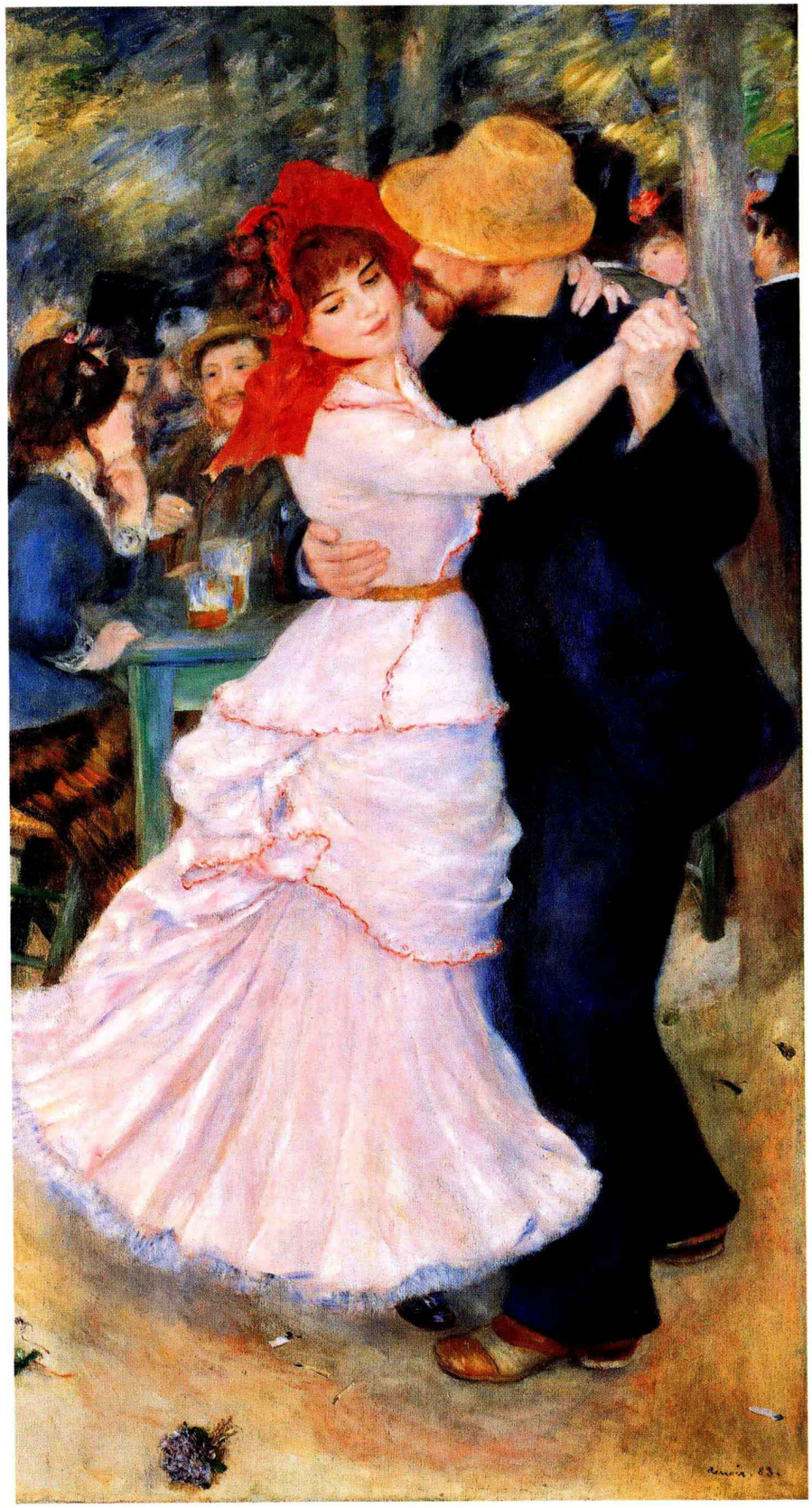
Masterpiece Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Masterpiece Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Editor: Beverly Fazio
Designer: Michael Hentges

