

# American impressionism.

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## American Impressionism

by Richard J. Boyle

*My God, I would rather go to Europe than to Heaven.*

-- William Merritt Chance, 1872

*Miss Baker is trying "to see blue and purple" and is progressing.*

-- Theodore Robinson, 1892

American Impressionism, more than, any other style created in this country, was largely inspired by European precedents. From the time that Benjamin West first crossed the Atlantic in the mid-eighteenth century, he was followed by a procession of American artists who went to Europe for study and for inspiration. However, never had so many made the journey abroad as in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the dominant artistic thinking in America was directed toward Europe and when this trend of thought was woven into the American social fabric as well as in its aesthetic concepts. Over the years American artists had studied and worked in London, Florence, Rome, Dusseldorf, Munich, and Venice. But, in the 1870s and 1880s Paris was the preeminent

international art center; the reputation of its art schools and academies attracted artists from all over the world. Yet these academies were primarily conservative, and the vital movements of European art were not to be found inside their walls. Impressionism did not come out of the academies or the established schools of art. Instead, it flowered outside these institutions, and its development was largely in reaction to the accepted official approach to art that was taught there.

Impressionism revolutionized the art of painting by its concern with the very act of painting, which in turn came about as the Impressionists found an innovative aesthetic framework for the expression of new ideas. Their primary innovation was a fresh approach to the use of color. The Impressionists reveled in a freedom of color made possible through the discovery of new pigments by the chemical industry.<sup>[1]</sup> Their pictures became brighter as hue replaced tone as the principal means of representing light and atmosphere on canvas. They supplanted theoretical knowledge with optical experience, thereby implying an expansion of sensuous perception. They broke with the older conception of a picture as a classically ordered unit in time and space and substituted that "fleeting moment" in time and fragments of continuous space, signifying movement. Hence, the changing elements, the representation of an overall light and atmosphere became their common concern.

Impressionism became an international style not long after its first public exposure in Paris in 1874. The American version, adopted in the 1880s, although markedly similar to its French prototype, was a compound of this Gallic-international mode and the American tradition of realism. Because the American artist sought to combine these two basically antithetical styles, American Impressionism evolved gradually; its acceptance by artists and the public was not assured until the 1890s. However, the ground was broken for public acceptance by the number of American collectors who acquired the work of French Impressionists; by exhibitions of French Impressionist painting in the mid-eighties, notably Durand-Ruel's massive and historic exhibition in New York in 1886, in which over three hundred paintings by masters of the Impressionist style were shown; and by the sheer number of talented American painters who practiced the style and who taught it as well.

In the mid-nineties the American Impressionists, Alden Weir, Theodore Robinson, Robert Vonnoh, Joseph DeCamp, and William Merritt Chase all

taught in the school of the Pennsylvania Academy. Although the Academy recognized their talents relatively early, it recognized their abilities as artists, not necessarily Impressionist artists. The Academy was not a driving force in the promotion of the style in America. Rather, the widespread acceptance of American Impressionism in the mid-nineties was a triumph of French influence and the climax of a period of dependence upon European culture.

The thrust toward a cultural dependence upon Europe became strong after the American Civil War. Prior to that conflict, there appeared to be a cohesiveness in American art, and a serenity. The War changed all that. It was the first modern war, and the growth of industrialism and economic change during and after the conflict turned the United States into the first modern industrial state, with all the attendant problems that transformation implied. American life became fragmented; the serenity of art was disrupted, not to reappear until later in the century through the delicate and genteel painting of the American Impressionists, for whom harmony in life and art was an espoused aim. As artistic directions became uncertain, American artists once again looked toward Europe, not only for training, as they had always done, but also for style.

A significant example of the shift in taste toward European art, particularly evident in the area of private collecting, is the comparison of three notable collections bequeathed to the Pennsylvania Academy -- the Carey, Harrison, and Gibson collections. Edward Carey, scion of the famous Philadelphia publishing company founded by his father Mathew, was an ardent patron of American art in the 1830s and 1840s and was personally acquainted with many of the artists he supported. In the 1850s and 1860s, Joseph Harrison pursued an interest in American art as history. Henry C. Gibson, on the other hand, collected the leading European artists of his day, and his collection is heavy in the area of French painting, much of which he acquired abroad between 1879 and 1880. Many of the artists represented, such as Gerome, Couture, Millet, and Courbet, either taught or influenced numbers of Americans who went abroad to study.<sup>[2]</sup>

Although Gibson acquired much of his collection abroad in 1879, he could have seen work by some of the same artists three years earlier in his hometown in the art section of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. This famous exposition can be used as a convenient, if not entirely precise, point of departure for a discussion of those American artists who

flocked to Europe to study.

The Exposition was organized to celebrate one hundred years of American Independence, but its chief impact was not the emphasis on a century of past achievements or on the future of a successful democratic society and its culture; rather, it gave Americans a glimpse into the future age of machinery and their first large-scale look at the arts, artifacts, and luxuries of the Old World. The art exhibitions, shown in Memorial Hall, which afterwards became the foundation of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, gave many American artists a chance to see the work of their European colleagues at first hand. The French section was one of the strongest in the exhibition and was undoubtedly an important factor in inspiring the migration of American artists to Parisian studios.<sup>[3]</sup>

