

# Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit

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THE ADORATION OF THE CHILD

MARIOTTO ALBERTINELLI

FLORENCE. 1474-1515

PURCHASED FROM THE JULIUS H. HAASS FUND

## A TONDO BY MARIOTTO ALBERTINELLI

A tondo—a type of painting on a round panel, fashionable especially in Florence, towards the end of the fifteenth and into the early part of the sixteenth century—the first in our collection of Italian art, has been acquired through the Julius H. Haass fund (32.89; 34" in diameter.)

The subject, well chosen for a circular composition, deals with that old favorite in Christian art, the Adoration of the Infant Jesus by Mary and Joseph. On their flight into Egypt, to save the Child's life from the wrath of Herod, the Holy Family is resting on a flowery meadow, in utter isolation. The Mother has made a comfortable place for her little son on the ground, by spreading a white cloth over the sack which contains her hurriedly amassed belongings, and proceeds to tighten up his swaddling-clothes. But as she kneels before her Child, she almost involuntarily folds her hands in wordless adoration. St. Joseph, a middle-aged man in traveller's cloak and with the wanderer's staff, also bends his knees and worships the Child. A few homesteads in the middle ground with people engaged in their daily tasks, a few feathery trees against the sunlit sky, bluish hills lost against the horizon, softly frame the plastic group in the foreground.

Mariotto Albertinelli, born October 13, 1474, had first learned the craft of gold-beating but, restless and venturesome, gave up this rather monotonous trade and, about twenty years old, entered the workshop of Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507), whose highly gifted pupil and assistant, Piero di Cosimo (1462-1521) seems to have become his teacher. Here he met Baccio della Porta (1472-1517), and soon there blossomed one of those rare friendships which outlasted all the vicissitudes of fortune and temporary estrangements, caused by the fundamental difference of their characters. On leaving their teacher's studio the two

friends worked as partners, although with widely different interests. Mariotto, gay, debonair, soon attracted the attention of Alfonsina, the wife of the younger Piero de' Medici, and Baccio became a follower of Savonarola, a "piagnone," and cast his drawings into the pyre of vanity, during the carnival of 1497 and 1498. Our sympathy goes to Mariotto who was bitterly distressed when his friend, in morbid anguish after Savonarola's death, assumed the habit of the Dominican friars, to be known henceforth as Fra Bartolomeo.

During the next few years Mariotto painted his finest works. The year 1503 was especially fertile. Besides his masterpiece, the Visitation, ordered by the congregation of San Martino at Florence, now in the Uffizi, he painted a round panel of the Nativity, now in the Pitti, and the tondo of the Holy Family in our collection. His growing fame attracted several disciples to his studio, Pontormo, Visino, Bugiardini, Innocenzo d'Imola, Franciabigio and others. The friendship with Fra Bartolommeo, even their partnership, continued until 1512, when their association came to an end, probably at the instigation of the prior of San Marco, who disliked the frivolous, sophisticated, epicurean Mariotto. Poor Mariotto, in high dudgeon, declared that he would rather keep an inn than continue his profession. But after a few months of performing the duties of innkeeper he returned to his easel.

Toward the end of his life Mariotto was invited to the monastery of S. Maria della Quercia near Viterbo, and thence he visited Rome. We would be glad to know what inspiration he may have received from the study of the immense works of Michelangelo and Raphael. But, hardly returned to La Quercia, he fell grievously ill and died soon afterwards in Florence, on November 5, 1515, only forty-one years old.

