



THE COLLECTIONS OF  
THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART

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AMERICAN  
PAINTINGS  
TO 1945

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MARGARET C. CONRADS, EDITOR

VOLUME 1

THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART  
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

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Dedicated with gratitude and appreciation to  
Mr. and Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper



# Foreword

Advancing knowledge of the Museum's collections is a prerequisite for furthering understanding and pleasure among our visitors. *The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: American Paintings to 1945* is the fourth in a series devoted to the Museum's collections. It dramatically eclipses in scope, ambition, technical complexity, and resources its three exemplary predecessors: Burton Dunbar's jewel, *German and Netherlandish Paintings, 1450–1600*, George McKenna's comprehensive *Prints, 1460–1995*, and Eliot Rowland's masterful *Italian Paintings, 1300–1800*, which set the standard at this institution for such publications.

The American paintings catalogue project consumed more than twenty years of work of varying intensity from many Nelson-Atkins curators, conservators, librarians, photographers, preparators, and registrars as well as scores of helpful colleagues elsewhere. Henry Adams, former Samuel Sosland Curator of American Art, initiated the project in 1985 in response to a mandate from me. Margaret C. Conrads, who arrived in Kansas City in 1990 as assistant curator specifically to work on the catalogue, took up the reins of the department in 1994 and enthusiastically kept the catalogue moving forward in addition to her other duties as head of a major curatorial department. Her unflagging dedication sustained the project. The success of these volumes rests on her skillful leadership and exacting scholarship, evident here both as a primary author and as general editor.

Continuity is critical to a project of such massive scale and long duration. We are indeed fortunate to have enjoyed the steadfast dedication of the authors and researchers who have contributed to this marathon effort. Lauren Lessing, Research Associate, has earned our gratitude and admiration not only for innumerable insights gleaned as a result of her superb research abilities but also for her many well-crafted entries and the scholarly apparatus heroically gathered with the help of Stephanie Fox Knapp and Helen Meyer. Randall R. Griffey, Associate Curator of American Art, completed the trio of primary authors, penning a number of finely researched entries with graceful style. We are also grateful to the contributing authors, listed elsewhere in this volume, who shared their expertise.

Examining the physical lives of paintings can significantly illuminate our understanding of an artist's intentions. Mary Schafer, Assistant Paintings Conservator, under the guidance of Paintings Conservator Scott Heffley, carefully examined each work and contributed significantly to the technical notes found in volume two. Ms. Schafer's detailed analyses and keen observations offered many vital keys to unlocking an artist's aims or processes that may have otherwise gone unrecognized.

One sort of continuity is essential at every moment of a project like this: ongoing, reliable funding. Shouldering by far most of the burden of long-term costs associated with research and preparation

of the manuscript is the Museum's own endowment fund dedicated to important scholarly publication: The Mellon-Frick-Rothschild Publications Fund, initiated in 1986 by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, whose matching provisions were met by two faithful Museum patrons, Grace Frick and Emily Rothschild, both of Kansas City. None of the Nelson-Atkins's important publications of the last two decades would have appeared without the exclusive funding of this permanent endowment.

Throughout, this project has enjoyed the special care of R. Crosby Kemper, who assisted the Museum in securing two very generous grants from the R. C. Kemper Charitable Trust, one for research and a second of equal amount for production. An ever-green supporter of worthy projects in American art, The Henry Luce Foundation joined the Getty Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, the H. O. Peet Foundation, and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in providing very substantial financial support. I value the confidence in our work that each of these grants signals, and I am beholden to each of them.

Habit of thought might have it that an art museum located in the middle of America would concentrate its resources for art acquisition on American art. Not so at the Nelson-Atkins. Our first generation of Trustees, who charted directions for a long time to come, did not invest in American art as they did in European art. Although a group of notable, important paintings was purchased by the Trustees in time for display at the Museum's opening in 1933, no concerted effort followed this promising beginning. Not until the mid-1970s did building the American paintings collection regain strategic prominence in the Museum's view of itself. The impetus for this renaissance came from R. Crosby Kemper, who found an eager partner in the Museum's Senior Curator, Ross E. Taggart, at the time responsible for American painting, who at his retirement passed the mantle of the relationship to Henry Adams. Many of the paintings we now cherish most reside in Kansas City thanks to Mr. Kemper's direction and support.

The face of American painting in Kansas City would be very, very different had Mr. Kemper, with his wife, Bebe (an Associate Trustee from 1983 to 1989), not exercised his own passion for American painting and acted with the conviction that the people of this region should be able to enjoy the best of the art of their own land. It is, therefore, with pleasure and gratitude that we dedicate this catalogue to Crosby and Bebe Kemper.

Marc F. Wilson

*Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell Director/CEO*





# Acknowledgments

The research for this catalogue began just over twenty years ago. Throughout the project's long duration, it has had the continuing encouragement of Mare F. Wilson, the Museum's director. His understanding of the importance of collection research has enabled the publication to reach completion. I would also like to thank Henry Adams, former Samuel Sosland Curator of American Art, under whose direction the project was launched.

A grant from the Henry Luce Foundation provided initial support. The Luce Foundation's key role in furthering the research and publication of American art collections cannot be overestimated, and we, like so many other institutions, are beholden to it and its program officer Ellen Holtzman. We are most grateful to the R. C. Kemper Charitable Trust for its generous and longtime commitment to the project. We also thank the Getty Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, H. O. Peet Foundation, and Samuel H. Kress Foundation for their significant contributions to the publication. I am additionally obliged to the Museum's Mellon-Frick-Rothschild Publications Fund for its sustained support.

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My deepest thanks are reserved for R. Crosby Kemper, without whom neither the collection nor this publication would be of such high quality. In his role as collector, donor of works of art, and financial supporter of this book and many projects originating from the Museum's American art department, he, along with his wife, Bebe, has ensured the success of American painting at the Nelson-Atkins. It is to them both that we gratefully dedicate this catalogue.

Margaret C. Conrads  
*Samuel Sosland Curator of American Art*



# Collecting American Paintings for Kansas City

MARGARET C. CONRADS

On the evening of 10 December 1933, the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts held a gala reception to celebrate its opening. The seeds for the institution had been sown more than three decades before in the Western Gallery of Art, which was first displayed in the Kansas City Public Library in 1897. A collection of photographs and copies of canonical European paintings and casts of sculpture, it was formed by William Rockhill Nelson (1841–1915), an important civic leader, founder of the *Kansas City Star*, and a great admirer of European art. In his adopted hometown, the Indiana native dedicated his prodigious energies to political reform and city improvements. An art museum was one of Nelson's high priorities because he desired that the region's citizenry "know art at its best," and he believed that such an institution would help secure young Kansas City's place as a preeminent American city.<sup>1</sup> Although a museum was not begun during his lifetime, Nelson ensured through his will that the city would have an art collection. Coincidentally, the estate of Mary McAfee Atkins, a Kentucky native who lived in Kansas City from 1878 until her death in 1911, also provided money for a fine arts museum. Fortunately, the trustees of both estates were able to craft an institutional structure that honored Nelson's and Atkins's wishes into the entity that today is the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

Unlike many museums, the Nelson-Atkins did not begin with a founding collection. Jesse Clyde (J.C.) Nichols, one of the three original trustees, explained in his opening-night speech that the mission of the Museum was to "create a collection reflecting the best handiwork of civilized man in all known ages."<sup>2</sup> To that end, the original Trustees—most notably Nichols—and their advisers, including Harold Woodbury Parsons and Laurence Sickman, the Museum's first curator of Oriental art and its second director, bought more than five thousand works of art by late 1933. Although European and Asian objects far outnumbered the initial American selections, Nichols expressed his great pleasure with the stature of the American display at the opening. He exclaimed that "there is no part of the collection which we present with greater satisfaction than that devoted to American work. Our outstanding American painters are admirably represented." In the heart of the Depression, he hoped that the new collections dedicated to the art of our nation would "sing with meaning, bringing new courage to the hearts of our people, new joy to their souls."<sup>3</sup>

The selection of American paintings for the Museum opening was in accord with two prevalent beliefs of the day: that the art of Europe was superior, and that American productions should be appreciated for their reflection of our country's unique qualities.

It was most appropriate, then, that the first canvas by an American artist to enter the collection was *The Right Honorable John Foster* by Gilbert Stuart, an Irish subject painted about 1790–91 by the artist who produced the most iconic of all American portraits, that of George Washington. Stuart's portrait of Foster had remained with the family of the sitter until 1922, when it was sent to M. Knoedler & Co., the dealers from whom it was purchased in 1930. Four more early portraits constituted the American painting additions for 1932. Canvases by Stuart, Samuel Lovett Waldo and William Jewett, and Mather Brown were chosen, in large part, for their connections to the five American period rooms that were being installed. Indeed, even though until the early 1980s American art of all media was collected homogeneously with no divisions of curatorial jurisdiction, this essay focuses on the history of the Museum's collection of American paintings created by 1945.

In the twelve months before December 1933 and amid growing nationalist sentiment, the Trustees broadened the scope of American paintings acquisitions to include history, landscape, genre, and figure painting. Portraits prevailed, and a great majority of the canvases had been painted before 1850. Twenty-two more paintings by American artists arrived in time for the Museum opening. No single individual was engaged to advise on these initial American purchases. Harold Woodbury Parsons, who was hired in 1930 to shepherd the European art purchases, initially provided some guidance for American works. Charles O. Cornelius of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was appointed adviser for the American field in 1933, but his specialty was the decorative arts. Nichols was the primary booster for American painting, and he was encouraged by savvy dealers in the field—most notably Robert C. Vose Sr. of Vose Galleries in Boston, Maynard Walker of Ferargil Gallery, Edith Halpert of the Downtown Gallery, both in New York, and Newhouse Galleries in New York and St. Louis—who recognized the potential of a new collection being built in the Midwest. As Parsons wrote in the *New York Times* in 1932, the Museum was not following a strict plan for purchases "but has bought haphazardly as fine paintings become available."<sup>4</sup>

An institution with about two million dollars to spend on art in the early 1930s was exceptional indeed. The Museum's purchasing power, location in the middle of the country, and the opportunities afforded by starting from scratch were noted in the early press reports about the Museum. William Milliken of the Cleveland Museum of Art recognized that it would have been impossible to bring together such an outstanding assemblage of art in such a short time in more "normal times." Others perceived the building and the institution as important steps in "deprovincializing" the



William Merritt Chase, *William Rockhill Nelson*,  
1907. Oil on canvas, 60 × 50 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (152.4 × 127.3 cm).  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Gift of William Rockhill  
Nelson, 34-316

Midwest, uniting the various regions of the country, and serving as an example to other communities.<sup>5</sup> American painting played a clear role in this agenda. If paintings by Stuart and Benjamin West reflected the nation's British heritage, other early American portraits, such as those by Rembrandt Peale, Ralph Earl, and Samuel F. B. Morse, as well as a small selection of folk paintings, most importantly Calvin Balis's *George and Emma Eastman*, were comprehended as "American hundred-percenters" and noticed as especially appropriate for Kansas City.<sup>6</sup> Jacob Ward's *Natural Bridge, Virginia*, an image that linked early American history and geology, and George Caleb Bingham's *Fishing on the Mississippi*, which related both local and national associations to westward expansion, further encouraged these initial responses that reflected larger attitudes and desires in New Deal America.<sup>7</sup> Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*, acquired less than a year after the Museum opened and today recognized as the single most important acquisition for many decades, masterfully connected the Museum's historical collections and its consciousness of its role in current American museum practice. At the time of its acquisition, the canvas from about 1822 by the son of Charles Willson Peale not only tightened the collection's ties to American art's patrimony but also resonated with contemporary art, notably Surrealism.

Within a few years, it was frequently exhibited and reproduced as a prime example of a perceived continuous thread that wove through American painting to modern art.

The founding of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 had focused debate on museums' roles in the contemporary art world, and from the beginning the men forming the collection for Kansas City had to negotiate the position recent art would hold at the Museum. Their efforts were complicated by a stipulation in William Rockhill Nelson's will that prohibited proceeds from his estate to be used to purchase an object if the artist had died fewer than thirty years before. So while the purchase of George Inness's *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* could be made with Nelson's trust proceeds, in the early 1930s the list of notable American late-nineteenth-century painters who had died after 1900 included William Merritt Chase, Winslow Homer, Thomas Moran, and John Singer Sargent, to name a few. The Trustees did, however, take advantage of the untimely deaths of John Twachtman and Theodore Robinson, buying turn-of-the-century canvases by both artists before the Museum opened its doors.

The stipulation in Nelson's will galvanized the formation of a group that was named the Friends of Art. The Friends group was incorporated in December 1934 on the first anniversary of

the Museum's opening.<sup>8</sup> Into the 1950s the Friends of Art bought only contemporary American art, making at least one acquisition a year outside the parameters allowed by Nelson's will. Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the birth of the Friends of Art coincided with the years when the spotlight on contemporary American painting frequently was focused on the Midwest through the attention garnered by Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry, the trio of artists whose names were synonymous with Regionalism.<sup>9</sup>

Initial challenges of organization caused the Friends' first steps to falter; the group truly began its work only at the end of 1935. Rossiter Howard, president of the Kansas City Art Institute, Fred C. Vincent, a civic leader with a passion for art who also served on the Building Committee, and Paul Gardner, the Museum's first director, formed the committee that ruled on the appropriateness of the choices made by the Friends for the Museum. They also worked closely with the Friends in making their initial selections. Gardner understood the importance of the Friends' first purchase: "it must not only appeal to the general public, but must have that quality which will bring to the whole organization as much publicity as possible."<sup>10</sup> Curry's *Tornado over Kansas* (1929; Muskegon Museum of Art, Mich.) was an early consideration, but its price of \$2,500 was considered too expensive. Benton's *The Sun Treader* (*Portrait of Carl Ruggles*), picturing the avant-garde composer, was much admired and, according to Gardner, the best thing Benton had painted to date.<sup>11</sup> A painting by Benton as the first purchase by the Friends of Art would have been particularly fitting, especially in light of the Missouri artist's appointment to the Kansas City Art Institute faculty that autumn. Pricing, however, again was a consideration, and the Friends' first gift to the Museum was instead *Dead Pheasant* by Henry Varnum Poor, a Chapman, Kansas, native. Not only did Poor have local connections, but his paintings and ceramics were very popular among traditionalists on both the East and the West Coasts. Yet, interest in Benton's canvas did not wane. Despite no reduction in price, *The Sun Treader* was purchased before the end of January 1936, making it the first work by Benton to enter the collection; Benton's first one-man show at the Museum followed in 1939. Through the years of World War II, purchases by the Friends of Art tended toward generally popular realist artists such as Alexander Brook, Henry Lee McFee, and Eugene Speicher. The choices appear to have been guided by both financial and aesthetic restraint. A notable exception is Walt Kuhn's *Juggler*, a Friends of Art gift in 1938 and a selection carefully shepherded by Gardner, who was friendly with the artist.

During this early period and, indeed, continuing to today, gifts to the Museum played a critical role in building the collection. In 1933 Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones gave the single largest group of American paintings. Albert Jones's success in the oil and gas industry and as the developer of Padre Island, Texas, enabled him to pursue his passion for collecting art. Although the Depression forced him to sell part of his collection, most notably a canvas by Frans Hals, the Museum benefited significantly from Jones's generosity.<sup>12</sup> Including three canvases by Chase, two by both Ernest Lawson

and Charles Hawthorne, and singular examples by Horatio Walker, Frederick Waugh, and Alexander Wyant, the Jones gift formed the nucleus of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century holdings, which were enhanced by the few purchases of work from this era such as those by Inness, Robinson, and Twachtman. In the early 1940s Jones added George Inness's *Brush Burning*, which followed the Museum's purchase from Jones of the same artist's signature oil *Old Farm—Montclair*.

Other gifts at this time also had a lasting impact on the collection. Kansas City's Board of Education presented to the Museum George Caleb Bingham's portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Benoist Troost in 1935. This gift, in addition to one of Bingham's portraits of Judge James Turner Vane Thompson and his wife, Emily Warner Drew Thompson, from a descendant of the sitters, began a continuing stream of donations of Bingham's portraits that today positions the Museum as a significant depository of the Missouri artist's work. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the Museum received the gift of a painting by another important regional artist, Birger Sandzén. The Swedish artist had arrived in Lindsborg, Kansas, via Paris, in 1894 to teach art, art history, and foreign languages at Bethany College. Over the next fifty years, he became well known for his paintings and prints of Kansas, Colorado, and other points west. His friendship with Mrs. Massey Holmes, who shared his love of Colorado, led to a series of paintings made from views near the Longs Peak Inn. Mrs. Holmes's enthusiasm for a small-scale canvas she purchased resulted in a commission for the artist to paint a larger, closely related version for the Museum. The attendance of Benton, Curry, and Wood at the ceremony where the painting was presented signaled its contemporaneous importance.<sup>13</sup> Friendship also brought Peter Hurd's *José Herrera* to the Museum. Gardner and the artist, who lived and painted in New Mexico, were well acquainted. Gardner, in turn, asked Mr. and Mrs. Robert Frizzell to purchase the painting so Hurd's work could enter the collection at the height of his career. The acquisition of *José Herrera* and the activities of the Friends of Art were noticed with some regularity in the national press throughout the late 1930s, integrating the Museum into larger discussions about collecting and museums across the country.<sup>14</sup>

The momentum of the Museum's American paintings acquisitions during its first five years slowed with the onset of World War II. The financial realities of running a museum also stemmed the flow of regular acquisition funds overall. By 1940 Gardner frequently responded to dealers that both the Museum and the Friends of Art had less money to spread over more interests and necessities than in the past.<sup>15</sup> Only three American paintings were bought in the 1940s, each of which expanded the collection in new ways. The purchase of Jeremiah Theus's portrait of Frances Warren brought the first work by an artist of the deep South to the Museum. Although Maurice Prendergast had been dead for only twenty years, his *Portrait of a Boy* entered the collection in 1944. The purchase was made through a fund created in 1942 by Mr. and Mrs. Milton McGreevy specifically for the purchase of European and American modern art. Then, the Trustees simply





The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art from the South Lawn, c. 1930s. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives

seem to have slightly elided the thirty-years-dead rule for the acquisition of Thomas Eakins's *Frances Eakins*, which was bought from M. Knoedler & Co. in 1944, when Eakins had been dead for only twenty-eight years. Although there is no surviving discussion of the purchase, Eakins was admired by Museum officials and preferred over other American masters such as Winslow Homer, whom Gardner considered "a most over-rated painter."<sup>16</sup>

During the war, although gifts of American paintings did slow down, some donations were made of significant paintings created in both the earlier and later periods. The Trustees of the Kansas City Art Institute gave Fletcher Martin's *Celebration* in 1941. The gift coincided with the artist's appointment as head of the painting department at the institute after Benton's contract was not renewed. Also joining the collection during the war was Benjamin West's hauntingly Romantic portrait of his two sons, Raphael and Benjamin Jr., one of the few original works of art owned by William Rockhill Nelson. It had descended to his daughter Laura, who owned it until her death in 1926, after which time it was held by a family trust until it was donated in 1944.

After the bombing at Pearl Harbor, the staff, which had been small from the beginning, became skeletal. Gardner and Sickman both left to serve in the army. James Roth, the paintings conservator, worked in an aircraft plant. The young maintenance crew had to be replaced with retirees, and the education department had to cut programs. The Trustees continued the hands-on management style they had established from the start, but Gardner's and Sickman's assistants, Ethlyne Jackson and Lindsay Hughes, effectively ran the Museum until their supervisors returned after the end of the war. The Museum also became a center for wartime

activities, including Red Cross training and dances for those in the service, as well as a depository for other museum collections, such as Yale University's, which were moved to the perceived safer Midwest. Overall, Kansas City prospered during the war, and afterward the Museum set its sights on expanding the European collections, especially earlier art.

At the same time, gifts of American paintings continued at a steady rate. The bequest of Frances Logan in 1947 added to the American holdings a beautiful Shinnecock beach scene by Chase and William Glackens's *Beach Side* as well as several works on paper. Logan, an early supporter of the Museum, consciously formed her collection with the Museum's needs in mind.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the Friends of Art continued its mission to provide the Museum with contemporary works, and after the war it became somewhat more adventurous in its selections. At a December 1946 meeting, Joseph Hirsch's 1946 *Lynch Family* quickly prevailed over thirteen other choices.<sup>18</sup> The decision to make it the first contemporary painting with social significance to enter the collection was perhaps influenced by the fact that during the year Kansas City had been in the public eye after Cab Calloway had been beaten and arrested trying to enter one of the city's white-only dance halls.<sup>19</sup> The Hirsch canvas was soon joined by Edward Hopper's 1940 *Light Battery at Gettysburg*. Recognized as an atypical subject for the artist, there was considerable debate over its acquisition compared with works by Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Isabel Bishop. At the urging of Gardner, who also suggested the painting could be later exchanged for another by the same artist, the group accepted the Hopper. The same year, thanks to funds given by Mrs. James A. Reed, widow of the Missouri senator, Marsden

Hartley's 1942 *Mt. Katahdin—November Afternoon* joined the collection. One of the artist's nationalist tributes to his beloved Maine, the canvas brought a new strain of modern art to the Museum.

The Museum experienced momentous changes in the 1950s. Two of the original three trustees, Herbert V. Jones and J. C. Nichols, died in 1949 and 1950, respectively. In mid-1953 Paul Gardner retired, effectively ending the reign of the initial team that guided the Museum's first two decades. However, the new trustee group, which included Milton McGreevy and David T. Beals, ensured that continuity prevailed when they soon appointed Sickman as director. Sickman continued in his role as curator of Oriental art until 1973, when Marc Wilson was named to the position. Gardner's retirement also revealed the need for a curator of European and contemporary art. Patrick J. Kelleher, with a doctorate from Princeton, came to the Museum from the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, New York. Although his tenure lasted only four years, he made significant European acquisitions and particularly invigorated the Friends of Art.

The acquisitions of Charles Sheeler's *Construction* in 1955 and Marsden Hartley's *Himmel*, of about 1914–15, in 1956, both promoted by Kelleher, significantly raised the bar for American modernist acquisitions. In the discussion of the Friends of Art selection for 1956, Kelleher noted the importance of buying work of abstraction, a style hardly represented in the collection.<sup>20</sup> Even so, the gift of *Himmel* also announced the end of the Friends of Art's significant contributions to the American paintings collection of works executed before World War II. The Friends increasingly recognized the opportunity to provide the Museum with works to fill the ever-widening gaps in the modern European collection, and, as the twentieth century progressed, the choices of the Friends of Art remained mainly contemporary.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1950s American painting gained its first true staff advocate. Ross E. Taggart, who joined the Museum staff in 1947, became assistant curator under Kelleher. His responsibilities were broad, covering ancient art, drawings, and European decorative arts as well as American objects in all media. First as assistant curator and later as senior curator, Taggart ensured from the 1950s until his retirement in 1983 that American art was collected and recognized for its significance within the larger collection. Between 1950 and 1954, as Kansas City celebrated its centennial and the twentieth century marked its midpoint, he supported the purchase of a trio of paintings that, along with gifts of the Sandzén from Mrs. Holmes and in 1945 William Keith's monumental *Sunset Glow* from Mrs. Ferdinand Heim, gave the Museum a meaningful cluster of works with themes connected to western expansion. Thomas Otter's *On the Road*, John Darc Howland's *Buffalo Hunt*, and Bingham's *Canvassing for a Vote* also spoke directly to the heritage of the Kansas City region. Several exhibitions in the 1950s, most notably *The Last Frontier: Art of the Old West* in 1957, set these acquisitions in context.

After World War II and through the 1960s American art created before 1945 was relegated to a low status in many museums. The rise of Abstract Expressionism in the early 1950s caused a fissure



Arnold Newman, *Paul Gardner*. Photograph originally published in *LIFE*, 31 July 1950. © Arnold Newman / Getty Images

between past and future American art that has lasted for many decades. Taggart still made certain that potential donors with interests in pre-1945 American painting were not ignored. When the Museum was purchasing little or no American painting, Taggart staged exhibitions, such as the 1953 *American Ancestor Portraits*, that encouraged the gifts of several more portraits by Bingham, among others. Taggart felt a certain responsibility to keep Bingham's reputation alive, which he effected throughout his tenure by his friendships with many donors and by exhibitions, including the celebration of Bingham's sesquicentennial in 1961.<sup>22</sup> The West, however, was not Taggart's only interest in these years. Adding to the holdings of portraiture from the early to later periods, he oversaw the purchase of Thomas Sully's beautiful 1831 rendering of Mrs. James Gore King and Robert Henri's energetic 1927 image of three-year-old Mary MacNamara in *The Green Sacque*.

Several key works also joined the collection by gift in the 1950s. Florine Stettheimer's 1928 *Portrait of My Aunt, Caroline Walter Neustadter* arrived as a gift of Ettie Stettheimer, who chose to distribute her sister's estate to museums rather than following the artist's will, which directed that her body of work be destroyed. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha made their first American gift through the Friends of Art when they donated the funds in 1945 for Max Weber's *Latest News*. Joseph Atha was the son of Frank Atha, who brought Folger's Coffee to Kansas City in 1908. The younger Atha continued his father's success, which allowed him to collect paintings and silver. The Athas donated paintings by Gifford Beal, Maurice Prendergast, and Childe Hassam between 1951 and 1958. Hassam's *The Sonata* of 1893 remains one of the collection's most beautiful examples of late-nineteenth-century figure painting.



American Art Installation, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, c. 1955.  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives

The continued rising cost of operating a museum significantly decreased the monies available for acquisitions in the 1960s. Gifts of American painting noticeably diminished as well, but the bequests of Mary Austin, Katherine Harvey, Kay Sage, and Marie McCune highlighted female donors and artists. In 1967 the work of one of Bingham's few students entered the collection through the bequest of Mary Austin, through which the Museum acquired her portrait by her aunt Amanda Austin. After the elder Austin left Missouri in 1879, she pursued an artistic career in California, where the Museum's painting was exhibited at the 1889 California State Fair. James Thrall Soby, Director of Painting and Sculpture for many years at the Museum of Modern Art and a great champion of Surrealist art, was charged with disseminating the estate of Kay Sage after her death in 1963. The gift of Sage's 1943 *Too Soon for Thunder* brought a seminal work of Surrealism by its most important female practitioner into the collection and to the Midwest. Katherine Harvey, a Kansas City native and granddaughter of the railroad restaurant impresario Fred Harvey, was foremost a collector of American Indian art. On her death, her Indian holdings were primarily donated to the Heye Foundation in New York and the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, but the Nelson-Atkins was fortunate to receive Thomas Moran's 1912 *Grand Canyon*, which the artist had given to Ford Harvey, Katherine's father, at the time of its painting.<sup>23</sup> Marie McCune was an active Friends of Art member in the 1940s. An accomplished amateur artist,

McCune bought Isabel Bishop's *Girl with a Newspaper* in 1947, when it had been passed over by the Friends in favor of Hopper's *Light Battery at Gettysburg*. McCune's death in 1968 brought the Bishop to the Museum permanently.

As the United States approached its bicentennial, interest in American art and generally all things American grew across the country. By 1970 Taggart was well aware that the Museum had been "remiss in past years" in not expanding the American collections more aggressively; he thoughtfully considered the need to rectify the past.<sup>24</sup> In large part due to Taggart's efforts, a series of very important gifts over a decade changed the face of American art at the Nelson-Atkins. A small but beautiful trio of canvases entered the collection through the bequest of Mr. and Mrs. William J. Brace. Brace was chairman and president of the Gleaner-Harvester Corporation and an early Kansas City automobile dealer. In the 1930s the Braces had purchased Mary Cassatt's *L'Enfant Blonde* and Childe Hassam's *Marlborough Street, Boston* from Effie Seachrest, who had a gallery and taught art appreciation in her Kansas City home. Indeed, Seachrest can be credited with selling most of the best French and French-influenced art found in Kansas City before 1960.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Moran's *Castle Rock, Green River, Wyoming* was the third of the Brace gifts and made a beautiful pairing with the artist's *Grand Canyon* given by Katherine Harvey.

Securing the institution as the center for the art of Thomas Hart Benton, the Museum received a bequest of eighteen paintings and more than twenty-five works on paper on the artist's death in 1975. The gift included ten panels of the series known as the *American Historical Epic*, such signature Benton easel paintings as *Hollywood*, *Crapshooters*, and *Minstrel Show*, and early and late work including *Construction* and *Desert Still Life*. Although Benton's relationship with the Museum has been described as contentious, his bequest may have reflected his recognition of the Museum's several one-man exhibitions and multiple group shows in which he was included.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Benton's most famous easel painting, *Persephone*, remained with his estate for another fifteen years.

A most extraordinary series of works was given between 1976 and 1983. The Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation funded the purchase of nine exceptional paintings by a number of America's most revered artists: John Singleton Copley, Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Eakins, Martin Johnson Heade, Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, and William Sidney Mount. Working with the Museum—primarily Taggart—at a time when American art prices were rising quickly, Crosby Kemper recognized the importance of acquiring iconic examples of American painting, and his passion for and knowledge of it supported every purchase. Each of the Kemper gifts filled a significant gap in the Museum's collection in addition to being an important representative of the artist's work. The pair of Copley portraits of Mr. and Mrs. John Barrett, which had descended through the sitters' family, brought to the Museum fine examples of America's foremost colonial painter. Mount's *Winding Up*, Homer's *Gloucester Harbor*, and Johnson's *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* added stellar

examples from the heyday of American genre painting. They also provided substantive context for paintings already in the collection such as those by Bingham and Francis William Edmonds. Church's *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, complete with its original artist-designed frame, provided an anchor for the landscape collection in the same way that Eakins's *Monsignor Turner* of about 1906, a gift from the Kemper family on the occasion of the Museum's fiftieth anniversary, did for later portraits.

Amid the wealth of the Kemper gifts, a number of other donations further enriched the collection. Mrs. Louis Sosland gave John Singer Sargent's *Oyster Gatherers Returning*, the first work by Sargent to enter the collection, and Georgia O'Keeffe's *Apple Blossoms*, which Sosland had purchased directly from the artist. Mrs. R. Kirk Askew donated the second work by Stettheimer to come to the Museum, *Birthday Bouquet*, which, with the O'Keeffe, expanded the modernist still-life holdings. Shepherd Brooks gave Gilbert Stuart's portrait of his great-great-grandfather Dr. William Aspinwall. Because it resembled Stuart's portrait of George Washington, and thus was mistaken for a likeness of the first president, this canvas had been saved from vandalism when a proslavery mob attacked the abolitionist family's home in 1834. In 1981 Mrs. Thomas King Baker and Mrs. George Bunting Jr. provided the funds for the purchase of Jasper Cropsey's *Stonehenge*, which complemented the recent acquisition of Church's *Jerusalem*.

The higher standing of American art at the Nelson-Atkins was recognized in an article on the collection by Taggart in the November 1982 issue of *Antiques*. His overview of the collection acknowledged, however, that in spite of the tremendous recent influx of American masterpieces, there were noticeable gaps yet to be filled. That challenge was left to the next generation of directors and the Museum's first curators dedicated solely to American painting. Taggart retired in 1983, the same year as the Museum's fiftieth anniversary. Sickman had retired in 1977 and was followed as director by Ralph Tracy Coe, who had served as Curator of Painting and Sculpture following Kelleher before being appointed assistant director in 1970. Coe's tenure as director was brief; he resigned in early 1982. During this period the Museum made many improvements to its building and expanded its governance structure, creating an associate trustee level supporting the three primary trustees.

Marc F. Wilson, Curator of Oriental Art since 1973, became the Museum's fourth director in 1983 and has carried the institution through successive waves of growth for more than two decades. At the start of Wilson's tenure, specific curatorial departments were created or refined to serve the increasing depth and breadth of the collections. It was at this time that American painting and sculpture became a department separate from the decorative arts. Opening expanded opportunities for American painting, an endowment to support a curatorship in the field was established by the Sosland family. Jay Gates briefly held the position along with his duties as assistant director, but Henry Adams, who arrived in 1985 from the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, was the first true Samuel

Sosland Curator of American Art. Adams brought serious scholarship and great energy to the American art department. With Wilson, he oversaw the purchase of a number of paintings that added strength to or filled gaps in the collection. Again, the generosity of the Kemper family enhanced the Museum's holdings.

The Kemper family funded five more canvases between 1986 and 1989, the most exquisite being John Singer Sargent's *Mrs. Cecil Wade*. The portrait of Mrs. Wade was offered at Sotheby's, having descended through the family until it appeared at auction. It was rare to find such a stellar example of Sargent's work on the market; the portrait of Mrs. Wade had not been publicly exhibited since 1926. Because of much competition for the painting, it fetched the highest price ever paid for a Sargent to that time. Soon after the gift of *Mrs. Cecil Wade*, another Sargent portrait—of the Argentine artist Francisco Bernareggi—came to the collection, again courtesy of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation. An energetically painted intimate portrait, it offered a perfect foil to the beautiful reserve of Mrs. Wade. Before the decade was over, a scene of the Grand Canal in Venice by Moran, a sunny beach scene by Edward Potthast, and an expressionistic portrait by Stanton Macdonald-Wright were acquired, all thanks to the Kemper family.

The influx of outstanding examples of American painting and the identification of American painting as a key curatorial area prompted the Museum to assess the collection in the early 1980s. As a result, some American paintings were deaccessioned in 1983, 1989, and 1990 to create needed acquisition funds. The works that were sold primarily duplicated holdings or were lesser works by artists represented by better examples. Two key purchases, made possible in part by proceeds from deaccessions, joined the many gifts of the 1980s. The holdings of mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting were boosted in 1986 with the acquisition of John Frederick Kensett's *A Woodland Waterfall*. The most significant purchase, however, was Thomas Hart Benton's *Persephone*. Conversations about the Museum acquiring Benton's magnum opus had taken place for over a decade.<sup>27</sup> The artist's estate, administered by Crosby Kemper's United Missouri Bank, gave the Museum first right of refusal when two potential purchasers from outside Kansas City expressed serious interest. The Nelson-Atkins Trustees agreed unanimously that the painting had to stay in Kansas City. Considerable monies had to be raised, as there were no endowed acquisition funds for American painting at this time. George Powell, chairman of Yellow Freight System and an associate trustee, contributed much of the purchase price. Powell's gift was joined by other generous donations from Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, Richard Stern, and the Doris Jones Stein Foundation, among others. Mrs. Peet's contribution was especially fitting as she had been a student of Benton's at the time *Persephone* was painted and had, like all the students in the class, created her own small-scale version from Benton's model.

Adams led the American art department through 1993. In the early 1990s he adroitly finessed the burgeoning American art market at a time when mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting and American Impressionism were bringing unprecedented



Mr. and Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper with their children Sandy, Mariner, and Heather viewing Frederic E. Church's *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, 1977. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives

prices. Recognizing the weakness of the holdings from the first half of the twentieth century, he focused on acquiring paintings executed between 1900 and 1945. The purchases of John Peto's *Books on a Table*, Reginald Marsh's *Pavonia—Jersey City*, and George Ault's *January Full Moon*, all canvases painted in that period, were accomplished primarily with deaccession funds. The Marsh acquisition was additionally supported by the Union Pacific Foundation and Mrs. Peet. Also at this time, two bequests of funds for acquisitions allowed other purchases. The arrival in 1991 of George Bellows's *Frankie, the Organ Boy* brought a great Ashcan portrait into the Museum. The same year, Severin Roesen's *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape*, acquired with funds from the bequest of Dorothy K. Riee, added to the collection a tour de force of post-Civil War still-life painting in pristine condition and in its original frame.

Adams also invigorated the Museum's exhibition and publication programs, chiefly with *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original*, a traveling exhibition and book celebrating the centennial of the artist's birth. Adams's dedication as scholar of the collection led him to begin the work for this catalogue as well as to complete *American Drawings and Watercolors from the Kansas City Region*.<sup>25</sup> Adams also cocurated *Albert Bloch: The American Blue Rider*, an exhibition out of which the Museum received three excellent examples of the artist's painting. In 1997 Mrs. Albert Bloch gave two works: *Die Drei Pierrots*, which was one of Bloch's contributions to the first Blue Rider exhibition in 1911; and *Winter in the Dead Wood*, painted in the mid-1930s, when the artist headed the painting department at the University

of Kansas. Dr. and Mrs. Harold Lasky also donated a signature early Bloch, *Klagehied*, in 1998.

In the last dozen years, the market for American art has skyrocketed. Even so, a number of key gaps in the collection have been filled by both gift and purchase. Several paintings came to the Museum with interesting local connections. John Douglas Patrick's monumental *Brutality* was given in 1994 by the artist's descendants. The canvas, which won a third-place medal at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, brought the Kansas City-area native international fame before he was named head of the painting department at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1903. The Museum also received a gift of an impressive example of American Impressionism by St. Louis native Richard Miller from his Kansas City niece.

Two purchases in the mid-1990s also were encouraged by local connections. While it was well known that the late-nineteenth-century artist Henry Ossawa Tanner had spent the summer of 1897 in the Kansas City area, it was brought to the Museum's attention that 1994 was the centennial anniversary of an African American women's club in Kansas City, Kansas, of which Tanner's mother had been a member. The Museum organized a Tanner exhibition in celebration of that milestone, and out of that project, Tanner's *The Young Sabot Maker* entered the collection, thanks in part to a gift from an anonymous donor. More tightly tied to the region was the art of Kansan John Stuart Curry. The Museum hosted an exhibition celebrating the centennial of his birth in 1997. Since the founding of the Friends of Art, it was recognized as imperative that Curry be represented at the Museum. In 1935 the Friends facilitated the purchase of Curry's watercolor *Stallion and Jack*, but a

major painting by the artist eluded acquisition for sixty-three more years. *The Batlers*, which Curry had given to his daughter Ellen, was purchased directly from her family, bringing a significant example of his Regionalist style to Kansas City's public domain. The Curry was purchased through a generous donation from the family of G. Kenneth Baum and funds generated by a previously deaccessioned painting. It was also with accumulated deaccession monies that Stuart Davis's *Hôtel de France* was purchased.

In 1998 and 1999 a group of paintings and watercolors was given to the Museum from the collection of Julia and Humbert Tinsman. The Tinsmans presented their first gifts of art to the Museum in the early 1980s, chief among them Bellows's *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* and Sargent's *Study for "Spanish Dance."* Following the Tinsmans' deaths, the remainder of their collection came to the Museum in 2002. The gift included Eakins's *Female Nude (Study)* and Martin Johnson Heade's *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport* as well as important watercolors by Charles Burchfield, Winslow Homer, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, and Georgia O'Keeffe. The passing of another longtime Museum supporter, Carol Levin, inspired the purchase of John Sloan's portrait of Katherine Schon. With funds from her family, the Museum was able to acquire this dashing portrait from the height of Sloan's career, a perfect memorial for a collector of early-twentieth-century Realist art.

American art at the Nelson-Atkins has begun the twenty-first century with an auspicious start. Several gifts in the last five years have contributed additional important paintings from the first half of the twentieth century. After many years as a long-term lender, Commerce Bancshares donated Arthur Dove's *Tree*, a signature organic abstraction from a key participant in the circle of Alfred Stieglitz. Lawrence Lebduska's *Wild Horses and Owl*, an impressive example of the blend of folk art and Surrealism in the 1930s, came through the estate of Elizabeth Calvin Bonner. In addition, a classic Albert Bloch painting from the 1920s, *Composition Red and Blue*, was the gift of Dr. and Mrs. Eric Voth, and a rare early portrait study by George P.A. Healy was presented by a descendant of the artist.

Of greatest consequence to the continual growth of the American paintings collection in Kansas City was the establishment of the Ever Glades Fund by Sarah and Landon Rowland in 2002. With Ever Glades support, the Museum acquired Thomas Cole's *The Mill, Sunset* in 2004. This exquisite canvas from 1844 by the father of American landscape painting provides a deeper foundation for the display of nineteenth-century landscape art. The Ever Glades Fund also supported the purchase of Lilla Cabot Perry's *Portrait Study of a Child*, a beautiful Whistlerian composition of the artist's daughter. Sarah and Landon Rowland's expansive generosity has also included the gifts of Fitz Henry Lane's "*Starlight*" in *Harbor* and most recently a painting by N. C. Wyeth that served as the endpapers illustration for *Drums*, James Boyd's 1927 novel set during the Revolutionary War.

These most recent acquisitions continue the nearly seventy-five years of institutional commitment to acquiring, preserving, and displaying the finest cultural productions for our ever-expanding

community. As the catalogue that follows demonstrates, the American paintings collection has developed to a position of distinction within and beyond the Museum. Although it has not grown always steadily or rapidly, the American paintings collection at the Nelson-Atkins has prevailed, and its future shines brightly thanks to the generosity of multiple generations of donors as well as the guidance of past and present trustees and directors.

## NOTES

1. Michael Churchman and Scott Erbes, *High Ideals and Aspirations: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1933–1993* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1993), 9. All information concerning the formation and history of the Museum can be found in this volume. The author greatly appreciates the assistance of Randall R. Griffey, Lauren Lessing, Helen Meyer, Loren Whittaker, and Holly Wright in the research for this essay.
2. Nichols's speech is included in University Trustee Minutes, digest of 17 November–30 December 1933, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (hereafter NAMA) Archives, n.p.
3. Ibid.
4. "High Ethics Urges upon Art Dealers—World's Art Center Here—Harold W. Parsons Tells of Plans of the Nelson Museum in Kansas City," *New York Times*, 10 February 1932, 13.
5. "Congratulatory Expressions from Other Museums to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art in Kansas City," *Art News* 32 (9 December 1933), 26–27; "Hail Kansas!" *ibid.*, 126; and "Kansas City's New Museum Is One of the Country's Finest," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 December 1933, A10.
6. It did not seem to matter that the painting by Earl was of an Englishman. Dr. Alfred M. Frankfurter, "The Paintings in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art," *Art News* 32 (9 December 1933), 30.
7. On the connections between American art and New Deal attitudes, see Emily Genauer, "New Horizons in American Art," *Parnassus* 8 (October 1936), 3–7.
8. The initial committee that sought funds and works of art was a group of about a dozen society women led by Mrs. Logan Clendening. The first board, however, was led by Fred C. Vincent with Mrs. Clendening as vice president. Throughout the Friends' history, women have played key roles. For the full history of the Friends of Art, see Nicholas S. Pickard, "Friends of Art of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum: A History," typescript, 1981, Spencer Art Reference Library, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.
9. Between 1930 and 1934 Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) was painted and acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago; Curry won a substantial prize at the Carnegie Institute's 1933 International Painting Exhibition; and Benton adorned the 24 December 1934 cover of *Time*. Works by the three artists were first shown together in 1933 at the Kansas City Art Institute across the street from the Museum.
10. Paul Gardner to Henry Haskell, editor of the *Kansas City Star*, undated note, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives.
11. Paul Gardner to Maynard Walker, 10 November 1935, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives. That same week, however, Gardner wrote to Walt Kuhn that he hoped the artist's *White Clown* might be the first purchase by the Friends. Gardner to Kuhn, 13 November 1935, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives.
12. Dick Fowler, *Leaders in Our Town* (Kansas City, Mo.: Burd and Flecher, 1952), 225–28.
13. For an expanded discussion of this acquisition and other paintings mentioned in this essay, see the individual entries in this volume and curatorial information in volume 2.
14. See, for example, "Painting Bought for Kansas City Museum," *New York Times*, 17 December 1937; "Friends of Art," *Art Digest* 12 (1 January 1938), 16; "Kansas City: Jubilee and an Acquisition," *Art News* 37 (3 December 1939), 18–19, 24; and "Friends Give Fine Works by Hurd and Speicher to Kansas City," *Art Digest* 14 (15 December 1939), 15.
15. See, for example, Paul Gardner to Edith Halpert, 6 February 1940 and 25 November 1940, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives.
16. For the admiration of Eakins, see Acting Director [Ethlyne Jackson] to J.C. Nichols, 13 September 1944, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives. On Gardner's feelings about Homer, see Paul Gardner to Eunice Chambers, 19 March 1946, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives.
17. "Liberal with Art," *Kansas City Star*, 1 January 1936, 8.
18. Friends of Art Minutes, 13 December 1946, NAMA Archives.
19. "Modern Painters Are Aided by the Friends of Art," *Kansas City Star*, 12 April 1947, D9, noted that the painting was the first work with social significance to be bought by the Friends.
20. Friends of Art Minutes, 1 November 1956, NAMA Archives.
21. See Paul Gardner to Robert Vose, 3 March 1950, Director's Office Records, NAMA Archives. The Friends of Art discussions about how best to support the collection are recorded in its minutes. See, for example, Friends of Art Minutes, 12 December 1952 and 25 June 1954, NAMA Archives.
22. Ross E. Taggart to Mrs. Thomas Heuckendorf, 3 February 1958, Senior Curator Records, NAMA Archives.
23. On the dispersal of Katherine Harvey's estate, see "Gifts to the Gallery in Harvey Estate," *Kansas City Star*, 26 October 1962, 14. On Harvey as a collector of Indian art, see Edwin L. Wade and Katherine L. Chase, "A Personal Passion and Profitable Pursuit: The Katherine Harvey Collection of Native American Fine Art," in *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway*, ed. Marta Weigle and Barbara A. Babcock (Phoenix: Heard Museum, 1966), 148–54.
24. Ross E. Taggart to Kennedy Galleries, 2 March 1970, Senior Curator Records, NAMA Archives.
25. Mary Lucas Jones, *Homage to Effie Seachrest*, exh. cat. (Kansas City, Mo.: William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, 1966). The Museum and Seachrest had a long, mutually supportive relationship from the early 1930s. For instance, Harold Woodbury Parsons suggested to Seachrest that she start a modern art shop. Parsons to J.C. Nichols, 31 March 1931, William Rockhill Nelson Trust Records, NAMA Archives.
26. The Museum hosted one-man shows of Benton's work in 1939, 1963, and 1974. Perceptions that relations between Benton and the Museum were strained are rooted in the artist's complex relationship with Paul Gardner. Gardner chaired the committee that chose a new director of the Kansas City Art Institute during Benton's tenure as professor. That new director, Keith Martin, and Benton never got along, and tension between them contributed to circumstances leading to the painter's controversial departure from the Art Institute in 1941. Thus, Benton perceived Gardner to have played an adversarial role in a conspiracy against him. After Gardner's retirement from the Museum in 1953, exchanges between Benton and the Museum seem to have warmed. See Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 302–13.
27. Milton McGreevy to Mrs. Leigh Brew, 28 December 1973, Trustees Minutes 1973–79, NAMA Archives.
28. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original*; and Henry Adams et al., *American Drawings and Watercolors from the Kansas City Region* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992).

# Notes to the Catalogue

This catalogue is divided into two volumes. The first is composed of essays on 125 particularly significant American paintings in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The second volume offers detailed documentation of all 266 American paintings in the Museum's collection.

The essays are arranged alphabetically by artist. Multiple paintings by the same artist appear in chronological order. In instances in which paintings were created as a pair or series, they are discussed in a single essay. Within the essay text, "q.v." (*quod vide*) indicates that an artist or painting mentioned in the text is represented elsewhere in the collection and catalogue. Notes citing relevant primary and secondary sources follow each essay.

Each essay is preceded by object information, arranged as follows:

- Artist's name, followed by life dates in parentheses
- Title, followed by date
- Alternative titles
- Medium and support
- Dimensions in inches followed by centimeters in parentheses; height precedes width
- Signatures and/or inscriptions
- Credit line and accession number

In most cases, the earliest known title of the painting is used as the primary title. A hyphenated date (e.g., 1910–20) means that the work was begun and finished within this time frame. Single dates given with a "c." (circa) indicate that the painting was likely executed within a span of five years preceding or following the date. A span of dates accompanied by "c." indicates that the painting was executed sometime within those years. The designation "n.d." (no date) means that no date could confidently be ascribed to the work.

Authors' initials follow each catalogue essay.

## Primary Authors

Margaret C. Conrads	MCC
Randall R. Griffey	RRG
Lauren Lessing	LL

## Contributing Authors

Henry Adams	HA
Julie Aronson	JA
David Cateforis	DC
Mark Cole	MC
Gina M. D'Angelo	GMD
John Davis	JD
David B. Dearing	DBD
Erika Doss	ED
Diane Evans	DE
Trudie A. Grace	TAG
Kathy Keinholtz	KK
Sharon Brooks Katzman	SBK
Carol Lowrey	CL
Sally Mills	SM
Kenneth J. Neal	KJN
Alexander Nemerov	AN
Margaret Stenz	MS





*Selections from the Collection  
of American Paintings to 1945*

# GEORGE COPELAND AULT (1891–1948)

## *January Full Moon*, 1941

Oil on canvas

20¼ × 26¾ in. (51.4 × 67 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: G.C.Ault 41.

Purchase: Nelson Trust (by exchange), 91-19

BORN IN 1891 TO A PROSPEROUS Cleveland family, George Ault spent most of his childhood in London, where his family moved in 1899, when his father, Charles, was appointed to represent a relative's ink manufacturing firm.<sup>1</sup> Encouraged to study art by his father, an amateur painter associated with William Merritt Chase (q.v.), Ault attended the University College School, the Slade School of Art at the University of London, and the St. John's Wood School of Art. Focusing on urban and coastal views, his early paintings reflect his conventional British academic training, a style described by the Ault scholar Susan Lubowsky as "an anglicized version of Impressionism."<sup>2</sup>

In 1911 the Ault family returned to the United States, settling in Hillside, New Jersey, near the father's newly established printing business. Three years later, the aspiring painter set up a home and a studio in Hillside. Ault first exhibited his work in 1920 at the Society of Independent Artists in New York City and relocated there soon thereafter. In New York, he adopted a clean, hard-edged manner of painting that was popular with many of his contemporaries, including Charles Sheeler (q.v.) and Ralston Crawford, a style later named Precisionism. Derived from various European movements, including Cubism, Futurism, and Purism, as well as, in certain instances, American folk art, Precisionism emphasized smooth surfaces, flat patterns, and precise clarity of line and overall design. Precisionist painters, who were also known as the "Immaculates," focused on New York's urban landscape, rendering skyscrapers and rooftop views that idealized the machine-age aesthetics of the modern city.<sup>3</sup> Featuring everyday subjects made to look strangely unfamiliar, Ault's paintings were also considered to be close to an American variant of European Surrealism that became known as Magic Realism.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1920s Ault achieved modest success and exhibited in several of the more progressive New York art galleries, such as the Whitney Studio Club. He eventually joined the stable of Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery, where he exhibited almost every year from 1927 to 1934. In the 1930s, however, following the failure of his marriage, his father's death, and the suicides of his two brothers, Ault became depressed and alcoholic. His increasingly neurotic and bizarre behavior largely alienated him from the art world.

Among his artistic peers, Ault demonstrated a unique penchant for nocturnal urban scenes, such as *Sullivan Street, Abstraction* (1924; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis), in which streets and

alleys are cast into deep, mysterious shadows. According to Lubowsky, this preoccupation reveals "the dark pathos that dominated [Ault's] artistic and personal life."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the painter's portrayal of enigmatic places and spaces betrays his debt to the otherworldly architectural vignettes characteristic of the early work of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (Fig. 1), which met with great acclaim among prominent American museums, critics, collectors, and dealers throughout the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> De Chirico's role as forebear of Surrealism was, in fact, cemented in America in 1936, when the Museum of Modern Art mounted *Fantastic Art Dada Surrealism*, the massive exhibition in which the Italian was heralded as a pioneer of the artistic and literary movement.

To begin life anew, in 1937 Ault moved to Woodstock, New York, with Louise Jonas, a young writer whom he had met two years earlier and would marry in 1941. Nearly destitute, Ault and Jonas rented a small house one mile from town for twelve dollars a month. It lacked electricity and indoor plumbing; a woodstove provided the only heat. For the remaining eleven years of his life, they occupied a series of similar lodgings in Woodstock but were never able to afford a house of their own. Ault refused to participate in the New York gallery scene, which he thought confining and creatively restrictive. Moreover, he rarely associated with the other artists of the Woodstock art colony, even former friends such as Alexander Brook (q.v.), Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Andrée Ruellan (q.v.). His paintings seldom sold and, when they did, only at low prices. For support, the couple relied largely on Jonas's income as a journalist for a small newspaper in Kingston, New York. For a brief period, Ault also received a small stipend from the Works Progress Administration, which sponsored arts projects to help destitute artists during the Depression.

Dating to this period of personal and financial difficulty, *January Full Moon* features a barn owned by a Woodstock farmer that Ault passed during his nightly walks through Russell's Corners, a well-known intersection he depicted many times.<sup>7</sup> The barn in *January Full Moon* furthermore appears in several of Ault's works from the period.<sup>8</sup> Like most of Ault's scenes of Russell's Corners, the composition contrasts the looming, dark farm building with the moonlit sky and the stark, snow-covered landscape, illuminated by moonlight flooding in from outside the picture. The barn's roof and the snow on the ground reflect the moon's light brilliantly, while clouds hovering overhead absorb it and, consequently, glow with a subtle intensity. The stark, eerie effect of Ault's deceptively simple composition suggests not only the influence of de Chirico but also that of Albert Pinkham Ryder, the late-nineteenth-century painter, highly regarded among early American modernists for his Romantic and expressive imagery. Ault openly confessed his admiration of Ryder, claiming him to be America's greatest painter.<sup>9</sup>





Fig. 1 Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of a Day*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 73¼ × 55 in. (186.1 × 139.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby Bequest, 1211.1979. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Ault's interest in both urban and rural subjects was shared with other Precisionist artists. Charles Sheeler, for example, began depicting barns in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, as early as the 1910s. (*Conference No. 1* [q.v.] is a late version of the theme.) Additionally, Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.) sought out barns and stables (near Lake George, N.Y.) as well as adobe dwellings (in New Mexico) as meaningful subjects for paintings that depart radically from her early fascination with urban architectural icons, such as the famed Radiator Building in New York City. Artistic explorations of urban and rural subjects like these were tied to critical questions concerning modern art and national identity raised throughout the interwar period, as Wanda Corn has recently explained. While many war-weary European émigrés worshiped America's "newness"—culturally speaking, a condition symbolized by New York's soaring skyline—American artists often expressed ambivalence concerning their country's perceived modernity, which they commonly associated with vulgar materialism. In this context, painters of Ault's generation turned with increasing regularity to folk art and vernacular architecture as examples of America's most

respectable and accomplished native artistic expressions.<sup>10</sup> Louise Ault, however, writing about *January Full Moon* in her biography of her husband, interpreted this particular painting in strictly and profoundly personal terms. "This canvas," she explained, "seemed to describe our life [in Woodstock]: main elements strong, simplified, illuminated."<sup>11</sup>

Despite the prevailing popularity of native rural subjects, *January Full Moon* failed to earn acclaim or a buyer when it was shown at the Albany Institute of History and Art annual exhibition.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, Ault exchanged it for two hundred dollars' worth of dental work for Louise. Even before Louise's work was complete, however, Ault learned from his dentist that "people don't like it; they say it's lugubrious."<sup>13</sup> The painter's critical and financial fortunes improved after World War II, along with the American art market. This resurgent success did not last long, however. On the night of 30 December 1948 Ault drowned in the flooded Sawkill Brook during his evening walk. When Ault's body was recovered five days later, the coroner's verdict was, in the absence of witnesses, suicide by drowning.

Ault's reputation as an exceptionally talented and underrated painter grew considerably in the years following his untimely death. Reviewing *The Precisionist View* exhibition at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1960, Hilton Kramer, for one, found Ault to be "the most interesting artist in the show—the most moving and poetic, and the one with the most compelling fantasy."<sup>14</sup> James Mellow, art critic for the *New York Times*, singled out *January Full Moon* for special praise in an exhibition of Ault's many nocturnes organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1973. Notwithstanding the picture's earlier critics, Mellow placed it "among the real masterpieces in this exhibition," proclaiming it "a powerful and brooding image, saved from any trace of sentimentality or nostalgia by Ault's analytical skills."<sup>15</sup>

RRG/HA

## NOTES

1. The most complete and recent treatment of Ault's career is Susan Lubowsky, *George Ault*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center, 1988). All biographical information that follows is drawn from Lubowsky's text.
2. *Ibid.*, 8.
3. For a thorough history of Precisionism, see Gail Stavitsky et al., *Precisionism in America, 1915–1941: Reordering Reality* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
4. Magic Realism was characterized by Dorothy Miller, the organizer of the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *American Realists and Magic Realists* in 1943, as a trend relating "to pictures of *sharp focus and precise representation*, whether the subject has been observed in the outer world—*realism*, or contrived by the imagination—*magic realism*." See Miller and Alfred H. Barr Jr., eds., *American Realists and Magic Realists* (1943; reprint, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969), 5. Ault was not featured among the artists included in this exhibition despite the degree to which his work has been linked to Magic Realism.
5. Lubowsky, *George Ault*, 7.
6. On the topic of de Chirico's reception in America, see Emily Braun, ed., *Giorgio de Chirico and America* (New York: Hunter College of the City of New York; Rome: Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico; and Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 1996). As Braun and other authors in this book discuss, the widespread critical embrace of the Italian's early work was accompanied by an equally determined rejection of his more recent efforts as redundant and inconsequential, an assessment that would have most certainly inspired Ault, as it did many other American artists of the period, to take his artistic cues from "old" de Chirico as opposed to the "new."
7. This series includes *Black Night, Russell's Corners* (1943; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia), *Bright Lights at Russell's Corners* (1946; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), *Night at Russell's Corners* (1946; private collection), and *August Night at Russell's Corners* (1948; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Neb.).
8. These works include an unlocated gouache (*Rick's Barn, Woodstock, 1938*) and an oil painting (*Rick's Barn, 1940*), also unlocated. *George Ault Papers, 1892–1980*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 3935, frames 1313–14.
9. Ault's admiration of Ryder is recalled by Louise Ault in *Artist in Woodstock: George Ault; The Independent Years* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, 1978), 134–35.
10. Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California

Press, 1999). In her introduction, Corn discusses at length the ambivalence expressed by Alfred Stieglitz and members of his artistic circle about America's modernity. Ault apparently shared their conflicted views about New York particularly. Lubowsky quotes him as calling the metropolis "the Inferno without the fire." *George Ault*, 7.

11. Ault, *Artist in Woodstock*, 43.
12. *Artists of the Upper Hudson: 6th Annual Exhibit*, exh. cat. (Albany, N.Y.: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1941), unpaginated.
13. Quoted in Ault, *Artist in Woodstock*, 130.
14. Hilton Kramer, "The American Precisionists," *Arts* 35 (March 1961), 37.
15. James R. Mellow, "A Successful Escape into Night," *New York Times*, 16 December 1973, D25.

## CALVIN BALIS (1817/18–1863)

### *George and Emma Eastman, 1850* (*A Fashionable Inn*)

Oil on canvas

53<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 66<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (136.8 × 167.9 cm)

Signed, dated, and inscribed on verso before lining lower right: C Balis Pinxit / Aug 1850 / Geo. 6 ys & Emma 4 years [line drawing of a palette with brushes and illegible words inscribed inside]

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-43

IN 1931 ARCHIE EASTMAN of Washington Mills, New York, just south of Utica, sold a portrait of his father and aunt, George and Emma Eastman, to a man who said he needed some props for a play he was producing.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, when the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts purchased the canvas from the noted New York art dealer Edith Halpert, its history had already been lost. Halpert called it *A Fashionable Inn* by an unknown artist.<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1951, when the painting was exhibited at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, that it regained its rightful title and attribution through comparison with similar local pictures.<sup>3</sup>

Few facts about Calvin Balis's life and art survive. Born in 1817 or 1818, he spent his entire life in Oneida County in central New York State near Utica. He presumably grew up on his father's 210-acre farm near Whitestown, today just northwest of the Utica city limits, and remained associated with that township until his death in 1863.<sup>4</sup> Balis's location near Utica placed him at the edge of a thriving community on the Erie Canal, where numerous craftsmen had settled in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1850 Utica made the transition from a trade and transportation hub to an industrial center for cotton textile manufacturing. During these same years, the city offered a rich cultural life that included exhibitions and fairs with art displays.<sup>5</sup>

Balis began his career in the mid-1830s, and at first he may have competed for portrait commissions with M.E.D. Brown, Utica's best-known local painter from 1835 to 1839.<sup>6</sup> Like many rural portrait artists of the first half of the nineteenth century, Balis traveled to various locations in search of commissions. In 1845 he set up a studio over a jewelry store in Hamilton, New York, some thirty miles from his home.<sup>7</sup> Over the next decade and a half, he seems to have worked steadily in the region around Utica. Whether Balis had to supplement his career as a portrait painter with other endeavors is unknown, but he was successful enough to be listed as a "painter" or "artist" when specific occupations began to be recorded with the census of 1850.<sup>8</sup>

Of the thirty-five canvases signed by or attributed to Balis today, more than half are dated in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>9</sup> The artist

was particularly productive in 1850. *George and Emma Eastman*, painted in August, is his most ambitious composition of the eleven surviving portraits dated to that year and, indeed, of his whole career.<sup>10</sup> George and Emma, depicted at ages six and four, respectively, were the children of Peter Sylvester Eastman and Deborah Hallenbeck Eastman.<sup>11</sup> Peter Eastman, a successful carriage and wagon manufacturer in Washington Mills, may have been introduced to Balis through a male relative of his wife, known today only as D. Hallenbeck, whose portrait Balis painted in mid-July.<sup>12</sup>

George and Emma Eastman dominate the right-hand side of the composition and are depicted with symbolic attributes frequently seen in early-nineteenth-century portraits. George is seated with one arm wrapped protectively around his younger sister; his other hand rests on the head of a dog, a common symbol of fidelity and also suggestive of boys' fondness for outdoor sport, including hunting.<sup>13</sup> The figure of Emma, with a rose—a symbol of love and purity—in one hand and a bunch of grapes—representing fecundity—in the other, suggests female domesticity.<sup>14</sup> Together, the two children dressed in their Sunday best standing under a pear tree—a symbol for affection, well-being, and virtue—offer an image of familial love, piety, obedience, and promise. With these attributes, Balis endowed the Eastman children with representations of the most desired traits of and attitudes toward children in mid-nineteenth-century America as he represented their father's personal and professional successes.<sup>15</sup>

Signs of Peter Eastman's professional achievements and prosperity are laid out clearly behind George and Emma. The sun shines on their father's substantial estate, which is painted with a pastel-tinted palette of green, pink, blue, and peach that adds a brightness to the Eastman property, including the carriage works across the street and to the left of the main house. A four-in-hand carriage with elaborate decoration (presumably from Eastman's shop) enters from the left. Formal gardens filling the space between the children and the back of the house and vast, open acreage leading to woodlands form a pastoral backdrop to the scene.

Balis created *George and Emma Eastman* by blending stock and personal elements. Like his more famous predecessor Ammi Phillips, Balis used standard body types, poses, and costumes for his sitters.<sup>16</sup> Formulaic methods aided rural artists, like Balis, who had little or no formal training and who needed to work quickly since their income directly related to the size of their output.<sup>17</sup> Balis painted at least three portraits of brother and sister pairs in 1850 that use recycled elements. Most strikingly, *Julia and Elliott* (Fig. 1) includes two children with a dog in poses and clothing nearly identical to those of George and Emma. The most







Fig. 1 Calvin Balis, *Julia and Elliott*, 1850. Oil on canvas, 42¼ × 37 in. (107.3 × 94 cm). Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Olde Hope Antiques, Inc.

noticeable differences—hairstyles on the girls, the objects they hold, and the breeds of the dogs—individualize the paintings. The third portrait (private collection), depicting Harriet and Adelbert Howes, relates to those of the Eastman children and Julia and Elliott in other ways. For example, the attributes held by Harriet and Emma are the same but appear in the opposite hands, and the backgrounds of the two canvases in private collections share many components.

Daguerreotypes also had an impact on Balis's portraits. By 1850 the easy and inexpensive availability of photographic images offered artists both a useful assistant and serious rival.<sup>18</sup> Some artists embraced the daguerreotype as an aid to procuring the factual and realistic images increasingly demanded by patrons who desired the effects of photography.<sup>19</sup> Utica had at least four daguerreotype galleries in 1850, and Balis made use of their productions in this way at least occasionally.<sup>20</sup> Although there is no surviving daguerreotype of George and Emma Eastman, one of Adelbert and Harriet Howes (1850; private collection) has clear connections to Balis's painted portrait of the Howes children.<sup>21</sup> In that instance, the artist's use of the photograph is quite specific. Although the compositions are different—the photograph of Adelbert and Harriet shows them seated side by side in an interior, not standing before a landscape as in the painting—the two depictions of the Howes children's features and certain elements of their costumes are remarkably similar. In a more general way, all three painted images of paired siblings share several hallmarks

of the camera's vision: psychological detachment, frozen expressions, a sense of the figure's presence in space, and uniformity of details.<sup>22</sup>

George and Emma Eastman are depicted in just such a way. They appear emotionally vacant with no connection from their frozen faces to either each other or the viewer. Additionally, their presentation in the immediate foreground with a landscape behind closely resembles a daguerreotype studio setup with sitters placed in front of a scenic curtain backdrop.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Balis treated the details in the painting, from Emma's pantaloon lace and George's buttons to the lettering on the carriage, with equal attention. Whether or not Balis had access to a daguerreotype of the Eastman children, the image's construction indicates a familiarity with photographic structure and vision.

*George and Emma Eastman* also suggests Balis's awareness of the real threat to painters posed by the daguerreotype. In 1848 *Codey's Lady's Book* noted that daguerreotype portraits were affordable to all,<sup>24</sup> and the proliferation of the photographic portrait caused many portrait painters' practices nearly to dry up by midecentury. The swift acceptance of photography for portraiture forced painters either to meet the challenge of the camera's accuracy or embellish their sitters in an elaborate setting that the camera could not yet accommodate.<sup>25</sup> Balis's ambitious composition and more painterly style of the landscape clearly place the portrait of George and Emma Eastman in the latter category.

If daguerreotypes informed certain elements of Balis's painting, the technique he used to depict figures matched that used by untrained painters of his generation. The artist drew faint but very accurate outlines of George and Emma's facial features, including the contours of their jawlines, nostrils, and lips.<sup>26</sup> Multiple layers of paint were then applied with nearly invisible brushstrokes to create an opaque, smooth surface that suppressed the artist's personality and focused instead on portraying the sitter's. Ellen Grayson has argued that the roots of such a style should be attributed not only to lack of training on the artist's part or taste on the patron's but also to rural patrons' predilection for an egalitarian society. In contrast to cosmopolitan styles founded on technical virtuosity that suggested innate, individual artistic genius, the artisan aesthetic celebrated honest, hard work that intimated that anyone could prosper through concerted labor. Such a style displayed self-reliance, learned skills, and a connection to the mechanical arts, qualities associated with the ideals of the independent individual in Jacksonian America.<sup>27</sup>

In the middle of the nineteenth century, as American society evolved into a market economy, portraits displayed the contradictory tensions of the day.<sup>28</sup> The composite elements of *George and Emma Eastman* suggest the competing interests of both painter and patron. On one side, Balis's figures reflect the spirit of self-made men like Peter Eastman and embrace elements of photography, a medium viewed as democratic. On the other side, the obvious prosperity of the subject and the complexity of the painting illuminate the Eastman children's privileged status and the artist's ambition to connect his work to the more elite fine arts

tradition. In *George and Emma Eastman*, Calvin Balis painted a richly layered image that celebrated a successful wagon maker and his family at the same time that it pointed to changing times. He succeeded, as did the best rural painters at midcentury, by interweaving an older egalitarian outlook with recent desires fostered by expanding middle-class consumerism and blending older artistic traditions with new.<sup>29</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Sold for a Song, Painting Now Rates as Masterpiece," *Utica (N.Y.) Observer-Dispatch*, 20 May 1951, 7B. This account dates the original sale of the painting to 1933, but it was exhibited at the Downtown Gallery, New York, in December 1931 (see Exhibitions).
2. Halpert's records indicate that she purchased the painting from an "agent" in Bridgeport, Connecticut, who had purchased it in upper New York State. Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel ND24, frame 144; and Edith Halpert to Ross Taggart, 9 September 1949, NAMA curatorial files.
3. Harris K. Prior, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, to Ross Taggart, 14 April 1951, NAMA curatorial files. Soon after the painting was acquired by the Nelson-Atkins until 1951, a signature copied from the back of the canvas was misread as "C. Chalis," causing the Museum to attribute it to an otherwise unknown artist of that name. See Exhibitions and References.
4. Oneida County Deed Book, 141, 211–13, describes the landholdings of Calvin Balis Sr., the artist's father. The artist first appears as the head of a household in the 1840 Oneida County census, Whitestown sec., 5. The 1850 Oneida County census, Whitestown sec., 66, the 1855 Whitestown census, 3, and the 1860 Utica census, sixth ward (which included Whitestown), 15, list Balis, his wife, Mary, and their children. The artist is last listed in the Utica city directory of 1862–63. In the 1863–64 city directory, the listing at the Balis family address appears under Mary's name, and in the 1864–65 directory, the appellation "widow" appears with her name. This information was kindly supplied by Francis A. Wilcox, Oneida County Historical Society, in letters to the author, 1 and 27 December 1990 and 2 February 1991, NAMA curatorial files.
5. For an overview of the arts in Utica, see *Made in Utica*, exh. cat. (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1976).
6. Balis's earliest-known paintings are dated 1834. A list of works by Balis appears in Cynthia Sutherland, "The Search for the Elusive C. Balis," *The Clarion: America's Folk Art Magazine* 13 (Fall 1984), 61. In 1992 a previously unlisted group portrait dated 1834 sold at Sotheby's (Sotheby's, New York, 19 June 1992, lot 208). Since that date, a few additional unrecorded canvases have come to light. Paul Schweitzer, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, to the author, 15 January 2002, NAMA curatorial files. In 1839 Brown left Utica for a decade in Europe. For an outline of Brown's career, see Rosemary Courtney, "M. E. D. Brown (1810–96): American Lithographer and Painter," *American Art Journal* 12 (Autumn 1980), 66–77.
7. Sutherland, "The Search for the Elusive C. Balis," 59.
8. Before 1850 only a limited number of occupation categories were used. Most artists or craftsmen appeared under the "manufacture and trade" category, as did Balis. The 1850 Oneida County census lists Balis as a portrait painter. In the 1855 census, his occupation is "artist." In the 1860 Utica census and the 1860–61 and 1862–63 city directories, he is recorded as a painter.
9. See Sutherland, "The Search for the Elusive C. Balis," 61.
10. Balis often inscribed the month as well as the year on his canvases. Paintings of 1850 are inscribed with the months of February, May, July, August, and September. The dates of various paintings are listed in *ibid.*
11. The children's ages were inscribed on the back of the original canvas and copied onto the relined canvas in 1933. Edith Gregor Halpert to Ross Taggart, 9 September 1949, NAMA curatorial files. Peter Sylvester Eastman was born in Waterville, New York. For Eastman family history, see Guy S. Rix, *History and Genealogy of the Eastman Family of America*, 10 vols. (Concord, N.H.: I.C. Evans Press, 1901), 1:413, 2:786. Rix, 786, records Deborah Eastman's death date as 2 February 1865, while in the records of the Forest Hill Cemetery, Utica, New York, her death is listed as 22 February 1861 at age forty-eight. Francis A. Wilcox to author, 2 February 1991, NAMA curatorial files.
12. Sotheby's, New York, 26 June 1987, lot 47.
13. James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 105; and Jack Larkin, "The Faces of Change: Images of Self and Society in New England," in *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters and Society, 1790–1850*, exh. cat. (Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1992), 15.
14. Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects*, 142, 268; and Larkin, *Meet Your Neighbors*, 15.
15. For the symbolism of the pear tree and pears, see Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Florence, Italy: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1977), 296–98. Ann Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820–1860* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975), 43–44, 73, 88, outlines the importance of obedience and the belief in the mid-nineteenth century of children as the hope for America's successful future. The importance of familial love and piety are addressed in direct connection to the evangelical and reform movements in Utica in Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chaps. 3 and 4.
16. On Phillips, see Colleen Cowles Heslip, "Collectors' Notes—Early Ammi Phillips Advertisements," *Antiques* 138 (October 1990), 662.
17. Colleen Cowles Heslip, "The Artisan Painter between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers," *Antiques* 138 (October 1990), 760.
18. Delores Ann Kilgoe, "The Sharp-Focus Vision: The Daguerreotype and the American Painter," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1982, 76.
19. *Ibid.*, 68, 82–83.
20. Carl Peterson, Head of Special Collections, Colgate University Library, Hamilton, New York, to the author, 29 March 2005, NAMA curatorial files. See also *Craig's Daguerreotype Registry*, [www.daguerreotype.com](http://www.daguerreotype.com).
21. Sutherland, "The Elusive C. Balis," 57.
22. Kilgoe, "The Sharp-Focus Vision," 84.
23. On photographic backdrops, see Avon Neal, "Folk Art Fantasies: Photographers' Backdrops," in "From the Background to the Foreground: The Photo Backdrop and Cultural Expression," *Afterimage*, March–April 1997, 12–18.
24. David Jaffee, "The Age of Democratic Portraiture: Artisan-Entrepreneurs and the Rise of Consumer Goods," in *Meet Your Neighbors*, 45.
25. Heslip, "The Artisan Painter between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers," 762.
26. These lines are visible using infrared reflectography. See Technical Notes.
27. Ellen Hickey Grayson, "Toward a New Understanding of the Aesthetics of 'Folk' Portraits," in *Painting and Portrait Making in the American Northeast* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 218–26.
28. Charles Bergengren, "'Finished to the Utmost Nicety': Plain Portraits in America, 1760–1860," in *Folk Art and Art Worlds*, ed. John Michael Vlach and Simon J. Bronner (Logan: Utah State Press, 1992), 85–120.
29. David Jaffee, "One of the Primitive Sort: Portrait Makers of the Rural North, 1760–1860," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 128–30.

## GIFFORD REYNOLDS BEAL (1879–1956)

### *West Wind*, c. 1945–50

Oil on pressboard

30 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 40 in. (76.4 × 101.6 cm)

Signed bottom edge, center: Gifford Beal

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha, 51-67

IN APRIL 1950, on the occasion of an exhibition of Gifford Beal's work at New York's Kraushaar Galleries, a critic for the *New York Times* remarked, "The niche of well-bred realism that Gifford Beal has long occupied in the hybrid façade of twentieth-century painting is not of earth-wide dimensions, yet, as can be seen by his recent work . . . he continues to garnish it with pleasant offerings." While he acknowledged that Beal's subject matter—consisting for the most part of bucolic landscapes, floral still lifes, quaint New England towns, and marines—was familiar, even conventional, the critic praised "the taste and conservatively acquired knowledge that have gone into these agreeable canvases."<sup>1</sup>

One of the paintings in this exhibition was *West Wind*, a work that reflects Beal's enduring attachment to the subject matter and techniques of American Impressionism. The painting depicts a flotilla of white sloops, their sails taut, gliding out of an enclosed bay past a breakwater. Beal deftly painted the water surrounding the boats using a heavily loaded brush. The water's rippling, sculptural surface shimmers with reflected colors. The bright blue water is offset by accents of complementary orange in the surrounding rocks, one crew member's foul weather gear, and the beacon marking the entrance to the bay. In contrast to the water, Beal painted the rocky foreground and the jutting breakwater thinly, leaving his armature of india ink underdrawing clearly visible. The flat, graphic quality of these passages bears witness to Beal's professed admiration for the late paintings of the French artist Raoul Dufy, in which washes of color coexist with dark, calligraphic outlines.<sup>2</sup> Despite Beal's varying technique, *West Wind* is unified by a balanced compositional framework of rhythmic horizontal and diagonal lines and by the bright sunlight illuminating the scene.

*West Wind's* sunny portrayal of summer leisure spent on the water is characteristic of Beal's work. A friend once described him as an artist who painted "the side of life upon which the sun hits."<sup>3</sup> Rising to artistic maturity at a time when Impressionism was the dominant aesthetic in New York art circles, Beal evolved a vigorous mode of painting in which he combined his interest in recording light and color with a realistic interpretation of his subject. In both his painting style and his choice of subjects, Beal was strongly influenced by his privileged background and optimistic sensibility.

Born in New York City, Beal was the youngest of six children of William Reynolds Beal, an affluent businessman, and his wife, Eleanor Bell Beal.<sup>4</sup> Growing up in Port Morris, New York, on the

East River, he was encouraged to swim and sail as a boy, developing a love of the water that would remain with him for the rest of his life. Beal began his artistic training during the summer of 1892, when he accompanied his older brother Reynolds to Shinnecock, Long Island, to attend outdoor painting classes conducted by the American Impressionist painter William Merritt Chase (q.v.). Chase, a well-known proponent of pleinairism, had recently begun a series of paintings depicting women and children relaxing on the dunes and beaches of Shinnecock, for example *Beach* (q.v.). Under Chase's guidance, Beal acquired a facility in recording the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere by means of a rapid painting technique. Beal spent the summers throughout the 1890s studying with Chase at Shinnecock, and he also studied off and on with Chase in New York. After graduating from Princeton in 1901, Beal studied at the Art Students League in New York under the academic painters Frank Vincent DuMond and George B. Bridgman; however, it was Chase who remained the principal influence on Beal's development.

Beal established his reputation in the years between 1900 and 1920, during which his colorful outdoor genre scenes—featuring people strolling in New York's Central Park, enjoying an excursion to the circus or a garden party at Willellen, his family's summer estate in Newburgh, New York—appeared in the national annuals. These works represent his earliest forays into the theme of modern leisure activity—a subject favored by many American Impressionists, among them the influential Chase, as well as other artists of Beal's milieu, including such New York realists as Robert Henri (q.v.) and John Sloan (q.v.). By 1914, the year in which he was elected an academician at the National Academy of Design, Beal had emerged as a prominent member of the New York art scene. His professional affiliations included the Century Association, the National Arts Club, and the American Water Color Society, among many others. Beal began teaching at the Art Students League of New York in 1914 and served as its president from 1916 until 1930. He had his first solo exhibition at the C. W. Kraushaar Art Galleries in New York in 1920, and from then on exhibited there regularly.

Beal continued to focus on recreational subjects while summering in Provincetown, Massachusetts, during 1921 and 1922, painting garden parties and sunlit marines. In 1922 he made his first trip to Rockport, Massachusetts, a small fishing village on the east shore of the Cape Ann peninsula about thirty miles north of Boston.<sup>5</sup> By then, Rockport had emerged as a popular artists' colony, attracting Impressionist painters such as Aldro Thompson Hibbard, Max Kuelme, and Charles Kaelin, all of whom, like Beal, were drawn to the town's rugged coastline and the clear light of the North Shore.<sup>6</sup> Finding Rockport quieter and less congested



than other artists' haunts along the North Atlantic seaboard (he referred to it as a "place bare of superficialities"), Beal summered there regularly after 1922.<sup>7</sup> During the late 1920s and 1930s he responded to the popular artistic trend toward Social Realism by painting Rockport's fishermen and quarry workers; however, he continued to paint themes of outdoor leisure as well. Beal's interest in sailing, one of his favorite pastimes, is revealed in the many paintings of sailboats he produced in Rockport, one of which is *West Wind*.

Like the earlier oil sketch *On the Rocks* (q.v.), *West Wind* was painted from the promontory known as the Headlands, a favorite sketching spot for many Rockport artists.<sup>8</sup> The later painting, with its looser facture and simpler composition, typifies the more decorative style Beal favored in the late 1940s and 1950s. In *West Wind*, Beal created a dynamic design through his grouping of forms. The rocks in the foreground, the boats gliding diagonally across the bay, the jutting finger of land in the center, and the narrow bands of land and sky in the distance create a zigzagging pattern that draws a viewer's eye into the scene. Beal's abrupt cropping of the composition imbues the scene with a sense of immediacy, as does his summary execution, which eliminates individual detail. These strategies, coupled with his limited palette of bright blue, orange, tan, and white, help capture the essence of his subject and suggest the breezy atmosphere of a summer's day at the shore.

Painted in the wake of World War II, *West Wind* underscores Beal's reputation as a painter who could convey, in the words of Arthur Miller, "a healthy feeling that life in this world could still be good."<sup>9</sup> Although Beal's paintings became slightly more stylized during this period, probably in response to the increasing taste for nonrepresentational art, Beal continued to paint recognizable subjects in a decorative, celebratory style. His paintings of the late 1940s and 1950s may have appeared relatively conservative to his contemporaries, but their beauty and idyllic subject matter appealed to Americans who longed for escape from the austerity of the war years and the anxieties of the new Cold War. Beal maintained a strong national presence during these years, winning such awards as the National Academy of Design's Saltus gold medal in 1948 and its Palmer prize for marine painting in 1955. A mainstay of the Rockport art colony, he participated in the exhibitions of the Rockport Art Association and in those of the Gallery-on-the-Moors in nearby Gloucester until his death in New York in 1956.

CL/LL

## NOTES

1. S. P., "Beal and Biddle Display Art Here," *New York Times*, 8 April 1950, 10.
2. "Gifford Beal: Perennially Youthful Painter of the Good Life," *American Artist* 17 (October 1953), 24.
3. Barry Faulkner, quoted in Ronald G. Pisano and Ann C. Madonia, *Gifford Beal: Picture-Maker*, exh. cat. (New York: Kraushaar Galleries, 1993), unpaginated.
4. Details of Beal's life and career have been drawn from Pisano and Madonia, *Gifford Beal*; as well as Helen Comstock, "Gifford Beal's Versatility," *International Studio* 77 (June 1923), 236–41; "Gifford Beal: Perennially Youthful Painter of the Good Life," 24–27; and *Gifford Beal: Paintings and Watercolors*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, 1971). See also *Gifford Beal, 1879–1956: A Centennial Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Kraushaar Galleries, 1979); and Jeffrey Wechsler, *Gifford Beal: At the Water's Edge; Fishing Paintings from the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Kraushaar Galleries, 1999).
5. The majority of published sources states that Beal did not go to Rockport until 1923; however, William Beal, the artist's son, has stated that Beal and his family did visit the town in 1922. See Katharine Kaplan, Kraushaar Galleries, New York, to Margaret Stenz, 24 August 1994. NAMA curatorial files.
6. For the Rockport art colony, see *Artists of the Rockport Art Association* (reprint; Rockport, Mass.: Rockport Art Association, 1989); and John Cooley, *Rockport Sketchbook: Stories of Art and Artists* (Rockport, Mass.: Rockport Art Association, 1965).
7. Comstock, "Gifford Beal's Versatility," 242.
8. We thank Roberta Paine, curator of the Rockport Art Association, for her assistance in identifying the sites of both *On the Rocks* and *West Wind*. Katherine Kaplan of Kraushaar Galleries kindly provided information relative to the dating and exhibition history of both paintings.
9. Arthur Miller, "Los Angeles," *Art Digest* 27 (15 February 1953), 13.

## GEORGE WESLEY BELLOWS (1882–1925)

### *Frankie, the Organ Boy*, 1907

Oil on canvas

48¼ × 34¼ in. (122.6 × 87 cm)

Signed lower left: Geo Bellows

Purchase: acquired through the bequest of Ben and Clara Shlyen, F91-22

IN JULY 1907, when George Bellows painted *Frankie, the Organ Boy*, he was a young artist with one foot in the establishment and the other in the avant-garde. A few months earlier, his painting *River Rats* (1906; private collection) had been hung in the spring exhibition of the conservative National Academy of Design, where, despite its gritty, realist subject matter, it was noticed and praised by several critics.<sup>1</sup> When reviews of the exhibition appeared, Bellows threw a party in his studio to celebrate his having officially “arrived.”<sup>2</sup> Less than a year later, he would help to organize the *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Contemporary Americans*, a show of radical art calculated to undermine the authority of the National Academy and to rival the recent, mutinous exhibition of the Eight.<sup>3</sup> Painted in the interval between these two exhibitions, Bellows’s portrait of a half-grown, half-civilized boy, hovering between the rude world of the street and the refined world of the studio, expressed the artist’s own liminal position within the art world both stylistically and thematically.

Adapting a conventional pose of grand-manner portraiture, Bellows placed his sitter in a large chair, perched on a cushion and with one elbow on an armrest. Boy and chair emerge from an inky black background; the seated child suggests both a monarch on his throne and a gangly, energetic boy temporarily caged by good manners or the hope of a reward. Bellows’s technique is masterful: his confident painting of black on black creates variations of tonal richness worthy of Édouard Manet or Diego Velázquez; his economical descriptions of form testify to the virtuosity of his draftsmanship and his easy assimilation of his teacher Robert Henri’s (q.v.) broad and fluid brush technique. The boy’s right arm appears as a few quick squiggles and his booted foot projects into space by means of a few scuffs of brown-gray highlights. The subject’s head and hands compel attention not only through their light color but also by their facture. Bellows used shorter, thicker strokes in these areas, creating rough and textured surfaces that contrast with the smooth strokes that describe the boy’s clothing and summarize the chair. The boy’s hands seem overly large, too, and his face somewhat awry. His round eyes bulge, his ears seem too big, and his crooked grin may obscure the traces of a harelip. These slight gestures toward the grotesque ensured that Bellows would not sentimentalize his child subject; they also demonstrate

the artist’s interest in particular children, with their personal quirks and individual histories.<sup>4</sup>

Lower-class children appealed greatly to Bellows as subjects during the early years of his career, which blossomed in New York during the first decade of the twentieth century. Born in Columbus, Ohio, Bellows attended college there and developed exceptional talents as both a varsity athlete and a yearbook illustrator. His artistic ambitions won out, and in 1904 he moved to New York and enrolled in the New York School of Art. There he found a mentor and friend in Robert Henri, an artist and teacher of anti-orthodox views who encouraged students to seek subjects in the active, modern life around them and to develop individual styles that might express the vitality of that life and the immediacy of their response to it. Bellows, already a fine draftsman, developed with Henri’s guidance a broad and painterly brushstroke that suggested form rather than outlining it; he also adopted a dark palette of toned values appropriate to city streets rather than sunny landscapes. By 1906 Bellows had ventured into the Manhattan scene then being explored by Henri and his circle of artist friends—the so-called Ashcan School, which included John Sloan (q.v.), William Glackens (q.v.), George Luks, and Everett Shinn. Like these realist painters, Bellows sketched vignettes of street life and painted scenes that feature urban children and their rude, unsupervised recreations.

For Bellows, slum children provided a vehicle to express his interest in life at the jagged edges of civilization. At the time, social scientists described children as “natural savages,” and the sons and daughters of New York’s largely immigrant poor seemed doubly (and somewhat dangerously) outside the bounds of civilized life.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Henri, Bellows scrupulously avoided prettiness in his early paintings of children. In this way, he separated himself from such older artists as John George Brown, who specialized in images of winsome, unthreatening, urban waifs, or Abbott Handerson Thayer, who painted idealized children in ethereal, decorative settings. Works like *River Rats* not only won Bellows admission into the circle of revolutionary painters who followed Henri and took their subjects from “real life,” they also placed him at the radical edge of this group, allowing him to frame himself as a kind of “savage” painter—a rebel capable of purging the art world of feminine sentiment and reinfusing it with unrestrained, virile energy.<sup>6</sup>

Even while Bellows was promoting himself as a certain kind of modern painter, he also worked to transcend his student technique. To that end he found models he could pose and paint in the studio. Shortly after arriving in New York, he began painting portraits of fellow students, and by 1906 he was hiring neighborhood children to pose for him. If street scenes allowed Bellows to paint “real life,” then these portrait exercises gave him the opportunity to try out the lessons of the old masters. Henri again gave





Fig. 1 George Wesley Bellows, *Paddy Flannigan*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 30¼ × 25¼ in. (76.8 × 64.1 cm). Erving and Joyce Wolf

him a model in this direction, as did William Merritt Chase (q.v.), founder and primary teacher of the New York School of Art. Both artists were masterful portraitists who, despite their divergent attitudes about art, admired the realism of seventeenth-century Spanish and Dutch artists such as Velázquez and Frans Hals, as well as the more modern French painter Édouard Manet.<sup>7</sup> With these precedents in mind, Bellows learned to depict his subjects with an immediate, rather than an idealizing, style, to render form in large masses against a dark background, and to make the sitter's head the primary focus of light and expression. Although Bellows's portraits demonstrated his growing mastery of technique, he rarely exhibited them. Probably, he astutely guessed that the more dynamic compositions and gritty subjects of his outdoor, urban scenes would attract greater attention and better support his burgeoning reputation as an artistic rebel.<sup>8</sup>

In the summer of 1907 the financially strapped Bellows remained behind while most of his fellow students at the New York School of Art accompanied Henri to Holland. While his classmates painted picturesque Dutch scenes and studied the works of the old masters, he endured a typically hot New York summer and a garbage strike that left the city streets cluttered with reeking piles of trash.<sup>9</sup> Bellows's favorite sketching ground on the Lower

East Side was particularly hard-hit by the strike, a fact that may have influenced his choice of subjects during the months of June and July. While the strike continued, he began sketching boxing matches in the athletic club across the street from his studio. He also painted posed studio portraits of Queenie Burnett, the little girl who delivered his laundry, and Jimmie Flannigan, a newspaper boy who lived in his neighborhood. The subject of *Frankie, the Organ Boy* could easily have been recruited from the street outside his studio window.<sup>10</sup> In choosing this model, with his slightly misshapen physiognomy, Bellows may have hoped to emulate Velázquez's empathetic portraits of dwarfs and jesters at the Spanish royal court, or Francisco de Goya's expressively distorted heads and faces.<sup>11</sup>

*Frankie, the Organ Boy*, with his large hands and feet, small head, and thin limbs, resembles the gangly street children in Bellows's drawings, for instance, *Watermelon Man* (1906; location unknown).<sup>12</sup> In his painting, Bellows used this slightly caricatured figure style to convey the awkwardness of his adolescent subject with sympathy and gentle humor. The boy's knee breeches, scruffy haircut, and spindly legs crossed childishly at the ankles contrast with his wry, alert expression, which engages the viewer as an equal, and his large, competent-looking hands, which suggest



both the physical stature he will one day attain and the adult responsibilities he is beginning to assume. Together with the chair in which he sits, his clasped hands complete an enclosure which (like his neat, stylish suit) surrounds and contains his body. Although he leans forward eagerly, his movement is checked. The impression conveyed, of youthful energy channeled by growing self-restraint, is perfectly in keeping with current theories about child development—particularly those articulated in 1904 by the American sociologist G. Stanley Hall, who described adolescence as a period during which children begin to internalize social expectations and structures of control.<sup>13</sup>

The external structures of control governing children like Frankie were a matter of public debate throughout the spring of 1907 as reformers petitioned the New York State legislature for stricter regulation of child labor. Responding to these humanitarian calls for reform, and also to growing fears about lawlessness and vice in urban areas, the legislature granted local police and schools greater power over children who worked in the streets.<sup>14</sup> Bellows's identification of his subject as an "organ boy" suggests that "Frankie" may once have been an organ grinder, an illegal street trade plied mostly by immigrants; however, Bellows depicted him as being well on his way to becoming an all-American boy.<sup>15</sup> The round, nickel-plated badge on his lapel indicates that he has registered and received permission to work in a respectable trade, most likely selling newspapers, a privilege granted by New York's Board of Education to boys between the ages of ten and fourteen who spoke English fluently, passed physical and mental exams, were enrolled in school, and observed a strict curfew. In Bellows's nearly contemporary painting *Forty-two Kids* (1907; Corcoran Gallery of Art) a gang of rowdy boys demonstrates their freedom from the constraints of civilized life by exuberantly shedding both clothing and decorum. Frankie, by contrast, has traded the free life of a Gypsy for the more dignified yoke of civilization.

X-ray examination reveals that Bellows painted *Frankie, the Organ Boy* over a study of a female nude composed in a frontal view with arms akimbo and hands on her hips. Bellows, for whatever reason, decided not to complete this provocative essay; however, the following year he adopted a similarly brazen attitude for his final portrait of urban ragamuffins, the streetwise Paddy Flannigan, whose brother Jimmie he had also painted.<sup>16</sup> With his insolent posture, naked torso, and heavy-lidded, tough-guy sneer, the subject of *Paddy Flannigan* (Fig. 1) stands in marked contrast to that of *Frankie, the Organ Boy*, who seems relatively polite and decorous, closer in attitude to William Merritt Chase's contemporary portrait of the newspaper magnate William Rockhill Nelson (q.v.). By posing Frankie like a wealthy capitalist, Bellows suggested ironically that the boy himself aspired to the powerful American myth of the self-made man.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to envision Paddy Flannigan ever willingly assuming such a pose of bourgeois respectability.

Whereas Bellows frequently exhibited *Paddy Flannigan*, he appears to have never exhibited *Frankie, the Organ Boy*.<sup>18</sup> He may have felt that the later painting better expressed his own

oppositional stance as he struggled to establish his artistic reputation. Although Bellows continued to exhibit at the National Academy every year and was elected an academician in 1909, he successfully cultivated a reputation as a rebellious, avant-garde artist through his association with Henri, his loose, painterly style, his participation in various independent exhibitions, and, perhaps most significant, his choice of subjects. Despite his lopsided physiognomy, the subject of *Frankie, the Organ Boy* is essentially a well-behaved young man, eagerly conforming to the expectations of his elders. Bellows may have feared that such a painting would undermine his reputation as a rebellious painter of gritty, "real-life" subjects. As his career took shape, Bellows gradually gave up painting slum children. His paintings of boxing matches, which solidified his fame, expressed rebellion in more aggressively masculine terms and were less susceptible to sentimental readings.

LL/SM

## NOTES

1. See Frank Fowler, "Impressions of the Spring Academy," *Nation* 84 (28 March 1907), 298; and *New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, 16 March 1907, 10.
2. Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1965), 70.
3. See Arnold Friedman, "The Original Independent Show 1908," typescript, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
4. Jane Myers, "'The Most Searching Place in the World': Bellows and Portraiture," in Michael Quick et al., *The Paintings of George Bellows*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 181–82; and Henry Adams, *George Bellows: An American Master*, exh. cat. (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1991), 2.
5. See, for instance, James Mark Baldwin, *The Story of the Mind* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902), 51–100; and Alexander Francis Chamberlain, *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 213–354.
6. Marianne Doezema has argued that, from the very beginning of his career, Bellows cultivated his reputation as a virile painter of manly subjects. See Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 16. Virginia Mecklenburg has pointed out that the press used the words *vitality* and *masculinity* as common tropes to differentiate paintings by members of the Ashcan School from the more sentimental works of older, academic painters. See Mecklenburg, "Manufacturing Rebellion: The Ashcan Artists and the Press," in Rebecca Zurier, Robert W. Snyder, and Mecklenburg, *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1995), 191–213.
7. For Bellows's foundations in the art of portrait painting, see Myers, "Bellows and Portraiture," 172–75.
8. We are grateful to Glenn Peck for this insight. Telephone conversation with Lauren Lessing, 3 June 2003.
9. See "Can't Arbitrate Ash Cart Strike; Mayor Says Law Won't Let Him, and Meantime the Strike Is Extending," *New York Times*, 30 June 1907, 1.
10. *Frankie, the Organ Boy* is recorded on page 37 of Bellows's Record Book A under the heading "Portrait of Boy"; the line "'Frankie' the organ boy" appears where Bellows typically recorded the name of his sitter or model. Bellows's record books are in the collection of Jean Bellows Booth, La Jolla, California.
11. A photograph of Bellows's first studio shows framed reproductions of paintings by the Spanish artist prominently displayed. See Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*, 7. At the turn of the century, Velázquez provided a model for modern artists rebelling against the glossy idealism of academic painting. See Elizabeth M. Boone, "Vistas de España: American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1898," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1996. For Bellows's possible emulation of Goya, see Eleanor Tufts, "Realism Revisited: Goya's Impact on George Bellows and Other American Responses to the Spanish Presence in Art," *Arts Magazine* 57 (February 1983), 105–13.
12. Reproduced in Doezema, *George Bellows and Urban America*, 134.
13. G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: Appleton, 1904).
14. The legislation passed in April and was put into effect at the beginning of the school year. See "Child Labor Laws in Force," *New York Times*, 1 October 1907, 11. The text of the 1907 legislation can be found in "New York, Revised Statutes," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor*, no. 73 (November 1907), 755–67.
15. Children were banned from performing as street musicians by a 1901 revision of the New York State child labor laws; however, the further tightening of child labor legislation in 1907 was partially in response to a lack of enforceability in the older laws. See "New York, Revised Statutes," 755–56. Molly Suzanne Hutton has recently suggested that the term *organ boy* may indicate that Frankie was one of the children who collected coins for organ grinders, rather than being an organ grinder himself. See Hutton, "The Ashcan City: Representational Strategies at the Turn of the Century." Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2000, 28.
16. See Myers, "Bellows and Portraiture," 185. Bellows did paint a somewhat fiendish *Newsboy* in 1916 (Brooklyn Museum), but this character study seems much closer to Henri's investigation of "types" and far removed from the Ashcan School's portrayal of contemporary urban children.
17. In this one respect, *Frankie, the Organ Boy* resembles sentimental, Victorian paintings of street children by artists such as John George Brown, who presented bootblacks and newspaper boys as aspiring young capitalists. See, for instance, Brown's *The Treasurer* (1903; Saint Louis Art Museum).
18. Neither Bellows nor his widow recorded any exhibitions for *Frankie, the Organ Boy*. See Bellows's Record Book A (as in n10).

## GEORGE WESLEY BELLOWS (1882–1925)

### *Cleaning Fish*, 1913 (*Fishermen and Gulls; The Fish Cleaners*)

Oil on panel

13¼ × 19½ in. (33.7 × 49.5 cm)

Signed lower left: Geo Bellows—

Gift of Mrs. Logan Clendening through the Friends of Art,  
47-31

GEORGE BELLOWS LEFT NEW YORK CITY for Monhegan Island, Maine, in late June 1913. There, he worked feverishly for nearly four months, producing more than one hundred paintings. Among the first of these was *Cleaning Fish*.<sup>1</sup> Painted on a small plywood panel, the picture retains the freshness and vigor of a sketch while lending its subjects a monumental quality. Arranged like figures in a classical frieze, four fishermen stand before a landscape composed of horizontal bands—the beach at their feet, the cove behind them, the looming landmass that seems to rest on their strong shoulders, and, above all, a dense, heavy sky. Painted in warm oranges and yellows complementary to the blue and green tones of the landscape and positioned close to the picture plane, they dominate their surroundings. As they work, a flock of gulls arches over them like a cresting wave, balancing the slope of the land behind and further stabilizing the composition. In its style and subject matter, *Cleaning Fish* celebrates labor—the hard labor of the fishermen and Bellows's own work as an artist, rendered visible through his bold composition and loose facture. The painting also provides a record of the powerful influences moving Bellows as he sought to reaffirm his reputation as a modern American painter in the wake of the Armory Show.

Bellows had visited Monhegan once before, in July 1911, accompanying his friend and mentor Robert Henri (q.v.) and another artist, Randall Davey (q.v.). By this time, the Maine coast had become a popular destination for artists inspired by Winslow Homer (q.v.), whose late paintings of the sea and rocky shores around Prout's Neck had achieved iconic status.<sup>2</sup> Looking for an affordable location that would offer similarly dramatic views, Henri in 1903 discovered Monhegan Island, some seventeen miles off the Maine coast from Boothbay Harbor. Over the next fifteen years he encouraged many of his students, including Bellows, Davey, Rockwell Kent, Leon Kroll, and Edward Hopper (q.v.), to paint there.<sup>3</sup>

When Bellows arrived on Monhegan in 1911, he found the island sparsely populated. Despite revenue generated by increasing numbers of summer visitors, inhabitants of the small village overlooking the island's natural harbor still relied on fishing for their living. Their simple lives, marked by repetitive toil and danger, seemed far removed from the artifice, complexity, and confusion of modern, urban life. The geography of Monhegan was also

magnificent: "This is the most wonderful country ever modeled by the hand of the master architect," Bellows enthused soon after he arrived there. Astounded that the small island could look "as large as the Rocky Mountains," Bellows reveled in Monhegan's black and gray rocks, its pine forests, and especially the surrounding sea. By the end of his four-week visit, Bellows had completed several works on both canvas and panel, which he worked up into four large, exhibition-scale landscapes.<sup>4</sup>

The following year Bellows helped to organize the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, known familiarly as the Armory Show, in which thirteen of his works were shown. When the exhibition opened in New York in February 1913, paintings by modernist European artists garnered the most public and artistic attention. Although many critics were dismissive, Bellows studied these works open-mindedly. His encounter with paintings by such artists as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir intensified his desire to experiment with color and composition in his own work. The Armory Show also echanged the definition of modern art in America, seemingly overnight. Bellows, who had cultivated a reputation as a radical modern artist, found himself overshadowed. He was forced to redefine himself and his work.

By early summer, then, Bellows was brimming with purpose. He returned to Monhegan with his wife and daughter, intent on staying longer than he had in 1911. Most of the works Bellows produced between July and October were painted on wood panels about 15 by 20 inches in size—small enough to preserve a quick sketch but large enough to contain a complex composition.<sup>5</sup> Having embraced the modernist idea of the sketch as an end in itself, Bellows exhibited these panels as finished works. On viewing an exhibition of twenty-seven of his Monhegan paintings, including *Cleaning Fish*, at New York's Montross Gallery in January 1914, Charles Caffin derided the artist's bold colors and compositions: "[Bellows] has come to regard himself as a painter of advanced ideas, an American counterpart of some of the new movement painters abroad. . . . As a matter of fact he only differs from the rank and file of the naturalistic representative painters in this country by not possessing their knowledge and sound craftsmanship."<sup>6</sup> The critic for the *American Art News* was more complimentary: "Following in Winslow Homer's footsteps Bellows, like Rockwell Kent, has translated with crude color . . . but with remarkable strength and sympathy, the scenery, the sea and the humans of the stern and rockbound Maine coast."<sup>7</sup> Almost every reviewer noted the resemblance between Bellows's paintings and those of Homer.<sup>8</sup> A surge of critical praise had followed the older artist's death in 1910, emphasizing his strength, independence, and American-ness, all qualities Bellows admired. With their stark depictions of





Fig. 1 George Wesley Bellows, *Fisherman's Family*, 1914–15. Oil on canvas, destroyed by 1923. Photograph courtesy of H.V. Allison & Co.

heroic figures and elemental forces, Bellows's Monhegan pictures paid tribute to Homer, whom Bellows considered his "particular pet" during this phase of his career.<sup>9</sup>

In *Cleaning Fish*, the rich, saturated colors, laid thickly on the panel, give the painting a vibrant immediacy. Windblown grains of sand mixed into the paint surface suggest that Bellows was working outdoors and near the beach; however, neither the composition nor the color of *Cleaning Fish* is entirely spontaneous. Infrared reflectography reveals a variety of pencil lines beneath the painting's surface, including fragments of Bellows's initial sketch of the scene and the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal guide lines that he imposed over it.<sup>10</sup> In the finished painting, Bellows carefully arranged the figures and the landscape to create a balanced, ordered composition. A reviewer who saw the painting in 1914 called his readers' attention to Bellows's "deep interest in what might be called the geometric logic of painting."<sup>11</sup> The specific compositional system, if any, that Bellows used in *Cleaning Fish* cannot be determined; however, by 1914 it was well known that Bellows, like his colleagues Henri and John Sloan (q.v.), was immersed in the study of color and compositional theory.<sup>12</sup>

For the palette of *Cleaning Fish*, Bellows relied on a modern system, that of Hardesty Maratta. A supplier of artists' paints, Maratta devised a color scheme marked by precise gradations, in which each color was associated with a particular musical note. By suggesting that artists could create harmonious compositions with colors just as musicians created themes with notes, Maratta's theory proposed a formulaic basis for color relations. Bellows appreciated Maratta's theory for just this reason, praising it about 1913 as "the most direct and scientific instrument that has ever been placed on the market for the use of the artist."<sup>13</sup> Bellows's record book indicates that the palette for *Cleaning Fish* was based on a triad of colors representing a specific "chord" in the Maratta system: purple-red, orange, and green-blue. The triad incorporates two

pairs, orange-blue and red-green, which as complements were supposed to enhance and intensify each other when used in proximity. When Bellows employed this triad in May 1913 for his painting *Cliff Dwellers* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), he made subtle use of the complements, keeping all areas of his composition relatively close in tonal value and using white as his primary accent.<sup>14</sup> By July, however, Bellows was using the triad in ways inflected by the vivid hues he saw at the Armory Show, in particular the Fauvist paintings of Matisse.<sup>15</sup> In *Cleaning Fish*, the complementary colors are brought into the center foreground: the oranges defining the fishermen's clothing and skin as well as those highlighting the upper contours of the promontory stand out as brilliant accents in an otherwise cool palette. After returning from Monhegan, Bellows wrote to his friend Joseph Taylor, "I painted a great many pictures and arrived at a pure kind of color which I never hit before and which seems to me cleaner and purer than most of the contemporary effort in that direction." Although he added that he had "got what I can out of the modern movement for fresh, spontaneous pure color," Bellows's color would grow even bolder and less dependent on observed nature in the years following 1913.<sup>16</sup>

*Cleaning Fish* clearly shows the evolution in Bellows's style following the Armory Show; however, its subject of strong men engaged in physical labor reiterates a theme that had preoccupied him since his early days in New York. Bellows, an accomplished amateur athlete, felt an affinity for strong, male bodies. He was also a socialist, and he may have taken a political interest in the plight of poor fishermen, who were struggling all over New England to maintain their independence in the face of rapid industrialization. However, Bellows's interest in manly labor also had to do with his identity as an artist. In 1910 Bellows contrasted the effeminate, "pretty" paintings that, he felt, characterized the National Academy exhibitions with the works in the recent *Independent Exhibition* in New York, which he described as full of "manliness, frankness

and love of the game.”<sup>17</sup> For Bellows, “manliness” was a vital, distinguishing characteristic of modern art, setting it apart from the decorative and ideal art of the recent past. It was also a cornerstone of his own artistic reputation. In an August 1914 article, in which *Cleaning Fish* was illustrated, Charles Buchanan wrote,

Strength—a great, broad, bulging, muscular strength, a strength with all its imperfections and crudities, its advantages and disadvantages largely thrown at you in the raw, so to speak, by an apparent sincerity of purpose. There, so I rightly or wrongly take it, you have George Bellows, painter of democracy and a clean, hard worker.<sup>15</sup>

When Bellows returned to Monhegan in 1914, he began a monumental self-portrait titled *Fisherman's Family* (Fig. 1); the central focus of the painting was the large group of George, his wife, Emma, and daughter, Anne, standing on a hill, but in the left corner Bellows included a group of fishermen on the shore, working together at a table to clean their catch.<sup>19</sup> The group was closely related to the men in *Cleaning Fish*, suggesting that Bellows identified with the fishermen on Monhegan, seeing in their hard, manual labor a parallel to his own work as an artist. No mere exercise in structure and geometry, *Cleaning Fish* also speaks to the notions of work and the active immersion in life that were central to Bellows's conception of himself as a virile, modern painter.

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## NOTES

- Cleaning Fish* is recorded on page 163 of Bellows's Record Book A, collection of Jean Bellows Booth, La Jolla, California; at the top of this page appears the title “Trip to Monhegan 1913,” suggesting strongly that *Cleaning Fish* is one of the first paintings Bellows completed. Bellows's record books are in the collection of Jean Bellows Booth. Bellows claimed to have produced 125 paintings during the summer and fall of 1913 in a letter to Joseph Taylor dated 15 January 1914, George Bellows Papers, Special Collections, Amherst College Library, Mass., Box 1, Folder 12.
- For Homer's pervasive influence at this time, see Bruce Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence*, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1990).
- See Jessica F. Nicoll, *The Allure of the Maine Coast: Robert Henri and His Circle, 1903–1918*, exh. cat. (Portland, Me.: Portland Museum of Art, 1995), 7–17. Nicoll points out that Henri purchased land on Monhegan in 1903 but did not return for many years, perhaps because Kent had become so closely identified with the locale.
- When he traveled to Monhegan in 1911, Bellows left his pregnant wife in New York. He wrote her almost daily, in letters that provide insight into his intense emotional and artistic responses to Monhegan. See Franklin Kelly, “‘So Clean and Cold’: George Bellows and the Sea,” in Michael Quick et al., *The Paintings of George Bellows*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 143–50. Charles W. Morgan, *George Bellows, Painter of America* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1965), 135–36; and Nicoll, in *Allure of the Maine Coast*, 17–18, also quote from these letters.
- Most of the panels Bellows used that summer were “three ply veneer white wood panels” suggested by Bellows's New York dealer in art supplies; see Nicoll, *Allure of the Maine Coast*, 22. *Cleaning Fish*, by contrast, is painted on a furniture-grade plywood panel. Because it was painted early in the summer, Bellows may have still been experimenting with panels of different types. In any case, he left the panel face bare in places, using the orange-red of the wood, which is probably mahogany, to indicate the feet and beaks of the seagulls.
- Charles Caffin, “An Instructively Poor Display,” *New York American*, 19 January 1914, 6.
- “George Bellows at Montross's,” *American Art News* 13 (24 January 1914), 3.
- See also “George Bellows as Romantic Painter,” *New York Evening Mail*, 20 January 1914, 9; “What Is Happening in the World of Art,” *New York Sun*, 25 January 1914, sec. 7, 2; and “Art Notes,” *New York Evening Post*, 24 January 1914, 8.
- Bellows to Dr. S. C. G. Watkins, 25 February 1924, George Bellows Papers, Amherst College Library, Box 1, Folder 15, quoted in Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer*, 88.
- Infrared reflectography reveals four vertical lines dividing the panel from top to bottom, several shorter horizontal lines extending from both edges of the panel, and, on the right side, a short fragment of a diagonal line beneath the paint of the boat. See Technical Notes.
- “Art Notes,” *New York Evening Post*, 24 January 1914, 8.
- During this period, Bellows was experimenting with compositional systems related to the golden section; however, there is not sufficient evidence to show that he used the golden section to compose *Cleaning Fish*. See Michael Quick, “Technique and Theory: The Evolution of George Bellows' Painting Style,” in Quick et al., *Paintings of George Bellows*, 21–26, 33–42. For Henri's interest in art theories, see William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, rev. ed. (New York: Hacker Books, 1988), 184–94.
- Brochure entitled “H. G. Maratta's Artists' Oil Pigments,” 4, quoted in Quick, “Technique and Theory,” 92n30. Quick describes Maratta's system and Bellows's uses of it on 33–63; see also Homer, *Henri and His Circle*, 184–89.
- Ilene Susan Fort and Michael Quick, *American Art: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 241. In *Cliff Dwellers*, Bellows employed the “chord” of orange–red–purple–green–blue in conjunction with two other triads in a composition that is both larger and more complex than *Cleaning Fish*.
- Matisse's seventeen works in the Armory Show garnered the lion's share of attention from critics, who made particular note of his strong colors. William H. Gerdtz has argued that, during the years 1907–18, Americans associated Fauvism almost exclusively with Matisse. Gerdtz, “The American Fauves: 1907–1918,” in *The Color of Modernism: The American Fauves*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1997), 5–22.
- Bellows to Joseph Taylor, 15 January 1914 (as in n1). See Quick, “Technique and Theory,” 42–45.
- Bellows to Professor Joseph R. Taylor, 20 April 1910, transcribed in Frank Sieberling Jr., “George Bellows, 1882–1925: His Life and Development as an Artist,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1948, 239.
- Charles L. Buchanan, “George Bellows: Painter of Democracy,” *Art and Decoration* 4 (August 1914), 370.
- Bellows destroyed his 1914 painting when he decided to repaint the theme in 1923. The section showing the group of fishermen survived, however; the fragment is known today as *Tending the Lobster Traps, Early Morning* (private collection). The 1923 version of *Fisherman's Family* is illustrated in Kelly, “‘So Clean and Cold,’” fig. 40. Kelly, 157, argues forcefully for the twinned roles of nature and life experience in Bellows's art and remarks that with *Fisherman's Family*, “one could hardly conceive of more explicit evidence in support of autobiographical meaning in [Bellows's] images of the sea.”

## GEORGE WESLEY BELLOWS (1882–1925)

### *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2, 1917* (*Tesuque Pueblo; Pueblo*)

Oil on canvas, mounted on plywood  
34<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 44<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (88 × 113.4 cm)  
Signed lower left: Geo Bellows  
Gift of Julia and Humbert Tinsman, F84-65

GEORGE BELLOWS TRAVELED WEST to California in the summer of 1917, financed by a wealthy mine owner in San Mateo who commissioned the artist to paint a portrait of his young son.<sup>1</sup> Although Bellows originally planned to return directly to New York, he changed his mind at the urging of his former teacher and close friend Robert Henri (q.v.), who was spending the summer in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Bellows was contracted to resume teaching at the Art Students League in New York on 1 October, but ill health permitted him to delay his return by a month, and he arrived in Santa Fe with his family on 27 September.<sup>2</sup> With Henri and another artist friend, Leon Kroll, Bellows drove into the countryside daily, looking for interesting subjects to paint. In his two largest paintings of New Mexico scenery, he depicted Tesuque Pueblo, located nine miles north of the town.<sup>3</sup>

In *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2*, the orange glow of the late afternoon sun falls on the rolling Sangre de Cristo mountains east of the pueblo, illuminating the plaza. The surrounding adobe buildings, including a seventeenth-century Spanish church, are bathed in the warm, lingering light. Under a dramatic, indigo sky, native inhabitants go about their daily activities. Although one man wears the colorful costume of a Green Corn dancer, Bellows chose not to depict the ritual dance itself. Rather, *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* presents a casual moment of pueblo life. In this regard, the painting resembles Bellows's urban genre paintings, which show city dwellers in their "natural" habitat, engaged in characteristic activities; however, Bellows's exaggeration of the height and proximity of the surrounding mountains and his use of intense, complementary colors lend an exotic, dreamlike quality to the scene. *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* echoes the ideas of the writer Everett Carroll Maxwell, who in 1911 emphasized "the Oriental aspect of Indian life in the weird pueblo districts" near Santa Fe and warned artists that "accepted laws for color harmony, light and shadow, atmospheric or tonal renderings, count for naught in this varitinted land of unrealities."<sup>4</sup>

In 1916 the anthropologist Paul A. F. Walter announced that a "new and virile American school of art" was forming in New Mexico. He wrote:

It is the historic background, the environment, the sunshine, the sky, the climate, the people, the mingling of nations and races, and above all, the American Indian, who in this

region embodies in himself a long lineage of artistic aspiration . . . all combining to make Santa Fe and Taos, and the intensely picturesque region that lies between at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo range, a lure as well as an inspiration to the artistic temperament.<sup>5</sup>

Such inducements prompted Henri to insist that Bellows come to Santa Fe, not only because he "would like it here," but also because he "would be called upon for an exhibit at the opening of the beautiful new [Museum of New Mexico]."

By all means manage to get here for long enough to paint a picture so that you will be represented in the first Museum ex[hibition] which is to be a historical event & well done with memorial illustrated catalogue, etc. If you paint a picture here you will be a painter of the So[uth]west—southern Calif[ornia] is not included.<sup>6</sup>

As Henri knew, there was a great demand for paintings depicting southwestern scenery, and American Indians in particular. In the years following the turn of the century the tourism industry, the burgeoning field of anthropology, and the Arts and Crafts movement all fueled interest in Native American cultures, particularly those of the Southwest.<sup>7</sup> The first artists to capitalize on this interest were the founders of the art colony at Taos, who went to New Mexico in the 1890s. Joseph Henry Sharp (q.v.), Ernest L. Blumenschein, and Bert Geer Philips, among others, produced Romantic representational paintings of Native Americans in supposedly natural settings and activities. When Europe was rendered inaccessible by World War I, a second generation of American artists turned for interesting subjects to the people and scenery of New Mexico.<sup>8</sup> The former expatriate and modernist painter William Penhallow Henderson settled in Santa Fe in 1916. Mabel Dodge, the influential Greenwich Village saloniste, traveled to New Mexico in 1917, settling permanently in Taos the following year and gathering about her an entourage of modernist artists including Marsden Hartley (q.v.) and Andrew Dasburg (q.v.), and such avant-garde writers as D. H. Lawrence.<sup>9</sup> Bellows visited Santa Fe at the pivotal moment when being a "painter of the Southwest" began to signify being at the cutting edge of modern art in America.

One factor drawing both generations of artists to New Mexico was the promise of exposure to "primitive" people, whose culture seemed more authentic and less corrupt than that of the modern world. In addition, many artists saw the roots of an indigenous, American aesthetic tradition in Native American art and rituals.<sup>10</sup>







Fig. 1 George Wesley Bellows, *Study for Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2*, 1917. Pencil on paper,  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$  in. (10.8  $\times$  16.5 cm). Susan L. Peek, Larchmont, N.Y.

Pueblo art and culture were particularly well preserved at Tesuque. The anthropologist Elsie Parsons, studying the region and its people in the 1920s, identified Tesuque as the most traditional of the pueblo towns; “such is its reputation among other townspeople,” she wrote, “Tesuque keeps all its old ways.”<sup>11</sup> At least twice Bellows visited the famous and more populous pueblo of Taos, but he never painted it, seeming to avoid deliberately the picturesque vistas and gatherings that had intrigued and inspired so many others. Tesuque, on the other hand, must have radiated an irresistible aura of authenticity.<sup>12</sup>

Bellows recorded his visit to the pueblo in a pencil sketch (Fig. 1). Later, in his rented Santa Fe studio, he made two paintings of Tesuque, abstracting the scene in progressive stages.<sup>13</sup> Like the drawing, *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 1* (Fig. 2) includes the motifs of a nursing foal, beehive ovens, and an uncovered Conestoga wagon. The offhand way Bellows recorded this painting in his record book



Fig. 2 George Wesley Bellows, *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 1*, 1917. Oil on canvas,  $34 \times 44\frac{1}{4}$  in. (86.4  $\times$  112.4 cm). The Anschutz Collection

(on the bottom of a page formerly used for another painting) and the fact that he neither signed nor exhibited it suggest that the artist considered it less successful than *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2*. In the second pueblo painting, Bellows continued the exploration of Expressionist color and Edenic subject matter that he had begun in Maine the previous year, presenting an ecstatic vision of life in an unspoiled, premodern setting. He abstracted the lower range of hills into a broad arc, eliminated many anecdotal details, and expanded the space of the central plaza to create a more open, less cluttered composition. He also simplified and strengthened the color scheme. Elaborating on Hardesty Maratta’s color system, he infused his palette with a Post-Impressionist range and intensity that were unusual even in the context of the sunny, brilliantly colored southwestern landscape.<sup>14</sup> He painted the mountains in deep, rich blues and the sky in blue-black and gray-pink, as if a storm were threatening. Against this dark backdrop, the peachy tones of the foothills and the red-oranges of the pueblo’s plaza stand out with complementary vibrancy, as does the startling yellow-green that Bellows placed at the center of the composition and repeated in the foreground, in the handfuls of green corn held by the dancer. By modulating the degree of black and white that he added to his pigments, darkening them at the right and top of the canvas, lightening them at the center and left, Bellows created the effect of a low afternoon sun breaking through clouds to illuminate the plaza, especially its mission church and the girl walking in front of it, who wears brilliant white sleeves and leggings.

Bellows was so pleased with *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* that he exhibited it in the *Dedication Exhibit of Southwestern Art* at the new Museum of New Mexico in November 1917 and in a number of one-man and group exhibitions throughout the country over the next three years. A writer for the Museum of New Mexico’s journal, *El Palacio*, later recalled that Bellows’s contribution, which included four other New Mexico paintings in addition to *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2*, “created a mild sensation locally in Santa Fe because of what was then considered its extreme modernism.”<sup>15</sup> When *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* was exhibited in Chicago in 1919, along with twenty-one other works by Bellows, the painting was reproduced in the *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* and the accompanying text identified Bellows as the “dean of the younger American radicals.”<sup>16</sup> Without mentioning the Nelson-Atkins painting specifically, a reviewer for the *Chicago Daily Journal* noted that Bellows “breaks arrogantly all the ‘rules’ of painting.”<sup>17</sup> Despite such reactions, Bellows was actually striking a balance between conservatism and modernism in his work around this time. This becomes obvious when one compares *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* with William Penhallow Henderson’s nearly contemporary pastel, *Ute Dance at Tesuque* (1917/19; Art Institute of Chicago). Henderson, a former expatriate, was influenced by the works of Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse. He created a flat, decorative composition whose rhythmic forms and Expressionist colors evoke Native American music and spirituality. Bellows’s use of color in *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2*, though intense and expressive, fell short of abstraction. The scene, though romanticized, remains representational,

thus tying it to the brightly colored, naturalistic works of the first generation of New Mexico artists. As one reviewer wrote, “George Bellows is one of the few American artists of our own day who seems successfully to bridge the chasm between the conservative and the radical in art.”<sup>18</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Charles H. Morgan, *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1965), 209–12.
2. Valerie Ann Leeds, *Robert Henri in Santa Fe: His Work and Influence*, exh. cat. (Santa Fe: Gerald Peters Gallery, 1998), 32; see also Morgan, *George Bellows*, 212–14.
3. Bellows’s Record Book B (Jean Bellows Booth, La Jolla, Calif.) lists the October 1917 paintings on 132–38. In addition to *Pueblo Tesuque*, No. 2, these include *Sanctuario* (formerly Anschutz Collection, sold at Christie’s, New York, 4 December 1992, lot 272); *Santa Fe Valley* (location unknown); *The Cow*, sketch (location unknown); *The Cow* (destroyed); *Pueblo Tesuque*, No. 1 (Fig. 2); and *Chimayo* (Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe). A seventh painting, *Well at Quevedo* (Minnesota Museum of Art, St. Paul), was also painted at this time and was added to the record book after Bellows’s death.
4. Everett Carroll Maxwell, “The Great Southwest as the Painters of That Region See It,” *Craftsman* 20 (June 1911), 270.
5. Paul A. F. Walter, “The Santa Fe–Taos Art Movement,” *Art and Archaeology* 4 (December 1916), 333–34.
6. Henri to Bellows, 11 and 25 August 1917, both quoted in Leeds, *Henri in Santa Fe*, 31–32.
7. See Judith A. Barter, *Window on the West: Chicago and the Art of the New Frontier, 1890–1940*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2003), 47–77.
8. See Leeds, *Henri in Santa Fe*, 31.
9. Sharyn Rohlfen Udall, *Modernist Painting in New Mexico, 1913–1935* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
10. William H. Goetzman and William N. Goetzman, *The West of the Imagination* (New York: Norton, 1986), 353–76.
11. Elsie Clews Parsons, “The Social Organization of the Tewa of New Mexico,” *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, no. 36 (Menasha, Wisc.: American Anthropological Association, 1929), 9.
12. Tesuque was not a popular destination for tourists, despite its proximity to Santa Fe. The Santa Fe Railway had no branch line leading to the pueblo, and its pottery-making operations were overshadowed by the successful revival wares produced in the pueblos of Acoma, Zia, and especially San Ildefonso. The pueblo’s small population (only about 100 people in 1910) meant a less commanding presence for the ceremonial dances that drew observers to larger pueblos such as Taos.
13. Although Bellows did not indicate in his record book which of these two paintings he began first, his numbered titles suggest that it was *Pueblo Tesuque*, No. 1, a conclusion supported by the visual evidence of the paintings themselves. Emma Bellows and Edward Keefe both recounted that Bellows often painted from memory in order to make his work more abstract. Frank Seiberling, “George Bellows, 1882–1925: His Life and Development as an Artist,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1948, 207, 227.
14. According to his record book, Bellows used a previously arranged palette for *Pueblo Tesuque*, No. 2, one identified by the notations “page 132” and “add. P s/3 RP 3”—with the added pigments of purple and red-purple, saturated to higher intensities. See Michael Quick, “Technique and Theory: The Evolution of George Bellows’ Painting Style,” in Quick et al., *Paintings of George Bellows*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 55; and William Imes Homer, *Henri and His Circle*, rev. ed. (New York: Hacker Books, 1988), 188. This chart does not give enough information to translate Bellows’s notations unequivocally, but it does employ the term *saturation*, as well as numerical notations such as 3 to indicate intensity and initials such as *R* and *P* to denote colors. Sadly, the space next to “Palette [*sic*]” on page 132 in Bellows’s record book is blank.
15. *El Palacio* 27 (23–30 November 1929), 248, quoted in Edna Robertson and Sarah Nestor, *Artists of the Canyons and Caminos: Santa Fe, the Early Years* (Salt Lake City: G. M. Smith, 1976), 51.
16. *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 13 (December 1919), 132.
17. “Art and Artists,” *Chicago Daily Journal*, 25 November 1919, Art Institute of Chicago Scrapbook, vol. 39, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.
18. “Bellows in Chicago,” *Arts and Decoration* 12 (November 1919), 10. For an overview of Bellows’s evolving representational strategies and technique, see Quick, “Technique and Theory,” 9–95.

## THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

### *American Historical Epic*, c. 1919–26

IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR I, in 1919, the thirty-year-old artist Thomas Hart Benton began work on an ambitious painting project, a multipart mural called *American Historical Epic*. Although never completed, the series had a profound effect on the artist. It sparked Benton's lifelong pursuit of public art and had a significant impact on the style and content of the major murals he generated in the 1930s, from *America Today* (1930–31; New School for Social Research, New York), *The Arts of Life in America* (1932; New Britain Museum of Art, Conn.), *A Social History of the State of Indiana* (1933; Indiana University, Bloomington), and *A Social History of the State of Missouri* (1936; State Capitol Building, Jefferson City), to several murals he painted in later decades, such as *The Seneca Discover the French* (1956–57; Power Authority of the State of New York, Massena) and *Jacques Cartier Discovers the Indians* (1956–57; Power Authority of the State of New York, Massena), *Father Hennepin at Niagara Falls (1678)* (1959–61; New York Power Authority, Niagara), and *Independence and the Opening of the West* (1959–62; Truman Library, Independence, Mo.). Benton's interests in large-scale wall painting continued the turn-of-the-century American mural movement, represented by the decorative, pastel-toned, and classically themed panels that Edwin Howland Blashfield (q.v.) and Kenyon Cox painted for numerous world's fairs, municipal buildings, and public schools. Yet the dynamic rhythms and bright colors of Benton's murals, with their scenes of everyday American history and society, show his keen engagement in the themes and issues of modern art and culture.

"My original purpose," Benton explained some decades after abandoning *American Historical Epic* to pursue a commission from the New School for Social Research to paint the *America Today* mural, "was to present a peoples' history in contrast to the conventional histories which generally spotlighted great men, political and military events, and successions of ideas. I wanted to show that the peoples' behaviors, their *action* on the opening land, was the primary reality of American life."<sup>1</sup> Originally, Benton envisioned that his vast project, covering the gamut of American history from Anglo-European "discovery" of the New World to modern times (the 1920s), would take shape in fifty or more life-size and brightly colored canvases, all linked in style and theme and displayed in a public venue. While he apparently completed only eighteen panels, including the ten that he bequeathed to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in 1975, *American Historical Epic* was an aesthetic and intellectual turning point for Benton. After beginning work on this project he turned away from the primarily formalist and abstract exercises that he had pursued throughout the 1910s and

began shaping his vision of a modern American art that came to be called Regionalism.

Benton's interest in painting public murals was sparked early in life, largely as a result of the privilege and political sensibility of his family background. Born in Neosho, Missouri, in 1889, Benton was the eldest son of "Colonel" Maecenas Eason Benton, a United States congressman with ties to progressive and populist politics. He was named after his great-uncle, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a nineteenth-century champion of Manifest Destiny. "Politics was the core of our family life," Benton later recalled, explaining that he was expected to continue in his family's liberal political footsteps. "From the moment of my birth," he wrote in his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, "my future was laid out in my father's mind. A Benton male could be nothing but a lawyer . . . only lawyers were equipped and fitted to possess political power." This Benton male, however, had other ideas. As a child, he drew constantly and took art classes at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., where the family lived when M. E. Benton was in Congress. He was attracted early on to the themes of American history and later recalled his youthful impressions of "the historical paintings in the Rotunda of the Capitol and the murals on legendary subjects in the Library of Congress."<sup>2</sup> That is not to say that Benton completely rejected the political ideals of his forebears; instead, he reshaped them as a modern style of public painting.

If Benton's concept of a public American art was first articulated in *American Historical Epic*, more than ten years of aesthetic experimentation preceded it. At the age of seventeen, in 1907, Benton enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; from 1908 to 1911 he studied in Paris, first at the Académie Julian and later drawing and painting independently. Beginning in 1912 he lived and worked in New York, where he remained until he moved back to Missouri in the mid-1930s. During his years in Chicago, Paris, and his first decade in New York, Benton relentlessly pursued various styles of modern art, from Impressionism and Pointillism to Fauvism and Synchronism. In 1914 Benton, along with the American painters Stanton Macdonald-Wright (q.v.) and Morgan Russell, exhibited his innovative nonobjective color-field paintings at New York's Carroll Gallery; in 1916 he showed several more of his brilliantly painted Synchronist pictures in the heralded *Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*. While most of Benton's early abstract artworks were apparently lost in 1917 in a disastrous fire at the Benton family home in Neosho, a "suitcase" of his small abstract paintings came to light in the early 1980s, clearly demonstrating his affinity for the "formal harmonies of [Paul] Cézanne and the Cubists as well as the bright, spectral colors of the Synchronist palette."<sup>3</sup>



*Discovery*, 1920

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
60 $\frac{1}{6}$  × 42 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (152.6 × 107 cm)

Signed lower right: Benton; inscribed on verso before  
mounting: History of US, Chapter 1, Panel #1

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/1



*Palisades*, c. 1919–24

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
66 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 72 in. (168 × 182.9 cm)

Inscribed on verso before mounting top center: History of U.S. /  
1<sup>st</sup> Chapter Panel #2

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/2

Benton later claimed he “arrived at no stylistic convictions” after these years of avant-garde experimentation, but his art demonstrates his clear assimilation of the formal innovations of modern art. Comparing the panel *Prayer* from *American Historical Epic*, for example, with nineteenth-century paintings of similar subjects, such as those by fellow Missouri artist George Caleb Bingham (q.v.), reveals Benton’s rejection of the naturalized compositions and colors of premodern art for the asymmetrical forms and electric hues of modernism. The critic Paul Rosenfeld even declared Benton among the “most ultramodern in tendency among modern American painters” in 1921, praising his structuralist experimentation with Cézanne’s recombinations of form and color.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, Benton’s understanding of modern art, and modern times in general, involved more than simply his aesthetic assimilation of various avant-garde styles. Despite his rejection of Benton family politicking, Benton never completely rejected his father’s political sensibilities. Most particularly, he adhered to an ideal of democratic liberalism, the republican values of the early nation, a championship of work and workers—or what might be termed producerism and a celebration of the thought and culture of the American folk. Benton was brought up as a populist: “I had been raised on the idea that the big capitalist monopolies, centered in New York, were against the ‘people’s’ interests. . . . I was convinced that the American dream had been continually discounted by capitalist organizations which had grown beyond the people’s control.”<sup>5</sup> His Regionalist approach, first evident in the various panels of *American Historical Epic*, closely adhered to these populist and reformist ideals. The stylistic strains of Benton’s painterly political visions, however, were those of modern art.

Modernism, thought to be “the dominant culture of twentieth-century America,” was originally projected as an adversarial and yet integrative aesthetic, encompassing diverse and often conflicting efforts aimed at fusing art and life.<sup>6</sup> Broadly viewed, nineteenth-century culture had held to dichotomies such as the separation of gendered and racialized spheres, the disjuncture between private and public behaviors, and distinctions between art and lived experience. By contrast, twentieth-century modernists strove for a unifying principle of visual and cultural integration, often accompanied by tenets of social and political reform. Pronouncing the art and culture of the late-nineteenth-century Gilded Age staid, repressive, and corrupt, Benton and other modern artists proceeded to make a new culture, a new art. The styles they developed, with their rhythmic compositions, overlapping forms, and bright hues, embodied both the frenzied dynamism of the new modern age and the artists’ personal search for synthesis. Modern art was a paradox, stressing both flux and wholeness, revolution and harmony.

For Benton, modern art provided an innovative and exciting aesthetic structure that allowed him to link his family’s long-standing liberal political traditions with his own search for a socially engaged contemporary culture. Adopting modern art’s integrative mode, Benton painted *public* murals aimed at fusing the previously separated spheres of high and low art, of elite culture and the folk. He painted them in a powerful *modern* style, which

abandoned the scientific perspective and overall stasis of Renaissance art, the preferred aesthetic model for the entrenched academic art of the Gilded Age. Like the Dutch De Stijl and Russian Constructivist artists who were his art-world contemporaries in the 1910s and 1920s, Benton used his particular style of modern art to serve and enlighten “the people,” as he understood a broadly defined American public.

Indeed, both the narrative tone and stylistic forms of *American Historical Epic* focused, as Benton intended, on “the peoples’ behaviors, their *action* on the opening land.” The mural was originally proposed as a series of ten chapters of approximately five panels each, ranging in theme from European arrival, conquest, confrontation, and settlement in the New World, through frontier exploration, slavery, the Civil War, and the making of modern American culture and industry. Its dynamic shapes and compositions, which the critic and author Lewis Mumford described in one 1928 review as “moving rhythmically through space and time,” reveal Benton’s own certainty that social “*action*” conveyed “the primary reality” of American experience, past and present.<sup>7</sup> Benton’s history of America, in other words, was one of decisions and movements, of assertions and performances, of hyperactive labor, energy, aggression, violent struggle, and conflict. In its emphasis on dynamism and flux, and its sweeping and generalized focus, not on American elites, but on the folk, Benton’s first mural projected a profoundly modernist point of view.

In 1928, when several of the later panels from *American Historical Epic* were exhibited at the annual *Architectural League Exhibition* in New York and criticized as “superficial” decorations in a “particularly convoluted” style, Benton came to their (and his own) defense in an article for *Creative Art* entitled “My American Epic in Paint.” His mural’s dynamic style, he said, embodied his desire to combine the “extensive experience one has of the real world” with the abstract patterns and designs that were his “modern inheritance.” Such a technique, Benton explained, allowed him to “handle the modern world” in a mode of representational dynamism. Earlier, in a series of five articles published in the *Arts* from 1926 to 1927, Benton noted the “fundamental mechanical factors which underlie what we generally respond to as aesthetic values.” Dynamic pictures, the sort that grab and hold our attention, said Benton, made special use of the artistic strategies of overlapping and rhythm.<sup>8</sup> Repeating and alternating forms dissolve into one another, foreground elements and deep space blend together, and the constant activity of these intertwined, unified forms visually attracts viewers. He was, of course, describing the extraordinary visceral appeal of modern art.

In the ongoing recognition that modern American painting, from the late nineteenth century through the 1940s, comprised many different and innovative styles and yet shared a concern with the thought and society of a decidedly changed twentieth century, *American Historical Epic* is certainly modern art. This description of *Discovery* by the art historian Matthew Baigell confirms Benton’s innovative modernist approach to technique and form: “The space that exists between the Indian woman in



*Aggression*, c. 1919–24

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel

65<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (167.3 × 69 cm)

Inscribed on verso before mounting upper right: #3  
Bequest of the artist, F75-21/3

the foreground and the European boatmen appears to be arbitrary . . . curving forms echo and parallel one another, and light and dark areas alternate. Edges of one form glide into those of others.” The style of Benton’s first historical mural thus not only challenged the temporal limitations of Renaissance art but, like the Cubist paintings and early edited films that date to the same era, heralded the integrative mode of modern art. Benton retained recognizable subjects in his mural but, as the art historian Stephen Polcari remarks, his “intellectualized abstract rhythmic interaction of curving shapes, the all-over fluctuating light and dark pattern, and the spatial arrangement which pulls all forms in depth back to the surface” are clearly the elements of modern art.<sup>9</sup>

The diverse strains of early-twentieth-century modern art were not the only influence on *American Historical Epic* and Benton’s nascent Regionalism; other, premodern, art forms also made an immediate and lasting impression on Benton when he first saw them in American and European museums. In a 1973 interview with the art historian Paul Cummings, Benton reflected on the impact that Peter Paul Rubens’s Marie de Médicis cycle (1622–25) had on him when he first encountered the series of twenty-one large-scale panels in the Musée du Louvre. “I remember the Salon Carré and the great Rubens room and *The Apotheosis of Catherine de Medici*. I’m sure I wanted right away to paint a big wall like that. But I didn’t begin this large-scale painting until 1919,” Benton remarked, offering yet another explanation of how and why he came to work on *American Historical Epic*. Throughout his career, Benton would intensely study old master drawings and paintings, dissecting their compositions and critiquing their use of light and color. Benton “admired and analyzed Giotto, Masaccio, Michelangelo and Tintoretto as well as El Greco,” the art historian Marilyn Stokstad has written; he even adopted the Renaissance-era practice of sculpting three-dimensional clay models before painting his large mural compositions. As Stokstad adds: “Benton’s relationship to Italian Renaissance painting is clear: his interest in mural painting and the tempera medium, his preference for Michelangelesque figures, his belief that art should be a public phenomenon easily understood—didactic and even entertaining.”<sup>10</sup> Yet the *forms* that his finished murals ultimately took were those of twentieth-century American popular culture and modern art, not the European Renaissance.

After studying in Paris for several years, Benton landed in New York City and, in 1912, shared a room with the future film director Rex Ingram at the Lincoln Square Arcade, a rambling refuge for “prize fighters, dancers, models, commercial artists, painters, sculptors, bedbugs, and cockroaches,” located at Sixty-fifth Street and Broadway.<sup>11</sup> Ingram, destined for fame for his direction of silent films starring Rudolph Valentino, including *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921), had quit Yale, where he had studied sculpture, to pursue a movie career in the then-burgeoning New York and New Jersey film studios of Vitagraph and Edison. For about five years, from 1912–13 to just before Benton enlisted in the navy in 1918, Ingram passed on to him various movie studio projects—set designing, scene painting, and advertising, and once

even got him a bit part. The movies were more than just a healthy seven-dollar-a-day salary for Benton, however. They were a powerful new form of mass communication grounded in the modern styles of montage and editing and oriented toward broad public accessibility with their use of stereotypes and storytelling. In many ways, movies were *the* outstanding public medium of the new modern age.

The technical work Benton did for the early silent movies had an immediate impact on his own artwork, as the artist later explained: “The movies of these days did not employ color [so] I made my set designs and backdrops in black and white. My conceptions were enlarged and sometimes modified by professional scene painters. . . . Observing the scene painters, I became interested in ‘distemper,’ or glue painting, and began experiments with that medium. . . . Later it would lead to the egg-tempera techniques which I used for my murals of the thirties.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the oversize scale and monochromatic palette of movie studio flats and sets were copied in *American Historical Epic*, whose imposing canvases exhibit strong light-dark contrasts and emphasize foreground activity. Originally planned as an expansive series of historically engaged scenes following the plot of American history, the completed fifty-panel mural would have been the canvas equivalent of a feature-length film.

The movies had more than simply a formal impact on Benton and his emergent mural style; their subjects and their orientation toward audience accessibility were also of strong appeal. In fact, it was while he was working for the movies during the 1910s that Benton began to shift from personal to public art. Because of his upbringing in a politically engaged family, he had always been uneasy about a solely private aesthetic but was unsure about how to create a modern art version of public service. He found answers in the world of popular culture and especially in the movies, most particularly in their use of stereotypes—cowboys and Indians, for example—which served as visual clues to guide audiences through screened stories. The westerns and melodramas that Benton worked on in the 1910s consisted of easily recognizable characters presented in straightforward plots; the fact that they were silent films permitted them to be understood by a diverse early-twentieth-century American public of non-English-speaking immigrants. Their montage forms and fast pace furthered their audience appeal: their dynamism was that of the modern age. As an immediate participant in the creation of this new form of mass communication (the movies got their start in the late 1890s), Benton learned the parlance of popular culture and applied it when he began to create his Regionalist art. The way the movies looked—flickering black-and-white scenes full of pantomimed theatrics—emerged in Benton’s public murals. *American Historical Epic* consists of the same snappy sequences and conventional imagery as the movies of its day. Moreover, since movies were aimed at the same broad public he also wanted to reach, it is not surprising that Benton adopted a cinematic style of public painting.

In his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, and in subsequent reflections, Benton commented that it was only after he





*Prayer*, c. 1919–24

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
65<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 72 in. (167 × 182.9 cm)  
Inscribed on top center edge folded over panel: History of  
U.S., Chapter 1 Panel 4  
Bequest of the artist, F75-21/4



*Retribution*, c. 1919–24

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel

60 × 42 in. (152.4 × 106.7 cm)

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/5

enlisted in the navy during World War I, spending a year as an architectural draftsman, that he shifted away from an “art-for-art’s-sake world” and became interested in creating a public art that revealed “the world of America.” But well before the war Benton had obviously been contemplating the development of a personalized public art. As early as 1909, in a poignant letter to his father, he remarked: “I hope soon to see all America putting aside the idea that a painter’s aim is to please the eye alone, and give him his place as a man who makes his fellowman better.”<sup>13</sup>

His desire to do so, although not the form that desire ultimately took, was similar to that of the Ashcan School artists of the early twentieth century, who also revolted against the elite and narrowly delineated academic styles of the Gilded Age and searched for aesthetic integration and authenticity in the life, peoples, and culture of urban New York. Benton knew the Ashcan School leader Robert Henri (q.v.), as both were on the faculty of the Art Students League in New York in the late 1920s, and he was certainly familiar with Henri’s espousal of a democratic American art aimed at raising public consciousness about “the relation between art and life.” As Henri wrote in 1916, “To have art in America will not be to sit like a pack-rat on a pile of collected art of the past. It will be rather to build our own projection on the art of the past, wherever it may be, and for this constructiveness, the artist, the man of means and the man in the street should go hand in hand. And to have art in America like this will mean a greater living, a greater humanity, a finer sense of relation through all things.”<sup>14</sup>

This aesthetic vision clearly resonated in *American Historical Epic* and Benton’s nascent Regionalism, with its similarly modernist emphasis on integration and public accessibility. Henri’s insistence on the construction of a modern American art embodying the experiences and peoples of everyday life is similarly evident in Benton’s first major mural project, whose multiple panels are drawn from what Benton imagined to be the scenes and sights of America’s historical past. As the art historian Karal Ann Marling relates, “Robert Henri’s disciples and students maintained a strong graphic presence in the New York art world” of the teens.<sup>15</sup> Draftsmanship based on the scenes of everyday life, a visual style based on the physical stuff of the real world—this was the aesthetic of the Ashcan School. Although Benton paid only brief homage to Henri in his memoirs, this was the aesthetic style that he, too, came to assimilate. Indeed, one reason he may have abandoned *American Historical Epic* was because the project was too deeply entrenched in a historical past that Benton had not directly experienced. In the mid-1920s, searching for more intimate and deeply felt encounters with “the American environment and its people,” Benton took to the open road, sketching what he saw rather than what he imagined the American epic to be.<sup>16</sup>

Henri was not the only intellectual influence on Benton in the 1910s. While still in Paris, Benton became enthralled with Hippolyte Taine’s *Philosophie de l’art* (1875), a collection of essays that took a contextualized aesthetic approach by emphasizing the “close ties of the older arts to specific social backgrounds and cultures.” As Benton later recalled, Taine’s treatise “made

me question many ideas about art that I had heretofore taken for granted.” The writings and philosophy of John Weischel, a Polish immigrant who chaired the Department of Mechanics and Drafting at New York’s Hebrew Technical Institute from the turn of the century until the mid-1940s, did much the same. The president of the People’s Art Guild, a short-lived organization of artists founded in 1915 in New York, Weischel introduced Benton to the “theoretical literature of the day”—William James, John Dewey, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx—and suggested how artists could apply theory to both aesthetic form and social action. Weischel and the People’s Art Guild rivaled Alfred Stieglitz and his 291 gallery for attention in the American art world before World War I; both were art-world seers who attracted groups of younger artists and spent considerable time, energy, and money supporting them. But whereas Stieglitz’s gallery was his own affair, based on his aesthetic preference for early American modernist abstraction, the People’s Art Guild was more of a cooperative gallery, which catered to no particular style. Along with such stylistically diverse artists as John Covert, Andrew Dasburg (q.v.), Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove (q.v.), John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe (q.v.), John Sloan (q.v.), and Joseph Stella (many of whom also showed their work with Stieglitz), Benton exhibited in at least five of the guild’s eclectic art shows, held at various settlement houses, public schools, and churches from 1915 to 1918.<sup>17</sup>

Weischel followed Henri’s insistence on the social function of art. In the prospectus he shaped for the guild, Weischel wrote:

The People’s Art Guild appeals to social minded and art-loving persons to undertake the solution to the art problem of to-day by helping to bring about a direct approach of artists and the people, so that in the midst of a beautifully active people a hospitable home for great artists may arise. Hence the People’s Art guild invites artists to re-enter the life of the people and to make their art a token of kinship.<sup>18</sup>

Weischel’s optimism about modernist social and aesthetic integration was typical of a liberal-progressive political sensibility of the late 1910s. Indeed, the People’s Art Guild, like Jane Addams’s Hull-House, was a typical Progressive Era institutional solution to the urban problems of social estrangement and class alienation. Sponsoring drawing, sculpture, art history, and crafts classes, organizing lectures by such activist artists as Sloan and Abraham Walkowitz, and mounting exhibitions of both professional and amateur artists in diverse neighborhood centers, the guild aimed to raise the aesthetic consciousness of New York urbanites and to foster civic culture.

Weischel reintroduced Benton to the possibilities of American democratic reform and made clear that they lay, not in the realm of politics, but in art. He showed Benton that social reform and aesthetics could be blended in the public milieu of the art gallery; like most progressives, Weischel saw galleries and museums, not as temples or treasure houses meant only for the elite, but as places for social improvement. Under Weischel’s guidance, Benton



*The Pathfinder*, c. 1926

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
60 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 42 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (152.7 × 107 cm)

Inscribed on verso before mounting upper right: Chapter 2,  
Panel #1

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/6



*Over the Mountains*, c. 1924–26

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel

66¼ × 72 in. (168.3 × 182.9 cm)

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/7

began to participate actively in a cultural milieu where, as he later noted, “ideas about the social meaning and values of art were germinated.”<sup>19</sup> Those ideas first took root in *American Historical Epic*.

In the years after World War I, Benton cultivated all of the aesthetic styles and ideas he had experimented with and brought them to fruition in the panels of his first large-scale mural project. Working on the panels from 1919 to about 1928, Benton became reconnected with his political inheritance and defined his identity as a modern artist. Although progressives succumbed to despair and cynicism after the collapse of the League of Nations, the Red Scare, and the failure of significant improvement for American labor, a “reform spirit managed to remain alive after 1920,” claimed the historian Richard Pells. Certain intellectuals, among them John Dewey, Charles Beard, and Lewis Mumford, refused to abandon liberal reform politics entirely and searched throughout the 1920s for “a suitable role” to play in its revitalization. Benton, too, looked for a way to keep the progressive dream alive in the 1920s. Yet, while he dabbled in radical politics for a bit—even providing the illustrations for Leo Huberman’s Marxist history of the United States, *We, the People* in 1932—his political sensibilities were always more liberal than leftist.<sup>20</sup> *American Historical Epic* became his progressive palette.

As Benton recalled in his 1928 defense of the mural:

I was raised in an atmosphere of violent political opinions. The stuff I soaked in lights up the epic I have started. What happened in Oklahoma in my lifetime, happened in Missouri in my father’s and in Kentucky and in Tennessee in my grandfather’s; and living words from people, not books, have linked them up in feeling and established their essential sameness. The job for me is how, using the precise and involved technique of deep space composition . . . I can order my recessions of form so that they really carry my content and are not mere suites of objects with a name appended.<sup>21</sup>

These sentences, coupled with the visual evidence of *American Historical Epic*, reveal Benton’s aesthetic goal of linking his modern style—the energetic overlapping of brightly hued and deeply recessed forms—with American social history. While deep-space composition itself was not new, Benton used it in innovative ways. In each of the mural’s panels historical episodes were layered, one on top of the other, so that each moment became connected with the next, ad infinitum. As Benton painted it, American history was dynamic and continuous, its past inextricably linked with the present. As he observed, there was an “essential sameness” between his modern world and that of his ancestors. That “sameness” was a shared political vision of democratic liberalism, and *American Historical Epic* represented Benton’s first effort to restore his political inheritance in modern times, to restore and revise that familial tradition by meshing it with the modern forms of a new twentieth-century world.

The immense scope of the mural project reveals Benton’s bold and youthful confidence in himself and his reshaped political aesthetic. Working on the panels throughout the 1920s, Benton exhibited the epic in various “chapters” at annual exhibitions held in New York by the Architectural League; the panels owned by the Nelson-Atkins comprise the first two chapters, which Benton titled “Exploration and Discovery” and “Colonial Expansion.” As Benton later wrote in his 1969 autobiography titled *An American in Art*, the first chapter encompassed some twenty-five feet of wall space and “received a great deal of attention, including some sharp critical attention.” As he explained:

Architects in general were then committed to the idea that mural paintings should not break the plane of the wall. They should be flat, pale in color, and unobtrusive. The French muralist Puvis de Chavannes provided the most acceptable type of mural. My “History” was totally at odds with this. It presented strong contrasts of light and dark, was agitated in its form and color, and was too projective and recessive to stay flat on the wall.<sup>22</sup>

*American Historical Epic*, in other words, was a key example of modern art. Any success with its permanent exhibition would require a patron with modern taste, as well as someone who sided with Benton’s belief that architectural interiors should, in fact, be “agitated” rather than passive.

Benton’s decidedly nonpassive history of “the ‘people’ of America—the simple, hard working, hard fighting people who had poured out over the frontiers and built up the country”—may have been based on Jesse Ames Spencer’s illustrated *History of the United States* (1858), which he discovered while living “off base” in a Norfolk boardinghouse during his stint in the navy. Paging through the “old-fashioned four-volume” text and examining “its illustrations with increasing interest,” Benton later recalled asking himself: “Why could not such subject pictures dealing with the meanings of American history possess aesthetically interesting properties, deliverable along with their meanings? History paintings, religious or secular, had occupied a large place in the annals of art. Why not look into it again, I asked, and try to fill the contextual void of my own painting, give it some kind of meaning?” The “meaning” he eventually uncovered was profoundly different from that projected in Spencer’s four-volume text: comparisons of the illustrations by John Vanderlyn and Emanuel Leutze with Benton’s own reveal a marked difference between an interpretation of “history from above” and “history from below.” Benton’s was clearly the latter, emphasizing, as he said, “the peoples’ behaviors, their *action*,” as “the primary reality of American life.” His comment suggests that the prominent contemporary historian Charles Beard, rather than the antebellum scholar Spencer, was his major historical influence. Indeed, Benton claims to have “often discussed” his art projects with Beard, who taught at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research and often wrote for the *New Republic*.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 1 Thomas Hart Benton, *The Axes*, 1919–26. Oil on canvas, 59¼ × 41¼ in. (150.5 × 104.8 cm). © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



Fig. 2 Thomas Hart Benton, *Planters*, 1919–21. Oil on canvas, 66¾ × 72¾ in. (168.6 × 183.8 cm). © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

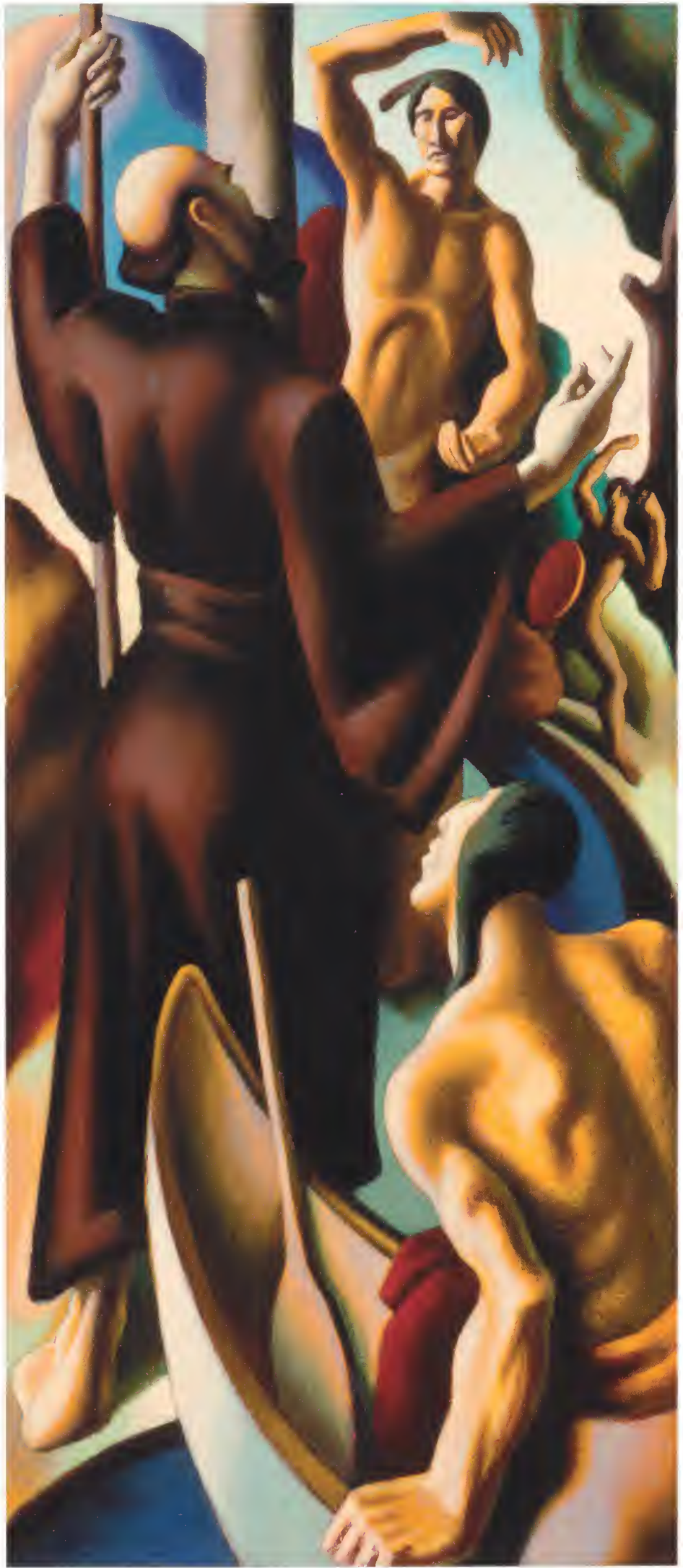
Beard's jeremiad history, by which he blamed the problems confronting America's reformist and progressive political sensibilities on the retention of Old World traditions and institutions, rather than on modern industrialization, paralleled Benton's similarly economic worldview. Beard insisted on the beneficence of industrial progress in books such as *The Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (1915), a point of view that finds resonance in Benton's own understanding of American history as one of "progress" from premodern and preindustrial traditions, behaviors, and peoples to those of the machine age. In postwar works such as *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927), Beard cautioned, as the historian David W. Noble has written, that "industrialism would restore the American heritage of democracy only if the nation followed a course of isolation" and its people turned back to "the republican virtues of the founding fathers—simplicity, native democracy, isolation, and eternal harmony."<sup>24</sup>

Beard's overall emphasis on the guiding ideology of an essentially Euro-American economic determinism is reflected in Benton's division of *American Historical Epic* into chapters—from discovery to settlement to industrialization—which show, as Benton put it, the progressive "evolution" of American civilization "from primitivism to technology through a succession of peoples'

frontiers."<sup>25</sup> That Benton used such terms as *primitivism* and repeatedly caricatured Native Americans in stereotypical guises as either stupefied or threatening beings suggest that his understanding of America's evolutionary economic history was primarily Western European in origin and profoundly racist in its treatment of America's first peoples. While Indians are represented as powerful figures in the mural, their indigenous patterns of culture and production are repeatedly pictured in derogatory terms as the art and economy of a distant, preindustrial, premodern, and hence vanquished past. Describing his historical epic in the 1928 *Creative Art* essay, Benton observed:

I was raised in a southwest Missouri town when the section reverberated with the great Oklahoma rushes. We always went hunting and fishing down in what was then Indian territory (the part of Oklahoma adjacent to Missouri) and I learned to wonder why those fellows with braided hair, dirty pants, and calico shirts were wrongly occupying more good lands than they could use! The Senecas used to come up on the Fourth of July and give a green corn dance in my home town, yelling and beating on drums and getting drunk and jailed. They all knew my father, for Indian law suits were common.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1950s Benton would attempt to assuage these biases about America's first peoples in a two-panel mural for the Administration Building of the New York Power Authority (1956–57; Massena), in which he drew on extensive historical research and detailed sketches of contemporary Indians to lend a humanity and credibility lacking in his earlier caricatures.



*Jesuit Missionaries*, c. 1924–26

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel

65 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 29 in. (167.3 × 73.7 cm)

Inscribed on verso before mounting: Chapez (r)  
Panel #3

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/8





Fig. 3 Thomas Hart Benton, *Industry*, 1924–27. Oil on canvas, 66 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 30 in. (168 × 76.2 cm). Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, 2003.3. © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY / Art Resource, NY



Fig. 4 Thomas Hart Benton, *Slaves*, 1924–27. Oil on cotton duck mounted on board, 66 $\frac{7}{16}$  × 72 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (168.8 × 183.8 cm). Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, 2003.4. © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY / Art Resource, NY

Ostensibly a sweeping social history of American economic progress, Benton's epic was clearly fraught in terms of racial difference and conflict. While the panel *Struggle for the Wilderness* hints to some degree of contestation between diverse European (English and French) claimants to American soil, most of the panels focus simply and explicitly on friction and hostility between generic bands of Anglo-Europeans and Indians. Several contemporary reviewers noted this emphasis, including the *New Yorker* critic Murdock Pemberton, who commented on “the struggle and travail that marked the pragmatic rush of the white settler over the naive Indian, untutored in the ways of trading and marksmanship.”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, it may have been Benton's own pessimism about this unceasing historical pattern of American racial confrontation and conflict that led him to abandon the mural project. Later, for a six-panel series proposed for the New York Public Library at Forty-

second Street and Fifth Avenue, which featured various depictions of the history of New York dating to approximately 1400, 1653, 1865, and 1927, as well as two lunettes titled *The Forest* and *Air Compressor*, Benton depicted a more optimistic “evolution” of American racial relationships from conflict to collectivity. Four of the panels, painted in arched compositions, showed Manhattan's development from aboriginal conflict to Indians and Dutch settlers engaging in trade; from the Civil War to the panel titled 1927—*New York Today*, showing black and white Americans laboring together in their building of the modern urban scene.<sup>28</sup> In none of its many panels, however, does *American Historical Epic* reveal any such resolution of racial conflict.

In fact, most of the mural's energies are concentrated in a crescendo of violence and destruction, struggle and anguish, from the themes of “Exploration and Discovery” that constitute the first chapter, to scenes of “Colonial Expansion” and “Colonization” in the second and what may be the third chapters of the epic. Each of the five panels in the mural's first chapter, with the titles of *Discovery*, *Palisades* (originally called *Fortification*), *Aggression*, *Prayer*, and *Retribution*, focuses on conflict and tension between European explorers and Native Americans; the five panels in the mural's second chapter, entitled *The Pathfinder*, *Over the Mountains*, *Jesuit Missionaries*, *Struggle in the Wilderness*, and *Lost Hunting Ground*, similarly examine strife and destruction. Even the spiritualist subjects, with their scenes of Pilgrims at prayer and black-robed missionaries, are strained and tense, a sensibility that is furthered throughout by Benton's dramatic and dynamic painting style, with its vivid colors, blatant light-dark



*Struggle for the Wilderness*, c. 1924–26

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
66¼ × 72¼ in. (168.3 × 183.5 cm)  
Bequest of the artist, F75-21/9



*Lost Hunting Ground*, c. 1924–26

Oil on canvas, mounted on aluminum honeycomb panel  
60¼ × 42⅛ in. (153 × 107 cm)

Inscribed on verso before mounting at top edge: History of  
U.S. Chapter 2—Panel #5

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/10

contrasts, powerful rhythmic compositions, and dissolution of space and ground.

The panels in what may be viewed as the third chapter of *American Historical Epic* continue this general emphasis, as if Benton's understanding of "the peoples' behaviors, their *action* on the opening land" was primarily one of racial hierarchy and conflict. Discovered only after Benton's death, in a roll of canvases stored in a loft of his Kansas City studio, the five panels date from 1924 to 1927 and are titled *The Axes*, *Planters*, *Industry*, *Slaves*, and *Religion* (Figs. 1–5). Scenes of racial hostility are obvious in *Slaves*, where a brutal white figure whips and beats several seminude black figures aboard what appears to be a slave ship, the steeple of a colonial church looming on the far right. Similarly, in *Planters*, Anglo-European figures are seen vigorously hoeing the land and feeding chickens, while an Indian figure with a bottle of liquor in his hand sits idly watching. Figures of industry and labor—the four men chopping trees in *The Axes*, or the odd grouping of men who appear to be getting ready to chop the neck of a woman in a white dress in *Religion*—are clearly European in ethnicity.

These five pictures have only been individually displayed, although their original grouping as a chapter of *American Historical Epic* may be speculated in the order given, with the central panel entitled *Industry*, which features two women spinning, bracketed by the two horizontal pictures focused on farming and the inhumane treatment of American slaves, and the panels entitled *The Axes* and *Religion* flanking the set. In a 1934 interview Benton named the third chapter of his epic history "Colonization," which certainly describes both the intensity of labor that followed North American discovery and exploration as well as the denuding of the American landscape and the horrific treatment of indigenous peoples, slaves, and those of "different" religious persuasions that were also dominant in the process of New World colonization.<sup>29</sup> While the panels in this third set of *American Historical Epic* may be seen as a group—the largest figures in both *The Axes* and *Religion* seem to echo one another, as do the vertical elements of trees and buildings in *Planters* and *Slaves*, and the smoothed, plasticized hills found in each panel—the chapter as a whole is less coherent than its predecessors, except for its consistent focus on conflict, struggle, and racial discord. Perhaps, after having embarked on these subjects, Benton came to realize his own pictorial preference at this time for the scenes and dramas of modern life. In the late 1920s he pursued a few other panels that seem to be attached to the general historical scheme of the mural, including the canvases *Brideship* (1927–28; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond) and *Bootleggers* (1927; Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, N.C.). By about 1929, however, Benton abandoned *American Historical Epic* in favor of work on the *America Today* mural and other projects.

Merging the modern styles he studied in the 1910s with his search for a socially reformist culture in the 1920s, *American Historical Epic* marked Benton's first large-scale foray into the realm of Regionalist art, a modern American style that, as Benton understood it and painted it for more than half a century, was deeply



Fig. 5 Thomas Hart Benton. *Religion*, 1924–26. Oil on canvas, 59¼ × 41¼ in. (150.5 × 104.8 cm). © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

engaged in the sweeping representation of the American scene and the American people. Working on *American Historical Epic* for almost a decade, Benton came to reconcile himself with the democratic liberalism of his family's politics, with public art, and with modernism. Although the epic was never completed, it firmly established Benton's reputation as a muralist and set him on the aesthetic course he would follow for the remainder of his career.

ED

## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, "American Regionalism: A Personal History of the Movement," in *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 149. For expanded accounts of this mural and Benton's pursuit of public art, see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); the remarks in this entry are based in particular on chapter 1, "Republicanism and Modernism: The Genesis of Regionalism in *The American Historical Epic*," 9–65. See also Matthew Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974).
2. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 5, 10, 11.

3. Benton discusses his youthful exploration of modern art in *An American in Art*, 29–41 and passim. See also Elizabeth Broun, “Benton and European Modernism,” in *Benton’s Bentons* (Lawrence, Kans.: Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art, 1980), 11–21. On the “suitcase” Bentons, see *Thomas Hart Benton: Synchromist Paintings, 1915–1920; From a Private Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: Salander-O’Reilly Galleries, 1981), which includes a short introduction by Matthew Baigell. See also Kay Larson, “The Seeret Suitcase of Thomas Hart Benton,” *New York* 14 (21 December 1981), 60–61.
4. Benton, *An American in Art*, 27; and Paul Rosenfeld, “American Painting,” *Dial* 71 (December 1921), 660–61.
5. Benton, “American Regionalism,” 163, 167.
6. Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” in *Modernist Culture in America*, ed. Singal (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 1–27. See also Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism, 1890–1930* (New York: Humanities Press, 1976).
7. Lewis Mumford, “Thomas Hart Benton,” *Creative Art* 3 (December 1928), 37.
8. Lee Simonson criticized the mural in “The Palette Knife,” *Creative Art* 3 (October 1928), 31–32. Benton responded with “My American Epic in Paint,” *Creative Art* 3 (December 1928), 30–36. For Benton’s essays in the *Arts*, see “Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting,” 10 (November 1926), 285–89; 10 (December 1926), 340–42; 11 (January 1927), 43–44; 11 (February 1927), 95–96; and 11 (March 1927), 145–58.
9. Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 70; and Stephen Poleari, “Jaekson Pollock and Thomas Hart Benton,” *Arts Magazine* 53 (March 1979), 120.
10. Benton, quoted in Paul Cummings, *Artists in Their Own Words* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 43; and Marilyn Stokstad, “El Greco in the Ozarks,” in *Benton’s Bentons*, 33.
11. Benton, *An American in Art*, 37.
12. Benton commented on his art-making techniques in a reply to a telegram dated 15 August 1940, from Betty Chamberlain of Time-Life, published as Appendix 2, “Benton the Model Maker,” in Bob Priddy, *Only the Rivers Are Peaceful: Thomas Hart Benton’s Missouri Mural* (Independence, Mo.: Independence Press/Herald Publishing House, 1989), 272–75, and in *An American in Art*, 34–35. See also Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*, 42–43.
13. Benton, *An American in Art*, 44–45; and Benton to his father, 1909, Paris, in Thomas Hart Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA).
14. Robert Henri, “Letter of 1916,” in *The Art Spirit*, notes compiled by Margery Ryerson (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1923), 129–30. On Benton and Henri on the faculty of the Art Students League, see William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 158–64.
15. Karal Ann Marling, *Tom Benton and His Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 17.
16. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 63.
17. *Ibid.*, 25. For information on Weischel, see John Weischel (the artist’s grandson), “The People’s Art Guild,” M.A. thesis, Hunter College, City University of New York, 1965. See also Benton’s discussion of him in *An Artist in America*, 41–42; and *An American in Art*, 35–36.
18. Prospectus of the People’s Art Guild, John Weischel Papers, AAA, microfilm reel N601, frames 144–47.
19. Benton, quoted in “A Chronology of My Life,” in *Thomas Hart Benton*, exh. cat. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Museum of Art, 1958), unpaginated entry for years 1913–16.
20. Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 12–13; and Leo Huberman, *We, the People* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932).
21. Benton, “My American Epic,” 33, 35–36.
22. Benton, *An American in Art*, 56.
23. Benton described reading Spencer in *An American in Art*, 44, and described the mural in “American Regionalism,” 149, 167, and *An Artist in America*, 62, 247. See also Emily Braun, “Thomas Hart Benton and Progressive Liberalism: An Interpretation of the New School Murals,” in Braun and Thomas Branchick, *Thomas Hart Benton: The America Today Murals*, exh. cat. (New York: Equitable Life Assurance Society of the U.S. and the President and Trustees of Williams College, 1985), 12. Baigell suggests the influence of Speneer in *Thomas Hart Benton*, 55. Benton noted his conversations with Beard in a letter to Baigell dated 22 November 1967, cited in Braun, 311–12. Benton discussed the mural in “My American Epic in Paint” (as in n8).
24. David W. Noble, *Historians against History: The Frontier Thesis and the National Covenant in American Historical Writing since 1830* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 56–75, 118–38; and David W. Noble, *The End of American History: Democracy, Capitalism, and the Metaphor of Two Worlds in Anglo-American Historical Writing, 1880–1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 41–64.
25. Benton, “American Regionalism,” 149.
26. Benton, “My American Epic,” 33.
27. Murdock Pemberton, “The Art Galleries: There Must Be Something in This Art, That People Become So Exeited about It,” *New Yorker*, 26 February 1927, 70–71, as quoted in Braun, “Thomas Hart Benton,” 311–15.
28. For illustrations of the 1927 New York Public Library proposal, see *Benton’s America: Works on Paper and Selected Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 1991), 32–33.
29. Helen Lieban, “Thomas Benton: American Mural Painter,” *Design* 36 (1934), 26–34.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Construction*, 1923

Ink with oil wash on canvas

27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 23<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (70.5 × 60.3 cm)

Signed upper right: Benton; signed and dated lower right:

Benton 24; signed lower right: Benton

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/42

IN THE EARLY 1920S, gathering visual information for subjects and themes pertinent to the *American Historical Epic* series, Thomas Hart Benton began to make multiple drawings of industrial scenes and laborers in and around New York City. *Construction*, for example, a medium-size oil sketch dating to 1923, is remarkably similar in scale and subject to a smaller and more carefully delineated oil on board of the same date and title (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Despite its inscription of “Benton 24,” comparing these works suggests that the Nelson-Atkins painting is the earlier of the two studies.<sup>2</sup> Its figures, tools, and building elements were hastily sketched in an oil wash and then outlined in india ink, and the general narrative, which centers on a group of about a dozen male figures at a building site, is interrupted by jarring and incomplete details. The odd pyramidal shape on the lower right of the Nelson-Atkins picture, for example, is more convincingly described as a heavy bundle about to be hoisted by a massive crane in Benton’s later version of *Construction*. Similarly, figures are more fully fleshed out in the later picture, demonstrating a sense of purpose and teamwork, and there is an anecdotal coherence regarding labor and productivity that is missing in the earlier preparatory sketch. The same sort of comparison can be made between many cognate studies dating to the same time: *The Drillers*, a small oil on canvas dating to 1921, is a later and more polished treatment of an even smaller oil sketch of similar composition titled *Workers, New York* (c. 1923–24; private collection).<sup>3</sup>

Drawing and sketching were always important to Benton, who reshaped the raw materials of his firsthand observations into finished painterly canvases throughout his career. His preparatory exercises took many forms, from quickly drawn charcoal and pencil sketches on paper to more technically involved and free-flowing oil washes on canvas, paper, or board. While Benton often remarked that it was his experience as a draftsman in the United States Navy during World War I that sparked his subsequent attention to the peoples and “things of the world,” in fact he had become an avid sketch-artist far earlier. From age six or seven, when he crayoned a freight train onto a wall in the family’s Neosho, Missouri, home and painstakingly copied pictures of battleships and Indians found in books and journals, to his teenage employment as a newspaper cartoonist for the *Joplin (Mo.) American*, and his art-for-hire labor in the 1910s as a set designer and scene painter for East Coast

movie companies, Benton was a consummate visual observer. His brief military experience did, however, hone his lifelong interest in machines and mechanics. While initially given the task of loading coal onto boats, Benton eventually made visual records of the Norfolk, Virginia, military installation for naval architects. Benton later recalled that his military career focused on sketching the “mechanical contrivances of building, the new airplanes, the blimps, the dredges, the ships of the base.”<sup>4</sup> The dramatic insertion of a giant dirigible floating in the background of *Construction* reveals that Benton’s interests in such “contrivances” continued after the war.

Everyday sketching also continued. The art historian Karal Ann Marling writes that Benton “began to carry a pocket sketchbook with him after his discharge from the Navy, to jot down his observations on the streets of the city, along the waterfront, and at the construction sights.” Driven by his ambition for *American Historical Epic*—to capture visually the “action” of the American people as they discovered, explored, colonized, built up, and industrialized the country and then the nation—it is not surprising that Benton looked for inspiration to the real-life energies and tangible projects of contemporary New York, whose go-go Roaring-Twenties milieu saw skyscraper after skyscraper reshape its urban landscape. As Marling notes, “The term *Regionalism*, associated as it often is with the rural scene, obscures the fact that Thomas Hart Benton was a major figure in the artistic exploration of industrial America and the advent of the skyscraper age, both themes associated with the modernistic end of the aesthetic spectrum of the twenties.”<sup>5</sup>

The wiggle of *Construction*’s inked outlines, as well as its loosely sketched pools of color, its surging and intersecting compositional elements (cranes, I beams, wooden building frames), and the rubber-band elasticity of its engaged army of workers, some uniformed in blue overalls, all combine to convey the excitement and enthusiasm Benton himself clearly felt about the modern age. Indeed, Benton had hoped that the last section, or “chapter,” of *American Historical Epic* would culminate in a series of scenes focused on the dynamism of twentieth-century American life and labor, and *Construction* was undoubtedly generated with this in mind.

Benton’s contemporaries were also engaged in picturing urban New York and capturing the hustle and bustle of the modern age. Artists ranging from Charles Sheeler (q.v.) and Charles Demuth to Joseph Stella, Georgia O’Keeffe (q.v.), Edward Hopper (q.v.), and Louis Lozowick were similarly attracted to modern architectural forms. Unlike these other artists, however, Benton chose to blend those forms and shapes with dynamic images of the laborers who had made America’s modern industrial prowess possible. Benton, as he recalled in his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, was





Fig. 1 Thomas Hart Benton, *Construction*, c. 1923. Oil on illustration board, mounted on plywood, 20 × 21¾ in. (50.8 × 55.2 cm). © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

attracted to the actual human forces who were manning the building sites and factories of America's post-World War I economic boom, the "great democratic dance" of labor and capital in the 1920s. In this he was inspired by the political sensibility of his congressman father and, in particular, by the ideal of worker determinism.<sup>6</sup> He was further inspired by his experiences working for the movie industry and the military, and by the insights of reform-era intellectuals such as John Weischel, who through the People's Art Guild encouraged American artists to link "artistic interests with the social interests of the workers' organizations, the unions."<sup>7</sup>

Assimilating these experiences and ideas, Benton's art from the 1920s through the 1930s was imbued with his keen attention to the world of work and workers. *Construction* reveals the manpower necessary to create the modern urban scene. It was painted at a time when Benton, searching for aesthetic and technical means by which he could satisfactorily paint the modern age, looked for answers in leftist politics. As he later recalled, "In the upheavals of the early twenties, during the Palmer raids and the crushings of the I.W.W., all of my sympathies were on the labor and radical side."<sup>8</sup> Yet Benton's aesthetic sympathies did not follow those of the era's Social Realist artists, such as John Sloan (q.v.) and Robert Minor, largely because his ideas about the strengths of the modern worker were rooted less in issues of class than in liberal convictions, still largely unformed at the time that *Construction* was painted.

Presumably generated as a preparatory sketch for the final chapter of *American Historical Epic*, elements from this 1923 oil sketch, and many others of similar scenes, were reworked in later mural projects, including the panel 1927—*New York Today*, proposed for the New York Public Library in 1927, and several similar urban scenes in *America Today*, the 1930–31 mural that Benton painted for the New School for Social Research. Particularly in this latter project, Benton would come closer to codifying a

personal political sensibility, much akin to that of the liberal New Deal era, that he was only beginning to visualize in *Construction*.

ED

#### NOTES

1. A 1929 lithograph by Benton is also titled *Construction*, although the scene is completely different from that in the 1923 oil sketches; see Creekmore Fath, *The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton*, new ed. (1969; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 27. The oil sketch owned by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art has not been shown or illustrated as frequently as that of the similarly titled work owned by the Benton Trust.
2. At an unknown date, Benton inscribed "Benton 24" in ink above the varnish layer. See Technical Notes. The 1930 exhibition label from the Delphic Studios, attached to the stretcher, lists *Construction's* date as 1923.
3. *The Drillers*, 24 × 18 in. (61 × 45.7 cm), signed and dated lower right "Benton '21," is illustrated in *Benton's Bents: Selections from the Thomas Hart Benton and Rita P. Benton Trusts*, exh. cat. (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1980), 28. *Workers*, 10 × 7 in. (25.4 × 17.8 cm), one of a cache of small works on paper discovered in the early 1980s, is illustrated in *Thomas Hart Benton: Synchromist Paintings, 1915–1920: From a Private Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1981), no. 20.
4. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 13, 44, 49.
5. Karal Ann Marling, *Tom Benton's Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 41, 76.
6. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 203.
7. Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 48.
8. Benton, "American Regionalism," a 1951 essay appended to his *An American in Art: A Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 165.



# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Crapshooters*, c. 1928

Tempera on pressboard

48 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 36 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (122.2 × 91.8 cm)

Signed lower right: Benton

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/14

IN THE OPENING SENTENCES of a chapter titled “On Going Places” in his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, Thomas Hart Benton asserted, “We Americans are restless. We cannot stay put.” Personalizing his own participation in this abiding national urge for mobility, Benton explained that after his brief “sojourn” in the navy, he “began getting the itch for change.” In 1922 he married Rita Piacenza, who had been his student in classes he taught at the Chelsea Neighborhood Association; in 1926 their first child, Thomas P. Benton (nicknamed “T.P.”), was born. Yet “the bonds of marriage did not lay very heavily on my back,” Benton recalled, and he began to “itch for freedom.” That itch was partially relieved by tramping across America, traveling “without interests beyond those of getting material for my pictures” and searching for the visual stuff that would eventually make up his Regionalist palette.<sup>1</sup>

At first, Benton traveled alone, hitchhiking on rural roads, knapsack on his back, sketchpad in hand. In 1928, however, he was joined by Bill Hayden, a student of his at the Art Students League. Together, in a banged-up Ford station wagon, “fixed up as a sort of combined kitchen, bedroom, and workshop,” the two traversed the American South that year from late spring through early fall. As the art historian Richard Gruber explains, the South was an important area in Benton’s overall consideration of American Regionalism, representing family history and memories as well as complex social and cultural changes in the nation’s evolving twentieth-century modern identity.<sup>2</sup> “Interested at the time in my projected history of the United States,” Benton later wrote, “I was looking for some of the old river towns where I might get next to authentic first-hand material. We had heard of one down below Natchez where the New Orleans gamblers used to transfer their activities from upstream to downstream boats.” After meandering along dirt roads and through isolated Louisiana parishes, Benton and Hayden camped along the banks of the lower Mississippi at a spot called the Red River Landing. Benton was “determined to make drawings of a riverbank loading,” a rare event by the late 1920s with the advent of train and truck transport. After waiting more than a week in the high heat and paint-blistering humidity of a late Southern summer, he was finally able to make multiple sketches of the *Tennessee Belle*, an old steamboat that docked at the landing for just a few hours.<sup>3</sup> He also sketched the African American workers who toiled long hours loading the *Belle* with bales of cotton and who then, labors accomplished and wages

received, gambled on the boat’s lower decks. The painting itself was rendered in tempera, a technique that experienced a revival among American painters during the 1930s through the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

*Crapshooters* is based on a pencil and ink drawing titled *Deck Hands’ Crap Game* (Fig. 1), a loosely sketched and fairly spare scene showing three workers playing a game of dice. In the drawing, a fourth figure is seen in the far background; in the painting, a group of four figures appears to be similarly engaged in a game of craps in the upper left corner. All of the men are types similar to the figures Benton portrayed in *Cotton Loading at Red River Landing* (1928; location unknown) and *Storing Cotton Aboard* (1928; location unknown), other sketches he quickly drew in the few hours of the *Tennessee Belle*’s docking. At one point, the captain invited Benton aboard and informed him that the *Belle* was “the last carryin’ packet on the lower river.” He also asked Benton and Hayden to join him for a lavish feast of Cajun cooking, “given in honor of the cotton planters of the parish who gave their carryin’ business to the *Tennessee Belle*.” Before joining these Louisiana patriarchs for lunch in the “old main saloon” of the riverboat’s upper reaches, Benton chanced on this scene of crapshooting on the *Belle*’s lower and less-refined deck.<sup>5</sup>

Craps, a gambling game played with two dice, was probably introduced to Americans in New Orleans by French aristocrats in the late 1700s; indeed, at the time of the Louisiana Purchase (1803), one of the city’s main thoroughfares, Burgundy Street, was called Rue de Craps. By the mid-nineteenth century, the game’s popularity had spread along the Gulf Coast and up the Mississippi River; during World War I it was avidly played by American soldiers overseas. In the 1920s, when Benton captured this scene aboard the *Belle*, craps had become popular all over the country, in “great vogue” at private parties and standard equipment at gambling casinos. It was a favorite game of chance among African Americans, especially among workingmen like the stevedores portrayed in *Crapshooters*.<sup>6</sup> Using a tipped-up perspective and a fairly bright palette, Benton accentuated both the exhilaration of the game and the rocking motion of the riverboat *Tennessee Belle*.

Riverboats and gambling have always been lumped together as a prevailing cultural myth in America; just a few years after Benton painted this scene, W.C. Fields starred in the musical comedy *Mississippi* (1935) as the flamboyant captain of a floating casino called the *River Queen*. But if that movie and most other American accounts of riverboat gambling tend to focus on nattily dressed cardsharps, Benton’s picture shows the sort of gaming far more prevalent among the “people of chance,” as the historian John Findlay has labeled risk-taking, thrill-seeking American gamblers (and the American people in general).<sup>7</sup> Craps are played fast, played anywhere (on tables, in corners, on city sidewalks),





Fig. 1 Thomas Hart Benton, *Deck Hands' Crap Game*, 1928. Pencil, pen and ink, and wash on paper, 12 × 9 in. (30.5 × 22.9 cm). Private collection

and played for any amount of money, all of which contributed to their once broad popularity; honestly played, rolling dice and betting on which numbers will be thrown also makes craps one of the fairest of all games. Of course, loaded dice, wheeling throws, and clever palming can make the game more of a swindle, but all in all, crapshooting—or “rolling the bones”—is a game of chance that does not play favorites.

The quick and equitable action of the game and its obvious popularity among the American “people” that Benton was so keen on capturing during his travels and adventures around the country in 1928 certainly immediately appealed to him. He may have feasted on Creole delicacies with the captain of the *Tennessee Belle* and its cotton plantation benefactors, but Benton’s visual attention was directed to the culture and rituals of Southern folk, not Southern society. As he remarked to a reporter in 1935, “If we are ever going to have a national [American] art, with universal value, we’ll have to yield to the pressure of the locality.”<sup>8</sup> Arguing against national homogeneity and standardization, Benton asserted that diverse local and regional cultures and peoples defined the nation as a whole; his interest in the South, as well as the rest of the country, was largely informed by his search for those Regionalist elements that contributed to the nation’s overall cultural sensibility. Once found, Benton quickly distilled those elements into the archetypal anecdotes of Southern American life that filled canvases like *Crapshooters*.

Despite such intentions, Benton’s stylized renditions of Southern African Americans were held up for particular contempt by artists and critics such as Stuart Davis (q.v.), who blasted Benton as a racist in a 1935 *Art Digest* article. In 1932 Benton reversed the figures in *Crapshooters* and included the scene as a small vignette in *Arts of the South* (Fig. 2), one of eight panels in *The Arts of Life in America*, a mural painted for the Reading Room of the Whitney Museum of American Art.<sup>9</sup> Davis was outraged by what he perceived as Benton’s “vicious” lampoon of blacks (and Jews) in the Whitney mural, citing “his *Puck* and *Judge* caricatures of crap shooting and barefoot shuffling negroes” as particularly egregious images. He added: “No danger of these negroes demanding a right to vote even if the poll tax has been taken off. If art forms have meaning and purpose and are inseparable from human ways of perceiving and doing, it is quite clear what Benton has perceived and what the purposes of his forms are.”<sup>10</sup>

Davis, however, failed to grasp Benton’s general reliance on easily understood—at least in the visual parlance of his era—and essentially stereotypical images. Exaggerating racial “types” and other identifying elements, Benton aimed to make character recognition an easy task for contemporary viewers. First developed during the 1910s while working in the motion-picture industry, Benton’s reliance on typecast figures—whether male or female, black or white, rural or urban—was done (as in movies) to assure broader audience accessibility. Regionalism, the art style Benton came to hone while gathering visual data for *American Historical Epic* and subsequent mural projects, “was an art of national stereotypes.”<sup>11</sup> If his images offended, it was because the “types” they were based on were generalizing, objectifying, and, ultimately, demeaning, like most stereotypes. While this hardly excuses Benton’s tendency to twist the real-life people he sketched and painted into these localized “types,” his larger goal of creating a national American art “with universal value” and ready accessibility—the art of Regionalism, in other words—explains his reliance on, and hence perpetuation of, popular racial, ethnic, and sexual stereotypes.

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Fig. 2 Thomas Hart Benton, *The Arts of Life in America: Arts of the South*, 1932. Tempera with oil glaze on linen, mounted on panel, 96 × 156 in. (243.8 × 396.2 cm). New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, Harriet Russell Stanley Fund, 1953.20. © T. H. Benton and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 65, 74–75, 77.
2. Richard Gruber, *Thomas Hart Benton and the American South*, exh. cat. (Augusta, Ga.: Morris Museum of Art, 1998), 11 and passim.
3. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 134–41; and Karal Ann Marling, *Tom Benton and His Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 49.
4. See *Milk and Eggs: The American Revival of Tempera Painting, 1930–1950*, with essays by Richard Boyle, Hilton Brown, and Richard Newman, exh. cat. (Chadds Ford, Pa.: Brandywine River Museum, 2002).
5. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 140. Benton's sketches of his observations of the *Tennessee Belle* are illustrated in *Benton Drawings: A Collection of Drawings by Thomas Hart Benton* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1968), 20–21, 24–25. The best overall depiction of the boat and its loading is seen in *Cotton Loading (Red River Landing, La.)* (1928; private collection), illustrated in Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 144. In *Thomas Hart Benton: Drawings from Life*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), Henry Adams suggests that Benton “may have erred in stating that he sketched *Crapshooters* on the deck of the *Tennessee Belle*” and posits that the picture may be based, instead, on sketches made in New Orleans on this same trip; see 195n24. Adams asserts that *Crapshooters* “neatly corresponds” with a description in Benton’s 1937 autobiography of “old boats” like the *Belle*, “tied up” at the New Orleans river landing below Canal Street, while “their crews and roustabouts, laughing and ragged, carried on crap games behind stacked bales of goods.” See Benton’s passage in *An Artist in America*, 152.

Yet, figures in the painting and in the numerous drawings made upriver share manners of clothing and physical similarities that suggest that the picture is, as Benton noted on the related drawing, based on events and peoples sketched on-site at Red River Landing, not New Orleans. A note in Benton’s hand, on the back of the drawing, reads: “‘Crap Game’ on the deck of the ‘Tennessee Belle’ / Aug 18—Red River Landing, La— / Thomas H. Benton.”

6. Herbert Asbury, *Sucker’s Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in America from the Colonies to Canfield* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1938), 44–48.
7. John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
8. Benton, quoted in Ruth Pickering, “Thomas Hart Benton on His Way Back to Missouri,” *Arts and Decoration* 42 (1935), 19–20.
9. This mural, and four others from the same series, was acquired by the New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, in 1953. For more on this mural, see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 88–97, 116–23. In “Important Works of Thomas Benton,” *Democrat* 13 (February 1943), 14, *Crapshooters* is given a date of 1932 in a list of Benton’s “important” oil paintings. This date may be based on mistaken assumptions linking it to the 1932 date of the Whitney mural.
10. Stuart Davis, “Rejoinder to Thomas Benton,” *Art Digest* 9 (1 April 1935), 13.
11. Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 89.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Minstrel Show*, 1934

Tempera with oil on Masonite

28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (72.1 × 91.1 cm)

Signed lower right: Benton; inscribed on verso upper left:

The picture was painted in 1934 from a drawing made of the scene in the West Virginia mountains (see “Artist in America”). The painting was done on gesso (masonite ground) with egg tempera and glazed with oil paint. It has been widely exhibited and has suffered damage several times. A final cleaning and restoration has been made, by my hand, in Feb. '64. Benton

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/13

FROM THE MID-1920S and throughout the 1930s, Thomas Hart Benton traveled across America gathering the visual information that would become the subjects of his major Regionalist murals and smaller canvases. In 1928 and again in the summer of 1934, he journeyed through isolated mountain settlements in West Virginia, sketching scenes of coal mines and miners, evangelical church services, tarpaper shacks, and “tough-looking” hill people. On an evening fully recounted in his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, Benton wandered into a small county seat on the edges of the Blue Ridge Mountains, near the Cumberlands. After eating supper at the Commercial Hotel, he strolled the town’s single street and found, in front of a “barn-like shack” that served as the “movie palace, lodge chamber, and convention hall” of the place, a large hand-lettered banner advertising a “minstrel and cabaret show” to be presented later that evening by “Five Famous Colored Artists and Entertainers.” *Minstrel Show* is based on Benton’s drawing of the performance he watched that night, one of an all-white audience of West Virginia men.<sup>1</sup>

The show, like blackface minstrelsy itself, was not exactly a pleasant communitarian performance. As Benton discovered before the show began, the five performers were the first blacks to venture into this Appalachian county seat since a horrific racial bloodbath years earlier, during which the town’s entire “Negro population” had been either lynched or driven away. “Ah don’t reckon they’ll be no show,” Benton overheard a local boy remark in the pool hall next to the makeshift theater. “It’s a bunch of uppity niggers, and we don’t ’low no niggers in here . . . I heerd tell they’s a bunch gonna run ’em out, come dark.” By the time the show started, however, the black performers (only four of whom were illustrated by Benton) had ascertained the town’s extraordinary racial animus and, as Benton’s lengthy description of their performance suggests, responded accordingly:

A little before eight, two of the Negroes stepped out in front of their theater with an ashen pallor deadening their dark skins and running to the edges of their lips painted white like those of clowns. They stood for a minute irresolutely. One had a cornet and the other a drum to which, besides the usual percussion brass, was attached a pair of cowbells. Bravely but frenziedly, after their one irresolute moment, they set to jazzing the crowd that gathered about them. The cornet player, his long black neck bulging and swelling to the needs of his instrument, his eyes rolling with something far from anticipatory relish of applause, brought prompt roars of laughter from the people gathered about. The ludicrousness of his fear, which was proclaimed by his frightened eyes and denied by the painted grin of his thick white lips, worked better than any mummery he could have devised to cool whatever there was of hot animosity in the townspeople. Sensing fun, suspecting its cause, the Negroes, with the quick adaptability of their race, made the most of it and put on an exaggerated musical pantomime of suspicious fear.

After moving the crowd to “high glee” and laughter and receiving thunderous applause from all (including Benton), the troupe “slipped away unharmed” later that night.<sup>2</sup>

With its horizontally divided composition of black performers onstage and white audience below, Benton’s painting visually posits the fierce racial divide in this small West Virginia town, and the rest of America. Only a small white boy, seen on the far right of the picture, bridges the separated spheres of white viewers and black performers; however, by drawing him with rickety thin arms, a grotesquely enlarged jaw, and a seemingly hydrocephalic skull, Benton does not encourage much in the way of the mythos of little children leading their elders to a better understanding of the brotherhood of man. It is only the performance itself, heightened and twisted into an anxious and uncomfortable kind of protective entertainment—the real fear of the performers provoking them to “ludicrous” pantomime and protecting them from the physical threat of their onlookers, the act of fear provoking laughter and relaxing the men in the audience, and keeping them from indulging in acts of physical brutality—that brings the two racial groups together. It also, of course, keeps them apart.

Indeed, as the historian Erie Lott asserts, the minstrel show itself “worked for over a hundred years to facilitate safely an exchange of energies between two otherwise rigidly bounded and policed cultures.” Rooted, as Michael Rogin remarks, in the “nationally dispossessed,” blackface minstrelsy was the first form of



popular culture in the United States of America, and the nation's most popular form of mass entertainment from the 1830s through the first decades of the twentieth century, when it was succeeded by vaudeville and then by the movies.<sup>3</sup> Originating in the urban North in the first decades of the nineteenth century, minstrel shows mainly consisted of working-class white men masked in blackface (faces darkened in burnt cork, lips enlarged in white paint), performing skits and singing songs for other white men. Minstrelsy itself was a form of both racial domination and desire, as working-class whites both mocked and mimicked those "below" them, and thereby further codified national patterns of race (and class) hierarchy.

Given its racist dialectics, it is not surprising that black performers were largely excluded from these spectacles of "black" representation. Nor is it surprising that when blacks were allowed into the public sphere of entertainment after the Civil War, they were expected to take up the same tropes of "blackness" invented earlier for and by white minstrels. The black performers in Benton's picture have clearly done so: with their grins painted on like clowns and their exaggerated and ridiculous manner, they act as their all-white, all-male audience expects, as carefree fools, as children, as lessers. The historian Robert Toll remarks that, on the one hand, blacks in blackface perpetuated and reinforced these race-based assumptions of inferiority, in part because they were expected to and in part because of the impact of racist ideology itself.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the mask of blackness, writes Lott, "may have been as much to maintain control over a potentially subversive act as to ridicule." As Paul Laurence Dunbar evoked in a late-nineteenth-century poem, acts of outward subservience helped to disguise "subversive" intentions—such as black survival in a profoundly racist country:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

The danger of the minstrel show mask, of course, was that while it manipulated the trope of "blackness" for both white enjoyment and black survival, it did so only through acts of racial derision. Benton may have laughed along with the all-white crowd in West Virginia, but his later comment, "it was a rotten affair though," and the racialized tensions expressed in his 1934 painting reveal his real discomfit with the counterfeit of blackface minstrelsy and its troubling display of black bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after he painted *Minstrel Show*, Benton was invited to join other American artists, including Peggy Bacon, Paul Cadmus, John Steuart Curry (q.v.), Reginald Marsh (q.v.), and Isamu Noguchi, to participate in the New York exhibition *An Art Commentary on Lynching*. Organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the College Art Association, and held at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries in New

York City in February 1935, the show coincided with congressional hearings on antilynching and a nationwide campaign by the NAACP to curtail racial violence.<sup>6</sup> Benton's contribution, entitled *A Lynching* (1934–35; destroyed), showed a mob of whites looting and rioting in a small town; the central scene depicted a black man tied to a telephone pole, a blazing bonfire surrounding his still struggling body. His painting, unfortunately now destroyed, may well have been based on the history he heard and the evening he experienced in West Virginia, in the summer of 1934.

Decades later, in a 1973 interview with Paul Cummings, Benton confided: "I don't dare show any of my Negro paintings today—paintings of Negroes working in the fields or anything like that." He added that "the museums" had "put theirs aside" as well.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, *Minstrel Show*, like Benton's earlier pictures *Crapshooters* (q.v.) and *Ploughing It Under* (1929–33; location unknown), which depicts a black sharecropper, were never sold and only rarely exhibited. Benton was among the few white painters during the interwar period who represented African American peoples—at work and at play, in those sites and situations that openly revealed the rifts of racial difference in the American Scene. Critical response was either patronizing (one reviewer gushed that for "those who love the negro for the chuckles in ones' throats, Benton's negro pictures are an unending delight") or caustic (as in Stuart Davis's condemnation of Benton's "vicious caricature" of "barefoot shuffling Negroes").<sup>8</sup> However critics reacted to Benton's obviously stereotyped representations of blacks, they failed to engage in what he, most obviously in *Minstrel Show*, was himself struggling to confront: the embedded assumptions, the troubling differences, and the ever-widening chasm of conflict between white and black Americans in the 1930s.

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## NOTES

1. Benton recounts the story of the scene depicted in *Minstrel Show* in *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 92–95.
2. *Ibid.*, 94–95.
3. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6; and Michael Rogin, “Black Masks, White Skin: Consciousness of Class and American National Culture,” *Radical History Review* 54 (Fall 1992), 141–52. The recent literature on minstrelsy is vast, ranging from Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), to David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991). See also Michael Rogin, “Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Spring 1992), 417–53.
4. Toll, *Blackening Up*, 196, 228.
5. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 113. Dunbar’s poem, “We Wear the Mask,” is included in his *Lyrics of Lowly Life: Complete Poems* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), 112–13, as noted in Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 87, 230. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 94.
6. The exhibition was originally scheduled to open at the Jacques Seligmann Galleries in New York on 16 February 1935 but was canceled by Germaine Seligmann because of “an outburst of protest” and moved to the Newton Galleries; see “Mysterious Protests Bar ‘Lynching Show,’” *Art Digest*, 15 February 1935, 14. For further accounts of the exhibition, see Marlene Park, “Lynching and Antilynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 18 (1993), 311–65; Frances K. Pohl, *In the Eye of the Storm: An Art of Conscience, 1930–1970* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1995), 45–52; M. Sue Kendall, *Rethinking Regionalism: John Stuart Curry and the Kansas Mural Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986), 78–81, 148–49; and Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). Zangrando, on 254n15, suggests that Benton’s painting never appeared in the exhibition. However, *A Lynching* did appear in the exhibition catalogue and was illustrated in the *Art Digest* (noted above), and, according to Park, 361n93, seems to have been reviewed by contemporary critics. Damaged by water while being stored at Benton’s property on Martha’s Vineyard, the painting was eventually ruined, although the precise date of this is unknown.
7. Benton, quoted in an interview with Paul Cummings, 23–24 July 1973, transcripts in the Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, as noted in Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 250.
8. Karl Freund, “Thomas Hart Benton—Realist,” *Ringmaster* 1 (November 1936), 36; and Stuart Davis, “Davis’ Rejoinder,” *Art Digest* 9 (1 April 1935), 13.



## THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

### *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)*, c. 1934

Tempera with oil on canvas, mounted on panel

45 × 38 in. (114.3 × 96.5 cm)

Signed lower right: Benton

Gift of the Friends of Art, 36-4

ABOUT 1931 MUSIC BECAME one of the great passions of Thomas Hart Benton's life. After completing the ten-panel mural *America Today* for the New School for Social Research in New York City, he found himself "in a little emotional slump that forbade painting." One day in his New York studio, he picked up a "two-bit harmonica" that someone had given his four-year-old son, T.P., "began to make noises on it," and found that its musical tones and scales were "like a revelation from heaven." It was a new medium for the forty-one-year-old artist, who had never received formal music lessons as a child (although his maternal grandfather, "Pappy Wise," was an expert fiddler) and who as a youth "never could sing or whistle a tune of any sort or cared to try doing so." It became a new obsession, too, a different sort of intellectual vehicle through which to study notions of style and theory, and yet also a creative form of physical release from the act of making pictures. Musical themes, songs, and performances soon worked their way into his art—*Minstrel Show* (q.v.), *The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* (1934; Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kans.), and *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)* all being superb examples.<sup>1</sup>

Music became a way to bring Benton's family together. His wife, Rita, was an amateur guitarist and singer, his son eventually became a professional flautist, and his daughter, Jessie (born in 1939), became an accomplished folk singer (and married folk musician Mel Lyman of the Jim Kweskin Jug Band). It brought friends together, too. From 1932 to 1935 Benton's musical interests extended to regular Saturday night jam sessions in his East Eighth Street apartment, with a band made up of his students from the Art Students League, including Jackson Pollock, Manuel Tolegian, and James Brooks. Occasionally, musicians, composers, and record producers such as Carl Ruggles, Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell, Frank Luther, and Carson Robinson dropped by Benton's apartment, as well.<sup>2</sup>

Benton's "Harmonica Rascals," as they were sometimes called, played traditional American folk songs like "Casey Jones" and "Buffalo Gals" and also tackled the sounds and songs of both classical European composers and non-Western musicians. "Well known and able musicians used to come over and sit among my half finished paintings and listen and laugh and sometimes join us," Benton wrote in the liner notes to a 1942 album of folk songs

that he recorded on the Decca label called *Saturday Night at Tom Benton's*. "Really famous musicians who were at the top of their stuff were not above playing fiddle with us or whacking out improvised accompaniments on the piano. . . . Pretty soon we were having singers and players of all kinds and from all sorts of places. We had an Armenian band with their marvelous drummers. We had Hindus and Chinese and Russian and Italian folk singers and Negro singers from Harlem."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, experiments with diverse musical forms, including the "peculiar harmonies" and "plaintive dances" of the various hymns and ballads that Benton had begun to collect during his sketching trips across rural America in the 1920s, had a lasting impact on many of those who gathered at his New York apartment during those Saturday night jam sessions in the early 1930s. Charles Seeger, for example, a professor of music with interests especially in the avant-garde, was apparently converted to the world of traditional American folk songs and mountain music when he, accompanied by his teenage son Pete, heard Benton's harmonica performance of "John Henry" at the 1931 dedication of the *America Today* mural at the New School for Social Research (where both he and Benton were then teaching). Musical evenings at Benton's apartment over the next few years seem to have helped Seeger shift toward the study of American ethnomusicology that would occupy him for the rest of his life.<sup>4</sup>

In the spring of 1935 various members of Benton's makeshift band played at Ferargil Galleries, 63 East Fifty-seventh Street in New York, where a show of his recent paintings was on view. Benton was soon to leave the city that had been his home since the 1910s and return to Missouri, both to pursue a mural commissioned for the state capitol in Jefferson City and to leave behind the "verbal stupidities" of what he perceived as an increasingly effete New York art world largely unreceptive to his Regionalist vision. In a long letter to Ruggles, an avant-garde American composer, Benton described the "big public farewell party" that was held at the gallery:

Everybody including the Press was invited and we had such a crowd as you seldom see in New York—a crowd that threw away all its presumptions and pretensions and sat on the floor and had a good time. I drilled my harmonica players for four hours a day all last week till they could play our past stuff as clean and neat as a whistle. We stood out in front of your portrait, and played the first thing you wrote us with 4 harmonicas and we got such a hand that we swelled up as if we were regular performers. We had to play it four times before we could go on.<sup>5</sup>



The portrait Benton mentioned was *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)*, a large oil that he had painted from sketches made while visiting Ruggles at his home in Arlington, Vermont, in September 1933.

Benton had recently completed *A Social History of the State of Indiana*, a gigantic multipaneled mural (some 200 feet long) frenetically painted in only five months as Indiana's contribution to the 1933 Chicago World's Fair (also called *A Century of Progress International Exhibition*). Later, Benton would reflect that the mural represented "the best work, so far, of my life," but it also left him exhausted, "like an empty sack." Indeed, after "two years of excited concentration [and] constant overstimulation" spent painting *The Arts of Life in America* mural for the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1932 and the Indiana mural in 1933, Benton felt "milked of every emotional possibility." After sitting around "for months" in his New York studio "without ever touching a brush," Benton unexpectedly received an invitation from Ruggles, and decided that "a walk through the autumnal hills of New England" might be just the thing to rejuvenate his aesthetic imagination. "I got re-charged all right," Benton later wrote, "but it was not the scenery that did it but Carl himself. Not more than an hour after I arrived while he was banging out Wagnerian chords on the piano, I started making drawings of him. Finally I hit one that fired me up and my creativity was restimulated."<sup>6</sup>

Benton had known Carl Ruggles since the early 1920s, perhaps from various lectures and classes the composer presented at the Whitney Studio Club (the forerunner of the New York art museum) and from International Composers Guild chamber music concerts in which portions of Ruggles's works *Angels* and *Toys* were presented. They had mutual friends and acquaintances, including Charles Seeger, the artists Roekwell Kent and Boardman Robinson, and the composer Edgar Varese, all of whom, like Ruggles and Benton, were deeply engaged in creating their own versions of a modern American aesthetic, albeit in different media and with different goals. They also had similarly expansive aesthetic interests: Ruggles started painting in 1929 at the age of fifty-three, at about the same time that a middle-aged Benton started seriously to investigate the world of music. While Ruggles's abstract and evocative oils and watercolors were profoundly different from those painted by Benton, their relationship was one of shared enthusiasms—Ruggles occasionally providing Benton with various musical "exercises" to be used by his amateur harmonica band, Benton lending his painterly expertise and advice.

Ruggles was an atonal composer particularly known for bold and complex polyphonic works. The conductor Michael Tilson Thomas writes that Ruggles "forged out an independent musical style, yet one based on his own idols—[Johann Sebastian] Bach, [Ludwig van] Beethoven, [Richard] Wagner: from Bach, the contrapuntal mastery and complexity; from Beethoven, a commitment to tough and dramatic formal organization; and from Wagner, a rich orchestra and harmonic vocabulary using complex chromaticism to convey violent or subtle emotional states."<sup>7</sup> Ruggles produced relatively few finished works in his long career, and as is typical of most

avant-garde American composers, those few received little attention in the United States during his lifetime. His best-known work, *Sun Treader*, for example, a dissonant and dramatic sixteen-minute orchestral piece composed between 1926 and 1931 (although, like most of Ruggles's music, reworked from earlier pieces), premiered in Paris in 1932 and received its first American performance only in 1966, in a concert given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Portland, Maine. Based on the line "Sun-treader, life and light be thine forever," from the 1833 poem "Pauline" written by Robert Browning as an elegy to Percy Bysshe Shelley, Ruggles's full orchestral composition is a symphony in one movement. Swept in wide-ranging melodies and rhythms, booming tympani, and dissonant counterpoints, the piece is as forceful and dynamic as Browning's poem, and as transcendental in tone.

It may seem surprising that Benton, outspoken champion of the folk and diehard defender of regional cultures and tastes, knew Ruggles and found his innovative modern music both important and compelling. Benton, of course, relished his Depression-era image as America's premier populist painter, an image realized on broad national terms when his self-portrait glared from the cover of *Time* magazine on 24 December 1934. Focusing on a new "U.S. Scene" of artists including John Steuart Curry (q.v.), Grant Wood, Charles Burchfield, and Reginald Marsh (q.v.), the magazine's writers liberally spiced their cover story with blunt quotes from Benton, whom they declared "the most virile" leader of the group: "I am no sentimentalist. I know an ass and the dust of his kicking when I come across it."<sup>8</sup> Simplistically reducing Benton to the category of a "Midwestern" painter and failing to address his national cultural interests, his abiding stylistic experiments in modern art, or the several decades that he had spent in the New York art world, *Time* initiated the standard critical treatment of the imprecisely tagged phenomenon of Regionalism, whereby its art and artists were stereotyped as unsophisticated nativists and intemperate conservatives.

Despite his own proclivities to act that part, Benton was, of course, a far more complicated artist, an individual whose broad and encompassing interests ranged from the traditions and rituals of the American folk to the dissonant aesthetics of avant-garde modernism. *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)* speaks to this, a seemingly straightforward portrait that on further consideration reveals the aesthetic complexities of both Benton and Ruggles. For all of Ruggles's atonal and supposedly elite modern sensibilities, Benton's 1934 portrait captures the composer as a "down-Eastern Beethoven" dressed in corduroy trousers and clunky boots, his shirtsleeves rolled up for a rousing bout at the piano, his large hands poised in musical play.<sup>9</sup> Benton's deep respect for Ruggles's elaborate and penetrating experiments with sound and rhythm, for his vision of a new American musical aesthetic, is revealed by how he compliments the composer as a working man, as a musical laborer. As with most of Benton's pictures of men at work, Ruggles dominates the tools of his trade: the baby grand is dwarfed by the composer's large and bulky frame, suggesting that it is the artist, not his medium, that really shapes the creative process.

In this regard, *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)*, as most portraits seem to be, is a painting of both its subject and its author, a picture of the artist-visionary—both Ruggles and Benton—as a working-class Joe, a regular guy, one of the folk. If some contemporary critics found it “a strange, unflattering likeness of a friend,” others, most notably Edward Alden Jewell, who wrote for the *New York Times*, championed Benton’s picture as “a fine piece of work, organically designed, exceptionally well painted and brilliantly successful in its reading of the sitter’s character. Here is Carl Ruggles indeed, that irresistible, irrepressible, exuberant American composer, whose music can almost never be heard played except in Europe.”<sup>10</sup>

Benton himself, in a letter written to Ruggles shortly after he finished *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)*, was pleased with the results. “The portrait I made of you came off fairly well though Charlie [Seeger] says (in fun) that the piano looks like it’s going to take flight. . . . The whole thing with the exception of the head is in violent foreshortening. Most people who have seen it and who know you like it very well. As a picture it’s the best thing I’ve done this winter.” In his letter, Benton also thanked Ruggles for a musical “exercise” he had sent and added: “Say, if you can knock off things that easy do me another a little longer. You can have all the art stuff you want from me if you’ll do me another piece. It sounds damn good and I like that 2/2 change at the end. It has some of the character of the old hymns I like so much only it’s better.”<sup>11</sup> Despite assumptions that cast Benton and Ruggles as aesthetic opposites, it is evident from this note that they were, in fact, cut from the same cloth, both deeply engaged in shared visions and ideas about modern American art.

In early 1936 Benton’s pictorial blend of the artist-visionary as American worker won over the Friends of Art, a group of Kansas City art lovers who had formed in 1934 to help the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts to build a collection of modern paintings and sculptures. Combining donations from twenty-six different subscribers, the Friends purchased *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)* for \$715.00 and gave the portrait to the museum, although not without first generating some “tumultuous” debate among certain Friends who found Benton’s portrait of a “distorted piano” too “modern.” Indeed, one member “resigned in protest and could never again be persuaded to contribute his \$10 to such a nefarious enterprise,” a *Kansas City Star* reporter recalled in 1939.<sup>12</sup> Yet as a *Kansas City Times* writer commented shortly after the Friends announced their gift: “They have set a high standard for future gifts to the gallery of the work of contemporary artists. And they have recognized not only that the best examples of the so-called middle western school of painting should be on view in Kansas City, as the natural center of the region, but that the artists of the Middle West should have tangible evidence of public interest in their work.”<sup>13</sup> *The Sun Treader (Portrait of Carl Ruggles)* was the first painting by Benton to enter the Museum’s collections.

## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 256. *The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* features a young Jackson Pollock playing a Jew’s harp at bottom center.
2. Vivien Green Fryd, “‘The Sad Twang of Mountain Voices’: Thomas Hart Benton’s *Sources of Country Music*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995), 301–35; and Archie Green, “Thomas Hart Benton’s Folk Musicians,” *JEMF Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1976), 74–90.
3. Thomas Hart Benton, “Our Saturday Night,” liner notes to *Saturday Night at Tom Benton’s*, LP album A-311, Decca Records, 3–7.
4. *Ibid.* See also Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 94–95, 277–78.
5. Benton to Carl Ruggles, c. March–April 1935, Carl Ruggles Papers, Yale University Music Library. Benton described his dissatisfaction with New York and reasons for leaving the city for the Midwest in his essay “Farewell to New York,” which was partially excerpted in the article “Mr. Benton Will Leave Us Flat,” *New York Sun*, 12 April 1935, and fully included in *An Artist in America*, 261–69.
6. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 254, 256. Benton discussed his relationship with Ruggles in his unfinished memoirs “The Intimate Story,” 20–21, Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. For further information about the Indiana mural, see Erika Doss, “New Deal Politics and Regionalist Art: Thomas Hart Benton’s *A Social History of the State of Indiana*,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 17 (1992), 353–78; and Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 100–112.
7. Michael Tilson Thomas, liner notes to the LP album *The Complete Music of Carl Ruggles*, dir. by Thomas, Buffalo Philharmonic, CBS M2 34591. See also Charles Seeger, “Carl Ruggles,” *Musical Quarterly* 18 (October 1932), 578–92.
8. Quoted in “U.S. Scene,” *Time*, 24 December 1934, 23–28.
9. Karl Freund, “Thomas Hart Benton—Realist,” *Ringmaster* 1 (November 1936), 33–36, 45.
10. *Ibid.*, 45; Edward Alden Jewell, “In the Realm of Art,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1935, 8.
11. Benton to Carl Ruggles, not dated but presumably c. Winter 1934–35, Ruggles Papers, Yale University Music Library.
12. “The Friends of Art Present a Portrait to the Gallery,” *Kansas City Star*, 29 December 1939, 6.
13. “The Friends of Art Decide,” *Kansas City Times*, 14 January 1936, 16.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Hollywood*, 1937–38

Tempera with oil on canvas, mounted on panel

56 × 84 in. (142.2 × 213.7 cm)

Signed lower left: Benton

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/12

THOMAS HART BENTON JOURNEYED to Los Angeles in August 1937, sent by *LIFE* magazine to paint a composite picture of the motion-picture industry. The result was *Hollywood*, a large horizontal painting centered on a scantily clad blonde starlet and filled to bursting with the actresses, actors, directors, technicians, machines, sets, lights, cameras, and props of modern moviemaking.

While visiting Movieland, Benton's "base of operations" became the "luxuriously appointed" offices of Raymond Griffith, a producer at Twentieth Century Fox, the successor to the same studio for which Benton had painted silent-film backdrops some twenty years earlier on the East Coast. Under Griffith's supervision, Benton forayed into the "vast departmentalized domain that is a major moving picture studio" and covered the making of various Fox films that were in production that summer. These included the Eddie Cantor farce *Ali Baba Goes to Town*, the screwball comedy *Life Begins in College*, and the historical drama *In Old Chicago*, a big-budget extravaganza starring Tyrone Power and Alice Faye that was ostensibly about the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 but was more accurately described by one film historian as a "disaster musical whose roisterous tale of political chicanery was interspersed with seven songs and a jig."<sup>1</sup> Benton's assignment was to create a "movie mural" and a series of drawings for *LIFE*'s audiences that illustrated how *In Old Chicago*, selected as a typical example of a 1930s Hollywood spectacle, was actually made—from story conference and star casting to filming and final editing. In production throughout the summer and fall of 1937, the movie was scheduled for theatrical release in early 1938, and *LIFE* may have wanted to cover the story in its regular "Movie of the Week" feature.