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Front cover: John Singer Sargent. *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (detail). 1882. Oil on canvas, 87 × 87 in. Gift of Mary Louise Boit, Florence D. Boit, Jane Hubbard Boit, and Julia Overing Boit, in Memory of their Father, Edward Darley Boit

Back cover: Luis Meléndez. *Still Life with Melon and Pears*. ca. 1770. Oil on canvas, 25⅛ × 33½ in. Margaret Curry Wyman Fund

Frontispiece: Pierre Auguste Renoir. *Dance at Bougival*. 1883. Oil on canvas, 71⅝ × 38⅝ in. Picture Fund

Contents

Foreword	6
Introduction	8
European Paintings	15
Italian	17
Spanish	32
Flemish	36
Dutch	44
French	49
British	84
Danish	90
American Paintings	91
Modern Paintings	131
Index of Artists	147
Acknowledgments	148

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with commentaries
by the curatorial staff
of the Department of Paintings

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

in association with

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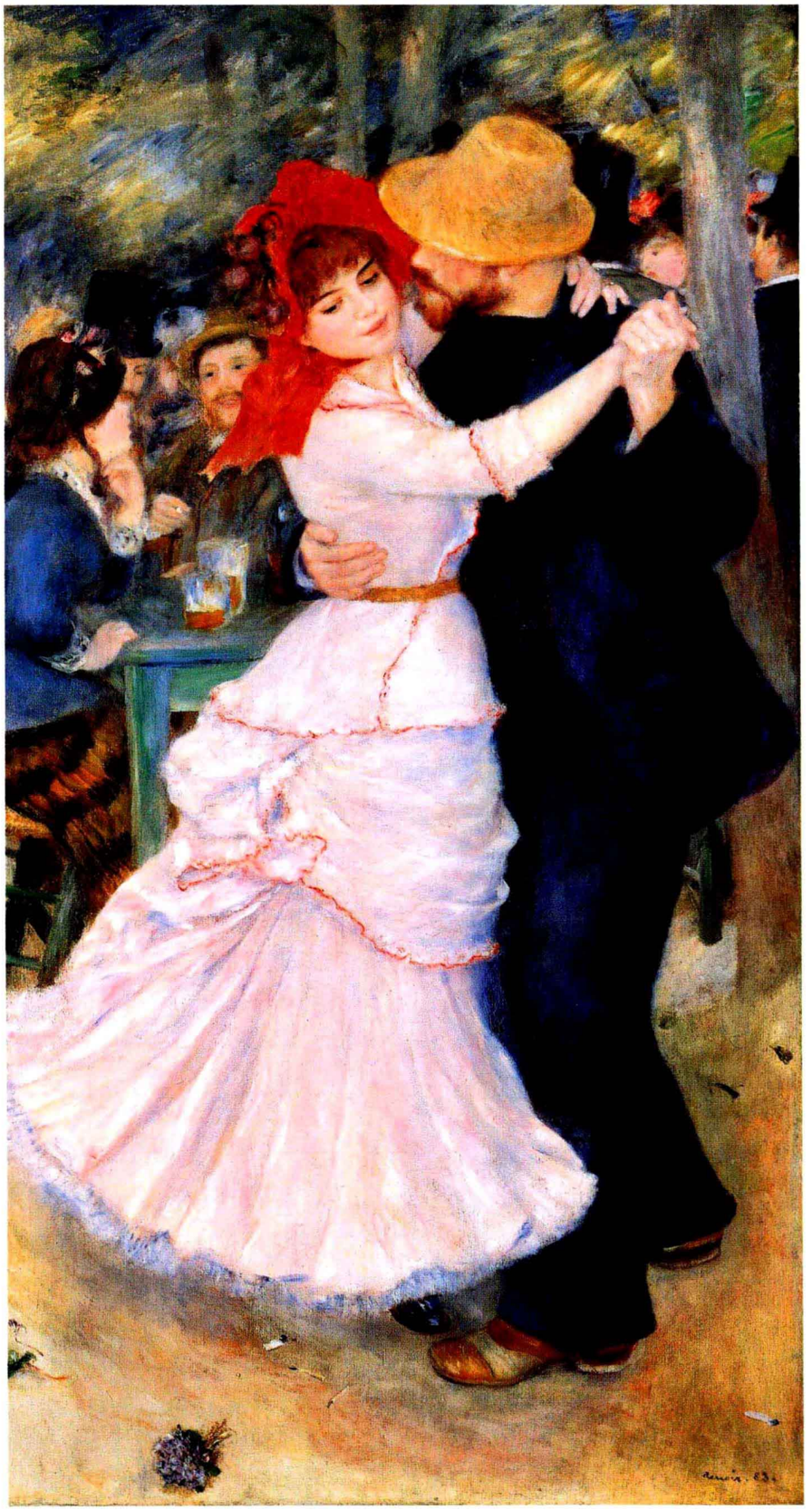

