

Hidden in Plain Sight: Northwest Impressionism, 1910-1935

John E. Impert

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Susan Casteras, Chair

René Bravmann

Douglas Collins

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Abstract

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John E. Impert

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Professor Susan Casteras

Art History

Northwest Impressionist artists are among the forgotten figures in American art history. Responsible for bringing Modernism to Washington and Oregon, they dominated the art communities in Seattle and Portland from about 1910 to 1928, remaining influential until the mid 1930's. After describing the artists briefly, this dissertation summarizes and evaluates the slim historiography of Northwest Impressionism. Impressionism and Tonalism are contrasted in order to situate these artists within the broad currents of American art history.

Six important artists who have not been studied in the past are each accorded a chapter that summarizes their educations, careers, and artistic developments. In Seattle, Paul Gustin, the early leader of the Seattle art community, was most closely associated with images of Mount Rainier. Edgar Forkner, a well established Indiana artist, moved to Seattle and painted numerous canvases of old boats at rest and still lifes of flowers. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, a latecomer, emphasized shoreline and harbor scenes in her work. In Portland, Charles McKim traded complete anonymity in Portland, Maine for the leadership of the Oregon art community, creating a variety of landscapes and seascapes. Clyde Keller produced an enormous output of landscapes over a long career that extended to California as well as Oregon. Clara J. Stephens, a favorite pupil of William Merritt Chase, was a leading art teacher in Portland as well an artist whose work encompassed many genres.

The factors that make Northwest Impressionism unique are explored, primarily the iconography of its tallest mountains, Mount McKinley, Mount Rainier, and Mount Hood, and of decrepit sailing ships, and the treatment pictorially of precipitation and atmospheric humidity. A rich iconography is developed based upon a reverence for the greatest mountains, combined with an awareness of their multiple significations of business activity and possession of the American patrimony. Postmodern parody analysis assists in understanding levels of meanings. The work of Northwest Impressionist artists is compared to American Impressionists in California and elsewhere. The quality and originality of the art is made evident.

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In addition to the guidance provided by my adviser, Professor Susan Casteras, I would like to thank David F. Martin in Seattle and Mark Humpal in Portland for making their artist files available. I would also like to thank Jay Franklin for providing photographic images of the Edgar Forkner scrapbook and the exhibition records of the Seattle Fine Arts Society, and for Jay Franklin's and David Martin's willingness to provide numerous digital images of works by some of the artists discussed in this dissertation. In the preparation of this dissertation, I am grateful to those who reviewed an earlier draft and provided helpful corrections and comments, David Martin, Mark Humpal, Ginny Allen, and Randy Dagele. Needless to say, I accept full responsibility for any errors or omissions.

DEDICATION

My inspiration for undertaking this dissertation arose from the graduate seminar on Northwest Impressionism given at the University of Washington in the fall term of 2007 by Professor Susan Casteras. It is a subject that had not been examined by the academy, and Professor Casteras demonstrated that it was a potentially rich area of art awaiting its first advanced academic study. Further inspiration was provided by the example of David F. Martin, an independent curator, art historian, and art dealer, who has written several excellent exhibition catalogs on “forgotten” Northwest artists, proving that the art of the Northwest in the first third of the twentieth century is deserving of study and respect. I wish to dedicate this dissertation to them.

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Introduction

Northwest Impressionism as terminology—and as a worthwhile subject of study—has not yet enjoyed the imprimatur of the art history academy. The dean of historians of American regional art and American Impressionism, William D. Gerds, published three weighty volumes entitled *Art Across America*, the third of which, *The Plains States and the West, 1710-1920*, addressed art produced in Oregon and Washington, the two states typically identified as the Pacific Northwest.¹ Although Gerds used “Impressionism” in his description of California artists, he eschewed use of the “I” word when he turned to the Northwest, speaking simply of landscapes. The principal promoter of the study of American Impressionism thus did not find any art in the Northwest to identify by the designation of Impressionist.

Nevertheless, one of the landscapes by a Northwest artist that Gerds chose to illustrate in *The Plains States and the West* is Paul Morgan Gustin’s “Nootka Island,” 1919, figure 1. A Vancouver Island scene, with an Indian village in the background, “Nootka Island” is constructed with the typical broken brushstrokes of American Impressionist artists. According to Sam Hunter, American artists embraced Impressionism to a far greater extent than in any other country except France, and it became a national style with a specifically American orientation. “Americans...significantly changed the French accent—toning down the bright French palette and using...broken brushstrokes...more to embellish surface, or to heighten the perception of observed reality than as a device for analyzing light effects and the act of perception itself, or to

¹ William D. Gerds, *Art Across America: The Plains States and the West: regional painting in America 1710-1920* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 183-222.

engage theoretical and scientific problems...The mood [of American artists] was far more decorous, tasteful and conservative.”²

Gustin may not have been engaged in attacking a scientific problem in painting “Nootka Island,” but he was interested in depicting the effects of the light in the Northwest through the use of his typically Impressionist broken brushstrokes. “Nootka Island’s” primary focus, the

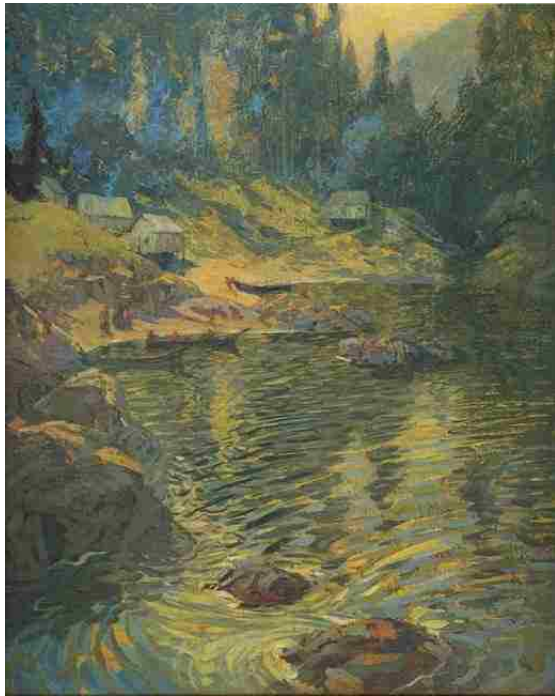


Figure 1. Paul Gustin, "Nootka Island."

bottom 60% of the canvas, is all about the reflection of light—pink, yellow, creamy white, green, and blue—from the water and rocks of Nootka Sound.³ Gustin has painted what his eyes *see* under the particular meteorological conditions he experienced, that is pink, almost dematerialized rocks, not the massive gray rocks he *knows* are there. Gustin evidences no particular anthropological or topographical interest in the Indians, their village, or the hills and trees around them, and they are rendered in very little detail.

The effect of light on the scene is *the* principal artistic interest of the “Nootka Island,” and its style is nothing if not American Impressionist.

The low point in the reputation of American Impressionism occurred in the mid-decades of the twentieth century, when the Metropolitan Museum in New York sold about two-thirds of

² Sam Hunter, *American Impressionism: The New Hope Circle* (Fort Lauderdale: Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, 1985), 15.

³ Nootka Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, was the “most important rendezvous of trading vessels in the Northwest” prior to the development of seaports in Puget Sound. Thomas Minor Pelly, *North-Westward*, Seattle: Lowman & Hanford, 1930, 33. A limited edition book, *North-Westward* contains an original color woodblock print by Corwin Chase, one of the Washington artists discussed in this dissertation.

its collection of American Impressionist art in order to buy works by living artists.⁴ The renewal of interest in American Impressionism began about 1975, according to William Gerdts.⁵ In 1980, the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington presented one of the first major retrospective reexaminations of American Impressionism. Although the show originated in Seattle before traveling to other cities, the 140 American Impressionist works in the exhibition did not include a single painting by a Northwest artist.⁶ Gerdts's later magnum opus on the subject, *American Impressionism*, second edition, 2001, mentions only one Northwest artist, Sydney Laurence, and in only one sentence. "In Alaska, Sydney Laurence's repeated images of Mount McKinley and other snow-covered peaks in a high-keyed colorism with glowing sunlight effects are not directly Impressionist, but the distinction between his vision and the older aesthetic of artists such as Albert Bierstadt must be attributed to Impressionism."⁷ "Mount McKinley from the Rapids of the Tokosheetna," 1929, figure 2, is one of Laurence's grandest landscapes of Mount McKinley. None of Laurence's works is illustrated in Gerdts's book. Although Gerdts attributes Laurence's use of brighter colors and his emphasis on the effects of light on snow—both evident in figure 2—to the influence of Impressionism, he nevertheless avoids the designation Impressionist, or indeed any other categorization, for Laurence's art.

Aside from the early work of Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and other Northwest Mystics, few art historians have written about any Northwest art—academic realist, Tonalist, Impressionist, or Modernist—that dates from the first third of the 20th century. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington, had resident artists who worked in an Impressionist mode at a high level of expertise, and this dissertation will thus fill

⁴ James Burke, PhD, retired director, Saint Louis Museum of Art, lecture at Portland Museum of Art, March 21, 2011.

⁵ William H. Gerdts, ed., *American Impressionism* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1980), 9.

⁶ Gerdts, catalog of exhibition listed above.

⁷ William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2nd ed., 2001), 255.



Figure 2. Sydney Laurence, "Mount McKinley from the Rapids of the Tokosheetna"

what has been a gaping hole in the corpus of American art history. These artists were not pale imitators of French or well-known American Impressionists. Much of their work is unlike that created elsewhere in the country or, indeed, elsewhere in the world. Their paintings tend to be images of the Northwest's iconic mountains (as Laurence's "Mount McKinley from the Rapids of the Tokosheetna"), of its wild seashores (as in Gustin's "Nootka Island"), and of its dark, evergreen forests. Their favorite subjects do not include fields of bluebonnets as in Texas or of poppies as in California.

Not only did Northwest Impressionists emphasize a different subject matter than artists elsewhere in America, the places they chose to paint carried unique meanings for them. There is an iconography of Northwest Impressionist art to be identified and elaborated that differs from Impressionist art elsewhere.⁸ The great volcanoes of the Cascades, in particular, embodied a sort of manifestation of the divine, first to Northwest Indians, and later to white artists. The specific meanings of the great mountains and dark forests can be elaborated through observations and remarks of the artists themselves, as well as contemporary journalistic commentaries.

⁸ Iconographic studies that I have found useful are E. Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition" and Louis Marin, "Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's The Arcadian Shepherds." In *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi, 257-276, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

The Northwest light is unique in the United States, with an especially marked contrast to the light of Southern California. Instead of bone dry atmosphere, the Northwest atmosphere is humid and misty. In contrast to Laguna Beach's average of 281 days of bright sunlight every year, Seattle has an average of 201 overcast days, plus frequent drizzle.⁹ In the Northeast, bright winter days with deep blue sky are common; in the Northwest, the winter sky—on those rare occasions when it is largely visible—is a pale, wan blue. The challenges of representing precipitation, misty atmosphere, and attenuated sunlight are a second theme to be developed in this dissertation.

The majority of Northwest Impressionist artists enjoyed a serious studio art education. Many of the artists studied with prestigious teachers and art academies in America and Europe and exhibited in American metropolises like New York and Chicago. For example, at least eight Northwest artists studied with William Merritt Chase (1845-1916) in Europe, New York, or California, and four of them were been singled out by Chase for special praise.¹⁰ Several studied at the Art Students League in New York and at the Art Institute in Chicago; one studied for several years at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, and three enrolled at the *Académie Julian* in Paris; many lived or traveled in Europe.¹¹ Indeed, two of these artists were Dutchmen who had studied art and painted in the Netherlands and France before immigrating to the Pacific Northwest during the first third of the twentieth century.¹² Yet, today, the names of only three of

⁹ My own experience, confirmed by the statistics available at www.weather.com

¹⁰ Belmore Browne, Edna Breyman, John Butler, Louise Crow, Edgar Forkner, Abby Hill, Clara Stephens, and Myra Wiggins (1869-1956) studied with Chase. Chase gave oils he had painted to Butler, Crow, and Stephens as recognition of their talent, and he publicly predicted the success of Hill.

¹¹ John Butler, Edgar Forkner, and Roi Partridge studied at the Art Students League in New York City; Edgar Forkner and Lance Wood Hart studied at the Art Institute of Chicago; Hart also studied at the Royal Swedish Academy of Art, and Browne, Dorothy Jensen, and John Trullinger were enrolled at the *Académie Julian* in Paris. In addition, Butler, Forkner, Partridge, Stephens, and Wentz traveled and worked extensively in Europe; Sydney Laurence lived and painted in France and Great Britain for over fifteen years.

¹² Citations for these facts, and for other basic information on the artists contained in this introduction, will be given in subsequent sections where they are treated in more detail.

the approximately thirty Northwest Impressionists who were most active might be recognized by someone with an extensive knowledge of American art: Sydney Laurence, Eustace Ziegler, and Belmore Browne.¹³ Few people, even in the Pacific Northwest, will have heard of Charles C. McKim, Clara J. Stephens, or Paul Morgan Gustin, all prolific and well known Oregon and Washington Impressionists of their time.

With one exception, major museums in the Oregon and Washington have not collected these artists in a serious or concerted fashion. The Seattle Art Museum (“SAM”) owns only a few paintings by them, and they are almost never on display. The Portland Museum of Art (“PAM”) does better in typically exhibiting a handful of works by Oregon Impressionists in its third floor Portland Room, but there is no depth in its Northwest Impressionist collection.¹⁴ In contrast, The Frye Art Museum in Seattle (“Frye”) has 65 Alaskan paintings by Laurence and Ziegler in its permanent collection, as well as a large number of works by lesser known Alaskan artists, although they are rarely on view.¹⁵ (It is no coincidence that Eustace Ziegler advised the Frye family for many years on their acquisition policies.¹⁶) As a result of this overall situation of institutional indifference, anyone interested in paintings by these artists must seek to see them

¹³ Although Browne spent his adolescence in Washington in the late 19th century, Laurence wintered in Washington in the 1930’s, and Ziegler was domiciled in Washington from the early 1920’s until his death in 1969, the scenes for which they are best known are of Alaska and the Canadian Rockies. Because the Pacific Northwest (Washington and Oregon) was not the principal subject of their work, and because they have already received serious art historical consideration, they will not be extensively discussed in this dissertation.

¹⁴ The online list of PAM’s collection includes only three works by Oregon artists named in this chapter, two by Harry Wentz and one by C. E. S. Wood, one of the founders of the museum, although not all PAM’s collection is listed online. Most of the Northwest Impressionist works that are on view from time to time in PAM’s Portland Room would appear to be borrowed. SAM’s online collection list includes no Northwest Impressionists, but files in the SAM library indicate that the museum owns three paintings by Paul Gustin and one by John Butler.

¹⁵ In 1980, the Frye announced plans to construct a new addition to house and exhibit its Alaskan art collection. Deloris Tarzan, “Frye plans wing for Alaskan art,” *Seattle Times*, June 22, 1980, E1. Although planned for completion in 1981, it did not open until 1984, when it was called the “Alaska wing,” and was said to be destined for “art from its permanent Alaskan collection and from traveling exhibitions.” Tarzan, “Wingding, The Frye Museum celebrates its new \$2 million Alaska wing,” *Seattle Times*, January 26, 1984, D1. In practice, none of the Frye’s Alaskan art is normally on view, and the new space is devoted almost exclusively to temporary exhibitions. Indeed, one hears rumors that the Frye would now like to find an Alaskan museum to take over its Alaska collection.

¹⁶ *The Charles and Emma Frye Art Museum: A Handbook of the Collection*, (Seattle, 1989), 10.

primarily in private collections or in whatever happens to constitute the inventory of a few dealers who carry their art.

Historiography of Principal Northwest Impressionist Artists

Apart from Browne, Laurence, and Ziegler, no substantial monograph or exhibition catalog has been published on any of these artists. No doctoral dissertation has addressed any of them, including Browne, Laurence, and Ziegler. The University of Washington, the only Northwest institution that grants doctorates in art history, has offered only one course within memory on Northwest Impressionism, a graduate seminar by Professor Susan Casteras in 2007. In the four years in which I have taken an interest in their work, the only public exhibitions of any Oregon and Washington Impressionist art have been the two or three paintings normally hung in the Portland Room of PAM mentioned earlier, a selection of 10 Northwest Impressionist paintings shown at the Tacoma Art Museum (“TAM”) as part of a much larger exhibition of Northwest art in 2009-2010, and a group of 10 small sized Northwest Impressionist images—having some overlap with the Tacoma show—that were part of an exhibition on Northwest Arts & Crafts at the Washington Museum of History and Industry (“MOHAI”) in Seattle and elsewhere in the Northwest earlier in 2009.¹⁷ In addition, during the summer of 2010, the Frye exhibited some of its Alaskan collection, along with paintings in the inventory of Len Braarud, the best known Washington art dealer who carries “Western art”, i.e., art that focuses on Indians, wildlife, frontier men, ranching, and the Western wilderness. (Within this category, Braarud’s emphasis is Alaska.) Unfortunately, there was no catalog for any of these exhibits.

¹⁷ The exhibition was organized in connection with the publication of Lawrence Kreisman and Glenn Mason, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Pacific Northwest* (Portland: Timber Press, 2007). Chapter 10, Painting and Printmaking, 283-311, mentions several Northwest Impressionist artists who were active during the period of the Arts & Crafts movement.

The following is a list, in alphabetical order by state and artist, of all the scholarly or quasi-scholarly articles, books, and exhibition catalogs of which I am aware (in addition to *The Arts and Crafts Movement in the Pacific Northwest*, the book that stimulated the Arts & Crafts exhibition mentioned above), that focused on any of the Northwest Impressionist artists.¹⁸ The list does not include newspaper articles. The criteria for inclusion are the following:

1. The artist has been identified with American Impressionism and was active within the period 1910-1935. The starting point of 1910 was chosen because it was the year that Charles C. McKim first visited Oregon, and it coincided generally with public exhibitions in the Northwest by many of the artists discussed in this chapter. It was four years after Paul Gustin moved to Seattle from Denver and Clyde Keller relocated to Portland from San Francisco, and it was two years after PAM purchased its first painting, a landscape in Eastern Oregon from the second of two trips to Oregon by Childe Hassam, in 1904 and 1908.¹⁹ The end point of 1935 was selected because it marked the last full year of operation of Keller's studio and art shop, which were liquidated the following year in connection with his bankruptcy. In addition, from the mid 1930's, there were few articles in Seattle or Portland newspapers that mention any Northwest Impressionist artist, except obituaries or occasional exhibitions granted toward the end of their lives.

2. The artist was the subject of one or more books or articles that appeared in art or history journals or was covered by local newspapers on a regular basis.

¹⁸ With the exception of some early pieces on Browne, Gustin, and Laurence, the publications listed date from the last thirty-five years. The biographical information summarized in this introduction has been drawn primarily from these publications and from news articles, obituaries, and genealogical research. I have confirmed my information with the data published in Ginny Allen and Jody Klevit, *Oregon Painters: The First Hundred Years (1859-1959)*, (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999), and Dode Trip and Sherburne E. Cook, *Washington State Art and Artists 1850-1950*, (Puyallup, Washington: Valley Printing, 1992). I have met with Ginny Allen to discuss corrections in her book, which is generally reliable. (The Trip and Cook directory contains numerous errors.)

¹⁹ Margaret E. Bullock, *Childe Hassam: Impressionist in the West*, (Portland: Portland Art Museum, 2004), 31-41, exhibition catalog.

3. The artist exhibited at museum shows, fine arts associations, or state fairs in the Northwest.

4. Paintings by the artist are sufficiently available today to be viewed in public and private collections and at art dealers.

5. The artist lived in Washington or Oregon for a number of years and developed a significant relationship with one of these states.

Oregon Impressionists:

Crook, John Marion, 1867-1924. Crook painted watercolors mainly at Astoria on the Oregon Coast, while actively participating in Portland art organizations. His emphasis on atmospheric mist is one of the typical features of Northwest Impressionism. He has not been the subject of any scholarly investigation. “Salt Marsh,” figure 3, is a much ‘dissolved’ landscape near the seashore at Astoria dated 1909.



Figure 3. John Marion Crook, “Salt Marsh.”

Keller, Clyde Leon, 1872-1962: Keller was surely the most prolific Northwest Impressionist, estimating later in life that he had produced thousands of canvases. He had many students in

Portland and exhibited constantly throughout the Northwest and elsewhere in the United States. Keller has not been the subject of any scholarly examination. “Water Lily Pond,” figure 4, is an Oregon landscape of 1917.



Figure 4. Clyde Keller, "Water Lily Pond"

McKim, Charles C., 1862-1939. McKim, barely acknowledged in Portland, Maine, where he spent the first two thirds of his life, moved to Portland, Oregon at the age of 48 in 1910 or 1911 and became an instant celebrity, was elected president of a new fine arts society, and was covered extensively in the press. “Mount Hood Viewed from a Marsh,” figure 5, is McKim’s painting that is most often reproduced. McKim has not been the subject of any scholarly art history examination, but has been addressed in print as follows:

Casazza, Elaine Ward, *The Brushians*. University of Maine, 1996. (Pamphlet on painting club in Portland, Maine in the late 19th century that mentions McKim briefly at a few points in the narrative)

Oatley, Elizabeth S., “Charles C. McKim: Brush’un of Portland, Maine, and Impressionist of Portland, Oregon,” *The Maine Genealogist*, no. 23.2 (May 2010): 65-75. (Result of research I commissioned to trace collateral descendants of McKim, who died a lifelong bachelor. Although I was able to contact several descendants of McKim’s sister Lila, none had any information or documentation concerning their great-great-uncle.)



Figure 5. Charles McKim, “Mount Hood Viewed from a Marsh.”

Stephens, Clara J., 1877-1952. Stephens and Harry Wentz, mentioned below, were the two most prominent art teachers in Portland, Oregon during the 1910’s and 1920’s. Stephens was a student of William Merritt Chase, and she had been recognized by Chase as an outstanding student by his gift of her portrait. Her Impressionist work and teaching activities were extensively covered in the Portland press (and by two articles in Parisian publications), but she has not been the subject of any published scholarship. “Mount Hood,” figure 6, is an oil sketch by Stephens of the highest mountain in Oregon.



Figure 6. Clara Stephens, “Mount Hood.”

Trullinger, John Henry, 1870-1960. Trullinger, from Astoria, Oregon, lived and studied in England and France from 1902-1910, where he adopted an Impressionist style. “Old French

Mill,” figure 7, is a Trullinger pastel of the French countryside that he exhibited at PAM in 1910. Once he returned to Oregon, he earned his living painting realistic portraits. Trullinger worked alone and appears to have rarely associated with his peers in Portland. One piece has been published on him:

Andrus, Lisa, *The Legacy of John Henry Trullinger*. Astoria, Oregon: Heritage Museum, Clatsop County Historical Society, 1989, exhibition catalog.



Figure 7. John Trullinger, “Old French Mill.”

Wentz, Harry, 1875-1965. “Sand Dune, Neah-Kah-Nie”, a landscape by Wentz, figure 8, was among fifty-one works by Wentz exhibited at PAM from November 20-December 7, 1914, and was the first painting by a Northwest artist to enter the collection of PAM in 1914.²⁰ Like Clara Stephens, Wentz was primarily known in Portland as an art teacher, and there has been no scholarly examination of his work.

²⁰ Funds were raised by public subscription to purchase “Sand-Dune, Neah-Kah-Nie” for PAM. “Work of Oregon Artist to Adorn Art Museum,” *The Oregonian*, Dec. 13, 1914. Neahkahnie Mountain rises 1800’ above the Oregon seacoast. The prefix “ne” in Northwest Indian languages means a place inhabited by the tribe. Lewis A. McArthur, *Oregon Geographical Names*, 4th edition, (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1974), 530.



Figure 8. Harry Wentz, “Sand Dune Neah-Kah-Nie.”

Wire, Melville Thomas, 1877-1966. Melville Wire painted in an Impressionist style for a lifetime throughout Oregon, as he moved from city to city every few years as an ordained Methodist minister. Although Wire did not typically date his works, the subjects can usually be identified, and the approximate date of execution can then be inferred, based on the areas of Oregon where Wire’s successive parishes were located. “Upper Columbia River Farm, Early Morning,” watercolor on paper, figure 9, is a scene along the Columbia River in Northern Oregon. Wire has been the subject of two articles, both timed to coincide with an exhibition of his work in Salem, Oregon at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University in 2005:

Allen, Ginny & Nelson, Gregory L., “Impressions of Oregon: the Art of Reverend Melville Thomas Wire, *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, winter (2004): 588-604.

Allen, Ginny & Nelson, Greg, “Melville Wire: Oregon Impressionist”, *American Art Review*, vol. XVII, no. 2 (2005): 126-131.



Figure 9. Melville Wire, "Upper Columbia River Farm."

Washington Impressionists:

Browne, Belmore, 1880-1954. Browne spent his adolescence in Tacoma, Washington, but his art was created primarily in Alaska and the Canadian Rockies. "Surprised," figure, 10 is an Alaskan scene of 1915 with hunters and a moose. Browne was an explorer and a writer as well as an artist, and he has attracted more recent interest by publishers than any other Northwest Impressionist.

Browne, Belmore, *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*. First edition, 1913; second edition, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1956. (Browne discovered the standard route to climb Mount McKinley. Autobiography.)

Browne, Belmore, *The Quest of the Golden Valley*. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1916. (Novel of Yukon adventure with 8 illustrations by Browne.)

Browne, Belmore, "Paintbrush on the Heights," *The American Alpine Journal*, vol. IV, no. 2, (1941), reprinted *The Alaska Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, spring (1973): 105-6 (Memoir).

Kennedy, Michael S., "Belmore Browne and Alaska," *The Alaska Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, spring (1973): 96-104 (Biography).

Render, Lorne E., *The Mountains and the Sky*, Glenbow: McClelland and Stewart West, 1974, 12, 170-79 (Art collection of Glenbow-Alberta Institute).

Bates, Robert H., *Mountain Man: The story of Belmore Browne, hunter, explorer, artist, naturalist*. Clinton, NJ: Amwell Press, 1988. (Biography with copious illustrations.)

Ordeman, John T. & Schreiber, Michael M., *George & Belmore Browne: Artists of the North American Wilderness*. Toronto: Warwick, 2004. (Biography with copious illustrations and extracts from personal papers.)



Figure 10. Belmore Browne, “Surprised.”

Butler, John Davidson, 1890-1976. Butler, a Wisconsin native, studied with William Merritt Chase (receiving the gift of a Chase painting as recognition of his talent) and painted in an Impressionist style during his early career. He left Seattle after a few years of residence as an artist, and his career was afterwards devoted primarily to ceramics and to teaching in Virginia. He has not been the subject of any scholarly examination. Figure 11 is an untitled “parasol” scene painted on the shores of Lake Washington that is reminiscent of Chase’s work on Long Island.



Figure 11. John Davidson Butler, untitled [Lake Washington].

Crow, Louise (a.k.a. Boyac), 1891-1968. Crow, a native of Washington, studied with William Merritt Chase and was rewarded for her excellence by Chase's gift of a painting he created during the summer school session. Like Butler, Crow left Seattle, in her case residing primarily in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she is generally identified with modernist trends in art. She returned periodically to Seattle to teach and exhibit. Figure 12 is an untitled landscape typical of her Impressionist period. She has been the subject of one brief article:

Martin, David F., "Louise Crow Boyac," *Artifact*, vol. 1, no. 2, September/October (1995), 29-30.



Figure 12. Louise Crow, untitled landscape.

Forkner, J. Edgar, 1867-1945. Forkner is considered to be a member of the Richmond Group of artists in Indiana, the region of his origin. However, he spent most of his working career in Seattle, and is one of the most prolific Northwest Impressionists. "Boats of Lake Union", figure 13, is a Forkner harbor scene in Seattle. He continued to exhibit both in Washington and Indiana, and he was one of the standouts of the annual Hoosier Salon in Chicago.²¹ Forkner has not been the subject of any scholarly examination.²²

²¹ Judith Vale Newton and Carol Weiss, *A Grand Tradition: The Art and Artists of the Hoosier Salon, 1925-1990*, (Indianapolis: Hoosier Salon Patrons Association, 1993), 227.

²² The Special Collections of the Seattle Public Library purports to have a short article by Katherine Wilson, "The Art of Edgar Forkner," that appeared in *Northwestern Woman*, May 1928, 9, but the librarian has been unable to find it when a search was requested in February, 2012. I have been unable to identify any other library with that journal.



Figure 13. Edgar Forkner, “Boats of Lake Union.”

Gustin, Paul Morgan, 1886-1974. Gustin settled in Seattle in 1906 and was soon recognized as the city’s leading artist. Gustin, who worked for many years in a polished Impressionist style, has been the subject of a single small exhibition of his etchings at the Frye that included a catalog, as well as two magazine articles:

Bailey, Madge, “Paul Martin Gustin,” *American Magazine of Art* (March 1922): 82-86.

Wilson, Catherine, “The Dean of Northwest Artists,” *Northwestern Woman* (April 1928): 9.

Martin, David F., *From Lake Union to the Louvre: the Etchings of Paul Morgan Gustin*. Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 2004, exhibition catalog.

Hart, Lance Wood, 1892-1941. Wood’s early work shows the influence of Impressionism, but he became more interested in decorative art, particularly art deco styles. He was an influential art teacher, as the first teacher of Robert Motherwell, the New York abstract expressionist (like Hart, a native of Aberdeen, Washington), and as an instructor at the University of Oregon.

Wilson wrote a similar piece on Gustin, which I was able to find, and she wrote more extensively on Eustace Ziegler.

“Camp Lewis,” figure 14, is a Hart watercolor gouache of 1917 depicting a rainy day at the army camp where Hart had volunteered during World War I. Hart was the subject of one brief article:

Martin David F.,” Lance Wood Hart,” *Artifact*, vol. 1, no. 1 (July/August 1995): 31-32.



Figure 14. Lance Wood Hart, “Camp Lewis.”

Hill, Abby Williams, 1861-1943. Somewhat older than the Northwest Impressionist artists listed in this chapter, Hill rarely participated in annual art exhibitions in Seattle and Portland. Yet another student of William Merritt Chase, who praised her talent and work ethic, much of her work evidences an Impressionist style. Her renown arises from a series of commissions from Western railroads to paint the wilderness of the West, the last of which occurred in 1906. Figure 15 is her “Emerald Pool” from Yellowstone National Park of 1906. Hill has been the subject of a book by an art historian.

Fields, Ronald, *Abby Williams Hill and the Lure of the West*, (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1989). Fields reports that William Merritt Chase told Hill “you can go to the top if you want to. You have talent and you have a genius for work; they go together.” Fields, 11.



Figure 15. Abby Williams Hill, "Emerald Pool."

Jensen, Dorothy Dolph, 1895-1977. Jensen enjoyed an education in art in Brussels and Paris. Originally from a prominent Oregon family, she settled in Seattle and painted in both Washington and Oregon. Most of her artistic output is similar in its Impressionist style, and her Impressionist work is instantly recognizable. Figure 16 is an untitled 1935 landscape painted in Union, Washington, on Puget Sound. A few pages on Jensen were included in an exhibition catalog:

Martin, David F., *An Enduring Legacy: Women Painters of Washington 1930-2005*. Bellingham: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, 2005, 36-40.



Figure 16. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, untitled Puget Sound scene

Laurence, Sydney, 1868-1940. Laurence is the Northwest's best known artist from the period 1910-1935. Although identified primarily with Alaska, he spent the winters in Seattle during the

1930's and painted a few Seattle scenes, such as "Aurora Bridge," figure 17. A prolific artist, his work regularly appears in auction sales in New York. As noted earlier, he is the only Northwest artist mentioned by William Gerdt in *American Impressionism*. Laurence has been the subject of two (unreliable) biographies and other publications as follows:

Jones, H. Wendy, "Sydney Laurence: Alaska's Celebrated Painter," *American Artist*, April (1962), 46-51. (Biography)

Jones, H. Wendy, *The Man and the Mountain: The Life of Sydney Laurence*. Anchorage: Alaskan Publishing (1962). (Biography)

Laurence, Jeanne, *My Life with Sydney Laurence*. Seattle: Superior Publishing (1972). (Biography)

Shalkop, Robert L., *Sydney Laurence: an American Impressionist*. Anchorage: Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, 1975, exhibition catalog.

Shalkop, Robert L., *Sydney Laurence: His Life and Work*. Anchorage: Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum, 1982, exhibition catalog.

Woodward, Kesler E., *Sydney Laurence: Painter of the North*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990, exhibition catalog.

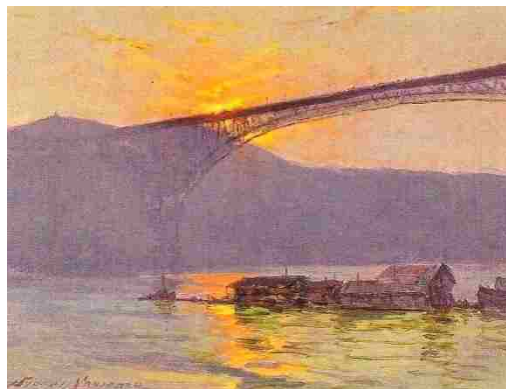


Figure 17. Sydney Laurence, "Aurora Bridge."

Partridge, George Roi, 1888-1984. Partridge was a close friend of John Butler, traveling with him to Paris to study and work.²³ Although a printmaker rather than a painter, some of

²³ Jennifer Kate Ward, "The Etchings of Roi Partridge," in Anthony R. White, *The Graphic Art of Roi Partridge: a Catalogue Raisonné*, (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1988), 3.

Partridge's early prints show an Impressionist influence, and he took an intense interest in the portrayal of the Washington's iconic mountain. Figure 18 is Partridge's etching of Mount Rainier, "In a Robe of Mist" of 1915, which captures the visual occlusion of the mountain resulting from precipitation. Partridge and his wife, the photographer Imogen Cunningham, are considered today as California artists, Cunningham as one of America's outstanding photographers, Partridge as the West Coast's most notable 20th century printmaker. There has been no scholarly examination of his Washington era work, apart from his catalogue raisonné:

White, Anthony R., *The Graphic Art of Roi Partridge*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1988, 114-133.



Figure 18. Roi Partridge, "In a Robe of Mist."

Tadama, Fokko, 1871-1937. Tadama, who immigrated to Seattle in 1909, was part of an unusual concentration of Dutch artists in Washington. In addition to Van Veen below, the third was Peter Camfferman, a modernist who was their contemporary. (A second unusual coincidence among Northwest Impressionists is that both Sydney Laurence and Tadama abandoned their wives and two sons in Europe, afterwards remarrying in America without ever having divorced their spouses.) Tadama, who earned his living primarily by teaching art, worked in an Impressionist style that he had developed in the Netherlands. Figure 19 is Tadama's "Lake Washington, Union Bay Marsh," a large landscape c. 1915 that provides

something of a Northwest version of Monet's water lilies. A monograph in Dutch on American artist George Hitchcock, with whom Tadama painted in the Netherlands, contains a chapter on Tadama:

Van den Berg, Peter J. H., *De Uitdaging Van Het Licht (An Outpouring of Light): George Hitchcock (1850-1913)*, Bahlmond Publishers, 2008, 118-122. (Annick Geelhand de Merxem, my wife, who is a native Dutch speaker, has translated the chapter on Tadama.)



Figure 19. Fokko Tadama, "Lake Washington, Union Bay Marsh."

Van Veen, Pieter J. L., 1875-1961. Van Veen was a member of the "Hague Barbizon" school of Dutch painters. He immigrated to America during World War I and painted in Connecticut during the 1920's in a rich Impressionist manner. He married a woman from Tacoma in the 1930's and moved to Washington, where he transitioned to an American scene style. Because Van Veen had abandoned Impressionism by the time he moved to the Northwest, none of his works is illustrated in this dissertation. The permanent collection of the Frye contains two of his Impressionist works painted in Connecticut and a third canvas painted in Europe. There are three exhibition catalogs on Van Veen, the first two commercial catalogs dating from the time paintings from his estate were being offered for sale.

Hammer Galleries, *Pieter J. L. Van Veen (1875-1961), Selected Works 1912-1943*. Hammer Galleries, Frye Art Museum, 1985, exhibition catalog.

Hammer Galleries, *Pieter J. L. Van Veen: "The Plein Air Landscapes"*. New York: Hammer Galleries, 1987, exhibition catalog.

Kollar, Allan J., *The Paintings of Pieter J. L. Van Veen*. Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 1998, exhibition catalog.

Ziegler, Eustace Paul, 1881-1969. Eustace Ziegler first went to Alaska as a missionary. He returned to New Haven, Connecticut to attend divinity school, and afterwards studied art for one year at Yale. Back in Alaska in the early 1920's, he decided to leave the ministry and become a full time artist. He soon developed a routine in which he sketched in Alaska in the summer, but spent most of the year in Seattle, where he painted (primarily Alaskan scenes) in his studio, while teaching extensively. Figure 20 is Ziegler's early, undated, "Chief Shakes' Cabin" in Alaska. Aside from Sydney Laurence, Ziegler was thought to be the only artist resident in Oregon or Washington to earn a living from the sale of his work. His style became progressively more austere after his youthful work in a colorful Impressionist mode. He has been the subject of three exhibition catalogs:

Shalkop, Robert L., *Eustace Ziegler: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Alaska Historical and Fine Arts Museum, 1977.

Woodward, Kesler E., *Spirit of the North: the Art of Eustace Paul Ziegler*. Augusta, Georgia: Morris Communications, and the Alaska Museum of History and Art, 1998.

Broocks, Steven, *Capturing the Character of the Northwest: Drypoints by Eustace P. Ziegler*. Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 2002.



Figure 20. Eustace Ziegler, “Chief Shakes’ Cabin”

Other Northwest Impressionists:

For the sake of completeness, some additional Northwest Impressionist artists deserve mention. None has been the subject of any academic study of his or her art. A few comments follow:

Breyman, Edna Cranston, 1881-1918, Oregon. Breyman also studied with William Merritt Chase, but she died young, with a relatively little extant work. “Old Boats near Steel Bridge,” figure 21, is a Portland harbor scene.



Figure 10. Edna Breyman, “Old Boats Near Steel Bridge.”

Chase, Waldo Spore, 1895-1988, Washington. Starting in 1924, Chase engraved color woodblock prints of the Northwest, principally of Mount Rainier and other great mountains. Although woodblocks by their nature emphasize flat areas of color, Waldo Chase experimented with reflections of light on water that imitate the broken brushstrokes of Impressionist painters, such as the color woodblock print, “USS Louisville,” figure 22, of 1931.



Figure 22. Waldo Chase, “USS Louisville.”

Chase, Wendell Corwin, 1897-1988, Washington. Like his brother Waldo, Corwin Chase was interested in achieving Impressionistic effects through the unlikely medium of obdurate woodblock prints. He was able to represent the Northwest mist and the resultant hazy form of Mount Rainier, as in “Sunset,” figure 23, of 1927. Corwin Chase wrote an idiosyncratic account of living in teepees in the Washington wilderness while creating color woodblock prints, along with his older brother Waldo, during the period from 1924 to 1930.²⁴

²⁴ W. Corwin Chase, *Teepee Fires*, Burley, WA: Coffee Break Press, 1981.



Figure 23. Corwin Chase, "Sunset."

Fulton, Cyrus, 1873-1949, Oregon. Fulton studied with Harry Wentz and Alfred Schroff, both listed herein, and his work appears derivative of theirs.

Hamilton, George [dates?], Washington. Hamilton—a shadowy figure—exhibited at the Seattle Fine Arts Society in the 1920's, and his extant work evidences a strong Impressionist style. However, his dates of birth and death are unknown, as is his period of residence in Seattle.

LeFever, Bird, 1885-1977, Oregon. LeFever was a student of Keller and often painted with him on Sauvie Island near Portland. Her style seems derivative of Keller's.

Manser, Percy, 1886-1973, Oregon. Manser's early painting reflected the academic training he had received in England, and his later painting was more reflective of American scene art associated with the 1930's than with American Impressionism.

Schroff, Alfred, 1863-1939, Oregon. Schroff was both an Impressionist artist and a teacher at the University of Oregon. His dark image of the evergreen forests of the Northwest is figure 76.

Sheffers, Peter, 1893-1949, Oregon. Sheffers was the last significant Northwest artist to work in an Impressionist style, painting in Oregon in the late 1930's, and residing in Oregon from 1941-1949, when he died from a heart attack. He sold much of his work through Gump's in San Francisco.²⁵ During the 1940's, he specialized in the depiction of rain, mist, and fog along the Oregon Coast. One such work, "Foggy Morning on the Coast," is figure 24.



Figure 24. Peter Sheffers, "Foggy Morning on the Coast."

Southworth, Frederick W., 1860-1946, Washington. Southworth was a practicing physician who exhibited his Impressionist works in Seattle and Tacoma. His output was not large, and he remains an essentially marginal player.

Wood, C. E. S. (Charles Erskine Scott), 1852-1944, Oregon. Wood was a protean figure in Oregon art, inviting New York Impressionists Childe Hassam and J. Alden Weir to visit and paint in the state in the early years of the 20th century, and being instrumental in the founding of the Portland Public Library and PAM. Some of his work, such as "Eastern Oregon Desert," figure 25, is nearly indistinguishable from Hassam's landscapes of Eastern Oregon. Although

²⁵ Conversation with Len Braarud, December, 2007.

Wood considered himself to be an amateur painter, he deserves study because of his influence on the collection and direction of art in Oregon.



Figure 25. C. E. S. Wood, “Eastern Oregon Desert.”

Dearth of Serious Scholarship

Several observations are apparent from these lists totaling thirty-one Northwest Impressionists artists. The number of artists is about the same as the thirty-two articles, exhibition catalogs, and books that make reference to them. However, nothing at all has been published on about half of the artists. Thirteen of the thirty-two articles, catalogs, and books relate to just two artists, Browne and Laurence. Of the remaining nineteen, four are by David Martin, a Seattle independent curator and art dealer who has written extensively on “forgotten” Washington artists²⁶, three are brief exhibition catalogs on Pieter Van Veen’s work in Europe and the Eastern United States, and two are by Ginny Allen and Greg Nelson, respectively a PAM

²⁶ In addition to Martin’s excellent articles and exhibition catalogs cited in the text, see David F. Martin, *The Art of Richard Bennett*, (Seattle: The Museum of History and Industry, 2010); David F. Martin & Nicolette Bromberg, *Shadows of a Fleeting World: Pictorial Photography and the Seattle Camera Club*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); David F. Martin, *Evergreen Muse: The Art of Elizabeth Colborne*, (Bellingham: Whatcom Museum, 2011); and Margaret E. Bullock, Christina S. Henderson, & David F. Martin, *A Turbulent Lens: The Photographic Art of Virna Haffer*, (Tacoma: Tacoma Art Museum, 2011). These four exhibition catalogs concern two woodblock print artists, a camera group, most of whose members were Japanese-Americans, and a separate exhibition on a photographer who was a member of the camera group and a woodblock print artist. All the artists and photographers featured in the exhibition catalogs were active in the 1920’s and 1930’s and fall into the category of “forgotten artists.”

docent and a Portland art collector, both of which concern the same artist, Melville Wire, and were written to coincide with a single exhibition of his work. One article on Charles C. McKim is the result of genealogical study that I commissioned for the research for this dissertation. Only three of the thirty-two publications are by authors with advanced academic credentials in art. Kesler Woodward, the author of exhibition catalogs on Laurence and Ziegler, is a professor of art—not art history—at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.²⁷ Ronald Fields, the author of the book on Abby Williams Hill, is a retired professor of art history at University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington, which is the repository of the largest part of Hill’s oeuvre.

Most of the writings concern Washington rather than Oregon artists. This is partly a result of the fact that Browne, Laurence, and Ziegler, although primarily associated through their art with Alaska and Western Canada, had important Washington connections. (Washington has long been the “gateway” to Alaska in terms of commerce and travel.) The preponderance of Washington artists is also the result of the fact that several of the articles were written by David F. Martin, a Seattle art dealer, guest curator, and (very knowledgeable) autodidact. Martin initially sold works by both Oregon and Washington artists of this period, but once Oregon dealers took an increasing interest in their regional artists, Martin decided to concentrate and write on Washington artists. Finally, although PAM takes a greater interest in Oregon Impressionists than SAM takes in those from Washington, smaller Washington museums in recent years like TAM and the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham have been willing to “invest” in artists of this period through guest-curator shows and serious catalogs. For whatever reason, when an Oregon museum has mounted a similar show, such as the Melville Wire exhibition at the Hallie Ford Museum in Salem in 2005, there was no catalog.

²⁷ Woodward initially moved to Alaska as a museum curator, and he writes with insight and authority. Alaskan artists have been fortunate to have an accomplished art historian publish so much.

Reputation of Northwest Impressionists

American Impressionism fell out of favor by the 1930's, if not earlier. In Seattle, the fall from grace can be dated to April, 1928, when several Northwest Impressionists were excluded from the annual exhibition of the Seattle Fine Arts Society (described in detail in Chapter II). Although some Northwest Impressionists like Edgar Forkner, who exhibited in Chicago regularly, and Clara J. Stephens, who exhibited often in New York, were known in the art world outside the Northwest, they too dropped out of public consciousness as the 1930's progressed. The case of Stephens is illustrative. At the time of her death in 1952, the contents of her studio and her inventory of paintings were sold at a general estate auction, and her papers were sent to the dump.²⁸ In this dissertation, we will look at the single year of Stephens's journals that survived, full of insightful comments, and very well written. Stephens had been perhaps the most publicized Portland artist when the full period of 1910-1935 is considered, yet over the fifteen years preceding her death, she had become largely forgotten, and documents that would be of interest today to students of the period have been irretrievably lost. In fact, apart from Browne and Hill, both of whom have already been the subject of one or more books, there is not a single significant archive of papers of any of these artists available for study. Many of these artists, like McKim, Forkner, and Stephens, were unmarried and, in the absence of descendants who might have preserved their work and papers, their possessions were dispersed or discarded at their death.

In the Northwest, Impressionism had become old-fashioned by the late 1920's as new modernist trends overtook the Impressionist style that, in the early 1900's, been the vanguard of

²⁸ Robert Lundberg, "Clara Jane Stephens, An American Impressionist," Portland: unpublished manuscript, 2000, 19. Mark Humpal archive.

modernism for the Pacific Northwest. At the fine art exhibitions in state fairs in Oregon and Washington, by the 1930's, Impressionist work was categorized as conservative, and separate prizes were awarded for it as compared to newer modernist styles.²⁹ To adapt to changing tastes, and to explore new methods of art, some of these Northwest Impressionist artists adopted other styles, such as Crow's creating modernist visions of Native Americans, Hart's conversion to art deco, and Van Veen's adopting the preferred "WPA" realism of the 1930's. Gustin and Wire forsook oils for watercolors, perhaps more for their own enjoyment than for sale to eventual clients. McKim appears to have greatly reduced his artistic activity after 1927. As the Great Depression persisted during the 1930's, and art markets in Portland and Seattle dried up, many artists became too discouraged to continue creating works of art.

Although these artists remain "forgotten" today in the broader American art community, a few dealers have taken an interest in them and promoted their work, starting in the late 1970's. The first was Len Braarud of La Conner, Washington, who specialized in Sydney Laurence, advertized heavily, and encouraged smaller museums to exhibit Laurence's work.³⁰ David Martin opened a gallery in Seattle in the mid 1980's oriented toward these artists. Allan Kollar, an American art dealer and consultant in Seattle, took a particular interest in Pieter Van Veen, writing the catalog for a show at the Frye Art Museum in 1998, while Jay Franklin is the most recent Seattle dealer to buy and sell their works. In Portland, Robert Joki and Mark Humpal operate galleries that carry the work of Oregon Impressionists, and Humpal has posted

²⁹ An anonymous reviewer anticipated this development when he described Ziegler's canvases as "representative of the conservative school," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* October 28, 1926. In the Washington State Fair of 1935, Paul Gustin won first prize in the "Conservative group" for oil painting, and in 1936, Edgar Forkner won first prize in the Conservative group for watercolors. Presumably attentive to a categorization that placed his art on the wrong side of history, Gustin entered his watercolors in the "Modernistic group" in 1936 and won second prize. *Seattle Times*, September 17, 1935, 10 and September 25, 1936, 21.