In September 1937 Benton wrote a letter to Daniel Longwell, the *LIFE* editor who arranged the commission and who accompanied Benton on his trip to California: "I have finished the 22 drawings necessary for the production series. I have also put 10 'Hollywood notes' in condition. I want to come down to New York early next week, probably Monday, and discuss available space, size of reproductions, etc. with you. I am anxious to get good reproductions of this stuff. It has cost me a lot more work than I counted on but I think I have done a good job and one worthy of good printing." In November 1937 Benton thanked Longwell for sending "photostats" (movie stills) of scenes from *In Old Chicago* but explained that he had "enough material" for the final painting

in the "several hundred drawings" he had made while they were both in Hollywood. He added: "I have almost finished my composition which is devoted mainly to the various aspects of the director on the set with all the structures and paraphernalia related to that."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the drawings he produced and in *Hollywood*'s own sweeping panorama, Benton provided specific insights into the various stages and numerous personnel involved in the production of a major motion picture.

Benton took full advantage of his time on the sets and in the studios and made extensive sketches of *In Old Chicago*'s climactic fire scene (Fig. 1), which is depicted in full Technicolor glory in the middle right section of *Hollywood*. In a letter to Longwell he wrote: "I have used the 'back lot set' Chicago as one of the main incidents in my design. You remember that place where they burnt the town."<sup>3</sup> Benton also illustrated the movie's stars—a Tyrone Power look-alike and a shapely Alice Faye clone may be represented in the guise of *Hollywood*'s two central figures. He made a few quick portraits of comedians like Cantor and W.C. Fields, hobnobbed at elite watering holes like the Coak and Bull, and spent some time interviewing Twentieth Century Fox mogul Darryl F. Zanuck. But Benton spent most of his month in Hollywood drawing carefully detailed ink and wash sketches that captured the business of making movies, from casting calls and director's meetings to set designing, sound-track dubbing, and special effects.

He also wrote an essay titled "Hollywood Journey," which along with his sketches may have been intended for a book about his Movieland experiences. As he noted:

I was sent out to Hollywood by one of our top magazines to gather material for a painting of the movies which they wished to use in a color spread. I went with full credentials and because no doubt of the potential publicity value lying in these was well received both on the movie lots and in the houses of Hollywood people of position and parts. I also had friends to help me. Years ago when many of the big companies were located in Fort Lee, New Jersey, I had worked for one or another of them in various artistic capacities. Some of the people I knew then were now living in Hollywood. These old acquaintances were well disposed toward me and were of considerable help in unearthing interesting material. It was mainly, however, my magazine connection which opened doors and answered questions and set the stage for the drawings in this book.<sup>4</sup>

Although the book was never realized, Benton's notes and sketches became the fodder for the colorful mural-sized picture of the movies originally commissioned by *LIFE*. Benton began





Fig. 1 Thomas Hart Benton, *Burning of Chicago*, 1937. Graphite, ink, and wash on paper, 13½ × 10½ in. (34.3 × 26.7 cm). Location unknown, illustrated in Thomas Hart Benton, *Benton Drawings: A Collection of Drawings* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1968), 99

painting *Hollywood* in the fall of 1937 and finished it in January 1938, working on the picture both in his home studio at 1100 Valentine Road in Kansas City and in his painting classes at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he had begun teaching in 1935.<sup>5</sup>

*LIFE*, which first appeared on 23 November 1936, was wedded to pictures, not only to the black-and-white images provided on a weekly basis by such brilliant photographers as Margaret Bourke-White, Carl Mydans, Eugene Smith, Dorothea Lange, and Gordon Parks but also to the flickering revelations provided by Hollywood. From 1936 through the late 1940s *LIFE* was “inundated with such a flood of publicity pictures that its Los Angeles bureau became second only to Washington.” Often the editors, wanting some spice to “offset all the pictures of bad news” would cable the West Coast: “Need good girl act by Wednesday for issue balance.” *LIFE*’s first major story on Hollywood (3 May 1937) featured just such an “act” with platinum blonde dynamo Jean Harlow (a native of Kansas City) on the cover. The article, “Hollywood Is a Wonderful Place,” set the tone for most of the magazine’s Movieland coverage: slightly irreverent (as *LIFE* was with almost everything) but mostly celebratory. Candid photos of movie “royals” Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard were displayed as “the living embodiment of all that the rest of the struggling Hollywood heap aspires to be.” A photo montage of swimming pools and Rolls Royces highlighted *LIFE*’s view that Hollywood was “an unparalleled Land of Opportunity.”<sup>6</sup>

When *LIFE*’s editors sent Benton to California in the summer of 1937, they no doubt expected him to provide, along with his in-depth treatment of the making of *In Old Chicago*, a similar view of glamorous stars and good living, a pictorial image of what the mid-western novelist Ruth Suckow called “the national fairy tale: the overnight rise to fame and material wealth, to social opulence, with

Sex and Beauty in headline type.”<sup>7</sup> Benton’s own comprehension of the *LIFE* commission, however, was somewhat different. He understood it in terms of a series of drawings and the painting of a “movie mural” illustrating the “production” of a typical Hollywood blockbuster. In other words, Benton saw his role as that of an investigative journalist scooping the ins and outs of moviemaking. “I made it my business while on ‘the lots,’” he later wrote, “to ask questions. I was not interested in particular Stars but in what went on all the time no matter what young ladies or young men were being blazoned [*sic*] on the billboard headlines of the country.”<sup>8</sup> As such, Benton’s general focus on the business of making movies, rather than the fame and glamour of the movie stars themselves or the fantastic exotica of Los Angeles, did not mesh with what *LIFE* thought its audiences wanted to see in a portrait of Hollywood.

And Hollywood, that summer of 1937, was indeed the “national fairy tale” that Suckow had described, especially in terms of booming production and profit. This was the height of the motion-picture industry’s “golden era,” when eight major studios offered hundreds of movies each year (778 feature films were released in 1937 alone) and monopolized all elements of film making, distribution, and exhibition. Mass-produced in an assembly-line fashion that heavily relied on a formulaic style of typecast characters and conventional subjects, movies were mass-consumed as well: despite the Depression, moviegoing grew in the 1930s from a weekly attendance of 37.6 million in 1929 to 45 million in 1937 and 54.6 million in 1941. Providing “new values and social ideals to replace shattered old traditions,” movies became a dominant culture for growing numbers of Americans in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Benton was not alone among the many American artists who were captivated by this new form of visual culture, as well as its

makers and mores: Nathanael West explored the all-devouring decadence of Movieland in his caustic 1939 novel *The Day of the Locust*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald described Hollywood's destruction of the American Dream in *The Last Tycoon* (1941). The painters Reginald Marsh (q.v.) and Edward Hopper (q.v.) offered their own views of Depression-era movie culture: in pictures such as *A Paramount Picture* (1934; private collection) and *Twenty Cent Movie* (1936; Whitney Museum of American Art), Marsh presented the social nature of movie culture; in *New York Movie* (1939; Metropolitan Museum of Art), Hopper depicted a bored usherette inside the hushed space of a largely empty Rococo-style theater.<sup>10</sup>

Benton's *Hollywood*, however, is different from Marsh's and Hopper's views. Rather than focusing on who was going to the movies, Benton chose to investigate how the movies, and their stars, were actually produced; to consider how celebrity is constructed in America. In this respect, Benton's painting parallels West's and Fitzgerald's literary analyses of life, work, ethics, and popularity in the motion-picture industry. With its cast of some fifty actors, actresses, directors, and technicians, Benton's picture shows how movies were made and who, especially, made them.

As in Benton's previous mural projects, we see a multiplicity of colorful, dynamic scenes, from the direction of a dance number on the far left and extras applying makeup and reading newspapers in a scene below that of *In Old Chicago's* raging fire, to the picture's central focus on the nearly nude body of the platinum blonde. In its snappy, quick-take structure, *Hollywood* cleverly mimics the style and aesthetics of many 1930s movies, with their central stars, their supporting casts of actors and actresses, and their variety of scenes all busily driving the plot. The movie mural further resembles a film in its manipulation of space and time: the banks of the river surrounding the fire look as if they might flood the studio dressing room at any moment; the middle ground occupied by the blonde sex goddess falls into the dressing room and spills into the picture's immediate foreground through Benton's unsettling use of angular floorboards. Space and time are as ambiguous in *Hollywood* as they are in any motion picture that extensively uses editing to link scenes from different places and moments. Audiences in the 1930s were familiar with this sort of ambiguity because by that date the dominant visual aesthetic was that of the motion picture: an aesthetic of montage and collage, of dynamic motion and double-movement camera shots. Space and time are not static in *Hollywood*, just as they were rarely static in the typical 1930s movie.

Still, our attention is drawn again and again to the center-stage audition—the screen test of a star in the making—of a scantily clad chorine. Outfitted in little more than a pair of hot pink high heels, purplish bikini-style panties, and a shimmering uplift brassiere, *Hollywood's* central blonde may be a referent to Louise Hovick, aka Gypsy Rose Lee, stripper-turned-star in *Ali Baba Goes to Town*—one of several Fox films in production in August 1937 while Benton was in Los Angeles. Burlesque was a big topic of conversation in 1937, especially after the nightclub entrepreneur Billy Rose took his Aquacade—a glorified strip show of near-naked

chorus girls prancing in and out of huge tanks of colored water—to Cleveland's Great Lakes Exposition that summer, where it enjoyed enormous attendance records and wide press coverage.<sup>11</sup>

Burlesque was controversial in the movie industry that year, too, especially when theater owners, hoping to entice even larger crowds of moviegoers, began hiring strippers to perform before and between movie showtimes. Motion-picture industry spokesmen such as the ultraconservative Martin Quigley, editor of the *Motion Picture Herald*, were quick to condemn this defamation of “decent family movie houses” and the practice soon stopped.<sup>12</sup> The reality was that the live performance of burlesque, faced with mounting costs and movie competition, was dying out as a form of popular culture in the late 1930s. For Benton, it had long been a favorite subject: several seminude chorus girls can be seen, for example, in *City Activities with Dance Hall*, one of the panels for his 1930–31 *America Today* mural. *Hollywood* may allude to burlesque's popular culture demise and also to the fact that in movie musicals like *Forty-second Street* and *Footlight Parade* (both 1933), with their stories of the lives and loves of the “girls of the theater” and their depictions of chorus girls in flimsy outfits, audiences could see nearly the same burlesque-style performances.

Or perhaps *Hollywood's* centerpiece pays homage to Jean Harlow, who was scheduled to star in *In Old Chicago* but who died in June 1937 at the young age of twenty-six. Or she may be a risqué representation of *In Old Chicago's* main romantic interest, Alice Faye, who played a dance hall songstress in the movie. Or *Hollywood's* glossy goddess, orb-tipped scepter in hand, may simply be a composite of the many, many box office beauties (Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis, Joan Bennett, Lana Turner, Greta Garbo, Joan Fontaine, Constance Bennett, Tallulah Bankhead, Norma Shearer) who helped the motion-picture industry amass huge profits in the 1930s. One of Benton's students at the Kansas City Art Institute, Jesse Charles O'Neill, recalls that in the fall of 1937, Benton asked a model named Lillian “to stay after the painting class to pose for a pencil sketch for the central figure” in *Hollywood*. Benton himself, in a letter to Longwell, only revealed the following:

The young lady who occupies the center of the panel is more a symbolical than an actual movie figure. I wanted to give the idea that the machinery of the industry, cameras, carpenters, big generators, high voltage wires etc. is directed mainly toward what young ladies have under their clothes. So I took the clothes off but added a few little bits for the post office. I hope you like the picture. I do. Tom<sup>13</sup>

As this short paragraph and *Hollywood* both suggest, Benton tended to dismiss the movies themselves as insubstantial, albeit titillating, visual products. Benton's focus was the “machinery of the industry” that he depicted surrounding *Hollywood's* blonde, the axle around which movie culture revolves—the spotlights, movie cameras, microphones, wind machines, electric generators, soundboards—and those who control them—technicians, directors, actors, and actresses. *Hollywood's* central figure certainly



embodies Benton's composite view of the typical 1930s movie female and, by extension, the thrust and content of the typical 1930s movie. But unlike Marsh, Hopper, and *LIFE*'s editors, Benton was less interested in how she was consumed by movie audiences than how she actually came into existence through the efforts of the multiple workers who toiled behind the scenes.

*Hollywood* suggests that Benton saw the movie industry as a thriving community of work and production, rather than the place of popular legend where Hollywood royalty lounged by swimming pools and rode around in Rolls Royces. But he also saw it as a business community, where profits—not good pictures, or compelling stories, or the tens of thousands of working men and women who actually made Hollywood's products magical—held the upper ground. “The moving picture Art is predominantly an economically conditioned Art,” Benton pointedly remarked in his essay. “Its forms are like the stock market. They are plays for a cash return.” He added:

The movie Art of Hollywood, the environment it creates and the behaviors it induces, may be regarded as genuinely a part of American business institutionalism. They are not something apart, something exotic, but are of the very warp and woof of our predominant social force. The movie Art is not only a business but a business expression. It speaks in by and through the patterns of the American business mind. It is go-getter, optimistic, sentimental, politically conservative. It sings and clowns in Rotary Club fashion, and romances with a high regard for the *status quo* in everything. This is not said critically but as a statement of fact. Without its recognition Hollywood, and the Art of Hollywood, may never be understood.<sup>14</sup>

*LIFE*'s editors, however, were not persuaded by Benton's visual and, despite his insistence otherwise, critical opinion that the “fact” of Hollywood's success was its identity as a business and an industry full of workers and machines. Ignoring Hollywood's role in consumer culture, Benton insisted that the “Art” of the movies was not terribly different from the profit-based production of most American business. *LIFE*'s editors had obviously expected Benton to show their readers how movies like *In Old Chicago* were actually made. But they had also expected this American artist to picture Hollywood's charming gods and goddesses, its myths and legends, its fancy mansions and trendy hot-spots.

In the end, it all came down to a matter of timing. Twentieth Century-Fox released *In Old Chicago* in early January 1938 and *LIFE* covered the story with several pages of black-and-white stills that illustrated the film's dramatic special effects. Benton, although a very fast painter, simply did not meet the deadline. In a letter of 20 January 1938 to Longwell he wrote: “I am sorry I could not beat ‘In Old Chicago’ to the press. But anyhow I show how the picture was done . . . I can tell you though that the picture is O.K.—sex, melodrama and machinery.”<sup>15</sup> By then, however, the story was old news and *LIFE* was no longer interested in Benton's picture of

Hollywood. The magazine never published the many sketches Benton made during his month in Movieland, either. Although *Hollywood* did appear in a two-page spread in the magazine in late 1938, it was presented as a prizewinner at the annual *Carnegie Institute International Art Exhibit*, not as an in-depth analysis of the motion-picture industry, and the nature of the painting's original commission was not discussed.<sup>16</sup>

A few years after Benton's adventure in Movieland, *LIFE* hired another American artist, Doris Lee, to paint her “impressions of movie city.” Lee's perky vignettes of movie culture included celebrity portraits (Edward G. Robinson, Lena Horne) and sketches of Hollywood haunts (Graumann's Chinese Theater, Schwab's Pharmacy).<sup>17</sup> Avoiding the production side of the motion-picture industry almost entirely, Lee showed Movieland exactly as *LIFE* had first described it in May 1937: a “wonderful place” of smiling stars, exotic architecture, fame, and fortune. Unlike Benton's *Hollywood*, Lee's cheery pictures did not challenge broader cultural expectations about how the movies were made or who was making them.

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## NOTES

1. Harry Salpeter, "A Tour of Hollywood: Drawings by Thomas Benton," *Coronet* 7 (1 February 1940), 34–38. For information on Twentieth Century-Fox's production schedule for August 1937, see "Advance Production Chart," *Variety*, 27 August 1937, 27. On *In Old Chicago*, see Clive Hirschhorn, *The Hollywood Musical* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1981), 144.
2. Benton to Daniel Longwell, 15 September 1937 and 15 November 1937, Daniel Longwell Papers, Box 32, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
3. Benton to Longwell, 15 November 1937, Longwell Papers, Box 32, Columbia University.
4. Thomas Hart Benton, "Hollywood Journey," 12-page typed and unpaginated manuscript, Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. For an extended discussion of Benton and *Hollywood*, see Erika Doss, "Thomas Hart Benton in Hollywood: Regionalist Art and Corporate Patronage," in her *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 147–228.
5. In a 20 January 1938 letter to Longwell, Benton wrote: "I have finally finished the 'movie mural.' What shall I do with it? Send it to Donnelly [*LIFE's* printers, located in Chicago] or to you?" See Longwell Papers, Box 32, Columbia University.
6. *LIFE Goes to the Movies* (New York: Time-Life, 1975), 4; and "Hollywood Is a Wonderful Place," *LIFE*, 3 May 1937, 28–37.
7. Ruth Suckow, quoted from "Hollywood Gods and Goddesses," *Harpers* 173 (July 1936), 189–200, reprinted in *Culture and Commitment, 1929–1945*, ed. Warren Susman (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 170–77.
8. Benton, "Hollywood Journey."
9. John Baxter, *Hollywood in the Thirties* (New York: Paperback Library, 1970), 10; and Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 1–4. Film attendance figures for the 1930s are analyzed in Lary May, "Making the American Way: Moderne Theatres, Audiences, and the Film Industry, 1929–1945," *Perspectives: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 12 (1987), 89–124. Quote from Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 161.
10. Erika L. Doss, "Images of American Women in the 1930s: Reginald Marsh and *Paramount Picture*," in *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*, ed. Mary Ann Calo (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 295–301, originally published in *Woman's Art Journal* 4 (Fall/Winter 1982–83), 1–4; and Erika Doss, "Edward Hopper: *Nighthawks*, and *Film Noir*," *Postscript: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 2 (Winter 1983), 14–36.
11. Gaston Power, "Aquacade in Cleveland," *Stage*, July 1937, 64.
12. William F. Crouch, "'Strip-Tease' Daneers Invade Film Theaters," *Motion Picture Herald*, 27 March 1937, 5.
13. Jesse Charles O'Neill to Henry Adams, 23 March 1937, Thomas Hart Benton Files, NAMA; and Benton to Longwell, 20 January 1938, Longwell Papers, Box 32, Columbia University.
14. Benton, "Hollywood Journey."
15. "Movie of the Week: In Old Chicago," *LIFE*, 16 January 1938, 48; and Benton to Longwell, 20 January 1938, Longwell Papers, Box 32, Columbia University.
16. "Carnegie Institute International Art Exhibition," *LIFE*, 12 December 1938, 74–75.
17. "Hollywood Gallery: A Painter's Portfolio of Impressions of Movie City," *LIFE*, 15 October 1945, 84–89.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Persephone*, 1938–39 (*Rape of Persephone*)

Tempera with oil glazes on canvas, mounted on panel  
72 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 56 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (183.2 × 142.4 cm)

Signed lower left: Benton

Purchase: acquired through the Yellow Freight Foundation Art Acquisition Fund and the generosity of Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, Richard J. Stern, the Doris Jones Stein Foundation, the Jacob L. and Ella C. Loose Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Levin, and Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Rich, F86-57

*PERSEPHONE*, AMONG THOMAS HART BENTON'S most controversial works of art, was painted during late 1938 and early 1939. Ostensibly an illustration of the Greek myth, albeit in the guise of a Rita Hayworth pinup plunked down in a Missouri hayfield, *Persephone* embodies a number of aesthetic and personal concerns that preoccupied Benton in the late 1930s. Among these were his teaching practices at the Kansas City Art Institute, his conflicts with administrators at the school (and at the William Roekhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts), and his growing sense of uneasiness that Regionalist art, and his place in it, had not achieved the clout in the art world and the American Scene in general that he had anticipated.

Benton turned fifty in 1939 and was the father of a teenage son (T. P. was born in 1926) and the soon-to-be parent of a baby girl (Jessie, born in July 1939). Despite his busy schedule of exhibitions, commissions, and travels, he was feeling the effect of his self-imposed Kansas City isolation from the New York art world. After more than two decades in New York, Benton had moved permanently back to the Midwest in 1935, a decision that received national press attention when he announced it on April Fool's Day that year. He was motivated both by the commission he had received to paint a mural for the Missouri State Capitol (*A Social History of Missouri*, completed in 1936) and by his disgust with what he sensed as the anti-Regionalist bias of the eastern art world. If Benton did not want to return to that world, he was still anxious about his absence from it.

While generally well received, Benton's 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, had met with less than positive reviews from influential art critics like Meyer Schapiro, which was hardly surprising given Benton's rash damnation of New York's "network of warring cliques," its "aberration" of "homosexuality," and its "dogmatic, self-righteous, and humorless" manner. But the book also incited fury from Kansas City culture brokers such as Howard Huselton, former Art Institute director and bitter anti-Bentonite who was so incensed by "the profanity, the vulgarity" of Benton's autobiography that in the summer of 1938 he tried to oust the

artist from his teaching job. The effort failed but undoubtedly left Benton feeling trapped in a place and position to which he had fled to escape the "radical intellectualism" and "aesthetic-minded homosexuals" that he believed plagued New York and the course of American art.<sup>1</sup>

In a poignant 1939 telegram to Daniel Longwell, the *LIFE* magazine editor who had helped arrange the commission that spawned *Hollywood* (q.v.), Benton begged the magazine to continue its attention to the Regionalist school of art: "Most important factor in bringing existence of school to public consciousness. For continued growth of school public interest essential. Your kind of patronage has proved itself more important than that of administration which is saying much. You have however much yet to do. I am not dead. Tom."<sup>2</sup> He certainly was not dead, and if it was attention—art world, popular press, or otherwise—that Thomas Hart Benton really wanted, he certainly got it with the brouhaha that surrounded *Persephone*. It came first when the painting was unveiled for public viewing in the spring of 1939 at shows in Kansas City and New York. And it came again a few years later, when an even more disgruntled Benton announced that pictures like this one "belonged to clubs, barrooms, and saloons"—and the New York nightclub entrepreneur Billy Rose took him at his word.<sup>3</sup>

There was no such consternation in the actual making of *Persephone*, whose intricate evolution indicates that foremost among Benton's concerns in the late 1930s were his educational and mentoring responsibilities at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he was head of the school's painting division and aspired to teach his students both old master and modern methods that he himself had consistently incorporated in his pictures. Unfortunately, his teaching appointment was wracked with conflict between Benton and Art Institute administrators, some of whom found the artist vulgar and brash and resented the fact that he was often away on lecturing trips and commissions. But Benton's students loved him. Photographs from the fall of 1938 show Benton hard at work on *Persephone* in his figure drawing class, surrounded by students making their own smaller versions of the scene (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>

Beginning with classroom instruction on the use of live models, which for *Persephone* included a young woman from Independence, Missouri, named Imogene Bruton who posed as the central figure, and a "dirty old bum" from the Kansas City mission district who posed as the wart-nosed Pluto, Benton showed his students the elaborate technical steps that he deemed crucial in preparing a canvas the magnitude of *Persephone*.<sup>5</sup> The overlife-size painting is divided into four sections: the nude figure of the woman; the still life with basket, flowers, and leaves at the lower left; the threshing scene at the upper left; and the narrative of the grizzled





Fig. 1 Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Thomas Hart Benton* Painting "Persephone," 1938. Gelatin silver print, 20 × 16 in. (50.8 × 40.6 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Purchase: acquired in 2002 through the generosity of docent members. © Alfred Eisenstaedt / Time & Life / Getty

old man and his lanky mules at the right. *Persephone* was as elaborately configured and detailed as one of Benton's mural paintings.

Benton was thoroughly familiar with art history's long tradition of depicting the female nude, and *Persephone* bears some superficial compositional similarities to Correggio's *Jupiter and Antiope* (c. 1520s–30s; Musée du Louvre, Paris), which Benton may have seen while studying art in Paris in the 1910s. However, Benton's picture depicts the moment in the Greek myth when Pluto (or Hades), the god of the dead, first sees Persephone, daughter of the earth goddess, Demeter; later, he would drag her into the underworld on his chariot (which Benton depicted as a mule cart). The picture bears comparison as well with the many reclining nudes painted by European and American artists ranging from Lucas Cranach, Giorgione, Titian, and Diego Velázquez to Francisco de Goya, John Vanderlyn, Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse. Benton's meticulous attention to specific iconographic details—the reddish day lilies in the basket signifying both innocence (or virginity) and death, the shimmery grape leaves on the right alluding to both intoxication and the cornucopia of an autumn harvest—reveals his newly expanded interest in the complex symbolic overtones of Flemish portraiture and still lifes.

The picture also, of course, draws on the stuff of 1930s popular culture, from the unabashedly nude girls drawn by commercial

illustrators like Howard Chandler Christy (q.v.) to the fleshy chorus girls of Busby Berkeley movie musicals. *Persephone's* female nude, with her arms raised akimbo to accentuate her breasts and hourglass figure, adopts a cheesecake pose common to clothed starlets in *Photoplay* magazine and Hollywood studio publicity shots, and to unclothed models and starlet wannabes in 1930s girlie calendars and pinup pictures. She is similar to the model featured in a 1936 anti-Democrat political poster by the commercial illustrator McClelland Barclay, illustrated in a March 1937 issue of *LIFE*, which similarly shows a seminude female surrounded by the bounty of nature, her arms stretched behind her, her body seemingly pasted into a tilting, awkward composition.<sup>6</sup> The great aesthetic assimilationist, Benton no doubt encouraged his Art Institute students to model their art-making choices on his own: to combine the stories of everyday American popular culture with the methods of both old master and modern art; to create, in other words, their own versions of Regionalist art.

Yet *Persephone's* still and frozen character demonstrates, as well, Benton's shift in style in the late 1930s. Benton had relied on a similar pose and depicted similar female bodies in several earlier pictures—the prancing chorines in the *City Activities* panel of the *America Today* mural (1930–31; New School for Social Research, New York), for example. But *Persephone's* chorus-girl body is passive and static, relaxed rather than active. She reclines in a palpably

sensual fantasy environment of highly keyed colors—her vermilion velveteen dress, for example, and furry golden moss beneath her body. Within the next few years, Benton's incorporation of diverse textures and gaudy colors, rather than the labor-intensive activities and energies of the American Scene, would generate pictures such as *Pussy Cat and Roses* (1939; Princeton University Art Museum, N.J.) and *Jessie, One Year Old* (1940; private collection), which the art historian Matthew Baigell describes as “one of the most eerie confrontations between a child and a butterfly ever painted,” a picture that “suggests not so much magical presence as hallucinatory ones.”<sup>7</sup>

*Persephone's* fanciful style, in fact, parallels the Magic Realist and Surrealist pictures of other American artists in the late 1930s and 1940s, such as Peter Blume and Ivan Albright, and corresponds to what Baigell observes as “the general drift of realistic American painting” at this time “toward a greater reliance on imagination and fantasy and toward concern for the manipulation of color, as well as of texture, and pattern.” Critics of the era noted this shift in Benton's style as well: Thomas Craven, Benton's longtime friend and Regionalist art enthusiast, noted in his 1939 book, *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, that “within the past two years, a new and surprising quality” had appeared in Benton's pictures, one of “interwoven minute and luxuriant textural variations,” an “affectionate regard for detailed foliage and flesh,” and “subtle modulations of color and tone.”<sup>8</sup>

Benton's reasons for this aesthetic change of style and emphasis were numerous, relating to both the changed political culture of the era, in particular the declining authority of the New Deal, and his own sense of loss and disillusionment about Regionalist art's apparent failure to achieve prominence in the art world. Later accounting for the changes evident in pictures from the late 1930s like *Persephone*, Benton explained:

How difficult it was for me to paint significantly about the social situation that developed. . . . I began giving much of my attention to the details of the natural world, flowers, trees, and foliage. I had had a lifelong interest in such growing things, but my major painting themes, when I turned my attention to our native scene, were always about the activities of people. . . . Now, however, people began to be accessory. . . . Although I did not realize it at the time, I was thus myself moving away from Regionalism, at least from Regionalism as I had heretofore conceived it.<sup>9</sup>

“Moving away” from the art and interests that had compelled him for the previous two decades, Benton focused increasingly on the surface effects of studio painting. He found himself engaged with studio practices on a daily basis in the classrooms of the Kansas City Art Institute, and thus began to concentrate on the making of pictures like *Persephone*.

Each part of *Persephone* was captured first in rapid, on-site sketches and then reworked in terms of detailed abstract shapes and forms, value studies, figural articulation, and anatomical scale.

As he had with his four previous mural projects, and following the studio practices of Tintoretto and El Greco, Benton shaped several clay models of the scene, three-dimensional studies in plasticene that helped him visually concentrate on accurate value patterns and realize his goal of deep perspective. Next, Benton produced small versions of the picture, first in grisaille and then in color. Finally, he began work on the full-scale picture, carefully sketching the scale drawings onto a plywood panel covered with linen and sized with gesso, and then painting first in egg tempera, with many intermediate clear glazes, and finishing with thicker pigments mixed with oils. Spending a good deal of the fall semester orchestrating these elaborate preparatory steps, and thus instructing his Art Institute students in the techniques of the old masters, Benton painted *Persephone* in his usual speedy and determined manner, finishing the canvas in the early winter of 1939.<sup>10</sup>

March 1939 saw the first comprehensive exhibition of Benton's work at the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts in Kansas City. *Persephone* made her public debut in the show, along with thirty other paintings and fifteen drawings by Benton. A month later, the show traveled to New York, where *Persephone* graced the posh new Fifth Avenue showrooms of Associated American Artists (AAA). This art group was established by the former public relations expert Reeves Lewenthal in 1934 specifically to promote first the prints, inexpensively marketed for only five dollars each, and then the paintings of a stable of Regionalist and American Scene artists. Benton had been one of the first artists to join the AAA, and Lewenthal, a consummate publicity hound, had been instrumental in helping Benton with the corporate commissions (such as his work with *LIFE*) and general fame that he achieved in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> Benton's 1939 show at the AAA was his first in New York in four years, and the gallery's first full exhibition of paintings. With works Benton had painted decades earlier in Paris and in New York, the show featured some forty pictures including *Persephone*, which was joined by the two other female nudes that Benton had recently painted: the center-stage starlet of *Hollywood* and the bathing beauty with glossy red fingernails of *Susanna and the Elders* (1938; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), a picture based on the Old Testament tale of the virtuous and falsely accused wife of a prosperous Jew.

Benton surely knew that this triple play of female nudes would create controversy: despite their attachment to the particular symbolic messages of Hollywood, the Bible, and Greek mythology, their girlie-magazine poses and 1930s hairstyles made them look less like fine art portraits and more like popular culture pinups. The *New York Times* writer Edward Alden Jewell, who had glowingly reviewed Benton's 1935 show at Ferargil Galleries, now found his paintings of female nudes to be “shallow,” “cheap,” “juvenile,” and “blatantly prurient.” Emily Genauer, critic for the *New York World-Telegram*, denounced *Susanna and the Elders* as a “cheap, trivial piece with the subtlety of a calendar picture,” and declared *Hollywood* “about as meaningless and disorganized a work as you're likely to encounter anywhere.” Jerome Klein, reviewer for the *New York Post*, found Benton's pictures “dismal” and dismissed them as

“salon nudes.” *Susanna and the Elders*, in fact, had been seen as so “very nude” by Meyric Roberts, director of the City Art Museum in St. Louis, that he attempted to have it removed from an exhibition of midwestern art at the museum; the picture stayed, but only after it had been roped off to protect innocent eyes.<sup>12</sup>

*Persephone* never encountered such censorship during Benton’s 1939 retrospective at the Museum or at the AAA exhibition in New York a month later; indeed, Benton’s Kansas City show set new attendance records for the museum, beating the record-breaking crowds that had flocked to the Vincent van Gogh exhibition a few years earlier. “No other local artist has ever aroused a comparable interest,” wrote the *Kansas City Star* art critic Henry Haskell. “This is a personal triumph for Mr. Benton.”<sup>13</sup> In New York, *Persephone* proved so popular that in October 1939 it made its way to Brentano’s bookstore on Fifth Avenue at West Forty-eighth Street, where it served as a window display and publicity hook to promote Craven’s *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces*. Craven lavishly praised *Persephone* in his book, comparing Benton’s painting with works by Sandro Botticelli, Peter Paul Rubens, John Singleton Copley (q.v.), Edgar Degas, and Picasso, writing: “The nude is a most provocative picture—a satiric fantasy, a rhetorical gesture in the American style. It is expertly composed and beautifully painted; and as the sumptuous embodiment of the fullness of the living world, it is unsurpassed by anything thus far produced in America.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, not all the reviews of *Persephone* were negative: an anonymous critic in *Art Digest* heralded the complexity of Benton’s composition and lauded the picture’s central focus on the “despoliation” of the American landscape by greedy farmers “who cultivate the land to exhaustion, to the point of droughts, erosion, and dust storms.”<sup>15</sup> It is doubtful that Benton, however, would have entirely agreed with this environmentalist assessment of *Persephone*, especially since the richly painted picture speaks more to fecundity and abundance than to sterility and destruction. In fact, while most depictions of this Greek legend illustrate Persephone’s kidnapping and physical violation, usually showing her flinging up her arms in despair as the love-inflamed Pluto kidnaps her, Benton pictured her as the goddess of spring, a lush and fertile body lounging in a moment of quiet, and quite independent, reverie.

Years later, Benton recalled the 1939 AAA show as “an immense success” and offered the following explanation of the reception of *Susanna and Persephone*, good and bad:

Now, although scores of nude ladies are regularly painted, and exhibited each season, these two of mine occasioned a furor. They were tied to quite conventional subject matter, to the old legends of Persephone and Susanna, but they presented these in American backgrounds and as if the occurrences involved were of the moment. Both pictures were realistic, detailed and developed in three dimensional compositions which so projected the ladies that their nudity was in quite positive evidence. Although I did not go in for what Mark Twain called the “explicitness” of Titian’s

celebrated nude in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, I left nothing out which the positions of my ladies permitted to be seen.

On one level, *Persephone*, *Susanna*, and *Hollywood* were simply further pictorial stabs at the stuffiness of the art world and the typical 1930s art museum, “dead places—graveyards,” as Benton termed them. Determined, like many American modern artists, to bridge the gap between art and life, to create art that was “easily approachable” and keenly centered on “ordinary American life,” Benton deliberately chose a long-standing art-historical device and most alluring visual hook—the female body—to make his point.<sup>16</sup> While perhaps not as anatomically “explicit” as Titian’s (or Courbet’s) infamous museum nudes, Benton’s repetitious use of naked women in three major pictures of the late 1930s, his “ladies” as he called them, obviously also embodied the artist’s personal sentiments about women and sexuality, and his own sense of vulnerability.

Benton’s understandings of women, as evidenced again and again in passages in *An Artist in America*, were tense and troublesome. His 1937 book is dotted with descriptions of “girls in whom I was much interested but with whom I could never seem to get along for any satisfactory length of time.” Women were “touchy” subjects, said Benton (thus explaining their rather infrequent appearance in his drawings), who more often than not described them in the pages of his autobiography in deprecating terms such as “slut,” “whore,” “tail,” and “bitch.” As Elizabeth Schultz explains, Benton’s “concern for ‘people in general’ appears restricted by the heterosexual and masculine basis of his assertions.” He may have claimed himself as a “proponent of tolerance and egalitarianism,” but he ignored “the moles in his vision—his sexism, his homophobia.”<sup>17</sup> On the rare occasions when he did represent women, Benton tended to picture them as sex objects, as chorus girls, burlesque queens, or, as seen in *Hollywood*, *Persephone*, and *Susanna and the Elders*, as provocative, symbolic, and sexually charged nudes.

From a psychological framework, Benton’s problems with women (and with feminine culture in general) stemmed from several sources. His politician father, for example, had expected his eldest son to become a lawyer and ridiculed artists as “mincing, bootlicking portrait painters” who “hung around the skirts of women” and “lisped a silly jargon about grace and beauty.” In the years following his father’s death (in 1924), Benton overcompensated for this parental display of sexism, misogyny, and homophobia with big, bold paintings that pictured a mostly masculine American Scene, and with a mode of behavior and discourse that overemphasized his personal claims as a heterosexual he-man, a heavy-drinking, boot-stomping, muscular, macho artist. Further, when things went wrong, as Benton felt they had for him in New York in the 1930s, it was because that environment had become plagued by “ladies” and “fairies” who were “intolerant” of Regionalism and were working “against the development of distinctly American forms” of art.<sup>18</sup>

Benton's open disdain for homosexuals, clearly evidenced in his 1937 autobiography, was further revealed in a rather drunken, certainly impolitic, and nationally reported April 1941 interview held at the AAA galleries, in which he publicly denounced the typical museum director as a "pretty boy with delicate wrists and a swing in his gait." It was a none-too-subtle homophobic rant at the director, curators, and various trustees at the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, with whom Benton had personal grievances. Paul Gardner, for example, the museum's director, "sometimes dropped unflattering comments about Benton's work" and had spearheaded the election of Keith Martin, the director of the Kansas City Art Institute, with whom Benton did not get along.<sup>19</sup> The institute responded to Benton's widely publicized remarks a month later by not renewing his contract, which ended his dream of generating in Kansas City a truly Regionalist school of national artistic importance.

While *Persephone* was painted a few years before any of this transpired, the picture's blatant display of desirable female flesh may be seen as an autobiographical testimonial to Benton's claim as a "normal," heterosexual man and hence a man of mainstream art-world power and authority. His need to make such declarations and hotly to denounce those who were not, in his opinion, "normal" men corresponded to his growing despondency in the late 1930s about his authority in the art world and about fulfilling his aesthetic ambitions with a dominant American school of Regionalist art in Kansas City. Now based in the Midwest, Benton simply did not have the everyday access to the New York communities and connections (the art publishing industry, the museums and galleries, the wealthy collectors) that had helped spark and shape his career and that still had enormous power over how his Regionalist art was reviewed, patronized, and purchased. Furious about that power, particularly when it did not work to his advantage, Benton lashed out, challenging its authority by questioning its sexuality. "A very real danger to the cultural institutions of the country," Benton declared, "lies in the homosexuals' control of policy." If his biases related to his anger about how his Regionalist art was not faring well with New York critics, they stemmed further both from the cultural creation, as the historian George Chauncey has convincingly argued, of a "hetero-homosexual binarism" beginning in the 1930s and from Benton's personal history of traumatic sexual experiences.<sup>20</sup>

One of his earliest memories, for example, was of his father forcing himself sexually on his mother: in his third autobiography, "The Intimate Story," which Benton was writing at the time of his death, the artist recalled that as a toddler, he "was more than once frightened by my mother's protesting screams when my father entered her room at night." While a teenager, Benton lost his virginity in a Joplin, Missouri, brothel to a "blackhaired harlot in a red kimono," an apparently unpleasurable experience. While a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1907–8, Benton was sexually molested by an older male companion. While studying in Paris a few years later, Benton's French mistress, Jeanette, gave birth to a stillborn child, an incident that so horri-



Fig. 2 Thomas Hart Benton, *Persephone* (detail)

fied him that he was rendered sexually impotent.<sup>21</sup> These formative experiences may have soured Benton on sex and shaped both his uneasy relationships with women and the vehemently homophobic attitudes that he held for his entire life.

In the late 1930s Benton's aesthetic interest in the fleshy contours of the nubile female body certainly also related to his own middle-aged status as a fifty-year-old figure of responsibility, a father and husband, the patriarch of Regionalist art. *Persephone* is represented as a temptress, and Pluto as a melancholy old farmer who steals a peek at her rawboned body and yet seems incapable of doing much more than gaze on her with sexual desire (Fig. 2). Like most female nudes, *Persephone* is "a spectacle: simultaneously looked at and displayed . . . the passive yet glamorous 'object of the gaze,' the catalyst for all subsequent action." It is telling that Benton originally titled the picture *The Rape of Persephone*, but probably backed away from that label when he began to assess the nature of this independent female nude's vulnerability and violation, and his own abilities to truly "act."<sup>22</sup> That is, perhaps the fleshy female of *Persephone*—a girlic-magazine pinup who seems to have been practically pasted on to the lush agrarian terrain of the rest of the canvas—represents the New York art world and Pluto is a portrait of Benton. The Regionalist painter thus pictured himself as an old man and an art-world outcast, marginalized in the midwestern Hades of Kansas City. Gazing on *Persephone*, Benton showed himself tempted but unsure of his own abilities to conquer and ascend that desirable yet, in his opinion, treacherous mountain of artful flesh. Benton's son, in fact, found the



resemblance between his father and the Pluto of *Persephone* uncanny, and once even told his father that he was “getting to look more and more like the bum in that painting.”<sup>23</sup>

Whatever *Persephone* meant to Benton—a painterly exercise revealing his old master expertise, a 1930s popular culture version of the Greek myth, an environmental treatise about the American landscape and its Depression-era despoilation, an erotic tease meant to seriously annoy traditional museum culture, a psychological portrait of the artist’s unresolved problems with sex, women, and the New York art world, a symbol of his enduring middle-aged masculinity, a melancholy assessment of his loss of faith in New Deal political culture and the declining popularity of Regionalist art, a cautionary tale about lust and desire—the picture meant hoopla and maximum publicity to Billy Rose.

Rose was best known in the late 1930s, according to *LIFE*, as America’s “No. 1 purveyor of mass entertainment.” This was amply demonstrated in the various extravaganzas Rose organized that featured burlesque girls and Olympic stars on fairgrounds in Fort Worth and Cleveland in 1936–37 and at the New York World’s Fair in 1939. The entertainment entrepreneur was also an art collector and in 1940 purchased a smaller Benton canvas, *Weighing Cotton* (1939; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven). Asked why he had decided to add American art to his substantial collection of works by Titian, Rubens, J. M. W. Turner, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Amadeo Modigliani, Rose told the press that “the only important painting in the last twenty years is that of the American school.” It was a remark that, while probably lifted from the press releases of Benton’s gallery, the AAA, must have further endeared him to the artist. When, in April 1941, a drunken Benton declared to the press that he hated museums and wanted to sell his pictures to “saloons [and] bawdy houses,” Rose delightedly took him up on his outburst. He offered to display *Persephone* at the Cabaret Diamond Horseshoe, his New York nightclub on Forty-sixth Street, where scantily dressed chorus girls were served up as the main floor show.<sup>24</sup> The picture hung on the red plush walls of the restaurant for over a month and, although Rose never purchased *Persephone*, the picture certainly garnered both him and Benton a considerable amount of further press.

Benton later wrote that Rose did not buy *Persephone* because it was “not enough of an asset where nakedness in the flesh was so evident” and because the “special virtues” of the picture, “or its lack of these, could hardly be thoughtfully considered where all virtues were absurd.” He added:

And then too the sneaking evil of old Pluto, come suddenly from his dark world on Persephone’s youth and beauty, carried perhaps too apt a meaning for a lot of Billy’s male customers. Many of these, no doubt, had also sneaked out from darkness, from the spiritual darkness of the countinghouse or from that maybe of a Puritanical home, where

some age-embittered fury ruled the roost, to take their own Plutonic peep at pink breasts and well-turned young asses.<sup>25</sup>

It was a revealing analysis of both *Persephone*’s appeal and Benton’s reflections on her meaning in his own life.

Never purchased and, while frequently illustrated, only rarely exhibited, *Persephone* remained in Benton’s possession until his death, when it was lent to the William Rockhill Nelson Museum of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts by the Benton Trusts. In 1986, eleven years after Benton’s death and almost fifty years after *Persephone* was painted, the picture continued to create local uproar when the news of its purchase by the Museum for \$2.5 million dollars was announced. Kansas City newspapers printed a flurry of letters protesting the Museum’s acquisition of this “pornographic” nude. These outbursts of indignation were met by rebuttals from Benton lovers all over the country and a series of helpful hints from regional readers on what to do with the problem picture. One wag suggested that *Persephone* be repainted in bra and panties or placed in “the kind of booth adult movies are viewed in.” The Naturist Society of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, offered to take care of *Persephone*; failing that act of generosity, the “clothing optional” society simply wanted a full-color glossy photo of the painting to illustrate a forthcoming issue of its magazine, *Clothed with Sun*.<sup>26</sup> It goes without saying that Thomas Hart Benton would have thoroughly relished all of this attention to a picture that stands out as one of his most accomplished paintings.

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 263–65. Passages quoted are from his essay “Farewell to New York,” published in the 1937 autobiography and written shortly before his move to Kansas City in 1935. For Schapiro’s review, see “Populist Realism,” *Partisan Review* 4 (January 1938), 53–57. See Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 279–83, for a discussion of Huselton.
2. Thomas Hart Benton to Daniel Longwell, telegram, 25 November 1939, Daniel Longwell Papers, Box 32, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
3. “Benton Rejoices as Art Is Hung in ‘Saloon’; ‘Persephone’ Adorns the Diamond Horseshoe,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1941, 27.
4. “Benton’s Nudes People the Ozarks,” *LIFE*, 20 February 1939, 38.
5. Benton student Duard Marshall, quoted in Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 287. See also the excellent technical overview in Gibson Danes, “The Creation of Thomas Benton’s *Persephone*,” *American Artist* 4 (March 1940), 4–10.
6. For a picture of Barclay’s poster, see “Private Lives,” *LIFE*, 1 March 1937, 60.
7. Matthew Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), 156–57.
8. *Ibid.*, 152. The Museum of Modern Art director Alfred Barr coined the term *magic realism* in 1942; see Dorothy Miller’s foreword to *American Realists and Magic Realists*, ed. Miller and Barr (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943), 5. Thomas Craven, ed., *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), 578.
9. For an extended discussion of Benton’s shift in style and the changed context of American political culture from the Depression to the Cold War, see Erika Doss, “Modernist Accommodation, Corporate Appropriation: The Collapse of Regionalism and the New Deal,” in her *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1991), 220–310. Benton, quoted in “And Still After,” a 1968 essay appended to *An Artist in America*, 326, 327, 368.
10. On the reverse of the canvas Benton attached a note, dated 14 May 1966, which reads, in part, “History of Painting. *Persephone*—painted Autumn and Winter of 1938–39.” and provided an extensive account of its making for conservation purposes. Karal Ann Marling also argues that Benton’s Kansas City teaching position “nudged him toward his newfound obsessions with accuracy and the mechanics of methodical picture-making.” See Marling, *Tom Benton and His Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 169.
11. See Erika Doss, “Catering to Consumerism: Associated American Artists and the Marketing of Modern Art, 1934–1958,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 26 (Summer/Autumn 1991), 143–67.
12. Edward Alden Jewell, “Benton Canvases Open New Gallery,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1939, 24; Emily Genauer, review of the Benton retrospective in the *New York World Telegram*, 22 April 1939, in the Thomas Hart Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel D-255; and Klein, quoted in Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 290. On *Susanna and the Elders*, see “‘Very Nude’ Nude Hung in Art Exhibit,” *New York News*, 2 February 1939, as noted in Adams, 350.
13. Henry Haskell, “A Changing Benton Appears in Gallery’s New Show,” *Kansas City Star*, 24 March 1939, 19.
14. Craven, *A Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, 578; for a discussion of the Brentano’s display, see Harry Hansen, “The First Reader,” *New York American*, 10 October 1939, unpaginated, Benton Papers, AAA, microfilm reel D-255.
15. “The Metamorphosis of Thomas Hart Benton,” *Art Digest* 13 (15 April 1939), 10.
16. Benton, quoted in “After,” a 1951 essay appended to *An Artist in America*, 280–81.
17. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 37, 79, 104, 159; and Elizabeth Schultz, “An Artist in America: Thomas Hart Benton’s ‘Song of Himself,’” in *Thomas Hart Benton: Artist, Writer, and Intellectual*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt and Mary K. Dains (Columbia: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1989), 171, 186.
18. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 12, 265–67.
19. On Benton’s comments about museums, see “Blast by Benton,” *Art Digest* 15 (15 April 1941), 6; for further discussion, see Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 302–13.
20. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 266; and George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13.
21. Benton’s account of these sexual incidents can be found in “The Intimate Story,” an unpublished and incomplete autobiography in the Thomas Hart Benton Papers, AAA. See also Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 19, 29–30, 44–45; and Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*, 36–37.
22. Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 290.
23. Kathy Grove comments about *Persephone* and gives her own pictorial interpretation of the picture with a 1992–93 altered C-print *The Other Series: After Benton*, illustrated in Nina Felshin, “Women’s Work: A Lineage, 1966–1994,” *Art Journal* 54 (Spring 1995), 82; and T.P. Benton, quoted in Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton*, 289.
24. “Billy Rose Puts on Two Shows,” *LIFE*, 14 July 1937, 36; and “Benton Rejoices as Art Is Hung in ‘Saloon,’” 27.
25. Benton, “After,” in *An Artist in America*, 282.
26. See the discussion in Bob Priddy, *Only the Rivers Are Peaceful: Thomas Hart Benton’s Missouri Mural* (Independence, Mo.: Independence Press/Herald Publishing House, 1989), 151–53.

## THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

### *Desert Still Life*, 1951 (*Desert Still Life, Wyoming*)

Tempera with oil on canvas, mounted on panel  
27½ × 35¾ in. (68.9 × 89.9 cm)  
Signed and dated lower right: Benton '51  
Bequest of the artist, F75-21/45

“THE PHYSICAL EFFECT OF THE WEST,” Thomas Hart Benton wrote in his 1937 autobiography, *An Artist in America*, is to make “you feel that you can keep moving forever without coming to any end.”<sup>1</sup> *Desert Still Life*, painted in 1951, captures that abiding myth of the American West’s seemingly boundless expanse in its long, low depiction of an arid desert landscape. Its foreground memento mori arrangement, however, also suggests Benton’s forlorn recognition that Regionalism, the style to which he had been attached for more than two decades, had indeed reached the end of its art-world and critical attention.

Best known for his major historical murals, substantial portraits, and ambitious Regionalist paintings of the American Scene, Benton also produced many smaller decorative works and still lifes. Throughout his career, Benton painted studies as a means of practicing and perfecting the methods of both old master and modern art. In his second autobiography, *An American in Art* (1969), Benton recalled painting flower pictures—or “florals” as he called them—in the 1910s in New York, as a way to experiment with the patterns and designs of Cézannesque modernism and to make a little money selling art. Having no income with which to buy bouquets, Benton “abstracted them from a seed catalogue, stylizing them in decorative patterns.” In the 1920s Benton continued to produce decorative floral designs for ceramics and embroidery projects, which he sold or gave to friends.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1930s Benton’s interests in “the details of the natural world, flowers, trees, and foliage” were reawakened once more, and he began painting a number of similarly configured still lifes and tabletop arrangements.<sup>3</sup> Most were aesthetic exercises in which the artist experimented with the technical problems of form, texture, pattern, and color and aimed more at pleasing the eye than, as with Dutch Baroque pictures, conveying overt moral lessons about the brevity of life and earthly pleasures. Some were special presents that Benton painted for his children or his wife; *Spring Still Life* (1943; private collection), for example, an oil tempera on panel, is inscribed on the reverse: “Happy Birthday to T.P. on his 15th yr. Dad / Benton.”<sup>4</sup>

Still lifes such as *Vase of Flowers* (q.v.), *Still Life with Flowers* (q.v.), *Morning Glories* (q.v.), and *Desert Still Life*, as well as larger pictures such as *Persephone* (q.v.), show that Benton’s art underwent a shift in style in the late 1930s, becoming oriented

toward textural variations, patterns, colors, and tones. Benton later recalled, “In the late thirties and in the forties I became fascinated with Flemish techniques and attempted to introduce them into my painting.” Although he argued that the “intensified chiaroscuro” and “added detail” of these techniques had “little effect” on his overall Regionalist style, Benton nonetheless increasingly focused on the “technical problems” of easel pictures at this time.<sup>5</sup>

In his classes at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he taught from 1935 to 1941, and in his private studio (a converted carriage house at the side of a huge old stone mansion at 3616 Bellevue Avenue) in which the Bentons lived beginning in 1939, Benton continued to work out the painterly problems of technique and form that had preoccupied him since the 1910s. Even after a night of heavy drinking and hearty harmonica playing, Benton was up every morning at dawn ready to tackle another canvas, solve another pictorial problem. Still lifes such as *Vase of Flowers* and *Still Life with Flowers* were often the result: pictures of cut flowers picked in the lush gardens that his wife, Rita, tended. Perhaps not as complex as his larger paintings, they nonetheless demonstrate Benton’s careful consideration of the pictorial problems of texture and color.

Other “florals” were painted in Chilmark, Massachusetts, a hilly and remote fishing and farming community located on the western end of Martha’s Vineyard, where Benton vacationed each summer for more than fifty years, from 1920 through 1974. Living on the island from spring through fall “had a profound effect on me,” Benton wrote in his 1937 autobiography. “It separated me from the Bohemias of art and put a physical sanity into my life for four months of the year.” From an artistic standpoint, that physical well-being was conveyed mostly in pictures of the land and people of the island; in all his Chilmark summers, Benton rarely painted scenes of the sea or of fishing. “Instead,” his longtime island neighbor Polly Burroughs recalled, “there were portraits of farmers working the land and nature’s effect on them—horses, mules, cows, even cats and butterflies, as well as ferns, flowers, sumac, corn, mushrooms, grapes, the trumpet vine, and those contorted tree trunks that appear in his work again and again.” Burroughs estimates that Benton produced hundreds of drawings, seven lithographs, and more than two hundred watercolor and oil paintings, including *Morning Glories*, during his summers on the island.<sup>6</sup>

Many of Benton’s still lifes found their way into private hands and collections.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that such paintings were frequently made as gifts or as relatively inexpensive pictures on a par with the multiple portraits of George Washington by the earlier American artist Gilbert Stuart (q.v.) (which Stuart jokingly referred to as his “hundred-dollar bills”).<sup>8</sup> Benton had reached a point of financial



stability by the early 1940s, largely through the sales and commissions arranged by his Associated American Artists gallery dealer, Reeves Lewenthal. Still, Benton's loss of his teaching position at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1941 dealt a blow to the steady income on which he and his family had come to depend. With the firm financial guidance of Rita, who had expertly managed the family's money (and the prices for Benton's pictures) since their marriage in 1922, Benton's art remained strongly priced and well collected long after Regionalism itself had vanished from popular and critical attention. Still lifes painted in Kansas City and Chilmark may not have been received critically as well as Benton's larger or more complex canvases, but they played a significant role in sustaining the Benton family on both psychological and financial terms.

Other still lifes were based on Benton's experiences in other regions of America, including the West. Benton first visited the West in 1926–27, gathering local details and anecdotal evidence of human efforts to tame the frontier for the intended panels of his first major Regionalist project, *American Historical Epic* (q.v.). Some of those western facts and energies found their way into early Regionalist paintings like *Boomtown* (1928; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, N.Y.), Benton's depiction of Borger, Texas, at the height of explosive oil speculation in the late 1920s. Others wound up as parts of his large-scale murals: *The Changing West* panel for *America Today* (1930–31; Equitable Center, New York) and *Arts of the West* panel for *The Arts of Life in America* (1932; New Britain Museum of Art, Conn.).<sup>9</sup> *The Changing West* juxtaposed engineers and oil tanks of the modern industrial West with the shepherders and cattle towns of a colonized American West. It is noteworthy that Benton never painted the Indian peoples and cultures who inhabited this region before European presence. *Arts of the West* reframed the cultural stereotypes of the wild frontier: drunken cowboys, buckin' broncos, shifty-eyed cardsharps, rollicking country and western music makers, unpaved streets, false storefronts.

In subsequent western pictures painted after World War II, such as *Desert Still Life* and *The Desert* (1956; Benton Trust, UMB Bank, n.a., Trustee, Kansas City, Mo.), a tempera painting that is very similar to this one, Benton continued that cinematic sense of stereotyping. *Desert Still Life*, for example, features the same sorts of visual tropes found in a typical Hollywood cowboy and Indian movie or a post-World War II issue of *Arizona Highways*. In the foreground, Benton depicted weatherworn rocks and smoothed piñon branches, desert shrubs and sagebrushes, dusty pine cones, and the bleached bones and grinning skull of a long-dead cow. In the distance, he painted the drawn-out horizon of the frontier, the pale pastels of the arid high country in spring, and the eroded stone of the kind of outcrop typically named Castle Rock or the Mittens by nineteenth-century pioneers. The art historian Henry Adams suggests that the distant mountain in *Desert Still Life* is Ship Rock in Arizona, yet the picture's painted outcropping only vaguely resembles the specifics of this well-known southwestern tourist spot and instead suggests Benton's long-standing proclivity for creating stereotypical or generic views of America's various

regions. Benton, in fact, marked "Desert Still Life / Wyoming" on the reverse of the canvas, and the picture was exhibited as *Desert Still Life, Wyoming* when it was shown in a 1962–63 retrospective of his work.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the source for this 1951 picture, it most obviously consists of dramatic props placed together to recreate the visual essence of a stereotypical "American Western Desert": skeletal remains, mesquite bushes, purplish mountains, big blue skies.

The biggest difference, of course, between Benton's earlier western stereotypes and this still life of 1951 is the lack of attention to the peoples and personalities of the American frontier. Later, Benton recalled that about 1948 he started an "intense study of [the] West—New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. These areas began taking [the] place of Middle West and South, which had heretofore received [the] bulk of 'regionalist' subjects."<sup>11</sup> If Benton had found the American West booming with human (and organic) activity in the 1920s, and similarly crowded with the popular arts and the pulse of the people in the 1930s, he concentrated on its natural beauty and its tenor of Romantic isolation in this picture from the 1950s.

Even so, he rendered *Desert Still Life* with the same restless energy that had long been his stylistic trademark, vivifying its generic western turf in bright colors, animating its rocks, shrubs, and branches with gyrating shapes and twisting contours. In fact, the skull in the picture seems its most spirited element, suggesting a point of similarity between Benton's view of the desert and that of fellow modern artist Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.), whose more abstracted renditions of bleached southwestern bones are, strangely, among her most personable and even humorous paintings. O'Keeffe's *Red, White, and Blue* (Fig. 1), for example, exhibits a cognate liveliness with Benton's 1951 still life in its similar depiction of the arid American West's stereotypical skeletal artifacts. O'Keeffe once commented that she "wanted to paint the desert" but had not "known how" until she "brought home the bleached bones as my symbols of the desert." As she remarked:

The bones are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around—hair, eyes and all, with their tails switching. The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert though it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.<sup>12</sup>

Benton's view of the West was hardly so harsh, yet the symbolic skull of *Desert Still Life* similarly embodies an importance far beyond its formal character.

Benton clearly retained his interest in the American Scene after World War II. But, painting in a more imaginative and modulated style close to Magic Realism, he reoriented his attention toward the minutiae of the American Scene. His new focus on the "sheer wealth of artifacts" increasingly replaced the pictures of hardworking men and the ideology of American democratic society and labor that he had painted from the early 1920s through the years



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red, White, and Blue*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 35 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (101.3 × 91.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (52.203). © The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

of the Great Depression. Perhaps, as the art historian Karal Ann Marling argues, Benton's almost obsessively materialistic postwar pictures were visual reminders of the many things that were lacking in the hard years of the Depression and the many "new and shiny things" that were eagerly collected in the postwar consumer boom.<sup>13</sup>

Or perhaps *Desert Still Life* represents Benton's modern American updating of a Dutch Baroque morality tale, a visual reminder of the brevity of life and the vagaries of fashion and popular taste. Benton was sixty-two when he painted this western scene. While its brilliant colors and energetic forms reveal his abiding attention to the Regionalist mode of painting that he had honed for well over three decades, the presence of the symbolic skull suggests that thoughts of growing old and the very mortality of his American Scene style were also in his mind. Indeed, in 1946 Regionalism was viciously dismissed by the art historian H. W. Janson as an "anti-artistic" and essentially antimodern aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> Janson was hardly alone in this postwar attack on Regionalism, and as Abstract Expressionism gained acclaim in the art world, the two styles were frequently pitted against one another: Benton's narrative art dismissed as that of the premodern past, while the nonobjective paintings of his former student Jackson Pollock were championed as the ideal art for the modern era.<sup>15</sup>

By the time he painted *Desert Still Life* in 1951, Benton was the only surviving member of the so-called Regionalist triumvirate, Grant Wood having died in 1942 and John Stuart Curry (q.v.) in 1946. Later, Benton would write that "gnawing suspicions

of failure" gripped him "when the Regionalist movement was repudiated" in the postwar period.<sup>16</sup> If he nevertheless persisted with his personal aesthetic and painted until the day he died (19 January 1975), pictures like *Desert Still Life* show that Benton also deeply felt the loss of his, and Regionalism's, significance in the American Scene.

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 200.
2. Thomas Hart Benton, *An American in Art: Professional and Technical Autobiography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 31; for illustrations of Benton's 1920s decorative works, see Polly Burroughs, *Thomas Hart Benton: A Portrait* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1981), pages following 90.
3. Benton, "And Still After," a 1968 essay appended to *An Artist in America*, 327.
4. As noted in *Thomas Hart Benton: An Artist's Selection, 1908–1974*, exh. cat. (Kansas City, Mo.: William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, 1974), no. 26.
5. Benton, *An American in Art*, 74–75.
6. Benton, *An Artist in America*, 63; and Burroughs, *Thomas Hart Benton: A Portrait*, 129, 186.
7. NAMA files for *Morning Glories* and *Vase of Flowers* include information about various other Benton still lifes. Matthew Baigell also illustrates others of Benton's still lifes in *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), pls. 152, 156, 196, 201, 209, and 210.
8. James Flexner, *America's Old Masters*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 296.
9. On *Boomtown*, see Karal Ann Marling, "Thomas Hart Benton's *Boomtown*: Regionalism Redefined," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 6 (1981), 73–137.
10. NAMA 1991, 198. On the 1962–63 exhibition, see *Thomas Hart Benton: A Giant in American Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Art Gallery, 1962), where *Desert Still Life, Wyoming* was no. 31. *The Desert* (1956) is illustrated in *Benton's Bentsons: Selections from the Thomas Hart Benton and Rita P. Benton Trusts*, exh. cat. (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1980), unpaginated.
11. Benton, *An Artist in America*, chronology for 1948, 387.
12. O'Keeffe, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich and Doris Bry, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Abrams, 1970), 23. In *Early American Modernist Painting, 1910–1935* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), Abraham A. Davidson, 68, remarks on the "uncanny" liveliness of O'Keeffe's pictures of desert bones. For further discussion of O'Keeffe's bone paintings, see Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 201–5.
13. Karal Ann Marling, *Tom Benton and His Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 161.
14. H[orst] W[oldemar] Janson, "Benton and Wood, Champions of Regionalism," *Magazine of Art* 39 (May 1946), 184–86, 198–200.
15. For further discussion of this postwar attack on Regionalism, see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.
16. Benton, "And Still After," 368–69.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Open Country*, 1952

Tempera with oil on canvas, mounted on panel

27¼ × 35¼ in. (69.2 × 89.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Benton '52; inscribed on panel verso: price \$3500.00; "Open Country" Thomas H. Benton / Oil painting—Varnished with methyl methacrylate varnish  
Bequest of David L. and Elise B. Sheffrey, F89-33

THE SWEEPING GRASSLANDS of the western American prairie were an abiding source of visual attraction for Thomas Hart Benton, as is evidenced in his repeated trips through the region (beginning in the mid-1920s and lasting through the 1960s), and his multiple drawings, lithographs, and paintings of the landscapes of Wyoming, Nebraska, the Dakotas, eastern Colorado, Montana, and the Texas panhandle. *Open Country* is typical of Benton's views of the Great Plains, which he remarked in his autobiography *An Artist in America* had "a releasing effect" on him:

They make me want to run and shout at the top of my voice. I like their endlessness. I like the way they make human beings appear as the little bugs they really are. I like the way they make thought seem futile. . . . The universe is unveiled there, stripped to dirt and air, to wind, dust, cloud, and the white sun . . . the plains afford me an immense freedom of spirit.<sup>1</sup>

*Open Country's* illustration of a solitary ranch hand reveals that Benton was also drawn to the "manners and physique" of the hardy cowboys and sheepherders who worked this western terrain, "big, silent fellows" he called them, who "have in their characters something of the largeness of their surroundings." But it is more the great abstracted expanse of the western prairie and yet also its fulfillment of human needs—both spiritual and more pragmatic—that he captured in this landscape painting. Moreover, if in earlier works such as *Desert Still Life* (q.v.) and in many smaller private canvases of the 1940s, Benton had been gripped for a time by "gnawing suspicions of failure" regarding the postwar repudiation of Regionalist art, it is evident in pictures such as *Open Country* that he revived and recovered, and returned to an exploration and illustration of the American Scene that had characterized his art for the previous three decades.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to determine which American prairie *Open Country* actually depicts, as the picture contains the same narrative details Benton included in many other western-themed scenes. His 1948 lithograph *The Corral*, for example, features the same windmill, watering trough, wispy clouds, horses, and cowboys, and was described by Benton as a "scene in western Nebraska" made from drawings done during a trip in 1939 "through the plains

country, Neb., the Dakotas, Eastern Wyoming and Montana." His 1952 lithograph *West Texas* (based on a 1944 drawing) also illustrates the same windmill, watering trough, cacti, and vast spread of land, and was described by Benton as a scene from the "Texas panhandle—a little west where the mesa-like formations show up." *Open Country* is also strikingly similar to the oil *High Plains* (1953; private collection), where Benton shows the same lanky cowboy rounding up three stray cattle and driving them back to the same herd and the same spot depicted in the 1952 picture.<sup>3</sup>

It is not as if the American West, or any other region of the country, is so completely devoid of identifying landmarks as to be so utterly uniform. Rather, Benton's western landscapes were shaped by his abiding Regionalist inclination to describe the American Scene in terms of what he determined were both its typical localized features and its larger national meanings.<sup>4</sup> Thus, his scenes of the American plains commonly feature the solitary windmill and watering trough featured in *Open Country*, as well as the jutting mounds of sandstone, occasional clumps of sagebrush, scraggly barbed-wire fences, hardy cattle, and "big, silent" cowboys of the western grasslands. Brought together in a single canvas, these stereotypical details helped fulfill Benton's double goal of representing the region and also conveying the mythic, popular culture understanding of the American West derived from Hollywood movies, Zane Grey novels, and *LIFE* magazine photo-essays.

That West might be, more specifically, the Casper landscape of Benton's onetime protégé, the Wyoming native and Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock, who had achieved a considerable amount of his own art world acclaim by the early 1950s. Or it might be the West of the Texas panhandle, which Benton visited as early as 1926 and returned to often throughout his long life. It makes no difference: the western landscape depicted in *Open Country* is Benton's tribute to the Great American Prairie, to what early-nineteenth-century American explorers dismissed as a vast desert wasteland, and what Benton found as a repeated source of visual reverie and anecdotal information.<sup>5</sup>

The space depicted in *Open Country* is quite different in this regard from the pastoral tranquility of an American eastern garden framed in contemplative nineteenth-century Hudson River landscapes by Jasper F. Cropsey (q.v.) and Asher B. Durand (q.v.). Nor does it follow the more operative view of the West's dramatic geologic outcroppings, its Rocky Mountains and grand canyons, that were pursued in panoramic and profoundly nationalistic paintings by Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) and Thomas Moran (q.v.). Benton's 1952 canvas conveys little of the "Virgin Land" potential of fertility, the scientific exceptionalism, or the imperialistic American credo of entitlement implied in nineteenth-century understandings of Manifest Destiny. Rather, it envisions the prairie as a free and open





western space, which personally provided Benton with a kind of spiritual liberation. Yet, by also including the vignette of the working cowboy and his cattle, the windmill, and the watering trough, Benton alluded to the larger social purposefulness of the western plains, to its utilization for farming and ranching, to employing and feeding the American folk.

*Open Country* is by no means, then, simply a sentimental environmentalist treatise about the lonely beauty of the American western prairie. Nor, as has been argued, is it an epilogue to Regionalism or to Benton's own sense of impending mortality.<sup>6</sup> It is, instead, another in a long series of Benton's pragmatic Regionalist depictions of the codependency of the American people and the American landscape, of the complex relations between American culture and nature. Painting both open and fenced prairie, both free and profitable space, Benton captured the "paradoxical nature" of the western plains in this Regionalist landscape.<sup>7</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America*, 4th rev. ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 200.
2. *Ibid.*, 201; Benton, "And Still After," a 1968 essay appended to *An Artist in America*, 368.
3. See Creekmore Fath, ed., *The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 162–63, 174–75, for discussion and illustration of *The Corral* and *West Texas. High Plains* is illustrated in Matthew Baigell, *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), colorpl. 193.
4. See, for example, Karal Ann Marling, "Thomas Hart Benton's *Boomtown*: Regionalism Redefined," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 6 (1981), 73–137.
5. Joni L. Kinsey, *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 15.
6. Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 320; and NAMA 1991. 199, assert that Benton suffered a "severe heart attack" in January 1952 and that this event, coupled with the recent deaths of his Regionalist partners Grant Wood (in 1942) and John Steuart Curry (in 1946), dramatically affected his formerly optimistic demeanor. However, information from Jack W. Wolf, M.D., Benton's personal physician from 1947 until his death, reveals that the artist suffered his first heart attack only in 1966. See Wolf to Fred W. McGraw, 18 September 1993, NAMA curatorial files.
7. Kinsey, *Plain Pictures*, 3–4. *Open Country* is discussed on 160–61.

# THOMAS HART BENTON (1889–1975)

## *Trial by Jury*, 1964

Oil on canvas

30<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 40<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (76.9 × 101.9 cm)

Signed lower right: Benton '64

Bequest of the artist, F75-21/11

IRONICALLY, FOR A MAN WHO shrugged off parental expectations of a career in law, Thomas Hart Benton paid close attention to the profession and its practitioners for much of his life. As the art historian Karal Ann Marling remarks:

Benton spent an inordinate amount of time in courtrooms, styling himself something of an expert on jurisprudence and on allied affairs, like politics. He befriended members of the legal fraternity. He fussed for years on end over the legal details of his will. He spouted legal jargon to the papers when he disputed an occupation tax levied on his studio by the Kansas City Division of Revenue, protesting that “art is not business” but a vocation. He even started a book about lawyers.<sup>1</sup>

He sketched courtroom drama, too, as seen in paintings such as *Trial by Jury*, a portrait of Benton’s close friend and celebrated Kansas City defense attorney, Lyman “Red Dog” Field.

It is no surprise that Benton was enormously attracted to the facts and theater of the culture of law; he was, after all, the eldest son of a longtime criminal lawyer who had also been U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri during Grover Cleveland’s first presidential term (1885–89). His brother Nat was a well-respected prosecuting attorney in Springfield, Missouri. Benton included sketches of both his father and brother in the 1936 mural he painted for the Missouri State Capitol, showing his father campaigning in one scene and his brother pleading a case in another.<sup>2</sup>

A year earlier, in 1935, Benton had attended the criminal trial of Bruno Hauptmann, accused of kidnapping the infant son of Charles and Anne Lindbergh and had had some of his quick pencil sketches published in the *New York Herald Tribune*. “Hauptmann is a cold-looking man,” Benton remarked to a newspaper reporter. “There’s no passion about him. While I was watching him I kept thinking, ‘did that pasty-faced fellow crawl up that ladder and grab that baby?’ Such a thing is hard to believe.” Still, Benton said the Hauptmann trial “was a gold mine for American artists”: “The courtroom is full of interesting faces. The sheriff would make a good picture, and the Judge in his more owlish moments is swell. In any big picture, however, I would put the newspaper men in the foreground. The trial is just a little pebble thrown into the water, and the press accounts for all those ripples around it.”<sup>3</sup>

Benton attended another child abduction trial in 1953 and sketched the prosecution of Bonnie Brown Heady and Carl Hall, accused of kidnapping and then murdering Bobby Greenlease, the six-year-old son of a prominent Kansas City businessman.<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s he returned to the subject of the law, but the “big picture” he eventually painted was not that of the dramatic child kidnapping trials he had witnessed in previous decades. Nor does Benton’s 1964 picture center on the media hoopla of those and other criminal trials. Rather, true to Benton’s abiding attention to courtroom personalities and their practices, *Trial by Jury* revels in the “interesting faces” of the twenty-two figures who occupied Judge John R. James’s Jackson County Circuit Court for four days in March 1964, during the civil case of *Smith v. Brown*, a personal-injury suit that arose from an automobile accident.

Lyman Field, a former Kansas City police commissioner, was the defense attorney for fifty-eight-year-old James W. Brown of Sedalia, Missouri, who was being sued by twenty-year-old Gayle Smith for \$80,000 in damages relating to the accident. “It was an ordinary but important case,” Field recalled some years later. “Even the name of the case, what we lawyers call the style of the case, was good old ordinary American: *Smith v. Brown*.”<sup>5</sup> As ordinary as this civil action may have been (and an \$80,000 damage suit was not that ordinary in 1964), Benton transformed the scene into one of quiet drama, relaying all the players and the courtroom details that he observed. He placed the opposing parties on either side of the central table, the Browns on the left, Smith and her lawyers on the right, highlighting Field’s yellow legal pad and the furiously scribbled response of opposing counsel. He individualized the faces and bodies of the twelve members of the jury (all men except Mrs. Bernell Farmer), seated in the wooden box in the northwest corner of the courtroom. And Benton sketched the judge’s left side, the court reporter (in back of Field), the clerk, and the bailiff (to the judge’s left), all following Field’s arguments with varying degrees of attentiveness, revealing his accurate accounting of human behavior in the long hours of legal wrangling that figure in the average courtroom.

Using tricks of perspective and bright colors, Benton draws our attention down the long line of the courtroom table toward the gesturing figure of defense attorney Field. Instead of focusing on the judge or the defendants, or even the shapely plaintiff, Benton reserved his attention for the Perry Mason dramatics of his friend Field, whom he outfitted in an outlandish purple suit. Seventeen years later, in 1981, surviving members of the cast of *Trial by Jury* were reassembled to celebrate the renovation of the Twelfth Circuit courtroom, and Field related how he had originally objected to Benton’s choice of suit color. “I explained that I had never owned a purple suit, had no intention of owning a purple



suit, let alone never had even dreamed of addressing a jury in a purple suit,” Field recalled. But Benton told him: “Lyman, it was artistically necessary to balance your suit with the lady plaintiff’s lavender dress and parasol. We painters call it artistic license.”<sup>6</sup> In March 1964, purple suit or not, Field’s persuasive arguments won the case for Brown.

Lyman Field was Benton’s lawyer, too, and remained his close friend until his death in January 1975. He delivered the eulogy at Benton’s funeral and recalled how his good friend “lived and worked with great vigor and purpose.”<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps that sense of purpose that is most apparent in *Trial by Jury*, a picture that reveals the certain promise of justice, the finality of decision, and Benton’s abiding faith in the American legal system in which he had been raised. Benton’s picture of that faith remained in Field’s personal legal offices until 1975, when under the terms of the will his friend helped to write, it was bequeathed to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts.

ED

## NOTES

1. Karal Ann Marling, “Art and the Law,” in *Tom Benton and His Drawings: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 186.
2. Bob Priddy, *Only the Rivers Are Peaceful: Thomas Hart Benton’s Missouri Mural* (Independence, Mo.: Independence Press/Herald Publishing House, 1989), 187, 198.
3. Benton, quoted in “Courtroom Teems with Material for Murals,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 January 1935, unpaginated, NAMA curatorial files.
4. For Benton’s sketches of the Bobby Greenlease trial, see Marling, *Tom Benton and His Drawings*, 186–89.
5. Quoted in Kimberly Mills, “A Case of Life Imitating Art,” *Kansas City Times*, 31 December 1981, A4.
6. Ibid.
7. Lyman Field, *Eulogy to Tom Benton* (Kansas City, Mo.: privately printed, 1975), 2. Field was a trustee of the Benton Trust, UMB Bank, n.a., Kansas City, Missouri, until his death in 1999.

# LEONID BERMAN (1896–1976)

## *Port Jefferson*, 1949

Oil on canvas

36¼ × 50½ in. (92.1 × 127.3 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Leonid. 49.; inscribed on verso top center: Port Jefferson / (Long Island) / Port Jefferson / (L. I.) / Leonid / 1949 / 50 × 36 inches

Gift of William T. Kemper Jr. through the Friends of Art, 49-81

REPORTING TO HIS NEW DEALER Kirk Askew in 1949, Leonid Berman proclaimed *Port Jefferson* “perhaps the best of my new canvasses, and certainly the largest.”<sup>1</sup> The painting offers a sweeping, panoramic view of Port Jefferson harbor, near the village of the same name, located on the northern shore of New York’s Long Island. Composed primarily of pale blue and cream tones, the painting exudes a soft, soothing effect, accentuated by the dramatic, serpentine curve of the shoreline. This compositional feature leads the viewer’s eye from the foreground quickly into the distance, where distinctions between land, sea, and sky effectively evaporate into ethereal ribbons of pure color and attenuated, blended brushstrokes. Consequently, *Port Jefferson* verges on abstraction.

Leonid staves off this stylistic possibility through the inclusion of select details, particularly in the fore- and middle grounds. The most conspicuous of these is the male figure lying on his stomach on a sand dune overlooking the harbor. Seen from behind, this figure, much like the viewer of the painting, enjoys an elevated vantage point that provides an unobstructed view of his coastal domain, which he surveys like a self-appointed monarch. Shown alone in the midst of this expansive topography, the young man

apparently enjoys the solitude and natural splendor his high position affords him.

Smaller figures, either working or playing, animate the middle ground. The two holding long poles—oars, fishing poles, or eeling spears—seem to stare out into space, their gazes orchestrating the viewer’s own experience through the composition. The wooden pierlike structures at the water’s edge in the foreground are ruins of trestles and platforms for dredging. These had been used previously to support pipelines through which high-grade sand and gravel were pumped to refining plants serving the demands of New York City’s booming construction industry after World War I.<sup>2</sup> Many of these details are featured in a drawing (Fig. 1) of the site on which Leonid based the painted composition. The artist furthermore sorted out the foreground figure’s lower body in perspective in a preliminary sketch.

Leonid’s portrayal of man’s confrontation with nature in *Port Jefferson* recalls a host of art-historical evocations. The theme was especially popular among European painters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries associated with the Romantic movement. Leonid’s treatment begs particularly favorable comparison with Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* (Fig. 2), in which a lone foreground figure similarly addresses a vast, ambiguous expanse of nature with his back turned to the viewer. In both works, nature operates as a visual metaphor for emotional or spiritual states. But, whereas Friedrich emphasizes the threat of nature’s powerful wrath, Leonid suggests a more serene, even harmonious relationship between mankind and its environs, an attitude that distinguishes his approach from his more theatrical artistic forebears. The modernist’s predilection for picturesque seaside scenery, a subject he took up initially during a vacation in the French Riviera during the winter of 1924, further separates him from the Romantic interest in landscape and history painting, even as it reveals his admiration of French Impressionism, the style that had sparked his youthful interest in painting as a career years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The conceptual and philosophical links between Leonid’s art and Romantic painting of the past were most apparent to contemporaneous viewers and critics. In February 1926 the Russian-born Leonid showed his work at the prestigious Galerie Druet in Paris, alongside several other fellow former students from the French capital’s Académie Ranson, including his brother Eugene and friends Pierre Charbonnier, Christian Bérard, and Pavel Tchelitchew (q.v.). The diverse work of these artists demonstrated a collective interest in human emotion and activity. For this reason, critics in 1926 dubbed their art Neo-Humanist and, subsequently, Neo-Romantic, noting the prevailing theme of “man or his imprint on place” and moods of introspection and nostalgia,

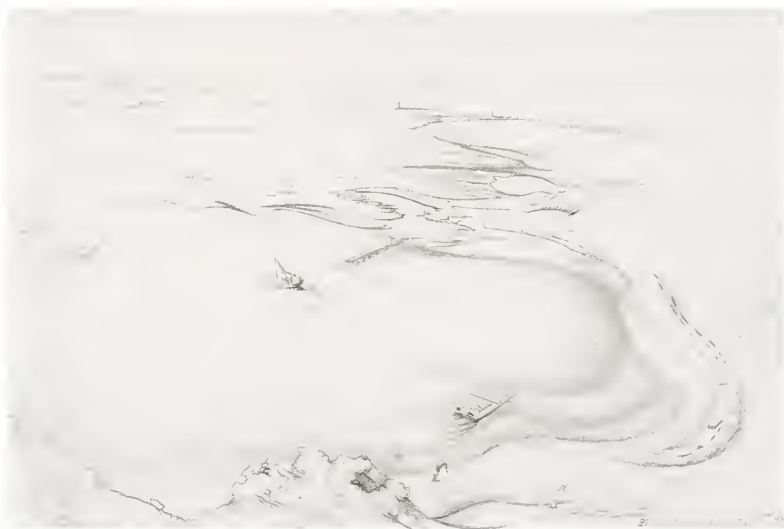


Fig. 1 Leonid Berman, *Study for “Port Jefferson,”* 1949. Graphite on paper, 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 17<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (30 × 45.2 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Gift of R. Kirk Askew Jr., 50-5





Fig. 2 Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above a Sea of Fog*, c. 1817. Oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (94.8 × 74.8 cm). Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany, on permanent loan from the Foundation for the Promotion of the Hamburg Art Collections. © Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

so different from the more analytic, formalist concerns of many of their Parisian counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Neo-Romanticism gained in notoriety and popularity in the United States following a group exhibition that included Leonid's work at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1931.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of its emergence, the most important contemporary artistic touchstone for Neo-Romanticism was Surrealism, as both movements sought to transcend reality, albeit in varying degrees. Opinions were split, however, as to whether Neo-Romanticism was a direct offspring of Surrealism or a restrained foil to its more outrageous—and sometimes perverse—visions. Regardless, the Neo-Romantics were joined, in part, in their shared admiration of the Italian Giorgio de Chirico, whom the Surrealist André Breton had originally identified (and later rejected) as the movement's artistic patron saint. For his part, Leonid readily admitted his debt to Surrealism, confessing in 1949, "I like to discover the surreal things that exist in nature."<sup>6</sup>

*Port Jefferson* also offers insight into Leonid's artistic temperament as well as important distinctions between Neo-Romanticism and Surrealism. Featuring a young man seduced into daydreaming by nature's vastness, Leonid's painting might be understood

literally to visualize Jean Cocteau's observation in 1926 that the Neo-Romantics "reacted from surrealism by painting the dreamer instead of the dream."<sup>7</sup> In *Port Jefferson*, Leonid shows the dreamer *and* the dream, the undulating shoreline serving as a compositional thought balloon connecting the figure's imagination to the dreamscape before him. Unlike a typical Surrealist fantasy, however, Leonid's dream is grounded in nature, pleasant, and chaste, qualities that no doubt contribute to *Port Jefferson's* enduring popularity.

RRG/SM

## NOTES

1. Leonid to Askew (in French), [June 1949] and [October 1949], trans. Sally Mills, R. Kirk Askew Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel N69-107, no frame nos. In the 1930s Leonid took to signing his paintings by his first name to avoid confusion with his brother Eugene, who was also a painter. Thus, he is popularly known and referred to by his first name only.
2. On Port Jefferson's history, see *Sands of Time: A History of the Sand and Gravel Operations in Port Jefferson and Nearby Harbors* (East Setauket, N.Y.: Three Village Historical Society, 1998). The contributions of Wallace Broege of the Suffolk County Historical Society in Riverhead, New York, and R. Sherman Mills of the Three Village Historical Society in Setauket are gratefully acknowledged.
3. The primary source for Leonid's biography and artistic development is the painter's autobiography, *The Three Worlds of Leonid*, trans. Olivier Bernier (New York: Basic Books, 1978). See also James Thrall Soby, "Léonid," *Horizon* 20 (November 20), 330-38. John Russell emphasizes the role of Impressionism in Leonid's emerging interest in art in "A Look at Leonid," in *Leonid and His Friends: Tchelitchev, Berman, Bérard*, exh. cat. (New York: New York Cultural Center, in association with Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1974), 12-13.
4. Soby attributes the term *Neo-Humanist* to the critic Waldemar George, who reviewed the 1926 exhibition, in "Léonid," 332. Karen Kundig has reiterated this attribution more recently in "Giorgio de Chirico, Surrealism, and Neoromanticism," in *Giorgio de Chirico and America*, ed. Emily Braun, exh. cat. (New York: Hunter College of the City of New York; Turin: Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico; Rome: Umberto Allemandi, 1996), 100. Soby popularized the term *Neo-Romanticism*. Leonid himself recounted the episode of the 1926 exhibition in *Three Worlds*, 140-42. See also Soby, "New-Romantics," in *After Picasso* (Hartford, Conn.: Edwin Valentine Mitchell; New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935).
5. On Neo-Romanticism in America, see particularly Kundig, "Giorgio de Chirico, Surrealism, and Neoromanticism." When five of the Neo-Romantics showed their work at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1931, their names alone constituted the exhibition title; the catalogue did not unite them under a collective label. The appropriateness of the term *Neo-Romantic* has been disputed from the very beginning. Tchelitchev maintained, for example, "I have never been 'Neo-Romantic.' This unfortunate title was invented by Jim Soby in order to give a group of artists . . . an '-ism' which at that (1931) and other times seemed like [a] reference. . . . We were called 'Humanists' in Paris—equally wrong." Tchelitchev, letter, 11 July 1956, Tchelitchev Scrapbook, Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York. In 1942 Soby came to admit the term's "usefulness has dwindled and its accuracy vanished." Soby, "Return to the North," *View* 2 (May 1942), impaginated.
6. Quoted in "Spacemaker," *Time*, 23 January 1950, 30.
7. Quoted in Kundig, "Giorgio de Chirico, Surrealism, and Neoromanticism," 100.



## GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM (1811–1879)

### *Fishing on the Mississippi*, 1851 (*Fishing on the Missouri*)

Oil on canvas

28¾ × 36 in. (73 × 91.4 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: G. C. Bingham / 1851

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-4/4

*FISHING ON THE MISSISSIPPI* FEATURES three men on the rocky bank of a river.<sup>1</sup> In a pastoral landscape bathed in the rosy golden light of sunset, they appear lost in thought in the moments after a flatboat has passed. The perfect equilibrium of the composition and smoothness of the paint strokes convey complete serenity, although the darker clouds moving in from the left suggest a threatening change on the horizon. Located in the frontier West through its titling and the artist's well-known associations with Missouri, *Fishing on the Mississippi* was part of George Caleb Bingham's project to construct an image of the West for his own day and for posterity. As he wrote toward the end of his life, a primary purpose of his art was to assure "that our social and political characteristics as daily and annually exhibited will not be lost . . . for want of an Art record rendering them full justice."<sup>2</sup> Bingham's dedication to this goal, borne out in *Fishing on the Mississippi* and nearly fifty other narrative paintings of western rivers and politics painted between the late 1830s and mid-1850s, was uniquely served by his work as both a painter and a politician.

Since 1840, when the *Boon's Lick Times* first assigned him the nickname "the Missouri artist," Bingham's art has been inextricably linked to the Show Me State.<sup>3</sup> However, the artist was born in Virginia in 1811, and his family migrated to Missouri Territory eight years later.<sup>4</sup> Arriving at the town of Franklin in 1819, two years before Missouri's entry into the Union, Bingham's boyhood years were spent on the western frontier. Even so, Franklin was a bustling midstate town on the Missouri River and, contrary to popular belief, the artist's experience was never truly isolated or rural.<sup>5</sup> Bingham's father's death and the destruction of Franklin by floods precipitated his family's move in 1827 to nearby Arrow Rock, a growing community on the river.<sup>6</sup>

Bingham was self-taught as an artist, although he encountered itinerant portraitists in his youth. In the late 1820s he followed a young man's typical path of apprenticeship, in his case, to cabinet-makers who also served as Methodist ministers; by the early 1830s he was pursuing a career as a portrait painter across Missouri.<sup>7</sup> Frequent visits to—and later studios in—St. Louis exposed Bingham to a nascent art culture, exhibitions, printed imagery, and original paintings before his first trip east in 1838.<sup>8</sup> Bingham's artistic ambitions inspired a trip that year to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and likely New York; a residence in Washington, D.C., during 1840–44; and

return visits to Philadelphia and New York in 1843, 1849, and for parts of 1850–53 and 1855–56. In these East Coast cities, Bingham exhibited regularly for fifteen years and participated in their larger art worlds.

Bingham's exhibition debut in New York was in late 1838 at the Apollo Art Gallery with *Western Boatmen Ashore* (c. 1838; location unknown). This canvas announced not just his arrival in America's art capital but also his first known picture with a river theme.<sup>9</sup> His visibility in New York was most concentrated from 1845 to 1852 through his relationship with the American Art-Union, a direct descendant of the Apollo Art Gallery. The Art-Union provided patronage for American artists by exhibiting and purchasing paintings "illustrative of the history, literature or manners of the country."<sup>10</sup> It was Bingham's most constant patron during his most productive years, a partnership mutually beneficial to both artist and organization. All told, Bingham sold twenty pictures under the Art-Union's auspices, including *Fishing on the Mississippi* in March 1851. The Art-Union, in turn, publicized Bingham as an example of nationwide progress in art.<sup>11</sup>

In tandem with his pursuit of a career in art, Bingham was equally committed to politics. He served in appointed and elected positions for four decades. As a Whig in the early 1840s, the artist participated in electoral conventions, making speeches and painting banners. During 1846–49, four of his busiest years as a painter, he lost a hotly contested election for state legislator but then soon served in that same position. Thereafter, and until his departure for Germany in 1856, Bingham remained active in Whig affairs. Returning to Missouri in 1859, he served as Missouri state treasurer during the Civil War and later was a candidate for Congress before his final appointment in 1875 as adjutant general of Missouri. This life in politics was inextricably entwined with Bingham's life in art.<sup>12</sup>

*Fishing on the Mississippi* is the eighth in a group of more than a dozen canvases in which Bingham focused on the men who worked on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The majority of these images show rivermen dancing, playing music or cards, fishing, resting, or waiting in perfectly tranquil river scenes, not actively engaged in their labors. They each present a fixed but transitory moment in harmoniously balanced compositions like vignettes excerpted from a larger panorama.<sup>14</sup> Within this framework, they outline Bingham's understanding of and complex attitudes toward the role of western rivers and Missouri in the context of broader national issues through modes that mirrored and aided the construction of American frontier identity.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars have suggested interpretations of these images that range from their describing a time and place with ethnographic



accuracy to generating myths.<sup>16</sup> In fact, they seem to offer a range of meanings, which reflect the comfort and conflicts the artist, and indeed many Americans, felt at midcentury. As Angela Miller, among others, has advocated, they simultaneously hinge on a nostalgia for a less complicated past, symbolized most transparently by settings of unspoiled wilderness, and a belief in current and future progress where virgin territory fuels production and the economy, as implied by the constellation of activities depicted.<sup>17</sup>

In *Fishing on the Mississippi*, as in his genre paintings generally, Bingham wove together subjects and artistic language that were popularized by both narrative and landscape painters in the 1840s, many of whom were also supported by the American Art-Union. Like William Sidney Mount (q.v.) and Francis William Edmonds (q.v.), Bingham created his realistic imagery from scenes of everyday American rural life that related to important contemporary national issues.<sup>18</sup> Even though the specific theme of fishing in American painting was not significantly developed until after the Civil War, Bingham constructed his scene within a framework already established in canvases by the artist-anglers Henry Inman (q.v.) and Charles Lanman, as well as John Gadsby Chapman (q.v.). These painters generally depicted fishing as a sporting activity in unspoiled nature, where the inherent contemplative experience yielded important mental and spiritual benefits in addition to the actual bodily sustenance provided by the catch.<sup>19</sup>

For the river paintings, Bingham drew broadly from the long tradition of river imagery, wherein water serves as a metaphor for both the passage of time and constancy.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, he aligned himself with the contemporary pastoral mode of American landscape painting, best exemplified in the work of Thomas Cole (q.v.) and Asher B. Durand (q.v.). Scenes like Cole's *The Mill, Sunset* (q.v.) or Durand's *Progress* (1853; Westervelt-Warner Museum of American Art, Tuscaloosa, Ala.) explicated the mid-nineteenth-century American dream of man and nature cooperatively engaged to further the progress of the nation, in a style derived from French and English traditions, where actual topography meshes with an idealized vision of nature.<sup>21</sup>

Underlying both American narrative and landscape painting—indeed, most American mid-nineteenth-century art—was a love affair with classicism on which Bingham relied heavily.<sup>22</sup> Using strategies that he frequently recycled in his river images, he rendered each element in *Fishing on the Mississippi* absolutely stable through a related counterbalance.<sup>23</sup> The three figures are carefully rendered and, from their position left of center, form a solid pyramid that anchors the image. Sky, land, and water, described with a somewhat freer brush than the figures, divide the canvas into three masses, alternating light and dark and providing a diaphanous foil to the solid figures on the rocks. Dramatically backlit clouds, filling the wide expanse of sky from the left, find their counterpoise in the softly colored light reflecting in the glassy water and seal the image in a harmoniously toned veil of air. This overall scrim, too, is offset by the circle of brightness, the only vestige of direct sunlight, which highlights the two central figures. As well, it accentuates their contemplative mood and

the red, white, and blue palette of their clothing, which directs the viewer to the imagery's national implications. In turn, in the foreground, the implied viewer hovers slightly above the surface of the water, providing an intuited counterweight to the unfolding of the scene. Laid over these larger components, the two fishing poles create strong horizontal and vertical axes that connect the figures with the flatboat downriver as well as with the surrounding scenery and, at the same time, emphasize the painting's flat picture plane. The overall effect is that the real time of the narrative visibly vibrates against a sense of timelessness.

Using touchstones of conventional approaches to subject and style, Bingham rendered a narrative that his East Coast audience of armchair travelers would have found familiar, but also as exotic as most foreign subjects.<sup>24</sup> In the years surrounding the gold rush, their knowledge of the western frontier was complicated as sensational newspaper accounts mixed with an image of the West and frontier types mainly derived from such novels as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and *The Deerslayer* and Washington Irving's *Astoria*.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, although *Fishing on the Mississippi*, like all of Bingham's narrative pictures, can be counted among the relatively small body of western pictorial imagery in the first half of the nineteenth century, it did not fit neatly into the category of topographic views or ethnographic portrayals like those by Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, or Alfred Jacob Miller, nor among the representations of daring heroics or exciting adventures of mountain men, hunters, and trappers created by Charles Deas, William Ranney, or Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait.

Bingham's images differ in part because he believed the West was a seamless extension of the settlement and progress of the East,<sup>26</sup> and thus he embedded *Fishing on the Mississippi* with issues he considered pressing not just for Missouri but for the nation as a whole. As the painting shimmers visually, the painting's narrative continually shifts between the local and the national.<sup>27</sup> Setting his scene on the Mississippi River, Bingham gave contemporary viewers a particular context in which to consider his canvas. By 1850 the Mississippi River played multiple roles in shaping national identity. To most easterners of the day, it represented the eastern edge of the frontier and symbolized the primitive and pristine beauty and natural wealth of the American wilderness. In reality, the Mississippi played an evolving and crucial function in national commercial trade that closely tied it to the economy and eastern agendas of western expansion. Bingham and his fellow Missourians were well aware that their state's important position within the rapidly expanding country was owed to its extensive river system, the Mississippi chief within it. By midcentury Missouri's rivers and the men who worked them made the state the largest trade center in the West.<sup>28</sup>

Just when Bingham was painting *Fishing on the Mississippi*, river transportation was being challenged as the primary mode of shipping in the West. The Mississippi was notoriously dangerous because of natural obstructions, and the question of whether the individual states or the federal government was responsible for keeping it navigable had caused fierce debate since 1846.<sup>29</sup> Now,



Fig. 1 George Caleb Bingham, *Fisherman* (recto), c. 1851. India ink, wash, and pencil on paper,  $14\frac{5}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$  in. (37.3 × 28.3 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Lent by the People of Missouri, acquired through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Robert Sutherland, 8-1977/42



Fig. 2 George Caleb Bingham, *Fisherman Waiting for a Bite*, c. 1851. India ink, wash, and pencil on paper,  $8\frac{7}{8} \times 11\frac{3}{16}$  in. (22.1 × 28.7 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Lent by the People of Missouri, acquired through the generosity of Emerson Electric Co., 8-1977/43

in early 1851. Congress refused to appropriate money to clear the western rivers after approving funds for similar work in East Coast harbors.<sup>30</sup> Many western Whigs like Bingham believed that the national market system and cross-country connections depended on unimpeded water travel from the Canadian border to New Orleans. For them, the failure of the federal government to ensure western river improvements jeopardized not just Missouri or western progress but the national economy and countrywide unity, each seriously threatened by the recent war with Mexico and the Compromise of 1850, respectively.<sup>31</sup>

Ensuring the Mississippi was clear of debris and sandbars at midcentury was increasingly important as traffic on the river shifted from flatboats to steamboats, which demanded deeper clearance due to their greater draw.<sup>32</sup> By the late 1840s flatboats no longer could compete with steamboats to carry goods; instead, they supported them as suppliers of wood (and later coal) for fuel.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the men who worked the rivers, too, changed. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the profile of a flatboatman was generally a young, unattached man yearning for frontier adventure, with a reputation for being crude and violent.

As steamboat schedules became more regular and frequent, they offered all boatmen a more reliable and faster return to a home base, and thus the opportunity for more stable family lives.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the western riverman of the steamboat era was considerably tamed, as was the near West of the Mississippi River valley, but the type had acquired mythic status as a rough, free-spirited folk hero, symbolic of American vitality and honesty.<sup>35</sup>

In his river paintings, Bingham repeatedly positioned boatmen as key players in western progress. As Nancy Rash has suggested, the diversity of types portrayed on the orderly boat in *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846; Manoogian Collection) dispels the image of these men as ruffians and points to the community of hard workers necessary for success on the river. *Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground* (1846–47; White House Collection) and *Watching the Cargo* (1849; State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia) also focus on the important role of the men working the river even in images that can be read as indicating the negative effects of inadequately cleared rivers. *Boatmen on the Missouri* (1846; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) and *The Wood-Boat* (1850; Saint Louis Art Museum) underscore Bingham's and his fellow Whigs' belief in the essential work these men continued to provide as commercial transportation entered a new era.<sup>36</sup> Making the figures large and literally in the spotlight in *Fishing on the Mississippi*, Bingham again highlighted rivermen as the backbone of western commerce. That the men depicted in the Nelson-Atkins canvas are, indeed, wood-boatmen, waiting to provide a steamboat with fuel, is indicated in a small but important detail. In the lower left, a rope is tied to a branch, implying its trailing end attaches to a boat like that in *The Wood-Boat*. Bingham ensured the men would have a powerful presence and function as the center of the narrative by developing their figures carefully.<sup>37</sup> He first drew them on paper

(Figs. 1 and 2) and then transferred them directly to the canvas, preserving dramatic light and shadow for emphasis.

Yet, with its story laid out on a segment of river under an ominous sunset, Bingham presents much more than a factual detail of life on the Mississippi. *Fishing on the Mississippi's* pervading ordered geometry of forms, still water, frozen moment, and staring figures all prompt a meditation on the changes at work in Bingham's West. The pastoral landscape suggests the constancy of nature and the passage of time. It also is a reminder of the bounty of the wilderness, which supplies the wood for steamboats and fish to feed the boatmen. As the flatboat literally fades into the distance, the fishermen's reflective attitudes, too, suggest an awareness of the changing times on the river and beyond.<sup>38</sup> By offering references of both past and present, wilderness and commerce, and regional and national concerns in a classical vocabulary that endows the image with a visual solidity, Bingham's fishermen are invested with a measure of heroism fitting his belief in the importance of the western boatman, past and present, to Missouri's—and ultimately America's—success. At the same time the artist suggests that life on the Mississippi is not entirely pastoral, and that the "fishing" of the title refers not simply to the figures' activity but perhaps also to the state of Missouri and America as they searched for solutions in an increasingly divisive time.

As Bingham rendered his commentary on the changes under way on the Mississippi, American painting and the Art-Union faced parallel changes. The purchase of *Fishing on the Mississippi* by the Art-Union coincided with a tumultuous time in both the organization's life and the artist's relationship with it. In late 1850 the Art-Union's system of dispersing paintings through a raffle was deemed illegal gambling; this led to the organization's demise in 1852. Simultaneously, after four years of unfailing support, in addition to rejecting some of Bingham's paintings, the Art-Union offered him lower purchase prices than it did some of his peers.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it began to favor edenic scenes of the New England landscape from the brushes of artists like Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), and Jasper F. Cropsey (q.v.).<sup>40</sup> As economic and political tumult grew in the 1850s, these bucolic images soothed the collective consciousness of America, while Bingham's work was perhaps too real a reminder of the multitude of changes the country was currently facing. This was especially true, perhaps, for his paintings that detailed election politics, which had intermittently engaged his attention since 1847 but which soon superseded river subjects as a priority in his art.

MCC

## NOTES

1. Bingham painted only a handful of images with fishermen. The Nelson-Atkins canvas is the most monumental in size and impact. See E. Maurice Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), passim.
2. George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins, 19 June 1871, reprinted in C. B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 33 (October 1938–July 1939), 73.
3. "The Festival at Rocheport," *Boon's Lick Times* (Fayette, Mo.), 4 July 1840, 2.
4. Unless otherwise stated, information on Bingham's life is drawn from Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*.
5. Malcolm J. Rohrbough, "The Art of Nostalgia: Bingham, Boone, and the Developing West," *Gateway Heritage* 11 (Fall 1990), 8. Mid-Missouri, especially Franklin, served as a primary jumping-off point for the Santa Fe trade before the ascent of Independence, Missouri, in the 1830s. Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 2:129–30.
6. McCandless, *A History of Missouri*, 2:132.
7. On Bingham's early exposure to art, see *Dr. Benoist Troost* (q.v.). In 1835 Bingham wrote that he had been painting seriously for about three years. Bingham to Elizabeth Hutchinson, 11 November 1835, Neff Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia.
8. In letters from 1835, Bingham sent his fiancée Elizabeth Hutchinson a "plate of Venetian scenery" and remarked on his copying buffalo hunt landscapes of "our western prairies." These images could have been by George Catlin or Karl Bodmer, both of whose works were in St. Louis collections at that time. Bingham also mentioned that his copies, considered by those who had seen them as "superior" to "the original paintings from which I copied them," were commissioned by an unnamed man who was taking them to Louisville to help spread Bingham's name. Bingham to Hutchinson, 16 February and 16 December 1835, Neff Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia. On early art activity in St. Louis, see John Francis McDermott, "Painters and Pictures in St. Louis, 1764–1864," typescript, n.d., John Francis McDermott Papers, Louisa H. Bowen University Archives and Special Collections, Lovejoy Library, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville; and Jane A. Reynard, "Painting and Sculpture in St. Louis, ca. 1800–1862," M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1975.
9. Rivers had appeared in the background of a few early portraits, most notably *Portrait of Mrs. David Steele Lamme and Son William Wirt* (1837; private collection) and *Leonidas Wetmore* (1839–40; private collection); both are reproduced in Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, xvi–xvii.
10. Art-Union purchases were disseminated across the country through a lottery, as well as through prints of selected images distributed to the entire membership. Charles E. Baker, "The American Art Union," in Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Record, 1816–1852* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 1:152–53.
11. *Ibid.*; and Françoise Forster-Hahn, "Inventing the Myth on the American Frontier," in *American Icons: Transatlantic Perspectives on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, 1989), 123–24, 134.
12. The most comprehensive investigation of the connection between Bingham's politics and his art is Nancy Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For other writings that focus on the connection of Bingham's politics to his art, see *Canvassing for a Vote* (q.v.).

13. The other major images include *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (1845; Metropolitan Museum of Art); *Boatmen on the Missouri* (1846; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco); *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846; Manoogian Collection); *Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground* (1846–47; White House Collection); *Raftsmen Playing Cards* (1847; Saint Louis Art Museum); *Watching the Cargo* (1849; State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia); *The Wood-Boat* (1850; Saint Louis Art Museum); *Mississippi Boatman* (1850; National Gallery of Art); *Mississippi Fisherman* (c. 1851; private collection); *In a Quandary* (1851; Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Collections, San Marino, Calif.); *Trapper's Return* (1851; Detroit Institute of Arts); *Watching the Cargo by Night* (1854; Museum of Western Art, Denver); *Western Boatmen Ashore by Night* (1854; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth); *The Jolly Flatboatmen in Port* (1857; Saint Louis Art Museum); and *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1877–78; Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago).
14. The cinematic quality of these images has been mentioned in Michael Edward Shapiro, "The River Paintings," in Shapiro et al., *George Caleb Bingham*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Saint Louis Art Museum, 1990), 141–74. The similarities to panoramas have been mentioned in Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 67; and specifically discussed in Angela Miller, "St. Louis' Lost Western Landscapes—River Panoramas of the 19th Century," in *St. Louis and the Art of the Frontier: Proceedings of a Symposium; St. Louis, Cradle of Western American Art, 1830–1900*, ed. John Neal Hoover (St. Louis: St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, 2000), 36–40.
15. On the Mississippi's role and its impact on art generally, see Janet L. Whitmore, "Panorama of Unequaled Yet Ever-Varying Beauty," in Jason T. Busch, Christopher Monkhouse, and Whitmore, *Currents of Change: Art and Life along the Mississippi River, 1850–1861*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2004), 12–57.
16. An example of the former is George Erlich, "George Caleb Bingham as Ethnographer: A Variant View of His Genre Works," *American Studies* 19 (Fall 1978), 41–55; for the latter type of interpretation, see Forster-Hahn, "Inventing the Myth on the American Frontier," 119–45.
17. Angela Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market and the Invention of Western Regionalism: The Example of George Caleb Bingham," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 115, 118. See also Timothy W. Luke, *Shows of Force: Power, Politics, and Ideology in Art Exhibitions* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 19, 124; and Arthur P. Dudden, "Nostalgia and the American," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (October–December 1961), 516.
18. Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 2–3.
19. William H. Gerds, "Before Winslow Homer: The Art of Fishing in the United States," in *Winslow Homer: Artist and Angler*, ed. Patricia Junker with Sarah Burns, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2002), 185, 190–91, 194–99.
20. Shapiro, "The River Paintings," 147, 160.
21. John Francis McDermott was probably the first scholar to connect Bingham's landscapes with the Hudson River School; see McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham: River Portraitist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 151 ff. More recently, Elizabeth Johns has looked at Bingham's landscapes as a group in "The 'Missouri Artist' as Artist," in Shapiro, *George Caleb Bingham*, 93–139, esp. 94–105.
22. John Wilmerding, "Bingham's Geometries and the Shape of America," in Shapiro, *George Caleb Bingham*, 175–181, esp. 176, 180. See also Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 84–85; and Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 152–64.
23. Maurice Bloch has noted that in all these paintings the nucleus of the subject is located in a group of three or four figures arranged in a pyramid set in the left or right foreground of the canvas. In several of these works, including *Fishing on the Mississippi*, *In a Quandary*, and *The Wood-Boat*, a figure holding a pole serves as the vertical axis. Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham: The Evolution of an Artist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 107–8.
24. Stephen C. Behrendt, "Originality and Influence in George Caleb Bingham's Art," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Winter 1985), 24–38, esp. 29–32.
25. Peter H. Hassrick, introduction to *American Frontier Life: Early Western Painting and Prints*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), 11–13.
26. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 82–83. Barbara Groseclose, "Missouri Artist as Historian," in Shapiro, *George Caleb Bingham*, 59, notes how Bingham's images are placed between civilization and wilderness.
27. Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market," 113.
28. The Mississippi was named "the great national highway" in "Improvement of Western Rivers," *Western Journal* 6 (April 1851), 5. Missouri had grown at seven times the national average from the time it entered the Union as a state in 1820 up to 1850, increasing from 66,000 inhabitants in 1820 to 682,000 in 1850. McCandless, *A History of Missouri*, 2:35.
29. Between 1845 and 1847, clearing the Missouri River of snags and improving the St. Louis harbor became national, not simply state, issues. In 1846 twenty years of consistent federal support came to an end. Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 77–79.
30. "Improvement of Western Rivers," 5.
31. John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 35. For many Missourians, the failure of this western river bill also indicated that the West was increasingly being manipulated by eastern interests rather than guiding its own future. "Improvement of Western Rivers," 1–5.
32. McCandless, *A History of Missouri*, 2:136–38. The dangers of the Mississippi for steamboats are colorfully described in T. B. T., "The Mississippi," *Knickerbocker* 16 (December 1840), 462–63.
33. Michael Allen, *Western Rivermen, 1763–1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 144–47.
34. *Ibid.*, 171–73.
35. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 83–84; and Allen, *Western Rivermen*, 197–224.
36. Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 67–93.
37. Bingham did make a few adjustments in the figures after transferring the images to the canvas. Most notably, he softened the features of the kneeling fisherman.
38. Perhaps the most significant change Bingham made on the canvas was to raise the flatboat about two inches above its original location. See Technical Notes. This change brought the flatboat closer to the horizon and emphasized its location farther downriver.
39. By 1851 Bingham perceived favoritism within the Art-Union committee. John Francis McDermott, "George Caleb Bingham and the American Art-Union," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 42 (January 1958), 66–67.
40. The Art-Union's disenchantment with Bingham's work stemmed, in part, from changing tastes in midcentury America. Carol Troyen, "Retreat to Arcadia: American Landscape and the American Art-Union," *American Art Journal* 23 (1991), 32–35.

## GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM (1811–1879)

### *Canvassing for a Vote*, 1852 (*Candidate Electioneering*)

Oil on canvas

25¼ × 30½ in. (64.1 × 77.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: G. C. Bingham / 1852

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 54-9

IN LATE MARCH 1851, just as the American Art-Union was purchasing *Fishing on the Mississippi*, the Missouri artist George Caleb Bingham wrote one of his frequent letters to his closest friend and patron James Rollins.<sup>1</sup> From New York, where he had been in residence for the past five months, Bingham described at length his reaction to recent political developments in Missouri. More than half of the letter detailed Bingham's disgust with some of their friends' behavior, especially that of Senator Henry Geyer, which he considered dishonest and driven by self-interest.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Bingham, even when living at a distance from his home state, remained deeply invested in its politics. An ardent Whig until the party's demise in 1856 and his coincident departure for Europe, he was very active in politics, including serving a term as a state legislator and a presidential electoral delegate and testing the waters for the governorship.<sup>3</sup>

Toward the end of his communication to Rollins, Bingham shared his own art news. He informed his friend that he was painting *The Emigration of Daniel Boone* (1851–52; Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis) and wondered whether it should be engraved independently or offered to the American Art-Union. The artist was especially pleased to report that he had a contract with Goupil & Co. to engrave one of his recent Mississippi River scenes (*In a Quandary*, 1851; Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, Calif.) and that he would be painting another picture for the same purpose over the coming summer. Bingham enthusiastically explained why these undertakings were particularly welcome: “[The paintings’] publication by such a firm will be calculated to extend my reputation, and enhance the value of my future works. I have discovered . . . that the present managers of the Art Union display in some cases gross favoritism in the purchase of their pictures.”<sup>4</sup>

The new painting for Goupil was *Canvassing for a Vote*, and the topics Bingham covered in his letter to Rollins had a keen impact on its creation. The artist's reputation and the income potential of his narrative paintings were constant concerns for a man who frequently was forced to rely on portraiture to make ends meet. This was especially true in 1851, when the American Art-Union, his single most lucrative sales venue, suddenly viewed his productions less favorably. The association with Goupil, which was the Art-Union's strongest competitor as a print publisher, allowed the

artist to snub the Art-Union and granted him broader exposure and potentially greater income.<sup>5</sup> Such circumstances not only fed Bingham's ego and family but also intersected with his artistic and political beliefs, which, in turn, influenced his choice of subject.

From the late 1830s through the mid-1850s, Bingham painted nearly fifty narrative and landscape images related to his experiences in Missouri, mostly depictions of life on the western rivers and scenes of the American political process.<sup>6</sup> *Canvassing for a Vote*, the fourth in a group of eight paintings with specifically election-related themes, took more than a year to complete.<sup>7</sup> During that time, although the American Art-Union rejected *The Emigration of Daniel Boone*, Goupil published it in 1852. Bingham also returned to Missouri in May 1851, in part because his mother died in Arrow Rock and in part because St. Louis served as a part-time home base from the late 1830s through 1856. Most of *Canvassing for a Vote* was painted there, as was the much larger *The County Election* (1851–52; Saint Louis Art Museum). Both canvases occupied him through 1851, as did the increasingly heated political climate in Missouri, which reflected national sectional strife surrounding the issue of slavery and the Compromise of 1850.

In this atmosphere, Bingham created *Canvassing for a Vote*, which depicts three men listening to a fourth, who gestures broadly to make his point. The speaker is identified as a campaigning politician only through the title.<sup>8</sup> The horse tied to a fence behind him and the saddlebag brimming with paper at his side suggest this stop is only one of many along the campaign trail. The scene takes place on the sidewalk outside a tavern, into which a fifth man looks, turning his back on the central grouping. The triangular mass of figures in the foreground is firmly grounded in a stagelike setting with the brick tavern, its signpost, the horse, and trees providing the backdrop for the action playing out in the foreground. A sleeping dog and mounting block at the left and right, respectively, frame the carefully painted figures. This vignette is highlighted by a broad swath of sunlight angling across the picture; its clarity snaps the figural group into sharp focus. The central figures are judiciously balanced by a wide dirt street that curves back from the foreground, leading the viewer's eye from the immediate scene past the right middle ground, which features a single-story building with wagon wheels leaning against it, to a rolling landscape in the distance. There, another town is nestled, perhaps the politician's next destination. The painting's overall design achieves an equilibrium that confers the visual solidity and stability often found in Bingham's compositions. Viewers are placed slightly above and to the right, as if they are approaching the harmonious scene and, through the outward gaze of the figure seated in the middle, are entreated to join the conversation.<sup>9</sup>







Fig. 1 George Caleb Bingham, *Country Politician*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 20 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 24 in. (51.8 × 61 cm). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III, 1979.7.16

Fig. 2 George Caleb Bingham, *Jolly Old Landlord* (recto), 1849. Graphite on paper, 20 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 16 in. (52.7 × 40.6 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Lent by the People of Missouri, acquired through the generosity of Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer, 8-1977/28

*Canvassing for a Vote* was not an entirely fresh conception for Bingham. It grew from the artist's habit of reusing subjects, compositions, figures, and other elements in multiple paintings. For example, *In a Quandary*, the first painting by Bingham to be engraved by Goupil, is a near replica of *Raftsmen Playing Cards* (1847; Saint Louis Art Museum). For the Nelson-Atkins painting, Bingham revisited *Country Politician* of 1849 (Fig. 1), albeit with some notable alterations, the most conspicuous being moving the setting outdoors and adding a figure. The new title linked the revised subject to current events; it was painted in the months preceding the 1852 presidential election of Franklin Pierce. Bingham used a workmanlike technique for the figures, using drawings as a basis both for their outline and the specifics of their shading. Some of these sheets were also used in the earlier painting. Such is the case for a drawing of the man who sits in the center of both the 1849 and 1852 canvases (Fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> While Bingham was able to translate his figure group cleanly to *Canvassing for a Vote*, he struggled to achieve the perfect setting. Numerous changes are discernible underneath the final paint layer, especially on the right side of the canvas.<sup>11</sup>

*Country Politician* was not Bingham's only resource for *Canvassing for a Vote*. Although in 1851 the *Western Monthly Journal*



hailed Bingham as a “new master” without any need to copy European old master painting, the Nelson-Atkins painting has multiple European and American antecedents, including the work of William Sidney Mount (q.v.), David Wilkie, John Lewis Krimmel, and William Hogarth, as well as popular prints.<sup>12</sup> Bingham clearly admired Mount, who was the most celebrated American genre painter of the 1830s and 1840s. The two men were acquainted and also shared certain political affinities, despite the fact that they belonged to opposing parties. More particularly, for both the Nelson-Atkins canvas and *Country Politician*, Bingham borrowed from Mount's *The Long Story* (1837; Corcoran Gallery of Art) the basic geometry for the figure arrangement—a triangle bisected by a strong vertical element—and the conceit of one man speaking to just a few others.<sup>13</sup>

Although Mount's art supplied Bingham with multiple points of artistic reference, the lineage of *Canvassing for a Vote* can be traced to a wider set of imagery. Closest to home, perhaps, was *Log Cabin Politicians* (Fig. 3), an 1841 print after a painting by William Hall that pointedly references the 1840 presidential campaign of William Henry Harrison. As Barbara Groseclose has pointed out, the resemblances between the two images are marked.<sup>14</sup> The print's locale outside a country tavern gave Bingham the general setting for his new painting.<sup>15</sup> The man looking out the window in the print perhaps inspired Bingham to transform the figure looking at the poster in *Country Politician* into one looking into the tavern in *Canvassing for a Vote*. Similarly, Bingham may have placed his viewer as if on horseback from the memory of the man departing on horseback in Hall's print.

*Log Cabin Politicians* may have reminded Bingham of William Hogarth's 1757 *Soliciting a Vote*, which Bingham would have



Fig. 3 John T. Bowen after William Hall, *Log Cabin Politicians*, 1841. Hand-colored lithograph, 14½ × 19¾ in. (36.8 × 50.2 cm). Harry T. Peters 'America on Stone' Collection. Behring Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

known from its appearance in an 1836 giftbook.<sup>16</sup> Hogarth's print offered both Bingham and Hall the idea of a campaigning subject set outdoors in a townscape. Although Bingham never approached Hogarth's sarcasm, the two artists shared an interest in picturing the variety of citizenry, and Hogarth provided a precedent for electioneering as a worthy subject.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Hogarth's image likely suggested to Bingham and Hall the tavern sign and its pole as a central compositional element carrying important symbolic references. In Bingham's case, the sign features an eagle, indicating the subject as national in content and import.<sup>18</sup> Also generally descended from Hogarth, David Wilkie's *Village Politicians* (1807; private collection), too, was likely familiar to Bingham in its print version and possibly also through John Krimmel's copy of it (c. 1819; private collection). Wilkie, like Hogarth, offered a model for painting political subjects and presenting narrative images of everyday life with gentle humor.<sup>19</sup> Although Wilkie's *Village Politicians* is an interior scene like *Country Politician*, its central group of four figures finds even closer correspondences in the Nelson-Atkins painting. Though Bingham, unlike Wilkie, never exaggerated his characterizations, the poses of the figures, such as the politician, the man to whom he talks most directly, and the standing listener, are remarkably similar. More generally, they share a significant empty space in the foreground and a single disinterested individual—a man who reads a paper in Wilkie's and the fifth player in Bingham's scene—who appears distinctly apart from the rest of the activity. This is equally true of Krimmel's remake of the Wilkie, which also offered Bingham more home-spun and less caricatured figures.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the many sources from which Bingham drew, he was no mere copyist. He created his own invention from his collection of visual images. Numerous scholars have worked to decode the meanings of his election pictures.<sup>21</sup> Reading the politics of his paintings has been complicated by the expectation or assumption that Bingham's pictures depict observed experience. Earlier scholars tended to believe that Bingham's images were reportorial, even ethnographic, in their replication of specific people, places, and events.<sup>22</sup> Such an analysis is understandable when Bingham himself indicated as early as 1847 that he would "immortalize some of his legislative and Saline friends in a painting he projects," and certain features, such as the Arrow Roek tavern in *Canvassing for a Vote*, are recognizable landmarks.<sup>23</sup> Yet the paintings themselves belie such literal readings. The reliance of *Canvassing for a Vote* on *Country Politician* and the reappearance of figures from drawings based on models are just two examples of Bingham's creative constructive mode. More recent scholarship has recognized how cleverly Bingham wove together elements of his experience to create synthetic images. Some writers interpret them as accurate but symbolic, while others, such as Timothy Luke and Barry Maine, recognize that Bingham fabricated scenes based in real life.<sup>24</sup> Rather, as Luke has argued and many others agree, Bingham's scenes cogently summarize and distill a conglomeration of ideas and experiences filtered through the artist's own idealizing vision. Over time, Bingham's paintings have functioned much like promotional imagery and have become accepted as authentic and thereby serve as vehicles to create national memories and reflect collective desires.<sup>25</sup>

Although a range of understandings of Bingham's art has emerged, each is founded on the recognition that the imagery is closely tied to the artist's unwavering belief in the American democratic system, his affiliation with the Whig party in Missouri, and his life in the West. Part of the challenge in understanding Bingham's paintings is due to the impossibility of discerning clear-cut political messages. Knowing the artist's Whig affiliation, scholars have found anti-Jacksonian messages in the paintings, particularly the negative effect of Jacksonian policies on one of its most central tenets, the power of the common people.<sup>26</sup> Yet, closer scrutiny of the paintings does not reveal pure Whig ideology. In fact, Bingham's depictions reflect his chafing against certain aspects of Whig rhetoric alongside his celebration of American democracy and the importance of the political process within it.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, as Gail Husch has convincingly detailed, he offers "an idealistic vision of national unity" at the same time he critiques what he perceived as weaknesses in the American political system.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to *Canvassing for a Vote* specifically, Bingham offers his misgivings as well as an ideal vision of the rights and responsibilities of politicians and especially the electorate in the campaign phase of the election process through a calculated balance of artistic and symbolic particularities and generalities. For example, setting the painting outside a representation of the Arrow Rock tavern, but with an eagle on its signpost, expands the notion of the location from a specific locale to all America, where citizens take part in a national institution—the political process. It also reflects Bingham's deeply held belief that the West, and Missouri in particular, was an important contributor to America's success, despite, or on account of, its position as a crossroads for clashes within and anxieties about the state of the Union.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Bingham endowed the figures with characteristics and attributes to make each a comprehensible, representative type. He dressed the politician in the Nelson-Atkins painting to impress, but with no definitive markers of his party affiliation or the issues he discusses. His top hat, not the usual headwear for traveling, suggests a seriousness of purpose, authority, male power, and ambition, all attributes that can be positively associated with Whigs generally as the party of business and professional men.<sup>30</sup> The hat, however, is noticeably scarred, thereby offering a commentary either on the reality of frontier travel or the status of politicians, regardless of party affiliation. Bingham agreed with other Missourians, including the writer of the *Western Journal* who warned in 1851, that "at such a time as the present the speculating politician should not be trusted."<sup>31</sup> Barbara Groseclose has suggested that the placement of the horse's rear end adjacent to the politician's head is a similar commentary on elected officials.<sup>32</sup>

The older man in the center of *Canvassing for a Vote*, when he first appeared in *Country Politician*, was identified in the *Daily Missouri Republican* as a "jolly old landlord," that is, an affable, older townsman.<sup>33</sup> Wearing a "wide-awake" straw hat and smoking a clay pipe, his outfit reflects men's fashion of the late 1830s or early 1840s. His slouched pose and benign facial expression suggest previous experience with, and a blasé attitude toward, such

conversations. The seat of his chair, however, is splitting, a sign, perhaps, of the impending end of his comfort and complacency. The man on the far left, who sits in a relaxed pose, appears the wealthiest of the group, a well-to-do farmer. His clothing is fashionably tailored of fine fabrics, including a silk tie and velvet collar on his coat. His rustic carved walking stick visually connects him to the land.<sup>34</sup> The sleeping dog behind his chair likely points to the issue of slavery, and his proximity to the farmer strengthens such an interpretation.<sup>35</sup> If he is from central Missouri, Bingham's farmer may have owned a modest number of slaves, but Bingham, knowing slavery's toehold on the national consciousness in 1851–52, used the figure to represent the larger national situation. The Compromise of 1850, by balancing the entry of California as a free state against the strengthening of the Fugitive Slave Law, had temporarily assuaged both pro- and antislavery factions across the United States. By 1852 the Whig national party platform agreed to abide by the compromise and called for all efforts to resist agitation on the slavery issue, that is, to "let sleeping dogs lie" so that the sectional strife would not increase.<sup>36</sup> More generally, then, Bingham seems to urge the agricultural class, slave owning or not, to be aware of the current political situation, in all its aspects, and to politicians themselves. Indeed, the farmer is the figure most engaged with the politician and is the man to whom he is literally reaching out. According to elocutionary manuals of the day, the politician's gesture of a pointed finger over an extended palm signals a warning while imploring his listener to agree with him.<sup>37</sup> At the same time the artist offers a warning to all involved, he also may have intended a personal rebuke to his Whig friend Henry Geyer for flipping his position on the extension of slavery to get elected in a district with strong Southern sympathies.

Bingham included another important member of the electorate in the figure standing between the farmer and the old man. Dressed in a coarse osnaburg shirt without a tie, wearing a brown leather apron and beehive-shaped hat, and not clean-shaven, he appears to be a hardworking member of society, perhaps representing specifically the influx of German settlers into Missouri, but also those immigrants to the East Coast in the late 1840s. He may be a wheelwright or blacksmith, trades suggested not only by his apron but also by the proximity across the street of the building with wagon wheels outside.<sup>38</sup> Standing, rather than seated with the rest of the group, he may have arrived after the conversation began, having interrupted his labor because of the gathering's import. As a tradesman, he also may not have felt secure enough to join the others, who literally and figuratively are on the same level and interrelated by their overlapping arms and legs.<sup>39</sup> Even so, he, too, is connected compositionally and pays attention, indicating that he recognizes the need to be informed and participate, even if the politician and the others all ignore him. With voter apathy steeply rising, Bingham was not alone in worrying about the lack of political engagement across all classes and conversely of politicians' inattentiveness to the broader populace.<sup>40</sup> Bingham further suggests the extent of voter disinterestedness through the figure whose back is turned toward the discussion. This man signifies not just this

particular individual but also those inside the tavern, who socialize rather than engage in the discussion. The dog likewise plays a role in this interpretation; sleeping, he represents those who ignore the debate at hand and, by extension, politics in general.

Altogether *Canvassing for a Vote* joins the primary classes of white citizenry—professional, service, agrarian, and mechanic—who participated in the political process in the early 1850s. Through their dress, demeanor, and relations with each other, Bingham did not prescribe specific political positions for any of them but implied a variety of viewpoints that, at once, celebrates the American political system and points out its hazards, most notably the potential harm done by a lack of participation and by dishonesty on the part of any class or party. The different conclusions viewers draw, in fact, are due to Bingham's own conflicting feelings and his wish to create layers of meaning to satisfy simultaneously himself, a hometown Missouri audience, and a more national, primarily East Coast, clientele.<sup>41</sup> By using local characters in *Canvassing for a Vote* and many other works, he wanted his paintings to be understood as national. In October 1852, in a description of *The County Election* to the engraver John Sartain, Bingham declared: "There will be nothing to mar the *general character* of the work, which I design to be as *national* as possible—applicable alike to every section of the Union, and as illustrative of the manners of a free people and free institutions."<sup>42</sup> This, too, was the case for *Canvassing for a Vote*. As the basis for a print to be distributed not only in the United States but also in France, the painting could give Bingham his widest exposure to date. He no doubt had this broader audience in mind as he painted, canvassing for his own kind of vote—both political and artistic—to his potential audience whom he hoped would heed his political messages and, more important, buy the print.<sup>43</sup>

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## NOTES

1. George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins, 31 March 1851, in C. B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 32 (October 1937), 18–21. For Bingham's relationship with the Art-Union at this time, see *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.).
2. A fellow Whig, Geyer had recently switched his views back and forth on the question of Congress's power to regulate slavery in order to gain votes for his election to the Senate. Bingham was extremely disappointed with Geyer's changing stance both because of its dishonesty and because he felt it was a slap in the face of those who had supported him earlier. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
3. Bingham ran for state legislature in 1846 and 1848, first losing, then winning a seat. In 1849 there was a movement to have him nominated for governor, but he did not advance to candidacy. He played an important role as an electoral delegate at the national Whig convention in 1852. Keith L. Bryant, "George Caleb Bingham: The Artist as a Whig Politician," *Missouri Historical Review* 59 (October 1964–July 1965), 460–61. In 1866 and 1874 he was a candidate for Congress, without success. For basic biographical information on Bingham, see *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.); and E. Maurice Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986). For the most thorough study of the intersection of Bingham's politics and his art, see Nancy Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
4. Bingham to Rollins, 31 March 1851, in "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," 21.
5. In the December 1851 Art-Union bulletin, the writer W. criticized Bingham for his lack of description, "mannered" and "mean" subjects, and a perceived "lack of earnestness" due to the repeated use of the same faces in multiple paintings. W., "Development of Nationality in Art," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* 4 (1 December 1851), 39. See also *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.) on Bingham's quarrels with the Art-Union and also its dissolution. In 1851 Goupil noticeably trumped the American Art-Union when it purchased Emanuel Leutze's second version of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* to make a print of it. Elliot Bostwick Davis, "The Currency of Culture: Prints in New York City," in *Art in the Empire City, 1825–1861*, ed. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 208–9.
6. See Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, passim.
7. The Nelson-Atkins painting, *Stump Orator* (1847; location unknown), *Country Politician* (Fig. 1), and *Stump Speaking* (1853–54; Saint Louis Art Museum) focus on candidates campaigning. The others picture aspects of election days themselves and include *The County Election* and *Verdict of the People*; Bingham painted two versions of each of these. See Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 198–200, 203–7. In actuality, Bingham's first overtly political images were not easel paintings but banners for a Missouri Whig rally and convention. Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 15–17, 23–25.
8. Bingham's first written reference to the painting was as *Canvassing for Votes*. Bingham to Goupil and Co., 31 January 1852, George Caleb Bingham Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel 2787, frame 180.
9. On Bingham's use of geometry and its effect on his compositions, see John Wilmerding, "Bingham's Geometries and the Shape of America," in Michael Edward Shapiro et al., *George Caleb Bingham*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Saint Louis Art Museum, 1990), 175–81. On Bingham's use of creating shared spaces with viewers, see Bryan J. Wolf, "History as Ideology or, 'What You Don't See Can't Hurt You, Mr. Bingham,'" in *Redefining American History Painting*, ed.

- Patriaia Burnham and Lucretia Giese (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 252–53.
10. Overall, Bingham's use of drawings remains something of a mystery. The primary cache of about one hundred sheets, owned by the People of Missouri and on deposit at both the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Saint Louis Art Museum, are precisely drawn and shaded. Some figures are drawn to scale for the paintings in which they appear, but others are not. Similarly, some are incised and have traces of a transfer medium, while others, which are equally precisely drawn, do not. In the case of the drawings for *Country Politician* and *Canvassing for a Vote*, the drawing for the man sitting in the center of each group is perfectly sealed for use in the Nelson-Atkins painting but is too large for the earlier canvas, even though certain details, such as his lack of hat, the disposition of his cravat and shirtfront, and the arc of his belly, are closer to the 1849 picture. Bingham's drawings deserve greater study to better understand how they relate to the paintings and prints. The author thanks Nancy Heugh, Heugh-Edmondson Conservation, Kansas City, Missouri, for her technical examinations and insights into Bingham's drawings.
  11. See Technical Notes.
  12. For the *Western Monthly Journal* quote, see Marquis Childs, "George Caleb Bingham," *American Magazine of Art* 27 (November 1934), 598.
  13. Both Mount and Bingham opposed Andrew Jackson's fiscal policies, although Mount was a conservative Democrat and Bingham was a Missouri Whig. These shared beliefs illuminate the blurring of party lines in the 1850s. On Mount's politics, see Joseph B. Hudson, "Banks, Politics, Hard Cider and Paint: The Political Origins of William Sidney Mount's Cider Making," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 19 (1975), 116–17. Just as he was finishing *Canvassing for a Vote*, Bingham asked in a postscript to a letter to Goupil & Co. that they give his "best regards to Mr. Mount," suggesting warm admiration and acquaintance if not deep friendship. Bingham to Goupil & Co., 31 January 1852, AAA, microfilm reel 2787, frame 180. On the connection of *The Long Story* to Bingham's two paintings, see Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 125–26.
  14. Barbara S. Groseclose, "Painting, Politics, and George Caleb Bingham," *American Art Journal* 10 (November 1978), 8. Bingham himself had created a Whig banner in support of Harrison for Boone County, Missouri. See Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 15–17.
  15. Bingham originally placed a building in the center background of the painting and a figure walking in the road that is reminiscent of the same elements in Hall's print. See Technical Notes.
  16. E. Maurice Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham: The Evolution of an Artist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 157, notes Bingham copied a portrait of Fanny Kemble from the same gift-book in which the Hogarth image appeared.
  17. Stephanie Eu, "Hogarth and Bingham: Differing Visions of the Electoral Process," *Apollo* 153 (May 2001), 20–22. Noting Bingham's ultimately positive message about American democracy, Stephen C. Behrendt has perceptively pointed out that Bingham's use of Hogarth as a model may have extended beyond artistic use to suggest the superiority of American over English society and political systems. Behrendt, "Originality and Influence in George Caleb Bingham's Art," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Winter 1985), 33–34.
  18. The eagle as representative of America can also be seen in Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico* (1849; Manoogian Collection), which appeared as one of the American Art-Union's engravings in 1851. Eagles were understood as political symbols beginning in the late 1820s. Philip M. Isaacson, *The American Eagle* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 191–93.
  19. Through the mid-nineteenth century American paintings of outright political subjects were rare. Wilkie's prints were issued regularly between 1820 and 1845 and were readily available in the United States. Catherine Hoover, "The Influence of David Wilkie's Prints on the Genre Paintings of William Sidney Mount," *American Art Journal* 13 (Summer 1981), 6. Krimmel's *The Village Politicians* is illustrated in Annelyse Harding, "British and Scottish Models for the American Genre Paintings of John Lewis Krimmel," *Winterthur Portfolio* 38 (Winter 2003), 238. For this approach and general compositional format, Wilkie drew from seventeenth-century Netherlandish painting. Harding, 227.
  20. Harding, "British and Scottish Models for the American Genre Paintings of John Lewis Krimmel," 241.
  21. In addition to those already cited, the scholars who have focused on the election paintings and whose work has informed this essay include Robert F. Westervelt, "The Whig Politician from Missouri," *American Art Journal* 2 (1970), 46–53; Leonard K. Eaton, *Gateway Cities and Other Essays* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 153–97; Shapiro et al., *George Caleb Bingham*, esp. chaps. 2 and 3; Scott Casper, "Politics, Art, and the Contradictions of a Market Culture: George Caleb Bingham's *Stump Speaking*," *American Art* 5 (Summer 1991), 26–47; Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 82–99; Timothy W. Luke, "George Caleb Bingham: Contested Ground," in Luke, *Shows of Force: Power, Politics, and Ideology in Art Exhibitions* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 9–26; Gail E. Husch, "George Caleb Bingham's *The County Election*: Whig Tribute to the Will of the People," in *Critical Issues in American Art*, ed. Mary Ann Calo (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 77–92; and Jonathan Weinberg, "The Artist and the Politician," *Art in America* 88 (October 2000), 138–44, 182–83.
  22. Bryant, "George Caleb Bingham: The Artist as a Whig Politician," 461; George Erlich, "George Caleb Bingham as Ethnographer: A Variant View of His Genre Works," *American Studies* 19 (Fall 1978), 41–55; and Marshall Davidson, "Democracy Delineated," *American Heritage* 31 (October–November 1980), 10.
  23. The painting Bingham refers to in the quotation is *Stump Orator* (1847; location unknown). Quoted in Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 97.
  24. For an example of the first type of interpretation, see Eaton, *Gateway Cities and Other Essays*, 164, 188; for examples of the latter, see Luke, "George Caleb Bingham: Contested Ground," 13–14; and Barry Maine, "The Authenticity of American Realism: Samuel Clemens and George Caleb Bingham 'On the River,'" *Prospects* 21 (1996), 27–28, 34–35.
  25. Luke, "George Caleb Bingham: Contested Ground," 26.
  26. Westervelt, "The Whig Politician from Missouri," 46–53; and Barbara S. Groseclose, "Politics and American Genre Painting of the Nineteenth Century," *Antiques* 120 (November 1981), 1212.
  27. Husch, "George Caleb Bingham's *The County Election*," 77–80; and Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 6–7, 102–6.
  28. Husch, "George Caleb Bingham's *The County Election*," 77.
  29. On Bingham's views about Missouri's role, see *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.). On Missouri's role as a crossroads for both real and perceived clashes, see Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*; Angela Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market and the Invention of Western Regionalism: The Example of George Caleb Bingham," in *American Iconology*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 113–14; and Elizabeth Johns, "Settlement and Development: Claiming the West," in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920*, ed. William H. Truettner, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 191–99.
  30. The author is indebted to Carol Kregloh, Museum Specialist, Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, for invaluable help with identifying the costumes in this painting. Kregloh, e-mail messages to the author,

- 7 and 15 September 2005, NAMA curatorial files. On Whig attributes, see Daniel Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 9, 13.
31. "Improvement of Western Rivers," *Western Journal* 6 (April 1851), 6. By 1853 Bingham was thoroughly soured on the party system, in large part due to politicians' behavior. See Bingham to Rollins, 23 November 1853, in "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," 169.
  32. Groseclose, "Politics and American Genre Painting of the Nineteenth Century," 1212.
  33. Quoted in Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 180.
  34. Jeffrey B. Snyder, *Canes and Walking Sticks: A Stroll through Time and Place* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing, 2004), 73.
  35. Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 127, has asserted that the dog would relate to an 1851 issue familiar to Bingham and thus suggested that it refers to recently ousted Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who called for a repeal of Missouri's Jackson Resolutions that year. In 1848 the Missouri legislature had passed the Jackson Resolutions, named for Claiborn Fox Jackson, which asserted states' over federal rights with regard to slavery and were essentially proslavery. Bingham, who was serving in the legislature at the time, vehemently opposed the resolutions and offered a compromise solution, which gained some but not enough favor to overturn them. In 1851 Benton, a longtime Democrat but opposed to the extension of slavery, reasserted Bingham's contesting of the resolutions without success. Interestingly, it brought the longtime political rivals on common ground. See Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 2:247–53.
  36. On slavery in mid-Missouri and its connection to larger markets, see Douglas R. Hurt, "Planters and Slavery in Little Dixie," *Missouri Historical Review* 88 (July 1994), 397–415. The Compromise of 1850 had several components. In addition to the Fugitive Slave Act, which favored slave owners, and the entry of California into the Union as a free state, it legislated that the determination of the new western territories as slave or free would be delayed until statehood and decided by their inhabitants. "Africans in America: The Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act," [www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4) (accessed 6 April 2006). For the Whig platform, see *National Party Platforms, 1840–1956*, comp. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 21.
  37. Alexander Melville Bell, *Elocutionary Manual* (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, 1852), 121; and Desmond Morris, *Manwatching* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), 59.
  38. By midcentury the number of Southern-born Missourians was being outnumbered by European immigrants, primarily German and Irish. Philip Thomas Tucker, "Missouri," *Journal of Confederate History* 10 (1994), 164–65. More generally, from 1850 to 1855 there was a large growth in voters who were naturalized citizens. Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 117–18. The author is grateful to James Boyles for suggesting the connection between this figure and the building with the wagon wheels. Boyles to the author, 23 September 1991, NAMA curatorial files.
  39. In an earlier stage of the painting, Bingham had included a man walking across the road from the building, suggesting he considered the idea of people joining the group. See Technical Notes.
  40. Glenn C. Altshuler and Stuart M. Blumin, "'Where Is the Real America': Politics and Popular Consciousness in the Antebellum Era," *American Quarterly* 49 (June 1997), passim, esp. 262. Specifically, in 1852 voter turnout for the presidential election was at the lowest in sixteen years. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development*, 246.
  41. The layers of Bingham's audience have been generally discussed by a number of authors including Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market and the Invention of Western Regionalism," 113–14. See also *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.).
  42. Bingham to John Sartain, 4 October 1852, Art and Artists Papers, 1807–1979, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. Quoted in Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham*, 138. As Hilton Kramer has suggested, it is through Bingham's detail of local expression that he posited his most national messages. Kramer, "The Plainspoken Realism of George Caleb Bingham," *New York Times*, 22 September 1974, 29.
  43. Scott Casper has suggested Bingham making a similar play on the word *canvass* in *The County Canvass*, which was the original title of *Stump Speaking*. Casper, "Politics, Art, and the Contradictions of a Market Culture," 40. Later in life, Bingham used the word *canvass* in a letter in which he discussed the need to peddle his own prints because of the insufficiency of agents he had hoped would do the job. Bingham to Amanda Bingham Barnes, 5 November 1871, Bingham Family Papers, Neff Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia.

## GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM (1811–1879)

### *Dr. Benoist Troost, c. 1859*

Oil on canvas

40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 30<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (103.5 × 76.8 cm)

Gift of the Board of Education of Kansas City, Missouri,

35-42/1

ALTHOUGH SCENES OF western river life and politics made his reputation, George Caleb Bingham, like many nineteenth-century artists, was primarily a portraitist.<sup>1</sup> He painted several hundred faces over his long career, which began in Missouri in the mid-1830s. Bingham was self-taught as an artist, but he had opportunities for early encounters with art at a young age. In the busy central Missouri river towns of Franklin and Arrow Rock, where he lived, he may have been aware of visits by Chester Harding in 1822 and Karl Bodmer in 1833.<sup>2</sup> By 1834 Bingham was traversing Missouri painting portraits. Beginning in 1835 he made regular trips to St. Louis, where he intermittently maintained a studio space and exhibited his paintings. As the largest city in Missouri, St. Louis offered Bingham an art community that included Manuel de Franca and Sarah Miriam Peale, who were likely his chief competitors for commissions in that city from the mid-1840s.<sup>3</sup>

A trip to Philadelphia and probably New York in 1838 plus a residency in Washington, D.C., from 1840 to 1844 introduced Bingham to popular portrait styles. These experiences and a regular stream of commissions advanced his painting from relatively flat, plain-style modes of representation to more convincingly rendered likenesses in the academic tradition. His portraits through the 1840s and early 1850s followed a typical prescription for mid-nineteenth-century portraiture. Generally painted against a dark background, they retained a simple but convincing transcriptual style. From about 1845 to 1855 portraiture vied for the artist's attention with his forays into narrative painting and politics.

In May 1856 the Missouri State Legislature commissioned Bingham to paint life-size portraits of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The artist chose to fulfill those commissions while living abroad. Bingham had intended to reside in Paris to study old masters, but he found it “such a wilderness to a stranger” that he soon left for Düsseldorf, Germany. In Düsseldorf, he joined a flourishing community of foreign artists, including a number of Americans studying with Emanuel Leutze, who warmly received the entire Bingham family.<sup>4</sup> Bingham also found colleagues sympathetic to his emphasis on accurate drawing, and, moreover, German art offered a strong tradition of grand manner portraiture. His residence in the German city lasted nearly three years, from November 1856 to September 1859, when the Bingham family were called home on the death of Mrs. Bingham's father.

### *Mrs. Benoist Troost, c. 1859*

Oil on canvas

40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 30<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (103.5 × 77.2 cm)

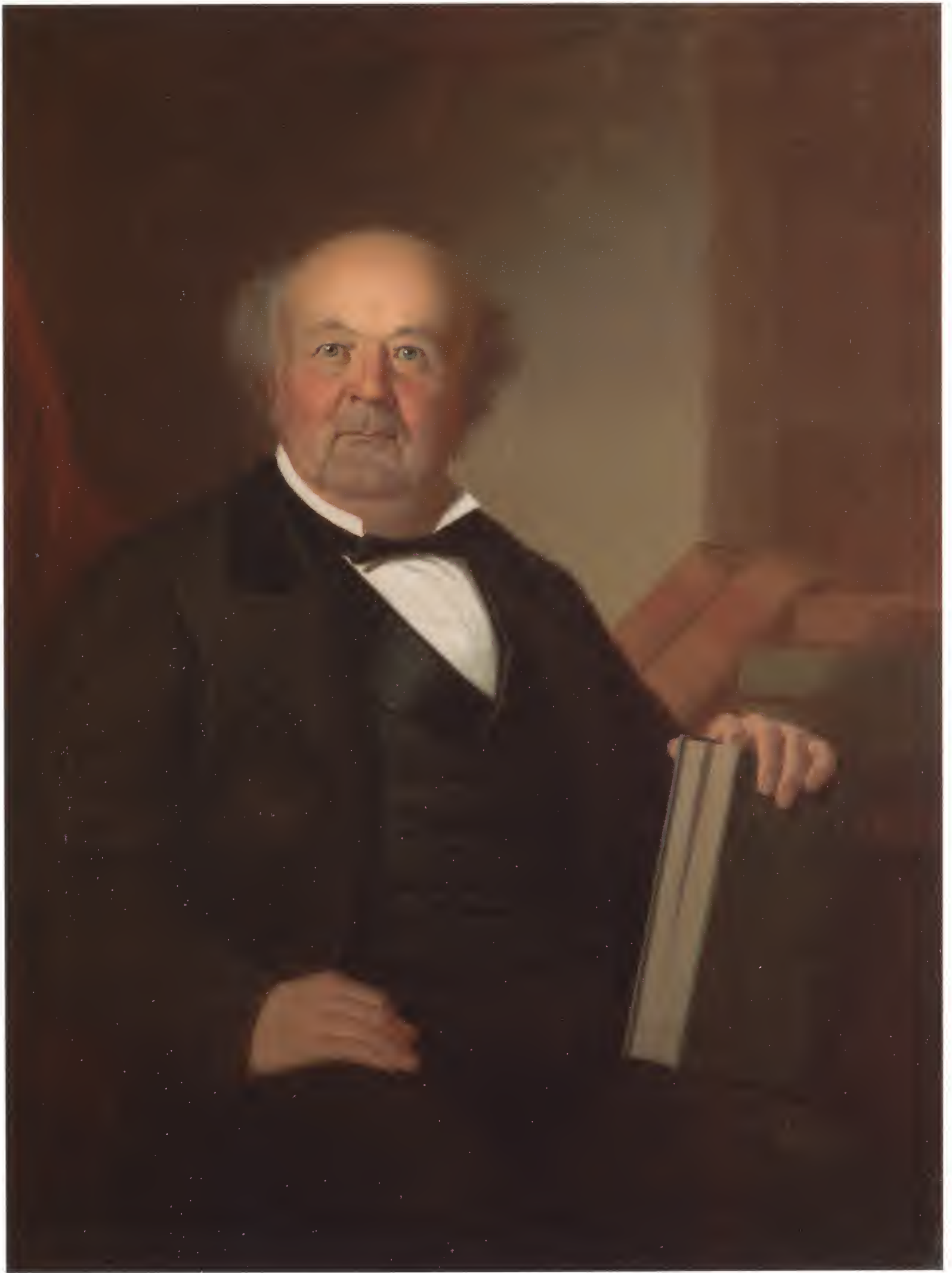
Gift of the Board of Education of Kansas City, Missouri,

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Likely painted shortly after Bingham's European experience, the portraits of Benoist and Mary Ann Troost set a new standard for Bingham's work in portraiture. *Dr. Benoist Troost*, which captured the early Kansas City physician and community leader's physical and civic largesse, has long been acknowledged as the artist's finest male portrait. Bingham depicted Troost seated solidly in a library or office with his gaze directed outward. His authoritative bearing and features are described with some of Bingham's most masterful paint handling. Using a layering technique combining thin, opaque paint and transparent glazes, the artist rendered Troost's face precisely yet softly and, by carefully mixing different tones of black, created a striking differentiation of fabrics—the silk lapel of the vest, the velvet collar of the jacket, and the wool of the suit.

Born in the Netherlands, Benoist Troost (1786–1859) served as a hospital steward in Napoleon's army before immigrating to the United States.<sup>5</sup> Troost first lived in Pittsburgh, where he operated a white lead (alum) works with his brother. He moved west, briefly residing in St. Louis before moving to Independence, Missouri, by 1844 and finally to Kansas City soon thereafter. In addition to establishing a medical practice, Troost was a member of the first local chamber of commerce, a stockholder in the Kansas City, Hannibal, and St. Joseph Railroad, and a candidate for the city's first mayoral election in 1853. He built the Gillis House, the first brick hotel on the riverfront. It was named for William Gillis, a successful trader, a founder of Kansas City, and the uncle of Mary Ann Barkley, whom Troost married in 1846.

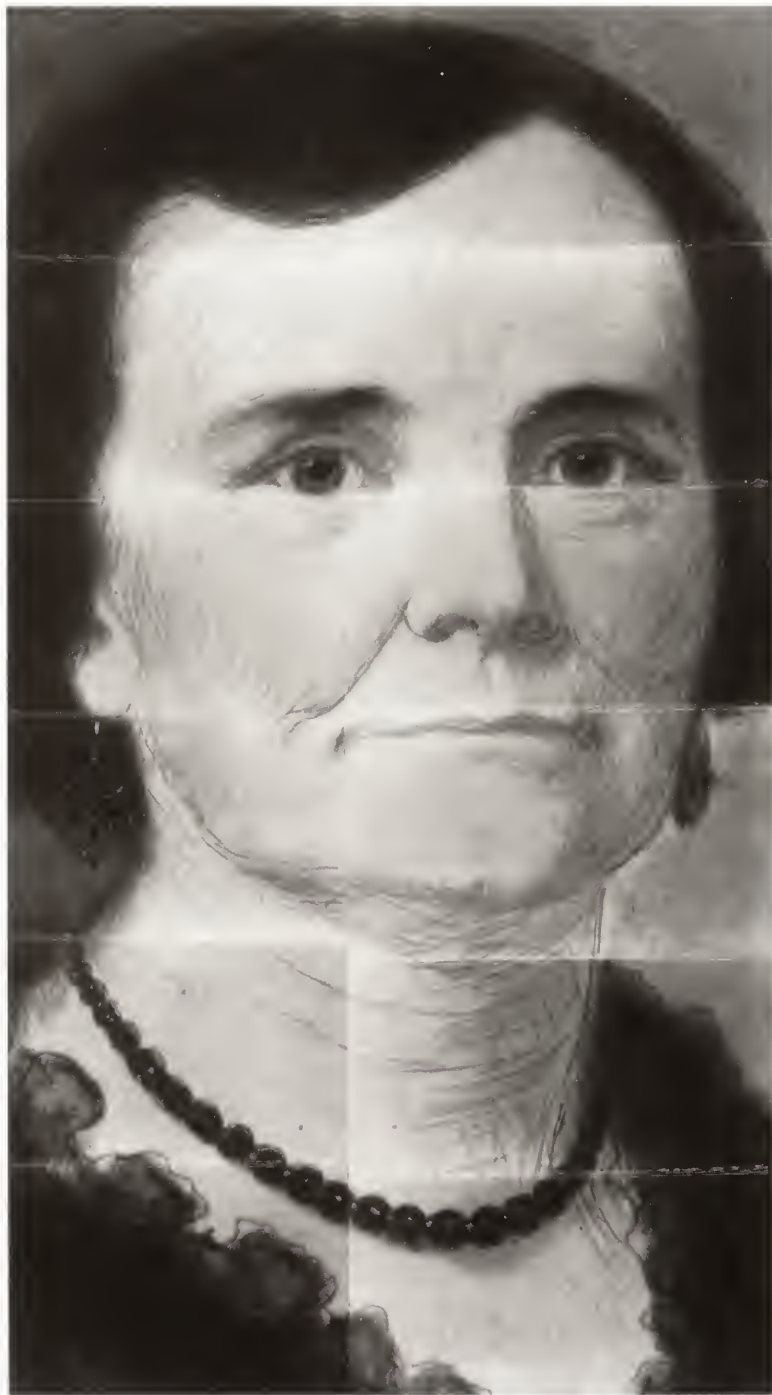
Mary Ann Troost (1812?–1872) was born in Maryland.<sup>6</sup> The date of her arrival in Kansas City is uncertain, but the presence of her uncle, William Gillis, a successful trader and one of the founders of the city, presumably influenced her move. She was in residence sometime after her 1830 wedding in Somerset County, Maryland, to George Kennerly and before 13 April 1845, when she was baptized in the Catholic faith in preparation for her marriage to Dr. Troost the following January.<sup>7</sup> Throughout her life, Mrs. Troost was civic-minded, but her most important contributions to Kansas City came after her death in 1872.<sup>8</sup> Her will provided for the building of an opera house named for her uncle. The revenues from performances there supported the building and an endowment of an orphans' home that is still in operation today.





The portrait of Mrs. Troost, while compromised by past damage and poor restoration, captures the sitter's reportedly lively personality.<sup>9</sup> Using fine brushstrokes and overlapping layers of warm and cool opaque paint, Bingham highlighted her animated eyes and pleasant facial expression. The setting, with a column behind her and a landscape view out a window, follows the conventions of grand manner portraiture and offers a feminized version of the exact same composition of her husband's portrait.<sup>10</sup> The images of the Troosts not only present engaging and very lifelike representations of the sitters but also expand the artist's typical portrait format of a brightly lit face emerging from a dark background. Bingham would repeat their poses—a figure seated, slightly turned, with one hand resting on the lap—against a background that reflected the sitter's experience and character in numerous portraits until the end of his career.

Benoist Troost died on 9 February 1859 at seventy-three. Record of the portrait commission does not survive, but Bingham



must have painted Troost's portrait posthumously with the aid of a photograph, since he did not work in Kansas City until late March 1859 during a brief return from Germany to present the presidential portraits to the state legislature.<sup>11</sup> Physical and technical differences between the paintings of Dr. and Mrs. Troost suggest they may have been executed at separate times. The canvas on which Dr. Troost is painted is common lightweight, tightly woven, plain-weave linen, whereas that used for the image of Mrs. Troost is very lightweight and finely woven, similar to handkerchief linen.<sup>12</sup> Bingham used quite different painting techniques on these canvases as well. The portrait of Mrs. Troost has a well-developed, comprehensive underdrawing (Fig. 1) that carefully outlines the features and contours of her face and neck. Bingham painted Dr. Troost after marking only faint pencil lines to indicate the placement of the eyes, nose, mouth, and primary contour lines. The difference in technique is likely the result of the artist recording Mrs. Troost from a single or intermittent live sittings in his studio rather than from a photograph, which could be consulted continuously. Additionally, Mrs. Troost's outfit suggests a woman in a later stage of mourning than would be expected if Dr. Troost had died just a few months earlier. Women's mourning attire was carefully prescribed in the mid-nineteenth century. Mrs. Troost's black dress with no hint of white trimming and jet, black coral, and hair jewelry are consistent with mourning attire about 1860. Yet, the lack of mourning crepe on her dress and presence of gold in her jewelry suggest she has passed out of the deep mourning of the first year or two after her husband's passing.<sup>13</sup>

Bingham was in Kansas City for the autumns of 1859 and 1860 as well as the entire second half of 1861. It seems likely that the Troost portraits were painted during this period, when the artist remained buoyed by his public commissions and his experience in Düsseldorf. Just two months after the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter in April 1861, Bingham wrote his good friend James Rollins that employment was at an all-time low, and "art is far below everything else in such times as these."<sup>14</sup> In fact, the artist traded in his brushes for war work from 1862 through 1866, after which he painted portraits once again, but more sporadically.<sup>15</sup>

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Fig. 1 Infrared photograph of George Caleb Bingham, *Mrs. Benoist Troost* (detail)



## NOTES

1. Biographical information in this entry, unless otherwise noted, is drawn from E. Maurice Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986). See *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.) and *Canvassing for a Vote* (q.v.) for information on each of Bingham's narrative themes. For other examples of Bingham's portraits in the Nelson-Atkins collection, see *Roma Johnson Wornall* (q.v.) and volume 2.
2. On Franklin and Arrow Rock, see Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 2:131–32. On Bingham's possible early meeting with Harding, see Leah Lipton, "George Caleb Bingham in the Studio of Chester Harding, Franklin, Missouri, 1820," *American Art Journal* 16 (Summer 1984), 90–91.
3. De Franea arrived in St. Louis about 1844, and Peale about 1847. See Karen McCoskey Goering, "Manuel de Franea: St. Louis Portrait Painter," *Gateway Heritage* 3 (Winter 1982–83), 30–35. Bingham may have met Sarah Peale earlier in Washington, D.C., where they both had studios in the early 1840s. On Sarah Miriam Peale in St. Louis, see Lincoln Bunce Spies, "St. Louis Women Artists in the Mid-19th Century," *Gateway Heritage* 3 (Spring 1983), 10–15.
4. George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins, 4 November 1856, in C. B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 32 (April 1938), 343. Düsseldorf may have been appealing to Bingham not only because of its manageable size and the presence of Leutze but also owing to his familiarity with Missouri's large German population and the Düsseldorf Gallery in New York. On Bingham's experience in Düsseldorf, see Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 16–19. On Americans in Düsseldorf, see Donelson Hoopes, *The Düsseldorf Academy and the Americans*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1972). On the Düsseldorf Gallery, see R. L. Stehle, "The Düsseldorf Gallery of New York," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 58 (October 1974), 305–14; and William H. Gerdtz, "'Good Tidings' to the Lovers of the Beautiful: New York's Düsseldorf Gallery, 1849–1862," *American Art Journal* 30 (1999), 50–81.
5. Information on Troost's life is sketchy at best. The most factual sources are "Death of Dr. Benoist Troost," *Daily Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, Mo.), 11 February 1859, unpaginated; Theodore Case, *History of Kansas City, Missouri* (Syraeuse, N.Y.: D. Mason, 1888), 69; Carrie Westlake Whitney, *Kansas City, Missouri: Its History and Its People* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing, 1908), 472–73; Charles P. Deatherage, *Early History of Greater Kansas City* (Kansas City, Mo.: Interstate Publishing Company, 1927), 1:242; Barbara M. Gorman et al., *From Shamans to Specialists: A History of Medicine and Health Care in Jackson County, Missouri* (Kansas City, Mo.: Jackson County Medical Society, 1981), 23, 25; and Richard Bradley, "The Good Doctor Troost," *Kansas City Star*, 14 April 1985, 18.
6. The most reliable biographical sketch of Mrs. Troost can be found in Fay E. Glenn, "Dr. and Mrs. Benoist Troost, Prominent Citizens of Kansas City in the Nineteenth Century," typescript, 1953. NAMA curatorial files, 4. Mrs. Troost's birth date is unknown. She was listed in Benoist Troost's household in the 1850 Jackson County, Missouri, census as age thirty-eight, but in the 1860 census, when she resided in the household of William Gillis, she appears as age forty-three. The census for 1860 is the last one in which she has been found. The 1850, 1860, and 1870 United States censuses were consulted through [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 1 May 2006).
7. The marriage of Mary Ann Barkley to George Kennerly is listed as 26 April 1830 in *Maryland Marriages, 1655–1850*, comp. Jordan Dodd, online database [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 1 May 2006). She may have moved as far west as St. Louis with her first husband by 1840. A George H. Kennerly appears in the St. Louis County 1840 United States Federal Census, but that census does not list individual household members. 1840 United States Federal Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 1 May 2006). In the baptism records, her name was listed as Mary Ann Kennerly Barkly [sic]. Her baptism is noted in Gilbert J. Garraghan, *Catholic Beginnings in Kansas City, Missouri* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1920), 130–31.
8. Mrs. Troost died of smallpox while visiting a friend in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, and is buried there. Alice Smith Sebree, "Leaders in the 1890s Had Fine Homes on Troost," *Kansas City Star*, 4 June 1950, Centennial sec. 5, 4.
9. Westlake, *Kansas City, Missouri: Its History and Its People*, 646.
10. On grand manner portraits, see William H. Gerdtz, "Natural Aristocrats in a Democracy: 1810–1870," *American Portraiture in the Grand Manner, 1720–1920*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981), 27–60.
11. At this time, Bingham received further commissions from the legislature to paint portraits of Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson. Early comments on Dr. Troost's portrait mention its genesis in a photograph. For more on Bingham's use of photographs for portraits, see *Roma Johnson Wornall* (q.v.). With the exception of an early trip, during which he painted some portraits in Clay County north of Kansas City, and one visit to Independence in 1855, before 1859 Bingham traveled in Missouri exclusively from the middle of the state east to St. Louis. Bingham wrote to James Rollins on 21 March 1859 that he was leaving Columbia for Kansas City that day: Bingham to Rollins, 21 March 1859, Rollins, "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," 373. He was in Brunswick, Missouri, by 22 April 1859.
12. See Technical Notes.
13. The length of deep mourning was generally at least a year long but could vary according to regional custom. On the states of mourning, see Ann Masson and Bryce Reveley, "When Life's Brief Sun Was Set: Portraits of Southern Women in Mourning, 1830–1860," *Southern Quarterly* 27 (Fall 1988), 37–45. The author thanks Prof. Laurel Wilson, University of Missouri, Columbia, and Amelia Peck, Metropolitan Museum of Art, for their assistance with identifying the elements in Mrs. Troost's outfit.
14. Bingham to Rollins, 5 June 1861, C. B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 32 (July 1938), 517.
15. Bingham served as a captain in the United States Volunteer Corps at the start of the war and as Missouri state treasurer from 1862 to 1865. After 1864 his primary residence was in the Kansas City area.

## GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM (1811–1879)

### *Roma Johnson Wornall*, c. 1867–74 (*Mrs. John Bristow Wornall*)

Oil on canvas

27 × 22¼ in. (68.6 × 56.5 cm)

Gift of Mrs. Roma Wornall Powell, granddaughter of the sitter, Roma Wornall, F85-1

DURING THE CIVIL WAR George Caleb Bingham turned his attention largely away from painting and toward working for his country. In June 1861 the artist was appointed captain in the U.S. Volunteer Reserve Corps in Kansas City, Missouri, near which city he had been living for about a year. Then, from 1862 until 1865, he spent most of his time in Jefferson City serving as Missouri state treasurer. At the end of the war, Bingham's outrage at the war's destruction found a voice in two large-scale canvases depicting military Order No. 11, which had a direct impact on Bingham, Kansas City, and its environs.<sup>1</sup> These paintings and the engraving after them occupied the majority of the artist's creative endeavors from 1865 to 1870. Consequently, throughout these years and continuing until Bingham's death in 1879, portrait painting took up decreasing amounts of his time.

Bingham's portrait of Roma Wornall depicts one of Kansas City's most beloved citizens and is closely tied to the story of her wedding. Born 30 August 1846 near Fayette, Missouri, Roma Johnson was the daughter of Keziah Givens and Reuben Johnson, a farmer.<sup>2</sup> She was also the niece of the Reverend Thomas Johnson, the founder and missionary in charge of the Shawnee Indian Mission near Kansas City. During visits to her uncle, Roma Johnson met her future husband, John Bristow Wornall, a prosperous farmer and influential early Kansas Citian.<sup>3</sup> Wornall was twenty-four years Roma Johnson's senior and a widower. His second wife, Eliza Shalcross Johnson, Roma's cousin and the daughter of Thomas Johnson, died in 1865. Roma Johnson and John Wornall married in November 1866.

John Wornall was among the few individuals who commissioned multiple portraits from Bingham right after the Civil War. Although the artist and the farmer took opposite sides during the conflict, they collaborated on three portraits—one of Wornall himself, a posthumous one of Eliza Wornall, and the Nelson-Atkins portrait of Roma Wornall.<sup>4</sup> *Roma Johnson Wornall* is based on a photograph of the new Mrs. Wornall taken on the couple's honeymoon in 1866 to Philadelphia and New York (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> She is pictured in her favorite dress from her trousseau. However, exactly when Bingham painted Mrs. Wornall's portrait is unclear, although a receipt dated 15 October 1867 from Bingham to John Wornall probably indicates its completion.<sup>6</sup> Complicating the dating, however, is a stereopticon of Bingham's studio that includes the

unframed portrait of Roma Wornall and paintings not completed until the early 1870s.<sup>7</sup> For this formal record of his studio, Bingham may have gathered favorite works from patrons, but if the photograph represents work Bingham had on hand, it would indicate *Roma Johnson Wornall* was painted after 1870.

Bingham rarely depicted his sitters in profile, but for the portraits of Roma Wornall, General Francis Preston Blair Jr. (1871; Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis), and Major James Sidney Rollins (1871; State Historical Society, Columbia, Mo.), he based his paintings on photographs with the sitters oriented in that position.<sup>8</sup> Although Bingham had used photography for various purposes since at least 1847, he more frequently used photographic models for portraits after his return from Düsseldorf in 1859.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, such as the portraits of Dr. Benoist Troost (q.v.) or William Chick (q.v.), the photographs stood in for the deceased. In the case of Roma Wornall, the use of the photographic model may have been a request from the patron and likely embraced by the artist. Roma Wornall's pose in the photograph recalls the contemporary popular Grecian-style profile and especially accentuated her stylish hairdo of waterfall curls. Yet, as photography gained in popularity and affordability in the mid-nineteenth



Fig. 1 Photographer unknown, *Roma Johnson Wornall*, after 1866. Photograph on glass, 11 × 6 in. (27.9 × 15.2 cm). Photograph courtesy of William D. Wornall Jr.



century, Bingham was surely aware that a painting had to surpass a camera's image in beauty if not in detail.<sup>10</sup> Thus, he took some liberties with the original image, such as excluding some trim that ran down the center of the dress, slightly lifting the sitter's face, and tidying the outline of her hair, all elements that made the likeness more flattering. He surrounded her with blue sky and billowing clouds, an unusual background in Bingham's oeuvre, appearing only in a few posthumous portraits.<sup>11</sup> A lighter palette applied with thin and fluid brushwork softened her features and added a delicacy to the image that suggests Mrs. Wornall's youth. Bingham's palette and technique harken back to his early interest in the work of Thomas Sully (q.v.) but also perhaps acknowledge the more decorative styles in American painting after the Civil War.

Roma Wornall lived in Kansas City until her death in 1933. She was active in many civic and social groups including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Missouri Valley Historical Society. The gentle beauty Bingham painted in the first years of her marriage lasted until the end of her life, when she was remembered for her "lovely gracious bearing and kindly sympathetic heart. . . . She was a true gentlewoman of the old South."<sup>12</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Order No. 11 forced the residents of Kansas City and the surrounding counties, regardless of their political stripe, to vacate their homes in the summer of 1863. The two canvases, one painted during 1865–68 and the other 1869–70, are owned by the Cincinnati Art Museum and the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, respectively. On Bingham and the Civil War, and especially Order No. 11, see Nancy Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 184–215.
2. "A Gay Heart Is Stilled," *Kansas City Star*, 9 May 1933, 1, gives the most complete biographical information on Roma Johnson Wornall.
3. On John Wornall, see Lawrence O. Christensen and William E. Foley, *Dictionary of Missouri Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 815.
4. On the portraits of John, Eliza, and Roma Wornall, see E. Maurice Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 224.
5. The original photograph on paper, likely a carte de visite or cabinet card, is now lost. The existing photograph is a copy of it on glass, which could date from any time after the late 1860s. The original was likely taken at the same time as another photograph of the entire wedding party, which shows Roma Wornall in the same dress. John Wornall House Collection, Kansas City, Missouri. The author thanks Keith Davis, Curator of Photography, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, for his help with dating the photograph on glass and identifying its original format.
6. There is a receipt for \$100, dated 31 May 1866, which must represent payment for one or both of the portraits of John and Eliza Wornall. The 1867 receipt is for \$155.25. While it could refer to the completion of the payment for the earlier pair of pictures, its higher amount suggests it was for the more unusual portrait painted after a photograph and with a background that diverged from the single-toned, dark one of the other two. The two receipts may be found in the John Wornall Papers, Jackson County Historical Society, Independence, Missouri.
7. Dating the stereopticon (Native Sons of Kansas City Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Kansas City) is aided by the presence of Bingham's copy of Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Va.), which he completed in 1871. It is impossible to discern which of the two versions of Order No. 11 is pictured. The portraits in the photo are generally dated between 1870 and 1874. See Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 227, 236–37.
8. For illustrations of the portraits of Blair and Rollins and information concerning Bingham's use of photographs for them, see Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 116–17, 229–30.
9. Bingham's use of photography is a topic worthy of its own study. By about 1847 he had photographs made of completed paintings, including one of *Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground* (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo.). He seems to have employed photographs to elicit criticism on paintings in progress, for marketing his work, for inspection by potential engravers, as well as for models for portraits. For example, he wrote to his friend and patron James Rollins in May 1854 that he was sending him some photographs to give him an idea of what *Stump Speaking* (1854; Saint Louis Art Museum) looked like. Bingham to Rollins, 29 May 1854, in C. B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 32 (January 1938), 185.
10. On photography's impact on portrait painting, see Delores Ann Kilgoe, "The Sharp-Focus Vision: The Daguerreotype and the American Painter," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1982, 68–82.
11. See, for example, Bingham's portrait of Mattie Melton (1863; private collection), illustrated in Bloch, *The Paintings of George Caleb Bingham*, 109, 222.
12. Mrs. Hubert Allen, "Reminiscence," undated typescript, NAMA curatorial files.

## ISABEL BISHOP (1902–1988)

### *Girl with a Newspaper*, 1946 (*Girl Reading Newspaper*)

Oil and tempera on Masonite  
24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (62.9 × 38.4 cm)  
Signed upper right: Isabel Bishop  
Bequest of Marie P. McCune, 68-8/2

IN 1918, AT SIXTEEN, Isabel Bishop left her hometown of Detroit for New York City to study illustration at the New York School of Applied Design for Women.<sup>1</sup> Two years later she transferred to the Art Students League, where she studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller and Guy Pène du Bois. Along with Miller and her fellow students Edward Laning (q.v.), Reginald Marsh (q.v.), and Raphael Soyer, Bishop focused on painting the area around Union Square at Fourteenth Street, where their studios were located and from which locale the group acquired their moniker, the Fourteenth Street School.<sup>2</sup> Bishop married Dr. Harold G. Wolff in 1934, and for the next four decades, she commuted daily from her home in Riverdale, just north of the city, to her Union Square studio. Unlike many upper-middle-class women of her generation, she balanced a career with motherhood beginning in 1940.

Favorable notice came to Bishop with her first solo exhibition at the Midtown Galleries in 1933. Her painting technique demanded that she work very slowly. Consequently, her output was small, and she had relatively few exhibitions. Nevertheless, she received considerable recognition in her lifetime. In the 1940s she was elected a member of the National Academy of Design and the National Institute of Arts and Letters; in 1946 she was elected vice president of the National Institute, its first female officer.

That same year Bishop painted *Girl with a Newspaper*. Like her fellow Fourteenth Street School artists, Bishop perennially pictured the middle and lower classes of New York. While Miller depicted matronly shoppers and Reginald Marsh painted urban sirens, from the mid-1930s Bishop specialized in images of the working girl, moderately pretty and self-possessed.<sup>3</sup> This subject remained strikingly contemporary a decade later as the role of women in the workforce was discussed in the context of men returning home from World War II. The number of working women had increased by 11 percent between 1940 and 1945, and many of them wanted to keep their jobs at the end of the war despite the prevailing sentiment that they should return to their prewar unemployed status.<sup>4</sup>

Bishop's working girls are often shown on their lunch hours or going to and from their jobs, either retail or clerical, which were the most prevalent businesses around Union Square. These kinds of employment were also the most desired by women since they paid better, offered a healthier environment, and often allowed them

to transcend their class backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Frequently pictured waiting, Bishop's young women often are seen fixing their hair, adjusting their makeup, or, as in the Nelson-Atkins painting, reading.

In all of her images, whether painted, drawn, or etched, Bishop is the unobtrusive observer. Watching from a distance, she preserves for her subjects a sense of privacy.<sup>6</sup> The view out her studio window onto Broadway and her daily commute on the subway gave Bishop close access to her subjects as well as a certain empathy for them, but her social position as a prominent doctor's wife may have caused her to keep the working girls she painted at arm's length.<sup>7</sup>

Less sexually charged than Marsh's women, Bishop's figures reflect a humanity rather than glamour or allure. They also depict the contemporary view of appropriate working-girl behavior and attire.<sup>8</sup> For Bishop, this girl suggested "a person of limited social experience, who is at the same time unfixed. She is coming from somewhere and could be going anywhere. Her children may be in the social columns or in the Bowery."<sup>9</sup> Bishop repeatedly conveyed this potential for social mobility, often found in the business world, by painting her subjects in movement. Even in *Girl with a Newspaper*, the figure's quiescent stance suggests the potential for movement. The contrapposto pose with most of the figure's weight on the right leg and the gentle outward swing of the skirt and its pleats add a suggestion of energy to an otherwise static posture.

Bishop stated that her goal in painting was "to retain the casual, informal, and heterogeneous character of people in movement, and yet to present them in a powerful art form."<sup>10</sup> Thus, technique played a role as important as subject matter in her work. The white lab coat that she wore while painting symbolized her empirical approach.<sup>11</sup> Each oil began with sketches from life made on a small notepad.<sup>12</sup> These were not studies per se but rather represented "a feeling toward an idea or motive for a picture."<sup>13</sup> The sketch *Girl Reading a Paper* (Fig. 1) represents Bishop's first exploration of the Nelson-Atkins painting's subject, and the final work remains remarkably true to its sense of a captured private moment and of a figure shifting in space. Drawings like this became the basis for an etching (Fig. 2), which Bishop afterward enlarged through photostats in a range of sizes. If the sketch was intended to remind Bishop of her original idea, the enlargements of the etching encouraged her to keep the painting loose and free. At this stage, she decided on a size for the oil and prepared a panel, usually Masonite, with multiple coats of gesso front and back. She then painted a ground of horizontal gray stripes, loose and uneven, to create a sense of vibration. This kind of ground layer imitates the method of Peter Paul Rubens, to which Bishop was first introduced by Miller and later saw on a 1931 trip abroad and carefully studied in accordance with Max Doerner's influential 1934 treatise, *The Materials of the*







Fig. 1 Isabel Bishop, *Girl Reading a Paper*, c. 1944. Pen and wash on paper. Location unknown, illustrated in "The Drawings of Isabel Bishop," *American Artist* 3 (June 1949), 50



Fig. 2 Isabel Bishop, *Girl with Newspaper*, 1945. Etching, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (18.5 × 11.2 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., acquired through the Print Duplicate Fund, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph F. Jacobs and the Woodcut Society, 87-17

*Artist.* After applying the ground, Bishop drew the figure in pencil or ink and tempera. This step not only located the image but also reinforced the painting's graphic origins. She then covered the surface with damar varnish to reduce the chance the panel would absorb oil from the paint. This varnishing also allowed the striped underpainting to remain somewhat visible. The painting process itself covered the entire panel, with highlights worked opaquely and shadows thinly. Bishop rubbed out portions with turpentine to expose the underlayers.

Through such painstaking technique, Bishop aimed to reconcile linearity and painterliness, two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, transparency and opacity, and preciseness and spontaneity.<sup>14</sup> Bishop's unusual concern with such traditional artistic dichotomies, treated in what was essentially an old master

technique, resulted in paintings that referred to the grand manner of Rubens even as they asserted the flatness of the canvas, an assertion that was at the crux of modernism; some accounts even linked her work to the rising school of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>15</sup> In *Girl with a Newspaper*, this method created a work that is both painterly and carefully drawn and whose figure seems to exist in a defined, boxlike space yet floats on the surface of the canvas. It suggests an ambiguous spatial environment with a solid figure that is at once rooted in the moment and constantly shifting. For Bishop, who thought that working women were in a sociological state of flux, the technique simultaneously ennobled her Everywoman subject and served to highlight what she perceived as unfixed boundaries of gender and class.<sup>16</sup> It was also perhaps an acknowledgment of her own status as a working woman.<sup>17</sup>

When *Girl with a Newspaper* was purchased by Marie McCune in 1947, it connected multiple links between artist and collector. McCune secured Bishop's canvas after it was rejected for purchase by the Friends of Art, the group that annually bought contemporary art for the Nelson-Atkins before 1986.<sup>15</sup> The widow of a prominent Kansas City judge, McCune may have identified with Bishop as an upper-middle-class woman artist. Her own artistic endeavors had begun only in 1941, but, despite her amateur status, she impressed Kansas Citians with her abilities from the start.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the two women shared the friendship of Edward Laning and his wife.<sup>20</sup> A close colleague of Bishop's from their student days, Laning taught painting at the Kansas City Art Institute from 1945 to 1950. He was at the December 1947 Friends of Art meeting when *Girl with a Newspaper* was considered—as, most likely, was Marie McCune—and he surely supported and perhaps even encouraged McCune in her acquisition of the work of a friend and like-minded artist.<sup>21</sup>

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## NOTES

1. The main sources on Bishop's life and art are *Isabel Bishop*, exh. cat. (Tucson: University of Arizona Museum of Art, 1974); Karl Lunde, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973); and Helen Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).
2. Bishop rented her first studio on Union Square in 1926. Susan Teller, ed., *Isabel Bishop. Etchings and Aquatints: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Associated American Artists, 1981), 38. John I. H. Baur coined the term *Fourteenth Street School* in 1951. Ellen Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 40–41.
3. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 273–74, charts Bishop's shift out of Miller's sphere of influence to her own themes.
4. Lois Banner, *Women in America: A Brief History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 202–3, 206. On the attitudes toward working women in 1945–46, see Eugenia Kaledin, *Daily Life in the United States, 1940–1959: Shifting Worlds* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 21.
5. In general, office jobs were considered the perfect employment for women in the time between school and marriage, after which many expected to pursue mainly domestic activities. Ellen Wiley Todd, "Isabel Bishop: The Question of Difference," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3 (Fall 1989), 28–29.
6. Mary Sweeney Ellett has written on the sense of privacy Bishop always retained in "Isabel Bishop: The Endless Search," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1987, 94–96.
7. *Ibid.*, 69.
8. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 282, 300–301. Books on business etiquette for women abounded in the 1940s. See, for example, Marie L. Carney, *Etiquette in Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), esp. chap. 2, "I Want to Look Right."
9. Quoted in Mildred Faulk, "Immortalizes Working Girls," *New York Sun*, 17 May 1949, Isabel Bishop Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel NY59-4, frame 1049.
10. Quoted in Lunde, *Isabel Bishop*, 61.
11. *Ibid.*, 16.
12. See *ibid.*, 62–65, for a full description of Bishop's technique.
13. Quoted in "The Drawings of Isabel Bishop," *American Artist* 13 (June 1949), 51.
14. Lunde, *Isabel Bishop*, 65.
15. For Bishop and the grand manner, see Lawrence Alloway, "Isabel Bishop, the Grand Manner and the Working Girl," *Art in America* 63 (September 1975), 61–65. For Bishop and her similarities to Abstract Expressionism, see Ellett, "Isabel Bishop," 23–24.
16. Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, xxix.
17. Although Harold Wolff was unusually supportive of Bishop's career, descriptions of their marriage indicate it was typically traditional in its roles. Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop*, 16–17.
18. See Introduction. The painting had come to Kansas City as one of nine paintings to be considered for purchase by the Friends of Art. After three rounds of ballots, *Girl with a Newspaper* lost to Edward Hopper's *Light Battery at Gettysburg* (q.v.). Friends of Art Meeting Minutes, 12 December 1947, Record Group 43/02, NAMA Archives. Midtown Galleries invoice to Mrs. Henry C. McCune, 18 December 1947, NAMA curatorial files.
19. Eleanor Corrigan, "Personal Glimpses," *Kansas City Star*, 30 November 1941, 12C.
20. Bishop and Laning's friendship is well documented. See, for example, Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised*, 72–74. McCune's friendship with the Lanings extended beyond Kansas City to travels to Italy with them in 1949. Erma Young, "Sketches Preserve Travel Memories for Kansas Citian," *Kansas City Star*, 30 April 1950, 3C.
21. Friends of Art Meeting Minutes, 12 December 1947, Record Group 43/02, NAMA Archives.

## ALBERT BLOCH (1882–1961)

### *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2 (The Three Pierrots No. 2), 1911* (*Die drei Pierrots*)

Oil on canvas

30<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (77 × 57.8 cm)

Signed with monogram upper right: **AB**; inscribed on verso

top: 'DIE DREI PIERROTS' NO. II. 25 / XI-1911

Gift of Mrs. Albert Bloch, F97-14/1

ALBERT BLOCH PARTICIPATED in the first exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), staged at the Galerie Thannhauser in Munich in 1911, and was the only American artist to exhibit with the group. The St. Louis native had been in the Bavarian capital less than three years and was virtually unknown in the art world when he was invited by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc to show in the *First Exhibition of the Editorial Board of the Blue Rider*.<sup>1</sup> Bloch showed six canvases, more than any other participant except Gabriele Münter, who also showed six.

Among Bloch's entries was *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2 (The Three Pierrots No. 2)*, which shows three stylized Pierrots, with sturdy bodies, bald heads, masklike faces, and rubbery limbs, who seem to dance together in a round. The Pierrots' overlapping bodies cluster so tightly together that they seem physically joined. The central and right-hand Pierrots, who turn in opposite directions with downcast heads, are virtual mirror images of each other. The left-hand Pierrot faces in the same direction as the right-hand one and makes a corresponding hand gesture. Behind the central Pierrot, it is difficult to tell where the body of the left-hand figure ends and that of the right-hand one begins, for the foot at the lower center seems to belong to both of them. Thick, black outlines define the Pierrots' bodies, which are made of flat masses of gray with only minor variations in hue and value. Touches of crimson on the lips and heads of the center and right-hand Pierrots are the only bright hues enlivening the figures. Surrounding the Pierrots is an abstract environment of sketchy color patches and sinuous lines, whose curves complement those of the Pierrots' bodies. Passages of red and yellow animate the background, whose dominant tones are also gray and black.

The rich textures of the thickly painted surface are amplified by paint layers below the surface, probably belonging to an earlier composition that Bloch covered over.<sup>2</sup> The Pierrot figures are defined through bold and somewhat crude drawing, and in one area the anatomy is awkwardly rendered: the neck of the left-hand Pierrot, obscured by the foreground figure, would have to be impossibly long to support the head, found near the upper center of the painting at some distance from the shoulders. Such a detail would likely have been of little concern to Bloch, however. A year before painting *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2*, he wrote that the "true

artist" is "indifferent" to the question of "whether a hand or foot be drawn with academic precision. . . . What does matter to him is that the picture should express to his satisfaction that which he sets out to express."<sup>3</sup> And the direct, almost raw, quality of Bloch's expression was in all likelihood what attracted the admiration of Marc and Kandinsky, who saw in the art of children, self-taught "folk" artists, and non-Western "primitive" artists paradigms of authentic creativity unburdened by the repressive conventions of European academic art.<sup>4</sup>

Albert Bloch was in fact largely self-taught as a painter, but he was no primitive. By the time he arrived in Munich in 1909, he had already distinguished himself as an accomplished illustrator, cartoonist, and caricaturist. Bloch was born on 2 August 1882, the second of five children born to Jewish immigrant parents from Bohemia and Germany.<sup>5</sup> He attended public schools in St. Louis before quitting high school at sixteen to pursue his goal of becoming an artist. From 1898 to 1900 Bloch studied at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts. He then began working as a newspaper artist, contributing cartoons and other illustrations to the *St. Louis Star* between 1901 and 1903. From 1903 to 1908 Bloch lived and worked mainly in New York, with occasional trips back to St. Louis.

Bloch's graphic work attracted the attention of William Marion Reedy, editor and publisher of the *Mirror*, a St. Louis-based political and literary weekly. In 1905 Reedy hired Bloch to work for the *Mirror*, which over the next four years regularly published his cover illustrations, cartoons, and caricatures. In his work for the magazine, Bloch employed the bold simplifications and flowing lines of international Art Nouveau, under the influence of the illustrated magazines *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*, which were published in Munich and must also have been available in New York.

Seeking to further his artistic training through study in Europe, Bloch, with Reedy's financial support, sailed from New York at the end of 1908 with his wife, Hortense, and their one-year-old son. Their destination was Munich, which was home not only to *Jugend* and *Simplieissimus* but also to a thriving cultural life. Settling in the vibrant artists' quarter of Schwabing, Bloch decided not to enroll at the Royal Academy and instead taught himself to paint by studying the old masters in the Alte Pinakothek as well as the more modern works he saw in contemporary galleries.<sup>6</sup>

In late 1910 Bloch traveled to Paris, where he admired the work of the old masters and the French Impressionists. After he returned to Munich, Bloch became aware of current Post-Impressionist tendencies through reproductions he saw in the catalogue of the second exhibition of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (NKVM; New Artists' Union of Munich), which had



been on view in the fall of 1910 while he was in Paris. The most radical painters in the NKVM were Kandinsky and Marc, whose art would soon influence Bloch, but his painting was affected more immediately by the examples of more moderate artists such as Adolf Erbslöh, Alexander Kanoldt, and Gabriele Münter.<sup>7</sup> Bloch's cityscapes of mid-1911, such as *Häuser mit Turm* (*Houses with Tower*, 1911; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich), are similar to those of the NKVM painters in their use of black outlines, strong colors, and minimal modeling to create a strongly two-dimensional composition.

Sometime in the fall of 1911 several members of the NKVM, including Kandinsky and Marc, visited Bloch in his studio. Shortly thereafter, Kandinsky and Marc proposed that Bloch be included in the third exhibition of the NKVM, but Erbslöh, the president, denied the request because Bloch had not been elected to the group. Bloch's rejection likely served to heighten tensions between Marc and Kandinsky on the one hand and the more conservative wing of the NKVM led by Erbslöh on the other. By early November Marc and Kandinsky were planning a separate exhibition to coincide with the third show of the NKVM. When, on 2 December 1911, the NKVM jury rejected Kandinsky's abstract *Composition V* (1911; private collection) on the grounds that it was too large, Kandinsky, Marc, and Münter resigned and swiftly organized their now-famous counterexhibition.

"In this small exhibition, we do not seek to propagate any one precise and special form," wrote Kandinsky in the preface to the catalogue, "rather, we aim to show by means of the variety of the forms represented how inner wishes of the artists are embodied in manifold ways."<sup>8</sup> The heterogeneous group of assembled painters depicted a wide range of subjects in an equally wide range of styles, from the naive realism of Henri "Le Douanier" Rousseau to the radical abstraction of Kandinsky.<sup>9</sup> In the view of the latter, the exhibition constituted a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "collective work of art," synthesizing an entire range of individual expressions—each of them impelled by the artist's "inner necessity."<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting in microcosm the eclectic nature of the Blue Rider exhibition were Albert Bloch's six submissions: *Harlekinade* (*Harlequinade*, 1911; Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Häuser und Schornsteine* (*Houses and Factory Chimneys*, 1911; location unknown), *Kreuztragung* (*Procession of the Cross*, 1911; Smithsonian American Art Museum), *Eine Hamletkomposition* (*A Hamlet Composition*, 1911; location unknown), *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2*, and *Kopf* (*Head*, 1911; private collection).<sup>11</sup> Of *Eine Hamletkomposition*, nothing is known since no record of the painting survives. *Häuser und Schornsteine* belongs to the group of urban landscapes Bloch painted in 1911 under the influence of the NKVM. *Kreuztragung* and *Kopf* (a head of Christ) represent Christian subjects and indicate Bloch's interest in the religious paintings of the old masters.

*Harlekinade* and *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* draw their subjects from the commedia dell'arte, which captured the imagination of numerous European artists, writers, and composers in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Originating in Renaissance Italy, the commedia dell'arte was a popular form of entertainment that typically involved improvisation, pantomime, and acrobatics.<sup>12</sup> The commedia dell'arte was imported to France in the late sixteenth century and from there spread to other northern European countries. Italian actors in Paris developed the three most familiar stock characters of the commedia: Harlequin, Pierrot, and Columbine.<sup>13</sup>

Harlequin wears a cocked hat and a multicolored costume decorated with diamond-shaped lozenges and often carries a stick that functions like a magic wand.<sup>14</sup> He is a trickster, known for his agility and his impressive leaping and tumbling. While Harlequin is a character of action, Pierrot is a character of feeling and sensitivity. Originally a young, trustworthy valet in early commedia plots, he was transformed into a melancholy romantic largely through his mid-nineteenth-century portrayal by the French mime Jean Gaspard Debureau. Closely identified with the moon and associated astrologically with both love and madness, Pierrot typically wears a baggy white costume with a ruffed collar and a few large buttons down the front. His head is often covered by a black skullcap, to which may be added a tapered, conical hat. The character of Columbine is less well defined. She provides the love interest for Harlequin, who must win her hand by overcoming obstacles posed by other characters, typically Columbine's father or a rival suitor such as Pierrot.

Catalyzed by Debureau's influential portrayal of Pierrot, a cult of the commedia dell'arte flourished in Parisian literary and artistic circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>15</sup> By the turn of the century the commedia was also popular in Munich, especially in the Schwabing district with its large population of students and artists. Schwabing residents frequently gave themselves over to carnivalesque merrymaking, especially during the week before Lent, known as *Fasching*, when many dressed up as commedia dell'arte characters.<sup>16</sup> Bloch, in a 1912 prose sketch describing the height of the revelry on *Faschingsdienstag*, wrote of a "carnival motley: clowns and bumpkins, Harlequin and Columbine, and Pierrot, sorry dog, with Ash Wednesday's shadow already lurking in his great, yearning eyes."<sup>17</sup> Commedia dell'arte characters were also seen on the stages of Munich cabarets, theaters, and puppet shows, and even above the main public square: the carillon on the Neues Rathaus (New Town Hall) includes Harlequin among its life-size dancing figures.

The commedia dell'arte enjoyed a vogue among numerous artists of the Blue Rider circle besides Bloch. Auguste Macke, Heinrich Campendonk, Alfred Kubin, and Paul Klee all depicted Harlequin and Pierrot, while Arnold Schönberg, whose paintings were featured in the first Blue Rider exhibition, composed his song cycle *Pierrot Lunaire* (op. 21) in 1912. Bloch, however, was the only painter to show commedia dell'arte subjects in the first exhibition of the Blue Rider, and for the next several years he concentrated on the theme more intently than any other artist in the group. Henry Adams suggests that Bloch may have identified personally with Harlequin and especially with Pierrot:



Fig. 1 Albert Bloch, *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 1*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 65 × 50 in. (165.1 × 127 cm). Private collection

Like Pierrot, the artist Bloch was an entertainer, subject to the fickle whims of his audience. Like Pierrot, he was often forced to conceal his feelings, to wear a white mask of indifference, in order to perform his part. Like Pierrot, he was tired of the duplicity of words and sought a new form of communication which was more spontaneous, more natural, and more authentic. Like Pierrot, he struggled with the serious issues of life, yet found it difficult to do so in a purely heroic fashion.<sup>15</sup>

In Bloch's *Harlekinade*, shown in the first Blue Rider exhibition, four Pierrots play a supporting role to the central leaping Harlequin.<sup>19</sup> The two on the right wear costumes that recall the traditional garb of Pierrot—in one case, a baggy white suit, in the other, a suit with large buttons and a conical hat. The other two clowns, with their unadorned costumes and rounded heads, are very close in appearance to the Pierrots depicted in *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2*. They represent Bloch's distinctive Pierrot type, which

he seems to have developed in the last few months of 1911 leading up to his participation in the first Blue Rider exhibition.

Bloch's earliest surviving painting of a Pierrot is probably *Pierrot* (1911; private collection), dated September 1911. This three-quarter-length figure wears the standard Pierrot costume with generous sleeves and large red buttons. Over the next few months, Bloch painted several other single, full-length Pierrot figures in plain, white, one-piece costumes without buttons, set in loosely brushed landscapes.<sup>20</sup> With *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 1*, dated November 1911 (Fig. 1), and *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2*, Bloch attempted a more complicated figural composition. The visual evidence confirms that *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* was painted after *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 1*, as suggested by the numbering of the canvases. The first canvas shows Bloch still working out the conception that he would render with greater force and clarity in the Nelson-Atkins version. In comparison to the latter canvas, the drawing in the former is more tentative and the paint handling more finicky. The abstract background is painted with less assurance, and even

Bloch's monogram lacks the confidence seen in the second picture. Also signaling the priority of the first picture is the detail of the three red buttons on the central Pierrot's torso, a holdover from Bloch's earlier, more conventional images of the clown; the buttons are absent in the Kansas City version. Bloch must have felt that the second version was superior, since it was the one he sent to the Blue Rider exhibition, while he gave the first one to his colleague Franz Marc.

*Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* synthesizes influences from Marc and Kandinsky while achieving a distinctive character of its own. The background of dark, wavy lines and brushy patches of color betrays the stylistic influence of Kandinsky's contemporaneous *Improvisations* and *Compositions*. But Bloch's colors are not as bright as Kandinsky's, his value contrasts are not as strong, and the mood of his picture is not as turbulent. Kandinsky's major paintings of this period employ a highly abstracted eschatological iconography comprising knights on horseback, resurrected saints, trumpeting angels, and mountain citadels. Bloch's iconography is both simpler and more legible, drawn from the commedia dell'arte rather than the book of Revelation and embodied in well-defined human figures rather than veiled and blended into an abstract pictorial environment.

Marc's influence is seen in the postures and grouping of Bloch's Pierrots, which have a clear parallel in the German's *Large Blue Horses* (1911; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis). The curving bodies of Marc's three horses seem to flow together, suggesting that they are unified in a harmonious collective existence, while their downturned heads signal absorption in an internal state of consciousness. Bloch's Pierrots similarly merge, and two of them likewise tilt their heads downward. Marc painted animals because he felt that they lived in a state of mystical harmony with nature unattainable by humans. Bloch remained committed to painting the figure, but in Harlequin, Pierrot, and other clowns he found something akin to what Marc found in animals, characters whose expressiveness exceeded that of everyday experience and whose versatility allowed him to explore poetically a wide range of emotions.

The poetry of *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* is profoundly enigmatic. The Pierrots seem to have emerged from Bloch's search for a deeply felt, personal expression, responding to what Kandinsky called the painter's "inner necessity." They seem to reveal the condition of their souls directly through color, movement, and gesture, without recourse to conventional signs or symbols. Bloch must have intended them as embodiments of emotional and spiritual states that can only be felt or intuited, not defined or explained.

The generalized Pierrot figures seen in *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* and other late 1911 canvases recurred, with minor stylistic variations, in several of Bloch's major paintings over the next four years, serving as generic figures of humanity capable of communicating a wide range of feelings.<sup>21</sup> The motif of the three dancing Pierrots, first seen in *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 1* and *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2*, was reused with some variations by Bloch in the drypoint *Arabesque* (1913; impressions in the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,

Munich, and Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kans.), as a background group in *Liegende Gestalt* (*Reclining Figure*, 1914; location unknown), and at the extreme right of *Fries für ein Musikzimmer* (*Frieze for a Music Room*, 1915; private collection), the painting that summed up Bloch's involvement with the commedia dell'arte during the early years of his career.<sup>22</sup> After this the Pierrot type seen in the paintings of 1911–15 disappeared from Bloch's art, but his love of the commedia dell'arte never faded. Other versions of Pierrot, along with Harlequin, Columbine, and a host of other clowns, recur in the work of Bloch's later American period, when his art reached its full maturity and apogee of expressive power.

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## NOTES

1. This exhibition, which ran from 18 December 1911 to 3 January 1912, featured fifty works by fourteen artists. The catalogue lists forty-three works, but several additional ones were shown *hors catalogue*. For detailed accounts of the first Blue Rider exhibition, see Janice McCullagh, "Disappearances; Appearances: The First Exhibition of the 'Blaue Reiter,'" *Arts Magazine* 62 (September 1987), 46–53; and Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, "Der Blaue Reiter," in *Stationen der Moderne: Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, in association with Nicolai, 1988), 109–29. I am grateful to Mrs. Albert Bloch for her assistance in the preparation of this entry.
2. Examination of *Die drei Pierrots Nr. 2* with the Museum's paintings conservator Scott Heffley revealed underlying brushwork that probably corresponds to an earlier composition; however, the imagery of this composition was impossible to determine. Early in his career Bloch painted over other compositions. These include *Untitled (Two Seated Nudes)*, c. 1911; private collection); *Häuser bei Nacht (Houses at Night)*, 1911; private collection); and *Untitled (Infernal Figures)*, 1912; private collection). Bloch may have chosen to paint over his earlier compositions because he was dissatisfied with them or because he was simply too poor at this time to purchase new materials.
3. Albert Bloch, "American Painting in Germany," *Mirror*, 9 June 1910, 4–6, quoted in Werner Mohr, "Albert Bloch as Caricaturist, Social Critic, and Authorized Translator of Karl Kraus in America." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1994, 19–20.
4. Both Henry Adams and Annegret Hoberg propose this reason for Marc and Kandinsky's interest in Bloch. See Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," in *Albert Bloch: The American Blue Rider*, ed. Adams, Margaret C. Conrads, and Hoberg, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1997), 28; and Hoberg, "Albert Bloch in Munich, 1909–1921," in *ibid.*, 60.
5. For an outline of Bloch's biography, see Annegret Hoberg, "Albert Bloch—Chronology," in Adams, Conrads, and Hoberg, *Albert Bloch*, 9–16.
6. By Bloch's own account, his only formal training in painting came in 1905–6 in the form of a few lessons from the English artist Dawson Dawson-Watson, an instructor at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts. Albert Bloch to Harold Butler, 23 June 1923, in Adams, Conrads, and Hoberg, *Albert Bloch*, 198.
7. On this point, see Hoberg, "Albert Bloch in Munich," 59. Hoberg, 59–60, also identifies the "cloisonnism" of Adolf Hölzel as an influence on Bloch around the middle of 1911. In the summer of 1911 Bloch painted at Dachau, north of Munich, where Hölzel was an influential teacher.
8. Wassily Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, ed. and trans. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vervo (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 1:113.
9. The roster of exhibiting artists included, in addition to the American Bloch, the Russians David and Wladimir Burluk, Elizabeth Epstein, and Wassily Kandinsky; the Frenchmen Robert Delaunay and Henri "Le Douanier" Rousseau; the Czech Eugen Kahler; and the Germans Heinrich Campendonk, Auguste Macke, Franz Marc, Gabriele Münter, Jean Bloé Niestlé, and Arnold Schönberg (better known now as a composer).
10. McCullagh, "Disappearances; Appearances," 49.
11. The paintings are listed in this order as catalogue numbers 3–8 in *Die erste Ausstellung der Redaktion der Blaue Reiter*, exh. cat. (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1911), 3.
12. Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell'Arte and the Modern Imagination* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 4.
13. *Ibid.*, 163.
14. This discussion of the commedia dell'arte characters follows Janice McCullagh, "Albert Bloch's Clowns," in *Albert Bloch: Artistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Baron, Helmut Amtzen, and David Cateforis (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, University of Kansas, 1997), 42–49. See also Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," 34–36.
15. For a survey of commedia dell'arte images by European artists from the sixteenth through the late twentieth centuries, see Thomas Kellein, *Pierrot: Melancolie und Maske*, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1995).
16. For example, the writer and actress Franziska zu Reventlow, known as "the queen of Schwabing," wrote of dancing through the week of *Fasching* in a Pierrot costume. Green and Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot*, 31–32.
17. Joseph Strong [Albert Bloch], "Wehmut," *Mirror*, 7 March 1912, 6, quoted in Mohr, "Albert Bloch as Caricaturist," 34.
18. Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," 36.
19. The other clowns depicted are Columbine, Pulcinella (another popular commedia dell'arte character), and a demonic character of Bloch's own invention.
20. Included in this group are *Pierrot, Liegende Gestalt (Reclining Figure)*, 1911; Poppe Collection, Hamburg) and *Flötender Pierrot (Piping Pierrot)*, 1911; private collection).
21. For example, in *Sommernacht (Summer Night)*, 1913; private collection), four contemplative Pierrots occupy a luminous nocturnal landscape. In *Lied I (Song I)*, 1913–14; Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Ind.), five Pierrots in a convulsive mountain landscape assume various attitudes ranging from withdrawal to exaltation. *Begräbnis (Entombment)*, 1914; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich) centers on the burial of a white Pierrot attended by a dark mass of mourners and suggests the entombment of Christ. *Harlekin mit drei Pierrots (Harlequin with Three Pierrots)*, 1914; Art Institute of Chicago), probably Bloch's best-known painting, juxtaposes an agile, leaping Harlequin with three Pierrots standing passively in a row.
22. On this point, see McCullagh, "Albert Bloch's Clowns," 49.



## ALBERT BLOCH (1882–1961)

### *Klagelied (Lamentation)*, 1912–13

Oil on canvas

38½ × 40⅜ in. (97.8 × 102.6 cm)

Signed with monogram center: ; inscribed on verso upper left: I bis VIII / 1913

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Harold J. Lasky, F98-29

FOLLOWING HIS PARTICIPATION in the first exhibition of the Blue Rider, Albert Bloch exhibited his work widely in Germany, showing in three group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions over the next two years.<sup>1</sup> The second of those solo exhibitions, held at Der Sturm gallery in Berlin, included *Klagelied (Lamentation)*.<sup>2</sup> The nearly square canvas depicts seven shrouded, monumental figures set before a minimally defined landscape. On the far left is a seated figure, draped in red. Above and to the right, a figure clad in pale yellow stands with face and arms raised toward the sky. In the center, two figures, one in blue, the other in yellow, turn their bowed heads in on their amorphous bodies. To their right, a standing figure in blue consoles a grieving figure in dark yellow. On the ground at the lower center, a green-clad mourner hunches over to become a rounded mass of drapery.

The figures' external contours are clearly defined by line and through value contrasts. But the figures are also thinly painted—in some places, the paint is scrubbed rather than brushed on—producing an effect of transparency at odds with their evident monumentality. Their bodies receive varying degrees of internal definition, ranging from the fairly detailed linear articulation of drapery folds and suggestions of underlying anatomical volumes in the upper-left- and right-hand pair of figures to the generalized treatment of the body as a flat mass of color in the seated red and yellow figures.

With the exception of the uppermost mourner, the figures' contours create predominantly curvilinear rhythms that unify the individual bodies into a larger, flowing mass. Close physical relationships between the figures are suggested in certain areas through formal means. Just below the standing yellow figure, for example, the silhouettes of the seated red and yellow figures meet and their bodies seem to merge. Set in counterpoint to the curving bodies in *Klagelied* are diagonal accents formed by a small number of rectilinear landscape elements, including an abstracted tree trunk at the left edge of the picture and several triangular forms posing as mountains.

*Klagelied*'s moderately abstract style is the product of Bloch's experimentation with current trends in modernist painting and has affinities with the art of his friend and fellow Blue Rider artist, Franz Marc. Some of Marc's contemporaneous paintings, for example, *Cows, Yellow, Red, Green* (1912; Städtische Galerie

im Lenbachhaus, Munich), show a few animals closely grouped together, each one rendered in a different primary or secondary color. Bloch reaches for a similar effect through his compact arrangement of figures draped in red, blue, yellow, and green, though they are rendered in less saturated hues than the ones favored by Marc. Even the slender tree along the left edge of Bloch's painting finds its counterpart in the work of Marc, whose *Large Blue Horses* (1911; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis) features two twisting white trunks that extend, like the tree in *Klagelied*, beyond the top edge of the canvas.<sup>3</sup>

Bloch's picture is distinguishable from the work of Marc and other Blue Rider artists in its subject matter, which is clearly derived from the religious paintings of the old masters. By the time he painted *Klagelied*, Bloch had studied older European art in the major museums of London, Paris, and probably Berlin, and had immersed himself thoroughly in the great collection of the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. But *Klagelied* was most strongly influenced by an artist whose greatest works Bloch, who never traveled to Italy, would have known only through reproduction: Giotto. A decade after painting *Klagelied*, Bloch, in one of his art history lectures, expressed unbounded admiration for Giotto, writing: "Never has expression in painting been more direct, more sincere, more unaffected."<sup>4</sup> In the same lecture, Bloch noted Giotto's strong influence on the European modernists.<sup>5</sup> That Bloch himself had responded to this influence is evident in the figures of *Klagelied*, whose monumental forms, somber bearing, and simple gestures recall those of the figures in the Italian master's most celebrated work, the Arena Chapel frescoes in Padua (Fig. 1). Similar, too, is the compositional emphasis on human actors in the foreground of an austere landscape defined through a few abstracted rock and tree forms. Even the nearly square format of *Klagelied*, slightly wider than it is high, approximates the format of the major scenes of Giotto's Arena Chapel cycle. Bloch's painting may owe its very subject to Giotto's Arena Chapel fresco of the Lamentation, in which several draped mourners in robes of different colors cluster around the body of the dead Christ. Further evidence of Bloch's awareness of Giotto's composition is found in the seated red figure on the left side of *Klagelied*, whose back is turned to the viewer. This figure appears to be based on the similarly positioned figure in the lower left corner of Giotto's *Lamentation*, who reaches out to support the head of Christ. And while *Klagelied*'s other figures do not seem to be derived directly from Giotto, their various postures and gestures recall, in a general way, the Italian artist's designs.

There are, of course, fundamental stylistic differences between Bloch's *Klagelied* and Giotto's *Lamentation*. The space in Bloch's picture is more compressed, the colors less naturalistic, the landscape and sky more abstract. The figures are less volumetric and





Fig. 1 Giotto di Bondone, *Pietà* (Lamentation), 1303–6. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy. © Alinari / Art Resource, NY

are less anatomically credible. In all of these qualities, Bloch's picture moves away from the very naturalism toward which Giotto's art aspired. Bloch's style in *Klagelied*, in keeping with the dominant tendency in modernist painting as it developed before World War I, turns toward abstraction. It is reasonable to understand Bloch's picture as an attempt to render a Giottesque subject in a contemporary stylistic language, driven perhaps by a desire to make it come alive again for a modern audience.

Bloch's treatment of the subject is also more abstract than Giotto's in its degree of generalization. Giotto's fresco represents a specifically Christian Lamentation. Bloch's picture, by contrast, includes no identifiably Christian iconographic elements, and the tragedy over which his mourners grieve is not necessarily the death of Christ. In this, Bloch departed not only from the iconographic specificity of the old masters but also from his own earlier efforts at religious painting, such as *Kreuztragung* (*Procession of the Cross*, 1911; Smithsonian American Art Museum) and *Kopf* (*Head*, 1911; private collection), whose subjects are explicitly Christian.<sup>6</sup> The mourners in *Klagelied* are generic representatives of humanity, without specific age, sex, race, or religion. They seem intended to express the emotional and spiritual essence of lamentation, extending beyond the bounds of any one historical event or religious belief. This desire for essential expression impelled Bloch's stylization of the figures and their environment.

As the Chicago collector Arthur Jerome Eddy, an early owner of the painting, perceptively observed: "The figures convey the feeling of lamentation far more powerfully than if they more literally resembled human beings; they are sorrowing masses, as distinguished from mere weeping men and women."<sup>7</sup>

*Klagelied* is significant as the first articulation of the subject of shrouded mourning figures that would recur frequently in Bloch's work following his return to the United States after World War I. Compositions depicting heavily draped mourners in desolate landscapes, such as *Lamentation* (1931; private collection), *Through the Night* (1942; Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.), and *The Grieving Women* (1950/1957; private collection), convey profound despair and urge an empathetic response from the viewer. Such pictures may be interpreted on one level as Bloch's response to grim historical episodes such as the Depression, World War II, and the Holocaust. But more fundamentally, through their generalized treatment of the subject of mourning—a treatment first essayed in *Klagelied*—they recognize tragedy as an inescapable aspect of the human condition, in all times and in all places.

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## NOTES

1. Bloch contributed eight drawings to the Blue Rider's second exhibition, *Schwartz und Weiss (Black and White)*, held February–April 1912 in the Munich gallery of Hans Goltz. From May to September, one of Bloch's canvases was on view in the *International Exhibition of the Sonderbund* in Cologne, the most comprehensive survey of modern European art to date. The following May, Bloch had his first solo exhibition, at Max Dietzel's Neue Kunstsalon in Munich. That September Bloch was included in the international *First German Autumn Salon*, organized in Berlin by Herwarth Walden, publisher of the magazine *Der Sturm* and proprietor of Der Sturm gallery, a major showcase for German Expressionist art. In December Bloch was given his own large solo exhibition at Der Sturm. I am grateful to Mrs. Albert Bloch for her assistance in the preparation of this entry.
2. The catalogue of Bloch's 1915 exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago indicates that *Klagelied* was also shown in the *Berlin Autumn Salon* of 1913, meaning Walden's *First German Autumn Salon*, which immediately preceded Bloch's solo show at Der Sturm. See *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Modern Paintings by Albert Bloch of Munich*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1915), 3. However, *Klagelied* is not listed among Bloch's five works in the catalogue of the *First German Autumn Salon*, so the Chicago catalogue may be in error. *Klagelied* is dated 1912–13, in accordance with the artist's own dating of it in his record book and in his annotated copy of the 1922 Eddy memorial exhibition catalogue (see n7) (both in the collection of Mrs. Albert Bloch). The inscription on the back of the canvas indicates, however, that the picture was executed from January to August 1913. Annegret Hoberg and Henry Adams, eds., *Albert Bloch: Ein amerikanischer Blauer Reiter*, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1997), 34, 209.
3. A tree similar in character to the one in *Klagelied* also appears in Bloch's earlier painting *Piping Pierrot* (1911; private collection), whose composition may have been inspired by Franz Marc's *Blue Horse I* (1911; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich).
4. Albert Bloch, "Lecture No. 2: Cimabue and Giotto," unpublished typescript lecture notes for a course in the history of art taught at the University of Kansas, 1923–24, 23. Courtesy of Mrs. Albert Bloch.
5. *Ibid.*, 26.
6. Bloch did, however, depict overtly Christian subjects on numerous later occasions, and although he never joined a church, his art and writings give ample evidence of his deep Christian faith. For a detailed consideration of Bloch's Christian paintings, see Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen, "Albert Bloch's Images of Christ," in *Albert Bloch: Artistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Baron, Helmut Arntzen, and David Cateforis (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, University of Kansas, 1997), 55–66.
7. Arthur Jerome Eddy, foreword to *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Modern Paintings by Albert Bloch of Munich*, 7. In the same place, Eddy wrote that "'Lamentation' (No. 5) is founded on a poem by the late Max Bierbauer. It is the spirit of the poem on canvas." By "Max Bierbauer" the not-always-reliable Eddy meant Otto Julius Bierbaum, a prominent turn-of-the-century German Symbolist writer and editor. The only poem by Bierbaum thematically related to the subject of Bloch's *Klagelied* is "Golgotha," in Bierbaum, *Gesammelte Werke, Erster Band: Gedichte*, ed. Georg Conrad and Hans Brandenburg (Munich: Georg Müller, n.d. [1912]), 2–4, a visionary prose poem in which a mysterious old man shows the narrator the crucified Christ in a variety of modern settings, and which includes a passing reference to the sound of lamentation (*Sterbeklagen*). It is by no means certain that Bloch painted *Klagelied* in response to Bierbaum's poem, however. In the catalogue of the 1922 Eddy memorial exhibition, *Exhibition of Paintings from the Collection of the Late Arthur Jerome Eddy*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute

of Chicago, 1922), it is not *Klagelied* but another painting by Bloch, *Summer Night* (1913; private collection), that is listed as "inspired by a poem by the late Max Bierbaum." In a handwritten note in his copy of the catalogue, Bloch corrected Eddy: "The name is Otto Julius B." and added, "but the picture was not 'inspired' by his poem." Annegret Hoberg provides evidence, however, that Bloch did paint *Summer Night* in response to a poem by Bierbaum, noting that a drawing by Bloch of 1913 (private collection) is inscribed "Summer night, dream summer night . . . Bierbaum." Hoberg, "Albert Bloch in Munich, 1909–1921," in *Albert Bloch: The American Blue Rider*, ed. Henry Adams, Margaret C. Conrads, and Hoberg, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1997), 66. Bloch may have had in mind Bierbaum's poem "An die Nacht" (To the Night), in *Gesammelte Werke*, 61, which contains the word *Sommernacht*.

## ALBERT BLOCH (1882–1961)

### *Winter in the Dead Wood*, 1934–38 (*Winter in Toten Wald*)

Oil on canvas

30½ × 36½ in. (76.5 × 91.8 cm)

Signed with monogram and dated lower center: *B*/ 1934

Gift of Mrs. Albert Bloch, F97-14/2

A HAUNTING IMAGE OF A COLD and desolate forest, *Winter in the Dead Wood* is a compelling example of the later painting of Albert Bloch, who worked in the United States for some forty years after his decade of residence (1909–19) in Germany. Teaching and painting in Kansas, at considerable remove from the European and New York art worlds, Bloch turned away from the experimentation with modernist styles that had characterized his earlier efforts and embraced tradition and technical mastery as the necessary bases for genuine artistic accomplishment.<sup>1</sup> While he continued to paint the same subjects as he had in Germany—clowns and commedia dell'arte characters, Christian scenes, shrouded mourners, still lifes, and landscapes—he now gave them a “somber monumentality” that, as he explained in 1936, “comes from an intensity for which I was then [in the German period] far from mature enough and is based upon a penetrating study of nature and a profound experiencing of the treated motifs.”<sup>2</sup>

*Winter in the Dead Wood* epitomizes the “somber monumentality” noted by its author. The palette is limited to earth colors, white, and blue—the characteristic hues of Bloch’s later painting, quite appropriate, in this case, to the hibernal subject. The forest is a bleak, snow-covered terrain, sparsely littered with dead trees. A dark clump of stubby trees at the left and a larger screen of brown trunks at the right serve as *répoussoirs*, guiding the eye into the landscape’s lighter-toned middle and backgrounds. The liberal use of white throughout the landscape imparts to it a penetrating quality of coldness. Above the hilly horizon hang a damp gray sky and at the right a dull red sun, half obscured by a low hill. The only living creatures in the forest are a pair of crows or ravens at the upper center, whose presence throws into relief the absence of human beings.

