



Robert Henri
American, 1865 - 1929

Indian Girl in White Blanket

1917

oil on canvas

overall: 81.28 × 66.04 cm (32 × 26 in.)

framed: 100.65 × 85.41 × 8.89 cm (39 5/8 × 33 5/8 × 3 1/2 in.)

Inscription: lower right: ROBERT HENRI

Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund) 2014.136.17

ENTRY

In 1902 Robert Henri decided to dedicate himself to portraiture. Rather than taking commissions, he sought out his own subjects, painting people of diverse ages and nationalities. He traveled widely, making trips abroad as well as to the American West, including three productive visits to Santa Fe in 1916, 1917, and 1922. There he produced a sizable body of work depicting Latino and Native American subjects, including this portrait of Julianita, a schoolgirl from the San Ildefonso pueblo.

Henri first painted Julianita on his second trip to Santa Fe. He arrived in July and was initially frustrated by his inability to find compelling subjects and settle down to work. On August 19 he wrote to George Bellows of his continuing struggle: “I’m sorry . . . I haven’t done anything exceptional to show you so far. Shall have to work up or try to get one at least before you come.” [1] By November 17, following Bellows’s visit, Henri finally expressed satisfaction to his friend: “[I] have been doing some since you left—got some good ones. Got a line of very beautiful Indian girls.” [2] These included Julianita, a student at an Indian school located near Henri’s studio in the Palace of the Governors. [3] Julianita also modeled for nine other portraits: five that fall and four painted when Henri returned to Santa Fe in 1922. [4] Among the five other 1917 works is *Indian Girl (Julianita)* [fig. 1], completed right before the present painting, in which Julianita appears wrapped in a brown silk shawl.

Henri frequently produced series of likenesses based on similar ideas, often using the same model, the same pose, or a similar compositional device. [5] He first

experimented with swathing his subject in a stark white wrap in a painting of the previous summer, *Mexican Girl, (Maria)* (1916, private collection, Kansas City, MO), which shows the model with a white cloth wrapped around her head. Henri also used the white blanket in two other portraits from 1917 that pre-date *Indian Girl in White Blanket*: first *Maria (Lucinda)* [fig. 2] and then *Gregorita, Indian of Santa Clara* [fig. 3]. In the latter the blanket is loosely wrapped around the girl; its folds obscure her body and create an abstract design that nearly overwhelms other elements of the composition. Henri exploits the motif of the blanket to its fullest in *Indian Girl in White Blanket* by enveloping Julianita's head and body more tightly. The thick folds of the fabric around her head and neck fall in concentric ovals that echo the shape of the sitter's face, while the more angular creases across her body repeat the lines of the decorative blanket in the background. Together, the folds of the white blanket strike a balance between articulating Julianita's form and creating visual interest in the composition as a whole.

During his three visits to Santa Fe Henri increasingly integrated Native American-inspired decorative elements into his compositions. Unlike other artists who painted in the Southwest, he was not interested in documenting Native American life, nor did he want to represent their material culture with an eye toward anthropology. Gregorita later recalled that Henri and his wife often posed the models and supplied the various accessories, including shawls and blankets. [6] In at least 15 paintings, including *Indian Girl in White Blanket*, he used colorful blankets with geometric designs to enliven the compositions. [7] As Henri himself noted, "I do not wish to explain these people, I do not wish to preach through them, I only want to find whatever of the great spirit there is in the Southwest. If I can hold it on my canvas, I am satisfied." [8]

The fall and winter of 1917 constituted one of the most creative and productive periods in Henri's career. Despite his slow start, the season resulted in a number of his most important portraits of Native Americans, including *Indian Girl in White Blanket*. As Henri noted, "I didn't really get above average until towards the end—then things began to happen and they happened right along to the end. . . . Had I quit at the end of the usual summer term I should have been nowhere." [9] By the conclusion of the 1917 Santa Fe sojourn he had completed more than 100 major works, 76 of which were portraits. [10]

Indian Girl in White Blanket was first included in the inaugural exhibition of the New Mexico Museum's new art gallery in 1917. [11] The work then appeared at a number of venues in New York; Baltimore; and Columbus, Ohio; where critics pointed to its

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bold, vigorous brushwork and its characterization of southwestern life. [12] One critic in particular noted that Henri's works were not too literal and praised his ability to express a "vivid appreciation for the spirit of the being he interprets." [13] *Indian Girl in White Blanket* was later featured in the Corcoran's Ninth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings in 1923, where it was one of the audience favorites. It was purchased by the gallery that year and was among the earliest acquisitions by a museum of Henri's southwestern subjects. [14]

