

The ART of COLLECTING



EDWARD HOPPER (1882-1967), *Road and Trees*, 1962, oil on canvas, 34 x 60 in., Collection Daniel W. Dietrich II

WHEN THE EMERSON GALLERY celebrated its 20th anniversary this spring with the exhibition *Hamilton Collects American Art*, not one, but two collections emerged — a collection of rarely seen paintings by prominent artists and an equally compelling collection of stories reflecting the exploration and discovery processes of the collectors themselves.

The exhibition included 62 works from 30 Hamilton lenders, many of them alumni whose love and appreciation of art was

first inspired while they were students on College Hill. With pieces by such renowned artists as George Bellows, Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper and Norman Rockwell, the exhibition offered a fresh look at the history of American art and its role in shaping our national identity.

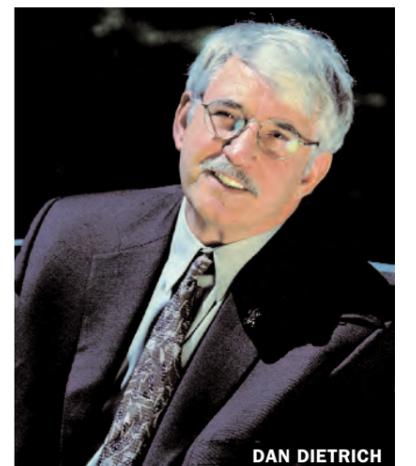
“The drive to collect is probably as much a genetic disposition as blue eyes or premature graying, but the collector’s focus and the skills he or she brings to the enterprise are products of personal environment and education,” noted William Salzillo, acting gallery director and professor of art. “One of our hopes

for this project is that the current generation of Hamilton students will be inspired to appreciate the rewards of living with art and work to accumulate the intellectual and creative tools necessary to embark on a collecting career.”

Prior to the exhibition’s opening, lenders were invited to share their thoughts about the works they loaned, the formative influence of their Hamilton experiences and what they have learned from friends and family about collecting. Here are excerpts from just a few:

Daniel W. Dietrich II '64

EDWARD HOPPER’S *Road and Trees*, amazing to say, returned to Hamilton for this exhibition. It was here long ago in 1964 at the Root Art Center among a group of Hopper oils, watercolors and etchings all assembled on loan in a major show. Upstairs and downstairs throughout the center’s lovely rooms was a wide array of work to explore, and it was required of the art history students to choose a Hopper and write about it.



DAN DIETRICH

(Images may be viewed at www.hamilton.edu/gallery/hamiltoncollects)

I did my paper on some classic, forthright painting well inside the mainstream of his art. No fool I. But it was this *Road and Trees* I kept circling back to. It was not yet two-years-old, and had a scrubbed and unabashed — even raw — look. It seemed oddly thin and nearly without consequence, like a cartoon. Comparing it at that time to the great *Second Story Sunlight* of 1960 (oh, just down this hall, and one room over!), *Road and Trees* looked oddly curdled and dissonant and slightly sour and somewhat empty. Missing were the Hopper regulars, his usual stalwarts — the totemic, stunned people; the white clapboard façade cut on the bias by that Hopper sunlight; the hard-won balance wherein a highway or a mass of trees might just play a supporting role in the drama. Usually the Hopper road served to take us in, by diagonal, to the upstage action. Typically Hopper trees gave distance and space to some scene, which might otherwise atrophy, of unbudging, too-solid, airless, rhetoric. Weren't his trees his great aerating device? His sparingly applied grace notes of poetry?

In 1962, the year of *Road and Trees*, Hopper was 80-years-old. One or two new pictures surfaced each year. To find a subject for big work had become very difficult and to paint at all was physically challenging. He would create just five more pictures before his death in May 1967.

Road and Trees is almost three feet high and a full five feet in length. In its shallow space, a narrow road and trees run together across the whole canvas. Seen straight on, without beginning or end visible, it seems Hopper has chosen a segment of a whole running frieze as his subject to paint. Perhaps this is the middle of the flow. There is no defining incident to focus on. Along this continuum, he will paint exactly here. Why here? Why are we here?