Since much of Mariotto's work was

done in partnership with Fra Bartolommeo, and because his early paintings, which at the time belonged to Alfonsina de'Medici and to Cesare Borgia, seem to be lost, we need not be surprised at the relatively limited number of works preserved. We are glad to have in the charming tondo an acknowledged painting of the artist's best period. The composition is closely related to that of a tondo in the Borghese Gallery in Rome, which Berenson and Van Marle assign, tentatively, to Piero di Cosimo, while other scholars see in it the hand of Lorenzo di Credi. But, while in the Borghese tondo the figures are placed in the landscape, Mariotto, in accord with his custom at that time—as seen also in the Uffizi Visitation—places them close to the front. Mariotto was persuaded that paintings are worthy of estimation “only in proportion as they combine relief and force with softness” (Vasari). Our tondo illustrates well this

tendency of accentuating plastic effects by a play of strong oppositions of light and shadow. The traditional red and blue of the Virgin's robes contrast pleasingly with the amber and old rose of St. Joseph's mantle, and the Child's white wrapping clothes are shaded into mauve and palest blue. The Child, struggling to get rid of the tightly wound clothes, is somewhat reminiscent of Andrea della Robbia's foundling children. St. Joseph looks like a not entirely successful attempt of competition with the grandiose figures of Fra Bartolommeo's, and in the Virgin we see reflected the influence of Lorenzo di Credi and Leonardo da Vinci.

Mariotto Albertinelli never was sufficiently great to rank with the giants in whose shadow he worked. That he was a good painter and a sincere artist is proved by our tondo.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL.

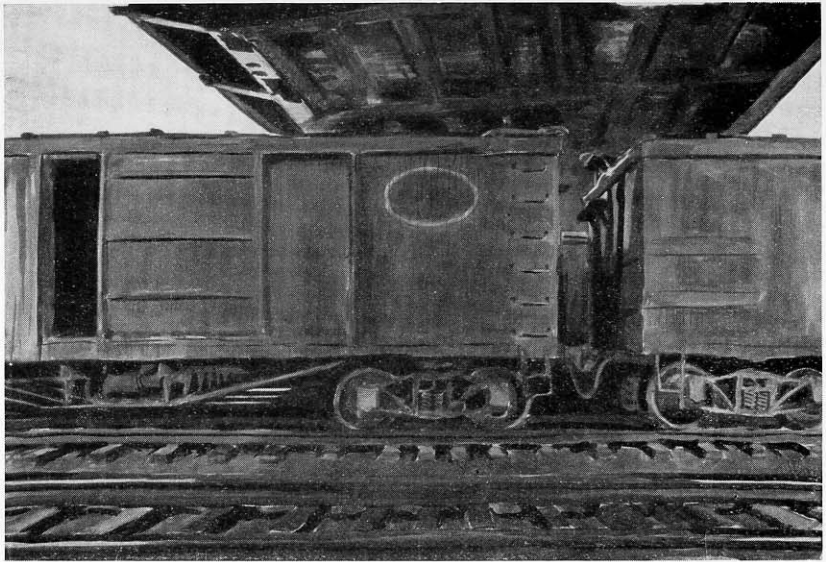
## PAINTINGS BY BURCHFIELD, KANTOR AND ELSHEMUS

Charles E. Burchfield, Morris Kantor and Louis Michel Elshemus are among the contemporary American painters to find representation in the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts during the past three years. Since the World War we have come to take pride in our cultural self-sufficiency, and these artists, whose works have a strong native flavor, have been singled out for enthusiastic praise from the critics and for a high place among their contemporaries. To a marked degree, the work of these painters possesses originality and reflects the character of the environment from which they grew. Burchfield and Kantor essay the American scene to the exclusion of other subjects, and Elshemus, long neglected, has during a half

century of painting exhibited a native, almost rustic, approach to his landscape themes.

The watercolor painting, *Freight Cars Under a Bridge*,<sup>1</sup> by Charles Burchfield was purchased and presented by Dr. and Mrs. George Kamperman from an exhibition of watercolors held at the museum in May, 1934. Like all the work of the artist's mature style, this picture is a presentation of a commonplace American scene in which the bald reality of life is touched with native sentiment. It is the kind of subject one may find in the railroad yards of any urban outskirts and might be thought trivial material for serious painting were it not for the artist's own innate regard for his theme. He makes one feel his

<sup>1</sup>Watercolor on paper: H. 24"; W. 34". Signed on right with the monogram C.B. and dated 1934. Installed in Gallery 35.



