



William James Glackens

William Glackens

American, 1870 - 1938

Luxembourg Gardens

1906

oil on canvas

overall: 60.6 × 81.6 cm (23 7/8 × 32 1/8 in.)

framed: 75.6 × 95.3 × 7 cm (29 3/4 × 37 1/2 × 2 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left: W[m?] Glackens

Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, William A. Clark Fund) 2014.79.47

ENTRY

William Glackens's *Luxembourg Gardens* revels in the casual moment in its celebration of an everyday, lazy afternoon in a Parisian park. The painting pays homage to Edouard Manet (French, 1832 - 1883) while at the same moment evidencing a vitality and verve that are unique to Glackens. The canvas was painted in 1906, when Glackens and his wife, the artist Edith Dimock Glackens, took a postponed honeymoon to Europe. After a sojourn in Madrid, the couple spent three productive weeks in Paris, where Glackens worked on a series of canvases that took the Luxembourg Gardens as their subject. [1]

Though painted more than thirty years earlier, the work did not enter the Corcoran Gallery of Art collection until 1937, following its appearance there at the Fifteenth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings. Glackens was chairman of the jury of admissions and awards for the biennial that year, and *Luxembourg Gardens* was one of three works representing him in the exhibition. Although the biennials were celebrations of contemporary art, the jury was permitted to select earlier paintings for inclusion, though such older works were not eligible for

awards. Reviewers acknowledged the painting's age; a critic for the *New York Times* went so far as to declare it "ancient" but nevertheless referred to it as "one of the most emphatic high spots" of the exhibition. [2] Glackens died a year later, and *Luxembourg Gardens* was among the works in the memorial exhibition, which traveled to the Corcoran in 1940. [3]

Born in Philadelphia in 1870, Glackens entered the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1892. Like many of his classmates, Glackens worked as a newspaper illustrator, initially for the *Philadelphia Record* and *Philadelphia Press* and later at the *New York Herald* and *McClure's Magazine*. Among his earliest acquaintances was John Sloan (American, 1871 - 1951), who in turn introduced him to Robert Henri (American, 1865 - 1929). Henri's studio became a site for social and artistic exchange, and the artist exerted considerable influence on Glackens throughout his career. Later, after the group of artists relocated to New York, Glackens participated in the legendary 1908 exhibition of The Eight that Henri organized at the Macbeth Gallery.

Luxembourg Gardens is a deftly observed leisure scene in which women and children predominate. Nursemaids attend to needlework or socialize with one another while children play. A smartly dressed boy sporting a dark hat and knee breeches stands in the center of the canvas, anchoring the scene. His hands are in his pockets and his legs are planted firmly on the ground as he oversees the two girls who play an early form of badminton called battledore. On the left, a couple engaged in intimate conversation bend their heads toward each other. An iron fence and the windows of Luxembourg Palace loom just beyond the trees and shrubs in the background.

Blackish green tree trunks divide the social activity of the gardens while unifying the space through their repetition. Above, branches and background foliage merge into one another in a rapid blur of yellow and green brushwork. The spontaneous application of paint and evidence of wet-into-wet blending suggest the painting was produced in only two or three sessions. [4] The ground is predominantly brown and tan, with patches of highlighting giving the appearance of sunlight filtered through the trees. The subdued palette is brightened by occasional pops of color, noticeable in the red trousers and hat of the standing soldier, the royal blue skirt of the woman seated at left, and the pink frock of the young girl at center. The empty central foreground contributes to the painting's immediacy by creating a space for the viewer to enter the scene.

The painting owes a considerable debt to Manet's *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (1862, National Gallery, London) in subject and handling. William Gerdtz notes that Glackens could have seen the Frenchman's painting in the spring of 1895, when a Manet exhibition was held at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in New York. [5] Both works feature a multiframe composition rendered in a shallow space and depict a leisurely afternoon in a Parisian public garden. There are tonal similarities as well; in each, one finds a dark, understated palette enlivened by spots of red. The points of divergence, however, are telling. Glackens's figures are more animated and less polished than the still, dignified figures in Manet's tableau. Glackens's background in newspaper illustration and his interest in caricature contributed to the lively, sketchy quality of the painting.