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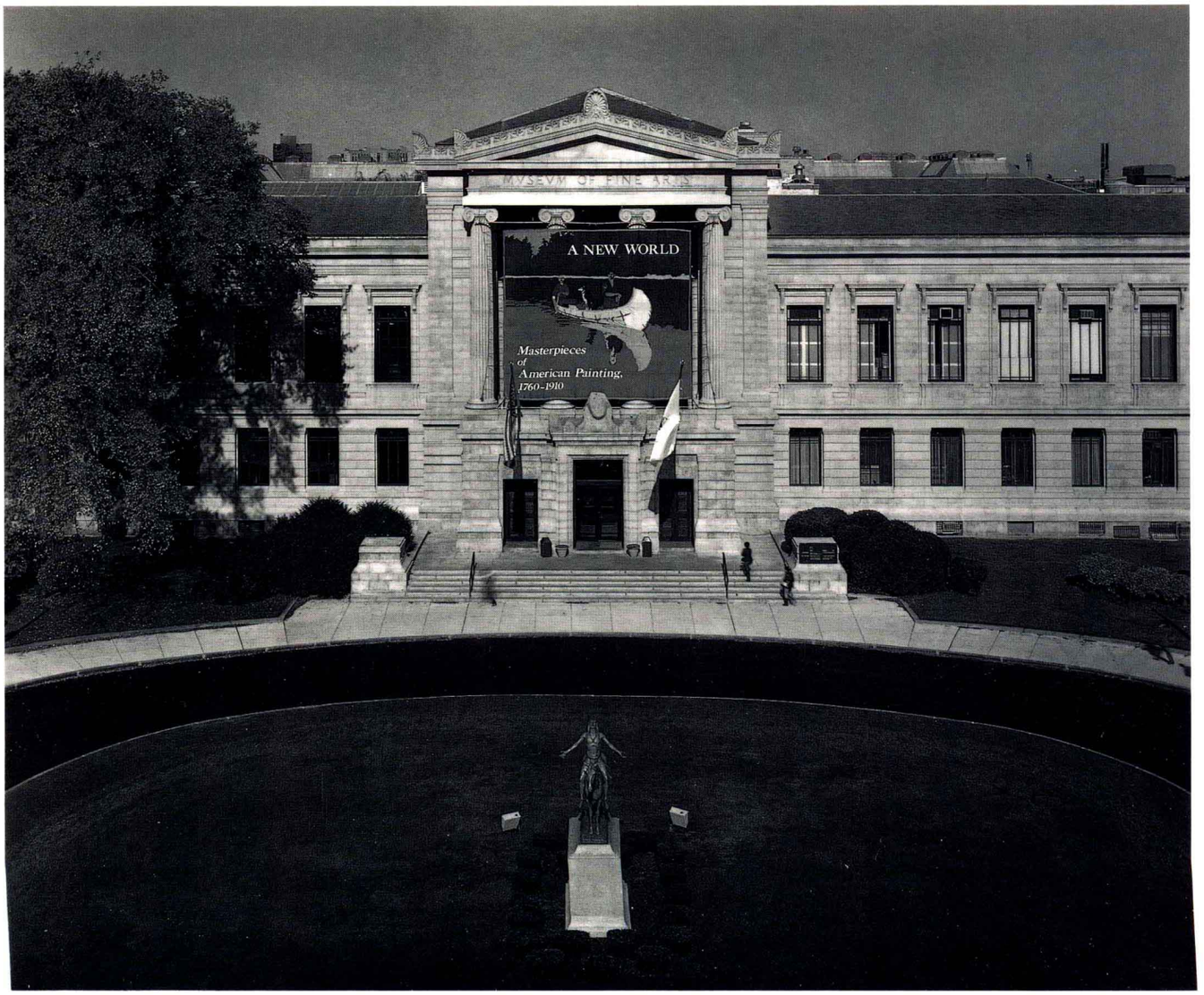
MVSEVM OF FINE ARTS
A NEW WORLD
Masterpieces
of
American Painting,
1760-1910

