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THE NEWSPAPER OF EASTERN IOWA



Gazette photo by Dave Gosch

"Looking for the Pieces," an exhibit of art that captures the essence of the Egyptian goddess Isis, is the brainchild of Adam Brown, director of the Isis Conceptual Laboratory.

# Isis myth travels from Egypt to West Branch



Photo by Linda Schreiber

**A statue of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of healing, and the earth and moon, sits on the grounds of the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum in West Branch.**

By Linda Schreiber

COMMUNITY NEWS Editor

**W**EST BRANCH - Why is a statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis in West Branch? Adam Brown, curator of the Isis Conceptual Laboratory, Inc., is exploring that mystery as well as Isis mythology.

The statue of a seated, veiled Isis, and its mysterious inscription, "I am that which was and is and will always be and no mortal has yet lifted the veil which covers me," has Brown intrigued.

Brown's new studio gallery is named for the statue located on the grounds of the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum. The Isis myth will be the central theme of several installations that Brown has planned for West Branch's newest art space.

Jane Champion, video producer and director of Champion Productions and Isis board member, says the statue of Isis in the park is somewhat of a mystery to all who walk by and experience it. "Art is somewhat of a mystery. A lot of people don't allow themselves to experience art work in a gallery because they think they won't understand it.

"It's not a matter of understanding art, it's a matter of experiencing it. It's important that people don't shy away from art," she adds.

The statue of the Egyptian god-

dess Isis arrived in West Branch in 1939. Artist August Puttemans was commissioned to create the work as a gift from the Belgium people to President Herbert Hoover in recognition of his efforts to feed the Belgium school children and soldiers during World War I.

According to Dwight Miller, senior archivist at the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum, the statue was supposed to be shipped directly to West Branch in 1922, but there was no place to exhibit it until the birthplace cottage was restored.

Instead the statue was displayed at the Stanford University

Museum of Art until 1939 when the restoration was complete and the statue was installed on the grounds.

Miller says the classical description of Isis gathering the parts of her slain husband is most remembered in mythology. He says, "The Belgium people have a more gentle connotation of Isis."

According to legend, Orisis and his twin sister Isis, Seth and his twin sister Nephthys were all the descendants of the sky goddess Nut and her spouse, the earth-god Geb.

Osiris and his sister-wife Isis helped the world flourish. Together they brought agriculture and civilization to the Nile valley and cannibalism ceased to exist.

Osiris is credited with monumental architecture, writing and astronomy. Isis is given credit for having discovered wheat, barley and the widespread use of grains. She gave her people weaving, preparation of foods, music, dancing and the arts.

"There you see the qualities that led the Belgians to use Isis as the symbol of Hoover's feedings," says Miller.

The common myth follows Isis' jour-

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*"Art is somewhat of a mystery."*

**Jane Champion  
Champion Productions**

ney after Seth kills his brother Osiris, not once, but twice. The first time Osiris is entombed in a chest which is thrown into the Nile. Isis restores his life and conceives a child. Seth tears Osiris' body into 14 parts (one for each part of the waning moon) and throws them to the four winds. Isis renews her search for her slain husband.

As the goddess of birth and productivity, Isis' symbol was the cow. She is often portrayed as a young woman, seated with her son Horus on her lap with cow horns on her head and the sphere of the moon between the horns. She holds a metal rattle in her right hand. Isis is also associated with the horn of plenty, ears of corn, the moon, a lotus flower, serpent and horns.