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Isabel Taube

exhibition review of

Americans in Paris, 1860–1900

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Americans in Paris, 1860–1900

National Gallery, London

22 February – 21 May, 2006

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

25 June – 24 September, 2006

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

17 October 2006 – 28 January 2007

Americans in Paris, 1860–1900

Kathleen Adler, Erica E. Hirshler, H. Barbara Weinberg with contributions from David Park Curry, Rodolphe Rapetti and Christopher Riopelle. Exhibition catalogue. London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2006. Hardcover distributed by Yale University Press.

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[View a short film of the exhibition \(.mov\). Quicktime only.](#)

Americans in Paris, 1860–1900 was a long overdue exhibition that aimed to explore, as the introductory wall label stated, "why Paris was a magnet for Americans, what they found there and how they responded to it, and which lessons they ultimately brought back to the United States." Organized by an international team of curators— Kathleen Adler from the National Gallery, London; Erica E. Hirshler from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and H. Barbara Weinberg from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York—the show made a three-city tour, ending in New York. The National Gallery's initiation of and involvement in the organization of the exhibition suggests that late nineteenth-century American art may be receiving finally the attention it deserves on the other side of the Atlantic. However, no Parisian museum hosted the show, so the pictures could not be considered in relation to the place where many of them were produced and/or first exhibited.

This exhibition marked the culmination of more than two decades of scholarship on American artists in Paris. In the early 1990s, two groundbreaking studies, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* by H. Barbara Weinberg and *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* by Lois Marie Fink, carefully documented the role of Paris as both "training ground" and "proving ground."^[1] Both books were published at a time when scholars had begun to revise the nativist interpretations of post-Civil War American art by considering it in an international context. Moving beyond a previously narrow emphasis on the distinctly American characteristics of late nineteenth-century art, art historians traced the implications of the artists' academic training abroad and their participation in international exhibitions. In the wake of this new approach, several studies elaborated on the role of Paris in the professionalization of American women artists and the representation of American art in the Expositions Universelles.^[2] In addition, a number of the artists featured in *Americans in Paris* have been treated recently in monographic surveys and exhibitions, many of which addressed the painters' Parisian experiences. In fact, *Americans in Paris* appeared in the same temporary exhibition galleries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art as did the Thomas Eakins and Childe Hassam retrospectives in 2002 and 2004, respectively. Although the topic of American artists in

Paris and, more broadly, the influence of French painting and sculpture on American art have been considered in depth elsewhere, this exhibition was the first encyclopedic, international loan show of this material. Given the high cost of exhibitions today, only major museums with strong financial backing from corporations, in this case Bank of America for the two American venues, can present such large, blockbuster survey shows, requiring significant loans from both private collections and world-renowned museums. Even major museums do not always succeed at securing extended loans, as attested to by the fact that Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1: Portrait of The Artist's Mother* (1871) traveled to London and Boston but not to the final venue in New York.

This review addresses the installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the public programming at this venue, and the accompanying catalogue. At The Metropolitan, 110 works, mostly paintings with a few sculptures drawn from the museum's collection, were assembled thematically and roughly chronologically in eight special exhibition galleries on the second floor.^[3] According to Weinberg, the curators began with a list of 30,000 to 40,000 possible works; the sheer number of viable images itself attests to the major impact of France on late nineteenth-century American art.^[4] Their final selection attempted to balance canonical paintings and lesser known images. It also was inclusive with regard to gender and race: *Americans in Paris* displayed works by seven women painters and a female sculptor and two paintings by the African-American artist, Henry Ossawa Tanner, as well as Hermann Dudley Murphy's Whistlerian-style portrait of him from around 1896. The choice of pictures paid tribute to the strong, late nineteenth-century American art collections of the two participating American museums, and as a result, the show had a limited focus on East Coast painters. At The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the installation featured a number of masterworks from the museum's collection, including John Singer Sargent's *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)* (1883–1884), Mary Stevenson Cassatt's *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* (1880), and Winslow Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (1866). As seen in an installation photograph taken at the entrance of the show, Sargent's portrait of Madame X was the "poster-girl" for the exhibition, and her image appeared in shop windows and on banners throughout the city during the run of *Americans in Paris* (fig. 1). Reinstalling these American works, most of which usually hang in the American Wing, in the grander, more central temporary exhibition galleries certainly improved the visitor's experience of them and may have succeeded in highlighting an aspect of the museum's collection with which less adventurous visitors might not be familiar.



Fig. 1, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing the entrance to *Americans in Paris, 1860-1900* with the exhibition poster featuring John Singer Sargent's *Madame X* and a view of the first gallery displaying John Singer Sargent's *In the Luxembourg Gardens*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

Americans in Paris was treated as one of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's fall 2006 blockbuster exhibitions as revealed by the extensive and, by extension, the expensive publicity campaign and public programming for the show.^[5] Not just one, but two audio guides for different target audiences sponsored by Bloomberg were available for purchase at the entrance to the exhibition.^[6] To supplement the on-site experience and to provide interested individuals who could not attend *Americans in Paris* with an idea of its layout and contents, the museum's website offers an [on-line gallery tour](#) with a complete checklist, text panels for each section, and a select group of images and their descriptive wall labels.