Foreword

With the publication of this book, we celebrate the rebuilding of the entire Evans Wing, which houses the Paintings Galleries at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Our public has waited patiently for several years while these galleries have been dismantled, and while a whole new system of climate and air control has been installed. Now, we can say with pride that more paintings are on permanent exhibition at the Museum than ever before in our history. The paintings have been sensitively installed for the enjoyment of the public in beautiful, refinished galleries, which have been made possible by farsighted gifts of some magnificent donors, for whom the Trustees have named many individual galleries and other spaces. And perhaps most important, the new climate-control system, making possible as it does stable temperature and humidity in the galleries and in the storage areas, helps us fulfill our highest obligation, the physical preservation and safeguarding of these collections for the enjoyment and instruction of future generations.

This rebuilding project has been truly a community effort, made possible by numerous acts of generosity and of devotion to this institution and its collections on the part of donors, Trustees, and staff alike. This project thus mirrors the way in which the paintings collection itself was formed. As the curators note in their short history of the paintings collection that follows, Boston's tradition is not that of the single, princely collector, but rather reflects a phenomenon quite special to this city—the widespread taste in the community for collecting paintings of all kinds, and the equally significant habit of making public-spirited gifts and bequests of those paintings, and of purchase funds to buy others, to the Museum of Fine Arts.

Boston has loved fine paintings, both American and European, for many generations. Over the years the city has formed its own taste, and so our collection has its own special strengths, which reflect the special regional culture of Boston and of New England itself. We reopen our Evans Wing with the hope that present and future generations will carry on this great tradition.

Jan Fontein, *Director*

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Introduction

On the occasion of the reopening of the Paintings Galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, after several years of renovation and the installation of a climate-control system, we take pride in presenting here 125 of the finest paintings in the collection. Each one is illustrated in color and each is accompanied by a commentary written by our colleagues in the Department of Paintings or ourselves. These masterworks were painted between 1310 and 1973 in eight countries of Western Europe and in the United States, and they provide a sampling of our collection of nearly four thousand American and European paintings.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was incorporated on February 4, 1870, "for the purpose of erecting a museum for the preservation and exhibition of works of art, of making, maintaining and establishing collections of such works, and of affording instruction in the Fine Arts." It grew out of the Boston Athenaeum, a private library and art gallery that served in effect as the city's art museum from shortly after it was founded in 1805 until 1877.

