

# THE SALMAGUNDI CLUB:

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### PRESTIGIOUS HISTORY

Excerpt from Alexander W. Katlan's book *The Salmagundi Club Painting Exhibition Records 1889 to 1939: A Guide to the American Exhibition of Oil Paintings and the Annual Exhibition and Auction Sale of Pictures*

The History of American Art permeates New York City's 139-year-old Salmagundi Club. It is located in the Irad Hawley mansion on 47 Fifth Avenue, built in 1852-53<sup>\*</sup>, and acquired by the club in 1917 from William G. Park. The building, the second and permanent location of the club, is preserved almost intact from the 1917 period. The American painter George Inness's palette and brushes are in a case by the coat check, and on the other side is J. Francis Murphy's palette. The original gas lightning chandelier, now converted to electricity, gives off a comfortable golden glow down the hallway filed with paintings donated by past artist members and antique furniture. Portraits of past presidents and fine paintings line the grand staircase leading to the second floor and circle the conference room. The distinguished list of past presidents read like a text on American art history, and climbing the grand staircase becomes a sort of presidential walk.<sup>†</sup>

First founded in 1871 by the American sculptor Jonathan Scott Hartley and two of his brothers, Joseph and John, the earliest meetings were in Jonathan S. Hartley's Skylight artist studio. The club was first called the Salmagundi Sketch Club and is one of the oldest art clubs in this country, along with the Philadelphia Sketch Club, the Providence Art Club, the Plastic Club, and Palette & Chisel Club of Chicago. The club may have received its name from the *Salmagundi Papers or Whim-whams and Opinions of Launcelot Longstaff, Esq. and others* (1807-08), written by Washington Irving in collaboration with William and James K. Paulding, the Salmagundi Papers

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<sup>\*</sup> Recent research findings are 1854

<sup>†</sup> These paintings can now be found in the Boardroom

were a series of twenty periodical essays republished in 1819 and many times afterwards into the 1860's. More likely the club's name is from the *Salmigandos*, as spelled by the Larousse dictionary, which is a ragout stew of different sorts of meat and flavoring ingredients served hot. A similar dish is still served at the Club's dining room. Other literary references include Rabelais's *Pantagruel* and Thomas Moore's poem *Salmagundian Hymn*. *The History of the Coronation of James II* (1687) lists as one of the dishes served to the King, No. 34, a salad of many ingredients including meat, fish, oil and lemon juice. The original Codex still exists in the club's library.

The early exhibitions were called "Black and White", in reference to the important annual show that the young club held on drawings, graphics and grisaille oils. From 1878 to 1887, the club gained a national and even international reputation for these annual exhibitions, which were open to all artists, passing before a jury of club members. Such international artists as Sargent, Whistler and Eakins submitted entries as well as many prominent women artists. Without a permanent location, the exhibitions were first held at Leavitts Art Gallery on Broadway, moving to Kurtz's Gallery (American Art Association) and then to the National Academy of Design. A critic for *the New York Herald* in 1879, reviewing this exhibition, gives praise to Winslow Homer who "sends a frame of very clever and effective outdoor studies in pencil on gray paper with the highlights in Chinese White. In another are grouped three decidedly impressionistic memoranda of scenes of Coney Island and an incisively drawn characterful sketch of a pretty, determined girl standing on the beach."

1917 September Auction # 2 at 14 West 12<sup>th</sup> St

Initially the Black and White exhibitions sold at good prices, but as the methods of printing reproduction were perfected, sales diminished, and when the art of photogravure made it possible to sell copies in black and white of the finest paintings at the price for which original drawings could not be made, the exhibitions were no longer possible. Although discontinued from the general public, the Black and White exhibitions continued for the club members, and were called as such. Many of these traditions continue at

the club in the annual exhibitions for its members, such as the graphic and sculpture exhibition. If continued in this context, then the annual graphics and drawing show becomes the oldest continuing graphics and drawing exhibition in the country. Recently silver point classes had been held at the club and the past president Richard Pionk had planned to have in the future an exhibition devoted solely to silver point drawings. The club also continues the annual Thumb-box exhibitions (the name beginning in 1908) for small oils or *en plein air* studies limited in size to 16 x 20 inches. The Thumb-box refers to a portable artist's paint box, held by the thumb, which contained a canvas or sketching board. The club's annual exhibition has been expanded in concept to include photographs of small size.

