

Art at Vassar



Fall/Winter 2016/17

Why We Lend

If you owned a necklace worth a million dollars would you lend it for two or three months or more to someone you did not know or knew only slightly because she had a reputation for honesty? Or, if you owned an automobile worth the same amount would you let someone drive it for a similar duration because he had a perfect driving record? If your answer is no, you might wonder why we lend works of valuable art in this manner. Perhaps these analogies seem absurd or flawed. After all, elite jewelers lend such things to actresses to wear on the red carpet at film awards (for a few hours) because it is good advertising. If there were such a thing as a ten million-dollar automobile, it would be wholly a personal choice subject to personal feelings of generosity or obligation, perhaps. But, the fact remains that we are often asked to lend to peer institutions very valuable works of art for lengthy periods.

Art museums, such as Vassar's, collect works of art and hold them in the public's trust to serve the mission of the institution. This usually focuses on the educational use of the works. One of the implied obligations of museum collecting is to share works with other institutions that subscribe to similar missions. Thus, each year we field many requests from museums around the world to lend (usually key works) from the collection. We also regularly request the loan of objects to enhance our exhibition projects as, for example, the upcoming exhibition *The Art of Devastation: Medals and Posters of the Great War* demonstrates via its combination of medals borrowed from the American Numismatic Society and posters from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Special Collections, Vassar Library. The photograph accompanying this article shows me in the Art Center's galleries posing in front of a painting of the Parthenon by Frederic Church that was on loan



to us from the Metropolitan Museum. The fiscal year 2016/17 will see works from our collection traveling to exhibitions in Syracuse, Houston, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Palm Beach, New York City, and Brooklyn to name some of the domestic locations. Internationally, we will have works on view in exhibitions in London, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, and Basel. The pace of such loan requests has picked up markedly over the past twenty years and our staff does a remarkable job insuring that our works of art travel and return safely.

When a loan request comes to us it is circulated to the curators and the registrar for their comments and recommendations. Our curator of academic programs will indicate whether there is any impact on the teaching program if the work is absent for a semester or longer. Our other curators will assess whether the work's condition will allow it to travel and experience additional handling. They might point out whether the work has been loaned too often over the past decade or so or, if the work is one on paper, what its recent exposure history has been. The input of the registrar is very important in

assessing the physical environment of the borrowing institution based on a lengthy facilities questionnaire that must be completed. All of these factors are important and, with their comments in hand, I am better able to make an informed final decision. Inevitably there are also possible subjective criteria in play. Have we a strong collaborative history with the borrowing institution, for example, or is there another sort of obligation or pragmatic consideration? While we do not normally lend to commercial galleries, we were once asked by a dealer for a painting that was part of a collection he steered to Vassar in the first place. Under such circumstances it would have been silly to stand on some rigid principle and refuse.

Many millions of dollars are spent each year organizing major loan exhibitions at museums the world over. It is quite often the case that the requests received are for the better and more valuable works in one's collection. The chief curator at the Louvre told me many years ago that the most requested work in their entire

collection was not the *Mona Lisa* (museums knew of that impossibility) but another lady, Whistler's mother. A friend of mine in the business world was incredulous when I told him that we are not paid a substantial fee to part with (or rent) a great work of art. While some museums are beginning to leverage the value of their collections through the monetization of lending, for us it would be a serious breach of the educational mission. Admittedly though, if you were one of the lucky museums that own one of the less than three dozen Vermeers in the world, it would be difficult to resist a six-figure loan fee offered by a motivated exhibitor when your budget needed balancing.

