



Lydia Field Emmet
American, 1866 - 1952

Olivia

1911

oil on canvas

overall: 162.6 x 102.9 cm (64 x 40 1/2 in.)

framed: 179.7 x 119.1 cm (70 3/4 x 46 7/8 in.)

Inscription: upper right: Lydia Field Emmet

Gift of Olivia Stokes Hatch 1983.96.1

ENTRY

This charming full-length portrait represents Olivia Egleston Phelps Stokes (1908–1983), one of three children born to the Episcopal clergyman and educator Reverend Anson Phelps Stokes and his wife, Caroline Green Mitchell. Active in New York and Massachusetts, Lydia Field Emmet was one of the leading society portraitists of her generation. Particularly admired for her portraits of women and children, at the height of her career she was considered one of the most talented American woman artists, second only to Cecilia Beaux. Her fluid, painterly style was influenced by John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase. The latter had been one of her teachers at the Art Students League in New York, and she taught at his Shinnecock Summer School of Art on Long Island.

One of Emmet's most popular works, *Olivia* amply demonstrates why she was considered particularly adept at painting children. [1] Her contemporaries found this spontaneous image of a young girl irresistible, and the portrait was awarded an honorable mention when it was exhibited at the Carnegie Institute in 1912. [2] No less a critic than Guy Pène du Bois admired the "most decided truth" in

that picture [of] a little golden-haired girl in white, holding her hat at her back with its ribbons. The attitude is spontaneous, quick, vivacious. Her eyes sparkle, her mouth opened in a half smile discloses teeth that add a spot of animation to the composition. The handling of the head has been accomplished, in the matter of

solidity and simplicity, with unusual success—the planes of light, well kept, are broken only just enough. So with the short white dress which is saved from monotonous simplicity by a well-placed necklace. [3]

The portrait also impressed the modernist collector Duncan Phillips, who described it to the sitter's husband as representing "a very small & lovely child holding on to a sunbonnet which seems to have just slipped off her little blonde head. She is bright-eyed and smiling and the artist was evidently enraptured with the subject." [4]

The portrait was commissioned in 1911 by Olivia's father, the son of a New York banker who had aided in founding the Metropolitan Museum of Art, while he was secretary of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and serving as assistant rector of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church there. [5] Born in New Haven, Olivia graduated from the Foxcroft School near Middleburg, Virginia, and attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania from 1925 to 1930. A member of the Junior League of Washington, DC, and the Colony Club of New York, she was an active member of the American Red Cross and the American Conferences of Social Work. She lived the life of a fashionable debutante until 1939, when she married John Davis Hatch Jr., a noted historian of American art and museum administrator. [6] The couple had four children. From the 1940s until her death in 1983 she worked and volunteered with many organizations, including the League of Women Voters, the Race Relations Group, Recording for the Blind, and the Berkshire Music Center. She traveled extensively throughout her life and coauthored with Mary Marvin Breckinridge Patterson *Olivia's African Diary: Cape Town to Cairo, 1932* (1980), which describes their trip throughout Africa. Stokes died in an automobile accident in 1983. [7]

In addition to their many philanthropic interests, the Stokes family had a tradition of commissioning portraits from the most fashionable American artists. Beaux had painted a full-length portrait of Stokes's parents (*Mr. and Mrs. Anson Phelps Stokes*, c. 1898, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), and Sargent's portrait of the subject's architect brother and sister-in-law, *Mr. and Mrs. I. N. Phelps Stokes* (1897, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) is a celebrated work. [8] More than just a stylish portrait in the vein of Beaux and Sargent, Emmet's *Olivia*, with its tilted floor, slanted ground line, and slightly off-center figure placed within an evocative interior, most strongly recalls Chase's depictions of children lost in the wonder of

exploring the richly appointed rooms of their extensive homes, such as *Hide and Seek* (1888, Phillips Collection, Washington, DC).

