



“NO NEKKID LADY!”

The Controversy Over Alonzo Hauser’s *Promise of Youth Sculpture*

Martin Zanger

Situated on the axis between the Beaux-Arts–styled Minnesota State Capitol and the sleek, modern Veterans Service Building on the State Capitol Mall is a statue by sculptor Alonzo Hauser entitled *Promise of Youth*. Whether or not passersby find the female figure positioned inside a lotus blossom attractive, they are likely unaware of the bitter controversy surrounding the birth of this work of art. Examining the drawn-out dispute reveals broader issues that often arise when governmental bodies make aesthetic decisions about public art.

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Alonzo Hauser in his Eagan studio.

Shortly after World War II, 40 years after the state capitol building was dedicated, Minnesota lawmakers finally agreed to beautify the capitol's grounds and approach ways. (See related article on page 120.) The massive project entailed eminent-domain proceedings, disputed evictions of poor families, and rerouted thoroughfares. As part of the overall plan, an advisory committee and lawmakers envisioned a new building to house activities related to veterans' issues and a memorial to honor Minnesota's involvement in the war. The building would contain offices, archives, an auditorium, and meeting rooms for groups ranging from the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars to Spanish-American War Veterans and Jewish War Veterans. The legislature created the 11-member Veterans Service Building Commission (VSBC) in 1945 to oversee construction of the new facility. The commission began by conducting a national architectural competition to select the building's

designer. The winner was young, Harvard-trained W. Brooks Cavin Jr. (1914–2002). Cavin's sympathetic modern design met the competition criteria that the new building should harmonize with the existing classical revival style of state government buildings. Architecture critic Larry Millett has described the Veterans Service Building as "one of the city's first truly modern buildings of note."¹

Cavin moved to the Twin Cities from Washington, DC, in the fall of 1946 to begin the huge project, buoyed by his good fortune in winning the coveted commission. Beyond the building itself, he envisioned indoor and outdoor artistic embellishments: murals, bas relief, mosaics, and a reflecting pool containing a fountain and a statue, perhaps "a small playful free form . . . in bronze or stone." Four years later Cavin elaborated on possible ideas for the statue: either a life-sized bronze of someone connected to the building's memorial nature or, if that proved too controversial, a symbolic or mythical figure.²

In September 1947 Cavin lunched with sculptor Alonzo Hauser (1909–88), discussing his plans for the building. Hauser had taught sculpture at Carleton College and had recently founded Macalester College's art department. The young architect's ideas intrigued him. "He has quite a sculpture program outline," Hauser wrote to his mother, E. Wynona Hauser, "so I am hoping to get on it. . . . I will have to continue to be in there pitching so as to get the break if it comes."³

A native of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Alonzo Hauser had studied sculpture in Milwaukee and New York City, where he also learned the stone carver's trade. Hauser engaged in social activism as a member of the Communist Party. In 1936 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired him to create sculpture for the Resettlement Administration's planned community in Greendale, Wisconsin. During World War II, prior to moving to Minnesota in 1944, Hauser worked at ceramics factories in Milwaukee.⁴



LEFT: Veterans Service Building (Brooks Cavin Jr. 1953–54, 1973), south façade.
ABOVE: Brooks Cavin Jr.



Early models of the *Promise of Youth* sculpture with lotus petals open and closed (inset).

The artist’s innovative concept for the sculpture featured mechanically operated lotus petals that opened at dawn, via a timer mechanism, to reveal a female nude with uplifted arms. At dusk, the petals would close.

Although the end of the war brought renewed interest among Minnesota legislators in developing the State Capitol Mall, budgeting problems, land acquisition difficulties, and building-materials shortages during the Korean War all delayed progress on the veterans’ building. Not until 1952 did Cavin negotiate an agreement for Hauser to create the fountain piece. By this time, Hauser had resigned from Macalester and was scrambling to earn a living through commercial and freelance

work (even traveling the carnival circuit as a barker for a “surrealistic extravaganza” created by Gypsy Rose Lee and her husband, artist Julio de Diego). Cavin had encouraged Hauser during the five years since their first lunch, so Hauser—just “to keep busy”—had begun a model sculpture piece for the veterans’ fountain.⁵

Hauser hosted several VSBC art subcommittee members at his Eagan studio to view a scaled-down clay model, having first shown preliminary sketches to Cavin. The architect

and sculptor explained that the figure’s gaze and uplifted hands were meant to gesture toward a proposed 27 × 9-foot plaque on the building’s façade. Together the ensemble was meant to depict peace and progress. A front-page article in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in May 1952 announcing the proposed sculpture featured three photographs of Hauser’s preliminary design: the lotus blossom both opened and closed, and “a slender female figure.” Apparently, no subcommittee members objected, and the full commission subsequently gave tentative approval to proceed with a plaster modeling of the statue. Hauser created a “figure a little larger than life-size in clay.” He spent months “push[ing] the clay around” until it satisfied him. The next steps would be to have it cast in plaster, then bronze, at a foundry.⁶

