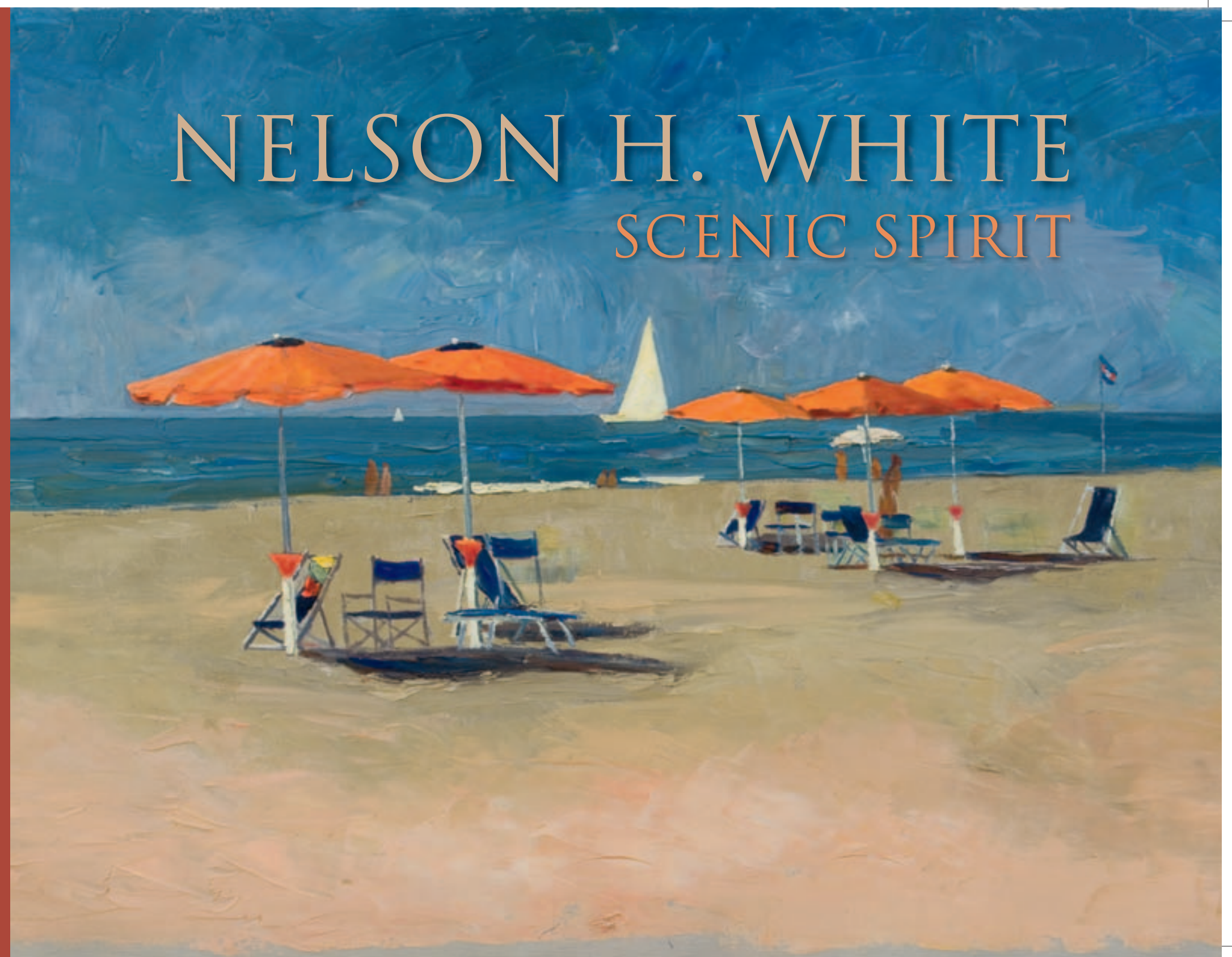


NELSON H. WHITE
SCENIC SPIRIT



NELSON HOLBROOK WHITE

American, born 1932

Museum Collections

Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT
 Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, CT
 New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT
 Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT

Corporate Collections

Bank of America
 Pfizer Corp.

