This month The Metropolitan Museum of Art will put on exhibition 425 American paintings dating from 1670 to 1963—the most comprehensive showing of American pictures seen in New York in many years. Among the earliest exhibitions held by the Metropolitan were "Loan Collections," pictures borrowed from private collectors in order to make available to the public paintings by many of the leading masters at a time when the Museum’s own collection was very limited. For the Museum’s last comprehensive retrospective show of American painting, the Life in America exhibition of 1939, more than eighty per cent of the pictures were borrowed from private collectors and from museums, historical societies, and other institutions. The present show, by contrast, is drawn almost entirely from the Museum’s permanent collection of more than 1250 American paintings by nearly 625 artists. We have, however, also followed tradition, and have once again turned to twenty-one private collectors and two artists, who have generously lent twenty-nine pictures. Thus we are able to show the work of twelve artists not included in our collection—the unidentified “Freake limner,” John Greenwood, Reuben Moulthrop, William Jennys, Joshua Johnston, George Catlin, Fitz Hugh Lane, John F. Francis, Man Ray, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Mark Rothko—as well as to represent more adequately the production of eleven others.

Since the Metropolitan owns no American paintings of the seventeenth century, we are particularly grateful to have been able to borrow the three portraits of the Gibbs children, which, incidentally, are seen here together for the first time since the memorable exhibition of seventeenth century painting in New England held at the Worcester Art Museum in 1934. The Museum also owns no family groups of the pre-Revolutionary period, a gap nicely filled by John Greenwood’s unique conversation piece. The two pictures by Ralph Earl are noteworthy additions since they are the only known pair of full-length life-size portraits by him. The few primitive paintings are a welcome supplement to our own collection, which has been greatly improved during the past few years through the generosity of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch. The paintings by James Peale, John F. Peto, and John F. Francis have bolstered the Museum’s own
small collection of still lifes, which has only recently been strengthened by the addition of major works by William Michael Harnett and Severin Roesen. The paintings by Thomas Sully and Jasper F. Cropsey are especially interesting additions, for in both cases the Museum has owned for many years the oil sketches on which they were based. The charming group portrait by Samuel F. B. Morse is an unusual and amusing complement to the three fine pictures by him in the permanent collection.

Some of the loans are familiar through reproductions in books and magazine articles, but most of them have not been widely exhibited in many years. Although Cropsey’s The Valley of Wyoming was included in a Cropsey retrospective at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich in 1964, it was last seen in New York at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design just a hundred years ago. For seventy-seven of the intervening years it hung, virtually unnoticed, in a warehouse in Erie, Pennsylvania. It is possible that Sully’s full-length of Queen Victoria has never before been exhibited in New York; it is, at any rate, brought together with the sketch from life for the first time since it left Sully’s studio more than 125 years ago. The portraits by Ralph Earl descended to two branches of the Boardman family about 1909 or 1910, and are here reunited for the first time since then. It seems particularly appropriate that this should occur at a moment when the Museum is placing on exhibition its newly acquired monumental group portrait by Earl, Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children (see page 300). Similarly, the works by John Greenwood, James Peale, William Jennys, and Mather Brown have probably never been seen in New York, and most of the others have made only brief appearances. We are fortunate to have been able to bring this distinguished group of pictures together for this exhibition and are deeply indebted to their owners for their cooperation and understanding in making them available for so long a period of time.

**OPPOSITE:**

*At left: Robert Gibbs (1665-1702), 1670. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Lent by Theron J. Damon. Photograph: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

*Henry Gibbs (1668-1723), 1670. Oil on canvas, 40½ x 33 inches. Lent by Mrs. David M. Giltinan. Photograph: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