Americans in Paris began with an introductory room where visitors could purchase audio guides and read the first label that addressed the thesis for the show. This space contained no paintings but had a wall-sized enlargement of a photograph depicting the Eiffel tower under construction (fig. 2). Reproductions of late nineteenth-century photographs as well as period quotations by artists and cultural critics mounted on the gallery walls were used throughout the exhibition to set the context for the paintings and sculptures. Although the Eiffel tower, now a major tourist destination, has come to signify Paris in the public imagination, it was considered an eyesore by many artists and cultural commentators when it was first built for the Exposition Universelle in 1889. Not surprisingly, it does not appear in any of the paintings in the exhibition, and for many of the painters, it did not define their idea of the city, making it an odd and seemingly presentist choice for setting the scene for the show. An image more accurate to the artists' perception of Paris, perhaps a picture of the Arc de Triomphe or the boulevard Champs-Élysées, might have been more appropriate for establishing the late nineteenth-century Paris experienced and remembered by these painters in their pictures.

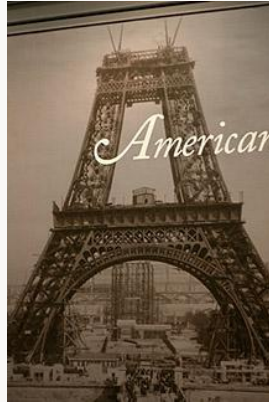


Fig. 2, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing detail of photograph mural of Eiffel Tower under construction for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, 1888. © Bettman/Corbis.

[\[larger image\]](#)

After passing through this introductory space, viewers entered the first gallery of paintings, representing the first theme, "Picturing Paris." This gallery established the thesis of the exhibition, showing that American artists responded directly to their Parisian training ground by painting the city itself and its venues for leisure and entertainment at varying times of day and in differing weather conditions (fig. 3). From the café to the Opéra to the Luxembourg Gardens to the Champs-Élysées, these images traced the everyday experience of the bourgeoisie in Paris during this period. Notably, no pictures of the working and lower classes and the places they frequented appeared here. The emphasis on genteel subjects in this gallery and throughout the exhibition could have been clarified in the introductory wall label or reinforced through comparisons with European pictures. For example, this room might have juxtaposed Willard Leroy Metcalf's depiction of a well-dressed bourgeois couple smoking and drinking in a crowded, Parisian establishment in his painting *In the Café (Au Café)* (1888) with Edgar Degas's portrayal of a downtrodden, isolated working class man and woman in a café in *The Absinthe Drinker* (1876, Musée d'Orsay). Reminding viewers about the absence of such subjects would have made them aware of the narrow perspective of most American artists and its divergence from that of some of their prominent French contemporaries, including Degas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Throughout the exhibition, the exclusive focus on paintings by Americans minimized the visual impact of the Parisian artistic context on these painters and left unexplored their assimilation and rejection of themes and styles favored by their European contemporaries.



Fig. 3, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; John Singer Sargent, *Rehearsal of the Pasedeloup Orchestra at the Cirque d'Hiver*, about 1879-1880. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

[\[larger image\]](#)

The selection of paintings in "Picturing Paris" underscored the approaches employed by American painters, from the tightly rendered, highly finished academic style of Nelson Norris Bickford and Charles Courtney Curran to the more painterly, impressionistic portrayals of Mary Cassatt and Childe Hassam. The latter's small oil sketches of Parisian streets in varying weather conditions and Maurice Prendergast's tiny and dynamically rendered *pochades* of young women and girls walking along boulevards and in parks were juxtaposed with larger scale works intended for exhibition, such as Cassatt's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (1879), submitted to the fourth Impressionist exhibition (fig. 3), and Sargent's *In the Luxembourg Gardens* (1879), shown at the National Academy of Design in New York (fig. 1).

The arrangement of the gallery reinforced existing scholarship on this period. For example, Griselda Pollock's claims concerning the significance of the artist's gender in Impressionist painting were exemplified perfectly by an across-the-room comparison of Bickford's and Cassatt's evocation of spectatorship. Bickford depicted a seated older gentleman adjusting his monocle to get a better view of a fashionably dressed young woman with a red parasol passing by (fig. 4). As in so many pictures from this period, the woman becomes the object of the gaze. Yet, as Pollock among others has elaborated, Cassatt, a female painter, broke with convention in her painting *In the Loge* from 1878 by representing her properly dressed young female theatergoer being looked at yet simultaneously assuming the power of the gaze by using her opera glasses (fig. 5).^[7] Such revisionist scholarship, however, was not incorporated into the text on the wall labels. Instead, these identified the places, monuments, and public sculptures portrayed in the paintings and offered exhibition history when relevant; they did not address the modernity of Paris and the city's significant role in the American search for the new and the modern in the post-Civil War era, nor did they explore issues of style, class, gender, or spectatorship essential to an understanding of these images. Viewers were left to arrive at their own interpretation of what made Paris so attractive to these artists and what visual devices they borrowed from their contemporaries abroad.



