

ARTS CLUB EXHIBITIONS

AT

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION OF

PAINTINGS OF ELLIS ISLAND

BY

MARTHA WALTER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

LÉONCE BÉNÉDITE

Director of the Luxembourg and Rodin Museums, Paris

JANUARY TENTH TO JANUARY TWENTY-NINTH

1923

MARTHA WALTER

Miss Martha Walter is known in America as one of the most talented woman painters. She has won official recognition and her paintings are on exhibition in the museums of several cities throughout the United States. She studied at the Pennsylvania of Art in Philadelphia, her native town, where she was awarded all the prizes for drawing, painting and antique. In 1902 she won the Toppan Prize, and in 1908 the Travelling Purse of the Cresson Foundation which enabled her to visit Italy, Holland and Spain. A year later she obtained the Mary Smith Prize awarded for the best work of art by a woman artist.

Miss Martha Walter, like so many other American artists, is influenced by our school, despite her undeniable local accent and a charmingly original and piquante individuality. She was without question formed in America, in that very center of art and teaching, Philadelphia, but her talent reached its full development in France. The Academie Julian, Lucien Simon, and René Menard at the Grande-Chaumière have considerably contributed to her education; but it is really the sky of France, the air of France and also the art of France which have presided at the maturing of this artistic personality. The vivacity of her instantaneous perception reminds one of Sorolla, makes one think of Zorn, whose memory she sometimes evokes by the brilliancy of her palette and by her large and beautiful brush strokes; but Miss Walter's predilection for these masters is largely due to the presence in their work of the very qualities they themselves owe to our impressionists, Manet, Renoir or Berthe Morisot.

The present exhibition shows her under different and even extremely opposed aspects. On the one hand, the joy of life, on the other, the dreary picture of human distress and suffering.

These contrasts are not intentional; they are due to the hazards of life and circumstances, but they are precious in showing the gifts of the artist under the contradictory aspects of her inspirations.

There are a number of subjects which attract and seduce by their freshness, their brilliancy and vividness. There are gardens and beaches. It is hard to imagine anything gayer, more full of air and joy; these groups, put down in their animation and the illusion of their mobility, on beaches under blue skies, swept with great white clouds, together with gowns, bathing suits and large colored umbrellas form the most exquisite parterre of living flowers intensely colorful in the subtle air. These American beaches by Miss Walter, composed of unforeseen harmonies, are very different from the French beaches, so delicately grey, by Boudin. This is a different sky, a different milieu and the artist has visualized for us scenes truly American. Her gardens, also, with their

garden-parties, their picnics, against the background of park foliage, with gaily set tables, surrounded by women in softly colored gowns and wearing hats which from a distance look like large anemones, passes an insinuating charm, their people happily alive in the brilliancy of the light and the fluidity of the air.

Looking at Miss Walter's paintings brings back to mind an admirable sentence I once heard, that of Benjamin West,—at that time President of Royal Academy, which in no way prevented him from being a bad painter. He once said to Constable: "Don't forget that light and shadows are never motionless." There is the principle which might be called the doctrine of the impressionists. This mobility of shadow and light, this animation of the elements, Miss Walter feels them and transcribes them with an extreme sensitiveness which brings her close to our masters.

These exuberant pictures of nature and modanity are contrasted with compositions of an entirely unusual and pathetic picturesqueness; the Ellis Island Group presents the sad spectacle of heterogenous crowds made up of Irish, Russians, Chinese, Dalmatians, women and children, miserable pariahs who have abandoned their native land in the hope of finding another and more charitable fatherland. These sad immigrants are being parked, after their landing from steamers where they have been piled together for days and nights at the bottom of the ship, men on one side, women and children on the other, in order to make them go individually through all the formalities of law and hygiene exacted by the regulations. This is a different colorful parterre of flower, poor and rude, anxious or frightened, some of them old and faded, others exhibiting the colors of healthy country youths. All of them are holding little children of a peculiarly strange type, with big eyes wide apart, clad in rags of vivid colors. All these crowds more in their strange and savage harmony between the yellow and brown pillars of this large hall, which reminds one of a hospital. The exotic and mixed accent is so strong that one almost can smell the emanations of its odor *sui generis*.

Miss Martha Walter has completed this double ensemble by a few pictures of a more familiar nature, representing popular Breton themes and some curious types of old Mexico, cross-breeds of old Indians and Spaniards, who still remain an important part of the population of certain Western localities. It is the observation of a more quiet picturesqueness. The vivid and energetic brush of the artist adapted itself wonderfully to this different milieu. Miss Martha Walter will certainly find the same sympathy at the hands of the Parisian public which her alert, intelligent and sensitive talent has called forth wherever she has chosen to exhibit.

LÉONCE BÉNÉDITE

Paris, June, 1922.

ELLIS ISLAND GROUP

- 1 Old Jewish Women
- 2 Greeks and Hungarians—Detention Room
- 3 A Future American—Detention Room
- 4 Jugo-Slavs—Detention Room
- 5 Just Off Ship Waiting for Registration
- 6 Registration
- 7 Inpouring of Unqualified (for inquiry)
- 8 Thru the Corridor to the Detention Room
- 9 Slavs in Departing Room
- 10 The Telegram—Detention Room
- 11 Italians
- 12 Italians and Armenians
- 13 Czecho-Slovacs Around Table
- 14 Slavs and Jews—Detention Room
- 15 Italians, Jews and Jugo-Slavs
- 16 Group of Slavs Against a White Wall
- 17 Italians, Spaniards and Slavs
- 18 Group of Jews Against White Wall
- 19 Jugo-Slavs and Italians—Detention Room
- 20 Listening to Call of Names to be Released
- 21 Waiting to be Taken to New York—New York
Room
- 22 Waiting, Tagged to Go West—Railroad Room
- 23 Waiting, Tagged to Go West—Railroad Room
- 24 Immigrants from Czecho-Slovakia
- 25 Jewish Section—Detention Room
- 26 Italians