

STUDYING THE ART OBJECT

Materials and Methods

Studying the Art Object: Materials and Methods presents a miscellany of objects, some of which have rarely been exhibited, but all of which tell a story when carefully examined.

Each object reveals the manner in which it was made and the talents of its maker; each provides clues to the artist's intentions and hence the meaning the work was intended to evoke. In addition, each object has a history that reveals the taste of its time and the taste of the persons who acquired it, and offers an opportunity to consider how our tastes might differ from those of our predecessors. Together, the works represent the generosity of St. Louis collectors who donated art and money throughout the 130-year history of the Museum, and the acumen of the directors and curators who acquired fascinating objects, often with limited funds, with great foresight and sensitivity.

William Merritt Chase (American, 1849–1916)

Garden of the Orphanage, Haarlem, Holland, 1883
Oil on canvas affixed to board, 66 7/8 x 79 1/8"
University purchase, Subscription Fund, 1885

William Merritt Chase so impressed local collectors when he lived and worked in St. Louis in the 1870s, that they financed his study in Europe. While studying abroad, Chase eschewed Beaux-Arts painting, preferring the concentration on everyday subjects characteristic of the more progressive art at that time, such as Realism and Impressionism. In the summer of 1883, he lived with companions in the city of Haarlem in The Netherlands, next to the orphanage that supplied the setting for this painting. *Garden of the Orphanage, Haarlem, Holland* is an exercise in working with a limited palette, using only green, ochre, white, black, and a touch of red. The artist prepared the canvas with a cream-colored ground of an oil medium and then applied the colors, painting wet paint into wet paint before finishing it with numerous layers of surface glazes. The painting was shown in May 1884 at an exhibition in New York City at the Society of American Artists, an organization composed of the most innovative American artists of the period. The work's lukewarm reception might be linked to the massive painting's lack of dramatic and heroic subject matter: a *New York Times* review of the exhibition referred to the *Garden of the Orphanage* as "a large scene containing nothing of special interest, somewhat hazily and softly treated, showing good effects of sunlight and some fairly characteristic figures of Dutch women." Supporters in St. Louis had

greater sympathy, however, for the progressive nature of the work, and recognized Chase as one of the most important American artists of the time.

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (French, 1824–1898)

La Charité (Charity), 1894
Oil on canvas, 36 3/8 x 29 1/8"
University purchase, Bixby Fund, 1908

William K. Bixby (1857–1931) was a formative figure in the early economic and cultural development of St. Louis. He made a fortune in the railroad and transportation industries, amassed significant collections of art and rare books, and was a major supporter of education and the arts. Among other philanthropic acts, he established a fund for the purchase of works of art at Washington University. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's *La Charité* was one of the first acquisitions supported by this fund. At the time he created this work, Puvis de Chavannes was interested in modernizing and secularizing allegorical themes such as those used in earlier periods in fresco paintings (mural decorations typically made for churches and other religious buildings). *La Charité* is a smaller version of a mural painted by the artist in 1894 in the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. The flat, opaque use of color in the oil painting emulates fresco techniques and in this way is quite different from the other oil-on-canvas paintings in the exhibition.

Franz Seraph von Lenbach (German, 1836–1904)

Portrait of Prince Otto von Bismarck, 1884–90
Oil on canvas, 75 1/2 x 58 1/8"
Gift of August A. Busch, 1929

The portrait of Otto von Bismarck was displayed as part of the exhibition in the German Pavilion of the 1904 World's Fair, an event at which the great powers—England, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States—all exhibited their imperial ambitions. Bismarck (1815–1898) became First Minister of Prussia in 1862 and served as the first Chancellor of the newly founded German nation until 1890. As such, he oversaw the building of a German empire that reflected the country's ambition to rival the overseas empire of Great Britain. His military prowess and other achievements were widely celebrated by German nationalists, a fact reflected as much in the portrait's setting as in the painting itself, which together form a

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TEACHING GALLERY

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

STUDYING THE ART OBJECT (con't)

secular altarpiece honoring the chancellor-saint. The frame is decorated with military trophies, reminiscent of ornament found on ancient Roman monuments and sculpted heroic nudes. The painting and frame were acquired by Adolphus Busch, whose son, August A. Busch, donated the ensemble to Washington University. The older Busch, cofounder of the Anheuser-Busch Brewery, was of German origin and a major supporter of German culture, including Harvard University's Busch-Reisinger Museum (opened in 1903 as the Germanic Museum), the establishment of which he helped fund.