Fig. 4, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Nelson Norris Bickford, *In the Tuileries Garden*, Paris, 1881. Oil on panel. New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 5, Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

The second gallery, lined predominantly with portraits and self-portraits, appropriately titled "Artists in Paris," concentrated on the identity of the modern artist and explored the artist–friend and mentor–pupil relationships. As in the first gallery, celebrated images like Sargent's portrait of his teacher Carolus-Duran were presented in the context of lesser known images, including Robert Vonnoh's striking depiction of the sculptor John Severinus Conway. Moving around the room, visitors could obtain a clear sense of the compositional tropes used to embody the two major artist-types of the period: "the impecunious bohemian" in his worn clothing and messy studio and "the self-confident flâneur" in his elegant suit affectedly holding a cigarette.^[8] Thomas Hovenden's humorous self-portrait from 1875 captures the disheveled bohemian type perfectly (fig. 6); however, the full significance of the image can only be understood when this picture is juxtaposed to his earlier, pre-Paris self-portrait from around 1870, a comparison discussed by Erica E. Hirshler in her catalogue essay.^[9] Hirshler's comparison of Hovenden's two self-portraits emphasizes, arguably exaggerates, the pronounced effect that Paris had on artists: the stiff, upright gentleman awkwardly holding a palette in his hand and looking at one of his paintings on an easel in an elaborately decorated studio is superseded by the lounging bohemian type with a cigarette casually dangling from his mouth. Regrettably, such before

and after comparisons were missing from *Americans in Paris*; they would have helped to convey in visual terms the transformation in style as well as in personality of artists during their Parisian sojourn.



Fig. 6, Thomas Hovenden, *Self Portrait of the Artist in his Studio*, 1875. Oil on canvas. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

Some of the portraits were arranged to tell a story about the American artists and their French teachers and/or mentors. On the wall across from the gallery entrance, Sargent's portrait of his teacher Carolus-Duran and the adjacent portrait of William Walton by James Carroll Beckwith spoke to the impact of Carolus-Duran and his atelier on American art (fig. 7 and 8). All three American artists studied with this French master, and Beckwith and Walton met while training in his atelier. The third picture on this wall, a portrait of the French artist Rosa Bonheur by the American artist Anna Elizabeth Klumpke (fig. 8), portrays the beginning of another artist–mentor relationship. As a result of this portrait, Klumpke and Bonheur became companions, and after Bonheur's death, Klumpke inherited her home and the contents of her atelier. A number of the other images, including Vonnoh's *Portrait of John Severinus Conway* (1883), Frank Weston Benson's *Portrait of Joseph Lindon Smith* (1884), and Hermann Dudley Murphy's *Henry Ossawa Tanner* (about 1896) document friendships either begun or furthered in French ateliers.



Fig. 7, John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Carolus-Duran*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing James Carroll Beckwith, *Portrait of William Walton*, 1886. Oil on canvas. New York, The Century Association; Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 1898. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

Besides conveying the identity of the artists, both real and imagined, this gallery offered insights into their training and studio life. Jefferson David Chalfant's *Bouguereau's atelier at the Académie Julian, Paris*, (1891), the first picture to the right of the gallery entrance, conveys a sense of the crowded conditions of the art classes, about which a number of American painters complained, and Winslow Homer's *The Studio* (1867) with its musical performance illuminates the type of extracurricular events that took place in studios. Yet, surprisingly, none of the artists' student works were exhibited.

Although the introductory text label for this section focused on the popular, late nineteenth-century male artistic types that dominated this gallery, Klumpke's portrait of Rosa Bonheur and the daring *Self-portrait* (1885) by the Boston artist Ellen Day Hale interrupted and reworked the conventional portrait gallery of great men. Ultimately, however, the gallery's lack of interpretive material regarding the experience of female art students in Paris made the inclusion of these two works by women artists seem more tokenism than serious revision. This oversight was puzzling particularly since women artists and their experience in Paris are addressed at length in the catalogue.^[10]

Due to its small size, the third room of the exhibition served as a reading room for visitors who wanted to consult the catalogue. As in the introductory gallery, a wall-sized reproduction of a late nineteenth-century photograph, in this instance the Statue of Liberty under construction in the courtyard of Gaget et Gauthier, rue de Chazelles, Paris, prior to its shipment to the United States (1884), overpowered the space (fig. 9). The image of Lady Liberty introduced the issue of politics and Franco-American relations, largely ignored throughout the exhibition, which, as *The New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter notes, masks "the prickly issues" and the sense of American cultural inferiority that drove so many Americans to Paris for training in the first place.[11]



Fig. 9, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing detail of photograph mural of Statue of Liberty assembled in the courtyard of Gaget et Gauthier, rue de Chazelles, Paris, prior to its shipment to the United States, 1884. © Bettman/Corbis. [\[larger image\]](#)

As the section title "At Home in Paris" implies, the third gallery (fourth room) shifted attention from public life and student experience to private, domestic scenes. With the exception of Cassatt's depiction of her eldest brother and his son, *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and his Son Robert Kelso Cassatt* (1884–1885), the pictures presented women engaging in a range of indoor activities, including reading newspapers, sharing in the ritual of afternoon tea, tending to children, and relaxing in elaborately decorated interiors. In contrast to the previous galleries, this one concentrated on the work of one artist, Mary Stevenson Cassatt. In fact, she painted all but two of the pictures displayed in this room, enabling visitors to consider eight of her works from varying moments in her career, including *Le Figaro (Portrait of a Lady)* from 1878 and *Woman holding a Child in her Arms* from about 1890 (fig. 10). During her introduction at the symposium held in conjunction with *Americans in Paris* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Weinberg admitted that she intended this room to serve as a mini-retrospective of Cassatt, because the major exhibition of her work in 1998–1999 never traveled to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.[12] Not surprisingly, Weinberg seized this opportunity to highlight the museum's strong holdings of Cassatt as well as her adaptability to life in Paris and her unique relationship to the French Impressionists, but the resulting presentation broke with the thematic layout in the other galleries and reinforced the well-rehearsed and narrow view of Cassatt as a painter of domestic life. Taking a broader view of interior imagery, this section might have included

the less familiar work of a painter like Walter Gay, who upon his death was given the title "dean of American artists in Paris" by *The New York Times*.^[13]



