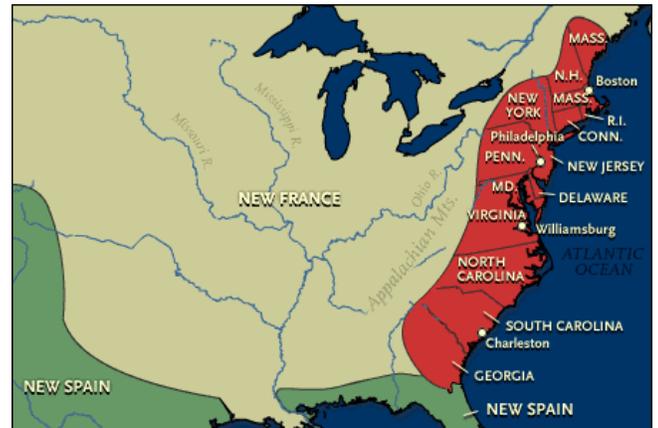


## American Art: c. 1760 - 1900

Americans were challenged to find ways to represent themselves in the new country. Artists made efforts to create images and objects that defined American character. Both patrons and artists were self-conscious of their “newness” yet were inspired by the sense that America was unique to world history. NOMA’s permanent collection includes works that demonstrate the development of a unique American art form from John Singleton Copley’s 18<sup>th</sup> century portrait of *Portrait of Colonel George Watson* through modern works by Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol. A study of American art reveals the trajectory of the nation’s evolution from a rural colonial past to an urban industrial nation.



Colonial Settlement to 1750

### Figure Painting and Portraits

During Colonial times, settlers had to obtain the necessities of life before acquiring cultural luxuries. Seventeenth century colonial paintings are primarily portraits, and often we know more about the sitters than we do about the artists. As prosperity grew, the rising middle class wanted records of their success, measured primarily by wealth. Early Americans were proud, self-composed, self-confident, and self-made. They displayed these qualities with portraiture.

### *Elizabeth Freake and Baby Mary and John Freake, Unknown artist, c. 1674 (Worcester Art Museum)*

John Freake was a successful lawyer and merchant of Boston and his wife Elizabeth came from an equally prosperous home. Their portraits by an unknown artist are generally accepted as masterpieces of 17<sup>th</sup> century New England painting. Elizabeth sits in a Turkey-work chair, which would only have been found in the finest homes. She is well-attired in satin with a rich brocade and a lace collar. The style is a reference to that preferred in Elizabethan England.



***The Bermuda Group—Dean George Berkely and His Family, 1729, John Smibert (Yale University Art Gallery)***

Scottish born artist John Smibert studied in Italy and is often considered the first artist to make a career in America. He painted over 250 portraits and helped establish a pragmatic style favored by American born artists. After his death his family maintained his studio as an art gallery, establishing a place for colonists and American born artists to learn about art.



Smibert arrived in America with a group of Englishmen and women who intended to establish a college in Bermuda where he was to teach drawing. The group had already arrived in Boston when Parliament refused to fund the endeavor. Smibert decided to remain in Boston and set up a studio. This group portrait of the Bermuda-bound group became an advertisement for his studio. Smibert appears the far left.

***Portrait of Staats Long Morris, c. 1749 – 1752, John Wollaston (English, c. 1710 – 75) p. 108***

Englishman John Wollaston immigrated to New York in 1749 leaving a successful London studio behind him. He became one of the most active portraitists of the Eastern seaboard, working in New York, Philadelphia and Annapolis from 1749 – 1767. The fashionable style that he had learned in England was well-received, and his patrons are portrayed in an idealized style with almond-shaped eyes.



Staats Long Morris was a member of one of the oldest families in Westchester County. One of his brothers later signed the Declaration of Independence, but Staats Long Morris remained a loyalist. He left for England where he joined the British Army and served in Parliament from 1774 – 1784. He was appointed Governor of Quebec in 1797 and died there in 1800.

***Portrait of Colonel George Watson, 1768, John Singleton Copley (American, 1738-1815) p. 109***

The arts flourished in colonial society by the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. John Singleton Copley was a leading painter of the colonial period and is generally considered the most accomplished of American-born artists of his time. He was introduced to art by watching his step-father Peter Pelham engrave mezzotint plates and later studied Smibert's portraits. His style, which found favor among Boston's wealthy merchants, displays an appreciation for



materialism blended with straightforward truthfulness. Copley was a friend of many political radicals including John Hancock, Paul Revere and Sam Adams, yet he remained a loyalist.

Although Copley's early commissions were from Boston's merchant class, his patronage changed as his career advanced. His later American clients included politicians and financiers, who were primarily loyalists. Colonel George Watson was also loyal to the British crown. He is depicted standing at a desk in three quarter view. As an elected member of His Majesty's Council in the colonies, Watson appears busy with government business.

