A painting of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white, high-collared dress with a white shawl draped over her shoulders. She is holding a wooden stick in her right hand and a red flower in her left hand. The background is dark and textured.

SEEKING  
BEAUTY  
PAINTINGS BY  
JAMES  
JEBUSA  
SHANNON



Cat. 6. *Spot Red* (detail on cover)



Cat. 9. *Mrs. Harold Burke* (detail)

SEEKING  
BEAUTY  
PAINTINGS BY  
JAMES  
JEBUSA  
SHANNON

May 1–June 30, 2014

Barbara Dayer Gallati, Ph.D.

*Debra Force* , .



*Shannon's Holland Park Studio*  
Family of the Artist

# FOREWORD

The inspiration for *Seeking Beauty: Paintings by James Jebusa Shannon* evolved from the recent availability of a group of paintings by the artist that descended in his family. Most have never been seen publicly and are being shown for the first time. Through his portrayals of family members and friends, they offer an intimate look into the artist's personal life.

One of the most highly sought portrait painters of his day, Shannon's work has generally resided in institutions or in the families of many of his sitters, who were prominent members of society both in America and abroad. His subjects included such notable figures as Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Mrs. Nora Mellon, Queen Victoria, Mrs. Henry Bourke, and Violet Manners (Marchioness of Granby and later Duchess of Rutland). Consequently, since his paintings rarely come into the marketplace, it is indeed exciting to present this exhibition.

Shannon strove to capture not only the physical attributes of his sitters, but also their inner selves. In delivering a speech in 1922, he described the vision to which he was striving: "We must . . . ever seek that beauty which makes the great appeal, and remember that the beautiful moment in a sitter's life, whether it is light and shade, colour or expression, is as true as all other moments."<sup>1</sup>

He was very well connected to the key institutions and artists of the time. Like his esteemed colleagues John Singer Sargent and James McNeill Whistler, his reputation was such that he exhibited at and was a member of various prestigious art societies and academies. He and Sargent were simultaneously members of the Royal Academy, and he exhibited at the Society of British Artists during Whistler's presidency. Shannon also joined expatriates George Hitchcock and Gari Melchers in painting and holiday excursions to Holland. In London, he lived next door to Frederic, Lord Leighton, where his Sunday studio openings attracted the likes of Oscar Wilde and Ellen Terry.

The following essay by Dr. Barbara Dayer Gallati discusses the artist's life and career, while the catalogue entries place each work chronologically and within the context of his oeuvre. The most knowledgeable scholar on Shannon, Gallati began her exhaustive work on this subject over three decades ago, completed her two-volume dissertation in 1992, and continues to research the artist in greater depth. With this catalogue, she provides yet another meaningful contribution to the study of American art history.

Debra J. Force

---

1. James Jebusa Shannon, quoted in Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), pp. 242–243.



Fig. 1. James Jebusa Shannon, *Self-Portrait*, 1884, oil on canvas, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 19 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, signed upper right: 'JJ Shannon 1884.' Collection of Remak Ramsay

# SEEKING BEAUTY

In 1895, an article appeared in *Munsey's Magazine* titled "An American Painter of the English Court." The piece opened with the declaration: "Three distinguished American portrait painters have flourished side by side in this generation among the mists and glooms of London."<sup>1</sup> Whereas one might expect John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) or James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) to head the list, neither was mentioned by name, presumably because the author assumed that his readers would automatically recognize that they were two of the three expatriates in question. Instead, the author focused on James Jebusa Shannon (1862–1923), a young artist who was then rising in the ranks of British society portrait painters to a status second only to that of Sargent.<sup>2</sup> At a time when the British portrait market was highly competitive, Shannon's achievement challenges belief. Yet, by dint of talent, force of will, and sheer good luck, the artist from rural upstate New York enjoyed a flourishing career on both sides of the Atlantic.

Shannon was born in the small city of Auburn, New York, on February 3, 1862, to Irish parents, who had settled in the United States shortly after their marriage.<sup>3</sup> His father was a contractor involved with railway development, a job that entailed frequent relocation for his wife and seven children. According to anecdotal family history, the future artist came by his unusual middle name as a result of an accident had by his mother in the final days of her pregnancy with him. When the horse pulling her buggy bolted, Mrs. Shannon fainted and woke to find herself being cared for by the chief of a local Indian tribe, whose name was Jebusa. She gave birth the following day and, believing that chief had saved her life, she named her infant son after her rescuer.

By 1875, the Shannons were living in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. It was there that James Jebusa Shannon's passion for art emerged. Although initially reluctant, Patrick Shannon permitted his son to take art lessons with a local painter, William E. Wright, whose encouragement ultimately led to the decision that the aspiring artist would go to England for formal study. Thus, in 1878, at the age of sixteen, Shannon enrolled at the South Kensington School in London (now the Royal College of Art), where he trained chiefly with Sir Edward John Poynter (1836–1919) until 1881. Shannon's three years under Poynter's guidance brought him significant accolades, including the school's gold medal for drawing, a prize that prompted two commissions from Queen Victoria. The two paintings, *The Honourable Horatia Stopford* and *Mrs. Henry Bourke*, were shown respectively at the 1881 and 1882 annual exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts, London.<sup>4</sup> Although both portraits reveal the workings of an as yet unsophisticated hand, the prestige attached to painting for the queen convinced Shannon to remain in England and to specialize in portraiture.

With his father's financial reversals, Shannon was forced to quit his formal training in 1881. In 1885, after shifting from one small studio to another, he moved to the Merton Villas Studios in Manresa Road, Chelsea, London, which he





Fig. 2. *Shannon in His Studio*  
Family of the Artist

occupied until 1888. The friendships and professional affiliations he forged during this period were instrumental in the development of his art over the next decade and were also crucial in affecting his integration within the larger artistic community of London. As part of the enclave of painters and sculptors who gathered in the area (including Henry Herbert La Thangue [1859–1929], George Percy Jacomb-Hood [1857–1929] and Thomas Stirling-Lee [1856–1916]), Shannon became acquainted with progressive aesthetics imported mainly from France.<sup>5</sup> During this fruitful period, he explored techniques ranging from the “square brush” facture inspired by Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884) and transmitted to him by La Thangue; the direct-painting practice of Carolus-Duran (1837–1917); the broken brushwork and high-key color of Impressionism; and the limited, muted palette of Whistler.

Shannon’s outgoing, magnetic personality suited the tenor of the community, and he contributed to the founding of the illustrious Chelsea Arts Club and the then-revolutionary New English Art Club, an artists’ organization intended to be an alternative to the hierarchical and conservative Royal Academy. These associations placed him, in the public eye, among the young stylistic

innovators in English art—as one of the “moderns.” However, Shannon never committed his loyalties unreservedly to a single aesthetic and rarely did he bend to any organization’s exhibition policy. This is reflected in the variety of styles he engaged throughout his career and his practice of exhibiting at a wide range of venues, including the New English Art Club, the Grosvenor Gallery, the New Gallery, the Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours, and the Society of British Artists (during Whistler’s tenure as president). He simultaneously courted the favor of those having more conservative tastes, mainly through his contributions to exhibitions at the Royal Academy, which remained the seat of cultural power in the British art world.

In fact, it was Shannon’s ability to bridge the widening gulf between tradition and innovation that distinguished his art. This is especially apparent in his striking self-portrait (fig. 1). Painted in 1884, it portrays a handsome, intense young man, with a vaguely bohemian attitude. The image itself falls into a long line of self-portraits in Western art and calls to mind earlier self-portraits by such illustrious masters as Sir Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641) and Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). By fusing the imagery of earlier artists with a facture that aligned him with advanced techniques (such as the square brushwork of La Thangue), Shannon participated in pioneering a new mode of painting for the British audience.<sup>6</sup>

Although he had received a moderate number of favorable mentions in reviews throughout the early-to-mid-1880s, it was not until 1888 that Shannon “arrived” as an artist to be taken seriously, mainly as a result of two paintings shown at the prestigious Grosvenor Gallery, a venue that showed works by invitation only.<sup>7</sup> The first was *Henry Vigne, Master of the Epping Forest Harriers* (1887, unlocated), a full-

length portrait of the distinguished ninety-year-old in hunting attire, riding crop in hand. As one critic proclaimed, the picture “confirms the report that a fresh candidate is about to dispute the profits of realistic portrait painting with Mr. Sargent, Mr. Herkomer [Hubert von Herkomer, 1849–1914], and Mr. Holl [Frank Holl, 1845–1888].”<sup>8</sup> The portrait later earned Shannon the status of *hors concours* when it was shown at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889. The second painting, *Myrrah* (unlocated) is reported to have piqued the attention of Lady Violet Manners (later the Marchioness of Granby and the future Duchess of Rutland), who paid a visit to Shannon’s studio, thus inaugurating three decades of her family’s patronage of the artist (see cats. 13 and 14).

