

Moments of Life

Sullivan Goss showcases prolific American impressionists like Potthast, Hassam, Cooper and Cassatt

Through September 2

Sullivan Goss

7 E. Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
t: (805) 730-1460
www.sullivangoss.com

by John O'Hern

Edward Henry Potthast (1857–1927) was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and lived on the East Coast. In his early 20s he made trips to Europe to study in Munich and then in Paris. Potthast is known for his chastely clad bathers on the sunny beaches of New York and New England, as well as chastely unclad figures bathing in mountain pools. It was a surprise to see a painting of the *Santa Barbara Mission* highlighting the works in this exhibition. The painting was also a surprise to Frank Goss when he first saw it.

Goss and his staff did extensive research to determine first that the painting was by Potthast and then that it had been painted on-site in Santa Barbara rather than from a photograph. He later learned that there is a small, 8-by-10-inch sketch of the same scene at night in the collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

The unusual painting (for Potthast) rests firmly in the tradition of American impressionism. Susan Bush, curator of contemporary art at the gallery, observes: "All of these works serve to capture moments—moments of light, moments of contemplation, moments of life—the roots of impressionism."

Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), who lived in Santa Barbara in



Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), *Mother and Child*, ca. 1900. Mixed media on paper, 19.875 x 15 in.

his later years, turned his impressionist technique to interpretations of the built environment, from the Flatiron Building in New York to the *Gate of the Maharaja's Palace, Jaipur*. Cooper

studied under Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His studies in Paris and his appreciation of the work of fellow American impressionist Childe



John Henry Twachtman (1853–1902), *Harbor Scene, Dordrecht, Holland*, 1880. Oil on panel, 15½ x 18 in.

Hassam, whom he met in New York in the early 1890s, seem to have had a greater impact. He was impressed by the atmosphere Hassam created applying the techniques of impressionism to his paintings of the buildings of the city.

Cooper and his wife traveled around the world seeking exotic locations for their work. His depiction of the intense light and leafy shade of the Maharaja's Palace was among

the paintings exhibited in New York which caused a critic to remark on the "architectural works which are said to possess such charm as to make them dreams of beauty...."

Mother and Child (circa 1900) by Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) exhibits Cassatt's spontaneous strokes of pastel and graphite and captures an unprompted moment of life. She was born in Pittsburgh and spent most of her life in France. Since women

weren't allowed to study at the École des Beaux-Arts at the time, she studied with Jean-Léon Gérôme, who would later take on Thomas Eakins as a student. She had exhibited regularly at the Paris Salon but was rejected in 1877. Edgar Degas invited her to join the impressionists. After seeing their exhibition in 1879 a Parisian reviewer wrote "M. Degas and Mlle. Cassatt are, nevertheless, the only artists who distinguish themselves...and who offer



Colin Campbell
Cooper (1856–1937),
*Study for the Gate of the
Maharaja's Palace, Jaipur*,
ca. 1914. Oil on canvas,
16½ x 20½ in.



Childe Hassam
(1859–1935),
Sunrise – Autumn, 1884.
Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in.



Edward Henry Potthast (1857-1927), *Santa Barbara Mission*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Images courtesy Sullivan Goss.

some attraction and some excuse in the pretentious show of window dressing and infantile daubing." The art establishment was slow to come around.

John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902) was born in Cincinnati where he studied under Frank Duveneck at the Cincinnati School of Design. He developed a synthesis of tonalism and impression, incorporating the soft tonalities of the former and the brushstrokes of the latter. His

compositions are both poetic and abstract as in the extraordinary painting *Arques-la-Bataille* (1885) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In her essay for the exhibition, *Seeing Abstractly*, at Spanierman Gallery, Lisa N. Peters wrote: "Considered a painter's painter throughout his career, Twachtman was driven by inner necessity rather than by commercial tastes. While his work was little understood by the public of his era, his artist colleagues expressed their

deep regard for his individualism and integrity as well as for his art, which they perceived to be ahead of its time. Indeed, had Twachtman lived beyond his 49 years, he might well have played an important role in the rise of abstraction in America in the early part of the 20th century."

The works on display at Sullivan Goss are products of a time when American art was trying to establish itself, aware of its roots, and aware of what the future could be. ■