

Brenau University Art Collection

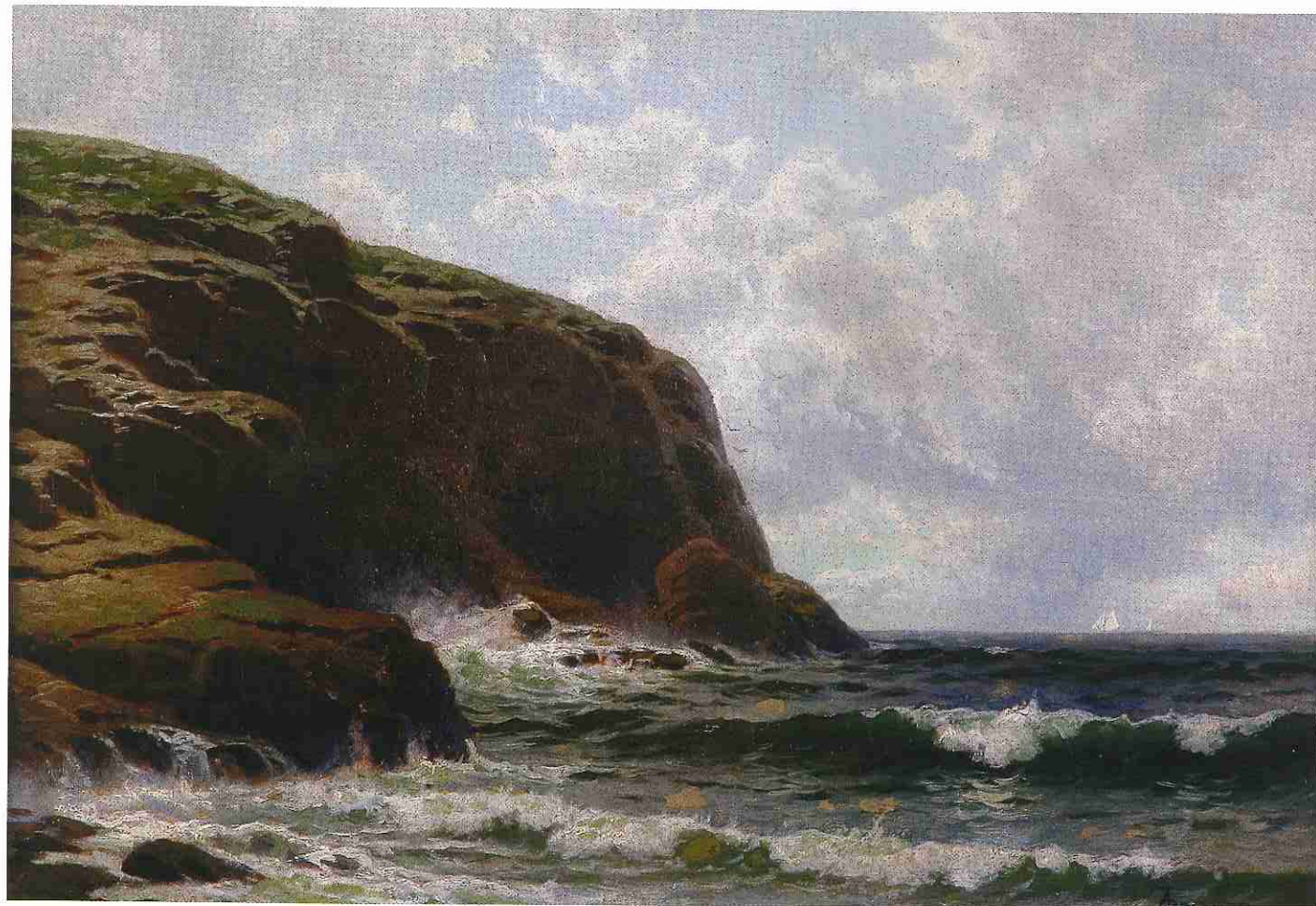
by Mary Beth Looney

Originally founded as the Georgia Baptist Women's Seminary in Gainesville Georgia in 1878, the institution now known as Brenau University has long been associated with the arts. President H. J. Pearce's purchase of the campus in 1900 prompted the name change to Brenau—a hybrid term comprised of 'brennen' (German for 'to burn') and 'aurum' (Latin for 'gold'). The theme 'gold as refined by fire' remains a mainstay of the college's literature. The year 1911 heralded the introduction of a guiding board of trustees. An expansion of educational offerings occurred in 1928 with the founding of Brenau Acad-

