

From Chloroforming Snakes to Sculpting Marble: The Arts of Harriett Hosmer



A physician's daughter, Harriett Hosmer (1830 to 1908, *left*) studied human anatomy at Missouri Medical College before returning to her native Massachusetts. From 1853 to 1860, she apprenticed in Rome, Italy, with master sculptor John Gibson of Wales. As Gibson's "dear little Hatty," Hosmer had sworn off marriage (and rearing children) in deference to mastering her art. As her "second daughter," Hosmer sculpted a bust (*right*) of *Medusa* to complete her first original commission in Rome (1853 to 1854). While preparing to carve the snaking curls of Medusa, Hosmer chloroformed and then plaster-cast snakes before releasing them back to the wild. Popular in Rome with both American and British expatriate artists, Hosmer battled overtly against gender bias and covertly against gender-preference bias to gain public recognition as America's most "Distinguished Sculptress" of the nineteenth century. Around 1900, Hosmer sailed from England back to New England, eventually dying eight years later in the town of her birth, Watertown, Massachusetts. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology.)

George S. Bause, M.D., M.P.H., Honorary Curator, ASA's Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, Illinois, and Clinical Associate Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. UJYC@aol.com.