

1989

The Harnett Collection of American Painting

University of Richmond Museums

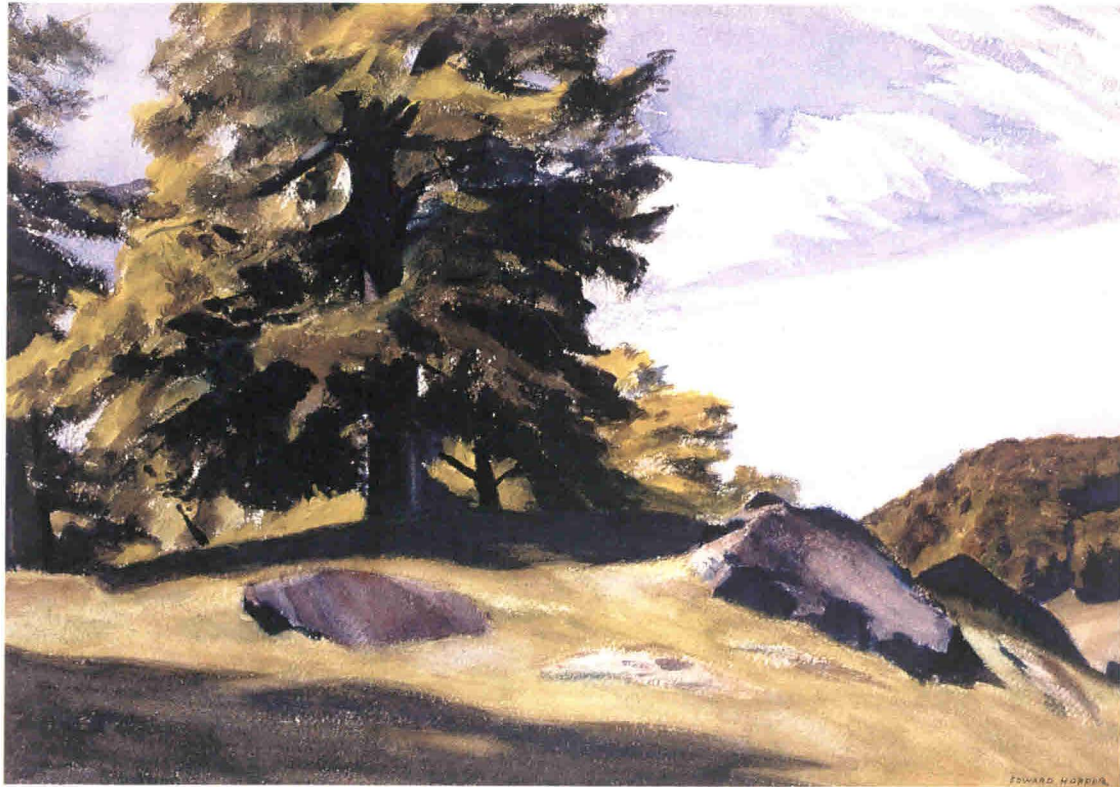
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THE HARNETT COLLECTION OF AMERICAN PAINTING



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1984 Joel and Lila Harnett became continuing donors, enabling the Marsh Gallery to bring to the University of Richmond community an exciting series of exhibitions of the work of major contemporary artists. On behalf of the Marsh Gallery, the faculty of the Art Department, and Dr. F. Sheldon Wettack, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I wish to extend thanks to the Harnetts for their vision and generosity.

For their help in bringing about this exhibition, I also wish to thank Dean F. Sheldon Wettack; Charles Johnson, Ephraim Rubenstein, and Mark Rhodes and Linda Brown of the Art Department; Dorothy Wagener of the Office of Communications; the UR Cultural Affairs Committee, and the J. Thomas Lecture Fund.

Elizabeth Langhorne-Reeve
Director of the Marsh Gallery

THE HARNETT COLLECTION OF AMERICAN PAINTING

The Marsh Gallery, University of Richmond, January 10-26, 1989

Joel Harnett, a 1945 graduate of the University of Richmond, discovered his interest in art when he met his wife, Lila. She had studied painting at the Art Students League in New York City. As a young couple they shared a love of art and of the collecting of art. Today with great generosity they share their collection, the fruit of some thirty years of intelligent and loving discrimination, with Joel's alma mater.

