Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr.

The autumn exhibition season at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center commences with a regional exploration of the history of art little studied in this country. A selection of thirty-four key paintings from the extensive nineteenth-century Danish painting collection assembled over the last twenty-four years by John L. Loeb, Jr. is on view for Vassar. It allows us a glimpse at what is held to be the best collection of Danish painting outside of Denmark itself and further permits us to celebrate the collecting passion of the eldest son of Frances Lehman Loeb. John L. Loeb, Jr. served as Ambassador to Denmark from 1981 to 1983 during the administration of Ronald Reagan. This exhibition, organized by the Bruce Museum of Arts and Science in Greenwich, Connecticut, will introduce the viewer to the heightened sensibilities of Danish painters of landscape, portraiture, still-life, and genre scenes where there is, at all times, the visual impression of a civil society suffused with the intense light of Northern Europe. The New York Times has declared this collection mandatory viewing for anyone concerned with the history of European art. The essence of Danish painting during the critical period of the nineteenth century is of a country whose artists had a receptivity to the normative model of French progressive artistic movements such as Realism or Impressionism, but synthesized these schools of artistic thought through a strong sense of national identity rooted in the slightly isolated nature of a culture poised on all but one side by water. The land masses of Denmark, like those of Japan, are composed of large and smaller islands punctuated with many peninsulas, inlets, and coves that define its coasts. In a geopolitical sense, Denmark in the nineteenth century was a kingdom in decline, threatened by its neighbors Prussia (and later a consolidated Germany) and Sweden. Losses of territory and an economy threatened by reduced circumstances spawned a nationalist intellectual foundation of a national “school” of art valued by the teachers of the key nineteenth-century artists were established academic artists in post-Enlightenment Europe.

In the pictures by Nicolai Abildgaard (1743-1809) and Jens Juel (1745-1802), or in the sculpture of Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768-1844 and not included in the Loeb Collection), one views the foundation of a national “school” of art that valued the academic traditions such as the rigorous study of the live model, but one that also encouraged travel via prizes and fellowships to study in Rome, or later, Paris. Many artists in the Loeb collection followed this career path, eventually returning to Denmark. One exception to this course of study was Christian Dalgasgaard (1824-1907) who never left Denmark during his lifetime. He was nevertheless a very accomplished painter of genre and his work in this exhibition, Young Girl Writing from 1871 (illustrated on page 8), is an engaging subject of innocent concentration set in a warm domestic interior punctuated by a typical view out through an open window.

From the 1830s, the remote fishing village of Skagen had served as an inspiration to Danish artists interested in plein air painting, largely owing to the encouragement of intellectuals such as Hans Christian Andersen. Thus, in this context such painters as Peder Severin Krøyer (1851-1902) emerged. Krøyer was perhaps the most internationally celebrated Danish painter of his day and the counterpart in the work of the two of Denmark artists best known internationally today, Carl Holsoe (1863-1935) and Vilhelm Hammershoi (1864-1916). Both artists were students of Krøyer, yet spent most of their careers painting in the urban environment of Copenhagen. Their works are imbued with an enigmatic quietude, rightly understood as inspired by the tradition of Dutch interior paintings of the seventeenth centuries, owing a particular debt to Vermeer. In their visions, contemplative bourgeois women drift through days of mild domestic activity against the backdrop of muted colors and ordered yet minimally furnished bourgeois interiors. The locations were often the homes of the artists themselves and the subjects members of their families, yet there is the insistent evocation of domestic archetypes that blur the sense that we are viewing specific individuals at work.

The quality and range of the Loeb Collection of Danish painting is excellent given the relatively short time that it has been in formation. The examples chosen for this exhibition are testimonial to the discerning eye of the committed collector. The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center is delighted to offer the experience of what may be our audience’s first, but we hope not last, encounter with a rare collection.

James Mundy
The Anne Hendricks Bass Director
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
There is a distinct difference between the concepts of collecting and accumulating. The former suggests a plan of some sophistication, the latter does not. A strong collection such as that at Vassar is the product of a period of fifty to forty years of acquisition. Those original gifts to the collection chosen by Elias Magoun and donated by Matthew Vassar were one with a specific set of foics, paintings of the American old masters and works on paper, largely European and primarily British from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since that time the small collection has been propelled forward by occasional major gifts of work in a specific area, thereby growing into a “collection of collections”. Among these were the Italian Renaissance panel paintings given by Charles Pratt in 1915; the Warburg Old Master print collection of 1941; the Steiglitz Circle works bequested by Paul Rosenfeld and Edna Bryner Schwab in the 1950s and 1960s; and the Deutsch Collection of Post-War American and European modernism given during the 1990s. There have also been transfers from other parts of the College such as the large Classical Collection that we house or the many needlework samplers that migrated from the Library to the Art Center in the past few years. In between, key individual works were bought or donated that helped connect the larger collections to one another. Thus, the skeleton of Vassar’s collection is composed of, to some degree, strokes of unplanned good fortune and planned growth.