Hauser conceived the fountain's centerpiece, *Promise of Youth*, as "a thing of beauty." The artist's innovative concept for the sculpture featured mechanically operated lotus petals that opened at dawn, via a timer mechanism, to reveal a female nude with uplifted arms. At dusk, the petals would close. Hauser intended to portray "youth yearning and reaching out to peace and freedom," asserting that he did not intend "to create a memorial glorifying war." In his artist's statement, the one-time radical (Hauser had quit the Communist Party in 1948) wrote of American warfare in a manner that would be met with nods of approval by American Legion officials:

Our country has never embarked upon a punitive war meant only for personal gain. Every war effort has been forced upon us. We have formed armies and fought to maintain our democratic American way of life and form of government as first envisioned . . . by our founding fathers. A war memorial in our country focuses attention on the ends of the war, which are peace and freedom. In such a world of peace, youth may flourish to fulfill the dreams of those who served.⁷

In the spring of 1953 Hauser expressed frustration about the budgetary woes and political maneuvering that was hindering progress on the Veterans Service Building. Hard-pressed to keep up with his mounting debts, he complained to his brother-in-law that legislators "pooped out on us, the bastards, [and] delayed for at least another two years the necessary appropriation to go ahead and complete the building." Cavin tried to assuage his feelings, informing him that the VSBC was unhappy too.

It planned to meet in May to propose a rudimentary building within the scope of the present appropriation, which would include the fountain figure. If that approach failed, Hauser faced the prospect of seeking work as a union stonecutter "in order to chip away" at his debts. He spent a week in April cleaning up the plaster cast of the sculpture. "I have it in pretty good shape now," he wrote family members. He hoped the project would become a "sure thing" in May so that he could begin drawing some money from it.⁸

After the artist finished his full-size plaster version, Cavin invited the VSBC chairman, Major General Ellard A. Walsh, out to Hauser's workshop. Lauded for his leadership in the National Guard, locally and nationally, Walsh was also known for his blunt opinions. According to Hauser: "The General hardly took a decent look at it and said 'Nozzir, I will never approve of a nekkid lady on the capitol grounds.' This came as quite a surprise as nothing along this line has been said before." Cavin told Walsh that changes could not be made to the figure, saying, "I'm sorry, General, but I must insist that this be brought before the Commission."

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Looking back years later, Cavin told an interviewer, "Generals don't like to be talked to that way, I understand."⁹

By the next VSBC art subcommittee meeting, commissioners variously expressed revulsion, were concerned that Minnesota citizens would disapprove of the figure, or withheld



National Guard Major General Ellard A. Walsh, about 1950.

comment. The architect felt "[Walsh] had talked with enough members so they were prepared to turn it down. I was really crushed," adding, "Neither Lonny [Hauser] nor I had thought of [the sculpture] as the naked woman[,] only as a lovely female figure." A disgusted Hauser compared the rejection to being "socked in the nose." The outraged sculptor railed against Walsh in particular, calling him "one of those stupid dirty-minded devils that sees evil in everything, no perception and absolutely no sense of art."¹⁰

Perhaps the commission—made up of prominent civic leaders—was motivated more by distaste for Hauser's outspoken social and political views and his nonveteran status than by concern that the sculpture might be inappropriate for public viewing. (Interestingly, Cavin had been a con-



Hauser working on clay model of *Promise of Youth*, 1954.

a payment schedule, he periodically doled out several hundred dollars to keep the sculptor involved. Hauser was grateful that the architect was “sticking his neck out” before formal clearance from the VSBC because it enabled his family (wife, Nancy, a modern dancer, and three children) to “skid by.” By year’s end, he had nearly finished the master petal, and a New York forge gave him what he considered a “very good bid”—\$1,150—for casting the *Promise of Youth* in bronze. Apparently, Cavin had given the artist hope that the VSBC would authorize additional funds for his work. “I don’t know just how he expects to grease it through,” he wrote his mother, “but . . . it’s not a dead issue in his mind at all. I hope he can get it straightened out soon so . . . I can have some steady money and get myself out of debt.” When Hauser learned that the commission would not meet until March 1954, he vented angrily in a letter to his mother. He had been held in limbo for more than two years. When Hauser listed medical and dental bills, car payments, and a \$225 grocery bill, Cavin doled out \$200.¹²

scientific objector during World War II, though he served in a civilian capacity in the War Department.) Whatever the reasons behind the delegation’s reaction, their rejection of *Promise of Youth* in June 1953 initiated a decades-long, sometimes-acrimonious controversy involving a broad segment of the Twin Cities public and its arts community.

