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OPULENCE AND OCULAR DELIGHT, SPLENDOR AND SQUALOR: CRITICAL WRITINGS IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE BY MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER. (VOLUMES I AND II)

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, PH.D., 1979

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OPULENCE AND OCULAR DELIGHT, SPLENDOR AND SQUALOR: CRITICAL WRITINGS IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE BY MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER

by

Lois Dinnerstein

A dissertation submitted in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(History of Art) in the Graduate School of
The City University of New York

June 1979

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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February 28, 1979
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Abstract

OPULENCE AND OCULAR DELIGHT, SPLENDOR AND SQUALOR: CRITICAL WRITINGS IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE BY MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER

by

Lois Dinnerstein

Adviser: Professor William H. Gerdts

This is a study of the origin, development, and impact of the critical writings on art and architecture by a significant figure in the formation of American taste, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer) (1851-1934). She was in the vanguard of those who comprehended that American art was part of a world culture. The criticism considered here offers access to the ideas, aspirations, and accomplishments of that vibrant era which followed the Civil War.

First the unusual circumstances of her formative years are investigated, including a five-year sojourn abroad. The first publications by Mrs. Van Rensselaer are discussed within the framework of the stimulus to change initiated by the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and the return of many European-trained American artists in the late 1870s. William Merritt Chase, Frank Duveneck, Walter Shirlaw, Thomas Eakins, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and J. Alden Weir figure in the discussion, as well as John La Farge and Winslow Homer.

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The mature style of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, found in the publications of the 1880s, reveals the diversity then being explored by American artists. Her writings illuminate significant works of the period, some long lost to view but hereby once again brought to light.

Internationally shared criteria are examined, and sources are traced in French criticism, the Munich School, and the late-nineteenth-century revival of seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish Realism. As the United States became an established world power, opulence and eclecticism were enjoyed while variety was more valued than consistency; sentiment was valued and distinguished from sentimentality. "The real" and "the ideal" as underlying concepts in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer are discussed, wherein idealism does not denote the antithesis of realism, but rather, an essential component of it.

This dissertation concludes with an investigation of the impact of these views which culminated in the American Renaissance as a concept in criticism. As American artists and architects expanded their capacities, Mrs. Van Rensselaer established points of reference within a world view which increasingly derived inspiration from Renaissance models of the past.

The achievements of late-nineteenth-century American architecture, landscape architecture, and environmental planning were brought to popular attention by means of Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer's extensive, and often pioneering, analysis. She wrote the first monograph on an American architect, the 1888 Henry Hobson Richardson, as well as early evaluations of the monumental architecture of McKim, Mead, and White, and the first study of Frederick Law Olmsted. In the 1886 Book of American Figure Painters, as well as in numerous articles, some reprinted in the 1889 Six Portraits, Mrs. Van Rensselaer focused on the human figure as an expressive instrument while she treated far-reaching subjects including the contemporary revival of pastel, etching, watercolor, stained glass, and mural painting in America.

Side by side with a consideration of the architecture and embellishment of sumptuous palatial residences and private clubs went a new civic consciousness which was articulated in the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer with demands for greater public access to art and with expressed concern for the design of public places. Camaraderie and cooperative efforts, unprecedented in American art, were fostered within this concept of public service.

As America came of age, freedom for the artist was defined, in the studios and on the printed page, as the license to work from living models and the opportunity to derive command from the study of the old masters and monuments of the past. The culmination of the American Renaissance occurred with the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and its aftermath, here considered via extensive writings by Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

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PREFACE

From that moment in 1974 when I first untied a frayed ribbon placed round a carefully preserved collection of letters from artists and writers, friends and colleagues of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, in the New York apartment of Mr. and Mrs. George Griswold, Jr., I knew what I wished to pursue as a dissertation topic. What I did not know then was how far afield this subject was to lead. Along the way there were many to help, and I would like to thank those whose scholarly generosity made this dissertation possible.

First and foremost I wish to thank William H. Gerdts, who first brought the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer to my attention and who has with imagination and enthusiasm contributed to so many ongoing projects in the history of American art that, by example, he has inspired a spirit of cooperation among those working in the field. Doors were frequently opened to me by those who had benefited from the exchange of ideas and information at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where the Program in American and Modern Art History was first conceived by Milton W. Brown. To H. Barbara Weinberg I am indebted for constructive criticism and far-ranging expertise. I would also like to thank Lois Marie Fink for raising thoughtful questions, both in her publications and in person.

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I am grateful for the initial encouragement of Mr. George Griswold, Jr. (the grand-nephew of Mrs. Van Rensselaer) and his family, who on countless occasions have shared with me reminiscences as well as long-forgotten documents ferreted out of attics and closets. I also wish to thank Rosamond Gilder, Mrs. James Williamson, and Laura Wood Roper for allowing me access to family papers and recollections.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of a City University of New York - Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in American Art and the assistance of numerous friends and colleagues. I especially would like to thank Doreen Bolger Burke, Lewis Sharp, David Kiehl, and Patricia Pellegrini at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; John H. Dryfhout of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site; Phoebe Peebles and Mrs. Martin Cohn of the Fogg Museum, Harvard University; Hortense Zera of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters; Richard L. Champlin of the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport; A. K. Baragwanath of the Museum of the City of New York; Dianne D. H. Pilgrim and Linda S. Ferber of the Brooklyn Museum; Ronald Pisano of the Parrish Art Museum; and Henry A. La Farge, Henry Hope Reed, W. Knight Sturges, Graham Williford, and Regina Soria. My debt to fellow students is noted throughout this dissertation.

Above all I wish to thank my family, long grown accustomed to a distracted wife and mother, clattering typewriter keys at all hours of the day and night, and "disser-

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tation stew" simmering untended for dinner. This study is dedicated to the inspiration of my husband, the artist Harvey Dinnerstein, with whom I have shared the best adventures.

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140. Photograph, "Interior of Studio at Marion" (1885-88). Reproduced: Rosamond Gilder, Letters of Richard Watson Gilder, opp. p. 144.

141. Nathaniel Lieberman. "Music Room for Whitelaw Reid in South Wing of Villard Houses, New York City." Photograph. Reproduced: Peter C. Neger, "Italian Renaissance Revival Architecture in America: The Villard Houses, 1882-85," American Art Review, September - October 1976, p. 127.

142. Nathaniel Lieberman. "Villard Houses, Exterior." Photograph. Reproduced: Neger, "Villard Houses," pp. 118-19.

143. Alfred Brennan. Tower of the Casino Court, Newport. Reproduced: MGVR, "Recent Architecture in America. 11. Public Buildings," 1884, p. 330.

144. Alfred Brennan. Interior of Casino Theater, Newport. Reproduced: MGVR, "Recent Architecture in America. 11. Public Buildings," 1884, p. 330.

145. H. H. Richardson. "Gate Lodge, North Easton, Massachusetts" (1880-81). Photograph. Harvard College Library.

146. Jean-François Millet. Nude Lying in Bed (1844-45). Oil in canvas. Louvre.

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147. John La Farge. "Christ and the Woman of Samaria." Encaustic. Trinity Church, north wall of Nave, Boston. Reproduced: American Art Review 2, part 2 (1881), cited in Weinberg, "John La Farge and the Decoration of Trinity Church, Boston," p. 349.

148. William M. Hunt. The Flight of Night and The Discoverer (1878). Oil on sandstone walls. Assembly Chamber, New York State Capitol, Albany.

149. Mary Cassatt. Modern Woman. Decoration of South Tympanum, Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Photo: Elliott, Art and Handicraft, p. 35.

150. André Castaigne. "Dome of the Horticultural Building--By Night." Reproduced: MGVR, "At the Fair," 1893, p. 35.

151. Gari Melchers. The Arts of Peace (1893). Reproduced: W. Lewis Fraser, "Decorative Painting at the World's Fair: The Works of Gari Melchers and Walter Macewen," Century, n.s. 24 (1893):16.

152. Studio of Hendrik Christian Andersen, Villa Helene, Rome. Photo: Harvey Dinnerstein.

153. Hendrik Christian Andersen. International World Centre (Ernest M. Hebrard, Architect, 1912). Published: Creation of a World Centre of Communication (Paris: privately printed, 1913), part 2, pp. 1-2.

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INTRODUCTION

Many new things seemed possible to the Americans who came to maturity with the last quarter of the nineteenth century. With the cultural treasure house of Europe opened to them as never before and more exotic discoveries unearthed by archaeological investigators, at the same time as waves of immigrants settled on these shores, there appeared a newly cultivated reading public eager to become acquainted with the arts, an audience concerned with defining just exactly what it was that American art could offer to a world now grown so interrelated.

This dissertation concerns the work of a woman who, although largely forgotten today, made a unique contribution to the development and perception of the arts in America. A figure of impressive bearing and international stature, cognizant of the world of art both at home and abroad, of her own time and ages past, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (1851-1934) was a distinguished authority on art and architecture as well as a lecturer and historian, journalist, essayist, poet, fiction writer, and public figure. (See bronze bas relief portrait by Augustus Saint-Gaudens of 1888 [pl. 1] and oil portrait by William Anderson Coffin of 1890 [pl. 2].) As an eminent American critic and historian, her judgment was sought by artists, collectors, museum officials,

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gallery dealers, and many an exhibition impresario. Frequently she was invited into the artist's studio to view work prior to public exhibition. Writings signed by "M. G. Van Rensselaer" were solicited to add luster to numerous publications ranging from the sumptuous illustrated art books then just made possible by the new printing technology of the 1880s to the most modest handbooks, brochures, and catalogues designed to aid the casual exhibition visitor. For many years she wrote regular art columns for newspapers and magazines.

Today, based as they are on the criteria of another era, the evaluations of Mrs. Van Rensselaer may provide us anew with insights into works of art which offered great pleasure to her contemporaries. Rejecting mid-nineteenth-century Ruskinian rectitude and visual austerity, she welcomed the lyrical and poetic, the sumptuous and painterly late-nineteenth-century modes, resonant with subtle color and formal grandeur.

As a friend and confidante of artists and architects, she was an intimate acquaintance of many of those who gathered in the informal salons then flourishing in the studio-homes of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. These creative figures, forceful personages of her age, found their way into the work of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, and frequently she was to be the first to write comprehensive evaluations and perceptive early considerations of their lifetime accomplishments.

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Her writings are sparked by an informed intelligence and lively curiosity, and her words articulate the aspirations of those who strove to create in the last decades of the nineteenth century in America an art which expressed, with new-gained powers, a deeply rooted earlier idealism. As a materialist mercantile ethos triumphed over agrarian values in post-Civil War America, Mrs. Van Rensselaer perpetuated an earlier spirit. A retrospective note characterizes many of her works, as it does much of the painting, sculpture, and architecture of the period.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was fully engaged in the issues and art of her day and focused on the concerns of a modern urban society, drawing sustenance for contemporary campaigns against the encroachments of commercialism from the earlier writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the American Transcendentalists and asserting the preeminence of the intuitive, or spiritual, over the purely empirical. At the same time, she welcomed the practical demands which inspired such new expressive forms as that developed for the Brooklyn Bridge. As America became a world power an expansive style characterized much of the art and architecture and is reflected in the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

From a prominent family of the politically powerful social elite of New York, Newport, and Connecticut, married to a scion of the Dutch patroon Van Rensselaer family which had originally settled in the area around Albany, Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer, despite unfettered social and geographic mobility, always gravitated back to New York City, where she fused an aristocratic elegance to a conscientious professionalism and a new spirit of reform shared by friends and colleagues. Her pen was fueled with a profound faith in progress, social Darwinism, and the potentiality of art and education to elevate the human condition. In this period which witnessed a mass-media explosion, many a new periodical venture dedicated to raising cultural standards boasted the early enthusiastic participation of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.

By the 1890s she was one of the best-known art critics of America and, as such, was subjected to somewhat caustic reappraisal once the ideas she espoused were no longer fashionable.

Such a disparaging note was sounded, for example, in 1969 by Louise H. Tharp, who described Mrs. Van Rensselaer as "an art critic whose books no American with any claim to culture would dare to miss--or dare to disagree with."[1] It is indeed true that today it would be quite impossible to write scholarly studies of many of the major artistic figures of her period without reference to her works.

Nevertheless, there is an hiatus in our comprehension of this era because of the change of taste which occurred in the decades following the turn of the century. Ever since the term "Genteel Tradition" was

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coined by George Santayana[2] (see portrait drawing by Andreas Andersen [1897, pl. 3]) and welded to Mark Twain's pejorative phrase "the Gilded Age,"[3] an aura of sanctimonious superiority has infected much of the research into this period.[4] More recently, with the current resurgence of interest in the late nineteenth century, Mrs. Van Rensselaer's books have been frequently republished and are still in print today, while quotable passages from her writings are often invoked by scholars dealing with various aspects of the age.[5]

However, her words are often misconstrued and incorrectly attributed. She has been called everything in print from "Margaret" and "Maria" to "Schuyler" and referred to as "he" (thus confusing Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer with the man she married). Many erroneous statements have appeared, including the claim that Mrs. Van Rensselaer only emerged as a critic with the death of her husband in 1884, when, in fact, by that date she had published a significant body of work (see Bibliography).[6]

This cosmopolitan and multifaceted woman is a figure who defies narrow specialization, and a search of only a single area broached by her writings is liable to overlook clues provided in another. The purpose of this dissertation is to unravel the record and evaluate the significance of the works on art and architecture by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in the context of the age in which they were created.

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NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

[1]Louise Hall Tharp, Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the Gilded Era (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), p. 237.

[2]". . . George Santayana, in a book of 1931 entitled The Genteel Tradition at Bay, lavished a good deal of skillful irony on a phrase he had earlier employed in a lecture at Berkeley in 1911 entitled 'The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.'. . . For him it seemed to connote a decaying idealism, baren and optimistic," wrote Howard Mumford Jones in "The Genteel Tradition," Harvard Library Bulletin 18 (1970):5. See also Russell Lynes, "Viewpoints: 'The Genteel Tradition,'" American Art Journal 6 (1974):73-77, which traces the change of taste regarding that era, and Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Revisited," American Quarterly 14 (1962):545-66, which offers an important challenge to the negative assessment of the accomplishments of the period.

[3]The Gilded Age (1874) was written by Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910) and Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900).

[4]Lewis Mumford, for example, wrote in 1952 the following evaluation of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's architectural criticism in Roots of Contemporary American Architecture (New York: Dover, 1972), p. 429:

> ". . . She was too near Richardson in time, when she wrote the biography [of H. H. Richardson], to see his work in full perspective; hence her over-emphasis on the more conventional part of his career, and her failure to give sufficient attention to his departures--whose full significance could in fact only be interpreted later, in terms of what they led to. Her architectural criticisms appeared frequently in the Century Magazine; but after Richardson, she succumbed to the general drift toward eclecticism with the emphasis on McKim Mead and White's Renaissance: so her architectural criticism, though copious, did not do for the layman what Montgomery Schuyler was doing for the professional in interpreting and supporting the innovators."

A similar attitude was expressed by Adolf K. Placzek in a review of a new edition of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works (1888) which appeared in 1967, when he wrote:

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> ". . . in the long run, Richardson's reputation was based on a different and more sophisticated view [than that of Mrs. Van Rensselaer], one which saw in him more the pioneer of bold new forms than the master of eclectic revivalism."

Prairie School Review 5 (1968):48. Another example of such condescension can be found in Vincent J. Scully, The Shingle Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p. 94, n. 10, when the author states: "Mrs. Van Rensselaer soon succumbed, as did everyone else, to the 'monumentality' of the late 80's and early 90's. . . ." These writers, as well as Henry-Russell Hitchcock (who wrote The Architecture of H. H. Richardson in 1938) were primarily interested in establishing the antecedents of functional modernism and thus perceived Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism as being limited by being so much part of her own time. However, it is this very quality which makes her writings so valuable. As Charles Moore has written, in comparing her treatment of Richardson with the approach of Hitchcock:

> "[Mrs. Van Rensselaer] concentrates on his expansive charm; Professor Hitchcock's [book] concentrates on establishing him as a 'modern' architect, which seems to me a dubious proposition to begin with, and especially worrisome when so many of the tenets of 'modern' architecture are fading, and Richardson's reputation remains secure."

Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 34 (1975): 323.

[5]The full range of the impact of the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer can be suggested by noting just some of the citings from her works which have appeared in the past decade alone: Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968), p. 384; Ernst Scheyer, The Circle of Henry Adams: Art and Artists (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970), pl. VII; Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Environment Is an Art," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 28 (1970):326; Mahonri Sharp Young, "The Remarkable Joseph Pennell," American Art Journal 2 (1970):85, 87-88; William H. Gerdts, The Great American Nude: A History in Art (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 125; Walter C. Kidney, The Architecture of Choice: Eclecticism in America, 1880-1930 (New York: Braziller, 1974), p. 158; Helene Barbara Weinberg, "The Work of John LaFarge in the Church of St. Paul the Apostle," American Art Journal 6 (1974):335-36; Wilson H. Faude, "Associated Artists and the American Renaissance in the Decorative Arts," Winterthur Portfolio (University Press of Virginia for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum) 10 (1974):127;

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Margaret Richardson, "Women Theorists," Architectural Design 45 (London, 1975):467; Theodore E. Stebbins, American Master Drawings and Watercolors: A History of Works on Paper from Colonial Times to the Present (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 241, 226; Michael Quick, American Expatriate Painters of the Late Nineteenth Century, exhibition catalogue (Dayton, Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1976), pp. 20-21.

Just about every one of the numerous recent publications concerning the work of the architect Henry Hobson Richardson, the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the painter Winslow Homer, and the landscape architect, environmental designer, and ecological planner Frederick Law Olmsted has made reference to Mrs. Van Rensselaer's seminal studies of the works of these artists.

[6]For example, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was the first to write in America about the large mural Mary Cassatt painted in France for the Woman's Building of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, the Columbian Exposition (The World, 18 December 1892, p. 24), yet her contribution was completely misunderstood by John Kysela in his article of 1966, "Mary Cassatt's Mystery Mural and the World's Fair of 1893," Art Quarterly, pp. 129-45 (see discussion below, pp.340-41). Many of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings were published unsigned and then were attributed to someone else. See, for example, "Architectural Fitness," editorial for Garden and Forest, 19 August 1891, attributed to Olmsted in first edition of S. B. Sutton's Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971) (see Zaitzevsky in Bibliography). Mrs. Van Rensselaer was called "Margaret Van Rensselaer" by Lloyd Goodrich and all those who referred to his citations afterwards; see "A Lost Winslow Homer," Worcester Art Museum Annual 3 (1937-38):70, and Winslow Homer, published for the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944), pp. 52, 80. The first name of "Margaret" also appears in A. D. Milgrome, "The Art of William Merrit Chase" (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1969), pp. 95, 159, 33, 164, and in The Paintings of Washington Allston, exhibition catalogue, Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, Fla., Univ. of Miami, 6 March - 13 April 1975, p. 55. "Maria" was offered by Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., in the introduction to an exhibition catalogue of the works of Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-80), Univ. of Texas, Austin, 25 October - 13 December 1970, p. 12, whereas "Mariana Griswald Von Rensselaer" was preferred by F. C. Moffatt in "The Life, Art, and Times of Arthur Wesley Dow" (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1972), p. 110 (where Mrs. Van Rensselaer's use of the word "synthesis" was misconstrued, see discussion below, p. 206), while "Mariana Gibson Van Rensselaer" appears in John Wilmerding's Winslow Homer (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 135.

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When the bronze relief portrait of Mrs. Van Rensselaer by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (pl. 1) was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, 29 January 1976 through 2 January 1977, as part of A Bicentennial Treasury: American Masterpieces from the Metropolitan (catalogue no. 69), it was erroneously asserted that Mrs. Van Rensselaer's close friendship with the sculptor only followed her complimentary review of his sculpture of Lincoln, published in 1887, when, in fact, the relationship can be traced to her 1881 article on his Farragut monument. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's words about the sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen (1872-1940), whose work she had first introduced to an American audience in 1900, were used without making mention of her name in the exhibition catalogue: Julia Ward Howe & Hendrik Christian Andersen, compiled by Richard L. Champlin (Newport, R.I.: Newport Restoration Foundation for the Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 1969), p. 7. The voluminous correspondence of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) with Mrs. Van Rensselaer, now in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., is listed as that of "Schuyler Van Rensselaer" in The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, 1962 (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1964), p. 393, and her writings are attributed to some unknown critic, referred to as "he" by H. N. Smith in "The Scribbling Women," Critical Inquiry (Univ. of Chicago) 1 (1974):50, as well as by Ronald Pisano in William Merritt Chase, exhibition catalogue, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 7 May - 5 June 1976, p. 36.

Talbot Faulkner Hamlin in 1943 asserted that Mrs. Van Rensselaer only became active as a writer and critic after the death of her husband in his biographical notice for The Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Scribners, 19), 19:208, and this idea was maintained by James D. Van Trump in his introduction to the 1967 Prairie School Press edition, Park Forest, Ill., p. 3, and by William Morgan in his introduction to the 1969 Dover edition (New York), p. v, of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's important study of the architect Henry Hobson Richardson, first published in 1888.

There is frequently a strange lapse in the documentation of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's work. For example, although she wrote a weekly art column for the New York Independent from 4 March 1886 through 6 June 1889, there is no mention of her name in the Sixtieth Anniversary Number of that periodical, 65 (1908):1345ff., although much attention was there devoted to those who contributed far less. Likewise, when the Archives of American Art in 1956 filmed the Century Magazine collection belonging to the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library, the recording skipped from "Van Dyke" to "Vedder," although there were to be found in that collection a significant group of letters from Mrs. Van Rensselaer, one of the foremost art critics of that magazine.

So persistent has been the confusion surrounding the name of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer that a publishing

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company sent royalty payments to her estate, after she had died, for a book which was, in fact, written by someone else (The Goede Vrouw of Mana-ha-ta by May King Van Rensselaer [1834-1925], who was not connected, but often confused, with Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer).

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CHAPTER I

ORIGINS AND EARLY INFLUENCES

Mariana Griswold was born on 23 February 1851 in New York City,[1] the first daughter and second of seven children of George Griswold (1819-84) and Lydia Alley Griswold (?-1908), both descendants of colonial families which had come to America from England and Scotland in the seventeenth century. Her family was proud of its pioneer past, and of all of her professional accomplishments Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer was to be most honored in her own lifetime for her two-volume 1909 History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century in which she commented, "I like to remember that the forbears of at least two of my grandparents came to America as soon as they could--with the earliest settlers of New England."[2] A concern for family history and a significant role assigned to factors of heredity can be found in many of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings.[3] Although the United States has no true aristocracy in the European sense, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer was always conscious of the fact that she was part of whatever it was that constituted an American equivalent. If she were ever tempted to forget, she would have been reminded by the attitude of others, such as that expressed, for example, by the

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French artist Felix Buhot (1847-98) (see pl. 4), who, in writing to Mrs. Van Rensselaer to thank her for an enthusiastic review and to suggest to her the possibility of undertaking a series of illustrated articles on his work for an American magazine, made a particular point of including a reference to "votre noble et ancienne famille, si bien connue à New York" (your noble and ancient family, so well known in New York[4]).

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to maintain lifelong ties to this family. Her only child was named after her father, and it is in the Griswold family plot in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn that are found the graves of not only Mrs. Van Rensselaer, but also of her husband and son (although one died in their home in New Jersey and the other as far away as Colorado).

No doubt it was to the family into which she had been born that Mrs. Van Rensselaer owed her first encounters with the fine arts. The rank and station of the Griswold family demanded an acquaintance with art and music, travel and foreign languages, literature and history. Her sister Louise was to become the wife of the Danish Ambassador to the United States, and her brother, the dashing Frank Gray Griswold (pl. 5), who was to become the director of the Metropolitan Opera of New York, as well as merchant, sportsman, and author, is perhaps best remembered today as the inventor of the "tuxedo," which he devised as a more informal evening

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costume in the early 1890s, bringing relief from the tyranny of tails, stand-up collars, and armor-plate shirt fronts.[5]

The father of Mrs. Van Rensselaer had succeeded to a position of business and civic leadership in New York City affairs established by his father, who had arrived in 1794 from Old Lyme, Connecticut (which had been originally settled by a Griswold forbear in 1664[6]). Childhood summers were frequently spent by the young Mariana Griswold with her family on the Connecticut shore.[7] It was probably also with her family that she first came to know Newport, Rhode Island, a summer resort attracting artists and intellectuals from Boston and New York which, in the post-Civil War years, became the stylish vacation address of the fabled "400" of "high society" who commissioned the major architects of their day to create for them lavish palatial Newport "cottages" and clubs about which Mrs. Van Rensselaer was later to write.[8]

The first recorded visit of her family to Newport was in 1865, when Mariana Griswold was fourteen years old.[9] It was shortly after the completion of the house designed for her uncle J. N. A. Griswold by Richard Morris Hunt (now, pl. 6, the home of the Newport Art Association). This wooden building of architectural significance has been praised as "an early example of . . . [the] apotheosis of skeletal expression . . . an excellent building in its own right and . . . perhaps Hunt's best."[10] Her uncle's house was

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described in 1905 in Newport, Our Social Capital:

> Mr. Griswold's lawn, that is guarded by a handsome wall surmounted by an orange hedge, overlooks Newport's ancient treasure, the stone tower that has served for years as a fruitful theme for antiquarians essayists, and poets. The spirited statue of Commodore Matthew Perry faces Mr. Griswold's house. 11

(Many of those enjoying family fortunes in Newport, the Griswolds among them, owed their affluence to merchant trade with the Orient, and Perry had opened Japanese ports to world trade when he sailed the first United States naval ship into Tokyo Bay in 1853.)

It is possible that in Newport Mariana Griswold was early exposed not only to considerations of architecture, but to the artistic circle of the Hunts (which included, in addition to the architect, his brother, the painter William Morris Hunt [1824-79] and his students John La Farge [1835-1910] as well as the brothers Henry and William James[12]). In later life Mrs. Van Rensselaer was frequently to summer in Newport, and the subjects of her writings often suggest ideas inspired there.[13]

Childhood winters were spent in New York City in a sumptuous new house which had been built by her father at 91 Fifth Avenue, then the most prestigious location in the city. This first home of Mariana Griswold was later described in her brother's memoirs:

> Our large house, with a warm nursery and two schoolrooms, was given up to the children. We had tutors and a governess. In the top story there was a gymnasium and a complete theatre, the latter a gift of a rich relative.[14]

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The family business interests included the shipping firm of N. L. & G. Griswold, engaged in the Canton Tea trade with the great clipper ships, the fastest craft that ever sailed, developed primarily in the United States during the middle years of the nineteenth century. Members of the family who established business in Canton, China, recalled Mrs. Van Rensselaer's brother, ". . . used to send us, by my father's ships, large cases of curios to use as playthings. These were mostly porcelains and bronzes."[15]

A receptive sensibility to the aesthetics of the Orient was thus formed in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's earliest years, and she was later to write:

> Of Japanese and other modern Oriental art I need not speak in detail. . . . Year by year we appreciate it more thoroughly, and enjoy its real beauty, I believe, more sincerely. Its vivid color, which at first startled, then amused us, we are gradually learning to reverence as we ought. To its influence is due whatever of reaction there has been against the dull coloring we have so over-prized. Perhaps before long we may dare to imitate its boldness and apply its teachings to our own very different ends. 16

Mrs. Van Rensselaer has left a vivid account of her childhood years in a description of the neighborhood of her family home:

> . . . I was born but half a mile from the starting-point of Fifth Avenue, and in a house which had just been built . . . my mother can remember when, in the [eighteen-] thirties, those marble-trimmed red houses were finished which . . . front on Washington Square. Into one of them moved her parents with their children, coming up from Beekman street; and into another moved my father's parents and their children, coming from the corner of Chambers street and Broadway. . . .
>
> My mother's newly transplanted childish eyes gazed

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from the back windows of the Washington Square house upon a stretch of green fields dotted with real live red cows. And the neighboring avenue must have grown slowly at first, for I am told that my own freshly opened baby eyes saw, from one of its new houses near Seventeenth street, only a few others marking out its further course. . . .

Later on, the material world in which I generally moved was bounded by Sixth Avenue and by Washington, Union, and Madison squares, although, of course, we sometimes walked farther up the avenue, and farther down Broadway where all the shops were congregated, and made veritable picnic excursions to far-off Central Park. I doubt whether any small girls who live on Fifth Avenue now [1893] are permitted to "play around the block." But this was our constant after-breakfast recreation, with not even a nurse to keep eye upon us. When we got too old to trundle hoops and fly red balloons, we "roller-skated," plied the daring bean-shooter, or played tag or "I spy," with a lamp-post for goal and area-doors as hiding-spots. There was much amusement also in watching for the people who daily passed up and down, with less frequent resort to public vehicles than the longer distances or more hurried occupations of to-day compel. They were young men and old going down to their business, school-boys and maidens going up to their desks; all were sure to come every morning; and those whom we did not actually know by name soon had names and characters invented for them. Private carriages were few in the mornings. But there was a line of stages which turned into the avenue from Broadway at Thirteenth street, and stopped finally at Forty-second. These stages were gaily colored, and had big pictures on each side--pictures of Swiss landscapes, prairie fights, foaming steamboats, and flying trotters; and part of our morning's interest was to watch for the ones which we had severally "chosen" as the most attractive. The trotting-wagon gave Fifth Avenue its afternoon character in those days. . . . The trotter, the sporting man, and the mature citizen of "horsey" tastes, were the figures one watched for. Most elderly citizens, however rich and staid, seem to have had these tastes when a horse always meant a trotter. It was wonderful to behold how fat they could be, and yet find comfort in such spidery wagons. But the most amazing of all was Commodore Vanderbilt, who regularly passed behind an alert, nervous team--he looked so little alert or nervous himself, and so saintly, with his serene, fine profile, his snowy hair, and his voluminous clerical white cravat. . . .

You should have seen the streets of New York in those days if you think they are dirty now. I cannot recollect the traditional predatory pig, but I remember how

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long the dirty snow remained, gradually changing into frozen dirt, and how ubiquitous, how necessary, was the crossing-sweeper when its melting seemed to flood the world. Great herds of cattle were then driven through the streets at midday on their way to the shambles. We were always on the watch for them on Tuesdays, so that we might seek refuge on some stoop which could be shut off by a gate. . . . The frequent boards which protected vacant lots were ragged with . . . [the bill-sticker's] declarations, and long, narrow slips were liberally pasted against the curbstones over the gutters, in the neighborhood of the crossings, especially when the election-day was near at hand.

"The block," I say, was our early morning playground; fortunately its farther side faced the shady, quiet precincts of Union Square, which were not positively forbidden to our unguarded feet; and a little later in the day we always took a decorous walk, now with due nursely protection, down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, to visit our Quaker grand-mother, whose "thee" and "thy" I remember as not less sweet than her gingersnaps.

. . . Washington Square (our elders called it Washington Parade-ground) . . . had a high wooden paling, and only children and very peaceful, decorous loiterers filled its paths and benches. Here, too, there were pop-corn and cake-venders, and old Irishmen who sold ballads. I wonder whether any ballads are sold in New York now? They were printed on little sheets of very bad paper, strung with clothes-pins on lines against the palings, and sold for a cent apiece. And as the middle of February drew near, their place was taken by comic valentines which, despite their gaily-tinted pictures, were disposed of at the same temperate price. It was usually for our governesses and tutors that we purchased these valentines. . . .

No one much younger than I can realize what a wail went up in New York when the first shop-window was cut on . . . [Fifth] avenue--if I am not mistaken, at the southeast corner of Seventeenth street. The pride the city then felt in this street was something quite provincial and superb. I was often told in my small years that it was the finest street in the world. I had imagination enough not to believe this, but I thought it tremendously fine; and when the shopman camped upon it, I too put ashes on my head, and believed that what Mr. Wegg would have called the "Decline and Fall Off" of New York had certainly set in.

Delmonico's was then on the northeast corner of Fourteenth street. I was allowed to visit only once or twice. . . .

At least as late as 1870, I think, it was still good

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> form to walk on the avenue. I do not mean when one needed to, but just for amusement. Its pavements are pretty full now of an afternoon, but every one looks as if a definite goal were in view; no one is simply "promenading." Twenty-five years ago promenading was not merely allowable--it was the fashion. The eastern side of the street was then altogether preferred: no matter how crowded it might be, the other would be empty. And the stretch especially beloved was between Fourteenth and Twenty-third streets. Here, on a bright winter afternoon, or, at a little later hour, on a shining one in spring, there were troops and troops of young women who, by no means old women yet, now drive in the Park instead: discreet, if still pleasure-loving, matrons who would no more let their daughters spend a couple of hours walking with young men up and down a bit of Fifth Avenue than they would let them go unchaperoned to the theater. But New York was a comparatively small place then, and its "society" was actually so small that everybody knew everybody else. There was less room for misconceptions as well as less likelihood of disagreeable encounters; and so the most carefully nurtured girls were permitted, as children and as maidens, to do many things which their daughters do not even wish to imitate.
>
> On Sundays, after church-time, the sauntering was very general. If you knew any one worth knowing in New York, you were pretty sure to find him on the avenue then. . . . 17

This was the world of which Edith Wharton was later to construct such novels as The Age of Innocence and The House of Mirth. However, it seems that although born within this society, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer always sustained a certain aloofness from it. Whereas Edith Wharton recalled, "In the eyes of our provincial society authorship was still regarded as something between a black art and a form of manual labour"[18] and vacillated all her days between work ambition and social demands, Mariana Griswold seems to have been encouraged to lead a vigorous, active life from her earliest years and to enter the arena of life on an equal

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footing with her male confreres. For example, in her recollections of childhood she remembered that she was fond of playing with the boys in their favorite haunt, under the shadow of the trees in Union Square:

> Under their shadow--all the boys of the neighborhood and one or two bad little girls as well--[among whom Mariana places herself] are playing "I spy" among the bushes, digging shallow pits in the earthen paths for our game of marbles, and drawing circles out of which we hope, with our pet lignum-vitae top, to drive the tops of the other fellows, perhaps--oh, bliss!--splitting them in the act. . . . 19

This drive to win at a boy's game was to remain with her into maturity, when she frequently found herself working in situations as the only professional woman involved.

The Griswold household of Mariana Griswold's earliest years was supported by the substantial position of her father, who not only owned the house of N. L. & G. Griswold, but was also director of two insurance companies, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Union and New York Clubs, as well as one of the founders of the Union League Club.[20] However, according to Frank Gray Griswold, the family clipper ship firm suffered a decline with the close of the Civil War and was adversely affected by legislation prohibiting vessels not built in the United States from flying the American flag. The company was liquidated, and Mariana Griswold's father took his family abroad in 1868, complaining, "There is no longer any protection for life or property in the United States."[21] George Griswold, the critic's father, remained abroad for the rest of his life, and when he died

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in 1884 he was buried in Dresden, Saxony, where the family had settled.

Thus, Mariana Griswold left the United States in her seventeenth year and did not return until her marriage at the age of twenty-two, when she reappeared as Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer.

The years spent in Germany were crucial to her development, both in terms of what she was exposed to and what she was denied. As recalled by her brother, "During the many years the family lived in Germany, I do not think a single one of us ever broke bread in a German house. . . . The people were civil, but ignored all foreigners."[22] Socially restricted to the Anglo-American community (a sizable one at the time), the Griswolds abroad would have been very conscious of their national identity. Upon her return to this country after an absence of five years, Mariana must have been particularly interested in and sensitive to exactly what it was that was specifically American. This youthful foreign sojourn during the most formative years of maturing intellect left an indelible mark on her critical faculties, which were there sharpened like a double-edged sword. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings were to become noted for both an obsession with furthering the development of American art, and a cultivated, cosmopolitan urbanity unrivaled by any of her contemporaries. Upon her return to the United States she continued to subscribe to foreign art publications, and

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many of her books and articles incorporated translations of and commentary upon current writings on art by her colleagues abroad. Some of the Griswolds married into German families, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer maintained contact with them through the years. She sent her son, her only child, to preparatory school in Dresden, and in the period of World War I, during the era marked by American and German troops battling each other across the trenches, Mrs. Van Rensselaer chose a dual role. On one hand she encouraged American soldiers stationed abroad and became active as the President of the American Fund for the French Wounded in New York.[23] At the same time, as the guns of war thundered, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who had by then published nothing relating to art for more than a decade, came out of retirement as an art critic to translate the words of contemporary German writers on art for American audiences (see Bibliography). She wrote of the Germans' "titanic struggle" and how they nonetheless thronged their concert rooms (just as the Americans and English were to be found resorting to imaginative literature in the midst of war) and thus characterized both peoples as equally civilized in their attempts to stem the dehumanization of the war.[24] In the "Translator's Preface" to The Art of the Low Countries: Studies by Wilhelm R. Valentiner, which appeared in New York in 1914, simultaneously with the German edition, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote sympathetically of the German author, who had come to America

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and been the Curator of Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum: "It should be explained, I think, that at the outbreak of the war, Mr. Valentiner remained in Germany to do his part for his country as a volunteer."[25]

Throughout her career Mrs. Van Rensselaer remained particularly indebted to German writers on art, although she rejected many of their qualities. The discipline of art history was a German invention, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer's extended early education there provided a background against which she would later work. She consciously fashioned a more graceful, personal style directed at a popular American audience, and in certain ways the examples set by her German colleagues inspired her to invent something different.

Take, for example, her relationship to her friend Wilhelm Bode (1845-1929) (see portrait by Max Liebermann, 1909, pl. 7), director of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, whose thinking paralleled her own in regard to the necessity for historical accuracy and disciplined professionalism in writing of questions of art. Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer described him as "perhaps the chief of living German art critics," she, at the same time, denigrated his work as of the "studious German sort"[26] and clearly strove to create a more vibrant, immediate, and responsive commentary on the works of artists.

The education of the Griswold children abroad included much of the "studious German sort." Mariana Gris-

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wold studied the writings of Johann Winckelman (1717-68), the first modern historian of art, whose writings had inspired Neoclassicism, and the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), renowned German Romantic poet and critic, as well as the books of such now-forgotten experts as Karl Schnasse, whose works on the history of architure and Netherlandish painting were published in Germany in the period of her stay there. Her readings were not confined to German scholars, however, and years later when Mrs. Van Rensselaer recapitulated the course of her art education it proved typical of that of her class and generation in America. She recalled, "From Mrs. Jameson we went to Ruskin, from Ruskin to Taine, from Taine to Schnaase, with wide open enlightened eyes, back to our pictures."[27]

While Mariana Griswold was being so educated abroad, John Ferguson Weir (1841-1926) established the first university art department in America, serving as director of the School of Fine Arts at Yale from 1869 to 1913. (Weir recommended a similar course of study, particularly suggesting Taine as a good counterbalance to Ruskin. Weir wrote, "Mr. Ruskin affects the subjective, moral aspect, the influences, and motives of art; while M. Taine is more concerned with its objective phase, its sensuous, positive characteristics, and its physical causes and relations."[28])

The most important aspect of Mariana Griswold's youthful sojourn abroad, for her future work, was to be the

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opportunities it afforded to study original works of art. Under the guidance of learned professors, the Griswold children were led through the great galleries and collections.[29] While living in Dresden the young Mariana Griswold developed an intimate familiarity with museum treasures, recalling later that she was permitted to "do all sorts of illegal things."[30] The Griswold children were taken to visit the architectural wonders of the Old World as well as the Paris Salon exhibitions and the big international exposition in Vienna in 1873. Music, too, was an important part of their education, especially the operas of Wagner, then at their pinnacle of fame. Even after her marriage and return to the United States, Mrs. Van Rensselaer continued to attend such events, making frequent trips abroad.

This broad cultural, historical, and, above all, visual education was to become discernible in the distinctive flavor of the writings on art and architecture by Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Not dependent on book learning alone, her criticism is infused with intuitive sensibilities refined through extended experience with original works of art. This connoisseurship was displayed in the treatment of far-ranging materials, and she was able to question attributions on visual evidence as well as historical precedent. For example, note the following passage which Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote about a large oil painting attributed to the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) exhibited at

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the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1882:

> . . . this work seems to have been skillfully done and the picture is an interesting one, though it would take confident lips to pronounce absolutely upon the question of its genuineness. It would be dangerous to say that Rubens did not paint it, for he did a thousand different and some very unexpected things. It is unlike the most characteristic work of Rubens in composition, in the type of the faces and in the drawing of the hands. The color is as utterly unlike his as can well be imagined, but this fact may be altogether due to its having been covered, long before it came into American possession, with a thick coat of yellow varnish. This was probably done to give it the air of an Italian work, and one can hardly believe such a piece of vandalism possible had the panel borne Rubens's so different beautiful, blond coloring in good condition. It looks altogether more Italian than Flemish, a fact which leads to the conclusion that if Rubens painted it he must have done so when the influence of his Italian journey was strong upon him. The picture may not be a Rubens or it may be an early Rubens in bad condition. The most that can positively be said is that it is an interesting picture, in spite of its altered state; that it has a certain grandeur of conception and plan which marks a great school if not a great brush, but that it will give a very odd idea of Rubens's manner to any one who studies him from its evidence alone. The portrait in the Historical Society's collection--long and possibly still attributed to Van Dyck--and even the small "St. Catherine" in the same collection show us in a far more truthful way how the great master worked. 31

Rubens remained a favorite artist for Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer. (When asked to send a photograph to Harvard University for the Arnold Arboretum, for example, she chose one showing herself at her work table behind which was prominently hung a reproduction of the Rubens painting from the museum in Munich, The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus, pl. 8.[32]) During her early stay abroad Mariana Griswold had cultivated a decidedly painterly sensibility,

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undoubtedly colored by the essentially bravura quality of many of the collections which she studied in those impressionable years. She was to write:

> In the pictures of the greatest schools, whether cabinet paintings or huge canvases for the permanent covering of wall and ceiling, we find the same thing--not reticence, but the most daring mastery. Rubens in the foggy North, Titian and Veronese in the glow of Venice, are the most renowned of colorists, and also the most brilliant. Even in their pictures to-day we see this--in the passionate depth of Titian, in the bright, clear contrasts of Veronese, in the carnival of audacity we call the work of Rubens. And they have certainly all lost more or less of their original vividness during the centuries' passage. . . . There is a Marriage of Cana by Paul Veronese in Dresden, with a superb figure all in orange that dominates the picture, and dominates, indeed, the whole company in the room where it stands, magnificent progeny though they be of Veronese and Titian and Tintoret. 33

The galleries which were first introduced to Mariana Griswold during her youthful stay abroad were often notable for their masters of the loaded brush, their splendid works by Correggio, Hals and Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Jordaens as well as eighteenth-century pastels. (The 1867 catalogue of the Dresden Royal Picture Gallery, for example, indicates that the ground floor featured an extensive collection of pastel portraits,[34] pictures which later provided Mrs. Van Rensselaer with a frame of reference with which to discuss the works of "The American Painters in Pastel"[35] who were to emerge in the 1880s.)

It was probably during those early years abroad that much of Mariana's character and presence was set. Exceptionally tall and, in her youth, exceedingly thin, she

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matured into a commanding figure. There was a large English and American colony in Dresden, and the Americans there had established a church and a club.[36] Among others it is possible that there Mariana first met the fifteen-year-old John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), who had already asserted his determination to become a professional artist when he spent the winter of 1871-72 with his family in Dresden.[37] (Mrs. Van Rensselaer was later to write extensively about Sargent's work, including the exhibition catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum memorial exhibition organized after the artist's death.)

It was in Dresden that Mariana Griswold married Schuyler Van Rensselaer (1845-84) (pl. 9) at the Church of Scotland on Monday, 14 April 1873.[38] They may have met prior to the Griswolds' departure for Europe, in New York or Newport, for example, as they came from similar backgrounds and circumstances.

A member of the Van Rensselaer family, which could trace its origins in America to a seventeenth-century Dutch West India Company land grant to Killaen Van Rensselaer (some twenty miles along the Hudson River near today's Albany, New York), Schuyler was the only son of John Cullen and Cornelia Josepha (Codwise) Van Rensselaer who survived to maturity. He was born in New York City on 6 July 1845 and, like Mariana, was educated privately as a child. In the summer of 1862, at the age of seventeen, Schuyler Van

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Rensselaer enlisted as a private in the Newport Company of the Rhode Island Regiment of the Union Army at the point of deepest despair for the Union cause. He was promoted and offered a commission, but at the expiration of the four months for which he had volunteered he entered Harvard University instead, graduating in 1867. From there Schuyler Van Rensselaer continued his studies at the Columbia School of Mines in the department of mining engineering and graduated there in 1868 (in the year that the Griswolds settled in Dresden[39]). Schuyler Van Rensselaer then attended the Mining Academy of Freiburg (which is near Dresden) and became a mining and metallurgical engineer (the current practice then for young men of fortune about to embark on a career in the expanding world of mining, steel, and railroads[40]).

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was thus born, in 1851, into wealth created by merchant shipping and married into wealth, in 1873, connected to railroad expansion, in each circumstance representative of the dominant form of fortune making of the time. Both as a child and as a woman, Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer had every reason to believe that she was placed at a center of privilege and responsibility.

It is interesting to note that the marriage documents list the "Rank or Profession" of the groom, as well as of his father and the father of the bride. While the designation "Gentleman" was inserted in the forms beside the

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names of both fathers, the groom is explicitly denoted as "Engineer." (Of course, there was no such definition of the bride.) It is significant that both Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her husband were to prove to be distinguished from their parents in their marked dedication to professional work. Neither of them was apparently content to live on family wealth alone, as their fathers had done, but chose to take an active part in fields demanding specialized expertise, and agreed to conform to the demands of work routines with fixed deadlines and requirements.[41] Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to become the only member of her family whose professional accomplishments were to be noted in Appleton's Cyclopaedia, the standard reference of the period,[42] and she was later to describe herself as "a working-woman who for many years has been thrown much with other working women"[43] and a "professional . . . working under difficulties."[44]

After Schuyler Van Rensselaer's premature death in 1884, the following account of his life and work during those years he shared with his wife was published as part of Harvard University's Twentieth Anniversary Class Report (Class of 1867):

> In July or August, 1877, he accepted a position as iron expert with the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad Company. His work in this capacity consisted chiefly in advising the company with regard to the making of contracts for rails, in supervising their production at the mills, and in keeping a careful eye upon their durability after they had been placed in use. A large amount of travelling thus fell to his share; and though his business headquarters were in Chicago, so much of his time had to be spent in the iron-works of

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Pennsylvania that it seemed best to him not to remove his family to Chicago, but to retain his home in New Jersey and his office in New York. The five years during which he retained this position were, therefore, years of constant unrest and bodily strain, the work in the mills being very hard, and the journeys between his home and the places of his labor very long and frequent.

The summer of 1878 he passed with his family at Cresson Springs, Pennsylvania, near the Johnstown iron-works; and before it ended the seeds were laid of that disease which caused his death in 1884--bronchitis. Year after year he struggled against its gradual advance, feeling secure in his sturdy constitution, and making so light of his ailments that his friends were unfortunately led to share his own optimistic outlook. Even during his worst attacks he refused to intermit labors which could hardly have been intermitted without loss of his position; and it was impossible to avoid dangerous exposure in a life which meant, summer and winter, days passed between the furnace fire and the open yard where the rails were subsequently examined, and often two nights in the week spent in sleeping-cars for the sake of a day or two at home. A prolonged stay in a warm climate was often urged upon him; but his family were dependent upon his exertions, and his love of his profession closed his eyes to the thought that, even if he remained in the North, he might better adopt a less laborious one.

In 1882 he gave up his position with the railroad, which no longer needed so much service as had been required during the preceding years, and turned his attention to mining matters. A journey to California and Utah, in the summer of this year, seemed almost entirely to have restored him to health. But another to Canada in the depth of the following winter undid much of the good it had done, and in the beginning of January, 1884, he was seized with a violent attack of capillary bronchitis, which resulted in his death, after an illness of two months' duration. They were months of perpetual and often of agonized suffering; yet throughout their course he preserved unimpaired his perfect patience, his cheerful sweetness of disposition, his courage, his incessant thoughtfulness for others, and his interest in what was going on in the outer world. Though for some weeks before his death he must have known that his days were almost certainly numbered, no word escaped him which might damp the hopes of his friends;--when he spoke of himself it was not of his illness, but of the work he meant to do when he should again be well. His life had been a strenuous and domestic one, devoted wholly to work and to his family; and his death was well in keeping with it.

Although he had many friends, only the members of

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> the household can have appreciated him for all he was. His greatest force and charm lay in the serenity and unselfishness of his private character; and his greatest talent was the gift of common-sense--the power to judge quickly, wisely, and wholly without prejudice or fantasy, any practical question which might come up. So happy and contented a disposition, so tender and self-sacrificing a spirit, and so sure and well-balanced a judgment in the ordinary affairs of life as he possessed could only be understood in his home; and his richest influence was felt by those whose lives were most closely bound up with his own.
>
> One of his most remarkable qualities, however, considering his birth and nurture and personal tastes, was the intense sympathy he felt with the working classes. Labor, not as a means towards the mere making of money, but in itself, he esteemed a characteristically American way; and his respect for working men in general was extended to individuals, and was quickly felt by all of humbler birth with whom he came in contact. Without laying aside the manners of action or speech proper to his own class, he invariably took an attitude of genuine friendliness towards the artisans and mechanics among whom his life was so largely spent. When acting as inspector for the railroad company he was, in a sense, the "natural enemy" of the men whose work he watched; yet, although he was the strictest and most exacting of inspectors, and although many who were less exacting were regarded as enemies, he was always held as a friend. His constant effort to lighten the workmen's labors and to accommodate his own convenience to theirs brought him cheerful and conscientious service in return; and his evident fellow feeling for them as men of like nature with himself caused him to be as much beloved in his private as respected in his professional capacity. These facts seem worth noting at this moment, for if men of his station more commonly shared his brotherly attitude towards those of lower station, the great problem of our day would be much more hopefully near solution.
>
> The bent of his mind was primarily scientific, practical; but he had a keen feeling for literature and for music, and an infinite respect for those forms of art with which he had never had time or occasion to familiarize himself.

An evaluation of the importance of the years spent with her husband, in terms of the development of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer as an art critic, awaits a full biographical study. In 1882 Mrs. Van Rensselaer published a

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series of articles drawn from her experiences while accompanying her husband at his work, entitled "In the Heart of the Alleghenies."[45] There she wrote of a mining town:

> Its streets are filled with begrimed men, their faces and their clothes of a uniform sooty complexion, and each wearing the tiny lantern which the world over is the miner's badge. . . . The artist who would fill his sketch-book with rustic figures from such a scene as this must be content with the individual, and that only of a grotesque kind: he must look neither for beauty nor for picturesqueness. . . . The types are not only unbeautiful, but most uninteresting . . . the pure air is probably not sufficient antidote against the bad food and hard labor and severe cold with insufficient shelter which form the basis of this monotonous existence. . . . 46

The articles conclude with an account of a night visit to a steel mill:

> The night is far advanced when we cross the yard once more. It is partly lit at times by the glare from the Bessemer chimneys, and anon covered with utter darkness as the converter is tilted down for a while. Leaving its dangers at last behind us, we pass along the bank of the river under the great railroad viaduct which spans it. A solitary locomotive, symmetrical, polished, docile, glides slowly over our heads. Surely it is alive in this magic midnight,--a living, magnificent child of steam and iron and man's intelligence. . . . The hoarse voices of the miners and the occasional flashing of their lights show that coal is mined as well as burned by nights. Is there no poetry in our nineteenth century and its work? Is there no majesty, no impressiveness, no food for the imagination, in its iron, and steam, and flame, and speed, and power? 47

Such subjects were soon to become the concern of American artists, the first such images created for magazine illustration. Frequently, such pictures were to be published in conjunction with articles which promoted the reform movements of the time, among the most memorable of them a series of drawings by Joseph Stella (1877-1946) and photographs by

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Lewis Hine (1874-1940) (see pls. 10-11) commissioned for "The Pittsburgh Survey," published in 1909 in Charities and Commons: A Weekly Journal of Philanthropy and Social Advance (later called The Survey). This magazine was issued by the Russell Sage Foundation in New York, where the editor of research publications was Helen Moore (1862-1954), former student of Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy and an intimate friend of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.[48] An interest in seeing artists explore modern industrial subjects and themes depicting figures at work can be found consistently expressed in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, beginning in those years she shared with her husband (see below, p. 167, and pls. 21, 22, 34, 41, 51, 53, 61, 108, 111, and 115), and there is no doubt but that the life and work of Schuyler Van Rensselaer significantly affected the scope of her criticism.

After their marriage abroad the young couple returned to the United States, establishing a home in New Brunswick, New Jersey, while Schuyler was engaged actively in his profession. Mrs. Van Rensselaer gave birth to a son there on 11 February 1875 who was named George Gray Griswold, and in the following year she published a poem in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. In the spring of 1877 two more of her poems appeared there, one entitled "Raphael's St. Cecilia." Mrs. Van Rensselaer then embarked on an active campaign to solicit writing assignments, which was soon followed by the publication of an extensive series of articles and catalogue

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essays on art and architecture, her first such works written in New Jersey during those early married years. When a new and significant art magazine was announced from Boston, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was among the first to contact the publishers, writing the following letter:[49]

New Brunswick
June 14th/79

Gentlemen,

Hearing that you are issuing a prospectus with reference to a new "Art Review" that you propose to publish I should be greatly indebted if you would furnish me with a copy of the same. Will you, if you see proper so to do, inform me at the same time whether the undertaking is sufficiently under way to warrant me in preparing articles with a view to submitting them for approval to the editor of the "Review." I have carefully studied art during a long residence abroad & written somewhat on the subject within the last year or two. But the want of such a magazine as I understand you propose to issue has forced me, in company with many others I imagine, to write articles of a more popular nature than I desired. Such have appeared in "Lippincott" & others of a more technical nature are now in the hands of the editors of "Appleton's Art Journal" & the "Atlantic." I have for some time been a regular correspondent of the "American Architect" writing all its N.Y. picture notices & other papers in stricter connection with its nominal purpose. --I cite these facts to prove that I do not trouble you for a word of information without some slight warrant that my work might prove acceptable. Will you kindly direct to Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, New Brunswick, New Jersey, & believe me,

Yours very respectfully

M. G. Van Rensselaer

Messrs. Estes &
Lauriat, Boston

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's letter was forwarded to the editor of the American Art Review, Sylvester Rosa Koehler (1837-1900), who was to prove to be Mrs. Van Rensselaer's

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first important mentor for whom she wrote her most significant early works. When financial losses resulted in the demise of the American Art Review, S. R. Koehler proposed that Mrs. Van Rensselaer establish a successor in New York for which he would work. Her letter in response is very revealing in terms of elucidating the conditions under which Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote her first works on art and architecture, and as a clue to her own evaluation of herself in those first professional years. Mrs. Van Rensselaer sent the following reply to Mr. Koehler:[50]

New Brunswick
Sept. 26th 1881

My Dea[r] Sir,

Thanks for your two last letters, the second of which came to hand this morning. I am immensely flattered by all you imply therein-- But I need hardly say that I am greatly surprised as well. I fear that what you propose to me is entirely out of the question. You know, I am sure, how great an interest I take--or took--in the continuance of the "Review," & how greatly pleased I should be at the thought it might soon have a worthy successor. If such a successor should be established I should be only too glad & proud to contribute in any possible way to its success--even to the extent, where it practicable for me to do so--of working with and under you at the editorial management. No work would please me better. It is what I have always wanted to be at & I have a certain facility in certain kinds of labor that would not be useless on your staff. You see I speak quite frankly of what I might accomplish--under given circumstances. But I do not see how those circumstances could be brought about at present. Even if a periodical were established in New York it would be impossible for me to take even a subordinate place in its office. You imply that I have much time at my command. So I have, but it is time that cannot be regularly given to any work at fixed hours or in a fixed place. As is the case with almost all of my sex I have family duties which must take precedence of all others. In the work I have done this far I have been able to

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give them such precedence & yet have much time left for writing. But as I have just said, it has always been & always must be, time taken at odd hours & liable to be broken in upon at any moment. I know, of course, that when a woman must be the "bread winner" she can & should so regulate her life as to have as absolute a command of her time & energies as though she were a man. But that is not just the case with me. Of course whatever money I make is a welcome addition to the general fund, but while I have a husband to work for me I cannot bind myself to any regular employment, nor would he for a moment consent that I should do so. My health, moreover, is so variable that I should not dare to pledge myself to any enterprise that might suffer from my withdrawal at any moment. It was to a great degree against my husband's first wish that I took the position I hold on the "World" as it involves at times doing a certain amount of work within a short given time. Add to all these reasons the fact that I could do nothing without living in N.Y. itself, that the change is for the present quite impossible & that owing to the nature of my husband's business we are liable at any time to set up our tent in Chicago or some other western town, & you will see that the proposition you make is surrounded with insuperable difficulties. To condense what I have just said--if you were at the head of a periodical in N.Y. & if I were able to live in the city, & if I could have such work to do under you that I could choose my own times & seasons to a certain extent, I should take the greatest interest & delight in helping you & would be willing to work hard so long as my health permitted. But there are a great many "ifs"! People say that the fact of being a woman need not limit one's activity, but I do not find it so!

As for getting up the company of which you speak, here again I feel myself utterly incompetent in spite of my eagerness to help in such a scheme. I do indeed know or rather, know of, some gentlemen in N.Y. whom I might in[d]uce to join in such an enterprise were it once underway. But not one of them is a friend of mine or a man to whom I could apply to help me <u>start</u> such a scheme. I have absolutely no acquaintances whatever among literary people or people in any way interested in publishing--with the exception of one or two men in the "World" office! I should have no idea where to turn to look for or hear of such a manager as you would require. And you ought to know the American people well enough to realize that the last person to attempt to start a business scheme of any kind is a <u>woman</u>. Again, I am very certain that my husband would never consent to my taking such a thing in hand, nor could he help me himself, though he would do all he could if I desired it, for all his

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> friends & business connections are outside of New York. . . .

After Mrs. Van Rensselaer signed this letter she added a postscript:

> In spite of all I have said, your proposition has fired my imagination! But I fear that will be all the good it will do me. . . .
>
> You would wonder that I accomplish as much as I do if you knew how hard my husband tries to prevent me from "working too hard," how he encourages every fit of "idleness," threatens to "smash the type-writer" & rages when I get what he calls an "order" from the World. He is delighted to have me write he says, so long as it is an amusement, but the moment it begins to be real work he means to stop it! Judge what likelihood there is that he would agree to my being chief figure-head in anything! If I could persuade him that it was merely to amuse myself he might consent. But the moment he found I was working when I did not "feel like it" there would be a full stop put to the whole matter. Of course it is one of the privileges & not the misfortunes of my sex to be taken care of--but the process sometimes interferes with one's ambition!

Within three years of that letter her husband died and Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer never again married. Her attitude was most succinctly expressed in her poem:[52]

If Great Love Die

If great love die, ask of thy days of earth
No other. Keep from lesser bondage free.
Let the high gift bequeath the next in worth--
Unto thyself thine own sufficiency.

It is clear that Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first works were produced under severe professional restraints. Yet it was in those early married years that she fashioned a critical instrument which gave voice to her generation on matters of art and architecture.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1]There is some confusion about both the date of birth and spelling of the first name of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (hereafter referred to in the notes as MGVR). Although she gave her date of birth as "February 23d 1851" in an unpublished letter to Editors, Library of American Literature, of 19 November (no year given) in Edmund Clarence Stedman collection, Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and this date was confirmed in the Last Will and Testament of Lydia Alley Griswold, her mother (will dated 8 January 1900, George Griswold, Jr., collection) and the tombstone of Mrs. Van Rensselaer at Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York, as well as the family genealogy, Florence Van Rensselaer, The Van Rensselaers in Holland and America (New York: American Historical Co., 1956), p. 79, Mrs. Rensselaer was said to have been born on 21 February 1851 by James Early in Notable American Women, 1607-1950 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ., 1971), 3:511-12, there writing that such was the date of birth indicated on Mrs. Van Rensselaer's New York City Department of Health Death Record, which was confirmed in copy of same death certificate mailed to L.D., 23 December 1976. (No birth certificate is available.) Yet a third alternative date can be found in Hamlin, Dictionary of American Biography, p. 207, which gives her birth date as 25 February 1851.

The death certificate gives first name as "Marianna," although tombstone and mother's will both use a single "n."

[2]New York: Macmillan, p. xx.

[3]See, for example, Mrs. Van Rensselaer's assertion that Frederick Law Olmsted "came of the best possible stock--of an English middle-class family, first settled at Plymouth" ("Frederick Law Olmsted," Century, n.s., 24 [1893]:860). An importance placed on blood lines is also to be found in her writings on Washington Allston and John Singer Sargent as well as Henry Hobson Richardson, the first chapter of her book on the latter being entitled "Ancestry and Early Life" (Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1888]).

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[4]Unpublished letter dated 6 November 1888 (George Griswold, Jr., collection). All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

[5]In this connection it is also interesting to note that Emily Post (the later authority on questions of social etiquette) was also of the Griswold clan and that Frank Gray Griswold was also the author of numerous volumes, among them The House of Flags of the Merchants of New York, 1800-1860 (1926), The International Polo Cup (1928), The Life-History of the Atlantic and Pacific Salmon of Canada (1929-30), El Greco (1929), The Gourmet (1933), Fra Filippo Lippi (1934).

[6]"There is no name more talismanic in the brave old State of Connecticut than Griswold; and in that quaint New England town, Lyme, they swear by it. The family were of the English gentry, and have always borne without abuse the grand old name of Gentleman," reported the Dutchess County Farmer in "Recollections of Some Old New England Families: The Griswold Family of Lyme, Conn." (undated clipping, Long Island Historical Society), and the obituary of Mrs. Van Rensselaer (New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1934 (clipping, George Griswold, Jr., collection), noted, "She was descended from Matthew Griswold who came from Kenilworth, England, to Windsor, Conn. in 1635." Further family information may be found in A. B. Allyn, Black Hall Traditions and Remembrances (Hartford, Conn.: privately printed, 1908); Salisbury, The Griswold Family of Connecticut (privately printed, 1884?), and Glenn E. Griswold, The Griswold Family: England-America, vol. 3 (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Publishing Co., 1943).

[7]See M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Fifth Avenue," Century, n.s., 25 (1893):12.

[8]See, for example, M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Recent Architecture in America: II. Public Buildings," Century 28 (1884):327-31, and "Newport," Garden and Forest 1 (1888): 470-71, 482-83.

[9]F. Gray Griswold, The Horse and Buggy Days (privately printed, 1935), p. 53.

[10]Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island: 1640-1915, 2d ed. (New York: Bramhall House, 1967), p. 145 and pls. 174-75.

[11]Written by May (King) Van Rensselaer (see above, n. 6 to Introduction) (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1905), p. 116. The unidentified statue of Perry reproduced appears to be a late-nineteenth-century naturalistic monument.

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[12]William Morris Hunt taught in his studio in Newport from 1859 to 1862, when he moved to Boston. See Gibson Danes, "William Morris Hunt and His Newport Circle," Magazine of Art 48 (1950):144-50.

[13]See, for example, "American Country Dwellings," Century, n.s., 32 (1886):3-20, 206-20, 421-34, and "A New Sculptor," Century, n.s., 61 (1900):17-20.

[14]Frank Gray Griswold, Afterthoughts: Recollections of Frank Gray Griswold (New York: Harper, 1936), p. 3.

[15]Ibid., p. 11.

[16]"Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," Lippincott's 25 (1880):219. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's interest in the Orient is also reflected in her concern for the field of landscape architecture and association with Charles Sprague Sargent, who had journeyed to Japan to gather trees for the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, as well as in such art criticism as she wrote of the works of Theodore Wores (1858-1939), a Munich-trained California artist who exhibited paintings done in Japan, of which Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote in The Independent, 5 July 1888, p. 839:

> ". . . so delightful were these that even were Mr. Wores a less accomplished artist we might still be thankful to him for his pictures. The glimpses he afforded us of tea-houses and temples, of Japanese of the lower classes in the streets and of the higher classes in their homes, of gardens and lotus-tanks and brilliant blossoming trees, were so varied and so vivid that for an hour we almost felt ourselves transported into the realm he pictured; and that desire to visit Japan which must exist in every well-constituted mind and must be especially strong in every mind which cares for the things of art, grew into a longing close akin in its strength to the pangs of homesickness."

Her brother, Frank Gray Griswold, also later wrote about the art of the Orient (see his Afterthoughts, pp. 109ff.). Mrs. Van Rensselaer particularly recommended the prints of Hokusai, carefully annotated by Mr. Fenelosa, when they were on exhibit in Boston (World, 4 September 1892, p. 26). It was not necessary to share Mrs. Van Rensselaer's early family contacts with the Orient to be enthusiastic about such art in the 1890s in America, yet a relationship exists.

[17]M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Fifth Avenue," pp. 5-18.

[18]A Backward Glance (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), p. 59.

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[19]M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Picturesque New York," Century, n.s., 45 (1892):175.

[20]Obituary of George Griswold, New York Times, 27 April 1884, p. 14.

[21]F. G. Griswold, Afterthoughts, p. 15. Mary Van Rensselaer (Mrs. Sigourney Thayer), great-niece of MGVR, asserts that the reason the Griswolds left for Europe in 1868 was because the father of the family was discovered to have a girl friend on Sixth Avenue, and his wife decided to simply pack them all up and take them to Europe (in conversation, 1 June 1977).

[22]F. G. Griswold, Afterthoughts, p. 18.

[23]See the American Fund for the French Wounded collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, as well as letters from Alan Seeger (1888-1916), American poet who had joined the French Foreign Legion and whose poems MGVR was instrumental in having posthumously published (George Griswold, Jr., collection).

[24]"Who Wants Art Nowadays," North American Review 204 (1916):241. See Bibliography for MGVR's translations from German during this period.

[25]New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., p. ix.

[26]In Six Portraits: Della Robbia, Correggio, Blake, Corot, George Fuller, Winslow Homer (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1889), p. 10 (in reference to his 1878 Die Kunstler Familie Della Robbia). Yet MGVR referred to Bode as "perhaps the chief of living German art critics" (Independent, 9 September 1886, p. 1138), and the artist John La Farge, in writing to MGVR on 10 October 1893 during Bode's visit to America to see the Chicago World's Fair, reported riding about with "your friend Dr. Bode" (unpublished letter, George Griswold, Jr., collection). MGVR's characterization of Bode was supported by Bode's successor, Max J. Friedländer (whose work MGVR translated), when he expressed similar reservations in "Reminiscences about Bode," in Reminiscences and Reflections, trans. Ruth S. Magurn (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1969), p. 22: "His [Bode's] capacity to grasp nuances of feeling in words was little developed. That it might be his task to cultivate this capacity never occurred to him." The importance of Wilhelm Bode in this period is reported in the memoirs of a colleague of MGVR, the Secretary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Henry Watson Kent, in What I Am Pleased to Call My Education (New York: Grolier Club, 1949), p. 91 (also in introduction by Fiske Kimball, p. xi).

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[27]Anna Brownell Murphy Jameson (1794-1860) was famous for writing Sacred and Legenday Art (London, 1848); John Ruskin (1819-1900), prolific critic, is discussed below, pp. 128-34; Hippolyte Adolphe Taine delivered a course of lectures during the winter of 1864 before the art students of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, which represented an application of the scientific experimental method to the fine arts, which was translated as Philosophy of Art by John Durand and imported to America in 1865. (Taine's later influential works were Idealin Art, Art in the Netherlands, and Art in Greece.) Karl Schnaase wrote Niederlandische Briefe (1834), Geschichte der bildenden Kunste (1843-64), and Geschichte der bildenden Kunste in Mittelalter (1869-76).

MGVR made the statement in "Art and Amateur," American Art Review 1 (1880):383.

[28]"Taine's Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands," New Englander 30 (1871):45, cited in Roger B. Stein, John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America: 1840-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 221.

[29]For an account of the Griswolds' education abroad, see F. G. Griswold, Afterthoughts, pp. 16-22.

[30]See unpublished letter from MGVR to S. R. Koehler, 1 June 1881, Archives of American Art, Koehler collection.

[31]There is no record of the painting at the Metropolitan Museum. This passage is from an unsigned article, here attributed to MGVR, "Metropolitan Museum of Art 11," New York World, 12 November 1882, p. 9. See also MGVR's "Ode to a Greek Head Called Aphrodite (In the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston)," Poems (New York: Macmillan, 1910) (see appendix B).

[32]Photograph is in the collection of the Arboretum because of MGVR's contribution to Garden and Forest, a periodical established by Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), founder of the Arboretum and intimate friend of MGVR. (See letters from Sargent to MGVR, George Griswold, Jr. collection).

[33]"Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," pp. 218-19.

[34]Julius Hübner, Verzeichniss der königlichen Gemälde-Gallerie zu Dresden (Dresden: E. Blochmann, 1867), nos. 2073-2256.

[35]M. G. Van Rensselaer, "American Painters in Pastel," Century, n.s., 7 (1884):204-10, and "An Exhibition of Pastels," Independent, 24 May 1888, p. 647.

[36]F. G. Griswold, Afterthoughts, p. 19.

[37]See the skillful cast drawings done by the fifteen-year-old Sargent, one inscribed "Dresden," in Sketch Book dated 1871 (Walter Binger collection, on loan to Brooklyn

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Museum) and notebooks of 1871-72 at Fogg Museum. Also see Richard L. Ormond, "The Letters of Dr. Fitz William Sargent: The Youth of John Singer Sargent," Archives of American Art Journal 14 (1974):18, and Evan Charteris, John Sargent, 2d ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), pp. 10-11.

[38]See copy from extract from the Register of the Church of Scotland, Dresden, 3 May 1873 (George Griswold, Jr., collection).

[39]That the Griswold family departure was intended to be final is suggested by MGVR's statement in an unpublished letter of 15 June 1881 to S. R. Koehler, where she wrote, ". . . my people live there [Dresden] permanently" (Archives of American Art, Koehler collection).

[40]For information on Schuyler Van Rensselaer, see W. W. Spooner, "The Van Rensselaer Family," American Historical Magazine 2 (1907):211-12; Florence Van Rensselaer, The Van Rensselaers in Holland and America, pp. 78-79; and obituary of MGVR, New York Herald Tribune, 22 January 1934.

The Van Rensselaer family, like the Griswold family, includes many literary figures, among them Herman Melville, and journalists, such as the gossip columnist "Cholly Knickerbocker."

[41]Although MGVR was clearly a woman of independent wealth--her estate at her death was valued at $215,958 Net (New York Times, 16 August 1934, p. 20)--there are frequent letters to her editor at Century, Richard Watson Gilder, in which she requests prompt payment for her work, saying she is short of funds (Manuscript Division, New York Public Library). Either she did not have easy access to her money, or these requests were a way of making her work appear necessary.

[42]Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: D. Appleton, 1889), 6:253.

[43]Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, "Should We Ask for the Suffrage?" To the Constitutional Convention, May 1894, p. 5.

[44]Unpublished letter by MGVR to S. R. Koehler, 5 August 1881, pp. 2-3, Archives of American Art, Koehler collection.

[45]Lippincott's, N.S., 4 (1882):84-92, 163-72.

[46]Ibid., p. 168.

[47]Ibid., p. 172.

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[48]See Last Will and Testament of MGVR, 29 April 1932, p. 9 (Surrogate Court, New York City); obituary of Helen Moore, New York Times, 3 August 1954, p. 19; unpublished letter from Rosamond Gilder to Mrs. Vanamee, collection of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.

For discussion of industrial themes in art and illustration, see Emily Bardack Kies, "The City and the Machine: Urban and Industrial Illustration in America, 1880-1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1971), cited by Patricia Hills in Turn-of-the-Century America (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1977), p. 177; also see there p. 91. Illustrations for "The Pittsburgh Survey" are mentioned in Irma B. Jaffe, Joseph Stella (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 19-22, and America and Lewis Hine: Photographs, 1904-1940, with a Foreword by Walter Rosenblum, Biographical Notes by Naomi Rosenblum, and Essay by Alan Trachtenberg (New York: Brooklyn Museum in Association with Aperture, 1977), pp. 18, 56, 100, 138-39.

[49]Unpublished letter, Archives of American Art, Koehler collection.

[50]Unpublished letter, Archives of American Art, Koehler collection.

[51]Poems, p. 114. Reflections of MGVR's relationship to her husband may also be found in "Hearthstones" (pp. 110-11) and "A Warning" (p. 115).

MGVR maintained strong ties to her husband's family all her life, left them generous bequests at her death, and encouraged younger members of the family to join her in professional work. Anna Murray Vail, her husband's niece, worked with MGVR for Garden and Forest Magazine, and MGVR's great-niece Molly Van Rensselaer Thayer, upon announcing at the age of thirteen that she wished also to write, was presented with a typewriter and advice. As "Mary Van Rensselaer," she became a journalist, first writing for the World, where MGVR had been the first "society woman" to write for a daily newspaper (according to conversation with Mrs. Thayer, 1977).

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CHAPTER II

FIRST WORKS AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Mrs. Van Rensselaer began by addressing both a popular mass audience and a small cultivated circle, writing in those early professional years, before turning thirty, the first of a series of articles for Lippincott's Monthly Magazine of Popular Literature and Science, published in Philadelphia, and the Boston-issued periodicals American Architect and Building News and American Art Review (see Bibliography). It is difficult to determine exactly which were her first words on art and architecture to appear in print, for her contributions were often published unsigned and can only be attributed by internal or external evidence. However, on 27 April 1878 the first signed art article materialized in the American Architect, a two-page review of the Fifty-Third Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design in New York (initialed "M.G.v.R."), followed in December 1878 by a far-ranging essay entitled "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art"[1] appearing in Lippincott's (which was signed "M. G. Van Rensselaer") which, although still giving no clue as to gender, offers a clear insight into the spirited point of view of this new art critic, one of a generation impatient to see in America a more widespread

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culture and developed school of art. The twenty-seven-year-old Mrs. Van Rensselaer began:

> The art of the present day succeeds to the art of past centuries not immediately nor by insensible gradation. It is preceded by an interval of absolute deadness in matters artistic. . . . Inspiration unsought and unquestioned is a thing of the past. Study, reflection, absorption, eclecticism,--these are the watchwords of the future.

The article then proceeds to discuss art and art criticism from an historic and international point of view, evaluating the contributions and limitations of recent painting in Germany, France, England, and Holland with which the author was obviously familiar. This early writing is critical of both the "literary and un-painterlike" quality of much English painting and the manner of what was here termed "the French 'impressionist' clique" (Mrs. Van Rensselaer's approach to Impressionism was to change later). Above all, this first major art publication by Mrs. Van Rensselaer is addressed to the question of the future of American art. She wrote:

> Some, casting the horoscope for this struggling art of ours, . . . believing that the vital germ of art is spontaneity--believing that there cannot again be a genuine form of art until there arise a fresh race of artists, unfed by the mummy-wheat of tradition, unfettered by the cere-cloths of criticism. Others, more sanguine, believe that spontaneity has done all it can, and that its place in the future to be worthily filled by a wide eclecticism.

This article was published just as reports of the famous Ruskin-Whistler trial reached America,[2] and Mrs. Van Rensselaer

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concluded this opening statement with a resounding plea for Americans to stay clear of the preoccupations which consumed both protagonists in that controversy. She wrote:

> In conclusion, it may be noted that we in America, whose art is just beginning even to strive, are subjected to a somewhat strange cross-fire of influences. Lineally the children of England, we are spiritually and by temperament in many things her opposites. . . . But while our dealers and students and millionaires throng the studios of Paris and Munich, and our eyes are being daily educated to demand above all things technique, our brains are constantly being worked upon by a stream of art-literature from England. Taste pulls us one way--identity of English speech, with consequent openness to English ideas, pulls us the other. Pictures preach one thing, books another. Our boy who has worked in Paris comes home to try to realize Ruskin. Both influences are too new, and our art is as yet too unsteady, for anyone to guess as to the ultimate result. One thing only can be unreservedly inculcated: Let us shun self-analyzation, self-consciousness, morbidness, affectation, attitudinizing. Let us look ahead as little as possible, keeping our eyes on our brushes and on the world of beauty around us. One thing only can with safety be predicted: If we are, or are to be, a people of artists, creative or appreciative as the case may be, we shall learn whatever of technique the world has to teach us, and shall improve upon it, and we shall perhaps digest the small measure of theory for which we have appetites left. But if we are not artists, actual or future, technique will be impossible, and will seem undesirable. We shall greedily fill our stomachs with the wind of art-philosophy, shall work with the reason instead of with the eye and the fingers, shall symbolize our aspirations, our theorizings, our souls and our consciences, and fondly dream we are painting pictures. Or we shall copy with a hopeless effort after literalness the first face or weed we meet, and call the imperfect, mechanical result a work of art.

In another early extended article, "Artist and Amateur,"[3] the first writing by Mrs. Van Rensselaer published in the American Art Review, the new critic clearly articulates her own goals and ambitions. Stating that critics, as well as artists, need to be born with a gift, Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer here sets the stage for a life's work dedicated to raising the level of artistic comprehension in America. In this article she notes the high standard for educated amateurs set in Germany by the writings of Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller, where "appreciation is held up as an aim complete in itself." She asserts that a widespread intelligent appreciation of great art would be far more important and beneficial to this country than the then-current widespread production of poor amateur art being exhibited.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first critical writings were not exclusively concerned with the fine arts, but also pertained to theater, literature, music, and the decorative arts (see Bibliography). However, gradually, a focus appeared on painting, sculpture, and architecture, and she was called upon to review current art exhibitions. Mrs. Van Rensselaer entered the arena as an art critic just as a new generation of American artists was struggling to assert its own preeminence over the authority of the older artists who had dominated the National Academy of Design since the middle years of the nineteenth century. "This fact of division and new departure . . . is the most interesting and vital fact in our art today," Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to write, as she took to task such critics as George William Sheldon (1843-1914) for his "failure to mark it more distinctly."[4]

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Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer was abroad during the period when the American artists of her generation established their own organizations for life-classes and exhibitions (the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists). Nevertheless, she emerged as a critic who fully subscribed to the goals of these artists. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to equally dismiss the Pre-Raphaelites, the "dull, dark deeds of Dusseldorf," and the landscapes of the so-called Hudson River School.[5] She was to insist that the aim of fine art was "Not to make literature or morals or mere records of one sort or another."[6] Most of the published art criticism by Mrs. Van Rensselaer represents an articulation of the values of the post-Civil War American artists of cosmopolitan consciousness with whom she identified, sharing both their generation and European experience. Recapitulating both these artists' development and her own, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to write, in 1886, when both she and they were at the high point of their powers:

> This generation was born to art pretty nearly at the moment when the Republic sang the dawning of its second century; and the Centennial Exhibition played what seems an almost "providential" part in opening a path for it. Examples of the beauty wrought by other nations came then in a countless host to prove that our utilities were not the sum and total substance of the modern world's achievements,--were not even the best and greatest and most precious on the list. The pictures and marbles of Europe, the stuffs and brasses and carvings of India, the keramics of the Flowery Kingdom, the grotesque lovelinesses and the majestically splendid trifles of Japan, flung their challenge in the face of Yankee steam and steel, and said (with none to contra-

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> dict), you are a means toward living: we are an end to live for.
>
> And, quickly following to profit by the opening thus secured, came the new band of native artists preaching a new artistic gospel. Individual forerunners holding the same doctrine there had been, of course; but never before a like-minded, brotherly band to preach that the painter's first privilege, first task, first duty, was to learn the art of painting. Our elder schools had been almost entirely absorbed in the subject of their discourse, in the claims of the theme they were trying to interpret; had forgotten almost entirely that in every form of human utterance, when it turns to art, the language itself is of primary importance. It was this truth that our younger men had grasped: it was the "gospel of technique" that they preached to a half-comprehending audience.
>
> Once in a while, perchance, they may have preached it with too narrow an enthusiasm,--may have thought technique only when they should but have thought of technique first. But such a mistake was natural, nay, inevitable, in the first strong impulse of reaction. . . . And even if it had for the moment been widely characteristic; even if it had for a time been wholly identified with the whole practice of the "new school," I do not think we need have lamented very loudly. With our new-world restlessness, impatience, inexperience, we are too prone to forget that everything alive must go by steps, and a living art by steps that must usually be very slow. And we hurt, not help, our art as often as we do forget it,--hasting to pluck the ripest fruits when spring blossoms are in season. I think we might well have been glad and proud and hopeful even if this present generation of American painters had done nothing more than just to learn what good painting means. But it has done much more than this: it has already given us fruits as well as buds, and from grafts of many divers flavors.

