



GREENWICH  
*Decorative Arts*  
SOCIETY

## *Thanksgiving Newsletter, 2019*

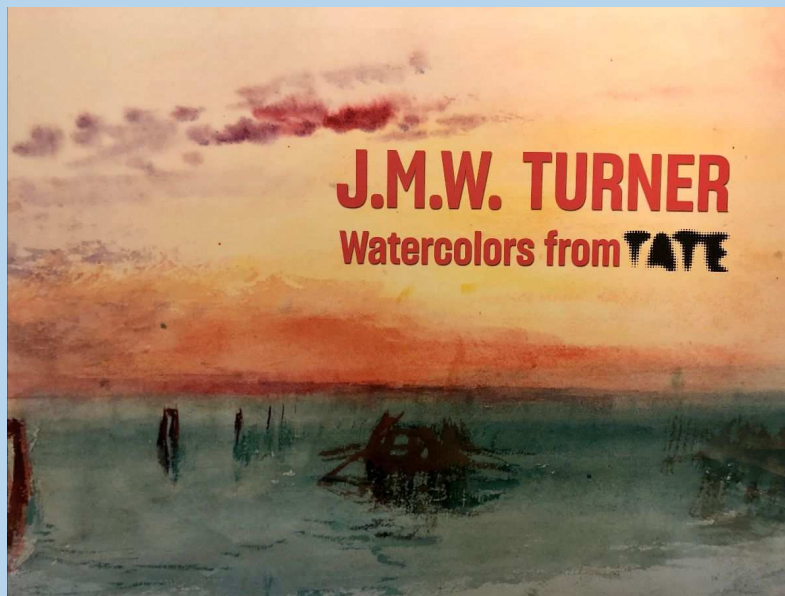
During this Thanksgiving season we have much to be grateful for, including our shared appreciation of the decorative and fine arts.

John Ruskin, the great artist and critic of the nineteenth-century, believed that all truth is comprehended visually.

Ruskin devoted himself to making us see and understand better. He said the imagination must be constantly fed by nature ~ take a nice walk in the natural outdoors!

And he believed the greatest moral and spiritual truths appear to us in symbolic form, which gives such human value to viewing art ~ take yourself to a museum, even for a brief time of contemplation.

Perhaps you will be traveling to see family or have the time to take a little arts road trip. Here are some interesting exhibitions to enjoy in the next weeks.



*Venice: Looking Across the Lagoon at Sunset, 1840*



Don and I drove up to see the largest collection of watercolors by the British artist J.M.W. Turner in the U.S. in decades at the [Mystic Seaport Museum](#).

John Ruskin championed Turner before Turner's genius was recognized. Ruskin felt he found a kindred spirit speaking back to him through his painting.

*Watercolors from Tate* brings together 92 watercolors, four oil paintings and one of the artist's last sketchbooks. "Not one of these watercolors or the sketchbook would have survived had Turner had anything to do with it," notes exhibition curator David Blayney Brown, Tate's Manton Senior Curator of British Art 1790-1850.

The Chancery Court of Britain saved the entire contents of Turner's studio, including more than 30,000 watercolors and sketches stashed haphazardly in cupboards, crammed in drawers, and rolled between canvases.



*Sunset Across the Park from Petworth House, 1827*

(N.B. I took the photos with my iPhone, which the museum allows.

The watercolors hang in a state-of-the-art new exhibition space which has ceilings 26 feet high and is supported by a sophisticated HVAC system to maintain the critical