***Paul Revere, c. 1769, John Singleton Copley (MFA, Boston)***

Copley may have painted this portrait of the silversmith Paul Revere to settle an account for the purchase of silver frames Copley used for miniature portraits. Revere is shown at his workbench with tools nearby. Copley achieves extreme realism and intimacy, as the subject looks directly at the viewer. Although a simple setting, the work is highly detailed and sharply focused.



Although successful in Boston, Copley chose to leave for England in 1774 because of oncoming American Revolution. When moved to England he befriended Benjamin West and began to paint historical paintings.

***Watson and the Shark, c. 1778, John Singleton Copley (National Gallery of Art)***

Copley became friends with Brooke Watson after his move to London in 1774. His new friend commissioned him to paint the story of his attack by a shark in Havana harbor in 1748 during which he lost one leg below the knee. Copley painted three versions of the incident and these painting mark his departure from portraiture to history paintings. The story became quite well known through engravings of Copley's work, serving as a lesson that adversity can be overcome.



***The Peale Family, 1773 and 1803, Charles Willson Peale (New York Historical Society)***

Charles Willson Peale was born in Maryland and received his first artistic training from John Hesselius. He spent two years in London studying with American expatriate Benjamin West. After returning to the United States, Peale settled in Philadelphia and became a favored portraitist. He eventually founded the first American art academy and the Peale Museum. Peale came from a large family of artists that included his brother, nephew and sons.



In this family portrait, Peale depicts his family gathered around the table in a jovial manner. A still life is set out on the table and a canvas and marble busts appear in the background. Peale believed that anyone could become an artist by learning the fundamentals and applying oneself.

***Portrait of Robert Morris, 1782, Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741-1827) p. 112***

Robert Morris was a successful businessman and one of the wealthiest men in the colonies at the time of the American Revolution. He was the most able financier and a co-founder the Bank of North America. In 1781 he was elected to the Continental Congress. Morris was a conservative and opposed the Declaration of Independence although he did sign the document. Charles Willson Peale was a radical liberal and held completely opposing political views to Morris. The two became bitter political enemies. Ironically when Morris was ousted from Congress in 1779, Peale took his seat. However, the artist held the position for only one year and then retired to paint exclusively. Peale's optimism in establishing the first museum in the United States captured Morris' attention and Morris commissioned Peale to paint a three-quarter length portrait of himself, a replica of the painting, and several smaller portraits of Morris and his wife. The NOMA portrait is a replica of the three-quarter version formerly in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.



***The Artist in his Museum, 1822, Charles Willson Peale (PA Academy of Fine Arts)***

In 1782, Peale founded the first museum in the United States to display his portraits of Revolutionary War heroes and added a natural history aspect to house his reconstructed mastodon skeleton. The museum had one of the earliest exhibitions of



American art and the institution helped train, support and exhibit American painters.

***Romeo and Juliet*, 1778, Benjamin West  
(American, 1738 – 1820) p. 111**

Benjamin West began his career as a portrait painter in colonial Philadelphia and went on to become a court painter to King George III in England and president of the Royal Academy of Art in London. At the height of his career in the 1770s, West specialized in three categories of subjects: English history, Biblical scenes, and scenes from Shakespeare. His style forecasts the Neoclassical movement with its interest in reviving classical forms, while his interest in nationalism and dramatic literary subjects are indicative of the Romantic movement.



West depicts the scene from Act III, Scene 5 of the play when the nurse runs to warn the young lovers of the awakening household: “Your lady mother is coming to your chamber. The day is broke; be wary, look about.” Juliet laments, “Then, window, let day in and let life out.” Romeo leaves hastily declaring, “Farewell, farewell! One kiss, and I’ll descend.”

***Death of General Wolfe*, 1770, Benjamin West  
(National Gallery of Canada)**

In 1668 West gained international fame and associated with England’s most acclaimed artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds. He was a founding member of the Royal Academy and eventually its president. With the *Death of General Wolfe* in 1770 West portrayed contemporary events on the grand scale of history paintings. This dramatic scene depicts the British victory over the French in Quebec. West recalls the drama of Baroque Lamentations or Descents from the Cross in the manner of Rubens, but in contemporary garb.



***Portrait of Chester Sully*, 1810, Thomas Sully  
(American, 1781 – 1834) p. 113**

Thomas Sully was born in England and moved to Charleston, South Carolina at an early age. His introduction to painting consisted of lessons from brother-in-law, Jean Belzons, and later from his brother Laurence Sully. In 1808 he settled permanently in Philadelphia where he was considered the leading portrait painter until his death at the age of ninety. His subjects included Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, and



the Marquis de Lafayette, as well as many leading musicians and composers. He made two trips to England: the first to study under Benjamin West and other painters in London from 1809 to 1810, and the second to paint a portrait of Queen Victoria in 1838.