Having thus presented the accomplishments of this "like-minded, brotherly band" with which she empathized, Mrs. Van Rensselaer then went on to pen a plea, to utilize her position as a critic to further the interests of both these artists and the development of art in America as she perceived it. Mrs. Van Rensselaer concluded:

> I cannot but feel that we do not yet appreciate its service as we ought. I am afraid we are at once too eager for a phenomenal rapidity of advance and too blind to the distance

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> which already has been covered. We also, and not our artists only, have a duty to perform if we wish the stream of progress to grow wider, deeper, swifter. We must give ourselves more earnestly and intelligently and generously than we have to the happy duty of appreciation. Let me end . . . with a bit of Emersonian gold.
>
> "Our part is plainly not to throw ourselves across the track, not to block improvement, not to sit till we are stone; but to watch the uprise of successive mornings and to conspire with the new works of new days." 7

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's generation felt that they were ushering in a period of an "American Renaissance." This retrospective evaluation of her contemporaries was written after she had achieved a position as a major established art critic of the period and just two years before an official reconciliation was reached between the old guard and the new blood, with the election of William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) and Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) as Associate Members of the National Academy in 1888, a move applauded by Mrs. Van Rensselaer.[8] However, the early art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer reveals that she was not party to the first significant battles for recognition.

The N.A. exhibition in the spring of 1875, from which almost all the younger artists were excluded, had moved some of those rejected to organize their own show, which took place in the rooms of the private art gallery Cottier and Company on Fifth Avenue.

Among the organizers of this exhibition, as well as of the Art Students League, was a young woman who was to become an important friend of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, Helena de Kay Gilder (1848-1916) (see portrait, pl. 12), who kept a journal during those tempestuous days in which she

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recorded on 6 April 1875, "We are to try to have our things seen at Cottier's . . . and have people talk in the papers."[9] The possibilities of journalistic enterprise were ever present among this new group of American artists. The husband of Helena de Kay Gilder was the poet, journalist, and reformer Richard Watson Gilder (1844-1909) (see portrait, pl. 13), who was, in 1875, the managing editor of Scribner's Monthly, where he was also in charge of art features. When the magazine became The Century with the issue of November 1881, Richard Watson Gilder took over as editor-in-chief, and it was soon after that Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer began an association with the magazine which was to endure over forty years (see Bibliography). The Gilders had been married in 1874, and their studio-home at 103 East 15th Street, just off Union Square, as well as their later summer studio at Marion, Massachusetts, became the favorite haunts of the American artists just returning from Europe, as well as of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, to whom such a "Bohemian" circle represented a release from the more stringent social world of her family.[10]

The artist Will Low (1853-1932) recalled the Gilders' home as:

> . . . the little house in Fifteenth Street, where so many of us found an oasis in the first years after the return to our desert home; as it appeared in comparison with the more flowering regions of art whence we came.
>
> To the hospitable welcome of this modest dwelling, every one who came to New York in those days, bearing a passport of intellectual worth appeared to find his way. 11

It was in the Gilder home that discontent over the academy's annual of 1875 developed into an independent exhibition, opening two weeks after the N.A. show.[12] Among those contrib-

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uting with the new group were many of the artists who were later to figure in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.[13]

A year after this first group exhibition Richard Watson Gilder published a tribute to the denigrated English muralist, history and genre painter Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), an artist who had felt himself so hounded by the art establishment of his time that he had committed suicide. Gilder followed this with an essay on the nature of art academies. He wrote:

> It would be strange indeed if in every Academy of Art there were not wise nad liberal men; and these may even constitute a numerical majority. But the tendency of Academies as institutions,--the influence of the class of artists who give the tone to the official action,--seems to be inevitably in the direction of monopoly and obstruction.
>
> Human nature is the same in London, Paris, and New York. The new man, if he is subservient to the reigning influences, need not be kept down. The new man, with his own strong, creative individuality, is an offense in the nostrils. And he may well be an offense,--for his success means death to the powers that be. Between Academic precedent and stupidity and error, and young originality, and genius and truth, there can be no compromise. . . .
>
> "Why," it is asked, "should we educate a lot of young people to take the bread out of our mouths?"
>
> The spectacle presented to-day in New York of an Academy which has succeeded in drawing its pupils away from its own well-equipped galleries to seek at oppressive cost a bare but hospitable asylum in a deserted photograph gallery,--such a spectacle would be discouraging, indeed, had not experience proved that from institutions such as the National Academy of Design the young art of a nation cannot hope for generous and intelligent support. 14

Throughout the years that followed, Richard Watson Gilder lent the pages of the magazine he edited to the cause of this group of artists, and many of the articles which Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote for him, as editor of Century, were devoted to the art and interests of this group. Gilder became an important mentor for Mrs. Van Rensselaer, succeed-

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ing S. R. Koehler after the American Art Review folded in 1881, not only in terms of art, but also in matters of civic reform. Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first contact with the Gilders has not yet been established, it is clear that they remained lifelong friends. In fact, it was in a bed in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's home that Richard Watson Gilder died in 1909. At the time of his death Mrs. Van Rensselaer composed a poem in memoriam to him, entitled "My House," and wrote a deep-felt eulogy which was not published until many years later, "Richard Watson Gilder--Personal Memories," in which she wrote:

> No one, I think, can ever have tried to describe Richard Gilder by comparing him with somebody else. At the first word with him one recognized a peculiarly distinct personality, and no length of acquaintance, no degree of intimacy, weakened this impression. Among the qualities that produced it were so evident a sympathy with others and so candid and confident a reliance upon their sympathy that, in a very unusual degree, he became to his friends a part of the tissue of their lives. Even today, when he was been dead more than twelve years, our sense of whatever we may feel of joy or sorrow still seems incomplete without his participation. And so apt was he to have a fresh idea, to show some flash of insight, to speak some crystallizing word which could have occurred to no one else, that there still comes the impulse to seek his advice, or at least to wait for his comments, before making up our minds about this matter or that. No one else is quite the same kind of friend as he was. . . . He was one of the few who can discuss, argue, actually fight in words, without irritation. He really tried to understand why you differed from him and tried to make you understand what he felt, sometimes with an ardor that ran into vehemence but still without irritation, and I may add, without clamor. . . .
>
> No other editor of the many for whom I have worked took, for their sakes, so deep an interest in his authors. No other was so bent upon finding, not only new writers, but new paths for established ones. When he wanted something done, he was not afraid, if so prompted, to pick out a person who could only protest

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> that he knew nothing whatever of the subject. "Well," he would answer, "you can learn. Other people have." And as a rule he showed as much sagacity as boldness in making such assignments. Often his authors did learn--learn things upon which they never would have ventured but for his trustful, stimulating insistence. . . .15

No doubt, it was through the Gilders that Mrs. Van Rensselaer learned of that group of artists to which so much of her art criticism was devoted, that "brotherly band" which organized in 1877 a new art organization in New York which was first called the American Art Association but ultimately the Society of American Artists.[16]

In 1877 the artists in charge of hanging the National Academy show had made a determined effort to prove that they were not hostile to the young artists. Lois Fink recounted:

> On varnishing day the academicians were stunned at what they saw. In the south gallery, the only well-lighted room in the gothic-style building, hanging on the line as the featured works were several large paintings, all by nonmembers: Turkish Page by Frank Duveneck [pl. 81]; Sheep Shearing in the Bavarian Highlands by Walter Shirlaw [pl. 14]; A Cloudy Day in the Pasture by Abbott H. Thayer; Close of a Stormy Day by Arthur Quartley; and a smaller work, Broken Jug, by William Merritt Chase. Well hung elsewhere in the galleries were Wyatt Eaton's Harvesters at Rest [pl. 15], which had been refused at the 1875 exhibition, and smaller works by William Sartain, Frederick Dielman, Julian Alden Weir, Thomas Eakins, and J. Carroll Beckwith.
>
> The next day [Daniel] Huntington [1816-1906; President of the National Academy] stormed into the council room demanding that the council rehang the show. That was impossible, however, for the constitution gave the hanging committee sole authority over the exhibition. Members of the committee were therefore cautiously requested to rearrange the picture . . . but declined on the ground that they had made no mistake. . . . The pictures in the 1877 exhibition were going to stay where they had been put. . . . Since undoing the hanging committee's deed was not possible, disgruntled members began to consider means whereby such indignities could be prevented in the future. Discussion of amending the

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> constitution was initiated two years earlier over the LaFarge rejections. Now two constitutional changes were speedily voted: first, the hanging committee was to be increased to a total of five members, three elected by the academicians as before and two appointed by the council, and second, each academician was to be entitled to a space on the line not to exceed eight feet. 17

Writing in 1883, Mrs. Van Rensselaer characterized that National Academy exhibition: "In 1877, the torpid National Academy precincts saw the advent of certain young men from Munich who caused a great rattling of dry bones at the moment, and who proved but the advance guard of a whole battalion of fresh and eager painters."[18] Although some of the "new men" had managed to get by the National Academy ramparts that year, the aftermath produced bad feeling all around, and at the instigation of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, whose work had been rejected outright from the exhibition, they banded together, meeting at the Gilders, and organized in the spring of 1877 the rival exhibiting organization.

Years later (in 1907) the spirit of that time was recalled by Richard Watson Gilder:

> Just then the old Academicians were carrying things with a pretty high hand, so I spoke to a few of the younger men of our American "renaissance" about starting a new organization. When I mentioned it [to Augustus Saint-Gaudens] . . . he said that the time had not quite come. But one day . . . he rang the bell at the iron gate at 103 East Fifteenth Street. It was noon and I was at home for lunch. I ran down to the gate and I tell you there was a high wind blowing! . . . [Saint-Gaudens] was as mad as hops! He declared that they had just thrown out a piece of sculpture of his from the Academy exhibit, and that he was ready to go into a new movement. I told him to come around that very evening. We sent, in addition, for Walter Shirlaw and Wyatt Eaton, and the Society of American Artists was that night founded by Walter Shirlaw, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Wyatt Eaton, and

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> Helena de Kay, . . . [Gilder] acting as secretary . . . Clarence Cook, the critic, was present though not as a member. 19

Clarence Cook (1828-1900), who had begun as an art critic writing in support of American Pre-Raphaelite painters, was then at the culmination of his journalistic career, the art editor of the New York Daily Tribune. He was very interested in keeping up with the latest developments and especially with "the younger generation of artists whose work he felt was expressive of an expected American renaissance."[20] Cook, like Gilder, used his position as a journalist to establish visibility and a positive public image for the new group of artists. It is significant that the two laymen present at the meeting of organization of the Society of American Artists were both professional journalists and that the role of art criticism was deemed, from the start, a crucial factor in their success. (Connections with the press have proved to be a repeated component in the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, both in Europe and America.) Even the detached and unsympathetic account of the formation of the new organization by G. W. Sheldon, "A New Departure in American Art,"[21] gave a certain authenticity to the territorial claims of the new generation in the New York art world. A more vivid report was provided by William C. Brownell (1851-1928), a contemporary, a colleague and friend of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who contributed

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a series of papers on "The Younger Painters of America" in which he wrote:

> The annals of art in America have not been eventful, but the year 1876-7 may be said to mark the beginning of an epoch in them. . . . We are beginning to paint as other people paint . . . at present it is quite evident that we are but accumulating and perfecting the material for such a national expression, and even to the taking of so initial a step as this, the destruction of our old canons and standards was necessary . . . the youngest of "the young men" will recognize the long-since-established reputations of Elliott, Page, Hunt, LaFarge, Inness, Vedder, Martin, Homer . . . before 1876-7, roughly speaking, this notion went begging. The American school of painting was wholly opposed to their spirit and methods. It was represented in portraiture, not by Page, but by Huntington; in genre, not by LaFarge, but by Eastman Johnson; in landscape, not by Inness or Martin, but by--what a galaxy of names occurs to one here, from Church and Kensett to Bierstadt and William Hart! Any one who does not remember the American contribution to the art display of the Philadelphia International Exhibition [1876] may refresh his recollection of the general condition of American art three or four years ago, --of what was then admired and pointed to as American. . . . In the first place, it shuns ideality as something profane, substituting therefor what is known in conservative American art circles as "truth"; in the second place, for real truth--the essential, spiritual, vital force of nature, however manifested--it substitutes what is known as "fidelity" and what the early pre-Raphaelites who protested with so much vigor and success against the false classicism current nearly a hundred years ago would greatly marvel at, we may be sure. It is . . . in idea and technique, born of that benign mother of the "American school," Düsseldorf. The day of Düsseldorf has, however, gone by; and to say that the long-continued and triumphant influence of Düsseldorf in American art has at last perished or greatly declined is to note progress. Only in general terms can this be said, perhaps. There are as many painters painting in the old way, of course, and thinking well of it; and the disesteem in which they hold the "young fellows" is quite unaffected . . . it is fair to point out the coincidence between their appearance and the beginning of the new order, the Renaissance, so to speak, of 1877. Any one who visited the Academy on varnishing day of that year will remember the wholly new aspect of things which greeted him. It created, indeed, a memorable sensation. The Academy was profoundly agitated. Certain popular and estimable paint-

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> ers who had a generous share of "the line" from time immemorial felt as if they had been treated not only with injustice and even contumely, but with absolute treachery by the hanging committee, of which a majority had studied at Munich, and had given the pas to works by mere students fresh from that famous but suspected metropolis of art, and had relegated the American school of painting to the limbo of the upper air. At a speedily called meeting a resolution that every Academician should have eight feet of "the line" to himself was passed in spleen, but it was soon after rescinded with magnanimous shamefacedness, and, after restoring the old order of things the next year, the Exhibition of 1879 was hung with an impartiality eloquent of the acceptance on the part of the Academy of the new departure. A new departure had, indeed, taken place. In 1878, the new painters overflowed from the Academy into the Kurtz Gallery, where they held an exhibition of their own, and a highly creditable one, though no doubt it seemed to many of their countrymen, who had been painters before they were born, a veritable chamber of horrors. Last year they emphasized their success with another which showed marked improvement and the excellence of that recently closed should be fresh in every one's mind. . . .
>
> Speaking broadly, therefore, whereas it used to be the main effort of American painters to imitate nature, it is the main effort of the new men to express feeling . . . the new men . . . lean toward feeling rather than toward logic; toward beauty, or at least artistic impressiveness, rather than toward literalness; toward illusion rather than toward representation. . . . 22

The very first exhibition review by Mrs. Van Rensselaer published (she was, in time, to produce hundreds) appeared in the month following the opening of the first exhibition organized by the new Society of American Artists, on 27 April 1878. (It was that show which had been featured in the art criticism of Cook and Sheldon and was later memorialized by Brownell.) While Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed ideas and preferences shared by the members and supporters of the new society, this first article is distinctly written from the vantage point of one outside the

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fray.

To begin with, this first review, which appeared in American Architect and Building News, was devoted not to the first Society of American Artists exhibition which had just occurred, but to that year's National Academy show in which the old guard had preempted the line positions and the canvases of the younger men were skied. (Cook had made a point of not reviewing that N.A. show.[23]) In addition, Mrs. Van Rensselaer clearly describes herself, in this first excursion as critic of contemporary American art, as having not been involved in the tumultuous events of the previous years. (Mrs. Van Rensselaer had been out of the country, her husband being awarded a degree from the School of Mines and Engineering in Saxony, Germany, in 1877.)

In this first art review Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:

> Critics of last year's show assert that this is inferior, but to one who has not visited the Academy since the spring of 1874 it seems a great advance. Works of genius, even of very great merit, can hardly be cited, but the average in commonplace is higher and there are fewer canvases which disgrace alike exhibitor and exhibiting committee. Most strongly impressed is one who is a stranger to the work of the last few years by the great number of new names in the catalogue, the strength--numerical at least--of the very youngest generation of American artists. It is to these, not to Academicians nor Associates, that is due the rise in the average of work. If one were asked to point out some of the very worst pictures in the seven hundred, pictures distinguished by lack of every necessary quality, by lack of drawing, color, manipulation, and imagination, even of sense of what can with any propriety be made a subject of art, the major part of the names would be followed by the N.A. of supposed distinction. Not that N.A.'s paint worse than any one else, but surely no one else can paint worse than some among them. 24

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Thus, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, from the outset of her career as art critic, joined forces with the ideas espoused by the supporters of the new Society of American Artists, although she was not, in the beginning, the intimate member of their circle that she was to become. In this first critical review of a contemporary American art exhibition published by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, out of the more than 700 works exhibited in the galleries of the National Academy that year, the focus was decidedly placed on the works of those artists who had also just organized and exhibited with the new, rival Society of American Artists.[25] Of the works of the National Academicians, Mrs. Van Rensselaer here describes them as generally being offensive and pretentious, or showing nothing very important, writing:

> It is with hope for the further future that we look from the elder, titled generation to the newcomers, who give us most of the best work on the walls. Mr. Shirlaw, the president of the "Society of American Artists," is successful in his portrait of himself, which, if rough,--I mean aesthetically, not technically,--is unaffected, strong, and lifelike. His life-sized "Bather," the most ambitious picture on the walls, but one of the least pretentious, is clever in the outline drawing, though the modelling is not always satisfactory. In spite of its seeming more properly a study of flesh-tints and pose than a picture per se, it is heartily welcome as showing we may yet dare to attempt--and perhaps achieve--the highest.

The Society of American Artists represented, at its founding, a fresh, vigorous voice which shook up the complacency of the American art world, questioning formularized approaches to picture making and vivifying imagery with direct contact with life outside the studio. In time, many

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of the works presented at the regular Society of American Artists exhibitions which followed began to reveal a different set of formularized mannerisms than those of the Academicians against whom they had revolted; more painterly, suggestive and intimate, but just as divorced from vitality as the most hackneyed rendering of the despised favorites of the National Academy. Even by 1881 it was already possible to view the two rival organizations as much the same, as was done by one critic of the older generation who had been hostile from the start to the new Society of American Artists, Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin (1837-1914), who wrote:

> . . . we really see very little difference between the rival collections. Evidently the new movement has spent its pyrotechnics, and after a great flourish of trumpets has settled down to solid average work, which is creditable enough in its way, but is a very different thing from what the founders of the Society proposed at the outset. 26

In fact, from the very first announcements, union rather than rebellion appeared to be the ambition of the younger generation. For example, the new Society was reported in London in 1877 in the following terms:

> Some of the leading members of the association are academicians and associate academicians, and probably all of the members of the association expect to be academicians. It is, however, believed that there is plenty of work for a new association, and that it is in the interests of art in general and of artists in general that there should be more than one important exhibition of American paintings during the winter. 27

Gradually the Society of American Artists' membership was admitted to the National Academy, and in 1906 the two organizations officially merged.[28]

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Nevertheless, the Society of American Artists represented a distinctive force in the history of American art. In favoring a technique which implied movement and suggestiveness, rather than linear and labored rendering, these artists questioned the immutability of the world as they found it. They were open to change and exploited accident. They invited fresh contact with the world around them and were eager to make available to Americans the works of art being created by American artists working abroad. Emphasis was placed on individuality, and from the start a concerted effort was made to include women artists.[29] They were inspired by the vigor of Velasquez and such Dutch Baroque painters as Hals and Rembrandt rather than smooth surfaces of the current Academic favorites such as Cabanel and Delaroche, and represent in America a development parallel to the French Impressionists organized in the same decade in revolt against the restrictions of French Academic art. (However, to the Americans, often what was rejected as stale by the French innovators was digested with good appetite by the Americans, who found the expertise of European academies exotic, new, fresh, and exciting.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer, as an art critic, can be identified with the history, goals, and aspirations of the Society of American Artists. Her perspective was formulated in concert with the artists who organized and participated in the exhibitions of the Society. Her allegiance is expressed

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in the words she wrote on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition held by the Society in 1892:

> Eighteen hundred and seventy-eight is so long ago that some of my readers may not be aware that this society was then founded by only four or five artists, among them St. Gaudens, Shirlaw and Helena De Kay, as a protest against the narrowness of those in control of the Academy of Design, or that their action was amply justified by the way in which admirable works by young un-academic artists had been treated by the old establishment. The new establishment was at once recognized by the then budding youthful school, which we now know to be the first true American school, as its standard-bearer and protector and also attracted the best among the elder painters. But the public was slow to grant it favor or even serious attention. For many years it was very poor, was forced to hold its exhibitions first in one small gallery and then another, and had to submit to seeing its gallery of the moment almost bare of any but professional visitors. No one but its members and their intimate friends can imagine how manfully it struggled against material difficulties and public indifference or scorn, or how richly it has deserved to succeed as it has now succeeded. The battle for recognition was won some years ago. Of late its exhibitions have been felt, even by the general public, to be the only ones that really represented the American art of to-day and the future; and every budding artist, abroad or at home, has longed for admittance to them as the best proof of his being truly an artist.
>
> . . . the Society of American artists was formed in consequence of the hostility of the Academy towards certain young painters, trained in foreign schools, who had just come home to do work quite unlike that old academic work which now seems so futile and unimportant. . . . 30

It was the works of these young artists which inspired the first art criticism of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer in the 1870s and continued to inform her taste into the years of the twentieth century. However, she did not enter the ranks as an unquestioning partisan supporter. Bringing to the field of art criticism a thorough grounding in the art of the Western world and a familiarity with the current

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European art capitals, Mrs. Van Rensselaer approached the works of these American artists with whom she identified with hope and critical detachment, accepting the dictum of Matthew Arnold that criticism should be "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."[31] There is a notable contrast to be found in comparing the tone of her criticism, for example, in that first 1878 National Academy review (see above) and that of the anonymous critic who reviewed the same show for the New York World[32] and was obviously a fervid champion of the new faction. Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed critical reservations concerning the works of many of the exhibiting artists.

Often the early reviews have a harsh and strident tone which was to prove atypical of her mature criticism. She denigrated both John LaFarge and his "worshippers" and Winslow Homer for the "various yet cognate eccentricities of his brush."[33] She dismissed a painting by Helena de Kay as "meaningless and ugly."[34] It was only in the 1880s that artists such as LaFarge and Homer were to develop more monumental forms, perhaps spurred on by the climate of opinion of which Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism formed a part, and then her writings on their works became lavish in praise of what she recognized as a coming of age of American art (see above, pp. 49-51). Although the harsh words of the youthful Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer were printed, on occasion

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the editors of the journal in which they appeared sought to disassociate themselves from her remarks. (For example, a footnote, rare in the format of The American Architect and Building News, was inserted by the editors who disagreed with Mrs. Van Rensselaer in regard to her characterization of LaFarge.[35]) Mrs. Van Rensselaer explicitly ridiculed the writing of overzealous critics in that first art review of 1878 and clearly set her sights on the task of goading and inciting those contemporary American artists whom she respected to their highest aspirations. The field of art criticism was just then emerging in America as a skill with distinct attributes. The desire for professionalism was succinctly expressed in an article on the subject which was published in that period of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first works, entitled "Art and Criticism." Written by an Englishman who was with the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum, Sir Sidney Colvin (1845-1927), and originally published in The Fortnightly Review, it was considered so relevant to current American interests that it was reprinted in Appleton's Journal (a magazine which Mrs. Van Rensselaer would have closely examined as she was just then in the process of submitting her first manuscripts for consideration). Colvin wrote:

> There never was a time when so much was written about art and artists as is written now. . . . It is a task, at the same time, which calls for special aptitudes and special study, and has methods and difficulties of its own. . . . In historical criticism it is easy to be dispassionate--you are not prepossessed by personal

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sympathies, by the conflicts of theories and rivalries of groups; it is easy to see things as they are--your judgment is not confused by the currents of momentary favor and neglect, or by the influence of the fashions amid which you have grown up; it is easy to keep a just sense of proportion--time has already brought the objects of your study into something like their true relations toward each other and their age. Whereas in contemporary criticism, to be dispassionate, to keep a just sense of proportion, and to see things as they are, apart from fashion and prepossession, are matters of very considerable difficulty indeed.

"Art-criticism" has on the whole been conducted so much at random, that a shade of ridicule and discredit has attached itself to the very word. . . . We all know in what kind of consideration the business is usually held by artists themselves. . . . Nor can it be said that the disesteem in which newspaper criticism is thus held by artists is without warrant, though certainly it had more warrant twenty years ago than now. . . .

But of the multitudes who interest themselves in painting, and flock to the yearly exhibitions, the interest of a great many neither goes, nor professes to go, beyond the curiosity and amusement of the hour. It is not the pictures in the exhibitions that they care for, but the life, the greetings, and the gossip. And even of those who really care for the pictures, and are anxious to understand and enjoy them, few feel that they can perfectly understand and enjoy them unaided. It is common, though not so common as it was, to find in persons otherwise full of cultivation a real insensibility, acknowledged or unacknowledged, to the effects and pleasures of this art. . . . The only cure for picture-blindness lies in habitual and rightly directed looking, and it is the business of criticism to teach people how to look. . . . Criticism employs words to assist and reenforce visual impressions; and the mission of criticism, as applied to the works of art, is fulfilled when it has defined and analyzed the qualities of the object before it in the way best calculated to help a reader see them for himself.

This may seem but a humble office to claim for the critic of art, who is apt to give himself airs, and to address his observations less to the public than to the artist, whom he tells of his faults, admonishing and putting him right with much frankness and confidence. But criticism of this kind, even where it is just, is generally thrown away. Artists are not, in fact, much influenced by any criticism except by that of their brother artists; they know that they possess powers and dexterities which the critic does not possess; and each of them in his way is generally conscious of devoting

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those powers and dexterities to the production of the best which it is in him to produce. The artist, by the very nature of his vocation, is more likely than other men to be continually doing his best . . . the criticism of those who can not do as much as he does, will have little direct influence in changing his way of work. Criticism may, indeed, indirectly affect the practice of artists, by . . . helping to form the public taste, and to create, so to speak, a market for the best kinds of things. But it is essentially to the public, and not to artists, that the critic has to address himself--to those who know less than he does, and not to those who know more. . . . For the public, what is wanted is a criticism that shall be able to sympathize with the most various ideals, and to define, interpret, and do justice to the most opposite kinds of excellence. . . .

The critic has . . . to be on his guard against his own literary ambition. If he is to be useful in his proper capacity, he must remember that his writing is but auxiliary to the works of art which he criticises. The artist is the creator and inventor, the critic is but the commentator and exponent; and an indifferent poem, picture, or statue is a higher achievement than the criticism which points out why it is indifferent . . . it is surely true that [Mr. Ruskin's] . . . interpretations of the works of art would . . . have been more just and final had he been able to keep them more severely to the point. . . .

In demanding from the creative artist qualities the reverse of what it happens to be his to give, criticism simply wastes its breath. . . . In the gallery at Dresden two pictures of Rubens are placed side by side--a Bacchus with his tiger, and a Jerome doing penance in the wilderness. The subjects are the most opposite in the world; but Rubens, with his genius for the painting of mighty thews and sinews, for rich carnations and the riot of life, and with his total disinclination for all that is ascetic or emaciated, has painted his Bacchus and his Jerome as though from the same brawny model, and with an equal strength of frame and splendor of bronzed and glowing flesh-color. A critic of Rubens would never trouble himself to point out or to condemn this, because for the reader who knew anything of the master it would be a matter of course, but would dwell on the special faults or excellences of the two pieces taken as examples of the master's genius working within its known limits. To do the same is an obvious rule for contemporary criticism also. . . .

It is the business of criticism to study and define with sympathy whatever is sincere and whatever is well done along the whole range of the efforts of the artistic spirit . . . let him keep his sympathies open to

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> excellence of all kinds; let him seek, not to dictate aims and conceptions to the artist, but to characterize with precision the aim and conception of the artist himself, to recite clearly and without exaggeration what he thinks good and what less good, to make a picture live to the mind of the reader both in its intellectual and its material qualities, and to put it in its proper place with reference to others with which it comes into comparison. 36

To these ideas Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to fully subscribe as she began to contribute, as a mature art critic, in the 1880s and 1890s. Although she was frequently mindful of shortcomings and inadequacies in works of art, and discriminating in judgment, her criticism lost the caustic tone of those first works of the 1870s.

Although the activities of American artists had supplied journalists with popular material since the middle years of the nineteenth century, there was a veritable explosion of interest in the fine arts in the period following the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.[37] There was an avalanche of publications on art both in specialized art periodicals and within the pages of popular magazines and newspapers which simultaneously presented news and household hints, scientific and political discussion, as well as current fiction and poetry. Although the number of magazines devoted solely to the arts had trebled during the decade and a half after the Civil War, most of the more perceptive criticism found its way into periodicals of wider interest, as Frank Luther Mott has noted.[38]

> The 1870s were a decade remarkable for the numerical increase in American publications. The number of news-

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> papers almost doubled in these years, reaching about 7,000 in 1880. Population increased only 30% in the same time; moreover, the decade's newspaper growth was gained in spite of a financial depression.
>
> The eighties showed only a slight slackening of the ratio of newspaper increase as compared to population growth, and by 1890 there were over 12,000 newspapers in the United States. 39

Most of the art criticism written by Mrs. Van Rensselaer was originally published in such newspapers and nationally distributed periodicals, although many of these writings were later also collected and published in books. She addressed a mass audience, one which was frequently preoccupied with questions of art and culture which, together with religion, have traditionally been considered the domain of women in America. Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote for what she considered to be a widely scattered "circle of intelligent, instructed amateurs."[40] There was a market for art writing on all levels, and she found many outlets for a prolific production of articles on a wide range of subjects of both contemporary and historic interest.

This was an era of personal journalism. By the end of the 1890s magazine and newspaper publication would have evolved into a high-pressured, mechanized big business and such urbane critics as Mrs. Van Rensselaer would be forced out and replaced with hard-driving, highly paid career columnists, usually men. But in the 1880s and early 1890s there were a number of distinguished critics still writing for the mass media who shared Mrs. Van Rensselaer's background. As Henry Adams (1838-1918), one such sometime

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writer on art, stated it: "Any man who was fit for nothing else could write an editorial or a criticism."[41] There was a natural affinity in late-nineteenth-century America between such things of the spirit as art and artists (no matter how impecunious) and the genteel society to which Mrs. Van Rensselaer belonged, for they shared a common disdain for the nouveaux riches and the ravages of commercialization all around them. For them art was to have a value which superseded material success.

For example, like so many of her circle, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to welcome the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition as offering an alternative to "our prosaic, calculating, commercial nineteenth century."[42] She was to write extensively about the fair (see Bibliography), from the days in which it was merely a plan to the period in which she was to look back upon it as a culminating event of her time. Before it was opened to the public Mrs. Van Rensselaer extolled the benefits of this fair in the following terms:

> It is to draw the eyes of the nation, by a stupendous object-lesson, to things and thoughts which are elevating, humanizing, intellectual, even spiritual . . . there is something beyond and above material success, something more important than mere money-making. 43

In a similar vein Mrs. Van Rensselaer celebrated the symbolic value of Richard M. Upjohn's Gothic Revival Trinity Church (1839-46) still standing at the foot of Wall Street in New York, the financial hub of the nation, writing of

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". . . church and graveyard impressing not only the eye but the mind as witnesses that beauty and righteousness have their claims no less than money-making and architectural display."[44] Mrs. Van Rensselaer decried the commercialization of the art world and took part in the campaign to end the tariff placed on the importation of works of art, taking a position consonant with the long-standing economic interests of old wealth in America (as opposed to the new industrial forces who profited from protective tariffs).[45]

In this era when a new professionalism and skill were being demanded in every field in America, Mrs. Van Rensselaer gave considerable thought to the nature of the profession she was entering, to the role of the critic. Just as the new breed of artist was stressing technical accomplishment, among critics there was a new consciousness of disciplined scholarship, both influenced by the growing belief in expertise characteristic of an ebullient technological culture.[46]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was furious, for example, at the way important paintings were frequently skied and placed in dark, inaccessible areas of the National Academy exhibitions (see pl. 16). She protested in the name of professionalism: "It is my duty . . . to look at every picture . . . a bad hanging . . . prevents my doing my work well."[47] In place of anecdote and sympathetic enthusiasm, critics were establishing a set of criteria based on an informed sense of

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history and craftsmanship. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was critical, for example, of the writings of the earlier art critic James Jackson Jarves (1815-88) for being "sentimental and theoretic rather than exact, technical, critical in the true sense,"[48] and noted, "It has only been of very recent years . . . [that] criticism has grown into a science, and is no longer a matter of mere personal feeling. . . ."[49] She declared that by dint of earnest historical study and through the indispensable aid of photography for the close comparison of widely scattered works, modern criticism "has grown from a mixture of guesswork and tradition into a pretty exact science."[50]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings helped to establish this new field in America. A later critic, appraising the changes initiated by Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her colleagues, noted in 1903:

> Ten years ago the English or American reader who wished to study the history of this or that painter or school outside the pages of a few compendiums was obliged, in most cases, to seek an authority in a language not his own. . . . Since that time things have changed, and at the present moment an extraordinary number of art books exist in English, constituting a phenomenon.[51]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote in English for an American public but derived standards and perspective from European training. Her first professional adviser, S. R. Koehler, editor of American Art Review, was himself German-born, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer valued his approach in which she found "German thoroughness" combined with "American enthusiasm."[52] She

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praised him for being "emphatically a historian, not a special-pleader."[53] In this age of increasing specialization, the perimeters of art criticism and art history were being established, and with a public-spirited idealism Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her associates became involved in introducing these new standards to the widest possible audience. It was a period in which there was not to be found the hard and fast distinction between "high-brow" and "low-brow" journalism that is today so marked on any newsstand. The more privileged welcomed the opportunity to address the multitudes with the perhaps naive expectation that the dissemination of high standards would permeate to the lowest ranks of society, thus improving conditions for all.

This was not a process without pitfalls. There were constant frustrations for the scholarly critic devoting major effort to the popular media, and by the turn of the century it had become a mode of criticism no longer viable and Mrs. Van Rensselaer turned her major attention to other endeavors (see Bibliography). But her first works and professional goals throughout her life were formulated with a persistently youthful idealism.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's struggle to maintain exacting standards of architectural criticism are well documented in her correspondence with Richard Watson Gilder,[54] who as editor of Century Magazine consistently sought to have Mrs. Van Rensselaer simplify material. Edith Wharton recalled a

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similar conflict when writing on "Italian Villas" for Century Magazine and later wrote

> . . . the application of scholarly standards to the judgment of works of art . . . certainly helped to clear away the sentimental undergrowth which had sprung up in the wake of the gifted amateur. . . . In the 'seventies and 'eighties there had appeared a series of agreeable volumes of travel and art-criticism of the cultured dilettante type, which had found thousands of eager readers. From Pater's "Renaissance" and Symond's "Sketches in Italy and Greece," to the deliciously desultory volumes of Vernon Lee and Bourget's delicate "Sensations d'Italie," though ranging through varying degrees of erudition, they all represented a high but unspecialized standard of culture; all were in a sense the work of amateurs, and based on the assumption that it is mainly to the cultured amateur that the creative artist must look for appreciation. . . . But while the cultivated reader continued to enjoy these books, and to ask for more, the voice of the trained scholar was sounding a note of resistance . . . my deep contempt for picturesque books about architecture naturally made me side with those who wished to banish sentiment from the study of painting and sculpture. . . . 55

At the very outset of a career as a critic, Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed similar ideas. In an article entitled "Artist and Amateur," her first work to be published in American Art Review, she stressed the importance of working to establish an informed public, writing, for example, of an area she was in the future to elucidate extensively, becoming a pioneer critic of architecture in America:

> Architecture offers one of the most constant sources of pleasure to the traveller, needs more than any other art some preliminary knowledge from which enjoyment may spring, and can be especially well taught in its rudiments from books and plates. Yet it is more neglected than any other branch; and this although it is the one practical and absolutely necessary art,--the one art which we cannot stop practising, in which, if we do not do well, we must continue to do badly. 56

In this early article Mrs. Van Rensselaer clearly articulates

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her notion of the art critic as a public servant, dedicated to the "national improvement," and at the same time explains the motivation of her own professional career. She wrote:

> . . . the power of living in intimate communion with beauty, of embellishing and sweetening our lives with it, of finding in it a refuge from care and sorrow, a renewal of cheerfulness and joy and delight in life, --we deny that this wide and deep capacity needs cultivation, or we deny that it is worth cultivating. We take for granted that knowledge and appreciative skill here come by instinct, and need none of the careful planting and constant training we find imperative with every other human power. . . . 57

Alluding to her formative years in Germany, Mrs. Van Rensselaer continued, referring to Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller:

> . . . the German people were exhorted and instructed, by those who had its aesthetic advance so passionately at heart, to become, not artists, but wise and loving amateurs. We shall see how appreciation is held up as an aim complete in itself, worthy of all effort and productive of all delight. We shall see that the greatest modern minds have counted it among their chiefest powers and privileges. . . .
>
> Color and outline, melody, harmony, and poetic imagery, can give pleasure, it is true, to the most uncultivated eye and ear. But what is such pleasure to the pleasure of the initiated, whose senses are dilated to perceive a thousand graces of outline and witcheries of color, a thousand imaginative meanings, a thousand waves and pulses of melody, a thousand shades and combinations and intensifications of harmony utterly and forever hidden from the untrained eye and ear? 58

"The first vital critic of the modern world," according to Mrs. Van Rensselaer, was Winckelmann, "the great German," whom she valued for his "trained and reasoning love."[59]

Although these early writings are infused with a youthful romantic language uncharacteristic of her later expression, the passion remains throughout her career a

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distinctive attribute, enlivening even the most erudite and technical passages of criticism.

The determination to introduce scholarly standards in writing about art was stimulated by the introduction of the new field of art history to America. Charles Eliot Norton, for example, had great impact through his lectures at Harvard, begun under the guise of the "History of Fine Arts as Connected with Literature" in 1874. Norton stressed discipline and professionalism in his classes, which soon became the most popular at Harvard.[60] Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism is notable for the historical perspective which is part of the treatment of even the most contemporary subjects. For example, in writing about the American contribution to the revival of the art of pastel, or etching, or stained glass in the 1880s, Mrs. Van Rensselaer discussed current work in the light of the history of the medium. When a volume appeared purporting to be a History of Art, which Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged to be dangerously substandard, she warned: "We are at a point now in our national education when there is a widespread craving for art-instruction. It is more than ever necessary, therefore, that none should be encouraged, especially of an elementary sort, which is not accurate and edifying."[61]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's life work can be seen as one continuous effort to be edifying. Returning to America at a time of dramatic growth and development, she offered her

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services in the hopes of directing the maturation of the nation towards the highest goals. Writings on art provided one avenue, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer was to become a major figure in the introduction of new standards of art criticism in the latter decades of the nineteenth century in America.[62] She viewed the future with confidence and had absolute faith that American art could one day rival the greatest accomplishments of civilization. Her optimism extended to include unlimited potential for enlightenment among the diverse masses of the public, and often she offered the most erudite analysis of works of art through the pages of cheap newsprint which made up popular journals and newspapers, sometimes selling for as little as ten cents and probably used to line garbage pails by the following day. Such articles were written under difficult conditions, deadlines being short and space limited. Frequently Mrs. Van Rensselaer would later rework such material and publish it in more considered form. Yet, it is interesting to note the tone with which she addressed her initial audience, the expectations she harbored of being understood by the general public, and the implied assumption that they shared common interests.

One case in point is Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writing about a fifteenth-century Florentine retable acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1882. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was by then art critic of the New York World, and her article on

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the subject was headlined "Mr. Marquand's Noble Gift of the Finest Luca Della Robbia Out of Italy";[63] she described the work as "one of the most important objects the Museum as yet contains." In this newspaper column (printed next to such mundane notices as an advertisement for a "Quick, complete, permanent cure [for] Corns. warts. bunions"), Mrs. Van Rensselaer proceeded to write:

> Of all the men who ever worked with clay and glaze, Luca della Robbia is surely the very greatest. He is the chief of his school, and his school is the only one in the hands of which fictile ware passed out of the domain of "decorative" or "minor" and into the domain of "high art." Such pottery as he made, when working at his best, is not decorative art in the usual sense; it is even something more than a mere adjunct to the architecture which it often ornamented. It is sculpture properly so-called, and of a high grade too. His works in glazed and colored pottery are of the same kind as his sculpture in stone and are scarcely inferior to these in quality, while unique in their material. . . . In clay sculpture he stands absolutely alone in all the history of art. . . . It is to be distinguished from ordinary moulded architectural pottery and not terra-cotta. It was used in architectural exterior decoration, as may still be seen in the streets of Florence, and also for interior ornamentation--as in the fine piece now owned by the Metropolitan Museum. We are fortunate indeed in having such a piece bestowed upon us (a piece of primary--almost unique--importance), and the museum is enriched nobly with a gift of such historic interest and such intrinsic value. There is none more perfect, more characteristic, more important in existence, none so good, perhaps, anywhere out of Italy. . . .
>
> It is not a mere ornamental piece intended to decorate an architectural structure, but is, in fact, such a structure in itself. It is a complete monument--which measures 3 metres, 15 centimetres in height by 2 metres, 25 centimetres in breadth, and represents the Assumption of the Virgin. Rising from the base on either side is a broad pilaster, ornamented with delicate early Renaissance designs in very low relief, and supporting an entablature, above which rises a round-arched pediment. The mouldings of the architectural motives are delicately designed, simple and beautiful to a degree only attained by Greek and early Renaissance workmen. But it is, of

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> course, the sculptural motives proper--the figures--upon which the chief interest centres. . . . Look at the faces in this work and we shall never doubt that genius. . . . Each is an individual, living, enraptured, heavenly . . . --not a mechanical, inspipid bit of carver's work. . . . Only a great sculptor could do work like this, so perennially fresh and true. . . .

There was in this period a great interest in Italian early Rensaissance works in America, especially revealed in the decoration of sumptuous mansions created for the new millionaires who visualized themselves as counterparts to cultivated Florentine noblemen. Professor Norton acquired a Luca della Robbia for Isabella Stewart Gardner to put in the palace-museum she created in Boston, the ultimate expression of the taste of this period, and copies of Luca della Robbia's cantoria figures adorned the library of Richardson and the music room of the Whitelaw Reid residence in the Villard Houses.[64] In 1882 Mrs. Van Rensselaer gave voice to the then generally accepted popular opinion regarding the authenticity of the Metropolitan retable.[65]

However, this work was once again featured when a new wing was added to the Metropolitan Museum in 1888, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer then took the occasion to reconsider the relief in the light of the most recent scholarly investigations. She was then art critic for the New York Independent and there wrote:

> It is erroneously attributed at the museum to Luca della Robbia, but is unquestionably one of the best works of his nephew, Andrea della Robbia. The excellence of the work proves this latter fact while the character of the design, and notably of its architectural borders, proves it be later than Luca's time. 66

The following year Mrs. Van Rensselaer published a more

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extended essay on the works of Luca della Robbia and his family, as part of Six Portraits, and this time acknowledged the recent art-historical publications which enabled her to pronounce that altered judgment and offered the reader a Della Robbia bibliography.[67] Drawing upon the work of German, French, and Italian scholars, Mrs. Van Rensselaer acted as an intermediary between the domain of the specialist and the general public.

Throughout her life Mrs. Van Rensselaer maintained the same professional standards in every undertaking, regarding all her audiences with equal respect, altering neither tone nor vocabulary. To Jewish immigrant girls at the University Settlement she offered the arts of Ancient Egypt as to the students at Harvard she brought the treasures of Crete. Although she unearthed no original discoveries alone, she was responsible for popularizing the findings of others and developed this new "science" of criticism to dispel erroneous conceptions and heighten the perceptions of the layman.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Lippincott's 22 (1878):706-18. For full article see Bibliography.

[2]See, for example, New York Times, 15 December 1878, p. 4, reporting the trial of 24-25 November with criticism for the excesses of both parties in the controversy.

[3]See p. 298, n. 27.

[4]In a review of Sheldon's American Painters (1881), American Art Review 11 (1881):156. Sheldon was born in Summerville, S.C., and had been a tutor in Latin and belles lettres at Princeton, 1865-73. After 1873 he became a journalist and art critic in New York. Sheldon wrote, "A New Departure in American Art," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 61 (1878):764-68, a not very sympathetic account of the revolt of the new generation.

[5]See, for example, Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6.

[6]American Architect and Building News, 19 January 1884, p. 30. This periodical will henceforth be abbreviated as AABN.

[7]Book of American Figure Painters (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1886), Preface, n.p.

[8]Independent, 26 July 1888, p. 935. For the best account to date of the conflicts between the artists of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's circle and the National Academy establishment, see Lois Marie Fink, "American Renaissance: 1870-

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1917," exhibition catalogue, Academy: The Academic Tradition in American Art (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975), pp. 50-89.

[9]Cited by Fink, "American Renaissance," p. 76, from Journal of Richard Watson Gilder and Helena de Kay Gilder, 1874-1878, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., with thanks to Miss Rosamond Gilder, New York.

[10]According to the Gilders' daughter, Miss Rosamond Gilder, in conversation, 22 December 1975. See also Letters of Richard Watson Gilder: Edited by His Daughter, Rosamond Gilder (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1916), pp. 140-41.

[11]Will H. Low, A Chronicle of Friendships: 1873-1900 (New York: Scribner's, 1908), p. 239.

[12]Fink, "American Renaissance," p. 77.

[13]In addition to Helena de Kay Gilder the exhibitors included Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), Abbot H. Thayer (1849-1921), Maria Oakey (later Mrs. Thomas Dewing; 1845-1927), Helen M. Knowlton (1832-1918) as well as sympathetic artists of the older generation, John LaFarge (1835-1910) and William Morris Hunt (1824-79).

[14][R. W. Gilder], "The Old Cabinet," Scribner's Monthly 11 (1876):743, cited, in part, in Fink, "American Renaissance," p. 55.

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[15]Rosamond Gilder describes the death of her father in Letters, p. 493. "My House" was published in Poems, pp. 133-36. "Richard Watson Gilder--Personal Memories" was published in Outlook, 8 March 1922, pp. 376-69, and noted as having been written in 1909 in a record book kept by Mrs. Van Rensselaer (George Griswold, Jr., collection) entitled "Writings: 1893- ."

[16]Awareness of the activities of such American artists abroad may have also been nourished by the Gilders' relationship to Katherine de Kay Bronson, the famous Mrs. Arthur Bronson, who maintained a home in Venice where she befriended many of the young American artists, of whom it was said, "she had a genius for friendship . . . a letter of introduction to her was more useful than one to an ambassador" (Morris Carter, Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1925], p. 116) and who was fondly remembered for having rescued the ill and destitute William M. Chase and Frank Duveneck when they were stranded in Venice (see J. Duveneck, Frank Duveneck: Painter-Teacher [San Francisco: John Howell, 1970], p. 67).

[17]Fink, "American Renaissance," pp. 77-78. The space-on-the-line provision was later rescinded.

[18]"American Etchers," Century 25 (1883):488.

[19]Rosamond Gilder, Letters, pp. 81-82. In fact, it was not until 1 June 1877 that a resolution of organization was formulated, and not until the following October that it was publicly issued (see Fink, "American Renaissance," pp. 80-81). Yet, Gilder was probably correct in recalling that the impetus derived from Saint-Gaudens' rejection in April.

[20]John Peter Simoni, "Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth Century America" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1952), p. 347. See there also pp. 337, 474, 477.

[21]See p. 82, n. 4.

[22]Scribner's Monthly 20 (1880):1-2.

[23]Simoni, "Critics," pp. 477-78.

[24]27 April 1878, pp. 149-50.

[25]An approach shared by another woman who reviewed that exhibition, S. N. Carter in "First Exhibition of the American Art Association," Art Journal 4 (1878):124, cited in Fink, "American Renaissance," pp. 83, 107.

[26]American Art Review 2 (1881):71. MGVR expressed

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great distaste for the art criticism of Benjamin (see unpublished letter to S. R. Koehler, 12 November 1882, p. 4, Archives of American Art, Koehler collection).

[27]Unsigned notice, The Architect 18 (London, 1877): 304.

[28]The whole drama was to be staged again in somewhat different terms when in 1898 the "Ten American Painters" resigned from the Society of American Artists because of what they felt were conservative policies, and began to exhibit together, and once again in 1908 when young artists slighted by the National Academy organized the first exhibition of "The Eight" at the Macbeth Gallery in New York.

[29]See Fink, "American Renaissance," pp. 82-83.

[30]New York World, 4 December 1892, p. 23, and 11 December 1892, p. 27.

[31]So Matthew Arnold proposed in The Function of Criticism at the Present Time (1st ed. 1864; New York: Macmillan, 1883), p. 37. Matthew Arnold (1822-88) was an influential British critic, poet, and philosopher of whose Literature and Dogma (1873) MGVR stated, "to no book in the world do I owe so much unless it be to the great Book with which it largely deals." However, she did also take issue with Arnold's negation of American art. (He had written, after a visit to the United States, "What really dissatisfies in American civilization is the want of those two great elements of the interesting, which are elevation and beauty" [Civilization in the United States, 1888].)
For MGVR's comments on Arnold, see "Mr. Arnold and American Art," Century, n.s., 14 (1888):314-16.

[32]14 April 1878, p. 3.

[33]AABN, 27 April 1878, p. 150.

[34]"Recent Pictures in New York," AABN, 22 March 1879, p. 93. Most probably MGVR had not yet met the artist, here identified as "Miss Kay."

[35]Ibid.

[36]N.s., 7 (1879):320-27.

[37]See Peter Bermingham, "Post-Centennial Critics and Patrons," exhibition catalogue, American Art in the Barbizon Mood (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975), pp. 69-73, and Quick, American Expatriate Painters, p. 17.

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[38]Bermingham, "Post-Centennial Critics," p. 69, citing Frank Mott, A History of American Magazines (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1938), 2:180-91.

[39]Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940 (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 411.

[40]Independent, 22 September 1887, pp. 1195-96.

[41]The Education of Henry Adams (1st ed., 1905; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1961), p. 211.

[42]"What Mrs. Van Rensselaer Says: 'The Fair Grounds,'" Rand, McNally & Co.'s Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1893), p. 411.

[43]"Current Questions of Art: The Chicago Fair," New York World, 11 September 1892, p. 32. Money making was a concern not only of businessmen but also of labor, which was beginning to organize for it in this period (see below, pp. 167-69).

[44]"Picturesque New York," Century, n.s., 23 (1892):172.

[45]See, for example, Independent, 5 April 1888, p. 423. For views parallel to MGVR's, see Clarence Cook, "Topics of the Time: Art and the Stupidities of the Tariff," Scribner's Monthly 21 (1881):631-32, cited in Simoni, "Art Critics," p. 426, and Sheridan Ford, Art: A Commodity (New York, 1888).

For an analysis of the tariff question I am indebted to Professor Richard C. Wade, who conducted a seminar on "Urban History: New York City" at the City University Graduate School, Spring 1976.

[46]So noted Howard Mumford Jones in "The Genteel Tradition," Harvard University Bulletin 18 (1970):6.

[47]Boston Evening Transcript, 30 April 1892, p. 6.

[48]Independent, 20 September 1888, p. 1199.

[49]Independent, 1 September 1887, p. 1098.

[50]Independent, 18 April 1889, p. 487.

[51]Royal Cortissoz, "New Aspects of Art Study," Atlantic 91 (1903):832.

[52]Independent, 23 June 1887, p. 779.

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[53]AABN, 23 January 1886, pp. 44-45. S. R. Koehler was also founding curator of the print department at the Boston Museum and the first honorary print curator of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

[54]See the Gilder Papers and the Century Company's and Richard Watson Gilder's letter books in the manuscript division, New York Public Library.

[55]A Backward Glance (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), pp. 140-41.

[56]1 (1880):384.

[57]Ibid., p. 341.

[58]Ibid., p. 381.

[59]In review of new English edition of Winckelmann's The History of Ancient Art in AABN, 8 January 1881, p. 15.

[60]See Colin Eisler, "American Art History," Art News 75 (1976):65, and Jones, "Genteel Tradition," pp. 11ff.

[61]AABN, 15 October 1881, p. 180.

[62]Others were John LaFarge, Montgomery Schuyler, William Crary Brownell, Kenyon Cox, John Charles Van Dyke, James Ripley Wellman Hitchcock, and Royal Cortissoz (see Simoni, "Art Critics," p. 24).

[63]5 November 1882, p. 5. Although MGVR's articles in the New York World from 1881-83 are unsigned, they can be attributed by style and documented by the statement in an unpublished letter from MGVR to S. R. Koehler of 28 February 1883, ". . . I am not to work for the World anymore. I had taken such an interest in it for two years, . . ." etc. (Archives of American Art, Koehler collection), and the reference to "a visit from a cousin of the Frelinghuysens, a Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who came for two hours to see our water colours and drawings. She is the art critic of the New York World newspaper, a young woman, and intelligent," in a letter dated 31 December 1882 from Marian Hooper Adams to her father published in The Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams: 1865-1883, ed. Ward Thoron (Boston: Little Brown, 1936), p. 411.

[64]For Norton's acquisition for Mrs. Gardner, see Van Wyck Brooks, New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915 (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940), p. 436. For photograph of Richardson's library c. 1886, see James F. O'Gorman, "The Making of a 'Richardson Building,' 1874-1886," exhibition catalogue, organized by the Department of Printing and

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Graphic Arts, Harvard College Library, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 23 October - 8 December 1974, p. 33. For Villard Houses see pls. 141-42.

[65]See, for example, E. D. R. Bianciardi, "Luca della Robbia and His School," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 60 (1880):692-98.

[66]27 December 1888, p. 1675. This position was affirmed in Art Amateur 8 (1882):28, and in Allan Marquand, "Andrea della Robbia's Assumption of the Virgin in the Metropolitan Museum," American Journal of Archaeology 8 (1891):422-31.

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CHAPTER III

MATURE STYLE

Locked in a tapestry-lined wooden chest at her death, together with carefully preserved letters from artists and other notables of her day, was found the following note written on a card in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's own hand: "In the appreciation of art there is no such thing as authority. The critic should not pose as a judge; he is a friend. Yukio Yashiro."

Not only does this note to herself attest to Mrs. Van Rensselaer's lifelong appetite for new insights (for she was at least seventy-four years old when she copied these words from the first publication of a young Japanese art historian[1]), but it also may be taken to be the motif of her own critical writing. When Yukio Yashiro went on to write, "Art in itself is Religion, the Religion of the Beautiful, to which you resort with a spiritual longing and thereby receive inspiration and consolation . . . ,"[2] he stated simply an idea eloquently expressed almost half a century earlier when the young Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, at the start of her work as an art critic, dedicated her efforts to cultivating in the American public a knowledgeable appreciation of art, what she termed "the power of

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living in intimate communion with beauty, of embellishing and sweetening our lives with it, of finding in it a refuge from care and sorrow, a renewal of cheerfulness and joy and delight in life. . . ."[3] The notion that culture could replace religious institutions as a more adequate means of improving humanity ultimately derives from the writings of the British critic Matthew Arnold,[4] who had such great influence on Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer and those of her generation. Addressing her efforts to this task, the criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is presented with such grace and charm, wit and elegance, that any analysis falls leaden beside it.

Often Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writing on art and architecture was published without benefit of illustration, or with very inadequate reproductions. This resulted in a style of criticism which is very explicit, remaining close to the original work of art. Mrs. Van Rensselaer accepted, as part of the function of art criticism, the need to convey the artist's image through words. Although she was discriminating and often caustic in her remarks, Mrs. Van Rensselaer conceived of the work of the living artist as primary, and her style is distinctive in the tone it takes, tuned to the sensibilities of the artists then actively engaged in the struggle to create that art. Take, for example, her contemporary evaluation of new directions being explored by Winslow Homer in 1883:

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Two or three years ago, Mr. Homer must have astonished, I think, many who, knowing his work so well, thought they had gauged his power and understood its preferences and its range; for he then exhibited a series of water-colors conceived in an entirely novel vein. No one could have guessed he might attempt such things. Yet the moment they were seen no one could doubt whose hand had been at work,--so strong were they, so entirely fresh and free and native. They were marine studies of no considerable size, done at Gloucester, Massachusetts. Never before had Mr. Homer made color his chief aim or his chief means of expression. . . . But in these marine sketches color had been his chief concern, and there was much less of crudeness and more of beauty in the result. They were chiefly stormy sunset views--glowing, broadly indicated, strongly marked memoranda, done with deep reds and blacks. A sweep of red-barred black water, a stretch of black-barred red sky, and the great black sail of a fishing-boat set against them, with no detail and the fewest of rough brush strokes, gave us not only the intensified color-scheme of nature but nature's movement, too,--the slow rise and fall of the billows, the motion of the boat, the heavy pulsation of the air. The hues were a palpable exaggeration of the hues of nature; but then all color that is homogeneous and good on canvas is and must be an exaggeration, either in the way of greater strength or of greater weakness. No one can paint nature just as she appears; and if one could, the result would not be clear and expressive art. . . . Most artists accomplish this end . . . by the weakening process. . . . To use the familiar phrase, they tone things down. But Mr. Homer had gone the other way to work in these little marines, and had toned things up. He had boldly omitted everything that could not serve his purpose, which was to show the demoniac splendor of stormy sunset skies and waters,--and then, unsatisfied by the brilliant hues of nature, had keyed them to deeper force, made them doubly powerful, the reds stronger and the blacks blacker,--insisting upon and emphasizing a theme which another artist would have thought already too pronounced and too emphatic for artistic use. That he could do this and keep the balance of his work is a patent proof of his artistic power. For though over-statement is not more non-natural or less allowable in art than under-statement, yet under-statement is, of course, the easier, safer kind of adaption. If this is unsuccessful, the result is simply weak; but if over-statement is unsuccessful, the result is an atrocity. Mr. Homer, however, was so artistic, so clear, so well poised in his exaggerations, that he did more than satisfy the eye. He opened it to the full force and beauty of certain natural effects, and filled

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for us the sky of every future stormy sunset with memories of how his brush had interpreted its characteristic beauty. . . .

At the water-color exhibition of 1883, Mr. Homer again surprised us with drawings of a new kind [see pl. 15] . . . possessing novel claims to praise. They were pictures of English fisher-women, set, as usual with him, in landscape surroundings of much importance, and were, I think, by far the finest works he had yet shown in any medium. They were lacking in but one quality we had prized in his earlier work--in the distinctively American accent hitherto so prominent. But we could not resent this fact, since, if an artist chooses a foreign theme, he must, of course, see it in its own light or do uncharacteristic and savorless work. To paint English girls as though they were Americans would have been as great an artistic sin as is the more common crime of painting Yankees to look like Bretons or Bavarians. It is proof of his true artistic instinct and insight, and his freedom from conventionality of thought or method, that Mr. Homer, who had so clearly understood and expressed the American type during so many years of working, could now free himself so entirely from its memory as to make these English girls as distinctly, as typically English as any which have ever come from a British hand.

It is this most recent phase of Mr. Homer's work [these English pictures which] . . . seem to me not only . . . the most complete and beautiful things he has yet produced, but among the most interesting American art has yet created. They are, to begin with, pictures in the truest sense, and not mere studies or sketches, like most of his earlier aquarelles. Then they are finer in color than anything except the sunset sketches just described, and finer than these in one way--as being more explicit and comprehensive in their scheme. . . . And in handling, these works were, I think, a great improvement on all that had gone before--more skillful, more refined, more delicate, while not less strong and individual. But the most interesting and valuable thing about them was their beauty of line. Linear beauty is a rare thing in modern art, scarcely ever aimed at even by a modern artist without a lapse into conventionality or would-be-classic lifelessness. And it is a quality which we might have thought the very last to which Mr. Homer could attain. . . . Compare the carelessly chosen attitudes, the angular outlines, the awkwardly truthful gestures of his New England figures, with the sculptural grace of these fisher-girls, and no contrast could be greater. The novel choice of material does not explain the matter. Had Mr. Homer seen with the same eyes as heretofore and worked with the same ends in view, he would not have marked and emphasized

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> the splendid linear possibilities of his new models, more suggestive though they doubtless were than those of his native land. For they had been possibilities only, to be discovered and utilized by artistic selection, and not persistent, evident, and unmistakable characteristics inherent in every figure and every attitude he might see. . . . These outlines might also be transferred to a relief in marble; and yet there is none of the stiffness, the immobility, with which plastically symmetrical effects are usually attended in painted work. They are statuesque figures, but they are living, moving, breathing beings, and not statues; and they are as characteristic, as simply natural and unconventional, as are the most awkward of Mr. Homer's Yankee children. It is interesting to note how this fine symmetry has been secured--as it is often secured in art of very different kinds, though more frequently in marble than in paint. The method is one that needs a master hand to manage it aright. It works first, of course, by making the lines of one figure reproduce to a great degree the lines of its fellows--not nearly enough to produce monotony and stiffness, but nearly enough to secure repose, harmony, and a sort of rhythmical unity not to be obtained in other ways. This device--the word is correct, for what looks to us like artistic instinct is always, of course, artistic reasoning, conscious--is used throughout these English pictures and studies. . . .[5]

Then in this article Mrs. Van Rensselaer refers to a picture which is probably the Homer she acquired for her own collection and later bequeathed to the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University (pl. 17). She continued:

> In a watercolor not yet exhibited,--which is a most remarkable rendering of figures seen through a thick fog,--there is in particular a group of two girls with their arms linked together, which as a bit of linear composition could hardly be surpassed by any pencil,--so statuesque is it, so superbly graceful, yet so simple, so natural, so apparently unstudied. . . .

Mrs. Van Rensselaer applauded the achievement of Homer, then in mid-career, writing:

> He has worked out his technical manners for himself. The results show something of crudeness, of rugged angularity,--are unscholarly, perhaps, but extremely original, and also forcible and clearly expressive of what he has

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> to say. He has invented . . . a language of his own. It is not polished, not deft and rapid and graceful. We could never care for it in itself and apart from the message it delivers, as we do so often care for really beautiful artistic workmanship. But it is not hesitating, confused, inadequate. It is always sure of itself, and always reaches its end, as ignorant or immature work does not, though it may reach that end in a rather blunt and uncompromising fashion. In a word, it is not childish, uncertain technique; but it is, I think, a little primitive, a little rustic. It is the strong, characteristic, personal, though unpolished, diction of a provincial poet. . . . Perhaps it is because of his naïveté, his occasional gaucheries, his sturdy if angular independence, and not in spite of these things, that his handling seems so fresh, so unaffected, so peculiarly his own, so well adapted to the nature of the feeling it reveals. I think it is an open question whether, had Mr. Homer been born a few years later and taken an early flight to Paris or to Munich with our younger brood of callow painters, his art would have gained or lost in value. It might have grown more scholarly, more gracious, more beautiful, more delightful to the eye and to that second sight which rejoices in work well done simply because it is well done. But with its polish might have come some loss of its freshness, of its genuine, spontaneous rendering of genuine, untutored feeling. . . . And his strong freshness of mood and manner is peculiarly precious in these days when most men are self-conscious,--these days of cosmopolitan experience and hackneyed practice. . . .
>
> That he will give us many different kinds of work in the years to come, no one who has followed his course thus far can greatly doubt. . . .

Although this critique does not adequately take into account Homer's debt to contemporary English and European paintings of related themes (that is, the field of monumentalized genre painting so popular then, though largely forgotten now[6]), it is a most sensitive and articulate evaluation of Homer's strengths and weaknesses, geared, above all, to the encouragement of a fruitful direction.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's mature style is notable for the manner in which she was able to comprehend the widely divergent aspirations of varied artists, at different moments

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in their development, and hone a critical instrument capable of elucidating their efforts, frequently finding laudable qualities in works which were difficult to contend with, or not completely successful. There is frequently a marked note of modesty in her writing (probably attributable to her position as a woman, working in what was considered essentially a man's profession). Concerned less with a display of her own erudition and more with a conception of public service, Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism combines this diffidence with a discerning sensibility and a cosmopolitan frame of reference. An example of her approach can be seen in her review of Thomas Eakins' Crucifixion (pl. 18), published when the canvas was first publicly exhibited. This 1880 painting of the Philadelphia artist had been submitted to the Society of American Artists in New York City for its Spring Exhibition in 1882. It had been rejected, but then was included in a supplementary show organized by the Society, at which point it met with an almost universally bad press.[7] Years later, Mrs. Van Rensselaer recalled that the Eakins Crucifixion had been then "bitterly discussed."[8] In one of the most intelligent and perceptive, as well as one of the longest, discussions of any of Eakins' works in his day, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:

> . . . the supplementary exhibition [which was] naturally less full and less important as a whole than the collection first shown. It yet contained some pictures of capital importance. Most prominent among them was Mr. Eakins's Crucifixion. Mr. Eakins had previously been known as the strongest and most characteristically local

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in temper of all those who had sought to put on canvas the types of humanity nearest to us in time and place. His chief pictures moreover, with the recent exception of his Mending the Net, had been of interiors; and his great skill in the management of strong effects of light had displayed itself in works where the general tone had been pitched very low. Knowing these facts and knowing Mr. Eakins's love for the actual rather than the imaginative side of art and his consummate anatomical science, one expected in a Crucifixion, from his hand a sombre though perhaps forcibly-illuminated picture, and a realistic study of death and agony. This last we have found; but combined with it no little unexpected pathos; and still more to our surprise, a picture conceived and well worked out in a very light scheme of color--showing the sacrifice as taking place under an unclouded Eastern sky. The conception is at variance with that traditional in any school, all the commonly accepted accessories of the scene being absent. No other human creature's presence is suspected by the observer. There is, as I had said, no hint of that sympathy of nature with the passing tragedy to which legend and art have alike accustomed us, and the cross, moreover, does not stand upon an elevation, but in the midst of a broken, rocky, sandy stretch of desert. But for the crown of thorns and the scroll above the cross one could not tell what martyr's death might be before us. These things, however, consecrated though they are by all tradition, are but accessories which an artist may omit at will provided he gives us the essential idea--which is that of a sacrifice--and provided he uses his novel material to heighten the impression of terror or pathos at which he aims. This in my opinion, Mr. Eakins has done. I know there are some who see in the picture little but a most painful anatomical study; to me, however, it has an intensity of pathos touched with horror. The composition is very good, the figure presenting itself just a little obliquely, and the lower part of the cross beneath the feet being invisible. The landscape is finely drawn, and in spite or perhaps because, of the full sunlight upon it, is instinct with the very spirit of desolation and abandonment. It adds more than one thinks at first to the effect of the picture. Without it one might see merely a suffering body,--I cannot tell. But I feel that with its aid one receives an impression that is very characteristic of the sentiment to be aimed at in such a work. The face is not an important feature, for death has come, apparently, and it is sunk upon the breast and in shadow: of course, therefore, there has been no attempt to render spiritual emotion. The hands are contracted in a way that is extremely painful, though, owing to Mr. Eakins's anatomical knowledge we may believe that it is physically prob-

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> able. The knees are much bent to bring the feet upon the little rest provided for them; and this also adds greatly to the painful impression. There has, moreover, been something less than an attempt to idealize the form of Christ: it is lean to the verge of attenuation and the limbs are extremely thin. The whole has been most admirably modelled in full illumination, the light streaming on the figure from the spectator's left, and the only space of decided shadow being where the head falls forward on the right. The management of the light is extremely good, and Mr. Eakins shows himself here as capable of fine chiaroscuro as when his scale is low and his shadows more all-embracing. It is true, simple sunlight, moreover, not the calcium-light effect so often substituted therefor in French studios to-day. Those who have the least acquaintance with the painter's art must appreciate what a difficult task has thus been accomplished, to paint actual sunlight from a palpitating blue sky, to model a nude figure in this high light without the assistance of contrasting shadows, and to draw from such elements an impression in harmony with the tragic subject. Of course this picture is no complete expression of that subject, for the higher physical elements are left entirely on one side; but this is not to be regretted, perhaps, for when attempted they have scarcely once been completely realized in the whole history of art; and what Mr. Eakins <u>has</u> attempted he has, I think, completely given. This has been, not merely the rendering of physical agony, but the suggestion of desolateness, pathos and sacrifice. It is extremely difficult to put into words the impression made by such a picture, so strong, so repulsive in some ways, yet so deeply pathetic, partly by reason, perhaps, of that very repulsiveness. I can only speak for myself, when I say that after seeing a hundred crucifixions from modern hands this one seemed to me not only a quite original but a most impressive and haunted work. 9

So undoubtedly did Eakins, for Margaret McHenry[10] reported that during the artist's lifetime the <u>Crucifixion</u> "always hung in the downstairs hall" of the artist's studio-home, which Mrs. Van Rensselaer had visited.

Responding to a very different kind of picture in her art column published the week before this Eakins commen-

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tary, Mrs. Van Rensselaer lauded the works of another controversial artist of the time, Albert Pinkham Ryder (see pl. 19), concluding:

> To those who do not sympathize with Mr. Ryder's aims in art--the aim, if I may so say, after beautiful paint as such, and the aim after strength and individuality, and poetry of sentiment rather than after definition and the recording of material facts--his pictures seem meaningless, I am told, or even affected; but to those who do sympathize with his aims, and these seem to include a growing band of lay admirers and all his brother artists, however alien from him in their own kinds of work, his pictures have a charm and value unequalled by that of any work done among his countrymen. 11

Some critics confronted by John Singer Sargent's paintings of the back alleys of Venice and their habitués (see pl. 20), so different from the popular picturesque canal views and his own fashionable portraiture, condemned them as banal and questioned the wisdom of traveling so far to paint such ordinary things. Yet Mrs. Van Rensselaer (like Henry James, whose evaluations most often coincide with hers) encouraged the young successful society painter to explore such new avenues, writing in a review of a National Academy exhibition:

> No pictures in the exhibition, I imagine, can have so attracted the eyes and inspired the praise of artists as Mr. Sargent's two studies of Venetian scenes--one an interior, and the other a street perspective, both with figures in the foreground. No one not thoroughly familiar with the most difficult problems of art and with the most successful solutions that have been arrived at by others, can quite appreciate the extraordinary power shown by Mr. Sargent in thus quickly, frankly, yet triumphantly dealing with these long perspectives and these effects of light, and in placing these unstudied and realistic, yet graceful and interesting figures. And no one else can know how true a colorist a man must be to manage so well these somber schemes in which scarce a

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> note of what we commonly call color appears. Justness of eye and skill of hand can go no further than they have gone here. 12

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's determination to see with the artist's eye led her not only to early perceive the value of those artists today generally recognized as the masters of late-nineteenth-century American art, but also enabled her to cite valuable qualities in works by artists overlooked today. For example, Sargent was not the only artist to paint such Venetian subjects in this period,[13] and with a discerning judgment Mrs. Van Rensselaer discussed related works by Sargent's contemporaries, as for example, in the following commentary on a painting entitled "Venetian Lace Makers" (pl. 21) by Robert Blum (1847-1903):

> One of the most remarkable, if not, indeed, the most remarkable--figure painting in the collection [exhibited at the Third Prize Fund Exhibition of 1887] is Mr. Robert Blum's "Venetian Lace Makers." Mr. Blum--every one knows how clever he always is, though, at times, too much in haste to do himself full justice--has gone very seriously to work on this canvas . . . whatever Mr. Blum may leave undone, his people are always not only really, but intensely alive; and each is always individualized from the others not by any effort to paint the deeper sides of character, but by a marvelously subtile skill in catching those superficial differences of movement and expression which, of course, are all the eye would catch if looking upon the living scene which he has painted for us. 14

This was Blum's first important oil painting exhibited, and it won honors for the artist both in New York and Paris. It is interesting to note Mrs. Van Rensselaer's acumen in regard to the artist's strengths and weaknesses as well as her approach, which consistently projects constructive

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attitudes, especially when she is discussing major efforts of young artists. This is even true when the work considered is judged less than successful, as in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism of "The Strike" by Robert Koehler (1850-1917) (pl. 22) exhibited at the National Academy in 1886 and reviewed twice by Mrs. Van Rensselaer:

> It cannot but claim respectful attention; for what we are always asking our young painters for is just such a serious treatment of just such a contemporary, "realistic" theme. It seems to me not a very fine picture, but a very promising one; good in composition, save for the introduction of the master, who might better have been left to the imagination; and good, too, in the rendering of distance and atmosphere; but, on the other hand, weak in the expression of character, when its groups, effective at a distance, are individually examined. 15

> . . . in the foreground an excited group of laborers parleying with the master who stands upon the steps of what, I imagine, was meant to be a "palatial mansion." Neither in the suggestion of this, nor in the characterization of the master was the artist very successful; and the groups of workmen, though well composed for general effect, were not very dramatically realized to close inspection. But there was much good painting on the canvas, especially in the background and atmosphere; and those one could not call it a real success, it was an encouraging sign of earnest ambition and the effort to grapple intelligently with a characteristically modern subject. . . . 16

The spirit of good will which permeates Mrs. Van Rensselaer's approach in no way blunts her critical faculties. With keen sarcasm, she reported, for example, "Mrs. Anna Lea Merritt, whom we have so long tried to believe in as a promising if not a successful painter, sent a portrait group [to a National Academy exhibition in 1883] which did much to quench our hopes forever. . . ."[17]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's discernment is evident in the

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distinctions she made regarding the ambitions and creations of numerous artists, and her writing is replete with scathing condemnation and caustic comment, as well as fulsome praise and encouragement. However, if there is one quality which characterizes her particular style it must be defined in terms of a distinctly personal perspective. Frequently Mrs. Van Rensselaer's perceptions were informed by direct contact with the artist. She was so criticized for this that she was moved to publish a succinct statement defending this mode of operation:

> It is often said, when we confess to knowing and admiring an artist as well as his art, that we confuse the one sentiment with the other. We are told that we praise him either with conscious friendly falsehood or with unconscious friendly bias. It is presumed that the personal had preceded the critical estimate, whereas, in truth, it more often follows as a consequence. I would not dwell upon such a point did I not know how widespread a feeling this is, and how constantly it militates against the acceptance of the most well-considered and impartial verdicts. Of course there is danger of bias (either for or against, be it said), when a writer comes in personal contact with an artist; but it must be incurred, for the greater risk of misapprehension and partial insight threatens if one knows the work alone and not the worker too. Of a single picture one may judge by its own witness only; but not all the work of a painter's life. To do this one must know aims, intentions, moods, and methods, as well as mere results. 18

In a curious way the personal involvement of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's style is accompanied by a very opposite quality. Loyalties which evolved through extended contact bred restraint, and often Mrs. Van Rensselaer, as the instrument chosen for conveying the official image of the artist to posterity, wrote with a marked reticence. For example, she was fully aware of

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certain deficiencies of Richardson which she consciously chose to bypass (judging them irrelevant) in her monograph on the architect, and Olmsted could trust Mrs. Van Rensselear to comprehend, yet omit, confidences that he related to her, knowing that they would find no place in her published account of his life and work.[19]

The critical style of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer was at once intimate and distant, garrulous and taciturn, revealing and reticent. With the formal reserve of another age her works suggest nuances of feeling absent from more recent criticism. As treasured by one of her contemporaries, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was truly "an exemplar of taste, sensibility and distinction."[20]

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NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]Yukio Yashiro, Sandro Botticelli (London: Medici Society, 1925), p. xi. Yukio Yashiro went on to become Professor of the History of Art in the Imperial Academy of Tokyo and an expert on Japanese art. His latest recorded publication is Art Treasures of Japan (New York: Abrams, 1960).

[2]Yashiro, Sandro Botticelli, p. xxix.

[3]MGVR, "Artist and Amateur," p. 341.

[4]See discussion above, p. 88, n. 35.

[5]"An American Artist in England," Century, n.s., 5 (1883):13-21.

[6]See William H. Gerdts, "Winslow Homer in Cullercoats," Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin 36 (Spring 1977):18-35.

[7]See, for example, Art Amateur (June 1882), cited in Gordon Hendricks, The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins (New York: Grossman, 1974), pp. 158-60.

[8]In an unpublished letter from MGVR to Henry Watson Kent, 30 September 1917, Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives.

[9]"The Society of American Artists, New York II," AABN, 20 May 1882, p. 231. Lloyd Goodrich characterized this review in a letter to this author of 2 September 1976 in which he wrote, "It is one of the most intelligent and perceptive, as well as one of the longest discussions of any of Eakins' works, and I am very glad to have a copy of it. I plan to refer to it in my forthcoming book on Eakins."

[10]Thomas Eakins, Who Painted (Oreland, Penn.?: n.p., 1946), p. 53.

[11]"The Society of American Artists, New York I," AABN, 13 May 1882, p. 219.

[12]Independent, 26 April 1888, p. 519. Compare unfavorable reviews of such pictures in Gazette des Beaux-Arts 27 (1883):192, cited in Richard Ormond, John Singer Sargent: Paintings, Drawings, Watercolors (London: Phaidon, 1970), p. 238, and criticism by Henry James, which is parallel to that of MGVR, Harper's New Monthly Magazine 75 (1887):689.

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[13]I am indebted to Beth Treadway for allowing me to see her dissertation-in-progress on the American painters in Venice for the City University of New York, Graduate Center.

[14]"The Third Prize-Fund Exhibition 1," Independent, 2 June 1887, p. 682.

[15]Independent, 6 May 1886, p. 555.

[16]AABN, 19 June 1886, p. 293.

[17]AABN, 12 May 1883, p. 244.

[18]Six Portraits, pp. 235-36.

[19]See, for example, letters to MGVR from Olmsted of 11 August 1886 and 11 June 1893 (Olmsted Papers, Library of Congress), which reveal more negative assessments of Richardson as an architect, and more personal information about his own development than finally appeared in MGVR's 1888 book on Richardson or 1893 article on Olmsted (see Bibliography). For discussion of the discretion with which MGVR treated the subjects of her criticism see Charles G. McLaughlin, "Selected Letters of F. L. Olmsted" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1960), pp. 390-92 and 428-33, and Laura Wood Roper, FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 453-54.

[20]See letter from Helen Moore, New York Times, 8 February 1934, p. 18.

