

Book Prospectus

Nonfiction/Illustrated

**The World of Wildlife Sculptor**

**LOUIS PAUL JONAS**

by Zella Merritt

with Stuart Murray

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For millions of Americans, one of the most memorable childhood experiences is visiting a natural history museum, and most of us remember the first time we stood there in awe before a realistically mounted creature of the wilderness.

Perhaps we saw the massive Bengal tiger in the Smithsonian Institution, or the walrus group in the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History. Our memory might be of the towering bronze grizzly and cubs in the Denver Natural History Museum, or of the beautiful African waterhole diorama at the California Academy of Science in San Francisco.

Another well-known and unforgettable museum exhibit is the Alaskan white sheep diorama at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, as is the African crane group at the

Huntington's Brookgreen Gardens, Myrtle Beach. To many of us, the most astonishing sight was the Indian elephant herd at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

All these famous museum mountings and dioramas sprang from the genius of one man: wildlife sculptor and taxidermist Louis Paul Jonas, who was regarded by his peers as one of the world's finest creators of museum exhibits. Jonas's reputation is unsurpassed even today, twenty-five years after his death at the end of a professional career that spanned almost six decades.

In 1964, at the pinnacle of his career, Louis Paul Jonas went beyond wildlife sculpture and created nine life-size dinosaurs, winning him international recognition as these monsters became the stars of the New York World's Fair.

#### **LOUIS PAUL JONAS**

Born in Hungary in 1894, Jonas was the youngest of six accomplished brothers, who included a trained engineer, artisans and taxidermists. In 1908, at the age of fourteen and after studying clay modeling in his native Budapest, he followed two elder brothers to Denver where he joined their fledgling taxidermy business, mounting the wildlife of the Rocky Mountains.

By 1914, Jonas Brothers Studio had earned the highest

reputation across the country among other professional taxidermists. Louis learned quickly, and when he visited New York and the American Museum of Natural History in 1914, he was offered an apprenticeship by Carl Akeley, the leading museum taxidermist in the world. A few years later, Akeley even offered to adopt Louis, who declined, having strong ties to his father, still alive in Hungary.

While intensely training with Akeley (meeting Akeley's friend, President Teddy Roosevelt, who admired young Louis's work), Jonas also studied at the National Academy under the country's finest art and sculpture instructors and alongside top young artists of the day. Acquiring sculpture techniques and developing an artistic eye for the character of animals, Jonas developed a unique ability to bring a mount to life. His attention to authentic details and uncanny touch with the tools of both taxidermist and sculptor brought him high regard in his field while just in his twenties.

Although he was a master at museum taxidermy, Jonas's artistry began to lead him more into the realm of sculpture, especially when he made one-tenth-scale miniatures. Originally created as studies for finished exhibits, these miniatures are faithful replicas of the full-size sculptures found on exhibit in many museums.

## JONAS MINIATURES

Full-size Jonas mountings are displayed in more than thirty museums, including the Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis; the Museum of Natural History, Houston; the Museum of Science, Boston; the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County; the Peabody Museum of Natural History, New Haven; the St. Louis Science Center and the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Mass.

Many museums also exhibit Jonas's one-tenth miniatures, which show his consummate artistry and craftsmanship as well as his understanding of the creature, its physique, movement, and perhaps its very soul. Forty years ago Jonas's miniature sculpture developed into a field of its own, and today copies of more than four hundred individual models are owned by museums and private collectors, including members of the Explorers Club and Safari Club International.

Ranging in price from \$100 for a red fox to \$8,000 for an elephant group, the miniatures are produced and marketed from Jonas Studios, Churchtown, New York. It was there in the mid-Hudson Valley that Louis Paul Jonas executed many of his greatest works, including his most stupendous achievement of all: the nine life-size dinosaurs for the New York World's Fair.

## JONAS'S JURASSIC PERIOD

Commissioned by the Sinclair Oil Company for its world's fair exhibit, the dinosaurs were created over an arduous two-year period at the Churchtown studios.

When finally completed, they were loaded on the open deck of a river barge and floated down the Hudson, around Manhattan Island in sight of awe-struck thousands who watched from shore, and then to the fairgrounds at Flushing Bay, where fireboats honored the bizarre sight with gushing waterspouts. The Jonas dinosaurs included a ferocious nineteen-foot tall Tyrannosaurus Rex; a Brontosaurus, seventy feet long; and full-size Triceratops, Stegosaurus, Ankylosaurus, Corythosaurus, Trachodon, Struthinimus and Ornitholestes.