With every movement of a work of art there is the possibility of incurring damage through handling, transport, misadventure or *force majeure*. In other words, a certain amount of risk is assumed when the answer to a loan request is yes. Therefore, a critical appraisal of the risk/reward scenario needs to be a key part of the process, and the serious study of the proposed exhibition concept and your work's role within it is mandatory. For example, a survey of fruit in art might not be a persuasive concept for lending our painting of *Figs* by Georgia O'Keeffe but a critical reassessment of her still-life paintings might be. A request for a key work, let us say, our study of a pope by Francis Bacon, is greatly furthered when the organizing curator has visited the museum and discussed the exhibition with our staff well ahead of time, a step which you might think is reflexive but is not—in fact it is surprising how some museums try to organize shows by perusing your collection online and ordering from it based on a digital image as if shopping on Amazon. So, concept, methodology, and safety are key components of the decision to lend. The last criterion is illustrated by a recent request we received to lend one of our major Abstract Expressionist works to an exhibition in London, a major world capital; we had intended to honor the request until we learned that in order to ship the painting there, the plan was to fly the work by air freighter (it was slightly too large to fit in the hold of a passenger flight) to Amsterdam and then drive it by truck through the Channel Tunnel adding another ten hours to the existing twelve hours of movement from Poughkeepsie to Amsterdam. It seemed at that point that the line between prudence and unacceptable risk had been crossed.

As ambitious curators continue to raise the bar on blockbuster exhibition ideas that can set in motion around the globe hundreds of millions of dollars worth of art, it is important for us to ask the difficult questions about whether we are remaining true to our mission and goals by lending. Or, perhaps, indirectly participating in a costly and possibly risky scavenger hunt for artistic trophies where the greatest pride of achievement lies simply in conquering the difficult political and logistical hurdles alone. In this dynamic, common sense is one's best ally.

James Mundy
The Anne Hendricks Bass Director

Suspended in Time

Celebrating Heroes:

American Mural Studies of the 1930s and 1940s from the Steven and Susan Hirsch Collection

September 2 – December 18, 2016

The 1930s and 1940s were a golden age for murals in America where the everyday worker rose to the status of a primary hero. As in film, photography, dance, music, literature, and theater of the time, ideas lifting up the citizen to a starring role blossomed in American mural art.

Suspended in time, thousands of realistic miners, settlers, Native Americans, steelworkers, and farmers inhabit murals painted during the Great Depression in government buildings and schools across the nation. Evidence of a period when America revitalized its pledge to democracy, these paintings were accessible to everyone who could enter a post office or a school or a government building in Washington. Unlike murals of the past with their allegories and neoclassical ideals, these works carved out a new ideal for American mural painting inspired in part by the socially conscious panels of the Mexican muralists and the regional murals of Thomas Hart Benton and Boardman Robinson. For the most part they pictured ordinary Americans in ordinary tasks, either historical or contemporary, and pushed artists' sketches of everyday episodes to monumental sizes. Consequently, the everyday became heroic during a harsh period when so many of America's everyday peoples struggled.

Artists struggled, too. The murals were part of a government-led push to put artists to work, just like other citizens. In what Woodstock painter Judson Smith called a "renaissance," artists for the first time in America were equated as workers worthy of keeping their skills alive. The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration hired mostly unemployed artists, while the Section of Painting and Sculpture (later the Section of Fine Arts) hired artists who were considered the most qualified for a particular job. Indeed, the Section's winners won prominent commissions, while runners-up gained smaller ones. Artists felt as never before a kinship with the everyday worker, and they felt for the first time that they were a part of the social fabric of society.

Artists working for the Federal Art Project could explore various artistic styles, including surrealism and cubism. Those working on post office murals for the Section were encouraged to paint in styles that were understandable, in what was called the American Scene, that is, creating "what they feel and see immediately about them," according to the writer of a contemporary article. Still, though, the post office artists received plenty of criticism from the American public and from government officials in charge of a project, but they worked with both in trying to resolve issues. To connect their murals with local audiences, these artists met with local committees and developed themes of interest to townspeople. The artist was indeed encouraged to visit the locale and spend time there to find out the keenest subject in the minds of the audience. In later years, during and after World War II, when the last of the post office murals were being completed, artists met a growing chorus of complaints from conservative forces skeptical of the philosophy behind the murals and critical towards murals that addressed sensitive and contentious subjects.

While some of the New Deal murals have been uninstalled from post offices and schools, many more are still in their original locations or have been moved to other buildings where they can be viewed. In any event, the story of their making lies in the sketches made by artists vying in regional or national competitions or given commissions directly. There are also those sketches that failed to win mural contests, and in this exhibition there are examples of those, including mural sketches made for the Poughkeepsie Post Office.

