

John Singer Sargent

A SELECTION
OF DRAWINGS & WATERCOLORS
FROM THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART



John Singer Sargent

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N.S.

Preface

The forty-three works in this exhibition were selected from over four hundred drawings and watercolors in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. The Museum's collection of Sargent drawings and watercolors was begun in 1915 with the purchase of ten watercolors selected by the artist. Eight of these are included here (figs. 5, 6; nos. 13, 14, 17, 20, 23, 29, 32, 33). In 1930 and 1931 the Museum received nine charcoal and pencil drawings from the artist's two sisters, Emily Sargent and Mrs. Francis Ormond. The collection grew to well over four hundred works in 1950 through a gift from Mrs. Ormond. The most recent addition, acquired in 1970, is a pencil study of Sargent's celebrated Portrait of Mme X (fig. 3, no. 6). Comprehensive in scope, the Sargent collection ranges from minor sketches done by the artist at the age of thirteen to watercolors made on the battlefields during World War I.



1. Study for El Jaleo
(no. 4)

John Singer Sargent: A Biographical Sketch

Born in Florence of American parents in 1856, John Singer Sargent spent his youth traveling with his family in England, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. His early interest in art was encouraged by his mother, and he kept sketchbooks with careful studies of animals, the mountains and people of the Austrian Alps, works of art seen in the great European museums, and various buildings and monuments that captured his imagination during the family's extensive travels.

He received his first formal instruction in art in Rome in 1868, from Carl Welsch, a German-American landscape painter. Two years later Sargent attended the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence, which he described in a letter to his cousin as "the most unsatisfactory institution imaginable." Despite his father's hopes that he pursue a naval career, Sargent passed his examinations for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and in 1874 entered the Parisian studio of the portraitist Emile Auguste Carolus-Duran. Carolus-Duran's method of instruction emphasized painting directly from observation, retaining only the salient or most essential features. He stressed the importance of initially establishing correct values (finding the halftones and then placing the darks and the highlights), and he urged the study of the works of Velázquez. "In art all that is not indispensable is harmful," he observed, and, "My aim has always been to express the maximum by means of the minimum." This direct, economical approach based on observation is the foundation of Sargent's style.

During the 1870s and 1880s Paris became a principal training ground for many American artists. The leading painters of the Barbizon school—Millet, Corot, Diaz, and Daubigny—who had brought landscape painting out of the studios and advocated a closer contact with nature, died during the decade 1870 to 1880, but the impact of their ideas remained. Courbet, the leading exponent of realism, died in 1877. Manet, who worked in the realist tradition, and whose *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* had scandalized Paris in the preceding decade, was active during this period. The attention of the critics, however, had been diverted by a group of independent painters, including Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Degas, Renoir, and others, who held their first group exhibition in the spring of 1874 and were given the derisive name "impressionists." In 1876 Sargent saw Monet's works at the Galerie Durand-Ruel. He met the painter, who became

his friend and whose work was influential in his development, especially in the late 1880s when impressionism was at its height.

Sargent visited America for the first time during the summer of 1876. The following year, at twenty-one, he first exhibited at the Paris Salon. At the Salon of 1878 Sargent received an honorable mention for *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale* (Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), painted in his Paris studio from studies done *en plein air* in Brittany the previous summer. During the winter of 1879-1880 he visited Spain and Morocco. In Spain Sargent studied the works of Velázquez, absorbing the master's subtle palette, his evocative use of light and space, and his creation of atmospheric effects. A trip to Holland in the spring of 1880 provided Sargent with the opportunity to study the works of Frans Hals, whose broad handling of paint, expressive brush stroke, and fluent technique attracted Sargent.

The summer of 1880 was spent painting in Venice. In 1882 *El Jaleo* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), a painting based on studies from his trip to Spain (fig. 1, no. 4), was enthusiastically received at the Paris Salon. During the late summer he returned to Venice and painted street scenes and interiors, which are characterized by brilliant plays of light and dark and the skillful use of values for defining space. The same qualities are present in his haunting painting, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), of which he said, "There is no real composition at all, merely an amateurish sort of arrangement that could find its rebuke in any good Japanese print."