Both diversity and coherence, in addition to a striking level of quality, characterize the Harnett collection. Having to limit themselves in some fashion, they decided early on to collect only American artists. Their preference has been for art with a referential content and what Lila Harnett describes as a "nourishing" substance. More specifically, they have sought out artists with an individual, even singular vision, prominent among whom are Charles Burchfield, Reginald Marsh, Edward Hopper and George Tooker. This criterion makes for diversity: the imaginative "Gothic" landscapes of Burchfield, the acutely observed urban bustle of Marsh, the lonely light-filled spaces of Hopper, the quiet intense psychological dramas of Tooker. The depth in which they collect the work of these men lends their collection a satisfying coherence, even as they continue their fascination with singular vision in individual works by artists of a younger generation, such as Pearlstein, Beal and Birmelin.

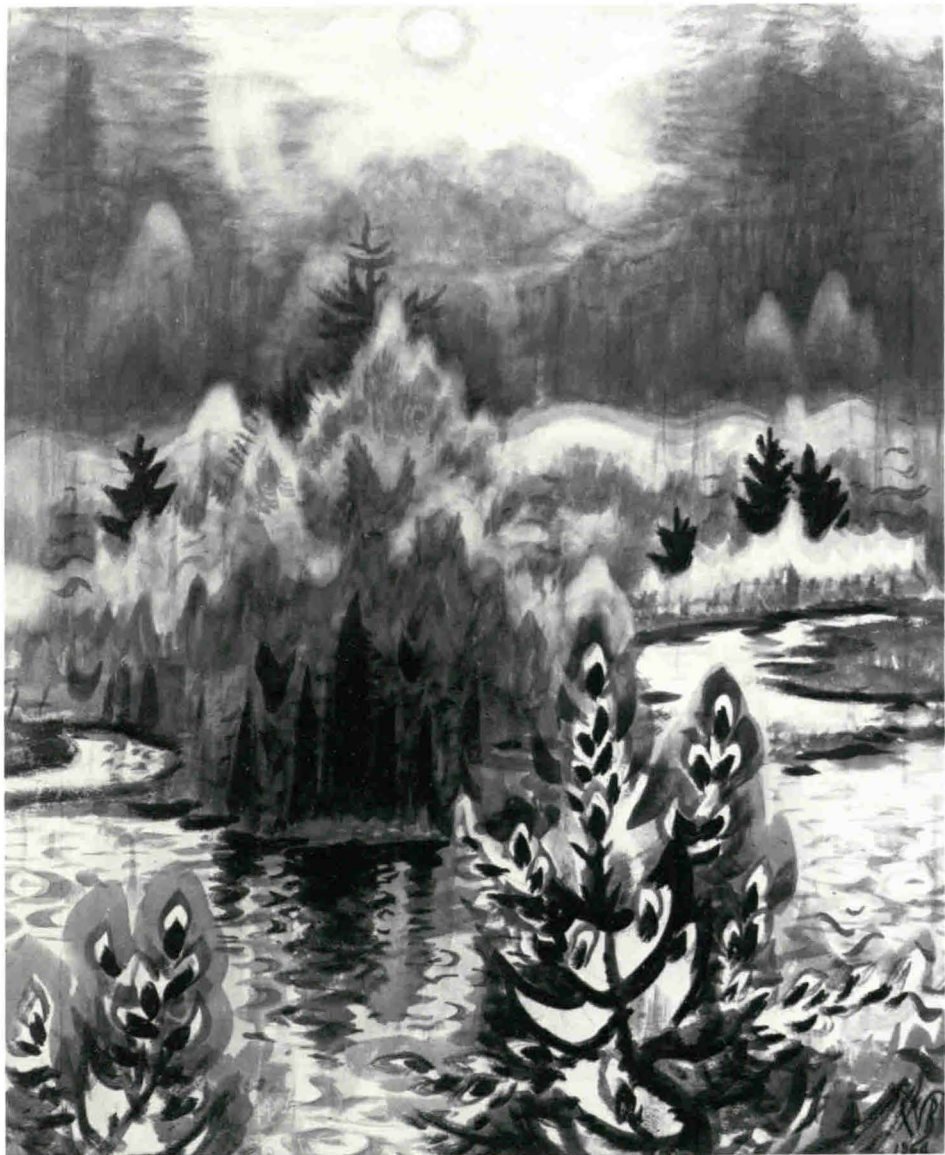
The first work the Harnetts ever bought was a Burchfield drawing done in 1920 as a study for the painting *Factory Town Scene*, now in the Newark Museum. Burchfield is an American master of watercolor, and as John Baur has said, is the last genuine pantheist in a tradition that stretches back to the early nineteenth century — to Emerson and Cole. In the watercolor *Cicada Song in September*, 1956, for instance, he renders the

vibrating spirit of nature and sound of the cicada's song in his linear, rhythmic patterning of the evergreen forest.