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

NOTES

- [1] Illustrations of *Olivia* appeared in *Art and Progress* 3 (June 1912): 619; *Fine Arts Journal* 29, no. 2 (Aug. 1913): 477; *St. Nicholas* 42 (Dec. 1914): 106; and *Ladies Home Journal* 33 (Apr. 1916): 17. According to the artist's Account Book, Emmet Family Papers, Archives of American Art, Reel 4765, frame 1015, she charged \$1,500 for the portrait.
- [2] Emmet had taken pains to enter *Olivia* in the Carnegie Institute exhibition and was delighted at receiving the award. In a letter of May 9, 1912, she informed the Institute's director, John W. Beatty, "I feel more glad to have received this from the Carnegie Institute than any other art institution in the country as its international character makes it much the most important and interesting one we have." This letter and other correspondence relating to the early exhibition history are in the Papers of the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, 1911–1912, Archives of American Art, Reel 21, frame 730.
- [3] Guy Pène du Bois, "The Essentially Feminine Art of Lydia F. Emmet. Women Painters of Today. First Article," *Arts and Decoration* 2 (Oct. 1912): 418.
- [4] Duncan Phillips to John Davis Hatch, Sept. 7, 1939, NGA curatorial files.
- [5] He later served as resident canon of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, from 1924 to 1939. For biographical information on Stokes, see *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 3 (Chicago, 1960), 823. The sitter's brothers were also notable in their day: Anson Phelps Stokes Jr. became the Episcopal bishop of Massachusetts and Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes II was a philanthropist.
- [6] In 1979 the National Gallery of Art acquired his collection of nearly three hundred American 19th- and 20th-century drawings.
- [7] For a more detailed biography of Olivia Stokes Hatch, see the finding aid for the Olivia Stokes Hatch papers housed at Bryn Mawr College Special Collections,
http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/ead.html?id=PACSCL_BMC_USPBmB MCM86.
- [8] For discussions of the Sargent and Beaux double portraits, see Doreen

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American Paintings, 1900–1945

Bolger Burke, *American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 3, *A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born between 1846 and 1864* (New York, 1980), 204–205 and 247–251; for the Sargent portrait, see also Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, *John Singer Sargent: Complete Paintings*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT, 2002), 122–124.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The unlined painting was executed on a heavy, highly textured, plain-weave canvas that is still on its original stretcher, although an extra set of tack holes indicates that at some point it was removed and restretched. An evenly applied, thick, gray-white ground extends over the tacking margins and over the tacks that attach the support to the stretcher, indicating that the ground was probably applied by the artist after the canvas was stretched. Infrared reflectography has revealed a very basic linear sketch outlining the contours of the figure and the features of the face and hair. [1] No X-radiographic examination has been conducted. The paint was built up in the background, the furniture, and the vase of flowers in thin, dark, transparent layers. In contrast, the paint used in the figure is thick and like pastel, with evident brushstrokes and high impasto in some areas. In the dress, the paint was built from dark to light with little blending, while the flesh tones were built from light to dark and were well blended. Ultraviolet examination shows extensive retouching through the lower third of the painting, probably compensating for abrasion from an overly harsh cleaning. Extensive retouching has reinforced the shadows in the hair, the furniture, and the vase of flowers. Judging by its fluorescence under ultraviolet light, the varnish is probably a natural resin. It is thick and glossy but remains clear and uncolored.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The infrared examination was conducted using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

Olivia

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Commissioned 1911 by Reverend [1874-1958] and Mrs. [1875-1962, née Caroline Green Mitchell] Anson Phelps Stokes, Lenox, Massachusetts; by inheritance to the sitter, their daughter, Olivia Egleston Phelps Stokes Hatch [1908-1983, Mrs. John Davis Hatch, Jr.], Lenox, Massachusetts; gift 1983 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1912 107th Annual Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, February-March 1912, no. 716.

1912 Fourth Exhibition: Oil Paintings by Contemporary Artists, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., December 1912-January 1913, no. 104.

1912 Seventh Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists, City Art Museum of St. Louis, September-? 1912, no. 42, repro.

1912 Sixteenth Annual Exhibition, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, April-June 1912, no. 99, repro.

1924 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Citta di Venezia, Venice, 1924, no. 21.

1982 The Emmets: A Family of Women Painters, The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts; The Danforth Museum, Framingham, Massachusetts, 1982, no. 48, pl. VI.

1987 American Women Artists 1830-1930, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.; Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; San Diego Museum of Art; Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist Univ., Dallas, 1987-1988, no. 20, repro.

1989 Extended loan for use by Vice President and Mrs. Dan Quayle, Vice President's House, Washington, D.C., 1989-1993.

2001 Extended loan for use by Mrs. Richard Cheney, Old Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C., 2001-2009.

2008 High Society: American Portraits of the Gilded Age, Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, 2008, no. 22, repro..

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2009 Extended loan for use by Vice President and Mrs. Joseph Biden, Vice President's House, Washington, D.C., 2009-2015.

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- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 175, repro.
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