The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center is fortunate to have a large number of mural sketches in its permanent collection, many generously given by Susan and Steven Hirsch. Researching the Hirsch gifts affords an opportunity to see the themes that emerged in mural making from the Great Depression until after World War II. One

sees this most brilliantly in the unheralded grouping of mural sketches by Russian-born Woodstock artist Anton Refregier for the Rincon Annex of the San Francisco Post Office. His mural series on the history of the city of San Francisco encapsulates several of the subjects addressed in the mural sketches by other artists. His themes on Native Americans, settlers, the history of the city, farming, industry, and opposition to forces undermining a free society are all subjects in the other works on view, most of which were created for post office mural competitions.

For instance, the Russian-American artist rendered two Native American men farming at Mission Dolores, the earliest mission in San Francisco. While they tend to hauling and to watching a herd of sheep, a priest preaches in the background. All seems an imaginative rendering of everyday pursuits, though in his earliest sketches for this scene one learns that the politically progressive artist viewed the Roman Catholic conversion of native peoples as exploitative.

Refregier cast the settler in numerous roles, as Roman Catholic monk, Russian trader, east coast immigrant crossing the plains or arriving by ship, newspaperman, a rebel hoisting the flag of the California republic, a miner discovering gold, and men waiting for mail, building the railroad, and surveying—that is, activities promising a new life and livelihood out West. Other artists in the exhibition also cast settlers as immigrants, and in religious, diplomatic, and social terms with no obvious tension as in some of the sketches by Refregier.

Even the city and a sense of boundless commerce, a quality missing somewhat from contemporary experiences during the depression years, were ripe for treatment in mural sketches. The resilience and productivity of both the city and the land sprang forward as subjects. A case in point, Woodstock painter Arnold Blanch contributed a losing entry to the Poughkeepsie Post Office mural contest of the city’s waterfront in 1940. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who lived in nearby Hyde Park, had taken a keen interest in planning the new post office and chose the theme. Bridges on either side of Blanch’s composition frame an expansive cityscape pulsating with colorful buildings chockablock. The rowers on the Hudson River add yet more energy and reflect Roosevelt’s great interest in the annual rowing regatta at Poughkeepsie.



Anton Refregier (American, b. Russia 1905–1979)
Study for mural, San Francisco Post Office,
Rincon Annex
Mission
Tempera, watercolor, and graphite on Masonite
Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971
2015.23.1.18



Arnold Blanch (American, 1896–1968)
Study for mural (unrealized) for Poughkeepsie,
New York, Post Office
View of Poughkeepsie in 1940
Tempera and graphite on Masonite
Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971
2014.46.1

While Refregier painted miners methodically mining for gold, Philo and John Ruggles rendered studies with more mechanical industrial experiences. The two little-known brothers from the Bronx together painted a huddle of miners clawing the earth in unthinking repetition for the Yerington, Nevada, Post Office. In a mural sketch for the Bridgeport, Ohio, Post Office they pictured two steelworkers laboring in a claustrophobic underworld of wheels, drills, and pipes (see the cover).

In his sketches for the Rincon Annex murals, Refregier battled religious, anti-immigrant, and political forces undermining a free society. New York City resident Stuyvesant Van Veen, a politically leftist artist like Refregier, painted a mural sketch for the War Department Building competition in 1941 in Washington, D.C., that pitted troops

against regressive forces. For Van Veen, these powerful influences included the Ku Klux Klan, the Michigan priest and radio star Father Charles Coughlin, and a bloated capitalist, the symbol of greed.

With topics tied to Native Americans, settlers, farmers, industrial workers, the city, and forces threatening a free and open democracy, the mural sketches in this exhibition represent a specific point in American history. They also represent the common and everyday, a radical idea for monumental paintings. Lifting the ordinary to heroic status, these artists and the Washington art projects that sponsored them established a new ideal for American mural painting, based in the raising up of the citizen during desperate times.

The exhibition is supported by the Evelyn Metzger Exhibition Fund.

