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AN EXHIBITION
OF PAINTINGS
BY

THE EIGHT

robert henri
arthur b. davies
william glackens
ernest lawson
george luks
maurice prendergast
everett shinn
john sloan

MARCH 9 — APRIL 1, 1979 WILKES COLLEGE SORDONI ART GALLERY

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EIGHT

Just about a lifetime ago, on February 3, 1908, an important exhibition of paintings opened in New York's Macbeth Gallery. It was to be among a handful of landmark events which, over the next few years, would arouse American art out of its complacency and into the mainstream of twentieth-century modernism. The exhibition consisted of works by eight American artists who were operating either outside of, or barely within the artistic establishment of the time: Robert Henri, John Sloan, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, Maurice Prendergast, Ernest Lawson, and Arthur B. Davies.

Two years later, Henri and Sloan helped to organize another landmark show, the Exhibition of Independent Artists, in direct competition with the annual display by the National Academy of Design, that august bastion of authoritarian conservatism. In 1913, another member of the Eight, Arthur B. Davies, became a prime mover of the renowned Armory Show which brought together, for the first time in America, hundreds of works by the leading avant-garde artists of Europe and the United States.

Today's spectator would perceive striking stylistic differences between the 1908 and 1913 events. The Armory show highlighted such radical groups as the Cubists and the Fauves, while the exhibition of The Eight offered work of solidly representational character, with an occasional excursion into Impressionism. Europe's progressive front had moved on from Impressionism some twenty years earlier. By 1908, Matisse's Fauvism was officially three years old, and Picasso was on the verge of Cubism. The pace of artistic development in America clearly lagged behind that of Europe, and sweeping changes were not to be made overnight. In the 1850s and 1860s the French realist painters Courbet and Manet had turned their backs on the accepted classical and romantic traditions of the French Academy, and had broken

a path for fresh thinking that ultimately drew along it the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists, and every radical movement of the early twentieth century.

In America, The Eight performed a similar, if somewhat belated function. They were spoilers who championed artistic freedom in a society which had held tenaciously and reverently to the academic line. They were not the first non-conformists; men such as Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Albert Ryder had successfully gone their own way, but they had not crystallized widespread rebellion; Mary Cassatt and Whistler had created more radical styles in their time, but only as expatriates little known or appreciated in their native land. The Eight, on the other hand, set off the first explosion to seriously undermine the power structure of the academic establishment in America.

The show was precipitated when the National Academy refused to accept works by Sloan and Glackens for their 1907 exhibition. Henri, a member of the Academy jury, could not prevail upon his colleagues, and in fact, found his own work luke-warmly accepted. Therefore, he determined to organize an independent exhibition which would show work of the more liberal artists. The show of The Eight, as a controversial event, was very well attended, and received as much favorable as hostile criticism. All in all, and with \$4,000.00 in sales, it was a success.

The painters of the Eight did not constitute a homogeneous group, and they never exhibited all together again. Lawson and Prendergast were strongly influenced by Impressionism, though in quite different ways, and Davies was a Fantacist, loosely related to the French Symbolists. Only Henri, Sloan, Shinn, Luks, and Glackens formed a long-standing and fairly closeknit group. These five shared a style of briskly painted realism, similar to Manet's, as well as a passion for ordinary subjects unsentimentally presented, particularly ones drawn from their own urban surroundings (hence their later designation "The Ash Can School").

Robert Henri, the eldest of these five, had been their inspirational mentor and supporter back in their Philadelphia days, when he was teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy and they were working as newspaper artists. With their journalistic backgrounds, Glackens, Luks, Shinn, and Sloan responded naturally to Henri's spontaneous realism. These men had not deliberately set out to break new artistic ground, and certainly they don't look very radical today. Indeed, they revered such old masters as Hals, Velasquez, and Goya, who mated candor with powerfully graphic styles. Henri and his Philadelphia friends sought to reveal twentieth-century life with the same candor and visual pungency. The other three members of The Eight were more involved with poetic transformations of the natural world, but all eight were ill-treated by an art establishment which still favored romantic idylls, classical pastiches, and vignettes of drawing room morality.

The historical position of The Eight is usually fixed in terms of the group's catalytic role in bringing about an important change in America's artistic values. By promoting liberalized exhibition opportunities for less conventional artists, they opened the door for a much broader exchange of ideas and tastes. It might not be reaching too far to assign another significance to these painters, particularly the Ash-Can contingent. Their brash, bravura, paint-loving technique and their sensitivity to the vital presence of the American urban environment place them closer to the Abstract Expressionism of the fifties than we might initially suppose. In a spiritual sense, The Eight were the forerunners of the New York School which erupted on the international scene after World War II.