With Violet Manners’ support, Shannon’s reputation as a portraitist was fully launched. The increasing number of commissions he received required more salubrious surroundings for his growing roster of high society clients and to that end, he took a larger space at the Alexandra Studios, Alfred Place, Kensington (fig. 2), located within comfortable walking distance of the Phillimore Gardens home that he shared with his wife, Florence (whom he married in 1886, see cat. 10) and their daughter Kitty (1887–1974, see cats. 4, 5, 8, and 11) (fig. 3). The rapidity with which Shannon’s career progressed is witnessed by his purchase of a highly desirable property in Holland Park Road, the site of the original Holland Park farm house and, what is more important, next door to Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830–1896), the estimable president of the Royal Academy.<sup>9</sup> Under the 1892 leasehold agreement, Shannon undertook to alter the farmhouse and build a studio as well. The end result was essentially a double-fronted structure in which the farmhouse and new studio were united by a shared façade dominated by a massive Flemish gable. The orange brick structure was unusual in that it had two main entrances, one that led to the studio and one to the family’s domestic spaces (fig. 4).

1892 also marked a period of extended travel for the artist. That year, he returned to the United States to visit his parents and made his first trip to the Continent—a tour that inspired the architectural plan for his new home and studio. Although his European itinerary is unknown, the trip was likely the first of many seasonal stays spent near Schuylenburg, a small manor house near Egmond aan den Hoef, Holland, occupied by his friend, the American artist George Hitchcock (1850–1913). Hitchcock and another American artist, Gari Melchers (1860–1932), had established themselves as summer residents at Egmond in the early 1880s.<sup>10</sup> Known for their depictions of local peasants, the two exerted thematic and



Fig. 3. *Florence and Kitty Shannon*  
Family of the Artist



Fig. 4. *James, Florence, and Kitty Shannon in their*  
*Front Parlor, Holland Park Road* Family of the Artist

stylistic influence on Shannon, whose holiday sojourns (primarily in the company of Hitchcock) yielded a fair number of paintings, including a portrait of Hitchcock (circa 1892, Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, Georgia), several genre paintings of girls in Dutch costume, and his fine double portrait of Kitty and Florence Shannon, *In the Dunes* (circa 1905, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC). The warm friendships Shannon established with the two men endured, as evidenced by the painting by Hitchcock that remained in Shannon's possession (fig. 5) and Shannon's portrait of Melchers (circa 1902, Belmont, The Gari Melchers Memorial Gallery, Fredericksburg, Virginia). The Shannons' stays with Henriette and George Hitchcock (known as "Miggles" and "Gorgeous," as Kitty Shannon recalled) ended in 1905, when the Hitchcocks divorced.

Shannon's excursions into genre painting represent only a small portion of his output; however, he is today best known for this aspect of his art. His *Jungle Tales* (fig. 6) garnered the first of many critical accolades when it made its public debut at the New Gallery (London) in 1895. Universally praised from the outset, the painting was subsequently exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900 as *Fairy Tales*. *Jungle Tales* entered the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection with another of Shannon's paintings (*Magnolia*, 1899) in 1913, both works having been previously owned by the renowned collectors George McCulloch and Arthur Hoppock Hearn, respectively. These paintings, along with *The Flower Girl* (circa 1900, Tate Britain), are now known widely through reproduction, yet audiences for these popular images are rarely aware of details of the artist's career.

Despite his American heritage, Shannon's art was not formally introduced to American audiences until he exhibited in the British section of the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition held in Chicago, where he received an honorable mention.

As his career in London progressed, however, American commentators were quick to claim him, proudly citing his origins. A watershed in Shannon's visibility in the United States occurred in 1897, when news of his election to associate status in the Royal Academy of Arts hit the American press. As one reporter asserted, Shannon's election and that of Sargent to full academic status had made it "an American day at the Royal Academy." Writing about Shannon, the same commentator declared, "As to Mr. Shannon, his career in England has been simply phenomenal. Almost unknown three or four years ago, he has, with his grace, elegance, and refinement, climbed to the very top of the ladder."<sup>11</sup> Shannon came into greater prominence when *Miss Kitty* (see fig. 10, cat. 8) was awarded the gold medal at the Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, an honor that occasioned his subsequent membership on the Carnegie International jury. From the late 1890s through the first decades of the twentieth century, Shannon's name appeared frequently in the American press, which at that time devoted extensive coverage to the major London art venues as well as to the large international exhibitions throughout Europe. More to Shannon's benefit was the fact that many potential



Fig. 5. George Hitchcock (1850–1913), *Woman in a Garden*, oil on panel, 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. Debra Force Fine Art, New York



Fig. 6. James Jebusa Shannon (1862–1923), *Jungle Tales (Contes de la Jungle)*, 1895, oil on canvas, 34 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 44 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1913 (13.143.1). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY

American clients were likely to have seen his work as a result of their seasonal transatlantic crossings, highlights of which included visits to the Academy, the Paris Salon, and other important annual exhibitions.

The factors cited here attest to the fact that the American market was primed for Shannon's New York arrival in late 1904, the first of three consecutive annual visits to the United States. Shannon's timing for this seemingly sudden emphasis on developing new patronage for his art was ideal. His reputation as a painter of England's aristocracy was secure, he had recently been awarded a gold medal at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis, and the demand for society portraiture was at its height, as witnessed by the veritable army of foreign portrait specialists who spent months at a time in the United States, swamped with commissions.<sup>12</sup> What is more, Shannon, like Sargent, had a distinct advantage over his American and European rivals because his American citizenship satisfied clients who desired a high-style portrait by an internationally acclaimed artist and yet wanted to "buy American." Yet, buying American in this case did not mean buying on the cheap; in 1907, Shannon's fee for a full-length portrait was a comparatively staggering seven-thousand-five-hundred dollars.

Shannon's arrival was announced in *American Art News*: "James J. Shannon, the American portrait painter, who has lived long in England, is sharing this season the studio of Frank D. Millet at no. 6 East Twenty-third Street, and is painting several portraits for which he has received commissions. Shannon stands in the front rank of modern portrait painters, and an exhibition of his portraits will, it is understood, be an event of the late art season."<sup>13</sup>

The three winter seasons Shannon spent in the United States yielded numerous commissions, some of which took him beyond New York (where, in 1906, he moved to a studio in the Bryant Park Building, 80 West Fortieth Street) to Providence, Rhode Island, and to Lenox and Boston, Massachusetts. Among the sitters for the more than thirty-five American portraits by Shannon thus far documented are such notable society figures as Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Mrs. Percy Rivington Pyne, Mrs. Robert Minturn, and Bishop Henry Codman Potter.<sup>14</sup> The fruits of his stateside labors were advertised in a series of three small exhibitions held at M. Knoedler & Co., in 1905, 1906, and 1907, all of which received favorable reviews that generally affirmed that "freedom and breadth of execution, with astonishing texture and naturalness of expression are noticeable qualities in Mr. Shannon's latest work."<sup>15</sup> The publicity surrounding Shannon's American activity was heightened by a strategically placed article by the noted critic Christian Brinton that was published in 1906.<sup>16</sup> Titled "A Painter of Fair Women," the article was liberally illustrated with examples of the artist's English and American productions, chosen no doubt to underscore the refined beauty and social distinction of his sitters on both sides of the Atlantic.

There is nothing to indicate that Shannon ever returned to the United States after 1907. Yet, it may have been that he planned to do so given that 1908 was the only year that he participated in the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, having been made an associate academician that year.<sup>17</sup> However, Shannon's professional schedule in England was demanding, made more so by his 1909 election to full academic status in the Royal Academy and his election to the presidency of the Society of Portrait Painters (London) in 1910. The latter organization was then floundering, but the situation was remedied the following year largely through Shannon's efforts and, in July 1911, he was able to announce that the Society would become "Royal" under the patronage of George V.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the main outlet for Shannon's exhibition activity was the Royal Academy—a fact that is indicative of the changing shape of the London art world as it responded to the impact of modernism, the closing of old and opening of new galleries, and, of course, the shift in cultural currency from the older generation of artists to the new. Nevertheless, Shannon's career continued to flourish until 1914, a year that proved to be a critical one in several ways. In February, Shannon was appointed the Chairman of the British Committee for the Anglo-American Exposition that was held in London later that year. By August, however, Britain was engaged in World War I, the upheaval of which, for the art world, resulted in fewer commissions, fewer exhibitions, and a significant reduction in the amount of attention given to the arts in the press. It was in 1914 as well that Shannon suffered a serious injury in a riding accident that eventually confined him to a wheelchair.

