



John Singer
Sargent
Watercolors

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ERICA E. HIRSHLER and TERESA A. CARBONE

Introduction by Richard Ormond

Technical essay by Annette Manick and Antoinette Owen

Contributions by Karen A. Sherry, Janet Chen, and Connie H. Choi

 Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Brooklyn Museum



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Directors' Foreword

JOHN SINGER SARGENT WATERCOLORS celebrates a great American artist and the shared collecting legacies of two great American art museums: the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Both came of age at a moment when the cultural leaders of their respective cities were committed to creating important art collections as centers of civic life. To fill their expansive new Beaux Arts galleries, trustees, directors, and curators in Brooklyn and Boston relied, as we do today, on the generosity of collectors and living American artists to achieve their goals. At the very same moment, both museums were beneficiaries of the energies and aesthetic discernment of one of the most brilliant and successful of contemporary artists, John Singer Sargent.

Demonstrating his strong, personal commitment to the advancement of American museum collections, Sargent advised the Brooklyn Museum's president, A. Augustus Healy, on the 1900 acquisition of a substantial body of James Tissot's watercolors and later recommended the purchase of Giovanni Boldini's famous portrait of James McNeill Whistler. In 1907 Healy commissioned his own portrait from Sargent (cat. 2). Two years later he leapt at the opportunity to buy the entire contents of Sargent's exhibition of watercolors at Knoedler's galleries, thus forever linking artist and museum.

Sargent's relationship with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, began during his first working trip to the United States in 1887; he proved to be a close friend to the museum, advising its leaders on purchases of art that ranged from El Greco to Sorolla. The first painting by Sargent entered the MFA's collections in 1905 (*An Artist in His Studio*, cat. 48), but the museum's purchase of forty-five of his watercolors in 1912 from Knoedler's marked a new level of commitment

and led to the commission in 1916 of Sargent's mural decorations for the rotunda and grand stair of the museum's main entrance, a project that occupied the artist virtually up to his death in 1925. The museum now holds more than five hundred of Sargent's works.

A landmark exhibition, *John Singer Sargent Watercolors* unites for the first time the whole of Brooklyn's and Boston's two quite distinct groups of watercolors, whose purchase before the First World War laid the foundations of Sargent's artistic legacy and offered a stirring demonstration of the commitment of two major American museums to the work of living American artists.

We are profoundly grateful to the funders who have made this exhibition and its accompanying publication possible: On behalf of the Brooklyn Museum, we thank the American Program of the Henry Luce Foundation and its Program Director, Ellen Holtzman, for their extraordinary support and encouragement. We are additionally grateful to the Robert Lehman Foundation and Sotheby's for their generosity. In Boston, we are indebted to our partners at Bank of America for their sponsorship of *John Singer Sargent Watercolors*, as well as for their long-standing support of the MFA's exhibitions and programs.

We must also thank our mutual funders: The Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts and the Foundation's president, Warren Adelson, for their significant support of all aspects of the exhibition, and the National Endowment for the Arts for its additional support. The accompanying catalogue has been made possible by a generous grant from the Vance Wall Foundation with additional support from the Ann and William Elfers Publication Fund at the Museum

of Fine Arts, Boston, and a Brooklyn Museum publications endowment established by the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

We are grateful to the exhibition's co-curators, Teresa A. Carbone, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and Erica E. Hirshler, Croll Senior Curator of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for their energetic and fruitful collaboration. The numerous other individuals who made key contributions to the project are named in the acknowledgments that follow.

We are delighted that *John Singer Sargent Watercolors* will be shared with audiences in Brooklyn and Boston, as well as in Houston. We are grateful to Gary Tinterow, Director; Emily Ballew Neff, Curator of American Painting and Sculpture; and Cornelia Cullen Long, Chairman of the Board of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for their support of and enthusiasm for the exhibition in Houston, a city that has long been home to a number of stunning Sargents in private collections and at the museum.

