



Robert Henri
American, 1865 - 1929

Edith Reynolds

1908

oil on canvas

overall: 196 x 96.3 cm (77 3/16 x 37 15/16 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Robert Henri

Gift of Edith Reynolds 1956.7.1

ENTRY

Robert Henri painted this formal full-length portrait of Edith L. Reynolds (1883–1964) at her home in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in February 1908 after he finished the pendant portraits of her neighbors George Cotton Smith and *Elizabeth Virginia Laning Bradner Smith*. Commissioned by Reynolds’s parents, the portrait was completed shortly after the historic exhibition of *The Eight* that opened at the Macbeth Gallery in New York on February 3.

The chronology of the Reynolds portrait is documented in Henri’s diary. [1] During a visit to Wilkes-Barre to work on the paintings of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Henri spent an “evening at Mr. Benj[amin] Reynolds[’s]” on January 20 and arranged “to paint daughter and wife—full length and 3/4 length.” The following day Henri wrote that he determined a fee with Mr. Reynolds, “1500 for one. 2000 for two. To begin Feb. 10.” In the meantime, Henri completed the two Smith portraits, traveling back and forth between Wilkes-Barre and New York, where he was managing the Macbeth Gallery exhibition. Henri executed the two Reynolds portraits during February and March; they were both of Edith, despite the suggestion in Henri’s diary that one portrait would be of her mother.

Edith Reynolds was born in Wilkes-Barre to a family with a long history in the area. Reynolds was proud of an ancestry that she traced to English immigrants who

arrived in North America on the Mayflower. [2] Her parents were Benjamin Reynolds, president of the Miners National Bank, and Grace Goodwin Fuller Reynolds. Reynolds graduated from a women's institute in Kingston, Pennsylvania, and attended preparatory schools in Connecticut and New York. She later studied under Henri at the Henri School of Art in New York. Reynolds became known for her paintings of the Wilkes-Barre landscape, and she exhibited with the Society of Independent Artists from 1917 to 1919 and at the Salons of America exhibition in 1922. She was active in the local Wyoming Valley Art League. Reynolds was an avid art collector who owned paintings by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640), Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669), Edouard Manet (French, 1832 - 1883), Winslow Homer (American, 1836 - 1910), and Henri Matisse (French, 1869 - 1954). An article in the *Wilkes-Barre Record* described her as “an outstanding figure in the artistic life of the valley because of her recognition of the need, not only for broader public understanding and appreciation of the fine arts, but also for standards of value in artistic expression.” [3]

Henri wrote a detailed description of the Reynolds portrait in his ledger: “176E Miss Edith Reynolds February 1908 38 × 78”. Wilkesbarre, Pa., 34 River Street. Full length. Brown velvet dress, low cut V, dark brown hair and dark grey or blue grey black [possibly background]. Gold bracelets and silver clasp bracelets, small garnet. Short sleeves. Hands simply held hanging in front. Marked on back with number and portrait of Miss Reynolds by Robert Henri 1908. Father was Benjamin Reynolds.” [4]

The artist imbued the painting of twenty-five-year-old Reynolds with a subtly dramatic mood. Reynolds wears a floor-length dark brown dress that nearly dissolves into the stark black background. Her face, arms, and clasped hands stand out in relief, illuminated by the bright light that enters from the right. Her elegant figure is oriented to the left, and she has turned her head to look directly at the viewer with a somewhat reticent expression. The austere tone is relieved by the glint of her gold and silver ornamental bracelets. Typical of Henri's style during this period, the artist conveyed Reynolds's individuality by not idealizing her features. Reynolds wears the same dress and jewelry in the three-quarter-length portrait completed as part of the same commission [fig. 1]. [5] Because of its stark, monochromatic composition, the Reynolds portrait in the National Gallery of Art is closely related to the full-lengths that Henri had painted earlier in the decade, such as *Lady in Black* (1904, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY). Henri's dark palette and spare background is a nod to his lasting interest in the 17th-century Spanish

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painter Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599 - 1660), whose work Henri admired and copied in the Prado on his travels in Spain. [6]

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July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Robert Henri, *Portrait of Miss Edith Reynolds*, 1908, oil on canvas, Collection of Everhart Museum of Natural History, Science, and Art, Scranton, Gift of Frances L. McLean, 1964.13.1. Photo by Chris Balton

NOTES

- [1] Robert Henri diary, Robert Henri papers, 1870–1954, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Reel 886 contains the entries relating to the Reynolds and Smith commissions.
- [2] Edith Reynolds to William P. Campbell, National Gallery of Art curator of painting, October 8, 1959, NGA curatorial files, in response to Campbell's request for biographical information following the donation of the portrait.
- [3] "3 Artists' Work in Show," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, February 19, 1957. Biographical information is from two obituaries from unidentified newspapers in the NGA curatorial files and "Rembrandt Painting Willed to Area Man," *Scranton Times*, April 17, 1964.
- [4] Artist's Record Book, Estate of Robert Henri, LeClair Family Collection, New York. Transcription sent May 11, 1972, by Chapellier Galleries, New York, to National Gallery of Art curator William P. Campbell, NGA curatorial files.
- [5] The Everhart Museum painting was donated by a Reynolds family member in 1964 following Edith Reynolds's death that year. Email from Francesca Saldan, curator, Everhart Museum, May 29, 2019, NGA curatorial files.
- [6] For further reading on Henri and Spain, see Valerie Ann Leeds et al., *Spanish Sojourns: Robert Henri and the Spirit of Spain* (Savannah, GA, 2013).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The plain-weave fabric support is unlined and remains mounted on its original stretcher. The artist applied paint in broad, medium-rich strokes, particularly in the background, over a commercially prepared off-white ground layer. The paint is thicker and more opaque in the face and arms, with lively impasto describing the curls of the hair, jewelry, and highlights of the dress. Alterations to the composition are impossible to discern using x-radiography because of the low density of the paint. Examination using infrared reflectography reveals neither underpainting nor compositional changes. The painting is in good condition with only a couple of small losses, one in the upper left and the other in the dress. There are two short, deep scratches in the paint in the upper right. The surface was coated with a layer of natural resin varnish in 1961 over an older layer of varnish that has an orange fluorescence under ultraviolet examination.

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PROVENANCE

The sitter, Edith Lindeley Reynolds [1883-1964], Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; gift 1956 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1967 National Gallery Loan Exhibition, Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1967, no. 16.

1974 Selected American Paintings from the National Gallery of Art, University Center Gallery, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 1974, no catalogue.

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