In its early years, moving from artist's studio to artist's studio, without a permanent location, the club was always dependent upon the generosity of its members. The club held some of its meetings at Napoleon Sarony's Photographic Gallery at Union Square, sharing the room with the Tile Club attended by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, R. Swain Gifford, W. C. Baird, F. Hopkinson Smith, Frederick Diehlman, George H. Maynard, F.D. Millet, and Joseph Hartley, to name a few Salmagundi artists who were Tile Club members. The Tile Club was given a dinner in Feb. 2, 1904. The artist William M. Chase was a noted and active member of both clubs; however he was absent from this banquet. In the middle of dinner a telegram arrived announcing the birth of Chase's daughter. Dinners honoring fellow artists were always popular at the Salmagundi Club. Edwin A. Abbey (1890), Anders Zorn (1893), Louis C. Tiffany (1901), J. Alden Weir (1913) were among the many artists given special banquets. The tradition is still maintained in the annual President's Dinner, which honors distinguished members of the arts community.

It is interesting to note that the artist members of the club supported and assisted in the breakaway formation from the Art Students League, when young artist students separated themselves from the constraints of the National Academy of Design to re-establish life classes and the use of live models. Nearly all the members of the Salmagundi Club, twenty-nine members at that time, were students or instructors at the National Academy

and afterwards seceded from that institution with the group who founded the Art Students League.

In 1894 the club moved to its first permanent location at 14 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City; the former home and studio of the American sculptor John Rogers, creator of the Victorian “Rogers Groups”. Plagued by ill health, Rogers gave up his beloved sculpture work and turned over his studio to the young artist club and moved afterwards to New Canaan. For the fireplace mantle in the new Club home the Salmagundi artist members created blue and white tiles and decorated steins. Although the blue and white tiles no longer exist, some of the steins (mugs) exist in the club’s collection.

The club’s membership in the early twentieth century reads like a Who’s Who of American Art, including, to name a few not previously mentioned; Elihu Vedder, Carlton Wiggins, Gustave Wiegand, Charles P. and his son Emil Gruppe, Emil Carlsen, John Carlson, William M. Post, Harry Roseland, Carle Blenner, F. Luis Mora, Edward Potthast, Bruce Crane, Childe Hassam and others of the Old Lyme School, John Folinsbee and others of Pennsylvania school, and Thomas Moran and other Moran family artists. From its very founding non-artist members, called lay members, were always a welcome part of the club. When Stanford White was proposed for membership, another member took the floor solemnly to explain that an architect was not an artist. Notwithstanding this objection, Stanford White joined the club as an artist member. Other distinguished members include John Phillip Sousa, the American songwriter who became a lay member in 1904, and Winston Churchill, who became an honorary artist member in 1958.

American tonalism was a pervasive influence at the Salmagundi Club. Highly influenced by J. Francis Murphy and George Inness (although not a member), by his son George Inness Jr. and Jonathan Scott Hartley, Inness’s son-in law, were both early exhibitors and donated the two Inness palettes to the Salmagundi club collection. The list of American tonalists reads like a membership list of the Salmagundi club of which Carleton Wiggins, Thomas Moran, Franklin de Haven and Bruce Crane were presidents of the club. Even the collectors of American tonalism and impressionism were lay members such as William T. Evans (SC1898), George Arnold Hearn (SC1898) and Samuel T. Shaw (SC1894). Both Shaw and Evans funded prizes in the oil exhibitions of the Club.

