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## The Realist Cause: Early 20th Century Paintings from the Permanent Collection - 1901-1930

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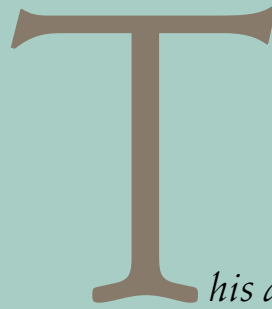
# *The Realist Cause:*

Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Paintings  
from the Permanent Collection, 1901–1930

Mary Beth Alger



**LEON KROLL, *Nude*, c.1916–1923**  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Dr. Gordon F. Lupien, 1998



*his article is the first in a series of thematic presentations of the college's permanent collection of art to be published in the Bridgewater Review. The series begins with the overarching theme of Realism, since a group of realist paintings, executed between 1901 and 1930, forms the basis of our collection. Realism in this context refers not to a particular style or movement but to a common commitment to an observation of the natural world, even after abstraction had taken hold in Europe and to some degree in the United States.*

Some of the most important works in our collection, are by painters who belonged both to the celebrated group of American painters known as “The Ten,” and to the acclaimed Boston School of Painting. Others are by students of these painters. “The Ten,” also known as “The Ten American Painters,” were America’s premier Impressionist group. They were “the ten” who left the Society of American Artists in 1898 when it became adamant that impressionism was an inferior type of realism. Members of the New York and Boston-based “Ten” were Frederic Child Hassam, Julian Alden Weir, John Henry Twachtman, Thomas Dewing, Edward Simmons, Joseph Rodefer De Camp, Willard Metcalf, Frank Benson, Robert Reid and Edmund Tarbell. Of the “Ten”, Edmund Tarbell and Joseph Rodefer Decamp would go on to become leading members of the Boston School of Painting, as would their students Aldro Hibbard, Marguerite Pearson and William Kaula. These five artists are represented in our collection.

William Kaula (1871–1953), a Boston-born painter of impressionistic landscapes and a student of Edmund Tarbell, is represented in our collection by his landscape of the hills of New Ipswich, New Hampshire. This piece demonstrates Kaula’s sensitive appreciation of the New England countryside; his penchant to paint vast, evocative skies; and his ability to imbue a landscape with mood and feeling, accomplished here through a

carefully limited palette of gold, orange-yellow and soft green. Kaula would always be considered a “Tarbell-ite,” even though his preferred subject would remain the landscape rather than genre scenes.

Aldro Hibbard’s (1886–1972) *Breaking Up—West River*, painted around 1925, is another fine example of the American impressionist style. Hibbard studied with Edmund Tarbell and Frank Benson. He enjoyed painting winter scenes, often spending hours in very cold weather so that he could record the special quality of brilliant winter sunshine and capture with utmost precision the icy snap of a cold day. The artist’s dazzling lighting effects and his quick, impasto brushstrokes make this painting particularly radiant.

New England artist Leon Kroll (1884–1974), whose work is represented in our collection by two pieces, *Girl with an Apple* and a nude (both painted sometime between 1916–23), was a student of J. H. Twachtman, one of “The Ten.” Kroll would later win a fellowship to study at the famous Academie Julien in Paris. This Paris experience acquainted the artist with the work of the French impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Indeed, his *Girl with an Apple* reflects the style of Cezanne with its collapsed space and modeling in large color patches. However, the subject, a single girl in a beautiful mo-

WILLIAM J. KAULA, *Hills of New Ipswich*, early 20th century. Oil on canvas.



ment of arrested action, is reminiscent of Vermeer, whose work had begun to be collected by Americans at the start of the twentieth century. In this instance, the girl is one of Kroll's neighbors, whom he painted on more than one occasion.

Kroll's nude is surely one of the highlights of our collection. There is a certain calculated rationality to this representation, as if the artist set out to paint a classical nude through deliberate and careful simplification of form. The entire figure appears to be developed through the basic geometric forms of cone, cylinder and sphere, a practice also used by Cezanne, but the fluid, sketchy brushstrokes and warm color produces a piece more sensual than coolly rational.