*Margaret Gibbs (1663-?), 1670. Oil on canvas, 40½ x 33 inches. Lent by Mrs. David M. Giltinan*
These portraits of the children of Robert Gibbs, a Boston merchant, are among the approximately two dozen American paintings that can be assigned confidently to artists active in New England in the seventeenth century. The identity of the painter has not been established, but the pictures have been attributed to the so-called “Freake limner” on the basis of their similarity to the portraits of John Freake and Mrs. Freake and Baby Mary, both in the collection of the Worcester Art Museum. The artist was very possibly a jack-of-all-trades, a skilled artisan who only occasionally rose above the level of house painter, glazier, and sign painter to the exalted position of portrait painter. Although it would seem likely that his immediate artistic source was English, the style of the pictures is similar to that seen in provincial Netherlandish portraits of the preceding generation. The pictures show the artist’s limited skill in draughtsmanship and in the delineation of sculptural forms, but in the customary fashion of the primitive painter he ignored his limitations and proceeded to create pictures in which he displayed a remarkable sense of design and a fine feeling for color. Small considerations such as the respective ages and sizes of the subjects did not concern him.
Greenwood was born in Boston, where at fifteen he was apprenticed to Thomas Johnston, who operated a shop specializing in heraldic devices, japanned decoration, and other types of ornamental painting. About 1745 he established himself as an independent portrait painter. After working with little competition in Boston until 1752, for some unknown reason he departed for Surinam, British Guinea, where he is known to have painted 115 portraits during the next half dozen years. Subsequently he studied mezzotint engraving in Amsterdam; he spent the last thirty years of his life in London, enjoying great success as a dealer in paintings and art objects.

This group portrait is the most ambitious work by Greenwood that has come down to us. He shows himself with palette in hand in the right background, and his fiancée and first cousin Elizabeth Lee in the right foreground. The others are, from left to right, his youngest sister, Hannah, his mother, his sister Mary or his sister Elizabeth, and his cousin Martha Lee. For the composition of the picture, which was certainly unusually elaborate for an American artist of that period, Greenwood probably referred to John Smibert’s well-known conversation piece, Bishop George Berkeley and His Family (Yale University Art Gallery), which still remained in Smibert’s studio along with some of Smibert’s other pictures and his collection of old masters. His attempt to be elegant and fashionable was tempered by his naivety; the result was a spirited picture in which the figures dance with vitality and display a wonderful sense of well-being.
Brown was born in Boston, a descendant of the divines Mather Byles, Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, and John Cotton. At sixteen he was active as an itinerant painter, and by nineteen he had accumulated enough money to go abroad. After studying with Benjamin West in London, in 1784 he established himself as a portrait painter in fashionable Cavendish Square. At first he received few commissions, but an Englishman writing to a friend in Boston tells us that by the age of twenty-five Brown was enjoying “the highest state of success.” Brown painted a portrait of Jefferson between March 11 and April 26, 1786, when the American statesman, then United States Plenipotentiary to the Court of Versailles, was visiting London. That portrait, which remained in Brown’s studio until 1788 while Brown was completing a companion portrait of John Adams, was then sent to Jefferson in Paris. Before Jefferson received the portrait, his friend the painter John Trumbull wrote him his opinion: “Mr. Adams is like—yours I do not think so well of.” The portrait painted for Jefferson no longer survives, but while Brown had it in his studio he made a replica of it for John Adams. A receipt to Adams, dated May 12, 1786, for the payment of six guineas is attached to the back of this picture. Although the portrait is less well known than the likenesses of Jefferson by Trumbull, Stuart, Houdon, and Rembrandt Peale, it is distinguished as the earliest known portrait of Jefferson and as one of Brown’s most dashing works.
Peale was an extremely versatile man, who worked as inventor, museum proprietor, scientist, writer, naturalist, and painter, all with equal facility. He was one of the best and most prolific artists in America during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, and he can be credited with having faithfully recorded the faces of most of the prominent individuals living in the Middle States at the time. Benjamin Laming was born in the West Indies, but settled in Baltimore, where he became a prosperous businessman. He married Eleanor Ridgely in 1784. This painting of the Lamings is probably Peale’s most successful double portrait. According to Peale’s diary, he “sketched out the design” on September 18, 1788. From then until October 5, he made daily visits to the Lamings’ country seat to work on the picture. His diary chronicles his progress; at one point he complained, “Mr. Laming sat for his face 2 [nd] sitting and yet meant for a finishing.” We learn that on a single day he painted the parrot and the flowers in Mrs. Laming’s hands and worked on the background, “a view of part of Baltimore town.” When the Lamings could not sit, Peale spent an afternoon catching bullfrogs and an evening dressing two woodpeckers for his museum.
Moulthrop spent most of his life in the vicinity of New Haven, Connecticut. Although he is known today as a portrait painter, contemporary notices show that he also did portraits in wax and owned a waxworks museum and a traveling waxworks exhibition, which was shown in many towns in Connecticut, as well as in New York and Boston. As a painter Moulthrop appears to have been largely self-taught; he was probably influenced by the work of Winthrop Chandler, John Durand, and others active in the area. These portraits, which are among the very few signed and dated works by Moulthrop that have been recorded, fall near the beginning of his career, but already show a distinctly personal style. Perit (1751–1794) was living in New Haven at the time the portraits were painted. The elaborate headdress worn by Mrs. Perit (1760–1829) is an unusual detail. The miniature she wears shows her daughter Elizabeth Sanford Perit at the age of five.
Mrs. Elijah Boardman and Her Son William Whiting Boardman, about 1797-1798, by Ralph Earl (1751-1801). Oil on canvas, 85 x 56 inches. Lent by Henry B. Mosle