Patricia Phagan
*The Philip and Lynn Straus Curator
of Prints and Drawings*



Philo B. Ruggles (American, 1906–1988)
John Ruggles (American, 1907–1991)
Study for mural (unrealized), Yerington, Nevada,
Post Office, 48 States Competition
Miners, 1939
Gouache, oil, and gesso on paperboard
Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971
2015.23.4.3



Stuyvesant Van Veen (American, 1910–1988)
Study for mural (unrealized), War Department Building,
Washington, D.C.
*The Real Battle; The True Defense is Against the Forces of
Hatred, Ignorance, Greed, and Poverty*, 1941
Gouache and graphite on Masonite
Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971
2015.23.14

The Enduring Expression of Diane Arbus

CURATOR'S CHOICE

A clean-cut, adolescent boy stares solemnly into the camera; his eyes, locked on the viewer, reveal both his resolve and his innocence. Dressed in a rumpled sport coat, a stiff straw hat, and a slightly askew bow tie, he is doing his best impression of an adult—only his Adam's apple and his ears, a little too big for his face, betray him. His expression reveals little emotion, yet the buttons on his lapel, which read, "God Bless America, Support our Boys in Vietnam," and "BOMB HANOI!" boldly announce his politics. The portrait, taken in New York City in 1967, is set against a stately stone building and is tightly cropped just below the boy's elbows, the top portion of an American flag poking into the frame, heightening the awkward demeanor of its subject—an outsider in his own country.

This photograph was taken by Diane Arbus, one of the most influential photographers of the last half-century, at the height of her short but remarkable career. This image is exemplary of the artist's skill in spotting the unexpected in everyday life. Known for her straight-forward, black-and-white photographs of unusual, eccentric people on the margins of society taken both on the street and in their own homes, Arbus was a master at capturing her subjects' posture, expression, and individuality in order to expose their vulnerability and make them seem more human. Like much of Arbus's oeuvre, this image carries an emotional content that is found not in the face of the subject, but in the potential impact it has on the viewer.

While many street photographers in the 1960s, including Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, and Helen Levitt, were partial to a 35mm format for its trim size and immediacy, Arbus favored a 2 ¼-inch, twin-lens Rolleflex camera. With this larger format, she was able to produce sharper detail, more clarity, and the square, uncropped prints for which she became known. The Rolleflex required Arbus to stop the person or people she wanted to photograph and have a conversation with them, eventually asking permission to take their picture. This protocol often meant her images depict subjects not in action, but just moments before or after the action—in this case waiting for, rather than marching in, the parade. She usually took several shots and then later, in the studio, selected which one to print. It is clear that this image was chosen for its subtle intensity and the way she has cleverly, if momentarily, disarmed her subject.

This fall seems to be a perfect occasion to celebrate Arbus's work, as her one-person exhibition, *Diane Arbus: In the Beginning*, is on view at Met Breuer through November 27. The Art Center's permanent collection includes eleven works by Arbus, each one worthy of close inspection, but this work, close to fifty years old, remains particularly relevant today as political rallies and anti-violence protests once again dominate American current events. This photograph expertly reflects 1960s turmoil in the U.S. and, at the same time, it is testament to Arbus's important contribution to photography that will endure for decades to come.

Mary-Kay Lombino

*The Emily Hargroves Fisher '57 and Richard B. Fisher Curator
and Assistant Director of Strategic Planning*



Diane Arbus (American, 1923–1971)
*Boy with a Straw Hat Waiting to March in a
Pro-War Parade, N.Y.C., 1967*
Gelatin silver print
Purchase, Louise Woodruff Johnston, class of 1922, Fund
1974.21.3

Marshaling Support

The Art of Devastation: Medals and Posters of the Great War

January 27– April 9, 2017



M. Nelli Company, Florence
One Heart for All the Cohort (reverse), 1916
Struck bronze, minted in Florence
American Numismatic Society, New York, 2014.14.34



Tiffany & Company, New York
Peace as Woman (obverse), 1915
Struck bronze, minted in New York City
American Numismatic Society, New York,
1940.100.383, Gift of Mrs. Robert James Eidlitz



Karl Goetz (German, 1875–1950)
The Sinking of the Lusitania (obverse), 1915
Cast bronze, produced in Munich
American Numismatic Society, New York, 1980.56.5,
Gift of C. Ebsen

Rare today, art medals thrived for centuries and rose to new heights during World War I. This exhibition of over 100 medals from both sides of the Great War reasserts their significance as works of art, and coincides with the 100th anniversary of the United States' entry into the war. The medals are complemented by war posters, which demonstrate commonalities between both mediums.