To this picture can be added other kinds of acquisitions of the some 17,000 works at the Art Center, probably less than half have come in the manner described above. Some works were accepted as bequests or gifts, a study or scrutiny to assess whether they might have a true role to play in the educational mission of the Art Center. Others arrived as lesser addenda to key works where the College was faced with an “all or nothing” proposition. Yet, others were acquired with the idea that they would contribute to the program, but were later found to be outdated, redundant, or otherwise flawed. Many of these works are consigned to permanent storage. Their “life without parole” for a work of art originally created for public or private delection. Naturally, there is the potential for any work of art, no matter how poor in quality or condition to be used in a “teaching context” even if the lesson is a negative one, “this is not how a work of art should look.”

Proper ethical care for works of art requires that they be conserved when in need of treatment. For works of art that are not used, the storage and maintenance carries cost implications that argue against keeping the works on the unlikely chance that they might be useful at some point down the line. Therefore, the proper thing to do is to return them to the marketplace where a new owner might better allow them to realize their purpose when they were created.

For museum objects in this category there is a two-part process. The works are deaccessioned in step number one which means they are effectively “decommissioned” as works in the collection and then, in step two, they are sold in the open market or, possibly, given to another museum that might have a better use for them. The policy as adopted by many museums dictates that the curators first survey the collection for works that might be redundant, in poor condition, or otherwise not exhibitable. Then the works are appraised by at least two independent sources to assess their potential market value. This list is carefully reviewed and presented for approval to the Collections subcommittee of the Art Center. The group makes up largely of museum directors and curators. The works that are finally selected for deaccessioning and sale are then offered in most, but not all, cases at public auction sales. Where there is a clear financial advantage to the museum in making a private sale, this can be used as an option. Where the donor of a work of art is still living and can be located, it is normally a courtesy for the museum to make the donor aware of the change of status of the object. Most importantly, it is at this stage that all donors and others are made aware that their names will not disappear from the rolls of contributors. The hands realized from the sale will eventually be applied against the purchase of another work of art and that work will carry the names of the donors of the deaccessioned works that made the purchase possible.

When listed on the credit line, the designation “by exchange” will denote that their gift was converted to this new use. This has the distinct advantage to the donor of moving his or her name from a work never exhibited to one that will see considerable more exposure in the public galleries.

True collections are very aware of the fluidity of collections as they improve, but sometimes their descendants require a more substantial explanation of why it is good to prune collections in order to improve them and how their family member’s name will continue to be associated perpetually with his donation. Vassar has periodically surveyed parts of its collection for deaccessioning but this has not taken place at all for twenty-five years. In the next few years we will look to see if there are paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and photographs that might not be living up to their original purpose. But, regardless of the outcome, the process will be prudent and composed of many checks and balances. Most of all, it will attempt to raise the level of artistic quality of the collection and to respect the donors who have made these collections possible.

James Mundy
The Anne Hendricks Bass Director
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center

The idea of starting a Friends group for Vassar’s Art Gallery was first advanced by Mary Gibbons in a conference called by Professor Nick Cikovsky. Happened to attend that conference and spoke up in favor of the idea. Carol Noyes and I met through the offices of President Alan Simpson, who invited us to explore this proposal with him. Probably Nick put my name forward, but Carol and I were Alan’s uncoined co-chairs and, in retrospect, his was a shrewed choice. Carol had “connections” that paid off handsomely in the formative years of the Friends. I had prior professional experience in the New York art world and a talent for organizing.

Elegant and patrician, Carol nonetheless was a down-to-earth, no-nonsense person. She could effortlessly and successfully engage people with an almost hypnotized to approach. She brought onto the first board a group of distinguished members including her uncle Edward Warburg, Blanchette Rockefeller, Suzanne Wurtzel Davidson, and Richard Jomes. She had a devilish sense of humor. She warned: “it’s the spoiling whale that gets the harpoon” – a lesson she has finessed.

