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SECTION

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The weekly entertainment guide of the Rutland Herald

## SVAC show is American art history in 33 pieces

By RICHARD L. BROWN  
Herald Staff

"From Cassatt to Wyeth" presents 33 pieces that are the cream of the permanent collection of the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts in Mount Vernon, Ill. This body of work has virtually never been seen outside the Cedarhurst gates. It is our good fortune that when Cedarhurst needed renovations, the directors decided to travel the collection rather than store it. The Southern Vermont Arts Center

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is the first of only a handful of venues to be visited.

Mostly collected between the 1940s and the 1960s by Cedarhurst founders John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell, the show consists primarily of two-dimensional figural work by American artists who worked after the Civil War.

The Mitchells were intelligent col-

lectors. With few exceptions, each work is representative of its creator's general body of work, making the collection a capsule course in American art history. Huge museums have been built to house collections acquired by the carload, but this gem is proof that wonderful things come in small packages, and marks the dis-

tinction between true collecting and acquisition for its own sake.

The exhibition is in the center's Elizabeth de C. Wilson Museum. Built specifically to house the center's permanent collection and to present traveling shows, the museum's design recalls Colonial houses, with a steep pitched roof and several gables. The high ceiling can accommodate very tall works, but also has the potential

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COURTESY PHOTOS

Details shown are from Maurice Prendergast's "By the Seashore," (above), painted in 1905-1906, "Mary Cassatt's Young Woman Nursing Her Child," c. 1908 (at right), and Arthur Davies' "A River Floweth," (far right) done in 1910. The three works are among the masterpieces on display at the Southern Vermont Arts Center in Manchester this summer. The collection on display is from the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts in Mt. Vernon, Ill.

## Cassatt

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of dwarfing smaller ones. Curator Scott Dimond has avoided this pitfall by giving each work a sizable spatial frame and spotlighting each one, allowing the viewer to focus on individual pieces without being distracted by its neighbors or by the height of the wall.

Here is some of what you will discover:

Just inside the door is the only sculpture, "Smoking Up," a 1904 tabletop bronze by Charlie Russell (1864-1926). Astride a rearing horse, chaps flapping, ten-gallon hat slightly askew and six-gun held aloft, a cowboy celebrates the end of a cattle drive. Unlike many "Western" artists, Russell lived the life, herding sheep, hunting and wrangling cattle. A passionate admirer of the West, a conservationist and champion of Native American culture, Russell knew his subjects intimately and portrayed them sympathetically.

Step into the main gallery and you're face to face with "Young Mother Nursing Her Child" (c. 1908) by Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). There is at least one other version of this work, in the Art Institute of Chicago. This one is apparently unfinished: part of the right side and lower right corner are unpainted, revealing bare canvas. This unpainted area is more significant for what it doesn't reveal: any sign of a preparatory sketch. One can't be certain without X-ray evidence, but the absence of a sketch suggests that Cassatt painted the work alla

prima, applying paint directly to the canvas so that the final work is developed immediately from the first brushstroke rather than relying on an underdrawing. Painting in this manner was a common practice among the French Impressionists with whom she worked. The powerful brush work is confident and energetic, and sets up an interesting tension with the calm and intimate subject.

Childe Hassam (1859-1935), like Cassatt, was drawn to Impressionism while visiting France, and was one of the "10 American painters" who championed Impressionism over the dark Germanic style favored by the late 19th-century American art establishment. "The Table Garden" (1910) shows a woman seen from the back looking through curtains to the cityscape outside. Between her and the window is a table holding trays of sprouting onion bulbs. The figure is seen in "lost profile," with only a portion of the turned-away face visible — an enigmatic approach fairly common in Hassam's work.

The show is rich in portraiture. There are three by Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), arguably the finest portraitist of his generation, whom Walt Whitman praised for painting the world as he saw it, not "as he thought it ought to be."

Robert Henri (1865-1929) was a founding member of the "Eight independent painters" whose focus on gritty urban scenes gave them the sobriquet "the ash-can school." His work can be gloomy, but his portraits of children, even those from "underprivileged" backgrounds, unfailingly radiate a zest for life and an innate dignity. "Patience (From the Gypsy



Camp) from 1916 is a fine example.

Henri's student George Bellows (1882-1925) is best known for his prize fight and bar scenes, but "Mrs. T. in Wine Silk" (1919) proves he could hold his own with the best society portraitists. The elderly lady poses in a burgundy gown with white lace collar and cuffs. Bellows used a muted green background that complements the dress without creating a harsh contrast. Mrs. T. seems somewhat amused. Initially skeptical about sitting for Bellows, she finally acquiesced, and enjoyed the experience enough to repeat it at least twice. There are portraits by Bellows of her in cream silk in the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., and in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

"From Cassatt to Wyeth" is important for its host of major American painters, but it is made delightful, and may offer some insight to the Mitchells' taste, by its inclusion of little-known artists, including:

Alice R. H. Smith (1876-1958), a South Carolina regional watercolorist whose work demonstrates

both her mastery of the medium and her admiration of the Japanese Ukiyo-e painters;

Jonathan O. J. Frost (1852-1928), a Marblehead, Mass.-based folk artist whose "A Sunset on the Banks" is the painting Grandma Moses would have done if she had painted marine subjects;

And the surrealist Siegfried Reinhardt (1925-1984), one of the few Americans to have a work in the Vatican Museum, whose contribution features a woman's head sprouting from an antique tuba and giant mother-of-pearl cufflinks.

This is a must-see show, and you have until Sept. 1 to see it. After that you can catch it in Orlando if you're planning a Disney trip over the holidays.

The Southern Vermont Arts Center is off West Road in Manchester Village. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays noon to 5 p.m. Adult admission is \$8, students \$3, preteens are free. The center's phone number is 362-1405 and the Web address is [www.svac.org](http://www.svac.org).

Richard L. Brown is an art historian and former gallery director.