Shannon continued to paint a number of fine commissioned portraits, including one of the whiskey-baron-philanthropist James Buchanan (later Lord

Woolavington) (untraced). Shown at the Royal Academy in 1918, the painting was apparently the talk of the art community, which as a whole, considered the work the “premier picture in the Academy.”<sup>18</sup> Generally, Shannon’s weakened condition prevented him from working on large canvases and he turned to painting plein-air genre subjects of moderate size. Characterized by their freshness, vibrant colors, and rapid execution, these paintings bear witness to the artist’s sheer love of painting. And, as one commentator put it, this new aesthetic direction seemed to “enlarge his painting delight.”<sup>19</sup>

Shannon’s contributions to the arts were officially recognized when he received a knighthood from King George V in 1922. A plaque was installed at St. James’s Piccadilly, London, commemorating his March 6, 1923 death.

Barbara Dayer Gallati, Ph.D.

1. James Creelman, “An American Painter of the English Court,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, vol. 14, no. 2 (November 1895), 129.

2. W. Graham Robertson, *Time Was: The Reminiscences of W. Graham Robertson* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1931), 234. Robertson was, among other things, a noted aesthete, stage designer, and artist. A friend of Shannon and Sargent, he recalled Shannon in the 1890s as being Sargent’s “most formidable rival among portrait painters.”

3. Unless indicated otherwise, information presented here is from Barbara Dayer Gallati, “Portraits of Artistry and Artifice: The Career of Sir James Jebusa Shannon, 1862–1923.” Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1992.

4. *The Honourable Horatia Stopford* (1880) and *Mrs. Henry Bourke* (1881) are in the Royal Collection, UK.

5. The Manresa Road artists were featured in Morley Roberts, “A Colony of Artists,” *Scottish Art Review*, vol. II, no. 15 (August 1889), 72–77.

6. Referring to the “square-brush” method associated with the Manresa Road contingent, Roberts wrote: “Certainly among those who owe much to La Thangue must be reckoned J. J. Shannon, the young portrait painter, who is rapidly rising to the foremost rank. . . . his present quiet method has been arrived at through the clever and evidently dexterous brush-work which he learnt originally from La Thangue.” *Ibid.*, 73.

7. For a history of the Grosvenor Gallery, see Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

8. “The Grosvenor Gallery. Second Notice,” *Athenaeum* (May 19, 1888), 638.

9. For a history of the Holland Park development and the list of the many artists resident there in the nineteenth century, see Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

10. For a general history of the American artists working in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, see Annette Stott, “American Painters Who Worked in the Netherlands, 1880–1914,” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1986.

11. “An American Day in Art,” *New York Times* (January 30, 1897).

12. For a discussion of the boom in society portraiture during the Gilded Age, see “Gilded Age Portraiture: Cultural Capital Personified,” in Barbara Dayer Gallati, ed., *Beauty’s Legacy: Gilded Age Portraits in America*, exh. cat., New-York Historical Society Museum & Library in association with D. Giles Limited, London, 2013, 10–49.

13. “Around the Studios,” *American Art News*, 3 (November 19, 1904), n.p.

14. Most of the portraits painted by Shannon in the United States have descended in the families of the sitters.

15. “Exhibitions Now On,” *American Art News*, 5 (March 16, 1907), n.p.

16. Christian Brinton, “A Painter of Fair Women,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, vol. 35, no. 2 (May 1906), 133–143.

17. “News and Notes,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1908. Shannon had made a single appearance at the 1906 exhibition of the Society of American Artists (*Ideal Head*, no. 372, owned by the artist’s sister-in-law, Mrs. W.J. Shannon) and it was probably on the basis of his affiliation with the Society of American Artists that he was admitted to the National Academy of Design as an associate after the two organizations merged in 1907. The two paintings displayed at the National Academy – *Mrs. Samuel Untermyer* (1906, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York) and *Irene Untermyer* (unlocated) – had been seen previously at Knoedler’s and at the Royal Academy.

18. Letter from Lord Dewar to James Buchanan, April 29, 1918, quoted in Kitty Shannon, *For My Children*, 236–7.

19. “Art Exhibitions: The Late Sir J. J. Shannon’s Paintings,” *Morning Post*, June 19, 1923.

# I Portrait of a Child

circa 1886, oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 10 inches

VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

Shannon's precocious adoption of French stylistic influence is readily apparent in this informal portrait of a child. Using blocked, "square" brushwork, Shannon produced the impression of three-dimensional form, thus aligning his art with that of the progressive French painter Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884), whose influence was transmitted to Shannon by Henry Herbert La Thangue (1859–1929). The child—most likely a boy—looks shyly out of the pictorial space, creating an impression of childhood reticence rarely matched by other artists of the time. Indeed, this painting is far removed from the stereotypical Victorian imagery of childhood in which youngsters were most often portrayed as carefree, playful beings. In contrast to the Victorian trope, Shannon injected the image with an almost palpable sense of the inner, more serious thoughts with which the child is apparently engaged. Among Shannon's contemporaries, John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was arguably the only other artist who was as attentive to suggesting the inner psychology of an individual child.





## 2 Woman in White with Flowers

circa 1886, oil on canvas, 15¼ × 6¾ inches

VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons



Fig. 8. *Florence Holding Flowers*  
Family of the Artist

A rare foray into Aestheticism on Shannon's part, this sketch testifies to the artist's abiding admiration for the art of James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). Shannon had received valuable support from the older artist early in his career and at one time owned Whistler's *Blue and Silver: Trouville* (circa 1865, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC). The dominant verticality of the canvas emphasizes the delicate form of the tall, lithe female, who raises a vase of flowers as if better to contemplate their beauty, a motif alluding to beauty as the primary site of a Whistlerian art-for-art's sake ideal. Dressed in a simple white gown, the woman calls to mind Whistler's series of paintings featuring similarly costumed women, the most famous of which is his ground-breaking *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC). Shannon also drew on what was by then a familiar compositional device associated with Whistler—the calculated asymmetry resulting from the placement of the framed picture that in turn frames the woman's head.

Although it is undated, this study was likely executed at the outset of Shannon's career, when he was experimenting with a variety of styles and before commissioned portraiture consumed the greater part of his time.



### 3 Portrait of a Young Woman

circa 1889, oil on canvas, 18 × 14 inches  
signed upper left: 'J · J · SHANNON'

#### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

Shannon determined to become a portrait specialist early in his career. And, even when commissions were few and far between, he persisted in honing his technical skills by making portrait studies such as this one that shows a lovely, and as yet unidentified, young woman in profile. A select few of these studies were probably exhibited since a number of untraced works bearing such titles as *Audrey*, *Eleanor*, *Pamela*, and *Ellen* are mentioned in contemporaneous sources.

The painting has been assigned a date of circa 1889, based on the way in which it is signed.<sup>1</sup> What is more, this dating is appropriate in terms of the painting's facture; the hard, linear character exhibited in many of his early efforts has now resolved into a softened, atmospheric approach resulting in a refined modelling of form through tonal gradation and controlled brushwork. Shannon's growing painterly facility is particularly evident in the delicate handling of reflected light, especially in the areas of the eye and nose. Indeed, this painting can be seen as a transitional work; whereas he had been invested in the "square brush" manner at mid-decade, only traces of that mode are present here in the dry, summary strokes used to define the ribbon at the sitter's neck and the corsage pinned to her black dress.

---

1. Shannon used block capital letters during the 1880s, perhaps in reference to the "square brush school" with which he was affiliated. In later decades, he would usually inscribe his initials and last name in script at either the lower right or left of his canvases.



## 4 Miss Kit (A Study)

also known as ‘Kitty’

1892, oil on canvas, 55¾ × 28⅞ inches  
inscribed lower right: 1892

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Society of Portrait Painters, 1892,  
no. 151, as *Miss Kit (A Study)*  
London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter  
Exhibition*, 1928, no. 46, as *Kitty*

### LITERATURE

“The Society of Portrait Painters,” *Athenaeum*,  
vol. 100, no. 3376 (July 9, 1892), 73.  
“Art Chronicle,” *Portfolio*, vol. 23 (1892), xvii.

Shannon's portrait of his only child Kitty (1887–1974, christened Katherine Marjorie Shannon) undoubtedly stands as his most overt emulation of the art of James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). The image of the small girl in a long white gown holding a spray of blossoms is a direct reference to Whistler's *Harmony in Grey and Green: Miss Cicely Alexander* (1872–74, Tate Britain, London). Shannon's monochromatic palette of warm greys and browns, thinly washed paint surface, and spare, flattened compositional space, reiterate the hallmark Whistlerian style. And, if this were not enough to signal Shannon's intention to associate his art with Whistler's, the painter added a rust-colored circle above the skirting board to act as a formal equivalent to the older artist's familiar colophon signatures.

It was not by chance that Shannon deliberately paraphrased this particular work by Whistler. Shannon was a founding member of the Society of Portrait Painters and was influential in organizing the society's 1891 inaugural exhibition that included Whistler's portrait of Cicely Alexander.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the fledgling society was to showcase and promote the variety offered by the portrait productions of the younger generation of portrait specialists, whose recent works were shown with carefully selected canvases by older, stellar practitioners. To be sure, “variety” was the by-word, especially for Shannon in the following year, when he showed four works to demonstrate his aesthetic range.

