

The Medallic Art of James Earle Fraser by *Carl Honoré*

Carl was a member of the Seattle Coin Club during the 1990s. This article was written around the year 2000 and has been slightly edited. We regret that a better photo is not available, however, you should be able to look up photos online of the two works of medallic art described.



Though **James Earle Fraser** is better known for his work on the Buffalo or Bison nickel, there are two other works of medallic art he created. For the United States Navy and Marine Corps, he created the design for the Navy Cross, and for the victory in World War I, he created the World War I victory medal.

The Navy Cross is the second highest decoration awarded to the Medal of Honor for the Navy and Marine Corps. The design is quite a simple one. The central figure is a ship, a caravel superimposed on a large cross. The reverse is a shield of crossed anchors and the USN interposed.

Though enacted by congress in 1919, the style of the cross is something mid-17th Century with the caravel set in the center. The actual medal is made in three pieces. The cross is in the middle with the two shields soldered to either side. It is anodized with a bronze finish.

James Earle Fraser was a student of Augustus St. Gaudens and therefore a student of representative symbolism. Among those schooled in this discipline were Harmon MacNeil, and Adolph Weinman. All were designers of U.S. Coins, and all had created prominent sculptures. All these men used this discipline in their coin designs, though Fraser in an interesting irony, stuck more to actual models in his buffalo nickel design.

Fraser instead used this discipline when he designed the World War I victory medal. Here, his debt to Augustus St. Gaudens is clear. The obverse figure of victory is seen as almost a biblical figure of an angel with sword drawn and shield with rays. In some ways it is in stark contrast to St. Gauden's ideal of victory on his double eagle with the angel holding the olive branch of peace instead of a sword. The reverse features double-sided fasces on top of a shield with a list of the countries who participated in this war, the first between nations in the modern era.