Exhibitions

2011 W.H. Patterson, London, The Summer Collection

2010 Nelson H. White Solo Show, Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY

2009 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Group Show
 W.H. Patterson Gallery, London, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show

2008 Centro Francese Internazionale, Massa, Italy, Group Show
 W.H. Patterson Gallery, London, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show
 Cooley Gallery, Old Lyme, CT, All Paintings Great and Small, Group Show

2007 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Studio Selects
 W.H. Patterson Gallery, London, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show
 Cooley Gallery, Old Lyme, CT, All Paintings Great and Small, Group Show
 Brigham Gallery, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Exhibition, Nantucket, MA

2006 W.H. Patterson Gallery, London, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show
 Brigham Gallery, Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show, Nantucket, MA

2005 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Shining Sands
 Florence Academy of Art Alumni Show, Florence, Italy

2005-2011 Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT, International
 Maritime Art Exhibition

2004 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, By the Sea, By the Lovely Sea

2003 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Two person show with Urban Larsson
 Hirschl and Adler Galleries, NYC
 Panorama Museum, Germany, Realism Revisited

2002 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Local Landscapes and Unique Florals

2001 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Sumptuous Still Lifes & Lush Landscapes
 The New Masters Show General Electric Headquarters, Fairfield, CT
 Museum of Maritime History, New London, CT, Whites of Waterford
 Flinn Gallery, Greenwich, CT, Three Generations of Whites

2000 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Solo Show

1998-99 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY, Group Shows

1997 Feathers Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ

1992 Kolomenskoy Museum, Moscow, Russia

1990 Hammer Gallery, New York, NY, Solo Show

1985 Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT

1964 Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, CT

1960-present Solo and Group Shows at:
 Grenning Gallery, Sag Harbor, NY
 Lyme Art Association, Old Lyme, CT
 Mystic Maritime Gallery, Mystic, CT
 Valardi Gallery, La Spezia, Italy
 Incontro Gallery, Cremona, Italy

Art Education

1999-present Florence Academy of Art, Florence, Italy

1956-1987 Student of Ms. Nerina Simi, Florence, Italy

1955-1980 Apprentice to Pietro Annigoni, Florence, Italy
 Studied watercolor painting with Ogden Pleissner

Awards

Biennale Internazionale Career Award 2003

NELSON H. WHITE

SCENIC SPIRIT

Survey Exhibition
July 12 – October 14, 2012

NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



56 Lexington Street
New Britain, CT 06052
(860) 229-0257
www.nbmaa.org

Published on the occasion of the exhibition:
Nelson H. White: Scenic Spirit
New Britain Museum of American Art
July 12 – October 14, 2012



56 Lexington Street
New Britain, Connecticut 06052-1412
Telephone: (860) 229-0257 • Fax: (860) 229-3445 • www.nbmaa.org

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ISBN-13 9780972449748

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012933149

Photography by Ted Hendrickson, Rabatti and Domicie

Cover: Nelson H. White, *Bagno La Salute – Viareggio, Italy*, detail,
2011, oil on canvas, 40½ x 70¾ inches

Printed in an edition of 2,000 copies

Printed by Post Printing, an RR Donnelley Company
201 East Progress Drive, West Bend, WI 53095

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Douglas K.S. Hyland

It is an honor to present a retrospective of the paintings of Nelson Holbrook White at the New Britain Museum of American Art. My admiration for his work and for Nelson as a person has increased steadily since I came to the Museum in 1999. Not only has he grown in proficiency as a keen observer of nature, but his canvases also have acquired a greater fluidity and a more masterful self-assuredness over the years. His marine subjects and landscapes, and portraits are marked by more insightfulness with more economy of detail.

Nelson is a true inheritor. He represents the third generation of a remarkably talented Connecticut family of artists. Having had the pleasure of visiting his late mother, who lived to be over 100 years old, I can personally attest to the fact that the Whites (who lived both in Hartford and on the coast in Waterford) knew almost all the leading artists of the Hartford, Cos Cob, Old Lyme, and Mystic art colonies since their inceptions. I am certain that our visitors will want to study *The Old Man* and *Clearing After Storm - New London* by Nelson's grandfather, Henry Cooke White (1861-1952), and *The Peonies* and *The Basin, Sterling Creek - Long Island, NY* by Nelson's father, Nelson Cooke White (1900-1989), as these examples illustrate the White tradition of artistic achievement and document the important heritage which is Nelson's birthright. As does Nelson, they keenly studied the constantly changing landscapes and Mother Nature's infinite variations.

