

## OBJECT of the **month**

***February 2021***

### **BEGIN TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to the Dayton Art Institute Object of the Month presentation for February 2021. My name is Rick Hoffman and I'm a Museum Guide. I'd like to share with you one of my favorite statues in the museum's collection, *Chief Massasoit*, by Cyrus Edwin Dallin, an American sculptor who lived from 1861 to 1944. He was famous for his depictions of Native Americans and patriotic figures like Paul Revere.

This statue is eleven and a half feet tall, the tallest figurative sculpture in the museum. Why do you think that the artist created this piece so large? Chief Massasoit played a very important role in the survival of the pilgrims and the shared celebration of 1621, which led to the modern-day holiday of Thanksgiving. He helped maintain peace between the pilgrims and the Wampanoag Confederacy for over forty years until he died. So, we can surmise that Dallin rendered him this way to indicate the importance that the Chief played in American history. His statue is in fact very much larger than life size.

Chief Massasoit was a grand sachem or leader of the Wampanoag Confederacy and he lived from 1581 to 1661. Ousamequin, or Yellow Feather in the native tongue of the Pokanoket tribe of modern-day Rhode Island and Massachusetts—his village was located where the town of Warren, Rhode Island is now.

Let's stand back and take a long look at this statue. He wears a simple deerskin, fringed loincloth, three beaded necklaces, and has a fringed leather pouch that hangs on his left side. Notice with what great detail that the artist has taken to show the athletic physique of the Chief. He has a "washboard" abdomen, sinewy arms and legs and is standing in a relaxed position of a person in authority. Now look at his face and facial expression. How would you describe it? Dallin has depicted Chief Massasoit as American royalty.



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Atop his head is a single eagle feather and his hair has braids on both sides. The eagle feather signifies he is being acknowledged with gratitude, love, and ultimate respect. It is awarded to chiefs for extreme acts of valor and bravery. The fact that his hair is braided shows strength since together they are stronger than a single piece of hair. Look more closely at his necklaces. The Wampanoag people lived on the land by the Atlantic Ocean so these could very well be wampum beads.

Now let's investigate the fringed leather pouch. If you look at the shape of it, it could certainly be a knife sheath. The rounded object at the left front end may be the knife's handle. Focus on what he's holding in his left hand. It is a peace pipe that has the figures of a cub climbing on a log on the bowl and a mother bear carved on the shaft. The bear is a symbol of motherhood which explains why there is a mother and her cub. An interesting fact is that some tribes prohibited hunting when the cubs were present with their mothers. In many Native American cultures, the bear also represents a medicinal being with impressive magical powers. It's a symbol of strength and wisdom often associated with healing and medicine.

Several copies of Dallin's majestic statue of Chief Massasoit were made. One is on the Utah State Capitol grounds—another, in Kansas City. Our bronze version was created in 1977. You can find it displayed in the Great Hall of the Dayton Art Institute on your next visit to the museum.

## END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) for full multimedia presentation.

## ARTWORKS FEATURED IN VIDEO\*

Cyrus Edwin Dallin (American, 1861–1944), *Chief Massasoit*, 1977, bronze. Dayton Art Institute, OH. Gift of the James F. Dicke Family, 1997.8

Cyrus Edwin Dallin (American, 1861–1944), *Chief Massasoit*, date unknown, metal. Brigham Young University, UT.

Detroit Publishing Co., Publisher, *Statue to Massasoit, Plymouth, Mass.*, 1921–1930, photograph. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 2016818146

*Massasoit and His Warriors*, 1857, wood engraving. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 2005688547

## IMAGE CREDITS\*

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## QUESTIONS?

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