



Glackens, William

Also known as
Glackens, William James
American, 1870 - 1938

William Glackens, 1906–1940,
Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Ira and
William Glackens papers, c.
1900–1990, box 2, folder 24

BIOGRAPHY

William James Glackens was born in Philadelphia on March 13, 1870, to Elizabeth Finn Glackens and Samuel Glackens, a clerk for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Both William and his older brother, Louis (American, 1866–1933), who would later become an illustrator, showed an early talent for drawing. Glackens attended Central High School, known for its strong art program. His classmates there included John Sloan (American, 1871 - 1951) and Albert Coombs Barnes. After graduation in 1890, Glackens worked as a newspaper illustrator, first for the *Philadelphia Record* and a year later for the *Philadelphia Press*, which also employed Sloan, George Luks (American, 1866 - 1933), and Everett Shinn (American, 1873 - 1953). From 1891 to 1894, Glackens took classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied under Thomas Anshutz (American, 1851 - 1912).


In 1892 Glackens met Robert Henri (American, 1865 - 1929), who became a teacher and role model for the artists in Glackens's circle. Henri and Glackens shared a

studio before setting sail for Europe in 1895 with a group of Philadelphia peers, including Sloan. They visited Belgium and Holland, where Glackens was deeply impressed by the works of Frans Hals (Dutch, c. 1582/1583 - 1666) and Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606 - 1669). Glackens then spent a year in Paris, returning to the United States in 1896. He settled in New York and briefly shared a studio with Luks. A brilliant draftsman, Glackens became a highly successful illustrator and contributed to a number of periodicals, including *New York World* and *McClure's Magazine*, which sent him to Cuba to cover the Spanish-American War. He later worked for *Scribner's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Glackens aspired to pursue a career in fine art and continued to paint. In 1901 he began to exhibit in group shows organized by Henri. In the same year, he met Edith Dimock, a fellow artist who had studied at the Art Students League. Glackens's 1904 marriage to Dimock, the daughter of a wealthy Hartford, Connecticut, silk manufacturer, gave him a measure of financial security. The couple would have two children, Ira and Lenna. After Glackens painted his celebrated *Chez Mouquin* (1905, Art Institute of Chicago), he and Dimock went to Spain and France on a delayed honeymoon in 1906. In Spain Glackens was drawn to the work of Diego Velázquez (Spanish, 1599 - 1660) and Francisco Goya (Spanish, 1746 - 1828).

The turning point in Glackens's career occurred in 1908, when he participated in an exhibition at New York's Macbeth Gallery with the American painters who became known as The Eight. These artists, along with George Bellows (American, 1882 - 1925) and several others, were later dubbed the Ashcan school for their focus on the grittier side of modern New York. Glackens, who in his work as an illustrator depicted a cross section of urban life, largely portrayed those of his own social class in his paintings.

In the years following the exhibition of The Eight, Glackens moved away from urban subject matter and dark tonalities. He began to paint vibrant, impressionist landscapes, marine scenes, portraits, and still-life subjects in a bright, sensuous palette that drew comparisons to Auguste Renoir (French, 1841 - 1919). Glackens played significant roles in organizing the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910 and the Armory Show in 1913. He reconnected with his former classmate Albert Barnes, who sent Glackens and Alfred H. Maurer (American, 1868 - 1932) to Paris in 1912 to purchase modern paintings that would form the basis of the Barnes Foundation collection in Philadelphia. This exposure to innovative French paintings reinforced Glackens's new stylistic interests. That same year, Glackens had his first

 **NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS**
American Paintings, 1900–1945

solo exhibition at the Madison Art Gallery in New York. He was elected an academician of the National Academy of Design in 1933. Glackens died in Westport, Connecticut, on May 22, 1938.

Catherine Southwick, Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1957 Glackens, Ira. *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group: the Emergence of Realism in American Art*. New York, 1957.

1996 Gerds, William H. *William Glackens*. Fort Lauderdale, FL, and New York, 1996.

To cite: Catherine Southwick, Robert Torchia, “William Glackens,” *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/1347> (accessed April 04, 2025).