Unlike the other members of the great Connecticut dynasties of painters – the Weirs, Wigginses, Flaggs, and Moores – Nelson has ventured much farther afield and divides his time between

Waterford, Connecticut, Shelter Island, New York, and Florence, Italy. For over 40 years, he has studied, painted, and lived in the Tuscan capital, and thus has been inspired by close proximity to the treasures of the Uffizi and the Palazzo Pitti. Nelson's appreciation for the great Italian masters of the past has been leavened with his admiration of Pietro Annigoni (1910-1988). Thus, his style represents an amalgamation of traditional training with the more intense, more innovative realism of Annigoni, and he is far more cosmopolitan and international.

Not only is Nelson White an artist of enormous talent, but he has proven to be incredibly generous as a mentor of countless young American artists who study at the Florence Academy of Art with which the White family has been associated for many years. Because of Nelson, the Museum has forged a strong link with the Academy.

First and foremost, I wish to thank Nelson for planning the exhibition and catalogue and for loaning key examples from his oeuvre. His resourcefulness and patience are exemplary. Having twice visited his cache of paintings, I know just how very difficult it has been to select the works to be displayed, as so many would have served our purposes equally well. To Anna Rogulina, Assistant Curator, and the entire staff of the Museum, I wish to extend my gratitude for once again attending to the myriad details and for creating such an ideal installation for all of us to enjoy.

SCENIC SPIRIT

Peter Trippi

From afar, the life of the American painter Nelson H. White (b. 1932) seems an aesthetic idyll. Since the mid-1950s, he has lived in Florence nine months of each year, punctuated with summertime stays along Long Island Sound and his home in Waterford, Connecticut and winter sojourns in the Bahamas and Swiss Alps, always armed with a brush and ready to record what he sees there. Yet unlike conventional jetsetters pursuing the same charmed itinerary, White is a tireless worker who has produced a large and impressive oeuvre that, had he lived a century ago, would surely have won him fame. It has been the fate of White's generation, however, to live in an era that does not care as much about his modern varietal of tonalism. This is just one of many reasons why his solo exhibition at Connecticut's New Britain Museum of American Art is so very welcome.

A Unique Lineage

White's showing in an institution filled with masterworks by earlier American artists is highly appropriate in light of his having grown up in a family of talented painters, primarily of landscapes. For more than a century, the Whites' lives have centered on Waterford, Connecticut, whose picturesque situation overlooking Long Island Sound first inspired Nelson's Hartford-born grandfather, Henry C. White (1861-1952), to commission the great architect Wilson Eyre to build him a fine stone house there. Not surprisingly, all the Whites have loved sailing on the Sound, which is why Henry also built a simpler summer home for the family on Shelter Island, tucked between the north and south forks of Long Island's East End.

Having studied at the Art Students League of New York, Henry was mentored by the renowned painter Dwight W. Tryon (1849-1925), whose biography he later published. As an original member of the art colony at Old Lyme (just 12 miles from

Waterford), Henry won acclaim, if not enduring fame, for his poetic oil and pastel scenes of fields and marshes. Steeped in a gentle tonalism that gradually made room for an impressionistic palette, Henry used his independent income to acquire pictures not only by Tryon, but also by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Eugène Boudin, and other gifted colleagues of his era. As a boy, his grandson Nelson admired these masterworks alongside subtly hued ceramics from China and Japan, a truly aesthetic experience one can half-seriously compare to living inside what is now the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

From the age of 13, Nelson studied technique with his grandfather, even drawing from plaster casts of iconic sculptures. "In teaching me drawing and painting," he recalls, "he would say that the design and the composition were always the first things to seek. My grandfather said, 'I think the greatest artists were the Japanese, like Hokusai. Observe his sense of design.'" He also fostered patience in the youngster by reminding him that "Drawing is not a trick of the hand; it is observation."