One of the most popular attractions in Philadelphia, the new building of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, was outside the fairgrounds. Designed by Furness and Hewitt and completed in April of 1876, the Academy building is imbued with a sense of Victorian optimism and exuberance. Yet, despite the European sources of its style, in its very eclecticism it retains -- as did the work of the artists who confronted foreign styles -- certain features which make it characteristically American. For one thing, there is clarity of structural form despite the profusion of decorative elements. In a way, it is an architectural statement comparable to George Inness's ideas about painting. Inness talked of "generalizing without losing that logical connection of parts to the whole which satisfies the mind" and concluded that "the elements of this, therefore, are solidity of objects and a transparency of atmosphere through which we are conscious of spaces and distances."<sup>[4]</sup> Inness was speaking for himself, but his statement reflects an aesthetic which was implicit in the attitude and work of most of the American artists who went abroad to study, and in particular those artists who went to Europe in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of them either studied at the Pennsylvania Academy or subsequently taught there, and they took with them the emotional and intellectual freight of American thought and experience. An important part of that experience was a preference for the factual, the real. This preference manifested itself early in the work of Benjamin West, of Charles Willson Peale, and of John Singleton Copley. And it was a strong part of Gilbert Stuart's thinking when he said, "For my own part, I will not follow any master. I wish to find out what nature is for myself, and see her with my own eyes."<sup>[5]</sup>

It is significant that when the Americans arrived in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s, they did not seek out the avant-garde or even follow their own independent paths. Basically conservative, they enrolled in the official art schools and studied with the masters of the French academic tradition. Even the Americans who subsequently became the stalwarts of American Impressionism and who, at least after 1874, could have sought out the French Impressionists were apparently not inclined or ready to do so; in fact, J. Alden Weir was quite shocked when he viewed his first French Impressionist exhibition. At the time, Weir, like many other American artists, was strongly influenced by the more conservative teaching of Jules Bastien-Lepage.

In the late 1870s, Lepage invented a style of picture -- making which combined rigorous studio draftsmanship with the light and atmosphere of painting out-of-doors. It was a style both daring and safe -- daring in its recreation of outdoor atmosphere and safe in its careful drawing of the figures that always populated his landscapes. It was a compromise method, and it led the way toward the eventual public acceptance of Impressionism.

Lepage's plein-airism became his particular contribution to art. It was especially of interest to American painters because of the background of their own landscape tradition and their respect for the integrity of the object. In fact, plein-airism does bear a superficial resemblance to American Luminism of the 1860s. In both there is a concern for light and atmosphere, and in both there is a dependence upon careful draftsmanship for the final realization of the picture. However, there are major differences. Luminism tends to be more philosophical, more contemplative; through clarity of form and dramatic handling of light, it seeks to express a higher spiritual meaning in the rendering of the natural world. The quiet lyricism of this style creates a feeling of stillness and tranquility, and the smooth finish of its execution creates an air of detachment as though the presence of the artist's hand should not in any way detract from the evocation of nature's moods. Plein-airism, on the other hand, is more aesthetic than philosophical; it is concerned with style rather than meaning. And with its emphasis on a method of representing nature, it lacks the intensity of Luminist painting. Plein-airism is also a more painterly style than Luminism; there is a greater degree of impasto on the canvas, and the artist's hand is very much in evidence.

*Hailing the Ferry* (cat. no. 194) by Daniel Ridgway Knight is a superb example of the Lepage plein-air method. The figures of the two girls, carefully drawn in an academic style, were obviously posed in the studio. The landscape, on the other hand, has a quality of immediacy and closely observed naturalism. Muted in color but evocative of light and atmosphere, it is representative of the kind of painting that made plein-airism a powerful and attractive movement.

A more important plein-airist than Knight was the expatriate Philadelphian, Thomas Alexander Harrison. Harrison was a student at the Pennsylvania Academy from 1880 to 1881, after which he made his way to France. Although he kept a studio in Paris, Harrison spent a great deal of time painting on the Brittany coast, in Concarneau, and in Beg-Meil. The seascapes he painted there were a sensation in his day and made this now obscure artist known the world over. *The Wave* (cat. no. 191) received a place of honor in the Paris Salon of 1884 and was subsequently exhibited throughout Europe. This picture was bought by the Pennsylvania Academy in 1891 for \$5400, one of the largest sums paid by the Academy up to that time. Harrison S. Morris, the managing director of the Pennsylvania Academy, who saw the artist last in 1910, characterized him as "tall and distinguished, and polished in dress and manner" and described his pictures as "brilliant canvases of the sea, rare experiments in color and atmosphere, sure in drawing and in beauty."<sup>[6]</sup> Indeed, *The Wave* is an astonishing painting. "Sure in drawing," it nevertheless has all the atmosphere of plein-airism. Despite its size, it has the detached quality of American Luminist painting of the 1850s and 1860s. With its softly modulated tones and subtlety of color, its combination of French technique and aspects of American tradition, *The Wave* exhibits a pervasive poetic realism.<sup>[7]</sup>

Just as Bastien-Lepage commanded a middle ground between the academic approach and Impressionist practice, there were those American painters who occupied that ground midway between the Hudson River School and American Impressionism. They went beyond the tenets of earlier American landscape painting, yet they stopped short of the full Impressionist method. This group of "Pre-Impressionists," which included Homer Dodge Martin, Dwight Tryon, Alexander and Birge Harrison, and Henry Ward Ranger, was noted for a particular quality which E. P. Richardson has called "quietism." Quietism describes a tranquil mood and an element of "quiet lyricism" which, side by side with

realism, had emerged in the Hudson River School. These elements became more important in the Luminist style and later were among those characteristics which made the American version of Impressionism different from that of the French. The influences on the Pre-Impressionist painters were diverse; Alexander Harrison's painting, of course, was affected by Bastien-Lepage, while Henry Ward Ranger was at first influenced by The Hague School and later more strongly by Monticelli and Diaz. Like George Inness, Ranger represents "American art in the Barbizon mood."<sup>[8]</sup>