Before the war began, the commemorative and propagandistic functions of the medal were already well known and understood. Established in Italy in the fifteenth century, early medals came into being through the revival of interest in antiquity, with particular attention to ancient coins. Soon afterwards, enthusiasm for the medal expanded to Germany, where it became a vehicle for celebrating emperors as well as city officials, diplomats, bankers, and art patrons.

Often shaped like a coin, the medal traditionally bears a portrait with an inscription on the front, and a related image, sometimes with text, on the reverse. At times issued in editions, medals were either cast or struck. Casting consists of the artist sculpting models of the front and back, making molds of each, and pouring liquid metal (which solidifies into the space) between the molds. In contrast, struck medals involve making a die of the image and imprinting it with great force onto medal blanks in a minting press.

Increasingly, by the turn of the twentieth century, the medal had become an important medium of more reflective, intimate, and private artistic expression. During World War I, tens of thousands of different types of medals were produced on both sides, consuming scarce metallic resources. This outlay underscores the fundamental role that medals played in fêting heroes, marshaling support, directing public opinion, and, more poignantly, expressing disgust. That medals could attain such importance is largely lost to modern audiences due in part to the seriously diminished role that medals play in today's societies, and in part to the fact that medals have been overshadowed by more artistically accessible, public, and still viable forms of communication like the poster.

There are numerous parallels between First World War medals and posters, including state and institutional sponsorship, the use of similar or identical imagery, and their exhortative function. During World War I, posters transitioned from advertisements for material items and leisure to patriotic calls for recruitment and aid, with their easily grasped messages and images switching broadly from commercial concerns to persuasion and propaganda. Artists on both sides of the conflict produced millions upon millions of copies of lithographic posters with designs meant to arrest the eye and attract the public's attention immediately.

In contrast, medals diverge significantly from posters in the intimacy of their communication. Meant to be held in the hand and contemplated over longer periods, the medal engages one viewer at a time, eliciting a response that is less collective and more individual. This is particularly the case with privately produced art medals that did not reproduce typical patriotic or heroic messages, but rather focused on the non-partisan human tragedy of the war, something posters could never do.

The two largest producers of medals during the war, the French and Germans, also produced the strongest contrasts in artistic styles. German medallic artists, like Karl Goetz (1875–1950) and Ludwig Gies (1887–1966), abandoned the use of classical allegory and allegorical figures that continued to adorn medals produced in France

and the Low Countries and that served to distance the viewer from the horrors of the war. German artists embraced the horrors. Often grotesque and satirical, their medals depict death, destruction, and personal calamity with an immediacy and bitterness wholly absent in the work of those on the far side of the trenches.

Medallic artists and their sponsors on both sides of the conflict were highly aware of each other's work and responded to it in kind. This type of discourse, played out in the medals themselves, is most apparent around contested events like the sinking of the British ocean liner *Lusitania*. The British, for example, responded to one of Goetz's medals on the sinking of the ship with their own copy, which inspired Goetz to respond with yet another medal. At the same time, Gies sidestepped this politicized discourse of the tragedy by drawing attention instead to the panic and struggle for life by those torpedoed.

To be sure, the sinking of the vessel led to a wave of anti-German publicity and recruitment posters in Great Britain. The British artist Bernard Partridge (1861–1945), well known for his political cartoons for *Punch* magazine, responded with the much-reproduced, allegorical recruiting poster *Take Up the Sword of Justice*. In this appeal, he presented a vividly rendered, defiant Justice standing upon the sea with the wreck of the ship, behind her, taking on water and tilting at the horizon, passengers strewn among the waves.