³⁰ Braarud told me in a conversation in November, 2011, that when William Gerdts researched his chapters on Northwest art for his series on regional American art, Gerdts remarked to him that he obtained his best information from knowledgeable dealers like Braarud.

biographical blogs on Oregon artists active in the first half of the 20th century on his gallery's website. Harvey and Steve's Gallery in Portland typically has several works of Melville Wire on offer, as they acquired the paintings in Wire's estate. The Portland area also has an art gallery that organizes two fine arts auctions per year, Matthew's Galleries, in nearby Lake Oswego. The gallery and auctions on occasion have works by Oregon Impressionists, particularly Clyde Keller. Thus, there is a renewal of interest in Northwest Impressionism among art dealers and collectors, but that interest has not pierced the academy. The lack of visibility today of these Washington and Oregon artists among members of the academy is similar to that of California and Eastern Impressionists in 1975, the year William Gerds identified as the beginning of the revival of broad interest in American Impressionism. Not only was the Pacific Northwest one of the last regions of the United States to adopt Impressionism as Modern art in the early 20th century, it is also one of the last regions to rediscover the very same Impressionists who once brought new ideas about art to the public in Portland and Seattle.

Because no serious academic work—at the level of a dissertation—has been done on these artists, this dissertation will address them as a group, much as Thomas Folk's seminal work on Pennsylvania Impressionists originated as a dissertation under William Gerds.³¹ I will present short artistic biographies and examine in depth the art of Paul M. Gustin, Charles C. McKim, Clara J. Stephens, J. Edgar Forkner, Clyde Leon Keller, and Dorothy Dolph Jensen, all of whom have been briefly described earlier. I have chosen this order to facilitate the development of the themes of choice of subject, iconography, and the depiction of atmosphere that differentiate Northwest artists from other American Impressionists. These artists were selected for more intensive study because no research on their work has been published, yet they

³¹ Folk, Thomas C., *The Pennsylvania Impressionists*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

were among the most prominent Northwest artists of their day.³² All were prolific artists whose work can be viewed in private collections. There are many modern auction records for sales of work by Forkner and Keller, and a significant number of modern records for McKim. Gustin was recognized as the leader of the Impressionist community in Seattle, while McKim was elected the leader in Portland. Forkner and Gustin were important art teachers in Seattle, as were Keller and Stephens in Portland. Jensen, originally from Oregon, painted extensively in both states. Thus, through the careers of these six artists, the overall map of the development of Northwest Impressionism can be charted.

This dissertation will emphasize how Northwest Impressionism differs from that of other places such as Boston, New York, Pennsylvania, and especially California. It will describe the unique features of Northwest Impressionism in terms of its implicit iconography, drawing upon research that has explored the iconography of French Impressionism.³³ Northwest iconography's most important aspect is the frequent choice of the highest mountains in the region, Mount Hood in Oregon, Mount Rainier in Washington, and Mount McKinley in Alaska, as the subject of paintings. (Indeed, images of Mount McKinley are so prevalent in the work of Laurence, e.g., figure 2, and Ziegler, that today their artistic identity is largely defined by them.) The various *meanings* of this focus on iconic mountains will be explored, drawing upon observations by contemporary journalists and the artists themselves. Other sources of Northwestern Impressionist iconography to be examined are the images of its forest wilderness, with little trace of human presence, and urban harbor scenes.

³² At least one work of each of Gustin, Keller, McKim, and Stephens is illustrated in Kreisman and Mason in their recent brief survey of Northwest Impressionism in the context of the Arts & Crafts movement, footnoted above, reinforcing my choice of them as illustrative artists for purposes of this study.

³³ Richard Brettell, "The Impressionist Landscape and the Image of France," in *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape*, ed. by Richard Brettell et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 27-53.

Apart from iconography, the most noticeable difference between Northwest Impressionism and American Impressionism elsewhere is the representation of the physical atmosphere of the Northwest. No rain or scenes of falling snow appear in Southern California Impressionist painting, but rain, mist, and fog are ubiquitous in Northwest art. Pennsylvania Impressionists are renowned for their snow scenes, as is New York Impressionist Guy Wiggins's scenes of New York City under a siege of snow. In Northwest art, by way of contrast, snow is depicted on the mountains that tower above Portland and Seattle, but it is the constant drizzle of rain, and the frequent fog and mist, that is represented in the foregrounds of paintings. How Northwest artists have "painted" the atmosphere, particularly the manner in which light in the Northwest is treated, differentiates Northwest Impressionism from that of the rest of the United States. Indeed, although this visual understanding of the Northwest atmosphere is more complex than the clear blue skies often depicted elsewhere, critics have generally failed to appreciate the expertise required to paint it. The subtle and sometimes somber depiction of the Northwest atmosphere has probably militated against public enthusiasm compared to the bright sun and clear light of Laguna Beach. A California Impressionist work inevitably brightens a room, while a Northwest Impressionist painting sometimes does not. The difference may be analogous to that between French Impressionist art of the English Channel and North Sea in contrast to that of the Mediterranean. We recognize that these differences in treatment are justifiable, even admirable in France, but that same recognition and admiration has so far been denied to Northwest Impressionists.

Chapter I

Impressionism, Tonalism, and Modernism

In identifying about thirty artists as representative of Northwest Impressionism, it is necessary to assert that their work is sufficiently similar to be discussed together. Not only should their work have been created at roughly the same time, but they should have been aware of each other's painting, or better, they should have belonged to the same organizations, or even have physically painted together. To contemporary and later observers, their collective work should evidence a certain consistency of "style" such that generalizations about their art should apply to most of them, most of the time. In other words, they should all comfortably fit within the parameters of American Impressionism.

In the cases of some artists, like Claude Monet (1840-1926) in France and Childe Hassam (1859-1935) in America, identification with Impressionism is evident. Monet was one of the seven "board members" of the first "independent exhibition" in France in 1874 by artists soon identified as Impressionists.³⁴ Hassam, born in Massachusetts in 1859, made his first trip to Europe at the age of 24, and his second at 26 to study at the Académie Julian in Paris. By the time he returned to America at the age of 30, according to Margaret Bullock, "he had developed a full Impressionist style focusing on urban scenes painted with broken brushwork and a high-keyed palette."³⁵ Hassam was also a founding member of the "Ten," a "loosely knit organization" that first exhibited together in 1898 at the Durand-Ruel gallery in New York City.

³⁴ Brettell et al, *A Day in the Country*, 331. The other artists on the board were Pissarro, Degas, Sisley, Morisot, and Guillaumin. All are today identified as Impressionists, although Guillaumin is largely ignored by the academy.

³⁵ Bullock, *Impressionist in the West*, 17.

Not only were the majority of the Ten “committed to an Impressionist aesthetic,” but Durand-Ruel was the Parisian art dealer, with a gallery in New York as well, that is most closely identified with Impressionism.³⁶ Bullock’s implicit definition of Impressionism quoted above contains three elements: urban scene, broken brush strokes, and high-keyed palette, the latter short brush strokes of pure, not blended, color. This description of Impressionism applies to urban artists identified as Impressionist in Paris and New York (where Hassam relocated upon his return to America), and it can be applied also to artists outside major cities whose chosen subject matter was not urban.³⁷

However clearly the appellation of Impressionist applies to Monet or Hassam, there is considerable disagreement when it is extended to others. For example, William Gerds in *American Impressionism* accepts without qualification that J. Alden Weir (1852-1919), John Twachtman (1853-1902), and William Merritt Chase, all members of the Ten, were American Impressionists. However, David A. Cleveland, an independent curator and art historian, in his recent *A History of American Tonalism*, includes them as Tonalists, not Impressionists, with Twachtman receiving an extensive subsection of his own nearly on a par with those of George Inness (1825-1894) and James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), generally acknowledged as the inspiration for Tonalism.³⁸ John Wilmerding, a retired professor of art history at Princeton, who wrote the foreword to Cleveland’s massive book, noted that Cleveland’s decision to include the

³⁶ Gerds, *American Impressionism*, 171.

³⁷ Edward Lucie-Smith’s *Dictionary of Art Terms* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 103, provides a similar definition of Impressionism that comprises painting out of doors in small touches of pure color, while catching a fleeting impression of light.

³⁸ David A. Cleveland, *A History of American Tonalism: 1880-1920* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2010), 94-101.

“more dissolved landscapes” of American Impressionists within the ambit of Tonalism would be “provocative” in art history circles.³⁹

Tonalism, according to Cleveland, is an established style of American art dating from before 1880. The term is claimed to have been fully recognized by 1890 among American art critics, who differentiated “somber tonalism” from the “frank naturalism” of Impressionism.⁴⁰ Rather than defining Tonalism by specific elements in the construction of a painting, like broken brush strokes and choice of pigments, Cleveland relies primarily upon the effect achieved by Tonalist artists, “the expression of poetic feeling or mood.”⁴¹ When referring to specific elements of style, Cleveland emphasizes “the use of a low-toned palette consisting mostly of cool colors—earthy greens, blues, mauve, violet, black—and a range of intervening grays, colors considered poetic and suggestive.”⁴² Thus, Cleveland’s definition of style ignores brush strokes, and substitutes low-toned blended colors for Impressionism’s more highly-keyed colors.

When looking at Northwest Impressionist art, these defining characteristics of Impressionism and Tonalism tend to be intertwined. Cleveland explains the “affinity for Tonalism” expressed in the work of northern California artists, whom others classify as California Impressionists, in terms of “the type of landscape and peculiar microclimate found along the Pacific coast.” Quoting Harvey Jones, “the landscape along the Pacific coast contributes its own distinctive colors...the faded greens and tawny ochre’s of the grassy hillsides

³⁹ Cleveland, vii. In what may be another “provocation” within the academy, Cleveland’s over 600 pages make no reference to Wanda Corn or her exhibition catalog, *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880-1910*, which launched the rediscovery of Tonalism in 1972, about the same time as William Gerdtz was gearing up to take a new look at American Impressionism. Elsewhere, Corn tends to figure prominently in books or articles on Tonalism, such as Marc Simpson’s *Like Breath on Glass: Whistler, Inness, and the Art of Painting Softly*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), which reprints Corn’s essay in its entirety, 228-254.

⁴⁰ Cleveland, xx. Although the word “tonalism” was used in a descriptive sense in the nineteenth century, it was not in common use as the name of a style or school of art.

⁴¹ Cleveland, xxi.

⁴² Idem.

in late summer, along with the gray-green foliage of eucalyptus, live oak, and olive trees, blend their muted tones with the pearly grays of marine mists and fogs...”⁴³ Although Jones was speaking of northern California, and the trees he named are not commonly found in the Pacific Northwest, the point remains pertinent, even exactly parallel, if evergreens, black cottonwoods, and other species of oak found in the Northwest are substituted for the trees of the northern California coast. Nature imposes its own imperatives of subject, light, and color on any mimetic representation of the landscape. The Northwest light is attenuated compared to California, and colors become more muted, more inclined toward gray-greens, the farther one progresses up the Pacific coast. It is thus not surprising that definitions of Impressionism and Tonalism overlap when applied to the landscape art of the Northwest.



Figure 26, Sydney Laurence, “Northern Lights.”

As noted in the introduction, the best known Northwest landscape artist of the early twentieth century is Sydney Laurence. In his exhibition catalog, *Sydney Laurence, Painter of the North*, Kesler E. Woodward aligns Laurence with Tonalism, primarily because of feeling rather than technique. The concluding sentence of Woodward’s essay lauds Laurence for allowing “a few more generations *to feel the magic* of the frontier.” (emphasis supplied) Laurence lived and

⁴³ Cleveland, 512, quoting Harvey L. Jones, *Twilight and Reverie: California Tonalist Painting, 1890-1930*, (Oakland: The Oakland Museum of California, 1995), 4.

worked in Europe for many years, arriving in 1889, and residing mostly in the artist's colony of St. Ives in Cornwall, England until his relocation to Alaska in the early twentieth-century during the gold rush.⁴⁴ His fifteen adult years abroad far exceeded those of any other American-born Northwest artist of that era. Laurence had many opportunities in England to be influenced by Whistler and his followers. Thus, in the case of Laurence, an exploration of Tonalism makes some sense, in particular for his paintings of the Northern Lights such as figure 26, which has many affinities with Whistler's Nocturnes (e.g., figure 27), a derivation surprisingly not emphasized by Woodward. Both Laurence's series of Northern Lights and Whistler's numerous Nocturnes share monochromatic color schemes, largely dark blue, the quiet tonal scheme enlivened by the aurora borealis, city night lights or, in the case of figure 27, exploding fireworks. In my opinion, however, Woodward's effort to fit the sometimes bombastic Laurence into a modest Tonalist mold is unsuccessful. The panache, enormity, and sublimity of Laurence's great paintings of Mount McKinley like figure 2 have little to do with the understated gray-blue landscapes of farm fields and meadows of most Tonalist canvases.



Figure 27. James McNeill Whistler, "Nocturne in Black and Gold—The Falling Rocket."

⁴⁴ Woodward, *Laurence*, 14-17. An earlier exhibition catalog from Alaska, Robert L. Shalkop, *Sydney Laurence: an Alaskan Impressionist*, (Anchorage: Anchorage History and Fine Arts Museum, 1975), obviously took a different tack, emphasizing the "quite impressionist treatment" of much of Laurence's work. Shalkop, *Laurence*, 1975, 10.

If Laurence is suspect as a Tonalist, is that true of the other Northwest artists addressed in this dissertation? William Gerdtz eschewed the use of Tonalism as well as Impressionism when discussing Northwest artists in *Art Across America*, clearly not wanting to take a position, and perhaps waiting for others to initiate a debate. In my opinion, the primary reason to opt for Impressionism is that American Impressionism is a well defined category of art, related both to French Impressionism, where the style was born, and to emanations of Impressionism in America and throughout the world. The concept of Tonalism, in contrast, remains in flux in America, and it seems to be largely unknown outside of the United States. In the standard English *Dictionary of Art Terms* referred to earlier, Tonalism is not even mentioned. Furthermore, in David Cleveland's expansive view of the subject, Tonalism incorporates so many artists, from so many styles like realism, naturalism, and Impressionism, that it tends to lose specificity in relation to technique, relying instead on amorphous "feeling." As explained in the Introduction, many Northwest artists lived and studied in France when Impressionism was, in art market terms, the most important style, and eight studied with William Merritt Chase, the latter typically categorized as an American Impressionist (except by Cleveland). Thus, in terms of their own experience of art in Europe, and the undoubted influence of their most renowned teacher, Impression is the style with which they would have identified if asked to make a choice—certainly none would have requested to be called a Tonalist, as that was no more than an adjective in a few art reviews of the period. Although Kesler Woodward argues at length that Laurence is a Tonalist—and Laurence makes a good test case because his European experience was primarily in England, not in France—Woodward, as I have argued, is not convincing. This dissertation will thus proceed to treat these Northwest artists as Impressionists, raising points of technique and style (and sometimes Tonalist color and feeling) as relevant.

A word remains to be said on the reception of Modernism in the Northwest. American Impressionism is often dismissed or underrated by art critics on what seems to be grounds of nationalism or patriotism because of its derivation from French Impressionism. Tonalism, by contrast, is described as an American invention (although Whistler, of course, made his contributions to Tonalism in England.) Indeed, Cleveland's apotheosis of Tonalism is based on its deep American roots, as well as his assertion that it was the first manifestation of Modernism in America. "Tonalism's modernity, its transcendentalist and Whistlerian embodiments, [epitomize] America's progress in the arts."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, most cultural and art historians credit the birth of Modernism to mid-nineteenth century Paris, and they designate Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) as the first Modernist in literature, and Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) or Edouard Manet (1832-1883) as the first Modernist in art. They choose Impressionism as the first broad avant-garde movement to exemplify Baudelaire's "painters of modern life" and to challenge, root and branch, the art academy.⁴⁶

Applying this cultural history of Modernism to the United States, Impressionism became the first Modernist art movement. American Impressionism, like the experience in other countries, involved an adaptation of Impressionism that reflected American sensibilities and priorities. American artists were intrigued with the Impressionist emphasis on color and the effects of light. However, they tended not to emphasize pure color applied in small touches that blended in the eye of the observer, and they certainly were not interested in turning the subject of a painting into a motif like Monet's Rouen Cathedral. Rather, for American artists,

⁴⁵ Cleveland, xiv.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Peter Gay, *Modernism, The Lure of Heresy: from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 104, where Gay designates Impressionism the first modernist art movement; more specifically, see T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-51*, (London: 1973); T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (London: 1973); T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Francis Francina et al, *Modernity and Modernism, French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

representation of the subject qua subject remained their goal. Mount Rainier had to be reverentially depicted as the Northwest's most iconic mountain, not as a motif for exploring the effects of light in the dissolution of mass and form. In the Northwest experience of the reception of Impressionism, colors tended to be blended because of the green-gray chromatics of the northern Pacific Coast. Northwest Impressionists adopted the broken brush strokes of the original Impressionists, but eschewed the highly-keyed colors found in France and among Southern California Impressionists, reacting in their cases to the bright sunshine of their "Mediterranean" climates.



Figure 28, Childe Hassam, "Afternoon Sky, Harney Desert."

The Northwest admittedly lagged much of the rest of the United States in its reception of Modernism. The first generation American Impressionists who resided in Giverny, the home of Claude Monet, as early as 1885, returned to the Eastern United States; some of the second generation of Giverny from 1900, including Richard Miller (1875-1943) and Guy Rose (1867-1925), settled in California.⁴⁷ None of the American artists who sojourned in Giverny relocated to the Pacific Northwest. Modernism arrived in the Northwest later than elsewhere, most dramatically in Childe Hassam's second trip in 1908, when PAM purchased its first oil painting,

⁴⁷ Gerdt, *American Impressionism*, 58, 263.

Afternoon Sky, Harney Desert, by Hassam, figure 28. Five years later, more recent emanations of Modernism paid a brief, dramatic visit when selections from the New York Armory Show were exhibited in Portland in 1913, including Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) "Nude Descending a Staircase."⁴⁸ Impressionism, the Northwest's first introduction to Modernism, took root in the form of Northwest Impressionism. The second introduction to Modernism—Duchamp, Picasso (1881-1973), and others from the Armory Show—was initially rejected by the public as too strange and different.⁴⁹ American Impressionism remained essentially the sole Modernist influence in the art of the Northwest until the 1920's, which marked the arrival of artists like Mark Tobey (1890-1976) in Seattle, and a general recognition that Impressionism had by then become the conservative standard by which to measure twentieth century art.

A last problematical term, related indirectly to the Northwest's late reception of Modernism, is regionalism. Although the *Dictionary of Art Terms* ignores Tonalism and basically gives up on Modernism, defining it lamely as "a succession of avant-garde styles in art", the *Dictionary of Art Terms* defines Regionalism as "the work of a small group of North American artists of the 1930's and 1940's who concentrated on rural Midwestern subject-matter", citing Thomas Hart Benton as an example.⁵⁰ William Gerdts uses regionalism with a small "r" much more broadly in his three volumes of *Art Across America, Two Centuries of Regional Painting*, covering all fifty states and many thousands of artists, but not the metropolitan centers of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Gerdts's sense of regionalism thus encompasses most of the art created over a period of two hundred years in the United States outside the confines of these three somewhat arbitrarily chosen Eastern cities. Although Gerdts's

⁴⁸ Allen, *Oregon Painters*, 31.

⁴⁹ Meyer Schapiro described the initial reaction of the New York public as "bewilderment, disgust, and rage." Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art, 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Braziller, 1982), 136. Some Portland artists like Carl Walters and Floyd Wilson were comfortable with more radical art exhibited in the Armory Show.

⁵⁰ Lucie-Smith, *Dictionary*, 122, 158.

use of regionalism is intended merely to be descriptive, many intellectuals, art historians, and museum curators tend to use “regional” in the sense of “provincial” and consequently to denote something of less interest or value.⁵¹

The United States is a federal nation, with political power broadly shared between the federal government in Washington, DC, and the states. In political and economic terms, Washington, DC is preeminent in politics, while various cities and states dominate different economic sectors, e.g., Texas and Oklahoma in oil production, Silicon Valley, California, in semi-conductors, Seattle in commercial aircraft and personal computer software, and so on. New York City is America’s financial center and, for most of the twentieth century, it was the most important artistic center (the two are closely linked). Of course, for the art of music, that mantle has been shared with cities like Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Philadelphia, and for film and television, the artistic center has been Los Angeles. It seems to me that describing most art produced outside three Eastern cities as “regionalist” is problematical because it is inconsistent with the federal history of America. On the one hand, the very use of the term tends to stigmatize artists in the rest of the country as less worthy than (principally) New York based artists. On the other, the practice runs counter to that of nations like Germany and Italy, where cities like Munich are the equal of Berlin, and Florence and Venice rivals of Rome. Even small nations like Belgium and the Netherlands do not accord any sense of superiority to art produced in Brussels or Amsterdam over that of Antwerp, Bruges, or The Hague. Indeed, smaller cities in Europe have their own art museums that feature the work of artists who lived in the area. When one visits the Beaux-Arts Museum of Lyons, for example, one primarily sees the work of

⁵¹ See, e.g., Michael Dirda’s assertion that “regionalist [connotes] folksy and second-rate.” Michael Dirda, “One of America’s Best,” *The New York Review of Books*, May 10, 2012, v. LIX, no. 8, 53.

Lyonnais artists through the centuries, along with a smattering of works from elsewhere in France that the Louvre lacked the space to exhibit.

In my opinion, it is regrettable that “regional” American art museums like the Seattle Art Museum and the Portland Museum of Art give precedence to the very same contemporary artists, typically centered in New York City, found in the museums of many other American cities. As noted earlier, SAM and PAM evidence very little interest in their own art history, an attitude entirely at odds with that of “regional” European museums. The result is a depressing sameness among American museums, many vying to display the identical “multiples” of artists like Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Jeff Koons (b. 1955). Their lack of interest in local artists because they were merely regional, and because they were allegedly not working in the forefront of Modernism, reduces them to permanently poor relatives of New York who can never compete with their admired Eastern cousins.⁵² Having said this, we remain burdened with “regionalism” in art history usage, as it has been adopted by the academy and museums in reference to artists who lived in places removed from New York.

Having clarified my use of Impressionism, Tonalism, Modernism, and regionalism, this dissertation thus addresses regional artists who worked in the Northwest using important elements of Impressionism as it was received in the United States. Most of the paintings that will be discussed are landscapes because landscapes have long been the preferred subject of art for Americans generally.⁵³ Although the climate of the northern Pacific Coast discourages artists

⁵² Meyer Schapiro, otherwise one of the most insightful art historians of the mid twentieth century, epitomized this New York-centric view, describing American reaction to Modernism outside of New York as “a singular play of provincial backwardness.” As such, regional American art was unworthy of scholarly interest. Schapiro, *Modern Art*, 157.

⁵³ James Burke, March 21, 2011 lecture at PAM, observed that, year after year, about 75% of the art sold at auction in the United States is landscape. In terms of contemporary American taste, portraits and still lifes do poorly at auction, and works with a religious subject are “dead upon arrival.”

from the consistent use of bright colors, their tendency toward hues favored by Tonalists elsewhere in America does not make the work of these Northwest artists Tonalist— Impressionism was the style that inspired them. Northwest Impressionists were the first Modernists of the twentieth century in Oregon and Washington—they deserve credit for being the vanguard in identifying and adopting a Modernist impulse.

Chapter II

Paul Morgan Gustin (1886-1974)

Paul Morgan Gustin was born in 1886 in Fort Vancouver, Washington, where his father was stationed as an army officer. Gustin grew up in Denver, Colorado, taking art lessons from Jean Mannheim (1863-1945), a German-born Impressionist who resided in Denver for reasons of health before relocating to California in 1908. Gustin reported that his studies with Mannheim lasted several years, ending at the age of 16, when Mannheim told him “You know the fundamentals. Now go to work by yourself and don’t let any teacher spoil you.”⁵⁴ Gustin moved with his family to Seattle in 1906 after his father’s retirement. Gustin’s life continued to be closely linked with his mother until her death in 1953. During much of that time, Gustin’s mother lived in a house that Gustin designed in Normandy Park, a wealthy, waterfront suburb of Seattle, and Gustin and his mother often traveled together, including spending the year of 1930 in Europe.

The first press notices of Gustin the artist are newspaper accounts of his one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society, the predecessor of the Seattle Art Museum, in May, 1913.⁵⁵ Among the nineteen canvases exhibited were “Fog on the Bay” and “Mount Rainier.” The latter could conceivably have been the large oil painting entitled “King above the Clouds,” figure 29, that now belongs to the Rainier Club of Seattle.

⁵⁴ Helen Ross, “Coming to the Front: Paul M. Gustin,” *The Town Crier*, May, 1916. Most such information concerning the artists addressed in this dissertation is self-reported and cannot be independently verified.

⁵⁵ Starting in 1914, the Seattle Fine Arts Society held fourteen annual exhibitions by Northwest artists, mostly in rented premises on Harvard Avenue; the fifteenth through the eighteenth were sponsored by the Art Institute of Seattle, the successor organization to the Fine Arts Society, in a nearby location through 1932; the Seattle Art Museum was founded subsequently, and it assumed responsibility for the annual exhibitions at its premises in Volunteer Park. The annual exhibitions were discontinued after 1971, when the museum’s mission to promote interest in the work of local artists apparently ended. Gustin served as an officer or director of the Fine Arts Society from at least 1914 until the early 1920’s, and he wrote the introductory paragraphs for several of the programs for the annual exhibitions.



Figure 29. Paul Gustin, “King above the Clouds”

“King above the Clouds” is not dated. Because of its size and evident ambition, David Martin speculated that Gustin may have painted it for possible exhibition at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909 or the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.⁵⁶ Although the “Mount Rainier” that Gustin exhibited in 1913 in Seattle was not published, the “Mount Rainier” that he exhibited in 1916 in Oregon is a different work than “King above the Clouds,” rather more static, with the foreground in shadow, and the mountain depicted in the clear light of day.⁵⁷ The first mention of the title “King above the Clouds” in the newspapers occurred in 1923 in connection with a campaign to raise funds to purchase it, described later in this chapter. Nothing is said about the work having been re-named. Compared to the earliest painting of Gustin that I have seen, an untitled pasture scene of 1909 described in more detail below, “King above the Clouds” seems to be the work of a more mature artist. It is more ambitious, the composition more complex, the brush strokes more concise, and the

⁵⁶ Conversation with David Martin, March, 2012.

⁵⁷ *The Sunday Oregonian*, November 19, 1916.

intended effect more dramatic. Whatever its date of execution, because “King above the Clouds” is Gustin’s best known painting, it seems appropriate to present it at this point in the narrative.⁵⁸

“King above the Clouds” illustrates several facets of Gustin’s work. The title announces that Washington’s highest mountain is more than a huge pile of rocks and lava, and that it deserves to be treated in a manner akin to the respect granted to royalty. The choice of *king* for the title thus emphasizes Gustin’s deferential, even reverential, attitude toward the mountain. The evergreen trees in the foreground, probably mountain hemlocks, are blown back and lean to the right. These leaning trees do not necessarily indicate that Gustin intended to depict the effect of the wind, as trees around Mount Rainier at high altitude have all been permanently bent by the strong winter blasts. Nevertheless, the crooked stature of the hemlocks certainly draws the eye toward them. Trees, like tall mountains, were symbolically important for Gustin and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Gustin showed a tendency to anthropomorphize them. Clouds surround the lower part of the Mount Rainier, blending imperceptibly with the fallen snow. Flecks of clouds blowing away in the upper right confirm that it is indeed a windy day near the summit. While the trees are depicted individually, the clouds and mountain are painted without much detail through a sort of haze, typical of the weather around the mountains of the Northwest, and illustrating Gustin’s interest in accurately representing the Northwest atmosphere. Although the sky is blue, and the deep azures scattered in the middle ground must reflect the presence of bright sunlight, the mountain is viewed through a thin, all enveloping, mist.

Gustin’s early work demonstrated a mastery of the misty atmosphere of the Pacific Northwest that was seized upon by commentators. The reviewer in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

⁵⁸ In the Seattle Fine Arts Society’s 1923 Exhibition of Pacific Northwest artists, “King above the Clouds” was described as “invited,” the only time a specific work of any artist was so identified and honored.

of Gustin's paintings in his first one-man show of 1913 noted that he was "tenderly brilliant, but never dazzling. He has caught one of the finest atmospheric impressions of an always-changing panorama." Referring again to Washington's variable weather, he observed that Gustin's beach and pastoral scenes will "delight the many...who have witnessed...the endless vagaries, the hourly transformations, which visit and overspread these familiarly beautiful places."⁵⁹

Responding also to Gustin's representations of the Northwest atmosphere, David Paul's review in *The Town Crier* was nevertheless less admiring overall. Although Paul lauded Gustin's "masterly" success in catching "the atmospheric spirit" of Puget Sound, he lamented Gustin's lack of "detail" and "finish" in his foregrounds.⁶⁰ Nostalgia for the rigorous academic standards of art of the nineteenth century thus lingered in Seattle well into the twentieth century. (Paul's criticism of one of the most Modernist aspects of Impressionism—its lack of detail and finish—confirms the argument in the introduction to this dissertation that Impressionism was the vehicle for first introducing the Northwest to Modernism.) One year later, several of Gustin's paintings were selected to be shown in San Francisco at the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, the most important "world's fair" held on the West Coast in the twentieth century. *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* reviewer singled out Gustin's "Mountain Snowfields" (not illustrated) for catching "the spirit of mountain solitude. The simplicity of the composition and the tremendous distance suggested by Gustin's skillful handling of subtle color dramatize the charm of the primitive."⁶¹ Although I have not identified or viewed "Mountain Snowfields," there is nothing in Gustin's oeuvre that I would describe as primitive, and I assume the reviewer

⁵⁹ John H. Raftly, "Seattle Artist to Exhibit Work," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (*Seattle P-I*), May 4, 1913. (When page numbers—and sometimes specific dates—are omitted in these footnotes, it is because the article has been found in a scrapbook or library file, for which the compiler failed to note these details, and a physical archive of the newspaper files was not available for identification of the page number or date.)

⁶⁰ David Paul, "Fine Arts Society Sees Gustin's Works," *The Town Crier*, May 4, 1913.

⁶¹ Jack Bechdolt, "Art Works that Win Honor Are Placed on View," *Seattle P-I*, October 14, 1914.

used the term to contrast Gustin's views of the natural world (which to his eyes were unmediated by deep intention) with sophisticated scenes of city life seen elsewhere. Nevertheless, the reviewer correctly pointed out the sense of solitude that pervades the mountain views of Gustin and other Northwest Impressionists, as well Gustin's skill in suggesting through subtle gradations of the color of the atmosphere the great distance between the vantage point of the artist (and viewer) and the mountain itself.

Gustin was a relatively prolific artist, exhibiting regularly from 1913 until the mid-1930's, and occasionally thereafter, with several one-man shows that often included fifty or sixty works, the last of which occurred in 1954-1955. Later accounts state that over 300 of his paintings were owned by Seattle collectors.⁶² Yet there is a question about Gustin's extant oeuvre—where is it? It is not in local museums, as SAM owns only three paintings by Gustin, the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington (the "Henry") two works, and the Frye none.⁶³ During the four years I have taken an interest in Northwest Impressionism, I have heard of only one Gustin oil for sale, "Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront", 1928, figure 34. In contrast with Charles C. McKim, whom I consider the Portland artist most comparable to Gustin, there have been over a dozen McKim's on the market during this period, yet he painted actively in the Northwest for fewer than 20 years, while Gustin painted here for over 60 years. During the same period of 2007-2011, there have been dozens of Keller's for sale, and many works for sale by Forkner and Wire, and several by Jensen. On askart.com in February 2012, there are 18 Ziegler's offered for sale by multiple dealers. One explanation is that Gustin himself destroyed many canvases. Madge Bailey's review of Gustin's 1920 one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts

⁶² John Voorhees, "Flowers that Bloom in Museums," *Seattle P-I*, December 19, 1954. The same figure of over 300 paintings owned locally appears in the *Seattle Times* review of the same date.

⁶³ The Frye does have 30 etchings by Gustin, which must represent a complete set, or nearly so, and the Henry has two etchings.

Society noted that the works on view “represented the majority of his finished work for the past ten years...he destroys earlier work that he feels his skill has outgrown.”⁶⁴ Another explanation is a fire at the home of Frank Pratt, his most important patron, in 1962. Although there is no mention in the newspapers of this fire, a letter from Roi Partridge to Gustin dated September 27, 1962 said he was “sorry to hear of the Frank Pratt fire and loss of works of art.”⁶⁵

In her twelve page memoir prepared for Gustin’s last one-man show at SAM in 1954-55, Mrs. Carl F. Gould, Jr. stated that Pratt owned about 200 of Gustin’s oils and watercolors.⁶⁶ Mrs. Gould is a credible witness, as she was the Dorothy Fay Gould who reviewed Gustin’s 1920 one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society.⁶⁷ Her husband, Carl Gould, Seattle’s leading architect of the pre-World War II period, was a fellow officer or director with Gustin in the Seattle Fine Arts Society, and Mrs. Gould’s name appeared frequently in the press in connection with art events in Seattle. In 1999, an appraisal in conjunction with the death of Robert Pratt, the son of Frank Pratt, listed only 20 paintings by Gustin, along with 51 drawings and watercolors, in his estate. One of the oils, 20 x 26”, was appraised at a nominal value because of fire damage.⁶⁸ As best as can be ascertained, the estate included other paintings by Gustin that were too damaged in the fire to include in the inventory. Today, all the works originally owned by Frank and Robert Pratt remain with their heirs or legatees.⁶⁹ Another substantial part of Gustin’s oeuvre remains in the possession of the family of Gustin’s widow, whom he married after his mother’s death. Thus, despite Mrs. Gould’s report of Gustin’s steady sales, said to

⁶⁴ Madge Bailey, “Fine Art Notes,” *Seattle P-I*, October 17, 1920.

⁶⁵ A copy of this letter is found in the Gustin archive of Martin-Zambito Fine Art.

⁶⁶ Mrs. Carl F. Gould, Jr., *Notes on the Paul Morgan Gustin Exhibition December 8, 1954-January 2, 1955*, 3, Seattle Public Library art files.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Fay Gould, “Hundreds Daily View Work,” *Seattle Times*, February 22, 1920.

⁶⁸ J. L. O’Rourke, *Appraisal of fine art from the estate of Robert Y. Pratt*, November 20, 1999, p. 6 of 37, Martin-Zambito archive.

⁶⁹ Conversation with David Martin, March, 2012.

occur “year in and year out,” including seven of his last ten paintings completed before Mrs. Gould’s 1954 interview, and her claim that “no other [Seattle] artist has so many pictures privately owned in Seattle and other major cities,”⁷⁰ it would appear that a large proportion of his work remained unsold during his lifetime and, like the collection of Robert Pratt, is still in the possession of his heirs.

Following Gustin’s one-man show of 1913, one of his Mount Rainier views, as noted above, was published in the *Sunday Oregonian* in connection with an exhibition of Northwest art at PAM.⁷¹ The Seattle Fine Arts Society devoted a second one-man show to Gustin in January, 1918, although he was not reportedly discharged from the United States Navy, where he held the officer’s rank of Ensign, until March 31, 1919.⁷² The reviewer in the *Seattle Times* described Gustin’s show as “the finest exhibition of Western paintings recently shown in Seattle,” consisting of 55 oils and watercolors and an unspecified number of drawings, some of them of New York and New England subjects completed during the fall of 1918.⁷³ (Gustin may have been assigned to a Navy base in New York or Boston, where he could have had the occasion to paint the New York harbor and New England villages.) Madge Houston lauded Gustin’s “subtle will-o-the-wisp blue mists and reddish purples of Puget Sound waters and mountains”, as well as “the soul-inspiring grandeur of our forests.” She could almost “hear the hymn of the wind through the vaults of green branches.”⁷⁴ (Later, as Madge Bailey, she will amplify her metaphors of the depiction of wind as hymns, and trees as cathedrals, in Gustin’s art.) She also found some of Gustin’s forest scenes suggestive of the peaceful repose extolled in Bryant’s

⁷⁰ Gould, *Notes*, 3.

⁷¹ Edith Knight Holmes, “Attractive Works...on Exhibit,” *The Oregonian*, November 19, 1916, with Gustin’s *Mount Rainier* chosen as illustrative of the exhibition.

⁷² *Seattle Times*, March 31, 1919.

⁷³ “Western Scenes Exhibited by Seattle Artist Attract Many,” *Seattle Times*, January 20, 1918.

⁷⁴ Madge Houston, “Washington Artist’s Work, Depicting State’s Natural Beauty, Draws Art Lovers,” *Seattle P-I*, January 23, 1918.

Thanatopsis, while others reminded her of the “wild romance” of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*.⁷⁵ The sense of movement in the trees in Gustin’s mountain scenes, like the wind-blown mountain hemlocks in the foreground of “King above the Clouds,” might suggest the passion of romance, while repose seems to be the dominant reaction of the viewer to the stately lines of Douglas firs or poplars in Gustin’s placid landscapes of forests and pastures.

That Gustin did not fully embrace Modernism is foretold in Houston’s last paragraph, where she describes Gustin’s hope in 1918 for “a great awakening in art.” After the “great war tragedy,...never again will there be room for the fantastic propaganda of such adventurers in art as the cubists and futurists, who represented the colorful brain seethings of international unrest.”⁷⁶ As Gustin hoped, Picasso, Léger (1881-1955), and the Italian futurists did “return to order” for a time after the war,⁷⁷ but the direction of the emanations of their *seething brains* pointed elsewhere than Gustin’s reverence for a regal or divine presence in mountains and forests.

As noted earlier, for such an apparently prolific artist, few paintings of Gustin are available for study. An example of forest scenes that imply the great arches of medieval cathedrals is the sole Gustin recorded by askart.com as sold at auction, “On the Quinault,” figure 30.⁷⁸ Although this thumbnail image of figure 30 is very small, one can imagine the path leading into the painting as the center aisle between rows of mighty columnar Douglas firs in a forest

⁷⁵ Houston, same as above.

⁷⁶ Houston, same as above.

⁷⁷ See Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps, the Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*, (Princeton University Press, 1989) and *Chaos & Classicism, Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010); see also Christopher Green and Jens M. Daehner, *Modern Antiquity: Picasso, De Chirico, Léger, Picabia*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011).

⁷⁸ *On the Quinault*, undated, 26 x 32”, sold at Christie’s New York, May 21, 1996, for \$2772.

“cathedral,” and the shining sunset at the end of the path as the stained glass windows over the altar.

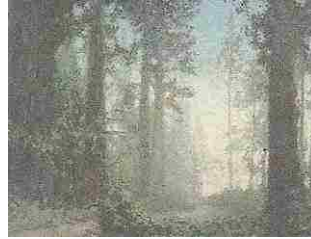


Figure 30. Paul Gustin, “On the Quinault.”

Another Gustin landscape with a line of tall trees across the horizon is an untitled oil painting, figure 31, 1909. This small oil is the work of Gustin most often available for public view, as I have seen it both in a temporary show at Martin-Zambito Fine Art in 2007 and at the Arts & Crafts exhibition at MOHAI in Seattle in 2009 described earlier. It is also reproduced in Kreisman and Mason.⁷⁹ Figure 31 shows a meadow with standing water in the foreground and two cows grazing in the background near a windbreak of poplars, perhaps the black cottonwoods common in marshy regions in the Northwest. Beyond the trees is a vaguely depicted hill. The day is sunny, with the scene brightly lit without shadows, probably at mid-day. Unlike “King above the Clouds,” the entire image is constructed of relatively large broken brush strokes applied freely. There is no attempt to suggest the often misty atmosphere of the Northwest. Colors are mostly shades of green, with the meadow itself, the horizontal line of poplar trees, and the hills beyond all variations on the same green hues, giving the composition a strong sense of unity. The static effect of this simple composition reminds the viewer of the sense of repose found in rural pastures, just as “On the Quinault” exemplifies the sensation of spiritual quietude within the great cathedral-like groves of national parks.

⁷⁹ Kreisman and Mason, 301.



Figure 31. Paul Gustin, untitled meadow landscape.

During the decade of the 1920's, opportunities to show art in Seattle at public-like institutions remained limited to the annual Northwest art exhibitions at the Seattle Fine Arts Society and its occasional one-man shows, for example, those offered to Gustin in 1913, 1918, and 1920. In 1921, the MacDougall-Southwick store in Seattle hung 23 paintings by Gustin in its main stairwell in a sort of commercial one-man show.⁸⁰ In 1923, as a demonstration of Gustin's preeminent position among local artists, when he announced plans to depart for Europe, an attempt was made to raise money for the purchase of four of his large paintings to ensure that they remained in Seattle. The paintings were "King above the Clouds," figure 29, described as his "masterpiece," "Quinault," said to blend "the glory of a western sunset with the rich greens" of the forest (very probably "On the Quinault," figure 30, given its similar composition and large size), "Glory of the Eastern Autumn," a New York State scene which is unidentified, and "Nootka Village" (very possibly "Nootka Island," figure 1).⁸¹ The amount needed was \$2800, and the effort failed, as the paintings were never purchased and exhibited as a group.

Upon his return from Europe, the Seattle Fine Arts Society gave Gustin his fourth one-man show in early 1927. "Most of his oils are of clouded opalescent peaks and Douglas fir

⁸⁰ Dorothy Fay Gould, "Paul Gustin's Art Graces Walls of Downtown Store," *Seattle P-I*, July 28, 1921.

⁸¹ "Seattle Artist's Pictures May Grace Hotel Olympic," *Seattle Times*, September 25, 1924.

forests,” reported a reviewer, suggesting that his time in Europe had not changed Gustin’s primary focus on the Northwest’s mountains and forests.⁸² The reviewer noted, however, that Gustin’s watercolors were of European scenes, and his etchings of Italy (the only work illustrated was an etching of an inn identified as a “scene in Italy,” although the house is quintessentially Northern European), and he singled out a watercolor of a cathedral interior for its expression of “quietness and loftiness.”⁸³ (If Gustin cannot find a forest cathedral in Europe, then an urban one will have to do.) In connection with the one-man show, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* published an essay that lauded Gustin as “the best of the artists now living in Seattle.” Gustin’s comments at the exhibition were quoted as follows:

I try to paint not what I actually see with my eyes in a landscape, but what I feel in the landscape, the sense of freedom, or of quiet, or of freshness. Observe the painting...showing a tree on a mountain ridge, with higher mountains in the distance. Now, as actually seen with the eye, those far away mountains were very clear and vivid. But if they are made too strong in the picture, they become a high wall across the background and destroy the sense of freedom and openness which was the main feeling of this windswept spot. That is the reason why I toned down the distant mountains and emphasized the foreground and the tree.

Every tree is different. So many artists paint a distant ridge of trees as if the trees were all alike. But this is a mistake, even in a very far-off ridge where each tree is only a small plot. Even so far away, they are different from each other. Many artists paint trees as if they were dead. Just beautiful designs. I am interested in them as lines of life. I want their roots firm in the soil, and every branch showing that it is growing, pushing upward and outward, moving in the wind.

⁸² “Art Exhibit by Gustin is Well Liked,” *Seattle Times*, February 13, 1927.

⁸³ Trips to Europe, especially from the West Coast, were very expensive before the age of air travel, so the reviewer or editor should be forgiven for his inability to recognize styles of architecture in different European countries. The reviewer or editor should not be forgiven for his inattention to detail, however, as the commercial signs in the etching are written in English, and the place is identified in the lower right corner as “York.” The etching is included in Martin, *From Lake Union to the Louvre*, 29.

Gustin diminished the clarity of distant mountains in a painting in order to emphasize the “freedom and openness” that he felt upon deciding to depict a tree in the foreground in a particular spot. Gustin’s “special fondness for trees,” noted by the author of the essay, is underlined by Gustin’s express desire to depict each tree individually, emphasizing its struggle to grow in mountainous, windswept terrain.⁸⁴

In addition to this newspaper essay exploring Gustin’s technique and motivation, two magazine articles appeared on Gustin in the 1920’s. In 1922, Madge Bailey’s piece reprised and inflated the religious metaphors in her earlier newspaper article as Madge Houston discussed above. Calling Gustin a “poet-painter,” she described his “dignity of restraint” as “suggestive of the understanding and vision of the temple builders of old Athens.” Noting that Native-Americans called Mount Rainier “the mountain that was god,” Bailey could identify no other Washington artist who excelled Gustin’s “painted Odyssey of the wanderings of the storm spirit battling...Mount Rainier.”⁸⁵ Even for Americans of the 1920’s, the mountain’s “soul-inspiring beauty and awesome grandeur remains god to the thousands who ascend to Paradise...at the edge of the snowline.” Turning to forests, Bailey’s fondness for religious metaphors continued unabated. Abandoning Greek temples and Native-American religion, Bailey turned to Christianity and druids. “With the same reverence with which he has approached the spirit of the mountains, he has followed an unblazed trail that leads to the heart of the mighty druids of the evergreen glades. He has heard the deep-toned reverberation of the organ of the winds sounding forth a continual ‘Gloria in Excelsis’ through the Gothic pillared aisles of Nature’s cathedrals where the starlit skies frescoing the green-arched domes are of the deepest blue. He has

⁸⁴ Anise, “An Hour of Color and Joy,” *Seattle P-I*, February 13, 1927.

⁸⁵ In the earliest ascents of Mount Rainier, Native-American guides were enlisted to help choose routes to the summit, but they refused to accompany the white climbers for fear of profaning the mountain. See Dee Molenaar, *The Challenge of Rainier*, (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 2011).

paraphrased these triumphal chants into tones of mauve, misty green, and softest grays for his forest pictures.”⁸⁶

Although Bailey’s rhetoric seems overblown to today’s sensibilities, it reflects the effect Gustin must have had upon many viewers of his paintings, and the (unsuccessful) effort in 1923 to purchase four of his major works for permanent exhibition together in Seattle. Referring to a painting entitled “Outpost Trees: the Tatoosh Mountains” [near Mount Rainier] that depicts two large twisted and knurled mountain hemlocks in the foreground, with somewhat indistinct mountain peaks in the background, Bailey noted that “[Gustin] has shown a keen sympathy for the hemlocks and cedars which fight the battle of life on the wind-swept mountain tops.” She lauded his ability to depict the “elusive effect of the mist so delicately caught by this artist in paint.”⁸⁷

Bailey’s commentary distills what I agree are the essential aspects of Gustin’s implicit iconography in his mountain and forest scenes. As noted at the outset of this chapter, Gustin’s respect and reverence for Mount Rainier—evidenced by his choice of title and compositional focus on the mountain peak—is analogous to the message borne by the Native-Americans’ naming it “the mountain that was god.” Bailey compares Gustin’s pictorial approach to that of the architects of the great Athenian temples, who built on hilltops so that people would raise their gaze in awe. For Gustin, Washington’s highest mountain seems to perform the equivalent function of an ancient hilltop temple in causing people to look up and reflect on its grandeur.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Madge Bailey, “Paul Morton Gustin,” *American Magazine of Art*, (March 1922): 82-85.

⁸⁷ Bailey, “Gustin,” 85-86.

⁸⁸ The tall mountain whose iconography has been most studied is Mount Fuji. Its etymology “fu-shi” means “no death,” suggesting that even as the world around it changes, the mountain remains steadfast. The belief that veneration of the mountain confers immortality has made it the focus of a devotional cult, with many pilgrims climbing it in the summer months. Because Mount Fuji is the tallest mountain in India, China, and Japan, pride in Fuji became colored with nationalistic connotations in the nineteenth century. Fuji has also become a favored

Similarly, Gustin's deep forest scenes like "On the Quinault," instead of causing the viewer to stare upwards at the visible presence of the sublime, lead him or her to enter the eternal peace of its temple or cathedral, whose walls and aisles are constructed from the tallest Douglas firs of the forest. There is no visible human presence in Gustin's mountain and forest paintings. Instead of people in his paintings, Gustin substitutes a quasi-human presence through his foreground trees in mountain scenes. The trees are not depicted as if "dead," but instead "fight the battle of life." In place of the tall and straight Douglas firs of the forests that remind one of the perfection of nature or of the divine, the "outpost" or "climbing" trees of the mountains are stooped and worn like some of the human viewers of Mount Rainier.⁸⁹ In proximity to the peak that incarnates the sublimity of nature and the presence of god, the valiant, yet twisted human-like forms remain poor things indeed.