Ranger was particularly drawn to the work of the Dutch painters, especially to the masters of The Hague School, whose landscapes, seascapes, and genre pictures of life in Holland were extremely popular in America at the time. However, he always had a strong feeling for Barbizon painting, and he became known for the rich texture of his paint surfaces and for the glimmering shafts of light in his pictures of forest interiors. Although Ranger adhered to the tonalism of The Hague and the Barbizon schools, his palette in the work of the late nineties appears to be lighter and brighter, and his brushwork in such later works as *Sheep Pasture* (cat. no. 199) is more open, freer, and closer to Impressionist practice than that in his earlier pictures. This freedom of handling and brighter color is perhaps an indication of the fact that by the late nineties Impressionism had become thoroughly accepted by the American art world and no artist was wholly untouched by its influence.

If, in the overall view of American Impressionism, the "Pre-Impressionists" seem to be a link between "stability" and "dynamism," between Bastien-Lepage and Monet, or Henry Ward Ranger and John Twachtman, Winslow Homer stands out because his work in the 1860s shows interesting affinities to that of the contemporary French Impressionists. Like them, Homer became interested in the atmospheric properties of light as well as its effect upon objects, and he, too, began to paint certain pictures during a specific time of day because he wanted a particular kind of light. During this period, he painted a series of beach scenes in which the handling of light is not unlike that of Monet in his *Terrace at Sainte-Adresse*, painted about 1866-67 (Metropolitan Museum of Art). At the same time, Homer abandoned the dry, illustrative approach and the fussy details of his earlier painting and adopted instead a more freely brushed technique similar to that of Manet or of early Monet. Moreover, like them, Homer developed in his work a new feeling for

texture and a stronger sense of immediacy. Although he later pursued a solitary path and became one of the most American of American artists in the late nineteenth century, Homer did anticipate some of the problems that would occupy such American Impressionist painters as Hassam, Weir, and Twachtman some twenty years later.

Homer spent the year 1867-68 in France. When he returned to this country, he brought with him aspects of French technique, but he continued to paint scenes of daily life in America. He drew his subjects, such as *Morning Call* (cat. no. 193) from the farms of New England and New York State, from the Adirondacks and the White Mountains, and from the popular and fashionable beach resorts on the Atlantic seaboard - all of them bathed in a pervasive and strong sunlight. However, the light in America is different than the light in France; American light is harder and more sharply focused. And Homer's painting was different from the French in a similar way. It also was harder, more sharply focused, and less ambient. As Lloyd Goodrich has pointed out, "To the true Impressionist, light and atmosphere were as important as nature's solid substance .... But Homer's chief interest remained the object, the thing-in-itself."<sup>[9]</sup>

In *Morning Call*, painted in 1870, the figure of the woman silhouetted against the landscape, although reminiscent of Monet, owes more to Homer's experience as an illustrator for *Harper's Weekly* in which, on June 11, 1870, the exact prototype of the girl blowing the horn was first published. The Detroit Institute of Arts owns a later and slightly different version of this picture, painted in 1873. E. P. Richardson calls it "one of the most cheerful of his pictures." Yet, he continues, "it has in small scale the monumental force of his style."<sup>[10]</sup> In addition to a concern for light, the "cheerfulness" of the picture also relates it to Impressionist painting. It was this element which American Impressionist painters would make much of and for which they would be called "painters of a holiday atmosphere."

This same "atmosphere" pervades *Honfleur* (cat. no. 210) by James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Small in size but great in charm, like the Homer it is a cheerful picture and much closer to an Impressionist conception. In its high -- keyed color, it appears to be atypical of Whistler, particularly in comparison with his great nocturnes and the elegant portraits, carefully "arranged" and painted in the lovely muted color of a "quietism" taken to its ultimate conclusion. Whistler painted a number of such small

seascapes during the sixties, but *Honfleur* is closer in style to *Coast Scene: Bathers* (Art Institute of Chicago), *Coast Scene with Boats* (Private Collection, London), *Bathing Posts, Brittany* (University of Glasgow), or *The Sea, Pourville* (Private Collection, London) -- all of which were painted in the late eighties or nineties.

When Harrison Morris first visited Whistler in Paris in 1895, Whistler had practically achieved the status of an "old master," at least in the eyes of English-speaking artists. Morris later recalled that, when he was introduced as the director of the Pennsylvania Academy, "Whistler took on much animation and showed me special warmth, because, he said, the Pennsylvania Academy had awarded him a gold medal -- which it had in 1893."<sup>[11]</sup>

The first picture by Whistler to be exhibited at the Academy was the celebrated portrait of his mother. It was shown in a special exhibition entitled "American Artists at Home and in Europe," organized in 1881. For this show, juries in London, Paris, and Munich selected paintings by Americans living abroad and, in addition to Whistler, the participants included John Singer Sargent and Theodore Robinson; John Twachtman, Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir and Thomas Dewing, Frank Benson, Edmund Tarbell and Joseph DeCamp; Alexander Harrison, Robert Vonnoh, William Merritt Chase, Edward Redfield, William Picknell and Robert Reid. Most of these painters would become known as the best of the American Impressionists.