The U.S. was drawn into the war from the beginning. Both sides pinned their hopes on support from this critical neutral country, although it soon became apparent that America was no impartial bystander. Growing disillusionment with the U.S. can be traced in German medals, while pleas for greater involvement in support of the Allies can be found in French and Belgian medals, especially. Meanwhile, medallic artists in the U.S., sometimes with the support of institutions like the American Numismatic Society, began to express their views on the conflict. Many of these artists had trained in Paris before the war and so were thoroughly steeped in Beaux-Arts style, although in American hands a different vernacular was developing that emphasized naturalism over detail.

It comes as no surprise that many American medals were produced in support of the Allied cause and also adhered to the same cautious refinements and use of allegorical figures. There are, however, major exceptions. It was only once the U.S. was fully committed to the war that the first instances of American medallic art appeared conveying the same degree of emotion and brutality that had become commonplace in European medallic art almost since the war began. One of the most striking examples was produced in 1918 by the highly regarded sculptor Paulanship (1885–1966), who, like most of his peers, maintained a studio in New York City. Like much medallic art produced in the U.S. before the war, Manship's medals were intended to help victims of the war with the proceeds from the sales. The sculptor's bile reached its peak with a non-commissioned work, his notorious *Kultur* in Belgium medal. Here one side depicts a brutish German soldier rushing off with a young woman, his war prize; the other shows Wilhelm II, the German Kaiser, bayonetted at the ready, and a rosary of skulls around his neck. Poster artists such as the American illustrator Frederick Charles Strothmann (1872–1958) and others furthered the theme of the brute German soldier, or "hun."



Bernard Partridge (English, 1861–1945)
Take Up the Sword of Justice, 1915
Color lithograph
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of John T. Spaulding
RES.37.1408
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

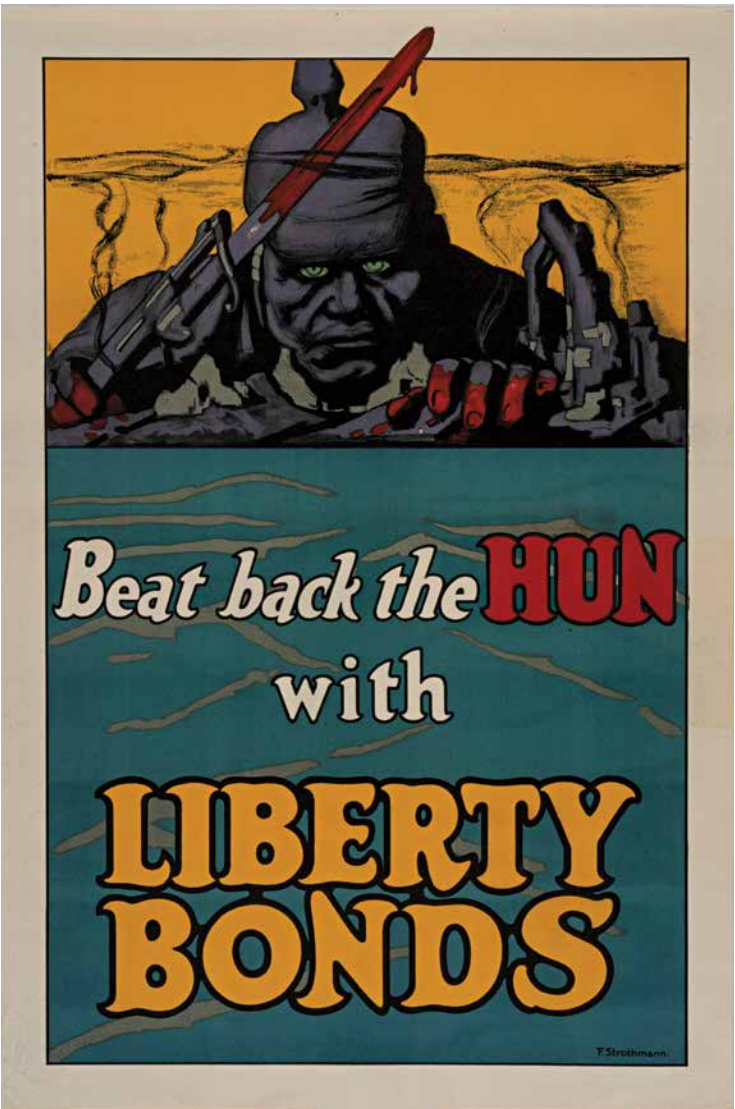
The medals on view come from the permanent collection of the American Numismatic Society in New York, which co-organized the exhibition with the Art Center. Interspersed are war posters on loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries. *The Art of Devastation* is divided into several sections, such as Heroes, War as Myth, Soldiers, Women and the War, German Atrocities in Belgium and France, the Central Powers' View of America, the U.S. War Medal, and Victory.