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CHAPTER IV

SHARED CRITERIA

In all that she wrote, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was primarily concerned with what was termed "expression." This emphasis was shared by many of her generation, those who first made their professional presence felt in the America of the late 1870s. In placing the quality of expression foremost, Mrs. Van Rensselaer articulated the criteria of the young artists just then returning from Munich and Paris, as had her friend and fellow critic William C. Brownell, who noted, ". . . whereas it used to be the main effort of American painters to imitate nature, it is the main effort of the new men to express feeling."[1] Long before the word took on its European Post-Impressionist connotations, the name "The Expressionists" was chosen by a small band of artists, writers, and their followers in New York City in an 1878 fictionalized account of the artists' life, a novel entitled The Bohemian written by Mrs. Van Rensselaer's colleague Charles de Kay.[2]

It was for those valued qualities of individual expression that Mrs. Van Rensselaer most admired the work of Rembrandt, Corot, Millet, and the French Barbizon painters as well as that of favored American, French, German, and

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Netherlandish artists of her own time. She wrote:

> The reason why Rembrandt now seems to many eyes the painter whom a modern artist should revere above all others . . . is because of all the artists who have ever lived he is the greatest master of expression, and because the desire to paint expression, as distinct from the desire to paint "pure beauty" is a marked characteristic of our time. 3

There is no other quality shared by the diverse artists included in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's book of essays Six Portraits: Della Robbia, Correggio, Blake, Corot, George Fuller, Winslow Homer, where she explains in the introduction:

> . . . I wanted to show the meaning of individuality in art; to illustrate what Emerson implied when he said Art is Nature "passed through the alembic of man." The main thing for an artist is to express himself--to clarify his sensations, and develop some adequate form of speech. He is not a mere recorder. He is an interpreter. He neither copies nor falsifies the facts of nature. He transmutes them, giving them new beauties and a new meaning drawn from the essence of his own soul. If I have made this fact at all clear with regard to the six artists whom I have tried to explain, the great difference between them should but accent its significance. 4

Under the name of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, on the title page of Six Portraits, is placed a quotation borrowed from the then popular French novelist Paul Bourget. It reads:

> Ce que nous appelons le talent réside dans le je ne sais quoi d'indéfinissable qui est la personne même. La preuve en est que cette personne une fois disparue, cette nuance de talent aura, elle aussi, disparu pour toujours.
>
> [That which we call talent exists in an undefinable personality, and the proof is that once the person disappears, the precise shade of talent has also disappeared and forever.]

A sensitivity to such "precise shades of talent" informs the

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body of this book. As Mrs. Van Rensselaer there asserted, "To be an artist means to be individual; and individuality can be tested only by its own standard."[5] She was willing to overlook technical faults, as found in the paintings of Courbet as well as of Page, Homer, Eakins, and Ryder, when she found in their works a forceful expression of individuality. Likewise, when confronted by correct but lifeless productions, such as those on view at the Munich New Picture Gallery, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was prompted to exclaim, ". . . learning and conscientiousness are the worst foes to art;--better the wildest extravagance, better the naïvest blundering, better the most childishly unsuccessful if spontaneous daring."[6]

Nevertheless, Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged that despite great imaginative force of expression, Blake had failed to reach the ranks of the greatest masters because of his technical deficiencies,[7] and it was always within a context of structure and form that Mrs. Van Rensselaer honored individuality.

Ultimately, the criteria of Mrs. Van Rennselaer were derived from standards set by the French art world and were particularly governed by the Paris Salon exhibitions and awards. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was among those critics who changed a longstanding hostile climate of opinion towards things French in American art criticism during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When, for example, in

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1894 she singled out a portrait by William Morris Hunt (1824-79) ". . . which New Yorkers have seen more than once before, but could not see too often" (in a review of an exhibition of paintings of women which was headlined "Mrs. Van Rensselaer Points Out the Most Notable Pictures and Compares Those of American Artists with the Best Ones of the French School"[8]), she had already helped to bring American art criticism a long way from the position of Clarence Cook, the influential critic of the previous generation. Cook, an admirer of Pre-Raphaelite painting in America, curiously wrote, from the 1860s to 1880s, more about Hunt's work than any other painter, but always presented Hunt as an artist who had fallen under evil foreign influences. Cook specifically disdained Hunt for his French associations and wrote that he merely ". . . translated Couture and Millet into Bostonese" and gleefully reported, ". . . there is no Frenchman but Mr. Hunt, and great is his profit."[9] Unsophisticated and blunt, Cook represented a very different kind of art critic from the cosmopolitan Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who felt no defensiveness in comparing American art to that of the French. In fact, Mrs. Van Rensselaer's very first extended art publication, the 1878 "Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," presented French art as a yardstick against which to measure the contributions of all other nations.[10]

While celebrating the originality of Richardson's architecture, Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted that it

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> . . . was owing to the fundamental benefit of that Paris training the superficial influence of which he had so instantly shaken off. His schooling had not taught him what was right (for him), but it had made him able quickly to recognize what was wrong. An untrained mind would never have seen its own missteps so instantly, or so soon have found and rapidly assimilated the wholly unfamiliar elements out of which it could create success. Nor, it is almost needless to add would an untrained mind have been able to secure fundamental qualities of excellence even in results which did not satisfy its aspirations. Richardson threw aside as useless the schemes upon which he had worked so long in Paris, but it was their careful study which had developed his feeling for proportion, his power of composition, and his appreciation of technical beauty to such a point that, dealing with wholly unfamiliar schemes, he could make his very first work admirable in mass and outline, could skillfully manage the great Brattle Square tower with its difficult decorative feature [see pl. 23], could charmingly reproduce in small upon his Court-house the huge towers of mediaeval Italy, could feel the full importance of such minor constructive features as the profiles of foundation-courses, and could at least try to treat all surfaces in an interesting and appropriate way. 11

In a similar vein, in 1886 Mrs. Van Rensselaer perceived the W. K. Vanderbilt House in New York (pl. 24), by the French-trained architect Richard Morris Hunt (1827-95), brother of the painter W. M. Hunt, as ". . . the most beautiful house in New York" and added:

> Mr. Hunt has long stood at the head of his profession in America, his preëminence acknowledged not only by ourselves, but by the Frenchmen who elected him one of the seven foreign members of their Academy. So long had we known his learning, his taste, and his ability, that it was an oft-mentioned subject of regret that he should have found no favorable opportunity to show what his idea of a city home would be. So we are all the more thankful that it should have come to him at last. We may pick little faults in his building if we will . . . [but] I think we may greatly rejoice in this sumptuous accumulation of beauty; for, while it is necessary that the virtues and possibilities of simplicity should be preached, it is well to be reminded occasionally that they are not the only virtues or the finest possibili-

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> ties. It is well that we should see that the richest elaboration need not be ostentatious, much less vulgar; that lavish art may be as refined as modest art; that excess means wrong work, not always much work. . . . If we examine his decoration closely . . . we shall see how great an improvement we have made in manual skill. What should have been the use had Mr. Hunt designed such work even a dozen years ago? Can we think with tolerance of how it would then have been translated into stone? 12

Thus, for Mrs. Van Rennselaer, French training offered a means of raising the standards of the home-grown products of American architects, and this was true in relation to painting and sculpture as well. It was the official art world of Paris which provided the stimulus and the exemplary models.

The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer mirrors contemporary popular French taste which was then reflected in official patronage during the Third Republic, which fostered what has been termed "juste milieu art," a compromise style which allowed for the enjoyment of modern innovations involving observations of light and themes taken from everyday life, but executed within traditional form emphasizing structure and draughtsmanship.[13]

That arena offered a wide range of possibilities, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer used that frame of reference to postulate the most rewarding avenues of exploration for American artists. Frequently the works of Americans elucidated in the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer had been featured at Salon exhibitions, and there was a continuing interest in the American art world in the works and ideas

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presented there. Artists from many nations participated in the Paris exhibitions, and from the attention their works received there, Mrs. Van Rensselaer became aware of their varied art forms, which she then introduced to her American readers.[14]

Often French works were exhibited in America, where they inspired reports by Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Such, for example, was the following passage devoted to a still-life by the contemporary French artist Antoine Vollon (1833-1900), called the Chardin of his day:

> . . . we saw simply a pumpkin. But it was a splendid, a regal, an imperial pumpkin; a czar-nay, an Indian rajah among pumpkins; a portly potentate whose gorgeous orange sides took the life and light and beauty out of everything within eyeshot and made us feel that the only things in the world really worth painting were pumpkins. This one had been painted by a famous artist, and it had greatly helped to make him famous. It was the world-renowned pumpkin of Vollon which, as a technical achievement, was the star of a certain Paris Salon years ago, and is perpetually quoted in the studios as one of those supreme successes which other men must try to work up to, but may scarcely even dream of rivalling. Some pictures are so fine that they make the tears come. Others are so fine that only one of Homer's heroes could laugh a just amount of admiration. Vollon's pumpkin is a picture of the latter sort; the thing itself is so homely, yet so superb, and the painter's interpretation is so true yet so bewilderingly audacious.
>
> Whenever I see this picture I cannot help thinking of one which hangs in the museum at Berlin. It is only "attributed" to Velasquez, but if he did not paint it there was once a painter as great as he whom the world has quite forgot. It shows an enormously fat man, with a pig-like face and a girdle that must have been pieced together of two, standing with his vast convex contour in full relief against a marble background and facing the world with a self-satisfied air that would seem conceived in Father Jove. This Velasquez admiral is like the Vollon pumpkin--he makes us laugh, partly from sheer delight that art could be so faithful to an ugly form and yet transfigure it into beauty, and partly because

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> we must assert our own individuality in some conspicuous way. We don't laugh at the pumpkin that we make into pies. But they don't sit up and patronize us, and say they are the finest things in the world, and declare it is lèse majesté to make pies out of pumpkins. This fellow does; he is self-asserting as the big, ugly admiral in Berlin, and I remember no other painted personage who is quite worthy to keep them company. 15

It was the expressiveness of this painting which stimulated the enthusiasm of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who found the quality of "expression" a potentiality of all the arts. She discovered it equally in architecture. Mrs. Van Rensselaer welcomed Richardson's Albany City Hall (pl. 25) for offering ". . . a distinct architectural emotion (that rare thing with modern work!)" and praised the architecture of Richardson's Crane Memoral Library for Quincy, Massachusetts (pl. 26), commissioned in 1880, a free public library where, as Mrs. Van Rensselaer perceived, ". . . the door is made so large, from expressive if not from practical necessity, since here is a building which should distinctly invite the foot of every passer-by."[16] This was written in an important nine-part series of articles for Century concerning "Recent Architecture in America," where in an introductory essay Mrs. Van Rensselaer insisted,

> . . . architecture is, like every other art, first of all a means of expression. [Emphasis supplied.]
> What every true work of art aims at is to express through the representation of something external to himself a meaning or an emotion which the artist feels. . . . 17

It was in the same terms that the sculpture of Augustus Saint-Gaudens was especially valued, as was the work of Daniel Chester French (1850-1931), whose early Thomas Gal-

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laudet Memorial (pl. 27), acclaimed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer (after a private viewing of the group, prior to casting, in the sculptor's New York studio in 1889), represents a monument to the power of expression itself. This richly modeled,[18] life-sized bronze group sculpture depicts the very moment when a child, the deaf and dumb Alice Cogswell, was first able to communicate with her neighbor, Thomas Gallaudet (1787-1851), by means of the system of signs he had taught her. Inspired by his success with his young pupil, Gallaudet went to Paris to study methods used there, and upon his return founded the first free institution for the instruction of deaf-mutes in America. This work was continued by Gallaudet's son, who established the School for the Deaf in Washington, D.C. (the upper grades later to be called Gallaudet College), for which this sculpture was commissioned, funded by contributions from deaf Americans.[19]

The unique circumstances of the commission lent themselves to an expressive tenderness in execution, unusual in monumental public American sculpture and founded on French tradition. (This was the first work created by the sculptor after his stay in Paris.) The means by which one human being communicates with another was the true subject of this monument and related to the sensitivity of the work as a whole. When Mrs. Van Rensselaer placed the force of individual expression as the prime criterion of her art criticism, she incorporated a supposition of emotional response,

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both on the part of the artist towards his subject and in terms of the viewer's reaction to the work of art. At the same time, false sentiment (or sentimentality) was carefully distinguished from this conscious use of sentiment in orchestrating this human response.[20] Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of the Thomas Gallaudet Memorial:

> Not long ago Mr. Daniel C. French, a sculptor who has been living in Boston, but has recently made his home in New York, exhibited in the plaster at his studio . . . [the Gallaudet Memorial]. The composition of the group is at once spirited, natural and graceful; the expression of the heads is delightfully individual yet sincere, and the treatment throughout shows the hand of a skillful artist. The monument seems to me a remarkable one, because it is not only a good piece of work technically considered, but an individual, purposeful and successful conception. The artist had a genuine idea to render and rendered it in a genuinely artistic way. Of how many of the works of our sculptors and pseudo-sculptors can as much be said? How often do we see a statue which is even intelligently handled? And how often one which has a genuine meaning within its forms? I am delighted to have this chance to speak of Mr. French's work, for it is time the New York public knew him better and appreciated his talent. In Boston he has long been favorably known by his "Minute Man" at Concord and his figure of "John Harvard" at Cambridge. But now that he has come to New York, we should quickly look to it that he does some work for us as well. . . . 21

Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer here speaks of talent (rather than genius) and rendering (rather than creation), her critical enthusiasm for the sculptor, based on his power of expression (as well as his expertise), was meaningful. Indeed, French was subsequently commissioned to work on several large-scale public monuments for New York City which continue to enhance the quality of life in this metropolis.[22]

Problems of expression concerned not only artists,

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art critics, and teachers of the deaf and dumb. This period witnessed, on both sides of the Atlantic, systematic attempts at a scientific analysis of expression as well. (See, for example, the photographs of living models attached to electric currents to demonstrate the movement of facial muscles in the 1877 French edition of Charles Darwin's The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals.[23])

At the opposite pole to such seemingly scientific investigation, and closer to the interests of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, was the contemporary concern for religious expression. Art was commissioned by the worldly and cosmopolitan congregations of New York and Boston, then richly supported by treasure reaped from the industrial expansion which followed in the wake of the Civil War. It was an era in which belief was no longer possible within the earlier framework of austere restriction and literal interpretation, and there developed a sumptuous and lyrical mode of church decoration in America, inaugurated with Trinity Church in Boston (1872-97), a wondrous whole by many hands.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was fully aware of religious commissions after 1848 in France (such as found in Paris in Saint Eustache, Saint Sulpice, and the Pantheon). She wrote with respect for the religious paintings of such a pillar of the French Academy as Antoine-Auguste-Ernest Hébert (1817-1908), whom she termed "one of the most interesting figures of contemporary art . . . [a] true religious

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painter," adding:

> Hébert's nature is of a romantic, dreamy, devout, poetic sort. This is the cause, doubtless, and not the result of his Catholicism. He stands entirely outside the present realistic, direct, rather prosaic tendency of art. He stands almost alone to-day . . . as a religious painter by natural tendency and not by deliberate choice. . . . [A painting by Hébert] is not an affectation, and it is not a copy, a pastiche, a willful imitation of something alien to the painter's true self. It is felt to be as genuine and honest as the most realistic canvas . . . and therefore it is truly expressive--even impressive--rendering, and not a sham made tolerable only by technical accomplishment. 24

It was in terms of a concern for expression that Mrs. Van Rensselaer made an eloquent plea to support American artists then eager to create monumental art for American churches. She wrote, as part of a series of nine articles devoted to the historical role of "Art in Our Churches":

> . . . surely the time has come when . . . they . . . need no longer . . . deny the fact that the emotional side of human nature is as God given as the intellectual . . . or the fact that the formative arts are as lawful a medium through which to work as eloquence or music.
>
> There was once, as we all know, a battle over the admission of instrumental music into our services. . . . This battle is so long behind us . . . that we can hardly imagine it to have ever needed fighting. The battle over painted and sculptured art . . . has also been pretty well fought out. There are few to-day, though there were still many even a generation ago, to contest the propriety of coloring a church interior in harmonious tones, filling its windows with beautiful tinted panes, or carving certain portions of it with lovely foliage or conventional designs. . . . But as yet, in non-ritualistic communions, it is beauty in indefinite shapes alone. There is still something more the Church should claim if it would have all its rights. Representative art--the art which works upon the emotions not vaguely but definitely, not lightly but forcibly, and to the arousing of distinct ideas--this now also demands that we should admit it within the portals of the Church. 25

Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote these words as the movement

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for church embellishment gained momentum in America, reflecting the growing dissatisfaction with the traditional austerity of American churches, particularly among Episcopal congregations, which had been among the first to be established in the colonies. During the American Revolution these congregations had become identified with the Tories and had suffered a subsequent decline. However, by the late nineteenth century they once again flourished and represented the wealthy and powerful, who were apparently convinced--by the reasoning of such concepts as those presented by Mrs. Van Rensselaer--to initiate vast church-building projects, thus providing new opportunities for American artists to create monumental art. In 1880, in one of her earliest articles, Mrs. Van Rensselaer championed the introduction of figurative art into church decoration, as well as civic architecture, writing:

> Our churches and public buildings are not as immutable as Egypt, yet they are more permanent than our homes, and their walls are not likely to be obscured by other things. Instances will occur to us all where our highest art has of late been employed upon them [probably referring to such interiors as Trinity Church in Boston (pl. 28) and the Assembly Chamber, New York State Capitol, Albany (pls. 29-30)]. Such are but isolated instances, however, and most commonly we plume ourselves on having "decorated" a vast interior when we have covered it with a meaningless little pattern. . . . Representation, adapted in one way or another, is the only true artistic decoration for our walls. 26

This was not the first time that discussion had taken place in America regarding the suitability of figure painting for church interiors. In 1846, as part of a debate

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then raging, Robert Weir had written:

> . . . the introduction of pictures into our churches is a subject of interest at the present time, when the accusations which have so long and frequently been brought against it as savouring of Romish superstitions, are beginning to give way, and yield to a better and higher estimate of the value of art as a handmaid of Religion; I should be sorry were I found on the side of those whose prejudices would bannish so powerful an auxiliary of the Church from our sacred edifices, or degrade its efforts to the imitation of a kaleidescope, or painted ornaments to carry out an architectural design. . . . [Pictures in the church] should be illustrations of the doctrines and precepts taught, and like sacred music, or devotional books, added to the structure to assist the congregation in pious aspirations. 27

A marked difference in tone can be detected in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's later comments, which project new tenets of religious expression. Secularization appears a potent factor within the church during the last quarter of the nineteenth century--that is, among those with whom Mrs. Van Rensselaer identified. As she explained, in writing of contemporary church architecture:

> With those sects--dominant . . . with us--that have abandoned ritual altogether, the whole character and whole intention of the service have been changed. It is no longer a sacrifice offered for the people by its priests, no longer a gorgeous ceremonial to be but vaguely seen, no longer an elaborate musical rite in a stronger tongue, but a common act in which the laity take a far more direct and personal share, and of which every word must be caught by all. It needs no chapels for a populous pantheon of saints; no spacious chancel for a numerous clergy; no broad aisles for processional pomp and show; and even the altar must change in place as well as purport when it is called a communion table. Moreover, --and this is no unimportant point,--that love of physical comfort which is a peculiarly modern characteristic asks for stationary cushioned seats, for unobstructed sight and sound, for warmth and ventilation, and for thorough lighting both by day and night. . . .
>
> And it is the same with regard to our expressional necessities. The mediaeval architect expressed not some

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> fundamental sentiment common to Christianity as a whole, but the special sentiments of its mediaeval phase, the peculiar mental mood and social state to which those sentiments owed their birth. The church was then the one great social fact and influence that ruled mankind with undisputed sway. It inspired, demanded, and absorbed all the activity of man's more peaceful moods; took the entire tribute not only of his heart, but of his mind and hand and purse. And it absorbed nothing more wholly than art. In its cathedrals was expressed all that we now express in our public buildings, our charitable institutions, our civic adornments, and our sumptuous private homes. Into its treasuries went all those minor works which are now dispersed to a myriad secular ends. Hence the size and richness, the pomp and splendor, the magnificence in effect and the lavish care in detail of a mediaeval sanctuary.
>
> But to-day we have no "church" in the same sense of the word. We have a number of different communions, banded together for the simple purposes of common worship and moral teaching, which are without direct secular influence or importance, and absorb but a part of our mental activity, our artistic energy, or our superabundant wealth. Consider, too, the devotional temper of mediaeval men. Consider their blind unreasoning faith in a thousand things we have long since questioned and denied; consider their mysticism, their love of symbolism and allegory, their passion for the gloomy, the obscure, the terrible, the grotesque, the vague, intangible, vast, and supersensual. 28

Against all this were ranged the criteria of reason, of intellect, and of science. Mediterranean pagan classicism was welcomed into the chilly north. Mrs. Van Rensselaer spiced her text with such expressions as ". . . thanks be to the divinities"[29] and praised such works as the full-bodied reliefs celebrating "The Sacrament of Marriage," which were thought appropriate for the tower of the new Brattle Square Church in Boston[30] (see pl. 23). Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer was brought up within the sterner walls of Presbyterianism, and maintained some connection to this family church until her death, she was attracted to the more

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lavish expression of the contemporary Episcopal church, and much of her art criticism was devoted to dispelling a persistent strain of American puritanical squeamishness. Not only in terms of defending the nude in art against the principles of Anthony Comstock (such as her eloquent plea for Americans to comprehend the value of a splendid nude by Kenyon Cox[32] [see pl. 31]), but also on a more critical level, in awakening the American art public to a multitude of visual delights proscribed by the sterner dicta of the disciples of Ruskin. The sensuous education which Mariana Griswold had enjoyed abroad stood Mrs. Van Rensselaer in good stead as she invited her countrymen to feast upon the banquet being prepared by their artists who were just then returning home with cultivated tastes.

Even in terms of so narrow a field as country architecture, Mrs. Van Rensselaer declared:

> Our more freely social, more lavish, more varied and complex ways of living cannot find full and truthful expression in any colonial pattern, nor our growing love of art full and lawful satisfaction. We still want to be dignified in our architectural voice, still to be refined, still to be quiet; but the dignity, the refinement, and the repose must be of a different character from those which appropriately marked the dwellings of our ancestors. The simpler types among these are extremely puritanical; and I do not think the adjective fits ourselves. 33

Edgar P. Richardson has written of "the thirst with which the descendants of the Puritans now turned to the past for something of splendor and mystery to feed their souls" and noted that "Richardson's rich, massive, vital, monumen-

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tal architecture was the first great artistic expression of the new spirit," asserting further that "buildings like Trinity Church, Boston, are creations of such emotional warmth that organic decoration in sculpture and mural painting was necessary to give them completeness."[34]

In 1885 Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged that Trinity Church was "the most beautiful structure that yet stands on our side of the ocean,"[35] and when a decade later in Boston Copley Square was further enhanced by the new McKim, Mead, and White-designed Public Library, Mrs. Van Rensselaer embraced the complex of architecture, painting, and sculpture, wishing it to be even more exuberant than the Bostonians ultimately allowed.[36] When one of the architects, Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909), offered, as a memorial to his wife, a gift of the over life-sized bronze Bacchante and Infant Faun by his friend Frederick William MacMonnies (1863-1937) to further enrich the library courtyard as the heart of a splashing fountain (see pl. 32), Mrs. Van Rensselaer spoke up, in the face of overwhelming opposition, to defend the sculpture, which was ultimately banished from the library, a victim of such forces as the Women's Christian Temperance Union.[37] It is interesting to follow the debate insofar as it elucidates the principles underlying the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer and the art of her age (as well as the provincialism of Boston).

A few days after the first official announcement of

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McKim's intended gift, the June 1895 issue of Century appeared, published in New York and including an article by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, "The New Public Library in Boston: Its Artistic Aspects," which stated that "MacMonnies' . . . beautiful Bacchante, bought by the French Government for the Luxembourg, is to stand in duplicate on the courtyard fountain."[38] However, within the week it became apparent that this was to become a controversial issue in Boston, igniting an eruption of guilt-ridden response. As just one example, take a single issue of the Boston Evening Transcript dating 1 June 1895 in which was printed the following letter to the editor, under the heading of "Sunday Afternoon in Copley Square":

> My window overlooks Copley Square and I wonder if people whose windows look out on quieter streets have any idea of the immense throng of people, from all parts of the city and suburbs, who wend their way through the beautiful square on a bright Sunday afternoon, pouring in and out of the doors of the Art Museum and Public Library. It is an interesting sight, and one cannot help feeling proud of our beautiful city and its monuments of art and literature, when one beholds this widespread enjoyment and appreciation of them by its citizens.
>
> There is, however, a third building facing Copley Square, noble and grand in its external appearance and commanding much attention. This imposing temple represents religion; and I could not help asking myself, seeing that religion has still greater claims on the interest of mankind than either art or literature, why is it that we do not see the same eager crowd thronging its portals, as we see passing towards the doors of the Art Museum and the Public Library. 39

On the same page another letter-writer objected to the proposed gift of MacMonnies' Bacchante, describing the offending figure as a "furiously dancing, drunken, naked woman"

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and asking, "Why strike this violent note, jarring so discordantly amid the serene and solemn harmonies of the most magnificent work of our day and country?"

The same issue of this newspaper featured a laudatory review of the article on the Boston Public Library, then available in the current issue of Century Magazine, written by Mrs. Van Rensselaer. This notice concluded:

> Mrs. Van Rensselaer truly says that the one thing which more than any other has already made this building famous is the interesting fact that each and every portion of it was "planned with the wish to secure the highest possible degree of beauty, in as many and as varied ways as are consistent with its artistic unity and with respect for its character and its fundamental purpose." Apply this rule to the statue proposed as a gift by McKim for the fountain in the court and the protest of our correspondent today will be fully sustained. Both artistic unity and respect for the character and fundamental purpose of the building are set at nought--kicked into the air, as it were, like the hats of spectators at a cancan by the exquisite and fascinating little fury of MacMonnies' fancy. McKim should keep this lovely thing for some Monplaisir if he should ever indulge his luxurious taste in building a pleasure-palace. 40

Mrs. Van Rensselaer could not let it go at that. The letter which she wrote in response appeared the following week:

> I am sorry that the kind words published last Saturday in the editorial columns of the Transcript in regard to my article in the Century Magazine, about Boston's Public Library, should have been so intimately coupled with the expression of a belief that MacMonnies's statue of a Bacchante will be inappropriate to its proposed place on the fountain in the library courtyard. I know, of course, that it was not intended that I should seem actually to share in the responsibility for this belief. But readers often read carelessly and draw conclusions not intended by writers; and therefore I feel impelled to say with distinctness that I do not think that the words quoted from my article ought to be construed as a "rule" condemning the Bacchante figure as an inappropri-

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ate ornament for your library building.

I consider any work of art "consistent with respect for the character" of this building which is beautiful in itself and, according to the laws of artistic styles and developments, is in artistic harmony with its environment: and I consider any such work of art consistent with "the fundamental purpose" of the building which is not immoral or vulgar in feeling, this purpose being, as I tried to explain in my Century article, to spread and develop the love of beauty as well as the love of knowledge.

Knowing the MacMonnies figure well, I esteem it one of the most beautiful, as well as one of the most individual and interesting works of sculpture that has been produced in modern times: and this view has evidently been shared by the highest authorities in France, as they have purchased a duplicate of it for the Luxembourg galleries. Of course, this fact might not be so readily accepted as evidence of the freedom of any piece of work from vulgarity or immorality in feeling. But I do not think that the Bacchante ought to be thought in any degree immoral, vulgar, "wild" or "drunken." It is not, I think the figure of a "fury," even an "enchanting fury." It is simply an enchantingly frank and free, spirited and innocent embodiment of what the French call la joie de vivre--of that unselfconscious abandonment to the pleasure of sinless physical existence which is best titled, perhaps, by the term "Arcadian." As such it may perhaps shock certain narrow-visioned Puritanical eyes; but it is just such eyes as these which need to be opened and clarified by the influence of really great and pure art of every kind.

The letter from a correspondent which prompted the remarks in your editorial column was confessedly written by a person who had never seen the statue--only a reproduction of it in a newspaper. Moreover, if she had looked a little into the precedents of classic and classicizing art, she would have found that a Bacchante may symbolize innocently sensuous as well as sensual physical joy. And had she carried her researches into the character and development of classic myths a little further, she would have found that Bacchus was not merely that god of drunkenness, that patron of immoral revelry, . . . and not merely the embodiment of innocent sensuous joy. For example, the Century "Cyclopaedia of Names" would have told her that "In Attica the rural and somewhat savage cult of Bacchus underwent a metamorphosis and reached its highest expression in the choragic literary contests in which originated both tragedy and comedy, and for which were written most of the masterpieces of the Greek literature. Bacchic festivals were sometimes drunken revels, but they were also those noble and

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> serious Athenian festivals when the solemn masterpieces of Aeschylus and Sophocles were presented to a reverent public.
>
> This fact certainly seems to give the figure of a votary of Bacchus some abstract title to a place in a library building. But, after all, the name of a work of art does not greatly matter. Its intrinsic beauty, its intrinsic meaning, are the important things. This figure of MacMonnies's, no one will deny, is extraordinarily beautiful, and I think most observers will agree with me that in expression it is entirely innocent--that it is the figure of a joyous Arcadian girl innocently playing with the very delightful baby whom she bears on her shoulder . . . I am sure that it will be a great misfortune for your community if it is prejudiced against this charming work of art by protests in regard to an immorality which I cannot think that it exhibits, either actually or symbolically.
>
> I trust that as the Transcript editorially affirmed that the "rule" which I had explained as the guiding rule of the library's projectors would, if conscientiously applied, exclude this statue from the building, you may find place for a letter, even though it be unduly long, which makes it plain that I do not by any means feel in the same way. And I hope that this place may be in a Saturday's issue, in order that those who, like myself, live outside of Boston and yet read a weekly account of its doings and sayings, may all recognize my real attitude towards a question with which my name has been associated. 41

The rebuttal of Mrs. Van Rensselaer derived from carefully summoned references to authority, the chief criteria of this age in which originality was not deemed to have the first priority.

This debate about the MacMonnies sculpture took place in Boston, home ground of American Puritanism, a university town where culture was an afterthought to the production of ministers. The exuberance of the urban civic expansion around Copley Square had gradually made manifest the growing secularization of the age, and MacMonnies' Bacchante had acted as a lightening rod for all the smoldering provincial resentments lying dormant beneath the pilings.

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There had always been a painterly and visionary tradition kept alive in Boston, from the time of Gilbert Stuart through Washington Allston, William Page, William Morris Hunt, and George Fuller. It was in Boston that the French Barbizon painters were most enthusiastically received (finding more substantial patronage there, sometimes, than even in France[42]). Many of the aesthetic preferences of Mrs. Van Rensselaer were consonant with Boston taste, particularly a delight in French Barbizon painting which contributed to her criticism of American landscape art:

> To deserve the name the artist must be an interpreter, not a mere record maker, topcgrapher--must be an intermediary between the spirit of nature and the spirit of man . . . behind whatever accomplishment of hand and accuracy of observation they may show--and these are often great--they show other qualities as well; qualities of feeling, of indivdual sentiment, which entitle their work to be called poetic; however unconscious they themselves may be of any right to the title. 43

From the Boston point of view there was a connection between the ethos of Barbizon and their own Transcendentalists of nearby Concord, and when record auction prices for French Barbizon pictures were reached in Paris and New York in the 1880s, at the same time as Mrs. Van Rensselaer published in New York extensive critical appraisals of Barbizon art, it represented in terms of American art criticism a marked Boston influence on the New York art world. Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of "the great poetic school of the last generation in France . . . which . . . was the only true and great school our century has seen; that is, which included the only body of painters who, with a common aim and common character (distinct from any that before had been expressed) were each and all individual in feeling and

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in manner of expression. . . ."[44] American artists who continued to paint "in the Barbizon Mood" (often with some Boston connection) received frequent acclaim in the art columns of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who made known to the world the qualities of the painter George Fuller (1822-84) and was called upon to write the Memorial Exhibition catalogue essay for the Boston Museum at his death. Mrs. Van Rensselaer stressed Fuller's Boston ties:

> . . . to me Fuller's art is not only American but distinctly local. It has an aroma--I will not say of Boston but perhaps of Concord. It is a painter's version of the delicate "transcendental" New England poesy that is fast dying out of this generation. . . . 45

Many of the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer were inspired by exhibitions staged in Boston (such as the article on Washington Allston, 1779-1843, which was mulled over for some eight years after a Boston exhibition), and she consistently championed the work of artists who had found, initially, more welcome reception in Boston than elsewhere in America--artists such as Gustave Courbet (1819-77) as well as Frank Duveneck (1848-1919), John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), Edmund Charles Tarbell (1862-1938), and Frank Weston Benson (1862-1951).[46] Much of what Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote was published in Boston, and she was a public speaker there, as well as a benefactor of Harvard University. No doubt, the spirit of reform which motivated much of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's activity in New York had roots in the Boston of Transcendental ethics and active political morality. These ideas were not new in Boston and represented the ideals of an earlier age perpetuated, as did the retrospective stance which characterizes much of the writing of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. (Often it was the recent death of an artist which provided the

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stimulus for the publication of writings on his art, so that Mrs. Van Rensselaer was frequently writing about the achievements of a previous generation.[47])

In a sense, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was a part of the Boston art world, and yet she participated in it as an outsider. This position accounts for the tone of such passages as those she addressed to the Boston public on behalf of MacMonnies' Bacchante (quoted above) as well as her vigorous defense of another controversial work, the monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the first black volunteer regiment in the North in the Civil War by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.[48]

The tradition of Bostonian visionary idealism led Mrs. Van Rensselaer to belittle the kind of counting-house naturalism which dominated mid-century painting and had notably characterized the American contribution to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. As a critic, from the time of her first art publication, Mrs. Van Rensselaer mocked the standard-bearer, John Ruskin, one of the most influential writers on art read in America:

> Mr. Ruskin is without doubt the most remarkable of English critics, and summarizes so many opposite theories and tendencies that his pages may in some sort be taken as an epitome of the whole matter. It would be impossible to abstract from their great bulk any consecutive or consistent system of thought or precept. His influence has been maintained by isolated ideas of more or less truth and value. It is impossible here to analyze his work. Such is the mixed tissue of his woof that the captive princess who was set to sort a roomful of birds' feathers had scarcely a harder task than one who should try to separate and classify his threads, some priceless and steady, some rotten, false, misleading. Morals, manners, religion, political economy, are mixed with art in every shape--art considered theoretically and technically, historically, philosophically and prophetically. Various as are his views on these varying subjects, on one subject even do they remain invariable. Yet such is

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the charm of his style, delightfully sarcastic, and eloquent as a master's brush, so vividly is each idea presented in itself, that each idea being enjoyed as it comes, all seem at first of equal value. We realize neither the fallacy of many taken singly nor the conflict of all taken together. His points are often cleverly and faithfully put, and our attention is so riveted on this cleverness and faithfulness that we take for granted the rightness of his deductions, slovenly, illogical or false though they may be. What we most remark in his book is how the purely artistic element in his nature--of a very high grade and very true instincts--is dwarfed of full development and stunted of full results by the theorizing literary bent which he has in common with his time and people. In theorizing even on truly-felt and clearly-stated facts, in explaining their origin and unfolding their effects, his guidance is least valuable. We may more safely ask him what than why. His influence on English art has been great at the instant: whether it will be permanent is doubtful. At one time it was said that without having read his books one could tell by an inspection of the Royal Academy walls what Mr. Ruskin had written in the past year. Now, the most notable exponents of his teaching, whether consciously so or not, are on the one hand the shining lights of the Grosvenor Gallery--hicrophants of mysticism and allegory and symbolism and painted souls and moral beauty expressed in the flesh, copying Ruskin's Botticelli line for line, forgetting that what was naïveté in him, and in him admirable, because all before him had done so much less well, becomes to-day in them the direst affectation, is reprehensible in them because many before them have done so much better. On the other hand, we have a naturalistic throng which follows Mr. Ruskin's precepts when he overweights the other side of the scale and says that art should "never exist alone, never for itself," never except as "representing a true"--defined as actually-existing--"thing or decorating a useful thing;" when he declares that every attempt by the imagination to "exalt or refine healthy humanity has weakened or caricatured it." Mr. Ruskin bade men "go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thought but how best to penetrate her meaning, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing;" and Mr. Hamerton was literally obeying him when he exiled himself for five years in a hut on an island in a bleak Scotch lake to learn faithfully to portray the shores of that single lake. Was it thus that Titian studied in his youth, and learned how, years after in Venice, to paint the chestnuts and the hills of Cadore a thousand-fold more artistically and more truly,

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> because more abstractly and more ideally, than could all the "pre-Raphaelite" copyists of to-day? Thus we see the two extremes of Mr. Ruskin's teaching--see him at one time exalting imagination and feeling over the pictorial part of art, at another degrading art into the servilest copying. 49

When an exhibition of drawings by Ruskin appeared in Boston and New York in 1880, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was moved to write a caustic letter which was published in the American Architect and Building News:

> Before seeing Mr. Ruskin's drawings curiosity was rife to know which phase of his varied pen-work would be found repeated by his pencil and his brush. We had been told a great deal about his technical ability,--especially since the Whistler controversy,--we had read a great deal about the qualities he deems necessary in the work of others, we heard a great deal about his courses of practical advice to students, and we looked for some decisive element in his handiwork by which we might judge the value of his theories, some characteristic excellence or defect with which those theories would stand or fall. But when seen, the wisest criticism is found to take a negative tone . . . there is not a picture among them. . . . He starts with labored imitations of other men, and ends with labored imitations of nature, --all thought out and done by rule. . . . 50

Mrs. Van Rensselaer then compared the drawings on exhibition with Ruskin's words about them, printed in the catalogue, and concluded by questioning "the probable value of his opinions in a wider field."

Mrs. Van Rensselaer equated Ruskin's limitations with those of naturalistic artists, writing:

> There are critics, I know, who profess to look upon . . . personality of the artist as superfluous, if not impertinent, in a work of art. Ruskin, in the more didactic of his many moods, is a good example. He tells us then that the artist should sink himself entirely in the things he renders, being no more than nature's humble, faithful copyist. Certain painters, likewise,--devotees of the so-called "realistic" schools,--have expressed

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> the utmost disgust at the idea of putting anything of themselves into the work in hand. But the first froth of Ruskin's influence has blown away; and all the declarations of the realists cannot longer blind us to the fact that their practice contradicts their precepts; --no one declaimed in louder words against personality in art than Courbet, yet few painters have ever put themselves more plainly upon canvas. So I think I shall hardly provoke discussion when I affirm that the suggested temperament of the artist is one of the most precious qualities that a work of art can have. 51

In discussing Antonio Correggio (1494-1534), Mrs. Van Rensselaer offered her contemporaries an approach to the art of this Renaissance master by vaulting the barriers established by Ruskinian criticism:

> All agree that no one can behold his figures "without a sensation of pleasure;" but some of them protest that it is an immoral sensation. There was once a pietistic prince who cut the head out of a copy of Correggio's "Leda" because he thought it "abominable" in expression. And Mr. Ruskin, perhaps, would not have condemned his act, for he calls the "Antiope" of the Louvre [pl. 33] an example of the "highest seventh circle" in "that whole vast false heaven of sensual passion, full of nymphs, graces, goddesses, and I know not what." Bluntness of perception speaks in these words. One of the first things a man should learn--if he does not feel it by instinct--when he addresses himself to the study of art is that sensuousness is not sensuality. . . . Correggio's work is never solemn or profound in a moral way; but it never shows a trace of . . . frivolity, . . . [or] meretricious glitter. . . . Sensual art may be noble and perfect as art--though blameworthy from the moralist's point of view--if conceived with dignity, sincerity, and strength. . . . Correggio was in earnest when he painted, whether his earnestness resembles what ours would be or not. His figures are not divine, but though mundane they are never worldly. The spirit of his art is not of heaven, but it dwells in Arcadia, and when we say Arcadia we say sensuous, but healthy and sincere. If his pictures are found unwholesome for our eyes, the fault is less theirs than ours. We have Puritan blood in our veins and can never forget that Adam fell. When we find ourselves in Arcady we try to believe that it is Eden, and when we see that it is not we decide it must be Babylon of the prophets.
>
> The key-note of Correggio's art is a vidid, intense,

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> yet tender and voluptuous delight in the mere fact of physical existence. 52

Even before the ideas of Ruskin took hold, Americans had difficulty accepting such paintings. John Vanderlyn had copied Correggio's Antiope as early as 1809, and it had inspired him to paint his own nude Ariadne (which created a scandal when exhibited in America[53]). Certainly, provincialism has never been an exclusive monopoly of Americans. (Recall the tittering Frenchmen before this same Correggio Antiope in Zola's memorable account of a wedding party visiting the Louvre in L'Assommoir of 1877.) But Mrs. Van Rensselaer dedicated her efforts to eliminating provincialism in America. In dismissing the precepts of Ruskin, Mrs. Van Rensselaer defined the new criteria of her time:

> . . . the morality or the lack of morality of a work of art [consists] . . . not, as is so often stated, in the subject which it actually presents to our eyes, but in the frame of mind it inspires in us through the keyboard upon which it plays--through those notes of emotion and of ocular delight which it alone can touch, and by which all the other springs of our mental being are more or less put in motion. 54

The ideas projected by the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer reflect the struggle between an inherited Puritanism and an expanded consciousness which was the result of the affluence and mobility of a new cosmopolitan age. Mrs. Van Rensselaer personally enjoyed the company of artists and poets, journalists and theatrical personalities, self-styled "Bohemians" of the American art world, whose companionship represented a marked contrast to the staid

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society of her own family.[55] Mrs. Van Rensselaer's taste in art was no doubt affected by a sense of release from restriction that encompassed an appetite for Correggio and Rubens.

The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer maintained the notion widespread in mid-nineteenth-century America that art be uplifting, but interpreted it in a more worldly and secular fashion in which was expressed an unbridled delight in bounteous forms and opulent embellishment, conceived not as an afterthought, but as an integral part of original creation. In this, the criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer was diametrically opposed to the ideas of Ruskin, which she explicitly rejected in writing on architecture:

> . . . decoration can never make a good work of architecture,-- . . . decoration cannot even be considered apart from constructive forms. It must grow from them, depend upon them, follow their lead and enforce their speech. . . . For not abstract beauty . . . but beautiful expression is the architect's concern, in the final ornamentation as in the first planning of his work. . . .
>
> If these things be true,--and I think they cannot be questioned,--we feel at once the falsity of the belief . . . that building and architecture are two different things, that delight alone is the object of the latter, and (consequently upon the first decision) is to be attained through superficial decoration--through the addition of what Mr. Ruskin, who champions this belief, actually calls "unnecessary features." From this mistaken theory, consciously or unconsciously held, have come not only most of the stupidity and vacillation of modern criticism, but much of the poverty and falseness

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> of modern work itself. No; building and architecture are not to be divorced. The chief elements in architectural beauty, as in architectural strength and fitness, are structural elements. 56

As late as 1916, during the devastation of World War I, Mrs. Van Rensselaer again attacked the pernicious ideas of Ruskin, this time as being at the root of a false idealization of war. Ruskin had written in The Crown of Wild Olive, "All the pure and noble arts of peace are founded on war. . . . No great art ever yet rose on earth but among a nation of soldiers. . . . There is no great art possible to a nation but what is based on battle." Ruskin used the example of Egypt to support his assertion that only war can make great art possible, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer questioned his understanding and countered:

> . . . it is worth while taking some trouble to understand how far were the Egyptians and their art from Ruskin's idea of them; for if we understand that the very first and one of the very greatest developments of art, one of the few that include a great and characteristic form of architecture, was produced by a peculiarly peaceable and peaceful, an essentially unwarlike nation, we need not follow the inquiry down through the complications of later centuries. We have proof enough that war is not necessary as the seed-bed of art. 57

Thus, from first to last, the art criticism of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer was based on a rejection of Ruskinian values and waged with an arsenal of contrasting formal criteria.

The perceptive portrait relief of Mrs. Van Rensselaer by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (pl. 1) bears the inscription: ANIMUS·NON·OPUS (the spirit, not the work). No more appro-

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priate motto could have been chosen for the portrait of this critic who, above all other considerations, valued soulful expression, breadth, and immediacy--what she herself termed "emotion and ocular delight." The writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer reveal a penchant for nuance and tone, for musing moods and celebrations of the evanescent. "Soul" in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's lexicon was not limited to the framework of religious expression. It was a quality praised in the genre paintings of Charles Frederick Ulrich (1858-1908) (pl. 34), in the figure paintings of J. Alden Weir (1852-1919) (pl. 35), in the early landscapes of George Inness (1825-94) (pl. 36), and even the inventions of Correggio, whose spirit Mrs. Van Rensselaer accurately depicted as completely pagan.[58]

While charmed by the early works of John Singer Sargent, she cautioned,

> He is immensely clever, this young man; whether he will rank among the great painters of our time seems to depend only upon the question whether he will show himself possessed of more soul, of more individuality of feeling than he has yet revealed. 59

Related to the concept of "soul" is that of "sentiment." For example, in writing of Rembrandt's portrait called The Gilder (pl. 37), which she welcomed as "the finest picture that has ever come to us from Europe," Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted:

> Rembrandt was something more than a great painter. He was a great artist--a man who . . . thought and felt profoundly, and in an individual manner, as well as painted beautifully. A picture by him differs from all pictures by other hands, in sentiment as greatly as it differs in execution. . . . No man ever painted who was

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> so great a master as he of facial expression--who could so adequately represent, through external features, the varied workings of the soul within. . . .
>
> It is this power of expression which brings his art so closely home to modern minds. The great Italians we admire and love and understand, but with a certain feeling of remoteness, a feeling that however a modern man might paint, he would never paint . . . like them. But Rembrandt seems to paint exactly as we might and should--exactly as we would if we only could. And the reason is that to care for the soul more than for the body, and to care for the passionate and complicated more than for the calm and simple moods of the soul, is the great characteristic of the modern world in art of every kind . . . [such as] the Millet's, the Courbet's, the Corot's, the Turner's, who think first of the soul, the sentiment of things, and secondly of their loveliness or purity or grace of form. . . . 60

This emphasis on sentiment in no way blinds Mrs. Van Rensselaer to the formal qualities of the work, for the greater part of her discussion of Rembrandt's The Gilder is devoted to such considerations:

> No portrait could be more simply conceived . . . there is no note of bright color save the intense red of the lips; yet the picture is as remarkable for true coloristic beauty as for splendor of chiar-oscuro and perfection of drawing and mastery of execution. . . . Strong and splendid as is the effect of light in this portrait, all local colors are perfectly preserved, and to those who believe that "tone means plenty of bitumen" or that a generally brown tone means of necessity a dull or dark result, this canvas may be recommended as a sure cure for all heresies of the sort. Such delicious warmth and richness of tone combined with such truth and such strength in tint, Rembrandt and only Rembrandt could have wrought--and Rembrandt only in his finest period.
>
> Doubtless it would take the eye of an artist fully to appreciate the exquisite truth of the modeling of the head--the unforced and yet complete way in which the planes of the face are indicated, and the perspective of the cheek accurately developed. . . .
>
> [Mrs. Van Rensselaer also admired] the relief given to the figure, the way in which it is surrounded by a palpable atmosphere, and not merely illuminated by light, but actually bathed therein . . . to detach a figure from its surroundings and yet keep the relationship true and vital between them; to bathe it in invisible air and yet

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> show this air as the intangible subtile medium it is--neither a vacuum nor a mist--this is the true triumph. . . .

The Gilder was the most costly Old Master treasure to be imported up to that time in America, and it remained with the dealer Schaus for several years. However, after this painting received the critical attention exemplified by this passage by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, it was acquired by the Havemeyers[61] and ultimately left to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, where it has remained accessible to the public ever since. The driving motivation behind all of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings was to further the public good and, insofar as these efforts were directed towards questions of art, there was no goal more fundamental than the desire to enrich the public treasury with the finest works procurable. Second to that, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote to enlarge the capacity of Americans to comprehend the great in art, so that such works as Rembrandt's Gilder were valued as standard-bearers.

A marked contrast to such Rembrandt portraits was found in the naturalistic portraits, so fashionable in her own time, which were discussed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in terms of their limitations. For example, she cited a portrait by the popular French painter Léon Bonnat (1834-1922):

> Dark hair, a severe black dress with a single pale flower and an unvaried blackness of background, from which the face, bust, and arms glow with almost exaggerated whiteness. . . . One who desires "characteristic art" must be amply satisfied with this picture, for if ever the nineteenth century can be incorporated in art it is here so incorporated with the utmost talent;

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> clever, brilliant, practical, hard, and cold. Both subject and treatment are not only of the earth, earthy,--one may be that and still be tender and poetical and sensuously divine,--but of the world, worldly. 62

Expressive feeling was the most important element of any work of art in the judgment of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, and she looked for it in the most varied forms. She was particularly eager to find it in ". . . the straightforward unvarnished portrayal of modern life in its ordinary aspects" and explicitly distinguished this admiral quality of sentiment from that of sentimentality when she discovered it in such works as Summer Afternoon in Holland[63] (pl. 38), a painting which Mrs. Van Rensselaer described as made with distemper, by William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), in which she found

> . . . sufficient sentiment to make the realism art and not photography . . . not sentimentality and not "literary" subject matter, but some feeling and idea upon the artist's part which should excite our feeling and awaken our interest in return . . . the painter had wished to reproduce an aspect and a mood of warm, languorous, aimless indolence; and he had succeeded--in his figures as well as in his atmosphere and color. And the fact that no definite title strove to accentuate or enforce this sentiment was a great advantage. 64

Praising the technical merits of the work, Mrs. Van Rensselaer places primary importance, however, on the expressive intent, writing,

> To succeed in painting air and sun-light implies, I think, that the painter had had artistic feeling as well as artistic eye and hand; implies the presence in his organization of something more personal and more sensitive and more emotional than is implied in the good painting of anything else save only the human face with a soul behind it.

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Here Mrs. Van Rensselaer values the artist's obsession with sunlight for its emotive possibilities (rather than the "scientific" aspiration so often associated with French Impressionist pictures equally concerned with sunlight). In doing so Mrs. Van Rensselaer perpetuates an approach to nature and art as keyed to human feeling. In like manner she prized such different works as the parks of F. L. Olmsted (". . . scenery which is to be looked upon contemplatively, and is productive of musing moods"), the innovative stained glass and the large figurative wall paintings by John LaFarge, the smallest Whistler etchings, and the monumentalized peasant genre paintings of a type popularized by the Paris Salon exhibitions.[65]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer maintained the greatest respect for one of the prime creators of the latter genre, Jules Breton (1827-1905), long after other critical attention had been focused elsewhere. She wrote:

> We have still some true poets among the more prosaic artists, the masterly technicians of our time. This the name of Breton is enough to prove. Technically he is very strong, but underneath his splendid, massive brush work lies a fund of true poetry and deep feeling. . . . [66]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer followed the work of this artist for years, both in Europe and America, and when Breton's Evening in a Hamlet of Finisterre (pl. 39) was exhibited in Brooklyn Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:

> How well I remember the effect of this picture when it hung on the Salon wall in 1882. What an oasis of poetry it was in the dry, if brilliant, desert of technical accomplishment--uninfused by sentiment, unvivified by

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> feeling--which spread about it. There is no definite action in its groups, no story told, no lesson preached. Yet how it shows the life, the surroundings, the human natures that the painter saw, and the feelings they inspired in him. It tells us more than could volumes of description. Only art of one kind or another can speak with so much force. And Breton's art is here as perfect, as speaking, as tenderly sympathetic as was Grey's when he rhymed his Elegy. 67

This was painting of the greatest value to Mrs. Van Rensselaer, although she wrote with respect for accomplishments of another kind as well. For example, the Salon of 1882, which featured the Breton Evening in a Hamlet of Finisterre, also established the reputation of a young American artist who had been drawn to Barbizon to work in homage to Millet, G. Ruger Donoho (1857-1916), whose widely acclaimed Marcellerie, now in the Brooklyn Museum, elicited the following comments by Mrs. Van Rensselaer when it was exhibited in America after its Salon success:

> It is not landscape art after the fashion of the elder French school, with its preponderance of sentiment and personal feelings. It is like a glimpse out of a window--as near the actual thing as art can manage, yet thoroughly artistic in effect. 68

This perceptive comment clearly acknowledges the direction of Donoho's development, for he was, despite Barbizon inspiration, an American Impressionist painter.[69] However, such priorities were to interest Mrs. Van Rensselaer less, and she bowed out as an art critic as such approaches began to dominate the American art world, and we find no comment on Donoho's later work, and little on Impressionism, although whatever she did write of it represented an attempt to deal

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objectively with what she considered a clearly legitimate mode. Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer was among the first to write of French Impressionism in America, it was always by way of explaining an odd and curious phenomenon.[70] Enthusiasm was reserved for other approaches.

Although the treatment of light in a work was frequently discussed in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, it was never for its own sake, as can be seen in her commentary on Breton. She was primarly concerned with the human expression of Breton's work, and she judged his formal means--such as his manipulation of light--in that context. For example, this was the way Mrs. Van Rensselaer discussed Breton's Le Dernier Rayon (The Last Ray) (pl. 40), which was featured at the Paris Salon of 1885:

> . . . The arrangement of light is the main point in the picture . . . [the group composed of the grandparents and the grandchild] is covered by the cold gray shadow of the cottage wall, while . . . [the group of the peasants returning to home after work in the fields] is illuminated by the warm red rays of the setting sun. The combination of the two effects with such perfect truth, and yet such perfect pictorial harmony, could hardly . . . have been accomplished by any other hand; and scarce any other could so perfectly have rendered the suggested sentiment--could have made it so strong and touching and yet kept it so pure from any taint of sentimentality or theatrical affectation. The attitudes, and expressions of the young parents, and still more those of the aged grandparents, are as natural and unforced as they are individual and affecting; and a wonderful skill is shown in the figure of the young girl, whose smiling interest we feel as clearly . . . though only her back and a bit of her cheek are visible. . . .

Mrs. Van Rensselaer concluded,

> . . . it is only the newest generation of Frenchmen who

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> are deficient in sentiment. . . . Jules Breton . . . still survives from an elder generation. And he does much more than survive--he seems to develop year by year into greater charm of sentiment on the one hand, and greater mastery of technical difficulties on the other. 71

Breton was a poet as well as an artist, and he often wrote verse to accompany his paintings. The emphasis on light in this passage by Mrs. Van Rensselaer parallels that of Breton himself in his related poem, "Les Champs et la Mer."[72]

The following year Mrs. Van Rensselaer admired a Breton work (pl. 41), ". . . a very beautiful example, showing peasant women gathering hemp at sunset,"[73] which was then up for auction and has since been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum, which has exhibited it only once in the twentieth century, and then only as a source for Van Gogh. Now called The Weeders, this picture is a replica of a Breton featured at the Paris Salon of 1861.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's estimate of the value of Breton's work is in marked contrast to that of critics of the generations before and after hers. Clarence Cook, for example, dismissed Breton's "studio peasants," "sentimentality that passed for poetry," and "tendency to idealize,"[74] while the hostility of later criticism was sufficient to ban the works from museum walls.

The paintings of Jules Breton have long since been relegated to museum storerooms with cavalier, unilateral condemnation on the part of curators entrusted with their

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care. As reported in a newspaper clipping of 1934 (the year of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's death), this was the manner in which these canvases have been hidden from view:

> "The Song of the Lark" may be the most frequently reproduced picture in America, as authorities say, but the Art Institute of Chicago, which owns the original Jules Breton canvas, has given it a flunking grade as art and put it in the storeroom.
>
> It isn't well painted, the institute's director declared some months ago, and down came the picture that for years was regarded as the most popular in the institute.
>
> So the toiling French peasant girl with the sickle, who paused at dawn to look skyward and listen, is now in retirement, sharing the fate of hair sofas and crinolines. . . .
>
> However, [there are] reproductions of the Breton painting in the institute sales department. Post-card copies of the painting are still the best selling number of all the reproductions obtainable here.
>
> No, there isn't a doubt that the customers of the institute want to see the painting, and the institute wants customers. But there are limits to which a director should go in conceding to popular demand, believes Mr. Robert B. Harshe, the institute's chief. The director's duty is to elevate the artistic standards of the community, not merely to give it what the public thinks it wants, he holds. People would not expect the conductor of a great orchestra to include "Swanee River" in his symphony programs at frequent intervals just because it is a favorite song with sentimental appeal, Mr. Harshe observes, and the case of this picture he thinks is parallel.
>
> As a precedent for the Chicago museum's policy, there is the example of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, which a few years ago found it no longer had room for "Washington Crossing the Delaware" and "The Horse Fair" of Rosa Bonheur, and so caused quite a flurry. The Chicago museum is seriously overcrowded, it is true, and 100 or more better pictures, so Mr. Harshe says, have had to share the storeroom with the Breton canvas, among them a noted Inness, "The Home of the Heron," also frequently reproduced.
>
> However, none of the others, whatever its artistic rank, can claim the affectionate devotion which has been won by the country maid painted 50 years ago by Jules Breton. 75

Another such artist was P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret

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(1852-1929), whose works were also collected in America and noted in the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. For example, she commented on

> one fine work of the most recent and most realistic school . . . imported by Mr. Schaus . . . a picture by Dagnan-Bouveret, exhibited at the Salon a year or two ago [1881], and called "An Accident" [pl. 42]. It showed a small peasant who had injured his hand and was having it bound up by the young village doctor, while a group of more or less sympathetic elders watched the operation. Fine in composition, low in tone yet good in color, and extremely strong in handling, the chief merit of this remarkable canvas was yet in its rendering of character. Such genre painting as this is very far from being literary in its interest. We need no description, no title to make us perceive all the painter's intentions, to take us at once into the presence of the actual scene. One felt that the characters of all the personages present--from the pale, half-fainting, yet plucky boy, with his twisting eyes fixed on the doctor's face, to the anxious grand-mother, the men with their different degrees of sympathy or indifference, or the doctor himself, seen from the back with only a bit of his cheek and his clever hands in view, yet instinct with professional enthusiasm in every line--might be interpreted by a study of this canvas as well as by a study of their actual flesh and blood. 76

This painting was acquired by the Walters Collection in Baltimore, and almost a decade later a smaller version was exhibited in New York. This time Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented:

> There are not so many figures as in Mr. Walters's picture, and their arrangement is different. But the smaller canvas is not inferior to the larger; indeed, I think it is superior in one respect, for the face of the surgeon is shown, while in the other version we saw only his back, and its characterization is as admirable as that of the lad. . . . Dagnan is one of the greatest painters of our day and his management of a low yet not dark scheme of color is as admirable in this picture as his handling. No kind of execution could be better than this; it "tells" strongly across a big room, and yet when we examine it close at hand we find that it renders detail in a very complete way. It is impossible, of course, to describe work like Dagnan's in words; but whenever possible it should be studied to learn how a

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> great master of the brush can be at once broad and delicate, emphatic and refined. 77

The cosmopolitan scope of the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is revealed in the natural way in which she was able to discuss such paintings as models for Americans and, at the same time, comprehend them in the international context of European art. Mrs. Van Rensselaer concluded her note on the Dagnan-Bouveret later in the Walters Collection:

> No one, I think, but Munkácsy could have painted such a scene in quite so artistic, strong, and speaking a way, and indeed the art of the younger painter [Dagnan-Bouveret] has much affinity with Munkácsy's. We have had no Munkácsys imported for us this year [1883] as far as I have seen, but this canvas of Dagnan-Bouveret's must have gone far to console his admirers for the fact. 78

Mihaly Munkácsy (1844-1900) was a Hungarian artist (inspired by Courbet, Millet, and the Barbizon painters, as well as by his contemporary, Leibl) who had worked in Munich and Dusseldorf and had sent paintings to the Paris Salon which won him such international fame that he then settled in Paris. Munkácsy attracted students, several Americans among them. Mrs. Van Rensselaer compared Munkácsy's landscapes to those of Inness and wrote with appreciation for his contributions to the Salon as a young artist (though she was to have great reservations about his sensational later works which toured in America to the accompaniment of promotional theatrics).

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was moved to write her first words on Munkácsy by rage induced by the Ruskinian criticism of Clarence Cook, who had dismissed the works of this artist

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for being factually inaccurate. Mrs. Van Rensselaer, as a twenty-eight-year-old novice art critic, expressed the greatest disillusion with the venerable critic of the New York Tribune, who had personally been interested in the doings of the new wave of American artists gathered about the Society of American artists, but had critically been consistently mired in the dictates of the idol of his youthful years, Ruskin. The occasion was the first public exhibit in New York, in 1879, of a painting which had been awarded a medal at the 1878 Salon and which now graces the grand stairway of the New York Public Library. Mrs. Van Rensselaer sent off the following article to the American Architect and Building News:

> Munkácsy's Milton dictating Paradise Lost to his Daughters [see pl. 43] has now been some weeks on view at the Lenox Library. Within my recollection no single picture has excited such general interest in New York. Artists and laymen have alike flocked to see it, and this although it is peculiarly difficult of access . . . where it necessitates a special pilgrimage and a special previous application for admission tickets--an application which has, unfortunately, to be repeated before each and every visit. This picture is so well known by reputation that to write in its praise would seem superfluous, were it not that it has recently been so severely handled by one influential paper that praise now becomes almost of necessity defence as well. The art critic of the New York Tribune has long been looked upon as the cleverest and most instructive of the American press. The general reader turns to him for trustworthy lessons, and our youngest, most promising school of artists for intelligent sympathy and comprehension. Often, also, they accept from him criticism and correction, such as they would heed from no one else. When, therefore, the Tribune criticized Munkácsy's picture very harshly, its words, standing opposed to the universal verdict, professional and amateur, created general surprise. The gist of the criticism is that Munkácsy, whose first noted picture (The Last Day of a Condemned Man) [pl. 44]

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led us to believe that he was "a dramatic painter with a special message of his own to communicate," has now . . . "entered the ranks of the painters of costume, furniture, and bric-à-brac, and left the story of humanity" to be interpreted by others. . . . It is impossible to do justice to the vehemence of this condemnation without quoting the whole of this long paper. . . . [He wrote] there is nothing in the painting to enjoy for its beauty; we must be content to praise it for its skill. . . ." One can hardly believe, reading these last words, that some of us have been greatly indebted to the critic's own teaching for the realization of the fact that skill is beauty in a painting. . . . There is much beauty of absolute and of contrasted color, and I know of nothing in modern painting more exquisite, for example, than the head of the daughter embroidering. . . .

What I . . . grieve over is that he looks for and insists upon the necessity of certain things that are not essential to this or any picture. One must regret that he sees fit to leave the true method of criticism, especially necessary, though perhaps, especially difficult, with a public so untrained as ours,--the technical artistic method, properly so called, which accepts an artist's work as he offers it, and judges it by the rules of art alone. When our public needs to be taught the very difference between good and bad painting, per se, and needs, in the presence of such a painting as Munkácsy's, to be told in what consists its immense artistic value as compared with the work of their popular favorites, it is disappointing to find a journal of the Tribune's well-earned authority confusing properly artistic with moral, philosophical, historical, and dramatic criticism. . . . [Cook] complains that the scene was not painted in accordance [with the authentic story of Milton and his daughters] showing Anne's "personal deformity," which "is here corrected," and Milton's gouty hands, and the plain, shabby interior, and the general discomfort and atmosphere of family discord that history lets us into. . . . Had Munkácsy painted his picture as this writer dictates it to him . . . it might have been valuable as a document. It could never have been a picture of artistic beauty . . . or of aesthetic value and truth in its effect upon our minds. . . . To argue the matter is to go back to the very ABC of criticism. It should surely be more than a truism by this time that such accuracy is never the highest, never even a very high factor in the artistic value of a work. . . . Yet does not Mr. Ruskin, with that fatal Philistine instinct all his culture has not eradicated, find the same fault . . . with the cartoons of Raphael. . . . Art is not history, and does not exist for the sake of

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> history, nor for any sake but its own. It represents what suits its own aims, and, moreover, as it suits them those aims, and alters history to adorn its own artistic tale. . . . [Munkácsy] has shown us how in the ideal, artistic fitness of things it ought to have been written. He has shown us a beautiful dream that we shall never forget, and that will help us to realize the dreams of Milton himself. We shall not confuse it with reality, shall not even bring them into comparison. . . .
>
> To me, and I believe to most others, Munkácsy seems to have altered facts for the sake of a high ideal, and to me he shows that ideal--the descent of the inspirational tongues of flame--by every line of the picture, and especially by the attitudes and expressions of the three women, so different from, yet so consonant with, each other . . . its main characteristic is its strength, its virile force of idea and execution. It is just this very quality that we need to have praised to us as a wholesome antidote to our love of the emasculated suavity of our recent idols,--of Bouguereau, Meyer Von Bremen, and the rest. . . . 79

The work of Munkácsy on these shores continued to represent a significant model for American artists in the criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who in 1884 proclaimed:

> No painter, of a more vigorous, intense, and truly artistic personality, has been born into the world in recent years than the Hungarian, Munkácsy. I may, indeed, call him without hesitation the very strongest of all living painters. It is hard to say which is the more impressive in his work--his masterly technique, of a sort quite peculiar to himself, or the splendidly artistic temperament it reveals. Munkácsy is no poet of the dreamy, sensitive, idyllic sort. He shares to a remarkable degree the realistic tendency of our time, --that tendency which seeks its subject matter in the facts of everyday contemporary life, and treats them without "idealizing" them in any way. Yet he is a poet, too, in his own fashion. He is intensely dramatic, to begin with. No such powerful drama, so pictorially conceived and rendered, had been seen on the Salon wall for many a year, as Munkácsy showed with his first exhibit --that Last Day of a Condemned Man [pl. 44], which at once brought him world-wide fame. [This painting, long planned by the young artist and executed in Dusseldorf by means of a commission arranged with a wealthy Philadelphia collector, bears a title similar to a Victor Hugo work opposing capital punishment, and was a star of the Paris Salon of 1870. The artist wished it lent

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to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, but the authorities did not deem it worthy. 80] Then, again, he is a true poet in landscape art--one of the most original and imposing of the few true descendants the old imaginative art of the first half of the century has left behind it. And he is always and everywhere, if I may so say, a technical poet--one who cannot treat any material whatever without bringing from it a high degree of artistic beauty.

Very many of Munkácsy's best works are in this country,--among them that first success to which I have just referred. . . . though Munkácsy can never do poor work, yet his results vary greatly in excellence. He has sometimes used his brush, we must believe, in answer to the desire for money, rather than in answer to the call of direct artistic impulse. . . .

In the Night Prowlers [pl. 45] we have an example of Munkácsy's dramatic side. How admirably he tells the story of these vagabonds, tied hand to hand and marched through the narrow, dirty street under the eyes of the early market-women. How vividly he conveys the pathetic note introduced by the startled face of the young girl who recognizes a friend in the shameful company, and the averted head of the student who tries to hide himself from her eye. And how strongly characteristic is the expression of each of the bystanders, varying from pity to indifference, or curiosity, or malicious glee. And how simply he does it all--in what a truly pictorial, unforced, unmelodramatic manner. There is all the reticence of well understood power, all the balance of perfect artistic feeling, in this picture. The tone of the canvas is low and brown, yet it has much coloristic beauty; and the handling is admirable for force and breadth and directness.

Yet, with all its strength, this canvas seems to me less remarkable than the Studio Interior. Here the subject is less dramatic, of course; but just for that reason the splendid force of the artist's characterization is all the better shown. It is easier to paint a pronounced type and a marked expression with speaking effect, than to bring a like effect from two mere portrait figures--portraits of Munkácsy and his wife examining a just completed picture. But nothing could be more intensely vivid and impressive than these two figures, so characteristic, so living, so natural, so absorbed in the rôle the painter has given them. There is not the faintest trace of that posing, unreal, lifeless, or else theatrical effect which, in the hands of lesser men, seems almost inseparable from a subject such as this. It is portrait art united to genre painting--a difficult combination to make successful. But it is so successful that it has all the dignity of historical

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> painting. In future centuries, such a canvas as this will be one of the most valuable and vivid historical records we shall have left behind us.
>
> Technically this picture is so brilliant that I hesitate to dwell upon it. Criticise it I cannot; and when praise must be unlimited in every direction, it seems as though it might be omitted altogether. Though he always adheres to a rather low tone, Munkácsy is a true, splendid, and most individual colorist--a colorist by temperament and not by labor. The fine harmonies of this canvas are not less remarkable than its brush work. Here again, Munkácsy is a master born--and, as I have said, the strongest of our time. And he is an original master--one who cannot be said to owe his qualities to the example of any predecessor. His manner may not seem so peculiar to some observers who do not know that all the work which looks in the least like his--and is always so immeasurably below his, in spite of any likeness--comes from the hands of pupils and not of teachers or contemporaries. Breadth, and vigor, and audacious yet admirably balanced rapidity of touch can hardly go farther than they go upon such canvases as this. If Munkácsy were a mere technician only, he would still be a marvel. But, as I have briefly and imperfectly tried to show, he is something much more than this. 81

Munkácsy's early Salon exhibits projected monumental compositions, frequently involving the urban poor and working classes, themes which Mrs. Van Rensselaer encouraged American artists to investigate. Yet she found little to admire in the works of English artists who had painted related subjects. Primary was a consideration for a well-made, richly painted picture, conveying subtle gradations of color, knowledgeable form, structured space, and enveloping air. Command of painterly means was most admired in this period when American artists struggled to acquire the expertise of their competitors in Paris, and when writing about the accomplishments of contemporary artists abroad Mrs. Van Rensselaer always sought to elucidate those elements which

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might be useful for the development of a masterly American art. A respect for professionalism encompassed a wide range of styles. No artist could have been further removed from Munkácsy than Puvis de Chavannes (1824-98), whose officially commissioned murals have been described as the most succinct artistic expression of the French Third Republic.[82] Mrs. Van Rensselaer sought to have the work of Puvis enjoyed in America, where, she noted,

> . . . the work of a man like Puvis de Chavannes is neither understood nor appreciated by the majority of observers; they cannot comprehend an art that seeks first of all for formal beauty, and not for the rendering of emotion. 83

Mrs. Van Rensselaer attempted to explain the qualities of this artist, who was soon to be commissioned to create murals for the monumental stairway of the new McKim, Mead, and White Boston Public Library:

> . . . no living man rivals Puvis de Chavannes as a painter in the "grand style." No painter alive has such nobility of mood and manner, such classic purity, such grandeur, such supreme distinction. In his art the best temper of the Renaissance seems to live again, and yet it is neither imitative nor in any way alien to modern moods. It is purely ideal work, but vital, individual, and wholly spontaneous and fresh. And it is marked, moreover by a peculiar yet most admirable and charming quality of color. If one were to try and rank all living artists not according to their degree of technical dexterity or of passionate expression or of deep or tender sentiment, but according to their relative claim to the title <u>great</u>, I think Puvis de Chavannes's name might be written first. Is it not fortunate, therefore, that he is at last to speak to an American public? 84

When a group of Puvis' paintings were exhibited in New York in 1887, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was disappointed in a number of reductions of his murals which she judged conveyed

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little of the quality of his large-scale works within the architectural settings for which they were designed. (She particularly admired Puvis' "great panoramic picture of the life of St. Genevieve . . . which fills a long stretch of wall in the Pantheon in Paris"). However, she found most noteworthy a version of Puvis' famous Poor Fisherman (pl. 46), which had been a stellar attraction of the Salon of 1881:

> . . . the color is pallid and the handling abstract and synthetic. Nor is there any beauty of form in the personages to attract the eye; yet the eye is attracted as well as impressed. The pale scheme of color is beautifully modulated, and suggests light and color in a wonderful way; the lines of the background are of singular loveliness as well as strength, and the depth of sentiment which suffuses the whole conception is quite impossible to describe. Such a union of pathos and dignity as the chief figure represents, such a contrast between its angular ugliness and the broad serenity of the nature about it, are only to be paralleled in the works of the early Italian Masters. Yet here there is no imitation of their art--the result is as individual and as unaffected as were theirs in their day. It is a singular work, indeed, as a product of modern Parisian art, but of course only the more interesting by reason of its very singularity. 85

Puvis, like many American artists, had studied with Thomas Couture (1815-79), whose approach and following constituted a faction in French art which was distinct from the Academy and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. It was just this element which was then gaining ascendency in the French art world, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed the same values as these artists in decrying academic aridity whether in Paris, Germany, London, or New York. In 1879 Couture's popular manual Méthode et entretiens d'atelier was translated into

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English, dedicated to America, and published in New York. Daniel Cottier, the art dealer and interior decorator who was friend and patron of Albert P. Ryder and imported French Barbizon and Dutch nineteenth-century works, was also known for his interest in Couture, an interest he shared with the wave of young American artists just returning from studies in Paris, many of whom settled in the immediate neighborhood of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. After the 1884 death of her husband and a stay abroad, Mrs. Van Rensselaer settled with her mother and son in New York City not far from the Benedick Building at 80 Washington Square East, where from the late 1870s many American artists returning from Paris had established their studios--figures such as J. Alden Weir, A. Wyatt Eaton, Olin Warner, and probably Augustus Saint-Gaudens, all of whom are significant personages in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.[86]

Control of the Paris Salon, that arbiter of quality, passed into the hands of the juste milieu artists (who were loathed, for the most part, by both Academicians and independents) just as Mrs. Van Rensselaer emerged as a prominent art critic, beginning with the reforms instituted for the Salon of 1881. As explained by Boime,[87] these French artists introduced into official and academic circles such features as a lighter palette and a looser, quasi-Impressionist execution. They represented to the world at large the last word in modernism, and many of the younger generation idol-

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ized their work, as did Mrs. Van Rensselaer in writing, for example, about one of the stellar figures of that group, Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-84), whom she termed ". . . surely another of the immortals," writing, "while no rival painted better, none seems to have felt so strongly."[88] When his Joan of Arc Listening to the Voices (now in the Metropolitan Museum) was hung as the only foreign picture included in the Society of American Artists exhibition of 1881 (after its debut at the Paris Salon of 1880), Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted it as ". . . one of the most interesting ever sent across the water."[89]

In that same year "the Divine Sarah" performed in New York, the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) (pl. 47), who was also an accomplished artist who exhibited at the Paris Salon and was a friend of Bastien-Lepage. Mrs. Van Rensselaer took the occasion to write an article on Bernhardt's approach to acting, which curiously reveals the same criteria as those she applied to painting and sculpture:

> No detail is given for its own sake, but each because it can play a part in the general effect. . . . The work is as "broad" as it is delicate. It is not the talent of a modern "Pre-Raphaelist" who loves details for themselves and forgets the whole; it is the genius of Leonardo or a Holbein who makes the detail of art rival the detail of nature and yet leaves the completed work as massive and coherent as a work of nature's own. . . .
>
> It is natural in the only way that art of any kind may dare be natural,--not by copying the methods of Nature to produce her effects, but by simulating those effects with strict artistic means. No true art of any kind ever copies, ever aims at literal transcription. It selects, modifies, interprets, translates, and so reproduces and intensifies. 90

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Mrs. Van Rensselaer described the portrait of Sarah Bernhardt by Bastien-Lepage (pl. 45) as among the most perfect and impressive of his works, despite its small size.[91] However, Bastien-Lepage was most known for his peasant subjects.

In this era of secularized and personalized religious expression, biblical subjects were frequently conceived in the guise of contemporary peasant genre scenes, and, in fact, it is this connection which lent monumentality to the peasant theme in the Salon art of this period, which was so valued in America. In 1892 Mrs. Van Rensselaer advised,

> . . . if any travelling American wants to bring home a really fine and famous picture, I recommend him to look up Mme. Bashkirtseff, at Nice, and buy a Bastien-Lepage which she is anxious to sell. It is the "Annunciation of the Shepherds," which nearly gained Bastien the Prix de Rome at the end of his student course. How beautiful it is, and how individual, how full of religious feeling, and yet how thoroughly modern, may be partly learned from the engraving of it that was published in the last Christmas number of the Century Magazine. 92

The collection of reproductions which embellished the 1891 Christmas issue of Century was organized by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who also there included and praised the first efforts of a young French-trained American painter working in this genre of religious themes rendered in a realistic style, noting the Holy Family and Monastic Life by Frank Vincent Dumond (1865-1951), just as he began his influential tenure of almost sixty years as a popular teacher at the New York Art Students League. Mrs. Van Rensselaer made a point of mentioning that Dumond's picture ". . . was very well hung at the Salon last year and

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came within a few votes of gaining a second medal."[93]

Other paintings of this type acclaimed in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer were by the German painter Fritz Von Uhde (1848-1911), who had studied first in Munich and then with Munkáscy in Paris,[94] and Jean Béraud (1849-1935), a student of Bonnat, as were many Americans. Mrs. Van Rensselaer described Béraud's 1892 Salon painting Descent from the Cross (pl. 48) as the "most impressive Biblical picture of our time."[95] This canvas represents the scene as if it occurred on the hill of Montmartre (literally, Hill of the Martyrs) overlooking the rooftops of Paris. The early Christian mourners are dressed in contemporary Parisian dress, the most striking being a French workman with rolled-up sleeves who gestures with a clenched fist in silhouette over the cityscape.

These artists, who were featured at the Paris Salon exhibitions, who were admired in America and respected by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, endowed their subjects with grandeur and postulated an entirely different conception of "realism" from that propounded by Courbet (who appropriated the term by capitalizing it). Indeed, Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed a view of Gustave Courbet (1819-77) which is distinctly different from that found in other writings. She criticized the treatment of Courbet by both French and American critics.

Rather than stressing the disengaged objectivity of his work, Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged Courbet an artist who ". . . thinks first of the soul, the sentiment"[96] and valued

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his work for exactly opposite reasons than those for which it is often esteemed. In one of the most perceptive articles on Courbet to appear in America (see appendix A), Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted:

> . . . we must not conclude that because [Courbet] [pl. 49] . . . reprobated all "idealism" in his speech there is none of it to be found upon his canvas. Idealism in the choice and arrangement and meaning of his subject-matter is, indeed, non-existent. But the true painter's touch is apt to idealize pictorially whatever subject it selects. . . . Who but he has ever shown with such strong . . . poetic sympathy the majesty of the tumbling surf and the overarching heaven, and the beauty of the deep-green, wet, and rocky woodland glades that were Courbet's peculiar province? Grant that there is no intellectual or spiritual poetry in Courbet's art, we must yet acknowledge that it shows, in spite of any verbal theories he may have seen fit to profess, an immense amount of poetic seeing and poetic rendering. 97

Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote this article as a rebuttal to "Gustave Courbet, Artist and Communist," by T. M. Coan, which had been published in 1884,[98] and she made a particular point of establishing the artist's historic significance:

> Courbet . . . was the prime mover in what has proved almost a revolution in art, and his example has largely molded the practice of our later day. He and Millet were the first champions of what we call--rather vaguely and incorrectly--"realism" in art. They were offshoots, of course, of the "romantic" movement of the early part of our century--that movement which proclaimed individuality to be the most important factor in art, and showed that a man might see with his own eyes and paint with his own brush, instead of seeing and painting in accordance with traditional, academic formulas.

This is written from a different perspective than that of Courbet's champion, Jules Antoine Castagnary (1830-88), who asserted that Courbet was a man who reacted ". . . with the greatest energy against the romantic tendencies. . . ."[99]

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(It was Castagnary who organized the large-scale exhibition of Courbet's work at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1882 which focused attention on the artist on both sides of the Atlantic.)

