

## American Art 1600-1850

### Architecture:

#### 17th to 18th centuries

The diffusion of architectural traits in the colonial aristocracy permitted the Georgian style to assert itself. At Mount Pleasant, (Philadelphia), John McPherson had a residence constructed in 1761-1762 equipped with an entrance topped by a pediment supported by Doric columns. We can recognize here a roof with a balustrade and a symmetrical arrangement, characteristic of the neoclassic style en vogue at the time in Europe. In Salem, Samuel McIntire was the architect of the John Gardiner-Pingree house (1805); he designed the roof with a gentle slope, a balustrade and built it out of brick. He took up Palladio's idea of linking the buildings by a semi-circular portico supported by columns.

In the 1780s, the Federal style began to diverge bit by bit from the Georgian style and became a uniquely American genre. At the time of the War of Independence, houses stretched out along a strictly rectangular plan, adopting curved lines and favoring the decorative details such as garlands and urns. Certain openings were ellipsoidal in form, one or several pieces were oval or circular.

Thomas Jefferson elaborated the plans of his own house of Monticello in Virginia, close to Charlottesville. A beautiful example of the Palladian style, it brings to mind the Salm Hotel situated in Paris, that Jefferson had been able to see when he was an ambassador in France. He used antique components such as Doric columns, tetrastyle porticos and a central dome.

In Louisiana, the colonial houses sometimes support a neoclassical pediment with columns, as is the case at *Belle Meade Plantation* in Tennessee. With symmetrical allure, the residence has at its disposal a columned porch and narrow windows. But the domestic architecture in the South had consciously freed itself from the classic model when it supported a mid-height balcony on the front and left out the pediment on the entrance portico (Charleston, South Carolina, Oak Alley plantation in Louisiana). The houses were adapted to the regional climate and registered themselves into the economy of the plantation. They sported a stucco and cast iron decor just like in the French quarter.

#### 19th century

Alexander Jackson Davis, Lyndhurst at Tarrytown, New York State, neogothic residence, 1864–1865

Much later, the great families of the coast had immense estates and villas constructed in the neogothic style, with antipodes of neoclassicism. They took the house of Sir Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill as a model. Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) worked on the villa projects in the Hudson river valley and dressed them with fantasy details taken from the medieval repertoire. For George Merritt's residence at Lyndhurst, he chose to

build a building with a complex plan and to open several ears who could be made to think of Church stained glass windows.

In the second half of the 19th century, the architects Richard Morris Hunt, Henry Hobson Richardson and Frank Furness usually responded to the orders of the rich families such as the Ames or the Vanderbilt and they constructed Roman or renaissance revival residences. The industry or transportation magnates invested in stone and commissioned villas imitating European palaces. The Biltmore Estate, close to Asheville in North Carolina, was the largest private residence in the country. Richard Morris Hunt copied the Louis XII and François I wings from the Château de Blois. It was the golden age for large agencies such as McKim, Mead and White and for the Beaux-Arts style, comprised there for private constructions. The architecture was an expression of notable Americans' prestige.

## **Traditional Art:**

### **Eighteenth century**

After the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which marked the official beginning of the American national identity, the new nation needed a history, and part of that history would be expressed visually. Most of early American art (from the late 18th century through the early 19th century) consists of history painting and portraits. Painters such as Gilbert Stuart made portraits of the newly elected government officials, while John Singleton Copley was painting emblematic portraits for the increasingly prosperous merchant class, and painters such as John Trumbull were making large battle scenes of the Revolutionary War.

### **Nineteenth century**

James McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother* (1871) popularly known as Whistler's Mother, Musée d'Orsay, Paris America's first well-known school of painting—the Hudson River School—appeared in 1820. As with music and literature, this development was delayed until artists perceived that the New World offered subjects unique to itself; in this case the westward expansion of settlement brought the transcendent beauty of frontier landscapes to painters' attention.

The Hudson River painters' directness and simplicity of vision influenced such later artists as Winslow Homer (1836-1910), who depicted rural America—the sea, the mountains, and the people who lived near them. Middle-class city life found its painter in Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), an uncompromising realist whose unflinching honesty undercut the genteel preference for romantic sentimentalism. Henry Ossawa Tanner who studied with Thomas Eakins was one of the first important African American painters.

Paintings of the Great West, particularly the act of conveying the sheer size of the land and the cultures of the native people living on it, were starting to emerge as well. Artists such as George Catlin broke from traditional styles of showing land, most often done to show how much a subject owned, to show the West and its people as honestly as possible.

Many painters who are considered American spent some time in Europe and met other European artists in Paris and London, such as Mary Cassatt and Whistler.

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