Whistler's portrait of his mother is one of the most famous American pictures ever painted. Unfortunately, the Academy missed the opportunity to purchase it, and there still is not an important example of his work in the collection. In his autobiography, *Confessions in Art*, Harrison Morris recalled his attempt in 1893 to buy one

of those Whistler's, which I secured from The World's Fair in Chicago and brought to the Academy in Philadelphia The three large canvases, ... *Yellow Buskin*, *Princess of the Land of Porcelain*, and *Fur Jacket*, were valued at \$15,000 each I tried to raise the sum to buy one of them for the Academy; but the management that had failed ... to take Whistler's "Mother" when exhibited at the Academy for \$1,500, would have none of the extravagant canvases that cost so much more.<sup>[12]</sup>

Whistler shared an awareness of new ideas and current trends with Mary Cassatt, whose work he admired. Mary Cassatt was the first major American painter to adopt successfully the Impressionist style and to make of it a strong personal statement. She not only absorbed the style but also became a member of the French Impressionist group, which Degas invited her to join in 1877. She exhibited with the French Impressionists from 1879 until 1886. Yet her early schooling was quite conventional.

From 1861 to 1865 Mary Cassatt studied at the Pennsylvania Academy, where Thomas Eakins was a fellow student. Then, like Eakins, she left Philadelphia for Paris in 1866. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War brought her back to the United States, and in 1872 she studied briefly in Italy and traveled in Spain, Holland, and Belgium.

Miss Cassatt's work in the late 1860s and early 1870s, inspired by her study of the old masters, was strongly modeled and dark in tone. The Academy owns one of her early pictures -- *Bacchante*, painted at Parma in 1872, probably while she was studying with Carlo Raimondi. It is an interesting example of her academic work at that time. About 1875, influenced by Degas, she began to develop into an Impressionist painter.

In 1880 Mary Cassatt began her mother and child pictures, and she soon became known as the painter of *the maternite'* theme. Her mother and child pictures were always somewhat detached, aloof, and so lacking in sentimentality that even Gauguin was moved to remark: "Mary Cassatt has charm, but she also has force."<sup>[13]</sup> In the late 1880s and 1890s she developed a large and luminous style with a feeling of permanence such as that evoked in *Young Thomas and His Mother* (cat. no. 184), done in 1893. Simple, direct, and strong, the picture is dominated by the two figures, which fill the picture plane and create a great sense of immediacy. Executed in pastel, it in no way reflects the inherent fragility of the medium.

But then Mary Cassatt was not a fragile person. Tough and independent, she went her own way, and she made the most complete statement of the *maternite'* theme in her time.

Although her work was admired by her contemporaries, she never had an artistic following. However, she did have considerable influence as a

patternmaker, as well as a deep interest in the struggles of art students and young artists. She was instrumental in introducing French Impressionist paintings into American collections, and her concern for young artists led her to refuse prizes and to decline jury memberships. In a letter to Harrison Morris, declining the Academy's Lippincott Prize, she expressed her feeling that awards should be money, a more practical thing for struggling students.<sup>[14]</sup> It is likely that she was also thinking of the students when she wrote to John Frederick Lewis, the president of the Academy, offering two portraits by Courbet, *The Mayor of Ornans* and *Madame Frond*.<sup>[15]</sup> The Academy accepted the pictures and two years later awarded her the Academy Gold Medal of Honor, not for any particular painting but for "eminent service in the cause of art."

Mary Cassatt was probably the only American Impressionist to be strongly influenced by Degas. In general, Edouard Manet's influence on the Americans was stronger, but the French Impressionist who exerted the greatest impact on American artists in the late eighties was Claude Oscar Monet, Monet's most famous American follower was Theodore Robinson. After Mary Cassatt, Robinson was the next major American painter to achieve successfully what John I. H. Baur has called the "wedding of French-born Impressionism to American art."<sup>[16]</sup> Robinson was a very quiet man, "a painter's painter," whose understated work was not well known in his lifetime. Harrison Morris spoke of Robinson's "gentle intelligence and something like genius" and recalled: "We engaged him to come over weekly from New York to teach his lovely landscape and figure art in the Academy Schools, and thus I came close to his simple qualities, his modest self-estimate."<sup>[17]</sup> Modest he may have been, but Robinson was one of the pioneers of American Impressionism and one of the most talented artists of the period.

Theodore Robinson painted in the realist tradition of Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer before he visited Monet in Giverny in 1887. Yet, as often as the American visited the great French artist and sought his advice, he was never really a formal pupil. More of a follower, he was a delicate, individual painter, a master of the quiet, intimate *vue*. His work is lyrical, tender, and reticent. From 1890 on, Robinson painted some of his best "pure" Impressionist pictures. It was not easy. He was, for all his admiration of Monet, somewhat distrustful of the potential for total abstraction in the Impressionist approach. He believed sound draftsmanship to be the basis for good painting, and he once wrote:

Altogether the possibilities are very great for the moderns, but they must draw without ceasing or they will "get left," and with the brilliancy and light of real out-doors combine the austerity, the sobriety that has always characterized good painting.<sup>[18]</sup>

These elements are at work in *Port Ben, Delaware and Hudson Canal* (cat. no. 203) painted in 1893. Despite the variegated color, the loose brushwork, and the overall light, the subject is not dissolved in light and atmosphere. Moreover, the surface tension characteristic of Impressionist pictures is here violated by the diagonal thrust of the canal as it penetrates into deep space.

