From Cassatt to Wyeth: American Masterworks from the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts

Elizabeth de C. Wilson Museum

HUNTER GALLERY

June 3-September 1

SATURDAY, JUNE 3

Kevin Sharp
Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Director of Visual Arts
Free Lecture, 1:00 p.m., Arkell Pavilion

Opening Reception
2:00-4:00 p.m.

From Cassatt to Wyeth: American Masterworks from the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts is a selection of 33 paintings, works on paper and sculpture that, although well known to scholars of American art everywhere, has never been exhibited as a whole beyond the gates of the Mitchell Museum at the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts in Mt. Vernon, Illinois, before this exhibition.

This very rare showing includes the collected works of the late John and Eleanor Mitchell and, as such, is now the Permanent Collection of the Mitchell Museum. It is made up solely of masterpieces created by major American artists, including George Bellows, Mary Cassatt, Arthur B. Davies, Thomas Eakins, William Glackens, Childe Hassam, Robert Henri, George Inness, George Luks, Maurice Prendergast, John Singer Sargent, John Sloan, Andrew Wyeth and others.

Philanthropists John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell, the founders of Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, were active art collectors for more than four decades, eventually acquiring a highly prized collection of late 19th and early 20th century American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts. Upon their deaths, they left their entire estate for the benefit of residents and visitors in southern Illinois.

The Mitchell’s collection, which has been enjoyed by thousands of individuals since the Mitchell Museum opened November 2, 1973, is one of the most significant collections of late 19th and early 20th century American paintings found anywhere; it includes examples of major American art movements including American Impressionism, the Hudson River School, the Ashcan School, and a host of other periods and figures crucial to the development of modern American painting.

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Gala Preview Party
Thursday, June 1
Cocktail Reception
See page 66 for details.

The Works
It has been said that the history of modern art in America began at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. After Lee’s 1865 surrender to Grant, ending the Civil War, no aspect...
of American life was left unaffected, including the visual arts. With the
armistice, Atlantic sea-lanes were
again opened to safe travel, and young
American artists pursued educations and
experiences abroad for the first time in
years.

Among those to board ships and make
their way to the academies of Europe
were Mary Cassatt and her fellow
Philadelphia, Thomas Eakins. Like
hundreds of others, Cassatt and Eakins
arrived in Paris within a year or two of
the war's end. Unlike the majority of their
compatriots, they were both accepted
into the atelier of France's leading
academic artist Jean-Léon Gérôme. For
Eakins, perhaps the most gifted draftsman
to matriculate from the Pennsylvania
Academy of the Fine Arts, entry into
Gérôme's studio was not unexpected. But
for Cassatt, a woman seeking the highest
levels of academic training in a profession
dominated by men, that acceptance was
nothing short of extraordinary.

Although bound by their
connections to Philadelphia and
to the French academic system,
Cassatt and Eakins took quite
different paths to their deservedly
lofty positions in American art
history. Eakins would return to the
United States and become arguably
this country's most inventive
artist-educator as well as its most
outspoken advocate of modern art.

By the time he painted the
collection's remarkable painting of
his sister Margaret in 1871, Eakins
had already startled Americans
with his unflinching realism and
aesthetic candor. Eakins' later
portraits of his friend Professor
George P. Barker and his student
Samuel Murray were even more
psychologically probing and visually
cisive than his first great works
had been.

In the early 1890s, when Cassatt
began to paint mothers and
children - her signature theme
Continued on next page

Arthur Bowen Davies, A River Floweth,
1910, oil on canvas, 14 1/8 x 8", gift of
John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell, 1973

Siegfried Reinhardt, 1861: The Horn, 1966, oil
and wax on panel, 48" x 24", gift of John R. and
Eleanor R. Mitchell, 1973
Cedarhurst continued — she had already achieved more professional success than almost any American artist of her era had. She had participated in four of the eight famous Impressionist shows in Paris, the landmark exhibitions staged by Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro between 1874 and 1886, and she was claimed by the French as one of their own.

By 1908, the year she produced the collection’s magnificent *Jeune Femme Allaitant Son Enfant (Young Woman Nursing Her Child)*, Cassatt was as well known in the United States as she was in France. Americans admired her sensitive yet unsentimental portrayal of maternity and her dedication to the principles of Impressionism, which would shape American painting for years to come.

Cassatt’s achievements in Paris encouraged generations of younger American artists to seek success comparable to her own, beginning with the brilliant expatriate John Singer Sargent. He would become the most cosmopolitan and fashionable portraitist of his age, but he was perhaps most inspired when portraying members of his intimate circle in landscape settings, as in the collection’s *Ilex Wood at Majorca with Blue Pigs*.

J. Alden Weir founded the Society of American artists, an independent exhibition union based on the French Impressionist model. Although the son and brother of academic painters, Weir would champion Impressionism in America, while producing such spectacular examples as the collection’s *The Feather Box*. Similarly, Childe Hassam haunted the same Paris arrondissement that Cassatt and her colleagues had pioneered, and through such works as *The Table Garden*, he became America’s quintessential Impressionist.

Philadelphia produced some of America’s most important painters of the early 20th century, thanks in part to the liberal pedagogy of Eakins. The younger artists Robert Henri, John Sloan, George Luks, William Glackens, and Everett Shinn were not students of Eakins, but they benefited from his ideas. Along with Maurice Prendergast, George Bellows, and Arthur B. Davies, these artists formed a collective called The Eight, which has come to be known as The Ashcan School.

Inspired by Eakins’ model of almost scientific realism, the
painters offered biting social commentary while recording the harsh reality of urban life. By later in their careers, when Glackens produced *A Summer Day*, Henri painted *Patience, (From the Gypsy Camp)* and Bellows executed his portrait of Mrs. T. *in Wine Silk*, they had come almost full-circle, back to the lessons they inherited from Eakins.

With significant examples by Eakins, Cassatt, Sargent, Hassam, Bellows, Luks, and others, *From Cassatt to Wyeth: American Masterworks from the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts* possesses an exceptional collection that has enriched the cultural life of many. But, this group of masterworks also represents a cogent synopsis of American art history during the modern era, a crucial period that may have begun in 1865 at the Appomattox Courthouse.

*From Cassatt to Wyeth* was developed by Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell Foundation, Mt. Vernon, IL and the tour organized by International Arts & Artists, Washington, DC.


This show sponsored in part by:

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