*Winter in the Dead Wood* may appear to depict a specific place but is a product of Bloch’s imagination. Informed by his study of nature and art, it is realized solely through the process of painting. Bloch had ceased to work from nature during his years in Munich, as he came to conceive of art, not as a means of rendering a likeness, but of kindling spiritual awareness. In 1923 Bloch declared that the sole function of art “*has always been and must always remain the deepening of the human perception and consciousness . . . to give to the human race some sense of the dependence*

of our life here on earth, upon a state of being higher than our present one: to bring to us a profounder feeling of our inextricable union with the Infinite.”<sup>3</sup>

With such lofty words Bloch expressed his continuing commitment to the idealistic values of the Blue Rider, whose founders, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, saw their art as a weapon against the deadening forces of materialism and a catalyst for spiritual renewal. Bloch remained in contact with Kandinsky until the outbreak of World War I (which forced Kandinsky to return to Russia) and with Marc until the latter’s death at the front in 1916. Thereafter Bloch corresponded with Marc’s widow, Maria, and in the mid-1930s he exchanged letters with Kandinsky. To the end of his life, Bloch remained “grateful” to Kandinsky and Marc “for the tremendous stimulation which association with them brought me.”<sup>4</sup>

Although World War I dispersed the Blue Rider circle, Bloch and his family remained in Munich throughout the conflict, and Bloch continued to work, exhibit, and sell his art. The only difficulty his American citizenship caused him was the necessity, after the United States entered the war, of reporting weekly as an enemy alien. After Germany surrendered in late 1918, however, harsh living conditions and growing hostility toward foreigners in Bavaria prompted Bloch to return with his family to St. Louis. He made a final trip to Europe in 1920–21 to bid farewell to old friends and to settle his affairs in Munich, and then settled permanently in the United States.

In November 1921 a large retrospective exhibition of Bloch’s paintings opened at the Daniel Gallery in New York. The show was well received, but Bloch, who had developed a strong aversion to the commercialization of art, resolved afterward to cut his ties with dealers and to exhibit only by invitation. Turning his back on New York, he returned to the Midwest, accepting a job at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, where he taught in 1922–23. In 1923 he became head of the Department of Drawing and Painting at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, where he taught art and art history for the next twenty-four years. He continued to paint, gradually abandoning his earlier experiments with modernism to develop a highly personal representational style of great expressive intensity. After he retired in 1947, Bloch lived and worked in Lawrence, where he died in 1961.

In addition to his work as an artist and teacher during his Kansas years, Bloch was active as a man of letters, writing essays and poems and translating into English the German poetry of such authors as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Georg Trakl, and Karl Kraus.<sup>5</sup> Kraus, a prominent Viennese satirist, critic, and poet, played a crucial role in Bloch’s intellectual and artistic development.





Fig. 1 Albert Bloch, *Winter in the Dead Wood*, before changes made by 1938. Photograph courtesy of the Albert Bloch Foundation

Bloch called Kraus his “master” and “the most ardent ethical force at work in the world today.”<sup>6</sup> He shared Kraus’s hostility toward many of the principal values of twentieth-century Western civilization and echoed his denunciations of uncontrolled technological development, bourgeois social decadence, and the debasement of language by modern journalism. Bloch read Kraus’s journal *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*) religiously, and in the late 1920s he began translating Kraus’s poetry, bringing out in 1930 the first English edition of his selected poems, authorized by the poet.<sup>7</sup> Following Kraus’s death, Bloch corresponded with members of his circle in Europe.

Even though Kraus largely ignored the visual arts, Bloch claimed to have learned more about painting from Kraus than from anyone else.<sup>8</sup> Kraus’s writings strongly influenced Bloch’s artistic sensibility, and Henry Adams suggests that Bloch’s late paintings can be understood as attempts to give visual form to Kraus’s moral and spiritual views.<sup>9</sup> In a few cases, scholars have proposed direct correspondences between the subjects of Bloch’s paintings and those of Kraus’s poems.<sup>10</sup> Among these is the possible influence on Bloch’s canvas *Winter in the Dead Wood* of Kraus’s poem “Die Tote Wald” (*The Dead Wood*), from *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (*The Last Days of Mankind*), an epic drama of protest against World War I.<sup>11</sup>

The only important Austrian writer to speak out consistently against the war, Kraus published *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* in special issues of *Die Fackel* in 1918 and 1919 and in book form in 1922.<sup>12</sup> Almost eight hundred pages long, the drama presents through hundreds of scenes and characters a sprawling panorama

of events on all the war’s fronts as well as behind the lines and in the capitals of Vienna and Berlin. The harrowing climax occurs in the final act, after a banquet attended by German and Austrian officers, where a series of apparitional victims of the war appear to condemn their tormentors.

Among these apparitions is a dead wood. Bloch translated Kraus’s description as: “A Dead Wood. The trees round about shot to splinters, cut down, sawn away. Naked soil, from which, here and there, rise a few sick trees. By hundreds the fallen, stripped, cloven trunks lie about upon the ground, their bark already half rotted. The dilapidated tracks of a military railway traverse the space.”<sup>13</sup> The dead trees intone the following verses: “Your hellish power has won the day. / I once was green. Now I am grey. / Behold the place where I once stood. / I was a wood! I was a wood! / The soul found here beneath my dome, / you Christians, her eternal Rome. / Here in my silence was the Word. / O murderers, had you but heard! / You struck me down; my curse on you! / No more I mount toward heaven’s blue. / How old I am! How green I stood. / I was a wood! I was a wood!”<sup>14</sup>

Bloch’s *Winter in the Dead Wood*, which depicts snow-covered ground rather than “naked soil” and shows neither fallen trunks nor old railroad tracks, does not literally illustrate Kraus’s forest. In fact, the imagery of the painting seems less a response to Kraus’s description of the forest than to the forest’s poetic utterance; it may be understood as a mental picture of the landscape evoked by the poem. Adams has noted an anthropomorphic quality in the trees in *Winter in the Dead Wood*, which seem to gesture like human sufferers.<sup>15</sup> Bloch may have intended to suggest that the

trees have the power not only to gesture but to speak, as they do in Kraus's poem.

To the landscape Bloch added other elements that resonate with the mournful mood of the poem, such as the dark birds, which may have been inspired by another of the apparitions at the end of *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, the ravens, which circle around a pile of corpses, chanting: "Food we find in plenty ever, / while young manhood dies for glory. / For while hearts mate ravens never / starve. It is the old old story."<sup>16</sup> Amplifying such macabre associations were two other motifs that Bloch originally included in *Winter in the Dead Wood* but later painted over: a dark owl perched on the stump at the left, and a human skull lying on the ground below it (Fig. 1). Not surprisingly, the skull is another element that appears in the final section of *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*.<sup>17</sup>

We can only speculate why Bloch removed the owl and the skull from the painting, probably in 1938, the second date on the back of the painting.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps he felt that the composition had become overloaded with symbolism. The decision arguably was a wise one, for it made the picture more ambiguous and opened it up to a wider range of interpretations. In its final state, *Winter in the Dead Wood* is capable of generating many possible meanings beyond those suggested by the poetry of Kraus that may initially have inspired it. While the painting may be interpreted as a somber reflection on World War I, it may simultaneously be seen as a rueful prediction of another war to come—Bloch's poetic response to the rise of fascism in Europe and the horrors that he sensed would follow. The painting also might suggest the bleak mood of the Great Depression, which cast a grim shadow over the United States throughout the 1930s, and likewise found symbolic form in the art of Charles Burchfield. And the picture need not even be seen as unrelievedly dark in mood; Adams detects in it "elements of hopefulness," noting that the "gestures of the trees stretch heavenward . . . and two of them on the left combine to form an arch, thus suggesting both a loving couple and the vaulting of a church or cathedral."<sup>19</sup> In addition, the sun could just as well be rising as setting.

In the end, *Winter in the Dead Wood*, like Bloch's art in general, resists definitive interpretation and invites from each viewer a fresh, personal response. "The artist is not the sole creator of his work," the painter wrote. "His dream is of an ideal public, of whom he should expect each individual who peruses what he has made, to re-create it for himself, so that at each beholding a *new* work shall come into being."<sup>20</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Albert Bloch to Edward A. Maser, 20 June 1955, reprinted in *Albert Bloch: The American Blue Rider*, ed. Henry Adams, Margaret C. Conrads, and Annegret Hoberg, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1997), 206. I am grateful to Mrs. Albert Bloch for her assistance in the preparation of this entry.
2. Bloch to Maria Marc, January 1936, quoted in Richard Green, "Albert Bloch: An Overview of His Artistic Career," in *Albert Bloch: Artistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Baron, Helmut Arntzen, and David Cateforis (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, in association with Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, University of Kansas, 1997), 19. For the original German of the letter, see Adams, Conrads, and Hoberg, *Albert Bloch*, 182.
3. Albert Bloch, "Lecture No. 1: General Introduction," unpublished typescript lecture notes for a course in the history of art taught at the University of Kansas, 1923–24, unpaginated. Courtesy of Mrs. Albert Bloch.
4. Bloch to Edward A. Maser, 20 June 1955, reprinted in Adams, Conrads, and Hoberg, *Albert Bloch*, 207.
5. Selected original and translated poems were published in Albert Bloch, *Ventures in Verse* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1947).
6. Albert Bloch, "To Karl Kraus" and "Ventures in Verse," vol. 1, unpublished manuscript, early 1930s–37, unpaginated. Courtesy of Mrs. Albert Bloch; and Albert Bloch, "Translator's Foreword," in Karl Kraus, *Poems: Authorised Translations from the German*, trans. Bloch (Boston: Four Seas Press, 1930), 11.
7. Bloch, "Translator's Foreword," 11.
8. Anna Bloch to Klaus Lankheit, 2 April 1965, quoted in Frank Baron, introduction to *German Poetry in War and Peace: A Dual-Language Anthology*, trans. Albert Bloch, ed. Baron (Lawrence: Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, University of Kansas, 1995), xiv.
9. Henry Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," in Adams, Conrads, and Hoberg, *Albert Bloch*, 48.
10. See Baron, introduction, xx–xxiv. See also Elke Lorenz Champion, "The Discovery of Karl Kraus' Poetry in Albert Bloch's Correspondence with Sidonie Nadherny," in Baron, Arntzen, and Cateforis, *Albert Bloch*, 145–53.
11. This connection was first noted by Werner Mohr, "Albert Bloch as Caricaturist, Social Critic, and Authorized Translator of Karl Kraus in America," Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1994, 253–54.
12. An abridged English edition, containing a useful introduction to Kraus's work by Frederick Ungar and a critical analysis of the drama by Franz H. Mautner, was published in 1974. See Karl Kraus, *The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, abridged, edited, and introduced by Ungar (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1974).
13. Kraus, *German Poetry in War and Peace*, 107. Kraus's original German appears on 106.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," 50.
16. Kraus, *German Poetry in War and Peace*, 115. Kraus's German appears on 114.
17. See Kraus, *The Last Days of Mankind*, 231: "A battlefield. Craters and holes. Walking paths through the barbed wire, which is still standing. Luxury automobiles arrive. The tourists scatter in groups, photograph each other in heroic positions, parody gun salvos, laugh and emit cries. One has found a skull, sticks it on the end of his walking stick, and brings it along with a triumphant expression. A mourner steps among them, appropriates the find for himself, and buries the skull. (The apparition vanishes.)"
18. If Bloch did indeed paint out the owl and skull only in 1938, they would still have been present when *Winter in the Dead Wood* was exhibited in 1936 at the *First National Exhibition of American Art* in New York. Evidence to confirm this is lacking, but it is tempting to speculate that the photograph of the first state of *Winter in the Dead Wood* was taken around the time of its inclusion in the New York show.
19. Adams, "Albert Bloch: The Invisible Blue Rider," 50.
20. Albert Bloch, "Painter's Progress," in "Ishmael's Breviary," unpublished manuscript, n.d., unpaginated. Courtesy of Mrs. Albert Bloch.



## ROSS EUGENE BRAUGHT (1898–1983)

### *Tschaikovsky's Sixth*, 1935

Oil on canvas

35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 40<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (91.1 × 101.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Ross Braught 35

Gift of Mrs. Massey Holmes, 38-15

ROSS BRAUGHT DEPICTS in *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* a view of the Badlands, the windswept, desolate region that lies between the Cheyenne and White Rivers in present-day South Dakota. The composition presents a formidable expanse of barren landscape, an inhospitable zone that French hunters and fur traders in the late eighteenth century described as “les mauvaises terres à traverser” (the bad lands to travel through) and nearby Lakota (or Sioux) tribes called “mako sica” (land bad).<sup>1</sup> Using curvilinear lines and organic forms, Braught envisions the Badlands undulating ceaselessly like abundant rolls of flesh, particularly in the foreground, where the artist offers a close-up view of the strange topography. Strong contrasts of light and shadow further emphasize the unusual effects of erosion, which appear like deep wrinkles in smooth skin and thus lend this otherwise austere image a sensuous appeal. On the distant horizon, mounds of earth evolve into ominous silhouettes, accentuated by the silvery, diffused light that pervades the scene from the hazy sky above. Appearing from the right-hand side of the composition, a single airborne dove reminds the viewer that this fantastic and seemingly otherworldly place is, nevertheless, earthbound.

A native of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Braught exhibited a predisposition to experience and to paint unfamiliar, exotic places. This penchant was fostered by his father, who engendered in his son a love of both art and reading. Following early lessons at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Braught received in 1921 a prestigious travel scholarship that enabled him to visit Europe.<sup>2</sup> When he returned to the United States, Braught married and moved with his wife to Upper Black Eddy, Pennsylvania, on the Delaware River. Braught could live and work there in proximity to both Philadelphia and New York City while also enjoying solitude. In 1925 he earned his first solo exhibition in New York, which was warmly received by critics.<sup>3</sup> His career on the rise, he moved his family in 1928 to the art colony of Woodstock, in New York's Catskill Mountains. Braught soon began working in lithography, a medium well suited to his drawing talents, and one that appealed to a wider audience and clientele. Throughout these early years, he painted mainly landscape, an interest that continued. His style, however, evolved significantly, moving from a moody, vaguely Art Nouveau-inspired mode of painting to more realist compositions possessing strong geometric substructures and, always, fine draftsmanship, a trait for which Braught would become highly regarded.

Braught's appetite for adventurous art-making seems to have been whetted especially by a move to the Midwest. In need of greater professional and financial security at the onset of the Great Depression, the artist accepted in 1931 the job as head of the painting department at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he earned the reputation as a popular, if somewhat quirky, teacher.<sup>4</sup> In 1933 Braught organized a painting trip with students to the Grand Canyon, where the magnificently eroded desert landscape seems to have awakened thoughts of new subjects in his own art.<sup>5</sup>

Braught first encountered the Badlands in the summer of 1934. The painter could have become aware of the region and its strange geography through a variety of means. For example, Gutzon Borglum's progress on his monumental sculptural project at nearby Mount Rushmore, begun in 1927, continued to garner considerable press.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, South Dakota state legislators had been working since the turn of the century to convince Congress to set aside a national park in the Badlands, which were increasingly used to promote tourism.<sup>7</sup> Other inducements to travel might have been literary, including Theodore Roosevelt's *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), the future president's immensely popular memoir of living in the Dakota Territory, or *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), the autobiography of an elderly Lakota holy man who still lived within sight of the Badlands near Pine Ridge.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever inspired Braught to travel there, the experience and the vision of the Badlands haunted him and his work for months to come. The painter executed at least two canvases featuring Badlands scenery, *Badlands, South Dakota* (c. 1930; Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis), which he exhibited at the Kansas City Art Institute's *Mid-Western Artists Exhibition* in February 1935, and the Nelson-Atkins *Tschaikovsky's Sixth*, first exhibited in 1938. At least three prints in his lithography exhibition at New York's Ferargil Galleries in 1935 depicted Badlands scenery. Additionally, he incorporated Badlands landscape imagery into two other major projects of the period: an illustrated book, *Phaethon*, published in December 1935, which tells the fateful story of a youth who desires to drive the sun chariot of his father, Helios; and a mural he completed six months later for the Music Hall lobby of the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium, *Muemosyne and the Four Muses* (1936).<sup>9</sup> *Tschaikovsky's Sixth's* symphonic title and similarities of color and composition further link the painting to Braught's impressive Music Hall mural.

Compositionally and conceptually, *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* is most closely tied to a lithograph Braught exhibited at the *Mid-Western Artists Exhibition* at the Art Institute in February 1935. A near mirror reversal of the painting, the print bore the Lakotan name *Mako Sica* (Fig. 1) but had been pulled from a stone dated “34” bearing the inscription “Tschowsky's [*sic*] Sixth” (Hirschl & Adler





Fig. 1 Ross Eugene Braught, *Mako Sica*, 1936. Lithograph, 13¼ × 14 in. (33.7 × 35.6 cm). Ross Braught Estate, Courtesy of Hirsch & Adler Galleries, New York

Galleries, New York), linking it irrevocably to the Nelson-Atkins painting.<sup>10</sup> The two compositions differ most of all in the conspicuous inclusion of the dove in the painting, an addition that simultaneously connects the painting to the real, observable world and moves it beyond geographical reportage to a realm of transcendence and spirituality.

Iconographically, the dove points to the Old Testament story of the Flood, where Noah releases a dove from the ark for assurance that floodwaters had receded. The olive branch the dove brought back to Noah signified the presence of dry land and renewed life after the deluge. It serves furthermore as the Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit or the soul. In this regard, the dove is related particularly to the Incarnation of Christ, in which Mary's imminent pregnancy is symbolized by a dove, which, as artists have typically depicted it, flies toward her abdomen or hovers over her head.<sup>11</sup> As a result of these iconographic allusions, the airborne dove in *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* highlights the fact that this infertile landscape lacks the capacity to spawn and sustain life.

Such an implication would have been especially meaningful during the time of the Dust Bowl, a sustained ecological disaster precipitated by faulty agricultural practices, which inspired many American painters and photographers to depict compelling scenes of geologic ruin on the prairie. From this perspective, Braught's *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* should be understood in relative proximity to such works as Joe Jones's *American Farm* (1936; Whitney

Museum of American Art), in which eroded plains have left a solitary farmhouse perched on a narrow cliff, and Alexandre Hogue's indictment of farm policy, *Erosion No. 2: Mother Earth Laid Bare* (1938; Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Okla.), in which barren ridges take the shape of a female nude, lying before a gleaming plow. The fact that Braught executed *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* in 1935—the worst year of the Dust Bowl—further accentuates the timeliness of the image in light of these bleak circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Because he was based in the Midwest and because he was devoted to representational painting, Braught became closely associated with Regionalism.<sup>13</sup> However, of his American contemporaries, Braught's spiritually infused, anthropomorphic vision of the Badlands recalls most of all Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.) and her New Mexican landscapes like *Grey Hill Forms* (Fig. 2), which also undulates with an irrepressible organic vitality.<sup>14</sup> Although it seems they never knew each other, Braught and O'Keeffe were kindred spirits who shunned large urban centers and sought to portray in their work the primal energies coursing through nature.

*Tschaikovsky's Sixth* also reveals that Braught shared with O'Keeffe—and many other artists of their generation—an interest in synesthesia, a nineteenth-century theory of experience that emphasized the connectedness and equivalency of the senses.<sup>15</sup> Of particular interest to artists was the synesthetic conflation of visual and aural experiences—the idea that color, for example, possesses

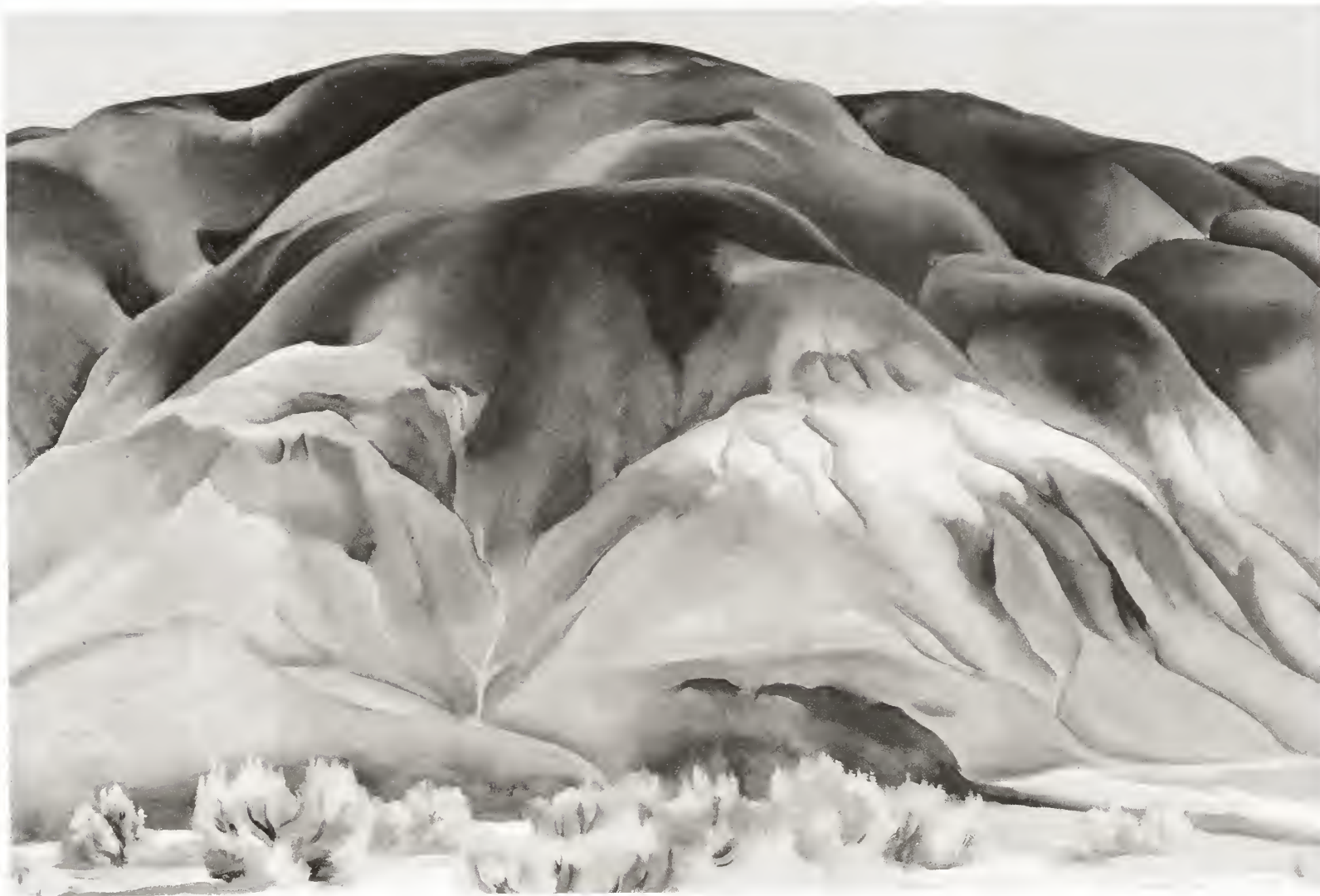


Fig. 2 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Grey Hill Forms*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 20 × 30 in. (50.8 × 76.2 cm). University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque, Gift of the Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe. © 2005 The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

and emits a “sound” and vice versa. Aspiring to approximate in their works the emotional and subjective qualities they perceived in music, painters as diverse as James McNeill Whistler and Wassily Kandinsky began incorporating musical references into the titles of their works. By choosing “Tchaikovsky’s Sixth,” the shortened form of the legendary Russian composer’s most famous symphony, Braught extended this tradition.

Braught’s adoption of “Tchaikovsky’s Sixth” as the title of the Nelson-Atkins painting furthermore heightens its psychological resonance. Intensely personal and emotional, Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6, the “Pathétique,” has been overwhelming and confounding American audiences since its New York premiere in 1894. Becoming a standard in American repertoire, it was performed and recorded well into the 1930s and beyond. Its French subtitle, “Pathétique,” denotes *pathos*, the full range and depth of human emotion. Within its movements and across the work as a whole, Tchaikovsky’s symphony suggests a struggle between despair and joy over the course of one’s life. The composer died nine days following its St. Petersburg premiere from an apparent suicide, a fact that has inspired conductors and audiences alike to look to the symphony as an index of Tchaikovsky’s troubled state of mind.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the larger autobiographic implications of the Russian’s popular symphony, Braught’s otherworldly *Tschai-*

*kovsky’s Sixth* suggests, quite literally, the intense emotional peaks and valleys associated with psychological unrest.

Anthropomorphic, hallucinogenic, and psychologically resonant, *Tschaikovsky’s Sixth* looks like a Surrealist landscape. Most surreal is the canvas’s overall imaginative, visionary quality. Braught envisioned this already unfamiliar place to be almost entirely incomprehensible. A sense of indeterminacy prevails. The hills and valleys of the Badlands seem to be made of material existing somewhere in between earth and flesh—with one mound to the right on the horizon evolving seemingly into a dollop of tan meringue.<sup>17</sup> Such effects appear to be by-products of a dreamlike state as much as a painterly transcription of waking “reality.”

For this reason, *Tschaikovsky’s Sixth* recalls the work of the Surrealists Salvador Dalí or Yves Tanguy, among others, who similarly depicted ambiguous, often barren, vistas but treated them more explicitly as visual metaphors for the unconscious plane where psychological dramas take place.<sup>18</sup> This scenario is most famously evident in Dalí’s popular and diminutive *The Persistence of Memory* (1931; Museum of Modern Art, New York), a composition that begs much favorable comparison with Braught’s depiction of the Badlands. In both, a barren landscape takes up roughly three-quarters of the composition. Both paintings blend identifiable and imagined scenery.<sup>19</sup> Both scenes are devoid of human

presence, presenting instead odd symbols that, in each instance, appear unrelated to their environs. While Braught's hills morph into flesh and meringue, Dalí's signature watches undergo their own transubstantiation, turning unexpectedly into something decidedly more pliant than metal usually is.

While Braught is not known to have admitted a debt to Surrealism, the striking similarities between *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* and Dalí's work from the 1930s seem more than coincidental. As Dickran Tashjian has discussed, Dalí emerged dramatically in America in the 1930s apart from the pack of European Surrealists, who were finding in the United States an increasingly favorable climate for their images and ideas.<sup>20</sup> Ever the opportunistic showman, Dalí mounted a successful media blitz leading up to and through his first visit to America in 1934. By the end of the decade, the suave, mustached painter and acclaimed self-promoter "had come to represent Surrealism to most Americans," Tashjian emphasizes.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, "in responding to Surrealism . . . American painters were often responding to Dalí, who was not only visible but also a painter, unlike [the Surrealist author André] Breton, and hence germane to their immediate concerns."<sup>22</sup> In fact, just as Braught was visiting the Badlands, the American art press and popular media were saturated with Dalí-related news, much of it involving *The Persistence of Memory*, which had become one of the best-known and widely reproduced paintings in America.<sup>23</sup>

In years following, Braught's work grew more bizarrely surreal and inagistic, and was filled with luxuriant vegetation and inexplicable visions. In June 1936 Braught moved to a small island near Tortola in the lush, tropical British West Indies.<sup>24</sup> In 1939, after a three-year teaching stint at Cornell University, Braught moved back to the Virgin Islands with his family, settling in a small house on Tortola, where he lived for the next seven years, breaking only in 1944 for brief trips to Dutch Guiana (Surinam) and to Puerto Rico, where he painted a mural at Fort Buehanan. His unconventional lifestyle and exotic art inspired a reviewer in 1956 to describe him as "a kind of American Middle West [Paul] Gauguin."<sup>25</sup> The painter returned in 1946 to teach once again at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he remained until 1962, when he left amid a general reorganization of the faculty. Returning to Philadelphia, Braught spent the next twenty-one years, until his death in 1983, in seeming seclusion. He exhibited no work after the early 1960s. Disinclined to divulge his secrets easily, Braught repeatedly insisted on the primacy of an emotional response to his art. His expressed "visceral empathy" beckons the viewer to share in his engagement, if not always to understand it.<sup>26</sup>

RRG/SM

## NOTES

1. On the Lakota and the Badlands, see Champ Clark, *The Badlands*, American Wilderness Series (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1974), 21. "Lakota" and "Sioux" are somewhat interchangeable. "Lakota," meaning "allies," is generally used by the Sioux to refer to their own larger tribe. See Ian Frazier, *On the Rez* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000), 11; also the related note on 284.
2. All biographical information on Braught has been gleaned from David Cleveland, *Ross Braught, 1898–1983: A Visual Diary*, exh. cat. (New York: Hirsch & Adler Galleries, 2000).
3. New York critics of the show noted Braught's "forceful originality" and "inequivocal draftsmanship," while praising his use of color and finding "charm" in his rhythmic compositional designs. H.C., "Braught's First Show," *Art News* 23 (17 January 1925), 3; and *Art Digest* 5 (September 1931), 30.
4. On Braught as a teacher, see Marianne Berardi, *Under the Influence: The Students of Thomas Hart Benton*, exh. cat. (St. Joseph, Mo.: Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, 1993), 62. See also "Resignations from the Faculty," *Bulletin of the Kansas City Art Institute*, April 1935, unpaginated.
5. Braught wrote to his father on 6 June 1933 that the Grand Canyon was "really wonderful but in a different way than it has been written and painted," quoted in Cleveland, *Ross Braught*, 13.
6. Borglum had been carving his popular monumental portraits of American presidents out of the granite face since 1927, a spectacle that brought more than 135,000 visitors to the Black Hills in 1933. In the early spring of 1934 the project enjoyed fresh publicity, thanks to a Hearst newspaper contest to compose an inscription for the monument. See Gilbert C. Fite, *Mount Rushmore* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 131–32, 151–52. Hearst's family fortune was derived from gold mining in the Black Hills.
7. Congress elevated the preserve to a national park in 1978. In the 1960s some 130,000 acres were added to the park's original 50,000 acres. See Joseph W. Zarki and Cheri C. Madison, *Badlands: The Story behind the Scenery* (Las Vegas: KC Publishing, 1997), 5, 38–42; John R. Milton, *South Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 139–40; and Federal Writers' Project, comp., *A South Dakota Guide* (Pierre: South Dakota Guide Commission for the State of South Dakota, 1938), 318.
8. In childhood, Braught might well have gained a knowledge or curiosity about Indians that would later prompt him to read this unusual work. It would be nearly impossible to have lived in Carlisle without knowing of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879–1918). See Barbara Landis, "The Carlisle Indian Industrial School," [home.epix.net/~landis/](http://home.epix.net/~landis/), and related links (accessed 18 June 2004).
9. See Ross Braught, *Phaethon* (Kansas City, Mo.: by the author, 1935), unpaginated. For more on Braught's completed mural, see *Kansas City Star*, June 1936, clipping, Missouri Valley Special Collections files, Kansas City (Mo.) Public Library; and "Mural by Braught Adorns Kansas City Hall," *Art Digest* 10 (1 August 1936), 7.
10. When the print won first prize for graphic arts in the Kansas City show, its title was probably misunderstood. In reproductions in art magazines that spring, "Mako Sica" was often misspelled. The Kansas City print dealer John H. Bender dismissed the print, saying it "nako me sicko too," and it "represent[ed] nothing that any sober human being ever saw in this world or dreamed of in the next." See "Mako Sico [*sic*]: The Prize Print at the Midwestern," *Fine Prints* 4 (December 1934), 13–15. The illustration to this article is captioned "Maco Sico." *Mako Sica* is illustrated, but not discussed, in "Artists Depict Midwest in Show," *Art Digest* 9 (February 1935), 21 (as *Mako Sico*); and "Speaking about Art," *American Magazine of Art* 28 (March 1935), 175 (spelled correctly).

11. Revised Standard Version, Genesis 8:6–11; and George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 15–16.
12. The literature on the Dust Bowl is voluminous. See especially Mathew Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt, and Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981); Donald Woster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Brad D. Lookingbill, *Dust Bowl, USA: Depression America and the Ecological Imagination, 1929–1941* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001). Of the dozens of dust blizzards that wreaked havoc across the plains throughout the 1930s, the most destructive occurred on Sunday, 14 April 1934—“Black Sunday.” Hurt’s study of the Dust Bowl opens with a dramatic re-creation of the events of this day. Also, he emphasizes, 3, “the Dust Bowl reached its greatest extent from 1935 to 1936 when it covered about 50 million acres and was concentrated in southwestern Kansas.”
13. “The Midwest,” *Art Digest* 9 (15 February 1935), 21. The artist even earned the favor of Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), whom he preceded as professor of painting at the Kansas City Art Institute. Benton reportedly praised Braught’s draftsmanship in particular. According to Louise Bradley, the owner of one of Braught’s drawings, Rita, Benton’s wife, emphasized, “Tom says he’s the greatest living American craftsman.” See Berardi, *Under the Influence*, 63.
14. At least one reviewer at the time likewise noted the similarities between Braught’s and O’Keeffe’s work. In an unflattering review of Braught’s 1938 exhibition at the Ferargil Galleries, where *Tschaikovsky’s Sixth* made its public debut, the *Art News* critic M. D. observed, “With an ingredient borrowed from Blake, added spice from the macrocosm of Georgia O’Keeffe and a dash of erudition, a potion is mixed that threatens to make pale the sandman’s vilest visitations.” M. D., “Braught Creates Fantastic Western and Tropical Scenes,” *Art Digest* 36 (19 February 1938), 14.
15. On O’Keeffe and synesthesia, see Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 167–71.
16. John H. Mueller, *The American Symphony Orchestra: A Social History of Musical Taste* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951), 77, 107, 152, 196–98. Mueller calls the Sixth Symphony “a warhorse.” Scholars continue to conjure scenarios for the music; see, for example, Timothy L. Jackson, *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
17. The intuitive nature of Braught’s painting process is confirmed by the lack of an extensive underdrawing. See Technical Notes.
18. On Surrealism and landscape, see Haim Finkelstein, “Salvador Dalí’s Anthropomorphic Landscapes,” *Pantheon* 46 (1988), 142–48; Jean-Christophe Bailly, “Yves Tanguy, le silence,” *XXe Siècle* 36 (December 1974), 105–12; and Suzi Gablik, “The Snake Paradise: Evolution in the Landscapes of Max Ernst,” *Art in America* 63 (May 1975), 34–39. Nicholas J. Capasso has emphasized that most studies of Surrealist landscape have tended to focus on the contents of the landscape, not the landscape itself. See Capasso, “Salvador Dalí and the Barren Plain: A Phenomenological Analysis of a Surrealist Landscape Environment,” *Arts Magazine* 60 (June 1986), 72–83.
19. As many scholars have noted, Dalí’s imaginative landscapes often contain identifiable references to his childhood environs along the Catalonian plain of Ampurdán and the beaches at Rosas. On this point, see Capasso, “Dalí and the Barren Plain,” 72–83, who both redresses and goes beyond this biographical reading of the Surrealist’s landscapes.
20. Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920–1950* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 50–65.
21. *Ibid.*, 36.
22. *Ibid.*, 110.
23. Tashjian retells this episode in *Boatload of Madmen*, 53. Dalí himself lectured on *The Persistence of Memory* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935, marking the museum’s fifth anniversary.
24. Many of the paintings from this period were exhibited at the Ferargil Gallery in New York in 1938, along with *Tschaikovsky’s Sixth* and other scenes from the American West. M. D., “Braught Creates Fantastic Western and Tropical Scenes,” 14; and Howard Devree, “A Reviewer’s Notebook: Brief Comment on Some of the Recently Opened Exhibitions in the Galleries,” *New York Times*, 20 February 1938, sec. 11, 8.
25. After his stay in the tropics, Braught was identified as painter of extreme sensuousness. See Winifred Shields, “Art and Artists: Interest in Visiting Show Remains at High Level,” *Kansas City Star*, 15 December 1956, 10A. See also Cleveland, *Ross Braught*, 19–26.
26. Cleveland, *Ross Braught*, 20. Cleveland, 27, discusses the hermitlike seclusion of Braught’s later years. Newspaper journalists were commenting on the lack of telephone, radio, or television in Braught’s home as early as 1955. See Bob Sanford, “Art and Artists: Turmoil of the Busy World Remote for ‘Garret’ Painter,” *Kansas City Star*, 17 June 1955, 8.

## ALFRED THOMPSON BRICHER (1837–1908)

### *Schooner Close-Hauled*, c. 1883

Oil on canvas

24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 44<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (61.9 × 113 cm)

Signed lower right: ATBRICHER.

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F81-34

THE SON OF AN ENGLISH IMMIGRANT, Albert Bricher was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and raised in Newburyport, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Self-taught, Bricher set up a studio in Boston and began painting professionally in 1858. Emerging from the Hudson River School tradition of landscape painting, Bricher specialized in marine subjects. His preference for this theme was likely encouraged by familiarity with the work of John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), William Trost Richards (q.v.), and especially Fitz Henry Lane (q.v.), who painted and exhibited in Boston in the 1850s, and William Stanley Haseltine, with whom Bricher traveled to Maine in 1859.<sup>2</sup> During his first two decades of painting, Bricher also adopted from these artists a sharply focused realist style employing strong, saturating light that evokes a persisting stillness.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-1860s Bricher was making paintings that were reproduced as chromolithographs for the Boston firm L. Prang and Company. In 1868 he moved to New York, and during the next decade he was active in a variety of art clubs and societies, including the Artists' Fund Society, the Brooklyn Art Association, the American Watercolor Society, and the National Academy of Design; he became an associate member of the latter in 1878. That same year, his work was included in the Exposition Universelle in Paris and in an exhibition at Gill's Art Galleries in Springfield, Massachusetts. The showing at Gill's proved to be the first of thirty, making that gallery the primary outlet for his art.

Throughout his long career, Bricher repeatedly depicted the coasts of Long Island, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Like so many of his colleagues, he frequently employed a horizontal composition with a coastline framing the left or right edge of the painting balanced by open sea on the other side. In Bricher's paintings, one or more boats almost always are harmoniously arranged on the water at varying distances between the shore and the horizon. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint the location and date of Bricher's many unidentified, undated works.

*Schooner Close-Hauled* falls into this category, although certain features suggest it may have been painted between 1880 and 1887. The Bricher scholar Jeffrey Brown has noted that a narrower tonal palette, the dark water, and the flourish in Bricher's signature are characteristic of work executed during these years.<sup>4</sup> Although Bricher rarely dated his paintings after 1881, there are a few paintings inscribed 1882 and 1883, including *Seascape* (1882; private collection), *Coastal View with Sailboats and Lighthouse*

(1883; William Vareika Fine Arts, Newport, R.I.), *The Lion Rock—Newport* (1883; private collection), and *In Gloucester Harbor* (1883; private collection), that share with *Schooner Close-Hauled* the warm brown undertones, painterly style, and dramatic cloud-filled sky, all features unique to this period of his art.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the coloration of the water appears to relate to the few brown and cream tonal studies of rolling surf found in a sketchbook on sheets surrounding one inscribed "1879," and the sky in the Nelson-Atkins canvas finds cognates in another small group of sketches, also restricted to the surviving drawings and dating to the summer of 1883.<sup>6</sup> On these sheets, Bricher recorded soft but precise renderings of dramatic groupings of clouds with color and weather notations.

In *Schooner Close-Hauled*, which depicts the boat of the title in the foreground sailing as close to the wind as possible—that is, beating, or close-hauled—the brown imprimatura layer simultaneously binds the composition with an overall tonality and serves as a platform for the overlying energetically applied paint that artfully weaves the light and dark tones within it. This use of a narrow tonal range along with active brushwork, those features that especially distinguish this canvas from Bricher's earlier paintings, suggest the artist was alert to trends current in American painting about 1880, including the work of William Morris Hunt (q.v.), the popularity of French Barbizon painting (in large part, thanks to Hunt), and the rise to prominence of George Inness (q.v.).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the drier paint aggressively applied in the froth of the waves and the staccato strokes of vibrant blue across the flatter water also may indicate an awareness of Gustave Courbet and the early Impressionists, many of whose paintings were collected in Boston from the mid-1860s and by the early 1880s could also be seen in New York.<sup>8</sup> The appearance of these contemporary influences in his well-known subject matter and style hints that Bricher may have been searching for ways to update his art.

The busy coastal waters depicted in *Schooner Close-Hauled* may well be off the southeastern shore of Long Island, although the locale has previously been identified as Rhode Island.<sup>9</sup> After his marriage to Alice Robinson in 1881, Bricher regularly stayed at Southampton, New York, his wife's hometown, and he annually exhibited Long Island views until 1894.<sup>10</sup> In fact, from 1883 to 1887 Bricher exhibited twice as many Long Island scenes than of all other locales together.<sup>11</sup> The influx of Long Island scenery into his repertoire reflects perhaps not only Bricher's new personal associations with the island but also his participation in the greatly expanded public interest in the area after 1878.<sup>12</sup> In *Schooner Close-Hauled*, the sandy headland in the right background is indeed more characteristic of Long Island's topography than the rockier coast of Rhode Island that Bricher also frequented.<sup>13</sup>





Indeed, both the site and composition are nearly identical to *Sailboats along the Shore (Southampton Beach)* (n.d.; private collection).<sup>14</sup>

Although the specificity of place originally may have held personal meaning for the artist or the painting's now unknown first owner, the coasts of both Long Island and Rhode Island were areas increasingly popular throughout the 1860s and 1870s as destinations for middle- and upper-middle-class vacationers and artists alike.<sup>15</sup> A survey of summer "pleasure places" in *Appletons' Journal* in 1876 called out the precise locations from Maine to New Jersey that Briher painted for more than four decades. The writer also reminded readers that all summer vacation spots have a "legitimate purpose," that of bringing "freshness to the mind, strength to the body, and recreation to the whole nature." In particular, he remarked on the especially restorative effects of the seashore, noting "the advance of the waves is life: a single white sail upon the expanse of water makes a picture; the salt savor of the breeze carries tingling pleasure to the veins."<sup>16</sup>

*Schooner Close-Hauled* elicits similarly pleasurable feelings. The viewer, who Briher suggests is standing on the beach just in front of the picture's lower right corner, is offered a panorama that engages all the senses. The texture of the painted waves conveys the sound of the incoming surf. The easeading clouds above the carefully rendered full sails of the double-masted fishing schooner in the center suggest the strength of the breeze, which, in combination with the activity of the waves, conjures the smell and taste of the salty air. The variety of boats silhouetted against the sky beyond the primary vessel indicates the activity of maritime commerce and leisure common to such shores in the late nineteenth century. Briher thoughtfully ordered these natural and man-made elements along a series of diagonals that play against the canvas's accentuated horizontal format to produce an artful, balanced composition evoking a poetic equilibrium, alternately calm and energetic. As an image that effectively fixes a transitory experience, *Schooner Close-Hauled* seems an especially revealing example of the way in which Briher's paintings could function as translations of temporary leisure-time activity into meaningful long-term memories.

The seeming veracity of Briher's paintings—the convincing effects of water, air, and topography as well as the resonances of the sea's moods—earned him generally favorable reviews. In 1882 a Boston art critic remarked, "The work of Briher is pretty well-known to the art public. . . . His marines are light and breezy, and have a true salty flavor about them. . . . His treatment of the water in his marines is generally good, and he shows a great deal of thorough appreciation of the different movements and light of the water."<sup>17</sup> Yet, also in the early 1880s, Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, expressing an increasingly prevalent opinion of American art in general, faulted Briher for offering "little feeling for the ideal," even though he considered him "among our more clever coast painters."<sup>18</sup> Although Briher embraced a more tonal palette in the 1880s, he never departed from the essentially transcriptive style for which he had become known in the 1860s and

1870s. This mode of painting resulted in *Schooner Close-Hauled* remaining one of his most painterly images and ensured that, by the end of his life in 1908, the artist would fall into obscurity as new movements and tastes, especially for Impressionism, surpassed his realist brand of art. It was not until nearly a century after the appearance of work such as *Schooner Close-Hauled* that Briher's art again attracted notice.

MCC

## NOTES

1. The main source of information on Bricher is Jeffrey R. Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher, 1837–1908*, exh. cat. (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973).
2. For the trip with Haseltine, see Marc Simpson, “Noble Rock Portraits: Haseltine’s American Work,” in Andrea Henderson, Sally Mills, and Simpson, *Expressions of Place: The Art of William Stanley Haseltine*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1992), 18.
3. Art historians have placed Bricher’s work of the 1860s and 1870s within the Luminist movement of the mid–nineteenth century. See John Wilmerding et al., *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875; Paintings, Drawings, Photographs*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980), *passim*.
4. Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher*, 28; and Jeffrey Brown, e-mail message to Randall Griffey, 24 September 2005. NAMA curatorial files.
5. For images of these paintings, see Christie’s, New York, 18 May 2004, lot 24; Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher*, 70; and Sotheby’s, New York, 19 May 2004, lot 60, respectively. A wash drawing of the painting is included in a scrapbook that the artist prepared for his daughter that Brown has dated to the early to mid-1880s. Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher*, 28–29.
6. There may be numerous sketchbooks that have not survived. For the 1879 studies, see Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 912, frames 41, 44; for the 1883 studies, see *ibid.*, microfilm reel 912, frames 877, 881–82, 886–87, 905.
7. On this topic, see Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975); Laura Lee Meixner, “Jean-François Millet: His American Students and Followers,” Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1979; and Daniel Rosenfeld, *The Spirit of Barbizon: France and America*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Art Museum Association of America, 1986).
8. On French paintings in Boston, see Alexandra R. Murphy, “French Paintings in Boston, 1800–1900,” in Anne L. Poulet and Murphy, *Corot to Braque: French Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), xvii–xlv. On French art in America more generally, see Laura L. Meixner, *French Realist Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). In the early 1880s Courbet’s canvases were on view in the rooms of Cottier and Company and Moore and Clark as well as at the 1883 Pedestal Fund Loan Exhibition in New York, where they generated considerable discussion in the press. On Courbet and the Pedestal Fund Loan exhibition, see Maureen C. O’Brien, *In Support of Liberty: European Paintings at the 1883 Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Southampton, N.Y.: Parrish Art Museum, 1986), 140–44.
9. Although the related wash drawing was once given the title *Near Newport* (Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher*, 28), Jeffrey Brown recently has questioned this titling and noted it certainly did not resemble Point Judith, for example, where Bricher often painted. Brown to Griffey, 24 September 2004, NAMA curatorial files.
10. Brown, *Alfred Thompson Bricher*, 29.
11. *Ibid.*, 96–97. In the spring of 1884 Bricher wrote Charles Kurtz from Southampton about marines he was currently painting. Charles M. Kurtz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 4806, frame 13.
12. *The New Long Island* (New York: Rogers and Sherwood, 1880), 1–2, pinpoints 1878 as the specific year. In artistic circles, the enthusiasm for Long Island sojourns is best recounted in William M. Laffan and Edward Strahan, “The Tile Club at Play,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 17 (February 1879), 457–78. On artists resident on Long Island, see Ronald G. Pisano, *Long Island Landscape Painting: 1820–1920* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1985).
13. William Vareika and Ann Cohen DiPietro kindly shared their insights on the geography of Rhode Island and Long Island, respectively.
14. Illustrated in Sotheby’s, New York, 20 May 1998, lot 103.
15. Daniel Edward Sachs, “Alfred Thompson Bricher and the Social Implications of Romantic Images of the American Victorian Summer Watering Place,” Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1996. On Rhode Island, see Robert Workman, *Eden of America: Rhode Island Landscape, 1820–1920*, exh. cat. (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1986).
16. “Our Summer Pleasure Places,” *Appletons’ Journal* 1 (September 1876), 193–202, at 193.
17. “The Fine Arts: Bricher and Elwell,” *Boston Post*, 8 April 1882, 4.
18. S. G. W. Benjamin, *Art in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), 111.

## MARY CASSATT (1844–1926)

### *L'Enfant Blonde (The Blonde Child)*, c. 1901 (*Fillette au Chapeau Bleu; Head of a Young Girl; Study of a Girl; Simone in a Blue Bonnet [No. 2]*)

Oil on canvas

23 × 17¾ in. (58.4 × 45.1 cm)

Bequest from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Brace,  
75-27

IN 1891 THE FRENCH DECADENT novelist J. K. Huysmans remarked that although he thought children in art were generally “stupid and pretentious,” he had recently, “thanks to Mlle. Cassatt, seen pictures of children who are ravishing . . . painted with a kind of delicate tenderness—completely charming.”<sup>1</sup> Mary Cassatt had not yet made such images her specialty, but by the time she painted *L'Enfant Blonde*, critics had long since recognized her as Europe's foremost interpreter of the child.

Cassatt was born in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania (now part of Pittsburgh), the daughter of a successful investment banker who delighted in European travel and culture. After a four-year stay abroad, the family settled in Philadelphia in 1855. From 1860 to 1862 Cassatt studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where, as a woman, her education was limited to sketching and copying works in the institution's collection. She went to Paris in the winter of 1865 in search of more formal art training. Although she lived in France for the rest of her life, she maintained her legal residence in Philadelphia and regarded herself as “simply and frankly American.”<sup>2</sup>

During her early days in Paris, Cassatt took private lessons from the portraitist Charles Chaplin and the history painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, both pillars of the academic establishment. However, she soon developed an interest in looser and more spontaneous painting techniques than those advocated by the academicians. She began a slow, steady drift toward the avant-garde, encouraged by her close association, beginning in 1875, with Edgar Degas, who later invited her to exhibit with the Impressionist circle. Cassatt shared with Degas a preference for portrait and genre scenes over landscape, and her penchant for drawing drew her naturally to Degas's more linear Impressionist style, rather than to the open-air Impressionism of Claude Monet, in which drawing was subsumed in painterly effects of light and color.<sup>3</sup>

Barred by convention from the urban demimonde that her male colleagues frequently depicted, Cassatt chose to paint subjects that were both easily accessible and personally appealing.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the late 1880s she turned increasingly to the mother-and-child subjects on which her reputation rests to this day. This was a natural choice of theme, inasmuch as, according to one of her nieces, she “adored even the most repulsive children and babies.”<sup>5</sup>

Her choice may also have been influenced by the great demand for such subjects. The Paris dealer Paul Durand-Ruel exaggerated only slightly in referring to Cassatt as the painter of “la sainte famille moderne.” These images of mother and child, although altogether secular and up-to-date, have an unaffected sweetness and gravity, at times a monumentality, that clearly ally them to images of the Madonna and Child, the theme of traditional Christian art most popular in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, their sensuous naturalism reflected contemporary beliefs about the mother-child bond, marking them as modern pictures.<sup>7</sup>

After 1900 the demand for Cassatt's work was greater than ever, but her time was increasingly dedicated to advising wealthy American collectors such as Mr. and Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer. To try to satisfy her dealers and their clients, she sold a great many portrait sketches of individual children in both oil and pastel. The subjects were little girls from the neighborhood of Le Mesnil-Théribus, a village about thirty miles northwest of Paris, where Cassatt, in 1894, had purchased a country house, the château de Beaufresnes. A longtime resident of Le Mesnil recalled years later that the artist, very much the great lady, “used to drive around the countryside in a horse-drawn carriage . . . [and] when she met a girl who could serve as a model, she took her to the château to work.”<sup>8</sup> Although from their portraits these models appear to be pampered daughters of the middle class, their actual social status was considerably lower: Cassatt always took care to have them decloused before they sat for her, and she provided them with the expensive clothes and oversize hats in which to pose.<sup>9</sup>

The subject of the Nelson-Atkins painting was one of Cassatt's favorite models between 1901 and 1904, having succeeded at least two other little girls in that role. In her 1970 catalogue raisonné, Adelyn Breeskin identified the child as “Simone”; however, she identifies the same girl elsewhere in her catalogue as “Sara.”<sup>10</sup> Cassatt occasionally assigned names such as “Sara,” “Simone,” and “Margot” to the children in her paintings of this period, but these may have been fabrications. Approximately forty-one images of the little girl in *L'Enfant Blonde* are known, including seventeen pastels, four oil sketches, and two finished oils, *In the Garden* (1904; Detroit Institute of Arts) and *Sara Seated, Leaning on Her Left Hand* (Fig. 1).<sup>11</sup> Both the Nelson-Atkins painting and another oil sketch, *Simone in a Blue Bonnet (No. 1)*, are preparatory studies for *Sara Seated, Leaning on Her Left Hand*.

Cassatt painted *L'Enfant Blonde* quickly, first applying a gray ground to the canvas and then, before it had dried, sketching the figure in black with a thin, dry brush. These sketched lines remain visible in the thinly painted areas, briefly but eloquently





Fig. 1 Mary Cassatt, *Sara Seated, Leaning on Her Left Hand*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 28¾ × 21½ in. (73 × 54.6 cm). Private collection

suggesting the position of the girl's shoulders and arms and the contours of her dress and bonnet. Although an oil sketch, *L'Enfant Blonde* recalls the pastels that were Cassatt's most popular productions during this period. The gray ground is similar in tone to the blue-gray paper that Cassatt preferred for her pastels, and the dry brushwork she used throughout the painting creates the impression of a chalky surface. In the Nelson-Atkins painting, as in her more numerous pastel sketches, Cassatt used line and gesture to create a sense of spontaneity and motion. The artist's virtuosic handling of paint is evident in the child's face, where her deft brushstrokes evoke the rounded contours and soft texture of flesh and hair. The child's costume is more summarily rendered with dashing white highlights and strokes of blue, gray, and pink. Cassatt applied the gray ground thinly beneath the dress and bonnet, intending the linen of the canvas to show through. However, wax from the lining subsequently saturated these areas, giving them an unintended brown tint. Another unfortunate change is evident from a photograph of the painting in a Hôtel Drouot catalogue from 1926. Painted lines indicating the crown of the little girl's bonnet, puffed sleeves, and the crumpled folds along the left side of her dress can be seen in the photograph but are now missing from the painting. A signature that was once visible at the lower right has also disappeared.<sup>12</sup> Despite these alterations, *L'Enfant*

*Blonde* retains the freshness and exuberance of Cassatt's initial response to her subject.

Although *L'Enfant Blonde* is a preparatory study for a later, more finished work, Cassatt intended it to stand on its own. At this time, sketches were increasingly prized by European and American collectors, both for their aesthetic value and for the insight they offered into an artist's thought process and working methods. Cassatt's sketches were so popular that, she claimed, they practically flew out of her studio.<sup>13</sup> *L'Enfant Blonde* was acquired by Pierre Decourcelle, a French novelist and collector. A photograph of Decourcelle's home, taken sometime before 1926, shows *L'Enfant Blonde* hanging above a pastel sketch by Berthe Morisot and near a large painting by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Decourcelle collected primarily drawings and sketches because, as he explained, "a drawing is the solidification of an idea, it is a living work. . . . In a drawing one believes one can see the tracing of an artist's thought."<sup>14</sup> *L'Enfant Blonde* combined, in the words of one viewer, "all the attraction of spontaneity and all the force of accomplishment."<sup>15</sup>

Like her style, Cassatt's subject matter was tremendously appealing to collectors. Children, like sketches, began to be recognized around this time as objects worthy of study in their own right. At the turn of the century physicians, educators, social scientists, and psychologists all subjected children to scientific scrutiny. In both France and the United States, books and periodicals emerged that sought to describe faithfully the various stages of children's development.<sup>16</sup> The French Symbolist poet Camille Mauclair, writing in 1902, detected a similar interest at work in Cassatt's images of children.

Miss Mary Cassatt may be the only painter today to have given us an interpretation of childhood that is contained within the child itself. Faced with a being in process, she has not been anxious to divine its maturity. She stops her calm, sure contemplation at the very minute when the creature she is studying appears before her; she captures the soul that is there, and that is all that she needs to create a psychology that is new, fascinating, and powerfully inspired by nature.<sup>17</sup>

Critics praised Cassatt for eschewing the cloying sweetness commonly seen in images of children. Her sketches, which are neither highly finished nor artfully composed, seem to be direct and faithful records of her observations. Commenting on four paintings exhibited by Cassatt in the Art Institute of Chicago's 1904 annual exhibition of work by American artists, a reviewer for the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* commented, "[Cassatt] offers four honest, everyday home scenes. Her children are not fairies or urehins or even angels; they are simple, wholesome, unspoiled youngsters."<sup>18</sup>

In France, the early years of the twentieth century were marked by anxiety over falling birth rates and soaring infant mortality. These issues were frequently invoked by legislators, physicians, and social scientists to support a wide array of reforms.

In 1902, just a year after Cassatt began making sketches of little girls at Beaufresne, the French government launched a national study to root out the causes of these ills. In the United States, too, reformers and politicians made children a central target of Progressive Era reforms. In both countries, children and, by extension, mothers had become the focus of a widely felt anxiety about the future.<sup>19</sup> Given this climate, it is hardly surprising that Cassatt's seemingly natural, sweetly reassuring images of healthy, well-behaved girls should find a large and appreciative audience on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite its apparent naturalness, the Nelson-Atkins painting, like the other sketches Cassatt produced around this time, adheres to well-established, sentimental conventions for depicting children. Its subject is plump and pretty. Her posture conveys boredom, but also well-behaved submissiveness. The child's oversize "Greenaway" bonnet emphasizes her small stature while it mimics an angelic halo around her head. This type of bonnet, which was ten years out of date by 1902, was based on the extremely popular illustrations of Kate Greenaway, who specialized in depicting little country girls clothed in the garb of the 1820s. Like many other images of children produced at this time, *L'Enfant Blonde* evokes nostalgia by locating its subject somewhere in the indeterminate past.<sup>20</sup>

LL/KJN

## NOTES

1. J. K. Huysmans, *L'Art Moderne* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883), 232, translated and quoted in Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Mary Cassatt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 59.
2. Frederick A. Sweet, *Miss Mary Cassatt: Impressionist from Pennsylvania* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 212; and Cassatt, quoted in Achille Segard, *Mary Cassatt: Un Peintre des Enfants et des Mères* (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorf, 1913), 2.
3. For a discussion of Cassatt's artistic education, see Andrew J. Walker, "Mary Cassatt's Modern Education: The United States, France, Italy, and Spain, 1860–73," in Judith A. Barter, *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 22–43. For her relationship with Degas, see George T. M. Shackelford, "Pas de deux: Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas," in *ibid.*, 109–43.
4. Criselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1988), 50–90.
5. Sweet, *Miss Mary Cassatt*, 197.
6. Durand-Ruel, quoted in Mathews, *Mary Cassatt*, 76.
7. Judith A. Barter, "Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman," in Barter, *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman*, 69–81.
8. Mme Henri Riché to Nancy Hale, c. 1971, quoted in Nancy Hale, *Mary Cassatt* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 172.
9. *Ibid.*, 183; and Mathews, *Mary Cassatt*, 129.
10. Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *Mary Cassatt: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors, and Drawings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), 172, no. 437, 159, no. 385.
11. *Ibid.*, nos. 385 and 435–53.
12. Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 16 June 1926, lot 18. These losses are probably due to overcleaning sometime before the Museum acquired the painting. A Durand-Ruel label affixed to the back of the painting's frame reads "frame for / 13068 Cassatt / which is signed / in pastel." If the signature had been written in pastel, this could account for its loss. Pastel adheres poorly to oil paint.
13. Nancy Plain, *Mary Cassatt* (New York: Dillon Press, 1994), 128. The new appreciation for sketches that emerged among collectors in the nineteenth century has been discussed in Alison Byerly, "Effortless Art: The Sketch in Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature," *Criticism* 14 (Summer 1999), 349–64; Peter Walch, introductory essay to *French Oil Sketches and the Academic Tradition*, exh. cat. (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1994), 9–22; and Albert Boime, "Political Signification and Ambiguity in the Oil Sketch," *Arts Magazine* 61 (September 1987), 41–45.
14. The photograph appears in Pierre Breton, "Pierre Decourcelle Collectionneur," Christie's, Paris, 21 March 2002, 22. Pierre Decourcelle, quoted in *ibid.*, 19.
15. Arsène Alexandre, in Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 16 June 1926, 7.
16. In the United States, see, for example, G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: Appleton, 1904); *The Pedagogical Journal* (begun in 1891); and *The Child Study Monthly* (begun in 1895). For the proliferation of scientific theories concerning childhood in France, see Katherine Hosmer Norris, "Reinventing Childhood in Fin-de-Siècle France: Child Psychology, Universal Education, and the Cultural Anxieties of Modernity," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000.
17. Camille Mauclair, "Un Peintre de l'Enfance," *L'Art Décoratif*, August 1902, quoted and translated in *Cassatt: A Retrospective*, ed. Nancy Mowll Mathews (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1996), 268.
18. "The American Exhibit at the Chicago Art Institute," *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, 13 November 1904, 5. The four oil paintings Cassatt exhibited were titled *The Caress*, *In the Park*, *Mother and Child*, and *The Reading Lesson*. *Seventeenth Annual Exhibition of Work by American Artists*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1904), 50.
19. Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1890–1920* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).
20. As Anne Higonnet has written, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 27: "The modern child is always the sign of a bygone era, of a past which is necessarily the past of adults, yet which, being so distinct, so sheltered, so innocent, is also inevitably a lost past, and therefore understood through the kind of memory we call nostalgia."

## JOHN GADSBY CHAPMAN (1808–1889)

### *A Lazy Fisherman*, 1844

Oil on canvas

25 × 30 in. (63.5 × 76.2 cm)

Signed with monogram and dated lower left: Ⓒ 1844

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 58-12

AS THE EDITOR OF THE *Knickerbocker* happily pointed out, *A Lazy Fisherman* is “laziness personified.”<sup>1</sup> In the painting, a barefoot boy in ragtag clothing gazes dreamily into space. The dusty, calloused sole of one foot is turned outward, testifying to summer rambles in the countryside. Now, however, the child is perfectly at ease. His fishing pole, simply a stick with string tied to one end, is saved from falling into the water only by being tucked under his elbow. His empty woven creel, fallen on its side, underscores that at least thus far it has not been a purposeful day of fishing. The pastoral landscape, complete with grazing cows and an obviously sluggish river, adds to the feeling of laziness that the boy’s heavy-lidded eyes suggest, as do Chapman’s thin, creamy brushwork and the slow ripples spreading across the river’s surface. The reflection of the bright but cloudy sky in the water creates a haze that envelops the scene in languid atmosphere sympathetic to the boy’s state of consciousness.

John Gadsby Chapman grew up in northern Virginia.<sup>2</sup> At his father’s urging, he attended law school in Winchester. However, as soon as he completed school, he moved to Alexandria to embark on his preferred profession, painting. Chapman’s greatest desire was to paint subjects from history, but, like many artists at this time, he found himself relying on portraiture for income. In the autumn of 1834 he moved to New York City. A facility for drawing led the young artist to book and magazine illustration, with which he had great success. In 1836 he was elected to the National Academy of Design, and the following year he was chosen to paint one of the murals, depicting the baptism of Pocahontas, for the Capitol in Washington, D.C. When he painted *A Lazy Fisherman*, Chapman was at the height of his popularity and was thoroughly immersed in the clubs, exhibitions, and activities around which the New York art world revolved.

Chapman’s concept for *A Lazy Fisherman* seems to have developed from his experience making illustrations for seasonal gift-books and collections of poetry. The pictures that appeared in these midcentury volumes of romantic verse were mainly tender-hearted genre scenes that amplified the writings.<sup>3</sup> The sentimental vision they presented permeated Chapman’s paintings beginning in the 1830s. Chapman’s work for *The Poets of America*, which he illustrated together with William H. Croome in 1840, may have provided the specific genesis for *A Lazy Fisherman*.<sup>4</sup> The poems “Green River” by William Cullen Bryant and “Poem: The Moss

Supplicateth for the Poet” by Richard H. Dana both extol the pleasure that spending time by a shady stream can bring. Bryant’s verses focus on the fisherman as idle dreamer, and one of Chapman’s drawings for Dana’s poem shows a young man in nearly the same pose as the boy in the Nelson-Atkins painting, but without his fishing garb (Fig. 1).

Though portraiture and landscape painting dominated American art until after the Civil War, scenes of domestic interiors, play and leisure activities, and images of children were immensely popular both among artists and the public in the 1840s, partially due to the wide circulation of illustrated books.<sup>5</sup> For artists, genre subjects provided an opportunity to showcase their skills depicting human figures, skills that, if mastered, could make their professional reputations.<sup>6</sup> For the public, such scenes constructed a pleasing vision of simpler times and thereby offered a respite from the tribulations of daily life.<sup>7</sup> The American Art-Union in New York encouraged and supported this type of art for the general population through exhibitions, an art lottery, and engravings.<sup>8</sup> *A Lazy Fisherman* was exhibited at the American Art-Union in 1844 and awarded shortly thereafter through its lottery to Dr. James H. Armsby, a prominent physician who lived in Albany, New York. Not surprisingly, genre scenes like the Nelson-Atkins painting were considered desirable decorations for well-appointed domestic interiors. By hanging such pictures in their parlors, nineteenth-century men and women could invest their homes with an aura of sentimental domesticity and present them as havens where children and adults could lose themselves in carefree play.

The image of the barefoot boy, made famous by poems like John Greenleaf Whittier’s “Barefoot Boy” (1856) and the characters Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* (1876), proliferated in art and literature during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, Henry Inman (q.v.), William Sidney Mount (q.v.), and especially Chapman painted him even before 1850.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the image of a barefoot boy fishing was in vogue during the 1840s.<sup>10</sup> Chapman seems to have made this subject a specialty, for he exhibited pictures of boys fishing on an almost yearly basis between 1837 and 1844.<sup>11</sup> This was a subject not only near to Chapman’s heart, for he was an avid fisherman, but also one that he could be sure would be appreciated by those who saw it.

The pleasure viewers could derive from *A Lazy Fisherman* can be directly tied to significant changes in American life in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As the United States industrialized, adult life was perceived as becoming increasingly complex. Thus, many came to view children’s activities, especially games and free play, with wistful nostalgia. Simultaneously, adult recreation gained popularity as an antidote to the more stressful world







Fig. 1 [John Gadsby Chapman], illustration for “The Moss Supplicateth for the Poet,” in *The Poets of America: Illustrated by One of Her Painters*, ed. John Keese (New York: Samuel Colman, 1842), 2:55

that the growing urban population experienced. For example, for members of the American middle class, fishing moved from being primarily a method for gathering food to a sport. In the 1830s and 1840s, clubs of gentlemanly anglers proliferated.<sup>12</sup> Fishing satisfied men’s desires for vigorous wilderness experiences and allowed them to replenish themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, rendering them more fit for their professional pursuits.<sup>13</sup> It also offered a way for them to escape their daily routine and tensions in a manner that replicated their boyhood adventures.<sup>14</sup> Hand in hand with these new ideas, an adjustment in attitudes toward children and childhood took place during the 1830s. Stated briefly, children ceased to be regarded as “young vipers” that must be molded into little adults, and childhood was embraced as a precious time of innocence to be protected and nurtured.<sup>15</sup>

*A Lazy Fisherman* illustrates this transition. Like earlier American depictions of children, the painting retains a moral lesson, in particular, the idea that a lazy fisherman brings home no catch. Even so, it is primarily a celebration of childhood freedom in an unspoiled, rural setting. Thus, the image of a barefoot boy fishing presented in *A Lazy Fisherman* would have played into its viewers’ longing for simple pleasures and their desire to celebrate childhood as a period of idyllic innocence. A writer for the *New World*, voicing a typical response to the painting, noted: “A Lazy Fisherman’ pleases us, for its simplicity and truth. A boy on a hot

summer’s day, laying at length upon a rock, almost too indolent to keep his fishing rod out of the water: The cattle in the distance seeking the shade of the trees, &c., &c., all render the picture very pleasing.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite its seeming “simplicity and truth,” *A Lazy Fisherman* is a carefully constructed scene. Its subject resembles the young son of Chapman’s good friend and agent, William Kemble, who may have served as a model; however, the artist may also have drawn from his knowledge of Renaissance sculpture for the pose of the figure.<sup>17</sup> While no drawings directly related to *A Lazy Fisherman* have come to light, surviving drawings for other paintings suggest that Chapman may have first made preparatory studies on paper for this painting, too.

In his seminal drawing manual *The American Drawing-Book*, published just three years after he painted *A Lazy Fisherman*, Chapman advised his readers in the section on oil painting:

Previous to the preparation of the palette, it is presumed that an accurately-indicated drawing of the subject has been made upon the canvas—upon which any amount of time and careful study that may be bestowed will be well applied, not only by securing this necessary basis of after operations, but in making us familiar with the object of imitation before we take the colors in hand.<sup>18</sup>

Before painting *A Lazy Fisherman*, however, Chapman sketched only the outlines of his composition on the canvas, using deftly applied paint strokes to delineate forms further. Chapman's ability to blend exquisite drawing in pencil and paint, evident in paintings like *A Lazy Fisherman*, led Charles Lanman to characterize the artist "a complete master of sketching."<sup>19</sup>

In 1848 Chapman traveled to Europe, living first in London and then, for thirty-four years, in Rome. The subjects of his paintings shifted, not surprisingly, from American scenes to ones of pastoral Italy. Financial hardship and family tragedies, however, made life increasingly difficult for him, and Chapman moved to Brooklyn, New York, in 1884 to live with a son. The elderly artist remained there until his death five years later.

MCC/LL

## NOTES

1. "Editor's Table—National Academy of Design," *Knickerbocker* 23 (June 1844), 596.
2. The most complete biographical information on Chapman can be found in Edward F. Heite, "Painter of the Old Dominion," *Virginia Cavalcade* 17 (Winter 1968), 11–19.
3. David Lovejoy, "American Painting in Early Nineteenth-Century Gift Books," *American Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1955), 345.
4. *The Poets of America*, ed. John Keese (New York: S. Colman, 1840).
5. Stephanie Mayer kindly shared her thoughts on this subject from her forthcoming Boston University dissertation, "The Art of 'The Gift': Sully, Mount, Huntington and the Antebellum Gift Book Industry," which will examine the correspondence between genre painting and popular illustration.
6. Teresa A. Carbone has discussed the professional advantages enjoyed by artists skilled in depicting the human figure in "The Genius of the Hour: Eastman Johnson in New York, 1860–1880," in *Eastman Johnson Painting America*, ed. Carbone and Patricia Hills, exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1999), 49–52.
7. For more on how images of rural life were created to present the past in a positive light, see Sarah Birns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
8. For the styles and subjects favored by the American Art-Union, see Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995), 1534–61.
9. See Sarah Birns, "Barefoot Boys and Other Country Children: Sentiment and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *American Art Journal* 20 (1988), 24–50; and Claire Perry, *Young America: Childhood in 19th-Century Art and Culture*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 11–33. Michael Clapper has explored the prominence of the barefoot boy in the second half of the nineteenth century and its relation to popular prints in "'I Was Once a Barefoot Boy': Cultural Tensions in a Popular Chromo," *American Art* 16 (Summer 2002), 17–39.
10. See William H. Gerdtz, "Before Winslow Homer: The Art of Fishing in the United States," in *Winslow Homer, Artist and Angler*, ed. Patricia Junker with Sarah Birns, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2002), 202–3.
11. See Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union Exhibition Record, 1816–1852* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 64–68; and Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), 1:74–76, for a complete listing of Chapman's exhibited works at these two institutions.
12. Colleen J. Sheely, "American Angling: The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of Rod and Reel," in *Hard at Play: Leisure in America*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; Rochester, N.Y.: Strong Museum, 1992), 78–79.
13. Gerdtz, "Before Winslow Homer," 186–87.
14. Sheely, "American Angling," 87.
15. For thorough studies of these complex changes, see Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2004); and Bernard Wisby, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).
16. "National Academy of Design," *New World* 8 (11 May 1844), 597.
17. Chapman frequently visited the Kemble country home in Pelham, New York. In 1838 he painted young Peter Kemble IV with his dog Nero. A comparison of that portrait with *A Lazy Fisherman* reveals a close resemblance between the two boys portrayed, taking into account the interval of about five years between the two paintings. *Peter Kemble IV and "Nero"* (1838; private collection) is reproduced in *John Gadsby Chapman: Painter and Illustrator* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1962), 13. Engravings of Renaissance art were widely available in nineteenth-century New York City. Although no single precursor to Chapman's boy can be identified, his arms and legs are reminiscent of those found in the work of the Italian sculptor Giambologna. Works like *Woman Reclining and Writing* have similar configurations of the limbs to those in *A Lazy Fisherman*. For examples, see *Giambologna, 1529–1608: Sculptor to the Medici* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), esp. 79.
18. John Gadsby Chapman, *The American Drawing-Book: A Manual for the Amateur* (1847; New York: A. S. Barnes, 1877), 222.
19. Charles Lanman, *Letters from a Landscape Painter* (Boston: J. Monroe, 1845), 252.

# WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE (1849–1916)

## *Baron Hugo von Habermann, 1875*

Oil on canvas

30 × 24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (76.2 × 61.9 cm)

Signed and dated upper left: Will M Chase. / 1875.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1599

BORN IN WILLIAMSBURG, INDIANA, in 1849, William Merritt Chase received his first art instruction from the Indianapolis portrait painter Barton S. Hayes before years of study in New York at the National Academy of Design.<sup>1</sup> In 1871 a group of St. Louis businessmen proposed to finance study abroad. On hearing their proposal, Chase exclaimed, “My God, I’d rather go to Europe than go to Heaven,”<sup>2</sup> and he entered the Royal Academy in Munich that fall. Soon he established himself as one of the most promising young American artists of his day.

Chase was not alone in his desire to study abroad. From the 1850s and increasingly in the 1870s, waves of American art students left their native country for what was considered the superior training offered by schools on the Continent. Whereas the previous generation had preferred Düsseldorf and a future generation would choose Paris, Munich was a major attraction for American artists in the 1870s.<sup>3</sup> Life for all students in Munich revolved around classes at the Munich Academy. An active social life radiated from there, embracing young artists from both within and outside the academy with student associations, group sketching excursions, and shared studios. This setting gave Chase and his peers a rich atmosphere in which to mature as artists. The painter went on to become, as Barbara Dayer Gallati has noted, “the most prominent American exponent of the Munich School,” characterized by dashing brushwork unfettered by extensive preliminary underdrawing and a generally dark, sooty palette with roots in the European old masters.<sup>4</sup>

Executing portraits of fellow students was a common practice among the young Munich artists. Between 1875 and 1877 Chase created portraits of his American friends Frank Duveneck and Frank Currier (Art Institute of Chicago), the Norwegian Eilif Peterssen (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.), the German artist Edward Grützner (private collection), as well as the Nelson-Atkins portrait of Baron Hugo von Habermann.<sup>5</sup> This young nobleman, born the same year as Chase, was the son of a German officer and had served in the military during the Franco-Prussian War. He went to the Munich Academy in 1871, and by 1873 he was studying under the distinguished professor Karl von Piloty. A year later Chase was himself accepted into Piloty’s studio, and the pair’s friendship developed from there.

Chase portrayed von Habermann emerging from deep shadow, a strong light focusing attention on his handsome face.<sup>6</sup> The baron

turns in three-quarter pose to look directly out at the viewer, establishing contact with a straightforward, self-possessed air. Although his facial features are pictorially resolved, individual layers of paint and brushstrokes remain clearly visible, suggesting the baron’s vitality and personality. As Robert Gates Bardin has observed, the portrayal “has an aggrandizing, romantic quality that connotes an unusual and intense engagement with the subject.”<sup>7</sup> Chase’s biographer, Katherine Roof, noted that the aspiring painter from Indiana was very impressed with “the graceful habit of speech and manner of the aristocratic Bavarian, and he frankly set himself to imitation.”<sup>8</sup> For late-nineteenth-century American audiences, Chase would come to typify the cultured, bohemian artistic type, and his well-known, refined cosmopolitan image—complete with a carefully trimmed Vandyke beard and elegant pince-nez—likely took root in his early admiration of his German colleague.<sup>9</sup>

The depth of Chase’s admiration of von Habermann is further revealed by the fact that the American based *Ready for the Ride* (1877; Union League Club, New York) on the German’s *Damenbildnis* (1875; Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal).<sup>10</sup> Chase also painted a second, more intimate and casual portrait of von Habermann (1875; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich), which, like the Nelson-Atkins canvas, displays the many influences the American assimilated during his Munich years. From the academy, and especially his teacher von Piloty, Chase mastered the head study, embraced the concept of illusionism, and understood the advantages of using a dark background against which to contrast a brightly lit face. The young artist also absorbed from his mentor a love of Spanish Baroque painting, especially the work of Jusepe de Ribera and Diego Velázquez. The artist’s admiration of Spanish painting—Velázquez particularly—was so strong that he made multiple trips to Spain beginning in 1881.<sup>11</sup>

As important as the Munich Academy in forming Chase’s style was the work of the radical painter Wilhelm Leibl, who also worked in Munich. Leibl’s art was sympathetic with that emanating from the academy, but its emphasis was significantly different. Leibl valued paint application for its own sake as well as a means to impart life to his subject without sentimentalizing it. Chase’s assertion of the physical reality of the paint in the Nelson-Atkins portrait through the use of impasto and vigorous brushwork reflects Leibl’s imprint on him, which would endure.

Both Chase and von Habermann became successful portraitists. By the time of his death in 1929, von Habermann had become one of Germany’s leading painters, providing portraits for German high society, and had taught at the Munich Academy. After six years abroad, Chase had so successfully learned the manner of the Munich Academy that he was asked to remain as an instructor there in 1878. However, Chase, determined to help bring to



fruition Karl von Piloty's prophecy that America was to be the next capital of art,<sup>12</sup> returned to New York in 1878 to begin his long reign as a leader in the New York art world as both a painter and a teacher.

MCC/RRG

## NOTES

1. For Chase's biography, see Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917); and Ronald G. Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art: William Merritt Chase, 1849–1916* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1983). A more recent overview of the artist's life and career has been provided by Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995).
2. Quoted in Pisano, *A Leading Spirit*, 25.
3. On the topic of Munich's influence on American painting of the period, see Michael Quick, "Munich and American Realism," in *Munich and American Realism in the Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (Sacramento, Calif.: E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, 1978), 21–36. See also Barbara Dayer Gallati, "William Merritt Chase und das Vermächtnis von München: Die Amerikanisierung eines «intensiven, unschönen Realismus»," in Katharina Bott and Gerhard Bott, *ViceVersa: Deutsche Maler in Amerika, Amerikanische Maler in Deutschland, 1813–1913*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches und Hirmer Verlag, 1996), 105–13. On a related subject, see Lisa N. Peters, "Youthful Enthusiasm Under a Hospitable Sky': American Artists in Polling, Germany, 1870s–1880s," *American Art Journal* 31 (2000), 56–91.
4. Gallati, "William Merritt Chase und das Vermächtnis von München," 105.
5. Chase's 1875 portrait of Duveneck, *My Friend Frank Duveneck* (or *The Smoker*), seems only to be known through an etching by William Unger. For a reproduction, see Robert Neuhaus, *Unsuspected Genius: The Art and Life of Frank Duveneck* (San Francisco: Bedford Press, 1987), 34, fig. 26. Von Habermann's biography is recounted briefly in Quick, "Munich and American Realism," 49.
6. Remains of an abandoned female portrait head appear faintly underneath the paint surface. Chase's decision to paint over the previous portrait could indicate his dissatisfaction with it or his need to conserve money by reusing canvas, or perhaps both. See Technical Notes.
7. Robert Gates Bardin, "'Posing as a Fine Art': William Merritt Chase's Portrait Strategies," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1997, 29.
8. Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase*, 34.
9. See Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Burns, 22–23, notes, "As one of the most visible of that cosmopolitan generation of painters born in the 1850s and trained abroad during the 1870s and '80s, the mature Chase cut an authoritative figure. He continued to inflect his appearance with distinguishing marks of artistic identity—a flowing tie (the 'Chase cravat') and a round, flat-brimmed hat—but he bound these accessories firmly into the code signifying the successful, refined, artistic gentleman."
10. Recalling an early portrait by von Habermann he had seen years before in an exhibition in Europe, the art historian John C. Van Dyke detected signs of a dynamic artistic exchange between Chase and the German. This portrait, which he did not identify, "was practically a duplicate" of Chase's *Ready for the Ride*. See Van Dyke, *American Painting and Its Tradition* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 191. Although Van Dyke's language indicates that he thought Chase's canvas preceded von Habermann's, it is now clear that Chase, painting in 1877, used von Habermann's portrait of 1875 as a model. For an illustration of von Habermann's *Damenbildnis*, see *Katalog der Gemälde des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Wuppertal: Von der Heydt-Museum, 1974), 80. Another instance of the artistic exchange between the American and the German is an unsigned portrait of Chase (1875; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich), identifiable by his fuller beard and heavier handlebar mustache, in a composition that is nearly a mirror image of the Nelson-Atkins picture. The painting was misidentified as a portrait of von Habermann by Chase in Eberhard Ruhmer, *Der Leibl-Kreis und die reine Malerei* (Rosenheim: Rosenheimer Verlagshaus, 1984), 42, fig. 39. However, because the artists' styles and materials at this time were so similar, a definitive attribution cannot be determined.
11. The influence of Spanish painting on American art of the period was pervasive. See M. Elizabeth Boone, *España: American Artists and the Spanish Experience*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1998); and H. Barbara Weinberg, "American Artists' Taste for Spanish Painting," in Gary Tinterow and Geneviève Lacambre, *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 259–305. Both sources make multiple references to Chase's particular response to Spanish art. In an adaptation of her catalogue essay, Weinberg addressed this topic specifically, "William Merritt Chase and the American Taste for Spanish Painting," *Antiques* 163 (April 2003), 92–101.
12. Ronald Pisano, *William Merritt Chase (1849–1916)*, exh. cat. (New York: M. Knoedler & Co., 1976), 35.

# WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE (1849–1916)

## *Beach*, c. 1895 (*Shinnecock Hills*)

Oil on canvas

14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 19<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (37.5 × 50.5 cm)

Signed lower left: W<sup>m</sup> M. Chase.

Bequest of Frances M. Logan, 47-106

RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES from Munich in 1878, William Merritt Chase began a long and successful career in New York City. He quickly secured a large, first-floor studio in the famed Tenth Street Studio Building, where many prominent nineteenth-century American painters lived, worked, and showed their wares to prospective clients.<sup>1</sup> Chase also began teaching at the Art Students League, a school that had been founded three years earlier by disgruntled students of the National Academy of Design.<sup>2</sup> The following year, he was elected to the Society of American Artists, an organization established in 1877 to support new ideas and styles in art. The broad range of Chase's professional associations ensured his immersion in the most dynamic currents of American art of the period.

Much of Chase's artistic legacy rests on his commitment over the course of his career to teaching, an activity that provided him financial security and personal satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> As a teacher, the painter earned particular renown for his work with students at the popular Shinnecock Hills Summer School and, later, the New York School of Art. An impressive number of his students became successful artists in their own right, including Gifford Beal (q.v.), Marsden Hartley (q.v.), Charles Webster Hawthorne (q.v.), Rockwell Kent, and Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.).<sup>4</sup>

The Shinnecock Hills Summer School, at which Chase taught for twelve consecutive summer seasons, was founded in 1891 by wealthy summer residents of Southampton, New York, a community that grew after the Civil War as elite New Yorkers increasingly sought escape from the demands and congestion of their ever-growing and -changing city.<sup>5</sup> Painting became a key element of the rejuvenating refuge that Southampton promised its visitors. Already integrated into New York's high society, Chase was a likely candidate to lead this group of painters, who ranged widely in ambition and talent and numbered upward of a hundred per season. For Chase, the allure of the position was rooted not only in its salary but also in the substantial time it provided him to pursue his own work in lovely environs.<sup>6</sup>

Chase's painterly output was voluminous during his tenure as the head of the Shinnecock School.<sup>7</sup> Showing an expanse of coastal landscape and sky, *Beach* typifies Chase's mature style as well as his pedagogy at Shinnecock, even in its small scale. To his students, the painter advocated painting *en plein air*. An informal

aesthetic philosophy that became popular in France in the early nineteenth century in response to restrictive precepts of academic painting, *plein air* painting took artists out of the confines of the studio and into nature to capture fleeting and intangible effects of light and atmosphere.<sup>8</sup> Under Chase's guidance, Shinnecock became the first major school in the United States with a mandate to teach painting outdoors.

Chase advised his students: "Never finish anything. Every picture completes itself in the process of doing."<sup>9</sup> Practicing what he preached, Chase rendered in *Beach* a sun-drenched scene that proudly retains the lively appearance of an improvisational sketch. The painting features the artist's renowned dexterity with the brush. Bright colors and summary brushwork fill the canvas. Short strokes suggesting figures marvelously evoke the effect of the wind blowing their clothing. Similarly, the patches of dune grass and pooled water are conveyed with direct applications of paint. More assertive strokes in the blue sky and fluffy clouds give *Beach* a feeling of fresh, moving air. The children playing in the foreground—likely the artist's own—contribute to the overall feeling of intimacy and informality. Moreover, the transitory effects of Chase's imagery poetically link to the temporary—that is, seasonal—character of life in Southampton before the inevitable return to workaday routines in the city.

Despite the fact that Chase executed *Beach* quickly, he considered the composition carefully. He bisected the canvas horizontally, just below center. From the far left of the horizon, the painter suggests a path in the sand directly to the bottom edge of the canvas, and a strong diagonal line, marked by the figures, to the lower right corner. The combination of these real and implied avenues endows the painting with a sense of expansiveness. Cropped edges further contribute to the implied extension of space.

Bright, breezy, and accomplished compositions like *Beach* placed Chase at the head of the Impressionist movement in America. Even so, the artist refused to admit any debt to his leading French contemporaries, such as Claude Monet or Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Rather, the American admired the more restrained work of Eugène-Louis Boudin, whose seaside views Chase himself collected.<sup>10</sup> Chase also attributed his loose brushwork to his enduring respect for the seventeenth-century Spanish master Diego Velázquez.

The rise of intimate, Impressionist landscape painting of the variety produced by Chase and many of his American contemporaries, including John Henry Twachtman (q.v.), signaled larger artistic and cultural changes in late-nineteenth-century America. Whereas the awe-inspiring, highly detailed views of the western landscape by Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) and Thomas Moran (q.v.) had



earned accolades throughout the 1860s and 1870s, public interest in—and the market for—such topographical theatrics faded as the West was increasingly settled and eventually declared “closed” in the census of 1890.<sup>11</sup> Thus Chase led a new generation of American landscape painters who provided their audiences and patrons an escape, not into an adventurous, exotic land of discovery, but rather into a fashionable and familiar world of comfort and leisure.

RRG/MCC

## NOTES

1. For a history of the Tenth Street Studio Building, see Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists*, exh. cat. (Southampton, N.Y.: Parrish Art Museum, 1997).
2. On the Art Students League, see Marchal E. Landgren, *Years of Art: The Story of the Art Students League of New York* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1940).
3. A full chronology of Chase’s teaching career can be found in Ronald G. Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art: William Merritt Chase, 1849–1916* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1983), 185. See also Katherine Cameron and Ronald G. Pisano, *The Artist as Teacher: William Merritt Chase and Irving Wiles*, exh. cat. (East Hampton, N.Y.: Guild Hall Museum, 1994).
4. Profiles of a selection of Chase’s students can be found in Cameron and Pisano, *The Artist as Teacher*, 30–41.
5. The history of the Shinnecock School has been recounted in numerous sources. Among these see particularly, William H. Gerds, “The Teaching of Painting Out-of-Doors in America in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *In Nature’s Ways: American Landscape Painting of the Late Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (Palm Beach, Fla.: Norton Gallery of Art, 1987), 25–40; and Deborah Epstein Solon, *Colonies of American Impressionism: Cos Cob, Old Lyme, Shinnecock, and Laguna Beach*, exh. cat. (Laguna Beach, Calif.: Laguna Art Museum, 1999). See also Ronald G. Pisano, *Summer Afternoons: Landscape Paintings of William Merritt Chase* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993).
6. Chase’s teaching schedule and his general activities on Long Island are described by John Gilmer Speed, “An Artist’s Summer Vacation,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 87 (June 1893), 13–14. His formal teaching duties took up only two days a week, after which he was free to pursue his own painting.
7. Due in large part to the volume of Chase’s production during his time on Long Island, it is difficult to date his Shinnecock compositions. The artist dated few of these pictures, and their similar subjects and generic titles make them nearly impossible to trace over the years. As Chase’s first biographer, Katherine Metcalf Roof, noted, the artist’s subjects seem to relate more to “painting moods” than to a linear development of his art. Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 281. Thus, trying to date these pictures more closely than to the 1890s seems futile unless documentation exists that allows greater specificity. Charles Eldredge, working from Roof’s comment, has illuminated why dating the Shinnecock landscapes is so trying in “William Merritt Chase and the Shinnecock Landscape,” *Register of the Museum of Art* (University of Kansas) 5 (1976), 21. More recently D. Scott Atkinson has built on Roof’s and Eldredge’s writings to dissuade further attempts to date these pictures definitively. See his “Shinnecock and the Shinnecock Landscapes,” in *William Merritt Chase: Summers at Shinnecock, 1891–1902*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 28. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. argued for assigning a linear development to the Shinnecock landscape paintings based on connections he detects between the artist’s aesthetic choices in these works and incidents in his life in the 1890s. In mid-decade, for example, Cikovsky finds formal considerations in the Shinnecock pictures playing an importantly visible role. It coincides with a time of change for Chase; he closed his Tenth Street studio and shifted where he taught. Cikovsky, “Impressionism and Expressionism in the Shinnecock Landscape: A Note,” in *William Merritt Chase: Summers at Shinnecock*, 31–37. While there is little solid evidence to provide a definitive date for *Beach*, tradition and Cikovsky’s stylistic analysis suggest the mid-1890s.
8. On the history of plein air painting, see, among other sources, Valentina Branchini et al., *Paysages d’Italie: Les Peintres du Plein Air, 1780–1830*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001); and Philip Conisbee, *In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996).
9. Chase, quoted in Pisano, *A Leading Spirit*, 154.
10. References to Chase’s admiration of Boudin are sprinkled throughout the literature on the artist. See, for example, Pisano, *A Leading Spirit*, 153; and Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 84.
11. For a discussion of American Impressionism in this context, see Charles Eldredge, “Connecticut Impressionists: The Spirit of Place,” *Art in America* 62 (September 1974), 84–90. Linda S. Ferber has traced the dramatic rise and fall of Bierstadt’s reputation in “Albert Bierstadt: The History of a Reputation,” in Nancy K. Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), 21–68.



# WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE (1849–1916)

## *Edward Steichen*, 1903

Oil on canvas

32 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 26 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (81.6 × 66.4 cm)

Signed lower right: Wm M Chase

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1600

EDWARD STEICHEN WAS BORN in Luxembourg in 1879 and immigrated with his family to Hancock, Michigan, in 1881.<sup>1</sup> Eight years later the Steichen family moved to Milwaukee. During a four-year apprenticeship with a Milwaukee lithographie company, from 1894 to 1898, Steichen began to paint and to take photographs. He was one of the organizers as well as the first president of the Milwaukee Art Students League. His photographs were first exhibited at the second photography salon in Philadelphia in 1899. Encouraged by Clarence White, a leading figure in the growing art photography movement, Steichen decided to pursue photography and painting simultaneously. In 1900, on his way to Paris, he stopped in New York, where he met Alfred Stieglitz. Seeking more responses to his work, he also made an appointment with Chase, who reportedly “received him kindly and encouraged him in his resolve.”<sup>2</sup> Steichen marked their first meeting by photographing his new, professional acquaintance, with whom he would become closer following his return from Europe.<sup>3</sup>

In Paris, Steichen enrolled at the Académie Julian, but the academie character of the teaching there frustrated him, and he dropped out after only two weeks. For the next two years, he trained himself in painting and sculpture with regular visits to the Louvre and other museums. Steichen’s ongoing interest in photography led him to plan a series of photographic portraits of the distinguished artists of Europe. Before he returned to the United States in the summer of 1902, he had frequently photographed and become friends with his idol, Auguste Rodin, as well as many other modernists, including Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

Steichen moved to New York by the early fall of 1902.<sup>4</sup> His photographs had preceded him, winning praise from art critics. Once in New York, Steichen turned his earlier acquaintance with Stieglitz into a friendship; with others they founded the group known as the Photo-Secession. Soon Steichen was featured prominently in Stieglitz’s groundbreaking magazine *Camera Work*. He also continued to paint and did so until World War I. He earned positive reviews for his efforts in both media.<sup>5</sup>

Chase painted Steichen’s portrait in the winter of 1903, although the exact circumstances of the sitting are unknown. The arrangement must have been facilitated, in part, by the fact that Steichen had taken a studio at 291 Fifth Avenue, very near Chase’s own studio, which at the time was at 303 Fifth Avenue.<sup>6</sup> Steichen may

have also sought out Chase as part of his project to photograph major artists. Following their initial meeting in 1900, Steichen took at least two more photographs of Chase, which were published in 1906.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, many young painters of Steichen’s generation studied under Chase at the New York School of Art, and through them Steichen may have visited one of Chase’s classes. Chase would occasionally paint portraits as demonstration pieces. Consequently, another possible explanation for the genesis of the Nelson-Atkins portrait is that Chase asked Steichen to model for such a work.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the thirty-year difference in age, Chase probably found much to like in Steichen. Chase was, after all, amenable to photography as a medium, a fact underscored by his participation in the jury for the Philadelphia photographic salon in 1898.<sup>9</sup> Also, the language of photography colored his teaching. As Chase later advised his students, “take only what you can see at a glance, without changing focus,” and “beginners should think of what they see through the finder.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Pictorialist aesthetic of Steichen’s early work, in which he manipulated his prints to achieve effects of chiaroscuro similar to those in old master paintings, shared much with the European pedigree of Chase’s work. Chase would have appreciated the young photographer’s emphasis on genteel portraiture in a manner similar to his own as well as John Singer Sargent’s (q.v.) and James McNeill Whistler’s.<sup>11</sup> Chase’s portrait of Steichen thus appears to testify to the elder painter’s respect for his sitter, suggesting that he now considered him to be a legitimate—albeit much younger—colleague who was making a reputable name for himself.<sup>12</sup>

Chase had been painting fellow artists from his days as an art student in Munich. In *Edward Steichen*, he employed the vocabulary for male portraits that he had developed over three decades. As in the portrait of Hugo von Habermann (q.v.), Steichen’s face emerges out of a dark background in a manner based on the portrait style of Diego Velázquez. Steichen turns three-quarters toward the viewer, with a slight smile on his face and looking directly out of the canvas. Chase used broad strokes with a full brush to accentuate the angles of his sitter’s jaw, chin, and prominent nose. The result is a dashing and dramatic persona, which, to the critic Charles Caffin, seemed to reveal “an unusually artistic mind groping for expression.”<sup>13</sup> Steichen appears as a cocky young man, quite as he does in a 1901 photographic self-portrait.

*Edward Steichen* was first exhibited at the annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists in the spring of 1903. The show elicited much comment because 1903 marked the society’s twenty-fifth anniversary. Many of the critical discussions focused on the reappearance of a generational split similar to that which had characterized the American art scene in 1878, when the society had



been founded as an alternative to the academicism of the National Academy of Design. Not surprisingly, the example of Chase, one of the society's early members and its president for more than a decade, became a springboard for these discussions. For many writers in 1903, the Society of American Artists was as stodgy as the National Academy. They railed against Chase, particularly in regards to *Edward Steichen*, for lacking artistic responsibility and for being "of small convictions and of little conscience."<sup>14</sup> More moderate critics, however, although they stopped short of putting Chase on the cutting edge of art, were willing to acknowledge that, as a dean of American painting, his portraits and still lifes were worthy of notice for their fineness of old master modeling and color.<sup>15</sup> Other writers, rather than commenting on Chase's art, used the portrait of Steichen as an occasion to praise the younger man's work.<sup>16</sup>

When the painting was shown the next year at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, it fared very well. Chase's art was more positively received in conservative Philadelphia, a situation encouraged by the fact that since 1896 Chase had been teaching regularly at the Pennsylvania Academy and was much loved by his students. The majority of the nearly twenty press citations praised the portrait.<sup>17</sup> A writer for the *North American* wrote most effusively of the qualities the Philadelphia critics appreciated in *Edward Steichen*: "A brilliant success in portraiture is William M. Chase's painting of Edward Steichen. . . . The flesh painting here is amazingly lifelike, the drapery is kept down to its proper value and the illusion of actuality grows as the beholder gazes. There is not a speck of paint in this picture—it is the man himself, and it makes adjacent figures seem like mere wood and fustian."<sup>18</sup>

Chase's portrait of Steichen commemorates not only the specific personal relationship between the artist and sitter but also an important link between two generations of American artists around the turn of the twentieth century. In this regard, it serves as a useful reminder of the considerable overlap between Gilded Age artists like Chase and modernists like Steichen, an intersection that is too often overlooked, underestimated, or denied. It furthermore reveals the dynamic aesthetic dialogue between painting and photography as it stood in the early years of the twentieth century, shortly before it would be extended and modified by artists with more abstract styles like Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.) and Charles Sheeler (q.v.).

MCC/RRG

## NOTES

1. Born Édouard, Steichen had anglicized his name by the time he signed naturalization papers in 1900; see Dennis Longwell, *Steichen: The Master Prints, 1895–1914* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 22n4. For a complete chronology of Steichen's life, compiled by Grace M. Mayer, see Edward Steichen, *My Life in Photography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1963), unpaginated. See also, more recently, Penelope Niven, *Steichen: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter Publishers, 1997).
2. Charles H. Caffin, "Progress in Photography, with Special Reference to the Work of Eduard J. Steichen," *Century Magazine* 85 (February 1908), 491. During this same visit in New York, Steichen also sought out the painter John White Alexander.
3. This photographic portrait was reproduced in a profile on Steichen; see C. B., "Eduard Steichen," *The Critic: An Illustrated Monthly Review of Literature Art and Life* 42 (March 1903), 193–98, at 196. Its appearance here thus roughly coincides with the execution of Chase's painted portrait of Steichen.
4. He spent the summer in Milwaukee, visiting family, before going to New York; see William Innes Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977), 35.
5. See, for example, "The American Artists—Whistler the Dominant Influence on the Young Painters—Brilliant Show of Pictures and Sculpture at the Annual of the Society," *New York Times*, 26 March 1904, 9; and "Pictures at the Society—Last Exhibition of the American Artists Full of Interesting Work," *New York Times*, 1 April 1906, 7. See also William Innes Homer, "Eduard Steichen as Painter and Photographer, 1897–1908," *American Art Journal* 6 (November 1974), 45–55.
6. See Bruce Weber and Sarah Kate Gillespie, *Chase Inside and Out: The Aesthetic Interiors of William Merritt Chase*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2004), 113–14. Steichen's studio at 291 would soon turn into Stieglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession.
7. The two photographs were reproduced in *Camera Work* 14 (April 1906), 7, and in that issue's Steichen Supplement, 15. Steichen's photographs were often published several years after they had been taken. They also appeared as plates VII and XXI in a deluxe boxed set of Steichen's photographs published in conjunction with *Camera Work*. Information about Steichen's photographs of Chase was supplied by Grace M. Mayer, Edward Steichen Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Keith L. Bryant Jr. makes this suggestion in *William Merritt Chase: A Gentle Bohemian* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 186 and 297n3.
9. Steichen was aware of the significance of this exhibition as well as Chase's sitting on its jury. See Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 48–49.
10. "Notes from Talks by William M. Chase: Summer Class, Carmel-by-the-Sea, California—Memoranda from a Student's Note-Book," *American Magazine of Art* 8 (September 1917), 433.
11. On this tradition, see Naomi Rosenblum, *World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 325–26.
12. Niven, *Steichen: A Biography*, 171, has noted, "1903 proved to be a remarkably productive year for both Steichen the photographer and Steichen the painter."
13. Charles H. Caffin, "American Studio Talk: Exhibitions of the Society of American Artists," *International Studio* 19 (May 1903), cxv.
14. "Society of American Artists: First Notice," *Sun* (New York), 29 March 1903, 7.
15. See, for example, "American Artists Open Annual Show," *New York Herald*, 28 March 1903, 11.
16. Caffin, "American Studio Talk," cxv.
17. See References.
18. "American Art Gems Are Placed on Show," *North American* (Philadelphia), 24 January 1904, 8.

## WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE (1849–1916)

### *Still Life—Striped Bass*, c. 1907 (*Fish Still Life*; *Still Life*; *Striped Bass*)

Oil on canvas

29¼ × 36¾ in. (74.3 × 92.4 cm)

Signed lower left: Wm M. Chase.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1601

STILL-LIFE PAINTING WAS AMONG William Merritt Chase's first endeavors as an artist. These early efforts, such as *Still Life with Watermelon* (1869; private collection), are meticulously detailed in keeping with the dictum of "truth to nature" that governed much American art in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Chase returned to still life sporadically as he matured artistically, broadening his range of subjects and altering his style. The painter recommitted himself seriously to the genre in the last two decades of his life, to the extent of devoting space solely to the painting of still life in his studios both in the Tenth Street Studio Building and at Shinnecock.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Chase's elaborately and eclectically decorated studios operated as still-life tableaux themselves, famously chockful of Victorian bric-a-brac, and his still-life paintings can be understood as extensions of his abiding love of arranging and presenting beautiful and sometimes exotic objects in his immediate surroundings for delectation, inspiration, and conversation.<sup>3</sup>

Chase was not alone in his interest in painting still lifes. Still life became an increasingly popular subject for American artists throughout the nineteenth century, as the old academic hierarchy that placed it in the very bottom tier of viable subjects gradually eroded and lost influence.<sup>4</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, a number of painters, John Frederick Peto (q.v.) and Emil Carlsen chief among them, focused on still life. Others, like John La Farge, Julian Alden Weir, and Chase, made lengthy excursions into still-life painting at various times in their careers. However, according to at least one prominent critic of the day, Chase had no rival in America as a painter of still life.<sup>5</sup>

*Still Life—Striped Bass* features many of the characteristics that garnered Chase and his still lifes much acclaim. The composition presents the viewer with a wide range of shimmering, eye-catching surfaces set against a dark background and rendered with bravura, exuberant brushwork. The painter's ability to capture the appearances of materials as different as metal and meat seemingly so effortlessly led fellow artist Kenyon Cox to praise Chase as a "wonderful human camera" and a "seeing-machine."<sup>6</sup> For other observers, however, the apparent ease and almost mechanical efficiency with which Chase painted seemed disturbingly cool and detached. This perception prompted the critic Samuel Isham, for one, to conclude in 1927 that Chase "seems to have treated his

sitters as bits of still-life . . . with no more attachment to their personalities than if they were brass pots or Kennebec salmon."<sup>7</sup>

In *Still Life—Striped Bass*, Chase's powers of observation and technique are manifest in his juxtaposition of the silvery tones of the fish and the warm gleam of a large brass bowl, a favorite studio prop that appears in a number of works.<sup>8</sup> The limp, serpentine bodies of the fish are echoed by the sensuous curves of the bowl and platter. Recognizing the painting's many technical merits, the critic Royal Cortissoz lavished praise on the picture when it was featured in the 1907 *Annual Exhibition of the Ten*. Chase, he argued,

has surpassed himself as manipulator of pigment. . . . [*Still Life—Striped Bass*] would appear to have been executed in a single jet of energy, with the artist's selective faculty in the matter of tones in perfect form, and with his individuality flowing like quicksilver to the point of his brush. The color is transparent, and of a distinguished quality. The painting is too genuine to be called a "tour de force," but it has the brilliance associated with such an achievement.<sup>9</sup>

Effectively combining banal subject matter and technical brilliance, *Still Life—Striped Bass* thus also embodies Chase's belief that beauty in art could and should be discovered in the commonplace.

Chase's particular focus on fish in many of his still lifes can be attributed to a variety of factors. "I enjoy painting fishes," Chase admitted in 1915, explaining, "in the infinite variety of these creatures, the subtle and exquisitely colored tones of the flesh fresh from the water, the way their surfaces reflect the light, I take the greatest pleasure."<sup>10</sup> The challenge of capturing effects of light and texture that only fish could offer as a subject was one that Chase extended to his students, and his rapidly executed fish pictures often served as demonstration pieces in the classroom.<sup>11</sup> More broadly, still-life painting gave the artist a pleasant reprieve from the personal and financial restrictions attached to portraiture, which provided him, as it did so many nineteenth-century painters, with a reliable source of income. As Chase put it, "in painting a good composition of fish I am painting for myself."<sup>12</sup>

The sense of freedom that the artist associated with painting still life is suggested by one of the most unusual, discreet, and intriguing elements of *Still Life—Striped Bass*: the illusionistic reflection in the brass bowl that shows not only the foreground arrangement in reverse but also the artist at work at his easel. In addition to showcasing Chase's stunning command of the brush, the reflection playfully asserts the notion that the artist alone in his studio is master



of his domain.<sup>13</sup> This passage of the composition also operates as an homage to the old masters of European painting with whom Chase wished to be associated. The illusionistic reflection and artistic manipulation of space recall *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*, 1656; Museo del Prado, Madrid) by his hero Diego Velázquez and the portrait said to represent Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife, Giovanna Cenami (1434; National Gallery, London) by Jan van Eyck. Van Eyck's double portrait seems particularly relevant with regard to *Still Life—Striped Bass*, as it similarly—and famously—contains an artist's self-portrait and studio view embedded quietly within the composition on a convex surface. Such references to canonical examples of European art of the past would have appealed tremendously to Chase's clientele, many of whom desired to align themselves with the cachet and erudition associated with Old World culture. No doubt the vaguely Old World appeal of *Still Life—Striped Bass* attracted the painting's first owner, James Smith Inglis, who managed the New York office of Cottier and Company, a prominent interior decorating firm that handled a vast array of international decorative wares, including art.<sup>14</sup>

Of the many strains of historic European art that informed Chase's oeuvre, none was more influential than seventeenth-century Dutch painting. As Annette Stott has discussed, Chase was among several American artists of the late nineteenth century who felt and projected a special affinity with the Dutch masters.<sup>15</sup> Chase had studied in Holland, kept copies of masterpieces by Frans Hals—his favorite Dutch painter—and others in his studio, and was even photographed dressed in Dutch costume. His adherence to still-life painting must be understood as yet another dimension of his enthusiasm for all things Dutch. Indeed, *Still Life—Striped Bass* recalls innumerable examples of still life by painters such as Willem Claesz Heda and Abraham Hendrickz van Beyeren. Another important model in this regard was the work of the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Siméon Chardin, whose paintings Chase also collected.<sup>16</sup>

"I suppose that some day," Chase hypothesized late in life, "I shall be known only as a painter of fish."<sup>17</sup> While this prophecy has not come to pass—his landscapes and portraits are generally more highly regarded by collectors and art historians—his paintings of fish like *Still Life—Striped Bass* exhibit his mastery of the subject and his consummate skill with the brush. Furthermore, Chase, in his demonstrated commitment to the genre, legitimized still life for a new generation of American artists, including his former students Charles Sheeler (q.v.) and Joseph Stella, who painted still-life subjects throughout their respective careers extending deeper into the twentieth century.

RRG/MCC

## NOTES

1. On "truth to nature" in nineteenth-century American art, see Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdts, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*, exh. cat. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum, 1985).
2. Gustav Kobbe, "Artist of Many Studios," *New York Herald*, 10 November 1910, 11, quoted in Annette Blaugrund, "The Tenth Street Studio Building," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1987, 307.
3. See Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 115.
4. For an excellent survey of nineteenth-century American still life, see William H. Gerdts, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life, 1801–1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981).
5. Arthur Z. Bateman, "Fine Arts Exhibition at Philadelphia," *Brush and Pencil* 13 (February 1904), 395.
6. Kenyon Cox, "William Merritt Chase, Painter," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, March 1889, 549.
7. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), 384.
8. It is highlighted in the painting *The Large Brass Bowl* (c. 1898; Trina, Inc. of Fall River, Mass.). In *Cod* (c. 1910; Akron Art Museum, Ohio), it appears much as it does in the Nelson-Atkins painting.
9. R[oyal] C[ortissoz], "Art Exhibitions: The Ten American Painters," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 21 March 1907, 7. For other positive reviews, see References. The Ten, a group working predominantly in an Impressionist mode, broke away from the Society of American Artists in 1898 because they found it too conservative and cliquish. For more on the Ten, see *Ten American Painters*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1990); and Ulrich W. Heisinger, *Impressionism in America: The Ten American Painters* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991). Chase joined the group in 1906, filling the vacancy left by the death of John Henry Twachtman (q.v.).
10. Chase, quoted in William H. Fox, "Chase on 'Still Life,'" *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 1 (January 1915), 199.
11. One of Chase's theatrical demonstrations was recorded by William H. Fox in 1915. His account offers a firsthand glimpse of the artist's working methods. Fox, "Chase on 'Still Life,'" 199–200: "The canvas had been prepared with a surface of silvery white and blue tones somewhat resembling the prevailing color of the fish. Over this the painter put in a back-ground of a reddish-green tone. A small spot of brilliant white shone on one of the fish. Mr. Chase had put on the canvas the highest light and then rubbed the darkest tone into the picture. 'Between these two tones,' he said, 'is my gamut. I must not allow any of the intermediate tones in the pictures to reach either of these extremes no matter what the light or shadow on it may be.'" As the work proceeded, the painter stopped occasionally to freshen up the fish with a dipper of water. Four hours later, "the picture was so far advanced that it might very properly have then been exhibited."
12. Chase, quoted in *ibid.*, 199.
13. Chase was fond of painting self-portraits discreetly into larger compositions. Perhaps most famously, he inserted an image of himself in *Hall at Shinnecock* (1892; Terra Foundation of American Art, Chicago).
14. On Cottier and Company in the context of the Aesthetic Movement in America, see Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).
15. Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Period in American Art and Culture* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1998).
16. Chase knew Chardin's work from his time in Europe. Furthermore, a revival in interest in Chardin had been sparked by, among others, the French painter Antoine Vollon, whose painting Chase also knew and admired. See Gallati, *William Merritt Chase*, 121–25.
17. Chase, quoted in Fox, "Chase on 'Still Life,'" 199.

## FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH (1826–1900)

### *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, 1870

Oil on canvas

54¼ × 84¾ in. (137.8 × 214.3 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: F. E. CHURCH / 1870

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F77-40/1

FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH'S monumental canvas *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives* marks the beginning of the final chapter of the artist's career, in which he moved beyond the North and South American subjects that had sustained him for twenty-five years to explore the grand themes of human history associated with the Old World. Church's only trip to Europe and the Middle East came relatively late in his career (1867–69), and the Nelson-Atkins canvas is perhaps the most significant of the paintings he produced in the wake of those travels. In it, Church sought to work out the differences in the contemporary debate between science and religion.

The son of a wealthy Hartford, Connecticut, businessman, Church became Thomas Cole's (q.v.) first pupil in 1844, an apprenticeship arranged through Church's father's connections.<sup>1</sup> After completing his study with Cole in 1846, Church settled in New York City and spent the next several summers sketching in Virginia, New York, New England, and Canada. Recognition came quickly for Church; he sold a number of early paintings to the American Art-Union, and he was elected to full membership in the National Academy of Design in 1849, the youngest artist ever to receive that honor. His works were admired for a meticulous attention to detail that bordered on the uncanny. This almost miraculous verisimilitude and clarity of expression—in rocks, trees, and clouds especially—would characterize his oeuvre for decades.

Church's life was changed by a trip he made to South America with his friend Cyrus W. Field in 1853. Two years later he stunned New York by exhibiting fresh, tropical landscapes, a type of scene considered novel at the time and which he produced throughout his career. He returned to Ecuador in 1857 with fellow painter Louis Rémy Mignot, and this trip resulted in his important *Heart of the Andes* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Church created his fame by privately exhibiting single blockbuster pictures such as *Heart of the Andes*; a subsequent trip to Labrador and the North Atlantic (1859) also yielded large-scale, crowd-attracting canvases, including *The Icebergs* (1861; Dallas Museum of Art). At the height of his career in the 1850s and 1860s, Church was one of the most celebrated painters in the United States. His resulting financial success allowed him to build Olana, a lavish, Middle Eastern-inspired mansion atop a great hill on his Hudson, New York, estate. Once settled with his family at Olana in 1872, Church

gradually withdrew from active participation in the organized New York art world.

After losing both of their small children to diphtheria in March 1865, Church and his wife, Isabel, left for a five-month trip to Jamaica, apparently in an attempt to seek consolation in a new environment. It was the couple's first trip abroad together, and it proved to be a dress rehearsal for a much more elaborate trip begun in the autumn of 1867. This time Church was joined by his wife, their new baby, and his mother-in-law. Over a period of almost two years, the family visited England, France, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Although they spent the longest time in Rome, Church was most profoundly moved by the Middle East, as he repeatedly indicated in letters home: "Syria, with its barren mountains and parched valleys possesses the magic key which unlocks our innermost heart," he wrote to his good friend William Osborn.<sup>2</sup>

Although Church would later execute a number of Middle Eastern canvases, it seems clear that the city of Jerusalem stood out in the artist's mind as the most significant subject he might hope to encounter while in the Holy Land. His initial view of the ancient metropolis came on 8 February 1868, when he and some traveling companions journeyed overland from Jaffa on their way to Petra (the rest of the Church family had stayed behind in Beirut). Church's diary indicates a certain disappointment with his first view of Jerusalem ("an appearance of newness prevailed"), but before long he had made the circuit of the city's walls and taken note of the situation of the impressive Mount of Olives rising to the east. The next day, a Sunday, began with a service at the Anglican church, yet perhaps the most inspiring event was his afternoon climb up the mount. Church pronounced himself "impressed" with the prospect from the top of Olivet, and in particular he noted, "from a ruined house had a fine view of the City."<sup>3</sup> This view would ultimately be the one he depicted so painstakingly in the Nelson-Atkins canvas.

Over the next week Church immersed himself in the history and archaeology of the city, consulting experts, descending into excavation shafts, visiting supposedly authentic sites associated with the life of Christ, and exploring the hills and valleys just outside Jerusalem's walls. Before leaving the United States, he had undertaken a campaign of reading to equip himself with the basic knowledge needed to navigate the historic terrain. Church's exposure to the actual material remains of the city ignited something of a passion for biblical archaeology and what was then termed "sacred geography," the scientific study of the Palestinian topography with a goal of confirming the truth and chronology of the Bible, especially in the face of recent geological theories that had





increased the age of the earth far beyond the account of Genesis. This interest in the “proof” inherent in the Palestinian topography remained with him for years, as evidenced by the many volumes on the subject at Olana, his collection of Middle Eastern survey photographs, and his participation as a member of the board of directors of the American Palestine Exploration Society in the 1870s.<sup>4</sup> While in Jerusalem, he also made some quick drawings, but the primary focus of his party was the ancient Nabatean city of Petra, to which they began their journey on 12 February.<sup>5</sup> Church’s next extended residence in Jerusalem would not come until 24 March, when he returned from Beirut with his wife.

The Churches remained in Jerusalem for two weeks. Isabel Church followed her husband in her cool reaction to the city itself, but the Mount of Olives was something else altogether. She wrote, “As you wind your way thru the *very* dirty—the old and picturesque streets you are still disappointed but from Olivet—at sunset—all your expectations are realized and Jerusalem is beautiful.”<sup>6</sup> The Churches joined other Protestant visitors in favoring the Mount of Olives—and the surrounding landscape features—over the actual city of Jerusalem. Suspicious of the Catholic-controlled churches and shrines, nineteenth-century Americans generally celebrated the natural features in the Holy Land as authentic, unchanging witnesses to the events of the Old and New Testaments. James T. Barclay, in a book that Church read before the trip and cited in his diary, assured his Protestant audience, “However much other sacred localities about the Holy City may have altered in the lapse of ages, there is no reason to believe that this hallowed mountain has undergone any material change.” As Isabel Church wrote, “I have been . . . deeply impressed with it all—Feeling that perhaps ‘Our Saviour’ took those very paths—and looked upon those same lovely views.” The Churches went so far as to spend a night camping high on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Reading scriptural passages by the light of the fire, they gazed down on the city: “Jerusalem lay spread out before us looking silvery and mysteriously grand.”<sup>7</sup>

Although disappointed by the cold, wet, and windy weather, Church sketched with pencil and brush at every opportunity.<sup>8</sup> A group of drawings and oil studies now at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum attests to his interest in plants, trees, rock formations, and architecture, as well as the local Arab inhabitants and their camels. A dozen diverse studies relate directly to the finished picture. By this point in his career, Church was an expert in plein air sketching and knew just what he needed. As he wrote to Osborn, “I secured the main thing—sketches of the city as seen from Olivet. I have all material sufficient for an elaborate view of Jerusalem.”<sup>9</sup>

Although Church would not begin his great Jerusalem canvas until he returned to the United States, his enthusiastic letters home ignited curiosity and anticipation among his friends and business partners. Michael Knoedler, the dealer who would later present the painting to the New York public at Goupil’s Gallery, wrote to the artist while he was still in Beirut, “You have seen so many new and I may say, strange things, and you make [*sic*] look for the very

best results. I think that especially your stretcher [*sic*] in Jerusalem will prove of the greatest value as to your future works. You know how much our people will like these subjects when translated by your pencil and rendered by your brush.” Another business associate, John McClure, confided, “I look forward with pleasure to the time when I may see your sketches—for of all lands in the world, the Holy Land has the most emotional interest for me. And I trust you will place before the world some day, a Jerusalem grander and more poetical than any yet painted.”<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his career Church followed a pattern of allowing ample time to pass between his first exploration of a new type of landscape subject and his definitive pictorial statement on the topic. Thus, while still in Beirut, the artist began by producing a stock South American scene, and even when he turned to the Middle Eastern landscape, he eased into it with a series of smaller, three-foot canvases. It was not until he had brought his family to a comparatively stable residence in Rome that he felt ready to begin a “great picture” with a Holy Land theme. Again, it appears that Church delayed commencing his projected Jerusalem painting in favor of an initial attempt to treat a less significant subject in the large format he favored for his important works. Thus in November 1868 he began his panoramic *Damascus from the Heights of Salchiyeh*, a seven-foot painting that took five months to complete.<sup>11</sup>

Although it was destroyed in the nineteenth century, the Damascus canvas is important to consider here, for it appears that many viewers, as well as the artist, thought of it and *Jerusalem* as a pair. One patron, Edward F. de Lancey, wrote Church in December 1868 that he “rejoiced” in the knowledge that the artist was painting Damascus and that he looked forward to a Jerusalem canvas as well: “Those two cities by you should be companion paintings.” A year later, a *Chicago Tribune* reporter who had received an advance viewing of *Damascus* before its New York opening at Goupil’s called it “in the order of this reproduction of Eastern studies . . . the precursor of ‘The City of Jerusalem.’” And in 1871, once both paintings were completed, Church wrote to fellow artist John F. Weir, expressing the hope that they might be exhibited together in a forthcoming exhibition at Yale University.<sup>12</sup>

These two paintings marked a departure for Church as they were relatively unedited transcriptions of well-known, actual sites. Both adopted an elevated perspective, looking down from surrounding hills to a distant city sparkling in the sun. (Previously, nearly all of the artist’s major works had been “compositions,” studio arrangements of the typical features of a given region.) The minutiae of this pair of large-scale Middle Eastern views thus took on added significance because of the specific historical, religious, and geographical associations brought to them by Church’s audience. Yet fidelity to the site also imposed certain compositional restrictions. The topographical “facts,” so important to pious Protestants, risked moving his compositions out of the realm of the poetic and visionary and toward the more perfunctory empiricism of the scientist or mapmaker. This pull in two, competing directions surfaced in reviews of *Damascus* when it debuted in London



Fig. 1 Frederic Edwin Church, *Light on Jerusalem*, 2 April 1868. Graphite and white gouache on paper, 4<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (12.2 × 20.5 cm). Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-436A

in 1869, and the English critics' responses presaged the reception *Jerusalem* would receive nearly two years later in New York.<sup>13</sup>

Church was back at Olana by the late summer of 1869, but the first press notice that he was at work on *Jerusalem* came in late February 1870.<sup>14</sup> At this point in his career, it was Church's practice to execute large-scale paintings only once he had secured a firm commission, and this appears to be the case with *Jerusalem*. The patron here was Timothy Mather Allyn, a wealthy dry-goods merchant, landowner, and onetime mayor in the artist's native Hartford. Preserved at Olana is a check from Allyn for \$2,240 dated 23 April 1870. This was undoubtedly a partial payment for the work.<sup>15</sup> Although they were not contemporaries, it is very likely that Church and Allyn knew each other before the commission. During the artist's childhood they were close neighbors (the Churches lived at 28 Trumbull Street, the Allyn at 20 Trumbull), and the young Church probably knew Allyn's four children.<sup>16</sup>

Allyn's motivation for this important commission is unclear. Although he collected art, he was not known for his extensive purchases. He was quite active in his church, but his Unitarian faith was not one that was predisposed toward the literal interpretation of the Bible and the conservative attitudes toward history and science that characterized most American Protestant (and Church's) interest in the Holy Land. Indeed, while Church lived in Hartford, he attended the mainstream Central Congregational Church and, later, the North Congregational Church, the ministers of which, Joel Hawes and Horace Bushnell respectively, actively preached against Allyn's denomination. As an adult, the artist continued to gravitate toward conservative churches (the Dutch Reformed and

the Presbyterian), an indication that he would not have shared much in the way of doctrine with his patron.<sup>17</sup>

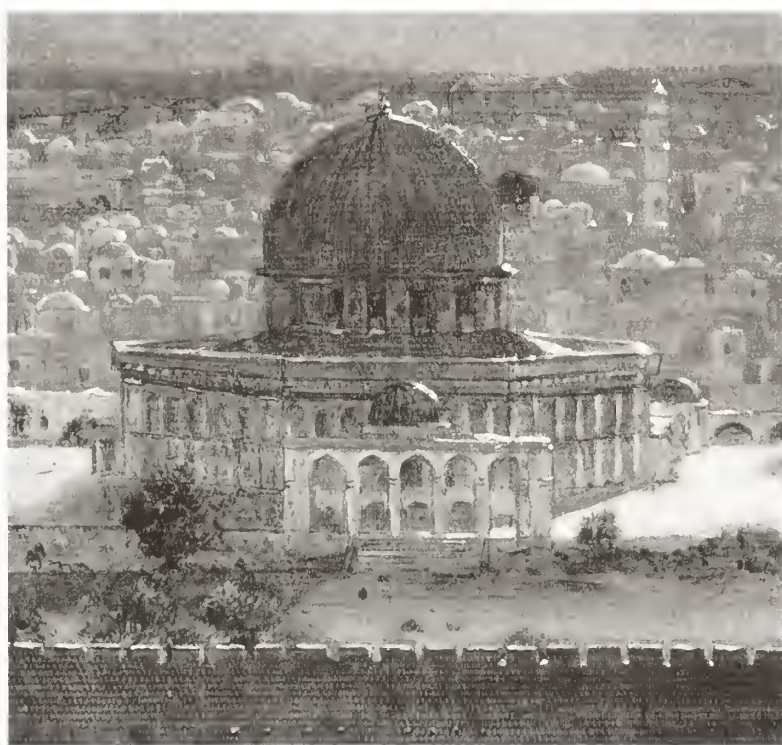
Local considerations might offer other explanations. The collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, which opened in Hartford in 1844, included a huge (14-by-22 ft.) work on canvas, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, by the little-known John Whichelo. This panoramic composition, with its roiling masses of ancient soldiers, burning temples, and historical conjuring of biblical Jerusalem, was different in many ways from the canvas Church would paint, but it is very likely that both artist and patron knew the work and were to some degree inspired by it. Also, another Hartford patron, Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, had recently acquired a seven-foot painting from Church, his *Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica* (1867; Wadsworth Atheneum). Church was an important adviser to Colt, especially regarding the lavish art gallery she was then constructing in her baronial home, Armsmead. Although Colt had given Church the commission in 1866 and it was completed a year later, the Jamaica painting did not arrive in Hartford for another three years, right at the time that Church was conceiving his *Jerusalem*. The opening of Colt's gallery and the public attention given *Vale of St. Thomas* no doubt brought Church and his recent successes to the minds of Hartford's elite.<sup>18</sup>

After receiving Allyn's commission, even though Church spent over a year working on *Jerusalem*, there is little indication that he wavered substantially from his initial conception of the painting.<sup>19</sup> By the time he had his stretched, primed canvas before him, Church had a very good idea of what he wanted, and he generally drew what outlines he needed with a thin brush, rather than a pencil. If a single drawing from his trip can be isolated as a beginning



Fig. 2 Frederic Edwin Church, *Study for "Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives,"* n.d. Oil on canvas, 10 × 16 in. (25.4 × 40.6 cm). Private collection, Courtesy Berry-Hill Galleries

point in the genesis of the composition, it is *Light on Jerusalem* (Fig. 1), a small pencil-and-gouache study that captures a moment when the clouds above the city part to allow strong rays of sun to illuminate the Dome of the Rock and the surrounding Haram al-Sharif, or Temple Mount. Here the dome becomes the central feature of the sketch, as it would in the finished painting. The marked chiaroscuro of the final canvas is adumbrated in the drawing in the almost artificially brilliant platform and the dramatic cast shadow of the building. The other crucial preparatory study is the small oil-on-canvas sketch executed by Church about 1870 as a kind of blueprint for the large painting (Fig. 2). While the sky is a bit more clotted and heavy and the viewpoint somewhat less elevated in the sketch, the main compositional lines and



overall scale of values are the same. In the final work, the artist nevertheless exaggerated the shadowed recess of the Valley of Jehoshaphat below the city walls, making the Temple Mount seem all the more prominent. Church also adjusted his perspective in the larger painting, so that the distance between the Dome of the Rock and the illuminated promontory at the bottom of the canvas seems telescoped, forging a more intimate connection between the viewer and the city.<sup>20</sup>

Substantial areas of Church's canvas are extremely thinly painted, particularly in the low-toned, shadowed regions of the valley, where an initial brown staining and touches of gray form a kind of translucent grisaille effect. At the other end of the value scale, there is a greater buildup of impasto, as in the multiple liquid strokes of white that form the Jewish gravestones at left, the dots of paint creating a silvery aureole at the top of the olive trees, or the slight relief defining the edges of clouds in the sky.<sup>21</sup> The most complex area of brushwork is the sky, where the artist alternated between dark, thin glazes and light touches of opaque, pale blue scumble. These two techniques are interlayered and varied depending on the artist's desire to represent light or shadow. Although it required patience (because of the need to allow the dark glazes to dry completely before more paint could be applied), the resulting three-dimensional, discontinuous surface is the perfect vehicle for the shimmering, changing illumination that is the painting's chief feature.<sup>22</sup>

For a work of such enormous scale, Church's *Jerusalem* is radically simplified in composition; it marks a departure from the complex landscape forms, spatial shifts, and layered framing devices that characterized his earlier "great pictures." It is as though

Fig. 3 Frederic Edwin Church, *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives* (detail)

Church has bowed before the essential qualities of his subject, unveiling it much like a precious work of sculpture, unadorned and raised on a pedestal. Certainly there is great attention to detail throughout, especially in the architectural forms (Fig. 3), but the basic structure of the composition is tripartite and rather straightforward. At the bottom, the gentle curve of Olivet embraces the distant city, cupping the prospect and providing a viewing platform populated by the small group of Arabs and the ancient olive trees. At the midpoint of the canvas, the city itself is spread laterally nearly the width of the canvas; like a thin band stretched from end to end, it bisects the painting into almost equal terrestrial and celestial realms. Above, the sky erupts in an apotheosis of visionary splendor. The mounting clouds at left rise above the city like Alpine peaks. Rolling back like a theatrical curtain swept aside, they allow a burst of light to warm the Temple Mount, recently refreshed by rain.<sup>23</sup>

The foreground of *Jerusalem* contains a more substantial concentration of olive trees, camels, and Arab figures than appear in the sketch. Church arrived at the central group of four men and two camels in a series of five pencil drawings culminating in the sheet now called *Sheet of Architectural and Figure Studies* (Fig. 4). He added these figures late in the process, painting them directly over the preexisting landscape without benefit of pencil lines. They function as surrogates on the scene, and with their long shadows cast to the bottom edge of the picture and the bright touches of red in the turban and shoes of the figure at right, they assert themselves strongly in the visual field. Such staffage groupings, while part of the standard vocabulary of landscape painting, are actually uncommon in Church's oeuvre. Here, though, he seems to have wanted to stress that his audience has been given the best seat in the house, a point reinforced by the engraved key he distributed at

Goupil's (Fig. 5), with its helpful orientation, "The spectator is supposed to stand in the early spring, on the Mount of Olives, facing the West." Drawn in by the radiance settling on this elevated perch, all eyes turn toward the drama and revelation of the sky.

*Jerusalem's* unique and important frame, designed by the artist and fabricated by his dealer, Knoedler, accentuates the effect of the painting's plunging perspective to the distant city.<sup>24</sup> It is a cassetta type, with a flat, running band set in a slight recess between an ogee profile and a raised fillet. A series of nested recesses, or coves, create pockets of shadow that alternate with bright, projecting, water-gilt bands of molding. The resulting visual rhythm creates momentum, leading the eye inward to the pictorial field. The solid, complex frame also makes for a pleasing contrast with the broad areas of canvas untenanted by large landscape forms. Cassetta frames derive from Italian Renaissance models, where the recessed frieze was often relatively plain. Church, however, has filled the cassetta, or "little box," with a Mamluk ten-pointed star pattern, a crucial iconographic element for his Middle Eastern subject.<sup>25</sup>

One consideration for the design of the frame was undoubtedly the impression *Jerusalem* would make in the lavish galleries of Goupil's, where it debuted on 27 March 1871. On the day of the opening, the *New York Evening Mail* was particularly taken by the placement of the painting as "the chief attraction of the gallery," occupying "the place of honor—that immediately opposite the visitor on entering." The ornate, highly reflective frame must have seemed doubly sumptuous under the artificial illumination at Goupil's, and several days later, the *Evening Mail* had more to say about the setting. This time, though, the critic found fault with Church for choosing to exhibit his work amid "the temptations of Art parlors—the meretricious skill of the upholsterer, the false



Fig. 4 Frederic Edwin Church, *Sheet of Architectural and Figure Studies*, 1868. Graphite on paper, 9¾ × 14½ in. (24.7 × 36.9 cm). Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-1152

# Jerusalem.



- |                     |                     |                                       |                         |                           |                      |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mt. Zion.        | 4. Mosque of Omar.  | 7. Beautiful Gate.                    | 10. Tomb of the Virgin. | 13. Jewish Burial Ground. | 16. Siloam.          |
| 2. Mosque of Aksa.  | 5. Holy Sepulchre.  | 8. St. Stephen's Gate.                | 11. Gethsemane.         | 14. Moslem Cemetery.      | 17. Old Olive Trees. |
| 3. Temple Platform. | 6. Russian Hospice. | 9. Road to Mt. of Olives and Bethany. | 12. Absalom's Tomb.     | 15. Bed of Brook Kidron.  |                      |

THE SPECTATOR IS SUPPOSED TO STAND IN THE EARLY SPRING, ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, FACING THE WEST

Fig. 5 Key to *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, 1870. Engraving, 6 × 9½ in. (15.2 × 24.1 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F77-40/2

glitter of a hundred gas jets, and the gathering of selected companies." Attributing venal motives to the artist, the critic suggested that the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, also opening that spring, might have been a more appropriate, less indulgent venue.<sup>26</sup>

Church, though, was eager for the crowds attracted to openings at private galleries. He reportedly sent out some one thousand invitations for the initial viewing. The advance publicity seems to have paid off, for the amount of attention *Jerusalem* attracted was prodigious. The *New York Evening Post*, for example, wrote about it four times during its two-month exhibition. Overall, the reviews were enthusiastic. It was "one of the most important recent contributions to American art," according to the *New York Herald*. However, many of the more rapturous comments were balanced by the recognition that the exigencies of the subject resulted in a somewhat drier, less imaginative composition than had come to be expected of Church. "The picture possesses no sensational features; it is a literal transcript of a fact, and as such we accept it," wrote the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. "Whilst he might have been fairly successful in a more poetical treatment of his subject, we think that this literal one is best suited to the scope of his genius," added the *New York Evening Mail*. "And we thank him for this simpleness of heart and purpose." The *New York World* concurred, noting that while the picture "might have been

made more effective to the eye," Church nevertheless "has by the disposition of the elements at his command given us at once a truthful and beautiful view."<sup>27</sup>

Others were less able to find merit in Church's negotiation between the real and ideal: "Fine as the picture undoubtedly is, it can only be regarded, however, as an admirable topographical rendering of a very interesting scene. Of sentiment there is little or none; less, we think, than Mr. Church's pictures usually contain. We do not feel in looking at this work that we have before us a city made holy by a thousand recollections dear to every Christian heart." Another critic was even more pointed: "The city, Jerusalem itself, is very minutely drawn, but every object in it, from the wall, cut as hard and sharply as a strip of paper against the pale grass without, and the pink buildings within it, lacks any feeling of distance, and any atmospheric effect."<sup>28</sup>

Such critical misgivings apparently mattered little to the crowds lined up at Goupil's. Their interest was stoked by the recent publication of the discoveries of Britain's Palestine Exploration Fund, whose excavations Church had visited.<sup>29</sup> The *New York Times* connected the painting with this archaeological effort to verify the Bible: "Mr. F. E. Church's large picture of 'Jerusalem,' just completed, is . . . a timely one, and especially instructive and interesting at the present moment." *Jerusalem* had struck a cultural chord at an opportune time, and the *Times's* review, like many others,

was studded with scriptural quotations designed to highlight the sacred issues it brought into focus. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* went so far as to elevate the painting above the rest of the artist's paintings based solely on its subject: "To the Christian observer, 'Jerusalem' possesses an interest before which all other works, whether glowing with the pomp and glory of the Orient, or sparkling with the phenomena of storm, themes which have been so eloquently portrayed by the artist's pencil, must give way." In essence, according to the *Evening Post*, the viewer who *believed* was able to put aside petty issues of composition and brushwork and focus instead on "[t]he Divine Spirit which hovers over the sacred mountains [and] throws a halo around their barren rocks and the venerable city which crowns them." This phenomenon, though, was not above ridicule in the press, as indicated by the review in the *New York Evening Telegram*: "Church's Jerusalem continues to attract large crowds of visitors to Goupil's gallery on Fifth Avenue daily. The painting is greatly admired by the good old ladies of moral proclivities, and the number of gentlemen of the pulpit profession who have viewed [*sic*] it is very large."<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not they were "of the pulpit profession," the viewers and critics of Church's *Jerusalem* were most impressed by the handling of light and clouds in the sky—a concern that can be traced back to the initial drawings executed by the artist on the Mount of Olives. While there was some quibbling that the brilliant illumination on the marble and grass of the Haram was exaggerated, most commentators, such as the critic for the *World*, applauded the effect: "A single shaft from the sun, softened and mellowed by a resplendent sky, strikes the city, and all else of the picture lies in a quiet, diffused light. This is unquestionably the artistic merit of the work." Church had long been known as a painter of skies, and the *Daily Tribune* acknowledged that he had lost none of his youthful powers: "No one has given us, of late years, a better cloud-mass than that in the left hand corner, piled up so lightly and smitten through and through with the visible shafts of sunshine."<sup>31</sup>

It was the *Tribune*, as well, that looked beyond the optical pyrotechnics to discern a larger message. Alluding to the complex history of Jerusalem, the critic described the city as "beautiful for situation, bathed in the full effulgence of the light that strikes through the rift of the tumbled cumuli, and rests like a loving consecration upon tower, and mosque, and portal, the minarets of Islam and the Sepulcher of the Nazarene. This is worth working and waiting for." Church, in other words, had provided a summation of the interwoven strands of human history and religion that are Jerusalem's unique heritage. The ideas and beliefs underlying this panoramic and prophetic vision were not facile; "working and waiting" might be necessary, the reviewer cautioned, before arriving at an understanding of the deeper significance of the image. But the viewer who believed, who was willing to accept Church's invitation to reconnoiter the hills and valleys of Jerusalem, would ultimately be changed by the experience.

With this painting, Church had entered the valedictory period of his career. Whereas he had once sought to astonish his audience

with the new, the exotic, and the unexpected, he now looked for what the *Independent* called "those deeper kinships by which the soil and air, the leaf and cloud, the sea and sunlight have become linked with the sighs and toils and sufferings." Nature had not lost its importance, but in a modern world fraught with anxiety and doubt, nature took on added significance as the staging ground for the reassuring history of human civilization. "It is in his Old World pictures, painted since the artist's return from his journeys in Italy, Greece, and the Holy Land, that we find this maturer phase of the genius of Church," explained the *Independent*, "and most of all in this painting of 'Jerusalem.'"<sup>32</sup> Despite the ravages of rheumatoid arthritis that beset him in the 1870s, Church continued to paint sporadically almost until his death in 1900. Yet in many respects, the thematic culmination of his distinguished career as an American landscape painter occurred thirty years earlier, with the public presentation of *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*.

JD

## NOTES

1. For the most complete treatment of Church's biography, see David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1966); Franklin Kelly et al., *Frederic Edwin Church*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989); and Gerald L. Carr. *In Search of the Promised Land: Paintings by Frederic Edwin Church*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2000).
2. Church to Osborn, 29 September 1868, typescript, David Huntington Archive, Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, N.Y. (hereafter Olana). By "Syria," Church was referring to the general Middle Eastern region he had visited, not the modern nation-state. For the most comprehensive treatment of Church's time in the Holy Land, see John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief: Encountering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 8.
3. Frederic Church, Petra Diary, typescript, Olana.
4. On this subject, see Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*, 174–76, 185–88; and John Davis, "Frederic Church's 'Sacred Geography,'" *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 1 (Spring 1987), 79–96.
5. For primary sources on the Petra trip, see Church, Petra Diary; D. Stuart Dodge, "Visit to Petra," *Evangelist* (New York) 39 (23 April 1868), 2; and Church's letters to Erastus Dow Palmer (10 March 1868, Albany Institute of History and Art, N.Y.) and Osborn (1 April 1868, Olana).
6. Isabel Church, Middle East Diary, n.d., typescript, Olana.
7. J. T. Barclay, *The City of the Great King; or, Jerusalem as it was, as it is, and as it is to be* (Philadelphia: Charles Desilver, 1859), 67.
8. "The weather has been fitful and really cold so far; and dear Fred has hard times with his sketching. It having been so exceedingly windy, that it has been almost impossible for him to paint. He has been very persevering however." Isabel Church, Middle East Diary.
9. Church to Osborn, 18 April 1868, Olana. In addition, Church collected a large group of photographs of Jerusalem, from a variety of viewpoints. They are preserved at Olana.
10. Knoedler to Church, 22 May 1868; and McClure to Church, 22 October 1868, Olana. Knoedler, in a savvy attempt to sow interest in Church's Middle Eastern work, forwarded a letter by the artist to the press: "Church, the Artist, in the East," *New York Evening Post*, 26 May 1868, 1.
11. Church to Osborn, 4 and 9 November 1868, Olana.
12. de Lancey to Church, 27 December 1868, Olana; "Church's Pictures of the Orient," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 December 1869, unpaginated; and Church to Weir, 8 June 1871, typescript, Olana.
13. For more on *Damascus*, see Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*, 182–85.
14. "Fine Arts in New York," *Anglo-American Times* (London), 26 February 1870, 13.
15. Several of the initial reviews of the painting indicate that it was "painted to order" for Allyn; see, for example, "Art Notes," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 March 1871. 2. The full price of *Jerusalem* is unknown; however, the purchaser of the similarly scaled *Damascus*, William Walter Phelps, paid \$6,000. D. Stuart Dodge to Church, 11 September 1868, Olana. The *Chicago Tribune*, quoting from an account of the commission of *Jerusalem* in the *New York Season*, gave the price as \$10,000; unfortunately, the *Season's* narrative is so full of errors as to be untrustworthy. A measure of the fame of *Jerusalem* can be found in a volume on the Holy Land published just a year after the painting's debut. The traveler Robert Morris, who had met Church in Beirut, compared his own view of Jerusalem to the famous canvas, reporting its sale for the unlikely price of \$32,000. Morris, *Freemasonry in the Holy Land; or, Handmarks of Hiram's Builders* (New York: Masonic Publishing, 1872; reprint, New York: Arno, 1977), 370.
16. The proximate addresses were noted in a letter from Gerald L. Carr, 11 April 1992, NAMA curatorial files. Allyn died in 1882, although in a letter to John Champlin dated 6 November 1885 (typescript at Olana), Church writes in a way that indicates he was unaware of Allyn's demise. This suggests a minimal degree of contact between them.
17. On Allyn's involvement in the Unitarian Church, see *First Unitarian Congregational Society, Hartford, Connecticut, 1844–1944* (Hartford, Conn.: privately printed, 1944), unpaginated; and his obituary, *Hartford Daily Courant*, 26 August 1882, 2, where he is described as "a liberal Christian." On Church's more conservative faith, see David Huntington, "Church and Luminism: Light for America's Elect," in John Wilmerding et al., *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 156–57. In his unfinished biography of Church, Charles Dudley Warner tempered this view of Church's beliefs, writing, "While ever adhering to the lines laid down in his inherited faith, he was essentially liberal in his belief." Warner, "An Unfinished Biography of the Artist," in Kelly et al., *Frederic Edwin Church*, 198.
18. On the Whichelo painting, see Richard Saunders and Helen Raye, *Daniel Wadsworth: Patron of the Arts* (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1981), 36; and Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*, 57–61. Whichelo's mammoth canvas was likely on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum continuously until the 1890s, and both Allyn and Church's father were active in the Atheneum's affairs (letter from Ann Brandwein, Wadsworth Atheneum, 14 June 2001, NAMA curatorial files). On the founding of the Wadsworth Atheneum and the Colt commission, see Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *American Paintings before 1945 in the Wadsworth Atheneum* (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1996), 1:16–18, 206–10.
19. In March 1870 Church wrote to his friend and fellow artist Martin Johnson Heade, "I am in the midst of 'Jerusalem' but owing to my string of influenzas have really accomplished little this winter." By the following October, Church reported to Heade that the painting was still "seasoning," and as late as February 1871 he was still touching up the canvas. Church to Heade, 7 March and 24 October 1870, and 8 February 1871, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel D5, frames 645, 651, 656. For the most detailed account of the artist's domestic and professional activities during the time he was working on *Jerusalem*, see Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1:305. Church began the canvas in his studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building in the spring of 1870, but it was completed in his studio in Hudson. Although *Jerusalem* bears the date 1870, the artist continued to paint on it up until its debut in early 1871.
20. In October 1900, six months after Church's death, his son Louis gave this oil sketch to family friend Virginia Osborn. Her reply is a good indication of how a sympathetic contemporary of the artist would interpret the composition: "I loved the picture when I first saw it, and it brought the tears to my eyes, for it voiced the thought that is very precious to me. The light of the sun of Righteousness still resting upon Jerusalem, and that it will one day be a redeemed city, full of the Holiness of the Lord. When I went to Palestine I saw how accurate the picture was, and the sketch is the thought of it, as it took form in your father's mind." Virginia Osborn to Louis P. Church, 31 October 1900, Olana.
21. *Jerusalem* received a wax lining in 1977, resulting in an overall flattening of Church's impasto and a sinking of paint into the weave of the canvas.
22. Careful analyses of the sky are found in Conservator Scott Heffley's Report of Examination, 19 August 1994, and Conservator Mary Schafer's Report of Examination, 25 June 2004, NAMA curatorial files. See also Technical Notes.
23. For an examination of this tripartite structure as it relates to contemporary theories of time and Christian destiny, see John Davis, "Frederic Church's

*Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives: Progressive Time in Nineteenth-Century America*,” in *Tempus Fugit, Time Flies*, ed. Jan Schall, exh. cat. (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2000), 244–50.

24. A canceled check at Olana indicates that on 28 December 1870 Church paid Knoedler \$462 for the *Jerusalem* frame.
25. Drawings at Olana indicate that Church was extremely attentive to the overall design of the frame, choosing the many additional decorative patterns (egg-and-dart, palmette, twisted banderole) as well as the areas that would receive a water-gilt, or high-gloss, treatment. For the corner plates, he conceived of what he later described as “a distinct and bold design,” and he indicated that they should be finished “with considerable burnish.” Quotations from a drawing at Olana (OL.1982.783) for a later frame that Church instructed be patterned after that of *Jerusalem*. Church used the same basic design for at least three other large works: *Syria by the Sea* (1873; Detroit Institute of Arts), *El Khasné, Petra* (1874; Olana), and *The Aegean Sea* (1877; Metropolitan Museum of Art). These frames, however, are slightly reduced from the initial model and lack the secondary cove inside the Mamluk strapwork, which is ornamented with an anthemion pattern. On American frames in general, see Eli Wilner, ed., *The Gilded Edge: The Art of the Frame* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000). See also Yuri Yanehshyn, “Pieture Framing I: A Frame Designed by Frederic Church,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 9 (June 1990), 219–21.
26. “Art Gossip,” *New York Evening Mail*, 27 March 1871, 1; and “‘Jerusalem,’” *New York Evening Mail*, 31 March 1871, 1.
27. “Art Notes: Jerusalem, by Church,” *New York Herald*, 3 April 1871, 5; “Art Notes,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 March 1871, 2; “Jerusalem,” *New York Evening Mail*, 31 March 1871, 1; and “Art Matters: Church’s Jerusalem,” *New York World*, 2 April 1871, 5.
28. “Fine Arts,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1871, 3; and “Art Notes,” *Appletons’* 5 (10 June 1871), 688.
29. Charles Warren and Charles W. Wilson, *The Recovery of Jerusalem: A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land* (New York: Appleton, 1871). Other contemporary accounts include “Exploration of Palestine,” *New York World*, 27 March 1871, 8; “Palestine Exploration Fund,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 April 1871, 2; and Lyman Abbott, “The Recovery of Jerusalem,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 43 (July 1871), 195–206.
30. “Fine Arts,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1871; “Art Notes,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 30 March 1871; “Church’s Picture of Jerusalem,” *New York Evening Post*, 24 April 1871, 2; and “Fine Arts: Miscellaneous Gossip,” *New York Evening Telegram*, 10 April 1871, 2.
31. “Jerusalem, by Church,” *New York Herald*, 3 April 1871; “Art Matters: Church’s Jerusalem,” *New York World*, 2 April 1871; and “Fine Arts: Church’s Jerusalem,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 31 March 1871, 5.
32. Fanehon, “Art and Artists: Church’s Painting of Jerusalem,” *New York Independent* 23 (20 April 1871), 2.



## THOMAS COLE (1801–1848)

### *The Mill, Sunset*, 1844 (*The Old Mill at Sunset*)

Oil on canvas

26 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 36 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (66.4 × 91.6 cm)

Signed and dated lower center: T. Cole / 1844

Purchase: Nelson Trust through The Ever Glades Fund and exchange of a gift from the Howard P. Treadway and Tertina F. Treadway Collection, 2004.29

THOMAS COLE'S BUCOLIC LANDSCAPE, *The Mill, Sunset*, depicts a small boy and girl playing on a grassy bank, bathed in the golden light of a summer evening. Like the cattle grazing placidly on a slope in the middle distance, they appear to be unsupervised. A man rowing a boat and another piloting a raft on the river are distant figures who go about their business seemingly oblivious to the children's presence. The viewer, too, stands at a distance, looking out from the lowering shadows of the foreground trees toward the bright clearing where the children sit. Unlike Cole's earlier, more sublime wilderness scenes, *The Mill, Sunset* depicts a settled, pastoral landscape. Its tree stumps and busy gristmill are, like the grazing cattle, signs of progress. While Cole elsewhere lamented the destruction of his beloved nature by "dollar-godded utilitarians," in the Nelson-Atkins painting he celebrated industry's transformation of the wilderness into a protected, domestic space that is at once natural and nurturing.<sup>1</sup>

Cole lived in Lancashire, England, until 1818 when, at the age of seventeen, he immigrated with his parents to the United States, settling the following year in Steubenville, Ohio.<sup>2</sup> He had trained as a calico printer and engraver in England. In the United States, his artistic interests shifted to painting. By 1821 he was studying with an itinerant portrait painter. From early on, however, Cole preferred to paint landscapes, using engravings of paintings by European masters, including Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, and his own carefully drawn pencil sketches of American scenery as his models.<sup>3</sup> The young artist settled with his family in New York City, and it was there, in 1825, that his paintings caught the attention of John Trumbull, William Dunlap, and Asher B. Durand (q.v.), three pillars of the New York art establishment. These men each purchased a landscape by Cole, and they collectively promoted his reputation. Under their wing, he quickly became one of the most sought-after painters in New York.

The landscapes that launched Cole's career depicted Hudson River and Catskill Mountain scenery. As Elwood Parry has noted, Cole's rise to prominence coincided with the opening of the Erie Canal and the subsequent economic boom enjoyed by New York City. His early landscapes, which celebrate the wild beauty and sublimity of New York's forested mountains and river valleys,

struck just the right note with optimistic and affluent New Yorkers—the same men and women who flocked in annually increasing numbers to the Catskills and Adirondacks as tourists.<sup>4</sup> Paintings like *From the Top of the Falls of Kaaterskill* (1826; Detroit Institute of Arts), purchased by John Hone, the brother of the mayor of New York, depict a seemingly untouched, boundless wilderness that served as a perfect foil for the rapidly growing metropolis.

By 1829 Cole's audience had expanded to include patrons throughout the northeastern United States. His range of subjects had expanded too, and now included the White Mountains of New Hampshire as well as scenes drawn from literature and the Bible. Cole's social and intellectual ambitions are revealed in such paintings as *The Garden of Eden* (1828; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth) and *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).<sup>5</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Cole was dissatisfied with the largely ornamental role that art played in the United States at this time. He aspired to paint "a higher style of landscape," one that would convey important religious and moral truths. By venturing into the more exalted field of historical landscape painting, he also hoped to elevate his own status as an artist. Although his paintings of Eden proved more difficult to sell than his wilderness views, Cole eventually found buyers and used the proceeds to finance an extended trip to Europe in 1829.

When Cole returned to New York in 1833, he was more committed than ever to his goal of painting historical and allegorical landscapes. He may, in fact, have already secured a commission from the New York dry-goods merchant Luman Reed for his series of five paintings entitled *The Course of Empire* (1834–36; New-York Historical Society), which have as their theme the cyclical and apocalyptic nature of human history. Other series followed, including *The Departure* and *The Return* (1837; Corcoran Gallery of Art), *Past and Present* (1838; Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Mass.), and *The Voyage of Life* (1840; Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.). A list of possible subjects for future paintings in an 1844 letter from Cole to his patron Daniel Wadsworth reveals that the artist would have liked to paint many more such allegorical works. His seemingly realistic views of American and Italian scenery, however, remained his most popular productions.<sup>6</sup>

In 1833 Cole rented a studio in the village of Catskill, one hundred miles north of New York City. Three years later, he married and settled permanently with his wife's family in their Catskill farmhouse. It was after moving to Catskill that Cole, alarmed by the rapid changes being wrought on the region by railroads and industrialization, began to voice his deep concerns about



the despoiling of America's natural beauty. The artist's relatively sudden transition, as a young man, from the industrialized north of England to the edge of the American wilderness had made a profound impression on him. As he stated in his 1836 "Essay on American Scenery," he saw the United States as a new Eden, where human beings had a second chance to act responsibly in their God-given role as stewards of nature. But, he added, "the ravages of the axe are daily increasing—the most noble scenes are made desolate, and often-times with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation."<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have debated just how—and to what extent—Cole's paintings of the late 1830s and 1840s reflect his resentment over industry's encroachment on the American wilderness. Angela Miller has described the many Arcadian, pastoral landscapes Cole painted during this period, including *The Mill, Sunset*, as evidence that the artist was "fleeing the social and political turbulence of Jacksonian America," which included rampant industrialization.<sup>8</sup> According to Earl Powell, by 1841 Cole had resigned himself to the loss of the wilderness and viewed his subsequent domesticated landscapes as mere amusing and lucrative exercises.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Alan Wallach has interpreted Cole's seemingly pastoral *River in the Catskills* (1843; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) as a subversive statement, in which the artist deliberately departed from the Claudian paradigm of beauty to vilify the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad, pictured in the distance.<sup>10</sup>

Most likely, Cole neither retreated from his commitment to conservation nor condemned industry unequivocally in his late, pastoral landscape paintings. As Nicolai Cikovsky has noted, the nearly ubiquitous tree stumps in Cole's American landscapes after 1833 reflect observed reality, but they also carry symbolic meaning.<sup>11</sup> They represent both the "ravages of the axe" and the advance of civilization, with all of its attendant benefits. Cole—like many Americans of his generation—was torn between feelings of loss and optimism in the face of the rapid changes taking place around him.<sup>12</sup>

Like most of Cole's late, pastoral landscapes, *The Mill, Sunset* reconciles—if only on canvas—competing desires for progress and preservation. As one reviewer noted, "It is a scene of repose, but replete with life."<sup>13</sup> The mountains, which represent the last vestige of sublime wilderness in the scene, are placed far in the distance. Bathed in the nostalgic light of the setting sun and shrouded in hazy atmosphere, they, like the unchanging crags in the background of all five paintings of *The Course of Empire*, serve as reminders of the immutable and eternal in nature. The foreground and middle ground, by contrast, depict a landscape in flux. Scattered stumps attest to recently felled trees. However, unlike the valley near Cole's studio, where—as the artist complained in an 1836 letter—the "copper-hearted barbarians" of the Canajoharie and Catskill Railroad cleared nearly all the trees in a single spring and summer, the trees in *The Mill, Sunset* have been thinned selectively, opening up space for easy walking, a pasture for grazing cattle, and a soft, grassy clearing. Even the twisting, exposed roots of the foreground trees, evidence of rapid erosion due to

deforestation, like the backlit leafy branches above, beautify the scene. The mill itself nestles harmoniously within the landscape. Its forms, though man-made, are echoed by the surrounding trees and rocks, and its reflection in the glassy water further anchors it to the natural world. The scene might almost illustrate Cole's wistful remark of six years earlier: "If men were not blind & insensible to the beauty of nature, the great works necessary for the purpose of commerce might be carried on without destroying it, and at times might even contribute to her charms by rendering her more accessible."<sup>14</sup>

Cole's preference for domesticated landscapes in the 1840s was part of a general shift in mid-nineteenth-century American visual culture away from sublime wilderness scenes toward pastoral, settled landscapes. As Miller has noted, a broad, middle-class, American audience bought countless paintings and popular illustrations during these years in which nature appears as a therapeutic and material resource, and as a backdrop for social interactions.<sup>15</sup> Yet, for Cole, such landscapes remained tied to larger, didactic goals. His religious conversion to low-church Episcopalianism in 1842 only confirmed his long-standing belief that his role as an artist was essentially ministerial.<sup>16</sup> By painting scenes in which human beings and nature coexist in perfect harmony, Cole preached a gospel of moderation and sentimental domesticity. In *The Mill, Sunset*, the religious nature of Cole's message is underscored by the cross that crowns the roof gable of the mill, a symbol that might also refer to the ongoing sacrifice of the wilderness for the benefit of humanity.

Cole elaborated the domestic aspect of his pastoral ideal in his "Essay on American Scenery," in which he stated:

I have alluded to wild and uncultivated scenery; but the cultivated must not be forgotten, for it is still more important to man in his social capacity—necessarily bringing him in contact with the cultured; it encompasses our homes, and, though devoid of the stern sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations—human hands have wrought, and human deeds hallowed all around. And it is here that taste, which is the perception of the beautiful, and the knowledge of the principles on which nature works, can be applied, and our dwelling-places made fitting for refined and intellectual beings.<sup>17</sup>

In this passage, Cole situated the idea of Home, with all its sentimental, mid-nineteenth-century associations, within the domesticated landscape. Indeed, for Cole, the values of the domestic sphere extended beyond the physical walls of the house and permeated the surrounding outdoor space. This is evident in *The Mill, Sunset*, where the landscape serves as a nursery that protectively enfolds its young denizens in pastoral loveliness and instructs them in the perception of the beautiful. Significantly, Cole's patrons purchased his pastoral landscapes of the late 1830s and 1840s primarily, if not exclusively, as decorations for their private homes.



Fig. 1 Thomas Cole, *View in Somes Sound, Mount Desert*, 1844. Graphite with white chalk on paper, 9 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 14 in. (25 × 35.8 cm). Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Frank Jewett Mather Jr.

The oval format of the Nelson-Atkins painting, which focuses attention on the center of the composition, also enhances this work's decorative effect, and thus renders it suitable for domestic display. Ensclosed in tasteful interiors, paintings like *The Mill, Sunset* functioned as imaginative surrogates for nature itself—in an appropriately domesticated form—helping to render their owners' dwelling places “fitting for refined and intellectual beings.”

Several years after Cole's untimely death from pneumonia in 1848, the artist's minister and friend, Louis Legrand Noble, published a biography of the artist in which he praised *The Mill, Sunset* for its “beauty of composition, fine colouring, graceful line and delicacy of touch, and that moist, living air, so peculiar to Cole.”<sup>18</sup> According to Noble, Cole was working on the painting in his Manhattan studio in the early spring of 1844.<sup>19</sup> While this date remains plausible, resemblances between the landscape in the Nelson-Atkins painting and landscapes Cole sketched during a trip to Mt. Desert Island, Maine, in the late summer and fall of 1844 suggest that the painting may have been made—or finished—toward the end of that year. In particular, the dramatic juxtaposition of a calm, winding bay and mountains recalls a drawing Cole made of Somes Sound (Fig. 1). Cole also made several careful drawings of mills in Maine. One of these, on the verso of

the Somes Sound drawing, may have been selectively quoted in *The Mill, Sunset*.<sup>20</sup>

Like most of Cole's late, pastoral paintings, the Nelson-Atkins canvas does not depict a specific place. Rather, the artist drew together imagery from a range of sources, observed over a period of years, to create the scene. The mountain range in the background resembles—in greatly exaggerated form—the view looking west from Cole's home in Catskill. The artist included this view in at least ten other paintings, including *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn* (Fig. 2).<sup>21</sup> As in this earlier work, Cole situated members of his own family—in this case his young children Theddy and Mary—within the landscape. Such inclusions were probably comforting for Cole, who typically spent winters painting in his Manhattan studio, isolated by the weather from his family in distant Catskill. On a more practical level, the drawings of Cole's family members interspersed throughout his sketchbooks provided the artist with the domestic imagery he needed to imbue his landscapes with moral meaning and human interest.

*The Mill, Sunset* was purchased by Thomas Morris Howell, a district attorney from Canandaigua, New York, in 1844.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Howell's brother-in-law, Henry Strong Mulligan, lent the painting to the National Academy of Design's annual



Fig. 2 Thomas Cole, *View on the Catskill—Early Autumn*, 1836–37. Oil on canvas, 39 × 63 in. (99.1 × 160 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895 (95.13.3)

spring exhibition. It is possible that Mulligan, an art collector who was actively involved in many of New York's cultural institutions, simply acted as an intermediary for Howell. More intriguing, however, is the possibility that Howell purchased the painting as a gift for his sister, Sally Howell Mulligan, Mulligan's wife, who had just given birth to her third child in the summer of 1844. Howell and his younger sister Sally had grown up together, four years apart, in the small village of Canandaigua, and they remained close in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>23</sup> Cole's painting, with its sentimental depiction of a boy and younger girl in an idyllic pastoral setting, would have made a perfect gift—reminding the city-dwelling Sally Mulligan of both her rural childhood and her loving attachment to her brother.

If Sally Mulligan owned *The Mill, Sunset*, it would also explain how the painting came to be sold at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy in 1866. By that time, Mulligan was a widow with three dependent children living in Buffalo with considerably reduced resources.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, her relationship with Howell, a Southern sympathizer, must have been strained by the Civil War, in which her two oldest sons died fighting for the Union.<sup>25</sup> In light of these circumstances, the painting may well have become for Mulligan a painful reminder of both her lost children and the emotional chasm separating her from her brother. Indeed, Cole's ideal of an insular and rural American Eden had lost much of its resonance in the wake of the war. In the rampantly materialistic, expansionist,

and cosmopolitan Gilded Age, *The Mill, Sunset* must have seemed a poignantly nostalgic relic of a gentler and simpler time. Not surprisingly, it was at this moment that the painting began to be referred to as *The Old Mill*, a title that firmly relegates it to the past.<sup>26</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. Thomas Cole to Liman Reed, 6 March 1836, quoted in Kenneth W. Maddox, "Thomas Cole and the Railroad: Gentle Maledictions," *Archives of American Art Journal* 26 (1986), 2–10.
2. Sources of biographical information about Cole include Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vessell (1853; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1964); Matthew Baigell, *Thomas Cole* (New York: Watson-Guption Publishers, 1981); and Elwood C. Parry III, *The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988).
3. For Cole's early influences, see Tracie Felker, "First Impressions: Thomas Cole's Drawings of His 1825 Trip up the Hudson River," *American Art Journal* 24 (1992), 60–93.
4. Kevin J. Avery, "Selling the Sublime and the Beautiful: New York Landscape Painting and Tourism," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2000), 108–33.
5. See Franklin Kelly, *Thomas Cole's Paintings of Eden*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1994).

6. Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, early 1844, cited in *The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth: Letters in the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, and in the New York State Library, Albany, New York* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1983), 70–71. For the disparity between Cole's ambitions and his audiences' desires, see Barbara Novak, "Cole and Durand: Criticism and Patronage: A Study of American Taste in Landscape, 1825–65," Ph.D. diss., Radcliffe College, 1957, 38–40; and Ellwood C. Parry, "Thomas Cole and the Problem of Figure Painting," *American Art Journal* 4 (1972), 66–86.
7. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836), 11–12.
8. Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 51–53.
9. Earl A. Powell, *Thomas Cole* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 116–18.
10. Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* as Antipastoral," *Art Bulletin* 84 (June 2002), 334–50.
11. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "'The Ravages of the Axe': The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Art Bulletin* 61 (1979), 611–26.
12. See also Maddox, "Thomas Cole and the Railroad."
13. "National Academy of Design—Twentieth Annual Exhibition," *Anglo-American* (New York), 26 April 1845, 21.
14. Entry in Cole's journal, 1 August 1836, Thomas Cole Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel ALC-3, quoted in Maddox, "Thomas Cole and the Railroad," 4.
15. Angela Miller, "Nature's Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24 (Summer/Autumn 1989), 113–38.
16. See Henry H. Glassie, "Thomas Cole and Niagara Falls," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 58 (1974), 88–111; and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *The Spirit and the Vision: The Influence of Christian Romanticism on the Development of Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 153.
17. Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 3.
18. Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 268–69.
19. Ellwood Parry has agreed with Noble's dating of the painting. Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 296–97.
20. See John Wilmerding, ed., *American Art in the Princeton University Art Museum, Volume I: Drawings and Watercolors* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum, 2004), 85–86. The mills that Cole sketched in Maine were sawmills. The mill in *The Mill, Sunset* is a three-story gristmill, albeit a fanciful one. The placement of the porch (high up in relation to the water), the apparent lack of a loading dock, and the seemingly random placement of the windows indicate that it is an invented building. Caroline de Marrais, Assistant Director, Hanford Mills Museum, East Meredith, N.Y., e-mail message to the author, 3 February 2006.
21. Other examples include *Sunset in the Catskills* (1841; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *The Hunter's Return* (1845; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth), and *River in the Catskills* (1843; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). See Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 288–90.
22. Cole inscribed Howell's name, address, and the date 1844 on the painting's stretcher.
23. Sally Mulligan and her children spent the summer of 1850 with Thomas Howell's family in Canandaigua, and they are recorded in the 1850 census at both his address and their own address in Buffalo, N.Y. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules for Erie County, N.Y., and Ontario County, N.Y., 1850, at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 4 February 2006).
24. The declining fortunes of the Mulligan family can be traced in New York City directories and federal census records. In 1840 Mulligan is a well-to-do merchant in Manhattan. See *Longworth's American Almanac, New York Register and City Directory for 1839–40* (New York: Longworth, 1840), at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 3 November 2005). In 1850 he is a middle-class bookkeeper in Buffalo, New York. In 1860 Sally Mulligan (now a widow with five dependent children) is maintaining a household in Buffalo. In 1870, although she still owns her home, she has taken in two boarders. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules for Erie County, N.Y., 1850, 1860, and 1870, at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 4 February 2006).
25. Howell was a "hunker" Democrat. This conservative, proslavery faction of the Democratic Party rose to prominence, particularly in New York, in the 1840s. They vigorously opposed the presidency of Abraham Lincoln and had strong antiwar proclivities. For Howell's political affiliations, see "The Conventions at Rome, New York," *National Era* 3 (23 August 1849), 135; "Ourselves," *United States Democratic Review* 28 (February 1851), 590; and "Not an Office Holder," *New York Times*, 13 August 1872, 2. Howell later regretted his sympathy for the Confederacy. See "Partial History of the Life of Thomas M. Howell, Written by Himself," 7 December 1866, MS, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library, 17–18.
26. See Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1867), 230, 626.

## JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY (1738–1815)

*John Barrett, c. 1758*  
(*Deacon John Barrett*)

Oil on canvas

49<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 40 in. (126.7 × 101.6 cm)

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F76-52

EMERGING FROM MEAGER familial circumstances, John Singleton Copley became the foremost chronicler of colonial Boston's influential mercantile society in the two decades preceding the American Revolutionary War.<sup>1</sup> Born to poor Irish immigrants in Boston in 1738, Copley gained foundational knowledge about art from his stepfather Peter Pelham, an English-trained engraver, portrait painter, and schoolmaster. On Pelham's death, the young, aspiring artist inherited his stepfather's studio, including its equipment, library, and portfolios of engravings and mezzotint prints based on well-known European paintings. Such valuable resources—not easily acquired in colonial America—secured Copley's path toward a professional artistic career.

Bowing necessarily to the narrow market for fine art that characterized colonial America, Copley gravitated to portrait painting despite his desire to paint historical and allegorical subjects.<sup>2</sup> He modeled himself after the few professional portrait painters who had preceded him in and around Boston, including John Smibert, John Greenwood, and Robert Feke, who, in turn, based their compositions on European, primarily English, prototypes. As Carrie Rebora has explained, Smibert's example was particularly important, as the elder painter's popular Queen Street studio stood near Copley's home on Lindel's Row and his own early studio spaces on Hanover and Court streets.<sup>3</sup> However, Copley soon outstripped his predecessors and contemporaries in popularity and acclaim for his ability to produce convincing—even dazzling—effects of volume and texture in his portraits, which, in the words of Paul Staiti, collectively “mirror [the] antimetaphysical, materialist, provincial, elitist, mimetic, consumerist values of the late colonial society he served.”<sup>4</sup>

Copley was only about twenty when he was commissioned by John Barrett to create likenesses of himself and his wife, Sarah Gerrish. The Barrett commission, like many the artist received before his departure for England in 1774, was symptomatic of the small, tightly interconnected world of colonial mercantile society. The Barretts lived on Hanover Street, again, in relatively close proximity to Copley's own home and studio at the time.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Copley's chief predecessor, John Smibert, had in 1737 painted Mrs. Barrett's father, Captain John Gerrish (Art Institute of Chicago), further illuminates the intimate, intertwined world of the colonial elite.

*Mrs. John Barrett, c. 1758*  
(*Sarah Gerrish; Mrs. John Barrett*  
[*Sarah Gerrish Barrett*])

Oil on canvas

49<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 39<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (126.7 × 101.3 cm)

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F77-1

Like most of Copley's sitters, John and Sarah Barrett were prominent citizens of colonial Boston. Mr. Barrett was a successful merchant and town officer, while Mrs. Barrett tended primarily to their home and eleven children.<sup>6</sup> Married in 1731, they attended New North Congregational Church, which stood at the head of North Square and was torn down in 1776 by British troops for firewood.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Barrett was elected deacon of the church in 1742.<sup>8</sup> He gained further prominence in the city as a longtime, devoted member of the Overseers of the Poor, an organization established in 1692 to provide financial and material aid to Boston's most destitute inhabitants, and as a participant in the Boston Merchants' Club, founded in 1751 to promote trade and commerce.<sup>9</sup>

As rendered by Copley in pendant portraits featuring their original, carved wood, Rococo frames, Mr. and Mrs. Barrett cut commanding but accessible figures.<sup>10</sup> Shown seated, they take up most of the space available in the respective compositions, comfortably inhabiting their separate pictorial quarters. Copley's convincing placement of their forms within space testifies to his growing mastery of human anatomy and proportion, gained, in part, through recent intensive study of authoritative anatomical manuals.<sup>11</sup> The couple wears fine, restrained attire commensurate with their generation and secure station in life.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Barrett sports a brown wool suit, complete with coat, waistcoat (or vest), and breeches. Mrs. Barrett wears a dress made of rich brown damask and accentuated by a lace collar and *engageants* (undersleeves). Such materials provided Copley irresistible opportunities to showcase his exceptional ability to describe and differentiate textures and to create effects of surface shimmer and sheen.

Despite such consistencies in composition and fashion, Mr. and Mrs. Barrett are distinguished from each other in ways both clear and subtle pertaining to the divergent social functions they performed as husband and wife. Whereas Mr. Barrett turns from his writing table, a movement suggesting that he has been interrupted momentarily from his work, his wife greets her viewer frontally, a pose indicating accessibility and engagement. Consequently, the portrait of Mr. Barrett discretely emphasizes his public role as a businessman and civic leader, while Mrs. Barrett's likeness suggests her role as domestic matron. She is shown not at home, however, but, rather, in a conventional, imaginary interior marked by a Greco-Roman fluted column in the upper-right-hand corner





and a view of sky and landscape to the left. Mr. Barrett occupies, by contrast, a more plausible space, appointed with only a writing table (or desk) and a common, somewhat old-fashioned side chair with lambrequin knees.<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Barrett's space alludes to her cultural and symbolic proximity to nature as well as to culture, which Copley suggests is inherent to her womanhood. Mr. Barrett's manhood, conversely, is facilitated by his space that allows his attention to be directed to pragmatic matters outside the home. Gendered distinctions between the sitters are encapsulated by the accoutrements they hold. Mr. Barrett has a quill pen, a tool for written communication with the outside world, while Mrs. Barrett has a fan, an instrument for the nonverbal language of social etiquette that, shown closed, indicates a moment of silence.<sup>14</sup>

Equally—though differently—gendered, the portraits of John and Sarah Barrett nonetheless highlight the degree to which likenesses of colonial women tend to be less individualized than those of men. As Deborah I. Prosser has argued, “artists working in the colonies universally took greater pains to individualize portraits of men than women, either by making male images unique in some way or at least by differentiating them from others in their oeuvres. . . . [T]o the eighteenth-century mind, men should appear as accomplished individuals while women must make pretty pictures.”<sup>15</sup> The pains that Copley took to individualize Mr. Barrett are evident most of all in his sitter's compelling face, filled with particularized features, such as his round, ruddy cheeks and fetching dark blue eyes. By contrast, Mrs. Barrett's individuality is largely subordinated to the need to produce a “pretty picture,” a compulsory exercise signified by the artist's heavy—and frequent—reliance on an identifiable preexisting source. Mrs. Barrett's pose mimics, in reverse, Smibert's 1730 portrait of Mrs. Daniel Oliver (private collection), a picture Copley likely encountered in person while executing portraits of various members of the Oliver family in the late 1750s and early 1760s.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Mrs. Barrett—like so many of her colonial sisters—is subsumed within entrenched pictorial conventions and the cultural ideals that reified and perpetuated them. Understanding Mrs. Barrett's personhood is further inhibited by the fact that her face has been largely repainted following damage to the canvas.<sup>17</sup>

As much as Copley's portraits of the Barretts can be understood as material by-products of colonial mercantilism, they can also be interpreted as windows onto Copley's own social desires. As Susan Rather has emphasized, the artist, born into lowly circumstances, aspired to the social status of his clientele. An elevation to the rank of gentleman was not, however, easy for someone like Copley whose profession was associated culturally with artisanal trades such as carpentry and shoemaking.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, the loving attention the painter paid to such details as Mr. Barrett's brass buttons and Mrs. Barrett's lace *engageants* can be read as an index not only of materialist values of colonial society but also of his personal yearnings for the external trappings of success and acceptance. Such details also assured potential clients that Copley possessed the ability to visualize signs of character and class they wished to project to the outside world.

Copley's dream of upward mobility in Boston society was effectively realized in 1769 with his marriage to Susanna Clarke, daughter of Richard Clarke, yet another of the city's successful merchants. His marriage up the social ladder closed both figuratively and literally the gap between him and many of his sitters. Purchasing property along the fashionable Boston Common, Copley soon counted among his illustrious neighbors John Hancock, whom he had famously depicted in 1765.<sup>19</sup> Copley's union with Susanna Clarke furthermore made him and the Barretts relatives through marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Brought closer through the painter's social ascent, Copley and the Barretts would—like so many personal and business associates in the colonies in the 1770s—find themselves on opposite sides of political lines being drawn in the years leading up to the Revolution of 1776. A fervent Whig, Barrett sat on a committee appointed to protest Parliamentary taxation. On the recommendation of this committee, Boston merchants banned all imports from Great Britain between 1 January 1769 and 1 January 1770 that were not deemed absolute necessities. An ardent supporter of the Revolution, Barrett also provided financial assistance to the American troops. Copley felt more conflicted about the impending break from the British crown, in large part because of his father-in-law's business connections with the British East India Company. Richard Clarke's tea was dumped in the legendary Boston Tea Party of December 1773, an event that made clear to the Clarke family the fact that Boston had become unsafe territory.<sup>21</sup> Having long harbored desires to travel and study abroad, Copley responded to tumultuous conditions at home by immigrating to London, and his wife and children followed him a year later. Situated in the British capital, the painter began a new phase in his career, wherein he met with even greater success, marked by his election to full membership in the British Royal Academy of Arts in 1779.<sup>22</sup>

RRG/MCC



## NOTES

1. Jules Prown, *John Singleton Copley* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966) remains the most essential text on the artist's life and career. Prown's key study was preceded by, among other influential early analyses, James Thomas Flexner, *John Singleton Copley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948; New York: Fordham University Press, 1993). Biographical information about Copley throughout this essay has been drawn from Carrie Rebora and Paul Staiti et al., *John Singleton Copley in America*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995). On Copley's early years in America, see also Richard Klayman, "An Artist's Formative Years: Copley's Education in Boston," *Biography* 8 (1985), 68–82. For an excellent study of the relationship between colonial America and its art, see Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). On Copley and his patrons, see esp. chaps. 24–27.
2. Copley revealed his frustration with portrait painting when he wrote famously: "A taste of painting is too much Wanting . . . was it not for preserving the resemble[n]ce of perticular persons, painting would not be known in the plac[e]. The people generally regard it no more than any other usefull trade, as they sometimes term it, like that of a Carpenter tailor, or shew maker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World." Copley to [Benjamin West or Captain R. G. Bruce], [1767?], in *Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739–1776* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914; repr., New York: Kennedy Graphics, 1970), 65–66.
3. See Carrie Rebora, "Transforming Colonists into Goddesses and Sultans: John Singleton Copley, His Clients, and Their Studio Collaboration," *American Art Journal* 27 (1995–96), 5–37.
4. Paul Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," in *John Singleton Copley in America*, 42.
5. For this and other biographical information relating to the Barretts, see Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Bolling Wheeler, *John Singleton Copley: American Portraits in Oil, Pastel, and Miniature with Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1938), 33 (hereafter Parker and Wheeler).
6. *Ibid.*
7. See "Second Church (Boston, Mass.), Records, 1650–1970, Guide to the Collection Historical Timelines," Massachusetts Historical Society, [www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0006](http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0006).
8. See Parker and Wheeler, 33.
9. As a gauge of Mr. Barrett's civic activities, see Robert Francis Seybolt, *The Town Officials of Colonial Boston, 1634–1775* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), in which no fewer than thirty-two references are made to him. The Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor are held by the Massachusetts Historical Society. See also Parker and Wheeler, 32.
10. For a study of Copley's frames, see Morrison H. Heckscher, "Copley's Picture Frames," in *John Singleton Copley in America*, 143–59.
11. For a discussion of Copley's drawings after manuals, a group of which is owned by the British Museum, London, see Carrie Rebora, "Book of Anatomical Drawings," in *John Singleton Copley in America*, 172–75.
12. It bears noting that the Barretts' dress seems not to be imaginary, as was the case with a number of Copley's sitters. On those instances in which the artist portrayed his subjects in imaginary dress, see Rebora, "Transforming Colonists into Goddesses and Sultans." For case studies on this topic, see Margaretta M. Lovell, "Mrs. Sargent, Mr. Copley, and the Empirical Eye," *Winterthur Portfolio* 33 (Spring 1998), 1–39; and Leslie Reinhardt, "The Work of Fancy and Taste: Copley's Invested Dress and the Case of Rebecca Boylston," *Dress* 29 (2002), 4–18. For a study of this phenomenon within the larger context of colonial portraiture, see Claudia Brush Kidwell, "Are Those Clothes Real? Transforming the Way Eighteenth-Century Portraits Are Studied," *Dress* 24 (1997), 3–15. Along similar lines, consult Aileen Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730 to 1790, and Its Relation to Fancy Dress in Portraiture* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984).
13. Mr. Barrett's chair is identified as such in Joan Barzilay Freund and Leigh Keno, "The Making and Marketing of Boston Seating Furniture in the Late Baroque Style," in *American Furniture, 1998*, ed. Luke Beckerdite (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, for the Chipstone Foundation, 1998), 1–40, esp. 28.
14. This comment is based on Margaretta M. Lovell's observations regarding colonial portraits: "men often touch and are associated with elongated instruments of contact with the outside world [whereas women hold] fruit, flowers, and dogs and other pets, what were seen as appropriate attributes for women." Lovell, "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images," *Winterthur Portfolio* 22 (Winter 1987), 247. The particular manner in which Mrs. Barrett holds her fan—with one end resting in her right palm and the other grasped by her left hand—follows the second resting position for fans described by the British etiquette connoisseur Matthew Towle in *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Private Tutor*, published in 1770. Towle and his publication are described in Ivison Wheatley, *The Language of the Fan* (Castlegate, York: York Civic Trust, Fairfax House, 1989), esp. 28–29. Towle seems not to have invented these six resting positions but codified them as pre-existing social norms.
15. Deborah I. Prosser, "'The rising Prospect or the lovely Face': Convention of Gender in Colonial American Portraiture," in *Painting and Portrait Making in the American Northeast*, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, Annual Proceedings (Boston: University of Boston Press, 1994), 186.
16. See Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 29.
17. See Technical Notes.
18. For a discussion of the social tensions in Copley's work relating to associations with trade, labor, and gentlemanly status, see Susan Rather, "Carpenter, Tailor, Shoemaker, Artist: Copley and Portrait Painting around 1770," *Art Bulletin* 79 (June 1997), 269–90.
19. See *ibid.*; and Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," esp. 35–39, for discussions of the artist's social ascent.
20. The Barretts' son Samuel married Susanna (Clarke) Copley's sister Mary. See the Clarke family tree in Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 151, which illuminates Copley's familial ties to the Barretts through marriage.
21. For an elucidation of Copley's conflicting political alliances, see Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," esp. 43–47.
22. See Emily Ballew Neff et al., *John Singleton Copley in England*, exh. cat. (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1995), for a thorough analysis of this phase of the painter's career. Critics and historians over the years have weighed the merits of Copley's American work against his accomplishments in England without reaching a qualitative consensus.

## JASPER F. CROPSEY (1823–1900)

### *Stonehenge, 1876*

(*Stonehenge, Salisbury Plains*)

Oil on canvas

24¼ × 54⅞ in. (61.6 × 137.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: J. F. Cropsey / 1876

Gift of Mrs. Thomas King Baker and Mrs. George H.

Bunting Jr., 81-11

IN 1872 CHARLES DICKENS remarked that Stonehenge was “one of the most venerable monuments of antiquity that remain on the globe.”<sup>1</sup> Ninety-four giant stones formed the outer circle at that time.<sup>2</sup> Standing in solitary splendor on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England, it stood with a diameter of more than one hundred feet, which enclosed remnants of two inner colonnades. Without date or verifiable history, the site is among the greatest mysteries of human existence. In the nineteenth century a variety of theories suggested its origins and meaning.<sup>3</sup> Most often Stonehenge was connected to druidical practices, especially sun worship, for it was generally accepted that the stones were fixed according to astronomical alignments, particularly those associated with the solstices.

Stonehenge was a well-known image in the nineteenth century, and by 1866 a writer for *Temple Bar* could declare: “Every one knows Stonehenge by print or model.”<sup>4</sup> Numerous topographic renderings of the site were available in prints and as illustrations to English guidebooks from the eighteenth century. While ruined church edifices were perhaps a more common subject in the canon of English Romantic art in the early nineteenth century, Stonehenge was also attractive to British painters, John Constable and J. M. W. Turner chief among them.<sup>5</sup> Ruins suggested to their viewers human mortality and fleeting human history in contrast to the continuity of nature that surrounded them. Stonehenge, too, conjured such associations, and its mysterious past and possible connections to pagan worship gave the site a certain eerie undercurrent that was appealing to the Romantic sensibility. Stonehenge’s dramatic setting on the open plain gave artists like Constable and Turner the opportunity to record spectacular effects in the sky that underscored the site’s electrifying enigma. Thomas Gilpin, the noted British author, summarized what was so compelling about Stonehenge for his generation: “[I]t is not the elegance of the work, but the grandeur of the idea that strikes us . . . awfully magnificent . . . astonishing beyond concept.”<sup>6</sup> However, if Stonehenge captured the imagination of English painters through the 1840s, it had lost its appeal as a subject for Victorian artists.<sup>7</sup>

For American artists, the circles of stones were never a popular subject.<sup>8</sup> While many nineteenth-century American artists,

including Thomas Cole (q.v.), Asher B. Durand (q.v.), John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), and Francis William Edmonds (q.v.) likely stopped at Stonehenge, only Cole chose to paint the monument. He depicted it, complete and newly built, on a hillside in the middle distance of *The Pastoral or Arcadian State* (1834; New-York Historical Society), the second panel of his five-part series *The Course of Empire*. There, it serves to locate the scene in the distant, mythic past and alludes to the theme of the series—the inevitable decay of all human endeavors. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, landscapists were attracted to either more exotic locales or intimate and poetic views of ordinary places. Jasper Cropsey, however, produced a series of paintings of twilight European ruins in the mid-1870s, based on drawings he had made during a grand tour nearly thirty years earlier. Through this series, which includes the Nelson-Atkins painting of Stonehenge, the artist responded to the dramatic changes occurring in American art while remaining true to his own more traditional ideals.

A native of Staten Island, New York, Cropsey traveled to Stonehenge with his wife, Maria, in early July 1849.<sup>9</sup> Their visit came at the tail end of a two-year wedding trip that took them to Italy and France as well as England. The artist had completed a five-year apprenticeship with the architect Joseph Trench in 1842. Although he had quickly abandoned architecture to become a successful professional painter, his architectural training probably moved him to make careful pencil sketches of the crumbling, ancient structures he observed during his European tour.

Cropsey returned to the United States in 1849 and soon distinguished himself as a painter of Hudson River and New England scenery. In 1855 he began to create sets of paintings depicting the four seasons. His images of autumn scenery painted with a palette full of bright greens, reds, and yellows set him apart from other midcentury landscapists and made his reputation. Cropsey also worked steadily from his European sketches throughout the 1850s, producing Romantic paintings of English and Italian ruins, including *Warwick Castle* (c. 1856; location unknown), *Temple at Paestum, Crescent Moon* (1859; Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.), and several depictions of the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli.<sup>10</sup> During the 1850s Cropsey also incorporated fancifully reconstructed ancient architecture in several allegorical history paintings, such as *The Spirit of War* (1851; location unknown), *The Spirit of Peace* (1851; private collection), and *The Millennial Age* (1854; private collection). Like Cole’s *Course of Empire*, these paintings present a moralizing, didactic vision of history.

As his career blossomed, Cropsey again left for England in 1856, armed with commissions for English scenes as well as



American sketches from which to work. He remained in London through 1863 and was part of a wide circle of artists and thinkers that included John Ruskin and John Brett. During this period, major paintings of American autumn scenes, including *Autumn on the Hudson* (1860; National Gallery of Art), brought him great acclaim at home and abroad.

Cropsey returned to New York City in 1863. From the late 1860s into the 1880s he exhibited regularly in New York at the National Academy of Design, the American Watercolor Society, the Century Club, the Brooklyn Art Association, and the Artists' Fund Society. However, after the early 1870s, the frequent offerings from the artist's brush met with little interest. By this time, panoramic views of American scenery, rendered with exact drawing and a wealth of detail, were no longer capturing the attention of critics and patrons.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the public and the press were increasingly drawn to the work of such younger artists as William Merritt Chase (q.v.) and John Singer Sargent (q.v.), who had trained in Munich or Paris and who worked in a wider variety of subjects and techniques, including figure subjects and more expressive paint handling.

A number of factors may have prompted Cropsey to revisit the subject of ruins in the mid-1870s. His training as an architect was being put to good use by the late 1860s, when, financially strapped, he supplemented his income with architectural commissions.<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising that, as he designed houses and apartment buildings, he looked again at his European sketches, either for inspiration or to reflect on the transience of all earthly endeavors. Ruins have long been used in Western art to evoke the passage of time and the brevity of human life. As Hiram Hitchcock wrote in an 1872 essay for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*,

The contemplation of the old will ever touch the deeper depths of the human soul, until all things are made new. The thoughtful man can not look upon an heirloom of a hundred years with a careless eye. He can not linger in the shade of the "old stone mill" without a reverie. He can not enter the circle at Stonehenge without weird and solemn shadows. He can not sit down at Pompeii . . . without feeling "what shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue."<sup>13</sup>

The middle-aged Cropsey, struggling financially and professionally, may have found solace in depicting the "weird and solemn shadows" of Stonehenge and other European ruins in such paintings as *The Campagna of Rome* (1874; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), *Temple of Ceres, Paestum* (1875; Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.), *Ruins at Narni, Italy* (1876; location unknown), *Temple of Sibyl, Tivoli* (1876; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio), and *Paestum* (c. 1877; Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.).<sup>14</sup> These scenes show their subjects from a low vantage point, bathed in the light of the setting sun and surrounded by moody shadows, marshy land, and wandering sheep or goats. The nearly thirty-year interval between Cropsey's observations and his

paintings probably contributed to the ruins' aura of reverie and mystery, an aura Cropsey emphasized through his technique.

Cropsey painted *Stonehenge* looking northeast. This view had been employed as early as 1800 and was one of the two most common angles from which the structure was seen in British art.<sup>15</sup> While Cropsey was likely aware of published views of Salisbury Plain, the Nelson-Atkins painting is closely related to a pencil and wash drawing he made at Stonehenge in July 1849 (Fig. 1). The drawing focuses on both the relationship of the stones to one another and the effect of dusk on them. Cropsey included a figure at right to indicate the scale of the massive stones. He also carefully shaded each facet of the individual monoliths to indicate how the fading light fell on them.

Notations that run across the top of the sheet point out Cropsey's particular interest in the sky at Stonehenge. The words "blue quite leaden in col. with much cirus [*sic*] forming" were a sufficient reminder of what he saw, and he also noted that a similar sky could be found in his 1849 memorandum book. The study of clouds was important to Cropsey throughout his life, and this drawing illuminates how meteorologically aware he was.<sup>16</sup> While Cropsey followed the 1849 drawing faithfully for the Nelson-Atkins canvas, he also incorporated later studies of sheep made in Kensington Gardens, London, on his second trip to England.<sup>17</sup>

Cropsey appears to have used his drawing of Stonehenge and his sketches of sheep to make a cartoon, and then used a pouncing technique to transfer this design to his canvas. Although the perforated cartoon for *Stonehenge* has not been found, infrared reflectography reveals pounced lines in graphite or charcoal delineating several of the monoliths, features of the landscape, and even some of the sheep (Fig. 2). These lines outline forms and also indicate surface contours and shadows. It is difficult to say why Cropsey chose to use this particular transfer technique, more commonly employed in large mural compositions, rather than simply drawing directly on the canvas. It is possible that he experimented with pouncing in *Stonehenge* with an eye to possible mural compositions in the future. About 1878 Cropsey designed decorative murals for the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York, and, under his supervision, his cartoons were transferred to the walls of the armory by pouncing.<sup>18</sup>

For the painting of Stonehenge, Cropsey chose an exaggerated horizontal format, used a low horizon, and cropped the foreground to magnify the awe-inspiring structure. The sheep-dotted terrain with shepherds relaxing enhances the overpowering presence of the stones but also humanizes the landscape. The viewer is placed neither very close to nor very far from the stones. The result is that one can imagine the experience of standing on Salisbury Plain but at the same time is too distant to hear the interchange between the shepherds at right.

Cropsey cast the salmon glow of sunset over the entire canvas, modulating it with shadows cast by the stones and clouds. To achieve this all-encompassing pink atmosphere, he used a salmon-colored ground on the canvas. The salmon intensifies the blue of the sky and verdant green of the landscape. In addition,



Fig. 1 Jasper F. Cropsey, *Stonehenge*, 2 July 1849. Graphite and white wash on paper, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (17.5 × 24.9 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Maxim Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Watercolors and Drawings, 1800–1875, 54.1634. © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

*Stonehenge* is painted broadly with only small clusters of detailing in the foreground grasses, yet the diagonal cast of light on the landscape, especially on the upright stones, adds a super-real, even surreal, quality to the image. Cropsey's use of dramatic lighting, unusual color combinations, and small areas of detail in an otherwise broadly painted canvas may have been a result of his knowledge of such British painters as William Holman Hunt and John Brett, who used similar strategies in their work in the 1850s and 1860s, when Cropsey resided in London. The combination of intense coloration, the strong light and dark patterning (indicating shadows cast by the setting sun), and the mix of sharp and soft focus heightens the emotional impact of the scene and frames it as mysterious.

Despite its considerable size and presence, *Stonehenge* does not appear to have been exhibited during Cropsey's lifetime. How-

ever, the painting did receive some attention from critics when it was viewed on Cropsey's easel just as he was finishing it. The critic for the New York *Commercial Advertiser* noted:

At first sight, there appears to be a lack of interest in these huge piles of stones, but as we study the artist's motive, as shown in the varying colors of the foreground verdure, the brilliant suggestions of light and shade, which give relief to the great granite blocks, and the subtle perspective effect, looking across the plains, the momentary disappointment disappears, and the subject assumes an importance in a pictorial sense as well as an impressiveness that rarely belongs to a landscape picture.<sup>19</sup>

This critic's emphasis on *Stonehenge*'s "pictorial" qualities may suggest his recognition of Cropsey's new, looser painting style.

In its historical and symbolic associations, its broad painterliness, and its connections to British art, *Stonehenge* exhibits some of the newer trends Cropsey saw coming to the fore in late-nineteenth-century American painting. By choosing the subject of Stonehenge and painting it the way he did, Cropsey was able to conjoin the stock elements that made up his style throughout his career with some of the newer tendencies. Painted when he was fifty-three, *Stonehenge* reflects the older artist's recognition that he stood at a turning point. He was facing the final phase of his own career and the beginning of a new era for American art.

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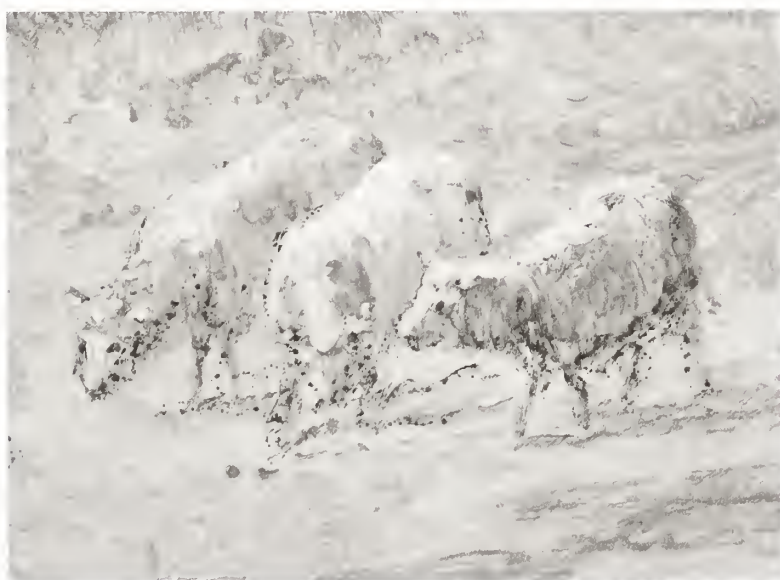


Fig. 2 Infrared photograph of Jasper F. Cropsey, *Stonehenge* (detail)

## NOTES

1. Charles Dickens, "Stonehenge; What It Is, and What It Is Not," *All the Year Round* 8 (10 August 1872), 294.
2. The site was thus described by Ralph Waldo Emerson in *English Traits* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1856), 275. Since 1856 the following changes have occurred: in 1900 a gale blew down one standing stone and its lintel, which broke into pieces. In 1901 a badly leaning stone was returned to an upright position. Military maneuvers on Salisbury Plain during World War I destabilized several of the stones. A 1919 restoration returned six leaning stones to their upright position and restored their fallen lintels. A second restoration, in 1958–59, restored two fallen stones to standing along with their lintels. Another standing stone fell in 1963, but was restored in 1964. See Christopher Chippendale, *Stonehenge Complete* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 164, 166, 179, 205.
3. For one example of the controversies over Stonehenge's date and meaning, see "Article I," *Christian Remembrance* 24 (July 1852), 1–19, which is a book review of Algernon Herbert, *"Cyclops Christianus;" or, an Argument to disprove the supposed Antiquity of the Stonehenge and other Megalithic Erections in England and Brittany* (1849).
4. "A Ramble on Salisbury Plain," *Temple Bar* 18 (November 1866), 391.
5. See Linda Marie Zimmerman, "Representations of Stonehenge in British Art (1300–1900): Antiquity, Ideology and Nationalism," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1997.
6. Quoted in Louis Hawes, *Constable's Stonehenge* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1975), 13, from Thomas Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty* (London: printed for T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), 81.
7. Louis Hawes has observed that William Inchbold was the only significant Victorian painter to picture Stonehenge. Hawes, *Constable's Stonehenge*, 20. Linda Marie Zimmerman has recently noted that Stonehenge's drop in popularity as a subject for British painters corresponded to its rise as an iconic subject for commercial photographers and its subsequent commodification through cheap souvenirs. See Zimmerman, "Representations of Stonehenge in British Art," 207–27.
8. In the Bicentennial Inventory of American Paintings Executed before 1914, Smithsonian Institution, only four paintings of Stonehenge are listed: the Nelson-Atkins's, two by William Trost Richards (q.v.) from the 1880s, and one by Frederick Stuart Church (1909).
9. The most comprehensive study of Cropsey's life and work is William S. Talbot, *Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823–1900* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).
10. According to Henry Tuckerman, Cropsey had made at least six paintings of the Temple of the Sibyl by 1867. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1867), 535. One 1858 version of this subject is now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida.
11. For a complete examination of the decline of the Hudson River School, see Doreen Bolger Burke and Katherine Hoover Voorsanger, "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 71–90.
12. As Cropsey's professional status waned, he began building Aladdin, a country house in Warwick, New York. Unfortunately, this project considerably drained his increasingly limited financial resources. Aladdin was repossessed in 1884, and Cropsey moved to Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, where he lived until his death in 1900.
13. Hiram Hitchcock, "The Explorations of Di Cesnola in Cyprus," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 45 (July 1872), 189.
14. This last painting has been frequently misdated to 1871 because overcleaning has made the last number in Cropsey's date, which was most likely a 7, appear to be a 1.
15. Hawes, *Constable's Stonehenge*, 13.
16. The artist had outlined the importance of cloud study in Jasper Cropsey, "Up among the Clouds," *Crayon* 2 (8 August 1855), 79–80.
17. Florence Levins, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, kindly found these drawings in the Cropsey archives.
18. The perforated cartoons for these mural decorations are now in the collection of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. We are grateful to Ken Maddox, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, for his assistance with this question.
19. "Fine Arts," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), 30 January 1877, 1.



# JOHN STEUART CURRY (1897–1946)

## *The Bathers*, c. 1928

Oil on canvas

30 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 40 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (76.5 × 101.9 cm)

Signed lower right: John Steuart Curry

Purchase: acquired with a donation in memory of George K. Baum II by his family, G. Kenneth Baum, Jonathan Edward Baum, and Jessica Baum Pasmore, and through the bequest of Celestin H. Meugniot, F98-3

JOHN STEUART CURRY'S *The Bathers* depicts three farmers and two farm boys gathered in and around a cattle tank. Here they undress, cool off, wash, and cavort after another day of hard work. Near the center of the composition, the young boys take turns diving into the shallow and murky water below. Silhouetted against a sky saturated with fading sunlight, one places his hands above his head and prepares for the plunge. His upright body forms a strong vertical axis and assumes an iconic presence that pervades the entire scene. The nearly identical boy to his side emerges from the trough in anticipation of another dip. At the right of the composition, an athletic young man dumps a bucket of water over the head of an equally well-built cohort, who lunges back at him in playful retaliation. Presiding over these energetic high jinx like a lifeguard is the figure sitting in profile to the left. Perched atop a wooden rail fence with his right leg resting on the edge of the tank, this commanding figure enjoys a view that extends beyond the four athletic young men to the landscape that opens up beyond them.

The ostensible subject of *The Bathers* was drawn from the artist's memories of his childhood growing up on a farm near Dunavant, Kansas. Family lore maintained that the boy emerging from the tank is Curry himself, while the other, more iconic diver embodies his brother Eugene.<sup>1</sup> The untimely death of the artist's brother Paul in November 1927 may have inspired the creation of the painting, which, rendered with warm, glowing hues, exudes a distinctly nostalgic mood.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the painting's numerous autobiographical dimensions, *The Bathers* projects far beyond the confines of any Kansas barnyard. Containing a striking preponderance of idealized male flesh, the composition evokes the grandest traditions of Western art, particularly ancient Greek precedents, which set revered standards for rendering the male nude. The painter's perfectly proportioned, muscular bathers are sculpted Greek athletes brought to life and relocated to the prairie, even as their tanned faces, necks, and forearms remind viewers that these bodies are rarely exposed fully to the sun. Curry's emphasis on the idealized male nude ties the picture also to Italian Renaissance art, to the work of Michelangelo especially. As Robert Gambone has observed, the figure at the far left seems a composite of the *ignudi* that the Italian master

rendered as part of his ceiling decorations for the Sistine Chapel (1508–12; Vatican City).<sup>3</sup> Even more, the painting's male bathers recall Michelangelo's fraternity hurriedly vacating the Arno River in the long-lost design *Battle of Cascina* (c. 1506). By tying his composition visually to such masterworks in the canon of Western art, Curry ennobled his quotidian subject matter.

These lofty art-historical evocations also betray the ambitions of an artist surpassing by far his humble artistic beginnings. Curry demonstrated interest in art early in life and honed his budding talents by sketching animals on the family farm. At the age of twelve, he took his first lessons in art from the nearest instructor, which necessitated a ten-mile round-trip commute on horseback. Six years later, in 1916, he left home and studied briefly at the Kansas City Art Institute, then more extensively at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he decided to make a career in illustration. After moving first to Leonia, New Jersey, and subsequently to Westport, Connecticut, he made important connections in the New York publishing world and sold his illustrations to several periodicals, including *Boy's Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Curry's increasing desire to learn how to compose easel paintings and murals resulted in his decision to seek training overseas. For nine months during 1926 and 1927 he studied at a Parisian drawing school headed by Basil Sehoukhaieff, a Russian-born academician. Numerous studies of male nudes that Curry completed during this period formed the general basis of *The Bathers*, among his first serious attempts at figurative easel painting, which he completed after resettling in his new home in Connecticut.<sup>4</sup>

Marking a new direction in Curry's career, *The Bathers* features the self-conscious and workmanlike technique of a young, essentially untested painter. Curry's brushwork is thin, dry, and heavily blended, qualities that suggest an aversion to the sensuous properties of oil paint, a condition symptomatic of his greater comfort and confidence with graphic media. Tight and controlled overall, Curry's application of paint nevertheless loosened somewhat in the foreground, particularly in the passages where he depicted ripples in the water caused by raucous roughhousing. While Curry's propensity to blend his brushwork helped model the figures successfully, it severely limited the differentiation of textures throughout the composition. Consequently, objects like the barn and tank seem to be made of the same material. Due to this pervasive evenness of effect, *The Bathers* might appear halting or even unexceptional, technically speaking. However, audiences and critics in Curry's day generally lauded his straightforward, "honest" realism, a style seemingly suited perfectly to his unpretentious rural subjects.<sup>5</sup>

Curry's blunt figurative style furthermore highlights the painter's particular response to the artistic milieu of the 1920s.



Studying the figure in Schoukhaieff's studio in Paris, the artist successfully resisted the innovations that held sway over many of his contemporaries. A comparison between *The Bathers* and *Hôtel de France* by Stuart Davis (q.v.), painted in Paris within a year following Curry's return to America, highlights Curry's distance from contemporaneous artistic trends in France. Newly arrived in Paris, Davis turned his attention to the city's unique architecture, while Curry turned back to homegrown subject matter. Davis blended the flat patterning of Synthetic Cubism and the Surreal cityscapes of Giorgio de Chirico, among other influences, while Curry extended time-honored academic traditions for rendering the figure.

Thus, with regard to both subject matter and style, *The Bathers* must be understood fundamentally as a rejection of European modernism. "Curry's attitude toward what was then known as 'modern' art," the artist's biographer Laurence E. Schmeckebier has recalled, "was one of respectful detachment. . . . He admired Matisse as an excellent colorist and designer, but a great many of the Matisse followers he considered insincere and cheap. Picasso's stylistic gyrations and the eddying currents which they set in motion were phenomena quite beyond his sphere of interest and he paid scant attention to them."<sup>6</sup> Refusing to accept Europe as a "cure-all" for American art or his own more particularly, Curry devoted himself to creating images rooted deeply in native soil.

Curry's decisive response to his Parisian experience—to paint American subjects in an appropriately accessible manner—was shared generally by the two painters with whom he quickly became closely associated, Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.) from Missouri and Grant Wood from Iowa. Benton experienced Paris the earliest of the three, traveling there in 1908. Disaffected with modernist abstraction, Benton, like Curry, eventually seized on a mode of image making when he returned in 1911 that glorified American scenes and ways, with a special focus on the rural Midwest. Wood returned from his fourth and final trip to the French capital in 1928 and similarly abandoned his experiments with modernist styles, which, in his case, involved Impressionist and Post-Impressionist techniques, to produce visual testimonials to midwestern fortitude and character, such as *American Gothic* (1930; Art Institute of Chicago). In this way, Curry, Benton, and Wood were perceived together as part of a larger movement that became known as Regionalism, a phenomenon popularized by a cover article written by the art critic Thomas Craven for the 24 December 1934 edition of *Time* magazine.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the shared experiences and responses of this triumvirate of artists, Regionalism nevertheless emerged as part of a larger revolt against the perceived inordinate influence of European—especially French—modernism on American culture. For many, the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 was clear and painful confirmation that such influence was undeniable. Detractors thus offered a chorus of spoken and published denunciations labeling contemporary European art as alternatively ridiculous or dangerous. "The rampant invasion of foreign art, fashionable at the moment," complained the disgruntled painter

Albert Sterner, "has little to do with the cultural progress so desired by and necessary to us. The work of leading French contemporaries does not reflect the temper or character of our people—is alien and at bottom quite as foreign as its source to our natural inspiration."<sup>8</sup> Curry and his Regionalist colleagues answered calls like these for images that accurately reflected "the temper or character of our people."

As far as the Regionalists were concerned, however, "our people"—that is, "true" Americans—resided in the rural Midwest, far from the East Coast, particularly the city of New York, the port into which all things foreign and suspect seemed to flow.<sup>9</sup> As Schmeckebier recounted, Curry believed "rural society has an advantage over the urban and suburban because in it the ancient ties of religion, family, and home are more thoroughly integrated with the stability of the land."<sup>10</sup> Ironically, his midwestern scenes were received in many instances more enthusiastically in the East, where they were viewed curiously as quasi-anthropomorphic studies of a semixotic species, than in his native Kansas, where locals would at times protest his emphasis on the more extreme, or stereotypical, aspects of their lives and surroundings.<sup>11</sup> The fact that Curry took to painting Kansas at a far remove in Connecticut underscores the significant degree to which his version of midwestern Regionalism was defined from, by, and for the East. Indeed, Curry owed his earliest and arguably greatest professional coup to one very prominent easterner, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who in 1931 purchased what became his most revered work, *Baptism in Kansas* (Fig. 1), for her new museum devoted to American art.

A comparison with Whitney's prized acquisition offers, in fact, the best opportunity for a more nuanced interpretation of *The Bathers* as well as a clearer understanding of the role that Regionalism was believed to play in American art of the period. On the surface, the two pictures are closely related as scenes of communal activities attesting to the inherent nobility of midwestern farm life. Featuring a local gathering celebrating the immersion of a Christian initiate, *Baptism in Kansas* also shares with *The Bathers* the barnyard setting, complete with the generic cattle tank, which quite literally takes center stage in both compositions. The religious connotations implicit in *The Bathers* are made explicit in *Baptism in Kansas*.

Despite similar subjects and settings, Curry's *Baptism* and *The Bathers* recount events and ideas in certain ways diametrically opposed to one another. Employed at the service of religious conversion in the former, the multipurpose cattle tank turns into the site of secular and bodily indulgence in the latter. As day passes into night from *Baptism* to *The Bathers*, restraint gives way to recreation and reverence blossoms into revelry. In *The Bathers*, all the serious Christians have packed up and gone home, leaving men and boys to focus on pursuits less holy.

More subtle distinctions are usefully drawn between the two compositions. In *Baptism*, the ties binding members of the group are generally communal, relating to both locale and faith, which bring and keep them together. The personal ties Curry emphasizes



Fig. 1 John Steuart Curry, *Baptism in Kansas*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in. (101.6 × 127 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, 31.159

in *The Bathers* are, by contrast, generational. In *The Bathers*, the painter concerns himself with a different kind of initiation, one more subtle and secular in character. The painting features the initiation—or, perhaps more accurately, the evolution—from boyhood to manhood. As the common meeting place for three different ages of men, the tank serves as a visual metaphor for life itself, into which the two prepubescent boys have only begun to dive and a stage through which the more mature farmer looking on at left has already passed. While youth and maturity occupy the margins of manly experience, the young men romping at right are immersed in it fully. Thigh-deep in the pleasures and passions of living, these two men are shown in the prime of their lives.

In its engagement with themes of personal growth and maturation, Curry's picture relates closely to a nearly contemporaneous image by Grant Wood. Wood's Flemish-inspired, allegorical portrait, *Arnold Comes of Age* (Fig. 2) features Arnold Pyle, the artist's friend and studio assistant, painted in 1930 on the occasion of his twenty-first birthday. To suggest his subject's transitional position in life, Wood placed the slim, earnest-looking Pyle in a lush

setting replete with traditional symbols of metamorphosis, such as the butterfly that flutters near the sitter's right elbow, as well as the trees with new blooms. Furthermore, Wood, like Curry, employs male nudes drawn to water as a means of suggesting a progression from youth to maturity. In the background of Wood's composition, a pair of nudes has approached a serene river, an age-old symbol of the transitory nature of life. Innocent and nostalgic, this distant vignette evokes Pyle's boyhood. Positioned prominently in the picture plane and looking past the viewer, he now faces his future bravely as a man.<sup>12</sup>

The theme of personal growth explored in paintings like *The Bathers* and *Arnold Comes of Age* can be read as a metaphor for the emergence of Regionalism itself, which was perceived and promoted widely as proof of the maturation of American art. Writing in the *New York Post* in 1931, Thomas Craven joyously reported, "For the first time . . . American artists are beginning to be concerned with the materials, tendencies and resources of American life. Heretofore they have been . . . imitators of the Europeans; now they are beginning to realize the necessity

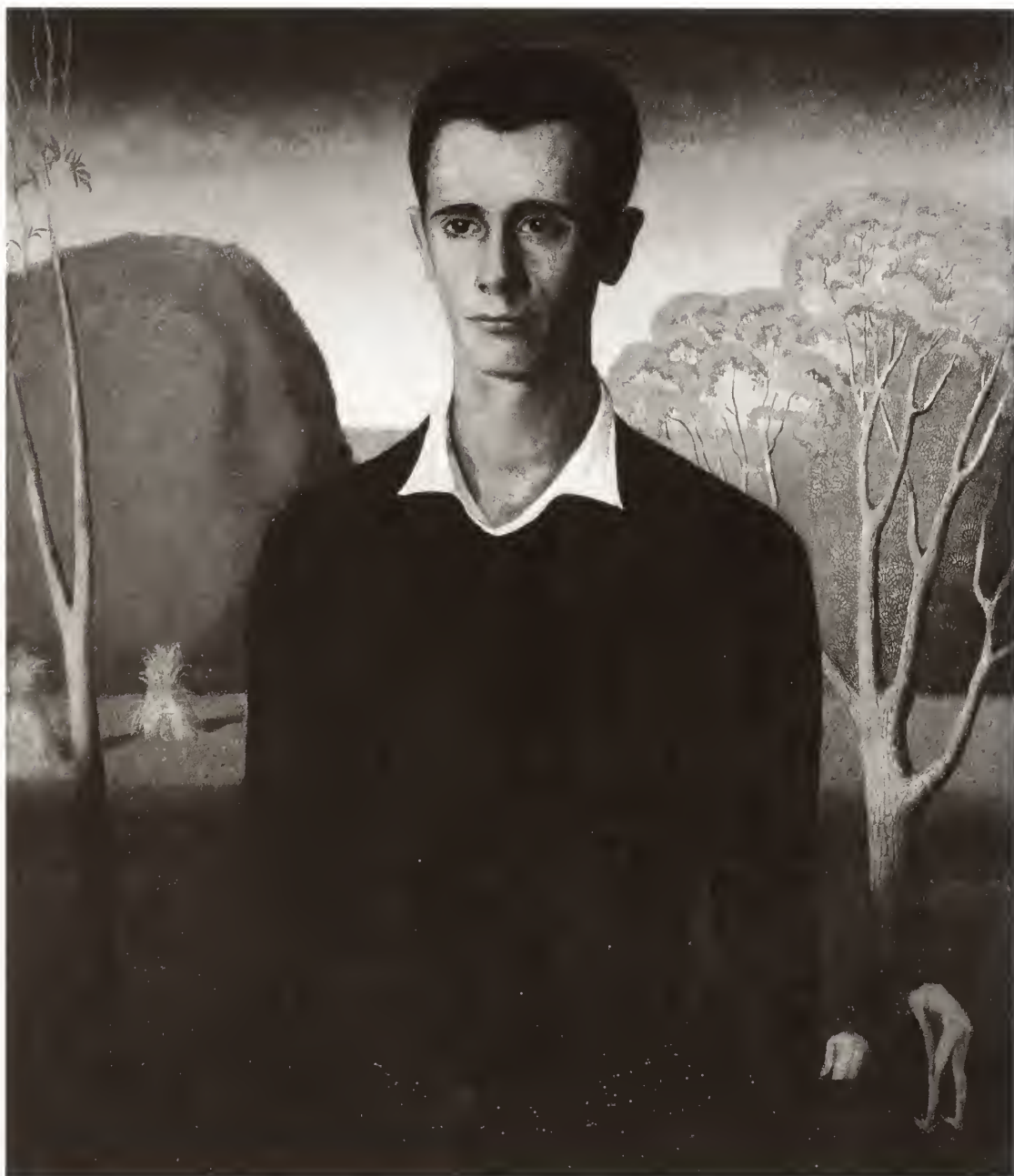


Fig. 2 Grant Wood, *Arnold Comes of Age (Portrait of Arnold Pyle)*, 1930. Oil on board, 26¾ × 23 in. (67.9 × 58.4 cm). Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, NAA-Nebraska Art Association Collection/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

of creating something in their own right.”<sup>13</sup> Newly weaned from Europe’s breast, American art had “grown up,” and Regionalism, many happily maintained, was the result. This notion was brought to a wide national audience in the 31 October 1938 edition of *LIFE* magazine, which featured the article “American Art Comes of Age.” The article consisted of eleven pages devoted to the history of painting in America, “where today the practice of painting is being more vigorously pursued than anywhere else in the world.” Proclaiming, “it is in America, not war-torn Europe, that the world’s art future lies,” the feature concluded with an extensive pictorial survey of art in America with images relating to Regionalism, including a photograph of Wood, a reproduction of his already famed *American Gothic*, as well as illustrations of *Susanna and the Elders* (1938; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) by Benton and *Trouble in Frisco* (c. 1935; Museum of Modern Art, New York) by Fletcher Martin (q.v.), who would soon replace Benton as instructor at the Kansas City Art Institute.<sup>14</sup> Concluding its celebratory trip down America’s art-historical past with Regionalism, *LIFE* reinforced the perception that the movement constituted an

era of unprecedented artistic independence and accomplishment in addition to a grand culmination of the democratic virtues laid by the country’s founding fathers in the eighteenth century.