The star of the group was *Iris* (1891, with Richard Green, London, 1998), a full-length figure standing in a landscape that critics observed was reminiscent of the art of the English portraitist George Romney (1734–1802).<sup>2</sup> Shannon's facility with progressive French techniques was revealed in *George Hitchcock* (circa 1892, Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, Georgia) in which he used an Impressionist style to portray his friend and fellow artist painting *en plein air*. A third work, *W.W. Beach, Esq., MP*, is untraced, but

is presumably a presentation portrait of the type that Shannon was frequently commissioned to paint. The fourth painting was the present work, identified by a reviewer for the *Portfolio*, who wrote, “*Miss Kit*, a child with a branch of white blossoms, is a capital study.”<sup>3</sup> Another review noted it as “the first-rate study of ‘*Miss Kit*.’”<sup>4</sup> No other published comments directed to the painting have been located, but this is understandable not only because it was designated a study in the exhibition catalogue, but also because *Iris* and *George Hitchcock* commanded greater attention by virtue of size (in the case of *Iris*) or celebrity (in the case of *George Hitchcock*).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, *Miss Kit* attested to yet another mode in Shannon's stylistic repertoire by aligning him with an alternate strain of modernity inspired by the still-controversial Whistler, whose nomination for membership in the Society in 1892 was seconded by Shannon.

Despite the evident similarities exhibited by *Miss Kit* and Whistler's portrait of Cicely Alexander, the respective moods carried by these paintings differ sharply. While Whistler captured his young subject's resistance to posing in her angry expression, Shannon pictured the essence of childhood wonder as Kitty gazes at the blossoms she holds.

1. Shannon served as the Society's third president and it was during his tenure that the society received royal patronage in 1910, thus making it the Royal Society of Portrait Painters.

2. The critics referred to the English portrait painter George Romney (1734–1802). See, “The Society of Portrait Painters,” *Times* (London), June 25, 1891, 8.

3. “Art Chronicle,” *Portfolio*, vol. 23 (1892), xvii.

4. “The Society of Portrait Painters,” *Athenaeum*, vol. 100, no. 3376 (July 9, 1892), 73.

5. George Hitchcock (1850–1913) was well known in the London art community. His *Tulip Culture* was shown at the Royal Academy in 1887, and he had one-man exhibitions at Dunthorne's Gallery and at Goupil's in London shortly thereafter.



## 5 The Doll

also known as ‘Kitty in Fancy Dress’

circa 1895, oil on canvas, 30 × 24 inches  
signed lower right: ‘J · J · S’

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist’s daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist’s granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Fine Art Society, 1896  
London, Leicester Galleries, 1923, no. 15,  
as *Kitty in Fancy Dress*

### LITERATURE

*Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Sir James J. Shannon, R.A.*, London, Leicester Galleries, June–July, 1923.  
Alfred Lys Baldry, “J. J. Shannon, Painter,” *Magazine of Art*, 20 (November 1896), 1–5; illus. 4.  
“Art Exhibitions,” *Times* (London), June 20, 1896, 19.  
“A Noted Portrait Painter, Death of Sir J. J. Shannon, R.A.,” *Times* (London), March 3, 1923.  
“Art Exhibitions. The Late Sir J. J. Shannon’s Paintings,” *Morning Post*, June 19, 1923.

By the mid-1890s Shannon’s career as society portrait painter was thriving. Yet, as many critics observed, he was at his best when he was painting his wife and daughter. Such was the case with this charming portrait of Kitty Shannon (1887–1974), which one reviewer deemed especially noteworthy when it was shown in the artist’s 1896 one-man exhibition. Described as “a Velasquez-like child, playing with a doll,” the critic acknowledged that Shannon’s imagery intersected with the widespread contemporaneous enthusiasm for the art of the great Spanish baroque painter Diego Velázquez (1599–1660).<sup>1</sup> This observation was again made at greater length later that year by the painter and influential critic Alfred Lys Baldry (1858–1939). Baldry’s admiration for Shannon’s technical skills and versatility was considerable, and he gave special praise to this painting (reproduced as *The Doll*), writing that it “was another happy record of infancy treated with something of the refinement of colour scheme which gave part of their charm to the canvases on which Velasquez depicted his dainty Infantas. The arrangement of the faded pinks, the silvery greys and ashy blacks of Mr. Shannon’s picture was certainly reminiscent of the great Spanish artist’s method.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Shannon’s palette and broadly handled brushwork echo those of Velázquez, and it is tempting to speculate that his inspiration for the painting originated in part from seeing either in reproduction or at first-hand a half-length portrait of the Infanta Margarita then attributed to Velázquez, but now given to his workshop.<sup>3</sup> Although Kitty’s costume is doubtless inspired by that or another of the Spanish master’s paintings (particularly the famed *Las Meninas*, 1656, Museo del Prado, Madrid), Shannon departed from the Spaniard’s static poses by portraying his daughter in motion as she looks upward joyfully at the

doll in her raised hand while clutching a second doll to her shoulder with the other. Here, Shannon captured the sense of spontaneity and playful imagination associated with childhood, thereby allying this sphere of his art with the cultural phenomenon designated as the “cult of the child.”<sup>4</sup> On another, more personal level, by linking the Spanish Infanta with Kitty, Shannon positioned his adored only child as a modern princess.

The painting was last exhibited in 1923 at the memorial exhibition of Shannon’s work at the Leicester Galleries, London. Kitty Shannon, who became an artist in her own right, evidently inherited her father’s passion for things Spanish, as indicated by a newspaper article stating that the “Velasquez-Goya Ball, for which Mrs. Kitty Shannon Keigwin, daughter of the late J. J. Shannon, R.A., is sending out invitations, promises to be a very lovely spectacle.”<sup>5</sup>

1. “Art Exhibitions,” *Times* (London), June 20, 1896, 19. The painting must have been a late addition to the exhibition since it is not listed in the catalogue.

2. Alfred Lys Baldry, “J. J. Shannon, Painter,” *Magazine of Art*, 20 (November 1896), 5.

3. The portrait of the Infanta (ca. 1653, Musée du Louvre, Paris) was popular at the time and was reproduced in Estelle M. Hurlll, *Child-Life in Art* (Boston: Joseph Knight & Co., 1895), 49.

4. The phrase came into popular use after the publication of Ernest Dowson’s essay, “The Cult of the Child,” in *The Critic* (August 1889).

5. “A Londoner’s Jottings,” *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, June 24, 1929, 5.





## 6 Spot Red

1896, oil on canvas, 49½ × 20¼ inches  
signed lower left: 'J J Shannon/96'

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon, the artist's wife  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Fine Art Society, 1896, no. 14  
Liverpool, England, *26th Annual Liverpool Autumn Exhibition*, 1896, no. 985  
Southport, England, *19th Southport Spring Art Exhibition*, February 1897, no. 157  
London, Leicester Galleries, 1923, no. 31

### LITERATURE

*Catalogue of a Collection of Pictures by J. J. Shannon with a note by Mr. Frederick Wedmore* (London: Fine Art Society, June 1896), 5, 8.  
"The Fine Art Society," *Standard* (London), June 13, 1896, 5.  
"Art Exhibitions," *Times* (London), June 20, 1896, 19.  
Alfred Lys Baldry, "J. J. Shannon, Painter," *Magazine of Art* 20 (November 1896), 1–5.  
"Southport Spring Art Exhibition," *Liverpool Mercury*, February 20, 1897, 6.  
*Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Sir James J. Shannon, R.A.* (London: Leicester Galleries, June–July, 1923).  
"Art Exhibitions. The Leicester Galleries," *Times* (London), June 19, 1923, 12.

*Spot Red* is a rare and significant example from Shannon's oeuvre that demonstrates his artistic ambition when he was freed from the confines of commissioned portraiture. The painting was first exhibited in Shannon's one-man exhibition at London's Fine Art Society in 1896, a small show of twenty-four works highlighting the artist's progress to date. Writing in the catalogue accompanying the display, the English art critic Frederick Wedmore (1844–1921) described *Spot Red*, saying, "the graceful lady with the billiard cue—is an attractive subject-picture, noticeable for the grace of the model and for the grace of the arrangement of line." Wedmore went on to summarize the character of Shannon's art: "He is a modern of the moderns, but one who, while he has never been enslaved by tradition, has likewise never violently revolted from it. While declining to be conventional, he could not be eccentric."<sup>1</sup> Wedmore's observations were on the mark inasmuch as Shannon adopted an innovative Whistlerian approach without compromising the naturalism he customarily devoted to portraying the attractive female form.