Elijah Boardman, 1789, by Ralph Earl. Oil on canvas, 83 x 51 inches. Lent by Mrs. Cornelius Boardman Tyler. Photograph: Frick Art Reference Library
Earl first set himself up as a portrait painter in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1775. Three years later he went to England, apparently with the intention of improving his art. Although he received instruction from Benjamin West and possibly from some of the other leading painters of the day, his style seems to have been little affected, and the paintings he did after his return from England in 1785 retained the direct primitive quality found in his earliest works. Most of the portraits for which he is known date from the last fifteen years of his life.

Among the best of them are those of the Boardman family of New Milford, Connecticut. Elijah Boardman (1760-1823) was a prosperous merchant whose business interests extended as far as the Connecticut lands in Ohio, where he founded the town of Boardman. He was elected to the Connecticut state legislature six times, first as representative, then as senator. He served in the United States senate from 1821 until his death. Boardman married Mary Anna Whiting (1767-1848) of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1792. The child shown was their eldest son, William (1794-1871), who also served in both houses of the state legislature as well as in Congress. The portrait of Elijah Boardman is dated 1789, as are Earl’s portrait of Boardman’s brother Daniel in the National Gallery and several other family portraits. The one of Mrs. Boardman is not dated, but the apparent age of the child suggests that it was painted shortly before 1800. In his customary manner, Earl placed the figures in the ample surroundings of office or parlor. Boardman stands next to his desk, on the shelves of which are seen such books as Martin’s Grammar, Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, London Magazine, a volume of Shakespeare, and another of Milton. Bolts of yardgoods are visible through the door at the left. The landscape background in Mrs. Boardman’s portrait probably represents a view of the countryside surrounding their house in New Milford. The colorful “ingrain” or painted carpet is nearly identical to that found in several of Earl’s other portraits, including the Museum’s monumental group, Mrs. Noah Smith and Her Children, of 1798.

Rembrandt Peale was the second son of Charles Willson Peale, from whom he not only learned to paint but also acquired a taste for scientific projects and museum management. He spent a considerable amount of time helping his father excavate several mastodon skeletons in Ulster County, New York, and also executed a number of portraits for his father’s portrait gallery and natural history museum, but he is best remembered today for his “port-hole” portrait of George Washington, of which he painted nearly eighty replicas. In contrast to the stereotyped, idealized representation of Washington, this sensitive likeness of his brother Rubens (1784-1865) is spirited and refreshing. The geranium plant on the table was the first of the species to be brought to the United States, probably for display in the Peale Museum. Just several months before this picture was painted, Peale had boldly announced that he was dropping his surname and would henceforth be known simply as Rembrandt, because few people bothered to distinguish between the work of his father, his brother, his uncle, and himself, thus creating “a confusion disadvantageous to the distinct merit of each of us as an artist.” This picture, however, is carefully inscribed Rem Peale.