Curry benefited tremendously from this critical environment. His work was exhibited extensively throughout the 1930s and 1940s, often to favorable reviews.<sup>15</sup> “Kansas Has Found Her Homer,” trumpeted the critic Edward Alden Jewell in his *New York Times* review of the painter’s show in 1930 at Ferargil Galleries, comparing Curry with the legendary painter from Maine or with the ancient Greek narrator.<sup>16</sup> Curry’s renown earned him numerous professional opportunities and considerable security. In 1936 he was named artist-in-residence at the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, a position he maintained until his death ten years later. In the mid-1930s Curry also began receiving prominent commissions for public murals. The most famous of these is the series of panels he executed for the Kansas State Capitol in Topeka, a project that occupied him from 1937 to 1941 and promised to mend poor relations between the artist and audiences in his native state. Such was not to be,

however, as persisting objections to the artist's designs plagued his efforts and ultimately led him to abandon the murals.<sup>17</sup> In the last few years before he died, Curry also illustrated a number of notable literary projects, including a new edition of *John Brown's Body: A Poem* by Stephen Vincent Benét, published by Limited Editions Club in 1948.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the numerous successes Curry enjoyed during his life, his artistic reputation plummeted dramatically in the years after his death in 1946. In the late 1940s Regionalism was trumped conclusively by the nonobjective formal innovations of Abstract Expressionism, which made canvases by Curry, Benton, and Wood appear even more provincial than before. Scholarly accounts of Regionalism in recent years have redressed the movement with less bias against its stylistic conservatism. Even so, Curry's reputation has proved the most difficult among the Regionalist painters to resuscitate and maintain. Concerns particularly regarding his technical proficiency commonly put the painter in "third place" behind his Regionalist counterparts.<sup>19</sup> Fifty years earlier, however, popular opinion concerning Curry's talent and importance ran much to the contrary. "America has lost one of the great creative personalities of our time," Chris L. Christensen, former dean of the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture, lamented in his eulogy to the artist: "For the strength and reality of his paintings, history must record John Steuart Curry as one of the true artists of American life."<sup>20</sup>

RRG

## NOTES

1. This information is contained in an undated (c. June 1991) letter from Don Lambert to Marc Wilson, Director and CEO, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, NAMA curatorial files.
2. M. Sue Kendall suggests the effect of his brother's death on Curry and his art in "Alien Corn: An Artist on the Middle Border," in Patricia Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry: Inventing the Middle West*, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with Elvehjem Museum of Art, 1998), 167.
3. Gambone makes this connection in "The Use of Religious Motifs in Curry's Art," in Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry*. See esp. 143.
4. These biographical and chronological details are gleaned primarily from Patricia Junker, "The Life and Career of John Steuart Curry: An Annotated Chronology," in Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry*, 212–39.
5. Such sentiments are evident, for example, in Margaret Breuning's review of Curry's exhibition at Ferargil Galleries in December 1930: "[Curry] is an artist who lives in, knows and paints the American scene. But, best of all, he does it with a highly developed personal idiom. His work is vivid and compelling. . . . he translates the facts of this world which environs him with such perception and sympathy that his penetrating record registers vividly. He has grown in his power of concentrated design and of selective vision. . . . He hesitates at nothing, I am sure he would step in where angels not only fear to tread but would urge him not to. Yet in most cases he emerges victorious, fusing esthetic emotion and warm human sympathy in one striking impression of dramatic vigor." Breuning, quoted in Junker, "The Life and Career of John Steuart Curry," 218. Bret Waller has written more broadly about Curry's relationship with his critics. See Waller, "Curry and the Critics," *Kansas Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1970), 42–55.
6. Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry's Pageant of America* (New York: American Artists Group, 1943), 38. Thomas Hart Benton corroborated Schmeckebier's assessment in 1946, admitting, "Neither John nor I objected to the school of Paris itself. We vastly admired its father genius, Paul Cézanne, and other painters also who were a part of it and to whom we were indebted for many suggestions as to method. But we did object to its American imitations." Benton, "John Curry," reprinted in Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry*, 74.
7. Thomas Craven, "U.S. Scene," *Time*, 24 December 1934, 24–27. General studies of Regionalism are numerous. One of the most highly regarded is Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930's* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974). On Benton, see Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959). On Wood, see Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
8. Albert Sterner, quoted in "Assails French Art," *Art Digest* 5 (15 November 1930), 19.
9. Charles C. Eldredge has explored the issue of place in Curry's work most thoroughly, particularly the influence of the Kansas geography and culture. See Eldredge, "Prairie Prodigal: John Steuart Curry and Kansas," in Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry*, 90–109. Regarding the Regionalist bias against the East, the author quotes the painter and teacher Henry G. Keller, who argued the Midwest had become "the great reservoir of the American Idea. As the East grows more effete and European, the middle-west will retain the thing Europe calls America." Keller, quoted in Eldredge, 92.
10. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry's Pageant of America*, 78.
11. Mrs. Henry J. Allen offered criticism of the Kansas that Curry painted: "I feel that Mr. Curry has a great force in delineating the subjects he has chosen, but to say he portrays the 'spirit' of Kansas is entirely wrong, I think. To be sure, we have cyclones, gospel trains, the medicine man. . . . But why paint outlandish friekish [*sic*] subjects and call them the 'spirit' of Kansas?" Allen, quoted in Junker, "An Annotated Chronology," 221.
12. Corn provides a similar reading of this painting in *Grant Wood*, 124.
13. Thomas Craven, "Renaissance Near?" *Art Digest* 5 (1 September 1931), 9.
14. "American Art Comes of Age," *LIFE*, 31 October 1938, 27.
15. Curry's exhibition history is recounted in Junker, "An Annotated Chronology."
16. Edward Alden Jewell, "Kansas Has Found Her Homer," *New York Times*, 7 December 1930, sec. 9, 11.
17. Curry left the mural he did complete unsigned, signaling the fact he considered the commission unfinished. For the most comprehensive study of the commission, see M. Sue Kendall, *Rethinking Regionalism: John Steuart Curry and the Kansas Mural Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986).
18. Four of the fourteen original mixed-media drawings Curry executed in 1946 for the Benét project are in the Museum's collection. These are *The Slaver*, *The Town Was Ready for Them*, *The Same Clang of Rock*, and *Against the Chisel Blade*.
19. In his widely publicized survey of American art published in 1997, the critic Robert Hughes in fact dismissed Curry outright as a "semicompetent illustrator but an inept and formally incoherent painter, whose attempts at 'heroic' art were travesty." Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 443.
20. Christensen, quoted in Junker, "An Annotated Chronology," 239.

## ANDREW DASBURG (1887–1979)

### *Loren Mozley, 1928*

Oil on canvas

40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 26 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (101.9 × 66.4 cm)

Signed lower left: Dasburg.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Hollander, 59-41

ANDREW DASBURG'S PORTRAIT of Loren Mozley is emphatically informal. The artist depicts his swarthy, mustached subject sitting in front of a neutral background, his head turned subtly downward and his eyes locked with the viewer's gaze. Mozley's shoulders slump heavily forward; his large hands fall casually between his thighs and onto the dark green bench on which he sits. These effects of weight are accentuated by Dasburg's firm, volumetric rendering of anatomical form and restrained, generally cool palette, composed primarily of shades of gray, tan, and flesh tones. Juxtaposed against a neutral backdrop, the vibrant pattern of Mozley's green-and-red checkered jacket, combined with his pink vest underneath, activates this otherwise unexceptional composition, ensuring that it exhibits sufficient visual interest to warrant the viewer's attention.

At the foundation of Dasburg's forthright portrait is the artist's commitment to drawing, evident in the painting's clear contours and boldly realized, almost sculptural forms. Living in New York City, the artist developed an interest in drawing early in life, partially as a result of severe physical limitations brought on by two serious injuries to his hip.<sup>1</sup> Attending a school for crippled children from 1894 to 1901, he attended classes designed to develop various manual skills, including drawing. In 1902 his art teacher introduced her promising fifteen-year-old student to the Art Students League, where Dasburg received instruction from Frank Vincent Dumond, who conducted courses from the figure, and Kenyon Cox, the esteemed academician and muralist. In Cox's classroom, the young Dasburg honed his skills by sketching from plaster casts of famous examples of classical and Renaissance sculpture, an experience that was de rigueur for art students around the turn of the twentieth century. When in 1957 the painter remembered his teacher as "a tired man teaching a listless class," he was speaking for a generation of modernists who eschewed traditional Beaux Arts instruction as tediously irrelevant.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Dasburg's abiding concern for rigorous compositional structure and his enviable command of form—characteristics that marked his long and diverse career—can be attributed at least in part to his academic training and its emphasis on the fundamentals of drawing.<sup>3</sup>

Dasburg's concern for clear drawing is accompanied in *Loren Mozley* by an equally strong interest in two-dimensional pattern, evident in the sitter's vibrant red-and-green jacket. This element of the composition reveals, however discreetly, the influence of

Dasburg's experience in New Mexico, specifically in and around the artistic colony of Taos. Accepting the invitation of the notorious society matron and art patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, the artist visited Taos for the first time in 1918 and eventually relocated there permanently in 1933.<sup>4</sup> Succumbing to the region's attractions, Dasburg was among scores of painters who flocked to the Southwest over the first two decades of the twentieth century for a variety of personal and artistic reasons. As several art historians, including Julie Sehnem, have pointed out, some artists—such as E. Irving Couse and Joseph Henry Sharp (q.v.)—were lured to the Southwest by the possibilities of painting exotic subjects ripe with historical evocations, namely the Pueblo Indians.<sup>5</sup> Others were more interested in taking inspiration from indigenous and "pure" aesthetic models that legitimized abstraction, exemplified by Pueblo textiles and ceramics, which were perceived as foils to oppressive academic standards. For his part, Dasburg responded most directly to the immense New Mexican landscape, which he rendered as a patchwork of interlocking, quasi-geometric forms recalling the style of Paul Cézanne as much as the design of a Navajo blanket.<sup>6</sup> In a few instances, as in the background of *Bonnie Concha, Taos Indian* (1927; Denver Art Museum), this painterly patchwork appears pulled tautly and evenly across the composition, providing a dynamic backdrop for the likeness. For his portrait of Loren Mozley, Dasburg roughly reversed this formal relationship by removing the patchwork from the back wall and wrapping his subject in it, leaving a neutral backdrop in its place.

This reversal is but one of many variables constituting the painting's unusual, complex evolution. Begun in the winter of 1927 as a portrait of Tom Holder, a worker on a dude ranch in Arizona who was residing temporarily in Taos, the picture was prepared for inclusion in Dasburg's upcoming one-man exhibition at the Rehn Galleries in New York.<sup>7</sup> After Holder left Taos for another job, the artist convinced Loren Mozley, one of his former students at the University of New Mexico's summer art program, to pose for him as a substitute.<sup>8</sup> In 1978 the new sitter recollected wearing the clothes in which he is shown in the finished portrait—including his plaid woolen jacket—but remembered a different background, "a beautiful quilt which [Dasburg's] mother had made." One suspects that the artist reconsidered the appropriateness of the quilt as background owing to a likely excess of conflicting pattern when combined with Mozley's striking jacket, a prominent element of the composition that, Mozley reminisced, "gave Andrew a lot of trouble."<sup>9</sup>

The two-dimensional design sensibility evident in Mozley's jacket also provides subtle insight into Dasburg's former artistic life as an abstract painter.<sup>10</sup> Dasburg was introduced to new and







Fig. 1 Paul Cézanne, *Seated Peasant*, c. 1892–96. Oil on canvas, 21½ × 17¾ in. (54.6 × 45.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1997, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (1997.60.2)

exciting ideas concerning abstraction in art early in his career through several sources. As a student at the Art Students League's summer school at Woodstock, New York, the painter met Morgan Russell, one of the founders of American Synchronism, a movement in the 1910s that used color to build form and express sensation. In 1909 Dasburg ventured to Paris, where he met Leo Stein, brother of Gertrude Stein and an important collector of vanguard art. Stein lent the young artist a small painting by Cézanne, which he studied and copied many times. Dasburg was equally interested in the work of Henri Matisse, particularly the Frenchman's use of bold color and flat pattern. Like so many American artists of his generation, Dasburg responded well to the wide range of European modernism featured in the Armory Show in New York in 1913. Such experiences inspired Dasburg to produce some of the most avant-garde work by any American artist of the period. However, perhaps aware of resistance within the art market and among U.S. audiences, the painter soon backed away from the artistic vanguard, as did many other American and European artists throughout the World War I era.<sup>11</sup> By 1915 Dasburg's work was characterized by a mild modernist aesthetic, bearing only hints of the ideas and styles that had revolutionized painting over the previous twenty years.

*Loren Mozley* embodies Dasburg's measured brand of modernism. In its sense of monumentality and overall generalization of form, the portrait bears a striking resemblance to many portraits executed by Cézanne, including, for example, *Seated Peasant* (Fig. 1). In fact, *Loren Mozley* might be interpreted stylistically as an homage to the French master, whose influence on Dasburg was enduring. In this regard, the painting should be seen among the host of spoken and painted tributes paid increasingly to Cézanne throughout the first third of the twentieth century as his once-radical techniques and ideas were gradually absorbed into the artistic mainstream. The public monument dedicated to the Post-Impressionist in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris in 1927 was one of the most conspicuous signs of this cultural assimilation.<sup>12</sup> Much of Cézanne's broad appeal resided in the way his work seemed to bridge the divide between tradition and innovation, blending recognizable subject matter and abstraction. Dasburg's approach to painting was informed by this artistic dialogue and legacy.

As a portrait of a former student, *Loren Mozley* highlights Dasburg's role as a teacher, which was, arguably, his greatest contribution to American art, particularly throughout his later years. After his permanent move to New Mexico in 1933, the painter exerted a strong influence on younger artists in both Santa Fe and Taos. Luhan commented on Dasburg's unique gifts as a teacher, claiming, "he had a magic hand that drew from the student the potential creativeness that so often is awakened and lies dormant a whole life through. He was able to communicate his own gift of seeing and stimulate in others the faculty so strongly developed in himself."<sup>13</sup> In 1957 Mozley testified eloquently to his teacher's talents. "Through Andrew Dasburg," he emphasized, "we learned something also of an art which lay beyond our ring of mountains, in a larger world."<sup>14</sup>

After he moved to Taos, Dasburg became less familiar to the New York art world. A near-fatal bout with Addison's disease left him unable to paint from 1937 to 1945. When he recovered, Dasburg returned to teaching and making art. By the 1970s his work, particularly his prints and drawings, attracted attention once again. In 1979, as a traveling retrospective of his art was being organized by the University of New Mexico, Dasburg died at age ninety-two.

RRG/MCC

## NOTES

1. Biographical details throughout have been drawn from Sheldon Reich, *Andrew Dasburg: His Life and Art* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1989); and Van Deren Coke, *Andrew Dasburg* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), the best sources of information about Dasburg's life.
2. Andrew Dasburg, "Notes," in *Andrew Dasburg*, exh. cat. (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1957), unpaginated.
3. It bears noting here that Dasburg's portrait of Loren Mozley does not include an extensive underdrawing, despite the artist's firm, rigorous technique for rendering form.
4. Dasburg's mentor and friend Robert Henri (q.v.) might also have encouraged him to travel to New Mexico. Henri first visited there in 1916.
5. On Dasburg's time in New Mexico, see Reich, "The Pull Westward," chap. 3, in *Andrew Dasburg*, 46–66. On the more general topic of New Mexican art, see Charles C. Eldredge et al., *Art in New Mexico, 1900–1945: Paths to Taos and Santa Fe*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986). For more recent considerations of this topic, see Celeste Conner, "The Most American Place: New Mexico," in *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924–1934* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 174–93; and Judith A. Barter, *Window on the West: Chicago and the Art of the New Frontier, 1890–1940*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2003).
6. Dasburg also bought and sold American Indian and Mexican arts and crafts. See Reich, *Andrew Dasburg*, 47.
7. While the exhibition at the Rehn Galleries was a critical and financial success, at least one critic considered the portraits the weakest dimension of the show. See "Andrew Dasburg," *Art News* 26 (24 March 1928), 11. The portrait of Mozley did not sell and remained in the artist's possession for a dozen more years. The artist sold the canvas to a friend, Richard M. Hollander, in 1940. Hollander to Deni McHenry, 10 May 1989, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Coke, *Andrew Dasburg*, 79–80, relates this story.
9. Mozley, quoted in Reich, *Andrew Dasburg*, 57. The fuller quotation from Mozley elaborates: "I wore the clothes that appear in the portrait—faded corduroys, white shirt . . . a striped Pendleton vest, and a plaid woolen jacket. For the background, Andrew used a beautiful quilt which his mother had made. . . . I left [the jacket] behind and he organized the folds, etc. modelling in *caput mortuum* and then overpainting the color-design. . . . The composition was derived at very deliberately but no substantial changes were made during the painting. I believe that the drawing was made in charcoal, but was in no great detail. The progress of the work was steady and direct, general areas and relationships, and then modelling of forms and development of color passages." According to Mozley, the painting appeared in its original form in the *Echo*, May 1928. See Reich, *Andrew Dasburg*, 57. However, a search of this publication proved fruitless.
10. On this period in Dasburg's career, see Reich, "A Member of the Avant-Garde," chap. 2, *Andrew Dasburg*, 30–45. Exactly when Dasburg created his first abstractions is unclear, in large part because so few paintings are datable to 1912. See *ibid.*, 31–32. In 1957 Dasburg stated that he began studies in abstraction in 1912. See Dasburg, "Notes," in *Andrew Dasburg*, exh. cat. (1957). Coke, in *Andrew Dasburg*, 25, argues that Dasburg did not begin painting in this mode until late 1913.
11. On this topic from a European perspective, see Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
12. See Roger Fry, "New Laurels for the Scorned Cézanne—France to Set Up a Statue to the Neglected Painter Who Founded a School," *New York Times*, 1 May 1927, SM6. In this article, Fry contemplates the conditions precipitating Cézanne's dramatic posthumous rise in popularity.
13. Mabel Dodge Luhan, quoted in *Andrew Dasburg*, exh. cat. (1957).
14. "Statement from Loren Mozley," in *ibid.*

## RANDALL DAVEY (1887–1964)

### *Spanish Child in White*, c. 1912 (*Portrait of a Girl in White; Little Girl in White*)

Oil on canvas

20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (51.3 × 38.4 cm)

Signed lower left: Randall Davey

Bequest of Mrs. Peter T. Bohan, F83-30/38

A FOUNDER OF THE SANTA FE artists' colony, Randall Davey was once recognized as one of America's best portrait painters. While his artistic reputation was based on his portraits, sensuous nudes, and colorful racetrack scenes, he was equally famous for his dashing lifestyle that included a love of fine horses, beautiful women, and fast cars. *Spanish Child in White*, however, represents not the work of Davey the New Mexico artist and bon vivant, but instead the work of Davey the student and follower of Robert Henri (q.v.).

Born in East Orange, New Jersey, Davey studied architecture at Cornell University, following his father's wishes.<sup>1</sup> In 1908 he dropped out of the program and soon began studying at the newly founded Henri School of Art in New York. At the time, Henri was well known as a champion of young progressive painters. He was an organizing member of the group known as the Eight, whose first exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery in February 1908 challenged the authority of the National Academy of Design and drew considerable media attention to its antiestablishment position within the New York art world.<sup>2</sup> Henri was also one of the most inspiring and influential teachers of his day. He counted among his students George Bellows (q.v.), Andrew Dasburg (q.v.), Stuart Davis (q.v.), Edward Hopper (q.v.), Rockwell Kent, Man Ray, Morgan Russell, John Sloan (q.v.), and Eugene Speicher (q.v.). In choosing to study with Henri, Davey allied himself with the avant-garde. According to Sloan, "Davey came to Henri at the age of twenty-two, in 1909; and he found *his* teacher. For Henri was a man who loved life and enjoyed the student who had the same enthusiasm. Henri was then at the peak of his strength as a painter and teacher, emphasizing individual expression and earnest, spirited painting of pictures. [For Davey, Henri was] a kind of Christ, in his way."<sup>3</sup>

*Spanish Child in White* was most likely painted in 1912 during Davey's second trip to Spain with Henri's summer painting class, in which he served as an assistant teacher. The class spent June visiting the southern cities of Granada, Gibraltar, Cordova, and Seville, then in July traveled to Madrid, where they occupied studios near the Prado.<sup>4</sup> Henri and his class followed a pilgrimage route well established by American artists in the previous century. Thomas Eakins (q.v.), Mary Cassatt (q.v.), and John Singer Sargent (q.v.), among others, had all traveled to Spain to study old master paintings in Madrid and to find picturesque subjects for their own

paintings in the south. Henri, however, made the pilgrimage in reverse, first allowing his students to observe Spanish types and locales, then taking them to Madrid, where they could study the techniques of the old masters in the Prado.<sup>5</sup>

At this point in his career, Davey was very much under Henri's influence. Like many of Henri's paintings, *Spanish Child in White* is a frontally posed portrait study of a child. The painting's dark background, simple composition, spontaneous brushwork, and realist subject matter all demonstrate Davey's mastery of Henri's style. The child's dress is not meticulously painted; rather, the color is applied in broad strokes. In the Nelson-Atkins canvas, Davey explored the various tonal relationships of a few selected colors. For example, the little girl is dressed in white, but Davey expressed the light effects in several pastel hues, including cream, yellow, and blue. Her hair ribbon is bluish gray, a shade that is picked up in the shadows of her dress. The pale pink of the child's face is heightened in her cheeks, which are painted in a slightly brighter hue. The overall effect is a delicate balance between the light shades of the child's face and clothes and the dark tones of the background and her eyes and hair.<sup>6</sup>

Davey eschewed the colorful ethnic costumes that Henri particularly relished in his Spanish subjects, choosing instead to paint this little girl in a simple dress that might just as easily have been worn by an American girl. Touches of white on the child's nose and upper lip emphasize the sharpness of her features. Despite the daub of red on her right cheek, Davey's little girl is paler than the children Henri preferred to paint. The child's stiff posture, compressed lips, and direct gaze all express the child's self-consciousness in posing for her portrait. In the pictures of adults Davey painted during this period, he typically positioned the figure higher on the canvas, making the subject seem larger and more imposing. In *Spanish Child in White*, the low placement of the figure, together with the dark background and dramatic lighting, emphasizes the little girl's small stature and fragility.

A 1914 exhibition of Davey's work at the Carroll Galleries in New York included many of the paintings he made during his 1912 trip to Spain, including "several studies of dark-eyed, peaky-chinned children," one of which could have been the Nelson-Atkins painting. A reviewer for the *New York American* wrote of these paintings:

[Davey] has visited Spain, it would appear, not as many painters simply to study in the Prado and observe cursorily the character of the country and the people. He seems to have penetrated into the character of both and absorbed it into his own. And, briefly, what is its quality? To myself it



suggests concentration. The rock-ribbed mountains and the vast sweeps of plain and sky are alike suggestive of concentrated power and dignity. One finds them inbred in the fine, hardy race of peasantry and again in the serene grandeur of Velasquez' art. . . . this concentration of power, sympathy, intellectuality and imagination . . . discovers itself particularly in the imaginative handling and color of these children's faces; and in the expression that holds one riveted with a strange longing to penetrate the spirit of these young creatures and to explore in fancy the future of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

For this reviewer, Davey's portrait studies of Spanish children embodied the geography, culture, and art of Spain. Henri too believed that children best expressed a nation's character, and he encouraged his students to take an ethnographic interest in their subjects. Davey painted portrait studies of Spanish, Irish, Cuban, and Portuguese children before moving to New Mexico in 1919, and he was consistently praised during these years for his ability to portray representational types.<sup>8</sup>

As Elizabeth Boone has recently argued, nineteenth-century American paintings of Spanish subjects, such as John Singer Sargent's *Study for "Spanish Dance"* (q.v.), typically express a Romantic admiration for Spain's exotic culture and glorious past, while diminishing its relevance to the modern world. Boone attributes this selective view to the political tension between Spain and the United States in the years leading up to the Spanish-American War in 1898. Spain's defeat in that war severely compromised its military and political power, exacerbating the American view of Spain as a country moored in the past, with a future promising only decline.<sup>9</sup> In *Spanish Child in White*, as in another painting Davey made of the same model titled *Margarita* (1912; Audubon New Mexico, Santa Fe), the little girl's small, delicate frame, the dark background that threatens to envelop her, and her intense, sober gaze all create a sense of frailty and vulnerability. The subject of Davey's painting lacks the vital energy found in portrait studies of children by other artists in Henri's circle, for instance Bellows's *Frankie, the Organ Boy* (q.v.). Delicate and immobile, *Spanish Child in White* might be read as a reflection on the uncertain future of Spain.

In 1912 Davey's work was at the cutting edge of new American art. His loose handling of paint, his experiments with color theory, and his association with the circle of Robert Henri marked him as a progressive artist. In 1914, when Davey's Spanish paintings were exhibited at the Carroll Galleries, they appeared surprisingly conservative. A reviewer for the *American Art News* described them as "thoroughly clean and sane."<sup>10</sup> The Armory Show of 1913 had changed the definition of avant-garde art in America. Davey brightened his palette in the years after 1913, and he experimented with flattened, more abstract compositions, but he continued to paint representational, figural works for the rest of his life. By 1957 *Spanish Child in White* had been acquired by the painter Ruth Harris Bohan, who studied under Davey at the Kansas City Art Institute. Bohan may have purchased the painting, or Davey may

have given it to her as a gift. In either case, it is appropriate that this painting, so expressive of Davey's relation to his own teacher, should have passed into the hands of his student.

LL/MS

## NOTES

1. The most recent study of Randall Davey is Donelson Hoopes, *Randall Davey: Artist/Bon Vivant*, exh. cat. (Santa Fe: Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of New Mexico, 1984). For more information on Davey's childhood and family background, see Hester Davey Fay, manuscript, Randall Davey Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 724, frames 373–81.
2. Rebecca Zurier, "The Making of Six New York Artists," in Zurier, Robert W. Snyder, and Virginia Mecklenburg, *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1995), 59–84.
3. John Sloan, "Randall Davey," *New Mexico Quarterly Review* 21 (Spring 1951), 21.
4. This itinerary is recounted in Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 105.
5. Elizabeth Boone, "Vistas de España: American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860–1898," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1996.
6. Davey's use of color may have been influenced by the so-called Maratta method. Based on the pseudo-scientific theories of Hardesty Maratta, this system equated the chromatic scale to a musical scale, with colors acting as notes that could be combined to create harmonies and rhythms. According to William Innes Homer, Davey began studying the Maratta method with Henri, Sloan, Bellows, Charles Winter, and A. F. Levinson in 1911. Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 186.
7. "Fine Imagination Shown by Davey," *New York American*, 19 January 1914, 6.
8. See, for instance, "Cuban Ways Shown in Randall Davey's Recent Sketches," *Touchstone*, May 1919, 118–23. Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier have discussed the relation of ethnic portraits painted by Henri and his circle to popular stereotypes. Snyder and Zurier, "Picturing the City," in *Metropolitan Lives*, 122. See also Margaret A. Stenz, "Primitivism and Nationalism in the Portraiture of Robert Henri," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2003.
9. Boone, "Vistas de España"; and James W. Cortada, "Diplomatic Relations between Spain and the United States, 1899–1936," *Iberian Studies* 8 (1979), 54–61.
10. "Randall Davey at the Carroll Galleries," *American Art News*, 17 January 1914, 8.

## STUART DAVIS (1892–1964)

### *Hôtel de France*, 1928

Oil on canvas

28 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 23 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (73.3 × 60.6 cm)

Signed lower right: STUART DAVIS

Purchase: Nelson Trust and Nelson Gallery Foundation through the exchange of bequests of Inez Grant Parker; Content Aline Johnson in memory of her mother, Augusta Adelaide Johnson; Thomas Hart Benton; Katherine Harvey; Frances M. Logan; and Mrs. Nell H. Stevenson from the estate of S. Herbert Hare; and gifts of Claudine Hancock Boyle in memory of her husband, Murat Boyle; Mr. and Mrs. Perry Faeth; Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones; Mrs. Peter T. Bohan; and Mrs. David M. Lighton through the Friends of Art; and another Trust property, 96-21

STUART DAVIS CALLED *Hôtel de France* “one of the three or four best pictures I painted in Paris in 1928–29.”<sup>1</sup> Among the first of the dozen or so paintings that Davis made during his fifteen-month stay in the French capital, the canvas depicts an ordinary street scene in a Cubist style of crisp lines, flat planes of color, and varied paint textures. The bright palette, jaunty composition, and picturesque imagery communicate the American visitor’s delight in the distinctive charms of the City of Light.

Unlike most other American modernists of his generation who visited Paris during their formative years, Davis was a well-established professional of thirty-five when he arrived there in June 1928. Immediately, he moved into a Montparnasse studio and began to frequent cafés and nightclubs, where he consorted with other American artists and writers. Among these was the author Elliot Paul, an old friend from Gloucester, Massachusetts, who provided Davis with introductions to Fernand Léger and Gertrude Stein and also promised to take him to the studio of Pablo Picasso—a visit that apparently never took place. Paul also wrote an article on Davis’s work for the fall 1928 issue of *transition*, a journal of avant-garde art and literature, which reproduced *Hôtel de France* on its cover.<sup>2</sup>

Davis’s travel to Paris was made possible by the recent sale of two paintings to Juliana Force of the Whitney Studio Club and a subsidy from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.<sup>3</sup> This windfall was part of a series of successes that began in 1925, when the Newark Museum gave him his first museum show. The next year the Whitney Studio Club (predecessor of the Whitney Museum of American Art) mounted a retrospective of his work, and in 1927 Edith Halpert became Davis’s dealer and staged the first of his many shows at her Downtown Gallery.

Davis took two of his Eggbeater paintings to Paris, hoping they would impress the French. These works were part of a series of

drawings and paintings based on the shapes of an eggbeater, electric fan, and rubber glove, which he had painted exclusively for a year. The still-life elements served as points of departure for radically abstract and tightly structured arrangements of lines and planes that play on the tension between surface and depth, reflecting the Synthetic Cubism that was the dominant stylistic influence on Davis’s work in the 1920s. Davis had come to this point in his development after having experimented with a wide variety of European modernist styles following his large-scale introduction to the European avant-garde at the Armory Show in 1913.<sup>4</sup>

In Paris, Davis abruptly switched tracks and began painting relatively realistic street scenes—a stylistic shift noted by American critics when several Paris scenes, including *Hôtel de France*, were exhibited at the Downtown Gallery in the fall of 1928.<sup>5</sup> Recounting a visit with Léger in a letter to his father, Davis mentioned that the French artist was impressed with his Eggbeater paintings but found his recent series of Paris street scenes too realistic.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Davis persisted in this vein for several possible reasons. He was enthralled by the otherness of Paris, whose architecture, culture, and atmosphere were so different from those of New York, and he valued the city’s sense of a long history coexisting with life in the present.<sup>7</sup> “The year before, in New York,” Davis later explained, “I had looked at my eggbeater so long that I finally had no interest in it. I stared at it until it became just a combination of planes. But over there, in Paris, the actuality was so interesting I found a desire to paint it just as it was.”<sup>8</sup> Davis must also have been aware that working in Paris, the capital of the avant-garde art world, conferred a certain prestige on his work. The artist’s sojourn in the French capital, recognizably documented in his paintings, demonstrated his modernist credentials to his American audience.<sup>9</sup>

Davis wandered around the city with a sketchbook, recording the interesting motifs he encountered in various Parisian neighborhoods. This approach resumed a practice from his student years, which began with Robert Henri (q.v.) in New York in 1909. After being raised in an artistic Philadelphia household, Davis joined the circle of artist-reporters and students surrounding Henri.<sup>10</sup> Like them, he drew and painted the everyday world of New York streets, theaters, restaurants, and saloons. In Paris, Davis was attracted to a few historically significant architectural subjects, including the Porte Saint-Martin and the Place des Vosges, but for the most part he depicted anonymous streets and corners occupied by ordinary hotels, cafés, and shops. Fascinated by signs and lettering, Davis included in his drawings common words such as *Hôtel*, *Café*, *Tabac*, *Vins*, and *Bière*, and a few brand names of well-known products advertised in the streets. Notably absent from Davis’s images, however, are people. Karen Wilkin has suggested that Davis, who did not speak French, may have avoided depicting Parisians because



he felt himself an outsider, unable to participate in the city's routine social life. Wilkin also notes, however, that this kind of detachment was already characteristic of Davis's work before his arrival in Paris and is typical of wider modernist practice.<sup>11</sup> His depopulated street scenes, with their fragments of signage and quotidian subject matter, recall the work of the French photographer Eugène Atget, who had died in 1927 and was already well on the way to canonization by proponents of modernism on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to quick, on-the-spot sketches of Paris scenery, Davis created more elaborate drawings that served as the basis for paintings made in the studio. *Study for "Hôtel de France"* (Fig. 1) established the composition that Davis would employ in the Nelson-Atkins painting. Dominating the left half of the drawing is the tall, narrow end of a four-and-a-half-story hotel. A sign below the top row of windows reads "Hotel de France." This may have been an actual hotel or, more likely, a name Davis invented to suit his representative Parisian scene, which includes all the features of a typical street in Montparnasse.<sup>13</sup> Advancing from the hotel facade toward the viewer across the right side of the drawing are a public drinking fountain, a tower-capped *pissotière*, an advertising column, and a streetlamp.<sup>14</sup> The column is decorated by the words *KUB* and *SUZE*, advertising bouillon cubes and an apéritif, respectively. Running down the column in a vertical strip are childlike drawings of two human figures and a horse's head; a second vertical panel to their right contains a loopy oval and illegible squiggles.<sup>15</sup> The base of the column features two cubes drawn in perspective, derived from an advertisement for the aforementioned *KUB* bouillon cubes, whose serendipitous affinity with Davis's own Cubist style of painting must have delighted the artist.<sup>16</sup> Wandering linear strokes suggest a partly cloudy sky above the rooftops, while raking lines entering from the upper left denote rays of sun.

The oil version of *Hôtel de France* closely follows the pencil study. The painting appears more abstract than the drawing, however, due to Davis's use of color and paint texture. By this time, Davis had abandoned the dark palette of his student days. Like a theatrical stage set, the bold, unmodeled colors and strong value contrasts of *Hôtel de France* are much flatter and more intense than those that could actually be observed in the city. The hotel facade is stark white and the fountain and street lamp are pure black; the advertising column, *pissotière*, and parts of the hotel are made of saturated greens, reds, and yellows. Through his use of these assertively vertical, phallic forms and his inclusion of the *pissotière*, Davis presented Paris as a decidedly masculine space, a view that opposed the tendency of conservative American art critics to feminize European culture in general.<sup>17</sup> Yet, even as they retain their identity as expressive components of the urban landscape, these potent color shapes take on the character of flat, independent, formal elements, similar to the color planes of Synthetic Cubism, and assert the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. Also emphasizing the canvas surface is the thick application of paint, marking a revival of Davis's interest in the sensuous properties of the



Fig. 1 Stuart Davis, *Study for "Hôtel de France,"* 1928. Graphite on paper, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 9 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (31.4 × 23.2 cm). Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 1984.50. © Estate of Stuart Davis / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

oil medium, strongly evident in his Vincent van Gogh-influenced paintings of the later 1910s but largely absent thereafter. *Hôtel de France* is thickly painted all over, with the highest areas of impasto seen in the building facades at center right, whose richly textured surfaces appear almost sculpted. Davis probably dabbed on these impastos with a paintbrush, and brushwork is also evident in such motifs as the lamppost and the green windows of the hotel facade. The remaining large blocks of color were laid down with a palette knife, imparting to them a tangible sense of solidity.

The surfaces of these flat yet solid areas of color bear the fine linear drawing that defines the details of architecture, signage, clouds, and the like. As Wilkin has remarked, these drawn patterns play a double role in Davis's Paris paintings. Lying on top of the larger color shapes, they further emphasize the flat, painted surface of the canvas. Yet, at the same time, they clearly represent specific elements of the cityscape recorded in Davis's sketchbooks.<sup>18</sup> Davis himself saw no contradiction, writing that the "same structural approach" he had developed in his Eggbeater paintings was continued in the Paris works, and that the "more or less literal references" of the later pictures "did not conflict with the structural



approach. In other words," he continued, "I did not think that particular truth eliminated general truth or general truth particular truth. I try to think of them as one thing."<sup>19</sup>

When he returned to New York from Paris in August 1929, Davis experienced culture shock. He found himself "appalled and depressed" by New York's "giantism." "Everything in Paris was human size, here everything was inhuman," he later observed. "It was difficult to think either of art or oneself as having any significance whatever in the face of this frenetic commercial engine. I thought 'Hell, you can't do any painting here.' It is partly true. But on the other hand as an American I had the need for the impersonal dynamics of New York City."<sup>20</sup> In 1931 Davis summed up his memories of Paris and his perceptions of New York in a series of three canvases entitled *New York-Paris*. In these paintings, Davis reused motifs from his Parisian pictures in combination with elements from the New York cityscape to create spatially discontinuous, collagelike compositions. In *New York-Paris, No. 2* (1931; Portland Museum of Art, Maine), the major elements of *Hôtel de France*—awning, hotel, fountain, *pissotière*, column, and lamppost—are combined with a section of Davis's *Place des Vosges, No. 2* (1928; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.) to form a Parisian foreground. Behind the Parisian structures loom the elevated train platform and rooftops of New York buildings, the one closest to the *Hôtel de France* tellingly emblazoned UNITED STATES.

Stuart Davis never returned to Paris, but the lessons he learned there stayed with him. As Lewis Kachur has noted, in his Paris pictures Davis consolidated the device, which he would use in many later paintings, of a stagelike space, often with a centralized architectural focus.<sup>21</sup> The Paris paintings also represent Davis's first sustained series of Cubist cityscapes, forecasting his Gloucester and New York scenes of the 1930s. The "human size" of Paris renewed Davis's commitment to painting intimate Gloucester scenes, while also encouraging him to depict specific locales within the larger context of New York City's "impersonal dynamics." Both general and specific elements of the Parisian pictures also found their way into Davis's later art. On a number of occasions Davis reused compositions from his Parisian paintings—as in *The Paris Bit* (1959; Whitney Museum of American Art), based on *Rue Lipp* (1928; private collection). In the 1950s Davis, feeling out of sync with the latest developments in American art, found his thoughts returning to the convivial days of his Paris sojourn, and he reintroduced French words into his compositions and titles. In 1953 he wrote: "I am strictly a European (French, that is) man myself, altho forced by birth and circumstance to live in the American Art Desert as exile. And then of course the 'Europe' I mentally dwell in no longer exists in actuality."<sup>22</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Stuart Davis to Martin Schwab, 19 June 1940, photocopy, NAMA curatorial files. The author acknowledges the assistance of Lauren Lessing and the Stuart Davis Catalogue Raisonné in the preparation of this entry.
2. The journal *transition* was published in Paris by Eugene and Maria Jolas between 1927 and 1938, during which time it featured the work of avant-garde writers including James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein, Hart Crane, Archibald MacLeish, William Carlos Williams, and Erskine Caldwell, as well as translations of works by leading European writers, ranging from Franz Kafka to Saint-John Perse. See Karen Rosenberg, "Celebrating the Spirit of the Avant-garde," *Yale Herald*, 18 September 1998, 11.
3. For detailed accounts of Davis's Parisian sojourn, see Lewis Kachur, *Stuart Davis: An American in Paris*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, 1987); Karen Wilkin, *Stuart Davis* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), chap. 3; and Elizabeth Hutton Turner et al., *Americans in Paris (1921–1931): Man Ray, Gerald Murphy, Stuart Davis, Alexander Calder*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, in association with Phillips Collection, 1996), 30–37.
4. In Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he spent most of his summers from 1915 on, Davis painted landscapes with bold colors and simplified forms inspired by Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Henri Matisse. Other paintings of the later 1910s followed the lead of Paul Cézanne and the Cubists.
5. See Margaret Breuning, "Art Season Opens with Many Shows and Promise of Brilliant Events," *New York Evening Post*, 13 October 1928, sec. 3, 6; and Edward Alden Jewell, "Art Galleries Offer a Rich Display: French Art Now Here in Abundance—Native Painters Reveal Present Trend—British and American Etchings," *New York Times*, 14 October 1928, sec. 10, 13.
6. Stuart Davis to his father, 17 September 1928, cited in Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 83.
7. Davis wrote, "Paris was old fashioned, but modern as well. That was the wonderful part of it. . . . There was so much of the past and the immediate present brought together on one plane that nothing seemed left to be desired. There was a timelessness about the place that was conducive to the kind of contemplation essential to art. And the scale of the architecture was human." Stuart Davis, "Autobiographical Notes," quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, *Stuart Davis*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1945), 19.
8. Quoted in Rosenberg, "Celebrating the Spirit of the Avant-garde," 20.
9. Davis had an American audience in mind when he painted his series of Paris street scenes. Forgoing opportunities to exhibit these works in Paris, Davis sent them back to New York, where they were exhibited and sold through the Downtown Gallery. See Karen Wilkin, "'Becoming a Modern Artist': The 1920s," in *Stuart Davis*, ed. Lowrey Stokes Sims, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 54.
10. Davis had been encouraged to pursue an artistic career by his parents, Helen Stuart Foulke, a sculptor, and Edward Wyatt Davis, art editor for the *Philadelphia Press*. Among the *Press's* employees were several artist-reporters in the circle of the painter Robert Henri.
11. Wilkin, *Stuart Davis*, 118.
12. See, for instance, "Photography in Paris," *New York Times*, 16 December 1928, sec. 20, 13.
13. According to Elizabeth Garrity Ellis, the names repeated throughout Davis's Paris series—"Hôtel de France," "Hôtel de Rome," "Orient Hotel"—were hotels located near his Montparnasse studio. Ellis, "The View from Paris," in Turner et al., *Americans in Paris*, 67–68. Contemporary guidebooks, however, do not list a Hôtel de France near Davis's studio, which was located at 50, rue Vercingétorix. Hotels with this name were listed as being located in neighborhoods distant from Montparnasse, where the combination of elements found in *Hôtel de France* would have been extremely unlikely. See Findlay Muirhead, ed., *Paris and Its Environs* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1927); and George Harvey, ed., *Paris and Its Environs* (London: Richards, 1931). It is nevertheless possible that a Hôtel de France did exist in Montparnasse in 1928 and was not listed in these guidebooks because it was overlooked or not deemed suitable for tourists. I am grateful to Loren Whittaker for her research into this question.
14. The fountain is a so-called Wallace fountain, one of the hundred or so public drinking water fountains, based on a model by the sculptor Charles Lebourg, that the English philanthropist Sir Richard Wallace donated to the city of Paris in 1872. (I am grateful to Serge Fauchereau for helping me to identify this element of Davis's composition and for providing this information.) Advertising columns of the sort shown by Davis also often served as newspaper kiosks. For a side-by-side *pissotière* and advertising column/newspaper kiosk similar to those in Davis's painting, see the Georges Chevalier photograph of the rue d'Aboukir, June or July 1914, in John Russell, *Paris* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), 118.
15. The horse's head is loosely related to another drawing Davis made in Paris, *Horse's Head (Child's Drawing)* (1928; private collection). Davis labeled this drawing "Child's wall drawing, Passage Thieré." Its recontextualization in *Hôtel de France* further emphasizes the nature of the composition as a pastiche.
16. The Kub kiosk advertisement that was Davis's source is recorded in a photograph by Eugène Atget, *Boulevard de Bonne-Nouvelle* (May 1926; Museum of Modern Art, New York), reproduced in Turner et al., *Americans in Paris*, 56. Several years earlier, Picasso had incorporated the Kub logo into one of his Analytic Cubist paintings, *Landscape with Posters* (1912; National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan), with a similar appreciation of its unintended appropriateness to his art. See Kirk Vamedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 42–43. When Edward Alden Jewell commented on Davis's sense of humor in *Hôtel de France*, he was probably referring to the play on this word *Kub*. See Jewell, "Art Galleries Offer a Rich Display."
17. See, for instance, Joseph Pollet, quoted in "Roughnecks," *Art Digest* 5 (1 March 1931), 23. For a broader discussion of the links American art critics made between European culture and feminine decadence in the decade preceding Davis's Paris sojourn, see David Allen Cole, "The Rhetoric of Degeneracy and Evolutionism in the American Critical Response to Modern Art, 1908–1921," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996, chap. 3.
18. Wilkin, *Stuart Davis*, 122.
19. Davis, quoted in Sweeney, *Stuart Davis*, exh. cat. (1945), 17–18.
20. Davis, quoted in *ibid.*, 22.
21. Kachur, *Stuart Davis: An American in Paris*, 10.
22. Davis to Edith Halpert, 11 August 1953, quoted in John R. Lane, *Stuart Davis: Art and Art Theory*, exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 76.

# ARTHUR GARFIELD DOVE (1880–1946)

## *Tree*, 1934

Oil on canvas  
18 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 24 in. (45.9 × 61 cm)  
Signed lower center: Dove—  
Gift of Commerce Bancshares, Inc., 2003.3

COMPOSED OF UNDULATING, organic forms and an earthy palette of browns and tans, Arthur Dove's *Tree* suggests the restless energy and restorative powers of nature. A large tree limb stretches snakelike from left to right across the modest, horizontal composition. This form is silhouetted against paler shapes defined by flaming contours. Painted with little discernible modeling, Dove's varied forms gain formidable presence through the artist's dynamic use of line. In this regard, *Tree* relates directly to the painter's assertion, offered in 1926, that "the force lines of a tree seem to me to be more important than its monumental bulk. When mariners say 'the wind has weight,' a line seems to express that better than bulk."<sup>1</sup>

An effective translation of elemental "force lines" into an abstract artistic vocabulary, *Tree* testifies to Dove's long-standing personal and artistic commitment to nature-based abstraction. Born in Canandaigua, New York, in 1880, Dove became interested in art at an extraordinarily young age.<sup>2</sup> His artistic proclivities were sparked initially by Newton Weatherly, a truck farmer and amateur artist, whom Dove met in 1889 after his family had relocated to Geneva, New York. To the end of his life, Dove cited the modest and thoughtful Weatherly among his most important influences. Following his father's dictates that he pursue a career in law, Dove enrolled in the prelaw program at Cornell University, where he also attended art classes in the university's School of Mechanical Engineering. Following his graduation in 1903, the aspiring artist, despite his father's wishes, moved to New York City and began illustrating for such popular periodicals as *Century*, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, and *LIFE*. The artists John Sloan (q.v.) and William Glackens (q.v.) encouraged him to take up painting. Early on, Dove adopted an impressionistic style in the manner of his friend Ernest Lawson (q.v.). In 1908 the painter and his wife, Florence Dorsey, departed for France, where Dove painted primarily in the countryside, characteristically shying away from the confusing congestion of Paris. When he returned to New York in 1909, Dove met Alfred Stieglitz, the Manhattan-based photographer and gallery owner, who provided the painter his first professional coup by including him in *Younger American Painters*, an exhibition he mounted the following year. Dove's most loyal supporter, Stieglitz granted him his first one-man exhibition in 1912 and, beginning in 1926, sponsored a solo show of the painter's work every spring.<sup>3</sup> Early in the 1920s the painter gained another important patron

in Duncan Phillips, one of the few champions of contemporary American artists at the time, who purchased many of Dove's paintings for his Washington, D.C., home and provided him with a regular stipend.<sup>4</sup>

Following Dove's debut in *Younger American Painters*, his art took a dramatic and surprising turn toward abstraction. This turn was precipitated in part by the artist's 1910 purchase of a farm in Westport, Connecticut, a venture he hoped would provide adequate income for his growing family (a son, William, was born that year) and that immersed him in nature. Dove's early abstractions, a series of lyrical pastels filled with layered, curved, arcing forms, record the artist's intuitive responses to nature's ever-evolving moods and conditions.<sup>5</sup> At the time of their execution, these images collectively set a new standard for nonobjective abstraction in American art. Such an approach found confirmation in the work and ideas of the Russian-born Wassily Kandinsky, with which Dove was familiar initially through Stieglitz's collecting practices.<sup>6</sup> In the 1920s Dove's place among the American avant-garde was consolidated by a group of inventive, witty assemblages he created, works existing in proximity to the New York Dada movement.<sup>7</sup> Dove's openness to experiment remains one of his most enduring and admired artistic attributes.

However experimental and intuitive the manner of his production, Dove was an artist singularly focused on nature as his subject. The painter's steadfast devotion to and fascination with nature have inspired many historians to view his work as an extension of the Romantic tradition dating back to the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Dove's sustained engagement with nature is more precisely understood as a generational interest shared by many of the American artists and writers who gathered around Stieglitz. As Wanda M. Corn, along with other art historians, has observed, artists and writers of Stieglitz's "Second Circle" in the 1920s—including Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.), Waldo Frank, and others—frequently turned to nature as part of a collective investigation of American national identity in the arts. In this regard, the exultation of nature—typically expressed in the form of landscape painting—served, among other purposes, as a powerful critique of rampant American materialism and consumption, which Stieglitz and his followers believed subdued the country's "spirit" or "soul" and, thereby, stifled the artist's creative powers.<sup>9</sup> As a painter who preferred an unconventional, rural lifestyle away from urban centers, Dove found in the Stieglitz circle a cadre of sympathetic, like-minded artists who similarly believed that individual expression—and, by extension, an "American" art—could be achieved only when artists rooted themselves deeply in their native soil.

In the context of Dove's four-decade-long artistic engagement with nature, trees constituted important and revealing subjects.



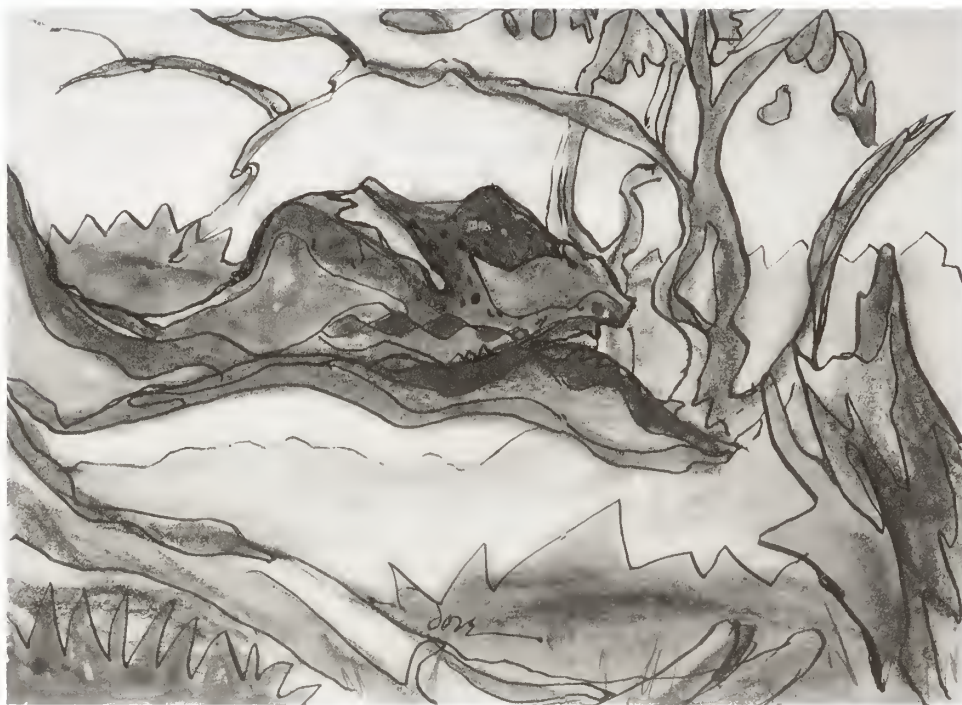


Fig. 1 Arthur Dove, *Tree I*, 1934. Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper, 5 × 7 in. (12.7 × 17.8 cm). Courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York

Dove returned frequently to trees as subjects for painting, from his earliest abstractions, such as *Nature Symbolized No. 3: Steeple and Trees* (Terra Foundation for the Arts, Chicago), rendered in 1911/12, to *Tree Trunks (Life Goes On)* (1934; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.), to his simplified and colorful late work, for example, *Dancing Willows* of 1943 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The Nelson-Atkins *Tree* must be understood as part of this substantial subset of images.

Dove's special interest in trees as subjects can be attributed not only to his devotion to nature but also to the nativist ideology that permeated the Stieglitz circle, particularly throughout the 1920s. As a strong, sturdy natural form anchored and nourished by the earth reaching to the sky, the tree was a subject of painterly and literary exploration perfectly suited to this collection of artists and writers concerned with American "roots," their cultivation and their aesthetic offspring.<sup>10</sup> "No word was more constantly on their lips [than 'roots']," Van Wyck Brooks recalled in his cultural memoir of the 1920s, "unless it was the native 'soil' or 'earth.'"<sup>11</sup> Perhaps due to these rich associations with America's cultural and artistic "roots," trees attracted not only Dove but also his close friend and fellow painter O'Keeffe, who began painting trees in the 1920s, as well as Stieglitz himself.<sup>12</sup> Understood in relation to the concerns and aspirations of the Stieglitz circle, the tree, consequently, can be interpreted as a symbol of the means by which great American art would be made manifest, quite literally from the ground up, on native soil.

*Tree* exhibits many stylistic traits characteristic of Dove's so-called Geneva Period, from 1933 to 1938. Following the death of his mother in 1933, Dove reluctantly returned with his second wife, Helen "Reds" Torr, to Geneva, New York, where he had spent part of his childhood and had attended two years of college. As Elizabeth Turner has described, Dove's return to Geneva was fraught with internal conflict and ambivalence.<sup>13</sup> On one hand, the painter was attracted to the possibility of relocating to an environment

more conducive to painting than the houseboat, *Mona*, on which he and "Reds" had been living and working since 1922. On the other hand, the move to Geneva threw into relief the fact that his career as a painter had not met with the success about which he fantasized in his youth. It also entailed contending with the remainder of his family's troubled, highly mortgaged estate. Living in a farmhouse with neither electricity nor running water, Dove began painting directly from experiences gained during countless solitary excursions around his new home and among the lush, rolling hillsides of the Finger Lakes region.

*Tree* is the product of Dove's experiences and sensations accrued during one or more of these private expeditions. As such, it possesses many of the stylistic hallmarks that scholars of Dove associate with his work from this period. These include a profusion of irregular shapes derived from the organic world and bounded by curving contours, as well as a narrow range of warm, earthy colors. Ann Lee Morgan has furthermore discussed Dove's work from this period as an important extension of the "line motif" in his art, his continued exploration of seemingly spontaneous mark-making as the starting point of painting.<sup>14</sup> Especially pronounced in Dove's Geneva Period, this technique begs comparison with the brand of automatic drawing commonly associated with European Surrealism. Replete with organic lines and shapes, *Tree* most certainly recalls the biomorphic abstractions of Joan Miró, although the similarities between the two artists are largely coincidental.<sup>15</sup>

Similarities to Surrealist automatism are particularly evident in the loose watercolor, graphite, ink, and watercolor sketch on which Dove based *Tree* (Fig. 1). In this preliminary work on paper, the artist established fundamental formal characteristics that he retained in the painting, including the horizontal orientation, the warm, brown palette, and the massing of organic shapes primarily across the center, bottom edge, and along the right-hand side. The painter also preserved the distinctive sawtooth pattern denoting areas of brush or foliage. In translating the sketch into oil, Dove

generally simplified form by depicting larger areas of unmodulated color. He furthermore minimized elements in the background, most noticeably the group of trees toward the right-hand side, which is so clearly delineated in the sketch but fades ambiguously to shades of gray in the painting. Thus Dove's process of translation produced a higher degree of abstraction overall.

After 1934 Dove moved increasingly away from recognizable imagery in his painting. Even so, his continued commitment to nature-based abstraction caused many to view him and his work as quaint relics of a bygone era.<sup>16</sup> Dove nevertheless maintained an ambitious exhibition schedule and garnered many honors for his art in the years leading up to his death in 1946 following a second heart attack. He counted on his annual exhibition at Stieglitz's An American Place (*Tree* was likely included in his exhibition there in either 1934 or 1935). In 1937 the Phillips Memorial Gallery organized Dove's first retrospective, a rare tribute to a living American artist. His work was also featured in several prominent special exhibitions throughout the period, including *Abstract Painting in America*, mounted by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1935, and *Art in Our Time* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939. With failing health, Dove moved in 1938 with "Reds" to Centerport, on the north shore of Long Island, where he lived the rest of his life and where his work became larger, more abstract and simplified compositionally, and brighter. Such work allowed his posthumous reputation to endure the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s more successfully than many of his more realist contemporaries.<sup>17</sup> More recently, regard for Dove's painting was boosted as part of the broader revival of interest in early American modernism in the 1990s, as scholars examined with greater intensity the period's transatlantic character.<sup>18</sup> In this context, Dove garnered another retrospective in 1997, wherein he was celebrated as an American artist who "recoiled from the self-conscious efforts of European artists" and "came to abstraction through emotion, not by design or expectation."<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Dove, quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1975), 7.
2. Details pertaining to Dove's biography have been gleaned primarily from Debra Bricker Balken, *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of Art, Phillips Academy; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). See esp. the chronology, 175–79.
3. On Dove's relationship with Stieglitz, see William C. Agee, "Arthur Dove: A Place to Find Things," in Sarah Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 421–39.
4. On Dove's relationship with Phillips, see Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz: The Stieglitz Circle at the Phillips Collection*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995).
5. Dove dubbed these works "the Ten Commandments." On this series, see Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, 20–29.
6. On Stieglitz's acquisition of Kandinsky's *The Garden of Love (Improvisation Number 27)* (1912; Metropolitan Museum of Art) from the Armory

- Show in 1913, see Charles Brock, "The Armory Show, 1913: A Diabolical Test," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 127–43, esp. 128. On the acquisition's impression on Dove, see Agee, "Arthur Dove," 429. It should also be noted that Stieglitz published Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) in his magazine *Camera Work* in 1912.
7. For a discussion of Dove's assemblages, see Balken, *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective*, 31–33. Balken emphasizes that William C. Agee's claim that Dove participated in the salons hosted by Walter and Louise Arensberg, who helped to launch the New York Dada movement, remains unsubstantiated.
8. For a discussion of Dove and Romanticism, see Sherrye Cohn, "Dove and the Romantic Tradition," in Cohn, *Arthur Dove: Nature as Symbol* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985), 1–18.
9. On these various related topics relating to the Stieglitz circle, see Wanda M. Corn, "Spiritual America," in Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 3–40. See also Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," in Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America*, 277–330; and Cohn, "Nativism and Modernism," in *Nature as Symbol*, 91–110.
10. On these issues, see, again, Corn, "Spiritual America," 3–40; and Greenough, "Alfred Stieglitz, Facilitator, Financier, and Father, Presents Seven Americans," 293–94.
11. Van Wyck Brooks, *Days of the Phoenix: The Nineteen-Twenties I Remember* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1957), 2.
12. O'Keeffe and Stieglitz both began depicting trees in Lake George, New York, where the couple regularly took respite from Manhattan. See Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 40–46. Eldredge's interpretation of O'Keeffe's tree "portraits" emphasizes their personal significance to the painter. For a similar biographical reading of O'Keeffe's trees, see Lisa Mintz Messinger, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 60–63.
13. See Turner, "Going Home: Geneva, 1933–1938," in Balken, *A Retrospective*, 95–113.
14. See Ann Lee Morgan, *Arthur Dove: Life and Work, with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Newark: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1984), 58. Turner likewise emphasizes Dove's exploration of line in Geneva in "Going Home," 102.
15. Dove's art has long been compared to Miró's. For an early instance of this comparison, see Elizabeth McCausland, "Authentic American Is Arthur G. Dove," *Springfield (Mass.) Union and Republican*, 5 May 1935, sec. E, 6. Throughout Dove's lifetime, such comparisons served partly the purpose of illustrating that American art was on a par with the European avant-garde.
16. Morgan discusses the decline in Dove's reputation in the 1930s in *Arthur Dove*, 80. Likewise, Turner discusses Dove's perceived decline during the period in "Going Home," 105, emphasizing the painter's omission from the Museum of Modern Art's major exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* as a clear sign of Dove's marginal status.
17. William Innes Homer points to Dove's influence on the Abstract Expressionists in *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977), 266: "Of all the members of the Stieglitz group," Homer claims, "Dove appears to have exerted the greatest influence on the generation that followed him."
18. On this revival in interest in academe, museums, and the art market, see Eileen Kinsella, "American Modernism Takes Off," *Art News* 101 (May 2002), 138–41.
19. Charles S. Moffett and Jock Reynolds, "Foreword and Acknowledgements," in Balken, *Arthur Dove: A Retrospective*, 9.

## ASHER B. DURAND (1796–1886)

### *Landscape, Welch Mountain, 1863* (*Landscape*)

Oil on canvas

20¼ × 30¼ in. (51.4 × 76.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: AB Durand / 1863

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 35-45

DURING A SKETCHING TRIP to New Hampshire in the summer of 1855, Asher B. Durand wrote the following lines in a letter to his son, the editor of the *Crayon*: “The region of the White Mountains is justly famed for its impressive scenery; passages of the sublime and beautiful are not infrequent. . . . But to one like myself, unqualified to penetrate the ‘untrodden ways’ of [deep chasms and frowning preeipices], the *beautiful* aspect of the White Mountain scenery is by far the predominant feature.”<sup>1</sup> Durand’s sketches, which he drew from the accessible vantage points of valleys and foothills, evoke the eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke’s conception of the Beautiful by emphasizing the harmony, serenity, and pastoral loveliness of the surrounding mountains.<sup>2</sup> Eight years later, during one of the darkest periods of the Civil War, Durand turned these tranquil sketches into a finished painting, *Landscape, Welch Mountain*.<sup>3</sup>

Durand painted the huge granite outcropping of the mountain rising in the distance, enveloped in the hazy atmosphere of a cool morning. Below, an expanse of green fields and pastures rolls gently back toward the mountain, bordered by woods and dotted with houses and farm buildings. A river with a sandy bed and tree-lined banks, which could be the Mad River or the Pemigewasset, meanders quietly through the scene. No figures are present to contemplate the view, but Durand left traces of his presence in the immediate foreground. On the rock in the lower left corner he inscribed “AB Durand / 1863.”

The artist conceived the landscape as a series of parallel planes that become progressively veiled in atmosphere as they recede into the distance. He painted the foreground elements with a fine brush, sharply defining individual forms and varying his strokes to suggest the textures of stones, grass, and shrubs. In the middle distance, more sketchily rendered elements are painted with a somewhat lighter palette. Finally, the background of *Landscape, Welch Mountain* incorporates a number of broad, almost flat areas of silvery gray, blue, and lavender that would have been unthinkable in Durand’s earlier, more detailed landscapes.<sup>4</sup> The painting marks a transition in the artist’s style toward the softer, more atmospheric, and idyllic aesthetic that characterized his late career.

Like many American artists born around the turn of the nineteenth century, Durand grew up in humble circumstances.<sup>5</sup> His father was a farmer, watchmaker, and silversmith in rural Jefferson

Village (now Maplewood), New Jersey. Poor health prevented him from working on the family farm, and Durand instead became apprenticed to the engraver Peter Maverick in 1812. For the next twenty years he worked as a commercial engraver, designing banknotes, playbills, and tickets, and copying portraits and historical paintings. During this time he was an active participant in the burgeoning New York art community.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1820s Durand became interested in oil painting. Thanks to the encouragement and patronage of Luman Reed, an influential New York merchant and collector, Durand was able to give up engraving. By 1837 he was painting landscapes almost exclusively. Durand made a grand tour of Europe in 1840–41, and he was unquestionably influenced by the paintings he saw there, particularly those by John Constable and Claude Lorrain.<sup>7</sup>

After Thomas Cole’s (q.v.) death in 1848, Durand became the acknowledged leader of the group later known as the Hudson River School. His work of the 1850s and 1860s, although still imbued with the pastoral sensibility of European landscape painters, also expresses Durand’s belief that the artist should be faithful to nature in all its details.<sup>8</sup> Seeking to express the harmonious relation between humanity and nature, which he viewed as God’s moral order made manifest, Durand began painting more realistic scenes, often representing recognizable locations. In search of subject matter, he traveled to the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the summers of 1855, 1856, and 1857.

Although the White Mountains were long known for their harsh climate and rough terrain, by the 1850s the region had become more settled. New roads and railway lines made even the most remote areas easily accessible for tourists and artists alike. Hotels and resorts sprang up, and so did artists’ colonies. The two locations most frequented by painters were also those most popular with tourists. North Conway, with its dramatic view of Mount Washington, was the most visited destination, while the more southerly village of West Campton, with its views of Welch Mountain and the Franconia range, provided a less sublime but also less crowded alternative.<sup>9</sup> Durand visited both locations, making sketches that he later assembled into more than twenty-five finished oil paintings of White Mountain scenery.<sup>10</sup> The Nelson-Atkins painting of Welch Mountain presents a picture similar to the view described by Daniel Huntington in the *Crayon* in 1855:

Nearer to you, and in another direction are the Welch mountains, whose outline is noble, with cliffs of a faint grey and fleshy color, which with the intermingled forests, deep gulleys and ravines, produces in the morning and evening light effects of light and shade, and delicate varieties of color,







Fig. 1 Asher B. Durand, *River Valley and Distant Hills, Campton, New Hampshire*, 1855. Graphite with chalk on paper, 9<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (25.2 × 35.2 cm). New-York Historical Society, 1918.138

quite magical. This mountain, combining with the wooded half distances before described, and with the river, its rocks, and overhanging trees, furnish some most noble pictures.<sup>11</sup>

Although Durand sketched Welch Mountain from a spot near the riverbed (Fig. 1), he created a vantage point for his finished painting that emulated that of a tourist looking out over a scenic vista from an elevated bend in the road, much like the one described by Thomas Starr King in his extremely popular guide to the region, *The White Hills*:

The picture of the Pemigewasset, seen from a bend in the road in the little village of Campton, will be one of the prominent pleasures of the afternoon. How briskly it cuts its way in sweeping curves through the luxuriant fields! And with what pride it is watched for miles by the Welch mountain completely filling the background, from which its tide seems to be pouring, and upon whose shoulders, perhaps, the clouds are busily dropping fantastic shawls of shadow!<sup>12</sup>

King's recommended viewpoint, like that offered by Durand, places the viewer in an advantageous position from which to survey both the mountain and the surrounding countryside. Both King and Durand blurred the distinction between painted landscapes and actual vistas seen from sanctioned tourist locations. King compared the White Mountains themselves to

a gallery . . . where Kensett, Coleman [*sic*], Champney, Gay, Church, Durand, Wheelcock, were continually busy in copying from new conceptions the freshness of the morning and the pomp of evening light upon the hills, the countless

passages and combinations of the clouds, the laughs and glooms of the brooks, the innumerable expressions that flit over the meadows, the various vestures of shadow, light and hue, in which they have seen the stalwart hills enrobed.<sup>13</sup>

As Robert McGrath has pointed out, travel writers and artists of the 1850s and 1860s participated in a dialogue that shaped perceptions of the White Mountains, constructing them as a site of regeneration, peace, and harmony rather than sublimity and drama.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly, Durand's patrons during this period were most often New York businessmen and their families, the very people who flocked each summer to the White Mountains, armed with guidebooks like King's. Like the mountains themselves, Durand's landscapes of the early 1860s offered them a momentary retreat from the urban world of business and the oppressing cares of the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> As Angela Miller has argued, landscapes like the Nelson-Atkins canvas expressed a specifically Northern brand of nationalism.<sup>16</sup> The year before Durand painted *Landscape, Welch Mountain*, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier published a poem explicitly linking the Pemigewasset Valley to the Northern cause, and extending the regenerative power of nature, embodied by the White Mountains, to the nation as a whole. It reads, in part,

While, in the vales below, the dry-lipped streams  
Sing to the freshened meadow lands again.  
So, let me hope, the battle-storm that beats  
The land with hail and fire may pass away  
With its spent thunders at the break of day,  
Like last night's clouds, and leave, as it retreats,  
A greener earth and fairer sky behind,  
Blown crystal-clear by Freedom's Northern wind!<sup>17</sup>

In 1863 Durand was nearing the end of his career. He had retired the previous year from his position as president of the National Academy of Design, feeling, as his son later related, that he had outlived his own generation of artists.<sup>18</sup> Reviewers of the National Academy's spring exhibitions in 1863 and 1864, where *Landscape, Welch Mountain* may have been exhibited, largely ignored Durand.<sup>19</sup> An essay about the artist that appeared in an 1867 encyclopedia of American culture asserted, "everybody loves Durand's landscapes, for they appeal to and satisfy the dearest emotions of the soul, in their deep-thoughtedness, their quiet and serene beauty, and their sweet poetic suggestion." Despite this praise, the author referred to Durand's career in the past tense, grouping him with Cole, who had died nearly twenty years earlier.<sup>20</sup> Still, it was not until 1869 that Durand retired to his family home in New Jersey, giving up regular exhibitions.

LL/MS

## NOTES

1. Asher Brown Durand, "Letter to the Editors, North Conway, New Hampshire," *Crayon* 2 (29 August 1855), 133.
2. At the opposite extreme, Edmund Burke defined as Sublime those images that evoked intense emotions of awe or terror by the display of scenery that was vast, irregular, or obscure. See Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Berwick, Eng.: R. and J. Taylor, 1772).
3. The New-York Historical Society owns drawings related to *Landscape, Welch Mountain*. See Related Works.
4. See the entry for Durand's painting *Monument Mountain, Berkshires* (c. 1855–60) in *American Paintings in the Detroit Institute of Arts*, vol. 1, *Works by Artists Born before 1816*, ed. Nancy Rivard Shaw (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1991), 82.
5. Durand has been the subject of numerous books and articles, of which the most important to date are John Durand, *The Life and Times of Asher B. Durand* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1894); David B. Lawall, "Asher Brown Durand: His Art and Art Theory in Relation to His Times," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1966; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 80–91; David B. Lawall, *Asher B. Durand: A Documentary Catalogue of the Narrative and Landscape Paintings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978); and Karen L. Georgi, "Asher B. Durand's American Landscapes and the Nature of Representation," Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2000. For a discussion of Durand's place in the development of American landscape painting, see, for example, *American Paradise*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987); and Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).
6. Durand was a founding member of both the New York Drawing Association (later the National Academy of Design) in 1825 and the Sketch Club (later the Century Association) in 1829.
7. For his response to these artists' works, as recorded in his letters, see Durand, *The Life and Times of Asher B. Durand*, 150–62.
8. Durand published a series of didactic essays in the *Crayon* expressing this view, which paralleled that of the English art critic John Ruskin. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting," *Crayon* 1 (3 January 1855), 1–2; 1 (17 January 1855), 34–35; 1 (31 January 1855), 66–67; 1 (14 February 1855), 97–98; 1 (7 March 1855), 145–46; 1 (4 April 1855), 209–11; 1 (2 May 1855), 273–75; 1 (6 June 1855), 254–55; and 2 (July 1855), 16–17.
9. A good-natured rivalry developed between artists loyal to each village; they corresponded in the *Crayon*, praising the virtues of each site and signing their letters with names such as "Flake White," "Rose Madder," and "Poppy Oil." Daniel Huntington (as Flake White) first described the merits of West Campton as a sketching ground; see "Correspondence," *Crayon* 2 (3 October 1855), 215, 217.
10. Catherine H. Campbell, *New Hampshire Scenery: A Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Artists of New Hampshire Mountain Landscapes* (Canaan: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1985), 50–53. Typically, Durand studied individual trees, rocks, and other natural formations for use in his foregrounds. Separate sketches provided records of distant views.
11. [Huntington], "Correspondence," 215.
12. Thomas Starr King, *The White Hills: Their Legends, Landscape and Poetry* (Boston: Nichols and Hall, 1859), 20. Durand's sketches make it clear that his painting of Welch Mountain is a composite scene subtly fused to create an ideal view of the mountain and the surrounding countryside. Durand's friend the landscape artist Winkworth Allan Gay painted a similar view of the mountain in his *Welch Mountain from West Campton* (1856; Brooklyn Museum); however, Gay's vantage point is more realistically portrayed as lower and closer to the river.
13. *Ibid.*, 176–77.
14. Robert L. McGrath, *Gods in Granite: The Art of the White Mountains of New Hampshire* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), xx–xxi. As Karen Georgi has recently discussed, Durand's apparent truthfulness to nature masks the carefully composed nature of his scenes, allowing him to make seemingly natural associations between nature and abstract concepts such as national identity and divine providence; see Georgi, "Asher B. Durand's American Landscapes," 63.
15. Kevin J. Avery has linked Durand's patrons and the New York tourism industry; Avery, "Selling the Sublime and Beautiful: New York Landscape Painting and Tourism," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 109–33. For a further discussion of how Durand's landscapes were viewed, see Rebecca Bedell, "Asher Durand and the Therapeutic Landscape," in Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825–1875* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 47–65.
16. Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 90.
17. John G. Whittier, "Franconia from the Pemigewasset," *Atlantic Monthly* 9 (March 1862), 299.
18. Durand, *The Life and Times of Asher B. Durand*, 177.
19. Durand exhibited one painting, titled simply *Landscape*, in 1863. The reviewer for the *New York Evening Post* devoted the most attention to Durand's entry for this year, writing, "Cropsey's 'Spring' and a landscape of Durand's are hardly intended, we suppose, to represent their artists' pair of fine reputations, though both are pleasing pictures, and can not entirely fail, of course, to contain something of the painters' identities." "The National Academy of Design, Its Thirty-eighth Annual Exhibition," *New York Evening Post*, 12 June 1863, 5.
20. *Eighty Years' Progress of the United States: A Family Record of American History, Energy and Enterprise* (Hartford, Conn.: L. Stebbins, 1867), 323–24.

## THOMAS EAKINS (1844–1916)

### *Frances Eakins, c. 1870* (Portrait of Mrs. William J. Crowell)

Oil on canvas  
24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 19<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (61.1 × 50.6 cm)  
Purchase: Nelson Trust, 44-55/2

FRANCES EAKINS, Thomas Eakins's hushed, intimate view of his sister at the family piano, marked the beginning of his artistic career in the United States. Though it was never exhibited publicly in his lifetime, the painting represents the artist's first attempt to apply his years of Parisian study at the *École des Beaux-Arts* to subjects from his native Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of those four years abroad as a pupil of the French academic painter Jean-Léon Gérôme, Eakins's entire life was spent in Philadelphia, where he graduated from the rigorous Central High School in 1861 and subsequently studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and attended medical demonstrations at Jefferson Medical College. Throughout his career, Eakins thrived in the rich intellectual, scientific, and cultural environment of Philadelphia. However, during his early years, in particular, this connection to the city's professional and artistic communities took place largely within the circle of his immediate family and their commodious home on Mount Vernon Street.

Thus, when he returned to the United States from Europe in July 1870, Eakins looked no farther than his family parlor for his first subject and to the sibling closest in age and interests to his own. After his father, Benjamin, there was no member of his family with whom he shared more of himself during this period than Frances "Fanny" Eakins, four years his junior. During the time of his study abroad, his other sisters, Margaret "Maggie" and Caroline "Caddy," were too young to engage in a meaningful correspondence, but a series of letters from Eakins to Fanny indicates a high level of mutual affection and respect (with a few exceptions, Fanny's letters to Eakins are lost). Eakins wrote to Fanny about literature, religion, art, and linguistics. She was particularly adept at foreign languages, but she had also developed an independent taste for art and architecture, as indicated by the observations in a diary she kept when she and her father visited Eakins in Europe in 1868. Their degree of closeness may be gauged by a fragment of a letter from Fanny, in which she questions her brother with unusual directness about his intentions toward a possible fiancée.<sup>2</sup>

These personal matters aside, the most frequent subject relating to Fanny in Eakins's letters home is music. By her teenage years, Fanny had developed a notable musical talent, and her brother took pains to describe the many performances he attended in Paris, contrasting them to the concerts he knew she could hear in Philadelphia. When she arrived in Paris, Fanny took advantage of the

opportunity, hearing music whenever she could, trying out French pianos, keeping up on her practicing, and on one occasion, striking out on her own in the French city to buy quantities of sheet music while her father and brother "went to take a swim." Eakins did his sister the honor of equating her own musical development with his struggle to learn to draw at the *École*, advising her not to waste too much time on technical flourishes such as trills: "Don't think that you are the only one that has been down hearted. I have often wanted to die & I feel now plain it was my stupidity. I was playing my trills drawing from plaster casts."<sup>3</sup>

In 1867 Eakins made a point of writing to congratulate Fanny on the family's acquisition of a new piano, and it is almost certainly this piano that Eakins featured prominently in a series of paintings he executed in the years immediately following his return to Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup> The Eakins parlor was one of many graced with an instrument during this period; in 1866 some twenty-five thousand pianos were made and sold in the United States.<sup>5</sup> A few commentators, especially musical professionals, took a dim view of this popular phenomenon, seeing both the expensive piano and the vogue for music lessons for young girls as a pretension to gentility on the part of the average consumer. Such a mocking tone can be heard in lines written in another context by the patrician art critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer after a visit to the Eakins home in 1881: "His home & surroundings & family were decidedly of the *lower* middle class, I should say. . . . I used to wonder why he did not put better clothes and furniture into his pictures, but now I wonder how he even managed to see anything so good."<sup>6</sup>

If Van Rensselaer objected to the actual Eakins interiors as common and out-of-date, this bias did not prevent her from recognizing the power and gravity of the works that had been painted there. Likewise, the caliber of music heard in the Eakins household was more than a step or two above the ordinary, thanks to Fanny's abilities and the family's social network, which included a number of professional musicians. Concerts of chamber music were given frequently at Mount Vernon Street, and though the artist himself was not a musician, his letters and the memories of those who knew him leave an impression of a man with a keen interest in and deep feeling for the expressive potential of music (more than twenty of his paintings deal with the subject). Eakins was known to weep at musicales, and watching musicians in the act of playing held a special fascination for him. This alone might account for the quiet reverence with which he captures his sister at the piano, yet there was another reason for the muted sensibility of the work. Eakins's mother was suffering from mental illness at the time; she died two years later, in 1872. As a result, Fanny had taken on the cares of running the household, and her brother



rarely left the house in the evening, so as not to cause his mother worry.<sup>7</sup> Such a milieu may well have contributed to the shrouded intensity of his painting of Fanny.

Eakins depicts his sister in profile, with the viewer positioned slightly above her, as if sitting in a chair just marginally higher than her plush magenta stool. The proximity creates a remarkable sense of intimacy, and one cannot help but feel the keen observational scrutiny of the artist bearing down on his subject. In this, and other piano paintings of his sisters and a family friend, Eakins gets so close that we can read the music, and the keyboard is always in view in this series, although from different angles. The piano, by no means an ancillary element of decoration, receives careful attention. Its highly polished surfaces gleam from the shadows (Fanny's hands are dimly reflected in the wood), and the scrollwork of the music stand has been scrupulously plotted and drawn in perspective. Other than in his attic studio, Eakins likely spent more time as a working artist seated next to this piano than any other place in these early years.

In the Nelson-Atkins canvas, Fanny wears a light summer dress, a type of garment not seen in Eakins's other paintings of this period and an indication that the work was painted immediately after his return from Europe in July or August 1870. Her seasonal attire only reinforces the feeling of closure, of being shut inside against the heat of a summer day. The garment also allows the artist to explore effects of layering and transparency, with the opaque underdress glimpsed through the gauzy overlay. Even more impressive is the veiled rendering of the bare skin of her back, shoulders, and arms—the warmer tones depicted with quite a bit of variety under the bunched gossamer folds.

By far the most remarkable part of the dress, however, is the concentrated power of the coral-colored sash and neck ribbon. These portions of the canvas seem almost electrified, blinking from the shadowy atmosphere with neonlike clarity. As a student, Eakins often wrote of his desire for “clean” and “bright” colors; he had a pronounced distaste for the muddied effect that came from too much mixing. In Paris, Gérôme had encouraged him to paint from “Eastern” fabrics. “The colors are strong & near the ends of my scale of colors, such high & low notes & this has taught me a good many things that I might not have paid attention to, if I had only been painting flesh,” he reported to his father. Years later, Eakins set his students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts to the same task, painting “from pure colored ribbons & muslins” to learn “the range of their colors.”<sup>8</sup>

The intense highlights (most often red or pink) that result from this focus on value and hue have puzzled and intrigued students of Eakins's art. The colors seem to charge the canvas with heightened emotional power, selectively drawing compositional elements forward from the murky depths of the pictorial space.<sup>9</sup> Scholars have also come to understand that Eakins keyed many of his paintings to a chromatic range designed for their intended locations—darkened Victorian parlors—rather than the light-flooded museum galleries where they are typically (and often unfavorably) seen today. He preferred an overall tonal scheme that was unusually

low, even for the late nineteenth century, and his characteristic red highlights were one way of punctuating his smoky web of subtle *demi-teintes*.<sup>10</sup> The management of light in *Frances Eakins* is in keeping with this strategy, with the entire illumination coming from a single source behind the sitter, throwing important areas of the composition into shadow.<sup>11</sup>

The greatest light falls on Fanny's back, with its brightly colored ribbons, leaving her face and hands to occupy a more nebulous space. Fanny's swelling cheekbone demarcates these areas of light and shadow, and Eakins uses the opportunity to indicate the underlying bone structure of the face. He illuminates only one of her fingers completely—the pinky finger depressing a key. Through these spotlight points of emphasis (the head, the finger in action, the glowing sheet music), the artist weaves into pictorial reality the combined mental, physical, and expressive energies that constitute the act of playing.<sup>12</sup> That this triangulation takes place in the indefinite shadows between the player and the instrument makes it all the more mysterious and private. Little more than a profile, Fanny's face is subsumed in the act of music making. Hands spread over the keys, she leans forward, concentrating on the musical notations, as though she is feeling out the melody for the first time and pausing to translate what she sees on the page into the action of her fingers. Fanny is one with the music, self-sufficient and absorbed, but she is not lost in a dreamy wash of emotion. Rather, she is depicted in a moment of intellectual suspension, one might even say of problem solving. Like her brother at this early stage of his career, she struggles palpably with the means to control her art, without robbing it of its abstractive, meditative pleasures.

JD

## NOTES

1. In an interview with Lloyd Goodrich in 1931, the sitter identified this painting as the first executed by Eakins after his return from Paris. Goodrich described the Nelson-Atkins painting in his notebook as “beautifully painted,” “very fine,” and “very delicate in workmanship.” Goodrich, catalogue raisonné manuscript notes, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
2. Frances Eakins to Thomas Eakins, 25 February 1868, in Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 171, doc. 139. Frances Eakins’s diary and other letters are located in the archives of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (hereafter PAFA). Additional letters from Eakins, once belonging to Fanny, are housed in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel 640.
3. Frances Eakins diary, 11 July 1868, PAFA; Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, 13 November 1867, AAA, microfilm reel 640; Thomas Eakins to Benjamin and Frances Eakins, 21 March 1867, in Foster and Leibold, *Writing about Eakins*, 145, doc. 18.
4. In addition to the Nelson-Atkins painting, these include *At the Piano (Frances and Margaret Eakins)* (c. 1871; Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Tex.), *Home Scene* (c. 1871; Brooklyn Museum), *Elizabeth Crowell with a Dog* (c. 1873–74; San Diego Museum of Art), *Elizabeth at the Piano* (1875; Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.), and *Singing a Pathetic Song* (1881; Corcoran Gallery of Art).
5. Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 170. On the topic of the parlor-piano phenomenon as it relates to Eakins’s work, see Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 5.
6. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer to Sylvester Koehler, 12 June 1881, Koehler Papers, AAA, microfilm reel D191. See Lois Dimmerstein, “Thomas Eakins’ ‘Crucifixion’ as Perceived by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer,” *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979): 143.
7. The anecdote of Eakins sobbing in the corner at concerts was first told in Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pa.: privately printed, 1946), 121. On Eakins’s enjoyment of seeing musicians play, see Lloyd Goodrich, “. . . About a Man Who Did Not Care to Be Written About: Portraits in Friendship of Thomas Eakins,” *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979): 98. On Eakins’s inability to leave the house, see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:76.
8. Thomas Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:25; and Thomas Eakins to J. Laurie Wallace, 27 February 1884, in Foster and Leibold, *Writing about Eakins*, 214.
9. See, for example, Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 42, 45–46.
10. See the very useful explanation in Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, “The Pursuit of ‘True Tones,’” in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Darrel Sewell, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 353–65. The authors also suggest that overcleaning has robbed many of Eakins’s paintings of their veiled, neutral-toned glazes, thus exaggerating the stridency of the highlights.
11. Just months before executing the Nelson-Atkins painting, Eakins had attempted his first outdoor work, *A Street Scene in Seville* (1870; private collection). Working *en plein air* had proved unexpectedly difficult and awkward for the artist, and his retreat to the controlled lighting of the parlor, with its single source of illumination, is understandable, given his experience in Spain.
12. For a sensitive analysis of this effect in the piano pictures, see John Wilmerding, “The Tensions of Biography and Art in Thomas Eakins,” in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. Wilmerding, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 18–19.

## THOMAS EAKINS (1844–1916)

### *Female Nude (Study)*, c. 1881 (*Nude—[The Model]*)

Oil on canvas

24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (61.4 × 36.8 cm)

Signed lower right: T. E

Gift from the Collection of Julia and Humbert Tinsman,  
F98-30/1

“FOR EAKINS THE NUDE WAS a crossroad where all of his ideas intersected,” writes the art historian William Innes Homer. “The nude was not a transcendent image, nor was it symbolie in the traditional sense: it was a marvel of nature, the superb end product of centuries of evolution. . . . He seems also to have seen the human form as a carrier of vital energy, an organism whose biological force excited him and carried sexual implications.”<sup>1</sup> The nude clearly meant a great deal to Eakins; perhaps no American painter believed more deeply in its artistic importance. Yet it was through his teaching and his photography that Eakins was most associated with the nude—both in the mind of the public and within his more intimate circle of students, friends, and family. There are, in fact, only a few examples of finished nude paintings (especially female nudes) in his oeuvre; the Nelson-Atkins oil study is thus quite unusual. A rare document, it effectively summarizes Eakins’s deep pedagogy beliefs, while also opening a door to the more private world of his studio practice.

Eakins would have been exposed to the artistic study of the nude model during his earliest period of study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he was admitted to the life drawing class in 1863. This regimen was greatly intensified in 1866, when he matriculated at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, under Jean-Léon Gérôme. There he spent five months drawing from the nude before being promoted to the painting class. Although still a student, the always opinionated Eakins developed a philosophy of the nude to which he stringently adhered throughout his long career. Unlike most academics, he did not place much store in the practice of drawing from the live nude, and he detested the exercise of drawing from plaster casts. Instead, Eakins preferred the early use of brush and paint. Perhaps because of his own difficulties in assimilating color into his practice after years of working exclusively in black and white, he urged his students to move quickly to oils in their study of the nude. “I think he should learn to draw with color,” Eakins said when asked his view on the ideal course of instruction for an art student. “The brush is a more powerful and rapid tool than the point or stump. Very often, practically, before the student has had time to get his broadest masses of light and shade with either of these, he has forgotten what he is after. . . . The main thing that

the brush secures is the instant grasp of the grand construction of a figure.”<sup>2</sup>

Eakins sought a holistic view of the nude, one that seized the underlying structure of the figure and made its system of weight and skeletal support manifest. His was an art of substance and volumes rather than contours and surfaces. As the chairman of the Pennsylvania Academy’s Committee of Instruction put it in 1881, “Mr. Eakins teaches that the great masses of the body are the first thing that should be put upon the canvas, in preference to the outline, which is, to a certain extent, an accident, rather than an essential; and the students build up their figures from the inside, rather than fill them up after having lined in the outside.”<sup>3</sup>

Eakins’s nudes were not ideal in the conventional sense: meltingly smooth, free of body hair, and perfectly proportioned. Instead, he reveled in the peculiarities of individual bodies, and he blanched at artistic attempts to “clean up” or alter the realities of normal physical diversity. As a student, for example, he objected to the practice of failing to represent pubic hair: “When a man paints a naked woman he gives her less than poor Nature did. I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to make a woman naked, but if I did I wouldn’t mutilate her for double the money. . . . She is the most beautiful thing there is [in] the world except a naked man.”<sup>4</sup>

Such strong views on the nude were translated into an artistic curriculum at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts that was unique in the nation, especially after Eakins was promoted to Director of Schools in 1882. Drawing was radically deemphasized, instruction in anatomy was intensified (it included human dissection), and life classes in painting and modeling dominated the course of study. Eakins went about his teaching with an almost missionary zeal, and he endeavored to instill in his students the same ardent, mystical belief in the beauty of the human body that he felt himself. He hoped to banish shame associated with nudity from his world, and to set an example, he was known to appear unclothed before his students. In addition, he encouraged them to model nude for one another, and he resisted pressure to segregate his classes by sex when there was a nude model present. His students were also drawn into several photographic projects where they appeared as nude models, such as the *Naked* series of the early 1880s, which involved taking a standard set of seven photographs of the model, in poses designed to maximize the visibility of skeletal and muscular articulation.

In Philadelphia, there were fairly regular objections to this single-minded focus on the nude, on both artistic and moral grounds. They came to a head in 1886, when Eakins was dismissed by the Pennsylvania Academy amid controversy and gossip

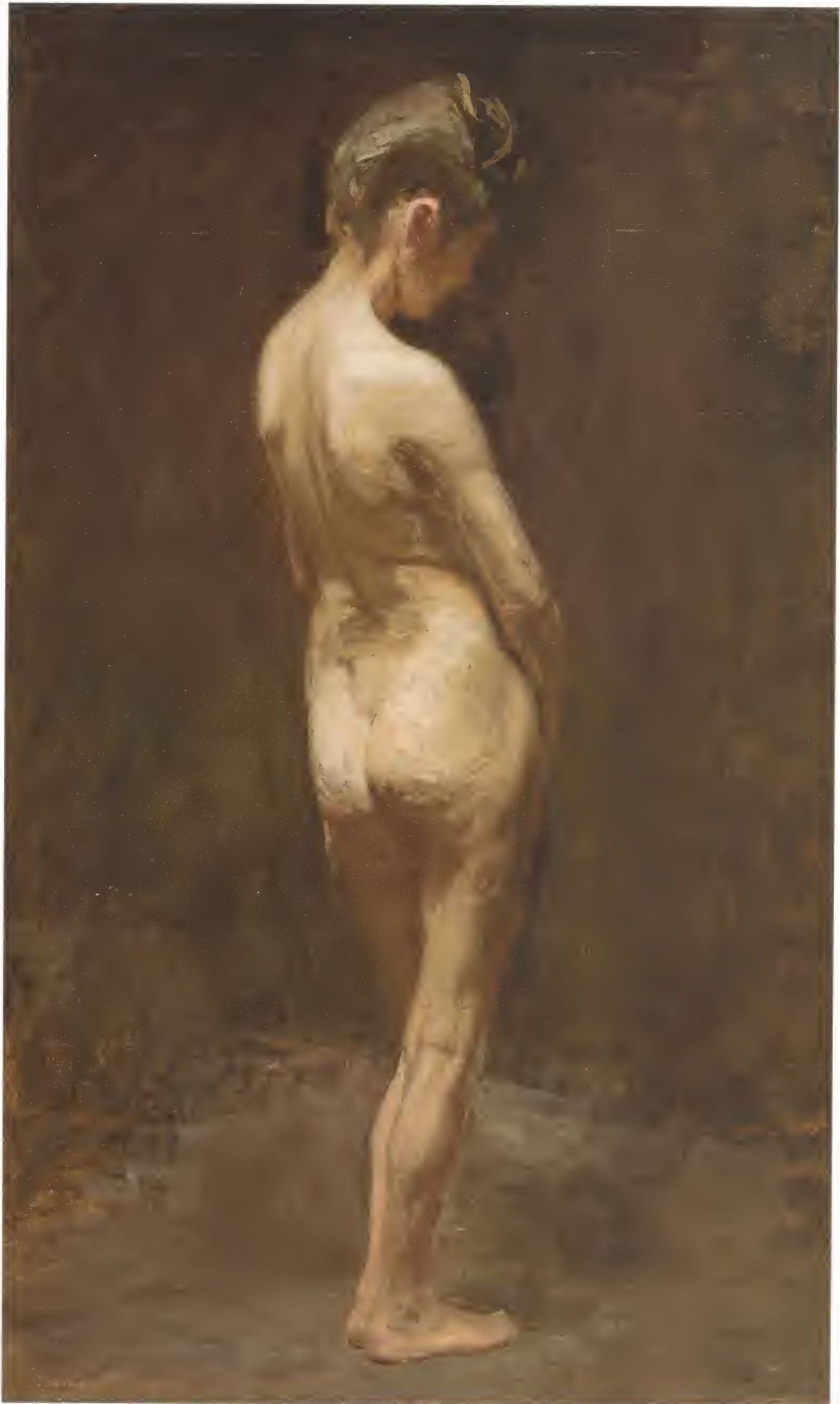






Fig. 1 Thomas Eakins, *Nude Woman*, c. 1882 (unfinished). Watercolor on paper, 17¼ × 8¾ in. (43.8 × 22.2 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Louis E. Stern, 1950

regarding nudity in the studio. It is also likely that the academy officers had grown weary of Eakins's inflexibility and his obsession with the nude, "enforced with an almost brutal conviction," as Kathleen Foster writes.<sup>5</sup> The artist composed a series of strongly argued letters in his defense, asserting, "I have but little patience with the false modesty which is the greatest enemy to all figure painting," and, "I see no impropriety in looking at the most beautiful of Nature's works, the naked figure." Yet even those who were inclined to support Eakins during this period, such as his brother-in-law and high-school friend William Crowell, eventually grew exasperated. "You, it seems to me, have set up the worship of the nude as a kind of fetic[h] [*sic*]," wrote Crowell with uncharacteristic severity in 1890.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the importance the artist attached to the nude in his teaching, it is unlikely that *Female Nude (Study)* was used as a classroom exercise. It was not Eakins's practice to demonstrate regularly in the studio. Instead, he periodically monitored the progress of his students as they worked from the model, commenting and occasionally taking up the brush to make a correction. Nevertheless, the Nelson-Atkins study embodies the core set of principles that was the foundation of his teaching. The brushwork Eakins used to describe his model exhibits a directness and a sculptural tangibility. The relatively loose strokes suggest that he worked rapidly, perhaps in as few as two sittings. He continued to add highlights and touches of red and white (on the shoulder and buttocks, for example) even after the canvas was squared for transfer through the grid he incised into the paint. A complete range of values seems to have been one of Eakins's greatest concerns, from the bright light falling on the model's neck to the areas of brown shadow pooled in the small of her back and in the hollow of her thighs. In his instructions to his students, he counseled them to avoid an impression of flatness at all costs, and here, he heightens the three-dimensional qualities of the nude by allowing her to glow from within an ambiguous background of brownish olive stain and hastily scrubbed-in gray and magenta.<sup>7</sup>

The model's quiet pose is typical of the artist, one found in a number of the photographic studies associated with his circle.<sup>8</sup> She is demure, contained, and folded in upon herself, with her hands and face (the greatest markers of personality) largely invisible to the viewer. Yet her body is revealing in a number of other, more anatomical ways. Eakins gives a remarkable sense of the sinews and tendons stretched over the back of her knee as well as the pressure of her shoulder blades underneath her skin. Overall, the nude has a low center of gravity, as though she has settled heavily into her pose. Still, thanks to her bent knee and left foot placed forward, her body marks a graceful S curve in space, a double arc that nicely illustrates the flexible "middle line" that Eakins stressed was the key to grasping the shifting axes of the body's weight and motion.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the model is so particularized (the rolled, sloping shoulders and birdlike upper torso, the long, narrow back, the high waist, the squared hips, the large head and prominent ear) that she can likely be identified as the artist's wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins.<sup>10</sup>

Susan often posed for Eakins, both before and after their marriage in 1884 (he disliked professional models and preferred to have a personal connection with the people who posed for him). For example, several outdoor nude photographic studies of her were taken during the development of his Arcadia series about 1883.<sup>11</sup> Yet *Female Nude (Study)* does not appear to be closely linked to this project or to the artist's earlier work on the William Rush theme (a historical reconstruction of that Philadelphia sculptor's studio, which featured an unclothed model and which generated Eakins's only significant body of oil studies of the female nude). The Nelson-Atkins painting, in fact, is both larger and more finished than most of the William Rush nude studies. It seems to have been created for an entirely different purpose, one related to the artist's practice in watercolor.

For about a decade beginning in 1873, Eakins pursued an interest in the medium of watercolor, and one sheet in particular, now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Fig. 1), is unmistakably connected to the Nelson-Atkins study. Most artists, when working on the same subject in the two distinct media of watercolor and oil, employ the former as the generator of ideas and the latter as the final worked-up version of the composition. Unusually, Eakins reversed this process, typically using the oil sketch to lay out his thoughts and then translating the motif into a carefully finished watercolor. Thus, *Female Nude (Study)* served here as the source for the smaller, unfinished watercolor, which is somewhat reduced in its range of tones but which otherwise conveys the rich textural effects of the oil original.

Why might Eakins have chosen this subject for treatment in watercolor (his only known nude in this medium), and why was the work on paper left unfinished? A possible explanation involves a visit by the noted New York art critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer to Eakins's home in the summer of 1881. Van Rensselaer hoped to publish an article about Eakins in the *American Art Review*, and as she wrote to her editor following the trip to Philadelphia, she had discussed the question of illustrations with the artist. Van Rensselaer reported that Eakins "says he destroyed all his academic studies & since that time has never worked in black & white even for the purpose of making notes . . . [yet] he said he should be glad to do some studies from life for our purpose tho' he was so unaccustomed to working in line that he did not know how he should suc[c]eed." She was certain that Eakins "could do splendid sketches & studies for us," and she noted that he had earlier done a grisaille watercolor copy of his celebrated *Gross Clinic* for the purposes of reproduction. In fact, a month later Eakins was corresponding with the *American Art Review* regarding the details of photographing this *Gross Clinic* copy.<sup>12</sup>

What is pertinent here is that while Eakins told Van Rensselaer he had no "academic studies" to offer her, he was willing to undertake some new "studies from life," even if he was not accustomed to "working in line." It is thus possible that *Female Nude (Study)* was one of these new studies intended for the *American Art Review*. Eakins, uncomfortable with line drawing as an illustrational technique, would have followed his normal practice of beginning in



Fig. 2 Edward W. Boulton, after *Life Casting in the Chestnut Street Studio*, mid-19th–early 20th century. Gelatin glass negative, 5 × 4 in. (12.7 × 10.2 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with funds contributed by Mr. Seymour Adelman, 1981

oil and then transferring the composition to watercolor, in this case the sepia nude sheet that he never finished. Lloyd Goodrich once speculated that Eakins had intended to add other figures to this watercolor.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the artist, whose professional identity was bound up so completely with the nude, had conceived of a scene involving a model that would illustrate his studio or teaching practice, one that would fairly represent his artistic values in the *American Art Review*. Van Rensselaer's article, however, was never published, as the journal went out of business shortly thereafter. With no publication in sight, Eakins may have lost interest in the composition and left it unfinished.

A glass photographic negative (Fig. 2), also in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, could be a clue as to what Eakins intended for his oil study and unfinished watercolor. It documents a painting (location unknown) of a female nude—clearly derived from the Nelson-Atkins sketch—in Eakins's Chestnut Street studio. Three men are mixing plaster to use in taking life casts of parts of her body (similar to those hanging on the wall in the background).<sup>14</sup> The painting reproduced by this negative is not thought to be by Eakins—the legs of the model differ somewhat from those in *Female Nude (Study)* and seem a bit awkward in their connection to the torso. Rather, it is likely the work of Edward W. Boulton, a student of Eakins who was president of the Art Students League of

Philadelphia, which drew its members from male students who left the Pennsylvania Academy to protest the firing of their teacher.<sup>15</sup> Whether the “Boulton” painting is a copy of one by Eakins that is now lost, a working-up of the idea that Eakins never executed in the watercolor, or an independent composition that simply derived from a sketch kept in the teacher’s studio is unknown. Along with the watercolor nude, it nevertheless hints at a grander project and a larger artistic context for *Female Nude (Study)*—a painting that, despite its seemingly straightforward subject, lies at the heart of Eakins’s complex artistic credo.

JD

## NOTES

1. William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville, 1992), 8. For a very thoughtful consideration of Eakins’s relationship to the female nude, see Jennifer Doyle, “Sex, Scandal, and Thomas Eakins’s *The Gross Clinic*,” *Representations* 68 (Fall 1999), 1–33.
2. Quoted in William C. Brownell, “The Art Schools of Philadelphia,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 18 (September 1879), 740–41.
3. Fairman Rogers, quoted in Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pa.: privately printed, 1946), 43.
4. Thomas Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, 9 May 1868, Daniel Dietrich Collection.
5. Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 225.
6. Thomas Eakins to Edward H. Coates, 10 March 1886 and 11 September 1886, in Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 217, 237; and William J. Crowell to Thomas Eakins, 10 April 1890, in *ibid.*
7. On Eakins’s practice in his oil sketches, see Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 73–77.
8. The kinship between the Nelson-Atkins oil sketch and a photograph of three nude models was pointed out in Sotheby Parke-Bernet, New York, 10 November 1977, lot 513.
9. Eakins’s student Charles Bregler remembers his teacher saying, “Get life in the middle line. If you get life into that the rest will be easy to put on.” Bregler, “Thomas Eakins as a Teacher,” *Arts* 17 (March 1931), 383.
10. The model was first identified as Susan Eakins by Gordon Hendricks (*The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* [New York: Grossman, 1974], 344). The Eakins scholar Kathleen Foster concurs with this identification (personal communications, 21 April and 7 May 2003). However, Lloyd Goodrich (catalogue raisonné manuscript notes, Philadelphia Museum of Art) and Theodor Siegl (*The Thomas Eakins Collection* [Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978], 102) found the visual evidence lacking. In recent years, a number of nude photographs of Susan have surfaced, and they bear a close resemblance to the figure in the Nelson-Atkins painting. See, for example, Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), no. 300.
11. A letter from Thomas Eakins to his sister Fanny suggests that as late as 1890 Susan regularly posed nude for her husband. See Foster and Leibold, *Writing about Eakins*, 109.
12. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer to Sylvester Koehler, 12 June 1881, Koehler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel D191, quoted in Lois Dinnerstein, “Thomas Eakins’ ‘Crucifixion’ as Perceived by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer,” *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979), 143–44. See also Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 109.
13. Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 177.
14. According to Charles Bregler’s memories of Eakins’s teaching, “Eakins would also come at other times, aside from his regular hours, assist and advise the students in the making of plaster casts from life, suggesting better ways and means. Life casts would be made of different parts of the body, face, and whole heads, involving casting of the hair. This required some skill to be successful.” Bregler, “About Thomas Eakins,” *Arts* 17 (October 1931), 35.
15. Kathleen Foster has attributed the painting to Boulton (personal communication, 21 April 2002). According to McHenry, Eakins once painted a portrait of Boulton. McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 108.

## THOMAS EAKINS (1844–1916)

### *Monsignor James P. Turner, c. 1906*

Oil on canvas

88 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 41 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (223.8 × 106.4 cm)

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F83-41

FOLLOWING EAKINS'S DISMISSAL from his position of Director of Schools at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1886, he nevertheless continued to teach in an ad hoc manner at quite a few institutions: the Art Students League and Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, and the National Academy of Design and Cooper Union in New York (to which he commuted), among others. National recognition also came his way, as evidenced by the impressive eleven works that were selected to represent him at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. In these years, Eakins pursued a number of discrete artistic projects for short periods of time, including several bronze relief sculptures, a series of cowboy paintings, and, later, in 1898–99, three major works with boxing as their theme. However, during the final decades of his life, portraiture was the mainstay of his oeuvre, in dozens of psychologically penetrating bust-format pictures and in a surprising number of ambitious, full-scale *portraits d'apparat*—images stressing the professional or intellectual achievements of the sitters, with elaborate treatments of related costume and equipment. The portraits were seldom commissioned; rather, Eakins sought out individuals who interested him or whom he admired.

Perhaps the most unexpected series to emerge from the studio at the top of his Mount Vernon Street home was the group of more than a dozen portraits of Roman Catholic prelates (most associated with the St. Charles Borromeo Seminary at Overbrook, just outside Philadelphia), which Eakins executed in a concentrated, six-year period of activity beginning about 1900 and ending with the large *Monsignor James P. Turner*. This clerical project is unique in the history of American art, and writers on Eakins's art have struggled to explain its meaning in the life of an artist whose relation to organized religion, and Roman Catholicism in particular, was ambivalent at best, and often characterized by extremes of antipathy.<sup>1</sup> Eakins's remarks on religion are not without contradiction, but when his views on abstract doctrine are separated from his perceptions of certain religious individuals, and when the different institutional settings of the Catholic Church in Europe and the United States are considered, it is possible to come to some understanding of what drew him to these sober priests, whose grave dignity is notable even among the normally serious demeanors of the artist's sitters.

All those who knew Eakins well enough to comment on his religious views stress his agnostic skepticism and his disbelief in any kind of absolute divinity or received dogma, either in the

sentimentalized persons of Christ or the Virgin or in the doctrinal pronouncements of the clerical hierarchy. As an art student experiencing life in Catholic Europe for the first time, his letters were filled with censorious commentary. He chafed at proscriptions against eating meat on Fridays, ridiculed the Church's refusal to recognize the truth of Galileo's observations, and found himself repulsed by what he perceived as the primitive, herdlike piety of Swiss peasants. In a letter to his sister Fanny, he mocked core Trinitarian beliefs ("think of the contemptible catholic religion the three in one & one in '3' 3=1, 1=3, 3×1=1 which they call mystery & if you don't believe it be damned to you"), and he cautioned against the typical Catholic mass:

You won't go to church to see their little parades their gildings & tinsel their little bells to hear the money clinking for the Society of Jesus for the new chapel the bad close damp air the nasty low priests who live without work. When I see genuflections & crossings & clap trap & wood virgins gild & statues in elay with gold crowns all jeweled on their heads I want to laugh always & I pity those who believe in them & I look down on them as my inferiors.<sup>2</sup>

Such pronouncements would seem to leave little room for nuance, but in fact, there were aspects of Catholic learning and ritual that the young artist found appealing. On the ocean crossing to Europe, Eakins enjoyed the shipboard company of a Jesuit priest. As he wrote to his mother,

He is the most learned man I ever saw and talks French to me by the hour. He has read all the books with which I am acquainted and knows them. He chats about authors, painters, musicians, colleges, the animals of the south, those of France. He knows anatomy, medicine, & all the languages of Europe. He has never tried to convert me although he knows I belong to no church. . . . The most striking thing about him is his modesty. He is a gentleman in every sense.

Once he had settled in Paris, he described a visit to the Church of St. Sulpice in a letter to Fanny: "It was the biggest church music I ever heard. Besides the music they had grand processions all around the cathedral. Over a hundred monks helped form the lines and they present a fine appearance with their long cloaks and covered heads."<sup>3</sup> Like so many non-Catholic American artists, Eakins (almost in spite of himself) was struck by the solemnity and visual spectacle of Catholic ritual. A few years later, while visiting Spain, he began an oil compositional sketch of women at prayer in the interior of the cathedral at Seville—an early experiment that was

no doubt useful when he returned to the subject of a cathedral interior, this time in his hometown of Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup>

From these varied remarks emerges a more precise picture of Eakins's attitudes toward religion in general, and Catholicism specifically. While he was contemptuous of "blind faith" and the unquestioning acceptance of doctrine promulgated by the corporate church, he nevertheless admired the intellectual achievements and cosmopolitan worldviews of individual priests. Eakins respected authority when he felt it was earned through honest work and discipline, but he was suspicious of dictates from above that demanded conformity without personal reflection or encouraged a sentimental piety cloaked in mystery. He was sensitive to the aesthetic appeal of the mass—its music, costume, and pageantry—but he had little patience for the iconographic and liturgical minutiae that served as the foundation for this spectatorial experience. In some ways, his was the approach of the detached anthropologist: wonder and admiration leavened by cultural distance and occasional distaste.<sup>5</sup>

We know of little in Eakins's life that would have altered this relation to Roman Catholicism until late in his career, when he became quite close to the Irish Catholic sculptor Samuel Murray, his former student. Eakins and Murray shared a Philadelphia studio on Chestnut Street during the 1890s, and they saw each other on a daily basis even after the studio was closed in 1900; Murray was with Eakins when he died. Although there is almost no documentary evidence in the form of letters or diaries, it is generally assumed that Murray, whose sister was a nun, introduced his teacher to the community at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. Beginning about 1896, they would occasionally take a Sunday bicycle trip to Overbrook, six miles from the center of Philadelphia, and spend the day in conversation with the priests, sometimes taking a meal with them and staying for a vespers service. Murray and, especially, Eakins became the "house artists" at Overbrook, executing a number of clerical portraits of faculty and alumni.

The seminary had been founded in Philadelphia in 1838, not far from the Eakins home. Three decades later, it had outgrown its city site and moved to Overbrook, occupying a farm on more than one hundred acres that had been purchased by the diocese. The curriculum followed by the seminarians was unusually rigorous, with up to a decade of study that included chemistry, physics, math, astronomy, and at least five foreign languages. Such a program corresponded closely with Eakins's interests in science and language (he knew at least five himself), and it is clear that for him, one of the primary attractions of Overbrook society was intellectual. In particular, he was known to speak Latin with the priests and to seek their counsel on translations of the formal inscriptions he sometimes included on his portraits.<sup>6</sup>

Yet there was more to Overbrook that made it congenial to the increasingly isolated artist. As several scholars have observed, the priests at the St. Charles Seminary were outsiders to mainstream Philadelphia society, both as Catholics and as celibate clergy. By virtue of their training and their international connections within the Church, they were also more worldly, less provincial than the

average city-dweller. Theirs was a close-knit, all-male community, united by common training and professionalism, a commitment to education, and a disciplined clarity of purpose. Such a description could serve equally well to characterize the confraternity of artists and students that Eakins had gathered around him at the Pennsylvania Academy, the Art Students League of Philadelphia, and his Chestnut Street studio, all of which he had left behind by 1900. Perhaps the fellowship of the Overbrook priests filled this social and intellectual gap in his life. The art historian Lloyd Goodrich remarked that even the democratic "way they waited on table for each other" impressed Eakins—an indication that he found there an almost Whitmanesque type of male friendship.

Of all the priests whom Eakins painted, James Patrick Turner seems to be the one he knew best. On at least two occasions, Turner served as the go-between to facilitate commissions for Eakins to paint higher church officials: *His Eminence Sebastiano Cardinal Martinelli* (1902; Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles) and *Archbishop William Henry Elder* (1903; Cincinnati Art Museum). Turner also has the distinction of being the only cleric who posed twice for Eakins. His intimate, bust-length portrait (c. 1900; St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Overbrook, Pa.) began the prelate series, and the much grander full-length likeness at the Nelson-Atkins completed it.

Turner's distinguished career embodies the achievements associated with the "Golden Age of Philadelphia Catholicism" (1875–1925), a time of unprecedented institutional growth, strong pastoral leadership, and unusual scholarly activity.<sup>7</sup> Born in Philadelphia in 1857, Turner entered St. Charles Seminary in 1876 and was ordained in the city's Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul (where he is depicted in this painting) in 1885. He served as an assistant rector in four Philadelphia parishes before being called back to the cathedral in that same post in 1896. He was then promoted to a series of positions: diocesan secretary to the archbishop (1899), chancellor of the diocese (1901), and vicar general (1903)—in this last instance functioning as deputy to the archbishop and primary executive administrator for the entire diocese. Turner was also known as an accomplished canonist, theologian, and minister to the laity, serving for many years as editor of the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* and spiritual director of the Association of Perpetual Adoration and Work for Poor Churches. In recognition of this sustained body of work, Pope Pius X named him a domestic prelate with the title monsignor in 1905, and a year later Turner was raised by the Vatican to the still higher rank of prothonotary apostolic, allowing him certain ceremonial dignities, including the black biretta and colorful vestments so carefully painted by Eakins.

The Turner portrait is unique in the clerical series in that Eakins depicts the priest performing his pastoral duties in a place of worship, rather than seated in a study or working at a desk. Designed by Napoleon Le Brun, the lofty, Neo-Baroque Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul was completed in 1864. The monsignor is seen standing at the opening of the Lady Chapel in the northeast corner of the cathedral, one of two primary cult spaces to either side of the choir. Eakins undoubtedly knew the cathedral well. It was within walking





Fig. 1 Thomas Eakins, *Sketch for "Portrait of Monsignor James P. Turner,"* c. 1906. Oil on cardboard, 14½ × 10½ in. (36.8 × 26.7 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams, 1930

distance of his house and was under construction during his entire childhood and adolescence. In fact, thirty years before he executed the large Turner portrait, the artist had planned a complex painting of Archbishop James Wood, the first Philadelphia-born leader of the diocese.<sup>8</sup> Nine drawings from 1876 (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.) document Eakins's study of the cathedral's architectural features and religious sculpture, as well as the archbishop and his subordinates in the act of performing a mass. According to Susan Macdowell Eakins, her husband also flirted with the idea of depicting Wood, who had just been elevated to the archbishopric a year earlier, outside on the steps of the cathedral, bestowing a blessing on the crowd.<sup>9</sup>

The Wood project places the later portrait of Turner in an interesting light. As early as 1876, we can see Eakins celebrating a significant event in Philadelphia Catholicism. Coming just a year after his monumental painting of Dr. Samuel Gross in his clinic (1875; ex-Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia), the planned Wood portrait might have been conceived as a public, "Philadelphia" subject, rather than a sectarian Catholic portrait. The possible outdoor setting adds weight to this notion and links the project to the other plein air scenes Eakins executed in the 1870s.

That is, we can perhaps locate a vein of civic pride running through his clerical series. The Catholic Church, as he came to know it in Philadelphia, was led by a hardworking intellectual elite who nevertheless used their knowledge and authority on behalf of a largely working-class, immigrant population. Their apparent selflessness placed them outside the commercial culture to which Eakins, also, was a stranger. This local context is crucial in understanding how the artist's earlier experience of European Catholicism—so seemingly at odds with his later respectful images of priests—might be squared with a work like *Monsignor James P. Turner*.

Lloyd Goodrich's interviewees remembered that the impetus for the Nelson-Atkins portrait was Eakins's attendance at the funeral mass of a Philadelphia hotel owner named Peter Dooner, which Turner celebrated.<sup>10</sup> However, as there is no apparent reference to these obsequies in the portrait, it is also conceivable that it was simply painted to commemorate the monsignor's recent promotion by the Vatican. Whatever the case, Eakins took pains to situate Turner in a specific part of the cathedral, the front of the Lady Chapel, where he would plausibly appear close to spectators in the transept and would not be dwarfed by the immense, lofty central nave. Although the background is dim and somewhat hazy, the artist invested considerable effort in working out the perspectival relation of the open gate of the communion rail at left, the receding pattern of the stone pavement, and the image of the Assumption of the Virgin over Turner's shoulder. Indeed, as Kathleen Foster has authoritatively shown, the Turner portrait, with its unusually complete series of six preparatory studies, presents one of the best opportunities to trace Eakins's working methods when painting a life-size likeness.<sup>11</sup>

Eakins's first thoughts on the Turner portrait are likely captured in the small oil sketch (Fig. 1) of the standing priest, which, though quickly executed with rich, loaded brushwork, includes a number of elements that figure importantly in the final version: the metal gate, the missal cradled in Turner's arms at center, and the intense colors of the costume, including the two-toned effect of the turned-out lining of his sleeveless mantellata.<sup>12</sup> The sketch shows even greater chiaroscuro than the full-length portrait, indicating that, from the start, Eakins sought the dazzling contrast of the priest's glowing vestments emerging from the shadowy chapel. In several of his most rapid strokes, the artist decisively fixed the spatial environment and point of view of the picture. Two gray slashes at the bottom of the sketch, set on a slight diagonal, establish the foreground step and the prelate's angled stance. Circumscribing the figure, a brownish yellow rectangular border determines the unusually vertical dimensions of the final portrait.

With the broad organization of his pictorial forms complete, Eakins proceeded to the more analytic calculations that characterized his full-length works, even at this late point of his career. Five large drawings in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts relate to this stage of the Turner portrait. Three of them are exact-size studies of the pattern of the stone pavers on the floor, receding swiftly into oblique perspective. Eakins apparently considered a more complex arrangement, with red and black stones, but in

the end rejected this in favor of the black-and-white, modified checkerboard of the painting. Two of these drawings, each one as wide as the stretched canvas, were placed against it like tracing paper; Eakins used a network of punched holes to transfer the design to the areas of floor to the left and right of Turner's long cassock. Another gridded drawing (also with punch holes) was devoted to the depiction of the Virgin in the upper left corner of the painting. Here, Eakins projected this background image into very slight, angled perspective, ensuring that it would not appear rigidly parallel to the picture plane. The visual effect is quite subtle and difficult to discern in the painting, but it is likely that the artist went to this trouble more for the spatial interest and exactitude it would add to his composition than for any concern with the iconographic niceties of the subject.<sup>13</sup>

By far the most telling of the Turner drawings is the one Eakins used to calculate the ground plan and viewing position of the spectator (Fig. 2). This sheet includes a gridded mock-up of the composition (with orthogonals, a vanishing point, and a ghostly outline of Turner in the foreground),<sup>14</sup> a measured plan of the floor (with several possible cones of vision indicated), and a series of numerical calculations (some carried to seven digits). Here we see the artist making the important decisions that would determine not only the underlying geometry of the portrait of Turner but also the affective qualities of his presentation. Eakins's carefully labeled axes tell us that the monsignor is positioned exactly 14 feet from the viewer; the wall behind him is considerably distant at 57 feet. The horizon line (and implied point of sight) is unusually low, at 28½ inches. As a result, Turner seems to rise above the spectator, adding to his quiet, paternal authority. This effect is further heightened by the narrow cone of vision (14°), first adumbrated in the framing lines of the oil sketch and designed to reduce peripheral distraction and distortion. Each pictorial element, in short, is carefully considered; even the outlines of Turner's shoes are included on the plan.<sup>15</sup>

Eakins was still working on the portrait in November 1906, when an opportunity to exhibit it arose. Harrison S. Morris, who had recently stepped down as managing director of the Pennsylvania Academy (and who had worked to repair the relationship between the artist and his former employer), was engaged by the Corcoran Gallery of Art to obtain works for its first annual exhibition. Morris reported on his visit to Eakins's studio in a letter to the Corcoran's director: "I went to Eakins' today. . . . E. had practically decided to send his two new ones to Phila. but I made him promise to send his best = 'Monsignor Turner' to Washington. It is a large panel [*sic*] of a prelate in red—bully! Send him a nice letter & two cards. . . . Compliment him & be *very* nice, but don't dwell on prizes as he don't own the portraits and he might be frightened off." The Corcoran made an appropriately polite inquiry, and Eakins wrote on 20 December 1906 that, although he was still working on the Turner, he thought it would be finished in time for the exhibition opening in February 1907.<sup>16</sup> Although it did not win a prize, one newspaper commented favorably on the "splendid full-length portrait of Monsignor James Turner, in

full canonicals," and another similarly noted the "scarlet silks and uncompromising reality."<sup>17</sup>

Certainly the flamelike, throbbing colors of the vestments have inspired more commentary than any other part of the portrait, having been variously described by historians as "incandescent," "fluorescent," "phosphorescent," "scintillating," "fuchsia," "cherry," and "raspberry red."<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the only chromatic equivalent in Eakins's oeuvre is his equally intense *An Actress (Portrait of Suzanne Santje)* (1903; Philadelphia Museum of Art)—a dressing-room scene, the intimacy of which places it at the other end of the scale from the interior of the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul. The exuberance of the Turner palette seems somehow out of sync with the contained posture and resolute expression of its subject. Whereas his clothing flashes out from the dim surroundings, he seems to retreat psychologically, his knotted fingers suggesting tension. He stares glassily—looking almost stricken—his mouth turned down, with chin and jaw squarely set. One wonders if the sounds of the mass and the movement of the participants could penetrate this momentary reverie. That his private introspection takes place in full public view makes it even more poignant; the corresponding formality of his body language is thus understandable, a clear contrast with the more relaxed stance of *The Thinker: Portrait of Louis N. Kenton*, a similarly themed work that can be fruitfully compared with the painting in Kansas City. Whereas *The Thinker* is set in a severely unadorned, almost dimensionless space,



Fig. 2 Thomas Eakins, *Portrait of Monsignor James P. Turner: Perspective Study and Ground Plan*, c. 1906. Graphite with red and blue ink on paper, 35½ × 33 in. (89 × 83.8 cm). Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust and the John S. Phillips Fund



the cathedral interior and the calculated position of the viewer prevent Turner from retreating into the same kind of abstractive, contemplative mood. The result is one of the artist's most revealing explorations of the dilemma of the public self.

In assessing *Monsignor James P. Turner*, as well as the other contemporary clerical portraits, critics of Eakins's art have arrived at widely varying interpretations. Some, such as Barbara Grose-close, see the series as profoundly antiheroic: "Eakins painted men from whom all will has seeped away; their immobility, their sometimes stunned or at the very least blank expressions, do not put the Church in a manly light nor do they furnish them with much intellectual wattage." Adam Gopnik also finds Eakins's clerics "painful to look at": "His Monsignors just look like high-school principals." But Kathleen Foster describes them as "modern, not quaint . . . wise, dignified, strong." Writing specifically of the Nelson-Atkins portrait, Henry Adams states that "the mood of the painting is tragic, as Turner contemplates human mortality," and Evan Turner notes its "almost apostolic aloofness," whereas Jay Gates sees it as "a symbol for the humanity of the Church." Marjorie Walter suggests that the portrait exemplifies "the inevitable suppression of the individual will to the institutional church," but Sylvan Schendler lauds Turner's "searching stare" and "the self-questioning that appears to extend beyond himself as he stands there." John Wilmerding likewise notes "fervent passion in check with serene meditation, and temporality in balance with transcendence."<sup>19</sup> More than many of Eakins's works, it would seem, *Monsignor James P. Turner* embodies and preserves the conflictual rifts and discontinuities that characterize his oeuvre and make it at once so challenging and rewarding.

JD

## NOTES

1. The first two studies dedicated to the clerical series were Evan H. Turner, "Thomas Eakins at Overbrook," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 81 (December 1970), 195–98; and William H. Gerdtz, "Thomas Eakins and the Episcopal Portrait: Archbishop William Henry Elder," *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979), 154–57. Later, and more extensive, treatments include Marjorie Alison Walter, "A Christian Agnostic: Thomas Eakins and His *Crucifixion* and Prelate Portraits," M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1989; and Kristin Schwain, "Figuring Belief: American Art and Modern Religious Experience," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2001, chap. 3. Schwain, in particular, is attentive to Eakins's complex relationship to organized religion.
2. Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, 1 April 1869, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel 640. See, also, letter from Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, Good Friday 1868, AAA, microfilm reel 640; and letters from Thomas Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, 31 January 1867 and c. 15 August 1867, in Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 144, doc. 14, and 147, doc. 28.
3. Thomas Eakins to Caroline Eakins, 1 October 1866; and Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, 8 January 1867, in Foster and Leibold, *Writing about Eakins*, 141, doc. 2, and 144, doc. 11.
4. *Scene in a Cathedral* (1869–70; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.). On the fascination of Protestant artists with Catholic ritual and ceremony, see John Davis, "Catholic Envy: The Visual Culture of Protestant Desire," in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, ed. David Morgan and Sally Promey (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 105–28.
5. An anthropological or ethnographic model for understanding Eakins's art has been usefully deployed in William H. Trnietner, "Dressing the Part: Thomas Eakins's Portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing," *American Art Journal* 17 (Spring 1985), 49–72; and Alan C. Braddock, "Displacing Orientalism: Thomas Eakins and Ethnographic Modernity," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2002.
6. On Overbrook, see James F. Connelly, *St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: St. Charles Seminary, 1979). For a contemporary account of Eakins's facility with Latin and other languages, see Harrison S. Morris, *Confessions in Art* (New York: Sears Publishing Co., 1930), 30–31.
7. Kristin Schwain, quoting Raymond H. Schmandt, discusses the "Golden Age" in the context of the clerical series. Schwain, "Figuring Belief," 129. For Turner's biography, see "Msgr. Turner Dies; Ill Only Two Days; Obsequies Are Held," *Catholic Standard and Times* (Philadelphia), 8 June 1929, 1; and Elizabeth Milroy, "Sketch for Monsignor James Turner," in *Thomas Eakins*, ed. John Wilmerding, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 177.
8. Wood, a Protestant convert and former banker, was also responsible for purchasing the Overbrook farm for the seminary; it was he who ordained Turner in 1885.
9. Goodrich relates this information in interview notes with Susan Eakins, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1:141. In the end, Eakins executed a more conventional portrait of Wood, seated alone in an interior (1877; St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, Overbrook, Pa.). Its date distinguishes it from all the other prelate portraits executed by the artist in the early twentieth century.
10. Lloyd Goodrich, catalogue raisonné manuscript notes, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

11. See Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 212–20. The Lady Chapel has undergone significant architectural changes in the twentieth century (including the rail, the pavement, the image of the Virgin, and the neighboring fenestration) and does not greatly resemble the space depicted by Eakins. For the most extensive investigation of the setting, see *ibid.*, 216–19.
12. Milroy, "Sketch for Monsignor James Turner," 177.
13. The floor-pattern drawings are discussed and reproduced in Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 219, 420–21.
14. Examination of the Nelson-Atkins painting with infrared reflectography indicates that Eakins used a center line and a twelve-inch-square grid to transfer the design from this drawing to his canvas.
15. Turner's firm stance nicely exemplifies one of the directives that Charles Bregler remembered Eakins giving to his students: "Get the foot well planted on the floor. If you ever see any Photo of Gerome's work you will notice he gets the foot flat on the floor better than any of them," quoted in "Mr. Eakins Talks to the League Boys," in *Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), microform, Series 4, Fiche 13. Charles Bregler Papers. Kathleen Foster is the only scholar who has written about these drawings. Her exhaustive analysis of the Turner portrait and its studies is invaluable: Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 62, 75, 200, 206–8, 214–19. Foster also documents Eakins's considerable interest in the problems inherent in depicting a full-length, life-size figure, 44, 61–62, 69, 207.
16. Harrison S. Morris to F. B. McGuire, 21 November 1906, and Thomas Eakins to F. B. McGuire, 20 December 1906, Corcoran Museum of Art Archives. (Subsequent correspondence indicates that the completed Turner portrait was collected from the Eakins house during the second week of January 1907.) Morris cautioned that Eakins also wanted to send the large *Antiquated Music (Portrait of Sarah Sagehorn Frishmuth)* (1900; Philadelphia Museum of Art), but he assured McGuire that "we don't want it." McGuire replied, "If Mr. Eakins insists upon sending that Frishmuth [*sic*] portrait we must, of course, take it. . . . We will avoid it if possible." McGuire to Morris, 22 November 1906, Corcoran Museum of Art Archives. In addition to the Nelson-Atkins canvas, Eakins showed *Home Ranch* (1892; Philadelphia Museum of Art) and *The Thinker: Portrait of Louis N. Kenton* (1900; Metropolitan Museum of Art) at the Corcoran that year.
17. William R. Lester, "Fine Display of American Art at Corcoran Exhibit," *North American* (Philadelphia), 11 February 1907, 8; and "American Art Exhibition Opened at the Corcoran Gallery," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 7 February 1907, 8. While this is the only documented public exhibition of the Nelson-Atkins painting in the artist's lifetime, Eakins did exhibit other prelate portraits at least fifteen times, in six cities, between 1902 and his death. See Elizabeth Milroy, ed., *Guide to the Thomas Eakins Research Collection, with a Lifetime Exhibition Record and Bibliography* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996). Another indication of his high regard for the Catholic series is the fact that in a letter written in 1907, he numbered six of these portraits (including *Monsignor James P. Turner*) among his nineteen "most representative paintings." Thomas Eakins to John Pickard, undated, AAA, microfilm reel 498.
18. Despite its brilliance, the paint is applied quite thinly and drily, with the exception of some freer passages such as the lace cuffs of the rochet, where red and gray tints are mixed wet into wet and pulled over each other with the brush. There is a certain haziness to the foreground area of the painting that may be the result of water damage, as well as some careless dripping and glazing on the part of the artist. This cloudy, darkening effect could have been exacerbated by the wax lining added in 1970.
19. Barbara Groseclose, *Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59; Adam Gopnik, "Eakins in the Wilderness," *New Yorker*, 26 December 1994, 89; Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 214; NAMA 1991, 51; Turner, "Thomas Eakins at Overbrook," 197; Jay Gates, in *A Bountiful Decade: Selected Acquisitions, 1977–1987* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1987), 168; Walter, "A Christian Agnostic," 59; Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 211; and John Wilmerding, "The Tensions of Biography and Art in Thomas Eakins," in *Thomas Eakins* (1993), 34.

## RALPH EARL (1751–1801)

### *General Gabriel Christie, c. 1784*

Oil on canvas

82 × 53½ in. (208.3 × 135.9 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-169

GENERAL GABRIEL CHRISTIE WAS BORN in 1722 in Stirling, Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The son of a merchant, Christie pursued a military career as a means of transcending his middle-class roots. Working his way through the British army, he constructed a career marked with success and distinction. Perhaps most notably, Christie participated in the famed British siege of Quebec in 1759 and a critical battle in the larger Seven Years' War, also known as the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Christie remained stationed in Quebec and was promoted to lieutenant colonel and deputy quartermaster for all British troops in North America. Throughout the early 1760s he acquired many properties, mostly in the Richelieu River valley in what is today Canada's southern Quebec province. By 1766, as the historian François Noël has discussed, Christie had become one of the largest landowners in Canada, although his holdings were considerably reduced as a result of the American Revolutionary War.<sup>2</sup> Stationed in London when war erupted in 1776, Christie spent most of the American Revolution in the West Indies. By the time he was painted by Earl about 1784, much of his military career was behind him, and he was traveling to England from Canada primarily to attend to landholdings. He would attain the rank of general in 1798 and die the following year in Quebec.

Executed in England, Earl's ambitious likeness shows Christie as a commanding, vital figure even in semiretirement. Christie stands straight-backed and engages the viewer's gaze directly. His erect posture fulfills cultural expectations pervasive in the eighteenth century for men of his high social rank.<sup>3</sup> It is visually and conceptually reinforced by a massive masonry wall that runs virtually the entire vertical dimension of the canvas, bisecting his body in the process. Striking a *contrapposto* pose vaguely reminiscent of the Apollo Belvedere, the most lauded and copied example of classical sculpture in the eighteenth century, the general plants his right leg firmly on the ground and bends his left knee as he slightly turns out his left thigh. This gesture causes a gentle tug at his waistcoat. The bend in his knee is echoed in his right arm, which bends so that his closed right hand lands solidly on the right hip. Christie's other arm projects boldly into space. With it he holds his walking stick, a sign of his gentlemanly status that he drives decisively into the ground, and his three-cornered hat, which was somewhat out of fashion by the 1780s.<sup>4</sup> This side of the composition gives way to a deep, pastoral landscape, Christie's apparent destination for a pleasant, leisurely stroll. Also rather outdated by this time would have been Christie's wig, adorned with a rolled side curl,

which has dribbled powder onto the shoulder of his blue wool coat. His ensemble is completed by matching summer vest and knee breeches made of striped buff silk, fairly formal and fashionable daytime attire for an older gentleman.<sup>5</sup>

Born in 1751, Ralph Earl was the son of a successful and patriotic farmer in Worcester County, Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> Hardworking and a devout Congregationalist, the elder Earl likely did not enthusiastically endorse his son's interest in a career in art. Even more, young Ralph refused to serve in the local militia, causing rumors to spread that the Earl family was loyalist. Under these circumstances, Ralph Earl left his family in 1774 and set himself up in New Haven, Connecticut, as a painter. He returned home late that year to marry his second cousin, Sarah Gates, but it appears the couple did not live together much and eventually split completely.

In New Haven, Earl met Henry Pelham, the half brother of John Singleton Copley (q.v.). Since Earl does not seem to have had any formal training before moving to New Haven, he likely found Pelham a helpful source of information on art. In 1775 Earl visited Pelham in Boston. Through Pelham's own collection and connections, Earl was able to study Copley's work and other fine examples of portraiture, which he used as models as he honed his skills. By 1776 the artist's political troubles had escalated to the point that he was denounced as a friend of George III. His refusal to bear arms in service to the Revolution gave Earl no choice but to leave the colonies or be imprisoned. Thus, he fled for England disguised as a servant of John Money, a quartermaster general of Burgoyne's British army and an important friend to the artist for the next seven years.

Earl arrived in London in April 1778. Of the number of aspiring American artists who went to England in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Earl did not arrive under the usual circumstances nor did he pursue his career in the same sequence as his colonial colleagues. The standard experience, like that undertaken by Gilbert Stuart (q.v.) and Mather Brown (q.v.), was to go directly to London to become associated with Benjamin West (q.v.), the American expatriate whose studio was the art center for young Americans. Earl would eventually come under West's tutelage, but first he seems to have settled in Norwich, near John Money's East Anglian country house.<sup>7</sup> Provincial Norwich and its surroundings may have held several advantages for Earl. Residing near Money probably provided the easiest access to needed potential patrons since Earl likely arrived in England with little savings.<sup>8</sup> Also, the East Anglian countryside was similar to the rural America of Earl's first patrons, and so the artist may have recognized that he would face less competition and be able to fulfill the commissions of Norwich patrons more satisfactorily than in artistically sophisticated and competitive London.<sup>9</sup>



London was the portrait capital of the world in the early 1780s; in residence were more than a hundred portrait painters, whose skills had to include not only competent paint handling but also conviviality and business sense.<sup>10</sup> Likely more confident by this time about his artistic abilities and social connections, Earl moved to London in 1783. Soon thereafter, he was painting prominent citizens and exhibiting in the annual exhibitions at the prestigious Royal Academy of Arts. Earl's rise in the London art world rested on his budding association with West and the sustaining support of Money. Although the exact time of Earl's entry into West's circle is unclear, he was working under the shadow of the older artist during the summer of 1784.<sup>11</sup> At this same time, Earl seems to have continued to reap the benefits of Money's friendship, particularly with regard to introductions to military personnel. The artist exhibited a portrait of Colonel George Onslow (Collection of Mrs. Ralph Earle) at the Royal Academy in 1783. The painting was favorably reviewed, and this, too, must have smoothed the way for more commissions.<sup>12</sup> In all, twenty-four portraits by Earl are known from his two years in London.

Although Earl's portrait of Christie is undated, circumstantial evidence suggests it was painted during the summer of 1784. Earl spent the 1784 season at Windsor as part of Benjamin West's extensive circle. As court painter to George III, West had spent nearly every summer and autumn at Windsor since the early 1770s. In a letter inscribed and dated "Windsor 23 Sept 1784," Earl wrote to his friend Joseph Trumbull: "I made Your Coms to Mr West I have finished the large picture, and lately finished another and half done a thirde) the picture which I have began and finished seince you was heir) is the best I eaver painted . . . both the Mr Wests desires to be remembred to you."<sup>13</sup> William Sawitzky has suggested that *General Gabriel Christie* may be one of the pictures Earl mentioned in this letter. He recognized that the wall to the left of Christie is similar to the architecture at Windsor, as is the landscape that fills the background.<sup>14</sup> How and when Gabriel Christie and Ralph Earl became acquainted are unknown, but they surely knew each other by the summer of 1784, by which point both men had accommodations on Leicester Fields (now Square).<sup>15</sup>

Immersion in London's art culture benefited Earl's painting substantially. Beyond the example of West, the portrait work of the esteemed British painters Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough proved predictably influential. Numerous similarities between *General Gabriel Christie* and Gainsborough's *Sir Benjamin Truman* (c. 1770–74; Tate Britain, London), including the relatively loosely rendered pastoral setting, a pervasive air of measured informality, and comparable figure-ground proportions, highlight the degree to which the expatriate American aligned his art with British prototypes.<sup>16</sup> Gainsborough's comparatively free handling of paint must have been particularly appealing to Earl, in part because it provided him a way to camouflage his lingering technical shortcomings as a draftsman. For similar reasons, Sawitzky has proposed that Earl emulated the work of George Romney, whose drawing was simple but graceful.<sup>17</sup>

For unknown reasons, Earl left London in the spring of 1785, arriving in Boston with a new wife in May. His return to America may have been prompted by the possibility of portrait commissions available after the Revolution and by his need to clear up unfinished business of his first marriage as he embarked on his second.<sup>18</sup> He secured commissions to paint heroes of the Revolution, a project for which he traveled to New York. However, Earl's career came to an abrupt halt in August 1786, when he was jailed for failure to pay debts. His incarceration lasted until January 1788, at which point he could pay his debts with income from portrait commissions he completed in jail. In prison Earl succumbed to alcoholism, which was prevalent in debtor's jail, and his artistic production suffered for the rest of his life. From 1790 Earl worked in an itinerant manner through rural Connecticut, Vermont, and Massachusetts. In 1801 alcoholism ended his life.

MCC/RRG

## NOTES

1. For Christie's biography, see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 4:149–51. A more thorough study of Christie's life and influence is François Noël, *The Christie Seigneuries: Estate Management and Settlement in the Upper Richelieu Valley, 1760–1854* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).
2. Noël, *The Christie Seigneuries*, 12–13, 36–37.
3. On the topic of proper carriage among the upper classes throughout the colonial era, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), esp. chap. 3.
4. On the cultural history of canes, see Jeffrey B. Snyder, *Canes and Walking Sticks: A Stroll through Time and Place* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing, 2004). Earl's depiction of Christie with a walking stick reinforces Margaretta M. Lovell's keen observation that "men [in colonial era portraits] often touch and are associated with elongated instruments of contact with the outside world." Lovell, "Reading Eighteenth-Century American Family Portraits: Social Images and Self-Images," *Winterthur Portfolio* 22 (Winter 1987), 247.
5. Dr. Aileen Ribeiro, Courtauld Institute of Art, kindly supplied information about Christie's costume. Ribeiro to Margaret C. Conrads, 4 February 1992, NAMA curatorial files.
6. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser is the preeminent scholar of Earl's art. Biographical information for this entry has been drawn from her writings: "Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic," in *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic*, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1991), 5–67, and "Ralph Earl: Artist-Entrepreneur," Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1988.
7. No records other than paintings survive to illuminate Earl's activities between 1778 and 1782. The existing paintings are connected to Norwich and the surrounding countryside, and thus Earl's residence there has been assumed. Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl*, 18.
8. Earl must have been in dire financial straits by 1779. That year he applied to the king for loyalist compensation, a payment for losses suffered for remaining true to the crown. The outcome of this request remains unknown. Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl," 51.
9. Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl*, 18.
10. *Ibid.*, 16.
11. William Dumlup, author of *History of the Arts of Design in the United States* and a fellow student of West, recorded that Earl was working with West in 1783. A letter sent from Earl to Joseph Trumbull, 24 September 1784, from Windsor, firmly places Earl with West at that time. Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl*, 21.
12. Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl*, 26.
13. Quoted in William Sawitzky and Susan Sawitzky, "Two Letters from Ralph Earl with Notes from His English Period," *Worcester Art Museum Annual* 8 (1960), 9.
14. *Ibid.*, 30. Of all the known Earl portraits from this time, the one at the Nelson-Atkins can most plausibly be placed at Windsor because of its setting. Furthermore, according to Ribeiro, Christie wears summer clothing; Ribeiro to Conrads, NAMA curatorial files.
15. Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl," 72. Kornhauser notes the two men probably met through Money, whom Christie may have known when they were both stationed in Canada with the British army.
16. Kornhauser, *Ralph Earl*, 23, cites this comparison. On Earl's reliance on English prototypes, see also Laurence B. Goodrich, "Ralph Earl's Debt to Gainsborough and Other English Portraitists," *Antiques* 78 (November 1960), 464–65.
17. Sawitzky and Sawitzky, "Two Letters from Ralph Earl," 22. The authors note, moreover, that although Romney did not show at the Royal Academy in the early 1780s, Earl could have visited the artist's studio, which was open to the public.
18. Kornhauser, "Ralph Earl," 75.

## FRANCIS WILLIAM EDMONDS (1806–1863)

### *The Thirsty Drover*, c. 1856

Oil on canvas

26 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 36 in. (68.3 × 91.4 cm)

Signed lower left: FWE

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-4/1

FRANCIS WILLIAM EDMONDS WAS BORN in Hudson, New York, in 1806.<sup>1</sup> His early interest in drawing was encouraged by his Quaker schoolteachers. Unable to afford the high fee needed to apprentice to a Philadelphia engraver in 1823, Edmonds was sent to work as an underclerk with his uncle, then cashier of the Tradesman Bank in New York City. For the next thirty-three years, Edmonds would achieve popularity and fame as both an intelligent, practical-minded banker noted for his business integrity and sound principles and a painter.<sup>2</sup>

Edmonds exhibited his first work at the National Academy of Design in 1829 under the pseudonym E. F. Williams, perhaps to avoid the embarrassment of failure or to protect his professional banking identity.<sup>3</sup> He devoted the next decade of his life to his banking career before returning to painting in the late 1830s. Until 1861 the artist variously offered his banking and artistic skills as a member, secretary, and treasurer of the National Academy. He was also active in other New York art organizations, including the American Art-Union, the New York Gallery of the Fine Arts, the Century Club, and the Artists' Fund Society. During these same years Edmonds pioneered money lending and fiscal practices that are still used today.

In his approach to subject, composition, and coloration, Edmonds was strongly influenced by seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings.<sup>4</sup> From early in his career, he had considerable exposure to Dutch art through special exhibitions, the private collections of his business colleagues, art publications, and engravings. Then, beginning in November 1840, the artist traveled in Europe for ten months. A secondary source, John Burnet's four-volume *Treatise on Painting*, also provided Edmonds with Dutch images as well as practical instruction to aid an artist in achieving Dutch-like results in his art.<sup>5</sup> Following in the footsteps of such colleagues as William Sydney Mount (q.v.), Edmonds appropriated from the Dutch the use of stagelike compositional formats, few figures, strong shadows, and a palette based on red, blue, and yellow.

Despite its exterior locale, *The Thirsty Drover* is placed within a boxlike setting, like that found in Dutch interiors. Within the parameters of a shallow space, Edmonds used diagonal lines, eye contact between the figures, strategic placement of the three primary colors, and repetition of shapes to focus attention on the central figure group and reinforce the painting's narrative. An extant drawing and two small oil studies remain as testaments to

Edmonds's careful preparations for *The Thirsty Drover*. The drawing of a horse (Fig. 1) is from a sketchbook that Edmonds used to record studies from life. For the Nelson-Atkins painting, Edmonds used another view of the animal but preserved the attitude of the head from this sketch. In two oil studies, the artist experimented with the figure of the drover sitting on his horse (q.v.). Finally, Edmonds blocked out his entire composition for *The Thirsty Drover* on a small scale in a third oil study, which includes all the figures, still life and landscape elements, and the cattle moving away to the right (q.v.).<sup>6</sup>

True to his Dutch models, Edmonds imbued many of the exquisitely rendered still-life elements in *The Thirsty Drover* with symbolic significance. The woman's body, as she bends to her washing, is echoed by the caged robin behind her, and the colors of her clothing are reflected by the green and white plant blossoming in the red clay jar on the windowsill. In this way, Edmonds suggested that, like the bird and the plant, the woman is thriving in her circumscribed domestic role. The mother hen tending her chicks similarly refers to the woman, under whose watchful eye the little girl performs her good deed. Finally, the red, white, and blue clothing worn by the drover and echoed in the laundry in the basket ties the central figure and the surrounding scene to national issues.

When *The Thirsty Drover* was displayed at the 1856 National Academy of Design annual exhibition, a reviewer for the *Crayon* noted:

a drover has stopped to obtain a drink from a country well; over it one of the long sweeps (to which a bucket is attached), a primitive machine, common in our country, but which is fast disappearing before water-rams and patent Egyptian bucket-lifters, or species of sakkiehs. Near the well is a woman engaged in washing, and by her side two children; the house furnishes the background on the left, while on the right the eye dwells upon a receding drove of cattle. . . . Mr. Edmonds' "Thirsty Drover", No 31, is the best picture to our mind, that he has produced.<sup>7</sup>

Not all reviews were as favorable. For example, the *New York Tribune* critic stated:

Mr. Edmonds is the most unimaginative artist that ever put figures upon canvas. All his heads belong, not only to the same family, but the same person. They all have the same monstrous eyes and thick lips, without any exception, in all the pictures he has exhibited. His subjects are not only low, but common. "The Thirsty Drover" is a stout man on







Fig. 1 Francis William Edmonds, *Sketch of a Horse*, n.d. Graphite and pen and brown ink on paper, 6 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (16.8 × 21 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Sheila and Richard J. Schwartz Fund, 1987 (1987.196.3)

horseback who takes a brown jug from a young girl, it is a roadside farmhouse in a dilapidated condition and the surroundings are characteristic of slovenliness and poverty. The Drover is badly drawn and sits on his horse as though he had no spine.<sup>5</sup>

The difference of opinion between these two critics, one of whom wistfully admires a scene of “fast disappearing” rustic life, and the other of whom sees only a “low,” “common” scene of rural poverty, can be attributed as much to opposing viewpoints about American life in the 1850s as to personal taste in art. *The Thirsty Drover*—like other works by Edmonds from the 1850s, including *The Speculator* (1852; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.) and *Taking the Census* (1854; private collection)—responds to the social and economic changes taking place in mid-nineteenth-century America.<sup>9</sup>

Edmonds and his contemporaries witnessed a strong demographic shift from rural areas to urban centers, beginning in the 1830s and culminating in the 1870s.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the rapidly expanding railroads made it possible for people and goods to move quickly and easily between cities and the surrounding countryside, where the bulk of the population remained tied to agriculture. The cattle industry became a focus of tensions between America’s past and present, and between its urban and rural aspects. Before 1850 most of New York City’s beef cattle were raised in New York or neighboring states and driven to market by drovers like the ones Edmonds depicted. By the end of the decade, three-quarters of the city’s cattle arrived in boxcars from regions far to the west.<sup>11</sup> The drover, long recognized as a northeastern American

type and lauded for his good-natured gregariousness and rugged independence, had become a nostalgic figure by 1856.<sup>12</sup> For example, in an 1855 engraving for *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* illustrating “Scenes and Occupations Characteristic of New England Life,” the figure of the drover appears much as he does in Edmonds’s painting, leaning down slightly from his saddle to exchange a greeting with a farmer (Fig. 2). However, both he and the farmer are dwarfed in comparison to the factory girl and the lumberman, representatives of the growing manufacturing sector of the economy. In the November 1852 issue of the *Wool Grower and Stock Register*, a writer noted that, with the advent of the railroads, “the occasion for long journeys either for men or cattle by land, no longer exists.”<sup>13</sup>

While the illustration for *Ballou’s* refers explicitly to contemporary developments in New England, Edmonds’s painting presents a scene of rural life seemingly untouched by industrialization or modern market culture. The farmwife and her children wear homemade garments, and Edmonds painted both the girl and her mother in underskirts and utility corsets, implying that each possesses only one everyday dress, which is in the wash.<sup>14</sup> The antiquated well and the vernacular farmhouse add to the sense that life on this farm has not changed significantly since the eighteenth century. Indeed, Edmonds connected this scene to the distant past through the gesture of the little girl, who, in offering water to the drover, mirrors the biblical heroine Rebecca.

Whereas in earlier paintings—for instance, *The City and Country Beaux* (1839; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.)—Edmonds had poked fun at rustie men and women, in *The Thirsty Drover* he portrayed them as industrious, domestic, and hospitable. Significantly, they are also temperate. It was a common practice for farmers with houses built near busy roads to sell whiskey, beer, and cider to passing drovers.<sup>15</sup> In Edmonds’s painting, the drover who asks for a drink is offered only water. Edmonds, a Quaker, supported the temperance movement. In at least one earlier painting, *Facing the Enemy* (1845; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Va.), he had humorously presented the perils of excessive drinking.<sup>16</sup>

Whether contemporary viewers of *The Thirsty Drover* shared Edmonds’s views on alcohol, many would have appreciated the painting for its rosy, nostalgic depiction of rural American life. By the 1850s artists in New York City and other urban centers were patronized by an affluent mercantile and professional class, the members of which longed for the simpler farm-based economy of their youths even as they embraced industrialization as the way of the future and were proud of their accomplishments toward this goal. Thus, Edmonds’s patrons were attracted to pictures with agrarian themes that personified values such as hard work, democracy, and community. Edmonds, too, was attracted to these themes. Although he spent the majority of his life in New York and was connected to its business activities (he served for some years as city chamberlain), the artist always felt a strong attachment to the country.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in the mid-1850s, when *The Thirsty Drover* was executed, Edmonds was involved in a banking scandal



Fig. 2 *Scenes and Occupations Characteristic of New England Life*. Engraving, from *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, 16 June 1855, 384

that forced him to resign from the New York banking and political worlds and likely made him yearn for simpler times.

Although long overshadowed in the history of American art by contemporaries like Mount, Edmonds, with his strong banking, political, and art connections, was a major player in shaping New York culture at midcentury. His work was appreciated because it made direct statements, neither overtly sentimental nor too serious, on poignant social issues affecting his patrons during the 1850s. As one of his few outdoor scenes, *The Thirsty Drover* must have presented a considerable challenge to the artist. Yet true to Edmonds's form, the result emits a sophisticated harmony between subject and style.

MCC/LL

## NOTES

1. Maybelle Mann, *Francis William Edmonds: Mammon and Art* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977); and H. Nichols B. Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds: American Master in the Dutch Tradition*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1988) are the primary sources for biographical information on Edmonds.
2. Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 19–22, 31–34.
3. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), 143–45.

4. In Dutch paintings, American genre painters of the mid-nineteenth century found domestic interior and agrarian themes sympathetic to their own goals. See Nancy T. Minty, "Dutch and Flemish Seventeenth-Century Art in America, 1800–1940: Collections, Connoisseurship and Perceptions," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2003; and H. Nichols B. Clark, "The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting on American Genre Painting, 1800–1865," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1982.
5. John Burnet, *A Treatise in Four Parts Consisting of an Essay on the Education of the Eye with Reference to Painting and Practical Hints on Composition, Chiaroscuro, and Colour* (London: J. Carpenter and Son, 1827). In a three-volume travel diary, Edmonds specifically mentioned an interest in the Dutch and Flemish artists Gabriel Metsu, David Teniers, and Adriaen van Ostade. See Mann, *Francis William Edmonds*, 61. For the availability of Dutch art in the United States, see Minty, "Dutch and Flemish Seventeenth-Century Art in America."
6. Similar preparatory studies by Edmonds are known for some of his other genre scenes, including *The Bashful Cousin* (c. 1841–42; National Gallery of Art), *The City and Country Beaux* (c. 1839; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.), *The Two Culprits* (c. 1850; private collection), *Taking the Census* (c. 1854; private collection), and *Devotion* (c. 1857; private collection).
7. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* 3 (March 1856), 91.
8. "The National Academy of Design (Second Article)," *New York Tribune*, 12 April 1856, 4.
9. Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 6–7, has described these types of genre images as "highly synthetic, selectively composed fictions, made to reflect and promulgate cultural values rather than represent 'real' life." Genre images of rural tranquillity tended to distract the public's attention away from industrial and labor problems.
10. *Ibid.*, 4–7; and Holly Pyne Connor, "City-Country Contrasts in American Genre Painting," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1996, 16–49.
11. See "The Cattle Trade with New York," *Ohio Cultivator* 11 (1 January 1855), 12; "Consumption of Animal Food in the United States," *Debow's Review* 19 (2 August 1855), 233–35; "Cattle Trade," *American Farmer* 11 (June 1856), 364–65; and Ernest Ingersoll, "Cattle Ranching in the United States," *Chautauquan* 6 (July 1886), 555–58.
12. Richard F. Palmer, "The Era of the Drover," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 30 (September 1974), 226–32.
13. Quoted in *ibid.*, 227.
14. It would have been extremely unusual in 1856 for a rural housewife or girl to own only one dress. By alluding to the small size of these two figures' wardrobes, Edmonds may have been suggesting that they were particularly frugal, old-fashioned, and unsophisticated. The drover, by contrast, wears more typical contemporary dress, a fact that refers to his more frequent contact with urban culture. Carol Kregloh, Museum Specialist at the Smithsonian Institution, e-mail messages to the authors, 28 December 2005 and 10 January 2006.
15. Palmer, "The Era of the Drover," 227; and Allan S. Everest, "Early Roads and Taverns of the Champlain Valley," *Vermont History* 37 (Autumn 1969), 252–53.
16. *Facing the Enemy* was engraved and distributed as propaganda by temperance movement activists. Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 80–83.
17. Several accounts in his autobiography and travel diaries discuss his youth and early life spent on an upstate New York farm. Francis William Edmonds, "The Leading Incidents and Dates of My Life," *American Art Journal* 13 (Autumn 1981), 4–10.

## DE SCOTT EVANS (1847–1898)

### *Still Life with Pears*, c. 1888 (*Two Pears*)

Oil on canvas

12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (31 × 25.7 cm)

Signed lower left: De Scott Evans / New York

Gift of Paul Mellon in memory of Mary Conover Mellon,

F94-37/1

DE SCOTT EVANS WAS BORN David Scott Evans in the small town of Boston, Indiana. The son of a country doctor, he took a year's course at Miami University in Ohio while also studying in nearby Cincinnati with Alfred Beaugureau, a teacher of French and drawing.<sup>1</sup> After teaching for several years in Indiana and Ohio, in 1874 Evans opened a studio in Cleveland, where he painted portraits, took in students, and helped found the city's first art club. By this time, he had Gallicized his name from D. Scott to "De Scott." Three years later he traveled to Paris, spending time in the atelier of the academic figure painter Adolphe-William Bouguereau before returning to Cleveland the following year.<sup>2</sup> In 1881 he began to send work to the annual exhibitions of the National Academy of Design in New York, and in 1887 he moved to New York. There, he soon earned a reputation as "a painter of pretty women," skilled at painting textures, fabrics, and the surface qualities of "stuffs."<sup>3</sup> He was en route to Paris to execute a decorative commission when he drowned in the shipwreck of the French steamer *La Bourgogne* on 4 July 1898.

No contemporary account describes Evans as a practitioner of the special branch of illusionistic still life, trompe l'oeil (French for "fool the eye"). Yet Evans's move to New York coincided with a remarkable surge of attention to that very branch of painting. Following the 1886 arrival in New York of the artist William Michael Harnett and the sale of his painting *After the Hunt* (1885; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) to the saloon owner Theodore Stewart, paintings that fooled the eye gained great notoriety.<sup>4</sup> Stewart installed the painting against a weathered door in his saloon, where it daily attracted throngs of viewers. Evans, who must have been aware of Harnett's success, was probably tempted to capitalize on the resulting demand for trompe l'oeil paintings even while working to establish his presence in New York as a figure painter. The Nelson-Atkins illusionistic painting of two pears, which bears a painted calling card reading "De Scott Evans / New York," may be Evans's first foray into the trompe l'oeil arena. All of his other paintings in this style are signed with initials or one of several pseudonyms.<sup>5</sup>

Evans's pears are painted on canvas but look as if they are hung from a wooden panel, with knots and chips meticulously rendered and strategically placed. A few chips appear scattered around the

edges of the "panel"; these "chips" create the illusion that the surface of the "panel" is veneer, a feature of mass-produced furniture that was itself deceptive. Evans painted all four tacking edges of his canvas to look like wood, as if he assumed the painting would remain unframed. The side edges are painted dark brown and striated as if the panel had been quarter-sawn; the bottom edge is in the same brown tones as the painting, but the top edge is lighter, as if covered in dust. The strings holding the two pears continue up and over this top edge, where they join but do not knot.<sup>6</sup> Using small, delicate brushstrokes to build up his forms and define his shadows, Evans carefully described the two pears, distinguishing them in size, color, perhaps even by variety: one is larger, greener, and duller, with a more elongated body and a short, thick stem; the other smaller, more yellow, and brighter, with a round body and a long, thin stem. The two nestle against one another, their spots and blemishes echoing the knots and chips in the panel. The larger pear on the left seems to blush red at the point where the smaller pear touches it, and it is hard to ignore Evans's obvious play on the words *pear* and *pair*; however, it is otherwise difficult to read content into this small painting that flaunts its illusionism.

Both William Gerdtz and David Lubin have noted the common late-nineteenth-century practice of displaying trompe l'oeil still-life paintings in taverns, where they contributed to an overall masculine atmosphere and encouraged viewers to see themselves in highly gendered terms.<sup>7</sup> Doreen Bolger has noted that many of Harnett's patrons were dry-goods merchants, who installed his paintings in their stores or offices.<sup>8</sup> Although it is impossible to say where *Still Life with Pears* was originally hung, it seems suited to a setting very different from Evans's more celebrated paintings of beautiful women in "artistic" interiors, for instance *The Connoisseur* (Fig. 1). This painting of a gorgeously dressed woman surveying an ornately framed artwork, surrounded by the trappings of a rich and comfortable house or studio, is both thematically and stylistically related to the feminized realms of the home and the department store. *Still Life with Pears*, by contrast, depicts humble, familiar objects whose inelegant mode of display suggests a county fair, general store, or farmer's market.<sup>9</sup> The fact that *Still Life with Pears* was painted so as to remain unframed supports the notion that Evans did not intend it for a genteel setting.

As Lubin has noted, trompe l'oeil paintings give viewers the pleasant sensation of having mastered a visual and cognitive game.<sup>10</sup> This implies a way of looking distinct from that depicted in (and invited by) *The Connoisseur*, where a refined viewer gazes at a painting purely for aesthetic gratification. By the 1880s paintings of elegant women enjoying art abounded, serving as emblems of upper-class leisure, culture, and taste.<sup>11</sup> Trompe l'oeil paintings,



Dr Scott Evans  
New York



Fig. 1 De Scott Evans, *The Connoisseur*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 43<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24 in. (109.7 × 61 cm). Windorf Galleries, Chesterfield, Mich.

for their part, were associated with the masculine culture of games and tricks and were classed as middle-brow entertainment. While Evans's paintings of pretty women celebrate a modern vision of American "high" culture as feminine and French, his trompe l'oeil still lifes subvert this vision with humor and nostalgia. At a time when many Americans felt increasingly jaded by their immersion in a world of advertising and mass-produced commodities, *Still Life with Pears*, with its down-to-earth, unglamorous subject matter and its technique that seems, ironically, to emphasize substance over appearance, offered viewers an imaginative escape into a seemingly more authentic, agrarian past.<sup>12</sup>

SM/LL

## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Evans is aptly summarized in Nanette V. Maciejunes, *A New Variety, Try One: De Scott Evans or S. S. David*, exh. cat. (Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art, 1985), esp. 19–32; and Nancy Troy, "From the Peanut Gallery: The Rediscovery of De Scott Evans," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* 36 (Spring 1977), 41. For Evans's years in the Midwest, see William H. Robinson and David Steinberg, *Transformations in Cleveland Art, 1796–1946*, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1996), 36–37, 40–45.
2. From Bouguereau, Evans "acquired a taste for ornate interiors and bric-a-brac productions." Robinson and Steinberg, *Transformations in Cleveland Art*, 41. Evans probably did not have any formal study under Bouguereau, who in 1877–78 was not yet associated with any school. Rather, as was customary in many French painters' studios, Evans would have been permitted to make copies of the master's work. One such copy by Evans, of Bouguereau's *La Guerre*, is in the Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio.

3. Cromwell Childe, "A Painter of Pretty Women," *Quarterly Illustrator* 1 (October 1893), 279–82.
4. Alfred Frankenstein, *After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other Still Life Painters, 1870–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), 80.
5. *Still Life with Pears* appeared on the art market about 1950, along with a similarly painted and identically sized trompe l'oeil of a single apple (q.v.); Alfred Frankenstein noticed the two paintings during his research on Harnett, and they are both catalogued as De Scott Evans in *ibid.* Scholars soon noted a handful of other still lifes that were clearly related: all the paintings were on panels about 12 by 10 inches in size, and all showed a similar "vocabulary" of illusionistic knots, chips, cracks, and graining. Although the paintings bore different signatures, William H. Gerdtz and Russell Burke noted in 1971 that one of these signatures, "Scott David," inverted Evans's given names, suggesting that the artist might exercise a level of wit akin to the deceptions inherent in trompe l'oeil. Gerdtz and Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 167–68. Nancy Troy pursued this line of argument when she researched two recent acquisitions at the Yale University Art Gallery, an apple picture signed "Stanley David," and a peanut picture signed "S. S. David" ("From the Peanut Gallery," 43–44). Other signatures on these paintings include David, S. David, and Stanley S. David.
6. Timothy J. McQuaid made the astute observation about Evans's suggestion of veneer by the specific shape of the painted chip. Maciejunes notes that this method of treating the taeking edges is "significant because it is highly idiosyncratic and yet characteristic of all these works—whether signed Evans or David" (*A New Variety*, 45). At least one painting of pears, signed "S. David," retains what is apparently its original frame, which shows the strings continuing over the top edge of the canvas, to attach to a nail painted on the frame. See *An American Gallery: Volume VIII* (New York: Riehard York Gallery, 1997), no. 12.
7. William H. Gerdtz, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still-Life, 1801–1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, in association with Phillbrook Art Center, 1981), 29; and David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 273–319.
8. Doreen Bolger, "The Patrons of the Artist: Emblems of Commerce and Culture," in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the Amon Carter Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 73–86.
9. Old-fashioned ways of displaying produce in these venues were, by the 1880s, being displaced by new "show window" techniques that emphasized the variety and attractiveness of the goods shown. See Keith Walden, "Speaking Modern: Language, Culture and Hegemony in Grocery Window Displays, 1887–1920," *Canadian Historical Review* 70 (Spring 1989), 285–310.
10. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 288–90. More recently, Michael Leja has argued that viewers' mastery over trompe l'oeil images contributed to their sense of themselves as informed consumers. See Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 125–52.
11. Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
12. William Leach has discussed the rise of department stores and their emphasis on enticing, ersatz surface in *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1993). For a discussion of trompe l'oeil as a backlash against turn-of-the-century consumer culture, see David M. Lubin, "Permanent Objects in a Changing World: Harnett's Still Lifes as a Hold on the Past," in Bolger, Simpson, and Wilmerding, *William M. Harnett*, 49–59.

## DE SCOTT EVANS (1847–1898)

### *Still Life with Apple*, c. 1890

Oil on canvas

11<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 10 in. (30.3 × 25.4 cm)

Gift of Paul Mellon in memory of Mary Conover Mellon,

F94-37/2

THE BODY OF TROMPE L'OEIL still lifes attributed to De Scott Evans has grown in recent years to include paintings of peanuts, almonds, potatoes, hatchets, message boards, beer mugs, baby shoes, and even a stuffed parrot and a caged eat. Nevertheless, apples and pears, shown hanging from strings, remain his most recurrent subjects.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Evans always painted pears hanging in “pairs,” he sometimes painted single apples. *Still Life with Apple* at the Nelson-Atkins is one such study.

As in *Still Life with Pears* (q.v.), the subject of *Still Life with Apple* is shown dangling from a string against what appears to be a wood panel, accompanied by a paper label, which, in this case, declares its weight as “One and a half Pounds.” Here, too, the painted illusion extends to the outer edges of the canvas, which are painted to resemble the cross grain of a sawn panel, with the top edge painted lighter to imitate a dusty surface. *Still Life with Apple* differs subtly from its companion, however, in that Evans painted it more carefully and deliberately, using even smaller, more delicate brushstrokes to build form and softening the edges of these forms with blended strokes. His brushwork is more consistent throughout, and his presence more concealed. Evans’s more tentative brushwork and his uncharacteristic signature in *Still Life with Pears* suggest that it may have been painted at an earlier date, when the artist was experimenting with the new trompe l’oeil style. By the time he painted *Still Life with Apple*, Evans appears to have mastered the technical finesse necessary to produce a nearly perfect illusion.<sup>2</sup>

Evans’s choice to depict fruit dangling from strings is partially a function of the trompe l’oeil mode, which is most effective when subjects are shown against a flat, vertical surface. His decision to paint apples and pears specifically is more mysterious. The subject of *Still Life with Apple* appears to be a specimen on display; however, the apple’s indicated size, while large, is not extraordinary. It has been suggested that Evans’s hanging apples depict a common nineteenth-century rural tradition of leaving apples strung to a neighbor’s door as gifts, and that Evans subverted this gesture by offering bruised apples.<sup>3</sup> Such a prank would not be uncharacteristic of the artist, who was described by his peers as fun-loving and mischievous.<sup>4</sup> The subject might also relate to the old-fashioned game of “snap apple,” in which blindfolded boys and girls attempt to bite into an apple dangling from a roof beam. More likely, however, Evans’s choice of subjects relates to the setting for which his

paintings were intended. William Gerdtz has noted that, near the end of the century, saloons became common venues for still-life paintings, particularly those painted in a trompe l’oeil manner.<sup>5</sup> Most apples grown in America in the nineteenth century were turned into hard cider, and pears, too, were commonly used to make pear cider, or “perry.” It seems likely that Evans’s preference for these fruits, shown in the slightly overripe state considered ideal for cider making, was related to the vogue of displaying trompe l’oeil still lifes in barrooms.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, cider was also considered an old-fashioned, rural drink. As one author noted, “the very name of hard cider suggests rather unpleasantly the corner grocery store and the pie-permeated, hair-cloth suited New England parlor.”<sup>7</sup> While this author found such associations distasteful, many of his contemporaries, dismayed by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and rising immigration, idealized New England and its folk traditions, seeing in them an image of a simpler, less artificial, agrarian past.<sup>8</sup>

Apples in particular were also linked, in the late nineteenth century, to Americans’ sense of themselves as rugged individuals. The preacher and author Henry Ward Beecher pronounced in 1864 that “the apple is, beyond all question, the American fruit . . . the true democratic fruit,” praiseworthy for its hardiness, adaptability, and ease of propagation.<sup>9</sup> Homely, ubiquitous, and quintessentially American, the subject of *Still Life with Apple* cut against the grain of late-nineteenth-century American “high” art, which was filled with images of beautiful women in elegant settings, painted in an academic, European style. Perhaps to an even greater extent than *Still Life with Pears*, *Still Life with Apple* appealed to a sense of nostalgia for a lost, more authentic American past while, at the same time, suggesting wryly that this idealized past was illusory.

SM/LL



Cost one half  
Pound.

## NOTES

1. Of the fourteen trompe l'oeil fruit paintings known as attributed to Evans, eight seem to form four pairs of apples and pears. Of the remaining six paintings, two are of pears and four are of apples. It is interesting to note that the nut paintings attributed to Evans, all signed "Stanley S. David" or "S.S. David," show exclusively peanuts or almonds. These do not seem to have been painted as pairs, however.
2. We are grateful to Scott A. Heffley, Paintings Conservator at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, for discussing the two Evans paintings and their differences in painting technique with us.
3. Bruce Weber, *The Apple in America: The Apple in 19th Century American Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1993), 14. In a telephone conversation with Lauren Lessing on 14 March 2000, Weber said that a New Hampshire apple grower had "immediately" associated the Evans apples on a string with a "rural tradition," but also admitted that he never found a reference in a book or journal to confirm such a tradition. The sources that Weber cites in his essay refer to dried apple slices, strung up above a hearth or assembled as gifts for soldiers. See, for example, E. C. Chapin, "A Characteristic American Fruit," *Home Progress* 6 (September 1916), 22.
4. See, for instance, John P. Green, *Fact Stranger than Fiction: Seventy-five Years of a Busy Life with Reminiscences of Many Great and Good Men and Women* (Cleveland: Riehl Printing, 1920), 168–69.
5. William H. Gerdtz, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life, 1801–1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, in association with Philbrook Art Center, 1981), 29.
6. For the popularity of hard cider in the nineteenth century, see Vrest Orton, *The American Cider Book: The Story of America's Natural Beverage* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1978). For the types of fruit preferred, see "Cider Making," *Scientific American* 19 (21 October 1868), 261. In other paintings, like *The Irish Question* (c. 1890; private collection), which depicts two hanging potatoes, Evans commented on such contemporary social issues as the recurrent crop failures in Ireland that brought waves of immigrants to American shores. See Christie's, New York, 4 December 2003, lot 49. Similarly, Evans's paintings of pears and apples, beer mugs and hatchets could be seen as joking references to the temperance movement, which had a devastating impact on cider production in the United States.
7. Robert Grant, "The Art of Living," *Scribner's Magazine* 17 (January 1895), 14.
8. Roger B. Stein, "After the War: Constructing a Rural Past," in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 15–41.
9. Henry Ward Beecher, *Pleasant Talk about Fruits, Flowers and Farming* (New York: J. B. Ford & Co., 1874), based on an 1864 lecture and quoted in Weber, *The Apple in America*, 10. For this discussion of apples, we have relied heavily on Weber's insightful essay, as well as on Michael Pollan's engaging book *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 15–23, 41–51.



# GEORGE FORSTER (1817–1896)

## *Still Life*, 1871

Oil on canvas

16½ × 13¾ in. (41.9 × 34.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: G. Forster / 1871.

Purchase: acquired through the Charles T. Thompson Bequest, F77-17

GEORGE FORSTER'S ARTISTIC CAREER is shrouded in mystery. Born in Bavaria on 12 March 1817, Forster established himself as a painter in Europe, but the extent and the reception of his work there are unknown. Immigrating to America about 1865, the painter settled with his wife, Christine, and their large family in Manhattan. They moved to Brooklyn by 1873 and remained peripatetic; seven different Brooklyn addresses for the family are recorded between 1873 and Forster's death in 1896.<sup>1</sup>

Forster seems to have exhibited only occasionally and with no notice, but his work appeared from New York to San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> He painted mostly still lifes, although a few figurative subjects by his hand have been identified. He specialized in finely wrought, attractive depictions of fruit (sometimes mixed with flowers), striking in their immaculate detail and convincing effects of texture and material variety.

Dated 1871, the Nelson-Atkins *Still Life* is typical of Forster's idealized fruit compositions. The modest canvas features an arrangement of unblemished strawberries, peaches, nuts, grapes, and gooseberries rendered in Forster's characteristically eye-popping detail, including a few glistening dewdrops. All these fruits are shown at the peak of ripeness or, in the case of the spray of strawberry buds, in early stages of growth. The accumulation of perfect fruit is bracketed by clusters of greenery, reminding viewers of its original natural state and adding to its symbolism as a celebration of America's wealth of natural resources. In this regard, Forster's *Still Life* can be distinguished from the work of earlier European still-life painters, especially famed seventeenth-century Dutch artists such as Willem Kalf and Rachel Ruysch, who often depicted fecundity alongside decay as a means of contemplating the transient nature of physical beauty and human mortality.

Still-life painting enjoyed a large market in nineteenth-century America.<sup>3</sup> Often hung in conjunction with profusely carved sideboards and other decorative arts, they reinforced ideas of abundance and prosperity in the increasingly ornate dining rooms that characterized postbellum American home decoration.<sup>4</sup> The seductive surfaces that characterize Forster's still lifes echoed and commemorated equally lavish—but temporary—table displays one might expect in upper-middle- and upper-class homes of the period.

## NOTES

1. Census records, New York directories, a few exhibition and auction records, and a death certificate provide a skeletal biography of the artist. Forster first appears in the 1865–66 New York City directory residing at 269 West Thirty-eighth Street. Correspondence between William H. Gerds and David Stewart Hull, Forster file, William H. Gerds library, provided the facts of Forster's life and the whereabouts of his paintings mentioned in this entry.
2. Forster showed at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1867, the Boston Athenaeum in 1871, at Newhall and Company in San Francisco in 1874, and the Brooklyn Art Association in 1879. The Bicentennial Inventory of American Paintings Executed before 1914, Smithsonian Institution, has the most complete listing and photo file of known works by Forster.
3. Surveys such as William H. Gerds, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life, 1801–1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, in association with Philbrook Art Center, 1981); and William H. Gerds and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971) provide considerable insight into the prevalence of and market for still life in nineteenth-century America. As testament to Forster's obscurity, he receives only one mention in each of these texts.
4. On this topic, see particularly, Kenneth L. Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

MCC



# GEORGE FULLER (1822–1884)

## *Hannah*, 1879

Oil on canvas

50 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 40 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (127.3 × 102.6 cm)

Signed lower left: G Fuller

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-15/1

Magician! Who from commonest elements  
Called up divine ideals, clothed upon  
By mystic lights soft blending into one  
Womanly grace and child-like innocence.<sup>1</sup>

WITH THESE LINES THE POET John Greenleaf Whittier paid tribute to George Fuller, whose idealized, ethereal paintings of adolescent girls made him one of the most popular American painters of the late nineteenth century. *Hannah*, which Fuller painted in 1879, seems the perfect embodiment of Whittier's lines. A critic writing in 1897 characterized the painting as "a picture full of the tenderness and dignity characteristic of a brilliant figure at his most brilliant period."<sup>2</sup> Yet *Hannah* was exhibited only once in Fuller's lifetime, and, perhaps for this reason, it has received less attention than his other paintings of adolescent girls, such as *Winifred Dysart* (1881; Worcester Art Museum, Mass.) and *The Quadroon* (1880; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Nevertheless, *Hannah* is one of Fuller's earliest and most beautiful treatments of this subject, and he considered it one of his finest works.<sup>3</sup>

George Fuller was born in 1822 on his family's farm near Deerfield, Massachusetts.<sup>4</sup> As was common for farm children of this period, his education was erratic and short. By the age of thirteen he was working in Boston as a store clerk. Two years later he traveled to Illinois with a railroad surveying team. He returned home and resumed his education at the age of seventeen, but the following year found him once again traveling, this time in eastern New York and western Massachusetts with his half brother Augustus Fuller, an itinerant portrait painter. Fuller must have felt that he had found his calling on this journey, because he wrote to the sculptor Henry Kirke Brown and asked to become his pupil. Brown acquiesced, and Fuller spent nine months in 1842 practicing drawing under his tutelage in Albany, New York. When Brown went to Europe in 1843, Fuller continued his studies at the Boston Artists' Association. There, he became enraptured with the paintings of Washington Allston, whose Romantic sensibility and golden, Titian-inspired palette had a lasting impact on Fuller's style.<sup>5</sup> In 1847 Fuller moved to New York to study at the National Academy of Design. He remained there for twelve years, making regular painting excursions to Philadelphia and to towns in the South. His paintings from this period, for instance *The Connecticut River from the Western Hills* (c. 1850–60; Smith College

Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.), are executed in a relatively tight, realistic manner. Although he made little money, Fuller was recognized and he was made an associate member of the National Academy in 1853.

The year 1859 marks a sharp break in Fuller's life and career. Both his father and his brother died that year, leaving him responsible for the family farm. Before returning to Deerfield, Fuller took a six-month tour of Europe, traveling through England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, and absorbing the artwork he saw there. In the fifteen years that followed he lived as a tobacco farmer, painting only on Sundays and sporadically during the winter. Fuller was not, however, completely isolated from developments in the art world. Trips to Boston and New York brought him into contact with modern art, including paintings by the popular French artists Jean-François Millet, Jules Breton, and Camille Corot.<sup>6</sup> As his style evolved in the relative obscurity of his Deerfield farm, Fuller adopted both the agrarian subject matter and the subjective, atmospheric style of these artists.

The crash of the tobacco market in 1875 forced Fuller to try to make a living as an artist, and in 1876 he exhibited two landscapes and a number of portrait studies at Doll & Richards Gallery in Boston. Reviewers were quick to link his paintings to those of Millet.<sup>7</sup> Fuller benefited from the aura of sentimental acclaim that surrounded Millet following the French artist's death in 1875. Like Millet, Fuller was a farmer who had retired from city life, and like Millet he painted rural scenes and picturesque regional types. Fuller painted graceful young girls instead of hardy peasants, and his palette was more muted, but these differences pleased many American viewers who were uncomfortable with the perceived radical, political content of Millet's paintings, appreciating them instead for their qualities of spiritual uplift and nostalgic reverie.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition was a critical success and Fuller found himself, at fifty-four, beginning a new career as a sought-after modern painter.<sup>9</sup> He opened a studio in Boston, where he became a friend and admirer of the Barbizon painters' leading American proponent, William Morris Hunt (q.v.). Citing Corot as his ideal, Hunt argued that painters should transform the material facts of nature into expressions of emotional states, eschewing narrative and finish in order to stimulate the viewer's feelings and imagination.<sup>10</sup> These ideas clearly influenced Fuller, whose paintings became increasingly evocative and enigmatic over the remaining eight years of his career.

Although some critics disparaged Fuller's mannered technique and inexpert drawing, most late-nineteenth-century viewers embraced his paintings wholeheartedly, finding in their hazy atmosphere a triumph of spirituality over materialism. In his 1884 tribute to Fuller, Francis Davis Millet wrote, "He has turned our





Fig. 1 Jean-François Millet, *The Shepherdess: Plains of Barbizon*, c. 1862. Oil on panel, 14<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (38 × 27.3 cm). Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass., 1955.532. © Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

attention from brie-a-brac, from pots and pans, from beggars and rags, and has made us look for the nobler facts of nature.”<sup>11</sup> As T. J. Jackson Lears has argued, many Americans at the end of the nineteenth century were troubled by the crass materialism of the era. Feeling lost and adrift in a world of mass-produced commodities and superficialities, they longed for authenticity and spiritual truth.<sup>12</sup> In 1908 the critic Elisabeth Luther Cary wrote of *Hannah*: “Her face is of the demure New England type with the intimate mystic beauty belonging to a reticent and vision-seeing race.”<sup>13</sup> Cary here attributed to the figure of Hannah the visionary nature that critics also ascribed to Fuller himself, an ability to pierce the deceptive veil of the material world and reveal an underlying reality beyond. Of Fuller’s painting *Winifred Dysart*, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer wrote,

It is herself that interests and fascinates us,—and less by actual beauty . . . than by a spiritual emanation which shines from her face and form, and from the artist’s every touch. He has made us see not only what he saw in a model, placed before him, but what he divined, imagined or created in her presence—her inner as well as her outer nature. And as this

was a poetical conception, and as it is expressed by consonant technique, the result is painted poetry.<sup>14</sup>

Cary and Van Rensselaer described Fuller’s paintings in the language of Spiritualism, a popular religious movement that flourished in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. By purporting to prove the existence of the human soul, Spiritualism offered an alternative to the rational, materialist worldview advanced by science and technology.<sup>15</sup> Fuller attended at least two Spiritualist séances in 1878, and he wrote enthusiastically to his wife of the ghostly, materialized spirits who spoke to him and touched him there.<sup>16</sup> Like these “manifestations,” Fuller’s paintings of ethereal New England maidens filled a deeply felt longing among his audience to see spiritual values given material form.<sup>17</sup>

Painted in 1879, *Hannah* is one of the earliest known examples of the compositional formula that became Fuller’s hallmark—a formula based, in part, on Barbizon paintings such as Millet’s *The Shepherdess: Plains of Barbizon* (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> Combining elements of portraiture, landscape, and genre painting, *Hannah* is a life-size, three-quarter-length painting of a tall adolescent girl, standing close to the picture plane, framed by a misty, agrarian scene. The girl turns her head to confront the viewer with a direct, solemn gaze. Her dress and apron are made of homespun cloth, and the drape of the heavy fabric across her body suggests her developing figure. The ruffle of her white chemise draws the viewer’s eye toward her face, where strong features are just emerging from the soft contours of childhood. The light of the setting (or rising) sun illuminates her face and hand, separating them from the dark, surrounding landscape. Near the horizon, on a line with the girl’s head, Fuller painted stacks of corn and wheat, and a reaper cutting grain with a four-bladed cradle scythe. He divided the canvas into three graded, horizontal bands of color, against which the figure of the girl stands as a vertical counterbalance. Fuller further unified this simple, stable composition by shrouding the scene in hazy atmosphere. The dark, muted colors and the girl’s sober expression set a melancholy tone, but Fuller left the painting’s narrative and symbolic content open to interpretation.

X-rays show at least one painting beneath the surface of *Hannah*. It is a landscape with figures, trees, and farm animals, oriented horizontally on the canvas. Stylistically, this hidden painting appears to date from the mid-1870s. It resembles both *The Turkey Pasture* (1876; Butler Institute, Youngstown, Ohio) and *Turkey Pasture in Kentucky* (1877; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Va.). In a conversation with *Hannah*’s first owner, Fuller mentioned that there were other paintings beneath the surface, explaining that he liked to layer paintings in this fashion to give his finished pictures greater depth.<sup>19</sup> In places, expansion cracks and Fuller’s own intentional abrasions have revealed layers of underlying pigment, possibly relating to the landscape painting beneath.

Writing in 1886, John J. Enneking described Fuller’s typical working method:

It was very interesting to watch from the beginning the growth of a picture under Mr. Fuller's brush. His method of producing them was peculiar to himself. He did not choose a subject and prosaically make sketches and studies for it, but first threw a rough draught of his idea on his canvas. A head would appear first, then, vaguely, the rest of the figure, developing the whole as accidents of the brush and his feelings would dictate.<sup>20</sup>

Infrared reflectography reveals that Fuller sketched the composition for *Hannah* in graphite on the canvas, probably after covering the preexisting landscape with a concealing layer of ground. Then he added successive layers of paint, mixing colors on the canvas with his brush and palette knife. William Howe Downes noted, "Nothing could have been more tentative and laborious than the processes by which [Fuller] produced his works. He did quite as much erasing and scraping as he did actual painting."<sup>21</sup> To conclude this process, Fuller added a layer of reddish glaze, scoring the wet surface of the painting with the pointed handle of his brush and working the glaze into the underlying layers of paint. This scoring is particularly evident in the figure of the girl, where Fuller used a dense web of incised lines to reveal the blue and green tones beneath the creamy surface of her face and hand. Longer, more calligraphic strokes suggest the creased surface of her clothing. This technique creates modeling, but it also imposes a textured, atmospheric screen between the viewer and the figure. Fuller's dense layering of paint and his predilection for unstable brown pigments made with bitumen have compromised many of his canvases.<sup>22</sup> *Hannah* has darkened slightly with age, and its surface is cracked. Nevertheless, the painting is in remarkably good condition given Fuller's eccentric use of materials.

*Hannah* was first shown publicly in a November 1879 exhibition of work by American artists at the American Art Gallery in New York, where it occupied the place of honor. Fuller expressed concern, in a letter to his wife dated 19 November 1879, that although it was prominently hung, "I am told they have the picture of H. draped." Worried that this might affect the \$1,250 price he hoped to get for the picture, he traveled to New York to amend the situation. In a second letter to his wife dated 18 December, Fuller reported that he had removed *Hannah* from the American Art Gallery and given it to the art dealer Daniel Cottier to sell, replacing it in the exhibition with another painting, *The Romany Girl* (1879; location unknown).<sup>23</sup> Despite these problems, *Hannah* was noticed favorably by almost every critic. A writer for the *New York Evening Express* described it as "a masterful work . . . vigorous and, withal, full of sentiment."<sup>24</sup> The reviewer for the *Art Interchange* wrote, "The canvas is full of poetic feeling and sentiment, and the peculiar coloring most effective."<sup>25</sup> Sentiment, by which these reviewers meant the ability to elicit strong emotions in the viewer, was a quality often noted in Fuller's work. Fuller was also consistently praised as a colorist, a fact that may seem surprising given his avoidance of bright hues. In the late 1870s, however, taste in color and design was strongly influenced by the

Aesthetic Movement, whose adherents used harmonious combinations of warm, muted tones. Fuller's decision to move *Hannah* to Cottier's gallery reveals his desire to have the painting viewed in an Aesthetic setting. Cottier, a leading proponent of the Aesthetic Movement, displayed works of art surrounded by art furniture, stained glass, textiles, and ceramics.<sup>26</sup>

In his review of *Hannah*, a writer for the *New York Herald* linked Fuller's recent rise in popularity to an increased interest, among Americans, in "beautifying the home," a statement further linking the painting to the new Aesthetic taste.<sup>27</sup> By January 1880 *Hannah* was beautifying the drawing room of Frank Hallet Lovell, the wealthy owner of a lamp factory, who purchased the painting in December 1879 as a Christmas present for his wife. Fuller remained attached to *Hannah*, and he frequently visited the Lovells' Brooklyn town house, where, according to their daughter, "he invariably sat facing the painting."<sup>28</sup>

Despite their seeming transcendence of materialism, Fuller's paintings were, in fact, prized commodities. The artist's struggle with his materials, which limited the number of pictures he was able to complete before his death in 1884, only increased the demand for his work. According to Sidney Dickinson, "[Fuller] received probably the largest prices ever paid for single figures."<sup>29</sup> The artist's deft stylistic expression of antimaterialist values and the new Aesthetic taste account for part of his popularity, but his subject matter was also a crucial factor. Fuller's paintings of winsome adolescent girls haunting the New England countryside had as their subjects two powerful and contested cultural symbols.

In the United States, the decade of the 1870s was marked by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and rising immigration. New England, which had maintained its cultural supremacy in the years leading up to the Civil War, suffered a number of devastating economic crises. While the region's importance as a commercial and industrial center waned, it was increasingly associated with a romanticized, agrarian past. The 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, for instance, gave New England a central symbolic role as the cradle of American culture, while at the same time locating its significance in the colonial and early Republican past. In an 1884 memorial article for Fuller, a critic for the *Bay State Monthly* wrote,

[Fuller] painted not places but the influence of places, even as he painted not persons merely, but their natures and minds. It is for this reason that, although we see in all his pictures where landscape finds a place the meadows, trees, and skies of Deerfield, we also see much more,—the general and unlocated spirit of New England scenery.<sup>30</sup>

The mood of reverie and nostalgia that Fuller evoked in his paintings was perfectly suited for the depiction of what Roger Stein has called "Old New England," a symbolic landscape representing a lost way of life.<sup>31</sup> *Hannah*'s old-fashioned clothing and the hand tool used by the reaper behind her also dislodge the scene from the present and look to the preindustrial past.

*Hannah* also evokes the future through the figure of the adolescent girl. Of Fuller's many depictions of this subject, Millet wrote:

he has created a type of beauty thoroughly natural in its character and individual in its style, and one which will live as a representative impression of the feminine beauty of the present day. In this type he has combined the choice elements of innocence and simplicity of character, and has given us a refined and sweet country maiden, full of health and youthful vigor, and rich in the promise of perfect womanhood.<sup>32</sup>

Appearing infrequently in American genre paintings before the Civil War, adolescent girls became common subjects in those painted afterward. Elizabeth Johns has attributed this change to a shift in focus, among painters and their patrons, away from public culture and toward the private, domestic sphere.<sup>33</sup> It was also due, in part, to an increased awareness of adolescence as a discrete period in the life cycle. By the 1870s children's teen years were distinguished by clothing and hairstyles, social practices, and rituals. As Crista Deluzio has argued, the modern concept of adolescence as a period of physical and emotional storm and stress has its roots in this period, and these new associations made it a lightning rod for anxieties about the future.<sup>34</sup> Whereas childhood was invested with idyllic innocence, physicians and social scientists described adolescence as a dangerous and pivotal period of development, on which adult health and sanity rested. In a letter to *Hannah*'s first owner, Fuller claimed the model for the painting was the daughter of one of his Deerfield neighbors; however, the subject of *Hannah* is also a generalized type.<sup>35</sup> Poised at the far edge of childhood, she embodies both the "promise of perfect womanhood" and the threat of lost innocence, unrealized potential, and death.

In Western art, the figure of a young woman has long been used emblematically as a *vanitas* symbol, reminding viewers that all earthly creatures, regardless how young and fair, will inevitably die. To make this message more explicit, a maiden is often paired with a personification of Death, in the guise of a skeleton or reaper. This is the case, for instance, in Hans Baldung Grien's painting *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (1517; Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland). Fuller's placement of a reaper in the background of his painting, so close to the young girl's head, is unlikely to have been coincidental. The artist intentionally paired figures evoking youth and death to suggest the passage of time and the brevity of earthly existence. Seen in this symbolic context, *Hannah* is transformed into a figure of poignant nostalgia. Like the New England landscape that subsumes her, she recedes into the unrecoverable past even as she reaches forward toward the promise of the future.

LL/SBK

## NOTES

1. John Greenleaf Whittier, "George Fuller," in *George Fuller: His Life and Works*, ed. Josiah B. Miller (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886), 71.
2. "Art Exhibitions," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 18 December 1897, 6.
3. *Hannah* was exhibited at the American Art Gallery in New York from 13 November until 18 December 1879 before entering the gallery of Daniel C. Cottier. See *Catalogue of the Paintings, and Art Loan Collection*, George Fuller Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel 610. Fuller wrote that *Hannah* was one of his favorite paintings in a letter to the painting's first owner. See George Fuller to Mr. F. H. Lovell, 8 January 1883, NAMA curatorial file.
4. For biographical information about Fuller, see William Dean Howells, "Sketch of George Fuller's Life," in *George Fuller: His Life and Works*, 1–52; and Suzanne L. Flynt, *George Fuller (1822–1884): At Home*, exh. cat. (Deerfield, Mass.: Memorial Hall Museum, 1984), 5–16. Many of Fuller's letters and two unpublished biographical essays about the artist are on microfilm, AAA, microfilm reels 606–10.
5. Thomas W. Ball, "Incidents of Early Days," in *George Fuller: His Life and Works*, 66. William Howe Downes noted that, without Allston, "there would have been no George Fuller." See Downes, "Boston Painters and Painting," *Atlantic Monthly* 62 (August 1888), 261.
6. Fuller's correspondence shows that he regularly attended exhibitions in these cities. After viewing one exhibition of modern European works in New York, he wrote his wife that there was no longer any need to travel to Europe to see the best modern work. George Fuller to Agnes Fuller, 17 April 1864, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 606.
7. See, for instance, "Art," *Atlantic Monthly* 37 (May 1876), 631–32.
8. For a discussion of Millet's reception in the United States, see Laura Meixner, "The 'Millet Myth' and the American Public," in *An International Episode: Millet, Monet, and Their North American Counterparts*, ed. Meixner, exh. cat. (Memphis, Tenn.: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 1982), 68–91.
9. Of the twenty-five paintings exhibited, Fuller sold eleven, and at excellent prices. Flynt, *George Fuller (1822–1884)*, 13.
10. William Morris Hunt, *Talks on Art* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1878). After Hunt's death in 1879, Fuller wrote to his wife, "I am too thankful for the good that [Hunt] has done—a good which in the coming years will be more and more recognized." See George Fuller to Agnes Fuller, 14 April 1880, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 607.
11. F. D. Millet, "George Fuller," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 69 (September 1884), 522. Sarah Burns has argued that Fuller worked within a "poetic mode" of expression that formed one strain of American idealism, encompassing Emersonian Transcendentalism, William Morris Hunt's inflection of the Barbizon style, Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings, and Washington Allston's Romanticism. See Sarah Lea Burns, "The Poetic Mode in American Painting: George Fuller and Thomas Dewing," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979.
12. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).
13. Elisabeth Luther Cary, "Four American Painters Represented in the Metropolitan Museum," *International Studio* 35 (September 1908), xcii.
14. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "George Fuller," *Century* 27 (December 1883), 229.
15. For a discussion of American Spiritualism in its cultural and historical context, see Molly K. McGarry, "Haunting Reason: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1999. Spiritualism was strongly associated both with New England, where the movement had its base, and with adolescent girls,

- who were its first mediums. In 1848 two teenage girls in Hydesville, New York, ignited the Spiritualist movement in the United States when they claimed to be in contact with the spirit world, producing mysterious rapping sounds with their toes to substantiate their assertion. They were not discredited until 1888. See David Chapin, "The Fox Sisters and the Performance of Mystery," *New York History* 8 (2000), 156–88.
16. In April 1878 Fuller wrote of the first séance he attended. "After dinner I went . . . to a séance at Mrs. Lord's, and we had a 'dark circle—' 18 present—it was as I had heard reported by others who had seen the manifestations. A guitar was taken from between my knees and played swiftly, passing around the circle, and once placed on my head. A round music box was placed in my hand and played with the handle down next to my palm—then moved away to someone else. So with a fan, which passed closely to our faces. And hands touching ours and rubbing our heads and fondling our faces. Once, when a hand had hold of mine, I said, 'Who is it?' and the voice said, 'George Sloan,' and I said, 'Poor George!' and the voice replied, 'No! Happy George!' Wallace Fuller and Fanny were the only ones who came to me besides George Sloan, but the others were more fortunate. . . . It was all very strange and interesting and there was more which I will tell you of when we meet." Fuller went to another séance, with a different medium, the following week, finding it even more surprising and stating his intention to return within the week. See George Fuller to Agnes Fuller, 18 and 29 April 1878, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 606.
  17. Wanda Corn, in her essay on American Tonalism, related Fuller to a group of painters, most notably represented by George Inness, who "came to synthesize the material and the spiritual in nature through tonal atmosphere and color harmony." See Corn, *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880–1910*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: M. H. de Young Memorial Museum and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 1972), 7. It should be noted, however, that Fuller was not identified as a Tonalist or linked to Inness in his lifetime.
  18. Similar paintings by Fuller, in addition to those already mentioned, include *Priscilla Fauntleroy* (1881; Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, Conn.), *Nydia* (1882; Metropolitan Museum of Art), and *Psyche* (1882; Art Institute of Chicago).
  19. Undated letter from Isabel Lovell Dorsey, NAMA curatorial file. Van Rensselaer wrote that "a collector who buys one of Mr. Fuller's pictures has often, if he could only profit by them, a whole little gallery of other pictures under the outer and ostensible creation." Van Rensselaer, "George Fuller," 231.
  20. John J. Emmeking, "Fuller's Methods in Painting," in *George Fuller: His Life and Works*, 76–77.
  21. William Howe Downes, "George Fuller (1822–1884)," *Atlantic Monthly* 62 (September 1888), 393.
  22. Problems with Fuller's paintings began to appear even before the artist died. In 1881 a patron wrote to Fuller complaining, "The portrait has arrived at our house safely, but I am sorry to notice that the canvas is *very badly* wrinkled." Dana Estes to Fuller, 27 May 1881, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 609.
  23. George Fuller to Agnes Fuller, 19 November and 18 December 1879, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 606.
  24. "Art Matters: The American Art Gallery," *New York Evening Express*, 6 November 1879, 1.
  25. "American Art News," *Art Interchange: A Household Journal* 3 (12 November 1879), 79.
  26. Max Donnelly, "Cottier and Company: Art Furniture Makers," *Antiques* 159 (June 2001), 916–25.
  27. "Studio and Gallery," *New York Herald*, 7 December 1879, 1.
  28. Lovell's purchase of *Hannah* is discussed in a letter from Daniel Cottier to Fuller dated 16 December 1879. Cottier wrote again on 31 December to inform Fuller that the painting was safely hung in the Lovells' home, "with a to-do that I will tell you about as soon as I see you in the flesh." Daniel Cottier to George Fuller, George Fuller Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 606. For Fuller's visits to the Lovell home, see an undated letter from Isabel Lovell Dorsey, NAMA curatorial file.
  29. Sidney Dickinson, "George Fuller," *Bay State Monthly* (Boston), June 1884, 377.
  30. *Ibid.*, 372.
  31. Roger B. Stein, "After the War: Constructing a Rural Past," in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 15–41.
  32. Millet, "George Fuller," 520.
  33. Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).
  34. Crista Deluzio, "New Girls for Old: Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1870–1930," Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1999.
  35. See George Fuller to Mr. F. H. Lovell, 8 January 1883, NAMA curatorial file.



# RÉGIS FRANÇOIS GIGNOUX (1816–1882)

## *Winter*, 1853

Oil on canvas, mounted on composite panel  
29¾ × 39¾ in. (75.6 × 101 cm)  
Signed and dated lower left: R. Gignoux / 1853.  
Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-104

IN THE MIDDLE DECADES of the nineteenth century, the French immigrant painter Régis François Gignoux was considered a leading American landscapist. His reputation rivaled those of Thomas Cole (q.v.), Asher B. Durand (q.v.), and John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), and his works commanded among the highest prices paid for American paintings.<sup>1</sup> In particular, his genre scenes set in winter landscapes, like the Nelson-Atkins painting, were so popular that the artist struggled to keep pace with the demand. According to Henry Tuckerman, American art patrons in the mid-1840s considered it essential to have a Gignoux winter scene in their collections.<sup>2</sup>

Born in Lyon, France, in 1816, Gignoux was educated there at the Académie de St. Pierre and in Fribourg, Switzerland. He later studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris with the history painters Horace Vernet and Paul Delaroche. It was Delaroche who encouraged Gignoux to abandon history painting in favor of landscape.<sup>3</sup> In 1840 the young artist came to the United States to marry his American fiancée, and he settled near his wife's family in Brooklyn. Soon after, he opened a studio in the Granite Building in New York City, where he quickly gained an appreciative audience. Gignoux's grounding in French academic methods enabled him to create crystalline forms and delicate atmospheric effects clearly distinguishable from those of his American contemporaries. In the words of one critic, "Almost everybody who had any taste in such matters went to see him, and his productions were universally admired. . . . He has had a sufficient number of commissions to keep him constantly employed."<sup>4</sup> Gignoux was also admired by his peers. The genre painter William Sidney Mount (q.v.) regularly sought his advice on matters of color and technique.<sup>5</sup> In the 1840s Gignoux offered private art lessons, counting among his pupils George Inness (q.v.) and John La Farge, but in the early 1850s he abandoned teaching to focus exclusively on his own work. By 1844 Gignoux was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design, winning full membership six years later. In 1861 he was elected president of the newly formed Brooklyn Art Association, a position he held until 1869. Throughout his years in the United States, he retained close ties to Europe. He exhibited at least twice in Paris, and his patrons included the baron de Rothschild and the earl of Elsemere.<sup>6</sup> He returned permanently to France in 1870. During the last twelve years of his life, Gignoux divided his time between Nice, where he owned a villa, and Paris.

Although he continued to paint, he exhibited infrequently and appears to have largely retired from professional life. He died in Paris in 1882.

Although Gignoux painted the full range of landscape scenery, by 1850 he had made winter scenes his specialty. Winter landscapes, which had been relatively rare in the United States before this time, were becoming more popular.<sup>7</sup> They provided the artist with an ideal forum in which to demonstrate his skillful handling of light and atmosphere. Like his contemporary George Henry Durrie, Gignoux emulated seventeenth-century Dutch painters such as Hendrick Avercamp and Aert van der Neer. He painted a large number of flat, snowy landscapes with frozen bodies of water, framed by trees and dominated by cloud-filled skies.<sup>8</sup> As in van der Neer's painting *Sports on a Frozen River* (Fig. 1), Gignoux's paintings often included groups of figures working, skating, and playing in the ice and snow. Gignoux's patrons were generally wealthy, urban businessmen, many of whom profited enormously from the exploitation of the landscape by industry even as they pined nostalgically for the unspoiled countryside and simple, rural communities of their youth.<sup>9</sup> Gignoux's paintings of common folk bound together in a seasonal pattern of work and leisure satisfied their desire to fix, in unchanging form, the distinctive, regional character of rural American life. Writing for *Harper's Monthly* in 1864, Samuel Osgood summed up the appeal of Gignoux and his fellow midcentury American landscape painters:

Every man who has lived in the country and made his fortune in the city must be haunted by charming scenes about the old homestead that he would gladly keep before him in his more artificial life. What would you or I give, dear reader, to get hold of Kensett, Hart, Colman, Inness, Haseltine, Cropsey, Casilear, Gignoux, Bierstadt, or Church, so as to have them take suitable sketches of the charmed spots about the old country home, and in due season enshrine them in gems of choice art that would make great Nature our household friend, and carry into the shady side of life all the sunshine and witchery of our early days.<sup>10</sup>

Gignoux traveled as far afield as Maine in search of winter scenery for his paintings; however, the majority depict locations closer to home in New York and New Jersey. Despite its seeming rusticity, *Winter* depicts the newly incorporated Red Hook neighborhood in Brooklyn. In the foreground, a group of boys plays hockey on the frozen Gowanus Creek, a tidal stream that flowed into Gowanus Bay on the eastern shore of the city, and that marked the city's eastern edge in 1853. Spanning the creek is the Ninth Street drawbridge, which had been built in 1848 to





Fig. 1 Aert van der Neer, *Sports on a Frozen River*, probably c. 1660. Oil on wood,  $9\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$  in. (23.2 × 34.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.11)

allow barge traffic to pass inland. Clearly visible in the distance, on a low hill above the bay at the left, is the distinctive John F. Delaplaine House, which stood near what is now Fortieth Street and Second Avenue. This area would become a polluted, industrial wasteland by the turn of the century, but in the 1850s it retained the aspect of a rural fishing village. In *Winter*, Gignoux illustrated the changes being wrought on the neighborhood by industrialization and urbanization. On the right, a mule hauls logs to the busy, steam-powered sawmill built in April 1853 by the New Jersey-based lumber company Ford & Doty.<sup>11</sup> Steamboats mingle with the sailing ships on the distant bay. At midcentury Americans were sanguine about such changes, and residents of Brooklyn took pride in the fact that theirs was the fastest growing city in the United States.<sup>12</sup> In 1851 a writer for the *Long Island Star* wrote,

On Red Hook, but recently a desert sand hill and unwholesome marsh, we now behold long rows of buildings, and listen to the busy hum of improvement. In a less period than twelve months the tide ebbed and flowed where now are new streets, laid out, graded and paved, and hundreds of eligible building sites . . . ready for occupancy. The old hill is fast passing away and soon will be numbered with the things that were.<sup>13</sup>

While *Winter* expresses a sense of wistful nostalgia for a vanishing way of life, symbolized by the marooned and icebound fishing boats in the foreground, its overall tone is optimistic. Bathed in soft winter light, under a unifying blanket of snow, industry exists in harmony with the landscape and its inhabitants.

Like his friend Asher B. Durand, Gignoux made oil studies *en plein air*, which he later used to compose finished paintings in his studio.<sup>14</sup> Following the academic method he learned from Delacroix, the artist began *Winter* by blocking out the composition

and establishing areas of light and shadow on the canvas. He then added surface color in successive layers. Gignoux's virtuosity as a painter and a colorist is particularly evident in the overcast sky and in the seared, translucent surface of the frozen creek, which he painted in subtly modulated tones of blue, gray, lavender, and green. A master of aerial perspective, Gignoux painted the hills, buildings, and ships at the horizon thinly, as if veiled in atmosphere, while he painted the objects in the foreground densely, with undiluted pigments in local color, lending them a tangible, physical presence that is enhanced by the bright, dappled sunlight falling on them. The resulting illusion of spatial depth draws the viewer's eye into the painting. For his figures, Gignoux used a few expertly placed strokes to suggest bodies in motion seen from a distance.

In an undated letter, Gignoux's granddaughter recalled that the artist struggled with proportion and perspective in his compositions.<sup>15</sup> This struggle is evident in *Winter* where, to give viewers the experience of looking down over a broad expanse of land and water, Gignoux created an artificial vantage high over Gowanus Creek.<sup>16</sup> To show both banks of the creek as if from this location, he seems to have pieced together landscape elements studied from two distinct points of view. As a result, the objects on the left bank of the creek and the figures in the foreground are disproportionately large in relation to the drawbridge and the buildings on the right. Despite such anomalies, the composition is held together by a rhythmic pattern of light and shadow and by the harmony of cool, luminous tones. The painting's oval shape and its rich, glowing color lend it a jewel-like quality.

*Winter* does not match published descriptions of the landscapes Gignoux exhibited in either the 1853 or the 1854 spring exhibitions of the National Academy of Design.<sup>17</sup> The artist sold a great many paintings directly from his studio, often on commission. It is possible that *Winter* was never exhibited publicly before it entered a

private collection. Gignoux's compositional formula for his winter scenes, developed by the early 1850s, featured innumerable frozen creeks, hockey players, bare trees, farmhouses, cloudy skies, and snow-dappled fields. His frequent repetition of these elements makes identifying individual paintings particularly challenging. Although the early history of *Winter* remains unknown, the painting combines all the qualities that made Gignoux one of America's most beloved mid-nineteenth-century landscape painters, qualities that included, in Henry Tuckerman's words, "great truth to nature and beauty of effect."<sup>15</sup>

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## NOTES

1. In a letter to his friend William Sidney Mount, dated 6 July 1858, the artist John M. Falconer related that Gignoux's painting *Niagara Falls in Winter* (1848; U.S. Senate Collection) had recently sold for \$5,000. Alfred Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 321. At the liquidation sale of the American Art-Union six years earlier, prices of landscapes averaged well below \$100 a painting. See "Sale of Pictures and Other Works of Art—Property of the American Art-Union," *New York Times*, 16 December 1852, 3. A comparison based on the Consumer Price Index reveals that \$5,000 in 1858 is roughly equal to \$100,000 in today's currency.
2. Henry Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1867), 508.
3. *Ibid.* Other biographical entries on Gignoux include Clara Erskine Clement and Laurence Hutton, *Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879), 296; and Richard J. Koke, ed., *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. and New-York Historical Society, 1982), 2:66–67.
4. Charles Lanman, "Our Landscape Painters," *Southern Literary Messenger* 16 (May 1850), 274.
5. See Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 30, 342.
6. For Gignoux's European patrons, see Clement and Hutton, *Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works*, 296. According to Clement and Hutton, Gignoux's painting *Mount Washington* was at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867. Lois Marie Fink's list of American exhibitors at the Paris Salons records Gignoux exhibiting four paintings at the 1855 Salon. Three of these were winter scenes. See Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1990), 346.
7. Discussions of nineteenth-century winter landscape painting in the United States can be found in Martha Hutson, "The American Winter Landscape, 1830–1870," *American Art Review* 2 (January–February 1975), 60–78; and Martha Young Hutson, *George Henry Durrie (1820–1863): American Winter Landscapist. Renowned through Currier and Ives*, exh. cat. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1977), 14–18.
8. Other winter landscapes by Gignoux now in public collections include *Skating in New Jersey* (c. 1870; Montclair Art Museum, N.J.); *Winter Landscape with Skaters* (undated; Fruitlands Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.); *Winter Scene in New Jersey* (1847; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); *Winter Landscape* (1859; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore); *Winter Scene* (1849; Corcoran Gallery of Art); *The Night before Christmas* (1847; Biblical Arts Center, Dallas); and *Niagara Falls in Winter* (1848; U.S. Senate Collection).
9. The names of some of Gignoux's patrons are listed in James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerds, eds., *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues: From the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1986), 2:1423–27. Nearly all of these men were city dwellers, and many were prominent manufacturers (for instance Robert Hoe, James B. Bradford, George Whitney, and George W. Austin) or railroad and steamship line owners (for instance Marshall O. Roberts and James J. Merriam). Gignoux's patrons also included merchants, bankers, sea captains, ministers, and, in one case, a prosperous shoemaker.
10. Samuel Osgood, "Our Artists," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 28 (January 1864), 242–43.
11. Ford & Doty purchased the water rights to Gowanus Creek to build this mill. See "Brooklyn City, Gowanus Creek," *New York Daily Times*, 14 April 1853, 3. This was the only steam-powered sawmill in Brooklyn in 1853. See "Steam Saw Mill in Brooklyn," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 July 1853, 3. In an 1882 obituary for the artist, an anonymous writer recalls, "[Gignoux] made innumerable copies of celebrated localities in Brooklyn, one of which, a sketch of the old mill on Gowanus creek, I recall at the present moment." "Regis Francis Gignoux," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 August 1882, 2. This author might be referring to a sketch made in preparation for the Nelson-Atkins painting or the painting itself.
12. For Brooklyn's rapid expansion in the 1850s, see "Growth of Cities in the United States," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 7 (July 1853), 171–75; and Albert Fein, ed., *Landscape into Cityscape* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968). For the history of Brooklyn in the nineteenth century, see Henry R. Stiles, ed., *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History, and Commercial and Industrial Record, of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York, from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W. W. Munsell, 1884).
13. Quoted in *Brooklyn before the Bridge: American Paintings from the Long Island Historical Society*, ed. John A. Kouwenhoven (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum, 1982), 62.
14. See Lanman, "Our Landscape Painters," 274.
15. Undated letter from the marquise d'Oncieu La Batie, St. Alban-Par-Leysses (Savoie), France. Transcribed by Dr. Clark S. Marlor, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1978. Vertical Files, Library of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.
16. Gignoux was well known for his frequent use of vertiginous points of view, prompting a writer for *Vanity Fair* to joke in 1860 that the artist "has been passing the dog-days on the summit of Graee Church, with an opera glass, gathering pretty *morceaux* for his next phenomena." "Whereabouts and Whatabouts of Our Artists," *Vanity Fair* 2 (1860), 104.
17. See Lewis Gaylord Clark, "Exhibition of the National Academy of Design," *Knickerbocker* 42 (July 1853), 95; and "The National Academy of Design," *Knickerbocker* 43 (May 1854), 540.
18. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 508.

## WILLIAM JAMES GLACKENS (1870–1938)

### *Beach Side*, 1912–13 (*Children on the Beach*)

Oil on canvas

26 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 32 in. (66.4 × 81.3 cm)

Signed lower left: W Glackens

Bequest of Frances M. Logan, 47-109

WILLIAM GLACKENS AND HIS FAMILY spent the summers of 1911 to 1916 on Long Island at Bellport, New York. According to Glackens's son Ira, Bellport was then "still an unspoiled town, and life was confined to the village street. There were no large estates in the neighborhood. Near the beach stood a huge barn-like 'Vacation Home' for New York shop girls."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Bellport was incorporated only in 1908, although from the mid-nineteenth century it was known as a summer resort.<sup>2</sup> The town, located sixty miles from Manhattan on the south shore of Long Island, attracted a range of visitors, from the upper-middle class like the Glackens family to the young women who came through the Jewish Working Girls Vacation Society.<sup>3</sup> Both Bellport and its population were somewhat distinct from Long Island's north shore communities, and especially from south shore communities farther out on the island around East Hampton and Shinnecock, where the genteel elite, including William Merritt Chase (q.v.), resided and vacationed.<sup>4</sup> Even so, Bellport, like Shinnecock, attracted a number of artists. The Glackens household served as a gathering place for many of them in the six years preceding the United States' entry into World War I. Alfred Maurer, Maurice Prendergast (q.v.) and his brother Charles, the illustrators May and James Preston, and childhood friend and budding collector Alfred Barnes all frequented the Glackenses' rented cottage in the summer of 1912.<sup>5</sup> That summer may have been particularly full of artistic conversation since Glackens had spent the previous February in Paris buying paintings for Barnes and at the time was head of the committee organizing the American section of the upcoming Armory Show.

In this convivial atmosphere, Glackens sketched and painted continually. *Beach Side*, an image of women and children on the shore observing swimmers, sailboats, and one another on a bright sunny day, was one result of the summer's work. The artist's initial conception of it began with drawings that nearly fill an entire sketchbook (1912; Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art).<sup>6</sup> It includes three compositional sketches and ten pages with multiple figure studies on each one. The majority of the drawings depicts pairs or clumps of children. The figures in all the sketches appear unaware of the artist. Glackens, in turn, recorded them as individuals, but he did not personalize them. In the compositional studies, he toyed with the distance of his vantage point. The first two sketches, confidently dashed off in Glackens's signature energetic hand, outline

the action on the beach and of the water and sky. The last sheet of the group (Fig. 1) is a quieter rendering that most closely describes the final composition—the architecture of the wooden structure, its ramp, the pier, and the disposition of figures on the beach and sailboats on the horizon.