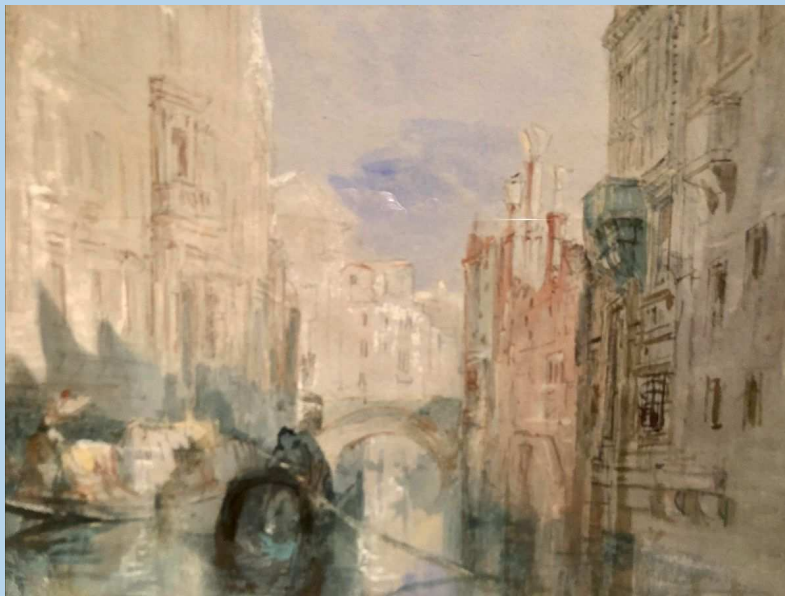
As professor and scholar Willard Spiegelman notes, the show "reveals how Turner became a master of luminosity, color, sublimity, action and stillness - not in oil, the medium for which he is most celebrated, but in the more delicate, fugitive, seemingly offhand medium of watercolor."



*Scarborough, circa 1825*

Turner's watercolors include harbors, seascapes, landscapes, travel scenes and interiors. Here washerwomen dot the water's edge and fishing vessels mark the harbor. A small starfish can be seen between the spotted dog and the shrimper foraging in the sands. The starfish is a curious feature of all Turner's Scarborough views.

Scarborough Castle, on the hill, was built in the 12th century. Turner sketched outdoors, but most of his watercolors were painted in his studio from memory.



*The Rio San Luca alongside the Palazzo Grimani, with the Church of San Luca,  
c. 1840*

Some of my favorites are his evanescent images of Venice.





*Venice: San Giorgio Maggiore: Early Morning 1819*

Turner visited Venice for the first time in 1819. He stayed only a few days but the visit inspired him to make a group of exceptional works, revealing a new understanding of the qualities of pure watercolor.

His love for the city compelled him to revisit where he used the medium to capture the wateriness and the light with layered washes and delicate hatching.



[J.M.W. Turner: Watercolors From Tate](#)

Mystic Seaport Museum  
through Feb. 23, 2020



*'Rocky Coast and Gulls (Manchester Coast)' (1869) Winslow Homer*

If you're headed up the coast you must stop at the Cape Ann Museum in Gloucester, Massachusetts, to a wonderful, intimate collection of Winslow Homer's seaside work made in the early part of his career.



*Winding Line, 1875*

The show includes 51 paintings by the artist at six waterfront locations from New Jersey to Maine. Period photographs and objects, including hats, bathing costumes and wooden ship models augment the show.



"The Tent" (Summer by the Shore) 1874

I love this striking sun-filled painting of a family shading itself by the sea. There's even a divan for reading as a breeze wafts through the open tent. The light is wondrous!



*Winslow Homer's Children on the Beach  
(aka Watching the Tide Go Out and Watching the Boats) 1873*

The museum has collaborated with 52 other collections to bring together the 95 items in the show. “It’s a quite daunting project, which we are launching in view of the significance of the 150th anniversary of Homer’s first paintings of the sea and his first documented trip to Cape Ann,” says Bill Cross, the exhibition’s curator.



*Beach Scene (1869) (left) and On The Beach (1869) were one painting until  
Homer cut it in two in dismay after receiving bad reviews.*

“Homer’s identity in the American consciousness is first and foremost that of a marine painter. Yet until the age of 33 he had never exhibited a marine painting—then the dam broke,” Cross says. “We thought that was an important moment in the history of American art and of Homer’s career.”