On May 26, 1870, the city of Boston awarded to the Museum of Fine Arts a parcel of land on Copley Square in the newly filled "Back Bay," next to the lot upon which Richardson's Trinity Church was shortly to be built, and where the Copley Plaza Hotel now stands. Fourteen architects submitted design proposals for the new building, and the Trustees chose that of the Boston firm of Sturgis and Brigham, which provided for a Ruskinian Gothic structure built of red brick with terra-cotta trimmings, similar to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Martin Brimmer, first president of the Museum of Fine Arts, proclaimed that the prizes of a museum's collection are "its best pictures and marbles," noting especially the "local duty" of the Museum, saying that its "collections would be singularly deficient if it did not contain a full representation of Copley and Stuart, of Allston and Crawford, of Hunt and Rimmer." From the start the Trustees followed this goal, aiming for a collection rich in the Old Masters and in European painting and equally committed to the best of American painting, with a special interest in Boston's own artists.

In the 115 years since its initial accessions, Bostonians have with equal generosity both established endowed purchase funds for paintings and given and bequeathed many of their best pictures to the Museum. Thus, of the 125 works included in this book, about half were gifts or bequests of friends of the Museum, and half were bought with the Museum's purchase funds. In general, the great holdings for which the Museum is best known—the superb, large groups of paintings by Copley, Heade, and Sargent, among the Americans, and by Millet and Monet

among the French—have come from gifts and bequests of private collectors, while purchase funds have been used to buy very special pictures unlikely to come to the collection as gifts, such as Harnett's *Old Models*, Turner's *Slave Ship*, Rosso's *Dead Christ*, or the Pollock, *Troubled Queen*.

This book reflects the whole of the paintings collection and thus records Boston's history and the city's special way of seeing as it has evolved over several centuries. One of the great strengths of the collection lies in the art of Boston and New England. Beginning with the first American school of painters, led by the Freake Limner around 1670, outstanding artists in every generation have worked in Boston and have been well patronized in the city. Local families have maintained a long tradition of passing along to the Museum their treasured paintings. As a result the collection is now unrivaled in eighteenth-century Bostonian painting—including Smibert, Copley, and Stuart—as well as in the nineteenth-century painters, from Washington Allston through William Morris Hunt and William Rimmer to such turn-of-the-century masters as the Museum School teachers Edmund Tarbell and Frank Benson and favored out-of-towners including Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent. The latter's masterpiece, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882, given to the Museum by the four sitters in 1919, remains one of the most popular pictures in the collection. During the nineteenth century Boston was busy collecting in two other fields, the Old Masters from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, and what was then modern French painting of the Barbizon and Impressionist Schools. Boston had only one truly great collector of Old Masters, Isabella Stewart Gardner, who was advised by Bernard Berenson, and whose collection, with its great Rembrandts, its Vermeer, and the Titian, *Rape of Europa*, far overshadowed that of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, when she opened her Venetian palace, Fenway Court, in 1903. In contrast, the Museum's Old Master pictures came into our collection singly and in pairs, often as the only or the major gift of a particular family. For example, Henry Lee Higginson, founder of the Boston Symphony, gave just one picture—but one of sublime importance—*St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child* by Rogier van der Weyden. Our first great Spanish picture, Velázquez's *Don Baltasar Carlos with a Dwarf*, was bought in 1901, and the Crivelli *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* was purchased in 1902 with Berenson's advice.

It was in the late nineteenth century that Boston formed a special affection for modern French painting. Hunt had studied with Millet in Barbizon, and he became his champion, buying *The Sower* in 1851 and successfully urging other Bostonians to buy the work of this important French painter. Over forty families bought Millets and later donated them to the Museum; most notable among Millet collectors was Quincy Adams Shaw, whose collection included twenty-seven oil paintings by this artist and an equal number of pastels, all of which were given to the Museum by his heirs in 1917. The art critic William Howe Downes wrote about Boston's taste and its style of collecting thusly: "Boston amateurs have never made such extensive, costly, and showy collections as those of the Vanderbilts, Belmonts and Stewarts of New York, or of Mr. Walters of Baltimore, but the number of good pictures modestly housed in the homes of the 'upper ten thousand' of the city is astonishing; and it is a significant fact in

the history of art that there was a time when New York dealers who had a good Corot or Courbet were obliged to send it to Boston in order to sell it."