American Impressionist painter Lillian Genth (1876–1953) was born in Philadelphia. She was a student of James Abbot McNeil Whistler in Paris for two years, a compliment to her since Whistler rarely accepted female students. Genth's early career is characterized by depictions of female nudes in pastoral settings. Later on, as the artist began to travel, more exotic themes entered her work, as exemplified in *Cuenca: Spanish Woman in an Outdoor Setting*, one of the college's finest paintings. Cuenca refers to the picturesque village in the background, against which a dark-haired woman wearing a richly embroidered shawl and a typical Spanish head-dress, sits in contemplation of the nature around her.

The painting was recently cleaned and restored by BSC alumna Teresa Carmichael, a highly regarded art conservator.

Philadelphia born Marguerite Pearson (1898–1978), whose portrait of her cousin Jeannette Pearson is another fine work from our collection, studied at the Boston Museum School with Frederick Bosley and privately with Edmund Tarbell. She would become one of Tarbell's favorite students. In fact, the small cast of the Venus de Milo included in the portrait reproduced here belonged to Tarbell, who loaned it to only his preferred students. Pearson would become an active member of the Rockport Art Association and eventually one of the most sought after artists of genre scenes, landscapes and portraits, selling literally thousands of prints during the 1930s and '40s.

In the famous Armory show of 1913, European Abstraction commanded American audiences' attention, as did the work of more pioneering American artists such as Joseph Stella, John Marin and Stuart Davis. Following the Ten's twentieth and final show in New York in 1917, critics began to think that the group was no longer the revolutionary force it once was. With their reputation in decline, several members of "The Ten" would go on to have successful commercial careers, painting portraits of businessmen, educators,

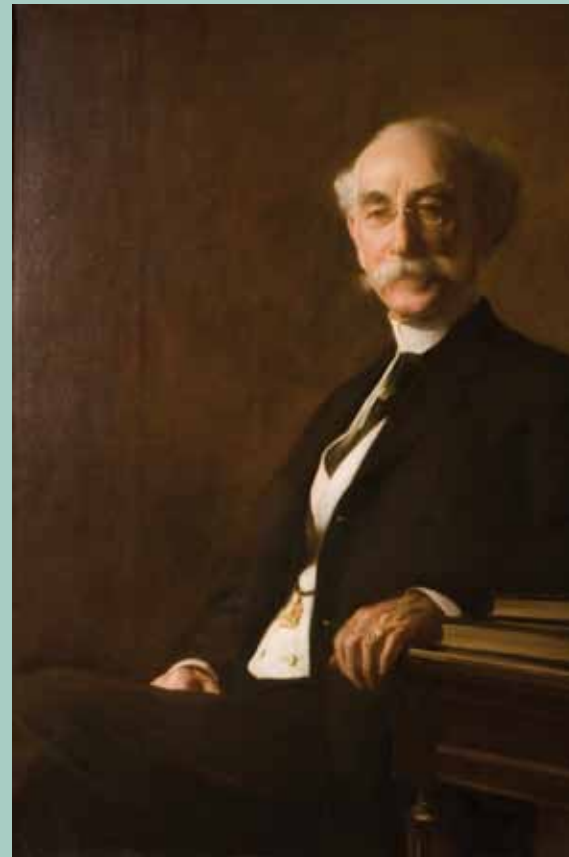
ALDRO HIBBARD, *Breaking Up—West River*, c.1925. Oil on canvas. Gift of BSC alumni.



statesmen and eventually, United States presidents. Joseph Rodefer De Camp's (1858–1923) *Portrait of Railroad Tycoon William Henry McDoel of Indiana* is such an example. In this portrait, the President of the Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville Railway sits to the side of a writing desk, his gaze focused directly on the viewer. This is a formal portrait but not lacking in psychological verity. Through a play of light and dark, for which De Camp was known, the artist focuses our attention on the shrewd and distinguished face with its shock of white hair and bushy mustache.

The works discussed here are currently exhibited in the Permanent Collection gallery within the Art Building. The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 until 4:00.

—*Mary Beth Alger is Visiting Lecturer in Art History and Curator of Exhibitions and Collections.*



JOSEPH RODEFER DECAMP, *Portrait of Railroad Tycoon William Henry McDoel of Indiana*, c.1918. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gar

**LILIAN GENTHE**, *Cuenca: Spanish Woman in Outdoor Setting*, early 20th century. Oil on canvas. Gift of Dr. Gordon F. Lupien.



*m Henry*  
*y Kearney.*

MARGUERITE PEARSON, *Portrait of Jeannette Pearson*, c.1930. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Irene Pearson Doughty.