Homer at the Beach: A Marine Painter's  
Journey, 1869-1880  
[Cape Ann Museum](#)  
through December 1, 2019







Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866. Oil on canvas.

If you want more Winslow Homer, stop by Harvard to learn how Homer’s work for the illustrated periodical *Harper’s Weekly* helped shape his later career as a painter and watercolorist.

During the Civil War (1861–1865), American artist Winslow Homer (1836–1910) served as a correspondent for *Harper’s*. His sketches of soldiers, both in battle on the front lines and in quieter moments back at camp, were reproduced to accompany the journal’s accounts of the conflict.

University Research Gallery,  
Harvard Art Museums  
Winslow Homer: Eyewitness  
Through January 5, 2020



BEFORE DOWNTON ABBEY  
THERE WAS THE  
**GILDED AGE**

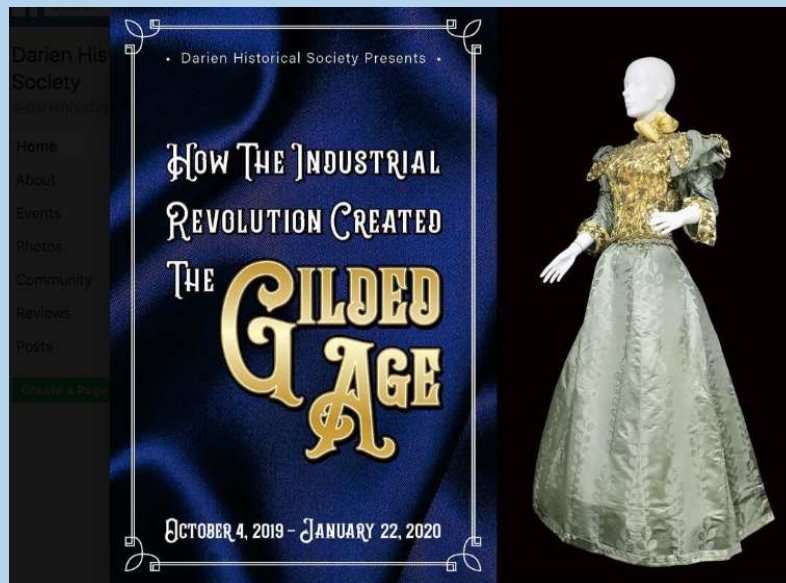
 A banner with the text 'BEFORE DOWNTON ABBEY THERE WAS THE GILDED AGE' in a serif font. The text is flanked by decorative flourishes. Below the banner is a small logo for the Darien Historical Society.

Closer to home, the Darien Historical Society is featuring a fashion exhibit on the Gilded Age. It's right near the Goodwives Shopping Center. You can shop for

Curated by our very own GDAS member, Babs White, it showcases amazingly preserved treasures in their collection.



Babs White, a Smith College art history major has a deep knowledge of history and women's fashion and has curated eight shows for the museum.



“The many social commitments of the Gilded Age required a whirl of dressing and redressing,” says Babs, the society’s costume curator, who is overseeing the exhibition. “There were lavish balls, picnics and regattas; and pampered wives and daughters assumed that each activity required an appropriate change of clothes.”

“With increasing interest in sports and other summer pastimes, the Gilded Age set favored Newport,” she says. “They built 'summer cottages' — actually mansions — on Bellevue Avenue and sponsored daily carriage promenades. The arrival of wealthy New Yorkers created a constant party atmosphere.”