Fig. 10, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Le Figaro (Portrait of a Lady)*, 1878. Private collection; Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Mother about to Wash her Sleepy Child*, 1880. California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

The succeeding two galleries—two of the largest and grandest spaces, painted in a deep vermilion that displayed the pictures to great effect—explored the idea of "Paris as a Proving Ground" (fig. 11). As the introductory text label explained, Paris became the art capital of the world during the nineteenth century and the place to which artists from all over the globe came to launch their careers and earn credibility by exhibiting their works. Rather than trying to reconstruct a specific exhibition as was done recently in two other shows, *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition* (1989–1990) and *Paris 1900: The "American School" at the Universal Exposition* (2000–2001), this section of *Americans in Paris* successfully maintained a thematic approach. As indicated by the large size of the canvases and delineated in each object's wall label, each painting on view was shown with varying critical success at one or more major Paris exhibition, the official French Salon, the Impressionist shows, the Expositions Universelles among others. In order to assist the uninitiated viewer, several didactic labels included reproductions of late nineteenth-century exhibition installation photographs, which conveyed the large number of pictures shown and the Salon-style hanging (fig. 12). Along with the installation views were reproductions of caricatures, poking fun at the Impressionists, giving visitors a sense of the scathing character of the late nineteenth-century art press (fig. 13).



Fig. 11, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Winslow Homer, *A Summer Night*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. [\[larger image\]](#)

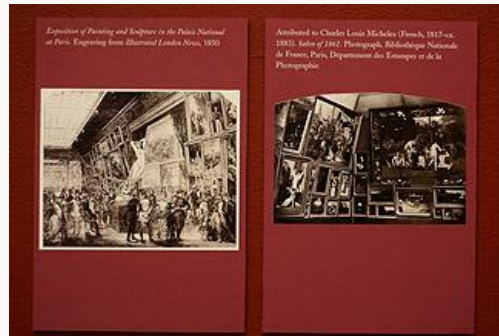


Fig. 12, Didactic wall labels showing Exposition of Painting and Sculpture in the Palais National, Paris. Engraving from *Illustrated London News*, 1850; Attributed to Charles Louis Michelez, *Salon of 1861*. Photograph. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. [\[larger image\]](#)

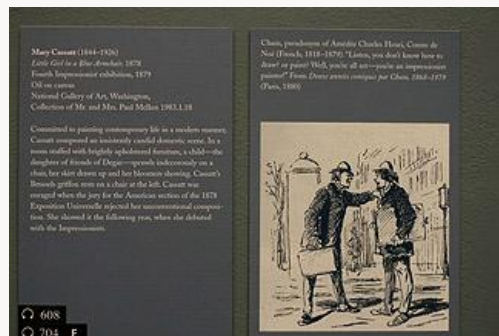


Fig. 13, Didactic wall label showing a reproduction of Cham, pseudonym for Amédée Charles Henri, Comte de Noé, "Listen you don't know how to draw? or paint? Well, you're all set – you're an Impressionist painter." From *Douze années comiques par Cham, 1868-1879* (Paris, 1880). [\[larger image\]](#)

The installation of the first room in this section concentrated on the best known, most highly praised late nineteenth-century American artists: Cassatt, Eakins, Hassam, Homer, Sargent, and Whistler. Although visitors at first might have wondered why Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (1866) appeared in *Americans in Paris*, given its distinctly American Civil War subject, its label explained that "although Homer never studied in Paris, he measured his achievement by Parisian standards by showing the canvas at the 1867 Exposition Universelle." In contrast, Sargent's close ties to Paris are undeniable, and he was represented in this gallery by three full-length portraits of Americans in Paris linked to his own experience of the city and its expatriate community: *Mrs. Henry White* (*Margaret Stuyvesant Rutherford*) (1883), *Madame X* (*Madame Pierre Gautreau*) (1883–1884), and *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882), hung in this order along the wall opposite the gallery entrance (fig. 14).^[14] This thoughtful grouping elucidated Sargent's struggle to complete works for the Salon in a timely fashion: as the label elaborated, he had to send *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* to the 1883 Salon, because he did not complete the portraits of Mrs. Henry White and Madame X on time. In addition, *Madame X* led to the scandal at the 1884 Salon, which forced Sargent to depart hastily from Paris. Hung adjacent to Sargent's woman in white, *Mrs. Henry White*, Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862) suggested his own trouble with the official Salon. After the picture was rejected by the 1863 Salon, he exhibited

it at the Salon des Refusés and later in the American section at the 1867 Exposition Universelle.



Fig. 14, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing John Singer Sargent, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. [\[larger image\]](#)

Perhaps one of the most thought-provoking and unexpected comparisons in this room was the juxtaposition of Thomas Hovenden's French history painting, *In Hoc Signo Vinces* (*By this sign shalt thou conquer*) (Salon of 1880), and Childe Hassam's *At the Florist* (1889, Salon des Artistes Français, 1890) on the far wall behind Augustus Saint-Gaudens' bronze and gilt sculpture, *Victory* (1892–1903; this cast, between 1912–1916) (fig. 15). Despite the disparate character of their subjects—historical genre versus everyday modern life—the pictures have similar frieze-like compositional arrangements and carefully rendered, monumental figures, and they both incorporate peasant themes as revealed by the peasant dress of the main protagonists in the Hovenden and the flower sellers in the Hassam. Such formal and thematic connections, mentioned only briefly in the wall label, suggest how artists like Hassam, who could paint in a much more impressionistic manner as seen in his street scenes earlier in the exhibition, might alter their subject matter or modify their style to suit the conservative taste of the Salon jury. More unusual pairings like this one would have enhanced the exhibition and stimulated a consideration of the lengths to which an artist might go to achieve critical success in Paris.