Although more than a hundred portraits have been attributed to Jennys, we know nothing about his life except what can be learned from the pictures themselves. He may have been the brother or son of the itinerant portrait painter Richard Jennys, for there is a stylistic unity between Richard's work and the early paintings by William. William himself traveled widely in search of commissions. After about 1800 one can trace his path northward along the Connecticut Valley, into central Massachusetts, and then into Vermont and New Hampshire. About this time he developed a highly personal style, in which he showed an extraordinary capacity to record the character of his hardy New England subjects. This pair of portraits was probably painted in New Hampshire in 1802, the year Allen was elected to the state senate. Allen was also a prosperous merchant and the publisher of a political journal. His colorful uniform, complete with scarlet sash and silver gorget, was the one he had worn years before as a general in the Continental Army.
Edward and Sarah Rutter, about 1805, by Joshua Johnston (or Johnson) (active about 1789-1824). Oil on canvas, 36 x 32 inches. Lent by Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch

Johnston appears to have been the first Negro portrait painter active in the United States. He is listed in the Baltimore city directories between 1796 and 1824, and a few paintings by him have been placed as early as 1789. Nothing is known about his training, but a study of his pictures suggests that he may have received some instruction from Charles Peale Polk, a nephew of Charles Willson Peale. His draughtsmanship was somewhat more refined than Polk’s, however, and his figures less wooden. Johnston seems to have specialized in painting family groups; more than half of his known portraits include children. One of the most charming of them is this portrait of the children of Captain Joshua Rutter of Baltimore. Like all of Johnston’s paintings, it is unsigned, but the wicker basket filled with strawberries and the bunches of strawberry leaves and berries held by the children recur throughout his work and virtually constitute a signature.

James Peale was the youngest brother of Charles Willson Peale, from whom he received instruction in watercolor and oil painting. Much of his career was linked closely to that of his brother, whom he assisted in painting and also in a variety of activities in conjunction with his museum. After working together for a number of years, the two brothers advertised in 1786 that they were dividing the painting business between them, with James becoming a specialist in miniatures. He continued to paint some larger portraits, however, as well as landscapes and historical compositions. About 1818 failing eyesight forced him to give up miniature painting, but he soon started painting still lifes and produced an extraordinary group of them in his last years. This impeccably arranged composition of yellow and red watermelons, grapes, and a pearl-handled knife is inscribed on the back, “Painted by James Peale/ in the 79th year of his age. 1829.”

Mrs. Richard C. Morse and Her Children, about 1835, by Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872). Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 inches. Lent by Mrs. J. Wright Rumbough