Glackens was an admirer of the English illustrators Charles Samuel Keene (British, 1823 - 1891) and Harry Furniss, whose caricatures were distinguished by their use of clear, vivid line and emphasis on gesture, as can be seen in Keene's work for the humor magazine *Punch*. From them, the artist learned the importance of rendering a scene with economy and energy. In *Luxembourg Gardens*, his figures are not individualized. As Rebecca Zurier notes, "Glackens rarely indicated faces of passersby, instead conveying personality through gesture, pose, or the tilt of a hat." [6] In the Corcoran's canvas, personality is insinuated through the cocked bowler hat of the young boy presiding authoritatively over the children's game and the casual body language of the woman at left, who tilts her head toward her companion with her arm resting on the back of the wire garden chair. Her body is oriented toward the man at her side with whom she is talking, yet her gaze is directed outward at the viewer. Here we see Glackens the artist as reporter, capturing the essence of a scene without dwelling on unnecessary particulars. This eye for the telling detail lends the composition a realism and vitality that distinguish it from the lighter and more genteel style of American impressionism favored by earlier artists such as Childe Hassam (American, 1859 - 1935) and Julian Alden Weir (American, 1852 - 1919).

Kerry Roeder

July 24, 2024

NOTES

- [1] Though the painting is not inscribed with a date, Glackens spent the summer of 1906 in France. This trip marked the artist's first visit since his eighteen-month stay there in 1895–1896. During the 1906 trip, Glackens produced several dated works of the Luxembourg Gardens that bear a compositional relationship to the Corcoran's painting, including *Luxembourg Gardens* (1906, Wichita Art Museum), *Under the Trees, Luxembourg Gardens* (1906, Munson Museum of Art, Utica, NY), and three prints, either etchings or drypoints, of the Luxembourg Gardens (1906, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale). Further corroborating the 1906 date for *Luxembourg Gardens* is a black ink stamp on the underside of the frame that reads "MADE IN FRANCE."
- [2] Edward Alden Jewell, "A Nation-Wide Survey: The Corcoran, for All Its Wealth of Good Painting, Proves an Unexciting Show," *New York Times*, April 4, 1937, Arts sec., 9.
- [3] Jane Watson, "Work of Glackens on View at Corcoran," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1940, sec. E, 6.
- [4] Lance Mayer, "American Paintings Catalogue Technical Examination Report," April 12, 2005, NGA conservation files.
- [5] William H. Gerds, *William Glackens* (New York, 1996), 21.
- [6] Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley, 2006), 191.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is executed on a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with no cusping visible around the edges but with the original tacking margins. It has a medium-thick, smooth, grayish-white, commercially prepared ground that extends over these tacking edges, indicating that the canvas was primed prior to stretching. The painting was lined in 1971 to linen with a fibermat interleaf using a wax/resin adhesive and was stretched onto a new expansion bolt stretcher. The paint was applied quite freely in a spontaneous and simple manner. In many parts of the background, liquid paint was scrubbed on thinly with a stiff brush, which allows the ground layer to remain slightly visible, giving a lively feeling to these areas. In some of the detailed areas, the paint was built up thickly and more precisely, yielding paint textured by low impasto. There are no apparent artist's changes.