Yet, except for Prendergast, whose style approached a Fauve-like abstractness and therefore seemed more modern, The Eight have rarely enjoyed the limelight in twentieth-century criticism. Modernist scholars were not inclined to look beyond the fact that these painters resembled Manet and his generation more than anyone else, which placed

them squarely in a late nineteenth-century aesthetic. It was as if they had reinvented the wheel, and historians whose primary criterion for achievement was innovation had difficulty looking at work which was "out of date."

Several things have happened in the last decade which may be changing this approach. For one thing, as we recede farther from the birth of modernism in Paris, the significance of its initial moments no longer overshadows so completely the importance of the hours of assimilation which followed, especially within the context of the cultural differences which existed between Europe and America. A somewhat analogous situation would be the adoption of Caravaggio's style by younger painters, such as Velasquez, in the seventeenth century. The intrinsic power and beauty of Velasquez' early work are not belittled because it resembles Caravaggio's.

There has also been a widespread return to various forms of naturalism in contemporary art, which places the center of vanguard taste somewhat closer to The Eight than it has been for quite a few decades. At the same time, American scholars (and not just the chauvinistic ones) have begun to outgrow their inferiority complex, vis-a-vis Europe, when it comes to any discussion of American art before our own revolutionary period of the forties and fifties. More than ever before, American art of the past is being looked at on its own terms and for its inherent strength. As historical catalysts, The Eight have always been recognized; as artists in their own right, they may now receive a fresh appraisal.

It is the purpose of this exhibition to reveal The Eight on both these levels. As we experience them together again, we can perhaps more easily imagine their impact in 1908.* At the same time, we can look at them with an open mind, in the solace of another day.

^{*} The present show, while representing all the artists of The Eight, does not include those pictures which were in the original exhibition (with one exception). Many of these works are later, and show something of the various directions the artists took during their careers.

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ROBERT HENRI

(1865-1929 Born in Cincinnati, Ohio)

Henri was the doyen of the Philadelphia, or Ash Can, contingent of The Eight. Having lived most of his adolescence in the middle and far west, Henri displayed something of the audacity and rugged individualism typically associated with the American frontier. His father, a land speculator, had killed a man in self-defense in Nebraska, but before his name was cleared, he had changed it and had fled to New Jersey. His son, Robert Henry Cozad, thus became Robert Henri (Hen'-rye).

Henri studied at the Pennsylvania Academy under Thomas Anshutz, one of Thomas Eakins' foremost students. His natural inclinations for candor and realism flowed easily into the Eakins tradition. Henri's ambition to excel as an artist carried him to Paris in 1888 for several years of study at the Academe Julien, during which time he was temporarily attracted to academic painters, such as his teacher Bougereau. His attempts at acceptance into the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts met with failure until 1891. Gradually, he gravitated toward the loosely-painted realism of Manet, as well as to old masters such as Velasquez and Hals.

Back in Philadelphia, Henri's charisma drew a large and faithful following to the weekly open-houses at his studio, where art, literature, philosophy and politics were discussed along with regular forays into madcap fun and frivolity. Henri, Sloan, Glackens, Shinn and Luks cemented their ties there.

After a well-reviewed one-man show at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1897, selection into three Paris salons, and the purchase of one of his paintings by the French government, Henri's place in the art establishment was well-secured. From that position, he fought to liberalize the establishment, particularly with regard to exhibition opportunities for young and progressive artists. He was chief instigator of the exhibition of The Eight and also had a hand in the Armory

Show and several other important exhibitions of the time.

Henri's success as a painter was matched by that as a teacher, and his students included such major figures as George Bellows, Edward Hopper, and Man Ray. In terms of local interest, it may be noted that during the summer of 1902, Henri painted landscapes at Black Walnut, Pennsylvania, northwest of Wilkes-Barre, at the home of his wife's parents. "Picnic at Meshoppen," in the present exhibition dates from this visit. In 1907-08, Henri again travelled to Wilkes-Barre, to paint portraits of Mr. & Mrs. George Cotton Smith and Miss Edith Reynolds.

1.
"Cafe at Night, Paris"
oil
32 x 25½"

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

2.
"Rue de Rennes"
oil
255 x 32"

On loan from Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York.

