

PRESSED IN TIME

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American Prints 1905–1950

GARY, BRENDA, AND HARRISON RUTTENBERG’S JOHN SLOAN COLLECTION

“Pressed in Time: American Prints 1905-1950” (on view Oct. 6, 2007–Jan. 7, 2008) includes 15 etchings, one etching plate and one drawing from the John Sloan collection of Gary, Brenda, and Harrison Ruttenberg.

The John Sloan collection of Gary, Brenda, and Harrison Ruttenberg, recently promised to The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, consists of approximately 350 prints, 50 drawings, illustrated books, illustrated magazines, and ephemera. The gift will make The Huntington, along with the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Delaware Museum of Art, one of the major centers for the study of John Sloan.

When Gary and Brenda Ruttenberg began collecting art in the late 1960s, they bought prints by German Expressionists and other modern masters. But an unfavorable shift in the exchange rate affected the price of desirable prints in those areas, and around the same time, there was what the Ruttenbergs observed as an inspiring mini-renaissance of American art collecting—pioneered by a group of collectors in the Los Angeles area.

The Ruttenbergs soon found themselves gravitating toward American art, and the artist who particularly appealed to them was John Sloan (1871-1951), who began his career as a newspaper staff artist and later drew upon his observations of everyday life as the subject for his prints and paintings. The Ruttenbergs were attracted to the social and political content in Sloan’s work, and were specifically inspired by a John Sloan exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 1971. Just a few months later, Gary purchased the first Sloan print of the collection, *Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street* (1908), as a present for Brenda upon her graduation from law school, and she fell in love with the piece.

The Ruttenbergs gradually amassed a comprehensive body of Sloan’s work, including multiple states and impressions of prints and, in the case of *Sunbathers on the Roof* (1941), the etching plate used to make the print. Through their enthusiasm for the artist, the Ruttenbergs came to meet his widow, Helen Farr Sloan (1911-2005), who became a friend of the family and encouraged their collecting.

Another devotee has been Gary and Brenda’s 18-year-old son, Harrison, who is himself a budding print collector—with the benefit of having grown up immersed in art in their West Los Angeles home, which is adorned almost floor-to-ceiling with John Sloan prints.

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