But all was not necessarily lost. Several phone calls with Cavin convinced Hauser that they were “far from licked yet.” Cavin proposed to

canvas VSBC members in an effort to “override the general.” In July 1953, a month after the vote, Hauser continued to hope the project could be rescued and his pay secured. He recognized that “the figure part is still controversial.” If the commission voted it down, he realized he’d have to design a different figure; “I hope not,” he wrote to his sister, Wynona Hauser Murray.¹¹

In spite of the ominous VSBC reaction, Hauser proceeded to model a full-size petal and consult with local foundries about doing a bronze casting. Although Cavin had not specified

The crucial VSBC meeting took place on March 4, 1954, at the courthouse in St. Paul. The commission deliberated at some length on the building’s art forms. After the secretary read the arts subcommittee’s 1952 meeting minutes into the record, Cavin explained how he chose the artists, emphasizing that such selection fell within the architect’s purview. If additional expertise seemed necessary, he intended to consult with Leon Arnal, emeritus professor of the University of Minnesota, School of Architecture. Cavin also described how he envisioned people

approaching the building's art forms. They would encounter a reflecting pool containing Hauser's sculptural piece. Meant to honor Minnesotans who had served in various military conflicts, the sculpture symbolized "the future of younger generations for which these conflicts were waged."¹³

Immediately following Cavin's presentation, Chairman Walsh questioned whether the commission had ever given the fountain "formal approval." Commissioner Henry J. Lund thought they had given the go-ahead to develop the fountain's mechanical workings. To be certain, Lund now moved to authorize building the mechanics as recommended by Cavin. Commissioner Homer Clark pondered the fountain's long-term maintenance requirements. Cavin assured members that he had employed a civil engineer to ensure the electrical and hydraulic elements would properly open and close the sculpture's petals. The commission passed a motion authorizing construction of the fountain alone.¹⁴

Walsh then homed in on the figure intended to grace the fountain, asking: "What is your pleasure with reference to the figure of the fountain piece?" Anticipating this moment, Cavin had been lobbying individual committee members since the previous summer. In August 1953, for example, he wrote to General Russell B. Rathbun, chair of the art subcommittee: "I assure you that if I believed that the Hauser fountain piece might instigate . . . undignified clamoring in the press, I would immediately withdraw my recommendation." Cavin arrived at the March 1954 meeting armed with a formal report containing testimonials he had gathered from respected members of the Twin Cities arts community.¹⁵

In requesting letters of support, Cavin had noted that rejection of the

A week after the bruising meeting in which the fountain but not the figure was approved, Cavin contemplated his next move.

statue raised "the basic issue of who should pass on works of art in connection with public buildings." Cavin told Ruth Lawrence, director of the University of Minnesota Art Gallery, that he was "unwilling to accept this decision by one person [Walsh] unfamiliar with art and, therefore, I am asking several leaders in the field of art for their frank opinions, which I shall submit to the entire Commission for its consideration." Lawrence strongly agreed: "Of course, I would back up the artist's right for his own expression and urge that people who know art be in a position to judge whether a thing is acceptable or not." Harvey H. Arnason, Walker Art Center director, responded: "I shall certainly do anything that I can." Wilhelmus B. Bryan, director of the Minneapolis School of Art (now Minneapolis College of Art and Design), made a special trip to view the *Promise of Youth*, and he, too, wrote a letter of support.¹⁶

As an emerging architect working on his first major commission, Cavin found himself in a precarious position. His aesthetic and ethical senses persuaded him that he needed to make a valiant plea to retain *Promise of Youth* but, pragmatically, he knew he had to work closely with the influential VSBC over the next few years. He told the commissioners he conceived of the sculpture's symbolism to represent "the ideal for which service people have served and enriching the entire setting." Cavin's formal report to the VSBC recommended full funding for all commissioned works of art and pointed to the expert testimony from "outstanding qualified people," who deemed the sculpture "entirely proper, a very competent job."¹⁷

Walsh had also been busy prior to the meeting. In July 1953, he sent key commissioners a *Time* magazine clipping describing an incident in Salem, Oregon, where those who favored public placement of a female statue ("a hippy bronze nude by France's great Pierre Auguste Renoir") had met with widespread opposition. In reaction, one VSBC member opined, "One should not deliberately court trouble!"¹⁸

Walsh wrote to VSBC secretary William H. Fallon:

It might be a good idea to save the clipping for the other members. Incidentally, something of the same thing is happening at the Capitol in Lincoln [Nebraska] where the younger element wanted to replace the statue of "The Sower" atop the Capitol [sic] with something along the lines of the Marilyn Monroe [sic]. Not any for me thanks.¹⁹