Mrs. Van Rensselaer acknowledged the revolutionary character of Courbet's art, but related it to that of the generation of 1830 in France:

> There had been a fierce battle at the outset of this romantic movement,--a battle which had been gained by the romanticists before Courbet's day, but which renewed itself about his work and Millet's. They saw fit to push the new doctrine further than the romanticists had carried it--were the first to insist upon absolute freedom in the choice of material, to say that peasants were as well worth painting as kings, humble contemporary life as history or mythology, and ugliness, upon occasion, as the goddess of beauty herself. Dr. Coan's words give us but a faint idea of the fury with which Courbet especially was attacked. He held a different position from Millet, and not alone in the more aggressive character of his work. Millet could be simply denied for many years all admittance to the Salon. But Courbet had won the right to such admittance when, in his earlier, less revolutionary time, he had gained a second medal. His work was, therefore, thrust constantly before unwilling eyes, and was assailed with corresponding violence. And the scorn which was confined to Millet's pictures was shared by Courbet's person. Never before or since has an artist been so berated, abused, and traduced simply for his pictures' sake. Political were mixed with artistic arguments and prejudice. It was in the year 1850 that Courbet's so-called brutal peasants first made their appearance on the Salon wall--just when the republic was disintegrating and before the coup d'état had restored security at the price of liberty. The pictures as such were involved in the wrath and fear excited by their subjects. The prevailing terror of socialism and revolution caused critics and public alike to see in these rustic figures and in the uncompromising portraits of the "Burial Scene at Ornans" [pl. 50], an attempt to exalt a dangerous class and to discredit the priesthood with the people; and the wildest political fury was turned upon them and their creator. Being what he was, Courbet retaliated with the weapons of the enemy, giving back scorn for scorn and rage for rage. But this

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> fact, however it may affect our opinion of him as a man, does not in the least detract from the merit of his course as an artist. It would have given a deserved relief to some of the less noble traits of Courbet's character had Dr. Coan dwelt more strongly on the steady, plucky, indomitable way in which he followed his artistic conscience. If he and Millet had succumbed to their assailants, the world of art to-day would have been immeasurably poorer and less vital--or else some later comers would have had to fight the battle in their stead. And where should we have found another such pair of giants to do the work? 100

Mrs. Van Rensselaer felt that exhibitions, such as the Salon of 1883, proved the acceptance of the principles for which Courbet's art stood, when understood in the context of Millet and the Barbizon painters, for there could be seen "not only the peasant but all his fellow-citizens in the social body as thankful subjects for the brush." She added,

> . . . the victory [Courbet] . . . has recently won over official conservatism is the most striking example that could be cited of the triumph of the new ideas. At the sale of his pictures held a year ago in Paris the same authority which once denied him admittance year after year to the Salon and loaded his work with every condemnatory epithet, saw fit to buy for the galleries of the Louvre and for various provincial museums a number of his pictures, and to pay for them the most extravagant prices. Courbet in the Louvre as a triply-honored guest is indeed a proof that . . . the revolution has been accomplished. 101

In this article Mrs. Van Rensselaer criticized the French critic Charles Bijot for omitting Courbet from his discussion of the new art of France published in the Gazette des Beaux Arts,[102] because Courbet, like those artists cited by Bijot, was able to see and express a "hidden poetry" without idealizing his theme. Mrs. Van Rensselaer perceived

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the heritage of Courbet embodied in those paintings at the Paris Salon of 1883 which projected this hidden poetry even when dealing with the most humble subject or apparently vulgar incident, such as The Harvesters' Payday (pl. 51) by Léon L'Hermitte, The Charitable Bureau by Henri Gervex, Dutch peasant scenes by Joseph Israëls (pl. 52), The Potato Gatherers by Bastien-Lepage (pl. 53), and A Storm-Tossed Fisherman's Boat by M. Renouf. In this approach Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared the appreciation for Courbet's work found in Boston in the circle of William Morris Hunt and his protégé Thomas H. Robinson (1835-88), an artist and dealer in Providence, Rhode Island, and Boston who studied with Courbet and was responsible for placing Courbet's works, together with those of the Barbizon painters, in American collections.[103] Hunt had been instrumental in engineering what was probably the first acquisition of a Courbet painting in America, when under his influence the Allston Club raised funds for The Quarry in 1866, an event which moved Courbet to proclaim, "What care I for the Salon, what care I for honors, when the art students of a new and great country know and appreciate and buy my works?"[104]

This early Bostonian appreciation for Courbet, within a context of Barbizon art, was maintained by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who determined the true heirs of Courbet to be the popular artists of the Paris Salon mentioned above, rather than Manet and the French Impressionists. Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer consistently defended a concept of realism in art which included human response and emotion. Her concept of realism in art and its worth was akin to that of Zola. She perceived in Courbet what Linda Nochlin later defined:

> A comparison between any of Courbet's realist works and Manet's early productions immediately reveals the fact that the realism of the former is constituted by a dialogue between the means of art and the subject represented, whereas Manet, almost from the beginning, conceives of his art as a monologue which his subjects seem to interrupt, a peeled lemon as much as a human figure.[105]

This aspect of communication in Courbet's work may be extended also to the viewer, and this concern for emotion and expression can be seen perpetuated in the works of the painters of peasant life which were so admired at the Paris Salon exhibitions. When Walter R. Sickert (1860-1942), the English artist and admirer of Degas, attacked the realism of Bastien-Lepage and the world of the Salon exhibitions within which his work functioned, Mrs. Van Rensselaer condemned Sickert's ignorance and scorn for tested values and quality, and in an article for the Boston Evening Transcript dismissed him as writing "most unintelligently of 'Modern Realism in Painting.'"[106]

The oblivion into which the works of such once popular artists as Bastien-Lepage, Breton, L'Hermitte, and Israëls have been since cast can be attributed to the kind of thinking articulated by Sickert, and his essay, which so infuriated her, is worth examining as the very antithesis of everything that Mrs. Van Rensselaer represented in art criticism. Sickert wrote:

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. . . Paris is the art-centre of European painting, and . . . the most serious training in drawing and painting that is procurable on European lines is procurable in Paris. I should therefore consider it a service of great utility to serious art if it were possible to make clear the reasons for my conviction that the tendency of the mass of exhibition painting in France . . . has been in an inartistic direction, and has led inevitably to the sterile ideal of the instantaneous camera. And, on the other hand, . . . the narrow stream of purely artistic painting, that has trickled its more sequestered course parallel with the broad flood of exhibition work, owes its vitality to a profound and convinced reverence for tradition. . . .

What . . . were the essential ideas of Bastien-Lepage's work? To begin with, he was a painter of exhibition pictures, of what are called in Paris machins. He was an inveterate salonnier, with the ideals and the limitations of the typical uncultured Paris art-student, the fort of his atelier. Faire vrai is the sum and aim of his intention. Realists he and his like have been jauntily labelled by the hasty journalist. But the truth in their work is truth of unessentials, and their elaborate and unlovely realities serve only to cover themes that are profoundly unreal. . . .

That woman stooping to put potatoes into a sack will never rise again. [See pl. 53.] The potatoes, portraits every one, will never drop into the sack, and never a breath of air circulates around that painful rendering in the flat of the authentic patches on the very gown of a real peasant. What are the truths you have gained, a handful of tiresome little facts, compared to the truths you have lost? To life and spirit, light and air?

. . . One characteristic of the modern photo-realist in painting is that almost any one of them could have painted a portion of the work of any other without making any appreciable discord of execution apparent. They are all equipped from the first at the studios with a technique which serves them equally once for all. It is known as la bonne peinture. It differs from style in being a thing you can acquire, and I believe it is even maintained, not only to be perfectible, but to have been on several occasions, perfected.

Nothing is more frequently brought home to the student of modern painting than the truth that the work of the salonnier, the picture, that is, that is born of the exhibition and for the exhibition, wears its air of novelty and interest strictly for the season. . . .

It was impossible, on seeing Bastien-Lepage's Joan of Arc at the Paris Exhibition of 1890, after a lapse of some years since its first appearance, to resist the

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> conclusion that it falls inevitably under the heading of "machin.". . .
>
> In his portrait of his grandfather, at the same exhibition, it was quite possible to see Lepage at his best as a workmanlike and photographic copyist of a figure in repose. It was at the same time possible to turn from this picture straight to Manet's fifre, and to his bon bock, and thus to measure the gulf that separates a meritorious workman from an inspired executant of the first rank. No useful end can be gained by obscuring this fact, and if, in league with the modern gigantic conspiracy of toleration, we are to speak of Bastien-Lepage as a master, what terms are left us for [Charles] Keene [1823-91, English artist] and Millet, for Whistler and Degas? 107

It was just eight years after the premature death of Bastien-Lepage, but the criteria of art criticism had already so begun to change that it was deemed appropriate to include Sicker's negative assessment in this memorial volume dedicated to the work of Bastien-Lepage in 1892. This change in critical climate was probably the most significant cause of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's withdrawal from the field of art criticism by the end of the decade, by which time she essentially devoted her energies to public service and the writing of history, fiction, and poetry. There was no way that Mrs. Van Rensselaer could continue to assert her views in an art world which dismissed with scorn all that she held valuable. Although she was among the first American art critics to write sympathetically of Manet and the French Impressionists,[108] Mrs. Van Rensselaer did not conceive of their direction as the exclusive route of progress in art. Her prime criteria remained geared to sentiment and a concern with communication of idea.

Degas (about whom Mrs. Van Rensselaer rarely wrote)

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characterized Bastien-Lepage as "the Bouguereau of the modern movement," no doubt disliking the sentiment of Bastien-Lepage's art.[109] When the essay by Sickert appeared, based on similar premises, Mrs. Van Rensselaer countered,

> I leave my readers to discover who Keene was or is. But I can assure them that they would have thought Bastien a master had they seen the Retrospective Exhibition at Paris in 1889. Throned high over all rivals who had lived and died during a hundred years, sat, incontestably, Corot and Bastien-Lepage, with, perhaps, Millet on a seat as high as theirs. And did one search among living men, in or out of the exposition, there was only one other who could have sat beside them, and that was Puvis de Chavannes. 110

Thus, Mrs. Van Rensselaer clearly shared the values of those who selected and enjoyed the Salon exhibitions of her time, and although this allowed for a wide range of styles, a premium was placed on poetic content. A constant feature of these Salon exhibitions were the many images of peasant life by artists of different countries. Mrs. Van Rensselaer often wrote about paintings which American artists had created abroad as part of this international school of peasant genre, and she admired Sheep-Shearing in the Bavarian Highlands[111] (pl. 14), brought home by Walter Shirlaw (1838-1909) and the "fine Brittany Peasants Reading Victor Hugo" by Robert Wylie (1839-77), noting, "the handling is very strong and the heads have the bold individuality of a portrait group by some classic Dutchman." Writing of Wylie, this influential artist who had grown up in Philadelphia, studied in Paris, and established a colony of American artists at Pont-Aven in Brittany, Mrs. Van Rensselaer added,

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"This is the first of Mr. Wylie's pictures I remember to have seen exhibited in this country, and all who see it must regret that the artist died so young, and that he is not better known on this side of the water, to be counted in whenever we speak of men who do us the most credit."[112]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer followed the progress of those American artists who had worked with Wylie at Pont-Aven, and among peasants elsewhere, and always discussed their paintings in terms of how they measured up to the work of their colleagues abroad. However, foremost in consideration was the question of the significance of these pictures for the development of American art.

For example, Mrs. Van Rensselaer followed the works of Thomas Hovenden (1840-95), reportedly a student of Jules Breton as well as Cabanel. On one occasion she judged that he had succeeded in even surpassing Munkácsy in "rendering of individual character" and "suggesting . . . general pathos and dramatic intensity. . . ."[113]

In 1880 the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts staged an ambitious exhibition of American art featuring a hundred paintings by artists residing abroad. Mrs. Van Rensselaer went there to review the show. She selected the Poacher's Story by Hovenden to illustrate her article and reported, "Mr. Hovenden's work has always been sincere and interesting, and grows in artistic completeness."[114] That year Hovenden returned to the United States and began applying to American

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themes the skills he had developed in connection with his Salon pictures of European peasant genre scenes, which he had composed in both contemporary and historic settings. When he exhibited the following year at the Society of American Artists show, Mrs. Van Rensselaer again cited his work and commended his direction: "Mr. Hovenden's small portrait of a gentleman was quite admirable in every way; his genre picture of Vendean peasants preparing for war [Salon of 1878; pl. 54] was a most thorough and conscientious piece of work; and his study of a negro in a cabin-interior was strong and genuine"[115] (see pls. 55-57). (America's rural black population was thus substituted for the European peasant, but not yet accorded a capitalized designation.) In 1883 Hovenden exhibited his Village Blacksmith at the National Academy, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented that it ". . . was well done, but an awkward compromise between a portrait and a genre painting,"[116] and The Harbor Bar Is Moaning (pl. 130), a figure painting by Hovenden alluding to a tragedy at sea among the Brittany fisherfolk, was included in the 1886 Book of American Figure Painters, for which Mrs. Van Rensselaer provided a preface. Hovenden's most famous work, The Last Moments of John Brown, exhibited to great acclaim in 1884, elicited no comment by Mrs. Van Rensselaer yet come to light. (This popular image, which Hovenden painted twice and etched, appears to owe much to Cabanel's Glorification of Saint-Louis.[117]) However, a similar subsequent Hovenden adaptation

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of the typical Paris Salon picture, featuring authentic genre detail in a historical scene executed on a large scale, now translated in terms of American history, In the Hands of the Enemy--After Gettysburg (pl. 57), evoked praise for the effort when it was exhibited at the National Academy in 1889. Mrs. Van Rensselaer then wrote that the painting was

> . . . a serious, ambitious and almost quite successful essay in the difficult field of historical genre. Few of our painters devote themselves to such exacting tasks as this, and the progress Mr. Hovenden makes from year to year [promises] . . . still more complete accomplishment in the future. 118

It was with a similar approach that Mrs. Van Rensselaer presented the work of the American artist Will Low, writing of his picture inspired by a local Nantucket incident,

> Mr. Will H. Low's Skipper Ireson Tarred and Feathered by the Women of Marblehead was an ambitious and clever, though not altogether successful, attempt to deal with native matter in the way of historical genre. It promised very well for what Mr. Low may yet accomplish in the same line. 119

A similar note characterizes Mrs. Van Rensselaer's discussion of another large Salon-type painting, The Strike by Robert Koehler (pl. 22). Despite reservations about the technical proficiency of the artist in working in this demanding format (a large-scale multifigured composition in a landscape with architectural detail) which required the highest degree of professional competence, Mrs. Van Rensselaer concluded by welcoming the canvas as "an encouraging sign of earnest ambition and the effort to grapple intelligently with a characteristically modern subject."[120] Labor

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union strikes were a central issue for Americans as these words were published in the month which followed that which opened with the Haymarket bombing (an aftermath of the police attempts to crush a strike for an eight-hour day at the McCormick Harvester plant in Chicago). Mrs. Van Rensselaer's review of the painting appeared as newspapers and magazines across America called for the suppression of labor agitators.

The painting itself, however, although said to have been suggested by a strike of American railroad workers, was actually executed in a European context.[121] The Strike was painted in Munich after the artist had studied strike locations in Belgium and England. Koehler was most probably inspired to undertake this large canvas by the high acclaim which greeted a painting in the Paris Salon of 1880, The Coal Miners' Strike (pl. 58)[122] by Alfred-Philippe Roll (1847-1910), a popular French artist of large-scale, multifigured compositions of contemporary events, and The Iron Workers' Strike at the Paris Salon of 1882 by the French artist Paul Soyer (1823-1903), a teacher of a number of American artists. When The Strike by Koehler was first exhibited, as the most conspicuous picture at the 1886 National Academy show in New York, the critic for Harper's Weekly thought it recalled "a class of pictures which has been very popular in England" and particularly cited the monumental 1874 Applications for Admission to a Casual Ward by Luke Fildes (1844-1927).[123] The Koehler canvas was then shipped to Europe and appeared in 1888 in Munich at the Internationalen

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Kunstausstellung (for which Koehler organized the American section) and in 1889 in Paris at the Exposition Universelle, where it was awarded an honorable mention. Thus tested in the international art world, it was included as one of the few American works in John Sartain's World's Masterpieces of Modern Painting, published a few years later.[124]

The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared the criteria of this same international art world of official and popular taste. However, as the successive comments concerning the development of European-trained American artists are examined, it becomes apparent that within this framework Mrs. Van Rensselaer assumed the task of goading these American artists and their public to consider new options. Although American artists participated in European exhibitions, they really did not enjoy the same opportunities. For example, while Roll's Miner's Strike was acquired from the Salon exhibition by the French government and placed in the museum at Valenciennes, Koehler's Strike was not purchased for many years, and shortly after it was, in 1901, it was rolled up and stored unseen until rediscovered in 1971. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was sensitive to this great contrast which appalled American artists as they returned home after the heady years abroad, and she perceived her function as providing the stimulus for artists and patrons in America to consider ways in which this country could evolve its own self-sustaining art world utilizing the new European-derived

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ambition and skill. With full admiration for all that American artists were able to accomplish abroad, Mrs. Van Rensselaer urged artists to turn to unexplored possibilities at home which could then excite the interest of the American public, and thus their patronage. This self-imposed role can be seen emerging in the following passage written by Mrs. Van Rensselaer about Mother and Child (pl. 59) by the French-trained American artist Edward Simmons (1852-1931):

> It shows the figure of a poor peasant, with her bowl of potatoes in her lap and her head resting, in the sudden sleep of exhaustion, on the bed of her awakening baby. There are no accessories, and no charms of pronounced color or of type to produce any of those effects of pictorial prettiness which the modern artist so often resorts to--even when his subject is of this kind--when he feels himself unequal to exciting interest of a truer, deeper kind. But this truer, deeper interest has been at Mr. Simmons's command. The value of his picture lies in its meaning, its feeling, its sentiment; lies in its interpretation of the significance of the words poverty and mother-love, there is as much simplicity as strength in the way this is told. If it is a good picture without the help of decorative details, so it is an expressive picture without the explanatory aid of sordid, harrowing details, and without any of that exaggeration which produces sentimentality in place of healthy sentiment. I need hardly say that, technically it is very accomplished; for how could an artist express his intentions thus clearly and strongly if the language of his art had not been thoroughly mastered? 125

However, Mrs. Van Rensselaer had some misgiving in praising this work which had been singled out for an award at an exhibition in New York in 1886:

> One fact which strikes us in all the awards and a little painfully, since these exhibitions were planned for the encouragement of native art, and since such art ought to be national too--is that not one of the prize pictures has an American theme. Not one shows upon its painter's part a desire to express the life which lies about him; to which he belongs; which, if he has the capacity for

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> feeling, ought to interest him more than any other; and which, if he has the capacity of expression, ought to be more vital beneath his brush than any other. 126

Yet the power of the sentiment expressed by Simmons' painting led Mrs. Van Rensselaer to overlook this scruple. She continued:

> Before Mr. Simmons's admirable work such criticism hardly occurs to us; for there is a level where all nationalities are at one. There is the field of simple human nature wherein all the peoples of earth show a common face and feel a common sentiment; and this is the field which Mr. Simmons has explored. Doubtless his model was French; but she might have been found in New York or Boston, or in any place where poverty and mother-love are known.

Among the favorites at the Paris exhibitions were such images of monumentalized peasant genre scenes which offered respite from an increasingly complex and urban world. These paintings projected grandly conceived human figures in harmony with each other and with nature, scenes of visual delight executed with subtly modeled forms bathed in light and set in palpable space. As Americans contributed to a mode then well established abroad, Mrs. Van Rensselaer honored their models and applauded their successes, only adding the plea that they direct such gifts to new and American themes. The admired French peasant genre was the invention of an alien culture and an earlier age.

The regime of Napoleon III rested on the support of the French peasants and therefore appreciated such representations of peasants as accepting of their fate and, as such, in perfect harmony with nature and the general scheme of

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things. This was not the situation in the upwardly mobile American society to which American artists returned from Europe, and the American farmer or "toiler of the sea," represented in such paintings especially lauded by Mrs. Van Rensselaer as Eastman Johnson's Corn Husking (pl. 60), or one of Winslow Homer's New England subjects (pl. 61), was fully expected, on other occasions, to participate in town hall debates, philosophize, and pitch his or her might against the destructive forces of nature.[127] (All except the disenfranchised ex-slaves in post-Reconstruction America, who continue to be represented in American painting much as the peasants were in France.[128])

For Americans to formulate a distinctive American art it was necessary for them to come home, tempting though it often was to stay abroad. Such was the advice, reported by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, of one very successful expatriate artist, Toby Edward Rosenthal (1848-1917), an artist raised in San Francisco, the son of German-American parents, who had gone to Munich to study and settled there as a professional painter.[129] Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged Rosenthal's painting in the Paris Salon of 1882 of "a motherless peasant family gathered sadly for their evening meal" the "best thing he has ever done." Following its Parisian success, this painting was brought by the dealer Schaus to New York, where it was again widely acclaimed. When Mrs. Van Rensselaer made a trip to Europe the following summer, she made a

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point of visiting this expatriate artist whose works were so popular in America. They spent some time together, and afterwards she was moved to write,

> Thanks to his long exile and his German name . . . [Mr. Rosenthal] is rarely known to be a native of San Francisco and still a true American at heart. With his long foreign residence, his German wife and a European clientèle which keeps him more than busy, he feels no impulse to come home himself; but his advice to his younger fellow workers is not to do as he has done and as he was much more justified in doing fifteen years ago, but to come home as soon as their course is finished, to go to work upon home material, with home sympathies, and home inspiration. . . . 130

Such advice was, indeed, followed by most of the younger generation of Munich-trained American painters (such as Chase, Duveneck, and Shirlaw), who represented a vital factor in the formation of the Society of American Artists, the association which most clearly exemplified the best in American art, as viewed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Nevertheless, the pages of art criticism by Mrs. Van Rensselaer are rich in reports of significant works created by expatriates. One such artist was Sarah Paxton Ball Dodson (1847-1909), who contributed biblical and classical subjects, in the French tradition, to the Paris Salon beginning in the late 1870s. In discussing the exhibition of nearly 600 paintings by American artists at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1880, Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted that Miss Dodson's life-size Deborah (pl. 62) was

> . . . certainly one of the strongest and most satisfactory things upon the wall. The handling is broad, without being obstrusively so; the color serious and fine. . . . The drawing of the figure is excellent, and especially

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> to be commended for the way in which the forms are given under the drapery. Fault has been found with the attitude as somewhat strained and rather suggestive of an academic overcoming of difficulties, than natural and right on the face of it. Repeated visits to the picture, however, do not produce the effect that would be the consequence of such a fault as this. Impressive at first sight, it grows more into our liking day by day. . . . Much of the force of the work lies in the face, which is no academic study, but a beautiful type, well adapted to the character portrayed. One could not label this picture, indifferently, with the name of any biblical heroine whatsoever, as with most similar pictures it is fatally easy to do. It is an imaginary portrait, well carried out and satisfactory in consequence, to the mind, as well as to the eye. I do not deny that for art to attain its utmost vitality, it should, as a rule, concern itself with contemporary things. Yet it would, indeed, be hypercritical to find fault with so good a p'cture as this because its success is not of some different sort. Such versatility as Miss Dodson exhibits is a good sign for the years to come. . . . 131

Although the work of those artists who chose to become expatriates was respected by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, the thrust of her criticism was directed at encouraging artists to develop their own art in the context of American experience. For example, although she praised the paintings of American artists in the Salon of 1887--pictures which represented such scenes as a dead body cast up on a French beach by Charles Stanley Reinhart (1844-96), the cultivation of Dutch tulips by George Hitchcock (1850-1913), a peasant old man with a child by Edward E. Simmons, and a French farmer's daughter by Elizabeth Jane Gardner (1851-1922)[132]--Mrs. Van Rensselaer took issue with artists' expatriation. In writing about Henry Mosler (1841-1920), she elaborated:

> An admirable band of <u>genre</u> painters has sprung up of late years among the young Americans in Paris--a band which yields in nothing to its contemporaries among

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> Parisian workmen. Among the most successful is Henry Mosler, who paints chiefly the peasant interiors of Brittany, and whose work has received the highest official recognition, being now represented in the galleries of the Luxembourg. . . .
>
> We can have only one wish to express with regard to a young painter who has already proved himself a technical master; and that is the wish that he might return to his own country and use his admirable art in the interpretation of the scenes with which, in spite of all the acquired sympathy of years of foreign residence, his nature must be most in harmony. As he stands to-day, he is an ornament to French art rather than to our own; though he helps American art, of course, since he shows how strong a native gift an American may have. But it would not be only his countrymen--it would, I think, be himself as well--that would profit by a change of field. A fresh kind of individual expression is what a man must seek if he would really make his mark in the world of art; and this sort of expression a painter is more likely to find if he looks to new, unused material instead of to such hackneyed figures as those of French rural life. It is curious to remember how few years have elapsed since Millet's death, and then mark that the French peasant has now become almost as much a convention of the studio as was the classic model of the days of Ingres. It shows what an immense natural gift a man has when he can paint such used-up material as freshly as Mr. Mosler paints it. What might he not do if he were to see and feel new material and express it in as vigorous a way? 133

A comparable note characterizes Mrs. Van Rensselaer's estimate of American contributions to another popular category of French Salon painting, the recreation of scenes of everyday life set in the exotic lands of North Africa and the Near East, then being colonized by France and England. While Mrs. Van Rensselaer respected the skill of one of the French practitioners of this genre, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), she had reservations about the direction of his American follower, Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847-1928). Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote in 1881, the year that Bridgman conquered the New York art world with a one-man show, after

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having gained a substantial position in Paris:

> Twenty years ago there was scarcely an American artist who could have been fairly judged without constant reference to the fact of his nationality. Our art was then to a great extent an isolated development, with rather arbitrary standards of its own. We were proud of our painters and of the peculiar sort of success they had achieved; but in estimating their ability we appealed to little beyond home competition and home approval. Of late years, however, our art has grown to maturer stature, and is now amenable to the severest tests of merit. A whole generation of young American painters believe in the necessity of scientific training, and appeal to European criticism and to cosmopolitan standards of success. Mr. Bridgman may well stand as typical of this generation. It has included, perhaps, certain men more exceptionally endowed than he. One may not call him so strong as Robert Wylie, so individual in mood and so enchanting in manner as John Sargent, so dashing a master of bold technique as a few of those we term our "Munich men"; yet his work is exceptionally striking when placed in comparison with the average work of a score of years ago, for it is exceptionally well trained, well informed, scholarly, and accomplished. No art could be less experimental than his, less provincial, self-taught, or self-deceiving. It is an art that shows at a glance the presence behind it of centuries of tradition, of generations of well-schooled and competent men. There is no "wild Western flavor" about it, as there was about some of the tentative art of our past, and as there will be, no doubt, in a different way, about the perfected national art of our future. Yet it is not a copy or a reflection of the art of other men. It is simply the excellent work of a man who has studied in the best modern school, and who paints on such lines and with such a manner as might be chosen by a modern artist in any possible land. 134

In another article that year Mrs. Van Rensselaer discussed Bridgman in summarizing "The New York Art Season":

> Mr. Bridgman's pictures and studies--more than three hundred in number--attracted great attention, professional as well as popular. Especially to be praised were his magnificent and varied out-door sketches. Some, too, among his latest studio-pictures showed a growing sense of color and quality and an increasing breadth of touch. It is to be regretted that Mr. Bridgman feels it best that he should continue to live in Paris. His influence over our advancing art will thus be nul, and

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> while we shall share in the world's enjoyment of a good cosmopolitan painter we shall lose one who might have been an admirable interpreter of the more picturesque aspects of our civilization. I can but think that Mr. Bridgman himself will lose something, too, by turning his back upon a career which might produce more original and distinctive art than that which he now creates. 135

The "increasing breadth of touch" which Mrs. Van Rensselaer welcomed in the art of Bridgman was probably related to the influence of Mariano Fortuny (1838-74), the much-admired Spanish artist whose scintillating brushwork was embraced by the young American artists of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's generation as the antidote to academic dryness. (Gérôme and Fortuny shared a mutual respect and were both represented by Goupil in Paris, where Fortuny sometimes painted in Gérôme's studio.) The largest collector of Fortuny paintings in the nineteenth century was an American, William Hood Stewart (1820-97), and when Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote about the Stewart Collection she termed Fortuny "the great master and inaugurator of the Spanish-Roman school" and stated,

> No man has impressed himself more strongly upon our century than Fortuny--no man half so strongly upon the generation of to-day. He was more than an individual painter, he was an original artist. He did more than introduce a new method of execution--he opened men's eyes to see Nature in a new way . . . to see how certain aspects of Nature might be painted which never had been painted before. The high, light scale of color he adopted, the strong effect of sunshine he introduced into landscape art, and the vivid opposition of bright notes which he permitted himself have become so familiar through the works of his disciples that one too easily forgets how new they were when he first produced them. No man has ever done just the same things before--though a hint of them is given in the work of Tiepolo and other very late Venetians. But many men have done them in the last twenty years, thanks to Fortuny's example. The whole Impressionist school, for one thing, traces many of its qualities back to Fortuny and no further. . . . 136

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Fortuny focused the attention of American artists on Spanish seventeenth-century masters of realism, such as Velasquez, who not only presented monumental images of kings, but also of the more lowly, and did so with a breadth of style emulated by such artists as Chase and Duveneck, Eakins and Sargent. Fortuny etchings also influenced the style of American illustration featured in the magazines which published the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

Like many of Gérôme's students who returned to America to formulate a style more fluid and painterly, Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged Gérôme's methods--if skillful--academic, dry, and old-fashioned, and she was just as reserved about the accomplishments of Gérôme's Russian pupil, Vassili Verestchagin (1842-1904), then very popular in America, as she was about Bridgman. (Mrs. Van Rensselaer termed the Verestchagin exhibit in New York in 1888 "a warning to artists and theorists" and added, ". . . no mistake is greater than to believe that because a man is a 'realist' he does not need imagination."[137]) On this basis Mrs. Van Rensselaer found

> . . . it was Mr. Bridgman's studies, and not his more careful creations, that were most striking and most delightful. . . . Among the large canvases which have fought Mr. Bridgman's competitive battles for him . . . most excellent pictures in their way . . . in spite of admiration for the painter's skill, one felt him a little too deliberate, too cool, and careful, and self-repressing. There were no definite faults of commission to be seen, but faults of omission made themselves felt that would have been obviated by a little more of vigor and breadth, and of spontaneous sentiment,--a little

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> more evidence of a characteristically "painter's way" of looking at things. 138

Mrs. Van Rensselaer found these qualities in Algerian scenes by Eugène Fromentin (1820-76), such as Hunting with a Falcon in Algeria (Salon of 1873), which she described as "truly impassioned, vital, and expressive,"[139] as well as in certain watercolors then being created by American artists which were exhibited in New York. In discussing the latter, Mrs. Van Rensselaer reiterated her concern that such powers be applied to American material. For example, Mrs. Van Rensselaer compared the paintings of Joseph Frank Currier (1843-1909), who settled in Munich, with those of Winslow Homer:

> Those who remember [the watercolors of Homer] . . . will remember also how they divided the honors of the exhibition [probably of 1879 and 1881] with certain watercolors sent from Munich by Frank Currier--these likewise being color-studies of stormy sunset skies though over moorland instead of water. In comparing them one saw the difference between a natural colorist like Currier and a vigorous artist like Homer, who, although he could make himself felt through color, did not handle it as though born to this sole end. Currier's drawings, in spite of their great breadth and hurrying dash of method, were far more suave in tone, more subtile in suggestion, more harmonious, more beautiful; and they were also more skilful and refined in execution. But they were no more artistic in conception than Homer's, no stronger, no more valuable, as fresh, frank records of personal sensations felt in the face of nature; and they lacked the native American accent which Homer had put into even his waves and boats. 140

At the same time, Mrs. Van Rensselaer valued professional training abroad, and she praised

> . . . the diligent way in which young Americans, both men and women, now approach the art of painting. The time has gone by when a clever young man, after a year in school, perhaps, and another year spent in desultory foreign travel, sketching from nature and producing so-

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> called copies of the Old Masters, felt himself able to enter the ranks of accredited artists; or when a charming young woman, with even slighter preparation, could open a studio. . . . And still further in the past is the time when young people boasted that they "had never had lessons from anyone." The favorite boast now is of long-continued lessons from the most famous masters in the world, and "Pupil of Gérôme" or "Pupil of Carolus Duran" is as carefully inserted in catalogue records as the fact that a mention or a medal has been gained at the Salon. 141

There is no question but that Mrs. Van Rensselaer considered the most important contemporary art to be that recognized by French authorities. Among the most admired French paintings of this period were two monumental canvases, now buried in the subterranean passages of the Metropolitan Museum, which were featured in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer: an allusion to a dormant continent at the opening of the Suez Canal, Egyptian Fellah Woman and Child, c. 1870 (pl. 63), by Léon Bonnat (1833-1922) and A Rehearsal in the Choir Loft, 1885 (pl. 64), by Henri Lerolle (1848-1929). When they were both acquired and proudly exhibited by the museum in 1887, Mrs. Van Rensselaer considered these works:

> At the first superficial glance [the Bonnat] . . . may strike one as a little academic in effect. But the moment we examine it we see that it is no academie, but a true and vital portrait of two clearly realized individuals; and it reveals, I think, a much greater degree of talent and accomplishment than those portraits of his own fellow-citizens which have made Bonnat's name familiar to us. In the posing, as in the characterization of the figures, in the color and in the execution, there is a wonderful dignity, sobriety, strength and beauty. It is an extremely clever yet a thoroughly serene and reticent piece of work--a picture to be studied by a young artist for the same order of qualities that are revealed in a very different work now also

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> hanging at the Museum--LeRolle's "Organ Loft." Unlike though they are in theme and treatment both these pictures are valuable protests against pictorial exaggeration of every kind. [142]

Although here Mrs. Van Rensselaer reveals a taste for the kind of visual pleasure shared by the general public in her time, it is not to be supposed that her art criticism simply reflects popular fashion. In fact, Mrs. Van Rensselaer made a special point, in reviewing this 1887 Metropolitan Museum exhibit, to disassociate her views from the acclaim accorded such sensational headliners of the season as the teasingly coy The Storm, painted by Pierre Cot for Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (Salon of 1880), which is, curiously, the only one of these canvases thought worthy of recent exhibition by the museum administration. Mrs. Van Rensselaer dismissed this picture as "the most conspicuous among pictures of an artistically trivial but popularly attractive sort."[143] By contrast, Clarence Cook found it ". . . a very pretty picture."[144])

Mrs. Van Rensselaer had discussed the Lerolle when it first came to this country and was a featured work in the exhibition organized by Durand-Ruel in New York to introduce the work of the French Impressionists to America in 1886. Mrs. Van Rensselaer explained the Impressionist pictures to her American readers, then, in what was among the earliest perceptive criticisms of their work in America, but only after first presenting the more easily comprehended work of popular and official acclaim:

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> Lerolle's large canvas, with life size figures, showing the choir of a church with the glimpse of the nave--arches bathed in light below. Nothing could be more simply realistic than his treatment of this simple, contemporary theme. There is no striving for effect, no attempt at conventional "picture-making," either in the grouping of the figures, or in the chosen types, or in the sober shapes and colors of their attire. Five or six members of the choir are sitting and standing in natural attitudes, listening intently to the soprano, who is standing at the rail singing alone to the accompaniment of the organist close behind her. Her figure is the center of interest alike to them and to us; and a most interesting figure it is, so charming in character and expression, and so thoroughly well realized as actually doing what it purports to do, that the effect is instantaneously complete and delightful. We know, we see, we all but hear, not only that she is singing, but how she is singing and almost what; it was by a wholly natural, unquestioning impulse that I wrote just now "soprano." The picture is extremely well painted; technically most admirable and interesting; but I think its chief value lies in its sentiment, as showing how a true artist can put feeling and meaning into the simplest straight forward treatment of the most "unpicturesque" materials. I do not know whether it was needful (except in order that the picture might make itself "felt" on the crowded, garnished walls of a Paris exhibition) that it should have been painted on so large a scale; but it is so excellent, so charming, so wholesome and instructive as it is that we can not really wish otherwise. 145

It is interesting to compare this passage to Mrs. Van Rensselaer's appraisal of a cognate painting, The Pathetic Song, 1881, by Thomas Eakins (pl. 65), as ". . . so impressive because it was admirably painted, and because it was at the same time absolutely true to nature."[146] (Such American paintings are more fully comprehended in the context of this international art world to which they relate, both in terms of shared criteria and divergent direction.)

When this Lerolle painting was featured at the Metropolitan Museum, Mrs. Van Rensselaer particularly admired

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the way in which it was exhibited, remarking that it was "especially well placed where its wonderful effect of space and atmosphere is increased by being seen through the opposite doorway."[147] In so honoring this picture, American authorities were joining the cosmopolitan art world which had already acclaimed it. Reports of Lerolle's success preceded the shipment of the canvas,[148] and Mrs. Van Rensselaer announced the expected arrival of the picture even before it landed.[149] Mrs. Van Rensselaer maintained an interest in this popular artist, and when asked, a few years later, to help choose a suitable collection of pictures for reproduction in a special Christmas edition of Century Magazine, she included Lerolle's Arrival of the Shepherds, a traditional biblical subject interpreted as a contemporary peasant genre painting, a picture also notable for dramatic use of light.[150]

The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer must be understood not only in terms of the contemporary French art then enjoying official sanction, but also must be related to French art criticism, for the principles which she enunciates are not alien to those found in the writings on these artists published abroad. For example, the evaluation of Lerolle by Mrs. Van Rensselaer might well be compared with the terms in which his works were presented to a French audience. The painting of The Rehearsal in the Choir Loft was one of the canvases which brought fame and fortune to

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Lerolle, who was a friend of many artists (including Degas and J. S. Sargent) and was remembered even by a later generation of French painters with respect and affection. The Symbolist Maurice Denis (1870-1943) recalled this painting as one of those which offered "a new note, a poetry of our times," and particularly noted the modern costumes and control of simplified values and finely distinguished grays. Denis also wrote about the social circles of the artist, of the "salon" of Lerolle, noted for fine music and good company, which represented a milieu parallel to that established by such friends of Mrs. Van Rensselaer as the Gilders in New York and the C. S. Sargents in Boston: refined, elegant, and comfortable (different from the cafes frequented by younger artists), the establishment of a bourgeois artist, in the traditional sense of the term, which implied urbanity, stability, and family life, which in no way precluded a "true originality."[151]

There were many other artists of this kind whose works were widely admired and popularly enjoyed, whose arena was the art world of Paris (though they frequently were born elsewhere), who have been largely forgotten since, but may be rediscovered through the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

The paintings of Jean Charles Cazin (1841-1901), for example (a student of H. LeCoq de Boisbaudran), inspired some of the most enthusiastic of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's comments. A large painting in the wax medium, encaustic, The Shipyard,

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established the artist's reputation at the Paris Salon of 1876 (a few months before encaustic was chosen by La Farge as the medium used to decorate the interior of Trinity Church in Boston[152]), and Cazin became a much-respected artist and a favorite of American collectors. When Puvis de Chavannes died in 1898, Cazin was appointed to direct the completion of the murals in the Pantheon begun by the deceased. Cazin's work had been included in the 1863 Salon des Refusés, and he was considered as related to the Impressionists within the French official art world. Like Americans who worked with Impressionist color while retaining structural form, Cazin represented neither an avant-garde nor academic approach, and so his works have been mislaid by the historians (see pl. 66). Mrs. Van Rensselaer, however, noted his pictures among those chosen by Chase and Beckwith for an 1884 exhibition in New York to raise funds for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty (an exhibition which spanned from Delacroix to Degas). Mrs. Van Rensselaer then reported:

> Cazin did not attract nearly so much attention [as Manet], being an original of a less noisy sort. But it is a pity this was the case, since he has hardly been known to us, and since he is rapidly coming to be acknowledged as one of the first among the very few really original, and at the same time, poetic painters of contemporary France. 153

In 1886 a painting by Cazin on exhibit at the Avery Gallery in New York captivated Mrs. Van Rensselaer:

> . . . a moonlight view of a street in the village where he was born; for he is another humble son of rural France to be added to the list of the many through whom her art has spoken. I do not know how the picture will seem to

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> others, to me it seems absolutely the most truthful and at the same time most beautiful rendering of moonlight I have ever seen. Often enough has moonlight been painted in many periods of art. Now the tone by which interpretation for its effects has been sought is brown; now it is dark blue; now dark cold gray or pale cold gray; now blackish even to the point of loosing color altogether. But never except in this canvas, has it seemed to me the true moonlight tones, soft and tender, yet full of light, monotonous yet delicately modulated, blending all local colors into a single harmony, yet preserving them in a faint and subtle semblance of their daylight selves; neither blue nor gray, yet both blue and gray; neither deep nor pale, but a sort of tender, pallid depth--a tone, in truth, as impossible to translate into words as it seems to have been difficult to transcribe in paint. Beautiful in tone and color, this picture is beautiful, too, in its simple composition, and is charmingly gracious in sentiment. We almost feel the gentle, chilly wind that stirs the scant leaves of the tall poplar, and the one light that glimmers in a window at the end of the street's perspective is as tenderly suggestive to the mind as "telling" from a purely pictorial point of view. And surely no one ever painted a star and materialized, unpoetized hardened and over-defined it so little as has Cazin in this picture. 154

Such a richly painted, evocative canvas has long been overshadowed by more egocentric expressions, such as Van Gogh's Starry Night, a creation of the same period, now so much more familiar. However, in the 1880s and 1890s Cazin was admired widely, and his name was of significance to American artists. John La Farge, for instance, numbered Cazin as among the welcome few to have expressed an interest in his own work,[155] and Mrs. Van Rensselaer considered his accomplishment comparable to that of Corot, as when she viewed paintings by both artists included in an auction sale in 1892:

> The most beautiful of all was a small Corot--a pearl among the paintings of him whom all the world knows as the pearl among painters. But a small Cazin pressed it

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> closely for first place. Here we had half the arc of a rainbow spanning half the canvas, and, so wonderful is the craft of this leader of living landscape painters, we had the shining, colored effect of the real phenomenon, although actual rainbow tints had been almost suppressed to bring it into pictorial harmony with the yellowing stretch of pastoral country beneath.
>
> Synthesis in painting could hardly be carried farther than it was in this picture, yet the result was infinitely more truthful than was ever attained by the more detailed methods of an earlier day. The synthesis of a Cazin or a Corot is based on an infinite patience in preliminary analysis and a beautifully wise selection of those facts which are most important. Details of form may be suppressed, but the relationship between main masses and the dignity and grace of leading lines is exquisitely emphasized. Details of local color may be ignored, but the harmony of all colors and the exact value of each as lighter or darker than the others are explained. And by some subtile process, never to be understood or imitated except by men who are really born to paint, there is the true light of nature on everything, and the true air of nature above and around and in everything. "Impressionism" existed before the name was invented to distinguish a late-born band enamored of strong light and vivid color. What Cazin shows us, what Corot shows us, is always an impression of a natural scene, not a photograph of natural facts. That is, it is the same thing which we see when we look at nature ourselves. Then we do not count the leaves and follow their outlines, or trace the edges of clouds like the contours on a map, or decipher minutiae of color such as we should note in a flower. We see the main masses and lines, the main effects of color, the light and the air, the movement of the wind and the pulsing of the water. And this we see if we look understandingly at a Corot or a Cazin. Mr. Fenollosa of the Boston Museum, who probably knows more about Japanese art than any other man in America, once told me that he could appreciate Cazin because he had learned to appreciate Japanese pictures--that the aim and feeling were in both cases practically the same. This may sound strange at first, especially if one knows only the Japanese pictures of commerce. But I think that it means that Cazin, like the Japanese, cares for general truth rather than special truths, and feels pre-eminently the broad harmonies of color and the significance of powerful and graceful lines. 156

This passage repeats ideas found in Six Portraits of three years earlier,[157] with the addition of the perspective

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of Fenollosa and Japanese art (which became a significant force in the art consciousness of Americans with Fenollosa's appointment as Curator of Oriental Collections at the Boston Museum in 1890, the year after Six Portraits appeared. The somewhat puzzled inclusion of this new approach to visual imagery in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer in 1892 attests to the changing art world from which the aesthetics and ideals of Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her generation were ultimately to be excluded.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]"The Younger Painters of America," Scribner's Monthly 20 (1880):7.

[2]The Bohemian: A Tragedy of Modern Life (New York: Scribner's), p. 2.

[3]"Old Dutch Masters: Rembrandt (1606-1669)," Century, n.s. 25 (1893):163.

[4](Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889), p. 1. This unillustrated volume is composed of revised articles which had originally appeared in Century, AABN, and American Art Review, some originally illustrated.

[5]Pp. 183-84.

[6]"Munich Art in the New Pinakotheck," AABN, 21 July 1883, p. 27.

[7]Six Portraits, pp. 137-38.

[8]New York World, 4 November 1894, p. 18.

[9]For a discussion of Cook's writings on Hunt, see Simoni, Art Critics and Criticism in Nineteenth Century America, pp. 301-11 and 347.

[10]Lippincott's 22 (1878):706-18.

[11]Richardson, pp. 57-58. This book also includes a section on "Methods of Instruction Followed and Problems Given Out at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris," appendix II, pp. 141-43.

[12]"Recent Architecture in America: V. City Dwellings," n.s. 9 (1886):555.

[13]See Albert Boime, "The Distinction between 'Official' and 'Academic,'" The French Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century (London: Phaidon, 1971), pp. 15-21.

[14]For example, MGVR presented the etchings of the Swedish artists Anders Zorn (1860-1920) by referring first to his recent honors in Paris. Century, n.s. 24 (1893):582-89.

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[15]Boston Evening Transcript, 12 March 1892, p. 13.

[16]"Recent Architecture in America: Public Buildings 1," Century, n.s. 6 (1884):57 and 64.

[17]Ibid., p. 51. The complete series was published from May 1884 to July 1886. (See Bibliography.)

[18]That is, prior to its disastrous cleaning for a 1976 exhibition.

[19]MGVR praised this monument in the Independent, 7 February 1889, p. 167 (where she mistakenly wrote that the sculpture was to be placed in Philadelphia). For information on the private viewing of the work, prior to casting, held in the artist's studio on 19 January 1889 (which was probably the event which inspired MGVR's article), see exhibition catalogue, Daniel Chester French: An American Sculptor, by Michael Richman (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), p. 65. See also, by the same author, "The Early Public Sculpture of Daniel Chester French," American Art Journal 4, no. 2 (November 1972):110-12. This work was also discussed by Lewis Sharp in "The Public Monument from the Civil War to World War I," lecture at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 5 April 1976. For information on Gallaudet, see Dictionary of American Biography, 4:111.

[20]For MGVR comments on the distinction between sentiment and sentimentality, see, for example, Atlantic Monthly, 20 February 1886, p. 90, and the Independent, 29 March 1888, p. 391. Kinnard took issue with this quality of emotive expression as the prime criterion in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer and wrote, ". . . her rare [sic] sculptural criticism never addressed itself to technique . . . but always to the associative emotional aspects. In this regard her writings about sculpture are very disappointing." "Life and Works of MGVR," p. 176.

In fact, Mrs. Van Rensselaer not only wrote frequently about sculpture (often in the regular newspaper columns for the New York World and New York Independent, of which Kinnard was unaware) but was very conscious about the Beaux-Arts techniques then being introduced in America. However, it is true that her primary criteria were concerned with the value of emotive expression, and it is this quality which enriched the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

[21]Independent, 7 February 1889, p. 167.

[22]See exhibition catalogue, New York City Public Sculpture by 19th-Century American Artists, with catalogue by Lewis I. Sharp and Walking Tours by David W. Kiehl (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974), pp. 20-22, 38-39,

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48-49, 58-59, and Frederick Fried and Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., New York Civic Sculpture: A Pictorial Guide (New York: Dover, 1976), pp. 8-9, 79, 130-31, 162-63.

[23]Paris edition of 1877 included heliotypes by O. Rejlander and Duchenne de Boulogne, translation of book originally published in London by John Murray in 1872. Some of the same photographs appeared earlier in Duchenne de Boulogne (advertised as founder of modern electrotherapy), Mecanisme de la physionomie humaine ou analyse electro-physiologique l'expression des passions (Paris, 1862).

The American artist Thomas Eakins probably had some such studies in mind when he attached electrodes to models for demonstrations at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. See "Differentiating the Muscles of the Face by Electricity," illustration by Susan H. Macdowell, in William C. Brownell, "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," Scribner's Monthly 18 (1879):749.

[24]A Catalogue of Oil Paintings Loaned for Exhibition in Aid of the Bartholdi Statue Pedestal Fund in the Galleries of the Brooklyn Art Association, January 1884, pp. 100-101, and AABN, 10 March 1883, pp. 112-13. Hébert was a critic at Julian's Academy in Paris, where Frank Vincent Dumond (1865-1951) was a student, and MGVR similarly praised religious paintings by Dumond. Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6.

[25]"Art in Our Churches" (part of a series of nine articles), Independent, 11 November 1886, p. 1449. For a discussion of this new movement in American church decoration, see Helene Barbara Weinberg, "La Farge's Eclectic Idealism in Three New York City Churches," Winterthur Portfolio 10 (1975):199, and E. P. Richardson, Painting in America (London: Constable, 1956), pp. 329-30.

[26]"Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," pp. 346-47.

[27]The Churchman (New York), 5 December 1846, p. 158. Robert Weir (1803-89) was a major artistic decorator of New York churches and created paintings for a church he had designed and helped establish in upstate New York. See William H. Gerdts, Robert Weir: Artist and Teacher of West Point, exhibition catalogue of the same title (West Point, N.Y.: Cadet Fine Arts Forum of the U.S. Corps of Cadets, 1976), pp. 19-20. The artist was the father of artists John Ferguson Weir and Julian Alden Weir (whose works frequently figure in the art criticism of MGVR).

[28]"Recent Architecture in America: IV. Churches," Century, n.s. 7 (1885):324-25.

[29]Book of American Figure Painters, unpaginaged preface.

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[30]H. H. Richardson, p. 53. These reliefs were carved by Italian workmen from the model by Fréderic-Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904), French Beaux-Arts sculptor of the Statue of Liberty.

[31]MGVR referred to ". . . the simple, severe, non-mystical rites of the Presbyterian faith . . ." in "Recent Architecture in America: IV. Churches," p. 327. Aside from the wish expressed in MGVR's Last Will and Testament (p. 1) for a funeral at the First Presbyterian Church at Fifth Avenue between 11th and 12th Streets (one block from where she lived), there is no indication that MGVR maintained any extended church affiliation. Extensive church records of that period reveal no mention of MGVR, although other funerals of that time are recorded. Professor Dorothy Fowler, currently writing a history of the First Presbyterian Church in New York, generously made available the church archives for examination. It is not improbable that MGVR, like many of her friends, was agnostic.

MGVR purchased a house in which she spent the last twenty-five years of her life (9 West 10th Street, New York City), which abutted the parsonage of one of the most sumptuous religious monuments decorated in that era of the American Renaissance, the Church of the Ascension, famed for the La Farge mural covering the entire west wall. At her death, the heirs of MGVR offered the building for sale to the church (which declined the offer). See correspondence, George Griswold, Jr. collection. The works of La Farge figure prominently in the art criticism of MGVR.

[32]Published in Independent, 22 July 1886, p. 913, in the same year as the picture was reproduced in Book of American Figure Painters (for which MGVR wrote the Preface), and Cox illustrated The Blessed Damozel by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.), for which MGVR wrote the Appendix. The following year MGVR and Cox collaborated on an article on Saint-Gaudens for Century, n.s. 13 (1887): 27-39. The Cox nude illustrated (pl.) is dated 1888.

Anthony Comstock (1844-1915), President of the Society for Suppression of Vice, was an active crusader against obscenity and foe of the nude in art.

[33]"American Country Dwellings I," Century, n.s. 32 (1886):19.

[34]Painting in America, p. 331.

[35]"Recent Architecture in America: IV. Churches," p. 333.

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[36]See "The New Public Library in Boston: Its Artistic Aspects," Century, n.s. 28 (1895):260-64.

[37]See Walter Muir Whitehill, "The Vicissitudes of Bacchante in Boston," New England Quarterly, 27 (1954):435-54.

[38]N.s. 28, p. 264.

[39]P. 17.

[40]P. 16.

[41]8 June 1895, p. 17.

[42]See Peter Bermingham, American Art in the Barbizon Mood (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1975), pp. 44-46, 72-73, and 109, n. 14.

[43]"The Academy Exhibition," Independent, 19 April 1888, p. 487.

[44]"The Morgan Collection," Independent, 4 March 1886, p. 267. MGVR's other writings on French Barbizon art include: "French Landscape Art," A Catalogue of Oil Paintings Loaned for Exhibition in Aid of the Bartholdi Statue Pedestal Fund in the Galleries of the Brooklyn Art Association, January 1884, pp. 53-82; Independent, 11 March 1886, p. 299; "Jean-François Millet: Painter-Etcher" (which was published in three editions reprinted from Independent, 17 March 1887, p. 332, and 15 September 1887, pp. 1163-64).

Related critical reception to French Barbizon painting in this period in America can be found in Ednah D. Cheney, Gleanings in the Fields of Art (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1881), and William Crary Brownell, French Traits (New York: Scribner's, 1889).

For discussion of the reception of Barbizon art in America at this period, see Bermingham, American Art in the Barbizon Mood, pp. 72-73.

[45]Six Portraits, p. 225. It was Royal Cortissoz who said that MGVR's Fuller article in Century, December 1883, ". . . first made his qualities known to the world." See American Artists (New York: Scribner's, 1923), p. 59. For MGVR writings on Fuller, see Bibliography.

[46]For MGVR on Courbet, see above, pp. 156-59; on Duveneck, see below, p. 236; on Sargent, see above, pp. 98-99; and for Tarbell and Benson, see Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6, and 21 May 1892, p. 20.

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[47]For example, MGVR provided memorial exhibition catalogue essays on the works of George Fuller (Boston Museum, 24 April - 13 May 1884, pp. 3-22) and John Singer Sargent (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 4 January - 14 February 1926, pp. xiii-xxii) as well as the memorial volume on H. H. Richardson and first article and unpublished manuscript on the life and works of F. L. Olmsted (late in his career). The recent death of the artist can be connected to MGVR articles on Courbet (see below) and Hans Makart in Portfolio 17 (1886):36-41 and 49-53.

For a discussion of the retrospective spirit found in Boston in this period, what Van Wyck Brooks termed the ". . . well-known Boston malady 'grandfather on the brain,'" see his New England: Indian Summer, pp. 402-5.

[48]Boston Evening Transcript, 2 July 1892, p. 6. MGVR first mentioned Saint-Gaudens' Shaw in the Independent, 24 January 1889, p. 103, and as late as 1925 cited it as an exemplary monument in "Changes," the chapter added to the new edition of Art Out-of-Doors, p. 393.

[49]"Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," pp. 714-15. Similar scornful statements about the ideas of Ruskin may be found by MGVR in "Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," p. 216, and Six Portraits, p. 95, and a parallel dismissal of German painting of the immediately preceding generation is to be found by MGVR in, for example, AABN, 16 October 1880, pp. 184-85, and 21 July 1883, p. 29; the Independent, 5 May 1887, p. 555; and the Boston Evening Transcript, 12 March 1892, p. 13, and 26 March 1892, p. 6.

[50]21 February 1880, pp. 72-73.

[51]Six Portraits, p. 95; first appeared, in somewhat different form, in "Correggio," American Art Review 2, part 2 (1881):234.

[52]Six Portraits, pp. 97-99.

[53]Gerdts, Great American Nude, pp. 52-61.

[54]"Sir Frederic Leighton on Morality in Art," AABN, 25 February 1882, p. 88.

[55]So reported Rosamond Gilder, in conversation, 22 December 1975.

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[56]"Recent Architecture in America: II. Public Buildings," pp. 51-52.

[57]"Who Wants Art Nowadays," p. 238.

[58]For example, see MGVR comments on Ulrich, AABN, 12 May 1883, p. 220, and 26 May 1883, p. 245; on Weir, see Independent, 17 February 1887, p. 203; on Inness, see The Art Collection of Mr. William Henry Hurlbert: A Review by M. G. Van Rensselaer (26 May 1883), Auction Sales Catalogue, New York, Leavitt & Co., 31 May - 1 June 1883, p. 3; on Correggio, see Six Portraits, pp. 90 and 96.

[59]AABN, 28 April 1883, p. 196.

[60]Independent, 13 January 1887, p. 44. This was the second of two articles on Rembrandt's Gilder (the first in Independent, 6 January 1887, pp. 8-9) which were privately reprinted, together with an article by Clarence Cook, "Rembrandt's 'Le Doreur,'" The Studio, n.s. 2 (January 1887): 107-11, as Le Doreur, The Gilder, Painted A.D. 1640, by Paul Rembrandt Van Rhyn (New York: Gilliss Bros. & Turnure, c. 1887). Simoni mistakenly dates this pamphlet as "(1893?)," p. 494.

[61]The Rembrandt Gilder was acquired by the H. O. Havemeyer Collection in 1889, according to information kindly provided by Frances S. Weitzenhoffer, who is writing a dissertation on "Mary Cassatt and the Havemeyers as Collectors of Modern French Art," in conversation, 12 December 1977.

[62]AABN, 27 April 1878, p. 150.

[63]Now known as Sunlight and Shadow, this Chase painting represents his friend, the artist Robert Blum, in the back yard of the house he occupied during a stay in Holland, together with a neighbor who posed in a hammock. Now in the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, where it is erroneously believed to be an oil painting, this work is made in distemper (pigment mixed with glue, rather than oil, egg, or gum) according to this review by MGVR, which explains the marked mat quality.

[64]AABN, 27 February 1886, p. 104. A similar interpretation is evident in MGVR's earlier description of Chase's 1877 Ready for a Ride as being "full of an indefinable pathos." "William Merritt Chase," American Art Review 2, part 1 (1881):135.

[65]The quotation on Olmsted is from Century, n.s. 24

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(1893):860. For the remarkable quality of sentiment in La Farge's stained glass, see Independent, 18 October 1888, pp. 1334-35, and 1 November 1888, p. 1399, and for his mural The Dance, for the Whitelaw Reid residence within the Villard Houses complex see Independent, 2 February 1888, p. 135. For MGVR comments on sentiment and Whistler see "American Etchers," p. 491.

[66]Bartholdi Statue Pedestal Fund catalogue, p. 87.

[67]Ibid., p. 88. This painting was especially promoted by the dealer S. P. Avery when he exhibited it in his New York gallery in March 1883, when he published a brochure of 109 pages, Criticisms from Foreign Journals upon Jules Breton's Salon Picture of 1882: Evening in the Hamlet of Finisterre.

[68]AABN, 12 May 1883, p. 221.

[69]See Ronald G. Pisano, exhibition catalogue, G. Ruger Donoho (1857-1916): A Retrospective Exhibition, New York, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 12 March - 2 April 1977.

[70]Simoni has written that Cook introduced "impressionism" to the American public during the first Durand-Ruel collection showing in the United States, when he wrote an article for The Studio, n.s. 1 (17 April 1886):245-54. See Simoni, p. 489. However, MGVR wrote extensively on the Impressionists. During that exhibition she wrote to S. R. Koehler, "I have been wrestling with . . . [the Impressionists] for the Independent where they do not seem to be at home" (16 April 1886, S. R. Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D191, between frames 237-39, p. 4), and her writings on the Impressionists appeared in the Independent, 25 March 1886 (announcement that show was coming), and extensive review of show, 22 and 29 April 1886, pp. 491-92 and 523-24. Earlier, MGVR had admired pictures by Manet and Degas, writing that they ". . . had much charm for those who can consent to see for a moment with the eyes of a peculiarly endowed painter instead of with their own" (AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 30).

[71]AABN, 20 February 1886, p. 90. Additional MGVR praise for the work of Breton may be found in the Independent, 21 April 1887, p. 490, and 24 November 1887, p. 1513.

[72]Marius Vachon, Jules Breton (Paris: A. Lahure, 1899), p. 91.

[73]Independent, 5 May 1887, p. 555. See also Catalogue of High-Class Paintings Many of Which Are by the Great Modern Masters: Private Collection of Mr. Henry Probasco,

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Cincinnati, Ohio, auction sales catalogue, New York, American Art Association, 18 April 1887.

[74]Art and Artists of Our Time (New York: Selmar Hess, c. 1888), 1:235-37.

[75]Unidentified clipping, Metropolitan Museum of Art Library, artists' file. The headline was "Famous Painting Scrapped By Art Institute of Chicago / Jules Breton Canvas 'The Song of the Lark' Goes Into Storage, Although One of Most Loved of Pictures by General Public."

[76]AABN, 10 March 1883, p. 112.

[77]Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6.

[78]AABN, 10 March 1883, p. 112. The popularity of Dagnan-Bouveret among American artists is attested to by the account of a tableau vivant staged at the summer school conducted by William Merritt Chase at Shinnecock, Long Island, in which Mrs. Chase appeared as a Madonna by Dagnan-Bouveret--a painting chosen by MGVR to be included in "The Century's Christmas Pictures: The Spiritual and Imaginative in Modern Art," Century, n.s. 21 (1891):275. The costume party of 1898 is recounted in The Students of William Merritt Chase, exhibition catalogue (Huntington, N.Y.; Heckscher Museum, 1973), historic essay by Ronald G. Pisano, p. 6.

[79]"Munkácsy's Picture of Milton," AABN, 20 December 1879, pp. 195-96. For extended discussion of Munkácsy's work by Clarence Cook, see The Studio (New York), n.s. 2, no. 6 (December 1886):81-85, and Art and Artists of Our Time, 2:87-90.

[80]See John R. Tait, "An Hungarian Artist," Lippincott's 23 (1879):179, and idem, "Michael Munkácsy," American Art Review 2, part 1 (1881):235-43.

[81]Brooklyn Bartholdi Pedestal Fund Catalogue, pp. 95-98. Additional MGVR comments on works of Munkácsy are in Independent, 9 December 1886, p. 1586; 21 April 1887, p. 490; 10 November 1887, p. 1447; and 26 January 1888, p. 103.

[82]Boime, The Academy and French Painting, p. 70. See also Robert Goldwater, "Puvis de Chavannes: Some Reasons for a Reputation," Art Bulletin 28 (1946):33-43.

[83]Century, n.s. 25 (1893):164.

[84]Independent, 5 May 1887, p. 555.

[85]Independent, 14 July 1887, p. 874.

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[86]See Albert Boime, "Newman, Ryder, Couture and Hero-Worship in Art History," American Art Journal 3, no. 2 (Fall 1971):5-22.

[87]See Boime, The Academy and French Painting, pp. 16-17.

[88]Century, n.s. 17 (1889):317.

[89]Atlantic 48 (1881):199-200. MGVR maintained a high regard for the work of this artist and wrote of "the great Bastien" (Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6) and referred to the Joan of Arc in 1893 as "a triumph of physical portraiture" ("Rembrandt," Century, n.s. 25:164). MGVR shared an interest in this painting with many American artists of the period who were in the process of formulating a comparable style combining aspects of Impressionism with structural solidity.

[90]"Sarah Bernhardt," Lippincott's, n.s. 1 (1881):185.

[91]Boston Evening Transcript, 14 May 1892, p. 6. This is in marked contrast to the estimate of such later critics as John Rewald, who wrote that Bastien-Lepage "cleverly and deceitfully debased the conquests of realism to the tastes of the day." The History of Impressionism, rev. & enlrgd. ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 242.

[92]Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6.

[93]Ibid. Dumond probably was included in the social circles frequented by MGVR, for, a few months later she wrote from Marion, Mass., where she was spending the summer, that Dumond was there renting the studio of Helena de Kay Gilder. See letter dated 27 June [1892] to Helena de Kay Gilder, Rosamond Gilder Collection.

[94]For MGVR comments on Von Uhde, see Independent, 15 November 1888, p. 1463. When MGVR organized "The Century's Christmas Pictures: The Spiritual and Imaginative in Modern Art" (1891), she included Von Uhde's Holy Night and Bastien-Lepage's Annunciation of the Shepherds.

[95]New York World, 4 September 1892, p. 26. This picture was one of those selected for illustration in The Salon of 1892, by Gustave Larroumet, trans. by Henry Bacon (Paris: Goupil), opp. p. 58.

[96]Independent, 13 January 1887, p. 44.

[97]"Courbet, the Artist" (open letter), Century, n.s. 7 (1885):793.

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[98]Century, n.s. 5 (1884):483-95.

[99]"Salon de 1863," cited in L. Nochlin, Realism and Tradition in Art, 1848-1900 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 48. This interpretation is reiterated by American critics Clara Erskine Clement and Laurence Hutton in Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works (Boston: n.p., 1879), 1:163, and by George Boas in "Courbet and His Critics," Courbet and the Naturalistic Movement (1938; New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 46.

[100]"Courbet, the Artist," p. 793.

[101]"Bijot on French Art," AABN, 20 October 1883, p. 185. MGVR also commented on Courbet in AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 30; Independent, 22 September 1887, p. 1195, and 19 July 1888, p. 903; and Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6.

[102]Charles Bijot, "Le Salon de 1883," Tome 27, 2d per. (1883):461.

[103]See Bermingham, American Painting in the Barbizon Mood, p. 40.

[104]Quoted in exhibition catalogue, Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 17 December 1959 - 14 February 1960, p. 58.

[105]L. Nochlin, Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society (New York: Garland, 1976), p. 229 (from 1963 dissertation).

[106]Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6.

[107]Walter R. Sickert, "Modern Realism in Painting," in André Theuriet, Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art: A Memoir (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), pp. 134-43.

[108]See n. 72, p.

[109]Noted in exhibition catalogue, Ingres and Delacroix through Degas and Puvis de Chavannes: The Figure in French Art, 1800-1870, New York, Shepherd Gallery, May - June 1975, p. 363.

[110]Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6. MGVR also noted here that Sickert incorrectly referred to the artist as "Lepage" rather than "Bastien," and questioned the validity of including in this volume a chapter, "A Study of Marie Bashkirtseff," by Mathilde Blind because ". . . the facts are simply that Bastien was a very great painter, and

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that she was a capable painter, whose artistic tendencies were akin to his, that she knew him well for a short time and that they both died of lingering illnesses within a few weeks of each other."

[111] American Art Review 2, part 1 (1881):93.

[112] AABN, 17 July 1880, p. 27. "One painting by Robert Wylie, 'Reading Victor Hugo's '93,'" is recorded as having been on loan from 1 April 1880 - 4 October 1880 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in a receipt book, according to a letter from the Assistant Registrar, L. Rutledge to L.D., 1977. Ninety Three, a novel by Victor Hugo published in 1874, presented a story of divided loyalties during the French Revolution.

Additional praise for Wylie's work by MGVR is found in Independent, 7 February 1889, p. 167, and American Art Review 2, part 2 (1881):49.

[113] Independent, 26 January 1888, p. 103.

[114] AABN, 25 December 1880, p. 303.

[115] Atlantic 48 (1881):200. Hovenden's return to America in 1880 was recorded in Helen Corson Livesey, "The Life and Works of Thomas Hovenden, N.A.," typescript of paper read before the Plymouth Meeting Historical Society, 22 February 1955, p. 3 (Archives of American Art, Roll P52, frame 562).

[116] AABN, 26 May 1883, p. 245. Other critics were more admiring. See Livesey, p. 4.

[117] This work by Alexandre Cabanel (1823-89) was placed in the Musée du Luxembourg in 1874, the year that Hovenden studied with Cabanel in Paris. See exhibition catalogue, Le Musée du Luxembourg en 1874, Paris, Grand Palais, 31 mai - 18 novembre 1974, Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Editions des Musées Nationaux, by G. Lacambre and J. de Rohan-Chabot, pp. 44-45.

The absence of any MGVR comment on Hovenden's The Last Moments of John Brown may be attributed to the fact that the painting was exhibited in the traumatic Spring of 1884, just following the deaths of both the husband and father of MGVR, when she was in the process of making hasty plans to join her mother in Europe. Further biographical research may unearth some additional information on this question (there may be some family relationship with the man who commissioned the work of Hovenden). MGVR ignored the painting in her reviews of the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris and the 1892 Retrospective exhibition of the Society of American Artists in New York, although it was included in both shows.

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[118] Independent, 16 May 1889, p. 632.

[119] Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):199. See also Low, A Chronicle of Friendships, 1873-1900, p. 268.

[120] For complete review, see above, p. . Koehler's The Strike, with its central female figure depicted restraining the man before her, could be interpreted in the same way as Louisine W. Havemeyer, the art collector, analyzed a bitter strike which took place a few years later when she recalled, ". . . Mr. Frick . . . [was] the hero of the celebrated Homestead Strike [of 1892], one of the earliest and the worst strikes in the history of our industrial development, and one in which women finally took part, not to incite, but to soothe and placate." Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1961), p. 32. For MGVR and her associates the Koehler painting was topical but not inflammatory and was approached with the same spirit as Richard Watson Gilder expressed when he consulted with Morgan and Carnegie ". . . in the matter of writing about labor unions and capital" (see Letters, p. 348). The last words written by MGVR to be printed during her lifetime appeared in a labor union magazine, American Federationist, in a Mayday issue devoted to child welfare, published by the American Federation of Labor; a poem originally addressed to children entitled "Manners," was there directed to workers then struggling against the hardships of the Great Depression (vol. 38 [1931]:587), first published in Many Children (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921), p. 22.

[121] Robert Koehler recollected, "The Strike was in my thoughts for years. It was suggested by the Pittsburg strike [the Railway Strike of 1877]. . . . I had always known the working man and with some I had been intimate. My father was a machinist and I was very much at home in the works where he was employed" (Minneapolis Journal, 23 March 1901, part 2, p. 10, cited by L. Baxandall in "Robert Koehler: The Strike; Preliminary Fact Sheet," 1975, p. 3). See also Patricia Hills, The Painter's America: Rural and Urban Life, 1810-1910 (New York: Praeger, in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), pp. 119, 123, and 149, and Rena N. Coen, Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota, 1820-1914 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, for the University Gallery of the Univ. of Minnesota, 1976), pp. 108-9 and pl. 32.

[122] See Catalogue illustré et annoté des oeuvres exposées au Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Valenciennes (Valenciennes, 1 [1931]:122, no. 338, planche XL). Note that this source is overlooked by Baxandall, who asserts that Koehler's Strike was the "first effort anywhere to

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depict labor struggle via painting." Hills, who maintains, "The painting . . . seems to be one of the first to depict not just the dignity of labor . . . but the struggle of the working classes against the industrialists and capitalists," and Coen, who more accurately states, "The Strike . . . is one of the first major American paintings to depict the early history of the labor movement and the struggle of the working classes against capitalist society.

[123]10 April 1886, p. 235.

[124]Philadelphia: William Finley, [189?], n.p.

[125]Independent, 17 June 1886, p. 753. In a similar vein MGVR praised Simmons' Carpenter Shop (probably the painting reproduced and discussed in Simmons' From Seven to Seventy: Memories of a Painter and a Yankee [New York: Harpers, 1922], pp. 77 and 179) in the Boston Evening Transcript, 21 May 1892, p. 20. For more on MGVR and Simmons, see AABN, 19 June 1886, p. 293, and Book of American Figure Painters, in which is reproduced Simmons' Mother and Child (n.p.) in the same year as MGVR's commentary on the painting in the Independent. See reproduction of the same, or related painting (now lost) as Tired Out, Catalogue of Paintings of the St. Louis Art Museum (St. Louis, 1924), no. S17. The painting was then on loan from Washington University, which sold it in 1945 (according to letter to L.D. from L. Ude, Administrative Secretary, Gallery of Art, Washington University, 1977).

[126]Independent, 17 June 1886, p. 753.

[127]MGVR commented on Eastman Johnson's "strength combined with pictorial effect" in comparing Corn Husking with Winslow Homer's Prisoners from the Front (AABN, 17 July 1880, p. 27) and noted Homer's ". . . tanned hay-makers in their shirt-sleeves and their coarse hide boots . . . the thousand and one rustic scenes . . . that were recorded with so much freshness and so much truth and strength, if often with so little beauty . . . or New England rural homes, with the characteristic human types they shelter . . ." ("An American Artist in England," p. 14).

[128]Compare, for example, the passive black man adrift in Homer's 1899 The Gulf Stream (Metropolitan Museum) with his active depictions of white men confronting the dangers of the elements in his watercolors of hunters and fishermen.

[129]See Quick, American Expatriate Painters, p. 128.

[130]AABN, 28 July 1883, p. 39. MGVR also admired the

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work of two other Munich expatriates, the German-American artist Carl Von Marr (1858-1936) and Joseph Frank Currier (1843-1909). See Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):195-98.

[131]AABN, 11 December 1880, p. 280.

[132]Independent, 26 May 1887, pp. 650-51. The Reinhart is reproduced in Harper's New Monthly Magazine 79 (1889):513. MGVR also praised Hitchcock's work in the New York World, 11 December 1892, p. 27.

[133]Brooklyn Bartholdi Pedestal Fund Catalogue, pp. 102-4. Mosler's Return of the Prodigal Son, a great success at the 1879 Salon, was the first painting by an American to be purchased by the French government for the Luxembourg Museum. See Quick, American Expatriate Painters, pp. 116-17.

[134]"Frederic Arthur Bridgman," American Art Reivew 2, part 2 (1881):49-56. This article was slightly revised and republished in W. Montgomery, ed., American Art and American Art Collections (Boston: E. W. Walker, 1889), 1:177-92 (from which it is quoted in Quick, American Expatriate Painters, pp. 20-21).

For MGVR comments on Gérôme, see Brooklyn Bartholdi Pedestal Fund Catalogue, pp. 93-94, and Independent, 4 March 1886, p. 267, and 7 February 1889, p. 167. MGVR discussed sculpture by Gérôme in Boston Evening Transcript, 14 May 1892, p. 6.

MGVR's estimate of the work of Gérôme's contemporary, the animal painter Rosa Bonheur (1822-99), was comparable. Writing of her celebrated The Horse Fair (Metropolitan Museum), which had been featured at the 1853 Salon, MGVR expressed respect for Rosa Bonheur's skill, but with reservations: "It has not the highest artistic quality. . . . But it is a thoroughly good, intelligent, fresh and agreeable piece of work. It is not a great picture as one might use the term of a Troyon, for example . . . [but it is] infinitely better than Landseer" (Independent, 3 March 1887, p. 266).

[135]Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):201-2.

[136]Independent, 10 March 1887, p. 299. Further MGVR comments on Fortuny are in Independent, 7 February 1889, p. 167. For information on Fortuny and the Stewart Collection see Bruce Weber, "Mariano Fortuny and the Americans," seminar paper for William H. Gerdts, "American Genre Painting," Fall 1974, C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center.

[137]Independent, 22 November 1888, p. 1495.

[138]"Bridgman," pp. 50-51. A similar hostility to academic dryness can be seen in MGVR comments on the work of

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Cabanel (". . . often so unvital, so cold in color, and so unsympathetic in touch," Brooklyn Pedestal Fund Catalogue, p. 92) and on Gérôme's diligence (ibid., pp. 93-94). In much the same terms MGVR dismissed the work of Charles Sprague Pearce (1851-1914). See AABN, 11 December 1880, p. 281.

[139]Brooklyn Pedestal Fund Catalogue, pp. 85-86, where MGVR also praises the critical writing of Fromentin, Maîtres d'autrefois.

[140]Six Portraits, pp. 247-48. This passage was quoted by Nelson C. White, The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier (Cambridge: Riverside Press, privately printed, 1936), p. 59, who went on to explain that Currier was "more at home in an urbane civilization than in the comparatively provincial society of America in the seventies and eighties. . . . I think [wrote White] the disparagement unwarranted. As a rule all artists sooner or later find their true environment, and if they flourish in it and produce great art there is little more to be said" (p. 60).

[141]Boston Evening Transcript, 14 May 1892, p. 6.

[142]Independent 24 November 1887, p. 1513. In this article MGVR mistakenly recalls having seen the Bonnat at "the first Salon I saw--that of 1868," when, in fact, the picture was exhibited at the Salon of 1870 and there was no Bonnat at the 1868 Salon, according to the published catalogues.

MGVR valued Bonnat and Lerolle here as "valuable protests against pictorial exaggeration of every kind," and it is in the same terms that she also here praised Jules Breton's Religious Procession in Brittany of 1873 and Munkácsy's Pawn-Broker's Shop ("far more in the artist's true vein than his big religious paintings; but there are other pictures in America in the same vein which seem to me much finer").

[143]"The Wolfe Collection at the Metropolitan Museum," 17 November 1887, p. 1478.

[144]Art and Artists of Our Time, 1:90.

[145]Independent, 22 April 1886, pp. 491-92.

[146]Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):199.

[147]Independent, 17 November 1887, p. 1478.

[148]See, for example, "Le Salon de 1885," Gazette des Beaux Arts [a magazine which MGVR read regularly] 31 (1885, tome 1):489.

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[149]Independent, 25 November 1886, p. 1518.

[150]"The Century's Christmas Pictures: The Spiritual and Imaginative in Modern Art," p. 275. This collection also included other related images of art of the "juste milieu" as J. Bastien-Lepage's Annunciation to the Shepherds, Fritz Von Uhde's Holy Night, and Dagnan-Bouveret's Madonna.

[151]Henry Lerolle et ses amis (Paris: privately printed, 1932), pp. 4-5 and 13-14.

[152]For the use of encaustic at Trinity Church, see H. B. Weinberg, "John La Farge and the Decoration of Trinity Church, Boston," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 33 (1974):328-30.

[153]AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 30. A similar assessment of Cazin may be found in French Art by W. C. Brownell (New York: Scribner's, 1892), pp. 105-7; W. A. Coffin, "Cazin," Century, n.s. 33 (1897):393-99; and F. Gibson, Six French Artists of the Nineteenth Century (London: Robert Scott, 1925), pp. 49-55.

[154]Independent, 25 March 1886, p. 363.

[155]"In twenty years I don't think that twenty men have asked to see anything of mine, including Cazin, Bourget . . . Boughton . . . ," wrote La Farge to MGVR in an unpublished letter dated Dec. 8 [1908-10] (George Griswold, Jr. Collection).

[156]Boston Evening Transcript, 12 March 1892, p. 13.

[157]"Corot," pp. 161-62.

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CHAPTER V

CRITICAL PRINCIPLES

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's discussion of synthesis in paintings of Cazin has been cited by Frederick Campbell Moffat, who concluded:

> Mrs. Van Rensselaer's use of the term "synthesis" was undoubtedly inspired by the popular use of the word "synthèse" by French art critics and artists since 1885, but it implies a rather special meaning shared equally with Dow and Fenollosa. By no means had the French used the word consistently since objective and subjective definitions varied within the several contexts in which the term was used. . . . The Frenchmen most often used "synthesis" in art as denoting the expression of the artistic personality. To Denis, Gauguin and Serusier the process of simplifying forms, constructing a composition and arranging and selecting the harmonious apportionment of light and dark colors was opposed to analysis and "general effect." To Mrs. Van Rensselaer, however, Corot's procedure allowed first for an analysis and acceptance of nature on its own terms. Of course the French formulators at the end of the century were hardly interested in Corot and would not have identified his approaches to landscape as anything similar to their own. Rather, nature study and synthetic treatments of painting forms became totally separate goals by 1900. . . .[1]

This distorts the meaning of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism, which, in fact, in considering the question of synthesis in the art of Cazin and Corot, shares nothing at all with Dow and Fenollosa and still less with Denis, Gauguin, and Serusier. Moffat places her words in this context merely to provide ancestors for modern theory. Nothing could be more alien to the spirit of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. She found interesting the Japanese component in the art of Theodore

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Wores (1858-1939) (pl. 67) and Giuseppe De Nittis (1846-84), rather than that of any of the artists mentioned by Moffat; that is to say, within the context of traditional Western painting as taught in Munich or Paris, slightly flavored by Impressionism, with only the subject matter or asymmetrical composition suggesting anything of Japanese influence.[2] Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote repeatedly of the work of Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), she avoided commenting on the most stylized, the most "Japanese" of her works--the color prints--while writing extensively about such more traditionally conceived projects as the now lost Puvis de Chavannes-inspired mural for the Chicago Columbian Exposition. Although it has not as yet been recorded elsewhere, probably the first major exhibition of Cassatt's prints in America was the addition of "twenty-four unfinished studies" by "Miss Mary J. Cassett" (sic) of Paris to an 1888 show which had originated at the Boston Museum and then moved to the Union League Club in New York, The Work of the Women Etchers of America.[3] The Cassatt prints had not appeared in the Boston exhibition, yet their inclusion in New York elicited no mention from Mrs. Van Rensselaer, although she wrote the introduction to the Union League Club Catalogue for this exhibition and many articles on the subject of prints and the concerns of women.