In a manner similar to Gustin's other critics, Bailey marvels at his depiction of the typical Northwest haze. Gustin's remarks add an element of intention. He accentuated the mist and haze—or even invented it on those clear summer days when it is absent—in order to prevent the mountain background from forming a "wall" that repulsed the viewer's gaze. Gustin did not want the viewer to ignore the quasi-human presence in the foreground of many of his mountain images, i.e., the "outpost" or "climbing" trees that "fight" to survive. Instead of the human staffage in nineteenth century American landscape, intended to assist the viewer in situating himself or herself in the scene represented, Gustin substituted his bent and struggling mountain

subject of artists, especially Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). Compared to the cult of Fuji, Gustin's concentration on Mount Rainier might seem minor. Nevertheless, when one thinks of artistic focus on specific tall mountains in the United States, the only three that merit discussion are Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Mount McKinley, in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. Thus, for the Northwest, iconic mountains are significant. For a discussion of the Japanese iconography of Mount Fuji, see Christine M. E. Guth, "Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture," *The Art Bulletin*, (December 2011): 473-474.

⁸⁹ Gustin also created small woodblock images of Mount Rainier in the 1920's, e.g., figure 73, with stooped mountain hemlocks in the foreground. He titled the prints "mountain-climbing trees", again anthropomorphizing the trees.

trees, each individualized, each a surrogate for the human viewer. Gustin's compositional devices thus caused the viewer's gaze to linger on the quasi-human trees of the foreground, to reflect upon their struggle for life, and then to lift to the mountain in the background, the symbol of the sublime and divine in nature.

An iconography for the Impressionist landscape of France has been developed by Richard Brettell based upon the identification of the tourist as the "everyman" of late nineteenth century France: "The tourist-based landscape of Impressionism has a modernist/populist iconography."⁹⁰ Brettell buttresses his argument by showing how the specific places painted by the Impressionists tended to be located along the new railways of France that transported thousands to the countryside every weekend. Brettell contrasts Impressionist iconography of the French countryside—as a public place belonging in some sense to the tourists—to that of the Barbizon school of painters earlier in the century. "The Impressionists' landscape...is almost everywhere at odds with the landscapes preferred by the Barbizon school...When in the Barbizon painters' forests, the viewer is far from civilization in a natural world of knurled trees, rugged rock formations, and deep, hidden pools...Being alone in the midst of nature was often given pantheistic meanings...the viewer was thought to become a better or more moral person through his contact with isolated nature...conceived as the equivalent...of wilderness or virgin nature: the place of God."⁹¹

The meta-message of Gustin's images of Mount Rainier, with no human presence apart from surrogate outpost trees, at first blush seems analogous to the iconography Brettell describes for the Barbizon artists. Yet the Northwest iconography must be a mix of the two sets of French

⁹⁰ Brettell, "The Impressionist Landscape and the Image of France," 40.

⁹¹ Brettell, 37.

symbols of nature and cultivated countryside, god and mammon. As Bailey pointed out, thousands of visitors came yearly to Paradise, one of the two highest points on the mountain that can be reached by road, to view Mount Rainier up close. Many people also visit Mount Hood annually, as it is even nearer to Portland, and as there is a ski resort on the mountain itself. While fewer people visit Mount McKinley because it requires such a long trip, first to Alaska and then to the mountain, it is known above all as a quintessential tourist destination. One suspects that Gustin, as high-minded as he appears to have been, would have preferred to believe that *his* mountain, Mount Rainier, symbolized some mixture of the sublime and the divine for viewers of his paintings. Nevertheless, those who saw, and those who purchased, his images of Mount Rainier would have felt it also belonged to them as part of their American patrimony, and they may have been drawn to it as a memory of a place visited. As far as tourism is concerned, all three mountains are tourist destinations, especially Mount Rainier and Mount McKinley. Mount Rainier is one of the five highest mountains in the lower forty-eight states (and by far the tallest looking because it rises from near sea level, whereas the bases of the slightly higher mountains in Colorado are already one mile high.) Mount McKinley, the highest mountain in North America, is not only Alaska's premier tourist destination, but Laurence's and Ziegler's many paintings of it were their most popular subjects, and a favored object of purchase by tourists who could afford them. According to Kesler Woodward, the primary authority on Laurence and Ziegler, the "increasing tourist demand" for Laurence's landscapes of Mount McKinley from such steady customers as Belle Simpson's Nugget Shop in Juneau, the tourist gateway to Alaska, caused Laurence to paint "many smaller, hurried, and repetitive canvases from the late 1920's onward."⁹² Although neither Seattle nor Portland had a successful tourist-oriented art gallery like the Nugget Shop, a tourist store with a fine arts department, it seems

⁹² Woodward, *Laurence*, 19.

likely that some of the purchasers of Gustin's paintings (and he exhibited widely outside the Northwest) would have been attracted to images of Mount Rainier because of its fame as a national park and a tourist destination. Thus, the meaning of Mount Rainier for Gustin's public must have combined elements of the sublime with a more down to earth sense of pride and possession of the national patrimony.⁹³

The last article to appear on Gustin was "The Dean of Northwest Artists." After noting his sojourn in Europe from 1924-26, the author applauded Gustin's return to depicting the unique landscape of the Pacific Northwest, "a vigor, a vitality, a serenity, a majesty, beauty, poetry and romance found altogether in no other region of the world." She paraphrased Gustin's declaration that the Northwest possesses "a wealth of material for a new school in landscape painting, a school that will evolve an expression of its own for forms, the spirit and substance of which have long since entered into the very fibre of its people, producing here a culture distinctive and unique."⁹⁴

In the exploration of the meaning of Impressionism in chapter I, it was noted that most definitions emphasized the urban character of the typical subjects of Impressionist painters, at least in France, New York, and Boston. That aspect of Impressionism has not applied to artists in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Indiana, or California, who preferred rural, seashore, or wilderness scenes. At first blush, Northwest Impressionists might also seem to have avoided

⁹³ The life of Belmore Browne incarnates the convergence of the sublime and tourism in artists' images of iconic American mountains. Browne is the mountain climber who is credited with discovering the "standard" route to climb Mount McKinley. He participated in three attempts to summit the mountain over several years and, although he missed reaching the top by only 125 feet, his account of the three expeditions has become a classic of mountaineering exploits. See Browne, *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*. Browne thus contributed to the "discovery" of Mount McKinley as a destination for tourists and mountain climbers, while becoming one of the leading Northwest Impressionist creators of mountain scenes. Ironically, compared to Laurence and Ziegler, he was the only one who knew Mount McKinley intimately, yet he was the only one of the three who rarely painted it. Perhaps the memory of the climbs was too painful.

⁹⁴ Katherine Wilson, "The Dean of Northwest Artists," *Northwestern Woman*, (April 1928): 9, 31.

urban subjects, but that reaction is mistaken. Gustin, as well as other Northwest Impressionists, was drawn to an important urban element of Northwest cities, their harbors, which combine human activity with port structures, ships, and water. Indeed, recalling that the prohibition of the sale of alcohol in the United States during the 1920's had decimated bars and cafés as centers of urban activity, and that the cool, wet weather of much of the year in the Northwest militates against outdoor restaurants, it is not surprising that Northwest artists turned their backs on the centers of cities and set up their easels in the ports. Thus, I would argue that Northwest Impressionism fulfills all the “dictionary” requirements of the style, as it includes a substantial corpus of *urban* harbor scenes.

Ella McBride's photograph of Paul Gustin painting at a Seattle Pier, 1922 (figure 32), captures a well dressed Gustin, wearing coat, tie, and hat, engaged in painting fishing boats. In what appears to be an obviously posed scene, Gustin is sitting uncomfortably low in order to reveal the pier in the background. Gustin's painting “Fishing Boats at the Pier” (figure 33) is dated 1938, but it is manifestly the same painting recorded in McBride's photograph. (As noted earlier, Gustin tended to date paintings the last time he worked on them, perhaps to repair some damage that had occurred after it was sold.)



Figure 32. Ella McBride, “Paul Gustin Painting.”

The broad horizontal brush strokes in the green water and blue sky are similar to those in Gustin's untitled pasture scene (figure 31) c. 1909, evidencing his stability in technique. A few men can be made out in the distance working along the pier, but the boats are tied up in port awaiting the opening of the fishing season.



Figure 33. Paul Gustin, "Fishing Boats at the Pier."

"Fishing Boats at the Pier," figure 33, can be contrasted with "Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront," 1928, figure 34, in some ways a similar scene combining repose and activity along the waterfront. A fishing boat glides by close to shore, while an ocean liner or freighter with two smoke stacks is barely visible as it steams out of the harbor through the mist. The rain has just stopped, the ground is wet, and the sun is peeping through the clouds as it descends toward the horizon. Two men are engaged in a lazy conversation along the water, while others appear to be working the wooden cranes to the left. Once again, Gustin uses broad, broken brush strokes to depict the surface of the pier and water.



Figure 34. Paul Gustin, “Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront.”

“Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront” reveals an evolution in Gustin’s painting.

Although similar to the earlier work in depicting a large pier on the right, slanting out into the water, balanced by a smaller bit of slanted structure on the left, there is much less symmetry in the later work. On the right, the pier building slants left, while its walkway seems to slant to the right as it narrows in the distance. Is this an optical contradiction? It might be correct if it were placed in the center of the scene in front of where the painter stands, but it looks slightly wrong off to the right. Meanwhile, the working crane on the left is slanted at a very different angle and, moreover, *it* is ambiguous. Is it another pier structure with a crane, or a barge with a crane?

“Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront” manifests Gustin’s ability to depict Seattle’s rain and mist, and in that sense it demonstrates greater skills than “Fishing Boats at the Pier,” painted in good weather. However, the elongated perspective of the pier looks unsettling and out of character with earlier works by Gustin. Two possible explanations come to mind. First, Gustin had recently returned from Europe, where he had spent several months in Paris, at the time when the French Surrealists had entered into a public dispute with Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978),

who had appeared to have abandoned his ‘metaphysical’ style that the Surrealists worshipped as a precursor of their movement.⁹⁵ De Chirico’s “Mystery and Melancholy of a Street,” 1914

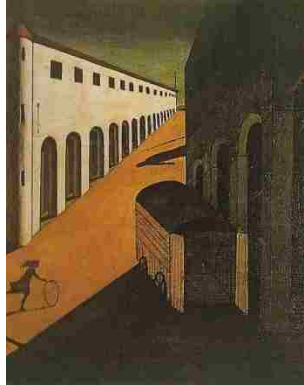


Figure 35. Giorgio de Chirico, “The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street.”

(figure 35), is typical of his pre-war work cherished by the Surrealists and exhibited by them in the mid 1920’s to counter de Chirico’s return to classicism in his paintings of horses and gladiators. Gustin’s pier in unusual perspective is reminiscent of the elongated perspective of de Chirico’s metaphysical piazza arcade, visible in figure 35, which he could have seen (or others like it) during his sojourn in Paris. Second, 1928, the year of execution of “Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront,” was the year that Gustin was excluded from the annual exhibition of the Seattle Fine Arts Association, along with other “conservative” artists, to be described in more detail later in this chapter. Did this painting, consciously or unconsciously, represent an attempt by Gustin to become a bit more Modernist?

As it happened, Modernism in various forms was taking root in Seattle, especially after Mark Tobey’s arrival in 1923. Other Northwest Impressionists like John Butler and Louise Crow, Gustin’s contemporaries, had left Seattle or transitioned to other styles of work. Gustin’s disappointment in the loss of interest in the Impressionist Northwestern landscape may have

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Jole de Sanna, *De Chirico and the Mediterranean*. (New York: Rizzoli, 1998): 72-74.

been signaled by a second departure for Europe in 1929. In a piece in *The Town Crier* in March 1930, Jean Fay describes a letter she received from Gustin, written in Spain after having spent several months with his mother in France. Gustin describes the works exhibited at the autumn Salon in Paris as “almost all freshly modernistic in a strident realism. There were a few crazy-quilts of triangles and squares in odd corners.”⁹⁶ In contrast to disappointment in contemporary French painting, he applauded new sculpture and architecture, particularly the casino in Nice. (*à chacun son goût*—the Nice casino, still in operation, is very much in the style of the elaborate art deco movie theatres built in the 1920’s in the United States and Europe.) Upon his return from Europe, a second article by Jean Fay notes that Gustin was exhibiting his oils, watercolors, and etchings at his apartment in Seattle, not, it should be noted, at the Seattle Fine Arts Society. One of his oils from France, *Le Vieux Moulin* (the Old Mill), was reported to be on exhibit at the Grand Central Galleries in New York City.⁹⁷

The SAM library files indicate that Gustin had a one-man show at SAM in 1933, soon after the art museum opened, but there are no records at SAM of what the show entailed. In the *Seattle Times*, two short paragraphs by Virginia Boren were devoted to the show, mostly enthusing over “the gorgeously hued mist” in Gustin’s painting “Lavender Mist” that reminded the author of crushed orchids (along with advice on how to pamper orchids).⁹⁸ For Virginia Boren, art criticism had merged with fashion and gardening. In the event, Gustin ceased sending paintings to the annual SAM exhibitions of Northwest artists, which continued to 1971. Gustin had exhibited watercolors along with oils at least from 1924, when he exhibited watercolors in

⁹⁶ Jean Fay, “Paul Gustin writes from Spain,” *The Town Crier*, March, 1930.

⁹⁷ Jean Fay, “Paul M. Gustin Returns,” *The Town Crier*, February, 1931. Gustin was the only Northwest Impressionist listed in 1928 as a “member” of Grand Central Galleries. Brochure, Grand Central Galleries file, SAM files, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁹⁸ Virginia Boren, “Art Museum Preview,” *Seattle Times*, December 7, 1933.

Chicago, but he seems to have concentrated primarily on watercolors after 1935.⁹⁹ In 1935, he entered a watercolor of flowers in the annual fine arts exhibition at the Washington state fair and, as noted earlier, received second prize in the “modernistic” section. (In 1934, he had received first prize in the “conservative” section.)

By 1945, the former “dean of Washington artists” was largely forgotten. Kenneth Callahan (1905-1986), one of the leading members of the so-called Northwest Mystics, an informal group whose other major figures were Mark Tobey, Morris Graves (1910-2001), and Guy Anderson (1906-1998), was an art critic as well as a painter. In an article in the national publication *Art News* in 1946, Callahan described developments in Northwest art from the year that Mark Tobey and Raymond Hill (1891-1980)¹⁰⁰ constituted the majority on the jury that vetted paintings for the Seattle Fine Arts Society’s annual exhibition. “Until then painting here was pretty conservative...dominated [by] Eustace Ziegler, a highly skilled neo-Impressionist landscape painter...and an equally talented watercolorist, Edgar Forkner, who devoted himself exclusively to flowers and the local scene rendered in the Sargent manner. But in the 1929 annual, prizes were awarded to relatively unknown artists and many of the familiar, “accepted” painters were turned down.”¹⁰¹ In fact, the revolt occurred in April of 1928, when neither Gustin nor Forkner were included in the show, although one genre scene of Ziegler was exhibited. The *Seattle Times* reported that the jury issued a statement explaining its criteria on whom to include

⁹⁹ Gustin’s watercolors are listed in the programs for the Fourth and Fifth International Water Color Exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1924 and 1925. University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁰⁰ Hill was a professor of art at the University of Washington, and he painted in the 1920’s in a realistic style.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Callahan, “Pacific Northwest,” *Art News*, (July 1946).

in terms of “modernism, the effort to paint as nearly as possible in the spirit of our own generation.”¹⁰²

In a unique departure from past practices, the Seattle Fine Arts Society held a second 1928 “annual” in October, 1928. An examination of all the general correspondence of the Society, the correspondence of the President, Carl Gould, and the files on the three “annual” exhibitions in 1927-1928 revealed only a few documents related to the issue. My belief is that a decision was made not to retain letters concerning those artists who were excluded, but a few items escaped the purge. This inference is based upon finding a plethora of letters in the files on minor matters, such as the supply of sandwiches for board meetings, but virtually none on the question of exclusion. The dispute was anticipated by a lengthy letter from F. W. Southworth, a Northwest Impressionist, to President Carl Gould on October 25, 1927 in which he proposed a series of criteria for decisions on admission to Society exhibitions and the award of prizes. Southworth’s proposed standards had a traditional ring, such as balance in composition, harmonious choice of colors, and so on. Southworth added that if jurors operated under such criteria, it “would cut out all this falsely styled ‘Modernism’ and raise the standards of art.”¹⁰³ Although Gould was assiduous in responding to letters, there is no response in the files, which implies that Gould discussed the letter orally with Southworth, rejecting his proposals. On May 12, 1928, after the “exclusionary” annual, Gould wrote to Southworth. “We are now expecting...to put in a fully representative Northwest Artists Exhibit in the fall...We will probably have two juries and the pictures can be judged at the discretion of the exhibitors under

¹⁰² *Seattle Times*, April 4, 1928, 21. Louise Crow was quoted in the unsigned article. “Mark Tobey admits that he was rejected in Paris and New York at different exhibitions. I have not been rejected in those cities. I was admitted to the Autumn Salon in Paris and the Ainsley Gallery in New York. Washington, Oakland and San Francisco shows are open to me. It remained for Mr. Tobey to reject me. My painting is objective. I consider subjectivity the refuge of artists who don’t know how to draw.”

¹⁰³ Letter from F. W. Southworth to Carl F. Gould, October 25, 1927, Special Collections, University of Washington library, Seattle Art Museum files.

either.”¹⁰⁴ In annuals through April, 1928, the jury is listed in the Seattle Fine Arts Society’s program, but in the October, 1928 and later annuals, the jury or juries are not listed, so it cannot be determined if Gould actually instituted the system of two juries and, if so, for how long it lasted.¹⁰⁵ In several letters in the 1928 file, Gould noted that the Society had rented the entire H. C. Henry property for future annuals, rather than only the “gallery” used in the April annual, as it had proved to be “far too small.”¹⁰⁶ The letters do not mention any dispute or unhappiness at the choices of admission to the April annual, suggesting Gould had decided to “spin” the issue as a matter of space. Nevertheless, the jury’s statement to the *Seattle Times* quoted earlier, and an April, 1928 telegram in the files, confirm that there had been a sharp disagreement of opinion. In the telegram, Anna Crocker, the curator of PAM, wrote to Mrs. McLouth, the curator of the Seattle Fine Arts Society, in support of the Society’s actions as follows: “consider the jury decision very fair based entirely upon artistic convictions of jurors...in the long run honest even if severe judging...is a general benefit.”¹⁰⁷ Anna B. Crocker (1868-1961), a fine artist in her own right, was curator of PAM for twenty-seven years, her job description the equivalent of what today is called director.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Carl F. Gould to F. W. Southworth, May 12, 1928, University of Washington Special Collections. (Southworth’s name did not appear in the April 1928 list of works exhibited for the Seattle Fine Arts Society annual, but he did have one painting in the October annual, so he may also have been a “victim” of the April exclusions.)

¹⁰⁵ Correspondence and exhibition files at the Society for 1928 make no mention of the “two jury” system.

¹⁰⁶ e.g., letter by Carl F. Gould, December 1, 1928, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram from Anna B. Crocker to Mrs. McLouth, April, 1928, University of Washington Special Collections. The curators in Portland and Seattle were very straightforward in their communications, with none of the “political correctness” so characteristic of our generation. In a letter from Mrs. McLouth to a disappointed exhibitor, someone whose work was not accepted for the October, 1928 annual, she wrote: “We are in receipt of your discourteous letter and regret to see that your absence from contact with developments in the art world have told with such disastrous effects upon you. We beg to call your attention to the fact that the standards of excellence which were avidly accepted by untutored pioneers during a mining rush are not standards which necessarily hold in a more developed civilization.” Letter from Mrs. Farley McLouth to George Jeffery, Portland, Oregon, October 9, 1928, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁰⁸ Allen & Klevit, 138-39.

According to Kenneth Callahan's 1946 article, since the exclusion of the "accepted" artists (that actually occurred in April, 1928), "painting in the Pacific Northwest has followed a new direction...such unifying characteristics as a consistent use of broken forms and greyed color; preference for tempera as a medium; leanings toward symbolism and expressionism; and the influence of Oriental art. Above all...a mystical essence." These characteristics of Northwest art cited by Callahan differ in most respects from the majesty, vigor, and rich color of the Northwest landscape that Gustin had predicted as the future of Northwest art in Katherine Wilson's article, published coincidentally in April, 1928. Tellingly, Callahan omitted Gustin entirely from his 1946 article in *Art News*, implying he had indeed ended up in the dustbin of history. Ziegler had been Callahan's teacher, which may help explain why Ziegler had one work accepted in the "exclusionary" April 1928 show and why Ziegler was anointed in the 1946 article with special praise.

In 1954, the year of Gustin's seventieth birthday, SAM accorded him a last one-man show of "all new" work (although *Le Vieux Moulin* from 1931 was included, apparently meaning it was new to SAM).¹⁰⁹ The show was said to be his second in that twenty year period (referring presumably to the 1933 one-man show for which no records have survived at SAM). SAM's monthly announcement for December, 1954 noted that Gustin "has not submitted any paintings for local exhibitions for a number of years, [but] he has continued to be very active as an artist. He has specialized in the portrayal of mountains and flowers." The show was reviewed in the *Seattle Times* by the same Kenneth Callahan who had failed to mention Gustin in his 1946 piece surveying art in the Northwest. Callahan lamented that Gustin had shown no interest in "the

¹⁰⁹ Gustin's etchings received a posthumous show at the Frye in 2004, thirty years after his death. The review by Judy Wagonfeld in the *Seattle P-I* noted Gustin's mastery at "poetic atmosphere", placing her in the same relationship to Gustin as his reviewers ninety years earlier. Judy Wagonfeld, "Gustin's etchings capture bygone times in remarkable detail," *Seattle P-I*, October 1, 2004.

dramatic beauty of Rainier in stormy weather.” (I would disagree with Callahan, as many of Gustin’s views of Mount Rainier are partially veiled by mist, which can be associated with bad weather, and the prominence given twisted mountain trees is evidence of mountain tempests. If Mount Rainier was obscured by snow or fog, there would be nothing to paint.) Callahan correctly underlined Gustin’s “strong consistency in use of color and handling of paint. Nature is customarily seen in highly keyed colors characteristic of the post-impressionistic landscape school.”¹¹⁰ Callahan observed in passing that, in Gustin’s watercolors of wild flowers on Mount Rainier, he had “made a tentative gesture toward modern cubist design by boxing in areas with line.” Callahan found “the arbitrarily placed lines...to be disturbing to the otherwise often charming rendering of the flowers.”¹¹¹

The *Seattle P-I* art critic, John Voorhees, took a different tack, finding the watercolors of flowers “to be the most successful...A new trend in his paintings—and a commendable one adding a good deal of interest to the paintings—is the use of cube-like prisms around the flowers as though magnifying them.”¹¹² The *Seattle P-I* illustrated one of the Mount Rainier flower paintings entitled “Deep Forest Flowers,”¹¹³ an oil almost identical to “Barber Pole—Deerfoot Vanilla Leaf, Wildflowers of Mount Rainier,” 1952 (figure 36), a watercolor possibly also exhibited at SAM. A second watercolor most likely exhibited at SAM is “Mistmaiden on Paradise River, Mount Rainier,” 1954 (figure 37). In both watercolors, the greens are

¹¹⁰The use of separate categories for American Impressionism and American post-Impressionism—which is not limited to Callahan by any means—makes no sense, in my opinion, in the American context. In French usage, the prefix “post” differentiates between the original Impressionists, who exhibited at one or more of the independent Impressionist shows in Paris, and later painters who adopted aspects of their technique like Seurat, Van Gogh, and Bonnard. American Impressionists, particularly late-comers like Northwest Impressionists, were “post” to all of them, and were influenced in differing measure by all of them. Thus, using “post-Impressionism” with reference to American artists is superfluous and confusing.

¹¹¹ Kenneth Callahan, “Gustin is Interpreter of Mount Rainier,” *Seattle Times*, December 19, 1954.

¹¹² John Voorhees, “Flowers that Bloom in Museums,” *Seattle P-I*, December 19, 1954.

¹¹³ *Seattle P-I*, December 12, 1954.



Figure 36. Paul Gustin, “Barber Pole—Deerfoot Vanilla Leaf, Wildflowers of Mount Rainier.”

exceptionally saturated, while the yellow mistmaidens are very bright as well. Mrs. Carl Gould attributed his luminous palette to the fact that Gustin “never uses fugitive colors which alter with age—but always the pure French colors he obtains from Paris. Thus, his [watercolors] retain their penetrating, jewel-like colors.”¹¹⁴



Figure 37. Paul Gustin, “Mistmaiden on Paradise River, Mount Rainier.”

¹¹⁴ Gould, *Notes*, 11.

In “Barber Pole—Deerfoot Vanilla Leaf, Wildflowers of Mount Rainier,” figure 36, the cubist design appears only in the small rectangular arrangement of fallen stalks of barber pole on the forest floor in the right foreground. The cube-like prisms are much more in evidence in “Mistmaiden on Paradise River, Mount Rainier,” figure 37, most strikingly in the “well” seen in the center right, boxed in by several rectangles, as well as in the larger quadrilateral forms that overlay much of the canvas. Looking at these two watercolors, dated 1952 and 1954, one can imagine how Gustin might have discovered and expanded his “cubist” concept. In “Barber Pole—Deerfoot Vanilla Leaf, Wildflowers of Mount Rainier,” 1952, dead stalks of the barber pole plant are depicted as having simply fallen in the ground, scattered on the left, but in a roughly rectangular shape on the right. If Gustin were to have obsessed about the ramifications of such apparent designs created by chance on the forest floor, he could have been stimulated to experiment and multiply the geometric shapes, arriving at the expanded number and variety of complex designs revealed in the 1954 work. Like Voorhees, Mrs. Gould was intrigued by the rectangular shapes. “He organizes into patterns through a mosaic medium of semi-geometric compositions of nature fantasies—square color planes of space...this approach is frankly contemporary, without strident realism.”¹¹⁵ Gustin’s late forays into watercolors are, strictly speaking, outside the focus of this dissertation, but have been included to complete this brief narrative of Gustin’s career, and to show where his encounters with the changing faces of Modernism ultimately led.

¹¹⁵ Gould, *Notes*, 11.

Chapter III

Charles C. McKim (1862-1939)

Charles McKim's personal and professional life story has many gaps, which this chapter will endeavor to fill. In the generally reliable biographical dictionary of Northwestern artists by Marion Appleton published in 1941, two years after McKim's death—when any knowledge of him should have been fresh—McKim's entry's was among the shortest: "deceased, painter, teacher, pupil of Winslow Homer".¹¹⁶ As we shall see, the first three are correct—McKim had painted; McKim had provided lessons in his studio, although the number of students who can be identified is small;¹¹⁷ McKim was dead; but McKim was surely never a pupil (in the normally accepted sense) of Winslow Homer.

Born while his father, William D. McKim, was serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, Charles McKim had what would be called today a deprived childhood in Bristol, Maine. His mother, Mary Sullivan, gave birth to seven children according to the United States census of 1870, of whom Charles, then aged seven, was the fifth. His parents later separated and, in 1904, McKim wrote a letter to the United States Pension Office in support of his mother's claim to 50% of her husband's Civil War pension.

As for providing a home for his wife and children, he never did, unless you would call half starved, half clothed and half housed providing one. [In] 1870-72, we went a good many days hungry and never had decent clothes and practically no shoes so we could not go to school in winter at all...My mother, after a good deal of urging got him to go to Portland [to work] while she and the rest of us remained at South Bristol...He did not average sending eight dollars a month to his family...I have known my mother to be obliged to go into the surrounding woods

¹¹⁶ Marion B. Appleton, *Who's Who in Northwest Art*. (Seattle: Frank McCaffrey, 1941.)

¹¹⁷ Mark Humpal states that there is a strong case that Conrad Pedersen was a student of McKim, as he has seen two canvases with a Pedersen on one side and a McKim on the other. Email from Humpal, April, 2012.

and pick up firewood in order to keep from freezing to death...When we came to Portland, it was about as bad...He would come home drunk day after day.¹¹⁸

After McKim left school at an unidentified date, most likely prior to high school, he was said to have been employed on a farm near Portland. There is no other record of his activities up to the age of twenty in 1882. If he attended high school, it would have been Portland High School, but he was never a registered student. The Portland Directory listed him as a clerk at Guptil Grocery in 1882, at the age of twenty, after which in 1885 he became a clerk or furniture painter at T. F. Foss & Sons. Evidencing an entrepreneurial spirit, from 1886 through 1903 he ran a variety store with Edmund Sprague. From 1904 until 1909, he was listed as an artist and a boarder at 203 Cumberland Avenue with no other place of business, implying his home and studio were the same. In 1910, he was recorded as having moved to Guilford, Maine, although there is no evidence of his presence there. It is a sparse record for the first 48 years of a person's life.¹¹⁹

In describing his art education much later in Oregon, McKim said that he had studied drawing in Portland, Maine with Charles Lewis Fox in the early 1890's.¹²⁰ Fox's art school opened in 1887 as a student cooperative with classes day and night. The school was inexpensive, and McKim could have worked during the day and studied art in the evening during the time he ran a variety store.¹²¹ As noted above, according to the City Directory, he had abandoned business and had no other occupation than as an artist after 1904. At an unspecified date, McKim became a second generation member of the Brush'uns, an old Portland sketching club,

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Elizabeth Oatley, "McKim: Brush'un...", 67, the article from which McKim's early biographical facts are drawn. As noted in the Introduction, I hired Ms. Oatley to research McKim's genealogy in order to try to contact living relatives who might have documentary information on him. Although my goal proved fruitless, Ms. Oatley was sufficiently interested in the subject to publish an article on the results of her research.

¹¹⁹ See Oatley.

¹²⁰ "Beauties of Oregon Told in Oils," *The Spectator*, May 23, 1925, 2.

¹²¹ Oatley, 4.

whose members were mostly amateur artists. In an article by William Barry, McKim is mentioned under the rubric of “latter-day, less well-known painters” in the club. Another second generation Brush’uns member, the architect John C. Stevens, is said to have introduced club members to his friend Winslow Homer.¹²² McKim’s relationship with Winslow Homer will be addressed below.

A pamphlet on the Brush’uns published in 1996 gave the nicknames of ten members during the unspecified period that McKim belonged to the club. McKim was called the “Watercolorist,” the only art-related nickname among the members. According to the pamphlet, “McKim is believed to be the only one of the Brushians who concentrated entirely in this medium.”¹²³ The club organized weekly outings to paint in the Portland and Cape Elizabeth area, and “over the years the Brushians ranged far and wide to paint...between Portland and the White Mountains.”¹²⁴ The only other mention of McKim in the pamphlet is in reference to a club outing by six members to a cottage by the Atlantic, where it is noted that “McKim had sent a plausible excuse” for not going along. The dates of the episodes chronicled in the pamphlet are not specified. McKim’s membership in the Brush’uns adds a second element in his art education to his drawing lessons with Fox, but his apparently low profile in the club, and the unknown length of time of his membership, leave considerable doubt as to the importance of the Brush’uns in McKim’s development as an artist.

¹²² William David Barry, “The Brush’uns—a Portland, Maine Art Group,” *Maine Antique Digest*, (April 1979), 18-19. Mark Humpal reported that he has seen 5 Maine watercolors of McKim. Email from Humpal, April, 2012.

¹²³ Elaine Ward Casazza, *The Brushians*, (University of Maine, 1996), 16. Although Casazza’s pamphlet opts for the more serious sounding “Brushians,” other sources cite the name as “Brush’uns.”

¹²⁴ Casazza, 17.

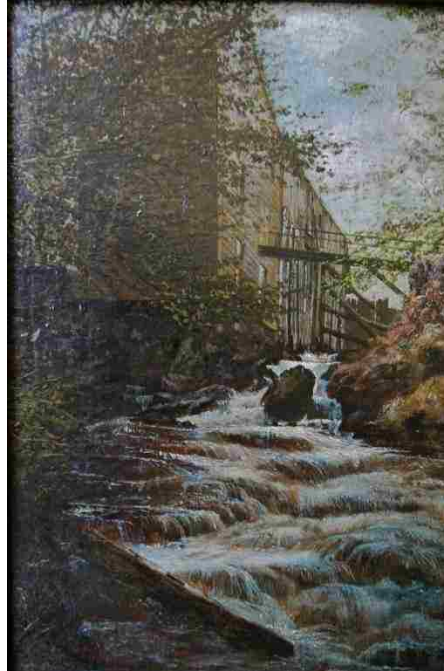


Figure 38, Charles McKim, “The Old Mill.”

“The Old Mill” (figure 38), a small oil by McKim from his Maine period, evidences a mastery of the American academic realist style as it was practiced in the late nineteenth century. It depicts what is already a very old mill in Eastern Maine, probably located on one of the tributaries near Portland of the Androscoggin River, the industrial river of nineteenth century Maine. The decrepit mill is held up by bracing from across the creek. Although a relatively dark and “closed-in” work in browns and pale greens, each detail is carefully depicted in a skilled manner. The work is that of an accomplished artist who has mastered the dictum of the realist school that if the artist can get every detail right, then the entire painting will be right. A static rural industrial landscape, there is no human element or sense of movement, both prominent in Homer’s work. The painting is signed “McKim” and is not dated.

Although McKim’s signature changed over the years, he almost never dated his work. As an oil painting, “The Old Mill” would seem to date after the period of McKim’s membership

as an amateur watercolorist with the Brush'uns. However, as will be seen subsequently, McKim painted in at least three other styles in Maine, so that leaves relatively little time for all the steps in the evolution of his art in Maine to have occurred. If McKim's recollection is correct that he took drawing lessons the first time in the early 1890's, and if he belonged to the Brush'uns while he was taking lessons, and if he painted as a Brush'un only in watercolors, then "The Old Mill" would have had to have been painted at the earliest in, say, 1895, shortly before he began to run a variety store for his own account. This chronology allows about fifteen years for McKim's artistic evolution through several distinct styles in Maine from 1895 up to 1910, the year he first visited Oregon. However, if it is believed that McKim needed some longer period of years to develop his skills as a painter in oils, then "The Old Mill" must have been painted later than 1895, and the chronology for McKim's stylistic development would have to be further compressed.

In addition to McKim's drawing lessons and communal sketching with the Brush'uns, a third element of his art education is a claimed relationship with Winslow Homer (1836-1910). A broad assertion of a teacher/student relationship between McKim and Winslow Homer (along with other art "studies" in Boston and New York) was made in *The Oregonian*, Portland's leading newspaper, in a birthday announcement in connection with McKim's return to Portland in 1932 after more than three years absence:

He began drawing pictures in his youth [in Maine] and continued to make sketches after he quit school and began working on a farm near Portland. A friend showed McKim's drawings to Winslow Homer, America's greatest marine painter, and that artist had the young man join him at his summer camp on the Maine seashore. Under the eye of this master, young McKim made notable progress. Later he went to Boston and studied, returning to Portland, Maine, to set

up his first studio. After a number of years, Mr. McKim went to New York City and painted and studied, although he never became a member of the Greenwich Village paint colony.¹²⁵

The Oregonian published a similar version of this account in McKim's obituary in 1939, which reported that "the work of the youth was shown the great painter and Winslow Homer sent for the boy to come and see him. Then and there began a friendship that ended only with Homer's death."¹²⁶ Homer's family owned a home at Prout's Neck in Scarborough, Maine. Homer lived in England in 1882-82, and he moved to Prout's Neck permanently in 1883, by which time McKim was living in Portland, working in a grocery store.¹²⁷ If McKim had met Homer, their meeting would have occurred before 1881 during a visit by Homer with family members in Maine, a time when McKim, a teen-ager, was working on a farm outside Portland.

In the Portland, Oregon *The Spectator* in 1922, McKim wrote what appears to be his earliest account of a relationship with Winslow Homer. McKim said he worked in some unspecified fashion for Homer or another family member one summer during his youth and recalled the extended Homer family to have been withdrawn and formal. McKim remarked "what a strange family they were" and recounted the following incident:

A group of us were sketching on the Scarborough marsh...and ordinarily he [Homer] would pass us by with or without a curt nod or no sort of nod at all. But this morning he was very friendly, and pleasantly greeted us all. He came out where we were and looked over our sketches. He did not say very much about them...I suppose least said the better. But it was the jolly and kindly side of Winslow Homer we saw that day. He told us on leaving that he had a toothache, and was on his way to the dentist, and was glad to stop and talk with us as it kept him

¹²⁵ *The Oregonian*, October 17, 1932.

¹²⁶ *The Oregonian*, February 9, 1939. McKim's obituaries in other Oregon newspapers included similar versions of this story. The Oregon Journal stated that McKim "progressed" under Homer's "tutelage." *Oregon Journal*, February 8, 1939. The Oregon Daily Journal reported that McKim's "talents became evident early in life and flowered under the encouragement of Winslow Homer." *Oregon Daily Journal*, February 9, 1939.

¹²⁷ Sarah Burns and John Davis, eds., *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 582.

that much longer from the torture chair. You had to take him as you found him. We were glad to find him in this mood, even though it took a toothache to bring it about.¹²⁸

This very different story of McKim's relationship with Homer from 1922 cannot be reconciled with the later expansive accounts from 1932 and 1939. Indeed, only the 1922 account can be clearly attributed to McKim, as the later stories by anonymous newspaper reporters do not cite a source. Apart from "work" for a Homer family member, McKim's only specific claim of meeting and speaking with Homer was a brief group conversation alongside a marsh. If McKim had had a significant friendship with Homer as an adolescent or a young man, it could have been reflected in the Brush'uns account of meeting Homer, which was attributed solely to the initiative of another member of the club. Furthermore, biographies of Homer do not mention his having had a student. Putting aside the Homer question, there is no evidence that McKim ever lived or studied art in Boston, although he seems probable he would have visited Boston—a fairly brief train ride from Portland—and viewed American Impressionist art there in the 1890's or the first decade of the 1900's. An intriguing possible relationship with another artist would be Childe Hassam, who made two extended visits to Oregon to paint in 1904 and 1908. One wonders if it was some news of those trips, or seeing some of Hassam's Oregon work in Boston, his home town, that might have led McKim to investigate moving to Oregon. Finally, there is no evidence McKim resided and painted in New York City, although he may have visited New York in 1910, the year he left Portland, Maine, and the year before he is typically said to have begun his permanent residence in Portland, Oregon.¹²⁹

My conclusion from this spotty collection of facts and stories is that McKim's formal art education was limited to his drawing lessons at Fox's school in Portland, Maine for a few years

¹²⁸ Charles C. McKim, "Winslow Homer: a Personal Impression of the Great Marine Artist," *The Spectator*, August 26, 1922.

¹²⁹ See, e.g., Allen & Klevit, 322.

after 1890 at a time when McKim was working as a clerk and would have taken classes in the evening. McKim's formal schooling apparently ended in grade school. I see no reason to believe he had anything other than a casual and limited acquaintance with Winslow Homer. I cannot but suspect that as McKim aged, he magnified his relationship with Homer in reminiscing of his youth, as the same time as he reinvented a more suitable family background, claiming to have been an architect himself, and that one of America's most famous architects was his uncle.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, I do not wish to belittle McKim's education and career as an artist. Growing up in poverty in a broken household, having little formal education, being largely self-taught in art, and slowly emancipating himself from the world of small business to begin a career as an artist beginning in his 40's, is in itself a remarkable achievement.

Ms. Oatley, in the summary of her research into the McKim's genealogy, concludes that McKim's "sense of family kept him in Portland [Maine] until everyone had either died or moved away."¹³¹ By 1904, his older brother William J. was the only immediate family member still living in Portland. In November 1909, William J. died, followed by both parents early in 1910. McKim was intrepid in leaving the East coast at the age of 48 and in seeking to earn a living as an artist in Portland, Oregon, a city where he was entirely unknown. Although the Portland Maine City Directories indicate he was a self-employed artist from 1904-1909, McKim and his art are entirely forgotten there today. The Portland Maine Museum of Art, while having an estimable collection of art by such American nineteenth century luminaries as Homer, Frederick Church, and Fitz Henry Lane, has no information on McKim. None of the local art galleries are

¹³⁰ In Allen and Klevit's handbook on Oregon painters, McKim is described as the nephew of Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909), the aristocratic and distinguished architect who designed Pennsylvania Station in New York City, an error in light of Ms. Oatley's exhaustive research of McKim's genealogy. Allen & Klevit, 232. Ginny Allen has told me that McKim's death certificate listed his occupation as "retired architect and artist." Email from Allen, April 2, 2011. There is no evidence that McKim was ever educated or worked as an architect.

¹³¹ Oatley, 69.

aware of or handle his work, and there are no auction records of the sale of his paintings in the East. (When examples of his Maine paintings like figures 38 and 39 have turned up in the East in recent years, the sellers have sent them to Portland, Oregon for sale at auction.)

The contrast between McKim's obscurity in Portland, Maine, and his rapid rise to celebrity in Portland, Oregon, is striking. In September, 1911, an exhibition of art by McKim in the Portland Press Club was reviewed in the Portland arts weekly, *The Spectator*. The show included over twenty paintings of scenes around Portland, as well as a "large collection" of Pacific coast scenes. "A dozen or more pictures brought from the Atlantic coast are especially interesting in comparison with the Pacific scenes," the reviewer noted. Springtime is not propitious for painting along the Pacific coast, as the weather is often rainy and foggy. To have completed thirty to forty works deserving of exhibition over one summer in Oregon seems unlikely, so it is probable that McKim moved to Oregon soon after leaving Maine in 1910. The anonymous reviewer described McKim's work as "brilliant in color and masterly in composition...marked by [pronounced] individuality...When an artist brings a brand-new method, like McKim's, to town we are apt to blink a bit at first, because we are not yet accustomed to just that way of seeing things." What did the Oregon reviewer see in McKim's work that was so novel? Childe Hassam's first visit to Oregon had occurred seven years previously, and many of his American Impressionist paintings of Eastern Oregon had been purchased and exhibited by Portland patrons.¹³² Although the reviewer did not specify what caused him to "blink" at McKim's paintings, McKim's commentary on his work quoted in the

¹³² During the summer of 1909, C. E. S. Wood organized an exhibition at PAM that included 17 paintings by J. Alden Weir and 23 by Hassam. *Shaping a Collection: C. E. S. Wood and Portland's Early Art Scene*, undated Portland Art Museum brochure, last page.

article seems to anticipate some resistance from Oregon viewers to his departure from the older, accepted canons of realism.

Mr. McKim, in a critical way derides the terms “impressionism,” “realism.” “One should paint the thing as one sees it,” he says. “The result is realistic to the painter and to all who see it like him. The truer his impression, the stronger will be his realism. Much depends on what you are after. Some think that to reproduce the charm of the landscape is itself enough to strive for; others seek to add something that may not be in the landscape, the result often being freakish, but sometimes infinitely poetic and fascinating.”¹³³

McKim seems to be defending his Impressionistic style on the grounds that it is “realistic” in terms of how he sees the landscape, thus reassuring Portland viewers of his work that it is not too radical. He hopes that whatever he may have “added” to the landscape will be appreciated for its poetry, not rejected as “freakish.”

Before looking at McKim’s work from his early Oregon period, another contemporary viewpoint by a fellow artist can be recounted. McKim figures in the diaries of Helen Lawrence Walters, a twenty-four year old graduate of the Minneapolis School of Fine Art who moved from Minneapolis to Portland in 1912 to marry fellow graduate Carl Walters. They remained in Portland until 1919, when they relocated to Woodstock, New York, with their Portland friend Floyd Wilson, all three becoming notable members of the Woodstock art colony. Her diaries describe how Carl and she often took the streetcar “to Charles C. McKim’s place near Columbia Slough,” implying an interest in visiting or painting with McKim. Her reaction to McKim and other Portland artists was mixed, however. After a December 2, 1912 meeting of the Society of Oregon Artists, of which the fifty year old McKim was a founder and the first president, she wrote that the members were “a dreadful bunch of old fogies!” On April 20, 1913, they attended

¹³³ *The Spectator*, September 30, 1911.

another meeting in the hope that her husband Carl might be elected president as McKim's successor. "Exciting meeting of the Oregon artists this evening. McKim had said so many times that he would not take [the presidency] again, that was a big surprise when he made no attempt to get out of it. [Some were] prepared to elect Walters but the McKim element, i.e., sign painters, was too strong." This pejorative view of McKim—"sign painters"—continued in her notes of the November 14, 1913 meeting. "The meetings of the SOA are such jokes. Mr. McKim, as president, presides chewing gum and never letting anyone know what business there is. So at the end it is all a muddle."¹³⁴ After the Society of Oregon Artists' November, 1913 show had closed, however, Walters took issue with a letter that appeared in the December, 9, 1913 *Oregonian* that "deplored the excessive impressionism and lack of detail" in paintings in the show. She reported "Mr. McKim most enthusiastic" in her desire to defend the art in a proposed letter to the editor. That Walters may have objected more to McKim's supporters than McKim himself is also evidenced by another entry in her diaries concerning a portrait she was painting, which she thought was "awful" enough to suit her client, a Mrs. Adams. Walters reported that McKim "tried to tell [Mrs. Adams] that things in nature weren't 'smooth', so 'smooth' painting is false," in an unsuccessful effort to convince Mrs. Adams to accept the portrait. Walters's good relationship with McKim, apart from the abortive electoral attempt, is attested also by her report of preparing for a costume party in April, 1913, where she planned to wear a Rembrandt costume and McKim to dress up as Hal's "Laughing Cavalier." The Walters "went out to dinner" with McKim and they "afterwards worked on their costumes."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ The Society of Oregon Artists was not necessarily the center of the art community in Portland and, in any event, it ceased to exist after 1913, having sponsored four exhibitions during its brief life. According to Michael Munk, more important were the Portland Museum of Art and its art school that opened in 1909. Michael Munk, "The Diaries of Helen Lawrence Walters," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 4 (2005): 3.

¹³⁵ Munk, 2-6.

A last example of Walters' sometimes ambiguous attitudes toward quality in art and artists appears in her entry for May Day, 1914, where the Walters visited C. E. S. Wood's house and pictures. (C.E. S. Wood was the amateur artist who had been instrumental in founding PAM and the Portland Public Library and in bringing American Impressionists J. Alden Weir and Childe Hassam to Portland to paint.) "A little disappointing. House full of beautiful things, but too full, cluttered up. None of his pictures much either—lots of Hassams." Walters' diary entry on Wood's art collection is ambiguous, as her deprecatory remarks may have been directed only at Wood's own paintings, or they may have included the Weir's and Hassam's. As concerns McKim, at a minimum her diary constitutes further testimony of the preeminent position McKim enjoyed among local artists so soon after his relocation to Portland.

An examination of McKim's later Maine work and early Oregon work makes clear that he had become an American Impressionist by the time of his settling in Oregon in 1910 or 1911. Over little more than the prior decade, his work had evolved considerably from the academic realism of "The Old Mill". A second Maine painting that includes an old mill, the canvas much larger and the mill relatively smaller, is "Landscape with Mill and Waterfall," oil on canvas, 22 x 36" (figure 39). The colors remain dark, mostly browns, but McKim's attention to detail



Figure 39. Charles McKim, "Landscape with Mill and Waterfall."

has lessened. The many minute reflections of light from the water of the river are not painted individually with tiny brushstrokes as in the earlier work. Instead, McKim has concentrated on *expressing* the turbulence of the spring run-off, as well as the enormous concentrations of mud deposited on both banks of the river. Although not fully evident in reproduction, there is a huge amount—several millimeters—of thick impasto in the paint depicting the dark brown mud and brownish water. (It is surprising that none has broken off in the past one hundred or more years.) Compared to the academic realism without use of impasto that informed “The Old Mill”, figure 39 seems inspired by the loose handling of paint of the Barbizon school, with McKim’s heavy use of impasto surpassing work done in France. The Brush’uns reportedly painted together in the White Mountains of Western Maine, and that would appear to be the location of “Landscape with Mill and Waterfall.” The trees depicted are the large deciduous hardwood trees of Western Maine, not the mainly evergreen trees of the Atlantic coast, and the impressive waterfall in the distance resembles photographs of the so-called “Little Niagara Falls” of Western Maine. Yet, once again, if McKim painted this large landscape on an outing with fellow Brush’uns, he should not be remembered solely as a watercolorist. Perhaps McKim’s brush with the Brush’uns was of short duration at the time he was studying drawing around 1890-1894 and, for whatever reason he avoided their company as he became a proficient painter in oils over the next fifteen years in Portland, Maine.

