NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
American Paintings, 1900–1945

William Glackens
American, 1870 - 1938

Family Group

1910/1911

oil on canvas
overall: 182.8 x 213.3 cm (71 15/16 x 84 in.)
framed: 200.7 x 231.1 x 7 cm (79 x 91 x 2 3/4 in.)
Inscription: lower right: W. Glackens
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ira Glackens 1971.12.1

ENTRY

Painted in New York during the winter of 1910 and 1911, *Family Group* is one of William Glackens's largest and most ambitious compositions. Glackens employed a remarkable variety of techniques to depict upholstery, curtains, rugs, still life details, and the sitters' attire. The crowded interior space is illuminated and expanded by the sun streaming through a window overlooking Fifth Avenue and the reflections in the mirror.

The intimate, informal group portrait includes, from left to right, the artist's sister-in-law Irene Dimock (future wife of the Dublin-born journalist and art critic Charles Fitzgerald) sitting in an armchair; his wife, Edith Dimock Glackens, who stands and rests her right arm on the back of her sister's chair; his son and future biographer, Ira Glackens, who stands in the approximate center of the composition; and Edith's lifelong friend Grace Dwight Morgan, daughter of a mayor of Hartford, who sits on a settee attentively leaning forward. The setting is the Glackens family's apartment on the second floor of 23 Fifth Avenue, at the northeast corner of Ninth Street. A painting of the interior without figures, *Twenty-Three Fifth Avenue, Interior* [fig. 1], is presumably a preparatory study for the painting.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

Capturing a rich panoply of color, light, and contrasting textures and patterns, *Family Group* is a prime example of Glackens's interest in impressionism. The brilliant palette reflects the strong influence of Auguste Renoir (French, 1841 - 1919). It has been suggested that Glackens was specifically inspired by Renoir's *Madame Charpentier and Her Children* [fig. 2], which had been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1907 on the recommendation of the English critic Roger Fry. [1] The bright colors, use of transparent glazes, and interior setting also suggest the influence of the French intimist painters Pierre Bonnard (French, 1867 - 1947) and Edouard Vuillard (French, 1868 - 1940). *Family Group* demonstrated how conversant Glackens was with avant-garde French painting, and shortly after completing it he was hired by the prominent Philadelphia collector Albert Barnes to travel to France in 1912 and act as his agent in purchasing works by Renoir and others.

In addition to its formal aesthetic qualities, the painting alludes to the independent women, progressive politics, and material culture of the Glackens household. Irene Dimock, Edith Dimock Glackens, and Grace Dwight Morgan are all sympathetically portrayed as distinctive individual personalities. The family's immediate circle of friends included many ardent suffragists. After brief attempts at studying medicine and acting, Dimock served as secretary for the noted women's suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt. Ira Glackens left a detailed account of how his parents and aunt marched down Fifth Avenue together during a major suffragist parade in 1913. [2]

The portrait's calm, peaceful atmosphere, moreover, speaks to the state of Glackens's domestic life and his happy marriage to Edith, who the critic Mahonri Sharp Young described as "a witty and strong-minded" student of the American impressionist painter William Merritt Chase (American, 1849 - 1916). [3] Edith had been featured previously in two other large and important paintings, the full-length *Portrait of the Artist's Wife* (1904, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT) and *Shoppers* (1908, Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA).

In 1971 Ira Glackens still owned the embroidered shirt, candelabra, statuette of Buddha, glass owl, and mirror seen in the painting. [4] The upholstered chair in the left background is the same one that appears in *The Artist's Wife and Son* [fig. 3]. Ira further recalled Grace Dwight Morgan "returning from Paris with some fashionable clothes—she was a very stylish dresser." Among them was a stunning creation by Paul Poiret, the leading French couturier of the time, who is credited with freeing women from corsets. Ira explained, "Father liked this brilliant costume

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

and asked Mrs. Morgan to pose in it, and completely reorganized the color scheme of his painting." [5] This change may explain several small studies for *Family Group* in private collections that differ from the final version.

When *Family Group* was painted in 1910/1911, the Glackens family was sharing the building with its then owner, General Daniel Sickles, and other tenants who lived below and above their second-floor apartment. The serene atmosphere of the painting is in stark contrast to the chaos surrounding the owner's family. Ira Glackens described the structure as "a fine old house, the ground floor of which was occupied by . . . Sickles, who had lost a leg at Gettysburg and, had shot his wife's lover." Grace Morgan remembered an incident while her family was living on the third floor when the police had to be summoned because the general's son threatened to kill them so he and his mother could move into their apartment. [6] William Glackens purchased the entire structure in 1919. The family remained there for the rest of their lives.