During 1883 Sargent made numerous studies of the notorious Parisian beauty Madame Pierre Gautreau (fig. 3, nos. 5 and 6). The exhibition of his portrait of Madame Gautreau as *Portrait of Mme X* (Metropolitan Museum) at the Salon of 1884 and its critical reception by public and press scandalized by the lady's daring décolletage and lavender coloring marked the culmination of the artist's Parisian career.

After spending the summers of 1884 and 1885 in England, Sargent moved to London, taking over Whistler's former studio, on Tite Street. London became his home for the remainder of his life, although he continued the extensive traveling that characterized his youth. In 1887 he visited the United States to paint a portrait of Mrs. Henry Gurdon Marquand (collection of Mrs. Allan Marquand, Princeton), wife of the American businessman, art collector, and president of the Metropolitan Museum

(1889-1902), whose portrait Sargent painted ten years later. Other portrait commissions followed. A laudatory article on Sargent and his career in the October 1887 issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine by his friend Henry James advanced his growing reputation with the American public, as did his first one-man exhibition at the St. Botolph Club in Boston in January 1888. During the late 1880s Sargent visited and painted with Monet at Giverny. The influence of impressionism is most apparent in his works dating from this period.

Sargent returned to America in December of 1889 and received a commission for the mural decorations of a hall in the Boston Public Library, designed by McKim, Mead and White. Abandoning his original idea of a cycle from Spanish literature, Sargent decided to illustrate the development of Western religion from paganism to Christianity. The next twenty-five years were in great part devoted to this project, with visits to Egypt, Spain, Africa, Greece, and Italy in search of material. Turning to medieval art for inspiration, during 1897 and 1898 he made studies of the mosaics in Sicily (no. 1) and Ravenna. Additional commissions for murals followed: the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1916; the staircase leading to the Rotunda in 1921; two panels for the Widener Memorial Library at Harvard University in 1922.

During the time he was working on the murals for the Boston Public Library, Sargent continued to satisfy the increasing demands for portraits from the great and fashionable. In 1897 he was honored by being elected Academician by the National Academy of Design in New York and the Royal Academy in London and being made an officer of the Legion of Honor in France. His growing dissatisfaction during the first decade of the twentieth century with the restrictions and demands of portraiture became apparent when he answered a request for a portrait with, "Ask me to paint your gates, your fences, your barns which I should gladly do, but NOT THE HUMAN FACE." To a friend he wrote: "No more pauphtraits whether refreshed or not. I abhor and abjure them and hope never to do another especially of the Upper Classes. I have weakly compromised and lately done a lot of mugs in coke and charcoal and am sick of that too, although occasionally the brief operation has been painless." Sargent had painted almost five hundred portraits by 1909, and although he abandoned portraiture after that date he continued to paint a few each year, including those of John D. Rockefeller and President Woodrow Wilson in 1917.

Sargent worked in watercolors from his early childhood when he kept sketchbooks, and during annual sketching holidays in Europe, but it is only after 1900 that watercolor became a favorite medium. It provided a form of relaxation and freedom from the restrictions imposed by commissioned portraits. Favorite spots for Sargent's sketching holidays included Purtud in the Val d'Aosta, the Simplon Pass, San Vigilio on Lake Garda, Lake Maggiore, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Spain. His two sisters, Emily and Violet (later Mrs. Francis Ormond), and his friends often accompanied the artist on these trips. Emily, who also painted in watercolors, appears in *In the Generalife* (fig. 5, no. 13).

It is difficult to place Sargent's watercolors in chronological order since numerous trips were made to the Alps, Italy, and Spain, few of his watercolors are dated, and he delighted in certain subjects—the mountains, chalets, streams, and meadows of the Alps (nos. 27-29, 33-35); the canals, streets, and architecture of Venice (fig. 7, nos. 17, 22-25); Italian and Spanish gardens, sculpture, and architecture (figs. 5 and 6, nos. 2, 3, 9, 13-16, 18, 20, 26)—to which he returned again and again.