Indeed, *Spot Red*, with its lack of overt narrative, monochromatic arrangement of warm greys and whites, compositional asymmetry, and a title referencing the one bright note of color, clearly indicates that Shannon took inspiration from Whistler. Yet, such allegiance to what were considered to be Whistler's eccentric aesthetics did not overtake Shannon's goal of portraying a "real" woman of flesh and blood whose seductive power is communicated by her pose and direct facial expression. Shannon's tendency to straddle the line between the naturalistic and the highly aestheticized was observed in 1897, shortly after his election to associate membership in the Royal Academy of Arts: "Mr. Shannon loves to paint in a somewhat low key, and seems to aim at a compromise between the tone of Mr. Whistler and the elegant facility of Mr. Sargent."<sup>2</sup>



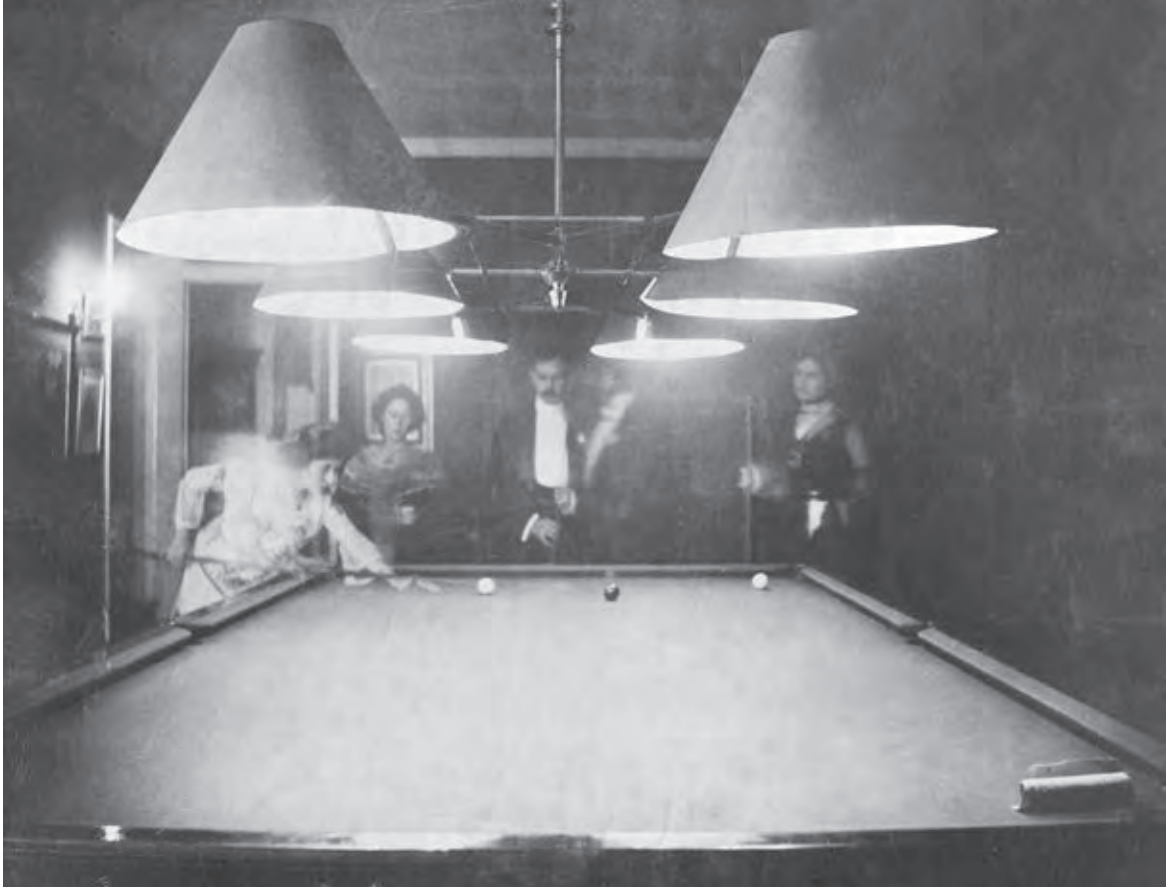


Fig. 9. *Florence and James Shannon and Unidentified Figures Playing Billiards*  
Family of the Artist

The iconography of a billiard-playing woman is unusual and leads to uncharted, speculative territory. On the one hand, Shannon may have simply chosen the motif for its decorative potential. On the other hand, there may be a meaning attached to this imagery that was familiar to viewers in the 1890s, but is now lost to us. Tantalizing hints regarding the possible symbolism embedded in the image may be found in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, a novel first published in London in installments beginning in 1897, in which one of the main characters (Ida Farange) is an accomplished billiard player, whose prowess in wielding the cue is interpreted as a sexual metaphor for her behavior.<sup>3</sup>

This type of reading ties in with the rules of the game; played with three balls (two white and one red), billiards lends itself to triangular strategems that here suggest romantic intrigue.<sup>4</sup> By extension, a subtext surfaces in which the purely objective meaning of the red ball merges with the apple of temptation offered by Eve. Indeed, Shannon's model does appear to offer (or display) the ball held loosely in her hand, but what we are to make of this remains ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, given that Shannon and his wife Florence (née Cartwright) shared their home (by then a magnificent house and studio in the prestigious Holland Park Road) with Florence's sister, Liz, who often sat for the artist and who may be the sitter for *Spot Red*.<sup>5</sup>

*Spot Red* continued to attract positive critical attention and was reproduced in the first article devoted exclusively to Shannon in which the painting was noted for "grace of pose and delicacy of colour" and stood in contrast to the "chromatic violence" of other examples of his art at the opposite end of his aesthetic range.<sup>6</sup> The painting was included in a small memorial exhibition held at the Leicester Galleries, London, in 1923, at which time a writer for the *Times* (London) remarked: "Now and then, as in 'Spot Red' . . . the grace of his work is spontaneous and complete."<sup>7</sup>

---

1. *Catalogue of a Collection of Pictures by J. J. Shannon with a Note by Mr. Frederick Wedmore* (London: Fine Art Society, June 1896), 5.

2. M. H. Spielmann, "The Royal Academy Elections," *The Graphic* 1417 (January 23, 1897), 92.

3. Paul Theroux, Introduction to Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 12.

4. Theroux also points to the opinion held by Henry James's brother, the famous pioneer psychologist William James, who compared billiard-playing with tight-rope-dancing saying that both demanded "the most delicate appreciation of minute disparities of sensation." (William James, *Principles of Psychology*, I, xiii, 509), cited *Ibid.*, 267.

5. The figure resembles Liz Cartwright, but no firm identification can be made. Tensions did arise within what was essentially a benign ménage-a-trois: the artist's granddaughter explained that Florence Shannon had cut down a painting in anger to eliminate her sister Liz from the composition. (Conversation with Julia Gibbons, 1983.)

6. Alfred Lys Baldry, "J. J. Shannon," *The Magazine of Art* 20 (November 1896), illus. 3; 4, 5.

7. "Art Exhibitions. The Leicester Galleries," *Times*, June 19, 1923, 12.

## 7 A Sketch on the River

circa 1896, oil on canvas, 17 × 27 inches  
signed lower right: 'J J Shannon'

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Fine Art Society, 1896, no. 9

### LITERATURE

*Catalogue of a Collection of Pictures by  
J. J. Shannon with a Note by Mr. Frederick  
Wedmore* (London: Fine Art Society,  
1896), 7.

This atmospheric depiction of two female boaters in a punt is unique within Shannon's oeuvre. The spare composition and uncharacteristically smooth brushwork signal that this placid river scene is a visual souvenir of the Shannon family's holiday stays along the River Thames. In *For My Children*, a volume chronicling her childhood, Kitty Shannon vividly described their days on the water saying, "[W]e were great river people and often spent the week-ends on the river." Their love of boating also included two summers spent on rented houseboats at Wargrave and Henley, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Kitty elaborated about Henley and their side-trips to more distant spots along the Thames:

*In those days Henley was marvellous. Along the whole length of the course house-boats with masses of flowers were moored, and at night all were lit up with Japanese lanterns [sic] and fairy lights; and on them all were the famous beauties, stage stars. In fact, it was the thing to do. Naturally my father's house-boat was very popular, and besides our invited guests, 'Boat Crashers' from the course came on board until there were so many the house-boat began to lean over and my father realized that it was on the point of turning turtle, so he had to shout to the 'Boat Crashers' to get off at once. Every Sunday in the summer we took the train to Taplow, where we got a punt and my father would punt up the Cleveland Reach where we used to see Lord Desborough, then Harry Grenfell, a champion punter.<sup>2</sup>*

Shannon's imagery bespeaks the quiet isolation associated with their Taplow excursions, which were highlighted by visits to Grenfell's Taplow Court, a favorite gathering place for members of the Souls, whose undisputed leader was the artist's principal patron, the Duchess of Rutland.<sup>3</sup> The white dog sitting at the prow of the punt (possibly Kitty's terrier Lulu) injects a personal note to this otherwise anonymous scene. Although it was designated as a sketch, the painting verges on a formal abstraction (likely inspired by James McNeill Whistler's marine subjects) that is eminently appealing to the modern eye.

1. Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), 95.

2. *Ibid.*, 96.

3. The group known as the Souls included members of English high society who prized intellect and art. See Jane Abdy and Charlotte Gere, *The Souls* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984).



## 8 Kitty

circa 1897, oil on canvas, 65 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 38 inches

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter Exhibition*, 1928, no. 23, as *Kitty*



Fig. 10. James Jebusa Shannon (1862–1923)  
*Miss Kitty*, 1897, oil on canvas, 66 × 40 in.  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh:  
Purchase, 97.4. Photograph © 2014  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

This formal full-length portrait of Shannon's only child Kitty (1887–1974) is closely related to his highly admired and widely exhibited *Miss Kitty* (1897, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), a painting that was awarded a gold medal at the second Carnegie International Exhibition in 1897, and purchased by the Carnegie Institute directly from the exhibition (fig. 10).<sup>1</sup> Both paintings are of nearly the same dimensions and depict the ten-year-old Kitty in a fashionable riding habit holding a crop and glove in one gloved hand, as if ready to depart for one of the regular morning rides in London's Rotten Row that she took with her father. Here, however, two dogs rather than one wait expectantly at her feet, thus emphasizing the impression of Kitty's imminent departure from what is probably the entrance hall of Shannon's elegant home and studio in Holland Park Road, Kensington.

Shannon obviously delighted in painting his daughter, but there may be a subtext that adds to the reading of the painting, the source of which is Shannon's relationship with the august Victorian artist Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830–1896). Given Shannon's ambition to achieve success in the competitive portrait market, it comes as no surprise that, with a mind to attracting socially elevated clients, he acquired a prime piece of real estate on which to build his home and studio—a plot of land in the exclusive Holland Park area that was filled with the homes and studios of some of the era's leading artists.<sup>2</sup>







Fig. 11. Frederic Leighton (1830–1896)  
*Portrait of May Sartoris*, circa 1860, oil  
on canvas, 59<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. ACF 1964.03.  
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

Completed around 1893, Shannon's impressive home/studio complex became a regular stop on "Show Sundays" (days that artists in the area opened their studios to the public). Although he was a popular draw on his own, Shannon's visitor numbers were doubtless boosted by the fact that he lived next door to the famed president of the Royal Academy, Lord Leighton. Moreover, in light of the politics attached to gaining membership in the Royal Academy, Shannon's proximity to Leighton was unquestionably advantageous since Leighton actively supported admission to the Academy of a younger generation of artists whose progressive aesthetics put off many of the older academicians. Shannon was elected an associate of the Academy in January 1897, and although Leighton had died the previous year (Shannon's former instructor Edward John Poynter assumed the Academy's presidency in 1896), Shannon likely owed as much to Leighton as he did to Poynter for this affirmation of his talent.

The Royal Academy mounted a large memorial exhibition of Leighton's work in late January 1897, a display that the newly-elected associate Shannon must have seen. Among the works on view was *May Sartoris* (circa 1860, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas), a full-length portrait of a serious fifteen-year-old girl in formal riding costume (fig. 11).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is theorized here that Shannon conceived *Miss Kitty* and the present work as subtle homages to the recently deceased academician whose stellar accomplishments he wished to match.

The chronology of the present portrait in relation to *Miss Kitty* is undocumented. However, since the artist planned to send *Miss Kitty* to the United States for display in the important Carnegie International Exhibition, it is likely that he painted this work as a near-replica, thus enabling him to keep it as a souvenir of a work of which he was justly proud. The painting remained in the family and was shown only once (as *Kitty*) in the memorial display of Shannon's work held at the Royal Academy, London, in 1928.

---

1. See the entry for *Miss Kitty* in *American Paintings and Sculpture to 1945 in the Carnegie Museum of Art* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1992), 426–427.

2. See Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

3. See Leonée Ormond's entry for the painting in *Frederic Leighton, 1830–1896* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1996), 121–122.

## 9 Mrs. Harold Burke

circa 1898, oil on canvas, 73¼ × 39 inches  
signed lower center: 'J. J. Shannon'

VENANCE

Harold Burke, London  
Beatrice Aveling Burke  
by descent in her family

This recently rediscovered full-length portrait of the striking Mrs. Harold Burke is a fine example of Shannon's mature style for formal portraiture. Like the majority of these commissioned works, the painting has remained in the family of the sitter. The portrait demonstrates Shannon's inherent interest in the texture of the oil medium itself, a concern that is revealed here in the roughly worked, irregular surface of the patterned backdrop, and the broadly applied dry brushwork that defines and highlights the varied fabrics of the gown. The full-length composition also reflects the growing tendency on the part of Shannon, Sargent, and their contemporaries to draw on the Grand Manner tradition of such earlier masters as Sir Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), Sir Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), and Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830).

Shannon took particular inspiration from Lawrence's art, manifesting it in his love of sumptuous, glistening fabrics often realized with a palette of reds, blacks, and whites, and his desire for a heightened level of animation and vitality in his sitters' facial expressions and poses. And, as shown here, Shannon's use of patterned backdrops provided a handsome alternative to compositions in which sitters were posed in landscape settings. Indeed, his preference for such variegated foils exhibits the decorative flair that characterized his style.

The sitter, Beatrice Mary Clifford Aveling Burke (1874–1970), was the daughter of Stephen Thomas Aveling and the former Mary Phoebe Clifford. She was born in the historic Restoration House in Rochester, Kent, the family mansion so-named because Charles II stayed there on the eve of his restoration to the crown in 1660. Restoration House, now open to the public, was also the model for Charles Dickens' fictional Satis House, the home of Miss Havisham, a pivotal character in *Great Expectations* (1861). Beatrice Aveling married the artist Harold Arthur Burke (1852–1942) in 1893, at Rochester Cathedral.

Because they were attempting to establish their careers simultaneously in London, Shannon and Harold Burke likely knew each other. Shannon had painted portraits of a Mrs. Charles Burke and Charles Burke (shown at the New English Art Club in 1887 and 1888, respectively), who were presumably the brother and sister-in-law of Harold Burke.<sup>1</sup> However, Harold Burke's was a privileged background (he was educated at Cheltenham College and Liège University and studied at the Royal Academy [London] and in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts) and because of that, he and Shannon likely did not travel in the same circles. Burke's artistic accomplishments were ultimately minor ones, perhaps in part because he had no pressing financial need to succeed. His chief exhibition outlet was the Royal Society of British Artists of which he was vice president from 1915 to 1919.

Although the portrait received favorable reviews when it was shown at the New Gallery (London) in 1898, it was subsequently modified by Shannon, most likely at the behest of the sitter.<sup>2</sup>

1. Harold Burke was the son of James St. George Burke, QC, and had a younger brother, Charles Carrington Burke (1853–1904).

2. The painting was reproduced in *A Record of Art in 1898* (London: The Studio, 1898), 78, and originally showed a cat lounging on a settee against which Mrs. Burke was leaning. The author's conversation with a collateral descendant of Beatrice Burke indicated that she owned a beloved dachshund, a fact that may account for the modification of the painting.



# 10 Florence Shannon

circa 1905, oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches

VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

Shannon's wife, the former Florence Mary Cartwright (b.?<sup>1</sup> – January 3, 1948) is shown against a profusion of lilacs, a motif that infuses the image with the romantic sensibility that is said to have endured throughout their marriage. The two met around 1884, when the young Englishwoman was attending the South Kensington School of Needlework and they married in 1886. Their only child Kitty was born February 3, 1887. The present work is assigned a circa 1905 date based on comparison with Shannon's *In the Dunes* (circa 1905, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC), in which Florence Shannon is shown from roughly the same angle that accentuates the distinctive line of her jaw.

Although Florence Shannon frequently modelled for the painter, she eschewed the social whirl attached to her husband's profession as a portrait specialist. Instead, she was content to remain at home and, once the family moved into their Holland Park Road property, she devoted much of her time to gardening. In this light, the floral foil for this bust-length portrait of Florence Shannon is entirely appropriate and, as Kitty Shannon recalled:

*The garden was a charming sight—a long whitewashed wall with a herbaceous border of hollyhocks, delphiniums, roses; many flowering creepers against the walls; a brick path and then another wide border of flowers. . . . I'm sure my mother talked to her flowers to make them grow. She got the most wonderful results in her London garden.<sup>1</sup>*

When Shannon was knighted in 1922, Florence Shannon became Lady Shannon. Following her husband's death, she and her close friend Henriette Lewis-Hind (the former wife of the American artist George Hitchcock) actively promoted Shannon's art in the United States, mounting a memorial exhibition that toured to museums in Buffalo, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Brooklyn.

---

1. Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), 66.