It has been, of course, a great joy to puzzle over *Road and Trees* these now 35 years. I once did ask the most evolved painter I ever knew, Warren Hohrer, why this painting wouldn't resolve, come clean, settle down. His thought was that whatever question Hopper painted *Road and Trees* to answer, he left there at the finish. Warren said, "He didn't paint out the question." So, one could say Hopper poses some question, and it is still hovering, unanswered, in this very moment, in his *Road and Trees*. It is right down there, or here, somewhere, even now causing a stir. The question, it would appear, is smack-dab everywhere along this place where Hopper took a fancy to paint a no-name location, which contains an ever-extending view.



ALFRED THOMPSON BRICHER (1837-1908), *The Return of the Yacht, Scituate Glades*, 1879, oil on canvas, 17 1/2 x 38 1/2 in., Collection Adrienne Ruger Conzelman



ADRIENNE RUGER CONZELMAN

Adrienne Ruger Conzelman '92

HAVING BEEN RAISED by art and antiques enthusiasts and having been exposed to my grandparents' esteemed collection of paintings, I developed a taste for and a keen interest in American art at a young age. I enrolled at Hamilton with the unusual insight of knowing what I wanted to study — not just vaguely, but exactly. After majoring in art history at Hamilton, I earned a master's degree in art history with a specialization in American art at Williams and then worked as a specialist in American paintings at Christie's.

Despite the profound loss of my beloved grandmother, who incidentally also served as an inspirational mentor, I was delighted to receive this Alfred Thompson Bricher painting, which I had so long admired in her Southport, Conn., home. Depicting a quiet summer day on Massachusetts' south shore, *Return of the Yacht, Scituate Glades* represents a brief interest of Bricher in incorporating figures into his otherwise undisturbed seascapes. Quintessentially Victorian, the painting now

proudly hangs in my New York City apartment opposite a Capri scene by Charles Caryl Coleman.

Until last year, my interest in art was mainly restricted to the 19th century, despite a secret passion for Rothko, Diebenkorn, Frankenthaler and others of their ilk. Perhaps my parents' and grandparents' tastes hindered me in some way from pursuing the more avant-garde aesthetics of post-war art. While at Hamilton I did explore the theories behind Wyndham Lewis' Vorticism and the sexual innuendoes of Georgia O'Keeffe's calla lilies; however, I did not delve any further into the 20th century. Thinking back, I doubt that a course on post-war art was offered, but even if there was, I dare say I would have skipped it and pursued the more time-tested subjects of Greek and Roman art, Islamic art, Neoclassicism, Romanicism and Impressionism.

Now with two small children and a third on the way, my preferences in art run toward the minimal and the simplified, representing perhaps a quest for peace and quiet in an otherwise chaotic world. I have long dreamed of Rothkos and Frankenthalers, and now as an adult with endless responsibilities and concerns, those color-field abstractions are even more appealing. As the still-growing popularity of these stars of the 20th century drives their values skyward, I have turned my attention to the lesser-known artists working during the '50s, '60s and '70s and the young emerging artists beginning to gain some attention in New York today. A pleasant surprise has been the compatibility resulting from the subject matter and palette of my cherished Bricher with those of the more contemporary works in my collection.

Stephen and Mary Craven P'99

COLLECTING ART is like studying history. Art tells a story; our collection tells the story of America from 1900-1950. We started collecting when we were first married. Stephen had a love for art, having majored in painting in college, and I had a love for shopping. It was a perfect match that has sustained us for 30 years.

In the first years we couldn't afford significant pieces, but loved visiting the galleries and learning all we could. Our first major acquisition forced us to eat macaroni for four months in order to pay for the painting. We would forgo vacations and dinners out just so we could acquire another painting. We read about art, visited galleries and poured over auction catalogs.

