

William Singer and America: Introduction to the exhibition program 2006-2012

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The Singer Museum was founded in 1956 by Anna Singer (1878-1962) in memory of her husband William Singer Jr. (1868-1943). William Singer was an American impressionist painter. The family's steel company in Pittsburgh (Penn.) was sold and the couple left for Paris, where William developed his skills as a painter. In France, they traveled to Barbizon, Pont Aven and other artists' colonies, and then they continued north to the Netherlands, looking for the artistic and topographical roots of the paintings of Hendrik Willem Mesdag and Anton Mauve, Hague School painters they were introduced to at the Carnegie Internationals. The Singer family belongs to the Pittsburgh circle of steel tycoons and collectors like the Fricks and Carnegies.

LAREN ARTISTS' COLONY

They settled in 1901 at the artists' colony in Laren, 15 km east of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The couple built a villa and started to collect contemporary art, mainly Laren School, Hague School and French art. The villa is now the heart of a beautiful museum and theater complex, surrounded by a lovely garden. As well as housing the collection, Singer Laren presents a lively program of exhibitions and theatrical productions and welcomes 100,000-150,000 visitors a year.

2006: THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY *LOVING ART: THE WILLIAM & ANNA SINGER COLLECTION*

The concept is a reconstruction of the Singer collection in 2006 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the museum. The ambition is to present the richness of the complete collection of this American couple of collectors. Their collection of paintings, works on paper, sculpture, Asian pieces and applied arts contains ca. 3000 objects that have been divided over four different locations in the US, Norway and the Netherlands. The two main sites are the museums founded by the couple: in 1931 Washington County Museum of Fine Arts opened its doors in Hagerstown (MA), Anna Singer's birthplace. In 1956 Anna founded the Singer Museum in Laren in the Netherlands, the village where the couple had lived for many years. Besides these two places, the Singers spent half their life in Olden, a small village in Norway, where they also built a villa. Part of the art collection left in Olden after William's death in 1943 and Anna's in 1962 remained in the village, with some of it going to the West Norway Museum for Decorative Arts in Bergen.

EXHIBITION *LOVING ART: THE WILLIAM & ANNA SINGER COLLECTION*

13 September 2006 – 7 January 2007, Singer Laren

21 January – 29 April, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown

Reconstruction of the original complete Singer Collection with loans from the sister institutions in Norway, the USA and the Netherlands.

Catalogue: *Loving Art. The William & Anna Singer Collection*, Helen Schretlen, with a contribution by Jean Woods. 260p. full-color, 1 September 2006, Dutch and American editions. Waanders Publishers, Zwolle, Netherlands (USA distr. ACC)

WILLIAM SINGER RETROSPECTIVE IN 2008

The ambition is to present this American painter in the context of his American contemporaries and his artistic background. American impressionist painters are not widely known in the Netherlands and Europe. Eurocentric art historians have traditionally seen them and William Singer as an echo of French impressionism and they have been neglected in exhibition programs. Turn-of-the-century American art does not form an integral part of the usual art-history programs at the universities either. If there is *one* museum that is qualified to introduce this specifically American art to the Dutch public, it is the Singer Museum Laren.

William Singer's ambitions as a painter began when he was still living in the USA. He visited the artists' colonies of Old Lyme and Monhegan Island. Singer Laren researches his artistic sources and inspirations and would like to present them to the Dutch and American public. In doing so, we hope to provide Singer, the artist for whom our museum is named, with a context that makes him more understandable. The first retrospective of the paintings, pastels, etchings and sketchbooks of this American impressionist will give insight into his oeuvre, his development and the influence of his American and Paris education, art colleagues, the Paris years, the Dutch artist's colony of Laren, and, finally, the Norwegian landscape. A top selection of his works and of his fellow artists is the first requirement. We anticipate scepticism towards early 20th-century American art. A convincing selection of artists and paintings could change that attitude and offer the public a new domain to enjoy. It will also counteract the one-sided image of American art in the Netherlands as a mainly post war phenomenon.

SINGER LAREN 2006-2014

Singer Laren sees these two projects as a starting point for developing its role in introducing turn-of-the-century American art to the Dutch (and European) public. Singer Laren wants to incorporate American art into its permanent field of interest and exhibitions program. The Netherlands is generally unaware of great American impressionists such as Walter Griffin, Frederic Carl Frieseke, Richard Miller, Childe Hassam, Willard Metcalf and John Twachtman, some of whom were close friends of the Singers. These artists are all closely linked to the Singer collection but almost completely unknown in the Netherlands. We could also present William Merit Chase, John Alden Weir, Robert Vonnoh, John Breck, Theodore Robinson, Robert Blum, and both Frederic William MacMonnies and Mary MacMonnies. Even artists like Mary Cassatt, Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent have not widely been presented over here! In addition to these artists, we can imagine a wide range of appealing themes and subjects once we have introduced American art as our focus and "unique selling point". American artists' colonies, for example, or the so-called Holland Mania, the discovery of late 19th-century Dutch art by American artists, The Ten, the Ashcan School, or American realism. Whereas William Singer mainly dedicated himself to the Norwegian landscapes in an American impressionist style, we can imagine staging exhibitions of American landscapes.

2006: *Loving Art. The William & Anna Singer Collection*

2008: *The William Singer (1868-1943) retrospective exhibition*

2009: *Dutch Utopia. American artists in Holland, 1880-1914* (In cooperation with The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA, and Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, GA)

FURTHER OPTIONS

2010: *American Impressionists*

2012: *American Artists' Colonies*