Although Glackens was an accomplished illustrator and draftsman, numerous pentimenti indicate the daunting challenges he faced creating the large-scale, complex composition of *Family Group*. A critic who saw the work at the 1913 Armory Show praised it as "one of the most radiant, courageous, color paintings America has produced . . . it has grace, humanity and the quality that the artists call painting." [7] *Family Group* and *The Artist's Wife and Son* remained on view in the Glackenses' living room for many years following the artist's death in 1938.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

fig. 1 William Glackens, *Twenty-Three Fifth Avenue, Interior*, c. 1910, oil on canvas, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, bequest of Ira D. Glackens, 91.40.135

fig. 2 Auguste Renoir, *Madame Georges Charpentier (Marguérite-Louise Lemonnier, 1848–1904) and Her Children, Georgette-Berthe (1872–1945) and Paul-Émile-Charles (1875–1895)*, 1878, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1907

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

fig. 3 William Glackens, *The Artist's Wife and Son*, 1911, oil on canvas, Raclin Murphy Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame

NOTES

[1] Vincent J. De Gregario, "The Life and Art of William J. Glackens" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1955), 242.

[2] Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group: The Emergence of Realism in American Art* (New York, 1957), 184–185.

[3] Mahonri Sharp Young, *The Eight* (New York, 1973), 105.

[4] Ira Glackens, interview by William Campbell, National Gallery of Art curator of painting, November 23, 1971, transcript, NGA curatorial files.

[5] Ira Glackens, June 1971, typescript attached to letter to William Campbell, National Gallery of Art curator of painting, June 24, 1971, NGA curatorial files. A preliminary oil study, with a slightly different figure grouping, is discussed

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

and illustrated in Christie's, *Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture of the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, December 2, 1988), lot 246.

[6] Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group: The Emergence of Realism in American Art* (New York, 1957), 137–138.

[7] "Notes of General Interest: Art in New York This Season," *Craftsman* 24 (April 1913): 136, quoted in William H. Gerdts and Jorge H. Santis, *William Glackens* (New York, 1996), 93. Mahonri Sharp Young admired the "flavor" of the painting while noting the "slightly stiff, uncomfortable figures." Mahonri Sharp Young, *The Eight* (New York, 1973), 107.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The medium-weight, plain-weave fabric support has been lined with a finer-weight fabric. The tacking margins were trimmed, but cusping along the edges indicates that the original dimensions have not been altered. The thinly and uniformly applied white ground consists of lead white that has been commercially prepared. [1] Glackens began his painting by sketching in a rough drawing in fluid paint. Even though he made several studies for this painting and sketched in the composition beforehand, numerous alterations still exist in the final version, visible as underlying brushwork unrelated to the present painting. Glackens's execution relied on a variety of techniques ranging from thick, impastoed passages to areas of thin, wet-in-wet blending without any visible brushwork. Many areas were modified with transparent or semitransparent glazes made by diluting the paint to a liquid consistency. Some of these were dripped down the canvas, while thicker ones were applied with more control. A blunt instrument (presumably the end of a paintbrush) was used to scratch vertical lines on the wall covering in the upper left. Glackens made a number of alterations that are visible in either raking light or infrared examination. The table was originally lower, and after it was raised to its present position, it initially had a round lower shelf; Irene's hat was wider on the left, and her chair higher and wider in the seat; the framed mirror in the upper right originally reflected a darker mantelpiece; and a second round figurine once stood in the candelabra's place.

The paint surface is in a very good state of preservation, although some flattening of the impasto and minor weave enhancement occurred during lining. A few minor areas of retouching exist in the necks of both the sitter at the right and the sitter at

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

the left of the painting. There is also some paint loss due to poor adhesion between layers of paint in the framed mirror and in the yellow mantelpiece. The surface is coated with a thin layer of natural resin varnish that is somewhat matte and yellow.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Based on its density in the x-radiograph, the inert material in the ground appears to be white lead. As the tacking margins have been removed, it cannot be conclusively determined whether or not the ground is artist applied, but its thinness and uniformity argue for a commercially prepared ground.