Formal qualities, the study of light and color, were Sargent's primary concern. Forms are reduced to essentials and defined with an economy of brush strokes for maximum expression. His watercolor technique varied. In some works the preliminary composition is sketched in pencil. He worked on wet or dry paper in transparent or opaque watercolors, with washes or a dry brush saturated with color. He used the white of the paper or added white for highlights. His works exhibit a complete and comprehensive command of the watercolor medium and virtually all of the technical possibilities that it offers the artist.

A reticent man with a terror of public speaking and publicity, Sargent avoided praise. According to his biographer, Evan Charteris, Sargent was reluctant to show his watercolors to prospective buyers and would assign such titles as "Vegetables," "Dried Seaweed," "Blokes," "Idiots of the Mountains," "Triple Bosh" to landscapes and figure groups. Sargent exhibited at the Royal Water-Colour Society during the 1900s and in 1904 was elected a member. The Brooklyn Museum purchased eighty of his watercolors from an exhibition at M. Knoedler & Co., New York, in 1909. In 1912 the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acquired a large number of them. In 1915 the Metropolitan Museum purchased ten watercolors selected by the artist from his best works.



2. Italian Model (no. 11)

The outbreak of the first World War in the summer of 1914 found Sargent in the Austrian Tyrol. Tyrolese Crucifix (no. 33) was painted at this time. After considerable difficulty he returned to London and in 1916 traveled to Boston to supervise the installation of the murals for the Boston Public Library. He spent the summer months camping and painting in Montana and the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia. Camp at Lake O'Hara (no. 36) and Camp and Waterfall (no. 37) date from this trip. In 1917 Sargent went to Ormond Beach, Florida, to paint a portrait of John D. Rockefeller. After completing the portrait the artist stayed in Florida for several weeks with Charles Deering at Vizcaya, the unfinished estate of James Deering at Brickell Point. His delight in the lush tropical setting found expression in a series of watercolors of palms, alligators, and figures (nos. 38-41).

After returning to England in the spring of 1918, Sargent agreed to visit France as an official war artist. Accompanied by his friend and fellow war artist Henry Tonks, Sargent went to France in July 1918. The sixty-two-year-old artist is reported to have spent much of his time painting under a large white umbrella, which the Americans made him camouflage when he joined them. Tommies Bathing (no. 42) and Dugout (no. 43) are two of many watercolors that Sargent painted at this time.

During the years following the war, Sargent devoted much of his time to the Boston murals, making frequent visits to America. He died in London in April 1925, shortly before a scheduled trip to Boston with the last of the Boston Museum murals, which were installed after his death.



3. Study for Madame X (no. 6)



Catalogue

Unless otherwise indicated, the measurements given in the following catalogue are sheet sizes, with height preceding width.

- 1. Study after a Byzantine Mosaic: Angels, Palatine Chapel, Palermo.** Pencil and watercolor, 9 7/8 x 14 1/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.83f
- 2. Study after a Mosaic: Crucifixion, Apse, San Clemente, Rome.** Watercolor, 19 7/8 x 13 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.83g
- 3. Study after a Mosaic: Madonna, Apse, SS Maria e Donato, Murano.** Pencil and watercolor, 12 7/8 x 9 5/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.83e

Sargent's lifelong interest in architecture and architectural decoration is well documented in his drawings and watercolors. Mosaic decoration offers an unusual challenge to the painter because the surface of each gold or colored glass cube that forms the mosaic reflects light at different angles. In 1897 and 1898 Sargent visited Sicily and Ravenna to sketch and study the mosaics in preparation for his mural decorations for the Boston Public Library. The Crucifixion and the Madonna (nos. 2 and 3), studies after medieval mosaics in Rome and Murano, probably predate 1897 since they both show a labored attention to detail and an opaque quality, which characterized Sargent's earliest work in watercolor. The artist exhibits greater freedom, selectivity, and technical dexterity in

the study of angels from the Palatine Chapel, Palermo (no. 1), which may date from 1897.