emy, a residential college-preparatory school for young women in grades 9-12. Since the 1970s, the school's Evening and Weekend College has admitted men. The fourth and most recent faction of the institution is the Online College. Brenau trustees voted in favor of changing the school to university status in 1992; the Brenau University Permanent Art Collection was inaugurated that same year.

While the college had always owned various works of art, Brenau's eighth president, John S. Burd, sought to further promote the school's legendary association with the arts by starting a permanent collection. A William Merritt Chase (c. 1870s) still life was documented as the first

piece. Dr. Burd placed ads in art periodicals, soliciting donations to the collection, and he fostered relationships with such art world fixtures as New York gallery-owner Leo Castelli, who participated as a member of the board of trustees until his death in 1999. Dedicated, generous donors such as Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bentley Sr. and Louise and Alan Sellars have consistently contributed to a very significant collection of works by American artists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Brenau's ninth president, Dr. Ed. Schrader, continues to foster the enhancement of the permanent collection by paving the way for Brenau's acquisition of its second work by Theodore Robinson.



Brenau University is located at 500 Washington Street SE, Gainesville, Georgia, 30501, 770-534-6263, artsweb.brenau.edu/Galleries.

All illustrations are gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bentley, Sr. unless otherwise noted.

ABOVE: *Front of Simmons Visual Arts Center*.
RIGHT: Willard Leroy Metcalf, *Flowering Trees*, w/c and gouache on paper, 10 x 14.

BELOW RIGHT: Charles Shepard Chapman, *The Artist Wife*, o/b, 30 x 24, gift of Mrs. Louise Sellars.

LEFT: Alfred Thompson Bricher, *Untitled (Seascape)*, o/c, 14 x 20.

As Brenau University's collection has expanded, so too has the historical prevalence of relationships among represented artists. *Relative Merits: Artistic Acquaintances in Brenau University's Permanent Art Collection* that opens January 29, 2008, honors the spirit of artistic lineage and draws connections between artists of a certain school, group, movement or familial relationship. Perhaps most important within the university context is the representation of generations of artist-teachers and artist collectives. Such an exhibition amplifies how such relationships produce legacies of methods and preferred subjects. While a number of works are not direct illustrations of the styles for which these artists ultimately became known, many point to educationally driven beginnings or more personally chosen subjects.

Renowned artist and teacher William Merritt Chase, American Impressionist and member of The Ten, taught many future artists represented in Brenau University's





Permanent Art Collection. Works by artists Charles Shepard Chapman and Lawton Silas Parker employ a common subject of their teacher's: women. Chapman's highly colorful *The Artist Wife* depicts the confident *Saturday Evening Post* illustrator Neysa Moran McMein in the studio, wearing a printed robe and clasping a handful of brushes. Chapman earned his living by teaching art at the Art Students League and at the University of Wyoming. He also opened a school of illustration in Leonia, New Jersey with Harvey Dunn.

Lawton Silas Parker studied at the Chicago Art Institute, the Académie Julian and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, as well as under the tutelage of William Merritt Chase. An original member of the Givernois Colony in France, Parker painted figures in landscapes in an Impressionistic fashion. In contrast to this legacy, his *Woman in a White Dress* drawing is a small, spare study in neutrals, but it does evoke Chase's full-length images of singular women in his studio environment. Like Chapman, Parker held teaching positions at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts and the Chicago Fine Arts Academy. He managed



ABOVE: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Mt. Chocorua*, o/c, 12 x 18 1/4.

RIGHT: William James Glackens, *Stream*, pastel on paper, post-1910, 15 3/4 x 13 3/4.

ABOVE LEFT: Lawton Silas Parker, *Woman in White Dress*, charcoal and pastel on brown paper, 10 1/4 x 7 1/2.