Fig. 15, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Thomas Hovenden, *In Hoc Signo Vincas* (*By this sign shalt thou conquer*), 1880. Oil on canvas. Michigan, The Detroit Institute of Arts; Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Victory*, 1892–1903; this cast, 1912 or after (by 1916). Bronze, gilt. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

Whereas the first gallery was dominated by canonical names and works, the second gallery, "Paris as Proving Ground: Part II," presented a wider range of artists and pictures, over a third of which were created by women. Whistler's full-length portrait of the art collector and critic Théodore Duret, *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Black: Portrait of Théodore Duret* (1883, Salon of 1885) (fig. 16), shared the wall opposite the entrance with two idealized images of women by his admirer, John White Alexander, a painter who until recently has not received the scholarly attention he deserves (fig. 17). The remaining walls provided a survey of the most common subject matter of the period: Biblical scenes by Eakins and Elizabeth Gardner, peasant imagery with Biblical overtones by Elizabeth Nourse and Tanner, an Orientalist scene by Charles Sprague Pearce and intimate portraits of family and friends by Cecilia Beaux and William Merritt Chase.



Fig. 16, James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Black Portrait of Theodore Duret*, 1883. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 17, John White Alexander, *Repose*, 1895. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

The next two galleries, dealing with the theme of "Summers in the Country," departed from the focus on Paris as subject matter, training ground, and site of recognition. For the most part, the pictures in these two rooms portrayed views of the French countryside and its inhabitants, and they documented the flourishing of art colonies in places such as Barbizon, Pont-Aven, Grez-sur-Loing, and Giverny (fig. 18). The curators tried to justify this departure from Paris by regarding the artists' experience in the country as an extension of their Parisian lifestyle, but, as Weinberg admitted, the focus on impressionistically rendered landscapes and figures in "Summers in the Country," "Summers in the Country: Giverny," and in the final gallery, "Back in the United States," was largely due to the fact that American Impressionist paintings draw crowds and appeal to a general audience.^[15] The seemingly abrupt transition from a broadly conceived, thematic study of Paris and its influence on American art to a narrowly defined examination of American Impressionism weakened the thesis of *Americans in Paris*. Such a limited focus overlooks the complexity of American artistic production at the turn of the century and furthers the myth of American Impressionism as a unified artistic movement.



Fig. 18, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Winslow Homer, *Cernay-la-Ville – French Farm*, 1867. Oil on canvas. Urbana-Champaign, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois; Dennis Miller Bunker, *Brittany Town Morning, Larmor*, 1884. Oil on canvas. Chicago, Terra Foundation for American Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

The final gallery, "Back in the United States," explored how American Impressionist artists wedded the lessons they learned in Paris with American subjects and taste. Except for Edmund Charles Tarbell and J. Alden Weir, who were introduced here for the first time, the other artists in this section were represented by works in previous rooms, enabling a comparison between their Parisian and post-Parisian production. For example, one could trace Hassam's shift from portraying Parisian streets in dramatic and stormy conditions to capturing the garden of Celia Thaxter on Appledore Island in bright sunlight or Metcalf's transition from painting everyday life in Paris in his warm orange-gold café scene to landscapes in New England in his bright, pastel-toned view of Gloucester harbor. These alterations in style and subject would have been easier to understand if earlier pictures had appeared side-by-side with later ones. This last gallery also raised the question of the inclusive dates of the exhibition—that is, 1860–1900, because it contained two paintings, Prendergast's *Central Park* (about 1914–1915) and Hassam's *Allies Day, May 1917* (1917) that evoked the ongoing influence of Paris on American art in the first decades of the twentieth century (fig. 19). If the intent in this final room was to show that Americans remained tied to a Parisian aesthetic long after their return home, why design the show around such strict dates?



Fig. 19, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Childe Hassam, *Winter in Union Square*, 1889–1890. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Maurice Prendergast, *Central Park*, about 1914–1915. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Childe Hassam, *Allies Day, May 1917*, 1917, Oil on canvas. Washington, D.C, National Gallery of Art; Edmund Charles Tarbell, *Across the Room*, about 1899. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[larger image\]](#)

The catalogue is beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated. The text consists of three lengthy essays by the three co-curators that explore the major themes of the exhibition and three shorter pieces that address the more focused topics of the French reception of American art, the American representation at the Paris Expositions Universelles, and the promotion of French art in the United States by American artists in Paris. Following the essays, a section titled "Notes on the Artists and Paintings" provides a short biography of each artist and thumbnail-sized reproductions of each painter's pictures in the exhibition accompanied by a short explanatory text. Grouping images by artist, the catalogue makes it possible to assess the stylistic development of each painter. The last part of the book consists of a thorough bibliography of the major period and art historical sources related to the topic of *Americans in Paris*. Although the catalogue does not put forth new interpretations or revise existing scholarship, its breadth of coverage and its wealth of information about individual painters and their experience in Paris make it a concise resource for specialists and non-specialists alike.

