

Paintings
by
Early American Artists

Detroit Museum of Art
December 29th, to January 12th

Jan 1



HOURS OF ADMISSION

Daily 9:00 a. m. to 5:00 p. m.
Sundays . . . 2:00 p. m. to 6:00 p. m.

FIFTEEN examples of the present collection of characteristic paintings by early American artists have been loaned for exhibition in several Museums through the interest of Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston, who brought the collection together. These have been supplemented by eight examples loaned through the courtesy of Mr. Lendall Pitts of Detroit and by two West's from the Museum's permanent collection.

To some genuine students of art, the works of these pioneer men even are lovable for their shortcomings. If technically they may be patronized, or pitied by some, yet in them sincerity and vital spirit are not sacrificed to make technique supreme. Does not their freshness help us recognize that "technique" may become but a marvelous wrapping for a spiritual mummy?

The history of American art must of course become more and more important to the students in our technical schools, to the artists who have graduated from them, in fact to the whole American people. As the American spirit more and more seeks for some adequate æsthetic impression, artists and public will turn to these pioneers who first gave utterance to that spirit. The very naivete of these early American painters means freedom from the bondage of the schools. It means that here is the spirit, primitive, unalloyed, in which the beauty-hungered American of untutored, colonial times turned to the study of art. Here, if anywhere, is the spark that can make an American art the realization of an American spirit.

There is an American spirit in art as in every other relation even though it may be dissolving in the "cosmopolitanism" of the day. Of course, to say that the elementary qualities possessed by our people are not possessed by another people, were rash. Yet some unique combination of qualities gives each people its character, and that is what is reflected in its art—even while the art of other countries may be followed blindly. The art of a people quickly discloses tendencies of that people's genius, and this is as true of the early beginnings of art in America as of the culmination of the modern schools in the contemporary French salon.

The very biographers of such men as West, Copley, Stuart, Sully, Smibert and Chester Harding, have an overflowing wealth of romance not paralleled in our day. Their work has imparted to it a quality not

elsewhere found. There still are great obstacles for the young American artists of the present day, but when we consider the obstacles pushed aside by these earlier men we are compelled to admire their human, not less than their artistic genius, and to recognize that from within their work there shines out a concentrated, intense expression of the elemental American spirit.

Some of these painters are numbered for all time among the most considerable artists of their time, not in America but in the world. Their work has beauty, strength of feeling, expressive ideality. To Americans it will mean more and more, until our very divergence from its point of view, its comparisons, its standards, will give it a happy relief, and its creators the primal significance which belongs to them, that which must belong to the first American masters.

The portraits by Badger and Smybert in the Pitts Collection were painted in Boston before the Revolution. About 1786 they were taken to the Brinley Mansion at Tyngoboro, Mass., by Hon. John Pitts, then Speaker of the House in the General Court (Legislature) of Massachusetts. After his service during the war, Mr. Pitts had retired to his country home, taking with him from Boston the family portraits of his grandfathers James Bowdoin (by Badger) and John Pitts (by Smybert); his grandmother Elizabeth Lindall (by Smybert); his father James Pitts and his mother Elizabeth Bowdoin Pitts (both by Blackburn); and of his great grandmother, Susannah Lindall (by Smybert). After the lapse of a century these portraits descended to the late Thomas Pitts, who brought them to Detroit. They now find a home in the residence of Mr. Pitt's daughter, Mrs. Arthur M. Parker, 1691 Jefferson Avenue; and they are the property of Mr. Lendall Pitts, son of Thomas Pitts, who was in the fourth generation from James Pitts.

JOSEPH BADGER

1 PORTRAIT OF JAMES BOWDOIN (1676-1747)

Painted in 1747, duplicate owned by Bowdoin College; Bowdoin was born in France in 1676; came to Boston in 1690; member of the King's Council; died 1747. His daughter, Mary Bayard, was the mother of General Arthur St. Clair, first Governor of the Northwest Territory; his granddaughter, Sarah Bowdoin, was the wife of General Henry Dearborn; his great-grandson was Hon. Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts.

Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

JONATHAN B. BLACKBURN

Jonathan B. Blackburn came to Boston about 1750 and remained about fifteen years. About fifty of his pictures are in existence. It is surmised that he remained in Boston until his pupil or imitator, Copley, had begun to paint better than himself. "Blackburn was a respectable painter," says Isham, "and might fairly rival Smybert or the youthful Copley. His portraits are rigid and the modelling dry, like those of his contemporaries, but they are serious work, and he sometimes shows a feeling for color in delicate grays and quiet tones which is entirely his own, and he was, moreover, capable of composing a group fairly well."