FREIGHT CARS UNDER A BRIDGE  
 CHARLES BURCHFIELD  
 GIFT OF DR. AND MRS. GEORGE KAMPERMAN

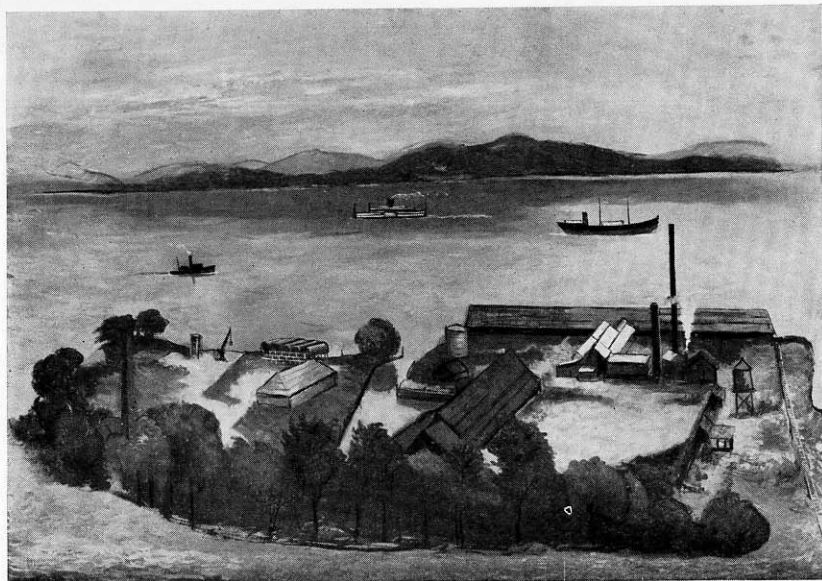
earnest desire to reveal the part the railroad played as one of the factors that have contributed to the growth and success of a new nation. It is done in the same spirit as the street scenes and old houses which he is wont to portray. When he paints the forlorn aspect of our rapidly changing cities, he does not point the finger of scorn; the fading glories of the deserted mansions that harbored the first families of yesteryear, or the deserted and run-down habitations of humbler mien, are depicted with a touch of sadness but with a sympathetic understanding that this is a necessary evolution in growing and rapidly changing cities.

Born in Ashtabula, Ohio, April 9, 1893, Burchfield had his training in the Cleveland School of Art under that inspiring teacher, Henry G. Keeler, and while he is now hardly more than forty years of age, he has risen to high distinction in his profession, having won

such awards as the Jennie Sesnan Gold Medal in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in 1929, for the best American landscape, and having works in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the John Herron Art Institute, the Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, as well as in our own Institute of Arts.

The landscape, *Brick Yards*,<sup>2</sup> by Morris Kantor, was purchased from the income of the Laura H. Murphy Fund and presented by the Founders Society from an Exhibition of Six Painters selected by the College Art Association and shown at the Detroit Institute of Arts in May, 1933. It is presumably a scene looking across the Hudson River toward the Berkshire Hills in the distance. The

<sup>2</sup>Canvas: H. 21"; W. 29¼". Signed and dated on lower left *M. Kantor, 1931*. Installed in Gallery 35.