Morse’s brilliant response to a commission from the City of New York for a full-length portrait of Lafayette for City Hall and the active role he played as one of the founders and first president of the National Academy of Design established him in the mid-1820s as one of the leading figures in the New York art world. When Morse first exhibited this picture at the National Academy in 1835, it was called The Gold Fish, A Family Group. The subjects are Morse’s sister-in-law and her children Elizabeth Ann and Charlotte. A critic for the New York Mirror called special attention to it as “the best painting we have ever seen from the worthy president,” and described it as a “masterly specimen of taste in composition.” The interior represented is typical of the classical revival style of the New York architect Alexander J. Davis. A couple of years later, Morse gave up painting in order to devote himself more fully to his experiments with electricity, which led eventually to the invention of the telegraph.
Hicks was born in Newtown, Pennsylvania, and spent most of his life in that vicinity. At thirteen he was apprenticed to a coachmaker and by twenty-one he was a partner in a coachmaking and painting business. Besides painting tavern signs, oil cloth, clock faces, milk buckets, furniture, street signs, and fireboards, he created a remarkable group of pictures that have won him a reputation as the foremost primitive painter in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. Hicks is best known for his Peaceable Kingdoms, the theme of which he derived from the eleventh chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah; in the last thirty years of his life he did about fifty versions of the subject. He regarded Penn’s treaty with the Indians as a fulfillment of the prophecy and introduced into the background of some of the paintings, including this example, a representation of the scene, taken from an engraving after Benjamin West’s well-known painting of the subject. Some of the other details he borrowed from Biblical illustrations and popular engravings. Hicks painted this picture as a gift for Joseph Foulke of Three Tuns, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and presented it to him in 1834. Foulke was his constant traveling companion when, as ministers in the Religious Society of Friends, they visited Quaker meeting houses in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and New England.
During a career of seventy years, Sully recorded more than 2,600 pictures in his account book, or Register. One of the most important was this portrait of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, which he painted for the Society of the Sons of St. George, a charitable organization established at Philadelphia for the advice and assistance of Englishmen in distress. Learning shortly after Victoria’s accession to the throne that Sully was about to depart for England, the Society resolved “to memorialize her Majesty to sit for her picture to Mr. Sully, for the gratification and use of the Society.” During sittings in the spring of 1838, Sully painted several studies, including a “sketch of the Queen on a kit-kat canvas,” which was bequeathed to the Museum by one of his grandsons in 1914. According to Sully’s Register, the full-length portrait for the Society was begun on September 30, 1838, and finished January 14, 1839. Sully painted a second full-length for himself, but later gave it to the St. Andrew’s Society in Charleston, South Carolina. (It was destroyed by fire in 1865.) Hoping to realize a substantial sum by the display of its picture, the St. George Society sought by legal means to obtain Sully’s oil sketch to prevent him from making further replicas or exhibiting any of them for his own benefit. After attempting to negotiate with Sully, the Society gave the matter to “three legal gentlemen,” who awarded to Sully as “author and exclusive owner of the invention and design” the right to retain and duplicate the original portrait of the Queen. When the Society finally unveiled its portrait to the public, it issued a pamphlet, dated June 13, 1839, explaining the legal action involved, and giving a lengthy rebuttal of the official opinion.
After working as a portrait and miniature painter for about ten years, Catlin determined to devote his life to recording for posterity the appearance and customs of the American Indian. During his initial trip to St. Louis in 1830, he painted tribal delegates who came to town, visited encampments in the vicinity, and began his collection of Indian costumes and artifacts. In 1832 he ascended the Missouri River, visiting Indian settlements and living with certain tribes for days at a time. He developed a shorthand technique in order to paint rapidly and made a great many sketches showing Indian life in all its variety and color. After exhibiting his pictures in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, New Orleans, and Buffalo,
Catlin brought his Indian Gallery to New York in 1837. After an unsuccessful attempt to sell his six hundred paintings to the United States government, Catlin took the pictures and several thousand Indian articles to London, where his exhibition at Egyptian Hall became a tremendous success. Some of its leading attractions were *tableaux vivants* staged by groups of visiting Indians, among them fourteen Iowas who arrived in 1845. These two portraits of members of this group were done in London at the time. With their dazzling colors and vivid characterizations, they stand at the summit of Catlin’s enormous production.
Heade was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and worked at various periods in Trenton, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, and St. Augustine. As Henry Tuckerman observed, “the love of travel was strong within him,” and besides making several trips to Europe, he went to South America on the recommendation of his friend the painter Frederic E. Church. An exhibition of his pictures in Rio de Janeiro so impressed the Emperor Don Pedro II that Heade was made a Knight of the Order of the Rose, an honor reserved for those having rendered unusual service to the country. Most of Heade’s works are small views of the meadows of New Jersey and Newburyport, Massachusetts, arrangements of orchids and hummingbirds, and still lifes. Occasionally, he attempted a larger, more dramatic painting, such as this one, which he exhibited at the National Academy in 1868. Although at that time a critic said it showed “a painful amount of labor with a corresponding feeling of hardness in color and execution” and regretted that “so hard and chilling a painting... should have been allowed to leave his studio,” the picture is now considered Heade’s masterpiece. When it was shown in 1943 at the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition Romantic Painting in America, it was widely admired and quickly aroused a renewed interest in his work.