As the years passed an actual collection started to take shape. We limited our acquisitions to American oil paintings from the first half of the 20th century. We began, in the early '70s, by buying American Impressionist paintings. These were affordable then and the later work was very difficult to find.

I have a love for William Glackens' work; I already had acquired two of his paintings when the beach scene became available. It is thought to depict a Cape Ann scene near our summer home in Rockport. One of my husband's favorite artists is John Sloan. He would love to do an entire room with his paintings. He even named our son Sloan! *Dogtown Common* was done while Sloan was in Gloucester, again near our summer home. It is a powerful piece and could hold its own with other



STEVE AND MARY CRAVEN



JOHN SLOAN (1871-1951), *Dogtown Common*, 1930, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in., Collection Stephen and Mary Craven

quality works. While easily recognizable as having been painted by Sloan, it is not what one first thinks of when considering the artist's work. Less predictable works are more challenging. They enliven a collection and, like non-conforming children, are appreciated more with time.

In addition to Sloan and Glackens, we like Kenneth Hayes Miller and his students, Robert Henri and his students, the Steiglitz Group — I could go on and on. Before we acquire a particular piece, we research the artist. I enjoy learning about the little idiosyncrasies of each artist as it makes the person come alive to me. Generally, we prefer visiting galleries to museums. Gallery owners are a tremendous source of information, happy to relay any knowledge of the artist or painting, whereas many museums are often too formal for us. I learn much more at a gallery. I can get as close as I want and ask as many questions as I desire, often too, seeing preliminary studies or alternate versions of a piece.



WILLIAM GLACKENS (1870-1938), *At the Beach*, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in., Collection Stephen and Mary Craven

Now, 30 years later, we are still collecting. Our paintings fill two homes, and there are still canvases stacked on the floor. We periodically rearrange the paintings to make them seem "new" and have recently started to acquire some sculptural pieces and decorative works. I think a true collector never has a complete collection. There is such fun in the hunt. We would love to find a wonderful Marin oil or a Hartley or a Kuhn circus painting. But there is the fun.

Louise A. and J. William Holland '59

DURING THE 1930S Norman Rockwell lived in New Rochelle, N.Y., and was a customer at my father's drug store, the Beechmont Pharmacy. My father and Rockwell became friends, and Dad would, from time to time, provide him with props for his paintings.

One in particular that I remember was his pharmacy license, some test tubes, beakers and flasks that appeared on a *Post* cover in 1939 involving a rather rumpled pharmacist compounding some syrup for a little girl. Rockwell had said he would give the pharmacist painting to my Dad, but it was either destroyed in a studio fire or asked for by one of the people at Curtis Publishing. Norman felt badly about this and resolved to give my father the *Barbershop Quartet* which he said was a better painting since it contained four and not two figures.

I remember him visiting our house to deliver the painting and explaining some of its composition to my parents. He said that rendering hands is a most difficult task. The detail is quite extraordinary including items one might say are throw-aways, such as the cloth on the floor, the cracked shoes and the comb with missing teeth, the diagonal line from the upper right brush to the lower left razor handle and the extensive use of triangles in spaces between the figures.

My dad tells me that the short fellow on the left was actually a barber in New Rochelle. The taller figure next to him was a policeman; the third, a fireman; and the seated man, an artist friend of Rockwell's named Walter Beech Humphries, who later painted a portrait of my mother.