4.
"Picnic at Meshoppen, Pennsylvania, July 4, 1902" oil
26 x 32"

On loan from The Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

5. "Dutch Fisherman" oil 24 x 20"

On loan from The Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.



3.
"Bridgie Beg"
oil
20 x 24"
On loan from a private collection.

ARTHUR B. DAVIES

(1862-1928 Born in Utica, New York)

Davies was not one of the Ash-Can painters, and at first glance it would seem unlikely that he could have had much in common with them. But like them, he sought to free art from the grip of the Academy. With a talent for organization and a perspicacious eye, he was largely responsible for putting together the Armory Show in 1913.

Davies initially studied landscape painting, then attended the Chicago Academy of Design, and briefly considered a career as a draftsman. He went to New York to further his studies in painting and in 1893 was off to Europe. His dreamy landscapes, often inspired by myths and poems, put him into the orbit of late Romantic and Symbolist artists such as Bocklin, Puvis de Chevannes, and Odilon Redon.

After the Armory Show, Davies began to experiment with Cubism, and also turned more and more to printmaking. His Cubist work put him irrevocably into the mainstream of twentieth-century art, and along with Prendergast, made him the most apparently modern of the painters of The Eight after World War I.

6. "Silvered Heights" oil 18 x 40"

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

8. "Barn Swallow" watercolor 7 x 5½"

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.



7.
"Seven Nudes"
oil
11 x 21¾"
On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

9.
"Lane with Trees and Fence"
watercolor
4½ x 7"

· On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

10. "Cows Out to Pasture" watercolor $4\frac{1}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{8}$ "

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

WILLIAM GLACKENS

(1870-1938 Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Glackens had little formal art training, but was gifted with a natural facility and a prodigeous visual memory. He was naturally suited to the artist/reporter profession. His interest in serious painting soon led him, via his Philadelphia newspaper colleagues, to Henri, who encouraged him and with whom he came to share a studio. Glackens travelled to France for a year before settling in New York, and developed a taste for Manet, the Impressionists, and several of the Post-Impressionists.

In 1898, Glackens risked life and limb to cover the Cuban War for *McClure's Magazine*. (Luks also covered the War, but mainly from the vantage point of the taverns, where he heard about the day's events.) Early under the influence of Manet, Glackens' later work followed a lighter, more colorful vein, similar to Renoir's Impressionism (as seen in "The Saco at Conway," for example). He also turned from urban scenes to nudes, landscapes, and still-lifes. A friend of Dr. Albert Barnes, Glackens was instrumental in selecting and procuring many of the masterpieces of French impressionist and post-impressionist painting which now comprise the important Barnes Foundation Collection in Merion, Pennsylvania.

11.
"Nude Dressing Hair"
oil
30 x 25"

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

13."Mixed Bouquet, White Vase"oil16 x 14"On loan from the Kraushaar Galleries, New York.



12.
"The Saco at Conway"
oil
25 x 30"
On loan from the Kraushaar Galleries, New York.

14.
"Nude with Black Stockings"
oil
16½ x 13"
On loan from a private collection.

15."Flowers in a Pitcher"oil24 x 18"On loan from the Berry Hill Galleries, New York.

ERNEST LAWSON

(1873-1939 Born in Nova Scotia, Canada)

Lawson was the only member of the group who was primarily a landscapist. During his lifetime, he travelled widely, beginning with a stint as a draftsman in Mexico, where his father was engaged in an engineering project. He later moved to New York, and studied under the American impressionists Twachtman and Weir.

In Paris, he came under the influence of European Impressionism as a friend of Sisley. Later trips took him to Spain, Nova Scotia, and west and midwest of the United States, and finally to Florida, where he died.

Today, however, we associate Lawson mostly with the upper reaches of Manhattan and the Harlem River, where he was living at the time of the Exhibition. More than any other painter, he preserved, with poetic substantiality, the character of those places. Working with the palette knife, he manipulated his scumbled impastos into a surface of "crushed jewels," as one critic described it. And though he is typically thought of as an impressionist, Lawson shared with the Symbolists a belief that color should be used to evoke particular emotions rather than merely depict natural facts.

17.
"Spring"
oil
25 x 30"

On loan from the Syracuse University Art Collections, Syracuse, New York.

18.
"The Everglades"
oil
30 x 40"

On loan from Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York.



16.
"High Bridge-Winter"
oil
19 x 24"

On loan from The Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania.