PROVENANCE

The artist [1870-1938], New York; by inheritance to his wife, Edith Dimock Glackens [d. 1955], New York and Hartford; by inheritance to their son, Ira Glackens [1907-1990], Center Conway, New Hampshire, and Washington, D.C.; gift 1971 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art [The Armory Show], Association of American Painters and Sculptors, Armory of the Sixty-Ninth Infantry, New York, 1913, no. 853 (not shown in Chicago or Boston).

1914 One Hundred and Ninth Annual Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1914, no. 462.

1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915, no. 2468.

1937 New York Realists 1900-1914, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1937, no. 61, repro.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

1938 William Glackens Memorial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1938-1939, no. 61, repro.

1939 Memorial Exhibition of Works by William J. Glackens, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1939, no. 14, repro.

1942 20th Century Portraits, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1942, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1945 Artists of the Philadelphia Press: William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, John Sloan, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1945, no. 9, repro.

1955 The One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniverary Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1955, no. 210.

1957 Face of America: The History of Portraiture in the United States, Brooklyn Museum, 1957-1958, no. 82, repro.

1963 1913 Armory Show - 50th Anniversary Exhibition, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica; Armory of the Sixty-ninth Regiment, New York, 1963, no. 853 (catalogue uses original Armory Show numbers).

1966 William Glackens in Retrospect, City Art Museum of St. Louis; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1966-1967, no. 33, repro.

1984 25th Anniversary Exhibition: Selected American Paintings 1750-1950, The Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, 1984, no. 48, pl. 76.

1991 Painters of a New Century: The Eight, Milwaukee Art Museum; The Denver Art Museum; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Brooklyn Museum, 1991-1992, no. 69, repro. (not shown in Ottawa).

2002 Idol of the Moderns: Pierre-Auguste Renoir and American Painting, San Diego Museum of Art; El Paso Museum of Art, 2002-2003, no cat.

2008 Face Forward: American Portraits from Sargent to the Present, Vero Beach Museum of Art, 2008, no catalogue.

2013 The New Spirit: American Art in the Armory Show, 1913, Montclair Art Museum, 2013, no. 15, repro.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

2014 William Glackens, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale; The Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, 2014-2015, pl. 39.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1931 Pène du Bois, Guy. *William J. Glackens*. New York, 1931: fig. 40.

1955 De Gregorio, Vincent John. "The Life and Art of William J. Glackens." Ph. D. dissertation,The Ohio State University, 1955, Columbus,OH, 1955: 238, 242, pl. LIX.

1957 Glackens, Ira. *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group: the Emergence of Realism in American Art*. New York, 1957: 139, color repro.

1972 Conroy, Sara Booth. "For Ira Glackens, A Father's Shadow is a Happy Place to Be." *The Washington Post Potomac Magazine* (27 February 1972): 15.

1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 165, repro.

1980 Wilmerding, John. *American Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1980: 148, repro.

1981 Williams, William James. *A Heritage of American Paintings from the National Gallery of Art*. New York, 1981: color repro. 168, 207-8.

1984 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. Rev. ed. New York, 1984: 572, no. 872, color repro.

1988 Wilmerding, John. *American Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art*. Rev. ed. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988: 170, repro.

1991 Milroy, Elizabeth. *Painters of a New Century: The Eight & American Art*. Exh. cat. Milwaukee Art Museum, traveling exhibition. Milwaukee, 1991: 175, 180, no. 69.

1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 187, repro.

1996 Gerdts, William H. *William Glackens*. Fort Lauderdale, FL, and New York, 1996: 87, 92-94, 119, 147.

2013 May, Stephen. "The New Spirit: American Art in The Armory Show, 1913." *Antiques and the Arts Weekly* (1 March 2013): 64, repro.

2013 Meckelenburg, Virgina M. "Slouching toward Modernism: American Art at the Armory Show." In *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution*. Marylin Kushner and Kimberley Orcutt, eds., Exh. cat. The New York Historical Society Museum and Library, New York, 2013: 249, 443, repro.

2014 Berman, Avis, et al. *William Glackens*. New York, 2014: 85, 101, color plate no. 39, 112.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
American Paintings, 1900–1945

To cite: Robert Torchia, “William Glackens/*Family Group*/1910/1911,” *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/52444 (accessed March 19, 2025).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington