



June 2004

Brooklyn Museum to Present First Exhibition to Focus on John Singer Sargent's Images of Children, October 8, 2004–January 16, 2005

Press Preview October 7, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

The Brooklyn Museum will present *Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children*, the first exhibition to examine the role of child imagery in the art of one of the foremost painters of the late nineteenth century. The exhibition of approximately 43 works on loan from important domestic and foreign collections includes commissioned portraits, portraits of family members and friends, genre paintings, and works portraying professional child models. *Great Expectations* is organized by Barbara Dayer Gallati, Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, where the exhibition will be on view from October 8, 2004, through January 16, 2005. It will be presented at the Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia, from February 25 through May 22, 2005, and at the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, from June 18 through September 11, 2005.

Although he is perhaps best known for his dashing high-style society portraits, John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) created a significant number of children's portraits and genre paintings featuring children —works whose subjects often do not conform to popular perceptions of his work and are unlike the often romantic depictions of children created by most of his contemporaries. The exhibition examines Sargent's child imagery in light of the broader cultural trends that simultaneously contributed to the redefinition of childhood in fin-de-siècle Europe and North America and brought about the new century's designation as the "Century of the Child."

This innovative look at a discrete segment of Sargent's output will reveal that paintings of children represent undisputed milestones in his career and that he deliberately displayed them at strategic moments to reorient critical and public opinion of his work. In the United States, his images of children created an audience eager to claim him as American despite his foreign birth and training, cosmopolitan life style, and notoriously "irreverent" portrayals of his adult sitters. In France, much of his early success was built on uniquely arresting portraits of children that not only declared his professional independence from his famed instructor, Carolus-Duran, but also helped to demonstrate the ever-widening range of his thematic interests. In England, his child subjects often evoked Romantic associations linking childhood with innocence and, as a result, veiled the impact of his avant-garde techniques, making his paintings palatable to audiences who otherwise resisted the incursion of contemporary French aesthetics into the insular English art world.

Brooklyn Museum

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The exhibition also maps Sargent's alterations of standard iconographic formulas and how his portrayals of children as psychologically complex individuals helped to remove the subject from the grip of Victorian sentimentality, elevating it to a higher level in the hierarchy of artistic subject matter.

In addition to including some of Sargent's most famous and noteworthy canvases (among them, *The Pail-leron Children*, *Garden Study of the Vickers Children*, and *Mrs. Carl Meyer and Her Children*), the exhibition will display fine, little-known paintings, some of which have not been exhibited since the first decades of the twentieth century. Executed over a four-decade period, they range from the first known oil portrait by Sargent (a circa 1875 portrait of his five-year-old sister Violet) to *The Tyrolese Crucifix*, a genre subject begun in the Austrian Tyrol during the early months of World War I.

Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children is accompanied by a book of the same title by Dr. Gallati, with contributions by Erica E. Hirshler, Croll Senior Curator of Paintings in the Department of the Art of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Richard Ormond, director of the John Singer Sargent Catalogue Raisonné Project. Co-published by the Brooklyn Museum and Bulfinch Press (Time Warner Book Group), the book is 256 pages and contains 100 black-and-white and 94 four-color illustrations. It will be available October 2004.

About John Singer Sargent

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was a leading force in the revival of society portraiture in Britain and America at the end of the nineteenth century. While best known for his portraits of fashionable and wealthy elite on both sides of the Atlantic, he also gained deserved respect for his landscape and genre subjects, as well as for his work as a watercolorist and mural painter. Sargent was born in Florence, Italy, slightly more than a year after his parents had moved to Europe from Philadelphia. The family traveled the Continent extensively throughout his youth, and early on he exercised his desire to draw and paint under the stimulus of the Old World atmosphere in which he was raised. His principal art training was from the Parisian master Carolus-Duran (1837—1917) with whom he studied from 1874 to about 1879. He officially marked the end of his student days with the display of his now famous portrait of Carolus-Duran at the 1879 Paris Salon. Although he maintained permanent residence abroad, Sargent considered himself an American and, in addition to intermittently working in the United States, was actively involved in the American arts through commissions, exhibition and organizational affiliations, and friendships. In the early 1880s Sargent was headquartered in Paris, where he was in contact with the major artistic and literary figures of the era, including Henry James, Claude Monet, and Giovanni Boldini. Following the disastrous reception of his painting *Madame X* at the 1884 Paris Salon, however, he spent increasing amounts of time in England and, by 1886, he had settled in London.

The strength of his talent kept him above the often petty political divisions that defined the art world of his time, as witnessed by his memberships in such varied and often competing organizations as the Society of American Artists, the National Academy of Design, the London Royal Academy, and the New English Art

Club. His work was included in nearly every major international exhibition from the late 1870s until his last years and almost invariably won official acclaim. He was decorated by the French, Belgian, and German governments, and received honorary degrees from, among others, Harvard, Oxford, and Yale universities.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$6; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$3. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. **Bus:** B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.