Essays by Adler, Hirshler, and Weinberg greatly expand on the information provided on the introductory text panels in the exhibition. Drawing on primary sources, particularly quotations from artists' letters, the authors convey a sense of the vicissitudes of an American painter's life in Paris and in the French countryside. In doing so, they also capture the wide range of individual experience, dependent on gender, race, class, artistic goals, and proficiency in French. Adler describes the struggle to find housing, the complaints about the overcrowded and "dilapidated conditions" of the Parisian ateliers, and the "blues and anxieties" of preparing pictures for the Salon followed by the tremendous disappointment if one's work received negative criticism (33, 40). Her text contains some memorable quotations, including Tanner's description of the smoky haze in the atelier, "Fifty or sixty men smoking in such a room for two or three hours would make it so that those on the back rows could hardly see the model. . ." and Ralph Curtis' description of his friend Sargent's response to the harsh criticism about *Madame X* at the Salon of 1884, "In a few minutes I found him [Sargent] dodging behind doors to avoid friends who looked grave. By the corridors he took me to see it. . ." (33, 42)." In "At Home in Paris," Hirshler treats roughly chronologically the various ways that American artists settled into their Parisian lifestyles. Starting with Whistler, one of the first artists to root himself in Paris, she explains the differing degrees to which American artists felt comfortable in this foreign city and the steps they took to make themselves at home. Her essay quickly makes clear that unlike Whistler, Cassatt, and Sargent, all of whom were fluent in French and actively engaged with modern French art, most American artists did what many American tourists and students abroad do today; rather than adapting themselves to a new culture, they formed an "American Colony" and pointed to the things they wanted. Weinberg's essay, "Summers in the Country," corresponds to the last three galleries in the exhibition and describes the development of and daily life in the art colonies in the French countryside before focusing on the particular colonies and their artists. In the last part of her text, she addresses the rise of American Impressionism following the return of the painters to the United States, where many of them sought out rural locations for their landscapes and established their own New England art colonies. Her essay also contains some quotable passages that capture the spirit of the period, especially the writer Robert Louis Stevenson's (fig. 20) description of an art colony's life cycle and the taming of the innkeeper who "must be taught to welcome as a favoured

guest a young gentleman in a very greasy coat, and with little baggage beyond a box of colours and a canvas. . . (117)."



Fig. 20, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Willard Leroy Metcalf, *The Ten Cent Breakfast*, 1887. Oil on canvas. Colorado, Denver Art Museum. In this scene painted at the Hôtel Baudy in Giverny, Robert Louis Stevenson appears seated at the table in the lower right. [\[larger image\]](#)

In the first of the shorter essays, "Assimilation and Resistance, 1880–1900," Rodolphe Rapetti, Chief Curator of Patrimony and Deputy Director at the Direction des Musées de France, Paris, offers a counterpoint to the earlier discussions by exploring the French, specifically the Parisian, reception of American art. To set the context for his analysis, he first discusses the negative criticism of the French influence on art by American commentators, quoting the sculptor William Wetmore Story, who regarded the impact of French art on that of other nations, especially the United States, as a disease (182). Next, he assesses the strategies adopted by American artists to help them integrate into artistic life in Paris and their tendency to remain conservative and cautious in their artistic choices, before turning to an interpretation of French criticism. Significantly, Rapetti notes that French commentators often did not mention the American nationality of artists in their reviews and rarely attempted to distinguish characteristically American elements in the works of those American painters, such as Whistler, Sargent, and Alexander, who were seen as "an integral part of the artistic community in Paris (186)." However, employing an example from the nineteenth-century humorist Alphonse Allais, Rapetti concludes his article with several well-known stereotypes of Americans, including their preference for technology and a type of art that reproduces reality in excessive detail.

The last two essays rework existing scholarship about the American representation at the Paris Expositions Universelles and the function of American painters in Paris as cultural intermediaries between France and the United States. David Park Curry, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and American Painting and Sculpture at the Baltimore Museum of Art, traces the shift in the American approach to the Expositions Universelles from an "off-hand showing" to "a patriotically driven promotional campaign, celebrating the work of American painters with the extensive backing of the federal government in 1900 (191)." Christopher Riopelle, Curator of Nineteenth-Century Paintings at the National Gallery, London, addresses a number of artists who served as art advisers from William Morris Hunt, who introduced Boston collectors to the Barbizon School, to Cassatt, who assisted the Havemeyers of New York in building their collection of French Impressionism.

The selection of an international group of scholars for the catalogue essays reveals a growing trend in American art scholarship to be inclusive and to welcome British and European art historians into a field dominated by Americans. The move to internationalize the field itself is accompanied by a new approach to American art in a global context.^[16] This new perspective encourages scholars to move beyond issues of nationality and to consider American artists as participants in an international discourse. And, the spoils of casting this wider net allow for Rapetti's assertion that Americans in Paris were "faced with a choice between provincialism and internationalism, rather than between American art and French art (185)." As a quick walk through the exhibition confirmed, American art of this period did draw on an eclectic range of sources—a fact underscored by the art critic Remy de Gourmont, whom Rapetti quotes: "American art is cosmopolitan. It is a reflection of Europe. . . here in the corner there is a painter of genuinely German inspiration; there, another who is completely English; over there, one who is undoubtedly Dutch; and this one here has to be French (184-185)." American art's eclecticism is largely due to the American artists' exposure to a wide range of styles from around the world in Paris. In many ways, this show marked the end of an era yet it contained the seeds of a new beginning, a new way of looking at American art that incorporates a broader definition of center and periphery, free from the distorting lens of nationality.

