Art OF OUR TIME

SELECTIONS FROM THE ULRICH MUSEUM OF ART
WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Patricia McDonnell and Emily Stamey

With contributions by
Toby Kamp, Laura Moriarty,
Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,
and Robert Silberman

Photo-essay by Larry Schwarm

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Childe Hassam was one of many American artists who around the turn of the twentieth century departed from a formal, academic style to adopt the vigorous brushstroke and vivid palette of the French impressionists. Like their European counterparts, these painters produced landscape, figure, and genre works that captured aestheticized glimpses of their subjects in fleeting conditions of light and atmosphere.

In 1898 Hassam helped found the influential group of American impressionists known as The Ten; among its members were Frank W. Benson, John Twachtman, and J. Alden Weir. Hassam played a key role in promoting impressionism within the American art world. These efforts—and the particular popularity of his many urban and coastal paintings among critics, the public, and his fellow artists—led him to be regarded as the preeminent American impressionist.

At his death in 1935, Hassam bequeathed the contents of his studio, including 126 oil paintings, eighty-nine watercolors, and thirty-three pastels, to the American Academy of Arts in New York, stipulating that they be sold to establish a fund for the purchase of works by American and Canadian artists. Once purchased, the art was to be donated to American museums. Sales of the artist’s paintings to create the Hassam Fund reaped the present-day equivalent of nearly $3 million. *Distant Valley, Montauk* was one of the works in Hassam’s studio, and so its eventual donation to the Ulrich Museum helped fulfill the desire that had motivated him to make his bequest.

The Ulrich’s painting is an idyllic view of several people basking in the late-afternoon sun as it casts a glow across a stretch of seaside dunes and shoreline. The image aptly reflects Hassam’s life in the 1920s. In 1919 he bought a beautiful eighteenth-century house, called Willow Bend, in East Hampton on Long Island and summered there every year until his death. Many of his later paintings were of subjects in that town and its vicinity. During the 1920s, he made numerous excursions and camping trips to Long Island locales such as Montauk with friends and fellow painters. For Hassam, this painting, which appears to be of a paradise imagined, might actually have been an attempt to depict a paradise he had found.

Timothy R. Rodgers
About the Contributors

Toby Kamps is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He has organized exhibitions on the work of Vanessa Beecroft, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenburg as well as such themed exhibitions as Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art (2000), Lateral Thinking: The Art of the 1990s (2002), and The Old, Weird America (2008).

Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include Marsden Hartley: American Modern (1997), On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art (2002), and Painting Berlin Stories (2003).

Laura Moriarty is the author of three novels and the recipient of several literary awards. Before becoming a full-time writer, she was a social worker. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Kansas.

Antonya Nelson has written three novels and published six short-story collections. She contributes often to the New Yorker and the New York Times Book Review. Nelson holds the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her award-winning novel, Loving to Tell (2008), takes place in her hometown of Wichita, and her forthcoming novel, Bound, is set there as well.

Timothy R. Rodgers is director of the Scottsdale (Arizona) Museum of Contemporary Art. Formerly chief curator at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, he is involved in a range of writing and curatorial projects. His scholarly concentration is on American early modernism.

Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. His chief scholarly interests have been photography, film, and contemporary art. Silberman collaborated with former New York Times photography critic Vicki Goldberg on the companion volume for the 1999 PBS series American Photography: A Century of Images.

Larry Schwarm is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, On Fire: Larry Schwarm, won the Honickman Book Award and Prize.


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