



Robert Henri  
American, 1865 - 1929

## *Young Woman in White*

1904

oil on canvas

overall: 198.8 x 96.8 cm (78 1/4 x 38 1/8 in.)

framed: 218.5 x 116.8 cm (86 x 46 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Robert Henri; upper left reverse: 19 / C; on both left and right

tacking margins: STEIN PROFILE

Gift of Violet Organ 1949.9.1

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### ENTRY

Following the favorable critical reception of his *Young Woman in Black* (1902, Art Institute of Chicago), Robert Henri painted a number of similar life-size, grand manner studio portraits of professional and amateur models that he submitted to exhibitions to demonstrate his command of the full-length format. Two of the most important examples of this type date from 1904: *Lady in Black* (The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York), a portrait of his first wife, and *Young Woman in White*, a portrait of the Czech-born professional artist's model Eugenie Stein. Henri may have been encouraged to pursue these types of studio portraits when his *Girl in White Waist* (1901, destroyed) was purchased in January 1904 by the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, thus becoming his first painting to enter an American museum's permanent collection.

Known as "Zenka" or "Efzenka," Eugenie Stein was an immigrant, working class woman. She knew Dolly Sloan, the wife of Henri's friend and artistic comrade, the painter John Sloan, who called her "a great girl, so ingenious, so paintable, the best professional model in New York probably, though my own experience is small." [1] Little is known about Stein, other than Sloan's statement that "she had strong opinions on politics and society and her English was odd but understandable." [2] Henri shared Sloan's admiration of Eugenie and painted her a

number of times.

Executed in a single day, Henri recorded the essential details of Stein's clothing in *Young Woman in White* in his record book: "Yellow scarf, straw hat with white lace and black lace. White gloves half on." [3] Wearing a long white dress, Stein stands in profile with her hands clasped together at her waist. She is dramatically illuminated by a powerful source of light that emanates from her right. Her psychological disposition is mysterious: standing off-center and slightly withdrawn, she faces the light with an attitude of composed anticipation. Following the examples of Francisco de Goya and Édouard Manet, Henri imbued his subject with a powerful presence by placing her in a dark, empty setting that emphasizes the contours of her gown. [4] All the props common to portraits of the period are eliminated so that nothing distracts the viewer's attention from the model. Even the fluidly painted dress plays a subordinate role, adhering to Henri's admonition to his students to "never get drapery unless you do it to express its beauty on a woman." [5]

Henri ultimately did not intend his full-length portraits to be simple, literal likenesses of specific individuals. Instead, he used them to capture abstract qualities that he described as "another dimension—that fascinating fourth if you like—which has to do with your concept of the significance of the whole—that ultra something which always engages your interest more than mere facts of the person standing before you." [6] As its title declares, *Young Woman in White* is a monochromatic tonal study in the tradition of James McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, a painting that Henri greatly admired as "a fantasy . . . a spiritual expression" in which "the frailty and delicacy of her dress are opposed to the solidity and strength of her." [7] This observation applies equally well to *Young Woman in White*, which, like Whistler's complex early works, balances aestheticism with an attention to the realities of the sitter's physical appearance.

The painting occupies a unique place along the spectrum between aestheticism and realism. Henri's adherence to realism in *Young Woman in White* clearly distinguishes it from the conventional narrow-waisted and youthful ideals of feminine beauty that often appeared in the formal exhibition portraits by his academically oriented contemporaries John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase. [8] Alternately, Henri's aesthetic proclivities in this instance become evident when the painting is juxtaposed with the three-quarter-length portrait of 1904, *Zenka (Portrait of Eugenie Stein)*, in which he portrays Stein, as one critic later put it, as the "grand dame of the disreputable with her toothless, sunken jaw, her leery

eyes, her great befeathered hat, flamboyant dress, and brown kid gloves.” [9] Both works bear comparison to Alfred H. Maurer’s contemporary portrait *Jeanne* (c. 1904, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art), whose subject even more blatantly flaunts the traditional social and artistic conventions of the day, as she raises a cigarette to her lips and peers brazenly at the viewer from under her outlandish straw hat.

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

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## NOTES

- [1] John Sloan, diary entry of January 18, 1908, quoted in *John Sloan's New York Scene: From the Diaries, Notes and Correspondence, 1906–1913*, ed. Bruce St. John (New York, 1965), 185–186, cited by Rowland Elzea, *John Sloan's Oil Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Newark, DE, 1991), 1:65; see also Van Wyck Brook, *John Sloan: A Painter's Life* (New York, 1955), 187. For a portrait of Stein that Sloan painted sometime in 1904 or 1905 (location unknown), see Elzea, *John Sloan's Oil Paintings*, 1: no. 60, 65. Two of Sloan's best-known portraits of Eugenie are *Stein at Window, Sixth Avenue* (1918, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond) and *Efzenka the Czech* (1918, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC); see Elzea, *John Sloan's Oil Paintings*, vol. 1, nos. 583 and 584, 228.
- [2] John Sloan, *Gist of Art* (New York, 1939), 257.
- [3] Artist's Record Book, Estate of Robert Henri, LeClair Family Collection.
- [4] Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight: American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show* (New York, 1962), repr. ed. as *Painters of the Ashcan School: The Immortal Eight* (New York, 1988), 125, considered this characteristic treatment of the background to be "the truly distinctive feature in Henri's art."
- [5] "The Teachings of Robert Henri: The Alice Klauber Manuscript," quoted in Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art* (New York, 1991), 146.
- [6] Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, comp. Margery Ryerson (New York, 1923), 109–110.
- [7] Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, comp. Margery Ryerson (New York, 1923), 266.
- [8] Valerie Ann Leeds, *My People: The Portraits of Robert Henri* (Orlando, FL, 1994), 20, has identified a group of similarly titled full-length portraits of women that Chase painted during the 1880s and 1890s as the precedent for

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this type of portrait.