Two further stylistic developments are evident in McKim’s Maine work. “Off the Maine Coast” (figure 40) is a small oil painting by McKim. Undated, like nearly all McKim’s, it has a new form of signature, C. C. McKim instead of simply McKim. The artist has adopted the broken brushstrokes of American Impressionism in this canvas, while maintaining a strong dose of impasto, although nothing like the mud of the spring New England run-off from melted snow



Figure 40, Charles McKim, “Off the Maine Coast.”

in figure 39. There are traces of violet in the clouds, but the coloration of the rocks and water is somber. Nevertheless, the work looks American Impressionist in style because of its broken brushstrokes, brighter violets, and lack of detail and “finish.” If McKim had visited Boston and viewed the work of the Boston Impressionists, that encounter could explain the new direction he had taken, although he has eschewed their sunny seacoast scenes, enlivened by beautiful young women in white.



Figure 41, Charles McKim, Untitled, farm in Maine.

Before relocating to Oregon, McKim's art evolved yet again. In what must be among his last paintings in Maine is a series of four scenes at an old farm. One of the four (figure 41) shows three farm buildings from a distance, framed by a grove of the tall evergreen trees of Eastern Maine on the right, and by a lone deciduous tree on the left. The latter has lost its leaves, but the remainder of the work is a riot of bright colors in broken brushstrokes. The predominance of reds, pinks, and yellows suggests an October scene when the fall colors are at their peak. The artist's small, jewel-like brushstrokes have replaced the more conventional longer broken brushstrokes of American Impressionism in the seascape "Off the Maine Coast," figure 40, and the overall effect is much brighter, consistent with the use of more saturated colors. This work is also signed C. C. McKim and is undated. McKim's use of impasto continues unabated, but the impasto elements are more controlled, consistent with the enamel-like effect of the smaller brushstrokes.

Figures 38 to 41, four oils from successive periods within about fifteen years, represent the four different styles in which McKim worked in Maine. It is impressive that a largely self-taught artist, with no obvious models for his work—certainly not Winslow Homer, whose genre scenes have nothing in common with McKim—could develop so steadily. In the small community of Portland, Maine, McKim had been known solely as a watercolorist when he was a member of the Brush'uns, presumably about 1890-1894. McKim must have experimented on his own, out of sight of his former sketching friends, during the later 1890's and the first decade of the 1900's. Unknown in Maine, he became an instant celebrity when he relocated to Oregon in 1910 or 1911. He helped found a new fine arts society, the Society of Oregon Artists, and he was elected its first president. He exhibited 40 to 50 works, mostly of Oregon scenes, at the Portland Press Club in 1911 and was feted in the newspapers for introducing Portland to

something new. What he brought seemed to be his newest variation of American Impressionism emphasizing small, enamel-like brushstrokes of saturated color, evident in figure 41 and its three companion Maine farm scenes.



Figure 42, Charles McKim, “The Pond.”

One of McKim’s few dated paintings is figure 42, a snow scene of 1911 that Mark Humpal suggested to me was painted in Oregon after McKim’s permanent relocation that year. There is a wide pathway in the foreground, with an abundance of snow underfoot, bordered by a scrim of trees in the middle ground that mostly hide the pond, three tall birches with white bark, as well as evergreens to their right. American Impressionism is evident in the broken brush strokes that represent the melting snow and mud, and in the focus on reflections of sunlight from the snow. Birches are not native to the Northwest, but they have been widely planted in cities and towns. Looking at the trees—white birches being common in Maine—the work might have been based on McKim’s memories of Maine. In terms of brightness of the reflected light and the attributes of his brushstrokes, McKim’s technique seems similar to, if more controlled than, the farm paintings c. 1909.

Figure 42 was illustrated in the *Portland Sunday Journal* shortly after a big snowfall in 1924, accompanied by a story to the effect that the walls of McKim’s studio were lined with “new and interesting snow scenes.”¹³⁶ Oddly enough, this 1911 painting, chosen for illustration, had obviously not been painted after the 1924 snowstorm that prompted the article, and the other painting illustrated is a scene along the Oregon coast—not in Portland where the recent snowfall had occurred—in which it is hard to tell if the gray sand is snow covered or not. (Perhaps they were the only two works hung in his studio for which McKim had photographs to provide to the newspaper.)

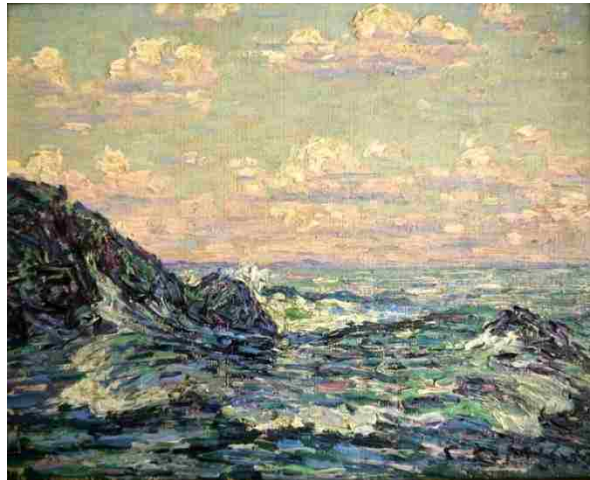


Figure 43. Charles McKim, “Tidal Pool, Oregon Coast”

Another coastal scene of McKim’s is “Tidal Pool, Oregon Coast”, figure 43. Although undated, its small, enamel-like brushstrokes are even more similar to the Maine farm scenes than McKim’s 1911 snow scene, suggesting it be should be dated c. 1910. Like figure 42, the work is very bright, the saturated colors popping off the canvas. McKim’s brilliant treatment of ocean-reflected light marks an evident change from his small Maine coastal scene, figure 40, a darker work. Although the brushstrokes are smaller in figure 43 than in figure 40, the continued use of

¹³⁶ *Sunday Journal*, February 14, 1924.

impasto is consistent with his Maine paintings once he had abandoned academic realism. Figure 43 was most likely painted at Yachats, midway down the Oregon coast toward California.¹³⁷

Yachats's rocky coast has many small tidal pools where the surf splashes in unexpected directions as the tide is coming in or out. To the south, the Yachats coast is dominated by Cape Perpetua, a tall mountain ridge that rises steadily as it retreats from the shore. As well as notable for its brilliant color, "Tidal Pool, Oregon Coast," figure 43, is worthy of study for its ambiguous composition that must reflect, in my opinion, McKim's sense of visual humor. On the one hand, a viewer can interpret the small work as depicting a close up view of a tidal pool as a wave splashes into it. In that case, the rocky formation to the left would also be short, perhaps six feet high, and it would be an amusing coincidence that its silhouette exactly copies that of Cape Perpetua, rising hundreds of feet from the ocean. On the other hand, if the rocky formation to the left is in fact Cape Perpetua, then the wave has to be an enormous tsunami, given its height in relation to Cape Perpetua. This ambiguity in interpretation would be evidence of McKim visual sense of humor.



Figure 44. Charles McKim, "Salt Marsh, Oregon Coast."

¹³⁷ The *Evening Telegram*, March 23, 1916, carried a long article on McKim's exhibition of 43 oils, many painted "along the rock-strewn coast near Yachats."

A similarly great wave appears in a rare McKim watercolor of the Oregon coast, presumably the area around Astoria at the northern end of the coast, with its abundance of salt marshes. “Salt Marsh, Oregon Coast,” figure 44, is different in that the scale implied by the height of trees at different distances from the viewer permits of only one interpretation of the scene, a salt marsh bordered by oak trees, with the Pacific in the background—another giant tsunami is about to crash down upon the shore!

“Salt Marsh, Oregon Coast,” along with a companion watercolor looking inland, is notable for two other reasons. McKim utilized a unique signature where the C, C and M are combined in one symbol. In his oil paintings of the period, McKim laid on paint thickly, and his signatures “C. C. McKim” were thick lines, often with horizontal slashes before and between the C’s. However, his signature of this watercolor is a bit of complex calligraphy that required a fine line that would not have been possible using thick slashes of oil paint. Thus, I wonder if this is a signature he reserved only for watercolors. The watercolor is also notable for its electric, neon-like colors, much less naturalistic than the colors used in his oils. “Salt Marsh, Oregon Coast” bears comparison to Charles Demuth’s (1883-1935) “The Bay # 4,” a watercolor painted in Paris, c. 1912, figure 45. In an article on Demuth’s Parisian watercolors, the author described figure 45 as Demuth’s having “applied bright, irrational tones in broad washes across the sky and intense passages along the shoreline”¹³⁸ In McKim’s watercolor, the colors in the sky and ocean are naturalistic, but the onshore colors of the land surrounding the marsh and the trees are as “irrational” as Demuth’s choice of colors. McKim, residing in Oregon at the time of Demuth’s trip to Paris, is unlikely to have seen his work in person or in reproduction, so the similarities

¹³⁸ Anne M. Lampe, “Charles Demuth in the City of Lights,” *American Art Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 3 (June 2011): 103.



Figure 45, Charles Demuth, “The Bay #4.”

must be taken as a sign of the times, as well as an indication of McKim’s interest in experimenting with Modernist impulses.

In his day, McKim was celebrated primarily as a marine painter. In his review of an exhibition of 43 McKim oils at the Meier & Frank’s department store in 1916, David Hazen describes his reaction to a Yachats scene. “At last the spirit of the artist found the spirit of the mist, and then the painter was able to record his impressions on the canvas...At first one thinks the paint has not dried, but this is only a part of the skill of the impressionist, for he has made his sea seem wet and his fog cold...Mr. McKim has given the world a picture of shore and sea and fog that no other artist has ever excelled, not even Winslow Homer.” (One wonders if McKim recounted his Homer anecdote to the reviewer.) Hazen also provides an insight into McKim’s working habits. “Mr. McKim spent all last summer at the rim of [Crater Lake]. He sketched every day...worked all summer long at Crater Lake. He filled several sketch books. Then he returned to his Portland home in the fall and went to work. How many pictures do you think he painted of this rare gem of the Cascades? One!”¹³⁹ Even discounting what may have been McKim’s hyperbole in his description of his modus operandi, this story nevertheless reinforces

¹³⁹ David W. Hazen, “Witchery of Fog Shown on Canvas,” *Evening Telegram*, March 23, 1916.

the hypothesis that McKim must have relocated to Oregon in 1910 in order to have had the time to paint so many Oregon landscapes before his exhibition at the end of the summer of 1911.¹⁴⁰

McKim organized another showing of paintings from Yachats in 1922 in his studio in the Labbe building.¹⁴¹ An article in *The Spectator* mentioned views of Cape Perpetua and Heceta Head at Yachats, as well as scenes of mountains, forests, and Mount Hood. The author noted that marines predominate in McKim's personal collection, and he singled them out as "his best. He can convincingly portray with his brushes the weight and mass of moving water and the color and atmosphere peculiar to the sea."¹⁴²

In addition to his article describing an encounter with Winslow Homer discussed at length above, *The Spectator* published a third piece on or by McKim in the summer of 1922 where McKim described his philosophy of art.

A picture to be good must have several qualities, such as good color and values, composition or balance, personality or style, and good drawing. Even then, it may not be a work of art. In fact, it may be all work, and no art at all. To make use of an Irishism, "Most of the good things in a picture are those that are left out."

Art is something almost indefinable. It is an appeal to the emotions. It should be a big think simply stated. Art has been defined in many terms; one definition, given by one of our teachers, is 'nature seen through a temperament.' But an impression of a mood of nature temperamentally expressed or interpreted, may or may not be art; temperament has done some wonderful things, but it has also been the cause of much disaster. Art, I would say, is self-expression, and the more nearly it is self-expressed (other things being equal) the better the art.

¹⁴⁰ In the several articles by and on McKim in *The Spectator* in the 1920's, McKim typically says he "visited" Oregon in 1910 before returning to Maine to prepare to relocate in 1911.

¹⁴¹ McKim did not paint only at Yachats on the coast. "About Art and Artists" reported that McKim was leaving for Pacific City for the month of September, "the best beach month." *Sunday Journal*, September 9, 1923.

¹⁴² "Some New McKim Pictures," *The Spectator*, September 9, 1922, 8.

An academic training is a mighty good thing, but, too, it may just make a very good mechanic of the student. A photographic rendition of a bit of nature can be a good example of workmanship but the artist can express the same thing in a lucid and simple manner. And while there will be apparently a lack of detail, his canvas will have all the significance of form necessary to express his impressions. This is the difference between art and a labored piece of workmanship. You will find yourself admiring the very fine finish of a photographic impression, but the big thing is not there. Art never appeals to one as having been very painstakingly worked out, but has the full, free and restful feeling of not having been any work at all.

Technique...is just habit. Sometimes an artist's technique is so lauded by the critics that it is taken too seriously by the painter, and his work becomes all technique. The artist's business is to convey to his public the beautiful in form and color, and when he does that the technique will be there. But the big thing, that which counts, will predominate.¹⁴³

McKim's essay is well-written and insightful for someone with an elementary school education. The "Irishness" and perhaps wisdom, of his mother, née Sullivan, can be inferred in his advice to simplify and avoid extraneous detail. McKim sees his appeal as targeting the viewer's emotions, not his intellect, and McKim accomplishes it by emphasizing a *big thing*. It would be convenient if McKim had pointed out his *big thing* in any particular canvas, but absent a good example, the viewer will have to discern it. At the very least, we know the big thing has not been painstakingly worked out, but must appear to be spontaneous. McKim seems to stand firmly in the school of naturalism of J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851) and John Constable (1776-1837), where representing the essence in nature is an important responsibility of the artist. Overall, McKim advocates an appeal to the viewer's emotions sparked by one big thing he has discerned in the corner of nature he has chosen to represent. In what I have tongue-in-cheek called his tsunami seascapes, the big waves could be the *big thing*. McKim's depiction of the brilliant reflections of light on snow could be the big thing in his snow scene. The big thing in

¹⁴³ C. C. McKim, "Art," *The Spectator*, September 22, 1922.

McKim's old mill and waterfall is surely the incredible run-off of roiled water and mud from the melting of the winter snowfall in Maine. (Anyone who has spent time in the spring in rural New England knows that "muddy" is the most necessary adjective to describe it.) Perhaps if a work of McKim "speaks" to us directly, we are responding to his big thing, even if we cannot clearly name it.

Although one-man shows were given to other Portland artists at PAM, McKim did not have one. McKim seems to have exhibited his work primarily at other institutions like the Portland Press Club or department stores, and especially in his own studio. He almost never sent paintings to Seattle exhibitions as Keller, Wire, Wentz, and Stephens commonly did. In 1923, a *Daily Journal* writer visited McKim's studio and reported on his recent works. McKim explained to the reporter that "California is [not] the only state in which a Western artist may successfully ply his trade. [All] are not suited to that sunny clime." Like Paul Gustin, McKim believed that the West "is offering a new impetus to the artistic expression of [America.] Here on the Pacific coast the people are removed from European influence. They do not look across the Atlantic for their ideals and traditions. The great pioneer movement, and the romance of the untouched forests, contributes to a freshness and spontaneity of expression." Like Gustin, McKim may have become disillusioned that his prediction did not materialize, and "the romance of the untouched forests" petered out as a subject of art by the late 1920's. McKim is described in the *Daily Journal* as spending his summers painting on the coast near Yachats and his winters in the Willamette Valley. But the canvas that drew the reporter's eye upon entering the studio was "a large oil of Mount Hood...It is a great vibrating giant lifting its proud head to the morning sky." Although the reporter lamented that McKim "does not talk of himself," he recounted McKim's story of moving to Oregon for its "color schemes and interesting

foliage...after having made a name for himself in the East.”¹⁴⁴ I suppose that McKim’s pride prevented him from admitting he was a nonentity in the East, but his fulgurate ascension to leadership of the Portland art community coming from nowhere at the age of fifty is remarkable in itself.

The Spectator’s last article by McKim was published in 1925, “What the Artist Sees in Oregon: The painter sees some things that do not go into the picture.” McKim wrote that “the autumn just passed...has been the most beautiful in years. The foliage has been a glory of gold, reds and purples, intermingled with deep bronzy greens, with the grays of the rocky banks.” McKim recounted how he painted a canvas on “one of those autumn-winter days when you feel that all nature is in perfect accord.” After an extended description of the creek where he was camping, McKim spoke of trout jumping, and little ouzels diving and skimming around on the water. (Apparently it was the trout and ouzels that he omitted from the painting.) Rather than extend his philosophy of art as set forth in an earlier article in 1922, McKim extolled the joy of trout fishing and cooking on a roaring campfire, all with a Hemingwayesque flavor.¹⁴⁵ Later in the year, in another *Spectator* piece on McKim, the reporter described viewing a “group of interesting canvases [of] the bright-hued autumn scenes on Patton Creek” near Portland from 1924.¹⁴⁶ It must have been Patton Creek where McKim camped, fished, and painted in the autumn of 1924.

McKim’s art underwent a further evolution in Oregon that can be followed through three canvases, one dated 1915, the second attributable to the autumn of 1924 on Patton Creek, and the third dated 1927. “Spring Evening, Sauvie Island” (figure 46), depicts a scene that is almost

¹⁴⁴ “Oregon Scenery Bewitching Artist Finds Joy in Rain,” *Daily Journal*, July 8, 1923.

¹⁴⁵ Charles C. McKim, “What the Artist Sees in Oregon: The Painter Sees Some Thing that do not go into the Picture,” *The Spectator*, March 14, 1925.

¹⁴⁶ “Beauties of Oregon Told in Oils: Charles C. McKim’s Canvases,” *The Spectator*, May 23, 1925.

unchanged today. A date in July, 1915 is written on the stretcher. Sauvie Island is located just north of Portland at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. It was a frequent destination for weekend painting by McKim, Keller, and the latter's pupils. Indeed, an oil on board by Keller dated 1942 to be discussed in the chapter on him, depicts the same spot on Sauvie Island. "Spring Evening, Sauvie Island," is a well-balanced composition centered on



Figure 46. Charles McKim, "Spring Evening, Sauvie Island."

the marsh known as Virginia Lake, framed by large oak trees. A few cows are grazing in the distance. The predominant color is the pink of the sky, echoed in the reflected pink on the leaves on the oaks. The alternation of dry seasons and wet seasons in the coastal Northwest implies that the work was executed in the spring or early summer, as the normal drought of the summer dry season would eliminate any grass for the cows to eat in the fields and pastures of Sauvie Island. Thus, an autumn date of execution must be excluded. Today, this specific area of Sauvie Island is a small state park surrounded by dairy farms and, as one walks around the marsh called

Virginia Lake, cows are visible in the distance. It is evident that by 1915, McKim had moved away from the riot of colors of his Maine farm scenes, or even his c. 1910 Yachats tidal pool/tsunami, in favor of a more harmonious use of color with variations on one or two hues, in this case greens and pinks. The spring evening seems especially quiet without a human presence, the cows peaceably foraging in the background. In a word, McKim's Impressionism had begun to embrace the limited range of colors of Tonalism, as well as its preferred feeling of peace and quiet. One holdover from his earlier style is a continued use of impasto, although to a markedly lesser extent.



Figure 47. Charles McKim, “Oregon Forest Stream.”

“Oregon Forest Stream,” figure 47, is painted with a greater variety of colors than “Spring Evening, Sauvie Island.” Instead of the setting sun “painting” the leaves of the trees with the pink color of the clouds overhead, McKim has depicted a closed-in section of a forest stream, illuminated by sunlight filtering through the leaves. There are many hues in evidence,

with a predominance of yellows, greens, and pinks. The variety of color suggests an autumn scene, which would be consistent with a date of execution in the fall of 1924 when McKim reported that he painted numerous canvases along Patton Creek. By this date, McKim had entirely abandoned the use of impasto. Despite affinities with Tonalism in the sense of quiet and the emphasis on pastel colors, in many ways, “Oregon Forest Stream” is one of McKim’s most Impressionist canvases. The rocks in the stream have picked up the pink colors of the leaves, becoming dematerialized reflections of the forest canopy instead of the solid rocks that actually rest in the creek bed. Like Gustin’s “Nootka Island,” figure 1, which shares its predominantly pink rocks, “Oregon Forest Stream” is a quintessentially Northwest Impressionist work, perhaps McKim’s most perfect plein air sketch.



Figure 48, Charles McKim, “Mount Hood, Early Morning.”

“Mount Hood Viewed from a Marsh,” figure 5, is McKim’s largest and best known painting of Mount Hood, reproduced in Allen & Klevit’s handbook on Oregon Painters, as well

as in Kreisman & Mason’s book on the Arts and Crafts movement in the Pacific Northwest. Its date has been attributed to the time of McKim’s arrival in Oregon,¹⁴⁷ although I find that improbable, as its colors are muted and it lacks the enamel-like brushstrokes of McKim’s late Maine and early Oregon work. “Mount Hood, Early Morning,” figure 48, can be securely dated to 1927, written on the back of the canvas in McKim’s hand. The two works are sufficiently similar that I believe figure 5 also dates from the mid 1920’s. It may very well be the “great vibrating giant [of a mountain]” that dominated McKim’s studio walls in 1923 mentioned earlier. “Mount Hood Viewed from a Marsh,” figure 5, is most likely the first executed, since “Mount Hood, Early Morning’s” scrim of trees in the foreground represents a sufficient improvement in the composition—adding variety and a heightened sense of depth—to imply that it was created later when McKim gave himself a second chance at depicting the specific scene. “Mount Hood, Early Morning” epitomizes some of the defining characteristics of Tonalism examined in Chapter I, especially its low-toned palette and sense of repose. The paint is sufficiently thin that, on occasion, the white color of the canvas can be seen and composes part of the early morning mist. “Mount Hood, Early Morning’s” time of day is indicated by the pink reflection from the rising sun as it illuminates the peak of the mountain, as well as by the streaks and wisps of fog and mist among the trees and bushes in the foreground of the work. Mist is very much a morning phenomenon in the Northwest, burning away as the morning advances. After more than fifteen years of study of the Northwest’s mist and fog, McKim’s talent in its depiction—often noted by his reviewers in the press—is evident. “Mount Hood, Early Morning” represents a synthesis of the American Impressionist and Tonalist traditions, nowhere better achieved than in McKim’s magisterial oil.

¹⁴⁷ See the color plate in Allen and Klevit.

There remains a last unanswered question in the life and career of McKim. After 1925, when several articles devoted to him appeared in the Portland press, little more was said until his death in 1939. In 1928 or 1929, McKim left Portland, for reasons that are unexplained, for about three years. The last time the press mentioned any of his works on exhibition was in July, 1929, when “three large canvases” of McKim were part of a larger show organized by the Mazamas, a Portland club.¹⁴⁸ His return in 1931 or 1932 was noted in the newspapers several months after he had moved back to Portland, adding that “he has done landscapes in the southwestern states” and that “he didn’t get excited over the landscapes he found in Wyoming, but enjoyed his stay at the artists’ colony at Taos, New Mexico.”¹⁴⁹ However, no painting by McKim from Wyoming or New Mexico has been identified. Thus, he appears to have painted much less after the late 1920’s, when he was still at the top of his form, and much appreciated in Portland.¹⁵⁰ After his return to Portland in 1931 or 1932, there was no other mention of McKim in the press until his death in 1939 at the Whyte sanatorium, where he had been a patient for two years. McKim’s death certificate listed diabetes, arteriosclerosis that began in 1929, and acute cardiac dilation.¹⁵¹ The most likely explanation therefore for McKim’s much reduced artistic activity was his health, not the Great Depression.

¹⁴⁸ “Mountain Pictures shown by Mazamas,” *Oregonian*, July 1, 1929, 10.

¹⁴⁹ *Daily Journal* and *Oregonian*, respectively, October 17, 1932.

¹⁵⁰ In emails of April, 2012, Mark Humpal reported that McKim painted two small California scenes of live oaks at unknown dates, and that he participated, or attempted to participate, in a federal arts project in the mid 1930’s.

¹⁵¹ Email from Ginny Allen, April 2, 2012.

Chapter IV

Clara Jane Stephens (1877-1952)

Clara J. Stephens and Harry Wentz were the two Portland artists most often mentioned in Portland newspapers and weeklies during the 1910's and 1920's, far more regularly than McKim. Both were also the most respected art teachers in Portland, initially in secondary schools, and later at the Portland Museum Art School. Both received one-man shows at the Portland Museum of Art. Both were identified with American Impressionism. As noted in the introduction, a small oil painting by Wentz was the first work by an Oregon artist to be purchased by the Portland Museum of Art, where it is typically exhibited in the Portland Room. Allen and Klevit indicate that PAM also owns two works by Stephens.¹⁵² Stephens appears to have been a more prolific artist than Wentz. While Wentz's style of painting is not dissimilar to that of his Oregon contemporaries, Stephens's work is sometimes surprising. Stephens's subjects are different, as she depicted children, genre scenes, and center city scenes as well as landscapes. Her *facture* became distinctive, with very free brushstrokes. She has been called "wild."¹⁵³ Works by Wentz or Stephens do not come to the art market often. As best I can tell, not a single work by Wentz has been offered for sale in recent years, and there are no auction records for him. Two small oil sketches by Stephens have appeared at auction over the past ten years, and one small oil sketch has been offered for sale recently by a dealer.¹⁵⁴ I initially

¹⁵² Allen and Klevit, 289. When I asked PAM about their Stephens' holdings, I was referred to their website, which does not list any. However, their website does not provide a complete listing of the museum's collection.

¹⁵³ Allan Kollar, the Seattle art consultant mentioned in the introduction, cautioned me to be "careful" with Stephens, as some of her work is "wild."

¹⁵⁴ Two oil sketches by Stephens were sold at auction at Matthew's Galleries for \$392 and \$456, very modest prices indicating a low interest in her work. The other oil sketch was sold by a dealer in 2008. Stephens's small oil

decided to include in this dissertation one of the principal art teachers in Portland who was also known as a practicing artist. Because of what seems to be a greater extant oeuvre, which is more original in style and subject, I have chosen Stephens rather than Wentz for study.

Stephens was born in England in 1877. Orphaned at an early age, she was taken to Portland to be raised by distant relatives. In her diary for 1939-1940, she noted that she “had practically no ‘formal’ education.”¹⁵⁵ In a newspaper interview for one of her last exhibitions, she described how, as a child, she paid for her art lessons. “I just wanted to paint from as early as I can remember. I used to scribble on the blank pages of my books in school. I am an orphan, however, and when no money could be spared for education along these lines from those with whom I lived, I earned the money.”¹⁵⁶ In December, 1892, when Stephens was fifteen, Mr. A. P. Armstrong, Principal of the Portland Business School, wrote to the Portland law firm of Caples, Hurley & Allen recommending Stephens as a stenographer, “not rapid in her work, but [otherwise] industrious and willing...I think you will find in her desirable help, as soon as she becomes familiar with...her duties.”¹⁵⁷ Compared to the hyperbole in a “normal” letter of recommendation today, Armstrong would seem to have damned with faint praise, but I suspect his was the more measured style of the Victorian age. In any event, an unpublished account of her education and early life reports that she found employment with Caples in 1895 at the age of eighteen, when she moved into an apartment.¹⁵⁸ Whether she found regular employment at

sketches are typically not signed, and she may have painted some of them in connection with her art classes as demonstrations for students, perhaps inspired by the example of her teacher, William Merritt Chase.

¹⁵⁵ Clara J. Stephens, *Green Fallow Journal*, PAM library archive, 206. Although Stephens does not explain “Green Fallow,” her neighborhood was called “Goose Hollow,” and I would guess that Green Fallow was the name given to the house where she resided.

¹⁵⁶ “Local Studies Rule Stephens Art Exhibition”, *Daily Journal*, January, 1926.

¹⁵⁷ A. P. Armstrong, letter to Messrs. Caples, Hurley, & Allen, December 8, 1892, PAM library archive.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Lundberg, *Clara Jane Stephens, An American Impressionist*, 2000, unpublished manuscript, Mark Humpal archive. This article was intended for publication in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, but Lundberg died before agreement had been reached on its editing.

fifteen or eighteen, it appears that she continued to finance her art studies with her savings from work. Stephens joined the Portland Sketch Club in 1896, taking lessons from Eva Woolfolk. Frank Vincent DuMond (1865-1951), an artist and teacher on the faculty of the Art Students League in New York City, taught at the Sketch Club in Portland in 1898 and 1905, and he was presumably responsible for Stephens enrolling in classes at the Art Students League in New York City in 1904-1905, when she studied with DuMond, Kenyon Cox (1856-1919), and George Bridgman (1865-1943). In 1909, the successor of the Portland Sketch Club was reorganized as the Museum Art School of PAM, where Stephens then enrolled to study drawing and painting with Harry Wentz, graduating with the first class one year later, at the age of thirty-three. Unlike Paul Gustin, who arrived on the Seattle art scene as a wunderkind at twenty, and more like Charles McKim, who was first recognized as a serious artist at forty-eight, Stephens underwent a lengthy period of study and maturation before she exhibited frequently.

The Portland City Directories list Stephens as a permanent resident from 1895 until the 1940's. The records of the Art Students League do not show her dates of attendance.¹⁵⁹ It is probable that she purchased tickets of admission to classes on a month to month basis when she had the opportunity to spend a few months in New York. The capstone of Stephens's art education, also apparently financed through her savings from working as a secretary and art teacher, was taking William Merritt Chase's last European summer class in 1913 as one of thirty students. Chase painted her portrait in Italy, giving it to Stephens as a reward for the quality of her work, and inscribing it "To my friend and pupil, Clara J. Stephens, Venice, 1913."¹⁶⁰ A

¹⁵⁹ Lundberg, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Lundberg, 2-5. The portrait was included in a 1916 exhibition at PAM of works of Chase following his death in New York on October 25, 1916. It was illustrated in the *Sunday Journal*, November 12, 1916 in a photograph of a wall of the exhibition, as well as in the *Oregonian*, November 12, 1916, in a truncated sketch of the portrait.

follow-on stage in Stephens's art education was participating in Chase's California summer course in 1914 in Carmel.

In September, 1914, the Portland Art Association, the parent organization of PAM, organized a one-man show for Stephens at PAM, where she presented 30 oil paintings and several drawings and illustrations for children's books. The oils were mostly sketches, including a number from her summer courses with Chase in Venice and Carmel. *The Oregonian* made the most of the Chase connection when it reported that "an interesting new feature at the Museum of Art is an exhibition...of paintings and drawings by Miss Clara J. Stephens, a well-known Portland artist who has spent the last two summers in Italy and at Carmel-by-the Sea painting with William M. Chase."¹⁶¹ In 1915, Stephens was appointed a member of the Advisory Committee for the West in connection with the selection of thousands of art works exhibited at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1914-1915. Although none of Stephens's work was selected for inclusion in the official venue, the Palace of Fine Arts, two small paintings by Stephens were exhibited in the Oregon Building.¹⁶² Stephens exhibited her work in the first annual show at PAM in 1911 and continued in subsequent years, for example nine paintings in 1912, six in 1913, two in 1914, and nine in 1915.¹⁶³ The Portland Art Association gave Stephens a second one-man show in 1919, where she exhibited 45 oils along with watercolors and drawings.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Lillian Tingle, "Home art on View, Work by Clara J. Stephens, of Portland, at Museum, Paintings are Notable, Local Expert's Talent Is Shown Particularly in Venetian Subjects. Oregon's Riot of colors Also Pictured Faithfully," *The Oregonian*, September 22, 1914, 13. According to Mark Humpal, Stephens's first significant exhibition was having a painting included in the Lewis & Clark Exposition of 1905. Email from Humpal, April, 2012.

¹⁶² Lundberg, 8.

¹⁶³ Lundberg, 10.

¹⁶⁴ Lundberg, 10-11.

Following Stephens's courses in 1904-05 at the Art Students League, she became an art teacher at the Portland Academy, a private school. It would appear that she ceased working as a legal secretary, although the precise chronology of her employment is not mentioned by Lundberg or in newspaper articles. After the Portland Academy closed in 1916, Stephens began teaching children's art classes for the Portland Art Association before joining the faculty of the Museum Art School in 1917, where she taught with Harry Wentz for the next twenty-one years. She rented a studio nearby to have space for work and storage.¹⁶⁵

Stephens's painting "Mount Hood," figure 6, was probably created in 1923 or earlier.¹⁶⁶ Like the images of mountains by Gustin illustrated in Chapter II, Stephens's vision of Mount Hood is depicted through a sort of haze reflecting the atmospheric conditions of the Northwest. As reported by Mark Humpal, Stephens did three versions of figure 6, as well as at least two other views of Mount Hood. According to the catalog entry when a "Mount Hood" was exhibited in New York at the Ainslie Galleries in 1925, the painting's viewpoint was "from an upland valley about eleven miles from the mountain, the last flush of sunset."¹⁶⁷ This describes figure 6 (and the two other versions of the scene). The mountain's conical outline can easily be distinguished in figure 6, but there is virtually no detail, either well defined shadows or crags, apart from a few bluish spots. Instead of Gustin's clearly identifiable "climbing" trees, Stephens's foreground features large smudges of green trees and bushes and two human viewers of the sunset. Stephens is not interested in any particularities of the trees or brush, and the two

¹⁶⁵ Lundberg, 10

¹⁶⁶ A Portland *Daily Journal* article refers to her paintings that were exhibited at the Anderson Gallery in New York City in 1923. Among them—according to its description—was a canvas of Mount Hood, said to be a "study, unusual in its color treatment." Thus, if figure 6 is the study in question, its correct date of execution should be 1923 or earlier. Calling it a "study" probably reflects Stephens's loose handling of paint. It was also called a study in "Local Artist's Work is Shown at Curio Shop," *Daily Journal*, March 19, 1923.

¹⁶⁷ List of Paintings, no. 12, *Exhibition of Paintings by C. J. Stephens*, Ainslie Galleries, April, 1925. *The Spectator* called it a "small landscape of special merit." "Miss Stephens' Art of the West," March 16, 1925. Mark Humpal reported that Stephens rarely titled her works verso with notations or labels. Email from Humpal, April, 2012.

sketchy foreground human figures are equally vague. Stephens's style is Impressionist in terms of the long, broken brushstrokes and the frequent use of purple and violet, suggestive of shadows. In the general imprecision of the scene, the mountain and trees could be said to be *dissolved* in the dim, evening light. Yet it is not evident that Stephens intended to explore the effect of light on the landscape or, alternatively, that she wished the viewer to marvel at the sublimity of the mountain as the sun was setting. Stephens's "Mount Hood" is neither obviously majestic nor dissolved into a giant pile of shaved ice. She seems to aim at something in-between the French Impressionists' concentration on bright light's dissolution of form, and the goal of other Northwest Impressionists of depicting the nobility of the Western landscape in a new idiom. Her "Mount Hood" is not a king, but is perhaps a young prince, awaiting a different day to be depicted in a manner reminiscent of regal ermine and the like.

Stephens's journal provides insights into what informed her visions of nearby mountains. Instead of awe at the pantheistic theophany imagined by Madge Bailey when she viewed Gustin's "King above the Clouds," Stephens articulated her reaction in the language of fashion. In the single year of Stephens's diaries that have survived, from September 1939 to September 1940, Stephens writes in her journal a total of twenty-six times about the two iconic mountains of the Cascades that can be seen easily from Portland, Mount Hood and Mount Saint Helens.¹⁶⁸ In a late autumn entry in 1939, she sees "Mount Hood...wearing a new coat of winter white, but Mount Saint Helens is in retirement [presumably obscured by clouds]—waiting until her winter garb is ready, perhaps." In December, 1939, "Mount Hood is out showing off its new coat.

¹⁶⁸ The typewritten daily journal commences on September 11, 1939 and ends on September 2, 1940. In a Foreword, Stephens explained that her journal was written during a year of "miserable illness." Manifesting a strict sense of privacy, Stephens never specifies the illness, where she was staying (her home or elsewhere), who took care of her, or the name of anyone who is recorded as having visited her. This one year journal is part of the PAM library's small archive on Stephens. It was given to the museum, along with a few letters, by a woman who described herself as an acquaintance.

Regal ermine, no less. Very splendid against a background of palest dove-color, just a hint of pink in it.” One month later, “Mount Hood is out too, superlatively beautiful in ermine with crag shadows for the ‘tails’ [of the ermines]. There too is Mount Saint Helens, but just peeping over a grey coat collar. Suppose that is moleskin she is wearing, keeping her ermine for high occasions.” Switching from metaphors of dress to those of jewelry, “at sunset, the atmosphere seemed to round out the form of Saint Helens, so that it looked like a big pink pearl against the sky of pale turquoise, set in a piece of ancient Navajo jewelry.” As if looking at a beautiful woman, in another entry, “today it is a hard matter to keep one’s eyes off Mount Saint Helens. All morning it has stood out in regal splendor...Is Fujiyama [Mount Fuji] as beautiful...perhaps it is that gleaming new snow that makes the lines of Saint Helens’ clearer...Today Hood is hidden by clouds and Saint Helens holds the center of the stage. It is hard to take one’s eyes away from it.” On another winter day, “it was a pleasant surprise to see Mount Saint Helens against the background of gray...and how lovely. Reminded me of a pale blond girl I once knew. Later it resembled a baroque pearl.” On yet another day, “Mount Saint Helens wears a delicate veil over her white robes.” On only one occasion is Mount Saint Helens not seen as a woman or jewel. “Its usual Fuji-like shape is trimmed by clouds to look like a ship in full sail, accompanied by a flock of small clouds resembling birds.” Finally, as Mount Saint Helens’ snowcap melted in the early summer, the mountain is awarded one last entry in June, 1940. “Saint Helens returns today in a new wrap of violet-blue velvet in a white collar, all that remains of her winter ermine.”¹⁶⁹ Is it Stephens’s femininity that explains her frequent recourse to metaphors of fashion, mainly clothing, but also jewelry, in describing Mount Hood and Mount Saint Helens? Both were conical mountains at the time Stephens wrote, the shorter Mount Saint Helens almost a perfect cone until its eruption in 1982, Mount Hood narrower and thrusting

¹⁶⁹ Stephens, *Daily Journal*, 54-55, 100, 118, 164, 165, 172, 221, 290, 343.

higher. It is not surprising that Saint Helens garnered the more feminine descriptions and was sometimes referred to as “her.” Mount Hood was always described as “it”, and its garb was typically regal ermine, without reference to more feminine veils and wraps. Putting gender-related imagery aside, Stephens’s metaphors align with those of Gustin, her “regal ermine” the equivalent of his “king.” Thus, concepts like the royal mountain, and the mountain sublime, seem relevant in the iconography common to both artists.

Stephens not only anthropomorphized the nearby mountains, she saw classical figures in the clouds. “One saw ‘Zeus on Olympus,’ then ‘Hercules’ and his labors, or Neptune rising from billowy seas.” On another occasion, the clouds “bring to mind drawings of figures and torsi by da Vinci, light graceful figures floating, flying dancing through the air, appearing, fading, vanishing so delicately.”¹⁷⁰ In addition to the imaginary figures described in Stephens’s journal, she makes vivid notes of people seen from her deck during her period of invalidity. In an early entry, Stephens describes “a tall youth...His bare arms and neck are a warm bronze color against his white sweatshirt. Well, if he hasn’t jerked the sweatshirt off over his head, and there he is, a bronze statue to the waist.”¹⁷¹ The following summer of 1940, Stephens watches children playing in the street of Goose Hollow, her neighborhood. “In the Hollow children play about in the most abbreviated of scanties, scantiest of abbreviations, perhaps better, in spite of which they do not look comfortable. Too much clothing or too little seems to have about the same effect....Not so long ago children’s clothes seemed about ideal. Now the ‘strip’ craze seems to have struck them.”¹⁷² Returning her gaze to young men, on the following day, “this ‘back to nature’ trend has its amusing side. A door or two away, on our old-fashioned, conservative

¹⁷⁰ Stephens, *Journal*, 215, 315. Many Northwest mountains were given the names of pagan gods. See Smitty Parratt, *Gods & Goblins: a Field Guide to Place Names of Olympic National Park*, (Port Angeles: C P Publications, 1984).

¹⁷¹ Stephens, *Journal*, 11.

¹⁷² Stephens, *Journal*, 287.

street, a 'Life Class' could set up easels and drawing boards; there is the model, ready for the call of 'pose.' A splendid model too, complete with breech-clout.¹⁷³ A handsome young neighbor washes his car at the curb. Of course, he considers that he is wearing 'trunks.' If he is right, either the laundry or many swims has reduced the aforesaid trunks to their least possible dimensions—that sounds like something in arithmetic, or is it geometry. There is nothing geometric about this 'gent.' Suppose the 'street' is shocked (much time in 'life classes' only makes my fingers tingle for a piece of charcoal. What a painting an Eakins, a Chase, a Bellows, could make of the sunlight on this fine lithe blond figure and the sunlight on the flying spray from the garden hose he is flourishing vigorously about. Too bad it is wasted on me.)¹⁷⁴

As noted in the introduction, many of the artists discussed in this dissertation never married, or married for the first time very late in life. It was of course difficult to earn a living as an artist in the early twentieth century in the Northwest, so some may have remained unmarried because of financial constraints. Given the role married women were expected to play as homemakers, one can understand how a Clara Stephens might have decided to remain single as the only guarantee that she could try to pursue her career on a full-time basis. Another possibility is that some of the unmarried artists were gay or lesbians. In view of the public disapproval of homosexuality in the early twentieth century, especially in more "provincial" areas like the Northwest of that era, most homosexuals experienced closeted lives. If any compromising letters or other documents remained at their deaths, such papers would have been quickly discarded by any relative or friend who looked through their possessions. My interpretation of the passages quoted above from Stephens's journals is that she was heterosexual, enthusing over the "bronze statue" of a first handsome young man, and desiring to

¹⁷³ A scanty loincloth, e.g., the type worn by American Indians.

¹⁷⁴ Stephens, 288.

draw the nearly nude, well-dimensioned, second young man vigorously spraying from his garden hose. Although it is true she noted that the image of the second young man, described in terms that could suggest an erection and ejaculation, are “wasted on her,” such a reaction could simply be a reflection of her age and infirmity. Given the sharp observations and sexual metaphors, and her impatient—her “tingling”—desire to draw the young man in his revealing shorts, I would conclude that her sexual interest in males—at least on an intellectual level—remained strong at the age of sixty-three.



Figure 49, Clara Stephens, “Woman Gardening, Goose Hollow.”

By way of contrast, a demure example of what Stephens might have seen from her deck is the oil sketch “Woman Gardening, Goose Hollow” figure 49. This small oil on board depicts a woman in a long, bright blue dress hoeing or raking in her garden. The scene is very much an urban or suburban setting, the viewer looking down into the small garden where the woman is working. She seems too well dressed for serious planting, so perhaps she is simply raking up

during what must be an early Portland spring, judging from the white flowering tree or scrub in the top center. The canvas appears to have been painted quickly, the surface a mixture of thick impasto in a few places with thin washes of paint elsewhere, the weave of the canvas strongly showing through in many spots. Robert Lundberg, a Stephens collector as well as researcher, noted that her public exhibitions always included a generous number of sketches, drawings, and studies.¹⁷⁵ This sketch's free combination of brush, palette knife, thick impasto, and thinned oils is more varied than the overall consistency of brushstrokes in "Mount Hood," figure 6, suggesting that it may have been executed as a demonstration of different painting techniques to show to her students. Indeed, perhaps Stephens asked one of her students to pose as the overdressed gardener of the sketch. According to Mark Humpal, the largest part of Stephens's oeuvre consisted of these small, unsigned oil sketches on board.



Figure 50. Clara Stephens, "New Bridge at Oregon City."

One of the works of which Stephens seems to have been most proud is "New Bridge at Oregon City," figure 50, a painting from the same period as "Mount Hood." It was illustrated in an article on Stephens that appeared in French in the Parisian *Revue du Vrai et du Beau* in

¹⁷⁵ Lundberg, 9.

1924;¹⁷⁶ it also appeared on the cover of the program for Stephens's exhibition at the Ainslie Galleries on 677 Fifth Avenue in New York in 1925 (it was no. 1 in the list of paintings; no. 12 was "Mount Hood," possibly figure 6); and it was published in *The Spectator's* piece on the Ainslie exhibition.¹⁷⁷ The latter article explained that word of the Ainslie exhibition had reached Paris, and that two Parisian art journals, *Les Artistes d'Aujourd'hui* and the *Revue du Vrai et du Beau*, had written to Miss Stephens asking her for photographs of her work and copies of American newspaper clippings. A second article in *The Spectator* later in 1925 quoted from the piece on Stephens that appeared in *Les Artistes d'Aujourd'hui*. "These are modern works, without exaggeration, which immediately separate themselves from the ordinary by their use of color and the spiritual realism of the persons depicted; all here are alive."¹⁷⁸ (I suspect the last part of the French text would have been better translated along the lines of "everything teems with life.") "New Bridge at Oregon City" depicts the bridge under construction, its scaffolding prominent on the right. At the time of execution, only the main steel arch of the bridge had been built. Stephens's very free brushstrokes are visible in the thumbnail reproduction on the water and in the sky. Her alleged "wildness," here well under control, is implied in the red-tinged trees on the left, the bright red reflections from the scaffolding, and the reddish hill rising to the right.

Stephens's subsequent exhibition history in Portland and elsewhere included landscapes, genre scenes, and portraits. All were in evidence at The Artcraft and Curio Shop in 1923, whose exhibition included some of the paintings that were subsequently shown at the Ainslie Exhibition

¹⁷⁶ Comte Chabrier, *C. V. Stephens*(sic), *Revue du Vrai et du Beau*, August 10, 1924, 28.

¹⁷⁷ "Miss Stephens' Art of the West," *The Spectator*, March 16, 1925. *The Spectator* got the chronology wrong, as the article in *Revue du Vrai et du Beau* appeared the year before the Ainslie Exhibition, so the latter could not have prompted the interest of the French journal.. Its curiosity about Stephens probably arose from her inclusion in the group exhibitions in New York City of the Society of Independent Artists and The Salons of America starting in 1921 and 1922, respectively. News in Paris about these exhibitions could have prompted inquiries from the Parisian publications. Stephens's participation in these group exhibitions are described later in this chapter.

¹⁷⁸ "Paris Notes Miss Stephens' Art", *The Spectator*, October 10, 1925.

in New York in 1925.¹⁷⁹ A number of the works exhibited at the Curio Shop, including the “Mount Hood,” are described as studies, consistent with Lundberg’s assertion that her exhibitions always included sketches, studies, and drawings. The Anderson Gallery in New York, the venue for shows of The Salons of America, exhibited Stephens’s “Flower Seller” (not illustrated) in 1925, after which it went for exhibition in Buffalo, New York. A Buffalo reviewer, Lula Merrick, wrote in *The Spur* that it is “a charming and vigorous canvas...with its ably-handled reds a brilliant achievement.”¹⁸⁰ Stephens also enjoyed a last one-man show at PAM early in January, 1926, mostly the same works exhibited the prior April in New York. Despite her earlier shows at PAM, *The Oregonian*’s reviewer suggested she was insufficiently known in Portland. “Miss Stephens is one of the most notable, and one of the most unassuming, of Oregon artists. It is only by degrees that Portland has learned of the work of this artist, whose paintings have been well received in the east and other parts of the coast.”¹⁸¹ In a review of the show in another newspaper, Stephens is described as “a dark haired, charming little woman.” The apparently male reviewer heralded her “virile brush. If it was not known that a woman’s hand had created these, one could so easily be deceived into believing the artist a man, so strong and virile are the subjects and their treatment.”¹⁸²

Beginning in 1921, Stephens had also exhibited one or two paintings per year at the Society of Independent Artists (“SIA”) in New York City. The SIA had been founded in 1917 by a group of artists who had been excluded from an exhibition at the National Academy of Design, and Marcel Duchamp’s original “readymade” wall urinal, signed R. Mutt, was submitted to its first show. Stephens exhibited at SIA in 1921, 1922, 1924, 1925, 1927, and 1931. A

¹⁷⁹ “Local Artist’s Work is Shown at Curio Shop,” *Daily Journal*, March 19, 1923.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in “Paintings of Clara Jane Stephens, Portland Artist, Exhibited Here,” *Oregonian*, January 10, 1926.