Women and children fill the slice of beach Glackens portrayed. No men are present, with the exception of the artist himself, who is only implied, watching from his position on Osborne's Bluff. The low bluff is located just across the street from the main beach at Bellport's original yacht and golf club on Great South Bay and not far from where Glackens resided.<sup>7</sup> This vantage point offered a window on a world Glackens loved as a completely devoted husband and father, roles that began with his marriage to the illustrator Edith Dimock in 1904 and the arrival of his oldest child, Ira, in 1907.<sup>8</sup>

The Glackenses' beach vacations were part of a larger movement at the turn of the twentieth century during which American urbanites sought relief from increasingly hurried lives to preserve their physical and emotional health.<sup>9</sup> In the 1910s vacationing at a place like Bellport offered a relaxed and wholesome family summer holiday away from the hubbub of the city or the noisy attractions at beaches with amusement parks such as Coney Island and Atlantic City, New Jersey.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in the years preceding World War I, Long Island's beach culture was particularly noted for being suitable for children and offering "healthy sporting and social amusements" in a less elitist atmosphere than at other summer resorts of the day.<sup>11</sup>

Glackens's depiction of resort life in *Beach Side* grew, in part, out of artistic ideals formed early in his career. Keen observation was a key element of Glackens's art from his days as a cub illustrator-reporter for the Philadelphia *Record*.<sup>12</sup> On that first job, he met John Sloan (q.v.), George Luks, and Everett Shinn; by 1892 the four men also attended night classes in drawing at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Glackens's commitment to recording his environment derived from the teachings of his friend and mentor Robert Henri (q.v.).<sup>13</sup> This attention to his everyday world also coincided with new visual impulses resulting from recent changes in urban life. As Deborah Fairman has noted, around 1900 an "intense interest . . . in the act of looking" rose out of people's efforts to comprehend a "new world of goods" flooding an increasingly consumer-oriented society. The wider variety of available goods fostered new types of displays, ones that encouraged looking as well as purchasing. The ensuing rise of window shopping as an activity intersected with the development of other establishments devoted to looking, most notably popular entertainments such as vaudeville, early movies, and theater.<sup>14</sup>





Fig. 1 William James Glackens, Untitled sketch, c. 1912. Bellport 1912 sketchbook, charcoal on paper,  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{4}$  in. (14 × 21 cm). Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale. Ira Glackens Bequest

The subject of people looking became especially attractive to Sloan, Shinn, and George Bellows (q.v.) as well as Glackens, who moved to New York in 1896 and with these painters became part of the group later known as the Ashcan artists.<sup>15</sup> Spectators are key elements in Glackens's New York City oils executed between 1900 and 1910, such as *Hammerstein's Roof Garden* (c. 1901; Whitney Museum of American Art), *Roller Skating Rink* (c. 1906; formerly Potamkin Collection), and *Central Park Winter* (c. 1905; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Outside the city, bathing areas offered another prime location for watching and being watched. Glackens acknowledged his role as both spectator and spectacle in *Château-Thierry* (1906; Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, Calif.), a bird's-eye view in which he and his wife are pictured in swimsuits, crossing a road to the water. In *Beach Side*, there is another kind of double-layered spectatorship; indeed, the image is constructed around the artist observing people on the beach engaged in their own looking activities.

Modern French painting, however, provided the most complete model for *Beach Side*. As early as 1904 critics had noted similarities between Glackens's work and French painting, especially that of Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas.<sup>16</sup> Two years later Glackens and his wife traveled to Spain and France. Especially in Paris, Glackens could see the full range of French Impressionism as well as Henri Matisse's bold new Fauve paintings. He was impressed by the images of pleasant everyday life energetically painted with bright colors. His second sojourn to France in 1912, expressly to buy paintings for Albert Barnes, included visits to galleries and private collections, including Gertrude Stein's, making himself more familiar with the work of Paul Cézanne, Manet, Camille Pissarro, Vincent van Gogh, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir as well as Matisse. He bought canvases by each of them for Barnes.<sup>17</sup>

During the years bracketed by his European travels, the influence of French painting played an increasingly significant role in Glackens's art as he shifted from darker, monochromatic urban

subjects to the more colorful, freely brushed depictions of leisure activities that commanded his attention for the rest of his long career. Canvases painted on the shore at Cape Cod and Wickford, Rhode Island, and on Nova Scotia in the summers from 1908 to 1910 indicated Glackens's new direction.<sup>18</sup> But it was at the Folsom Gallery in New York in March 1913 with the exhibition of Bellport pictures, including possibly *Beach Side*, that critics commented that Glackens had entered a new phase of his career. Reviewers of the exhibition noted that the artist retained the sharp observational skills he had honed as an illustrator, but they were gratified to see him reaching beyond an earlier propensity for reportage to suggesting the spirit of the shore and beach life.<sup>19</sup> Charles Caffin believed that Glackens's success in this regard was the result of his "picture-seeing eye" that allowed for scenes "delightfully impressionistic in the sense that they have caught and hold . . . the magic of the momentary expression."<sup>20</sup>

Higher-keyed color was recognized as the most distinctive attribute in the Bellport paintings and was credited with injecting new life into them. The writer for the *New York Times* found the "cheerful and aggressive color breathing optimism" into the beach pictures at the Folsom Gallery.<sup>21</sup> Blue, red, and green are used in their full value and a variety of hues in *Beach Side*. The painting vibrates with color, and this quality animates the scene. While artists like Childe Hassam (q.v.) and John Henry Twachtman (q.v.) had adopted lighter palettes derived from French Impressionism since the 1890s, Glackens's use of such pure, bright color was unconventional for American painting in 1913. The *Craftsman* applauded Glackens for this "fearlessness in the demarcation of color."<sup>22</sup>

The art Glackens saw in Paris in February 1912, especially that of Matisse and Renoir, surely influenced this shift. *Beach Side's* brighter, more saturated colors certainly reflect Glackens's admiration of Matisse, but the subject and overall style correspond to deeper connections to Renoir. While later writers on Glackens have derided his dependence on Renoir, in 1913 critics mainly praised Glackens's relation to French art.<sup>23</sup> "If one is at all reminded of

Renoir,” wrote the critic for the New York *Evening Post*, “the thought of slavish imitation never arises, but rather the thought of artistic affinity. The influence of the French colorists has been felt sympathetically by the artist, yet his work has a rich personal flavor. . . . Mr. Glackens is one of the really important figures in American art.”<sup>24</sup>

Glackens clearly learned from Renoir, and the two men shared certain attitudes.<sup>25</sup> Common to both artists were an enjoyment of life, its reflection in their painting, and the use of bold color. Yet the means and ends for which they used color differed. Renoir employed color mainly to shape form. Glackens, by contrast, applied it for more expressive purposes.<sup>26</sup> While Renoir generally suppressed the visibility of his brushwork, Glackens favored vigorous strokes of varied colors that add textures and emotion, another aspect of his work that recalls Matisse and other Fauve artists. In *Beach Side*, the colorful strokes convey an ebullient atmosphere as they animate the landscape.

His work in illustration, the teachings of Robert Henri, and what he had seen firsthand in the works of French painters, notably Renoir, all contributed to Glackens’s art. Yet, when the writer from the New York *Sun* viewed *Beach Side* and the other paintings from that summer at Bellport, he acknowledged that even though Glackens was “a voracious assimilator . . . [he] has succeeded in the main in doing his own thinking . . . knows his own intentions.”<sup>27</sup> Those intentions were not just to paint a place and a time, but also to create paintings, as the critic Royal Cortissoz noted, “tingling with joy and life.”<sup>28</sup>

Through 1919 Glackens focused on seashore subjects, and his painting continued the freely brushed, festive, sunlit quality of *Beach Side*. After 1920 he devoted more time to figure painting and still life. In this last phase of his career, Glackens drew from the various aspects of early-twentieth-century art he had admired as a young man and retained his enjoyment of life at the center of his art.

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## NOTES

1. Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Eight* (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), 170.
2. White settlement began in the late seventeenth century. Martha R. Houston, ed., *Bellport: A Historical Community* (Bellport, N.Y.: The Village, 1976), 3–4; and Victor Principe, *Bellport Village and Brookhaven Hamlet* (Charleston, S.C.: Acadia Publishing, 2002), 8. The author greatly appreciates Victor Principe’s generosity with his knowledge and material about Bellport.
3. Principe, *Bellport Village and Brookhaven Hamlet*, 8, 11; George Eisen, “Sport, Recreation and Gender: Jewish Immigrant Women in Turn-of-the-Century America, 1880–1920,” *Journal of Sport History* 18 (Spring 1991), 118.
4. Principe, *Bellport Village and Brookhaven Hamlet*, 8; Marilyn E. Weigold, *The American Mediterranean: An Environmental, Economic and Social History of Long Island Sound* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1964), 86, 90, 92; Bernie Bookbinder, *Long Island: People and Places, Past and Present* (New York: Abrams, 1983), 133. On artists on Long Island, see Ronald Pisano, *The Long Island Landscape, 1865–1914*, exh. cat. (Southampton, N.Y.: Parrish Art Museum, 1981). On the north shore painters, see Ronald G. Pisano and William H. Gerdtz, *Painters of the Peconic: Edith Prellwitz and Henry Prellwitz*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2002).
5. Glackens, *William Glackens and the Eight*, 170–71.
6. Dr. Richard Wattenmaker, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, kindly shared his firsthand observations of the sketchbook with the author, Spring 2004.
7. Principe, *Bellport Village and Brookhaven Hamlet*, 16–17, 80.
8. Their second child, Lemna, was born in December 1913; William H. Gerdtz, *William Glackens*, exh. cat. (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Museum of Art; New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 89.
9. Donna Braden, *Leisure and Entertainment in America* (Dearborn, Mich.: Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, 1988), 12; and “How Long Should a Man’s Vacation Be?” *New York Times*, 31 July 1910, SM3. White-collar and mercantile employees generally received some paid vacation in the 1910s. See Hiroko Tsuchiya, “The Making of Hard Playing Americans: The Legitimization of Working Class Leisure, 1890–1929,” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1986, 320–25, 331.
10. Glackens did paint Coney Island, but only rarely, as images from about 1898 and 1907 attest. Gerdtz, *William Glackens*, 39–40. For an overview of beach use, see Russell Lynes, “At the Water’s Edge: Changing Perspectives on the Beach,” in *At the Water’s Edge*, exh. cat. (Tampa, Fla.: Tampa Museum of Art, 1989), 17–24. On Coney Island, see John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); on Atlantic City, see Charles E. Fennell, *By the Beautiful Sea: The Rise and High Times of That Great American Resort, Atlantic City* (New York: Knopf, 1975).
11. “Where to Have a Two Weeks Vacation for Fifty Dollars,” *New York Times*, 15 June 1913, X2; and “Suburban Recreation Centres Rapidly Increasing—How They Contribute to Residential Growth,” *New York Times*, 2 August 1914, X12. Private clubs were primary centers of resort activity on Long Island at this time. The Bellport Club, though more reasonably priced and open than exclusive clubs, was not entirely inclusive in the 1910s, banning Jews and African Americans. Principe, *Bellport Village and Brookhaven Hamlet*, 42; and Principe, e-mail message to the author, 24 May 2004, NAMA curatorial files.
12. For biographical information, Glackens, *William Glackens and the Eight*, offers a popular, anecdote-filled biography; more recently, Gerdtz, *William Glackens*, has given a scholarly overview of the career.



13. Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1939), 85; and Valerie Leeds, "William Glackens Reappraised," *William Glackens*, exh. cat. (New York: Gerald Peters Gallery, 2001), 13.
14. Deborah Fairman, "The Landscape of Display: The Ashcan School, Spectacle, and the Staging of Everyday Life," *Prospects* 18 (1993), 206–9. For more on this topic and with regard specifically to John Sloan, see Laurel Weintraub, "Women as Urban Spectators in John Sloan's Early Work," *American Art* 15 (Summer 2001), 72–83.
15. On Glackens and his colleagues in New York, see Rebecca Zurier, Rob Snyder, and Virginia Mecklenburg, *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, in association with W.W. Norton and Co., 1995).
16. Reviews of the landmark exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery of the Eight also had noted parallels in those painters' art to Impressionism. Gerdtz, *William Glackens*, 61, 85.
17. On the paintings Glackens bought for Barnes, see Richard J. Wattenmaker, "Dr. Albert C. Barnes and the Barnes Foundation," and Anne Distel, "Dr. Barnes in Paris," in *Great French Painting from the Barnes Foundation: From Cézanne to Matisse* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 6–7, 34.
18. Leeds, "William Glackens Reappraised," 16.
19. See, for example, "Glackens Art Seen in His Recent Works," *Sun* (New York), 5 March 1913, 9. R[oyal] C[ortissoz], "Art Exhibitions," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 20 November 1912, 7, had noted this change when he saw Bellport images the previous autumn.
20. Charles Caffin, "Eighteen Canvases by Glackens on View," *New York American*, 10 March 1913, quoted in Richard Wattenmaker, "William Glackens's Beach Scenes at Bellport," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2 (Spring 1988), 81n18, 93.
21. "Paintings by W. J. Glackens," *New York Times*, 9 March 1913, 15.
22. "Notes of General Interest: Art in New York This Season," *Craftsman* 24 (April 1913), 135.
23. William H. Gerdtz has pointed out that it is only relatively recently that Glackens's Renoir connections have had negative connotations. *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 281. Of nearly twenty reviews of the 1913 Glackens show at Folsom Gallery, only one had a negative response to Renoir's influence on his paintings. See [Royal Cortissoz], "Mr. Glackens, Mr. Frieseke and Some Others," *New-York Tribune*, 9 March 1913, sec. 2, 6.
24. "Art Notes," *Evening Post* (New York), 8 March 1913, 19.
25. Richard Wattenmaker perceptively wrote about the connections between Glackens and Renoir in "The Art of William Glackens," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1972, 257–74.
26. Ann E. Dawson, *Idol of the Moderns: Pierre-Auguste Renoir and American Painting*, exh. cat. (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2002), 27, 41.
27. "Glackens Art Seen in His Recent Works," 9.
28. C[ortissoz], "Art Exhibitions," 7.

## MARSDEN HARTLEY (1877–1943)

### *Himmel*, c. 1914–15

Oil on canvas

47<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 47<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (120 × 120.3 cm)

Gift of the Friends of Art, 56-118

*HIMMEL* EXEMPLIFIES the powerfully expressive modernist work that Marsden Hartley produced in Berlin in 1914–15. Thrilled by the brisk modernity and military pageantry of the German capital, Hartley sought to portray Berlin's energetic character through a stirring combination of abstract forms and referential signs derived from his daily observation of the city.<sup>1</sup>

Hartley painted *Himmel* in a direct and spontaneous manner, without preparatory studies or underdrawing on the canvas. Numerous revisions evident beneath the top layer of paint suggest that the artist determined the final composition through the active process of painting it. This resulted in a kaleidoscopic array of flat, brightly colored forms in white, yellow, red, blue, and green, set against a black ground that heightens their visual impact. The pictorial elements cluster densely in the center of the painting and become sparser around its borders. Several of them spill over onto the painted wooden frame, extending the picture's energies off the flat canvas and into the physical space of the viewer.

*Himmel's* most prominent feature is the red and black icon of a man on horseback, set within a yellow panel decorated with two white, eight-pointed stars. The flat, abstract elements that spread over much of the painting include ribbonlike bands, angular stripes, concentric disks, and linear stars. While initially perceived as purely decorative, each of these forms might also carry symbolic value; the disks, for example, could connote suns. Overtly referential are the words *himmel* and *hölle*—German for “heaven” and “hell”—which appear on rectangular panels in the left half of the composition.<sup>2</sup> The word *himmel* is written in yellow against a red-rimmed blue ground bearing white stars, while *hölle* is written in red against a white field. Although clearly meant to be read, the words' cursive script and their coloristic harmonization with the rest of the painting grant them a decorative quality. *Hölle* is appropriately painted a fiery, devilish red. Equally apt in the case of *himmel* are the golden lettering and star-studded blue ground, which may be associated respectively with royalty and the dome of heaven.

*Himmel's* intricate arrangement of overlapping, flat shapes, locked together in a frontally oriented composition, reveals a debt to the Synthetic Cubist paintings and collages of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, which Hartley had studied carefully in Paris. The use of words in *Himmel* also suggests the influence of the Cubists, who frequently included verbal elements in their pictures. But while the Cubists typically employed mundane words derived

from newspapers and cafés, Hartley's words have religious connotations and suggest a concern with spiritual values. Hartley's interest in the spiritual in art was stimulated by the work and writings of Wassily Kandinsky and other artists of the Blue Rider German Expressionist group, whom he had met during his first year in Germany. Yet, while Hartley was certainly affected by the European Cubists and Expressionists, the style he forged from these influences was a strongly personal one, and one that he considered distinctly American.<sup>3</sup>

Hartley traced his Americanism to his New England roots. He was born Edmund Hartley in Lewiston, Maine, and spent his childhood in Maine before moving to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1893.<sup>4</sup> He began studying art in Cleveland in 1896 and in 1899 moved to New York, where he studied at the New York School of Art and later the National Academy of Design. Beginning in 1900 Hartley returned each summer to Maine and painted landscapes in a style that gradually evolved from academic realism to Impressionism and then, after 1906, to a personal brand of Neo-Impressionism. During these years Hartley was deeply affected by the Transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and he sought to infuse his Neo-Impressionist landscapes with a sense of nature's in-dwelling divinity. Hartley also became devoted to the poetry of Walt Whitman, whose celebration of “adhesiveness” between men encouraged him to accept his own homosexuality.

In 1909 Hartley met the New York photographer and dealer Alfred Stieglitz, who gave him an exhibition at his 291 gallery that May. Through exhibitions at 291 Hartley encountered the work of Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Picasso, and began to experiment with modernist styles. In April 1912 Hartley traveled to Paris. There he met other American expatriate artists and members of the European avant-garde and joined the circle of the American writer Gertrude Stein, whose collection of paintings by Cézanne, Matisse, and Picasso further stimulated his artistic development. Hartley also participated in the homosexual subculture centered on the Restaurant Thomas and established friendships with the German sculptor Arnold Rönnebeck and his handsome young cousin Karl von Freyburg, a lieutenant in the Prussian army.

At Rönnebeck's invitation, Hartley visited Berlin in January 1913 and was captivated by the city, which he found “so alive and ultra modern and so calm and quiet.”<sup>5</sup> He was also probably pleased to discover that Berlin was home to a sizable gay community and a relatively tolerant attitude toward homosexuality. Next Hartley traveled to Munich, where he met Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter and saw paintings by Franz Marc. On his return to Paris, Hartley announced to Stieglitz, “Now it is in Germany that I find my creative conditions.”<sup>6</sup> In April he returned to Germany, meeting Marc



in Sindelsdorf and other members of the Blue Rider in Munich, arriving in Berlin on May 17.

Pre-World War I Berlin was, as Patricia McDonnell has noted, a city of stark contrasts.<sup>7</sup> With a population of more than four million by 1914, it was a major industrial and cultural center, fast-paced, up-to-date, and thoroughly cosmopolitan. At the same time, it was the capital of the Second Reich and home to the imperial court of Kaiser Wilhelm II, a conservative ruler with a taste for traditional pomp and pageantry. Both aspects of Berlin enthralled Hartley.<sup>8</sup> He expressed his enthusiasm for the pageantry of prewar Berlin in his colorful paintings of 1913–14, which, unlike the mystical abstractions that immediately preceded them, were inspired by his direct observations of the city. Many of these pictures include images of the cavalry soldiers Hartley admired as they paraded through the imperial capital.<sup>9</sup> Another recurrent motif in the artist's 1913–14 Berlin paintings is the eight-pointed star, which Hartley reportedly saw “by the thousands . . . —on the Kaiser's breast it is always—on the helmets of the thousands of soldiers—on the pavements on the tablecloths.”<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1913 Hartley proudly exhibited five paintings in the Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon (First German Autumn Salon) in Berlin. But after a year and a half in Europe he had not managed to sell a single painting, and his funds were depleted. At Stieglitz's urging, Hartley sailed back to New York in November. A solo exhibition of his recent work at 291 in January–February 1914 resulted in sufficient sales to fund another sojourn in Europe, and in March Hartley set off again for Berlin, with stops en route in London and Paris. In Paris Hartley went to Picasso's studio and saw the Spaniard's latest Synthetic Cubist paintings and collages. Hartley also visited the Salon des Indépendants, where he was impressed by Robert Delaunay's masterpiece of Orphic Cubism, *Homage to Blériot* (1914; Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland).<sup>11</sup>

Back in Berlin, Hartley embarked on a series of color abstractions featuring concentric disk forms and flat bands of color stimulated respectively by Delaunay's radiating circular motifs and the flat color planes of Synthetic Cubism.<sup>12</sup> He also completed four pictures on the theme of “Amerika,” which incorporated various motifs from American Indian culture into symmetrical, patterned designs.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, he continued to depict military subjects, producing decorative arrangements of mounted soldiers and kneeling horses juxtaposed with landscape elements and a variety of symbols including crosses and eight-pointed stars.<sup>14</sup> Hartley rendered these paintings, sometimes called his Berlin Ante-War pictures, in a palette restricted to primary colors along with white and black, and he provided them with painted frames embellished with geometric decorations.<sup>15</sup>

Although he had been greatly stimulated by the prewar pageantry of imperial Berlin, Hartley was troubled by the outbreak of World War I in early August and feared for the lives of his German friends who were to be in the war, telling Stieglitz that it was “heart-rending to see Germany's marvelous youth going off to a horrible death.”<sup>16</sup> On 23 October Hartley sadly informed Stieglitz that Arnold Rönnebeck had been wounded and was recovering in

a Berlin hospital and that Karl von Freyburg had been killed in action on 7 October.<sup>17</sup>

Devastated by the loss of his cherished friend, Hartley found himself unable to paint for several weeks. Then, on 3 November, he reported to Stieglitz that he had at last returned to the easel and was “working out some war motives.”<sup>18</sup> Hartley's War Motif paintings, which he created over the next year, are tightly knit, rigidly frontal arrangements of boldly colored shapes and patterns, interspersed with symbolic numbers, letters, and fragments of German military paraphernalia and insignia.<sup>19</sup> Flattened out and interlocked, these various images form an overall design of overlapping planes similar in character to Picasso's Synthetic Cubist compositions. The coarse brushwork and brilliant palette of saturated reds, blues, yellows, and greens, however, owe more to Kandinsky and other German Expressionists. The intensity of the colors is heightened by the black ground that surrounds them, which imparts to the paintings a solemn, funereal undertone.<sup>20</sup> The War Motif series has been convincingly interpreted as a memorial to Karl von Freyburg. Several of the pictures, including the famous *Portrait of a German Officer* (1914; Metropolitan Museum of Art), are symbolic portraits of von Freyburg and contain specific references to him.<sup>21</sup>

With its stirring panoply of brightly colored shapes and patterns set against a black ground, *Himmel* is close in style to the War Motif paintings. Strictly speaking it does not, however, belong to that series, because, although it contains some military motifs—the eight-pointed stars, concentric circles that evoke helmet cockades, and two starlike forms at the upper right that suggest spurs—it includes no specific references to Karl von Freyburg. There are good reasons to suppose that *Himmel* was in fact painted before the style and iconography of the War Motif pictures had crystallized. While *Himmel* has traditionally been dated to 1915, Barbara Haskell dated it to 1914 because it displays “structural and imagistic characteristics of earlier paintings.”<sup>22</sup> *Himmel* indeed shares with such mid-1914 paintings as *Indian Composition* (Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.) and *Berlin Ante-War* (Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio) the compositional device of a large circular motif at the upper center, atop a loosely defined vertical axis around which subordinate forms are arranged. A further connection to the American Indian paintings is suggested by *Himmel*'s combination of concentric orbs and radiating stripes that hints at a feathered Indian shield or headdress, and the two conical elements beneath the orbs whose complex patterns evoke Native American beadwork.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding this stylistic affinity with Native American decoration, these conical forms may have a very different, distinctively German source, as the art historian Reinhild Janzen has proposed: each may be a stylized rendition of a *Zuckertüte* (literally, a “sugar bag”)—a tall, brightly colored, cone-shaped container, filled with candy and toys, that is traditionally given by German parents to their children on the first day of school in the fall (Fig. 1).<sup>24</sup> Hartley's reasons for possibly alluding to this tradition in *Himmel* are unknown. Since he filled his Berlin paintings with forms gleaned



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from his daily observation of the city, he may simply have included the *Zuckertuete* decorations because of their visual appeal. Meanwhile, further allusions to childhood may be present in *Himmel*. The mounted figure at lower right might be based on one of the toy Prussian soldiers that Hartley collected in Germany (Fig. 2). Furthermore, Janzen notes that the words in Hartley's painting are written in measured calligraphy reminiscent of German school-taught script.<sup>25</sup> She also notes that these words could refer to the German variety of hopscotch known as *Himmel und Hölle* as well as to an identically named game of chance played with a piece of paper folded into compartments designated "Himmel" and "Hölle" (through the colors blue and red, or through the written words), which one player reveals by opening the number of folds called out by another player.<sup>26</sup> In both of these games, the winner ends up, imaginatively, in heaven, the loser in hell. Whether Hartley knew these games cannot be determined, but their existence indicates the degree to which the dualistic concepts of salvation and damnation, paradise and hell, pervaded German popular culture, finding expression even in children's games, as they do in Hartley's painting.

Aspects of Hartley's prewar military paintings also survive in *Himmel*, further separating it from the War Motif series. The

Fig. 1 *Herzlichen Glückwunsch zum ersten Schultag* (*Congratulations on Your First Day of School*), 1909. Postcard, 5½ × 3½ in. (13.9 × 8.8 cm). Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1991/731

sawtoothed orb at the upper left is seen in earlier abstractions such as *Pre-War Pageant* (1914; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio) but does not reappear in the War Motif series. The compartmentalized image of the horse and rider at the lower right of *Himmel* echoes Hartley's use of inset images in the lower register of *Berlin Ante-War* and also recalls the former painting's central motif of a cavalry officer. Finally, *Himmel* also has a painted frame like the Berlin Ante-War pictures and related abstractions such as *The Aero* (c. 1914; National Gallery of Art), whereas none of the War Motif paintings has a painted frame, nor is there any evidence that they once did.<sup>27</sup>

Hartley likely painted *Himmel* sometime near the beginning of the war in the late summer or early fall of 1914, before the 7 October death of von Freyburg. Bruce Robertson, who, like Haskell, dates the picture to 1914, suggests that it was meant to "honor the young men who were marching off to a 'horrible death' . . . to the 'Himmel' and 'Hölle' . . . of the future."<sup>28</sup> Reinforcing this interpretation is the image of the mounted ruler on horseback at the lower right. Gail Levin suggests that this figure may be meant to evoke Daniel Christian Rauch's gigantic nineteenth-century monument to Frederick the Great, located near the Staatsbibliothek (City Library) on the Unter den Linden.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, the departing German troops paraded down the Unter den Linden on their way to the front, presumably passing the statue of the great Prussian ruler as they went off to war. In this context, the several eight-pointed stars that punctuate the composition of *Himmel* evoke the "yellow + white fire" that Hartley described as glinting on the foreheads of parading soldiers.



Fig. 2 Manufacturer unknown, Tin Soldier; n.d. 2¾ × 3¼ in. (7 × 8.3 cm). Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Bates College Museum of Art

It is still possible, however, that Hartley completed *Himmel* after the death of von Freyburg and intended the painting as a memorial to him. Levin, who accepts the date of 1915 for the canvas, suggests that in evoking the monument to Frederick the Great, Hartley was perhaps thinking of his deceased friend “who, unlike the Prussian leader, would merit no public memorial sculpture.”<sup>30</sup> Henry Adams also interprets the picture as a tribute to von Freyburg and, on the basis of Hartley’s strong feelings toward the slain officer, interprets the split between heaven and hell as a probable reference “both to the contrast between the glory and horror of war, and to the contrast between the ecstasy and despair of love.”<sup>31</sup>

In October 1915 Hartley displayed forty-five of his recent paintings in the galleries of the Münchener Graphik Verlag in Berlin. As no checklist of the exhibition survives, it is uncertain whether *Himmel* was among the paintings on view.<sup>32</sup> *Himmel* was definitely included in the exhibition of Hartley’s Berlin work at 291 in April 1916, which followed his return to the United States in December 1915.<sup>33</sup> Avant-garde critics admired Hartley’s pictures, but their public reception was apparently clouded by the anti-German sentiment prevailing among American viewers. Hoping perhaps to forestall interpretation of his paintings as pro-German, Hartley wrote a brief catalogue statement claiming:

The forms are only those which I have observed casually from day to day. There is no hidden symbolism whatsoever in them; there is no slight intention of that anywhere. Things under observation, just pictures of any day, any hour. I have expressed only what I have seen. They are merely consultations of the eye, in no sense problems, my notion of the purely pictorial.<sup>34</sup>

Present-day art historians have taken Hartley’s words as a challenge to uncover the symbolism he denied was in his Berlin paintings and have revealed them to hold a rich variety of associations surpassing casual daily observation. *Himmel* and Hartley’s other Berlin pictures embody the painter’s most intense experiences, poignant memories, and deepest feelings, expressed in an artistic language of singular power. Today they are justly regarded as masterpieces of American modernism.

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## NOTES

1. For a consideration of Hartley’s Berlin paintings in the context of other early modernist images of the metropolis, see Patricia McDonnell, “‘Portrait of Berlin’: Marsden Hartley and Urban Modernity in Expressionist Berlin,” in *Marsden Hartley*, ed. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2002), 39–57. For her assistance in the preparation of this entry, I am grateful to Patricia McDonnell.
2. Ignoring the grammatical rule that German nouns are always capitalized, Hartley rendered these words with lowercase initial letters.
3. Hartley observed in a letter to his dealer Alfred Stieglitz, written shortly after his first visit to Berlin, “I could never be French—I could never become german [*sic*]—I shall always remain American—the essence which is in me is American mysticism.” Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, 8 February 1913, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter Yale), quoted in Gail R. Scott, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 44.
4. Hartley’s mother died in 1885 and four years later his father married Martha Marsden. In 1906 Hartley adopted the maiden name of his stepmother as his middle name, and in 1908 he dropped the name Edmund to become Marsden Hartley.
5. Marsden Hartley, postcard to Nonna Berger, 8 January 1913, Yale, quoted in Townsend Luddington, *Marsden Hartley: The Biography of an American Artist* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1992), 92.
6. Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, February 1913, Yale, quoted in Luddington, *Marsden Hartley*, 93.
7. Patricia McDonnell, *Dictated by Life: Marsden Hartley’s German Paintings and Robert Indiana’s Hartley Elegies*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, 1995), 10–11, 23.
8. “I like the life color of Berlin,” Hartley wrote to Stieglitz shortly after settling there. “It has movement and energy and leans always a little over the edge of the future. . . . It is essentially the center of modern life in Europe. . . . The military adds so much in the way of a sense of perpetual gaiety here in Berlin. It gives the stranger like myself the feeling that some great festival is being celebrated always.” Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, May or June 1913, Yale, quoted in McDonnell, *Dictated by Life*, 23.
9. McDonnell, *Dictated by Life*, emphasizes Hartley’s homosexual attraction to these martial displays of manhood—an attraction sensed in the artist’s loving description in his autobiography of “those huge cuirassiers of the Kaiser’s special guard—all in white—white leather breeches skin tight—high plain enamel boots—those gleaming blinding medieval breast plates of silver and brass—the inspiring helmets with the imperial eagle and the white manes hanging down—there was six foot of youth under all this garniture.” Marsden Hartley, *Somehow a Past: The Autobiography of Marsden Hartley*, ed. Susan Elizabeth Ryan (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 90.
10. Marsden Hartley, postcard to Alfred Stieglitz, 28 June 1913, Yale, quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 32. Hartley observed that Frederick the Great also wore the eight-pointed star and that “the occult say it has deep symbolism—but I don’t know as far as that—I only know it is much prettier than the American five-point—much more radiant and life-giving—and in the sunlight on all the hundreds of foreheads it looks like real fire—yellow + white fire, not red ever.” Hartley to Gertrude Stein, June 1913, Yale, quoted in Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, 140n95.
11. Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, 42.
12. For instance, *Pre-War Pageant* (1914; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio).
13. For instance, *Indian Fantasy* (1914; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh).
14. For instance, *Berlin Ante-War* (1914; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio).

15. Kandinsky's painted frames are identified as a probable source for Hartley's in Gail Levin, *Marsden Hartley: Six Berlin Paintings, 1913–1915*, exh. cat. (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1992), 13. Patricia McDonnell, letter to the author, 1 November 1999, suggested that Kandinsky's and Marc's painted furniture and architectural decoration may have inspired Hartley's painted frames.
16. Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, 2 September 1914. Yale, quoted in William H. Robinson, "Marsden Hartley's *Military*," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 76 (January 1989), 11.
17. Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, 23 October 1914. Yale, quoted in *ibid.*, 12. Hartley described von Freyburg as "in every way a perfect being—physically, spiritually and mentally, beautifully balanced—24 years young." He termed the officer's death "the most pathetic sacrifice of our time," lamenting, "I shall never see his equal again." Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, 29 October 1914, Yale, quoted in *ibid.*, 20. In death, von Freyburg came to represent for Hartley the romantic ideal of male beauty and nobility, tragically cut down in its prime.
18. Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, 3 November 1914, Yale, quoted in *ibid.*, 13.
19. On the War Motif paintings, see Gail Levin, "Hidden Symbolism in Marsden Hartley's Military Pictures," *Arts Magazine* 54 (October 1979), 154–58; Roxana Barry, "The Age of Blood and Iron: Marsden Hartley in Berlin," *Arts Magazine* 54 (October 1979), 166–71; Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, 43–45; Robinson, "Marsden Hartley's *Military*"; Bruce Robertson, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 56–66; and McDonnell, *Dictated by Life*.
20. The only War Motif painting that does not have a black ground is *Painting No. 49, Berlin* (1914–15; private collection), whose bright colors float against a field of light silver.
21. For instance, his initials ("Kv.F"), his age ("24"), his regiment number ("4"), and the Iron Cross he was awarded the day before he was killed appear. Most of the paintings also feature a black-and-white checkerboard pattern that evokes von Freyburg's love of chess.
22. Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, 44.
23. W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 57–58, notes that "Hartley . . . incorporated the symmetry, emblematic forms, and geometric patterns of Native American art into his German military pictures."
24. Reinhild Janzen, e-mail message to Randall Griffey, 14 January 2004. According to one source, the "history of the *Zuckertüte* harks back to the year 1810 in the Germanic regions of Saxonia and Thuringia, where wealthy, privately-schooled children received large cone-shaped bags filled with sweets and toys to celebrate their first day of school. It wasn't until much later that the middle and lower class children were brought in from the fields to begin public school. From then on, the practice was mainstreamed and has grown into a time-honored back-to-school routine. It wasn't until 1910 when this handcrafted tradition was compromised. Carl August Nestler from Wiesa in Saxonia began to mass-produce the token bags. Today more than 700,000 candy bags are sold every year in Germany." German Agricultural Marketing Board, "A Taste of Germany," [www.germanfoods.org/consumer/fallholidays.cfm](http://www.germanfoods.org/consumer/fallholidays.cfm) (accessed 27 May 2004). Janzen, who grew up in Germany, also notes that Hartley's forms resemble the *Zuckerhut*, "a compressed sugar sold in a conical paper or cardboard container" that is decorated in a fashion similar to the *Zuckertüte*.
25. Janzen to Griffey, 14 January 2004.
26. Reinhild Janzen, e-mail message to Randall Griffey, 9 November 2003. For a description of the German hopscotch game *Himmel und Hölle*, also known as *Paradies Hüpfen*, see Mary D. Lankford, *Hopscotch around the World*, illustrated by Karen Milone (New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1992), 18–19.
27. It should be noted, however, that at least one painting from 1915, *Schiff* (Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg, Halle, Germany), has a painted frame, proving that Hartley did not entirely abandon this device after commencing his War Motif series.
28. Robertson, *Marsden Hartley*, 53.
29. Levin, *Marsden Hartley: Six Berlin Paintings*, 12. The same contention also was made by Reinhild Janzen, who writes: "The equestrian image alludes to monuments of the first Prussian King, perhaps to an equestrian monument of Frederick the Great." Janzen to Griffey, 14 January 2004.
30. Levin, *Marsden Hartley: Six Berlin Paintings*, 12.
31. Henry Adams, *Handbook of American Paintings* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1991), 165. Adams's interpretation is echoed in the entry for the painting by Deborah Emont Scott in *Made in America: Ten Centuries of American Art*, ed. Kathryn C. Johnson, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1995), 138.
32. Patricia McDonnell, e-mail message to the author, 2 July 1999, confirmed that the catalogue of the Berlin exhibition has not been located. The main source of information about this exhibition is an unsigned article by an American reporter, "American Artist Astounds Germans," *New York Times*, 19 December 1915, sec. 6, 4.
33. *Himmel's* presence in the 291 exhibition is confirmed by its identification in a review: "There is one composition, in which the statue on horseback of an early Prussian ruler appears surrounded by designs among which appear the words which in German signify Heaven and Hell." "The Martial Spirit of Marsden Hartley," *American Art News* 14 (8 April 1916), 9.
34. Marsden Hartley, catalogue statement, quoted in Henry McBride, "Current News of Art and the Exhibitions," *Sun* (New York), 9 April 1916, sec. 6, 8; reprinted in *Camera Work*, October 1916, 59.

## MARSDEN HARTLEY (1877–1943)

### *Mt. Katahdin—November Afternoon, 1942*

Oil on Masonite

30 × 40 in. (76.2 × 101.6 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: M. H. / 42

Gift of Mrs. James A. Reed in memory of Senator James A. Reed, through the Friends of Art, 46-3

DURING THE LAST FOUR YEARS of his life, Marsden Hartley painted some eighteen pictures of Mt. Katahdin, the highest and most famous peak in his native state of Maine. Inspired by a visit in October 1939 he made to the mountain, which Hartley later described as a “‘saered’ pilgrimage,” this extended portrait of Katahdin culminated Hartley’s lifelong fascination with the mountain as an artistic subject and played a central role in his bid to gain recognition as the “official” painter of Maine.<sup>1</sup>

Hartley was attracted to mountain landscapes throughout his career and painted them with regularity.<sup>2</sup> Like the nineteenth-century Hudson River School landscape artists before him, Hartley was conditioned by his reading of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists to find divinity in nature and to equate the mountain with God. His earliest mature paintings, painted between 1907 and 1909, were Neo-Impressionist views of the mountains of Maine, which Hartley described as “efforts at rendering the God-spirit in the mountains.”<sup>3</sup>

In his subsequent wanderings about North America and Europe, Hartley returned time and again to the motif of the mountain. A proud and lonely man who routinely experienced financial privation and professional frustration, Hartley seems to have identified with the mountain’s majestic solitude and found in it a source of solace and strength. A sojourn in Taos and Santa Fe in 1918–19 generated a series of pastels and paintings of the New Mexico mountains, which Hartley continued to depict in New York in 1919–20, and in his New Mexico Recollections series of 1923–24, executed in Europe. Relocating to the south of France, Hartley painted the Provençal Alps in 1925–27 and in 1927–28 numerous canvases of Mont Sainte-Victoire, the peak made famous by Paul Cézanne. In 1930 Hartley painted the White Mountains of New Hampshire and two years later, on a Guggenheim Fellowship-funded trip to Mexico, created visionary pictures of the great volcano Popocatepetl. And on his final voyage to Europe, Hartley in 1933–34 drew and painted the Bavarian Alps in the area of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

The poor reception of these German mountainscapes, combined with the then widespread calls by American critics for Americanness in art, prompted Hartley’s decision in the later 1930s to return to his New England roots and reconnect artistically with his “native continent of Maine.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps taking his cue from the

highly successful midwestern Regionalists Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), and John Steuart Curry (q.v.), whose self-consciously nativist work (which Hartley despised) celebrated the rural heartland and its traditional values, Hartley now positioned himself as a New England Regionalist, who would root his art in the Maine land and its people, and assert his own Americanness along with that of the region.<sup>5</sup> After publicly declaring himself “the painter from Maine,”<sup>6</sup> Hartley in the summer of 1937 went back to his home state for the first extended period since 1911 and for the remaining six years of his life spent at least nine months of every year there, searching for subjects that would solidify his reputation as Maine’s foremost painter. Adopting an expressionistic style whose rough and “primitive” vitality connoted Americanness to both the painter and his critics,<sup>7</sup> Hartley became a painter of Maine motifs: the rocky shoreline and crashing waves of the Atlantic coast; hardy lumberjacks, fishermen, and swimmers; isolated still-life subjects such as dead seabirds, fish, and seashells, bouquets of roses, fisherman’s ropes, and gloves; and, perhaps most important, Mt. Katahdin.

Donna Cassidy has argued that Hartley’s return to Maine was calculated to please the New York art market, which in the later 1930s was hungry for images of Maine.<sup>8</sup> His decision to paint Katahdin, the preeminent symbol of the Maine wilderness, was likely encouraged by the mountain’s growing renown as a tourist destination.<sup>9</sup> The Katahdin area had become increasingly popular as a vacation spot during the 1920s and 1930s thanks to the efforts of the Appalachian Mountain Club—Katahdin is the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail—and the Bangor and Aroostook Railway, both of which arranged expeditions to the area and promoted the mountain in their publications.<sup>10</sup> Also serving to popularize the area was the 1931 founding of Baxter State Park, which included most of Katahdin.

Described by a nineteenth-century surveyor as “the highest point in the State of Maine and . . . the most abrupt granite mountain in New England,”<sup>11</sup> Katahdin is a ten-mile-long ledge that rises 5,267 feet above sea level, in the midst of a vast forest eighty miles north of Bangor. The peak was named by the Indians of the area (*Katahdin* simply means “the highest land”), who considered it the home of their gods and feared to climb it. For the white settlers, Katahdin became a potent symbol of the primeval wilderness and a challenging goal for mountain climbing. The most famous ascent of Katahdin was that of Henry David Thoreau, the Concord Transcendentalist, who traveled to the mountain with a small band of adventurers in September 1846 and described the journey in an essay, “Ktaadn,” serialized in the *Union Magazine* in 1848 and later incorporated into *The Maine Woods*.<sup>12</sup> Thoreau found Katahdin a forbidding precinct, “an undone extremity of the globe . . . vast,





Titanic, and such as man never inhabits.”<sup>13</sup> Alone amid Katahdin’s cloud-shrouded peaks, the Sage of Walden Pond felt his vitality sapped and his reason threatened.

Katahdin appeared equally awesome from a distance, as a passage from the Maine historian, folklorist, and naturalist Fannie Hardy Eckstorm suggests:

Mount Katahdin rules over all the West Branch country, a calm despot. Mute, massive, immense, hard-featured, broad shouldered, nowhere can you get in that country where the broad forehead of Katahdin is not turned upon you. Snow and rain it sends to that region; it floods the river from its flanks; its back cuts off the north wind, making the valley hot. . . . Katahdin makes all that region what it is.<sup>14</sup>

Hartley, an avid reader of New England literature, knew and admired Thoreau’s and Eckstorm’s writings on Katahdin and was inspired by these, as well as by the mountain’s popularity as a tourist attraction, to make his own pilgrimage to Katahdin to stake an artistic claim to it. Arriving in Bangor in September 1939, he prepared himself for the journey. “Next month I go up to Mt. Katahdin to paint the ‘sacred mountain’ as I have wanted to for years,” the artist wrote to a friend, “and I must put myself on record as having done it—and as far as I know it has never appeared in art—I have elected myself official portrait painter. I *must get* that Mt. for future reason of fame and success.”<sup>15</sup>

In early October, Caleb Scribner, a Maine state game warden, drove Hartley north from Bangor to a point near the mountain, then led him on a hike of nearly four miles into Cobbs Camp on the shores of Lake Katahdin. The final leg of the journey, which took place in the dark along a slippery trail, was a great challenge to the sixty-two-year-old artist, who was in poor physical condition and fell several times along the way. From Cobbs Camp, Hartley could see the mountain’s most striking profile, a conical shape that was visible only from this southern vantage point.<sup>16</sup> Hartley did not attempt to climb the mountain but remained at its base for eight days, making numerous sketches and at least two oil studies of it. Following his return to Bangor, Hartley described the journey as an epiphany: “I have achieved the ‘sacred’ pilgrimage to Ktaadn Mt—exceeding all my expectations so far that I am sort of helpless with words—I feel as if I had seen God for the first time—and find him so nonchalantly solemn.”<sup>17</sup>

The studies Hartley brought back from his “pilgrimage” to Katahdin provided the basis for the extensive series of paintings he produced over the next three years. Depicting the ever solemn Katahdin in different seasons and under different atmospheric conditions, all of the paintings are variations on the same compositional theme: a foreground lake, a stand of pines in the middle ground, and a mountainous background, dominated by the dark, massive shape of Katahdin, which rises from the left and culminates in a crenellated peak near the upper center, capped by an expanse of sky. Seen from an elevated viewpoint, unlike the one actually occupied by Hartley at Lake Katahdin, the landscape

resolves itself into a series of horizontal bands punctuated by the jutting head of the mountain. Gail Scott describes this arrangement as an “iconic gestalt image,” which “lent itself naturally to . . . thematic serialization. Like the different voices of a fugue, the four landscape elements of lake, middle ground . . . mountain, and sky constitute an intrinsic compositional unity from which arise a rich interplay of melodies.”<sup>18</sup>

In painting the Nelson-Atkins *Mt. Katahdin—November Afternoon*, Hartley simplified the forms of the landscape and reduced his palette to a few essential hues to achieve an image of austere beauty. Hartley executed the picture in oil paint with a lean vehicle, smoothly and flatly applied to an unprimed, varnished panel of Masonite. The Masonite’s natural reddish hue, deepened and rendered glossy by the shellac he applied before painting, provides the picture’s dominant, autumnal tone. In several areas of the forest, the shiny red surface of the Masonite is left unpainted and allowed to function as a positive color.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, this rusty color is submerged beneath the surface pigments, bleeding through the chalky white of the clouds, the powdery blue of the sky, the grayed purple of the mountain, the sandy tan of the beach, and the deep blue of the water. The use of cool blues and purples over a warm red ground suggests the distinctive fall climate of the Katahdin area, with its bracing combination of sunshine and shadow, warmth and chill. At the same time, the tight, layered compositional arrangement and flat, even lighting impart to the landscape a curious quality of immobility, as if this remote and unpopulated wilderness were frozen in time.<sup>20</sup>

Dominating the landscape is the imposing mass of Katahdin, rendered with hard, linear outlines that convey a quality of implacable solidity. Lording over the lake and forest, the mountain extends its granite influence even to the clouds, which in its orbit take on a rocklike aspect at odds with their expected physical lightness. “A mountain is not a space, it is a thing,” Hartley had written ten years earlier, “it is a body surrounded by illimitable ethers, it lives its own life like the sea and the sky, and differs from them in that little or nothing can be done to it by the ravages of silent agencies.”<sup>21</sup> As he had in *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, *Popocatepetl*, and the *Bavarian Alps*, Hartley found in Katahdin an icon of majestic solitude and permanence that counterbalanced his sense of his own insecure existence. But Katahdin took on special meaning above these other peaks because Hartley, the self-proclaimed “painter from Maine,” saw it as *his*. “Ktaadn has saved me again,” he wrote shortly after beginning the series, “and I feel as if I shall be rivalling Hiroshige who published 80 views of Fujiyama . . . —and Cézanne, his *Victoires*. It is my mountain—and so that is established history. . . . [I] am the only native ever to paint the Mt. seriously. I will be famous alone for that.”<sup>22</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, 24 October 1939, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), quoted in Jeanne Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids: The Art of Marsden Hartley* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 111.
2. For a detailed consideration of Hartley's paintings of mountains, see *ibid.*
3. Hartley to Horace Traubel, 10 February 1907, quoted in *Heart's Gate: Letters between Marsden Hartley and Horace Traubel, 1905–1915*, ed. William Innes Homer (Highlands, N.C.: Jargon Society, 1982), 24.
4. Marsden Hartley, "On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine (1937)," in Hartley, *On Art*, ed. Gail Scott (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), 115. This essay was originally published as the catalogue foreword to Hartley's 1937 exhibition at Alfred Stieglitz's An American Place—an exhibition that, ironically, included no images of Maine.
5. For detailed analyses of Hartley as a New England Regionalist, see Donna M. Cassidy, "'On the Subject of Nativeness': Marsden Hartley and New England Regionalism," *Wintertuur Portfolio* 29 (Winter 1994), 227–45; and eadem, "Localized Glory: Marsden Hartley as New England Regionalist," in *Marsden Hartley*, ed. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2002), 175–92.
6. Hartley, "On the Subject of Nativeness," 115.
7. For an excellent analysis of this point, see Randall R. Griffey, "Marsden Hartley's Late Paintings: American Masculinity and National Identity in the 1930s and '40s." Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1999. See also Carol Troyen, "The 'Nativeness' of 'Primitive Things': Marsden Hartley's Late Work in Context," in Kornhauser, *Marsden Hartley*, 239–53.
8. Cassidy, "'On the Subject of Nativeness,'" 237. Among the artists whose Maine images were exhibited in New York's commercial galleries and museums in 1936, the year before Hartley's resettlement, were Bangor artist Waldo Peirce, Winslow Homer (q.v.), and John Marin. The last was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, for which Hartley wrote an appreciative catalogue essay.
9. *Ibid.*, 239–40. See also Cassidy, "Localized Glory," 184–85.
10. Cassidy, "Localized Glory," 184, summarizes two articles by Myron H. Avery on Katahdin's history and artists, respectively, which appeared in 1939 and 1940 in the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad's promotional magazine, *In the Maine Woods*.
11. Charles T. Jackson, quoted in Henry David Thoreau, "Ktaadn" (1864), in *The Maine Woods*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 65.
12. "Ktaadn" is chief among several alternative spellings of the mountain's name and was the one most often used by Hartley.
13. Thoreau, "Ktaadn," 63, 64.
14. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, *The Penobscot Man* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1904), 123.
15. Hartley to Helen Stein, 29 September 1939, in Helen Stein Papers, AAA, quoted in Cassidy, "'On the Subject of Nativeness,'" 240. Hartley was at this point evidently unaware that Mt. Katahdin had in fact been depicted by earlier painters, most notably Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), who visited and painted it several times in the 1850s and 1870s. Church was singled out as "the master painter of Katahdin" by Myron H. Avery, "Artists and Katahdin" (1940), in *In the Maine Woods*, 18, quoted in Cassidy, "Localized Glory," 184.
16. Hartley later wrote to his friend Carl Sprinchorn, a fellow Maine artist: "Katahdin is only conical at just the spot where I was; you know how it looks broadside—not very attractive as a painting form." Quoted in Gorham Mims, "Homage to Marsden Hartley: The Painter from Maine," *Arts Magazine* 35 (February 1961), 41. Donna Cassidy notes that the southern aspect of Katahdin had, by the time of Hartley's visit, become the standard "tourist view" featured in travel brochures. Cassidy, "'On the Subject of Nativeness,'" 239.
17. Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, 24 October 1939, in AAA, quoted in Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, 111.
18. Gail R. Scott, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 132.
19. Hartley employed a similar technique in other paintings of Mt. Katahdin. For example, he painted *Mount Katahdin* (1941; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.) in oil over a shellacked fiberboard ground, allowing the red of the fiberboard to show through in several places to create a middle tone in the painting's chromatic scale. I am grateful to Hirshhorn staff members Judith Zilczer, Curator of Paintings, and Susan Lake, Painting and Research Conservator, for sharing with me this information about their museum's Mt. Katahdin painting.
20. David William Olds, "A Study of Marsden Hartley's Mt. Katahdin Series, 1939–1942," M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1978, 43, makes this observation about *Mount Katahdin, Maine* (1942; National Gallery of Art); it is perhaps even more apt in describing the Nelson-Atkins painting.
21. Marsden Hartley, "On the Subject of the Mountain: Letter to Messieurs Segantini and Hodler" (1932), reprinted in Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, 135.
22. Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, 2 February 1940, in AAA, quoted in Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids*, 111.

## CHILDE HASSAM (1859–1935)

### *The Sonata*, 1893

(*The Maréchal Niel Rose; Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata*)

Oil on canvas, mounted on board

32½ × 32½ in. (81.3 × 81.3 cm)

Signed and dated upper right: Childe Hassam 1893

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha, 52-5

PICTURES OF THOUGHTFUL, solitary young women in elegantly furnished interiors enjoyed a considerable vogue in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. The women in these pictures commonly bow their heads or turn away from the viewer to contemplate a beautiful object, read a book, or finger a musical instrument. These beautiful and erudite ladies served as emblems of leisure, culture, and taste—qualities increasingly connected with American women of the upper class and with the private world of the domestic interior.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Wilmer Dewing and the artists of the Boston School specialized in pictures of this type, whereas Childe Hassam is best known for his brilliantly colored Impressionist landscapes and cityscapes. Nevertheless, Hassam produced nearly thirty paintings depicting young women in interiors over the course of his career. *The Sonata* is one of the earliest of these, and Hassam considered it one of his most important works.<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Childe Hassam was born in Dorechester, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston.<sup>3</sup> He began a career as an engraver and illustrator at the age of seventeen. With the goal of becoming a painter, he took evening classes at the Boston Art Club and private lessons with the self-taught American artist William Rimmer and with the Munich-trained academician Ignaz Gaugengigl. Even at this early point in his career Hassam was drawn to contemporary subject matter, and his first oil paintings were Boston street scenes executed in an atmospheric, Tonalist style. In 1886 Hassam left for France in search of academic art training.<sup>4</sup> Like many other American art students at this time, he studied at the Académie Julian under Jules-Joseph Lefebvre and Gustave Boulanger, both pillars of the French academic establishment. However, Hassam quickly grew frustrated with the strictures of the academy. By 1888 he had largely abandoned formal art training and spent more and more time wandering the streets and neighborhoods of Paris in search of subjects for his paintings.

The time that Hassam spent in Paris did much to enhance his reputation. After a short visit to London, he returned to the United States in the autumn of 1889 with a bronze medal from that year's Exposition Universelle, an even more prestigious gold medal from the Salon of 1888, and excellent notices from French critics. Hassam's Paris sojourn also had a profound impact on his style. Although the artist later insisted that he had never so much as heard of Claude Monet or the other French Impressionists while

he was in Paris, his paintings tell a different story.<sup>5</sup> In Paris, his palette brightened, and he abandoned his former blended, atmospheric brushwork in favor of a broken and spontaneous facture. *Marlborough Street, Boston* (q.v.), which Hassam probably painted immediately on his return to the United States, shows just how thoroughly he had assimilated Impressionist techniques. In this sketch, Hassam dragged his brilliant colors quickly over a bright white ground. The impression conveyed, of swift-moving modern life taken in at a glance, echoes canvases painted years earlier by Monet, for instance *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo.).

Shortly after his return to the United States, Hassam moved to New York, the center of the American art world. Around this same time, he widened his range of subjects to include flower gardens, seascapes, and interior scenes. He began spending his summers on Appledore Island, one of the Isles of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire. There he joined a coterie of artists, writers, and musicians surrounding the poet and gardener Celia Thaxter. A disciple of the Aesthetic Movement, Thaxter preached the soothing and civilizing influence of beauty and promoted its artful infusion into all aspects of daily life.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1890s Hassam also became an admirer of James McNeill Whistler, whose art-for-art's-sake philosophy was a central tenet of the Aesthetic Movement. Hassam painted a series of poetic, semiabstract night scenes, which he titled "Nocturnes" in tribute to Whistler. Hassam's depiction of a musical subject in *The Sonata* may also have been inspired by Whistler, who affirmed in his influential *Ten O'Clock Lecture*,

Nature contains the elements of color and form of all pictures as the keyboard contains the notes of all music, but the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements—that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos, glorious harmony.<sup>7</sup>

By the 1890s Whistler's work had won widespread acceptance by the critical establishment in the United States. French Impressionism, by contrast, was still disparaged as a scientific transcription of nature, pleasing to the eye but lacking depth and intellectual content.<sup>8</sup> In *The Sonata*, Hassam set out to distance himself from the French Impressionists and ally himself with Whistler and the Aesthetic Movement by painting an idealized figure in a carefully constructed, Aesthetic composition that had as its subject the effect of beauty on a delicate and refined sensibility.

*The Sonata* depicts a young woman seated at a piano, lost in contemplation of the music she has just finished playing. The room



Fig. 1 James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 20 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (76.5 × 51.1 cm). Tate Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

she occupies is decorated with a hanging Japanese scroll and one of Hassam's Whistleresque Nocturnes in a simple, gilt frame.<sup>9</sup> The combination of Eastern and Western art, carefully arranged against dark green walls, marks this as an Aesthetic interior.<sup>10</sup> Like *The Room of Flowers* (1894; private collection), *The Sonata* evokes an interior world of beauty and sensory pleasure in which a seated woman is enclosed. The scents of the yellow roses and the extinguished candle seem to mingle in the sun-warmed air with the fading notes of the piano. With her head bowed and her gaze turned inward, Hassam's subject appears to be nearly overwhelmed by the intensity of her aesthetic experience. Like the figure in Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (Fig. 1), she is both a beautiful object of the gaze and an enraptured respondent to beauty.

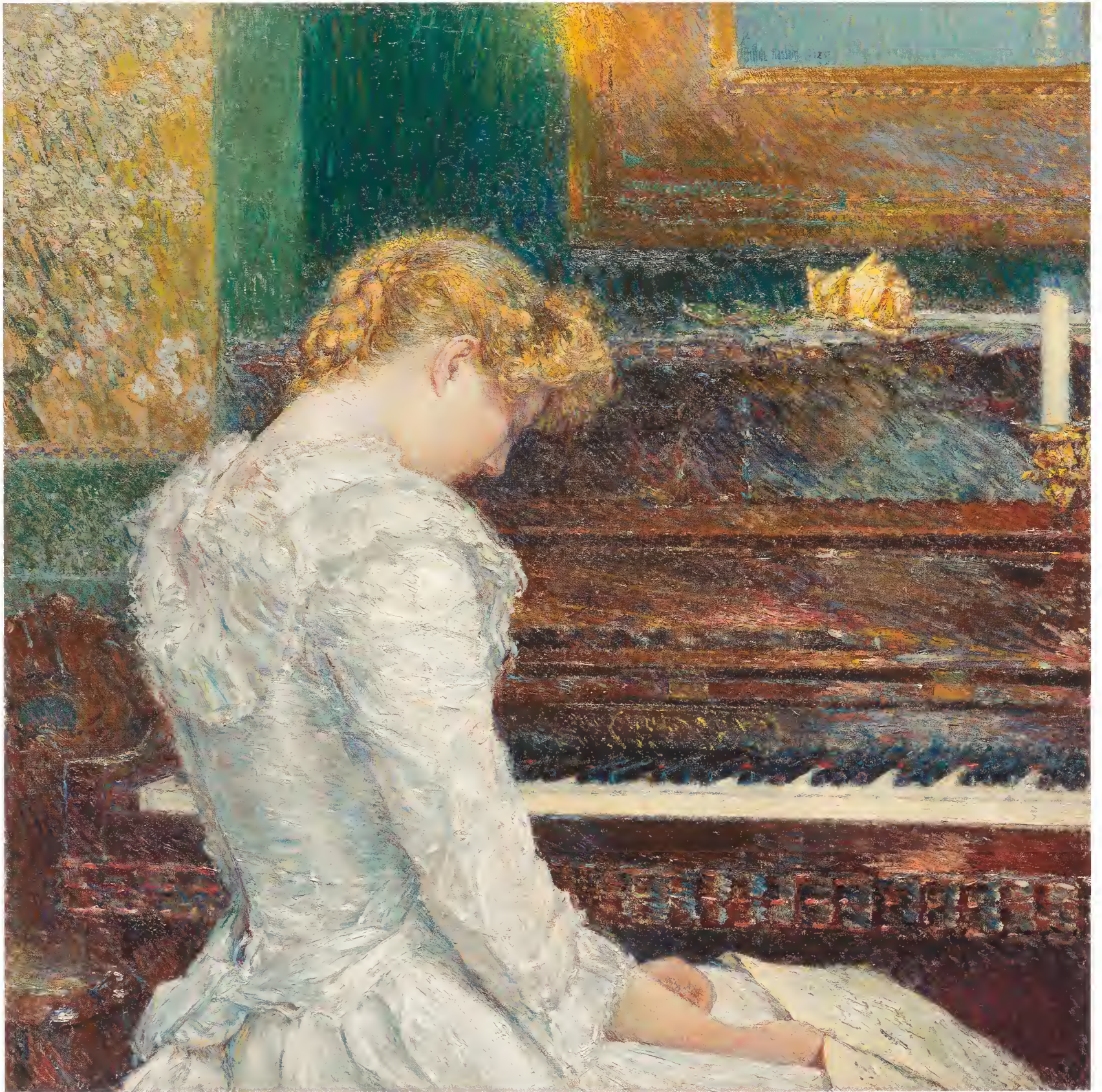
Although scholars have linked *The Sonata* to Hassam's summers on Appledore Island, he painted the canvas in his New York studio, and it should be considered in relation to the numerous other paintings of beautiful young women in studio interiors produced by European-trained artists around this time.<sup>11</sup> For instance,

the French artist Louise Abbéma's painting *At the Piano* (c. 1885; private collection) is both compositionally and thematically similar to *The Sonata*.<sup>12</sup> *The Sonata* also bears some resemblance to Hassam's earlier painting *Mrs. Hassam and Her Sister* (Fig. 2), which depicts a piano performance in a studio interior. However, this small painting appears to be both composed more spontaneously and painted more freely, creating the impression of a casual moment quickly observed and recorded by the artist. Although *The Sonata* is also painted with Impressionist bravura, its more stable composition and the self-contained stillness of its single figure create a very different impression—one of time suspended in a portentous, almost holy, moment.

As Charlotte Eyerman has pointed out, the piano was an important nineteenth-century attribute of both bourgeois femininity and modern domestic life.<sup>13</sup> This made it a favorite subject of the Impressionists. Pierre-Auguste Renoir made six paintings of young girls at the piano in 1892, all of which convey the cultured femininity and idyllic sweetness of their subjects.<sup>14</sup> Hassam adapted this motif in *The Sonata*, adding iconography drawn from Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation (a virginal girl who pauses in her reading with her head submissively bowed, a snuffed candle, and eut flowers) to give his painting art-historical depth and to convey the idea of an aesthetic epiphany. Sunlight pouring into the interior from the upper left creates a golden halo around the young woman's head and might also be read as a metaphor for perception.<sup>15</sup>

Depicting a sunlit interior allowed Hassam to display his virtuosity as a painter. Working on a white ground, a technique that added intensity to his colors, he used dashes of pigment to trace the play of light across the glossy wood of the piano. He added touches of vermilion to the ebony piano keys, a device that separates them from the dark wood of the piano and makes them advance toward the viewer. Hassam used the same hue in the shadows of the woman's face to mimic the effect of bright sunlight. Although he painted *The Sonata* quickly, he lavished great care on the figure, painting her face, hair, arm, and hands with a fine brush and using curving strokes to evoke the soft, rounded contours of her flesh. He used broader, more spontaneous brushwork in her white summer gown, which shimmers with a myriad of reflected blue, red, and lavender hues. Like the French Impressionists before him, Hassam believed that a single tone could never accurately convey the way white appears in nature, and he also feared that white oil pigments would yellow over time, reducing the intensity of his sun-drenched scenes.<sup>16</sup>

*The Sonata* refers to Japanese art both through its flat, decorative design—in which straight lines that echo the edges of the painting abound—and through the Japanese hanging scroll, which shows a blossoming cherry tree against a gold background.<sup>17</sup> The American Impressionists, like the French Impressionists before them, were profoundly influenced by Japanese art. Hassam had begun collecting ukiyo-e prints while a student in Paris. In them, he found a model for his own exploration of painting's decorative qualities. The self-reflexive posture of the woman in *The Sonata*,



the graceful curve of her figure (which mirrors the sinuous curve of the tree in the painting), the cropping of objects by the picture frame, and the bright colors all point to the influence of these prints. The Japanese reverence for beauty was particularly appealing to followers of the Aesthetic Movement. As Hassam was probably aware, blossoming cherry trees are powerful cultural symbols in Japan, where they represent both the cultivation of beauty for its own sake (Japanese cherry trees bear no fruit) and the poignantly fleeting nature of aesthetic experience.<sup>15</sup>

The two large yellow blossoms on the piano relate to the painting's earlier title, *The Maréchal Niel Rose*. This particular type of rose was quite modern in 1893, having been bred in France just twenty-nine years earlier. In the nineteenth century it was highly prized for its large, deep yellow blossoms and its sweet scent; however, it was both difficult to grow and top-heavy. When in bloom, these roses' delicate stems lack the strength to support the weight of their flowers so, like the figure in Hassam's painting, they perpetually bow their heads. Hassam created a visual parallel between the roses and the woman by placing the blossoms close to her head, where they echo the cluster of curls over her brow and crown her reflection in the piano. His alignment of the woman in *The Sonata* with a new and lovely, but delicate, breed of hothouse flower suggests that Hassam was already aware of social Darwinist theories that held the Anglo-American woman to be a new and highly evolved type, characterized by an extremely refined and sensitive nervous system.<sup>19</sup>

Hassam was clearly attached to *The Sonata*. He withheld it from an 1896 sale at the American Art Association, which included almost every other finished painting in his studio, and kept it for another twenty-three years.<sup>20</sup> Whatever Hassam's reasons for keeping *The Sonata*, it probably served as a model for his later paintings of women in interiors. These include his well-known series of New York window paintings, which depict young women lost in contemplation, surrounded by cut flowers and Japanese art, and four later paintings of women at pianos.

In November 1919 Hassam exhibited the painting in a retrospective of his work at the Milch Galleries in New York, where he also displayed many of his New York window paintings.<sup>21</sup> *The Sonata* must have appeared decidedly old-fashioned in the context of the 1919 exhibition. Although a reviewer for *American Art News* praised it as "an excellent work," other critics derided the painting's sentimental subject and Impressionist facture.<sup>22</sup> Despite these criticisms, *The Sonata* was featured in an article for *Country Life*, where the author lavished it with praise, describing it as "one of the loveliest and most worthy of [Hassam's] early canvases."<sup>23</sup>

Duncan Phillips acquired *The Sonata* for his art gallery the following year.<sup>24</sup> In 1926 Phillips published a catalogue of his collection in which he wrote, "With Hassam there is always a rapture in the spirit of a particular place or in the universal dance of air and light which disarms our criticism of his mannerisms as a draughtsman of the figure and his general lack of depth and volume."<sup>25</sup> Hassam was offended by this passage and wrote an angry letter to Phillips in which he defended *The Sonata*.<sup>26</sup> Four months later,



Fig. 2 Childe Hassam, *Mrs. Hassam and Her Sister*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 9<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (24.9 × 15.6 cm). Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.40 / Art Resource, NY

the artist published an article in *Art News* in which he publicly lambasted Phillips. By this time, Hassam was well known as the cantankerous, archconservative "grand old man" of American painting. If in 1897 he had led the secession of the progressive Ten American Artists from the Society of American Artists, thirty years later he was denouncing younger progressive artists and their supporters, including Phillips, as "the outer foolfringe of the Fine Arts."<sup>27</sup> In response, Phillips sold all five of his Hassam paintings. When Hassam learned of the sale, he anonymously repurchased *The Sonata* and kept the painting until he died.<sup>28</sup>

Hassam exhibited the painting under a new title, *Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata*, in a 1929 retrospective of his work at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy.<sup>29</sup> He may have felt that the oft-misspelled title *The Maréchal Niel Rose* sounded too antiquated or too French, or he may have wanted to separate the painting from past criticisms. Through his choice of a musical title, Hassam demonstrated his continuing admiration for Whistler, while at the same time he may have been alluding to the contemporary

preoccupation with synesthesia in the arts. Around this time some of Hassam's younger contemporaries, for instance Ross Braught (q.v.), chose titles like *Tschaikovsky's Sixth* to emphasize the interconnectedness of visual and aural experience and to encourage an emotionally intense reaction to their paintings. Hassam's new title also recalled his cherished association with Celia Thaxter, who considered Beethoven "the greatest musician the world has ever seen."<sup>30</sup> Hassam's warm and sympathetic relationship with Thaxter, who had died in 1894, must have seemed particularly agreeable to him after his bitter falling-out with Phillips. Whatever Hassam's motivations, the musical title was well suited to his painting. Beethoven's Piano Sonata in F Minor, op. 57 ("Appassionata") was associated both with stormy passion and with deep thought and feeling; nevertheless, at an unknown date Hassam again changed the title, shortening it to, simply, *The Sonata*.<sup>31</sup>

LL/KJN

## NOTES

1. See Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
2. Childe Hassam to Duncan Phillips, 1 January 1928, Phillips Collection Papers, 1920–1960, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel 1935, frames 1123–25.
3. Biographical information about Hassam may be found in the following sources: Adeline Adams, *Childe Hassam* (New York: American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1938); Ulrich W. Hiesinger, *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, exh. cat. (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1994); Warren Adelson, Jay E. Cantor, and William H. Gerdtz, *Childe Hassam, Impressionist* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999); II. Barbara Weinberg, ed., *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2004).
4. Hassam's time in Paris and the work he did there have been discussed by Weinberg in *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, 53–85.
5. See Childe Hassam, interview by DeWitt McClellan Lockman, 25 January 1927, Lockman Papers, New-York Historical Society, quoted in II. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 246.
6. David Park Curry, *Childe Hassam: An Island Garden Revisited*, exh. cat. (Denver: Denver Art Museum, in association with W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 18. For discussions of Celia Thaxter's aestheticism, see Sharon Paiva Stephan, *One Woman's Work: The Visual Art of Celia Lighton Thaxter*, exh. cat. (Portsmouth, N.H.: Portsmouth Athenaeum, 2001); and Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
7. Hassam probably read the version of this 1885 lecture reprinted in James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: John W. Lovell, 1890). In a 1903 letter to his friend the painter J. Alden Weir, Hassam noted, "I have also read again with the greatest pleasure Whistler's Ten O'clock. I have not read it for ten years. How true it is! And reassuring too." Childe Hassam to J. Alden Weir, 12 August 1903, American Academy of Art and Letters, quoted in Adelson, Cantor, and Gerdtz, *Childe Hassam, Impressionist*, 119.
8. W.C. Brownell criticized the Impressionists for being "absolutely insensitive" to "truly pictorial rendering with its constructive appeal, its sense of *ensemble*, its presentation of an idea by means of the convergence and interdependence of objects focused to a common and central effect." Brownell, "French Art III: Realistic Painting," *Scribner's Magazine* 12 (November 1892), 625. The same critic had nothing but praise for Whistler. See Brownell, "Whistler in Painting and Etching," *Scribner's Magazine* 18 (August 1879), 483. For a recent discussion of Whistler's popularity in the United States, see Linda Merrill, "Whistler in America," in *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, ed. Merrill, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2003), 10–31.
9. Although the exact Nocturne depicted in *The Sonata* can not be determined with certainty, Susan G. Larkin has recently suggested that it may be Hassam's pastel *The Evening Star* (1891; Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University). If this is the case, then Hassam must have slightly altered the pastel's composition in his painting to align the reflected moonlight with the extinguished candle. See Larkin, "Hassam in New England," in *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, 126, fig. 124.
10. For a discussion of Aesthetic interior decoration, see Marilyn Johnson, "The Artful Interior," in Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 110–41.
11. David Park Curry first connected the painting to Appledore in *Childe Hassam: An Island Garden Revisited*, 57, an association that has been accepted by subsequent scholars. See References. Sarah Burns has argued that the women frequently depicted in studio scenes, who "inhale, absorb and savor the aesthetic atmosphere, thereby metaphorically consuming it," act as stand-ins for patrons and viewers. See Burns, "The Price of Beauty: Art, Commerce, and the Late Nineteenth Century American Studio Interior," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 229.
12. Abbéma also produced a larger version of this painting in which she made it even clearer that the subject is a concert in an artist's studio. See *La chanson de l'après-midi* (c. 1893; location unknown) at [www.corpusetampoils.com/cae-19-abbemao16.html](http://www.corpusetampoils.com/cae-19-abbemao16.html). For a discussion of the various social and artistic activities that took place in artists' Aesthetic studios, see Karen A. Zukowski, "Creating Art and Artists: Late Nineteenth-Century American Artists' Studios," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1999.
13. Charlotte Eyerman, "The Composition of Femininity: The Significance of the Woman at the Piano Motif in Nineteenth-Century French Culture from Daumier to Renoir," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997.
14. Three of these, all entitled *Jeunes Filles au Piano*, are in the following collections: Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The remaining two paintings are in private collections.
15. For a discussion of the Aesthetic Movement's appropriation of religious forms, see Kathleen Pyne, "Whistler and the Religion of Art," in Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 84–134.
16. Hiesinger, *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, 86.
17. We are grateful to Patricia Graham for identifying the subject of this scroll.
18. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Japanese art and culture held great fascination for Americans and American artists in particular. Examples of the many publications that discuss the Japanese reverence for cherry blossoms include "Bric-a-Brac," *Saturday Evening Post* 61 (21 January 1882), 3; and Theodore Wores, "An American Artist in Japan," *Century* 38 (September 1889), 674. See also Laurel Lyman, "The Influence of Japonisme on the American Impressionists and Their Circle, 1893–1915," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2004; and Merrily Baird, *Symbols of Japan: Thematic Motifs in Art and Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001), 48–50.



19. Elizabeth Broun, "Childe Hassam's America," *American Art* 13 (Fall 1999), 46–49. Kathleen Pyne has linked the many late-nineteenth-century images of beautiful women contemplating works of art to the process of self-culture, a central force driving evolutionary change in the writings of Herbert Spencer. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 7.
20. American Art Association, New York, *Catalogue of Paintings, Pastels and Water Colors by Childe Hassam, to Be Sold at Absolute Public Sale on Thursday and Friday Evenings, February 6th and 7th*, 1896.
21. *Exhibition of Works in the Various Mediums by Childe Hassam*, exh. cat. (New York: Milch Galleries, 1919). *The Marshall Neil Rose* is number one.
22. "Hassam at Milch Galleries," *American Art News* 8 (22 November 1919), 2. Royal Cortissoz disapprovingly described the Nelson-Atkins painting as the single "trace of sentiment" in the exhibition. "The Personal Touch: The Part It Has Played in the Growth of Mr. Childe Hassam," *New York Tribune*, 23 November 1919, sec. 4, 11. Henry McBride was more critical still, disparaging Hassam's abilities as a figure painter and describing all the women in his interior scenes as "worsted dolls." "Childe Hassam's New Work at the Milch's," *New York Sun Magazine*, 23 November 1919, 12.
23. Sydney de Brie, "Modern American Paintings for the Home," *Country Life* 39 (November 1920), 110.
24. Phillips expressed interest in the painting in 1919. Writing on Hassam's behalf, the Milch Galleries informed Phillips that he could purchase the painting for \$12,000. Mrs. Albert R. Kohlman to Duncan Phillips, 19 November 1919, Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, D.C. In June 1921 Phillips offered to trade another painting in his collection, Hassam's *Fifth Avenue Flags* (1917; private collection), for *The Maréchal Niel Rose*. Hassam responded by changing his asking price to \$5,500 plus the return of the flag picture, on the condition that Phillips pay him in cash within the week. Phillips agreed and Hassam placed *Fifth Avenue Flags* back on the market for the remaining \$6,500 of his original asking price. Despite his assertion that "I am always willing to oblige and aid [Mr. Duncan Phillips] in his efforts to make a good collection of pictures," Hassam drove a hard bargain. Childe Hassam to Edward Milch, 29 and 30 June 1921, Milch Gallery Records, AAA, microfilm reel 4420.
25. Duncan Phillips, *A Collection in the Making* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1926), 43.
26. Hassam wrote, "My attention was called, only a few days ago to the revised edition of your book. . . . I have something to say apropos and my French is not light. A collection in the making implies also a collector in the making. Let me tell you something pleasantly. 'The Marshall Niel Rose' does not lack volume, in fact it has more volume than your Renoir that you think so much over. 'C'est d'un dessin qui coule de source,' as a Frenchman said some years ago of all my works." Childe Hassam to Duncan Phillips, 1 January 1928, Phillips Collection Papers, 1920–60, AAA, microfilm reel 1935, frames 1123–25.
27. Childe Hassam, "Twenty-five Years of American Art," *Art News* 26 (14 April 1928), 27.
28. Phillips, who had been Hassam's patron for ten years, wrote to John Gellatly, a collector who favored American Impressionist work, and offered to sell him all the paintings by Hassam in his collection. He added, "'The Marshal Niel Rose' I might reserve as it cost me \$10,000 and I doubt if I could get that from anyone." Despite Gellatly's suggestion that he keep "the very important 'Marshall Niel Rose,'" Phillips sold all five paintings. Duncan Phillips to John Gellatly, 30 October 1928, Phillips Collection Papers, 1920–60, AAA, microfilm reel 1935, frame 971; John Gellatly to Duncan Phillips, 20 November 1928, Phillips Collection Papers, 1920–60, AAA, microfilm reel 1935, frames 973–76; Duncan Phillips to Alma Thayer, 3 December 1928, Phillips Collection Papers, 1920–60, AAA, microfilm reel 1937, frame 330. In *Catalog of a Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings Representative of the Life Work of Childe Hassam, N.A.*, exh. cat. (Buffalo, N.Y.: Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, 1929), the painting (no. 97) is listed as belonging to Robert W. Macbeth. There is no other evidence that Macbeth ever owned it, and Kathleen Burnside, of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, believes that Hassam probably used the name as a "public cover" (Burnside to Deni McIntosh McHenry, 7 November 1989, NAMA curatorial files). The ruse was apparently successful, for in a 1935 letter Phillips wrote that he had sold the painting through Alma Thayer, but had never heard who bought it. Duncan Phillips to A.L. Felton, 29 January 1935, Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, D.C.
29. *Catalog of a Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings Representative of the Life Work of Childe Hassam, N.A.*, no. 97.
30. Celia Thaxter to John Greenleaf Whittier, c. 1869–70, in *Letters of Celia Thaxter*, ed. Annie Fields and Rose Lamb (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), 43.
31. One writer called *Appassionata* "a misleading title to a work whose characteristics are deep thought and feeling rather than passion." "Lives and Letters of Beethoven," *Living Age* 119 (22 November 1873), 491. Other writers compared the work to volcanoes, raging torrents, furious tempests, and anguished cries. See, for example, Louis Nohl, *Life of Beethoven* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg and Company, 1881), 85; and Romain Rolland, *Beethoven the Creator* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929), 1:175–202. At some point, Hassam crossed out a label on the stretcher of the painting that reads "The Marshall Niel Rose by Childe Hassam" and replaced it with "The Sonata" in black pastel.

# CHARLES WEBSTER HAWTHORNE (1872–1930)

## *Mother and Child*, c. 1917–20

Oil on canvas

40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 35 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (101.9 × 91.1 cm)

Signed lower left: Charles Hawthorne

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1591

BORN IN LODI, ILLINOIS, by the accident of his mother's visit to relatives, Charles Hawthorne grew up as a sea captain's son in Richmond, Maine; the ocean was never far from him thereafter.<sup>1</sup> He left Maine when he was eighteen to study at night at the Art Students League in New York, where he learned the techniques of nineteenth-century academic realism. In 1896 Hawthorne began lessons with William Merritt Chase (q.v.), and he soon became his teacher's assistant, having assimilated Chase's bravura technique. After a short trip to Holland in 1898, Hawthorne founded a summer art school in Provincetown, Massachusetts, which he directed until his death.

With funding from a patron, Hawthorne took leave from his teaching and spent two years in Italy from 1906 to 1908. There, he experimented with new techniques and developed a predilection for the religious themes of Renaissance painting.<sup>2</sup> In 1912 Hawthorne began spending his winters in Paris. By 1914, when the outbreak of World War I forced him to return home, he had gained a thorough knowledge of contemporary European trends. His paintings after 1912 are characterized by such modern stylistic devices as flattened pictorial space and simplified forms. American audiences found Hawthorne's synthesis of traditional subjects and modern technique very appealing.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his career, Hawthorne alternated summers spent painting landscapes on the sand dunes of Provincetown and winters spent painting figure pieces in his Provincetown and New York studios. He made paintings of mothers and children a specialty after the birth of his son in 1908.<sup>4</sup> These paintings, many of which refer overtly to Renaissance depictions of the Madonna and Child, are also perfectly in keeping with the Romantic portrayals of women so prevalent at the turn of the century, for instance in the work of Abbott Handerson Thayer, an artist Hawthorne knew and admired.<sup>5</sup> As Hawthorne's popularity grew during the late 1910s and 1920s, commissioned portraits of society women and their children (which were in demand and paid well) became an important source of income.

Although *Mother and Child* might be mistaken for a portrait, the woman it depicts closely resembles the subject of at least one other painting by Hawthorne, suggesting that she was a model rather than a paying sitter.<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne often painted the local Portuguese and Yankee fishermen and their families, his students, and members of his own household, posing them in evocative,

poetic settings, which he invented to suit his subjects.<sup>7</sup> In *Mother and Child*, a well-dressed woman sits with her young son, who leans back into her lap. His left arm rests on hers as she holds him close with one elegant hand. His other arm rests on her knee, the fingers of his hand interlaced with hers. While the boy gazes directly out at the viewer, his mother looks down and to the side, seemingly distracted by her thoughts. Behind them, Hawthorne painted a rust-colored hillside, a few dark brown and gray-green trees, and what might be either a dark blue evening sky or the sea in a muted, atmospheric style. He positioned the figures in *Mother and Child* gracefully and drew them beautifully. This is in keeping with his advice to his students to consider carefully the silhouettes of the objects they painted, to paint forms simply, and to arrange them harmoniously.<sup>8</sup> The contours of the two figures flow smoothly together, and their rhythmically arranged heads, throats, arms, and hands lead the eye around their interconnected bodies. The figures stand out sharply against the almost abstract landscape, which evokes a melancholy mood rather than a particular place. Having abandoned the slashing brushstrokes that characterized his early work, Hawthorne applied his colors deftly but with a delicate touch. He ground the colors by hand, mixing them with a medium specially prepared by an art supply company in New York in accordance with a supposed sixteenth-century formula.<sup>9</sup>

The position of the figures in *Mother and Child* bears some resemblance to that of the Madonna and Child in the celebrated *Gypsy Madonna* by Titian (c. 1510; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a favorite painter of Hawthorne's.<sup>10</sup> The woman's blue dress also evokes the Virgin Mary, who in Renaissance paintings is typically robed in blue. The Nelson-Atkins painting, however, is not overtly religious. While it may allude to the Madonna and Child, it also relates to several secular issues that appeared as inter-related threads in American visual culture during the late 1910s, in particular the United States' entry into World War I, the widespread anxiety about declining American birthrates, and women's suffrage.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, images of mothers and children were used to evoke the sacrifice and resolve of those who remained on the home front and to enlist women as nurses in the American Red Cross.<sup>11</sup> Hawthorne's sympathy for these causes was demonstrated by an exhibition of his work held at the Macbeth Gallery to benefit the Red Cross in February 1917 as the United States stood on the brink of war. The centerpiece of the exhibition, a painting entitled *The Widow* (1914; Huntington Museum of Art, W.Va.), depicts a young woman holding a baby in her arms and gazing mournfully into the distance. On a ship in the harbor behind her, a flag flies at half-mast.<sup>12</sup> Although Hawthorne originally intended this imagery to convey a sailor lost at sea, its





Fig. 1 Cornelius Hicks, *Our Greatest Mother—Join!* 1917. Lithograph, 76 × 51 in. (193 × 129.5 cm). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 2 Unknown artist, *We Give Our Work, Our Men, Our Lives If Need Be. Will You Give Us The Vote?* 1917. Poster, 41 × 27 in. (104.1 × 68.6 cm). US5085, Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Calif.

portentous new meaning in the context of the 1917 exhibition could hardly be mistaken. The missing father in *Mother and Child* and the woman's solemn and distracted gaze similarly evoke the absence, or even the death, of an American soldier.

In 1917 the American Red Cross began advertising itself as “the Greatest Mother.” Enlistment posters featured maternal-looking nurses cradling wounded soldiers or comforting young children. Like Hawthorne’s paintings, these images allude to Renaissance depictions of the Madonna and Child. One 1917 poster by Cornelius Hicks (Fig. 1) shows a nurse and a young girl posed almost identically to the figures in *Mother and Child*. Behind them, an allegorical landscape is menaced by an updated version of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The little girl in Hicks’s poster, who resembles a younger version of the woman beside her, might be seen as a future American mother. The little boy in Hawthorne’s *Mother and Child*, who already wears a child’s version of an olive drab infantry field uniform, might similarly represent a future American soldier. Motherhood and military service emerge from

these images as interrelated patriotic duties, equally vital to the state. In this sense, *Mother and Child* is analogous to the innumerable contemporary paintings of mothers and children produced by artists in France, which Kenneth Silver has linked to the French government’s war propaganda urging French citizens to “Fight!” and to “Give birth!”<sup>13</sup>

The subject of *Mother and Child* also corresponds to widespread concern about declining American birthrates. At that time, middle- and upper-class American women (especially the growing number who were college-educated) were having fewer children and bearing them later in life, sparking anxiety about the country’s future cultural and military strength.<sup>14</sup> Some state governments responded to this perceived crisis by offering financial incentives to women for bearing children, and President Woodrow Wilson made Mother’s Day a national holiday in 1914. Hawthorne’s iconic paintings of young New England mothers, to which he gave titles like *Motherhood Triumphant* (1919; private collection) and *American Motherhood* (1921; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), place

motherhood at the apex of the female life-cycle and link it to nationalist concerns.<sup>15</sup>

Although the exact date and early provenance of *Mother and Child* are unknown, the woman's full-skirted dress with its cross-over bodice and the child's "liberty boy" uniform, like the painting's subject matter, suggest a date in the late 1910s.<sup>16</sup> The mother in Hawthorne's painting wears the same hairstyle and dress as the mother in a 1917 poster in support of women's suffrage (Fig. 2). The mother in the poster, who wears a yellow rose symbolic of suffrage tucked into her belt, stands between her two sons. One wears the uniform of a marine and the other of an infantryman. The caption beneath her reads, "We give our work, our men, our lives if need be. Will you not give us the vote?"<sup>17</sup> Like a modern, secular Madonna, she offers her sons as sacrifices for the state. The year 1917 was a pivotal one in the struggle for women's suffrage. With greater organization and support than ever before, suffragists launched a series of public demonstrations and released a flood of propaganda in support of their cause.<sup>18</sup> While those opposed to suffrage used idealized descriptions of mothers to emphasize the sacred nature of women's traditional, domestic role, suffragists turned this rhetoric to their own advantage by arguing that women's vital, patriotic role as mothers entitled them to a voice in government.<sup>19</sup>

In *Mother and Child*, Hawthorne presented an idealized image of modern American motherhood that evoked contemporary concerns while avoiding explicit comment on them. The poetic ambiguity of his paintings confirmed their status as fine art and made them appealing to viewers of all political stripes. Hawthorne's reputation faded after his death in 1930. In 1968 Hilton Kramer (who was then an archenemy of traditional painting) characterized Hawthorne as being in a "continuing discipleship to a variety of masters. Even at his best, he is never quite himself."<sup>20</sup> In fact, Hawthorne was true to both his own ideals and the period in which he worked. By combining the traditional and the modern in his technique and themes, he created a style that was almost universally appreciated by his contemporaries.

LL/SBK

## NOTES

1. Biographical information about Hawthorne can be found in Richard Mühlberger, *Charles Webster Hawthorne*, exh. cat. (New York: Babcock Galleries, 1999); Elizabeth McCausland, *Charles W. Hawthorne, an American Figure Painter* (New York: American Artists Group, 1947); and Charles Hawthorne, interview by DeWitt M. Lockman, DeWitt M. Lockman Interviews with Artists, Manuscript Collection, New York University.
2. Hawthorne was not alone in adopting the themes of Renaissance painting. Artists in the 1880s were attracted to the "spirituality and classic beauty" of such quattrocento artists as Sandro Botticelli. Older contemporaries of Hawthorne's such as George de Forest Brush and Abbott Handerson Thayer also painted Renaissance-inspired images of women and children. David C. Huntington, "The Quest for Unity: American Art between World's Fairs, 1876-1893," in *The Quest for Unity: American Art between World's Fairs, 1876-1893*, exh. cat. (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), 33-34.
3. See, for example, Anna Seaton-Schmidt, "Charles W. Hawthorne," *Art and Progress* 4 (January 1913), 821-22.
4. By 1912 at least one critic referred to him as "the painter of motherhood." Robert G. McIntyre, "Charles W. Hawthorne—Intellectual Painter," *Fine Arts Journal* 26 (March 1912), 202.
5. Bailey Van Hook, among other scholars, has noted that the classicizing and decorative treatment of women as subjects during the late nineteenth century was reinforced by the trend away from literature and history as subject matter and toward art for art's sake and generalized figure painting. *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
6. Hawthorne appears to have depicted the same woman in both *Mother and Child* and *Twilight* (1917; location unknown). An exhibition catalogue identifies the model for *Twilight* as Julia Morrow, a student of Hawthorne's. See *The Paintings of Charles Webster Hawthorne*, exh. cat. (Storrs: University of Connecticut Museum of Art, 1968), no. 25.
7. Seaton-Schmidt, "Charles W. Hawthorne," 825.
8. Charles W. Hawthorne, *Hawthorne on Painting, from Student Notes Collected by Mrs. Charles W. Hawthorne* (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1938), 25, 29.
9. Hawthorne's decision to paint with an "authentic" Renaissance formula reveals the depth of his desire to emulate the Venetian masters. Joseph Hawthorne to Sylvia Crane, 25 October 1917, Charles Webster Hawthorne Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
10. *Gypsy Madonna* was widely reproduced in publications such as *The Masterpieces of Titian* (London: Gowan & Gray, 1907), 55.
11. See Susan Zeiger, "She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War," *Feminist Studies* 22 (Spring 1996), 6-39.
12. *Loan Exhibition, Paintings by Charles W. Hawthorne, N.A., February, 1917* (New York: Macbeth Gallery, 1917). For a discussion of *The Widow* as the centerpiece of the exhibition, see Dunean Phillips, "Charles W. Hawthorne," *International Studio* 61 (March 1917), 19, 24.
13. Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 191-92, 282.
14. See, for instance, "Why Girls Should Marry Young," *Literary Digest* 55 (15 September 1917), 85; and Leta A. Hollingworth, "Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children," *American Journal of Sociology* 22 (July 1916), 19-29. For an overview, see Mary E. Cookingham, "Combining Marriage, Motherhood and Jobs before World War II: Women College Graduates, Classes of 1905-1935," *Journal of Family History* 9 (Summer 1984), 178-95.
15. Hawthorne painted a number of images of young girls and older women, for instance, *The Trouseau* (1910; Metropolitan Museum of Art) and *The Captain's Wife* (1924; private collection); however, the majority of his paintings of women show them as young mothers.
16. JoAnne Olian, ed., *Everyday Fashions, 1909-1920, as Pictured in the Sears Catalog* (New York: Dover, 1995), 76-88, 108.
17. *Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 66.
18. See Holly J. McCammon, "'Out of the Parlors and into the Streets': The Changing Tactical Repertoire of the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements," *Social Forces* 8 (Fall 2003), 787-815.
19. See Martha Ann Hagan, "The Rhetoric of the American Anti-Suffrage Movement, 1867-1920," Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1993.
20. Hilton Kramer, "Charles Hawthorne, Gifted but Minor," *New York Times*, 7 December 1968, 56.

## MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE (1819–1904)

### *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport, 1861* (*Marine View—Rocks at Newport*)

Oil on canvas

11 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (28.3 × 64.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: M. J. Heade 1861

Gift from the Collection of Julia and Humbert Tinsman,

F98-30/2

BORN INTO A RELATIVELY prosperous family in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Martin Johnson Heade studied under Edward Hicks, a successful folk painter in Bucks County and a cousin of the academically trained painter Thomas Hicks, with whom Heade may also have studied.<sup>1</sup> Hicks undoubtedly instructed Heade in portraiture, knowing that the young man would have a better chance of making a meaningful income by working, at least part-time, in that area. Indeed, Heade's earliest works were portraits, one of which was shown at the Artists' Fund Society exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia in 1841. This slight exposure was Heade's artistic debut, but as time would tell, his fame, both during his lifetime and after, would come from paintings other than portraits. Heade would prove to be an amazingly prolific artist, and a very peripatetic one, as well. His itinerary could have been either the cause or the effect of his diversity, at least in terms of the subjects he painted, but it is clear that the breadth of his achievement, witnessed by his ability to create masterpieces of landscape, seascape, still life, genre, and animal paintings, is impressive.<sup>2</sup>

Heade's many travels began in the 1840s. At least at first, he traveled to find portrait commissions, but his journeys also helped him to mature as an artist and to discover a personal style by which he could express his artistic intent. He left his native Pennsylvania for New York in 1843 but within a year was working in Trenton, New Jersey, and by 1845 he was in Brooklyn. The following year he moved to Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., before heading back to Trenton in 1847.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, he followed up his 1841 debut in Philadelphia by sending works to New York's prestigious National Academy of Design, where several of his portraits appeared in 1843 and 1852. His exhibition record indicates that, about 1850, he began to expand both his choice of subject matter and the number of venues to which he sent his work. He made forays into genre painting with *The Roman Newsboys* (1848; Toledo Museum of Art), which was exhibited by the Western Art Union in Cincinnati the year after it was painted, and *The Woodcutter's Repast* (c. 1852; location unknown), which was seen at the National Academy in 1852. By the late 1850s he was sending both portraits and landscapes to the latter institution and to the Pennsylvania Academy and the Boston Athenaeum. By 1860, however, portraits

more or less disappeared from his exhibition submissions; instead, he sent almost nothing but landscapes and still lifes.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as the title of his early genre painting, *The Roman Newsboys*, suggests, his travels continued, now including an overseas visit, as he spent part of 1848 in Europe, specifically in Italy, England, and France.

By about 1858 Heade's break with portraiture—and figure painting in general—seems to have been complete. That year, he moved into New York's famous Tenth Street Studio Building, a recognized haven of landscape painters belonging to the so-called Hudson River School. Among them was Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), who had just returned from his second working trip to South America and who was about to achieve international fame with his great landscape *The Heart of the Andes* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art), which was painted and exhibited in the Tenth Street building.<sup>5</sup> Although Heade remained somewhat aloof from these artists, his encounter with them marked the beginning of a period of impressive productivity. Within a year of his arrival on Tenth Street, Heade painted his first true masterpiece, *Approaching Thunder Storm* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art). It was a type of landscape—more accurately, seascape—for which he would become well known.

Heade's early seascapes show the influence of Church and others, possibly including the Gloucester painter Fitz Henry Lane (q.v.). However, as the art historian Karen Quinn has recently noted, Heade's marines show a "harsher view of nature" than was common, and their compositions became "both more austere and more abstract" than in, for example, Church's paintings.<sup>6</sup> As he did when working on other types of paintings, Heade established a basic formula for his seascapes: a strongly horizontal image with sea and sky given nearly equal space. A narrow strip of rocky coast might make up the immediate foreground and, if people or objects such as boats are included, they are tiny; buildings rarely appear. In several early seascapes, Heade used *répoussoir* (framing) elements, such as trees, but these quickly disappeared from the works. Waves are either fairly violent, crashing on a rocky coast, or nonexistent, replaced by calm water with a mirrorlike surface. Similarly, clouds either suggest an approaching or departing storm or are relegated to fleecy cumulus puffs spaced along a flat horizon. As time passed, Heade often manipulated this formula, simplifying and further abstracting it.<sup>7</sup>

As was common for landscape artists at this time, Heade traveled during the summer months, making sketches of picturesque scenery that he would later use to compose finished paintings in his studio.<sup>8</sup> By 1860 he was renting a summer studio in Providence, Rhode Island, and he appears to have made extended visits to the





Fig. 1 Martin Johnson Heade, *Storm Clouds on the Coast*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 20 × 32¼ in. (50.8 × 81.9 cm). Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Me., Museum purchase, Charles L. Fox Fund, 1965

nearby resort town of Newport (about two hours away from Providence by train) in 1860 and 1861. Like the similar paintings *Sea and Rocks near Newport* (1861; Mitsubishi International Corp., New York) and *Seascape: Sunset* (1861; Detroit Institute of Arts), *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport* was probably composed from sketches made along Newport's rocky beaches.<sup>9</sup>

An insistent geometry underlies Heade's composition of *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport*. The canvas is divided into three long, horizontal bands. The crashing waves at the bottom and the skimming clouds at the top frame the pink horizon, where distant sails pull the eye into the picture. Jagged rocks, which break the surface of the waves at the left, reach up to meet the clouds, closing off that side of the canvas. On the right, however, the composition remains open. Like the sails of the distant ships, the waves recede rhythmically and diagonally away from the picture plane, toward the still-bright horizon, conveying a sense of vast, sweeping, open space.

A late afternoon drive or ride along the beach was a daily ritual observed by visitors to the fashionable seaside resort.<sup>10</sup> In his early seascapes, for instance *Storm Clouds on the Coast* (Fig. 1), Heade included a strip of land in the foreground, giving viewers the illusion that they were observing the choppy ocean from a safe distance. In *Seascape: Sunrise* (private collection), painted the following year, he reduced the land to almost nothing. In *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport*, Heade provided no safe strand on which to stroll. The viewer is confronted with only the turbulent ocean crashing against jutting rocks, the blood red sky, and the distant sails on the horizon. As Adam Greenhalgh has noted, evening landscapes in which the viewer is positioned precariously became especially popular with American artists in the early 1860s and reflect the pervasive anxiety brought on by the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

Although the relation between a twilight stretch of ocean off the coast of Newport and the crisis of the Civil War may seem oblique, it was made explicitly by at least one contemporary of Heade's. In November 1861 George William Curtis, an art critic and writer for

*Harper's Monthly Magazine*, reflected on the "war summer" just past. He mused:

Who can doubt that we have been a soberer, sadder, better people this summer than for many summers before? There is probably many a philosophic loiterer upon Newport beach in one of those gleaming, golden twilights . . . who, as his horse paced slowly along the edge of the sea, or he sat upon a rock snuffing the sea-weed, has mused upon the gilded youth of Rome and the watering-place splendors of Baiae. For so we love to contemplate ourselves historically.

Continuing in his reverie, Curtis reflected that the town of Newport, unlike the vast, immutable ocean, would eventually be reduced to "a ruin, upon which all the busy and beautiful life of the watering-place will have made no impression whatever."<sup>12</sup> Heade's seascape similarly pulls viewers out of their own time and place, allowing them to measure their present troubles against the powerful, slow-changing forces of the natural world.

The sense of solitary contemplation that pervades *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport* is characteristic of Heade's work and, to a degree, characterizes the artist's personality as well. Heade valued his privacy, and he shunned the professional organizations, clubs, and juried exhibitions to which his contemporaries flocked. Still, as the Nelson-Atkins painting attests, Heade remained engaged with the visual and cultural currents of his day even as he charted his own course as a painter of landscapes and seascapes.

DBD/LL



## NOTES

1. Heade was the son of Joseph Cowell Heed and Sarah Johnson. About 1846 the artist changed the spelling of his family name to correspond with that used by some of his ancestors.
2. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. is the authority on Martin Johnson Heade and has published widely on him. His latest works are *Martin Johnson Heade*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1999); and *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
3. The chronology of Heade's travels is complicated and has become confused in publications over the years. However, in his most recent works, cited above, Stebbins has brought his expertise to bear on the problem and has greatly clarified the timing of the events of Heade's life. See "Chronology" in Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 184–89.
4. The remarkable range of Heade's abilities that begins to emerge is reminiscent of that of his teacher Thomas Hicks who, although primarily a portraitist, was also a competent landscape and genre painter. Hicks undoubtedly gave Heade, at an early age, the confidence to do likewise.
5. Between 1867 and 1881 Heade sublet Church's Tenth Street studio, where he worked during the fall, winter, and spring. He lived in a room around the corner on Sixth Avenue but spent the summers traveling. Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 187.
6. Karen E. Quinn, "Seascapes," in Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 11, 13.
7. Heade's refinement of his seascapes has landed him in the category of what recent art historians have dubbed Luminism. A number of his contemporaries, such as Lane, John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), and Sanford R. Gifford, are part of this group. The most thorough discussion of them in this context is John Wilmerding et al., *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875: Paintings, Drawings, Photographs*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980). In that exhibition catalogue and elsewhere, Wilmerding suggested the link between Heade and Lane. See John Wilmerding, *American Marine Painting*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 124–25.
8. For a discussion of Heade's process of transforming sketches into finished paintings, see Sarah Cash, *The Thunderstorm Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1994), 24–28.
9. All the paintings discussed here are listed in Stebbins, *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade*, 214–19. The Nelson-Atkins picture and the one owned by Mitsubishi are especially close in composition. Heade also maintained a studio in Boston during these years, and, as Sarah Cash has recently shown, he painted a number of seascapes that depict Singing Beach, near Manchester, Massachusetts, in the early 1860s. However, *Sunset on the Rocks—Newport* lacks the distinctive landmasses that dot the horizons of Heade's Singing Beach scenes. See Cash, "Singing Beach, Manchester: Four Newly Identified Paintings of the North Shore of Massachusetts by Martin Johnson Heade," *American Art Journal* 27 (1995–96), 84–98. The jutting rock formation on the left side of the Nelson-Atkins canvas resembles the one that marks the boundary between Spouting Rock Beach and Bailey's Beach in Newport.
10. See "Gossip from Newport, R.I.," *Living Age* 50 (9 August 1856), 344; and Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 63–64.
11. Adam Greenhalgh, "'Darkness Visible': A Twilight in the Catskills by Sanford Robinson Gifford," *American Art Journal* 22 (2001), 45–75. Sarah Cash has recently related the pervasiveness of thunderstorm imagery in Heade's landscapes of the 1860s to the Civil War and Reconstruction, which, she argues, encouraged viewers to read these images in allegorical terms. Cash, "Singing Beach, Manchester," 37–49.
12. [George William Curtis], "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 23 (November 1861), 840.

## MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE (1819–1904)

### *After the Rain in the Salt Marshes*, c. 1874 (Marsh Scene)

Oil on canvas

13 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 26 $\frac{7}{16}$  in. (33.3 × 67.2 cm)

Signed lower right: M. J. Heade

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F78-10

IN 1858 MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE took a studio in Richard Morris Hunt's new and soon to be famous Tenth Street Studio Building in New York. The move put Heade at the center of the New York art world and seems to have had an immediate, stimulating effect on his work. Within a year of his arrival at this haven of Hudson River School painters—men such as Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), Sanford R. Gifford, William Hart (q.v.), Louis Mignot, and James Snyder, all of whom moved into the Tenth Street building in 1858—Heade produced early examples of two types of landscapes with which he would make his reputation: seascapes and marsh paintings.

While Heade had some success with his seascapes, especially those that captured the sublimity of threatening weather, he “found his true place in the anonymous salt marshes of the Eastern United States,” according to Theodore Stebbins Jr., the leading authority on the artist. The marsh was “his wilderness and his Niagara” and “became uniquely his own subject.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the painter remains the American master of this genre and eventually executed more than 120 versions of the subject.<sup>2</sup> As Stebbins has suggested, these paintings “convey the entire development of Heade's landscape style, his unique concern with light and atmosphere, and the rise and decline of the artist himself.”<sup>3</sup>

Heade had begun painting marsh scenes by 1859. The earliest extant dated marsh painting by Heade, *Marsh at Dawn* (Jerald Dillon Fessenden), is inscribed with that year, and a writer for the *Boston Transcript* mentioned a scene of this type in December 1859.<sup>4</sup> The painter quickly established a formula, just as he did with his seascapes and coastal scenes. This included a low, flat horizon, a winding stream, and the haystacks—arranged singly or in groups—that would quickly become a distinctive and defining element of these compositions.<sup>5</sup> As in Heade's seascapes, if people, animals, or hay wagons appear at all in his marsh pictures, they are small within the seemingly eternal landscape.

The salt marshes that Heade painted are as uniquely American as the Rocky Mountains, if less dramatic. The salt grass and black grass that grow in these regions were named after European grasses but are native to North America, as is the particular system of grazing and hay farming practiced there. Several nineteenth-century authors noted the aesthetic appeal of the salt meadows that once dotted the Atlantic seaboard of the United States. “The

stretches of meadow are like great patches of parti-colored velvet, so soft is the tone of color given by the fineness of the grass and the delicacy of its tints,” wrote Fred B. Perkins in 1854.<sup>6</sup> Another writer observed, “In summer the long coils of silver are set in a ground of green that is vivid and tremulous like watered silk; in autumn the grasses are richly mottled purple, sage and brown; and the play of sunlight and shadow, while the winds are brushing the velvet this way and that, gives an inimitable life to the picture.”<sup>7</sup>

As both Nancy Frazier and Kimberly R. Sebold have noted, by the 1850s such scenes were already tinged with nostalgia.<sup>8</sup> Salt marshes abounded in regions where the first and most extensive European settlements occurred. Forced to devise uses for even the least arable land, settlers used the marshes to provide fodder for their cattle and as shared hunting and fishing grounds. By the mid-nineteenth century, as the West opened up to Anglo-European farmers, the hard-to-farm and occasionally treacherous marshlands were gradually abandoned. Developers moved in, draining or filling the marshes and transforming them into suburbs, private hunting parks, and sites for industry. Heade, an avid hunter, lamented these changes.<sup>9</sup> In his many paintings of salt meadows, he celebrated a vanishing American landscape and, with it, a vanishing regional way of life. Like John Greenleaf Whittier's 1866 poem “Snowbound,” *After the Rain in the Salt Marshes* invites viewers to imagine themselves

Stretched idly on the salted hay,  
Adrift along the winding shores,  
When favoring breezes deigned to blow,  
The square sail of the gundalow  
And idly lay the useless oars.<sup>10</sup>

The Nelson-Atkins painting is typical of Heade's large output of marsh paintings and conforms to his basic formula. The emphasis here is on the horizontal. (As Heade painted more and more of these images, they became more and more horizontal.) The space is divided between marsh and sky, with the latter being allotted almost two-thirds of the canvas. The absence of framing elements creates a wide, panoramic format.<sup>11</sup> A stream or tidal river winds in a sharp S-curve through the composition, leading the viewer's eye across the foreshortened, grassy landscape to the horizon. The sun, breaking through the overcast sky, falls on a patch of land in the distance, further pulling the viewer's eye into the painting and contributing to the illusion of spatial depth. Though the sun is high, a full moon is dimly visible through the leaden haze, adding an element of unreality to the hushed scene. The landscape is unpopulated. However, a rude hunter's lean-to at the edge of



the tidal stream, like the haystacks and the grazing cattle, reminds viewers of the human presence here.

The only elements in *After the Rain in the Salt Marshes* that have any verticality at all are the well-defined and well-contained haystacks. These punctuate the composition in a seemingly random manner, but like everything else we see here, their placement has been carefully plotted by the artist. The haystacks, with their insistent geometry, establish a contrapuntal rhythm across and back into the marsh. These forms are so carefully arranged that we must conclude that, while Heade has found his inspiration in nature, he has manipulated the haystacks to achieve balance, harmony, and beauty. Likewise, the strips of sunlight and shadow that alternate across the watery land of the marsh emphasize the flatness and horizontality of the scene while creating another rhythmic pattern. Through such careful composition, Heade, like Thomas Cole (q.v.), Church, and other mid-nineteenth-century American landscape painters, has successfully blended the natural and the ideal. It was probably a painting from this series—one such as *After the Rain in the Salt Marshes*—that prompted a British critic who was writing for the *London Art Journal* to give Heade high praise. Having seen such a landscape, the author wrote, “It would be difficult, in the whole range of art, to find better painting with simple breadth of treatment, every part is minutely finished.”<sup>12</sup>

The large number and formulaic nature of Heade’s marsh scenes make identifying individual paintings particularly challenging. Although the early history of the Nelson-Atkins painting is unknown, Heade’s paintings of salt meadows were purchased by nineteenth-century collectors all along the eastern seaboard of the United States and as far west as Kentucky. Although they do appear in a few well-known nineteenth-century private collections, Heade’s relatively small and affordable landscapes were particularly appealing to affluent members of the middle class. In her 1865 book, *House and Home Papers*, Harriet Beecher Stowe included a fictional account of a young, upwardly mobile couple who, on moving to a new house, find they cannot afford new furniture. To make up for this lack, they tastefully arrange their collection of chromolithographs, plaster statuettes, and framed photographs around their single, original work of art—a “lovely golden twilight sketch of Heade’s.”<sup>13</sup> With paintings like *After the Rain in the Salt Marshes*, Heade appealed to men and women eager to decorate their homes with scenery that was restful, beautiful, and uniquely American.

DBD/LL

## NOTES

1. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 42.
2. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *Martin Johnson Heade*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1999), 29.
3. Stebbins, *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade*, 42. Also see Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 186. Stebbins points out that, due to the similarity of marshes up and down the eastern seaboard of the United States, it is impossible to locate firmly the location of any of Heade’s marsh paintings. Furthermore, current titles of his paintings are often not to be taken literally, as most of them have been applied to the objects in recent times. Stebbins, *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade*, 44.
4. “Art Items,” *Boston Transcript*, 1 December 1859, quoted in Stebbins, *Martin Johnson Heade*, 29. See Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 213, no. 63.
5. The earliest known painting by Heade to include a haystack is *Rhode Island Shore* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) of 1858, although it is not a marsh scene. See Stebbins, *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade*, 213, no. 61.
6. Fred B. Perkins, “Connecticut Georgics,” *Putnam’s Monthly* 3 (April 1854), 359.
7. “Editor’s Table,” *New England Magazine* 14 (March 1893), 134.
8. Nancy Frazier, “Mute Gospel: The Salt Marshes of Martin Johnson Heade,” *Prospects* 23 (1998), 193–207; and Kimberly R. Sebold, “‘Amid the Great Sea Meadows’: Re-constructing the Salt-Marsh Landscape through Art and Literature,” *Maine History* 40 (Spring 2001), 50–69.
9. Frazier cites a fascinating 1881 letter to the editor of *Forest and Stream Magazine*, in which Heade expressed his views on this subject. See Frazier, “Mute Gospel,” 202.
10. John Greenleaf Whittier, *Snowbound: A Winter Idyll* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 5–52, quoted in Sebold, “‘Amid the Great Sea Meadows,’” 53.
11. Some of these aspects of Heade’s landscapes have been discussed in Barbara Novak and Timothy Eaton, eds., *Martin Johnson Heade, A Survey: 1840–1900*, exh. cat. (West Palm Beach, Fla.: Eaton Fine Art, 1997), 34, 36, 48, 50; Elizabeth M. Thompson, “Spatial Definition in the Landscape Paintings of Martin Johnson Heade,” *Rutgers Art Review* 4 (January 1983), 61–67; and Bruce Johnson, “Martin Johnson Heade’s Salt Marshes and the American Sublime,” *Porticus* 3 (1980), 34–39.
12. Quoted in “Art Notes,” *Ladies Repository* 12 (October 1873), 303.
13. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *House and Home Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865), 95.

## ROBERT HENRI (1865–1929)

### *The Green Sacque*, 1927

(*Girl in a Green Coat*; *Girl in a Green Coat [Sissy's Sister Mary]*)

Oil on canvas

24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 20 in. (61.1 × 50.8 cm)

Inscribed and signed on verso top: 111 N Robert Henri

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 59-46

ROBERT HENRI PAINTED *The Green Sacque* during his sixth summer on Achill Island, off the western coast of Ireland. He described the subject in his record book as “Sissy’s sister.”<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly Mary MacNamara, whose older sister and brother Henri also painted.<sup>2</sup> Henri depicted the three-year-old Mary in a coat of bright green, a color he picked up in the girl’s eyes, hair ribbon, and the shadows in her face. The blue and red background contrasts with the girl’s coat and fair hair and nicely complements her rosy pink face. Broadly and quickly painted, *The Green Sacque* exemplifies Henri’s interests in rapid execution and bold color combinations during the later years of his career. The painting also expresses Henri’s sympathy for the Irish nationalists, who extolled the people of western Ireland for their uncorrupted traditions, and it relates to a broader Euro-American nostalgia for vanishing indigenous cultures.

Robert Henry Cozad was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, the son of a professional Mississippi riverboat gambler who invested his winnings in real estate.<sup>3</sup> While growing up in Ohio and Nebraska, the young Robert designed and printed posters to attract settlers to his father’s newly established towns. When the elder Cozad shot and killed one of his employees in 1883 (he was later cleared of the murder charge), the family was forced to adopt new identities. Eighteen-year-old Robert Cozad, now Robert Earle Henri, relocated to Atlantic City, where he began to spend more time on his art. He enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia in the fall of 1886, studying under the realist painters Thomas Anschutz and Thomas Hovenden. In 1888 he moved to Paris, first studying at the Académie Julian, then briefly at the École des Beaux-Arts. During a second trip to Europe from 1895 to 1900, Henri gradually adopted a muted palette and a broadly brushed style influenced by the work of Édouard Manet, as well as the old masters Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez.

Returning to the United States, Henri moved to New York City and began the period of his greatest success. He taught at the New York School of Art from 1902 to 1909 and at his own Henri School of Art from 1909 to 1912. An influential and charismatic teacher, he counted among his distinguished students George Bellows (q.v.), Randall Davey (q.v.), Stuart Davis (q.v.), William Gropper, Edward Hopper (q.v.), Guy Pène du Bois, Man Ray, Moses Soyer, and Eugene Speicher (q.v.). Although he won professional recognition

and was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1906, Henri and his disciples, who were later derisively dubbed the “Ashcan School,” rebelled against the genteel tradition of the National Academy by painting such unrefined aspects of city life as dockyards, tenement houses, and the uncouth denizens of the slums.<sup>4</sup>

Although he often painted landscapes and cityscapes, Henri was best known for his portraits. These included both large-scale, formal studio portraits and, increasingly over the years, smaller, more informal studies of common people. Children appear often in these portrait studies. To Henri, children represented a period of precious naïveté that could serve as an antidote to the complexity that characterized modern life.<sup>5</sup> Henri also believed that children best expressed a nation’s essential character because they were less encumbered with acquired habits and ideas.<sup>6</sup> He found many of the subjects for his portrait studies during his travels in Spain, Holland, Ireland, New Mexico, and California. *The Green Sacque* belongs to a large group of studies of Irish children that Henri executed during the last decade of his life.<sup>7</sup>

Perennial travelers, Henri and his wife first went to Achill in 1913, probably prompted by their friends John Butler Yeats, the father of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and the Dublin-born art critics Charles FitzGerald and Frederiek James Gregg. These men were all proponents of the Irish cultural revival, a movement closely allied with Irish nationalism that sought to purge Ireland of British influence. They viewed western Ireland, where most residents were Gaelic-speaking farmers, as the seat of authentic Irish culture.<sup>8</sup> Henri’s family background also encouraged his interest in Ireland: his great-grandmother had been Lady Fingall of Killin Castle, and his wife was born and raised in Ireland. After arriving on Achill, the Henris rented Corrymore House, a large, rambling cottage on a hill above the villages of Keel and Dooagh. Nine years later, after the end of the Irish Civil War, they purchased the house and returned every summer but one until Henri’s death in 1929. Over the years, Henri came to know the families of Achill quite well, and he painted hundreds of portraits of the villagers and their children.<sup>9</sup>

Henri included his Irish portraits in various museum and gallery exhibitions throughout the 1920s, and another portrait of a little Irish girl, *The Wee Woman* (1928; location unknown), won the Temple Gold Medal at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1929. By the late 1920s, major museums across the United States had acquired Henri’s paintings, and his reputation as a pillar of the American art establishment was secure. However, Henri also exhibited his Irish portraits in such decidedly middle-brow arenas as the Chicago department store Carson Pirie Scott.<sup>10</sup> The art gallery at Carson’s was part of the furniture department and



sold primarily decorative artwork. Henri's choice of Carson's as a venue demonstrates the extent to which he acknowledged that his late paintings had been assimilated into the mainstream of American visual culture. Once considered radical in both execution and subject matter, his portraits now appeared so innocuous as to be decorative.<sup>11</sup>

Like Henri, Irish-Americans were moving into the cultural mainstream at this time. In the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants often appeared in American publications as threatening, brutish interlopers. By the mid-1920s Americans had come to view Irish culture as a vital strain within the broader culture of the nation.<sup>12</sup> For instance, St. Patrick's Day, once a brave demonstration of ethnic pride by an embattled minority, became a recognized—if not official—American holiday. Greeting card companies began printing St. Patrick's Day cards featuring plump Irish children in old-fashioned green clothing. At just this time, a number of American writers lamented the imminent disappearance of a distinct, undiluted Irish culture and lauded efforts in the new Irish Republic to revive Gaelic and record Celtic folklore.<sup>13</sup>

This early-twentieth-century interest in Irish culture relates to a broader interest in traditional, agrarian societies, sparked in part by the burgeoning field of anthropology. Many Americans glossed over the poverty that plagued such societies and nostalgically viewed them as fading remnants of a simpler, more authentic time. Tourists flocked to isolated rural areas like Achill Island, expecting to find uncorrupted specimens of preindustrial life. Henri noted in a 1926 letter to one of his patrons that the Gaelic-speaking residents of Achill “take life easily and quite beautifully. In fact, they live in a romance which would be impossible to people who travel in subways and live the complex life such as we have in the cities.”<sup>14</sup>

Henri reinforced a Romantic and nostalgic view of Ireland in portraits like *The Green Sacque*. The painting's winsome young subject gazes reticently out at the viewer. Her plump, rosy cheeks and bright green coat recall images of Irish children in American popular culture. Her gingham dress and white pinafore, like her old-fashioned coat, are quaint accoutrements of the previous century. While Henri's stable, triangular composition lends her a dignified air, she appears to be both personally and culturally innocent. Like the pueblos around Santa Fe, New Mexico, which Henri also frequented, Achill Island offered him the opportunity to paint appealing, seemingly authentic images of rural people uncorrupted by the modern world.

Henri's late technique, characterized by spontaneous execution and inventive color combinations, greatly enhanced the aura of authenticity that surrounded his portrait studies. His interest in vivid color can be traced back to 1910, when he began experiments with the Maratta palette and Jay Hambidge's color theories. These systems of color relationships related color harmonies to musical harmonies and allowed painters to plan their palette before painting the picture. Henri further intensified his color after 1913, probably in response to the modernist European work he saw at the Armory Show. At this time he also began to use more rapid brushwork. The vibrant immediacy of his late paintings gave viewers the

impression that they were, in the words of Royal Cortissoz, “direct transcripts from reality, thrown off at white heat.”<sup>15</sup> When a group of Henri's paintings was posthumously shown at New York's Macbeth Gallery in 1933, Edwina Spencer praised *The Green Sacque* for the “illusion of vivid life” it created.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Henri offered a carefully edited version of reality in his Irish portraits. He concealed the presence of modern civilization, in the form of tourism and mass-produced goods, and he invariably depicted his subjects as healthy, happy, and well-fed. In reality, many children on Achill Island suffered from poor nutrition and inadequate health care. The subject of *The Green Sacque*, Mary MacNamara, became ill and died not long after Henri painted her.

Many critics have dismissed Henri's late portrait studies as repetitious and lacking the psychological depth of his earlier works.<sup>17</sup> Reviewing the 1933 exhibition for the *New York Evening Post*, Margaret Breuning found that “the increasing facility of technical accomplishment realized in many of the later figure paintings gives a superficial character to many of these works.”<sup>18</sup> In a review of a 1939 exhibition of Henri's work, which may have included *The Green Sacque*, Emily Genauer described his Irish paintings as “too self consciously picturesque.”<sup>19</sup> It is true that by 1927 Henri had abandoned the gritty, Realist subject matter that characterized his early work, yet his late portrait studies of Irish children are not lacking in content. *The Green Sacque* is a sensitive study of an individual personality through which Henri hoped to reveal a vision of unspoiled rural life. It is also a harmonious and technically masterful exploration of color and form.

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## NOTES

1. Robert Henri, Record Book N, 111, collection Janet C. LeClair, New York.
2. Information on Mary's identity was provided by Tom McNamara, Achill Island, in letters to Margaret Stenz, NAMA curatorial files. Henri refers to "Mary MacNamara (Sissy's little sister)" in a diary entry; see Diary, 7 July 1928, Robert Henri Papers. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 886, frame 1013. Annie ("Sissy") appears in a portrait now owned by the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens. Jimmy Michael ("Mick") MacNamara is the subject of *Skipper Mick*, which sold at Christie's, New York, 4 December 1992, lot 76.
3. The basic studies on the art and the career of Robert Henri are William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle* (1969; New York: Hacker Art Books, 1988); and Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991).
4. See Elizabeth Milroy, *Painters of a New Century: The Eight and American Art*, exh. cat. (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1991); and Mahonri Sharp Young, *The Eight: The Realist Revolt in American Painting* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1973).
5. See Henri to Mr. C. C. Horn, 7 June 1927, quoted in Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, 207.
6. Bruce Weber, *Ashcan Kids: Children in the Art of Henri, Luks, Glackens, Bellows and Sloan*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Gallery, 1998), 9–12. Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier have discussed the relation of ethnic portraits painted by Henri and his circle to popular stereotypes. Snyder and Zurier, "Picturing the City," in *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1995), 122.
7. For a recent study of Henri's portraiture, see *My People: The Portraits of Robert Henri*, exh. cat. (Orlando, Fla.: Orlando Museum of Art, 1994).
8. Margaret Stenz, "Primitivism and Nationalism in the Portraiture of Robert Henri," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2002, 215–76.
9. Bennard B. Perlman estimates that in 1927 and 1928 alone the artist executed some 140 portraits of Achill children, many of which were later destroyed by Henri's niece, Violet Organ; see Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art*, 134, 138.
10. Sarah Vure, "Independent American Artists: The Post-Armory Show Careers of Robert Henri and John Sloan," Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2002, 275–76; *Paintings of Irish Children: A Selection from the Last Season's Work in Ireland by Robert Henri, N.A.*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Carson Pirie Scott & Company, undated); and *A Memorial Exhibition of the Work of Robert Henri, 1865–1929* (Chicago: Carson Pirie Scott & Company, 1934), the last two in the pamphlet files of the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.
11. Another portrait of an Irish child, which Henri painted the same year as *The Green Sacque*, was reproduced on the front page of *Arts and Decoration*, a magazine devoted to interior decoration. "'Skipper Mick'—from an Irish Painting by Robert Henri," *Arts and Decoration* 33 (September 1930), front page.
12. See Diana Marcia Selig, "Cultural Gifts: American Liberals, Childhood, and the Origins of Multiculturalism," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001, 3–6.
13. See, for example, James F. Abel, "Earnestly Striving to Revive Irish Language and Literature," *School Life* 12 (January 1927), 98–99; "The Disappearing Irish," *Review of Reviews* 73 (June 1926), 652; and "The Tide of Irish Emigration," *Literary Digest* 89 (June 1926), 16.
14. Henri to unknown correspondent, 6 March 1926, quoted in Weber, *Ashcan Kids*, 12.
15. Royal Cortissoz, "Dead Henri Proves Live Theme," *Art Digest* 7 (15 March 1933), 15.
16. Edwina Spencer, "Around the Galleries," *Creative Art* 12 (April 1933), 316.
17. Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, 266.
18. Margaret Breuning, "Exhibitions of Robert Henri and William Chase," *New York Evening Post*, 11 March 1933, 85.
19. Emily Genauer, "Landscapes by Henri in Special Exhibit," *New York World Telegram*, 14 January 1939, 12. A note in Henri's record book, which was updated after his death by his wife, Marjorie Organ, indicates that *The Green Sacque* was included in the 1939 exhibition *Henri Today* at the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York, although it is not listed in the exhibition checklist. See Robert Henri, Record Book N, 111, collection Janet C. LeClair; and *Robert Henri Today* (New York: Grand Central Art Galleries, 1939), exhibition checklist in the pamphlet file of the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.



## JOSEPH HIRSCH (1910–1981)

### *Lynch Family*, 1946

Oil on canvas

35 × 33 in. (88.9 × 83.8 cm)

Signed lower left: Joseph Hirsch

Gift of the Friends of Art, 46-82

COMMENTING ON HIS ARTISTIC philosophy in 1942, Joseph Hirsch asked, “Does not any genuine personal expression, by its very nature, seek to propagandize? In my painting I want to castigate the things I hate and paint monuments to what I feel is noble.”<sup>1</sup> Hirsch belonged to a generation of American artists who viewed art as a weapon that could be wielded against social injustice. Unlike many artists, who retreated into pure abstraction after World War II, Hirsch never lost his commitment to this vision. In a 1969 letter he wrote, “A stranger once asked if I was in the entertainment world. I thought of my paintings and I said No, I make cudgels.”<sup>2</sup> Despite its austere beauty, Hirsch’s *Lynch Family* is a cudgel aimed at racial hatred and a monument to human endurance in the face of oppression.

The son of a surgeon, Hirsch was born into a comfortable, middle-class family in Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> Though he had planned to become a doctor, he changed his mind after winning a four-year scholarship to the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art. After graduation, he studied briefly in New York with George Luks, an artist associated with Robert Henri (q.v.) and the Ashcan School; however, it was in the mid-1930s, painting murals in public schools and government buildings for the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project, that Hirsch came into his own as an artist. In 1937 he had his first one-man show at the ACA Gallery in Philadelphia. Most of the pictures he exhibited were indictments of social injustice and exhortations for racial harmony painted in a mannered, Social Realist style.<sup>4</sup>

During World War II, Hirsch traveled as an artist-correspondent with the United States military. Sponsored by Abbott Laboratories in Chicago and by two successive Guggenheim fellowships, he made two tours in the Pacific theater and one in Europe, painting propaganda pictures that were used to recruit medical personnel and sell war bonds. In paintings such as *Attention Deluxe* (1943; U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C.), which depicts a cluster of concerned white medics and friends surrounding an injured black sailor, Hirsch presented interracial cooperation as both a vital element of the war effort and a symbol of American civilization. During the war, Hirsch also made more subjective, expressionist paintings such as *The Survivor* (1945; private collection), which depicts a pair of dark-skinned hands, presumably belonging to an American GI, clasped between the skeletal hands of a hooded man, who guides a proffered match to the cigarette between his lips.<sup>5</sup>

After the war Hirsch settled in New York. He worked briefly as a commercial artist before becoming disgusted with advertising when the American Tobacco Company insisted that he remove images of black tobacco growers and factory workers from a proposed advertisement.<sup>6</sup> At this time, Americans were witnessing a series of violent racist attacks, many of which were directed against returning black veterans in the South. Painted in the spring of 1946, Hirsch’s *Lynch Family* is undoubtedly a response to these incidents.<sup>7</sup> Although the Tuskegee Institute reported hopefully in January 1946 that lynchings in the United States were at an all-time low, over the next several months race-related murders and assaults occurred with renewed ferocity.<sup>8</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) urged Congress to pass antilynching legislation, comparing these attacks to the atrocities of the Nazi war criminals who were then being tried in Nuremberg.<sup>9</sup> Hirsch’s painting became especially pertinent in July and August, when a rash of racial violence swept the South and angry citizens across the country rose in response, urging President Truman and the Congress to take action. Hirsch and his fellow New Yorkers were not isolated from these events, as updates were published almost daily in local newspapers and articles appeared in such widely read magazines as *Time*, the *Nation*, and the *New Republic*.<sup>10</sup> As if specifically addressing the tragedies of the summer, *Lynch Family* was reproduced in the September issue of the populist journal *New Masses* following an article on the July lynching of two black men (one of whom was a veteran) and their wives in Monroe, Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

The subject of lynching had been frequently depicted by Social Realist painters during the 1930s. Artists such as Paul Cadmus, Philip Evergood, Louis Lozowick, Philip Reisman, and Harry Sternberg made dramatic images of violent, racist acts, often emphasizing the physical agony of victims.<sup>12</sup> Many of these works appeared in two exhibitions held in New York in 1935, the first organized by the NAACP and the second by the Artists Union and the communist John Reed Club.<sup>13</sup> Although these exhibitions generated moral outrage among viewers and a modicum of national publicity, they fell short of their political goal of mustering support for anti-lynching legislation before Congress. As Helen Langa has recently argued, the most explicit images in these exhibitions portrayed black men and women as helpless victims, unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes about their subordination to (and dependence on) white power.<sup>14</sup>

In *Lynch Family*, Hirsch depicted the tragic aftermath of a lynching. The widow of a murdered man, holding her fatherless child, covers her face and turns away from the viewer in despair. Although her expression is hidden, the strained muscles of her neck and hands betray the extremity of her pain. Her lively,



squirming baby forms a physical and emotional counterpoint to her collapsing form. As she bows her head, he strains upward, reaching out symbolically toward the future. The woman's tattered clothing and the peeling plaster wall behind her contrast with the silver rattle and the baby bottle, attributes of modern, middle-class childhood that signify the better life she desires for her child.<sup>15</sup> By including them, Hirsch implied that this woman and her husband had hoped for a secure, upwardly mobile, nuclear family—just as many white Americans did in the wake of a depression and a long, bitter war. It is not only this family, his painting suggests, but the American dream itself that has been betrayed by racism and lawless violence. By portraying the surviving family of the lynched man, Hirsch both avoided the threatening image of an adult black man and evoked a sense of moral obligation in the viewer. The child's raised arm poses a question about the future. Will he reach out, as his parents did, for a share of American prosperity and freedom? Or, denied this opportunity, will he instead seek retribution? Unlike earlier paintings, which portrayed victims of lynching as utterly powerless, *Lynch Family* suggests the possibility of revolt.

In *Lynch Family*, a series of interlocking triangles creates a balanced, monumental composition. Hirsch's work as a commercial illustrator and wartime propaganda artist had honed his ability to paint bold, persuasive pictures. *Lynch Family's* forceful, diagonal lines, simple massing of forms, and flat, abstract background combine to create a powerful visual statement. Hirsch's expressive use of color adds to the painting's emotional impact. The predominant tones of deep blue, which surround and frame the figures, create a feeling of melancholy and also evoke Renaissance paintings of the Madonna and Child, where blue was used lavishly as a sign of reverence. Like most of the pictures Hirsch painted after the war, *Lynch Family* was probably composed from memory, a technique that allowed the artist to ignore distracting details and concentrate on his emotional response to the subject.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of 1946 *Lynch Family* was included in an exhibition of Hirsch's postwar paintings at the Associated American Artists Gallery in New York.<sup>17</sup> It was noticed favorably by almost every critic and reproduced in several reviews. While critics avoided any explicit discussion of the painting's theme, they were quick to note that a new interest in the abstract qualities of paint underlay Hirsch's Social Realist subject matter. "His color has grown richer and clearer and his drawing more linear and direct," wrote Robert Coates for the *New Yorker*.<sup>18</sup> Commenting that "A previous tendency toward mere illustration is contradicted in *Lynch Family*," Alonzo Lansford noted,

Hirsch has changed, and for the better. While retaining his single-minded interest in people as dramatic protagonists, he has refined and personalized his means of projecting that drama. . . . His new paintings may be enjoyed for their "pure painting" qualities in color, texture and abstract composition, although these remain subsidiary to the crux of his credo: "The aesthetic power and timelessness of great painting

comes from grasping the big, simple truths of the living world in which the artist functions."<sup>19</sup>

Despite Hirsch's deft handling of paint, his technique remained subordinate to his goal of promoting social justice.<sup>20</sup>

Hirsch's melding of beautiful painting with a social message parallels the work of other American Social Realists, who increasingly emphasized subjective qualities and aesthetic concerns in their paintings after the end of World War II.<sup>21</sup> This trend flowed in part from the popularity of modern German art. Because it had been labeled "degenerate" and banned by the Nazis, the Expressionist work of artists like George Grosz and Max Beckmann came to symbolize embattled humanist values in a hostile, modern world.<sup>22</sup> In the charged political climate of the first years of the cold war, many artists began to avoid explicit social commentary in their work for fear they would be labeled un-American. Some abandoned representational painting completely, and the growing popularity of purely abstract art may also have influenced Hirsch to emphasize abstract qualities in his paintings. Looking back on his career in 1970, Hirsch cited *Lynch Family* as an example of a style he had come to regard as too explicit. "I think a noncommittal title is usually better," he concluded, "as the French say, *qui non engage à rien* [which doesn't commit itself]."<sup>23</sup> His later work became increasingly subtle, employing highly personal and often obscure symbolism. Still, for Hirsch, the narrative, human content of his paintings remained their most important element.

The Friends of Art, a group dedicated to acquiring works of contemporary art for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and its predecessor museums, purchased *Lynch Family* as its annual gift to the Museum in 1946.<sup>24</sup> According to a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, the vote to purchase *Lynch Family* was the speediest and most decisive one for acquisition in the twelve-year history of the group. The reporter noted, "It was the first time the Friends of Art had selected a painting with social significance."<sup>25</sup> Hirsch's reputation as a "top flight contemporary artist" probably influenced the choice.<sup>26</sup> Members of the Friends received a discounted subscription to *Art Digest*, and many would have read Alonzo Lansford's recent, glowing review of Hirsch's Associated American Artists exhibition. Also, just seven months earlier, Hirsch's war paintings had been exhibited at the Museum as part of a traveling exhibition sponsored by Abbott Laboratories, drawing large crowds and enthusiastic praise from the Kansas City community.<sup>27</sup>

Another factor that may have influenced the Friends' decision was an ugly incident involving the popular African American band leader Cab Calloway. Just a few days before Christmas in 1945, Calloway was pistol-whipped and arrested as he attempted to enter a white-only Kansas City dance hall. Both the local and the national press reported the beating, and Calloway filed a lengthy, ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit, which kept the story before the public eye for another two years.<sup>28</sup> All of this must have been acutely embarrassing for the well-educated and civic-minded Friends of Art, a group with strong ties to New York. It seems likely that the Friends, eager to prevent Kansas City being tagged a Jim Crow backwater, leaped

at the opportunity to acquire a painting that combined contemporary technique and popular appeal with an unequivocal indictment of racist violence.

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## NOTES

1. Quoted in *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 60.
2. Joseph Hirsch to unknown correspondent, 18 February 1969, Joseph Hirsch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel D387, frame 628.
3. There is currently no monograph on Joseph Hirsch. For basic biographical information, see *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*; Diane G. Cochrane, "Vision of Joseph Hirsch," *American Artist* 36 (October 1972), 26–31, 75–76; and Paul Cummings, Oral History Interview with Joseph Hirsch, 13 November 1970, AAA.
4. For instance, *Two Men* (1937; Museum of Modern Art, New York), voted the most popular work of art at the 1939 World's Fair, depicts a black man and a white man engaged in animated, mutually respectful conversation. See Patricia Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting in the 1930s*, exh. cat. (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983), 59. Hirsch is discussed in several other recent scholarly treatments of Social Realism, including David Schapiro, ed., *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1973); Howard E. Wooden, *The Neglected Generation of American Realist Painters, 1930–1948*, exh. cat. (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita Art Museum, 1981); Frances K. Pohl, *In the Eye of the Storm: An Art of Conscience, 1930–1970* (New York: Chameleon Books, 1995), 75–76; and Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change, 1920–1950* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Columbus Museum of Art, 2003), 136–37, 146.
5. Pohl, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 75–76.
6. Cummings, Oral History Interview with Joseph Hirsch, tape 2.
7. Although the canvas is not dated, Hirsch wrote to John Hopkins, Assistant Registrar of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, 23 November 1967, NAMA curatorial files, that, "To the best of my recollection 'Lynch Family' . . . was painted in the Spring of 1946."
8. See "Lynching at All-Time Low," *Christian Century* 63 (16 January 1946), 67. In February a twenty-one-year-old navy veteran was nearly flogged to death in Georgia, and in April two other young veterans were murdered in a Tennessee prison after disrupting the attempted lynching of a mother and son. See the following *New York Times* articles: "Klan Terrorists Linked to Killing, Georgia Agents Report Boasts of Murder, Negro Veteran of Navy Is Flogged," 8 June 1946, 28; and "Governor Insists Tennessee Is 'Fair' to Negro," *New York Times*, 25 April 1946, 3.
9. "Killing of Negroes Is Protested Here," *New York Times*, 2 March 1946, 26.
10. See "Georgia: The Best People Won't Talk," *Time*, 8 August 1946, 25; "The Shape of Things," *Nation*, 3 August 1946, 1; and "The Murders at Monroe," *New Republic*, 2 September 1946, 258–60.
11. Lawrence Gallert, "Talk in Monroe," *New Masses*, 3 September 1946, 20–22. *Lynch Family* appears on 25.
12. Some examples are Cadmus's drawing *To the Lynching* (1935; Whitney Museum of American Art); Evergood's *Lynching Party* (1935; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.); Lozowick's 1935 lithograph *Lynching*; Reisman's *Forces Opposing the Negro* (1936; ACA Galleries, New York); and Sternberg's 1937 lithograph *The Lynching*.
13. See Marlene Park, "Lynching and Antilynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s," *Prospects* 18 (1993), 311–65.
14. Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Political Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13 (Spring 1999), 10–39.
15. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1970s, medical professionals advised mothers to bottle-feed their babies. A comprehensive study of the history of breast-feeding and bottle-feeding is found in Rima D. Apple, *Mothers and Medicine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).
16. For Hirsch's working methods, see Henry C. Pitz, "Joseph Hirsch," *American Artist* 22 (June 1958), 62–68; and Cochrane, "Vision of Joseph Hirsch," 26–31, 75–76.
17. *Joseph Hirsch, Paintings, November 18 to December 7, 1946*, exh. cat. (New York: Associated American Artists, 1946).
18. Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries," *New Yorker*, 30 November 1946, 68, 70.
19. Alonzo Lansford, "Joseph Hirsch Deepens His Aesthetic Power," *Art Digest* 21 (1 December 1946), 9. The statement by Hirsch that Lansford quotes in part is from the exhibition catalogue. It ends, "truths which give contemporary life its meaning and direction and the constant expounding of which is today so urgent." Other reviews include "In the Galleries," *New York Times*, 24 November 1946, sec. 2, 9; "Reviews and Previews," *Art News* 45 (December 1946), 42; "Notes from Here and There," *Pictures on Exhibit* 9 (December 1946), 28–29; "Art Notes," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 17 November 1946, 11; "New Work of Soloists Adds to Stature as Painters," *New York World-Telegram*, 23 November 1946, 11; and Carlyle Burrows, "In the Art Galleries," *New York Herald Tribune*, 24 November 1946, sec. 5, 8.
20. As the reviewer for the *New York Sun* noted, "Perhaps there is a bit of melodrama in *Lynch Family*, a blue-and-black symphony of a Negro woman and child, but it does get its message across, and that after all is the reason for its existence." "Solo Exhibitions in Varied Styles," *New York Sun*, 22 November 1946, 30.
21. Greta Berman and Jeffrey Wechsler, eds., *Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting, 1940–1960*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982).
22. Cécile Whiting, "Regenerate Art: The Reception of German Expressionism in the United States, 1900–1945," *Art Criticism* 9 (1994), 72–92.
23. Cummings, Oral History Interview with Joseph Hirsch, tape 3.
24. See Nicholas S. Pickard, "The Friends of Art of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum: A History," typescript, 1981, Spencer Art Reference Library, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; and minutes of the twelfth annual meeting of the Friends of Art, 13 December 1946, Friends of Art Records, NAMA Archives.
25. "Modern Painters Are Aided by the Friends of Art," *Kansas City Star*, 12 April 1947, D6, 9.
26. Minutes of the twelfth annual meeting of the Friends of Art.
27. See newspaper clipping dated 5 May 1946 in scrapbook for 1944–49, 55, NAMA Archives.
28. See "Cab Calloway Beaten, Arrested," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 December 1945, 10; "Clubs Cab Calloway," *Kansas City Star*, 23 December 1945, 2; "Cab Calloway Incident," *Kansas City Star*, 31 December 1945, 10; "Cab Calloway Freed," *Kansas City Star*, 29 February 1946, 3; and "Cab Calloway Is Exonerated in Altercation," *Washington Post*, 29 February 1946, 3. The editor of the *New Masses* linked the assault to both Southern lynchings and Nazi atrocities. See "Assault on the USA," *New Masses*, 13 December 1945, 18.

## WINSLOW HOMER (1836–1910)

### *Gloucester Harbor*, 1873

Oil on canvas

15½ × 22¾ in. (39.4 × 56.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Winslow Homer 1873

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F76-46

WINSLOW HOMER EARNED A HIGH RANK in the canon of American art with his powerful paintings of the coast of Maine and his dazzling watercolors resulting from travels in upstate New York, New England, England, Canada, Florida, and the Caribbean. The foundation of his commitment to painting the sea and working in watercolor was laid in the summer of 1873, a portion of which he spent in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Homer's time there fostered significant changes in his art; chief among them was the elevation of watercolor from a tool for his illustration work to a preferred medium for painting. Additionally, although coastal images had appeared from the start of his career, Homer's stay in Gloucester advanced his deeper consideration of the sea as a meaningful subject.<sup>1</sup> At Gloucester and during the following year in his New York studio, Homer mainly concentrated on painting in watercolor. Even so, he produced a few small-scale oils, including the jewel-like *Gloucester Harbor*. Using the simple scenario of three children in a dory at sunset, Homer created a perfectly balanced and harmoniously colored design that reflects his signature ability to invest the subjects of daily life with universal resonances.

Homer's career as an artist began in the late 1850s, when he was an apprentice at Bufford's lithographic firm in his native Boston.<sup>2</sup> His imagery drew on both his personal experiences and those of others he observed in 1850s Boston. His apprenticeship taught him much about the importance of line and design and market response.<sup>3</sup> It also confirmed a desire for independence that motivated his actions throughout his entire career. In 1859 he moved to New York, the center of both the publishing and art worlds. Although he continued to earn money as an illustrator into the mid-1870s, he earnestly worked to become a painter, studying briefly at the National Academy of Design. By the end of 1861 Homer hoped to gain the important credential of having traveled in Europe, but the Civil War delayed that opportunity for six years.<sup>4</sup> During the war, Homer drew illustrations for *Harper's Weekly* and painted pictures that focused on daily life at home and among the soldiers. Common to these images is the depiction of both the physical realities and complex emotions of wartime, an experience that marked Homer, as it did his entire generation.<sup>5</sup> After the war, he painted thought-provoking canvases such as *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865; Metropolitan Museum of Art), whose title suggests Homer's awareness of the profound changes in every walk of life.<sup>6</sup>

Homer finally traveled abroad in 1867, spending most of a year in France. The coincidence of his trip with the Exposition Universelle in Paris allowed him to see, in an international context, his own *Prisoners from the Front* (1866; Metropolitan Museum of Art), the canvas that for many decades was considered his highest achievement.<sup>7</sup> He also painted in the city and countryside in addition to taking in the Parisian museums and art world. Although it is unknown exactly what impressed Homer, he felt the trip improved his art and positioned him to make money from it on his return home.<sup>8</sup> Resettled in New York, Homer followed the typical patterns of artists there: working in the city during the fall, winter, and spring seasons, and traveling to resorts for the summer. Over the next several years, Homer ventured to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the Adirondacks in New York, and the beaches at Long Branch, New Jersey, and coastal Massachusetts, among other popular destinations. In the city, he moved in the art circles of the day, exhibiting at and participating in the National Academy of Design, Century Club, and Union League Club and also selling work in available auction venues.

Women and especially children became Homer's most frequent subjects after his return from Europe. These popular themes offered Homer a platform from which to search for the best expression of his art in post-Civil War America. Homer had included children in his repertoire of figures from early in his career, but in 1871–72 boys took center stage in such works as *The Country School* (1871; Saint Louis Art Museum), *Snap the Whip* (1872; Butler Institute of American Art), and *Crossing the Pasture* (1872; Amon Carter Museum). They appeared in school and out, working, and playing, joining a platoon of childhood imagery produced by friends and colleagues, most notably J. G. Brown and Eastman Johnson (q.v.), whom Homer likely considered his greatest rival and whose *The Old Stage Coach* (1871; Milwaukee Art Museum) was hailed as a perfect example of child life.<sup>9</sup>

In the spring of 1873 Homer apparently did not have a new major exhibition piece and thus did not show at the National Academy of Design annual exhibition. Instead, he presented several paintings at the Century Club and at auction before leaving for the summer's travels.<sup>10</sup> He spent more than a month in Gloucester, on Cape Ann, twenty-eight miles northeast of Boston. At the time it was the largest fishing port in the world; of its population of sixteen thousand in 1873, six thousand worked on boats and in other fishing-related industries, particularly oilcloth. It also boasted a beautiful harbor, outstanding beaches, and a quaint town. With such amenities and easily accessible by train, it was also a popular tourist and artist spot.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, from the 1850s Gloucester attracted artists; over the next century, its artistic residents and visitors included Fitz Henry Lane (q.v.), William Morris





Fig. 1 Winslow Homer, *Gloucester Harbor*, 1873. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 9½ × 13½ in. (24.1 × 34.3 cm). Collection of Meredith and Cornelia Long

Hunt (q.v.), Childe Hassam (q.v.), Maurice Prendergast (q.v.), Stuart Davis (q.v.), and Marsden Hartley (q.v.).<sup>12</sup> The *Gloucester Telegraph* reported that Homer stayed at the Atlantic House, and that “the pages of *Harper’s Weekly* have been heightened by his seaside sketches.”<sup>13</sup> Although *Harper’s Weekly* did benefit from Homer’s Gloucester visit, he concentrated on material for paintings. In them, the artist and his subjects primarily faced the water. Boys far outnumber girls in the paintings, but they all reside in a contemplative atmosphere. Although most of the children are pictured in repose, they also are shown playing, and, as in *Gloucester Harbor* and five other works, some row.<sup>14</sup>

In *Gloucester Harbor*, Homer’s view appears to be from Stage Fort or Fresh Water Cove looking across Gloucester Harbor to Ten Pound Island.<sup>15</sup> A Gloucester dory with three children is the focal point of the image, but an elevated viewpoint leads the eye across the glassy water to an array of schooners anchored or sailing in front of the island beyond.<sup>16</sup> Homer measured the spatial depth of the image from foreground to background through bands of color applied with a variety of brushwork. In the foreground, strokes of blues, pinks, and tans in different lengths create stripes to achieve the effect of ripples of water closer to shore. Beyond the dory, the reflective blue of light hitting calm water fills the middle ground. Overhead, a heavy pink-red cloud casts a glow over the entire composition; it both asserts an awareness of the canvas surface and identifies the time of the scene as sunset. Small touches, most notably the two gulls to the right of center, help the viewer to read the image as depicting a particular moment and complete the interplay between flat surface and illusion that vibrates in many of Homer’s paintings of this decade and later.

*Gloucester Harbor* was likely not painted in Gloucester, however, but in Homer’s New York studio in the autumn of 1873. A

closely related watercolor (Fig. 1) provided the genesis for the oil. The two works are remarkably similar, but the Nelson-Atkins painting reveals altered artistic and thematic considerations. Homer’s primary concern in the watercolor appears to be the suggestion of light effects. His close observation of how light and its reflection play on water is transformed in the oil not simply due to the greater opacity of the heavier medium. A shift in palette from brown to pinkish red for the atmosphere’s tone gives the Nelson-Atkins painting a sharper contrast of color.<sup>17</sup> The most significant change from watercolor to oil, though, is the transfer of the primary focus from natural conditions to the children in the dory; the oil includes a little girl nestled against the boy on the right. Homer gives the human presence a greater prominence by enlarging the boat and figures, lowering the horizon and thereby condensing the pictorial space, and enhancing the highlights, especially on the boy rowing, whose shirt color is changed from brown to white. This greater emphasis on the vignette of the children removes the painting from the watercolor’s straightforward, albeit beautiful and sophisticated, depiction to the realm of narrative. In an era when watercolor was considered a less serious medium for art, more suited for studies or other preliminary work, weightier content would have been expected for an oil painting by Homer’s possible patrons and the critics of the day.<sup>18</sup>

The narrative content Homer offered in *Gloucester Harbor* was not a particular story but a consideration of current events and universal concerns. Following the devastation of the Civil War, childhood was seen as a specific time of life to be nurtured and celebrated. Children, in many respects, were also identified as the hope for America’s future success.<sup>19</sup> Using directed bright light to heighten the association of the young oarsman to the schooners in the center background and employing a title that locates the

painting in Gloucester; Homer pointed to multiple generations of fishermen working out of the Massachusetts port. Yet, the artist pictured the harbor with little reference to its extremely busy, and often dangerous, fishing industry, including the August 1873 violent gale on the fishing banks that destroyed nine vessels and killed 128 Gloucester men.<sup>20</sup> By suppressing unpleasant realities in *Gloucester Harbor*, Homer linked his painting with the many images of New England created after the Civil War that provided a foil to the era's harsh realities.<sup>21</sup> He further reinforced a sense of serenity by including the sliver of land at the horizon. Marking the limits of the pictorial space, it effectively contains the image. It underscores a sense of security, just as the site depicted is in fact a safe harbor, complete with the Ten Pound Island lighthouse, itself a beacon of safety. Such a view was in contrast not only to the particular experiences of Gloucester residents but also to the mounting challenges of Reconstruction in both the North and the South, complicated in the fall of 1873 by the onset of a devastating financial crisis, which lasted until the end of the decade.<sup>22</sup>

Attention focused on the boy rowing in *Gloucester Harbor* also urges the viewer, who seems to occupy a nearby boat, to contemplate his own position as well as the child's. Shown rowing two other children who relax comfortably in the back of the dory, the oarsman functions both as the participant in an enjoyable summer outing and as a harbinger of his potential adult role as a working boatman and caretaker of others. The scene offered Homer's original viewers the opportunity to reminisce perhaps nostalgically about their own pleasant childhoods and to contemplate the transition from boyhood to manhood in the post-Civil War era. E. Anthony Rotundo has written how apprenticeship and marriage were the ultimate markers in the transition to manhood in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Homer's boy, paused between strokes and looking at his passengers, seems caught in a moment of awareness of the two most likely paths of his adult life.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, the Nelson-Atkins painting perhaps compares favorably with such images as Thomas Cole's (q.v.) *Voyage of Life* (1839; Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.), in which boats are used as metaphors for the course of life's experiences. Like Cole, Homer employed the dory as the conduit for a morality tale. The boy as oarsman is responsible for the path of his boat and its contents—his life and the lives of those for whom he is responsible. Glancing at the viewer as well, he includes the observer of the painting in his recognition.

Although *Gloucester Harbor* primarily suggests a contented moment of childhood experience, it is not of the wholly happy character of many of his peers' images of children. Similar to other artists' imagery, it plays on viewers' feelings of nostalgia and erases contemporary grim urban realities, which included many impoverished children. Brown and Johnson, among others, often depicted youth in the tradition of the barefoot boy, made popular in John Greenleaf Whittier's 1856 poem. In contrast to Homer's children in *Gloucester Harbor*, they more often appear insulated from the adult world and are imbued with sentimentality, as in Johnson's *Barefoot Boy* (1860; private collection) and Brown's *The Berry Boy*

(1875; George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Mass.).<sup>25</sup> The Nelson-Atkins painting, by contrast, tingles with an uneasiness found in much of Homer's work from his Civil War images through the croquet and other leisure themes of the late 1860s to *Snap the Whip*.<sup>26</sup> It emits a visual tension from several angles, most notably the empty space in the very center of the painting that separates the single boy on the left, in highlight, and the pair of children, on the right, in shadow. The eerie contrast of red and blue and the composition's remarkable design, which uses a series of unequal partners to achieve a perfect equilibrium, reinforce the painting's discomfort.<sup>27</sup>

In 1873 Homer was at a stage in his life that may have stimulated his interest in the themes of family and work explored in *Gloucester Harbor*. Recently, his parents and older brother Charles and his wife, Mattie, had relocated from the Boston area to nearby Brooklyn and Manhattan, respectively, putting his already close-knit family in proximity to each other. This tighter connection to his immediate relations may have caused the artist, at age thirty-seven and unmarried, to consider more deeply his position with regard to family obligations.<sup>28</sup> As to his art, Homer received mixed reviews for his early 1870s canvases of children. Generally, they were praised for their charm and representation of national types and character. His style, however, was frequently criticized for its sketchiness.<sup>29</sup> The relations among subject, imagination, the need for literal representation, and the role of style were continually modulating in painting through the end of the 1870s, and Homer struggled to find an appropriate balance that would please himself, potential patrons, and art critics.<sup>30</sup>

Homer exhibited *Gloucester Harbor* at the Century Association in February 1874. The one hundred men who constituted the club's membership, like Homer, could have seen in the painting their own childhoods as well as their journeys to manhood and its component parts of work and family. At the same time, he had several *Leaves from a Sketchbook* on view at the American Water Color Society. These watercolors, many of Gloucester children, were received with great enthusiasm, giving Homer the kind of success that, in the 1870s, was only exceeded by *The Country School* and *Breezing Up* (1876; National Gallery of Art).<sup>31</sup> Even so, none of Homer's paintings of the 1870s surpassed the great acclaim accorded *Prisoners from the Front*. Higher praise would not be bestowed on his art until the appearance of the sea paintings created in Prout's Neck, Maine, in the 1890s. Before Homer settled in Maine, he returned to Gloucester in the summer of 1880 and then visited the coast of England at Cullercoats, searching for the next direction of his art. Like the boy rowing in *Gloucester Harbor*, he, too, pondered the choices of adulthood. Homer opted to focus on work and allowed any family ambitions of his own to recede into the shadows. Painting primarily in watercolor again in Gloucester and in Cullercoats, he steered the course of his own boat—and his life—most definitely toward the sea.

MCC



## NOTES

1. Homer drew illustrations of the seashore in 1858 and 1859 for *Harper's Weekly*. See Philip C. Beam, *Winslow Homer's Magazine Engravings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 62, 51. Homer had made an earlier brief visit to Gloucester, probably in 1869 or 1870, the result of which can be seen in *Shipyards at Gloucester* (1871; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.). John Davis and Jaroslav Leshko, *The Smith College Museum of Art: European and American Painting and Sculpture, 1760–1960* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2000), 180; and Lloyd Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, ed. and expanded by Abigail Booth Gerdtts (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), 2:149–51.
2. The Homer bibliography is vast and much of it depends, as does this entry, on Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944). Other biographical information has been taken from Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and the chronology in Goodrich/Gerdtts, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, 1:75–81, 2:7–34.
3. Elizabeth Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 12, rightly pinpoints Homer's time at Bufford's as instrumental in his understanding that art was a business.
4. *Ibid.*, 28–29, details Homer's mother's role in trying to make the trip become a reality.
5. On the war's impact on Homer, see *ibid.*, 34. The most comprehensive study of Homer's Civil War paintings is Marc Simpson, *Winslow Homer: Paintings of the Civil War*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988).
6. On *The Veteran in a New Field*, see Christopher Kent Wilson, "Winslow Homer's *The Veteran in a New Field*: A Study of the Harvest Metaphor and Popular Culture," *American Art Journal* 17 (Autumn 1985), 20–27; and Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "A Harvest of Death: *The Veteran in the New Field*," in Simpson, *Winslow Homer*, 83–101.
7. On the impact of *Prisoners from the Front* on the critique of Homer's paintings in the 1870s, see Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, in association with Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2001), 9–12, 44, 88, 92, 95, 105, 172, 184, 197. See also Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "Winslow Homer's *Prisoners from the Front*," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 12 (1977), 155–72.
8. Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, 40.
9. Sarah Burns has written about the possible rivalry between Homer and Johnson as well as the resemblances in their work in "In Whose Shadow? Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer in the Postwar Decades," in Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hills, *Eastman Johnson: Painting America*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli International, 1999), 180–214. For a recent survey of nineteenth-century images of childhood, see Claire Perry, *Young America: Childhood in 19th-Century Art and Culture*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
10. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, 49–51. Goodrich/Gerdtts, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, 19, says Homer's first stop was in Connecticut before arriving in Gloucester sometime in July. Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 394, record his arrival as late June. Contemporary newspapers, as they complained that artists were always going to the same summer spots, noted, likely erroneously, that Homer was traveling to Newport and the White Mountains. "Art Matters. Whereabouts of Artists," *New York Herald*, 21 June 1873, 11.
11. In 1875 S[amuel] G[reene] W[heeler] Benjamin noted: "at present the cape is overrun annually for three or four months by an army from the cities. The era of boarding-houses, shanties, and shooting boxes has fairly set in." Benjamin, "Gloucester and Cape Ann," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 51 (September 1875), 474. See also Edwin A. Start, "Round about Gloucester," *New England Magazine* 6 (August 1892), 687–703; James R. Pringle, *History of the Town and City of Gloucester* (Gloucester, Mass.: privately printed, 1892); and James Connolly, *The Port of Gloucester* (New York: Doubleday, 1940). Train lines to Gloucester were well established by the early 1840s.
12. On artists in Gloucester, see Kristian Davies, *Artists of Cape Ann: A 150 Year Tradition* (Rockport, Mass.: Twin Lights Publishers, 2001); and James F. O'Gorman, *Portrait of a Place: Some American Landscape Painters in Gloucester*, exh. cat. (Gloucester, Mass.: Gloucester 350th Anniversary Celebration, 1973).
13. Quoted in D. Scott Atkinson, introduction to Atkinson and Jochen Wierich, *Winslow Homer in Gloucester*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Terra Museum of American Art, 1990), 10.
14. The images from the summer of 1873 are illustrated in Goodrich/Gerdtts, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, 2:220–56.
15. The author thanks Stephanie Buck, Cape Ann Historical Association, for identifying the location from which Homer painted. Buck to Margaret C. Conrads, 25 August 2006, NAMA curatorial files.
16. On the history of schooners, see Joseph William Collins, "Evolution of the American Fishing Schooner," *New England Magazine* 24 (May 1895), 336–49.
17. Homer's choice of the red-blue combination likely was connected to his interest in the color theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul. Homer received an 1859 English translation of Chevreul's *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs* (1839) from his brother in 1860. For Homer and Chevreul, see Kristin Hoermann, "'A Hand Formed to Use the Brush,'" in Simpson, *Winslow Homer*, 103–9; and, more generally, Jana Therese Colacino, "Winslow Homer Watercolors and the Color Theory of M. E. Chevreul," M.A. thesis, Syracuse University, 1994.
18. It connects, too, to Homer's ongoing work in illustration. A Gloucester harbor scene of children on the water appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on 27 September 1873. Beam, *Winslow Homer's Magazine Engravings*, 224.
19. Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 297–313. For a more recent overview of child-life imagery, see Perry, *Young America*.
20. D. Scott Atkinson, "Winslow Homer in Gloucester, 1873: Hymns to an Older America," in Atkinson and Wierich, *Winslow Homer in Gloucester*, 25.
21. *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, ed. William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), xii–41. Homer's work for *Harper's Weekly* in the winter and spring of 1874 included some of his rare depictions of the grimmer side of New York life. For examples of these illustrations, see Beam, *Winslow Homer's Magazine Engravings*, 229, 231.
22. In late September 1873 the banking firm that was financing a second transcontinental railroad failed, causing the New York Stock Exchange to close for ten days. This event in concert with the collapse of Reconstruction policies precipitated the worst depression in United States history. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–77* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 511–59.
23. E. Anthony Rotunda, *American Manhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 53–54.
24. For Gloucester boys, Homer's image offers a kind of visual correlative to literary works such as Edmund C. Stedman's "The Lord's-Day Gale," an 1874

poem that commemorated the loss of men out of Gloucester the previous August. It ends with the lines “The lads shall say: ‘Another year, / And we shall be of age to sail! / And the mothers’ hearts shall fill with pride, / Though tears drop fast for them who died / When the fleet was wrecked in the Lord’s-Day gale.” *Atlantic Monthly* 33 (April 1874), 406.

25. Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions*, 297–308; and see Perry, *Young America*, 12, for Johnson’s painting, and chap. 4 on city “Ragamuffins.”
26. Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, 40. For example, the croquet paintings, powerfully designed with dramatic color schemes, are charged with an underlying tension resonant of the changing roles of men and women in post-Civil War America. David Park Curry, *Winslow Homer: The Croquet Game*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1984).
27. Red skies in 1860s or 1870s American painting typically have been connected to the idea of twilight as the end of an era and often tied to the Civil War and the difficulties that ensued. Adam Greenhalgh, “‘Darkness Visible’: *A Twilight in the Catskills* by Sanford Robinson Gifford,” *American Art Journal* 22 (2001), 45–75. Yet Marc Simpson has recently written about how the “wine-red” coloration in Homer’s 1880 watercolors of Gloucester should be understood as reflecting calm, recalling the old adage “red sky at night, sailor’s delight.” Simpson, “Homer’s Wine-Dark Seas,” in *Winslow Homer: Poet of the Sea*, ed. Sophie Lévy, exh. cat. (Giverny, France: Musée d’Art Américain Giverny, 2006), 26–30, esp. 29. Indeed, Simpson’s point may also be appropriate for reading the Nelson-Atkins painting, where Homer may have wittingly counterbalanced the unease in the painting by the very feature that contributes to it. Similarly, he achieves compositional balance in part through such juxtapositions as the placement of the boat off center against the rhythm of sails across the horizon and the use of the two gulls, created with single brushstrokes, as counterweights against the open water on the left.
28. Around this same time, Homer explored the theme of courtship both blatantly and more obliquely in paintings including *Waiting for an Answer* (1872; Peabody Collection, Maryland State Archives, Baltimore) and *Temperance Meeting* (1874; Philadelphia Art Museum) and illustrations for James Lowell Russell’s *The Courtin’* in 1872.
29. *Snap the Whip* was particularly criticized for its “crudities and apparent carelessness of execution.” On the critique of Homer’s painting from 1870 to 1872, see Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, 29–47.
30. On the critique of Homer’s art during these years, see *ibid.*, chaps. 4–7.
31. On the reception of these watercolors, see *ibid.*, 52–58.

## EDWARD HOPPER (1882–1967)

### *Light Battery at Gettysburg*, 1940

Oil on canvas

18 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 27 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (46 × 69.4 cm)

Signed lower right: EDWARD HOPPER

Gift of the Friends of Art, 47-95

DURING THE FIRST THREE DAYS of July 1863, a Confederate army of 75,000 met a Union army of 90,000 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in the climactic contest of the Civil War. On the first day, the Northern troops, under the command of General George G. Meade, assumed a strong defensive position along Cemetery Ridge south of the town, while the Southern troops, led by General Robert E. Lee, gathered in a parallel line along Seminary Ridge to the west. On the second day, the Confederates attacked the southern end of the Union defenses, inflicting heavy losses, but failed to gain the high ground. On the third day, Lee ordered a frontal attack on the Union center. General George E. Pickett led his famous charge of several thousand men across an open field and up Cemetery Ridge in the face of deadly Northern fire. The Confederates reached the crest but could not hold it. Lee was forced to withdraw his shattered army to Virginia. Gettysburg marked a turning point in the war. While about 23,000 Northern soldiers were killed or wounded, the smaller Confederate army suffered some 28,000 casualties. Never again would Lee have the strength to mount a major offensive against the Union.

The dramatic story of the Battle of Gettysburg would have been well known to Edward Hopper. Deeply interested in the Civil War, Hopper had visited Gettysburg and owned a ten-volume, illustrated history of the war that included a detailed account of the famous battle.<sup>1</sup> Yet in his 1940 painting *Light Battery at Gettysburg* Hopper showed no fighting, none of the battle's celebrated commanders, and none of its storied sites. Instead, he depicted, with thick, sometimes labored brushstrokes, an anonymous company of blue-clad Union soldiers, mounted and seated on wagons with their backs to the viewer, receding diagonally into the picture along a nameless road. Running along the left side of the road is a split-rail fence, enclosing a field of short, regularly spaced, leafy trees. Beyond this field is a forested area, with the blue crest of a low mountain visible above it in the distance. To the right of the road, separated from it by a white-painted board fence, are a white farmhouse and outbuildings, behind which rise tall trees. Overarching the scene is a sky mostly filled with white stratus clouds, except for an area of blue at the upper left.

Despite the seemingly specific setting in which the Union battery is placed, Hopper offers no clue as to the identity or destination of these soldiers. The viewer cannot tell what day of the battle is depicted, nor if the company is going into an engagement or

returning from one. In short, Hopper's *Light Battery at Gettysburg* frustrates the viewer's desire to see it as an identifiable episode from a familiar historical narrative. *Light Battery at Gettysburg* shares with Hopper's more characteristic pictures of contemporary American life a refusal to tell a story and a fundamental quality of indeterminacy. Like all of Hopper's mature work, the picture is elliptical, and much of its fascination depends on what it does *not* depict or narrate.<sup>2</sup>

The suspension of narrative in Hopper's mature paintings marked a decisive break from his earlier professional work as an illustrator, which required him to tell stories through pictures. Born and raised in Nyack, New York, he was the son of businessman Garrett Henry Hopper and Elizabeth Griffiths Smith, who supported Edward's youthful decision to become an artist but urged him to pursue commercial illustration rather than the financially uncertain career of a painter. In 1899 Hopper enrolled at a school for illustrators in New York City and the next year transferred to the New York School of Art, where he remained until 1906. His most influential teacher there was Robert Henri (q.v.), who exhorted his students to depict the modern world around them in a direct and vigorous manner.

Following art school Hopper made three trips to Europe, in 1906–7, 1909, and 1910, spending most of his time in Paris, where he visited museums and exhibitions but ignored the radical modernist work then being done in the city; he would throughout his life hold abstract art in low regard. From 1908 Hopper lived in New York City, making his living as an illustrator for such magazines as *System*, *Everybody's*, *Farmer's Wife*, and *Adventure*. Hopper detested this commercial work and later said that he was not interested in drawing people "grimacing and posturing." "Maybe I am not very human," he added. "What I wanted to do was paint sunlight on the side of a house."<sup>3</sup> Hopper continued to paint in his free time and often exhibited in New York, but his pictures received little notice. He enjoyed more professional success in etching, which he took up in 1915. In this medium he first articulated several of the themes that would recur in his later art: the solitary figure looking out a window, the isolated individual in an urban environment, the lonely building in a drab landscape. For the rest of his life, Hopper depicted scenes that suggest isolation, alienation, and abandonment, the absence of human communication, and the lack of emotional fulfillment. As portrayed by Hopper, modern existence is essentially lonely, mundane, and devoid of any high or noble purpose.

In 1923 Hopper began painting seriously in watercolor, working directly from nature. A solo exhibition of his watercolors in 1924 at the Frank K. M. Rehn Gallery was a commercial and critical success, finally establishing Hopper, at age forty-two, as an important





Fig. 1 Edward Hopper, *Dawn before Gettysburg*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 15 × 20 in. (38.1 × 50.8 cm). The Warner Collection of Gulf States Paper Corporation and on view in the Westervelt-Warner Museum, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

artist and enabling him to abandon commercial illustration. Around this time Hopper also arrived at his mature style of oil painting, featuring simplified yet solid forms, sober brushwork, tightly structured compositions, and bold contrasts of light and shadow—all evident in *Light Battery at Gettysburg*. Although Hopper's style was realistic, he did not paint directly from nature but created his pictures in the studio, synthesizing observation, memory, and imagination into images that embodied his subjective vision of the objective world. He typically worked out his compositions in drawings that served as studies for his oils. He executed his paintings slowly and deliberately, often completing just one or two canvases a year during the later decades of his career.

From the mid-1920s Hopper's art gained increasing recognition. Lloyd Goodrich, Forbes Watson, and other critics who promoted the expression of national character in art praised him for resisting the influence of French modernism and for producing straightforward depictions of the American Scene. Hopper himself wrote articles on John Sloan (q.v.) and Charles Burchfield, lauding them as honest delineators of American life whose art was rooted in the American soil.<sup>4</sup> In 1933 Hopper was honored by a retrospective at the recently founded Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the catalogue, Hopper described his aim in painting as “the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

He also sounded a nationalistic note by suggesting that “a nation's art is greatest when it most reflects the character of its people.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1924 Hopper married the painter Josephine Verstelle Nivison, who had also studied with Henri. Jo moved into the Washington Square apartment that Edward had occupied since 1913, and the couple lived there until their deaths. They typically spent the warm months on the New England coast, where in the 1930s they built a summer home on Cape Cod. The Hoppers also traveled widely by car throughout the United States, driving as far as California. The experience of travel provided Hopper with many of his characteristic themes, including highways and gas stations, motels and cafeterias, trains and railroad tracks. *Light Battery at Gettysburg* also shows its subjects traveling, albeit by the nineteenth-century conveyance of horses and wagons.

In the spring of 1929 the Hoppers drove to Charleston, South Carolina, where Edward painted a watercolor of the cannons at Fort Sumter, site of the first battle of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> On their way back north, the Hoppers visited the Confederate Museum in Richmond, where Jo reported that Edward displayed “the greatest reverence.”<sup>8</sup> They then traveled up the Shenandoah Valley to see the historic battlefield at Gettysburg. As Gail Levin has noted, Edward Hopper had been interested in military history since childhood and was particularly fascinated by the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Garrett Hopper,



Fig. 2 Edward Hopper, Study for *Light Battery at Gettysburg*, 1940. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 16 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 24 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (42.2 × 62.3 cm). Private collection

born in 1852, had been too young to serve but had lived through the 1863 New York draft riots, and told his son of the terrifying experience. Images of the war were available to Edward Hopper in documentary photographs and works of art, from the famous illustrations of Winslow Homer (q.v.) to commemorative statues of war heroes, as well as in various public ceremonies and reenactments.

Hopper was particularly drawn to the Civil War photographs of Mathew Brady, abundantly reproduced in Francis T. Miller's *Photographic History of the Civil War* (1911), which Jo gave him as a present in 1936. Hopper later praised Brady's work, noting that "the pictures aren't cluttered up with detail; you just get what is important. Very simplified."<sup>10</sup> Hopper's characterization of Brady's photographs as simple and uncluttered is telling, for his own compositions may be described in the same terms.

In February 1934 Hopper painted *Dawn before Gettysburg* (Fig. 1), the first of his two paintings inspired by the Battle of Gettysburg. The delay of five years between Hopper's visit to the battlefield and his creation of the painting was not unusual; the artist would often ruminate for years on a subject before committing it to canvas.<sup>11</sup> In *Dawn before Gettysburg*, an alert Union sergeant stands watch while his tired men sit shoulder to shoulder along the side of the road. Behind them stands the simple white farmhouse that served as the Gettysburg headquarters of

General Meade.<sup>12</sup> This historic house was recorded in wartime photographs by Alexander Gardner and the Tyson Brothers, but Hopper seems to have rendered it from his own observation. The soldiers, while invented by Hopper, were doubtless inspired by vintage photographs of Union troops. Hopper's decision to show the men at rest rather than in action is characteristic, for he often depicted people sitting or standing idly in states of apparent fatigue or boredom, waiting for something to happen.

Hopper's unusual foray into American history painting in 1934 should be considered in the context of the search by Depression-era artists and intellectuals for what came to be called a "usable past."<sup>13</sup> This renewed interest in American history was driven by a desire to gain perspective on the present time of national distress. Writers and historians of the 1930s were particularly absorbed by the Civil War, the greatest crisis in the nation's history.<sup>14</sup> Hopper clearly shared this interest and, as Virginia Mecklenburg suggests, seems to have recognized the Civil War as a turning point in national history, when the simpler, more innocent character of early American life gave way to the alienating complexities of modern existence.<sup>15</sup>

Hopper returned to the subject of the Civil War for the second and final time in the spring of 1940, when he painted *Light Battery at Gettysburg*. On this occasion not just history but contemporary

events may have been on the artist's mind as he rendered an American military subject; World War II was raging in Europe and the prospect of United States involvement in the conflict was growing. Jo Hopper, however, noted in her diary on 29 April 1940 that Edward professed to be working on the canvas "only to be busy," and added, "That is seldom his motive." In the same entry, Jo reported Edward's progress on the picture: "E. worked from Early A.M. til dark—standing up. Has had the sky with dark cloud above, strip of robin's egg below—all scraped out—too heavy. The new sky not so impressive." A week later, on 6 May, she noted the physical strain the work was causing: "E. still adding touches to Civil War canvas. It's amazing how long he can keep it going and it certainly grows richer. He has tied a cushion on a high stool, but finds he must work standing and gets so tired."<sup>16</sup> Two days later, on 8 May, the picture was delivered to Hopper's dealer, Frank Rehn.

*Light Battery at Gettysburg* is related to the earlier *Dawn before Gettysburg* in its imagery of soldiers, a road, a white house, and background trees. The composition of the second Gettysburg painting differs substantially from that of the first, however. The soldiers are no longer lined up across the foreground of the painting but are now placed along a diagonal receding into the picture space. The house is no longer situated behind the soldiers but is on their right, while to their left is a field dense with green foliage. The road occupied by the light battery, with trees on one side and architecture on the other, defines a border between nature and civilization—a thematic opposition of particular interest to Hopper at this time, also seen in *Cape Cod Evening* (1939; National Gallery of Art) and *Gas* (1940; Museum of Modern Art, New York).<sup>17</sup> In the case of *Light Battery at Gettysburg*, the troops seem reluctantly but necessarily fixed on this borderline. The house, behind a protective fence and drawn shades, does not welcome them but only reminds them coldly of the homes they have left behind, and nature, on the other side, is a place of menace, for it harbors, unseen, the death-dealing Confederate enemy.

As was his wont, Hopper worked out his ideas for *Light Battery at Gettysburg* in sketches, three of which survive. The largest and most finished of these (Fig. 2) closely predicts the composition of the painting, with one significant difference. The drawing includes the head of a horse entering from the right, to suggest, in Jo Hopper's words, "the continuation of the long stream of tired men & beasts."<sup>18</sup> The horse's head does not appear in the final painting, and as a result, the mounted soldiers seem more isolated within the landscape setting and more distant from the viewer. The elimination of the horse's head also lessens the impression of the battery's motion into the painting. Close inspection in fact reveals that the battery is not moving but is at a halt; the horses' legs are straight, their feet planted on the ground. The rearmost men sit with their arms folded, waiting, stiffly. The labored brushwork in many areas of the painting reinforces the overall quality of brooding inertia.

The troops in *Light Battery at Gettysburg* do not communicate with one another and do not communicate with us. We cannot see their faces, we cannot know what they are feeling, we cannot

identify with them. Like the nameless soldiers in the old Civil War photographs that fascinated Hopper, they are strangers to us, substantial yet ghostly, visible yet inaccessible. Who are these men? Where are they going? What will happen to them? The bluntly rendered painting does not tell, and suggests that it does not matter. The pessimistic Edward Hopper imagines even Gettysburg, the most consequential battle of the Civil War, as a banal and essentially meaningless situation, in which ordinary people find themselves incapable of action, resigned to their lot.

DC

## NOTES

1. Hopper received Francis T. Miller's ten-volume *Photographic History of the Civil War* (New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1911) as a gift from his wife in 1936. See Gail Levin, *Hopper's Places*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 99.
2. As Robert Hobbs has noted, the viewer of a Hopper painting is required to acknowledge the lack of a storyline and to recognize the ambiguous situation that this creates. Hobbs, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with National Museum of American Art, 1987), 20.
3. Hopper, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), 31. Goodrich recorded this statement on 20 April 1946.
4. See Edward Hopper, "John Sloan and the Philadelphians," *Arts* 11 (April 1927), 168–78; and Hopper, "Charles Burchfield: American," *Arts* 14 (July 1928), 5–12.
5. Edward Hopper, "Notes on Painting," in *Edward Hopper: Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 17.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Three years earlier, in 1926, Hopper had recorded a historic Northern Civil War site in his watercolor *Civil War Campground* (Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art, St. Joseph, Mo.), which depicts a hilltop in Rockland, Maine, that in 1861 served as a campsite for ten companies of men recruited from the area. See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 2:116.
8. Jo Hopper to Bee Blanchard, 14 July 1930, quoted in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 223.
9. See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with W.W. Norton and Company, 1980), 60–61; Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 18, 20; and Levin, *Hopper's Places*, 97–99.
10. William Johnson, unpublished account of an interview with Edward Hopper, 30 October 1956, 23, quoted in Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, 61. Recent historical studies have demonstrated that Brady was sometimes given credit for photographs taken by his assistants, such as Alexander Gardner and Timothy H. O'Sullivan—a fact of which Hopper would have been unaware. See Levin, *Hopper's Places*, 99.
11. Levin, *Hopper's Places*, 98.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See Alfred Haworth Jones, "The Search for a Usable American Past in the New Deal Era," *American Quarterly* 23 (December 1971), 710–24. The term *usable past* was coined by the literary critic Van Wyck Brooks in 1918. See Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *Dial* 64 (11 April 1918), 337–41.
14. Depression-era writers and artists were particularly fascinated by the Civil War-time president Abraham Lincoln. On this point, see Jones, "The Search for a Usable Past," 722–24; and Randall R. Griffey, "Marsden Hartley's Lincoln Portraits," *American Art* 15 (Summer 2001), 35–51. Not surprisingly, Hopper, with his artistic dedication to anonymous Americans, did not share in the hero worship of Lincoln.
15. Virginia M. Mecklenburg, *Edward Hopper: The Watercolors*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, in association with W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 88. Mecklenburg also notes Hopper's predilection for painting houses built during or just after the Civil War.
16. Quoted in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 326.
17. Hopper reprised this opposition in later works such as *Seven A.M.* (1948; Whitney Museum of American Art), *Cape Cod Morning* (1950; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), *Sunlight on Brownstones* (1956; Wichita Art Museum, Kans.), and *Second Story Sunlight* (1960; Whitney Museum of American Art).
18. Jo Hopper diary entry for 18 April 1940, quoted in Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, 325.



# JOHN DARE HOWLAND (1843–1914)

## *Buffalo Hunt*, c. 1868 (*Hunting Buffalo on the Plains*)

Oil on canvas

18 × 24 in. (45.7 × 61 cm)

Signed lower right: J. D. Howland

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 50-48

JOHN DARE HOWLAND'S *Buffalo Hunt* depicts three American Indian men on horseback, each wielding a lance and pursuing a fleeing bison across an expansive, grassy landscape. The central figure, his face and bare torso tense with exertion, closes in on his quarry and prepares to thrust his lance into its side. His white horse, which charges directly toward the animal, flares its nostrils and rolls its eyes. In the right foreground, the skeleton of another buffalo lies half hidden in the tall, waving prairie grass—an oblique reference to the ongoing extermination of the American buffalo herds and the displacement of the Plains Indians. However, no other sign of the encroachment of white civilization can be seen.

Howland was born in Zanesville, Ohio, on 7 May 1843, the son of a riverboat captain.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by tales of the frontier told by his uncle Lem Owens, he ventured west at the age of fourteen. According to his own account, he lived periodically with the Sioux, hunting buffalo and purchasing buffalo hides for the American Fur Company. The 1858 Colorado gold rush enticed Howland to that region. He failed as a prospector but survived as a partner in a song-and-dance routine that played saloons and taverns. In late 1858 he helped lay out the town of Auraria (now West Denver) and from that time considered Colorado his home. In the early 1860s Howland served in the Colorado Volunteers of the Union army, fighting first against Confederate soldiers in New Mexico and afterward against Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians in Colorado.

After leaving the army in 1864, Howland traveled to Washington, D.C., and possibly Paris. Three years later, he served as a clerk in the Indian Peace Commission, whose purpose it was to make treaties with the Plains Indians across the upper Midwest.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he worked as an artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*.<sup>3</sup> Howland's whereabouts over the decade following the Peace Commission's disbanding in late 1868 are only known in part, yet it seems clear he continued to work as an artist. The *Denver Daily Tribune* reported in June 1877 that Howland was making frequent visits to Denver "as he had passed to and from his studio in Washington, to the scenes of . . . his studies in the Far West, from Montana to the City of Mexico."<sup>4</sup> From 1878 until his death in 1914, Howland worked primarily out of his studio in Denver. He was a founding member of the Denver Art Club and in 1905 was commissioned to create a Civil War monument outside the Colorado State Capitol.

Howland's success as an artist was closely intertwined with his vaunted experiences as a trapper, scout, and frontiersman. As a result of his reputation, the artist's paintings of buffalo and American Indians—two subjects that he painted repeatedly—have often been viewed as accurate historical documents rather than invented scenes.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in 1897 a reporter for the *Denver Times* noted, "For more than thirty years Mr. Howland has been artist, guide, hunter, scout and miner in the Rocky Mountain country. This artist, like George Catlin, has painted types of western life that no longer exist. The buffalo, which he excels in painting, has virtually become extinct, as has also the strong, noble type of Indian that years ago was a favorite subject of the brush."<sup>6</sup> In the twentieth century, *Buffalo Hunt* was included in the Joslyn Art Museum's exhibition *Life on the Prairie: The Artist's Record*, where it was presented as part of a "visual record left by artist-explorers" whose "real" paintings "tell us a simple, direct story that needs no embellishing."<sup>7</sup>

This vision of Howland's art is complicated by the fact that the central section of *Buffalo Hunt* is nearly identical to an illustration by F. O. C. Darley called *The Buffalo Hunt*, which appeared in the 1 May 1858 issue of *Harper's Weekly* (Fig. 1). Howland copied almost verbatim Darley's pair of hunting Indians. He then amplified the composition's foreground with carefully delineated prairie grasses, flowers, and the skeleton, while he filled in the background with less distinctly defined, smaller groups of buffalo and a mountain range in the distance.

Although he did not date it, Howland probably painted *Buffalo Hunt* in the late 1860s. It displays the concise but generalized drawing of his early illustrative work, and the subject matter is also typical of his paintings from this period. In February 1869 the artist exhibited a canvas called *Buffalo Hunting* at the Washington (D.C.) Gallery of Fine Arts.<sup>8</sup> Also in the late 1860s, a Howland painting of a buffalo hunt was on view in a Washington, D.C., jewelry store. The description of that picture reveals it to be remarkably similar though not identical to the Nelson-Atkins canvas.<sup>9</sup> Howland painted these scenes of Indians hunting buffalo during a period when white migrations, the beginning of the first long cattle drives, and especially the construction of the transcontinental railroad resulted in increasingly frequent confrontations between whites and Indians.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, massive buffalo slaughters were carried out by members of both groups.<sup>11</sup> Howland himself had recently been deeply involved in these events, first as a fur trader and later as a soldier in the bloody "Colorado War" that drove native peoples from their traditional hunting range in the eastern part of that state.<sup>12</sup>

In light of these facts, Howland's decision to copy his composition for *Buffalo Hunt* from Darley's illustration of nearly a decade





Fig. 1 Felix O.C. Darley, *The Buffalo Hunt*, c. 1858, wood engraving, 5 × 9 in. (12.7 × 22.9 cm), illustrated in "Pictures of Indian Life," *Harper's Weekly* 2 (1 May 1858), 281

earlier is telling. Darley had been catapulted to fame in the 1840s with illustrations of the western experience, especially Indian life. By the time his 1858 illustration of buffalo hunting appeared, it was noted: "Of all the artists who have made Indian life their study, Mr. Darley has been, without doubt, the most successful."<sup>13</sup> Even though Darley never traveled west of Pennsylvania, he gleaned a fairly accurate idea of what a Plains Indian buffalo hunt was like from George Catlin's 1844 *North American Indian Portfolio*, in which the artist illustrated hunts he had observed during his western sojourns in the 1830s. Drawing selectively from Catlin's images, Darley presented American Indians as both untamed and fierce, embodying "the Wild West as a place of stirring and dramatic action."<sup>14</sup> By reiterating Darley's nostalgic presentation of an Indian buffalo hunt, Howland perpetuated this mythic vision of the West. He also effaced his own role in the destruction of both the buffalo and the Plains Indians' way of life. In *Buffalo Hunt*, noble savages chase buffalo in perpetuity across a boundless landscape untouched by white settlers or railroads.

At some point before *Buffalo Hunt* entered the Nelson-Atkins collection, Howland's signature was painted over and replaced with that of Arthur F. Tait, along with an incorrect date of 1852. Traces of this false signature and date, which were subsequently removed, remain partially visible.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tait was a more prominent and celebrated painter than Howland. No doubt, a dealer sought to sell

the painting at a higher price by passing it off as the work of the better-known artist. Howland's painting lent itself to this misdating because it followed so closely the recognizable mid-nineteenth-century formula for paintings of Indians hunting buffalo, one that included an Indian mounted usually on a white or dappled horse, chasing the behemoth animal with a feather-decorated spear or bow and arrow across a vast, desolate plain. Interestingly, though, Tait's western scenes of the 1850s—for instance, *The Prairie Hunter*, "One Rubbed Out" (1852; Autry National Center, Los Angeles)—take as their principal subject the very conflicts between Plains Indians and white settlers that Howland habitually suppressed in his paintings. Tait's vision of the West was ultimately the more enduring. By the end of the nineteenth century, scenes of frontier warfare—presented most famously in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and innumerable paintings by Frederic Remington (q.v.)—would largely displace Howland's nostalgic fantasy of undisturbed Indian life.<sup>16</sup>

MCC/LL

## NOTES

1. Howland's life story has been recounted in Nolie Mumey, *The Art and Activities of John Dare (Jack) Howland: Painter, Soldier, Indian Trader, and Pioneer* (Boulder, Colo.: Johnson Publishing Co., 1973).
2. In part, the Peace Commission's mission was to convince Native Americans not to interfere any longer with the building of the transcontinental railroad. In return the Plains peoples were allowed to hunt on their old reservations "until the settlements drive them away from that hunting ground." "The Indian Peace Treaty," *Harper's Weekly* 11 (16 November 1867), 725.
3. Illustrations based on sketches by Howland accompany "The Indian Commission," *Harper's Weekly* 11 (5 October 1867), 629.
4. "A Colorado Artist," *Denver Daily Tribune*, 16 June 1877, courtesy Colorado Historical Society.
5. While portraits and pure landscape are scattered through his known body of work, images of buffalo predominate. About seventy paintings by Howland are known today, and the majority of them date to the later years of his life. The most complete records of Howland's work can be found in Mumey, *John Dare Howland*; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum database of the Bicentennial Inventory of American Paintings Executed before 1914.
6. "John D. Howland," transcript of clipping from the *Denver Times*, April 1897, NAMA curatorial files. See also "Memories of Pioneer Past, Faithfully Put on Canvas," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 21 December 1900, 7.
7. Eugene Kingman, introduction to *Life on the Prairie: The Artist's Record*, exh. cat. (Omaha, Neb.: Joslyn Art Museum, 1954), 2.
8. The artist's daughter, Kate Howland Charles, had a copy of the catalogue of this exhibition whose information she relayed in a 13 February 1951 letter to the Museum, NAMA curatorial files.
9. Photocopy of newspaper fragment given to the Museum in the 1950s by the historian Robert Taft, NAMA curatorial files. Taft deduced the date and place of this report from the combination of the address given in the newspaper account and Howland's presence in Washington, D.C., after the end of the Peace Commission in 1868.
10. For a cogent survey of this subject, see Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 5th ed. (1949; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982), esp. "The Indian Barrier," 591–601.
11. A thorough study of the buffalo is Larry Barsness, *Heads, Hides and Horns: The Compleat Buffalo Book* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1985).
12. The First Cavalry Regiment of the Colorado Volunteers, in which Howland served as a scout, perpetrated the infamous Sand Creek Massacre in November 1864, in which nearly two hundred Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians—the majority women and children—were murdered and scalped. It is uncertain whether Howland, who was mustered out of the army in 1864, participated in this massacre. However, his presence in Washington, D.C., in 1865, while Congress conducted an investigation of the incident, and his possession of at least one Indian scalp are suggestive. Howland claimed to have taken the scalp from one of the "murders [*sic*] of the Hungate family on Box Elder Creek in 1864." The killing of the Hungate family by Plains Indians precipitated the Sand Creek Massacre. Howland's commanding officer, Colonel John Chivington, was publicly reprimanded for the massacre in 1865. See Jerome A. Greene and Scott D. Douglas, *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); and Lincoln B. Faller, "Making Medicine against 'White Man's Side of the Story': George Bent's Letters to George Hyde," *American Indian Quarterly* 24 (2000), 64–90.
13. For Howland's scalp, see "Howland Collection Is Given to Historical Society," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 8 February 1931, 6.
13. *Harper's Weekly* 2 (1 May 1858), 281.
14. John C. Ewers, "Not Quite Redmen: The Plains Indians Illustrations of Felix O. Darley," *American Quarterly* 3 (Autumn 1971), 88–98. By the second half of the nineteenth century there was a recognizable prescription for scenes of Indians hunting buffalo that had begun nearly a quarter century earlier and was codified by Darley. See Rena N. Coen, "The Last of the Buffalo," *American Art Journal* 5 (November 1973), 91–93.
15. Hal Prestwood, Paintings and Graphic Arts Conservation Assistant at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, identified the false signature from extant fragments using digital enhancement.
16. See Alexander Nemerov, "'Doing the Old America': The Image of the American West, 1880–1920," in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920*, ed. William H. Treutner, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1991), 285–343.

# WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT (1824–1879)

## *Landscape*, 1875

Oil on linen

23 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 33 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (58.7 × 84.5 cm)

Signed with monogram and dated lower left: WM 75.

Gift of Prof. Samuel Eliot Morison, 34-38

IN 1877 A REVIEWER for the *Atlantic Monthly* praised William Morris Hunt for the poetic suggestiveness of his landscapes. “In spite of the bold and sketchy execution, the great masses of color, though laid on as with a trowel, are yet so carefully selected and skillfully placed that they have a harmony, a tenderness and delicacy. . . . [In all Hunt’s landscapes] will be recognized the power to see rightly and the ability to express briefly and strikingly.”<sup>1</sup> This critic was not alone in his praise. Hunt was revered in his own day, especially in his native Boston. Although his reputation foundered after his death, even his detractors acknowledged his contributions as a teacher and as one of the first and most important advocates of French art in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The eldest son of a prominent New England family, Hunt enrolled at Harvard in 1840 but preferred to spend his time taking private lessons in sculpture.<sup>3</sup> In 1843 he traveled to Europe, where he trained for several months in Rome under the rising young American sculptor Henry Kirke Brown, then went on to the Düsseldorf Academy. During a visit to Paris, he was attracted by Thomas Couture’s spontaneous technique and open-mindedness toward subject matter. Hunt became the first of Couture’s many American pupils, producing under his tutelage a number of genre portraits depicting Parisian street types. An even greater influence was Jean-François Millet, whom he met in 1852. Millet at that time was poor and virtually unknown; nevertheless, Hunt considered him “the greatest man in Europe” and moved to Barbizon the following year to be close to his idol.<sup>4</sup>

Hunt began exhibiting French-influenced genre pieces at the National Academy of Design in 1856, shortly after his return to the United States. New York critics, who were as yet unfamiliar with Millet’s subjective, atmospheric style and who were accustomed to finer detail and firmer drawing, were initially negative. One reviewer described a painting by Hunt as having “the look and complexion of dried mushrooms with a vehicle of soapsuds.”<sup>5</sup> That same year, Hunt settled in Newport, Rhode Island, and turned his attention to portraiture and teaching, pursuits that would absorb him for the next eleven years. After a second visit to France in 1866–67, he settled in Boston. Here, his students were mostly affluent women, few of whom would become professional artists. Still, his fashionable and well-attended classes helped popularize the newer French and French-derived modes of painting among persons rich enough to patronize them.<sup>6</sup>

Hunt’s *Talks on Art*, an anthology of classroom utterances collected by his assistant Helen M. Knowlton and first published in 1875, disseminated his views to a wide audience and played an important role in remodeling American taste. In them, Hunt pointed out how Millet, Jules Breton, Camille Corot, and Théodore Rousseau subordinated narrative and finish in their paintings to expressive effect, generalizing the material facts of nature to stimulate the viewer’s feelings and imagination.<sup>7</sup> An American public increasingly disenchanted by the rampant materialism of the post-Civil War era responded warmly to these artists’ ethereal and poetic paintings. By the time of Millet’s death in 1875, the taste for Barbizon painting was firmly established in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

*Landscape* dates from the last few years of Hunt’s career, when his interest shifted from the figure to landscape. Although landscape painting had long been a primary concern of the Barbizon painters, he came to it late, during an extremely difficult phase of his life—an instance, perhaps, of the familiar phenomenon of a distressed mind seeking solace in the otherness of nature. On 6 November 1872 his Summer Street studio, containing much of his own work and a valuable collection of pictures by Millet and other French artists, was destroyed in the great fire that ravaged central Boston. Soon afterward, his marriage, which had been unhappy for many years, came to an end when his wife accused him of “leading an immoral life” with his female students.<sup>9</sup> Hunt began making plein air charcoal sketches in 1873 while visiting a friend in Florida, and landscapes in both charcoal and oils, executed in a loose, dark-toned Barbizon mode, soon became a major part of his production. It is not surprising, considering the circumstances under which they were created, that their mood tends to the melancholic.

The prevailing melancholy mood of *Landscape* also relates to its subject matter. The painting probably depicts one of the many sandbanks near Newbury, Massachusetts, a favorite subject of Hunt’s during the summer of 1875.<sup>10</sup> Hunt painted this austere locale in a style similar to that of his friend R. Swain Gifford, who made atmospheric, Barbizon-inspired Massachusetts landscapes a particular specialty. As Roger Stein has argued, the industrial and commercial vitality of New England waned after the Civil War, leaving the region economically depressed and increasingly associated with a romanticized, agrarian past.<sup>11</sup> Hunt enhanced the mood of reverie and nostalgia in his New England landscape by allowing a pink ground to peek through the clouds at the horizon, suggesting a sunset, and by blending the sky and the foliage with a dry brush to create the impression of misty atmosphere.

*Landscape* exemplifies those features of the Barbizon painters that would have pleased viewers in search of poetic and antimaterialist values. Beneath the painting’s hazy, unifying shroud of twilight,



the overall tone is insistently brown; however, subtle nuances of color soon become perceptible. "Suggestion of color is better than color itself," Hunt explained to his friend Henry C. Angell in May 1875. "All landscape painting is too green; the green should be felt beneath the neutral tint in landscape."<sup>12</sup> In 1877 the critic for the *Atlantic Monthly* wrote, "Made up as [Hunt's landscapes] are of great splashes and blotches of different shades and colors, see how exquisitely they blend into one harmonious whole . . . and how the quality of color thus produced is throughout as far as possible removed from coarseness and vulgarity!"<sup>13</sup> The same year, a critic for the *Art Journal* praised "the free vigor of [Hunt's] handling and the masterly management of color, especially of the less brilliant tints," adding that his "twilight scenes are compared to Rousseau, so finely poetic and suggestive are they."<sup>14</sup>

Hunt painted *Landscape* quickly, wet into wet, with bravura brushwork that is particularly evident in the sky. Although abrasion has compromised the thinly painted foreground, the overall effect remains striking and fresh. Samuel Isham later claimed that Hunt "shirked the labor of carrying the sketch to completion." It seems clear, however, that Hunt deliberately suppressed details in the interest of larger effects.<sup>15</sup> His handling of paint became looser and more vigorous after 1872. At this time, sketches were increasingly prized by American collectors both for the insight they offered into the artist's process and for their "suggestiveness." As Henry S. Mackintosh remarked in 1874, "it is that intangible quality of suggestiveness which exerts the greatest influence on the true lover of art. . . . When we see more with our minds than we can with our eyes, then comes the keenest delight."<sup>16</sup> Defending Hunt from charges of "inaccuracy, or indifference as to finish," a critic for the *Art Amateur* wrote, "The question is, what do we want in a picture? Is it the mere display of a trade or trick learned? Is it not rather some effect, some idea, the fixing on canvas of something in human character or the beauty of nature that stirs the emotions?"<sup>17</sup>

Hunt became so attached to landscape painting that when he was commissioned in 1878 to create two murals for the Assembly Chamber of the New York State Capitol, he suggested Niagara Falls as an appropriate subject, an idea that was rejected in favor of figural allegories. Though the murals were well received, the governor vetoed a legislative appropriation that would have kept Hunt working in Albany for many years. His friends believed that the veto, together with the strain of work, led to his untimely death.<sup>18</sup> On 8 September 1879, after several months of illness and depression, his body was discovered floating in a reservoir on the resort island of Appledore. The press attributed his death to suicide, his friends blamed an attack of vertigo, and the cause remains uncertain to this day.<sup>19</sup>

LL/KJN

## NOTES

1. "Three Boston Painters," *Atlantic Monthly* 40 (December 1877), 713.
2. See, for instance, "Boston Correspondence," *Art Amateur* 12 (March 1885), 82.
3. For biographical information on the artist, see Henry C. Angell, *Records of William Morris Hunt* (Boston: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1881); Helen M. Knowlton, *The Art Life of William Morris Hunt* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1879); and Sally Webster, *William Morris Hunt, 1824-1879* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
4. Hunt, quoted in Knowlton, *The Art Life of William Morris Hunt*, 12.
5. *New York Daily Tribune*, 12 April 1856, 4, quoted in Webster, *William Morris Hunt*, 42.
6. Hunt's friend the sculptor Thomas Ball recalled that Hunt was eager to begin a school for young ladies, believing that "there is a vast deal of talent among them that only required to be directed." Ball, *My Threescore Years and Ten* (Boston: Robert Bros., 1892), 304. *Landscape* once belonged to Emily Marshall Eliot, a Boston woman of the right age and social class to have been one of Hunt's students. For biographical information about Eliot, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *One Boy's Boston, 1887-1901* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 4-20.
7. H. M. Knowlton, ed., *W.M. Hunt's Talks on Art* (Boston: H. O. Houghton and Company, 1875). A second series of talks was brought out by the same publisher in 1883.
8. For a discussion of Millet's reception in the United States, see Laura Meixner, "The 'Millet Myth' and the American Public," in *An International Episode: Millet, Monet, and Their North American Counterparts*, ed. Meixner, exh. cat. (Memphis, Tenn.: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 1982), 68-91.
9. Jane Hunt, journal, 23 September 1874, 144, quoted in Webster, *William Morris Hunt*, 105.
10. Hunt spent much of 1875 painting the countryside north of Boston. Several paintings of dunes and sandbanks painted around Newbury were exhibited at Leonard & Co. in Boston in December 1875. Webster, *William Morris Hunt*, 117-19.
11. Roger B. Stein, "After the War: Constructing a Rural Past," in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1999), 15-41.
12. Angell, *Records of William Morris Hunt*, 35.
13. "Three Boston Painters," 718. The dark palette Hunt favored during the 1870s can also be attributed to his involvement with the Aesthetic Movement, whose proponents touted the soothing and refining influence of warm, muted tones in both artworks and interior design.
14. "Notes," *Art Journal* 3 (1877), 63-64.
15. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1905; 2nd ed. with supplemental chapters by Royal Cortissoz, 1927), 314. Hunt urged his students to work from memory as a way to eliminate distracting details. See Knowlton, *Talks on Art*, 8, 61.
16. Henry S. Mackintosh, "Water-Color Painting," *Atlantic Monthly* 34 (December 1874), 699.
17. Greta, "A Defense of William M. Hunt," *Art Amateur* 2 (1880), 48.
18. Knowlton, *The Art Life of William Morris Hunt*, 171-72, 177, 183.
19. See "Suicide of an Artist," *New York Evening Express*, 9 September 1879, 1; and Knowlton, *The Art Life of William Morris Hunt*, 188-89.

## PETER HURD (1904–1984)

### *José Herrera*, 1938

(*Portrait of José; Portrait of a Cowhand; Portrait*)

Tempera on panel

48 × 46½ in. (121.9 × 118.1 cm)

Signed, inscribed, and dated lower left: PETER HURD /  
EN SAN PATRICIO / 1938

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Fizzell through the Friends  
of Art, 39-35

ONE OF THE FINEST of Peter Hurd's many portraits, *José Herrera* pays tribute to the painter's trusted friend and ranch foreman. Wearing a leather jacket, chaps, and gloves marking his profession, Herrera strikes a bold pose, placing his right hand on his right hip, as he stares directly out at the viewer. He stands before a spectacular natural backdrop, the remote Hondo Valley in southeastern New Mexico, where both the artist and his subject lived and worked for many years. Utilizing egg tempera's great capacity for conveying detail, Hurd carefully rendered diminutive and discrete particulars of the valley—the church steeple, the empty hayrack, the scattered buildings, and a truck—evoking its specific appearance and character. This vista culminates in Sentinel Mountain, the lone element in the composition that challenges Herrera's superiority. Otherwise, the proud ranch worker appears undeniably monumental and as rugged as the expansive, arid environs over which he towers, effects accentuated by the contrast between the warm tones describing Herrera's face and clothes and the cooler greens and blues surrounding him.

A native of Roswell, New Mexico, Hurd probably met Herrera in 1934, when he employed several local men to help build his new ranch house in San Patricio, where the artist and his wife, Henriette, settled permanently after living intermittently in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Over the next few years, the painter often employed Herrera and his brothers to complete odd jobs around Sentinel Ranch and recruited them, along with other Mexican American cowboys and ranch hands from the valley, to play on his amateur polo team, Los Mendingos de San Patricio (The Beggars of San Patricio). José and his brothers—“all talented and dedicated horsemen,” in the artist's estimation—were widely regarded for their “flamboyantly conspicuous” performances at local fiestas and rodeos and their showmanship on the polo field, which were subsequently praised by Hurd in a firsthand account published in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*.<sup>2</sup> As the ranch grew, Hurd hired Herrera as its foreman, a position he held for twenty-three years.

Hurd painted numerous portraits of Herrera and his family. José sat for several portraits and posed for various figures in Hurd's landscapes. The Nelson-Atkins portrait was probably Hurd's first portrayal of the foreman. The artist had expressed his desire to

paint Herrera before executing the work, explaining in a letter in 1937 to his wife, “Luckily for me the swaggering, poetical José has just today returned from six months' work on a ranch twenty five miles south east of here breaking broneos. He came to see me of course as we are close friends and seeing him again makes me resolved to do his portrait as soon as I'm able.”<sup>3</sup> Hurd's enthusiasm for Herrera as a subject remained strong and, in 1941, inspired him to admit, “He's one of the most paintogenic people I know and I'm frequently tempted to skip even the most urgent projects of ranch work to set him on the model stand.”<sup>4</sup>

Hurd based his arresting portrait of the honorable and “paintogenic” Herrera on many ideas rooted in the Italian Renaissance. Chief among these is the format for portraiture in which the sitter appears in front of an impressive distant landscape, a formula employed famously by Sandro Botticelli in *Portrait of a Man Holding a Medal* (Fig. 1), among a host of similar portraits by many fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century artists.<sup>5</sup> Hurd utilized innumerable variations of this format for the portraits of friends and family members he painted frequently over the course of his lengthy career. Herrera's confident countenance and posture, which recall (in reverse) Donatello's bold *David* (c. 1450; Museo del Bargello, Florence), distinguish the Nelson-Atkins portrait from many of these works. The painter's devotion to tempera furthermore ties *José Herrera*—and Hurd's work generally—to esteemed Renaissance traditions.

By painting with egg tempera, Hurd was participating in a pervasive revival in interest in the medium in American art throughout the early twentieth century, a revival whose practitioners included, among other notable painters, Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), Paul Cadmus, and Kenneth Hayes Miller.<sup>6</sup> As a medium conducive to fine surface description, tempera was particularly attractive to avowed “realists” like Hurd, who self-consciously rejected European abstraction as it gained in support and acceptance throughout the 1930s and 1940s. According to Richard J. Boyle, Hurd began experimenting with the medium about 1930, soon after concluding his apprenticeship with the famed illustrator N. C. Wyeth (q.v.), whose daughter he had married the previous year.<sup>7</sup> “I can't tell you what a boost it has given my work—this new technique,” the painter exclaimed to his friend Paul Horgan in 1933, sharing his enthusiasm for the gesso-covered panels of the Renaissance masters and the tempera formula of Cennino Cennini, which served as the bases for many popular technical manuals on the medium published in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Hurd's impassioned promotion of tempera even inspired his famous artistic father-in-law and his brother-in-law, Andrew Wyeth, to follow his lead, a fact highlighting his significant contribution to the revival.





Throughout the 1930s Hurd's southwestern subjects intersected neatly with the vogue for homespun "Regional" art, a response to insurgent nativist sentiment following World War I as well as accompanying suspicion of European modernism in conservative critical corners, among other factors.<sup>9</sup> As Benton embraced Missouri, John Steuart Curry (q.v.) rediscovered Kansas, Grant Wood exalted Iowa, and Marsden Hartley (q.v.) rendered and wrote new tributes to Maine, Hurd successfully claimed his native New Mexico.<sup>10</sup> However, unlike these painterly prodigals, all of whom had previously forsaken their respective homes for Europe (and later repented), Hurd never left the Southwest behind him entirely, even while studying in Pennsylvania.

While the midwestern plains states had rarely inspired rampant enthusiasm among the nation's painters, New Mexico had long attracted artists for its great potential on canvas, luring painters as diverse in style as the academically inclined Joseph Henry Sharp (q.v.) and the experimental modernists Hartley and John Marin.<sup>11</sup> Like the scores of transients and tourists armed with loaded brushes who had been flocking to New Mexico since the turn of the century, Hurd was incurably enamored with the region's distinctive light and its evocative history.<sup>12</sup> Even so, he worked knowingly apart from the centers of activity in Taos and Santa Fe, a fact that often results in his omission from more recent scholarly surveys and studies of southwestern art, which tend to focus by exclusion on these two popular sites. Due to his predilections for portrait painting and realism, Hurd has furthermore become largely overshadowed by Georgia O'Keeffe (q.v.), the legendary Abiquiu transplant, most widely identified with New Mexico, whose more abstract visions of the Southwest are celebrated for tapping into the region's supposed heightened potential for spirituality. Ultimately, Hurd's interest in painting New Mexico had less to do with the state's presumed exotic sights or inherent spiritualism than the deep personal attachment he felt to the place and its people.

In addition to the artist's strong ties to Regionalism, Hurd's fame and popularity throughout the 1930s and 1940s rested substantially on his rural, athletic lifestyle and his rugged persona, which he actively cultivated and promoted. In an era when concerns regarding effeminacy and excessive intellectualism in art ran particularly high among American critics and audiences generally, Hurd offered an attractive artistic model of normative masculinity. In this regard, he earned a feature in *LIFE* magazine, Henry R. Luce's photojournalistic brainchild founded in 1936, which ran articles highlighting American artists who seemed anachronistic for their interests and backgrounds in boxing or cattle ranching, among other atypically "macho" activities.<sup>13</sup> However, Hurd's stake in the dominant model of artistic masculinity would be loosened considerably in the late 1940s and into the 1950s by the emergence of Abstract Expressionism and the younger, moodier ideal of masculinity that accompanied it, personified by the brash Jackson Pollock and his monumental gestural paintings. For the remainder of his career, Hurd nevertheless remained highly regarded for his steady commitment to his personal artistic vision rooted in his native New Mexico and for the undeniable humanism of



Fig. 1 Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Man Holding a Medal*, 1474. Tempera on panel, 22 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 17 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (57.5 × 44 cm). Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Scala / Art Resource, NY

his work overall, a quality most evident in absorbing portraits like *José Herrera*.

RRG/MS

#### NOTES

1. Biographical details have been gleaned from *My Land Is the Southwest: Peter Hurd Letters and Journals*, ed. Robert Metzger (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1983); and Paul Horgan, *Peter Hurd: A Portrait Sketch from Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965).
2. Peter Hurd, "Polo as She's Seldom Seen," *Sports Illustrated* 1 (8 November 1954), 62.
3. Hurd to Henriette Wyeth Hurd, 21 June 1937, quoted in *My Land Is the Southwest*, 178. Hurd did not complete the portrait until the following autumn.
4. Hurd to Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Longwell, 14 February 1941, quoted in *My Land Is the Southwest*, 242.
5. The similarity to Botticelli's portrait is more than coincidental. Hurd identified the Renaissance master as one of his "gods" of painting. See *My Land Is the Southwest*, 84. It is worth noting that Hurd's familiarity with the Italian Renaissance came from visits to major American museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and through the study of reproductions. The painter did not visit Italy until 1944, when he served as war correspondent with the Air Transport Command.

6. On the topic of the tempera revival, see Richard J. Boyle et al., *Milk and Eggs: The American Revival of Tempera Painting, 1930–1950*, exh. cat. (Chadds Ford, Pa.: Brandywine River Museum, 2002).
7. Boyle, “Synopsis: The American Tempera Revival,” in *ibid.*, 48. According to Boyle, Hurd was encouraged by Frederick Weber, the head and technical advisor of Weber and Company, a supplier of artists’ materials in Philadelphia. The author rather reductively attributes tempera’s resurgent popularity to the presumed retrospective mood of the 1920s.
8. Hurd to Paul Horgan, 3 January 1933, quoted in *My Land Is the Southwest*, 96. The artist continues: “[Tempera] combines all the brilliance of watercolour with the great advantage of being readily wiped out—or if dry sandpapered out and passages redone. . . . All sorts of effects are possible—washed, stippled effects, smeared colour—thin palette knife impastos & glazes. All the worries canvas has had for me as a ground are removed by using the gesso surface.” Among the manuals published were *The Craftsman’s Handbook* (1933) and *The Practice of Tempera Painting* (1936).
9. The literature on Regionalism and the various artists associated with it is voluminous. On midwestern Regionalism, see James M. Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists: The Modern Independence of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Stewart Curry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
10. The degree to which Hurd had become identified with his native state is suggested by the title of the autobiographical essay he published in the *Magazine of Art* in 1939, “Painter of New Mexico,” *Magazine of Art* 32 (July 1939), 390–95, 432–33.
11. On the topic of New Mexican art, see Charles C. Eldredge et al., *Art in New Mexico, 1900–1945: Paths to Taos and Santa Fe*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1986). For more recent considerations of this topic, see Celeste Conner, “‘The Most American Place’: New Mexico,” in *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924–1934* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 174–93; and Judith A. Barter, *Window on the West: Chicago and the Art of the New Frontier, 1890–1940*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2003).
12. Hurd shared his thoughts on these two topics, among others, in “Peter Hurd Writes with Feeling on the Subject of His Art: New Mexico,” *New Mexico Magazine* 39 (January 1961), 13, 34, 36, 38.
13. “Peter Hurd Paints His Own Ranch in New Mexico and Swaps Art for Ponies,” *LIFE*, 24 July 1939, 24–26. The article emphasizes the fact that Hurd “has the hands of a cowboy and the keen eyes of an artist” and that “his cowboy friends refuse to call him a highfalutin ‘artist.’ As a tribute, they call him a ‘sign painter.’” Other artists who received similar treatment in *LIFE* include John Carroll, Paul Sample, and Joe Brown.

## GEORGE INNESS (1825–1894)

### *Brush Burning*, 1884 (*The Brush Burners*)

Oil on canvas

20¼ × 30½ in. (51.4 × 77.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: G. Inness 1884

Gift of Albert R. Jones, 42-47

DURING AN 1878 INTERVIEW, George Inness declared:

No great artist ever finishes a picture or a statue. It is mercantile work that is finished, and finish is what the picture dealers cry for. Instead of covering the walls of his mansion with works of character, or, what is better, with those works of inspiration which allure the mind to the regions of the unknown, [the modern art buyer] is apt to cover them with the sleek polish of lackadaisical sentiment, or the puerilities of impossible conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Inness spoke these words just as he was gaining recognition as one of America's foremost landscape painters. His condemnation of "mercantile" art reflects his disdain for both the glossy, highly detailed paintings that still dominated the American art market and the rampant materialism that permeated American culture in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. By 1884 a growing number of Americans shared Inness's disaffection. In paintings like *Brush Burning*, which depicts a man and a woman clearing a field in an ethereally painted, autumnal landscape, they saw an antidote to the acquisitiveness, frenetic pace, and overcrowding of life in modern cities.

George Inness was born in New York City and, after the age of four, grew up in Newark, New Jersey. Although his parents were prosperous members of the middle class (his father was a grocer), epilepsy prevented him from attending school regularly and he received only a sporadic education.<sup>2</sup> After deciding at the age of fifteen to become an artist, Inness studied with the itinerant painter John Jesse Baker, then apprenticed himself to the New York engravers Sherman & Smith—an experience that left him with a lasting dislike for fussiness and detail in art. When his apprenticeship ended in 1843, he studied briefly with Régis François Gignoux (q.v.), who had been a student of the French academic painter Paul Delaroche. Although Inness later claimed to have spent only a month under Gignoux's tutelage, the older artist probably sparked his enduring love of European art. Inness spent most of the next decade in New York, painting landscapes in a style reminiscent of Claude Lorrain and exhibiting them at the National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union. On a trip to France in 1853 he fell under the sway of contemporary French landscape art,

in particular the painterly, rustic scenes of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and other artists who painted near Barbizon. The paintings Inness exhibited in the late 1850s show the unmistakable imprint of the Barbizon style. In works like *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset* (1859; New York Public Library), his paint handling is noticeably looser, his color truer, and his composition less obviously contrived than in his early landscapes.