BRICK YARDS

MORRIS KANTOR

PURCHASED FROM INCOME OF THE LAURA H. MURPHY FUND

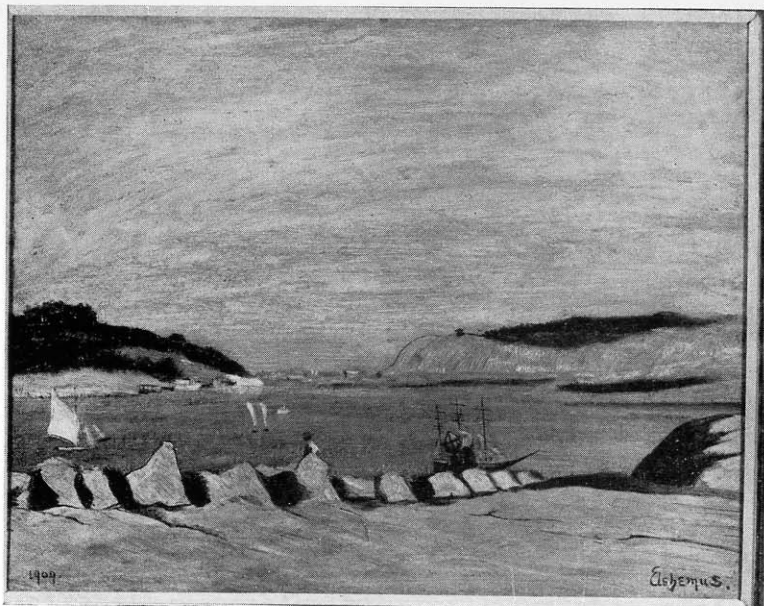
composition has been simplified to emphasize the artist's conception and yet retains to a remarkable degree the suggestion of fresh impression of a gray day after rain with the brilliant summer greens in the trees against an expanse of gray sky and water.

Morris Kantor, some three years younger than Burchfield, is also imbued with the desire to portray the American heritage. Figure subjects in mid-Victorian surroundings, still-life compositions with the quaint old-fashioned flavor of the day our grand-parents, landscapes such as *Brick Yards* come from his brush to make themselves felt for their indigenous quality. Born in Russia, Kantor came to this country at an early age with his parents, and while he had his art training under Homer Boss, of realistic persuasion, his approach to his subject matter is quite different from that of Burchfield. He might be called

a fanciful realist, for while he deals with the verities, he invents conventions to satisfy his needs of self-expression, and his painting often projects itself into the realm of the imaginary. In 1931 he received the first prize of \$2,500 and the Logan Medal at the Art Institute of Chicago for his painting, *Haunted House*, which well illustrates the independence and originality of this creative artist. In our picture, this inventiveness of arrangement is not so apparent as in many works which have come from his brush.

*Coast Scene*<sup>2</sup> by Louis Michel Elshemus was presented by Mrs. Lillian Henkel Haas in 1932. This picture, with its effective landscape bathed in strong sunlight and with a warm gray sky, is but one of many phases of this artist's work. Adjacent to it are two other landscapes by Elshemus loaned by Robert H. Tannahill which show the variety of his

<sup>2</sup>Canvas: H. 22"; W. 28". Signed *Elshemus* in lower right corner; dated 1909 lower left corner. Installed in Gallery 34.



## COAST SCENE

LOUIS MICHEL ELSHEMUS

GIFT OF MRS. LILLIAN HENKEL HAASS

work and his fine feeling for the romantic mood of American landscape.

Perhaps Elshemus does not deserve all the extravagant praise and adulation that came to him on the occasion of his one-man exhibition in New York, in 1926, when his work first received flattering and enthusiastic recognition; and, on the other hand, it seems incredible that a painter of such serious purpose and sterling qualities should have been entirely neglected during the half century when he was producing landscapes that portray the mood of the American scene with the same fidelity and in much the same poetic spirit as the men of 1830 painted their native France. His works were exhibited at the Independent Society and one can understand how their quiet but compelling qualities might

be lost amidst this babel of paint and canvas vying for public attention. He was also an exhibitor at the Societé Anonyme, noted for sponsoring new and unknown talent, but this did not give him the standing as an artist that a similar show under less experimental auspices might have given him; and it was only after he had reached the proverbial three score and ten years that success came to him. For half a century, with little support and no acclaim, guided only by the firm conviction that he had toward the rightness of his own work, he produced some three thousand pictures, many of which are now finding appreciation in public and private collections, bringing to the artist satisfaction and comfort in his declining years.

CLYDE H. BURROUGHS.