Valerie Ann Leeds

August 17, 2018

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Robert Henri, *Indian Girl (Julianita)*, c. 1917, oil on canvas, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. John N. Carey

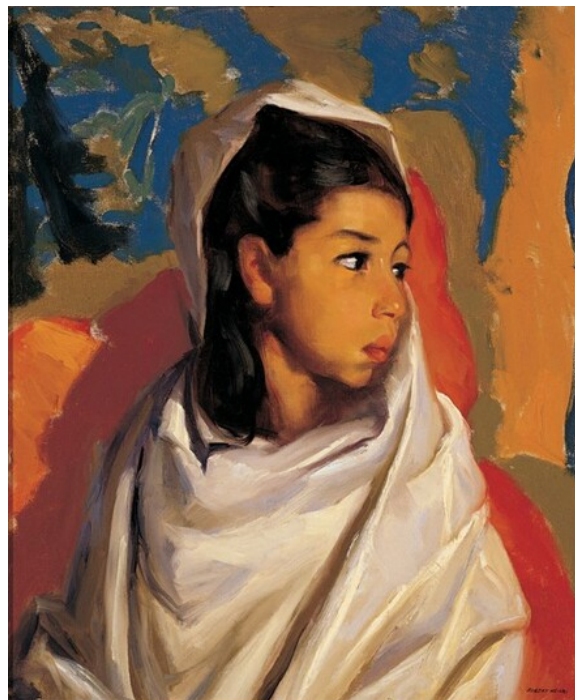


fig. 2 Robert Henri, *Maria (Lucinda in Wrap)*, c. 1917, oil on canvas, Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Bequest of Helen Miller Jones, 1989



fig. 3 Robert Henri, *Gregorita, Indian of Santa Clara*, 1917,
oil on canvas, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa

NOTES

- [1] Henri to Bellows, Aug. 19, 1917, Robert Henri Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven.
- [2] Henri to Bellows, Nov. 17, 1917, Robert Henri Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
- [3] Henri's friend Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, an ethnologist and director of the School of American Archeology (now the School of American Research) in Santa Fe, provided the artist with a studio in the Palace of the Governors. For more on Henri and Hewett, see Valerie Ann Leeds, "Robert Henri and the American Southwest: His Work and Influence" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2000), 123–133.
- [4] The title was changed from *Indian Girl in White Ceremonial Blanket* to

Indian Girl in White Blanket in accordance with the Corcoran Gallery of Art's American Paintings Catalogue policy, which restored the titles to those originally given by the artist or under which a painting was first exhibited or published. This painting was first exhibited in the *Dedication Exhibit of Southwestern Art* at the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe (Nov.–Dec. 1917, cat. no. 141) as *Indian Girl in White Blanket* and was recorded under the same title in Henri's ledger (Artist's Record Book, Estate of Robert Henri, LeClair Family Collection, New York City). See Lisa Strong, Corcoran project manager, to Corcoran registrar, memorandum, June 7, 2010, NGA curatorial files. Other paintings of Julianita are *Julianita Ready for the Dance* and three paintings titled *Julianita*, each in private collections. See Artist's Record Book.

- [5] Valerie Ann Leeds, *Robert Henri: The Painted Spirit* (Santa Fe, 2005), 14, 26, 30.
- [6] Gregorita Baca Chavarria, conversation with the author, Oct. 9, 1998. She was a favored model of Henri's that season and also attended the Indian School in Santa Fe.
- [7] For the history of geometrically patterned blankets produced for trade with Indians in the Southwest, see Barry Friedman, *Chasing Rainbows: Collecting American Indian Trade and Camp Blankets* (Boston, 2003).
- [8] Robert Henri, "My People," *The Craftsman* 28, no. 5 (Feb. 1915): 467. Henri had not yet visited Santa Fe when he wrote this article, but he had visited southern California in 1914 and had painted Native American sitters.
- [9] Henri to Randall Davey, Dec. 18, 1917. Henri remained in Santa Fe until December 1917 before returning to New York. Henri to his mother, Nov. 1917; both letters in Henri Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven. Henri anticipated leaving Santa Fe by November 29 and returning to New York by December 3.
- [10] Artist's Record Book, Estate of Robert Henri, LeClair Family Collection, New York City.
- [11] The list of the works with their catalog numbers is included in "When Dreams Come True," *El Palacio* 4 (Nov. 1917): 95. The work is listed as *Indian Girl in White Blanket*, although the painting is inscribed on the verso in Henri's hand: "Robert Henri / Indian Girl in White Ceremonial Blanket / 21K [circled]" as well as on the top tacking edge: "JULIANITA WHITE CEREMONIAL BLANKET"; and on the bottom tacking edge: "WHITE CEREMONIAL BLANKET."
- [12] "Exhibitions at New York Galleries: Tarbell, Henri, Burlin, MacDonald-Wright," *Fine Arts Journal* 36 (Mar. 1918): 62–63; and Charles Henry Dorr, "Brooklyn Artists to the Fore in Corcoran Gallery Show," *Brooklyn Times*,

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Dec. 23, 1923, 7.

