's Fair

By JAMES BARRON MARCH 3, 2014



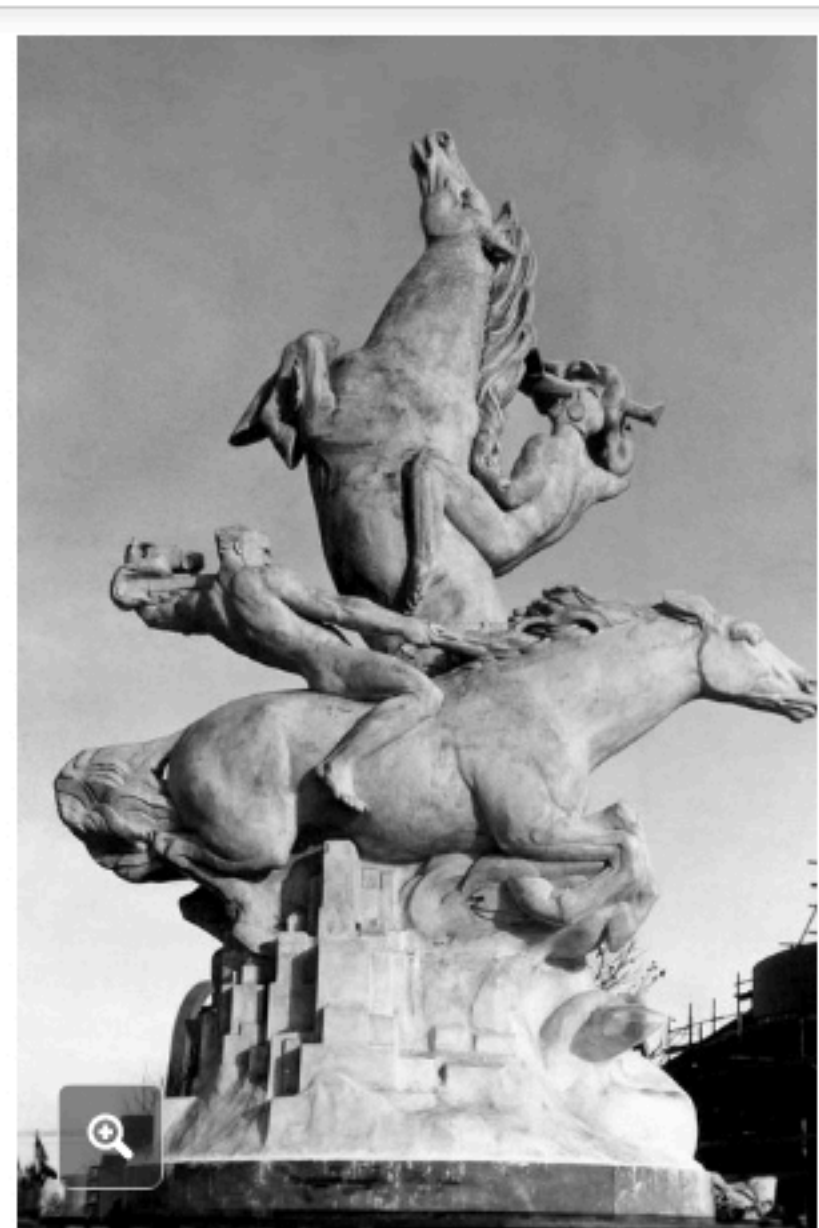
Dr. Roy Goldberg, left, and Keith Sherman standing next to the plaster model of a statue from the 1939 World's Fair in Queens. James Estrin/The New York Times

PAWLING, N.Y. — Keith Sherman and Dr. Roy Goldberg call it “the Chester,” and there is a reason it resides in the garage.

“We couldn’t get it in the house,” Mr. Sherman said.

“The Chester” was the 7-foot-tall plaster model for a statue at the 1939 World’s Fair at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens — a 42-foot-tall riot of horses and ships towering over a cityscape.

The statue stood on the Avenue of Transportation, a short walk from the fair’s icons, the Trylon and Perisphere — the T&P, as they were referred to in “1939: The Lost World of the Fair” (Free Press, 1995), a fictional account of the fair by David Gelernter, a Yale professor. And the Chester behind “the Chester” was Chester Beach, a New York sculptor.