Clearly the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer must be understood in the context of all that she represented, enjoyed, and expressed. It is only one part of a

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worldview which has everything to do with the preservation of traditional European values as enrichments of contemporary American life and nothing at all to say about art as a formal studio exercise. Like many of her contemporaries, she viewed art as a form of communication and thus judged meaning and feeling as of primary importance. When Symbolist artists rejected Impressionist objectivity, they drew sustenance from some of the expressive feeling found in the popular, officially honored art of France and thus occasionally expressed ideas parallel to those of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, whose criteria were shared by that world of art. Thus, for example, her writing about Lerolle's Rehearsal in the Choir Loft (see above, p. 182) can be seen to be related to that of Maurice Denis (1870-1943), who wrote much later of such paintings by Lerolle that these ". . . toiles d'inspiration personnelle, où le costume moderne, la mise en toile imprévue, un régime de valeurs simplifié et des gris distingués, mettaient une note nouvelle, une poésie de notre temps" (. . . canvases of personal inspiration, where the modern costumes, unusual composition, a control of simplified values and distinguished greys presents a new note, a poetry of our times).[4]

The emphasis on the poetic and the expressive in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer on one hand and Denis on the other derives from opposite goals. Whereas the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer represent the preservation of

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shared values, those of Denis assert a heritage for new forms. Many of Mrs. Rensselaer's publications were literal translations and summaries of French and German art criticism of her time, and her other writing is infused with ideas formulated in that context. Théophile Thoré (1807-69) had admired the spontaneity of the sketch and the value of poetic invention even before Mrs. Van Rensselaer was born, and he had written extensively about the Barbizon artists whose works were of central concern to Mrs. Van Rensselaer. Thomas Couture (1815-79), who had directed so many American pupils towards a painterly style, wrote, "An artist who feels keenly subjects his theme and execution to the expression of the love by which he is inspired. This imparts to the form of his work what is called style, and to his thought what is called originality."[5] The French etcher Felix Buhot (1847-98), whom Mrs. Van Rensselaer introduced to an American audience in 1888 (see pl. 4),[6] was characterized by the French critic Léonce Bénédite in the following related terms:

> Buhot--painter and etcher--. . . [was] above all a poet . . . a soul which was essentially subjective, which had a sympathetic feeling with all that it saw, and which seemed to invite confidences from both men and things. 7

For the artist to see with the eye of a poet was not an innovation of the late nineteenth century, and in American art there had been many painters who had dabbled in verse as well as writers who were amateur painters.[8] Through the gatherings of the Knickerbocker Sketch Club and the Century Club there had long been an association of artists and poets

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(such as that commemorated in A. B. Durand's Kindred Spirits, the celebrated 1849 leaf-by-leaf painting which represents the poet William Cullen Bryant and the painter Thomas Cole in the Catskills). However, by the last decades of the nineteenth century different concepts of painting and poetry had evolved. When Mrs. Van Rensselaer commends a work of art as "poetic," she asserts the importance of subjective interpretation over objective representation, of spirit over materiality, of poetry over prose. She insists that the artist ". . . is not a mere recorder. He is an interpreter. He neither copies nor falsifies the facts of nature. He transmutes them, giving them new beauties and a new meaning drawn from the essence of his own soul."[9] As mid-century counting-house realism, presenting an inventory of accumulated stuffs, gave way to more casual suggestion of infinite riches, the criteria of criticism also changed. Oblique intimation became more valued than fully rendered statement, the fluid passage of paint, suggesting the ephemeral and transitory, more treasured than the firmly contoured presentment of the unalterable, and daring inspired more admiration than handicraft.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer came to maturity with the first generation of American millionaires. Like others in a position to enjoy material plenty, she favored opulence and what she termed "ocular delight."[10] The development of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's art criticism was based on a fundamental rejec-

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tion of Puritanical restriction and an embrace of the artistic as an enrichment of life which proved that ". . . our utilities were not the sum and total substance of the modern world's achievements."[11] With a note of triumph Mrs. Van Rensselaer announced, ". . . our days of Puritanic rigor are upon the wane . . . we may well rejoice . . . and strive to accelerate the reaction which has thus begun."[12]

Although art was thus conceived as something beyond the strictly utilitarian (and thus related to religious feeling in providing a soulfulness to life), there was at the same time in the writing of Mrs. Van Rensselaer the assumption that "the pursuit of material well-being" was to be included in "the category of things beyond question needful for the progress and happiness of mankind."[13] There is a materiality to the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, a delight expressed in the sumptuous. Indeed, there is often a lavish use of language in the writing of Mrs. Van Rensselaer which reflects the opulence in which she lived. Here, for example, is her advice on furnishing a dining room in 1880:

> Let us choose table-linen not with geometrical designs, but with the naturalistic rose-wreaths of "Bacchus-patterns" still made in Saxony, or colored in some subtly artistic way. Let us have utensils in the perfect shapes Cellini gave to gold, and Germans of the Renaissance to silver, and that Pompeian artisans have left in bronze. Let us add, in pottery, fine Gubbio portrait-dishes and the realisms of Palissy, and exquisite porcelain figurines from Meissen, and Greek vases with their faultless shapes and free-hand sketches. Let us drink from fantastic forms of Venice, or from ivory tankards with battle--and hunting--scenes in high relief, or from

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> Bohemian glass with similar groups in deep intaglio. Let us sort our flowers into appropriate settings, and not shun the most gorgeously effective. . . .
>
> Now let the wall be tinted flat behind our pictures, but painted above with designs to all but rival them. Let the hangings be the most glowing products of the needle, the most masterly delineations of the loom. . . . Let us have Venetian buffets of redundant sculpture, and eighteenth-century cabinets with figures in ormolu, and marquetry tables with inlaid flowers in brilliant tints. Surely our eyes would feast more sumptuously on such surroundings than on our mild neutralities of color and of form. 14

This clutter of objects from every culture and clime reveals the same Gargantuan visual appetite expressed in the workroom of the architect H. H. Richardson (pl. 68), the studio of William Merritt Chase, the stained glass of John LaFarge, and even the encrusted surfaces of the oil paintings of A. P. Ryder (all of which figure in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer). As America began to join the nations of the Old World in annexing far-distant areas of the earth to provide raw materials for industry and markets for produced goods, the historical epochs of foreign cultures were pillaged as well. Eclecticism is the aesthetic of a consumer society. The writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer were designed to direct the public towards an artistic accumulation of goods. The myriad materials, sumptuous surfaces, juxtaposed forms, and vibrant color combinations of this period were created to be enjoyed. Their visual effects were meant to be consumed. For the first time in America, art could be fun.[15]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was a collector of eighteenth-

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century English popular magazines and commended to her readers the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century figurines which were the treasures of the Green Vaults in Dresden.[16] Like many others of her class who shared a family lineage going back through the eighteenth century in America, Mrs. Van Rensselaer in the late nineteenth century enjoyed Rococo art for its contrast with the harsh realities of the world in which she lived, summoning images as it did of a seemingly more gentle epoch. She admired eighteenth-century portraits in pastel:

> . . . no medium could have been in greater sympathy with the spirit of the age of Louis Quinze, when powder and pearls and soft rosy flesh, and clothes of pink and blue and white, made up the ideal of beauty--when grace not strength, when charm not force, when buoyancy not depth, when sensibility not earnestness, characterized both life and art.

However, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was too much an active participant in her times, an optimistic reformer who saw unlimited potential in the age in which she lived to have ever shared Henry Adams' attitude that he was born too late, an eighteenth-century gentleman, a misfit in nineteenth-century industrialized America.[17] Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer enjoyed the Rococo, she also concluded the passage on pastel cited above:

> . . . charming as are the pastels of this age, they do not reveal the whole of which the art is capable. So plentiful were they, however, and so perfect in their way, that they long blinded the world to further possibilities which lay behind them. As then practiced, the art was characterized by elaborate finish, carefully blended tones, soft effects, and a gently florid or a rather pale and chalky scheme of color. It seemed fit only for a super-elegant, somewhat shallow, and sentimental sort of work. . . . 18

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Mrs. Van Rensselaer focused her attention on the more robust use of pastel developed in the nineteenth century and especially by the new and promising group of current American "Painters in Pastel." Mrs. Van Rensselaer's interest in the eighteenth century was only one aspect of a wide-ranging eclecticism which was a very important part of late-nineteenth-century creativity. Out of the old the new was made, in a process which was peculiar to that period. Individual aspects of varied art of the past were used as tesserae in a mosaic, forming together an irregular opulence. In the art world of the 1970s, novelty is prized above all other considerations, and any work containing references to imagery of an earlier age is often exclusively characterized by reference to that particular quality. However, for Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer and the young American artists of her generation, coming to maturity in the 1870s-80s, a return to the art of the past represented a vital force in the creation of the new. In Mrs. Van Rensselaer's very first article on art she had written, ". . . study, reflection, absorption, eclecticism,--these are the watchwords of the future."[19] Just as the artists of the Renaissance and Neo-Classicism went back to the art of pagan antiquity, and these artists of Romanticism returned to the Baroque in order to formulate new style, so the eclecticism of late-nineteenth-century American art must be understood in terms of the total new expression made possible through the borrow-

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ing of various traditional components. The end result was not mere duplication. The resonance and tone, the accumulated opulence of American art of the last decades of the nineteenth century, was an expression of a distinctive age, one in which seasoned old branches provided the best of fuels for the sparks of youthful vitality.

Take, for example, the exuberant camaraderie expressed by that most original, yet clearly derivitave, Portrait of Duveneck, which was painted by William Merritt Chase in 1875. This work has since been lost[20] and is today known only by a reproductive print by the German etcher William Unger (pl. 69) published as an illustration to an article on Chase by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in which she wrote of the painting in 1881:

> It marks, I think, the highest point of accomplishment he has yet attained; and it would assuredly be hard to find its superior in any atelier where an American has been at work. Its most valuable quality, to those who look for indications of national progress and future general endowment, as well as for signs of individual talent, is its originality. I do not speak now of the conception of the picture; that is a charm to very many in itself, while to others it seems a drawback,--a deliberate eccentricity, or the proof of a not very acute feeling for beauty. I speak of its merits as a painting narrowly so called. Nothing could be more harmonious, more balanced, more thoroughly of a piece throughout. The scale of the color is low, but without any hint of blackness or sombreness. There is as much reticence in the use of excessive darks as there is in the employment of pronounced lights. It is wonderful to see how well the values have been given with so restrained a scale, how much richess of effect accompanies so severe a self-denial, and how much "color" there is in a picture which, literally speaking, shows not a single note thereof. There is no hint of affectation in the choice of so low a key, no following of any "old master" in its grays and browns. And these appear, moreover, to have been chosen

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> for their own sakes, and not in an effort after "tone" as the popular eye conceives it, after those effects which time has rendered dear to us, having bestowed them upon the canvas of the great men of other days. Nor is there in the work a flavor of any living artist whose style might be supposed to have influenced a young and ardent painter. It is the work of a master who has struck out a line for himself, but who follows it so easily, so soberly, with so much self-possession, that it is hard for the uninitiated to believe that it has not long before been trodden by someone else. 21

It is curious to note the emphasis on originality in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's discussion of this portrait, in which the young American artist is decidedly garbed in a period costume suggestive of seventeenth-century Holland. This very same picture has more recently been discussed from a diametrically opposite point of view by an historian writing without ever having seen the original oil painting:

> The need of the late 19th century to form some intimate and almost physical contact with the artistic past was deep and urgent, and had other outlets of expression beyond the decorated studio based on historical models. Its art was characterized by an undisguised emulation of the brushwork, coloration, and composition of such idols as Hals and Velasquez. And its artists strove, fictively through their art, to re-create themselves in the image of those idols. Perhaps the most concise image of this desire is Chase's 1875 portrait of his friend and fellow-artist, Frank Duveneck, shown wearing a wide-brimmed hat and smoking a long clay pipe, unmistakably in the manner of 17th-century portrait and genre paintings, while pausing in the contemplation of one of the 19th century's favorite images from the 17th, Hals's Malle Babbe (which we . . . discovered in a central position in one of Chase's studio paintings). 22

The juxtaposition of these two such antipodal viewpoints towards the same work of art, Chase's Portrait of Duveneck, suggests something about the changing positions of the concepts of "the old" and "the new" between Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer's pericd and the current era, almost one hundred years later. Eclecticism was viewed as an aid to originality by Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her contemporaries and can be seen as a potent factor in the works of art created not only by Chase and his fellow painters who banded together at the Society of American Artists. It may also be seen to be a feature of the architecture of Richardson and McKim, Mead, and White, as well as the sculpture of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, and others of that period, all of which Mrs. Van Rensselaer was tc write about extensively. By choosing what was thought best from the great art of the past these artists formulated a new art which conveyed a sumptuous richness of color, texture, and space as well as a sensitivity to transitory nuance and emotional content. Just as many of the artists whom Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote about were eclectic in the means by which they formed their art, so was Mrs. Van Rensselaer in her approach to criticism.

The range of subject matter which forms the volume of her essays on art, Six Portraits, reveals an eclectic taste. By valuing individual expression above all other criteria, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was there prepared to contend, within the covers of one book, with such diverse artists as Luca Della Robbia, Correggio, William Blake, Corot, George Fuller, and Winslow Homer. In the introduction to that book Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote in 1889, "The main thing for an intelligent observer is to learn to appreciate all forms of

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speech and all ideas that are well expressed. No kind of art is better than all others."[23] Although a marked preference for the loaded brush of the more painterly artists and scorn for the dry, academic late followers of Neo-Classicism marked Mrs. Van Rensselaer's criticism, she had nothing but veneration for such great masters of line and contour as Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) and J. A. Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) and particularly admired the distinctive linear qualities of the art of Winslow Homer.[24]

A similarly eclectic taste was revealed by the design and motto incorporated into the seal of the Art Students League (pl. 70) by Kenyon Cox in 1889, which reads "NULLA DIES SINE LINEA" (No Day Without Line) and thus asserts the importance of drawing and academic tradition even within the precincts of the painterly new school.

The yearning to encompass it all, shared by Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her contemporaries, is nowhere better displayed than in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (pl. 71), and there survives a most revealing letter from Mrs. Van Rensselaer to Mrs. Gardner which succinctly expresses so much of what these culturally voracious Americans felt at the time. Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:[25]

"Dear Mrs. Gardner,

"While I was on my travels I could not find a moment to thank you for your great kindness in showing me your most beautiful place, and for the plasure it gave me--& always will give me, for, I am thankful to say, I have a memory that keeps such things always vividly before me. I was dazed by the multitude of impressive & enchanting things that I saw,

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but the . . . strongest & most unusual impression I received was of the combined & ordered beauty of the place as a whole--such a place as, when we are young, we hope to see in Europe but do not find when we get there. It is a great work of art that you have achieved, I don't see how you can go to sleep at night for the pride and joy of thinking about it. I am grateful indeed for the chance you gave me to see it in your company, & shall treasure that morning among my richest recollections. . . .

"Sincerely yours,
"M. G. Van Rensselaer
"9 West Tenth Street
"March 12"

Much of the art and architecture of this epoch, between the 1870s and World War I, may be understood exactly in the terms used by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in this letter. The artists strived to create ". . . combined and ordered beauty . . . as a whole," believing that such accomplishment would indeed be quite beyond anything already achieved in the Old World. It was not a simple reconstruction that was the goal, but something new and impressive, with the recycled splendor of varied cultures used in inventive juxtapositions. All that was grand and noble, delectable or amusing, suggestive or thought-provoking was absorbed with passion. Richness was more highly valued than consistency. (Mrs. Van Rensselaer thought it perfectly delightful to find that the new Boston Public Library was French on the outside and Italian on the inside.[26] See pls. 72 and 73.)

Originality did not have the central focus of attention then, as it was to acquire later with developments in twentieth-century art. When original great works of art were inaccessible, fine casts and photographic reproductions

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were highly valued, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer devoted years of effort at the turn of the century to enriching the interiors of New York City public schools with eclectic assortments.[27] (It is revealing to inspect the site of a public school such as one Mrs. Van Rensselaer embellished to find today the walls of the institution adorned with such remnants as a cast of a Luca della Robbia relief, in the auditorium, while the halls are defaced by "original" grafitti-style painting, by some local hand, installed by the current school administration.[28]) Artists of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's era thought it appropriate to repaint major works, and some of the finest painting of the period exists, not in the "original," but in such later replicas. (See, for example, the spirited Portrait of Augustus Saint-Gaudens [pl. 74], 1908 replica of 1887 painting lost in a fire, by Kenyon Cox [1856-1919] and the soulful Portrait of Richard Watson Gilder [pl. 13] by Cecilia Beaux [1855-1942], which is a 1931-32 replica of a 1902-3 canvas.[29])

In the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is found no stigma attached to works of art which are derivative (in any sense) as long as the end result contains the breath of life and force of creative imagination. Indeed, the zestful appropriation of the riches of the past was enjoyed as a positive attribute of the period.

Before the Civil War in the United States, nationalism was expressed by an art primarily focused on the present

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and on American subjects. Late-nineteenth-century eclecticism is also an expression of nationalism. It is to be understood in terms of a statement of maturity, an assertion that, with the achievements of the late nineteenth century, America had joined the community of established nations, and with the advantage that it could reap the benefit of their prior accomplishments. Mrs. Van Rensselaer termed Americans of her day ". . . cultivated men and women who are the heirs of all the ages, living in a state of superior enlightenment . . ."[30] and insisted:

> We are not a primitive people, but the heirs of all the ages; for surely the mere fact that we have crossed an ocean does not disinherit us. It is as utterly foolish to talk of throwing away our legacy of art, and of beginning afresh with the intent to develop "something American," as it would be to hold the same language with regard to science, industry, morals, manners, feelings, tastes--with regard to any other of those civilized necessities or sentiments or requirements which are ours as much as Europe's.
>
> . . . we may never have a really great building age in America . . . until we go to work, and long persist in working, as we confess we ought to work in every other department of human effort--building intelligently on a wide knowledge of what has been done before, not thinking a bastard modern primitiveness a desirable foundation; systematizing our efforts, not wasting ourselves in crude experiments; keeping definite aims and ideals in view, not waiting lazily for "the spirit of the age" to speak through empty minds and untrained hands. If hitherto we have seemed to show little enough of artistic aptitude, let us take comfort from the confession that we have been very ignorant, and that we have had a very childish trust in the capabilities of ignorance. 31

There is nothing in this posture which suggests a desire to return to the past. It is not nostalgia, but aggressive acquisition which marks the art and art criticism of this period. It has been noted that ". . . Mrs. Van Rens-

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selaer was the first to understand [that] Richardson was never a copyist, but without embarrassment he drew on Romanesque sources for his own purposes"[32] (pl. 75). In examining the language chosen by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, it is significant to note that she emphasized the originality of Richardson's use of earlier sources by using the word "eclectic" as an equivalent to "free" when she wrote of Richardson that he:

> . . . had a scholarly grasp upon the richest traditional resources of his art . . . when he was not scholarly it was of deliberate intent . . . in the maturity of his power, he was "free" or "eclectic" in treatment . . . because he felt that fitness did not call for historic accuracy, that practical or expressional needs demanded more of inventive and less of reproductive effort. 33

Thus, by going back to the past, contemporary artists broadened their capacities and enlarged their horizons. This resulted in such a catholicity of taste and such diversity of style that it is impossible to comprehend the art of this period in any simple fashion. When a Retrospective Exhibition of the Society of American Artists was organized after fourteen years of efforts closely followed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, it was this very quality which she found most laudable. She wrote:

> . . . the one thing that is most conspicuous is catholicity of taste. Solidly good, beautifully skillful, sincerely felt works of time-honored and of novel sorts hang side by side. . . . True artistic excellence has been the only standard set up, and it is delightful to see how very high is the general average of the collection and how very different in character are the best examples. It would be a pleasure to bring any foreigner into these rooms and bid him test by the witness of their contents whether Americans have learned the arts of painting and sculpture or not and whether or not they are likely to pursue them along narrowly limited paths.[34]

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As Lois Fink has noted, these artists of the Society of American Artists (with whom Mrs. Van Rensselaer identified)

> set themselves apart from the National Academicians in their attitude toward the art of the past and contemporary European art, in their acceptance of individuality in artists, and in their acceptance of women in art. "We are all of us," insisted an unidentified member to George Sheldon, "real admirers of the old masters; while the typical National Academician admires Lambinet, Bouguereau, Cabanel, Delaroche, Meyer von Bremen, and such men as Guido Reni and Murillo." 35

In reaching back to the great masters of a time before their immediate predecessors who were their European professors, these artists created what has been termed an "American Renaissance," a rebirth of the old in a New World context. At the same time, their European contemporaries strived for renewal of their own art by similarly drawing upon the past. (Both the independents and the academicians of Paris made copies from the Old Masters during their formative years.[36])

The creative aspect of eclecticism is not universally recognized. For example, in noting the absence in America, for all intents and purposes, of the various Art Nouveau styles of architecture flourishing in Europe in the period from 1895 to 1914, Carroll L. V. Meeks attributed it to the ". . . great weight of authority, and the lip service paid to it in the United States" and felt compelled to add:

> It must be remembered that these [American] architects traveled abroad constantly and so supplemented their book knowledge by frequent contact with the originals. Furthermore there was a positive rejection of any obligation to be decisively original. . . . There was no shame in being conservative, it was in fact the obliga-

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> tion one owed to the deity of "Taste." There was a secure reliance on the past which architects were able to convince themselves was part of the present, in a way which the events of 1914 made it impossible for their followers to recapture. 37

A similarly negative estimate was projected by Milton W. Brown, who wrote of this period when American art ". . . was brazenly flaunting its delusions of grandeur" and of artists who ". . . lived on the borrowed magnificence of the old masters . . . an array of technically proficient nonentities."[38]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her colleagues conveyed another view. They found recourse to great art of the past liberating. They relished sumptuous opulence and enjoyed matching quotations. They felt that a whole world had just been opened to them which had been denied their predecessors in a restricted and puritanical America. As both artists and critics grappled with new ambitions and new problems, they struggled to broaden their perspectives in an America come of age. By going back they went forward. By returning to the Romanesque, Renaissance, or Baroque they seized powers unknown by their provincial forbears and rejected the taste of the generation immediately preceding them.

For example, in terms of architecture, Mrs. Van Rensselaer championed the monumentality, first of Richardson and then of McKim, Mead, and White, over the picturesque busyness of the structures erected as an expression of official taste just as she emerged as an architectural critic. A proud

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municipal ornament, the Jefferson Market Courthouse (pl. 76) in New York, completed in 1876, for instance, was a conspicuous improvement on an area of land that had up until then been covered with wooden market buildings. Designed by two architects of English origin, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Withers, it was in that banded variety of mid-Victorian English Gothic, Venetian-influenced, that was called either Ruskin Gothic or the "Lean Bacon Style" in its time.[39] Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer was shortly to find herself settled in a house in the immediate neighborhood of this imposing structure, as a young architectural critic she was explicit in rejecting the principles of its design, writing in 1884:

> . . . Mr. Withers's Police Courts at the corner of Tenth street and Sixth Avenue . . . has great merits--notably in the picturesque composition of its masses resulting from its intelligent adaptation to an irregular site. But its composition with voids and solids is scattered and restless, and its decoration, both in color and in sculptural detail, may be charged with the same fault. It is overdone to begin with, and what is done is not so well done as it might have been . . . mere architectural composition alone may make a fine building, . . . here we have proof that it is easy to spoil a good design by elaborating it in mistaken ways. This same design more simply carried out, both as to color and to form, would have been a far more valuable work. 40

Mrs. Van Rensselaer denigrated the recent influence of England on American architecture and of Düsseldorf on American painting and pointed ahead to Paris as the proffered beacon for the future development of art in this country. She expressed gratitude for the picture dealers who were instrumental in furthering the progress of American art when

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she wrote: ". . . almost everyone can remember when Schaus's and Goupil's were the only important picture shops in New York, and only the ungrateful forget how much good their owners did in acquainting America with the best works of France and breaking the reign of the long dominant Düsseldorf school."[41] From the start, the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer reserved the most caustic remarks for what she considered obsolete values:

> Many of the pictures . . . of the Düsseldorf school [were] good in their way, but that way [was] the dullest and driest and most tedious that imagination can conceive . . . it is a mystery what charm, what attraction, the collectors of the last generation can have found in these hard, brown, insipid, tiresome, unsuggestive, ugly products of patient prosers with the brush. The gallery-haunter of to-day is apt to find them not only unattractive but unutterably depressing; and if he knows what painting means, he finds them all the more depressing just because they are not really incompetent, only inartistic; just because so much labor and knowledge and even skill in certain directions was wasted in their making. 42

Similarly, Mrs. Van Rensselaer dismissed the paintings of the immediately preceding generations which she found exhibited in the New Picture Gallery in Munich:

> A more dreary collection could hardly be imagined. . . . After seeing the first room, with Piloty's Death of Wallenstein and his immense Triumph of Germanicus (superbly painted, but a scene or a panorama rather than a picture proper), one finds nothing on the walls but the dry and tedious relics of [this] generation. . . . An immense respect fills one's mind as one gazes--respect for those who could have loved art so passionately and so truly during long and earnest lives, when art must have appeared to them--their own art at least--so formal, so dead, and so mechanical . . . their color is harsh, and crude, and savorless; their handling hard, dull, monotonous, painstaking and over-elaborate; of tone they have no notion, in composition only the precepts of formality have guided them; in life, in character, in expression, their pictures

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> are totally deficient. One becomes more and more depressed in passing from room to room. If the pictures were only worse the pilgrimage would be more lively, but it is impossible to laugh . . . evidently every man knew all he could ever learn, and did his very best. They are not painters, that is all. . . . 43

Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted with regret the absence of any significant number of paintings of "the current Munich school" in this collection and expressed in this passage the same fervor which motivated the American artists of her time who had gone to study in Munich, to repudiate the values of the previous generations of the Munich academy in which they were trained, and turn for inspiration to the circle of Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900) (pls. 77-78), an artist who advocated painting the contemporary life of ordinary peasants with directness. Like Chase, Duveneck, and Shirlaw, Mrs. Van Rensselaer considered Leibl a great painter and wrote with respect for the current Munich artists:

> Who has not heard of the school at Munich as one of the most seductive goals toward which the Yankee student yearns? The men who are now the chief Munich painters or professors have a world-wide reputation--Piloty, Dietz, Lenbach, Leibl, --it is strange indeed to think that such artists should have grown up . . . [in Munich] as the successors and under the tuition . . . [of the earlier generation of academic painters]. No antithesis could be greater--on the one hand the most earnest effort, the most minute and scrupulous care, but the most utter want of artistic endowment either in feeling, in color, or in tone; on the other hand artistic individualities of a force and charm unsurpassed to-day in Europe and of such a freedom in execution as has made the "Munich manner" a by-word of reproach to those among our picture critics who cling to the old traditional hard, labored, shiny, varnishy practice of Düsseldorf and of Munich as she was a generation back. The very sons of some of the most tiresomely Philistine of these old painters are to-day leaders of the newer school, the opposites in every way of the men whose blood and whose

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> art went to make their own. The Younger Kaulbach, the younger Zimmermann have indeed little affinity with their fathers--in their case as in others we feel it has been the Old and not the New Pinakothek which has taught them their craft. It is Brauwer, and Rembrandt, and Rubens, not Cornelius, and Overbeck, and Kaulbach who have been their teachers. 44

The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer shares the perspective of those artists in Munich who brought reform to an art world previously dominated by the dryer system of the older generation of academic painters. The artists praised by Mrs. Van Rensselaer represent a German equivalent of the French "juste milieu" artists in that they enjoyed official recognition and popularity while bringing new breadth, contemporaneity, light, and air to traditional painting in the 1870s and 1880s. Mrs. Van Rensselaer advised, "While many other things might best be learned in Paris, an eye for color and tone could be cultivated to the greatest advantage in Munich."[45]

It is interesting to note how all these artists of reform, whether in Paris, Munich, or New York, created something new by returning to the past. Leibl reverted to the seventeenth-century masters of the Netherlands as well as Holbein, and the dichotomy of his work (varying from brushy painterliness to the linear, flattened image of Three Women in Church) can best be understood in terms of this eclecticism. The vitality of his ideas which so influenced the young American painters who, like Mrs. Van Rensselaer, first made their presence felt in the American art world of the late 1870s, was not to be found in Leibl's sources (which

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included Courbet) in themselves, but in the creative use he put them to in approaching the contemporary life of ordinary people with directness. The international scope of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's frame of reference enabled her to see connections between such foreign artists and their American counterparts, and when she visited the studio of Thomas Eakins in Philadelphia during the summer of 1881, she mentioned Leibl and was shocked to learn that Eakins had never heard of him.[46] In a dispatch Mrs. Van Rensselaer sent to the New York World from Munich the following year, Mrs. Van Rensselaer reported:

> One of the great names in Munich to-day is that of Leibl, and the name is well known in America, I think, though but few of his canvases have crossed the ocean. I was disappointed to find him absent from Munich, having hoped for a possible sight of his atelier and a more thorough acquaintance with his work. Never had the doctrine of realism in art--of exact, unquestioning reproduction--been pushed to greater theoretical extremes than in Leibl's words as reported by those who know him, and never has it found a more loyal exponent on canvas. No man with any artistic instinct could go quite as far in practice as Leibl goes in theory, but he goes a good deal further than one might imagine to be compatible with the production of really fine artistic results . . . with his technical power cultivated to an extraordinary degree, he paints chiefly groups of figures--usually peasants--which are strictly portrait-like in character. . . . a picture painted in Paris was bought by Munkácsy. Among the more recent works is the one now on view at the International Exhibition in Vienna, showing three peasant women--grandmother, mother and daughter--praying in a church [see pl. 78]. In this canvas his theories may be seen most literally put into practice. The figures are placed one behind the other with small regard to "composition" properly so called. The light is scattered, not concentrated so as to produce a more striking or more single effect. And so little regard is paid to the tonality of the canvas that the dark figures are relieved against a dead-white wall, no effort being made to bring this into pictorial harmony with the rest. It is not to be supposed that Leibl went thus contrary to accepted artistic canons in ignorance or carelessness.

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> "I know the wall is out of harmony," he is reported to have said, "but then there are always things in nature which are not in harmony." A dangerous doctrine, truly, to follow in one's art--a doctrine which would ruin the work of almost every other man. Even Leibl's admirers cannot agree with him in all such points, but his work is so powerful that one is glad to accept it in whatever shape he may choose to cast it. And as originality is the chief charm, if not the chief intrinsic merit, in a work of art, one prizes Leibl's exhibitions thereof, though copied by other men they would repel. As a clever German critic wrote not long ago: "One would not wish every man to paint as Leibl does, but in this age of the world it is a great piece of good fortune that one man paints so." It is well, that is, to see the realistic tendencies which are now so powerful in all artistic circles pushed to their utmost logical development by a master hand. . . . 47

S. R. Koehler, the editor of American Art Review and Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first professional mentor, was a collector of etchings by Leibl and included them in the magazine (which placed great emphasis on the current interest in etchings among American artists who had recently returned from abroad). The international context in which the art of the 1880s was developing made it imperative that an art critic have a cosmopolitan grasp of the scene as a whole. No one was better prepared by background, experience, and discernment than Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who during her 1882 trip to Munich sought to inform herself about those things most relevant to the American art world. She reported:

> So far as I can judge there are to-day but two places which a student would choose between for the completion of his training--Paris and Munich. For many things the Parisian training is undoubtedly the best, but I should say that the place for a young man with the indications of true coloristic talent is Munich. . . . Here is a great art academy, world-famous and attracting students from every land . . . and in this the Government still keeps up its interest, being most liberal in paying pro-

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> fessors and lecturers and doing whatever lies in its power to sustain its prestige, even going so far as to give studios rent free, with fire and servants, to the best scholars of certain professors. I saw, for example, a day or two ago, the studio which Mr. Chase held on this tenure when he was studying with Piloty. 48

The year before Mrs. Van Rensselaer had written the first extended discussion of the work of Chase to be published,[49] and she visited Munich with his interests firmly in her mind, reporting on the admirable technical qualities of portraits by Franz von Lenbach (1836-94) and paintings by Karl Theodor von Piloty (1826-86) (whose Triumph of Germanicus prompted the comment, "I should hesitate if I were asked to name a painter in Paris who could execute such a work with such good emotional as well as technical success"). In Munich Mrs. Van Rensselaer also encountered the fantastic paintings of the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), which she considered ". . . sometimes conceived in a mood more suited for poetical than for pictorial interpretation," yet worthy of extended comment as the works of ". . . a living Swiss painter who is almost unknown . . . in America"[50] and ". . . a very original artistic personality--rarest of things in these prosaic days of art."[51]

Thus, within just these few Munich articles a wide range of tastes is revealed. The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is as eclectic as any of the art of the contemporary figures she wrote about.

Throughout all the years of reviewing exhibitions Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared many of the premises and maintained

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an interest in the works of the Munich-trained American artists, who formed such a vital contingent of the Society of American Artists, the Society of American Painters in Pastel, the Society of American Etchers, and the Tile Club. From 1885 Mrs. Van Rensselaer essentially lived in the same neighborhood in which she had spent her childhood years, that is, near Fifth Avenue and Ninth or Tenth Street in Manhattan, which had become so identified with those German-trained artists that their faction was jocularly referred to as "the Tenth Street Munich School."[52] There is no doubt but that Mrs. Van Rensselaer's interest in Leibl was stimulated by these artists and particularly by Chase, whose sumptuous studio (pl. 79) in the famed Tenth Street Studio Building designed by R. M. Hunt (which represented, literally and figuratively, an usurpation of the territory formerly occupied by the Düsseldorf-trained Albert Bierstadt, 1830-1902) Mrs. Van Rensselaer visited in preparing the article on Chase's work in 1880 while she was still living in New Jersey.[53] One of the treasures to be admired in Chase's colorful studio was ". . . a picture of a girl smoking a long clay pipe, which was painted by Leibl in 1869, in Gustave Courbet's studio."[54] The start of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's own professional activity was linked to that of these artists who had also been trained in Germany, and it is not surprising to find a Munich-school orientation to her early criticism. She noted the works of the American artists who

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first went to Munich and remained, becoming part of the academic establishment there, such as Toby Rosenthal and David Neal (1838-1915).[55] The painterliness of the works of Hans Makart (1840-84) (pl. 80), an Austrian artist and pupil of Piloty very prominent during Mrs. Van Rensselaer's youthful years in Germany, was later recalled in a perceptive critique published after the artist's premature death:

> Makart painted with extreme rapidity--with a dash and summariness that often went beyond the bounds of the permissible. Even when his palpable "pot-boilers" are omitted, his legacy includes work of many degrees of imperfection. . . .
>
> All Vienna was at his feet. . . . How well I remember when the Pest in Florence [or The Seven Deadly Sins, 1867-68] came to Dresden in the spring of 1869--the stir, and the endless discussion, and the battling, all "young Germany" on the one side and all national traditions, theories, and reputations on the other . . . it was something more than merely sensational. It was very clever art; though some could see no real worth beneath its cleverness and many saw immorality behind its charm. . . .
>
> It was easy to name the chief effect produced--an effect of intense sensuous beauty. One might deny or question many things, but not that the eye's delight had been planned for and secured. The composition lacked simplicity and repose, but had a picturesque, seductive harmony and ardour. . . .
>
> But above all it was the colour that charmed the eye; or, rather, that intoxicated the sense . . . those who cared for color at all could remember nothing save that the new painter was a colourist de race. . . . For fifty years the whole tendency of German art had been to exalt its abstract--intellectual or sentimental--at the expense of its concrete, sensuous side. . . . Kaulbach [was] no colorist but he approved the colouristic effects of Piloty, and encouraged the young generation to take him for its master. . . . Certain foreign influences--from France the influence of Gros through his pupils. . . . The day was dawning when the old art of Holland should furnish an ideal to the new art of Munich. Men were already beginning to work here who were true painters--who had a true feeling for colour and tone and

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> movement and technical vigour, a conviction that these were more valuable things in painted work than philosophic thought or cold accuracy of line. And in the North such names as Knaus and Menzel were beginning to be spoken. But it was still a reaction in its infancy. Colour was still the great thing wanting. . . . Never was there greater need than in Germany, twenty years ago, for a man who should preach by very conspicuous practice the value of sensuousness in art. Such a man was Makart. . . .
>
> . . . he is not sincere in execution, not truthful in the way he translated Nature in rendering these conceptions . . . he is most untruthful when he treats humanity. . . . Is it not a strange, unhealthy preference which thus exalts inanimate over animate beauty, and finds its chief inspiration in those things which to great decorators have always seemed secondary when weighed in the scale with the human form? 56

Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted the widespread influence of Makart, particularly ". . . the school which is directed by Matéjko in Cracow, and that branch of the new Russian art which is led by Sémiradski and Makowski." However, she sought inspiration for American artists from another direction.

The lush qualities of paint admired in Makart were of greater significance to Mrs. Van Rensselaer when united with the force of honesty and the most promising developments in American art Mrs. Van Rensselaer traced back to the first canvases which were sent home by artists studying in Munich who had been inspired, not by Makart or Piloty, so much as by Leibl:

> A few years ago one would not have been very ready to prophesy that American art was about to produce a new development of a strong and vital sort. Though a critic might have said that it was not an art of very deep endowment or very rich performance, yet he would hardly have called it undeveloped or preparative. It had been at work for many years, with the impression that it was fully grown, and had perhaps nearly attained the utmost

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that was to be drawn from the modes of thought and practice it preferred. The paintings which we were accustomed to see year after year on the National Academy walls bore a strong family likeness to each other. There was a very wide distance, of course, between the best and the worst of them; yet there was a similarity among almost all of them, not only in sentiment and artistic aim, but also in the ways adopted to incarnate the sentiment and realize the aim. There were very few American artists who seemed to care in the least to experiment,--to strike out a new line of observation or of practice,--who seemed impelled by any artistic impulse different from that which possessed some dozens of their brethren. There were, of course, some painters among us against whom such charges as these could not with justice be brought. But their number was not large, and they exerted, with perhaps but a single exception, very little individual influence. Collective influence they could not exercise at all, for they were radically diverse among themselves. They did not seem to be logical outgrowths along any line of development, but rather resembled what a gardener calls "sports,"--varieties whose genesis no one understands, whose advent no one has foreseen, and whose recurrence no one can predict.

There were some paintings shown on the walls of the National Academy of Design in 1877, however, which seemed to predict that a new and coherent development in art was beginning. Sent home from Europe by young and hitherto unknown artists, they were as unlike as possible to the average academic thing in pictures; and their authors differed, moreover, from such peculiar talents as I have just noticed by showing an affinity among themselves. There was a certain unity in the conception and treatment of their work,--taking these words in their widest sense,--a similarity of belief as to the sort of excellence to be aimed at, though the mental and manual individuality was strong in each case, and there was consequently much diversity in the methods that had been employed to attain such excellence. I need hardly repeat that the family likeness among the elder painters was a likeness that was apt to run through their entire work, down to the very details of conception and of treatment. On the other hand, the likeness between the "new men," as they quickly came to be called, was merely indicative of a coherent impulse such as has always been necessary to the formation of a sound and vital national art,--of a school of any kind. There was no mistaking the hands of the new men, no possibility of confusing them among themselves, as had been so easy with many of their elders. Yet there was no denying their brotherhood in art. It was this brotherhood, combined with the individuality of each, that prophesied a new future for American painting.

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> There were many to say, of course, that the new style of work was a bit of studio practice only, a plagiarism of Munich masters, a trick of Munich ateliers, a flavor of Bavarian soil that would evaporate after a year or two of home residence and work. Time has not verified, however, such predictions as these. . . . since that time the new men have more than held their own, . . . the strongest evidence that their first inspiration is to last, and their style of work to influence our future. This strongest evidence is the fact that their ranks are being daily swollen by new recruits, that in every exhibition we see quite new names signing some of the best work, and that all the débutants, variously endowed and of varying temperaments though they be, and coming though they do from a number of different schools, are yet inspired by a certain fraternity of spirit in the way they conceive of their profession and of the place which they aspire to hold in it. And further, into the ranks of the new men have fallen those exceptional talents which before seemed isolated from the general band of artists and from one another as well. The missing links between them have been supplied by the new-comers, and they now appear, not as straggling offshoots from the main stem of our development, but as the first scattered buds of a new and important growth.
>
> Most prominent in our minds, as we think of the exhibition of 1877 and the men whom it brought to light, are the names of Shirlaw, Duveneck, and Chase. Mr. Shirlaw indubitably ranked highest at the time. His Sheep-Shearing in the Bavarian Highlands was the great picture of the year. Second to him we placed . . . Mr. Duveneck, with his masterly Turkish Page [pl. 81].
>
> . . . Near this last hung Mr. Chase's contribution, a full-length of a child with a broken jug. 57

In Mrs. Van Rensselaer's memorable phrase it was these "young men from Munich who caused a great rattling of dry bones"[58] at the crucial National Academy exhibition of 1877 and were responsible for inaugurating the flourishing new epoch in American art which followed. However, Mrs. Van Rensselaer sometimes found the Munich manner lacking and preferred the works of Americans who studied in Paris. For example, in reviewing the 1879 National Academy exhibition, she wrote:

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> The Munich students, from whom we have come to expect the best work on the wall, are this year very disappointing. . . . It is not sketchiness I blame in these pictures. A dozen outline strokes may be sufficient unto themselves, the result perfect in its way. And, on the other hand, an "impressionist" picture, where outline does not exist and where color is suggested almost without form, may have a value of its own. But a picture which starts to be a definite rendering and stops halfway cannot be more satisfactory than a half-written book, no matter how clever, or a blocked-out statue, though genius held the mallet. . . . [The paintings of the Munich students] show aptitude enough to make us impatient that the labor has not been given. 59

Ultimately, the American artists who had studied in Munich also shifted their focus to Paris and Salon standards and for them, as for Mrs. Van Rensselaer, German training was merely a prelude.[60]

One lasting legacy of the Munich School to American art and criticism, however, was a lively interest in Dutch and Flemish art of the seventeenth century. Mrs. Van Rensselaer not only undertook the task of acquainting her readers with the accomplishment of Hals, but she also wrote extensively on Rembrandt, Rubens, and their contemporaries and translated The Art of the Low Countries by W. R. Valentiner for American readers[61] (see Bibliography). In 1883 Mrs. Van Rensselaer reported:

> If one of our younger American painters were asked to name those artists of bygone times whose influence is most potent in the studios to-day, he would surely cite Frans Hals among the very first [pl. 82]. In Munich Hals has been of late the most dominant of artistic forces,--directly in his own work and indirectly in that of his pupil Adriaen Brouwer; in certain Parisian quarters his influence is almost as apparent; and many of our own young painters, who began in Paris or in Munich, have studied him later in his own land and have formed themselves largely by his example. . . .

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> In the present day . . . when "realism" is the watchword and when devotion to clever and individual workmanship has become almost excessive, [Hals] . . . has been re-discovered and eulogized afresh, put on a pedestal in the studios, and worshiped, with only Velasquez for his fellow, as "the painter's painter." Yet, with all his immense vogue among professionals and amateurs, his name and work are still not very familiar to the public. . . . Hals must be seen at home to be understood, and his home lies a little off the highway of common travel. . . . The best of Hals's work is . . . in Haarlem. . . .
>
> It is impossible here to explain the technical perfection of these pictures, where he shows himself not so great an artist as Velasquez, but a painter whose workmanship is as transcendent, and who manages at times, moreover, a wider and more difficult scale of color. Everything is fine and original,--color, tone, arrangement, character,--but it is the touch which is really the point,--swift, direct, spirited, broad and bold, yet faultlessly exact and sympathetic. No man's handling was every more personal, more autographic, more wholly his own creation; and such individuality is, of course, a prime factor in great technical performance. . . . It is mere workmanship, of course, that I am praising. But workmanship is more than the half of art, and this of Hals's is so free, so true, so expressive, and so rarely individual, that it seems due to something like inspiration, and not to the study and reflection which guide the brush of others. 62

Mrs. Van Rensselaer went on to praise the boldness of a small Hals which she remembered in the Dresden gallery and to question the current popularity of a work which has since been reattributed:[63]

> Unfortunately, . . . it is [Hals's] . . . less perfect works that are most familiar outside of Holland, a rather extreme example being the "Hille Bobbe," in our own Metropolitan Museum--a work where heavy browns replace the fine color and exquisite tone of his greater pictures.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer concluded this article by projecting her own cosmopolitan awareness, her expertise and connoisseurship upon the current development of American art:

> The worship of such technicians as Hals and Velasquez has undoubtedly been of immense advantage to the rising

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> generation of our artists. Perhaps it has sometimes induced a disregard, even a comparative contempt, for the other and more subtile artistic factors which must go with splendid workmanship to make up a splendid art. But while we look for these other qualities to follow, we recognize the fact that upon technical excellence all good art must be grounded. And as technical excellence was the one thing most disregarded in American work until very recent years, we are far from regretting the reverence with which Frans Hals has been studied, the fervor with which his teaching has been applied to practice. Yet we must lament a little that his highest efforts have not always been the ones consulted,--that his shorthand execution and his almost monochromatic brown tone have oftener served as text-books than the canvases where he shows himself a master of gray or golden tone and of lovely color; of perfect freedom, yet of perfect balance; of the utmost swiftness, yet the most accurate, complete, and expressive definition.

Although addressed to current concerns of the American art world, this article is not directed at an isolated, provincial entity, but rather one that is part of the international art world then centered in Paris, and it is French criticism which guides Mrs. Van Rensselaer. This article is a paraphrase of Eugène Fromentin's "Frans Hals at Haarlem," in which is found:

> To-day the name of Hals appears in our school at the moment when the love of the natural re-enters it with some clamor and no little excess. His method serves as a programme to certain doctrines by virtue of which the most word-for-word exactness is wrongly taken for truth, and the most perfectly indifferent execution taken for the last word of knowledge and taste. By invoking his testimony for the support of a thesis to which he never gave anything but contradictions in his fine works, a mistake is made, and in so doing, an injury is done to him. 64

Here again, although dealing with Dutch art, Mrs. Van Rensselaer reverted to French standards and explicitly stated, "French pictorial criticism . . . stands above any

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comparison with that of other nations" and added, ". . . were one asked to name the most admirable critical essay that had ever been produced in French, the unhesitating answer would be, Fromentin's Maîtres d'Autrefois."[65] This book on the Old Masters of Belgium and Holland, which Mrs. Van Rensselaer pronounced "the most perfect book about pictures ever written in any tongue," provided her with a model of inspiring yet balanced and intelligent writing on art. It is interesting to note how Mrs. Van Rensselaer spoke to her age in approaching the past. Like the artists of her generation, she made something new out of the treasures of the old.

The writings of the French artist and critic Fromentin also nourished the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer concerned with Rembrandt, who was a seminal figure for American artists of her time, especially those who had been influenced by Leibl's realism in Munich in the 1870s and Whistler's enthusiasm for etching in Venice c. 1880.[66] When Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted that Rembrandt was ". . . an idealist though portraying the tawdry patriarchs of the Ghetto"[67] or praised a Rembrantesque sketch by Robert Blum of a butcher's booth with a great carcass hanging in the foreground (pl. 83) because "it showed in a convincing way how much charm in a picture depends upon artistic vision and artistic treatment, how little upon those qualities which make charm in actual life to the inartistic eye,"[68] she was thinking in terms of Fromentin, who concluded his writing on

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Rembrandt:

> In truth, his was a brain served by an eye that could see at night, and by an able hand with no great dexterity. This painful labor came from an agile and free mind. This man of no account; this ferreter, this costumer, this erudite being nourished on extravagances; this man of the lower levels, of so lofty a flight; this moth nature, which flies to whatever shines; this soul, so sensitive to certain forms of life, so indifferent to others; this ardor without tenderness, this lover without visible flame; this nature of contrasts, contradictions, and double meanings, moved and eloquent, loving and not very lovable; this disgraced man so well endowed; this pretended materialist; this trivial, hideous person,--was a pure spiritualist, or, to express it in a single word, an idealist; I mean, a spirit whose domain is that of ideas, and whose language is the language of ideas. The key of the mystery is there.
>
> Taken thus, Rembrandt is wholly explained; his life, his work, his leanings, his conceptions, his poetry, his methods, his way of working, even to the color of his painting, which is only a bold and studied spiritualization of the material elements of his art. 69

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writing on Rembrandt was also informed with the insights of Wilhelm Böde, a Rembrandt expert who stimulated the collecting of Rembrandt in America whom she cited as ". . . perhaps the chief of living German art critics." (She published an article on Rembrandt in the year that Böde came to America to visit the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.[70]) Mrs. Van Rensselaer's extensive writings on Rembrandt also relate to the activities of S. R. Koehler, who exhibited and wrote about the etchings of Rembrandt.

Indebted as she was to these knowledgeable sources, Mrs. Van Rensselaer presented Rembrandt to her American readers with a special urgency of her own as a model of ". . . perfect sobriety of manner, . . . artistic reticence . . .

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[and] lack of all apparent effort after anything but simple truth and naturalness." With such terms she praised The Gilder (pl. 32): "It is the exact antipodes of those works, in such high vogue just now, [which] . . . seem to aim, first of all to astonish."[71] As with her writing on Hals, Mrs. Van Rensselaer here again argued against empty technical virtuosity for its own sake. This is art criticism in a living context, the accomplishments of the past projected as a standard for the future. When Mrs. Van Rensselaer found a "prosaic and unskillful" portrait was about to be "framed in the beautiful wood-work of Richardson's Court of Appeals Room in Albany," she protested that the room (pl. 84) offered a "setting so beautiful that a row of Rembrandt's would not more than do justice to it."[72] It was by using the Rembrandt-inspired standard of "truth" and "naturalness" that Mrs. Van Rensselaer was able in 1881 to celebrate Chase's The Apprentice (pl. 85) as a "bit of intense, if unbeautiful reality" and contrast it to ". . . the vapid discretion, the smooth nothingness, the sickly conventionality, of the portrait studies to which our public had been most accustomed."[73]

This admiration for the integrity of Rembrandt and the directness of Hals was extended to the then-current Dutch School, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer often wrote of the achievements of those artists then working with traditional forms attuned to contemporary subjects in the Netherlands (pls. 86 and 52), noting both paintings and etchings which were then widely

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enjoyed in America. Like many of their American contemporaries, these late-nineteenth-century Netherlandish artists were inspired by Millet and French peasant painting, as well as their own native seventeenth-century heritage. In her very first published article on art just before considering the state of art in America, Mrs. Van Rensselaer declared:

> Nowhere does contemporary art seem so healthy and sane, so sure of itself, so consonant with the best nature and gifts of the people, as in the Netherlands: nowhere are its ideals so free from morbidness, affectation or sentimentality. Is it perhaps that in the studios of Amsterdam, in the great school of Antwerp, even in the galleries of Brussels, one is somewhat out of the wildest stream of modern life--less driven to analysis and theorizing and self-consciousness than in London, Paris or Munich? Whatever is cause, whatever effect, the Netherland school shows two things side by side--the least measure of self-consciousness, and the soundest contemporary painting: if not the most effective, it is, I think, the most full of promise. There seems to be forming the most healthy national soil for the development of future genius. 74

Here Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared the ideas of many of the young American artists of her generation who, within a few years, were to make their way to Holland to work.[75] The paintings of these artists figure in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, whose cosmopolitan frame of reference enabled her to perceive them in the context in which they were created. For example, she welcomed the studies of New York streets exhibited in 1886 by Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916) (pl. 87), saying that they were related to the "new Dutch School of aquarellists,"[76] and in reviewing a water-color exhibition in New York of 1888, made a particular point of noting pictures included by contemporary Dutch artists,

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". . . a few figure pieces which are among the most interesting things in the collection."[77] A pastel, North Sea, Holland, by the now-forgotten American painter Harry Chase (1853-89) was particularly valued by Mrs. Van Rensselaer for the way in which the artist had presented nature ". . . in a hazy, misty mood, when its light is diffused and veiled rather than direct and vigorous,"[78] thus suggesting a relationship between the development of American tonalism and Dutch influences.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer judged the tradition of Rembrandt to be a vital force in the Dutch art of her time, and particularly valued the work of Joseph Israels (1824-1911) and his followers in those terms. When Israels' painting Expectation (pl. 88) was given to the Metropolitan Museum in 1887, Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented:

> This . . . picture shows a beautiful young peasant-woman sitting with a bit of embroidery in her hand beside a still empty cradle, and is as charming in feeling as masterly in treatment. One sees that the artist had studied Rembrandt, but sees it with the pleasure one takes in the work of an intelligent scholar, not the distaste excited by that of a mere would-be imitator. . . . 79

The aims and aspirations of many young American artists were so combined with their contemporaries in Holland at this time that a certain confusion was possible. In reviewing a watercolor exhibition in New York in 1886, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:

> I do not know whether Mr. Keever is one of the new Dutchmen, or an American who is studying among them; but in either case his Dutch peasant subjects were a welcome addition. . . . Perhaps the best of them was "Mother's Care," in which the sentiment, without undue imitation,

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> suggested Israels, and the scale of color was also not dissimilar to his. 80

Most probably Mrs. Van Rensselaer was here referring to the work of Jacobus Simon Hendrik Kever (1854-1922) (see pl. 89), whose name she more correctly identified in reviewing the New York watercolor show three years later. This review is remarkable for its international scope and suggests the futility of attempting to comprehend American art in a vacuum. While sharing certain late-nineteenth-century expressive qualities, the works cited in this review by Mrs. Van Rensselaer had to cross many different national borders before arriving in New York for exhibition, where Mrs. Van Rensselaer was able to discuss them as part of a related whole.

After praising a Venetian Market scene by Robert Blum for its ". . . vitality, animation, individuality and charm" (a work probably inspired by such Venetian paintings as the market scenes by Ettore Tito, 1859-1941), Mrs. Van Rensselaer went on to praise a series of landscapes from widely scattered sites:

> Among the landscapes the first place is claimed by a tiny thing that Mr. Whistler sends from over-sea. It is but a "Study" of a river scene with a stretch of green water and pale blue sky and a yellow boat--fragile, airy, almost evanescent in effect, yet masterly in conception and execution and full of the purest and most individual poetic feeling. Poetic, too, in a high degree are Mr. Tryon's sea views and landscapes, the simplicity of which may disguise their merits from careless eyes, but to more sensitive observers will seem a priceless quality to be simple in idea and treatment, yet to be individual and truly poetic--to make no loud appeal to notice and yet to produce work which, when it is noticed, seems fresh and true and lovely--this is to paint in a perennially satisfying way. 81

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In similar terms Mrs. Van Rensselaer then praised watercolors by Horatio Walker (1858-1938), who, like Dwight William Tryon (1849-1925), had spent time painting abroad, some of it in Holland. The Canadian-born, Millet-inspired artist was introduced by Mrs. Van Rensselaer:

> A young man who within a year or two has worked his way to the very front rank of American painters is Mr. Horatio Walker. His admirable painting of a barn interior with pigs exhibited last spring by the Society of American Artists will doubtless be remembered by many of my readers. Now he shows a similar subject. . . . For graceful vigor of handiwork no picture in the exhibition surpasses this, nor for the infusion of pictorial charm, without the least unnaturalness or "idealization," into a subject which under a prosaic brush might have been actually repulsive. Even more attractive than this "Pastoral," perhaps, is the "Spring Morning" which shows a woman milking in a soft green landscape suffused with moist atmosphere most excellently rendered. . . .

In the same review Mrs. Van Rensselaer went on to write of paintings sent to this exhibition from Amsterdam by Kever (mentioned above), George Poggenbeek (1853-1902), and Nicolaas Bastert (1854-1939), all of whom worked in a painterly and lyrical style related to American late Barbizon and tonalist paintings of the same period. Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of these late-nineteenth-century Dutch landscapes and figures in landscape settings that they were ". . . marked by a soft yet vigorous breadth in handling, a sober yet agreeable scheme of color, and much tenderness of feeling," using the same terms as those she applied to comparable American pictures.

Another "admirable Netherland artist" praised by Mrs. Van Rensselaer was Anton Mauve (1838-88), whose landscapes were then collected together with those by the Americans Charles H. Davis (1856-1933) (pl. 90) and George Inness (1825-94). It was in such international company that Mrs. Van Rensselaer

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considered the works of Inness, Autumn Oaks (pl. 36) and Evening, 1868, and concluded, ". . . I do not hesitate to call [Inness] the very first of living landscape painters."[82] Mrs. Van Rensselaer applauded the importation of paintings and etchings by living Dutch artists by the F. Keppel Gallery and by the New York branch of the English art firm, Cottier & Co., which at the same time was handling Barbizon painting and the works of Albert P. Ryder, all of which can be seen as related and all of which play a prominent part in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. The first exhibition of the American dissidents who later founded the Society of American Artists had taken place at Cottier's in 1875 (see above, p. 51). Ryder and Daniel Cottier made a tour abroad together in 1882, when Ryder probably visited the studio of Matthijs Maris (1839-1917), the visionary Dutch painter ". . . with whom he had many affinities in both his art and his way of living, and for whom he retained a lifelong admiration."[83] Maris was among the contemporary Dutch painters whose works Mrs. Van Rensselaer was delighted to see included in the loan exhibition organized by W. M. Chase and C. Beckwith in New York as a benefit for the Bartholdi Statue Pedestal Fund, an occasion on which she took the opportunity to note, ". . . an admiral selection from that new Netherland school which Mr. Cottier should have the credit of having introduced to us. . . ."[84]

For artists and critics of the 1880s the art scene was international, even for one, like Ryder, fabled as a recluse, or distinguished, as Mrs. Van Rensselaer, for furthering the goal of a distinctly American art. Qualities of feeling and

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breadth of treatment were more significant than national origins. Above all, Mrs. Van Rensselaer consistently opted for "individual sentiment" over "prosaic inventory of minor facts" as when she asserted, "These facts any eye can see--it is the broad effects which they make up and the varying sentiment of these effects that the average eye fails to perceive."[85]

It is no accident that many of the artists lauded by M. G. Van Rensselaer also worked as illustrators, teachers, and writers. Expressiveness, the prime criterion in the art criticisms of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, was associated with breadth of style, a choice which enabled the artist to editorialize, to interpret, to interject. For Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her contemporaries the "individual sentiment" expressed by a work of art was the primary factor, and technique was viewed as a means to further that goal, not as an end in itself. Note how Mrs. Van Rensselaer explained to American readers the significance of art of the seventeenth-century Spanish master Diego Velasquez, then a great influence on artists on both sides of the Atlantic:

> When one studies close at hand the apparently meaningless broad touches in a picture by Velasquez, then, standing back, sees how marvelously they fall into place as renderings of things which could not be more truthfully, or half so forcibly, rendered by any amount of careful elaboration, one learns to appreciate that truly synthetic kind of painting which may be called interpretation rather than representation. 86

The development of realism in American painting after the Civil War owed much to the impact of the Spanish seventeenth-century realists. Although Makart was admired by Mrs. Van Rensselaer for technical virtuosity, it was Velasquez who was understood as a great artist. Probity and

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veracity were the desired goal, painterly brushwork merely the means. Mrs. Van Rensselaer rejoiced in the fact that some of the most forceful of the Spanish-inspired American Realist painting of her time became an integral part of the American art world, such as John Singer Sargent's "large square picture of the little daughters of Edward Boit now owned by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, a fourfold portrait in a beautifully rendered wide and simple interior" (pl. 91), and the Sargent painting which was the sensation of the Salon of 1882, "the spirited Spanish dancing scene, called El Jaleo," commissioned by Isabella Stewart Gardner and now installed in palatial splendor in the Gardner museum in Boston (pl. 92).[87] When the latter painting was first exhibited in Boston, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote to S. R. Koehler:

> Let me know what you [t]hink of Mr. Sargent's picture if you see it in Boston. I like it immensely but have an idea it is one about which we may disagree. . . . My friend Mr. Blum has brought home a lot of Spanish sketches that I think even you would like. . . . 88

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's admiration for Eakins' Crucifixion (pl. 18) (see above, pp. 99-100), a painting generally disparaged by contemporary critics, no doubt was based on its strong affinity to such Spanish seventeenth-century realists as Velasquez and Ribera, whose influence Eakins actively sought as an antidote to the methods he had been taught in Paris. Eakins had written in a letter to his father from Spain, ". . . O what a satisfaction it gave me to see the good Spanish work--so good so strong so reasonable so free

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from every affectation. It stands out like nature itself."[89]

The emphasis on immediacy and spontaneity was based on the belief that such was more truthful an expression of an artist's idea. In this period a great interest evolved in the most casual of artist's productions, in their slightest sketches, as offering the most personalized statements. Mrs. Van Rensselaer often introduced her own writing as being a sketch, as made ". . . not of finished pictures, but of broad impressions,"[90] and found value in some artists' studies while dismissing the more labored finished product executed in a more inhibited style. For example, a small painting by Thomas Cole (1801-48) which appeared at auction inspired the following comment:

> It is a long way back to Thomas Cole--and a way that those who only know his more ambitious works may not feel inclined to follow. But Mr. Hurlbert has a little landscape that will, I think, show Cole in a novel light--that is most interesting as a proof of the possibilities that were in him but were smothered by the inartistic temper, the technical poverty, and the mistaken ideals of his time. 91

There is no mistaking the self-congratulatory tone with which Mrs. Van Rensselaer addressed her contemporaries. All earlier American art was viewed as merely a prelude to their own age of maturity and it was valued only in so far as it could enhance the ambitions of the artists of her time. Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828) was acclaimed "the greatest name among the pioneers of American Art" by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who valued his portraits as "renderings, very subtle and masterly in many cases, of moods and sentiments and disposi-

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tions--of the very breath and essence of the man."[92] In this period when many Americans joined the international colony of artists working in Venice, Mrs. Van Rensselaer commended Washington Allston (1779-1843) for his "Venetian breadth and suavity and charm" while maintaining reservations about his work as a whole. Allston was primarily valued by Mrs. Van Rensselaer as an historic figure in the development of art in the United States:

> If his pictures can have no notable influence upon American art, his life and character had an immense and happy influence upon the reverence for, and appreciation of, art in America. What we needed fifty years ago was not so much a great artist as a great prophet and apostle and servant of art. . . . I do not think I under-estimate the value of his painting when I say that he was by no means the potent artist our fathers thought him. But I am sure I could not over-estimate the value of his life.[93]

As an American traveling abroad, Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted an Allston painting which was displayed in Munich with German works of his period, and in condemning them all equally Mrs. Van Rensselaer voiced greater allegiance to her generation than to her national origin. Mrs. Van Rensselaer reported: "One . . . work excites interest . . . chiefly because one is so surprised to find it here--a little landscape by our own Washington Allston. I wish I could say it stood out with any prominence from the dull average of its similar surroundings."[94] Mrs. Van Rensselaer found both Allston and his German contemporaries lacking in that breadth and touch which constituted mastery in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As explained by Mrs. Van Rensselaer,

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> The noble physical endowment of an artist--that by reason of which, and by reason of which alone, he is an artist--is twofold: power of eye and power of hand. By power of the eye I mean simple vision exalted into a special gift, a special appreciation of line, an ultra delicate and profound perception of color, and an exact, unconscious memory. This last is not imagination nor imaginative memory, but an automatic power . . . of the retina--as unconscious as is the pianist's memory of his notes, and as unerring. It is not the power to fix in the mind by conscious effort the objects before one, and to recall them deliberately, inch by inch, at any time, but the power, when the brush pauses trembling for the signal, to put down unerringly facts learned God knows where, or imagined God knows how. . . . The tongue might not be able to tell, nor the mind deliberately to recall in cold blood, what was the depth of blue on a distant hill or the vagueness of its outlines, or what the anatomical structure of a mistress's fingers. But the brush knows, as nothing but the brush of an artist can; and when it comes to painting them, aërial perspective and anatomical detail must come right. This is the first and the great endowment. And the second . . . is the gift of a dexterous hand, winged with lightness and steady as steel, sensitive as a blind man's finger-tips, yet unerring in its stroke as the piston of a steamship. This is a gift as well as the other, but it can, far more than the other, be improved and developed by practice and patience. Both gifts in equal perfection constitute a technical master. 95

Such mastery enables the great artist to project bold ideas with the most fluid means. Suggestion is more appropriate to these ends than fully rendered detail, and it is this preference for breadth in all media, and in projects both large and small, which characterizes the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. In discussing architecture, for example, she noted:

> [A] . . . fundamental quality in Richardson's work is breadth of treatment. It is this which gives his results their air of "bigness"--not the actual size which in many of them chances to be great. Artistically speaking, his smallest structures are as big as his largest, and they are so because they are as largely treated. Whatever his faults he never worked in a small, hesitating, feeble way. 96

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Richardson's architectural drawings are executed as simple, broad masses, hastily sketched (see pls. 93-94). Recent criticism has deemed this breadth Richardson's most significant quality. James F. O'Gorman has written, "He thought in wholes, not in parts. This led to his most important contribution to the history of late nineteenth-century American architecture, the control of mass, the discipline of the picturesque. . . ."[97] Richardson preferred to maintain the greatest flexibility possible as construction progressed, and hesitated to commit himself on paper.[98] This was the motivation behind his succinct and spontaneous style of architectural drawing, and it was this approach which made possible the monumental effect of his work.

A similar bravura was championed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in the popular field of illustration, even in terms of wood-engraving, which by its very nature is dependent on the effects of carefully established linear patterns. A new school of wood-engraving was introduced in the same pages of Century Magazine as featured the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, sacrificing accepted rules of procedure in order to give a more pictorial effect of painting. The emphasis became, even in reproductive print making (pl. 82), a question of the artist's interpretation.[99] Here again a return to the old, an eclectic use of the art of the past, became a positive force in the creation of a vital new native school. Timothy Cole (1852-1931) introduced the new approach in his wood-

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engravings after Old Master paintings in the museums of Europe, by which the great works were brought into American homes via the pages of the popular magazine Century. The first article by Mrs. Van Rensselaer to appear there was on the subject of wood-engraving, and she wrote extensively on that field and related areas of print making and illustration in this period when the innovations of American techniques were becoming recognized the world over.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer perceived that the penchant for literalism in mid-century art criticism had obscured the gifts of certain American artists who, contrary to prevailing taste, had worked in a fluid and poetic style, and she wrote in the 1870s and 1880s art commentary which played a part in revising the estimates of these artists of previous generations.

William Page (1811-85) was an old man whose works had fallen into obscurity when Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted that his art deserved further study. While acknowledging the uneven quality of his painting, she wrote of Page, "He was one of the few true painters of his generation, as distinguished from the mere men who painted--one of the few born with a natural gift, an artist's soul."[100] Mrs. Van Rensselaer particularly admired the monumental portraits which Page painted of himself and of his wife (pl. 95), and she wrote,

> . . . he remains, in spite of his sombreness and strangeness and in spite of the recent advent of so many clever

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> painters, one of the few great portrait painters our art has known . . . his portraits of himself and his wife are strong and admirable things--not "pleasing" in the popular sense but beautiful in a deeper way, and revealing a painter of something more than cleverness--of true individuality and originality and force. . . . 101

Another neglected American artist championed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer was William Morris Hunt (1824-79), who might have been a figure familiar to her from childhood visits to Newport, where Hunt had made a lasting impression. A contemporary of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, Maud Howe Elliott (1854-1948), reported:

> My own early impressions of Hunt recall a dazzling personality. He was a polished man of the world, and at the same time a sensitive, passionate artist--a rare combination. . . .
>
> My mother and I went out one hot July day to visit the Hunts. As we drew near the barn, a wagon laden with newmown hay and drawn by two milk-white oxen creaked down the lane and drew up beside the stable. High up at the open door of the loft we saw Hunt, pitchfork in hand. He threw off his wide-brimmed hat and studio blouse, stepped on the top of the load and began to work vigorously at putting in the hay. Through the whirl of gray beard, hair, and wildly tossed hay, shone three bright points of light--Hunt's keen eyes and the big diamond he wore on his little finger. 102

Such an image conjures up visions of Barbizon laced with Newport elegance and a legendary personage probably known by Mariana Griswold either directly or by reputation (as his brother had been the architect of her uncle's Newport home[103]). However hallowed Hunt's name remained in Newport and Boston, during his later years his wider reputation dimmed, and he died, probably a suicide, while deeply despondent over his murals in the Assembly Chamber of the State Capitol in Albany (one of the earliest attempts to

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create an ambitious mural decoration for an architectural interior in America, after John La Farge's decoration of Trinity Church in Boston), which were fated to crumble because of structural flaws in the building. Just months before Hunt's life ended in despair, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, then a twenty-eight-year-old novice art critic, cited as outstanding his "strong and careful portrait of himself" in her first review of a Society of American Artists exhibition,[104] and a decade later protested the wanton neglect which resulted in the obstruction of Hunt's Albany murals, the work of ". . . a man of original and uncontestable genius in design, in color, in feeling. . . ."[105] By 1892 Mrs. Van Rensselaer turned from the work of contemporary artists to reexamine Hunt. "By way of contrast," wrote Mrs. Van Rensselear, "look at those quiet mellow, richly colored portraits of Mr. William Hunt, which remind us of the time when Couture seemed modern."[106] Two years later she still found Hunt's work outstanding, this time citing a portrait which she maintained could never be seen too often.[107]

The gifts and personality of Hunt were associated with his contemporary George Fuller (1822-84) (pls. 96-97) in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who deemed Fuller more fortunate in having found his "perfect artistic medium."[108] She maintained that, although he was born to the generation of the Hudson River School painters, Fuller belonged to her own age. This was an idea which Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared

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with the founders of the Society of American Artists who elected the aged Fuller a member of their young organization a few years after he had been rediscovered by American artists through an exhibition of his work staged in Boston in 1876 with the support of Hunt. Will Low reported,

> George Fuller . . . came to us like some Rip Van Winkle of the arts newly awakened. He was in spirit among the youngest of the members of the new Society, coming from Boston to its earlier meetings, simply and frankly happy to find that his art, groping and elusive as it was at times, seeking expression through technical methods alien to those which we adhered, found warm admiration. . . . 109

Mrs. Van Rensselaer acknowledged that some of Fuller's paintings were weak but insisted that he be judged by his best work.[110] She valued his art for its poetical and regional qualities and for the way in which he wielded paint:

> . . . the sensuous side of painting--that side which appeals to the bodily sense and not the mind--is of far greater relative value than is the sensuous side which poetry owns as well. Mere manual execution, even apart from color and light and shade, has a worth which can hardly be over-estimated. 111

This is a quality which never appears in reproductions of paintings, and it is necessary to study Fuller works in the original to understand that they speak much the same painterly language as Ryder on one hand and Monticelli on the other. Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed delight in the paintings by the French artist Adolphe Monticelli (1824-86) (see pl. 98) imported by Mr. Cottier: ". . . much the finest . . . that have ever crossed the water. They are a very revelry of color . . . they differ from pictures where line is given its legal place, as an intoxicating perfume differs from

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wine."[112] In a series of articles for the New York World on the homes of distinguished private art collectors, Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of several in which the interiors were arranged throughout by Mr. Cottier, ". . . beautiful with the rich materials and deep, warm colors in which he delights," in which frequently one found Fullers and Ryders hung in international company. Here Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of Monticelli as "the most sensuous of modern painters" and added, "any one who cares for the utmost sensuous beauty that paint can show and for the evidences of poetic temperament and peculiar manual skill will delight beyond measure in Monticelli's work." In an upstairs room she praised "the color and tone and simple yet poetic sentiment" of a spring landscape by William Maris and "a peasant girl reading, notable for the beautiful effect of the light which falls upon her from an unseen window" by Albert Neuhuys, as well as a life-sized figure of an Italian girl by Antonio Mancini.[113] In one collection Mrs. Van Rensselaer was pleased to find that a Ryder, which she remembered admiring when first exhibited, held its own even when hung next to "a splendid Monticelli" in which "delicious color runs riot. . . ."[114] It was in this context that Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted Fuller's significance for her generation:

> [Fuller is] . . . an artist who will one day be cited as a striking example that a veritable prophet of art may be without much honor at the hands of his countrymen at large. Yet, in spite of popular indifference, it is no small triumph for a man to have won his way to such a position as is accorded Mr. Fuller by his brother artists

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> and by those among the laymen who are best qualified to speak.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer reported that Fuller's studio in Boston was notable for the way in which the artist had turned all his own paintings against the wall, leaving visible, on the occasion of her visit, only a small canvas by Monticelli:

> Hung on the empty wall was a single little canvas, a gorgeous, vague, entrancing bit of Monticelli's color, shining like a star from the surrounding void. Here was the one resting-place, apparently that the artist's eye demanded--a keynote, a term of comparison, an inspiring draught to which he could turn at will. 115

As with the work of Page and Hunt, Mrs. Van Rensselaer's appreciation of Fuller and Monticelli represents a continued tradition of perpetuation, of the Bostonian reverence for the kind of color first introduced by Allston and reinforced by Hunt's contact with Couture and Millet. However, Fuller had spent many years in isolation, and the excitement which greeted the rediscovery of his work during his last years--an enthusiasm found in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer--was related to the feelings of neglect from which it was believed he had suffered and the sense that his work contributed to a common cause: the struggle against the entrenched forces which then dominated the National Academy.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer protested the limbo into which Fuller's work was often relegated, and a disregarded Fuller placed at auction in 1881 inspired the following commentary from the critic:

> It is the fashion to complain of want of originality and

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> of poetry in our painters. Mr. Fuller has an abundance of both and some good things beside. There is not an artist on this side of the water, perhaps, who could quite match this picture for color. I hope there are few who would not gladly unhook one of their own pictures to hang it on their studio wall. Yet there seemed to be no place for it on the wide walls of New York picture buyers. It sold for $50. 116

In this period of neglect Fuller painted Negro Funeral (pl. 97) during what Mrs. Van Rensselaer later explained as three winters which Fuller spent in the South, making studies of Negro life.[117]

In another article that year of 1881 Mrs. Van Rensselaer was outraged that the National Academy had failed to elect this artist a full Academician, and she explicitly related the neglect of Fuller to the aspirations of the artists of her generation: "The National Academy . . . has been universally accused of proving once more that it is almost ridiculously behind the times, almost childishly opposed to outside men and novel methods, almost destructively devoted to its own interests instead of to those of the public and of art."[118] In the face of this slight, Mrs. Van Rensselaer pronounced Fuller's Winifred Dysart ". . . original and perfect in conception, in sentiment, in color, in handling,--in every possible way; a glory to our art, and a priceless contribution to the art of the world at large."[119] By May of 1882 Mrs. Van Rensselaer had been commissioned by Gilder to write an article on Fuller for Century, and her correspondence with this artist, then in the last years of his life, provides an insight into her approach:[120]

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"New Brunswick
"May 18, 1882

"My Dear Mr. Fuller,

". . . I shall not have the space to write anything very elaborate, or anything that will do as much justice to your pictures as I should wish. But what I can do within the limits set me you may be sure I will.

"What I should like to have from you are: the various dates of your life as you may deem them of importance--especially the time when you first exhibited long ago. I should like also to have some note as to the kind and manner of the pictures you then painted, as I fear they are all unknown to me. Are there any of them in New York that I could see. Will you tell me, if you do not mind, how your first technical and artistic education was received, & how, in a general way, of course, you worked during the years that preceded your again exhibiting at the academy in New York--which was, if I remember, in 1878. If you have any ideas upon art in general or your own especial aims and wishes I should like to have them. All such things interest the public of a magazine more than a mere account of pictures . . . biographical details are always interesting. . . . I hope you will not be afraid--in case you do not object to writing at all about yourself--to write me in detail. For every word will be more than interesting to me, even though I may not use every thing in print . . . you need not fear that I will print anything that you would not care to have go in; I shall be very careful to keep within the narrowest limits in that way. . . .