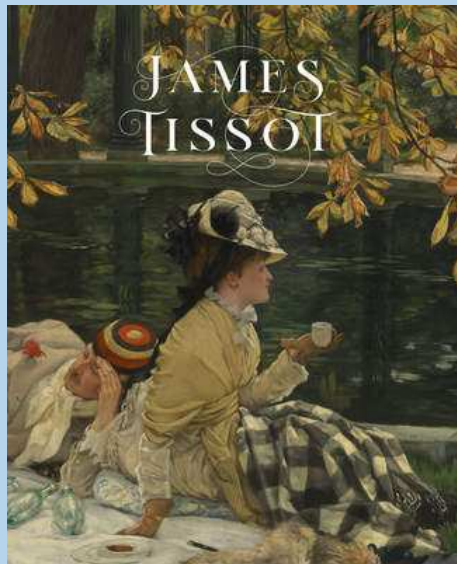
*A floral milkmaid's dress on display*





“The costumes were just extraordinary,” White says. “During one costume ball, Mrs. Vanderbilt’s costume, “Spirit of Electricity” included a torch light that was powered by a battery hidden in her skirt.”

Darien Historical Society  
45 Old Kings Highway North, Darien  
Through January 22, 2020



I know some of you have family on the west coast as I do, and if you are in San Francisco you must go to see “James Tissot: Fashion & Faith” at the Legion of Honor.

I plan to take my little granddaughters Louise Larkin and Magnolia June to this exhibition. John Ruskin and William Morris shared the view that children must be surrounded by the magnificence of nature and the beauty of art. And I agree!



*James Tissot's 'Children's Party,' 1882*

Informed by new scholarship, curator Melissa E. Buron, with colleagues at the Musée d'Orsay, are taking a new look at this complex artist who famously turned down Edgar Degas's invitation to join the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874.



*James Tissot's 'Portrait of Mlle L. L....' (1864)*



PHOTO: MOJEE B. GORAN

Tissot's extraordinary artistic talent is obvious in the 70 paintings and other objects on view. This portrait, redolent with wallpaper and furniture patterns and with the billowing black dress and red bolero, captivates the viewer.



The stunning "October" (1877) opens the exhibition. As art critic Judith Dobrynski notes, "it is quintessential Tissot: it shows his lover and muse, Kathleen Newton, in an

exquisite black, fur-trimmed, embroidered jacket and puffed skirt, walking along a golden autumnal trail." Tissot's precision and extraordinary artistic talent capture the ladies and gentlemen of the late nineteenth century - always dressed to the nines!



The exhibition presents Tissot as a storyteller whose narratives deal with human relationships beneath their decorous surfaces. Amidst the high style and exuberant colors, note the yearning wallflower in "The Ball on Shipboard" (c. 1874)





James Tissot's 'Painters and Their Wives' (c. 1883-85)

I enter right into this painting with the finely observed details from the French breads plump and fresh in their napkins to the patterns on the women's dresses to the gardens and museum beyond. It's a celebratory luncheon on the terrace of the restaurant *Le Doyen* at the annual art exhibition of the *Palais de'Industrie*, still a Parisian institution.

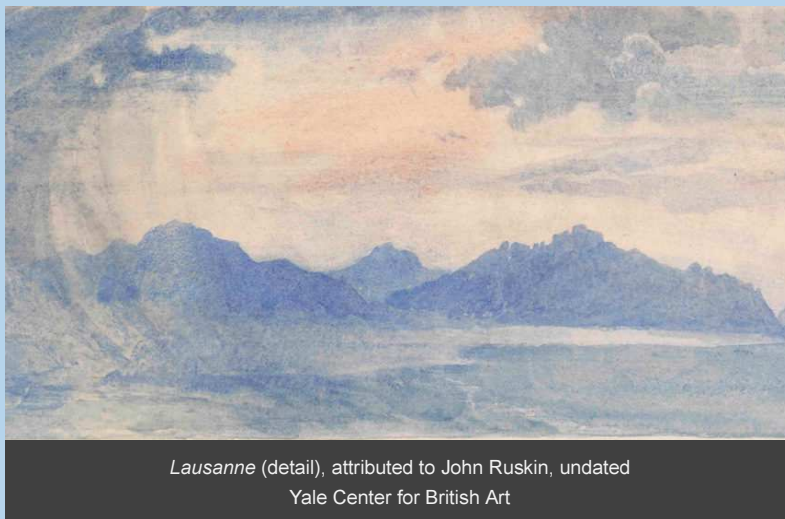




Celebrities include the sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840 – 1917), the man with the brown beard and spectacles standing in the center of the picture (to the top left in the insert). When I gaze at it I feel enveloped in another time, and the waiter is about to open that bottle of wine in this bustling gathering of artists and wives. You can almost feel the frisson of flirtations and hear the buzz of greetings, gossip and art talk.