Inness moved frequently during the next two decades before settling permanently in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1878. During a three-year stay in the quasi-utopian community of Eagleswood, New Jersey, he became close to the painter William Page. It was probably Page who, about 1864, introduced Inness to the teachings of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Inness became a member of Swedenborg's Church of the New Jerusalem in 1868. For the artist, his new religion was a matter of lifelong, intensive study. Swedenborg taught that a spiritual realm exists within the material world, imbuing all objects—animate and inanimate alike—with a constantly outflowing spiritual essence. This "influx" of spirit, according to Swedenborg, gives the material world its shape, color, and movement. With a few notable exceptions, after 1865 Inness's paintings became increasingly atmospheric, partially in response to Swedenborg's vision of the natural world.<sup>3</sup>

The influence of Swedenborgianism is palpable in *Brush Burning*, as is that of Corot and the Barbizon artists. As in many of Corot's paintings, for instance *Morning on the Estuary, Ville d'Avray* (Fig. 1), *Brush Burning* is loosely painted in warm, luminous tones, enveloped in hazy atmosphere, and infused with the pink light of daybreak or dusk. The painting depicts two small, anonymous figures, American equivalents of Barbizon peasants, clearing a field in autumn. The land and sky, which Inness painted thinly and broadly over a black imprimatura, have an inner radiance that suggests a half-hidden spiritual dimension.<sup>4</sup> Alternating bands of sunlight and shadow ripple across the field, creating a rhythmic pattern that draws the eye into the picture. The tall, vertical forms of the trees, whose sparse foliage is reduced to a dark haze, counterbalance the flat horizon. The man and woman, whom Inness placed at a distance from the viewer, have set fire to a pile of brush. Brush burning, which cleared a fallow field of debris and prepared its soil for cultivation, was a traditional part of the agricultural year in rural New Jersey at the time Inness painted this landscape. In *Brush Burning*, smoke from the fire rolls upward to merge with an overcast sky that fills more than half of the canvas. Like the trees to their right, the workers' bodies seem rooted in the soil. In its depiction of laborers tied to the earth's timeless cycle of death and rebirth, *Brush Burning* recalls paintings by



Fig. 1 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Morning on the Estuary, Ville d'Avray*, 1870. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas, 22 × 31<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (55.9 × 81 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Charlotte Dorrance Wright, 1978



Jean-François Millet, the Barbizon artist most revered by Inness and generally in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor shaping Inness's paintings in the 1880s was the 1879 book *Progress and Poverty* by the economist and philosopher Henry George.<sup>6</sup> Reacting to the growing disparity between rich and poor in Gilded Age America, George proposed a single federal tax that would eventually lead to common ownership of all arable land. His vision of the United States as an agrarian, socialist democracy was deeply appealing to Inness, and his description of land as a sacred trust meshed neatly with the artist's animistic, Swedenborgian beliefs. Given Inness's engagement with George's theories, *Brush Burning* can be read as a utopian image. Unlike earlier landscapes by members of the Hudson River School or the operatic vistas of Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) and Thomas Moran (q.v.), *Brush Burning* does not depict the grandeur of American scenery or even a particular place; rather, its subject is the timeless, symbiotic relationship of farmers to the soil. Free from the tyranny of modern, urban, industrial life, its figures merge with the land they cultivate under a unifying veil of atmosphere.

The metaphysical, utopian, and antimaterialist values Inness expressed in paintings like *Brush Burning* appealed to many Americans troubled by the crass materialism of the post-Civil War era.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1875, the Boston artist and critic Darius Cobb praised Inness for his rendering of the "spiritual element" in nature. "Inness brings to you the realization that the eye is only the medium of sight," Cobb wrote, "and that the soul must see and comprehend the higher truths in nature . . . without which a landscape is but a feeble result of an effort to copy material objects."<sup>8</sup> As Sarah Burns has noted, Inness's diffuse style, which had been frequently criticized before the Civil War, came to signify the triumph of spiritual over material values during the Gilded Age.<sup>9</sup>

Viewers also found in Inness's paintings a reflection of the artist's eccentric, oppositional personality.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the 1860s, a series of agents and sympathetic critics promoted an image of Inness as a restless, misunderstood genius whose poetic sensibilities placed him at odds with the modern world.<sup>11</sup> Inness's technique seemed to reveal both his spontaneous emotional response to his subjects and his high-strung nature. Elliott Daingerfield, an artist friend of Inness's, described his working method as follows:

With a great mass of color he attacked the canvas, spreading it with incredible swiftness, marking in the great masses with a skill and method all his own, and impossible to imitate; here, there, all over the canvas, rub, rub, dig, scratch, until the very brushes seem to rebel, spreading their bristles as fiercely as they did in the days of yore along the spine of their porcine possessor.<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, given his populist leanings, Inness also benefited from the increasingly elitist understanding of high culture that followed the Civil War. As one critic noted, "It is not often that Inness paints a picture which can be understood by ordinary people."<sup>13</sup> By purchasing a landscape by Inness, a collector set him- or herself apart as a person of unusual taste and discernment, whose refined sensibilities were in tune with a higher ideality.

*Brush Burning* was purchased by Thomas B. Clarke, one of Inness's most important patrons and promoters.<sup>14</sup> Clarke, a New York lace and linen manufacturer and leading collector of American art, began acquiring contemporary American paintings in the 1870s, just as European art began to dominate the American market.<sup>15</sup> Clarke, who was probably motivated by patriotism, personal taste, and self-interest in equal measures, took a particular

interest in Inness, and his interest proved mutually beneficial. Clarke became Inness's agent in 1878 and was largely responsible for transforming him, in the eyes of the critical establishment, from a second-tier landscape painter to a revered American artist. Even before he became the artist's dealer, Clarke took potential patrons to Inness's studio, encouraged them to buy his paintings, and smoothed over the rough edges of the artist's volatile personality.<sup>16</sup> Despite Inness's frequent and prolonged trips to Europe and his obvious debt to the Barbizon artists, his preeminent place in Clarke's increasingly well-known collection helped to frame him as a quintessentially American artist.

Inness's ethereal style set him apart from scores of other American painters who looked for inspiration to academic European artists, with their glossy, detailed depictions of the material world, or the French Impressionists, whose style emphasized the painted surfaces of their canvases, and enhanced his reputation as a particularly American artist. A younger generation of critics, eager to champion the cause of American art, embraced Inness as a native genius whose poetic sensibilities flowed from his deep, spiritual connection to his homeland.

Two years after he painted *Brush Burning*, Inness painted *Silvery Autumn* (1886; private collection), a nearly exact copy of the Nelson-Atkins painting.<sup>17</sup> By duplicating an existing work, Inness flew in the face of his own assertion that paintings should be unique, subjective responses to nature.<sup>18</sup> That he did so speaks eloquently about the market for his paintings in the 1880s. When a major exhibition of Inness's work was held at the American Art Association in 1884, a critic for the *New York Tribune* noted, "Not to know Mr. Inness argues one's self a benighted Philistine as regards our native art."<sup>19</sup> By 1886 a writer for the *Boston Transcript* wrote, "Orders are flying in upon [Inness] from the highest sources; and the amount he realizes on them is something of the Aladdin stamp. Mr. Inness is so crowded with orders that, to use his own expression, made recently to a friend, 'pictures grow from his fingers' ends."<sup>20</sup>

Despite such reports of Inness's professional and financial success, the painter's misty style and homely subject matter diffused potential criticisms that he was producing paintings for a market. George Sheldon, in his 1895 memorial to the artist, wrote that Inness was "utterly indifferent" to both financial gain and worldly honors.<sup>21</sup> Inness's antimaterialist aura also shielded Clarke from criticism that his interest in American art was merely speculative. When Clarke sold his collection in 1899, he realized a tremendous profit on his investment, yet few critics mentioned this fact.<sup>22</sup> A writer for the *Century* was typical in his framing of Clarke as a philanthropist rather than a businessman:

The recent exhibition and sale of the Thomas B. Clarke collection . . . not only was a proof of the excellent taste and good judgment of the collector; it must also surely count in the development of native art by affording encouragement to our artists, and by its education at once of the public at large and of picture-buyers in particular.<sup>23</sup>

In part because of patrons like Clarke and sympathetic exhibition venues like the Lotus Club in New York, Inness's restful, poetically suggestive style became mainstream in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. The many American artists who painted in this vein, including Albert Blakelock (q.v.), Homer Dodge Martin, Henry Ward Ranger, Dwight Tryon, and others, became known collectively as Tonalists. By 1903 *Brush Burning* was owned by John Harsen Rhoades, president of the Greenwich Savings Bank and a collector of Tonalist art. *Brush Burning's* political content was probably lost on Rhoades—or at least comfortably subsumed within the peaceful atmosphere of Inness's style. When Rhoades exhibited his collection, including *Brush Burning*, at the Lotus Club, a critic for the *New York Times* commented that "there is not a single discordant note on the walls."<sup>24</sup> Although Inness had died nine years earlier, his wish for American art buyers who would collect "those works of inspiration which allure the mind to the regions of the unknown" had been fulfilled.

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## NOTES

1. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February 1878), 461.
2. For biographical information about George Inness, see George Inness Jr., *The Life, Art and Letters of George Inness* (New York: Century Co., 1917); LeRoy Ireland, *The Works of George Inness: An Illustrated Catalogue Raisonné* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965); Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *The Life and Work of George Inness* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977); and Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *George Inness* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).
3. For Swedenborgian themes in Inness's paintings, see Sally M. Promey, "The Riband of Faith: George Inness, Color Theory, and the Swedenborgian Church," *American Art Journal* 26 (Spring/Summer 1994), 44–65; Michael Quick, "George Inness: The Spiritual Dimension," in *George Inness: Presence of the Unseen*, exh. cat. (Montclair, N.J.: Montclair Art Museum, 1994), 29–32; Eugene Taylor, "The Interior Landscape: George Inness and William James on Art from a Swedenborgian Point of View," *Archives of American Art Journal* 37 (Spring/Summer 1997), 2–10; and Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape*, exh. cat. (New York: National Academy of Design, 2003).
4. Recently, Rachel Ziady DeLue has argued that in his paintings of the 1880s and 1890s, Inness wanted to approximate a mode of perception that she terms "spiritual sight," which could divine hidden or obscure meanings in nature. DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20–21.
5. Inness considered Millet "the greatest figure painter that ever lived, because his figures best and most often expressed the tenderest and purest sentiments of labor and of home, with just enough objective force for perfect lucidity." George William Sheldon, "Characteristics of George Inness," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 49 (February 1895), 533. For Millet's popularity in the United States, see Laura Meixner, "Popular Criticism of Jean-François Millet," *Art Bulletin* 65 (March 1983), 94–105.
6. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth, a Remedy* (New York: H. George and Co., 1879). For Inness's admiration of George, see Leo G. Mazow, "George Inness, Henry George, the Single Tax, and the Future Poet," *American Art* 18 (Spring 2004), 58–79.
7. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).
8. Darius Cobb, untitled review, *Boston Evening Traveler*, 10 June 1875, quoted in Cikovsky, *The Life and Work of George Inness*, 240.
9. Sarah Lea Burns, "The Poetic Mode in American Painting: George Fuller and Thomas Dewing," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979, 25.
10. As one critic wrote, "Mr. Inness was one of the first American artists to assert his individuality and speak through his brush, a language of his own, filled with passion and fire and intensity of expression." "Present and Future Art Exhibitions," *Studio* 7 (17 February 1892), 120.
11. Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 114–15.
12. Elliott Daingerfield, "A Reminiscence of George Inness," *Monthly Illustrator* 3 (March 1895), 262–64, at 264.
13. "George Inness," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 7 December 1876, 2. For the increasing stratification of late-nineteenth-century American culture, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
14. Clarke, who owned just five paintings by Inness in 1879, owned thirty-nine of the artist's canvases twenty years later, making Inness the best-represented artist in Clarke's collection. See Edward Strahan [Earl Shim], *The Art Treasures of America* (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1879), 2:132; and *Catalogue of the Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke*, exh. cat. (New York: American Art Galleries, 1899), 70–71.
15. On Clarke, see Linda Skalet, "Thomas B. Clarke, American Collector," *Archives of American Art Journal* 15 (Fall 1975), 2–7; and H. Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," *American Art Journal* 8 (May 1976), 52–83.
16. Inness, *The Life, Art and Letters of George Inness*, 191–92.
17. See Ireland, *The Works of George Inness*, 301. According to Michael Quick, Inness made one or more replicas of a number of his paintings, either to meet demand after a successful exhibition or to improve on his original composition. Letter to the author, 20 June 2005, NAMA curatorial files.
18. Inness, "A Painter on Painting," 461.
19. Cited in Thomas Norton, *100 Years of Collecting in America: The Story of Sotheby Parke-Bernet* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 22.
20. Quoted in Cikovsky, *George Inness*, 93.
21. Sheldon, "Characteristics of George Inness," 532–33.
22. Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," 68.
23. "American Art," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 57 (April 1899), 955.
24. "Paintings at the Lotus," *New York Times*, 31 January 1903, 2.



## GEORGE INNESS (1825–1894)

### *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*, c. 1886–88 (*Overlooking the Hudson at Milton*)

Oil on canvas

27 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 22 in. (68.7 × 55.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: G. Inness / 1888.

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-87

DURING THE LATE 1870S and early 1880s, George Inness spent his summers in Milton, New York, seventy miles north of New York City on the west bank of the Hudson River. Although Milton was far from being a major artists' colony, the *Studio* described it in 1883 as a "charming little hillside village," and the painters Will Hicok Low and George Shelton also spent summers there.<sup>1</sup> Inness's friend and patron Asia Hallock owned a summerhouse in Milton, where she hosted informal gatherings of feminists and intellectuals, among them Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Inness stayed with Hallock and used her barn as a studio. *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* depicts the back garden of Hallock's house, with her barn just visible down the slope of the hill.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1880s Inness made an etching that shows the same scene in reverse and minus the figure (Fig. 1), and a scattering of his paintings dating from the mid-1870s to the mid-1880s depict similar scenery along the Hudson.<sup>3</sup> Although the foreground of *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* retains the freshness of a quick sketch executed *en plein air*, Inness likely painted the work from memory several years after his last summer in Milton.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1890s Inness had abandoned the sketchlike style he employed in *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*. During the last five years of his life, he frequently expressed his low opinion of the French Impressionists and their American followers. "Now, there has sprung up a new school, a mere passing fad, called impressionism," he wrote in 1894, "the followers of which pretend to study from nature and paint it as it is. All these sorts of things I am down on. I will have nothing to do with them. They are shams."<sup>5</sup> Inness was far from alone in his scorn. As late as the turn of the century, Impressionist paintings were still widely disparaged in the United States as mere transcriptions of visible surfaces, which, though sometimes aesthetically pleasing, lacked spiritual and intellectual depth. Small wonder then that Inness, who prided himself on his ability to see beyond the surface of the natural world, should have contempt for Impressionism. Still, though Inness likely would have denied it, *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* shows the unmistakable influence of Impressionism in both its subject and its style.

Inness generally painted rural landscapes populated by men and women in picturesque peasant garb. In *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*, he chose instead to depict a scene of modern,

middle-class, suburban leisure. In the 1880s Milton was still a rural village surrounded by farmland. Yet, the Hudson River Railroad stopped on the opposite bank of the Hudson, where a ferry stood waiting to shuttle passengers back and forth across the river, making Milton easily accessible to vacationers and tourists. Like innumerable other rural communities across the country in the second half of the nineteenth century, Milton was quickly becoming a site of leisure rather than labor. As early as 1866, Benson Lossing made note of the village in his tourist guide to the Hudson valley:

Opposite Spring Brook is the village of Milton, remarkable, like its sister, Marlborough, a few miles below, for the picturesque beauty of the surrounding country and the abundance of Antwerp raspberries produced in its vicinity every year. . . . These villages are upon high banks, and are scarcely visible from the river. They have a background of rich farming lands, terminating beyond a sweet valley by a range of lofty hills that are covered with the primeval forest. They are the resort of New Yorkers during the heat of summer.<sup>6</sup>

In Inness's painting, a young woman or girl in a white dress and beribboned straw hat sits on a hillside, half-hidden by summer foliage, sketching, reading, or, as the title implies, simply contemplating the view. The decorative flowerpots and jardinière in the foreground, which show the influence of the Aesthetic Movement on late-nineteenth-century American garden furniture, suggest that she is sitting in the slightly overgrown back garden of a country house.<sup>7</sup> As in innumerable Impressionist paintings, such as Claude Monet's *On the Banks of the Seine* (1886; Art Institute of Chicago), the viewer is invited to identify with this figure and enjoy vicariously her summer day spent on the sun-warmed hillside. While Inness's paintings *Brush Burning* (q.v.) and *Old Farm—Montclair* (q.v.) are timeless scenes of rural labor, untouched by modern technology, the artist's inclusion of modern sailing vessels, such as a steamship, on the river anchors *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* firmly in the late nineteenth century.

Inness also abandoned his customary style in *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*. Although he worked from memory and painted the river, the misty New Jersey shore, and the sky in cool, smoothly blended tones, he rendered the sunlight falling on the hillside with dabs of vivid pigment, and he painted the tangle of bright green vegetation in the foreground with thick paint and rapid brushwork. From an area of shade, the viewer looks out on a brilliant, sunlit expanse in which the seated figure is enveloped. As Rachel Ziady DeLue has noted, Inness began experimenting with broken brushwork, effects of light, and cropping of objects by the picture





Fig. 1 *Fac-Simile of an Etching by Mr. Inness*. Illustrated in S. G. W. Benjamin, *Our American Artists* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1881), 36

praised the Impressionist painters' deft, forceful handling of their materials.<sup>12</sup> In a lecture given in conjunction with the exhibition, the artist F. Hopkinson Smith asserted that beauty and truth in art would result from a "middle path" between Impressionism and realism.<sup>13</sup> *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*, which appears to be something of a pastiche to modern eyes, was probably Inness's attempt to wed the Impressionists' bright color and free handling to a more traditional and thoughtful foundation.<sup>14</sup>

*Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* remained in Inness's studio until his death, along with hundreds of other paintings by this prolific artist. Artemisia Stace Lascell of Charlotte, New York, bought it at the posthumous sale of Inness's work in 1895.<sup>15</sup> Lascell's father, Stephen Stace, was a wealthy farmer and horticulturalist, and her husband, Joshua B. Lascell, was the first superintendent of the Rochester Electric Railway, a commuter line that ran between Rochester, New York, and the surrounding villages and towns. Lascell must have been a great admirer of Inness. She purchased *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* under her own name, an unusual gesture for a woman in the late nineteenth century. It is fitting that this woman, who had familial ties to both the older, agrarian landscape of New York and the railroads that were transforming it, should have chosen a painting that depicts the results of that transformation in bright and glowing tones.

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edge in his paintings after 1884.<sup>8</sup> These experiments were sporadic. Nevertheless, they cut against the image of him as a solitary genius communing with nature on his isolated New Jersey farm. In paintings like *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton*, Inness revealed his active engagement with the varied currents of the American art world during the dynamic period of the 1880s.<sup>9</sup>

Inness was a founding member of the Society of American Artists, a group formed in 1877 as an exhibition venue for a younger generation of American painters. His membership in this organization brought him into contact with artists who had trained in Paris and Munich, for instance William Merritt Chase (q.v.) and Julian Alden Weir, who embraced modern subject matter and experimented with Impressionist techniques. Furthermore, despite his avowed antipathy to Impressionism, Inness almost certainly saw the large exhibition of French Impressionist paintings on view at the American Art Association in New York in the spring of 1886. A widely attended show, it included work by almost every significant member of the Impressionist group.<sup>10</sup> The American Art Association's director, James Sutton, had sponsored Inness's first one-man show two years earlier. His decision to display a large and influential collection of avant-garde French paintings demonstrates the growing (and, for American artists, threatening) popularity of French art in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Although some critics dismissed this exhibition outright, others were more salutary in their response. Inness's friend Charles de Kay, writing for the *New York Times*, stopped short of embracing the exhibition wholeheartedly, although he

## NOTES

1. "Studio Notes," *Studio 2* (August 1883), 78.
2. I would like to thank Glenn Clarke, Asia Hallock's descendant, for his helpful information about his family and about Hallock's house, the Knolls, in Milton.
3. These scenes appear in LeRoy Ireland, *The Works of George Inness: An Illustrated Catalogue Raisonné* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 188–89, 247, 272–73.
4. Although the painting is dated 1888 in what appears to be Inness's hand, the color and pigment of the signature and date do not match, suggesting they were added at different times. It would not have been out of character for Inness to date a painting, or even continue working on it, years after he had signed it. The style of the painting is more consistent with a date of 1886, when Inness was most actively experimenting with Impressionist technique. Michael Quick, e-mail message to the author, 30 June 2005, NAMA curatorial files.
5. "George Inness on Individuality and Feeling in Art," *Art Interchange* 23 (September 1894), 75.
6. Benson J. Lossing, *The Hudson from the Wilderness to the Sea* (New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1866), 193–94.
7. Glenn Clarke has identified the jardinière in *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* as one that once stood behind Asia Hallock's house. For the impact of the Aesthetic Movement on garden design, see May Brawley Hill, *Furnishing the Old Fashioned Garden: Three Centuries of American Summerhouses, Dovecotes, Pergolas, Privies, Fences and Birdhouses* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 78–80.
8. Rachel Ziady DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 171–74.
9. Inness's involvement with the art world has also been noticed by Michael Quick. See Quick, "The Late Style in Context," in *George Inness*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. and Quick, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), 45–67.
10. This exhibition was organized by the Parisian art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in conjunction with the American Art Association. See William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 51–53.
11. Gerald Bolas, "The Early Years of the American Art Association, 1879–1900," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998, 196–97.
12. [Charles de Kay], "Paintings for Amateurs," *New York Times*, 10 April 1886, 5.
13. "Realism and Impressionism," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 5.
14. DeLue has recently argued that Inness, who was often described in the 1880s as an "Impressionist," attempted to separate his own freely brushed, brightly colored compositions from those of the French Impressionists through his use of "geometry, formula and measure." DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, 304–5.
15. Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, *Catalogue of Paintings by the Late George Inness, N.A.* (New York: Ortgies & Co., 1895), no. 226. Lascell is listed as the buyer of *Looking Over the Hudson at Milton* in Alfred Trimble, *George Inness, N.A.: A Memorial of the Student, the Artist, and the Man* (New York: Collector, 1895), 50. I would like to thank the family of Artemisia Stace Lascell, particularly David M. Lascell, for the information they provided about their ancestor.

## GEORGE INNESS (1825–1894)

### *Old Farm—Montclair*, 1893

(*The Old Farm, Early Moon*; *Old Farm—Moonrise*)

Oil on plywood

30 × 49<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (76.2 × 124.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: G. Inness 1893

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 39-21

IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS of his life, George Inness enjoyed a preeminent position among American landscape painters. Freed from the financial difficulties that had previously plagued him, the artist could concentrate on refining his style. *Old Farm—Montclair*, a misty, meditative painting of a shepherdess standing in a farmyard at dusk, is a representative example of Inness's late paintings. The artist's friend and fellow painter Elliott Daingerfield described these works as "waves of wonderful color, marvelous and mysterious—the very essence of the beauty of nature."<sup>1</sup>

Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. has referred to Inness's late paintings as "spiritualized landscapes," where the presence of the all-pervading spirit world described by Inness's religious mentor Emanuel Swedenborg is made manifest.<sup>2</sup> Swedenborg's influence on Inness's late style is undeniable. As early as 1879, Inness claimed that his goal as a painter was "not to imitate a fixed material condition, but to represent a living motion" in his landscapes.<sup>3</sup> By 1893 he had arrived at a stylistic formula for portraying the constant, outward-flowing spiritual essence that, according to Swedenborg, animates and gives form to the material world. To an even greater extent than *Brush Burning* (q.v.), *Old Farm—Montclair* shimmers with a radiance that emanates from within the landscape itself, dissolving the edges of forms and suggesting this "living motion" of spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Michael Quick has pointed out that the artist's late landscapes also fit neatly within a broader, late-nineteenth-century artistic climate that favored pictorial unity and poetic expression over clarity and verisimilitude.<sup>5</sup> Inness was certainly far from alone in his choice to paint suggestive, atmospheric landscapes. The Boston artist William Morris Hunt (q.v.) had published his *Talks on Art* in 1875, in which he praised the French Barbizon artists for eschewing narrative and finish in their paintings in order to stimulate viewers' feelings and imagination.<sup>6</sup> By the 1890s the taste for Barbizon landscapes was firmly established in the United States.<sup>7</sup> American painters who worked in a modified Barbizon mode include George Fuller (q.v.), Alexander Wyant (q.v.), Dwight Tryon, and Henry Ward Ranger, among many others. For these artists and their patrons, as for Inness, landscape no longer served as a nationalist celebration of native scenery. It had become a subjective vehicle of emotion.

Another factor that may have contributed to Inness's extremely ethereal late style was the artist's failing health. Inness painted

*Old Farm—Montclair* just one year before he died. In a letter he wrote that year to his friend and patron Thomas B. Clarke, he complained, "There appears to be a constitutional change going on in my system & I find that I must wait until my energies are restored before I can make much head way." He added, "I find myself very well and make a start . . . but I soon tire and then my good work of the short time is injured with the bad work of the forced endeavor."<sup>8</sup> Inness had long believed that his obsessive tendency to paint on a single picture, sometimes for years, harmed his work.<sup>9</sup> In the end, the artist's loss of physical stamina may have provided him with the necessary imperative to stop working on his paintings at an earlier stage, when they still retained the freshness of his initial idea.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its seeming simplicity, *Old Farm—Montclair* is masterfully composed. As in many of Inness's paintings, the horizon divides the composition evenly in half. Inness washed the upper half of the primed plywood panel with brown and the lower half with green before painting the landscape in thin layers with a dry, square brush. The brown and green base tones shimmer through the overlying paint, animating the surface and, at the same time, creating an illusion of depth. The vertical forms of the standing shepherdess, the tree trunk, and the pole of the birdhouse counterbalance the horizon and lend the picture an air of stability. A low picket fence recedes inward from the right edge toward the horizon, where its diagonal trajectory is carried forward by the flock of sheep, the hanging laundry, and the gabled roof of the barn. These diagonals draw the eye into the picture, countering the flatness of the paint-laden surface. *Old Farm—Montclair* hangs in a suspended state between sky and earth, surface and depth. Every element in the painting is so perfectly balanced that time seems to have stopped. This sense of timelessness is enhanced by the moon, which shines weirdly in the powdery blue sky, and the peculiar quality of the light, which falls evenly everywhere, produces no shadows. The indistinct, smoothly blended edges of forms add to the painting's aura of unreality.

The title *Old Farm* was probably invented by Inness's wife, who assigned titles to almost all of her husband's paintings. It is an apt choice in this case, because it highlights Inness's central theme of wistful nostalgia. Although *Old Farm* became associated in the twentieth century with Inness's rural hometown of Montclair, New Jersey, the artist never identified the specific locale depicted.<sup>11</sup> Instead, he almost certainly intended the painting to represent a generalized, pastoral ideal. By the 1890s such scenes were inevitably steeped in nostalgia.

Just three years before Inness painted *Old Farm—Montclair*, the U.S. Census Bureau declared the American frontier officially



closed. As the western regions of the country became more populous, the long-settled landscapes along the eastern seaboard were either transformed by rapid urbanization or languished in a state of economic decline. As Roger Stein has argued, these landscapes became symbolic spaces, signifying the nation's vanishing agrarian past.<sup>12</sup> The sense of nostalgia that pervaded scenes like *Old Farm—Montclair* was heightened by the fact that many Americans, faced with the noise, clutter, and confusion of modern cities, were filled with poignant longing for the simple joys of rural life. The popular magazines of the 1890s abounded with stories, both true and fictional, of men and women fleeing the city for homesteads in the countryside. In one such story, Robert Grant told of a New York architect and his wife who desperately needed rest and who "found it at last, here on this abandoned farm, a good twenty miles from the meretricious excitement and vitiated atmosphere of town." Comfortably situated in their new home, the young couple enjoys their peaceful, rustic surroundings. "To Tom, as he lay in his hammock, the landscape seemed a paradise. The fields rolled away in green freshness, with here and there a stretch of woodland, to a horizon of stately hills, and on every side were peace and stillness."<sup>13</sup> Inness's late landscapes offered similar views into a restful, agrarian Eden. As Leo Mazow has recently contended, these paintings defined rural landscapes as islands of "calm and homogeneity in a hectic and fragmented world."<sup>14</sup>

*Old Farm—Montclair*, with its dreamlike atmosphere and subjective color, also seems to offer a glimpse of Inness's "internal landscape."<sup>15</sup> Inness himself claimed, in 1878, that a painter's principal task was to "reproduce in other minds the impression that a scene has made upon him."<sup>16</sup> So closely were Inness's paintings associated with the artist himself that Frank Fowler noted, in his 1894 memorial essay about the artist, "We could almost think the very life currents of the man had co-mingled themselves with the tints he made use of."<sup>17</sup> Such statements offered the promise that, by buying a landscape by Inness, one could acquire a fixed expression of the artist's own famous, antimaterialist, poetic sensibility. This prospect must have seemed particularly appealing in the reverent climate that surrounded the 1894 memorial exhibition and the subsequent sale in 1895 of Inness's paintings. Although the original owner of *Old Farm—Montclair* is unknown, William T. Evans, a well-known connoisseur and collector of Inness's paintings, selected it from the 1895 sale on his or her behalf.<sup>18</sup> Evans's choice of *Old Farm—Montclair* reveals both his taste and his deep familiarity with Inness's oeuvre. The painting's subtle color, perfectly balanced composition, and dreamlike, ethereal atmosphere exemplify the artist's late style.

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## NOTES

1. Elliott Daingerfield, "A Reminiscence of George Inness," *Monthly Illustrator* 3 (March 1895), 268.
2. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *George Inness* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 115.
3. "Mr. Inness on Art Matters," *Art Journal* 5 (December 1879), 377.
4. For a perceptive, recent discussion of Inness's engagement with Swedenborg's ideas, see Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape*, exh. cat. (New York: National Academy of Design, 2003), 24–31.
5. Michael Quick, "The Late Style in Context," in *George Inness*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. and Quick, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), 43–67.
6. H. M. Knowlton, ed., *W.M. Hunt's Talks on Art* (Boston: H. O. Houghton and Company, 1875). A second series of talks was brought out by the same publisher in 1883.
7. See Laura Meixner, ed., *An International Episode: Millet, Monet, and Their North American Counterparts*, exh. cat. (Memphis, Tenn.: Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 1982).
8. George Inness to Thomas B. Clarke, 12 February 1893, Charles Henry Hart Autograph Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel D5.
9. Inness's son related that the artist once complained, "if I could only learn to leave a thing alone after I feel I have what I want! It has been the curse of my life, this changing and trying to carry a thing nearer to perfection." George Inness Jr., *The Life, Art and Letters of George Inness* (New York: Century Co., 1917), 192–95.
10. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. has suggested that some of the late landscapes left in Inness's studio at the time of his death, which have since become emblems of the artist's late style, were, in fact, unfinished. Cikovsky, *George Inness*, 123. The fact that *Old Farm—Montclair* is signed and dated implies that Inness considered the work complete.
11. Inness once purportedly retorted, in response to a query about the location of one of his landscapes, "Do you suppose I illustrate guide books? That's a picture." Reginald Cleveland Cox, "George Inness," *Scribner's Magazine* 44 (October 1908), 511.
12. Roger B. Stein, "After the War: Constructing a Rural Past," in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, ed. William H. Truettner and Stein, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 15–41.
13. Robert Grant, "In Fly-Time," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 89 (July 1894), 296.
14. Leo G. Mazow, "George Inness: Problems in Antimodernism," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996, 191.
15. This term was coined by Engene Taylor in Taylor, "The Interior Landscape: George Inness and William James on Art from a Swedenborgian Point of View," *Archives of American Art Journal* 37 (Spring/Summer 1997), 2–10.
16. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February 1878), 458.
17. Frank Fowler, "A Master Landscape Painter, the Late George Inness," *Harper's Weekly* 38 (29 December 1894), 1242.
18. According to an unpublished folio produced by the Ainslie Galleries about 1920, *Old Farm—Montclair* was bought from the 1895 Ortgies & Company sale of Inness's paintings "by William T. Evans, for a friend, from whom it was acquired by Mr. Ainslie." Ainslie Galleries, "The Old Farm, by George Inness, N.A.," copy of unpublished folio, NAMA curatorial files.

## EASTMAN JOHNSON (1824–1906)

### *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path*, c. 1878–81 (Reading the Bible)

Oil on canvas

22¼ × 26¾ in. (56.5 × 67.9 cm)

Signed lower right: E. Johnson.

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F79-12

EASTMAN JOHNSON'S ARTISTIC CAREER spanned an era of tremendous upheaval in American society. The Civil War, the industrial revolution, relocation of people from rural to rapidly growing urban areas, and an influx of immigrants upset old social structures. In response to feelings of apprehension about the future, a wave of nostalgia swept the nation for what was perceived as a simpler and more virtuous past.<sup>1</sup> Johnson, although well known for his portraits and Civil War scenes, made his greatest contribution at this time in the area of genre, recording a seemingly more innocent and rapidly vanishing way of life in paintings such as the Nelson-Atkins *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path*.

Born in 1824, Johnson was the son of Maine's secretary of state. He showed an early aptitude for portraiture and in 1849 traveled to Europe to obtain the technical training not yet available to artists in America.<sup>2</sup> He spent two years working in Düsseldorf with Emanuel Leutze, the German American painter best known for his *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851; Metropolitan Museum of Art). After leaving Düsseldorf, Johnson spent four years working as a portrait and genre painter in The Hague, where he was much influenced by the seventeenth-century Dutch masters, particularly Rembrandt van Rijn. Indeed, the subdued, spiritual mood, warm tones, and contrast of deep shadow and carefully manipulated light in *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* are reminiscent of much of the Dutchman's work. These qualities were hallmarks of Johnson's style and earned him the appellation "America's Rembrandt."

After a brief stint studying with Thomas Couture in Paris, Johnson returned to the United States late in 1855. Almost immediately, he began searching for ways to apply his European training to recognizably American subjects. The following year, he made a number of drawings and several small paintings of the fur trappers and Anishinabe Indians living near Superior, Wisconsin, where his brother owned a mill. Plagued by financial difficulties, however, Johnson was forced to abandon this project and relocate to Washington, D.C., where he could earn a living painting portraits. In Washington he also began painting genre scenes featuring African Americans—a subject that would make his reputation. In *Negro Life at the South* (1859; New-York Historical Society), Johnson adapted the compositional style of the seventeenth-century Dutch

genre painter Jan Steen to a stereotypical depiction of happy black men, women, and children, who while away their free time dancing, courting, and listening to music. The scene, which caused a sensation at the spring 1859 exhibition of the National Academy of Design, pleased Northerners and Southerners alike.<sup>3</sup>

Johnson's later depictions of black Americans, which he painted in New York City throughout the Civil War and during the early years of Reconstruction, are more sympathetic and overtly abolitionist. *The Lord Is My Shepherd* (1863; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), which resembles the Nelson-Atkins painting in both subject and composition, depicts an elderly black man seated near a hearth, studying his open Bible by the embers of a dying fire. As Patricia Hills has argued, this image, while non-threatening, is clearly political.<sup>4</sup> The man's perusal of the holy text communicates both his literacy and the Christian values he shares with most white Americans, thus demonstrating his readiness for citizenship. In the early 1860s paintings like *The Lord Is My Shepherd* pleased Johnson's patrons, who were primarily Northern, Republican entrepreneurs and industrialists. As the federal government gradually abandoned its commitment to black suffrage, however, Johnson found that his paintings of African Americans no longer sold.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the 1860s, he was again searching for American subject matter that would appeal to his audience.

In 1870 Johnson discovered Nantucket Island, off the coast of Massachusetts. Once a busy hub of maritime activity, particularly whaling, the port community was languishing in a prolonged economic slump brought on by the advent of cheap steam transportation and the collapse of the whale oil market.<sup>6</sup> Johnson quickly recognized the pictorial potential of Nantucket's weathered, colonial houses and quaint New England types. He bought a house and studio on the island in 1871. There, he spent his summers in a retreat from the hustle of the New York art world, painting islanders engaging in various local customs.<sup>7</sup> As Roger Stein has shown, the years surrounding the centennial in the United States were marked by widespread nostalgia for the perceived simplicity and homogeneity of old-fashioned New England life.<sup>8</sup> As the region's commercial supremacy faded, its symbolic role as the cradle of American civilization grew. Paintings like *Husking Bee, Island of Nantucket* (1876; Art Institute of Chicago) reinforced an idealized vision of "Old New England" as a region permeated by values of community and hard work and insulated from the tumultuous changes of modern life.

The citizens of Nantucket served as models for Johnson's paintings, and, unlike most of his European contemporaries, he chose to portray them as recognizable individuals rather than as generalized, rustic types. Johnson's favorite models were elderly sea





captains and their families, who appear in a number of the artist's Nantucket pictures. In *The Nantucket School of Philosophy* (1887; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore), for example, Johnson depicted four elderly men seated in a semicircle, conversing around a stove. All four have been identified by name as former sea captains who lived and worked on Nantucket.<sup>9</sup> Two of the men depicted are bearded and bear a resemblance to the elderly man in *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path*.

In several paintings made during the late 1870s, Johnson used these aged New Englanders to allude to the rapid social changes taking place in the United States. In both *The New Bonnet* (1876; Metropolitan Museum of Art) and *The Reprimand* (1880; private collection), an old man sits hunched disapprovingly in a chair by the hearth while his daughter, a modern young woman more concerned with fashionable pleasures than with wholesome, filial obligations, turns away. Johnson's point in these paintings can hardly be missed. While a younger generation embraces the urban and cosmopolitan culture of the new Gilded Age, old New Englanders hold fast to the values of the past. Johnson's rugged sea captains, whose ages mirror that of the century itself, embody the fast-fading virtues of the early republic.<sup>10</sup>

Nowhere are these old-fashioned virtues more clearly expressed than in Johnson's subtle and sensitive portrayals of elderly men and women reading the Bible or listening to it being read. The frequency with which Johnson returned to the theme of Bible reading near the hearth suggests that he was aware of its popularity within the visual culture of the period.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1866, in *Sunday Morning* (New-York Historical Society), Johnson recast the black Bible reader from *The Lord Is My Shepherd* as the white patriarch of an extended family, whose members gather around the hearth of an old-fashioned New England farmhouse to listen reverently as he reads. In this way, Johnson transformed an image that, just three years earlier, had evoked the future prospects of black Americans into a nostalgic reflection on the charms of America's antebellum past.

In the Nelson-Atkins painting, Johnson simplified his composition and reduced the number of participants to two. Yet he conveys a great deal through his masterful economy of means, creating a statement about the humble virtues on which the stability and morality of the family and thus the nation are based. As one contemporary reviewer described the painting:

An old honest looking farmer has opened a ponderous copy of the Scriptures on a table, and is reading to his wife, a contented and serene looking matron, seated a little way from him in a high backed chair. The expression of infinite peace on the old lady's face, as she sits there with folded hands, tells a story that goes directly to the heart. Who shall say that the poetry of the world is confined to the youth of the world?<sup>12</sup>

Despite this account, the woman in *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* does not sit with folded hands.

Rather, she raises one hand to her face in a thoughtful gesture as she gazes down at a tiny, closed, well-worn "thumb Bible" (Fig. 1) in her lap. These miniature, condensed editions of the scriptures were published for children—girls in particular—beginning in the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> With print too small to be read by such an elderly woman, this artifact of her childhood (which is also, perhaps, a family heirloom) serves as a nostalgic reminder of her past and signifies her childlike faith. It is also a kind of reliquary, containing God's sacred promise of a future life in paradise.

The thumb Bible is one of many references to the past in the Nelson-Atkins painting. The scene is set in what was, even during the 1870s, a very old-fashioned, colonial-style interior. The heavy, whitewashed beams, wide-plank flooring, and furnishings are rendered with an almost archaeological attention to detail. As Lizzie Champney noted in 1885:

[Johnson] is a chronicler of a phase of our national life which is fast passing away. . . . He lives in a fascinating "house of seven gables," filled with curiosities brought to Nantucket by seafaring men,—keepsake pitchers inscribed with amatory poetry, and made in England a century ago for sailors' sweethearts, and many another treasure in willow-ware or other china. Mr. Johnson's studio is stored with antique furniture, spinning wheels, and costumes.<sup>14</sup>

Although the interior depicted in the Nelson-Atkins painting is most likely a pastiche, created from various artifacts in the artist's collection, it appears to be honest and unadorned, signifying the sturdy, orderly, and upright lifestyle of its inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> The large, centrally placed fireplace makes explicit the idea that the hearth is the center of the elderly couple's home, a symbol of domestic warmth and security.<sup>16</sup> Yet the fire of the hearth has been nearly extinguished, alluding to not only the approaching ends of their lives but possibly the end of an era. Light streams in through an unseen window, implying the existence of another world outside this quiet enclave. But the true illumination comes from a different source, identified by a label written in the artist's hand and attached to the back of the painting. Quoting Psalm 119:105, Johnson wrote, "[Thy] Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

As David Paul Nord has shown, the relationship of Americans to the printed word underwent a transformation over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Early in the century, when most rural American households contained only a Bible and a few religious tracts, the reading done there was largely of a religious nature. It was marked by repetition and meditation as readers and listeners alike weighed each word for its spiritual significance. The figures in the Nelson-Atkins painting, whom Johnson depicted lost in silent contemplation of the psalm that the old man has presumably just read, embody this intensive relationship to the text. Indeed, the author of Psalm 119, to which Johnson explicitly referred with his title, dwells on this very subject, declaring repeatedly, "I will meditate in thy statutes." As mass-production made cheap, secular printed material widely available, more Americans began to read

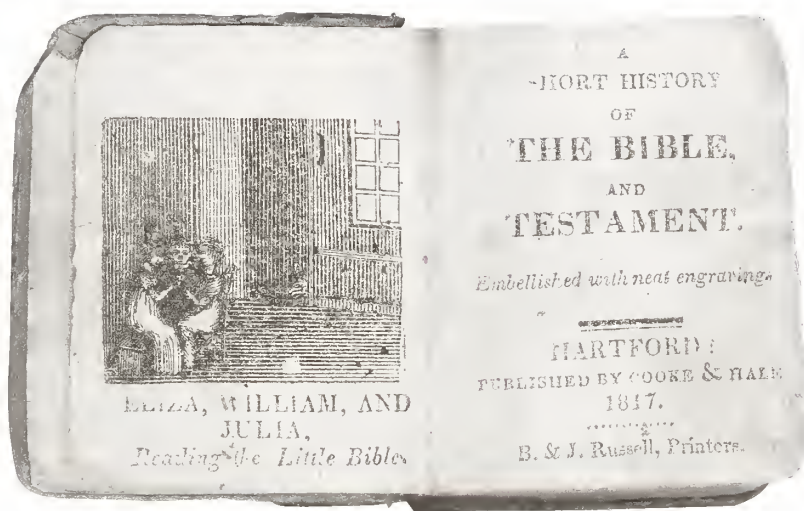


Fig. 1 *A Short History of the Bible, and Testament. Embellished with Neat Engravings* (Hartford, Conn.: Cooke & Hale, 1817), frontispiece and title page.  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  in. (6.4 × 5.1 cm). Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington

extensively rather than intensively—a shift decried by conservative religious and cultural lights. Although Johnson does not appear to have been particularly religious, *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* expresses a sense of wistful nostalgia for an earlier, more fervent, and pious form of reading. It anticipates the words of a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, who lamented in 1883 that “We take even our bible-reading from books that look as if they belonged to baby-house libraries: Daily Foods and Pearls of Sacred Thought, one verse of the Bible for each day, as if it were all our spiritual constitutions would bear in their present weak conditions.”<sup>18</sup> Significantly, a contemporary reviewer noted of Johnson’s painting, “one may long linger before this canvas, detecting fresh beauties and subtler fancies than those apparent at first glance.”<sup>19</sup> According to this reviewer, the Nelson-Atkins canvas encourages a careful visual analysis similar to its subjects’ meditative contemplation of the Bible.

*Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* was Johnson’s contribution to the annual sale for 1881 of the Artists’ Fund Society of New York, an organization set up to help the indigent families of deceased artists. There it sold for the generous sum of \$1,350, the highest price brought by any painting in the exhibition.<sup>20</sup> It was purchased by Luther C. Tillotson, a wealthy manufacturer of telegraph equipment. Although, professionally, Tillotson created the technology that drove a revolution in modern communication, his brownstone mansion on East Forty-ninth Street in Manhattan was filled with a large collection of sentimental genre scenes that idealized rural, preindustrial life.<sup>21</sup> The Nelson-Atkins painting, which celebrates profound, uncomplicated religious faith and an old-fashioned reverence for the printed word, must have blended seamlessly with this collection.

Despite its success, *Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* was one of Johnson’s last genre paintings. By the 1880s, as a taste for modern, French painting grew in the United States, fewer and fewer patrons collected this type of

work.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Johnson largely abandoned genre painting to return to portraiture, a pursuit that he found less satisfying but much more profitable.

LL/DMM

## NOTES

1. See Kenneth L. Ames, introduction to *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1985), 1–14.
2. Biographical information about Johnson can be found in the following sources: Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hills, *Eastman Johnson: Painting America*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, in association with Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1999); Marc Simpson, Sally Mills, and Patricia Hills, *Eastman Johnson: The Cranberry Harvest, Island of Nantucket*, exh. cat. (San Diego: Timken Art Gallery, 1990); and Patricia Hills, “The Genre Painting of Eastman Johnson: The Sources and Development of His Style and Themes,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1977.
3. See John Davis, “Eastman Johnson’s ‘Negro Life at the South’ and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C.,” *Art Bulletin* 80 (March 1998), 67–92.
4. See Patricia Hills, “Painting Race: Eastman Johnson’s Pictures of Slaves, Ex-Slaves, and Freedmen,” in Carbone and Hills, *Eastman Johnson*, 140. Johnson created two identical versions of this painting in 1863. The other, *The Chimney Corner*, is owned by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, New York.
5. Other genre painters, including Winslow Homer (q.v.) and Thomas Waterman Wood, returned to the theme of African Americans reading the Bible in the 1870s in paintings such as Wood’s *Sunday Morning* (c. 1875; Smithsonian American Art Museum) and Homer’s painting of the same title (1877; Cincinnati Art Museum). These scenes may, in turn, have influenced Johnson’s later depictions of white Bible readers.
6. See Marc Simpson, “‘Taken with a Cranberry Fit’: Eastman Johnson on Nantucket,” in Simpson, Mills, and Hills, *Eastman Johnson*, 33–35.
7. As Marc Simpson has discovered, Johnson also quickly apprehended Nantucket’s potential appeal as a tourist destination and summer retreat, and he invested in real estate on the island. See Simpson, “‘Taken with a Cranberry Fit,’” 36; and Simpson, Mills, and Hills, *Eastman Johnson*, 102–4.
8. Roger B. Stein, “After the War: Constructing a Rural Past,” in *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, ed. William H. Truettner and Stein, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 15–41.
9. These identifications were given by Johnson himself to Edward D. Adams, the original owner of the painting. See Everett U. Crosby, *Eastman Johnson at Nantucket: His Paintings and Sketches of Nantucket People and Scenes* (Nantucket Island, Mass.: privately printed, 1944), 15, no. C28.
10. Patricia Hills, “Afterword/Afterwards: Eastman Johnson’s Transition to Portrait Painting in the Early 1880s,” in Simpson, Mills, and Hills, *Eastman Johnson*, 79–80.
11. See, for instance, the Currier and Ives prints *Reading the Bible* (1848; Library of Congress), *Remember the Sabbath-Day, to Keep It Holy* (c. 1876; Museum of the City of New York), and *Old Age. ‘The Season of Rest’* (1868; Library of Congress); and Winslow Homer, *Sunday Morning in Virginia* (1877; Cincinnati Art Museum).
12. “Fine Arts,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3 February 1881, 1.
13. See Ruth Elizabeth Adomeit, *Three Centuries of Thumb Bibles: A Checklist* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), xiii–xix.
14. Lizzie W. Champney, “The Summer Haunts of American Artists,” *Century* 30 (October 1885), 854. Antique hunters discovered Nantucket around the same time that Johnson did. In 1875 Charles Nordhoff noted, “of late,

- auctions have furnished recreation also to summer visitors, where they purchased curious old furniture, old china, old table gear; and I was even offered a magnificent brass warming pan." An illustration of Johnson in his studio appears just below this passage. Nordhoff, "Cape Cod, Nantucket, and the Vineyard," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 51 (June 1875), 65.
15. One reviewer described this "New England interior" as "characteristically neat and prim." "The Artists' Fund Society," *Art Journal* 7 (February 1881), 63.
  16. For Johnson's use of hearth imagery, see Jane Weiss, "Home-Loving Sentiments: Domestic Contexts for Eastman Johnson's Paintings," in Carbone and Hills, *Eastman Johnson*, 69–71. For the hearth as a symbol of New England culture at this time, see Rodrith Roth, "The New England, or 'Olde-Tyme,' Kitchen Exhibit at Nineteenth-Century Fairs," in Axelrod, *The Colonial Revival in America*, 159–83.
  17. David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
  18. "The Contributor's Club," *Atlantic Monthly* 51 (March 1883), 426.
  19. "The Artist Fund Exhibition," *Studio and Musical Review* 1 (5 February 1881), 22.
  20. "The Artists' Fund Sale," *New York Evening Post*, 10 February 1881, 4. According to this account, bidding for the Nelson-Atkins canvas was especially brisk, with bids being "exploded at the auctioneer with an unembarrassed rapidity worthy of the successive discharges of a well-lighted pack of fire-crackers."
  21. See "Luther G. Tillotson," *New York Times*, 1 February 1885, 7. For Tillotson's collection, see Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, *Catalogue of High Class Oil Paintings and Water Colors Belonging to the Estate of the Late Emma A. Tillotson*, 21–22 January 1909.
  22. See Hills, "Afterword/Afterwards." Although Johnson abandoned genre painting in the 1880s, other American artists continued in this vein. Notably, Thomas Hovenden, who had returned to New York from Paris just in time to view the Artists' Fund Exhibition, painted two similar scenes of Bible readers shortly afterward, *The Old Version* (1881; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) and *The Revised Version* (1881; National Academy of Design, New York). See *Thomas Hovenden (1840–1895): American Painter of Hearth and Homeland*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Woodmere Art Museum, 1995), 39–41, 86.

## RAYMOND JONSON (1891–1982)

### *Oil and Tempera No. 1—1941, 1941*

Oil and casein tempera on canvas, mounted on Masonite  
26⅞ × 39⅙ in. (66.4 × 99.2 cm)

Signed and dated vertically lower right: JONSON 41

Gift of Mr. Raymond Starr, 53-83

A CHAMPION OF ABSTRACT ART and an influential teacher in New Mexico, Raymond Jonson began making art in Portland, Oregon. His family had settled in Portland in 1902 after years of traveling to support the senior Jonson's career as a minister.<sup>1</sup> Jonson's art education started at the school of the Portland Art Museum in 1909. One year later he moved to Chicago to study at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and subsequently at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also designed theater sets and worked lights for the Chicago Little Theatre.

While in Chicago, the artist received his initial exposure to modernist art and theory. An exhibit of abstract pastels in 1912 by Arthur Dove (q.v.) impressed Jonson.<sup>2</sup> The following year an abbreviated display of the International Exhibition of Modern Art (the so-called Armory Show) arrived in Chicago. The large show of European and American modernism was even less well received in Chicago than it had been in New York. Although Jonson did not appreciate all the works on view, he was attracted to the wide range of expressive possibilities that modernism afforded artists.<sup>3</sup> During this early period, his paintings evolved generally from Impressionist-inspired landscapes to various Post-Impressionist methods relating to Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat, among others.<sup>4</sup>

In 1922 Jonson first visited and painted in New Mexico, and he moved there permanently with his wife, Vera White, in 1924, settling in Santa Fe. He based his decision to retreat to the Southwest primarily on his deep belief that the United States had embraced the mechanical age at the sacrifice of the arts. Like many American painters before and after him, Jonson found New Mexico to be refreshing and inspiring, and its unique topography profoundly affected his art. As Charles C. Eldredge has observed, "the angular shapes of the country, accentuated by crisp light and dark shadows, led him ultimately to a distinctive abstract style."<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, Jonson's style became defined by vaguely Cubist-inspired interlocking and overlapping planes of color—sometimes muted and, in other instances, highly saturated and contrasting—that created strong visual rhythms recalling Art Deco.

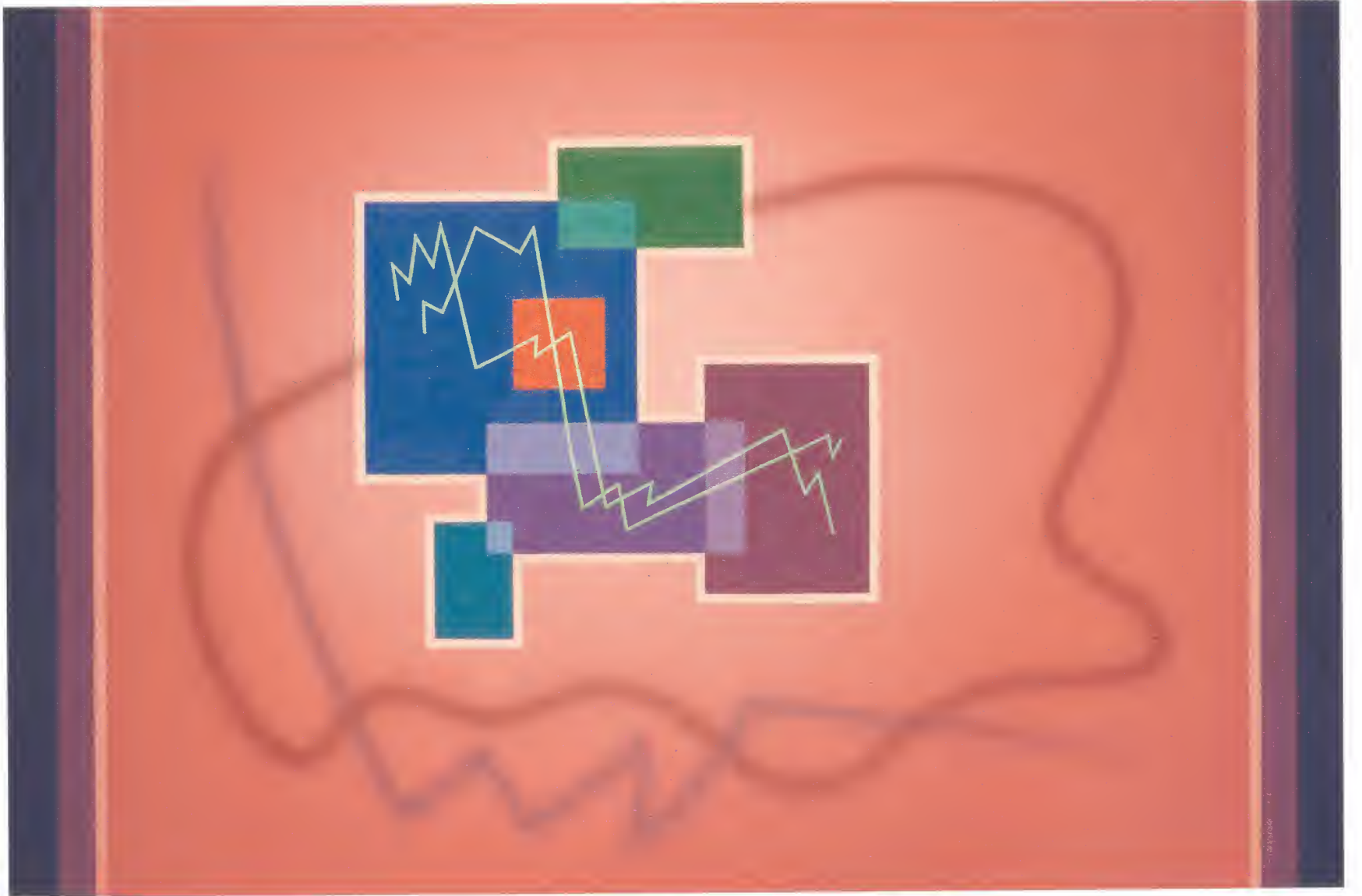
In addition to the New Mexico landscape, enduring sources of inspiration and guidance for Jonson came from traditional southwestern American Indian designs as well as the writings of Wassily Kandinsky concerning the inherent spiritual properties of abstraction. Conditioned to notions of spirituality as a result of his upbringing, the artist was first exposed to Kandinsky's ideas

about 1921, when he read *Art of Spiritual Harmony*, a treatise that Jonson described as "the greatest book concerning art I have ever read."<sup>6</sup> He held Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in similarly high esteem. The Russian's liberating ideas regarding art's transcendent spiritualism helped Jonson to develop an abstract vocabulary of his own. In 1938 he and other artists based primarily in New Mexico and California who shared his artistic convictions, among them Agnes Pelton, Emil Bisttram, and Lauren Harris, formed the short-lived Transcendental Painting Group. The group's goals included, according to Jonson, supporting "art which releases from its creators the deepest springs of vitality and consciousness and which aims to stimulate in others . . . a more intense participation in the life of the spirit."<sup>7</sup>

By the time that Jonson created *Oil and Tempera No. 1—1941*, the Transcendental Painting Group had unofficially disbanded, and obvious references to landscape had disappeared from his art. The painting presents a horizontal field of softly modulated, pale salmon tones, bracketed on both ends by vertical bands of mauve and light pink. This ethereal field serves as a ground against and over which various abstract patterns and designs appear. The most prominent of these constitute a series of overlapping squares and rectangles, rendered variously in blue, mauve, orange, and green, which fill up the center of the composition. A light pink outline running around the perimeter of these shapes locks them into a single unit, a visual motif Jonson derived, in part, from Navajo sand painting.<sup>8</sup> The pure geometries making up this dominant compositional feature also reveal the influence of the Hungarian-born Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy, another nonobjective artist Jonson admired.<sup>9</sup>

Jonson set within his bold geometric network two abrupt, white zigzagging lines that look like stylized lightning bolts. Consequently, *Oil and Tempera No. 1—1941* subtly recalls earlier landscapes by Jonson, such as *The Decree* (1918; Jonson Gallery, University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque), wherein a single bolt issuing from a dark sky strikes a large butte. The recurrence of such motifs in *Oil and Tempera No. 1—1941* imparts visual and psychological energy to the work and, perhaps, even apocalyptic import.

Faintly echoing the pair of electrifying lines, two larger, looser, and blurrier lines further activate the field on which all of the composition hovers. One line, the more organic of the two, encircles the geometric mass in the center. The other, running along the left and bottom edges of the picture plane, more closely mimics the linear angularity of the inner lines, thereby clearly connecting these different areas of the composition. In fact, the internal formal relationships between and among forms determine much of the painting's content, especially as it pertains to the painter's



exploration of opposites—geometric and organic, closed and open, sharp and soft. Following Kandinsky's theories, such relationships, in Jonson's estimation, trigger spiritual vibrations that enable artist and viewer alike to transcend the imperfect, unbalanced nature of earthly existence.

Perhaps surprisingly, Jonson's visualization of abstract, spiritual vibrations was created with the aid of a most modern and mechanical instrument—the airbrush. The painter first began experimenting with airbrush in 1938. Whereas more popular artists of the period, such as George Petty and Alberto Vargas, adopted the tool to produce sleek depictions of scantily clad women for commercial uses, Jonson turned to the device for its ability to blend pigment and light seamlessly, an effect that suited the metaphysical character of his art.

The degree to which Jonson remained absolutely committed to the exploration of spirituality in his painting is highlighted by the fact that he created *Oil and Tempera No. 1—1941* as global warfare was proliferating and would soon reach America's doorstep at Pearl Harbor. American and European artists responded to World War II in a variety of ways. Some, like Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), incorporated direct references to the conflict in their art. Others, like the younger Mark Rothko, explored themes of tragedy and loss rooted in Greek and Roman myth. Revealingly, Jonson's work contains no direct reference to the present dire situation. For him, such circumstances confirmed the need for the kind of enriching balance and harmony he believed his art provided. As he observed in an interview in 1967, "Around us we have realism, strife, pain and greed. I wish to present the other side of life, namely the feeling of order, joy and freedom. By setting up my own plastic means I can at least thrill to the attempt of establishing some fundamental principles that are universal and enduring."<sup>10</sup>

Jonson moved from Santa Fe to Albuquerque in 1949, when he accepted a professorship at the University of New Mexico. This began a lasting and mutually beneficial association. In 1950 the Jonson Gallery—University of New Mexico opened, giving the artist studio and exhibition space and providing ongoing support for his mission. Over the next thirty years he provided an influential pocket of spiritual modernism for many students and continued his own quest for universal expression in art.<sup>11</sup>

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## NOTES

1. The most important sources for information on Jonson are Ed Garman, *The Art of Raymond Jonson, Painter* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976); and the Raymond Jonson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA). The most recent substantive study on the artist is Herbert R. Hartel Jr., "The Art and Life of Raymond Jonson (1891–1982): Concerning the Spiritual in American Abstract Art," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2002. The author thanks Hartel for his valuable comments regarding this entry.
2. The influence of Dove's pastels is conveyed in Sharyn Rohlfen Udall, *Modernist Painting in New Mexico, 1913–1935* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 92–93.
3. See Garman, *The Art of Raymond Jonson*, 24.
4. On Jonson's artistic maturation, see, among other sources, Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Raymond Jonson: The Early Years*, exh. cat. (Albuquerque: Art Museum, University of New Mexico, 1980).
5. Charles C. Eldredge, "The Faraway Nearby: New Mexico and the Modern Landscape," in Eldredge et al., *Art in New Mexico, 1900–1945: Paths to Taos and Santa Fe*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 159.
6. On Kandinsky's influence on Jonson, see esp. Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz, *Theme and Improvisation: Kandinsky and the American Avant-Garde, 1912–1950*, exh. cat. (Dayton, Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1992), 91–116; and Hartel, "The Art and Life of Raymond Jonson," esp. 52–57.
7. Jonson to Arthur Jonson, 28 July 1938, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 1, frame 530.
8. The outlining of flat shapes in light-colored line is a common motif in sand painting, which Jonson would have seen at the many festivals he attended. See "Navajo Sand Painting," *Design* 48 (May–June 1947), 16.
9. See *Raymond Jonson: Geometric Form in the Pursuit of a Unifying Principle*, exh. cat. (Albuquerque: Jonson Gallery of the University Art Museum, 1990), unpaginated. Jonson may have been encouraged to experiment with airbrush through his familiarity with Moholy-Nagy's work.
10. Raymond Jonson, interview by Van Derek Coke, in *Raymond Jonson: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), 10.
11. When the artist died in 1982, the university was bequeathed the Jonson Gallery collection of more than 2,000 works, including approximately 800 by Jonson.

## WILLIAM KEITH (1838–1911)

### *Sunset Glow*, 1896

#### *(Sunset Glow on Mt. Tamalpais)*

Oil on canvas

36<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 72<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91.9 × 184 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: W. Keith / S. F. 1896

Gift of Mrs. Ferdinand Heim in memory of Ferdinand Heim,  
45-22

WILLIAM KEITH'S *SUNSET GLOW* showcases an impressive panorama of rugged California scenery. Most of the composition is filled with a forested, mountainous landscape and a river valley, soon to be shrouded by thick evening cloud cover moving in from the right. The view culminates in two prominent peaks on the horizon toward the left. The striking shades of violet giving shape to these blunted outcroppings call attention to the volcanic origins of California's distinctive topography. In this prehistoric, natural splendor, a lone hunter passes quietly along a winding trail that connects him visually and symbolically to the geographic grandeur that stretches out seemingly into the infinite.

One of California's best-known and most popular nineteenth-century landscape painters, William Keith was born in the Scottish village of Old Meldrum, about twenty miles from Aberdeen.<sup>1</sup> In 1850 his widowed mother moved her family to New York, where William's older brother had already relocated. After early training and employment as a wood engraver and a short stint working in Britain, the aspiring artist pursued an ill-fated job in 1863 with a magazine in San Francisco, a town that was growing exponentially in the wake of the discovery of gold in the late 1840s. A robust market for landscape imagery in northern California turned Keith toward that subject, a change of artistic direction that was confirmed by a commission the painter received from the Oregon Navigation and Railroad Company to depict the Pacific Northwest. In the early 1870s he went to Düsseldorf, Germany, where he took private lessons and studied old master painting. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War prompted his return to America, where he lived in several cities on the East Coast before returning to San Francisco by the spring of 1872.

American landscape painting in the mid-nineteenth century was characterized by the monumental, sensational scenery depicted by Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), Albert Bierstadt (q.v.), and Thomas Moran (q.v.). Fascination with newly charted lands in the far West—particularly the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada—fueled the production of awe-inspiring canvases that catered to the fantasies of eastern audiences.<sup>2</sup> Keith's career, however, coincided with a gradual but profound shift away from such operatic western visions among painters and audiences toward more intimate, poetic, and subjective views of nature. A key factor

informing this change in taste was the settlement, or "closure," of the western frontier, declared officially by the U.S. Census of 1890.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the languorous sunset Keith painted in *Sunset Glow*, along with other compositions of the period, could be understood as a natural metaphor for the closing of the frontier and, with it, the quiet, inevitable passing of the age of Manifest Destiny.

Symptomatic of these new cultural conditions were the rise and professional success of the landscape painter George Inness (q.v.), whose diffuse, tonal compositions effectively evoked subjective mood rather than topographic exactitude.<sup>4</sup> Keith's own desire to interpret—rather than slavishly imitate—the appearance of nature was corroborated by his meeting and friendship with Inness, who ventured to San Francisco in 1891. Under Inness's influence, Keith's palette became darker—concentrated around deep browns and greens—and his brushwork broader, producing subtle veils of color suggesting atmosphere and mystery. These effects are minimized in *Sunset Glow*, making the canvas somewhat atypical for his work in the 1890s. Nevertheless, Inness's example impressed on Keith the notion that the role of a landscape painter had evolved dramatically over the course of the century. As the transplanted Californian explained,

What a landscape painter wants to render is not the natural landscape, but the state of feeling which the landscape produces in himself. Under the impulse of feeling he has produced a piece of work and the feeling will have fused the material into a whole. Art is not the slave of Nature, but an independent force using Nature as a mine of material or like a dictionary with lots of words which have to be put together to express ideas.<sup>5</sup>

No longer a neutral reporter of visual "facts," the ideal landscape painter had become, Keith and many others believed, a kind of spiritual medium and translator.

Keith's emphasis on the imaginative and synthetic possibilities of landscape painting likely accounts for the ambiguity of the locale of *Sunset Glow*. Evidence suggests that the scene is a compilation of various stock elements of California scenery—the igneous terrain, the redwood trees, and brush fields, which compose the familiar "dictionary" of landscape Keith consulted within himself in constructing the scene.<sup>6</sup> The theme of ambiguity extends as well to the painter's focus on twilight, a transitional time of day thought to inspire complex, sometimes conflicting, emotions. Equally relevant to Keith's generation was twilight's ability to elicit and sustain reverie, a consummate absorption into the beauty and power of nature rooted in a deep, personal, and psychological attachment to it.<sup>7</sup>





Such visual invocations of meaningful relationships with nature were important to Keith's primary base of patronage, mostly middle- and upper-class men of European derivation who lived in and around the Bay Area. Many of these men, therefore, would have been personally familiar with the environs that he was painting. Indeed, Keith's patrons, unlike the chief consumers of paintings by Bierstadt and Moran, might likely have hiked or hunted in the very sites that appear most commonly in his art, including Mt. Shasta, Mt. Tamalpais, and Mt. Hood. In this regard, the lone hunter in *Sunset Glow* can be understood as an anonymous personification of the typical individual who could be in the market for one of Keith's paintings—the white, middle- or upper-class white-collar male who, feeling stifled by the demands of urban, corporate life, during his leisure time immersed himself in nature for its restorative and therapeutic powers and in order to reconnect with his own “primitive” drives. With his rifle firmly in hand, the hunter furthermore testifies to the need felt among many men in this group to reclaim, if even temporarily, their mastery and domination over the natural world.

The regenerative functions of landscape were promoted most famously by the legendary San Francisco-based naturalist and conservationist John Muir, with whom Keith was close friends for many years.<sup>8</sup> Muir's efforts to ensure that America's urbanites did not forget the beauty and wonder of its woodlands corresponded neatly with the concerns of Theodore Roosevelt, who would become the era's most vocal spokesman for the “strenuous life” and a critic of what he perceived to be the increasing lethargy of America's men.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Keith's art was part of the cultural effort that strove to offset the seeming stagnation of modern life. Installed in their owners' homes, his paintings operated as visually pleasurable vacation souvenirs and, more important, as gentle reminders to stay active and not attend to the world of commerce at the expense of nature.<sup>10</sup>

RRG

## NOTES

1. Biographical information has been drawn from a range of sources. The foundational biography of Keith is Brother Fidelis Cornelius, *Keith: Old Master of California* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942). Another key source is Eugen Neuhaus, *William Keith: The Man and the Artist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1938).
2. On eastern fascination with the western landscape and its effects on the careers of Bierstadt and Moran, see Nancy K. Anderson, Linda S. Ferber, and Helena E. Wright, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1990); and Nancy K. Anderson, *Thomas Moran*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997).
3. On shifting tastes in American landscape painting in the late nineteenth century, see Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, “The Hudson River School in Eclipse,” in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987); Bruce Weber and William H. Gerdts, *In Nature's Ways: American Landscape Painting of the Late Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat. (West Palm Beach, Fla.: Norton Gallery of Art, 1987); and Charles C. Eldredge, “Connecticut Impressionists: The Spirit of Place,” *Art in America* 62 (September 1974), 84–90.
4. On Inness's emergence on the American art scene, see Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. and Michael Quick, eds., *George Inness*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985); and Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *George Inness* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).
5. Keith, quoted in Paul Mills, *Thirty Paintings: An Introduction to the Art of William Keith* (Oakland, Calif.: William Keith Memorial Gallery of the Oakland Art Museum, 1954), 7.
6. *Sunset Glow* entered the collection as a view of Mt. Tamalpais, a localization that has long been disproved. Subsequent curatorial efforts to identify the site are recorded in the files of the Department of American Art. In this endeavor, we were greatly helped by Karen L. Barnette, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Fall River, California; Alfred C. Harrison Jr., San Francisco; Brad Jackson, Redding, California; Harvey L. Jones and Christopher Richard, Oakland Museum; and officials at Lassen National Forest, Fall River Mills, California. Sites other than Mt. Tamalpais that have been considered and discounted for a variety of reasons are the Hat Creek and Castle Craggs regions.
7. See Valerie Ann Leeds, *Dreams and Dramas: Moonlight and Twilight in American Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 2003).
8. Keith's friendship with Muir is discussed frequently in the literature on the artist. See, for example, Cornelius, *Keith: Old Master of California*, 51–74. Keith was a charter member of Muir's influential Sierra Club.
9. For a compelling analysis of Roosevelt's investment in nature and the “strenuous life,” see Gail Bederman, “Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and ‘Civilization,’” in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170–216.
10. This scenario applies especially well to the first owner of *Sunset Glow*, Ferdinand Heim, a Kansas City brewer, who acquired the painting—possibly from Keith directly—while on vacation in San Francisco. He brought it back to display in his home in Kansas City.

## JOHN FREDERICK KENSETT (1816–1872)

### *A Woodland Waterfall*, c. 1855–65 (*The Flume, Franconia Notch, N.H.*)

Oil on canvas

40 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 34 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (101.7 × 86.5 cm)

Signed lower left: JK,

Purchase: Nelson Trust through the generosity of Mrs. George C. Reuland through the W. J. Brace Charitable Trust and by exchange of Trust properties, 86-10

A LEADING FIGURE OF THE GROUP of nineteenth-century American landscape artists known as the Hudson River School, John Frederick Kensett was celebrated for his picturesque mountain vistas, light-suffused coastal views, and intimate woodland scenes. The art critic and historian Henry T. Tuckerman, Kensett's contemporary, attributed the artist's fame to his pictures' fidelity to detail as well as to their "rare purity of feeling."<sup>1</sup> Despite critics' frequent assertions that Kensett's paintings were "remarkably true to nature," the artist freely manipulated the scenery he painted.<sup>2</sup> *A Woodland Waterfall* is no exception. The painting is loosely based on a well-known tourist site in the Catskill Mountains known as Fawn's Leap, but Kensett exaggerated the rocky cliffs surrounding the cascade, added a range of alpine peaks in the background, and enveloped the scene in a dramatic, luminous atmosphere to produce what Tuckerman described as a sense of "sublime repose."<sup>3</sup>

Kensett was born in Cheshire, Connecticut, the son of an immigrant English engraver.<sup>4</sup> After training with his father and uncle and serving for a time as apprentice to the New York engraver Peter Maverick, Kensett worked as a successful engraver of maps and banknotes. As Tuckerman noted, this occupation undoubtedly influenced his subsequent attention to detail in his painting.<sup>5</sup> In 1840 Kensett set sail for Europe, accompanied by fellow artists Asher B. Durand (q.v.), John Casilear, and Thomas P. Rossiter. During his seven-year tour of Europe, which included extended stays in Paris, London, and Rome, he applied himself to painting and drawing. His activities included studying and copying illustrious old master works in the Louvre and other galleries, undertaking numerous sketching tours of the countryside, and developing an extensive circle of friends and acquaintances in the art world. Encouraged by occasional sales to collectors and, in 1845, to the American Art-Union, Kensett soon became a highly accomplished landscape painter. He was enthusiastically received on his return to the United States in 1847. In a very short time Kensett became an important participant in New York art and literary circles and was elected a full member of the National Academy of Design in 1849. His subsequent successful career was cut short when he died suddenly in December 1872, after a heroic attempt to

retrieve the body of a friend's wife from the waters of an icy inlet at Contentment Island, Connecticut.

During the 1840s and 1850s, Kensett shared the current philosophical attitudes toward God and nature found in the Transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Of particular importance to these writers was the aesthetic category of the Sublime, used by the British philosopher Edmund Burke to describe vast, irregular, or obscure scenes that evoked intense emotions of awe or terror.<sup>6</sup> Like the Transcendentalists, Kensett's predecessor Thomas Cole (q.v.) and his contemporaries Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.) and Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) stressed the apocalyptic, majestic character of the untamed American landscape and invested it with religious, moral, and therapeutic power.<sup>7</sup> Another group of landscape painters, which included Cole in his late career, as well as Benjamin Champney and Durand, conformed to Burke's aesthetic category of the Beautiful by emphasizing the harmony, serenity, and pastoral loveliness of the scenes they painted. Kensett struck a middle path between these two modes of landscape painting. As Melissa Geisler Trafton has shown, critics praised Kensett for his fusion of the Sublime and Beautiful elements of nature, finding in his restrained wilderness vistas an antidote to the crass sensationalism of modern commercial culture.<sup>8</sup>

Kensett was famous for his meticulous technique by which he delineated natural forms such as trees, water, and, in particular, rocks.<sup>9</sup> In this way he was in step with both Durand and the British critic-philosopher John Ruskin, both of whom advocated a truthful recording of nature in all its details. Durand suggested that artists sketch from nature to learn the form and variety of natural objects.<sup>10</sup> Kensett took this advice to heart, executing hundreds of drawings and plein air oil sketches during his annual summer trips to the Catskills, Adirondacks, and White Mountains, through the regions of the Hudson, Niagara, Upper Missouri, and Mississippi rivers, and along seaside locales such as Newport Beach, Rhode Island. He used these sketches to compose larger, finished paintings in his Manhattan studio during the winter months.

Kensett depicted numerous cascades during the 1850s, including Niagara, Trenton, Kaaterskill, Bash Bish, and Britain's Rydal Falls. During an 1849 painting trip with Casilear, he visited Fawn's Leap, a twenty-foot waterfall in a narrow chasm of the Kaaterskill Clove in the Catskill Mountains near Pallenville, New York. Kensett wrote to his brother-in-law, "We find the ravine abundantly rich in material—sufficient at any rate to keep us occupied for a couple of months." He noted the "exceeding beauty" of the waterfalls along Kaaterskill Creek and related that he and Casilear were making large oil sketches on canvas on the spot.<sup>11</sup> An oil sketch of Fawn's





Fig. 1 John Frederick Kensett, *Bash Bish Falls*, c. 1855–60. Oil on canvas, 22 × 18 in. (55.9 × 45.7 cm). Private collection. Digital Image © Christie's Images Limited 2004

Leap by Kensett (Fig. 1) may have been painted during or immediately after this 1849 excursion or during one of Kensett's subsequent trips to Kaaterskill Clove.<sup>12</sup> The sketch, which retains the freshness of Kensett's initial response to the site, probably served as a model for several later depictions of Fawn's Leap, as well as for the more fantastical Nelson-Atkins canvas.<sup>13</sup> It corresponds closely to a description by Daniel Alexander Payne, who visited the waterfall in the 1870s. Payne recalled:

The Fawn's Leap was also a remarkable spot for its depth and the clear pool of greenish water that flows from it, as well as for the deep glen, whose bottom was paved with blue stones and through which a streamlet flowed even at that dry season of the year. . . . The glens of these mountains are numerous, narrow, deep, and darkened by overshadowing trees, deciduous and evergreen. . . . Lichens, mosses and wild flowers were the robes of the ponderous rocks that lined both the glens and the mountain sides.<sup>14</sup>

Kensett's sketch also resembles other mid-nineteenth-century depictions of Fawn's Leap, including a stereograph of the site produced in the 1850s by the photographer William England (Fig. 2).

Most commentators on Kensett's work in the 1850s and 1860s stressed the artist's strict fidelity to nature. "Mr. Kensett is no

enthusiasm," wrote one critic, "His pictures are rarely imaginative. They are the portraits of what he has seen, not visions of his fancy."<sup>15</sup> Another writer noted that, in Kensett's studio, "we retrace, at ease, our summer wanderings" through various well-known American tourist locales.<sup>16</sup> These notions have persisted to the present day. Recently, Rebecca Bedell described "the intense particularity of Kensett's paintings" and their "precise descriptions of topographical forms."<sup>17</sup> *A Woodland Waterfall*, which is more an invented composition than a faithful depiction of an actual site, casts doubt on this notion of Kensett as a faithful recorder of observed reality. As Karen Georgi has discussed in relation to the work of Durand, the apparent topographic exactitude of mid-nineteenth-century American landscape paintings masks their carefully composed nature.<sup>18</sup> The differences between the relatively large, finished *A Woodland Waterfall* and Kensett's initial sketch of Fawn's Leap clearly show that Kensett, like most of his contemporaries, freely rearranged and exaggerated the landscapes he painted for expressive effect.

In the Nelson-Atkins painting, which Kensett probably painted in the late 1850s or early 1860s, the subject is no longer clearly identifiable as Fawn's Leap; it has become far more dramatic. As in many of his paintings of waterfalls, Kensett employed a vertical format to emphasize the large boulders and the great height of the gorge and to convey a sense of tightly enclosed space.<sup>19</sup> The high banks that frame the waterfall have grown into massive outcroppings of stone, to which trees cling like weeds. Mountain peaks rise in the distance, shrouded by mist. The cascade, partially obscured by the surrounding cliffs, twists and turns down its broken channel to crash against a pile of stones at its base. The rocks in the foreground pool of the sketch have become partially submerged boulders, whose jagged outlines contrast with the glassy surface of the water. Similarly, the mellow skies that appear in Kensett's sketch have been replaced by rolling gray clouds. A beam of sunlight penetrates these clouds at the upper left, illuminating and clarifying the pines above the waterfall and the upper cliff face at right; however, it fails to lighten the pervading gloom of the chasm. All of these features make *A Woodland Waterfall* among the most Sublime of Kensett's landscapes. Still, its distance from such spectacular paintings of cascades as Cole's *Scene from Byron's "Manfred"* (1833; Yale University Art Gallery) and Church's nearly contemporary, operatic tour de force *The Heart of the Andes* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art) is clear. Painted with Kensett's characteristic crisp brushwork, transparent light, and masterful blend of dark green, brown, and gray tonalities, *A Woodland Waterfall* is both an arresting painting of a magnificent rocky precipice and an intimate scene of a dark, cool forest interior.

Waterfalls such as *A Woodland Waterfall* and panoramic mountain vistas such as *The White Mountains—Mount Washington* (1851; Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Mass.) exemplify Kensett's production during the 1850s. He continued to paint these subjects well into the 1860s. However, as Trafton has shown, large, Sublime landscape paintings began to be condemned as "sensational" by American art critics in the



Fig. 2 William England, *The Fawn's Leap, Kauterskill Clove, Catskill Mountains*, c. 1859. Albumen print,  $3\frac{3}{16} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$  in. (8.2 × 17.5 cm). George Eastman House, 81:7752:0006

mid-1850s.<sup>20</sup> In 1855 a writer for the *Crayon* noted disapprovingly American landscape painters' "tendency to rush to the grandiose." He admonished, "The true poetry of Art consists, not in being able to grasp huge themes, so much as in elevating simple ones to beauty and impressiveness."<sup>21</sup> As large-scale paintings of majestic scenery became associated with degraded popular taste, American art buyers, who increasingly wished to separate themselves from a popular audience, began to look for more subdued paintings with which to decorate their homes and adorn their art galleries.<sup>22</sup> Kensett was unusually successful in his ability to redefine himself during this transitional period. About 1855 the artist's interests turned toward the depiction of waterscapes—coastal views or lakes and rivers bounded by mountain vistas. In these pictures, he explored the interplay of light, atmosphere, and reflections in water in a calm, restrained style that would later be referred to as Luminism.

LL/MS

#### NOTES

1. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Son, 1867), 511.
2. "The National Academy: A First View, Durand and the Landscapes," *Literary World* 6 (27 April 1850), 424. Kenneth John Myers has discussed Kensett's deviation from topographic accuracy in his landscapes in "Selling the Sublime: The Catskills and the Social Construction of Landscape in the United States, 1776–1876," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1990, 289–90.
3. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 512. The New York waterfall expert Russell Dunn has identified the cascade in the Nelson-Atkins painting as loosely based on Fawn's Leap. See Steve Hoare, e-mail message to Lauren Lessing, 24 May 2005, NAMA curatorial files.
4. Information on Kensett's life and art can be found in Mark White Sullivan, "John F. Kensett, American Landscape Painter," Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1981; John Paul Driscoll and John K. Howat, *John Frederick Kensett: An American Master*, exh. cat. (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, in association with W.W. Norton & Company, 1985); and Melissa Geisler Trafton, "Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003.
5. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 510.
6. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Berwick: R. and J. Taylor, 1772).
7. The concept of the Sublime in American landscape painting is discussed in Andrew Wilton, "The Sublime in the Old World and the New," in Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 2002); and Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34–44.

8. Trafton, "Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett," 40–42.
9. See, for example, "The Century Papers, the Paintings of John Kensett," *Knickerbocker* 42 (August 1853), 194, in which the author exclaims, "[Kensett's] delineation of rocks and rock forms commands great admiration. It would be difficult to name an artist who has excelled him in a more faithful representation of these forms, and who has exhibited for them a finer and truer feeling."
10. Durand published a series of didactic essays in the *Crayon*, expressing this view, which paralleled that of Ruskin. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting," *Crayon* 1 (3 January 1855), 1–2; 1 (17 January 1855), 34–35; 1 (31 January 1855), 66–67; 1 (14 February 1855), 97–98; 1 (7 March 1855), 145–46; 1 (4 April 1855), 209–11; 1 (2 May 1855), 273–75; 1 (6 June 1855), 254–55; and 2 (July 1855), 16–17.
11. Kensett to Noah Kellogg, 15 July 1849, James R. Kellogg Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, quoted in Myers, "Selling the Sublime," 284.
12. See Christie's, New York, 18 May 2004, lot 17, with the incorrect title *Bash-Bish Falls*.
13. Kensett's studio books show that he had a painting entitled *Fawn's Leap* for sale in 1857. He sold a painting with this title to "Mr. Hoxall" (possibly the wealthy Virginia planter and art collector Bolling Haxall) in 1859 for \$250. See John Frederick Kensett Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel N68, frame 85. Another painting by Kensett entitled *Fawn's Leap* and measuring 25 by 36 inches sold at auction in March 1859. See Trafton, "Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett," 378. Neither the Nelson-Atkins canvas nor a version of *Fawn's Leap* by Kensett, now in the Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Massachusetts, has the dimensions cited in Trafton. The Mead Art Museum's painting is clearly related to the sketch.
14. Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, D.D., L.L.D., and Rev. C. S. Smith, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville: A. M. E. Sunday School Union, 1888), 250.
15. "The Century Papers, the Paintings of John Kensett," 195.
16. "New York Artists," *Knickerbocker* 48 (July 1856), 31.
17. Rebecca Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825–1875* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101.
18. Karen L. Georgi, "Making Nature Culture's Other: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting and Critical Discourse," *Word & Image* 19 (July–September 2003), 198–213.
19. See, for example, Kensett's *Cascade in the Forest* (1852; Detroit Institute of Arts), *Bash-Bish, South Egremont, Massachusetts* (1855; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *The Falls* (1858; Century Association, New York), and *Rocky Pool, Bash-Bish Falls* (1865; private collection, reproduced in *John Frederick Kensett, 1816–1872*, exh. cat. [New York: American Federation of Arts, 1968], no. 36).
20. Trafton, "Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett," 39.
21. "Sketchings: Exhibition of the Academy of Design," *Crayon* 1 (April 1855), 218, quoted in *ibid.*
22. Trafton, "Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett," 41–43.

## WALT KUHN (1877–1949)

### *Juggler*, 1934 (*Blue Juggler*)

Oil on canvas

30 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 24 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (76.5 × 61.6 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: Walt Kuhn / 1934

Gift of the Friends of Art, 38-1

ONE OF WALT KUHN'S MOST compelling paintings, *Juggler* is an excellent example of the artist's distinctive figurative style, which he practiced for many years and for which he achieved much acclaim. Typical of his working method, Kuhn painted his subject—a circus juggler, dancer, and boxer named George Silverette—against a neutral, nondescript background, in this case, composed of somber blue-browns.<sup>1</sup> His body is lean and sinewy, and his hands appear firm, sure, and skilled. Holding two white balls in his right hand and one in his left, he raises one shoulder slightly, prepared to set the balls in motion with a flick of his wrist. The saturated blue of Silverette's pristine costume contrasts with the stark gray pallor of his gaunt face and subtly connotes a hint of sadness. Turning slightly to his left, Silverette casts his heavy, narrow eyes downward, a gesture that, coupled with his unsmiling expression, conveys a certain world-weariness. As a critic for *Art News* observed in a glowing review of *Juggler* in 1937, "all the nervous tension and exhaustion from many one-night stands are written on his thin tubercular face and his precise, mechanical hands."<sup>2</sup>

Kuhn's intense focus on circus performers was rooted in his long-standing personal experience in show business, coupled with his interest and talent in art. He spent much of his childhood in Brooklyn, New York, around the International Hotel, a dockside establishment owned and operated by his parents, where Kuhn met a wide range of eccentrics.<sup>3</sup> He began drawing around the age of eight, illustrating colorful yarns told by the seamen around the hotel. After finishing school, he tried his hand at numerous jobs, including commercial photography, selling real estate, delivering uniforms for a sporting goods store, and professional bicycle racing. In 1899 he traveled west and drew cartoons for the *San Francisco Illustrated Wasp*, painted hotel signs along the coast, and, as his biographer Philip Adams noted, drove a stagecoach, "registering every impression a young and virile country could make on a young and virile sensibility."<sup>4</sup> Two years later, Kuhn sailed for Europe, hoping to improve his cartooning abilities. He enrolled initially at the Académie Colarossi in Paris but soon transferred to the Royal Academy in Munich, where he studied for two years with Heinrich von Zügel, a famous animal painter. Kuhn returned to New York in 1903 and for the next decade worked as a freelance cartoonist for *Puck*, *Judge*, *Life*, the *Sunday Sun*, and the *World*. His free time

was spent painting and drawing and organizing the annual balls for the Kit Kat Club and, later, the Penguin Club.

Kuhn became one of the principal organizers and chroniclers of the International Exhibition of Modern Art, the so-called Armory Show, a monumental showing in 1913 of modern art from Europe and America.<sup>5</sup> From that experience he was directly influenced by European modernist painting, especially the work of Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and André Derain. Throughout the early 1920s Kuhn worked in theater to supplement his meager income as a painter. His close contact with show people at this time served as inspiration for the later portraits. For part of each year Kuhn earned money by designing costumes and sets and writing and directing vaudeville sketches. The remainder of the year was reserved for painting. Kuhn was forced to give up theater work in 1925, however, after he almost died from a perforated ulcer. The next two years were focused strictly on painting, and soon thereafter he began to receive substantial recognition. He began exhibiting on a regular basis, especially at New York's Marie Harriman Gallery, where he also served as advisor.<sup>6</sup>

About 1930 Kuhn began depicting circus performers, some of whom he found backstage at the theater or the circus. Others were referred to him by former models. As they appear in Kuhn's art, these performers are, like the man in *Juggler*, curiously removed from the larger spectacle of the circus and neither convey nor elicit the emotions of joy and wonder typically associated with it. In these regards, the painter's circus subjects are in distinct contrast to those created by his contemporary John Steuart Curry (q.v.), who focused primarily on the dizzying athletic energy contained under the big top.<sup>7</sup> Kuhn tended to see his sitters not only as performers but also as personifications of or metaphors for broader experiences binding humankind together. He dubbed *Juggler*, for instance, a portrait of self-pity.<sup>8</sup>

The circus was an exceedingly popular subject among many prominent American painters of the period. In addition to Kuhn and Curry, Paul Cadmus, Alexander Calder, Marsden Hartley (q.v.), and Norman Rockwell produced paintings treating the subject. Such substantial and diverse artistic output on the theme corresponded to widespread public discourse about circus life throughout the 1930s. Popular periodicals, like *Good Housekeeping* and *National Geographic*, frequently offered readers profiles of performers and their vagabond lives and behind-the-scenes exposés on the staging of the circus itself.<sup>9</sup> Kuhn's subdued, poignant portrayals of circus performers relate most of all to the nostalgic—even melancholic—tone pervading many of these Depression-era articles. One piece in the *New Republic*, for example, proclaimed, "the circus is a dying institution," a condition the author attributed





to its increasingly diffused, amalgamated, and corporate character, which alienated its audience.<sup>10</sup> A writer for *Literary Digest* in 1930 attributed waning public interest in the circus to larger historical circumstances, arguing:

It is becoming daily more difficult to be a skilful juggler, acrobat or clown, and that is particularly true since the war. Before the war it was comparatively simple to amuse the crowd or make it laugh. At present, the juggler and the clown find it hard work to create an amusing act. People have become too blasé, and they are no longer satisfied with the simple acts which astonished them formerly.<sup>11</sup>

From a fiscal perspective, circuses now competed with unprecedented numbers of entertainment options vying for the consumer's dollars, a scenario that spelled apparent doom for the expensive and labor-intensive enterprise, especially in hard economic times.<sup>12</sup> More abstractly, Kuhn's emotionally complex circus portraits embody the concepts of human triumph and tragedy, long associated with the circus. The best-known persona of this combination throughout the Depression era (and beyond) was the sad-faced hobo created and performed by the circus clown Emmett Kelly, the much-beloved Weary Willy, a distant cultural relative of Kuhn's joyless *Juggler*.

Shown in 1937 in Kuhn's one-man shows at Marie Harriman Gallery in New York and at Studio House in Washington, D.C., *Juggler* received virtually unanimous critical approval. Almost all the reviews named it one of the best paintings in the show, and it was reproduced in several newspapers and art journals.<sup>13</sup> The painting was also given considerable attention throughout the remainder of the year, and Kuhn recorded numerous visits to his studio by collectors interested in acquiring *Juggler*.<sup>14</sup> Several potential purchasers were representatives of the Nelson-Atkins Friends of Art group, who presented a yearly gift of contemporary art to the Museum. Two years earlier the Friends had proposed Kuhn's *Young Clown* (1932; Denver Art Museum) as a possible purchase, but after heated debate Henry Varnum Poor's *Dead Pheasant* (q.v.) was selected instead.<sup>15</sup> In 1937, however, after an immensely successful exhibition and a trip to Kansas City by Kuhn, *Juggler* was selected with almost unanimous approval.<sup>16</sup> The purchase was given considerable publicity in the press of the day and remains one of the most important early gifts of the Friends of Art.

MS/RRG

## NOTES

1. Silverette also posed for *Clown with Winged Collar* (1934; private collection), *Clown with Maudolin* (1935; private collection), and *Musical Clown* (1935; Walt Kuhn Estate). See file on *The Juggler*, Walt Kuhn Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), microfilm reel D242A, frame 1133.
2. "A New Kuhn," *Art Digest* 11 (15 February 1937), 16.
3. Biographical details are drawn from Philip Rhys Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter: His Life and Work* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978); and *Walt Kuhn*, exh. cat. (New York: Midtown Galleries, 1989).

4. Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter*, 11.
5. On Kuhn's involvement in this exhibition, see Milton W. Brown, "Walt Kuhn's Armory Show," *Archives of American Art Journal* 27 (1987), 3–11. See also Walt Kuhn, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Walt Kuhn, 1938); and Milton Wolf Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1963).
6. On the Marie Harriman Gallery, see Nancy H. Yeide, "The Marie Harriman Gallery (1930–1942)," *Archives of American Art Journal* 39 (1999), 2–11.
7. For information on Curry's circus subjects, see Patricia Junker, "John Steuart Curry and the Pathos of Modern Life: Paintings of the Outcast and the Dispossessed," in Junker et al., *John Steuart Curry: Inventing the Middle West*, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with Elvehjem Museum of Art, 1998), 152–64, esp. 155–63. For a compelling overview of the circus in American history, see Dong A. Mishler, "The Greatest Show on Earth: The Circus and the Development of Modern American Culture, 1860–1940," Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Reno, 1994.
8. Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter*, 158.
9. See, for example, Francis Beverly Kelley, "The Land of Sawdust and Spangles—A World in Miniature," *National Geographic Magazine*, October 1931, 463–516; Earl Chapin May, "Following the Nomads of the Big Tents: Through America with the Circuses—Life in a Canvas-covered World—Circus Elephants on the Rampage," *Travel* 58 (April 1932), 18–22, 58; and Dixie Willson, "Under the Big Top: Dixie Willson Joins the Largest Family in the World," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1931, 36–39, 153–60.
10. M. C., "Afterthought on the Circus," *New Republic: A Journal of Opinion* 66 (6 May 1931), 330.
11. "Word to Boys Who Want to Be Circus Clowns," *Literary Digest* 105 (5 April 1930), 56. Furthermore, Mishler, in charting "the circus's transmogrification from a modernist to a traditional entertainment form" in the 1920s and 1930s, notes, "it [became] perceived as a stable refuge offering control, rejuvenation, an escape into the simple past. Its appeal no longer lay in its novelty, ambiguity, and surreal spectacle, but in its predictability and its expression of traditional values that offered the public an alternative to the hectic pace of modern life." Mishler, "The Greatest Show on Earth," 281.
12. Michael Kammen notes that "by 1910–20 'going out' meant more than the customary fare of popular culture: the circus and the carnival, the minstrel show and the Wild West show, Barnum and burlesque. It meant illuminated amusement parks and trolley parks, nickelodeons and movie houses, vaudeville and musical reviews, dance halls and cabarets." Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 24.
13. See "A New Kuhn," *Art Digest* 11 (15 February 1937), cover, 16; E[dward] A[lden] J[ewell], "Among the New Exhibitions," *New York Times*, 21 February 1937, X9; Margaret Breuning, "Current Exhibitions," *Parasus* 9 (March 1937), 34; and Alice Graeme, "Studio House Exhibits Art Work of Walt Kuhn," *Washington Post*, 4 April 1937, 73. Subsequently, Kuhn's biographer Adams judged *Juggler* "one of his outstanding paintings." Adams, *Walt Kuhn, Painter*, 158.
14. File on *The Juggler*, Walt Kuhn Papers, AAA.
15. See George Ehrlich, "An Atypical Walt Kuhn Watercolor," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 1 (Spring 1982), 29–32, for more on Kuhn's relation with the Museum. The artist visited Kansas City in mid-June 1936, possibly to work on club cars for the Union Pacific Railroad and to cultivate ties with the Museum.
16. "Triple Gift to Gallery," *Kansas City Times*, 11 December 1937, 9.

## FITZ HENRY LANE (1804–1865)

### “*Starlight*” in Harbor, c. 1855

Oil on canvas

24¼ × 36⅞ in. (61.6 × 91.8 cm)

Gift of Sarah and Landon Rowland through The Ever Glades Fund, 2002.8

WRITING TO THE EDITOR of the *Independent* in 1854, the art critic Clarence Cook declared that Fitz Henry Lane’s name “ought to be known from Maine to Georgia as the best marine painter in the country.” Although he was not then as famous as Cook felt he deserved to be, Lane had a loyal following among seafaring men, who, the critic noted, appreciated his paintings for their “perfect truth.”

Lane knows the name and place of every rope on a vessel; he knows the construction, the anatomy, the expression—and to a seaman everything that sails has expression and individuality—he knows how she will stand under this rig, before this wind; how she looks seen stern foremost, bow foremost, to windward, to leeward, in all changes and guises; and, master of detail, he has earned his money thus far mostly painting “portraits” of vessels for sailors and owners.<sup>1</sup>

“*Starlight*” in Harbor, which Lane likely painted for the ship’s first owner, the former sea captain and shipping magnate Ezra Howes Baker, is just such a portrait. It is also a striking seascape that depicts the calm waters of Boston Harbor under a dramatic, cloudy sky and a genre scene of men at work.

Lane was born Nathaniel Rogers Lane in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the son of a sailmaker. Partially paralyzed by a childhood illness, while still a boy he immersed himself in drawing. After a brief stint as a shoemaker, Lane apprenticed with the Boston lithographer William Pendleton in the early 1830s, shortly thereafter changing his name to Fitz Henry Lane.<sup>2</sup> In Pendleton’s shop, he honed his skills as a draftsman and learned perspective and naval architecture from colleagues and drawing books.<sup>3</sup> Lane quickly rose to prominence within the shop and was creating most of its harbor views and maritime scenes by the late 1830s. In 1841 he struck out on his own as both a lithographer and a marine painter.

Lane’s early oil paintings, such as *Gloucester from Rocky Neck* (1844; Cape Ann Historical Association, Gloucester, Mass.), have a hard-edged clarity and lack of atmosphere that stem from his training as a graphic artist. The paintings of Robert Salmon, an English-born marine artist active in Boston from the late 1820s until the early 1840s, provided crucial examples for Lane at this point in his career.<sup>4</sup> From such works as Salmon’s *Wharves of Boston* (1829; Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston), Lane learned to

create effects of light and atmosphere that softened his compositions. Indeed, his paintings became progressively atmospheric in the 1850s and 1860s. He gradually abandoned lithography and, by the early 1850s, was supporting himself primarily by painting ship portraits.

The Nelson-Atkins painting depicts the clipper ship *Starlight*, built in 1854 by E. and H.O. Briggs of South Boston for the Boston shipping firm Baker & Morrill. According to an account in the *Boston Daily Atlas*:

[*Starlight*] is not only one of the best, but is the most beautiful of all the clippers which the Messrs. Briggs . . . have yet produced. . . . In her outfits she is all that a ship of her class ought to be, and is as well-fitted aloft as she is unquestionably good and beautiful below. She has been inspected by many of our best ship-fanciers, and so far as we have heard, she is considered a perfect ship to all her details; and one, too, that bids fair to be a very rapid sailor.<sup>5</sup>

Clipper ships’ spare, streamlined designs and large sail-to-body ratio made them light, fast, and maneuverable. They rose to prominence in the 1840s, the height of the China trade, because perishable goods such as tea brought a higher profit if they were delivered to market quickly, making speed more desirable than cargo size. During the gold rush American clippers also transported passengers around Cape Horn to California. By the 1850s a well-publicized spirit of brisk competition arose between clipper ship crews, a spirit that mirrored the mercantile competition between their owners. New or particularly fast clippers became celebrities, and crowds gathered to watch as they sailed in and out of Boston Harbor.<sup>6</sup>

Although Lane painted other clipper ships at the triumphant moment of their arrival or departure, he chose to paint *Starlight* at anchor, with her brilliant white sails half furled and delicately outlined against a partly cloudy blue sky. Clouds swirl upward near the center of the composition, framing the mainmast and emphasizing *Starlight*’s sails. Despite the presence of two other ships in the distance, a sailboat in the middle ground, and a laden sailboat and dock in the foreground, the scene remains uncluttered. A pervasive sense of peace and stillness emanates from Lane’s carefully arranged composition, in which all elements exist in balanced harmony. On the right, the edge of the dock and a floating wooden spar lead the eye diagonally into the composition toward the clipper’s sleek, gray hull. The ship itself, which floats at a slight angle to the picture plane, leads the eye farther back in the opposite direction, toward the horizon. This zigzagging progression into depth is repeated on the left side of the canvas by the trajectory of the two





Fig. 1 Fitz Henry Lane, *Ship "Starlight" in the Fog*, c. 1860. Oil on canvas, 30 × 50 in. (76.2 × 127 cm). The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, S-128-0-127

sailboats, a distant ship, and a landmass on the horizon. Although the sun is not visible, Lane's precisely rendered shadows and reflections and the bright light that floods the picture space indicate that it is close to noon—a time of day that symbolically links *Starlight* to the zenith of American maritime accomplishment.

Perhaps because of the meticulous drawing so evident in his paintings, Lane's contemporaries stressed his fidelity to observed truth. "Mr. Lane was eminently conscientious, never deviating from an accurate copy of nature as presented to his view," stated one writer in an obituary for the artist.<sup>7</sup> Yet Lane did not hesitate to alter facts in his paintings for compositional ends. For instance, infrared reflectography confirms that the artist painted over the topmost two sails on *Starlight's* mainmast, a change that created a more harmonious balance between the ship's body and its rigging, even as it altered what Cook referred to as the vessel's "expression and individuality." Similarly, Lane depicted *Starlight* with her sails only partially, not fully, furled, as they would be on a ship that is at anchor, in order to enhance the ship's beauty. As the popularity of Lane's ship portraits attests, owners and captains understood and appreciated this kind of artistic license.

The genre scene in the foreground of the Nelson-Atkins painting, like Lane's portrayal of the ship itself, is creatively and selectively rendered. Lane painted "*Starlight*" in Harbor at a moment when tensions between black and white laborers in the United States were running high. Writing for his own abolitionist newspaper in 1854, Frederick Douglass noted with alarm that

"poverty-stricken thousands from the continent of Europe" were "displacing the colored man as a COACHMAN, as a WAITER, as a BARBER, as a WHITEWASHER, as a BOOT-BLACKER, as a STEWARD, as a STEVEDORE, as a WOOD-SAWYER."<sup>8</sup> In Boston two hundred thousand new residents, most of them Irish immigrants, competed for the few jobs open to black Americans during the 1850s. Black stevedores, like those depicted in the foreground of Lane's painting, as well as black ship caulkers, sailors, and other maritime workers, were the targets of vicious "job busting," as working-class whites used lower wages, force, and intimidation to push them from their jobs.<sup>9</sup>

No such tensions are apparent, however, in Lane's harmonious depiction of maritime labor in Boston Harbor. The genre scene in the foreground of "*Starlight*" in Harbor resembles the beautifully engineered clipper ship itself, whose streamlined parts work together toward a single goal. While a solitary, barefoot figure dangles a fishing line from the edge of the dock, adding a pastoral element to the scene, crews of white boatmen row cargo to and from *Starlight* as black stevedores wait to load and unload that cargo at the dock. Such a flattering portrayal of competent, happy, well-behaved workers must have pleased Ezra Howes Baker: Displayed in the offices of the Baker & Morrill Shipping Company, Lane's painting would have symbolized his mastery over both a fast, beautiful ship and the men whose labor made it profitable.<sup>10</sup>

Lane painted another portrait of *Starlight* about 1860 (Fig. 1). Although the provenance of this second canvas is unknown, it

too was most likely commissioned by Baker & Morrill. By 1860 *Starlight* had been confirmed as one of the fastest American clippers, and her owners may have felt that she deserved to be commemorated a second time.<sup>11</sup> Executed in the artist's later, more atmospheric style, *Ship "Starlight" in the Fog* retains the sense of light-suffused calm evident in the Nelson-Atkins painting. In this second canvas, however, the setting is more ambiguous. Though the presence of other vessels and *Starlight's* furled sails indicate that she is in a harbor, the dense fog, through which the sun dimly shines, hides the surrounding land. The low position of the sun in *Ship "Starlight" in the Fog*, like the noon sun in "*Starlight*" in Harbor, is symbolic. A ship that had represented the zenith of American technology just six years earlier was, Lane suggests, already becoming an object of nostalgia.

Four years after Lane painted his second portrait of *Starlight*, Baker & Morrill sold the clipper to a Peruvian company. Technological advances were making steamships more competitive at this time, and the transcontinental railroad that was under way would soon render passage to California by clipper obsolete. Always a prescient businessman, Ezra Baker began divesting from the shipping business during the Civil War, placing his capital in railroads instead.<sup>12</sup> Lane himself died in 1865, just as the golden age of American sailing ships was coming to a close.

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## NOTES

1. C[larence] C[ook], "Letters on Art.—No. IV," letter to the editor, *Independent* (New York), 7 September 1854, 281.
2. Lane, who signed his name "Fitz H. Lane," was mistakenly known as Fitz Hugh Lane until 2005. See "Collectors' Notes: Fitz Who Lane?" *Antiques* 167 (June 2005), 48. Sources of biographical information about Lane include John Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane* (New York: Praeger, 1971); and John Wilmerding, ed., *Paintings by Fitz Hugh Lane*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art), 1988.
3. See Elliot Bostwick Davis, "American Drawing Books and Their Impact on Fitz Hugh Lane," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 105 (1995), 79–104.
4. Lane copied at least one of Salmon's paintings in 1845. In addition, Salmon's paintings were frequently exhibited in Boston in the 1830s and 1840s, and Lane may also have known them from various local private collections. It is likely, given the small, close-knit community of marine painters in Boston during these years, that Lane knew Salmon personally. See Wilmerding, *Fitz Hugh Lane*, 34–35.
5. "The New Clipper Ship Starlight," *Boston Daily Atlas*, 2 March 1854, 1.
6. G.W. Sheldon, "The Old Packet and Clipper Service," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 68 (January 1854), 217–37.
7. "Fitz H. Lane," *Gloucester Telegraph*, 16 August 1865, 1.
8. Frederick Douglass, "The Industrial College," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 January 1854, [3].
9. See George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750–1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 115–23.
10. For a study of how Lane succeeded in pleasing his patrons by emphasizing their power and wealth in his paintings, see Sharon Worley, "Fitz Hugh Lane and the Legacy of the Codfish Aristocracy," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 22 (Winter 2004), 55–89.
11. For a record of *Starlight's* fastest voyages, see Carl C. Cutler, *Greyhounds of the Sea: The Story of the American Clipper Ship* (New York: Halcyon House, 1930), 439, 494, 500, 506, 510, 514, 517.
12. Biographical information about Ezra Howes Baker, as well as information about his business and his family, can be found in Simeon L. Deyo, ed., *History of Barnstable County, Massachusetts* (New York: H.W. Blake & Co., 1890), 538–39.

## ERNEST LAWSON (1873–1939)

### *On the Harlem*, c. 1910

Oil on canvas

30 × 40 in. (76.2 × 101.6 cm)

Signed lower right: E. LAWSON

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1598

ERNEST LAWSON'S *ON THE HARLEM* provides a serene, wintry view across the Harlem River from upper Manhattan toward the Fordham section of the Bronx. Through the flurry of Lawson's broken and layered brushwork, which effectively evokes cold, icy conditions, at least two structures overlooking the river are easily identifiable: Webb's Academy and Home for Shipbuilders, the two-towered Neo-Romanesque building to the right of the composition, and the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, the imposing Beaux Arts edifice to the left. Silhouetted against the pale gray sky, these large buildings stand out as sentinels in the uninhabited landscape. Evidence of human activity is limited to the river below, where a small steam-powered tugboat chugs along and paddleboats rest more discreetly at water's edge.

*On the Harlem* is part of a small group of pictures Lawson devoted to this particular strip of the Fordham Heights (now Washington Heights) shoreline that the artist knew well; he lived on West 155th Street from 1902 to 1905 and returned to the area many times to paint. Related paintings include *Harlem River* (c. 1913–15; Manoogian Collection) and *Harlem River* (n.d.; private collection).<sup>1</sup> The three paintings share Lawson's characteristically encrusted brushwork, a predominantly cool palette, and horizontal stacking of forms across the picture plane. The Nelson-Atkins painting is distinguished by a reduction of elements in the foreground and enhanced presence of the architectural landmarks in the distance. As a result, space seems especially compressed and flattened.

Before settling in upper Manhattan, Lawson, a native of Nova Scotia, received training at the Kansas City Art Institute.<sup>2</sup> The aspiring artist moved to New York in 1891 and soon enrolled at the Art Students League, where he took lessons from John Twachtman (q.v.). Because of his association with Twachtman, Lawson became a member of the loose collective of American Impressionist painters that gathered in Cos Cob, Connecticut.<sup>3</sup>

Inspired by Twachtman's restrained, poetic views of landscape, Lawson similarly modified the lessons of French Impressionism into a highly personal idiom, characterized by a light palette and unusual, encrusted surfaces. The artist sometimes further activated his compositions by incising lines into the paint with the blunt end of his brush, as seen in the water in *On the Harlem*. Responding to the prevailing shimmering, prismatic effect of Lawson's technique, one critic famously described his paintings as being made with

crushed jewels.<sup>4</sup> In beautifying otherwise unexceptional or even unpleasant views of urban scenery, Lawson—along with other latter-day Impressionists—provided a painterly equivalent to the efforts of landscape architects sustaining the City Beautiful movement, which transformed urban environments by developing green space and adding amenities for pedestrians.

Through William James Glackens (q.v.), Lawson became acquainted with artists associated with the Eight, a group that included Robert Henri (q.v.), John Sloan (q.v.), and George Luks, and exhibited with them at their scandalous show at Macbeth Gallery in 1908.<sup>5</sup> The visually pleasing, jewel-like effects of Lawson's paintings make him, in retrospect, an odd fit with these gritty realists, who sought to upend the perceived overly sophisticated, materialistic values of Gilded Age America by depicting lowly street scenes, often of immigrant neighborhoods, with broad brushwork and sooty tones.<sup>6</sup> Lawson's less formally and politically radical approach to painting ties his work more closely to pleasant scenes created by Glackens and Maurice Prendergast (q.v.), which likewise do not fit the conventional characterization of the Eight's imagery as unapologetically objectionable to refined tastes.

A scene of nature and urban civilization peacefully coexisting, *On the Harlem* suggests that Lawson felt little, if any, need to turn a critical eye on many of the key values on which the Gilded Age was based, such as industry, wealth, and power. The horizontal tripartite division of the composition, in which the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum and Webb's Academy take their place in the uppermost level, produces a pictorial apotheosis of philanthropy and collateral concepts of cultural authority and influence. In this regard, the painting relates to select other paintings by Lawson, such as *University Heights, New York* (c. 1905; private collection).<sup>7</sup> Whereas some of his colleagues in the Eight captured the dynamic and sometimes dangerous aspects of modern urban life, like motorcars and elevated train lines, Lawson almost invariably imbedded in his views reassuring signs of continuity and tradition.

Continuity and tradition are signified in *On the Harlem* by Webb's Academy and Home for Shipbuilders and the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, institutional landmarks that transformed Fordham Heights shortly before Lawson made his painting. Established by the renowned shipbuilder William H. Webb, Webb's Academy and Home for Shipbuilders was dedicated in 1894 in a ceremony described as the crowning achievement in the benefactor's exemplary life and career.<sup>8</sup> An extensive and laudatory profile outlining Webb's accomplishments and contributions followed in the *New York Times* in July 1897.<sup>9</sup> This profile was accompanied by illustrations showing scenes of life in and around the school, including one featuring the academy building itself. The year before his death in 1899, Webb was featured in Jay Henry





Mowbray's *Representative Men of New York*, in which his various cosmopolitan interests are emphasized.<sup>10</sup> Additional testament to Webb Academy's perceived importance is the fact that its environs and architecture appeared on period postcards and in pictorial souvenir sets, any one of which could have piqued Lawson's interest in the area.

Trustees of the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum took possession of property in Fordham Heights in early 1899 and began building a new facility, which, contemporary reports highlighted, was second in expense only to the building of the new Cathedral of St. John the Divine at Amsterdam Avenue and 112th Street.<sup>11</sup> The Orphan Asylum expanded its property and, thus, its presence in the Bronx in 1903.<sup>12</sup> Historic and valuable, the property occupied by the Orphan Asylum and Webb's Academy was known by many residents of the immediate and outlying areas by reputation if not through personal experience.

The serenity and calm of Lawson's paintings did not, generally speaking, extend to his personal life. He traveled and taught widely throughout the United States, including at the Kansas City Art Institute, while his finances suffered as a result of his alcoholism and rheumatoid arthritis. He made annual trips beginning in 1931 to Florida, which became his permanent residence by 1936 until his death three years later.<sup>13</sup>

RRG/KK

## NOTES

1. *On the Harlem* has been dated to about 1910 on the basis of its multiple similarities to the Manoogian painting. The author thanks Jonathan Boos of the Manoogian Collection for his help in dating the Nelson-Atkins picture.
2. Biographical information has been drawn primarily from Henry Berry-Hill and Sidney Berry-Hill, *Ernest Lawson: American Impressionist, 1873-1939* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, Publishers, 1968); and Adeline Lee Karpiseak, *Ernest Lawson: 1873-1939*, exh. cat. (Tucson: University of Arizona Museum of Art, 1979).
3. On the history of the Cos Cob colony, see Susan G. Larkin, *The Cos Cob Art Colony: Impressionists on the Connecticut Shore*, exh. cat. (New York: National Academy of Design; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
4. F. Newlin Price, "Lawson, of the 'Crushed Jewels,'" *International Studio* 78 (February 1924), 367.
5. For a thorough overview of the Eight, see Rebecca Zurier, Robert Snyder, and Virginia Meeklenburg, *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan School and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1995).
6. Lawson's seemingly surprising aesthetic alliance with the Eight has been commonly noted in the literature. Karpiseak observed, for instance, that Lawson "was not interested in the social realism that characterized the other members of the Eight . . . , and he was not interested in what was termed the ugliness of too much realism for 'it did not concern him and his style of painting.'" Karpiseak, *Ernest Lawson*, 6.
7. William H. Gerds establishes this connection in *Impressionist New York* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 197-98.
8. "Crown of W.H. Webb's Life—Dedication of His Academy and Home for Shipbuilders—Exercises Attended by a Distinguished Company—Conducted by Bishop Henry C. Potter—Mr. Webb Presented the Institution to the Trustees—Addresses by the Rev. Robert Collyer and Joseph H. Choate—Mr. Webb Overcome by Emotion," *New York Times*, 6 May 1894.
9. Washington Bridge, another Washington Heights architectural landmark completed around the same time (1889), similarly drew Lawson's attention in the 1910s. See the discussion of Lawson's *Spring Night, Harlem River* (1913; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.) in H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885-1915*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 165-68.
10. "William Henry Webb," *New York Times*, 11 July 1897, WM2.
11. Jay Henry Mowbray, ed., *Representative Men of New York: A Record of Their Achievements* (New York: New York Press, 1898).
12. "Orphan Asylum Takes Title—Roman Catholic Institution Pays \$290,000 for Its New Site and Secures \$750,000 on a Mortgage," *New York Times*, 18 January 1899, 2; and "Church Extension Work—Large Outlay for Buildings in New York Boroughs—Vacation Season Over and Services Generally to be Resumed—Aid for Galveston," *New York Times*, 15 September 1900, 10.
13. "In the Real Estate Field—Large Purchase at Fordham Heights by Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum—Other Dealings—Bronx Lots Sold at Auction," *New York Times*, 12 November 1903, 14.
14. Lawson was found dead on a beach near his Florida home, and the unusual circumstances of his death left many to conclude that he had committed suicide, a suggestion his family strongly rejected. See Jean Nison Snyder, "Defending Lawson's Reputation," *New York Times*, 6 February 1977, 88.

## LAWRENCE H. LEBDUSKA (1894–1966)

### *Wild Horses and Owl*, 1938

Oil on canvas

34½ × 40½ in. (86.7 × 101.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: L. Lebduska. / 38.

Bequest of Elizabeth Calvin Bonner, 2003.16.7

LAWRENCE LEBDUSKA'S *WILD HORSES AND OWL* presents a colorful, magical realm full of energetic and curious activity. Four horses—two white and two pale blue, and all with blue manes—gallop across an open plain. A great horned owl descends abruptly into the scene from the upper right corner and seizes the central horse's mane. This frenzied encounter takes place in a vibrant but tranquil landscape marked with two trees, three tree stumps, and patches of dandelions and delicate blue flowers resembling forget-me-nots. Particularly puzzling is the spotted pattern of the tree in the middle distance, recalling that on a giraffe's hide. The presence of the large tree in the left foreground is enhanced by copious green leaves. One of its most substantial branches has fallen to the ground, and the leaves on that branch have dramatically turned blood red, a hue that engenders feelings of mystery and unease. Two blue ravens perch on the branch and watch the horses and owl like spectators in some otherworldly arena.

Born in Maryland to Czech immigrants, Lebduska earned considerable renown in the 1930s and 1940s for lush visual fantasies like *Wild Horses and Owl*.<sup>1</sup> His early education occurred in Leipzig, Germany, where Lebduska's parents relocated while he was still a child. He learned various skills in design and decoration from his father, a trained stained-glass maker. Returning with his parents to America in 1912, he settled in New York. Following a stint creating murals as an employee of the interior design maven Elsie de Wolfe, Lebduska pursued freelance decorating and subsequently opened his own business. The flat and fanciful characteristics of his paintings can be attributed partly to the artist's background in decoration.

Lebduska began exhibiting easel paintings in New York galleries in the early 1930s and quickly became known for his distinctive, naïve-looking style and his unusual repertoire of subjects, mainly animals, but also including farm and biblical scenes. His most frequent—and presumably favorite—subject was a herd of horses, a theme inspired by, among other sources, his childhood experience on an uncle's horse farm in Maryland. Often, as in *Wild Horses and Owl* and *Panicky Horses* (1957; private collection), a composition that shows horses responding frantically to a lightning storm, the herd appears agitated, even vulnerable. More generally and obliquely, Lebduska's subjects were drawn from Bohemian folklore, although specific myths have yet to be identified for particular compositions. Rather, it appears that Lebduska painted an intensely personal and evocative iconography, one that suggests

allegorical meaning and lends itself to subjective, almost inexhaustible, interpretation.

Lebduska owed his emergence in the American art world to the vogue for naïve—or folk—art in the early twentieth century. Interest in the work of unidentified portrait and sign painters, furniture makers, and decorators from the colonial period was piqued as part of a sweeping reevaluation of American history that characterized the interwar years, a national self-examination most often described as a search for a “usable past.”<sup>2</sup> Once slunned and derided as pitiful evidence of America's cultural inferiority to Europe, such productions came to be embraced by influential collectors, curators, and institutions for their perceived “primitive” beauty, humility, and aesthetic sincerity.<sup>3</sup>

The cultural exaltation of the efforts of untrained artists of the past turned greater attention toward contemporary folk painters like Lebduska, who, along with John Kane, Morris Hirshfield, and many others, enjoyed short-lived critical success. The work by contemporary folk artists was, in certain instances, promoted as an important, seamless tie to traditions and traits of independence and honesty deemed central to American national identity.<sup>4</sup> In other instances, the vaguely abstract and strange aspects of much folk art appealed to viewers with more avant-garde interests. In this regard, American folk art was conceived as a parallel to—and sometimes an antecedent of—various aspects of European modernism, including Cubism and Surrealism.<sup>5</sup>

Lebduska ranked with the most active and prominent of his innumerable folk contemporaries. In addition to one-man shows at various Manhattan galleries, the painter was featured in the period's key exhibitions and studies devoted to folk art, including *Masters of Popular Painting: Modern Primitives of Europe and America*, an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1938, and Sidney Janis's book *They Taught Themselves*, published in 1942. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, the era's most famous folk art enthusiast, was inspired to form her renowned collection of historical and contemporary folk art partly in response to Lebduska's work and made sure it was represented in her esteemed cache. Art critics, too, embraced his imaginative, fetching imagery and often highlighted stylistic similarities with the work of the French painter Henri Rousseau, considered by the Museum of Modern Art director Alfred H. Barr Jr., along with other tastemakers of the era, the “greatest modern primitive.”<sup>6</sup> Despite Lebduska's own impressive credentials as a “modern primitive,” his personal correspondence reveals the thoughtful considerations of a painter responsive to the needs and wishes of his clients, a characteristic not typically associated with “folk” artists.<sup>7</sup>

For reasons likely relating to ill health, Lebduska faded from the New York art scene in the late 1940s and remained forgotten



for nearly twenty years. He was rediscovered in 1960 by Eva Lee, a Long Island art dealer who encouraged him to resume creating and exhibiting his art. But, under changed cultural conditions, Lebduska failed to regain his former artistic stature before his death in 1966.

RRG

## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Lebduska has been drawn from Chuck Rosenak and Ian Rosenak, *Museum of American Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 184–86.
2. See Alfred Haworth James, “The Search for a Usable American Past in the New Deal Era,” *American Quarterly* 23 (December 1971), 710–24. The phrase “usable past” was coined by the literary critic Van Wyck Brooks in 1918. See Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *Dial* 64 (11 April 1918), 337–41.
3. Among the numerous critics to call attention to the new, favorable opinion accorded works by American “primitive” artists, Jean Lipman observed in 1937, “they were formerly described as crude, uncomth, stiff, distorted, poorly executed, by critics whose touchstone of value was fidelity to real, or visual, appearance. That the same objects are now described as original, individual, formalized, lucid, abstract, merely implies a shift in the attitude of the critic, who has come to value abstract above illusionistic representation and so to evaluate primitive art positively rather than negatively.” Lipman, “A Critical Definition of the American Primitive,” *Art in America and Elsewhere: An Illustrated Quarterly Magazine* 26 (October 1938), 171–77, at 172.
4. Holger Cahill alluded to these wider nationalistic associations when he proclaimed folk art “an honest and straight-forward expression of the spirit and experience of provincial America, vigorous, naïve, with a great deal of aesthetic quality, and rich in documentary interest.” Cahill, quoted in “Folk Art, Williamsburg and Points North,” *American Magazine of Art* 28 (May 1935), 305.
5. Numerous critics remarked on coincidental stylistic similarities between American folk art and European modernism. Martha Candler Cheney explained: “distortion of the kind that shocked conventional observers in some post-Impressionist work is often used intuitively in . . . early [colonial-era] paintings as the artist’s means of emphasizing some of the sitter’s features at the expense of others or by reason of his arbitrary arrangement of the figure in the interest of design.” Cheney, *Modern Art in America* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), 36.
6. Alfred H. Barr Jr., foreword to Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century* (New York: Dial Press, 1942), xix. For reviews highlighting similarities between Lebduska’s work and Rousseau’s, see Edward Alden Jewell, “Exhibition at Church,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1932, 22; and “Fanciful, Naïve Detail: Lebduska’s Picture,” *Art News* 38 (2 December 1939), 15.
7. See, for example, Lebduska’s correspondence with his patron Louis Kaufman, Louis and Annette Kaufman Papers, 1931–2000, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 1189.

# STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT (1890–1973)

## *Self-Portrait*, c. 1907–9

Oil on canvas

19 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (49.9 × 39.7 cm)

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F89-39

BORN IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, Stanton Macdonald-Wright lived in Virginia until 1900, when his family moved to Santa Monica, California.<sup>1</sup> In 1906 he began studying at the Art Students League of Los Angeles, where he encountered the teachings of Warren Hedges, a former instructor at the Art Students League in New York City, who disseminated painterly, realist methods like those advocated by Robert Henri (q.v.). After relocating to Paris with his mother and young wife in 1909, Macdonald-Wright attended lectures at the Sorbonne and briefly enrolled at the Académie Colarossi, the Académie Julian, and the École des Beaux-Arts.<sup>2</sup>

A rare example of Macdonald-Wright's early work, *Self-Portrait* betrays few of the academic principles that the artist would have encountered in any of the French capital's renowned art schools. Rather, its pronounced brushwork, diagonal patches of paint that build up form, and the heavy black outlining of parts of the head and collar suggest the influence of Paul Cézanne. These stylistic characteristics accentuate the artist's pleasant facial features—his thick mound of brown hair, his large, dark eyes, and his strong, angular cheekbones and jawline—which are silhouetted against a shadowy background.

During the years leading up to and including Macdonald-Wright's stay in Paris, Cézanne's work was the topic of considerable analysis and debate throughout Europe and the United States. Prompted largely by the French painter's death in 1906, scores of cultural critics and artists began to assess and respond to his contribution to Western painting. Most famously, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque incorporated Cézanne's inventive methods into the style that would become known as Analytic Cubism. Less well known but more pervasive were the responses of countless painters, including Macdonald-Wright, who turned to the Post-Impressionist painter as a model that legitimized their own desires to paint in a manner tied less stringently to the observable, natural world. Macdonald-Wright's admiration of Cézanne was so great, in fact, that he purchased four watercolors by the Frenchman during his Parisian sojourn.<sup>3</sup>

Macdonald-Wright was among the earliest American painters to experiment with the revolutionary ideas Cézanne's art represented.<sup>4</sup> Cézanne's work was little known in the United States before 1913, the year the International Exhibition of Modern Art, otherwise known as the Armory Show, introduced many aspects of European modernism to large American audiences for the first

time.<sup>5</sup> Before the Armory Show, Cézanne was known mainly in New York through the more modest but no less groundbreaking efforts of the photographer and gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by the innovations of Cézanne, Picasso, and Braque, Macdonald-Wright began about 1908 executing bold new works of his own, like *Self-Portrait*, which earned many admirers among his fellow aspiring artists.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), for one, recalled the awe he felt when he saw his friend's new work on a visit to Macdonald-Wright's Parisian studio in 1909. "One after another he exposed his paintings," Benton reminisced. "None were completed, but their bravura, their confident brush stroking, took my breath."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Macdonald-Wright and his like-minded peers believed they stood perpetually on the precipice of aesthetic discovery. As the painter recollected from the perspective of 1970, "We lived with 24-hour-a-day enthusiasm. [Fellow painter Morgan] Russell would rush in with a dripping canvas and shout, 'Today I have gone further than anyone!'"<sup>9</sup> Perhaps because *Self-Portrait* served him as a deeply felt memento of these heady times early in his career, the painting remained in the artist's possession until his death in 1973.

In the months following the creation of *Self-Portrait*, Macdonald-Wright, working in collaboration with Russell, developed an abstract style they called Synchromism ("with color"), widely regarded as his most important contribution to modern painting. Inaugurated in Munich and Paris in 1913, Synchromism is characterized by brilliant and dissolving veils, planes, and curved bands of spectral color that produced vaguely figurative or abstract paintings and served as equivalents to sounds. From 1914 to 1918 Macdonald-Wright lived variously in Paris, London, and New York City, and his Synchromist works evolved to include landscapes influenced by Asian art. In 1918 he returned to California, where he experimented with color abstraction in film and eventually became an authority on Asian art. From 1923 to 1932 he taught and served as director at the Art Students League of Los Angeles. He was involved with federal art projects in California as an advisor, artist, and administrator from 1934 to 1943. Between 1942 and 1954 he taught aesthetics at the University of California at Los Angeles, thereby playing an important role in integrating theories of modernism into the university curriculum.

RRG/TAG



## NOTES

1. Biographical information about Macdonald-Wright has been drawn from Will South et al., *Color, Myth, and Music: Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Synchronism*, exh. cat. (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2001).
2. South, *ibid.*, 19, gives 1909 as the date for Macdonald-Wright's arrival in Paris. Earlier publications have suggested 1907.
3. *Ibid.*, 28.
4. See John Rewald, *Cézanne and America: Dealers, Collectors, Artists and Critics, 1891–1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
5. On the history of the Armory Show, see, among other sources, Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988); and 1913 *Armory Show: 50th Anniversary Exhibition, 1963*, exh. cat. (Utica, N.Y.: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1963).
6. On Stieglitz's promotion of Cézanne, see Jill Kyle, "Paul Cézanne, 1911: Nature Reconstructed," in Sarah Greenough et al., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 101–15.
7. On the basis of a 1987 exhibition label with information likely provided by Jean S. Wright, the artist's widow, *Self-Portrait* has previously been dated to 1918. Yet, noting stylistic similarities between *Self-Portrait* and works Macdonald-Wright executed soon after his arrival in Paris, South convincingly contends it was painted about 1908, and the Museum, following his authority, has redated the picture. South to the author, 23 February 2000, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Thomas Hart Benton, "Paris," in his unpublished and incomplete autobiography "The Intimate Story," Thomas Hart Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
9. Macdonald-Wright, quoted by William Wilson, "Art: A Link to the Heroic Years," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 November 1970, 65.

## REGINALD MARSH (1898–1954)

### *Pavonia—Jersey City, 1928* (*Street Scene, Twelfth Avenue*)

Oil on canvas

20 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 30 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (51.1 × 76.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: REGINALD MARSH 1928

Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Union Pacific Foundation, Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, and the Nelson Gallery Foundation, F90-37

REGINALD MARSH'S *PAVONIA—JERSEY CITY* shows casual street activity in a drab, working-class, industrial district marked by a café on a street corner, unsightly electrical poles and lines, and a large locomotive belching steam and smoke into the gray sky. At street level, men variously gather to talk, read, and wait for railcars. Their clothes identify them mostly as laborers, some in the railroad industry, while their bodies—generally portly and hunched over—exhibit signs of physical wear and age. Shining like a beacon across this mundane scene, an attractive young woman wearing a deep red dress and fashionable coat strides confidently and briskly along the sidewalk and catches the attention of two men. Her sexual allure, enhanced by her ample bosom and exposed knee bursting through her unbuttoned coat, is suggested not only by male gawking but also by the forceful mechanical catcall released by the phallic locomotive behind her.

Born in Paris to Fred Dana Marsh and Alice Randall Marsh, Reginald Marsh experienced a childhood ideal for a future career in art.<sup>1</sup> His parents, both talented artists, instilled in him knowledge of and appreciation for the old masters. Even after his family's relocation to Nutley, New Jersey, in 1900, Marsh was immersed in a cultured atmosphere filled with writers and artists, and he began drawing at age three. Although recognizing his son's innate ability, Fred Marsh, who had largely abandoned his own career in the 1910s, discouraged Reginald from becoming an artist. Accounts of Marsh's life suggest that his deep devotion to his craft—most clearly manifested in the hundreds of filled sketchbook pages he left behind—was in no small measure a reaction to the negative example set by his father's unrealized potential as an artist.<sup>2</sup>

Marsh's interest in drawing extended into and beyond his formal education.<sup>3</sup> As a student at Yale University from 1916 to 1920, his prominent illustrations for the *Yale Record* allowed the socially awkward, introverted student to acquire a level of presence and notoriety on campus that would otherwise have been unthinkable. Aspiring to a career in illustration, the artist relocated to Manhattan after graduation from Yale and enrolled in graphics instruction at the Art Students League, where his teachers included John Sloan (q.v.). A promising job for the *New York Daily News*, for

which he worked as an artist for three years beginning in 1922, led to an even more attractive position as part of the original staff of the *New Yorker* magazine in 1925. For articles appearing in the budding publication, Marsh produced dozens of vignettes of street sights and activities, including busy commuters, workers on break, and down-and-out loiterers.

*Pavonia—Jersey City* betrays both conceptually and stylistically Marsh's extensive work in illustration. The composition shares with many of the artist's *New Yorker* illustrations not only urban subject matter but also a proportional scheme in which figures are dwarfed by their architectural environs. Furthermore, Marsh's restrained technique produces a sturdy, linear quality consistent with the hand of an experienced draftsman or illustrator. However, as much as *Pavonia—Jersey City* takes cues from Marsh's commercial work, the painting notably lacks a clear narrative of the type characteristic of his illustrations for the *New Yorker*, which were often accompanied by witty captions.

Despite the degree to which *Pavonia—New Jersey* highlights Marsh's expertise in illustration, the painting dates from a period when he was seriously reconsidering and reconstructing his career and self-image. A confluence of events in the late 1920s encouraged him to think of himself more as a painter than an illustrator.<sup>4</sup> Not the least of these was a six-month European sojourn Marsh undertook beginning in December 1925. Traveling with his wife, the artist visited London and Florence but spent most of his time abroad in Paris. While many other American artists in the French capital in the 1910 and 1920s, such as Marsden Hartley (q.v.) and Stuart Davis (q.v.), developed abstract stylistic vocabularies and broke into avant-garde circles, Marsh primarily studied the old masters in the Musée du Louvre. The painter later asserted proudly to Lloyd Goodrich, "I have made some kind of copy in pen and ink of almost every great picture in the European cities."<sup>5</sup> Overall, Marsh's European experience in 1925–26 strengthened his commitment to painting and, more specifically, to representational painting in the face of increasing interest in and acceptance of abstract art in America.

Marsh's gravitation to painting was furthermore encouraged by the substantial inheritance he received in 1928 following his paternal grandfather's death. Liberated from the need to create commercial art to pay for food and housing, the artist intensified his artistic investigation of low- and working-class life. Comfortably insulated from the hardship experienced by his subjects, Marsh, unlike many artists of his generation who painted scenes of social and financial disenfranchisement, never promoted a Marxist critique of the pitfalls and inequities of American capitalism. Rather, he saw signs of poverty as part of a larger human drama of suffering





and adversity that provided him with a limitless repertoire of material to explore. For this reason, perhaps, Marsh concluded in 1934, “well-bred people are no fun to paint.”<sup>6</sup>

Buoyed by his inheritance, Marsh also moved from Flushing, in the borough of Queens, into a new home and studio on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. This location put him in close physical and personal proximity to his mentor Kenneth Hayes Miller, with whom Marsh had studied at the Art Students League in 1922. Situated in the heart of the Union Square neighborhood, the painter became part of Miller’s inner circle, the so-called Fourteenth Street School, which also included Isabel Bishop (q.v.) and Edward Laning (q.v.).<sup>7</sup> Under Miller’s classically inspired tutelage, Marsh and his colleagues formed a key group of realist painters whose works throughout the 1920s and 1930s stood as a collective foil to various abstract styles. In this context, the Fourteenth Street School contributed a distinctly urban variant of American Scene painting of the interwar period.<sup>8</sup>

Marsh’s reputation today rests primarily on his scenes of gritty Manhattan districts, such as the Bowery and Hell’s Kitchen, and his exuberant depictions of raucous beach activities at Coney Island. Less well known and studied are the images the artist created in and around New Jersey. In addition to *Pavonia—Jersey City*, this group includes *Lunch* (1927; Whitney Museum of American Art) and a 1928 etching related closely to *Lunch* entitled *Pavonia Ave.*, in addition to numerous other works on paper from the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in preparation for painting *Pavonia—Jersey City*, Marsh completed at least three preliminary sketches (Fig. 1) in which he established the positions of the various structures and blocked in the train in the distance. For the painting, Marsh added and choreographed the figures and, in so doing, imbued his image with sexual tension, one of the artist’s dominant themes.<sup>10</sup> Even more, the young, attractive female traversing potentially unfriendly areas of town became a type to which the artist returned many times over the course of his career and for which he became renowned.

Marsh was drawn from Manhattan westward across the Hudson River to New Jersey mainly for the opportunity to sketch trains, which had long fascinated him. Jersey City was a major transportation hub, serving both the Erie and Pennsylvania Railroads in addition to other commercial and commuter lines.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Erie Railroad terminal stood at the edge of the Hudson River on Pavonia Avenue, the street name Marsh inscribed on the stretcher of the Nelson-Atkins painting.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the train that occupies the background of Marsh’s *Pavonia—Jersey City* serves not only as a symbol of heterosexual male desire but also as an index of Marsh’s love of trains and as an emblem of Jersey City as a center for East Coast rail travel.

Marsh may have been prompted to address themes relating to New Jersey and transportation by the news reports of commuter problems that made nearly daily headlines in the *New York Times* throughout the 1920s. Such reports often focused on the pressures exerted on transit lines linking New Jersey and Manhattan by the booming suburban populations on the west side of the Hudson.<sup>13</sup>

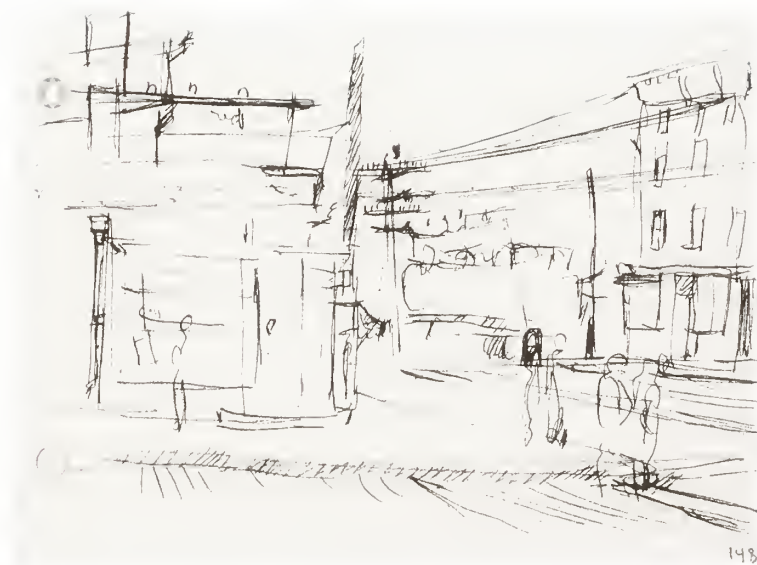


Fig. 1 Reginald Marsh, Study for *Pavonia—Jersey City*, c. 1928. Graphite on paper, 4½ × 6 in. (11.4 × 15.2 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Felicia Meyer Marsh, 1979.292.907

Several plans put forward throughout the decade failed to remedy the transit fiasco.

In light of contemporaneous discussions concerning transit relations between New Jersey and Manhattan, the determined young woman featured in *Pavonia—Jersey City* quite likely belongs to what the *Times* called the “New Jersey Army” that was contributing mightily to area commuter woes. Marsh, it seems, shows her en route to her suburban New Jersey home, possibly after work in Manhattan. This reading is further supported by drawings in Marsh’s sketchbooks of similarly attired women using the subway, one of which labels them explicitly as “suburbanites” on the “Jersey Tube Subway.”<sup>14</sup>

Marsh exhibited *Pavonia—Jersey City* with four additional paintings and a group of lithographs and watercolors in November–December 1928 at the Whitney Studio Galleries, where he had first shown four years earlier.<sup>15</sup> Commenting favorably on the artist’s gradual evolution as a painter, the critic for *Arts* magazine observed:

Mr. Marsh . . . is not one of those artists who are afraid of the catch-on cry of “illustrator.” His work never loses its roots in reality. His portraits of freight-yards and mean streets and automobiles abandoned in suburban dump-heaps show a deep feeling for this most American type of subject. . . . Mr. Marsh’s development as a painter is slow but I feel that this is a good sign. He is taking the hardest road—not that of easy fashionable tricks, either modernist or academie, but direct observation of life and strenuous and solid construction. His lack of complete realization so far is therefore not only understandable but almost laudable.<sup>16</sup>

Such complimentary reviews set the general trajectory of the reception of Marsh’s work well into the 1930s, especially among critical circles resistant to European abstraction. Following the

creation of *Pavonia—Jersey City*, Marsh increasingly dislodged his painting from its roots in illustration, as his figures and forms grew generally in both size and dynamism, characteristics inspired especially by the work of Michelangelo and Peter Paul Rubens. Shifting his medium from oil to primarily tempera, the artist secured his artistic reputation and legacy by painting spectacles of modern urban life that blended, somewhat ironically, high art and low subject matter.

RRG

## NOTES

- Lloyd Goodrich's writings on Marsh provide key biographical information about the painter. See, among the chief works by Goodrich, *Reginald Marsh*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1955); "Reginald Marsh: Painter of New York in Its Wildest Profusion," *American Artist* 19 (September 1955), 18–23; "Reginald Marsh," in *American Masters: Art Students League* (New York: Art Students League, 1967), 92; *Reginald Marsh* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972); and "Lloyd Goodrich Reminisces: Part I," *Archives of American Art Journal* 20 (1980), 3–18. Goodrich and Marsh were close friends, so Goodrich's writings on the painter have traditionally been taken to be authoritative. See also Reginald Marsh, "A Short Autobiography," *Art and Artists of Today* 1 (March 1937), 8; and John Baker, "Lloyd Goodrich, Reginald Marsh," *Art Quarterly* 1 (1977), 139–41.
- Baker, "Lloyd Goodrich, Reginald Marsh," 141.
- For a study of Marsh's voluminous drawings, see Edward Laming, *The Sketchbooks of Reginald Marsh* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973). Many of the artist's sketchbooks were part of the Folicia Meyer Marsh Bequest to the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1979 and can be studied most easily on microfilm in the Reginald Marsh Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA).
- Goodrich, *Reginald Marsh* (1955), 7, observed, "In the first years of his career Marsh had thought of himself as an illustrator and cartoonist, not a painter," and charts the artist's shift toward painting in the mid-1920s.
- Marsh, quoted in *ibid.*, 14.
- Marsh, quoted in "U.S. Scene," *Time*, 24 December 1934, 25.
- On the teaching of Kenneth Hayes Miller and the Fourteenth Street School, see Alan Burroughs, *Kenneth Hayes Miller* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931); Lloyd Goodrich, *Kenneth Hayes Miller* (New York: Arts Publishing Corporation, 1930); Lincoln Rothschild, *To Keep Art Alive: The Effort of Kenneth Hayes Miller* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1974); James Walter Ellis, "The Fourteenth Street School," Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2003; and Ellen Wiley Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).
- The qualifier "American Scene" was used extensively throughout the 1920s and 1930s to describe works that depicted recognizably American subjects, presumably in rejection of foreign—especially French—artistic influences. See Peyton Boswell Jr., *Modern American Painting* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 58–62. The concept of American Scene painting likely reached its widest audience in "U.S. Scene," *Time*, 24 December 1934, 23–28. Key studies of American Scene painting include Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930's* (New York: Praeger, 1974); Dickran Tashjian, *William Carlos Williams and the American Scene*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978); and Nancy Heller and Julia Williams, *Painters of the American Scene* (New York: Galahad Books, 1982). See also Milton W. Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), 173–91.
- For Marsh's works on paper, see Norman Sasowsky, *The Prints of Reginald Marsh: An Essay and Definitive Catalog of His Linoleum Cuts, Etchings, Engravings, and Lithographs* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1976).
- During a trip to Coney Island, Miller reportedly summarized Marsh's art, observing to his friend and fellow artist, "You are a painter of the body. Sex is your theme." Isabel Bishop and Reginald Marsh, "Kenneth Hayes Miller," *Magazine of Art* 45 (April 1952), 170.
- On the subject of Jersey City's railroad history, see Kenneth French, *Railroads of Hoboken and Jersey City* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002).
- The author thanks Bob Leach at the Jersey City Public Library for his assistance in deciphering Marsh's faint inscription. Mr. Leach consulted the local historians John Gomez and Leon Yost in his efforts on the Museum's behalf.
- Among the numerous articles addressing the undesirable transit situation, see "Commuter Problem Puzzles Two States—Growing New Jersey Army Adds Heavy Load to New York Subways—New Routing Suggested," *New York Times*, 26 April 1925, XX4; "Jersey Proposes a 17-Mile Transit Loop with This City—Commission's Plan Calls for Tunnels at the Battery and 57th Street—Puts Cost at \$154,000,000—Huge Transfer Station to Be in the Meadows—Emergency Measures Offered—Quick Action Is Asked—Governor Approves the Program—A Vast System for Northern Part of State Later," *New York Times*, 1 January 1926, 1; "Commuter Traffic Increasing Rapidly—23,000 More a Day Enter City than Two Years Ago, Board Reports.—New Jersey Retains Lead—Sends in 318,000 Daily as against 167,000 for Long Island and 95,400 for Westchester," *New York Times*, 3 March 1930, 21.
- Reginald Marsh Papers, AAA, microfilm reel NRM9, frame 105.
- The painting is most assuredly the work Marsh identified as "Jersey City" that, with four others, was delivered for exhibition at the Whitney Studio Galleries in November 1928. See Reginald Marsh Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 2234, frame 124. The other works listed are *Brooklyn Bridge*, *Skyline*, *Buick*, and *Flemish Woman*. Marsh's notes indicate he hoped to sell *Jersey City* for \$200.00.
- "Exhibitions in New York," *Arts* 14 (December 1928), 327.

# FLETCHER MARTIN (1904–1979)

## *Celebration*, 1939

Oil on canvas

30½ × 25½ in. (76.5 × 63.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: fletcher martin / 1939

Gift of the Trustees of the Kansas City Art Institute, 41-45

FLETCHER MARTIN WAS BORN IN PALISADE, a small frontier town in western Colorado. His father made a living by taking over and reviving faltering weekly newspapers in Colorado, Idaho, and Washington. The seven Martin children all helped to run the business. At fifteen Fletcher ran away from home, preferring the life of a hobo, migrant worker, and lumberjack to that of a printer.<sup>1</sup> He joined the navy in 1922 at eighteen and spent his free time boxing and making pornographic drawings to amuse his fellow sailors. After his discharge in 1926, he settled in Los Angeles, where the city's motion-picture industry was attracting many artists.<sup>2</sup> Martin supported himself as a printer's assistant, spending nights and weekends on his artistic pursuits.

While living in Los Angeles, Martin learned of the famed Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who would exert tremendous influence on American art of the interwar period and into the 1940s.<sup>3</sup> Martin became most familiar with Siqueiros, who was living in Los Angeles in exile. He assisted the Mexican on a two-month-long mural project, learning the fresco techniques that he later applied in his own government mural commissions.<sup>4</sup> Although Martin disagreed with the Mexican artist's communist politics, a disagreement that ultimately caused a violent argument and a long interruption of their friendship, he was most impressed by Siqueiros as a person and an artist: "His great effect upon me . . . was the powerful impress of his personality. He talked little of art but at length about life and ideas, and one got the feeling that life was delicious and rich and that ideas, poetic ideas, made it so."<sup>5</sup>

II. Lester Cooke Jr. has suggested Siqueiros's philosophy influenced Martin to paint from his varied personal experiences.<sup>6</sup> This quality of Martin's work was precisely what struck the critics and the public. During Martin's rise to fame in the late 1930s and early 1940s he exhibited numerous canvases based on recollections of his years in the West and in the navy. These scenes of saloons, fights, rodeos, and baseball illustrated what *Art Digest* called a "surging, vital, often erude and lusty, America."<sup>7</sup> Yet Martin's spare compositions were not literal transcriptions. Rather, he strove to convey his feelings about an experience rather than its exact details. "Nearly all my subject material is a revived memory. I rarely make sketches of things which impress me until some time after the event. I think the time lapse helps me to be more selective as regards the material I want to use in the composition."<sup>8</sup> As in *Celebration*, Martin

often reduced the composition to basic elements, exaggerated the forms to maximize expressive content, and accented the muted browns and grays of his palette with bright colors to add a decorative quality to the painting. This new, more subjective interpretation of the American Scene was typical of the artists of the 1940s, whose paintings increasingly focused on aesthetic dimensions—texture, form, color, and paint quality—in addition to traditional themes.<sup>9</sup>

Painted in 1939, *Celebration* depicts a disheveled man drinking alone in a bar. For some viewers the scene may bring to mind the Depression era's severe economic problems: the man's baggy clothes, loose shirttail, and crumpled, skewed hat are obvious signs of his poverty and drunken state. Yet Martin more likely intended the image to be not an exposé of social ills but rather a sympathetic, good-natured depiction of basic human nature. He portrayed the bum engaged in song, with an air of theatricality and an expression of vitality and joie de vivre that contradict the more serious implications of the man's circumstances. Martin's nonaccusatory rendering of his subject is clearer when it is compared with Paul Sample's less hopeful *Celebration* (1933; private collection), in which inebriated laborers languish in the foreground of a desolate, industrial landscape. Said Martin of his barroom subject, a character he no doubt encountered often during his days as a sailor and prizefighter, "I was always touched by his pathetic assertion of his personality."<sup>10</sup>

*Celebration* was exhibited in one-man shows in 1939, 1940, and 1941 and reproduced numerous times in reviews and articles in newspapers, art journals, and popular magazines.<sup>11</sup> The painting was often selected by critics as one of Martin's best works. Peyton Boswell Jr., the influential editor of *Art Digest*, praised Martin's works for their "simplicity of statement . . . all extraneous detail is dispensed with to strengthen the power of expression Martin sought. . . . It is this same sense of essentialness that makes *Celebration* another of Martin's major works to date. To anyone who has explored life's detours, the pathos of this incident modifies its humor."<sup>12</sup> By 1940 two of Martin's paintings had been acquired by major museums—*Trouble in Frisco* (1938; Museum of Modern Art, New York), his best-known work, and *Juliet* (1939; Metropolitan Museum of Art). Thus, *Celebration* was an important gift for the Museum in 1941, a time when it, like many similar institutions across the country, had begun to acquire contemporary American art.

Martin's painting was presented to the Museum by trustees of the Kansas City Art Institute, and its acceptance coincided with the artist's recent appointment as head of the school's painting department. Having succeeded Grant Wood as artist-in-residence at the University of Iowa in 1940 and having replaced Thomas



Hart Benton (q.v.) in Kansas City the following year, Martin was clearly a leader in the second generation of America's realist painters.<sup>13</sup> The war stymied Martin's rise to fame. Like many of his colleagues, including Peter Hurd (q.v.), Sample, and Aaron Bohrod, Martin accepted an assignment from *LIFE* magazine to document American activity in World War II. After the war he chose not to return to his post in Kansas City and never regained his former popularity. By the end of the 1940s realist art had lost its audience and was supplanted by more abstract styles.<sup>14</sup> Martin turned to book illustration and documentary painting for income, and although he continued to teach, exhibit, and win prizes, his paintings became increasingly flat and decorative, lacking the insight into human nature that had elevated his earlier works.

RRG/MS

## NOTES

1. Biographical information has been drawn mostly from H. Lester Cooke Jr., *Fletcher Martin* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977).
2. Early-twentieth-century California art has received considerable attention recently. See particularly Sheri Bernstein, "Contested Eden: 1920–1940," in Stephanie Barron, Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000). See also Jeffrey David Garner, "The Fine Arts and Hollywood Visual Culture: Art Practices and Artistic Identity in the California Southland of the Nineteen-Thirties," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2003. For analyses of California art that extend beyond Los Angeles and deeper into the century, see Paul J. Karlstrom, ed., *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996); and Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
3. On the influence of the Mexican muralists in America, see, among other sources, Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Susan Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930s—Modernism, Marxism, Americanism: A History of Cultural Activism during the Depression Years* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999).
4. Martin was commissioned to paint murals at North Hollywood High School (1936), the federal building in San Pedro, California (1937), the Boundary County Courthouse, Bonners Ferry, Idaho (1938), the Ada County Courthouse, Boise, Idaho (1940; uncompleted), and United States post offices at Lamesa, Texas (1939), and Kellogg, Idaho (1940).
5. Quoted in Barbara Ebersole, *Fletcher Martin* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1954), 23–24.
6. Cooke, *Fletcher Martin*, 22.
7. "New York Introduced to Fletcher Martin," *Art Digest* 15 (15 November 1940), 6.
8. Statement by Fletcher Martin in *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*, ed. Dorothy C. Miller, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 98.
9. This new variant of realist painting was termed "Pure Art" by Peyton Boswell Jr. in his book *Modern American Painting* (1939; New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1940), 63. See also Peyton Boswell Jr., "Fletcher Martin: Painter of Memories," *Parnassus* 12 (October 1940), 8–9; and Howard Wooden, *The Neglected Generation of American Realist Painters: 1930–1948*, exh. cat. (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita Art Museum, 1981), 14.
10. Quoted in "Ex-Gob Fletcher Martin Goes from Hollywood to Iowa to Paint and Teach," *LIFE*, 11 November 1940, 92.
11. See References.
12. Boswell, "Fletcher Martin," 11.
13. Benton's contract was not renewed after he sparked a controversy by denouncing publicly the "stuffed shirts and sissies" of the Kansas City art community. According to Henry Adams, Martin, the muscular ex-boxer "who had attended the school of hard knocks," was hired to diffuse Benton's claims; see Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 302–13, esp. 312.
14. Although many artists still painted in a representational style, it became increasingly more difficult for all but the most well known to sell their paintings. Howard Wooden documents the rise and fall of Martin's generation of painters in *The Neglected Generation*. For a brief introduction to the dilemma faced by realist artists in the 1940s and 1950s, see Greta Berman and Jeffrey Wechsler, *Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1981), 1–6.

# HENRY LEE MCFEE (1886–1953)

## *Fruit and Leaves*, 1938

Oil on canvas

30 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 24 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (76.5 × 61.1 cm)

Signed lower right: M<sup>c</sup>Fee

Gift of the Friends of Art, 39-1

HENRY MCFEE'S *FRUIT AND LEAVES* presents a humble assembly of pears, apples, and serving wares scattered seemingly at random across a draped tabletop. Situated in a largely non-descript, even gloomy interior, the table presses assertively forward, blurring the boundary between the viewer's space and the scene depicted. The still life's dominant element is a bouquet of magnolia leaves contained within a piteher. The pitcher's presence is echoed and enhanced by the painting's vertical orientation. Leaning toward and into the center of the composition, the meager bouquet appears to respond physically to compositional pressure exerted by dark blue and green fabrics hanging along the canvas's right-hand side and also calls attention to similar leaves appearing in the left background. McFee's broad, blocky brushwork and earthy palette produce solidly rendered, convincing forms and suggest a decidedly no-nonsense, no-frills artistic sensibility widely associated with American painting of the 1930s.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1886, McFee was a relative rarity among American painters of the early twentieth century in his almost exclusive focus on still life.<sup>1</sup> The painter's art education likely began before 1907 at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts. A trust fund created by an elderly cousin provided McFee enviable financial security to study art full-time. Subsequently, McFee attended the Stevenson Art School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for a year. His plans to continue study in New York City were altered by a summer spent at the artists' colony in rural Woodstock, New York, where he produced tonal, poetic landscapes in a quasi-Impressionist style. McFee remained in Woodstock until late 1936, after which he pursued a variety of professional opportunities in Savannah, Georgia, and San Antonio, Texas, for the next few years.

McFee's reputation in twentieth-century American art rests largely on his association with Woodstock's celebrated art colony. Founded in 1902, the colony attracted scores of artists throughout the early twentieth century from across the region who sought both summer instruction and camaraderie.<sup>2</sup> The colony was one of the earliest and most important venues through which various strains of European modernism were introduced into the American art world. Among the modernist principles espoused by leaders of the Woodstock colony were those represented by the French Post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne and the stylistic innovations of Cubism.<sup>3</sup> Even so, Woodstock's philosophical climate also

accommodated and cultivated ideas and styles that were less avant-garde than those represented by French modernists.<sup>4</sup>

This balance between innovation and tradition, perceived to be characteristic of the art of the Woodstock colony, speaks more broadly to the trajectory of McFee's development as a painter. In the throes of his conversion to modernism, McFee created throughout the 1910s and 1920s still lifes notable for their exploration of abstract, Cubist-inspired form and non-naturalistic spatial relations.<sup>5</sup> Working into the 1920s, McFee built a considerable reputation as an artist whose painting suggested a sophisticated and personal assimilation of modernist abstraction.<sup>6</sup> But by the 1930s McFee gained notice more for the steady, consistent, and measured quality of his output than for any penchant for innovation.<sup>7</sup>

*Fruit and Leaves* is a fine example of the brand of proficient realist painting into which the artist had settled by the late 1930s, an idiom that the art historian John Baker tagged "formalist realism."<sup>8</sup> Cubist fracture of space and shape that characterized McFee's earlier work has been replaced by coherent, essentially illusionistic spatial relationships and volumetric form. The influence of Picasso has been superseded by that of Cézanne, about whom McFee observed, "there can be no genuine art of the future without his directing and guiding hand. His postulates are too solidly founded on human organisms ever to be ignored."<sup>9</sup> Cézanne's precedent fueled McFee's retention of still life as his primary subject as well as his conceptualization of painting as a kind of visual "architecture" composed of solidly rendered forms—like those seen in *Fruit and Leaves*—that tend toward basic geometric shapes.<sup>10</sup> However, the degree to which McFee relied on traditional modeling to realize his forms and maintain clear distinctions between foreground, middle ground, and background suggests a cautious application of Cézannesque methods and ideas.

Thus, the Nelson-Atkins canvas, like much of McFee's work from the mid-1920s onward, highlights the French master's ironic legacy in twentieth-century painting. Once heralded as a springboard to artistic invention and abstraction, by the 1930s Cézanne's painting had become a repository of aesthetic tradition for those artists especially seeking refuge from—or a remedy for—what was then known in American art circles as "ultra-modern" art, exemplified most often by the nonobjective compositions of Piet Mondrian. Cézanne's mainstream appeal is confirmed by the seemingly coincidental—but meaningful—appearance in the 2 April 1938 edition of the *New York Sun* of an announcement of McFee's exhibition at Rehn's Gallery, in which *Fruit and Leaves* made its public debut, with an article by the critic Henry McBride proclaiming: "Cezanne's in Fashion: The Once-Neglected Master Is Now Admired by All."<sup>11</sup> Invoking the precedent and style of Cézanne allowed painters like McFee to appear artistically *moderne* but not





to alienate audiences and potential buyers of his work, a key concern for artists working during the Great Depression.<sup>12</sup>

In retreating from the more extreme aspects of European modernism, McFee was not alone. As many art historians have noted, artists on both sides of the Atlantic withdrew from experimental modes after World War I.<sup>13</sup> This tendency became especially pronounced in American art in the 1930s, as fears regarding European cultural “isms” of various stripes surged in the face of advancing communism and fascism. For many prominent American art critics and artists, then, realist painting—that is, any style seemingly free of ties to European modernism—became invested with nationalist significance.<sup>14</sup>

Professional opportunities took McFee eventually to Los Angeles, where he held various teaching appointments and was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. By 1950 McFee’s still lifes appeared decidedly *retardataire*, particularly when they were measured against the efforts of a new generation of painters in America, including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, whose monumental abstractions were perceived to speak more profoundly to emotional and psychological states of being after World War II. Serious health problems also began to hamper McFee’s work and quality of life, leading to his death in 1953.

MCC/RRG

## NOTES

1. The authoritative source on McFee is John Baker, *Henry Lee McFee and Formalist Realism in American Still Life, 1923–1936*, exh. cat. (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1987). Biographical information throughout this essay has been drawn from this source.
2. On the history of the Woodstock colony, see *Woodstock: An American Art Colony, 1902–1977*, exh. cat. (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1977); and Tom Wolf, “Historical Survey,” in *Woodstock’s Art Heritage: The Permanent Collection of the Woodstock Artists Association* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1987).
3. On Cézanne’s reception and influence in America, see John Rewald, *Cézanne and America: Dealers, Collectors, Artists and Critics, 1891–1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Sylvia Yount and Elizabeth Johns, *To Be Modern: American Encounters with Cézanne and Company*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1996). Neither text, however, addresses the Woodstock colony or McFee’s work more specifically.
4. A report on America’s art colonies in the *Magazine of Art* in 1930 included Woodstock as well as those in Ogunquit, Maine, and Gloucester, Massachusetts. It described the New York colony as “fairly evenly balanced between the ‘modern’ ideas and the well-established older ones.” “Woodstock Colony,” *American Magazine of Art* 21 (June 1930), 341.
5. The painter exhibited a selection of these cutting-edge compositions at the Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters of 1916. See *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters: March Thirteenth to March Twenty-fifth, 1916: On View at the Anderson Galleries, New York*, exh. cat. (New York: M. Kennerly, 1916). McFee’s artist’s statement appears on 62, and a reproduction of one of his entries, *Still Life*, follows on the facing page.
6. Such was the extent of the painter’s standing that fellow artist Alexander Brook (q.v.) paid him tribute in 1923, proclaiming, “in thinking of the painters of the day one can never omit the name of Henry Lee McFee,” adding, “McFee’s pictures are always distinguished . . . in good taste, not the good taste of [the deceased expatriate painter of lush interior scenes] Walter Gay but rather that of [the Cubist Georges] Braque.” Brook, “Henry Lee McFee,” *Arts* 4 (November 1923), 251.
7. In a glowing profile of McFee in the *Magazine of Art* in 1937, the eminent art critic Forbes Watson observed, “Among other attributes . . . McFee has one important gift—patience. It is a quality which was underestimated in the impatient, fickle, and quick-changing attitudes toward art which characterized the years when McFee’s art matured. . . . McFee eschewed wayward and fruitless experiment, despite the almost hourly messages from Paris that change was the order of the day.” Watson, “A Note on Henry Lee McFee,” *American Magazine of Art* 30 (March 1937), 142.
8. Due to the peripatetic nature of McFee’s life during this period, it is difficult to determine if he painted *Fruit and Leaves* in Savannah or San Antonio. See Baker, *Henry Lee McFee and Formalist Realism*, 15–19, for the author’s definition of “formalist realism.”
9. McFee, quoted in *ibid.*, 37.
10. McFee’s conceptualization of painting in terms of architecture is explained in Ernest W. Watson, “Henry Lee McFee: A Discussion of His Still Life Painting,” in *Twenty Painters and How They Work* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1950), 85–88.
11. “Spring Show at Relms” and “Cézanne’s in Fashion: The Once-Neglected Master Is Now Admired by All,” *New York Sun*, 2 April 1938, 10.
12. Economic factors should not be discounted among the reasons for McFee’s stylistic conservatism into and beyond the 1930s, which the critics often noted in reviews of his work. As Baker recounts, the painter was experiencing financial problems in the mid-1930s and, thus, felt the need to “get a real job.” See Baker, *Henry Lee McFee and Formalist Realism*, 119. Later in the same chapter, Baker discusses McFee’s increasingly uneven reviews from critics.
13. For the European perspective, see Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism, 1910–1930*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1990).
14. The confluence of realism and Americanism is apparent in “Modern Artists Return to Painting Still Lifes Like Famous Old Dutch Masters,” *LIFE*, 28 August 1939, 24. This article concluded, “the return to still life is one more sign of the good health of our national art.”

## PAUL RAPHAEL MELTSNER (1905–1966)

### *Paul, Marcella and Van Gogh (No. 2)*, c. 1937 (*Paul, Marcella and Van Gogh*)

Oil on canvas

36 $\frac{1}{6}$  × 30 in. (91.6 × 76.2 cm)

Signed lower right: PAUL MELTSNER.

Gift of Oscar Serlin, 40-2/2

AMONG THE NUMEROUS superbly talented and once popular artists of the 1930s, Paul Meltner has been largely forgotten. Meltner was born in New York City and was trained at the National Academy of Design.<sup>1</sup> Like many artists of the Depression era, he spent much of his early career executing murals for public buildings. In his easel paintings, for which he was best known, he specialized in still lifes during the early 1930s. Later, he turned to scenes of industry and labor, which often feature solidly painted workers toiling against a backdrop of smokestacks, furnaces, factory buildings, cranes, and other heavy machinery. Other paintings reveal out-of-work strikers, derelicts, and outcasts. About 1938 he created images of farm laborers before abandoning socially conscious themes altogether for portraits of celebrities, dancers, and Broadway performers, among whom Carmen Miranda and Martha Graham were two of his favorite subjects.

The 1930s were the most successful years of Meltner's career. Regarded as one of America's up-and-coming young painters, Meltner exhibited his work often and in prominent East Coast venues. His canvases hung at the annual shows of contemporary art at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His paintings and lithographs of industrial scenes were acquired by many prominent museums in the United States and other countries, and his work was purchased in the 1930s and 1940s by such collectors as Franklin D. Roosevelt, James N. Rosenberg, Billy Rose, and the famed Broadway producer Oscar Serlin, who gave *Paul, Marcella and Van Gogh (No. 2)* to the Museum in 1940.

Painted about 1937, Meltner's striking and complex self-portrait links the artist's industrial scenes to his portraits. The composition, however, includes not only a self-portrait of the artist but also likenesses of his model Marcella, who reads a newspaper, and his alert, wire-haired terrier Van Gogh, who stares directly out at the viewer.<sup>2</sup> Their three bodies fill up much of the available space of the vertical canvas, leaving little room for other compositional elements. Breaking from the old master tradition of the artist's self-portrait that shows him or her in the process of painting, Meltner has represented himself turned away from his easel, holding a hammer and wooden frame or stretcher and wearing a simple work shirt with its sleeves rolled up. The only elements tying Meltner to his profession of painting are an example of his industrial scenes

displayed on an easel in the background and a tube of paint barely visible on a small shelf at lower right. He appears more like a worker (or craftsman) than a painter, not unlike the laborers who populate his paintings.

The Nelson-Atkins canvas was preceded by another version of this group portrait. Also painted about 1937, this second picture displays a different arrangement of figures and a related industrial scene in the background.<sup>3</sup> The acquisition of this earlier version by the Luxembourg Museum in Paris marked one of Meltner's greatest claims to fame, one he used proudly in subsequent promotion of himself and his work, even after the painting was confiscated by the Nazis because of the artist's Jewish heritage.<sup>4</sup> This composition also reveals Meltner's abiding concern for sturdy anatomics and volumetric form as well as his interest in aligning himself pictorially and symbolically with blue-collar labor. Meltner's workmanlike technique—a smooth, methodical application of paint—furthermore alludes to the artist's suppression of his individual identity in deference to a larger, more important collective.

The artist-as-worker was a popular conceit for many painters throughout the 1930s. Raphael Soyer and Louis Lozowick, among others, self-consciously cultivated both real and imagined connections between artists and laborers in efforts to express empathy and support for the lower and working classes. Such sentiments were fueled by leftist politics and often felt most passionately by Jewish artists.<sup>5</sup> Connections along these lines, which gained in popularity following the stock market crash of 1929, were encouraged by the Artists' Union, the Society of Independent Artists, the American Artists' Congress, and the John Reed clubs, organizations with which Meltner was associated.<sup>6</sup> In this artistic and political climate, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, whose images of heroic workers reminded viewers of art's capacity to fuel cultural revolution, emerged as both a hero and a model for emulation among artists.<sup>7</sup> The sculptural muscularity of Meltner's industrial subjects suggests that he, too, fell under Rivera's influence.

After having debuted *Paul, Marcella and Van Gogh (No. 2)* at the *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1937, Meltner exhibited it again the following year at a solo exhibition at the Midtown Galleries. Featured among a fresh body of work highlighting the artist's new interest in rural life and work, the group portrait earned little notice. However, the writer for *Art News* called the composition out for special recognition, observing, "its colors, particularly a rich green, are stronger than those which are used in most of the work in this show, and this intensity brings to the painting vastly more interest than that of some of his work."<sup>8</sup>



This reviewer's backhanded compliment speaks more broadly to the increasingly mixed reviews Meltsner started receiving about 1940 as critics began detecting a certain redundancy and superficiality in his work. Turning to celebrities as his subjects by 1939, Meltsner exhibited less frequently and was discussed less often in the art press. However, in 1944 he donated eight of his celebrity portraits to the Fifth War Loan Drive; their sale raised \$2,715,000 in war bonds.<sup>9</sup> In the late 1940s Meltsner exhibited "New York types" in an Impressionist technique at the Jacques Seligmann Gallery, but after 1950 he virtually disappeared from the New York art scene. He eventually settled in Woodstock, New York, where he died in 1966.

MS/RRG

## NOTES

- Biographical information has been derived from various sources, including Peter Hastings Falk, Audrey M. Lewis, Georgia Kuchen, and Veronika Roessler, *Who Was Who in American Art* (Madison, Conn.: Soundview Press, 1999), 2245; Howard E. Wooden, *Collected Essays on 101 Art Works from the Permanent Collections of the Wichita Art Museum* (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita Art Museum, 1988), 122–23; and "Paul Meltsner Dies," *Woodstock (N.Y.) Week*, 1 December 1966, clipping, NAMA curatorial files.
- Marcella has been identified variously as Meltsner's model, "woman companion," and daughter. Although none of these suggestions can be supported by any evidence, the last is perhaps the least likely, for in the painting Marcella appears too old to be the daughter of the thirty-three-year-old artist. Van Gogh was well known enough as Meltsner's canine companion to earn his own death notice in the art press. See "Van Gogh Dies," *Art Digest* 17 (1 July 1943), 19.
- See "Meltsner Who Paints the Drama of Labor," *Art Digest* 11 (1 May 1937), 15.
- For example, Meltsner touted the Luxembourg acquisition in promoting his work to Paul Gardner, director of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts. See Meltsner to Gardner, 14 November 1941, NAMA curatorial files. See "Museumized," *Art Digest* 15 (1 May 1939), 5. The Luxembourg self-portrait remains unlocated since its confiscation.
- See Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002); and Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change, 1920–1950*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the Columbus Museum of Art, 2003). See also Ori Z. Soltes, *Fixing the World: Jewish American Painters in the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003); and Norman L. Kleeblatt and Susan Chevlowe, eds., *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900–1945*, exh. cat. (New York: Jewish Museum, 1991).
- On these related topics, see Patricia Hills, *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s*, exh. cat. (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983); Susan Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930s: Modernism, Marxism, Americanism: A History of Cultural Activism during the Depression Years* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999); David Shapiro, "Social Realism Reconsidered," in *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon*, ed. Shapiro (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973), 3–35; and Donald E. Sloan, "'Why Not Revolution?': The John Reed Club and Visual Culture," Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2004. Meltsner was included in *The Social Viewpoint in Art*, an exhibition organized in 1933 by the John Reed Club of New York, of which he was likely a member. See "Propaganda and Freedom Mark Independents," *Art Digest* 8 (15 April 1934), 7; "American Artists Take up Eager Roles in 'Social Revolution,'" *Art Digest* 7 (1 March 1933), 32; and Gertrude Benson, "Art and Social Theories," *Creative Arts* 12 (March 1933), 216–18, reprinted in Shapiro, *Social Realism*, 79–80. Sloan also lists Meltsner among likely artist members of the John Reed Club. See "'Why Not Revolution?'" Appendix A, 239.
- Rivera's influence is discussed widely within literature of the period. Among the most useful sources are Platt, "Deep on the Left: Artists, Writers, and the Proletariat," in *Art and Politics in the 1930s*, 87–101; and "The Mexico/New York Axis: Anita Brenner," in *ibid.*, 125–40.
- [Jeannette] L[owe], "New Exhibitions of the Week: Farm Scenes Replace Urban Subjects in Recent Paintings of Meltsner," *Art News* 36 (28 May 1938), 16. The Nelson-Atkins painting was also praised by the reviewer for the *New York Sun*, who found *Paul, Marcella and Van Gogh (No. 2)* and another painting, *Hill Folk*, just compensation for the awkwardly painted *Study of Martha Graham*; see M. U., "New Art Group Holds Display: Meltsner and Others Also Seen in Exhibitions," *New York Sun*, 28 May 1938, 9.
- "War Bonds for Famous Faces," *Art Digest* 18 (1 August 1944), 8.

## RICHARD E. MILLER (1875–1943)

### *At the Window*, c. 1910–12 (*Paris Morning*)

Oil on canvas

39½ × 32 in. (100.3 × 81.3 cm)

Signed lower right: Miller

Gift of Mrs. Harry G. Woodward Jr., niece of the artist,  
F96-14

RICHARD EDWARD MILLER was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1875, the son of a civil engineer.<sup>1</sup> He showed an early inclination for art and at sixteen enrolled in night classes at the St. Louis Academy of Fine Arts. The following year he became a full-time student. Miller attended the St. Louis Academy for six years, studying under such European-trained artists as Edmund H. Wuerpel and winning recognition in his classes and in local exhibitions. After leaving school, Miller worked as an illustrator for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Unlike a slightly later generation of American artists, among them John Sloan (q.v.), George Luks, William Glackens (q.v.), and Everett Shinn, who would draw on their experiences as newspaper illustrators to provide subject matter for realist paintings, Miller had little interest in exploring the gritty side of urban life. During these years, he instead painted muted and wistful Tonalist landscapes. In 1899 the St. Louis Academy awarded Miller a six-hundred-dollar scholarship, and he quickly left for Europe.

Miller was among the last great wave of American art students to go to Paris for academic training. Like many of his predecessors, he enrolled at the Académie Julian, where he studied for a year under Jean-Joseph Benjamin Constant and Jean-Paul Laurens. Although it did not have the same rigorous entrance or attendance requirements as the state-run École des Beaux-Arts, the curriculum of the Académie Julian was essentially the same, stressing thorough study of the human figure and accurate drawing. Miller excelled at both. His drawings won a number of student competitions and, only a year after arriving in Paris, he was giving private instruction to other art students. In 1901 he had a painting accepted by the Salon of the conservative Société des Artistes Français.

Despite his growing mastery of academic technique, Miller was interested in the more progressive art that surrounded him in Paris. In addition to his Salon subjects, he began painting theater, café, and street scenes with a bright palette and a loose brush. He also painted modern young women in interiors, shown sewing, drinking tea, examining themselves in mirrors, or contemplating beautiful objects. The evolution of Miller's style and subject matter can be attributed to the pervasive influence of French Impressionism and also to the first exhibition of Fauve paintings at the Salon d'Automne in 1905. At this exhibition, Miller was able to see paintings by Henri Matisse, Maurice Vlaminck, André Derain, Raoul

Dufy, and Kees van Dongen eight years before his colleagues in the United States would see them at the so-called Armory Show in New York. The Fauves' use of bright, unmixed colors fascinated Miller, and their expressive use of line clearly had an impact on his later work.

By 1907 Miller was spending his summers in the village of Giverny, the home of Claude Monet. As early as 1890 painters interested in the experimental use of color had come to regard Monet as an oracle and had formed an artists' colony around him. Miller was among the second generation of such artists. Together with his fellow Americans Frederick Carl Frieseke (q.v.), Karl Anderson, Lawton Parker, Guy Rose, and Edmund Graecen, he developed a style that combined an armature of academie drawing with Impressionist brushwork and Post-Impressionist color. When these artists exhibited their work together at the Madison Art Gallery in New York in 1910, they were dubbed "the Giverny Group." "They are not the last cry of French art by any means," wrote a critic for the *New York Times*, but he added, "In this country nothing much stronger has been done from an 'impressionist' standpoint."<sup>2</sup>

Painted between 1910 and 1912, *At the Window* exhibits all the features that made Miller a popular success on both sides of the Atlantic. Its subject is a pretty young woman in loose morning attire, standing by a tall, open window, bathed in bright sunlight. As she contemplates the view, she leans against a French Rococo table whose gracefully curving legs echo the curve of her back. The table's dark, polished surface gleams with reflected color, and a bowl of cheerful flowers on its top echoes the bright tones of the garden outside. The gold of the woman's silk kimono matches the gold of her hair, and both contrast vividly with the sheer white curtains behind her. Miller's loose, active brushwork enlivens the canvas, adding to the painting's sensual appeal. By contrast, his handling of the woman's face is tighter and more carefully modeled, leading one reviewer in 1913 to describe *At the Window* as "brilliant, but not completely homogenous in effect."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Miller's paintings, which customarily included a smooth, volumetric, pretty face as a focal point, appealed to Americans and conservative Europeans who appreciated the decorative potential of Impressionist color and brushwork but were reluctant to abandon solid form entirely.<sup>4</sup>

Although *At the Window* was exhibited several times between 1912 and 1918, it was rarely singled out by reviewers. Indeed, Miller's paintings were often described in general, though appreciative, terms. Of a 1912 one-man show at the Maebeth Gallery, which included the Nelson-Atkins painting, a reviewer for the *New York Post* wrote, "The subjects of the sixteen paintings here lend



[Miller] opportunities for noting the outdoor sun, and the green things of the garden and river-bank, and the interludes of that no-man's land where it is always time for afternoon tea."<sup>5</sup>

*At the Window's* strawberry-blond model and her distinctive kimono appear in other paintings by Miller that date between 1910 and 1914, for instance, *Goldfish* (1912; private collection). Her repeated presence confirms that the Nelson-Atkins painting is not a portrait but a posed, studio composition—one of many paintings of restful, contemplative young women that, in the early years of the twentieth century, served as emblems of culture and taste.<sup>6</sup> These paintings, which celebrate the private world of the domestic sphere, were ideally suited for elegant, upper-class interiors, such as those described by Elsie de Wolfe in her influential 1914 decorating manual *The House in Good Taste*. Rebelling against the dark, Aesthetic decor that had predominated in the years around the turn of the century, de Wolfe emphasized the importance of light, air, and bright colors set off against a white background and graceful, curving lines—all qualities also celebrated by Miller in his highly decorative paintings.<sup>7</sup> Miller himself referred to his paintings as “designs” and asserted, “Art’s mission is not literary, but decorative, the conveying of a pleasant, optical sensation.”<sup>8</sup>

Miller’s emphasis on the abstract, decorative qualities of his paintings links him definitively to avant-garde artists whose work surrounded him in France, particularly the Fauves and the group of Symbolist-inspired painters known as the Nabis, which included Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, and Édouard Vuillard, among others. Denis declared in 1890 that “a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.”<sup>9</sup> Like the Nabis, Miller embraced the flat, decorative potential of paint. Like Matisse, he wanted paintings to produce a soothing, calming influence on the mind, “something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.”<sup>10</sup> The young woman in *At the Window*, who seems to derive a restful, sensuous pleasure from her contemplation of a beautiful view, models the very kind of looking that Miller encouraged with his paintings.

Miller’s use of color and form, though expressive, was never truly abstract. Unlike the American painters Alfred H. Maurer and Morgan Russell, who were also influenced by avant-garde French art in the years before the Armory Show, Miller walked a fine line in his paintings between what his American audience considered acceptably decorative and what most still viewed as the excesses of the European avant-garde.<sup>11</sup> As one contemporary noted in 1912, “the present is undoubtedly an age of ‘color,’ and Miller’s adaptation of the excessively brilliant palette of the advance guard of modern art to the stricter confines of his more conventional picturing may be a vital part of his contribution to art. We are too close to judge.”<sup>12</sup>

Miller’s extended stay in France ended with the advent of World War I. He returned home in 1914 and soon settled in the artists’ colony of Provincetown, Massachusetts. There, he continued to produce brightly colored, freely brushed paintings of lovely young women. However, as modernist art took hold in the United States

in the wake of the Armory Show, these paintings seemed more and more old-fashioned. Miller joined a chorus of conservative voices decrying abstract art and, in the two decades before his death, his palette became more muted and his style more conventional.

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## NOTES

1. The most extensive study of Miller and his work is Marie Louise Kane, *A Bright Oasis: The Paintings of Richard E. Miller*, exh. cat. (New York: Jordan-Volpe Gallery, 1997).
2. “News and Notes of Art World,” *New York Times*, 25 December 1910, Magazine sec., 15.
3. “Some of the Striking Pictures to Be Seen in This Year’s Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy,” *New York Times*, 16 February 1913, 55.
4. Wallace Thompson referred to Miller’s paintings as “sane selective art.” Thompson, “Richard Miller—a Parisian-American Artist,” *Fine Arts Journal* (Chicago) 27 (November 1912), 710.
5. “Art Notes,” *New York Evening Post*, 6 April 1912, 7.
6. See Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
7. Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: Century Co., 1914).
8. Quoted in Thompson, “Richard Miller—a Parisian-American Artist,” 711.
9. Maurice Denis, “Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme,” *Art et Critique*, August 1890, quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 94.
10. Henri Matisse, “Notes d’un Peintre,” *Grande Revue* 52 (1908), quoted in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, 135.
11. For the impact of Matisse and other Fauve painters on American painters in the early years of the twentieth century, see *The Color of Modernism: The American Fauves*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1997).
12. Thompson, “Richard Miller—a Parisian-American Artist,” 714.

## THOMAS MORAN (1837–1926)

### *Venice, the Grand Canal with the Doge's Palace, 1888–89* (*Venice; Venetian Grand Canal*)

Oil on canvas

24¼ × 36¼ in. (61.6 × 92.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: MORAN. 1889.

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F88-35

“VENICE HAS BEEN PAINTED and described many thousands of times,” the author Henry James reported in *Century Magazine* in 1882, “and of all the cities of the world it is the easiest to visit without going there. . . . There is as little mystery about the Grand Canal as about our local thoroughfare; and the name of St. Mark is as familiar as the postman’s ring.” Nevertheless, James, writing with a highly literate and worldly audience in mind, set about illuminating in characteristically rich, insightful prose the sights and sounds of the legendary city, which, he feared, had degenerated into tourist kitsch. “The Venice of to-day,” the author lamented, “is a vast museum where the little wicket that admits you is perpetually turning and creaking, and you march through the institution with a herd of fellow-gazers.”<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1886 the American painter Thomas Moran added his name to the voluminous guest book of visitors passing through Venice’s well-worn, imaginary turnstile. Born in Lancashire, England, Moran immigrated to the United States in 1844, settling with his family in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> As a teenager, he was apprenticed to Scattergood and Telfer, a wood engraving firm in Philadelphia, a position that afforded him the only formal artistic training he would ever receive. By the mid-1850s the aspiring artist was, along with his brother Edward, exhibiting at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and at local galleries. Stylistically and conceptually, Moran’s early efforts owed much to the grand and highly descriptive landscapes by such members of the Hudson River School as Thomas Cole (q.v.), Asher B. Durand (q.v.), and John Frederick Kensett (q.v.). Opportunities to accompany important western expeditions to Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon in the 1870s forever changed Moran’s career and sparked his rivalry with Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) for the position of chief painter of America’s remarkable western landscapes.

During his long career as a landscape painter, Moran turned his deft brush to a wide range of both domestic and foreign locales, including Wyoming, Arizona, Scotland, Mexico, and Venice, among others. Venice ranked first among the faraway places that captured his imagination.<sup>3</sup> “Venice is all & more, than travelers have reported of it,” the painter wrote in a letter to his wife during his six-week visit there in 1886, a trip that inspired at least thirty drawings that served as bases for both paintings and etchings the artist subsequently executed in his East Hampton, Long Island, studio.<sup>4</sup>

A return visit in 1890 yielded even more sketches, watercolors, and paintings, not to mention an unusual souvenir in the form of a gondola once owned by the poet Robert Browning.

Unlike Yellowstone when Moran visited it in 1871, the magical sights of Venice were, as James’s 1882 account suggests, exceptionally well known among many of the artist’s potential audiences and patrons. The city had long served as an important stop on the European grand tour and, as such, had been portrayed by countless artists and writers.<sup>5</sup> However, over the course of the nineteenth century, as the unsightly stamp of the industrial revolution spread across Europe and the Americas, Venice was increasingly celebrated as a safe haven from modernity, despite the fact that trains now carried travelers to and from the city, gas lamps illuminated public squares, and steam-powered boats vied with gondolas in its labyrinthine canals.<sup>6</sup> Writers such as Lord Byron and William Wordsworth eulogized Venice’s tragic fall from former glory as a morality tale steeped in Romantic melancholy.<sup>7</sup> Less emotionally laden but no less influential for the nineteenth century’s appreciation of Venice was the architectural study *The Stones of Venice*, published in 1851 and 1853 by the British philosopher and critic John Ruskin, whose writings Moran greatly admired.<sup>8</sup> Venice had furthermore seduced Joseph Mallord William Turner, who, in Ruskin’s opinion, was the only painter capable of capturing the city’s singular, diverse sites. Turner was the artist whom many painters in the nineteenth century, including Moran, sought to emulate if not to surpass.<sup>9</sup>

Like many of Moran’s Venetian pictures, the Nelson-Atkins canvas places the viewer in the Canale di San Marco looking west into the Canale Grande, which is lined to the right (north) by Gothic facades culminating in the Doge’s Palace and to the left (south) by the domed Santa Maria della Salute.<sup>10</sup> The canal is covered with boats and gondolas carrying seafarers dressed in exotic costume. Throughout the composition, Moran effectively evokes the appearance of light, reflection, and atmospheric haze caused by air thick with moisture. Like icing on a cake, diaphanous clouds top off this sumptuous visual feast, which pays homage not only to the city represented but also to Turner and his exquisite painterly expositions of the same locale earlier in the century. Characteristically disregarding any undesirable signs of modernity, Moran painted Venice as many imagined and desired to see the city—without trains, factories, and decay, a view that harkened to its storied past as a great political and maritime power.

*Venice, the Grand Canal with the Doge’s Palace* occupies an important place in a group of closely related Venetian pictures dating from 1887 to 1889. The composition stems primarily from an 1886 sketch, which also inspired an unlocated oil, *The Gate*







Fig. 1 Thomas Moran, *The Gate of Venice*, 1888. Etching, 18 × 31 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (45.7 × 81 cm). Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Okla., 1426.446e

of Venice (1887).<sup>11</sup> The Moran scholar Anne Morand posits that *The Gate of Venice* generated the well-known 1888 etching by the same name (Fig. 1), which earned the artist much acclaim in the context of the etching revival of the late nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Like the 1886 sketch, the etching compares favorably to the Nelson-Atkins canvas.<sup>13</sup> A key difference between the two compositions is Moran's reduction of elements along the right-hand side, which lessens congestion in the lagoon. In the oil, Moran also enhanced the presence of the vessels occupying the middle of the canal and shifted the time of day from dusk, evoked by the deep shadows and the setting sun in the etched composition, to mid- or late afternoon. An afternoon setting is likewise suggested in a related watercolor dating to 1889 (private collection), a view that features some adjustments in the architectural facades and vessels toward the right side.<sup>14</sup> Unique to the Nelson-Atkins picture are the figure group and dock at the left-hand side.

In recognition of Venice's enduring market appeal, Moran painted and exhibited Venetian scenes to the end of his career, often adapting preexisting studies and compositions.<sup>15</sup> Moran's wide repertoire of exotic subjects, like Venice, marked him in the latter stages of his career as an exceptionally cosmopolitan—if not a stylistically avant-garde—artist, whom many regarded as “the Dean of American Painters.” This lofty honorific was secured not only by immense public enthusiasm for his Romantic portrayals of foreign lands but also, on a deeper level, for his heroic depictions of the American West, for which he is best remembered today.

RRG/SM

## NOTES

1. Henry James, “Venice,” *Century Magazine* 25 (November 1882), 4.
2. Biographical details about Moran have been gleaned primarily from Nancy K. Anderson and Anne Morand, “Chronology: 1837–1926,” in Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 182–279.
3. Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran, Artist of the Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 184, suggests that Moran painted more views of Venice than of any other subject. See also Margaretta M. Lovell, *A Visitable Past: Views of Venice by American Artists, 1860–1915* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 104n10.
4. Moran, quoted in Anne Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 1856–1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 73.
5. Studies of Venice's particular appeal to American artists and writers include *Americans in Venice, 1879–1913*, exh. cat. (New York: Coe Kerr Gallery, 1983); Margaretta M. Lovell, *Venice: The American View, 1860–1920*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1984); Lovell, *A Visitable Past*; Julian Halsby, *Venice, the Artist's Vision: A Guide to British and American Painters* (London: Unicorn Press, 1990); Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Venetian Hours of Henry James, Whistler, and Sargent* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991); Erica E. Hirshler, “Gondola Days: American Painters in Venice,” in Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. et al., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760–1914*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 112–28; and Elizabeth Anne McCauley et al., *Gondola Days: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Palazzo Barbaro Circle*, exh. cat. (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004).
6. See John Ruskin, introduction to *The Stones of Venice*, ed. Jan Morris (1851; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981), 7–31.
7. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
8. Moran's admiration of Ruskin is widely noted. According to Nancy Anderson, the painter was first exposed to Ruskin's writings in the 1850s during his engraving apprenticeship. During a trip to London in 1882 the painter sought out the critic, who received him and his work positively. See Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran*, 25, 120–21.
9. On Turner's Venetian views, see Hardy George, “Turner in Venice,” *Art Bulletin* 53 (March 1971), 84–87. Moran's artistic worship of Turner has been widely discussed. See Richard P. Townsend et al., *J. M. W. Turner: “That Greatest of Landscape Painters”: Watercolors from London Museums* (Tulsa, Okla.: Philbrook Museum of Art, in association with the University of Washington Press, 1998).
10. Observing that the architectural landmarks in Moran's Venetian paintings are “heightened, lengthened, or inflected out of normal perspective,” Margaretta Lovell notes that the compositions “deviate so much from topographical reality as to be unmappable.” Lovell, *A Visitable Past*, 22.
11. This key sketch is reproduced in Morand, *Thomas Moran*, 241, no. 745.
12. *Ibid.*, 73.
13. The tie between the Nelson-Atkins painting and the 1888 etching is strengthened by an earlier date and signature, visible with infrared reflectography, that mark a campaign of painting that preceded Moran's subsequent inscription of 1889. The overpainted date appears to have been 1888. See Technical Notes.
14. This watercolor is illustrated in Sotheby's, New York, 22 May 1996, lot 96.
15. Moran returned to the general composition of his Venetian pictures from 1886 to 1889 in, for example, *View of Venice* (1895; Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Mass.).

# THOMAS MORAN (1837–1926)

## *Grand Canyon, 1912*

Oil on pressboard

15<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 23<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (40.3 × 60.6 cm)

Inscribed, dated, and signed lower right: To My Friend /

M<sup>r</sup> Ford Harvey · 1912 / 

Bequest of Katherine Harvey, 63-44

MODEST IN SCALE, Thomas Moran's *Grand Canyon* nonetheless delivers a powerfully arresting vision of the geological wonder in Arizona known the world over. The composition is filled with impressive buttes and steep canyon walls, which conceal the bottom of the chasm carved by the Colorado River. However, the painter took care to provide the viewer with clear compositional steps leading from foreground to background. Beginning with the cliff in the lower left corner, one progresses to the butte just right of center and ends with the white-topped formations known as Zoroaster Temple and Brahma Temple that break the horizon line. This recession into space is accompanied by distinct shifts in Moran's palette, which becomes increasingly lighter and less saturated as the forms recede into the distance. Moran also carries the viewer's eye in a circular motion—down the left-hand side, up the right, and across the clouds at top, which grow dense with precipitation as they loop back to the left to begin again. The painter's inclusion of this discrete rain shower also serves as a subtle reminder that the Grand Canyon owes its existence to the awesome, but often quiet, power of water as the progenitor of both growth and erosion.<sup>1</sup>

Painted in 1912, *Grand Canyon* is a product of Moran's long and intimate familiarity with the grand western landscape. Moran first ventured deep into the West in 1871, as part of Ferdinand V. Hayden's famed expedition to Yellowstone.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of pencil and watercolor sketches the painter executed throughout this life-changing adventure attest to his unbridled fascination with the awe-inspiring landscape, exceptional technical skill, and faithful adherence to the aesthetic philosophy of the influential British critic John Ruskin, who advocated direct study from nature.<sup>3</sup> Moran translated, combined, and embellished these visual notations in his Newark, New Jersey, studio to create his monumental *Grand Cañon of the Yellowstone* (1872; United States Department of the Interior), which was purchased by Congress and used to urge President Ulysses S. Grant to sign into law legislation designating Yellowstone America's first national park. The painter's equally ambitious *The Chasm of the Colorado* (1873–74; United States Department of the Interior), created after he accompanied John Wesley Powell's expedition into the Southwest in 1873, secured Moran's reputation as chief rival to Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) as the country's preeminent painter of the western landscape.<sup>4</sup> The degree to which Moran hitched his proverbial star to the West is

suggested by his pattern of signing his name with the distinctive colophon seen in the lower right corner of the Nelson-Atkins canvas: "TYM," for Thomas Yellowstone Moran.

Moran completed multiple western sojourns over the next two decades but did not return to the Grand Canyon until 1892, when the Santa Fe Railroad subsidized his travel in exchange for the copyright to a painting that it could use in promotional materials.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1901 Moran vacationed nearly every winter at the Grand Canyon, often courtesy of the Santa Fe Railroad. As Anne Morand has observed, the artist's sketches from the field were by this time generally far more cursory than those from the 1870s, a testament to his supreme confidence in his ability to draw on memory to re-create the appearance of the landscape in studio paintings.<sup>6</sup>

Moran created the Nelson-Atkins *Grand Canyon*, like many of his late paintings, by relying on memory and imagination as much as topographical exactitude. Tapping into his wealth of experience painting grand scenery as well as earlier specific studies of the area, including drawings of Zoroaster and Brahma from a visit in 1905, the seventy-five-year-old painter arranged the buttes, cliffs, and scraggly trees to create the desired aesthetic effect.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Moran's method was akin to a poet's in which words are composed in certain combinations to achieve particular imagistic and emotional ends.

Almost imperceptibly deceptive is Moran's habitual erasure from the scene of any signs of tourism.<sup>8</sup> *Grand Canyon* provides its beholder with an exclusive view of the site undisturbed by any evidence of habitation. By the turn of the century, such a view was a veritable impossibility thanks to growing hordes of vacationers, seasonal residents, like Moran, and adventure and treasure seekers arriving now not only by train but also, increasingly, by car. Consequently, Moran's *Grand Canyon* exudes a decidedly nostalgic aura, as it allows the viewer to imagine that he or she might be the very first to bear witness to its otherworldly beauty.

*Grand Canyon*'s most distinctive attribute—Moran's inscription of the painting to Ford Harvey—makes clear the deep personal and professional debt the painter owed the very industry he so effectively effaced in the composition. Director of the Fred Harvey Company, the railroad industry's primary dining and hotel contractor based in Kansas City, Harvey was able to provide special amenities and perquisites to distinguished travelers, such as Moran, who enhanced the marketability of the canyon. Moran's celebrity, in turn, was heightened by the industry's use of his name and imagery in promotional materials. While it is unknown if the two men ever met, they clearly felt grateful toward one another.<sup>9</sup> The gift remained in Harvey's family after his death in 1928 and passed to his daughter, who subsequently bequeathed it to the Museum.<sup>10</sup>

RRG/SM



## NOTES

1. Moran's inclusion of rain showers and storms in many of his Grand Canyon views suggests his acceptance of the geologic theories of the surveyor and geologist John Wesley Powell. Rain and its erosive power were critical to Powell's understanding of the geologic process; he promoted the uniformitarian view of gradual change over time rather than the opposing catastrophist theory of change through violent upheaval. See Elizabeth C. Childs, "Time's Profile: John Wesley Powell, Art, and Geology at the Grand Canyon," *American Art* 10 (Spring 1996), 6–35; and Joni Louise Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 95–99, also chap. 2, "Landscape as Metaphor."
2. The literature on Moran's participation in western surveys is extensive. See Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran, Artist of the Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); William H. Truettner, "'Scenes of Majesty and Enduring Interest': Thomas Moran Goes West," *Art Bulletin* 58 (June 1976), 241–59; Carol Clark, *Thomas Moran: Watercolors of the American West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*; Nancy K. Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997).
3. On these sketches, see Anne Morand, *Thomas Moran: The Field Sketches, 1856–1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).
4. Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran*, 48, addresses Moran's rivalry with Bierstadt. More evidence of competition between the two artists is provided by Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 182n1. On this topic, see also Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat. (New York: Hudson Hills Press, in association with the Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1990), 48–49, 51–53.
5. Morand, *Thomas Moran*, 77–78.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. For one such drawing of Zoroaster and Brahma from 1905, see *Bright Angel* (Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Okla.), illustrated in Morand, *Thomas Moran*, 283, no. 993. Drawings from a trip in 1908 also played a part in Moran's execution of the Nelson-Atkins oil. For examples, see Morand, *Thomas Moran*, 288, nos. 1020–25.
8. As early as the 1870s railroad entrepreneurs and marketers recognized artists as valuable assets in promoting tourist travel and business investment along their routes. Especially after 1901, when the spur line from Williams, Arizona, to the canyon rim itself was completed, the Santa Fe Railroad began actively courting artists by providing rail fare, lodging, sightseeing tours, studio space, and exhibition opportunities, often in return for paintings that became part of the corporate collection and publicity archive. For an extensive discussion of Moran's relationship with the railroad industry, see Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 134–36; and Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran*, 125, 164–65. Regarding the Santa Fe Railroad's relation with artists, see Marta Weigle and Barbara A. Babcock, eds., *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway*, exh. cat. (Phoenix, Ariz.: Heard Museum, 1996), 1–3, 13–15.
9. It is at least clear that Moran did not give *Grand Canyon* to Harvey in person. He shipped it to Harvey's Kansas City office in August 1912. See Moran's record book, 1901–21, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Okla.; and Thomas Moran Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 3275, frame 1450, where he records: "The Grand Canon / presented to Ford Harvey / sent August 1912."
10. For a discussion of Katherine Harvey's personal collection and tastes, see Edwin L. Wade and Katherine L. Chase, "A Personal Passion and Profitable Pursuit: The Katherine Harvey Collection of Native American Fine Art," in Weigle and Babcock, *The Great Southwest of Fred Harvey and the Santa Fe*, 148–54. The painting may have passed first to Harvey's son Frederick, who died in 1936.

## HENRY MOSLER (1841–1920)

### *Stroll in the Park*, c. 1875–77 (*Courtship*)

Oil on canvas

35½ × 26¾ in. (90.2 × 68 cm)

Signed and inscribed lower left: Henry Mosler. / München.

Bequest of Mrs. M. B. Nelson, 56-83/2

HENRY MOSLER WAS A LEADING cosmopolitan artist at the turn of the twentieth century. He painted portraits, historical subjects, and landscapes but is best known for his anecdotal genre scenes of American and Breton life, which he enlivened with historical costumes and accessories. He was admired for his carefully structured compositions, his technical virtuosity, and his ability to penetrate beneath the surface of everyday life and capture timeless human emotions.<sup>1</sup> Mosler was of the generation of American artists who pursued artistic training in Europe in the decades following the Civil War, and his mature style is a hybrid of his eclectic training in Düsseldorf, Paris, and Munich in the 1860s and 1870s. *Stroll in the Park* is one of the few extant works from his Munich period. Painted when Mosler was in the Bavarian capital, it is a fine example of the dark, rich palette and broad, painterly realist style of his Munich years and of his interest in then-popular historical costume genre subjects.<sup>2</sup>

Mosler was born in 1841 in Silesia, Prussia, to Gustave Mosler, a Berlin-trained lithographer who later became a principal in the Mosler-Bahmann Safe Company, and Sophie Weiner Mosler.<sup>3</sup> When he was eight years old, he and his family immigrated to the United States. During the next decade the family moved frequently—living in New York, Cincinnati, Nashville, and Richmond, Indiana—and his earliest art education was a series of ad hoc experiences. In 1859 his family settled permanently in Cincinnati, and Mosler began his first formal training with the portrait and genre painter James H. Beard. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Mosler worked as an artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*, producing fairly straightforward illustrations of camp life, troop movements, and skirmishes. In 1863, heeding Beard's advice, the artist went to Europe to pursue professional training in Düsseldorf.<sup>4</sup> He spent the next year and a half at the Royal Academy there, studying drawing with Heinrich Mücke and painting with Albert Kindler, a specialist in genre subjects.

As a student at the Düsseldorf Academy, Mosler drew from engravings, antique casts, and live models before learning to produce paintings distinguished by careful drawing, meticulous detail, and a highly polished finish, such as *Children under a Red Umbrella* (1865; Terra Foundation of American Art, Chicago).<sup>5</sup> At the end of his Düsseldorf training in 1866, Mosler went to Paris for six months to round out his studies with the history, genre, and

portrait painter Auguste-Antoine-Ernest Hébert. After returning to the United States in 1867, he married, worked in Cincinnati and New York, where he received portrait commissions, and sent genre and landscape subjects to various exhibitions. His reputation was established when *The Lost Cause* (1868; Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Ga.), a genre scene of the Civil War, was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1868.

In the fall of 1874 Mosler started making plans to return to Europe. The popularity of the Düsseldorf style, which had been highly regarded by American patrons and critics at midcentury, was being replaced by a preference for subjects and styles associated with the art capitals of Paris and Munich.<sup>6</sup> In 1875 Mosler went to Munich to refresh and augment his training. He arrived at an opportune time. Munich was enjoying a period of economic prosperity and national euphoria following the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71).<sup>7</sup> The presence of the Royal Academy, a strong art market, and premier collections of old and modern masters of the Alte Pinakothek and Neue Pinakothek had attracted an international community of artists that included numerous Americans, among them fellow Cincinnati artists Frank Duveneck, William Merritt Chase (q.v.), Walter Shirlaw, and J. Frank Currier.<sup>8</sup> Mosler became an active member of the Munich art colony, joining both the Munich Kunstverein and the American Artists Club started by Duveneck. He did not enroll in the Munich Royal Academy but studied privately with Alexander von Wagner, who taught classes in painting, and with Karl Theodore von Piloty, the director of the academy. Piloty, a disciple of the French artist Paul Delaroche, specialized in melodramatic history painting in which he emphasized historically accurate costumes and properties with careful attention to texture and detail. During this period Mosler was strongly influenced by the work of Piloty as well as the avant-garde taste in Munich for a realistic style inspired by seventeenth-century Dutch, Flemish, and Spanish painting.

Mosler used his time in Munich to explore new subjects and to experiment with a more fluid and expressive style of painting.<sup>9</sup> *Stroll in the Park* is an early essay into the category of historical “costume genre” paintings, which were enjoying great popularity in the European salons and with wealthy European and American collectors. Scenes of seventeenth-century cavaliers and gentlemen from the period of the French king Louis XIII were made particularly popular by the French painter Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier.<sup>10</sup> Mosler's scene of aristocratic courtship is a recasting of the garden of love motif, a theme popular with artists since the Middle Ages. An elegant lady and a cavalier dressed in seventeenth-century costumes stroll arm in arm down a footpath in a park. Involved



Fig. 1 Peter Paul Rubens, *Rubens and Hélène Fourment in Their Garden*, 1631. Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 51 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (97.5 × 130.8 cm). Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. no. 313



in an intimate tête-à-tête, their attention is directed toward each other, and the dense, woodland landscape and shallow middle ground create a sense of enclosure and privacy. Only the castle visible in the upper left background provides an illusion of spatial recession.

The composition is a mélange of sources that would have appealed to Mosler's audience. The lush garden setting recalls the grounds of the Nymphenburg palace and park on the outskirts of Munich. These splendid gardens, which surrounded the summer residence of the seventeenth-century Bavarian kings, were described at length in contemporary guidebooks.<sup>11</sup> The artist's more immediate source of inspiration was likely Peter Paul Rubens's *Rubens and Hélène Fourment in Their Garden* (Fig. 1), a painting he could have seen in the Alte Pinakothek.<sup>12</sup> Piloty encouraged his students to study the Baroque old masters, and his admiration for Rubens may have directed Mosler to the seventeenth-century painter. In Rubens's domesticated "love garden," the artist promenades arm in arm with his wife Hélène Fourment down a path, while in the background traditional garden of love iconography provides a key to his theme. The symbolic content of Mosler's garden of love is underscored by the intimacy of the couple's expressions, the enclosing composition, and, in particular, the swans (attributes of Venus) gliding on the small pond to the left.

The solidly drawn, volumetric figures of the woman and her swain, with their convincing contrapposto and their disposition on a diagonal stage, are indebted to lessons Mosler acquired at the Düsseldorf Academy and reemphasized during his studies with Hébert in Paris and with Piloty in Munich. Without relinquishing this academic armature, Mosler employed the dark palette and painterly brushwork favored by avant-garde Munich School artists to create a more powerful realism and to energize his composition.<sup>13</sup> The figures are subtly modeled, and soft, fluid brushstrokes have replaced Mosler's earlier enamel-like surfaces. The surrounding

woodland, painted with a dark, rich palette of browns and greens enlivened with slashes of orange, is a tour de force of bravura paint handling. Mosler's studies with Piloty probably influenced his dramatic placement of the figures against the dark landscape and the strong Caravaggesque lighting, as well as his emphasis on historical costumes and his skillful rendering of different textures.<sup>14</sup> Despite their seeming authenticity, the costumes in *Stroll in the Park* are romantic re-creations of seventeenth-century fashion rather than accurate period dress.<sup>15</sup> The faces of the models are not idealized but are particularized contemporary types and would have encouraged Mosler's viewers to engage in a bit of nostalgic escapism and imagine themselves in this scene of courtly romance.

*Stroll in the Park* was likely a pendant of the now unlocated painting *Recreation* of 1876.<sup>16</sup> In that composition, Mosler used the same models and vertical format and a similar garden setting; furthermore, both pictures were painted for Brandes and Wolff, a printmaking firm in Hanover, Germany.<sup>17</sup> There is little doubt that these paintings served as the bases of chromolithographs, a fact that explains Mosler's choice of subject. In addition to their popularity with wealthy collectors, cavalier subjects enjoyed a broad, popular appeal during the last half of the nineteenth century, due in part to such widely read, serialized authors as Alexandre Dumas. Nevertheless, Mosler's foray into seventeenth-century subjects was apparently limited to just a few paintings, although he explored the theme of young love and courtship and showed an interest in historical costume genre throughout his career.

In 1877 Mosler went to Paris, where he remained for seventeen years. He was a regular contributor to the Paris Salons and spent several summers in the French province of Brittany, where he began to paint pictures of Breton peasants in the new looser style and rich tonality that he had learned in Munich. His *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1879; Musée Départemental Breton, Quimper, France) was a great success at the 1879 Salon, becoming the



first painting by an American to be purchased by the French government for the Luxembourg Museum. In 1894 Mosler returned permanently to New York City, where he lived for the rest of his life, focusing primarily on American genre and historical paintings. He taught painting and composition in his Carnegie Hall studio in the winter months and ran a summer art school at his home in Margaretville, New York, in the Catskills.

Artistic tastes shifted away from sentimental genre scenes in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. As early as 1885, one American critic wrote of Mosler's work, "As a rule, the literary element is strong, but its quality is not of the highest."<sup>18</sup> Still, Mosler's adherence to narrative and universally appealing subjects made his work accessible to a wide audience and ensured his continued popularity. As Roger Riordan noted in 1895, "A painter who can paint, and who yet cares for subject and dramatic composition, who exerts his powers as a painter to hint at something beyond the momentary impression, and suggest a story is something of a rarity nowadays."<sup>19</sup>

GMD/LL

## NOTES

1. See, for example, "Pictures by Henry Mosler," *New York Times*, 19 October 1885, 4; and Theodore Child, "American Artists at the Paris Exhibition," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 79 (September 1889), 516.
2. An undated letter from Henry Mosler to May Milhon Nelson, the donor of the painting, states that it is "one of my paintings I executed when in Munich and I consider it a fine example of my work and congratulate you upon its possession." NAMA curatorial files.
3. The most comprehensive study of the artist is Barbara C. Gilbert, *Henry Mosler Rediscovered: A Nineteenth-Century American-Jewish Artist*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Skirball Museum, 1995). In her bibliography, 140–41, Gilbert cites a wealth of other sources on Mosler. Other useful studies include "Henry Mosler," *Art Amateur* 13 (November 1885), 113–16; Theodore Child, "American Artists at the Paris Exhibition," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 79 (September 1889), 516; "Our Artists at Home," *New York Herald* (Paris ed.), 11 July 1891, Sunday Supplement, NAMA curatorial files; "Mr. Henry Mosler," *Art Interchange* 30 (March 1893), 69–71; "Philip Martiny and Henry Mosler," *Metropolitan Magazine* 7 (March 1898), 235–47; Julia Rowland Myers, "The American Expatriate Painters of the French Peasantry, 1863–1893," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1989, 162–80; and Brigitte M. Foley, "Henry Mosler: Figure Drawings for Narrative Paintings," *American Art Review* 8 (August 1996), 100–103.
4. "Well-Known Artists Tell of the Paintings That Did Most to Win Fame for Them and How They Came to Take up Art," *New York Times*, 28 January 1912, sec. 5, 5. Mosler recalled that one day when out walking with Beard, "I broached the subject of studying abroad. We were passing at the time a cabinetmaker's shop. Without giving a direct answer to my question, Mr. Beard pointed to a fine mahogany table exquisitely carved and turned. 'What does it lack?' he asked. 'Sandpapering, varnishing,' was my prompt reply. 'Just so, my boy. . . . Go abroad for your sandpapering and varnishing.'"
5. For a discussion of the Düsseldorf program, see Donelson F. Hoopes, "The Düsseldorf Academy and the Americans," in *The Düsseldorf Academy and the Americans*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1972), 19–34; Anneliese Harding, "The Düsseldorf Academy," 4–6, and Brucia Witthoft, "American Artists in Düsseldorf," 7–15, in *American Artists in Düsseldorf: 1840–1865*, exh. cat. (Danforth, Conn.: Danforth Museum of Art, 1982); and William H. Gerdtz, "The Düsseldorf Connection," in Gerdtz and Mark Thistlethwaite, *Grand Illusions: History Painting in America* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of American Art, 1988), 125–65.
6. Linda Hene Skalet, "The Market for American Painting in New York: 1870–1915," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980, ii–iv, 39.
7. Michael Quick, "Munich and American Realism," in *Munich and American Realism in the 19th Century*, exh. cat. (Sacramento, Calif.: E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, 1978), 22–23.
8. S. G. W. Benjamin, "Contemporary Art in Germany," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 55 (June 1877), 4–6.
9. Other works from Mosler's Munich period include *Grandma's Tale* (c. 1875; Cincinnati Art Museum), *Recreation* (1876; location unknown), *Heidi* (1877; private collection), and *The Women and the Secret* (1877; private collection). In general, these works are sentimental, rural genre scenes, painted in a looser, more expressive style than Mosler's earlier paintings. Only *Recreation* and *Stroll in the Park* are set in the seventeenth century. Barbara C. Gilbert, Curator, Skirball Museum, to Gina M. D'Angelo, 4 February 2000, NAMA curatorial files.
10. For a discussion of French anecdotal historical genre painting and its popularity in America and Europe, see Eric M. Zafran, *Cavaliers and Cardinals: Nineteenth-Century French Anecdotal Paintings*, exh. cat. (Cincinnati: Taft Museum, 1992).
11. See, for instance, K. Baedeker, *Southern Germany and the Austrian Empire: Handbook for Travelers* (Coblenz: Karl Baedeker, 1868), 82. The grounds included several lakes, a swan pond, and pine forests of woody solitude through which one could catch a glimpse of the royal château.
12. Rodolph Marggraff, *Catalogue of the Pictures in the Old Royal Pinakothek at Munich* (Munich, 1800), 27.
13. Michael Quick has characterized the Munich style as a "dynamic balance of technique and realism." Quick, "Munich and American Realism," 28. A significant amount of the brushwork in *Stroll in the Park*, particularly in the upper left background, was reconstructed by Museum conservation staff, who worked from an early photograph of the painting. See Technical Notes.
14. Mosler owned costumes, furniture, and bric-a-brac, which he incorporated into finished pictures. Many of these properties were sold at auctions in 1900 and 1921. See American Art Galleries, New York, 18 July 1900, lots 137 and 143; and American Art Galleries, New York, 13 December 1921. The same white satin gown worn by the lady in *Stroll in the Park* reappears in an 1896 illustration of a painting by Mosler entitled *A Noble Lady of the Seventeenth Century* (location unknown). See Lillian Baynes, "Henry Mosler and His Work," *Illustrated American* 19 (29 February 1896), 272.
15. R. Turner Wilcox, *The Mode in Costume* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 153, 155; and Karen Baelawski, *The Guide to Historic Costume* (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1995), 111.
16. We are grateful to Barbara C. Gilbert for sharing information with us about these paintings and about the career of Henry Mosler. Gilbert to D'Angelo, 4 February 2000.
17. Henry Mosler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel 4285, frames 148–57. Entries in Mosler's account book between 24 February 1875 and 9 July 1877 list receipts from Brandes and Wolff and expenses incurred in the production of these paintings, that is, canvases and stretchers, paint, modeling fees, costume, trimming, and fabric purchases.
18. "Pictures by Henry Mosler," *New York Times*, 19 October 1885, 4.
19. Roger Riordan, "Henry Mosler," *Art Amateur* 71 (June 1895), 123.