"Most Sincerely yours
"M. G. Van Rensselaer"

Fuller responded with so lengthy a reply that Mrs. Van Rensselaer thanked him for sending her a "manuscript,"[121] and with that in hand, and after a visit to his studio in Boston, she proceeded to write the article which appeared in the December 1883 issue of Century. This was a thoughtful essay which took account of the weaknesses of Fuller's work as well as of his significance. When a memorial exhibition at the Boston Museum was organized after Fuller's death a few months later, Mrs. Van Rensselaer was the logical candi-

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date to write the catalogue essay and material from this tribute was integrated into the Century article and republished in its final form in Six Portraits in 1889. Here we can perceive the signal quality of Fuller's work for the "New Men of '77," that is, for the men and women who organized the Society of American Artists and infused the American art world with new life in the decades of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's tenure as an art critic:

> On the walls of the National Academy of Design in the spring of 1878 there hung a small picture called "A Turkey Pasture in Kentucky." Simple in theme, sober in tone, telling no story, and making no daring technical appeal to notice, it was yet remarked by the popular eye and was called by all sensitive observers the most interesting picture of the year. Who, we very soon began to ask, is this Mr. Fuller whose name is so unfamiliar, whose work is so original and charming--who seems to be making his first appearance yet is already a master in his way? If he is a newcomer from abroad he bears the trade-mark neither of Paris nor of Munich; and if he is a product of home education he shows even less affinity with the traditions of our elder schools. Where does he come from that he has learned to paint in so peculiar yet so fine a way?
>
> Glancing at the Catalogue we found that George Fuller was in no sense a "new Man," but an artist past middle age, who since 1857 had stood on the Associate list of the Academy itself. Then we asked, Where has he kept himself aloof during so many years that he comes back now a stranger--where, and why, and how employed? The answer which may be read in a brief sketch of his life is doubly interesting, because it reveals a temper that is exceptional in the history of art, whether the records we search are those of our own land or another.
>
> . . . It is curious to read the names of those who were . . . [in the late 1850s] Mr. Fuller's friends and fellow-workers, and to remember that now we think of him as standing side by side with the most successful of our younger painters. . . . And in how different an artistic circle from the one he had known in years gone by! The great exodus of students to Parisian and Bavarian schools, of amateurs to foreign studios and galleries, had begun a few years before [the 1878 National Academy exhibition]. Its results were just returning to us in

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> the shape of a more cultivated and critical public used to the best foreign work, and of a throng of vigorous, eager, cosmopolitan young painters, all alike disregardful of older American traditions and filled with new ideas on every subject from the definition of the abstract term "art" down to the most concrete professional questions of the studio. But in this new world George Fuller's voice sounded a consonant note. The artists--I mean the younger brood and not his brother academicians who "skied" his pictures--were the first and most enthusiastic in his praise. . . .
>
> The "Turkey Pasture in Kentucky" [pl. 96], the lovely pastoral with which he reappeared at the Academy of Design in 1878 . . . is wonderful in its strongly poetic yet truthful expression of light, of sun and shadow, and of color, yet almost equally remarkable in grace of composition, and in the suggested life, motion, and individuality of the figures. 122

Fuller's reappearance as part of the New York art world coincided with the debut of Mrs. Van Rensselaer as a reviewer of contemporary American art exhibitions, and the reception which his work then received significantly affected her critical sensibilities. For Mrs. Van Rensselaer, despite all its acknowledged limitations, Fuller's work remained a model of "delicacy, self-restraint, suavity, mellowness, low, soft-toned, misty harmony,"[123] and she harbored these values as a healthy antidote to that which she perceived as empty virtuosity:

> The disciplines of modern dash and brilliancy . . . will see no virtue in [Fuller's] . . . advice to "hide their doing," since this very "doing," independently of what is done, is too often to-day a picture's and an artist's highest claim to honor. That it is a very high claim when well sustained I do not question; nevertheless, if there were more significance and individuality of matter behind some of the current ease and grace and strength of manner, modern art would greatly be the gainer. 124

Fuller's advice can be found concurring with ". . . the real lesson taught by Corot's pictures [pls. 99-100] and Corot's

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life" in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's Six Portraits:

> . . . breadth in painting (if it is not meaningless and empty) must repose on accurate knowledge; that freedom (if it is not mere idle license) must have its basis in fidelity to facts; that feeling must be guided by reason and self-restraint. 125

Elsewhere Mrs. Van Rensselaer reasserted this principle:

> . . . Incorrect rapidity, boldness which misses the mark, and breadth which slurs but does not indicate, are among the worst possible sins in art. Out of them is less likely to come any good thing than out of over-elaboration and a hard insistence upon details. 126

In writing the first American publication on the work of the Swedish artist Anders Zorn (1860-1920), in the wake of his triumphal tour of the United States as portrait painter and Swedish official to the Columbian Exposition, Mrs. Van Rensselaer stressed the same point. She discussed Zorn's portrait etching of the renowned French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan (1823-1892) (pl. 101), which was created from life shortly before the death of the sitter, who had been so instrumental in bringing scientific and historical inquiry into the domain of religious tradition. Mrs. Van Rensselaer insisted:

> . . . speedy, succinct work is good only when it really tells us all that we need to be told--when it is synthetic, not empty; when it is wisely bold, not merely reckless; when it is truly broad, not simply slipshod. . . . One should not admire Zorn's "Renan" because the facts it gives were so swiftly set down and so vigorously emphasized, but because, with this bold brevity of speech, he has managed to tell us so much and in so clear and convincing a way. His portrait of Renan is not a sketch, simple though its language is. It is a thorough study. It portrays the man, in soul and body, as fully and forcibly as any portrait without color could. It is neither to its credit nor its discredit that, as Mr. Zorn tells us, it was done in one short sitting. The

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> fact has biographical and critical, but no purely artistic, significance. Mr. Zorn wanted to record his impression of Renan. He could hardly have done it better had he been three months about it, and his result would be no more wonderful, as a work of art, had it been finished in three minutes. Its true value is intrinsic--resides in the impression made upon the observer desirous of knowing how Renan looked. 127

Here again Mrs. Van Rensselaer brought to an American audience a cosmopolitan awareness of the international art scene as measured by acclaim in Paris, for although Zorn came from Sweden his importance for contemporaries was based on his awards at the Salon of 1888 and Universal Exposition of 1889.

Similarly, Mrs. Van Rensselaer introduced to Americans the work of the French etcher Felix Buhot (1847-98)[128] (pl. 102), and their ensuing correspondence reveals the complex international texture of the art world of that period. A delight in perceptive breadth of treatment was by no means confined to America, and Buhot perceived a connection between Dutch and American etchers. In a charming letter richly embellished with watercolor sketches, Buhot recommended to Mrs. Van Rensselaer's attention a group of contemporary Dutch etchers, particularly commending their "libre large exécution qui ait aussi, à un haut degré vos Etchers Américains. . ."[129] (free, large execution which your American etchers also had to a high degree . . .). Mrs. Van Rensselaer developed a special expertise in the area of prints, and her criticism did indeed allude to the Dutch print-makers who shared these qualities with their American contemporaries.

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There were numerous sources for this emphasis on breadth of treatment, fluid execution, and bold and sketchy surface. This approach was then being encouraged in the studios where Americans went to acquire professional training abroad. It also was reinforced by the work of Whistler (pl. 103), whose career defied national identification. The teachings of Horace LeCoq de Boisbaudran (1802-97), who had encouraged quick sketching in the training of artists' memory, had been an influence, both direct and indirect, on this late-nineteenth-century style and can be seen underlying the aesthetic of such artists discussed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer as Fantin-Latour, L'Hermitte, Rodin, Cazin, Whistler, and Saint-Gaudens.[130] Mrs. Van Rensselaer welcomed such broadening teaching in America, and, although she was to have reservations later about the mannered adaptation of his style, at the start of her career as an art critic she identified W. M. Chase as a healthy influence as a teacher (pls. 104-5):

> The admiration of fine technique as such, the love of rapid handling and bold effects which characterize Mr. Chase and his associates, must have a good influence, I think, upon the cold, and timid, and over-careful methods which have been for so long identified with American art. 131

Breadth of treatment was associated with opulence of surface and self-expression in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer. For example, in distinguishing the least interesting pictures of Frederic Arthur Bridgman (1847-1927), those she judged "a little too deliberate, too cool, and careful, and self-repressing" from one of his paintings, a Brittany land-

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scape, which she considered his best, Mrs. Van Rensselaer praised the picture in the following terms:

> Here was no too studious accuracy, no cool elaboration. Nothing could have been more suave, more freshly felt, more delightfully reported. Nothing could have been finer in quality,--if one takes "quality" to mean that peculiar richness of surface which is about the best attraction a work can have, that peculiar texture which makes the paint and canvas appear, not only like the copy of a beautiful theme, but, in themselves, like a rich and precious substance. 132

This quality of opulence was valued at the same time as an admiration was voiced for an artist's economy of means. The goal of the etcher, Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserted, was

> . . . to make every line "tell," and to use no more lines than are absolutely needed to tell exactly what he wants to say; to speak strongly, concisely, and to the point; to tell us much while saying little; to suggest rather than to elaborate, but to suggest in such a way that the meaning shall be very clear and individual and impressive--these are things the true etcher tries to do. . . . 133

By contrast, Mrs. Van Rensselaer scorned as "aggressive in their inefficiency" the "inartistic, ambitious, showy, badly handled plates" or etchers working with earlier criteria.[134] She preferred to use suggestive sketches, rather than fully rendered reproductions of oil paintings, as illustrations for her articles when the choice was open to her, and she particularly commended the pen-and-ink drawings (see pl. 105) which Chase provided for her article on his work for the American Art Review. Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented:

> It is not necessary to remark upon the boldness of their handling or to emphasize the rapidity of touch which alone could have made such boldness possible. I would call attention rather to another quality which may more easily be overlooked by the hasty,--the extreme economy of means. . . . 135

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The same quality in Robert Blum's figure drawings, made during his stay in Holland, likewise elicited praise for the artist's "skill in producing the maximum of effect with the minimum of effort."[136]

Such an emphasis on the sleight-of-hand technique of these virtuoso performers was in marked contrast to the criteria of an earlier age in American art when, in the middle of the nineteenth century, artists, critics, and the general public demanded a fully rendered execution as attesting to the dedication and competence of the artist who thereby delivered an honest product of a concrete and measurable value.

The shift in criteria was engendered in Munich. Robert Koehler revealed the new consciousness experienced by the American artists who went there to continue their studies: "I found that they did not work so hard at the 'Royal Bavarian Academy of the Fine Arts' as we did at the 'N.A.D.' in New York; but still, they accomplished more."[137] With the return of Chase and Shirlaw, who brought this emphasis on technical virtuosity into their classes at the newly formed Art Students League by the late 1870s, the new direction in teaching in America was taken (reinforced by the methods which had been perpetuated in Boston by W. M. Hunt and which had been derived from Couture and Millet).

Technical virtuosity, in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, was never admired for its own sake but was

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always linked to the expression of character. In fact, technical deficiencies would be overlooked if found together with "fervid, truthful, individual feeling and striking expression of character," as in the work of Courbet.[138] The frank depiction of character was admired in the paintings of Hals along with the brio of the artist's manipulation of paint,[139] and the work of the least facile of artists, The Writing Master (pl. 106), Thomas Eakins' portrait of his father, was valued by Mrs. Van Rensselaer for its "marvelously characteristic hands."[140] An Accident (pl. 42) by Dagnan-Bouveret was concurrently praised by Mrs. Van Rensselaer in the same terms, "the chief merit of this remarkable canvas . . . its rendering of character."[141]

Conversely, insincerity in an artist was accounted a grievous fault, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer observed that the allegorical figure composition entitled Art and Poetry by Kenyon Cox (1856-1919) "seems a little ungenuine"[142] and criticized Bridgman's Oriental scenes for being "as insincere in feeling as hasty in treatment and overbright in color."[143]

The highest accolade bestowed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer

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was to honor a work of art for its poetic qualities, as she did in writing of a still-life by John LaFarge (pl. 107):

> Such pictures are very valuable as proving that sentiment . . . lies far more in the eye that sees and the hand that paints than in the object painted. How many prosaic canvases we see year by year, for which the most poetical subjects have sat as models! The most spiritual of flowers, for instance, may be as prosaic as a paving-stone, if a prosateur tries to reproduce it. But let Mr. LaFarge paint a water-lily with the sun on it, and it becomes even more poetic than a real water-lily in real sunlight, though "truth to Nature" is perfectly preserved. 144

This penchant for poetic sensibility endowed the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer with perceptive distinctions, such as those made in the following commentary on Corot and the French Impressionists in 1889:

> The profound and accurate study of values--the knowledge how to keep tone perfect and yet keep color complete and true--is the greatest technical achievement of modern times. Here Corot led all his rivals, and therefore he has become the leader and teacher of all younger painters. In many ways they have carried his lesson further than he went himself. To paint things truthfully in the open air means to-day tasks of a variety and difficulty which Corot never essayed, results of a vividness and splendor he never achieved. But the whole development rests on his own. He was the first great "impressionist," and the modern impressionists are but his more daring sons. Sometimes we--and perhaps they themselves--forget the fact; for there is one great point of difference between him and most of his sons in art. He was a poet on canvas, and most of them are speakers of prose. It is their fashion to rave about "realism," to despise idealism--to exalt the mere facts they chance to see above the greater fact which Corot divined and gave. But do what they will, the best among them are more idealistic than they think; and, say what they will, the world will never agree to rank the reporter above the poet. 145

The relationship of the "real" to the "ideal" was a consistent concern in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer,

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as it was for many of that era. "The Real Thing," a superb short story by Henry James (which was first serialized in the Boston Evening Transcript in 1892, at the same time as articles appeared there which Mrs. Van Rensselaer dispatched, as special art correspondent from New York), depicted the way in which an artist actually invents "reality."[146] Accepting similar premises, the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer asserts that "idealism" in art does not exclusively denote the antithesis of "realism" (as it so often does in later criticism). This duality has been reexamined by George Heard Hamilton, who in 1964 stated:

> It is no longer fashionable to call attention to an artist's expressive intentions insofar as those can be distinguished from the formal structure of the work as a whole, especially in this day when we are told on every hand that representational art is no longer capable of communicating humanistic content. Perhaps so, but to ignore such considerations in work undertaken for just such purposes is to diminish one's understanding of the artist's total problem. . . .
>
> If we confront the real with the ideal--these two aspects of style and tradition in the 1890s--they will not appear as opposite poles of expression, but as two aspects of the same situation.

Hamilton proposed to examine the problems faced by the artists "in reconciling a realist technique, which they accepted as the inevitable mode of expression at the time, with the requirements of a style both traditional, in that they had no desire to renounce the European past, and symbolic, in that they were trying to create symbols valid for contemporary American life." Hamilton spoke of the "differing solutions to the problem of endowing the actual with ideality,

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or of making the ideal a valid symbol of historic reality" in the work of two artists who figure prominently in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, Eakins and Saint-Gaudens.[147]

For Mrs. Van Rensselaer "idealism" in art signifies that an artist must bring to bear on whatever subject and material is dealt with an idea, an artistic concept, a structure and form. In writing about Corot Mrs. Van Rensselaer expounded her notion of "idealism" in art (pls. 99-100):

> If but a single phrase of Corot's had been recorded, I should wish it the one which says that sentiment in art is a poetic power to see things or to complete them in some personal way. Here the whole import of idealism in art lies crystallized in a word. Not to depart from Nature, but to complete her is the true idealization; not to conceive an ideal foreign to her own, but to perceive her own with so much sympathy that it can be more perfectly revealed than, on this imperfect earth, she herself is often able to reveal it; not to be untrue to fact, but to choose and arrange particular facts so that the type, the ideal, toward which they tend shall be most clearly shown. 148

"Realism" is highly valued by Mrs. Van Rensselaer,[149] and because it is so important she maintains that it must be conveyed with power. In the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer "realism" in art which lacks this quality of "idealism" frequently is viewed as fragmented trivia, or naturalism, which is a poor imitation of life, without artistic merit. "Nothing in art is or can be a copy of anything in nature,"[150] she wrote, and insisted that "no mistake is greater than to believe because a man is a 'realist' he does not need imagination."[151] In 1881 Mrs. Van Rensselaer singled out the work of Eakins and his pupils for force of idea

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as well as realism of subject, and was the first critic to acknowledge the merits of Ironworkers: Noontime (pl. 108) by Thomas P. Anshutz (1851-1912), a painting unique in the artist's work and in the history of American art for both form and content.[152]

The idea that realism required breadth and imagination was also found in the theater and was expressed by Joseph Jefferson (pl. 109)--popular actor of the day, amateur painter, and an intimate of the circle around Mrs. Van Rensselaer--who said, in criticizing a naturalistic performance, "Art is not imitation of nature, but built upon nature. There is a process of elimination and idealization."[153] When Richard Watson Gilder organized a lecture on "Certain Tendencies in Current Literature" he formulated it as "a plea for the ideal."[154] Indeed, a preoccupation with the "ideal," however interpreted, can be found a pervasive concern in this period and characterizes the art criticism of John LaFarge and S. R. Koehler as well as Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who gave considerable thought to the use of terms and questioned conventional usage. For example, she wrote of an unfinished painting by the French artist Jean-François Millet (1814-75) (pl. 110) of two men spading that it is

> . . . terrible, almost, in its revelation . . . of the laboriousness of labor; terrible, and yet beautiful through the artistic grandeur of its composition and its strong sympathetic accent. And yet with all the beauty, with all the sentiment, there is nowhere a sign of what is conventionally called "idealization." There is nothing but truth in its highest potency; that is to say, truth on the one hand to the facts of life that is

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> pictured, and on the other hand to the facts of the artist's mood while he was picturing. 155

These sentiments were shared by American collectors of the 1880s when many of Millet's major works migrated to these shores. Mrs. Van Rensselaer reported the acquisition of one canvas, a unique subject and popular favorite in America although ridiculed by French critics when it was first exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1864:

> Millet's famous "Bringing Home the New-Born Calf" [pl. 111] found so much favor in the eyes of Mr. Shaw, of Boston--who owns the finest collection of Millet's in the country and, I imagine, in the world--that he purchased it for $18,500. 156

That what Mrs. Van Rensselaer termed "artistic grandeur" was incorporated into images celebrating the humble peasant in his ceaseless uncomplaining labor, no doubt, gave comfort to their new wealthy American owners,[157] who at this moment in history would have appreciated some of the same from the American workers, who were instead just then actively organizing unions. Such uses of the ideal in art are explicitly revealed in the writings of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's early mentor, S. R. Koehler, who equates the promotion of idealism in American art with a yearning for political stability:

> Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of art . . . is this, that is simply the effort to give sensible embodiment to the ideal. If we accept this definition, we need have no fears for the future of art. As long as man exists, he shall strive after the ideal, seeking the perfect with ever renewed and untiring effort, however often baffled. Hence art can only die with the last of the human race. But it must be admitted that the ideal is not always easily discernible. In periods of transi-

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> tion, in which some men adhere to old faiths, and others tear themselves away from them while the new faith that is to be their light is still hidden from all, or at best but dimly seen by a few,--in which old-fashioned political institutions are subverted, and the whole social fabric is threatened with radical change,--this must necessarily be so. These are the times in which individualism asserts itself. The old highways having been abandoned, and there being no generally recognized leaders to point out new roads, every one must shift for himself. And yet there is more earnest yearning for and striving after the ideal, in these periods of doubt and inquiry, than in those other periods in which mankind with unquestioning faith, and often with unthinking minds, follows in the beaten track marked out by the footprints of its predecessors. It is but natural that this state of things should manifest itself in art. In periods of unity of faith or creed, when all men, or at least the great majority of men, see the ideal under a common form, or from one common point of view, there must naturally be also a unity of art, resulting in great works achieved by the co-operation of many minds and many hands. In periods of doubt, this unity no longer prevails, and the ideal, appearing in a multitude of forms, seems to the superficial observer to have been lost. But, although it may be less sharply defined, more vaguely outlined in the mist of doubt which floats about it, it is nevertheless there. Or is there no ideality, even though it be unconscious, in the endeavors of the best of our modern landscape painters to bring man into closer communion with nature, to open his eyes to the glories of sea and sky and land, and thus to make him happier and better by teaching him to enjoy the beauties which continually surround him? And is there no striving after a more perfect humanity, no protest against the abasement of human faculties in the works of the painters whose themes are chosen from among the poor and the lowly? Indeed, it would not be difficult to show that a picture by Millet, born of unselfish pity, has a far higher ideality than any of the great votive pictures of the old artists, which owe their existence solely to the egotistic anxiety of conscience-stricken souls for their own safety, or those immense frescos on church and grave-yard wall which enforce the teachings of virtue by an appeal to fear. 158

Mrs. Van Rensselaer shared Koehler's conception of the "ideal" in art, endowing it with qualities of soul and spirit, with grandeur of idea rather than prettiness of

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style. She wrote that there were two kinds of painting, "what we know as 'realistic' painting" and that which is "distinctly ideal in its essence" and elaborating further asserted:

> All paintings belong in one of these two classes, though the limits of the two meet, of course, and some few may stand on the wavering boundary line that parts them. The distinction between the one kind of work and the other is never to be based on choice of subject. Neither does it rest primarily on technical manner, though, indeed, a painter's manner is most apt to conform to the nature of his aims and conceptions, since it is but his means for expressing these. The true difference, however, is between the nature of one painter and another. Every artist, like every philosopher, is born a Platonist or an Aristotelian. It is not the thing he chooses to paint, but the way in which he sees and feels that thing, which marks him an idealist or a realist. Michael Angelo was an idealist while painting divine creative power and the wrath of judgment-days; Millet, while depicting peasants at their toil. Dürer was a realist when painting the Madonna, as is Verestchagin when he draws the dead on the field of battle. Even in simple portraiture the same difference between dispositions makes itself clearly felt--Rembrandt on the one hand, Holbein on the other; Holbein a realist though limning philosophers and queens, Rembrandt an idealist though portraying the tawdry patriarchs of the Ghetto.
>
> In drawing this distinction I would not, of course, have it for a moment believed that I call any art realistic in the sense of being a mere copy of external facts. All art, of whatever kind, however denuded, apparently, of imagination or poetic sentiment,--the art of Holbein or Jordaens or Metsu, . . . as well as the art of a Raphael or a Corot,--is, as Emerson has put it, "nature passed through the alembic of man." The difference between . . . a really great artist like Holbein and the idealist--is a difference of quantity only. It lies merely in the degree to which he has modified, transmuted, transfigured, the theme he took from nature. But this difference in degree may be so immensely wide that we are quite justified in drawing a distinction as between two opposing camps. Indeed, to draw this distinction clearly and assign a place within this camp or that, and near or far from their dividing lines, is the most important of tasks when we would estimate any painter's art. 159

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This concept of "idealism" was associated with the highest aspirations of artists, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer brought that standard to bear upon the works of contemporary Americans. Even the field of portrait painting was subjected to this criterion:

> . . . the tendencies of modern portrait painting--a number of conspicuous examples to the contrary notwithstanding--are too generally in a direction which it is not unjust to call a direction of shallow and often vulgar realism. To make an effective picture, to catch a superficially "striking likeness," these are the main things kept in view, so constantly does the artist fail in conveying an air of distinction when he should--fail in making a gentleman look like a gentleman and a lady look like a lady--that we are driven to believe that he seldom even conceives the aim. Yet such an air--or any air which is characteristic of position in life, breeding, intellectual and moral standing--is of infinite importance in the total effect produced by a person's aspect. To make a clever man look stupid, or an aristocratic woman look underbred, or a sensitive woman look apathetic, or a spirited man look weak--this is to fail in portraiture more sadly than to give a wrong shape to a nose, or wrong color to a skin. Naturally, however, the reading and interpreting of these more subtle physical facts is a harder task than the perceiving and recording of facts of outline and color; and while it is regretable it is not, perhaps, surprising that so many should fail in the one direction who succeed in the other. 160

This was the critical context in which Mrs. Van Rensselaer reviewed, for example, the portraits presented at the exhibition of the Society of American Artists in 1887.[161]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer singled out the work of Thomas Eakins for comment although he was by this time a controversial figure. She wrote, "Mr. Eakins contributes several portraits, all of them strong, and the small, full-length of a lady with a dog, extremely interesting, despite its lack

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of charm." (See Lady with a Setter Dog, portrait of Susan MacDowell Eakins, artist's wife, pl. 112.) There is no doubt, however, that Mrs. Van Rensselaer preferred the portraits in this exhibition by Thomas Dewing (1851-1938) and Wyatt Eaton (1849-96), whose life-sized lady in a red gown, seated, with her hands clasped upon a book (portrait of Helena de Kay Gilder) she noted as

> remarkable in its rich and glowing color, in its beautiful painting (especially to be noted in the hands), and in that indefinable accent of aristocratic distinction, which is too commonly missing in the clever "realistic" work of the present day. Not every man who paints brilliantly can paint a woman so that she will look as though she were a lady and had chosen a gentleman to paint her. But this exhibition proves that both Mr. Dewing and Mr. Eaton can do this. Two more high-bred looking portraits than theirs it would be difficult to find.

Breeding was very important to Mrs. Van Rensselaer. One of the paintings which impressed her most forcefully in this exhibition was a portrait which epitomized this quality, a Portrait of Miss Olga Gardner (pl. 113) by Dennis Miller Bunker (1861-90). Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote:

> Mr. Bunker has signed one of the strongest works in the room--the seated half-lenth figure of a lady in black. In composition and in color it is almost ascetic . . . a serious, sympathetic and complete study of the deeper meanings which a face contains.

(A few years later Mrs. Van Rensselaer posed for the portrait by William Anderson Coffin [pl. 2], which curiously appears to be inspired by this painting, but with the figure turned around so as to present a frontal image, related to the Holbein portraits then greatly admired as part of a Renaissance revival.) In this review Mrs. Van Rensselaer contrasted

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this Bunker portrait of Miss Gardner with a painting by William M. Chase which she admired, while noting that it was created with an entirely different approach, offering a "glimpse of a lady as we might see her passing in the street rather than an interpretation of the woman as her friends may know her."

The concept of the "ideal" (as construed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her contemporaries) embraced a wide range of styles. The highest tribute was bestowed, in this review of 1887 cited above, upon the small landscape of Albert Pinkham Ryder Moonlight (see pl. 19),[162] for pure poetical interest." Mrs. Van Rensselaer wrote of this painting, with its straining horses drawing a wagon up a wooded hillside:

> The theme is little in this picture--the treatment everything. It is one of those products which cannot be analyzed, which can only be felt, which perhaps will not be very strongly felt by eyes enamored of realities only, but which by poetry loving minds will be felt with extraordinary force.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer championed the creation of "ideal" works as an appropriate endeavor for American artists. In terms of sculpture, for example, she wrote:

> Even cultivated Americans often regard the sculptor's art as valuable merely for the making of portraits or of monumental memorials in which the portraiture plays a prominent part. They appreciate its peculiar commemorative utility, but either wholly ignore its role as a ministrant to the love of beauty, or consider this distinctly subordinate to what may be called its biographical function. Or, at the best, they admire classical works, consecrated by the verdict of time, and covet reproductions of them for private or public enjoyment. The cases are rare when the art, as practiced by living masters, is sympathetically approached from its purely aesthetic side. . . . 163

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If the work of an artist expressed a visual idea, whether it was visionary or observed, Mrs. Van Rensselaer found the highest merit in the undertaking. Having that intent, however, did not guarantee the artist success, and when the work of art fell short of the goal the commentary of Mrs. Van Rensselaer was explicit in enumerating its failings.[164]

The most scathing criticism of Mrs. Van Rennselaer was reserved, however, for those works judged without artistic idea, which might be termed suffering from "naturalism." Occasionally Mrs. Van Rensselaer uses that terminology, as in her characterization of the portrait of Mr. Isaacson by J. Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917) (pl. 114), which she pronounced "an almost over-naturalistic presentation of a Hebrew gentleman rubbing his hands."[165] This is in contrast to Mrs. Van Rensselaer's unstinting praise for Ulrich's The Glass Blowers (pl. 34), the quality of which led her to write of the artist, ". . . he belongs to the 'Realistic' School, but his realism does not carry him outside of artistic work,"[166] and her keen appreciation for the "ideal" within the "real" in pastels by Blum of working-class subjects:

> His three chief pictures (on view at the first exhibition of the Society of Painters in Pastel in New York in 1884) were groups of working-girls--actual transcripts from the local life about us, and from a side of that life which offers rich opportunities which have hitherto been neglected. They were no less truthful than novel, and were truthful in the best fashion--with a veracity touch touched by artistic idealization, but not transformed by

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> it out of true verisimilitude. The artist had worked as an artist should,--realistically, but judiciously, I might almost say judicially,--keeping to the facts of nature, but carefully choosing from among them those which would best insure artistic felicity in his result. One of these pictures [see pl. 115] reproduced in our engraving, showed a group of young laundresses at work; another a room full of busy seamstresses; and the third, called "The Sisters," two girls sewing by a window. All were unconventional and apparently unstudied in arrangement, rapid, frank, and nervous in handling, and charming though subdued in color. All had a gray scheme and a rather light tonality, cleverly vivified in the two first-named by touches of brilliant yet harmonizing color; and in all three the light shone strongly from the pictured windows toward the spectator's eye. Such a device often savors of affectation, or of a desire to secure effectiveness at the expense of simplicity and repose. But here it was so well managed that it seemed as natural and unforced as any more conventional expedient. It was merely an evidence of that artistic choice to which I have referred--a choice which is praiseworthy or blamable, not according as it is conventional or eccentric, but according as the result confirms or does not confirm its rightness. Another evidence of apt selection lay in the character of the figures themselves--in the grace and charm that had been given without taking them outside the bounds of faithful portraiture. All our working-girls are not ugly, coarse, or vulgar. Far from it, as the first street or shop will prove. And we owe Mr. Blum a debt for the clear yet discreet way in which he marked the fact--for his protest against the oft-supposed necessity of painting ugliness whenever we turn from "imaginative" work to the transcribing of our every-day contemporary life. 167

It was the bold way in which the mature Winslow Homer combined the "ideal" with the "real" which made him an artist of the greatest significance for Mrs. Van Rensselaer:

> . . . the prime excellence of these pictures [by Homer, pls. 15, 61] lay not in one quality or another which appeared upon analysis, but in the fact that all qualities held so well together in a result pictorially so complete. The impression was vivid and individual, though details had been carried further than in Homer's early essays. Out-door nature had been given the true out-door look. Facts of atmosphere and light had been translated with wonderful force, and linear beauty was vitalized by great strength in the suggestion of charac-

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> ter. Although they were but water-colors and pictured toiling peasants merely, they were serious works of "high art;" and by this I mean that they had an ideal cast which placed them far above mere prosaic records of common facts. One can hardly call Winslow Homer a poetical painter, and perhaps he would himself disclaim the title of idealist, saying that he only tries to show us certain interesting facts under the aspects which seem to him the best for pictorial use. But this is just the point I wish to make. Interesting facts are what he wants, and the best possible aspects for pictorial use. Wise choice, not chance, directs his brush, and personal feeling shows in its creations. To say this is to imply some sort of "completing" process; and such a process always implies some sort of idealism in the result. A poetical painter might have dwelt more on the spiritual suggestions of these rude sea-faring folk and their surroundings--a Millet would have shown us more of the pain and pathos of the fisher's life, more of the cruelty and terror of the waves from which he wrings his bread. But Homer, merely emphasizing physical suggestions,--showing us the dignity and beauty which may reside in humble bodies and in waves and skies,--is he not an idealist too although perhaps no poet? [168]

All of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's architectural criticism was primarily concerned with projecting the concept or idea expressed, and thus was also concerned with "idealism" in the sense that she used it in writing of painting. For example, Mr. Tiffany's house (pl. 116), designed by Messrs. McKim, Mead, and White, was valued by Mrs. Van Rensselaer because it had style found only when "the artist has had a definite, homogeneous conception to express. . . ."[169]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer applied the same criteria to considerations of sculpture. In her judgment the worst offenders of the artistic spirit were the countless vacuous Civil War monuments being erected all over the country. She wrote of one such example, a life-sized bronze figure of a general, on foot, dedicated at Gettysburg:

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> . . . it was "naturalistic" rather than monumental in conception, and had been stood directly on the rock without the semblance of pedestal or base of any kind. One was tempted to call it an imitation man rather than a statue of a man, for this was just the effect it presented. It seemed as tho an effort had been made to give it as little as possible the look of a monument, as much as possible the look of a real soldier surveying the surrounding country. No work of art conceived in this spirit can be successful. Art in its essence, as well as in its methods, is a convention, not a would-be attempt at literal imitation, and to try to deny, in so far as possible, its true character is always to fall into triviality, childishness and lack of beauty on the one hand and of impressiveness on the other. 170

Similarly, Mrs. Van Rensselaer castigated a memorial to Lincoln:

> . . . in Newark, New Jersey, one may see the utmost limit of bad taste in the placing of a commemorative figure which in itself has merit. Here a bronze Lincoln sits, just as might a living man, on an actual park bench with his feet on the actual ground, with no sculptural or architectural accompaniments whatever, unless one may so call the bronze hat resting on the bench beside him. Living children, I am told, sit in his lap and enjoy themselves, but even Mme. Tussaud knew that this is not what statues are for. 171

When similar projects were created with force and imagination, entailing an "ideal" conception as well as perceptive observation, Mrs. Van Rensselaer acclaimed the achievement, as, for example, in 1887 in "Saint Gaudens's Lincoln" (pl. 117):

> The Lincoln monument for Chicago is the most important commemorative work that Mr. St. Gaudens has yet produced and may well remain the most important of his life. There could be no nobler task for an American sculptor than the task of representing the greatest of all Americans; and it so chances that the external as well as the intellectual problems it involved were of peculiar interest and difficulty.
>
> To an artist brought up in the belief that only through the representation of purely beautiful forms can a work of sculpture be beautiful as such, Lincoln would,

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or course, have offered an unsympathetic theme; both in physical structure and in attire he might have seemed almost the embodiment of the sculpturally impossible. But to an artist trained like Mr. St. Gaudens in the gospel of individuality, full of that modern spirit which prizes "character" in a model for portraiture above even beauty itself, no face could have been more inspiring than Lincoln's, while even the difficulties presented by his form and costume could not seem insuperable.

The intellectual problem on the other hand--the primary task of conceiving the soul and potency of the man is so clear and full a way as to make adequate expression possible--had to deal with elements in which force and beauty were equally commingled. A more distinct personality than Lincoln's could not be imagined, nor one in which moral purity and power should be more commensurate with intellectual strength. Here it was the complex richness of his opportunity which made the sculptor's task as difficult as noble. We may truly say that Lincoln was not one great man but many. He was a thinker whose profound imaginings dealt with the deepest, subtilest public problems and a practical man of affairs who controlled a myriad daily details of immediate definite bearing; a leader who guided his people through a terrible crisis, yet an executive who carefully sought out and followed out their own desires; the champion of his country before the world and the father individually of every fellow-countryman who appealed to him; a wonderful orator and a wonderful master of prose expression and of the poetry which may be woven into it; a humorist and yet a philosopher saddened by the ever-present pathos and tragedy of life. His mind seemed a very synonym for practical good sense; yet it was the mind of a poet, a prophet too, and beneath it lay the heart of a child and the tender instincts of a woman. How, we had often asked ourselves, can any artist ever show us such a character? And how can we permit him to dismember it and accept a single part as Lincoln? Yet Mr. St. Gaudens has not dismembered it, and has expressed it for us no less adequately than broadly.

The first question to be decided must have been: Shall the impression to be given base itself primarily upon the man of action or upon the man of affairs? Shall the statue be standing or seated? In the solution of this question we find the most striking originality of the work. The impression given bases itself in equal measure upon the man of action and the man of affairs. Lincoln is standing, but stands in front of a chair from which he has just risen. He is before the people to counsel and direct them, but has just turned from that other phase of his activity in which he was their executive and their protector. Two ideas are thus expressed

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in the composition, but they are not separately, independently expressed to the detriment of unity. The artist has blended them to the eye as our own thought blends them when we speak of Lincoln. The pose reveals the man of action, but represents a man ready for action, not really engaged in it; and the chair--clearly typical of the Chair of State--reveals his title to act no less than his methods of self-preparation.

We see, therefore, that completeness of expression has been arrived at through a symbolic, idealistic conception. No given moment of Lincoln's life is represented, no special branch of his public usefulness or of his intellectual endowment is emphasized,--all are suggested in the symbolic reach of the conception. But the rendering of this conception is realistic in the best sense of the word. The pose is simple, natural, individually characteristic--as far removed from the conventionally dramatic or "sculpturesque" as from the baldly commonplace. Neither physical facts nor facts of costume are palliated or adorned. Even the chair is in general outline such a one as Lincoln might very possibly have used. It is idealized only by its massiveness and its unobtrusive decoration, and the figure is idealized only by refinement and breadth and vigor in treatment. What we see are realities, but we see them suffused with poetic thought and typical explanatory meanings, and ennobled though not altered by the subtile touch of art: and the reposeful composition speaks to us with true dramatic intensity. Examine the figure more narrowly and see how rich it is in significance, how it carries out in every line the fundamental ideas which inspired the composition as a whole. This Lincoln, with his firmly planted feet, his erect body, and his squared shoulders, stands as a man accustomed to face the people and sway them at his will, while the slightly drooped head and the quiet, yet not passive hands express the meditativeness, the self-control, the conscientiousness of the philosopher who reflected well before he spoke, of the moralist who realized to the full the responsibilities of utterance. The dignity of the man and his simplicity; his strength, his inflexibility and his tenderness; his goodness and his courage; his intellectual confidence and his humility of soul; the poetic cast of his thought, the homely vigor of his manner, and the underlying sadness of his spirit,--all these may be read in the wonderfully real yet ideal portrait which the sculptor has created. . . . The union of idealistic conception and realistic rendering which it reveals is almost always found when modern art is at its very best. But it also shows a union of perfect repose with strong dramatic significance, and this union is characteristic of classic art when at its best. There as here it is

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> secured by the same expedient,--by the choice of a moment which is not the one of most vigorous action but the one in which such action is imminent.
>
> The statue is of bronze, eleven and a half feet in height. The simple pedestal which supports it stands in the center of a platform some sixty feet in breadth by thirty in depth which is raised a few steps above the surface of a slight elevation near the entrance of Lincoln Park. Around three sides of the platform curves a stone seat, upon the back of which one reads the name of Lincoln, with the dates of his birth and death, and upon the ends two characteristic citations from his own utterances. In the architectural portion of his work Mr. St. Gaudens was assisted by Mr. Stanford White, and together they have given us a monument which is the most precious the country yet possesses; which is not only our best likeness of Abraham Lincoln, but our finest work of monumental art. 172

It is interesting to note that the photograph of Saint-Gaudens' Lincoln which was used to illustrate this article by Mrs. Van Rensselaer does something which others of that monument do not (compare pls. 117 and 118). It emphasizes, as does the text by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, the "ideal" qualities while at the same time maintaining the realism which so totally dominates other photographs of the monument. As an art critic Mrs. Van Rensselaer sought form and structure imbued with life and viewed criticism as a means of determining that point of harmonious balance between such polarities as the abstract means on one hand, and the vitality of a freshly felt reality on the other. Either factor devoid of the other, in the estimate of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, produced a shallow art, and she equally condemned academic aridity and formless literalness. In this sense the criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is related to contemporary popular French taste, then reflected in official commissions

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both in France and America, incorporating lively surfaces and natural gesture, but within a traditional form emphasizing classical structure.

In a typical passage, written about a work by D. C. French, The Milmore Memorial (pl. 119), Mrs. Van Rensselaer celebrated an American sculptor's contribution to both the Paris Salon and the development of American art in terms, again, of the "real" and the "ideal":

> This is . . . a large work in bronze, which was much remarked and . . . officially rewarded at the last Paris Salon.
>
> I call it a relief for want of an exacter word. But while the background slab shows, in very lowest relief, the figure of a sphynx upon which the sculptor is at work, his own figure and that of the Angel of Death are fully in the round. The latter is a stately but beautiful, a solemn but not terror-inspiring female figure, heavily draped, with a cloak thrown over her head, so that her face is in deep shadow, and a bunch of symbolic poppies in her pendant right hand. She leans towards the sculptor and with her left hand strikes up his, holding its busy chisel, while he turns his head with surprise, but not alarm, to see who it is that thus bids him pause. He is represented as quite young, and he rests with one knee against a ledge that projects from the base of the back-ground slab in an admirably chosen attitude, full of vigor as well as grace, yet quite unforced and natural. The whole conception, as regards the sculptor's figure no less than that of Death, is idealistic, not naturalistic, in the current modern sense. And yet so true is the feeling, so simply genuine and unsentimental, yet solemn and touchingly tender is the expression of the work, that one does not think of classing it among the ordinary "ideal" statues of today. I mean that it does not seem to have resulted, as do so many of these statues, from a wish to do an "imaginative" piece of work simply for the sake of dealing with attractive sculptural materials--simply to escape from the hampering bonds of modern costumes and occupations into a field where free fine draperies and unclothed limbs can be dealt with. It seems, on the contrary, the natural, sincere expression of a naturally conceived and sincerely felt conception. The beautiful lines and masses of the draperies and of the vigorous young sculptor's body

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> exist in order that the conception may be properly realized--the conception has not been elaborated for their sake. In short, while technically considered, this is one of the most remarkable pieces of sculpture we have yet had from an American hand, one hardly thinks at first of its technical merits, so strong and so moving is the impression it makes upon the mind. It is not only the work of a very able sculptor; it is also the expression of the thought of a very intelligent and individual artist in the higher sense. The theme, of course, is not new--hardly any theme possible of artistic treatment could be new to-day. But it is conceived in so fresh and personal a way that the resultant work of art is both new and very impressive. It is interesting, indeed, to compare this conception of premature death with that of the mediaeval or Renaissance artists who filled Europe with their grim and ghastly versions of this subject. Every one knows the "dance of Death" as what are called the "ages of faith" loved to portray it, with its grinning skeletons carrying off its terrified princes and peasants, young men and old. But if faith means the acceptance of the Gospel of Christ, with its promises of a life to come which shall be better than the life we know, or which at all events shall mean rest and peace for those who have worked worthily in the world, then this beautiful creation of our so-called age of unfaith is much more religious, more Christian than its famous forerunners. Death seems no enemy here, although the sculptor's earthly work is interrupted. His face shows no terror; the angel's no threat. We seem to see a representation of an implacable but loving Mother Nature, regretful that she must interfere with a noble activity, but promising at least eternal repose as consolation.
>
> . . . it was designed to commemorate . . . [an] American sculptor, Millmore, who died not long ago. Wherever it stands it ought to carry to the minds of those who see it a message of consolation as regards the idea of death, and also a message of hopeful prophecy as regards the future of American art. Here and there a valiant artist may fall by the wayside ere his work is really begun, but the band is steadily increasing; . . . we feel that, although good American sculptors are not nearly so numerous as good American painters, the best among them stand at the very head of the artists of our country. 173

The concept of the "ideal" in the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is related to a lingering commitment to the "heroic" in an age increasingly plebeian. Mrs. Van

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Rensselaer would have the multitudes addressed in the same exalted language as that deemed appropriate for an elite, and found no incongruity in summoning grandeur and monumentality, sumptuous decor, and the noblest ambitions in the art created for public places. Such art was directed at the same anonymous multitudes as the art criticism which Mrs. Van Rensselaer published in the mass media, and both were designed to inculcate the idea that all had a stake in a mutual undertaking, which was the establishment of a beneficent society. "Even those classes of our population which have the least education," wrote Mrs. Van Rensselaer, "are quick to appreciate the fact if a commemorative statue is unusually successful from the aesthetic point of view."[174]

During the period in which Mrs. Van Rensselaer functioned as an art critic there was a nostalgic preoccupation with ages past, and especially that of the Civil War, the most recent era of heroic undertaking in American history. The pages of the magazines to which Mrs. Van Rensselaer contributed were filled with memoirs and reenactments of those days (as well as of such historic European figures as Napoleon). True, all of this was treated in a mundane, matter-of-fact manner, yet expressed throughout is a notion that those, indeed, had been days of greater significance. Mrs. Van Rensselaer and her generation were born too late to participate in those momentous events which dominated the years of their childhood, and she and her contemporaries grew to

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look back on that period with a vague sense of loss. Mrs. Van Rensselaer reminisced, for example, for the readers of Century Magazine in 1893:

> It was not merely that the architectural and social backgrounds were different. Behind these backgrounds, mingled with them, pervading every part of my life within and without my home, I see the tremendous, glorious shadow of the war. . . . You who are younger do not know how a national disaster makes a city look; you did not see the faces one met on the morning when Lincoln died; you did not watch his funeral-train pass up the avenue between the black ranks of his heart-broken children. Grant's funeral, Sherman's funeral, were impressive, truly. But the nation was safe then: who could doubt it that saw the Confederate generals bearing the great Union general's pall? When Lincoln lay dead, and just because he had died, no one felt sure that the nation was really saved; the end of the war looked to most men like the possible beginning of a worse--an anarchical--strife . . . you do not know how a city feels when it breathes the breath of a new life, if you cannot remember how people's faces looked when Sherman reached the sea, when Lee surrendered. 175

It was to those "mighty days" (as Walt Whitman termed them[176]) that Mrs. Van Rensselaer's generation looked for inspiring values. For example, in acclaiming the contribution of Olmsted she wrote:

> In every energetic man there is a fine leaven of combativeness, and the unrighteous obstacles perpetually piled in Mr. Olmsted's path aroused his spirit to righteous intensity. While fighting his own artistic battle he felt that he was fighting, too, the battle for better municipal conditions; and any one who knew him at the time will testify that he threw himself into his park work much as our young soldiers, just then, were throwing themselves into martial combats. 177

The highest praise was lavished upon those monuments to Civil War heroes judged worthy of the theme, such as Saint-Gaudens' Shaw Memorial (pls. 120-21), which was extolled as "the realization of the ideal--the idealization of the real,"[178] and

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Mrs. Van Rensselaer long maintained an interest in appropriately commemorating the valiant of that era.[179] A generation mired in political corruption, commercialization, and artistic mediocrity found solace and hope for reform in grandly realized monuments to the heroic potential of Americans.

Throughout the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is found a persistent interest in the "ideal" in art.[180] It is evident in her enthusiasm, for example, for a kind of sculpture which continued to be created by artists who sought their roots in past traditions which they applied to life around them. Mrs. Van Rensselaer applauded the works of such sculptors as Olin Levi Warner (1844-96) for projecting that happy mesh of the "real" and the "ideal," writing, in a typical passage in 1881, "Nothing could have been more lovely or more skillfully wrought than the latter's portrait bust of Miss Maud Morgan [a noted harpist of the day] which was well worthy to stand side by side with some exquisite antique. More valuable even than its beauty, however, was its loyalty to the aspect of our own time and people."[181] In a similar manner Mrs. Van Rensselaer welcomed the youthful creations of the following four generations of American sculptors of the "ideal," citing the works of John Donoghue (1853-1903), Herbert Adams (1858-1945) (pl. 122), Edmund A. Stewardson (1865-92) (pl.123), Hendrik Christian Andersen (1872-1940) (pl. 124), and Paul Manship (1886-1966)

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(pl. 125), artists whose early direction lauded by Mrs. Van Rensselaer was soon stifled by either public neglect on the part of the art world (Adams), premature death (Donoghue and Stewardson), or atrophied by conversion to a partially understood modernism embracing stylized archaisms (Andersen and Manship).[182]

When Andersen was twenty-eight years old, for example, Mrs. Van Rensselaer visited his New York studio and wrote an article which introduced his work to the readers of Century Magazine in 1900 in terms which projected this value system based on a balance of the "real" with the "ideal." Mrs. Van Rensselaer presented the first works of this sculptor (see pls. 124 and 136), who had all his future career ahead of him, with the following words:

> . . . we understand that idealistic art chiefly attracts him. But for this very reason his portraits . . . are doubly interesting. They show that he possesses that keen love for the real, for the prosaic and personal natural facts, which alone can give truth and vitality to idealistic work; and, on the other hand, they prove that his idealism is genuine, because, while faithful as portraits, they are not mere bald, photographic transcripts from life.
>
> All of Mr. Andersen's works, of whatever kind, tell us that his main concern is the expression of character. He does not fall into an error too common among modern artists and identify character with physical ugliness or eccentricity. But he does not think, with the great bulk of the modern public, that an insipid, meaningless portrayal of academically correct forms and features can have artistic value. He knows that art can draw beauty of some sort from almost any source, but he believes that to reach its highest level it must appeal as strongly as possible to both the mind and the eye. To quote some of his own words, the noblest art is that which "most successfully unites physical and mental nobility." A sculptor should "symbolize the finest qualities of the human form," should infuse the shapes

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> he creates with "the highest intellectual expressiveness of which they are capable." Even in portraiture he cannot use his chances well unless he perceives, interprets, and accentuates the best that the model offers. And in idealistic work his opportunities are limited only by his own power to conceive fine ideals and to realize them clearly. To cultivate this power he must be sympathetically alive to every mental and physical impression he receives from the world around him, studying each and all with his intelligence as well as his eyesight, and searching for those most worthy of artistic record. He must feel, Mr. Andersen says, that "a head is not interesting in itself, but only in so far as it interprets interesting qualities, that a form is not fine unless it reaches or approaches some ideal that will elevate as well as animate the mind that perceives it."
>
> I need hardly explain that a sculptor who looks at his art from this point of view does not value technical brilliancy for its own sake. He knows that . . . the handiwork, the technical style, is merely the voice of the idea. 183

Mrs. Van Rensselaer continued to maintain into the twentieth century an interest in the ideal when she found it vivified by the real, a mode encouraged with the establishment of the American Academy in Rome. As late as 1916, when Manship returned from his stay there to exhibit his work in New York, Mrs. Van Rensselaer came out of near retirement as an art critic to write about a work which impressed her forcefully, the artist's relief portrait of his three-week-old daughter (pl. 125):

> . . . truthful though it is, there is more than truth in Mr. Manship's "Pauline." Not idealized, still less prettified or sentimentalized, the figure is, nevertheless not a bald prose rendering of facts. It is an artist's vision and version of facts, where dignity in the arrangement and beauty in the handling have given aesthetic interest and distinction to a theme that did not easily lend itself to sculpture. The way in which the blanket behind the head, while it supplies for our eyes the support that we know the head of so young a child demands, also unifies and dignifies the composition, may

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> be appreciated even in a reproduction, and so may the way in which the pose of the hands, with their suggestion of undirected motion, adds animation of effect and variety of line, and, again, the masterly management of the methods of relief. But we need to see the warmly toned marble itself to value at their worth the beautiful and explanatory treatment of the surfaces, the skilful achievement of "color" in the sculptural sense; and also--a detail not to be overlooked--the expression of the softness of the flesh by the touch of a finger on the cheek.
>
> This technical skill, this power of perfect craftsmanship, does not surprise us when the hand is Mr. Manship's. Nor does the delicately conventionalized treatment of the hair. Nor does the echo of Oriental art in the prominence (nevertheless, quite truthful) of the lower part of the body and in the leaf-like lines of the blanket behind the head--an echo that poetizes the soberly ruminating little figure and adds to its artistic distinction by giving it, faintly and without at all impairing its individual character, an air as of an infant Buddha. 184

Mrs. Van Rensselaer chose to focus on the one work in the group of those exhibited by Manship in 1916 which perpetuated an earlier tradition (although treated in novel ways). By that time the field of art criticism had, by and large, evolved other criteria, more formal and abstract, and in this article the then-sixty-five-year-old Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted the change of standards which had overtaken her own tenure as an art critic. In noting criticism which had questioned Manship's choice of a newborn infant for a subject, Mrs. Van Rensselaer sarcastically countered:

> It was refreshing thus to be encouraged, even by authoritative voices, to feel that the subject of a work of art is a proper matter of debate, so frequently, so dogmatically, are we enjoined never to care what an artist chooses to do, only to think of how he chooses to do it. It was refreshing to be told that a sculptor "ought not" to have portrayed a three weeks' child, and to suspect as the reason for the verdict the simple human fact that the critics did not enjoy, or felt sure that they would

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> not enjoy, the contemplation of so young an infant in the flesh. 185

In the following year Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted the end of an era and mourned the death of the "ideal" as a victim of World War I. In "Who Wants Art Nowadays?" Mrs. Van Rensselaer condemned those who "are doing their utmost to kill out of the world the great art of right, and sane and gracious living," and went on to connect the "ideal" in art with all that was worthy in human behavior:

> Used in this connection the word "art" is not a mere figure of speech, for consistent beauty of conduct is a gift to the world of those who mould their lives to fine issues according to visions and intentions of their own. The virtue of all things "whether body or soul," says Plato, is best achieved "not by chance but as the result of the order and truth and art which are imparted to them." And because a sensitiveness to the influences of material beauty may help to develop what is beautiful in conduct, one of the most evil results of the war is . . . the shaking of our faith in idealism and therefore in the beneficent utility of the arts. 186

Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer brought a particular sensibility to American art criticism. She was the first to give serious critical attention to many major figures, diverse art forms, and significant works of art and was in the vanguard of those who comprehended that American art was part of a world culture. Her writings convey a distinct consciousness, one which has left a rich legacy. In the course of her work she helped produce the critical climate which fostered the establishment of art-filled public places and a sensitivity to the relationship between art and its environment, both structurally and socially.

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There is a largeness to the perspective of Mrs. Van Rensselaer which characterized an era of grand enterprise. Never patronizing, petty, nor mired in irrelevant issues of personality, the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer is bountiful and generous, yet perceptive and discriminating. She wrote for her contemporaries who found neither emotion nor facility suspect, and she welcomed gifts of intellect and dexterity when they enabled artists of probity to project ideas forcefully.

Favoring techniques which implied movement and suggestiveness, rather than labored rendering, celebrating inventiveness which created new forms for new demands, the art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer functioned in a rapidly changing world which was given cohesion by a system of time-honored references.

The contribution of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer must be comprehended in this larger context, as part of the creation of the American Renaissance. The privileged circumstances of her origins and the early exposure to cosmopolitan influences made possible the distinctive critical instrument which Mrs. Van Rensselaer finely honed and applied to the task of cultivating a knowledgeable national art consciousness. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's first works defined her aims, and with her mature criticism of the 1880s it became clear that her role was to articulate the shared criteria and critical principles of her generation, of those who came

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to power in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer lived on to contribute occasional art criticism in the years to come (see Bibliography), her vision can be seen as consistently rooted in that era of national optimism between 1876 and 1917, termed "the American Renaissance."

Having examined the origin and development of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's writings on art and architecture, we must comprehend the impact of her contribution within an investigation of what was meant by this concept, "the American Rensaissance."

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NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]Dow, pp. 110-11.

[2]MGVR's use of the term "synthesism" is related to that found in the criticism of her colleague Charles de Kay. See, for example, his "George Inness," Century Magazine, n.s. 2 (1882), pp. 57-64 (under name of Henry Eckford).

MGVR comments on Japanese subjects painted by Wores in Independent, 5 July 1888, p. 839 (see above, p. 40) and on De Nittis' painting of two women in Japanese dress beside a pool, Confidences, in Independent, 7 February 1889, p. 167.

[3]MGVR did not acknowledge Cassatt as a great printmaker (New York World, 31 July 1892, p. 27) but never wrote extensively about her prints.

[4]Henry Lerolle et ses amis (Paris: privately printed, 1932), p. 14. Translation by the author.

[5]Entretiens, as cited in Boime, The Academy and French Painting, p. 76. On Thoré see also pp. 95-98.

[6]Independent, 26 January 1888, p. 103, and 1 March 1888, p. 263.

[7]English translation by Buhot's American widow, 1910, p. 27, from Bénédite, Felix Buhot: Etude et catalogue de l'oeuvre de cet artiste exposé au Musée National du Luxembourg (Paris, 1902), p. 12.

[8]See, for example, James T. Callow, Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Caroline Press, 1967).

[9]Six Portraits, p. 1.

[10]AABN, 25 February 1882, p. 88.

[11]Book of American Figure Painters, Preface (n.p.).

[12]"Art in Our Churches: IX," Independent, 2 December 1886, p. 1553.

[13]History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century, p. ix.

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[14]"Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," pp. 348-50. This passage relates to the decorative ideas of Candace Wheeler (1827-1923), who was an important figure in the development of American decorative arts and whose embroidery designs displayed abroad MGVR judged superior to European examples (AABN, 30 June 1883, pp. 305-6) and to whom MGVR dedicated Six Portraits in 1889. The two women had first met in Dresden in the late 1860s when MGVR was a child and Candace Wheeler an art student with three children in school (being a woman of the same generation as MGVR's own mother). Candace Wheeler provided MGVR with a model of a woman of her own class successfully engaged in the art world as a professional, and the encouragement to her own efforts on the part of the older woman was reciprocated when MGVR helped her daughter, the artist and student of Chase, Dora Wheeler (1858-?) to obtain illustration work commissioned by the periodicals for which MGVR wrote art criticism, AABN and American Art Journal. The three women frequently vacationed and traveled together, providing each other with encouragement to work while surrounded by those more preoccupied with social obligations. (See, for example, MGVR letters to S. R. Koehler, 16 September 1880 through 1881, 26 June 1883, 23 February 1887, Koehler Papers, Archives of American Art, Rolls D190-91.) For information on Candace Wheeler see her autobiography, Yesterdays in a Busy Life (New York: Harper & Bros., 1918), and Pullman Collection of Candace Wheeler Papers, Mark Twain Memorial, The Nook Farm Research Library, Hartford, Conn. See also Madeleine B. Stern, chapter on Candace Wheeler, in We the Women: Career Firsts of Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Schulte, 1963), cited by Kinnard, p. 298.

[15]To be sure, earlier artists had painted jokes (such as Raphaelle Peale's After the Bath, 1823), but the application of paint had then remained sober. Even the eighteenth-century Rococo style had been adapted in America with gravity. Only in MGVR's period do we find American artists painting with an ease and familiarity which allowed them to revel in the sensual pleasures of the loaded brush.

[16]American Art Review 2, part 2 (1881):247-54.

[17]The Education of Henry Adams (1905; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mufflin, 1961), pp. 266 and 284.

[18]"American Painters in Pastel," p. 206.

[19]"Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," p. 711. MGVR was not the first to assert this. James Jackson Jarves, for example, while finding virtue in the fact that American art was "not overborne by the weight of a glorious past" and "our country free from those weighty intellectual authorities

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and conventional conditions which powerfully tend to hedge in the student to prescribed paths, undermine his originality, and warp his native individualism," yet insisted, "Our knowledge is eclectic" and advised American artists "to get artistic riches by virtue of assimilated examples, knowledge and ideas, drawn from sources. . . ." See The Art Idea, ed. B. Rowland Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1960; original publication 1864), pp. 164-66.

[20]Probably destroyed by fire, according to Ronald G. Pisano, in letter to the author, 10 May 1977.

[21]"Chase," American Art Review, p. 95.

[22]"William Merritt Chase's Tenth Street Studio," Archives of American Art Journal 16, no. 2 (1976):10-11, written by Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., derived from Molly Nesbit, "William Merritt Chase and Art-Atmosphere in the New World" (unpublished senior paper, Vassar College, 1973). A critique of this painting which is closer to that by MGVR may be found in Samuel Isham, The History of American Painting (New York: Macmillan, 1905), p. 383.

[23]P. 2.

[24]For MGVR's comments on Dürer see AABN, 23 June 1883, pp. 291-92; on Ingres see Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6; and for linear qualities of Homer see "An American in England," p. 17.

[25]This very casual, crossed-out, undated letter is in the Gardner Museum Collection, Archives of American Art, Papers of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Roll 390, between frames 364 and 370. MGVR moved to the address given in this letter in 1908, and so it dates between then and 1924, the year I. S. Gardner died.

[26]"The New Public Library in Boston," p. 262.

[27]"Let us remember," wrote MGVR in her first article for the 1880 American Art Review, "that our children will be the public for our artists of the future" (see "Artist and Amateur," p. 386), and by 1898 MGVR was functioning primarily as the president of the Public Education Association of New York, which had made a gift of about 170 pictures and casts to New York City Public Schools. The chairman of the Art Committee reported that year, "The Committee on Art is charged with the work of making the interior of the public schools attractive to the eyes of teachers and pupils, and elevating and refining in their influence . . . the pictures and casts were all large works used in decorating the walls." "Supplementary Report on Art in Public Schools," American Art Annual 1 (1898), ed. Florence N. Levy (New York: Macmillan,

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1899, p. 62. MGVR wrote to Augustus Saint-Gaudens, 4 June (1897, L.D.) to personally ask him for a photograph of the Shaw Memorial for a school she was especially interested in:

> "I think I told you that I am doing this Boy's Grammar Department myself, as a memorial to Griswold [her only child, who had died a few years before]. Therefore I want it to be as nice as possible, and there is a fine space in the Assembly Room, right in front of the boys, where I want to have an enlargement of the Shaw at least 50 inches long and larger if possible. This school is No. 7 on Chrystie Street. I think you told me once that you had been to school there, and of course I hope this is so as it would add greatly to the interest of the picture if it could be labelled as a work of a former pupil of the school."

Unpublished letter, Saint-Gaudens Collection, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.

MGVR placed a high value on such photographic reproductions and on casts as well. For example, she pronounced the casts of Greek sculpture promised for the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition one of the chief attractions of the expected fair. Boston Evening Transcript, 2 April 1892, p. 6.

[28]This was the condition of P.S. 3 at 490 Hudson Street, on the site of one of the New York City Public Schools formerly enhanced by MGVR's organization, during a visit by the author, September 1977.

[29] MGVR noted the original Cox painting as "extremely interesting in subject and treatment," Independent, 17 May 1888, p. 615. The year before, the year in which Cox painted this work, was also the year in which Cox and MGVR collaborated on an article on Saint-Gaudens for Century Magazine, n.s. 13, pp. 28-39. MGVR was also an early enthusiast for the paintings of Cecilia Beaux and a close friend of the artist. See New York World, 11 November 1894, p. , and Cecilia Beaux' account of her attachment to MGVR, "whose friendship has been one of the ties that since [meeting MGVR at the Gilders' house] . . . have bound me to New York." Background with Figures (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930, p. 209).

[30]It is interesting to note that MGVR toned this passage down to read, ". . . cultivated men and women who are the heirs of all the ages, living in a state of high civilization . . ." when the article of which it was a part was republished in book form. The original statement was published in an unsigned editorial, "Architectural Fitness," Garden and Forest, 19 August 1891, p. 385, which was first attributed to MGVR by Cynthia Zaitzevsky, who noted that it

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was reprinted, with slight alterations, as "A Word for Architecture" in MGVR's 1893 Art Out-of-Doors, in which the altered statement appears on p. 192. See Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 32 (1973):168.

[31]"American Country Dwellings 1," pp. 10-13.

[32] Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., "Richardson and Trinity Church: The Evolution of a Building," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 28 (1968):291.

[33]Richardson, p. 89. Eclecticism had no pejorative connotation for MGVR. This point is misunderstood by C. Kinnard in "Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer," where, for example, on p. 152 "eclectic" is misspelled and MGVR's position misconstrued. Cf. Richardson, pp. 74ff.

[34]New York World, 4 December 1892, p. 23.

[35]"American Renaissance," p. 81. The quote from George W. Sheldon is from American Painters (New York, 1878), p. 174.

[36]See Boime, "The Copy and the Aesthetics of the Sketch," The Academy and French Painting, pp. 127-32.

[37]"Wright's Eastern-Seaboard Contemporaries: Creative Eclecticism in the United States around 1900," Problems of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art (1961, New York City) (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), 4:75-76.

[38]American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (1955; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 3.

[39]See "Two Major Victorian Landmarks Saved," The Victorian Society in America Bulletin 1, no. 4 (Winter 1967):1.

[40]"Recent Architecture in America 1: Public Buildings 1," Century Magazine, n.s. 6 (1884), p. 66.

[41]Boston Evening Transcript, 12 March 1892, p. 13.

[42]Independent, 5 May 1887, p. 555. See also AABN, 16 October 1880, p. 184, and Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6.

[43]AABN, 21 July 1883, p. 29.

[44]AABN, 28 July 1883, p. 39. See also AABN, 12 May 1883, p. 220.

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[45]AABN, 28 July 1883, p. 39.

[46]Unpublished letter of MGVR to S. R. Koehler, 12 June 1881 (pl. 1), Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D191, frame 58.

[47]"Noted Munich Artists" (unsigned article attributed to MGVR by L.D.), dated "Munich, September 10," New York World, 1 October 1882, p. 10. MGVR also referred to Leibl as a "great painter" when reporting that Charles Frederic Ulrich (1858-1908) had studied with him in Munich. AABN, 12 May 1883, p. 220.

[48]"Art in Munich" (unsigned article attributed to MGVR by L.D.), New York World, 8 October 1882, p. 10.

[49]"William Merritt Chase," American Art Review 2, part 1 (January-February 1881):91-98 and 135-42. See MGVR letters to S. R. Koehler concerning evolution of this article from 7 July 1880 (when she writes of undertaking it "con amore") to 7 September 1880, when it was almost finished (S. R. Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D190, frame 1588, to Roll D191, frame 0018).

[50]"Noted Munich Artists," p. 10.

[51]AABN, 28 July 1883, pp. 39-40.

[52]So jested Chase (whose studio was then around the corner from MGVR's house) as cited in A Book of the Tile Club (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1887), p. 60. MGVR lived at 9 West 9 Street from 1885 to 1908, when she moved to 9 West 10 Street, where she lived until her death.

[53]MGVR's familiarity with Chase's studio is documented in her unpublished letter to S. R. Koehler, 16 August 1880, Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D191, frame 006. For Chase's studio see also Mary Sayre Haverstock, "The Tenth Street Studio," Art in America 54 (September-October 1966):48-57. For report of Chase's appropriation of studio formerly used by Bierstadt, see New York Daily Tribune, 22 December 1879, p. 5.

[54]John Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," Art Journal (American edition), n.s. 5 (1879), p. 344.

[55]See, for example, AABN, 27 April 1878, pp. 149-50, and 28 July 1883, p. 39.

[56]"Hans Makart," Portfolio (London, 1886), pp. 36-41 and 49-53.

[57]"Chase," pp. 91-93.

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[58]"American Etchers," p. 488.

[59]AABN, 10 May 1879, p. 148.

[60]This shift in taste can be seen in comparing the two portrait studies of his wife painted between 1885 and 1886 reproduced in Frank Duveneck (New York: Chapellier Gallery, 1972), pls. 49 and 50. Duveneck began to recommend that his students transfer to Paris, and Chase, during his numerous trips abroad with his students, often went to Paris but never to Munich.

[61]It is to be noted also that MGVR's own modest art collection included a large Dutch landscape with a woman, child, and cattle by an unknown painter which had been left to her by her father (mentioned in Last Will and Testament of MGVR).

[62]"Frans Hals," Century Magazine, n.s. 4 (1883), pp. 417-18.

[63]This painting is now attributed to a follower of Frans Hals by the Metropolitan Museum (according to telephone conversation, 1977).

[64]The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 225. Translated from Les maîtres d'autrefois by Mary C. Robbins, first published in 1882, the work was praised by MGVR as "the most perfect book about pictures ever written in any tongue" (although she questioned some of the English translation). See AABN, 9 December 1882, p. 279.

[65]Bartholdi Statue Pedestal Fund catalogue, p. 85.

[66]Dutch influence had long been an element in the French nineteenth-century painting to which Americans looked for inspiration. See Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, French Realism and the Dutch Masters (Utrecht: Dekker & Gumbert, 1974).

[67]Six Portraits, p. 204.

[68]Independent, 24 May 1888, p. 647. MGVR made the same point in "Two New Rembrandt's," Independent, 6 December 1888, p. 1563.

[69]Old Masters of Belgium and Holland, p. 313.

[70]Century Magazine, n.s. 25, pp. 163-68. MGVR's references to Rembrandt as an etcher include: "a study of his work alone would serve to show nearly all of which the art [of etching] is capable" ("American Etchers," p. 487)

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and the statement that Rembrandt was "the prince of etchers" (AABN, 23 January 1886, p. 44). See also writings on Rembrandt in the Independent, 23 June 1887, p. 779; 5 July 1888, p. 839; and 6 December 1888, p. 1563. For account of Böde's visit to U.S., see his Mein Leben (Berlin: Reckendorf, 1930), 2:97-99. MGVR referred to Böde and his writings in Independent, 9 September 1886, p. 1138, and 6 January 1887, p. 9. An interest in late Rembrandt in America has been attributed to the influence of Dr. Böde. See W. R. Valentiner, "Important Rembrandt's in American Collections," Art News 28 (26 April 1930):3.

[71]Independent, 6 January 1887, p. 9.

[72]Independent, 29 December 1887, p. 1682.

[73]"Chase," p. 95.

[74]"Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," p. 717.

[75]Among them were Chase, Blum, John H. Twachtman (1853-1902), J. Alden Weir (1852-1919), J. S. Sargent, Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916), Harry Chase, George Hitchcock (1850-1913), Gari Melchers (1860-1932), and Walter MacEwen (1860-1943).

[76]AABN, 27 February 1886, p. 103.

[77]Independent, 9 February 1888, p. 167.

[78]"American Painters in Pastel," pp. 207-8.

[79]Independent, 17 November 1887, p. 1478. This painting, the gift of Mr. Seney of Brooklyn, was also mentioned by MGVR in the Independent, 21 April 1887, p. 490 (where she erroneously referred to Israëls as "the great Belgian painter"). MGVR recommended an Israëls exhibition at Knoedler Gallery, Boston Evening Transcript, 23 April 1892, p. 6.

[80]AABN, 27 February 1886, p. 103.

[81]Independent, 7 March 1889, p. 295.

[82]Independent, 21 April 1887, p. 490.

[83]Lloyd Goodrich, Albert P. Ryder (New York: Braziller, 1959), p. 17.

[84]AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 29.

[85]Independent, 19 April 1888, p. 487.

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[86]"A Swedish Etcher" (Anders Zorn), pp. 588-89.

[87]"We may be glad that they are . . . in this country, for they still rank among Sargent's best," MGVR wrote of these paintings years later in the Metropolitan Museum Sargent Memorial exhibition catalogue, 1926, p. xv.

[88]Unpublished letter, 12 November 1882, p. 3, S. R. Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D191, frames 152-55.

[89]McHenry, Eakins, p. 17.

[90]"People in New York," illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson, Century Magazine, n.s. 27 (1895), p. 534. See also Six Portraits, p. 225.

[91]The Art Collection of Mr. Wm. Henry Hurlbert: A Review by M. G. Van Rensselaer, Auction Sales Catalogue, Rogers and Sherwood, 31 May-1 June 1883 (New York: Leavitt & Co., 1883), p. 3.

[92]"The Gilbert Stuart Loan Collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts," AABN, 31 July 1880, p. 51.

[93]"Washington Allston, A.R.A.," pp. 148-50. At the time of the 1881 Allston exhibition at the Boston Museum, S. R. Koehler asked MGVR to write an article on it for the American Art Review. She went to Boston that June to see the exhibition but found it disappointing. Although she then produced a brief notice of the show for the New York World, "Allston and Stuart: How the Boston Exhibition of Two American Masters Strikes a Modern Critic," 17 July 1881, p. 3, MGVR was not satisfied with her writing on Allston and did not complete anything on Allston for the American Art Review before it expired. However, she continued to ponder the project in the subsequent years, sending an Allston manuscript to Koehler in 1886 (which was not then published because of a disagreement over copyright with the publishers but which finally appeared in 1889 in the Magazine of Art, then edited by Koehler). See MGVR letters to S. R. Koehler, 21 and 24 July 1881; 7, 12, 14, and 16 April 1886; 4 and 10 May 1886. S. R. Koehler Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll D191.

MGVR's reservations about the ambitious compositions of Allston are similar to those of Margaret Fuller (Ossoli) as expressed in "A Record of the Impressions Produced by the Exhibition of Mr. Allston's Pictures in the Summer of 1839," Works of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, ed. Arthur B. Fuller (Bos-

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ton, 1860), 6:285-92, reprinted in John W. McCoubrey, American Art, 1700-1960 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 57-60.

[94]AABN, 21 July 1883, p. 29.

[95]"Some Aspects of Contemporary Art," pp. 709-10.

[96]Richardson, p. 113.

[97]This, O'Gorman added, was Richardson's "basic legacy to Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright" in "Henry Hobson Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright," pp. 302ff., cited in "The Making of a 'Richardson Building,' 1874-1886," exhibition catalogue essay for Selected Drawings: Henry Hobson Richardson and His Office (Cambridge: Harvard College Library, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, 1974-75), pp. 24-25.

MGVR also judged breadth Richardson's most significant quality, but in its own right rather than as an antecedent to anything following.

[98]Ibid.

[99] See S. R. Koehler, "The New School of Wood-Engraving," The Art Review 2, no. 4 (New York, December 1887): 76-81, and Alphaeus P. Cole and Margaret Ward Cole, Timothy Cole, Wood-Engraver (New York: Pioneer Associates, 1935), pp. 21-24.

[100]AABN, 26 May 1883, p. 245.

[101]New York World, 12 November 1882, p. 9 (unsigned).

[102]This Was My Newport (Cambridge, Mass.: privately printed, 1946), pp. 117-18.

[103]See in this dissertation pp. 13-14.

[104]AABN, 10 May 1879, p. 149. For Hunt's despair see John C. Dalton, exhibition catalogue essay, William Morris Hunt, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 11 November-15 December 1879, 3rd ed. (Boston: Mudge, 1879), pp. 8-9.

[105]Independent, 4 October 1888, p. 1263.

[106]New York World, 11 December 1892, p. 27.

[107]New York World, 4 November 1894, p. 18.

[108]Fuller Memorial Exhibition Catalogue, p. 8.

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[109]A Chronicle of Friendships, p. 242.

[110]Fuller Memorial Exhibition Catalogue, pp. 12-13.

[111]Ibid., p. 16.

[112]AABN, 20 December 1879, p. 196.

[113]"New York Houses: The Residence of Mr. Sidney Dillon," New York World, 5 June 1881, pp. 4-5.

[114]"New York Houses: The Collections of Mr. I. T. Williams," New York World, 29 May 1881, p. 5.

[115]Six Portraits, pp. 197-98.

[116]AABN, 12 February 1881, p. 80.

[117]Six Portraits, p. 193.

[118]"The New York Art Season," Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):197.

[119]Ibid., p. 201.

[120]For MGVR-Fuller correspondence see George Fuller Collection, Archives of American Art, Roll 608, frames 422-31.

[121]Letters of 26 October and 17 November 1882, George Fuller Collection, Archives of American Art.

[122]Six Portraits, pp. 190-95, 212. Fuller's Turkey Pasture in Kentucky may have been inspired by one of Millet's last paintings, Autumn Landscape with a Flock of Turkeys, 1872-73, now in the Metropolitan Museum.

[123]Ibid., p. 221.

[124]Ibid., p. 218.

[125]Ibid., p. 159. MGVR expressed a similar idea in discussing J. S. Sargent's painting in Century Magazine, n.s. 21 (1892), p. 798.

[126]Addressed to Chase students who would imitate their teacher's manner without adequate training in "Chase," p. 142.

[127]"A Swedish Etcher," pp. 586-87.

[128]Independent, 26 January 1888, p. 103, and 1 March 1888, p. 263. Philippe Burty, a French friend of Buhot, also

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wrote an article on the artist which appeared in Harper's New Monthly Magazine 76 (1888):329-35.

[129]Unpublished letter, 6 November 1888, p. 11. George Griswold Jr. Collection.

[130]Cazin had been a student of Le Coq de Boisbaudran, Whistler had learned of his teachings through his friends Henri Fantin-Latour and Alphonse Legros, and Saint-Gaudens had attended the Petit Ecole, the school in Paris where his method was followed, in 1867-68.

[131]"Chase," p. 141.

[132]"Bridgman," p. 53.

[133]Independent, 17 March 1887, p. 332.

[134]Independent, 14 March 1889, p. 327.

[135]"Chase," p. 97.

[136]Independent, 17 February 1887, p. 203.

[137]"Chapters from a Student's Life," Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts Bulletin 1 (September 1906):4.

[138]AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 30.

[139]"Hals," p. 418.

[140]AABN, 28 April 1883, p. 196.

[141]AABN, 10 March 1883, p. 112.

[142]Independent, 19 May 1887, p. 618.

[143]Independent, 22 December 1887, p. 1648.

[144]Independent, 9 June 1887, p. 715.

[145]Six Portraits, pp. 185-86.

[146]See James' Stories of Artists and Writers (New York: New Directions, n.d.), pp. 168-91. For a discussion of the real and the ideal in the work of Henry James see Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1970), p. viii.

[147]"Realism and Idealism in Late 19th Century American Art: Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Thomas Eakins," Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Akten des

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21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn 1964. 1. Epochen europäischer Kunst (Berlin: Mann, 1967), pp. 250-56. A similar position was taken by W. C. Brownell in "Criterion," in Criticism (New York: Scribner's, 1914), pp. 39-67 (written in answer to the "Critical Impressionism" of James Gibbons Huneker).

[148]Six Portraits, pp. 170-71.

[149]MGVR consistently encouraged American artists, for example, to explore subjects of contemporary life not painted before. See AABN, 31 December 1881, pp. 311-12; American Art Review 11, part 1 (1881):141; and Brooklyn Bartholdi Pedestal Fund exhibition catalogue, pp. 103-4.

[150]Boston Evening Transcript, 16 April 1892, p. 6.

[151]"The Verestchagin Exhibition," Independent, 22 November 1888, p. 1495.

[152]MGVR referred to the painting as "Dinner-Time at a Foundry" when it was exhibited at the newly formed Philadelphia Society of Artists exhibition. See AABN, 31 December 1881, p. 312.

[153]Quoted in Letters of Richard Watson Gilder, p. 68.

[154]Ibid., p. 151.

[155]Independent, 4 March 1886, p. 267. MGVR here expresses a far more positive estimate of Millet as an artist than did Fromentin, whose style she admired without accepting all his judgments.

[156]Independent, 5 May 1887, p. 555. This painting, acquired in 1887 by Quincy Adams Shaw, is now in the Art Institute of Chicago. It is interesting to compare the more hostile French criticism of this painting (see André Fermigier, Jean-François Millet, tr. Dinah Harrison (New York: Skira-Rizzoli, 1977), p. 108.

[157]The picture of the two men spading, for example, was the property of the affluent Mrs. Mary J. Morgan and is probably the painting now in the Tweed Museum of Art, Univ. of Minnesota, Deluth. For an interpretation of Millet's peasants see Linda Nochlin, Realism and Tradition in Art: 1848-1900 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 56.

[158]"The Future of Art," American Art Review 1, part 1 (1880):73.

[159]Six Portraits, pp. 203-5. See also p. 10, where MGVR refers to the "idealism" of Ghiberti as compared to the "realism" of Donatello.

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[160]Independent, 28 June 1888, p. 807.

[161]"Society of American Artists 11," Independent, 19 May 1887, p. 618.

[162]Ryder continually worked over his paintings, leaving them impossible to date. Possibly the painting discussed by MGVR in 1887 was related to the work here illustrated.

[163]Garden and Forest 8 (1895):111.

[164]See, e.g., the explicit reservations expressed by MGVR for the Kenyon Cox idealized illustrations for Dante Gabriel Rossetti's The Blessed Damozel (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1886), comments which were actually printed in MGVR's Appendix incorporated into the book itself.

[165]New York World, 11 December 1892, p. 245. This is a very different appraisal of this painting from that offered by another critic, Robert J. Wickenden, who praised the same picture: ". . . the modelling of the head and face is as thorough as the expression is humorously benign, and the painting of the hands, placidly clasped in front with raised thumbs, has rarely been surpassed." "The Portraits of Carroll Beckwith," Scribner's Magazine 47 (1910):457. Additional MGVR comments on the inadequacies of Beckwith's work can be found in AABN, 26 May 1883, p. 245.

[166]AABN, 26 May 1883, p. 245.

[167]"American Painters in Pastel," p. 208. For a comparison of this statement with that concerning a related oil painting by Blum see in this dissertation p. 99.

[168]Six Portraits, pp. 256-57.

[169]"Recent Architecture in America V: City Dwellings," Century Magazine, n.s. 9 (1886), p. 557.

[170]Independent, 24 January 1889, p. 103.

[171]"Changes," Art Out of Doors (New York: Scribner's, 1893; reprint ed. 1925), pp. 393-94.

[172]Century Magazine, n.s. 13 (1887), pp. 37-39.

[173]New York World, 18 December 1892, p. 24. Richman notes that the bronze version of French's Milmore Monument was exhibited at the Salon de Champs Elysées, which opened 1 May 1892, and then at the new Salon de Champs de Mars, organized by the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts (where it was

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exhibited as "The Angel of Death and the Sculptor"). Here French was awarded a third-class medal, only the second time an American had been so honored by the Parisian art world (in 1891 Frederick MacMonnies was awarded a second-class medal). French then also received a favorable response from the French press, and when this work was then exhibited in New York in the Fall of 1892 it was widely acclaimed by American critics. See Daniel Chester French, pp. 74 and 79.

[174]Garden and Forest 8 (1895):111.

[175]"Fifth Avenue," p. 17.

[176]In "Death of General Grant" (1885), for example, Whitman termed the Civil War hero who died in 1885 and whose tomb was dedicated in 1897 "Man of the mighty days--and equal to the days!"

[177]"Olmsted," p. 864.

[178]In a comment by Richard Watson Gilder which was reported by MGVR to Augustus Saint-Gaudens in a letter of 12 September 1897, Saint-Gaudens Collection, Dartmouth College. Saint-Gaudens' son later wrote of his father's struggle to "combine the ideal with the real," particularly in the flying figure of the Shaw Memorial. See Homer Saint-Gaudens, Reminiscences of Augustus Saint-Gaudens (New York: Century, 1913), 1:343-44. Hence, the sculptor would have been particularly gratified by such praise. It was in similar terms that the artist-critic William A. Coffin wrote of the Shaw Memorial as a "poet's dream of heroism." Century Magazine, n.s. 32 (1897), p. 184.

[179]See, e.g., "The Grant Monument for Riverside Park," Garden and Forest 4 (1891):27-28, and "John Brown's Grave," Garden and Forest 9 (1896):47.