*Port Ben* came to the Academy by default. "Well, when he died," recalled Harrison Morris,

some of his friends among the artists in New York ... presented it, in his memory, to the Metropolitan Museum ... the Metropolitan declined to accept the picture; and I thought it a tribute to Theodore Robinson and a liberal movement for the Pennsylvania Academy to indicate that it might find acceptance by the Academy. And it was offered and accepted.<sup>[19]</sup>

Actually, the whole affair created quite a fuss and was the subject of several articles in the *New York Times* in January 1899. The picture was selected by John LaFarge, then president of the Society of American Artists, and bought by a group of artists, which included Will H. Low and J. Alden Weir. According to the newspaper accounts, the Metropolitan rejected the offer on the grounds that this was not the kind of art the trustees wanted to encourage. In later statements, they indicated that they did not think the painting was one of Robinson's best. They were mistaken. Not only is it one of his best, but also, as Morris pointed out, "when it makes its very seldom appearance on the walls of the galleries, all may see what a jewel of color and observation it is."<sup>[20]</sup>

"A jewel of color" is a more than apt description for *Summer Clouds* (cat. no. 183) by Soren Emil Carlsen. Carlsen, like William Lamb Picknell, practiced a very personal kind of Impressionism, and both deserve to be made better known to a wider segment of the public. Carlsen was born in Denmark and studied architecture at the Danish Royal Academy before immigrating to the United States in 1872. About 1891 he settled in New

York. He taught intermittently at the Pennsylvania Academy until 1918, when he gave up teaching altogether. *Summer Clouds*, which was purchased by the Academy in 1913, was probably painted in Maine, but specificity of place gives way to the generalized poetry of beach, sea, and sky. *Summer Clouds*, like Carlsen's celebrated still-life pictures, is timeless, elegant, and still.

Timeless also is Picknell's *Road to Nice* (cat. no. 198). Picknell went to France in 1876 and soon made his way to the Breton village of Pont-Aven, which Paul Gauguin made famous a decade later. There Picknell worked with the Anglo-American artist Robert Wylie.

In 1880 he painted *Road to Concarneau* (Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), which received a great deal of favorable comment when it was exhibited in the Salon of that year. Thereafter, Picknell painted a series of "Road to" landscapes, including the Academy's *Road to Nice*, dated 1896. *Road to Nice* is built up with a series of small brushstrokes in a tightly knit structure, filled with a vibrant and overall light.

Picknell died in 1897, the year the group which came to be called The Ten American Painters was organized. Late in December of 1897, Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir, and John Henry Twachtman submitted their resignations to the Society of American Artists. They were joined in their new group by Thomas Dewing, Joseph DeCamp, Willard Metcalf, Edmund Tarbell, Frank Benson, Edward Simmons, and Robert Reid. Later, William Merritt Chase joined the group after Twachtman's death. They were all painters who, dissatisfied with the immense size and mediocrity of the Society's annual exhibitions, decided to form a loosely knit group of their own. Like the term "Impressionist" in France, the term "Ten Americans" was invented by the press; the name was derived from the title of the group's first exhibition, which was simply called "A Show of Ten American Painters," indicating the number of participants. The Ten American Painters constituted a kind of Academy of American Impressionism, and some of its members, notably Weir, DeCamp, and Chase, had close associations with the Pennsylvania Academy.

J. Alden Weir was a tireless worker on behalf of American art. He helped to organize the Society of American Artists in 1877 and served as secretary during 1879 and 1880. He also served as president of the National

Academy from 1915 to 1917, and he was a visiting instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy from 1899 to 1905.

Weir painted without affectation and without mannerism. About 1890, Weir's palette began to brighten, at least in his landscape painting (he kept to a more low-key style in still life and portraiture). This change was perhaps due to the influence of Theodore Robinson and John Twachtman, with whom he painted in the late eighties and nineties. His special delight was painting out-of-doors -- the fields, the woods, and, as in *Midday Rest in New England* (cat. no. 209), the farm. Weir painted *Midday Rest* in 1897 at his farm in Branchville, Connecticut, which the collector Irwin Davis had given him in exchange for a picture. In 1898 the Pennsylvania Academy bought this "beautiful landscape of his, fresh and green, and smelling of the countryside where he lived in the summer."<sup>[21]</sup> In March of that year the Academy lent the picture to the first exhibition of The Ten.

Another member of The Ten who had associations with the Academy was Joseph DeCamp. In 1895, Harrison Morris went up to Boston and hired DeCamp to run the Academy school; he replaced Robert W. Vonnoh, who had been conducting the school since 1891. Because of ill health, Decant had to resign in 1896.

DeCamp, Tarbell, and Benson were considered the "Boston men" of The Ten. DeCamps work was not as spontaneous as Benson's or as lively as Tarbell's. It was sober, solid, and based upon craftsmanship in the academic tradition. DeCamp was not as committed to the Impressionist style as were Weir, Twachtman, or Hassam: his Impressionism tended to be more conservative than theirs, his color more muted and tonal, as in *The Little Hotel* (cat. no. 185) of 1903.

Harrison Morris recalled that when DeCamp had to leave the Academy School, there was one conspicuous artist and teacher whom it would be a crowning act to engage if he could be persuaded to come, this was William M. Chase Thus I went to see him ... at his summer house and studio in the Shinnecock Hills, on Long Island; ... Chase consented to come to the Academy schools on certain days of each week.<sup>[22]</sup>

William Merritt Chase taught at the Academy from 1896 to 1909. Chase

was not only a vital member of The Ten, he was also, next to Whistler, one of the most important personalities in American art in the late nineteenth century. Between the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, Chase absorbed and adapted nearly every artistic influence exerted on American painters in his time. He was obviously eclectic, but he was also a strong and brilliant virtuoso who painted in a broad, spirited style with a sense of elegance and éclat. After 1887, his most brilliant Impressionist work was done at Shinnecock, Long Island, where he conducted summer classes. It is unfortunate that the Academy does not own an Impressionist painting by Chase, for he painted some of his best pictures in that style, which was well suited to the verve and zest of his ebullient personality.

