

The Insider: Forgotten sculpture gets second chance

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Photographer Owen Murphy captures the beauty of the newly restored *Atala and Chactas* from many angles. (Photos from *Tulane* magazine)

In 1976, Horst W. Janson, an art historian and visiting Mellon Professor in the Newcomb Art Department, noticed a statue displayed outdoors in a courtyard on the uptown campus of Tulane University. He recognized the significance of the weather-beaten sculpture and asked university officials to move it indoors immediately.

That was a turning point in the journey of [*Atala and Chactas*](#), a 2,269-pound sculpture that has since undergone professional cleaning and repair. It is currently on loan to the [Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art](#) in Bentonville, Ark., where it will be on display beginning in November.

“It is being installed at the same time as a newly acquired and conserved marble sculpture of ours,” says Diane Carroll, media relations manager at the Crystal Bridges museum. “The weight of these works adds some layers to the installation, so the exact date is still being determined.”

In 1848, American sculptor Randolph Rogers created the marble sculpture that depicts characters from François-René de Chateaubriand's famous romance published in 1801. The sculpture was featured in the winter issue of [Tulane magazine](#).

The statue shows a life-size Chactas, who is kneeling, and Atala, who is seated on his knee. Chactas has extracted a thorn from the sole of Atala's foot. He holds the thorn between his fingers as small drops of blood ooze from her sole.

Tulane has possessed the sculpture, which was commissioned by R.W. Montgomery, since 1889. His wife, Virginia C. Montgomery, donated the sculpture to the university in her husband's memory.

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