NORMAN ROCKWELL (1894-1978), *Barbershop Quartet*, 1936, oil on canvas, 36 x 27 in., Collection Mr. and Mrs. J. William Holland



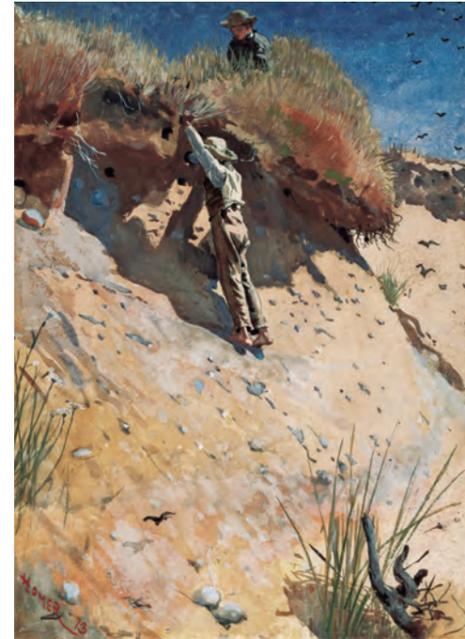
BILL AND LOUISE HOLLAND

Rockwell has been criticized by many art critics as being nothing but an illustrator who produced work solely for reproduction. It is, of course, true that much of his work is illustration, but much of it is also art. One proponent of Rockwell has suggested that with his work "what you see is what you get." His pictures tell a story which requires no interpretation or intermediation, so the art critic is not needed, and therefore, they denigrate him for all the good trade union reasons. I subscribe to this later theory. The painting is, I

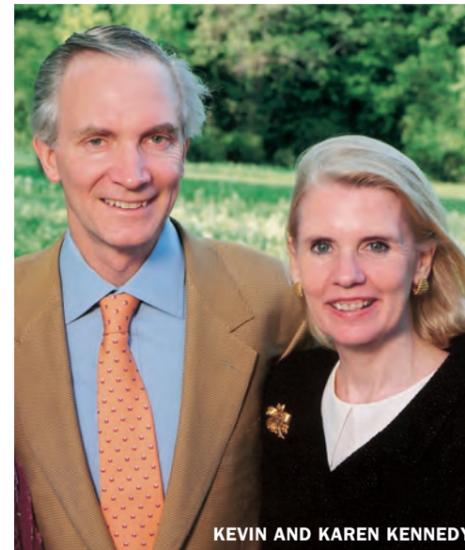
feel, an allegory for harmony and hangs in the dining room of our house, a room where, we feel, harmony is important.

Karen A. and Kevin W. Kennedy '70

I DEVELOPED AN INTEREST in art as an undergraduate at Hamilton. Recognizing the limitations of my artistic aptitude and abilities, choosing art as a major was one of the great privileges of a liberal arts education. I studied studio art with James Penney and art history with Paul Parker. Through Paul Parker, I was exposed to American artists like Homer, Marin, Burchfield, Hartley, Glackens and Shinn. After college while working on Wall Street, I maintained my interest in these artists and many



WINSLOW HOMER (1836-1910), *How Many Eggs?*, 1873, watercolor, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2 in., Collection Karen A. and Kevin W. Kennedy



KEVIN AND KAREN KENNEDY

others, but it was only in the last few years that my wife and I have been active collectors.

While my parents were not collectors, they enjoyed art and encouraged my interest. My aunt was very interested in art, and her father was one of the founders of the Albright-Knox Museum in Buffalo, and my cousin is an active board member there today. While I was influenced by my cousin and my aunt, Paul Parker and James Penney were the most powerful influences on the development of my interest in art.



CHARLES BURCHFIELD (1893-1967), *Dandelion Seed Heads and the Moon*, (1961), 1965, watercolor, 54 3/4 x 38 1/2 in., Collection Karen A. and Kevin W. Kennedy

Over the years, my wife and I have enjoyed the museums in New York where we live including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The museums of Paris, particularly the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée national des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, are familiar haunts, as is the Museo del Prado in Madrid. The Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, N.Y., was an important part of my education when I was an undergraduate.

My wife and I have somewhat different tastes. She prefers figurative art, which I enjoy, but she is less enthusiastic about the more abstract works that are attractive to me. We have compromised on some works by Marin, Stuart Davis and Max Weber that appeal to both of us.