Fortunately, such artistry and determination had not skipped a generation. Henry's son, and Nelson's father, was Nelson C. White (1900-1989), who studied at the National Academy of Design and Yale University. He was similarly inspired by Tryon, but also by Dewing and Childe Hassam, and he ultimately wrote definitive monographs on his mentor Abbott H. Thayer and J. Frank Currier. Thayer had studied in Paris with the great academician Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), and so the Frenchman's trenchant tips and wisdom have been passed down through the White line, as if they were channeling the *École des Beaux-Arts* in its late 19th-century heyday.

His father focused young Nelson on aesthetic decisions, especially on the significance of half tones, which had mattered

so much to Tryon. He also introduced him to such leading figures as Frank DuMond (of Old Lyme and the Art Students League), the Long Island Peconic colony's Irving Ramsay Wiles, and even such seriously out-of-fashion classical realists as R.H. Ives Gammell and Richard Lack. In an art historian like myself, young Nelson's privileged observation of America's leading traditionalists (rather than its modernists) inspires pangs of envy, which makes it all the more remarkable that, until he was 25, he planned to become a professional violinist. Indeed, all the Whites have loved and played music, so it was not a cause for concern when Nelson departed Connecticut's Mitchell College after just one year in order to focus intensively on his violin.

When Florence Beckoned

A turning point came in 1954, however, when the family visited Florence. There his father discovered a book on Pietro Annigoni (1910-1988), whom Nelson still considers "the greatest realist painter of our time." Renowned worldwide for his portraits of presidents and royalty, Annigoni invited the young man to help in his studio, promising not to be his teacher but a sort of coach, available to critique his work regularly. Their friendship blossomed, and soon they were traveling widely together. White learned from Annigoni not only how to work hard, but also to further refine his values, especially through drawings in wash. It is values, White believes, that give life to one's drawing, much more so than color. Even today, he is constantly checking his scene with the black mirror his grandfather gave him, a simple device that eliminates color so that he can focus on the darks and lights.

"I was never interested in emulating Annigoni," White explains, and the same could be said about his many years studying under Nerina Simi (1890-1987), the great Florentine teacher whose atelier he joined shortly after starting work for Annigoni. Thanks in part to his close friendships with Simi and Annigoni, White never left Italy, a situation not so surprising when one learns that his American-born mother, Aida Rovetti White, was the daughter of an Italian immigrant skilled in carving stone. Still intimate with his maternal relations in Cremona, Nelson White is now an Italian in many ways, and Florence is truly his home.

It was in Simi's atelier that White met his fellow American Daniel Graves (b. 1949), who went on to found the Florence Academy of Art in 1991. Dedicated to teaching traditional techniques (in English) to students drawn from around the world, the Academy inspired White to join its board before he began studying there in 2002. At age 70, White could easily have taught his own course there, yet he perceived in Graves's innovative curriculum a range of skills, especially in drawing, that his own generation had been denied in American art schools. Ever modest, White now says that when he needs an opinion about his work, he consults Graves, as well as the head of the Academy's painting program, Angel Ramiro Sanchez (b. 1974), and his wife Melissa Franklin Sanchez (b. 1984).

Perhaps more than any place on earth, the Florence Academy of Art is a magnet for those who share White's inherited, and passionately felt, beliefs that "the essential objective of art is to render beauty," and also that painting is "supposed to say something," to communicate a mood or emotion that no photograph can. Almost inevitably, a community of kindred spirits has formed not only around Graves, but also around White, an international network of students and instructors who consider him a knowledgeable, and enthusiastic, connector between the present and the not-so-distant heritage of traditional art almost erased late in the 20th century.

Capturing Nature in All Its Moods

On weekdays in Florence, White usually focuses on the portraits, self-portraits, figures, and still lifes for which the Academy's painters are best known, and indeed the exhibition duly contains superb examples of his efforts in these genres. But on Friday afternoons, White heads to Viareggio or Torre del Lago on the Tuscan coast to pursue his true passion, paintings that consider nature's ever-changing intersections of water, earth, and sky. Thus the greater part of the exhibition offers an array of dunes, marshes, canals, ponds, and streams, and also broad sandy beaches dotted with brightly hued umbrellas or folding chairs.