William Merritt Chase was the last member of The Ten to be "voted in," whereas Childe Hassam was one of the first. Hassam's early work was basically tonal, but his handling was broad and free, more in the manner of Manet than of Bastien-Lepage. By 1889 he had adopted the wiry brushwork and high-keyed palette for which he is best known. In the 1890s his style reached its maturity, and he was recognized as one of the leading artists of his day. He was popular in his time and he is popular still. Not, however, in Philadelphia. In 1894 Hassam complained to Morris that "Philadelphia is not the most encouraging place for the painter to send to ... as I am sure all of us feel."<sup>[23]</sup> Nevertheless, he contributed extensively to Academy exhibitions, and in 1902 his picture *Cat Boats: Newport* (cat. no. 192) received a Temple Gold Medal and was purchased for the collection. *Cat Boats*, which Harrison Morris watched him paint in 1901, is one of his most cheerful and painterly pictures. Hassam had facility; his work is joyful and exuberant, but it has none of the intensity of some of Weir's pastoral scenes and certainly none of the profound introspection and the poetry of John H. Twachtman's.

Twachtman was the most unique, sensitive, and searching of all the American Impressionists. His "fragile dreams in color," as Morris called his paintings, were extremely personal. He understood abstraction better than most, and as a consequence, his work was not easily understood and he did not sell very much. "Do you know," he wrote to Morris the year before he died, "that I have exhibited eighty-five pictures this year and have not sold one?"<sup>[24]</sup> The Academy did not purchase *Sailing in the Mist* (cat. no. 206) until 1906, four years after the artist's death. *Sailing in the Mist* is one of his most beautiful pictures. Extremely subtle, it comes very

near to Monet's paintings of the Thames. The subject provides Twachtman with an opportunity for a display of pure painting, an overall delicate relationship of hue against hue. Yet, unlike Monet, Twachtman was a romantic, and he liked painting from nature in all its isolation and silence.

It is interesting to compare Twachtman's work with that of Willard Metcalf, who was also sensitive to the moods of nature. Metcalf's *Twin Birches* (cat. no. 196) is a quiet, pleasing picture, but it has none of the profundity or the poetry of *Sailing in the Mist*. Yet Metcalf was known as "the poet laureate" of the New England hills; he received many honors and awards, including a gold medal from the Academy. And *Twin Birches* was bought for the collection during his lifetime.

While Hassam, Weir, and Twachtman were New York members of The Ten, Frank Benson and Edmund Tarbell, like Joseph DeCamp, were Boston-based. Benson was famous for his pictures of female figures in sunlit landscapes, painted with dash and with more than a little sentiment. They are good examples of that "holiday atmosphere" which permeated so much of American Impressionism. Benson also became very well known for his prints of birds in flight, which are similar to his painting *Great White Herons* (cat. no. 182). Painted in 1933, the picture has, in a tentative way, some of the flat patterns of Post-Impressionism. Although it has charm, it is not really Benson at his best.

On the other hand, *Breakfast in the Studio* (cat. no. 205) is one of Tarbell's best pictures. Painted in 1896, it is a classic example of a subject for which Tarbell became famous -- an Impressionist version of the genre picture. His paintings of intimate family groups and figures in interiors are reminiscent of those of Degas, as well as evocative of the flavor of the seventeenth-century Dutch "Little Masters." The cut-off figure in the lower right is very Degas, and the handling of paint and the disposition of the elements in space are very modern. Yet the still life on the table and especially the figure of the maid servant seen through the open doorway recall the genre scenes of Pieter de Hooch. Tarbell exhibited frequently at the Academy, and, according to Morris, all three of the Boston members of The Ten, especially DeCamp, felt that their first recognition came from the Pennsylvania Academy.<sup>[25]</sup>

Edward Simmons and Robert Reid were rather minor Impressionists.

Simmons was essentially a muralist, and he painted few easel pictures. Reid, too, was a muralist, but he also painted figure pieces and some landscapes in a rather sentimental and decorative manner. *The Mirror* (cat. no. 201), in its artiness and "mood," is very Whistlerian, but it lacks the austerity and sense of abstraction of Whistler's nocturnes and portraits.

The remaining member of The Ten, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, was, by no means, a minor artist. Next to Weir, Hassam, and Twachtman, Dewing was one of the group's most important members. Stylistically, however, he stood apart from the rest of the group, as Degas stood apart from his Impressionist colleagues. Like Degas, Dewing was a conceptual painter; drawing was his forte. His pictorial repertoire included portraits and figure pieces of women, painted with surpassing elegance and refinement. However, his women are detached, unapproachable, alone, and isolated from each other and from the viewer. *Spring* (cat. no. 186) is classic Dewing. There is the jewel-like color, the elegant surface, the mystery. There are the isolated figures that inhabit a refined and self-contained world, a world which exists solely on Dewing's canvases.

Although The Ten American Painters are considered to be a kind of academy of American Impressionism, there were other artists of merit who did not belong to that group but who deserve attention and recognition -- Robert W. Vonnoh and William Ritschel, for example. Both were nationally known in their time; yet today their fame seems to be limited to certain geographical areas -- Vonnoh to Philadelphia and Boston, and Ritschel to California.