[180]This quality can also be traced in other writings by MGVR, such as in the poem "Ode to a Greek Head Called Aphrodite," Poems (1910), which was honored during MGVR's lifetime as "ranking among the most beautiful classical poetry produced in America" (American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1923 Gold Medal Award testimonial).

[181]Atlantic Monthly 48 (1881):199. See also New York World, 29 May 1881, p. 5.

[182]MGVR's writing on Donoghue in Independent, 9 June 1887, p. 715; on Adams in New York World, 4 December 1892, p. 23, and Garden and Forest, 15 May 1895, p. 199; on Stewardson in New York World, 4 December 1892, p. 23.

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[183]"Hendrick Christian Andersen: A New Sculptor," Century Magazine, n.s. 39 (1900), p. 17. Andersen was delighted when MGVR took an interest in his sculpture and in the paintings of his brother Andreas. See letter from H. C. Andersen to Andreas, 30 April 1900, Andersen Papers, Letter 16, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Manuscript Division. H. C. Andersen wrote of MGVR, ". . . she is working for herself and is sharp." MGVR acquired one of Andersen's sculptures which she bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum (which they rejected) and a drawing which she left to Harvard University (which is now there in the collection of the Fogg Museum).

A study of MGVR, the Andersen brothers, Henry James, Rome, and a plan for world peace warrants an independent presentation elsewhere.

[184]"'Pauline'--Mr. Manship's Portrait of His Daughter at the Age of Three Weeks," Scribner's Magazine 60 (1916): 776.

[185]Ibid., p. 772.

[186]P. 236.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE AS A CONCEPT IN CRITICISM

"In America, art is chaotic," bemoaned a critic in 1875. "There is nothing that we can talk of yet as an American School of art."[1] Yet, within a decade there had emerged a new critical estimate, and by 1887 it could be maintained, "the present is a remarkable period in American art . . . when the popular interest in native art is awakening, and the appreciation of the few is commencing to arouse emulation in the many. . . ."[2] "The next great school of art would arise in America," predicted a respected painter of the Munich Academy to his American students,[3] and the French sculptor Rodin reportedly commented, "America is in the midst of an artistic period as great as that of the Italian Renaissance, only the American people do not know it--yet."[4]

As the United States became a world power an ebullient, then stately, style characterized much of the art, architecture, and critical writing. Artists and critics shared a commitment, felt part of a rebirth. A dedication to journalism was one means of promoting this American Renaissance, for, as Richard Watson Gilder perceived it, "the dailies, weeklies and monthlies of our country wield a

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wider influence than the pulpit, and perhaps even than the schools; for the press is a school we all attend every day in the week from the time we learn to read to the end of our lives."[5] The art criticism of Mrs. Van Rensselaer which was published in the popular press not only sparked immediate interest in current works of art but also stimulated the creation of more substantial presentations of the artists' works, such as the 1886 Book of American Figure Painters, which featured reproductions of many of the paintings which Mrs. Van Rensselaer had written about in the months just prior to its publication and for which she provided the preface (quoted above, pp. 49-50), which proclaimed the summit of ambition for these artists of the American Renaissance. This sumptuous volume of art and poetry gathered together such varied images as Lady with a Setter Dog (pl.112), Thomas Eakins' compassionate evocation of his wife in the familiar setting of the artist's studio, a classically styled relief displayed against the wall; A Reverie by J. Alden Weir (pl. 35), a gentle, introspective portrayal of a figure close to the artist; The Tambourine Player (pl.126) by William M. Chase (from a life-sized painting of the artist's wife masquerading as a Spanish dancer); as well as an heroic and decorative, biblical Delilah (pl.127) by Elihu Vedder, presented as if pushing against the confines of the page. Restful calm conveyed through ordered form characterizes both Douglas Volk's Pioneer's Rest (pl.128) and Dennis

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Miller Bunker's A Dozing Tar (pl. 129), while impending disaster is suggested by Winslow Homer's Lost on the Grand Banks. Monumental form dignifies the peasants of Edward E. Simmons' Mother and Child (pl. 59) (cited above, pp. 174-75) and Thomas Hovenden's The Harbor Bar Is Moaning (pl. 130) (cited above, p. 166). The book was promoted as featuring the very latest works of the artists, and indeed this was the case, for Eakins, Dewing and Homer were still at work on their paintings when the reproductions were made and the final pictures are somewhat changed. Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented in this preface:

> When I say that such a book could not well have been given us even a very few years ago, I do not merely refer to the quality of its pages. I speak also of the nature of their subject-matter, the character of the aspirations they reveal. For in the very earliest days of our art, portraiture was all in all to us; and in the period next succeeding, landscape attracted almost every brush.

The major preoccupation of the artists of this American Renaissance was this new field of figure painting, in which the expressive possibilities of the human form were explored in a way in which they had never been before in American art. In 1887 Mrs. Van Rensselaer cited two such works in a review of the National Academy exhibition:

> The two most remarkable pictures it includes are Mr. [Thomas Wilmer] Dewing's "Days" [pl. 131; a version of a painting reproduced in the Book of American Figure Painters] and Mr. Winslow Homer's "Undertow" [pl. 132]. The latter is to be called a "realistic" and the former an "ideal" work; and the fact is fortunate since each is so good of its kind, and since it is well that all sorts of art should have their exponents among us.
>
> Mr. Dewing's picture represents--or rather interprets--

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Emerson's beautiful poem of the same name:

> Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
> Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
> And marching single in an endless file,
> Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.
> To each they offer gifts after his will,
> Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
> I, in my pleachèd garden watched their pomp,
> Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
> Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
> Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
> Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

The artist was wiser in his choice of theme than most artists are who go to a poet's pages for suggestions. For he selected a poem whose underlying thought lent itself no less well to pictorial than to verbal interpretation; one which was distinct enough in its imagery to stimulate his own imagination and yet not so definite as to fetter it. . . . The passing file of Days fills the center and right of the canvas, moving with a sad slowness that is as well expressed by their attitudes as by their faces--away from the self-cheated poet whom we see back toward the left, with his "herbs and apples" in his hand gazing with half-conscious regret after their vanishing forms. In their hands they carry the symbols of the intellectual and temporal powers he has missed; and in bearing and feature they have a dignity and despite their sadness, an impersonal calm which well typifies their divine origin, their unalterable destiny to come and pass and not return. In composition as well as in meaning and feeling the picture is remarkably good; and in color it is as individual as charming--a low-toned, soft, yet vital and exquisitely modulated harmony of green and blue and grayish notes. The execution is tender and vague . . . and admirably fitted to express the sentiment which has inspired and controlled the work . . . it is a true, deep, and most interesting work of imaginative "ideal" art, and its decorative beauty greatly enhances, but by no means <u>makes</u> its worth.

By contrast with its lovely, delicate harmonies, the color of Mr. Homer's picture may seem crude and harsh and overbold. But it is not by contrasting works that are alien in kind as well as in manner that we should judge of them . . . while Mr. Dewing's work is one of those which we may consider close at hand . . . Mr. Homer's is one of those which, in Rembrandt's words, were not "made to be smelt." More than most canvases of its size, it needs to be seen from a considerable distance.

Viewing it thus, its color will seem bold, and, perhaps, a little crude, but neither harsh nor unnatural.

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> Most of us, of course, never really use our eyes in the presence of Nature. . . . Thus we called "unnatural" many of those effects, shown in the Impressionist exhibition of last spring [presented by Durand-Ruel in New York] which trained and sensitive eyes had caught in the presence of Nature, and which skillful and sensitive fingers had reproduced on canvas. And thus it is likely to be with this picture, which, in certain respects, shows much affinity with the plein air painting of the Impressionist school. But, dear reader, before you call these colors unnatural, remember that this artist is one of the most serious, studious, painstaking, as well as one of the best endowed who has ever been born in America; that he lives his life on the shores of Maine, and that living his life means solely and only this: observing natural effects with the keenest vision, and striving to represent them with the most patient skill. And when you again have a chance to see wet human flesh under such a light as this, and relieved against such water as this, look at what you see, and then say whether you do not see pretty much what Mr. Homer had shown you.
>
> Yet the color of this picture is not its main point of interest. This point is its composition, the magnificent lines produced, without the least apparent striving after "effectiveness," the least forcing of the subject, by the two half-drowned, interlocked bathers and the two sturdy life-saving men who are drawing them ashore with a rope, and by the splendid curve of the great waves behind them. The beauty of these lines, their force and grandeur, the almost Greek way in which they express active effort without destruction of unity or repose, this is the great point in this picture; this and the statuesque yet wholly natural beauty of the features of the one bather whose face we see. . . . This, too, has feeling as well as technical excellence to recommend it; and, I repeat, its very unlikeness to the other picture . . . gives them both an added interest as proving not only the vitality but the versaility of our art. 6

In large part the American Renaissance was made in France and it was during years of training in Paris that these artists learned to work from the figure. A pivotal personality in the new movement was Augustus Saint-Gaudens, whose sculpture Angel with Scroll, an Italian Renaissance-inspired figure designed originally for the tomb of Governor

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E. D. Morgan, was reproduced as a frontispiece for The Book of American Figure Painters. Saint-Gaudens was influenced by a resurrection of Italian Renaissance ideas in the work of contemporary French sculptors. The art criticism of this era stressed this cosmopolitan consciousness. Kenyon Cox (one of numerous artists of this period to write art criticism to supplement their income at a time when American collectors preferred pedigreed, if dubious, European works) placed the matter succinctly:

> All of us who care for art and to whom beauty is a necessity owe a deep debt of gratitude to that band of artists who, in this latter part of the nineteenth century, have resuscitated for us the dead art of sculpture. . . . That it is now alive again, full of fresh vigor and moving on to the conquest of new realms of beauty for us and those that shall come after us, we owe younger men who hailed the advent of the new prophet, and, gathering around him, formed the present French school of sculpture, the third of the three great schools of sculpture that the world has seen.
>
> One of these men [Saint-Gaudens] we have among us, and to him we owe a special debt in that his work is not only for us in common with the rest of the world, but is first for us,--is here in our own country, in the midst of us,--delighting us, and forming the taste of our children. 7

Cox likened Saint-Gaudens' early experience as a cameo-cutter to the apprenticeship of a Florentine sculptor of the fifteenth century and noted the sculptor's sojourn to Rome prior to returning to America after his French training. Cox reiterated the credo of the American Renaissance artists when he stated:

> . . . when the sculptors of to-day, following the lead of the painters who had already begun the movement, turned again to the independent study of nature, they

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> naturally reverted to the study of Renaissance models. In the sculpture of the Renaissance only could they find nature represented as she appeared to them. There only could they find the modern man with his pronounced individuality and his special development of character, and there only could they find the means of representing him in their art. And so, jumping over four hundred years, jumping over the inroad of academicism and all the subsequent degradation of art, the best sculpture of to-day is the legitimate successor to that of the fifteenth century,--its successor, not its imitator.

Cox explained Saint-Gaudens' fascination with Renaissance low-relief:

> In the struggle to depict the infinite variety of things that was necessary to their modern nature, and yet to avoid the mere matter-of-fact, which is fatal to art,--in their desire to be real without being realistic,--they naturally turned to a part of their art which is the nearest akin to painting. . . . Low-relief does not deal with actual form but with the appearance of form. . . .

Saint-Gaudens' relief portrait of Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (pl. 1), with its handsome wood frame designed specifically for it by the sculptor's close friend Stanford White, is clearly inspired by a study of Early Italian Renaissance art and artists.

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The artists of the American Renaissance were interested in realism, not naturalism. Concept and idea gave form and structure to the world they represented, and they ransacked the history of art for suitable prototypes.

The American Renaissance not only reflected the Italian Renaissance, but it also was affected by a Holbein revival (see Coffin portrait of Mrs. Van Rensselaer, pl. 2)[8] as well as a return to seventeenth-century realism, of Velasquez and Ribera, of Rembrandt and Hals. "The new order . . . the Renaissance of 1877," as Brownell had termed it, was formed by the early exhibitors of the Society of American Artists, including the creators of such derivative works as the Las-Meninas-inspired Daughters of Edward D. Boit, Sargent (see pl. 91), the Eakins Crucifixion from Velasquez and Ribera, as understood by Bonnat[9] (see pl. 18), and the Hals-induced Portrait of Frank Duveneck, W. M. Chase (see pl. 69). All of these influences first reached the American artists through shop-talk in the Munich and Paris ateliers, where they went for professional training. Just as the artists of the Italian Renaissance and French neoclassicism had returned to pagan antiquity, and the artists of Romanticism had gone back to the Baroque to formulate new style, so the eclecticism of the American Renaissance must be understood. The end result was not mere duplication. The resonance and tone, the accumulated opulence, the directness of approach were the expression of a distinctive age. The awesome stance

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which American artists of this period held before the great achievements of the Old Masters and their consciousness of history stimulated myriad developments in a variety of art forms in which it was felt that Americans could still contribute significantly. There was nothing genteel, effete, nostalgic, or Rococo in these artists' use of the messy, crumbly, smeary pastel sticks (as, for example, in Robert Blum's Rembrandt-inspired A Slaughtered Ox in a Butcher Shop (pl. 83) or in the hand-rubbed monotypes or intricately developed etchings or dynamically staged tonal streetwise illustrations (see pls. 133-35), which American artists particularly pursued in this period, when, as Renaissance figures, they turned their hands to many different things. Great ingenuity characterized these artists' technical virtuosity and organizational ability, for they banded together in numerous associations to further the development of exhibition facilities for the various media. (There were far more opportunities for artists to exhibit current work in group exhibitions then than there are today.)

Art criticism in this context functioned to convey the artists' excitement to the public and thereby engender a broad base of support for watercolor and pastel, etching and illustration, stained glass, wood-engraving, and tile-painting--whatever it was the artists turned to next. The spirit of the American Renaissance was expressed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who asserted:

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> . . . our most notable evidence of progress lies in the fact that these minor branches are no longer either unfamiliar or despised; that we have turned with eagerness to many methods of interpretation our fathers did not touch. . . . 10

Speaking of wood-engraving, she noted that

> Here the goal we set ourselves is in many respects quite new--a goal we have ourselves discovered and proclaimed. But none could be more legitimate and worthy; and our results are not only so novel, but already so valuable and persuasive, that they have begun to affect the practice of the art in all foreign lands. 11

The exploration of new media ranged from the design of the smallest coin (such as the 1909 Lincoln cent by Victor Brenner[12]), to the monumental earth-works of the new field introduced by Frederick Law Olmsted (pl. 137), the profession of landscape architecture (whose perimeters were defined and legitimacy established by pages of explanatory criticism by Mrs. Van Rensselaer[13]). Although Mrs. Van Rensselaer, as an American Renaissance critic, preferred the formality of park structures designed by McKim, Mead, and White to the crude boulders of Olmsted's rustication, she wrote the first comprehensive study on Olmsted and his work and provided background with a series of articles on the history of landscape gardening.[14]

It was a sense of the past which inspired innovations in the present, and as the artists turned their attention to different media Mrs. Van Rensselaer explained the history and development of the various techniques. In so doing she stressed the originality of these new uses of the past.

Before the Civil War, nationalism was expressed by

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an art focused on the present and on American subjects. Late-nineteenth-century eclecticism was also a nationalistic assertion. It is to be understood in terms of a statement of maturity. It is not nostalgia, but aggressive acquisition which marks the art and art criticism of this period. Recourse to the art of the past was liberating. By 1892 Mrs. Van Rensselaer announced:

> . . . we have gone from the days of promise to the days of ripe achievement. . . . The arts of composition and expression, as well as the arts of drawing and painting, have been thoroughly acquired, and with this mastery of the forms of pictorial speech the individuality of our painters makes itself clearly felt. 15

Mrs. Van Rensselaer particularly cited Abbott H. Thayer's Madonna Enthroned (pl.138) as "conceived with the simplicity, dignity, serenity, and nobility of old Italian art . . . and much of the old Italian richness of color." "But," Mrs. Van Rensselaer insisted,

> we can pick out no old master, no historic school, and say that this picture is a posthumous child thereof . . . it is distinctly modern and distinctly personal. This remarkable and beautiful picture would alone suffice to prove that American art is now capable of dealing, spiritually as well as technically, in its own way, and in a very fine way, with the noblest artistic tasks.

The American Renaissance was a mosaic of many derived elements inventively put together, and whether the idiom was Italian Renaissance, as with the Thayer, or French Impressionist, as with another painting commended at the same exhibition, Theodore Robinson's In the Sun (pl.139), the result was perceived as original. Inspired by the Robinson, Mrs. Van Rensselaer continued:

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> No difficulties of strong or subtile light and vivid color now daunt our young painters, no complicated combination of figures and foliage in a brilliant or a tender illumination. Those methods of decomposing colors, of rendering one tint to the eye by the association upon the canvas of small touches of many tints, which are called impressionistic methods, have found so many adherents that we may say an American impressionistic school now exists. . . .
>
> . . . we are keeping up with the best schools of Europe in technical directions; yet, far from losing our individuality, we are growing more and more American as our powers of self-expression enlarge.

The American Renaissance was an expression of confidence. John C. Van Dyke (1856-1932) exclaimed, "I hope I may live long enough . . . to see . . . on this new soil and under these bright skies the greatest art the world has ever seen."[16] "Art," he maintained,

> is man's language for the expression of the beautiful, and nature furnishes him the words of that language . . . nature is passive, while the active principle, the sublime thought and the glowing fancy--is the contribution of the artist. . . . 17

These words do not express powerlessness or alienation. They give voice to the aspiration of those engaged in numerous projects which laid the foundations for vast cultural and educational institutions, many offering art in settings accessible to the public--museums, libraries, schools, parks, and even settlement houses. Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer not only wrote about art, but actively participated in schemes to bring art within reach of the poorest slum dwellers (those whom she described as "Busy people with as little money as time to spare") and noted how (nevertheless) many more people visited a loan exhibition

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staged among the tenements in the spring of 1894 than came to an uptown show in a more fashionable district. Mrs. Van Rensselaer addressed her newspaper columns to such questions as "What Should Be Done For the Poor of New York," and her answer included provisions for works of art, flowers, and parks.[18] For those whose work prevented museum visits during the week a successful campaign was launched to open the palatial public galleries of art on Sundays, and it is significant that, simultaneously, Mrs. Van Rensselaer contributed regular art columns to the Sunday supplement of a popular newspaper.

Just as the Italian Renaissance princes had channeled some of their treasure to the task of beautifying the public spaces of the areas they controlled, so the individual merchant princes and financial magnates of this era of the American Renaissance were notable for concerted efforts in this direction, and it was the art criticism in the public press which goaded them on.

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When Saint-Gaudens seemed to be taking an interminable time to create the monument on Boston Common to honor Robert Gould Shaw and the first black volunteer regiment in the North during the Civil War (see pls. 120-21), the impatient commissioners were exhorted by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer:

> It is always unpleasant to have to give more for a thing than one anticipated. But surely, in a world where one often buys only ugliness and disappointment at excessive cost, there are compensations in a transaction where, if the cost mounts up, the article itself proves admirably fine. 19

Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted how rarely "Negroes have been introduced into sculptors' work before," asserted that "no great artist has ever portrayed them in bronze or stone," and commented that Saint-Gaudens' Shaw Memorial would be valuable because it would reveal their potentiality as worthy subjects for artists (see pl. 121). At length she cited the rare quality and dedication exhibited in Saint-Gaudens' elaborate studies for the monument and particularly urged support for the proposed balustraded terrace setting (pl. 120) which incorporated two splendid old elm trees already on the site and which was the cooperative scheme of some of the finest minds of the American Renaissance: in addition to the sculptor, Charles F. McKim, Stanford White, and Henry Hobson Richardson all played a part in the evolution of the monument.

Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer made a point of writing to Augustus Saint-Gaudens once the monument was

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unveiled:

> You must be glad the Shaw is in place, and you ought to be both glad and proud to think what an immense success it is, and how clearly everyone, even the Philistine, recognizes the fact. I cannot tell you how it impressed me when I saw it in place--its meaning and feeling no less than its technical success. When both are combined in so high a measure, the real greatness of art is reached; and I think many will agree with me that you have now done the greatest work of art that our country holds. It will have its triumph in Paris too, but here it will have the greatest of possible artistic triumphs--a success which will mean, not merely giving aesthetic pleasure but also, through this, & as it cannot be given in any other way, an inspiration to patriotism and noble living. 20

In this letter Mrs. Van Rensselaer asked the sculptor for the name of a photographer through whom she might acquire a reproduction of the Shaw Monument, some fifty inches long, to place in the assembly room of a public school, the one she remembered Saint-Gaudens had attended, which was by the 1890s Americanizing the immigrant children then arriving in unprecedented numbers, their families escaping from persecution and famine abroad. Thus the critic, like the artist, was then, in part, a public servant who functioned as a member of a team. Camaraderie and cooperative effort distinctively mark this epoch when the art of the whole became a shared goal, whether it was for a published volume (a work of art in itself), a church or civic building enriched with sculpture and murals, a monument with its environment fully considered, a relief or painting (with enhancing frame designed specifically for it), or critical writing as an organic expression of the artist's intention, with artist

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and critic working in the closest collaboration. It is a rare moment in the history of American art, for the artist is considered the primary authority and it is his judgment which "gradually percolates from the artistic through the journalistic circle, and down through semi-artistic and would-be artistic circles until it reaches the uttermost bounds of Philistia."[21]

In an act inconceivable in another period one artist composed a tribute to critics:

> So a good word for the critics,
> Precious poets who
> Bless the age by talking about
> What other workers do 22

Basically motivated by a concept of public service and little concerned with a display of their own cleverness, the art critics of the American Renaissance prided themselves on being part of a cooperative effort. "I am not a Communist--except upon occasion; and I have never yet despaired of the Republic," wrote Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer in urging private collectors to lend their most important works to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, "but I should feel a distinctly communistic impulse, and a definite loss of faith in the American citizen, if this gallery of masterpieces should prove inferior to my expectations."[23]

Mrs. Van Rensselaer also appealed to this sense of shared civic responsibility in discussing the question of "Client and Architect":

Everything that ever was built is a good work of archi-

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> tecture or a bad one. If it plainly shows that its builders did not even try to make it good, it is only the more inexcusably bad. We are not naïve savages. We know that if a man is hungry for good or for beauty our obligation is the same, and we must give him the best that opportunity allows. When we insist that our neighbors shall daily look upon barrenness or deformity, when we fill what before was placid, empty space with crying shapes of ugliness, we are bad citizens, brutal neighbors. 24

It is in the same spirit that William Crary Brownell, one of the most urbane American art critics of the period, began his career by addressing the readers of the New York World, the same daily newspaper to which Montgomery Schuyler and Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer also contributed in the earliest years of the American Renaissance. This distinctive era of personal, gentlemanly (and occasionally gentlewomanly) journalism was later recalled:

> There was a time when it was a pleasure for a scholar to glance at . . . [the World's] editorial page, which was rarely without some exquisite writing. . . . Salaries were light, but good-fellowship and culture were abundant, and The World editorial staff, without the formality of officers, by-laws or constitution, formed, perhaps, the most select and thoroughly enjoyable club in New York. 25

Contributing art criticism gave purpose to the lives of the leisured, who thereby found themselves in stimulating proximity to creative artists, experiencing what Brownell described as "being plunged in Bohemia."

Brownell had written of "the beginning of the new order, the Renaissance . . . of 1877" (see above, p. 59) and had explained the new criteria:

> Speaking broadly, . . . whereas it used to be the main effort of American painters to imitate nature, it

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> is the main effort of the new men to express feeling. . . . the new men . . . lean toward feeling rather than toward logic; toward beauty, or at least artistic impressiveness, rather than toward literalness; toward illusion rather than toward representation. . . .

It is in the same terms that this generation of American artists turned to classical sources for inspiration in the 1880s. Kenyon Cox wrote of admiring Early Renaissance reliefs for their "delicate suggestiveness . . . variety, individuality, and naturalness,"[26] and his editor, Richard Watson Gilder, with his wife, brought casts of sculpture with them into the country. The rustic studio of the Gilders in Marion, Massachusetts, harbored, among the rough-hewn rocks on either side of the fireplace, symmetrically placed casts of the Parthenon frieze and Michelangelo's Madonna with the Book relief tondo, and it was in this setting that these tastemakers had themselves formally photographed (see pl. 140). As editor-in-chief at Century, R. W. Gilder allotted pages to the serious presentation of various past epochs of art, and with the 1880s a discernible interest in the Italian Renaissance appears.

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In terms of architecture, a new note of delicate symmetry and classical harmony was recognized in the 1880s as a sign of America coming of age.[27] It was then, for example, that the firm of McKim, Mead, and White shifted from an earlier hybrid production of picturesque silhouettes of the so-called "Queen Anne" style.[28] Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer detected a new spirit at work in the McKim, Mead, and White Tiffany House (pl. 116), which was created for fellow artist Louis Tiffany and his progeny, one of whom had a hand in the cooperative effort. She wrote:

> . . . it seems to me the most interesting and most promising house we have yet constructed--more interesting even and much more promising than Mr. Hunt's indisputably beautiful French château [the W. K. Vanderbilt House]. This is because when we come into its presence we do not for a moment think of asking what "style" it follows, or care a whit whether it follows none or draws inspiration from a dozen. Style it has--that style which means harmony of proportions, accord of features, unity of effect; which means that the artist has had a definite, homogeneous conception to express, and has expressed it clearly, coherently, and in each and every proportion, form and detail. But it is a style of its own--one which must be judged by intrinsic standards, and not by reference to bygone fashions and antiquarian dogmas. For this reason I believe it must have a good influence upon our art; not as inciting to direct imitation,--that would perhaps be a dangerous essay,--but as showing that it is possible to be "original" without being fantastic or unscholarly (no work is unscholarly which is perfectly coherent and harmonious), and to build admirably without a particle of ornamentation. 29

At the same time, Mrs. Van Rensselaer cited the next project

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of McKim, Mead, and White, their first creation in the Italian Renaissance mode favored by the firm's architect, Joseph Wells (see pls. 141-42):

> The whole block is occupied by four houses treated as a single composition. In happy variation on our usual arrangement, the central ones are thrown far back, giving space for a turfed court with a fountain in the middle, while the others form projecting wings on either hand. The southerly wing contains Mr. Villard's house, so justly famed for its interior beauty. The external treatment is throughout very simple, after an Italian Renaissance fashion which wins a local flavor from the use of "brown-stone,"--better, however, than the average, both in quality and color. The broad plane walls and regularly spaced and delicately ornamented windows are enlivened by the introduction of a loggia in the central portion, and are composed, moreover, by intelligent proportioning. The effect is very quiet, a little cold, perhaps a little tame; but it is extremely refined, and affords an interesting contrast to the effect of those "vernacular" examples whose inspiration was drawn from similar sources. Perhaps a careless eye will not see at first all the differences between the two; but it is there, both in structure and in decoration,--all the difference that marks off art from no art. . . . these artists seem to be protesting against frivolity, tawdriness, unrest, and ostentation. 30

The interior also alluded to the Renaissance (see pl. 142). In describing John LaFarge's decorative picture created to embellish the music room of Mr. Whitelaw Reid's residence, "still popularly known as the Villard house," Mrs. Van Rensselaer commented that although the ownership of the building had changed hands it "doubtless will not soon lose the name by which it gained recognition as one of the finest results of the recent so-called renaissance in American architecture," thus revealing a certain restraint in adopting the term. However, in describing the LaFarge painting, Music, which was designed to be placed above casts of Luca della Robbia's

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cantoria of singing children, Mrs. Van Rensselaer articulated the critical concept of American Renaissance painting:

> . . . there is no theme so familiar that an artist of feeling and imagination cannot make it new again, and when we see this canvas it gives as fresh an impression as though we had never seen a subject of the kind before. This fact is largely due, I think, to the conception of the background which is a landscape of singular grandeur, charm and individuality. . . . Mr. LaFarge's figures . . . are not only fresh and individual but most beautiful; they are not only alive but intensely alive; not only sentient but passionately yet simply expressive of the sentiment which he wished to convey; and they gain an added value as results of American art by their patent Americanism of type. They desire to be called "classic" if by classic we mean that they are at once simple and noble, full of action yet full of repose, real and yet ideal, human and yet infused with a more than merely human charm. [The work of LaFarge] . . . is the same in essence as the reality of the great old masters of Florence and Venetia. In this sense . . . we may call it classic but if by the word we mean any touch of conventionality, any effort to reproduce types, effects, schemes of color or of composition, or expressions of sentiment which have been rendered classic for us by the success of any earlier master--then it is a patent misnomer. We are forced to compare it with the results of the classic age of Italian painting because it is nearest akin to these in its dignity, its serenity, its charm and force; but to draw the comparison is but to mark a contrast. It is akin to them in the degree to which it possesses these qualities, but it shows these qualities in a way and fashion of its own. . . It is . . . an idealized American type which shows in each of these lovely figures and is made the vehicle of expression for the perennial human emotions it represents--idyllic peace, pure delight in mere existence and the emotional rapture caused by sunlight and color, vernal sights and odors, and the concord of sweet sounds. To live in sight of this picture will be to have a window forever open into Arcadia--into the true, simple, outdoor, unself-conscious, beautiful Arcadia of the Golden Age. 31

With a similar spirit the wealthy transported themselves to the replenishing air of the countryside, where

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they were equipped in the style to which they had grown accustomed. The Newport Casino by McKim, Mead, and White (pls. 143-44), for example, while made of derivative elements, projected a monumental stability akin to classicism. It is in designing the palatial country retreats of the affluent of this pre-income tax era that architects proliferated the forms of the American Renaissance, and these structures were widely publicized.

The American Renaissance in architecture was perceived in 1886 by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer as a

> . . . reformation which now begins to show in each and every branch . . . due . . . to the fact that we are repenting of . . . [a] fundamental sin (the tendency toward ignorant, reckless "originality")--are beginning to feel the necessity for basing all our work on rational foundations, for taking as our guide intelligent, cultivated thought, not apathy or impulse, not mere vague artistic aspirations nor a merely formal adherence to the examples of some other age.

She saluted the viable new national idiom then being developed, the new growing out of an awareness of the old, and hailed the unique forms then being developed in the country:

> It is not strange that in building our country homes we should have shown ourselves more original, more "American" than elsewhere. Here most of all we have been forced to meet--or at least deal with--new and diverse requirements.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer particularly acclaimed the sumptuous rural retreats designed by H. H. Richardson and McKim, Mead, and White (see pl. 145).[32] In 1886 Mrs. Van Rensselaer expressed the view that the forms of the Early Renaissance and Romanesque offered the greatest potential for American architectural development

> . . . those which used the round arch and the lintel

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> very straightforwardly without much reliance upon the column; for in the first place they are very sensible and very flexible, and in the second place they never lived out their life and came to a death of natural exhaustion: they were replaced, while they seem to us to have been still instinct with latent capabilities, by those columnar fashions known as "Roman" or "Later Renaissance." 33

This she projected as a more fruitful direction for American architects than a revival of colonial style:

> We still want to be dignified in our architectural voice, still to be refined, still to be quiet; but the dignity, the refinement, and the repose must be of a different character from those which appropriately marked the dwellings of our ancestors. The simpler types among these are extemely puritanical; and I do not think the adjective fits ourselves. 34

The highest accolades were bestowed upon the productions of the firm of McKim, Mead, and White through the following decades, who ". . . thought of beauty as of practical efficiency, and took unwonted financial risks."[35] Mrs. Van Rensselaer noted,

> They work consistently in the spirit of Renaissance art, although they vary somewhat in choosing its severer or more ornate modes, according to the differing demands of different kinds of structures, and often very freely in adapting the chosen mode to modern needs and tastes. 36

By the 1890s High Renaissance style was identified as being both modern and American. "To build truthfully, spontaneously, modern men must build in the fashion that was evolved when the modern world was born," wrote Mrs. Van Rensselaer. "We may admire the forms of Gothic art more than any others, but with them no progressive nation can make a garment to cover all the needs of the twentieth century. With the forms of Renaissance art such a garment can

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be made."[37]

Artistic freedom for the artists of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's generation implied the pursuit of the very two elements from which artists were to flee, in the name of freedom, in the period which followed; the human model and the art of the "Old Masters." As in so many other epochs of Renaissance, or rebirth in the history of art, American artists began in this period to focus on the human figure: ". . . nothing is so interesting in art, so important, so all-sufficient as the human form," wrote Mrs. Van Rensselaer; "he who really knows how to paint it may well dispense, for the moment, with everything else. . . ."[38] Mrs. Van Rensselaer pronounced a J.-F. Millet nude of a woman lying on a couch seen from the back (see pl. 146) "a veritable revelation . . . of purely artistic power."[39] Artistic liberty during the American Renaissance implied the freedom to work from life and to introduce figurative representation on a large scale, not only for private delight but also in terms of more public church and civic commissions. Kenyon Cox explained, in a letter to his father, that although he would do portraits and landscapes and had plans to illustrate and teach,

> . . . I must be allowed I think to keep some such piece of work on hand as this picture in which apart from all the considerations of money and success I will strive for what I love most in art. Otherwise I should as lief be a clerk or a cobbler. 40

Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer brought to her newspaper

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readers a way of approaching such pictures as a nude by Cox exhibited by the Society of American Artists (see pl. 31):

> No one will question the fact that the painting of such themes is not only lawful [Anthony Comstock had filed suit against the Art Students League for mailing nude images] but also one of the very highest directions which the painter's activity can take . . . such pictures should be a revelation of pure physical beauty--the noblest work of God to be found in the whole range of material facts . . . it is not the world of the intellect, of thought, of spirit, of culture, from which the artist must take his inspiration, but the old Arcadia of the imagination, where not mind but body ruled; where nymphs and shepherds were innocent because ignorant; where the serpent had not come, and the tree of knowledge had not yet dropped its fruits into the hand of man.
>
> . . . [We] are too much accustomed to think and moralize . . . instead of to see with simple eyes, and to feel with Arcadian innocence. . . . Either a nerveless expressionless abstraction, or an undressed model . . . is too often what we are given to-day in place of the splendidly physical yet mentally pure creations which the sculptors of Greece and the painters of the best days of Italy could create. I do not mean to rank Mr. Cox's work with these last; but I do think that it is of the same kind. . . . It is a pleasure, indeed, to see an artist so ambitious in temper. . . . And we can hardly be too grateful when, as here, ambition means a desire to do something "Important," which shall win attention by its charm instead of compelling it by mere eccentricity, which shall have sentiment as well as technical merit, and shall show a love for beauty, instead of an interest in the ugly, the abnormal, or the commonplace. 41

The evolving vocabulary of monumental figure composition, whether derived from contemporary Europe, seventeenth-century Baroque, or classical prototypes, was seen as building towards a vigorous, new, and specifically American art. The development of American Renaissance art was perceived as being analogous to the maturation of the nation, as shown in the following commentary by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin (1837-1914):

> . . . we share with our predecessors that yearning after beauty which comes from a universal instinct . . . even . . . apparent variety of expression is governed by laws, and proceeds upon certain lines of action, which we are

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> just beginning to perceive and formulate. First come the feeble, fluttering attempts at articulate language; then imitation of those whose art has the precedence in point of time; then individuality of style or art language; and then the symmetrical equilibrium and reposeful power of a great national life exuberant with thought, colossal in imagination, and wielding styles of expression adequate to the demand of the age. Then culminates the art of a people, and after that conventionalism and decadence succeed.
>
> . . . we are now floating on the full tide of the imitative period. . . . But in time, when the artist of the culminating period arrives, teeming with thought and urged on by a rush of imaginative force, he places less importance on style. . . . The time is coming when the nation, settling down to a consciousness of stability and sure of a grand and prosperous future, with a homogeneous race evolved from the many that have landed on our shores, strong in the full ripeness of maturity, and confidently reaching out after the unattained, shall be moved by great thoughts and aspire to utter them in the language of art, but in a dialect of its own, racy with the flavor of the Western world . . . we shall not find out what we are really capable of achieving until we try to walk alone. Such efforts as Mr. Homer's give hope of an approaching emancipation. . . . In the interior decorations of Mr. La Farge, especially those of Trinity Church, Boston, we find another hopeful sign. 42

As America emerged as a world power its artists, joining the ranks of their professional colleagues abroad, sought a figurative expression in monumental terms. Published criticism prepared the way for a comprehension at home of these ambitions nurtured abroad. For example, soon after the appearance of the first American Renaissance mural projects, by two of the most distinguished elders associated with the formation of the Society of American Artists--John La Farge's decorations for Trinity Church (pl. 147) and William Morris Hunt's murals for the Assembly Chamber of the State Capitol Building in Albany (pl. 148)--Mrs. Van Rensselaer advocated continued support for such undertakings, a plea which was only to be heeded with the impetus to mural painting generated by the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. However, as early as 1880 she had counseled:

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> Our churches and public buildings are not as immutable as Egypt, yet they are more permanent than our homes, and their walls are not likely to be obscured by other things. Instances will occur to us all where our highest art has of late been employed upon them. Such are but isolated instances, however, and most commonly we plume ourselves on having "decorated" a vast interior when we have covered it with a meaningless little pattern. . . . Representation, adapted in one way or another, is the only true artistic decoration for our walls. 43

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was in the forefront of those heralding the potentiality of the Columbian Exposition planned for 1893 in Chicago to revive an interest in mural painting in America. For example, she reported in 1892:

> Miss Hallowell has just returned from a long stay in Paris, and one of the most interesting things she tells about is the progress of the mural decorations for the woman's building at the Chicago Fair.
>
> The centre of this building is occupied by a large and lofty hall, and at either end of this hall, above the doorways, is a great semi-circular wall space excellently adapted to mural painting on a large scale. . . . It is very fortunate . . . that the managers were able to secure the assistance of two American women who paint . . . with much ability.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer then wrote of the murals then in progress, of "Primitive Woman" by Mrs. McMonnies and "Modern Woman" by Miss Cassatt (pl.149). She noted the "long established Parisian reputation" of Mary Cassatt, who had undertaken this uncharacteristic project in an attempt to achieve recognition in her native land, and informed her readers:

> . . . the artist had to build a new studio before she could attempt canvasses of the required size. This she did at her summer home, in some small French town . . . on the way towards Beauvais. Then she very wisely determined to make her modern woman as truly modern as possible--to paint her in the most characteristic (which means, of course, the most fashionable garments of the current year 1892). To do this properly characteristic models were needed, and so some stylish Parisian young women migrated to the distant studio.

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What followed was a very full description of the mural and its concept:

> . . . there is to be no serpent in this nineteenth century Eden, and no hint of any angel approaching with a flaming sword. For to-day the forbidden fruit is no longer forbidden. Adam himself actually tempts Eve to partake of it; and as she has learned to let Worth and Doucet dress her, so she has learned that it is better to eat of the Tree of Knowledge than to feed upon husks and straws, or to try and sustain life on nothing at all. . . . we may expect nothing less than a masterpiece in beauty and significance. I am glad for Miss Cassatt's sake that she has the opportunity to do so unusually important a picture, and I am still more glad for the sake of her fellow-countrymen, who will learn from it to appreciate an artist whose fame has thus far been much greater in Europe than here. 44

Mrs. Van Rensselaer was among the first American critics to note the work of Mary Cassatt. However, no other account is as extensive as this passage dedicated to the artist's singular contribution to the American Renaissance. Published months before the Chicago Fair opened, it was part of an avalanche of writing inspired by the exposition which provided people with a way of coping with the vast enterprise (see pl. 150). Criticism was the conduit of influence, and the fact that the Columbian Exposition stimulated further cooperative projects in terms of murals and urban planning was in large part due to the impact of the printed words which continued to convey concepts long after the temporary Fair structures were demolished. Proclaimed Richard Watson Gilder:

> Say not, "Greece is no more."
> Through the clear morn
> On light winds borne
> Her white-winged soul sinks on the New World's breast.

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Ah! happy West--
Greece flowers anew, and all her temples soar![45]

On a more mundane level were celebrated the communal efforts which made the exposition possible, with critics stressing that the artists "were good comrades, and that their comradeship was based upon respect for the artist in each other."[46] This also included women: "We are yoke-fellows, equal and indivisible," wrote Maud Howe Elliott, "tugging and straining at the load of humanity which we must drag a few paces onward ere our work is done."[47] The critic Ripley Hitchcock (1857-1918) wrote that the Fair "stands for a command of selection, assimilation, and harmonious combination, a largeness of purpose, discretion, and perception of aesthetic fitness." In contrast to the reaction to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, the collection of American art displayed inspired the conclusion that "Our own art has emerged successfully from the enforced comparison, and Americans from every corner of our broad land have been able to convince themselves that American art has developed sufficient stature and dignity to take an honored place in the congress of the nations."[48] Mrs. Van Rensselaer prepared the readers of an inexpensive guidebook to the Fair:

> You will not believe that you are standing in a temporary pleasure-ground, constructed by many artists, uncontrolled by anything but their own sense of artistic fitness; or that you are still living in our prosaic, calculating, commercial nineteenth century. This formally arranged portion of the Fair looks as though it had been built to please the eye of some beauty-loving potentate, able to bend all individual talents to a single task. And because of the harmony thus revealed on so grand a

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> scale and with such richness of decoration, because the items of beauty and impressiveness are so many and varied yet so concordant, you will behold a sight which, I am unafraid to say, has not been paralleled since the Rome of the emperors stood intact with marble palace, statue, terrace, bridge, and temple under an Italian sky no bluer than our own. You will feel that the Romans whom Augustus ruled must somewhere have built themselves a Venice, and somehow you have been spirited back 2,000 years to see it. 49

Rome of Augustus replaced Florence of the Medici as a model for the America which was preparing to send troops beyond the confines of the continental United States with imperialist ambitions launched in the 1890s. The newly acquired classical forms were employed to celebrate The Arts of War (see pl. 151), together with the Arts of Peace in the large murals by Gari Melchers, American expatriate lured home by the opportunity to paint murals.

The Chicago Fair remained a keystone in the system of critical support for the aesthetics of the American Renaissance, and when a young critic, Lewis Mumford, in 1924 condemned the Fair for stifling "the more creative modes of architecture," the then-aged Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer rose to the occasion to insist:

> . . . whatever its other results, the Chicago Fair implanted among us a belief in the beauty of concord, of harmony, in the need for organization, for co-operation in the arts. There were no signs of such a belief at Philadelphia in 1876. . . . To thousands of those who imbibed at Chicago this idea of the prime importance of harmony, of unity, in artistic enterprises, Olmsted's landscape work must have given their first inkling of the existence of the art he practiced and of its intimate connection with the art of building. 50

The idealistic zeal for the cooperative aspects of the

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Chicago Fair was mirrored in the writings on numerous subsequent projects, many of them of a public nature. "The architects of the [Boston Public] library [pls. 72-73] have won a victory, not only for their own building, but for the general cause of architectural sobriety, dignity, simplicity, and refinement," wrote Mrs. Van Rensselaer, and she added,

> It was well that a Renaissance style should be chosen for a building of such great importance. . . . We are gradually learning now that modern weapons, modern ideas and expedients, are the best for the men of to-day. We are steadily gaining belief that the art which, in modern versions, was reborn with the birth of modern civilization, and which is the living art of Europe still, is the one to be adopted by America and adapted to her multiform, thrice-modern needs. An effective exposition of this truth was made on the Chicago Fair grounds, and we may be very glad that Messrs. McKim, Mead & White perceived it some years before the Fair was built. . . . Its builders rightly felt that a greater degree of sumptuousness would be appropriate within its walls, as expressing its erection by a populous and prosperous city, with a past enriched by intellectual achievement, and with fine ambitions for a still broader and more fertile future. . . .
>
> Coming immediately upon it from a raw, prosaic American street, our surprise makes but the more impressive and seductively poetic the pure and simple beauty of its shadowy arcades, the solid nobility of its upper walls, the peacefulness of its sunny central areas of turf, and its pervading atmosphere of carefully considered art and cloistered quietude. Seats will be provided beneath its arcades and under protecting awnings, also upon their roofs; and during the long warm months of the year it will be a place without parallel as yet on American soil --a place owned by the public of a great city, where hours or even moments of repose or study will be doubly fruitful, feeding the most careless or unconscious eye with the food of high artistic loveliness. 51

Such words helped provide the popular support necessary for a multitude of such projects across the country and overseas.

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The Academy in Rome has continued to offer American artists access to Renaissance inspiration into the twentieth century. One of the sculptors awarded a grant to stay at the Academy was Paul Manship (1885-1966), who upon his return exhibited work in 1916 which drew sustenance from the same sources that had inspired Saint-Gaudens generations earlier. Manship's Pauline (pl. 125; discussed above, pp. 293-94) was enthusiastically reviewed by Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who wrote, ". . . so fresh and so vital a work of art will prove to be one of those that repay their debt to nature by opening many eyes to the interest and the significance of natural things which they had never really seen before."[52] However, neither Manship nor many other twentieth-century artists were to pursue this direction. Renaissance values were rejected. This can already be perceived in the stylization of the framework within which Manship placed this figure, the one element to which Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer took exception when she wrote, "Were the architectural details more broadly conceived, were they simpler and . . . less fantastic, some of us would be better pleased." But Manship became increasingly enchanted with Etruscan and Archaic

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forms. He could no longer accept the critical assumptions of the American Renaissance stated at the outset by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, who in 1880 was certain that

> . . . the marbles of Aegina are wonderful examples of realistic art, for their creators were mastering the mysteries of style and the knowledge of external things; but how inferior are they to the Elgin marbles, which succeeded, and could not have been created without them!

Benjamin was as sure of this as he was that

> The time is coming when the nation . . . strong in the full ripeness of maturity, and confidently reaching out after the unattained, shall be moved by great thoughts and aspire to utter them in the language of art. . . . 53

The era of World War I put an end to such confidence. "One of the most evil results of the war," wrote Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "is . . . the shaking of our faith in idealism and therefore in the beneficent utility of the arts."[54]

There is, however, one postscript to this idealism of the American Renaissance which remains lodged in Rome (pl. 152): the creation of a figure who--as a result of being both American and European, artist and visionary--has fallen between the cracks of historical study. This incompleted "International World Center of Communication" (pl. 153) (a premature United Nations designed to end all wars) was a vast project of the sculptor Hendrik Christian Andersen, who was raised in Newport, Rhode Island, but settled in Rome and whose sculpture Mrs. Van Rensselaer first introduced in 1900 (see above, pp. 291-93). Devoting all his energies and those of a cooperative team (which at one time included

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forty architects) up until his death in 1940, Andersen maintained the hope that a revival of Renaissance art could save mankind and end war, despite the doubts cast on his scheme by his early admirer Henry James, who cautioned:

> There is no use or application or power of absorption or assimilation for these enormities, beloved Hendrik, anywhere on the whole surface of the practicable, or, as I should rather say, impracticable globe; and when you write me that you are now lavishing time and money on a colossal ready-made City, I simply cover my head with my mantle and turn my face to the wall, and there, dearest Hendrik, just bitterly weep for you. 55

Mrs. Van Rensselaer harbored neither the delusions of Henrik Christian Andersen nor the despair of Henry James, yet for her, too, despite a long and active life, the limits of possibility within the art world were determined by the end of an era. She was one of the foremost critics of the American Renaissance, and her writings on art and architecture must be comprehended within that context.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1]Clarence Cook, "About an American School of Art," Scribner's Monthly 10 (1875):381.

[2]Alfred Trumble, Representative Works of Contemporary American Artists (New York: Scribner's, c. 1887), p. 2.

[3]Statement by Karl Von Piloty is mentioned in Katherine Metcalf Roof, The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase (New York: Scribner's, 1917), p. 293. Cited by Ronald G. Pisano in exhibition catalogue essay, The Students of William Merritt Chase (Huntington, L.I.: Heckscher Art Museum, 1973), p. 4.

[4]Mentioned by John Gellatly in "Thayer in the American Renaissance," The Arts 1 (June-July 1921):5. Note MGVR's eager anticipation of the completion of Rodin's Balzac Monument, Boston Evening Transcript, 14 May 1892, p. 6, and her comments on Rodin and his statue of Claude Lorraine in the New York World, 31 July 1892, p. 27.

[5]Quoted in interview with Clifton Johnson in "The Newspaper, the Magazine, and the Public," Outlook, 4 February 1899, p. 317.

[6]Independent, 14 August 1887, p. 459.

[7]"Augustus Saint-Gaudens," Century Magazine, n.s. 13 (1887), pp. 28-38.

[8]See also drawings made in Paris in the 1890s, Portrait of Frank Wallace Stout (pl. 136) by Hendrick C. Anderson and Portrait of Andreas Andersen by Howard Gardiner Cushing. Michael Quick first suggested to me the late-nineteenth-century Holbein revival (in conversation, 1974).

[9]See Gerald M. Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," Gazette des Beaux Arts 73, ser. 6 (April 1969):235-56, and above, p.

[10]MGVR, "American Painters in Pastel," p. 204.

[11]Ibid., p. 205. See also M. G. Van Rensselaer, "Wood-Engraving and the Century Prizes," Century 2 (June 1882):230-39.

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[12]See MGVR notes and correspondence for a study of numismatic art, collection of George Griswold Jr., and Cornelius Vermeule, Numismatic Art in America: Aesthetics of the United States Coinage (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973).

[13]For significance of MGVR's writings on landscape architecture see Laura Wood Roper, FLO: A Biography of Frederick Olmsted (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 423 and 452, and Charles G. McLaughlin, "Selected Letters of F. L. Olmsted" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Univ., 1976), pp. 395 and 426.

[14]See "Frederick Law Olmsted," Century Magazine, n.s. 24 (1893), pp. 860-67, and unpublished manuscript, "Sketch of the Life of Frederick Law Olmsted," collection of Laura Wood Roper, as well as extensive contributions to Garden and Forest, 1888-97, and numerous editions of Art Out of Doors.

[15]"The Fourteenth Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," Harper's Weekly, 14 May 1892, pp. 468-70.

[16]The Increase in the Appreciation of Serious Art in America, A Paper Read Before the Rembrandt Club, February 4th, 1889 (Brooklyn: Rembrandt Club, 1889), p. 32.

[17]Principles of Art (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1887), p. 291.

[18]New York World, 17 December 1894, p. 4, and 24 December 1894, p. 4. The page following MGVR's first article was devoted to "In Trinity's Tenements. Nellie Bly Visits Many Miserable Homes Owned by the Corporation: Wretchedness and Squalor: Outrageous Rents for Filthy Dens in Foul, Rickety, Leaky, Unsanitary Hovels; Death, too, Lurks in Many of Them: You Will Learn Here Something About the Real Life of Dismal New York."

This aspect of MGVR's art criticism offers material for presentation elsewhere and includes her participation in a scheme to send "working gentlewomen" on summer vacations in the country with the proceeds of the sale of artists' prints. See Independent, 26 July 1888, p. 935.

[19]Boston Evening Transcript, 2 July 1892, p. 6. For a history of the Shaw Memorial see Lois Marcus, "The Shaw Memorial: A Late Nineteenth Century History Painting in Bronze," Winterthur Portfolio, in press.

[20]4 June [1897], Saint-Gaudens Collection, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H., courtesy of John Dryfhout.

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[21]So stated MGVR in "Statues and Pictures," Boston Evening Transcript, 26 March 1892, p. 6. This notion of culture filtering down from an elite to the multitudes derives from the ideas of Matthew Arnold.

[22]Carl De Muldor (pseudonym of Charles Henry Miller), The Philosophy of Art in America: A Dissertation upon Vital Topics of the Day: Perhaps of All Time (New York: Jenkins, 1885), p. 57 (brought to my attention by Doreen Bolger Burke).

[23]"Current Questions of Art," New York World, 18 December 1892, p. 24.

[24]North American Review 151 (1890):319-28, reprinted in Lewis Mumford, Roots of Contemporary American Architecture (New York: Dover, 19), p. 261.

[25]Gertrude Hall Brownell, William Crary Brownell: An Anthology of His Writings together with Biographical Notes and Impressions of the Later Years (New York: Scribner's, 1933), p. 294. See also Montgomery Schuyler, American Architecture and Other Writings, ed. William H. Jordy & Ralph Coe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 4.

[26]"Sculptors of the Early Italian Renaissance," Century Magazine, n.s. 7 (1884), pp. 62-66.

[27]See Richard Guy Wilson, "Charles F. McKim and the Development of the American Renaissance: A Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 1972).

[28]In 1883 Montgomery Schuyler ridiculed this style as vulgar in "Concerning Queen Ann," reprinted in American Architecture Studies (New York: Harper, 1892), pp. 6-51. Unlike MGVR, who favored Renaissance forms in American architecture, Schuyler most respected Gothic Revival and looked forward to a style of modern functionalism.

[29]"Recent Architecture in America V: City Dwellings," Century Magazine, n.s. 9 (1886), p. 557.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Independent, 15 December 1887, p. 1612.

[32]"Recent Architecture in America VII: American Country Dwellings I," Century Magazine, n.s. 10 (1886), pp. 3-20.

[33]"Recent Architecture in America IX: American Country Dwellings III," Century Magazine, n.s. 10 (1886), p. 431.

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[34]"Recent Architecture in America VII: American Country Dwellings I," Century Magazine, n.s. 10 (1886), p. 19.

[35]"The Madison Square Garden," Century Magazine, n.s. 25 (1894), p. 738.

[36]Ibid., pp. 742-43.

[37]English Cathedrals (New York: Century, 1892), p. 396.

[38]New York World, 4 November 1894, p. 18.

[39]AABN, 19 January 1884, p. 30. MGVR commented on this picture when she discovered it in the exhibition organized in New York by W. M. Chase and C. Beckwith for the Bartholdi Pedestal Fund.

[40]Letter to Jacob Cox, 3 June 1885, Cox Papers, Box 4, Avery Library, Columbia University.

[41]Independent, 22 July 1886, p. 913. See also Independent, 6 June 1889, p. 728.

[42]"Tendencies of Art in America," American Art Review 1, part 1 (1880):106-10 and 197-98.

[43]"Decorative Art and Its Dogmas," Lippincott's, 1880, pp. 346-47. See also "Art in Our Churches," Independent, 11 November 1886, p. 1449.

[44]"Current Questions of Art," New York World, 18 December 1892, p. 24. Other MGVR writings on Mary Cassatt include AABN, 10 May 1879, p. 149; "Art and the Fashions: L'Art de la Mode," American Art Review 2, part 2 (1881): 129.

[45]"The White City," Century Magazine, n.s. 24 (1893), p. 22.

[45]W. Lewis Fraser, "Decorative Painting at the World's Fair: The Works of Gari Melchers and Walter MacEwen," Century Magazine, n.s. 24 (1893), pp. 20-21.

[46]"The Building and Its Decoration," Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbia Exposition (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1894), p. 33.

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[48]The Art of the World: Illustrated in the Paintings, Statuary, and Architecture of the World's Columbian Exposition (New York: D. Appleton, 1894), 1:v-vi.

[49]"What Mrs. Van Rensselaer Says: 'The Fair Grounds,'" Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1893), p. 60.

[50]Art Out-of-Doors, enlarged ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1925), pp. 416-18. Comments were in response to Mumford's Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization, 1924. Mumford continued to maintain these ideas and in a letter to L.D. cautioned, ". . . don't forget that Mrs. Van Rensselaer after writing her classic 'Richardson' left the field to Montgomery Schuyler, and the only woman of comparable stature in architecture was Edith Wharton whose influential revival of 18 century French taste turned American fashion toward an irrelevant past" (letter of 17 October 1975). Mumford's view of the Fair as a bad influence is comparable to that of Montgomery Schuyler in "Last Words about the World's Fair," Architectural Record 3 (January-March 1894):271-301, reprinted in Schuyler, American Architecture, Jordy & Coe ed., pp. 588-97.

[51]"The New Public Library in Boston: Its Artistic Aspects," Century Magazine, n.s. 28 (1895), pp. 260-64.

[52]"Pauline," pp. 772-76.

[53]"Tendencies of Art in America," p. 104.

[54]"Who Wants Art Nowadays?" North American Review 204 (1916):236.

[55]Letter from London, 14 April 1912, Selected Letters of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (New YOrk: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955), p. 199.

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APPENDIX A

COURBET THE ARTIST

Dr. Coan's article on Courbet [about a year ago] doubtless seemed to all its readers what it seemed to me--an interesting account of an interesting man. But to those who care about Courbet chiefly as an artist, it will not have been, I think, entirely satisfactory. I may be pardoned, therefore, if I try to explain in a very few words what seems to me his real artistic worth.

To begin with, no strikingly individual artist should be judged wholly by the intrinsic value of his pictures. He should also be judged by the place he holds in the history of art--by the peculiar qualities his works reveal when compared with those of his predecessors and contemporaries, and still more by the influence they have had on subsequent performance. Notably is this the case with Courbet. He was not only a very strong and individual painter, but an innovator in the full force of the term. He was the prime mover in what has proved almost a revolution in art, and his example has largely molded the practice of our later day. He and Millet were the first champions of what we call--rather vaguely and incorrectly--"realism" in art. They were offshoots, of course, of the "romantic" movement of the early

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part of our century--that movement which proclaimed individuality to be the most important factor in art, and showed that a man might see with his own eyes and paint with his own brush, instead of seeing and painting in accordance with traditional, academic formulas. There had been a fierce battle at the outset of this romantic movement,--a battle which had been gained by the romanticists before Courbet's day, but which renewed itself about his work and Millet's. They saw fit to push the new doctrine further than the romanticists had carried it--were the first to insist upon absolute freedom in the choice of material, to say that peasants were as well worth painting as kings, humble contemporary life as history or mythology, and ugliness, upon occasion, as the goddess of beauty herself. Dr. Coan's words give us but a faint idea of the fury with which Courbet especially was attacked. He held a different position from Millet, and not alone in the more aggressive character of his work. Millet could be simply denied for many years all admittance to the Salon. But Courbet had won the right to such admittance when, in his earlier, less revolutionary time, he had gained a second medal. His work was, therefore, thrust constantly before unwilling eyes, and was assailed with corresponding violence. And the scorn which was confined to Millet's pictures was shared by Courbet's person. Never before or since has an artist been so berated, abused, and traduced simply for his pictures' sake. Political were mixed with artistic

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arguments and prejudices. It was in the year 1850 that Courbet's so-called brutal peasants first made their appearance on the Salon wall--just when the republic was disintegrating and before the coup d'état had restored security at the price of liberty. The pictures as such were involved in the wrath and fear excited by their subjects. The prevailing terror of socialism and revolution caused critics and public alike to see in these rustic figures, and in the uncompromising portraits of the "Burial Scene at Ornans," an attempt to exalt a dangerous class and to discredit the priesthood with the people; and the wildest political fury was turned upon them and their creator. Being what he was, Courbet retaliated with the weapons of the enemy, giving back scorn for scorn and rage for rage. But this fact, however it may affect our opinion of him as a man, does not in the least detract from the merit of his course as an artist. It would have given a deserved relief to some of the less noble traits of Courbet's character had Dr. Coan dwelt more strongly on the steady, plucky, indomitable way in which he followed his artistic conscience. If he and Millet had succumbed to their assailants, the world of art to-day would have been immeasurably poorer and less vital--or else some later comers would have had to fight the battle in their stead. And where should we have found another such pair of giants to do the work?

But even when Courbet's art is judged intrinsically, not historically, it seems to most critics, I think, much

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more worthy of admiration than it does to Dr. Coan. Of course it must not be confounded with his spoken theories. Who does not know how often the things an artist most sincerely holds in theory are belied by the testimony of his work? Driven to bay as Courbet was, moreover, and possessed as he was of a rough, excitable, domineering disposition, we should not go far wrong, perhaps, if we guessed that his words were more radical and uncompromising than were his inner feelings. But be this as it may, we must not conclude that because he reprobated all "idealism" in his speech there is none of it to be found upon his canvas. Idealism in the choice and arrangement and meaning of his subject-matter is, indeed, non-existent. But the true painter's touch is apt to idealize pictorially whatever subject it selects. Dr. Coan admits as much when he says that the head in one of Courbet's portraits of himself is "too ideal for Courbet's at any time, unless possibly for the year or two during his college life, when he studied Goethe, and even painted a scene from the 'Walpurgisnacht.'" And could one look, for example, at the "Violoncello-Player," recently exhibited in New York and reproduced in this magazine, and call its creator a quite prosaic artist? Or at the Boston Museum picture? Or at the majority of his superb and splendid waves and skies and landscapes? Who but he has ever shown with such strong and, I must submit, poetic sympathy the majesty of the tumbling surf and the overarching heaven, and

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the beauty of the deep-green, wet, and rocky woodland glades that were Courbet's peculiar province? Grant that there is no intellectual or spiritual poetry in Courbet's art, we must yet acknowledge that it shows, in spite of any verbal theories he may have seen fit to profess, an immense amount of poetic seeing and poetic rendering.

Nor do I think our author is quite right in saying that Courbet was "in one sense not a painter at all, at least outside of his landscapes. . . . In all his other work he was a story-teller. He did not paint for the sake of painting. . . . He was a born story-teller and satirist, and he painted to tell stories and to satirize." On the contrary, I think all his brethren in art will bear me out in saying that whatever else he was or was not,--perhaps not a great artist, for that is another and a wider matter,--he was most certainly a "born painter." His doctrine was that a man should paint only what he saw--not what he imagined, or what he thought he should have seen. After this principle he worked; and it is, I think, a painter's principle, if not the whole principle which guides the greatest artists. And his eyes were peculiarly wide-open and clear-sighted and sensitive. He saw an infinity of things with pleasure and sympathy, and he painted them all with equal sympathy and pleasure,--ugly things and beautiful things, rare things and common things, landscapes and sea views and figures and animals and fruit and flowers, and sometimes stories and satires

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too; but even in this last case not often for the sake of the story itself so much as for the sake of the picture which that story made before his eyes. He was extremely sensitive to all physical things; and this is what marks the painter born. He was not very sensitive to spiritual things; and this, if you will, is his failing as an artist. If there is one fact proved alike by his life and his work, it is that he did paint for the sake of painting. Whether he chose his subjects well or ill is quite another matter--as is also anything he may have said about his "mission."

With regard to his technical merits, Dr. Coan says: "As pure art, his works have little value outside of their color; but they have a sturdy material verity." With this judgment, too, I think most artists will disagree. He was often deficient in drawing--as have been, at times, so many great painters before and after, including Titian. And for composition he had commonly no care--though here, I think, he sometimes showed a great if unconventional ability. But his handling had a freedom, a fire, an individuality, and an immensity of vigor we seldom find in modern work. A perfect painter he never was--but a great painter, none the less. It is a curious parallel to set him beside Blake, who was not a painter at all, but a draughtsman of very variable skill. Even the more abstract comparison which would mean that he ever failed as entirely in realizing his conceptions as Blake often failed in realizing his, comes nowhere near the mark.

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And to say that he was a less able practitioner than Martin leads us very far indeed astray. Surely it is not Courbet's color alone, nor the rather rude vigor and verity which Dr. Coan accords him, that have raised him to so high a rank in recent years; nor yet the extrinsic fact that he was a sturdy pioneer who opened up for us a new and fruitful field in art. No; Courbet's works are admired and studied to-day, purchased at immense prices by his government, and hung with honor in the Louvre, because he was a true if not a great artist, and a great if not a faultless painter.

M. G. van Rensselaer

Printed under "Open Letters," Century 29 (1885):792-94.

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APPENDIX B

ODE

TO A GREEK HEAD CALLED

APHRODITE

(In the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston)

Cold is the day, a northern day and darkly cold,
  The daylight drowned in snow.
The singer heeds not, for his eyes and heart behold
  Beauty's high lamp aglow.

Thou lovely waif from mellower time and clime than
    ours,
  Give ear to his low plea:
Grant him a breath from the one field that bore such
    flowers--
  Thy prototype and thee.

Not Aphrodite, though they name thee so.
Thine eyes are misted crescent moons below
      The white cloud of thy brow,
  But hers are stars--clear and elate
Like the bright Twins that once were Leda's sons,
      Or passionate
As Betelgeuze and Bellatrix of martial name
      Who in his shoulders flame
Where the huge Hunter through the midnight runs.
  Her lips are tools of destiny:
Forever, newly they accord, refuse, invite,
      Deep dangers of delight;

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Thine but imagine tremulously.
And, many though her moods, she knoweth not
the one
That woos us to this stone
Wherein thou livest passionless,
Immortal in a vision-haunted wistfulness.

Not Aphrodite, nor of race divine
Another, bidding worship such as mine
Come never nearer than the dust beneath her
tread.
A girl from golden years long dead,
A maid unknown, unnamèd, here survives,
Rescued in this
Fair chrysalis
From a far ruined world whose shore
Shows dense with formless shadows of lost lives,
Lost and forevermore forgot, forevermore.

Thou, only, saved!--and yet not thou, not thou!
Only the line
Of cheek and brow,
The curves of eyelid, lip, and chin,
The delicate languor of the head's incline,
The rippling of the soft and heavy hair;
And, shrined their purity within,
Veiled and elusive yet imperishably there,
In reverence to be read as on some sacred scroll,
The signet-markings of the soul.

How shall we trace the clue to thy sweet mystery?
We fancy thee as one who grieves
For the soft stirring of gray olive leaves,
And yellow jonquils underneath the olive tree,

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And for the high clear lines of shaft and architrave,
For lifted walls serene in beauty won
From chiselled form and pattern, brave
With brazen shields where break the arrows of the sun.
A first quick fancy! But we know,
Shut here in arid walls beneath a cold
And alien sky,
Thou art not yearning for the land
Thy home. For even as we to-day behold
And worship, even so
His eyes beheld whose hand,
From exquisite flesh that needs must die,
To marble of immortality
Transferred they spirit while were thine
Olive and ivy, laurel and the vine
In varying companionship accordant met,
Far hills' unchanging rhythm of undulate line
And changing rhapsodies of purple hue,
And shining fanes on bare and sunny headlands set
Between the darker and the paler blue.

Not these the loadstone of thy wishful gaze.
Now, even as when the sculptor sought in thee
A guide to beauty's verity,
Inward it turns always.
And who shall follow? Where the path
Into the sanctuary of a soul that hath
The walls of pilèd centuries for guard?
Long have I loved and pondered; keeping patient watch,
Long have I waited, as though unawares to catch
A voice soft-whispering beneath
The impenetrable sheath
Marmorean. And I hear no word.

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I only know that in thine own heart lay
The clouds that dimmed for thee the brilliance
of the day.
Not throes of empire shadowed thus the joyous-
ness.
Of thy young years; not cities' leaguered long
distress,
Lost armies, argosies a-wreck, or heroes' fate,
Crushed to a splendid death by their own glory's
weight.
In thee alone it lives, the gentle grief,
The tender burden of desire
That finds in dreams a half-relief,
But would not weep lest falling tear on tear
Lessen the burning of a fire
Than any calming touch more intimately dear.

The hurt we know not, but we know
Never it pierced the shield of innocence below,
To the immaculate deep core of maidenhood.
Thy rosaries
Of fond remembering with but pearls are strung;
The roses of delight whereon thy longings brood
Thy virgin vision sees
Unsullied lily-fields among.
--Ay, but they budded once in crimson wealth
to blow
And fervent fragrance, all ungarnered though they
died.
Not thine a claustral chastity
That had denied
To answering love its happy seignory.
Not by thine own free choosing was withheld
The passionate whole.

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Of woman's dower; not thine own will but fate.
  Implacable thy feet compelled
    To turn thee from the gate
Of motherhood, to the enkindled soul
    Refused the body's mate,
And bade the stirred heart live--ah, how re-
  luctantly!--
Betrothed forever to virginity.

How are we parted, thou and I! What miles of
  space,
What irretraceable far miles of time,
    Dissever from thy face
The eyes that crave so to have seen its living prime!
  Even the pole-star, to our sense
  Symbol and proof of permanence,
Hath journeyed, so were multiplied the years,
    Unto the pilot place
He held not for seafarers of thy race;
And on the scintillant highway of the zodiac
  The sun hath tired and fallen back;
    No longer he appears,
Punctual, in the appointed star-framed houses
  where,
  When ancient wisdom sought him there
As solstice or as equinox returned,
    His dazzling signal burned.
Thou art the elder by how much! Yet young,
  so young--
As though the birds of dawn had by thy cradle
  sung
  When I long since had learned to bear
The burdens of the laboring day. So long,
Long dead! Yet still a woman-child among
The living generations, and alive

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With such an animate flame as shall survive
When we who breathe to-day are in our turn
  Tenants of perished graves; ay, sure--
  Voiceless and yet how eloquent!--
  Ageless, unaltering, to endure
Till unborn centuries shall of thy witness learn
Not time but beauty is the arm plenipotent.

  And now, to-day, leaning thine ear
So gently, it must be that thou canst hear
How I, a wandering singer, plead to thee.
  Quicken my timid minstrelsy:
Show me in dreams that memories hold thy
    long
      And tender gazing,
      That, woven in my song,
  They thrill it to a tender phrasing;
Let visions of thy visions of young love
To purest cadences my passion move;
Interpret the sweet patience of such pain
As stirs to ardencies of love again;
Interpret innocence, and youth, and April's
    breath,
The powerlessness of time, the impotence of
    death.
To the high deities for my sake pray
Who choose and use us as they will: prevail that
    they
With joys and tears prepare the seed-beds of my
    heart,
Winnow with chastening winds the harvests of
    my soul,
Touch my chill lips with the white coal
  Of truth, and clarify my sight
Upward to follow where the guiding light
      Streams from the torch of art.

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So shall I sing, albeit with muted notes, as sing,
Celestial clear,
The musical fair meanings of thy face;
So to the eye, the ear,
Of spirits straying in a dumb and darkened place
My melody shall bring
Echoes, if only faint and far,
Of brooks and birds and sun-rays of the spring;
So shall it lave them in a halcyon air,
Lead them with banners as of moon and morning star;
Lull them to rest;
In the numb breast
Unseal the fountains of emotion;
Soothe the tempestuous mood
And quell
The headstrong insurrection of the blood
With balm of poesy's ablution,
And the sure anodyne
Of harp-strings touched to chords that tell
What thou hast told this burning heart of mine,
Daughter of earth and voice of the divine!
1909.

From Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, Poems (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

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OPULENCE AND OCULAR DELIGHT, SPLENDOR AND SQUALOR: CRITICAL WRITINGS IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE BY MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER

by

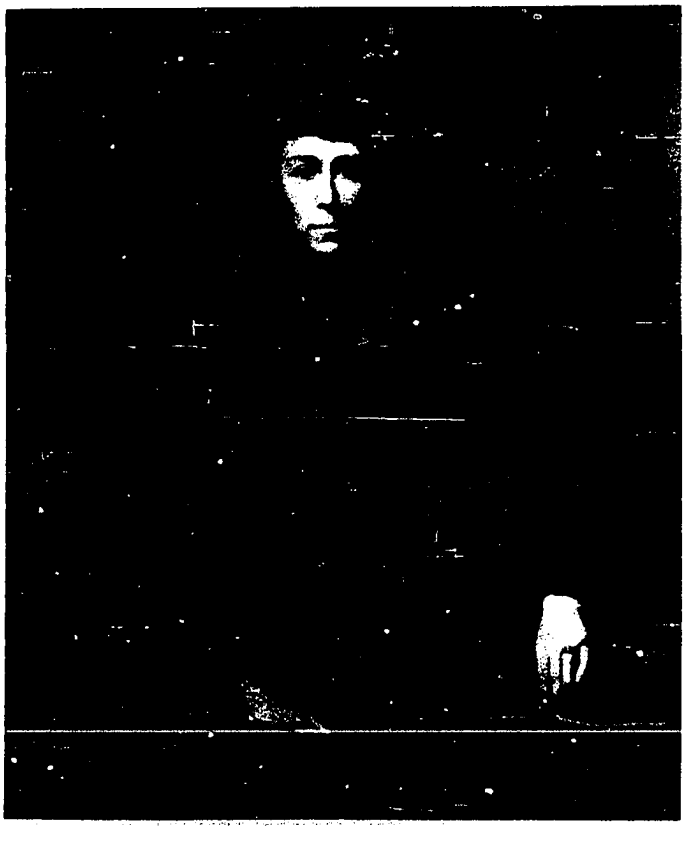
Lois Dinnerstein

Volume II

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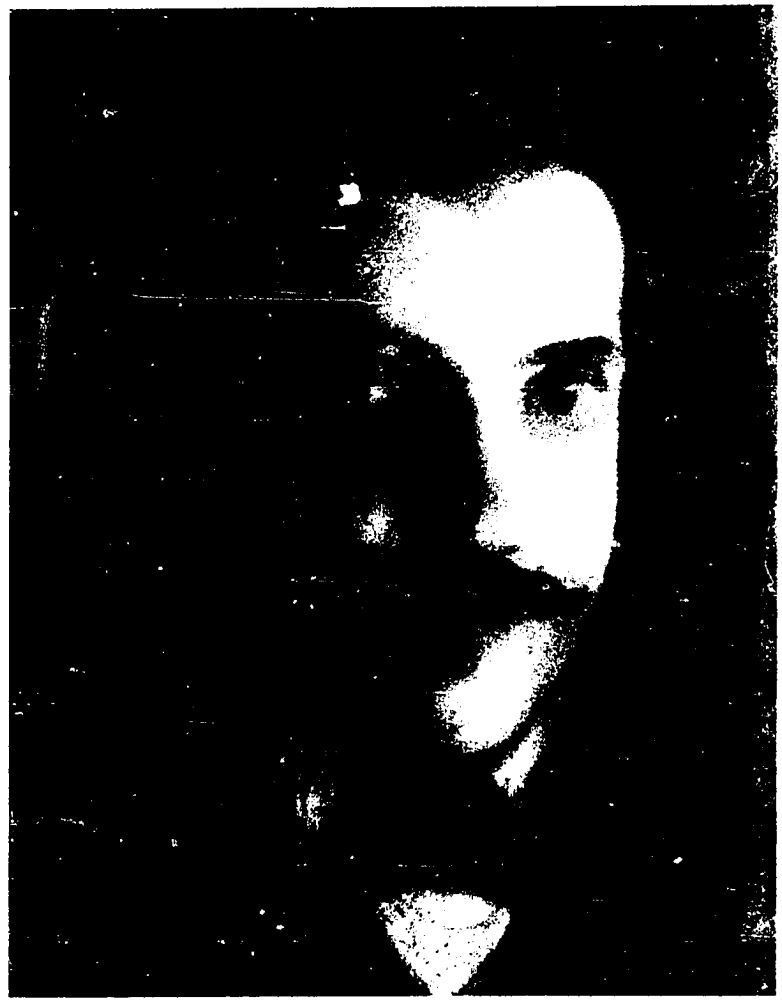


1. Augustus Saint-Gaudens. *Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer* (1888). Bronze. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



2. William A. Coffin. *Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer* (1890). Oil on canvas. Museum of the City of New York.

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3. Andreas Andersen. George Santayana (1897). Charcoal drawing. Villa Helene, Rome.

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4. Felix Buhot. "Westminster Bridge" (also called "Westminster Clock Tower," 1884). Etching. George Griswold, Jr. collection.

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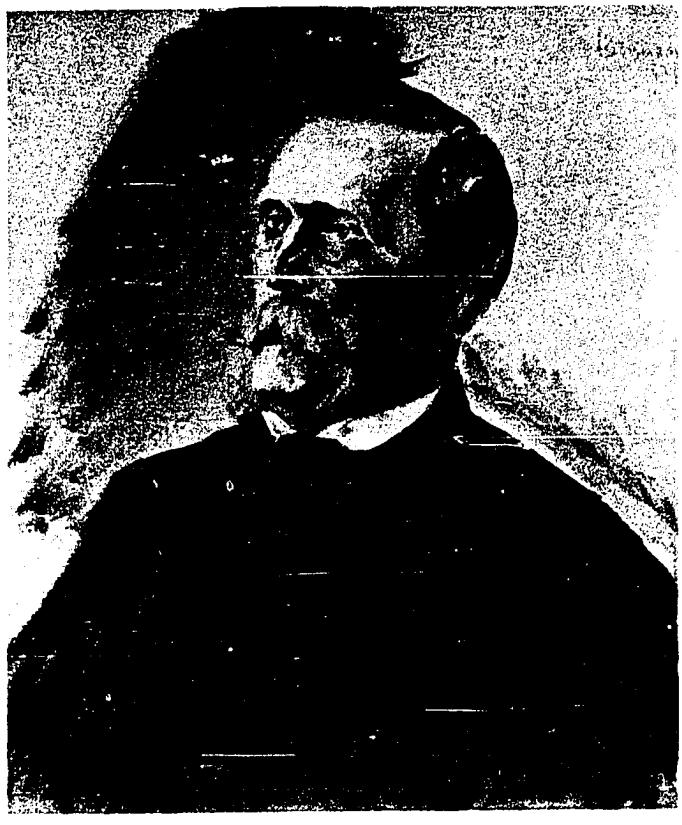


5. Photograph of Frank Gray Griswold.



6. Richard Morris Hunt. The Griswold House (1862-63; now the Newport Art Association).

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7. Max Liebermann. Wilhelm von Bode (1909).



8. Photograph, "Mrs. Mariana G. Van Rensselaer in Her Study at Marion, Massachusetts" (188-?). Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University.

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9. Photograph of Schuyler Van Rensselaer. New York Public Library Picture Collection.

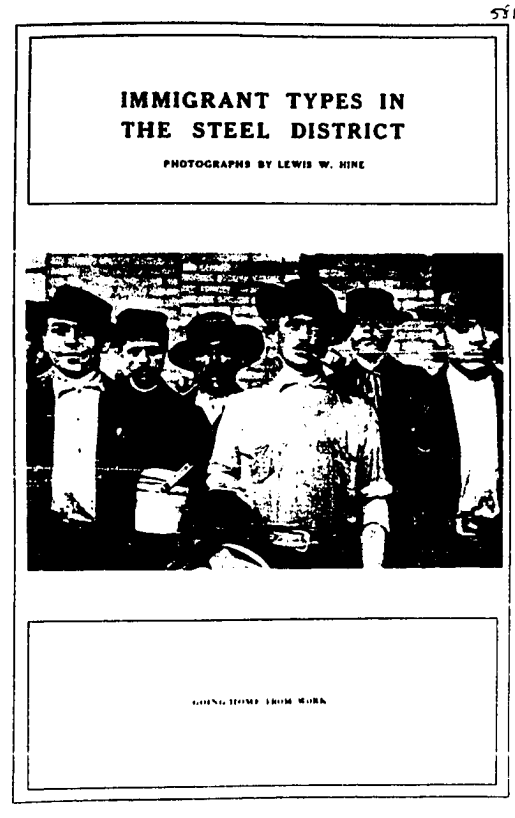
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PITTSBURGH TYPES

ITALIAN LEADER

10. Joseph Stella. "Pittsburgh Types: Italian Leader." Drawing.



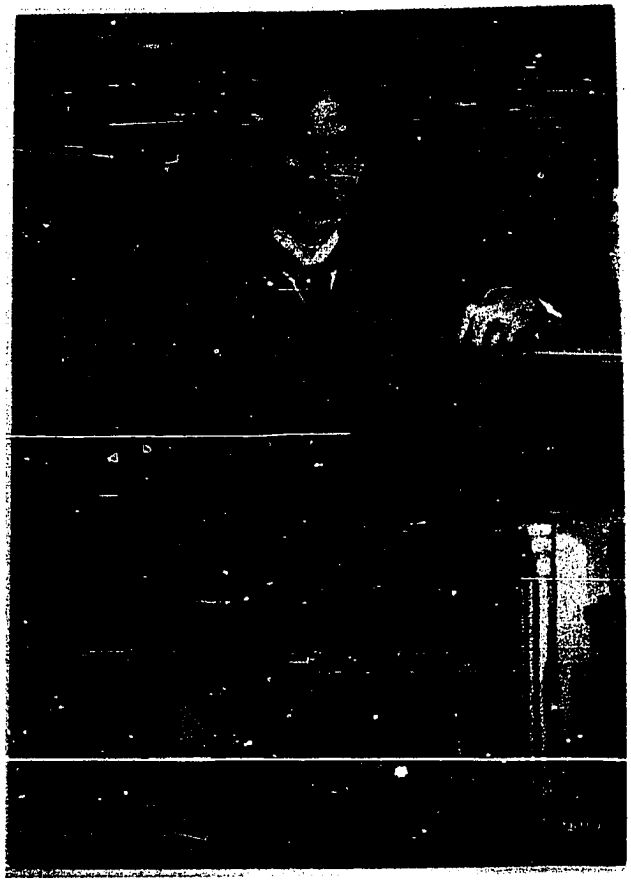
11. Lewis W. Hine. "Immigrant Types in the Steel District: Going Home from Work."