Sully's romantic portrait of his brother Chester reflects the influence of the English portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence, with whom Sully is said to have studied in 1809. Chester Sully, born in England in 1781, was living in Norfolk, Virginia, when this portrait was painted in 1810. Later in life Chester lived in New Orleans where he imported mahogany from Santo Domingo. The portrait was given by the artist to his nephew, George Washington Sully, who left it to his son, Thomas Sully, the well-known New Orleans architect. In turn, Thomas Sully gave it to his daughter Jeanne Sully West, who donated it to the museum in 1971.

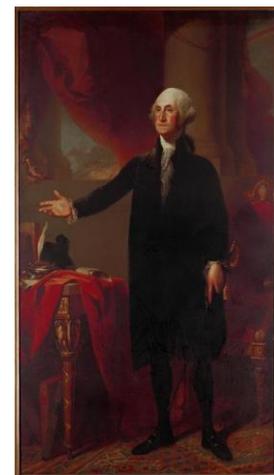
***The Skater, 1782, Gilbert Stuart (National Gallery of Art)***

Gilbert Stuart was born and grew up in Rhode Island and studied in Scotland and in England with Benjamin West. He established his own studio in London and gained critical acclaim when *The Skater* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782. He returned to America in 1792 as a mature, Europeanized artist. With the success of *The Skater*, Stuart became the most prominent portraitist in America during the Federal period. Five presidents as well as many lesser personages sat for Stuart, and these portraits played a vital role in shaping American imagery for the new republic. His easy mastery of European painterly conventions made him ideally suited to introduce these techniques to America.



***George Washington (The Lansdowne Portrait), 1796, Gilbert Stuart (PA Academy of Fine Art)***

Stuart liked painting portraits because they could be completed quickly and were lucrative. He developed a taste for elegant living and was always in need of money both in England and America. This full length portrait of Washington was painted from an earlier portrait. Although it was criticized by many, including Martha Washington, for not being an accurate likeness, it has come to represent what admirers wished to think of him—dignified, solemn and stately.



***Portrait of Major Peter Fort, circa 1818, Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755-1828), oil on board p. 115***

"The Portrait of Major Peter Fort" was painted during Stuart's Boston period, late in the artist's life. The Yankee qualities of his sitters interested him, so the dashing nature of his earlier European brushwork was toned down to realize a more authentic American style in his work. The subject of this portrait, Major Peter Fort, had close connections to New Orleans. Born in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1783, Fort lived in New Orleans from 1808 to about 1816, working for his brother John A. Fort, a wholesale grocer. From contemporary documents it is also known that Peter Fort fought with the City Riflemen on the extreme right of the American line during the Battle of New Orleans.



***Portrait of Mrs. Asher B. Wertheimer, 1898, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)***

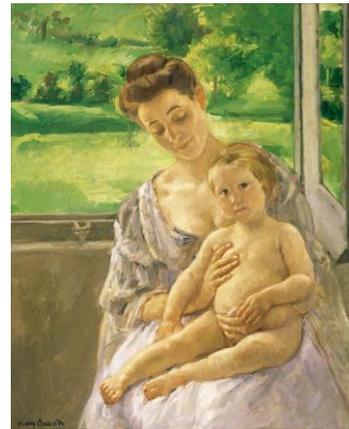
Sargent was born in Florence, Italy to wealthy expatriate New England parents. He remained in Tuscany until the age of nineteen, when he left for Paris to study with the academic portraitist, Emile-Auguste Carolus-Durand, from 1874 through 1876. In 1877 he began exhibiting at the Paris Salon, but the scandal created by his *Portrait of Madame X* and a lack of patronage encouraged Sargent to move to London. By 1897 the artist was a famous figure on the London art scene and the preeminent portraitist of his period.



Included in Sargent's list of eager portrait sitters was Asher B. Wertheimer, a wealthy London art dealer, who commissioned the artist to paint a pair of portraits of himself and his wife to commemorate their silver wedding anniversary in 1898. In contrast to Mr. Wertheimer's portrait in a dark suit with a dark background, Mrs. Wertheimer wears a white silk gown with pearls strewn around her neck. Both paintings were shown at the Royal Academy in 1898 and created an enormous sensation. Sargent painted ten more portraits of members of the Wertheimer family. With the exception of the 1898 New Orleans portrait and two others, the Wertheimer family portraits were bequeathed to the British nation by Asher B. Wertheimer and hang in London's Tate Gallery.

