



AT WORK

1937
11 1/2" H
Poplar

Inscriptions:
front "At Work"
back "10-23-'37 / To Mr. Quinn
From L. G. Bolling / 5-21-38"

Lent by the Poehler family in
memory of Raymond Poehler

At Work may be a self-portrait of the artist. The sculpture shows a man closing up a wooden crate that is balanced on a handcart. The man wears a cap and a work apron over a shirt open at the neck and with the sleeves rolled up. About 1937 the Harmon Foundation filmed Bolling at work at Everett Waddey Co., located on South Eleventh Street, packing and closing a crate very much like the one in the sculpture.¹ As with his figures of working people, Bolling conveys the sense of motion as the right arm swings up and the left hand moves forward to position the next nail. The figure's left knee steadies the crate, and a handled box, perhaps used to hold nails, sits on top of the crate. Bolling's interest in detail is evident in the laces of the shoe and the back pockets of the man's trousers. Further, Bolling scribed lines in the block of the crate to indicate the wood planks and bored tiny holes to suggest the nails used in the construction of the crate. The result is a carefully crafted homage to a workman engaged in physically demanding, intellectually unimaginative work.

The "Mr. Quinn" to whom Bolling inscribed *At Work* was Martin L. Quinn, a shipping clerk at Everett Waddey Co. Quinn evidently lent the sculpture to a Richmond Academy of Arts exhibition, probably in 1938. When Quinn died, his aunt, Elizabeth Poehler, received the sculpture. *At Work* descended through the Poehler family to the present owner.²

1. In 1882 Everett Waddey established the company that bore his name. By 1930, the company had built an eight-story concrete building between the southern ends of Eleventh and Twelfth Streets in downtown Richmond. The building incorporated the printing and lithography divisions of the company, as well as its bindery and shipping departments. Among its amenities were a roof garden and a top floor with a cafeteria and recreation room for employees. See Robert Gordon, "A Leader in the Graphic Arts," *Richmond Magazine* 17, no. 3 (September 1930): 31-32.

2. Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, and Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. The remains of a Richmond Academy of Arts label and another label listing Quinn as the owner are attached to the bottom of the base.