¹⁸¹ Article above. The exhibition was also reviewed in the *Daily Telegram*, January 6, 1926 and *The Spectator* of January 16, 1926.

¹⁸² “Local Studies Rule Stephens Art Exhibition”, *Daily Journal*, January, 1926.

schism within the SIA in 1922 led to the formation of a competing organization, The Salons of America (“SOA”). Stephens exhibited also with the SOA in 1922, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1929, 1930, and 1931. The SOA exhibitions were held in the Anderson Galleries, Park Avenue at 59th Street.¹⁸³ It was surely news of the SOI and SOA exhibition lists that included Stephens that prompted the two Parisian art journals to ask Stephens for information on her work, and that led the Ainslie Galleries to offer her their 1925 one-man show.

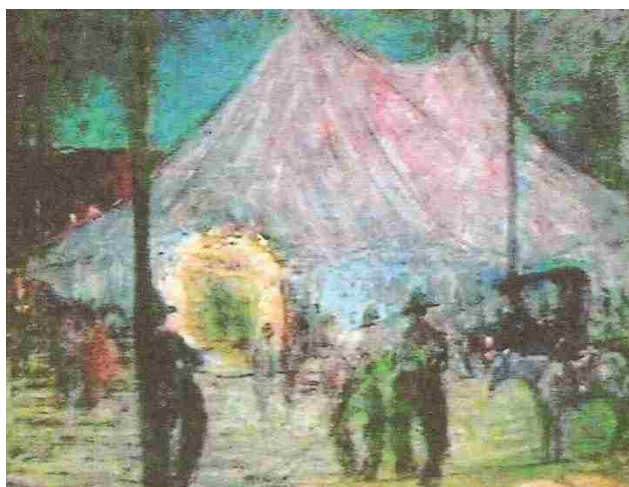


Figure 51. Clara Stephens, “Cow Puncher.”

Although Stephens continued to send one or two paintings to New York annually through 1931, it seems clear that her career as an artist had reached its apogee in Portland and elsewhere in 1925-26, marked by the back-to-back exhibitions at the Ainslie Galleries in New York and her last one-man show at PAM. “Cow Puncher,” included in the Ainslie show as no. 7, figure 51, suggests the direction her art was taking in the mid 1920’s. The Ainslie catalogue commented on “Cow Puncher” as follows: “A fast-disappearing type from Idaho. Neither the gospel meeting nor the automobiles interest him much. He is even a bit indifferent to the flappers.” One wonders who invented this catalogue description, as it seems unworthy of Stephens in

¹⁸³ Lundberg, 12-14.

comparison to the quality of her 1939-1940 journal. The painting, a night-time scene, depicts in silhouette three men wearing some variety of cowboy hats lounging outside a large tent. A sketchily drawn horse is standing to their right, with an automobile a bit farther back. Several indistinct figures can be seen outside the tent, the door of which is the only brightly lit part of the scene. Taking the Ainslie description into account, the canvas must depict the tent where a gospel meeting is being held, the posture of the slouching cowboys proclaiming their lack of interest. As the cowboys seem equally indifferent to the automobile and the horse, Ainslie seems off point in claiming the cowboys do not like cars. The Ainslie comment on flappers appears frankly ridiculous, as a gospel meeting would be the last place to meet racy young women, and none are in evidence outside the gospel tent. (If the tent harbors an entertainment event that would attract flappers, then the emphasis on the gospel meeting would be misplaced.)

Proportion and perspective are not priorities of Stephens in this work, as the horse appears to be placed in approximately the same plane as the cowboys, but if so, it is about half its “correct” size. In her desire to exhibit with more progressive elements in New York, Stephens would seem to have abandoned the tenants of perspective that were still applied rigorously by her Northwest contemporaries like Gustin and McKim. Her goal seems to have become more spontaneous and expressive, heightening her impact on the viewer with an “irrational” color like the intense blue of the nighttime sky. She thus appears to be trying to paint in a more Modernist fashion than either Gustin or McKim in 1924.

As Stephens’s exhibitions were winding down in the 1930’s, her attitude toward art and artists may be reflected by the comments in her journal on Ernest Lawson, a member of “The Eight,” or “Ash Can School,” who committed suicide in 1939. “Read of the sad death of Ernest Lawson. I owe this artist a debt of gratitude for the beautiful pictures he painted. Never knew

him or saw him, even, that I know of, but his landscapes, shown with ‘The Eight’, are treasures of memory [Stephens had viewed Lawson’s work at MacBeth Gallery with others of The Eight]...The world owed better things to the man whose “palette was set...with crushed jewels.” To think of the rewards in money showered on prizefighters, football gladiators and slick politicians, while Lawson was denied the means of life. Something is wrong.”¹⁸⁴ Two years earlier, in 1937, a Northwest Impressionist, Fokko Tadama, committed suicide in Seattle. According to his obituary, “he shot himself in the heart with an automatic pistol which he took with him when he left home. Tadama had been in ill health and unemployed for some time...His body was cremated..., but his urn was never picked up.”¹⁸⁵ Stephens’s journal does not make a connection with Tadama’s suicide, which was also attributed to his dire financial situation, although she must have known of him from her frequent exhibitions in Seattle.¹⁸⁶ Stephens did not share Lawson’s or Tadama’s financial fate. Whether from her own earnings as an art teacher, or as a gift from a friend, Stephens gained a life tenancy in a house in San Diego, and she spent an increasing amount of time there from the mid 1930’s onward.¹⁸⁷ In the fall of 1948, she had a last one-man show at the Frances Webb Galleries in Los Angeles. The gallery reused the introduction to the catalogue from her Ainslie show nearly twenty-five years earlier, and the paintings exhibited were mostly from the mid 1920’s and included several that had been exhibited then in New York and Portland. Her price list ranged from \$40 to \$550, very probably

¹⁸⁴ Stephens, *Journal*, 119-120.

¹⁸⁵ Peter J. H. van den Berg, *De Uitdaging van het Licht: George Hitchcock*, Netherlands: Bahlmond Publishers, 2008, 122, translation by Annick Geelhand de Merxem.

¹⁸⁶ Stephens exhibited at the Fine Arts Society’s annual shows in Seattle in 1915, 1920, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, and 1929. Spread sheet in Annual Northwest Artists Exhibition folder at SAM Library. She also had what appears to have been a small one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society in 1921. “Clara Stephens Pictures Will Cheer You Up,” *Seattle Star*, April 26, 1921, *Scrapbook*, Fine Arts Society, Seattle Public Library, Special Collection.

¹⁸⁷ Lundberg, 18.

lower than the 1925 prices at the Ainslie Galleries.¹⁸⁸ Most apparently were not sold, and they remained at her house in San Diego until her death. Lundberg concluded his account of her life as follows:

Clara Jane continued living between California and Portland for the next four years [after the Webb show]. She died in Portland on May 1, 1952, from injuries received in a fall...As was the case with so many women artists of her period Clara Jane had neither children nor close family around her to foster and preserve her memory. Her personal papers, letters, and photographs were discarded. Her studio was sold off, and the many paintings remaining in her possession were, ultimately, dispersed widely having been neither catalogued nor photographed.¹⁸⁹

Like Gustin, whose position in the Seattle art scene was sharply diminished after 1928, when he was excluded by the “young Turks” from the annual Fine Arts Society exhibition, and like McKim, who appears to have cut back his painting after 1927, Stephens’s public position peaked in Portland in 1926 with her third one-man show at PAM. She essentially stopped exhibiting in 1931, apart from a last duplicative one-man show in 1948. The “curve” of the Northwest careers of all three artists began about 1910, peaked in the mid 1920’s, and reached bottom by the early 1930’s. Stephens and Gustin did have last one-man shows much later, in 1948 and 1954, respectively, but these brief renewals of public attention did not re-launch either’s career. Thus, the significant Northwest Impressionist period of each artist lasted only about fifteen years.

¹⁸⁸ Frances Webb Galleries catalogue and Stephens’s hand-written price list, PAM library archive.

¹⁸⁹ Lundberg, 19.

Chapter V

J. Edgar Forkner (1867-1945)

Edgar Forkner was a diligent, esteemed, and uncontroversial artist and art teacher. He painted and exhibited up to his death in 1945 at seventy-seven. When Kenneth Callahan wrote the first significant article in a national arts publication on developments in Northwest art from the 1930's, as noted earlier, he singled out Forkner as one of only two Seattle artists worth mentioning from what he considered the prior generation. After naming Eustace Ziegler, a "neo-Impressionist" and Callahan's own teacher, he added "an equally talented watercolorist, Edgar Forkner, who devoted himself exclusively to flowers and the local scene rendered in the Sargent manner."¹⁹⁰ Making a comparison to John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) constituted high praise, as Sargent was not only one of a handful of internationally famous American artists at the time Callahan was writing, but his watercolors were especially prized for their sparkling treatment of light, freshness, and original expression of Sargent's rare talent. Callahan should have eschewed "exclusively," however, as Forkner's largest and most ambitious paintings were oils, although his watercolor output outnumbered his oil paintings. Callahan was nevertheless correct that Forkner generally restricted himself to a narrow choice of subjects, flowers and boats tied up in a harbor, with a few exceptions. In terms of style, Callahan seemed to draw a distinction between artists whose style is Impressionist (or neo-Impressionist, a possibly useful term, but one that never caught on) and who work in oils (e.g., Ziegler), and those who work in watercolors like Forkner. This distinction is not apposite. Ziegler did many watercolors on location in Alaska, producing his oil paintings of Alaskan scenes in the winter in his Seattle studio. Thus, both artists worked in watercolors and oil. Furthermore, Forkner's oil paintings produce, in my

¹⁹⁰ Callahan, "Pacific Northwest," 2.

opinion, a greater Impressionist effect than Ziegler's. Thus, this chapter will not dwell further on Forkner's identification as a Northwest Impressionist, and the Impressionist qualities of his *facture* will be noted as appropriate. A good example is Forkner's "Golden Sail," figure 52, which garnered the record price for a Forkner sold at auction, \$17,080 on May 26, 2010.¹⁹¹



Figure 52, Edgar Forkner, "Golden Sail."

"Golden Sail," a large oil on canvas, shows two old fishing sailboats in the foreground, tied to a dock along with other sailboats and utility boats. In the background is the Ballard Bridge over the Ship Canal in Seattle. The white sailboat on the left has its golden-colored sail rigged out, probably for drying. The loose broken brushstrokes and the emphasis on light reflecting from the boats and golden sail on the water make this work quintessentially Northwest Impressionist. Forkner has not overemphasized the coloration, however, as the day is partially cloudy, and the Northwestern haze has diminished the clarity of the bridge in the background, even though the boats are quite close to it. Thus, the painting's attention to atmosphere keeps in well within the

¹⁹¹ AskArt is an on-line subscription service with prices of art sold at auction around the world.

gamut of Northwest art. It would not be confused with a Laguna Beach California Impressionist seascape, which would normally express brighter colors and clearer air. Yet “Golden Sail” is not a retiring picture. When hung with other art, it tends to dominate the room

Forkner is unusual among Northwest Impressionists in that he is claimed as a notable artist by two states, Indiana and Washington. Born in Indiana and trained in art in New York City, Forkner is first mentioned in the *Seattle Times* in 1912 when, at the age of forty-five, he exhibited nine watercolors at the first annual exhibition of Northwest artists at the Seattle Fine Arts Society. A painting of an Eastern scene, “Indiana Backwoods” (not illustrated), was singled out as especially meritorious. “The bold handling and strong effects are remindful of the work and methods of David Cox [1783-1859], the great English landscape artist.”¹⁹² As none of Forkner’s Indiana work seems to have remained in Seattle, I cannot express a well-founded opinion on it, although the reference to David Cox constitutes a high compliment. Given the inclusion of several Indiana scenes along with watercolors of Washington in Forkner’s participation in this group show, it seems fair to assume that Forkner had recently begun to paint in Seattle and needed to fill out his submission with paintings from the East. Although news coverage of Forkner never mentioned why he moved to Washington, the most obvious reason would seem to be that his older brother, Willard Elmer Forkner, had built a mortuary in Seattle in 1910, which he operated until his retirement in 1931, so Forkner would likely have been encouraged by his brother to consider relocating to Seattle.¹⁹³ Forkner resided in Seattle until his death in 1945, but he continued to send paintings back to Indiana and Chicago for exhibit and sale. Although he was often mentioned in the Seattle press, most of the insightful articles about

¹⁹² David Paul, “Local Art Exhibition Shows Great Merit...Edgar Forkner Shines”, *Seattle Times*, December 3, 1912, 22.

¹⁹³ “Obituary, Willard E. Forkner,” *Seattle Times*, September 28, 1935, 9.

him are by Indiana and Chicago journalists. Of the 82 records for his work at auction from 1993 to February, 2012 listed on askart.com, only 7 are from Northwestern auction houses; Indiana firms constitute the vast majority. In terms of subject, 44 are harbor scenes from Seattle, 21 are still lifes of flowers, and 17 are landscapes, the latter all of Indiana scenes. Thus, at least in terms of work of Forkner sold at auction, nautical subjects predominate. “Boats of Lake Union,” figure 13, is atypical of Forkner’s Puget Sound area watercolors, which tend to focus on two or three old boats tied up at a dock. Figure 13 depicts over ten boats, in the foreground, middle ground, and background, of many different types, including two old commercial sailboats, already obsolete at the time. The closest large sailboat on the right is depicted at a strange angle, implying that it rests partially on the lake bottom, a sign of abandonment. The other large sailboat is visible only in its masts. Like most of Forkner’s watercolors of nautical scenes, its colors are less vivid than in his large oil paintings. It is also notable for Forkner’s attention to atmospheric detail, particularly the fog that obscures much of Queen Ann Hill in the background, suggesting it was painted in the early morning.¹⁹⁴

Forkner rarely talked at length about his art, and he never published newspaper accounts of his ideas like McKim did. As is the case with most other Northwest Impressionists, there are no archives of his papers and letters. At his death, he was survived by a sister, Mrs. Florence Lesh, then of Seattle, and a niece and nephew of his deceased brother, both of Seattle.¹⁹⁵ Mrs. Lesh kept a scrapbook of news clippings that she gave to the Seattle Public Library. Many clippings are from Chicago and Indiana newspapers and, on the few occasions when Mrs. Lesh is

¹⁹⁴ References to Forkner’s depictions of “sea and lakes” should be understood in the Seattle context. The city of Seattle has an hourglass shape, squeezed between the saltwater of Puget Sound and the freshwater of Lake Washington, a large lake to the immediate east of Seattle. The two bodies of water are joined by the ship canal built in the early twentieth century, which itself transits a smaller lake in the middle of Seattle, Lake Union. A reference to Forkner’s images of “sea” refers to the Seattle harbor in Puget Sound, and of “lakes” refers to Lake Union. Both provide mooring for seagoing ships at anchor, with the result that images of both places can be similar.

¹⁹⁵ “J. E. Forkner, Noted Painter, Dies in Seattle”, *Seattle Times*, July 8, 1945, 25.

mentioned in the Seattle Times in connection with social life within the art community, she is said to be from Chicago. Thus, it appears that she moved to Seattle late in her life, presumably to live with or near Edgar, who had never married.

Mrs. Lesh's scrapbook, as well as brochures from SAM and the Frye in connection with his one-man shows, state that he studied with John Elwood Bundy (1853-1933) in Richmond, Indiana, and for two years with Irving Wiles (1861-1948) at the Art Students League in New York, as well as with William Merritt Chase and J. Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917), both identified with American Impressionism, and with Frank DuMond, also at the Art Students League. Following his studies in New York, he traveled and painted in Italy and taught at the Chicago Auditorium before relocating to Seattle.¹⁹⁶

Although the Hoosier Impressionists of Brown County, Indiana, led by Theodore Steele (1847-1926), are better known, the Richmond, Indiana, Group of artists also has a rich history. The Art Association of Richmond mounted annual shows from 1898, and traveling shows from 1910, the latter following a circuit as far north as Milwaukee, as far west as Lincoln, Nebraska, as far south as New Orleans, and as far east as Syracuse, New York.¹⁹⁷ The leader of the Richmond Group, John Elwood Bundy, is described by William Gerdts as a "naturalist" in style. A teacher as well as an artist, Bundy took charge of the art department of Earlham College in Richmond in 1888, and it was possibly there or as a private student that Forkner studied with him. "Wane of Winter," 1914, figure 53, an oil sketch of Bundy's, is typically American Impressionist in its broken brushstrokes and interest in the reflection of light from snow.

¹⁹⁶ *J. Edgar Forkner Scrapbook*, 5, Seattle Public Library; see, also *Frye Vues*, Frye Art Museum, September 1978.

¹⁹⁷ William H. Gerdts, *A Walk in the Woods: The Art of John Elwood Bundy (1853-1933)*, (Richmond: Eckert Fine Art Galleries, 2000): 5.



Figure 53. John Elwood Bundy, “Wane of Winter.”

Bundy’s studio works, however, have a very finished appearance, with brush strokes much less evident, presumably leading Gerdts to characterize his art as naturalist. Gerdts’s thoughtful essay on Bundy develops an iconography based on Bundy’s choice of trees in his landscapes, associating elms with spiritual values and oaks with a paternalistic, sheltering role, for example.¹⁹⁸ Bundy’s paintings that include close-ups of particular species of trees are similar to Forkner’s Indiana landscapes, tending to confirm a teacher/pupil relationship. Gerdts’s essay on Bundy mentions Forkner on two occasions as the member of the Richmond Group who gained “significant fame” in the Northwest.¹⁹⁹

A 1903 article on the Richmond Group by a New York journal emphasized the importance—as a subject of painting—of the Valley of the Whitewater, a nearby river gorge with precipitous bluffs, and many of Bundy’s landscapes depict the Whitewater. In addition to Bundy, the 1903 article described the careers of three other Richmond Group artists, including Forkner. “Edgar Forkner, who has for many years had an enviable reputation as one of the most

¹⁹⁸ Gerdts, *Bundy*, 19.

¹⁹⁹ Gerdts, *Bundy*, 7.

delightful water color painters in Indiana, studied in New York and has, within the past few years, established a studio in Chicago, where his work has been seen at all the principal exhibitions held in that city, including those of the Society of Chicago Artists and the Associated Arts, of which latter organization Mr. Forkner is a member.” Two watercolor landscapes of Forkner are illustrated in the journal, “Country Roadway” and “The Miller’s Home,” the latter a freely painted sketch of a mill along the river, probably the Whitewater.²⁰⁰ The black and white image projects a strong contrast between the brilliant sky and the shaded foreground in the shadow of the mill, suggesting an American Impressionist influence that Forkner could have assimilated during his studies at the Art Students League in New York as well as from the study of Bundy’s preliminary sketches.

Forkner also took an interest in landscapes by the artists now called Tonalists, particularly Bruce Crane (1857-1927). A 1938 article on art in Richmond around the turn of the century recounted a story involving Forkner, who returned to Richmond from New York, where he was studying at the Art Students League, with a canvas by Bruce Crane.

Mr. Forkner displayed the painting on an easel in an empty store room on Main Street and invited Richmond people to see it. The painting represented a late evening scene, with a foreground and middle distance in the lovely grays and violets characteristic of Mr. Crane’s work, then a distant red after-glow on low lying clouds with a green sky above. We went in crowds to visit this painting and expressed our ignorant opinions freely, as people do now about the progressive art of today [1938]. We accepted the foreground, we knew sunsets were red, but we balked at the green sky...Nature settled the question by producing...a series of red sunsets with skies so green that they could not be denied. [We decided to learn] to see beauty in nature

²⁰⁰ “The Richmond Group of Painters,” *The Art Interchange*, New York City, (October, 1903): 85-89.

as the [painter's eye] sees it...and were grateful to Mr. Forkner for his valuable lesson...which is one of the fundamentals of art appreciation.²⁰¹

A charming anecdote, it demonstrates that Forkner as an art student had a desire to teach and to introduce people to developments in art with which they were unfamiliar. Compared to what the people of Richmond expected to see in a painting—presumably a familiar image that did not require reflection on its technique, along the lines of McKim's academic realist "The Old Mill," figure 38—Forkner exhibited a landscape with an unusual sunset effect that he knew would be resisted and would invite comment. At the same time, Forkner was not a person to expound from a soapbox, so he left it to the people of Richmond to observe and draw their own conclusions. The gentle Forkner thus had a radical side, but it was well disguised.

Like Charles McKim, Forkner moved to the Pacific Northwest in his late-forties. Unlike McKim, Forkner already had an established reputation and client base, in his case in Indiana and Chicago. After moving to Seattle, Forkner mostly ignored rural landscapes as subject, becoming an urban artist specializing in harbor scenes and still lifes of flowers, and taking up oil painting for some of his sketching and most of his largest works. In 1915, three years after Forkner participated in the first Annual Exhibition of Northwest Artists by the Seattle Fine Arts Society, he had a one-man show at the Washington State Art Association of over fifty pictures. Among them was "Country Roadway" illustrated in the 1903 article, so it would appear that works he considered to be among his best did not always find buyers.²⁰² A piece in a Chicago newspaper in 1918 indicated that "since his residence in Seattle for the past three years, he has added oil as the medium of portraying the charm of Puget Sound marine views and mountainous wilds," thereby dating his permanent residence in Seattle to 1915 and his adoption of oil painting to

²⁰¹ Ella Bond Johnston, "History of Richmond Art Association, First Meeting in 1898 Foreshadowed by Previous Art Events and Influences," 1938, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 38.

²⁰² "Forkner's Works to form Exhibit, *Seattle Times*, October 29, 1916, 60.

1915-1918, although David Martin observed to me that he has never seen a Forkner oil with a date before the mid 1920's.²⁰³ Another piece from the same period speaks of “the riot of color, atmosphere, and splendid scenery [of] Naples and [other] Italian ports where he has pursued studies.”²⁰⁴

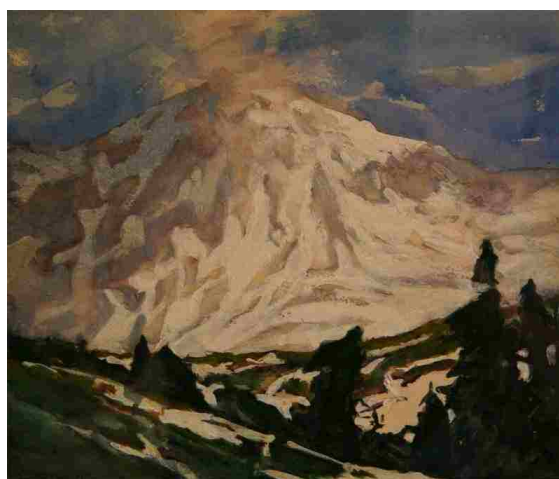


Figure 10. Edgar Forkner, “Mount Rainier.”

As the Chicago critic noted, Forkner did show an interest in portraying the Northwest’s “mountainous wilds.” His watercolor of “Mount Rainier,” figure 54, c. 1915, depicts the iconic volcano on a typical Seattle spring day of mixed cloud and sun, with the right side of the mountain in sunlight, and the left in shade. The viewpoint of “Mount Rainier” is from Paradise Valley, and the season must be early summer in the valley—which translates to early spring on the mountain—evidenced by the snow near the vantage point of the artist that still lingers in the mountain meadows. A few “climbing” trees are visible to the right, but they are incidental to the

²⁰³ Conversation with Martin, March, 2012. The newspaper clipping, with only the year 1918 specified, is found in the *Forkner Scrapbook*, 4. I have cross-checked the incompletely labeled news clippings in the *Forkner Scrapbook* by doing an on-line search of newspapers from Washington, Indiana, and Illinois, but as most newspaper historical editions are not on-line, I have been able to find complete citations for only a few *Forkner Scrapbook* articles that appeared in the *Seattle Times*.

²⁰⁴ Clipping, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 5. David Martin has seen only one Forkner depicting a European scene. The exhibition list for Forkner’s December, 1920 one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society lists 112 watercolors and 1 oil, but none bears a title that suggests an Italian or European origin.

mountain, which dominates the scene. This watercolor demonstrates that Forkner was sensitive to the majesty of Rainier, even if it did not inspire him in the same way as the harbor scenes and still lifes that constituted the vast part of his oeuvre.

Forkner exhibited frequently in Seattle, as well as in Chicago, his former home. In February, 1917, Young's Art Galleries in Chicago took out a full page advertisement in the *Chicago Tribune* touting the exhibition of work of three Indiana artists, including Bundy and Forkner. The unusual advertisement consisted of a long article by J. W. Young, "A Straightforward Business Talk to Western People by a Western Art Dealer about Western Art Conditions," arguing that the purchase of American art was a better investment than European art.²⁰⁵ In 1918, the Seattle Fine Arts Society offered a three-man show to Forkner, along with Fokko Tadama and Hamilton. A. Wolf (1883-1967). Forkner's works consisted of Puget Sound scenes, along with woodlands and meadows, the latter presumably from Indiana. One of the Puget Sound scenes was possibly Forkner's watercolor "The Market in the Early Morning," a

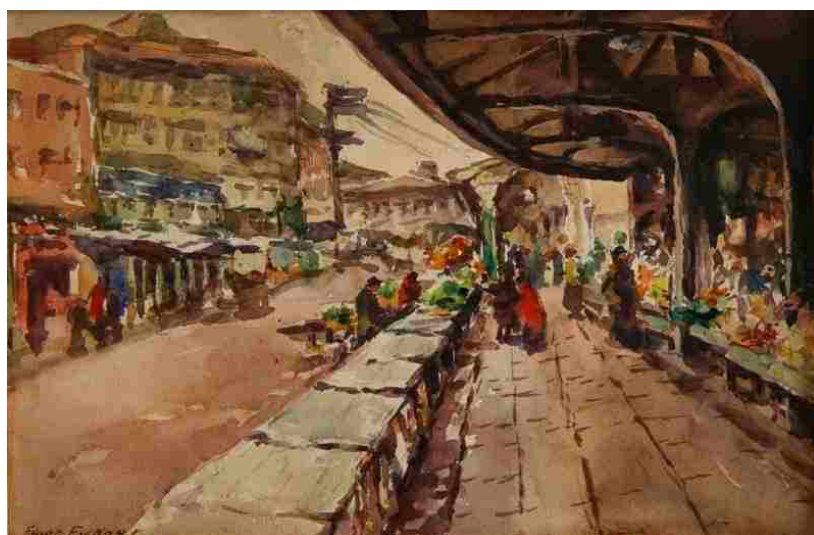


Figure 55, Edgar Forkner, "The Market in Early Morning."

²⁰⁵ *Forkner Scrapbook*, 7.

watercolor sketch of flower sellers at Seattle's Pike Street Public Market, figure 55, which was published in *The Town Crier* on December 21, 1918.²⁰⁶ Most of the stalls have not yet opened, and a few buyers walk along checking out the flowers, and perhaps vegetables, on offer. The Public Market on Pike Street remains operating in Seattle today, looking much like "The Market in Early Morning," and it is regrettable that very few early images of it were created by Seattle artists. Forkner's interest in urban scenes, like Gustin's, was oriented mainly toward the harbors, both on Lake Union and along Elliot Bay, the principal Seattle port at the time.

In December 1920, Forkner had his first one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society, consisting of 112 watercolors and one oil painting. Forkner arrived in Seattle a mature artist, and the only artistic evolution that can be credited to Seattle was his increasing recourse to oil painting. There are no discernible developments in his style that can help in dating any particular work. "The Market in Early Morning" was not included in his one-man show, but several watercolors had what for Forkner are generic titles like "Old Boats," "A Crowd of Boats," and "Boats at Lake Union," any one of which could have been figure 13, called "Boats of Lake Union" by its present owner. Madge Bailey, who in passing enthuses about the "Grecian simplicity" of Gustin's mountains, credits Forkner with "voicing the pastel charms of color of our skies, waters, and wooded landscapes...he has endeared himself to the public through his studies of the ocean weary boats resting in the harbor of Lake Union and the sheltered bays of the Sound. He never tires of depicting the romance of the era in these derelicts or in creating fairy fantasies of color in the intricacies of their shadows reflected in the water."²⁰⁷ Earlier in the year, when Forkner had exhibited ten paintings at the annual exhibition of the Fine Arts Society, Bailey emitted a similar reflection. "Mr. Forkner finds unlimited material for his deft brush in

²⁰⁶ *Town Crier*, December 21, 1918, 32.

²⁰⁷ Madge Bailey, "Fine Art Notes," *Seattle P-I*, December, 1920, *Forkner Scrapbook* 10.

these old hulks and their grotesque shadows. They appeal to him like weary world wanderers who, reflecting over past adventures, retell the romances of distant seas in lazy contentment amid the soft tap of waves of the inland waters the gray of morning mists and purple sunsets.”²⁰⁸

Bailey’s purple prose notwithstanding, she has certainly intuited the sense of nostalgia that Forkner’s numerous images of old commercial sailboats—already obsolete—were surely intended to stimulate. Bailey observes that “a number...will find immediate market in the East where [Forkner’s] name is better known than here.”²⁰⁹ It must be that this romantic attachment to the lost world of exploration and trade by sailing ships appealed as much, or more, to inland Americans. Forkner’s work thus gives evidence of an urban iconography that differs from Gustin’s, who painted working fishing boats, as well as steamships and boats gliding past in the distance. Gustin’s iconography of ships made them emblematic of their role in industry and commerce. However, as in “Sunset—Docks on Seattle Waterfront,” figure 34, where the steamship appears as a wraith in the fog, Gustin’s ships constitute a modest symbol compared to what would be required for his vision of a new American art based on the greatness of the natural wonders of the American West. I would not go as far to say that Forkner’s iconography of decrepit, ruined sailboats implies the decline of American economic strength and the irrelevance of the American West in establishing any new direction for American art. Yet I suspect the romance of old hulks may have been modest Forkner’s antidote to the boasting that sometimes seems endemic in America, as well as an appeal to the nostalgia of Americans for what they recalled as the earlier, simpler era of sailing ships.

²⁰⁸ Madge Bailey, “Fine Art Notes,” *Seattle P-I*, February 2, 1920, *Forkner Scrapbook* 11.

²⁰⁹ Bailey, February 2, 1920.

In 1925, in connection with a second one-man show at the Seattle Fine Arts Society, Forkner observed to a journalist that “art is first good drawing, color sense, good taste, and sincerity...The modern idea of vibrating light and color is pleasing to me.”²¹⁰ While Forkner’s advice is basic and unsurprising, it is noteworthy that he includes himself within Modernism through his use of the Impressionist technique of capturing the “vibrations” of color in light. Forkner is of course correct in terms of his own art, but times were changing, and the very moment Forkner was proclaiming his adherence to Modernist techniques, the “young Turks” of the Seattle art world were labeling painters like him “conservative.” Forkner claimed a stronger identification with Modernism in an article in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1929. “Mr. Forkner is a modernist, though not an extreme one. He likes the modern, he says, because it is giving art more color and simplicity.”²¹¹ The article emphasized Forkner’s tendency to paint more in oils. One may surmise that Forkner’s desire to be categorized as modern was an impetus for his increasing practice of using oil paints, as his colors in oils were considerably more brilliant than in watercolors. Forkner’s embrace, in his fashion, of the modern found some acceptance. In 1931, Eleanor Jewett reviewed “Modern Art” currently exhibited in New York and Chicago for the *Chicago Tribune*. She cited as makers of modern art Oskar Gross (1871-1963) and Edgar Forkner (for his “colorful” still lifes of flowers) in Chicago, and Charles Demuth, and William Zorach (1887-1966) and Marguerite Thompson Zorach (1887-1968), at the Knoedler Gallery in New York.²¹² Those who believe “Northwest Impressionism” is a backward-looking group that is best forgotten—and that is the predominant view in the academy today—would be bemused at a contemporary critic finding it normal in 1931 to list Forkner with a member of the Vienna Secession (Gross), a Modernist watercolorist whom I already compared to McKim (Demuth),

²¹⁰ G. V. Boucher, “Art News of the City,” *Forkner Scrapbook*, 1925, 15.

²¹¹ *Chicago Tribune*, May 12, 1929, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 24.

²¹² Eleanor Jewett, “Shows Depict Modern Art in East, Midwest,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1931, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 28.

and the acknowledged Modernist sculptor and painter (William Zorach) and his Modernist painter wife (Marguerite Zorach). In any event, the march of Modernism tended to leave Forkner behind, even in conservative Seattle. As noted earlier, Forkner received first prize in the “conservative” section at the state fair in 1933, his entry referred to in the press as being among the “very conservative pictures, well painted in the conservative manner.”²¹³ Yet we must be careful in assuming we understand the categories used by prior generations, as the conservative group was said also to include a “decorative panel” by Guy Anderson, (1906-1998), one of the leading members of the Modernist Northwest Mystics.

Whether or not art critics accepted Forkner’s claim to be Modernist, all reviewers continued to be beguiled by Forkner’s fidelity to the proper representation of the Northwest atmosphere, emphasized by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*’s critic as follows: “The paintings...have always in them the atmosphere of this country, whether done in oil or water color. The coloring is subdued; the skies are always clouded, and the light that filters through them mellows every object in the picture. A good example of this atmosphere is very evident when Mr. Forkner’s low-toned pictures are compared with [his] clear and brilliantly colored ones from the East...In fact, many of these [Seattle] pictures appear monotonous unless viewed under a strong light. All possess to a remarkable measure the quality of light and air in the Northwest. And to that they owe as much of their excellence as to anything.”²¹⁴ Perhaps the subdued quality of their colors, especially of Forkner’s watercolors like “Boat of Lake Union,” figure 13, explains why the newspapers often chose a work of Forkner to illustrate in connection with a group show rather than a painting by another artist. The hues of gray of a newspaper

²¹³ “Seattle Artists Win Prize at Puyallup Fair,” *Seattle Times*, September 24, 1933, and “The Art Museum,” *Seattle Times*, October 29, 1933, 11.

²¹⁴ “Forkner’s Paintings of Northwest on Display,” *Seattle P-I*, October 25, 1925, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 17.

reproduction do less violence to a low-toned Forkner watercolor than to a brighter work by another artist. In newspaper reports of Seattle annual group shows between 1917 and 1927, nine Forkner's were illustrated in the Seattle papers, but no works by other artists. Conversely, over the same period, several Gustin's were published in the Seattle newspapers, but always in connection with his one-man shows.

It would be tedious to catalogue all of Forkner's exhibitions and prizes, in Seattle as well as in Chicago at the annual Hoosier Salons. For example in 1922, in the absence of an institutional one-man show, Forkner organized a private exhibition of 40 watercolors in a West Seattle home, where he enthused to a reporter that "Seattle is the Venice of the New World,"²¹⁵ and in 1923, Forkner won two prizes at the annual exhibition of the Fine Arts Society, for miniatures as well as watercolors.²¹⁶ The *Chicago Daily News* reported that Forkner's "Summer Flowers" won first prize in the watercolor category at the two week Hoosier Salon in 1926,²¹⁷ and Forkner was awarded a silver medal for "Lake Union Ships" in the International Water Color Exhibition in Vancouver, British Columbia, also in 1926, where the work was described as "juicy in its handling."²¹⁸ Forkner's renown in Chicago was not limited to the Hoosier Salons. In 1927, the Chicago Galleries filled one exhibition room with Forkner watercolors and oils from the preceding three years. The Chicago critic, Eleanor Jewett, particularly admired an oil of two old ships "laid up...for a gradual falling to ruin," indicating that Forkner's appeal to nostalgia through his images of ruined sailing ships was recognized by his Midwestern critics, who attributed purpose and process to the otherwise static image of old ships at dock.²¹⁹ Three years later, in 1930, the Chicago Galleries gave Forkner another show of twenty paintings. The art

²¹⁵ "Seattle Held Venice of America," *Seattle Times*, November 3, 1922, 20.

²¹⁶ "Coasts Artist's Exhibit," *Seattle Times*, December 23, 1923.

²¹⁷ Marguerite B. Williams, "Prizes Awarded in Hoosier Art Exhibit" *Chicago Daily News*, March 18, 1926.

²¹⁸ "Art Notes Here and There," unidentified Vancouver B. C. newspaper, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 19.

²¹⁹ Eleanor Jewett, "Edgar Forkner Watercolors on Exhibition," *Forkner Scrapbook*, 22.

critic of the Indianapolis Star devoted a long article to Forkner, focusing once again on old ships. “There clings to [this picture of old ships] an indefinable something that seems to come out of the past...the two old ships that thrust forward their snouts as if poking inquisitive noses into this modern world to find out what it is all about.” For Lucille Morehouse, these two themes of nostalgia for the “lost time” of the sailing ships, and the challenge of Modernity, were conjoined in Forkner’s portrait of the two hulks. “Brought to life again,”²²⁰ as it were, the old ships are defying ideas of Modernity by their very presence. In this analysis, not only is Forkner adopting aspects of Modernity in his new, more colorful, works in oil, at the same time he is challenging it by dwelling on the past.

Forkner is quoted on his fascination for old ships:

The old sailing vessels, the three-masted and the five-masted ships, will be a thing of the past before many years, as they are fast being sent from the ocean to the “boneyard” in lakes and bays. Sometimes they are driven back and forth many months before they find themselves at rest with the other derelicts. One such old craft was a Japanese sailing vessel, wonderfully strong as originally built, but without masts and rigging when it drifted in. The ship’s log book showed that it had been beaten back and forth in the channels for two years. On its decks and in its hold were half a score of dead men, some of whom had turned cannibal, the last one drying, it was evident, only a few weeks before the old ship came to shore.

Morehouse comments that Forkner’s story “sounds like an old sea captain’s tale.”²²¹

Nevertheless, it testifies to the depth of Forkner’s emotional commitment to his old hulks and his effort to express the Proustian “lost time” that inform them. It would certainly represent a

²²⁰ Lucille Morehouse, “In the World of Art,” *Indianapolis Star*, February 16, 1930.

²²¹ Morehouse, *Indianapolis Star*, 1930.

superficial reaction to dismiss Forkner's work as tourist pictures for visitors to Seattle or as something "romantic" for land-locked Midwesterners to hang in their living rooms.²²²

Morehouse finds that Forkner "puts as much romance into his flower paintings" as his boat paintings. If the same in both cases, the "romance" could not be the simple love of beauty, but rather the awareness of the passing of time—and the need to make something of life—before the inevitable approach of decay and death. "Peonies and Larkspur in Green Vase," figure 56, illustrates an observation that Morehouse makes with respect to a Forkner painting of tulips.



Figure 56, Edgar Forkner, "Peonies and Larkspur in Green Vase."

"The handling of the light background is so skillful that the light seems to envelop the [flowers] and enhances the note of contrast in the pale yellow and red blossoms."²²³ While it is true that figure 56 is very skillfully painted, with subtle contrasts between the hues of the flowers and wall

²²² Others interpreted Forkner's old ships in a similar way, stressing the sense of repose they project. "The penitentiary wants to hang Edgar Forkner's "Ships in Lake Union" in the warden's office. It's a restful thing and has a softening effect on tough mugs called into the warden's presence." Doug Welch, "PWA Art Sought by State Prison for Inspection, *Seattle P-I*, July 7, 1934.

²²³ Morehouse, "In the World of Art."

behind, there is also a sense of unease or apprehension arising from the dark shadow the bouquet casts on the wall to the right. Making the parallel to old ships closer, the table top is littered with leaves and petals from the roses, in the full but advanced beauty of their “bloom,” at the same time redolent of decay and death. Thus, Forkner’s images of old ships and his still lifes of flowers are not two unrelated subjects of his art, but rather they are of a piece in suggesting the transience of life, recalling its romance to be sure, but pointing towards an inevitable slide into senescence. This of course is not a new trope in art, especially for still lifes. Dutch and Flemish paintings of the seventeenth century have long been described in terms of symbolic representations of the vanity of human ambition and the omnipresence of death. Louis Marin has pointed out that, in the context of Poussin’s symbolic representation of death in his paintings of shepherds in Arcadia, death can be represented both as dying and as delight.²²⁴ Forkner, in his own modest way, has achieved a similar synthesis of death and beauty in his paintings of decrepit ships and fading flowers.

Forkner augmented his income by teaching and, by 1930, some of his students received independent recognition. In a 1929 article on the upcoming annual Northwest artists exhibition, the director of education at SAM noted that “Mr. Forkner’s boats and flower painting is well known here and in the East. He has had a studio in Seattle for many years and his pupils are legion.”²²⁵ In 1930, a Seattle newspaper covered the one-man show of Crissie Cameron at the Washington Athletic Club. “She is a student of Edgar Forkner. Miss Cameron won second prize in the watercolor group at the state fair last fall. She is now exhibiting two pictures at the Philadelphia Watercolor Club, and has pictures hanging in Grant’s Galleries in Brooklyn, N. Y.

²²⁴ Louis Marin, “Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin’s ‘The Arcadian Shepherds,’” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.) 275.

²²⁵ A. M. Young, Educational Director, SAM, “Artists Prepare for N. W. Exhibit,” 1929, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 24.

Her pictures in the exhibit being held here are watercolors of *flowers and boats*.²²⁶ (Emphasis added.)

During the 1930's, Forkner continued to exhibit at the Hoosier Salons and the annual Northwest artist exhibitions in Seattle. Within the larger art community, there was no consensus on the direction artists should follow. Kenneth Callahan expressed his concern at the annual exhibition of Northwest artists in 1936, then under the aegis of the Seattle Art Museum. "There is good painting in the exhibition...But here, as in other regional exhibitions, there is a noticeable lack of conception, a lack of thinking on the part of our artists, that certainly is not too encouraging for future generations...There is...a large group of paintings which springs from...direct sources. Painting in which the artist was moved by the color, texture or attractiveness of the subject, such as Edgar Forkner's "Flowers in my Window...[Callahan regretted artists] painting their pictures unthinkingly, uncaringly, content with minor achievements and ignoring their real hope for eternity, the creation of new symbols to express the great forces which exist in life today...I am not excluding myself from this criticism. I am equally guilty."²²⁷ Callahan seemed to intend to include more traditional artists like Forkner, responding to "direct sources" like an arrangement of flowers on a table, among those who were content with "minor achievement." Thoughtful as ever, Callahan found himself as deficient as other artists in being unable to "create new symbols to express [today's] great forces." But, of course, it is the rare critic who can understand and identify new artistic currents at the moment of creation. The direction becomes evident much later. Considering that Forkner developed his symbolic vocabulary of old, obsolete sailboats and withering flowers during the prosperity of the 1920's,

²²⁶ "Exhibiting Paintings this Month," 1930, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 25.

²²⁷ Kenneth Callahan, "The Art Museum," 1936, *Forkner Scrapbook*, 36.

he was prescient to have been able to express them during the long, dreary decline of the Great Depression that followed, even if hardly anyone noticed.

Forkner continued to exhibit at the annual exhibition of Northwest artists at SAM and at the Hoosier Salon until his death in 1945—even after his death, as his pictures were also included in the Hoosier Salon in 1946 and 1947.²²⁸ A memorial exhibition for Forkner was held at the Hoosier Salon in late July, 1945 and, in the two months before his death, SAM gave Forkner a one-man show that was extended from the planned month to a full six weeks because of the enthusiastic attendance.²²⁹ Forkner died on July 7, 1945, not long after the show closed. In a talk about Forkner broadcast on the radio, Theodora Harrison seemed to recognize the elegiac quality of Forkner’s harbor scenes “of boats quietly at anchor waiting, at dusk, for the pall of darkness to blot out, one by one...the tiresome details.” Nevertheless, so familiar were Forkner’s pictures of flowers and old boats that Harrison saw them primarily as “lovely, untroubled, romantic...and set apart from the...strife of everyday life.” She credited Forkner with giving a “more polished, urbane, and gracious atmosphere” to the formerly “raw and crude” Seattle.²³⁰ Although I would agree with Harrison that Forkner’s work always exhibited a sense of refinement, I think an excessive familiarity with Forkner’s consistent imagery over thirty years had blinded her to its nostalgic longing for “lost time” and its message of inevitable senescence and death. The subversive side of the young Forkner, bringing what he knew would be a controversial landscape to Richmond and letting the people argue it out, remained at work throughout his life in his superficially pretty, but essentially melancholy, images of decaying ships and soon to be desiccated flowers.

²²⁸ Newton & Weiss, 207.

²²⁹ Lucile E. Morehouse, “Forkner Memorial Exhibition Continues at Hoosier Salon”, Indianapolis Star, July 22, 1945, 18, and Theodora Harrison, “An Appreciation of Edgar Forkner,” radio station KXA, July 14, 1945.

²³⁰ Harrison, 2-3.

Chapter VI

Clyde Leon Keller (1872-1962)

Clyde Keller was without doubt the most prolific Northwest Impressionist, indeed among the most prolific artists in Northwest history. This achievement—if indeed that is what it is—was due to working fast, showing resiliency in the face of the San Francisco earthquake and personal bankruptcy, and living a long life. Keller was born in Salem, Oregon, worked in San Francisco as a young adult for ten to twelve years, and relocated to Portland, Oregon for most of the remainder of his life, dying at ninety in Cannon Beach, the Oregon coastal town where he often had painted. Keller had an artist son, Clyde Keller, Jr., who has been available to fill in details and interpret episodes in his father’s life, in contrast to the four artists covered in previous chapters, none of whom left descendants. Thus, his dictionary entry in Allen and Klevit’s *Oregon Painters*, for example, can be considered to be better founded and more reliable than McKim’s entry, which begins with two assertions that are not borne out at by recent research, i.e., his close relationship with Winslow Homer, and that his uncle was the famed architect Charles Follen McKim. Keller also made an implausible claim of studio art study in Boston, Munich, and London, but he surely misread the questionnaire, and Allen and Klevit would have been able to confirm his error in interpretation after consulting with his son.²³¹

²³¹ A “biographical record” form in the PAM Library that Keller filled out on May 25, 1949 asking “where” he studied states that he studied under Bridges in Munich, Professor Knowles in Boston, and E. W. Christmas, R.B.A. [Royal British Academy?] in London. (Although there is no Royal British Academy, there is a Royal Academy of Art in London.) E. W. Christmas (1863-1918), who was born in Adelaide, Australia, and died in Honolulu, Hawaii, spent much of his life in California, where he exhibited at the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco in 1915, as did Keller. It is thus plausible that Keller studied with Christmas in San Francisco. Mary Bridges Watson (1853-1916) taught at Willamette University in Salem from 1882-1887, and she must be the “Bridges” with whom Keller said he studied, as he grew up on Salem. According to Ginnie Allen, Keller studied

According to Allen and Klevit, Keller first studied art with Mary Bridges (Mary Bridges Watson, 1853-1916) in Salem in 1884, at the age of twelve. In Keller's youth, he was also interested in music and entertainment. With his brother Harry, the two performed in a musical act, including writing and publishing their own songs.²³² "I wore a bright red wig, made up my cheeks with lots of color, and informed the audience that I had got sunburned from eating too many tomatoes. We played the Western circuit, and our act went over in good shape."²³³ By 1893, Keller was listed as an artist—not an actor or musician—in the Salem City Directory, and in 1894, Allen and Klevit report he was employed as a cartoonist for the San Francisco Examiner.²³⁴ After the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, he moved to Portland, Oregon. A painting frame has been published with the label "Clyde L. Keller, the Modern Picture Framer," and a San Francisco address, and when Keller moved to Portland, he opened a frame shop where he initially operated as "Keller, the Art Man, Modern Picture Framing", and later as simply "Keller, The Art Man" until 1936.²³⁵

In a 1921 interview, Keller gave a more detailed account of his San Francisco experience. "In my late teens...I had the ambition to become a cartoonist. Homer Davenport of Silverton [Oregon], at one time the best known, most loved, and highest paid cartoonist in the United States, was a long-time friend of mine, so he got me a place on the Examiner in San Francisco...If you go through files of the Examiner for 1896, you will find some of my cartoons.

with Joe Knowles, an artist who lived in Seaview, Washington, in 1920. Email from Allen dated April 2, 2012. Keller is thus innocent of exaggerating the prestige of the locations in which he studied art.