4. Study for El Jaleo (fig. 1). Before 1882. Pencil and wash, sight size 10 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.139

In the autumn of 1879 Sargent visited Spain and North Africa; he returned to Paris in the spring of 1880. Two years later he painted *El Jaleo* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), based on sketches made in Spain and using a Parisian, Marie Renard, as a model for the dancer. The painting was acclaimed by critics when it was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1882. This preliminary sketch for *El Jaleo* in pencil and wash demonstrates Sargent's skill as a draftsman. The pencil shading indicates the light source below, and sharp, incisive, broken lines define the contours of the dancing figure.

5. Study for Madame X. Before 1884. Pencil, 12 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond and Miss Emily Sargent, 31.43.3

6. Study for Madame X (fig. 3). Before 1884. Pencil, 9 3/4 x 13 3/16 inches. Charles and Anita Blatt Gift, Rogers Fund, and John Wilmerding Gift, 1970.47

The critical reaction to Sargent's portrait of Madame Pierre Gautreau, or Portrait of Mme X (Metropolitan Museum), at the Paris Salon of 1884 was based on the notoriety of the subject, her revealing evening dress, and the lavender coloring of her skin. This reception disappointed Sargent, who refused to comply with the demands of Madame Gautreau's mother to withdraw the painting from exhibition. The uproar lost the painter commissions and was instrumental in his subsequent decision to move to London.

Sargent probably met the well-known beauty in 1881. He wrote his childhood friend, Ben del Castillo, in 1882: "I have a great desire to paint her portrait and have reason to think she would allow it and is waiting for someone to propose this homage to her beauty." The portrait was begun the following year. During the summer of 1883 Sargent stayed with the Gautreaus at their summer home in Brittany and reported in a letter to a friend that he was "struggling with the unpaintable beauty and hopeless laziness of Madame Gautreau." The painter had difficulty deciding on the pose and later with the execution of the painting. These two pencil studies were probably done in 1883. The study showing Madame Gautreau on a sofa was probably an early idea discarded in favor of the standing pose of the final painting. The

spontaneous quality of the study communicated by scribbled pencil lines varying in intensity offers a striking contrast to the eloquent linear tracing of Madame Gautreau's distinctive profile, the subject of the other study.

7. Javanese Dancer. About 1889. Pencil, 13 1/8 x 9 3/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.109

Sargent visited the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1889 and made several oils, watercolors, and drawings of the Javanese dancers, one of the leading attractions of the Exposition. The Metropolitan has a sketchbook by the artist with numerous pencil drawings of the dancers, studies of heads, arms, and hands. This sketch captures the stylized and formal gestures of the exotic dancer and makes an interesting contrast to the study of the Spanish dancer for *El Jaleo* (fig. 1, no. 4).

8. Young Woman with a Black Skirt. Watercolor, 14 x 9 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.33

9. Cathedral Interior. Pencil and watercolor, 13 3/4 x 9 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.35

10. Figure in Costume. Pencil and watercolor, 14 x 9 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.34

11. Italian Model (fig. 2). Pencil and watercolor, 14 1/2 x 22 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.72

12. Figure with Red Drapery (fig. 4). Pencil and watercolor, 14 1/2 x 21 3/16 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.73

Italian Model and Figure with Red Drapery demonstrate Sargent's mastery of watercolor. The figures are defined by the white of the paper modeled with thin transparent washes. By contrast, the areas of greatest color saturation are concentrated around the figures to increase the illusion of weight and volume in the forms. Selective and economical use of brush strokes for maximum expressive effect and an effortless technique distinguish these two studies as examples of Sargent's finest work.