***Mother and Child in the Conservatory, 1906, Mary Cassatt (American, 1845 – 1927) p. 123***

Mary Stevenson Cassatt was born May 22, 1844 into an affluent Pennsylvania family but spent much of her formative years with her parents and siblings abroad in Paris, Heidelberg, and Darmstadt. After the death of her eldest brother, the Cassatt family returned to Pennsylvania and settled in Philadelphia. Cassatt studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and eventually chose to further her artistic education in France. Although she experienced early success when two paintings were accepted to the Paris Salon, Cassatt vowed never again to submit another work to the Salon after a painting with a lighter palette was rejected. The lighter palette was inspired by an exhibition of independent artists she saw in 1874 that included works by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Edouard Manet.



*Mother and Child in the Conservatory*, a late work, is representative of Cassatt's interest in the domestic sphere and the human body. It highlights her talent at capturing a fleeting moment as a representation of the universal bond between a mother and her child. The pyramidal structure of the painting conveys solidity and endurance. This sentiment is echoed by the mother's embrace of her child and their interlocking hands. The painting illustrates Cassatt's tendency to depict moments replete with the psychological nuances that characterize the development of an intimate relationship.

**Landscapes**

Portraiture dominated early artistic efforts of American painters, but artists soon turned their eyes to the natural world. A rise of landscape tourism fueled an objectification and commoditization of the natural world. And the idea of Manifest Destiny inspired national pride in the vast land. Romantic writers Thoreau and Emerson also responded to the power of nature. Landscape artists made works in the romantic tradition to make landscapes more picturesque.

***Forenoon, 1847, Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) p. 117***

Asher Brown Durand was born in New Jersey in 1796. Although he began his artistic career as an engraver, he painted landscapes exclusively after his tour of Europe in 1840. The National Academy of Design appointed him



President of the Academy from 1845 to 1861. Along with Thomas Cole, Durand was one of the leading members of the Hudson River School, a loosely based group of artists active from 1820 to 1850. Each artist had a distinct style in depicting a landscape while emphasizing the enormous scale and sublime beauty found in nature. Durand painted the Hudson River, Catskills and Vermont regions, becoming one of the leading American landscape artists to paint outdoors.

Durand favored the “unadorned” landscape, highlighted by the harmonious relationship between man and nature. *Forenoon* reflects this idea, in which Durand depicts features of the environment that instill in the viewer a sense of peace. The enormous forest of beech trees frames the right side of the painting. This artistic technique of **repoussoir**, or framing with large objects, pulls the viewer’s eye into the central part of the painting. He has captured the purity of the landscape at a moment when the cool morning is about to be overcome by the brightness and warmth of a midday sun. The cattle herder and cows in the foreground are seen as mere visitors to this peaceful landscape. As they move to their destination, the grand forest and valley will remain.

**Alfred L. Boisseau, *Louisiana Indians Walking Along the Bayou, 1847, oil on canvas, p. 116***

Alfred L. Boisseau arrived in New Orleans in 1845, one of a number of well known European artists who were lured to the city in the 1830s and 1840s. Boisseau was greatly attracted to what he saw in Louisiana, what he perceived as exotic and was able to depict the native scene with freshness and perceptive vision.



In 1845 and again in 1847 Boisseau exhibited at the Paris Salon, which is where *Louisiana Indians Walking Along the Bayou* was first shown. In this painting we see a group of Indians walking in a wooded area presumably to the market. What makes these Indians different is that their clothing is western material and they are holding such western objects as a rifle and a blow gun and darts. Details of the Indians hair and the baskets they are carrying indicate that they are of the Choctaw tribe. The setting for this painting is thought to be on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain somewhere along the Tchefuncte River. The Choctaws were frequently seen in the French Market where they sold baskets, goods from palmetto leaves and filé, a common ingredient in Creole food.

**Richard Clague, *Batture Shanty*, 1870, oil on canvas**

Though born in Paris, Richard Clague's early life and artistic training were divided between France and New Orleans. The artist's father came to New Orleans around the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and became a prominent member of the community. Clague's father financially backed the Americans during the Battle of New Orleans and was a close friend of Andrew Jackson. In 1832 when his parents separated, Clague moved to Paris with his mother, a free woman of color. He studied art in Switzerland and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris returning to New Orleans. In the United States Clague's style of naturalistic landscape painting was accepted and praised whereas at the Paris Salon landscapes were considered secondary to history painting.



Though Clague had many European influences, he is very much part of the American naturalistic landscape tradition. He was the first artist in Louisiana to understand in aesthetic terms the distinct character of the swamps, forests, and rivers of Louisiana. In *Batture Shanty* we see Clague's ability to characterize the atmosphere and geography he was painting. He depicts a way of life on the batture of which many in the U.S. and Europe were unaware. Clague's adaptation of the Barbizon artists' composition, style and technique to the representation of Louisiana resulted in a native landscape tradition.