Given the breadth of the exhibition's topic, one easily can point out omissions, such as the focus on painting at the expense of other media, the absence of European objects to set the context, or the lack of revisionist scholarship on the wall labels and in the catalogue, but *Americans in Paris* ultimately provided a very rich opportunity to reconsider celebrated paintings in the context of lesser known works—an experience that may never occur again. This kind of exhibition has the potential to generate a widespread interest in American art as well as new scholarship on this period.

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Notes

I wish to thank Egle Zygas in the Communications Department at The Metropolitan Museum of Art for her assistance with obtaining photographs of the installation, Gregory Donovan for his photographic expertise, and Gabe Weisberg for his helpful comments and insights.

[1] Lois Marie Fink. *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons*. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and H. Barbara Weinberg. *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers*. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991). Both of these publications expanded on earlier projects by the authors, including Lois Marie Fink. "The Role of France in American Art, 1850–1870." (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1970); and H. Barbara Weinberg. *The American Pupils of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, The Anne Burnett Tandy Lectures in American Civilization, no. 5. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1984).

[2] Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, eds. *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian*. Ex. cat. (New York: The Dahesh Museum and New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Kirstin Swinth. *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870–1930*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Laura R. Prieto. *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women*

Artists in America. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Annette Blaugrund et al. *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition*. Ex. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989); Diane P. Fischer, ed. *Paris 1900: The 'American School' at the Universal Exposition*. Ex. cat. (New Jersey: Montclair Art Museum, 1999). In addition, several exhibitions have addressed the topic of Americans in Paris or more generally in France: William H. Gerds. *Lasting Impressions: American Painters in France 1865–1915*. Ex. cat. (Evanston, IL: Terra Foundation for the Arts, 1992); Erica E. Hirshler. *Impressionism Abroad: Boston and French Painting*. Ex. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005); *American Artists and the Louvre*. Ex. cat. (Paris: Musée du Louvre Editions and Hazan, 2006).

[3] Since the sculpture was not treated in the catalogue or in the text labels for each section, it seemed like a late addition, used to enhance the gallery space.

[4] H. Barbara Weinberg, "Introduction" (symposium in conjunction with *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, November 30, 2006).

[5] To supplement the usual gallery talks and family and student events, two scholarly programs were organized: an all-day symposium, sponsored by the Lunder Foundation, covering a wide range of related topics and a half-day Sunday at the MET program on American Impressionism. Both of these events drew large crowds to the Grace Rainey Rogers auditorium.

[6] One audio guide targeted the general museum visitor and provided a tour conducted by H. Barbara Weinberg, whereas the other addressed an elementary school audience and featured subjects and themes to engage younger viewers and their families in discussion.

[7] Griselda Pollock. "Modernity and the spaces of femininity" in *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 75-76.

[8] "The impecunious bohemian" and "the self-confident flâneur" are phrases used on the main wall label for this gallery to define the two primary identities of male artists in nineteenth-century Paris.

[9] Erica E. Hirshler opens her catalogue essay, "At Home in Paris," with a discussion of Thomas Hovenden's before and after Paris portraits. Erica E. Hirshler. "At Home in Paris," in *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*. Ex. cat. (London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2006), 57. This page number and all succeeding page numbers for this catalogue refer to the paperback edition.

[10] For further information on American women artists, see Weisberg and Becker, eds. *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Académie Julian; Swinth, Painting Professionals*; and Prieto, *At Home in the Studio*. Kathleen Adler refers to Swinth's scholarship in her catalogue essay, "We'll Always Have Paris: Paris as Training Ground and Proving Ground," in *Americans in Paris*, 33.

[11] Holland Cotter, "Back When America's Art School Was Paris," review of *Americans in Paris*. *The New York Times*, October 20, 2006, Arts section.

[12] Weinberg, "Introduction" (symposium in conjunction with *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, November 30, 2006).

[13] Walter Gay's obituary in *The New York Times* described him as "dean of American artists in Paris. . . noted for his paintings of interiors and still lifes, his works having been purchased by the Luxembourg Museum and other French national collections." Obituary of Walter Gay. *The New York Times*, July 15, 1937, 19. The Metropolitan Museum of Art held a memorial exhibition of Gay's work in 1938, the year after his death.

[14] Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (fig. 17) was well placed, framed by the doorway through which visitors entered the gallery.

[15] Weinberg, "Introduction" (symposium in conjunction with *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, November 30, 2006).

[16] The issue of the globalization of American art history was most recently addressed at the symposium "American Art in a Global Context" (28–30 September 2006), sponsored by The Smithsonian American Art Museum with support from the Terra Foundation for American Art. A webcast of the three-day event can be viewed on the Smithsonian American Art Museum's website (http://americanart.si.edu/education/fellows_interns/opportunities-symposium.cfm).