Francis was born in Philadelphia and spent most of his life in Pennsylvania. He painted portraits, animal pictures, and, as he himself recorded, “fancy Signs—Banners—and Scarves for... Different Societies,” but it is his still lifes that are of most interest today. He appears to have specialized in informal table-top arrangements of fruits and nuts, cheese and biscuits, wine bottles, pitchers, compotes, and glasses. Like his contemporary Severin Roesen, he used the same props repeatedly, sometimes placing them against a blank wall, sometimes, as here, happily introducing a landscape background. A replica of this picture, dated 1879, is in the Shelburne Museum, Vermont.
Cropsey was one of the leading painters of the Hudson River School. For more than a half century he specialized in painting autumnal landscapes. Although he maintained a studio for many years in New York City, he made frequent sketching trips to New England, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and also went abroad several times. This picture, one of his largest and finest works, was based on a sketch, now in the Museum’s collection, that Cropsey had made in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania in 1864. The original owner of the large painting was Milton Courtright, who is variously listed as “capitalist” and “gentleman” in the early directories of Erie, Pennsylvania. Courtright was born and raised on the Courtright Farm in Plains, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the Wyoming Valley, between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. It was for his home in Erie that he commissioned Cropsey to paint this panoramic view, in which all the minute details of town and countryside were faithfully recorded. The picture retains its original frame, which bears a plaque with a dozen lines from a poem by Thomas Campbell proclaiming the beauties of the Wyoming:

On Susquehanna’s side, fair Wyoming!
Although the wild-flower on thy ruin’d wall
And roofless homes, a sad remembrance bring
Of what thy gentle people did befall;
Yet thou wert once the loveliest land of all
That see the Atlantic wave their morn restore
* * * * * * * * * * * beneath thy skies.

The happy shepherd swains had naught to do
But feed their flocks on green declivities,
Or skim perchance thy lake with light canoe.
* * * * * * * * * * * So sweet a spot of earth, you might, (I ween)
Have guess’d some congregation of the elves,
To sport by summer moons, had shaped it for themselves.
Patch Self-portrait with Small Pictures, 1890 or later, by John F. Peto (1854-1907). Oil on canvas, 26¾ x 24¾ inches. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem. Photograph: Brenwasser

Although Peto studied briefly at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, he was largely self-taught. The greatest influence on his career was exerted by the still-life paintings of William Michael Harnett, with whom he became acquainted sometime between 1876 and 1880, when Harnett departed for Europe. In contrast to Harnett, who enjoyed a notable success in the 1880s, Peto was unable to earn a living from his paintings, and as early as 1889 he made frequent trips to Island Heights, New Jersey, to augment his income by playing the cornet at religious revival meetings sponsored by the Island Heights Camp Meeting Association. He settled permanently at Island Heights in 1891 and retreated from the outside world, frustrated by a lack of recognition, and most of his work remained in his studio. As a result, he and his still lifes had passed into obscurity even before his death, and many of his pictures (including the Museum's The Old Cremona) were sold as the work of Harnett. Although Peto depicted many objects similar to those used by Harnett—the mug and pipe at the lower left of this picture, for example—he painted in a soft, impressionistic style quite different from Harnett's tight, illusionistic manner. This picture is a striking example of his work, for it is, in effect, a trompe l'oeil of trompe l'oeil. It is a whimsical variation of his familiar “office boards,” or rack pictures. Surrounding the self-portrait are several of Peto’s own pictures as well as two views he copied from paintings by Frederick Briscoe in his possession.

Note: In addition to the pictures discussed above, four twentieth century paintings were borrowed for the show—Man Ray's Dance, of 1915, lent by Mr. and Mrs. William N. Copley, Jasper Johns's White Flag and Robert Rauschenberg's Rebus, both of 1955 and lent by the artists, and Mark Rothko's Number 2, of 1962, lent by Mrs. Albert D. Lasker. These paintings are illustrated and discussed in Henry Geldzahler's American Painting in the Twentieth Century, published this month by the Museum. Pictures on long-term loan from Adelaide Milton de Groot, Georgia O'Keeffe, Lucille S. Pfeffer, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Schwartz, and Mrs. Edward P. Sharretts will also be on view. A group of portraits of American artists from the collections of the Century Club, the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, and the National Academy of Design will be shown in the entrance gallery to the exhibition.