²³² Clyde Leon Keller, "Memories of Salem," *Oregon Magazine*, March, 1922, 24.

²³³ Fred Lockley, "Impressions and Observations of the Journal Man," *Daily Journal*, April 4, 1927, 10.

²³⁴ Keller most likely became a free lance cartoonist. There is a newspaper report to the effect that Keller was doing "art work" in San Francisco, where his "pictures" had "appeared in different newspapers." *The Oregonian*, March 8, 1898, 3. Working independently and part time as a free lance cartoonist seems consistent with operating a picture frame shop, whereas being employed by one newspaper seems less so.

²³⁵ Images of Keller's various frame labels in San Francisco and Portland are posted on clydeleonkeller.com. The website also has images of seventeen of his paintings.

At San Francisco, I met E. W. Christmas...a noted landscape artist...Mr. Christmas took a great interest in me and advised me to devote my efforts to landscape painting.”²³⁶ In another newspaper interview in 1927, Keller said that he opened his art store in San Francisco with his savings. “My older brother, Edward, took charge of the mechanical end of the business while I rustled orders. From an investment of a few hundred dollars, within ten years our business had so increased that we had nine men working for us...We were sitting pretty, when out of a clear sky came the earthquake and fire of April 13, 1906, and by noon of that day we had lost \$70,000. It was a case of beginning from the very bottom and building up a new establishment, so we came to Portland and started in business under the name Keller the Art Man.”²³⁷ It is difficult to accept this story in all respects, as \$70,000 amounted to a small fortune in 1906, and it is hard to imagine a picture frame shop, even one employing nine persons, worth so much. San Francisco was quickly rebuilt and, if the business was so phenomenally successful, one wonders why Keller and his brother did not remain there and rebuild.

In any case, it seems evident that Keller’s most time consuming activity in art was operating his picture frame shops and studios from about the age of twenty-two in San Francisco until the age of sixty-four in Portland, when he apparently filed for bankruptcy in 1936, and the contents of his Portland shop were sold at auction.²³⁸ Keller claimed at various times to have painted up to 4500 canvases during his lifetime, a plausible figure given the large number of his paintings available for sale in Portland today, mostly executed after 1936, when Keller stated that

²³⁶ Fred Lockley, “Observations and Impressions of the Journal Man,” *Daily Journal*, May 27, 1921. It should be noted that Keller dates his employment by the Examiner to 1896, not 1894, making his San Francisco period ten years. Since the years 1894 and 1896 have both appeared in the press as the time Keller moved to San Francisco, I have referred to both dates whenever Keller’s relocation to San Francisco is mentioned.

²³⁷ Fred Lockley, *Daily Journal*, April 4, 1927, 10.

²³⁸ Wilson’s Auction House advertised an initial auction on December 9, 1936, of the contents of Keller’s frame shop, as well as some of his paintings and sketches. Follow-on sales occurred on December 14 and 21, with the last one promising to “positively close out the balance...of the stock.” Newspaper clippings, Mark Humpal archive.

he had begun painting four days per week.²³⁹ Of the 141 auction records for Keller recorded on askart.com as of March, 2012, only 20 can be dated before 1936. Keller's later work after the age of sixty-four tends to follow the same format, 18 x 24," canvas on board, landscapes in rural areas around Portland that appear to have been painted rapidly in a simplified, repetitive manner. According to Mark Humpal, Keller did not drive a car and, as an older man trying to earn a living during the Great Depression, he walked door to door in Portland selling these serially produced works.²⁴⁰ As he observed new colors used in home decoration in the later 1930's and 1940's in the houses where he tried to sell his paintings, like teal and other new varieties of blue-green, he adapted his palette accordingly so that his landscapes would accord better with the colors chosen by young housewives.²⁴¹ In any event, Keller's paintings that are of most interest to collectors today were executed before 1936; these sell at auction in the thousands of dollars, whereas those dated 1936 or later sell in the hundreds. Keller dated nearly all his work, and the earliest pre-1936 painting that I have seen is dated 1911. Thus, little is known about Keller's art before 1912, when Keller was already forty, implying that most of his work from 1894-1906 was destroyed. "The earthquake and fire at San Francisco wiped me off the map. I lost not only my art shop and all equipment, but I lost scores of sketches in oil and paintings that I greatly valued."²⁴² After he returned to Portland, perhaps Keller devoted most of his time for the first few years to establishing his new frame business, painting more frequently thereafter, which would explain the dearth of pictures dated 1906-1910.

²³⁹ In a newspaper interview in 1951 at the age of seventy-nine, Keller said he had done 3000 paintings. "I paint four days a week and each day is a full day of work." Louise Aaron, "Painting Works like Tonic for Tired Women and Men," *Daily Journal*, October 1, 1951. Other claims of total output are documented elsewhere in this chapter.

²⁴⁰ Conversation with Mark Humpal, April, 2011, Portland. Humpal told me that Clyde Keller, Jr. was deceased, but that he is a good friend of Keller's grandson, who has also been a source of information.

²⁴¹ Conversation with Randy Dagel, a major Keller collector, in Portland, March, 2010.

²⁴² Fred Lockley, *Daily Journal*, May 27, 1921.



Figure 57. Clyde Keller, “Spring Rain.”

“Spring Rain”, a Keller watercolor dated 1912, figure 57, depicts a street corner in downtown Portland, the near side of which is now the home of the Portland Art Museum, constructed in 1932. A man holding an umbrella scurries across Park Avenue during a spring rainstorm. The sky is about to clear, as the sun peeps under the dark stratus clouds, illuminating the belfry of St. James Lutheran Church. The tall trees along Park Avenue are still mostly bare, with a smattering of green as the spring leaves begin to show. Keller at forty is a mature artist, with large brushstrokes that suggest the mantle of new leaves without depicting any individually. Keller seems intent on creating a rainy-day mood. His brushstrokes are broader and more smudged than the Forkner watercolors illustrated in the prior chapter. The somewhat dark blue-green hues are consistent with a late afternoon shower, the sun about to peep out beneath the clouds for a few moments before setting. Keller demonstrates a marvelous technical skill in a few bright patches of light that seem to shine through the trees and reflect off the street. This work is the second oldest Keller, and the only watercolor, that I have seen in person or

illustrated.²⁴³ Keller's signature is "Clyde Keller" in print with a very elaborate "K" and without his middle name "Leon." Its original frame bears the "Keller the Art Man" label on the back.

Reminiscing at seventy-nine, Keller described his approach to painting as follows:

My first work was a crayon drawing of a band of sheep...I had a natural instinct but I had to study, too. Study is necessary to any painter. I have observed through the years the different trends. I continue doing conservative or representative painting of what I honestly see and feel in nature. I feel a good painting, say of a tree, may be photographic in appearance but it must have atmosphere and values of color, must bring out some of the poetry of the subject not caught by a camera. I paint honestly and that is what all artists must do...paint the way they see and feel.²⁴⁴

In other interviews twenty-five years earlier, Keller provided more details on how and what he painted:

When someone asks me how long it takes to paint a landscape...I usually say 'about 30 years and four hours,' which is the truth. Every picture speaks for the background of the artist who creates it... Eleven months I devote to landscape paintings and one month to marines. [I spend] two full days a week with [my] easel out of doors.²⁴⁵

Keller's thus described a schedule of spending five days in his frame shop, managing the shop and teaching in his studio located in the same premises, and two days painting outdoors. In another interview, Keller explained how he came to combine painting and the frame business.

I have been painting, first in watercolors and later in oil, the beauty spots of the West...When I started in the painting of landscapes in California, I had to make my living...I started an art store. ...I would give instruction in painting and my students put me in the way of a good deal of work in the framing of pictures. Then, too, I soon began to sell my canvases to

²⁴³ There must be more, as a 1923 article on Keller noted that "his watercolors are done on tinted paper." *Daily Journal*, November 4, 1923.

²⁴⁴ *Daily Journal*, October 1, 1951.

²⁴⁵ "Portland Painter Makes Specialty of Oregon Scenes," *Sunday Journal*, November 4, 1923.

tourists and occasionally canvases of my pupils. During the past 30 years [1891-1921] I have painted about 1700 canvases.²⁴⁶

Keller concentrated on landscapes once he moved to California in 1894 or 1896. He began as a watercolorist. He worked fast, claiming to expend four hours per canvas. If he painted 1700 canvases over thirty years starting at the age of twenty, it amounts to 85 per year. If he took four hours per canvas, plus time to and from his home, he could have done all of them by painting one canvas on Sunday every week, plus another on Saturday about every other week. In other words, Keller had adequate time to manage his art shop and paint one or two canvases per week, both in California after 1894 or 1896 and in Portland after 1906.

Although there is no reason to believe Keller was dissatisfied with subjects for painting around San Francisco, he claimed that Oregon offered the best landscapes. “With our majestic snow-clad sentinel peaks, our filmy and lace-like waterfalls, our crystal-clear mountain streams, our lush meadows, our evergreen-clad foothills, our sky-reflecting inland lakes and our surf-kissed shore, Oregon is an inspiration and a dream of delight to an artist.”²⁴⁷

Keller rarely specified the place he painted, but rather titled his paintings in terms of the time of day or mood, for example, “Late Autumn Afternoon.” As he had explained, he was most interested in the “poetry” of a scene and how he “felt.” In the conservative art market of the pre-World War I Northwest, Keller may have seemed modern in his focus on his own reactions and the lack of precision and specificity implied by his poetic response to the landscape. Certainly, “Spring Rain” has nothing in it of academic realism. In the opinion of partisans of traditional American realism, this self-referential approach was surely exacerbated by adopting Impressionist techniques in the choice and application of colors. In the earliest criticism of his

²⁴⁶ Fred Lockley, *Daily Journal*, May 27, 1921.

²⁴⁷ Fred Lockley, *Daily Journal*, May 27, 1921.

work in *The Oregonian* in 1914, a critic commented that “for those who like the ultra-impressionistic style, where colors go by theory rather than according to nature, there are works by Clyde Leon Keller...[at the art show].”²⁴⁸



Figure 58. Clyde Keller, “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach.”

A second painting by Keller that brackets this criticism of 1914 is “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach,” 1915, figure 58. Keller’s signature had changed to the form he used for the rest of his life, “Clyde Leon Keller” in separate printed letters, with a more cursive shape, followed by the year in full. The “K” was no longer more elaborate than any other letter. The title of this work was given by its owner. Keller would normally have chosen a name suggestive of time, weather, or mood, perhaps “Overcast Afternoon.” This small oil provides an opportunity to compare Keller’s work in 1912 and 1915 and to explore his reliance on Impressionist techniques. “Sea

²⁴⁸ “Exhibit by Local Artists is Opened,” *Oregonian*, May 8, 1914, 1.

Rocks at Cannon Beach” depicts the southern end of one of the largest and best known beach towns on the Oregon coast. Ecola State Park is located at the northern end of Cannon Beach. When looking south from the park, the scene is dominated by a huge rock—Haystack Rock—lying offshore in the center of Cannon Beach. Most photographs of the shore at Cannon Beach feature Haystack Rock. There are also several close offshore rocks at the southern end of the beach, but they are smaller and do not seem to have been awarded distinctive names. In this painting, Keller has depicted one of these south end sea rocks, a rounded boulder whose outline is not dissimilar to Haystack Rock, along with some of the smaller rocks that surround it, with a much larger rock far offshore in the distance. (The rock far offshore can be mistaken for a ship.) When one visits Cannon Beach and takes the long walk to its southern end, the scene today—if the viewer focuses only on the sea rocks in the painting and ignores everything to their right—is unchanged.²⁴⁹

The right and left sides of this small canvas on board are slightly abraded, consistent with Keller’s having painted it on the spot and then slid it into the storage area for canvas boards that can be found inside paint boxes. Figure 59 is an undated photograph of Keller painting along the Oregon coast, and his paint box, with what seems to be a supply of canvas boards inside it, is visible underneath his makeshift easel. Although Keller is painting in a field close to a forest area, it is clear from his nearly completed canvas that he is looking straight at the Pacific Ocean. No sea rocks are visible, so Keller is probably not standing near Cannon Beach, unless he is standing in the state park and intends to add Haystack Rock afterwards.

²⁴⁹ These sea rocks at the southern end of the beach include a tall pointed rock immediately north of the large rounded boulder in the painting. In framing the painting, Keller simply excluded the tall pointed rock.



Figure 59. Clyde Keller painting.

In “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach,” nearly half the image is the steep, rocky hillside that walls off the south end of the beach. When the canvas is viewed up close, the ocean in the distance is seen to consist of alternating horizontal bands of blue and green, while in the nearby ocean between the sea rocks and shore, these bands are obliterated by the heavy white impasto of the breaking waves. When viewed from a normal distance, the separate bands seem to disappear as the eye interprets the subtle color changes as the expression of movement and depth. Pace Leonardo, the “band” farthest away is blue, while green predominates in the closer bands. Although Keller seems to have reversed classical Renaissance techniques for expressing depth in using blue rather than green in the farthest distance, it seems to work, implying that it is the change in color that signifies distance, not that the color farthest away must imperatively be green. (When depicting the ocean, the bands of color also imply movement, which may be as important as maximizing the viewer’s sense of depth.) Keller has painted with short, compact brushstrokes, and he has avoided depicting any details in the scene. In fact, he has lavished most attention on the waves, expending little effort in showing how the path in the foreground might

lead up the rocky promontory on the left. For someone who favors academic realism in art, or someone who prefers the information overload that a photograph can provide, it is understandable that “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach” might be called “ultra-impressionist.” However, for most knowledgeable art viewers of the period, “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach” would have been only “mildly Impressionist” because of Keller’s avoidance of saturated colors and his tightly knit construction. (The foreground of “Spring Rain” is even more imprecise, making the work a more likely target of abuse by Keller’s unnamed 1914 critic.)

Keller’s artistic development in Portland can be separated into four periods. During the decade of 1910, Keller seems to have produced mostly smaller canvases like “Spring Rain” and “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach, figures 57 and 58, his oils tightly constructed with small brushstrokes like those in figure 58. In his choice of palette, Keller eschewed very bright colors. During the decade of 1920, Keller painted larger and more ambitious canvases, built up with larger broken brushstrokes. Keller introduced more color into his oils, but at a level of brightness still less than that of Southern California Impressionists. Keller elaborated on his approach to painting in his 1923 interview:

‘When I’m out after a picture,’ this thin, eager-eyed artist explained, ‘I work at top speed. Nature is like an unruly child. She never stands still.’ This is the fun of it all, Keller finds. The artist is continually running a race with moods of nature. If he completes his impressions in paint before the scene changes, he wins. Oregon scenery is especially temperamental, Keller finds, and runs the artist a merry chase.

Because of this constant change of landscape, Keller begins his paintings with a series of color notes on the side of his canvas. This enables him to keep his color values balanced should he not complete his sketch before the scene takes on other hues. Nature never changes in spots, Keller said. Her transformations are complete. If the sky shifts from blue to gray, there is a

corresponding difference in the shades of hills and trees, etc. In her color harmonies, Keller insists, nature is consistent.²⁵⁰

When it comes to the design of a picture—the artist laughed mischievously—‘I never hesitate to transplant a tree or move a mountain to aid my design.’ This, he explains, is not done with the idea of improving upon nature. Because a picture is bound by four straight lines and excludes so much, it is necessary often to arrange objects within the frame.²⁵¹

In a column in *The Spectator*, fellow artist William Purcell described what it was like to paint outdoors with Keller:

During the past winter, I have gone out with Mr. Keller nearly every week to paint nature as we found it. He makes it perfectly plain to his classes and proves his case for me, that you must not let the weather deter you, however threatening. We sat in the snow, a foot of it, and were comfortable. We sat under his delicate canvas shelter in the pouring rain and kept right on painting. Some days it blew, and some days we had samples of a little of everything...

Keller knows how to make any spot outdoors look like home in a few minutes, and on chilly days a big fire to leeward, is all that is needed in addition to warmly clad feet, sweaters, and mittens minus a finger or two.²⁵²

“Late Autumn,” figure 60, is a large oil on canvas dated 1924.²⁵³ Not only do the yellow and brown colors in the trees indicate that it is late in the autumn, the very long shadows in the foreground demonstrate that the time of day is late in the afternoon. A tall mountain ridge with multiple peaks is visible in the distance, well illuminated by the late afternoon sun. Colored a salmon pink by the setting sun, the tallest peak shares the viewer’s attention with the line of trees

²⁵⁰ See Thayne J. Logan, “Painting with Clyde Leon Keller,” *Brushmarks*, no. 91, undated, Oregon Society of Artists, for a more detailed account of how Keller painted, and how he placed paint on the pallet. Mark Humpal archive.

²⁵¹ “Portland Painter Makes Specialty of Oregon Scenes,” *Sunday Journal*, November 4, 1923.

²⁵² William Gray Purcell, A. I. A., President, Society of Oregon Artists, “The Arts,” *The Spectator*, June 29, 1929, 10.

²⁵³ Keller tended to title his paintings with references to time or season, such as “Summer Afternoon” or “Late Autumn.” Over time, these titles have become lost or forgotten, and most owners today title the same paintings by referring to the places the owners believe they were painted.

in the middle ground and the portion of the brightly lit yellow and green meadow not yet in shadow. A trace of snow is suggested by a reflection in the crotch of the steep, narrow valley that descends from the tallest peak. If snow it is, the snow would be a remnant from the prior winter. Although Keller did not typically memorialize the subject of a landscape by noting its place name, it would appear that the mountain range in “Late Autumn” is the Tatoosh Range near Mount Rainier. Keller painted in Washington as well as Northern California, and the close succession of peaks along the mountain ridge in “Late Autumn” looks much like the profile of the Tatoosh Range when viewed from Paradise on the flank of Mount Rainier.



Figure 60, Clyde Keller, “Late Autumn.”

Keller exhibited often at shows that awarded prizes, such as fine art shows at state fairs and the annual exhibitions at PAM and SAM and their predecessors, and he claimed on the 1949 form mentioned in the first page of this chapter that he had been awarded 250 prizes for his

work. As it happens, “Sea Rocks at Cannon Beach” was awarded the “First Premium” prize at the Multnomah County Fair (Portland is located in Multnomah County) in 1915, and “Late Autumn” won First Honorable Mention at the Seattle Fine Arts Society in 1924. When Keller painted a canvas with a particular prize in mind (that he expected to win), he signed the painting in red!



Figure 61. Clyde Keller, “Fields of Purple and Gold.”

“Fields of Purple and Gold”, 1930, figure 61, and “Tatoosh Range from Mount Rainier National Park”, 1931, figure 63, are two large canvases from a few years later. Both evidence Keller’s increasing tendency toward bright colors and subject matter that resemble California Impressionist art from Laguna Beach and Los Angeles, in these cases blue, purple, and yellow wildflowers that run riot through the meadows. Both combine broken brush strokes and highly saturated colors and, in my opinion, are the closest that any Northwest Impressionist artist came to the vast beds of poppies and lupines that attracted California Impressionists like Granville

Redmond (1871-1935), e.g., his “Poppies and Lupines,” undated, figure 62. Like Redmond’s vista of Southern California hillside meadows in yellows and blues, the similarly colored flowers in Keller’s “Fields of Purple and Gold” occupy about half the canvas. Keller’s *facture* is looser than Redmond’s, as Redmond has painted the blue flowers with individual daubs of paint, while Keller’s plants are represented by purple splotches that encompass several flowers at once. Keller also uses a broader range of hues, with bright greens, purples, and oranges. In fact, not a single low-toned color is visible. Redmond, in contrast, uses highly saturated yellow, but his blues are lower toned, as are his greens and browns.

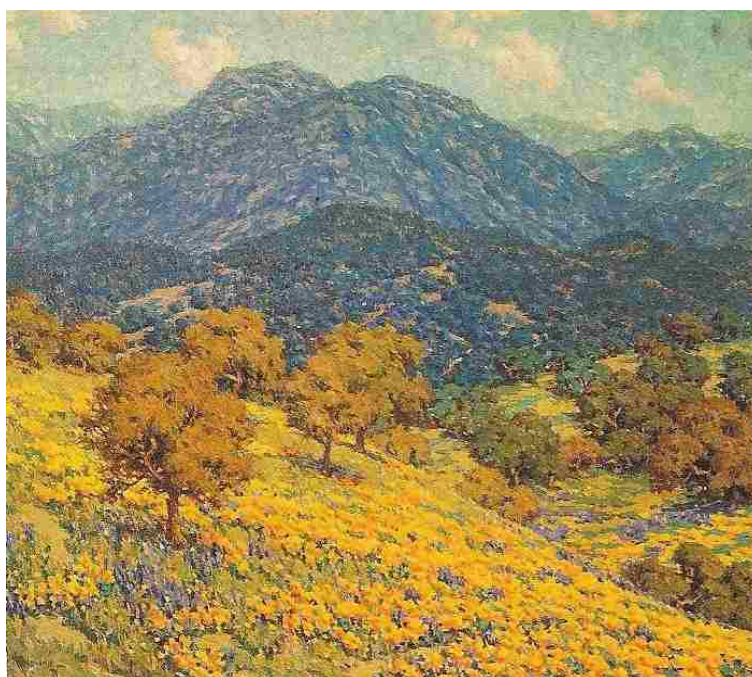


Figure 62. Granville Redmond, “Poppies and Lupines.”

The “Tatoosh Range from Mount Rainier National Park,” figure 63, provides another basis of comparison with respect to the artist’s treatment of atmosphere. Even though Redmond has depicted a partially cloudy day in “Poppies and Lupines,” figure 62, with shadows visible under the trees, his air is much more transparent than Keller’s. There is very little loss of clarity

and definition from the front to the back of the painting, a scene that might encompass ten or twenty miles in the coastal mountains of Southern California. The hills in the middle ground and background are relatively dark and may well be in the shadow of the clouds above, but their topographical ridges and valleys are easily situated. The “Tatoosh Range from Mount Rainier National Park” also represents a partially cloudy day. Although the foreground trees are depicted as clearly as Redmond’s, the intervening mountains in the middle ground are almost completely indistinct, more like blue clouds than gray stone and rock. The more humid Northwest atmosphere has swallowed almost all detail and definition. The snow-covered Tatoosh ridge in the distance does exhibit a more definite shape, but only because it is illuminated by bright sunlight that cuts through the haze, while the middle ground is left in shade. Once the viewer reflects on the presence or absence of the painting’s expression of atmosphere, it is immediately apparent which painting is by the hand of an artist from the more humid Northwest, and which was created in the desert-like conditions of Southern California.



Figure 63. Clyde Keller, “Tatoosh Range from Mount Rainier National Park.”

In a brief article published after Keller's death, Thayne J. Logan, a fellow artist, described how Keller used the "atmospheric effect" to increase the expression of depth in a painting. "He knew the name of each mountain and hill on the horizon and could paint them in a way they seemed to go away back into infinity. He called this getting the atmospheric effect and as it was disappearing into the distance, it was a poetic or ethereal effect. Today we call it aerial perspective. He helped people to see nature as they did not know existed before."²⁵⁴

The "Tatoosh Range from Mount Rainier National Park," figure 63, can also be compared with "Late Autumn," figure 60. Both depict the same mountain ridge, although Keller composed them with the liberty he explained earlier, that is his freedom of choice in the position, and the inclusion or exclusion, of elements of the scene. The main difference of course is that figure 63 was painted in the Northwest spring, when wildflowers proliferate and the peaks remain covered in snow, while figure 60 depicts late autumn when the only botanical color is provided by fading leaves, and there is no more than a trace of snow remaining in a distant mountain crevice. Both paintings share the same almost palpable atmosphere that eliminates definition in the middle grounds and backgrounds. Both show the same descending mountain ridge in the middle ground that frames the scene on the right, but the big blue middle ground descending ridge that frames the peaks on the left of figure 63 is absent in figure 60. Either Keller made the change in framing for aesthetic reasons, or he may have chosen such a different viewpoint that the ridge on the left was not visible in figure 60. The placement of the humps on the spine of the Tatoosh ridge is also somewhat different in the two views of the mountains, but I suspect this difference is largely aesthetic. Keller was not a topographical artist, and such details were not as important to him as the poetic mood he wished to achieve.

²⁵⁴ Thayne J. Logan, "Painting with Clyde Leon Keller," *Brushmarks* no. 91, Oregon Society of Artists.

Not only did Keller submit many works to exhibitions in the hope of winning prizes and renown, he gave a painting to President Herbert Hoover of a swimming hole near Newburg, Oregon, where Hoover and he had swum as children. As Keller recalled it, Hoover had once loaned him a bicycle when they were children in Oregon and, to return that “kindness,” Keller sent Hoover a painting of a swimming pool in the Chehalem River “a few miles from Newberg where President Hoover lived during his boyhood... Tall trees shelter an inviting pool, and the light is such that an illusion of the heat of summer and the coolness of the retreat is very definitely created.”²⁵⁵ There are no follow-on articles describing President Hoover’s reaction to the work, and its present location is unknown.

In addition to Keller’s painting his most ambitious canvases at this time, the studio connected with his art shop had become an important place for teaching and exhibiting. In 1930, The Oregon Society of Artists showed 45 paintings in Keller’s studio at 450 Washington Street that had been donated for sale with the goal of raising enough funds to erect a beach lodge for its members at Neah-Kah-Nie.²⁵⁶ Among his students, perhaps the most successful was Paul Lauritz, who later moved to California and became a respected member of the second generation of California Impressionists.²⁵⁷ In 1931, Keller was elected President of the Oregon Society of Artists, and in 1931 and 1932 his studio was again used for large shows of waterfront scenes for the annual exhibition of work of members of the Society.²⁵⁸ Thus, Keller’s loss of his art shop and studio in 1936 was another significant setback, perhaps rivaling his losses in the San Francisco earthquake.

²⁵⁵ “Hoover Retreat Painted,” *Oregonian*, October 18, 1931, 1.

²⁵⁶ “Paintings Put on Sale,” *Oregonian*, December 9, 1930, 9.

²⁵⁷ “Paul Lauritz Studies under Clyde Leon Keller,” *Oregonian*, February 9, 1931, 11.

²⁵⁸ “Waterfront Scenes Will Be Displayed at Keller Art Studios,” *Oregonian*, June 17, 1931, and “June Art Exhibition Set,” *Oregonian*, April 20, 1932, 20.

A last word is needed on the paintings Keller produced between his bankruptcy in 1936 and his death in 1962, a period of 26 years as he aged from 66 to 90, when he seemed to have produced the largest part of his oeuvre. The owner of one of the most extensive collections of Oregon Impressionists in Portland told me that it is a shame all these later Keller's have not been tossed into a bonfire, as their repetitiveness and banality reflects badly on Keller's earlier work, which is much more skilled and distinctive.²⁵⁹ "Summer Afternoon," figure 64, is dated 1942 and thus represents an example of Keller's last period. It happens to depict exactly the same place as Charles McKim's "Spring Evening, Sauvie Island," figure 46, painted 27 years earlier.



Figure 64. Clyde Keller, "Late Afternoon."

I attest personally to this claim, and I have walked through the area and identified the spot. The same prominent group of spreading oak trees stands on a hillock to the right, serving as a *repoussoir* in the two works, increasing a sense of depth. During the twenty-seven years

²⁵⁹ Conversation, March, 2010.

intervening between 1915 and 1942, the oaks continued to grow, and their horizontal extension became much greater in Keller's later work. McKim chose to depict a spring evening in early summer when the sky was colored a vivid pink, while Keller's image was created in mid-summer when the predominant hue is green, and the meadow is turning brown. There is nothing left for cows to graze upon, and the cows, or rather their progeny, have gone elsewhere in search of forage. Admittedly, Keller's oaks are depicted in a more rubbery manner than McKim's or the trees in his 1930 landscapes like figures 61 and 63, which stand straight and rigid, and Keller's limb lying on the ground in the 1942 work looks formulaic and artificial. Conversely, the "second" subject of the 1942 landscape, the lake and row of trees in the background, is a wonderful synthesis of Impressionist brightness of color and Tonalist economy of hue, the trees and water a shimmering variation on blue-green within a very narrow range (and blue-greens that harmonized well with home decoration c. 1940). Looking simply at this part of the landscape, it demonstrates as much skill as anything Keller did earlier

Keller continued to work until his death in 1962 at the age of ninety. According to his obituary, he had painted approximately 4500 paintings over his lifetime, compared to the 1700 he reported in 1921 and the 3000 in 1951. Although the obituary implies that Keller painted an additional 1500 paintings in his last 11 years, about 135 per year during his 80's, this is probably an exaggeration. The obituary also claims a total of 275 prizes at his death compared to 250 in 1949.²⁶⁰ Taking both claims at face value, it would seem that the quality of his art had declined in statistical terms, as Keller produced 33% of the total during a bit more than his last decade, but won only 9% of the prizes during the same period. In any event, it is safe to conclude that Keller painted a few thousand landscapes over a career of about seventy years, that his work of around

²⁶⁰ "Obituary: Clyde Leon Keller, 90, Noted Oregon Artist, Succumbs", *Daily Journal*, August 9, 1962.

1930 is as free and brilliant in color and execution as similar scenes by Southern California Impressionists, and that his later years were marked by a surprising increase in the rate of production for a person in his 70's and 80's, but an unsurprising reliance on formula and routine.

Chapter VII

Dorothy Dolph Jensen (1895-1977)

Dorothy Dolph Jensen's career as an artist was very different from that of Clara J. Stephens. Not only was Stephens older by half a generation, Stephens pursued her career as a self-supporting single woman without reliance upon family wealth, a husband, or "solidarity" with women's organizations. Even in patriarchal American society around 1900, the Portland art community treated Stephens in a gender-neutral manner. Her group exhibitions and one-man shows were well reviewed in Portland journals and newspapers and, apart from one passing comment quoted in her chapter where she was described as a "little woman"—which was true in terms of physical stature—there was nothing that implied that the critics treated her differently than male artists. Her work was extensively covered in the press, and it was typically praised without relating it to her gender. Indeed, the overall attention she received was greater than that accorded Charles McKim or Clyde Keller, her contemporaries in Portland. (Stephens may have received more coverage because she was a prominent teacher at the Museum Art School of PAM, while McKim and Keller taught privately. Stephens received several one-man shows at PAM, while neither McKim nor Keller had any.)

Although eighteen years younger than Stephens, Jensen "caught up" with Stephens in terms of her career development because her art education began at a young age and continued uninterruptedly. Stephens did not complete her training as an artist until her mid-thirties, as her family was poor and she worked first as a legal secretary and later as an art teacher to save enough for study in New York and Europe. In contrast, Jensen came from what today is called a privileged background. Her grandfather Joseph N. Dolph (1835-1897) served two terms in the

United States Senate representing Oregon. Her mother, Augusta Armstrong Dolph, had been an actress on the stage in New York and in motion pictures. Although her father died when Jensen and her two sisters were young, the family had the means to send them to Europe and enroll them in a boarding school in Antwerp, Belgium, for girls from wealthy families. (One wonders if Augusta Armstrong's desire to re-launch her career played a role in this decision to send her daughters to boarding school. As her acting in New York occurred about 1890, and as she sent her daughters to Europe in 1907, a large parenthesis in her career had already occurred.²⁶¹ Perhaps Augusta Armstrong Dolph and her in-laws simply thought it was the best place for them.²⁶²)

Jensen's art education was in many ways the opposite of Stephens. As noted, Jensen's instruction in art started young, and it began in Europe. By the age of twenty, Jensen had studied art privately in Belgium for six years and for one year in Paris at the Academy Julian, the source of instruction in Europe favored by American art students. Nevertheless, Jensen must have paid a price for her privilege. On the one hand, she undoubtedly suffered an emotional shock in being "abandoned" by her mother in a foreign country thousands of miles from home. On the other hand, once she returned to the Northwest, married, and combined family and art, the art community treated her sometimes as a housewife instead of as an artist. The press covered her far less than Stephens, and far less than her Seattle male contemporaries Gustin and Forkner. There is not a single article that discussed her philosophy of art, her goals as an artist, or the techniques she used. Jensen became a founding member of Women Painters of Washington in

²⁶¹ A photo of Jensen c. 1920, figure 66, in one of her mother's stage dresses, was taken thirty years after her mother acted in New York, situating the apogee of Augusta Armstrong's theatrical career about 1890.

²⁶² David Martin has a substantial archive of childhood letters Jensen wrote to her mother, friends, and relatives. Jensen's boarding school letters to Augusta Armstrong were written in both English and French, indicating that her mother had at least a reading knowledge of French. Jensen's letters to her mother were mainly factual, describing recent activities. Her letters to her grandmother and aunts seem to have been written in a warmer tone. In a letter to her grandmother dated April 26, 1914, Jensen lamented that "mother hasn't written for quite a while."

1930. The new organization was well covered in the Seattle press during the 1930's and 1940's. In common with other organizations, newspaper articles seemed to emphasize the "society" aspects of its activities as much as its stated purpose. (Male artists, and Clara Stephens, were covered by both male and female journalists, but artists associated with Women Painters of Washington were covered only by female journalists. Although this exclusively feminine point of view, combining fashion and art, may have resulted in more total press coverage, it tended to steer members of the organization into the category of amateur artists.)



Figure 65. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, "Ballard Locks."

Like her Seattle contemporary Edgar Forkner, Jensen often depicted urban waterfront scenes, but she favored boats operating on the Ship Canal that links Lake Washington with Puget Sound, not derelicts grounded in Lake Union. Jensen did not normally date her work. She painted mostly in oils and watercolors in the 1920's, but once the Depression arrived, like other artists in Seattle, Jensen gravitated toward prints, in her case etchings, dry points, and

lithographs, at least in part because they were less expensive for potential clients. “Ballard Locks,” oil on canvas, figure 65, can be assigned to the 1920’s. The viewpoint looks eastward toward Lake Union, and the Ballard Locks on the Ship Canal are not visible, being located just around the corner where the bascule railroad bridge has been rotated to its up position. The dominant color is the blue of the water, sky, and vegetation and hills in the middle ground. The foreground is green, with trees framing on the view on the right and left, and with smudged scrubs, grass, or weeds occupying the space immediately in front of the viewer along the bank of the canal. The sky is radiant with pink and violet. A sailboat under power, smoke trailing, chugs down the canal toward salt water, while a boat in the distance, sailing with the wind, must be moving more slowly on this languid spring or summer day. As is evident even in reproduction, Jensen applied paint freely, using impasto, with palette knife as well as brush. The image is harmoniously conceived, created with confidence. A Northwest artist’s ever present attention to atmosphere is evident. Because of the maritime humidity, there is little definition in the middle ground. The tall metal tower in the center right disappears in the haze. Jensen’s small, sharp brushstrokes are prominent, and she emphasizes the reflections of light between the sky and the water. Indeed, there is considerable dissolution of forms in the painting, especially of the towers, and there is no doubt that Jensen can be characterized as a Northwest Impressionist.

In articles and exhibition catalogs that address Jensen, her seven years in Europe are treated in summary fashion. None explores the implications of her particular boarding school education. Jensen and her sisters were enrolled in Notre Dame de Sion, usually specified to have been a “French” or “Parisian” boarding school. More accurately, Notre Dame de Sion should have been described as a Roman Catholic boarding school for girls in Antwerp, Belgium, operated by a religious order that originated in Paris. Notre Dame de Sion had the unusual

mission to improve understanding between Christians and Jews. Its founding in 1844 is traced to Théodore Ratisbonne (1802-1884), a Strasbourg Jew who became interested in Christianity, and to his brother Alphonse, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1843.²⁶³ As a teaching order, the nuns provided instruction in the language of their pupils. Antwerp is a Dutch speaking city. However, in the nineteenth century, the upper and educated classes in Antwerp spoke French, and Notre Dame de Sion's instructional language was French because it catered to students from wealthy families in Belgium and abroad. Located in the center of an important port where Dutch was spoken in the streets, it provided a more complex environment than "French boarding school" would imply.²⁶⁴

Jensen took private lessons in art during her six years of residence in Antwerp. Toward the end of her time in Europe, Jensen's mother joined her for a year and took Jensen to Paris, where she enrolled in the Academy Julian and studied with Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921), one of its best known teachers in the academically prescribed styles of the nineteenth century. Her arrival and departure from Antwerp were equally precipitous. Jensen and her sisters were awakened one morning in Portland in 1907 at 6:00 AM by their mother, who announced that they were leaving immediately for Europe with an aunt, their mother having packed their bags the night before. During their years in Notre Dame de Sion in Antwerp, one of Dorothy's sisters

²⁶³ Notre Dame de Sion website. It is not a well-known religious order; it does not appear, for example, in the recent dictionary of religious orders, Gaston Duchet-Suchaux and Monique Duchet-Suchaux, *Les Ordres religieux*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2006.)

²⁶⁴ The late Sister Martha, a friend of mine, became one of the first female lawyers in Antwerp. Finding the practice of law unfulfilling, she decided to join the order of Notre Dame de Sion and become a nun, and she eventually became director of their schools throughout the Middle East with the mission to educate Muslim and Jewish girls. My sister in law, Sylviane Geelhand de Merxem, married Sister Martha's brother, Baron Jack Delbeke. Jack and his sister were born in London, where their family had taken refuge during World War I, and their parents called them Jack and Jill. When Jill entered the order of Notre Dame de Sion, she took the name *Soeur Marthe*. Speaking English fluently from her childhood in England, as well as Dutch and French, and taking account of her legal education and experience in the practice of law, this impressive background surely contributed to Sister Martha's career as an administrator within the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion. It is regrettable that Jensen never reminisced in print about the effect of her European education on her career as an artist.

decided to join the order as a nun and entered the convent. Just before World War I, some Dolph relatives visited Antwerp in 1914 and asked Dorothy and her other sister to meet them in the port of Antwerp to say good-bye. According to Jensen, “before they knew what was happening, they had been shanghaied.”²⁶⁵ Taken on board ship without any luggage, all their possessions, including Dorothy’s paintings, were left behind in Antwerp and never recovered. Jensen seemed to attribute this unseemly and hasty departure to the threat of war, but it reads to me more like the family was worried by the threat of the remaining two sisters being shanghaied as nuns.

Upon her return to Oregon in 1914, Jensen studied portraiture in Portland with Sydney Bell; she also studied with Harry Wentz. Working at the Schneider Gallery in Seattle in 1917, she met Lloyd Jensen, a frame maker employed at the gallery. They were married in 1919.²⁶⁶ A photo of Jensen that appeared in the press shortly after her marriage is figure 66. A beautiful young woman, her wistful look is enhanced by the rose at her breast and the lacy gown worn many years before by her mother on stage in New York.²⁶⁷



Figure 66. Newspaper photograph of Dorothy Dolph Jensen

²⁶⁵“Walk a Little Faster,” *Seattle Times*, October 18, 1936, 32.

²⁶⁶ David Martin, *An Enduring Legacy: Women Painters of Washington, 1930-2005* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005): 36.

²⁶⁷ “Wears Quaint Gown...Mrs. Jensen [in] stage gown worn by her mother thirty years ago when, as Augusta Armstrong, she appeared in ‘A Fair Rebel’ ...at the Old Fourteenth Street Theater in New York City,” undated newspaper photo, c. 1920, Martin-Zambito archive.

Jensen's participation in the Seattle Fine Arts Society "annuals," which had begun in 1914, permits inferences about competing demands of career and motherhood, and what she believed were her most successful subjects of painting. Jensen exhibited one portrait at the Seattle Fine Arts Society annual in 1920. In 1921, she exhibited another portrait and a genre scene, one priced at \$40 and the other at \$150. (Until 1927, prices were listed only once—for the 1921 show—in the Society's brochure.) Among the other artists discussed in this dissertation, Forkner exhibited five seascapes and landscapes priced from \$40 to \$100 in 1921, Keller three landscapes from \$150 to \$300, and Gustin five landscapes and seascapes from \$150-\$800. Jensen's work was thus priced in the middle. (Gustin always priced his paintings far above everyone else.) Jensen did not exhibit again until 1930, when she submitted one portrait specified "not for sale." Jensen returned with two portraits in 1932, one NFS, the other priced at only \$30. Jensen next exhibited in 1936, a watercolor landscape listed at \$75; in 1938, she sent another watercolor landscape, this time at \$60, and in 1940, another at \$45.²⁶⁸ All in all, Jensen had a relatively slim exhibition record at the Fine Arts Society (SAM after 1932). During the period 1920-1940, Jensen exhibited a total of 9 works compared to Forkner's 60, Gustin's 26, Stephens's 26 (1920-1929 only), and Keller's 25 (1920-1930 only). The expense of sending paintings from Oregon to Seattle, and presumably the small number of sales that resulted, must have discouraged Keller and Stephens after the onset of the Depression. Consistent with what the public could afford during the Depression, Jensen switched her submissions to the annual exhibitions from oils to watercolors, and decreased her prices as time passed. For the first fifteen years, almost all her submissions were portraits; afterwards, they were all landscapes. The Jensen's had only one child, Doris Jensen Carmin (1920-2002). Jensen's absence from the exhibition lists at the Fine Arts Society annuals from 1921 to 1930 were probably related to her

²⁶⁸ This data is taken from a spreadsheet of Seattle Fine Arts Society exhibitions, SAM Library archive.

role as a mother and homemaker during that period. In fact, a keyword search of the *Seattle Times* reveals only one article that mentioned Jensen during the 1920's, in connection with an art show in West Seattle in 1925, where she exhibited one work.²⁶⁹ Her predilection for exhibiting portraits in the Fine Arts Society annuals may have stemmed from her studies in portraiture with Sidney Bell after she returned from Europe, and may have been the type of work for which she considered herself to be most proficient during her early career.



Figure 67. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, “Lake Union.”

As has been noted, Jensen exhibited only watercolors at the SAM annuals during the latter half of the 1930's, and a good example of her talent in watercolor is “Lake Union,” figure 67. The bridge in the distance is University Bridge (formerly Roosevelt Bridge), a draw bridge with a central span that opens and fixed arches on either side. The freighter belching smoke has probably paused to pick up its pilot from the small boat alongside before departing for Puget

²⁶⁹ “Art Club Pays Tribute to Mrs. Baker,” *Seattle Times*, March 15, 1925, 46.

Sound and ports unknown. Jensen has a vivid sense of color, having used virtually every color in her watercolor kit, mostly pure, saturated colors. Is the extreme coloration, Fauvist in its intensity, Jensen's concession to Modernism? In any case, the image is noticeably Northwest Impressionist in its subtle understanding of mist, the ships in the distance almost merging into the far hillside, which itself presents no more detail than the clouds above.

Other inferences about Jensen's choice of subjects can be made from the inventory of her work belonging to her daughter Doris at the time of Doris's death in 2002.²⁷⁰ Of the 163 paintings and prints in the list, only 18 were identified as portraits. Seven of the eighteen were said to be portraits of Doris, and ten were estimated to have "no value" because they would appeal to family members only. Thus, judging from the description of her works that remained in the family, portraits constituted a small proportion, and many were personal mementos of her only child. The large majority of the works were landscapes, which thus appear to have become Jensen's preferred subject of painting as she matured as an artist, consistent with other Northwest Impressionists.

As noted earlier, Jensen was one of the founding members of Women Painters of Washington in 1930, and most of the press's attention to Jensen occurred in the context of that organization. The earliest mention happened in 1932, but Jensen was merely named as an exhibitor (of portraits) and as a member.²⁷¹ Although there are nearly 300 such references in the *Seattle Times* after 1932, they provide little insight into critics' and Jensen's ideas about her art. Jensen made an effort to exhibit publicly. In October, 1933, the Northwest Art Galleries

²⁷⁰ Anita Carmin-Tomisser, "Inventory of art in the possession of Doris Jensen Carmin," October 2, 2003, Martin-Zambito archive.

²⁷¹ "Artists of Washington to Exhibit," *Seattle Times*, July 31, 1932, 14.

provided her a one week show²⁷², and two months later, her paintings were hung in the Weaver's Inn in Seattle.²⁷³ In 1934, Jensen was awarded first prize among the paintings exhibited by Women's Artists of Washington at SAM. A full length photograph of Jensen was published that included her winning painting, but the photographer's emphasis was on Jensen, and little can be discerned about the painting. The article does not give its title, and nothing about Jensen or her work appears in the text.²⁷⁴ On January, 10, 1935, a piece appeared on Polynesian art at SAM, and a reception held to preview the exhibition. Jensen's photo appeared in the article, but her only mention in the text was as one of many attendees.²⁷⁵ (Did the fact that Jensen was photogenic deflect attention from her art?) In May, 1935, Women Painters of Washington offered Jensen the second one-man show they organized at the Washington Athletic Club. The Seattle Times article was perfunctory, adding the information that Jensen had studied etching with Eustace Ziegler, presumably recently, and that she shared a studio at 1105 Seneca Street with her husband, Lloyd Jensen, a "wood carver."²⁷⁶ Jensen's artistic relationship with her husband was surely significant to them both, and it is regrettable that nothing seems to have been recorded on the subject. Lloyd Jensen is remembered today as Seattle's premier picture frame maker of hand carved frames, and many of Jensen's paintings—like figure 70—were framed by him. *The Town Crier* published in 1936 a dry point by Jensen, "Old Ironsides," an image of the warship from the days of sailing ships, but there was no discussion of paintings or her prints in the text.²⁷⁷

²⁷² "Dorothy Jensen's Art to be Shown," *Seattle Times*, October 8, 1933, 5.

²⁷³ *Seattle Times*, November 26, 1933, 17.

²⁷⁴ Virginia Boren, "Artists Given Awards," *Seattle Times*, August 8, 1934, 11.

²⁷⁵ Virginia Boren, "At the Art Preview," *Seattle Times*, January 10, 1935, 10.

²⁷⁶ "U. W. Artists Hold Second One-Man-Show," *Seattle Times*, May 22, 1935, 12. (One speculates that the person responsible for headlines read the article carelessly and inferred that the artists were associated with the University of Washington!)

²⁷⁷ "Old Ironsides," *Town Crier*, May, 1936, 7.

In 1938, Jensen was granted a one-man show in her childhood home town of Corvallis, Oregon, at Oregon State College (now University). Although covered by a long article in the local paper, it must have copied her press release, as it summarized her education and exhibition history, without describing or commenting on the thirty five oils and water colors in the exhibition.²⁷⁸ In January, 1939, in connection with a one-man show in the fine arts gallery of the Frederick & Nelson Department Store, Jensen was interviewed by a Seattle Times reporter designated by her initials, V. B., surely Virginia Boren, who wrote regular arts columns for the paper. Described by V. B. as “a small, vital person, who brims over with personality and love of her work,” Jensen explained what inspired her to draw “The Big Tree,” a sketch that appealed to the reporter. “That’s the one I call my coffee cup sketch. Honestly, I saw it in my coffee cup...I looked in my cup and saw a landscape with many trees...I turned the cup around and I saw a surrealist bit: an old harpie (sic) standing on a pile of trash and trying to push me down in the rubbish. I quickly turned the cup around and then came this landscape I’ve painted, with the big tree...The rest of my pictures are painted from actual scenes and people...right in Seattle.” The reporter concluded that “it’s a good show, a show of brilliant coloring. It has landscapes, wistfully reminiscent of spring...[and] flowers that make you rush out to buy a bunch of violets.”²⁷⁹

One senses yet again the reluctance of art critics to take seriously a member of an “amateur” group, even a person as active in the arts community as Jensen. V. B. avoids using her own full name, and the metaphor of the coffee cup reduces the reporter’s dialogue with the

²⁷⁸ “Socially Speaking: Artist Returning to Show Paintings in Her Home City,” *Corvallis Daily Gazette-Times*, April 14, 1938, 4.

