



Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY
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TONALISM THEN: 1870-1930

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SANTA BARBARA, CA - Sullivan Goss announces a landmark exhibition devoted to American Tonalism - a late 19th and early 20th century movement marked by muted palettes, brushy or soft painting, and a dreamy, atmospheric quality.

The gallery mounts this exhibition in the wake of three major developments: the gallery's late 2012 discovery and acquisition of the Estate of Tonal hero **Leon Dabo**; the late 2010 publication of David Cleveland's *A History of American Tonalism: 1880-1920*; and the discovery of

several significant caches of work by **Lockwood de Forest** whose interest in Tonalism becomes more apparent in this exhibition. Between Cleveland's major contribution to the scholarship and the gallery's sudden discovery of several significant bodies of Tonal paintings, the timing seemed perfect to look into an influential and bicoastal "school" that is admired by many collectors while remaining largely unknown to the general public.

Tonalism is more of a pictorial approach than a particular school. In 1972, Wanda Corn curated an exhibition called *The Color of Mood* for San Francisco's de Young Museum that united various artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries whose works were aesthetically tied together by their approach to color. These artists were progressives in the Romantic tradition who glorified both nature and the individual. Generally, Tonalism developed as a response to the brushy, moody works of the French Barbizon school; the Aesthetic Movement's adoption of Asian art's chromatic and compositional minimalism; and the mysterious air, heightened subjectivity, and poetic sensibility of the Symbolists. George Inness might be thought of as the leader of the American Barbizon; James Abbott McNeill Whistler, the leader of the Aesthetic Movement; Albert Pinkham Ryder or Arthur B. Davies, the leaders of the American Symbolists. Both the American Barbizon and American Symbolism adhered to a metaphysics where reality couldn't be seen, but could be sensed. These artists worked to capture echoes of a larger reality that could be sensed in the quietest moments. Indeed, some critics called the movement "quietism"

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for the portentous silence felt in the images. Many consider this interest in subjectivity and painterly abstraction to be an important antecedent to Modernist abstraction.

Gallery artists like Lockwood de Forest (1850-1932), Leon Dabo (1864-1960), and **Nell Brooker Mayhew** (1876-1940) each grew to maturity during the time in which Tonalism was most in vogue. They each responded to its ideas and aesthetics differently.

De Forest's principal efforts as a painter occurred before 1881 and after 1900. In the latter portion of his career, he gravitated towards brushy, highly atmospheric works, with a pervasive sense of quietude. He followed the light away from Inness' American Barbizon style.

Dabo, a New York artist whose career exploded between 1905-1917 was a major proponent of "Whistlerian" Tonalism. Indeed, he was sometimes thought of as "Whistler on the Hudson." Major collections of the period and major retrospectives since held him up as an influential and distinctive Tonalist.

Mayhew's "color etchings" responded most to the Asian influences found in the Aesthetic Movement and to the poeticism of the European Symbolists. Indeed, she took her degree in French Impressionism from Northwestern University during a time in which French Symbolism began to gain currency in progressive art circles.

Tonalists from both coasts operated in a time when the Academic tradition had begun to loosen its hold. Photography had freed them from the need to make records instead of works of art. Indeed, photography itself had been freed from record making, and the blurry sepia effects of the Pictorialist tradition will be represented in this exhibition.

TONALISM THEN: 1870-1930 is presented as the historical counterpart to the Gallery's concurrent exhibition of contemporary material, ***TONALISM NOW***.

TONALISM THEN: 1870-1930 features work by: James Renwick Brevoort, Bruce Crane, J. Frank Currier, Leon Dabo, Charles Harold Davis, Lockwood de Forest, Charles Melville Dewey, Charles Warren Eaton, Alexander Harrison, Childe Hassam, Xavier Martinez, Nell Brooker Mayhew, Thomas McGlynn, John Francis Murphy, Granville Redmond, Chauncey Ryder, Edward Steichen, Ray Strong, Alexander Wyant