Although we came together traveling on very different paths, during the time we served as co-chairs of the Friends, Carol and I found that we had strikingly similar life experiences. Sharing these during the time we served as co-chairs of the Friends, Carol and I found that we had strikingly similar life experiences. Sharing these
Friends’ Report

Spring bloomed with much excitement around the Art Center’s opening of *Time and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* in April. For the Friends, April 8th was filled with a busy schedule, as the exhibition opening coincided with the Friends’ full board meeting. Susan Kuretsky, Professor of Art at Vassar College, gave a wonderful and informative lecture on Dutch art on *Finding Time: On the Virtues of Fallen Things*, which was followed by a reception allowing guests the opportunity to view the new exhibition. Later in the evening, the Friends’ Board of Directors hosted a celebratory gala dinner at Alumnae House, where everyone came together to sing Susan Kuretsky’s praises and discuss the highlights of the exhibit.

Continuing with the fascinating subject of Dutch art, author Russell Shorto and Charles Gehring, Director of New Netherlands Project and noted historian joined the Vassar community in May for a reading and discussion of Mr. Shorto’s new book, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America*. It was the perfect complement to the *Time and Transformation* exhibit at the Art Center and allowed guests to increase their knowledge and appreciation of such an important exhibition.

There is exciting news on the development front as the goal to endow the position of Coordinator of Public Education and Programs was reached in April. The program is in its seventh year and we all look forward to its continued health, ably managed by Kelly Thompson.

For our Friends members and Vassar students, The Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center invite you to a fall Art Film Series, opening Thursday, October 20th at 8:00 p.m. in Taylor – room 203, with *I Shot Andy Warhol*, starring Lili Taylor. Come early to the Art Center for our special 6:30pm – 7:45pm gallery hours before each screening, including a docent led discussion at 7:00 and light refreshments in the museum atrium.

The four other films in the series are: *Basquiat* on 10/27, *Frida* 11/10, *Naked States* 11/17 and *Jackson Pollock: Love and Death on Long Island* 12/8. For information on the films being screened and to become a Friend please visit www.fllac.vassar.edu

Jennifer E. Cole
Administrative Manager
Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center

James Mundy introduces guest lecturer Susan Kuretsky ’63 who enlightened the audience with her knowledge of seventeenth-century Dutch art.

Guests take time viewing the interesting pieces from the *Time and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* exhibition April 8, 2005.
Presses, Pop, and Pomade
American Prints Since the Sixties

January 13 – March 19, 2006
Prints and Drawings
Galleries

Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987)
Marilyn, 1967
Screenprint on paper
Gift from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander E. Racolin
1995.13.49

Vassar College is delighted to announce the acquisition by its Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center of an important late Cubist painting by Pablo Picasso, “Glass, Guitar, and Musical Score” (winter 1922-23), as a gift of Virginia Herrick Deknatel, class of 1929, in honor of Frances Daly Fergusson. Fergusson recently announced that she will step down after 20 years as president, on June 30, 2006. The painting is the fourth by Picasso to enter the Art Center’s collection and is the first at Vassar to represent the artist’s Cubist period. A studio-bound still life, Glass, Guitar, and Musical Score is an expression of the pastel-toned, decorative style of Cubism that Picasso practiced after the First World War. Serene and harmonious, the painting reflects Picasso’s immersion in this period in the high-society world of dance and theater, both through his marriage to ballet dancer Olga Koklova and through commissions for stage, costume and set designs for various companies, notably Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

This gift has immense personal meaning for me,” said Fergusson. “Ginny Deknatel and her husband Fred, with whom I studied art at Harvard, together collected with brilliant eyes for quality and importance. Since I became president of Vassar in 1986, Ginny has been a kind, witty, and good friend to me and to the College, sharing generously her intelligence and savvy. I am so honored to have this magnificent work — which I have admired frequently and avidly in her home — here at Vassar.”

According to James Mundy, The Anne Hendricks Bass Director The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, “Glass, Guitar and Musical Score adds immeasurably to our collection, for the first time allowing our students and visitors to see a remarkable major work of Cubism here at Vassar. It is tremendously generous of Mrs. Deknatel to have made this gift in honor of President Fergusson.”

The other Picasso paintings in the Vassar collection are Woman in a Red Armchair (1924), Sheperd and Goat (1946) and Tete de femme (1953-54). The Art Center’s Picasso holdings in all media number more than thirty and represent every decade of his career, from an 1899-1900 drawing to an etching of 1968. Besides adding a major chapter to the Art Center’s survey of Picasso’s career, Glass, Guitar and Musical Score significantly expands Vassar’s representation of the modern masters. The work takes its place at the Art Center among fine paintings by artists including Paul Cezanne, Edmond Munch, Edouard Vuillard, Robert Delsnauy, Balthus, and Alberto Giacometti.

