

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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\*\*PRESS PREVIEW:  
JANUARY 17-18, 1983  
11 A.M. to 3 P.M.

## AMERICAN NAIVE PAINTINGS: A PERMANENT COLLECTION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

WASHINGTON, D.C. December 15, 1982. Edward Hicks, Thomas Chambers, Joshua Johnson, and Erastus Salisbury Field are among the artists of the American folk art tradition whose paintings go on extended view February 3, 1983 in the National Gallery of Art's new West Building Galleries. Drawn from the Gallery's Garbisch Collection, one of the country's foremost holdings of naive art, the installation includes more than 60 paintings chosen from over 300 generously given by Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch to the National Gallery over the past twenty-five years. The display will be part of the New Ground Floor of the Gallery's West Building, including over 40,000 square feet of remodeled exhibition space going on view to the public the same day.

Knowledgeable enthusiasts of naive art, the Garbisches began acquiring eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings in 1944 for their estate on Maryland's Eastern Shore, Pokety

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Farms. They soon amassed the most comprehensive collection in the field--over two thousand objects in their lifetime. Colonel and Mrs. Garbisch eventually donated or bequeathed their entire collection to museums throughout the country, with the National Gallery receiving the largest and most impressive group. The Garbisch gifts make up almost one-third of the National Gallery's American holdings, with subject matter ranging from portraiture, still life, landscape, and seascape to historical, religious, and genre scenes.

A recent bequest to the Gallery augments their gift with 63 paintings and 20 graphics, representing some of the most significant and cherished objects collected by Colonel and Mrs. Garbisch. There are four canvases by Edward Hicks including a Peaceable Kingdom and Penn's Treaty with the Indians, two portraits by Joshua Johnson, and several anonymous works that have become icons of the folk tradition: early portraits of Susanna Truax, Dr. Philemon Tracy, Miss Denison of Stonington, Connecticut, and The Cat.

Edward Hicks, a Quaker minister who painted religious, historical, and landscape scenes, is perhaps best known for his favorite theme, the Peaceable Kingdom, inspired by the biblical passage, "the lion shall eat straw beside the ox." The painting symbolizes man's difficult triumph over his baser instincts.

The Cornell Farm has been acknowledged by Hicks and others as his masterpiece. It symbolizes the nineteenth-century pride in neatly cultivated land and exemplifies

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Hicks' depiction of atmospheric perspective and realistic autumn light.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, portraits were commissioned by the colonists to record their likenesses for posterity. One of the most prolific portrait painters in the Hudson River area is known as the Gansevoort Limner (possibly Pieter Vanderlyn) whose name derives from several of his sitters. His full-length portrait, Susanna Truax, reflects both English and Dutch traditions: the stilted pose derives from English mezzotints and the direct facial expression and realistic interior from the Dutch painting style.

As the colonies became more populated and prosperous, portraits were painted to document wealth and social standing. Two of the most well-known portraits from the revolutionary period are Captain Samuel Chandler and Mrs. Samuel Chandler by Winthrop Chandler.

In the nineteenth century, portraiture continued to be a dominant genre; many portraits of children survive. The ideals of freedom inspired by the American Revolution and the philosophy of the Enlightenment elevated the status of childhood and it became the most cherished period of life. In contrast to eighteenth-century portraits which depict children as miniature adults, The Burnish Sisters by William Matthew Prior, painted in the nineteenth century, shows two smiling, carefree children dressed in youthful clothing and surrounded by a variety of toys. The high rate of infant mortality resulted in memorial portraits of

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young children such as Joseph Whiting Stock's Baby in Wicker Basket.

Joshua Johnson, a black artist from Baltimore who described himself as a "self taught genius," painted approximately 79 portraits, five of which are owned by the National Gallery. Sarah Ogden Gustin is the only portrait signed by Johnson, whose style is characterized by stiff poses, flat features, and thinly applied colors.

The exhibition has been organized by John Wilmerding, the Gallery's Senior Curator and Curator of American Art, and Linda Ayres, Assistant Curator, American Art. An illustrated brochure, written by Laurie Weitzenkorn, research assistant, will accompany the exhibition.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Engel Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.