Walsh may have stifled inclusion of the testimonials Cavin had gathered. Apparently in no mood to tolerate expert endorsements, Walsh temporarily excused himself from the chair so he could offer a motion to reject Hauser's statue. Commissioner Kenneth Law wished to know the reason behind Walsh's motion. The general cut off attempts to discuss his rationale: "I don't care to discuss it. I have given my reason. I promise I will not be a party to having a figure of this kind being placed on the Capitol grounds." If the figure were installed, he continued, there would surely be "criticism," therefore he insisted his motion stand. Other commissioners

expressed similar fears of public ridicule.²⁰

Although not called upon to make his full report, Cavin was able to speak briefly in favor of *Promise of Youth*, maintaining that those who viewed Hauser's plaster model were at a "disadvantage" by not seeing its full effect in bronze within the fountain's spray. Walsh retorted that context would not make the "slightest difference" to him. Commissioner Rathbun thought that while the commission may have been "rather rough" on the young architect, it should not invite trouble it "can easily avoid." Having seen the figure, Commissioner Lund said it did not appeal to him and he wished to disassociate himself from supporting it. The commission "should not be put on the spot," Lund said, and Cavin "should have sensed the criticism and come up with something else." Walsh followed by admonishing, "Mr. Cavin, I have lived in this State too long not to have sensed the reaction of its people and secondly I do not think the Commission should do something which would undo everything it has done." A few commissioners offered speculations about substituting other, more militaristic figures, but the motion to reject the *Promise of Youth* carried. "So much for the fountain piece," Walsh commented.²¹

During the ensuing discussion regarding the rest of the building's artwork, Cavin had to explain why the commission could not simply buy ready-made statuary. He felt so committed to his chosen artists, he admitted, that he had advanced them

View from the state capitol toward downtown St. Paul, 1955. The rectangle at the end of the mall in the center of the photo is the reflecting pool that would contain the Promise of Youth sculpture. Flanking the pool are the two low wings of the Veterans Service Building, completed in 1954. Not until 1973 was the building's connecting three-story "bridge" built.

money from his own funds before getting commission authorization. And he asserted, "I am sure we are getting a bargain. For the work of well known artists we would be paying twice as much. . . . We are fortunate in having these artists in this vicinity."²²

A week after the bruising meeting in which the fountain but not the figure was approved, Cavin contemplated his next move. He thought it wise to proceed with fabrication of the base and petals since creating a figure that "does not offend the members of the Commission and which, incidentally, may also be artistic" might take some time. Somewhat consoled that he had not entirely lost the commission, Hauser thought he would be paid for his work to date and, presumably, for creating a more acceptable figure. "I am afraid," he wrote, "I can not have the heart for the new assignment that I had for the original conception." He planned to finish the fountain's petals and cogitate on an idea "that will not look like a replacement."²³

Cavin continued to advocate for *Promise of Youth*. According to Hauser, Cavin paid for *Promise of Youth* to

be cast in bronze at a Long Island foundry, figuring that he could sell it to another client if need be. In 1955 Cavin attempted to exhibit the statue at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, writing the director, "There is a little background history which you should know about, but which should not receive publicity." After explaining why the commission shied away from approval, Cavin said: "I personally, felt this was a very fine work and had it cast in bronze on my own account so that it would not be destroyed."²⁴

Late in 1956, the *Minneapolis Tribune* planned a feature on the statue controversy and asked for a picture of Hauser alongside the bronze version of *Promise of Youth*. Neither the artist nor Cavin wished to have a story on the sensitive issue appear. "I was able to pull some strings and get the story killed," Hauser claimed, "but apparently my string broke." Eventually, he allowed reporters to visit his studio to photograph the bronze. He told relatives, "I actually don't give a damn about the story breaking but the arch[itect] is unhappy."²⁵



Nearly a year later, the *Minneapolis Tribune* ran a front-page article and photograph of what it called a “plaster model of [the] rejected statue.” The article quoted VSBC secretary Fallon saying that the commission objected “because nudes in public places are often criticized,” then quoted an unidentified source who said that one commissioner remarked: “I want it understood we’ll have no nekkid women on the capitol grounds.” The story also reported that one observer hinted, “With a change in make-up of the commission, its ‘attitude toward art’ might be altered.”²⁶

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press*’s story on the same day, titled “Capitol Nude ‘Bounced,’” quoted Fallon saying that the commission, though initially impressed by the novelty of having petals open and close, ultimately disapproved of the statue due to “sort of a public uproar” over similar pieces of art elsewhere. The commission “didn’t want anything like that here. This question of what is art,” Fallon went on, “and what isn’t art is kind of a delicate thing.” Cavin, unsurprisingly, said he was “very much disappointed.” Hauser thought his statue was “certainly decent” and “entirely appropriate.” The artist said that “the thought of its being a nude hasn’t entered our minds at all.” Indeed, he pointed out, as far as nudes around the capitol went, “there are plenty of them now”—two other unadorned female statues and several paintings inside buildings. Cavin claimed to be looking for a replacement statue, though he said he did not intend to “grab just anything” for the fountain.²⁷