The American muralists were also an early influence; with the important muralist Charles Yardley Turner joining the club in 1872 and Frederick Dielman in 1876, with Edwin Blashfield, Percival de Luce and John LaFarge becoming later members. A small stain leaded glass panel by LaFarge, and another by Tiffany, exists in the dining room of the club. Edwin Blashfield drawings exist in the Salmagundi Club's collection. Kenyon Cox although not a formal member did extensively exhibit from "Drawings for the Blessed Damozel" twenty works, in the Black and White exhibition of 1887.

Published in *The Salmagundi Club Painting Exhibition Records 1889 – 1939* by Alexander W. Katlan<sup>‡</sup> in 2008 for the first time, under *Biographical Information and Letters*, a recently found letter by John LaFarge written in 1906 (late in his life) and which is addressed to the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore, makes the case about for the importance of hiring American mural artists.

The separation between artist and illustrator also did not exist in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Many artists of the Salmagundi Club were active as illustrators and became part of the *Golden Age of Illustration*. A case in point is Charles E. Chambers, known for his illustration of Pearl S. Buck, Booth Tarkington and Arnold Bennett stories. Howard Pyle was an early member in 1877c as well as Frederick C. Yohn in 1901 and both were considered early influences on American illustration. Norman Rockwell became a member in 1921 and Dean Cornwell in 1926 and Joseph C. Leyendecker in the 1920s. A collection of Cornwell's paintings hang in the staircase leading to the dining room given by the Holt family<sup>§</sup>. Other illustrators who were early members were Edwin A. Abbey, Gilbert Gaul, A.B. Frost, Albert Sterner, W. Granville Smith, Edward Penfield and Charles Dana Gibson famous for the Gibson Girl. Many of these artists' artworks exist in the Salmagundi Club's collection and were seen in the recently exhibited poster collection.

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<sup>‡</sup> Edited from the original text in the same book by Alexander Katlan. who wrote a version of this article published in the American Arts Quarterly, winter 1997 for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Salmagundi Club.

<sup>§</sup> Paintings are now in storage

The Salmagundi Club was part of the etching (decorative arts) revival which peaked in the U.S. in the late 1920's. Etchers and lithographers who were active members include John Taylor Arms, Joseph Pennell, James Allen and Ernest Roth. Edward Penfield was famous for his posters, architectural studies and covers for Harper's magazine. By this time the club was international in reputation. Alphonse Mucha joined the club in 1921 during one of his frequent trips to the United States. Shortly after joining the club he was commissioned to create original "Salmagundi Art Box" tins for Whitman's candies; which he did through the 1920s.

During World War I, the Salmagundi Club was very active in supporting the war effort. Charles Dana Gibson became chairman for the Division of Pictorial Publicity for the war and were called upon "***...to flood the country with posters which, through no other appeal that own graphic portrayal, would stir a people to action***" A number of these war and book posters were recently restored and exhibited by the club. In the First World War, eight artists (seven of which were members of the club) were sent to the front to depict the war., William J. Aylward (SC1910), Walter Duncan (SC1915), Harvey T. Dunn (SC1915), George M. Harding (SC1912), Ernest C. Peixotto (SC1898) J. André Smith (SC1911), Harry E. Townsend (SC1908) and the non-club member Wallace Morgan. These eight artists "***...commissioned as captains in the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), these brave men-known as the AEF Eight-risked their lives roaming through the occupied zones, blood soaked battlefields, and the forward trenches to complete a groundbreaking mission: they were the first artist-soldiers to be recruited through official government channels to make a (art) historical record of war.***"

These eight artists were assigned to record the war, not propagandize it. On January 28, 1919, over 507 drawings and paintings became a part of the Smithsonian Institution and the War College, U.S. National Museum. The eight artists were disappointed that the whole collection, being too large, could never be shown all at once. Other artist members contributed in less official capacities creating posters for the Liberty Bonds and raising funds such as Alphaeus Cole, Winfield Scott Clime, and Clarence Monroe. In a letter to club members, entitled the *War Service of the Salmagundi*, the artist F. Ballard Williams who was president at that time, talks about the club artists volunteering and "***...discovered an opportunity for effective war service...in the painting of designation charts for machine gun instruction***