William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764)

Lord Grey and Lady Mary West as Children, c. 1740

Oil on canvas, 42 1/8 x 35 5/8"

University purchase, Parsons Fund, 1936

William Hogarth was an eighteenth-century engraver best known for his satires of contemporary life in London, such as the series of prints entitled *Rake's Progress* (1734) and *Marriage à la Mode* (c. 1743). He also painted portraits, including most notably a few on a monumental scale he created around 1740, of which *Lord Grey and Lady Mary West as Children* is a prime example. It is a gentle satire of baroque aristocratic portraiture in which elegantly attired sitters are placed before columns and drapes and flanked by props, all of which allude to their nobility and wealth. Lord Grey and Lady Mary West are represented here as precivilized children in their nursery gowns. Lord Grey, wearing a fancy hat, is depicted at three years of age, manhandling a small dog. Beside him, his sister, depicted as a one year old, is seated in a high chair holding a coral, or teething toy. They seem to have pulled an elegant drape off its rod in such a manner that it all but obscures the noble column behind them. The broken drum to the side of Lord Grey further emphasizes Hogarth's satirization of the "civilized" lifestyle of the upper class.

Aelbert Cuyp (Dutch, 1620–1691)

Landscape with Cattle and Milkmaid, c. 1650

Oil on canvas, 46 x 64 3/4"

University purchase, Parsons Fund, 1947

Aelbert Cuyp was a Dutch artist who lived and worked near or in the city of Dordrecht. His work, produced over a period of more than fifty years, reflects the changing tastes of Dutch landscape and social expectations from the 1630s until the artist's death in 1691. The painting was acquired for the collection in 1947 by the now-renowned art historian H. W. Janson, who taught at Washington University (1941–48) and served as curator of the University's art collection (1944–48). It was displayed at the Saint Louis Art Museum from the time of its purchase until 1961, when the University collection found its first home on the main campus in Steinberg Hall. In a 1975 monograph on Aelbert Cuyp, author Stephen Reiss noted that *Landscape with Cattle and Milkmaid* is one of a number

of paintings produced by the artist in the decade in which the Dutch Republic was at the height of its political and financial powers—as perhaps symbolized by the painting's large scale and depiction of an elegant horseman riding into the scene from the background.

Unknown (Oceanic, New Guinea, Sepic River)

Homme Oiseau (Man-Bird), early 20th century

Polychrome wood, 48 x 43 3/4"

University purchase, Kende Sale Fund, 1945

Art historian and curator H. W. Janson purchased this wooden sculpture in 1945 while in the process of building Washington University's noteworthy collection of European and American early twentieth-century art. The object complements Janson's purchases of abstract, modernist art by providing "better understanding of the origins of our own culture," as he later wrote in his formative *History of Art* textbook (first published in 1962). In that seminal publication, he included this object as an outstanding example of early twentieth-century sculpture from the Sepic River in New Guinea. "The cultural heritage of ethnographic societies," he wrote, "has enriched our own...., and ethnographic art is being avidly collected and admired throughout the Western world." He cited analogies, for example, between the figure of the bird emerging from behind the sculpture's head (symbolizing a freeing of the spirit from the body after death), and Christian imagery of a dove representing the Holy Spirit in Western art.

El Greco (Spanish, 1541–1614)

The Resurrection, 1600–5

Oil on canvas, 44 3/4 x 20 3/4"

University purchase, Parsons Fund, 1952

Frederick Hartt, a noted Renaissance scholar who taught at Washington University and curated its art collection in the 1950s, selected *The Resurrection* for purchase in 1952. The painting is a smaller version of El Greco's monumental painting of the same subject in the Prado Museum in Madrid; it has often been considered a workshop replica of that work, largely restored and repainted at a later date. A thorough examination and restoration in 1966 of the Washington University painting, however, resulted in the assessment that the work shows the quality of a master. Robert T. Buck, Hartt's successor in charge of the University's collection, noted in an article in *Art Journal* in 1968 that the painting "displays a rich jewel-like quality.... The subtle deftness of hand required to achieve these brilliant painterly effects, evident in rich passages of tonality heightened by deep shadow, is implausible as the work of an assistant." The painting now is accepted as a replica largely painted by El Greco himself.