ABOVE FAR LEFT: George Henry Hall, *Lady in Red*, o/c, 21 1/4 x 27.

LEFT: Henry Hammon Ahl, *Vermont Snow*, o/c, 14 x 14, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Sellars.

his own school of painting in Paris, known as the Parker Academy.

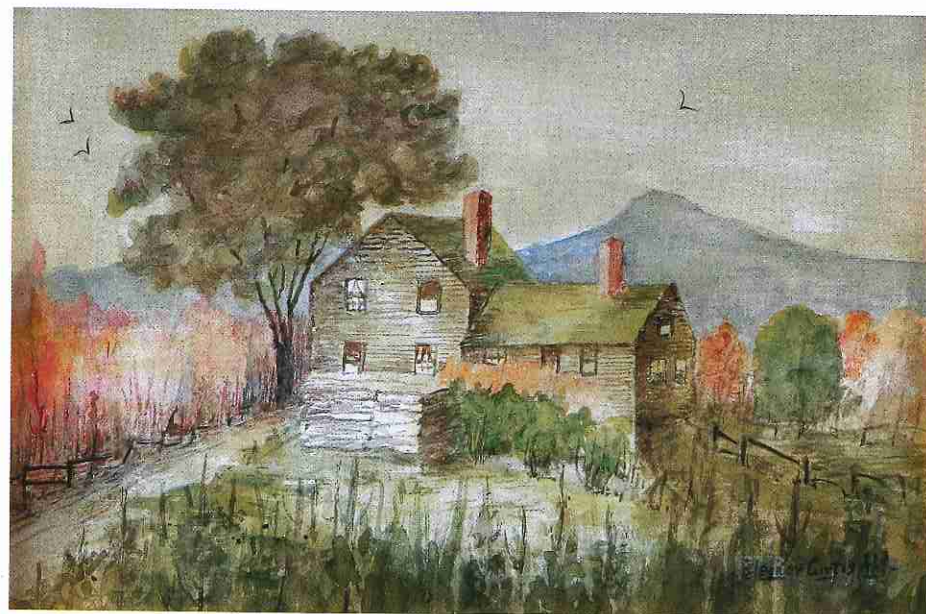
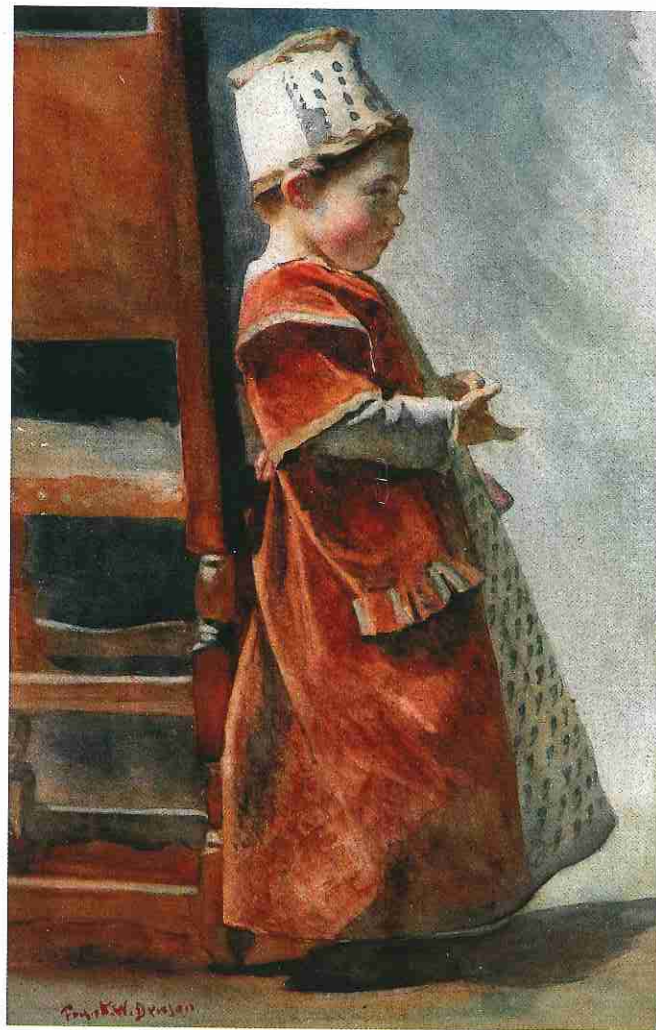
Artists Sanford Robinson Gifford and Alfred Thompson Bricher were members of the Hudson River School of landscape painting of the nineteenth century. These so-called Luminist painters demonstrated a concern with the effects of atmospheric light in their paintings of northeastern scenery. Both artists painted New Hampshire's White Mountain scenery. Gifford's painting of the distinctively shaped Mt. Chocorua retains his characteristic "salmony" pink light of evening. Bricher's unidentified marine painting is exemplary of the work for which he is best known.