James Tissot: Fashion and Faith.  
Legion of Honor, San Francisco  
Through Feb 9, 2020



*Lausanne* (detail), attributed to John Ruskin, undated  
Yale Center for British Art

When I started this newsletter, I was musing about John Ruskin for some reason. I was reflecting about his love of art and visionary ideas. He influenced the thinking of

He was intensely interested in the world around him. Ruskin was such an observer - he once gave a lecture based on a lifetime of cloud-watching.



John Ruskin, Blenheim Orange Apple c.1873, Watercolor

*The Stones of Venice*, his treatise on the architecture of Venice, was a labor of love that had powerful effects on the conservation movement of ancient buildings. It knocked me over as a student although I could hardly trek through its vast vocabulary and long cascading sentences.

He had a profound interest in and influence on the great American painters of the 19th century. He lived up to Henry James' counsel "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" Now there's a worthy goal.



John Ruskin, *The South Side of the Basilica of St. Mark's, From the Loggia of the Doge's Palace, Venice, ca. 1850-52*, watercolor over pencil, heightened with bodycolor

Ruskin has one of those sensibilities that just gets into your head. After immersing yourself in him, you wander around seeing the world with a different vision. He roams among his memories and observations with such joy - and understanding of loss. He called it "the infinite pain of seeing."

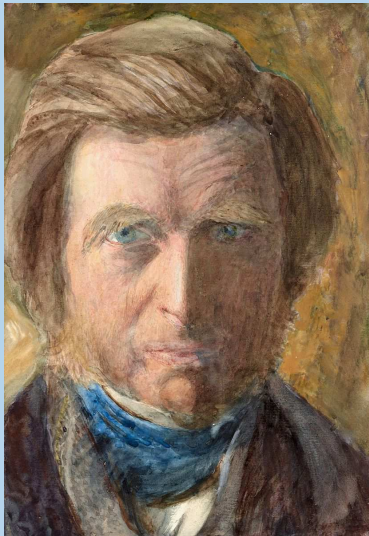




John Ruskin, *Study of a Magnified Pheasant's Feather*, 1879,  
watercolor on paper

Then, just as I was going to send this newsletter, I happened upon an announcement of an exhibition on the bicentenary of the birth of John Ruskin at Yale.

What?! How did I miss this? This is one of those uncanny synchronies. I am going to rush up to see it before it closes.



"Ruskin's eyes were blue, and he liked to emphasize their color by wearing a bright blue stock, visible in most portraits of him. Had the hue of his eyes washed away with the force of his seeing—a measure of how much he saw and how hard he looked—they would have been transparent by the time he lapsed into his final madness in 1889."

Verlyn Klinkenborg

*John Ruskin, Self-Portrait,  
in Blue Neckcloth, 1873*



John Ruskin, *Study of Portal and Carved Pinnacles, Cathedral of St. Lô, Normandy*, 1848, graphite, brown ink, and brown wash on papeyles.

"Drawing on the Center's rich collection of Ruskin's drawings and publications, with significant loans from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and other institutions, this exhibition positions Ruskin as a pioneering ecological thinker, social reformer, educator and preservationist. Bringing together an array of diverse materials including paintings, drawings, literary manuscripts, mineral samples and memorabilia, the exhibition highlights Ruskin's impact in his own time and his enduring significance today."

Yale Center for British Art  
Unto This Last: Two Hundred Years of  
John Ruskin  
Through December 8, 2019





Wayne Thibault's *Pies, Pies, Pies* 1961

Perhaps you are thinking about your Thanksgiving dinner menu whether you are cooking for two or twenty. Perhaps you are not cooking, but surely you might be thinking about pies.