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing the entrance to *Americans in Paris, 1860-1900* with the exhibition poster featuring John Singer Sargent's *Madame X* and a view of the first gallery displaying John Singer Sargent's *In the Luxembourg Gardens*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)

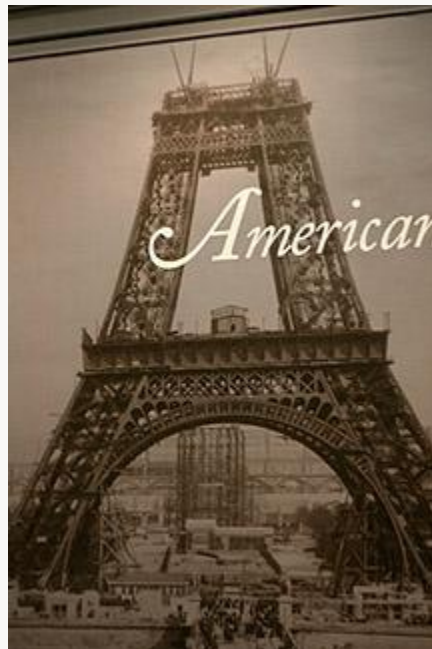


Fig. 2, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing detail of photograph mural of Eiffel Tower under construction for the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle, 1888. © Bettman/Corbis. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; John Singer Sargent, *Rehearsal of the Padeloup Orchestra at the Cirque d'Hiver*, about 1879-1880. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Nelson Norris Bickford, *In the Tuileries Garden*, Paris, 1881. Oil on panel. New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Thomas Hovenden, *Self Portrait of the Artist in his Studio*, 1875. Oil on canvas. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Carolus-Duran*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing James Carroll Beckwith, *Portrait of William Walton*, 1886. Oil on canvas. New York, The Century Association; Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur*, 1898. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing detail of photograph mural of Statue of Liberty assembled in the courtyard of Galet et Gauthier, rue de Chazelles, Paris, prior to its shipment to the United States, 1884. © Bettman/Corbis. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Le Figaro (Portrait of a Lady)*, 1878. Private collection; Mary Stevenson Cassatt, *Mother about to Wash her Sleepy Child*, 1880. California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 11, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Winslow Homer, *A Summer Night*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. [\[return to text\]](#)

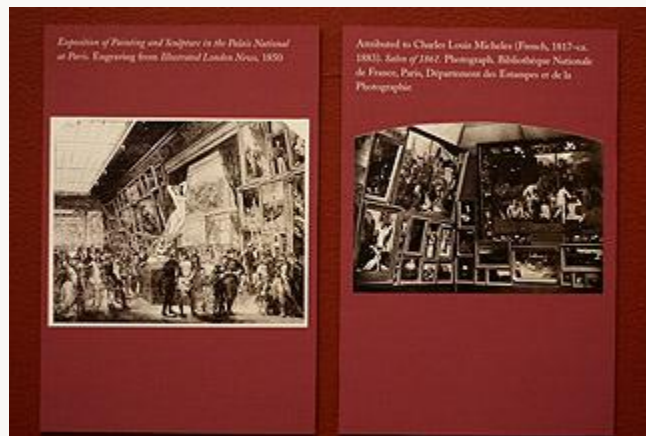


Fig. 12, Didactic wall labels showing Exposition of Painting and Sculpture in the Palais National, Paris. Engraving from *Illustrated London News*, 1850; Attributed to Charles Louis Michelez, *Salon of 1861*. Photograph. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. [\[return to text\]](#)

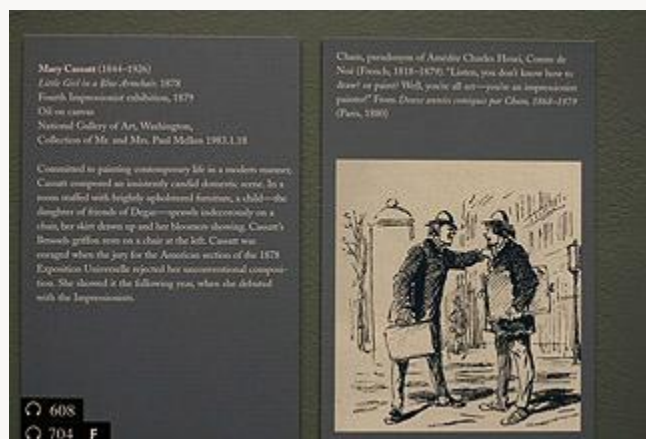


Fig. 13, Didactic wall label showing a reproduction of Cham, pseudonym for Amédée Charles Henri, Comte de Noé, "Listen you don't know how to draw? or paint? Well, you're all set – you're an Impressionist painter." From *Douze années comiques par Cham*, 1868-1879 (Paris, 1880). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 14, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing John Singer Sargent, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882. Oil on canvas. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 15, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Thomas Hovenden, *In Hoc Signo Vinces (By this sign shalt thou conquer)*, 1880. Oil on canvas. Michigan, The Detroit Institute of Arts; Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Victory*, 1892–1903; this cast, 1912 or after (by 1916). Bronze, gilt. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 16, James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Black Portrait of Theodore Duret*, 1883. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 17, John White Alexander, *Repose*, 1895. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 18, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Winslow Homer, *Cernay-la-Ville – French Farm*, 1867. Oil on canvas. Urbana-Champaign, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois; Dennis Miller Bunker, *Brittany Town Morning, Larmor*, 1884. Oil on canvas. Chicago, Terra Foundation for American Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 19, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Childe Hassam, *Winter in Union Square*, 1889–1890. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Maurice Prendergast, *Central Park*, about 1914–1915. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Childe Hassam, *Allies Day, May 1917, 1917*, Oil on canvas. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Edmund Charles Tarbell, *Across the Room*, about 1899. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 20, Installation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art showing Willard Leroy Metcalf, *The Ten Cent Breakfast*, 1887. Oil on canvas. Colorado, Denver Art Museum. In this scene painted at the Hôtel Baudy in Giverny, Robert Louis Stevenson appears seated at the table in the lower right. [\[return to text\]](#)