

# INTRODUCTION

The first American Impressionist painting that I recall seeing was a Childe Hassam. I was eighteen years old, and it was hanging in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, outside of the curator's office. It was a large canvas of a woman seated in a garden surrounded by flowers, bursting with reds and greens and sunshine. I remember standing in front of it in a narrow hallway and thinking it was beautiful. I had never heard of Hassam, and I don't know if the term "American Impressionism" existed in 1960. It was to gain currency some years later and became prominent upon the event of Dr. William Gerdt's groundbreaking exhibition and publication in 1980, *American Impressionism*, which irrevocably set these artists and their work in proper perspective.

For the past three decades, scores of exhibitions and publications have elucidated and explored the role of American men and women and their connection to "the new painting," as Impressionism was first called in Paris by the critic Edmond Duranty in 1876. The next generation of artists that moved away from Impressionism in America has generally been called Realists, although their work overlaps in time and subject matter with their Impressionist colleagues, and stylistically it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one from another. The subject matter of the Realists often portrayed the gritty side of urban life, painted in bravura strokes of paint as opposed to the more delicate application of the impressionist brush.

We are pleased to present this collection of American paintings which range chronologically from Winslow Homer (1836-1910) to John Whorf (1903-1959). Included herein are some of our most well-known painters: Mary Cassatt, William Merritt Chase, Childe Hassam, Maurice Prendergast, John Singer Sargent, and James Whistler. We are also pleased to include some lesser luminaries, artists that have great merit, but whose work is uncommon on the art market. It is our belief that seeing these artists as a whole is an apt perspective of the richness and variety of American painting at a most vital moment in our history.

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