*in army cantonments.*” He also quotes an English Officer who states, *“If all of you subscribe \$100, 000 for Liberty Bonds, you would not be doing as valuable a service as you can do by painting these landscape targets.”*

During World War II, Francis Vanderveer Kugler who was a chairman of the Salmagundi Club War Art Committee of September 1942 writes a finely worded justification of artist’s involvement with the war effort in a letter to the U.S War Department,

*It is with utmost reluctance that artists turn from highly individualistic endeavors to the concerted action that war demands, but when ideologies arise that threatens the principle of untrammelled thought they must lend their talents in support of that institution which allows them to function without restraint.*

*The Classic Arts, through the ages, were never remote from the strife that wracked their day, and the Members of the War Art Committee of the Salmagundi Club are proud that, at a time when the manpower of America was still unmobilized, they pledge themselves to marshal the creative talent of the nation to a militant, intellectual Spearhead.*

Kugler goes on and in words that resound honor, pride and altruism, he states:

*...In the United States today there are many hundreds of fine artists...Is it not logical that these men should be turned to in time of national Crisis? It is the role of art to lead, not to follow. These artists, accustomed by the very nature of their work to deal with dramatic and emotional phases of life, are available and eager to devote their talents to the national course... The need for stirring posters creates the ideal opportunities for America’s artists to give their unlimited talent to the nation. This Committee most earnestly recommends that those in authority make the most of it.*

Besides the poster campaigns, this Committee and the Salmagundi Club also created a movie with Paramount Film Co. taken in the Club’s galleries showing artists drawing and painting soldiers. The club held two art exhibitions for the war effort and created two unique war trophy statuettes. The scarcity of bronze made it necessary to appeal to all holders of medals and decorations to donate them for the creation of the sculpture. On the base

of the two trophies the names of all medal donors were inscribed. The first 18" statuette created by George Lober, was a sculpture of a sailor about to slam a shell into a gun breach. It was presented to the Navy Department and was proposed for the first warship throwing a shell into Tokyo. The second statuette by Ulysses A. Ricci, was a figure of Victory, her sword at rest, standing over a vanquished soldier with her foot firmly planted on the Japanese flag of the rising sun. These works were presented to the public and the war department in a special exhibition, and was reviewed in the news media with the title "Salmagundi War Art Shuns Prettiness".

The Club fell out of favor and influence in the 1950's, during the rise of Abstract Expressionism in New York City. Labeled, perhaps incorrectly as one of "New York's last strongholds of Academic Traditions," the Club was actually more open-minded, although critical of some of the modernists. The exhibition of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club in 1945 is a case in point. An award jury composed of "museum men," Lloyd Goodrich, Bartlett Hayes, Jr. and John A.H. Baur awarded three \$1000 prizes. *Office at Night* by Edward Hopper won the cash prize, while Reginald Marsh's *The Holy Name Mission* won the Thomas J. Watson purchase prize. Jon Corbino's *Circus Aerialists* was awarded the third. As one reviewer stated: "...a new point of view is definitely in evidence and the change of policy is a forward-looking one".

Today the Salmagundi Club is very active in the arts community and continues to exhibit quality art work by contemporary artists. The Salmagundi Club's medal created by U.A. Ricci, is awarded to distinguished citizens in various fields who have linked one area of culture to another, or fostered the work of American artists and painters. This medal has been awarded in the past to many prominent Americans, including in June 1970 the Apollo XIII astronauts, Captain James A. Lovell, Jr. Fred W. Haise, Jr. and John L. Swigert for outstanding scientific achievement. Salmagundi artist member Lumen Winter designed the emblem logo worn in the space mission and the club was proud to host the first official reception in New York City honoring the Apollo XIII crew. The plaster cast of the Apollo medal and logo with photographs still hang in the club today.