## II Kitty and the Silver Ship

circa 1909, oil on canvas, 45¼ × 34½ inches

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

This portrait of Kitty Shannon (1887–1974) is related to at least two other paintings by Shannon that feature the same silver ship. All three works portray attractive young women shown at three-quarter length, facing the viewer's left. Neither of the other works qualifies technically as a formal portrait. *The Silver Ship* (circa 1907, formerly Forbes Collection of Victorian Pictures) probably portrays a professional model, and, although *Flora and the Silver Ship* (1922, unlocated) shows the artist's niece, Flora Cartwright, the image registers as a generic figure painting as opposed to being a portrait.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the other works cited here, *Kitty and the Silver Ship* seems not to have been exhibited and was, instead, kept by the artist likely as personal memento of his daughter holding what was undoubtedly one of the family's prized possessions. Silver ships—or *nefs*—had a long history in Europe as functional and/or decorative table ornaments that attested to their owners' aristocratic status.<sup>2</sup> Kitty appears to be caught in motion, and it is difficult to say whether she is turning toward or away from the viewer. She glances out of the pictorial space with a look of youthful solemnity, an expression that imbues the image with a sense of nostalgia, as if this were Shannon's farewell to the child as she entered womanhood. Such a reading rings true inasmuch as this portrait is one of the last Shannon would paint of his daughter.<sup>3</sup>

The silver ship undoubtedly had sentimental meaning for Kitty Shannon, who used it as a motif in her own art and whose portrait photograph (circa 1933) shows her in profile next to the family heirloom (fig. 12).



Fig. 12. *Kitty with Silver Ship* Illustrated in Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1933), opp. 257.

1. *The Silver Ship* was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1907 and the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908. *Flora and the Silver Ship* was exhibited at the Carnegie International in 1922 and the Albright Art Gallery (Buffalo) in 1924. Both works were widely known through reproduction.

2. See, Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson, "Nef, or Table Ship," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, vol. 6, no 24 (October 1908), 53–55; and "Silver Galleons On Dining Tables," *Times* (London), February 21, 1959, 9.

3. Shannon's last documented portrait of Kitty is his Royal Academy diploma piece, *Black and Silver*, 1910. She married in 1912.





## 12 The Fountain

after 1910, oil on canvas, 32 × 25 inches  
signed lower left: JJS'

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

### EXHIBITED

London, Leicester Galleries, 1923, no. 19  
London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter  
Exhibition*, 1928, no. 40

Shortly after Shannon's death, London's Leicester Galleries mounted an exhibition of thirty-one of the artist's paintings, all of which were from his studio and on loan from his widow. The exhibition was accompanied by a short catalogue containing a brief appreciation by the art historian-critic C. Lewis Hind (1862–1927), who emphasized that the show was not a retrospective, but, rather, a demonstration of the "leisure hour delights of a very successful portrait painter."<sup>1</sup> Among the works on display was *The Fountain*, a vibrant, sun-dappled view of the artist's front garden in Holland Park Road, Kensington. The freely brushed surface and bright palette suggest Shannon's interest in experimenting with a variant, post-impressionist mode and, as Hind maintained, such stylistic forays into unfamiliar territory were "indicative of what he could have been had not the demands of sitters been so strong."



Fig. 13. *Fountain, Shannons' Front Garden, Holland Park Road*  
Family of the Artist

1. *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Sir James J. Shannon, R.A.* (London: Ernst Brown & Phillips).



# 13 Lady Marjorie Manners

circa 1911, oil on canvas, 26½ × 19½ inches

VENANCE

The artist  
 Lady Florence Shannon  
 Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
 Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
 Estate of Julia Gibbons

This fanciful portrait deliberately recalls the art of the great Spanish Baroque painter, Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), not only because of its freely brushed surface of deep reds and blacks, but also because the sitter's hairstyle and costume are reminiscent of those found in portraits of seventeenth-century Spanish royalty. In that respect, this painting reflects the influence of the Spanish master on Shannon and other late-nineteenth-century artists (among them John Singer Sargent [1856–1925], Sir John Everett Millais [1829–1896], and William Merritt Chase [1849–1916]), all of whom incorporated stylistic and/or iconographic elements inspired by Velázquez into their art to varying degrees.

The sitter is identified as Lady Victoria Marjorie Harriet Manners (Lady Marjorie Manners) (1883–1946), the eldest of the three daughters of Henry John Brinsley Manners, 8th Duke of Rutland and his wife, the former Marion Margaret Violet Lindsay, the latter of whom was a source of considerable patronage for Shannon over the course of his career.<sup>1</sup> Like their mother, the three Manners girls—Marjorie, Violet (“Letty”) (1888–1971), and Diana (see cat. no. 14)—were noted for their beauty and artistic temperaments. As Lady Diana Cooper later wrote of her older sister, “Marjorie was the stuff genius is made of, and suffered the weight of it. She taught me much, including melancholia—though not, alas! her philosophy, nor yet her arts.”<sup>2</sup> Marjorie's striking features—her delicate, heart-shaped face, large eyes, and elegant, elongated brows—are the primary focus of this otherwise freely rendered, informal portrait that stands in contrast to the famous portrait of her painted by Shannon when she was seventeen that drew acclaim when it was shown at the Royal Academy in 1902.

The present painting may document a costume worn by the young woman to the Savoy Ball in aid of the Prince Francis of Teck Memorial Fund, at which Shannon assisted Prince Alexander of Teck in awarding the prizes for best costume. As one newspaper report noted, both Marjorie Manners and her sister Diana attended “as reproductions of a Velasquez painting.”<sup>3</sup> The Savoy Ball was only one of

the many then-fashionable costume balls that often required attendees to dress as personalities based on historical portraits. Shannon is also known to have organized *tableaux vivants* for society events and it is also possible that this portrait is an outgrowth of that activity. Moreover, Marjorie Manners' brief period of study at the women's department of King's College Art School, London, with Byam Shaw (1872–1919) overlapped with Kitty Shannon's and, like Kitty, she doubtless enjoyed the vogue for elaborate masquerades that involved art historical references.<sup>4</sup>

Marjorie Manners was a perennial favorite with the American gossip columnists from the moment she came out in 1904, when one headline billed her as the “Daintiest Woman in All England.”<sup>5</sup> She married Charles Henry Alexander Paget, 6th Marquess of Anglesey in August 1912, after which her title was Marchioness of Anglesey. The couple had six children.

1. This identification is based on the author's conversation with the artist's granddaughter in the 1980s, comparison with contemporaneous photographs of Lady Marjorie Manners, and a 1909 portrait of her painted by Jacques-Emile Blanche (1861–1942) (National Trust, United Kingdom).

2. Diana Cooper, *The Rainbow Comes and Goes* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), 80.

3. “Savoy Ball a Big Success,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1911.

4. See Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), 140. Although charming and helpful, this volume was not written with historians in mind and fails to provide adequate information, especially regarding dates.

5. “The Daintiest Woman in All England,” *Washington Times*, April 17, 1904, 5. This was a full-page article devoted to the young debutante.



# 14 Lady Diana Manners

circa 1919, oil on canvas, 30 × 22 inches

VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

Although the sitter in the present work is not conclusively identified, the young woman depicted is likely Lady Diana Manners (1892–1986), the daughter of the 8th Duke and Duchess of Rutland, who married the diplomat Alfred Duff Cooper in 1919. Duff Cooper was later made the 1st Viscount Norwich, making Diana the Viscountess of Norwich (a title she so disliked that she preferred being known as Lady Diana Cooper). This identification is based on the sitter's resemblance to Diana Manners as she appears in other paintings, drawings, and photographs that capture her unmistakable facial structure.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the sitter's expression of subdued yearning is one that Diana Manners typically adopted.

Shannon had a long and cordial history with the Manners family from whom he had steady patronage beginning in 1888, when Violet Manners (1856–1937) (later the Duchess of Rutland), a famed beauty in her own right, saw his work at the Grosvenor Gallery. The first tangible result of this long artist-patron relationship was Shannon's 1889 full-length portrait of Violet Manners (*Lady Violet Granby*, since she was then the Marchioness of Granby; private collection) that was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery that year. This was followed by additional portraits of Violet Manners, her husband, and five children. Diana Manners, the youngest of the couple's three girls, first sat to Shannon before she was two years old and, as she recalled, "I knew him and loved him and spent much time in his beautiful studio in Holland Park."<sup>2</sup> The rapport Shannon established with the Manners family is well documented; his daughter Kitty and Diana Manners were close in age and played together as children, remaining friends into adulthood, with Diana as one of Kitty's bridesmaids.<sup>3</sup>

It is speculated that this portrait was executed in 1919, the year that Shannon painted the half-length portrait of Diana Manners in her wedding dress (private collection). By then she was known as one of England's most beautiful women, but one who had lost many friends in the Great War, during which she had worked as a nurse.<sup>4</sup> Her celebrity arose in the pre-war years, when she was at the center of an exclusive

group of English aristocrats—the bright young things of the era. After the war, she toured intermittently for five years in Max Reinhardt's revival of the stage pageant *The Miracle*, in which she had the role of the Madonna. She also featured in a number of silent films—mainly to finance her husband's political career. At her death in 1986, she was known internationally as a "beloved English eccentric" whose "acquaintances ran the gamut from the theatre to Sir Winston and Lady Churchill to Evelyn Waugh."<sup>5</sup> She was survived by her only child, the noted author and historian, John Julius, 2nd Viscount Norwich.

