

Lang Mausoleum: a Formal Analysis

Lang Mausoleum—Lot number 89—is an Art Nouveau styled mausoleum designed by Frank Bostwick of the Memorial Studios Inc. from 1929-30 which is located just south of Walnut Street in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. Abraham Lang, his wife Clara, son Carl, daughter-in-law Annette, and grandson Chrystal are buried in the mausoleum. This structure, measuring 17.5' by 12.5' sits on the Columbine section of the cemetery. The exterior of the mausoleum is comprised of 15 inch thick slabs of granite. This thickness is exposed through the joints on the sides of the mausoleum. Although the majority of the structure is plain in appearance—mainly consisting of stark unadorned granite—a combination of the few ornaments used and the battered walls make this mausoleum visually interesting. The main focal point of the design is the door panels, which utilize stylized entangled curved lines, giving the mausoleum a sense of movement. The mausoleum itself is set back on the south side of Walnut Street. Whereas the mausoleums next to and across from the Lang Mausoleum have a presence on the street, the Lang Mausoleum is further away and obscured by trees. It is barely noticeable from the street.

The Lang Mausoleum is a perplexing example of the Art Nouveau style. In her book Art Nouveau, Lara-Vinca Masini states that by 1900 the best Art Nouveau architectural specimens had been created. The style was then commercialized and exploited, which resulted in architects turning their backs on this style.¹ The Lang Mausoleum was designed from 1929-1930, decades after Art Nouveau was popular. Central to the Art Nouveau style is the use of vegetal motifs

which are stylized to express emotion, with a strong focus on line rhythm and movement.

Furthermore, this vegetal ornamentation was not simply decoration, but rather an expression of the whole.ⁱⁱ In the Lang Mausoleum, this is the most evident in the door panels—the structure's central components—which evoke a stylized series of stem-like shapes undulating towards the top of the door. The vegetal motif is further exemplified by the rosettes present at the bottom of the doors. Viollet-le-Duc—the famous restorer of Medieval cathedrals and monuments—was responsible for bridging the 19th century Gothic revival movement with the Art Nouveau movement. Gothic features became commonplace in Art Nouveau design.ⁱⁱⁱ The arched doorway and windows, as well as the four curved “buttresses” jutting out of the bottom of the masonry structure, are components of the Lang Mausoleum that definitely appear to be a new interpretation of Gothic style. Perhaps the location of the Lang Mausoleum in relation to the street also exemplifies this Art Nouveau style. Most of the mausoleums around Lang—including ones built in the same year—are built along the axis of Walnut Street in a Beaux Art style. The Lang Mausoleum is further back and its relation to the street is negligible. The focus on axes would be more appropriate for the Beaux Arts style than the Art Nouveau style, which almost justifies the mausoleum's placement.

The interior of the mausoleum is different from the exterior, and not representative of Art Nouveau style. It is made of pink marble with a very traditional looking stained glass window depicting Moses. Although stained glass was common in Art Nouveau design, the stained glass would be more stylized. Glass by Tiffany was very popular in America during the Art Nouveau period. However, the stained glass of Lang Mausoleum is not stylized. Similarly the interior marble material offers no continuity with the exterior granite. This differs from one of Masini's major characteristics of Art Nouveau, in which there is a unity then stems from Art Nouveau

design emanating from the interior and projecting out.^{iv} However, in the context of a mausoleum—whose interiors should not be the focus of passersby—this might make more sense.

Abraham Lang and his wife Clara were both Americans born to parents who emigrated from Germany. Abraham was born on November 6, 1862 in Philadelphia and died on August 26, 1929. He worked as a men's furnishings merchant. Clara commissioned the mausoleum soon after Abraham's death, and the final plans for the mausoleum were completed by February 21st, 1930.^v Clara was born on September 17, 1865 in Aurora, Indiana and died on October 14, 1949. Abraham was the son of Elias—a teacher—and Henrietta Lang, who came from Bavaria.^{vi} By the time the 1910 Census was taken, Abraham and Clara were listed as spouses living in Queens, New York along with their son Carl who was 21 at the time. Carl's place of origin is listed as Illinois and not New York.^{vii} Clara and Abraham married on March 11, 1885 in Dearborn County, Indiana, which also shows that at some point the Langs were in the Midwest.^{viii} However, most of the records—including Abraham's workplaces—are from New York.

The Langs frequent voyages to Europe may help explain the style of the mausoleum. Abraham applied for a passport on his own in 1901, perhaps for work.^{ix} He reapplied for a passport in 1908, this time stating that he would bring his wife Clara and son Carl with him abroad.^x Carl applied for a passport to take his family on a tour of France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, England, and Holland in 1923.^{xi} On September 10, 1925, Clara and Abraham sailed back from Boulougne Sur Mer, France to New York.^{xii} Similarly, he and Clara took another boat back from Europe—this time from Antwerp, Belgium—on September 11, 1927.^{xiii} Abraham and his family definitely traveled back and forth from Europe many times in his life. Perhaps memories of seeing European Art Nouveau sights together inspired Clara to commission this mausoleum despite it being out of fashion in 1930.

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- ⁱ Lara-Vinca Masini, *Art Nouveau*, Thames and Hudson London 1984, 52.
- ⁱⁱ Klaus-Jürgen Sembach, *Art Nouveau: Utopia: Reconciling the Irreconcilable*, Taschen, NY 1999, 22
- ⁱⁱⁱ Masini, 33
- ^{iv} Masini, 49
- ^v Frank Bostwick, "Enclosed find set of blueprints of the final plans for the LANG Mausoleum," From Lang Miscellaneous File, Woodlawn Archives at Avery Library. Accessed 10/4/2010
- ^{vi} Year: 1880; Census Place: Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Roll 1172; Family History Film: 1255172; Page: 411C; Enumeration District: 187; Image: 0623
- ^{vii} Year: 1910; Census Place: Queens Ward 5, Queens, New York; Roll T624_1068; Page: 4B; Enumeration District: 1248; Image: 1000
- ^{viii} *Dearborn County Indiana, Marriages 1869 - 1899, bks. 12-15 Part I Grooms Part II Brides Compiled b;* Book: 15; Page: 51
- ^{ix} Passport Issue 20 Jun 1901, Abraham Lang, Ancestry.com, *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007
- ^x Passport Issued 1 Jun 1908, Abraham Lang, Ancestry.com, *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007
- ^{xi} Passport Issued 8 Mar 1923, Carl Lang, Ancestry.com, *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007
- ^{xii} Year: 1925; Microfilm serial: T715; Microfilm roll: T715_3716; Line: 11; Page Number: 18
- ^{xiii} Year: 1927; Microfilm serial: T715; Microfilm roll: T715_4126; Line: 12; Page Number: 128

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