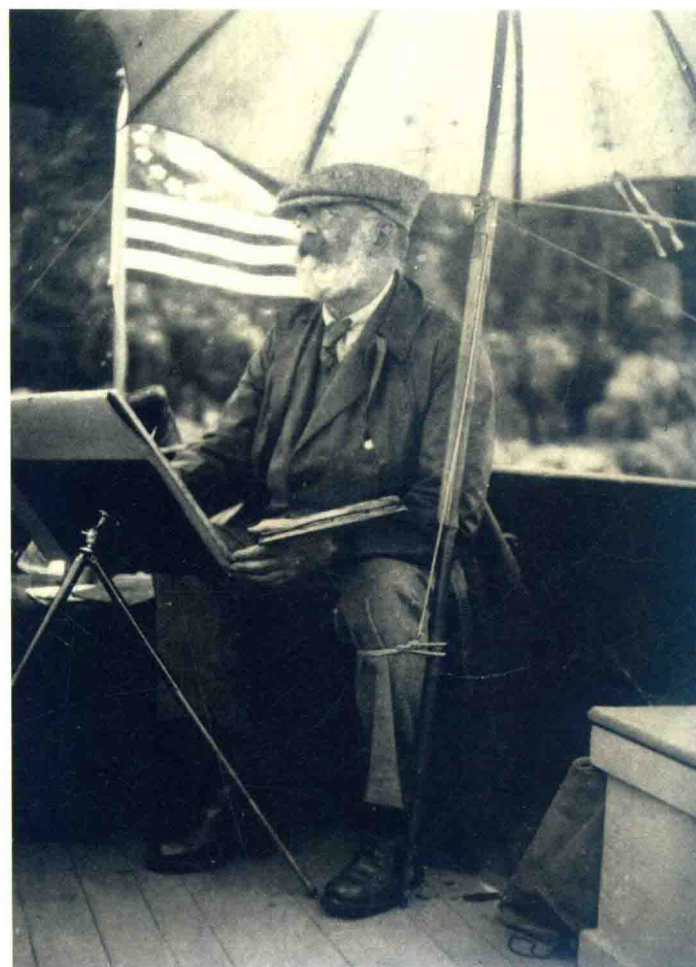
We are especially grateful for the ongoing support of the Trustees of the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and to John S. Tamagni, Chairman, and Stephanie Ingrassia, President, Brooklyn Museum, and to Richard Lubin, Chairman, and Sandra Moose, President, Board of Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

ARNOLD L. LEHMAN

*Director
Brooklyn Museum*

MALCOLM ROGERS

*Ann and Graham Gund Director
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*



Sargent painting in Maine, 1922

Acknowledgments

THE EXCEPTIONAL STAFF members at the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, contributed their considerable expertise and energy to ensure the success of *John Singer Sargent Watercolors*, and we extend our thanks to each one of them. We are deeply grateful to our directors, Arnold L. Lehman and Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director, for their extraordinary support of the project at every phase. We join them in expressing profound thanks to our funders for the exhibition and its accompanying publication, without whose sustenance and encouragement we could not have brought this project to completion. The exhibition has been enhanced by a select group of loans from private collections, and we are sincerely thankful to these friends for allowing us the chance to display their works and in so doing to expand our understanding of Sargent's work.

At the Brooklyn Museum, we additionally thank Kevin Stayton, Chief Curator; Ken Moser, Vice Director for Collections; Paul Bessire, Deputy Director for Development, and his staff, and especially Kathryn Lisa; former development head Paul Johnson; Sharon Matt Atkins, Managing Curator of Exhibitions, for her constant support in all administrative aspects of the project, and Dolores Farrell, Exhibitions Coordinator; Katie Welty, project registrar, with the support of Liz Reynolds, Chief Registrar; Lance Singletary, Exhibition Designer, and Jon Grizzle, Assistant Graphic Designer, for their elegant presentation of the exhibition in Brooklyn; Elaine Komorowski, for expert matting and framing; Walter Andersons, Collections Manager, Filippo Gentile, and the entire Collections staff for their work on the installation; Sara Devine and Sarah Sonner, Interpretive Materials; Shelley

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Special thanks go to the Paper Conservation staff at the Brooklyn Museum for their help and support: Rachel Danzing, Conservator of Paper; Beatriz Centeno, Mellon Fellow in Paper; Lisa Nelson, Contract Paper Conservator; Caitlin Jenkins, former Mellon Fellow in Paper; and Pavlos Kapetanakis, former Contract Paper Conservator. Bea and Lisa's help with infrared and false color imaging was invaluable. We also thank the botanical watercolorist Monika deVries Gohlke for helping us understand Sargent's virtuoso technique.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, we are grateful to Katie Getchell, Deputy Director, and Patrick McMahon, Director of Exhibitions and Design, both steadfast advo-

cates for the project; and Elliot Bostwick Davis, John Moors Cabot Chair, Art of the Americas, and Clifford S. Ackley, Chair, Prints, Drawings, and Photographs and Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Curator of Prints and Drawings, who have championed this interdepartmental effort. We also thank Maria Muller, Deputy Director, External Relations, and Andrew Russell, Director, Institutional Relations; exhibition designer Virginia Durruty, senior graphics designer Jennifer Liston Munson, and their colleagues and staff; Gillian Fruh, project manager; and Jill Kennedy-Kernohan, Registrar for Exhibitions. Our presentation benefited enormously from the interpretive talents of Barbara T. Martin, Barbara and Theodore Alfond Curator of Education, and Adam Tessier, Head of Interpretation. Janet Chen, Curatorial Research Associate in Art of the Americas, has been a devoted researcher, writer, and administrator, and we are truly grateful for all of her good work.