13. In the Generalife (fig. 5). About 1912. Pencil and watercolor, 14 3/4 x 17 7/8 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.8

Painted about 1912 in Granada, Spain, *In the Generalife* is one of ten watercolors selected by the artist from his best works and purchased by the Museum in 1915. The three figures in the foreground, Jane de Glehn, the wife of Sargent's friend and fellow artist Wilfred de Glehn,



4. Figure with
Red Drapery
(no. 12)

Sargent's sister Emily at the easel, and a Spanish woman identified only as Dolores, provide an interesting contrast as portrait and character studies. A brilliant light source from the upper right reduces Emily Sargent's undefined facial features to barely suggested planes, illuminates the pensive and absorbed face of the fashionable Mrs. de Glehn, and leaves Dolores, the most sharply defined and penetrating character study of the group, in complete shadow. The intensity of contrasts of light and dark contributes to the haunting quality of this work. Dazzling brushwork and the arrangement of the figures, viewed from above, in a strikingly unconventional composition reflect the impact of impressionism on Sargent's style.

14. Spanish Fountain (fig. 6). About 1902-1903 or 1912. Pencil and watercolor, 20 7/8 x 13 9/16 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.6

This study of an unidentified Spanish fountain has been dated about 1902-1903, when the artist was in Spain collecting material for the decoration in the Boston Library, or about 1912, the date of Sargent's last trip to Spain. Sargent's preoccupation with the qualities and properties of light and water finds expression in many of his watercolors. The sun-filled site of the fountain, the sculptural group cast in shadow but subject

to the intensity of reflecting light, and the reflections caught in the rippled surface of the water provide the artist with an opportunity for the study of the different effects of light on various surfaces and under different conditions. The wide range of rich color used in Spanish Fountain, from warm reds to green-blues with highlights (the stream of water issuing from the basin and the base of the sculptural support) heightened with white, demonstrates Sargent's skill as a colorist.

15. Granada. About 1912. Watercolor, 15 5/8 x 21 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.80m

Granada was painted during Sargent's final trip to Spain. The dark vertical cypresses dominate the scene and are further distinguished by the gray mass of olive trees before them and the pink-washed sky of the background. A profusion of colorful flowers and tangled grasses in the foreground contrasts with the almost monochromatic middle and background. Each stage of the work is painted in a different manner: short brush strokes of intense color with some use of a sponge make up the foreground; broad sweeping strokes of brown, black, and dark green form the cypresses; and the background is executed with transparent washes.



5. In the Generalife (no. 13)

16. Ionic Capital, Italy. Pencil and watercolor, 13 15/16 x 9 15/16 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.38

17. Venetian Canal. Pencil and watercolor, 15 1/2 x 20 7/8 inches. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.10

From the summer of 1880, when Sargent took a studio at the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, until 1913, the city was one of the artist's favorite haunts. The architecture, gondolas, canals, light, and water provided material for many of his paintings. In a descriptive passage on Sargent's Venetian paintings in the October 1887 issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Henry James observed: "... wonderfully light and fine is the

touch by which the painter evokes all the small familiar Venetian realities . . . and keeps the whole thing free from that element of humbug which has ever attended most attempts to reproduce the Italian picturesque."

In *Venetian Canal* brilliant sunlight illuminates the beige and orange buildings along the left side of the canal; deep purple, brown, and blue shadows mark the buildings on the right. The water reflects the glowing orange and purple shadowed buildings and the clear blue sky, conveying a vivid impression of Venice on a sunny day.

18. Tiepolo Ceiling, Milan. About 1904. Pencil and watercolor, 14 x 10 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.25

As part of his preparations for the decoration of the Boston Public Library, Sargent studied the mid-eighteenth-century ceiling decorations representing the course of the Sun's chariot through the skies, by the Venetian painter Tiepolo, in the Palazzo Clerici, Milan. Although small, this watercolor after Tiepolo's frescoes captures the vast scope of the large-scale ceiling decoration. Characterized by a high-key palette dominated by brilliant yellow and ochre, and executed in wet but controlled washes evoking the immediate and spontaneous quality that can be one of the captivating features of drawings and watercolors, Tiepolo Ceiling, Milan displays the extraordinary energy and effortless technique of Sargent's work.