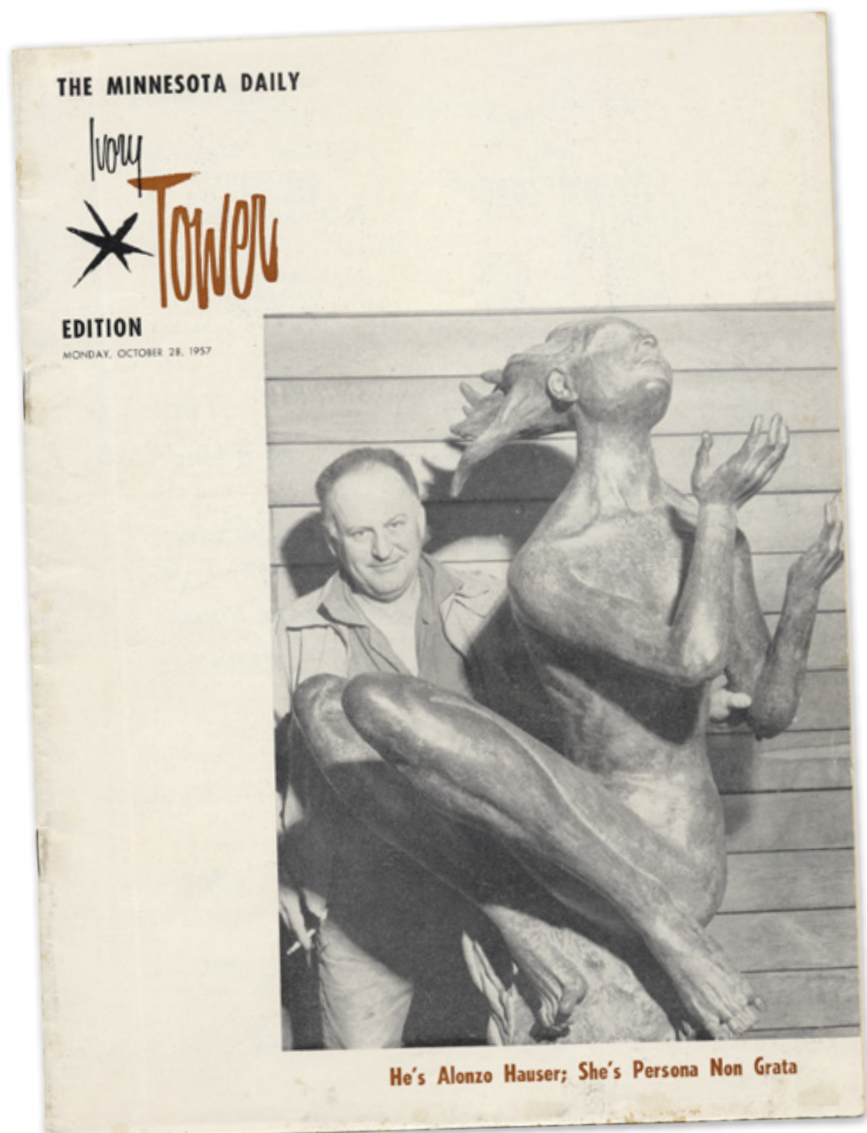
Meanwhile, Hauser continued to work with a welder to try to get the

Hauser heaped praise on this sympathetic article on the Promise of Youth saga published in October 1957 in Ivory Tower a University of Minnesota student magazine.

fountain’s petals to operate properly. By October 1957, he had begun a part-time position teaching drawing at the University of Minnesota’s School of Architecture. That month, *Ivory Tower*, a magazine published by the university’s student newspaper, the *Minnesota Daily*, carried a story on the fountain.²⁸ Reporter Phil Schrader Jr. had visited Hauser’s studio, where he interviewed the outspoken sculptor and examined his works. The magazine’s photographer, Carroll Hartwell, contributed splendidly posed shots with suitably cheeky captions.²⁹

Schrader’s article shed light on several key nuances of the *Promise of Youth* saga. The reporter made clear that he viewed the VSBC’s negative response as a travesty and felt the

statue deserved placement inside the “huge bronze tulip.” Cavin was quoted as saying that he felt fortunate to have signed up a sculptor of Hauser’s caliber, who had produced a fountain that, in Schrader’s view, “would make other states envious.” Schrader also reported on the commissioners’ earlier reactions to the plaster model and their suggested substitution of a grenade-hurling soldier. Schrader reported that, at the March 1954 meeting in which the statue was rejected, Cavin was not allowed to read excerpts from the favorable testimonials of W. B. Bryan, director of the Minneapolis School of Art, and Malcolm E. Lein, director of the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art.



Commissioner Lund's quotes were feisty: "There's a lot more to this than appears on the surface. If anyone says it was turned down it's not the truth. It wasn't even commissioned in the first place—and that's a heck of a long way from being turned down. The clay model was not satisfactory. They went ahead without authority." Rathbun stated that he did not care for the "little figure" from its inception. "The Art Committee," he pointed out, "thought the nude figure generally distasteful. We did not like the idea of putting nudes on the Capitol approach." Schrader concluded the article by quoting Hauser's artistic credo: "One thing is certain to me, the artist does not live to ornament existence. . . . My drawings and sculpture are done for the purpose of providing me clarification as well as emotional expression of my world."

