

## George Montgomery's Suspension Table

By John Tuttle

### Contents:

- Title of artwork selected: suspension table
- Artist's name, nationality, year of birth/death: George Montgomery; American of Russian descent; born 1916; died 2000
- Status of artwork at museum: gift from the estate
- Medium: black oak and iron
- Date and place work was completed 1960; San Fernando Valley
- Movement or time period of work; post-war contemporary

This suspension table was designed and built by George Montgomery, a famous cowboy actor and renaissance man who lived in southern California, shuttling between Hollywood and Palm Springs. He was born in 1916 of Russian parents and raised on a ranch in Montana along with 15 siblings. While living on a ranch Montgomery learned the riding and roping skills and an appreciation for the western lifestyle that would shape his professional and artistic careers.

Montgomery had no formal art training but had natural artistic talent and was highly influenced by western artists such as Frederick Remington and Charles Russell. After two years of an architecture program at the University of Montana, Montgomery became impatient with school and moved to Hollywood to pursue his dream of becoming an actor. Montgomery starred in dozens of Hollywood westerns in a career that stretched from 1935 to 1985.

As Montgomery matured in life and gained confidence in his artistic talents he harnessed his creative drive and experimented with drawing, designing and building homes, photography, furniture-making and bronze sculpting. While he was a modern man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was aware of modern technology, it was his experience on a ranch and the making of western movies that formed the artistic aesthetic that had the most influence on his artistic production.

After World War II, Montgomery designed and built all kinds of custom furniture, starting with pieces he made for his own home. He experimented with chairs and cabinets, and by 1948 had his own cabinet making studio in the San Fernando Valley, employing about 20 craftsmen. Montgomery made this black oak suspension with a centered "Lazy Susan" dining table in 1960. It is beautifully hand-carved with rich details, and includes four iron poles with shaped arms and wrought iron floral decorations ending in floral candle cups. The suspension design makes it possible for 12 people to dine without the interference of legs and is easily cleaned. Montgomery donated this table and many other pieces of furniture to the Palm Springs Desert Museum. The table is typical of Montgomery's rustic but refined style. It harkens back to the

Old West yet is contemporary and functional. The table and Montgomery's other hand-made furniture demonstrate him as a man of his time, looking both backward and forward for inspiration.

Montgomery's evolution as an artist culminated in becoming an accomplished bronze sculptor. He died in 2000. I picked this work because I too am an admirer of western art and am fascinated by the post-war nostalgia for the old west at a time when other artists were experimenting with space-age design and materials.

Sources: George Montgomery, by Cathy Pitts (Desert Museum docent program, 1981); notes from a talk given by Katherine Hough, Curator, Palm Springs Art Museum; PSAM accession notes; "The Years of George Montgomery" (1981) (from the Toor Library)