19. Architectural Sketch. Pencil and watercolor, 9 3/4 x 13 1/2 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.36

20. Escutcheon of Charles V of Spain. About 1912. Pencil and watercolor, 11 7/8 x 17 3/4 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.11

Sargent's interest in architectural decoration was stimulated by his work on the murals for the Boston Public Library. This watercolor of the coat of arms of Charles V (the first Hapsburg ruler of Spain), an early sixteenth-century decoration on a wall in the garden of the Generalife Palace in Granada, was painted in 1912, when Sargent was working on designs for six lunettes in the Boston Public Library.

The heraldic device worked in low relief, framed in a lunette and illuminated by a raking light, presents an unusual subject for the artist—the definition of a shallow space with an intricately carved sculptural surface cast further in relief by a strong light. Using the white of the paper for highlights, tracing the intricate sculptural forms in washes of yellow and ochre, and indicating shadow in brown, blue, and purple, Sargent reproduces the tangible, highly articulated intricate surface of the low relief in one of his finest and most accomplished watercolors.

21. Women Approaching. About 1882. Watercolor, 10 x 14 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.32

Painted about 1882, *Women Approaching* is characterized by the austere monochromatic coloring that distinguishes Sargent's Venetian interiors and street scenes of 1880 and 1882 and an interest in atmospheric effects that marked his studies in Spain. Color, however, is subordinate to technique in this work. Using a very wet gray-green wash for the ground, the artist

delineates the emerging figures in the foreground with a few selective dry black strokes applied with an expressive economy that recalls Oriental calligraphy.

22. Venice. Watercolor, 9 7/8 x 14 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.29

Closely related to Sargent's paintings of Venetian interiors and street scenes of 1880 and 1882, this Venetian street or courtyard is an intriguing study and definition of enclosed space. In contrast to the Escutcheon of Charles V of Spain (no. 20) with its shallow space and intricately sculpted surface, Venice offers a different exploration of space. The space is enclosed and defined by three walls marked with windows, shadowed doorways, and a lamp. The far wall is illuminated by sunlight. Working with blue and black for shadows, Sargent uses subtly modulated washes of yellow, tan, and ochre to indicate the textural variations in the irregular surface of the walls in this simple and evocative composition.

23. Giudecca. Watercolor, 13 1/2 x 20 3/4 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.4

24. Venetian Passageway (fig. 7). Watercolor, 21 1/2 x 14 5/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.77

Venetian Passageway, identified by David McKibbin as a corner of the Palazzo Giustiniani Faccanoni on the Rio de la Fava, is one of Sargent's most studied and deliberate compositions. The work functions effectively in two ways: as a careful geometrical arrangement of rectangles in a decorative surface pattern and as a three-dimensional representation of a passageway. The asymmetrical placement of the passageway and the column on the left and the effective use of contrasts of light and dark for maximum decorative effect demonstrate Sargent's strong sense of design. The diaper-patterned window, the spiral fluting of the column, and the brickwork on the right side of the passageway increase the decorative quality of the surface.

25. Green Doorway. Watercolor, 21 x 14 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.76

26. Italian Garden. Watercolor, 11 1/2 x 18 1/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.74

27. Brook and Meadow. Watercolor, 14 x 20 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.80j

28. Rushing Brook. Watercolor, 18 x 12 3/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.80i

One of Sargent's most abstract compositions, *Rushing Brook* was probably painted in Purd



6. Spanish Fountain (no. 14)

in the Val d'Aosta, a favorite spot for the artist's annual summer sketching holidays. Abandoning the intrinsic qualities of the objects (rocks and water), which usually dictate the manner of painting, Sargent explores the qualities of paint for the sake of paint and creates a dynamic work, which paradoxically suggests the force of rushing water and the weight of the rocks. Prussian blue, emerald green, and burnt sienna in streaks of pure undiluted color from the tube applied in a calligraphic fashion suggest the turbulent waters, and the white of the paper and heavy applications of white paint mark the foam and the rocks in this freely expressive work distinguished for its immediate and spontaneous qualities.