All the press attention, including pro-statue letters to the editor, coupled with Walsh's retirement to Florida at the end of 1957, created an atmosphere more receptive to the *Promise of Youth*. Cavin phoned Hauser to set up a meeting with the new VSBC leadership to explore what might be "ironed out." The arts subcommittee voted in March 1958 to install the *Promise of Youth* in the fountain, ostensibly so that the full commission could appraise it in place. Hauser believed this made acceptance a *fait accompli*. "Once it is in," he predicted, "I feel it will stay in and all this fuss about it will be over." He happily reported that at the subcommittee meeting Cavin had demonstrated the mechanism that opened the petals and "it worked beautifully and they were impressed." The sculptor anticipated that he would derive favorable publicity from the installation, perhaps leading to other projects.³⁰

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In mid-April Hauser loaded the bronze figure into his truck. At the fountain, a crane lifted it off and swung it into place. Hauser expressed relief and the hope that the statue would be left in place. When the VSBC convened in June, it elected Henry J. Lund chair and, following subcommittee reports, the entire commission traipsed over to see the *Promise of Youth* in operation. The somewhat unpredictable fountain apparatus performed well, and a reconvened VSBC approved the installation. Cavin's notebook entry recorded that the vindicated architect "returned [Commissioner] Law's wink!" An excited Hauser proudly wrote his mother, "It works and looks beautiful and I'm anxious for it to be going every day."³¹

That fall, Hauser heaped praise on university journalist Paul Schrader. His article of the previous year "did the trick," said Hauser. After Walsh retired, the sculptor continued, "the other members . . . came around and asked me if I would change the statue slightly and I said no. The *Ivory Tower* article really put pressure on that commission" to lift its censorship.³²

The *Promise of Youth's* "career" as a fixture in the Veterans Service Building's fountain has been as convoluted as the battle to install it. Plagued by vandalism and mechanical and plumbing problems, the installation seldom performed as designed; the entire statue was rarely visible between 1958 and 1962. In the early 1960s the Twin Cities press

frequently reminded readers about the "trouble-plagued sculpture" being "cooped up," except on special occasions. Photographs showed that "a hand is all of the statue visible . . . because petals are nearly closed." The papers cited beer can litter, danger of children drowning, water shortage, faulty machinery, vandalism, and lack of monitoring staff as reasons for nonoperation. When queried by the *Minneapolis Tribune*, Cavin expressed optimism that the fountain would ultimately function properly, and "the people will get used to it and learn to love it in time." Hauser noted that other US cities operated reflecting pools, and he had not heard of any drownings.³³

Whenever the *Promise of Youth* was on the verge of a rare public emergence, newspapers took note. In July 1962, *Pioneer Press* writer Gary Palm imagined that, following a cameo appearance, "the teenager will return to her rose petal prison, the fountain's water will be drained, and tourists will ask again, 'What's that thing?'" The following day, the paper's front-page story announced that the statue had come "out of hiding," providing "camera fans" with new subject matter and drawing a steady flow of onlookers. Fred Denfeld, Minnesota's director of public property, explained that he would like to see the day when continuous operation could be the norm. That would require, he said, budgetary increases to provide for a full-time security guard to protect the statue from defacement and keep children out of the surrounding pool.³⁴

The next year, in an article headlined “Fountain Near Capitol Spews Nothing but Trouble,” a *St. Paul Dispatch* reporter cataloged the installation’s difficulties, ranging from kids swimming in the pool to the cost of water. The fountain, he wrote, had only operated a half-dozen times in eight years, including one occasion when Sparky the seal from Como Park Zoo visited and another when Hauser wanted to show friends how it worked. Some legislators, the reporter claimed, “felt the young lady should have some clothes on even if they got wet.” Although a new device recirculated the fountain water and fewer swimmers could be anticipated since the nearby apartments had been razed, the reflecting pool remained waterless. VSBC secretary Fallon said he hoped the state would someday find a way to operate the fountain because “we think it’s an attraction.”³⁵

Periodically, Minnesota elected officials have attempted to restore the fountain to functionality. In 1965, just prior to the US governors’ con-

ference in St. Paul, Cavin received a call from Governor Karl F. Rolvaag’s office, requesting that the fountain be restored to the artist’s original conception. The request thrilled the architect, who contended, “Actually, all that is required is for someone to say: ‘TURN IT ON!’ . . . It is a most handsome fountain; all who have seen it in operation love it; there is none other similar to it; it is fully automatic; Minnesota citizens have paid for it and should be able to enjoy it—in short, why not?”³⁶

By the 1970s the issue of *Promise of Youth*’s nudity had become a light-hearted joke more than a refuge for prudes. If the controversial sculpture still bothered people in St. Paul, suggested popular columnist Barbara Flanagan, “the fountain would fit nicely on the Nicollet Mall” in Minneapolis.³⁷ Skeptical observers still felt that the nudity issue, rather than vandalism or problems with the fountain’s apparatus, underlay the degree of exposure accorded the figure. From time to time, newspapers criticized

the neglect of the public artwork, but the state’s commitment to maintenance and security remained an unresolved issue.