## WILLIAM SIDNEY MOUNT (1807–1868)

### *Winding Up*, 1836 (*Courtship*)

Oil on panel

18<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 14<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (46.7 × 37.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: W<sup>M</sup> S. MOUNT. / 1836

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F77-39

IN HIS BOOK *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*, the French traveler and political historian Alexis de Tocqueville recorded his impressions of American life in the 1830s. De Tocqueville was particularly impressed by the freedom and self-assurance of young American women. “Even amidst the independence of early youth,” he wrote, “an American woman is always mistress of herself.” According to de Tocqueville, American women’s rational self-control, which he saw as representative of the nation’s democratic culture, was particularly evident during courtship. “A young woman does not contract [the conjugal tie] without considerable circumspection and apprehension,” he wrote. “Precocious marriages are rare.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Winding Up*, painted the year after *Democracy in America* was published, William Sidney Mount presented a similar view of a young American woman carefully sizing up a potential husband. Dressed emblematically in red and white, with a blue scarf over her arm, Mount’s Yankee maiden stands in a somewhat shabby farmhouse kitchen and winds a ball of yarn. Her suitor, who holds her skein wrapped around his extended hands, is seated before her on a broken chair. The young woman’s posture is graceful, and her stylish, albeit homemade, clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry reveal her social aspirations.<sup>2</sup> Her suitor, by contrast, is rustically dressed and, in defiance of period dictates of etiquette, continues to wear his hat indoors in the presence of a woman. His inelegant posture and openly adoring, animated expression further communicate his lack of social polish. Like the half-knitted stocking of unbleached wool on the stool before him, he is unfinished. The young woman, who regards him with coy attention, seems to be asking herself what she might make of him. Although the couple appears to be alone, a man’s hat hanging against the back wall suggests that the girl’s father is nearby. In fact, the viewer regards the pair from the position of a chaperone.

William Sidney Mount was born in Setauket, Long Island, New York.<sup>3</sup> His father died when he was still a boy, and his family settled in 1817 at his grandfather’s farm in nearby Stony Brook, thus beginning Mount’s lifetime association with that town. Mount apprenticed as a sign painter with his brother Henry for two years before entering the school of the National Academy of Design in 1826 to study drawing. For the next decade Mount divided his time between New York City and Stony Brook. During these years he increasingly turned to painting portraits, scenes from

history, landscapes, and, about 1830, genre pictures. The artist was America’s first successful genre painter. Although portraiture always occupied a significant portion of his time and gave him certain financial stability, scenes from American rustic life made his reputation.

In 1836, the year he painted *Winding Up*, Mount moved permanently back from New York to Stony Brook. By this time his reputation as a genre painter was established and rising toward its pinnacle.<sup>4</sup> The artist’s images of rural Americans hoeing, haying, courting, bargaining, and cider making were extremely popular with the new urban, merchant class of art patrons that came to the fore in the 1830s. John Glover of Manhattan and Fairfield, Connecticut, who commissioned *Winding Up*, was typical of Mount’s patrons during these years. Glover’s father had been raised on a farm in Fairfield County but had made a fortune in New York banking and real estate during the early years of the nineteenth century. As Franklin Kelly has argued, Mount’s genre paintings romanticized his patron’s rural roots at a moment when the United States—especially around New York City—were becoming increasingly industrialized.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the gentle humor with which Mount portrayed his rustic subjects emphasized the relative sophistication of his urban audience.

*Winding Up* was exhibited at the National Academy of Design’s 1837 annual exhibition along with Mount’s *Farmers Noonning* (1836; Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages, Stony Brook, N.Y.) and *Raffling for a Goose* (1837; Metropolitan Museum of Art).<sup>6</sup> Although criticism for that exhibition focused on the larger *Farmers Noonning*, *Winding Up* also received favorable attention. In particular, critics discussed the humorous narrative of the couple’s courtship, although they were divided about its outcome. A writer for the *New-York Mirror* understood that the young woman was about to break off with her admirer: “Can anything be more beautifully correct than the graceful figure, arch (yet modest) expression, of the American farmer’s daughter? She has asked her clownish admirer to hold the skein, while she holds the ball in her own hands, and is winding up a courtship not suited to her taste. We may imagine that when the yarn is dropped off, and he drops his hands, she may dismiss him by dropping a *curtsey*.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, a critic from the *New-Yorker* writing on the same day saw a happy ending to this tale: “No conception could be more agreeable than this. There is a fine rustic ease in the suitor; his face has a broad grin of inward exultation, declaring that he has ‘turned up hearts’ and feels happy in the conquest. . . . The bashful timidity of the female is exquisite.”<sup>8</sup>

These critics’ differing opinions stem from the inherent ambiguity of Mount’s scene. The suitor has clearly made up his mind in



W.C. MOUNT  
1836.

favor of the girl. The stick he had been whittling—an activity that Mount used in other paintings to signify decision making—is abandoned beneath his chair, and he has willingly allowed his hands to be bound by the object of his affections.<sup>9</sup> The young woman, however, continues to deliberate. Her dominant position within the painting—she has literally entangled the man in her web—communicates her complete control of the situation.<sup>10</sup> The ball is truly, as the critic for the *New-York Mirror* noted, in her hands. While her right foot, which she has sidled forward to touch his, offers a hopeful sign, the downward-hanging horseshoe on the back wall could be read symbolically as a sign that the suitor's luck has run out. However, this object actually has several meanings within American folklore. First and foremost, it was recognized as a symbol of protection because it was made of iron, which was believed to be able to repel witches. Also, the arch form of the horseshoe is connected to the moon and ultimately fertility. The horseshoe commonly recurs as a good luck charm, but there has been continual debate as to which way it should hang so that luck is ensured. Thus, while our modern eye may immediately associate the upside-down horseshoe in *Winding Up* with luck running out or bad luck, it could also have been understood as signifying that the luck would run into the room as well as protecting this couple and ensuring a fruitful marriage.<sup>11</sup>

Mount carefully constructed each one of his paintings. He produced only two to five pictures a year and often made numerous drawings and sketches for each one. However, documentation of the creation of Mount's paintings from the 1830s, and of *Winding Up* in particular, is sparse. Only one sketch directly related to *Winding Up* is known today (Fig. 1), and it focuses on the two figures. In one of his journals following an entry dated 14 November 1852, Mount noted that the picture was “painted in the same way [as *The Breakdown*]—at Stony Brook, at the residence of Capt. Henry Smith,” that is, “by the aid of two south windows (in winter) and separated by a curtain to divide the two lights. The artist by one window & the model by the other.”<sup>12</sup> How long it took Mount to complete the painting is unknown. The artist's reference to its being painted in winter could refer either to early 1836 or the year's end. At any rate, it was still in his studio on 24 December, when it was seen by a writer from the *New-York Mirror*.<sup>13</sup>

Composition and painting technique were very important to Mount. The majority of the pages of his diaries that survive are filled with technical thoughts and notations of practical experiments.<sup>14</sup> In the winter of 1836 Mount was occupied with studying treatises in perspective and the writings of John Burnet.<sup>15</sup> The one-point perspective, shallow space, and coloration of *Winding Up* particularly reflect Mount's occupation with these specific interests. They also attest to Mount's great debt to seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Many of the paintings cited by Burnet are Dutch, and Mount could have seen Dutch paintings in private collections in New York.<sup>16</sup> Another influential source for Mount was the work of the Scotsman Sir David Wilkie. Mount would have been familiar with Wilkie's work through available prints.<sup>17</sup> His depictions of the pleasant side of country living, like that seen in *Winding Up*, are



Fig. 1 William Sidney Mount, *Study for "Winding Up,"* c. 1836. Ink on paper, 4¾ × 3½ in. (12.1 × 8.9 cm). Private collection

akin to the British models Wilkie exemplified, leading one critic to refer to him as “a Wilkie, junior. The only one in this country.”<sup>18</sup> Also from Wilkie, but ultimately from the Dutch on whose work the Scot's was mostly based, Mount borrowed the geometric organization of space, the use of small gestures and details, the definition of interior space by architectural elements, the placement of action in the foreground, and the focus on a frozen moment.<sup>19</sup>

In the popular comedies enacted on the New York stage, Mount found another important source of inspiration. Both Sarah Burns and Deborah Johnson have rightly made connections between *Winding Up* and the Yankee theater tradition that was already well ensconced by the 1830s and very familiar to Mount.<sup>20</sup> Mount's uncle, Micah Hawkins, wrote the first successful American comic opera in 1824.<sup>21</sup> A watercolor sketch, which Mount painted at the Bowery Theater in the early 1830s, shows an actress whose posture and costume are very similar to those of the young woman in *Winding Up* (Fig. 2). Even more significantly, the male figure in Mount's painting is a stock character of American comic theater as well as literature from the 1830s. The character of the Yankee was American, rustic, unaffected, unrefined, provincial, a tricky trader, a farmer-philosopher, and clownish, especially in love.<sup>22</sup> One of the Yankee's most endearing and comical aspects was his repeated failure in love. His unromantic, clumsy attempts at courting were regularly told in poems, stories, and plays.<sup>23</sup> Because so many of the characters in these narratives were named Jonathan, the type was



Fig. 2 William Sidney Mount, *Costume Drawn at the Bowery Theatre*, 23 January 1832. Watercolor and pencil on paper,  $4\frac{7}{8} \times 4$  in. (12.3 × 10.2 cm). The Long Island Museum of American Art, History & Carriages, Stony Brook, Long Island, N.Y., Bequest of Ward Melville, 1977

so called. His mixed bag of traits meant that he was celebrated as well as a cause for embarrassment. As Maura Jortner has pointed out, Yankees on the stage, in this country as well as abroad, embodied both rural naïveté and such renowned, supposedly American characteristics as self-reliance and intrepidity.<sup>24</sup> Thus, much like independent-minded young women, they served as emblems of American culture.

It was precisely this comic type that the critic from the *New-York Mirror* evidently saw in *Winding Up*. Yet, as a comparison of *Winding Up* with Mount's preliminary figure study makes clear, the artist softened the caricatured aspect of both the Yankee and the country belle in his finished composition. In the sketch, both figures appear to be awkward bumpkins. The woman cranes her neck to gawk at her suitor, who sits with his coat tail threaded through the chair's rungs and stares bashfully at the yarn in his hands. In *Winding Up*, by contrast, Mount presents an assiduously refined young woman and a suitor who, though unsophisticated, is confident and at ease in her presence. Placed in a stagelike space of muted browns and bathed in light coming in from the right (presumably from a window), the woman and the man gaze affectionately at each other.

One of the hottest topics for debate in the 1830s was the relative merit of country versus city life. In 1830 less than 7 percent of the population in the United States lived in cities of eight thou-

sand or more. By the end of the decade a great migration to the cities had begun to turn the tide the other way.<sup>25</sup> Mount felt this dilemma personally. Running throughout his existing diaries is a commentary on the benefits of city life and the virtues of the country. For him, New York was the place to see art and socialize, but it was too crowded and dirty; Stony Brook, on the other hand, was beautiful but psychologically isolated, the people were indifferent to art, and life was difficult.<sup>26</sup> The year before *Winding Up*, Mount had painted *The Sportsman's Last Visit* (1835; Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages, Stony Brook, N.Y.) in which a country gentleman competes with a city dandy for the attentions of a pretty country girl. In that painting, the rural man was clearly the loser.<sup>27</sup> In *Winding Up*, the country beau's prospects are brighter. While Mount did not conceal the arduousness of rural life in the Nelson-Atkins painting, he presented it as the cradle from which a more refined American society was rising. By emphasizing the young man's determination and earnest good nature, and by presenting the young woman's social aspirations and thoughtful self-determination, Mount created a genre scene that is both a humorous reflection on the vicissitudes of rural courtship and a celebration of the youthful, upwardly mobile, democratic culture of the United States.

Mount wrote in one of his journals, "Paint pictures that will take with the public—never paint for the few, but for the many."<sup>28</sup> True to this aspiration, he instigated in this country an accessible and broadly appealing form of genre painting. Indeed, evidence of *Winding Up*'s popularity can be found in correspondence through the 1840s concerning its possible use as an engraving.<sup>29</sup> Probably with the goal of appealing to a wide audience, Mount left open many possible interpretations of *Winding Up* and thereby suggested the fundamental paradoxes of American life in the 1830s. For those disdainful of rural life, it could appear as a bit of comic opera. For the romantic, it could suggest a pastoral love idyll. For the patriotic, it could display all that was fine in America. For lovers of art, it was an example of finely crafted painting. For Mount himself, a lifelong bachelor who had just moved from New York City to the country at the time he painted *Winding Up*, it might reflect his own ambivalence about rural life and romantic love. Though he celebrated both themes in the Nelson-Atkins painting, he did so from a slight ironic remove.

MCC/LL

## NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835; New York: New American Library, 1956), 234, 236.
2. Carol Kregloh, Museum Specialist, Smithsonian Institution, telephone conversation with the authors, 26 May 2005. The distinctive pinkish red color of the young woman's gown, which appears to be made of homespun cloth dyed with madder, marks it as homemade. At the same time, the woman's side curls and top knot, and her gown's high hem and waist, wide neck, and long leg-of-mutton sleeves conform quite closely to American fashions for the summer of 1835. See "A Description for the Present Fashions," *Godey's Ladies Book* 11 (July 1835), 2. One contemporary viewer of the painting noted with pride that the "taste in the arrangement of [her] hair and apparel would be unnatural in the peasant-girl of Europe; but it is perfectly characteristic of the yeoman's daughter of America." "The Fine Arts: William Sidney Mount," *New-York Mirror* 14 (24 September 1836), 206.
3. The three main sources for material on Mount are Mary Bartlett Cowdrey and Herman Warner Williams Jr., *William Sidney Mount, 1807–1868: An American Painter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Alfred Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975); and Deborah J. Johnson, *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life*, exh. cat. (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1998).
4. Mount became well known not only from his yearly offerings to the annual exhibitions of the National Academy of Design from 1828 until his death but also through the dissemination of prints after his work, which first appeared in 1834. Herman Warner Williams Jr., "William Sidney Mount," in Cowdrey and Williams, *William Sidney Mount*, 5.
5. See Franklin Kelly, "Mount's Patrons," in Johnson, *William Sidney Mount*, 109–28.
6. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826–1860* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), 2:42.
7. "The Fine Arts. The National Academy of Design. Concluded," *New-York Mirror* 14 (17 June 1837), 407.
8. "Exhibition, National Academy of Design—Concluded," *New-Yorker* 3 (17 June 1837), 205.
9. For figures who whittle while making decisions in paintings by Mount, see *Bargaining for a Horse* (1835; New-York Historical Society) and *Coming to a Point* (1854; New-York Historical Society). See also Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 31–32.
10. Carl N. Degler has noted that women in the nineteenth century had the greater autonomy and could exercise the greater freedom and individuality during courtship. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 19–20.
11. Marjorie Tallman, *Dictionary of American Folklore* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 151.
12. Recorded in Cowdrey and Williams, *William Sidney Mount*, 17.
13. "The Fine Arts: William S. Mount," *New-York Mirror* 14 (24 December 1836), 206.
14. See, for example, diary entry for January 1846, quoted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 141.
15. In the collection of Mount materials at the Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages is a "Perspective Notebook" inscribed with the date 29 February 1836. The book contains twenty-six drawings Mount copied from J. P. Thénot, *Cours de Perspective* (1829) and Edward Edwards, *Perspective on the Principles of Dr. Brook Taylor* (London, 1803). A portion of a letter Luman Reed sent to Mount on 29 February 1836 reads, "I am happy to hear that you find 'Burnet on painting' interesting to you." Reed was referring to John Burnet, *Practical Essays on Art* (London, 1827), a popular treatise on the practical matters of painting.
16. Benjamin N. Pflingstag, "Aspects of Form and Time in the Paintings of William Sidney Mount," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, 1980, 30–31, 41; and for an overview of the influence of Dutch painting in Mount's time, see H. Nichols B. Clark, "The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Genre Painting on American Genre, 1800–1865," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1982.
17. Catherine Hoover, "The Influence of David Wilkie's Prints on the Genre Paintings of William Sidney Mount," *American Art Journal* 13 (Summer 1981), 33.
18. Unidentified review of the 1835 annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, William Sidney Mount Scrapbook, Emma S. Clark Memorial Public Library, Setauket, New York, quoted in David Cassidy and Gail Shrott, *William Sidney Mount: Works in the Collection of the Museums at Stony Brook* (Stony Brook, N.Y.: Museums at Stony Brook, 1983), 55. See also Donald Keyes, "The Sources for William Sidney Mount's Earliest Genre Paintings," *Art Quarterly* 32 (1969), 262.
19. Hoover, "The Influence of David Wilkie's Prints," 25.
20. Sarah Burns, "Yankee Romance: The Comic Courtship Scene in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 4 (1986), 51–75; Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 99–190; and Johnson, "William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life," in *William Sidney Mount*, 32.
21. Edward P. Buffet, "William Sidney Mount and His Environment," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 7 (October 1923), 75.
22. Burns, *Pastoral Inventions*, 149.
23. *Ibid.*, 158.
24. Maura Jortner, "Playing 'America' on Nineteenth-Century Stages; Or Jonathan in England and Jonathan at Home," Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2003.
25. Francis Hodge, *Yankee Theater: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825–1850* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 29.
26. Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 8.
27. See Holly Pyne Connor, "City-Country Contrasts in American Genre Painting, 1830–1860," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1996, 87–91.
28. Quoted in Cowdrey and Williams, *William Sidney Mount*, 11.
29. Letters from 1842 and 1849 show that *Winding Up* was offered and considered for engraving in the popular illustrated giftbook *The Gift*, and as a single-sheet engraving for the Apollo Association and for the dealer Goupil's in New York. *Winding Up* seems never to have been engraved, perhaps because it was in private hands. Unfortunately, no other correspondence that could shed light on the matter has appeared. See Mount to E. L. Carey, 9 January 1842; Jonathan Sturges to Mount, 30 December 1842; and Mount to William Schaus, 14 November 1849; all quoted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 76–77, 99, 159.

## GEORGIA O'KEEFFE (1887–1986)

### *Apple Blossoms*, 1930

Oil on canvas

36 × 24 in. (91.4 × 61 cm)

Signed and dated on verso upper center: Georgia O Keeffe

1930

Gift of Mrs. Louis Sosland, FS1-62

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE IS JUSTLY FAMOUS for her paintings of flowers, which elevated a traditionally humble still-life genre into a powerful mode of modernist expression. Working from actual blossoms, the artist magnified their scale, intensified their colors, and edited and stylized their forms, lifting them out of their ordinary, transitory existence and transforming them into vivid and monumental presences. O'Keeffe painted more than two hundred pictures of flowers, most of them between the late 1910s and the early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Her subjects included such blossoms as calla lilies, eanmas, irises, jaeks-in-the-pulpit, orchids, petunias, poppies, and roses. The flowers painted by O'Keeffe range in hue from pale whites and pinks to intense yellows and reds to deep blues, purples, and blacks. With their sensuous forms and vibrant colors, O'Keeffe's flower paintings glorify the inexhaustible beauty and fecundity of nature, her lifelong source of artistic inspiration.

O'Keeffe painted certain flowers, such as roses and calla lilies, numerous times over the course of several years. Apple blossoms, however, appeared in her work only in the spring of 1930, when she devoted three canvases to the subject. The Nelson-Atkins version, measuring three by two feet, is the largest of these. About half a dozen pink and white multipetaled flowers fill the painting. Situated squarely in the upper center of the canvas and dominating the composition is a large, white, frontal blossom with a cluster of yellow stamens at its heart. Below it is a smaller, pink-tinged blossom, also seen head-on. On either side of the frontal blossoms are flowers seen in profile, one at the lower left and the other at the upper right. Overlapped by the four principal flowers are the petals of more blossoms. Pink buds appear at the upper left and lower right, juxtaposed with curvaceous green leaves. The voids between buds, leaves, and petals along the picture's margins are filled with powdery light blue.

Although this blue connotes sky, the painting does not picture a horizon line. Neither does it feature any branches of the apple tree that has grown these flowers. Without such cues, the viewer cannot tell which way is up; the gathered leaves and blossoms seemingly float in space, like clouds, liberated from the forces of gravity. Buoyant and expansive, the flowers appear to push out from the front of the canvas and to burst beyond its borders, which crop buds, leaves, and blossoms on all four sides. They swell and pulsate with the vitality of new life. And yet, this passionate content

is conveyed, somewhat paradoxically, through a style of cool precision. The canvas has a dry, coarse surface. The edges of most forms are crisply defined and their interiors are modeled with great subtlety. The smooth surfaces of the leaves are described through fluent brushwork, while the scratchy texture of the petals has been convincingly rendered through dabbing rather than brushing. The combination of voluptuous imagery and smooth technique is characteristic of O'Keeffe's mature paintings, which looked to one eonemporary critic as if they had been "wished upon the canvas."<sup>2</sup>

The technical control evident in *Apple Blossoms* reflects the rigorous academie training O'Keeffe received as an art student. The second of seven children born into a prosperous Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, farming family, O'Keeffe decided early in life that she wanted to be an artist. In 1905–6 she studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and in 1907–8 at the Art Students League in New York, where she was a prizewinning student of William Merritt Chase (q.v.). In 1914–15, after a brief period of study in Virginia and a stint teaching high school in Amarillo, Texas, O'Keeffe studied under Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York. Dow's teaching, which was informed by Japanese aesthetic principles, emphasized the formal elements of design rather than the imitation of nature. O'Keeffe gratefully recalled: "It was Arthur Dow who affected my start, who helped me to find something of my own. . . . This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way."<sup>3</sup> During this period, O'Keeffe was also influenced by her reading of Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* to conceive of art as an expression of "inner necessity" rather than a copy of the external world.

In the fall of 1915, while teaching at Columbia College in South Carolina, O'Keeffe created a series of abstract charcoal drawings combining organic and geometric elements, which marked her artistic breakthrough. She sent several of these works to a friend in New York, Anita Pollitzer, who in turn showed them to Alfred Stieglitz, the avant-garde photographer and art dealer, who in his Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, known as 291 for their Fifth Avenue address, displayed the works of pioneering European and American modernists. As a gallery director and an irrepressible advocate of modern art, Stieglitz supported particularly the efforts of the Americans Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove (q.v.), Marsden Hartley (q.v.), John Marin, Edward Steichen, and Paul Strand, a group with whom O'Keeffe became closely associated.<sup>4</sup>

Impressed by the power and originality of O'Keeffe's work, Stieglitz included her drawings in a group show at 291 in the spring of 1916 and struck up a relationship with O'Keeffe herself, who was back in New York for further study with Dow. In the fall of 1916 O'Keeffe returned to Texas to head the art department at West Texas State Normal College in Canyon. There, in response





to the open landscape, she produced a radiantly colored series of semiabstract watercolors. In the spring of 1917 Stieglitz gave O’Keeffe her first solo exhibition, the final show held at 291, and the following year O’Keeffe moved to New York. That summer, Stieglitz left his wife for O’Keeffe; they would marry in 1924.

In 1918 O’Keeffe returned to oil painting and over the next few years created a number of pure abstractions, often with sensuous colors and folded spaces penetrated by slits and orifices. She also painted simple still-life subjects of fruit, leaves, flowers, and vegetables. Stieglitz, meanwhile, had begun photographing O’Keeffe in 1917, a project he would continue over the course of their relationship. For many of the early photographs, O’Keeffe posed nude. Stieglitz exhibited several of these photographs in 1921 at the Anderson Galleries. In 1923 he staged at the same gallery an exhibition of one hundred works by O’Keeffe, the first of the annual O’Keeffe exhibitions he would mount virtually every year until his death in 1946. Numerous reviewers of the 1923 exhibition, conditioned by Stieglitz’s photographs to see O’Keeffe as an erotic being and influenced by fashionable Freudian ideas, suggested that O’Keeffe’s abstractions were unconscious expressions of her female sexuality—an idea that Stieglitz promoted but that O’Keeffe deplored.<sup>5</sup>

Hoping to thwart further sexual interpretations of her work, O’Keeffe, following the 1923 show, “got down to an effort to be objective.”<sup>6</sup> Working at the Stieglitz family property at Lake George, New York, where she and Stieglitz spent their summers, O’Keeffe began to paint enlarged, frontal images of tree leaves and, the next year, her famous series of magnified flowers. These paintings emulated the close-up aesthetic of the photographer Paul Strand, a young associate of Stieglitz whose work O’Keeffe greatly admired. But while Strand magnified objects to turn them into abstractions, O’Keeffe did so to lend them greater compositional presence and emotional force. According to O’Keeffe’s later account, she was inspired to paint enlarged flowers after seeing a small floral still life by the nineteenth-century French painter Henri Fantin-Latour—a still life whose fragile beauty went virtually unnoticed amid the modern city’s obsession with speed, power, and technological advance.<sup>7</sup> “Nobody sees a flower—really,” wrote O’Keeffe in 1939,

it is so small—we haven’t time—and to see takes time like to have a friend takes time. . . . So I said to myself—I’ll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.<sup>8</sup>

First shown in 1925 at Stieglitz’s *Seven Americans* show at the Anderson Galleries, O’Keeffe’s magnified flowers stimulated much discussion and quickly became her signature subject. While O’Keeffe’s choice of flowers as a subject was entirely personal, flowers carried connotations that the artist may not have meant to express. In nineteenth-century American culture, women were closely associated with flowers, which symbolized ideal feminine

qualities of innocence, purity, and beauty. Paradoxically, in the newly Freudianized world of the 1920s, flowers evolved into erotic symbols.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, many critics of the 1920s saw O’Keeffe’s voluptuous flowers as sexual metaphors—a source of continuing irritation to the artist, who denied that this was her intention. The suggestions of vulval and phallic imagery in O’Keeffe’s paintings are, as her biographer Roxana Robinson reminds us, based in the facts of botany: “Flowers do bear structural similarities to human reproductive organs, and this has more to do with the process of reproduction, both horticultural and human, than with the suppressed or expressed sexuality of an artist who paints the image of a flower.”<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that O’Keeffe’s flower paintings have sexual content, but to suggest that this content should be construed in broad rather than narrow terms—as a celebration of nature’s primal life forces.

Despite her frustration with the continuing sexual interpretations of her flower pictures, O’Keeffe persisted in painting them throughout the second half of the 1920s. Other themes during this period included abstractions; Lake George landscapes, trees, and leaves; seashells gathered from the coast of Maine; and the towering skyscrapers of New York. Breaking her pattern of summering in Lake George with Stieglitz, O’Keeffe spent the summer of 1929 in Taos, New Mexico, and was captivated by the dry and bright southwestern landscape. From this point onward, O’Keeffe would spend most of her summers in New Mexico; she settled there permanently in 1949.

O’Keeffe’s summer trip to Taos in 1930 was preceded by a spring sojourn in Lake George. It was unusual for O’Keeffe to be at Lake George so early in the year; she and Stieglitz normally went up between June and August, with O’Keeffe often remaining in the fall to paint. In early April 1930 O’Keeffe wrote to a friend, “I am going to Lake George on May 7th—Stieglitz will go up later for a few days—he plans to go for the summer sometime in June—. The fruit trees are blooming here now—it is about two weeks later up there so it should be lovely.”<sup>11</sup> At Lake George O’Keeffe painted spring flowers that had not heretofore appeared in her art: the jack-in-the-pulpit, which she depicted six times, and the apple blossoms, to which she devoted three canvases. While the jack-in-the-pulpit, a fleshy, sculptural flower with furling leaves and dark coloration, served as the basis for some of O’Keeffe’s most dramatic flower abstractions, such as *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. V* (1930; National Gallery of Art), the apple blossom, with its delicate structure, flat corolla, and light hues, received from her a relatively naturalistic treatment.

Apple blossoms were a popular subject among late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American artists, appearing in pictures by Jasper Francis Cropsey (q.v.), John Joseph Enneking, Martin Johnson Heade (q.v.), John La Farge, Enoch Wood Perry, and a host of lesser known painters.<sup>12</sup> There is no evidence, however, that O’Keeffe was aware of or interested in this tradition. More likely, she was attracted to the subject because of the associations that apples held for her and for Stieglitz in their life together at Lake George. Between 1920 and 1922, when the

fruit harvests at Lake George were unusually abundant, Stieglitz made numerous photographs of apples and apple trees and several portraits that included apples. O’Keeffe painted several still lifes of apples in 1921. In 1920 Stieglitz had photographed her holding apple branches and resting her head on a basket of apples (both, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, National Gallery of Art). As Sarah Greenough has pointed out, Stieglitz and the artists and writers of his circle considered the apple a symbol of America.<sup>13</sup> Stieglitz likely posed O’Keeffe with apples to intimate that her artistic being was firmly rooted in the American soil and perhaps to suggest that she produced art as naturally and spontaneously as a tree produces fruit.<sup>14</sup> As an extension of this idea, Stieglitz saw O’Keeffe reflected in her paintings of natural subjects, writing of her as “self portrayed through flowers and fruits.”<sup>15</sup> O’Keeffe, also fond of organic metaphors, likened her husband to a gardener and herself to a plant: “Stieglitz . . . brings remarkable things out of the people he comes in contact with. I feel like a little plant that he has watered and weeded and dug around.”<sup>16</sup>

Significant for the interpretation of O’Keeffe’s 1930 apple blossom paintings is the fact that Stieglitz on an earlier occasion compared O’Keeffe to an apple tree in bloom. At Lake George on 27 July 1922 he playfully inscribed a photograph of a flowering apple tree to O’Keeffe: “In springtime some little girls go crazy.—Like appletrees sometimes do.—I know one such little girl—Guess who she is.—A riddle for Georgia O’Keeffe [signed] ‘291.’”<sup>17</sup> Stieglitz doubtless found the apple blossom an appropriate floral sign for O’Keeffe not only because of the American qualities he perceived in its fruit but also because of the flower’s white color. For Stieglitz, philosophically steeped in late-nineteenth-century Symbolist thought, which posited correspondences between physical phenomena and spiritual qualities, white was a particularly resonant color, symbolizing virtue and an immaculate purity of spirit. From the beginning of their relationship, he had seen O’Keeffe as “white,” and his letters and recorded conversations contain numerous references to her “whiteness.”<sup>18</sup>

Inclined toward the same sort of organic metaphors that Stieglitz favored, and fully aware he associated her with apples, apple blossoms, and whiteness, O’Keeffe may well have recognized her *Apple Blossoms* as a kind of self-portrait. However, she certainly did not intend the average viewer to understand the picture in that way, nor would she likely have considered such a biographical interpretation, however interesting, relevant to the painting’s success as a work of art. In the end, O’Keeffe would have wished for *Apple Blossoms*, like all of her flower paintings, to be appreciated in larger terms—as a passionate celebration of the beauty, mystery, and vitality of nature, transmuted into art.

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## NOTES

- Nicholas Callaway, afterword to *Georgia O’Keeffe: One Hundred Flowers*, ed. Callaway (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, in association with Callaway Editions, New York, 1987), unpaginated. A definitive inventory of the artist’s floral subjects can be gleaned from Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). I am grateful to Charles Eldredge for generously sharing with me numerous ideas, insights, and documents that assisted me in preparing this entry.
- Henry McBride, “Georgia O’Keeffe’s Exhibition,” *New York Evening Sun*, 14 January 1933, 10.
- O’Keeffe, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich and Doris Bry, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, exh. cat. (New York: Praeger Publishers, in association with Whitney Museum of American Art, 1970), 8.
- For a thorough scholarly examination of Stieglitz and his gallery activities, see Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000). Of her Stieglitz circle colleagues, O’Keeffe was most often compared to Dove, who shared her devotion to nature. For an analysis of the pairing of O’Keeffe and Dove by critics, see Marcia Brennan, “Arthur Dove and Georgia O’Keeffe: Corporeal Transparency and Strategies of Inclusion,” in *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 96–135.
- A sustained dissection of the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on the critical reception of Stieglitz circle artists can be found in Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*.
- O’Keeffe to Sherwood Anderson, 11 February 1924, Sherwood Anderson Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago, in Jack Cowart, Juan Hamilton, and Sarah Greenough, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 176.
- See the interview with O’Keeffe in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist’s Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), 190–91.
- O’Keeffe, “About Myself,” in *Georgia O’Keeffe: Exhibition of Oils and Pastels*, exh. checklist (New York: An American Place, 1939), unpaginated.
- This symbolic inversion is discussed in Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 280–83.
- Ibid.*, 282.
- O’Keeffe to Dorothy Brett, early April 1930, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, in Cowart, Hamilton, and Greenough, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 200.
- See the list of paintings that have “apple blossoms” in their titles in the Smithsonian Institution Art Inventories Combined Catalogue, [www.siris.si.edu/webpac-bin/wgbroker](http://www.siris.si.edu/webpac-bin/wgbroker).
- Sarah E. Greenough, “From the American Earth: Alfred Stieglitz’s Photographs of Apples,” *Art Journal* 41 (Spring 1981), 46–54.
- The fact that an apple appears prominently in the symbolic “poster portrait” of O’Keeffe created by her friend and fellow Stieglitz protégé Charles Demuth (1923–24; Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University) suggests that her association with this fruit extended beyond her intimate relationship with Stieglitz.
- Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, 1924, quoted in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O’Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics, 1916–1929* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1989), 334n36.
- O’Keeffe to Blanche Matthias, probably March 1926, quoted in Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 295.
- The photograph is in the collection of The J. Paul Getty Museum. I am grateful to Charles Eldredge for bringing this photograph to my attention.
- Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 263. See also Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O’Keeffe: American and Modern*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with InterCultura, Fort Worth, and Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, 1993), 165.

# THOMAS PROUDLEY OTTER (1832–1890)

## *On the Road*, 1860

Oil on canvas

22 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 45 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (56.2 × 115.3 cm)

Signed and dated lower center: T. O. / P. / 18 60

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 50-1

LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT the life and art of Thomas P. Otter. A Pennsylvania native, he began his artistic career as an apprentice to a Philadelphia engraver, probably David Scattergood.<sup>1</sup> After two years in that endeavor, the twenty-year-old Otter entered the studio of James Hamilton, a prominent Philadelphia marine painter. Even though Otter continued to work as an engraver into the late 1850s, he was chiefly interested in painting.<sup>2</sup> To that end he studied for three years at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and then opened a studio of his own in Philadelphia. In the late 1850s and early 1860s Otter seems to have met with qualified success, having students of his own and occasionally exhibiting his pictures at the Pennsylvania Academy, National Academy of Design in New York, and the Boston Athenaeum. By 1865 Otter had left Philadelphia for New Britain, Pennsylvania. About 1871 he moved to Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where he taught art at Linden Female Seminary. Otter's artistic ventures seem to have continued locally during the 1870s, but after an 1882 exhibition of his work for the Bucks County Bicentennial, he virtually disappeared.

*On the Road*, dated 1860 and therefore painted during Otter's tenure in Philadelphia, is one of just a handful of his works that survive or are known from exhibition records. Of his Philadelphia paintings, the majority, like *The Raft*, *Moonlight* (c. 1860; private collection), which was shown with *On the Road* at the 1860 Pennsylvania Academy annual exhibition, are marine nocturnes. A few titles in addition to *On the Road* suggest that Otter also was interested in picturing commerce and transportation. *Shipping Hay*, *A Wheat Field*, and *On the River*, which perhaps was a companion picture to and was exhibited with the Nelson-Atkins canvas at the Boston Athenaeum in 1860, all may have fit in this category.<sup>3</sup>

Otter's paintings of American enterprise, especially transportation, reflected important issues of the day and could have been directly inspired by his potential patrons in Philadelphia. The city had been a center for the transportation industry, especially railroad and locomotive building, beginning in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> Matthias Baldwin and Joseph Harrison Jr., both locomotive manufacturers in Philadelphia, owned works by Otter.<sup>5</sup> Although the ownership history of *On the Road* is unknown before 1949, the prominence of the train in the painting and, in fact, the entire image would certainly have pleased any of the wealthy railroad magnates in Philadelphia.

*On the Road* praised railroad technology and its role in the development of the West. Otter's juxtaposition of a Conestoga wagon and a train contrasts the new technology, which moves smoothly and directly, with the older mode, bumping along a rougher, more circuitous route. The Conestoga wagon, which originated in Pennsylvania in the 1750s, was the primary means of transportation in the eastern United States through the 1840s.<sup>6</sup> Although these boat-shaped, swaybacked wagons were rarely used to travel west of Missouri, Conestogas nevertheless became synonymous with westward migration.<sup>7</sup> Full of pioneers or freight goods, they represented the march of civilization west.<sup>8</sup> By the 1850s the necessity of a transcontinental railroad for better overland travel was acknowledged, but sectional strife stymied its completion until 1869.<sup>9</sup> The railroad train, sleek in style, made of iron, and coal driven, was recognized as key to America's future as an industrial nation and symbolized the next step of American progress.<sup>10</sup>

Although the railroad and questions of transportation occupied the public's mind in the years immediately before the Civil War, paintings of trains were not common. Images of technology appeared mainly as illustrations in popular periodicals.<sup>11</sup> Artists working on canvas tended to incorporate scenes of transportation within river scenes, which had long been an accepted subgroup of the landscape genre.<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cole's (q.v.) *River in the Catskills* (1843; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) was the first major canvas by a prominent American artist to include a train.<sup>13</sup> Painted in 1843, it appeared when railroads were fairly well established in the eastern United States. In the seventeen years between Cole's *River in the Catskills* and Otter's *On the Road*, only a few American paintings were made featuring railroads or trains. Those that do, like Asher B. Durand's (q.v.) *Progress* (1853; Warner Collection of Gulf States Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Ala.), included them as a detail in a pastoral setting.<sup>14</sup> Only in a work like George Inness's (q.v.) *Lackawanna Valley* (c. 1856; National Gallery of Art), commissioned by a railroad company, did the train receive greater prominence.

*On the Road*, too, with its view to the distance bracketed by cottonwood trees on the left and mountains on the right, is rooted in the pastoral landscape tradition. Painted in muted earth tones, Otter's picture is reminiscent of those by the German landscape painter Paul Weber, who was Otter's mentor and friend in Philadelphia before he returned to Germany in 1861.<sup>15</sup> Otter adopted Weber's approach of combining details of actual elements with general effects of light and landscape.<sup>16</sup> The cropped foreground and the mile marker (inscribed with the artist's initials and the date) lead the viewer into the scene, as if riding in the next wagon. This device pulls the eye down the curve in the road to the arched stone bridge.



The traditional long view into the distance is interrupted by the train, which commands the center of the painting. Carefully drawn and crisply painted, it stands out against the mountains in the distance and the expanse of clear blue sky above. Not quite across the bridge and with its smoke trailing behind, the train moves powerfully forward, pulling the viewer's eye with it. Both Otter's train and its track were forward-thinking, if not visionary.<sup>17</sup> The train is being pulled by an "American"-type engine, which came into use in the 1850s and was used as the standard locomotive for passenger service for several decades. Its presence, then, represents up-to-date technology. Unusual, however, is the length of the train pictured. It is composed of three baggage or freight cars and at least eight passenger carriages, an extremely long train for the implied lengthy trek through varied terrain. Convenient for his compositional strategies but perhaps, too, pointing to future possibilities is Otter's placement of the track. Typically trains ran through valleys to maximize the strength of the engine and minimize the effects of friction and curve. Set on a raised bed and traveling across sloping ground, this stretch of track would have impressed any railroad man as fine engineering.

Perpendicular to the wagon but parallel to the picture plane, Otter's train is emphasized without disrupting the composition. It appears as no great intrusion or threat to the landscape, for in the mid-nineteenth century Americans did not always perceive their desire to be a great industrial nation as detrimental to their country's natural beauty or resources.<sup>18</sup> Otter's desire to compare the two modes of transportation likely prompted him to simplify his design during its painting. At some point, the artist painted out a smaller wagon being driven in front of the one that now goes on alone. Against the backdrop of somewhat rugged but not wild landscape, this distillation of pitting the capabilities of one train against one wagon strengthened Otter's visual endorsement of America's progress through technology. Other elements of the painting support reading it as a positive commentary on the relation of new technology to specifically western growth. The landscape's uninhabited, scrubby, and semiarid terrain and the cottonwood trees characteristic of the Great Plains indicate a locale more to the west than Otter's native eastern Pennsylvania. The inclusion of the mile marker on a road leading toward mountains may have suggested to viewers that it pictured the National Road, an early way west and the first federally subsidized highway across mountains.<sup>19</sup>

In 1859 alone more than one hundred thousand American settlers and fortune hunters poured west across the Mississippi River, most traveling by wagon. Although the westward land routes were considerably safer than they had been ten years earlier, such travelers still faced an arduous and dangerous journey. As the wagon in Otter's painting lurches along a curving road that follows the lay of the land, the train rushes overhead, as if on a magic carpet. Significantly, it moves from right to left, the direction that signifies west on American maps. As Leo Marx has argued, the railroad served not only as a symbol of progress in American paintings; it also tied the idea of progress to westward expansion and nation building.<sup>20</sup> Nine years before a transcontinental railroad, Otter presciently

and optimistically predicted the locomotive's role in the settling of the American West and the vast cultural and economic changes it would bring. His painting echoes Lansford Hastings's 1845 prediction that one day "the entire country will be everywhere intersected with turnpike roads, rail-roads, and canals; and . . . all the vastly numerous and rich resources of that now almost unknown region will be fully and advantageously developed."<sup>21</sup> Like a writer for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Otter seems convinced that "the ages of gold, of silver, of brass, and iron, as described by the poets are past. The present is the age of steam."<sup>22</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Helen Hartman Gemmill, "Ferretting out Thomas P. Otter," *Bucks County Historical Society Journal* 1 (Fall 1976), 19–40, is the best source for biographical information on Otter. Much of her information is derived from Otter's obituary that appeared in the *Doylestown (Pa.) Democrat*, 11 March 1890, 1.
2. Otter appeared in the 1857 Philadelphia directory as an engraver but was listed as "artist" in subsequent years. Gemmill, "Ferretting out Thomas P. Otter," 27.
3. See Peter H. Falk, ed., *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1988), 1:159; and Robert F. Perkins Jr. and William J. Gavin III, eds., *The Boston Athenaeum Art Exhibition Index* (Boston: Library of the Athenaeum, 1980), 106. *A Wheat Field* and *On the Lehigh below Bethlehem* were shown at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1862; *Shipping Hay* appeared there in 1864. Falk, *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*, 1:159. The current locations of these paintings are unknown.
4. Edward Hungerford, *The Story of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 1827–1927* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 1:218.
5. Gemmill, "Ferretting out Thomas P. Otter," 22–23. Harrison, in particular, owned an Otter painting that he called *The Past and Present*, which may be the Nelson-Atkins canvas. See *Catalogue of Pictures, Statuary, and Bronzes in the Gallery of Joseph Harrison, Jr., Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1870), 18; and *Catalogue of Paintings, Statuary, Etc.: The Collection of the Late Joseph Harrison, Jr.*, sale cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Art Galleries, 1910), 24. The fact that the painting resurfaced near Philadelphia in 1949 suggests that it was originally owned by a collector in that city.
6. George R. Stewart, "The Prairie Schooner Got Them There," *American Heritage* 13 (February 1962), 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Patricia Hills, "The American Frontier: Images and Myths," in *The American Frontier: Images and Myths*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973), 9.
9. Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 5th ed. (1949; New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982), 581.
10. Leo Marx, introduction to *The Railroad in the American Landscape: 1850–1950*, exh. cat. (Wellesley, Mass.: Wellesley College Museum of Art, 1981), 12–14.
11. John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776–1900* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 171.
12. Elizabeth Johns, "Settlement and Development: Claiming the West," in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920*, ed. William H. Truettner, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 214.
13. Kenneth W. Maddox, "Asher B. Durand's *Progress*: The Advance of Civilization and the Vanishing American," in *The Railroad and American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, ed. Susan Danly and Leo Marx (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 17–19.
14. Susan Danly, introduction to *The Railroad and American Art*, 5, 13.
15. Gemmill, "Ferretting out Thomas P. Otter," 27.
16. *Ibid.*, 29. Precise pencil underdrawing is visible in places on the train and wagon, suggesting Otter may have modeled these components from actual sources (illustrations if not the real things).
17. Mark Cedeck, Curator, John Barringer Railroad Library, Mercantile Library, St. Louis, offered many helpful insights into the accuracy of Otter's presentation of the train in conversations with the author, Fall 1992.
18. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*, 174.
19. Cedeck, conversations with the author, Fall 1992, first pointed out the possibility of the analogy with the National Road. See also Billington and Ridge, *Westward Expansion*, 293.
20. Leo Marx, "The Railroad-in-the-Landscape: An Iconological Theme in American Art," *Prospects* 10 (1985), 82.
21. Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California* (1845), quoted in William H. Truettner, "The Art of History: American Exploration and Discovery Scenes, 1840–1860," *American Art Journal* 14 (Winter 1982), 15.
22. Porte Crayon, "Artist's Excursion," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 19 (June 1859), 1.

# JOHN DOUGLAS PATRICK (1863–1937)

## *Brutality*, 1888

Oil on canvas

139 × 115¼ in. (353.1 × 292.7 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: J. Douglas Patrick / –88

Gift of the families of Grayce Patrick Wray and Hazel Patrick Rickenbacher, daughters of the artist, F94-33

JOHN DOUGLAS PATRICK'S enormous painting *Brutality* represents the pinnacle of his artistic career. A profoundly moving work that powerfully conveys the artist's compassion for his subject, *Brutality* is a stinging indictment of the inhumane treatment of horses on the streets of nineteenth-century Paris. Remarkably, Patrick produced this stunning canvas near the beginning of his artistic career, which became circumscribed by familial responsibilities.

The son of Scottish immigrants, Patrick was born in a log cabin near Hopewell, Pennsylvania, in 1863.<sup>1</sup> During his childhood, his family moved to what is today Overland Park, Kansas (suburban Kansas City), to pursue farming, thus commencing his long association with the midwestern state. According to his obituary, Patrick began sketching "sylvan scenes in the timber near his home" during these early rural years.<sup>2</sup> By seventeen he had saved enough money to spend three years studying at the Saint Louis School of Fine Arts under Carl Gutherz and Halsey C. Ives. Trained in the academic manner of drawing from the nude model, Patrick was soon considered a promising artist.

With the encouragement of Gutherz, Patrick left for Paris in September 1885. Shortly after his arrival, the young painter enrolled at the Académie Julian.<sup>3</sup> These formative years in Paris stimulated Patrick artistically and personally. Letters sent to his family in Kansas were full of enthusiasm. He recounted many stories of the Académie Julian, which he informed them was "one of the best if not the best drawing academie in the world."<sup>4</sup> His instructors included Gustave Boulanger, Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, and William Bouguereau, and he wrote his family that "Lefebvre congratulated me on my very first drawing and wanted to know where I had studied."<sup>5</sup> Patrick developed this particular drawn composition into a painting entitled *Psyche* (1886; Cherie Wray Smith and Pattie Rickenbacher Hogan), which he submitted to the Paris Salon of 1886 on Boulanger's advice. He later reminisced, "I couldn't believe the Salon had taken it and I doubted it until I saw *Psyche* there."<sup>6</sup>

The following year another work by Patrick was accepted at the Salon. It was a painting of his family's mule, named Jerry (1885; Cherie Wray Smith and Pattie Rickenbacher Hogan), that he had painted during his early years in Kansas. In a letter home dated 2 May 1887 the painter wrote: "you have no idea how much good it does me to see Jerry with his wide forehead which I have so often

patted, looking coolly around with an air of becoming dignity, at his esteemed companions."<sup>7</sup> The success of *Jerry* likely encouraged Patrick to continue painting animal subjects.

In June 1887 Patrick reported that he had begun to study animals three afternoons a week while working under the direction of the renowned animal sculptor Emmanuel Frémiet. By August he told his parents that he had begun studies for a work of "a horse being severely abused by a brute of a driver, from a sketch made on the streets of Paris." Patrick claimed that Frémiet admired it and added, "I intend on having it in the next Salon. Shall do all to succeed. I feel next year is my most important one. I aim to be among our first American artists someday not far off."<sup>8</sup> His intuition was correct: the work to which he referred, which became *Brutality*, would be without question the most important painting of Patrick's career.

During the autumn of 1887 Patrick traveled to England with the British artist George Gasgone, whom he met in Paris and whose family owned a horse farm in Kent. At this farm, Patrick was provided with housing, a studio, and an assistant, and he was able to work undisturbed on a series of horse studies.<sup>9</sup> Returning to Paris, Patrick began *Brutality* on an enormous canvas and enrolled again at the Académie Julian so he could receive advice from his distinguished mentors.<sup>10</sup> Needing additional funds to finish the painting, Patrick turned to his dealer, Paul Foinet, for an advance, which he secured with a promise of the finished work.<sup>11</sup>

Patrick wrote of *Brutality* to his parents in Kansas: "it eats up a lot of paint, and will horrify those who may see it."<sup>12</sup> The painting's horrific effect derives from the accumulation of its large scale, gruesome subject, generally dark palette, and the physicality of the paint, which Patrick applied liberally. In the immediate foreground, the painting depicts, to scale, a horse harnessed to a large, two-wheeled, wooden cart filled with stones, its head flung to its left, and its right leg raised in terror and pain. The animal has just received a violent blow to the head from a club brandished by its large, brutish master. The master, sneering and heavily muscled, is shown holding the horse by its bridle. While the horse rears back its neck, the perpetrator leans back in the opposite direction, presumably preparing to club the hapless animal again. A tension is created by the right blinder of the horse, which is depicted as an insufficient shield between its right eye and the right eye of its master. This flimsy piece of leather makes the animal appear even more vulnerable to the whims of its carter since it prevents it from seeing the man's next move. The scene's violence is accentuated by a palette consisting primarily of dark shades of blue, brown, and gray, which offset the bright red blood pouring from the horse's nostrils, mouth, and eye and smeared on the master's club. Patrick chose a similar red for the sash tied around the driver's waist, drawing attention to the man's form.



J. Douglas Patrusk  
-88



In the left background appears the haunting silhouette of the distinctive dome and roofline of the Panthéon, an architectural landmark that places the drama of *Brutality* in the Latin Quarter, home of the University of Paris. As the burial place of many of France's most esteemed thinkers, including Victor Hugo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, the Panthéon serves, among other functions, as a shrine to the ideals of the Enlightenment and intellectual achievement. Juxtaposed with this monument to human reason looming in the distance, the violent cruelty perpetrated by the driver in the foreground appears all the more barbaric.

Owing in large part to its unsettling subject, *Brutality* achieved considerable notoriety over the course of its early exhibition history. Even before the painting's debut at the 1888 Salon, the painting drew visitors to Patrick's studio to bear witness to the artist's bold and jarring vision. One visitor, Theodore Child of *Harper's Weekly*, reported to his American audience: "It is a piece of real and cruel life closely observed and rendered with singular intensity," but, Child noted, "one would have preferred to see Mr. Patrick display his undeniable talent on a less repulsive subject."<sup>13</sup>

Although *Brutality* is mysteriously not listed in the catalogue of the 1888 Salon, it appeared in select clippings and exhibition reviews.<sup>14</sup> In the summer of 1888 Patrick sent *Brutality* to the Internationale Kunstausstellung in Munich, where it was favorably received. Several months later, the painting attracted special attention and received high praise when it was returned to Paris and shown at the 1889 Exposition Universelle, a major exhibition celebrating the centennial of the French Revolution and at which Gustave Eiffel opened his now iconic tower.<sup>15</sup>

The controversy surrounding *Brutality* stemmed from its realistic depiction of cruelty toward animals. During this time, the poor treatment of horses throughout Paris was severely criticized, particularly by American tourists.<sup>16</sup> The concurrent display of Patrick's painting at the exposition fueled this fire, which resulted in the passage of legislation in 1895 to protect both workhorses and cab horses from cruelty.

By the time of the 1889 exposition, Patrick had returned to the United States to pursue teaching at his former school, the Saint Louis School of Fine Arts. He was awarded the prestigious third-place medal for *Brutality* in Paris in absentia and learned about it, according to legend, from a friend on the streets of St. Louis.<sup>17</sup> The granting of the award brought the painter an apparent flood of letters asking him to return to Paris to pursue his career, but he became seriously ill, needing hospitalization for nearly a year.<sup>18</sup> Once recovered, Patrick fully intended to return to Paris, but his plans were disrupted by mounting family responsibilities following the deaths of his two sisters and father.

Returning to Kansas, Patrick painted rural scenes somewhat sporadically while tending the family farm. By 1904 Patrick had married and founded the John Douglas Patrick School of Art. He also began a thirty-two-year career as a faculty member of the Kansas City Art School (now Kansas City Art Institute), where, among other achievements, he spearheaded a successful campaign to defeat a proposed statute that would have prohibited study from

the nude.<sup>19</sup> He exhibited again in 1904, showing his work at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after reestablishing his career and twenty years after leaving Europe, Patrick was reunited with *Brutality*, which had remained in Paris, and its medal. J. Logan Jones, a Kansas City dry-goods merchant with a "theaterette" in his downtown store for showing works of art, heard the story about the local artist and was greatly moved. During his next business trip to Europe, Jones went to Paris and acquired the painting from Foinet's son. Once the painting arrived in Kansas City, Jones created great fanfare about "The Home Coming of the Famous Painting 'BRUTALITY,' . . . a Story That Reads like a Romance of the Crusade."<sup>21</sup> Seeing the work again prompted Patrick to reflect on the path that his artistic career had taken. "You cannot imagine how the sight of that picture affects me," the artist exclaimed bittersweetly. "Oh, if these happy student days, for they were happy despite the hardships, could only have gone on forever. As I look back, I wonder sometimes what I would have been able to do, had I the means to go on with my studies after completing 'Brutalite,' and gaining the reputation that I did there from."<sup>22</sup> Up to his death in 1937, from a sudden heart attack, Patrick remained Kansas City's most renowned artist, a mantle that was quickly inherited by Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.).

RRG/JA

## NOTES

1. "John D. Patrick's Paintings to Hang in Honor Display: Art Institute Arranges Exhibit for Teacher Who Will Retire," *Kansas City Journal-Post*, 3 December 1936, 8.
2. "John D. Patrick Dies," *Kansas City Times*, 20 January 1937, 2.
3. See *ibid.* for reference to Ives as instructor; and Amy Beth Scott, "Academic Art and Animal Cruelty: The Legacy of John Douglas Patrick, 1863–1937," M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, Kansas City, 1996, 4, for reference to Guthertz as instructor. Scott's thesis is the most comprehensive account of Patrick's *Brutality*.
4. John Douglas Patrick to his sister Susie Patrick, 15 November 1885, NAMA curatorial files.
5. *Ibid.*
6. "John Douglas Patrick: A Kansas City Painter Whose Work Has Appeared in the French Salon," *Kansas City Star*, 4 September 1904, 1.
7. Patrick to his father, William Patrick, 2 May 1887, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Patrick to his parents, William and Agnes Patrick, 14 August 1887, NAMA curatorial files.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Scott, "Academic Art and Animal Cruelty," 23.
11. Amy Scott, *John Douglas Patrick*, exh. brochure (Kansas City, Mo.: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1996), 4.
12. Patrick to his parents, 30 December 1887, NAMA curatorial files.
13. Theodore Child, "The Paris Salon: Pictures by American Artists," *Harper's Weekly* 32 (21 April 1888), 294.
14. One notable mention of the canvas at the 1888 Salon appears in Theodore Child, "The Paris Salon," *Art Amateur* 19 (June 1888), 1–2. Child described *Brutality* as "a strangely drawn picture." Child, "The Paris Salon," 2.
15. See Annette Blaugrund, *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1989). On Patrick's participation in the 1889 exposition, see chiefly *ibid.*, 195–96; and Scott, "Academic Art and Animal Cruelty."
16. For American discomfort with the treatment of horses in Paris, see May Kingston, letter to the editor, *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 June 1890, 3, in which the author complained, "It seems to me that it is time something was done when Americans shorten their stay in Paris on account of the cruelty they see on every hand to horses. It is now about the only place where such cruelty is allowed among civilized nations."
17. "'Brutalite': Story of the Masterpiece of John D. Patrick, of Kansas City, Mo., Which Was Awarded the First-Class [*sic*] Medal by the French Government," *Art Review* 16 (April 1908), 5.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Scott, "John Douglas Patrick," 5.
20. Blaugrund, *Paris 1889*, 195.
21. Original guidebook of the *Theaterette of Jones Dry Goods Co.* exhibition, 12 February 1908, NAMA curatorial files.
22. "Brutalite," *Art Review*, 5. The painting remained on exhibition at the theaterette until 1933, when it was returned to the Patrick family.

## CHARLES WILLSON PEALE (1741–1827)

### *Catherine and Elizabeth Hall, 1776*

Oil on canvas

30¼ × 25¼ in. (76.8 × 64.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: C.W. Peale / pinx 1776

Gift of William B. and Harvey R. Fullerton, descendants of the sitters, F90-16

OVER THE COURSE OF HIS LONG LIFE, Charles Willson Peale mastered a variety of trades. In addition to saddlemaking, silver-smithing, taxidermy, and watch repair, he was a soldier, inventor, curator, and scientist. He was also the preeminent portrait painter of the mid-Atlantic colonies during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. With his many children, including Raphaelle (q.v.), Rembrandt (q.v.), Rubens, Franklin, and Titian Ramsey Peale, he founded a dynasty of American painters accomplished in portraiture and still life.<sup>1</sup> A true scion of the Enlightenment, Peale was thoroughly immersed in the cultural currents of the late eighteenth century. His sensitive portrayal of two little girls, painted in Maryland on the eve of American independence, reveals much about his sensibilities during that turbulent period. The double portrait combines Peale's characteristic attention to likeness with a pervasive tenderness that stemmed from new ideas about filial love and child development.

Peale left a substantial record of himself in diaries, letters, an autobiography, and in the reflections of his many friends.<sup>2</sup> Born in 1741, he was the eldest son of a country schoolmaster who had fled England as a young man to avoid a death sentence for forgery. Peale completed an apprenticeship in saddlemaking and set up shop in Annapolis, Maryland. He received his first painting lessons from the portraitist John Hesselius (q.v.) in exchange for a saddle. In 1766 a group of eleven wealthy businessmen sent Peale to England, where he studied painting with Benjamin West (q.v.). He returned to America in 1769, well versed in both the latest styles of portraiture and the latest currents of European philosophical thought. Eager to make his reputation, he aggressively sought out portrait commissions, traveling regularly between Annapolis and Williamsburg, Virginia. He painted at least two hundred miniature and full-size portraits in the years between 1769 and the summer of 1776, when he settled permanently in Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>

Prompted by a deep sense of patriotism, Peale joined the Pennsylvania militia soon after his arrival in that state, and he served in the Revolutionary army under the command of George Washington. Washington, whose portrait Peale had painted in 1772, became his lifelong friend.<sup>4</sup> In 1782 Peale added a skylighted gallery to his Philadelphia home and filled it with portraits of heroes of the Revolution. This was the beginning of Peale's Museum, which eventually included fine art, specimens of natural history,

and dioramas—scenic display boxes that Peale himself invented. When Peale died at age eighty-six, he had married three times and was energetically courting a fourth wife. He was the father of seventeen children, whose education became a lifelong occupation for him. Not surprisingly, his many portraits of children reflect his interest in educational theory and practice.

The Nelson-Atkins portrait of Catherine and Elizabeth Hall is extremely well documented in Peale's journals.<sup>5</sup> In 1775 Peale began moving his family north in stages from Annapolis to Philadelphia, along the way painting the portraits of wealthy plantation owners. By November the Peales had settled temporarily with his sister and her husband, Nathaniel Ramsey, in Charlestown, Maryland. One of Ramsey's acquaintances and neighbors was Elishu Hall, father of Catherine and Elizabeth. Peale had known Hall since 1771, when the artist had painted portraits of him and his wife Catherine Orick Hall.<sup>6</sup> Colonel Elishu, as he was known, owned a large plantation in Cecil County, which extended from the Susquehanna River to the Octoraro. He had thirteen children and served as a judge on the County Orphan's Court.<sup>7</sup> Like Peale, Hall was an ardent patriot; on 6 June 1776 he was appointed second major of the Susquehanna Battalion of the Maryland militia.<sup>8</sup>

On 26 April 1776 Peale commenced work on the portrait of the Halls' youngest daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth, in a "¾ size" (i.e., half-length).<sup>9</sup> He had arrived at the family plantation the day before to paint ten-year-old Susanna (Miss Sucky).<sup>10</sup> Peale noted his work on the children's portrait again on 29 April: "Walk from Cha(rles) Town to Mr. Hall's 12 or 14 miles. Paint Miss Sucky's, work (on) the little one." He continued to work on the pictures intermittently from 30 April to 2 May and again on 9 May. Both pictures were completed by 9 May.<sup>11</sup> The expediency with which Peale completed the Hall sisters' portrait followed his general practice.<sup>12</sup> Most sitters, especially children, were unable to pose for long hours. Peale generally used a series of short sittings to capture the likenesses of his young subjects. His brief, sporadic visits to the Hall plantation suggest that this was the method he followed with the Hall sisters.

The Hall sisters' distinctive auburn hair, pleasant, somewhat idiosyncratic faces, and generalized figures and costumes reflect Peale's interest in combining recognizable likenesses with highly conceptualized social types.<sup>13</sup> Peale rarely made preparatory studies but instead worked directly on a canvas prepared with a ground of lead white mixed with burnt umber. In the case of the Hall portrait, he used blue underpainting to provide an effective base tone for the girls' heads, arms, and hands. Peale probably captured the girls' faces on canvas with his subjects sitting before him. The sisters' bodies, though, were almost certainly painted later and may be based on a print source.<sup>14</sup> Using his imagination or studio props,



Peale could simply have invented costumes, jewelry, and accouterments that would have been deemed appropriate for young girls of the Halls' station.<sup>15</sup> Four-year-old Elizabeth wears a dark blue dress, detachable white sleeve protectors tied with pink ribbons, and a pearl necklace. Catherine, an eighteen-month-old baby, wears a white muslin frock lined with pink taffeta, red kid-leather shoes, and what appears to be a coral necklace. Low-necked, loose-fitting frocks like those in Peale's portrait became fashionable for young children of both genders in the mid-eighteenth century. They reflect a new interest in allowing children's bodies to develop naturally through movement and play. Catherine sits on a typical eighteenth-century mahogany high chair and clutches at the freshly picked flowers in a wicker basket that her older sister holds in front of her.

Peale keenly admired the natural beauty of flowers and sought to incorporate them in his portraits whenever possible. He especially preferred the more fragrant varieties, such as the rose and lilacs represented in the Hall portrait, because he aimed to add another sensory dimension to his images.<sup>16</sup> Peale's selection of flowers also likely reflected the well-known emblematic tradition that associated particular meaning to different varieties. The pink rose, for example, commonly suggested love and beauty, while lilacs could represent youthful innocence. Both these themes would have been appropriate for a portrait of young girls.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the basket of flowers held by Elizabeth might refer to the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas about "natural education," which he published in his popular book *Émile* in 1762. Rousseau, whom Peale greatly admired, stressed the importance of allowing children to interact with the natural world and encouraged parents to make gardening and the study of living things a part of their children's education early on.<sup>18</sup>

The Hall portrait also reflects the sentimental enjoyment of domestic life and, in particular, children that was based in the mid-eighteenth-century "cult of sensibility." Responding to a growing respect for warm and loving familial bonds, men and women in both Britain and North America began to commission portrayals of themselves and their families in seemingly candid, intimate moments.<sup>19</sup> Peale demonstrated his adherence to the new, more emotional mode of family portraiture in his depiction of his own family, *The Peale Family* (1773–1809; New-York Historical Society), which hung for years in his studio, where it served as an example of his prowess as a portrait artist and conveyed his ideal of harmonious familial relations.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the stiffly posed family members in Robert Feke's *Isaac Royal and Family* (1741; Harvard University), for instance, the Peales smile and touch one another affectionately.<sup>21</sup>

Like the Peales, the Hall sisters interact lovingly in their portrait. They stand and sit so close to one another that their heads and upper bodies resemble flowers blooming on a single stem. By depicting Elizabeth solicitously offering her younger sister a basket of blossoms to fondle, Peale emphasized her loving nature and her suitability as a future mother. By showing both girls with their eyes gazing directly outward and their heads cocked sweetly and

attentively, he also engaged the viewer's affections. His portrait is both a decorous depiction of two young ladies of rank and a charming image of childhood innocence. Given his fondness for Rousseau and his own, well-documented child-rearing practices, there is little doubt that Peale embraced the new, eighteenth-century vision of children as blank slates, born with natures inherently innocent and good.<sup>22</sup> Peale's typical painted child, wrote his biographer and distant relative Charles Coleman Sellers, "is recognizable at a glance from all other children in fact or fancy, an impish little creature, a wanton, wide-eyed, smiling thing."<sup>23</sup>

According to family records, both Catherine and Elizabeth lived with their parents until their marriages. Not much is known about Catherine. She married a man by the name of Churchman but had no children. The date of her death is not known.<sup>24</sup> As the eldest, Elizabeth apparently received the Peale portrait. In 1792 Elizabeth married Charles Ogle from neighboring New Castle County, Delaware. The couple lived in Cecil County and had three children, Charles Williams, James Brindley, and Catherine. In 1800, after her husband's death, she married Andrew Gordon but had no additional children. Elizabeth died in Maryland on 10 March 1841.

LL/DE

## NOTES

1. See Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770–1870*, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press, in association with Trust for Museum Exhibitions and National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1996).
2. Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983–96). Other biographical information about Peale can be found in Edgar P. Richardson, Brooke Hindle, and Lillian B. Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983); Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward, eds., *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991); and David C. Ward, *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).
3. See David Steinberg, “The Characters of Charles Willson Peale: Portraiture and Social Identity, 1769–1776,” Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1993, 65.
4. Richardson, Hindle, and Miller, *Charles Willson Peale and His World*, 44–45. Peale visited Mount Vernon in May 1772 to paint the portrait now at Washington and Lee University. This was the only likeness of Washington painted before the Revolution and commemorates Washington’s service in the French and Indian War.
5. Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 1, *Charles Willson Peale: Artist in Revolutionary America, 1735–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 179–80.
6. Charles Coleman Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952), 2:94–95. These portraits are in a private collection. In the following years, Peale made several replicas of them, which Hall apparently gave to his adult children. Two such copies, painted in 1773, are in the Newark Museum, New Jersey.
7. George Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Maryland, and the Early Settlements around the Head of Chesapeake Bay and on the Delaware River, with Sketches of Some of the Old Families of Cecil County* (1881; Baltimore: Regional Publishing Co., 1967), 480–82. The children included Elihu Jr. (1758–1794), John (1760–1826), James (1762–1793), Elisha (1764–1835), Susanna (1766–1852), Charles (1767–1821), Samuel Chew (b. 1769), George Whitefield (b. 1770), Elizabeth (1772–1841), Henry (1773–1808), Catherine Orrick (b. 1775), Washington (b. 1776), and Julia Reed (b. 1778).
8. *Ibid.*, 481.
9. Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, 19. In Peale’s list of pictures from 1770 to 1775, his “¾” pictures represent half-lengths. Peale charged £5.50 for “Head size”; £6.60 for “Kitcat”; £10.10 for “Half length” (¾ length); £22.1 for “Whole length”; and £5.5 for “Miniatures.”
10. *Ibid.*, 85, 94, fig. 341. Peale apparently painted only the Hall daughters at this time.
11. Miller, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, 1:179–80.
12. Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, 12.
13. Ward, *Charles Willson Peale*, 39–40.
14. The sisters’ poses closely resemble the poses of the French dauphin and his sister in a later portrait by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun (1784; Musée National du Château de Versailles), suggesting that both artists may have used a common print source.
15. See Leslie Kaye Reinhardt, “Fabricated Images: Invented Dress in British and Colonial American Portraits,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003, 354–66. Elizabeth Hall’s frock is identical in all but color to that worn by the young sitter in Peale’s *Henrietta Maria Boardley* (1773; Honolulu Academy of Arts).
16. Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, 10.
17. See Claire Powell, *The Meaning of Flowers: A Garland of Plant Lore and Symbolism from Popular Custom and Literature* (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1979), 135–58; and Laura C. Martin, *Garden Flower Folklore* (Chester, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 1987), 11.
18. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile: ou de l’Éducation* (Paris, 1762). Peale borrowed a copy of this book from one of his patrons, Robert Edens, on 4 November 1775, but he had probably read it earlier in London. Miller, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, 1:154. For Peale’s admiration of Rousseau, see *ibid.*, xxvii, 408n3.
19. See Parnie P. Giuntini, “The Politics of Display: Family Portraits, the Royal Academy and Modern Domestic Ideology,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995; James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830*, exh. cat. (Berkeley, Calif.: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1995); and Kate Rettford, “Sensibility and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century Family Portrait: The Collection at Kedelston Hall,” *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 533–60.
20. Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., “Democratic Illusions,” in Cikovsky, Linda Bantel, and John Wilmerding, *Raphaelle Peale Still Lifes*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 37.
21. John Adams wrote admiringly of Peale’s painting in 1776, “There was a pleasant, a happy cheerfulness in their countenances, and a familiarity in their air toward each other.” Quoted in Ward, *Charles Willson Peale*, 138. To reinforce this air of domestic felicity, Peale included, on the easel to the left of his own image in the portrait, an unfinished painting of three embracing figures. Over them is the Latin inscription “Concordia Animae” (Harmonious Spirits).
22. See Lillian B. Miller, “Father and Son: The Relationship of Charles Willson Peale and Raphaelle Peale,” *American Art Journal* 25 (1993), 22–60; and Christopher Brooks, “Charles Willson Peale: Painting and Natural History in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Oxford Art Journal* 5 (1982), 35.
23. Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, 4.
24. William Borland Fullerton Jr. to Henry Adams, 29 May 1990, NAMA curatorial files.

## RAPHAELLE PEALE (1774–1825)

### *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*, c. 1822 (*Still Life—A Deception—Venus Rising from a Bath*; *After the Bath—New England; After the Bath*)

Oil on canvas

29½ × 24½ in. (74 × 61.3 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Raphaelle Peale 182[?]/Pinx[it]

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 34-147

PAINTED ABOUT 1822, Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* remained unknown to the public for a century before its "discovery" about 1930. The finder was the art dealer Edith Halpert, who titled it *After the Bath—New England* and exhibited it at her Downtown Gallery in New York in 1931. The press, struck by the painting's similarity to contemporary Surrealist paintings, hailed it as "one of the most interesting 'finds' in many years," "virtually unique, no similar work of the artist being generally known," and "one of the few skilled examples of early American still life painting."<sup>1</sup> Even so, the painting is atypical of Peale's oeuvre. Most of his works are conventional still lifes rather than outright deceptions—or *trompe l'oeils*. Still, it is undoubtedly his most famous work and the painting most responsible for the revival of his reputation in the twentieth century. Its immediate popularity also helped to spark interest in other American still-life and *trompe l'oeil* painters, most notably William Michael Harnett and John Frederick Peto (q.v.), so that Peale is now generally acknowledged to be one of the fathers of American still-life painting.<sup>2</sup>

Raphaelle Peale, the eldest child of Charles Willson Peale (q.v.) and Rachel Brewer Peale to survive infancy, was born in Annapolis, Maryland, and raised in Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> A bright, precocious child, he was apprenticed early on in his father's studio, where he learned oil and miniature painting. He also assisted his father in the establishment of his natural history museum, developing techniques for preserving, mounting, and exhibiting the displays, and traveling to South America and Mexico to collect specimens. In 1794 Charles Willson Peale retired from his portrait career, referring his clients to his sons Raphaelle and Rembrandt (q.v.). The brothers spent 1796 and part of 1797 in Charleston, South Carolina, Savannah, Georgia, and Baltimore, where they exhibited their copies of their father's portraits of Revolutionary heroes and advertised their ability to take likenesses in miniature and full size.

By 1797 Raphaelle Peale had returned to Philadelphia to marry—against his family's wishes—Martha McGlathery, the daughter of an Irish-American carpenter. Although he continued his interest in science by working at the Peale Museum as a taxidermist and patenting several of his inventions, he turned to portraiture to support his growing family. His pendant portraits

of the Philadelphia merchant Robert Berrett and his wife Lydia (q.v.), which he painted around this time, are typically deft but unidealized. Peale's inability or unwillingness to flatter his sitters left him unable to compete with Gilbert Stuart (q.v.), the leading portraitist in Philadelphia from 1795 to 1803, or with his more successful brother Rembrandt. After 1810 Peale increasingly focused on still lifes, a less lucrative branch of painting than portraiture.<sup>4</sup>

Peale's declining health may have been another factor that led him to shun the strenuous business of soliciting portrait commissions and entertaining sitters. Tragically, after 1798 he experienced frequent and progressively severe attacks of illness that affected his stomach and hands. During these attacks he was unable to paint. The Peale family believed his condition was the result of his frequent, heavy drinking and gout.<sup>5</sup> Although Peale painted diligently during his periods of remission, he was unable to earn a living and relied on his wife and father for financial support. He died in 1825 at the age of fifty-one.

In a series of letters written over many years, Charles Willson Peale expressed both his deep love for his son and his dissatisfaction with his professional and personal failings. The younger Peale's decision to devote himself to still life, which ranked lowest in the academic hierarchy of genres, was a continual thorn in his father's side. Charles Willson Peale felt that "the painting of objects that have no motion, which any person of tolerable genius may acquire" was beneath the considerable talents of his son.<sup>6</sup> A true product of the Enlightenment, the elder Peale also believed that physical suffering could be avoided by right living and strenuous effort. "If you suffer," he wrote to his son on one occasion, "do you not know that you are deserving of pain?"<sup>7</sup> Peale's responses to his father's admonitions that he stop drinking, return to portrait painting, and "act the man" are not known. However, it seems likely that he found this constant harangue humiliating. In an extremity of physical and emotional pain, he threatened suicide at least once, in 1818.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their lowly status, Raphaelle Peale's still lifes were praised during his lifetime. Critics favorably compared his simple, elegant arrangements of fruit, vegetables, and other comestibles, which he typically depicted on a ledge in raking light, to seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish still lifes.<sup>9</sup> As several scholars have recently noted, they also recall Spanish *bodegón* paintings, which mimic displays of food on the window ledges of restaurants and which the young artist may have encountered during his 1793 trip to South America and Mexico, or in private collections in Philadelphia.<sup>10</sup> Still, although a few connoisseurs were interested in Peale's paintings and acquired choice works for







Fig. 1 Raphaelle Peale, *Fruitpiece, with Peaches Covered by a Handkerchief*, 1819. Oil on canvas, 12½ × 18 in. (31.8 × 45.7 cm). Private collection

their collections, most were sold for very low sums, exchanged for household labor, or purchased by Charles Willson Peale to help keep his impoverished son afloat.

Raphaelle Peale began painting “deceptions,” as *trompe l’oeil* paintings were then known, as early as 1795; however, only three such still lifes by him are currently known to exist.<sup>11</sup> The first, *Catalogue Deception* (after 1813; private collection), served as a humorous display in his father’s museum.<sup>12</sup> The painting depicts an 1813 edition of the Peale Museum catalogue hanging by one corner against a green background that emulated the museum’s baize wall coverings. Originally, a real nail projected through the painting’s surface, from which the catalogue appeared to dangle. As visitors entered the museum, many would have reached out to consult what appeared to be a free catalogue, only to find themselves deceived. *Catalogue Deception* is perfectly in keeping with the Peale family culture of visual jokes and games, the most famous of which is Charles Willson Peale’s *Staircase Group* (1795; Philadelphia Museum of Art), a *trompe l’oeil* portrait of Raphaelle and his younger brother Titian that incorporates a post and lintel door frame and a real wooden step. Not only did such works highlight the technical skill of the painter, they also, as Wendy Bellion has pointed out, forced viewers to question their perceptions and contemplate the role of art and the limits of vision.<sup>13</sup>

Peale’s second extant *trompe l’oeil* painting, *Fruitpiece, with Peaches Covered by a Handkerchief* (Fig. 1), is more subtle. At first glance, the painting appears to be a typical Peale still life. Against a dark background, a shallow bowl of peaches overflows onto a ledge. The only *trompe l’oeil* elements here are the insects that seem to crawl, not across the diaphanous lady’s kerchief covering the fruit, but across the surface of the painting itself.<sup>14</sup> The resulting emphasis on the picture plane as a flat, solid surface rather than an illusory window into depth calls attention to the nature of painting as artifice. At the same time, Peale used the painting to broadcast his own abilities. His painted peaches are so convincing, he implies, that even the wasps are fooled.

The Nelson-Atkins canvas, like *Fruitpiece with Peaches*, is a painting of a painting. It depicts a dazzling white linen cloth pinned to a tape, which is seemingly attached to the top edge of the canvas. Peale painted the hanging drapery skillfully, with such small, delicate, and smoothly blended strokes that his role as creator is largely concealed. The cloth sags in the center, and the resulting deep fold seems to project slightly into the viewer’s space. Dark shadows around its edges and under the tape suggest a flat, painted background. In fact, the cloth appears to be hiding a painting of a woman whose bare left arm, holding a lock of golden hair, and right foot extend above and below its margins. Dorinda Evans identified this partially depicted nude as a copy of *The Birth of Venus*, a painting by the Irish artist James Barry (1772; National Gallery of Ireland), which enjoyed great acclaim and wide popularity when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1772.<sup>15</sup> Peale would have known this painting through one of at least two eighteenth-century engravings (Fig. 2).<sup>16</sup> Because of its quotation from Barry’s *Venus*, Evans was able to identify the Nelson-Atkins painting as Peale’s *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*, which he exhibited twice in 1822 and at least one more time, in 1827.<sup>17</sup> The painting was purchased for twenty-five dollars by the Baltimore native William Gilmore, whose brother Robert owned *Fruitpiece with Peaches*.<sup>18</sup> It seems likely that, having seen the earlier *trompe l’oeil* painting in his brother’s collection, William wished to acquire a similar work for himself.<sup>19</sup>

Since the painting’s rediscovery in the twentieth century, competing narratives about its meaning have battled for supremacy. The first of these, which emerged long before the painting’s subject had been identified, stressed its similarity to contemporary Surrealist paintings by Pierre Roy and René Magritte, both of whom painted dreamlike and mysterious assemblages of *trompe l’oeil* objects. Edith Halpert encouraged such associations by including the painting in her 1931 exhibition *American Ancestors*, where she presented it as one of many American antecedents of European

modernism.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation began to give way after 1947 to an anecdotal explanation offered by Peale's distant relative Charles Colman Sellers.

In his biography of Charles Willson Peale, Sellers claimed that Raphaelle Peale intended the painting as a practical joke aimed at his wife, "to turn upon her the laughter of the children and the boarders." According to Sellers, Peale pretended to conceal an indecent picture behind "one of her best linen napkins," causing her to become outraged.<sup>21</sup> Although this story was repeated endlessly for the next four decades, it is almost certainly apocryphal.<sup>22</sup> For one thing, Sellers (who never mentioned this story before 1947) was unaware of the actual high-art source of Peale's painted nude. Furthermore, the trompe l'oeil cloth in *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* is not a table napkin, as Sellers claimed, but a kerchief—a common nineteenth-century item of apparel worn by men around the neck or by women tucked into the bodices of their dresses.<sup>23</sup> Finally, as Evans has pointed out, Martha Peale must have been quite conversant with trompe l'oeil paintings after twenty-five years in the Peale family and would not likely have been fooled.<sup>24</sup>

Recent interpretations of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* have focused on Peale's contentious relationship with his father, his failing health, and the social, political, and artistic climate of early-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. What emerges from these studies and from a thorough understanding of the painting as a physical object is an appreciation of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* as a layered and complex painting that resists neat definition. Peale, who was well known for his cryptic sense of humor, almost certainly intended the painting to be seen in slightly different, though parallel, ways by at least two different audiences: the art-viewing public and his own family.

Despite the celebrity it has enjoyed in the last century, *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* was ignored by reviewers during the 1820s. Still lifes, and trompe l'oeil still lifes in particular, were regarded as mere transcriptions of the visible world, lacking in moral and intellectual content, and therefore beneath serious, critical consideration. As both Phoebe Lloyd and Nicolai Cikovsky have maintained, however, Peale took real pleasure in subverting this notion by including topical comments and historical notations in his still-life compositions.<sup>25</sup> Through his selection and arrangement of specific fruit, dessert, and tableware items, Peale's still lifes offer oblique commentaries on contemporary events. *Still Life with Cheese and Hard Biscuits* (1813; private collection), for instance, recalls the winter of 1813, when Philadelphia's food supplies dwindled because of a British blockade, and inhabitants were forced to eat long-keeping foodstuffs such as cheese and biscuits. *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* similarly comments on contemporary events. It was, first and foremost, a satirical response to the divisive, contemporary issue of the nude in art.

James Barry's painting of Venus elicited controversy for some years after his death in 1806. Its owner, the Anglo-Irish merchant Cooper Penrose, lent the painting to the 1819 exhibition of the Cork Society for Promoting the Fine Arts in the south of Ireland. Like Philadelphia, Cork was a provincial city whose residents were



Fig. 2 Valentine Green after James Barry, *Venus Rising from the Sea*, 1772. Mezzotint, 24 $\frac{1}{6}$  × 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (61 × 39.1 cm). Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The William A. Whittaker Foundation Art Fund, So.62.1

unused to nudity in art. Conservative members of the society's exhibition committee had Barry's painting removed on the grounds that it was indecent.<sup>26</sup> Whether or not Peale was aware of this incident, he would certainly have been familiar with similar controversies in the United States. By 1822 a number of scandals had occurred here involving exhibitions of nudes, including Adolph Ulric Wertmüller's *Danaë and the Shower of Gold* (1807; National Museum, Stockholm), John Vanderlyn's *Ariadne on the Island of Naxos* (c. 1809–14; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), and Rembrandt Peale's *Jupiter and Io* (1812–13; destroyed). Although these paintings attracted large crowds, they were widely criticized on moral grounds.<sup>27</sup> Peale's brother Rembrandt, in particular, received a scathing review from the Philadelphia magazine *Port Folio*, which described his *Jupiter and Io* as "a scene of seducing voluptuousness" that posed a moral threat to the youth of Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup>

As Carol Eaton Soltis has pointed out, the scandal surrounding *Jupiter and Io* highlights a generational division in the American

art world.<sup>29</sup> While many older artists, including Charles Willson Peale, were outraged by the painting's public display, Rembrandt Peale and a younger generation of painters, many of whom had studied in Europe, accepted the European understanding of nudes in art as symbols of high, moral truths. Still, buckling to public pressure and the pleas of his father, Rembrandt painted over parts of his composition and retitled it, more vaguely, *The Dream of Love*. Despite these alterations, controversy flared anew when Peale placed a collection of his paintings, including *The Dream of Love*, on display in Boston in 1822, and the artist ultimately removed the nude from that exhibition.<sup>30</sup>

Such controversies would have been well known to the crowds that saw *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* in 1822 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Peale's Baltimore Museum. Both *The Dream of Love* and Vanderlyn's *Ariadne* had been exhibited at the Baltimore Museum in 1819 and 1820 respectively.<sup>31</sup> For the past eleven years, the Pennsylvania Academy had exhibited its collection of casts made from antique statuary in a special room behind a cloth-covered partition, allowing only single-sex groups of men or women to see them at any given time. Finding this policy incomprehensible, the English traveler and author Frances Trollope recalled in 1832, "I never felt my delicacy shocked at the Louvre, but I was strangely tempted to resent as an affront the hint I received, that I might steal a glance at what was considered indecent [in Philadelphia]."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Raphaelle Peale's painted kerchief makes the unseen nude it apparently conceals seem more, rather than less, lewd. Whether his viewers were shocked or titillated, they would undoubtedly have been curious about what the kerchief covered. In this way, Peale made them examine their own motivations for wanting to look behind the cloth. He also pointed out, wryly, that a painting of a nude rendered decent enough to satisfy all viewers would be a ridiculous image.

In *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*, Peale followed a tradition of painted trompe l'oeil curtains that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century, for instance Gerrit Dou's *Painter with Pipe and Book* (1645; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). The surfaces of these paintings appear to be partially obscured by swags of drapery, painted in imitation of the curtains that were used to cover pictures, particularly racy ones, in domestic interiors.<sup>33</sup> By substituting a kerchief for a curtain, Peale made his joke even more pointed. In the early nineteenth century, when clean laundry was a luxury, a tidy, pressed, white kerchief communicated both affluence and bourgeois propriety.<sup>34</sup> In *Fruitpiece with Peaches*, for instance, Peale draped a thin lady's kerchief over ripe peaches to suggest both cleanliness and self-restraint. Yet because kerchiefs were also intimate garments worn next to the body, they carried with them associations with warm, desirable flesh. In Charles Willson Peale's portrait of Benjamin and Eleanor Ridgely Laming (1788; National Gallery of Art), a kerchief very similar to that depicted in *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* spills over Benjamin's thigh onto Eleanor's skirt. Like his phallic telescope and the peaches she holds in her lap, it symbolizes the couple's amorous union. With



Fig. 3 Charles Willson Peale, *Portrait of Raphaelle Peale*, 1817. Oil on canvas, 29 × 24 in. (73.7 × 61 cm). Private collection

this in mind, the meaning of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* becomes even more ironic. The painting appears to have been preemptively covered with an object that is itself erotic.

A more fraught, private meaning of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* is revealed within its layers of paint.<sup>35</sup> Penitenti of an earlier composition, which Raphaelle abandoned early on and which was once completely hidden by the brown background, have grown clearer over the years. These traces of underlying pigment, together with X-ray photographs of the painting, shed light on Peale's thought process as he worked. He began by painting the trompe l'oeil kerchief. Then, around its edges, he began a partial copy of an 1817 portrait of himself by his father (Fig. 3). His hands, holding brushes and palette, appear vaguely in the lower left corner. A ghostly image of the framed still life that hangs above Peale's left shoulder in the portrait is now visible at the upper right of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*. After abandoning this copy, Peale left the painting long enough for its surface to dry completely. When he returned to the canvas, he covered the background with brown paint before adding Venus's arm, hair, and foot. The flowers springing up around the goddess's toes cover the dabs of paint that once appeared on Peale's palette.

As Lloyd has shown, the circumstances surrounding Charles Willson Peale's painting of his son's portrait were less than ideal.<sup>36</sup> The older artist wrote to Raphaelle on 17 February 1817, urging him to come to Belfield, his country estate outside Philadelphia,

and sit for a long-promised portrait. That same day he also wrote to his younger son Rubens, noting that he intended this portrait as a “lesson” for Raphaelle, “to help him with his coloring.” On the one hand, as Lillian Miller has argued, Charles Willson’s portrait of Raphaelle shows him as a dignified professional, at ease with the tools of his trade. On the other hand, he presented this portrait to his son not simply as a gift but as an object lesson on how to become a more successful artist. It was, in essence, a painted equivalent of the elder Peale’s frequent, admonishing letters. Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the younger Peale would have wanted to cover the portrait, if only symbolically.

It may have been Peale’s original intention to deceive his father, making him reach out to remove a kerchief from what he believed to be his own painting. As Evans has noted, Peale’s painted “curtain” recalls a rivalry between two ancient Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, related by the Elder Pliny. Zeuxis produced a painting of grapes so realistic that birds converged upon it. In turn Parrhasius “produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now be drawn and the picture displayed; and when he realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.”<sup>37</sup> As their letters show, the painters in the Peale family were well acquainted with this story.<sup>35</sup> By fooling his father, Peale may have hoped to prove, like Parrhasius, that he was the better painter.

*Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* also has darker associations. In Western art, the image of a linen kerchief hanging parallel to the picture plane has long been used to represent Saint Veronica’s veil (Fig. 4). According to legend, Veronica used her linen head covering to wipe away the sweat and blood from Jesus’ face as he carried the cross to Calvary. The cloth (often referred to in the nineteenth century as a kerchief) was afterward miraculously imprinted with the image of Christ’s face. As Alexander Nemerov has noted, the similarity between the hanging trompe l’oeil cloth in *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* and paintings of Veronica’s veil is striking.<sup>39</sup> This comparison is made all the more provocative by the implied presence, in Peale’s original composition, of the artist’s face behind the kerchief, in exactly the location where one would expect to find the face of the suffering Christ. Given Peale’s strained relations with his father and his considerable physical suffering (which was likely partially due to his exposure to the heavy metals used as preservatives in the elder Peale’s museum), it seems possible that the artist originally also envisioned his painting as a rebuke to his father.

There are several possible reasons why Peale abandoned his earlier composition. First, he could not have exhibited or sold an image whose meaning was so personal that it was discernible only to members of his own family. As usual, Peale was desperate for money in the early 1820s and probably seized the opportunity to transform a private painting into one with commercial appeal.<sup>40</sup> Second, the artist may have shied away from his earlier composition because it appeared so overtly calculated to wound his



Fig. 4 Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Veil of Saint Veronica*, 1630s. Oil on canvas, 42¼ × 31¼ in. (107.2 × 79.3 cm). Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, 1980.9

father, whom he loved and on whom he was financially dependent. By replacing his father’s portrait with Barry’s *Venus*, he found a more subtle way to criticize his father.

Charles Willson Peale had himself painted a nude *Venus* in 1776; however, this painting, now lost, was a private commission and was apparently never exhibited.<sup>41</sup> In an 1805 letter to the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the senior Peale expressed his distaste for the public display of nudes: “such subjects may be good to shew Artists talents, but in my opinion not very proper for public exhibition—I like no art which can raise a blush on a lady’s cheek.”<sup>42</sup> In 1811 he related to Thomas Jefferson that he had ordered “pictures of Nudities” to be “put out of sight” at the most recent exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.<sup>43</sup> By 1815 the elder Peale was begging his son Rembrandt not to exhibit his *Jupiter and Io*.<sup>44</sup> Two years later, after visiting an exhibition of the American Academy of the Fine Arts in New York, he noted in a diary entry that a painting of a “Naked female figure caressing her Child . . . ought not to find a place in an American Exhibition. We ought to keep all such pictures out of sight, if we wish to preserve the modesty of our females.”<sup>45</sup> Seen against the backdrop of this ongoing battle to keep nudes “out of sight,” the pointed, personal meaning of Raphaelle Peale’s painting can hardly be denied.

*Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* not only poked fun at Charles Willson Peale's prudery but it also lambasted the older artist's belief that still lifes were merely mute transcriptions of mundane objects, unworthy of his son's talents. The painted kerchief, which bears the younger Peale's signature like an embroidered monogram on its lower right corner, plays the role of moral protagonist in the painting by appearing to conceal the painted nude. The goddess of love, in this scheme, is reduced to a two-dimensional prop. By relegating the mythological narrative of Venus's birth with its associated philosophical musings on love to the background, the painting turns the academic hierarchy of genres on its head. *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* suppresses the power of the ideal and champions the material.

Using the trompe l'oeil style that Charles Willson Peale had also used and appreciated, Raphaelle Peale reminded his father that, however much he disliked still lifes, he liked nudes even less. It is not hard to believe that Peale, long accustomed to his role as Charles Willson's prodigal son, might have privately enjoyed his more favored brother Rembrandt's plight as he again fended off criticism of his mythological nude in the early 1820s.<sup>46</sup> As Soltis argues, he may have intended *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* to poke fun, not only at his father, but also at his brother, who had "covered" *Jupiter and Io* by repainting it.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Rubens Peale most likely repurchased the Nelson-Atkins painting from its first owner suggests that members of the family recognized the personal themes it expressed.<sup>48</sup>

*Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* is a complex painting, so appealing yet mysterious that it invites speculation. Over the years since its discovery, it has been discussed as a dream image, a joke, a scathing social critique, a psychological puzzle, and even a painted suicide note. As David C. Ward and Sidney Hart have argued, "elusiveness, illusion, and silence are the keys to Raphaelle's art, and perhaps his life."<sup>49</sup> In the end, like the trompe l'oeil cloth it depicts, *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* appears to conceal more than it reveals. What emerges most clearly from its painted surface is the image of a brilliantly subtle artist, capable of nesting meaning within meaning to create a rich, provocative picture that is simultaneously funny and poignant.

LL/MS

## NOTES

1. "Rare Canvas by Son of Charles W. Peale to Be Shown Here," *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 December 1931, 27. For other reviews, see References.
2. See, for example, William H. Gerdtz, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life, 1801–1939*, exh. cat. (Columbia: Philbrook Art Center with University of Missouri Press, 1981), 47–65.
3. Sources of biographical information about Raphaelle Peale include Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812–1824* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); David C. Ward and Sidney Hart, "Subversion and Illusion in the Life and Art of Raphaelle Peale," *American Art* 8 (Summer/Fall 1994), 96–121; Lillian B. Miller, "Father and Son: The Relationship of Charles Willson Peale and Raphaelle Peale," *American Art Journal* 25 (1993), 5–61; Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., Linda Bantel, and John Wilmerding, *Raphaelle Peale*

*Still Lifes*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988); Phoebe Lloyd, "Philadelphia Story," *Art in America* 76 (November 1988), 155–202; and Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

4. Some late portraits by Raphaelle are documented in Phoebe Lloyd, "Raphaelle Peale's Anne-Arundel Still Life: A Local Treasure Lost and Found," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 87 (Spring 1992), 1–9.
5. Phoebe Lloyd has demonstrated that Peale's symptoms are also indicative of chronic heavy metal poisoning, which he may have developed through extended periods of exposure to toxins used as preservatives in the Peale Museum. Lloyd and Gordon Bendersky, "Arsenic, an Old Case: The Chronic Heavy Metal Poisoning of Raphaelle Peale (1774–1825)," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 36 (Summer 1993), 654–65. The extent of Raphaelle's work in the museum and, thus, the cause of his illness is a controversial subject among Peale scholars. Recently, the psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison has suggested that Peale's illness may have resulted from manic depression. See Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 265–70.
6. "The Autobiography of Charles Willson Peale," MS, Peale-Sellers Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 337. Cited in Brandon Fortune, "A Delicate Balance: Raphaelle Peale's Still Life Paintings and the Ideal of Temperance," in *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770–1870*, ed. Lillian B. Miller, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville Press, in association with Trust for Museum Exhibitions and National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 138.
7. Charles Willson Peale to Raphaelle Peale, 1 March 1816, in Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 3, *The Belfield Farm Years, 1810–1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 580.
8. Although the suicide note, which Raphaelle wrote to his wife, is lost, Charles Willson Peale's reaction is recorded in a letter to his son dated 26 June 1818. He wrote, "But I fear, Raphaelle, that you are not right, I am led to think so by seeing the word Suicide in your letter." In Miller, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, 3:593.
9. See for instance, "From the Philadelphia Gazette. Paintings," *New-England Palladium*, 11 June 1813, 1.
10. Lloyd, "Philadelphia Story," 158; Cikovsky, Bantel, and Wilmerding, *Raphaelle Peale Still Lifes*, 50; and Gerdtz, *Painters of the Humble Truth*, 53–55.
11. As a young artist, Raphaelle exhibited two "deceptions" (now lost) in the 1795 Columbianum Exhibition in Philadelphia. See Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 2, pt. 1, *Charles Willson Peale: The Artist as Museum Keeper, 1791–1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 114n5. Phoebe Lloyd also has attributed an early-nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil still life of dueling pistols to Raphaelle Peale, but this attribution is based largely on circumstantial evidence. See Lloyd, "Peale's Pistols: An Attribution to Raphaelle," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 90 (Spring 1995), 3–19.
12. Lance Humphries, "A Trompe l'Oeil for Peale's Philadelphia Museum: Catalogue Deception and the Problem of Peale Family Attributions," *American Art Journal* 32 (2001), 4–44.
13. Wendy Ann Bellion, "Likeness and Deception in Early American Art," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2001, 7–10.
14. Humphries, "A Trompe l'Oeil for Peale's Philadelphia Museum," 35.
15. Dorinda Evans, "Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea*: Further Support for a Change in Interpretation," *American Art Journal* 14 (Summer 1982), 62–72.
16. In addition to the well-known 1772 mezzotint after Barry's *Venus* by the English engraver Valentine Green, an eighteenth-century "red chalk" engraving of the painting by a pupil of the Italian engraver Francesco Bartolozzi, printed on silk, has emerged on the art market. Engravings printed

- on silk were popular household ornaments. The fact that Barry's *Venus* was reproduced in this way attests to the painting's broad popularity. Louan Thompson, Oranmore Antiques, Dallas, e-mail message to Lauren Lessing, 18 August 2005, NAMA curatorial files.
17. Evans, "Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea*." William H. Gerdtz has suggested that the Nelson-Atkins painting is a copy, by Peale, of an earlier work of the same title. He based his argument on his reading of the last digit of the date, which he believes is a "3." See Gerdtz, "A Deception Unmasked: An Artist Uncovered," *American Art Journal* 18 (1986), 5–23. At the time of this writing, however, the last digit of the date of the Nelson-Atkins canvas is illegible. Even so, the pentimenti of *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* reveal the evolution of Peale's ideas and suggest that the painting is not a copy but the original work. Its theme leaves little doubt that Evans's identification is correct.
  18. See Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 4, *Charles Willson Peale: His Last Years, 1821–1827* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 207.
  19. See Lanee Lee Humphries, "Robert Gilmor Jr. (1774–1848): Baltimore Collector and American Art Patron," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1998, 310–13.
  20. Diane Tepfer, "Edith Halpert and the Downtown Gallery, 1926–1940: A Study in Art Patronage," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1989, xi, 163–66, 222–23.
  21. Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale*, vol. 2, *Later Life, 1790–1827* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1947), 390. In a later edition, Sellers attributes this family anecdote to Raphaelle's descendant Harry Peale Haldt; see Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (1969), 420, 482n5.
  22. Sellers's story has unfortunately served to trivialize Peale as an artist. Alexander Eliot, for example, described Raphaelle as "a hopeless, henpecked boozier, two years from the grave," who "had painted one of the finest still lifes in history as a practical joke." See Eliot, *Three Hundred Years of American Painting* (New York: Time, 1957), 2.
  23. An early-nineteenth-century napkin would not have had a striped, woven border, such as the one Peale depicted. This feature was, however, common on kerchiefs, as were the square creases, formed by pressing the kerchief while it was folded, which also appear in *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception*. We are grateful to Linda Eaton, Curator of Textiles, Winterthur Museum, Delaware, for her identification of this object. See Linda Eaton, e-mail message to Lauren Lessing, 8 June 2005, NAMA curatorial files.
  24. Evans, "Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea*," 65.
  25. See Lloyd, "Philadelphia Story," 158–62. For other discussions of Raphaelle's still lifes as social commentary, see Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "Democratic Illusions," in Cikovsky, Bantel, and Wilmerding, *Raphaelle Peale Still Lives*, 54–58; and Annie V. F. Storr, "Raphaelle Peale's *Strawberries, Nuts, &c.*: A Riddle of Enlightened Science," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 21 (1995), 25–74.
  26. The Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, "A Chronological History of Art and Architecture in Nineteenth Century Cork, Incorporating a History of the Crawford Art Gallery and the Crawford School of Art," [www.crawfordartgallery.com/1800-1825](http://www.crawfordartgallery.com/1800-1825) (accessed 30 July 2005). Colleen O'Sullivan, administrator of the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery in Cork, Ireland, kindly confirmed this information.
  27. See E. McSherry Fowble, "Without a Blush: The Movement toward Acceptance of the Nude as an Art Form in America, 1800–1825," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974), 103–21.
  28. "A Lover of the Arts," *Port Folio* 3 (1814), 37, quoted in Carol Eaton Soltis, "In Sympathy with the Heart: Rembrandt Peale, an American Artist and the Traditions of European Art," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2000, 318.
  29. Soltis, "In Sympathy with the Heart," 290–349. Soltis correctly places Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* in the context of this controversy.
  30. *Ibid.*, 333. After removing *The Dream of Love* from his Boston exhibition, Rembrandt placed it on long-term display in New York. A writer there observed caustically that he was "confident, that there *have been*, and *now are*, pictures exposed to public examination in the 'good city of Boston,' more to be deprecated than the elegant painting under consideration." Philo Pro Bono Publico, "The Fine Arts and Peale's 'Dream of Love,'" *American Federalist Columbian Centinel*, 15 November 1823, 1.
  31. Soltis, "In Sympathy with the Heart," 331.
  32. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 269.
  33. *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, in association with Lund Humphries, 2002), 123. For an image of a domestic interior with a partially covered painting of a presumably nude supine woman, see William Hogarth, *Shortly after the Marriage* (1743; National Gallery, London).
  34. Lower-class men and women generally wore kerchiefs that had been printed or dyed to hide dirt and stains. Only the well-to-do wore white kerchiefs. See Paolo Peri, *The Handkerchief* (Modena: Zanfi, 1992), 20–21; and Merideth Wright, *Everyday Dress of Rural America, 1783–1800* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 53–54.
  35. See Technical Notes. We are grateful to Assistant Paintings Conservator Mary Schafer for the information she uncovered about the painting's construction and history.
  36. Lloyd, "Philadelphia Story," 164.
  37. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.36, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1984), 308–11.
  38. Evans, "Raphaelle Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea*," 67–69.
  39. Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale*, 70–71.
  40. Peale, who apparently owned property in Maryland, is listed in a Baltimore newspaper in 1821 as owing two years of back property taxes. See "A List of Persons," *Republican Star and General Advertiser* (Baltimore), 10 March 1821, 4.
  41. Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 2, pt. 2, *Charles Willson Peale: The Artist as Museum Keeper, 1791–1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 834n2.
  42. *Ibid.*, 834.
  43. Miller, *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family, The Belfield Farm Years*, 3:117–18.
  44. *Ibid.*, 330–31.
  45. *Ibid.*, 499.
  46. In a letter to Rembrandt Peale dated 27 July 1812, Charles Willson addressed Raphaelle's resentment of Rembrandt's more favored treatment at his father's hands. Charles Willson attributed Raphaelle's jealousy to his "deranged state" and commented that his marked attention to Rembrandt was "my pleasure, which none of my children have any right to controul." Cikovsky, Bantel, and Wilmerding, *Raphaelle Peale Still Lives*, 100.
  47. Soltis, "In Sympathy with the Heart," 334–35.
  48. See *Catalogue of the Paintings* (New York: Peale's New York Museum and Gallery of the Fine Arts, c. 1825), 7; and *Catalogue of the First Exhibition of Paintings in the Athenaeum Gallery: Consisting of Specimens by American Artists, and a Selection of the Works of the Old Masters*, exh. cat. (Boston: William W. Clapp, 1827), 1.
  49. Ward and Hart, "Subversion and Illusion in the Life and Art of Raphaelle Peale," 97.

## LILLA CABOT PERRY (1848–1933)

### *Portrait Study of a Child*, 1891 (*Child with Violin; Portrait of Alice*)

Oil on canvas

60½ × 36½ in. (152.7 × 91.8 cm)

Signed and dated upper left: LILLA · CABOT · PERRY · / · 1891 ·

Purchase: The Ever Glades Fund, 2003.<sup>1</sup>

IN PRAISE OF THE SIX PAINTINGS of children, including *Portrait Study of a Child*, that Lilla Cabot Perry exhibited at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the critic William Howe Downes wrote, "All of Mrs. Perry's works show a lively appreciation of the quaint picturesqueness of children, and their ingenuous charm, which nothing but the most complete sympathy enables the artist to express."<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite her round, childish face, long hair, and frilly dress, the subject of the Nelson-Atkins canvas—the artist's seven-year-old daughter Alice—exhibits little of the carefree charm commonly associated with children in the nineteenth century. Rather, she wears a solemn expression and stands in the dignified pose of a serious musician. In this portrait, Perry not only demonstrated her assimilation of various modern painting styles—most notably that of James McNeill Whistler—she also expressed her support for women's pursuit of professional careers in the arts.

Lilla Cabot was born in Boston in 1848, the daughter of a distinguished surgeon.<sup>2</sup> The Cabots were Transcendentalists and close friends of such cultural scions as Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and James Russell Lowell. Growing up in this rich, intellectual milieu, Lilla received an education that encompassed drawing, music, languages, and literature—all suitable accomplishments for a young lady in the second half of the nineteenth century. She was an unusually brilliant student who wrote prolifically and became fluent in five languages. Through her friendship with her classmate Alice James, she became part of the erudite circle surrounding the writer Henry James in the late 1860s. There, she met the Harvard linguistics professor Thomas Sergeant Perry, whom she married in 1874.

The Perrys settled into a middle-class existence in Boston. Only after the birth of her youngest daughter, Alice, in 1884, did Perry begin her formal education as a painter—a step she took to help support her growing family. In Boston she studied with Alfred Quentin Collins, Robert Vonnoh, and Dennis Bunker, all of whom taught at the Boston Museum School or the Cowles School of Art. In 1887 she moved with her family to Paris, where she studied at the Académie Colarossi, the Académie Julian, and, after a brief stint at the Royal Academy in Munich, in Alfred Stevens's Paris studio. In paintings like *Portrait of Thomas Sergeant Perry* (1889; private collection), Perry demonstrated her somewhat halting

synthesis of these various academic influences. Her work of this period resembled that of other artists of the so-called Boston School, for instance Edmund Tarbell and Philip Leslie Hale.

The year 1889 was a pivotal one for Perry. She exhibited two portraits at the prestigious Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, which ran concurrently with the Exposition Universelle that spring. There, she undoubtedly saw the large, highly praised paintings by Whistler that were also on view. That summer, Perry made her first of many sojourns to the village of Giverny, the home of Claude Monet. She greatly admired the aging Impressionist painter and, under his influence, began to experiment with broken brushstrokes and dabs of bright, unmixed color; however, Perry did not immediately abandon her more conservative portrait style.

As late as the 1890s, most Americans still regarded the French Impressionists as radicals, operating outside the boundaries of acceptable artistic practice. Whistler, by contrast, was widely embraced as a native genius.<sup>3</sup> Perry painted *Portrait Study of a Child* in France, after a brief return to Boston in 1890. While her subject's brown hair and powder blue dress shimmer with reflected mauve, green, and blue tones—an effect Perry probably learned during her time with Monet—the painting attests most clearly to the influence of Whistler, outwardly resembling Whistler's *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander* (Fig. 1). Both paintings present little girls in party frocks, decoratively arranged against flat, predominantly gray backgrounds. Both girls are shown full-length with their faces turned toward the picture plane and their bodies in three-quarter profile. Like Whistler's subject, Alice is thinly and delicately painted, although she retains at least some of the solidity and volume of a figure in a French academic painting. Despite these similarities, Perry's goals differed sharply from Whistler's. Whereas Whistler represented Cicely Alexander as a beautiful aesthetic object, Alice Perry emerges from her portrait as something more—an active creator of aesthetic experience.

Perry frequently painted her daughters, Margaret, Edith, and Alice, holding or playing musical instruments. As Bailey Van Hook has pointed out, women and girls idly fingering musical instruments often served, in late-nineteenth-century American paintings, as passive symbols of genteel culture.<sup>4</sup> Perry's portraits of her daughters, however, are marked by unusual seriousness and concentration. Rather than lounging, lost in thought, the subjects of *The Beginner* (c. 1885–86; University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson), *Open Air Concert* (1890; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *Playing by Heart* (1897; private collection), and *The Trio* (c. 1898–1900; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.), for example, hold and play their instruments. *Portrait Study of a Child* is no exception. Although Alice was actually a pianist rather







Fig. 1 James McNeill Whistler, *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander*, 1872–74. Oil on canvas, 74 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 38 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (190.2 × 97.8 cm). Tate Gallery, London. Bequeathed by W.C. Alexander, 1932, No4622

than a violinist, Perry depicted her holding her sister Margaret's violin in the quasi-guitar position—a position sometimes used by concert musicians for pizzicato playing in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Caroline B. Nichols, the professional violinist who founded the Fadette Women's Orchestra of Boston in 1888, struck a similar pose in a photograph taken sometime before 1897 and reproduced in the book *Occupations for Women: A Book of Practical Suggestions for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women*.<sup>6</sup>

Perry's portrayal of Alice as a serious, burgeoning musician must be viewed as part of her ongoing attempt to carve out a niche for herself as a professional artist. Although she is sometimes

dismissed as an amateur even today, Perry was one of a growing number of American women artists struggling for professional status in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In an 1891 self-portrait (Terra Foundation of American Art, Chicago), the forty-three-year-old artist depicted herself standing in her studio, wearing a painter's smock. She holds a palette in one hand and, with the other, is painting on a large canvas. Her intent expression, her confident grasp of her tools, and her pose—with her body turned slightly away from the picture plane—echo those of her daughter in *Portrait Study of a Child*. In both paintings, Perry sought to dismiss the still-pervasive image of female artists as idle dilettantes.

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## NOTES

1. William Howe Downes, "New England Art at the World's Fair," *New England Magazine* 14 (May 1893), 363–64.
2. For biographical information on Perry, see Meredith Martindale et al., *Lilla Cabot Perry, an American Impressionist*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1990); Marcia Lynn Soderman-Olson, "Reconstructing Lilla Cabot Perry (1889–1993): A Study in Class and Gender," Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2000; and Erica E. Hirshler, *A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston, 1870–1940*, exh. cat. (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), 80–82, 190.
3. For a recent discussion of Whistler's popularity in the United States, see Linda Merrill, "Whistler in America," in Merrill et al., *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2003), 10–31.
4. Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876–1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).
5. Robin Stowell, "Violin since 1820: Technique and Performing Practice," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, at bert.lib.indiana.edu:2285 (accessed 29 September 2005).
6. Frances Elizabeth Willard, *Occupations for Women: A Book of Practical Suggestions for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women* (Cooper Union, N.Y.: Success Co., 1897), 235.
7. See Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Nancy Mowll Mathews, "American Women Artists at the Turn of the Century: Opportunities and Choices," in Martindale, *Lilla Cabot Perry, an American Impressionist*, 105–13. Careers in the arts were particularly appealing to women because they were widely viewed as "feminine"—that is, they merely extended, rather than violated, the code of genteel feminine behavior that still governed the lives of middle- and upper-class American women at this time.

# JOHN FREDERICK PETO (1854–1907)

## *Books on a Table*, c. 1900

Oil on canvas

24<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 42<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (62.6 × 108.9 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust through the exchange of a gift of the Friends of Art, 90-11

JOHN FREDERICK PETO'S *Books on a Table* features an array of evocative objects—several worn books, a tarnished brass candlestick covered with wax drippings, a ceramic inkwell and quill pen, an earthenware jug, a pipe, and an open tobacco canister. Seemingly scattered and stacked randomly across a long table covered with a deep green cloth and pressed close to the picture plane, these objects nevertheless reveal their environment—a gentleman's library. Thrown into stark relief against a flat, black background, the various objects, rendered in rich, somber tans, browns, and greens, emit a warm, quiet radiance, which the artist punctuates with discrete passages of off-white, bright orange, and yellow-green. Despite the arrangement's apparent randomness, it exudes a stately, reserved dignity due to its roughly pyramidal organization that culminates at the apex in a single page of a book mysteriously standing upright. Additional stability is provided by a network of horizontal and vertical lines, which is offset by a few diagonal elements—the pipe, the covers of books awkwardly tilted, and the quill pen springing gracefully from its reservoir. Excluded from the painting, but essential to its eerily intimate effect, are the implied hands that previously caressed the tattered books, the unseen fingers that formerly activated the quill pen to communicate, and the absent mouth that, in some time past, drew smoke pleurably from the abandoned pipe.

Preeminent among American still-life painters of the late nineteenth century, Peto was born in Philadelphia in 1854 to Catherine Ham and Thomas Hope Peto, a gilder, picture frame dealer, and volunteer fireman. His childhood interest in drawing and sketching is evident in an album filled with vignettes of local scenes and several extant flower studies in watercolor.<sup>1</sup> By 1876 Peto was listed in the city directory as a painter, and two years later he appeared as a student in the rolls of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He sent work occasionally to annual exhibitions of the Pennsylvania Academy between 1879 and 1887 and to industrial exhibitions in distant cities.

Generally speaking, Peto's still lifes can be divided into four categories based on their subject matter: small kitchen compositions, often arrangements of a few basic objects such as pipes, mugs, jugs, dry biscuits, or bottles; office boards and rack pictures; still lifes of objects hanging on sections of walls or door panels; and library still lifes. The strong tradition of still life in Philadelphia, owing largely to the precedent of members of Charles Willson Peale's (q.v.)

family, especially Raphaelle Peale (q.v.), likely encouraged Peto to pursue this genre as his specialty. Perhaps even more influential was William Michael Harnett, considered today among the finest American still-life painters of the nineteenth century. Six years Peto's elder, Harnett also studied at the Pennsylvania Academy in the 1870s and maintained a studio near his younger colleague on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia's artistic district. Furthermore, both artists sold their works through Earle's Gallery at 816 Chestnut Street, which touted its "Fine Line of Sporting Pictures, and Pictures Suitable for The House, Physician, Merchant, The Lawyer, Billiard Room, Stable."<sup>2</sup>

In 1889 Peto relocated with his wife, Christine Pearl Smith, to Island Heights, New Jersey, roughly sixty miles east of Philadelphia. Living and painting in coastal New Jersey, the artist became increasingly disconnected from Philadelphia's art culture. Thereafter his painting was often impeded by personal problems, not the least of which was a battle with Bright's disease, from which he eventually died. Largely forgotten and scarcely documented, Peto's work was famously rediscovered in 1947, long after his death, by the art historian Alfred Frankenstein, who found the painter's mostly intact studio and subsequently concluded that many works inscribed with Harnett's name had actually been executed by Peto.<sup>3</sup>

One of Peto's largest and most impressive library pictures, *Books on a Table* contains many of the props Frankenstein found in the artist's Island Heights home and studio and that reappear in many of his canvases dating about 1900.<sup>4</sup> Peto's predilection for painting isolated, neglected objects has generally been interpreted as evidence of his empathetic identification with their lonely and compromised states of being.<sup>5</sup> Even so, *Books on a Table*, filled with objects that are well-worn if not obsolete, seems additionally to provide insight into Peto's apparent regret that he lived in a time when fountain pens had replaced quills, electric light superseded candlelight, and tobacco typically came packaged in the form of cigarettes, which reduced the more elegant, tapered pipe to a relic of a bygone era. While many nineteenth-century still-life painters, like Severin Roesen (q.v.), celebrated America's abundance by focusing on robust, pristine forms from nature, Peto, in his library pictures, contemplated—even eulogized—antiquated artifacts of culture as pitiable signs of the inevitable passage of time.<sup>6</sup>

Peto's work was embraced throughout the early twentieth century by critics, collectors, and audiences possessing varied and sometimes competing tastes and interests. As the reviewer Belle Krasne observed in *Art Digest* on the occasion of Peto's first retrospective in 1950: "the Peto-Harnett breed of American super-realism has come to the fore . . . partly as a result of the cubists' revival of still-life, partly because of interest in surrealist trompe-l'oeil, and partly as a reaction against non-objective painting."<sup>7</sup> As



Krasne's assessment suggests, Peto's seeming reduction of form to geometric essentials marked the painter in certain circles as possessing distinctly modern sensibilities, far removed from the extravagance generally associated with the Gilded Age and closer in sensibility in the 1930s and 1940s to, for example, Precisionist paintings by George Ault (q.v.) and Charles Sheeler (q.v.). Furthermore, the austere strangeness that pervades much of Peto's work could seem to viewers astonishingly resonant with the variant of American Surrealism known as Magic Realism. Today, Peto's oeuvre stands as one of the great art-historical finds in American art of the early twentieth century. More specifically, the Nelson-Atkins *Books on a Table* encourages reflection on our own culture of programmed obsolescence and solicits consideration of and for those personal objects too often disregarded in our compulsive rush to the new.

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## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Peto has been drawn primarily from Alfred Frankenstein, *After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters, 1870–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), 99–111; and John Wilmerding, *Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century America*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983). The album of Peto's childhood sketches is misplaced.
2. "Earles' Galleries of Paintings and Looking-Glass Warerooms," advertisement, in Doreen Bolger, "The Patrons of the Artist: Emblems of Commerce and Culture," in *William M. Harnett*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 78, fig. 31.
3. The story of Frankenstein's discovery of Peto has been retold many times. See esp. Alfred Frankenstein, "Harnett, True and False," *Art Bulletin* 31 (March 1949), 38–56. See also Olive Bragazzi, "The Story behind the Rediscovery of William Harnett and John Peto by Edith Halpert and Alfred Frankenstein," *American Art Journal* 16 (Spring 1984), 51–65. Frankenstein outlined the stylistic differences between Harnett's and Peto's work in "Harnett, True and False." For additional stylistic analysis and comparison, see Lloyd Goodrich, "Harnett and Peto: A Note on Style," *Art Bulletin* 31 (March 1949), 56–58.
4. Other library pictures by Peto tied especially closely to the Nelson-Atkins canvas include *In the Library* (1900; Timken Museum of Art, San Diego), *Discarded Treasures* (c. 1904; Reynolda House, Winston-Salem, N.C.), and *Lights of Other Days* (c. 1906; Art Institute of Chicago).
5. Frankenstein, *After the Hunt*, 107, observes, "It does not take a Freudian psychologist to perceive that Peto's concern with used-up, discarded, and rejected things parallels his own life."
6. For a key study of Peto in the larger context of American still-life painting, see William H. Gerdtz, *Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life, 1801–1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981).
7. Belle Krasne, "Peto's Harnetts and Peto's Peto," *Art Digest* 24 (1 May 1950), 13. The presumed kinship between nineteenth-century American still life, Surrealism, and Magic Realism was reinforced especially by the major exhibition *American Realists and Magic Realists* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1943. See Dorothy C. Miller and Alfred H. Barr Jr., eds., *American Realists and Magic Realists*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

## MAURICE BRAZIL PRENDERGAST (1858–1924)

### *Portrait of a Boy*, c. 1910–13

Oil on canvas, mounted on Masonite

18 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 15 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (47.3 × 38.7 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Milton McGreevy through the Westport Fund, 44-23

DURING HIS SECOND TRIP TO PARIS, in 1907, Maurice Prendergast visited various Post-Impressionist and modernist exhibitions, including the Salon d'Automne, where he saw paintings by Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and the group of Symbolist-inspired painters known as the Nabis, which included Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, and Édouard Vuillard. Delighted by what he saw, he wrote to a friend, "All those exhibitions worked me up so much that I had to run up and down the boulevards to work off steam." He added, "I got what I came over for, a new impulse. . . . I think Cézanne will influence me more than the others."<sup>1</sup> After his return to the United States later that year, the artist began acting on the "new impulse" he had gained in Paris. *Portrait of a Boy* is one of a number of portrait studies executed about 1910 that clearly shows Prendergast's evolving engagement with avant-garde French art as well as modern art in New York.

Maurice Prendergast was born in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, but his family immigrated to the United States and settled in Boston when he was ten.<sup>2</sup> There, he studied technical drawing as part of his public school education. After he left school to work as a grocery store clerk at the age of fourteen, he continued taking evening drawing lessons at several schools.<sup>3</sup> He left the grocery business in the late 1870s to work as a commercial artist and decorator. Prendergast continued in this vein for more than ten years, spending his free time on sketching trips through the New England countryside with his brother Charles, with whom he lived throughout his adult life.

Prendergast's development into a professional painter took place during his first extended sojourn in France, from 1891 to 1895. There, he frequently took in exhibitions featuring the work of such artists as Bonnard, James McNeill Whistler, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, and Paul Signac. He also had frequent meetings with the avant-garde, English-speaking clientele of the Chat Blanc café. Included in this group were the artists Charles Conder, Walter Sickert, Aubrey Beardsley, and the Canadian artist James Wilson Morrice. Morrice often accompanied Prendergast on sketching outings to the parks, boulevards, and cafés of Paris. All of these activities took priority over Prendergast's instruction at the Académie Julian and Colarossi, where he spent the first year or two of his time in Paris sketching from live models and plaster casts.<sup>4</sup>

Back in the United States, Prendergast built his artistic reputation on his many watercolor paintings of fashionable beaches,

parks, and promenades of Boston, New York, Paris, and Venice. Colorful and decorative as well as detailed and descriptive, they pleased many tastes. Prendergast's Venetian views, which he executed during a trip to Italy in 1898 and 1899 and exhibited shortly after his return at New York's Macbeth Gallery, were immensely popular with audiences and critics alike. The reviewer for the *New York Evening Sun* commented, "Of the twenty-six water-colors here there is not one that is commonplace."<sup>5</sup>

After his 1907 trip to France, Prendergast began painting more frequently in oil. Like his avant-garde colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic, he painted still lifes, landscapes, nude studies, and portraits in which he experimented with new theories on the relationship of art to reality.<sup>6</sup> His new, more imaginative paintings were riotously conspicuous among the somber, realistic portrayals of American cityscapes exhibited by the Eight, later known as the Ashcan School, with whom he exhibited. At the 1908 exhibition of this vanguard group, reviewers singled out Prendergast's brightly colored and freely brushed paintings as "studies in pink and purple paint" and "artistic tommy-rot."<sup>7</sup> Yet, by 1910, a critic for the *New York Times* could describe "the spotted harmonies of Maurice Prendergast," so startling just a few years ago, as "classic, since we are America and we assimilate quickly."<sup>8</sup>

*Portrait of a Boy* is one of a group of about twenty portraits that Prendergast painted between 1910 and 1913. Prendergast's earlier portraits of his friends Annie Sargent Jewett (c. 1902; Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Mrs. Oliver E. Williams (c. 1902; private collection) did not differ greatly from his other figural compositions and lacked an emphasis on describing the individual characteristics of his sitters.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Prendergast's later paintings show a concentrated effort to produce recognizable likenesses. Titles such as *Girl in Blue Dress* and *Woman in Green Dress* identify color as the artist's main concern, yet for all their decorative qualities the paintings also exhibit unexpected psychological insight and expressive power.

Paintings of children—all bust-length, frontally posed, and disarmingly honest and sincere—form the bulk of Prendergast's portrait studies. His decision to paint children was almost certainly influenced by his good friend Robert Henri (q.v.) with whom he had exhibited regularly beginning in 1904. Henri and his followers made paintings of children a specialty, believing that they embodied a period of precious naïveté and could serve as antidotes to the perceived overcivilization and complexity of modern life.<sup>10</sup> This idea was no doubt appealing to Prendergast, whom contemporaries described as a "Peter Pan," never quite reconciled with his role as an adult, and whose own artistic naïveté was considered a hallmark of his style.<sup>11</sup>



The unidentified, dark-haired, dark-eyed boy in the Nelson-Atkins portrait also appears in a similar portrait in the Hirshhorn Museum.<sup>12</sup> Like Henri, who painted favorite sitters repeatedly to capture various aspects of their personalities, Prendergast seems to have stuck with a few models who pleased him. Stylistically, though, Prendergast diverged sharply from Henri's muted, loosely brushed portrait studies. In 1925, the year after Prendergast's death, *Portrait of a Boy* was recognized, above all else, for being a "beautiful promise of technical experiment."<sup>13</sup> In it, Prendergast depicted his young subject with broad, emphatic outlines, on and around which he added a shimmering weave of bronze, olive, and gray tints. As Milton Brown has pointed out, *Portrait of a Boy* recalls portraits by Cézanne.<sup>14</sup> With its broken brushstrokes, emphatic flatness, and juxtaposition of complementary colors, the Nelson-Atkins portrait also calls to mind works by Vincent van Gogh and members of the Nabis, particularly Denis. Typically, Prendergast improvised as he worked, painting over portions of his composition—for instance, the back of the boy's chair. As a result, viewers become acutely aware of the nature of painting as a process.

Prendergast's experiments in portraiture seem to have been limited, for the most part, to the period during the early 1910s when he was most influenced by the modernist art he had seen in Paris. Having synthesized the lessons of modernism to create his own decorative style, during the last decade of his life Prendergast returned to his earlier subjects of outdoor spectacles, picnics, and promenades, yet now painted them in a more imaginative and subjective fashion.

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## NOTES

1. Prendergast to Mrs. Oliver E. Williams, 10 October 1907, cited in Richard J. Wattenmaker, *Maurice Prendergast* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 87. Prendergast was among the first American artists to be swept up by the wave of interest in Cézanne's art that followed the French Post-Impressionist's death in 1906. See John Rewald, *Cézanne and America: Dealers, Collectors, Artists and Critics, 1891–1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 32, 34.
2. For biographical information about Prendergast, see Wattenmaker, *Maurice Prendergast*; and Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art, 1990).
3. See Ellen Glavin, "The Early Art Education of Maurice Prendergast," *Archives of American Art Journal* 33 (1993), 3–5.
4. Various accounts differ as to the length of Prendergast's study at these Paris ateliers. The only documentation found so far is a bill for classes proving he studied at Julian's at least during April–May 1892; see Eleanor Green, *Maurice Prendergast: Art of Impulse and Color*, exh. cat. (College Park: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1976), 11.
5. "Mr. Prendergast's Water Colors at the Macbeth Gallery," *New York Evening Sun*, 13 March 1900, as cited in Gwendolyn Owens, "Maurice Prendergast among His Patrons," in Carol Clark, Nancy Mowll Mathews, and Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art; Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1990), 51.
6. The most extensive discussions of Prendergast's 1907 trip to Paris and the modernist influence in his art can be found in Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast*, 23–30; and Nancy Mowll Mathews, "Maurice Prendergast and the Influence of European Modernism," in Clark, Mathews, and Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast*, 35–45.
7. Quoted in Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast*, 26.
8. "Young Artists' Work Shown," *New York Times*, 2 April 1910, 9.
9. Prendergast was also known to have painted portraits in 1904, when he mentions straining his eyes while painting children's portraits; see Green, *Maurice Prendergast*, 112.
10. Bruce Weber, *Ashcan Kids: Children in the Art of Henri, Luks, Glackens, Bellows and Sloan*, exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Gallery, 1998). For a discussion of the concept of overcivilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4–5.
11. For a description of Prendergast's love of children and childlike qualities, see Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group: The Emergence of Realism in American Art* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), 116–22. For Prendergast's perceived naïveté, see "Art Notes," *New York Evening Post*, 20 February 1915, 7. Amy Goldin has described Prendergast's modernist engagement with naïve art in "How Are the Prendergasts Modern?" *Art in America* 64 (September–October 1976), 61–67.
12. *Head of a Boy*, c. 1910–13, oil on canvas, 13½ × 11 in. (34.3 × 27.9 cm), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. It has been suggested that the Nelson-Atkins boy and several other youths portrayed by Prendergast may be the children of his friend Mrs. Oliver E. Williams. Green, *Maurice Prendergast*, 48, 112. Prendergast wrote to Mrs. Williams in November 1905 about his desire to paint her children: "I find when two together are working from the same head there is more inspiration. If you feel as if you would take up painting it would be an opportunity. I would like your children to pose. I find they are more willing."
13. "The World of Art: A Memorial Exhibition and Some Books," *New York Times Magazine*, 1 March 1925, 16. One of Prendergast's biographers, Hedley Howell Rhys, noted in a phrase reminiscent of descriptions of Robert Henri's portraits that what Prendergast "caught most successfully was the intent gaze and sweet solemnity of childhood." He concluded, "*Portrait of a Boy* . . . is his best effort in this field." Hedley Howell Rhys, *Maurice Prendergast, 1859–1924*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 50.
14. Milton W. Brown, "Maurice B. Prendergast," in Clark, Mathews, and Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast*, 21. See also Mathews, "Maurice Prendergast and the Influence of European Modernism," in *ibid.*, 38–39.

# MAURICE BRAZIL PRENDERGAST (1858–1924)

## *Castle Island*, c. 1915–18

Oil on canvas

18<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 28<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (47.1 × 71.8 cm)

Signed lower left: Prendergast.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha, F58-57

DURING THE LAST DECADE OF HIS LIFE, Maurice Prendergast continued to paint the scenes of outdoor leisure that had preoccupied him since the 1890s. Now, however, instead of capturing the restless spectacle of modern life, he painted highly decorative and subjective idylls. *Castle Island* exemplifies these late landscapes. Painted loosely and densely in glowing, jewel-like tones, it depicts a throng of seated and standing figures enjoying a sunny afternoon in a lush island setting. As a sailboat drifts by, the sun hangs low in the sky but casts no shadows. Light seems to emanate from within the composition itself, almost as if it were composed of stained glass. The result is both decorative and otherworldly.

The ostensible location of the Nelson-Atkins painting is an island in Boston's Inner Harbor. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Castle Island was a military site that housed a succession of prisons and forts. In 1890 the federal government gave the island to the city of Boston. It was soon connected by a bridge to South Boston's Marine Park and became a fashionable spot for picnics and promenades.<sup>1</sup> *Castle Island*, which is stylistically most compatible with Prendergast's work of the years 1915–18, when the artist lived in New York City, was probably painted from memory.<sup>2</sup>

Despite its title, the Nelson-Atkins canvas is less a topographic rendering of a recognizable place than a fantasy scene, one of numerous whimsical outdoor fêtes that the artist painted during the years of World War I. These works, which the artist rendered with decorative dabs and dashes of paint, share a similar pastoral sensibility and, for the most part, the same rich, luminous palette. Their dreamy, languorous atmosphere sets them apart from Prendergast's earlier, more representational, and frenetic works. The artist's new vision may have resulted from several factors, including his growing deafness, which isolated him from the busy hum of modern life, his study of naïve and folk art in the early teens, and his reaction to the war.<sup>3</sup>

Prendergast's interest in folk art derived from the American Arts and Crafts movement, of which his brother—the frame and cabinetmaker Charles Prendergast—was a follower.<sup>4</sup> Arts and Crafts practitioners did not constitute a formal school. Rather, they were a group of loosely affiliated artists, working in a range of media, who reacted against the impersonal, factory-made aesthetic of the industrial age. They promoted the revival of traditional crafts—from carpentry to weaving to pottery—and sought to break down the boundaries between these “handicrafts” and the

“fine arts” of painting and sculpture. It is no coincidence that critics have compared the paintings Prendergast made during the 1910s to tapestries, samplers, patchwork quilts, and weavings.<sup>5</sup> With their densely painted surfaces, pleasant subject matter, and lovely, harmonious colors, they call attention to themselves as handmade, ornamental objects.

The Arcadian imagery of Prendergast's paintings during the mid-teens was probably also a reaction on the artist's part to the grim, militarized atmosphere of World War I.<sup>6</sup> Prendergast, who visited France for a third time in 1914 and kept abreast of developments there, must have felt acutely the ominous shadow of the war. As the United States prepared to enter the conflict in 1917, many American artists—for instance, Charles Hawthorne (q.v.)—embraced the war effort wholeheartedly, seeing in it a dual opportunity to aid their country and further their own reputations.<sup>7</sup> Prendergast, by contrast, retreated further into a realm of pastoral fantasy. Although the United States Army briefly reclaimed Castle Island in 1918 for use as a military installation, no sense of the momentous events unfolding there or in the outside world intrudes on Prendergast's depiction of a peaceful, seemingly timeless scene. The artist's flight from modernity paralleled that of many of his modernist French colleagues. However, whereas they adopted classicizing styles and themes to express their affinity with French nationalist ideals, Prendergast's motivations and art were more personal and idiosyncratic.<sup>8</sup>

Prendergast's new mode of oil painting was often misunderstood and received very mixed reviews. While some critics found it pleasing, others found it and him “overburdened by his own mannerisms” and limited by the boundaries of his self-imposed conventions.<sup>9</sup> Still others underestimated his engagement with the currents of contemporary art and attributed the idyllic quality and simplicity of his paintings to the artist's natural joie de vivre and childlike nature.<sup>10</sup> One critic even condemned Prendergast for turning away from modernity toward “the sterilities of antiquity.”<sup>11</sup> Yet despite the critics' sometimes unreceptive attitudes, Prendergast was quite popular with important collectors such as Lillie Bliss, Edward Root, John Quinn, Albert Barnes, and Duncan Phillips.<sup>12</sup>

Although he signed *Castle Island*, suggesting that he considered it worthy of exhibition in its present state, Prendergast at this point in his career viewed his paintings as living, evolving entities. The mysterious, satyrlike being atop the central rock is only one of several seemingly unfinished figures in the painting.<sup>13</sup> The artist's loose, layered technique enhances the impression of *Castle Island* as an open-ended work in progress. Unconcerned with the pseudo-scientific color theories that intrigued many of his former colleagues in the Eight or the Impressionists' earlier





faithful translation of optical effects, Prendergast developed his late paintings in his studio, according to his own subjective choices of color, pattern, and finish. Prendergast's frequent inclination to make changes in his paintings, along with his reluctance, at times, to part with them, attests to the personal nature of his work.

LL/MS

## NOTES

1. Edward Rowe Snow, *The Islands of Boston Harbor, 1630–1971* (1936; New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971), 62–89; and William J. Reid, *Castle Island and Fort Independence* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library, 1995).
2. During the late 1910s Prendergast frequently reworked old paintings, even ones already exhibited. This practice, which his brother Charles Prendergast called “pecking away,” gained him a certain degree of notoriety among his patrons. It also accounts for the thick and complex surfaces, as well as for the uneven quality, of many of his late paintings. In the case of *Castle Island*, however, there is no evidence of an earlier, underlying composition. Nancy Mowl Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art, 1990), 37.
3. For the idea that Prendergast's increasing deafness allowed him to retreat into a world of his own making, see “Deaf Prendergast, Dead Ten Years, Presents His ‘Still Domain,’” *Art Digest* 8 (1 March 1934), 10.
4. Carol Derby, “Charles Prendergast's Frames: Reuniting Design and Craftsmanship,” in Carol Clark, Nancy Mowl Mathews, and Gwendolyn Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art; Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1990), 95–105. In keeping with the Arts and Crafts movement's emphasis on collaboration, Maurice and Charles often worked together, with Charles making frames for Maurice's paintings, and vice versa.
5. As early as 1910 Charles Hovey Pepper wrote of Prendergast's “paint quality as delicious as an old tapestry.” Pepper, “Is Drawing to Disappear in Artistic Individuality? A Sketch of the Work of Maurice Prendergast,” *World Today* 19 (July 1910), 716–19. For similar references, see Richard J. Wattenmaker, *Maurice Prendergast* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 125–26, 135, 137, 141.
6. Nancy Mowl Mathews, *The Art of Leisure: Maurice Prendergast in the Williams College Museum of Art*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art, 1999), 45.
7. See Kevin Louis Nibbe, “The Greatest Opportunity: American Artists and the Great War, 1917–1920,” Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2000.
8. Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
9. See Dominic Madormo, “The ‘Butterfly’ Artist: Maurice Prendergast and His Critics,” in Clark, Mathews, and Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast*, 69.
10. Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast*, 33–35.
11. Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (New York: John Lance Company, 1915), 322.
12. Gwendolyn Owens, “Maurice Prendergast among His Patrons,” in *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast*, 47–58.
13. Hedley Howell Rhys, *Maurice Prendergast, 1859–1924*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 52.

## FREDERIC REMINGTON (1861–1909)

### *Teaching a Mustang Pony to Pack Dead Game*, c. 1890

Oil on canvas

20¼ × 30¼ in. (51.4 × 76.8 cm)

Signed lower right: — REMINGTON

Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the Union Pacific Foundation, F86-19

FREDERIC REMINGTON WAS the premier interpreter of the American West in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. His romantic images of the cowboy, the Native American, the cavalryman, and the plainsman so seamlessly fused observation and imagination that they were accepted as “authentic” and came to define Americans’ perceptions of life on the western frontier. Writing in 1892, the painter and critic William Coffin astutely noted:

It is a fact that admits of no question that Eastern people have formed their conception of what the Far Western life is like more from what they have seen in Mr. Remington’s pictures than from any other source, and if they went to the West . . . they would expect to see men and places looking exactly as Mr. Remington has drawn them. Those who have been there are authority for saying that they would not be disappointed.<sup>1</sup>

Remington was born in Canton, New York, the son of a local newspaper proprietor who had distinguished himself as a Union cavalry officer in the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> In 1873 his family moved to Ogdensburg, New York. Remington’s childhood in the Adirondacks and along the St. Lawrence River fostered his lifelong love of horses and the outdoors. He received his first formal art training in high school, and he filled sketchbooks with drawings of cavalrymen, cowboys, Indians, and horses—youthful efforts that hinted at his future career. In 1878 he entered Yale University as an art student, where he studied with John Ferguson Weir and John H. Niemeyer. The Yale curriculum stressed drawing from the antique and the live model, anatomy, and painting.<sup>3</sup> Remington may have found such study too stringent. When his father died in 1880, he decided not to return to college.

In the summer of 1881 Remington made his first trip west. During a two-month stay in Montana Territory he investigated the ranching industry and the goldfields, and he returned with a portfolio of sketches, one of which he sold to *Harper’s Weekly*. After Remington received his inheritance in 1883, he bought a sheep ranch in Peabody, Kansas, which he sold after a year, then relocated to Kansas City, where he invested the remainder of his patrimony in a hardware store and a saloon, both of which failed. He traveled widely in Kansas, the Arizona and New Mexico

Territories, and Texas, observing and sketching western life. When his savings disappeared, Remington’s thoughts reverted to art. He was emboldened in this career move by the sale of several paintings through the gallery and art supply store in Kansas City owned by W. W. Findlay.<sup>4</sup>

In 1885 Remington moved to Brooklyn, New York, to pursue a career as an artist. Recognizing his need for further training, he enrolled briefly in the Art Students League of New York, where he studied painting with Julian Alden Weir. In 1886 he returned to the Arizona and New Mexico Territories on assignment for *Harper’s Weekly*, and his illustrations soon animated the pages of other leading magazines, including *Outing*, *Harper’s Monthly*, *Century Magazine*, and *Scribner’s*. After receiving a prestigious commission to illustrate Theodore Roosevelt’s 1887 book, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, Remington also began to exhibit his paintings. *The Last Lull in the Fight* (c. 1889; location unknown), won a silver medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle. A few months later his painting *A Dash for the Timber* (1889; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth) was a popular success at the autumn exhibition of the National Academy of Design.

Remington’s early success coincided with a period of resurging nationalism in the arts and in American life. The arts commentator George W. Sheldon, himself a staunch advocate of European training and cosmopolitanism in art, acknowledged the nascent call for national themes. For an influential minority, he noted, “America for the Americans’ is their watchword; ‘let the painter study art in his own land, and paint the subjects that suggest themselves around him.’”<sup>5</sup> Western imagery in particular assumed renewed prominence at this time.<sup>6</sup> In 1890, close to the time when Remington painted *Teaching a Mustang Pony to Pack Dead Game*, the U.S. Bureau of the Census declared that the western frontier was closed. The vanishing of the frontier, amid the anxieties of the 1890s—economic depression, massive immigration from Europe, and rapid industrialization and urbanization—contributed to a nostalgia for the West as a uniquely American region and for the unassimilated individualism that the westerner seemed to embody. In 1905 Remington reflected:

I knew the railroad was coming—I saw men already swarming into the land. I knew the derby hat, the smoking chimneys, the cord-binder and the thirty-day note were upon us in a restless surge. I knew the wild riders and vacant land were about to vanish forever, and the more I considered the subject the bigger the Forever loomed. Without knowing exactly how to do it, I began to try to record some facts around me and the more I looked the more the panorama unfolded.<sup>7</sup>



In particular, the rough-and-tumble cowboys that appear so frequently in Remington's art served as foils for urban, eastern American culture. "Cowboys," the artist wrote in 1899, "possess a quality of sturdy, sterling manhood, which would be to the credit of men in any walk of life."<sup>8</sup>

Although Remington is better known for his action-packed scenes that emphasized wild riders and gunplay, he frequently essayed the more mundane aspects of cowboy life. *Teaching a Mustang Pony to Pack Dead Game* depicts three rugged cowboys who, having returned from a hunting expedition, are disciplining a spooked pony to carry a dead deer. The artist may have executed the grisaille oil painting on speculation then submitted it to *Harper's Weekly*, where the design was engraved for a full-page illustration that appeared in the 16 August 1890 issue.<sup>9</sup> A brief, explanatory text by a staff writer accompanied the illustration. "Some horses have a deep-seated antipathy to carry dead game, . . ." the author noted, "and abhor the scent of blood." He then described one of the more extreme methods cowboys used to force a startled horse into compliance. "First the slip knot is thrown around that pony's neck, and if he is unruly a throttling process follows. A second rope has secured him by the foreleg about the fetlock. Should he show any disposition to be ugly not much mercy will be shown him."<sup>10</sup>

The Nelson-Atkins painting is typical of the compelling narrative quality of Remington's early pictures and of his ability to imbue his work with a sense of realism in what one reviewer described as "a decisive and convincing manner."<sup>11</sup> The artist deftly represented a few pictorial elements—three stalwart cowboys, their faces and bodies stamped with gritty determination, a terrified mustang, his eyes bulging and head rearing, and the remaining ponies waiting behind—that encapsulate the whole story. The scene is set in a barren landscape, vaguely reminiscent of the vast plains, which does not distract from the contest between man and beast. The leftward leaning cowboy, whose shadow and lariat invade the viewer's space, quickly leads us into the picture, where our attention is directed along the taut rope to the struggling horse, then backward to the upper right corner, where a cowboy steadies the second rope, and forward again to a third colleague who prepares to toss the deer on the mustang's back. Our eye wanders to the two ponies waiting patiently in the left background. One, with a deer already on its back, suggests the inevitable outcome of the struggle. Remington's dynamic composition—especially the taut pose of the cowboy in the left foreground—and his vigorous brushwork impart a sense of liveliness and immediacy to the work and convey the impression that he painted the scene from life. Remington also made his story more convincing with a profusion of realistic details, including the cowboys' clothing and equipment and the horses' tack.

During his sojourn in Kansas and in his travels through the southwest and northwest territories in the 1880s, Remington had ample opportunity to observe and record cowboy life. Nevertheless, *Teaching a Mustang Pony to Pack Dead Game* is an artful reconstruction put together in his New York studio—a composite

likely assembled from his on-site sketches, photographs, and journal notes, as well as from his collection of western artifacts and his creative imagination.<sup>12</sup> Like many late-nineteenth-century artists, Remington researched his subjects and accumulated props to give his pictures a feeling of authenticity. The Winchester Model 1873 Repeating Rifle in the right foreground was but one of the many items in his studio collection, which is housed today at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the patrons who bought Remington's paintings and the readers who enjoyed his illustrations were not themselves westerners but middle- and upper-class easterners. His seemingly reportorial depictions of life on the frontier were, in fact, carefully constructed to please this audience by reinforcing their cherished ideals. In particular, *Teaching a Mustang Pony to Pack Dead Game* presents a vision of virile American manhood. In the years before the turn of the twentieth century, urbanization, industrialization, and women's increased power in the public sphere led many Americans to fear that their culture was becoming effeminate.<sup>14</sup> The nation's incipient imperialism and racial conflicts at home also sparked anxiety that white men in particular had become overcivilized and lacked the manly energy necessary to maintain their position of control. The cowboys who appear in the Nelson-Atkins painting—strong, determined, and engaged in a brutal, ongoing struggle for mastery—reinforced a new masculine ideal that was replacing older Victorian notions of self-restrained, moral manhood.

The cowboys in Remington's paintings and illustrations were also instrumental to his self-fashioning as a manly artist. A cavalry lieutenant stationed in Montana described the artist in 1890 as "a fat citizen" wearing expensive Prussian riding boots and English spurs, whose "horse was glad to get rid of him, for he could not have trained down to two hundred pounds in less than a month of cross-country riding on a hot trail."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in the East, Remington quickly became identified with his subjects. By 1893 a New York critic could assert confidently that "Mr. Remington 'has come out of the West' with whirling lariat and clanking of spurs and trappings. . . . His art is wide awake and shouting."<sup>16</sup> Through his choice of subjects and his seemingly direct, documentary style, Remington set himself apart from such cosmopolitan American artists as Abbott Handerson Thayer and William Merritt Chase (q.v.) and framed himself as both masculine and quintessentially American.

GMD/LL

## NOTES

1. William A. Coffin, "American Illustration of To-Day," *Scribner's Magazine* 11 (March 1892), 348.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, the authors have drawn on the following sources for information on the life and work of Frederic Remington: Harold McCracken, *Frederic Remington: Artist of the Old West* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1947); Harold McCracken, *A Catalogue of the Frederic Remington Memorial Collection* (New York: M. Knoedler & Co., for the Remington Art Memorial, Ogdensburg, N.Y., 1954); Peter H. Hassrick, *Frederic Remington: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture in the Amon Carter Museum and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation Collections* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973); Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Frederic Remington: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1982); David Tatham, "Frederic Remington: North Country Artist," in William Crowley, Tatham, and Atwood Manley, *Artist in Residence: The North Country Art of Frederic Remington*, exh. cat. (Ogdensburg, N.Y.: Frederic Remington Art Museum, 1985); Michael Edward Shapiro and Peter H. Hassrick et al., *Frederic Remington: The Masterworks*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Saint Louis Art Museum, 1988); Allen P. Splete and Marilyn D. Splete, *Frederic Remington, Selected Letters* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988); James K. Ballinger, *Frederic Remington* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989); Brian W. Dippie, *Remington and Russell: The Sid Richardson Collection*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Peter H. Hassrick and Melissa J. Webster, *Frederic Remington: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Watercolors and Drawings* (Cody, Wyo.: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1996); and Brian W. Dippie, *The Frederic Remington Art Museum Collection* (Ogdensburg, N.Y.: Frederic Remington Art Museum, 2001).
3. For a description of the program of instruction at the Yale School of Fine Arts when Remington was in attendance, see Betsy Falilman, *John Ferguson Weir: The Labor of Art* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1977), 134–35; and Doreen Bolger Burke, "Remington in the Context of His Artistic Generation," in Shapiro and Hassrick et al., *Frederic Remington*, 40–42.
4. As the artist said: "Now that I was poor, there seemed to be no reason why I should not gratify my inclination for an artist's career. In art, to be conventional, one must be penniless." Quoted in P. J. H. Jr., "Frederick Remington," *Book Buyer* 11 (October 1894), 440.
5. George William Sheldon, *Recent Ideals of American Art* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 2:37.
6. The critic Friedrich Pecht, for instance, singled out western subjects as the most appropriate for American artists. Fr[iedrich] Pecht, "A German Critic on American Art," *Art Amateur* 2 (September 1884), 76–77, quoted in Burke, "Remington in the Context of His Artistic Generation," 47.
7. Frederic Remington, "A Few Words from Mr. Remington," *Collier's* 34 (18 March 1905), 16.
8. Frederic Remington, "Life in the Cattle Country," quoted in Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, eds., *The Collected Writings of Frederic Remington* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 388.
9. Henry Adams, "Remington Painting Added to Collection," *Calendar of Events* (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art), February 1987, 2; and "Teaching a Pony to Pack Game," *Harper's Weekly* 34 (16 August 1890), 632.
10. "Teaching a Pony to Pack Game," 634.
11. "Art in New York," *Arcadia* 1 (16 January 1893), 376.
12. Burke, "Remington in the Context of His Artistic Generation," 43. For a thorough discussion of Remington's use of photography, see also Estelle Jussim, *Frederic Remington, the Camera and the Old West* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1983).
13. Julie Coleman, Curatorial Assistant, Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Buffalo Bill Historical Society, to Gina M. D'Angelo, 21 February 2002, NAMA curatorial files.
14. For an in-depth study of this perceived crisis in gender, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. 170–215.
15. Alvin H. Sydenham, quoted in Brian W. Dippie, "'Cowboys Are Gems to Me': Remington, Russell, and the Cowboy in Art," *South Dakota History* 32 (Fall 2002), 223.
16. C. M. Fairbanks, "New York as an Art Center," *Chautauquan* 13 (June 1893), 332.

## FREDERIC REMINGTON (1861–1909)

### *Hostiles Watching the Column*, c. 1896–97 (*The Scout*)

Oil on canvas  
25 × 27¼ in. (63.5 × 69.2 cm)  
Signed lower right: Frederic Remington —  
Gift of the Newhouse Galleries, 32-12

IN THE MID-1890S REMINGTON began a process of reevaluation and redirection in his art. His early success had brought fame and wealth. By 1890 he owned both a home and a studio in New Rochelle, New York, and a small island in the St. Lawrence River near Ogdensburg, New York, where he spent his summers painting and canoeing. The accolades that came his way were primarily for his work as an illustrator. His one-man exhibitions and sales of paintings in 1893 and 1895 were generally well received, but critics faulted his “dry and opaque” color and the lack of “personal feeling in his brushing.”<sup>1</sup> In 1896 Remington confided to his friend Owen Wister that “I have to find out for once and for all if I can paint. The thing to which I am going to devote two months is ‘color.’ I have studied form so much that I never had a chance to ‘let go’ and find if I can see with the wide open eyes of a child.”<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 1890s Remington continued to travel extensively in the West, where he drew his subjects from his experiences with the cowboys, cavalry, and Native Americans. However, as the West became increasingly settled and accessible, Remington made his depictions of the region less ostensibly documentary and more retrospective and reflective. This change in vision was accompanied by more simplified compositional strategies and a greater sensitivity to color and paint.

*Hostiles Watching the Column* is an excellent example of Remington’s transition in the late 1890s to a more contemplative and pictorial manner. One of a portfolio of sixty-two pictures that Remington published in a book entitled *Drawings* in 1897,<sup>3</sup> the Nelson-Atkins painting depicts a small Indian war party. Here, two Plains scouts have ridden to an advanced position to observe the movement of the enemy before beginning their attack. Isolated in a desolate landscape, they scan the surrounding countryside from a high hill. Overt narrative is suspended; only the title of the painting suggests that the U.S. cavalry may be the intended target of the warriors. Remington is less concerned here with identifying the unseen foe and telling the story of a particular skirmish than with paying tribute to a beleaguered and courageous adversary.

The Plains warriors in the Nelson-Atkins painting suggest their people’s brave struggle against displacement and assimilation. In reality, by the 1890s the last of the Indian Wars had been fought, and the Plains tribes were largely confined to reservations, their numbers reduced by war, disease, and poverty, and

their traditional way of life disrupted. Beginning in the late 1880s Remington periodically visited the Blackfeet, Crow, Comanche, Wichita, Cheyenne, and Sioux reservations, among others, where he sketched, photographed, and collected Native American artifacts and gathered stories “of the old Indian life before the conquest.”<sup>4</sup> In December 1890 he rode as an artist-correspondent with the Seventh Cavalry’s Cheyenne scout corps and witnessed the Battle of Wounded Knee, the last Sioux outbreak and subsequent massacre. Increasingly, he sympathized with the indigenous tribes and spoke out against the Bureau of Indian Affairs for oppressing a conquered people and for the intolerable conditions of reservation life.<sup>5</sup> “They were fighting for their lands,” Remington wrote in 1899, “they fought to the death—they never gave quarter, and they never asked it. There was a nobility of purpose about their resistance which commands itself now that it is passed.”<sup>6</sup>

Remington celebrates this “nobility of purpose” in *Hostiles Watching the Column*. The painting centers on the mounted figure in the foreground, who is shown heroically from below, linking him with equestrian military portraits by such nineteenth-century French painters as Alphonse de Neuville and Édouard Detaille, whose work Remington particularly admired.<sup>7</sup> Although Remington’s armed Indian warrior sits astride his mount, his pose alert and his bearing regal, the eerie stillness of the terrain and the scout’s troubled gaze, which is echoed in the awkward stance of the sturdy war pony that has been halted in his tracks, register a feeling of tension and danger from the unseen forces. Likewise, although the foreground horse and rider loom large in the uninhabited landscape, they also are dominated by it, the warrior’s head barely cresting the horizon line. The distant horse and rider, by contrast, occupy a position higher up the hill. Facing in the direction opposite to that of the foreground Indian and his mount, they serve both to balance the composition and to emphasize the Indians’ strategic vigilance. In this nostalgic essay on the transformation of the West, the heroic ideal of the Plains warrior endures in an elegiac tribute to a vanquished people and their glorious past.<sup>8</sup>

Remington’s shift to an overtly nostalgic view of the American West coincided with his efforts in the late 1890s to rejuvenate his art. While his careful delineation of rider and mount in the Nelson-Atkins painting demonstrates his remarkable skill as a draftsman and the lingering authority of his academic training, he worked almost “entirely from memory” and imagination now, claiming to have abandoned even his earlier reliance on the camera.<sup>9</sup> “The interesting never occurs in nature as a whole, but in pieces,” he observed, as he readied *Drawings* for publication. “It’s more what I leave out than what I add.”<sup>10</sup> The reduction of







Fig. 1 Frederic Remington, *The Twilight of the Indian*, c. 1897. Watercolor on paper, 20½ × 29¾ in. (52.1 × 75.6 cm). R.W. Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, La.

forms to an essential equestrian figure, the minimized action, and sense of quietude that pervade *Hostiles Watching the Column* reflect Remington's new attitude and anticipate such late works as *The Outlier* (1909; Brooklyn Museum). Similarly, the pictorial dynamics of loose brushstrokes and light impasto that define the landscape and sky and the subtle blue-ocher complementary color palette, punctuated with red accents, evince his growing sophistication as a painter and a colorist.

Despite his new interest in the expressive qualities of color and paint, Remington continued to define himself primarily as an illustrator. In his introductory text for *Drawings*, Owen Wister praised Remington for celebrating the epic history of the frontier as it "recedes into tradition." According to Wister, Remington gives us "a landscape seasoned by mystery, where chiefs and heroes move, fit subjects for the poet."<sup>11</sup> While *Hostiles Watching the Column*, like most of the paintings reproduced in *Drawings*, transforms the recent American past into the stuff of myth, the final image in the book, *The Twilight of the Indian* (Fig. 1), represents the more mundane present. This illustration complements the Nelson-Atkins painting thematically and compositionally. In it, a lone Indian gazes into the distance—a gesture that mirrors that of the mounted warrior in *Hostiles Watching the Column*. His

gaze, however, is wistful rather than purposeful. He has harnessed his horses to a plow, and the furrow of earth he is turning echoes the line of the sloping hillside in *Hostiles Watching the Column*. A fence recedes into the distance behind him, enclosing him within its bounds. Like the log cabin that stands next to his tepee in the distance, he is rooted to this spot.

After the turn of the century, Remington's works became increasingly iconic, as he sought to pare down his subjects to essences of a West that was no more. "Shall never come West again," he wrote his wife in 1900, "It is all brick buildings—derby hats and blue overalls—it spoils my early illusions."<sup>12</sup> He did venture west again, however, but he traveled to make landscape and color studies.<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, Remington abandoned his familiar brand of storytelling and chose more imaginative themes that were as much about mood, light, and color as they were about an idea of the old West. Impressed by the nocturnes of Charles Rollo Peters and the Impressionist canvases of his friends Childe Hassam (q.v.), Julian Alden Weir, and Willard Metcalf, Remington experimented with poetic nighttime effects, vivid colorism, and broken brushwork in his late paintings.<sup>14</sup> In December 1909 Remington received some of the best critical notices of his career. Shortly afterward, he died after an emergency appendectomy at the age of forty-eight.

GMD/LL

## NOTES

1. "The Chronicles of Arts. Exhibitions and Other Topics," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 8 January 1893, 14, quoted in Doreen Bolger Burke, "Remington in the Context of His Artistic Generation," in Michael Edward Shapiro and Peter H. Hassrick et al., *Frederic Remington: The Masterworks*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with Saint Louis Art Museum, 1988), 58–59.
2. Frederic Remington to Owen Wister, [before 1 February 1896], quoted in Allen P. Splete and Marilyn D. Splete, *Frederic Remington, Selected Letters* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 280. Almost simultaneously, Remington began working in bronze and in 1895 cast his first sculpture, *The Bronco Buster* (1895; Metropolitan Museum of Art).
3. Frederic Remington, *Drawings* (New York: R. H. Russell; London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1897), unpaginated.
4. Frederic Remington, "Artist Wanderings among the Cheyennes," *Century Magazine* 38 (August 1889), 540.
5. Frederic Remington, "Indians as Irregular Cavalry," *Harper's Weekly* 34 (27 December 1890), 1004–5. As Brian W. Dippie has pointed out, Remington belatedly developed a great admiration for the vanquished Plains Indians. Dippie, *The Frederic Remington Art Museum Collection* (Ogdensburg, N.Y.: Frederic Remington Art Museum, 2001), 22.
6. Frederic Remington, "How Stilwell Sold Out," quoted in Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, eds., *The Collected Writings of Frederic Remington* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 397.
7. Detaille's equestrian portrait *A Dragoon on Horseback* (1876; Metropolitan Museum of Art) is a prototypical example. For a thorough discussion of de Neuville and Detaille's influence on Remington, see Joan Carpenter, "Frederic Remington's French Connection," *Gilcrease Magazine of History and Art* 10 (November 1988), 1–26.
8. The hairstyle and accoutrements of the horseman in *Hostiles Watching the Column* indicate that he is a tribesman of the Central Plains. In particular, his loose, matching braids and the beadwork on his moccasins suggest that he is a Cheyenne. We are grateful to Gaylord Torrence, Fred and Virginia Merrill Curator of American Indian Art, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, for these insights. See also Richard Conn, *Circles of the World: Traditional Art of the Plains Indians*, exh. cat. (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1982), 55, no. 55; and Josephine Paterek, *Encyclopedia of American Indian Costume* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1994), 83–86, 99–104. For a discussion of Remington's painting *The Fall of the Cowboy* (1895; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth) as a similar melancholic essay on the passing of the West, see Peter H. Hassrick, "The Painter," in Shapiro and Hassrick et al., *Frederic Remington*, 118.
9. Frederic Remington to Owen Wister, June 1896, quoted in Splete and Splete, *Frederic Remington, Selected Letters*, 217.
10. For a discussion of the transition in Remington's style in the period immediately before the Spanish-American War, see Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Remington: The Complete Prints* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1990), 32.
11. Wister, in Remington, *Drawings*, unpaginated.
12. Frederic Remington to Eva Remington, 6 November 1900, quoted in Splete and Splete, *Frederic Remington, Selected Letters*, 318.
13. Frederic Remington to Eva Remington, 13 April 1907, quoted in *ibid.*, 399.
14. See Nancy K. Anderson, *Frederic Remington: The Color of Night*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2003).

# THEODORE ROBINSON (1852–1896)

## *The Duck Pond*, c. 1888–93

Oil on canvas

25<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 32<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (65.7 × 81.8 cm)

Signed lower left: Th Robinson; inscribed on verso left: N<sup>o</sup> 4

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-103

THEODORE PIERSON ROBINSON was born in Irasburg, Vermont, the third of six children, and raised in Evansville, Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> He began his art studies in 1870 at the Chicago Academy of Design, but his training was cut short by severe asthma attacks, a malady that plagued him throughout his life. After recuperating for four years, Robinson resumed his study at the National Academy of Design in New York. Later, in 1876, he traveled to France, where he studied with Carolus-Duran and Jean-Léon Gérôme and exhibited at the Paris Salon. Like many of his fellow students, Robinson spent his summers away from the Paris academies: in 1877 he stayed at Grèz-sur-Loing, and in 1878 he traveled to Venice, where he met James McNeill Whistler. Returning to New York in 1879, for the next several years Robinson supported himself by teaching and by working as an assistant to John La Farge and Prentice Treadwell, who were executing mural commissions in various public and private buildings in New York. In the spring of 1884 Robinson returned to France, where he lived for the next eight years with frequent trips back to the United States.

Robinson is generally acknowledged as one of the most significant and influential of the American Impressionists, a label that relates in part to his early acquaintance with the artists' colony at Giverny and with its most famous inhabitant, Claude Monet.<sup>2</sup> Accounts differ as to Robinson's and other American painters' first contact with that picturesque village on the River Epte. Robinson may have visited there as early as 1885, but he was surely among the contingent of artists who "discovered" the town in 1887.<sup>3</sup> Robinson returned to Giverny for the next five summers and developed a close friendship with Monet. This association with the French master would be one of the dominant forces that affected Robinson's art.<sup>4</sup>

Robinson's early works combined the academic technique of his teachers and the plein air Barbizon style practiced by followers of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Charles-François Daubigny, and Jules Bastien-Lepage. Paintings such as *The Apprentice Blacksmith* (1886; private collection) reveal Robinson's training in their sound draftsmanship, dark tonalities, and somber mood. After his move to Giverny, his palette became brighter and his brushwork more painterly with each succeeding year. By melding these new innovations with the peasant subjects, solidly painted forms, and carefully composed space characteristic of his earlier works, Robinson soon developed his mature style.

In 1891 and 1892 Robinson produced his most impressionistic canvases to date. In them he explored the purely visual problems of color and ever-shifting light. *The Duck Pond*, probably executed in 1891 but certainly dating to his years in Giverny, is an anomaly in Robinson's work, for it lacks figures, buildings, or other landscape elements that would help locate the scene. Instead, Robinson presents a dense network of green, in which color and light are emphasized over naturalistic detail or traditional compositional structure. In some areas the paint is quickly applied in short, thick dabs, while in other places, especially the water, the canvas is left bare. Robinson provided no horizon line and virtually no spatial perspective in this tightly enclosed setting; the viewer is oriented only by the two light-colored but solid tree trunks anchoring the picture and the smaller trees receding in the distance at upper left. The trio of ducks, from which the painting derives its name, is camouflaged among the greenery, yet they provide the only naturalistically described objects amid the broken brushwork that represents foliage and water.

Unlike his mentor Monet, who sought to capture transitory effects of light and atmosphere in pure colors laid directly on the canvas, Robinson preferred more subdued tones, and he carefully planned and constructed even his most seemingly impressionistic paintings. *The Duck Pond* is no exception. Although the painting appears to be a spontaneous transcription of an observed scene, it was almost certainly painted in the studio and in fact is based on an earlier sketch (Fig. 1). In his finished composition, Robinson replaced the intense blues, whites, and yellows of his plein air sketch with a narrower range of harmonious, predominantly cool hues. He lifted the group of three paddling ducks in the Nelson-Atkins painting directly from a photograph, using grid lines drawn in graphite and incised into the paint to help him transfer the image.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his career, the camera was a significant aspect of Robinson's painting method.<sup>6</sup> He took photographs to find basic subjects and compositions and to save money on models. Explaining his long-standing reliance on photography, he wrote, "Painting directly from nature is difficult, as things do not remain the same, the camera helps to retain the picture in your mind."<sup>7</sup> Robinson amassed a library of photographs that he used and reused in his finished paintings. The trio of ducks in *The Duck Pond* also appears in two other oil paintings, *By the Brook* (c. 1891; Montclair Art Museum, N.J.) and *The Little Bridge* (c. 1891; private collection), which were most likely painted the same year.

In his Giverny canvases, Robinson limited his themes to a few settings and subjects that interested him. In exploring their various compositional arrangements, he often painted several versions of each. Some were based on photographs taken in quick





Fig. 1 Theodore Robinson, *Duck Pond*, c. 1891. Oil on canvas, 18 × 22 in. (45.7 × 55.9 cm). Private collection. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart Galleries

succession: for example, the paintings *In the Orchard* (1891; Princeton University Art Museum, N.J.) and *Blossoms at Giverny* (1891–93; Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago) present a woman and a small girl at different points during their walk along a garden path. Other times Robinson assembled his images from several photographs or from previous paintings, slightly altering the poses, the background, or the angle of view. In this way, earlier paintings such as his watercolor *Girl with Ducks* (1887; Wichita Art Museum, Kans.), which features a group of waterfowl gliding across the sun-dappled surface of a pond in a wooded setting, may have served as models for *The Duck Pond*.

Kathleen Pyne has linked Robinson's preference for relatively subdued color and idealized, bucolic subject matter to late-nineteenth-century Anglo-American evolutionary theories.<sup>8</sup> These theories placed individuals with sensitive nervous systems at the top of the evolutionary chain and stressed the importance of refinement and harmony in art at the expense of jarring optical effects.<sup>9</sup> Robinson's paintings fit this ideal so well that William A. Coffin described him in 1892 as a painter "whose artistic temperament is one of delicate sensibility" and who "gives evidence of a refined artistic sense."<sup>10</sup> Robinson's decision to paint small-scale depictions of generalized rural locales further endeared him to his American audience. As the expansionist era in the United States ended, taste in landscape was shifting away from the grand western vistas painted by Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) and Thomas Moran (q.v.) and the equally nationalistic scenery of the Hudson River School. Increasingly, Americans collected smaller, more intimate paintings

of settled landscapes, in which beauty and the artist's personality, made evident through his style, took precedence over moralizing content. Like his contemporaries George Inness (q.v.) and Childe Hassam (q.v.), Robinson embraced this new paradigm.

After his last summer in Giverny in 1892, Robinson returned to the United States to travel and teach summer art classes. His only one-man show during his lifetime was held in 1895 at New York's Macbeth Gallery. Featuring mainly works executed after 1892, the show was a great success, although critics observed that Robinson was primarily a realist, who merely presented his vision in an Impressionist style. Royal Cortissoz noted that it was "tempting to describe [the paintings] as illustrative of the impressionism of Mr. Theodore Robinson, rather than impressionism in general. . . . He has neither imagination nor sentiment, and the spectator must therefore be content with a purely visual report of nature. That report is given, however, with such taste and skill, with such directness and delicacy, that the absence of more subjective qualities is not suffered to spoil one's pleasure in the work."<sup>11</sup> Soon after, on 2 April 1896, Robinson succumbed to asthma. He was buried in Evansville, Wisconsin.

MS/LL

## NOTES

1. The monographic studies on Theodore Robinson are John I.H. Baur, *Theodore Robinson, 1852–1896*, exh. cat. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum, 1946); Sona Johnston, *Theodore Robinson, 1852–1896*, exh. cat. (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1973); Eliot Clark, *Theodore Robinson: His Life and Art* (Chicago: R. H. Love Galleries, 1979); D. Scott Atkinson, “Theodore Robinson: Pioneer of American Impressionism,” in *Theodore Robinson*, exh. cat. (New York: Owen Gallery, 2000), 9–33; and Johnston, *In Monet’s Light: Theodore Robinson in Giverny*, exh. cat. (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art; London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004). The artist and his works are currently being studied by the Theodore Robinson Catalogue Raisonné project, Spanierman Gallery, New York. For Robinson’s career in the context of American Impressionism and Giverny, see William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2001), 70–75, 98–99, 151–54; William H. Gerdts, *Lasting Impressions: American Painters in France, 1865–1915* (Evanston, Ill.: Terra Foundation for the Arts, 1992), 130–41; William H. Gerdts, *Monet’s Giverny: An Impressionist Colony* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 23–26, 52–54, 58–60; and H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885–1915*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 4–5, 67–71, 354–55.
2. Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 66.
3. See Gerdts, *Monet’s Giverny*, 23–30.
4. See Johnston, “Theodore Robinson and Claude Monet,” in Johnston, *In Monet’s Light*, 47–75.
5. Johnston, *In Monet’s Light*, 100–101.
6. This phenomenon was first discussed in John I.H. Baur, “Photographic Studies by an Impressionist,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, no. 30 (October–November 1946), 319–30. Additional examples of Robinson’s use of photographs are given in virtually every subsequent discussion of the painter’s art.
7. Quoted in Baur, *Theodore Robinson*, 36.
8. Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 9–10.
9. American critics disparaged French Impressionism as garish and superficial. See Gerdts, *American Impressionism*, 125–29. In a lecture given in conjunction with the exhibition of French Impressionist paintings at the American Art Association in New York in the spring of 1886, the American artist F. Hopkinson Smith asserted that beauty and truth in art would result from a “middle path” between Impressionism and realism. It seems likely that Robinson sought to follow just such a middle path. See “Realism and Impressionism,” *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 5.
10. William A. Coffin, “American Illustrators of Today,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 11 (February 1892), 204–5.
11. Royal Cortissoz, *New York Tribune*, 3 February 1895, as quoted in Johnston, *Theodore Robinson*, xxiv–xxv.

## SEVERIN ROESEN (c. 1815–1872)

### *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape*, c. 1867 (*Still Life; Fruit [Two Tiered]*)

Oil on canvas

36¼ × 50¼ in. (92.1 × 127.6 cm)

Signed lower center: *Roesen*

Purchase: acquired through the bequest of Dorothy K. Rice, F91-58

AMONG THE MOST RESPECTED American still-life painters of the nineteenth century, Severin Roesen remains a compelling enigma in American art.<sup>1</sup> Thought by scholars to have been a German Rhinelander, Roesen immigrated to New York in 1848 in response to widespread political upheaval. Nothing certain is known of his artistic background or training. Soon after his arrival in New York, the painter fortuitously gained support from the American Art-Union, the organization that cultivated greater interest in collecting American art and promoted such artists as George Caleb Bingham (q.v.) and William Sidney Mount (q.v.). Records indicate that Roesen exhibited work not only in New York City but also in Brooklyn, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. For reasons unknown, the painter left his wife and family about 1857 and settled eventually in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The German-speaking communities throughout central Pennsylvania likely help to account for Roesen's attraction to this area. The artist mysteriously disappeared from Williamsport in 1872, the year of his last known dated painting, and no record of his death has been located.

Characteristic of Roesen's still lifes, *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape* presents a profusion of nature's bounty that spills toward the viewer's space, recalling numerous Dutch and Flemish precedents, especially paintings by Rachael Ruysch and Frans Snyders. The composition is filled with an astounding variety of fruit, a subject in which Roesen specialized. Among the fruits depicted are grapes, peaches, apples, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, currants, plums, blackberries, pears, cantaloupe, watermelon, and a lemon. The raspberries, plums, cherries, and currants garner special attention by being highlighted by the attractive serving wares that barely contain them. Scattered somewhat chaotically across a luxurious two-tiered, marble-topped sideboard, the diverse fruits are unified by their similar states of pristine ripeness, an unrealistic instance of simultaneity that confirms that Roesen did not paint the arrangement entirely from life. Minimal signs of decay at the edges of select grape leaves accentuate the immaculate state of the radiant fruit. The uniform clarity and richness of the composition inevitably emphasize the fine technical facility of the painter, whose highly detailed style suggests adherence to the British philosopher and

critic John Ruskin's dictum that artists should study nature closely and directly in its purest state.<sup>2</sup>

One of the distinguishing characteristics of *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape* is the panoramic landscape that serves as a dramatic backdrop. Just as the still life trumpets the abundant diversity of America's cultivated vegetation, so the landscape behind suggests the awesome range and appearance of America's topography—from the secluded, forested landscape on the left to the open, mountainous terrain at the right. This grand and varied landscape was touted by Thomas Cole (q.v.) and other cultural spokesmen in the nineteenth century as key to American national identity and pride.<sup>3</sup> Roesen's depiction in the late 1860s of conflated landscape views recalling, collectively, the work of Cole, John Frederiek Kensett (q.v.), Asher B. Durand (q.v.), and Albert Bierstadt (q.v.) no doubt correlated well with the expansionist mood of the era, which was punctuated by the completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory, Utah, in 1869.

While the landscape setting pulls viewers of *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape* into distant vistas, the painted marble sideboard firmly situates them—as well as the painting itself—in a domestic context. Roesen likely intended this compositional element to echo the sideboard in the dining room over which the painting would presumably hang. Moreover, functioning largely as interior decoration, still-life paintings like those produced by Roesen and his contemporaries, including George Forster (q.v.), William Harnett, and John Frederick Peto (q.v.), circulated within an increasingly diversified marketplace of fruit-themed decorative wares available to American consumers in the nineteenth century. This range of products included chromolithographs of still lifes, recommended as tasteful home decoration by no less an authority on domestic protocol than Harriet Beecher Stowe. By the 1870s wax fruit arrangements emerged as a popular, three-dimensional alternative for still-life decoration.<sup>4</sup> As might be expected, oil paintings, especially large compositions like the Nelson-Atkins Roesen, were produced with wealthier consumers in mind.<sup>5</sup>

Like most of his fellow still-life painters, Roesen created his dazzling compositions in a variety of sizes and formats—horizontal, vertical, and oval—to fit the needs of his clientele. *Two-Tiered Still Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape* ranks as one of the artist's largest and most ambitious compositions, and, as such, the painting no doubt was an appropriate adornment of Williamsport's well-known Lycoming Hotel, where it hung for many years. The painting's original wood-carved frame, which extends ornate, natural motifs assertively into the viewer's space, makes the picture all the more exceptional in Roesen's fine oeuvre and in the history of nineteenth-century American still life.

RRG





## NOTES

1. Biographical information about Roesen has been drawn primarily from Judith Hansen O'Toole, *Severin Roesen* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1992). Other key studies of the painter's life and career include Lois Goldreich Marcus, *Severin Roesen: A Chronology* (Williamsport, Pa.: Lycoming County Historical Society and Museum, 1976); Maurice A. Mook, "Severin Roesen and His Family," *Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society* 8 (Fall 1972), 8–12; "Severin Roesen: Also the Huntington Painter," *Lycoming College Magazine* 26 (June 1973), 13–16; Maurice A. Mook, "S. Roesen, 'the Williamsport Painter,'" *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pa.), 3 December 1955, 10; "Severin Roesen, the Williamsport Painter," *Lycoming College Magazine* 25 (June 1972), 33–41; and Richard B. Stone, "'Not Quite Forgotten': A Study of the Williamsport Painter, S. Roesen," *Lycoming Historical Society Proceedings and Papers* 9 (November 1951).
2. Ruskin's influence on nineteenth-century American art has been widely discussed. See, for example, Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdts, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites*, exh. cat. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1985). For a study more directly germane to Roesen, see William H. Gerdts, "The Influence of Ruskin and Pre-Raphaelitism on American Still-Life Painting," *American Art Journal* 1 (Fall 1969), 50–97. Discrete passages of *Two-Tiered Still-Life with Fruit and Sunset Landscape*, such as the pears at the far right, appear flatter and less refined technically than the rest of the composition, suggesting that studio assistants may have completed some areas. On Roesen's use of studio assistants, see O'Toole, "Students of Severin Roesen," in *Severin Roesen*, 52–60.
3. See, for example, Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836), 1–12.
4. On Stowe's promotion of chromolithographs, see Lori E. Rotskoff, "Decorating the Dining-Room: Still-Life Chromolithographs and Domestic Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American Studies* 31 (April 1997), 19–42. As evidence of increasing popularity of wax still lifes as home decoration, see C. S. Jones and Henry T. Williams, *Household Elegancies: Suggestions in Household Art and Tasteful Home Decorations* (New York: H. T. Williams, 1875), esp. 177–90.
5. This assumption is echoed by Rotskoff, "Decorating the Dining-Room," 37: "Perhaps the modest nature of the chromos reflected the financial means of lower middle-class audiences, while the abundance depicted in oil-paintings kept pace with the values and tastes of affluent customers who could afford original works of art."

## KAY SAGE (1898–1963)

### *Too Soon for Thunder*, 1943

Oil on canvas

28 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 36 in. (71.3 × 91.4 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: Kay Sage '43

Bequest of the artist, 64-36

KAY SAGE'S *TOO SOON FOR THUNDER* presents a stark and barren mountainous landscape. Cool colors and clean, straight lines dominate the composition and accentuate its austere, remote appearance, which is emphasized by the lack of a human presence. Rather than people, this uninviting space is inhabited by a bizarre quasi-organic, cocoonlike form marked with prominent veins undulating over and through it. Separated from the landscape by a low wall, the form is shrouded in a rich orange drape, which sets it off dramatically from the relatively neutral tones around it. The composition's pristine clarity, owing largely to a strong, unseen light that throws everything into high relief, is countered conceptually by the ambiguity of the forms themselves, which appear to be neither fully natural nor identifiably industrial. The painting's evocative title, implying imminent threat or danger, enhances the image's discomfiting effect; it also allows insight into the fine facility with language the multilingual Sage exercised by writing poetry.<sup>1</sup>

A native of Albany, New York, Sage was one of the few American artists to make a significant contribution to Surrealism in both France and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Her highly unconventional and privileged childhood included numerous summer trips to Europe. Following the separation of her parents, Henry Manning Sage and Anne Wheeler Ward Sage, she lived with her emotionally unstable mother in New York. As testament to Sage's keen intelligence, she passed college entrance examinations at the age of fourteen despite her frequent absence from school.

After World War I Sage was sent by her father to live in Italy, where her mother had relocated. While life in Italy enhanced her desire to study art, her studies sputtered for roughly a ten-year period beginning about 1922, when she met an Italian nobleman, Prince Ranieri di San Faustino, whom she married in 1925. However, a few years into their marriage, Sage began to feel oppressed by Roman society and confined in her role as Princess di San Faustino.<sup>3</sup> Although little evidence exists that she painted during her marriage, Sage made several acquaintances that were later significant to her work, including the key literary figures Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and T.S. Eliot. Following her divorce from Ranieri in 1935, Sage poured more energy into painting and writing and achieved her first exhibition the following year in Milan, where she exhibited geometric abstract compositions.

In 1937 Sage moved to Paris, where her artistic career began in earnest.<sup>4</sup> Sage took an apartment on the Île St.-Louis, sold her

jewelry to raise money and shed her patrician identity, and began an extended series of vaguely Cubist abstractions based on architectural motifs. The trajectory of Sage's life and work changed forever after she saw the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in early 1938, which bolstered her emerging interest in psychologically resonant imagery. The profound impact of Surrealist imagery and ideas concerning the subconscious was evident in the work Sage submitted later that year to the Salon des Surindépendants, which featured recurring egg forms occupying vague, sparse spaces marked by mechanical and architectural details.

Among the artists associated with Surrealism, Sage was most deeply affected by the work of Giorgio de Chirico, who had been identified by the Surrealist leader and author André Breton in the 1920s as the honorary father figure of the movement. De Chirico's shadowy piazzas, distant vistas, and shrouded figures find many echoes in Sage's similarly mysterious compositions, including *Too Soon for Thunder*. Her esteem for de Chirico was so great, in fact, that she purchased the Italian's *La Surprise* (1913; location unknown) from the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*.

De Chirico's influence on Sage was nearly matched by that of the French Surrealist Yves Tanguy, who had admired her work at the Surindépendants exhibition in 1938. Although details of the episode are few, it seems that the couple met sometime that year, possibly at the urging of the expatriate collector Peggy Guggenheim, who might have been trying to arrange a sale of Tanguy's work to the wealthy American. Sage and Tanguy married in 1940, and their occasionally stormy marriage secured a place for her in the Surrealist group. Unfortunately, her close ties to the well-known painter prompted many to misconstrue her work as merely derivative of her husband's, a perception that was also symptomatic of the chauvinistic, even misogynistic, nature of Surrealism generally.<sup>5</sup>

Despite her marriage to Tanguy and the merits of her own work, Sage was never fully accepted by prominent members of the group, especially Breton. He particularly harbored resentment of her wealth, aristocratic background, and demeanor. Consequently, Sage was effectively relegated to the margins of Surrealism, even though she facilitated and largely financed the immigration of several members, including Tanguy and Breton, to New York at the onset of World War II and sought to promote their work. Sage and Tanguy's move from New York to Woodbury, Connecticut, in 1941 put even greater physical and personal distance between them and other Surrealists living in Manhattan and marked one of many fractures the movement experienced during the war years.

Painted in 1943, *Too Soon for Thunder* dates to Sage's early years painting in Connecticut, a period that, as her biographer Judith D. Suther has observed, prompted a surge of new work



and multiple refinements to her artistic vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> Among these are emergent emphases on shadow, drapery, and stronger color, all traits evident in the Nelson-Atkins canvas. The distinctive red-orange in *Too Soon for Thunder* recurs in other paintings from 1943 to 1944, such as *I Saw Three Cities* (1944; Princeton University Art Museum, N.J.) and *In the Third Sleep* (1944; Art Institute of Chicago). *Too Soon for Thunder* is furthermore distinguished by the degree to which it evokes concepts and images likely derived at least in part from T.S. Eliot's heralded epic poem *The Waste Land* (1922).<sup>7</sup> Eliot's bleak, hermetic poetry no doubt appealed to the aloof and melancholic Sage. *Too Soon for Thunder* is evocative of *The Waste Land* in its allusion to thunder and the appearance of an ambiguous shrouded figure that serves as a sort of protagonist. Lightning and thunder in Eliot's poem signal the approach of life-giving rain, for which Sage's landscape seems to wait anxiously. Moreover, the fifth section of Eliot's poem—provocatively entitled "What the Thunder Said"—announces:

Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy road  
 The road winding above among the mountains  
 Which are mountains of rock without water  
 If there were water we should stop and drink  
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think

Additionally suggestive of Sage's painting is Eliot's unforgiving landscape inhabited by a figure—"gliding, wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded"—that "was living [and] is now dead / We who were living are now dying." Written and published in the wake of the devastation of World War I, Eliot's pessimistic and dismal worldview would have seemed equally relevant as global warfare raged anew while Sage painted *Too Soon for Thunder*. Ultimately, however, viewers are left to ponder the real meaning of Sage's perplexing and distinctive Surrealist imagery, especially since she spoke about it only infrequently.<sup>8</sup>

After the war and into the 1950s, Sage's work became increasingly geometric, filled with nonfunctional scaffolding, possibly partly as a means of distinguishing it from Tanguy's more biomorphic style.<sup>9</sup> After Tanguy's sudden death in 1955, Sage's painting grew even harsher and more morbid. By 1959 her eyesight had deteriorated to the point that she could no longer paint. As a sign of her despondency, Sage had a friend shoot bullets into one of her final paintings, *Watching the Clock*. This painting, considering the title's reference to time running out, is easily interpreted as a premonition of her own suicide. In January 1963, after two unsuccessful eye operations and a failed attempt at suicide, Sage took her own life.

RRG/DG

## NOTES

1. For a study of Sage's poetry, see Judith D. Suther, "The Poetry of Kay Sage and French Surrealism," *Comparative Literature Studies* 23 (Fall 1986), 234–49. See also Mara R. Witzling, ed., "Kay Sage: 1898–1963," in *Voicing Our Visions: Writing by Women Artists* (New York: Universe, 1991), 231–49.
2. Biographical information on Sage has been drawn primarily from Judith D. Suther, *A House of Her Own: Kay Sage, Solitary Surrealist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997). Sage drafted an unusual autobiographical manuscript about 1955 entitled "China Eggs," which remained unpublished until 1996. See Sage, *China Eggs/Les Oeufs de Porcelaine*, bilingual ed., trans. Elisabeth Manuel, ed. Judith Suther (Charlotte, N.C., and Seattle: Starbooks/L'Étoile, 1996). Sage's work on "China Eggs" coincided with a rush of new writing, inspired, in large part, by the death of her husband Yves Tanguy in 1955. Consequently, much of the thrust of Sage's autobiography was therapeutic. Suther, *A House of Her Own*, 173–74, writes of "China Eggs": "Sage seems to have written 'China Eggs' as a means of channeling the rush of memory that threatened to engulf her. Whether intended as such or not, 'China Eggs' is also an exercise in self-examination. . . . [Sage's manuscript] is at the same time an apology in the manner of autobiography and a Sage-style negation of the possibility of knowing."
3. In *China Eggs*, 298, Sage summarized her years of marriage to Ranieri as the "inconsequential part of my life, one day or one year was just about like the next."
4. Suther, *A House of Her Own*, 60, observes: "Once she encountered Surrealist art in concentrated doses and began to know the Surrealists personally, her work took off on a binge of invention."
5. An early comparative study of Sage's and Tanguy's art was provided by the art dealer Julien Levy, a friend of both artists. See Levy, "Tanguy—Connecticut—Sage," *Art News* 53 (September 1954), 24–27. Levy's article appeared on the occasion of the only dual show the painters mounted of their work, which took place at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. A more recent and objective account of their relationship has been provided by Judith D. Suther, "Separate Studios: Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy," in *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 137–53. The chauvinistic nature of Surrealism is widely recognized and, thus, has inspired a considerable body of feminist art criticism. See, among other studies, Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985); Mary Ann Caws, "Singing in Another Key: Surrealism through a Feminist Eye," *Diacritics* 14 (Summer 1984), 60–70; and Ruth Markus, "Surrealism's Praying Mantis and Castrating Woman," *Woman's Art Journal* 21 (Spring/Summer 2000), 33–39.
6. See Suther, *A House of Her Own*, 106–10.
7. For a compelling study of Eliot's poetic and disturbing invocation of landscape, see Nancy Duvall Hargrove, *Landscape as Symbol in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), 86.
8. A rare exception to her silence occurred in an interview with *Time* magazine in 1950. See "Serene Surrealist," *Time*, 13 March 1950, 49.
9. On this period in Sage's art, see Stephen R. Miller, "In the Interim: The Constructivist Surrealism of Kay Sage," *Dada-Surrealism* 18 (1990), 123–47.

## SVEN BIRGER SANDZÉN (1871–1954)

### *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)*, 1938 (*Long's Peak, Colorado*)

Oil on canvas

40 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (101.9 × 122.2 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Birger Sandzén / 1938

Gift of Mrs. Massey Holmes in memory of her husband, 38-10

IN 1894 THE YOUNG BIRGER SANDZÉN emigrated from his native Sweden to accept a position teaching art at Bethany College, located in the Swedish American community of Lindsborg in central Kansas.<sup>1</sup> For the rest of his life he remained in Lindsborg, establishing his reputation as the region's foremost artist.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he garnered national recognition in both his native and adopted lands, with his work traversing these respective countries in exhibitions from Malmö to Uppsala, and from Los Angeles to New York.<sup>3</sup>

Sandezén was born in Blidsberg, Sweden, and received his earliest art instruction at the age of ten. His most significant training took place at the Konstnärsförbundet (Artists League) in Stockholm under Anders Zorn, whose antiacademic preference for direct painting, rather than methodically applying underpaints and glazes, was adopted by the pupil.<sup>4</sup> Later, the young artist studied in Paris under Edmond-François Aman-Jean, a Symbolist painter whose classes attracted a large international clientele, among them several Americans who sparked Sandzén's interest in their country. After reading a book about Bethany College, Sandzén wrote to the school and offered his teaching services, which were accepted enthusiastically.

Sandezén arrived in Lindsborg in 1894 to assume his responsibilities, which involved teaching not only fine art but also art history and Romance languages. Over the next half century his art evolved through various stylistic phases.<sup>5</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s he developed a highly distinctive hybrid of various turn-of-the-century modernist styles, including Paul Cézanne's structural, quasi-abstract approach to rendering form, the thick impasto of Vincent van Gogh, and the enhanced color of Henri Matisse and the Fauves.<sup>6</sup> The artist translated his bold strokes just as effectively into woodcut prints and lithographs.<sup>7</sup>

Averse to the heavy Kansas summer heat, the artist regularly escaped farther west. In 1913 he launched a series of regular visits to Colorado that continued for more than three decades.<sup>8</sup> Colorado's dramatic topography remained a steadfast source of inspiration, as the region's rocky terrain lent itself readily to the artist's blunt, weighty strokes, as seen in the Nelson-Atkins *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)*. An exceptional example of Sandzén's western landscapes, the impressive composition features the mountain named after Major Stephen H. Long of the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers, who led the first U.S. government-sponsored expedition through northern Colorado in the summer of 1820. Topping off at 14,255 feet, it is the tallest peak in Rocky Mountain National Park. The artist presented the scene untouched by human intrusion, though the reality of its environs was otherwise. In 1938, the year Sandzén painted *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)*, approximately 660,000 tourists visited the park, more than double the number just five years earlier.<sup>9</sup>

Appropriately, most of Sandzén's composition is given over to Longs Peak, which sits like an icon in the center and towers over smaller promontories in the foreground, two of which are capped with pine trees. The painter depicted the mountain from the north; visible on the left side of the central mountain mass is its famed eastern face, a thousand-foot sheer wall nicknamed "the Diamond." Thick brush marks, often running parallel to one another, create a dynamic visual rhythm across the surface of the canvas. At the same time, the painter's predominantly pale but still intense palette, consisting of violet, lavender, and blue, suggests distance and atmosphere and, thus, creates distinct tension between two and three dimensions, a characteristic of Sandzén's work generally.

The composition of the Nelson-Atkins canvas is based on sketches that Sandzén completed during a visit to Estes Park in July 1937.<sup>10</sup> The painter sketched the mountain as seen from Longs Peak Inn, a view suggested to him by Mrs. Ethel Greenough Holmes, the wife of a prominent Kansas City lawyer and an amateur painter and art collector who knew Sandzén personally.<sup>11</sup> Remaining in Colorado into August, Sandzén produced in the studio three similar paintings of the mountain for Mrs. Holmes's consideration for purchase. She bought one of these three (Fig. 1) in the fall and soon thereafter commissioned from the artist a larger version of her painting expressly with the intent of giving it to the Museum. Mrs. Holmes's painting and the Nelson-Atkins version are related by their remarkably similar compositions and corresponding inscriptions by Sandzén across their top stretcher bars. In converting the composition into the larger format, the painter tightened his brushwork, making his forms appear even grander and more geometric. He also increased the number of trees from three to five and reduced his use of naturalistic color.<sup>12</sup>

The public presentation of *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)* to the Museum in 1938 was likely deeply meaningful to Sandzén in multiple ways. That year marked the three-hundred-year anniversary of the first Swedish settlement in North America, and events across the country celebrated the contributions and achievements of American citizens of Swedish descent.<sup>13</sup> The presentation ceremony for *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)* was attended by, among





Fig. 1 Sven Birger Sandzén, *The Great Peak (Longs Peak)*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 22 × 28 in. (55.9 × 71.1 cm). Private collection

other local and regional notables, Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.), Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry (q.v.). Although Sandzén's art was unrelated to the Regionalist movement, he was admired by these men, for they were united in their efforts to encourage the creation of art in and about America's heartland. Perhaps most meaningful to Sandzén was the fact that the Nelson-Atkins had very recently acquired one of Cézanne's views of Mont Sainte-Victoire (c. 1902–6), a significant acquisition that ensured that he and the French master after whom he had modeled his own vision would be forever linked in the Museum's collection.

MC/RRG

## NOTES

1. For monographic discussions of Sandzén's life and career, see Howard DaLee Spencer, *Birger Sandzén: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita Art Museum, 1985); and Emory Lindquist, *Birger Sandzén: An Illustrated Biography* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).
2. As a testament to the profound regard that the local community held for him, the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery opened in Lindsborg soon after his death in 1954. Still in operation, it continues to display works from its permanent collection and host traveling exhibitions. The establishment of the gallery is discussed in Margaret Sandzen Greenough, "From Sweden to Kansas: The Story of a Living Memorial to Birger Sandzen Whose Life's Work Inspired Its Creation in 1957," *American Artist* 25 (January 1961), 26–31, 72–73.
3. Sandzén's exhibition history is discussed in Lindquist, *Birger Sandzén*, 79–91. Perhaps the culmination of the artist's binational acclaim was his being made a Knight of the Royal Order of Vasa, Order of the North Star by King Gustaf V of Sweden in 1940, during a ceremony that took place at the opening of Sandzén's exhibition at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia. This event is reported in *Birger Sandzén Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Luther-Weeks Silversmiths, International Galleries, [1947]), [8].
4. A detailed discussion of Swedish influences on Sandzén's art is presented in Janet Knowles Seiz, "Birger Sandzén: A Painter in His Paradise," in Mary Em Kirn and Sherry Case Maurer, *Härute—Out Here: Swedish Immigrant Artists in Midwest America*, exh. cat. (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana College Art Department, 1985), 56–62.
5. Sandzén's stylistic phases are systematically outlined in *ibid.*
6. The influence of van Gogh on Sandzén has been doubted. Nonetheless, several critics of Sandzén's work after the 1920s drew parallels between the two artists. See Lindquist, *Birger Sandzén*, 66.
7. For a study of Sandzén's printmaking, see Charles Pelham Greenough III, *The Graphic Work of Birger Sandzén*, 4th ed. (Lindsborg, Kans.: Birger Sandzén Memorial Foundation, 2001). Much of Sandzén's printmaking activities took place in the context of the Prairie Print Makers, a group of midwestern graphic artists who advocated printmaking as a means to encourage artistic activity throughout the region. See Karal Ann Marling, Bill North, and Elizabeth G. Seaton, *The Prairie Print Makers*, exh. cat. (Kansas City, Mo.: ExhibitsUSA, Mid-America Arts Alliance, 2001).
8. Henry McBride, "Paintings of the West, by Sandzen," *New York Herald*, 5 February 1922, sec. 3, 5.
9. C.W. Buchholtz, *Rocky Mountain National Park: A History* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1983), 177.
10. These sketches are owned by the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg, Kansas. The 1937 trip is documented in letters between Alfrida Sandzén, the painter's wife, who accompanied him, and his daughter Margaret as well as correspondence between the painter and his daughter. The letters are held by Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery Archives.
11. Mrs. Holmes's nephew, Charles Pelham Greenough, later married Margaret Sandzén.
12. Mrs. Holmes was very pleased with the larger version Sandzén produced: "The picture is superb, it is the best one you have ever done and I am perfectly thrilled with it. The mountain is certainly glorious and the whole color scheme is so beautiful." Holmes to Sandzén, 24 February 1938, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery Archives.
13. The coincidence of the presentation ceremony and the tercentenary was noted by a reporter of the Museum event: "The presentation of a landscape by Birger Sandzen to the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum is particularly appropriate at a time when preparations are being made throughout the country to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the first Swedish settlement in what is now the United States." "Sandzen in Kansas," *Kansas City Star*, 10 March 1938, D.

## JOHN SINGER SARGENT (1856–1925)

### *Oyster Gatherers Returning*, c. 1877 (*Mussel Gatherers*)

Oil on canvas

19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (49.9 × 61.6 cm)

Gift of Mrs. Louis Sosland, F77-36/1

JOHN SINGER SARGENT'S *Oyster Gatherers Returning* depicts a huddled mass of fisherfolk returning with a day's catch to their village, which appears faintly on the horizon. Shown in a desolate and darkening landscape with smoky clouds overhead, the group might appear initially more like a cluster of war refugees fleeing a dangerous conflict than a team of fish gatherers returning safely home at dusk. This powerful, if rather misleading, pictorial allusion nevertheless encourages great empathy for the humble troop and their meager existence. Additionally, it highlights the evocative, dreamlike quality of Sargent's image overall, a by-product of the artist's severely limited palette and cursory paint application. These are brought together most memorably in the brooding but vulnerable silhouettes of the peasants as they stagger back across a reflective expanse of wet beach at low tide.

Disquietingly picturesque, *Oyster Gatherers Returning* showcases the prodigious and inquisitive talent of a young expatriate American painter. Sargent was born in 1856 in Florence, Italy, to Dr. Fitzwilliam Sargent and Mary Newbold Singer Sargent, former residents of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1867 Sargent showed a great interest and talent in art, which his cosmopolitan parents supported both emotionally and financially. In 1873 he began formal training at the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence. The following year, the Sargent family relocated to Paris, where the eighteen-year-old John passed entrance exams to study drawing at the renowned École des Beaux-Arts. To develop his facility with the brush, Sargent joined the studio of Charles-Émile-Auguste Durand, known as Carolus-Duran, a stylish portraitist who advocated painting without extensive preliminary drawing on the canvas. This technique would have a lasting effect on the aspiring professional artist. Sargent engaged in rigorous study over several months, breaking in 1876 to make his maiden voyage to America, where he visited the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia before heading to Newport, Rhode Island, West Point, New York, and finally Montreal. His hard work paid significant dividends the next year, when the Salon accepted his very first submission, a portrait of Mrs. Frances Sherborne Ridley Watts (1877; Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Like scores of nineteenth-century artists, including his mentor, Sargent could have settled quickly into a comfortable career as a portrait painter. Eager to expand his repertoire of subjects, however, he made his initial foray into genre painting during a ten-week stay

in 1877 on the northern coast of Brittany. Sargent settled in the remote village of Cancale and set to recording the singular character of its coastal topography and seafaring population. For the ambitious and savvy young painter, the village's appeal undoubtedly also derived from the fact that Cancale's peasantry had been the subject of a medal-winning canvas by Auguste Feyen-Perrin at the 1874 Salon, an exhibition Sargent attended.<sup>2</sup>

*Oyster Gatherers Returning* belongs to a group of "dashing painted site views," in the words of Marc Simpson, which came to bear in varying degrees on Sargent's best-known image from the period, *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* (c. 1878), a breezy, sun-drenched scene of fisherwomen and children going easily about their routines at water's edge.<sup>3</sup> That Sargent produced two versions of *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* (Fig. 1 and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) suggests the great sense of pride and accomplishment he felt in finishing his first major genre painting.

Because of substantial differences in mood and execution, *Oyster Gatherers Returning* and *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* appear only distantly related despite their close chronological and thematic connections. Whereas *Oyster Gatherers Returning* emphasizes the toil of the peasants' labor in the same unfriendly meteorological conditions that hindered the artist's own work, *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* accentuates the picturesque aspects of their dress and environs. *Oyster Gatherers Returning* was presumably painted *en plein air*, in sympathy with the new and controversial practices of Impressionists like Claude Monet, whom the American had likely met the previous year. Both versions of *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale*, by contrast, exhibit conspicuous signs of studio execution, including a fuller and brighter palette, tighter detail, more calculated figural relationships, and greater variety of surface treatment.<sup>4</sup>

These differences demonstrate the importance Sargent placed on audience. In translating preliminary works like *Oyster Gatherers Returning* into a studio composition, Sargent, like many European and American painters before and after him, represented the peasantry with urban and urbane viewers in mind, audiences for whom country folk embodied, among other things, a simpler, preindustrial way of life.<sup>5</sup> The popular fascination with rural existence inspired European as well as American artists to flock to Brittany and Normandy, where a well-maintained tourist industry provided inexpensive food and housing, among other amenities catering to travelers.<sup>6</sup> Along with scores of his contemporaries representing a wide range of styles, Sargent perpetuated this bourgeois myth of the peasantry by erasing unsavory references to hardship and poverty when his work was destined for public display.







Fig. 1 John Singer Sargent, *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale (En route pour la pêche)*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (79.1 × 123.2 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 17.2

Because *Oyster Gatherers Returning* does not turn a blind eye to the more difficult physical and emotional realities of peasant life, the picture recalls the art of Jean-François Millet (Fig. 2), whose sympathetic, even heroic portrayals of peasants earned the artist great notoriety beginning in the late 1840s. Millet's death and the subsequent sale of his studio contents in 1875 inspired renewed interest in his work, and waves of artists, likely including Sargent, honored the memory of the Barbizon master by making pilgrimages to northern France to paint peasant subjects.<sup>7</sup> The occasion also prompted Sargent to execute copies from Millet's set of etchings *Les Travaux des Champs*.<sup>8</sup> Images from this series familiarized the American with the French artist's tendency to show peasants below the horizon line and, less frequently, from behind, as a means of conveying their humility and close relation with nature. These compositional devices produce similar effects in Sargent's *Oyster Gatherers Returning*.



Fig. 2 Jean-François Millet, *Waiting*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 33 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 47 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (84.5 × 121.3 cm). Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo., Purchase: Nelson Trust, 30-18

Undoubtedly encouraged by the success of this initial venture into genre painting, Sargent continued producing images of the daily activities and customs indigenous to the many lands to which he traveled after his return from Brittany. Many of these paintings surpass by far *Oyster Gatherers Returning* and *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* in exotic and sensual appeal. His summer trip to Naples and Capri in 1878, for instance, yielded ethereal images of beautiful, languid female models communing peacefully with nature. But it would be during and after his trip to Spain the next year that Sargent's consuming fascination with intriguing, even outlandish native expressions would become more fully realized, expressed in new pictures that announced his mature arrival on the European art scene.

RRG

## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Sargent has been drawn from the extensive literature on the artist. Key sources include William Howe Downes, *John S. Sargent: His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925); and Stanley Olson, *John Singer Sargent: His Portrait* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). A more recent account has been provided by Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
2. Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent*, 16.
3. Marc Simpson, with Richard Ormond and H. Barbara Weinberg, *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1997), 74.
4. The preceding observations are informed by Simpson's discussion of *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale*, in *ibid.*, 74–75.
5. For a compelling analysis of the widespread artistic appeal of rural life and subjects in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century painting, see Gill Perry, "The Going Away—a Preparation for the 'Modern'?" in Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with Open University, 1994), 8–45.
6. David Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy, 1860–1910*, exh. cat. (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1982) provides a useful discussion of the region's popularity with many American painters, including Sargent. See also Julia Rowland Myers, "The American Expatriate Painters of the French Peasantry, 1863–1893," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1989.
7. Richard Ormond, *John Singer Sargent: Paintings, Drawings, Watercolors* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 17.
8. For a discussion of some of Sargent's copies after Millet, see Stephanie L. Herdrich and H. Barbara Weinberg, *American Drawings and Watercolors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 136–38.

# JOHN SINGER SARGENT (1856–1925)

## *Study for “Spanish Dance,”* c. 1879–80

Oil on canvas

28½ × 19 in. (72.4 × 48.3 cm)

Signed upper right: John S. Sargent

Gift of Julia and Humbert Tinsman, F83-49

EMERGING FROM A THICK atmospheric haze, the two couples portrayed by John Singer Sargent in this oil sketch dance the tango passionately. The painter depicts both pairs at a particular moment of the dance known in Spanish as *haciendo la bisagra* (making the hinge), the point at which the woman bends languidly backward over her male partner.<sup>1</sup> A drastic shift in scale from one couple to the other suggests great space between them as well as the expansive floor that encourages their energetic, expressive movements. The composition is likewise energized by the lemon yellow dress in the foreground, which flickers like candlelight amid shades of black and silver gray evoking nighttime or a dark interior. Theatrically highlighted and contorted, the woman's voluptuous body assumes a sensuous, organic shape that, like the other forms throughout the painting, verges on total abstraction. In the background, a row of anonymous musicians and spectators marks the far boundary of the dancers' available space. Barely discernible, thanks to the artist's quick, economical brushwork and deep, tonal palette, their presence contributes considerable mystery to this already starkly exotic scene.

This animated dancing study, like other works related to it, is a product of Sargent's trip to Spain in 1879.<sup>2</sup> Sargent's long admiration of Spanish culture began in 1868, when at the age of twelve he traveled with his cosmopolitan family to the country for the first time. Six years later, he entered the atelier of the French painter Charles-Émile-Auguste Durand (Carolus-Duran), who cultivated in his students a deep appreciation of seventeenth-century Spanish art, particularly the work of Diego Velázquez. Sargent's trip to Spain in 1879 was undoubtedly encouraged by Carolus-Duran's teachings, which upheld Velázquez's painterly, unflinching compositions as exemplary. Traveling with two fellow students from France, the young painter visited Madrid, where he copied works by the Spanish master in the Museo del Prado. He subsequently ventured south to the Alhambra in Granada and to Seville, cities where Sargent indulged his fascination with indigenous expressions of Spanish culture in music and dance, interests shared by many other European and American artists of the day, including Édouard Manet, Mary Cassatt (q.v.), and Thomas Eakins (q.v.).<sup>3</sup> Years later, in 1890, Sargent extended his engagement with Spanish subjects by painting a portrait of the dancer La Carmencita (1890; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), whom he saw perform in New York. To the end of his long and varied career, the painter's

technical virtuosity and enviable social standing would incite comparisons with Velázquez, forever binding Sargent to the legendary richness of Spanish culture.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by the sights and sounds of Spain in 1879, Sargent produced dozens of pencil and oil sketches, studies that he used in conceiving larger, finished compositions. The Nelson-Atkins study is tied closely to at least one other effort quickly executed in oil. This picture (1879–80; Mr. and Mrs. Warren Adelson) shows the woman's dress in deep red rather than yellow and the upper part of the composition filled with staccato brushwork, suggesting fireworks or luminous stars, as opposed to the more fluid mark-making in the Museum's study, which accentuates the scene's sultry ambience. At least four known drawings reveal Sargent's contending with the complex poses of the figures.<sup>5</sup> This group of studies contributed to the painter's most highly finished variation on the theme, *The Spanish Dance* (Fig. 1), which he likely completed on his return to Paris via Morocco the following year.<sup>6</sup> Despite appearances, most of Sargent's studies—the Nelson-Atkins version included—were not, according to scholars, executed on the spot in Spain but, rather, like his more finished Spanish paintings, after reentry to France.

Painted from memory, *Study for “Spanish Dance,”* like the larger group of works of which it is a part, marks a distinct and important shift in Sargent's early career. Turning away from the picturesque French peasants that populate his early Parisian efforts, including *Oyster Gatherers Returning* (q.v.), Sargent began indulging more freely in his fascination with exuberant displays of personality and emotion during his trip to Spain. The artist's keen interest in subjects seemingly so different in character from himself—outwardly expressive, brash, or sometimes even ill-mannered—would become one of the most consistently intriguing traits of his art overall. However, this apparent inconsistency between who Sargent was and what he painted should not be accepted uncritically, as Trevor Fairbrother has discussed.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the Spanish dance pictures relate quite directly to the artist's love of dance, especially ballet, an interest that informed his work to the end of his career. In this respect, the paintings he began executing about 1880 became not only more obviously exotic but also, perhaps paradoxically, more personal, that is, less bound to conventional subjects rooted in mid-nineteenth-century French art.

*Study for “Spanish Dance”* also reveals Sargent's temporary departure from the vivid, loosely Impressionist style with which he created his best-known Breton paintings. The dark tonalities that emerged about 1880 can be attributed partially to his study of Spanish art but also to the influence of James McNeill Whistler, whom Sargent had met earlier in Venice.<sup>8</sup> A vocal advocate of art





Fig. 1 John Singer Sargent, *The Spanish Dance*, before 1906. Oil on canvas, 34<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 32<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (88.2 × 83.7 cm). Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York, A152

for art's sake, Whistler largely severed painting's dependence on the observable world, emphasizing instead the inherent capacities of color and form to evoke subjective moods and feelings. Sargent's evocation of mood in *Study for "Spanish Dance"* through a thin application of paint that teeters precariously on the edge of abstraction recalls especially Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875; Detroit Institute of Arts), his most notorious composition, famously condemned by the British critic John Ruskin. This close tie to Whistler serves as a necessary reminder of Sargent's openness to experimentation, particularly throughout this part of his career, an attribute that art critics and historians have often overlooked or ignored.

Considered in retrospect, the period during which Sargent completed *Study for "Spanish Dance"* and related works was marked by considerable personal and professional maturation. Having ended his studies with Carolus-Duran in 1878, Sargent would soon outstrip his teacher in both artistic accomplishment and fame. Throughout the early 1880s the painter exhibited a string of pictures in Paris and London that announced his arrival as a consistent and formidable—if not always welcome—force in the European art world. Among these was his most renowned Spanish picture, *El Jaleo* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), featuring a Gypsy dancing the flamenco, which caused a great stir at the Salon of 1882 and was subsequently shown in New York and Boston. Ambitious and unconventional works like this set the stage for Sargent's conspicuously successful career, as he quickly became one of the most highly sought-after and fashionable artists in Europe.

## NOTES

1. Sargent studied this pose in preparatory drawings. See, for example, *Two Dancers (Study for The Spanish Dance)* (1879–80; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston). For a discussion of this study and pose, see Mary Crawford Volk, *John Singer Sargent's El Jaleo*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 142.
2. Biographical information on Sargent has been drawn from a range of sources, including William Howe Downes, *John S. Sargent: His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925); Stanley Olson, *John Singer Sargent: His Portrait* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); and Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
3. For an extensive study of the vogue for Spanish art in nineteenth-century French painting, see Gary Tinterow and Geneviève Lacambre, *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003). For the American perspective on a similar topic, see M. Elizabeth Boone, *España: American Artists and the Spanish Experience*, exh. cat. (New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 1998).
4. On the pervasive artistic interest in Spanish dancers as subjects, see Kathleen Mary Spies, "The Female Performer as Artistic Subject and Cultural Figure," in "Burlesque Queens and Circus Divas: Images of the Female Grotesque in the Art of Reginald Marsh and Walt Kuhn, 1915–1945," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1999, 23–49. For a lengthy analysis of Sargent's ties to Spanish art and culture, see Marc Simpson, "Sargent, Velázquez, and the Critics: 'Velázquez Come to Life Again,'" *Apollo* 148 (September 1998), 3–12.
5. In addition to *Two Dancers (Study for The Spanish Dance)* cited above, these include *Two Dancers* (1879–80; Metropolitan Museum of Art), *Two Dancers (Study for The Spanish Dance)* and *Study for the Spanish Dance* (both 1879–80; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.). See Volk, *El Jaleo*, 140–45.
6. *Ibid.*, 150.
7. This is a central theme in Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2000). See esp. "Unraveling the Paradox," 153–79.
8. For a discussion of Whistler's influence on Sargent, see Linda Merrill et al., *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2003), 220–23.

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## JOHN SINGER SARGENT (1856–1925)

### *Mrs. Cecil Wade*, 1886

(*Portrait of a Lady; Portrait; Mrs. Cecil Wade [Frances Frew Wade]*)

Oil on canvas

66 × 54¼ in. (167.6 × 137.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: John [illegible] Sargent [very faint] 188[?]

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F86-23

JOHN SINGER SARGENT'S exceptional portrait *Mrs. Cecil Wade* is the product of a youthful collaboration between the thirty-year-old expatriate American artist and the twenty-three-year-old British sitter. In this monumental canvas, Sargent portrays Mrs. Wade (née Frances Frew), the wife of a successful London stockbroker, seated at home delicately holding a fan in her lap.<sup>1</sup> Dressed in the long white satin gown she wore when presented to Queen Victoria, Mrs. Wade turns and looks to her right, revealing her pale, flawless complexion against a dark, nearly nondescript background. Her pose suggests a calm and commanding assuredness. Ambitious in scale and painterly execution, the picture also reveals the talent and confidence of a young painter who had already earned admirers—and detractors—at exhibitions at the British Royal Academy of Arts and at the Salon in Paris, as well as at other, less prominent, venues, both in London and on the Continent.

*Mrs. Cecil Wade* was one of two pictures that Sargent exhibited at the New English Art Club exhibition in April 1887.<sup>2</sup> Originally shown as *Portrait of a Lady*, the picture garnered generally warm, if somewhat uneven, reviews. The critic for the *Manchester (England) Guardian* announced glowingly, “Mr. Sargent has . . . performed a difficult feat with success as complete as it is rare. He has given his sitter for [a] background the perspective of a modern drawing-room, and yet she is in no sense overpowered.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the reviewer for the *Spectator*, while admitting *Mrs. Cecil Wade* was “painted in a masterful way,” concluded, “the work is cold, as if it had been executed by a machine, and has no hint of tenderness, no suspicion of poetry.”<sup>4</sup> After its initial showing at the Art Club, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* appeared in public view on only two occasions, at the Sargent memorial exhibitions held at Liverpool in 1925 and at the Royal Academy the following year. Descending through two generations of the sitter's family, the work was little known when it came to auction and was acquired by the Museum in 1986.<sup>5</sup>

As contemporaneous reviews suggest, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* is striking, in part, for its grand and complex composition. The picture is distinguished among Sargent's English pictures from 1884 to 1886 as a daring union of figure painting and interior space. Nearly as remarkable as the imposing image of Mrs. Wade in the foreground is the deep, dark interior space revealed behind her, which

makes up nearly half of the composition. This space provides a generous, if significantly obscured, view into the Wades' luxurious residence at Gloucester Place. Sargent experimented with portraying sitters within identifiable interiors beginning in the early 1880s, most notably in 1882, when he completed *The Daughters of Edward D. Boit* (1882; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), a picture that earned the painter much praise at the exhibition of the Société Internationale de Peintres et Sculpteurs in Paris that year. Interior spaces play a more consistent role in a number of the portraits he executed nearer in time to *Mrs. Cecil Wade*, including *Mrs. Edward Burckhardt and Her Daughter Louise* (1885; private collection) and *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson*. However, Mrs. Wade's environs lack the compartmentalization that breaks up the spaces behind the Burckhardts and the Stevensons, which grants her portrait even greater monumentality.

The dramatic effect of *Mrs. Cecil Wade* is enhanced by strong contrasts of light and shadow. A bright, evenly cast spotlight in the foreground calls requisite attention to the portrait's protagonist and describes her satin gown and the rich, reflective beads adorning it. In the dark background, warm, yellowish light struggles to penetrate a large, heavily draped and shaded window. Breaking into the room, light throws into relief a group of household furnishings, including a planter, table, chair, piano, and set of wall shelves displaying a selection of the Wades' prized possessions. Spilling onto the floor, it is absorbed by a rug and reflected by polished floorboards, creating a blinding glare that threatens to distract the viewer from the sitter.