We collect because we enjoy having art in our home for our pleasure and for our family and friends. We are happy to lend our art for museum shows, and the Winslow Homer watercolor, *How Many Eggs?*, in this exhibition has just returned from a year-long Homer

retrospective that began in Kansas City and traveled to Los Angeles and Atlanta. It is very satisfying to share some of our paintings with the Hamilton community and to participate in this exhibition with other members of the Hamilton family.

Keith S. Wellin '50

I'VE NEVER CONSIDERED MYSELF to be a collector. I simply buy a painting when I see one that I like. I don't haunt galleries, but I do walk around galleries when I am in New York, and if something catches my eye, I buy it.

The artwork I own is eclectic. Among the paintings I own, *Segovia Girl* is the only painting that I did not purchase. I inherited the painting from my father, who was a great admirer of Robert Henri. He loved the painting. My father worked his way through school by sketching, although he did not pursue art professionally after graduation. *Segovia Girl* hangs over the fireplace in my apartment in New York and has always been very special to me.



KEITH WELLIN

Patricia Bakwin and Frederick Richard Selch P'79,88

AMONG THE MANY HAPPY DISCOVERIES that Pat and I made when we married nearly 50 years ago was that we both liked gardening and children. Another was that we both liked to collect. Frankly, our shared love of collecting was in our blood, since both our families collected actively. However, the type of collecting of the two families was very different.

As a son of the Reverend Grant Selch '28, widely known as "the puppeteering parson," I was exposed to a style of collecting connected primarily to his activities as a latter-day Geppetto and producer of amateur theatricals. Our house was filled with every kind of collectable thing in the world, and everything we ever brought there was intended to be used as a prop, a stage decoration or a costume for either his human or his doll players. But to him I guess I owe my more controlled habit of collecting the materials — musical instruments, books and prints — related to my obsessive study of music history.

Pat's parents were prominent New York pediatricians and collected famously the paintings, sculpture and art books of the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Their public rooms were filled with eye-boggling canvases by Cézanne, Van Gogh, Modigliani and the like.



PAT BAKWIN AND ERIC SELCH



ROBERT HENRI (1865-1929), *Segovia Girl*, 1912, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in., Collection Keith S. Wellin



THOMAS SULLY (1783-1872), *The Misses Coleman*, 1844, oil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 35 1/4 in., Collection Patricia Bakwin and Frederick Richard Selch

Their library boasted the great illustrated works of Rouault, Derain and Shahn, and the hallways and staircases were lined with the sculpture of Renoir, Degas and Matisse.

As a family the Bakwins traveled to Europe every summer visiting and talking to the living artists they collected, as well as the major collectors, dealers and scholars. In time their children came to understand that the main purpose of collecting was to acquire beautiful items to decorate the home and to achieve an understanding of what the artist had intended to impart with his work. This was a philosophy very different from that of many of the well-known collectors of the time who seemingly collected only with an eye for fame, market value and popularity.

Pat purchased her first painting at the age of 18, a Vlaminck, when her family was visiting that artist's studio. Later when we married we started collecting together: our first joint selection was a small Renoir oil, *Head of Gabriel*. It is still our favorite painting. After that, while living in Europe in the late '50s and early '60s, we started buying works by the then-popular "School of Paris" — Janssen, Minaux, Aispiri and the like. Upon our return to America we added more paintings by some of our personal friends, Don Nice and Xavier De Calletay, but did not begin consciously collecting Americans as such until the early 1990s.

This shift was influenced by our other collection, the musical instruments, books, prints

and paintings related to early American culture. Now we have more than 40 American paintings and drawings ranging from those of leading professional painters like Charles Bird King and John Vanderlyn, to works by the naïve folk artists Joseph Whiting Stock and Ammi Phillips. Most of these are housed in an 1802 Georgian-Palladian mansion in Sharon Springs, N.Y., that we have recently restored to its original Federal splendor. But there are still more in our New York house.

Our enthusiasm goes on and on. Our quest for American art, antiques and books in the last decade has drastically reinvigorated our interest in collecting in general and added to our knowledge and interest in American culture and history.