

United States \$20.00 SAINT-GAUDENS DOUBLE EAGLE 1907-1933



Diameter: 1-1/3" (34mm)

Weight: 516 grains (33.47 grams)

Composition: 90% gold - 10% copper

Designer: Augustus Saint-Gaudens

Engraver: Charles E. Barber

Mint Marks: Philadelphia (none) Denver (D)

San Francisco (S) - found above date on obverse

Obverse: Full length portrayal of Liberty striding forward extending the "Torch of Liberty" in her right hand and an olive branch in the left. Rays (behind), LIBERTY (above) with stars around plain border. The U.S. Capitol Building in lower left field with the date in lower right field.

Reverse: Eagle in flight among sun rays from lower edge. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and denomination TWENTY DOLLARS (above in two lines) around plain border. Motto IN GOD WE TRUST (beginning part way through 1908) at base of rays, above top edge of sun

Edge: Stars and letters E PLURIBUS UNUM

As the U.S. the 20th century, Augustus Saint-Gaudens was widely recognized as the nation's preeminent sculptor. However, after having his magnificent design for the official medal for the 1892 World's Columbian Exposition attacked as "obscene" (the reverse of which depicted a nude of a Grecian youth holding a torch and wreaths for the victors) St. Gaudens vowed that he would go to the grave before having anything further to do with the Mint Bureau. Fortunately, in 1905 his close personal friend, President Theodore Roosevelt, made Saint-Gaudens the "offer he couldn't refuse" to make his official inaugural medal.

Roosevelt was so pleased with the design, he discussed his "pet crime" with St. Gaudens. This was his desire to improve our "atrociously hideous" coinage, elevating it to the beauty and dignity of that of Ancient Greece. The result of this collaboration is widely acclaimed as *the crowning achievement of all U.S. coinage*, the Ultra High Relief Saint-Gaudens \$20 Gold Double Eagle.

It took relentless persistence and presidential orders to force the resentful Mint Engraver Charles E. Barber to complete the process required to produce some 24 proof specimens of this spectacular coin. They were almost twice as thick as previous double eagles at the edge - each requiring nine impressions at 172 tons apiece in a hydraulic press.

After St. Gaudens' death in August 1907, his pupil Henry Hering slightly modified the design to create the Regular High Relief Roman Numeral variety. Barber jealously blocked progress every step of the way until President Roosevelt ordered "Begin the new issue even if it takes you all day to strike one piece!"

After production of only 11,250 pieces, the requirements of high-speed mass production gave Barber the excuse he needed to make his own Low Relief version. Fortunately, even in lower relief, this magnificent coin's stunning beauty remains. In 1908 one final modification was made when the motto IN GOD WE TRUST was added. Roosevelt felt it was sacrilegious to put "GOD" on coinage but public sentiment prevailed.

The Saint-Gaudens \$20 was minted every year from 1907-1916 and 1920-1933. Beginning in 1929 almost all newly minted \$20 coins were held in reserve. Nearly all of these were melted after the gold recall was signed into law in 1933 by yet another President Roosevelt (Franklin, cousin of Theodore) creating many classic rarities.

This timeless work of art received the ultimate compliment in 1986 (more than 50 years after the last "Saint" rolled off the presses) when the U.S. Treasury selected the St. Gaudens design to grace the obverse of the new "American Eagle" gold bullion coins.

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