

FOREWORD

Cities are sites of memory, layered with monuments and scattered pieces of the past that make up their complex physical fabric. They are also sites of fragmented experiences, of momentary impressions, of novelty and change. Defined by their many inhabitants and visitors, urban settings shape the way city dwellers make sense of the world around them. *John Sloan's New York* and the exhibition it accompanies, *Seeing the City: Sloan's New York*, present the artist's coming to grips with the paradoxes and pleasures of life in early twentieth-century New York, while his impressions of the city—captured on canvas and paper, in sketches, paintings, photographs, and diary entries—trace the way the city fashioned his own development as an artist.

It is entirely fitting that this exhibition should take pride of place as the first major traveling exhibition organized by the Delaware Art Museum since its ambitious expansion, completed in June 2005. The Delaware Art Museum has the largest collection of the art of John Sloan in the world, and it is the repository of a treasure trove of archival and manuscript information about the artist. This distinction is the result of the lifelong generosity and patronage of a single individual, Helen Farr Sloan, the artist's second wife and devoted widow, who passed away in December 2005.

Helen Farr was sixteen years old when she met John Sloan in New York in 1927. Having arrived for her first art class at the Art Students League, she had planned to study with Boardman Robinson and was surprised when her instructor turned out instead to be John Sloan. Her experience in Sloan's class became an enduring relationship that, through the circuitous channels of chance and circumstance, eventually led her to Wilmington and to the Delaware Art Museum. By now, the story is well known. The young Helen Farr began taking copious notes in Sloan's class, which, through a close collaboration that resulted between the student and the seasoned artist, were published in 1939 in *Gist of Art*. She became an accomplished artist and art teacher. After the death of Sloan's first wife, Dolly, Helen Farr visited the ailing artist in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where they were wed on the spur of the moment. The years they enjoyed together as a married couple, from 1944 until Sloan's death in 1951, were productive and happy. After the artist's death, his widow returned to teaching and devoted her life to stewarding his legacy and nurturing his reputation.

In 1960, Bruce St. John, then Director of the Delaware Art Museum, consulted Helen Farr Sloan regarding an exhibition celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the 1910 Exhibition of Independent Artists. Since Sloan's diaries were a rich resource of information, this first collaboration became the beginning of what Helen called "a long and happy association" with the Delaware Art Museum. At first she commuted from New York to Wilmington when her teaching year ended, and she eventually retired to full-time residency in Delaware in 1989. The Delaware Art Museum became her second home. In 1978 she gave the Museum John Sloan's personal library and the archival materials she had so carefully

FIGURE 1
Berenice Abbott (1898–1991)
Portrait of John and Helen Farr Sloan
in Chelsea studio, ca. 1948
Photograph, 10 × 8 inches
John Sloan Manuscript Collection
Delaware Art Museum

been compiling and preserving. In the ensuing years she shared her knowledge, experience, and organizational skills with generations of scholars, curators, collectors, and visitors. She donated thousands of works of art, books, and archival materials related to Sloan and his circle. She funded numerous exhibitions and acquisitions and contributed to two ambitious expansions of the Museum’s physical plant, in 1987 and again in 2002–2005. But it is for her personal and unassuming generosity in sharing of herself, of her memories, and of her wisdom that Helen will perhaps be most remembered and most sorely missed.

Organizing an exhibition as ambitious and far-reaching as this one requires immense amounts of collegiality and generosity. Lenders, both public and private, have parted with cherished pieces, and for this we are immensely grateful. The Henry R. Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided essential and early support without which the project would never have come to pass. The partnership of Anthony G. Hirschel, Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; Judith Hansen O’Toole, Director/CEO of the Westmoreland Museum of American Art; and Allison Perkins, Executive Director of Reynolda House Museum of American Art, was indispensable to ensuring the widest possible audience for this groundbreaking endeavor. The organizing curators, Joyce K. Schiller and Heather Campbell Coyle, are to be roundly commended for their steadfast commitment to and unwavering leadership of this project while they simultaneously navigated the rough waters of a major expansion, a move to a new building, a complete reinstallation of the permanent collection, as well as several other demanding exhibition projects with good humor and utmost professionalism.

Many years in the making, the exhibition and book also benefited from the wisdom and expertise of individuals who are no longer working at the Delaware Art Museum but whose insightful presence continues to be felt. We owe continuing debts of gratitude to the late Rowland Elzea for his groundbreaking work in cataloguing Sloan’s work; to Elizabeth H. Hawkes for her many years as curator of the John Sloan collection; to Kraig Binkowski, the Museum’s former librarian, for his guidance in cataloguing the Sloan archives and library; and to Stephen T. Bruni, Executive Director of the Delaware Art Museum from 1986 to 2004, under whose leadership the Museum grew enormously and became a major center for the study of John Sloan. Carol Pesner and Katherine Degn of the Kraushaar Gallery in New York, lifelong friends of Helen Farr Sloan, were invaluable in their support of the Museum’s efforts to organize this exhibition and in their dedication to continuing Helen’s legacy. Finally, I wish to extend personal thanks to Sandy Lion and Jerome K. Grossman for taking such loving personal care of Helen Farr Sloan and ensuring her comfort and well-being in her final years. We know that, were she still with us, the opportunity provided by this exhibition for art lovers of the twenty-first century to rediscover New York as John Sloan experienced it would delight and thrill Helen Farr Sloan. We sense her spirit cheering us on, and we joyfully dedicate this book to her in loving memory of her indomitable spirit, her generosity, and her steadfast passion for art.

