

American Venus: The Extraordinary Life of Audrey Munson, Model and Muse

Diane Rozas, Anita Bourne

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Audrey Munson was once called the "The most perfect, most versatile, most famous of American models, whose face and figure have inspired thousands of modern masterpieces of sculpture and painting." It was not an exaggeration. Audrey's career is the classic tale of meteoric rise and tragic downfall—from "Queen of the Artists' Studios" to fragile psychiatric patient.

Her best known clients included Daniel Chester French and Karl Bitter for whom she provided inspiration beyond her physical grace. The consummate professional, she modeled for dozens of civic monuments and was called "America's Venus." At one time, thirty pieces of art based on her poses were housed at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. In addition to many public edifices throughout the U.S., she has adorned the estates of John D. Rockefeller and George Vanderbilt, J. P. Morgan's yacht, and U.S. Mint coins. At the peak of her career she was selected as the primary model for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.) in San Francisco, eventually appearing in 24,000 feet of mural decorations, scores of groups of statuary, and the Exposition's exquisite symbolic figurine which graced the cover of Sunset magazine. Audrey Munson's life as a fine art model was the subject of four controversial silent films in which she starred—mostly nude. After a media spectacle linking her with a murder case her career faltered and ultimately doomed her to a life of reclusion in a psychiatric facility at the age of 39. She lived there largely unacknowledged by her family until the astonishing age of 105. This then is her story.



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