2 PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH BOWDOIN, (1717-), WIFE OF JAMES PITTS

Painted 1757. Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

3 PORTRAIT OF JAMES PITTS (1710-1776)

Painted about 1757. Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY

BORN, Boston, July 3, 1737; DIED, London, September 9, 1815. His parents, Richard Copley and Mary Singleton, were natives of Ireland, English in origin. He received some art instruction from his stepfather, Peter Pelham, and before twenty was recognized as a painter. From Boston he sent the "Boy with Squirrel" (a portrait of his half-brother, Henry Pelham) to Benjamin West, in London, who arranged its exhibition in 1866, at the Society of Artists. In 1774 he went to Europe, and at the end of the year 1775 settled in London. In 1777 he was made associate of the Royal Academy; in 1779 a full member.

4 PORTRAIT OF ADMIRAL GAMBIER

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

5 PORTRAIT OF MRS. THOMAS DONGAN

The Mrs. Dongan of this picture was a Carleton, and Carleton Street, New York, was named for her family.

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

6 PORTRAIT OF MR. THOMAS DONGAN

Mr. Dongan was the grand-nephew of Governor Thomas Dongan, first British Governor of New York.

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

7 PORTRAIT OF MRS. DANIEL REA

Mrs. Daniel Rea was a Miss Salter, of Salem, Massachusetts. Her daughter Elizabeth, the child in the picture, was born in 1756, and on March 22, 1785, at Trinity Church, Boston, married Zachariah Rhodes, of Rhode Island, who served with distinction in the Revolutionary War, and in 1783 was commissioned by President John Adams, lieutenant of the United States Navy, at the time of its establishment. The portrait was painted in 1757, and has remained in the family, now being owned by Mrs. Horace Churchill Thompson, daughter of Seth Morton Vose.

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

8 PORTRAIT OF SAMUEL PITTS (1745-1805)

Painted in 1770. Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

9 PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH PITTS, WIFE OF JONATHAN WARNER

Painted in 1770. Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

CHESTER HARDING (1792-1866)

BORN at Conway, Mass., 1792. He lived in St. Louis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Paris (Kentucky), Cincinnati, Louisville and Boston. He commenced his artistic career as a sign painter in Pittsburgh, but seeing some portraits by an itinerant limner, experimented, and found he could make likenesses himself. He went to Paris (Kentucky), announced himself as a portrait painter, and in six months painted nearly a hundred heads, for which he charged twenty-five dollars each, and thus was enabled to study at the Pennsylvania Academy. He went to England in 1825, and was successful there but returned after three years. Chester Harding was one of the earlier painters to be intimately associated with St. Louis. Numerous examples of his work are to be intimately associated with St. Louis. examples of his work are to be found in St. Louis homes. In the City Art Museum, in the 1911 annual exhibition of Paintings Owned in St. Louis, Harding was represented in a "self-portrait," lent by the artist's grandson, the Hon. Chester Harding Krum, and by a "Portrait of Samuel Christy," lent by Miss Eugenia Chouteau.

10 PORTRAIT OF MRS. GEORGE HALLETT

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

11 PORTRAIT OF MR. GEORGE HALLETT

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

JOHN SMYBERT

In America the earliest artist whose works are known and of sufficient merit to warrant serious considerations was John Smybert (or Smibert, for he spelled his name both ways), who came to America in 1728 with Bishop Berkeley to assist the great philosopher in his attempt to start a college in Burmuda. Smybert remained in America after Berkeley returned to Europe and settled in Boston where he married a woman of fortune. "Smybert," says Samuel Isham in his History of American Painting, "was a fair painter according to standards of his day which were not high, since he lived just before the brilliant flowering of English art at the end of the eighteenth century." He was Scotch by birth, born in Edinburgh in 1684; in his youth he was a house painter and plasterer. Ambition took him to London where he supported himself by painting coaches and copying old pictures.

He studied in the Academy of Sir James Thornhill, then the leading native artist of England and almost the first to receive public recognition. While at Thornhill Academy, Smybert had for a fellow student Hogarth, the first of the great English portrait painters. Hogarth secretly married Thornhill's daughter.

In 1717 Smybert went to Italy and upon his return to London he became a fashionable portrait painter and as such was known to Horace Walpole. "Smybert," says Walpole, "was a silent and modest man who abhorred finesse in his profession and was enchanted with a plan which he thought promised tranquillity and an honest subsistence in a healthy and elysian climate, and in spite of remonstrances engaged with the Dean (Berkeley)."