Becoming fully engaged in the adventure of collecting, the Harnetts followed all of Burchfield's work as it came into John Clancey's New York gallery. They began to seek out, as they have also done for Hopper, Marsh and Tooker, key examples of the distinctive facets of an artist's vision. Burchfield's watercolor *Passing Shower in June*, 1917, was done in the year that he himself called his "golden year," when he first hit his full strength as an artist. In a surprisingly bold composition he depicts a rainstorm moving over rooftops. Burchfield loved the changing moods of nature and its seasons. Whereas in *Cicada Song* the day is hot and the sun is streaming through the trees, cold winter light characterizes both *Swamp Apparitions*, 1962, a full blossoming of his pantheist vision, and the comforting *Pussy Willows by Moonlight*, painted as a Christmas present for his wife in 1964.

Again exemplifying the Harnetts' success in finding key examples of an artist's vision, Edward Hopper's etching *Evening Wind*, 1921, is one of the finest impressions of this print ever made. The wind, coming in through the open window, blows the curtain, as light flows over the nude girl in that display of light and dark planes that so fascinated Hopper. His love of American light is also central to his depiction of the urban landscape in *Manhattan Bridge and Lily Apartments*, 1926, and of the rural New England meadow in *Sugar Maple*, 1938. These two watercolors, a medium in which Hopper often worked, are exemplary of the urban and rural genres which made Hopper famous as a painter of the American scene in the 1920s and '30s.

Another American Scene painter whose singular vision the



Charles Burchfield, *Pussy Willows by Moonlight*, 1964

Harnetts have pursued is Reginald Marsh, who celebrates people in urban New York, in such quintessential images as the May 31, 1931, etching *Tenth Av. at 27th St.*, a final state, and the 1952 drawing of a Coney Island scene *On the Beach. Eyes Examined*, done in 1946 in tempera, possesses the humor that characterized Marsh's own person. Lila Harnett tells the tale that even in the middle of a conversation Marsh would get his sketch book out. In the gallery questioning his dealer John Clancey — "Did you sell any of my pictures?" "What's this?" and "How's that going?" — he would be all the while looking out the window into the street, sketching constantly. He went out to the Coney Island beaches, would roll up his pants, put a handkerchief, knotting it at the four corners, on the top of his head to protect himself from the sun, and would stand there knee deep in the water — sketching the bathers who gathered around.

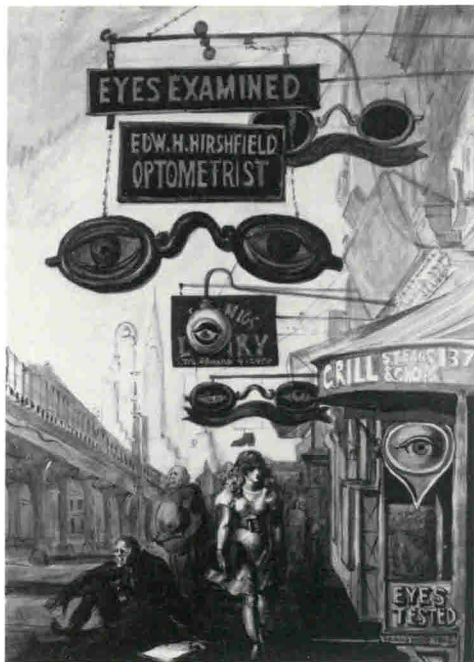
In 1943-45 George Tooker studied at the Art Students League with, among others, Reginald Marsh. "Reginald Marsh was a marvelous teacher, a wonderful artist and man." While building on the American revival of Renaissance techniques of draughtsmanship, composition and execution emphasized at the League, Tooker found his own and singular artistic voice. Examples of his art constitute another very strong part of the Harnett collection. Tooker works in the painstaking medium of egg tempera, usually completing only one or two paintings a year. Two such works are the Harnetts' *Gypsies*, 1968, and *Ward*, 1970-71. The exquisite precision of his figuration is inflected by a slightly surreal and modern psychological vision. He explores the human attempt to communicate, even as it is encased in an atmosphere laden with silence and unsettling echoes. The eyes in the drawing *The Sleepers* are open; the young man in the lithograph *Voice* listens — through a barrier; the two women in *Gypsies* confront us — with their mystery.