²⁷⁹ V. B., “Mrs. Jensen Inspired by Coffee Cup Figures,” *Seattle Times*, January 25, 1939, 12. As described in the chapter on Paul Gustin, Virginia Boren reviewed his 1933 one-man show at the Seattle Art Museum. Her review emphasized the proper care of orchids more than Gustin’s depictions of flowers. Judging Ms. Boren as a reviewer based only on that article, one would characterize her observations as superficial in the extreme.

artist to idle chat over a cup of coffee. Jensen seems to have joined the game by inventing the story about images in the swirling coffee, including the harpy trying to pull Jensen into a pile of rubbish. Or was Virginia Boren the harpy, and did Jensen anticipate that Boren intended to trivialize the interview, just as prior *Seattle Times* coverage of Jensen's art had been so superficial? On this reading, there are two levels of parody in Jensen's story. The primary level is Jensen's parody of the supposedly serious nature of the artistic process in her visualization of a landscape with trees in the patterns of cream in a cup of coffee. At this level, Jensen included herself, the artist, as the target of her parody. But there is a second level in Jensen's anecdote of the harpy, a witch-like female mythological figure, trying to pull the artist into the harpy's rubbish pile. If the harpy represents Virginia Boren, an arts journalist who failed to take female artists seriously, then the parody can be "re-contextualized" to target Boren. This is my preferred interpretation, one that will be developed at some length in other contexts in the next chapter on iconography and parody. If so, Jensen's parodist intention probably backfired, as once again, her work failed to receive the same serious consideration by newspaper art journalists as had the work of her contemporaries Stephens and Gustin during the 1920's.

In January, 1940, Jensen held a one-man show in the Little Gallery of the Frederick & Nelson Department Store.²⁸⁰ In an interview, Jensen explained that she had gone almost entirely into landscape painting because "it is more restful and healthful. One works out of doors and one is free to paint what she sees. Portrait work sometimes is very trying, particularly if a subject does not see eye to eye with the painter."²⁸¹ (In 1933, Jensen, described as a "dainty, little woman brimming with personality," was quoted with a similar remark. "Trees can't talk

²⁸⁰ "Heads Artists' Group," *Seattle Times*, January 11, 1940.

²⁸¹ "There'll be a Showing," *Seattle P-I*, January, 1940, Martin-Zambito archive.

back to you like live models, that's why I find them restful to do.”²⁸²) These snippets of commentary on Jensen's views on art in 1933 and 1940 constitute virtually the entirety of what the Seattle press published on Jensen's ideas and experience.²⁸³ In September, 1940, she won first prize in watercolors in the fine arts exhibition at the Washington state fair, beating Edgar Forkner, who was second.²⁸⁴ Jensen's winning picture was published in the newspaper, a realistic depiction of a farm, with a haystack or pile of grain in the center. Jensen's palpable concern with realism demonstrates that, by 1940, Jensen had adopted the preferred “WPA” style, as had other Northwest artists like Pieter Van Veen. The painting remained in her daughter's inventory as no. 35, “Farm,” 22 x 31”, figure 68. Jensen's twenty year commitment to American Impressionism had ended.

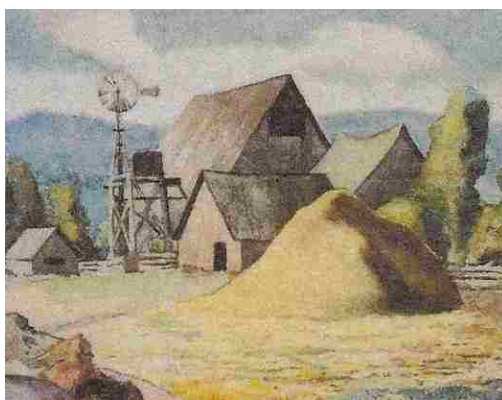


Figure 68. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, “The Farm.”

In 1942, Jensen received a one-man show at SAM, her first in her own name and not as a member of Women Painters of Washington.²⁸⁵ An undated, handwritten note by Kenneth Callahan is filed in the Martin-Zambito archive, along with other documents on this show. There

²⁸² “With Virginia Boren,” *Seattle Times*, August 3, 1933, 12.

²⁸³ In the archive of Jensen's letters at Martin-Zambito Fine Art, there is an unsigned, handwritten note entitled “Thoughts” dated July, 1937, that ends “To the heart that stays loyal, And keeps at his task--The Recording of beauty in everyday life.” Perhaps that was Jensen's motto.

²⁸⁴ “Seattle Artists Win Puyallup Fair Awards,” *Seattle Times*, September 15, 1940.

²⁸⁵ “Art Museum,” *Seattle Times*, June 1, 1942, 9.

were no worthwhile press reviews, merely perfunctory recitals of education and prior exhibitions. Callahan, a leading Northwest Mystic artist, was in my opinion the most insightful critic of Northwest art of his era. He was not enthusiastic about American Impressionist or WPA style realist artists. His remarks on Jensen imply an effort to say something laudatory without endorsing her art personally. “Good painting is always the result of serious concerted effort, humility of approach to one’s subject, and an open mind—these are the characteristics of Mrs. Jensen, and her paintings show the results. They are decorative, charming and, more importantly, sincere, personal observations of nature.”²⁸⁶



Figure 69. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, “Mount Rainier.”

One year after Jensen’s death, she had a one-man show at the Frye in 1978, whose notice of the exhibition was not dissimilar in tone to Callahan’s somewhat dismissive note thirty-five years earlier. “Her paintings, watercolors and oils, are uncomplicated by detail and show her

²⁸⁶ Kenneth Callahan, undated, signed note, Martin-Zambito archive.

appreciation and familiarity with the Northwest.”²⁸⁷ In 1995, she was one of three artists of Scandinavian descent whose works were exhibited at the Northwest Heritage Museum in Seattle. An article in *Western Viking* paid more attention to her prints than to her painting. Jensen “was one of the few artists in Seattle producing intaglio prints during the 1930’s. She was the only woman to have her own etching press—imported from France—during that time.”²⁸⁸ To illustrate its article, *Western Viking* chose Jensen’s “Mount Rainier,” figure 69, an oil rather than a print. The mountain is framed by hemlocks on the right and left and, adhering to the conventions of art school, a path is shown leading toward the mountain to facilitate the viewer’s imaginary entrance into the picture. Although evidencing the humility and seriousness underlined by Callahan, the subject does not seem to have stimulated Jensen’s “open mind” to the same extent as her waterfront scenes of Seattle, figures 65 and 67. Although the *facture* of Impressionism is present, Jensen made no particular effort to depict the Northwest atmosphere, apart from a few clouds that obscure portions of Mount Rainier’s face. The clouds blend so well with the snow cover, both depicted with broad broken brushstrokes, that it takes a second look to see them.

“Boiler Bay,” figure 70, is another Jensen seascape, this time the Oregon coast about midway to California. Jensen’s attraction to bright colors places this oil within the aesthetic of “Lake Union,” figure 67. Jensen has unified the canvas with an almost “irrational” blue-green that permeates the vegetation, the water, and the sky. The sense of freedom, even of abandon, of Jensen’s brushstrokes is particularly visible in the bank on the lower left.

²⁸⁷ *Frye Vues*, December, 1978.

²⁸⁸ “Dorothy Dolph Jensen, Ebba Rapp and Jean Johanson: Remembering Three Early Seattle Artists of Scandinavian Descent,” *Western Viking*, June 30, 1995, B.



Figure 70. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, “Boiler Bay.”

“Boiler Bay” provides an opportunity to admire Lloyd Jensen’s frames, as it has a very typical Jensen design in its geometric art deco pattern carved into the four corners of the frame, and a gray reserve between the liner and the outside frame. “Boiler Bay” was one of Doris Jensen Carmin’s favorite canvases painted by her mother; before Doris’s demise, she gave it to her son, who owned it until its recent sale.

It is regrettable that Jensen did not receive more serious attention from the art community in the Northwest.²⁸⁹ Her art education and time spent in Europe occurred earlier in her life and lasted longer than the European experiences of Gustin, Stephens, and Forkner, and that alone could have led the Northwest art community to take an interest in her work. It was surely the

²⁸⁹ In a 1971 article on Mark Tobey, an interview with Jensen was quoted from 1940. She had taken a class with Tobey at the Cornish School at an unspecified date (after 1923, when Tobey moved to Seattle.) She credited Tobey with freeing her from “the idea that things had to be perfect.” The article described Jensen as a “housewife,” highlighting the fact that her husband Lloyd “framed paintings for so many of the well-known painters.” Thus, by 1971, six years before her death, Jensen had been forgotten as an artist. “Art Northwest: a day with Mark Tobey,” *Seattle Star*, March, 1971, 5.

fact that Jensen was out of the public eye during the 1920's that limited her reputation. The period of preeminence of Northwest Impressionism was the approximately seventeen years from 1911 to 1928, from Charles McKim's celebration in Portland in 1911 for bringing what was "new" in art to the Northwest, to Gustin's and Forkner's exclusion from the Seattle Fine Arts Society annual show in 1928 as too "conservative". As a style, Impressionism dominated the art scene in Portland and Seattle during that period, where it was embraced as the vehicle for Modernism in art. Unfortunately for Jensen, although she may have continued to paint at home with baby Doris during the 1920's, she was invisible to the public and her peers until 1930. By the time she exhibited again, American Impressionism was on the wane, and Jensen was further marginalized by associating primarily with other female artists, many of them amateurs. Her style was distinctive, and her extremes of coloration were original; she deserved better.

Chapter VIII

Iconography and Parody

The “Western sublime” is used by art historians to describe the work of artists like Thomas Moran (1837-1926), who painted the great natural monuments of the American west in canvases that were themselves monumental in size. “Moran denies that he is in any sense a topographer; he tends, rather, ‘toward idealization.’ Unlike Frederic Church, celebrated for the precision of description in his panoramic views of exotic scenery, Moran seeks to blend observation with expression, description with feeling. In this aim, he aligns himself with a newer sensibility that exalts poetry and subjectivity over prosaic fidelity to surface appearances. Critics almost invariably stood in awe before the immensity and energy of Moran’s huge paintings, which seemed in their very size to embody the vastness of the West.”²⁹⁰ There are elements of the western sublime embedded in the work of the Northwest Impressionists, particularly the blend of observation with expression, and description with feeling. Moran’s tendency toward idealization refers to his willingness to rearrange the specific elements of the landscape to achieve a more harmonious whole that better reflects its emotional impact on the viewer. Clyde Keller explicitly defended the reordering of nature in his canvases to better “frame” the scene and, although he could name every element of the landscape to a viewer, he omitted all such information from the titles of his landscapes, preferring expressions of mood or ambiance.²⁹¹ Viewers and critics of Northwest Impressionists would rarely have stood in open-mouthed awe before their paintings of the Northwest landscape. For one thing, a large work by a Northwest Impressionist would be 24 x 32”, a small fraction of one of Moran’s grand landscapes. For

²⁹⁰ Burns and David, *American Art to 1900*, 631.

²⁹¹ References for such assertions are found in the chapters on the artists earlier in this dissertation.

another, a sense of awe would most likely arise from the viewer's reflections on the meaning of the image, such as a viewer's recognition that Gustin's great diagonals of Douglas firs suggested the columns of a Gothic cathedral. The canvas itself is too small and muted to project directly the vastness and magnificence of the scene in the fashion of a Moran.

The predilection of Northwest Impressionists for painting the tallest mountains of Oregon, Washington, and Alaska has been explored at length. Paul Gustin was best known for his paintings of Mount Rainier and, whenever his art was exhibited, it tended to be views of Mount Rainier that were requested by the organizer of the show, and that were published in newspaper reviews. Edgar Forkner and Dorothy Dolph Jensen also painted Mount Rainier, although less frequently. In Portland, Charles McKim depicted Mount Hood in his grandest canvases, and Clara Stephens not only exhibited her canvases of Mount Hood on several occasions, but she wrote at length about Mount Hood and its female consort, Mount Saint Helens, garbed in an ever changing repertory of feminine fashion, such as ermine coats, veils, and wraps. Interestingly, it was only Clyde Keller—the most prolific Oregon landscapist—who generally forsook Mount Hood (although he painted it once or twice) in favor of lesser known mountains, probably because he did not wish the viewer's fixed ideas of place to impede reception of Keller's desired mood or ambiance. How could Keller have titled a view of Mount Hood anything other than "Mount Hood," given that every resident of Portland sees it every clear day of the year?

Northwest artists were not insensible to the idea of the mountain sublime, but they could no longer achieve it with huge canvases that directly awed the viewer, as that fashion had passed. Their use of Impressionist techniques that softened outlines, smudged foregrounds, eliminated detail, and dissolved forms increased the opportunity for poetry and feeling at the expense of

stimulating open-mouthed awe and mindless wonder. Paul Gustin declared that he wished to achieve a higher level in Western art through a new school of landscape painting that would evolve its own expression for the forms of nature. Charles McKim hoped to provide a new impetus to American artistic expression, with freshness and spontaneity, in depicting unique parts of nature like the West's untouched forests. McKim sought one *big thing* that would create an emotional response in the viewer. Gustin spoke at greater length—and with less directness—of what he hoped to achieve. Gustin seemed to express a view of human existence akin to Jansenism, a Catholic school of thought that emphasized original sin and human frailty. *Nous sommes peu de choses*—we struggle to find our place in the divine scheme of things—to paraphrase a French Jansenist motto—might well describe Gustin's vision of “climbing” or “outpost” trees that fight to survive in the hostile environment of Mount Rainier. Gustin veiled Mount Rainier in thick mist in order to force the viewer to contemplate the forlorn climbing trees, surrogates for humanity, and to marvel at their continued struggle for existence. Gustin rarely pictured humanity explicitly, but it was always present symbolically in his paintings of Mount Rainier, sharing the stage with the sublime mountain, each with its own place in nature.

Apart from any relationship with humanity, the tallest mountain was entitled to respect for its size alone. In terms of visual impact, the great volcanoes of the Northwest and Alaska are among the most impressive mountains in the world. Although Mount Rainier is the fifth highest mountain in the lower forty-eight states, it is within about 200 feet in height of the tallest. However, Mount Rainier has much more visual impact than its taller cousins in California and Colorado because their bases are already very high, over one mile in the case of Colorado. From their bases to the summits, they are much shorter than Mount Rainier or Mount Hood, whose bases rest close to sea level. In fact, Mount Rainier's “topographical prominence” exceeds that

of K2 in the Himalayas. Mount McKinley's visual impressiveness is unmatched in the world, as it is the tallest mountain worldwide when measured from its base, also near sea level, to its summit. Furthermore, all these iconic Northwest and Alaska volcanoes stand alone, enhancing their topographical prominence, rather than being an integral part of a mountain range, and therefore sometimes hard to distinguish from peaks nearby.

Gustin called Mount Rainier "king" in his most renowned image, "King above the Clouds," figure 26. Stephens mentally clothed Oregon's tallest mountain in ermine, but implied a male identity by her coquettish references to Mount Hood's companion, Mount Saint Helens. Stephens's choice of genders is not surprising, as Mount Hood is more phallic in form than any other great Northwest mountain. In comparison, Mount Rainier is shaped like a pyramid of ice cream scoops, and Mount McKinley like a pile of enormous ice cubes. Although located in southern Washington, Mount Saint Helens is nearly as visible in Portland as Mount Hood. Before its eruption in 1982, Mount Saint Helens was a symmetrical cone, more perfect in shape than Mount Fuji, its beauty befitting the regal feminine garb in which Clara Stephens dressed it day to day. Although Mount McKinley might look more like a blockhouse than a tower, it rises so abruptly from its surroundings, and its massive size is so overpowering, that it certainly constitutes a regal presence, more threatening than reassuring, as is evident in Belmore Browne's "portrait" discussed below.

Sydney Laurence painted a few very large landscapes that merit comparison to those of Thomas Moran, for example "Mount McKinley from the Rapids of the Tokosheetna," figure 2, which is nearly twelve feet wide. According to Kesler Woodward, it is a "studio construction,

[with] ambitious scale, careful construction, and delicate handling of color and form.”²⁹²

Woodward does not explore or develop an iconography for Laurence, but Laurence’s depictions of Mount McKinley seem to fit as easily within the royal symbolism articulated by Washington and Oregon artists as within Thomas Moran’s “Western sublime” when Laurence’s largest canvases are considered.



Figure 71. Belmore Browne, “Mount McKinley, the South Face.”

Belmore Browne painted a different view of Mount McKinley in his “Mount McKinley, the South Face,” figure 71. Indeed, Browne is the only artist among Laurence, Ziegler, and himself who actually saw Mount McKinley up close from multiple vantage points. Browne’s close acquaintance with the mountain of course occurred during the many months expended in his three expeditions to climb it. Laurence and Ziegler viewed it from a greater distance, and their favored representations of the mountain appear to be chosen in a manner to permit easy

²⁹² Woodward, *Sydney Laurence*, 20.

variation of the foreground so that each of their many renditions can be somewhat different.²⁹³

The incredible human effort expended in Browne's three expeditions to Mount McKinley suggests that he understood the mountain as a metaphor for struggle, not on behalf of suffering humanity like Gustin's outpost trees, but by the would-be conquering explorer. "Always dominating man's endeavor is the struggle against the forces of nature...and when all is said, this is the world-old magnet that draws alike scientist, explorer, prospector, mountaineer, and hunter. This was the force that brought men who joined our ventures."²⁹⁴ Bradford Washburn, a more recent explorer of Mount McKinley, has written that mountaineers admire Browne and his fellow climbers "for the very quality of their undertaking, their daring spirit and their amazing determination. In their tragic defeat, they displayed a quality of fairness and nobility that is still applauded...throughout the world."²⁹⁵ Their third and most successful expedition to Mount McKinley, led by Browne, was forced to turn back because of storms 125 feet from the summit. Browne's victory consisted in finding the standard route to the summit and in proving that it was practicable. His defeat was not reaching the summit on any of his three ascents. It is perhaps for this failure that Browne rarely depicted Mount McKinley in his many years of plein air painting. Taking account of Browne's determined, but perhaps to him futile, efforts, Gustin's iconography combining the majesty of the mountain and the struggles of bent-over humanity can find an echo in Browne's painting. The South face of Mount McKinley in figure 71 is viewed from across a forbidding bed of ice. There is nothing that suggests a path on and up the mountain. Browne thus omitted any reference to his notoriety in finding the best route to the summit. Although the

²⁹³ Len Braarud, the leading dealer of Laurence's work and a student of the region, has told me that the biographies of Laurence by Wendy Jones and Jeanne Laurence—listed in the bibliography—are filled with "fabrications." Nevertheless, Laurence had prospected to the south of Mount McKinley in 1906 and "knew that terrain as well as Browne and certainly better than Ziegler." Email from Braarud, June 2, 2012.

²⁹⁴ Belmore Browne, *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913, new ed. 1956), vii.

²⁹⁵ Bradford Washburn, "Foreword," Robert H. Bates, *Mountain Man: The Story of Belmore Browne*, (Clinton, NJ: Amwell Press, 1988), 7.

summit is bathed in bright light, two dark ominous rocky outcroppings frame the South face, implicitly warning the climber of the dangers ahead. Clouds swirl from the level of the observer all the way above the top of the mountain, close to fifty percent higher than Mount Rainier. Browne's portrait of the mountain is fearsome and foreboding. In contrast, Laurence's Mount McKinley is viewed from afar, at a point where thoughts of climbing the Mountain would not be paramount. Browne's viewpoint is that of an explorer who has reached the place where the trek to the mountain has ended, and the explorer must either turn around and go home or commence what seems an impossible ascent. The "tragedy" of the explorer's failure-to-be places him in the company of Gustin's bent-over climbing trees, which are also destined never to reach the summit.

Eustace Ziegler's "Mount McKinley with a Prospector," figure 72, is one of many versions of what Ziegler called "his Alaska potboilers," which he created in his studio using a grid that allowed him to transfer his preferred composition of the mountain to a canvas of any size.²⁹⁶ Figure 72 is 16 x 20", but Ziegler could scale the image up to a length of nearly six feet.²⁹⁷ I have seen a number of these canvases in person and in reproductions, and Ziegler's grid technique makes them all close cousins. Indeed, Ziegler can be considered a precursor of Andy Warhol's conception of the making of art as akin to a manufacturing process that results in series of "multiples," differing principally in color in Warhol's case. Ziegler of course worked alone, not supported by a team of assistants who actually produced or manufactured the work, and his finished products differed in foreground detail and the amount of care devoted to the application of paint. The larger the "Mount McKinley," the looser the brushstrokes used to

²⁹⁶ Estill Curtis Pennington, "The Seekers and the Sought: Notes on the Pictures of Eustace P. Ziegler," in Woodward, *Spirit of the North*, 52-54.

²⁹⁷ Ziegler's "Mount McKinley with pack train" illustrated in Woodward, *Spirit of the North*, 54-55, is 48 x 114".

produce it. Yet the most important part of the work, the massive mountain itself, is essentially the same image no matter the size of the canvas, just as Marilyn Monroe's facial expression remains constant in Warhol's multiples.



Figure 72, Eustace Ziegler, "Mount McKinley with a Prospector."

Ziegler's iconography of great mountains is related to that of Laurence and Browne, but it is both more complex and more mundane. His Mount McKinley is business above all. It is hard business and hard labor. In the foreground of his Mount McKinley potboilers, Ziegler tended to paint prospectors, hunters, or pack horses. If the latter, instead of the prospector in figure 72, the pack horses would be seen resting on the promontory, with Mount McKinley in the distance. On other occasions, instead of the promontory, Ziegler created a wide, flat, wet traverse that the pack horses splash across. These foreground subjects—unless they are artists like Ziegler and his sketching friend Ted Lambert—are rarely represented gazing at Mount McKinley. Instead, they are depicted resting, staring aimlessly into the distance, but not at the

mountain. Ziegler represents the men and horses of Alaska going about their business of prospecting for minerals, hunting game, or carrying provisions. Mount McKinley looms over them, dominating their puny presence, but they are oblivious, contemplating the hard work ahead. Susan Larkin has listed the strategies used by American Impressionists to diminish the impact of sacrifice signified by the depiction of hard labor, such as distancing, concealment and erasure.²⁹⁸ Ziegler has chosen yet another strategy, what might be called intermittency of labor, i.e., choosing periods of rest instead of periods of hard work.

“Mount McKinley with a Prospector,” figure 72, illustrates Ziegler’s style as it developed in the 1930’s. Instead of the broad, broken brush strokes of “Chief Shakes’ Cabin,” figure 20, dating to about 1922 after Ziegler’s return to Alaska following a year of study at Yale, his Mount McKinley in figure 72 is constructed as much with a palette knife as a brush. The blue-green geometric construction of ‘ice cubes’ that is Ziegler’s “Mount McKinley with a Prospector” is carefully worked up from the promontory in the foreground. Ziegler painted most of the foreground indistinctly, except for the lone tree, a companion for the lonely prospector taking a break from his search for minerals. It is a very skilled construction; one that Ziegler had had many opportunities to perfect as it remained his most sought after subject.”²⁹⁹ Apart from its general avoidance of detail, there is not much American Impressionism remaining in this “Mount McKinley with a Prospector,” so tightly is it constructed of small, disciplined brush strokes and points of the palette knife. In its blue-green color scheme for the foreground and mountain, it too

²⁹⁸ Susan G. Larkin, *American Impressionism: The Beauty of Work*, Greenwich, CN: Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, 2006, 56.

²⁹⁹ Figure 72 is undated, as is most of Ziegler’s work. It bears a label from the Golden Nugget Shop in Juneau, which closed in 1939, indicating a prior date of execution. My brother, an artist in Los Angeles, has viewed collections of Northwest Impressionists with me, and chose this canvas as his favorite work. He admired it not for its mimetic properties or its iconography, but for Ziegler’s painterly skill in representing the great mountain as an intricate pile of something like blue-green ice cubes.

achieves a synthesis of American Impressionism and Tonalism, spurred on of course by the imperatives of the largely monochromatic Alaskan landscape.

Laurence and Ziegler painted Mount McKinley so often because their dealers and customers demanded it. It was their business decision, much as the activities of the men depicted in Ziegler's many "Mount McKinley's" were the result of their decisions to try to earn a living in Alaska as independent businessmen through carrying supplies, hunting, or prospecting. Ziegler's iconography can thus be conceived as the businesses of Alaska, his own and those of the subjects of his paintings. America itself has long been conceived as a symbol of business, indeed crass business, epitomized by such novels as Sinclair Lewis's *Babbit* of 1922. According to art historian Nancy Anderson, "the American West functioned as both an iconic symbol of national identity and a resource to be used in transforming the nation from a wilderness republic into an industrial power."³⁰⁰ Anderson's symbolism linking national pride and national economic strength explains much of the attraction of Laurence's and Ziegler's "Mount McKinley's" to potential customers. Purchasing a Laurence or Ziegler "Mount McKinley" represented the symbolic possession of an important part of America's patrimony. This great mountain was an *elevated* symbol of America, literally and figuratively, permitting its acquirer to transcend the dark side of American economic strength exposed by the novels of Lewis and other muckrakers. Furthermore, an expensive image—a fine painting—was emblematic in the 1920's and 1930's of its owner's ability to visit Alaska as a tourist, indeed a wealthy tourist, and return with a costly souvenir. Mount McKinley in art thus symbolized the business of America in different ways: the hard business of earning a living in Alaska; a manifestation of American might; and the fruit of business success permitting the purchaser of the painting to travel and "possess" America's

³⁰⁰ Nancy K. Anderson, "The Western Landscape," in Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy, eds., *Reading American Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 210.

patrimony. The Northwest Impressionists achieved a multiple symbolism of iconic peaks that included variations on the mountain sublime, allied with related significations of business, work, and American might. It is a much richer iconography than the single signification developed by Brettell, discussed in Chapter III, linking French Impressionism and tourism.



Figure 73. Paul Gustin, “Mountain Climbing Trees, Rainier.”

Japanese woodblock prints had a decisive influence on the development of Impressionism in France and elsewhere, encouraging artists to depart from symmetrical, well ordered compositions, and to try new bird’s eye perspective. “To paint in a Japanese manner means to paint in a decidedly foreign, anti-rationalist style, with new colors, without shadow, and without single point perspective...The incorporation of lessons from Japanese color woodblock

prints...brought about new palettes [and] new compositions.”³⁰¹ During the same period in the 1920’s and early 1930’s that Impressionism became the dominant aesthetic in the Northwest, numerous artists, especially in Washington, took up woodblock prints. Paul Gustin “crossed-over” and created small color woodblock prints in the 1920’s. Figure 73 consists of three small color woodblock prints by Gustin, all of Mount Rainier. According to David Martin, Gustin learned techniques of etching in 1910 and woodblock printing later, only to abandon them in the 1930’s as he withdrew from an active exhibition schedule. Later in life, Gustin used his small woodblock prints as Christmas season greeting cards, entitling them “Mountain Climbing Trees, Rainier.” The three prints in figure 73 are miniature versions of Gustin’s personal iconography combining surrogate humanity and the great mountain, but their subject of snow and evergreens made them suitable for greeting cards, with a reminder of Gustin’s serious purpose in their title for those who might want to reflect further on what Gustin may have intended by his choice of words and image.

Other Washington artists devoted themselves primarily to woodblock prints, and there appears to have been a considerable amount of cross-fertilization between painters and print-makers. The Chase brothers and Elizabeth Colborne in the period 1925-1934 introduced aspects of Impressionism in their woodblocks. Among the “forgotten” artists of the Northwest, Waldo and Corwin Chase were perhaps the most idiosyncratic. The only extensive account of their activities is found in Corwin Chase’s memoir, *Teepee Fires*, of 1981, and it primarily involves sewing teepees and living outdoors.³⁰² According to Corwin, elder brother Waldo proposed they should live in teepees in wilderness areas of Western Washington and learn to make woodblock

³⁰¹ Gary Tinterow, “The Impressionist Landscape,” in Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, eds., *The Origins of Impressionism* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 233.

³⁰² W. Corwin Chase, *Teepee Fires*, (Burley, WA: Coffee Break Press, 1981).

prints using Japanese techniques. “In June, 1924, we undertook the project of learning to do wood blocks in the Oriental manner...[carving] our own designs on blocks of wood using this simple craft method which required no expensive press.”³⁰³ Having acquired F. Morley Fletcher’s textbook *Wood-block Printing as Practiced by the Japanese*, 1916, along with appropriate supplies from Japanese stores in Seattle, they studied the book and experimented painfully over the summer, completing and printing two full designs, one of which—“Mount Rainier, as seen from Lake Washington” (not identified or illustrated)—they printed in 80 copies to give away as publicity. In 1925, they set up their teepees in Glacier Basin on Mount Rainier and proceeded to create additional prints, selling some to tourists and hikers.³⁰⁴

Considering how proficient in woodblock printing the brothers became, this claim of being autodidacts has met with skepticism. “Fletcher [in his textbook] entered into the minutia of methodology...and only the truly dedicated could have slogged through it.”³⁰⁵ David Martin explains that they were instructed by the Japanese woodblock printer Kazuo Yamagishi, who offered a class to Seattle artists in 1927,³⁰⁶ although it is not mentioned in Chase’s memoir.

The Chase brothers published numerous prints, the first dated prints that I have seen being 1927. According to Corwin’s 1981 memoir, they typically pitched their teepees along the Hood Canal in the Olympic Peninsula to the west of Seattle, residing in them during the dry months, and retreating to Seattle in the winter. However, in a 1987 interview, Corwin said they lived primarily on Mount Rainier from 1924-1928.³⁰⁷ In 1930, Corwin married, and the memoir ends with his honeymoon with Dee at Aurora Lake in Mount Rainier National Park. The

³⁰³ Chase, 2.

³⁰⁴ Chase, 52.

³⁰⁵ Clive Cristy, *Art and the Aesthete: The Chase Brothers*, clivechristy.com

³⁰⁶ Martin-Zambito Fine Art, *Biography for Waldo Chase*, ask.art.com. The Chase family owns a Japanese woodblock print with an inscription indicating that it was given to the brothers by the Japanese instructor.

³⁰⁷ Julie Stagers, *W. Corwin Chase: Artist*, (Peninsula Life, August 12, 1987), B.

brothers used Japanese hand-made *Hosho* paper, and there is a suggestion that the difficulty in obtaining Japanese artisanal paper in the 1930's contributed to a slower rhythm of production of color woodblock prints.³⁰⁸ In any event, Corwin's memoir states that Corwin ceased living in teepees with his marriage.

This brief account of the Chase brothers is relevant for two reasons. As mentioned in the introduction, both used painterly techniques in their creation of woodblocks that are not part of the traditional Japanese woodblock vocabulary, but that seem inspired by Northwest Impressionism. For example, in "USS Louisville," figure 22, Waldo has carved horizontal broken "woodstrokes" in the portions of the wood blocks that represent water and seem to capture the effect of Impressionist brushstrokes, very much like those in Paul Gustin's "Nootka Island", figure 1. As each separate color requires a separate woodblock, and as Waldo used several colors for the water, Waldo would have been required to have carved the strokes for each color on separate blocks, while ensuring that all the strokes meshed perfectly when printed. In Waldo's "Seattle Skyline Silhouetted against Mount Rainier," 1927, figure 74, the horizontal

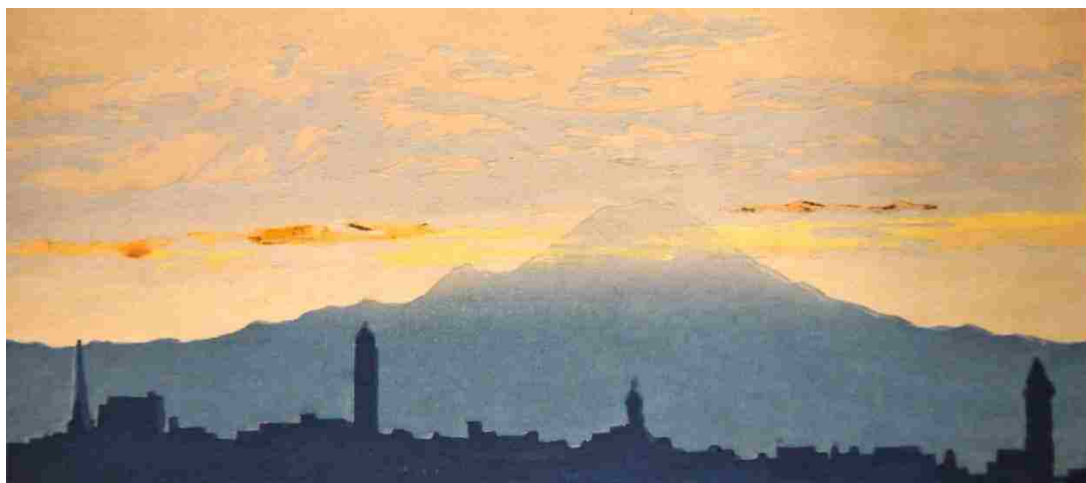


Figure 74. Waldo Chase, "Seattle Skyline Silhouetted against Mount Rainier."

³⁰⁸ Chase, 47.

bands of clouds that traverse the face of Mount Rainier offer multi-colored visual effects that imitate paintings of clouds and increase the illusion of depth. In contrast, traditional Japanese woodblock printing resulted in flat areas of monochromatic color that lessened the depth of the image and produced more of a decorative effect. At the time of the print's creation, Seattle had only one skyscraper, Smith Tower on the far right. The second structure from the right is the clock tower at Colman Dock on the waterfront. Prints or paintings by any artist of the period of the Seattle skyline are rare, and Waldo's woodblock combining the skyline and Mount Rainier is highly accomplished as well as visually striking in its Impressionist cloud effects. Dated 1927, its high quality implies that their training that year with a Japanese teacher supplied those technical elements in woodblock printing they had been unable to work out fully for themselves.

As for Corwin Chase, rather than finding inspiration in techniques of Impressionist brushstrokes, Corwin seems to have taken a cue from Paul Gustin's interview where he emphasized the climbing trees of Mount Rainier. In Corwin's "Sunset," figure 23, also dated 1927, the prominent mountain hemlocks in the foreground seem inspired by Gustin, as does Corwin's decision to veil the mountain in mist to such an extent that only a few of its features are visible. In the unlikely medium of woodblock prints, Corwin has taken Gustin's Impressionist vision of "King above the Clouds" and diminished the presence of the king, while augmenting the prominence of his subjects, the climbing trees. Once again, the Chase brothers had mastered all the elements of Japanese woodblock printing, the design (the only part performed by the great Japanese woodblock artists like Utagawa Hiroshige, 1797-1858), the carving of the woodblocks, and the printing process, each of which was performed by different specialists in Japan.

The primary relevance of the Chase brothers in this chapter is their devotion to Mount Rainier. Fifty percent of their prints that I have seen depict Mount Rainier or some part of

Mount Rainier National Park, like Aurora Peak where Corwin and Dee spent their honeymoon. Yet the brothers were not content merely to create images of Mount Rainier and its environs, they insisted on living there for months at a time in their home-made teepees. Apart from monks like Fra Angelico who resided in monasteries while creating religious images, or early artists of Native Americans, it is difficult to think of secular artists more devoted to their subject, living on its flanks while depicting it under primitive conditions. *Teepee Fires* is not a deeply self-reflective memoir, and Corwin Chase never says what drew the brothers to Mount Rainier. Yet their actions speak volumes, and their months living on Mount Rainier epitomize the incredible magnetism of iconic mountains for Northwest artists of the 1920's.

The most accomplished woodblock artist of the period was not a Chase brother, however. Elizabeth Colborne (1885-1948), after spending her childhood in Bellingham, Washington, resided in New York City, where she earned her living as an illustrator. Returning often to Bellingham, she created exquisitely finished and complex color woodblock prints of the forests and mountains of the area. Bellingham's iconic mountain is Mount Baker, the third highest mountain in Washington, visible also from Seattle when one has unobstructed views to the north.³⁰⁹ "Mount Baker, Washington," figure 75, is one of Colborne's five different woodblock views of Mount Baker, constituting an important part of her oeuvre. Colborne's "Mount Baker, Washington," exhibits a very traditional composition. The image is framed by the branches of mountain hemlocks or Douglas firs. The immediate foreground is the darkly silhouetted evergreen forest, a monochromatic dark green. The middle ground is a taller hillside in lighter greens, with large sections of brown that must represent rocky, avalanche prone areas where few trees can grow. Above the hillside rises the rounded summit of Mount Baker, a cheery white.

³⁰⁹ Like Mount Rainier, Mount Baker is inactive in the sense that it has not erupted recently. However, copious steam escapes continually from the craters of both volcanoes.

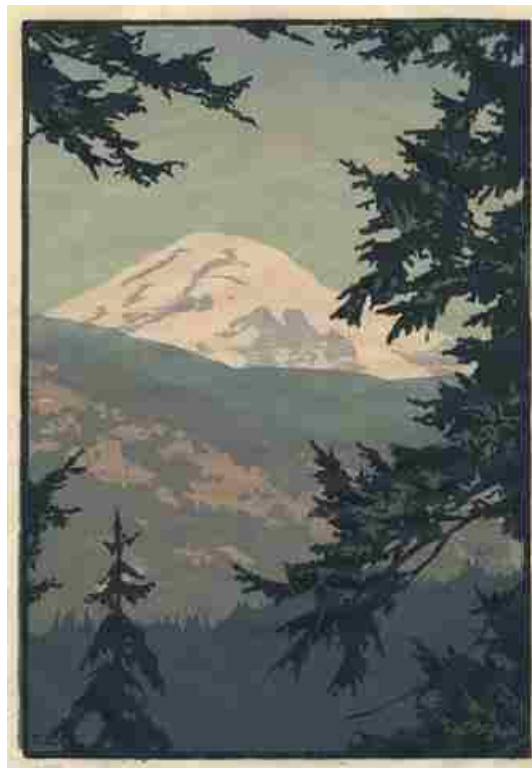


Figure 75. Elizabeth Colborne, “Mount Baker, Washington.”

Colborne’s Mount Baker is not a threatening image.³¹⁰ Colborne’s talent is evidenced by the intricate, interlocking shapes of the branches that frame the image, as well as sense of relief or depth suggested by splotches of light green against the darker green of most of the framing branches. Colborne also created color woodblock prints of Mount Rainier, Mount Hood, and other northwest tall mountains, all inactive volcanoes.³¹¹ In an excerpt from her journal of 1933, she analogized the mountains to theatre. “The day ended in a glorious cloud show over the mountains across the lake, like a dramatic backdrop of stage scenery in its dramatic glory...The sun must have set intensely to throw such a reflection on the heavy clouds

³¹⁰ When I moved to Seattle, I took mountaineering lessons and climbed to the summit of Mount Baker for the graduation hike. Climbers must rope up together because they traverse glaciers with hidden crevasses, but the summit at 10,781 feet is not exceptionally high. Two years later, I climbed Mount Rainier, but I turned back at about 12,400 feet with altitude sickness, well short of the summit at 14, 411.

³¹¹ David F. Martin, *Evergreen Muse: The Art of Elizabeth Colborne*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

that floated about the top of the mountains.”³¹² “Mount Baker, Washington,” figure 75, is framed by evergreen branches much like the manner in which curtains frame a proscenium stage. This particular image does not feature a sunset with “dramatic glory,” but a placid mid-day scene. Colborne’s significance for the argument of this chapter relates but incidentally to methods of Northwest Impressionist painting; its primary relevance is her concentration on images of iconic mountains. The mountain sublime that informed the Pacific Northwest landscape pulled female artists, as well as male, within its sphere of influence.

In addition to mountains, Gustin was attracted to the dark forests of the Northwest, as were McKim and Keller. Gustin depicted rows of tall Douglas firs that reminded viewers of the columns of the naves of the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe, according to a Seattle critic. Gustin’s most important such image is “On the Quinault,” figure 30, most likely one of the four paintings for which a subscription was launched to try to ensure they remained in Seattle. An Oregon Impressionist who has been passed over previously deserves mention at this point. Alfred Schroff taught for many years at the University of Oregon and exhibited at the annual shows in Portland, and occasionally in Seattle, notably in 1920, 1923, and the second annual in October 1928. Some of Schroff’s paintings are of dark woodland scenes such as figure 76, an untitled oil dated 1915. This landscape depicts an untended pond, where several trees have fallen into the water in the foreground. Slowly rotting away, they have become beds for weeds and wildflowers, the red wildflowers providing the only touch of brightness.

³¹² Elizabeth Colborne, *Journal*, June 28, 1933, quoted in Martin, *Evergreen Muse*, 30.



Figure 76. Alfred Schroff, untitled landscape.

Admittedly, Schroff has not depicted a wilderness area, as a fence bisects the painting in the middle ground, and the trace of a building can be discerned through the dense trees. However, Schroff's oil is illustrative of a certain Northwest taste for the aesthetic of dark forests that is uncommon elsewhere in America, and entirely absent among Southern California Impressionists. Another example is "Lake Washington, Union Bay Marsh," figure 19, in which Fokko Tadama depicted the marshy wetlands of Lake Washington near the northern edge of the Arboretum, the largest Seattle city park. Instead of choosing to paint the open water of Lake Washington, which would have resulted in a brighter scene with blue water, Tadama has chosen a marsh along the lake that is shaded with Douglas firs and other Northwest evergreens. The native yellow water lilies are suggested by a few yellow daubs of paint, but Tadama's coloration is otherwise muted and low-toned. A sense of quasi-religious reverence can be discerned in works by Gustin, but other Northwest artists who were drawn to forest and marshland scenes like

McKim, Keller, Tadama, and Schroff seem more charmed by the quiet and seclusion of these closed-in spaces, a sensation epitomized by McKim’s “Oregon Forest Stream”, figure 47. In McKim’s small oil, light filters through trees to reveal bright autumn colors, the only possible sound the “laughing” water coursing down the trout stream. Keller also painted wilderness forests, like those that ring the mountain meadows of Mount Rainier in figures 60 and 63, views of the Tatoosh Range from Paradise in Mount Rainier National Park. Keller’s eye was drawn more toward the meadows—and their spring flowers when in season—than to the depths of the tall evergreen forests. Indeed, as discussed earlier, Keller is the Northwest Impressionist most comparable to California artists. Although Gustin’s iconography of reverence and awe applies primarily to his work and somewhat to that of Stephens, the expression of calm and repose is common to all these artists.



Figure 77. Elizabeth Colborne, “In the Rain Forests of Washington.”

Elizabeth Colborne’s work is significant in exploring the iconography of Northwest forests because she depicted individual trees of the deep forest, an example being “In the Rain Forests of Washington,” figure 77. Colborne has anthropomorphized a cedar stump whose dark bulk occupies much of the image. A sharp bit of broken limb could be the nose, a few ferns the hair, and a faint white spot in the side of the stump, the eye. There are several large white mushrooms growing around the stump, and the “eye” is most likely another mushroom that has taken hold in the rotting bark of the stump. In this image, Colborne achieves painterly effects in the blobs of mushrooms, which look like white daubs of paint. The small area of bare ground in front of the stump is depicted with broken “woodstrokes” of brown and speckled white, perhaps the influence of Northwest Impressionism. Colborne accomplished an enhanced—and eerie—deep yellow background through printing colors on both side of the paper. A critic’s comment on Gustin’s forest interiors applies to Colborne as well. “It is perhaps on these wood interiors that the eye rests with the greatest delight, full of the wonder of dark trunks and green gloom of the foliage.”³¹³

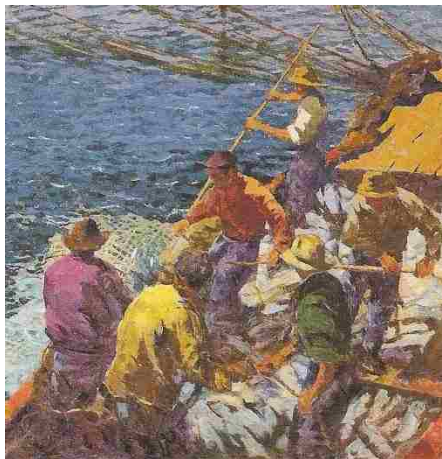


Figure 78. Eustace Ziegler, “Fish Pirates.”

³¹³ “Western Scenes by Seattle Artist Attract Many,” *Seattle Times*, January 20, 1918, 62, quoted in David Martin, *Evergreen Muse*, 19.

Other iconographies embedded in Northwest Impressionism are not as pervasive as those of mountains and forests. Gustin, Forkner, and Jensen depicted urban port scenes in Seattle. Ziegler also painted maritime scenes in Alaska and Seattle, often of fishermen pulling in fish at sea or unloading their catches in port. A colorful example of the former in an Impressionist idiom is Ziegler's "Fish Pirates," figure 78, showing six fishermen gathering in their nets, standing ankle deep in fish. It provides another example of Ziegler's interest in depicting Alaskans at work, here engaged in the tough and dangerous life of the fisherman, some of whom perish every year in winter storms. It also illustrates Ziegler's method of painting as described by Woodward. Ziegler organizes "the planar space into formal layers directing the movement of his figures from foreground to rear ground with considerable ease. His work also evinces a highly personal color sensibility, partially derived from impressionist and tonalist precedents, which rather wondrously conveys the striking colors of the Alaskan terrain."³¹⁴ Keller and Stephens depicted port activity in Oregon, but not as frequently as Seattle artists. Seaport scenes of Keller, Stephens, Gustin, and Jensen tended to feature working images of the waterfront that were the Northwestern urban equivalent of the Central Park and Washington Square paintings of New York Impressionists or the Parisian and suburban café scenes of French Impressionists. As such, they captured fleeting images of urban work and leisure, without a deeply symbolic component. While they represented "work" primarily in their images of moving ships, they did not dissect work close-up apart from Ziegler's depictions of fishermen pulling in the catch like "Fish Pirates," figure 78.

A more profound urban iconography is provided by Forkner's symbolic representation of decaying boats and fading flowers, both suggestive of senescence and death. It was easy to

³¹⁴ Woodward, *Spirit of the North*, 50.

overlook Forkner's deeper meanings in his many paintings of old, often colorful, sailboats like those in "Golden Sail," figure 52. To most viewers, they stimulated nostalgia for the romance of the days of sailing ships, but few noted the compelling evidence of decay in Forkner's sunny, bright scenes of the waterfront retirement of obsolete vessels. Gentle Forkner was not the least didactic or bombastic. It required reflection, with no assistance from Forkner, to discern his emblems of decay that remind the viewer of the inevitable transience of life.

Presentations of serious ideas, if repetitive, can give rise to parodies that ridicule the original intentions. Indeed, the existence of parody is a back-handed compliment, recognition that the artist's ideas have been widely—too widely—communicated. If no one has understood them apart from the author of the parody, then the effort at ridicule falls flat. In the academy, "postmodernist parody" is one step removed from this usual meaning of parody. Postmodernist parody refers to use of the parodied text or image to target something else. An example in contemporary art is Andy Warhol's multiple images of Campbell Soup cans. Warhol famously claimed to have consumed one can a day of Campbell Soup for years, so his paintings and silk screens of oversized, repetitive, banal copies of Campbell Soup cans were not meant to make fun of soup as nourishment. Rather, Warhol's "multiples" should be understood as raising questions about the means and limits of artistic expression, the role of advertizing in the American visual experience, and the effects of celebrity culture (in the case of his Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, and other celebrity multiples).³¹⁵

³¹⁵ As concerns parody in art, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 42, 46-49, 57-61. All of Hutcheon's examples concern parodies of famous works of art, e.g., Ingres's "La Grande Odalisque," where the parodist intent is evident at first glance. In this particular example, Mel Ramos's "Plenti-Grand Odalisque," 1973, parodies both Ingres's work of the almost-same name (for those who don't recognize the image), as well as a second level parody of Playboy photos. Both the first level parody and the re-contextualized parody are not hard to find. The two levels of parody in the Northwest examples cited in this dissertation are more subtle and require more effort of the viewer or reader.

Virna Haffer (1899-1974) was a Tacoma photographer and free spirit who took up woodblock printing c. 1927-1930.³¹⁶ “Strange Forest Creatures,” figure 79, an unpublished Haffer woodblock print, was created during the apogee of Northwest Impressionism and its unrelenting focus on iconic mountains and dark evergreen forests. The background of the image in “Strange Forest Creatures” is a mountain lake surrounded by evergreens, enlivened by a few cartoonish flowers. A tall, drooping Douglas fir frowns at the viewer, simultaneously sticking out its tongue. The typical cartoonist’s “face” of the tree looks more idiotic than angry. In the sky above hovers an enormous anthropomorphic cloud, its “teeth” the sails of a great clipper ship. One smaller cloud “eye” is rests above the teeth, and something like a torso with bended head floats to the left. The print is untitled by Haffer, so her parodist intentions were not articulated verbally.