Boston's next generation of collectors naturally turned from these Barbizon masters to the French Impressionists. They bought exceptional paintings by Manet, Degas, Cézanne, and Van Gogh, but they favored above all the beautiful, light-filled landscapes of Claude Monet. One observer noted with gentle humor in 1888 that "among Boston collectors it is not altogether impossible to find extremists who already avow openly their admiration for those mad outlaws, the Impressionists." Today the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, owns thirty-eight Monets, the largest collection outside of Paris. In the case of Monet's work, as with Barbizon and Impressionism in general, pleasing pictures of domestic scale came to the Museum from the homes of such collectors as Robert Treat Paine 2nd and John Taylor Spaulding, while purchase funds and the "eye" of curators and directors brought us such large-scale canvases as the superlative Gauguin *D'où venons-nous?* (bought in 1936), and the large Monet, *La Japonaise* (a 1951 purchase).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Boston was truly a modern city. Each generation of painters practiced an up-to-date style, often one recently imported from Europe. Copley portrayed his sitters, as they wished, in fashionable dress and surrounded by the very latest and most stylish furnishings. Eighteenth-century Boston was rebuilt in the latest Federal style by Charles Bulfinch, and it was rebuilt again in the most modern styles of Henry Hobson Richardson and McKim, Mead & White after the fire of 1872. Boston's taste for the contemporary served it well over the years, not least in the field of paintings that were collected here. This taste for the modern stemmed (as it frequently does) from confidence, which in Boston's case resulted from the fact that because the society was stable and money was being made, the city's future seemed bright.

But the city's mood changed around 1900. Van Wyck Brooks in his *New England: Indian Summer* studied this period in terms of literature and found Boston turning in on itself, increasingly pessimistic, and stagnating. A taste for the latest and best became instead a taste for the historic and sentimental; the modern and the experimental in paintings were no longer sought. Boston simply stopped buying contemporary art between 1900 and 1950 and consequently missed the opportunity to acquire works by Seurat and the Pointillists, Matisse and the Fauves, Picasso, the Cubists, and the Futurists, as well as the Surrealists and the advocates of Dada. Fortunately, this trend has been reversed, and the city's collectors are now actively and courageously buying in the contemporary field.

The building on Copley Square was soon outgrown, and it served as the Museum's home only until 1909. In that year a great new classical structure, designed by Boston architect Guy Lowell in the Beaux Arts style, and standing between Huntington Avenue and the Fenway, was opened. Its east wing housed Boston's great collections of Egyptian and classical art, while the west wing was given to the vast collections of Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian art. In 1911 a donor came forward to build a paintings wing on the Fenway side of the property: this was Maria Antoinette Evans, widow of the wealthy, self-made merchant Robert Dawson Evans, in

whose memory the gift was made. The majestic, colonnaded Evans Wing, designed by Lowell, opened in February 1915. Visitors admired its twelve spacious, beautifully articulated, second-floor galleries, all with skylights admitting natural light, and all lined with rich damasks in the nineteenth-century style. The marble Tapestry Gallery housed a fine collection of French and Flemish tapestries, while the whole of the first floor was devoted to curatorial offices, storerooms, a lecture hall, and the Department of Prints and Drawings. Accompanying the opening was a special loan exhibition that included 110 European and American paintings drawn from the collections of thirty-five Boston families, and that put its emphasis on the directions the Museum would pursue in the following decade—Italian Baroque, English eighteenth-century, Barbizon, and French Impressionist painting. Major lenders included Mrs. Henry C. Angell, whose collection of French paintings came to the Museum in 1919, and Mrs. Evans herself. When Mrs. Evans died in 1917, the Museum received an endowed purchase fund as well as her collection of some fifty paintings, including the Jordaens and Vigée-Le Brun portraits illustrated here.