29. Mountain Stream. About 1912. Pencil and watercolor, 13 1/2 x 21 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.2

Painted about 1912 at the Val d'Aosta, Mountain Stream presents an interesting contrast to Rushing Brook (no. 28). Mountain Stream is a more controlled and less freely expressive work,

in which the artist displays a greater sense of detail and uses local color to define the qualities of the nude figure, the rocks, the water, and the foliage. Sargent's use of color and light to produce a scintillating surface in this impressionistic work also contrasts with the treatment of color and light in Figure and Pool (no. 41), painted in Florida in 1917.

30. Sky. Watercolor, 13 1/8 x 19 5/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.68

31. Clouds. Watercolor, 14 x 9 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.30

32. Sirmione. 1913. Watercolor, 15 1/2 x 21 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.5

33. Tyrolean Crucifix. 1914. Pencil and watercolor, 20 7/8 x 15 1/2 inches. Joseph Pulitzer Fund, 15.142.7

At the outbreak of the first World War in the summer of 1914, Sargent was painting in the Tyrol. Tyrolean Crucifix dates from this period. The locally carved Alpine crucifixes appear in a few of Sargent's watercolors in sketchbooks dating to his childhood. Tyrolean Crucifix is the artist's ultimate development of the theme in watercolor. Blues and browns dominate the palette. The stroke of blue along the edge of the underside of the brown gable roof is one of the artist's frequent devices—the use of the complementary color of a local color to intensify a shadow—and proves especially effective against the blue sky executed in transparent washes. The figure of Christ appears silhouetted against the sky in deliberately dramatic perspective that intensifies the impact of this powerful work.

34. Chalet. Watercolor, 21 x 13 3/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.811

35. Abriez. Watercolor, 20 7/8 x 15 3/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.81m

36. Camp at Lake O'Hara. Dated 1916. Watercolor, 15 3/4 x 21 inches. Gift of Mrs. David Hecht, in memory of her son Victor D. Hecht, 32.116

37. Camp and Waterfall. 1916. Watercolor, 20 x 14 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.801

Early in 1916 Sargent returned to Boston to continue his work on the final decorations for the Boston Public Library. During the summer he set out on a camping expedition to the Canadian Rockies of British Columbia by way of Montana. In a letter to a relative, Mary Hale, he provided a graphic description of his camping experiences: "As I told you in my first or my last it was raining and snowing, my tent flooded, mush-

rooms sprouting in my boots, porcupines taking shelter in my clothes, canned food always fried in a black frying pan getting on my nerves, and a fine waterfall which was the attraction of the place pounding and thundering all night. I stood it for three weeks and yesterday came away with a repulsive picture. Now the weather has changed for the better and I am off again to try the simple life (ach pfui) in tents at the top of another valley, this time with a gridiron instead of a frying pan and a perforated India rubber mat to stand on. It takes time to learn how to be really happy."