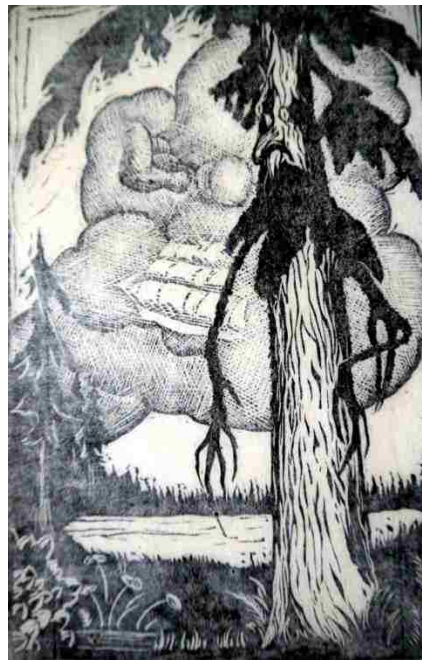


Figure 80. Virna Haffer, “Strange Forest Creatures.”

³¹⁶ David F. Martin, “Daughter of Destiny: Virna Haffer and the Transcending of Regionalism,” in Margaret E. Bullock, Christina S. Henderson, and David F. Martin, *A Turbulent Lens: The Photographic Art of Virna Haffer*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 96-97.

Haffer had not seen Colborne's cedar stump or trees in other Colborne prints of the deep forest if David Martin is correct in dating them c. 1933. Thus, she did not intend to mock Colborne specifically, although she has been prescient in creating an image with many features in common with "In the Rain Forests of Washington," figure 77. Haffer's intent to mock Gustin and other Northwest Impressionist artists of dark evergreen forests could be plausible because of the prominence given her idiotic tree. But where is the regal mountain? In its place, Haffer has piled up the enormous cloud "monster" with its sailing ship mouth. Was she thinking of Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*, or Forkner's derelict wrecks? Was she bored by maritime portraits of the great clipper ships, a subject always popular with marine artists? Had she been listening to someone explaining the shapes he saw in changing cloud formations, much as Clara J. Stevens visualized Greek mythological figures in the cumulus clouds of Portland? Haffer could have intended to mock various symbolic interpretations of Northwest art in "Strange Forest Creatures." Her target could have been Gustin's brave outpost trees, here transformed into a slumped, village idiot. It could have been other anthropomorphic images that resembled Colborne's witty cedar stump with its perky fern hair and pretty garniture of mushrooms. Rather than lampoon the mountain sublime directly, Haffer may have found more opportunity for humor in an amorphous cloud. Like an iconic mountain, it dominates the scene, but unlike the mountain, the cloud's non-specific and every-changing shape lends itself to multiple anthropomorphic associations. Instead of a sternly regal mountain, Haffer substituted the giant nimbus, smiling stupidly at the viewer through its "clipper ship" teeth. There is no majesty in this print, and there is nothing deserving of reverence. Instead of the mountain sublime, there is the cloud ridiculous. Instead of the surrogate human fighting to gain a foothold on the mountain side, there is a loopy, droopy fir, its facial expression that of the village idiot.

It is possible to re-contextualize Haffer's image and suggest a target once removed from the works of art of her contemporaries. If Haffer were living in today's green generation of environmentalists, Haffer could be making fun of the "tree huggers" of the Northwest by offering an idiot tree that would be repulsive to embrace. But Haffer was a rebel, having been raised in the Home Colony, a commune on the Oregon coast described as a "hotbed of anarchy and free love."³¹⁷ She would seem an unlikely candidate to have mocked efforts to preserve the natural environment. During the 1920's and 1930's, the national forests were managed by the federal government as piggy banks for big timber companies, which cut down old growth forests at a fast pace. Yet Haffer's print would seem to embrace the policy of ridding the West of ancient trees, so forlorn and stupid is her old evergreen. The promotion of the destruction of old growth forests would be an unlikely intention for a person with Haffer's rebellious nature. To re-contextualize Haffer's print, a more likely target for the 1920's would not be artists like Gustin who memorialized nature from the comfort of their urban studios, but artists like Waldo and Corwin Chase who chose not only to create works of art inspired by the sublimity of nature, but to live in "primitive" conditions in the actual physical space their art represented. Perhaps the scene in "Strange Forest Creatures" was inspired by the mountain lake where the Chase brothers set up their teepees, "playing" at living like Native-Americans.

There is no doubt that Haffer was fully cognizant of the concept of the mountain sublime and the compulsive attention paid by Northwest artists to Mount Rainier, as she was an acquaintance of Corwin Chase. In the most amusing section of *Teepee Fires*, Corwin Chase recounts a morning visit at the teepee by Haffer and her friend Betty. Haffer is said to have desired to photograph Chase "in the raw," and Chase had started to prepare by drawing bulls'

³¹⁷ Christina S. Henderson, "Virna Haffer: The Radical Light," in Bullock, et al, 46.

eye patterns on his leg with batik dye. Upon seeing him, Haffer said “Don’t you think I’d better paint you all over? It’ll look funny if only your legs are painted” As Chase described it, Haffer “continued to decorate me, covering my buttocks, back, hips and belly, breast, shoulders, arms and face with paint. All of which is a distinct delight to me, to Betty, to Virna...I wade in the creek...pose against the sunlight, sneak through the weeds, [and] hunt for wild fowl...I fill the exploring eyes of the girls playing over me deliciously, like invisible hands.”³¹⁸ Ultimately, Haffer used up all her film taking pictures of the nude Chase with her Graflex, and the three friends retired to the teepee for a lunch of stew prepared by Chase.



Figure 80. Virna Haffer, untitled photograph of Corwin Chase.

Figure 80 is an untitled photograph of Chase, nude, gesturing toward the forest. His position recalls that of classical period Greek sculpture, here perhaps in the service of the imitation of conventional poses attributed to Native-Americans when drawn by white artists.

³¹⁸ Chase, *Teepee Fires*, 90. Needless to say, Chase has recounted his own interpretation of the women’s reactions. They may well have experienced it differently, more as absurdity than sensuality.

Photos of Chase “sneaking thorough the weeds or hunting wild fowl” might not have made as clear a parodist statement. The artfully posed nude of figure 80 reveals almost as obvious an intention of parody as “Strange Forest Creatures.” Its target as conceived jointly by Chase and Haffer could have been the iconic photographic portraits of American Indians by Edward Curtis (1868-1952), a resident of Seattle, which were known to be artificially composed, or perhaps the fancifully dressed and carefully posed Indian warriors depicted by George de Forest Brush (1855-1941). Turning to postmodernist parody theory, the target of parody of figure 80 once removed as re-conceptualized by Haffer could have been Chase himself and his pretensions of living like a “noble savage” in the wilderness. After the séance of photography, and back in the teepee, when the conversation turned to the mountain sublime, or pantheistic interpretations of clouds and trees, Haffer could have been inspired to create a woodblock print to parody directly the images implied by Chase’s harangue, and to parody at a level once removed Chase’s fanciful life as a counterfeit Native-American living in a teepee on Mount Rainier. “Strange Forest Creatures,” figure 79, would have been the result.

Chapter IX

Comparison of Northwest Impressionism with Other Regional Groups

Potential examples for comparison of Northwest Impressionism with American Impressionism from other regions can be selected from scenes of tall mountains, forests, urban harbors, or other subject that are similar, or which suggest an interesting contrast, to the Northwest Impressionist works discussed in this dissertation. The illustrations in this chapter were drawn from a diverse list of books, despite the frequency of the name of William Gerdts.³¹⁹ The American Impressionist paintings illustrated in Frank's book are largely drawn from the Phillips Collection in Washington, D. C., and reflect the taste of Duncan Phillips, c. 1920. Similarly, the works in the Irvine Museum survey were primarily selected by Joan Irvine Smith, in her case within the last twenty years. The Pfeil Collection contains paintings purchased mostly in the 1980's, and it therefore reflects prevailing taste a decade or two earlier than the works in the Irvine Museum. The California Art Club illustrates paintings of members of the club, which include a very large number of artists. Gerdts's own choices are found in his surveys of American Impressionism and New York Impressionism, which is treated as another "region" in this chapter. Lastly, Gerdts's survey of California Impressionism is two books in one, the choice of illustrations in the second half having been made by Will South.

³¹⁹ Frank, Susan B., *American Impressionists: Painters of Light and the Modern Landscape* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007); Gerdts, William H., *All Things Bright and Beautiful: California Impressionist Paintings from the Irvine Museum*. (Irvine: The Irvine Museum, 1998); Gerdts, William H., *American Impressionism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville, 2001); Gerdts, William H., and South, Will, *California Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville, 1998); Gerdts, William H., *Impressionist New York* (New York: Artabras, 1994); Gerdts, William H., *Masterworks of American Impressionism from the Pfeil Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1992); Stern, Jean, and Siple, Molly *California Light: A Century of Landscapes—Paintings of the California Art Club* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011.)

Looking through the hundreds of paintings illustrated in these sources, it turns out that it is difficult to identify works with subjects similar to those of Northwest Impressionists. There are no American Impressionist paintings from other regions that focus on an iconic mountain—not a single one that I can find. There are mountains, of course, but the choice seems incidental to the artist’s purpose, and the paintings rarely seem to focus on only one mountain. There are few dense forests depicted by these artists. California has groves of redwood and sequoia that rise higher than the Northwest’s old growth Douglas firs, but no California Impressionist seems to have painted them. There are urban harbor scenes, but not so many that concentrate on small craft and abandoned sailboats. Conversely, many subjects that were popular elsewhere were rarely depicted in the Northwest, such as women in white, women with parasols, nude women, children on the beach and playing in sand dunes, city streets, city parks, factories and tenements, mansions and homes, interior scenes, farms, fields of poppies, hillsides in autumn, snowy hillsides in winter, and frozen lakes and rivers.

In Chapter VI on Clyde Keller, landscapes by Keller and California artist Granville Redmond were compared. Keller’s treatment of a field of wildflowers in summer was contrasted with that of Redmond, the California artist most closely identified with fields of poppies. In terms of painterly approach, Keller tended to aggregate flowers in broad swaths of color in his “Fields of Purple and Gold,” figure 61, while Redmond painted many lupines individually in his “Poppies and Lupines,” figure 62. This is a difference, to be sure, but not a fundamental one. The distinctive contrast involved Keller’s treatment of atmosphere, his sense that the Northwest’s humidity results in mists or heavier air that veil objects in the distance. Redmond’s background hills, also decked out with wildflowers, are as clearly depicted as the poppies and lupines in the foreground. Redmond provided an adequate illusion of depth, but the dry desert

air did not seem to diminish the clarity of form or brightness of the distant hills and wildflowers. In contrast, there is very little definition of the objects in Keller's middle ground and background in "Fields of Purple and Gold." The heaviness of the humidity is almost palpable. Many other California fields of poppies or Texas landscapes of bluebonnets could be illustrated to similar effect, but there would be few Northwest paintings to compare them with, as Keller was almost alone in painting fields of wildflowers. In his oeuvre, they in fact are uncommon. Of the 148 works by Keller listed on askart.com as of March, 2012 as sold in auction, only two depict fields of wildflowers. One was a replica of "Fields of Purple and Gold", figure 61, sold at auction in 2007 as "California Mountain Landscape," and the other work was called "Poppy Fields." Keller painted in California and Washington as well as Oregon, so a California location of these two Keller paintings of wildflowers is likely. Despite choosing the same subject as many California Impressionists, Keller visualized the atmosphere as veiling distant objects in figure 61, even though he was painting in the dryer air of California. There are several possible explanations for Keller's conception of the appropriate degree of clarity for distant objects in this California painting. Keller's work in California most probably occurred in northern California, where there is more humidity than in southern California. As a Northwest artist, from a region where weather conditions change often, Keller was probably more sensitive to atmospheric effects wherever he painted. As a matter of habit from painting in the Northwest's humidity, Keller may have automatically smudged the middle grounds and backgrounds of his landscapes. Taking all these possibilities into account, it is not surprising that the clarity of distant objects is considerably more diminished in Keller's paintings than in the work of California artists depicting the same sort of scenes.



Figure 81. Dorothy Dolph Jensen, untitled [coastal tree].

Dorothy Jensen’s landscapes illustrate the effects of the humid Northwest atmosphere as interpreted by Washington artists. Figure 81 is her untitled image of a coastal tree, most likely created on an island or along the shoreline of Puget Sound. Although the scene appears to have been painted on a warm day in the summer—the sun is shining while the sky is mostly clear—the entire image is indistinct, from the verdant foreground meadow to the large tree in the middle ground to the blue-colored shoreline in the background. Jensen’s vision is quintessentially that of the Northwest. It would be difficult to imagine that this painting originated in Southern California.

The mountain sublime was not a subject that attracted American Impressionists outside of the Northwest and Alaska. Eastern mountains do not make the grade, and the American Rockies do not seem to have attracted American Impressionists. Jean Mannheim lived in Denver for a time, but his published work tends to consist of interior scenes in Southern California. A California Impressionist who often painted mountains was Edgar Payne (1883-1947). A typical work is “The Sierra Divide,” figure 82, which depicts a mountain ridge with several peaks, the

tallest in the center.³²⁰ At their base is a mountain lake, and *repoussoirs* of tall evergreens have been placed on either side of the foreground to frame the view and accentuate the sensation of depth. Payne's strong broken brushstrokes stand out, revealing little detail in the objects in the painting. Bright sunshine radiates from the right, with subdued purple shadows on the face of the ridge, and dark purple shadows under a few of the evergreens. There is a feeling of repose in this mid-day scene, with no suggestion of wind, even at high altitude. There is little sense of majesty or sublimity, however, and no call for the viewer to assume an attitude of reverence. The foreground evergreens have not been tested by winter storms. They stand tall, not deformed like Gustin's climbing trees. Some snow remains on the mountain ridges, but nothing suggests that they would be extremely difficult to climb. Payne's broad brushstrokes have smoothed out much of the mountainside, and the slopes are not terribly steep. It is not a formidable presence in the same way as the Northwest's giant sleeping volcanoes.

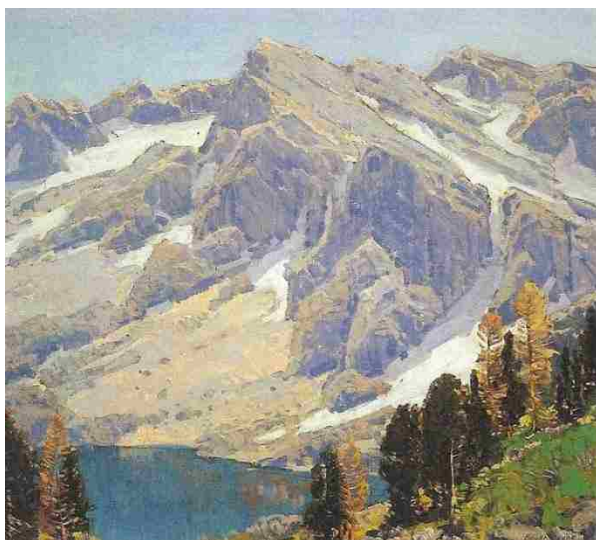


Figure 82. Edgar Payne, "Sierra Divide."

³²⁰ This painting is popular with authors and editors, as it appears in Gerdt's, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, 24, and Stern & Siple, *California Light*, 48.

This quintessentially California scene also illustrates the transparency of the California atmosphere in the eyes of California artists. Rocky formations on the mountains are rendered with the same degree of detail as the boulders in the foreground. Those on the mountain are much farther away, but there is no suggestion of an intervening haze that diminishes their clarity. The viewer's sensation of depth arises primarily from the high vantage point and the diminished hues of the sandy colored mountain ridge compared to the more intense dark greens of the grasses and trees of the foreground rim.

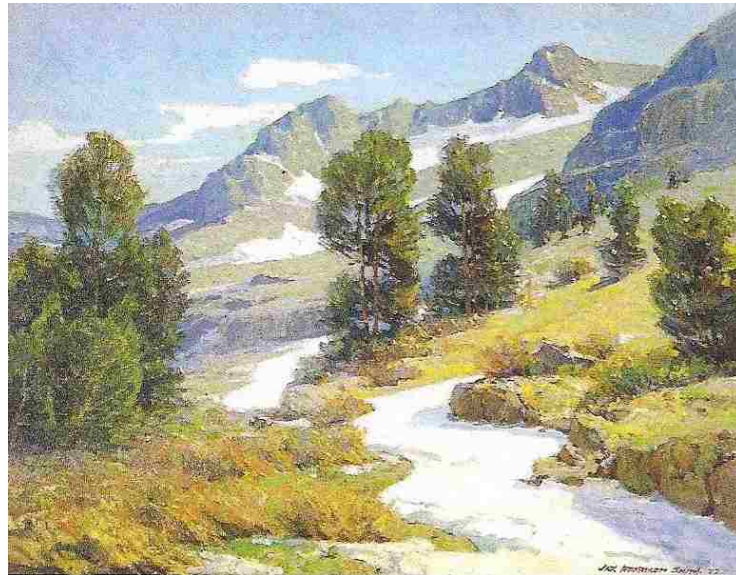


Figure 83. Jack Wilkinson Smith, “Sierra Slopes.”

There are a seemingly endless number of similar views of the Sierras by other artists, like Paul Lauritz (1889-1975) and Jack Wilkinson Smith (1873-1949). Smith's “Sierra Slopes,” 1922, is illustrated as figure 83. A detailed description of “Sierra Slopes” is unnecessary, as much of what was said with respect to Edgar Payne's work applies in terms of composition, mood, and depiction of atmosphere. Smith's Sierras landscape is more conventional in composition. Smith leads the viewer into the scene with a meandering mountain stream in the center of the painting,

still frozen solid, a banal device. Smith's modest mountain outcroppings are placed from the middle ground to the background, avoiding any message of monumentality. Smith's landscape epitomizes typical Southern California clarity in his depiction of distant objects, with no sense of an intervening heaviness of the air, and no haze of any sort. (At the time these works were created, man-made photochemical smog had not penetrated to such rural areas in California. In coastal areas of the Northwest, the haze or mist that often veils the great mountains is a natural phenomenon created when air that has been cooled by the Pacific flows inland.)

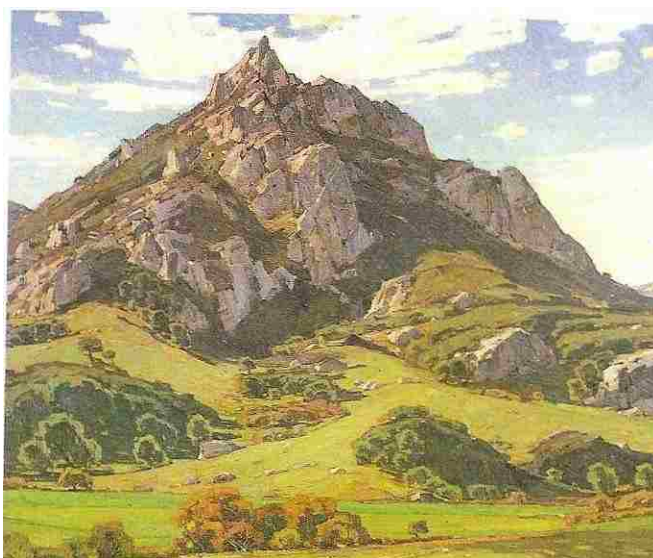


Figure 84. William Wendt, "Where Nature's God Hath Wrought."

When discussing attitudes toward iconic mountains in the Northwest, it was necessary to parse the writings of critics, and draw inferences from remarks by the artists, to develop an iconography of that included regal and quasi-religious symbols, as well as multiple significations of work and labor. That effort is often unnecessary with respect to the landscapes of California Impressionist William Wendt (1865-1946), who incorporated overtly religious references in the titles of many of his landscapes, such as "Where Nature's God Hath Wrought," 1925, figure 84. Although not explicitly Christian, Wendt's echo of the language of the King James's Bible

would lead many viewers to make conscious or unconscious associations with Christianity. Wendt's landscape shares the placidity of many Northwest works, but its topography is different. Instead of thick evergreen forests, there are alpine meadows with scattered groves of leafy trees. Although no humans are present, what could be low-roofed California barns are nested in the highest meadow in the center. One would not be surprised to see sheep or cows grazing in these mountain meadows. The mountain that "Where Nature's God Hath Wrought" dominates the scene, built up to a pointed "steeple" from a fractured jumble of rocks. Wendt has pictured Nature's version of a Christian chapel built upon a mountain top, a peak taller and steeper than would be practicable for human construction, in the service of a one-dimensional iconography—reverence for the rugged beauty of creation. Will South argues that Wendt was a nascent environmentalist as well as a painter of Nature's temples. "Wendt summarized his own penchant for grandeur...at a time when he was keenly aware of the destruction being wreaked by California's rampant development."³²¹ Wendt's claimed anticipation of the environmental movement may describe his personal concerns in 1925, but the site depicted is so far removed from any urban setting that it is hard to infer distress over human despoliation of the environment in this particular work. In my opinion, the only convincing iconography for the work is derived from its title, a reference to an ostensibly pantheistic, but impliedly Christian, deity. The unnamed mountain's role to epitomize the magnificent result of creation could be played by any single, rugged peak in a verdant countryside. There is no added oomph from what makes certain Northwest mountains iconic, i.e., the viewer's knowledge that the mountain is a volcano, possibly active at any time, as well as the highest point in the state. None of these further attributes are present in Wendt's landscape. Thus, Wendt's pantheistic exhortation is far simpler

³²¹ William H. Gerds and Will South, *California Impressionism*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998). 226.

than the multiple significations expressed by Northwest Impressionists when they depicted Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Mount McKinley.

Descending from lofty mountains to the lowlands, one finds that Northwest artists have created numerous verdant waterside scenes, typically along streams and rivers, but also on Puget Sound, notably Keller's "Water Lily Pond," figure 4, Jensen's untitled figure 16, probably a cabin on Puget Sound, Gustin's untitled figure 31, a watery meadow, McKim's "Spring Evening, Sauvie Island," figure 46, McKim's "Oregon Forest Stream," figure 47, and Keller's "Summer Afternoon," figure 64. All used Impressionist painterly techniques to depict a restful scene along the water, typically in direct sunlight, or with sunlight streaming through a leafy arbor.



Figure 85. William L. Lathrop, "The Tow Path."

Such scenes were popular with American Impressionists elsewhere, such as William L. Lathrop's "The Tow Path," undated, figure 85, and J. Alden Weir's "Afternoon by the Pond," c. 1908, figure 86. Lathrop was the founder of the art colony at New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Alden Weir was a founding member of the Ten, as well as a childhood friend of C. E. S. Wood,

the most active promoter of fine art in Portland. The subject of Lathrop's very subdued landscape is announced by its title as a tow path along a canal, probably no longer in use for water transport by the early twentieth century. A lone person stands or walks in the distance. Various hues of light green depict the grass on both sides of the tow path, the water, and the trees that border the canal. The sky is a very pale blue-green, with a few reflections on the surface of the canal. Nothing would seem to move on this hazy, Pennsylvania summer day. Lathrop has utilized many small broken brush strokes throughout the canvas, the sky more smoothly brushed in, the foreground strokes more broken. Lathrop's Impressionist *facture* aside, "The Tow Path" could easily be claimed by the Tonalists for its low-toned, limited range of color and expression of lethargy. Although Northwest Impressionist works tend to look subdued when compared to those from Southern California, they appear bright and forceful in comparison with Lathrop's landscape dominated by such muted greens.

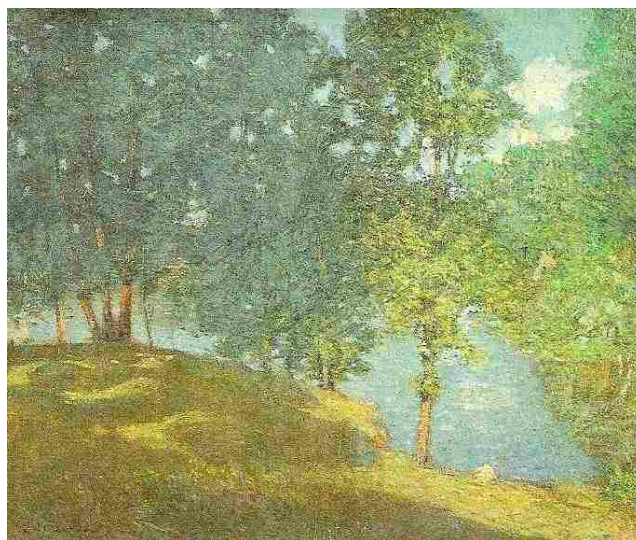


Figure 86. J. Alden Weir, "Afternoon by the Pond."

Alden Weir's landscape "Afternoon by the Pond," figure 86, is marginally brighter. In a few places, the sun has broken through what might be the mantle of tall trees behind the artist,

illuminating two trees along the pond, as well as some bits of lawn. The pond and sky are blue, and Weir has thus used two colors compared to Lathrop's essentially monochromatic green canal. Weir's foreground is mostly shrouded in shadow, giving his work a dark, monotonous overall tone despite some light playing on the pond's surface. Weir's relationship with Impressionism is redeemed by his small broken brushstrokes, but a claim of affinity by the Tonalists would not be out of order. Both Weir's and Lathrop's landscapes could appear boring to viewers. Of course, there are many lively paintings by Pennsylvania and New York Impressionists, but they often involve city or beach scenes with a great deal of human activity. When Eastern Impressionists painted quiet scenes along the water, the subject of choice for many Northwest Impressionists, their efforts sometimes fall flat in comparison with their Western counterparts.

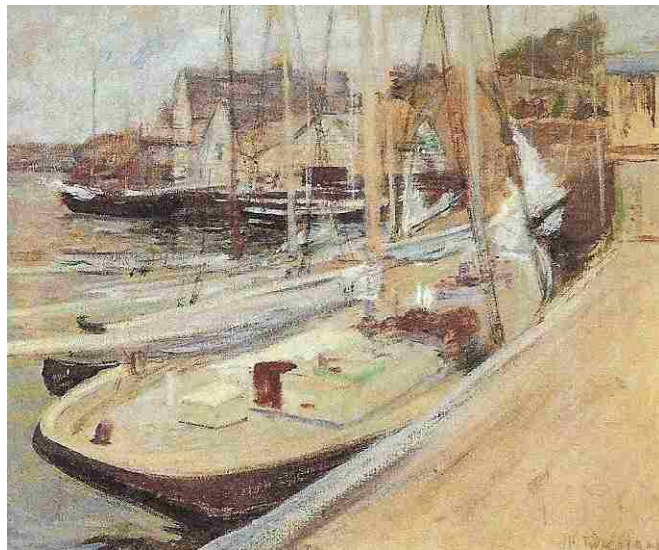


Figure 87. John Twachtman, "Fishing Boats at Gloucester."

New York Impressionists painted many harbor scenes, but they were typically of a larger scale than those assayed by Northwest artists, featuring great monuments like the Brooklyn Bridge, or large seaport cranes unloading ocean going freighters. A closer comparison to

Northwest artists could be made with John Twachtman's Gloucester, Massachusetts paintings around 1900, such as "Fishing Boats at Gloucester," 1901, figure 87. Twachtman depicted three sailboats moored to the dock, with another in the distance. The dockside is ringed by old wooden boathouses. The sailboats appear to be fishing boats judging from the gear on their decks. Their furled sails indicate they remain active members of the local fishing fleet, but by 1901, the Gloucester seaport must be a pale reflection of its storied past, and Twachtman's scene a nostalgic reminder of the great era of New England fishing and whaling ports.

Twachtman, in my opinion, was the most original American Impressionist, and I would not argue that any Northwest seascape discussed in this dissertation exceeded the quality of his work. The streaks of white in "Fishing Boats at Gloucester" that suggest the furled sails and reflect highlights along the docks appear to be spontaneous yet result from subtle intention. The myriad tones of brown that make up the prevailing color scheme surprise the viewer by their variety and veracity; although low-toned, they are not the banal choices of colors in Lathrop's and Weir's paintings. Twachtman's image exudes repose, but it is the repose of fatigue, and it does not promise any renewed vitality after a time of rest. Rather, the viewer anticipates continued decline in the port's fortunes; perhaps Twachtman's ill health and fear of an early death prompted his vision.

Although the port scenes of Northwest Impressionists illustrated in earlier chapters may not exceed Twachtman's exacting standards of execution, they are enlivened by colors that seem appropriate to their situation, like Forkner's golden sail, the yellow port buildings in Gustin's canvases, and Jensen's vivid blues along the Seattle Ship Canal. In "Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront," figure 34, Gustin has recreated a scene where the sun breaks through just as a rainstorm is ending. The precipitation remaining in the air is palpable, while the bright

reflections of the setting sun on the pavement emphasize how wet it remains. Not only were these Northwest artists highly skilled technically, but at least Forkner's seafront scenes express an iconography that can confidently be enunciated because he expressed it so consistently. Twachtman painted for a short period in Gloucester before his early death, and although the iconography suggested for his "Fishing Boats at Gloucester may seem credible, it has not been confirmed by consistency over time. The viewer of Forkner's canvases can be confident that a message of senescence and death is embodied in his work because it was evidenced in a lifetime of painting. Perhaps it was the Seattle public's implicit understanding of Forkner's iconography that contributed to their appetite to view his works in his last one-man show in 1945 just before his death, which was uniquely extended for two weeks because of the great public response. Mere mimetic images of flowers and boats, and only those two subjects, without a deeper signification, would seem insufficient to have attracted so many viewers.

Chapter X

Conclusion

The academic world has no valid reason to have ignored Northwest Impressionist artists for the past one hundred years. No dissertation has been written on any Northwest Impressionist artist. Very few learned articles touching upon them have been published by university art historians. In an attempt to remedy this inexcusable neglect, the careers of thirty-one Northwest Impressionists have been identified in this dissertation, and separate chapters have been devoted to six of the most representative among them who have been overlooked by the academic world. Paul Morgan Gustin, Edgar Forkner, and Dorothy Dolph Jensen had extended artistic careers in Seattle, Washington. All three traveled and painted in Europe. Forkner studied at the Art Students League in New York, and Jensen was enrolled in the Academy Julian in Paris. Gustin was lionized as the “dean” of Northwest artists, and he regularly exhibited in New York at the Grand Central Galleries, of which he was the only Northwest member. Forkner, originally part of the significant Richmond, Indiana group of painters, remained closely connected with Chicago and Indiana after he moved to Seattle, sending the majority of his work there for exhibition and sale. Jensen’s career opportunities were curtailed by child raising during the 1920’s, the heyday of Northwest Impressionism, but she exhibited, as did Forkner, throughout the 1930’s, even as Gustin curtailed his calendar of exhibitions.

The trajectory of Northwest Impressionism was similar in Portland, Oregon. Charles C. McKim, an unknown, uneducated, middle-aged Portland, Maine artist, moved to Oregon in 1910-1911 and was instantly celebrated for introducing Portland to his Impressionist approach to art. McKim, like Gustin, was largely self-taught. McKim appears to have invented a more

storied past as the nephew of Charles Follen McKim, the great Beaux-Arts architect from New York, as well as a student of Winslow Homer. Clara J. Stephens, like McKim and Keller, came from a very modest background. Indeed, in the case of Stephens and McKim, their childhoods could genuinely be described as deprived. Stephens worked and saved diligently for several years as a legal secretary and later an art teacher, financing her art education in Portland, New York, California, and Europe, including two summer study sessions with William Merritt Chase. Her youthful portrait, painted by Chase as a reward for her effort and talent as a student, became her prize possession. Extensive exhibitions by all three began in Portland around 1911. McKim and Keller exhibited privately in their studios, and Keller submitted works to exhibitions in museums, fine arts societies, and state and local fairs, primarily in the Northwest. Keller's obituary stated that he garnered 275 prizes through these exhibitions throughout his long life, a claim that seems plausible given his output of something like 4500 canvases. McKim painted much less after 1927, probably because of ill health, although he lived until 1939. Stephens's exhibition activity reached a peak in 1925-1926, when she was granted one-man shows in Portland and New York. Although she continued to teach and paint, her period of prominence had ended. Keller doggedly continued to paint, increasing his pace after the bankruptcy of his art store and studio in 1936 in order to earn what must have been a meager living.

Three other Northwest Impressionist artists, Belmore Browne, Sydney Laurence, and Eustace Ziegler, enjoyed more prominent careers. They have not been extensively treated in this dissertation because articles and books on them have already appeared, generally written by museum curators. Nevertheless, interest in their work, individually or collectively, has never reached a critical mass sufficient for the academy to take note of them and include them within the purview of studies of American Impressionism. Belmore Browne and Sydney Laurence both

studied art in the East, in Boston and New York, respectively, and both studied and worked in Europe, Browne for several months at the Academy Julian in Paris, Laurence for fifteen years in Europe, mostly as a member of the artist colony at St. Ives in England. Eustace Ziegler studied art in Detroit and at Yale. All three men moved to Alaska in the early years of the twentieth century, Browne as a mountaineer and explorer, Laurence as a prospector for gold, abandoning his family in England, and Ziegler as a lay missionary. All three eventually returned to their earlier vocations as artists and painted the Alaskan landscape. Browne's association with Alaska ended the soonest, as he moved to Banff in the Canadian Rockies, where the largest part of his oeuvre was created. Browne became the director of the art school in Santa Barbara, California, and transitioned to a painter of dioramas in natural history museums during the Great Depression and afterwards. Laurence gained the most fame of any Alaska landscape artist, his period of greatest activity being the 1920's and 1930's, when his work was not only sold to tourists to Alaska, but also throughout parts of the Midwest. Ziegler and his family lived in Seattle from the 1920's onward. Ziegler sketched during the summers in Alaska, creating his "multiples" of Mount McKinley in his studio in Seattle during the winters. Ziegler was for many years a leading Seattle art teacher, instructing artists who became identified with the Northwest Mystics like Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson. All three Northwest Impressionists had ties with Washington. Browne moved to Tacoma with his parents during his childhood; Laurence spent his winters in Seattle during the 1930's; and Ziegler was a Seattle resident and prominent participant in the Seattle art community for over forty years.

In the early twentieth century, Oregon and Washington remained something of "frontier" communities, as of course did Alaska, Currents in European Modernism—starting with French Impressionism—adopted in the Eastern United States in the 1890's, and in California a decade

afterward, did not take root in Portland and Seattle until after 1910. The period chosen for this dissertation begins in 1910 because that was the year Charles McKim first visited Oregon, and it was approximately the time that many Northwest Impressionist artists began to exhibit publicly. It followed closely upon New York Impressionist Childe Hassam's two visits to Oregon in 1904 and 1908, when he painted more than 80 canvases, mostly in Eastern Oregon. News of artists like Gustin, Forkner and Jensen in Seattle, and McKim, Keller, and Stephens in Portland, did not appear regularly in the press until after 1910, roughly coincident with the founding of the Portland Museum of Art and the Seattle Fine Arts Society, which became the principal institutional supporters of art in the two cities. The period of ascendancy of Northwest Impressionism was relatively short, from about the year 1911, when Charles McKim was celebrated for bring the *new* to Portland, to 1928, when Paul Gustin and Edgar Forkner were excluded from the Seattle Fine Arts Society April annual show for being too conservative. McKim seems to have painted very little after 1927, while Gustin traveled to Europe for the year 1930 and, after his return, concentrated mostly on watercolors, exhibiting much less frequently. Forkner continued to paint until his death in 1945 in an American Impressionist idiom. Jensen's period of greatest activity occurred during the 1930's, but by 1940, she had abandoned Impressionism for a "WPA" style of art. As noted earlier, Keller continued to paint until the age of 90, but his work became simplified and formulaic. Stephens's career followed a trajectory similar to Gustin's, peaking about 1925-1926, followed by continued painting (and teaching in the case of Stephens), but with a much lower level of public interest in her work.

A subject commented upon, but not addressed in depth, was the differential treatment that the art communities and journalists in Portland and Seattle meted out to Clara J. Stephens and Dorothy Dolph Jensen. The brief narratives of their lives reveal many differences. Stephens, an

orphan from a deprived background, first tried to enter the job market at fifteen to earn a living to enable her to pursue art lessons in her free time. Jensen, from a politically prominent family, was educated at a religious boarding school in Europe for girls from wealthy backgrounds. She benefitted from private lessons in art for six years, as well as one year at the Academy Julian in Paris, studying with one of its most prominent instructors. Upon her return to Portland, she continued her art studies. Although younger than Stephens, she “caught up” with Stephens by completing her studies in her early twenties, whereas Stephens was not able to reach a similar level until her mid-thirties. However, Stephens by then was an established art teacher as well as an artist in Portland, and she benefitted from regular exhibitions at the Portland Museum of Art and elsewhere in the country. She never married, enabling her to devote all her time and energy to her dual careers in art and teaching. Conversely, Jensen moved to Seattle and married another artist, a wood carver and frame maker, and she essentially disappeared from the Seattle art world during the 1920’s after her daughter was born. When she re-engaged publicly with art about 1930, she had missed the years of ascendancy of the Impressionist movement in the Northwest. Furthermore, she re-engaged in the context of Women Painters of Washington, an estimable organization, but one that the press seemed to treat as amateurs less deserving of probing interviews and articles. The anecdote recounted in Jensen’s chapter of the harpy in the cup of coffee illustrated Jensen’s difficulty in being taken seriously by the press. Jensen was certainly a bright, insightful woman, and an analysis of the two levels of parody in her anecdote demonstrated that she put something over on her interviewer, although it did not result in better press coverage. As an example of the challenges that faced female artists in America before World War II, a dual study of Stephens and Jensen would produce worthwhile insights.

The very late reception of Modernism in the Northwest—in the form of American Impressionism about 1910—is most likely the reason that the academy has shunned Northwest Impressionists, deeming their art doubly derivative of earlier developments in France and New York, and out of touch with newer Modernist trends like those in evidence at the Armory Show in New York City in 1913, a portion of which traveled to Portland without making any noticeable impact. It took another fifteen years for avowedly Modernist artists like Mark Tobey to gain traction in Seattle, the key date being the 1928 exclusion of Gustin and Forkner from the Seattle Fine Arts Society annual exhibition when Tobey was named a member of the jury. Nevertheless, this dissertation has demonstrated that Gustin, Forkner, Jensen, McKim, Stephens, and Keller were skilled and talented artists who first introduced Modernity in the form of Impressionism to the Northwest, and whose presence dominated the art communities of Portland and Seattle for over fifteen years. Furthermore, those years were a vibrant period for artists, with regular coverage in the daily press in Portland and Seattle, as well as in weekly journals of art and culture like *The Spectator* and *The Town Crier*. Portland and Seattle are much, much larger and wealthier cities today, but there is possibly less media coverage of the visual arts (with the exception of cinema, of course). Not only was 1910-1935 a period of media interest in the arts produced locally, but the Portland Museum of Art sponsored regular group and one-man shows for home-town artists, while the precursor of the Seattle Art Museum, the Seattle Fine Arts Society, performed the same role in Seattle. Today, in contrast, neither institution takes any significant interest in the contemporary art scene in their cities, looking instead for their cues to New York. Thus, the period of 1910-1935 was in some ways a “golden age” for artists in Seattle and Portland, and it deserves the attention of the academy, whose mission should include deepening the understanding of American art history in all regions of the country.

Impressionist art movements worldwide have typically been appreciated by the public for the brightness of their colors, and the attention paid to vignettes or “snapshots” of daily urban life. In Southern California, artists heightened the saturation of their colors, while preferring more rural scenes of seashores, meadows, the high deserts, and the Sierras. As one moves up the Pacific Coast, however, the colors of nature become more muted, and the air more humid. The visual effect of these changes in the environment was expressed in the work of artists who gravitated toward Impressionism. The lower-toned colors of San Francisco artists of the period have led proponents of Tonalism to claim some of these artists for their own. Artistic developments north of San Francisco that followed the reception of Impressionism have generally been ignored by art historians.

A similar pattern occurred in Canada. The books devoted to Canadian Impressionism start in the Eastern provinces and stop in Winnipeg, less than one half of the way across the continent. The only exception is a few pages devoted to the Impressionist years of Emily Carr (1871-1945), the now celebrated outlier genius of Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia. Carr achieved recognition very late in life. During her last ten years, she gave up painting for writing, and eventually five of her books were published, including those that appeared posthumously. Thus, developments in art during the 1910’s and 1920’s in the American Pacific Northwest *and* in the Canadian Northwest, with the exception of Carr, have been largely overlooked by art historians, I believe because of the North American academy’s strong Eastern cultural bias.

This dissertation has demonstrated that a tendency toward the use of lower-keyed colors by Northwest Impressionists is consistent with the actual hues of the Northwest, where dark evergreens are the dominant forest trees, and the colors of the mountains above the tree line tend

toward shades of gray. In addition to use of more subdued colors, landscape artists have expressed the Northwest's "atmospheric effect" of diminishing the level of detail in objects in the middle ground of canvases and of veiling distant mountains in mist. The higher level of skill required to paint the Northwest landscape successfully has not been recognized by critics outside the region. The canvases produced by Northwest Impressionists are typically more pale and subdued than those from Southern California. Yet they compare well to landscapes of summer meadows and seascapes of small harbors created in the East, and the skill required to paint them surely exceeds what is needed for similar scenes in Southern California, where artists face fewer atmospheric challenges because of the predictably dry air and steady sunlight.

Not only were Northwest Impressionists adept at picturing atmospheric conditions that affect the clarity of distant objects, they were expert in painting precipitation manifested as falling rain, fog, and water on the ground. Lance Wood Hart's "Camp Lewis," 1917, figure 14, depicts soldiers walking along a dirt roadway filled with puddles, light rain still falling. Hart reduced his colors to shades of gray and pale blue to capture the muted visual experience, the wet feeling of an autumn rainy day, and a certain sense of foreboding—these young soldiers were about to depart for the trenches in France. In the medium of etching, Roi Partridge used myriad parallel lines to represent the light rain or heavy mist that mostly veiled the left side of his image of Mount Rainier, "In a Robe of Mist," figure 18. In Peter Sheffers's "Foggy Morning on the Coast," figure 24, the viewer feels the chill of the fog and the dampness from the ocean spray as Pacific waves crash against the rocks. Paul Gustin's "Sunset, Docks on Seattle Waterfront," figure 34, illustrates the moment after the rain when the setting sun peeps through the clouds. Gustin's broad broken brushstrokes and variety of muted pinks and grays wonderfully express the reflections of sunlight from the wet pier surface. Lastly, in Clyde Keller's "Spring Rain,"

figure 57, various aspects of representing precipitation and mood are combined in one small watercolor. The subdued tonality of a rainy spring day is suggested by Keller's dominant blue-green color scheme derived from newly sprouted foliage. Falling rain is made manifest by the lone pedestrian with an umbrella, bending his body into the wind. The wetness of the spring leaves and dark pavement is expressed by the reflections from the setting sun, sensed under the stratus clouds, typical of a Northwest afternoon. Despite the falling rain, Keller has managed to impart a cheery mood, emblematic of the renewal of springtime. In Southern California, when it occasionally rained, one imagines that Southern California Impressionists made the decision to take the day off. It is difficult to think of a single work from that region that could be compared to any of these Northwest depictions of precipitation.

What is unique in Northwest Impressionism, in addition to its atmospheric effects, is its iconography of tall mountains. Each of Oregon, Washington, and Alaska has a single inactive volcano which stands much higher than other mountains. Native-Americans venerated Mount Rainier as "the mountain that was god." White settlers internalized this attitude, which was seized upon by the Northwest artists of the first third of the twentieth century, who disproportionally depicted Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Mount McKinley compared to other scenes available to them. A sense of reverence toward these mountains was expressed in different ways. Gustin developed a personal iconography of a regal Mount Rainier, approached but never conquered by its ring of "outpost" or "climbing" mountain hemlocks that cling, twisted and wind-blown, to its flanks. Gustin viewed these stunted trees as surrogates for humanity, and he emphasized their visual and emotional impact on the viewer by accentuating the veiling effect of Northwest mist to shroud the mountain peak above. McKim and Stevens painted Mount Hood in Oregon with different emphases. In her journal, Stevens revealed herself attracted to the

mountain's ever changing garb, typically seeing its winter wear as snowy, royal ermine. McKim preferred to depict Mount Hood in the far distance, with a foreground marsh on whose waters played pink reflections of sunlight from the snows of Mount Hood. McKim's vision was more a matter of aesthetics and mood, and he achieved the fullest synthesis of Northwest Impressionism and Tonalism, a related style of American art that emphasized subdued colors and a feeling of quietude.

Those artists who painted Mount McKinley, nearly fifty percent higher than Mount Rainier, developed related iconographies. Sydney Laurence, the best known, remained within Gustin's regal signification, without an emphasis on humankind's relationship to the mountain. Browne, having suffered tremendously during three attempts to climb McKinley, rarely painted it, but when he did, it presented an impassive, threatening face to the viewer, more of a distant, mysterious god than a possibly approachable king. Ziegler combined an exalted image of Mount McKinley accompanied by small-in-stature representatives of an indifferent humanity in the form of traders, hunters, and prospectors who paused in its shadow, looking elsewhere. Ziegler expressed his own symbolism of the work of the people of Alaska in these "potboilers," perhaps better described as "multiples," produced in his studio from a grid design in quasi-industrial fashion. An additional iconographic element in the many "Mount McKinley's" of Laurence and Ziegler arose from their acquisition by tourists to Alaska and admirers of the American national parks, who sought to possess America's patrimony both tangibly and symbolically.

A different parallel iconography can be observed in New York Impressionist John Twachtman's paintings of old fishing boats in Gloucester, Massachusetts and Edgar Forkner's many canvases of decrepit sailing ships rotting along the piers of Seattle. Twachtman's "brown" harbor scenes may have presaged his early demise. Forkner lived a long life, and he kept

returning in the vast majority of his works to images of obsolete ships and fading flowers, annunciations of senescence and death. Forkner's seemingly morbid symbolism was often offset by bright green hulls and golden sails, or by hiding the old wrecks in plain sight through surrounding them with other vessels. Thus, purchasers of Forkner's paintings could choose to see them as uplifting or depressing depending on which aspects of the work they preferred to focus. Some may have understood Forkner's symbols of decline as signifying both death *and* delight.

The thirty-one Northwest Impressionists named in this dissertation do not constitute the entirety of artists who could be so described. Others are less well known as painters because they did not live in Seattle and Portland, because they exhibited less widely, because they are more appreciated as photographers, or because their extant work is small. Alaskan art has many parallels to art produced in Oregon and Washington, and this dissertation has addressed Alaska briefly, and only with respect to three significant artists with important connections to Washington. Alaska has been fortunate in having Robert Shalkop and Kesler Woodward, who have mounted several exhibitions on Impressionist or Impressionist-influenced artists of the 1920's and 1930's, and written serious essays on them. Apart from David Martin's exhibition catalogs on forgotten Washington artists, Oregon and Washington have not fared as well. The talent and skill of Northwest Impressionist artists should be obvious, and the refusal of the academic world in the Northwest to study them—in distinction to their contemporaries in California, Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, and Boston—is hard to understand. This dissertation represents but the beginning of the research that could be accomplished on Northwest Impressionism.

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Vita of John Impert

Advanced Degrees:

Certificate of Political Studies, *Institut d'Etudes Politiques*, Paris, 1962

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Yale College, 1963

Juris Doctor, Harvard Law School, 1966

Master of Arts, Art History, University of Washington, 2009

Doctor of Philosophy, Art History, University of Washington, 2012

Publications:

“Restitution of Art and Antiquities: What are the implications of Holocaust restitution for museums that collect antiquities?” *Muséologies*, April, 2008, vol. 2, no. 2, 12-41.

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“Relations with Outside Counsel in Asia Pacific,” *The International Lawyer*, Winter 1985, vol. 19, no. 1, 29-38.

Employment:

Lieutenant, Judge Advocate General Corps, United States Naval Reserve, active duty, 1966-1969

Associate, Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen, & Hamilton, New York, Brussels, Paris, 1969-1974

Area General Counsel, ITT, Brussels, New York, 1974-1987

Senior International Counsel, then Vice President—Government Affairs, Boeing, Seattle, Brussels, 1987-2004