During the early years of the Museum there was no Department of Paintings as such, and responsibility for them fell to the "Division of Western Art," whose tripartite responsibilities included Paintings, Textiles, and "Other Collections." Beginning in 1902 John Briggs Potter, an able painter himself, was appointed keeper of paintings, and in 1910 a group of friends offered to fund for three years the post of curator of paintings, provided a distinguished scholar could be found. In 1911 the position was filled by Jean Guiffrey, adjunct curator of paintings at the Louvre, and the Paintings Department was founded. At the same time, a group of collectors pledged $100,000 a year for two years for the purchase of pictures. Guiffrey spent the funds wisely, buying major works by Andrea Solario and Lucas Cranach, by Guardi, Claude, and Turner, together with large groups of watercolors by La Farge and Sargent, an early Copley, and the telling portrait of *Marquis de Pastoret* by Paul Delaroche illustrated herein.

Guiffrey's leave of absence from the Louvre came to an end in March 1914, and he returned to France after a most productive tour of duty here. John Briggs Potter, as keeper, was again in charge of the department, this time until May 1, 1930, when Philip Hendy was appointed curator. An Englishman, Hendy had been assistant to the keeper of the Wallace Collection in London, and he had come to Boston three years before to write a scholarly catalogue of the paintings in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. During his term in Boston he concentrated on conservation of the collection, the refurbishment and reinstallation of the galleries, and the organization of exhibitions (including an important show of American colonial portraits). He also published a catalogue of the collection in 1932, and in addition purchased several fine Italian pictures, including the exquisite Giovanni di Paolo, *The Virgin of Humility*. Moreover, a number of superb pictures were received as gifts during this time, including Manet's *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (given in 1930 by Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Macomber) and the superior double-portrait by Degas, *Edmondo and Thérèse Morbilli* (given by Robert Treat Paine 2nd in 1931). In October 1933 Hendy resigned to become director of the Leeds Gallery in England.

A year later, in April 1934, George H. Edgell, a teacher of fine arts at Harvard and dean of Harvard's School of Architecture, was appointed curator. He was the institution's third curator of paintings, and he had served for only a few months when, in October 1934, he was also made director of the Museum. Continuing as curator, he was assisted by Charles C. Cunningham, who went on to a distinguished career as museum director in Hartford and Chicago; James S. Plaut, who later played an important role as director of Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art; and Mrs. Haven Parker, who wrote a pioneering book on Copley and whose close relationship with the department continues to this day.

Remarkable acquisitions were made in the years between 1935 and 1937. Robert Treat Paine 2nd, a notable and generous connoisseur of pictures, gave his famous Van Gogh, *The Postman Joseph Roulin*, and important purchases included the fine Renaissance panel by Fra Carnevale, the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, bought with income from the Charles Potter Kling Fund, Renoir's *Dance at Bougival*, and the unsurpassed Gauguin, *D'où venons-nous?* In addition, two important modern American pictures were bought, setting the stage for a collecting effort that continues today; these were Charles Sheeler's *View of New York* and Edward Hopper's *Room in Brooklyn*.

Edgell, who served as director until his untimely death in 1954, continued as curator only until 1937, when W. G. Constable, former director of the Courtauld Institute, London, was appointed as the fourth occupant of the post. Constable served for almost twenty years and is well remembered for his significant and wide-ranging acquisitions, including the Duccio *Crucifixion*, Canaletto's *Bacino di San Marco, Venice*, and the Poussin *Mars and Venus*, as well as several of the notable American pictures in the collection by Harnett, Eakins, and Ryder—all of which are included in this volume. Constable was a distinguished scholar who published widely on such painters as Richard Wilson and Canaletto; his ground-breaking book *Art Collecting in the United States* (1964) remains much in use today.