Support for the exhibition is made possible by the Smart Family Foundation.

Patricia Phagan
Philip and Lynn Straus Curator of Prints and Drawings
Peter van Alfen, Margaret Thompson Curator of Ancient Greek Coins,
American Numismatic Society



Paul Manship (American, 1885–1966)
The Foe of Free Peoples: Kaiser Wilhelm II (obverse), 1918
Struck bronze, minted in New York City
American Numismatic Society, New York, 1929.54.10,
Gift of Albert Gallatin



Frederick Charles Strothmann (American, 1872–1958)
Beat Back the Hun with Liberty Bonds, 1918
Color lithograph
Archives and Special Collections Library,
Vassar College Libraries

The Value of Collecting

Universal Collection: A Mark Dion Project

May 26 – December 11, 2016

ON VIEW

Mark Dion's work is often inspired by the sixteenth-century notion of a Wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosity, a collection of objects, ranging from natural history specimens to works of art of every category, that reflect the inclinations, personal taste, and means of their collector. Objects were collected, often during transnational excursions, for their aesthetic, historical, and material value and sometimes for their age, rarity, or peculiarity. For *Universal Collection*, Dion delved deeply into the history, ideology, and methodologies of collecting practices at Vassar College, resulting in an extraordinary exhibition that not only reflects the character of this historic institution, but also, much like the cabinets of our Renaissance predecessors, serves to reaffirm the college's educational mission, its traditions, and its uniqueness among its peers.

When Dion set out to create an installation in the Atrium Gallery he had only just begun to familiarize himself with the history of Vassar College and the treasure trove of objects amassed by various departments on campus. As the objects were discovered and selected over the course of several months, an overall theme and several underlying ideas began to take shape and solidify, ultimately culminating in an arresting visual array that at once seduces and challenges viewers as it breaks with our assumptions of how things are selected, categorized, and displayed in a museum setting.

To view the cabinet as a whole is to get a glimpse into what is distinct about Vassar's cultural history, what rituals are carried forward from the early days, and what has changed over time. The installation is rich with artifacts that tell a story about the college, but it also addresses a much larger issue about colleges and universities as collectors and the rationale behind the accumulation of their collections. Today, in the digital age, when images and information are just a click of the keyboard away, an argument can be made for abandoning collections altogether. Yet, most students currently enrolled at Vassar, and many others in their generation, seem to have a renewed fascination with things that can be seen in person, experienced with the senses, and studied in the way their grandparents might have done. The belief in the aura of an object lives on in their young minds. Perhaps this can be seen as a backlash against the ephemeral nature of technology and the rapid disappearance of the physical manifestations of the immediate past as well as a reminder that new is not always better, and less is not always more.

Universal Collection is on view throughout the fall semester and a fully illustrated publication accompanies the exhibition. As visitors arrive each day and pull out the drawers and encounter an assortment of class pins or ancient oil lamps, peer into a shelf full of preserved reptiles floating in jars, or look down from the landing at an array of Vassar's possessions, new discoveries and imaginative connections are sure to be made.

Universal Collection is generously supported by the Creative Arts Across Disciplines initiative of Vassar College, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation; and the Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center Exhibition Fund. Additional support provided by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and by The Helen Forster Novy 1928 Fund.