Robert Vonnoh had strong associations with the Pennsylvania Academy. He ran the Academy school from 1891 to 1896, and, after his resignation from that post, he continued to substitute for various members of the Academy faculty through the 1920s. He was also involved in obtaining pictures for exhibitions and with their installation as well. He was active in recommending artists for faculty positions and seems to have had a voice in the selection of guest lists for special openings.

Vonnoh began his career in Boston. During his second trip abroad, in 1887, he adopted the Impressionist practice and palette, and in 1890 he was given a one-man show at the Academy consisting of the pictures he had painted in France. *November* (cat. no. 208) was in that exhibition; it

became his best known work. Through his active association with the Academy, he soon made a name for himself in Philadelphia. "Nowhere, we think," wrote Morris, "have you a larger measure of consideration and regard than in Philadelphia."<sup>[26]</sup>

Californians had the same high regard for the work of William Ritschel, who emigrated from Germany in 1895. His *Rocks and Breakers* (cat. no. 202) exhibits a vigorous but conservative Impressionist style that was relatively rare on the West Coast. *Rocks and Breakers* appears to be a sober bridge between the Barbizon approach of William Keith and the more vibrant and experimental style of later California painters.<sup>[27]</sup>

By the time of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, at which the best painters working in the Impressionist manner were represented, the generation of Americans who were born in the 1860s and 1870s could receive instruction from American artists who had already assimilated the Impressionist style. Elmer Schofield and Edward Redfield, for example, studied under Robert Vonnoh at the Academy, and Philip L. Hale studied under J. Alden Weir before continuing on to Paris. Hale's painting tends to be decorative and somewhat sentimental, as in *The Crimson Rambler* (cat. no. 190), purchased by the Academy in 1909. In contrast, Schofield and Edward Redfield were exponents of "manly" American painting. Such terms as "virile and outstepping" were used to describe their work by the critics of their day. In his painting *Winter* (cat. no. 204), Schofield responded directly to that season. The strong dark verticals of the trees and the stark white of the snow are done with the strength and zest of a man who loved to paint out-of-doors in the winter. In 1903 Schofield settled in England, and thereafter, he traveled back and forth between England and America, but he always kept up his interest in the Academy, as did Edward Redfield.

Edward Redfield's painting bears striking similarities to that of Schofield. He too was known as a "painter of winter-locked nature," and his painting *New Hope* (cat. no. 200) is an example of his favorite theme. Redfield was an *alla prima* painter and was convinced that his paintings should be done on the spot with no later alterations in the studio. *New Hope*, probably done in just that manner, is a winter portrait of the town in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where he settled when he returned from Paris in 1890. Redfield is credited with the founding of a lively art colony in New Hope, and he was also active in Pennsylvania Academy affairs; in

1907 he received the Academy Gold Medal for eminent service to art.

Redfield was a friend of Ernest Lawson and William Glackens, both of whom were members of The Eight. They both began their careers as Impressionist painters, and, although they held on to the style in some respects, they gradually developed in another direction. In *At the Beach* (cat. no. 189), Glackens owes a considerable debt to Renoir, and *Fort George Hill: Morning* (cat. no. 195) by Lawson has elements of the Impressionism of Twachtman, with whom he studied. Guy Pene du Bois said of Lawson that he "was an off-shoot which met new conditions, with eyes perhaps less blinded by the sun itself and more open, anyway, to its action upon matter."<sup>[28]</sup>

Du Bois wrote those words in 1916, and by that time "new conditions" were necessary indeed. Impressionism itself had run its course, and the American version, always less robust than its French counterpart, had become, in general, sentimentalized and decorative, as represented in the work of Frederick Frieseke and Richard Miller. Both were superficial artists but sound craftsmen; they were famous in their day, and they carried the style into the late 1930s. Frieseke had the benefits of the teaching of both Whistler and Monet, and *Seated Nude* (cat. no. 187) has the muted tones of Whistler and the brushwork of Monet, but these elements have been reduced to an easy formula. Frieseke lived most of his life in France, as did Richard Miller. The latter went to Paris from St. Louis in 1898 and stayed in France for twenty years. *The Boudoir* (cat. no. 197) is slick and pretty and represents the kind of painting done at the end of the Impressionist movement in the United States.

Although the Impressionist style did reach its high point in the 1890s in America, there were artists of merit who used it effectively even past the point of its decline. Daniel Garber was just such an artist. Garber's work has a strongly decorative, designed quality. He trained with Duveneck at Cincinnati in 1897 and with Anshutz and Weir at the Pennsylvania Academy from 1899 to 1905. His work is uneven, but in his good painting, such as *Battersea Bridge* of 1905 (cat. no. 188), and in his landscapes of Bucks County, where he lived for thirty years, there is a very personal sense of poetry and a lyricism of color which made him one of the more interesting of the late American Impressionists. Garber had a long association with the Pennsylvania Academy, serving on the faculty of the Academy school from 1909 to 1951, and through his painting and his

teaching his personal brand of visual poetry was kept alive well into the twentieth century.

Impressionism in America was developed by study abroad, of course. But the American landscape tradition was certainly a contributing factor to the American version, as was the influence of such key painters as Whistler, Bastien-Lepage, and Monet. Photography played an important role, as did the Japanese print. On the whole, although the American Impressionists were not innovators, there were still brilliant individual and personal achievements. Many of the best artists were associated with the Pennsylvania Academy as students, teachers, or exhibitors. Some of them, in the words of Harrison Morris, "held that their first recognition came from The Pennsylvania Academy in our time, in the way of medals," though not always, as he points out, "in the ways of the more necessary sales."<sup>[29]</sup> Nevertheless, that early recognition of talented artists who created many memorable images was an important contribution to the American tradition, which they and the Academy have served so well.