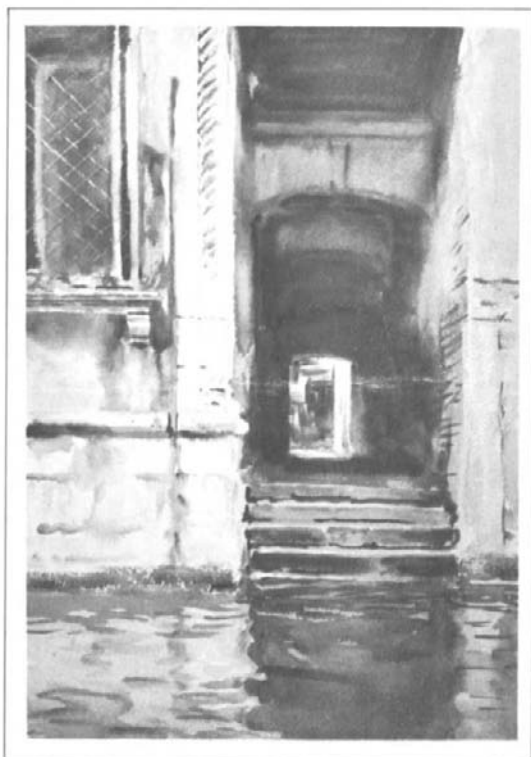
Both Camp at Lake O'Hara and Camp and Waterfall were painted during this trip. In both works Sargent focuses on camp life rather than the scenic grandeur of the area. The canvas of the tents, shown in sharp perspective, dominates the composition of Camp at Lake O'Hara. The treetops above the tents are painted in broad blue strokes, and blues and browns dominate the artist's palette in both works.

38. Palmettos, Florida. 1917. Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 21 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.65

In 1917 Sargent went to Ormond Beach, Florida, to paint a portrait of John D. Rockefeller. After completing the portrait he spent several weeks in Florida as the guest of Charles Deering, whose brother James was engaged in building Vizcaya, an elaborate estate at Brickell Point. A series of watercolors dating from this trip document Sargent's fascination with the lush tropical scenery of Florida and the splendors of Vizcaya, of which he noted: "It combines Venice and Frascati and Aranjuez, and all that one is likely never to see again." Palmettos, Florida, Alligators, Landscape with Palms, and Figure and Pool (nos. 38-41) all date from this period and are distinguished by the brilliant color effects and intense light that characterize Sargent's Florida series. Tropical vegetation proved a favorite subject. In Palmettos, Florida Sargent captures the effects of altering sunlight on the palm fronds by using the white of the paper, strokes of undiluted opaque color, and transparent washes, demonstrating his technical versatility in the medium.

39. Alligators. 1917. Watercolor, 15 3/4 x 20 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.63

This watercolor of alligators basking in the sun illustrates a variety of watercolor techniques: wet washes, dry brush strokes, and an effective use of the white of the paper for composition.



7. Venetian Passageway (no. 24)

40. Landscape with Palms. 1917. Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 21 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.64

41. Figure and Pool. 1917. Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 21 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.62

42. Tommies Bathing. 1918. Watercolor, 15 3/8 x 20 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.48

43. Dugout. 1918. Watercolor, 15 3/8 x 20 7/8 inches. Gift of Mrs. Francis Ormond, 50.130.53

In June of 1918 Sargent accepted an official commission from the British War Memorial Committee of the Ministry of Information to travel to the war zone and paint a work commemorating the cooperation of British and American troops. The sixty-two-year-old artist was in France from July to the end of October. The painting Gassed (Imperial War Museum, London), depicting the aftermath of a gas-shell attack that Sargent and Henry Tonks, a fellow

artist, witnessed, fulfilled the commission. His struggles with the commission and his impression of the war were graphically expressed in a letter to Evan Charteris, his biographer: "The weather is breaking and rain and mud have set in for good I fear, and I hate to consider my campaign over before my harvest of sketches has grown to something more presentable in quality and quantity. The programme of 'British and American troops working together,' has sat heavily upon me. . . . How can there be anything flagrant enough for a picture when Mars and Venus are miles apart whether in camps or front trenches. And the farther forward one goes the more scattered and meagre everything is. The nearer to danger the fewer and the more hidden the men—the more dramatic the situation the more it becomes an empty landscape."

Tommies Bathing and Dugout are two of many watercolors based on Sargent's wartime experiences. Both reflect the nature of the series of wartime watercolors, which are characterized by an undramatic and unemotional choice of subject matter showing preparatory scenes such as Dugout, marked by desolation, the destructive aftereffects of war in various studies of Arras, or the commonplace occupations of the troops as in Tommies Bathing. It is only in a few drawings and the studies for Gassed that the artist draws on the tragic elements of his wartime experience.

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