Thanksgiving is a holiday we get to indulge in pie!

In our GDAS year of Americana, what could be more American than pie for Thanksgiving and the quintessential American artist who paints them?!





Wayne Thiebaud paints pies. And he is turning 99 on November 15, 2019.

Thiebaud is pronounced Tee-bow. It's Swiss. The Arizona-born painter spent most of his life in California where he was raised.

He continues to get up every day before the morning light to paint in his upstairs Sacramento studio. Are you inspired? I am!



"Cherry Pie" (2016) by Wayne Thiebaud

A masterpiece from his dessert series could go for \$8 million according to Thiebaud expert John Berggruen. The sums of money involved keep growing. In 2011, a group of Thiebaud's paintings fetched a combined total of \$27.5 million.

Yet Thiebaud is a child of the Great Depression who never forgot how his father lost his mechanic's job and struggled to support his family.



Lemon Meringue Pie Slices (1990) by Wayne Thiebaud

As Wayne Thiebaud says, "Pie has a long history and it has other implications: the idea

of 'Pie in the Sky,' the old American preoccupation with Mom and Apple Pie, pie throwing contests, pie throwing in Chaplin films. One makes a pie out of ordinary stuff, like raisins, squash or apples and gift wraps it, in a sense with a crust. It's very magical, very special."

His mother, Alice, was a wonderful cook and baker. And he explains "I met my wife, and I was charmed by her lemon meringue pie. That became my favorite dessert, both to paint and to eat." He says he didn't pick pies for their substance, but for their shape.

When Thiebaud began painting food he thought, "That certainly has to be the end of me as a serious painter—a slice of pie.' But I couldn't leave it alone...It just seemed to be the most genuine thing which I had done."



*Wayne Thiebaud, Sandy Cliff, 2013/2018–19, Oil on canvas,  
Acquavella Galleries, New York City*

Though he is best known for his iconic still life desserts frosted in a fluorescent glow, writer Julia Friedman notes that "Wayne Thiebaud is equally luminescent in his high-calorie candied landscapes."

Now at Acquavella Gallery in New York City, thirty-three of these confections in acrylic, charcoal, graphite, oil, and watercolor, inspired by the Sierra Nevadas and





*Cloud Ridge 1967*

Thibaud's depictions of California mountains have been an enduring focus of the artist's practice. The abstracted, yet material mountains present the grandeur of nature's force.

"My own sense in being American is a very important part of what I feel and do," Thibaud says. That Americanness infuses his work. What he does, with astonishing virtuosity, is paint a pie or a mountain in a way that has never been painted before.

Make a 99th Happy Birthday toast to Wayne Thibaud on November 15 and enjoy a piece of pie on Thanksgiving!



You can see Thibaud's pie paintings at the MET and at the Whitney.  
*Wayne Thibaud Mountains 1965-2019*  
[Acquavella Galleries](#), 18 East 79th Street  
 between Madison and Fifth  
 Through December 13, 2019





C. Z. Guest wearing Mainbocher, 1959, Lord Snowdon photo

Please join us on Monday, December 2 at the Bruce Museum at 1:15 pm for  
"The Best of American Fashion" by Caroline Rennolds Milbank,  
fashion historian and author.



*Claire McCardell; Photographed at Oak Beach, New York by Herman Landshoff for Mademoiselle, 1951.*

Look through those forgotten couture items and wear or bring a fashion item, dress, jacket, hat, shoes or purse. Feel free to dress in an entire outfit or wear some costume jewelry of the era. We are going to have a little surprise period visual display for you.

It's our holiday celebration and we will have some fun sharing couture treasures and enjoying a wonderful program. See you December 2 at the Bruce!



Wayne Thibault "Cakes No 1" 1967

A very Happy Thanksgiving to you ~ and don't forget dessert!  
Karen Handal, President  
Greenwich Decorative Arts Society



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