

JOHN S. SARGENT, FIRST OF AMERICAN PORTRAIT PAINTERS, AND HIS WORK



THE OYSTER-GATHERERS. BY JOHN S. SARGENT FROM THE EXHIBITION PENN. ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS.



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JOHN S. SARGENT,
AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS PORTRAIT PAINTER.
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of American Parents in Florence He Inherited a
Pupl of Carolus Duran When Only a Lad—Com-
mended by Frederick Leighton for the Ability He
Displayed in His Early Sketches—His Life in Paris
and Its Effect Upon His Paintings.

John S. Sargent was born in Florence, Italy, forty-seven years ago, or to be more exact, on Jan. 12, 1816. From his father, Dr. Pitts William Sargent, he inherited those traits of careful study and analysis for which the latter was famous.

His father, although a native of Gloucester, Mass., graduated from the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, and was a successful practitioner in Philadelphia, where he met and married Mary Newbold Singer, a member of an old Philadelphia family and an accomplished painter in water colors.

In 1825 the parents of Sargent moved to Florence, Italy, where they resided until the son, John B. Sargent, became 15. The young artist while in Florence did not show any marked ability in art, for in that city art is common and the person without an artistic temperament in a much rarer product than in other cities.

Sargent's education in Florence included instruction in the classics and the fine arts, but whether he was dull or studious history fails to state. We only know that during a summer spent in the Tyrol he showed some of his sketches to Frederick Leighton, steward Lord Leighton, president of the Royal Academy, who sympathized with the youth, for he remembered his own student days as a lad in Rome, and later at the Royal Academy in Dublin and to Sargent's native city of Gloucester.

Sargent Goes to Paris.
Later he left Sargent a resident of Paris, not because he felt the restlessness to study art and to pursue the impulse to study but in Paris; for the very simple reason that his parents moved to that city, and, of course, went with them, and so, by a chain of circumstances which the boy seems to have had no part in forming, was sent to that city of students, humbly asking the great favor—admission to the atelier in the studio of Carolus Duran.

Among the other things Duran taught this young man were some important lessons given while he worked together in decorating a ceiling in the Luxembourg. We know that Sargent loved his work, and that he loved Duran, for in one corner of the Luxembourg ceiling his introduction to the portrait of his teacher. Men always emphasize work which they love, and something of this kind.

His art students of the school of Carolus Duran were somewhat amused one morning in 1837, by the appearance of a tall, well dressed and apparently a rich and bashful boy at the door of Duran's studio, waiting for the entrance of the master in order that he might obtain permission to that famous school as a pupil.

The boy was apparently 16 or 17 years of age, a mother's boy, if you may use the term. Although the boy's parents, he was born in sunny skies of Italy, and the German language bore traces of his mother tongue. Utile signs he carried a neat portfolio of sketches, some made from many interesting subjects in Rome, the city of his birthplace, and some were done in the Alps, that grandland for the art student, and the sketcher.

These sketches were drawn in the sketching manner customary to the artist of the day, but because he had not been permitted to add his knowledge of the accomplishments of the day, he was attracted to the youth not for his gentile, beaming manner, but for the early marks of a budding genius, showing through in his sketches of the Alps.

Had he doubted him he would have imagined to have worked in some manner a caricature of Duran, as Michelangelo pictured in his decoration of the Sistine Chapel a caricature of an obnoxious cardinal in that portion of the "Last Judgment" which indicates the hottest fire of the souls who are damned.

In after years, when Sargent was selected to carry out a part of the decorative scheme of Boston's Public Library, his early instruction under Duran, aided by the study of his more mature years, gave him that knowledge of the art and that imaginative faculty that has placed these decorations so high in the admiration of all.

Worked With Abbey.
A somewhat interesting incident connected with these decorations is that Edwin A. Abbey, who is but two years older than Sargent, and whose birthplace is Philadelphia; was also one of the decorative artists who adorned the Boston Library, that these two artists are warm friends, and that during the time they were working on these decorations they were both living at Fairfield, Gloucestershire, England, and that under English skies in English studios these great masterpieces of decorations were painted by American artists.

Early in the eighties we find Sargent located in Paris in a studio of his own. He was then beginning to feel his strength, and the value of his careful study and excellent art training showed itself in his work.

From the time of his first exhibition efforts success seems to have been waiting for this young artist; and the success that crowned his efforts during the early years of his career was sufficient to ensure the unshakable assurance that there is a royal road to fame in art, and that fortune had smiled for the coming of Sargent.

His First Visit to America.
In the course of his studies Sargent visited the city of Madrid to study the paintings of Velasquez, and although a diligent student, he was not a mediocre crowd, and the influence of Velasquez, great as it must have been on the young student, is not shown in his work.

Sargent possessed the faculty of a most masterful but wary brain, and the story is told of the judgment of Sargent,

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Sargent first visited the United States during the Centennial year of 1876. At this time he was unknown as an artist and the cable did not herald his coming. Now telegraph and cable tolls are not considered too expensive to send over to every artist that he does or says in the art world.

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"Now, different, from the coming of this same Sargent to this country in 1876 was his coming in 1891. During this year an exhibition of his work was held in Boston under the auspices of the Art Students' Association which probably awakened more interest in America than any other exhibition of his work of a single artist ever held before or since. The collection consisted of 139 examples of Sargent's art, and was considered one of the most successful exhibitions that ever came from the old world to Boston.

His First Visit to America Occurred in 1876, and His First Exhibition Took Place in 1891—Engaged to Help Decorate the Boston Public Library—Sargent's Most Striking Characteristic is His Ability to Bring Out the Hidden Character of the Men and Women Whose Portraits He Paints—The Rewards of His Efforts.

fully exhibited from the pride which this exhibition gave his citizens. Ask a Bostonian about Sargent, and he will at one claim him as a Bostonian because of this exhibition, and because Sargent's father was born in Gloucester.

It is from the best of artists that Sargent receives the highest praise, not because he has attempted to paint above the heads of the people, but rather because to them is revealed the full scope of his genius.

A Gentle Rebuke.
One of the most striking characteristics of Sargent's work is his ability to bring out the hidden character of the men and women whose portraits he painted as clearly as though an analysis of the character of the model had been spread before the eyes of the spectator upon the page of a book. Thus far no one has ever accused Sargent of stooping to flattery in his portrait painting; on the contrary, some critics accuse him of realism wholly uncalculated for, and sometimes strained to a point that admits of no excuse.

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His Royal Judgment
Not Under His Control

Some years ago King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, was a guest at a country house in England, and looking up a sporting paper in the billiard room one morning, was seen deep in its contents. A clergyman also a guest, noticed this, and, adding up to him in a tone that was meant to carry reproach:

"The clergyman, though, would not be denied."

"Do you know, your royal highness, that one of my friends has lost hundreds of pounds by betting on horse racing, and has never won anything?"

"Yes," said the prince, as he turned to another column, "he must have a very bad judge of horses."

Embraced the Subject
"Dear me," said the good-looking female, "that is the saddest of the Junius situation, "but a vicious look that woman has we just passed in the corridor. Is she dangerous?"

"Yes, at times," replied the superintendant, "especially."

"But why do you allow her such a position?"

"I can't help it."

"Oh, that's all an inmate and under your control?"

"Yes, she is not under my control, sir, at times."

"Embraced the Subject"
"Dear me," said the young student thoughtfully, "when I get interested in a subject I never stop until I have thoroughly it through."
"That's nice," was his sweetheart's smiling reply. "I wish I were an interesting subject."
—And the young man,