- [9] Dorothy Grafly, "Robert Henri," *American Magazine of Art* 22 (June 1931): 441. For a discussion of another of Henri's full-length portraits of Stein, see Carol Lowery, *A Legacy of Art: Paintings and Sculptures by Artist Members of the National Arts Club* (New York, 2007), 116–119.
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### TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The unlined, medium-weight, plain-weave fabric was remounted on an old but nonoriginal stretcher. The tacking margins are intact. [1] The artist prepared the thick, smooth, grey ground that partially covers the tacking margins. Oil paint was applied thickly in complex layers with moderate to high impasto. X-radiographs suggest that the subject's face was originally in a frontal position, and that the left side of her body extended much farther to the right. These changes were not apparent during infrared examination. [2] Other than minor areas of retouching in the subject's face, the background, and the bottom edge, the painting is in very good condition. The surface was coated with a thick layer of randomly and unevenly applied natural resin varnish, which is now markedly discolored. The inscription "19/C" is located on the upper left reverse of the canvas.

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### TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] An extra set of old tack holes exists along the tacking margins. The impression of the right vertical stretcher member on the paint surface is somewhat broader than the present stretcher bar, suggesting that the stretcher has been replaced.
- [2] Infrared examination was conducted with the Kodak 310-21x, a platinum silicide camera with a 55 mm macro lens and a 1.5–2.0 micron filter.
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### PROVENANCE

The artist [1865-1929]; by inheritance to his wife, Marjorie Organ Henri [1886-1930], New York; the Henri estate; Marjorie's sister and the artist's sister-in-law, Violet Organ [d. 1959], New York, by 1937; [1] gift 1949 to NGA.

[1] The painting was identified as being lent by Miss Organ in the catalogue of a 1937 exhibition in New York. Prior to that the painting was listed as being lent by either Marjorie Henri's estate or the estate of Mr. and Mrs. Henri.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1904 An Exhibition of Portraits, The Union League Club, New York, 1904, no. 16, as *Woman in White*.

1931 Memorial Exhibition of the Work of Robert Henri, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, March-April 1931, no. 23, repro., as *Young Woman in White--Profile*.

1931 Robert Henri Memorial Exhibition, Baltimore Museum of Art, May 1931, no. 16, repro.

1932 *Entering the Twentieth Century: Oils, Watercolors, Drawings*, Springfield Art Museum, Massachusetts; Howard Young Galleries, New York, October 1932, no. 24.

1932 Memorial Exhibition of the Work of Robert Henri, Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey, January 1932, no catalogue.

1933 Memorial Exhibition, Philadelphia Art Alliance, 1933. [According to the Artist's Record Book, added after his death]

1936 Carson-Pirie-Scott Galleries, Chicago, 1936. [According to the Artist's Record Book, added after his death]

1937 *New York Realists 1900-1914*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1937, no. 30, repro., as *Young Woman in White--Profile*.

1939 *Robert Henri Today*, Fifth Avenue Galleries of Grand Central Art Galleries, Inc., New York, 1939, no. 3.

1940 *Survey of American Painting*, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1940, no. 217, as *Young Woman in White--Profile*.

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1946 American Painting from the Eighteenth Century to the Present, Tate Gallery, London, 1946, no. 102.

1951 The 75th Anniversary Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture by 75 Artists Associated with the Art Students League of New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1951, no. 21, repro.

1955 The One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1955, no. 106, repro.

1965 Robert Henri 1865-1929-1965: An exhibition held in observance of the centennial of the artist's birth, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1965, no. 25.

1969 Robert Henri: Painter-Teacher-Prophet, New York Cultural Center, 1969, addenda no. 1, repro.

1982 Japanese Artists Who Studied in U.S.A. and The American Scene, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1982, no. 63, repro.

1984 Robert Henri, Painter, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington; Pennsylvania State Univ. Museum of Art, University Park; Cincinnati Art Museum; Phoenix Art Museum; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1984-1985, no. 44, repro.

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- 1931 Read, Helen Appleton. *Robert Henri*. American Artist Series, Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, 1931: 44-45, repro.
- 1932 "The Art Market," *Parnassus* 4, no. 5 (October 1932): 13, repro.
- 1963 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.* New York, 1963 (reprinted 1964 in French, German, and Spanish): 328, repro.
- 1970 *American Paintings and Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1970: 66, repro.
- 1975 Scott, David W. *John Sloan*. New York, 1975: 33-34, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 175, repro.
- 1980 Wilmerding, John. *American Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1980: no. 48, color repro.
- 1981 Williams, William James. *A Heritage of American Paintings from the National Gallery of Art*. New York, 1981: repro. 198, 201, 202.

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- 1984 Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. Rev. ed. New York, 1984: 561, no. 854, color repro.
- 1988 Homer, William Innes. *Robert Henri and His Circle*. Ithaca, 1969; rev. ed, New York, 1988: 238, fig. 52.
- 1988 Wilmerding, John. *American Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art*. Rev. ed. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988: 154, no. 54, color repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 199, repro.
- 1994 Leeds, Valerie Ann. *My People: The Portraits of Robert Henri*. Exh. cat. Orlando Museum of Art; Museum of Art, Ft. Lauderdale; Columbus Museum, GA, 1994-1995. Orlando and Seattle, 1994: 21, fig. 2.
- 1994 Weinberg, H. Barbara, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry. *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885-1915*. Exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth; Denver Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art. New York, 1994: 265.
- 1997 Perlman, Bennard B., ed. *Revolutionaries of Realism: The Letters of John Sloan and Robert Henri*. Princeton, 1997: ix, fig. 39.

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