After Alonzo Hauser’s death in 1988, *Pioneer Press* columnist Joe Soucheray reflected on the transformation of a fickle public’s receptivity toward the *Promise of Youth*. In the 1950s, he wrote, many felt “Hauser’s figure too nude and perhaps too seductive especially in the presence of children.” By the standards of the 1980s, however, he found the statue “absolutely chaste. . . she looks tarnished and fashionably undernourished, which just proves how far ahead of his time Lonnie Hauser must have been. She has big doe-eyes, too, and sculpted hair flying behind her in points like antlers. She is a beautiful piece of work, but voluptuous, certainly not provocative.”³⁸

Finally, a 1998 project championed by DFL senator Steven Morse to clean and restore public art on the State Capitol Mall allotted \$262,000 for the statue and fountain. The Minnesota



A rare public emergence, 1962.

Historical Society collaborated with other government agencies to restore the installation. In the *Saint Paul Legal Ledger*, a public-notice newspaper, Christopher Sprung reminded readers that the nude had “caused more of a stir than a splash.” Now, “the nymph fountain can finally fulfill her watery potential.” Both the statue’s surface and the lily’s patina had deteriorated; in 1999 both components were removed for refurbishing. They were reinstalled in the summer of 2000. Lieutenant Governor Mae Schunk rededicated *Promise of Youth* on May 19, 2001.³⁹

As of winter 2016–17, the lotus blossom does not open and close but is fixed in a partially open position. The surrounding reflecting pool is dry, the fountain does not spray water, and, unlike other artwork on the capitol grounds, the *Promise of Youth* bears no plaque identifying either the sculpture or its creator.

This case study of the controversy over Alonzo Hauser’s *Promise of Youth* statue can inform ongoing debates over public subsidy of the arts and bears out historian Jo Blatti’s assessment that the Minnesota State Capitol and its grounds are contested space. Artists will continue to clash with bureaucrats and Philistines over who decides what creative works, if any, adorn our public spaces.⁴⁰ ■

Notes

The author would like to thank Tony and Michael Hauser for access to the letters, papers, and photographs in the Hauser Family Collection.

1. Jeffrey A. Hess and Paul Clifford Larson, *St. Paul’s Architecture: A History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 180–181; Larry Millett, “Veterans Service Building,” *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 359.

2. Brooks Cavin to Archer Lawrie, Jan. 17, 1948; Cavin to Henry [J.] Lund, May 26, 1952; Job File for Veterans Service Building in Brooks Cavin papers (N 118), Northwest Architectural Archives,



Promise of Youth, 2000.

University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis (hereafter Cavin papers); Alan K. Lathrop, *Minnesota Architects: A Biographical Directory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 34.

3. Alonzo Hauser (hereafter AH) to E. Wynona Hauser (Hauser’s mother, hereafter EWH), Sept. 2 and Sept. 7, 1947, Alonzo Hauser Correspondence, Hauser Family Collection in family’s possession (hereafter AHC).

4. Hauser biographical information, <http://www.alonzohauser.com/theartist/abouttheartist.html>, accessed Nov. 8, 2016.

5. AH to EWH, Mar. 2 and Mar. 31, 1952, AHC; AH biographical timeline, <http://www.alonzohauser.com/theartist/abouttheartist.html>, accessed Nov. 8, 2016.

6. Paul Schrader Jr., “State Orphans Miss ‘Promise of Youth,’” *Ivory Tower* (a *Minnesota Daily* magazine), Oct. 28, 1957, 5–6, 16; “Commission Sees Model—‘Approach’ Art Studied,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 10, 1952; AH to Wynona L. Hauser (Hauser’s sister, hereafter WLH), Jan. 17, 1953, AHC.

7. Press release and artist’s statement, Apr. 7, 1958, <http://www.alonzohauser.com/publicinstallations/promiseofyouthtext.html>, accessed Nov. 8, 2016.

8. AH to Gordon Murray, Apr. 23, 1953, AHC; AH to WLH and family, Apr. 25, 1953, AHC.

9. Jack K. Johnson, “Ellard A. Walsh (1887–1975)—‘Mr. National Guard,’” www.mn.militarymuseum.org/files/5413/3480/0663/Ellard_Walsh.pdf; AH to WLH and family, June 30, 1953, AHC; Interview: W. Brooks Cavin, Oct. 7, 1987, cited in Jo Blatti, “The Minnesota State Capitol Complex, the 1940s to the 1980s,” Nov. 1987, <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2009/other/091089.pdf>.

10. Blatti, “The Minnesota State Capitol Complex;” AH to WLH and family, June 30, 1953, AHC.

11. AH to WLH and Gordon [Murray], July 31, 1953, AHC.

12. AH to WLH Oct. 19, 1953, AHC; AH to EWH, WLH, and Gordon [Murray], Nov. 24, 1953, AHC; AH to EWH, Nov. 3 and Dec. 6, 1953, and Feb. 2, 1954, AHC.