Shannon's highly romanticized portrait of Lady Diana Manners in her wedding gown (mentioned above) was a gift to the bride and groom on their marriage. The present painting of Lady Diana, which is of almost the same dimensions, may have been painted at about the same time and appears to have been kept by the artist as a private memento of the young woman whom he had known since she was a toddler.

1. See especially John Singer Sargent's 1914 portrait drawing of her (unlocated), a reproduction of which can be found online.

2. Undated note to Barbara Dayer Gallati from Lady Diana Cooper, [1983].

3. Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), 173.

4. Lady Diana Cooper wrote a number of autobiographical volumes, among them, *The Rainbow Comes and Goes* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958) and *The Light of Common Day* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959). Another important biographical source is Philip Ziegler, *Diana Cooper* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

5. Wolfgang Saxon, "Lady Diana Cooper is Dead; A Beloved English Eccentric," *New York Times*, June 16, 1986.



# 15 The Tea Party

circa 1921, oil on canvas, 28 × 22 inches  
signed lower right: 'J.J. Shannon'

## VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons  
Private Collection, Colorado

## EXHIBITED

London, Leicester Galleries, 1923, no. 7  
London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Winter Exhibition*, 1928, no. 34

## LITERATURE

"Art Exhibitions. The Late Sir J. J. Shannon's Paintings," *Morning Post*, June 19, 1923.  
"Royal Academy. Pictures in Winter Exhibition," *Times* (London), January 11, 1928, 17.

*The Tea Party* is one of Shannon's late excursions into genre painting. A vibrant, freely painted outdoor setting forms the backdrop for three young women for whom tea is being served by a uniformed maid. The wooded scene suggests that the work was painted in or inspired by the countryside near Great Batchelor Farm, a small property in Kent (England) that the artist and his wife purchased in the late 1910s to be near their daughter Kitty and her family. Although it is impossible to say with certainty, the attractive female figures may be some of his daughter's friends from the area. By this time, Shannon had become confined to a wheelchair because of the gradual onset of paralysis resulting from a riding accident that occurred perhaps as early as 1914. Increasingly unable to withstand the physical stress of painting large canvases, the artist shifted his attention to creating more intimately scaled works that did not entail the pressures of dealing with clients.<sup>1</sup>

*The Tea Party* was exhibited at the Leicester Galleries, London, in 1923, shortly after Shannon's death. The exhibition catalogue contained a note of appreciation by the art critic C. Lewis Hind, who remarked that most of the works on view were "mainly leisure hour delights of a very successful portrait painter" that were indicative of "what he could have been had not the demands of sitters been so strong."<sup>2</sup> In a contemporary review, the painting prompted one writer to observe that it demonstrated Shannon's "true landscape sense."<sup>3</sup> The overall critical reaction to the exhibition was enthusiastic, with one writer commenting, "In the sketches his elegance and suavity are unforced; there is a true vitality which is sometimes lacking in the portraits painted with so much industry during his long years of active life."<sup>4</sup> Another reviewer was taken by the "real joy in pigment" that was to be discovered in Shannon's genre paintings in which he "indulged his taste in fine, full colour."<sup>5</sup> To be sure, in the 1890s, Shannon had explored a modified Impressionist technique using a palette of bright

colors. His awareness of progressive French styles was forged with his association with fellow members of the New English Art Club, an organization formed in 1886 largely by the young generation of Paris-trained British artists. In the case of *The Tea Party*, however, Shannon appears to have responded to the second phalanx of French influence—the Post-Impressionists, whose work, by 1910, was well-known to London audiences owing to the artist-critic Roger Fry's exhibition, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, held at the Grafton Galleries.

Shannon received a knighthood from King George V in 1922 and died the following year. It was not until 1928 that the Royal Academy mounted a memorial exhibition that featured the work of several of its recently deceased members.<sup>6</sup> Of the fifty-five paintings by Shannon on view, most were commissioned portraits whose formality stood in dramatic contrast to *The Tea Party*, which was praised for its demonstration of the artist's "best qualities" headed by "a sensuous enjoyment of painting."<sup>7</sup>

1. For an account of this period in the artist's life, see Kitty Shannon, *For My Children* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933).

2. *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Sir James J. Shannon, R.A.*, Leicester Galleries, London, June–July, 1923.

3. "Art Exhibitions. The Late Sir J. J. Shannon's Paintings," *Morning Post*, June 19, 1923.

4. "Art Exhibitions," *Times* (London), June 19, 1923, 12.

5. Unidentified newspaper clipping, Willetta G. Ball Collection of Clippings, Boston Public Library.

6. The others were the American expatriate Mark Fisher (1841–1923), F. Cayley Robinson (1862–1927), Luke Fildes (1843–1927), and Ambrose McEvoy (1878–1927).

7. "Royal Academy. Pictures in the Winter Exhibition," *Times* (London), January 11, 1928, 17.





## 16 Woman in White

circa 1921, oil on canvas, 22½ × 15½ inches  
signed lower left: 'JJS'

### VENANCE

The artist  
Lady Florence Shannon  
Kitty Shannon Keigwin, the artist's daughter  
Julia Gibbons, the artist's granddaughter  
Estate of Julia Gibbons

*Woman in White* bears an obvious stylistic relationship to *The Tea Party* (see cat. no. 15 and fig. 14) and on that basis, the painting is assigned a date of circa 1921.<sup>1</sup> The loosely worked landscape backdrop for the single female figure is an example of the direction Shannon's art might have taken had he lived longer, and was also most likely painted near the Shannons' small Kent property, Great Batchelor Farm. The shift in style stems in part from the artist's weakened health and because the market for portraiture in post-World War I Britain had changed radically with the passing of the Edwardian era of opulence. Still, this new mode found favor with a number of critics, as described in the previous entry.



Fig. 14. *The Tea Party* (detail of cat. 15).

---

1. The title given here is a recent construction; no documentation for the original title has been located.





*James, Florence, and Kitty Shannon*  
Family of the Artist

## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

### *United States*

Belmont, Gari Melchers Memorial Gallery, Falmouth, Virginia  
Brooklyn Museum, New York  
Carnegie Art Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York  
Lauren Rogers Library and Museum of Art, Laurel, Mississippi  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York  
Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC  
Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, Georgia

### *United Kingdom*

Birmingham Museum, Birmingham  
Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, Bradford  
Chatsworth Settlement, Bakewell, Derbyshire  
Glasgow Art Gallery, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, Scotland  
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford  
Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin  
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff  
National Portrait Gallery, London  
National Portrait Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh  
Newnham College, Cambridge  
Oldham Art Gallery, Oldham  
Preston Manor, Preston  
Royal Academy of Arts, London  
Royal Collection  
Sheffield City Art Galleries, Sheffield  
Tate Britain, London  
University of London, Royal Holloway and  
Bedford New College  
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool  
York City Art Gallery, York

### *Other*

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia  
Museum of the Regiments, Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Mumbai  
South African National Gallery, Capetown, South Africa

## SELECTED HONORS

Gold Medal, National Art Training School, South Kensington,  
London, 1880  
Gold Medal, Paris Exposition Universelle, 1889  
Honorable Mention, World's Columbian Exposition,  
Chicago, 1893  
Gold Medal, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1897  
Medal, Paris Exposition, 1900  
Lippincott Prize, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,  
Philadelphia, 1899  
Gold Medal, Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, 1901  
Gold Medal, International Exposition, Venice, 1906  
Medal of Honor, International Exposition, Barcelona, 1911  
Knighted 1922

## MEMBERSHIPS

Belgian Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts  
Chelsea Arts Club  
Institute of Painters in Oil-Colours  
International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers  
National Academy of Design (A.N.A. 1908)  
New English Art Club (founding member)  
Royal Academy of Arts, London (A.R.A. 1897; R.A. 1909)  
Royal British Colonial Society of America  
Royal Hibernian Academy  
Royal Society of British Artists  
Royal Society of Portrait Painters (founding member;  
president 1910–1923)

© 2014 Debra Force Fine Art, Inc.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014937172

Design: Amy Pyle, Light Blue Studio  
Photography: Timothy Pyle, Light Blue Studio  
Lithography: Meridian Printing

*Debra Force* FINE ART, INC.

13 EAST 69TH STREET SUITE 4F NEW YORK 10021 TEL 212.734.3636 WWW.DEBRAFORCE.COM