John Taylor Spaulding, who in 1921 had given a notable collection of Japanese prints, in 1948 bequeathed to the Museum a splendid, wide-ranging group of paintings strong both in the French School and in the modern American field. Included were magnificent examples by Renoir, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Fantin-Latour, as well as by Prendergast, Henri, Bellows, and Hopper. If Spaulding was the typical Boston collector, with his genteel background and his Harvard education, then Maxim Karolik—who provided the other great donation of 1948—was cut from a different cloth. A Russian émigré with a flamboyant manner that struck some Bostonians as charming and others as crude, Karolik became a full-time collector of American art after marrying the much older, wealthy Bostonian Martha Amory Codman in 1928. He first collected American colonial furniture of the highest quality, and he gave this collection to the Museum in 1938. Karolik then turned to American nineteenth-century painting, seeing his opportunity in the unjustly neglected period between Stuart and Homer, or roughly the years 1815 to 1865. Karolik became the modern discoverer of Fitz Hugh Lane, Martin Johnson Heade, and a host of other major American masters. His gift in 1948 brought to the Museum 233 paintings that he had gathered over the past six or seven years; it

was followed by further gifts, and a generous bequest in 1964. All in all, the M. and M. Karolik Collection constituted the most significant single donation of paintings ever received by this Museum.

Edgell's successor as director was Perry T. Rathbone, who also served as paintings curator in the years 1955 to 1972 and who was in many ways responsible for bringing the Museum into the modern age. The pace of exhibitions quickened, and major shows in these years were devoted to the work of Copley, Sargent, Van Gogh, and Matisse, and to the "Age of Rembrandt." Magnificent acquisitions of Old Master and modern paintings were made in this era, and purchases included ten of the pictures found in this volume, notably the masterworks by Rosso Fiorentino and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, as well as Lucas van Leyden's *Moses After Striking the Rock*, Ruisdael's *Rough Sea*, and Edvard Munch's *The Voice*. Significantly, it was during Rathbone's directorship that exhibitions of modern art and the purchase of important twentieth-century painters first occurred, and this led to the formation of a Department of Contemporary Art in 1971. Kenworth Moffett served as curator until 1984, and major acquisitions included a superlative group of paintings by Morris Louis. From 1972 to 1977 the Department of Paintings was managed by Laura Luckey and Lucretia Giese. The major acquisitions of this time occurred in 1975, when the Boston Athenaeum, facing the need to raise capital funds, decided to sell the best of its paintings collection, which had long been on deposit at the Museum. The Museum purchased several of these historic works, including *Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome* by Pannini, *Young Woman in a White Hat* by Greuze, *Pat Lyon at the Forge* by Neagle, and *King Lear* by West; later, after a protracted negotiation, it also bought half-interests in *George Washington* and *Martha Washington*, both by Gilbert Stuart.

In 1977 John Walsh, Jr., became the first Mrs. Russell W. Baker Curator of Paintings, and Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., was appointed curator of American Paintings. A department that had frequently had no curator now had two. Working together with Director Jan Fontein they were responsible for an active series of paintings exhibitions, including "Pissarro," "Chardin," and "Jean François Millet," as well as "Washington Allston," "Thomas Eakins," and "The Lane Collection." They also organized exhibitions of American paintings for an international audience, including a show of sixty-three pictures from Smibert to Dzubas that toured the People's Republic of China in 1981 and the widely acclaimed survey of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American painting, "A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760–1910," which traveled to Washington, D.C., and to Paris in 1983–84. Recent purchases of European pictures—for example, the beautiful works by Largilliere, Boilly, and Caillebotte included here—have of necessity been imaginative and eclectic, for the Museum's purchase funds, which have brought so many great masterpieces to Boston, can no longer compete in today's art market for major works by the greatest masters.

On the American side, the Museum's effort has been twofold: to add truly outstanding paintings where possible in the older areas and to build the modern collection. Superb gifts in pursuit of these goals have been received, most notably Copley's masterpiece of 1765, *Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel)*, and Joseph Stella's *Old Brooklyn Bridge*. The Museum has also been

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