The paint is generally in very good condition, although the signature may have been thinned by a previous cleaning. Some areas of the green paint also appear to

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have been abraded by cleaning; these areas were retouched in the 1971 treatment when the varnish was also removed and replaced. Paper tape from a previous glue lining, now covered with retouching that does not match very well, have been allowed to remain on the top, left, and right edges. This painted tape does not show when the painting is in its frame. There are also several spots of bluish-white paint scattered on the surface that do not have the character of the artist's paint. Some of these were inpainted in the 1971 treatment. The current varnish layer of medium gloss, also applied in this treatment, consists of one natural resin varnish applied prior to retouching, followed by a synthetic layer after.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

PROVENANCE

On consignment from the artist to (Kraushaar Galleries, New York), by 1937; purchased April 1937 by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; acquired 2014 by the National Gallery of Art.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1908 Possibly An Exhibition of Paintings by Arthur B. Davies, William J. Glackens, Robert Henri, Ernest Lawson, George B. Luks, Maurice B. Prendergast, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan, Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1908. no. 53.

1909 Possibly Newark Public Library, New Jersey, 1909, no. 7.

1935 Probably C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries, New York, 1935, no. 27.

1937 Fifteenth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1937, no. 367.

1938 William Glackens Memorial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1938-1939, no. 7.

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1939 Memorial Exhibition of Works by William J. Glackens, Department of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute, 1939, no. 44.

1940 Memorial Exhibition: Paintings and Drawings by William J. Glackens, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1940, no catalogue.

1945 Artists of the Philadelphia Press: William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, John Sloan, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1945, no. 2, repro.

1946 Exhibition of 200 Years of American Painting, Tate Gallery, London, 1946, unpublished checklist.

1956 American Painting: Second Quarter of the 20th Century, Jacksonville Art Museum, Florida, 1956, no. 4.

1959 Loan Exhibition. Masterpieces of the Corcoran Gallery of Art: A Benefit Exhibition in Honor of the Gallery's Centenary, Wildenstein, New York, 1959, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

1966 Past and Present: 250 Years of American Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1966, unpublished checklist.

1966 Williams Glackens in Retrospect, City Art Museum, Saint Louis; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1966-1967, no. 21, as *In the Luxembourg Gardens*.

1972 Conservation in the Museum, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1972, unpublished checklist.

1976 Corcoran [The American Genius], Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 1976, unnumbered catalogue.

1978 The William A. Clark Collection, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 26 April - 16 July 1978, unnumbered catalogue.

1980 Guy Pène du Bois: Artist About Town, Corcoran Gallery of Art; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; Mary and Leigh Block Gallery, Northwestern University, Evanston, 1980-1981, no. 95.

1985 Henri's Circle, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 20 April - 16 June 1985, unnumbered checklist.

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1986 Artistic Transitions: From the Academy to Impressionism in American Art, Cummer Gallery of Art, Jacksonville, Florida, 1986-1987, no. 19, as *In the Luxembourg Gardens*.

1993 The Century Club Collection, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, unpublished checklist.

1998 The Forty-Fifth Biennial: The Corcoran Collects, 1907–1998, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 17 July - 29 September 1998, unnumbered catalogue.

2003 The Impressionist Tradition in America, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 19 July 2003 - 18 October 2004, unpublished checklist.

2004 Figuratively Speaking: The Human Form in American Art, 1770-1950, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2004-2005, unpublished checklist.

2004 The Impressionist Tradition in America, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2003-2004, unpublished checklist.

2005 Encouraging American Genius: Master Paintings from the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Parrish Art Museum, Southampton; Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte; John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, 2005-2007, checklist no. 62.

2008 The American Evolution: A History through Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 2008, unpublished checklist.

2009 American Paintings from the Collection, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 6 June - 18 October 2009, unpublished checklist.

2013 American Journeys: Visions of Place, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, 21 September 2013 - 28 September 2014, unpublished checklist.

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

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- 1959 Corcoran Gallery of Art. *Masterpieces of the Corcoran Gallery of Art*. Washington, 1959: 61, repro.
- 2011 Roeder, Katherine. "William James Glackens, *Luxembourg Gardens*." In *Corcoran Gallery of Art: American Paintings to 1945*. Edited by Sarah Cash. Washington, 2011: 190-191, 275, repro.
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