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For creating this beautiful volume, we are indebted to our colleagues in MFA Publications: Emiko K. Usui, Jennifer Snodgrass, Anna Barnet, Terry McAweeney, Cynthia Rockwell Randall, and Fronia Simpson, editor extraordinaire. We also thank Quinn Corte; Meredith Crawford; Alton Davis; Jenna Fleming; Karen Frasca; Melissa Gallin; David Geldart; Ann Ghormley; Jennifer Gillespie; Dawn Griffin; Deanna Griffin; Greg Heins; Chris Hightower; Amelia Kantrovitz; Mark Kerwin and his team; Lauren Kimball-Brown; Debra LaKind; Ralph LaVoie and the facilities crew; Kenneth Leibe; Elizabeth Martin; Paul McAlpine; William McAvoy; Julia McCarthy; Craig McQuate; Maureen Melton, Susan Morse Hilles Director of Libraries and Archives and Museum Historian; Katharine Mohana; Chris Newth; Janet O'Donoghue; Molly Papows; Kim Pashko; Brooke Penrose; Christine Pollock; Karen Quinn, Kristin and Roger Servison Curator of American Paintings; Sue Welsh Reed; Jennifer Riley; Matthew Siegal; Jennifer Weissman; Jean Woodward; and John Woolf.

Every book about Sargent has benefited from the heroic work of the Sargent Catalogue Raisonné, and we are beholden to Richard Ormond, director of the project, and his colleagues Elaine Kilmurray, Warren Adelson, and Elizabeth

Oustinoﬀ for offering us so much of their knowledge and expertise. We are especially honored to have been able to incorporate information and research from volumes as yet unpublished, a mark of scholarly generosity and collegiality that is a rare and much valued gift. We also acknowledge the generous assistance of our colleagues at the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at the Harvard Art Museums: Anne Driesse, Narayan Khandekar, Penley Knipe, and Henry Lie.

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As an exhibition team, we consider ourselves tremendously fortunate to have been able to devote our time and energies to these exceptional works by Sargent in the company of excellent colleagues.

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Preface

"SARGENT PAINTINGS SOLD," declared the *New York Times* in a scoop announcing the Brooklyn Museum's 1909 purchase of all the watercolors John Singer Sargent had exhibited at the Knoedler & Co. gallery in New York. When the event was described in the museum's annual report, the curator William Goodyear proclaimed that the acquisition of these works by Sargent meant that "no collection in the world has a more remarkable exhibit of modern pictures than the one offered by these water-colors, whether they be considered from the standpoint of technical dexterity, of optical veracity, of strong composition, of harmonious combinations and contrast of color, or of attractiveness to the general public, to which they immediately appeal by their charming choice of subject matter and unimpeachable beauty."¹ Three years later, it was Boston's turn; the Museum of Fine Arts bought Sargent's watercolors even before his 1912 exhibition opened. "The series . . . show[s] the painter in the most attractive, the most varied, the happiest and at the same time the most just light. . . . Every one of these pictures shows a new aspect of his talent," declared Jean Guiffrey, the curator of paintings, in the MFA's annual report.² The Brooklyn and Boston collections, shown at Knoedler's in 1909 and 1912 and brought together here, allow an unprecedented opportunity to reexamine the works Sargent himself had selected for his only two watercolor displays in the United States.

Even though many great scholars and artists have discussed Sargent's watercolors and unraveled some of their mysteries, our book offers new insights and information.

Using the objects that Sargent chose to represent his own best efforts in watercolor, we hope to explore the nuance and range of his technique, from fluid, broad washes to carefully worked watercolors that bear more than a passing resemblance to his oil paintings. We want to share new discoveries about Sargent's role in the exhibition and marketing of his watercolors, which turns out to be less active than previously believed. We would like to bring Sargent's works in watercolor back into the context of his career, for, although many critics and scholars have characterized them as simple souvenirs of his travels, they were an integral part of his artistic production beginning in 1900. In consequence, we have turned away from geography as an organizing principle and sought to examine some of the themes that attracted Sargent's attention no matter where he was: sun on stone, reclining figures tumbled together, patterns of light and shadow. And, finally, we want to reconsider Sargent's unusual compositions in the context of the disparate art world of the early twentieth century, a time on the brink of modernism, when the definition of what constituted art was being rewritten, but no one yet knew how.

Sargent's friend and biographer Evan Charteris wrote that "to live with Sargent's water-colours is to live with sunshine captured and held."³ Along with our fellow authors, we are delighted to give our readers the chance to become familiar with these amazing works of art and the complex man who made them.

TERESA A. CARBONE and ERICA E. HIRSHLER