19. "The Blue Hill"

oil

16 x 19½"

On loan from Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York

20.
"The Lock"
oil

17½ x 31¼"

On loan from The Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

GEORGE LUKS

(1867-1933 Born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania)

Luks, the son of a cultured physician, was from the outset a free spirit and a mocker of Victorian respectability. He went to Philadelphia in 1883, apparently to become a vaude-ville performer. He briefly attended the Pennsylvania Academy, and then spent several years traveling in Europe. Luks met his fellow Ash-Can painters in the art department of the *Philadelphia Press*, where they regularly met. Joining the staff of the *New York World*, he took over the first continuing comic strip, "The Yellow Kid." As he became increasingly involved in painting, he developed a style similar to Henri's with dark tonalities and broad brushstrokes. His fondness for seventeenth-century Dutch painting was evident in this work. Luks, only half-jokingly, used to claim that Frans Hals was incarnate within him. His later work became lighter, more colorful, often garish.

With his irrepressible theatrical flair and brashness, Luks was the group's clown prince, given to practical jokes and instigating barroom brawls. But his painting was unfailingly honest. On his impulsive and brutally realistic style, he claimed, "I can paint with a shoestring dipped in pitch and lard . . . Guts! Guts! Life! that's my technique."

22.
"Portrait of a Man"
oil
30½ x 25¼"
On loan from The Westmoreland County Museum of Art,
Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

23.
"Beggar Woman"
oil
20 x 16"
On loan from a private collection.



21.
"Boy with Bowl"
oil
30 x 25"
On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

24.
"Old Timer"
oil
30½ x 25"
On loan from the Hirschl and Adler Galleries Inc., New
York.

25.
"Little Tommy"
oil
23 x 17½"
On loan from the Coe-Kerr Gallery Inc., New York.

MAURICE PRENDERGAST

(1859-1924 Born in Newfoundland, Canada)

Prendergast, although the eldest of The Eight, was the most avant-garde in style. He came to serious painting gradually, having started out as a show-card painter in Boston. Three years in Paris (1892-95) were spent absorbing the latest developments in art created by the Impressionists, the Neo-Impressionists, the Symbolists, and the Nabis. Despite the fact that he was a provincial painter in his middle thirties, Prendergast gravitated easily to this radical current. By 1900 he had developed a personal style reminiscent of Pierre Bonnard's. Both men shared a love for the festive promenades and graceful landscapes of urban parks. The dancing rhythms of Prendergast's bright patchworked color exuded an air of bourgeois elegance. Perhaps more than any other American painter of the first decade of the twentieth century, Prendergast approached the lyrical color explorations of Matisse. His abstractness, lack of "finish," and lavish color caused his work to be the most strongly attacked by the critics of The Eight, but this was no deterrant to a mature and independent spirit. Later on, he experimented with a somewhat pointillist technique of painting, partly derived from Paul Signac. From beginning to end, Prendergast remained an individualist who charted his own artistic course.

"Marblehead Rocks," in the present show, was in the original exhibition of The Eight.

26.

"La Rouge: Portrait of Miss Edith King"

oil

 $28\frac{1}{2} \times 31\frac{1}{2}$ "

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.



27.

"Marblehead Rocks" watercolor

14 x 10"

On loan from a private collection.

28.

"Bathers in a Cove"

oil

20 x 27³/₄"

On loan from Pennsylvania State University, Museum of Art, University Park, Pennsylvania.

29.

"Cresent Beach"

oil

 $10\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{7}{16}$

On loan from Bucknell University, Ellen Clarke Bertrand Library, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

30.

"Paris Omnibus"

oil

101/4 x 131/16"

On loan from Bucknell University, Ellen Clarke Bertrand Library, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

EVERETT SHINN

(1876-1953 Born in Woodstown, New Jersey)

Everett Shinn, the youngest of The Eight, had the most varied career. In addition to painting and illustration, Shinn, at one time or another, was involved in set design, motion picture art direction and playwriting.

Shinn met the other Philadelphia painters at the Pennsylvania Academy, which he attended while working as an illustrator for the *Philadelphia Press*. His ambition, upon migrating to New York City, was to establish himself as a fashionable illustrator for the better magazines and publishing houses. His pastel of the Metropolitan Opera House in a snowstorm, rendered overnight to meet the deadline for landing a job with *Harper's Weekly*, helped to launch him toward the fulfillment of his ambition. Unlike the other Ash-Can painters, Shinn gravitated to the fashionable sections of town rather than the humbler ones.