The original “Riders of the Elements,” the statue made from the plaster model. The New York Times

The model is the largest piece in a collection of memorabilia from a World’s Fair that Mr. Sherman, 58, a publicist, and Dr. Goldberg, 56, a geriatrician, never saw — they are too young to have attended. But they have turned their weekend house into a shrine to it, acquiring everything from paintings and models of buildings at the fair to menus from the restaurants to scrapbooks that tourists assembled once they had returned home.

The collection is eclectic. Mr. Sherman and Dr. Goldberg have a metal stanchion that was used for crowd control ropes at the fair — an estimated 44 million visitors streamed through the gates over two years. They have a parasol made of paper that fairgoers could open on sunny days and a portable chair they could sit on while waiting in line.

They have a radio with controls shaped like the Trylon and Perisphere. They have a Remington portable typewriter with the Trylon and Perisphere on the cover that must be removed to change the ribbons. (Does anyone remember portable typewriters?)

They have an Al Hirschfeld drawing of a worker selling souvenirs. They have a 60-piece set of flatware, with the Trylon and Perisphere engraved on each knife, fork and spoon.

And they have posters, cookbooks, sketches, even a book that was supposed to be humorous, offering advice to New Yorkers who did not want relatives staying in their guest rooms. The book came with a sign that could be posted on the front door. “Black Plague,” it warned. “Scram. All persons are hereby warned that these premises are quarantined for the duration of the World’s Fair.”

As for the statue, it was called “Riders of the Elements.” Tall as it was, it was dwarfed by other landmarks at the fair. The world’s largest cash register, for example, stood atop the National Cash Register Building and recorded the attendance each day.



The home in Pawling, N.Y., features paintings, fair menus, tourist scrapbooks and more. James Estrin/The New York Times

Beach, the sculptor, was known for busts and medallions and had designed several commemorative half dollars that went into circulation in the 1930s. He aimed to portray “man’s tangle with transportation at the dawn of the machine age,” Mr. Sherman said of the statue, which displayed three horses with stylized riders and a ship, a car, a train and a plane.

“It was of its time and, I think, futuristic,” said Louise Weinberg, the archives manager at the [Queens Museum](#), which is on the former fairgrounds. “It was in the genre of many of the other sculptures that were done at the time. They grew out of futurism and Art Deco and a streamlined style. They were rooted in traditional building, but they were far-reaching in their aspirations. It was all about building the world of tomorrow, which was the theme of the fair.”

What happened to Beach’s full-size statue is something of a mystery, Ms. Weinberg said.

“I believe most of the originals were destroyed” after the fair had closed, she said. “The sculptures on that scale were really impermanent. The Trylon and Perisphere were covered with gypsum that was painted brilliant white and, by the second year, there were panels that were dropping off the Perisphere into the pool below.”

Mr. Sherman, Dr. Goldberg and a friend, Max Ember, bought the model of the statue at auction in 2009 for \$8,625. They looked into having three copies the size of the model fabricated in bronze. That would have cost more than \$300,000, Mr. Sherman said, far more than they could afford. Eventually, they arranged to have half-size statues made by the sculptor Michael Keropian, who used an old-fashioned pantograph to create the reduction from Beach’s model.

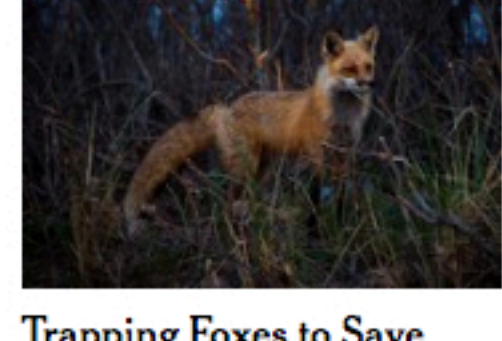
“This represents hope,” Mr. Sherman said. “Transportation, air travel was the future, and the figure on top is hurling an airplane. It was the hope of the future. This was the embodiment of a moment when everything seemed possible.”

Correction: March 10, 2014

A picture caption on Tuesday with an article about two men who collect memorabilia associated with the 1939 World’s Fair reversed their identities in some editions. Dr. Roy Goldberg was shown at the left and Keith Sherman at the right.

A version of this article appears in print on March 4, 2014, on Page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: For Two Collectors, a Weekend Getaway to the 1939 World’s Fair. Order Reprints | Today’s Paper | Subscribe

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