- [13] Dorothy Grafly, “Charcoal Club’s Annual Show of American Art in Baltimore,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 26, 1923, 10.
- [14] Viktor Flambeau, “Public Votes This Week on Prize Picture: Corcoran Biennial Exhibition Visitors Will Select Their Favorite,” *Washington Herald*, Jan. 6, 1924, March of Events sec., 5.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a fine, plain-weave canvas that was preprimed with a smooth, off-white ground. The artist appears to have blocked in major elements of the design with a thin, fluid paint primarily in umbers in the background and dark tones containing black in the figure. He then built up the composition by painting wet into wet with an opaque, pasty paint that holds the marks of the brush and has a low, soft impasto. In the background the artist freely applied many layers of rich, saturated colors, adjusting the shapes and contours as he went along. In the face of the figure Henri painted more delicately, blending thinner applications of paint with little texture.

According to the Corcoran Museum files this painting has had several different conservation treatments. In 1967 a puncture in the painting was patched, filled, and retouched, and nine areas of the canvas were infused from behind with a wax adhesive to consolidate areas where the paint on the front was flaking. In a 2005 treatment the patch was removed, the painting was lined to a secondary support with a Beva 371 adhesive, and the canvas was stretched onto a new, modern stretcher. Also at this time the old, discolored, natural resin varnish was removed and replaced with a synthetic resin, and several losses, including a small tear located 9 inches from the right edge and 3.5 inches from the top edge, were filled and inpainted.

PROVENANCE

(William MacBeth, Inc., New York); purchased 1923 by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington;[1] acquired 2014 by the National Gallery of Art.

[1] The purchase involved both cash and an exchange with MacBeth; in part payment for *Indian Girl in White Blanket*, the Corcoran deaccessioned and returned to the dealer the Henri painting *Willie Gee*, which had been purchased in 1919, and was Corcoran accession number 19.35. (The exchanged painting is now in the collection of the Newark Museum in New Jersey, accession number 25.111.)

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1917 Dedication Exhibit of Southwestern Art, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, November - December 1917, no. 141.

1918 Exhibition of Paintings by Robert Henri, Milch Galleries, New York, 25 February - 16 March 1918, no. 15.

1919 Daniel Gallery, New York, 1919.

1923 Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of American Art, Peabody Institute, Baltimore, 29 January - 25 February 1923.

1923 Macbeth Gallery, New York, 1923.

1923 Ninth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 16 December 1923 - 20 January 1924, no. 281.

1923 Ohio State Fair, Columbus, September 1923.

1938 XXI Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, Venice, 1 June - 30 September 1938, United States Section, no. 29.

1959 American National Exhibition, Moscow, 1959, not in catalogue.

1961 Directions in Twentieth Century American Painting, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1961, no. 14.

1962 Modern American Painting, Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, 1962-1963, no. 21.

1969 Robert Henri: Painter-Teacher-Prophet, New York Cultural Center, 1969, no. 76.

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1971 French Impressionists Influence American Artists, Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, 1971, no. 66.

1980 Symbols and Scenes: Art By and About American Indians, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980.

1985 Henri's Circle, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 20 April-16 June 1985, unnumbered checklist.

1998 The Forty-Fifth Biennial: The Corcoran Collects, 1907–1998, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 17 July - 29 September 1998, unnumbered catalogue.

2004 Figuratively Speaking: The Human Form in American Art, 1770-1950, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2004, unpublished checklist.

2005 Encouraging American Genius: Master Paintings from the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Parrish Art Museum, Southampton; Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte; John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, 2005-2007, checklist no. 76.

2008 The American Evolution: A History Through Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2008, unpublished checklist.

2009 American Paintings from the Collection, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 6 June-18 October 2009, unpublished checklist.

2013 American Journeys: Visions of Place, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 21 September 2013-28 September 2014, unpublished checklist.

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- 1924 Flambeau, Viktor. "Public Votes This Week on Prize Picture: Corcoran Biennial Exhibition Visitors Will Select Their Favorite." *The Washington Herald* (6 January 1924): March of Events sec., 5.
- 1930 Henderson, Rose. "Robert Henri." *American Magazine of Art* 21, no. 1 (January 1930): 8, repro.
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