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MR. AND MRS. GILDER
At the time of their marriage

12. "Mr. and Mrs. Gilder at the Time of Their Marriage" (1874). Tintype.



13. Cecilia Beaux. Richard Watson Gilder (1931-32; replica of a painting first executed in 1902-3). Oil on canvas.

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14. Walter Shirlaw. Sheep Shearing in the Bavarian Highlands (c. 1877). Oil on canvas. Formerly City Art Museum, St. Louis.



15. Wyatt Eaton. The Harvest Field (1884). Oil on canvas. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

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16. "A Flank Movement on the Hanging Committee." Engraving in Scribner's Monthly 17 (November 1878 - April 1879), p. 456.



17. Winslow Homer. Two Girls on a Cliff (c. 1882). Wash drawing. Fogg Museum, Harvard University.

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18. Thomas Eakins. The Crucifixion (1880). Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



19. Albert P. Ryder. The Sentimental Journey (sold in 1889). Oil on canvas. Canajoharie Library and Art Gallery, New York.

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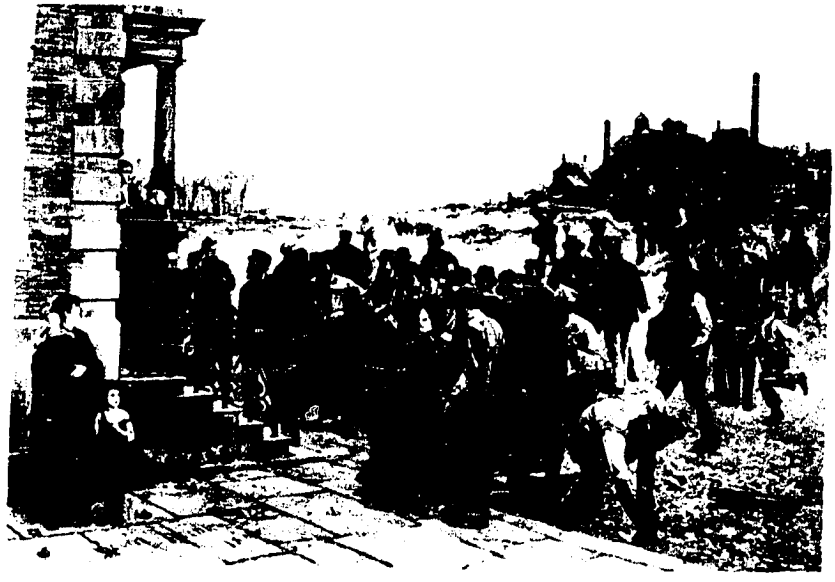


20. John Singer Sargent. A Street in Venice (c. 1882). Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



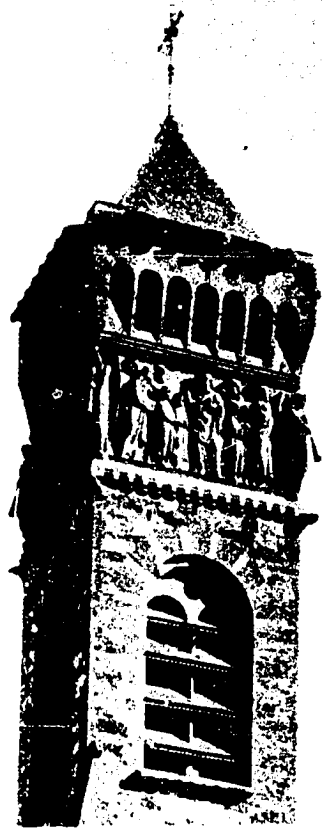
21. Robert F. Blum. Venetian Lace Makers (1887). Oil on canvas. Cincinnati Art Museum.

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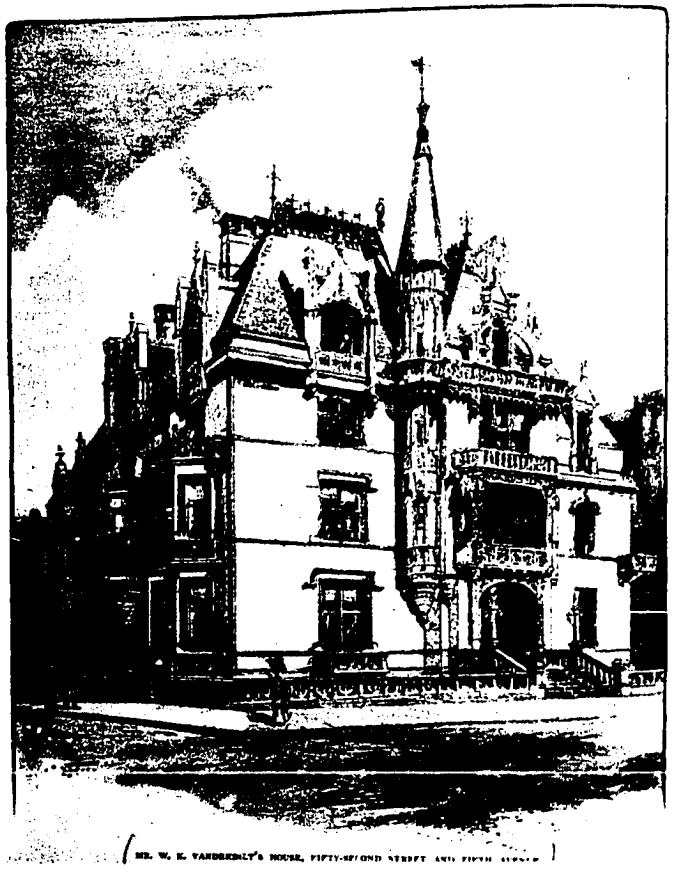


22. Robert Koehler. The Strike (1886). Oil on canvas. Lee Baxandall collection, New York.

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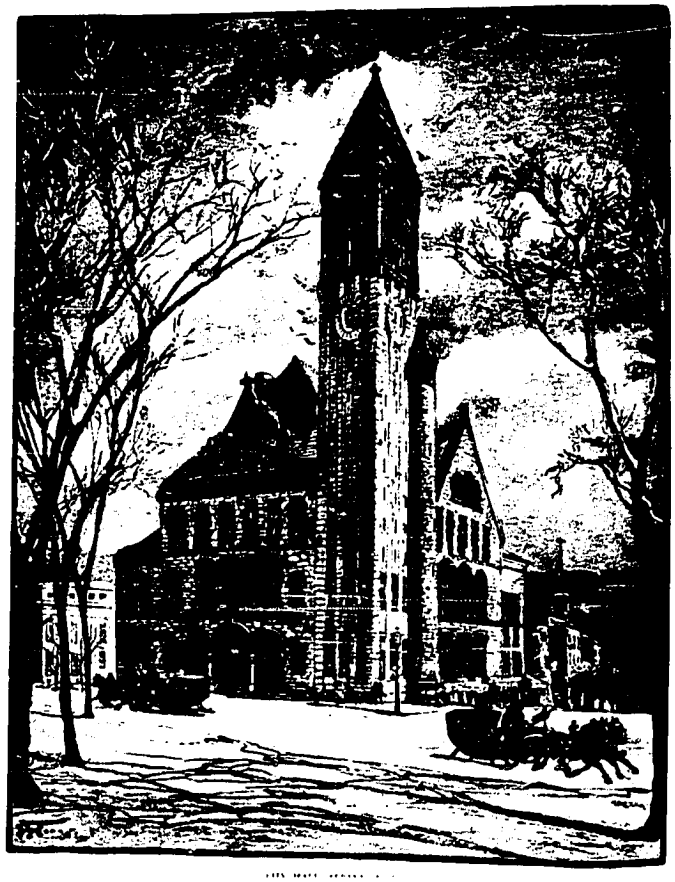


23. Auguste Bartholdi. The Sacrament of Marriage. Relief sculpture, tower of Brattle Square Church, Boston.

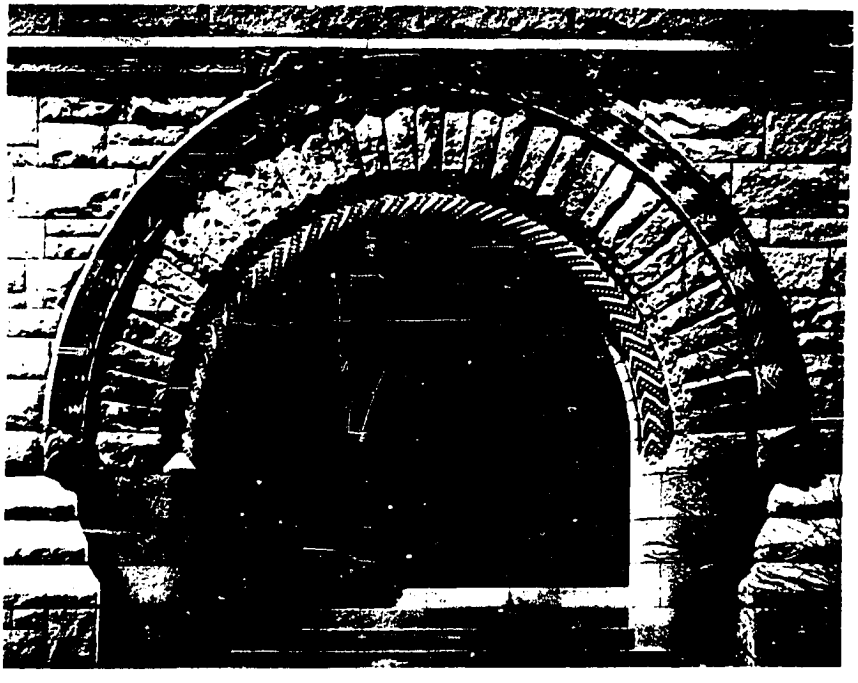


24. Harry Fenn. "W. K. Vanderbilt's House (by Richard Morris Hunt)." Pen and ink drawing.

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25. Harry Fenn. "City Hall, Albany, New York (by H. H. Richardson)." Pen and ink drawing.

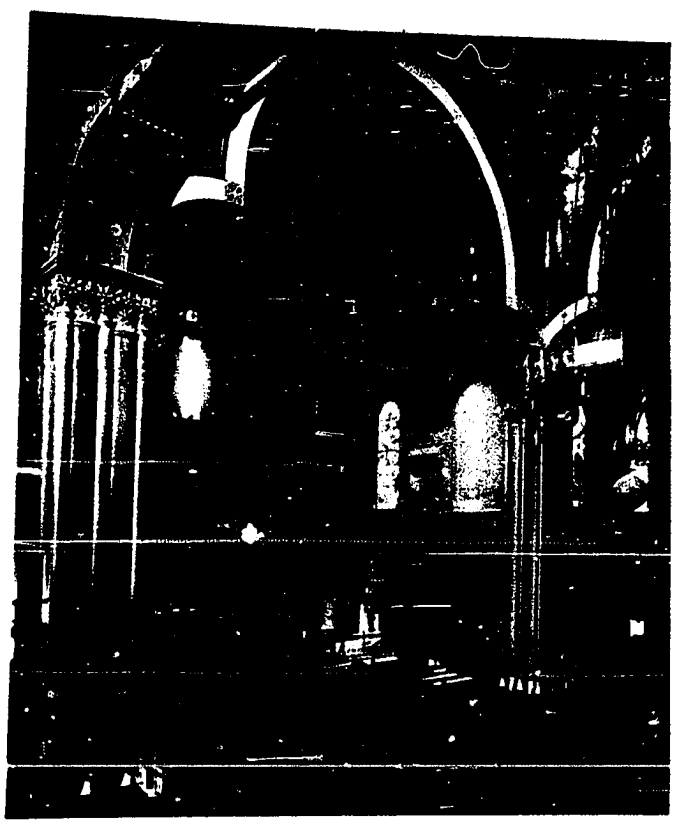


26. H. H. Richardson. Ames Memorial Library, North Easton, Massachusetts (1877-79). Detail of portal.

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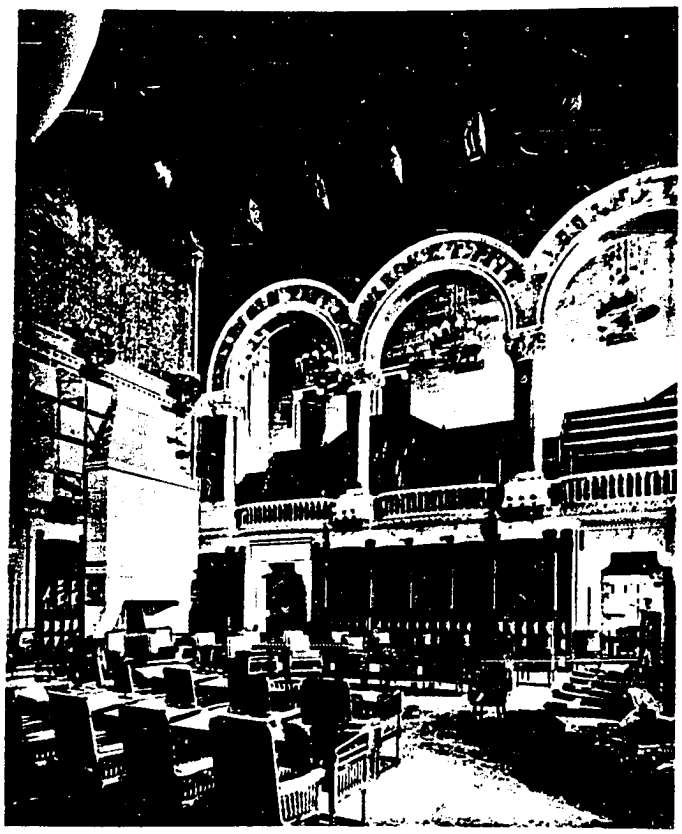


27. Daniel Chester French. First model of the Gallaudet Memorial (1887). Plaster.

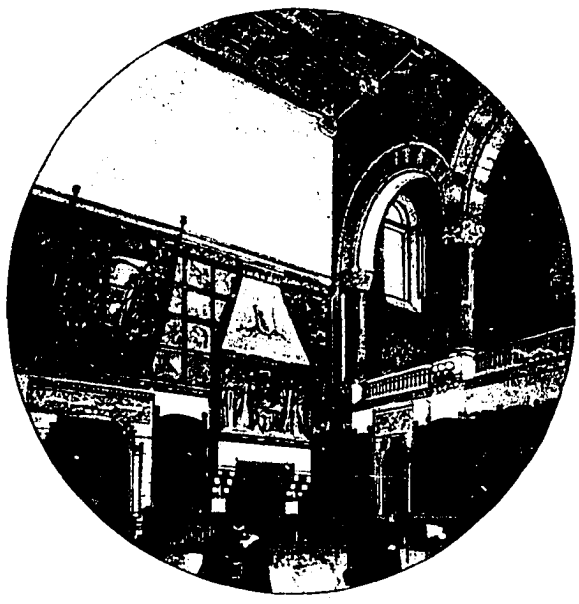


28. H. H. Richardson. Interior, Trinity Church, Boston (begun 1872).

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29. H. H. Richardson. Interior, Senate Chamber, Capital, Albany, New York (begun 1875).



30. H. H. Richardson. Interior, Senate Chamber, State Capitol, Albany, New York (begun 1875).

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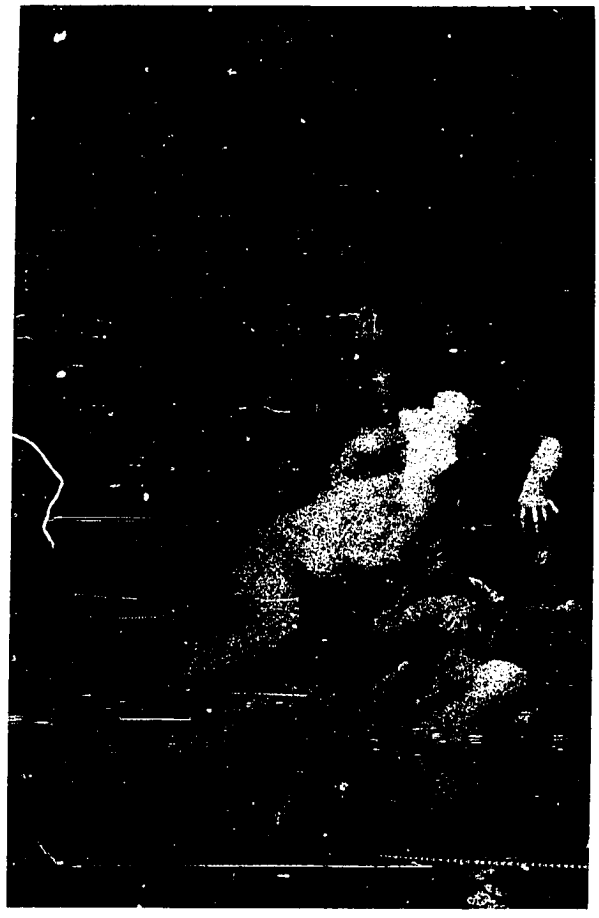


31. Kenyon Cox. Nude (1888). Oil on canvas. Louis K. Meisel collection, New York.



32. Frederick William MacMonnies. Bacchante and Infant Faun. Bronze. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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33. Correggio. Jupiter and Antiope (c. 1525). Oil on canvas. Louvre.

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34. Charles Frederick Ulrich. The Glass Blowers (1883). Oil on panel. Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.



35. J. Alden Weir. Reverie (c. 1886). Oil on canvas.

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36. George Inness. Autumn Oaks (c. 1875). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



37. Rembrandt van Rhyn. The Gilder Herman Doomer (1640). Oil on wood. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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38. William Merritt Chase. Sunlight and Shadow (1884). Distemper. Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha.

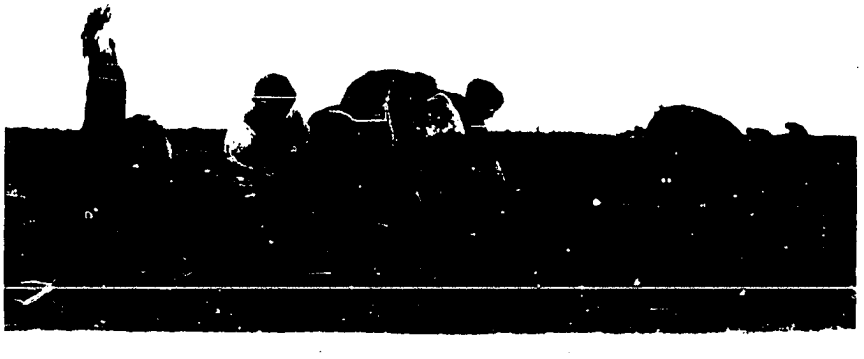


39. Jules Breton. Evening in Hamlet of Fenesterre (1882). Oil on canvas.

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40. Jules Breton. The Last Rays (1883). Formerly Walker Art Gallery, Minneapolis Public Library.

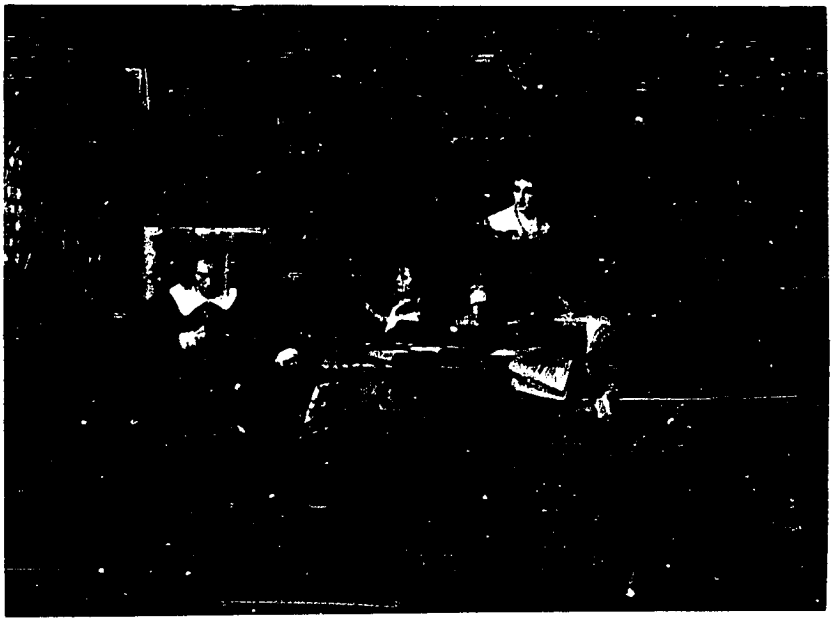


41. Jules Breton. The Weeders (1868). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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42. P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret. The Accident (c. 1881). Oil on canvas. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

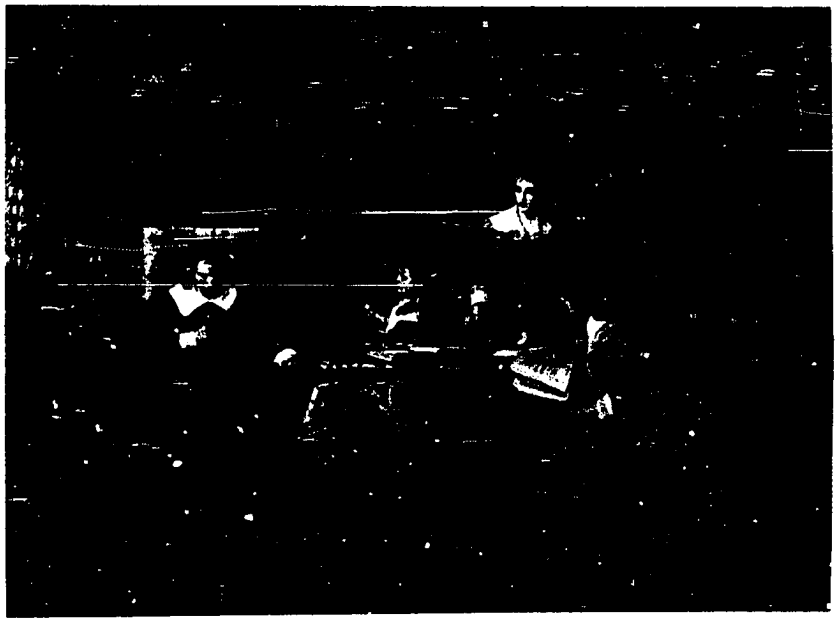


43. Mihaly Munkácsy. Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to His Daughters (1878). Oil on canvas. New York Public Library.

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42. P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret. The Accident (c. 1881). Oil on canvas. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.



43. Mihaly Munkácsy. Milton Dictating Paradise Lost to His Daughters (1878). Oil on canvas. New York Public Library.

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44. Mihaly Munkácsy. The Last Day of a Condemned Man (1869-72). Oil on wood. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.



45. Mihaly Munkácsy. Bringing in the Night Rovers (1872-73). Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

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46. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. The Poor Fisherman (1881). Oil on canvas. Louvre.



47. Jules Bastien-Lepage. Sketch of Sarah Bernhardt. Oil. National Museum, Stockholm.

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48. Jean Béraud. The Deposition (1892 Salon).



49. Gustave Courbet. The Sea (c. 1865). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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50. Gustave Courbet. Burial at Ornans (1849). Oil on canvas. Louvre.



51. Léon L'Hermitte. The Harvesters' Payday (1882). Château-Thierry Town Hall.

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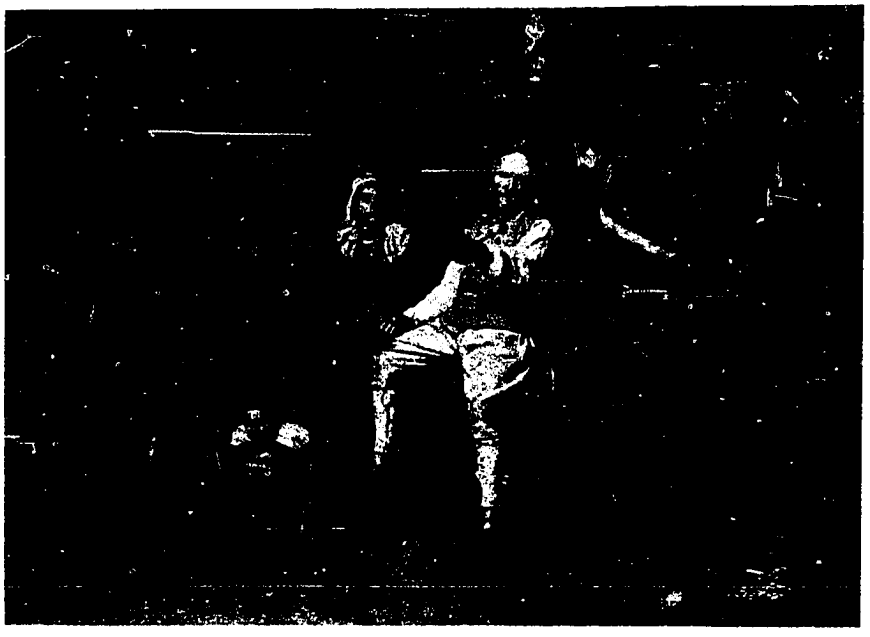


52. Joseph Israëls. Work. Watercolor.



53. Jules Bastien-Lepage. The Potato Gatherers (1878). Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

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54. Thomas Hovenden. A Breton Interior (A Vendean Volunteer) (1878). Oil on canvas.



55. Thomas Hovenden. Sunday Morning (1881). Oil on canvas. Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco.

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56. Thomas Hovenden. Chloe and Sam (1881). Oil on canvas.

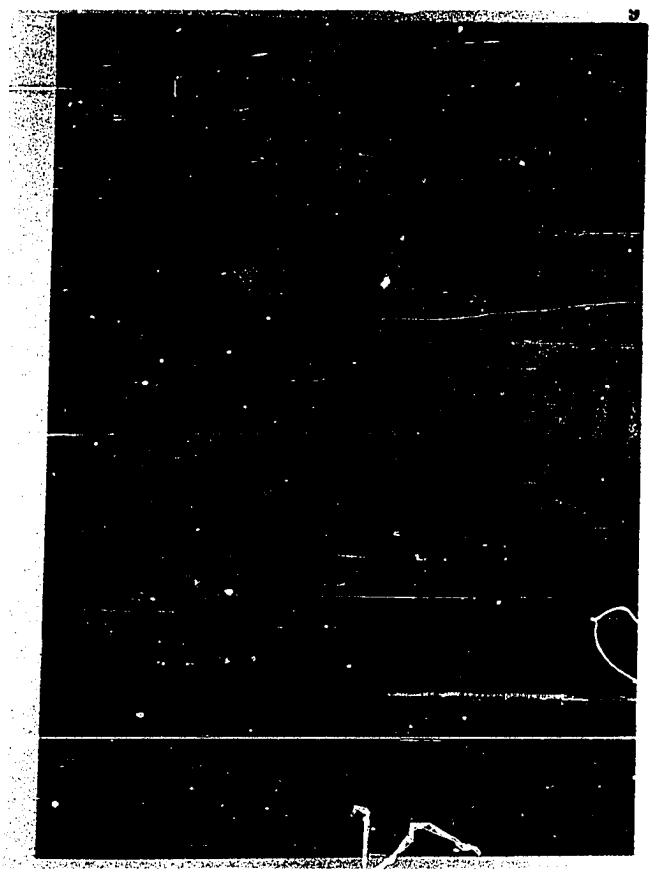


57. Thomas Hovenden. In the Hands of the Enemy (1888). Oil on canvas. Battell collection, New Haven, Conn.

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58. Alfred-Philippe Roll. The Miners' Strike (Salon of 1880). Oil on canvas. Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Valenciennes.



59. Edward Simmons. Mother and Child (Tired Out) (c. 1886). Oil on canvas.

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60. Eastman Johnson. Corn Husking (1876). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



61. Winslow Homer. The Herring Net (1885). Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago.

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62. Sarah P. B. Dodson. Deborah (c. 1879). Oil on canvas.

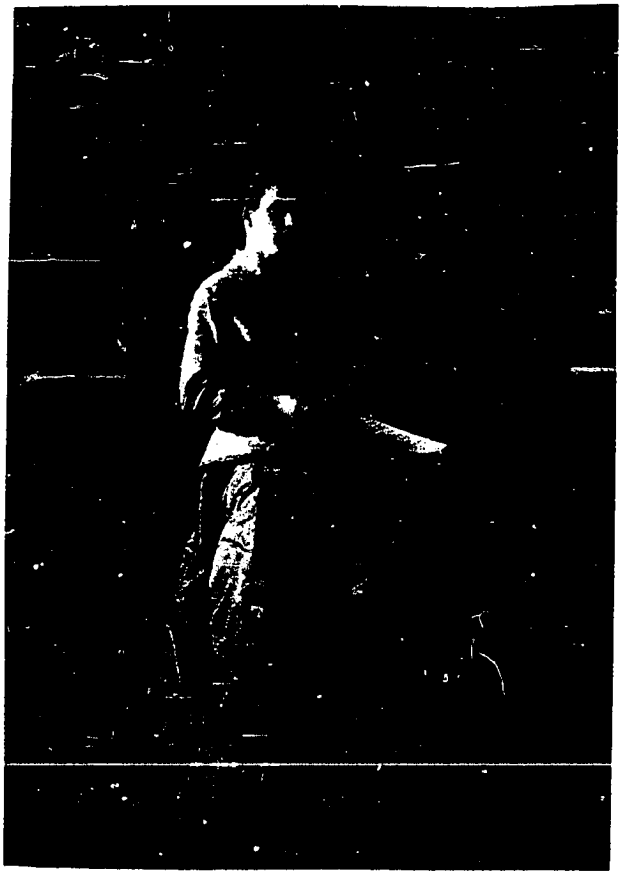


63. Léon Bonnât. Egyptian Fellah Woman and Child (An Egyptian Peasant Peasant Woman and Her Child) (c. 1870). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of art.

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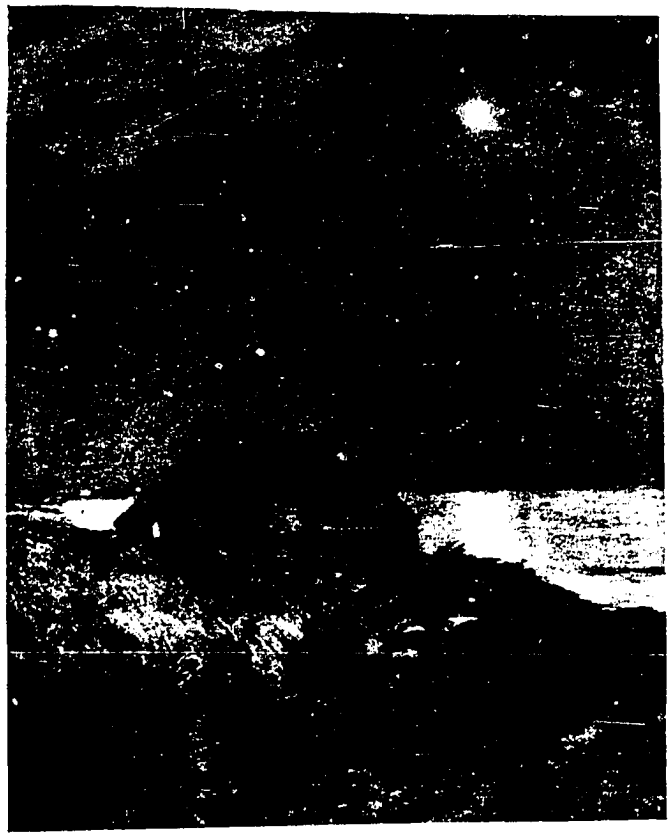


64. Henri Lerolle. A Rehearsal in the Choir Loft (1885). Metropolitan Museum of Art.



65. Thomas Eakins. The Pathetic Song (1881). Oil on canvas. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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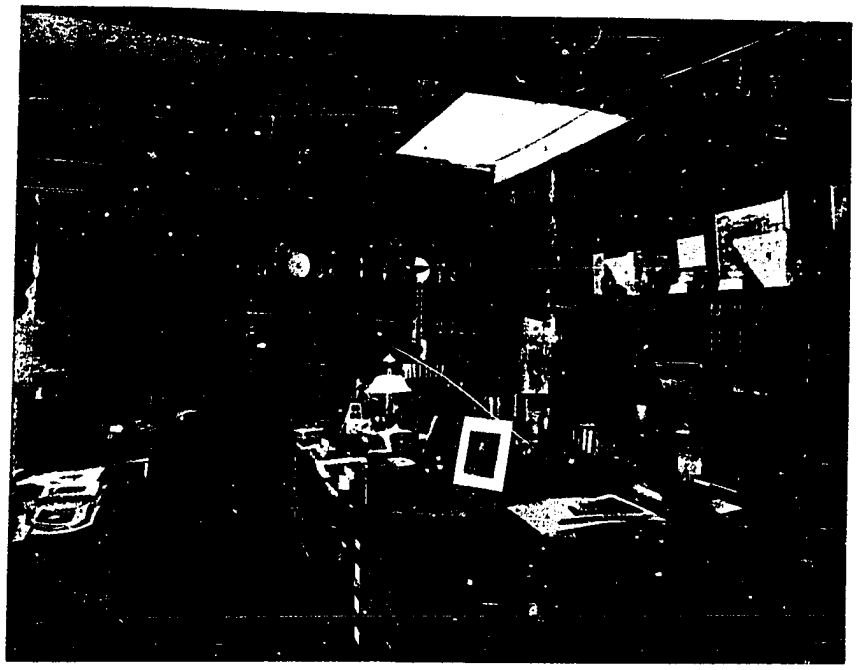


66. Jean Charles Cazin. Moonlight Scene.



67. Theodore Wores. Chinese Fishmonger (1881). Oil on canvas. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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68. Photograph, "Henry Hobson Richardson's Private Study and Library" (c. 1886). Harvard College Library.



69. William Unger. "Reproduction of William Merritt Chase's 1875 Portrait of Frank Duveneck (now lost)." Etching.

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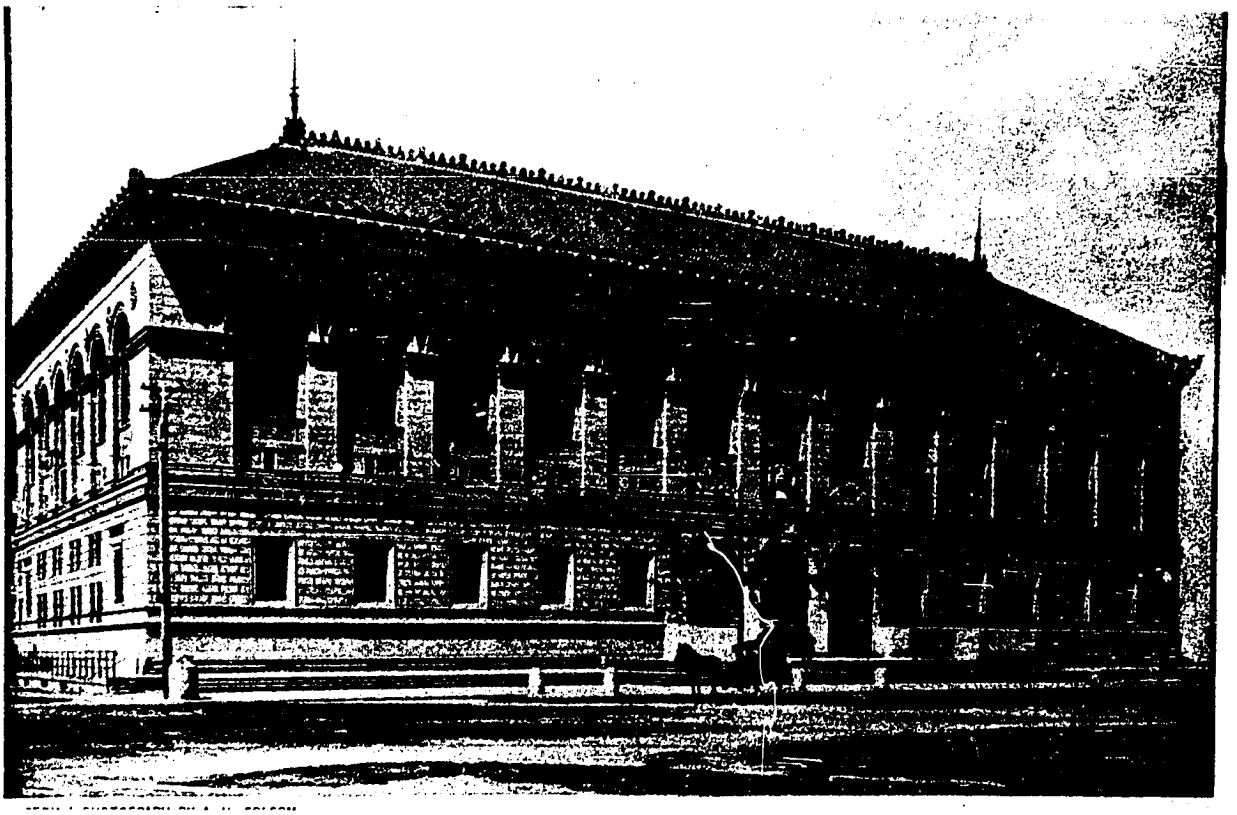


70. Kenyon Cox. "Study for the seal of the Art Students League of New York" (1889).



71. Thomas Marr. "Fenway Court" (1903). Photograph.

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72. McKim, Mead, and White. "The Boston Public Library" (1895).

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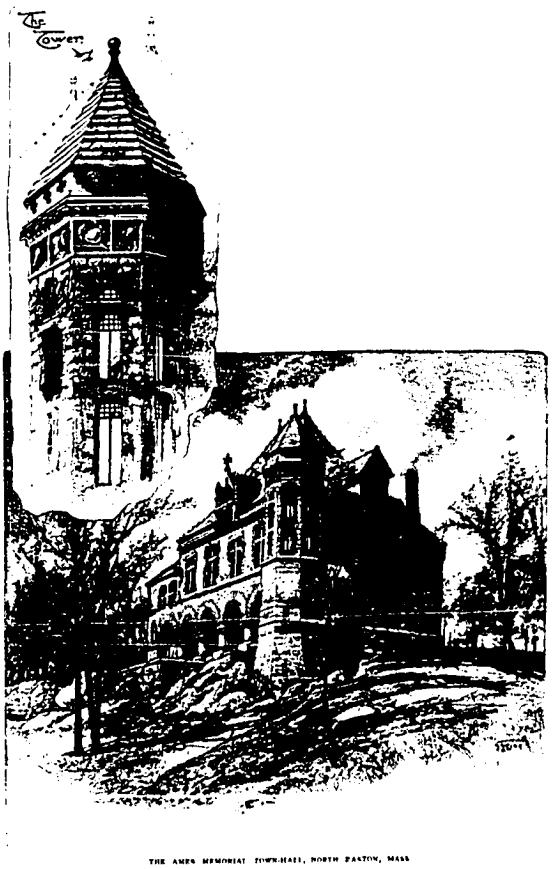


73. McKim, Mead, and White. "The Boston Public Library, Entrance Hall" (1895).

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74. Kenyon Cox. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1908; replica of 1887 painting). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



THE AMES MEMORIAL TOWN-HALL, NORTH EASTON, MASS

75. Harry Fenn. "The Ames Memorial Town-Hall (H. H. Richardson), North Easton, Mass." Pen and ink drawing.

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76. Calvert Vaux and Frederick Withers. Jefferson Market Courthouse, New York (1876).

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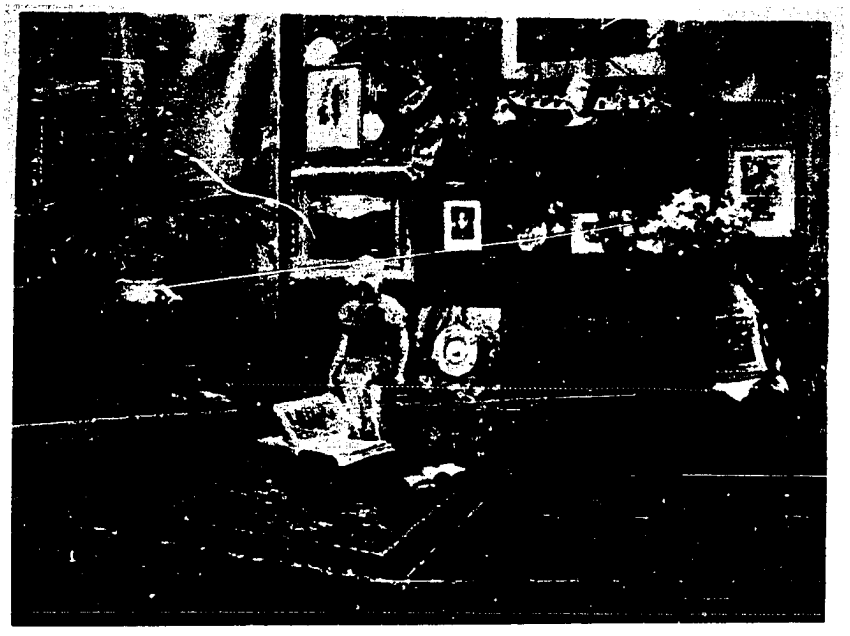


77. Wilhelm Leibl. Kitchen in Kutterling (1898). Oil on canvas. Wallfar-Richartz Museum, Cologne.



78. Wilhelm Leibl. Three Women in Church (1878-81). Oil on canvas. Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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79. William Merrit Chase. In the Studio (c. 1880). Oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum.



80. Hans Makart. Ariadne at Naxos (1870-75).

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81. Frank Duveneck. Turkish Page (1876). Oil on canvas. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.



82. William Miller. Reproduction of Frans Hals' "La Bohèmienne" (The Gypsy). Oil. Louvre.

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83. Robert Blum. *A Slaughtered Ox in a Butcher Shop* (c. 1888). Pastel on dark brown paper. Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Mass.



84. H. H. Richardson. Fireplace in Court of Appeals Room, Capitol, Albany, New York (1881).

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85. Frank Duveneck. He Lives by His Wits (1878). Oil on canvas. Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence H. Kyte collection.

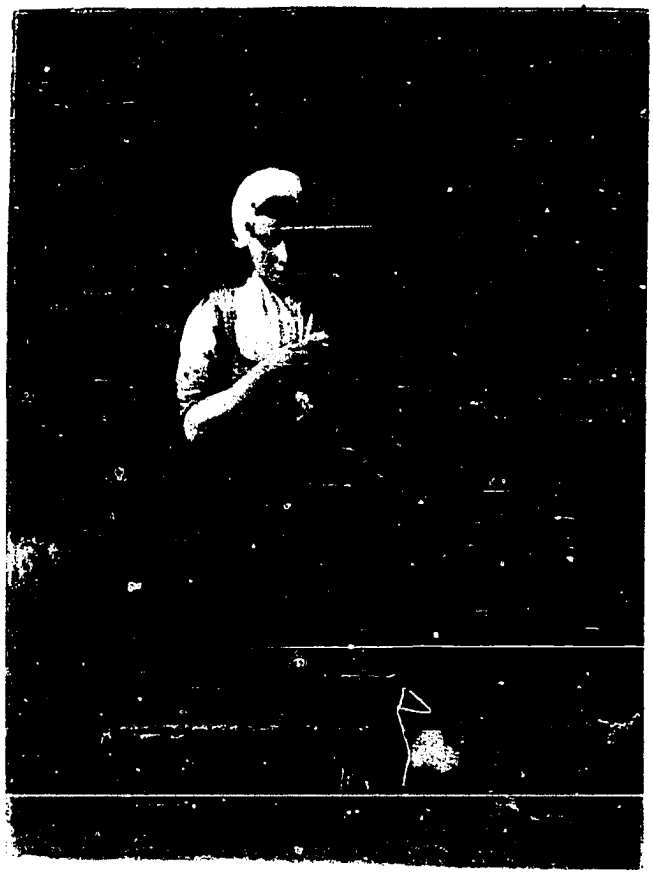


86. Joseph Israëls. Shipwreck Victims (1840s). Oil on canvas.

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87. Henry Ward Ranger. The Armory (exhibited 1903).



88. Joseph Israëls. Expectation. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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89. Jacobus S. H. Kever. Mother and Children. Oil on canvas.



90. Charles Harold Davis. Evening (1886). Oil on canvas. Thomas Colville collection, New Haven, Conn.

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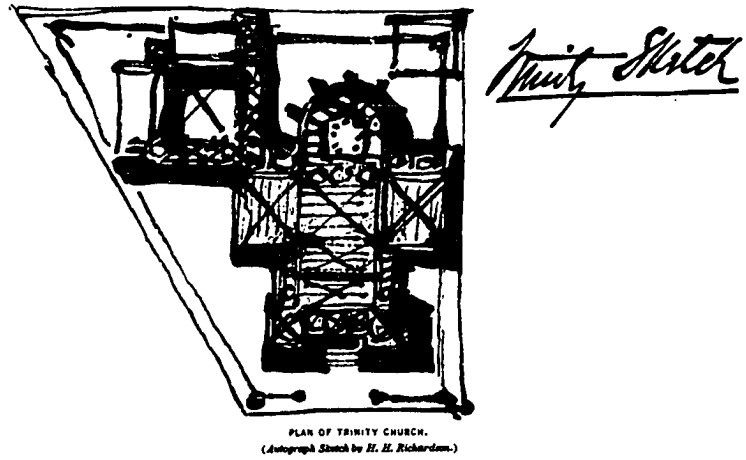


91. John Singer Sargent. Daughters of Edward Darley Boit (1882). Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



92. John Singer Sargent. El Jaleo (1882). Oil on canvas. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

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93. H. H. Richardson. Plan of Trinity Chuch (1872). Pencil, blue pencil, and brown ink on watercolor paper.



94. Hubert von Kerkomer. Henry Hobson Richardson (1886). Oil on canvas. Henry H. Richardson III collection.

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95. William Page. Mrs. William Page (1860). Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts.



96. George Fuller. The Turkey Pasture (1878). Oil on canvas. Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia.

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97. George Fuller. Negro Funeral (1881). Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



98. Adolphe Monticelli. A Sacrifice to Pan. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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99. Camille Corot. Recollections of Italy: Castel Grandolfo (c. 1865). Oil on canvas. Louvre.

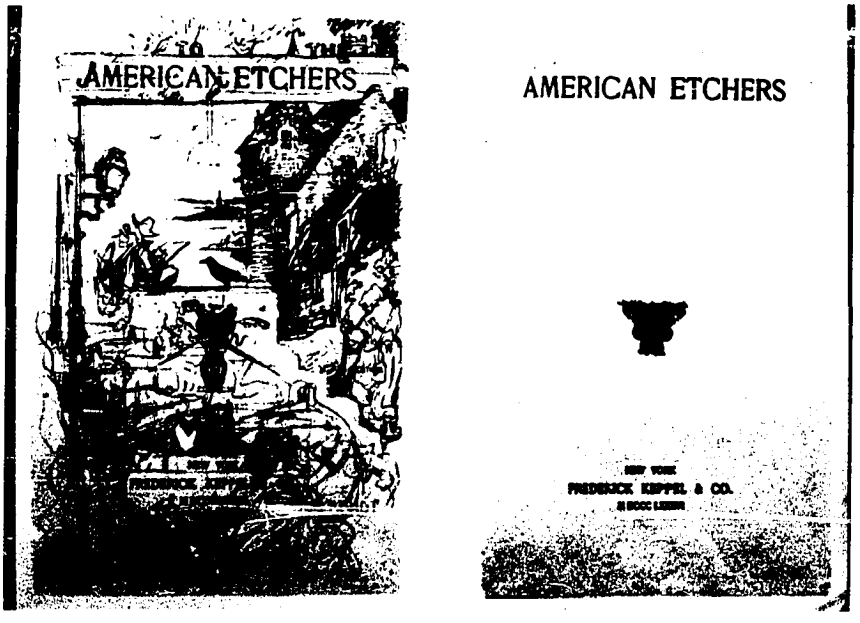


100. Camille Corot. The Interrupted Reading (1865-70). Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago.

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101. Anders Zorn. "Ernest Renan" (1892). Etching.



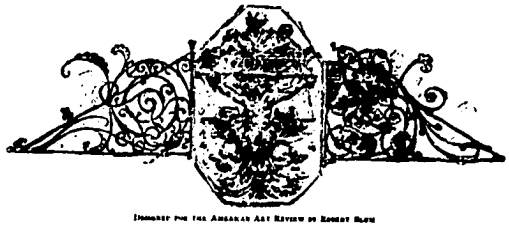
102. Felix Buhot. "The Critic." Pencil, pen and ink, and casein. On title page of MGVR, American Etchers, 1886. New York Public Library.

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103. James McNeill Whistler. Jo (1861). Drypoint. New York Public Library.

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Designed for the American Art Review by Robert Blum

WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE

FIRST ARTICLE.



Drawn by Robert Blum

ALL works of art have, of course, an intrinsic value; but they have also a relative value greatly dependent upon the time and place of their production. Merely to settle the rank of any given picture as good or bad painting it is but necessary to know the canvas itself. We are not concerned with the when and how of its creation, or with the nature and circumstances of the man who created it: its pure technics are alone under examination. But this is not half of what we understand by a complete judgment on a picture, still less by a complete estimate of any painter's work as a whole. To form such an estimate, we must consider his art as a factor in the local progress of civilization; we must examine what were all his surroundings when he created it, and, especially, what was the general state of art at the time; we must consider what men had gone just before him, and what were working by his side. Only thus can we understand his art in its entirety; only thus can we gauge the importance of it to his contemporaries, only thus decide what has been his by right of exceptional endowment, and what by right of mere inheritance shared in common with all the artistic portion of his generation.

When an artist has come in a period of pronounced transition, such a comparative method of criticism is especially demanded. In a period of transition Mr. Chase belongs, having indeed greatly [illegible] It will therefore be well for us, when considering his art, to [illegible] current of memory, which shall bring into [illegible] the [illegible] to which we had been most accustomed before he [illegible]

[illegible] ready to prophesy that American art was

104. Robert Blum. "Design and Drawing of the Knocker on the Studio Door of William Merritt Chase." Pen and ink drawings.

expression one remembers as being in such strong contrast to the massive character of the musician's face. The technical handling was a delight,—vigorous and broad in the extreme, not an outline stroke in the whole head, and the pen having worked with extraordinary freedom.

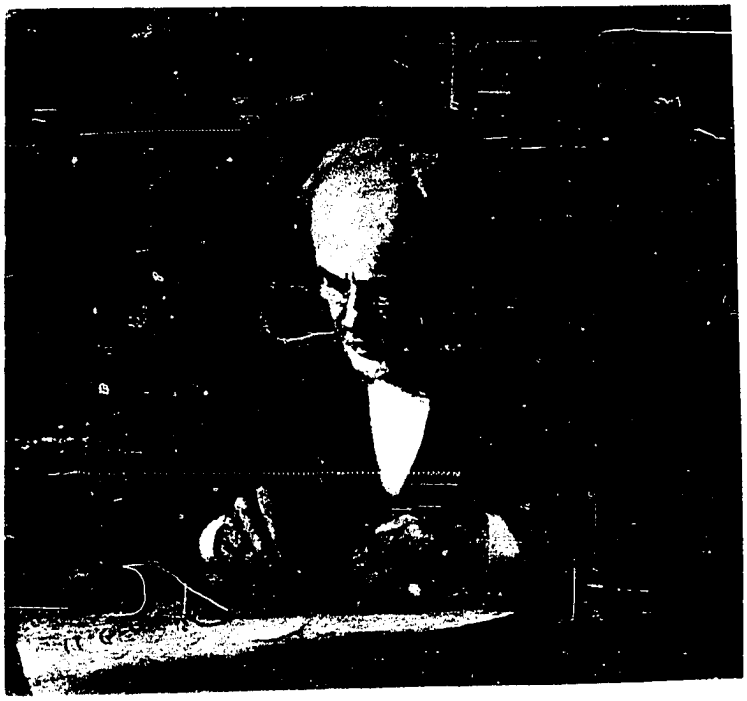
The initial illustration of this paper has been sketched from the knocker on Mr. Chase's studio door, a bit of Renaissance bronze brought by him from Venice. The head-piece represents his door-plate, also a bronze, but this time a clever piece of work done by Mr. Baur, of New York. The ornaments on each side of the plate were composed and added by Mr. Blum.

M. G. VAN RENSSELAER.

105. William Merritt Chase. "My Friend Frank Duveneck." Pen and ink drawing.



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106. Thomas Eakins. The Writing Master (Portrait of the Artist's Father) (1882). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



107. John La Farge. Magnolia Grandiflora (1870). Oil on canvas. Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Mass.

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108. Thomas P. Anshutz. Ironworkers: Noontime (1880-81). Oil on canvas. M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco.



109. John Singer Sargent. Joseph Jefferson (1890). Oil on canvas.

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110. Jean-François Millet. Two Men Digging (unfinished; 1855-56). Oil on canvas. Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Deluth.

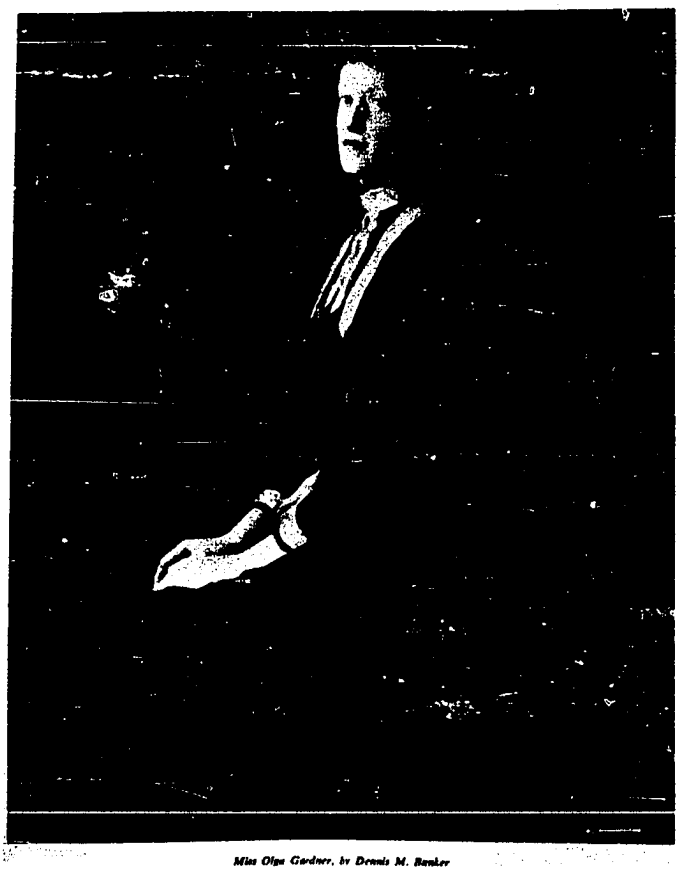


111. Jean-François Millet. Bringing Home the New-Born Calf (c. 1864). Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago;

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112. Thomas Eakins. *Lady with a Setter Dog (Mrs. Eakins)* (begun 1885). Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Miss Olga Gardner, by Dennis M. Bunker

113. Dennis M. Bunker. *Miss Olga Gardner* (1885-90). Oil on canvas.

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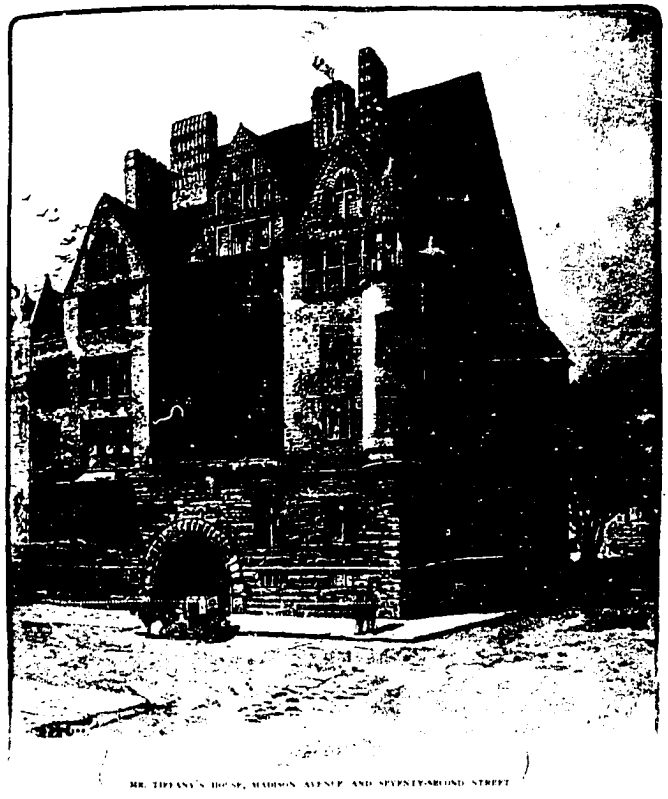


114. Carroll Beckwith. Mr. Isaacson (exhibited 1893). Oil on canvas.



115. Robert Blum. The Lace Makers (c. 1885-98). Oil on canvas. Mr. & Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz collection.

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MR. TIFFANY'S HOUSE, MADISON AVENUE AND SEVENTY-SECOND STREET

116. Harry Fenn. "Mr. Tiffany's House." Pen and ink drawing.

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117. Unidentified photograph, "Statue of Abraham Lincoln, Chicago."



118. Unidentified photograph, "'Abraham Lincoln' by Augustus Saint-Gaudens." New York Public Library.

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119. Daniel Chester French. Milmore Memorial (1890-91). Plaster model full size. Chesterwood collection, Stockbridge, Mass.

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120. Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Soldiers of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers (1884-97). Bronze (marble and granite setting designed by Charles F. McKim and Stanford White).



121. Detail of Shaw Memorial.

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122. Herbert Adams. Primavera (1893). Polychromed marble. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



123. Edmund A. Stewardson. The Bather (begun 1889; marble carved posthumously in 1894 from artist's plaster model). Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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124. Hendrik Christian Andersen. Conte Alberto Bevilacqua (a cast of this acquired by Henry James in 1889). Marble. Villa Helene, Rome.



125. Paul Manship. Pauline Frances (1914). Marble set in bronze frame designed by the sculptor. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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126. William Merritt Chase. A Tambourine Player (c. 1886). Oil on canvas. Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey.



127. Elihu Vedder. Delilah (with frame designed by artist) (1886). Graham Williford collection, New York.

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128. Douglas Volk. Pioneer's Rest (c. 1886).



129. Dennis Miller Bunker. A Dozing Tar (c. 1886).

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130. Thomas Hovenden. The Harbor Bar Is Moaning (c. 1886).



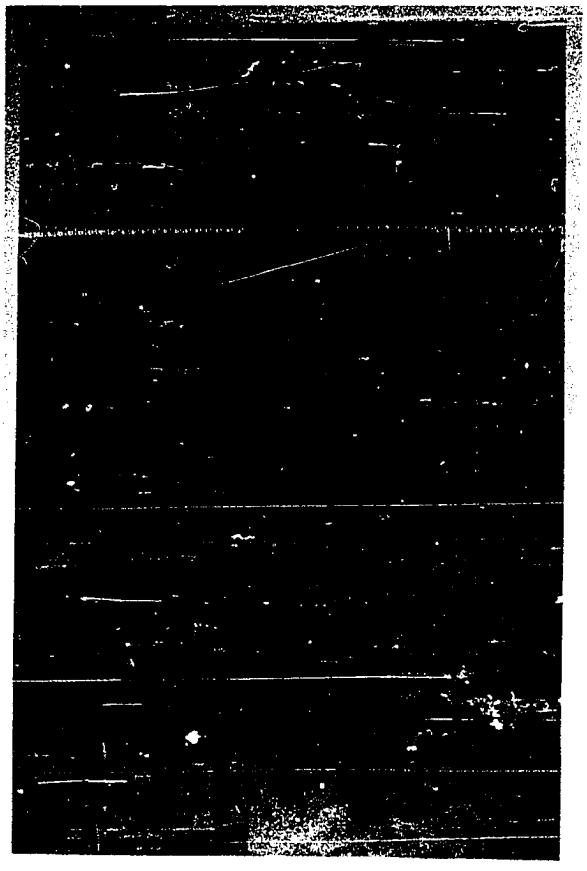
131. Thomas W. Dewing. The Days (1887). Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.

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132. Winslow Homer. Undertow (1886). Oil on canvas. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

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133. André Castaigne. Landing.



134. André Castaigne. After the Show.

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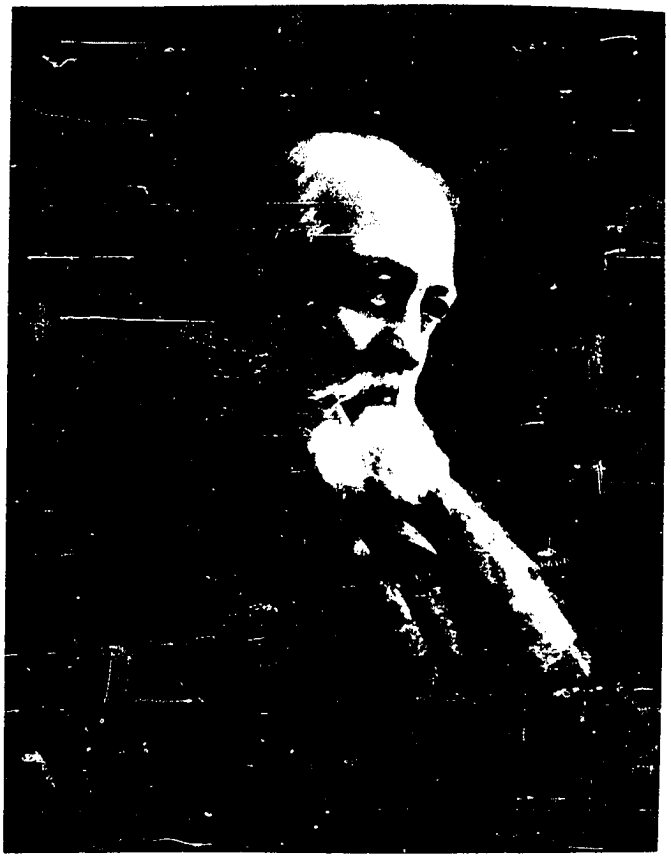


135. R. Swain Gifford. The Path to the Shore (1879). Original etching, American Art Review, Frontispiece.



136. Hendrik Christian Andersen. Frank Wallace Stout (1895).

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137. Fanny Perkins. Frederick Law Olmsted. Painted from photograph by James Notman.

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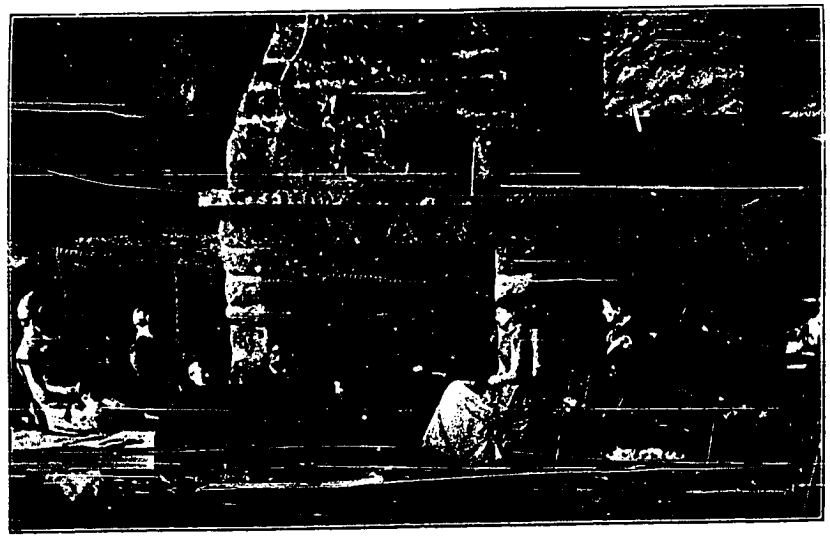


138. Abbott H. Thayer. Virgin Enthroned (1891). Oil on canvas. National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



139. Theodore Robinson. In the Sun.

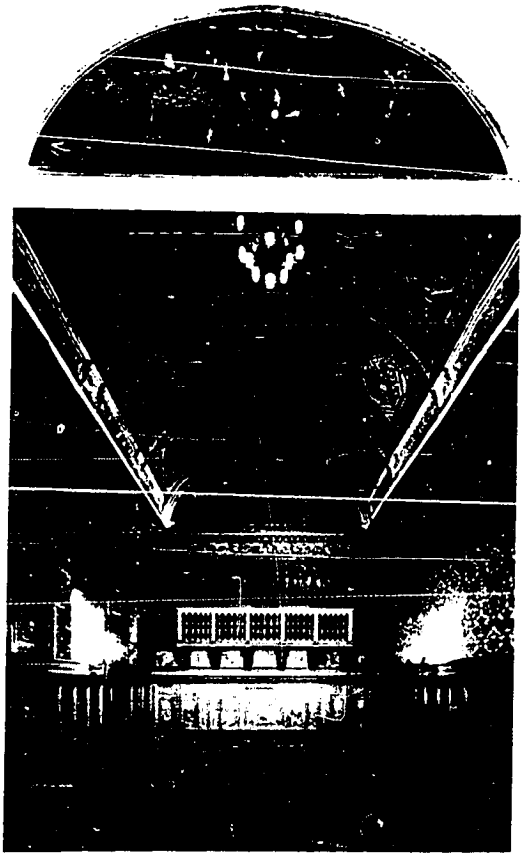
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INTERIOR OF STUDIO AT MARION

140. Photograph, "Interior of Studio at Marion" (1885-88).

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141. McKim, Mead, and White. "Music Room for Whitelaw Reid in South Wing of Villard Houses, New York City" (begun 1882), with Music by John La Large (1887).

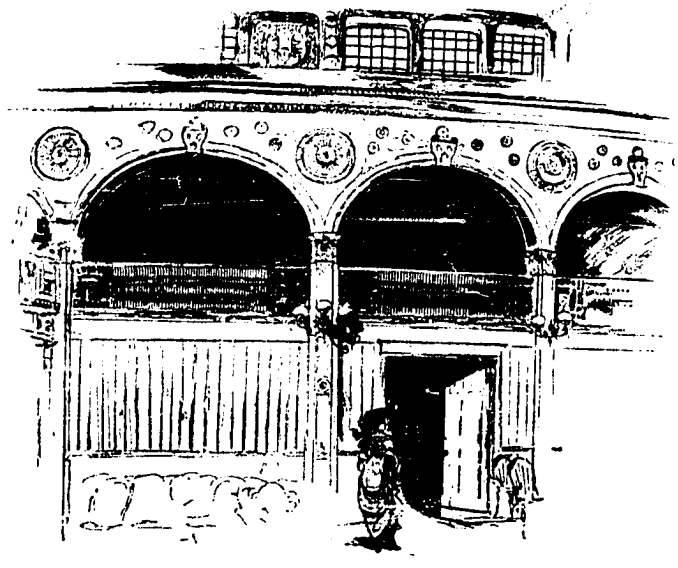


142. Villard Houses, Exterior.

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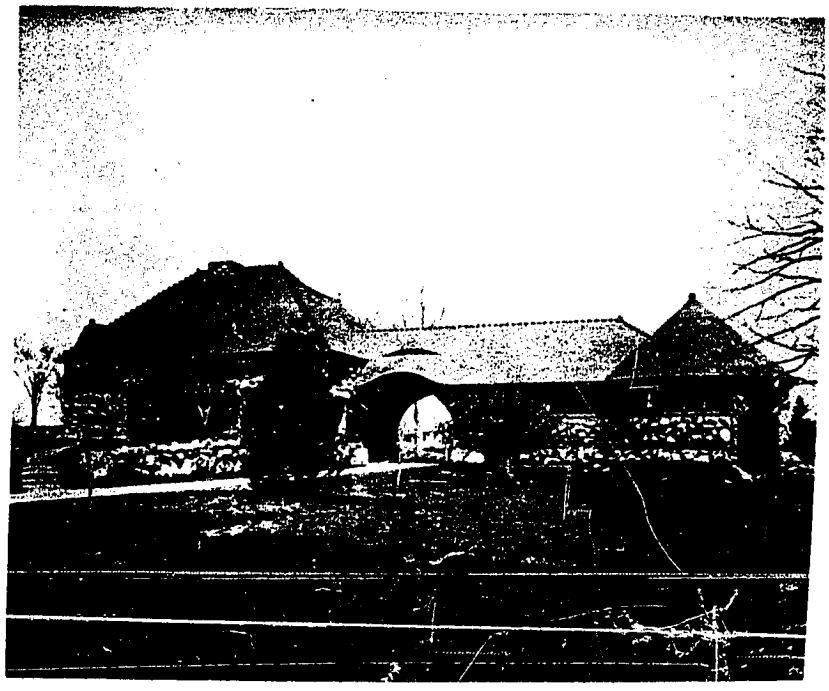


143. Alfred Brennan. Tower of the Casino Court, Newport.

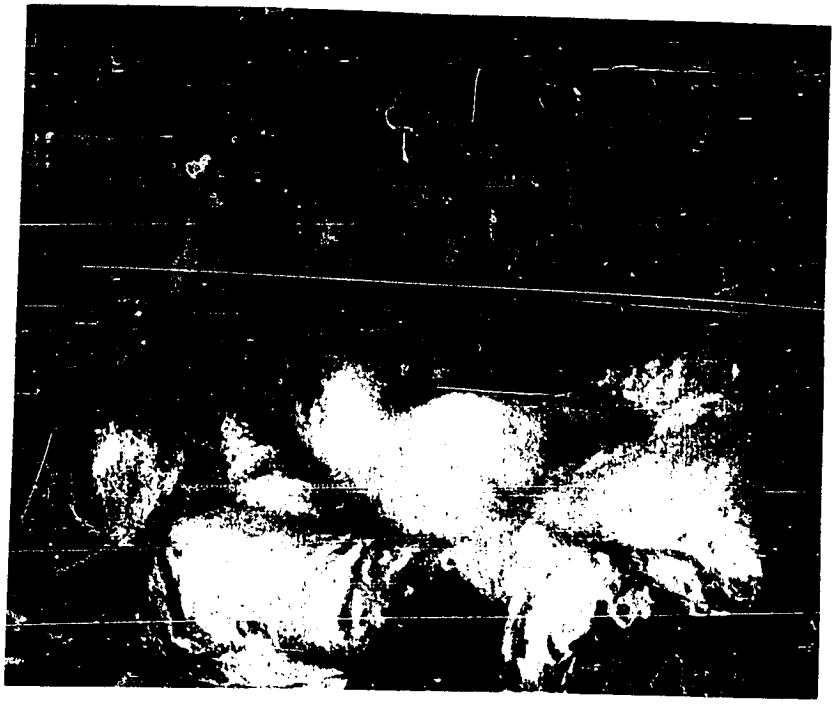


144. Alfred Brennan. Interior of Casino Theater, Newport.

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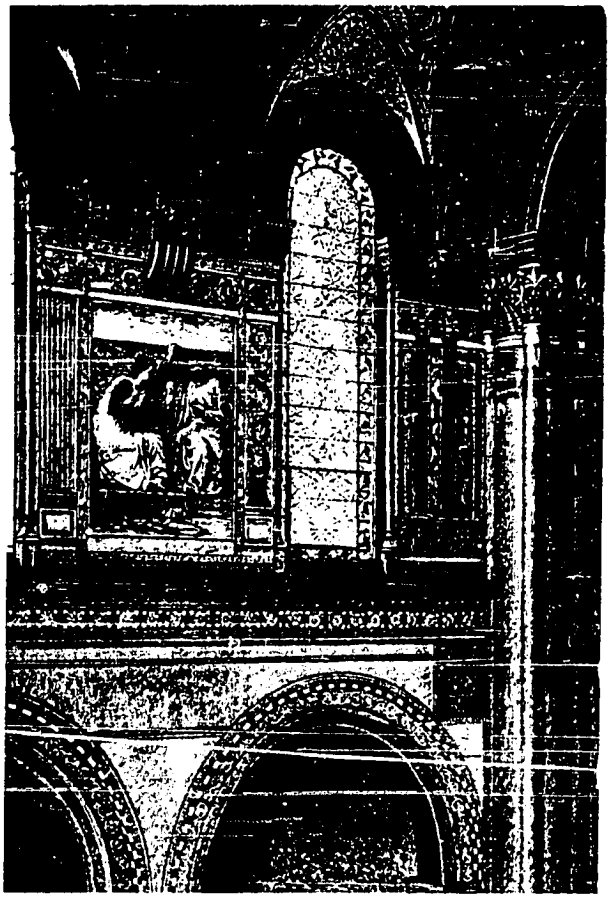


145. H. H. Richardson. "Gate Lodge, North Easton Massachusetts" (1880-81). Photograph. Harvard College Library.

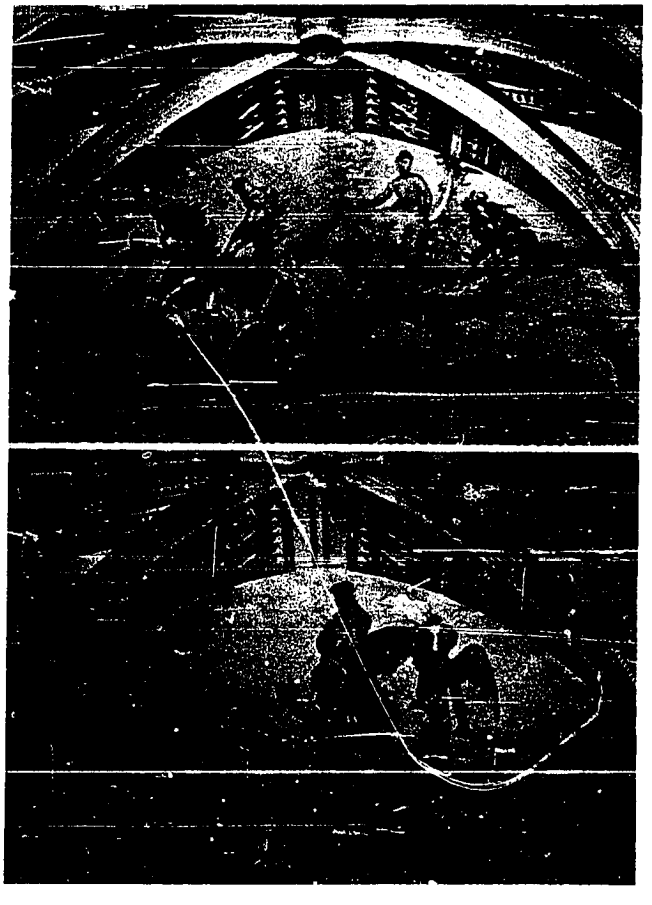


146. Jean-François Millet. Nude Lying in Bed (1844-45). Oil in canvas. Louvre.

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147. John La Farge. "Christ and the Woman of Samaria." Encaustic. Trinity Church, north wall of Nave, Boston.

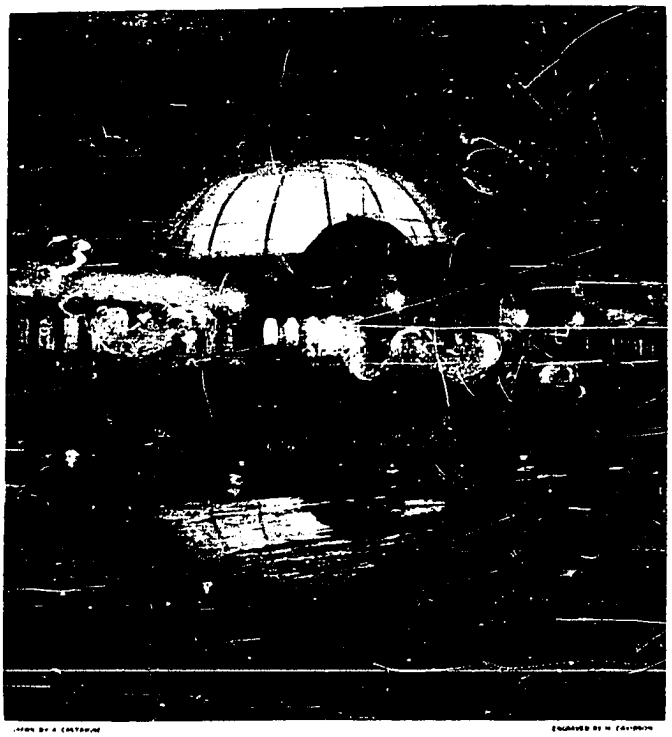


148. William M. Hunt. The Flight of Night and The Discoverer (1878). Oil on sandstone walls. Assembly Chamber, New York State Capital, Albany.

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149. Mary Cassatt. Modern Woman. Decoration of South Tympanum, Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.



150. André Castaigne. "Dome of the Horticultural Building--By Night."

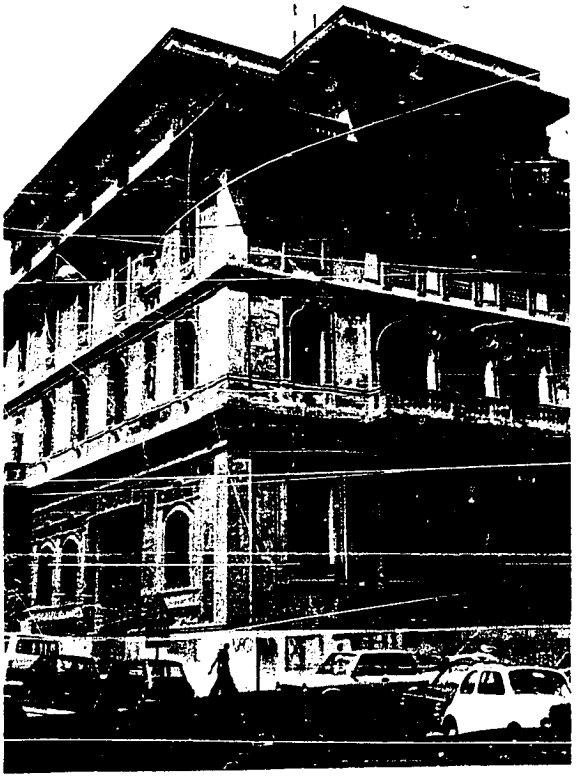
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THE ARTS OF WAR.

151. Gari Melchers. The Arts of Peace (1893).

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152. Studio of Hendrik Christian Andersen, Villa Helene, Rome.



153. Hendrik Christian Andersen. International World Centre (Ernest M. Hebrard, Architect, 1912).

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