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1 The discovery of new pigments by the chemical industry from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards played an important but largely overlooked role in the development of Impressionism. In a letter of June 3, 1905, to his dealer Durand-Ruel, Claude Monet described the colors he used. These were cobalt blue, cadmium yellow, vermilion, deep madder, emerald green, and white. With the exception of vermilion and white, the colors he mentions were introduced to artists in the nineteenth century. For further discussion of the influence of technology on Impressionist painting, see Richard J. Boyle, *American Impressionism* (Boston, 1974), chapters I and II.

2 For a more thorough study of these significant collections, see Frank H. Goodyear, Jr. and Carolyn Diskant, *The Beneficent Connoisseurs* (exhibition catalogue, PAFA, 1974).

3 For criticism and comment on the art section of the Philadelphia Centennial, see Edward Strahan, "The Fine Art of the International Exposition," in *Illustrated Catalogue, The Masterpieces of the Centennial Exposition*, vol. I (Philadelphia, 1876)

4 Quoted in George Inness, Jr., *The Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness* (New York, 1917) , p. 169.

5 Lawrence Park, *Gilbert Stuart: An Illustrated Descriptive List of His Works*

(New York, 1926), vol. I, p.69.

6 Harrison S. Morris, *Confessions in Art* (New York, 1930) , pp. 85, 88.

7 "Poetic" also was the critical description of the work of Alexander Harrison's brother Birge Harrison (1854-1929) , who became known for his paintings of winter landscapes. Birge founded The Woodstock School in New York State, which is still the summer school of the Art Students League of New York, and he was probably responsible for the growth of Woodstock as an art colony. The father of the two painters was a Philadelphia intellectual who had the delightful name of Apollos Harrison.

8 This phrase was derived from the title of an exhibition which explored the influences of the Barbizon School on American landscape painting, organized by the National Collection of fine Arts. See Peter Bermingham, *American Art in The Barbizon Mood* (exhibition catalogue, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., 1975)

9 Lloyd Goodrich, Winslow Homer (exhibition catalogue, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1973), p. 28.

10 E. P. Richardson, "The Dinner Horn by Winslow Homer," *Art Quarterly*, 2 (1948), 153-57. The format in the Detroit picture is horizontal, and the figure more monumental. The same porch in the Detroit picture appears in Homer's painting, *Shelling Peas* (Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York). At the time, Dr. Richardson did not know of the version exhibited here.

11 Morris, p. 49. The Academy Gold Medal was awarded to Whistler for his painting, *Arrangement in Black: Lady in the Yellow Buskin, Lady Archibald Campbell*, now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, W. P. Wiltach Collection.

12 Morris, p. 45.

13 Quoted from Christian Brinton, *A Glance in Retrospect: Mary Cassatt* (exhibition catalogue, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania, 1939) , p. 5.

14 Mary Cassatt to Harrison S. Morris, March 2, 1904, PAFA Archives.

15 Mary Cassatt to John Frederick Lewis, March 22, 1912, PAFA Archives.

16 John I. H. Baur, *Theodore Robinson* (exhibition catalogue, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1946), p.51.

17 Morris, p. 173.

18 Quoted in Donelson F. Hoopes, *The American Impressionists* (New York, 1972), p. 50.

19 Morris, p. 171.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 145.

22 Ibid., pp. 69-70.

23 Childe Hassam to Harrison Morris, November 17, 1894, PAFA Archives.

24 Quoted in Morris, p. 131.

25 Ibid., p. 66.

26 Harrison S. Morris to Robert Vonnoh, July 25, 1901, PAFA Archives.

27 For the most part Impressionism in California was more idiosyncratic than it was in the East and not as widespread. Ritschel's style tends to be more European than that of other California Impressionists, who used a bright palette more for expressionist, than for impressionist ends. Further, California painters seem to have made a stylistic jump from the tonalism of William Keith (1838-1911), who was the best known nineteenth-century California painter outside California, to a flat-patterned style derived from the Japanese (via the French Nabis group) through the strong influence of the San Francisco muralist Arthur Mathews (1860-1945). This was probably in part due to the distance from the East Coast, where an Anglo-European influence predominated, and in part due to the influence of Mathews himself. San Francisco was the art world of California and Mathews and his wife were the dominant figures in it. See Harvey L. Jones, *The Mathews: Masterpieces of the California Decorative Style* (exhibition catalogue, The Oakland Museum, California, 1971).

28 Guy Pene du Bois, "Ernest Lawson, Optimist," *Arts and Decoration* (September 1916), 505.

29 Morris, p. 66.

## About the author

Richard J. Boyle wrote the above essay as part of the book, *In This Academy: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1805 - 1976*. The

catalogue was published to coincide with the exhibition of the same name at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1976. Richard J. Boyle was Curator at the Cincinnati Art Museum from 1965 until 1973 He served as Director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1973 until 1983. He is the author of *American Impressionism* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1974) and *John Twachtman* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1979). Mr. Boyle is a co-author of the exhibition catalogue, *Twachtman in Gloucester: His Last Years, 1900-1902* (New York: Universe Books/Ira Spanierman Gallery, 1987) and served on the advisory committee for the John Henry Twachtman Catalogue Raisonné. He published, along with Elizabeth de Veer, *Sunlight and Shadow: The Life and Art of Willard L. Metcalf* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987).

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