Danielle Rice

Executive Director

Delaware Art Museum

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When John and Dolly Sloan moved to New York in 1904, they were two of approximately one hundred thousand migrants and immigrants arriving in the city that year. Settling in Lower Manhattan, the Sloans joined numerous artists and writers living between Third and 30th Streets, including several friends from Philadelphia who had already made the transition. Sloan remained anchored in New York—painting, making prints and illustrations, and teaching—for the rest of his life, and as his relationship with the city changed, so did his pictures. As he painted his urban encounters, Sloan documented his experiences in an ever-changing city; even in his lifetime, his paintings were called snapshots and historical documents. Through exhibition and publication, these images helped define New York City in the popular imagination. In his early years in the city, Sloan focused on the pedestrian experience, including people, streets, elevated trains, and public parks. In so doing, he revealed the complex dynamism of this growing and diverse urban metropolis and made it his own. Sloan’s engagement with New York did not end when he came to know the city; he painted, etched, and drew it actively throughout the teens and twenties, reacting as New York reinvented itself again and again.

John Sloan’s New York and the exhibition it accompanies, *Seeing the City: Sloan’s New York*, chronicle John Sloan’s particular engagement with New York City. Excellent studies of the Ashcan School and The Eight, including *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and Their New York* (National Museum of American Art, 1995) and *Painters of a New Century: The Eight and American Art* (Milwaukee Art Museum, 1991), provided the foundation for this project. This exhibition and catalogue shift the focus from the group to the individual and explore the long arc of Sloan’s career as a recorder of urban life. By bringing together his paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, and illustrated letters and placing these rich materials in conversation with the history of the city he adopted as his home, this exhibition examines Sloan’s contribution to the iconography of New York City.

Nearly one hundred years have passed since The Eight exhibition opened at Macbeth Galleries on February 3, 1908, and this group of artists and the city that hosted their groundbreaking exhibition have inspired excellent scholarship in recent years. But it is the legacy of Helen Farr Sloan, who preserved her husband’s letters, books, photographs, and diaries, that served as the catalyst for this project. These papers became the heart of the John Sloan Manuscript Collection, which she donated to the Delaware Art Museum beginning in 1978. A grant from The Henry R. Luce Foundation allowed the Museum to organize and preserve these materials. This collection provides profound insight into what it meant to be an artist in New York in the first part of the twentieth century and has been crucial to the scholarship presented in this exhibition and catalogue.

The essays in this catalogue explore Sloan’s unique and nuanced view of New York City and the places, activities, and relationships that inspired his vision. We provide an overview of Sloan’s years in the city and the city’s influence on his art, paying particular attention to

the neighborhoods where he lived and how these places became the subjects of so many of his pictures. Molly S. Hutton identifies what she terms Sloan’s “pedestrian aesthetics”—his mobile, street-level gaze—developed in the first few years after his arrival in New York. Reading his diaries alongside travel narratives of the period, Hutton posits that Sloan and his associates came to know the city by walking it, writing about it, and picturing it in their work and, in the process, transformed themselves from newcomers to New Yorkers. Susan Fillin-Yeh examines Sloan’s views of life on the urban sidewalk, which she identifies as a liminal space, a charged location between the street and the shop. Katherine E. Manthorne explores Sloan’s interest in moving pictures and the medium’s influence on the structure and substance of his art. She also considers his relationship to John Butler Yeats, whom Sloan embraced as a father figure. Alexis L. Boylan turns her attention to the other defining relationship of Sloan’s adult life, his friendship with Robert Henri.

The concept of this exhibition and the selection of the staff and scholars who have worked on it were all subject to Helen Farr Sloan’s consideration. The project was begun with the hope that it would come to fruition before her passing. Unfortunately, Helen died on December 13, 2005.

As the exhibition curators, we owe a gigantic thank you to all the staff at the Delaware Art Museum, who over the past five years have assisted us as we brought this project to completion. We would also like to thank individuals who worked with us on aspects of the project. They include Ronya Anna, Anne Corso, Julie Ehmann, Allison Evans, Sarena Fletcher, Mary Holahan, Renay Mercer, Lois Stoehr, and Courtney Waring. We also want to thank Carson Zullinger, who photographed the Delaware Art Museum’s works that appear in this catalogue.

We would like to thank Alexis L. Boylan, Susan Fillin-Yeh, Molly S. Hutton, and Katherine E. Manthorne, not only for their dedication but also for the stimulating exchanges that working together produced. In addition to the essay authors, a variety of scholars and museum professionals provided advice, assistance, access, and thoughtful suggestions. They include Avis Berman; Bennard Perlman; Susan Faxon, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy; Ryan Grover, Biggs Museum of American Art; Erica Hirshler, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Neil Harris, The University of Chicago; Janis Tomlinson, University of Delaware; Brianna Flinchbaugh, Hagley Museum and Library; Rebecca Zurier, University of Michigan; Mark D. Mitchell, National Academy Museum; Clay Lewis and our anonymous reviewers from the National Endowment for the Humanities; Paige A. Simpson, formerly of the National Gallery of Art; Lynn Marsden-Atlass, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Marla K. Shoemaker and Carolyn Macuga, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Virginia Mecklenburg and Bill Truettner, Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Susanna Gold, Temple University.

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