Jonas, himself, was so overwhelmed by the gruelling task of building the dinosaurs--5,000 pounds of clay for the Brontosaurus alone--that he once declared as he was working on the top of the Tyrannosaurus that he would "be glad to get back down to elephants."

After the World's Fair, these fantastic creations, so vastly different from Jonas's wildlife sculptures, went on a national tour and later were dispersed to a number of sites around the country. More were created, and now Jonas dinosaurs can be seen across the United States and Canada and

in Australia: The Boston Museum of Science was built around a Jonas Tyrannosaurus Rex; the two largest originals from the world's fair--Tyrannosaurus and Brontosaurus--are on exhibit at Glenrose State Park near Ft. Worth, Texas. A Stegosaurus is exhibited at the new Atlanta Natural History Museum, and a Tyrannosaurus and Triceratops are at Forest Park, St. Louis. Also, there is a Jonas Triceratops in Queensland, Australia, and the Calgary zoo has six Jonas dinosaurs.

Other dinosaur types were created, until twenty individual models were produced--all of which are also available as miniature replicas in one-tenth scale.

## **THE BOOK**

The World of Wildlife Sculptor Louis Paul Jonas is the only book about the sculptor's life and work from 1894 to 1971.

It is illustrated with photographs from dozens of publications that featured him, including LOOK Magazine and the New York Times; also included is photography of work in his studios, from Denver to New York City and the Hudson Valley; and there are dramatic images of the four hundred miniatures as well as of museum mountings and dioramas.

With a text of 20,000 words, plus captions and appendices, the Jonas story is told by telling the stories behind his sculptures. This includes 1920s museum taxidermy,

how specimens were collected in the field, and creating sculpture from many hours of studying living animals. In the case of the dinosaurs, the stories are about creating sculpture in cooperation with leading paleontologists--and no one has ever seen the creatures alive.

## **THE AUDIENCE**

**\* Lovers of wildlife art:** There are few comparable collections of such perfectly detailed wildlife sculpture, and a well-defined segment of the book-buying public will be attracted to an illustrated book that features the miniatures as well as the life-size sculptures. Sportsmen's clubs, animal lovers and environmentalists alike are drawn to the beautiful Jonas sculptures.

**\* Museum shops:** Each year millions of families see Louis Paul Jonas mountings in more than thirty leading museums. A book that tells the story of the sculptor and the exhibits would be welcome in the museum's store.

**\* Collectors of Jonas Miniatures:** Thousands of persons own hand-painted, individually cast miniatures and will be interested in a book about the man who created them. These collectors are often members of organizations, such as the



Explorer's Club, which have periodic conventions.

**\* Youngsters who love dinosaurs:** Parents will find the story and pictures of the dinosaurs in this book an excellent way to lead their children to reading about the other wildlife images and to look closely at the Louis Paul Jonas renderings of animals in their natural habitat--an experience almost as memorable as a visit to the natural history museums.

## THE CO-AUTHORS

Louis Paul Jonas's daughter and co-worker, Zella Merritt was closely involved in his career from the 1930s until 1971. So, too was her husband, Walter Merritt, a key associate in Jonas Studios, skilled in many creative aspects.

Mrs. Merritt saw her father's successes and struggles first-hand, and for decades she worked long hours in his studio, through the lean years and through triumph. Mrs. Merritt and her family are active in operating Jonas Studios, which has Safari Club International of Tucson as its major representative. Her four sons are all highly regarded professionals in the fields of museum management or in creating special effects for feature films.

Journalist, editor and author of fourteen books, fiction and nonfiction, Stuart Murray just completed Three Miles from Anywhere, the story of Rudyard Kipling's years in Vermont, 1892-96. Murray has been published by Simon & Schuster, Berkley, Bantam, and a number of regional presses.

His Norman Rockwell's 'Four Freedoms,' published in spring, 1993, was selected as an alternate by the Literary Guild. His Shaker Heritage Guidebook was published in 1994, with a foreword and endorsement by the Shakers of Sabbathday Lake, Maine.