

The Whites of Waterford: An American Landscape Tradition

An Exhibition at the
Florence Griswold Museum
Old Lyme, Connecticut

October 10–December 1, 1985

This exhibition presents an unusual opportunity to view the work of three successive generations of painters from one family—the Whites of Waterford, Connecticut. The natural beauty of southeastern Connecticut has had special significance to the White family since 1891 when Henry C. White first came to Waterford as a summer resident. His son, Nelson C. White, and grandson, Nelson H. White, were both born in Waterford and live there today. Together these three artists have painted views of the Connecticut shore for nearly one hundred years.

While the longevity of their association with this region is in itself impressive, more intriguing are the artistic connections that bind these three artists to an American landscape tradition. Bearing the heritage of such painters as William Morris Hunt, Dwight Tryon, Charles Davis, and Henry Ward Ranger, the Whites respond to nature in a very personal, subjective way. Especially fond of the more gentle and intimate themes of nature—a small clearing in the woods, a meandering stream on the edge of a marsh or a narrow coastal inlet—they avoid the obviously picturesque or grandiose. Father, son, and grandson have been attracted to what Nelson C. White calls the “fleeting, evanescent effects of nature.” Using delicate gradations of tone, their landscapes are often invested with poetic evocation and understatement. Sharing a kinship with Emerson and Thoreau, the Whites strive to interpret the moods and spirit of New England. Their success is suggested by the individual manner in which each artist has found inspiration in the surroundings they know and love so well.

Jeffrey W. Andersen
Director

Henry Cooke White (1861–1952)

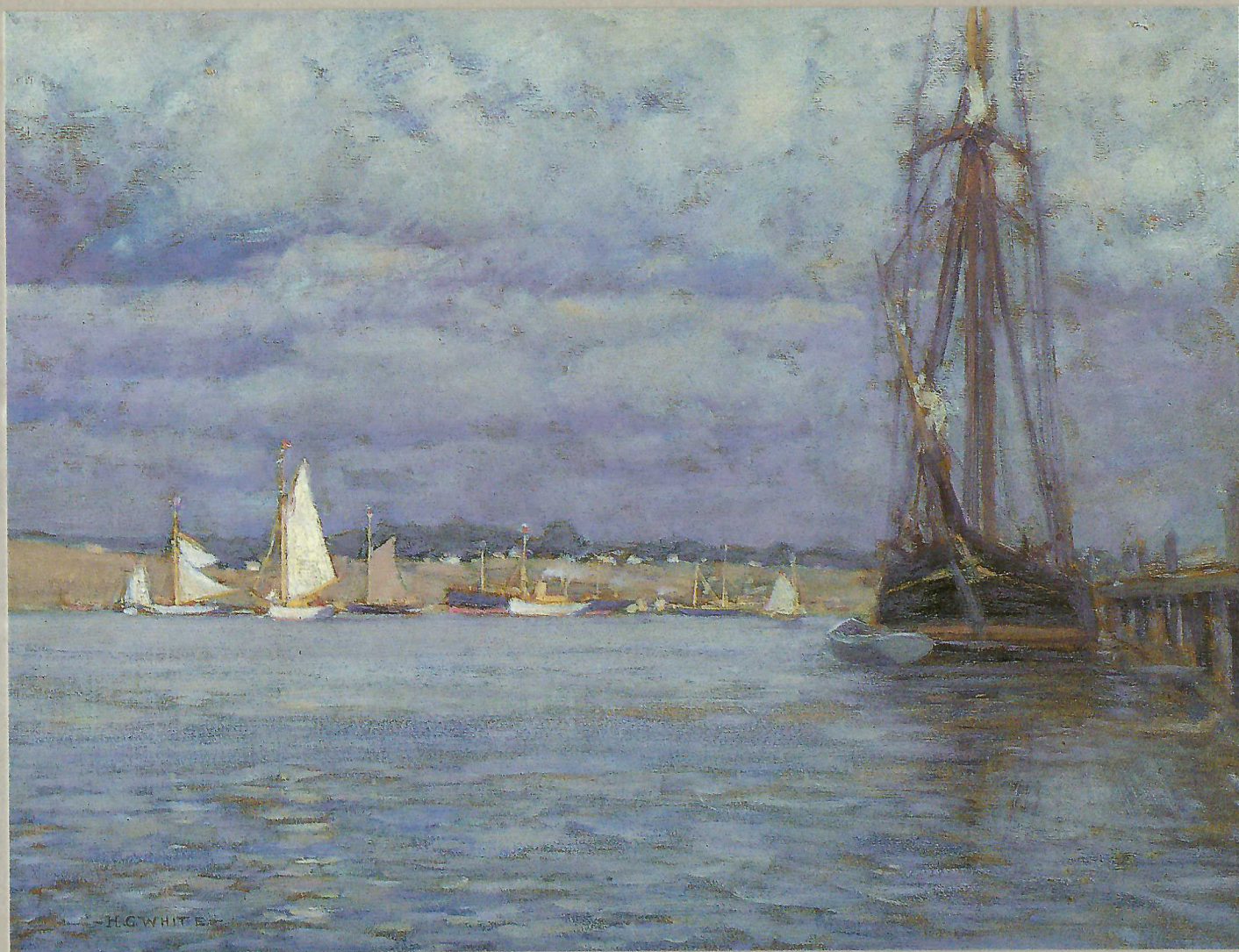
Henry C. White first studied art in his native city of Hartford with Dwight Tryon (1849–1925) who became his artistic mentor and a life-long friend. Tryon is also the subject of a major biography written by Henry White and published in 1930. In 1903 he and his family boarded at Miss Florence Griswold's house, making him one of the original members of the Lyme art colony. Thereafter he made several extended stays in Old Lyme where he was particularly attracted to the more delicate effects of spring and fall. For him the lush greens of a Connecticut summer were “too much spinach.” While his oil paintings were usually executed in the studio, White produced some memorable pastels and pencil drawings *en plein air*. He was a founding member of the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts.

Nelson Cooke White (1900–)

Nelson C. White is the only living artist whose personal reminiscences date to the early days of the Lyme art colony. He was three years old when his parents brought him to Old Lyme. “As the only child among a group of artists,” he recalled, “I was terribly spoiled and indulged by being played with and entertained.” A keen observer, White is widely admired for his entertaining stories, some of which are captured on his record album entitled *Connecticut Characters*. Following a period of instruction from his father, Nelson C. White studied at the National Academy of Design in New York from 1919 to 1923. He is particularly fond of landscape and marine subjects he finds in Waterford and eastern Long Island. Like his father, he is an author, having written biographies of two American artists, J. Frank Currier and Abbott H. Thayer. He is an active member of the Lyme Art Association.

Nelson Holbrook White (1932–)

After practicing the violin for several years, Nelson H. White left for Florence in 1955 to study with the renowned Italian portraitist, Pietro Annigoni, and later with Nerina Simi at her atelier in the same city. White currently spends his winters in Florence and his summers in Waterford, but he makes frequent sketching trips to other places. While the subjects of his landscapes are diverse, they are, in Annigoni's words unified by “an emotional understanding and profound respect of nature.” White's landscapes were recently the subject of an exhibition in Cremona, Italy. In Connecticut, he has exhibited at the Lyman Allyn Museum, the Mattatuck Museum, and the Lyme Art Association.



Henry Cooke White (1861–1952)
Clearing After Storm—New London



Nelson Cooke White (1900–)
The Basin—Sterling Creek, Long Island, New York



Nelson Holbrook White (1932-)
The Marsh—Waterford, Connecticut