## IN MEMORIAM

A tragic fate has carried away the museum's Curator of Far Eastern Art, Benjamin March, in the thirty-fifth year of his life. In the few years that he had been connected with us he had accomplished much, and much was still to be expected from him. When he began his activity at the Museum, in 1928, he had returned from a six years' stay in China, where he had absorbed so much of the spirit of the East that he was in a position to accomplish valuable things as a scholar and educator. He came to the museum at a moment when the still scarcely organized department of Far Eastern art was in need of definite leadership, and in a short time and with limited means at his disposal knew how to build it up to a point where it formed an important and recognized link in the chain of the Institute's collections. To the objects acquired under his leadership belong the two bronze Maitreyas of the sixth and seventh centuries (one dated A. D. 520), the two fine stone statues of the Sui and Wei Dynasties,—one of a Buddhist Monk, the other a Kuan Yin dated 581,—the monumental head of a lion, in cast-iron, of the T'ang Dynasty, the large Sung celadon vase, and a number of rare early paintings like the *Early Autumn* by Ch'uan Hsuan, of the thirteenth century, and *Spring Pasture* of the Yuan period,—all works of significant quality, whose value Mr.

March was able to present convincingly in scientific articles. At the same time he understood to a rare degree the difficult task of making the spirit of this art, so removed from us in time and space, accessible to the general public by means of lectures and creative explanations, and to assemble a small community about him who carried on this interest.

If, in Detroit and Ann Arbor, where he has taught the past two years, an interest in Asiatic art has been created in wider circles, stimulating at the same time a collecting activity, it is mainly due to his efforts.

Combined with his deep understanding of Eastern art and his scientific gifts, he possessed a practical sense which is not frequent with scholars and which enabled him to examine the objects of his department from every technical angle, to display them cleverly according to their nature and to keep his department in order to the smallest detail. In his scientific works also, such as the two books, *China and Japan in Our Museums* (1929), and *Standards of Pottery Description* (1934), he most fortunately combines the mind of the scholar with that of the practical man. With his death the museum has suffered the loss of a scientific force, an excellent educator and a personality which inspired confidence.

W. R. V.

## CALENDAR OF LECTURES AND EXHIBITIONS

## EXHIBITIONS

December 27-January 31. Four Centuries of Landscape Prints.

January 1-15. Photographic Exhibitions.

January 10-February 28. Paintings by Frans Hals.

(Gallery talks on the Frans Hals Exhibition Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays at 3:00 p. m. and at 8:00 p. m.)

## GALLERY TALKS

(Tuesday afternoons at 3:00 and Thursday evenings at 8:00)

January 8 and 10. Mohammedan Art.

January 15 and 17. Early Medieval Art.

January 22 and 24. Gothic Art in the North.

January 29 and 31. Italian Gothic Painting and Sculpture.

February 5 and 7. Flemish Painting in the Middle Ages.

## WORLD ADVENTURE SERIES

(Illustrated lectures every Sunday)

- January 6, 3:30. "Explorations in the Gobi Desert," by Roy Chapman Andrews.  
8:30. "In the Shadow of Eastern Gods," by Robert Edison Fulton, Jr.
- January 13, 3:30. "Bali, Eden of the South Seas," by Andre LaVarre.  
8:30. "A New Language for a New Generation," by Louis Untermeyer (unillustrated).
- January 20, 3:30. "Birds, Bergs, and Kodiak Bears," by William L. Finley.
- January 27, 3:30. "Where the Strange Trails Go Down," by Colonel E. Alexander Powell.  
8:30. "The Eskimos as I Know Them," by Peter Freuchen.

## GARDEN CENTER

January 3. House Plants," by V. R. Depetris.

January 17. "Trees," by Professor Ethel Chase, of Wayne University (illustrated).

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

(Pageant of History Talks Saturday afternoons at 2:30)

January 12. "Early Art of the Christian Church."

January 19. "Mosques of the Mohammedans."

January 26. "The Dark Ages in Europe."