Art Center Receives Picasso in Honor of President Frances Fergusson

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881-1973)
Glass, Guitar, Musical Score, 1922-23
Oil on canvas
Gift of Virginia Herrick Deknatel, class of 1929, in honor of Frances Daly Fergusson, President.

Time, Transformation and Travel

Following its presentation at Vassar College, Time and Transformation in Seventeenth Century Dutch Art will be exhibited at the following distinguished institutions:

John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Sarasota, Florida
(August 20 – October 30, 2005)

Speed Art Museum Louisville, Kentucky
(January 10 – March 26, 2006).

In conjunction with these exhibitions, the College’s Office of Regional Programs has organized programs in Sarasota, Cincinnati and Louisville with James Mundy, ‘74, Anne Hendrick Bass Director, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center; and Susan Kuretsky, ’63, Sarah Gibson Blanding Professor of Art and exhibition organizer. They will be joined by John Wetenhall, Director, and John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art; and Peter Morrin, Director, Speed Art Museum and former Director, Vassar College Art Gallery.

Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center from throughout the United States will be invited to join local alumnicus and friends at these programs. Please watch for the formal announcement and registration form.

October 26, 2005
Ringling Museum of Art
Sarasota, Florida
6:00 – 9:30 p.m.
Exhibition Opening and Dinner

January 6, 2006
Taft Museum of Art
Cincinnati, Ohio
6:00 – 9:30 p.m.
Exhibition Opening and Dinner

January 7, 2006
Speed Art Museum
Louisville, Kentucky
5:00 p.m. Lecture by Susan Kuretsky, ’63
6:30 p.m. Exhibition Opening and Reception
7:00 p.m. Dinner and Panel Discussion
Curator’s Choice

Vija Celmins, Untitled (Ocean), 1972

Margaret Bourke-White's photographs are among the most enduring images of the twentieth century. The castle-like towers of a dam, looming up on the cover of the first issue of Life magazine (1936); flood victims lined up for soup under a billboard trumpeting, “There’s No Way Like the American Way” (1937); dazed prisoners peering out through barbed wire during the liberation of Buchenwald (1945); Mahatma Gandhi seated at his spinning wheel (1946); the sweat-headed faces of South African miners (1950). Several women before her had achieved some prominence in photography, such as Anna Atkins in the 1840s, Jessie Tarbox Beals and Gertrude Käsebier in the 1900s. Bourke-White, though, was unmistakably a dominant figure in photojournalism – a burgeoning new field in 1930s America, and one in which women would long constitute a rare minority.

Self-taught and unapologetically ambitious, Bourke-White handled her public image as adeptly as she did a camera. In 1929, on the strength of a spectacular set of photographs of industry in Cleveland, Henry Luce lured her to New York to work for the Fortune magazine. Amid other assignments over the following year, Bourke-White recorded the construction of the Chrysler Building, and – falling in love with both the stylish tower and the publicity value it promised – opened a studio and office there.

In a self-portrait recently acquired by the Art Center, the artist posed on a sofa in the anteroom of her high-rise quarters, leafing through a portfolio of photographs made on her three voyages (1930-1932) to Soviet Russia. Her characteristic air of dashing self-assurance is offset here – a comical degree that may help to explain her smile – by the lace frills on her dress, a feminine (and quite uncharacteristic) touch.

That the portrait’s setting helps to convey the up-to-the-minute spirit of the sitter is no accident. Bourke-White had assigned every detail of the design and outfitting of her office to her friend John Vassos (1898-1985), an illustrator and industrial designer whose command of machine-age elegance matched both the Chrysler Building’s close interiors and the public image of a cutting-edge photographer. (In a formidable touch of her own, Bourke-White kept on site a pair of pet alligators, Hypo and Pyro.) The present print, in fact, comes from Vassos’s collection, which featured other Bourke-White photographs illustrating his product designs, including a close-up of the Art Deco clock seen here.

This exquisitely made and preserved print, which joins com-
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To help continue activities in support of the Art Center, we invite you to become a member of the Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center.

Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center receive:

- invitations to Art Center openings and special events
- the Friends newsletter published twice a year
- an invitation to the Friends annual meeting
- invitations to participate in special trips

Yes, I wish to be a Friend.

- Student Friend $10
- Junior Friend (Graduates within 5 years) $25
- Individual $50-99
- Contributing Member $100-249
- Sustaining Member $250-499
- Donor $500-999
- Patron $1000-2499
- Benefactor $2500-4999
- Director’s Circle $5000

Make checks payable to Vassar College, Friends of the Art Center, Box 102, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York 12604

Christen Dalsgaard (1824-1907)
Young Girl Writing
Oil on canvas, 25 x 18 3/4 in.