13. Arnal, who designed the Women’s Club Building, Foshay Tower, and US Post Office in Minneapolis, was one of the judges who had selected Cavin’s plans for the Veterans Service Building. Veterans Service Building Commission (hereafter VSBC) meeting minutes, Mar. 4, 1954, including minutes from the arts subcommittee meeting, Aug. 6, 1952, Cavin papers.

14. AH to WLH and family, June 30, 1953; AH to WLH and Gordon [Murray], July 31, 1953, AHC.

15. Cavin to R. B. Rathbun, Aug. 10, 1953, Cavin papers; Cavin sent identical letters to directors Harvey H. Arnason (Walker Art Center), Wilhelmus B. Bryan (Minneapolis School of Art), and Malcolm Lein (St. Paul Gallery).

16. Cavin to Ruth Lawrence, July 9, 1953; Harvey H. Arnason to Cavin, Aug. 13, 1953; Cavin to Wilhelmus B. Bryan, Jan. 15, 1954; Gertude Lawrence to Cavin, Sept. 3, 1953, Cavin papers.

17. Architect’s report to the commission, Mar. 4, 1954, Cavin papers.

18. “Art: Venus Observed,” *Time Magazine*, July 6, 1953. The statue was meant to symbolize pioneer womanhood. Critics suggested that settlers preferred their women “slimmer” and garbed in “gingham dress and a sunbonnet . . . not this trash.”

19. Ellard [Walsh] to Bill [William H. Fallon], July 18, 1953, Cavin papers.

20. Meeting minutes, Mar. 4, 1954, Cavin papers.

21. Box 21, June 29, 1953, July 29, 1953, Mar. 4, 1954, Record Book; meeting minutes, Mar. 4, 1954, Cavin papers.

22. Meeting minutes, Mar. 4, 1954, Cavin papers.

23. Cavin to Paul F. Cummings, Mar. 11, 1954, carbon copy sent to Hauser, Cavin papers; AH to EWH, Mar. 6, 1954, AHC.

24. Cavin to Russell A. Plimpton, Aug. 19, 1955, Cavin papers. Three decades later, Cavin related an amusing story about a state treasurer's office agent upbraiding him for "co-mingling" private and state funds when he attempted to be reimbursed for advancing the money for this casting. See Cavin interview in Blatti, "Minnesota State Capitol Complex," Nov. 1987, <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2009/other/091089.pdf>.

25. AH to WLH, Sept. 20, 1957, and AH to EWH, Sept. 20, 1957, AHC.

26. John McDonald, "Veterans Building May Get Nude Statue Yet," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 20, 1957.

27. Tom Bodin, "A Rose by Any Other Name, Capitol Nude 'Bounced,'" *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Sept. 20, 1957.

28. AH to EWH, Oct. 1, 1957, and AH to WLH, Nov. 6, 1957, AHC.

29. This and the next two paragraphs: Schrader, "State Orphans Miss 'Promise of Youth,'" 5-6, 16.

30. AH to EWH, Dec. 9, 1957, AHC; AH to EWH, Mar. 17, 1958, AHC; AH to EWH, Mar. 17, 1958, AHC.

31. AH to EWH, Apr. 14, July 16, and July 17, 1958, AHC; Box 21, June 16, 1958, Record Book, Cavin papers.

32. Terry Olson, "An Intimate Little Fountain," *Ivory Tower*, Nov. 3, 1958.

33. Mercer Cross, "Promise of Youth . . . Is Cooped Up," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1961.

34. Gary Palm, "Statue of Girl to Appear Today," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 29, 1962; "Capitol Approach Statue Comes Out of Hiding," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 30, 1962.

35. Richard A. Williams, "Fountain Near Capitol Spews Nothing but Trouble," *St. Paul Dispatch*, Sept. 11, 1963.

36. Cavin to Sally Luther, July 14, and July 22, 1965, Cavin papers.

37. Barbara Flanagan, *Minneapolis Star*, Dec. 5, 1972.

38. Joe Soucheray, "Racy in 1955, Nude Almost Chaste Today," *St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch*, n.d. ca. Nov./Dec. 1988; "Alonzo Hauser, 1909-1988," [scrapbook], compiled by Carol Brown Hauser, AHC.

39. Jon Fure, "Youth Restored," *Session Weekly* (Minnesota House of Representatives), Apr. 28, 2000, 11; Christopher Sprung, "After 40 Years, 'Millie' is Water Sprite Again," *Saint Paul Legal Ledger*, July 6, 2000, including photographs of a state technician adjusting the water jets of the refurbished fountain; Press Release, *Promise of Youth*, ca. summer 2000, <http://www.alonzohauser.com/publicinstallations/promiseofyouthtext.html>; Mary Abbe, "Metal Petals," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 11, 2001.

40. Blatti, "The Minnesota State Capitol Complex," Nov. 1987, <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2009/other/091089.pdf>, p.107.

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Veterans Service Building and Promise of Youth, November 2016.





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