Both extending and rounding out the Harnetts' collection is a

sequence of individual pieces by a variety of artists, among whom are Balcomb Greene, Michael Mazur, Philip Pearlstein, Jack Beal and Robert Birmelin. This sequence focuses on a range of realist and figural art done from the 1960s through the present. While the Harnetts have collected a small number of abstract works, for instance by Paul Jenkins and Fangor, they are clearly drawn to work that has a discernible subject matter. Interestingly, they own a figural painting by Balcomb Greene, who was prominent in the American Abstract Artists group of the late 1930s but who later rejected non-objective abstraction in favor of the cubistically shattered figures of such a work as *Cafe*, 1963.

Although the works of the 1960s to the present seem diverse, echoes and resemblances appear when one studies the collection. Greene's *Cafe*, 1963, shares its urban jostle with Marsh's *Tenth Av. at 27th St.*, 1931. Mazur's *View Onto Garden with Blue Chair*, 1973, echoes the light-filled spaces of Hopper. Pearlstein's *Reclining Nude and Piano Stool*, 1968, echoes the strong figural style of Tooker, but with the psychology taken out. This 1968 painting is an early distillation of the New Realism in which the artist's eye registers a female nude and a piano stool with the same dispassionate objectivity. On the other hand, a pronounced reintroduction of allegory into figural composition marks Beal's *Temperance and Gluttony*, a 1977-78 pastel. Much as Beal's pastel offers a vivid contrast to the lusty and simple joys of Marsh's *On the Beach*, so the urban sidewalks depicted by both Marsh and Greene provide a thought-provoking backdrop to Birmelin's up-to-the-minute image of urban anomie, *Street Crossing — The Red Headed Woman*, 1985. Threads weaving through the Harnetts' collection continue to multiply, and reward our attention.

Elizabeth Langhorne-Reeve is on the Art and Art History faculty of the University of Richmond, and is the Director of the Marsh Gallery.



Reginald Marsh, *Eyes Examined*, 1946

CHECKLIST

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

1. Edward Hopper
Evening Wind, 1921
Etching on paper
6 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
2. Edward Hopper
Sugar Maple, 1938
Watercolor on paper
14 x 20 inches
3. Edward Hopper
Manhattan Bridge and Lily Apartments, 1926
Watercolor on paper
14 x 20 inches
4. Charles Burchfield
Study for *Factory Town Scene*, 1920
Graphite, ink and wash on paper
6 x 8 inches
5. Charles Burchfield
Swamp Apparitions, 1962
Watercolor on paper
40 x 30 inches
6. Charles Burchfield
Passing Shower in June, 1917
Watercolor on paper
18 x 22 inches
7. Charles Burchfield
Cicada Song in September, 1956
Watercolor on paper
40 x 33 inches
8. Charles Burchfield
Pussy Willows by Moonlight, 1964
Watercolor on paper
41 x 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
9. Reginald Marsh
Tenth Av. at 27th St., May 31, 1931
Etching on paper
8 x 11 inches
10. Reginald Marsh
Eyes Examined, 1946
Tempera
30 x 20 inches
11. Reginald Marsh
On the Beach, 1952
Chinese ink on paper
22 x 30 inches
12. George Tooker
Sleepers, n.d.
Graphite on paper
16 x 22 inches
13. George Tooker
Ward, 1970-71
Egg tempera on gesso wood
19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
14. George Tooker
Gypsies, 1968
Egg tempera on gesso wood
23 x 23 inches
15. George Tooker
Mirror, 1978
Lithograph
20 x 16 inches

16. George Tooker
Voice, 1977
Lithograph
11 x 9¾ inches
17. Michael Mazur
View Onto Garden with Blue Chair,
1973
Oil on canvas
35¼ x 31½ inches
18. Balcomb Greene
Cafe, 1963
Oil on canvas
40 x 50 inches
19. Philip Pearlstein
Reclining Nude and Piano Stool, 1968
Oil on canvas
44 x 36 inches
20. Jack Beal
Temperance and Gluttony, 1977-78
Pastel on paper
32 x 39 inches
21. Robert Birmelin
*Street Crossing – The Red Headed
Woman*, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24 inches



George Tooker, *Gypsies*, 1968

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January 10-26, 1989

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University of Richmond
Virginia 23173

- Tuesday, January 10
7:30 PM Introduction
by Lila and Joel Harnett
Lecture on Edward Hopper by Gail Levin,
Baruch College, City University of New York
- 8:30 PM Opening Reception, Marsh Gallery
- Thursday, January 19
4:00 PM Film, "Burchfield's Vision,"
Rm. 207, Modlin Fine Arts Center



MARSH GALLERY

Modlin Fine Arts Center
University of Richmond, Virginia 23173
804/289-8276

Hours: Tues.-Fri. 12:00-4:00 PM
Sat. and Sun. 1:00-5:00 PM