His interest in the theater was stirred by his trip to Paris in 1901, and the pictures he showed with The Eight included stage scenes. Partly because of this interest, he was particularly drawn to the art of Degas. He also shared with Degas a love for pastel as a medium, two examples of which appear in the present show.

31.

"Strong Man, Clown and Dancer"

oil

10 x 8"

On loan from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

32.

"Clown"

oil

9 x 71/2"

On loan from Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York.



34. "Snowstorm, Washington Square" pastel $25\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$ " On loan from a private collection.

33.
"The Green Ballet, 1943"
oil
19³/₄ × 30"
On loan from The Westmoreland County Museum of Art,
Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

35.
"Startled Nude"
pastel
15 x 14½"
On loan from a private collection.

JOHN SLOAN

(1871-1951 Born in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania)

Sloan was the "slow starter" of the Ash-Can group, but one of its most durable successes. He continued to work as an artist/reporter for Philadelphia newspapers long after his journalist colleagues in The Eight had turned to painting. He was the last of them to move to New York, and the only one never to go to Europe. For a long time he received little attention as a painter, and sold his first painting only after he was past forty.

His manner of painting was also slower than that of his Philadelphia friends. He had less facility with the quick study than men such as Luks and Glackens, and during his newspaper career concentrated on illustrations for the Sunday sections rather than attempting on-the-spot recordings of fast-breaking news. On the other hand his work took on an increasing structural solidity, and he gained early recognition as an illustrator with his art-nouveau drawings and his etchings for novels.

When he began his career as a serious painter in New York, Sloan turned to the realities of the urban environment for inspiration. So candid and forceful was his work that several paintings submitted to an exhibition in 1906 were rejected for their "vulgarity." Sloan's deep attachment to the humbler elements of urban society aroused more than artistic interest in them, and he ran for the State Assembly in 1908 on the Socialist ticket, but was defeated. In 1912 he became art editor for the socialist magazine, The Masses. His social consciousness continued to influence his painting and illustration for several years, but after World War I, he turned more fully to formal problems, such as the study of the nude. Like his own mentor, Henri, Sloan became an influential teacher, whose students included such later masters as Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Reginald Marsh.

37.
"Horace Traubel"
oil
32 x 26"

On loan from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

38.
"Self Portrait"
oil
24 x 20"

On loan from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

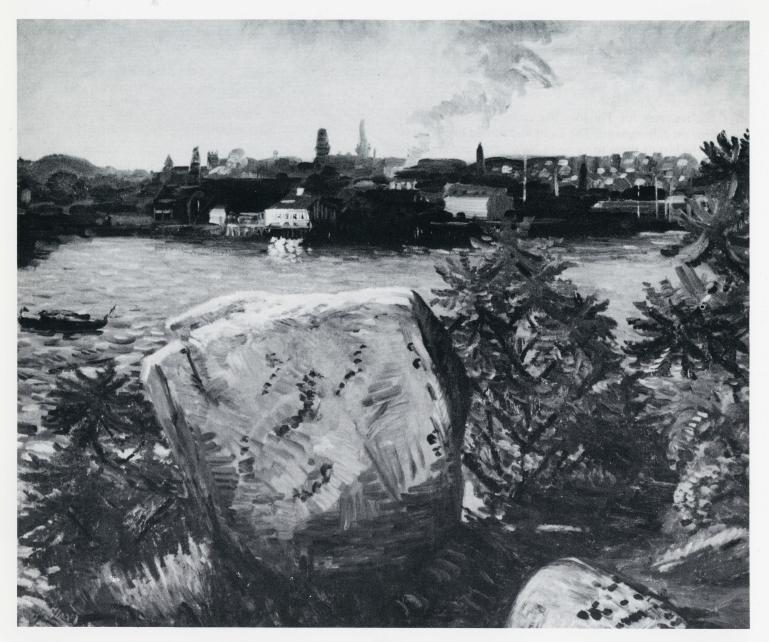
39.
"Gloucester Harbor"
oil
26 x 32"

On loan from Syracuse University Art Collections, Syracuse, New York.

40.
"Dolly Reading"
oil
20 x 24"
On loan from a private collection.

36. "Balancing Rock, Gloucester Harbor" oil $26\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{1}{2}$ "

On loan from Lehigh University, Department of Exhibitions and Collection, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.





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