George Henry Hall, who trained briefly with Eastman Johnson in New



York, executed a large body of work in Seville, Spain, establishing a unique niche as one of the first American painters to work in that country. His *Lady in Red*

painting, in which a draped Madonna-like figure sweetly implores to the viewer, certainly points to historically Romantic treatments of the figure.



Edmund Charles Tarbell and Frank Weston Benson both studied at the newly formed School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. They later returned as highly influential teachers. Considered American

Impressionists who asserted the importance of the figure within the traditional yet expressive landscape. Both artists sometimes also relied upon their family members as models for at-home or in-studio

work. Considered one of his finest drawings, the graphite on paper *Mary Tarbell* features the artist's daughter. Benson's *Standing Child* watercolor may be an image of one of his children, possibly son George. This tender image may date to pre-1915, as Benson switched his focus from images of women and children to outdoor sporting subjects around that year.

American Impressionist Robert Vonnoh taught in the 1880s at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts School, as well. He enjoyed lengthy teaching and working assignments in Grez, France, where he studied the works of Claude Monet. His sophisticated use of color for this ruddy-checked, older woman in the small portrait *Solitude* reveals Realist and Impressionist influences. Vonnoh also taught at Pennsylvania's Academy of Fine Arts, which produced artists William James Glackens and Robert Henri.

A Pennsylvania native, Glackens worked as an illustrator for *Harper's Bazaar*, the



ABOVE: William Merritt Chase, *Still Life*, c. 1870s, o/c, 18 1/2 x 24.

RIGHT: Robert William Vonnoh, *Solitude*, o/b, 12 1/2 x 9.

ABOVE LEFT: Edmund Charles Tarbell, *Mary Tarbell*, 1925, graphite on paper, 16 x 12 1/4.

ABOVE FAR LEFT: Frank Weston Benson, *Untitled (Standing Child)*, w/c, 12 x 8 1/2.

LEFT: Eleanor Curtis Ahl, *The Old Farm*, watercolor, 7 x 10, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Sellars.

Philadelphia Record and *McClure's*. He traveled to Europe with Henri, studying the works of Realist and Impressionist artists. His pastel drawing, *Stream*, harkens to the latter movement's prevalent use of the integrity of the painted or drawn mark in light-hued, interwoven strokes. Such rendering dates this drawing to post-1910, marking a stage of Glackens' development from pure illustrator to pure artist.

Willard Leroy Metcalf's renown as a



pivotal painter of the New England landscape stemmed from his studies with Georgia Loring Brown in Massachusetts and

also in Paris alongside Edmund Tarbell and Frank Benson. He earned a living through art, teaching and illustrating, principally in New York. The bucolic quality of *Flowering Trees* belies the temperament of an artist who was a founding member of The Ten.

Relational lines drawn between these artists yield a complex web of individuals who studied and worked together, taught one another at home and abroad, endorsed each other's career goals and initiated new art movements and causes. The exhibition visitor can be briefly immersed in this historical coterie of traditionalists and innovators, whose strong awareness of Europe's artistic offerings as well as America's continually evolving artistic tastes inspired newly synthesized visions. Many of the works in *Relative Merits: Artistic Acquaintances in Brenau University's Permanent Art Collection* emphasize these artists' beginnings and more private leanings, drawing attention to the less-considered but nonetheless important path to greatness.