Staged and natural, filtered, reflected, and refracted, the varied light in *Mrs. Cecil Wade* attests to Sargent's astounding technical virtuosity as well as his awareness of and debt to French Impressionism.<sup>6</sup> However, as William H. Gerdts and other scholars have noted, the artist was reluctant to adopt fully the more radical aspects of the Impressionist technique, such as the buildup of thick paint and the subsequent rejection of illusionistic form and space, a reluctance symptomatic of his reliance on portrait commissions. As *Mrs. Cecil Wade* demonstrates, Sargent's application of Impressionist interests in light was typically mediated by the painterly but more naturalistic precedent of his former mentor Charles-Émile-Auguste Durand (Carolus-Duran), whose reputation remained strong within fashionable Parisian circles into the 1880s. Moreover, because of Sargent's ties to Impressionism and Carolus-Duran, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* would have appeared distinctly French to its English audience in 1886. This, according to Marc Simpson, is likely the reason Sargent chose to exhibit the portrait at the Francophile New English Art Club rather than the staunch Royal Academy, where Continental styles were less welcome.<sup>7</sup>





Fig. 1 John Singer Sargent, *The Bead Stringers*, 1880 or 1882. Oil on canvas, 26 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 30 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (67 × 78.1 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y., Friends of the Albright Art Gallery Fund, 1916, 1916:2

The dynamic, light-filled space behind Mrs. Wade connects the portrait also to paintings Sargent completed during two visits to Venice between 1880 and 1882. Throughout this period, he produced about twenty works, which include street scenes and interiors occupied by the working urban poor. Sargent composed pictures like *The Bead Stringers* (Fig. 1) and *A Venetian Interior* (c. 1882; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.) using a set number of compositional elements: a group of female figures in the foreground, a dark, cavernous room, and a window in the background that admits sunlight from outside. Mrs. Wade has seemingly moved into one of these earlier compositions, displaced the lowly workers, and renovated and decorated their humble accommodations to suit her personal tastes.

Within the context of Sargent's early English portrait commissions, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* exhibits not only greater complexity with regard to composition but also a higher degree of formality. Unlike most of Sargent's sitters from the period, such as Edith Playfair, who greets her viewer with a warm, direct expression (1884; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), Mrs. Wade coolly turns to her right, disregarding her admirer's direct gaze. Shown in near profile, which accentuates the elegant contours of her face and neck, Mrs. Wade recalls Virginie Avegno Gautreau, the American-born wife of a Parisian businessman whom Sargent rendered in his most notorious portrait. Popularly known today as *Madame X* (Fig. 2), Sargent's theatrical likeness ignited the French public at the Salon of 1884, where audiences ridiculed the painter and

his subject alike for their audacity, evident in Mme Gautreau's plunging neckline, heavily powdered skin, and haughty pose.<sup>8</sup> From this picture, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* retains not only the profiled pose to a certain degree but also its monumentality and calculated pretension.

Despite numerous similarities, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* and *Madame X* might be better considered paired opposites rather than pendants. Mrs. Wade ultimately refuses to mimic or condone Mme Gautreau's more sensuous display. Her white dress, which bunches and billows behind her like heavenly clouds, counters Mme Gautreau's revealing black evening gown. Mrs. Wade's bosom is capped at a respectable line with a small bejeweled cross, confirming her goodness and fidelity, while Mme Gautreau's neckline dives to sinfully dangerous depths. From this perspective, the women embody not fraternal twin sisters but the two opposing female types that pervade late-nineteenth-century art, the virgin and the femme fatale. Hung side by side, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* and *Madame X* would appear locked in an eternal battle between feminine good and evil.

It is tempting to attribute the conceptual and formal differences between the portraits entirely to the personalities of the sitters themselves. Familial accounts, for example, posit that Mrs. Wade was, much like Sargent himself, a shy and reserved individual, whereas Mme Gautreau was known for her flamboyant public behavior, which the artist quietly admired.<sup>9</sup> One might be further inclined to elide personal traits with cultural stereotypes with regard to each portrait, that is, to understand *Mrs. Cecil Wade*





Fig. 2 John Singer Sargent, *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)*. 1883–84. Oil on canvas, 82½ × 43¼ in. (208.6 × 109.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum, New York, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1916, 16.53

as an emblem of “typical” British etiquette and *Madame X* as a symbol of unbridled sensuousness characteristic of the French.

More pertinent to Sargent’s less sensuous and aggressive portrayal of Mrs. Wade was the set of personal and artistic circumstances in which the painter conceived and executed the portrait. As numerous scholars have emphasized, the debacle caused by *Madame X* at the Salon in 1884 haunted Sargent for years.<sup>10</sup> His friends at the time observed the artist’s despondency about the present and concerns about the future. Recounting a recent conversation with fellow author Henry James, Sargent’s friend Vernon Lee, for one, explained, “[James] seems to think that John is in

a bad way. Since Mme Gautreau . . . women are afraid of him lest he should make them too eccentric looking.”<sup>11</sup> His reputation and ego bruised in Paris, Sargent removed to England, in part, on James’s suggestion. On arrival, he moved into the studio that James McNeill Whistler had recently vacated at 33 Tite Street to begin mining more deeply the British market for his work he had started tapping earlier in the decade.

A thorough analysis of *Mrs. Cecil Wade* reveals that Sargent learned his lesson at the 1884 Salon well, for the picture retreats in many ways from the more adventurous and controversial aspects of the earlier work. In composing Mrs. Wade’s face, for instance, Sargent took care not to replicate Mme Gautreau’s arrogant profile exactly; instead, he applied a broad band of light gray pigment along the British woman’s forehead. This subtle adjustment turns Mrs. Wade’s head in space slightly toward three-quarter view, causing her to appear more demure than condescending. To similar ends, Sargent located Mrs. Wade firmly within domestic quarters, unlike the expansive, ambiguous space occupied by Mme Gautreau, which suggests her overwhelming presence. Underseoring Mrs. Wade’s harmlessness, the rails of the settee on which she rests operate visually as bars that guarantee she cannot break loose and enact her will on the outside world. Formal but demure, monumental but not domineering, Sargent’s likeness of Mrs. Wade would assuage prospective clients who might worry that he make them appear “too eccentric.”

Despite his hopes and efforts, Sargent’s critical fortunes did not improve dramatically in England, where his imagery was still marginalized because of its French inflection. With portrait commissions proving unreliable, Sargent turned his brush with greater frequency to creating informal likenesses of various friends and associates. He also took the opportunity to execute numerous landscapes and outdoor scenes notable for their vigorous, impressionistic spontaneity. In 1887 the painter began looking seriously to the United States for the first time as a viable market for his art. Residents of New York, Boston, and Newport, Rhode Island, sat happily for the now-famous expatriate, who produced more than twenty portraits during his eight-month stay.<sup>12</sup>

As many scholars have noted, Sargent rendered *Mrs. Cecil Wade* during a period of considerable transition in his career as he moved from Paris to London and then turned to the United States for more opportunities. Despite the unsettled conditions in which it was painted, Sargent’s portrait of Mrs. Wade reveals no self-doubt or anxiety on the part of the artist who painted it. Rather, like so many the prolific artist produced over the course of his lengthy career, the picture appears to conceal successfully Sargent’s personal feelings under a dazzlingly confident display of painterly pyrotechnics. In this way, *Mrs. Cecil Wade* suggests an incongruity between Sargent’s life and his art, a discontinuity between experience and imagery that fuels fascination with this supremely gifted American painter.

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## NOTES

1. Information about Sargent's portrait and Mrs. Wade has been drawn, in part, from Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings*, vol. 1, *The Early Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 144. Ormond and Kilmurray's entry for Mrs. Cecil Wade contains a few additional biographical details about the sitter, including her life dates (1863–1908) and the fact that she and her husband had two daughters, Kathleen and Aileen. Biographical information about Sargent is extensive. For this entry, it has been gleaned particularly from William Howe Downes, *John S. Sargent: His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925); Stanley Olson, *John Singer Sargent: His Portrait* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); and Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
2. Marc Simpson, with Richard Ormond and H. Barbara Weinberg, *Uncanny Spectacle: The Public Career of the Young John Singer Sargent*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1997), 126. The other painting Sargent showed at the New English Art Club in 1887 was *Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson* (1885; private collection), a smaller and more experimental portrait that he exhibited with the subtitle *A Sketch*.
3. "Two Spring Exhibitions," *Manchester (Eng.) Guardian*, 6 April 1887, 8.
4. "Art: The New English Art Club," *Spectator* (London) 60 (16 April 1887), 527. Generally, reviews of Sargent's treatment of the background were more positive than comments about the artist's rendering of Mrs. Wade's features, which, as this assessment suggests, was perceived as too cold and without feeling.
5. Before its accession by the Nelson-Atkins, the painting was best known to visitors to the Willmer House, a local history museum in Farnham, England, where it hung on loan from the family for several years. See "Museum Portrait Sells for £m," *Farnham (Eng.) Herald*, 8 May 1987, 2.
6. Early in his career, Sargent had met the movement's most influential practitioner, Claude Monet, likely at the second Impressionist exhibition in the spring of 1876. In the year after he completed *Mrs. Cecil Wade*, he painted with Monet at his gardens at Giverny. William H. Gerds observes Sargent's works from the 1880s "can only be considered 'impressionist' in the broadest sense of the term, that is, in the recording of momentary effects with a spontaneous, relatively 'unfinished' brushwork." Gerds, "The Arch-Apostle of the Dab-and-Spot School: John Singer Sargent as an Impressionist," in Patricia Hills et al., *John Singer Sargent*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1986), 111–45, at 111.
7. Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle*, 126.
8. Among numerous discussions of *Madame X*, see Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2000), 72–81.
9. Rosalind Wade, Mrs. Cecil Wade's granddaughter, reported: "My grandmother found the young artist very shy and difficult to talk to during the sittings. But then she also was shy and reserved." Wade to Richard Ormond, 26 March 1969, John Singer Sargent Catalogue Raisonné Archives, quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: The Early Portraits*, 144. Fairbrother proposes Sargent's admiration of Mme Gautreau's theatrical personality in *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist*, 77.
10. Among the many discussions of this episode in Sargent's career, see Stanley Olson, "Sargent at Broadway," in Olson, Warren Adelson, and Richard L. Ormond, *Sargent at Broadway: The Impressionist Years*, exh. cat. (New York: Universe, 1986), 11–23, esp. 13.
11. Vernon Lee, quoted in Simpson, *Uncanny Spectacle*, 121.
12. See Gary A. Reynolds, "Sargent's Late Portraits," in Hills et al., *John Singer Sargent*, 147–79.

# JOHN SINGER SARGENT (1856–1925)

## *Francisco Bernareggi, c. 1908*

Oil on canvas

26<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (68.1 × 49.1 cm)

Inscribed and signed across top: à M. Francisco Bernareggi, souvenir amical de / John S. Sargent; dated lower right: 1907 [likely not in artist's hand]

Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F86-26

JOHN SINGER SARGENT'S radiant and rapidly executed portrait of fellow artist Francisco Bernareggi numbers among his most freely painted pictures in oil.<sup>1</sup> Sargent rendered Bernareggi's head, shoulders, and upper torso in broad, whipping strokes, while the bottom fifth of the portrait gives way almost entirely to the canvas's warm brown underpainting, further accentuating the composition's informal and abstract qualities. Tighter technique above the middle of the canvas draws primary attention to the Argentine's handsome face, which offers a direct expression in concert with the painter's spontaneous brushwork. Brought to life by Sargent's kinetic mark-making, Bernareggi's image veritably crackles with vitality and erotic potency.

The easy assuredness with which Sargent executed his portrait of Bernareggi reveals the unqualified confidence of a painter who by 1908 had earned nearly universal international acclaim and acceptance.<sup>2</sup> His youthful artistic indiscretions like *Madame X* behind him, Sargent was selected for full membership into the British Royal Academy of Arts in 1897. The artist enlarged his Tite Street apartment and studio in 1900, in part, to accommodate an ever-increasing demand for portrait commissions. In 1907 King Edward VII nominated Sargent for knighthood, an honor the painter respectfully declined, claiming that his American citizenship rendered him ineligible.

In America, the Boston Public Library in 1890 commissioned from Sargent a series of murals, a project for which the painter assumed the ambitious task of depicting the history of world religions from ancient paganism to "modern" Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The National Academy of Design named him a full member in 1897. Distinguished English and American universities, including Oxford, Cambridge, Pennsylvania, Yale, and Harvard, awarded the painter a string of honorary degrees between 1903 and 1916. As a result of his talent and high social position, Sargent was widely regarded—and caricatured—at home and abroad at the turn of the century as the modern embodiment of his long-time idol Diego Velázquez. In fact, the famed American painter officially attained the eminence of the Spanish old master when, in 1907, the esteemed Uffizi Gallery in Florence ordered from Sargent a self-portrait—his last in oils—to join its renowned collection of self-portraits by Velázquez, Michelangelo, Titian, and

Rembrandt, among others. Such legendary company certified Sargent's artistic greatness.

Sargent's boldly energetic portrayal of Bernareggi betrays not only unlimited professional self-confidence but also warm personal regard for a fellow painter.<sup>4</sup> Sargent met the South American while on holiday on the Spanish island of Majorca, where Bernareggi had established residence in 1903. During this time, the two painters likely shared their mutual enthusiasm for Velázquez and El Greco. Bernareggi might also have told stories of his early days in art school at the Academia de Bellas Artes in Barcelona, Spain, where he became close friends with the young Pablo Picasso.<sup>5</sup> Picasso produced at least two drawings of Bernareggi while they studied and traveled together, one showing the Argentine copying paintings in Madrid's illustrious Museo del Prado, and another in which he enjoys a drink at a local bar in true bohemian style.<sup>6</sup> In 1900 Bernareggi gravitated to Paris, where he immersed himself in the work of recent French masters, including Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas. His move to Majorca soon thereafter was prompted by his desire to develop his art away from outside influences, a project he pursued by painting landscapes alone in nature. Signed and inscribed at the top as a gift to the sitter, Sargent's portrait of Bernareggi commemorates their brief but apparently meaningful time together.

Broadly considered, Sargent's portrayal of Bernareggi extends a lengthy series of portraits of artist-friends that the American executed over the course of his career.<sup>7</sup> Occasional diversions like these freed Sargent from the wearying demands and constraints that accompanied commissioned portraits, requests for which increased dramatically as the painter's reputation skyrocketed in the early twentieth century. "I have long been sick and tired of portrait painting," Sargent announced in 1907, when he reduced substantially his output of formal portraits.<sup>8</sup> The personal freedom suggested by Sargent's vigorous likeness of Bernareggi must be attributed in part to the freedom that the painter must have savored as he produced the picture as a gift to a new friend and colleague, rather than as a means of fulfilling yet another professional obligation with monetary strings attached.

Furthermore, Bernareggi, with his strikingly swarthy good looks, embodied a particular physical and ethnic type to which Sargent was especially attracted.<sup>9</sup> This olive-skinned and dark-haired type also appears in two of the painter's most outwardly sensual compositions, *A Male Model with a Wreath of Laurel* (c. 1878; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), which features a recipient of Apollo's victory crown emerging seductively out of deep shadows, and *Study of a Male Model* (c. 1878; Hevrdejs Collection), showing a partially nude figure, his warm flesh accentuated by stark white surroundings. Bernareggi's uncanny resemblance to



M. Francisco de Paula ...  
F. de ...



Fig. 1 John Singer Sargent, *Seated Male Nude with Drapery*, c. 1890–1915. Charcoal on paper, 24 $\frac{7}{16}$  × 17 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (62 × 43.5 cm). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 1937.9.19. © President and Fellows of Harvard College

the models in these paintings confirms the painter's own physical ideal as well as the portrait's latent homoerotic content.

The erotic implications of *Francisco Bernareggi* extend well beyond subject matter to include issues pertaining to style as well as coded symbolism. The pronounced sketchiness of Sargent's portrait of Bernareggi must be tied to numerous nude studies that Sargent rendered from roughly 1890 to 1915 as part of his ongoing mural commission for the Boston Public Library.<sup>10</sup> According to Trevor Fairbrother, these studies disclose in different ways Sargent's homoerotic desire. "When his entire production of drawings is taken into account," he explains, "it is evident that Sargent was most absorbed and inspired when working with male models." Fairbrother bases his conclusion not only on the larger number of studies featuring the male rather than the female nude but also on Sargent's more vigorous draftsmanship in them. "Not only did he draw men much more frequently than women," the author points out, "his drawings of female models can be unexceptional in execution and lacking in erotic response."<sup>11</sup> A comparison of *Francisco Bernareggi* and any number of these preparatory works (Fig. 1) reveals a strikingly similar technique,

one in which the artist applied a flurry of agitated marks to block out large areas of the composition while leaving less important portions largely untouched. If ecstatic mark-making is, as Fairbrother argues, a sign of Sargent's erotic response to his subject, then *Francisco Bernareggi* is a picture that nearly explodes with sexual energy.

Iconographic connections between Francisco Bernareggi and the completed murals further suggest Sargent's personal attraction to his sitter. With a halo of golden brush marks surrounding his head, the Argentine painter appears descended from both *A Male Model with a Wreath of Laurel* and the multitude of mythological and religious deities that Sargent assembled in the Boston library's lofty barrel vaults. Radiantly beautiful, Bernareggi discreetly assumes the guise of a dark-haired and mustached Apollo, the Greek god of light, reason, and truth, who, manched at the bottom of Sargent's canvas, rises dramatically and appropriately toward the sun. In this respect, Sargent's portrait looks ahead to his next mural commission, secured in 1916, for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where Apollo appears on multiple occasions and in more conventional modes. In *Classic and Romantic Art* (Fig. 2), the design for the rotunda dome, the god is silhouetted against a schematized sunburst as he contemplates the two great traditions of Western painting, classic and romantic art, personified respectively by a male and female nude.

The portrait's coded allusion to Apollo suggests that Sargent's interest in Bernareggi as a subject went far beyond mere professional camaraderie. Apollo stands atop the pantheon of homosexual icons, where he is accompanied only by Saint Sebastian, whose nude martyrdom makes him a likely candidate for worship by men persecuted for their same-sex desire. Apollo's great appeal in this regard has rested historically not only on his legendary physical beauty but also on his relationships with other males, such as Hyacinth, an affair retold in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>12</sup> The degree to which Apollo served as a eode for homoerotic attraction and affection around the turn of the twentieth century is suggested by a letter written by Sargent's fellow artist and notorious acquaintance Osear Wilde in January 1893 to his beloved Lord Alfred Douglas, in which the lovelorn author observed, "I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days."<sup>13</sup> The letter containing this passage was, in fact, presented as evidence against the writer when he was infamously tried on charges of gross indecency in 1895. Wilde's conviction, which generated international media attention, would have served Sargent and other homosexual men of his generation as a stark reminder that the "love that dares not speak its name" should be expressed only through the most private and oblique means, if at all.

Brought together by similar personal circumstances and shared professional interests in 1908, Sargent and Bernareggi apparently never met again, their lives and careers diverging markedly thereafter. Retaining his residence in Majorca, the Argentine continued to pursue his art and by 1920 was exhibiting widely throughout Europe. However, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 forced him to return home to Argentina, where, cut off from his

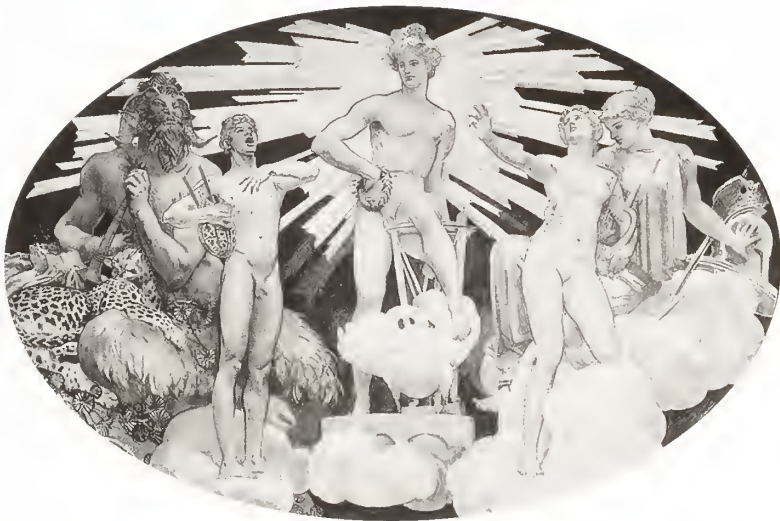


Fig. 2 John Singer Sargent, *Classic and Romantic Art*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 100 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 167 in. (255 × 424.2 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund, 21.10514

patrons and the European art world, he endured years of economic hardship and personal malaise. Temporary personal and economic security accompanied his appointment as professor at the University of Cuyo in 1942. That same year the Chilean artist Lorenzo Domínguez sculpted his portrait in stone (location unknown), a rough, simplified likeness that suggests the effects of age and misfortune on the once young, dashing painter.<sup>14</sup> Fired from his position four years later, Bernareggi returned to his beloved Majorca, where he continued to live in poverty and died in obscurity in 1959.

The story concerning the final stages of Sargent's life offers, by comparison, a distinctly happier ending. At the time of his death in 1925, the painter had attained a position enjoyed by few American artists. After his memorial service in Westminster Abbey and a series of retrospective exhibitions in London, Boston, and New York, however, Sargent's reputation plummeted dramatically and languished throughout the mid-twentieth century for several reasons. The projects he completed late in his career, particularly his classicizing designs for murals adorning the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, marked him somewhat unfairly as an opponent of modernism. American art critics also condemned Sargent for his lifelong expatriation in their determined search for "native" values in art during the Great Depression and World War II. Since the 1980s the painter has resumed his lofty place in art history, thanks to the efforts of a new generation of scholars for whom avant-garde productions matter no more than issues of patronage, class, and gender. In this new critical climate, Sargent has once again begun setting records—in auction houses, where his paintings have garnered unprecedented sums, and in museums, which have in recent years mounted dozens of exhibitions devoted to his sensuous, complex art.

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## NOTES

1. The portrait has been dated to c. 1908 in accordance with Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings*, vol. 3, *The Later Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 206, who note: "The picture was dated 1907 in [Diego F.] Pró's biography [of Bernareggi] and is inscribed '1907' in pencil (not in Sargent's hand) at the lower right of the canvas. However, 1908, when Sargent is known to have been in Majorca [where the two artists met], is the more plausible date."
2. Biographical information about Sargent primarily has been gleaned from William Howe Downes, *John S. Sargent: His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925); Stanley Olson, *John Singer Sargent: His Portrait* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); and Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).
3. The most thorough account of Sargent's library murals is Sally M. Promey, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). The murals became, in Trevor Fairbrother's words, "a burden, and a source of endlessly protracted toil," until the final sections were installed in 1919. Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent*, 90.
4. On Bernareggi, see Diego F. Pró, *Francisco Bernareggi* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Amancy, 1969). The author thanks Robert Conrads for his assistance in translating from the Spanish.
5. See John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1, 1881–1906 (New York: Random House, 1991), 94–95.
6. These two drawings, *Bernareggi Copying in the Prado* (1898; Museu Picasso, Barcelona) and *Bernareggi* (1898; Museu Picasso, Barcelona), are reproduced in *ibid.*
7. His first portrait of an artist-friend, a compelling likeness of his teacher Carolus-Duran (1879; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.), brought Sargent initial favorable publicity when it received an honorable mention at the Salon of 1879. The next year, Sargent rendered the French sculptor Jean-Joseph-Marie Carriès (c. 1880; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln). In years following, he added Auguste Rodin (1884; Musée Rodin, Paris) and Paul Helleu (c. 1880; private collection) to his growing list of artistic sitters.
8. Sargent, quoted in Carter Ratcliff, *John Singer Sargent* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982), 191.
9. Trevor Fairbrother, *John Singer Sargent: The Sensualist*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2000), 99: "Sargent had an admiration for olive- or brown-skinned, dark-haired people of Mediterranean origin; he clearly turned to their exotic allure as an escape from his own Caucasian heritage."
10. A group of these studies, in the collection of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, is reproduced in *ibid.*, 180–211.
11. *Ibid.*, 104.
12. For thorough discussions of Apollo and Saint Sebastian as icons of homosexual desire and identity, see James M. Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999). Sargent even seems to acknowledge Apollo's same-sex inclinations in *Classic and Romantic Art*, in which the god gestures slightly to his right in the direction of the male personification. With a lusty satyr behind him attesting to his sexual appeal, the beautiful male nude appears prepared to receive Apollo's laurel wreath of victory.
13. Wilde to Douglas, January 1893, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 544.
14. Illustrated in Federica Domínguez Colavita, Alberto Colavita, and Clara Digiovanni de Domínguez, "Lorenzo Domínguez: General Catalog, 1998," [www.ictp.trieste.it/~colavita/htmls/p20.htm](http://www.ictp.trieste.it/~colavita/htmls/p20.htm).

## CHARLES SHEELER (1883–1965)

### *Conference No. 1*, 1954

Oil on canvas

20 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (51 × 64.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: Sheeler—1954

Gift of the Friends of Art, 55-93

THE EVOCATIVE TITLE of Charles Sheeler's *Conference No. 1* suggests a dialogue—in this case, a visual dialogue between the formal elements of art and the principles of design. *Conference No. 1* confronts the viewer with a bold arrangement of hard-edged monochromatic planes formed by straight and angled contours, which produces an energy that is contained somewhat by the artist's generally cool, tonal palette. Pyramidal forms throughout the painting evoke buildings, specifically barns, while black and lavender trapezoids and rectangles suggest windows, and two pieces of blue in the upper left, sky. Overall, however, Sheeler's insistent flatness reveals his conceptualization of painting as an exercise in two-dimensional design. The geometric forms of Sheeler's composition evolve in degrees of opacity and transparency, in some areas seeming to overlap and obscure other shapes and, in others, appearing as semitransparent veils of color. This ambiguity is especially apparent in the trapezoid running along the painting's right-hand side, which changes color five times and, in so doing, seems to occupy background, middle ground, and foreground simultaneously, thereby conflating them.

Tightly controlled and expertly crafted, *Conference No. 1* illuminates Sheeler's long-standing concern for rational, sleek design in art. Born in Philadelphia, Sheeler studied at the School of Industrial Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.<sup>1</sup> One of his early teachers was William Merritt Chase (q.v.), with whom he traveled to Europe in 1904 and 1905. After graduating, however, Sheeler rejected Chase's spontaneous impressionistic style in favor of a more structured approach influenced by Paul Cézanne and other European modernist painters. One of Sheeler's early claims to fame was his inclusion in the International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show, in 1913. From 1917 to 1921 Sheeler was affiliated with the circle of Walter and Louise Arensberg, an influential group of New York-based avant-garde artists, writers, dealers, and collectors, which included Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and William Carlos Williams. These personal and artistic ties reinforced his interest in conspicuously modern subjects, especially those relating to industry and the machine age. Sheeler famously celebrated the machine age in a six-and-a-half-minute film he made in 1920 with the photographer Paul Strand called *Manhatta*, which showcased the dizzying heights of New York's skyline.

In painting, Sheeler was instrumental in the development of a style now known as Precisionism, defined by hard, clean edges

and smooth surfaces bearing little, if any, sign of the artist's brush.<sup>2</sup> Seen also in the work of Elsie Driggs, Ralston Crawford, and George Ault (q.v.), this style was widely thought most appropriate for depicting the machine age. Informed by his experience and expertise in photography, with its evenness of focus and distillation of form, Sheeler's particular brand of Precisionist painting found lasting expression in many industrial scenes, especially a series of paintings of the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant outside Detroit.<sup>3</sup>

While Sheeler may appear to have left his deepest mark in American modernism with his portrayals of colossal machines and sprawling industrial plants, more modest, historical subjects played an equally important role in his oeuvre. Of special interest to him were examples of vernacular architecture—especially barns—that dotted the countryside of Bucks County in his native Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the 1910s Sheeler began collecting and appointing various living quarters he occupied in rural areas in Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut with select pieces of early American design. These items often appear in his art, such as the nineteenth-century armchair in the painting *Home, Sweet Home* (1931; Detroit Institute of Arts). He held Shaker furniture in the highest regard.<sup>5</sup>

By embracing the aesthetics of both America's past and its industrial present, Sheeler was participating in the generational reassessment of the nation's cultural heritage, which had typically been measured against that of Europe and been found wanting. The artist, like many of his contemporaries, was struck by the apparent kinship between the no-nonsense functionalism of early American buildings and artifacts and the modernist ideals of formal purity and abstraction. As described by Wanda Corn:

Sheeler's discovery that he could wed a consummately twentieth-century style to the specific lines and craftsmanship of local historical architecture was seminal; he would refine and recalibrate the equation for the rest of his life. . . . the conflation of modern and historical became something . . . like an aesthetic theory. Increasingly Sheeler's art hypothesized a genealogy of elegance and modernity that began in early American craftsmanship and continued in machine age aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

As *Conference No. 1* suggests, Sheeler's fascination with the relationship between old and new America extended deep into his career. Stints in the late 1940s as artist-in-residence at the Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire, reinvigorated his interest in early American architecture. In the early 1950s the artist began incorporating into his painted compositions the effects of multiple





photographic exposures, which were derived from composite photographs he created at the same time and evoked the simultaneous views and fracture of Cubism. Like several other late images of barns and farm buildings, *Conference No. 1* may have been based on photographs he took in Connecticut or north-central Massachusetts, areas Sheeler explored in the late fall of 1953 with his friend and benefactor William H. Lane.<sup>7</sup> The New England barn complex in the Nelson-Atkins painting also appears in several other works, including *Conversation Piece* (1952; Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, N.C.).<sup>8</sup> Sheeler also made small tempera sketches, which functioned either as preparatory studies or as records of his major oil paintings. One such sketch relating to the Nelson-Atkins work, known alternatively as *Conference No. 1 (Second Version)* or *Conference No. 2*, has been documented.<sup>9</sup>

Acquired by the Nelson-Atkins only a year after it was painted, *Conference No. 1* was made at a time when the art world was turning its attention away from Sheeler and his generation toward such younger painters as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. In this new critical climate defined by large, more expressionist, and psychologically laden canvases, Sheeler's rational designs seemed less relevant. His relevance in the 1950s permeated heated discussions at a Museum committee meeting that considered the purchase of *Conference No. 1*. "I definitely feel that Sheeler turned the corner a long time ago," David Strout, dean of the Kansas City Art Institute, announced, "and has been going backwards ever since." An advocate for the artist begged to differ: "Sheeler is a great, great painter. He isn't a has-been at all and anybody who disagrees with me can meet me outside after the meeting."<sup>10</sup>

A severe stroke in 1959 effectively ended the artist's career. The death of this elder statesman of American art in 1965 prompted a lengthy and laudatory obituary in the *New York Times*, doubts regarding his continued importance notwithstanding. Eulogizing Sheeler, the writer observed admiringly that the artist "was blessed with the talent of creating substance out of shadow. And . . . he would create shadow out of substance. He painted lines, angles, curves and colors in arrangements of his own choice to express the essence of a structure."<sup>11</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Sheeler has been drawn primarily from Martin L. Friedman, *Charles Sheeler* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1975); and Carol Troyen and Erica E. Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings*, exh. cat. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987). An early biography was provided by Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler, Artist in the American Tradition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938).
2. For studies of Sheeler's work in the context of Precisionism, see Katherine Lochridge, *The Precisionist Painters, 1916-1949: Interpretations of a Mechanical Age*, exh. cat. (Huntington, N.Y.: Heckscher Museum of Art, 1978); Marianne Doczema, *American Realism and the Industrial Age*, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980); Karen Lucie, *Charles Sheeler and the Cult of the Machine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); and *Precisionism in America, 1915-1941*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). See also James H. Maroney Jr., "Charles Sheeler Reveals the Machinery of His Soul," *American Art* 13 (Summer 1999), 26-57.
3. For more extensive studies of the relation between Sheeler's painting and photography, see Charles Brock, *Charles Sheeler: Across Media*, exh. cat. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); and Karen Tsujimoto, *Images of America: Precisionist Painting and Modern Photography*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1982). On Sheeler's photography, see esp. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. and Norman Keyes Jr., *Charles Sheeler: The Photographs*, exh. cat. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1987); and Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., Gilles Mora, and Karen E. Haas, *The Photography of Charles Sheeler: American Modernist*, exh. cat. (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002).
4. On this development in Sheeler's early career, see Karen Lucie, *Charles Sheeler in Doylestown: American Modernism and the Pennsylvania Tradition*, exh. cat. (Allentown, Pa.: Allentown Art Museum, 1997).
5. On Sheeler's appreciation of early American design, see, for example, Susan Fillin-Yeh, *Charles Sheeler: American Interiors*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1987).
6. Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 302.
7. This supposition is based on the discussion of Sheeler's *Lunenburg* (1954; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), in Troyen and Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler*, 206. See also Carol Troyen to Margaret Stenz, 14 July 1994, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Troyen and Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler*, 218. In an effort to reframe perception of Sheeler's work from this period in his career, Charlotte Helen Wellman has examined the artist's return to earlier motifs and images beginning in the late 1940s in relation to his age, among other personal factors. See Wellman, "Reviewing the 'Late' Paintings of Charles Sheeler, 1943-1959," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1995. *Conference No. 1* does not appear in Wellman's study.
9. The author thanks Carol Troyen for bringing this sketch to his attention. See Related Work.
10. Winifred Shields, "At Odds on an Art Gift," *Kansas City Times*, 28 October 1955, 4A.
11. "Charles Sheeler, Painter, 81, Dead—Artist of Precisionist School Was in 1913 Armory Show—Noted Photographer," *New York Times*, 5 May 1965, 31.

# JOHN SLOAN (1871–1951)

## *Katherine Sehon, 1909*

Oil on canvas

35¼ × 24¼ in. (89.5 × 61.6 cm)

Signed lower right: John Sloan

Purchase: acquired in memory of Carol Levin through the generosity of her family: Richard M. Levin, Michael and Diane Levin, Nancy Levin and Jeff Flora, and Ann and John Brendle, 2000.30

ALTHOUGH JOHN SLOAN is best known for his paintings and prints of gritty, modern, urban life in the early decades of the twentieth century, he also painted many portraits. Particularly in the years before 1915, when Sloan was most influenced by his mentor Robert Henri (q.v.), he worked hard to perfect a portrait technique that would capture, with an economy of means, both the likeness and the personality of his sitters.<sup>1</sup> His portrait of Katherine Sehon, a family friend and neighbor, expands our understanding of Sloan's work by presenting an image of a middle-class woman who confronts the viewer with dignity and warm good humor.

Sloan was born in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, but grew up in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> He studied art at Central High School, alongside both William James Glackens (q.v.) and the future art collector Albert Barnes, but left school in 1888, when his father's stationery business failed. Sloan continued to draw in his spare time and also taught himself to etch. Soon he was working full-time making etchings for calendars, greeting cards, and advertisements. Along with Glackens, Sloan began working as an illustrator for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1892. That same year, he enrolled in night classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied under Thomas Anschutz. Although Sloan benefited from the traditional training offered by Anschutz, he was frustrated with the limitations of drawing from plaster casts. With thirty-nine other students, he founded the Charcoal Club, an evening gathering where members could draw or paint from live models and receive informal criticism from other members. At the Charcoal Club, Sloan joined a group of young artists, including Glackens as well as Everett Shinn and George Luks, who clustered around the charismatic Henri.

In the mid-1890s, under Henri's watchful eye, Sloan began painting portraits of his friends and family. Although he continued to make newspaper illustrations in an elegant Art Nouveau style even after moving on to the *Philadelphia Press*, his earliest oil paintings follow Henri's work both thematically and stylistically. In paintings such as *William Glackens* (c. 1895; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington), Sloan positioned his subject's head and shoulders against a dark neutral background and painted them with loose, fluid brushstrokes. Within a few years, he broadened

his range of subjects to include landscapes, cityscapes, and genre scenes, but he retained his mentor's painterly, antiacademic style. When he lost his steady newspaper job in 1903, Sloan joined Henri, Luks, Glackens, and Shinn in New York City.

Sloan and his wife, Dolly, rented an apartment and studio on West Twenty-third Street, a few blocks north of Greenwich Village. Fascinated by the life he observed on the streets of Manhattan and in the low-rent apartments whose back windows faced his studio, Sloan produced many paintings and prints that depict working-class people unself-consciously going about their daily activities outdoors, in restaurants and bars, or in their homes.<sup>3</sup> His preference for lower-class subjects and his loose, painterly style are consistent with the work of other members of the circle of radical New York painters later known as the Ashcan School to which Sloan, Henri, Glackens, Luks, and Shinn all belonged.<sup>4</sup> More than the other members of the Eight, however, Sloan particularly imbued many of his genre scenes of women, such as *Chinese Restaurant* (1909; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, N.Y.), with a dignity and vitality that likely stemmed from his active engagement with feminism and the Socialist Party.<sup>5</sup>

While Sloan painted genre scenes quickly and spontaneously, often working from memory, he found portrait painting to be a far more laborious undertaking. He kept a diary, and his entries from the early years of the twentieth century reveal an ongoing struggle to achieve both a recognizable likeness and a sense of solid form in his portraits.<sup>6</sup> Henri, who excelled at portrait painting and whose painterly virtuosity the younger artist admired, jibed on one occasion that "*Sloan* is the past participle of *Slow!*"<sup>7</sup> Probably hoping to emulate Henri, Sloan worked tirelessly to improve his technique, hiring models when he could afford them and relying on the good graces of his friends when he could not. One friend who posed at least five times for Sloan was Katherine Sehon.<sup>8</sup>

Katherine and her mother, Virginia, were neighbors of the Sloans, and Sloan's diary reveals that they visited frequently and were particular friends of Dolly.<sup>9</sup> Katherine's father, Lester Sehon, an accountant who did not live with his family during these years, visited periodically. Sloan noted that "While [the Sehons] are unaware of the class struggle, they are very nice," a comment that reveals both his fondness for the family and his growing preoccupation with radical politics.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the rather conventional, middle-class Sehons were anomalous among the Sloans' New York friends, most of whom were artists, writers, or activists. Sloan described Katherine as a girl who was "strong on the vanities of New York life" and who "talked a streak of prattle."<sup>11</sup> When she became engaged in 1912 to Samuel Felder, an electrical engineer, Sloan wrote disapprovingly of her bourgeois eagerness for wedding presents. "Still," he noted, "she's a nice little girl."<sup>12</sup>





Fig. 1 Robert Henri, *Girl with Red Hair*, 1903. Oil on canvas, 31 × 25 in. (78.7 × 63.5 cm). Spartanburg County Museum of Art, Purchased by the Spartanburg Arts and Crafts Club, 1977.2.01

The Nelson-Atkins canvas is the first portrait Sloan painted of Katherine Sehon. She sat for it in October 1909, when she was just seventeen years old. Sloan noted in his diary, “Miss Sehon called, and as I felt like painting she posed for me in the afternoon.” He continued to work on her portrait the next four days, recording in his diary both his progress and his frustration. Preoccupied with freelance illustration work during the summer months, Sloan had not picked up a paintbrush since May. His decision to plunge again into portraiture may have been precipitated by an exhibition of seventeenth-century Dutch art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sloan, who visited the exhibition just a few days before he began his painting of Sehon, wrote enthusiastically in his diary about portraits he saw there by Rembrandt van Rijn and Frans Hals.<sup>13</sup>

Sloan’s portrait of Sehon depicts an attractive and engaging woman who seems considerably older than seventeen. She is dressed in a fashionable tan walking suit and a large black hat crowned with ostrich plumes, beneath which her light brown hair is loosely gathered.<sup>14</sup> While her posture is erect, her pose is far from stiff. Against a dark brown background, Sloan positioned her body at a slight angle to the picture plane, but her head is turned to look directly at the viewer. The artist masterfully painted a slight contraction of the muscles in her forehead that, together with her wide, attentive eyes, conveys a listening attitude. Similarly, the hint

of a smile that plays around her lips suggests that she is engaged in conversation with the viewer. Although her hands are not part of the composition, her bent arms suggest that the hands are folded graciously in her lap, as would have been proper for a lady paying a social call. Sehon appears perfectly in command of her environment, and her comportment and tasteful clothing communicate her respectable, middle-class identity.

Sloan painted Sehon’s clothing with summary brilliance, describing the fabric’s folds, pleats, and ruffles with a minimum of expertly applied strokes. By contrast, the densely worked paint surface of the face suggests that the artist struggled in this region. On the fifth day of painting, he noted in his diary, “[Miss Sehon] does her part splendidly. I wish that mine were done as well.”<sup>15</sup> A later painting of Sehon by Sloan, in three-quarter profile, depicts a young woman with a pronounced overbite, and it may have been this awkward feature that frustrated Sloan as he attempted to capture a flattering likeness of his sitter.<sup>16</sup> Sloan also experimented in the Nelson-Atkins portrait of Sehon with the Maratta palette, a new system for combining hues developed by the color theorist and paint merchandiser Hardesty Maratta that Sloan used here for the first time.<sup>17</sup> Painting the background and Sehon’s clothing in the neutral brown, black, and gray tones that had characterized his earlier paintings, he attempted to create a harmonious color “chord” in her face and neck with contrasting green-yellow and orange-red Maratta hues.

In the end, although Sloan’s portrait of Sehon is both beautifully painted and appealingly expressive, the artist chose not to exhibit the painting and never sold it. It may have been that he could not shake from his mind a comparison with portraits by Henri, for instance *Girl with Red Hair* (Fig. 1), in which Henri painted his subject’s face with the same painterly bravado as her ruffled shirt-waist. Sloan’s recent admiring perusal of portraits by Rembrandt and Hals may also have caused him to view his own work hypercritically. Nevertheless, Sloan’s portrait of Katherine Sehon is an important picture within his body of work, both because it marks his first attempt to use Maratta color combinations and because it offers a rare respectful view by Sloan, during the Ashcan phase of his career, of a middle-class subject.<sup>18</sup>

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## NOTES

1. See Linda Ferber's introductory essay in *Making Faces: A Selection of Portraits by John Sloan*, exh. cat. (Columbus, Ga.: Columbus Museum; New York: Kraushaar Galleries, 2001), 4–7.
2. Biographical information about John Sloan can be found in Lloyd Goodrich, *John Sloan, 1871–1951*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1952); Bruce St. John, ed., *John Sloan's New York Scene from Diaries, Notes, and Correspondence, 1906–1913* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); David Scott, *John Sloan* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1975); Rowland Elzea, "John Sloan: Spectator of Life," in *John Sloan: Spectator of Life*, exh. cat. (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1988), 10–22; and Janice Coco, *John Sloan's Women: A Psychoanalysis of Vision* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).
3. For possible psychological ramifications of Sloan's voyeurism, see John Baker, "Voyeurism in the Art of John Sloan: The Psychodynamics of a Naturalistic Motif," *Art Quarterly* 1 (Autumn 1978), 379–96; and Coco, *John Sloan's Women*.
4. Many members of this group exhibited with the Eight at the Macbeth Gallery in February 1908, challenging the authority of the National Academy of Design and drawing attention to their antiestablishment position. Rebecea Zurier, "The Making of Six New York Artists," in Zurier, Robert W. Snyder, and Virginia Mecklenburg, *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1995), 59–84.
5. Patricia Hills, "John Sloan's Images of Working-Class Women: A Case Study of the Roles and Interrelationships of Politics, Personality, and Patrons in the Development of Sloan's Art, 1905–16," *Prospects* 5 (1980), 157–96.
6. For an example of Sloan's problems with portraiture, see St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 282–87.
7. Quoted in Scott, *John Sloan*, 32.
8. Sehon first posed for Sloan in March 1909, when she modeled for illustrations he was making for the *Century*. Next, she sat for the Nelson-Atkins portrait between 11 and 15 October 1909. Immediately afterward, Sloan began another portrait of Sehon, which he never finished and destroyed. In February 1912 Sloan painted another portrait of her whistling, which is now lost. She sat again for *Katherine Sehon, Rose Feather Hat* (location unknown) in January 1913. See transcribed diary entry, 13 July 1909, John Sloan Collections, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; and Rowland Elzea, *John Sloan's Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), pt. 1:99–100, 129, 135–36. I am grateful to Catherine Reed Holochvost for her research in the John Sloan Collection.
9. Information on the Sehon family can be found in federal census records for 1910 and 1920, and in St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 202, 341–42, 347–48, 355, 357, 422, 560–61, 567, 603, 613, 628, 631.
10. Quoted in St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scenes*, 561. Sloan joined the Socialist Party in 1910.
11. Quoted in transcribed diary entry, 13 July 1909, John Sloan Collections, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.
12. Quoted in St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 613.
13. *Ibid.*, 340–41.
14. A suit and hat very similar to Sehon's appeared in the fall 1909 Sears catalogue, priced affordably but not cheaply at \$15 to \$38, depending on the material selected. See JoAnne Olian, ed., *Everyday Fashions, 1909–1920, as Pictured in the Sears Catalog* (New York: Dover, 1995), 1, 4.
15. Diary entry for 15 October 1909, quoted in St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 342.
16. See Elzea, *John Sloan's Oil Paintings*, 1:129. A color transparency of this painting is in the John Sloan Collections, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.
17. St. John, *John Sloan's New York Scene*, 342.
18. See Robert W. Snyder and Rebecea Zurier, "Picturing the City," in *Metropolitan Lives*, 108.

# WILLIAM LOUIS SONNTAG (1822–1900)

## *Evening in the Mountains*, c. 1860–70

Oil on canvas

36½ × 56¼ in. (91.8 × 142.9 cm)

Signed lower right: W.L. Sonntag.

Gift of Mrs. Lawrence Fox, 49-78

ALTHOUGH LITTLE KNOWN to twentieth-century audiences, William Louis Sonntag was one of the most prolific landscape painters of his day. Born in East Liberty, Pennsylvania (now part of Pittsburgh), in 1822, he grew up in Cincinnati, where he began his career as a largely self-trained artist. About 1846 he was employed at Joseph Dorfeuille's Western Museum, a Cincinnati institution that provided both entertainment and education to a broad popular audience. There, in the words of an anonymous 1858 biographer, his job was to "paint the needed dioramas, to *make thunder* on the drum, to *blow* for the organist, light the lamps and to make himself *generally useful*."<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon gave him his first important commission, a series of four didactic landscapes, *The Progress of Civilization* (location unknown). Based on a poem by William Cullen Bryant and inspired by Thomas Cole's (q.v.) famous series *The Course of Empire* (1834–36; New-York Historical Society), these works established Sonntag's reputation in Cincinnati and led to many further commissions.

In 1852 Sonntag was hired by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company to paint the "wild and impressive scenery" along its line between Baltimore and Cumberland, Maryland.<sup>2</sup> He toured Europe in 1853–54 with fellow Cincinnati artists John R. Tait and Robert Duncanson and, after a brief return to America, lived in Florence from November 1855 to May 1856. Determined to succeed in a field larger than Cincinnati, Sonntag moved to New York in 1856 and thereafter regularly exhibited at the National Academy of Design. He was elected an associate of the academy in 1860 and an academician the following year. Throughout the 1860s Sonntag made extensive sketching tours in both Europe and the United States.

During the first phase of Sonntag's career, from roughly 1840 to 1850, he experimented with a variety of techniques, styles, and subject matter.<sup>3</sup> In the 1850s, influenced by the picturesque conventions of the Hudson River School and the ideal landscapes of the seventeenth-century landscapist Claude Lorrain, he developed the compositional format that became typical of his panoramic wilderness views: a low, sharply detailed foreground; a central body of water flanked by trees or wooded hills; and a hazy prospect of distant mountains.<sup>4</sup> Like most of his contemporaries, he drew his basic materials from the close observation of nature and produced his finished compositions in the studio according to established

formulas. James William Pattison, who sketched with Sonntag in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in 1863, recalled almost forty years later that the artist "went to nature only to look and draw a few new lines. His pictures were made by rule."<sup>5</sup>

*Evening in the Mountains* probably dates from between 1860 and 1870, when the artist had thoroughly assimilated the conventions of the Hudson River School style.<sup>6</sup> The scene is not an accurate transcription of a specific site but a pastiche combining the picturesque aspects of several different landscapes.<sup>7</sup> While the alpine peaks in the background of the Nelson-Atkins painting suggest the White Mountains, which Sonntag began to frequent in the summer of 1863, the steep, vine-covered crags in the foreground recall the Ohio River valley and the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, where he also made sketches. The foreground, framed by a group of finely detailed trees and logs, opens on to a mountainous river valley at dusk. A crystal-clear river leads the viewer back to the left, while just above it, at the center of the composition, sits an outcropping of rocks silhouetted against the evening sky. In the distance, precipitous mountains are veiled by a misty haze, which reflects the light of the setting sun. The entire composition is filled with autumnal reds, yellows, and browns and bathed in a sunset glow. *Evening in the Mountains* strongly recalls Sonntag's idyllic Claudian Italian landscapes of the late 1850s.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the painting's depiction of bright fall foliage in a seemingly boundless arboreal wilderness is reminiscent of paintings by Jasper F. Cropsey (q.v.), for instance *Autumn on the Hudson River* (1860; National Gallery of Art), and marks it as an American scene. Unlike his contemporaries Asher B. Durand (q.v.) and John Frederick Kensett (q.v.), who focused their art on more settled, pastoral landscapes in the 1860s, Sonntag continued painting rugged, undomesticated vistas. Two fishermen in a boat at the bend of the river, barely perceptible beneath the towering rocks and trees, are the only intruders in this unspoiled American Eden.

Fishermen are nearly ubiquitous in Sonntag's landscapes of the 1860s. As William H. Gerdts has pointed out, fishing became increasingly popular as a recreational activity in the United States during the nineteenth century, and its popularity is evidenced in such paintings as John Gadsby Chapman's *A Lazy Fisherman* (q.v.), George Caleb Bingham's *Fishing on the Mississippi* (q.v.), and Winslow Homer's *Gloucester Harbor* (q.v.), as well as Sonntag's *Evening in the Mountains*.<sup>9</sup> While Chapman and Homer appealed to their audience's nostalgic recollections of childhood leisure, and Bingham presented genre scenes of workingmen fishing as much for sustenance as for recreation, Sonntag's landscape appealed directly to the middle- and upper-class American men who traveled, in annually increasing numbers, to remote vacation spots in search of regeneration through contact with nature.<sup>10</sup>



As Adam Greenhalgh has noted, evening landscapes in which the viewer is placed in a precarious, vertiginous position became popular subjects for American artists in the early 1860s and reflect the widespread anxiety brought on by the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> Although the precise date of *Evening in the Mountains* is unknown, its foreground, which offers no easy access for the viewer, and its depiction of lowering twilight evoke wistfulness. The sun is setting on this peaceful wilderness, and the viewer is already cut off from it by the deep gully that stretches across the foreground and a rocky barrier at the left edge.

Sonntag was frequently praised for his technical facility. Henry Tuckerman noted in 1867, “Differing from many of our landscape-artists, [Sonntag] has marked individuality of effect and of color.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, his reputation never equaled that of such luminaries as Kensett, Durand, Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), and Albert Bierstadt (q.v.). His work suffered from overproduction and from an excessive repetition of tried-and-true formulas. As a friend of the artist noted years later:

When Sonntag began to paint his pictures, they were so novel in their conception and rich in coloring . . . that they at once became the rage. Everybody wanted to have a “Sonntag,” and Sonntag was not disinclined to please everybody; so he painted away. . . . Soon, however, it was ascertained that Sonntag’s pictures were not at all scarce, but as plenty as blackberries; and the parties that had measured the value of a picture according to the comparative scarcity of them, not in point of real merit, became dissatisfied, and the Sonntag rage subsided.<sup>13</sup>

After 1870 Sonntag, like his more famous contemporaries, suffered from the changes in artistic taste that made critics and patrons reject the large-scale landscapes of the Hudson River School, including *Evening in the Mountains*, as bombastic, old-fashioned, and middle-brow.<sup>14</sup> Though he attempted to accommodate his art to the demand for intimate, French-style landscape and continued to make a living, he soon found himself relegated to a minor place in the world of American art.

KJN/LL

## NOTES

1. “William Louis Sonntag,” *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 3 (December 1858), 3, quoted in Nancy Dustin Wall Moure, *William Louis Sonntag, Artist of the Ideal, 1822–1900* (Los Angeles: Goldfield Galleries, 1980), 10. Moure reprints this valuable biographical sketch in its entirety.
2. Biographical essay by William Sonntag Miles in *William L. Sonntag, 1822–1900; William L. Sonntag Jr., 1869–1898*, exh. cat. (Boston: Vose Galleries, 1970), 2.
3. In her monograph on Sonntag, Moure has divided his career into four distinct phases. Moure, *William Louis Sonntag, Artist of the Ideal*, 43–44.
4. *Ibid.*, 44–49.
5. James William Pattison, quoted in *ibid.*, 58–59.
6. Moure, *William Louis Sonntag, Artist of the Ideal*, 49–52.
7. *Ibid.*, 61.
8. See, for example, *Italian Lake with Classical Ruins* (1858; Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, N.H.) and *Classic Italian Landscape with Temple of Venus* (c. 1859; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).
9. William H. Gerdtz, “Before Winslow Homer: The Art of Fishing in the United States,” in *Winslow Homer: Artist and Angler*, ed. Patricia Junker with Sarah Burns, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2002), 185–226.
10. *Ibid.*, 193–95.
11. Adam Greenhalgh, “‘Darkness Visible’: A *Twilight in the Catskills* by Sanford Robinson Gifford,” *American Art Journal* 22 (2001), 45–75.
12. Henry Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Son, 1867), 566.
13. Charles Frederic Goff, *Cincinnati, the Queen City, 1788–1912* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), 446, quoted in Moure, *William Louis Sonntag, Artist of the Ideal*, 37n26.
14. For a recent discussion of this shift in taste, see Melissa Geisler Trafton, “Critics, Collectors, and the Nineteenth-Century Taste for the Paintings of John Frederick Kensett,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003, 39–43.



## FLORINE STETTMEIER (1871–1944)

### *Portrait of My Aunt, Caroline Walter Neustadter, 1928*

Oil on canvas

38 × 26¼ in. (96.5 × 66.7 cm)

Signed left edge, center: FLORINE STETTMEIER;  
inscribed, dated, and signed right edge, center: TO THE  
MEMORY OF AUNT CAROLINE / 1928 / F.S.; inscribed top  
stretcher member: Mrs. Henry Neustadter By Florine  
Stettmeier; inscribed bottom stretcher member, center: 1928  
Gift of Miss Ettie Stettmeier, 51-13

BORN IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK, Florine Stettmeier experienced a distinctly cosmopolitan childhood, living in Stuttgart, Berlin, and Paris.<sup>1</sup> Her interest in art was apparent by the age of fifteen, by which time she had produced accomplished figure drawings. From 1892 through 1895 she studied at the Art Students League in New York, where she drew from ancient casts in a class taught by J. Carroll Beckwith and took life classes from H. Siddons Mowbray and Kenyon Cox. Her art changed dramatically during travels in Europe in 1898 and 1899 and again from 1906 to 1914, after she became aware of many avant-garde movements and artists, including Symbolism, Fauvism, and Marcel Duchamp. Stettmeier tended not to imitate these modes slavishly. Rather, she developed a signature style that generally embraced the anti-academic and the seemingly childlike spontaneity of much of modern art but eschewed its attendant nihilism.<sup>2</sup> Her creative endeavors extended to writing poems filled with wit and insight.

By the 1910s Stettmeier had evolved a unique figurative style, fanciful, whimsical, and self-consciously feminine in character, in which delicate forms appear to float in pleasurable, often vaguely recognizable environments rendered in pastel hues.<sup>3</sup> She drew her subject matter largely from her life, especially from her family, particularly her sisters, Ettie and Carrie, and their mother, Rosetta. Her group portraits, “conversation pieces” as she called them, frequently depict parties, picnics, and informal salons the Stettmeiers hosted either in their New York City town house or at their summer homes outside the city. Stettmeier’s most highly prized compositions feature artists, writers, and other celebrities who attended these gatherings, including Duchamp, the composer Virgil Thompson, and the art critic Henry McBride. Stettmeier typically enriched the identities of the subjects of her portraits by including select objects, words, and phrases associated closely with them.

*Portrait of My Aunt, Caroline Walter Neustadter* is one of three portraits dating from 1928 and 1929 in which Stettmeier memorialized women important to her.<sup>4</sup> Known to her family as LaLa, the eldest sibling of Stettmeier’s mother, Caroline Walter Neustadter was born in 1840 to a wealthy German-Jewish family and

grew up in their home on lower Broadway in New York City. Caroline married Louis Neustadter and, after his death, his brother Henry. The brothers were businessmen in San Francisco.<sup>5</sup> When Henry retired after amassing a fortune, the Neustadters moved to New York. Caroline traveled extensively throughout Europe, crossing the Atlantic more than forty times before her death in 1912 at the age of seventy-one. She was also a car enthusiast, one of the first American women to take up that sport. She is also credited as the first American woman to drive through Norway and Sweden.<sup>6</sup> Neustadter left an estate worth more than four million dollars, approximately half of which went to charities. She willed her house on West Seventy-sixth Street in Manhattan to Rosetta Stettmeier, who, along with Florine, Carrie, and Ettie, lived there from 1914 to 1926. Neustadter also left them monetary bequests.

Stettmeier’s unconventional portrait of her aunt recalls Neustadter in her later years, possibly in Europe, where Stettmeier frequently visited her. The setting may be the apartment Neustadter kept in Paris or an elegant hotel or restaurant. Neustadter’s full yet graceful form fills much of the composition and evokes her dignified carriage, for which she was well known.<sup>7</sup> She stands upright with the aid of a lengthy walking stick resembling a shepherd’s crook or bishop’s crozier and is dressed in a deep purple-black velvet and silk evening gown styled in the fashion of the 1870s. Lace, a material that Stettmeier loved to paint, flows from the elbows and reappears at the hemline and collar. The elaborately curvilinear design on the surface of the outer layer and train of the dress suggests that the velvet has been voided or embroidered. Neustadter wears what is most likely a pearl choker—a fashion accessory much in vogue in the 1890s and at the turn of the century—and probably fine kid gloves. The curved egret feather in her marcelled hair is a witty visual touch on Stettmeier’s part, as is the slight suggestion of a wing shape, of a bird or insect, in the train of her gown. Thicker paint emphasizes the contours of the costume. As in other portraits, Stettmeier used pink for the flesh and drew the features of the face with small brushstrokes of reddish pink. Neustadter’s features resemble those in a family photograph, although the eyebrows here are heavier and more arched.<sup>8</sup>

Stettmeier’s abiding interest in decorative details can be seen not only in her treatment of the gown but also in other elements in the painting. Standing on a tall pedestal, a blackamoor, probably of carved wood and resplendent in pantaloons, turban, earrings, and red pointed shoes, holds a calling card from “Florine.” Such decorative sculpture was common in fashionable European settings before World War I. On the wall behind this figure hangs a framed portrait head of a blonde woman with a red flower in her hair. She resembles a Parisian cabaret dancer but may have had some special significance for Stettmeier, who placed a portrait of



herself as a young girl in *Portrait of My Teacher, Fräulein Sophie von Prieser* (1929; Portland Art Museum, Ore.). The stand to the right of Neustadter holds a huge bouquet, testament in part to Stettheimer's own love of flowers. The wide ribbon streaming from the bouquet carries the message TO THE MEMORY OF AUNT CAROLINE, evoking a eulogy. It is rescued from moroseness by the stand's highly ornamental quality, including the stylized animal face composing part of it. Decorative details such as these are enhanced throughout the composition by Stettheimer's use of impasto, into which she often incised linear flourishes.<sup>9</sup> The painter also added details in pen and ink to depict the calling card, although these are now partly abraded.

Adding to the fanciful quality of the foreground are the parted curtains—creamy and peach-colored, pulled back to form flamboyant scallops—and the viewpoint from above. Both are theatrical devices that Stettheimer used in other works. By incising into the paint to expose orange underpaint, the artist created forms suggestive of angels' wings to the left and right of her aunt. The wings relate to the function of the painting as a memorial, adding a hint of spirituality to an otherwise refined, secular setting.<sup>10</sup> In the dining room above Neustadter, a dinner party is in progress, and Neustadter appears again, this time seated with her back to the viewer and in the company of at least two guests. A butler stands at attention while another delivers what appears to be a still-feathered pheasant on a platter. The table seems to be piled high with red-orange forms, undoubtedly meant to evoke something wondrous. Feathery potted palms and a chandelier decorate the setting. Hovering high in the composition, the banquet scene likely illustrates how Stettheimer imagined her beloved aunt in the heavenly hereafter—presiding over a fun-filled dinner party that never has to end.

The intimate enclosure evoked by Stettheimer's *Portrait of My Aunt, Caroline Walter Neustadter* provides insight not only into the artist's family history but also to the highly circumscribed arenas in which her work was seen and admired throughout her lifetime. Painting for her own pleasure, the artist intended her output to be appreciated by her friends and family, not the art world at large. In fact, *Portrait of My Aunt, Caroline Walter Neustadter* could have been seen during the painter's lifetime only in the Alwyn Court building on West Fifty-eighth Street in Manhattan, where her family occupied a large apartment after 1926. Stettheimer, furthermore, mandated that all her work be destroyed when she died. Disregarding these wishes, Ettie Stettheimer placed her sister's paintings in museums across the country, thereby illuminating for the public a little-known dimension of American modernism.

TAG/RRG

## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Stettheimer has been drawn primarily from Barbara J. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
2. Despite Stettheimer's focus on leisure subjects and the camp sensibility her work seems to emit, Linda Nochlin has insisted on the social consciousness of her art. See Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive," *Art in America* 68 (September 1980), 64–83.
3. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 19–23, attributes much of the formation of Stettheimer's signature style to her exposure to a brief revival of interest in Rococo art in France around 1900.
4. The other two portraits depict Margaret Burgess, the Irish nurse of the five Stettheimer children, and Fräulein Sophie von Prieser, Stettheimer's teacher from Stuttgart. For reproductions of *Portrait of Our Nurse Maggie Burgess* (1929; Minneapolis Institute of Arts), *Portrait of My Teacher, Fräulein Sophie von Prieser* (1929; Portland Art Museum, Ore.), as well as *Portrait of My Mother* (1925; Museum of Modern Art, New York), which also relates to Stettheimer's portrait of her aunt, see Elisabeth Sussman, Barbara J. Bloemink, and Linda Nochlin, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 122, 124, and 17, respectively. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 3–4, provides information concerning Stettheimer's references to her aunt in her diaries and also writes that Caroline Neustadter and the youngest of her siblings, Josephine Walter, who became a doctor, were among the most important figures in the artist's childhood development.
5. Caroline Neustadter's parents were Henriette Content Walter and Israel D. Walter, of Dutch and German descent, respectively. Her first husband was listed as L.W. Neustadter, a commercial merchant, in the San Francisco City directory of 1852–53 and was probably an owner of Adelsdorfer & Neustadter at that time. Copies of receipts of purchases in 1858 and 1864 show L.W. Neustadter, with an office in New York, and Henry Neustadter, with an office in San Francisco, as partners of Neustadter Bros., importers of fancy goods, hosiery, and so forth. See NAMA curatorial files.
6. The information on Neustadter's car hobby is from "Obituary Notes: Mrs. Caroline Walter Neustadter," *New York Times*, 20 January 1912, 13.
7. A newspaper article written shortly after her death described her as having been "still a beautiful woman, with manners that lent grace to her years," adding, "her carriage was always stately." "Mrs. C.W. Neustadter," *Evening Sun* (New York), 2 February 1912.
8. For the photograph of Caroline Neustadter and members of her family, see Sussman, Bloemink, and Nochlin, *Florine Stettheimer*, 118.
9. Henry McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 13, tells of Stettheimer's applying a "lavish, preparatory build-up of Chinese white" on her canvases, often to the point of relief, before painting. See also Technical Notes.
10. Elisabeth Sussman states that Stettheimer's portrait of her aunt and her portrait of her nurse "exemplify the decisive shift [in Stettheimer's work] toward a visionary style derived from vernacular religious art." Sussman, "Florine Stettheimer: Still Lifes, Portraits and Pageants 1910–1942," in Sussman, *Florine Stettheimer: Still Lifes, Portraits and Pageants, 1910–1942*, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1980), unpaginated. While this point is arguable regarding the portrait of Neustadter, it seems more applicable to the portrait of her nurse in which five heads of the Stettheimer children are meant to be winged angels. Tyler describes Stettheimer's portrait of her aunt as "a sophisticated, gilded version of the American Colonial portraits that imitated those at the English Court." Parker Tyler, *Florine Stettheimer: A Life in Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1963), 171.

## FLORINE STETTMEIER (1871–1944)

### *Birthday Bouquet*, 1932 (*Flowers with Snake*)

Oil on canvas

30 × 26½ in. (76.2 × 66.4 cm)

Signed and dated lower center: FLORINE 1932; signed and

dated top stretcher member: FLORINE 1932

STETTMEIER; inscribed right stretcher member:

TARRYTOW ON HUDSON; inscribed left stretcher member:

BIRTHDAY BOUQUET 1932

Gift of Mrs. R. Kirk Askew Jr. in memory of R. Kirk Askew Jr.,  
F79-65

FLORINE STETTMEIER PAINTED primarily for personal pleasure. The creative enjoyment and gratification she derived from painting is nowhere more evident than in her floral still lifes, which she called “eyegays” for the visual—rather than olfactory—appeal of nosegays.<sup>1</sup> Several of these sumptuous compositions commemorate the artist’s habit of picking a bouquet of flowers as a gift to herself on her birthday. For the unmarried Stettmeier, this yearly practice must have served, among other private functions, as a meaningful expression of her independence and self-respect.<sup>2</sup>

On 19 August 1932 Stettmeier noted in her diary: “My Birthday—NOON—I have made my bouquet.”<sup>3</sup> The painting she subsequently created, the Nelson-Atkins *Birthday Bouquet*, is one of her most striking and complex flower compositions. Four purple petunias create a dominant rhythm across the center; a cactus dahlia holds its own below them; what are probably red and yellow pompon dahlias reach above them; and a delphinium continues the vertical accent begun by the vase. Another long form, perhaps a yellow snapdragon, arches to the left. The other flowers, possibly a group of small daisies or a type of dianthus, maybe a light-colored convolvulus, and petunias, add more shapes and colors, while the delicate, serpentine stems, with berries on one side and small yellow flowers on the other, link the bouquet to figures in the background. Characteristically, she oriented many flowers frontally, emphasizing their individual shapes; she also took some liberties with their details and contrasted the saturation of the flower colors with the color scheme of the background. Stettmeier defined the flowers by working the paint to varying thickness, up to one-eighth inch in some areas, applying some of it with a palette knife. Her seemingly spontaneous mark-making was linked to Surrealist techniques of automatism both during and after her lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

The four petunias allude symbolically to the family of four women in the background, the artist herself, her elder sister Carrie, younger sister Ettie, and their mother, Rosetta. Ettie, seated on a canopied chaise to the left, is characteristically wearing red and

is rather skimpily dressed in an outfit that leaves her shoulders bare. She either reads or writes, a reference to her intellect, to which the painter alluded in other works.<sup>5</sup> Carrie plays Russian bank with Rosetta, who loved to pass time playing this particular game. Whereas Stettmeier usually pictured her mother seated with a straight back, playing cards, and dressed in black lace, here she appears in dark blue. Carrie, whom Stettmeier normally depicted in diaphanous dress, appears in a flapper costume of two shades of green and with an uneven, scalloped hemline. The color of her shoes matches her dress, evoking her fashion sense. She excelled at the management of the many social occasions hosted by the Stettmeiers and was known for the fine dollhouse that she created.<sup>6</sup>

Stettmeier depicts herself in the lower right arranging flowers, an activity often prompted by parties the family hosted.<sup>7</sup> This activity also refers to the still-life subject of *Birthday Bouquet*, making the painting wittily self-referential. Appearing on a balcony or terrace, she seems to have just placed a vase of flowers on a table covered with a cloth so full and fanciful that it resembles the skirt of a ball gown.<sup>8</sup> Because the artist depicts herself wearing pants, in which she preferred to work, she appears to dance with the “feminine” table and bouquet. Regardless of their actual ages, Stettmeier presented herself and her sisters as eternally youthful. When she painted this work, she was sixty-one; Ettie and Carrie were in their late fifties and early sixties, respectively. The painting consequently suggests that the Stettmeiers themselves constitute an arrangement of flowers perpetually in bloom in their garden.

The garden setting of *Birthday Bouquet* is André Brook, an estate in Tarrytown, New York, with a large mansion and extensive, terraced grounds beloved by Stettmeier. The family rented the property for many summers beginning in 1916. The grounds of André Brook appear in multiple outdoor scenes by Stettmeier, although here she reduced them generally to one arched flowering trellis and the large tree. The background possesses a kinship with several poetic lines written by Stettmeier: “OUR PRIVET HEDGES ARE IN BLOOM / And the outdoor world / Is like a fragrance-laden / Room.”<sup>9</sup> The cityscape barely visible in the distance to the left is very likely Tarrytown.

An edenic space filled with elegant figures and sensuous color, *Birthday Bouquet*, like many other paintings by Stettmeier, recalls the work of Henri Matisse. As Barbara J. Bloemink has discussed, Stettmeier enjoyed ample opportunities to study the Frenchman’s unconventional, decorative paintings.<sup>10</sup> *Birthday Bouquet* especially calls to mind Matisse’s *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (Fig. 1), which entered the renowned collection of Alfred Barnes in suburban Philadelphia in 1922. Both paintings feature figures





Fig. 1 Henri Matisse, *Le Bonheur de Vivre*, 1905-6. Oil on canvas, 69 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 94 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (175.6 × 241 cm). Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa., BF719

inhabiting pleasurable natural environs in which bodies and trees seem to undulate in concert with one another. Stettheimer derived her expressionistic palette at least partly from Matisse, although, as this comparison reveals, she tended to paint in more pastel hues than the French master. A comparison of *Birthday Bouquet* with *Le Bonheur de Vivre* furthermore throws the delicate character of Stettheimer's clothed figures into relief against Matisse's more robust nude male and female bodies, which, in turn, imbue the Frenchman's image with an undeniable carnality lacking in the American's.

Despite its relative chastity, Stettheimer's garden, unlike Matisse's, appears complete with a snake, the most inexplicable element of the painting, which wraps around the vase, recalling innumerable images of Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve. The snake appears in other flower paintings dating to 1928 and 1931.<sup>11</sup> In both the Nelson-Atkins canvas and the 1931 painting, Stettheimer signed her name on the snake. The ominous form relates most of all to a small porcelain reproduction of the Apollo Belvedere that the artist kept on her bedroom mantelpiece in her family's New York City apartment on which a snake climbs around the supporting stump of the statue's base, a reference to the god as Master of the Python.<sup>12</sup> One interpretation of the snake motif gives it phallic significance and suggests a disturbance in this otherwise exclusively feminine Eden.<sup>13</sup>

Stettheimer's tight-knit existence with her sisters and mother ended in 1935 with the death of Rosetta at the age of ninety-three. The bond of caring for their mother undone, the painter and her sisters began leading their lives apart from one another. Stettheimer moved into an apartment and studio in the Beaux

Arts Building in Manhattan. A photograph of her boudoir, elaborately decorated with lace, shows *Birthday Bouquet* hanging on a wall, where it no doubt reminded Stettheimer of days passed filled with familial companionship and affection.<sup>14</sup>

TAG/RRG

## NOTES

1. See Barbara J. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 58, on the meaning of “eyegay” to Stettheimer. For related works that contain a foreground bouquet with similar flowers but no background scene, as was sometimes the case, see *Bouquet for Ettie / Blue Curtain* (1927; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence) and *My Birthday Eyegay* (1929; Collection of William Kelly Simpson). For an earlier, more naturalistic still life influenced by Henri Matisse, see *Flowers against Wallpaper* (1915; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Tenn.). Flowers also figure in Stettheimer’s poetry. An undated poem reads in part: “I like oysters cold / and my garden of mixed flowers / and the sky full of towers. . . .” Florine Stettheimer, *Crystal Flowers* (New York: printed privately at Pawlet, Vt.: Banyon Press on Rives, 1949), 23.
2. This interpretation of Stettheimer’s annual tradition is consistent with the discrete brand of feminism attributed to her by Bloemink, who writes: “Florine was less outspoken [than her sister Ettie] in her affiliation with feminism, yet various entries in her diary and poems reveal her allegiance to women’s causes and her awareness of a developing ‘Female Aesthetic.’” Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 15.
3. Florine Stettheimer, diary entry, 19 August 1932, Florine Stettheimer Diaries, Box 6, Folder 116, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven; transcription in NAMA curatorial files.
4. See, for example, Henry McBride, *Florine Stettheimer*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 17–18, where he describes “the whimsicality in the stems of [Stettheimer’s] flowers” as “not to be outmatched for waywardness in the ‘automatic’ paintings of Miro.”
5. Ettie Stettheimer earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Freiburg in Germany in 1908 and by 1932 had published two novels under the pseudonym Henri Waste: *Philosophy: An Autobiographical Fragment* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917); and *Love Days (Susanna Moore’s)* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1923). Her dissertation was on the philosopher William James.
6. Carrie Stettheimer’s famed dollhouse, which replicated the family’s apartment in the Alwyn Court building in Manhattan, is now in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York. Leading artists in the family’s circle, such as Gaston Lachaise, Marcel Duchamp, and Albert Gleizes, created miniature works of art for it.
7. See Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 59–61, on Stettheimer’s arranging of bouquets.
8. In *Family Portrait No. 2* (1933; Museum of Modern Art, New York), Stettheimer’s mother wears a dress that is very similar to this tablecloth. One has to wonder what the outfit looked like that Stettheimer referred to in her diary entry on the day she began this painting. She described it as a new, “greekish” white moiré gown with fringes. Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 200, writes that Stettheimer wore it while picking her bouquet.
9. Stettheimer, *Crystal Flowers*, 16.
10. See Bloemink, *The Life and Art of Florine Stettheimer*, 55–58.
11. For the other paintings with the snake motif, see *Three Flowers and a Dragonfly* (1928; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.) and *Sun* (1931; Whitney Museum of American Art).
12. See Parker Tyler, *Florine Stettheimer: A Life in Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1963), 154, for the Apollo reference and the idea that Stettheimer’s “private coat-of-arms might be construed as her snake-entwined bouquet.” He also suggests the possible influence of Paul Gauguin’s *Self-Portrait with Halo* (1889; National Gallery of Art), showing the artist holding a snake.
13. Elisabeth Sussman, “Florine Stettheimer: A 1990s Perspective,” in Sussman, Barbara J. Bloemink, and Lisa Noehlin, *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995), 52.
14. This photograph is reproduced in Sussman, “Florine Stettheimer: A 1990s Perspective,” 51, and is part of the Florine Stettheimer Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

## GILBERT STUART (1755–1828)

### *The Right Honorable John Foster*, c. 1790–91

Oil on canvas

83<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 59<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (212.4 × 152.1 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 30-20

GILBERT STUART GREW UP in Newport, Rhode Island, the son of a snuff grinder.<sup>1</sup> At the age of fourteen, he apprenticed himself to the Scottish itinerant portraitist Cosmo Alexander. He traveled with Alexander to Edinburgh, Scotland, but the older artist's untimely death forced Stuart to return home before completing his artistic education there. Stuart traveled abroad again in 1775, this time to London and became a pupil and studio assistant of the expatriate American painter Benjamin West (q.v.). Twelve years later he not only was the leading portrait painter in that city but was also declared "the Van Dyck of the Time." Yet in the summer of 1787, at the summit of his profession, Stuart suddenly and unexpectedly left London for the Irish capital of Dublin.

Historians have suggested various reasons for Stuart's hasty departure from London, the most popular being his pressing need to escape mounting debts and the threat of debtor's prison.<sup>2</sup> More likely Stuart saw a great untapped market for his portraiture in Dublin, where he arrived in September or October 1787.<sup>3</sup> Though his original patron, the duke of Rutland, died soon after his arrival, Stuart's connections with other highly placed men, whom he had known in London, thrust him immediately into a position to monopolize Dublin's portrait business. As the artist's daughter Jane Stuart reported:

The moment it was known that he had arrived, he was called upon by his friends and the public, and was soon fully employed by the nobility. . . . Stuart was delighted with the society he met in Ireland, the elegant manners, the wit and hospitality of the upper class of the Irish suited his genial temperament. He was so much beloved by them that they tried to claim him as a fellow-countryman . . . they would say, "Oh, nobody ever painted such a head as our Irish Stuart could."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, Stuart's talent and reputation enabled him quickly and easily to displace the town's other practicing portraitists, Christopher Pack, Robert Hunter, and Robert Home. For the next six years Stuart had no competitors for the patronage of Ireland's political and social elite.

Following the style he had developed in London, Stuart's Irish portraits were almost exclusively painted in bust or half-length. Nonetheless, the artist received a few commissions to paint full-length images of the most influential men in the country. In 1789 he executed a large portrait of John, Lord FitzGibbon, the lord

chancellor of Ireland, depicting him in his robes of state (Fig. 1). Two years later he completed a similar portrait of FitzGibbon's political foe John Foster, speaker of the Irish House of Commons, the subject of the Nelson-Atkins portrait.

Born in 1740, John Foster was the eldest son of Anthony Foster, lord chief baron of the Irish exchequer, and his wife, Elizabeth Burgh.<sup>5</sup> Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Foster began his rapid ascent in Irish politics in 1761, when he was first elected to the Irish Parliament for the borough of Dunleer. In 1769 he was chosen to represent the county of Louth, a seat he held until his elevation to the peerage in 1821. Throughout his career he directed his attention to the financial and commercial affairs of the country, for he believed that prosperity would cure Ireland's political discontent. He served as chairman of the committees for ways and means and supply and was admitted a member of the Irish privy council. In 1784 he was appointed chancellor of the Irish exchequer. The next year Foster was elevated to the position of speaker of the Irish House of Commons, a position he held for the next fifteen years. He was an extremely effective orator, and four of his speeches in the Irish House of Commons were published and widely circulated. In 1800 Foster unsuccessfully opposed Ireland's imminent union with Great Britain. On the last meeting of the house on 2 August 1800, he refused to surrender his speaker's mace, declaring that "until the body that entrusted it to his keeping demanded it, he would preserve it for them."<sup>6</sup> Foster was one of the few antiunionists who obtained a seat in the united parliament. He again served as chancellor of the Irish exchequer from 1804 to 1806 and from 1807 to 1811 and was quite active in house debate. He retired from office in 1821, when he was created Baron Oriel of Ferrard in the county of Louth. He died at his seat at Collon on 23 August 1828.

In the tradition of official state portraiture, Stuart portrayed Foster in the opulence and splendor appropriate to a man of his position. Dressed in the elaborate and weighty speaker's robes, Foster assumes an attitude indicative of his status as a legislator, orator, and gentleman. His pose, with one foot forward and one arm extended, recalls various grand manner portraits by Anthony Van Dyck and Sir Joshua Reynolds and may perhaps be an adaptation of the popular ancient sculpture known as the Apollo Belvedere.<sup>7</sup> This reference would be especially pertinent to Foster's portrait, as Apollo was sometimes associated with moral order or codes of law.<sup>8</sup> As in Stuart's portrait of FitzGibbon, Foster wears a full-bottom wig that, by the 1790s, signified high political rank.<sup>9</sup> In both portraits, a heavy, silver-gilt mace, symbolic of his public office, rests prominently on a tabletop. Whereas Stuart depicted FitzGibbon before an invented backdrop featuring a dramatic sky and cloth-draped column, Foster appears in the second-floor







Fig. 1 Gilbert Stuart, *Baron FitzGibbon*, 1789. Oil on canvas. 96½ × 60¾ in. (245.1 × 154 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art, General Income Fund, 1919.910

gallery of the House of Commons, an interior whose renovation he had recently ordered and supervised.<sup>10</sup>

Like the setting, the articles on the table to the left of Foster are specific illustrations of his parliamentary career. The speaker's hand rests on two papers. The upper reads "Plan for Establishing a Nation . . . in Ireland," and the lower, "Bill for Extending Linen."<sup>11</sup> The uppermost sheet alludes to the Bank of Ireland, which was founded in 1783 and was located in Foster Place, next to the Parliament House.<sup>12</sup> The other paper refers to Foster's Linen Bill of 1780, which made it easier for Ireland to trade its linen with countries other than England. To the left of these bills lies a packet of papers, the top one labeled "Corn Trade" and another on which can be deciphered the letters "Agric" (Agriculture). These must surely refer to Foster's celebrated Corn Law of 1784, which granted large subsidies for corn exports and imposed heavy duties on its importation. According to William Edward Hartpole Lecky's *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, this law "changed the face of the land and made Ireland to a great extent an arable instead of a pasture country."<sup>13</sup> Three leather-bound volumes

at the extreme left are labeled "Trade of Ireland," "History of Commerce," and "Irish Statutes." These clearly relate to Foster's tireless efforts on behalf of Irish free trade, which culminated in his commercial propositions of 1785. According to Foster's biographer A.P.W. Malcomson, these propositions directly resulted in Foster's unanimous election to the speakership of the House of Commons.<sup>14</sup>

With his portrait of Foster, Stuart demonstrated his ability to adapt to the Irish portrait tradition that called for a more conservative and controlled application of paint. The face and wig are extremely well defined and contain none of Stuart's usual flourishes of the brush. The gold filigree on the sleeves and the chasing on the mace are also very detailed and may possibly have been painted by Stuart's assistant John Dowling Herbert, who was trained by the Irish portraitist Robert Home.<sup>15</sup> The waistcoat buttons, the breeches, and the gold trim on the lower hem of the robe all reveal Stuart's hallmark loose brushstrokes, but these areas are kept to a minimum.

Hugh Crean has suggested that Stuart's portraits of FitzGibbon and Foster were created as a pair, by which the sitters intended to memorialize the period in 1789 when, as lord justices, they jointly ruled the country in the absence of the viceroy.<sup>16</sup> Malcomson believes the portraits may have been commissioned by the Irish parliament and were designed to hang in an entrance to the Irish Parliament House to mark the sitters' roles as speakers of the Lower and Upper Houses.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, a receipt for money that Foster paid for portraits of himself and his three children, signed by Stuart and dated September 1790, suggests that Foster himself commissioned the Nelson-Atkins painting.<sup>18</sup> Most likely, the painting, which Stuart executed two years after the portrait of FitzGibbon, was displayed in Foster's private home rather than in a public setting. Nevertheless, Stuart's portrayal of Foster owes a clear debt to his earlier portrait of FitzGibbon. Not only do the subjects appear in similar ceremonial garb, with similar accoutrements, but they turn in opposite directions, with FitzGibbon's receptive, listening attitude complementing Foster's oratorical gesture.

A mezzotint of Stuart's portrait of FitzGibbon, engraved by Charles Hodges, may have inspired Foster to request a similar image of himself. The popular demand for engravings of eminent men may also have encouraged Stuart to make his portraits of these well-known political rivals pendants. Indeed, the artist arranged for Hodges to make an engraving of his portrait of Foster before he had even finished painting it, and a Dublin newspaper announced in April 1791 that an engraving was forthcoming "from the capital whole-length picture now painting of [Foster] by Mr. Stuart."<sup>19</sup> Thus, even if Stuart's portraits of FitzGibbon and Foster never hung side by side, collectors could paste Hodges's engravings next to one another in their albums as pendant portraits.

A caricature that appeared in *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* in 1799 attests to the popularity of Hodges's engraving after Stuart's portrait of John Foster (Fig. 2). It presents Foster posed and garbed much as he appears in the Nelson-Atkins painting,



Fig. 2 *The Children of Erin Seeking Protection from Their FOSTER Father*, c. 1799. Illustrated in *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, March 1799, n.p. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

comforting three kneeling Irishmen. The caption reads “The children of Erin Seeking Protection from their foster Father.”<sup>20</sup> As Marcia Pointon has argued, eighteenth-century caricatures relied for their legibility on the wide circulation of engravings after painted portraits, which made the faces of powerful men immediately recognizable to a mass public.<sup>21</sup>

While Stuart painted most of the influential leaders of Ireland during his stay in Dublin, only Foster and FitzGibbon were executed in full-length format. The other legislators were usually depicted seated at their desks or holding books or papers; few were clothed in their parliamentary robes.<sup>22</sup> The best-known full-length portraits by Stuart are his monumental paintings of George Washington; as a group, they were based on Stuart’s earlier depictions of Foster and FitzGibbon and incorporated elements of each. For instance, Stuart’s well-known *George Washington (The Lansdowne Portrait)* (1796; National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.) depicts the first president standing in a pose that is almost a mirror image of Foster’s against an imaginative background of columns, drapery, and sky that recalls Stuart’s portrait of FitzGibbon.

MS/LL

## NOTES

1. Biographical sources for Gilbert Stuart include George C. Mason, *The Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879); Charles Merrill Mount, *Gilbert Stuart: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964); Dorinda Evans, *The Genius of Gilbert Stuart* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Carrie Rebera Barratt and Ellen G. Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004).
2. The various explanations for Stuart’s removal to Dublin are summarized in Hugh Crean, “Gilbert Stuart and the Politics of Fine Arts Patronage in Ireland, 1787–1793: A Social and Cultural Study,” Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1990, 235–44.
3. *Ibid.*, 243–44.
4. Quoted in Mason, *The Life and Works of Gilbert Stuart*, 22–23.
5. Biographical information on John Foster mainly was derived from *The Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1963–64), 7:496–97; and A.P.W. Malcolmson, *John Foster: The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
6. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 7:496–97. The mace and the speaker’s chair are today preserved by Foster’s descendants at Antrim Castle.
7. Virtually all the leading painters of London, including Thomas Hudson, Allan Ramsay, Thomas Gainsborough, and Benjamin West, adapted this pose at one time or another; see Robin Simon, *The Portrait in Britain and America* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987), 80–84. Mount found Foster’s pose to be an adaptation of Reynolds’s *Lord Rawdon* (c. 1789; Royal Collection, Windsor). Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 149. This connection is doubtful, however, because Stuart probably did not return to England after 1788 and could not have seen the portrait. *Lord Rawdon* was shown at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1790, and the engraving was not published until 1792;

- see Nicholas Penny, ed., *Reynolds*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 327.
8. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N.G.L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 81–82.
  9. Mareia Pointon has discussed how wigs conveyed masculine power in the eighteenth century. Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 107–36.
  10. Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 150. For Foster's renovations of the House of Commons, see Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 87.
  11. In the mezzotint version of this portrait by C. H. Hodges, these papers read "Extending the Linen Manufacture" and "Plan for Establishing Bank of Ireland & reducing the Interest of Money to 5 pr. Cent"; see Rosalind M. Elmes, *Catalogue of Engraved Irish Portraits Mainly in the Joly Collection* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1938), 160.
  12. A.P.W. Malcomson to Margaret Stenz, 24 May 1993, NAMA curatorial files.
  13. Quoted in *Dictionary of National Biography*, 7:496.
  14. Malcomson, *John Foster*, 60.
  15. Stuart's Irish style is discussed by Crean, "Gilbert Stuart and the Politics of Fine Art Patronage," 256–60, 264–68. For Herbert's collaboration on Stuart's Irish portraits, see *ibid.*, 123–24.
  16. Crean's arguments are based on the similarity of portraits in size, pose, and style; see *ibid.*, 262–64.
  17. Malcomson noted that Foster and FitzGibbon "absolutely detested each other" despite their parallel offices. If the works were intended as companion pieces, the sitters probably did not initiate the commission as Crean proposed; see Malcomson to Stenz, 24 May 1993, NAMA curatorial files.
  18. Foster/Massereene Papers, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D.562/4957, courtesy of the Viscount Massereene and Ferrard and the Deputy Keeper of the Records of Northern Ireland.
  19. Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 149. Assuming that the portraits were commissioned together, Malcomson has suggested that FitzGibbon was painted and mezzotinted first to capitalize on his extreme popularity as the first Irishman since the 1720s to be made lord chancellor. The 1792 publication of Foster's mezzotint coincided with his successful opposition to Catholic relief measures; Malcomson to Stenz, 24 May 1993.
  20. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 85–87.
  21. Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 81–82.
  22. According to Mount, Stuart attempted a full-length of Henry Grattan presenting his Bill of Rights in the House of Commons but could not bring himself to finish it after what Mount considered to be the "lamentable failure" of the portrait of Foster. The canvas was presumably finished by Nicholas Kenny and now hangs at Trinity College, Dublin; see Mount, *Gilbert Stuart*, 151, 360–61. Mount's dislike of the Nelson-Atkins portrait was based on his opinion that the figure lacks the graceful attitude and expression of Stuart's depiction of FitzGibbon. *Ibid.*, 149–50.

## GILBERT STUART (1755–1828)

### *Dr. William Aspinwall, c. 1815*

Oil on panel

28<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 22<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (72.7 × 57.9 cm)

Gift of Esmee and Shepherd Brooks, 81-35

DESPITE A SUCCESSFUL CAREER as the exclusive portraitist to Ireland's political and social elite, Gilbert Stuart left Dublin in 1793 to continue his career in the United States. Various reasons—personal, patriotic, financial, and political—have been given for his departure, and all seem equally convincing.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of his motives, Stuart arrived in New York in May 1793 and spent the next two years painting the city's businessmen, merchants, statesmen, and visiting dignitaries. From 1795 to 1803 he lived in the Philadelphia area and from 1803 to 1805 in Washington, D.C. In those cities he increased his fame by painting George Washington, his cabinet, and other political leaders. By 1805, however, he had tired of painting endless copies of his popular Washington portraits and desired a change of scenery. Stuart moved to Boston at the invitation of his friends Sarah Perez Morton and Senator Jonathan Mason; their connections immediately boosted him into the highest levels of Boston society and he was again in great demand. Among Stuart's long list of Boston sitters were many aging members of the Revolutionary War generation.

William Aspinwall, a renowned physician, was one such subject. Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1743, Aspinwall was a descendant of Peter Aspinwall, one of the original English immigrants to Massachusetts in 1630.<sup>2</sup> He graduated from Harvard College in 1764 and then studied medicine, first with Dr. Benjamin Gale of Killingworth, Connecticut, author of *A Treatise on Small Pox Inoculation*, and later with Dr. William Shippen of Philadelphia, who gave him a certificate for skill in 1769. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, Aspinwall fought as a volunteer in the battle of Lexington. Even so, he was dissuaded from his initial aim to enlist in the army and instead was appointed surgeon in General William Heath's brigade and, soon after, deputy director of the hospital in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. After the war, Aspinwall opened in Brookline a hospital for the inoculation of smallpox, the second of its kind in America. His practice prospered until the successful development of the smallpox vaccine by Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse in 1800. Recognizing his competitor's superior methods, Aspinwall closed the doors of his hospital and wrote to Waterhouse, "This new inoculation of yours is no sham. As a man of humanity, I rejoice in it; although it will take from me a handsome annual income."<sup>3</sup>

For forty-five years Aspinwall conducted a large and successful practice. He was greatly admired. As one of his biographers reported, "he was distinguished for prompt attendance, for

soundness of judgment, just discrimination, caution in untried experiments, and for fearless confidence in what stood approved to his reason and resulted from experience. His patients reposed unlimited confidence in his judgment, skill, and fidelity. To them he was an angel of consolation, a physician greatly beloved."<sup>4</sup> In 1808 Harvard conferred on him the honorary doctor of medicine degree, and in 1812 he was elected a fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society. Aspinwall was also involved in the local affairs of Brookline, serving as treasurer, warden, surveyor, representative to the general court, state senator, and member of the governor's council. He was married in 1776 to Susanna Gardner, with whom he had seven children. In 1823 he died in the house he had built on Aspinwall Hill.

Stuart depicted Dr. William Aspinwall dressed in a high-collared black broadcloth coat, with a white stock and ruffled shirt. His white, curly hair is tied with a black queue bow in an antiquated style. The background is dark brown with a lighter brown curtain at the right. This portrayal reveals some of the good nature, kindness, and robust health ascribed to the doctor. His brown eyes appear to engage the viewer, and a smile hovers about his lips, with an amused, lively expression. Like most of Stuart's portraits, Aspinwall's is a bust-length, three-quarter profile view. This format was especially suited to the aged doctor, whose right eye is partially in shadow. Aspinwall had lost this eye early in life, when the notched end of an arrow slipped out of the bowstring as he drew it. Through a slight difference in the color and pupil size of his subject's right eye, Stuart may have been alluding to the doctor's use of a prosthetic. These were commonly made of Bohemian blown glass in the early nineteenth century.

The brushwork in the Nelson-Atkins portrait is especially fine and displays Stuart's celebrated skill at rendering the various colors and transparencies of flesh tones. As Dorinda Evans has pointed out, the compositions of Stuart's late portraits were formulaic, but he experimented in these works with the painting of flesh. In particular, the artist sought to make the skin of his subjects appear translucent, with an inner light shining from within.<sup>5</sup> Stuart told his students, "Good fleshcoloring partook of all colors, not mixed, so as to be combined in one tint, but shining through each other, like the blood through the natural skin."<sup>6</sup> By using various layered and intermingled shades of gray, green, pink, and white, the artist not only successfully conveyed the texture and coloring of an elderly man's skin, but he created a striking impression of life.

Stuart executed many of his Boston portraits, including *Dr. William Aspinwall*, on wood panels that were scored to imitate the texture of twill canvas. Some scholars have attributed this practice to President Jefferson's 1807 embargo, which stopped the importation of canvas for about fifteen years.<sup>7</sup> As Marcia Goldberg



has pointed out, however, Stuart continued to use scored pine and mahogany panels even after English canvas again became available.<sup>8</sup> He appears simply to have grown accustomed to working on this material.

Although the Nelson-Atkins panel is not dated, Aspinwall's portrait was probably painted in 1815. Lawrence Park states that it was commissioned by Aspinwall's daughter Susanna and her husband, Lewis Tappan, who were married in September 1813.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Aspinwall's sudden and unexpected death in June 1814 may have prompted the young couple to obtain portraits of their surviving parents, for Stuart painted Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Tappan that fall. Dr. Aspinwall may have sat for Stuart the next spring.<sup>10</sup> According to family tradition, the Nelson-Atkins painting was almost destroyed in July 1834, when a proslavery mob wrecked the home of his abolitionist daughter and son-in-law. The rioters burned most of the Tappans' furniture in the street, but they spared Dr. Aspinwall's portrait because they mistook it for Stuart's famous Athenaeum portrait of George Washington.<sup>11</sup> The painting remained in the Aspinwall family until 1981, when it was donated to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

Stuart continued to paint into the 1820s, although the quality and consistency of his paintings gradually declined after 1815. An increasingly severe tremor in his right hand made it difficult for the artist to control his brush, and eventually old age, illness, and partial paralysis kept him from work. He died on 9 July 1828 and was buried the next day in Boston Common Cemetery.

MS/LL

## NOTES

1. These discussions are summarized in Hugh Crean, "Gilbert Stuart and the Politics of Fine Arts Patronage in Ireland, 1787–1793: A Social and Cultural Study," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1990, 301–26.
2. Biographical information on William Aspinwall was derived from Algernon Aikin Aspinwall, *The Aspinwall Genealogy, Compiled by Algernon Aikin Aspinwall, Washington, D.C., Published by the Author* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Co., 1901), esp. 53–55; Howard A. Kelly and Walter L. Burrage, *American Medical Biographies* (Baltimore: Norman, Remington Company, 1920), 44–45; *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), 1:395–96; James Thacher, *American Medical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 91–95; and Clifford K. Shipton, *Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1764–1767* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1972), 8–12.
3. Quoted in Thacher, *American Medical Biography*, 94.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Dorinda Evans, *The Genius of Gilbert Stuart* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), xvii, 95.
6. Quoted in William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834; Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1918), 1:256.
7. Charles Merrill Mount, *Gilbert Stuart: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964), 274.
8. Marcia Goldberg, "Textured Panels in 19th Century American Painting," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 32 (1993), 33–42.
9. Lawrence Park, *Gilbert Stuart: An Illustrated Descriptive List of His Works Compiled by Lawrence Park; with an Account of His Life by John Hill Morgan and an Appreciation by Royal Cortissoz* (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1926), 1:116.
10. Lewis Tappan noted his parents' sittings in his Gentleman's Annual Pocket Remembrance for 1814: 22 September, "At Stewart's—father's portrait first begun"; 3 October, "At Stewart's—last sitting of father"; 10 October, "At Stuart's—mother sat"; 18 October, "Rode to Roxbury & call at Stuart's"; 27 October, "Rode on horseback with S[usanna] to Stuart's to see portraits"; 4 November, "Paid G. Stuart esq. \$200—for father [and] mother's portrait"; 21 November, "On Ruby to Stuart's—"; 3 December, "Portraits of father [and] mother brought home." Dr. Aspinwall's portrait is not mentioned in the 1814 journal (of which several pages are missing), and an 1815 edition unfortunately was not included among Tappan's papers. See Lewis Tappan Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm reel 1.
11. Aspinwall, *The Aspinwall Genealogy*, 55.

## WALTER STUEMPFIG (1914–1970)

### *The Monument*, c. 1947–49

Oil on canvas

26½ × 40½ in. (66.4 × 101.7 cm)

Signed lower left: Stuempfig

Gift of the H. V. Jones Memorial Fund in memory of  
Herbert V. Jones through the Friends of Art, 49-66

WALTER STUEMPFIG'S SCENES of urban Philadelphia and nearby New Jersey seaside resorts are Romantic expressions of isolation and loneliness. Even in the wake of avant-garde Abstract Expressionist paintings by Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, Stuempfig's work received considerable critical and popular acclaim throughout the 1940s, as evidenced by his sold-out exhibitions at New York's Durlacher Brothers galleries in 1943, 1945, and 1947. Steeped in the Philadelphia realist tradition of Thomas Eakins (q.v.), Stuempfig painted in a representational style, exploring light, atmosphere, and mood rather than explicit narrative.

Born in Germantown, a suburb of Philadelphia, Stuempfig attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1931 to 1934.<sup>1</sup> At the academy he earned a reputation as one of the best students of his class. He first exhibited in the school's 1933 annual exhibition, and the following year the institution bought his painting *The Stable* (location unknown). Stuempfig was also awarded the academy's Cresson Traveling Scholarship, which allowed him to study the art and architecture of Europe. In 1949 he was appointed a professor of painting at the Pennsylvania Academy, a position he held for twenty years.

*The Monument* emits the enigmatic, almost surreal eeriness that pervades Stuempfig's mature work. A monumental plinth occupying the middle of the composition serves as a stark backdrop for an ambiguous encounter between two unkempt adolescent boys. Leaning against the monument, one boy gestures with his right hand and casts a shadow ominously pointing toward his companion, who squats on the ground, perhaps drawing on the sidewalk. In such a monochromatic composition lacking much detail, the color and style of the boys' clothes and hair appear conspicuous. The brown-haired boy wears a blue-and-white jersey; his blond cohort sports a brown T-shirt, revealed since he has removed a red-striped overshirt, which is tucked in his back pocket. The attenuated horizon line, stretching the entire width of the canvas, underscores the anxious calm that saturates the scene. Stuempfig's portrayal of unexceptional moments exuding a deafening quietude recalls the art of Edward Hopper (q.v.), with which his has often been compared.<sup>2</sup>

Stuempfig achieved this spare composition through an extended process of reworking and reduction of form. Technical examination reveals that he removed three additional figures from

his design: one leaned against the pole on the left and faced the center, another walked toward the monument slightly hunched over as if in deep thought, and a third at the right of the picture bent over to pick a cloth up from the grass. He furthermore painted out houses in the distance, leaving the space to be defined mostly by a horizontal band of green-ocher.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the barren landscape refuses to disclose a particular locale, although it evokes the New Jersey shore, where Stuempfig often spent his summers.

Lacking the sculpture that one expects to see atop such a pedestal, the plinth appears as a kind of historical ruin, neglected and useless. Stuempfig's interest in architectural ruins is more explicit in such works as *Ruins at Lea's Mill* (1948; location unknown), *Youth Midst Antiquity* (1962; location unknown), and *Remains* (c. 1965; location unknown). By focusing on ruins and derelict buildings, the painter aligned himself deliberately with European Romantic art, in which ruins serve as springboards for consideration of one's existence. "All good painters are romantic painters," Stuempfig proclaimed in 1949. "You have to have a certain romantic approach to life or you wouldn't be a painter in the first place."<sup>4</sup>

A self-identified Romantic, the painter took many aesthetic cues from artists like Hubert Robert and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, who similarly depicted figures inhabiting historical, sometimes ruinous landscapes.<sup>5</sup> Even so, *The Monument*, featuring figures juxtaposed against a haunting architectural monolith, brings to mind most of all the second of Nicolas Poussin's two versions of *Et in Arcadia Ego* (c. 1650; Musée du Louvre, Paris), in which shepherds contemplate a gravestone whose inscription alerts them to the transitory nature of life. That Stuempfig later executed a version of this very subject (*Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1956; Forbes Collection) confirms that themes of mortality were on his mind. In this regard, the painter played a key role in a thread of American painting of the 1940s and 1950s that became known as Neo-Romanticism, which included also Leonid Berman (q.v.) and Pavel Tchelitchew (q.v.).<sup>6</sup> Stuempfig's human subjects, like the boys in *The Monument*, exist as modern-day Gypsies and peasants seemingly wandering aimlessly through architectural relics and ruins of a war-torn world. In this regard, his works from the 1940s on can often be interpreted as emblems of postwar regret and quiet desperation.

When Stuempfig exhibited *The Monument* in his fourth one-man show at Durlacher Brothers, he was perceived to be at the height of his career. His scenes of desolate New Jersey beaches and dilapidated tenements of south Philadelphia garnered praise for blending sound principles of traditional painting with a "personal poetic vision."<sup>7</sup> However, one slightly displeased critic declared that Stuempfig "sacrificed everything to mood."<sup>8</sup>





Enthusiasm for Stuempfig waned somewhat in the 1950s, as critics called attention to redundancy in the artist's output.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the painter was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1963 and was eulogized in *Art News* when he died in 1970 for his "meticulous, dreamlike still-lives and landscapes with figures, faintly tinged with Surrealism."<sup>10</sup> At present, Stuempfig's art, like that of many of his Neo-Romantic contemporaries, generally suffers, not unlike the ruins that appear in his paintings, in a state of benign neglect, lost in the long shadow cast by the legacy of Abstract Expressionism.

RRG/MS

## NOTES

1. Biographical information is derived from Harry Salpeter, "Stuempfig," *American Artist* 12 (November 1948), 52–55, 74–76; "Stuempfig," *Art USA Now* (Laeerne, Switz.: C.J. Bucher, 1962), 2:276–79; and *Walter Stuempfig*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1972).
2. Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, for example, observed, "Without the precedent of Hopper, it would be difficult to conceive such varied and distinct poetic documentations of the American scene of the late thirties and early forties as those by Ben Shahn, Walter Stuempfig, and Loren MacIver." Hunter and Jacobus, *American Art of the 20th Century: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973), 175.
3. See Technical Notes, which explain that some of these changes by the artist might also relate to Stuempfig's working on and over an older composition.
4. Quoted in "The Romantic Mood," *Time*, 12 December 1949, 51–52, at 52.
5. Harry Salpeter noted in 1948, "The Stuempfig of today could not have come into being without Poussin and Corot, then Delacroix, and then such Americans as Homer and Eakins." Salpeter, "Stuempfig," 74. His reference to Nicolas Poussin points to the interpretation put forward in this essay.
6. For a more thorough discussion of Neo-Romanticism, see the entry on Berman's *Port Jefferson*.
7. "Romantic Painter: Stuempfig's Poetic Canvases Are Best-Sellers," *Life*, 20 September 1948, 99.
8. "The Romantic Mood," 51.
9. See, for example, Stuart Preston, "Current Variety: Drawings by La Fresnaye—A Group—Stuempfig," *New York Times*, 2 December 1951, see. 2, 11; and Howard Devree, "Marin and Grosz: American Academy, Whitney Museum Stage Retrospectives—Other Shows," *New York Times*, 17 January 1954, see. 2, 11.
10. "Walter Stuempfig," *Art News* 69 (January 1971), 7.

## THOMAS SULLY (1783–1872)

### *Mrs. James Gore King (Sarah Rogers Gracie King), Wife of “The Gold Beater,” 1831 (Mrs. J. King)*

Oil on canvas

30 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (76.4 × 74.3 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: TS. 1831

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 51-47

LIKE SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, with whom he is often compared, Thomas Sully was best known for his portraits of female sitters. Henry Tuckerman found him “specially endowed to delineate our countrywomen. . . . He has an extremely dexterous way of flattering, without seeming to do so; of crystallizing better moments, and fixing happy attitudes. . . . One always feels at least in good society among his portraits.”<sup>1</sup> John Neal went further in his praise, calling Sully’s portraits of women “oftentimes poems,—full of grace and tenderness, lithe, flexible, and emotional.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Sully’s portraits contributed to a new, sentimental feminine ideal that would pervade American visual culture in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The Nelson-Atkins portrait of Sarah Rogers Gracie King is a superlative example of the many sweet, graceful, female personages that the artist painted during his seventy-year career.

Thomas Sully was born in Horncastle, Lincolnshire, England.<sup>3</sup> At the age of nine he immigrated to the United States with his family. The Sullys settled in Charleston, South Carolina, where they managed the town’s new theater. Most of the Sullys’ nine children, including Thomas, participated in the family business; Thomas also was placed briefly with an insurance broker, who recognized and encouraged the youth’s natural artistic talents. Though largely self-taught, Sully received inspiration and instruction from several sources. Charles Fraser, a classmate who later became known as a miniaturist, was, by Sully’s own admission, “the first person that ever took the pains to instruct me in the rudiments of the art, and . . . determined the course of my future life.”<sup>4</sup> Other guidance came from his elder brother Lawrence and brother-in-law Jean Belzons, who were both miniature painters. Sully’s first recorded work was an 1801 miniature portrait of his brother Chester. From that date he met with increasing success and by 1804 had opened his own portrait studio in Richmond, Virginia.

Like many painters of his generation, Sully’s primary goal was to study art in Europe. Just when he had raised sufficient funds for his passage, however, these plans were frustrated by the sudden death of his brother Lawrence in 1804. Consequently, Sully delayed his trip to assume the responsibilities of his brother’s children and widow, whom he married in 1806. When Sully finally arrived in London in 1809, his skills as a portraitist were relatively advanced.

Armed with a letter of introduction from Charles Willson Peale (q.v.), Sully presented himself to Benjamin West (q.v.), who thereafter advised him in his studies. The artist also received guidance and fellowship from Charles Bird King, a young Philadelphia artist with whom he shared a studio. For the next year Sully followed a traditional, rigorous course of study: he examined and copied old master paintings in London’s galleries and private collections; he drew from casts and classical sculpture; and he met or studied with the noted artists John Trumbull, Henry Fuseli, and Thomas Lawrence. Sully was especially impressed by Lawrence, whose fluid style and flattering portrayal of ladies were dominant influences in the development of Sully’s own manner.

When he returned to the United States, Sully established a studio in Philadelphia’s Philosophical Hall and began painting a large number of portraits. Sully’s popularity increased steadily, and with the deaths of Peale in 1827 and Gilbert Stuart (q.v.) in 1828, he had few rivals. The list of his clients included popular actors and actresses, military heroes including Andrew Jackson and the marquis de Lafayette, political leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and Daniel D. Tompkins, governor of New York and vice president of the United States, as well as members of such wealthy and influential families as the Livingstons of New York, the Middletons of South Carolina, and the Biddles and Cadwaladers of Pennsylvania. His most prestigious patron was the newly crowned Queen Victoria, whom he painted in 1838 for a Philadelphia society of British expatriates.<sup>5</sup>

Many of Sully’s portraits of famous individuals reached a broad popular audience in the form of engravings. Surely aware that such prints would increase demand for his work, he cultivated relationships with editors and publishers, most notably Sarah Josepha Hale, who included engravings after paintings by Sully in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and Edward Lea Carey, who illustrated Sully’s work in the popular annual giftbook *The Gift*. In these publications, Sully’s pictures of sweet-faced ladies reinforced the surrounding sentimental texts extolling domestic happiness and romantic love. Writing of Sully’s images of women in 1845, Hale particularly praised “the soft expression of the eye, the sweet repose of the features, indicative of perfect sympathy of feeling, and the graces of attitude and costume.”<sup>6</sup>

All of these qualities are present in the Nelson-Atkins portrait. Sully depicted Sarah King wearing a day dress of rich yellow silk over a white organdy blouse. She gently clasps her bodice with her left hand. Her rich costume is simple, and her only ornaments are a jeweled blue enamel and gold bracelet, a gold wedding band, and a lace bonnet with its blue silk ribbons casually untied.





Fig. 1 Unknown artist (attributed to Anson Dickinson), *Mrs. James Gore King*, c. 1820. Watercolor on ivory,  $2\frac{7}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$  in. (7.3 × 5.7 cm). Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Leonard Cox, 33.114.2

Beneath her pale, smooth forehead, her wide blue eyes address the viewer directly. Her chestnut curls are rich and glossy, and her delicate mouth and plump cheeks are coral pink. The blue, gold, white, and pink of her clothing and her face are mirrored in the delicate tints of the sky behind her, where drifting clouds reflect the light of the rising or setting sun. Sully's deft, painterly brushwork further softens the contours of King's features and endows her portrait with subtle elegance.

"Sally" King was the daughter of Archibald Gracie, an affluent New York shipping magnate.<sup>7</sup> In 1812, when she was twenty-one, she married James Gore King, the son of Rufus King who was foreign minister to England and a New York state senator. In his own right a successful banker and financier and a longtime president of the New York chamber of commerce, James Gore King is best known for persuading the Bank of England to loan one million pounds sterling to be distributed among New York banks during the financial panic of 1837. His grace under fire earned him the moniker "the gold beater." According to Sully's studio register, he began the portrait of Mrs. King on 9 December 1830 and finished it on 12 January 1831. A standard bust-size portrait, its price was listed at \$75—the equivalent of roughly \$1,700 in today's currency.<sup>8</sup> By the time she sat for her portrait by Sully, King was forty years old and had given birth to eight of her eleven children.

The extent to which Sully idealized the subject of the Nelson-Atkins portrait is suggested by a portrait miniature of Sarah King probably painted by Anson Dickinson in 1820 (Fig. 1). The miniature shows her with the short, curly hair fashionable at the time, wearing a high-waisted empire gown, and holding a closed fan casually in her left hand. Her long nose dominates her narrow, oval face, and her thin lips make her small mouth appear somewhat pinched. Her expression, while serene, lacks the warmth evident in Sully's portrait. Sully's popularity stemmed from his ability to portray his sitters in their best light: "From long experience I know that resemblance in a portrait is essential; but no fault will be found with the artist, (at least by the sitter,) if he improve the appearance."<sup>9</sup> In his portrait of King, as in his other portraits of female sitters, Sully not only softened and idealized his sitter's features but also filled her expression with a "perfect sympathy of feeling" that invites a sentimental response.

Sully often portrayed his sitters in rather vague and indeterminate settings designed to accentuate their appearance. In the Nelson-Atkins portrait, King appears before a low stone wall that separates her from a large masonry mansion surrounded by tall trees in the left background. This edifice may represent her father's house on State Street in Manhattan, where she was married in 1813.<sup>10</sup> More likely though, Sully included the vaguely Italianate building in its garden setting simply to lend a Romantic note to his portrait. Like her modest attire and gentle demeanor, the presence of the nearby house also emphasizes King's domestic nature.

Sully remained in Philadelphia, leading in his profession until his death in 1872. He enjoyed his greatest popularity, however, in the decades before the Civil War, when sentimental culture was at its height in the United States. Although most critics in the 1870s regarded his paintings as overly sweet and idealized, Edward Spencer, in his obituary for the artist, noted that Sully's portraits were "always pleasing; he caught the best features of his sitters, and made good likenesses that were natural, easy, and genteel."<sup>11</sup>

MS/LL

## NOTES

1. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Son, 1867), 158–59.
2. John Neal, “Our Painters,” *Atlantic Monthly* 23 (March 1869), 337.
3. Of the few monographic studies on Thomas Sully, the majority were written more than seventy-five years ago. The authoritative study is Edward Biddle and Mantle Fielding, *The Life and Works of Thomas Sully, 1783–1872* (1921; Charleston, S.C.: Garnier & Company, 1969). More recent publications include Monroe H. Fabian, *Mr. Sully, Portrait Painter*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1983); and John Clubbe, *Byron, Sully, and the Power of Portraiture* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).
4. Biddle and Fielding, *The Life and Works of Thomas Sully*, 4.
5. See Carrie Reborra Barratt, *Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).
6. [Sarah Josepha Hale], “The Rose and the Lilly,” *Codey’s Lady’s Book* 31 (September 1845), 85. Robert Wilson Torchia has argued that Sully’s early emphasis on sweetness and refinement in his portraits of American women was a patriotic response, on the artist’s part, to foreign criticisms of American women as rude and uncouth. Torchia, “Eliza Ridgely and the Ideal of American Womanhood, 1787–1820,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 90 (Winter 1995), 405–23.
7. Very little information is available on Sarah Rogers Gracie King. Biographical material for this entry has been gleaned from several sources on the Gracie and Gore families. For the Archibald Gracie family, see Mary Black, *New York City’s Gracie Mansion: A History of the Mayor’s House, 1646–1942* (New York: Gracie Mansion Conservancy, 1984), 18–47. For the Gores, see Walter Whipple Spooner, *Historic Families of America* (New York: Historic Families Publishing Association, 1907), 73–81; Freeman Hunt, *Lives of American Merchants* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1858), 185–214; and *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 5:392–93.
8. “Account of Pictures Painted by Thomas Sully,” Thomas Sully Journal, 1792–93 and 1799–1846, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm reel N18, frame 35. Sully typically recorded the names of the sitter and the person who commissioned the portrait. Since only Mrs. King’s name is listed, she most likely commissioned the portrait herself. Sully’s business often took him to other cities, including New York, yet Mrs. King must have visited his Philadelphia studio, for Sully’s journal (Archives of American Art, microfilm reel N18) makes no mention of travel at the time he painted her portrait. The relative value of 1831 currency, based on the Consumer Price Index, can be found at “How Much Is That?” part of the Economic History Services website hosted by Miami University and Wake Forest University, at <http://eh.net/limit/> (accessed 15 August 2006).
9. Thomas Sully, *Hints to Young Painters and the Process of Portrait-Painting* (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart, 1873), 38.
10. Archibald Gracie’s new mansion on State Street and Broadway was completed in 1812. The largest and grandest of his dwellings, it bordered on the gardens of Government House, a building erected in 1790 and intended as the president’s official home when New York was the nation’s capital; see Black, *New York City’s Gracie Mansion*, 39, 42. Certainly the house depicted is neither Gracie Mansion, a porticoed structure, which Gracie sold in 1823, nor Highwood, James Gore King’s country home in New Jersey, which was not completed until 1832, nor the Kings’ town house on Bond Street in Manhattan, which was a narrow brownstone rowhouse.
11. Edward Spencer, “The Late Thomas Sully,” *Appleton’s Journal* 8 (21 December 1872), 694.

# HENRY OSSAWA TANNER (1859–1937)

## *The Young Sabot Maker*, 1895

Oil on canvas

47<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (120.3 × 89.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: H. O. TANNER / 1895

Purchase: the George H. and Elizabeth O. Davis Fund and partial gift of an anonymous donor, 95-22

WRITING OF HENRY OSSAWA TANNER'S *The Young Sabot Maker* in 1895, a critic for the *New York Times* noted that the artist was an American pupil of the French academic painters Gustave Boulanger and Jules Lefebvre. In the painting's "vigorous drawing and masterly coloring," he saw the traces of Tanner's lessons with his Parisian teachers. He described the painting this way:

In the interior of a sabot shop a boy of about fourteen is working with all his might on a pair of sabots on a bench in the foreground, while an old workman in the rear turns his head from his work and smiles at the energy of the youth. His face wears an expression which seems to say, "When you have worked as long as I have, you will take things more easily, my boy."<sup>1</sup>

The reviewer continues to suggest that, like the energetic young man in his painting, Tanner was striving with both skill and zeal to master his chosen trade. In fact, the thirty-six-year-old artist had been producing mature and technically masterful paintings for several years before he painted *The Young Sabot Maker*. Nevertheless, the Nelson-Atkins canvas marked a shift in Tanner's career. It was his first submission to the Paris Salon to garner international attention, and it was one of the last genre paintings he made before turning to the overtly historicized religious themes that would occupy him for the rest of his career.

Tanner was born in Pittsburgh but grew up in Philadelphia, a member of a prominent, middle-class, African American family.<sup>2</sup> His father, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, was a respected theologian and a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His mother, in addition to raising five children, wrote literary essays for the *Christian Recorder*. Tanner's sister Halle Tanner Dillon was one of the first black women physicians in the United States. Other members of the family were ministers, lawyers, and teachers. While not overjoyed about their son's ambition to become an artist, Tanner's parents supported him financially while he pursued his education as a painter. In 1879 he enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied under Thomas Eakins (q.v.) and Thomas Hovenden.

As one of the first black students at the Pennsylvania Academy, Turner faced both social ostracism and overt racism in the form of taunts and, on at least one occasion, physical abuse. He wrote

years later of the discouragement he felt during his student years in Philadelphia. "I was very timid, and to be made to feel that I was not wanted, although in a place where I had every right to be, even months afterward caused me sometimes weeks of pain."<sup>3</sup> His teachers were supportive, however, and throughout the 1880s Tanner exhibited paintings at the academy's annual exhibitions as well as other venues including the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition in New Orleans and the National Academy of Design in New York.

Tanner's first paintings were seascapes, executed in a Tonalist style with muted colors and atmospheric brushwork. In the 1880s he broadened his range of subjects to include landscapes, figurative works, and animal paintings. His style changed rapidly, too. Within three years of entering the Pennsylvania Academy, he was producing beautifully drawn and deftly painted genre scenes such as *Boy and Sheep under a Tree* (1881; private collection), which show the unmistakable influence of his teacher Eakins.<sup>4</sup> Tanner also worked as a freelance illustrator and a photographer during these years. Between stints studying at the academy, he traveled around the eastern half of the United States searching for picturesque subject matter. For a brief time, he operated a photography studio in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1891 Tanner sailed to Europe with the intention of studying in Rome. Stopping in Paris en route, he was struck by the city's large, international, and racially diverse community of artists, who welcomed him as a fellow professional. Finding in Paris the sense of belonging that had eluded him in Philadelphia, he gave up the idea of Rome. Like many other American art students at this time, he enrolled at the Académie Julian, where the emphasis on drawing the human figure must have reminded him of the French-inspired curriculum at the Pennsylvania Academy.

During his first summer in France, Tanner traveled to the village of Pont-Aven on the Brittany coast. Brittany was a popular summer destination for artists. Not only were the accommodations there cheap, but the Bretons, with their distinctive costumes and preindustrial way of life, were intensely picturesque.<sup>5</sup> The financially strapped Tanner, who was anxious to paint salable pictures, must have been aware that rural, French subject matter was extremely popular in the United States. Just one year before Tanner visited Pont-Aven for the first time, close to four hundred thousand people had thronged to see Jean-François Millet's painting *The Angelus* (1857–59; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) at the American Art Association galleries in New York.<sup>6</sup> Scores of American expatriate painters, including Elizabeth Nourse, George Hitchcock, Will Hicok Low, Charles Sprague Pearce, and Edward Simmons, capitalized on the popularity of Barbizon School paintings







Fig. 1 Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Young Sabot Maker*, 1893. Pastel and ink on paper, mounted on paperboard, 10 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (26.3 × 21.2 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of H. Alan and Melvin Frank, 1983.95.49

by depicting innumerable quaintly garbed European peasants in seemingly timeless, rural settings.<sup>7</sup>

Tanner made sketches in Brittany in the summers of 1891 and 1892, and he began working on a studio painting of Breton musicians, *The Bagpipe Lesson* (1892–93; Hampton University Museum, Va.), in the fall of 1892. Shortly after completing this painting, a bout of typhoid fever sent him home to Philadelphia. Tanner's subsequent yearlong stay in the United States awakened in him a renewed sense of solidarity with his fellow African Americans, who were struggling against increasingly institutionalized racism during the 1890s. At the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he delivered a paper entitled "The American Negro in Art." A few months later, he wrote that he was drawn to paint "negro subjects," both because he felt a natural sympathy with them and because he desired to redress prevalent comic stereotypes of African Americans.<sup>8</sup> In *The Banjo Lesson* (1893; Hampton University Museum, Va.) and *The Thankful Poor* (1894; private collection), Tanner painted pairs of black men and boys in humble interiors, imbuing them with the dignity, sensitivity, and monumentality often seen in contemporary paintings of French peasants. His style is considerably looser in these paintings than in *The Bagpipe Lesson*, and his expressive brushwork is

complemented by subtle combinations of warm brown and silvery gray and blue tones.

Although both *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor* received positive reviews in the United States, Tanner abandoned African American subjects after his return to Paris in 1894. He may have based this decision, in part, on the fact that French critics ignored *The Banjo Lesson* when it hung in the Salon that year. Tanner had also found an appreciative audience for his paintings of Breton life in Robert C. Ogden, half owner of Wanamaker's Department Store in Philadelphia, who arranged for a special exhibition of *The Bagpipe Lesson* at Wanamaker's in 1894. Tanner, who would develop a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the Wanamaker firm, may have been eager to meet Ogden's and John Wanamaker's need for paintings that would please the broadest possible range of tastes.<sup>9</sup>

Tanner had begun working on *The Young Sabot Maker* in Philadelphia in 1893. Two preliminary sketches, one in colored pastel, the other a grisaille gouache (Figs. 1, 2), show the basic elements of the Nelson-Atkins composition. In both, a boy and an older man occupy the interior of a woodworking shop. A woman sits near the rear of the shop with her back turned. Because sabot making was traditionally a family trade in Brittany, these figures can be understood with reasonable certainty to be the boy's parents.<sup>10</sup> As his father looks on, the youth stands with widely spaced legs, pushing with all his weight against the crossbar handle of a drill, with which he is hollowing out a wooden shoe affixed to the sawhorse before him. A single window illuminates the scene. Tanner went so far as to sketch this composition loosely in oil on a large canvas, but he abandoned the painting early on and used the other side of the canvas for *The Thankful Poor*.

When Tanner painted the Nelson-Atkins version of *The Young Sabot Maker* the following year, he removed the figure of the mother and reversed his original composition so that the boy faces the right side of the canvas. As in the earlier sketches, his father proudly watches him from the shadows in the back of the shop. In contrast to this older man, the youth stands in the full light of the sun streaming through the window. His face, under a mop of curly auburn hair, is flushed and strained by both concentration and physical exertion as he leans into his work. Tanner's own work as an artist is rendered visible in *The Young Sabot Maker* by his loose facture. His painterly virtuosity is particularly evident in the curled wood shavings scattered over the hexagonal tile floor that are painted with quick, calligraphic brushstrokes. Against the warm gold and cool brown and gray tones of the shop interior, the boy's relatively bright blue Breton suit, white collar, and red socks stand out—an oblique reference, perhaps, to the flags of Tanner's native and adopted countries.

As in *The Bagpipe Lesson*, *The Banjo Lesson*, and *The Thankful Poor*, *The Young Sabot Maker* pairs a boy with an older man. This device suggests cultural stability and continuity, a feature of European peasant life described in 1877 by the American writer for the *Aldine*: "Life, with [the European of the peasant class], commenced centuries ago, and has moved in a steady stream—except

when casually interrupted by war—ever since. What was done by the grandfather the father repeated; and the son followed both.”<sup>11</sup> The figures in *The Young Sabot Maker*, like the African Americans whom Tanner had painted the previous year, occupy a humble interior that seems to exist apart from the modern world. Nothing in their costumes, tools, or trade betrays the existence of current technology. Indeed, sabots themselves had long been associated in European art and culture with resistance to urban industrial culture. Any hint of radical politics is suppressed, however, in Tanner’s painting. Here, the father’s proud and happy countenance communicates his contentment with the traditional way of life his son is willingly adopting. Furthermore, the compositional pairing of the half-made sabot on the sawhorse with the loaf of bread on the table at the back of the shop evokes God’s injunction to Adam, from the book of Genesis: “by the sweat of your brow will you earn your bread.”

Tanner’s emphasis on the inherent dignity and ennobling effect of work in *The Young Sabot Maker* echoes the well-publicized beliefs of Booker T. Washington. Washington, a family friend who had helped to support Tanner during his art studies in Paris, was the influential president of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where Tanner’s sister was the resident physician. He stressed the importance of skilled manual labor especially for African Americans, and industrial arts constituted the basis of the curriculum at Tuskegee. Noting the parallel between *The Young Sabot Maker*, in which a boy learns a humble but honest trade, and Washington’s educational philosophy, Albert Boime has argued that Tanner intentionally elided racial boundaries in the Nelson-Atkins canvas.<sup>12</sup> Boime pointed out that a preparatory study for the finished version of *The Young Sabot Maker* (c. 1894–95; Smithsonian American Art Museum) portrays both father and son with dark hair and dark skin, and that the finished painting lends certain stereotypically African features—a broad nose and curly hair, for instance—to the boy, features that do not appear in Tanner’s earliest studies. It should be noted, however, that Bretons were envisioned in the nineteenth century as dark-haired, dark-skinned people.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not one accepts the existence of concrete visual parallels between the subjects in *The Young Sabot Maker* and the subjects in Tanner’s genre paintings of African Americans, the thematic links between these works are clear. By painting poor African Americans in roles and attitudes like those of European peasants, Tanner sought to make his American audience recognize in them the same qualities that they admired in Millet’s rural subjects. Similarly, Tanner brought to his depictions of Breton people a deep respect born, in part, from his encounters during the 1880s with rural African Americans, whom he seems to have viewed as American counterparts to European peasants.<sup>14</sup> After his return to France in 1894, Tanner increasingly sought to present images that transcended categories of race and conveyed universal human truths. For this reason, as Alan Braddock has argued, Tanner often gave the figures in his later, overtly religious paintings ambiguous racial characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

In painting *The Young Sabot Maker*, Tanner was influenced by a wide range of contemporary paintings depicting scenes of rural life in Europe and the United States. In particular, he may have looked to his former teacher, Hovenden, who had painted Breton peasants in the 1870s and whose recent *Breaking Home Ties* (1891; Philadelphia Museum of Art) was a popular attraction at the World’s Columbian Exposition.<sup>16</sup> This painting, which depicts a gangly adolescent boy taking leave of his mother in the kitchen of a rustic New England house, struck a chord with many viewers who feared that the ongoing, large-scale migration of young people to urban areas would undermine American values of hard work, thrift, and piety.<sup>17</sup> It seems likely that Tanner, with *The Young Sabot Maker*, sought to tap into the same nostalgia for unspoiled rural life that fueled admiration for Hovenden’s *Breaking Home Ties*. Unlike the boy in Hovenden’s painting, however, Tanner’s young sabot maker has apparently decided to “cast down his bucket where he is.”<sup>18</sup> If he is aware of a modern, urban world



Fig. 2 Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Study for “The Young Sabot Maker,”* 1893. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 15¼ × 10¾ in. (38.7 × 25.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, purchase, Erving Wolf Foundation gift and Hanson K. Comings gift, by exchange, 1975. 1975.27.2



Fig. 3 Edward Emerson Simmons, *The Carpenter's Son*, 1888–89. Oil on canvas, 66 × 50½ in. (167.6 × 128.3 cm). First Unitarian Church, New Bedford, Mass.

outside his rural enclave, he exhibits little interest in it. Even the trade he is learning is tied to the agrarian, preindustrial past. Tanner also sought to present his theme in a way that is less sentimental and more artistic—by the cosmopolitan standards of the late nineteenth century—than Hovenden's treatments of similar subjects.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that Tanner's subject overlaps with mass-produced popular imagery, his masterful, painterly technique emphatically marks *The Young Sabot Maker* as fine art.<sup>20</sup>

Tanner, in *The Young Sabot Maker*, appears to have taken a specific cue from Edward Emerson Simmons's 1888–89 painting *The Carpenter's Son* (Fig. 3). Simmons, an American who lived in Paris and spent his summers in Brittany, was probably an acquaintance of Tanner's, and Tanner was almost certainly familiar with *The Carpenter's Son*, which was exhibited in London in 1889, New York in 1892, and Chicago in 1893.<sup>21</sup> The painting depicts a barefoot peasant boy, dressed in white and seated on a sawhorse in a carpenter's shop. His mother, shown in earnest discussion with his father at the far, shadowed end of the shop, gestures toward him reproachfully. Seemingly unaffected by her disapproval, the boy gazes thoughtfully out at the viewer. In his left hand he idly holds a long, curled wood shaving. More shavings, piled in fanciful shapes, lie around his feet, evidence of his father's work and his own play. Simmons made the religious nature of his image

explicit both by the title—a clear reference to the boyhood of Jesus—and by the windowpanes that form a cross, the doves in the rafters, and the golden halo of sunlight around the boy's head. Although reviewers praised Simmons's sensitive composition and deft, painterly technique, his depiction of Jesus as an idle dreamer was controversial. “[*The Carpenter's Son*] is so well painted,” wrote one New York critic, “that we wish with all our hearts that Mr. Simmons had been content to give it another name, or leave it with no name at all.”<sup>22</sup>

In *The Young Sabot Maker*, Tanner, like Simmons, painted a peasant boy in a carpenter's shop, its floor littered with wood shavings. Both paintings present their central subject in the middle ground, surrounded by a stream of sunlight, with one or both parents positioned in the shadows behind him. As in Simmons's painting, Tanner's depiction of a father and son at work in a carpentry shop is resonant with religious significance. The subject itself recalls the boyhood of Jesus, and Tanner made this reference even clearer by painting his young sabot maker clasping a cross-shaped tool. The sunlight that pours through the window onto Tanner's sabot maker and his work might also be read as a symbol of divinity. Tanner used light to symbolize the presence of God in several later paintings, including *The Annunciation* (1898; Philadelphia Museum of Art) and *Mary* (1900; Lasalle University Museum, Philadelphia).

Despite the Christian references in *The Young Sabot Maker*, Tanner avoided censure by forgoing an overtly religious title. He also portrayed his carpenter's son as both dutiful and industrious—a view that jibed more closely with his own religious beliefs and values, in which work and duty played a central role. Tanner's avoidance of controversy in the Nelson-Atkins painting is consistent with his career-long desire to find broad acceptance for his work among affluent white critics and collectors. As Matthew Wilson has noted, Tanner repeatedly chose to omit from his paintings what this audience might find jarring or objectionable—images of young black men, for instance.<sup>23</sup>

In 1902 W. S. Scarborough noted that “Four years after Mr. Tanner went to Paris he sent to the Salon ‘The Sabot Makers’ which received favorable attention, and then he dropped what the artistic world calls *genre* painting and adopted another style.”<sup>24</sup> Tanner turned, in 1895, to historicizing scenes drawn directly from the Bible, which he imbued with a mystical quality that occasionally bordered on Symbolism. As Jennifer Harper has argued, Tanner's chosen audience embraced paintings such as *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (1897; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which transcended categories of race and nationality to present, in a modern but not radical style, a theme with nearly universal appeal.<sup>25</sup> Positioned at the chronological juncture between Tanner's genre paintings and his religious paintings, *The Young Sabot Maker* incorporates elements of both. Fittingly, this image of a young man following in his father's footsteps marks the moment when Tanner, who had earlier disappointed his own father by refusing to follow him into the clergy, embraced a role that was ministerial as well as artistic.

L.L.

## NOTES

1. "American Art in Paris," *New York Times*, 29 April 1895, 5.
2. Biographical information on Tanner can be found in H. O. Tanner, "The Story of an Artist's Life," *World's Work* 18 (June 1909), 11661–66, and 18 (July 1909), 11769–75; Walter Augustus Simon, "Henry O. Tanner—A Study of the Development of an American Negro Artist: 1859–1937," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960; Marcia M. Mathews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Dewey F. Mosby, Darrel Sewell, and Rac Alexander-Minter, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1991); and Marcus Bruce, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002).
3. Tanner, "The Story of an Artist's Life," 11664–65.
4. Mosby, Sewell, and Alexander-Minter, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, 74–75.
5. See, for instance, Julia Rowland Myers, "'Sympathy for Humanity': Robert Wylie and His Paintings of Breton Life," *American Art Journal* 28 (1997), 82–121; and Kathleen Adler, Erica E. Hirshler, and H. Barbara Weinberg, *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery, 2006), 120–22.
6. "'The Angelus' to Go Back," *New York Times*, 1 November 1890, 8.
7. See Julia Rowland Myers, "The American Expatriate Painters of the French Peasantry, 1863–93," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1989.
8. Henry Ossawa Tanner, statement in the files of the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, Philadelphia, quoted in Mosby, Sewell, and Alexander-Minter, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, 116.
9. For Wanamaker's new strategy for appealing to a broad, middle- and upper-class audience of consumers, see William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of the New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), esp. 71–90.
10. As one writer stated in 1882, "The never altering end and aim of a Breton wooden shoemaker's being is to fabricate sabots, and out of this groove he and his never run. Such as the father is such as the son and such, for that matter, is the daughter also. Children, so to speak, are to the manner born of making sabots." "The Wooden Shoe," *Saturday Evening Post* 61 (11 March 1882), 14. See also "French Wooden Shoes," *Living Age* 36 (5 March 1853), 51.
11. "Not an Expert," *Aldine* 8 (1 July 1877), 319.
12. Albert Boime, "Henry Ossawa Tanner's Subversion of Genre," *Art Bulletin* 75 (September 1993), 424–26.
13. Havelock Ellis, for instance, described Bretons as "a blue-eyed people, on the whole rather dark." Ellis, "The Genius of France," *Atlantic Monthly* 75 (January 1895), 73.
14. In particular, Tanner's description of "the Negro's . . . warm, big heart that dwells within such a rough exterior" echoes the way European peasants were typically described in the late nineteenth century. See, for example, Sidney C. Lawrence's description of "the faith, humility, and loving simplicity" of the French peasants painted by Millet. Lawrence, "Religion in Art," *New York Times*, 19 January 1890, 16. Tanner, statement quoted in Mosby, Sewell, and Alexander-Minter, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, 116.
15. Alan C. Braddock, "Painting the World's Christ: Tanner, Hybridity, and the Blood of the Holy Land," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3 (Autumn 2004), 1–27.
16. For a painting of Breton life by Hovenden, see *The Reading Lesson* (1877; private collection), reproduced in Catherine Pugnet, *Peintres Américains en Bretagne, 1864–1914*, exh. cat. (Pont-Aven, France: Musée de Pont-Aven, 1995), 42. Tanner's friend W. S. Scarborough recounted in 1902 that Hovenden had given Tanner "a comprehension of and sympathy with the broader and deeper things of life and art." Scarborough, "Henry Ossian [sic] Tanner," *Southern Workman* 31 (December 1902), 661–70.
17. Sarah Burns, "The Country Boy Goes to the City: Thomas Hovenden's 'Breaking Home Ties' in American Popular Culture," *American Art Journal* 20 (1988), 59–73.
18. Paraphrase of Booker T. Washington's exhortation to African Americans to "cast down your bucket where you are," at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. Louis R. Hurlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 410.
19. Critics described the "sturdy realism" of *Breaking Home Ties* as inartistic and saw its subject as "trite" and "a trifle overwrought." "Popular Successes of the Art Palace," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 October 1893, 35.
20. Images of Breton life, especially Breton sabot makers, were popular as stereographs and postcards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See, for instance, John Mountney Jephson, *Narrative of a Walking Tour in Brittany* (London: Lovell Reeve, 1859).
21. Summer Crane and Susan Lehman, "In Memoriam: Simmons's *The Carpenter's Son* (1888–1996)," *American Art* 14 (Summer 2000), 76–89. The painting was vandalized in 1996 and was believed destroyed, but the missing central section was recovered in 2006; the painting is currently undergoing conservation. Telephone conversation with Linda Fridette, First Unitarian Church, New Bedford, Mass., 5 October 2006.
22. "The Society of American Artists of New York: Fourteenth Exhibition," *Studio* 7 (28 May 1892), 233–34, quoted in Crane and Lehman, "In Memoriam," 88.
23. Matthew Wilson, "The Advent of 'The Nigger': The Careers of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Henry O. Tanner, and Charles W. Chestnut," *American Studies* 43 (2000), 27–30.
24. Scarborough, "Henry Ossian [sic] Tanner," 665.
25. Jennifer J. Harper, "The Early Religious Paintings of Henry Ossawa Tanner: A Study of the Influences of Church, Family, and Era," *American Art* 6 (Fall 1992), 84.

# JOHN HENRY TWACHTMAN (1853–1902)

## *Harbor View Hotel*, 1902

Oil on canvas

30¼ × 30¼ in. (76.8 × 76.8 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-57

PAINTED IN EAST GLOUCESTER, Massachusetts, John Henry Twachtman's *Harbor View Hotel* depicts the environs of the coastal town's famous resort hotel, which appears tucked discreetly behind an elm tree in the distance. Working in a cool palette and a sketchy, delicate style, Twachtman evoked the hotel's seaside atmosphere, saturated with sunlight and moist air. The painter's economical method, which might suggest a state of incompleteness, subsumes much detail and, thus, verges on abstraction. The absence of figures in *Harbor View Hotel*, coupled with the square proportions of the canvas, further enhances its nonnarrative and two-dimensional qualities. Perhaps its most striking formal attribute is the artist's sparse treatment of the foreground causeway, where he applied an extremely thin layer of gray paint over the primed canvas.<sup>1</sup> This technique suggests Twachtman's dual experiences in etching and in pastels, wherein the white of the paper support is exploited to strengthen effects of light.

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, Twachtman was introduced to painting by his father, a German immigrant who decorated window shades with still lifes and landscapes.<sup>2</sup> Forced to leave high school to help support his family, the young Twachtman managed to study at the University of Cincinnati's McMicken School of Design in 1871. Shortly thereafter, he met the artist Frank Duveneck, who persuaded Twachtman to accompany him on a voyage to Bavaria. When they arrived in 1875, Twachtman enrolled in Munich's Royal Academy. Over the next two years, he developed a style characteristic of the academy, marked by heavy impasto and somber color. Returning to the United States in 1878, Twachtman began exhibiting frequently at the Society of American Artists and, the following year, at the National Academy of Design. He later joined fellow artists Childe Hassam (q.v.), Julian Alden Weir, and Edmund C. Tarbell to form the Ten American Painters (the Ten), which staged independent exhibitions in opposition to the practices of both institutions.<sup>3</sup>

In 1880, after having established residence in New York, Twachtman spent four years living, working, and studying in Europe. In 1883 he enrolled in the Académie Julian in Paris. During this time he gravitated toward a lighter palette and became more careful in rendering his subjects. On summer holidays he painted *en plein air* in the Normandy countryside and at Arques-la-Bataille, near Dieppe, along with Hassam, Theodore Robinson (q.v.), and Willard Metcalf.<sup>4</sup> Despite Impressionism's growing popularity at the time and Twachtman's relative success with the

style, he eventually rejected it as unchallenging and superficial. His artistic sensibilities ultimately rebuffed the painterly exuberance of Impressionism in favor of the restrained tonal harmonies of James McNeill Whistler, whose work he would have known through several fellow artists and by attending exhibitions in New York and Paris.<sup>5</sup>

Returning again to the United States in late 1885 or early 1886, Twachtman struggled somewhat to keep his artistic career on track and lamented the fact that America, unlike France, did not support its artists sufficiently. Over the next two years he produced very few canvases, continuously fought bankruptcy, a condition exacerbated by his growing family, and became a heavy drinker. In 1889 Twachtman found steady employment as an instructor at the Art Students League, a position he held to the end of his life. The artist and his family settled in Greenwich, Connecticut, where he cultivated an intimate, almost spiritual relationship with the landscape. One young painter who knew Twachtman recalled that he would often see the artist's solitary figure walking meditatively through the countryside "inhaling nature."<sup>6</sup> The relatively stable, pleasurable conditions in and around Greenwich allowed the painter to produce some of his most highly regarded canvases, particularly snow scenes that earned him special acclaim.

Twachtman spent his last three summers in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he enjoyed, in the words of Lisa Peters, "times of pleasure and exuberant painting."<sup>7</sup> Gloucester had long served as a summer haven for artists, including Fitz Henry Lane (q.v.), Winslow Homer (q.v.), and William Morris Hunt (q.v.).<sup>8</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the Cape Ann town had become a major tourist destination, as evidenced by, among other developments, the new luxury hotel Twachtman depicted in the Nelson-Atkins canvas. The Harbor View Hotel was built between 1896 and 1898 to serve the needs of growing numbers of middle- and upper-middle-class vacationers.<sup>9</sup> As testament to its prominence and popularity, it was featured in period postcards (Fig. 1).

Twachtman seems to have taken clear steps to ensure that his painting not be associated with the reportorial and commercial function of such tourist imagery. His *alla prima* technique, which he revived in Gloucester from his early days in Munich, stands at a far stylistic and conceptual remove from the market-driven realism of the postcard's photograph. Furthermore, his cropping of *Harbor View Hotel* dislodges the hotel from the harbor's larger topography, making the site more dreamlike and ethereal. Even more discreet, his deliberate inclusion of the stand-alone cottage at left, which Twachtman likely used as a personal studio and in which he held painting classes, reveals the deeply personal nature of his subject as well as the artful nature of the painting's creation.





Fig. 1 Leighton and Valentine Co., New York, *Harbor View Hotel, East Gloucester, Mass.*, c. 1912. Postcard, 3½ × 5⅞ in. (8.9 × 13.8 cm). NAMA curatorial files

Twachtman died suddenly of a brain aneurysm in August 1902 in Gloucester, where he was laid to rest. The painter's unexpected death sent shock waves throughout his peer group and prompted moving testimonials. "By the death of John H. Twachtman," opined the painter Thomas Dewing, "the world has lost an artist of the first rank. . . . He is too modern, probably, to be fully recognized or appreciated at present; but his place will be recognized in the future, and he will one day be a 'classic.'"<sup>10</sup> Weir echoed Dewing's lofty praise, adding, "rare as were the qualities which Twachtman possessed, it is hard to think that they remained veiled from the public."<sup>11</sup> Trustees of the newly opened William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, however, were quick to discern the aesthetic and art-historical value of *Harbor View Hotel* in 1933, when the Museum acquired the work from the artist's son, who claimed the canvas was the last on which the painter worked before his death.<sup>12</sup> In Gloucester, too, Twachtman's poetic and enduring vision of American landscape was commemorated, as the town's North Shore Arts Association erected in 1934 an honorific bronze tablet in front of his former studio at Harbor View Hotel.<sup>13</sup>

RRG/MS

## NOTES

1. See Technical Notes for a fuller explanation of Twachtman's technique.
2. Biographical information about Twachtman has been drawn primarily from Richard J. Boyle, *John Twachtman* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1979); Lisa N. Peters, *John Henry Twachtman: An American Impressionist*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1999); and Lisa N. Peters, *John Twachtman (1853–1902): A "Painter's Painter,"* exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2006).
3. For a study of Twachtman in the context of the Ten, see William H. Gerdtz, *Ten American Painters*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1990).
4. For a key study of American artists, including Twachtman, in Brittany and Normandy, see David Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy, 1860–1910*, exh. cat. (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1982).
5. For a study of Whistler's influence, including and beyond Twachtman, see Linda Merrill et al., *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2003).
6. Quoted in John Douglass Hale, "The Life and Creative Development of John H. Twachtman," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1957, 287.
7. Peters, *John Henry Twachtman*, 155. Peters elaborates: "After many years of focusing almost exclusively on the subject matter of his Greenwich property, the picturesque scenery and brilliant light of Gloucester had a liberating effect on Twachtman." *Ibid.*, 157. For a study focusing exclusively on this period in the artist's career, see Lisa N. Peters et al., *Twachtman in Gloucester: His Last Years, 1900–1902*, exh. cat. (New York: Universe Books, 1987).
8. For general surveys of Gloucester and its artists, see James F. O'Gorman, *Portrait of a Place: Some American Landscape Painters in Gloucester* (Gloucester, Mass.: Gloucester 350th Anniversary Celebration, 1973); R.H. Love Galleries, *Gloucester: Views of the Art Colony by American Masters*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Haase-Mumm Pub. Co., 1991); and Lisa N. Peters and Karen Quinn, *Painters of Cape Ann, 1840–1940: One Hundred Years in Gloucester and Rockport*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1996).
9. Information concerning the Harbor View Hotel has been provided by Sarah Dunlap, Gloucester Archives, to Randall R. Griffey, 14 September 2006, NAMA curatorial files. See also the entry for *Harbor View Hotel* in Peters et al., *Twachtman in Gloucester*, 86.
10. T.W. Dewing, Childe Hassam, Robert Reed, Edward Simmons, and J. Alden Weir, "John H. Twachtman: An Estimation," *North American Review* 176 (April 1903), 554. For a brief but critical discussion of Twachtman's "modernity," see Peters, "Conclusion: Twachtman and Modernism," in *John Henry Twachtman: An American Impressionist*, 169–70.
11. Dewing et al., "John H. Twachtman: An Estimation," 561.
12. The designation of *Harbor View Hotel* as Twachtman's last work remains intact. See Peters, *John Henry Twachtman*, 162.
13. "A Twachtman Tablet," *Art Digest* 8 (1 April 1934), 21.

## HORATIO WALKER (1858–1938)

### *Ploughing in Acadia*, 1886

Oil on canvas

44¼ × 65⅜ in. (112.4 × 166.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: Horatio Walker / 1886 —

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert R. Jones, 33-1604

HORATIO WALKER BUILT and sustained a substantial artistic reputation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by painting stirring noble depictions of French-Canadian farmers of the St. Lawrence River valley. The Nelson-Atkins *Ploughing in Acadia* is one of his finest. Born in the English-speaking province of Ontario, Walker associated himself publicly throughout his career with the Quebecois.<sup>1</sup> His father was a Yorkshire immigrant who owned a thriving lumber company in Listowel. Walker demonstrated an early determination to be an artist rather than to work in the family business. As a youth he enjoyed drawing animals, and as a teenager he executed various painting commissions for the local townspeople. In 1873 he was apprenticed to the Toronto photographic firm of Notman and Fraser, where he tinted photographs and learned the rudiments of painting. Much of his knowledge of art was acquired by studying the few paintings available in Toronto galleries. Beginning in the 1870s he resided and painted at least part-time in New York State, initially in Rochester and eventually in New York City. A trip to Europe with fellow artist Henry Ranger in 1882 exposed him to wider range of painting than was available in Canada and upstate New York. The most profound influence on Walker was, as *Ploughing in Acadia* reveals so clearly, the French painter Jean-François Millet, whose heroic portrayals of rural labor influenced a generation of American painters.

By 1885 Walker was firmly established in New York City, where his Millet-inspired portrayals of rural life met with quick success. One of his first marks of distinction involved *Ploughing in Acadia*, which was accepted by the jury of the 1886 Prize Fund Exhibition, an annual show sponsored by the American Art Galleries.<sup>2</sup> He exhibited frequently at the prestigious annual exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and the American Water Color Society, and his works were displayed regularly at and promoted by the Montross Gallery. Walker was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1890 and was elevated to full member the following year. His prizes and awards were numerous. A shower of gold medals—at the 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition, the 1902 Charleston Exposition, the 1904 St. Louis Purchase Exhibition, the 1906 Pennsylvania Academy annual exhibition, and the 1907 Worcester Art Museum annual exhibition—marked the period of Walker's greatest acclaim, although his agrarian-themed work remained widely popular until the artist died in 1938.

*Ploughing in Acadia* exhibits many of the qualities that contributed to Walker's exceptional success. The painting presents two farmers driving a team of three horses plowing an expansive field. The older, bearded man handles the plowshare, while his younger companion brandishes a whip to promote the horses' thrust forward. Much of the composition is filled with the bulk of the horses, which, rendered in rich, dark brown paint, merge to form one powerful, muscular machine. The red-decorated harnesses on the horses' backs not only mark the animals as prized possessions but also enlarge their already imposing silhouettes. Offset in white tones, the tortured facial expression of the beast in the center conveys the physical struggle of the team. Walker's active, layered brushwork effectively conveys the appearance of hard, dense sod filled with knotty weeds through which the horses tear. The painting's bleak emotional content is reinforced by the gray, fading sky, which is truncated abruptly by a horizon accentuated by peach and lavender ribbons of color.

After the initial appearance of *Ploughing in Acadia* in 1886, the painting was rarely exhibited and remained in the personal collection of gallery owner N. E. Montross for many years. Montross included it in his celebrated album, published in 1902, known as "Montross Prints," a group of photographic reproductions of 150 paintings that were often used as illustrations in exhibition catalogues, art books, and articles. *Ploughing in Acadia* was furthermore enthusiastically endorsed by the influential critic Charles H. Caffin, who included it in his popular survey *American Masters of Painting*, in which he lauded the painting and touted Walker as rival to the best Dutch landscapists and Barbizon animal artists.<sup>3</sup>

Walker, like many other painters of his generation, owed his success to the wide-ranging appreciation throughout and beyond the late nineteenth century of Millet's work and, more broadly, the tradition of the Barbizon School, including Théodore Rousseau and Constant Troyon. As Laura L. Meixner has observed, Barbizon painting found critical and commercial success in America for diverse reasons.<sup>4</sup> Introduced and promoted in the 1850s by William Morris Hunt (q.v.), Barbizon painting appeared, by American aesthetic standards at the time, distinctly avant-garde, largely for its unfinished surfaces. However, the popularity of Barbizon art was sustained into the twentieth century by antimodernist sentiment, which encouraged the production of imagery that imagined a preindustrial age in which man presumably lived and worked in close concert with nature and enjoyed the fruits of his labors.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing his subjects primarily from Ile d'Orleans, which was accessible only by ferry until the early twentieth century, Walker portrayed a way of life that seemed to his audiences frozen in time.<sup>6</sup> This disjunction in Walker's canvases between the modern





world and earlier eras was often highlighted by critics of his work. “Partisan of no recent day is the painter of the North,” F. Newlin Price observed in 1923. “He sings of olden times, thatched roofs and bitter pioneer winters.”<sup>7</sup> O.J. Stevenson similarly and even more poetically evoked the nostalgic thrust of the painter’s work: “In our time, when labour has become a huge, highly organized machine, the unspoiled, primitive life depicted by Horatio Walker is fast receding. . . . Walker’s pictures tell a story which is of universal significance, of workers doing the same kind of work, year after year, in the same fields, in accordance with a natural order, and the story is told so powerfully that it is not too much to say of his work that it is an epic of labour.”<sup>8</sup>

When *Ploughing in Acadia* entered the Nelson-Atkins collection in 1933, Walker was still considered a vital and relevant artist, exhibiting and selling work, and judging several notable shows. Among the numerous honors he received late in life was an honorary doctorate from Montreal’s McGill University in 1932.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Walker’s scenes of dignified labor and struggle, rooted in French Barbizon imagery of the 1850s, seemed to resonate deeply with American audiences of the 1930s, when the dire economic conditions of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl prompted a new generation of artists representing a wide range of artistic and political backgrounds to focus anew on themes of labor and struggle.<sup>10</sup> As it circulated in the 1930s, Walker’s peasant imagery, which avoids direct criticism of capitalism, coexisted most comfortably with the backward-looking, epic depictions of rural fortitude and humility produced by such midwestern Regionalists as Thomas Hart Benton (q.v.). Thus, unlike most artists who followed in the Barbizon tradition, Walker lived long enough to connect with a new generation and to see his art form an unexpected bridge between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

RRG/MS

## NOTES

1. Biographical information has been drawn from Dorothy Farr, *Horatio Walker, 1858–1938*, exh. cat. (Kingston, Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen’s University, 1977); and David Karel, *Horatio Walker, 1858–1938*, exh. cat. (Québec City: Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec, 1987), among other, smaller sources.
2. For a history of the American Art Galleries and its Prize Fund Exhibitions, see Gerald D. Bolas, “The Early Years of the American Art Association, 1879–1900,” Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1998, esp. 177–216.
3. See Charles H. Caffin, *American Masters of Painting* (New York: Doubleday, 1902; rev. eds., 1903, 1906, 1918, 1921). Caffin’s discussion of Walker appears on 171–82 in the 1921 edition.
4. Laura L. Meixner has written about Millet’s reception in the United States in a variety of contexts. See *French Realist Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *An International Episode: Millet, Monet and Their North American Counterparts*, exh. cat. (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester Art Museum, 1982); “Popular Criticism of Jean-François Millet in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Art Bulletin* 65 (March 1983), 94–105; and “Jean-François Millet’s *Angelus* in America,” *American Art Journal* 12 (Autumn 1980), 78–84.
5. For a classic study of antimodernist sentiment around the turn of the twentieth century, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
6. As David Karel has explained, Walker loved the island and its people. A defender of the island heritage, Walker exhaustively researched its history, geography, and architecture, and collaborated with such scholars as the Canadian economist James Mavor and the historian Pierre-Georges Roy on their studies of the island’s culture. After 1883 he typically spent summers in Québec City and later on the Ile d’Orleans, and winters in New York City. His paintings were based on years of careful and prolonged observation and detailed drawings. He knew the landscape intimately through frequent travels—as one biographer noted, rather hyperbolically, “there was not a house, a field, a tree, a rock, a flower, a baby which he did not know.” L.A. Richard, quoted in Karel, *Horatio Walker*, 85.
7. F. Newlin Price, “Horatio Walker, the Elemental,” *International Studio* 77 (August 1923), 359–63, at 359. A slightly shorter version of the same essay was reprinted in Price, *Horatio Walker* (New York: Louis Carrier & Company, 1928).
8. O.J. Stevenson, “An Epic of Labor,” in *A People’s Best* (Toronto: Musson Book Company, undated), 21–29, at 25.
9. “McGill Honorary Degrees for Five,” *New York Times*, 27 March 1932, 26. Into the twentieth century, Walker began participating more than before in Canadian art circles. The Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec now owns the largest collection of his works.
10. One clear sign of Walker’s perceived relevance in the 1930s appears in Leila Mechlin, “Farm Art Is Fertile Theme at Women’s Sessions,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 20 June 1936, B3. The article reports on a roundtable discussion on farm subjects in art that was part of a large national conference on the state of farm life in America. The author lavishly praises Walker for his devotion to rural themes.

## JACOB C. WARD (1809–1891)

### *Natural Bridge, Virginia, c. 1835* (*The Natural Bridge*)

Oil on panel

23<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 32<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (60.3 × 81.4 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-4/3

IN 1840 A WRITER for the *New-York Mirror* noted that the landscape painter Jacob C. Ward “has a good knowledge of color; paints with great freedom, and is a devoted admirer of nature. . . . One of his best [productions] is a view of the ‘Natural Bridge’ in Virginia.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Ward’s painting of this popular nineteenth-century tourist attraction reflects the view of the traveler who in 1838 described “the immense sweep of the single arch thrown over this wide and growing gulf, below which and over and upon which trees are growing in masses, and which sustains a solid block of everlasting rock, *fifty feet thick*.”<sup>2</sup> Ward’s painting presents the Natural Bridge as seen from below, a view calculated to convey, in the words of the 1838 visitor, “an idea of its vastness, and the many wonders that its existence, its formation, and its regular mathematical proportions excite in the mind of the contemplative observer.”<sup>3</sup> Ward was no doubt well aware that his antebellum American audience believed that this striking geological formation, nestled deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains, expressed God’s favor toward the young republic.

As early as 1791 Thomas Jefferson, who owned the land on which the bridge rose, wrote to the American painter John Trumbull, urging the artist to visit the site. “Remember you will never be so near it again, and take to yourself and your country the honor of presenting to the world this singular landscape, which otherwise some bungling European will misrepresent.”<sup>4</sup> Although Trumbull failed to heed Jefferson’s advice, many later American artists did paint the Natural Bridge. These included Thomas Sully (q.v.), Frederic Edwin Church (q.v.), David Johnson, Thomas Moran (q.v.), and the folk painter Edward Hicks, who depicted the striking rock formation in several versions of his *Peaceable Kingdom*, where it serves as a symbol both of America and of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s biblical prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

Ward, whose painting of the Natural Bridge was among the first in oil, could hardly have painted the subject at a more opportune time. Although tourists had braved steep, narrow, and sometimes treacherous roads through the mountains for decades to see the bridge, it was in 1833, when Jefferson’s family sold the monument and its surrounding land, that access to the site was greatly improved by the building of a better road and the addition of an inn.<sup>6</sup> Ward’s painting, which was exhibited in 1835 and again in 1838, marked the emergence of the Natural Bridge as a major American tourist attraction.

Born in Bloomfield, New Jersey, in 1809, Ward was the son of the painter and engraver Caleb Ward. Jacob Ward established his artistic career in New York City about 1829, exhibiting at the National Academy of Design, the American Academy of the Fine Arts, the Apollo Association, and the American Art-Union between 1829 and 1852. In 1832 Ward was listed as a patron of the American Academy; he served as a member of the board of directors from 1833 to 1836.<sup>7</sup> By 1832 Ward was listed as again living in Bloomfield, but he continued to exhibit his landscapes at the National Academy until 1849. In 1845 Ward and his brother Charles V. Ward embarked on a three-year expedition to Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Panama, Jamaica, and Cuba, where they worked as itinerant daguerreotypists.<sup>8</sup> Ward also completed numerous sketches of the South American landscape that he later made into paintings. In 1848 Ward returned to his family home in Bloomfield, where he continued to paint and attended to the family carriage business until his death in 1891.

From early in his career, Ward cultivated a popular audience by painting themes with broad appeal and seeking out engravers to reproduce his work. He made a specialty of American landscapes with nationalist and historical associations. These included a view of the site in Weehawken, New Jersey, of the infamous duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton—a scene later engraved by the artist’s father—and a painting of the spot near Fort Edward, New York, where Jane McCrea was killed by Algonquin Indians in 1777.<sup>9</sup> By 1835 the Natural Bridge was similarly steeped in nationalist folklore. In addition to having once been owned by Jefferson, it had been cited by generations of European and American travelers as proof that one could find in America natural wonders comparable to—if not better than—those of any European nation. One popular nationalistic anecdote explained the metaphoric significance of several dark stains on the interior of the arch that resemble a spread eagle and a lion:

Strange it is that the spread eagle, the national emblem of our country, with the lion of England under its wing, should be supporting, as it were, this most stupendous of nature’s arches! What does it mean? Surely it would seem as if the hand of the Divinity had imprinted on tables of stone this emblem of our country’s independence and future supremacy.<sup>10</sup>

Early travelers’ reception and subsequent descriptions of the Natural Bridge were also influenced by the eighteenth-century aesthetic theory of the sublime.<sup>11</sup> Jefferson, for instance, wrote of the vertiginous view from the top of the bridge:



You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet, and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute, gave one a violent headach. If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme. It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here; so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing as it were to heaven: the rapture of the spectator is really endiscribable!<sup>12</sup>

Some painters of the site similarly emphasized the bridge's sublimity. Church, for instance, enhanced the soaring height of the bridge by painting it on a narrow, vertical canvas in *The Natural Bridge, Virginia* (1852; Bayly Art Museum, Charlottesville, Va.). He also cast the lower part of the monument in deep shadow and added two tiny figures at its base. While a black man points upward at the soaring bridge above, a well-dressed white woman kneels and looks up in an attitude that suggests both awe and religious devotion.

Ward, by contrast, painted the Natural Bridge on a horizontal canvas, a view that conveys the breadth as well as the height of the scene. His depiction of the site conforms more closely to the aesthetic category of the picturesque, a mode of landscape representation that gained popularity in the United States in tandem with the rise of domestic tourism.<sup>13</sup> In Ward's *Natural Bridge, Virginia*, the irregular landscape forms, juxtaposition of rough and smooth textures, and rhythmic play of light and shadow across the scene are all hallmarks of the picturesque aesthetic. While the central, towering rock formation and the turbulent, cloudy sky inspire wonder, the viewer contemplates the scene from a safe vantage point near the banks of Cedar Creek. Although Ward avoided any overt reference to tourism in his painting, his point of view corresponds to the position of a viewing platform erected later in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The forest and the rocky outcrop that sweep upward at the left and right sides of the canvas are wild but not threatening. They serve, rather, to frame the central motif while lending drama to the scene.

As Angela Miller has argued, the ability to appreciate landscapes aesthetically, and to understand them in symbolic terms, was an important marker of middle-class status in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Grant Thorburn, who likely purchased *Natural Bridge, Virginia* during its 1838 exhibition at the Apollo Gallery in New York, was deeply invested in this relation between landscape and class identity. In addition to being a popular writer and well-known New York personality, he was the first large-scale merchant of flowers and flower seeds in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Like tourism, gardening was symbiotically linked to the picturesque aesthetic in the decades before the Civil War.

In 1835 Ward's *Natural Bridge, Virginia* was engraved by William James Bennett and published by the frame maker and art dealer Lewis P. Clover of New York, who owned the painting at that time.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Ward, Bennett included several well-dressed figures, presumably tourists, in his depiction of the bridge. When

Currier and Ives pirated the composition from Bennett's print in the 1860s, they replaced these tourists with a lone fisherman.<sup>18</sup> In both print versions, the figures serve as stand-ins for the viewer, defining his or her recreational relationship to the depicted scenery. Confronted with Ward's painting, in contrast, the viewer is left alone and undisturbed before a great natural wonder that evoked both the beauty of the American landscape and the blessing of God on it. As a poet wrote in 1834, the Natural Bridge called to mind "the fruits of Freedom's favored clime. . . . For thee has nature thrown, o'er the wild stream a curb of stone, whose pendant arch in verdure dress'd, binds the tall mountain's cloven crest."<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Our Landscape Painters," *New-York Mirror*, 25 July 1840, 38.
2. "Journal of a Trip to the Mountains, Caves, and Springs of Virginia, Chapter VII–VIII," *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (August 1838), 517.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Quoted in Julian Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), 19:298.
5. See, for instance, Hicks's *Peaceable Kingdom* (1822–25; Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Mass.). In this painting, and at least five others, Hicks incorporated an image of the Natural Bridge, seemingly copied from an 1822 map of North America engraved by Henry S. Turner. See Carolyn J. Weekley, *The Kingdoms of Edward Hicks*, exh. cat. (Williamsburg, Va.: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, 1999), 94–99, 136, 140.
6. For a history of the Natural Bridge, see James C. Kelly and William M. S. Rasmussen, *The Virginia Landscape: A Cultural History* (Charlottesville, Va.: Howell Press, 2000), 11–14, 70–77.
7. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of the Fine Arts and American Art-Union, 1816–1852* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 1:78.
8. Ward noted in a letter that they could produce up to eight daguerreotypes a day, selling them for about eight dollars apiece. Joseph F. Folsom, "Jacob C. Ward—One of the Old-time Landscape Painters," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 3 (1918), 91.
9. References to these paintings, which are now unlocated, can be found in John Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1844), 234; and T. B. Thorpe, "New-York Artists Fifty Years Ago," *Appleton's Journal* 7 (25 May 1872), 573.
10. Caroline Gilman, *The Poetry of Travelling in the United States* (New York: S. Colman, 1838), 360.
11. Kelly and Rasmussen, *The Virginia Landscape*, 11–14. For an explanation of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque, see Walter J. Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957). For a discussion of the influence of English aesthetics on American painting in the nineteenth century, see *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque: British Influences on American Landscape Painting*, exh. cat. (St. Louis: Washington University Gallery of Art, 1984).
12. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Baltimore: privately printed, 1800), 24.
13. See Kenneth John Myers, "Selling the Sublime: The Catskills and the Social Construction of the Landscape Experience in the United States, 1776–1876," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1990, 185–223; and Kevin J. Avery, "Selling the Sublime and the Beautiful: New York Landscape Painting and Tourism," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 109–33, esp. 110–12.
14. See Katherine Loomis Parsons, "The Natural Bridge of Virginia," *New England Magazine* 10 (July 1891), 590.
15. Angela Miller, "Landscape Taste as an Indicator of Class Identity in Antebellum America," in *Art and Bourgeois Society, 1790–1850*, ed. Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344.
16. See "Days Long Past Recalled," *New York Times*, 28 December 1886, 2. Grant Thorburn later published a humorous history of Virginia. See Thorburn, *Laurie Todd's Notes on Virginia: With a Chapter on Puritans, Witches, and Friends* (New York: privately printed, 1848).
17. For Clover's art dealing, see Sidney Rose, "New York's First Art Center," *American Artist* 20 (February 1956), 60–62; and Thorpe, "New-York Artists Fifty Years Ago," 572–73. In an advertisement of 1837, Bennett's *Natural Bridge* was listed for sale for five dollars, while a view of Niagara cost four dollars. See I. N. Phelps Stokes and Daniel C. Haskell, *American Historical Prints, Early Views of American Cities, etc. from the Phelps Stokes and Other Collections* (New York: New York Public Library, 1932), 121. Clover's address label as well as a broadside of Thomas Jefferson's "Description of the View" (discussed above) are attached to the verso of Ward's painting.
18. Kelly and Rasmussen, *The Virginia Landscape*, 74.
19. "The Genius of Columbia to Her Native Muse," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (2 October 1834), 51.

## MAX WEBER (1881–1961)

### *Latest News*, 1941

Oil on canvas

23¼ × 28¼ in. (59.1 × 71.8 cm)

Signed lower right: MAX WEBER

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha through the Friends of Art, 45-19

ONE OF THE PIONEERS of modern art in America, Max Weber had a lengthy and prolific career that incorporated many different styles and subjects. Technically versatile and accomplished, he worked in oil, tempera, gouache, pastel, woodcut, and lithography, as well as making sculptures in plaster and bronze. Weber was also interested in art education, functioning as a frequent teacher and essayist. The confluence of Weber's talent, fame, and longevity was such that he was widely regarded as the most esteemed modern "old master" in the country at the time of his death.

Weber was born in Bialystok, Russia, and at the age of ten immigrated with his family to the United States, settling in Brooklyn, New York.<sup>1</sup> As a young boy, his artistic interests were occasionally discouraged by members of his Orthodox Jewish family who disapproved of them on religious grounds. He decided to pursue a career in art nonetheless. The teenaged Weber studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn under Arthur Wesley Dow, a progressive teacher who encouraged his students to examine Japanese prints in order to develop spatial strategies other than the illusionistic approaches favored in Western cultures since the Renaissance. Beginning in 1905 Weber spent four years in Paris, where he received something of a dual education. His enrollment in various art academies provided him with traditional instruction, but he was also exposed to avant-garde ideas and techniques while taking a class in the atelier of the Fauve painter Henri Matisse. In addition, Weber befriended Pablo Picasso and witnessed the development of Cubism, which would become the most important stylistic influence on his art not long after the American's return to the United States in 1909.

Back in New York, Weber's Cubist-inspired work caught the eye of the patron and photographer Alfred Stieglitz, the most important champion of avant-garde art in America during the early decades of the twentieth century. Weber exhibited at Stieglitz's 291 gallery, joining the ranks of other early innovative American modernists, such as Marsden Hartley (q.v.) and Arthur Dove (q.v.). At the time, the art establishment routinely greeted Weber's Cubist paintings with acerbic derision, a far cry from the laudatory reviews he would receive later.<sup>2</sup>

Weber's art changed drastically during the late 1910s, when he initiated a style focused on the figure and recognizable forms. In addition to producing female nudes and genre scenes, the artist

inaugurated a series of Jewish subjects on which he worked periodically over the next thirty years. In 1930, despite receiving only sporadic acclaim for his work, Weber was honored with a retrospective exhibition at the recently opened Museum of Modern Art, the first show the museum awarded a living American artist.<sup>3</sup>

During the Great Depression, as Weber became increasingly involved in socialist causes, he created a number of works depicting laborers.<sup>4</sup> Weber's style became freer and more expressive during the late 1930s, and many of his forms are outlined in thin black skeins of paint that suggest movement or anxious states of being. Weber's labor subjects decreased in frequency in the wake of World War II, and during the final years of his career he painted a number of still lifes and landscapes, sometimes incorporating elements of geometric abstraction.

Painted in 1941, *Latest News* depicts a group of factory workers spending their lunch hour reading newspapers.<sup>5</sup> The painting combines Weber's interest in the worker with one of his own favorite pastimes, for throughout his adult life the artist kept dutifully abreast of current events by reading several newspapers and magazines in various languages.<sup>6</sup> It reprises a subject Weber had explored two years earlier in *Worker's Reading Room* (Fig. 1), although in the 1941 rendition Weber reduced the number of figures from seven to four and removed most details of the room. Because of their reduced numbers, the men in *Latest News* appear more monumental, as the artist increased their proportions relative to the space they inhabit.

The Nelson-Atkins painting retains influences from Weber's early exposure to European modernism, specifically the patches of Fauvist color and the multiple perspectival systems derived from Cubism. Weber executed the painting in thin washes of oil paint diluted with turpentine. Some passages are so thin that the paint approximates watercolor, and in some areas the painting's ground shows through. This effect offers an indirect homage to the sculptor Auguste Rodin, whose graphite and watercolor sketches Weber likely saw during his time in Paris, where he also met the renowned artist.<sup>7</sup> Weber's animated lines in *Latest News* create heightened compositional activity and emotional intensity; in fact, one contemporary critic noted that the newspapers looked as if they were "about to fly away."<sup>8</sup> Given the sense of urgency conveyed by the painter's calligraphic brush marks, one might safely assume that the news the workers are shown anxiously absorbing pertains to World War II, which the United States would enter at year's end.

Weber's critical and popular success exploded in the 1940s, and the artist won prizes in most of the decade's major group exhibitions. He began holding a series of annual exhibitions at Paul Rosenberg & Co., New York, which also represented Picasso and







Fig. 1 Max Weber, *Worker's Reading Room*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 20¼ × 28¼ in. (51.4 × 71.8 cm). Private collection

Matisse. In 1945, the year the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts acquired *Latest News*, the artist was named by *LIFE* magazine “the greatest living artist in America, and one of the few really great ones in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Biographical information on Max Weber has been taken mainly from Lloyd Goodrich, *Max Weber: Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1949); Alfred Werner, *Max Weber* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975); and Percy North, *Max Weber: American Modern*, exh. cat. (New York: Jewish Museum, 1982).
2. Since the late 1970s Weber's artistic reputation has rested primarily on his series of Cubist-influenced paintings. For an extensive analysis of these works, see Percy North, *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade, 1910–1920*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1992).
3. Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Max Weber, Retrospective Exhibition, 1907–1930*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1930), reprinted in Museum of Modern Art, *Three American Modernist Painters* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).
4. In a speech delivered in 1937 to the American Artists Congress, a leftist artists' group he served as national chair, Weber revealed the importance he attached to this current interest: “I would suggest to the artist and student to take time off from the life-class and go out among the people who toil in the mills and shops, go to scenes of bridge construction, foundries, excavation. There he will find the energy and heroism of those who create the wealth and wonder of modern times. Let the student look upon the artisan and mechanic as did the Greeks upon their gladiators, discus throwers and wrestlers.” Quoted in Werner, *Max Weber*, 65.
5. The painting's iconography is discussed in Alexander Eliot, *Three Hundred Years of American Painting* (New York: Time, 1957), 183. Eliot, who researched the contemporary portion of his book by interviewing the
6. Werner, *Max Weber*, 23.
7. This infrequently cited, yet important influence was acknowledged by Weber in Max Weber, “A Letter from Weber,” *Walker Center Edition of the Magazine of Art* 2 (November 1946), [1]. It is also possible that Weber knew Rodin's drawings through the activities of Alfred Stieglitz, who showed the sculptor's sketches in his gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue in 1908 and 1910. Since Weber was in Paris for much of 1908, he more likely saw Rodin's work at Stieglitz's gallery in 1910, by which time the American painter had returned to New York. On Stieglitz's exhibitions of Rodin's drawings, see Anne McCauley, “Auguste Rodin, 1908 and 1910: The Eternal Feminine,” in Sarah Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 71–81.
8. Doris Brian, “E Pluribus Weber,” *Art News* 40 (15–28 February 1941), 38. The flight metaphor also surfaced in the writings of another commentator who noted the “albatross-like” newspapers: Eliot, *Three Hundred Years of American Painting*, 183.
9. Winthrop Sargeant, “Max Weber,” *LIFE*, 20 May 1945, 84.

## BENJAMIN WEST (1738–1820)

### *Mr. and Mrs. John Custance, 1778*

#### *(A Gentleman and Lady, Painted in Commemoration of Their Marriage)*

Oil on canvas

60¼ × 84⅝ in. (153 × 214.9 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: B. West 1778

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 34–77

BENJAMIN WEST WAS BORN in rural Pennsylvania near Philadelphia, where, before he was twenty, he met several itinerant artists including William Williams, a British-born portrait painter.<sup>1</sup> Under the influence of Williams, West began painting portraits and even a few rather crude but promising historical scenes and landscapes. With high hopes and aspirations, he left America in 1760 to seek artistic training in Italy, the first American-born artist to do so. He spent the next three years in Rome, during which time he met many of the leading artists of the day, notably the Neoclassicists Anton Raphael Mengs and Gavin Hamilton. From them, West learned to appreciate the old masters, specifically Raphael, Correggio, and Titian, whose work would play important roles in the development of his style. West's abilities grew, and he soon received the attention of several socially and politically significant clients. Encouraged, he went to England in 1763.

Initially, West intended that his visit to England be simply a stop on his way back to America, but his new connections, as well as the success of several paintings he exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts shortly after his arrival in the city, prompted him to stay. Over the next five years, he established himself as a leading proponent of the Neoclassical style in England and was soon recognized as Europe's premier history painter. His new status brought him to the attention of King George III, who gave West the first of many royal commissions in 1768. Between that year and 1801, West painted sixty pictures for the king, including decorative projects for the state rooms and for St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. Throughout his career, portraiture was an important part of West's oeuvre.

The elaborate and compositionally complicated double portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John Custance is fully within the tradition of grand manner portraiture, which had developed during the Baroque period. Indeed, it displays most of the attributes of that international style: billowing drapery, massive columns and other classical references, relaxed figures, and a distant view of a Romantically lit sky. It is also one of several portraits West painted during the 1770s that imbue what might otherwise be simple, possibly even boring, likenesses with historic or allegorical meaning. In his *Mrs. Worrell as Hebe* (c. 1770; Tate Gallery, London), for instance, he presented a rather ordinary-looking young woman in

the guise of the cupbearer of the Olympian gods, offering nectar in a golden bowl to the eagle of Zeus.

The great contemporary proponent of this method of combining genres was Sir Joshua Reynolds, as can be seen in his *Lady Sarah Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces* (c. 1764; Art Institute of Chicago) and *The Montgomery Sisters: Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen* (1773; Tate Gallery, London), among others.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely that West was aware of both pictures—the first was shown at the Society of Artists in London in 1765 and the second at the Royal Academy in 1774.<sup>3</sup> As Marcia Pointon has argued, such allegorical portraits served two purposes in late-eighteenth-century England. They counteracted a perceived debasement of modern portraiture by associating portrait painting with history painting, and they allowed for levels of eroticism and excess that would have been unthinkable in more straightforward presentations of respectable, upper-class subjects.<sup>4</sup>

The subjects of the Nelson-Atkins portrait, John Custance (1749–1822) and Frances Beauchamp-Proctor (d. 1836), were members of two related families of Norwich, England. He was a gentleman-farmer, the resident of Weston House; she was the sister of the premier baronet of England, Sir Thomas Beauchamp-Proctor of Langley Park. The same year that he painted the Custances' portrait, West also painted Sir Thomas's wife, *Lady Beauchamp-Proctor* (1778; Tate Gallery, London) in allegorical guise, as a vestal adorning a term of Hymen in the manner of Reynolds's *Montgomery Sisters*. The smoldering brazier before which Lady Beauchamp-Proctor stands in this portrait is identical to the one that appears in *Mr. and Mrs. John Custance*, suggesting that it was one of West's studio props.

The Nelson-Atkins portrait evidently celebrates the marriage of John and Frances Custance.<sup>5</sup> It is rife with symbols appropriate to such an event. The most conspicuous of these is the figure of Hymen, the god of marriage, who dominates the left side of the canvas. West may have borrowed the idea of including Hymen from Reynolds's portrait of the Montgomery sisters, but his interpretation of the figure is quite different from that of Reynolds, or from his own contemporary depiction of Hymen in the portrait of Lady Beauchamp-Proctor. In *Mr. and Mrs. John Custance*, West imagines Hymen not as a sculpture but as an active participant in the proceedings, fully integrated, both physically and psychologically, into the group. Although West's stylistic interpretation of the figure was probably inspired by classical sculpture, the artist has breathed life into Hymen, transforming the deity into a living, earthly presence.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, given the body language of both Hymen and John Custance, the god is obviously on friendly terms with the mortal. Custance, relaxed with one leg crossed over the



other, leans on the god for support, suggesting familiarity and a modicum of dependency. In *Mr. and Mrs. John Custance*, where the newly married pair relates to one another in a formal and dignified way, the figure of Hymen adds a suggestion of intimacy and eroticism.<sup>7</sup>

Frances Custance has her own companion in the form of a putto or Cupid who seems to have just unveiled her, pulling a swath of drapery up and away from her face, similar in a way to the manner in which Hymen inexplicably fingers a fold of Mr. Custance's robe. Mrs. Custance appears to be either curtsying to her husband or stepping up to offer him her hand, although—oddly, given what they are doing—neither looks directly at the other. Instead, both figures stare off into empty space. Perhaps this is meant to imply a momentary action or, on a higher plane, the mystery and holiness of the sacred sacrament in which they are partaking. Or, it may simply be the result of the Custances having posed separately for West, after which he integrated—or not—the two individuals into what he hoped would be a final, harmonious composition.

West likely intended the somewhat stiff, formal attitudes of Mr. and Mrs. Custance to convey the sanctity and gravity of their nuptials. However, in a period when the popularity of affectionate, companionate marriage portraits was on the rise, their seeming coldness was off-putting to many viewers.<sup>8</sup> The portrait was not particularly well received when it was shown at the Royal Academy in 1779. One critic, writing for *Budget or Weekly Miscellany*, thought that, while Mr. Custance appeared to be in glowing health, Mrs. Custance “looks as if taken out of a tomb where she had been deposited by mistake, and where she had stiffened and grown cold.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, Mrs. Custance's attitude, Hymen's expression, and the presence of another small, winged figure at the far left suggest another interpretation of the work. Hymen is coy: he smiles, bows his head, and gives the foolish mortals a benevolent but knowing sidelong glance. He is attended by an impish figure who holds the instruments of the god's worship, the symbolic torch of marriage, interlocked with the god's bent arm, and a brazier or portable altar, which smokes as though ready for sacrifice. The manner in which the altar is being carried into the scene and the fact that the somewhat catatonic Frances, guided by her soon-to-be husband, steps toward it may imply that she herself is the sacrifice, about to be offered on the altar of love. If this is the case, it is no wonder that Hymen smiles.

DBD/LL

## NOTES

1. The bibliography for Benjamin West is extensive. Among the most useful works are Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978); Dorinda Evans, *Benjamin West and His American Students*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1980); Ann Ulry Abrams, *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985); Jenny Mayfield Carson, “Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West,” Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2000; and Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). The last is the definitive catalogue of the artist's oeuvre.
2. This connection has been noted by others, including Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 30–31. See also Edgar Peters Bowron, “Benjamin West's *Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John Custance*: A Note on Its Sources and Context,” typescript, 1979, NAMA curatorial files, which is the most thorough analysis of the painting to date.
3. Nicholas Penny, ed., *Reynolds*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 225, 261.
4. Marcia Pointon, “Graces, Bacchantes and ‘Plain Folks’: Order and Excess in Reynolds's Female Portraits,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17 (Spring 1994), 1–26.
5. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 499–500, note that no record of the Custance marriage has been located. When the painting was shown at the Royal Academy in 1778, the catalogue of the exhibition stated that it was “painted in commemoration of their marriage.”
6. Bowron, “Benjamin West's *Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John Custance*,” 7, suggests that West's Hymen was based on the second-century sculpture that he calls *Antinous as Hermes*. West certainly would have had access to the marble since it was in the collection of Cardinal Albani in Rome, a collection with which West was familiar. See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 143–44.
7. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau has pointed out, the ephebic youths who frequently appear in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Neoclassical paintings served as signifiers of beauty and timeless classical values, while at the same time heightening the eroticism of these images. Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 98–175.
8. For the popularity of intimate marriage portraits in the late eighteenth century, see Margaret Ann Hammi, “The Marriage Portrait in Eighteenth-Century England,” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1996, esp. 182–217; and Kate Retford, “Sensibility and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century Family Portrait: The Collection at Kedleston Hall,” *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 533–60.
9. “Exhibition,” *Budget or Weekly Miscellany*, [1779], clipping, NAMA curatorial files. We would like to thank Andrew W. Potter, Research Assistant, Royal Academy of Arts, for providing this reference.

## BENJAMIN WEST (1738–1820)

### *Raphael West and Benjamin West Jr., Sons of the Artist, c. 1796* (Portrait of Two Brothers)

Oil on canvas

36¼ × 29⅝ in. (92.1 × 74.4 cm)

Gift of the Laura Nelson Kirkwood Residuary Trust, 44–41/1

IN 1772 BENJAMIN WEST was made the official Historical Painter to King George III, and in 1792 he was elected president of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, succeeding that organization's revered first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds. By that time, West was considered—and, one assumes, considered himself—a thoroughly British artist. But he never forgot his homeland. During the American Revolution, he was able to tread lightly enough around George III to avoid serious conflicts, and West was always affable to and supportive of visiting American artists. In fact, most of the leading American artists of the Federal period, including Charles Willson Peale (q.v.), Gilbert Stuart (q.v.), and John Trumbull, were proud to announce themselves as having been pupils of Benjamin West.

While West's fame depended on his adeptness at history painting, he was also well known as a portraitist, a role in which he excelled. A majority of artists in the late eighteenth and for most of the nineteenth centuries painted portraits primarily for financial reasons, and certainly West was no different in this. However, the fact that he painted so many pictures of himself and of members of his family, alone or in groups, suggests that he also enjoyed creating them. As a rule, such personal images, especially self-portraits, would have been painted without commission and with little or no thought of profit.

West began producing portraits of his family in the second half of the 1760s, when he painted his father (c. 1764–70; Library of the Society of Friends, London) and a double portrait of his wife and son Raphael (before 1770; Collection of the Marquess of Lothian, Great Britain).<sup>1</sup> Slightly later, about 1772, he painted the most elaborate of these familial groups—a portrait that pictures West's wife, Elizabeth, their sons Raphael and Benjamin, the painter's half brother Thomas, their father John, and the artist himself (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven). In addition, at least ten self-portraits are known, including one in which the artist appears with his son Raphael. Several others pair Mrs. West with sons Raphael or Benjamin Jr. at various stages of childhood; these are rendered in imitation of images of the Madonna and Child.

West's sons appear alone together in at least three portraits.<sup>2</sup> One of these, painted in 1775 (private collection), shows Raphael as a handsome boy of nine and Benjamin Jr. as a chubby, naked toddler.<sup>3</sup> In a garden setting, beneath a swag of red drapery, the two boys play with a black spaniel puppy under the watchful eyes

of the mother dog. As Benjamin Jr. leans toward him, Raphael reaches around his baby brother with one arm, simultaneously supporting him and offering him the puppy. Like his student Peale, West admired the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas about "natural education." In his portrait of his young sons, he not only emphasized the importance of carefree play in an outdoor setting, but he also presented Raphael and Benjamin Jr. as angelic innocents whose tender interaction with one another reflects a new, widespread, sentimental understanding of domestic life.<sup>4</sup> In the Nelson-Atkins double portrait of Raphael and Benjamin West Jr., the brothers appear as sober, fashionable young men of about thirty and twenty-four, respectively. Although they have shed the carefree innocence of childhood, their affection for one another is undiminished, and Benjamin Jr. continues to lean on his older brother.

Little is known about the lives of the two West brothers, and in fact, there seems to be little to tell, especially when compared with the adventurous life of their illustrious father. The hopes that Benjamin West had for his boys are reflected in the names he gave them, but it appears that his own actions interfered with these dreams. His wife implied that her husband's leniency caused both sons to grow up spoiled and that their father gave them little incentive to dedicate themselves to work or to contribute to the financial well-being of the family.<sup>5</sup> Some drawings attributed to Benjamin West Jr. (1772–1848) have survived, suggesting that he may have at least dabbled in art, but there is no indication that he ever had pretensions of becoming a professional artist.<sup>6</sup> However, his ambitions did lead him to cash in on his father's legacy in an unusual way: having inherited his father's monumental *Christ Rejected* (1814; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia), Benjamin Jr. took it on a lucrative tour of the United States in 1829.<sup>7</sup>

Raphael Lamar West (1766–1850), the elder son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Shewell West, was born and educated in London. He spent most of his youth serving as his father's apprentice.<sup>8</sup> Judging by a small group of his surviving drawings, the young man possessed a certain amount of artistic talent, but evidently not enough to allow him to overcome his father's formidable domination and make a name for himself.<sup>9</sup> William Dunlap noted Raphael's abilities as a draftsman but had to admit that Raphael "did not apply himself with the necessary industry to painting which ensures success." In Raphael's defense, however, Dunlap noted that the younger man "seems to have been discouraged by the overshadowing merit and fame of his father."<sup>10</sup> Following his father's death, Raphael squandered the sizable estate that the elder man had bequeathed to him. His last opportunity for any success occurred



in 1800, when he briefly visited the United States to manage some of his father's remaining property there. But the venture failed, and he soon returned to England "in disgust."<sup>11</sup>

The elder West's devotion to the art of the past, notably of the Renaissance, is evident from his decision to name his older son Raphael. This admiration can also be seen in his use of the so-called Venetian Secret to create a number of paintings in the 1790s, including both the Nelson-Atkins portrait of his sons and *Venus Comforting Cupid* (q.v.).<sup>12</sup> This technique for mixing and applying paint was purportedly discovered by the father-daughter team of Thomas and Mary Ann Provis, who claimed to have found it among a group of inherited sixteenth-century documents. Subsequently, and conveniently, the documents disappeared, and the Provises' claim was revealed, in 1797, to be a hoax. Before this date, however, West used their method in hopes of replicating the tints and tonalities of the Venetian masters, specifically Titian. Aspects of *Raphael and Benjamin West Jr., Sons of the Artist*, such as its overall darkness and the purple tinges seen in the shadows, probably result from West's use of this technique; however, the current state of the painting makes this difficult to confirm.

Despite West's fascination with the past, *Raphael and Benjamin West Jr., Sons of the Artist* is, in its style and content, very much a painting of its time. The portrait shows the brothers tightly grouped in a vertical format. They are dressed in expensive and fashionable suits, and Raphael is depicted with his right hand tucked into his waistcoat, a stance that suggested polite deportment and good breeding in the late eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Benjamin's right arm is draped over Raphael's shoulder in a gesture of brotherly love or at least familiarity. The dark shadows behind them and the moonlight seen through clouds at upper right set a melancholic mood. Each man's intent gaze, which is directed out of the canvas and to the viewer's right, implies the presence of an unseen person or object that demands attention. The momentary nature of the gazes, the relaxed gesture, and the dramatic lighting are distinctly Romantic qualities, showing the influence of such contemporary artists as Henry Fuseli.<sup>14</sup> West defined his sons' clothing with rather loose brushstrokes while rendering their faces and hands with a much sharper linearity. This duality, by which the styles of the Baroque and the Neoclassical join to create a new Romanticism, underscores West's role as a leading artist of his day.

DBD/LL

## NOTES

1. See the chapter on West's portraits of himself and his family in Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 450–62.
2. *Ibid.*, 459–60.
3. This painting is reproduced and discussed in Arlene Katz Nichols, *Likenesses and Landscapes: A Portrait of the Eighteenth Century*, exh. cat. (New York: Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 2002), 71–72.
4. See Parme P. Giuntini, "The Politics of Display: Family Portraits, the Royal Academy and Modern Domestic Ideology," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995; James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830*, exh. cat. (Berkeley, Calif.: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1995); and Kate Retford, "Sensibility and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century Family Portrait: The Collection at Kedelston Hall," *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 533–60.
5. Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), quoted in Ruth S. Kraemer, *Drawings by Benjamin West and His Son Raphael Lamar West* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1975), 87.
6. See Kraemer, *Drawings by Benjamin West and His Son Raphael Lamar West*, 98–101.
7. William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834; New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 2:148.
8. *Ibid.*, 2:145.
9. See Kraemer, *Drawings by Benjamin West and His Son Raphael Lamar West*, 87–104. For Raphael West's participation in the workings of his father's studio, see Jenny Mayfield Carson, "Art Theory and Production in the Studio of Benjamin West," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2000, 103–4.
10. Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 2:146.
11. *Ibid.*, 2:147.
12. The relationship between these works and the Venetian Secret was mentioned by West's fellow Royal Academician Joseph Farington, in diary entries made in November and December 1796 and January 1797. Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*. A modern summary of West's involvement with the Venetian Secret is John Gage, "Magilphs and Mysteries," *Apollo* 80 (1964), 38–41. Gage says that the recipe for "Titian's Shade" called for equal quantities of lake, indigo, and Hungarian (Prussian) or Antwerp blue, mixed with ivory black. Also see Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 226–29; and Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 134–35.
13. Arline Miller, "Re-Dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth-Century 'Hand-in-Waistcoat' Portrait," *Art Bulletin* 77 (March 1995), 45–64.
14. See Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 223–24.

## NEWELL CONVERS WYETH (1882–1945)

### *Illustration for “Drums,”* c. 1928

Oil on canvas

26½ × 40½ in. (67.3 × 101.9 cm)

Signed upper right: N. C. Wyeth/W

Gift of Sarah and Landon Rowland, 2006.6

N. C. WYETH'S ENDPAPER ILLUSTRATION for James Boyd's novel *Drums* is a celebration and a defense of reading. This is true in ways that are both clear and obscure. Wyeth was the most talented American illustrator, making pictures to accompany books and magazine articles during a long career that lasted from his early days training with the great illustrator Howard Pyle in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, until his death in 1945. Wyeth is especially remembered for his work on the Charles Scribner's series of classic literature. Boyd's novel, in the Scribner's edition of 1928, was only the latest in a line of volumes Wyeth had illustrated for the New York publisher. By then, working in his Chadds Ford studio in the Brandywine River valley, where he had settled with his wife and children (including Andrew, born in 1917), N. C. had made memorable illustrations for the Scribner's editions of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1911), *Kidnapped* (1913), and *Black Arrow* (1916), Paul Creswick's *Robin Hood* (1917), and James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1919), among others. It made sense that this artist so accustomed to making pictures for books—such an avid reader himself, too—would sometimes touch on the importance of books and reading in his illustrations, even when they do not explicitly show a book. The endpaper painting for *Drums*, Boyd's novel set in North Carolina during the American Revolution, is one such occasion.

Endpapers are, of course, what you see first when you open a book. They set the stage for what is to follow, announcing that you are entering another world. Wyeth made the Nelson-Atkins painting expressly for the endpapers to *Drums*. In the upper right corner he experimented with his signature, first painting “N. C. WYETH” before blotting it out and replacing it with a “W” monogram, perhaps because he knew this was the spot where the book's owner might sign his name.<sup>1</sup> Here he represents the owner's experience of opening the book as the entrance into a forest. The setting is appropriate for Boyd's tale of young Johnny Fraser joining a band of frontier colonials to fight the British,<sup>2</sup> but it is still more appropriate for the reader. With the opening of the book we enter the depths of the woods, moving through the portal of the two thickest trees back into the past and more especially into the special realm—the inward, enclosed space—demanded by the act of reading itself.

Wyeth was fond of these transitions back in time, via the imagination. In a letter to Boyd written in 1927, when he was visiting

the town of Edenton, North Carolina, researching the place where the action in *Drums* unfolds, he described the way he could hear, even in the late-night silence, “the echoes of the past.” He noted that Boyd had made the years around 1770 “live for me.” He sees “dimly bulking against the glow of the moon on the water . . . the angular shapes of three warehouses” and immediately is transported: “There they stand as Johnny Fraser saw them!” Even an old piece of wood could make him think that way. In a historic Edenton building, “a roof timber creaked, a slow, weary creak, as though it were changing its position. . . . There was no wind, the sun was low, the old building was talking to itself, and I overheard. I imagine that I know what it said. . . .”<sup>3</sup> Reading was like that for Wyeth. It drew him into another space, mysterious like a forest, even as it kept him safe on his side of the piney threshold, observing the historical pageant pass by.

Reading is male-oriented in his picture. Boyd's Johnny Fraser derives from Stevenson's adolescent heroes such as Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* and David Balfour in *Kidnapped*. Like Hawkins and Balfour, Fraser is designed predominantly for a readership of adolescent boys, an audience that might readily identify with the thrilling exploits of a hero its own age. How different this makes Wyeth's representation of reading fiction compared with that of fifty years earlier. In *The New Novel* (Fig. 1), Winslow Homer (q.v.) also connects reading with the entrance into a forest, though in an independent watercolor not intended as a book illustration. The young woman reclines on the edge between meadow and wood. The act of reading a new work of fiction allows her to mingle with a dark unknown space even as she remains secure in a flower-filled meadow world. In Homer's picture, unlike Wyeth's, this transport is feminine. In an era when some of the most famous American novelists were women, and when the readership for such work was largely female,<sup>4</sup> Homer casts entrance into the woods of reading as the fantasy of a woman.

Wyeth, by contrast, treats reading as the stuff of masculine seriousness as well as adventure. Reading the book will be—the endpapers suggest—a relentless march onward, part of a journey into adulthood, to a destination unknown but with the promise of lasting lessons learned. The left-to-right progression of the militia suggests the adolescent reader's own intent movement through the novel's more than four hundred pages. The progression also evokes the way episodes and characters appear in a book—first coming into view, showing their faces, as it were, as do the figures on the left—and then parading past, showing their backs, like the figures on the right. The reciprocal journey of reader and story is a steady, solemn march, “a scroll of lighted pictures,” in Stevenson's words,<sup>5</sup> backlit by a sunny forest that glows as if by a light emanating from the book itself—a light that gives the effect,





Fig. 1 Winslow Homer, *The New Novel*, 1877. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 9½ × 20½ in. (24.1 × 51.9 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass., Horace P. Wright Collection, 46.D11



somehow, of having been smothered until the very moment the book is opened. Reading for Wyeth was always an endeavor of earnest purpose and great joy.

Again a comparison with Homer is instructive. *The New Novel* comments on ephemeral literature. Homer's punningly redundant title is charming but also acerbic, with its allusion to the trifling though poignant pleasures of the moment. In the girl's pose and dress, Homer connects these pleasures to leisure and fashion, the idleness of a passing fancy. Wyeth, by contrast, would illustrate "classics," even when, like Boyd's, these books were relatively new novels. The adventure that such books promised, in turn, was anything but momentary. Novels like *Treasure Island* and *Drums* are stories of boys becoming men—of callow youths entering into the somber, thrilling worlds of adult responsibility and emerging, several hundred pages later, on their way to becoming men and (in Boyd's case) citizens of the United States. To that end, it is significant that the Nelson-Atkins painting appears, of course, not just as the front but also as the back endpapers of *Drums*. There the relentless march of soldiers invites the reader to return to the beginning and start anew.

Wyeth's definition of the powers of reading is hyperbolic, and with good reason. By the time the Scribner's illustrated edition of *Drums* appeared, the art of reading a book was in steady decline. New technologies such as film and gramophonic sound recording had usurped the book's long-standing place as devices for bringing absent scenes and persons directly into one's midst. Back in 1863 George Eliot, in her novel *Romola*, could describe writing as "black weather-marks on a wall" that then become "magic signs that conjure up a world."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps even then there were doubts—perhaps there *always* had been about these "black marks"—but Eliot is strikingly sure all the same of reading's conjuring powers. By the early twentieth century, however, there were other and seemingly far superior technologies for producing these visions. "Movies thus took the place of the fantasy of the library," writes the cultural historian Friedrich Kittler. "All the tricks that once magically turned words into sequential hallucinations are recalled and surpassed."<sup>7</sup>

Wyeth experienced this momentous change firsthand. He once watched, amazed, as his daughter Henriette stared deep into the family's Victrola to listen to a sound recording of *Rip Van Winkle*. The voices coming from the gramophone, Wyeth wrote, were so convincing that they made his daughter fancy she could see "the dwarfs of the Catskills slinking 'round in the dark depths of the machine."<sup>8</sup> In a technological world full of such wonders, reading a book had become an antiquated way to deliver voices and visions. Boyd knew this well, too. The opening of *Drums* acknowledges that reading is boring compared to the stuff of daydreams and fantasies. Johnny Fraser pulls down a grammar book and peers "at the dim letters through the yellow glazed sheet," hardly able to keep himself awake as he studies "the words, words meaningless and dead compared to the life of the pine forest in which he spent his days." Distracted, he stares into the fireplace and envisions a fantasy battle, seeing "in the flames a vague turmoil of swords and shields and drifting smoke."<sup>9</sup> Boyd's task, stated clearly in this scene, is similar to Eliot's many years before but now somehow more arduous: to make lifeless words into hallucinated visions.

Wyeth understood his job the same way. He knew the endpapers (and all his illustrations) needed to help the reader *see* what the words described, to deliver to that reader Wyeth's own quasi-hallucinatory powers of historical visualization ("There they stand as Johnny Fraser saw them!"), even if the very presence of these vivid color pictures testified paradoxically to the fact that the words could no longer be expected to elicit such conjuring by themselves. In 1913 Wyeth had made a defiant and melancholy painting, *The Wreck of the "Covenant,"* one of his illustrations for Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, that is probably the most ambitious defense of reading ever made by an American artist.<sup>10</sup> If Emily Dickinson had written around 1873 that "There is no frigate like a Book," Wyeth's painting of a sinking ship, its brilliant sails fluttering like the pages of an opened volume, visualized this power of words "To take us Lands away" even as the transport by 1913 is now descending below the waves.<sup>11</sup>

The desperate situation of the book presented the illustrator with both doubts and exciting possibilities. The Nelson-Atkins



Fig. 2 Margaret Bourke-White, Photograph taken for the International Paper Company, 1937. Gelatin silver print, 10¼ × 13½ in. (26 × 34.3 cm). Margaret Bourke-White Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York

picture proclaims the material of the book. Depicting trees, the painting calls attention to the wood pulp out of which the book is made. The foreground pine-tree verticals stretching from bottom to top emphasize the book's size and rectilinear shape. The bark of these nearest trees calls attention to the textures of the book's pages and (more especially) the hardness of its cover boards. The left-right adjacency of the two "portal" trees asserts the left and right sides of the opened book and even seems somehow to invite, or allude to, the hands that will clasp the book on either side. The thickly outlined flatness of the nearest trees—their marvelous decorative patterning—attests not only to Wyeth's awareness of modernist pictorial design but to the flatness of the endpapers themselves. Finally, the wonderfully painted sunlit trees in the distance strangely recall the unevenly cut, tightly clustered pages of an original Scribner's edition if one stands the closed book upright and examines those pages lengthwise. In 1930 and again in 1937 the photographer Margaret Bourke-White took photographs of the paper industry in Quebec, the result of a commission from the International Paper Company (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> Her task, commemorated most fully in the 1939 International Paper publication *Newsprint*, was to chart the creation of paper from forest to printing press. In the endpaper illustration for *Drums*, Wyeth condensed this journey into one concise expression—forest and book as the same thing—now held tightly, pleasurably, in one's hands.

The transformed conception of the book is stunning. The historian Francis Parkman, the author of *Montcalm and Wolfe* (1884) and other classic studies of warfare and empire building in eighteenth-century America, called his own life's work a "history of the American forest."<sup>13</sup> By the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, there were many writers continuing in this vein—not just Boyd but the acclaimed historical novelist Kenneth Roberts, for example, author of Revolutionary War sagas such as *Arundel* (1933) and the great French and Indian War novel *Northwest Passage* (1937),

both epics of the woods. But by then the history of the American forest had become increasingly internalized as the material of the book itself. To judge by Wyeth's endpaper illustration, the book's conjured past was visible now only intermittently, beheld through the interstices of the book's increasingly apparent—and ever-encroaching, ever-darkening—material presence, which appears here in irrepressible streaks, like condensation blooming on a windshield. The situation was not hopeless, however. For, even if movies and sound recordings were stealing the power of illusion, and if the theft became still more noticeable with the advent of talking movies in the late 1920s when the Nelson-Atkins canvas was painted, the book could always assert its own obdurate and deeply gratifying *thingness*, there in the reader's hands, as a sign of its special power.

AN

## NOTES

1. For information on the signatures, see Technical Notes. In the painting as it appears in the original illustrated edition of *Drums*, only the "W" is visible, extremely faintly.
2. Wyeth chose the scene, apparently, from a description at the conclusion of the novel. See James Boyd, *Drums* (New York: C. Scribner's Illustrated Classics, 1928), 407–8.
3. N. C. Wyeth to James Boyd, December 1927, quoted in *The Wyeths: The Letters of N. C. Wyeth*, ed. Betsy Wyeth (Boston: Gambit, 1971), 740.
4. Writing about "the many novels by American women authors about women, written between 1820 and 1870," the cultural historian Nina Baym notes that "this fiction was by far the most popular literature of its time, and on the strength of that popularity, authorship in America was established as a woman's profession, and reading as a woman's avocation." Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 11. *The New Novel* comes from the end of that tradition but lucidly shows the historical situation described by Baym.
5. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (New York: Signet, 1987), 48.
6. George Eliot, *Romola* (London: Penguin, 1996), 334.
7. Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 247.
8. N. C. Wyeth to Henriette Zimigibel Wyeth, 18 April 1913, in *The Wyeths*, 429.
9. Boyd, *Drums*, 4–5.
10. See Alexander Nemerov, "The Boy in Bed: The Scene of Reading in N. C. Wyeth's *Wreck of the 'Covenant'*" and "The Author Replies," *Art Bulletin* 88 (March 2006), 7–27, 61–68.
11. Emily Dickinson, No. 1263, in *Selected Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Anchor, 1959), 184.
12. Margaret Bourke-White, "Power and Paper," *Fortune* 1 (May 1930), 65–72; "Economics of Paper," *Fortune* 16 (October 1937), 110–13; and *Newsprint* (New York: International Paper Company, 1939). For more on these publications, see Kim Sichel and John R. Stomberg, *Power and Paper: Margaret Bourke-White, Modernity, and the Documentary Mode* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1998).
13. Francis Parkman, quoted in C. Vann Woodward, foreword to *Montcalm and Wolfe* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), xxv.

## UNKNOWN ARTIST (formerly attrib. to Robert Fulton)

### *Captain Benjamin L. Waite*, c. 1825–33 (*Self-Portrait* [of Robert Fulton])

Oil on canvas

30 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (76.4 × 63.8 cm)

Purchase: Nelson Trust, 33-167

THE NELSON-ATKINS PORTRAIT of Benjamin L. Waite shows the young sea captain in a paneled interior, seated in an armchair before a desk covered in green baize, on which sits a silver inkwell. He appears to pause in the act of writing to look up at the viewer. Locks of dark brown hair curl around his high forehead. Waite is impeccably dressed in a black suit coat, a white silk waistcoat, and a crisp white collar bound by a ruffled stock. His expression, while businesslike, is welcoming. A hint of a smile plays around the corners of his mouth and deep-set gray eyes, brightening his handsome face. His portrait recalls the words of one of his passengers, who described Captain Waite as

affable, courteous, and kind . . . all seemed at once to repose confidence in his skill and judgment as a seaman. His passengers looked up to him as a commander into whose hands they would willingly commit their safety. . . . There is a something in the face of a man that bespeaks his character more broadly than all your phrenological lore.<sup>1</sup>

In the freely brushed background of the Nelson-Atkins portrait, a tall window or doorway reveals a cloudy sky tinted pink by a rising or setting sun and a blue-green vista that might be either rolling hills or the billowing waves of the sea.

Benjamin L. Waite was, in the words of one biographer, “trained to the sea from infancy.”<sup>2</sup> He was born in 1805 in Liverpool, England, where his mother and her family lived, but his father was an American ship captain. The younger Waite sailed as a ship’s mate to China when he was just sixteen years old and at nineteen became commander of the Liverpool packet ship *Superior*. He was subsequently made captain of the *Pacific* in 1832, the *Britannia* in 1834, and the *England* in 1835—all Liverpool-based packets. In the 1830s Waite became well known in the United States as both a skilled sailor and a “wide-awake and gentlemanly” man.<sup>3</sup> He counted among his friends the British actors Charles and Fanny Kemble and the former mayor of New York Philip Hone. In his diary Hone praised the young captain’s fine manners and reflected on his suitability as a match for his daughter Margaret.<sup>4</sup> In 1836 Waite further endeared himself to conservative, wealthy Americans, including Hone, when he filled his ship’s cannons with grapeshot and turned them on striking New York dockworkers.<sup>5</sup>

Waite retired to his family’s home in Westport, Connecticut, in 1843, by which time steamships had replaced packets as the

transportation of choice for first-class transatlantic passengers. Although he never commanded a steamship, he had the foresight to invest in them. Until his death in 1874, he led the quiet life of a country gentleman. For many years he resided with his widowed mother, two younger sisters, and a younger brother, who was deaf and dumb.<sup>6</sup> The needs of this family seem to have delayed Waite’s beginning one of his own. He married for the first time in 1855, when he was nearly fifty years old, and settled with his wife, Eliza Hayes Waite, in Stamford, Connecticut. After Eliza’s death in 1861, he married Margaret Flynn. The couple’s adopted daughter, Sara Davis Waite Washburn, inherited the Nelson-Atkins portrait of Waite.<sup>7</sup>

The Nelson-Atkins portrait is undated, but it bears the canvas stamp of Samuel Scarlett, an art supply merchant in business in Philadelphia between 1818 and 1865.<sup>8</sup> Waite’s clothing and apparent age—he seems to be in his early or mid-twenties—support a date for the painting between the mid-1820s and early 1830s. It stands to reason that Waite, who first became a ship captain in 1825, would have wanted a portrait to commemorate his new rank. The Nelson-Atkins painting follows closely the early-nineteenth-century formula for captains’ portraits, which are generally half-length depictions of soberly dressed young men at the outsets of their careers.<sup>9</sup> It was a common practice for a captain to display his portrait in his quarters and also to leave a portrait of himself behind with his family. In either of these contexts, Waite’s portrait would have presented him as a fashionable young gentleman who was also serious and capable. His suit, while tasteful, is both expensive and elegant and appears to date from the mid- to late 1820s.<sup>10</sup> His tousled curly hair would have been equally modish in the years after 1824, when the heroic death of Lord Byron sparked a vogue on both sides of the Atlantic for such coiffures.<sup>11</sup> Waite’s Byronic hair, like the dramatic sky behind him, adds a Romantic touch to an otherwise restrained likeness.

Waite’s portrait entered the Nelson-Atkins collection in 1933, misidentified as a self-portrait by the American artist and inventor Robert Fulton, a mistake that seems to have originated with the Ehrlich Galleries in New York in the late 1920s. The portrait does bear some resemblance to Fulton, whose likeness is well documented in paintings such as Fulton’s *Self-Portrait* (c. 1800–1810; United States Patent Office, Arlington, Va.) and Benjamin West’s *Robert Fulton* (1806; New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown). However, Fulton had brown rather than gray eyes and lighter-colored hair than the man pictured in the Nelson-Atkins portrait.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Benjamin Waite’s family, who retained the portrait from the time it was painted until 1927, apparently identified Waite as the first owner.<sup>13</sup> Finally, a



photograph of Waite, taken when he was a middle-aged man, confirms that he is the subject of the Nelson-Atkins portrait.<sup>14</sup>

The attribution to Fulton has similarly been overturned, based on the fact that Fulton died in 1815, several years before Samuel Scarlett began selling artists' materials in Philadelphia.<sup>15</sup> This leaves the painter of Waite's portrait in question. However, the likely date of the painting, together with Scarlett's canvas stamp, suggests that the portraitist may have been the Philadelphia-based John Neagle.<sup>16</sup> Neagle typically used Scarlett's canvases and, especially in the wake of the success of his widely exhibited portrait *Pat Lyon at the Forge* (1826–27; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), he enjoyed enough celebrity to have drawn Waite to Philadelphia to sit for him. Waite might also have visited Philadelphia for social reasons and could have met Neagle through friends they had in common. Neagle also spent several months painting portraits in New York during 1825 and 1826, and he may have portrayed Waite in that city, which was one of the captain's frequent ports of call.<sup>17</sup>

The Nelson-Atkins painting of Benjamin L. Waite resembles several portraits by Neagle, including *Dr. Thomas Tucker Smiley* (1825; location unknown) and *George Peabody* (1822; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).<sup>18</sup> The former depicts a young man seated before a desk with a silver inkstand, looking up from a book to meet the viewer's eyes. Two fingers and the thumb of his right hand, visible along the bottom edge of the canvas, resemble the same portion of Waite's hand and are painted in a similarly awkward manner. Neagle's portrait of Peabody presents another soberly but fashionably dressed young man, positioned before a tall window or doorway through which a blue-green landscape can be glimpsed. All three portraits show their subjects with artificially elongated necks—a characteristic mannerism of Neagle's—and are painted in a style that recalls Gilbert Stuart (q.v.), an artist Neagle particularly admired. As Robert Torchia has noted, however, the Nelson-Atkins portrait possesses a feathery softness in the face that is not common in Neagle's work, and Waite's ruffled white stock lacks Neagle's typical high impasto.<sup>19</sup> A number of other portrait painters active in Philadelphia during the 1820s and 1830s, including Jacob Eichholtz, may also have painted the Nelson-Atkins canvas.<sup>20</sup>

Waite's obituary in the *New York Herald* read, in part:

When sailing ships were the only communication with Europe, he was known as one of the most intrepid as well as skillful and careful of navigators. Numerous stories of his feats while commanding the "Black Ball" ship "England" are still spun by old "sea-dogs" with a readiness and zest that are in themselves good tributes to Capt. Waite's ability. The affectionate references made in them to the "old man" apparently indicate a mariner of almost fabulous age, and yet Capt. Waite had but reached thirty-nine years [when he retired].<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of who painted it, the Nelson-Atkins fine portrait of Benjamin Waite successfully captures his youth and affability and communicates something of his intrepid nature.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in "Capt. Benjamin L. Waite," in D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Fairfield County, Connecticut* (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1881), 741.
2. *Ibid.*, 740.
3. G.P. Putnam, "Some Things in London and Paris," *Putnam's Monthly* 13 (June 1869), 733.
4. Philip Hone and Bayard Tuckerman, *The Diary of Philip Hone* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1881), 1:215–17.
5. *Ibid.*, 200; and "Summary," *Episcopal Recorder* 13 (5 March 1836), 195.
6. 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Westport, Fairfield County, Connecticut, through [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed 20 September 2006).
7. Information provided by the Ehrlich Galleries, New York, in 1933, NAMA curatorial files.
8. Alexander W. Katlan, *American Artists' Materials* (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1992), 2:431–32.
9. Jane E. Allen, "Portraits of American Master Mariners," *American Neptune* 51 (Spring 1991), 115–23.
10. Carol Kregloh, Museum Specialist at the Smithsonian Institution, telephone conversation with Margaret C. Conrads, 18 September 2006; and Pam Saulsbury, National Portrait Gallery, to Margaret C. Conrads, 30 August 2002, NAMA curatorial files.
11. For Byron's popularity in the United States, see Peter X. Accardo, *Byron in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Library, Harvard University, 2001).
12. Fulton's likeness is well documented in more than a dozen portraits and self-portraits. See Robert Fulton files, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.
13. The full provenance was obtained by the Ehrlich Galleries when they acquired the painting in 1927 and passed on to the Nelson-Atkins along with the painting in 1933. See Provenance.
14. This photograph is reproduced in Hurd, *History of Fairfield County, Connecticut*, opp. 740.
15. Cynthia Owen Philip, a Fulton scholar, noted in 1986 that the Nelson-Atkins portrait was executed in a style rather different from Fulton's. Philip to Curator of American Art, 29 January 1986, NAMA curatorial files.
16. Robert Torchia has suggested a guarded attribution to Neagle. Torchia to Margaret C. Conrads, 10 April 1992, NAMA curatorial files.
17. See Ransom R. Patrick, "The Early Life of John Neagle, Philadelphia Portrait Painter," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1959, 45–63; and Robert W. Torchia, *John Neagle: Philadelphia Portrait Painter*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1989), 33–34. By the mid-1830s Waite was sailing into New York Harbor from Liverpool three times each year, in March, July, and November. "New York and Liverpool Packets," *Albion* 5 (21 January 1837), 24.
18. The portrait of Smiley is reproduced in *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Portraits by John Neagle*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1925), 77.
19. Torchia to Conrads, 10 April 1992.
20. The author appreciates the insights of William H. Gerdtz, Ellen Miles, Linda Thrift, Robert Torchia, Carol Huxner, and Alexander Katlan in attributing this painting.
21. Quoted in Hurd, *History of Fairfield County, Connecticut*, 741.

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