Smybert's most important work is his picture of Bishop Berkeley and family in the dining hall of Yale University. "His portraits," says Isham, "were by far the best executed in the country up to his death, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincerity with which he has preserved for us the likenesses of our early worthies, men like Jonathan Edwards or John Endicott of Massachusetts, and the others who out of their unskilfully drawn eyes stare at us stiffly from his canvases." Perkins gives a list of thirty-six pictures by him which he considers authentic. Smybert died in 1751. His son Nathaniel followed him but died in 1756.

12 PORTRAIT OF SUSANNAH LINDALL (1660-1733), WIFE OF JAMES LINDALL

Painted about 1728. Her daughter married John Pitts.
Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

13 PORTRAIT OF JOHN PITTS (1668-1731)

Painted about 1728. Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

14 PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH LINDALL PITTS (1699-1763),
WIFE OF JOHN PITTS

Painted about 1728.

Loaned by Mr. Lendall Pitts.

GILBERT STUART (1756-1828)

BORN at Narragansett, Rhode Island, 1756. He received his first lessons in art from Cosmo Alexander, a Scotch painter who came to America in 1770. Stuart accompanied him into Scotland, and later in life studied with Benjamin West in London, where he painted portraits of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, John Kemble, Alderman Boydell and others. He returned to America in 1793 and resided in New York, Philadelphia and Washington alternately until 1806, when he settled in Boston.

15 PORTRAIT OF JONATHAN AMORY

Mr. Amory was BORN in 1763; DIED in 1820. The canvas was painted about 1810, prior to his journey to Europe with his family.

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

THOMAS SULLY

BORN at Horncastle, Lincolnshire, England, 1783; DIED at Philadelphia, November 5, 1872. He went to London with an introduction to King, whose studio he shared and who introduced him to West, and he copied paintings in West's collection, and received criticisms from that kindly master, returning to America after nine months. In 1837 he made a record visit to England, which lasted for two years, during which he painted various portraits, including one of Queen Victoria.

16 THE SCHOLAR

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

BENJAMIN WEST

BORN at Springfield, Pennsylvania, October 10, 1738; of an old Quaker family from Buckinghamshire, England; DIED at London, March 11, 1820. STUDIED in Philadelphia and New York, and later in Italy (from 1760 to 1763, when he settled in London). He became court painter in 1772, was one of the early members of the Royal Academy, and succeeded Reynolds as president. One of his historical pictures, "Prince John's Submission to Richard Coeur de Lion," is in the City Art Museum, St. Louis.

17 JUNO RECEIVING THE CESTUS FROM VENUS

Painted in 1771, and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1772. "The Cestus, or girdle of Venus, had the power of winning for the wearer the love of the beholder. Through it Venus won the love of Mars, and she loaned it to Juno, who through its magic influence became the wife of Jupiter."

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

18 "HE THAT IS WITHOUT SIN AMONG YOU, LET HIM
CAST THE FIRST STONE AT HER"

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

19 H. R. H. EDWARD AUGUSTUS, DUKE OF YORK AND
ALBANY, K. G.

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

20 ETRURIA

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

21 THE EAGLE BRINGING THE CUP OF WATER TO PSYCHE

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

22 THE HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDING UPON CHRIST AFTER
HIS BAPTISM IN THE RIVER JORDAN

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

23 THE FOUR QUARTERS OF THE WORLD BRINGING
TREASURES TO BRITANNIA (water color)

Loaned by Mr. R. C. Vose of Boston.

24 QUEEN PHILIPPA INTERCEDING FOR THE LIVES OF THE
BURGHERS OF CALAIS

At the right, Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III, of England, attended by two maidens, pleading with her husband, who appears in full armor, with battle axe in his left hand; by him stands a boy holding the gauntlet which he has removed from his right hand, and behind him the Black Prince his son, between two other armed knights; at the left stand six burghers with ropes about their necks and their hands pinioned behind them, guarded by armed soldiers. Calais had surrendered to the English after a long siege, and the keys of the city had been brought to the victorious Edward by its six most noble burghers. The surrender occurred in 1347. The picture is signed and dated 1788. Canvas; h. 39½ in., l. 52¼ in.

This picture was presented to the Detroit Museum of Art by Mr. James E. Scripps.

25 BELISARIUS AND THE BOY

A signed and dated picture, exhibited in London in 1802 and presented to the Detroit Museum of Art by A. Leonard Nicholson, Esq., of London, England.