Mary-Kay Lombino
The Emily Hargroves Fisher '57
and Richard B. Fisher Curator and Assistant
Director of Strategic Planning



Universal Collection: A Mark Dion Project, 2016
Detail view
Photo by Chip Porter



Universal Collection: A Mark Dion Project, 2016
Installation view
Photo by Jeffrey Jenkins

“For through the painter must you see his skill”

Shakespeare in Art from the Permanent Collection

September 21 – December 23, 2016

2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare (1564–1616). To commemorate this occasion, the Art Center has organized with Leslie Dunn, Associate Professor of English, the Focus Gallery exhibition, “For through the painter must you see his skill”: *Shakespeare in Art from the Permanent Collection*. Highlights include a trio of prints made in conjunction with the seminal Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery, which opened in London in 1789, as well as drawings donated by Matthew Vassar, such as *The Death of Hotspur* by John Trumbull. Among the thirteen works on view are paintings by American-born artists, including *Titania’s Fairie Court* by Washington Allston and *The Shrine of Shakespeare* by Sanford Robinson Gifford. Adding to the international scope of the exhibition are dynamic nineteenth-century prints by French artists Édouard Manet and Eugène Delacroix.

This project joins a wider, yearlong celebration of Shakespeare on campus. Among the events were an evening of music by St. John’s Recorder Ensemble and readings by Shakespeare Troupe at the Art Center on April 21 and the Shakespeare Festival, a series of performances and games held in the Shakespeare Garden on April 24. The exhibition *Shakespeare at Vassar* at the Frederick Ferris Thompson Memorial Library, which runs from August 29 through December 16, is accompanied by a catalogue with texts on the Shakespeare Garden (Leslie Dunn, English), teaching Shakespeare at Vassar (Zoltán MárKus, English), Shakespeare in drawings and paintings at the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center (Elizabeth Nogrady, Art Center), Shakespeare in Special Collections (Ronald Patkus, Library), and performing Shakespeare at Vassar (Denise Walen, Drama). These multidisciplinary festivities provide the perfect opportunity for the Art Center to display its wealth of Shakespeare material, showing that art, like literature and drama, has long helped make Shakespeare a vital part of intellectual and cultural life at Vassar.

Elizabeth Nogrady

Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Academic Programs

IN MEMORIAM

Margaret (“Marnie”) Lanphier Smith Wengren (’38) and Merymose

Since 1989, when Margaret (“Marnie”) Wengren, class of 1938, gave it to the then-named Vassar College Art Gallery, our magnificent head of the Egyptian Viceroy in the reign of Amenhotep III (Dynasty 18, ca. 1375 BCE) has introduced multitudes of Vassar students to sculpture with a work that would be the pride of any museum. Indeed, other fragments of Merymose’s sarcophagus are in the Louvre, the British Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. An extraordinary presence within a college collection, this ritual object made in ancient Thebes more than 3000 years ago continues to cast its spell.

Mrs. Wengren, who died in Lexington, Massachusetts, on March 8, 2016, six weeks before her 100th birthday, had studied Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Asian art as a Gallery Instructor at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and as a museum guide (also Board Chair and interim Executive Director) at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, whose Education Room is dedicated to her.

As each new academic year begins, and another Art 105 conference gathers in front of Merymose, we continue to thank Marnie Wengren, both as our benefactor and as our colleague. Her devotion to art and museum education meant that she knew exactly what we needed and exactly how much it would always mean to us.

Susan Donahue Kuretsky (’63)

Sarah Gibson Blanding Professor of Art

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883), *L'acteur tragique* (*The Tragic Actor: Philibert Rouvière in the role of Hamlet*), 1866, etching, Purchase, 1968.3



John Smith (English, 1751–1812) after Henry Fuseli (Swiss, 1741–1825), *The Weird Sisters*, 1785, mezzotint, Purchase, 1967.17



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July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

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The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
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The Art Center is open Tuesday/
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9pm, and Sunday from 1pm to 5pm.

Art at Vassar

A publication for the members of
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
Fall/Winter 2016/17



Cover:
Philo B. Ruggles (American, 1906–1988)
John Ruggles (American, 1907–1991)
Study for mural (unrealized), Bridgeport, Ohio,
Post Office, 48 States Competition
Steel Workers, 1939
Gouache, watercolor, and graphite on cardboard
Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971
2015.23.4.2