White recalls that he "got into painting beach scenes with parasols after a trip to Saint Tropez on the French Mediterranean coast. I found the views

there particularly inspiring. Since then I think my approach to outdoor painting has evolved significantly. At first I was still finding my subject, developing a feel for the objects before me. Now I am more intent on the atmosphere, to render a feel for the moisture, the humidity in the air. I want to produce a complete scene, where everything is connected.” Indeed, it is this comprehensive connectivity that makes White’s land-and-sea-scapes so successful, that allows them to convey nature’s moods and light effects.

Usually working *alla prima*, he accomplishes this with lusciously textured brushstrokes of oil paint that coalesce from a distance and delight the eye when studied up close. Particularly dynamic is his bold application of whites for sand or whipping water, though the past decade has witnessed the appearance of bolder color, including an almost abstract sunset of 2010 that would make Turner proud. White’s tonalist inheritance, flowing smoothly from the Barbizon school toward Whistler and Tryon and onward through his own family, is particularly apparent in the Long Island Sound scenes, and also in his less familiar works in pastel, at which his grandfather particularly excelled.

The scenes on view confirm White’s identity as an inveterate traveler, an inheritor of John Singer Sargent’s peripatetic lifestyle, which also tied in closely with Florence (where he was born in 1856). Though he prefers to work outdoors, White will happily paint in the car if it is raining, or at his hotel window in severely cold weather. This last scenario applies particularly to his explorations of snowy landscapes created during the skiing trips in Switzerland. Snow is ultimately just another form of water, and it is hard to imagine a more dramatic intersection of sky and earth than the Alps.

A survey of White’s oeuvre underscores his ongoing passion for the low-key colors of Waterford and Shelter Island, interspersed with less numerous depictions of such scenic places as Nantucket, Ogunquit, California, Sweden (where the Florence Academy of Art has a second location), and even Brooklyn. More brilliantly colored are the scenes from Nassau in the Bahamas, which members of the White family have visited regularly since 1915.

Setting aside this diversity of subjects and settings, it is worth considering a thread that might tie all of White’s art together, an interdisciplinary one often neglected in our overly specialized world. There is, I believe, something crucial in Nelson White’s early experiences in music, in his family’s longstanding love of music, and in the Whistlerian legacy of art’s emotional interconnections with music. White does not bother to name his pictures nocturnes or symphonies, as Whistler did, yet I, for one, can discern the light touch of a composer in their subtle placement of elements and masterful management of values and half tones. Quiet as they seem at first glance, White’s scenes of shore and marsh can also be imagined with soundtracks—the crash of waves, the squawking of gulls, the ebbing of tidal waters—not so remote from music itself.

Looking Forward

Finally, what of Nelson White’s own legacy? Though he has no children, one can be certain that White has impacted the artworks and lives of hundreds of Florence Academy students. He has taken on only a few students in a formal way, perhaps most significantly Flora Beth Kenyon and Laura Grenning, who now represents his work through her own Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor on Long Island.

More broadly, the exhibition affords us the privilege of considering a living master’s work in the context of his American forerunners, whose works the Museum has gathered so cannily since 1903. It’s an ideal fit, and I particularly hope that students from Connecticut’s many art schools will take advantage of this rare opportunity. Then let’s see where that encounter might take them next.

•••

Peter Trippi is the Editor of Fine Art Connoisseur and President of Projects in 19th-Century Art, Inc.



Bagno La Salute – Viareggio, Italy

40½ x 70¾ inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



Self-Portrait

16 x 12 inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



The Dune Viareggio

16 x 20 inches

Oil on canvas, 2002



Samedan, Switzerland

12 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 1999



Pond Lilies

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



The Fish

9 x 12 inches

Oil on canvas, 2005





Kitching's Point
detail on opposite page

12 x 20 inches

Oil on canvas, 2009



Haven

16 x 12 inches

Oil on canvas, 2010



Evening on the Dune

7³/₄ x 20 inches

Pastel, 2002





The Poppy Field
detail on opposite page

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



The Farm

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2006



The Marsh – Waterford, CT

30 x 40 inches

Oil on canvas, ca. 1980





Yellow Umbrella
detail on opposite page

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2010



The North Shore – Greenport, NY

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2001



Dering Harbor – Shelter Island, NY

12 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 1998



Sag Harbor, NY

4 x 9 inches

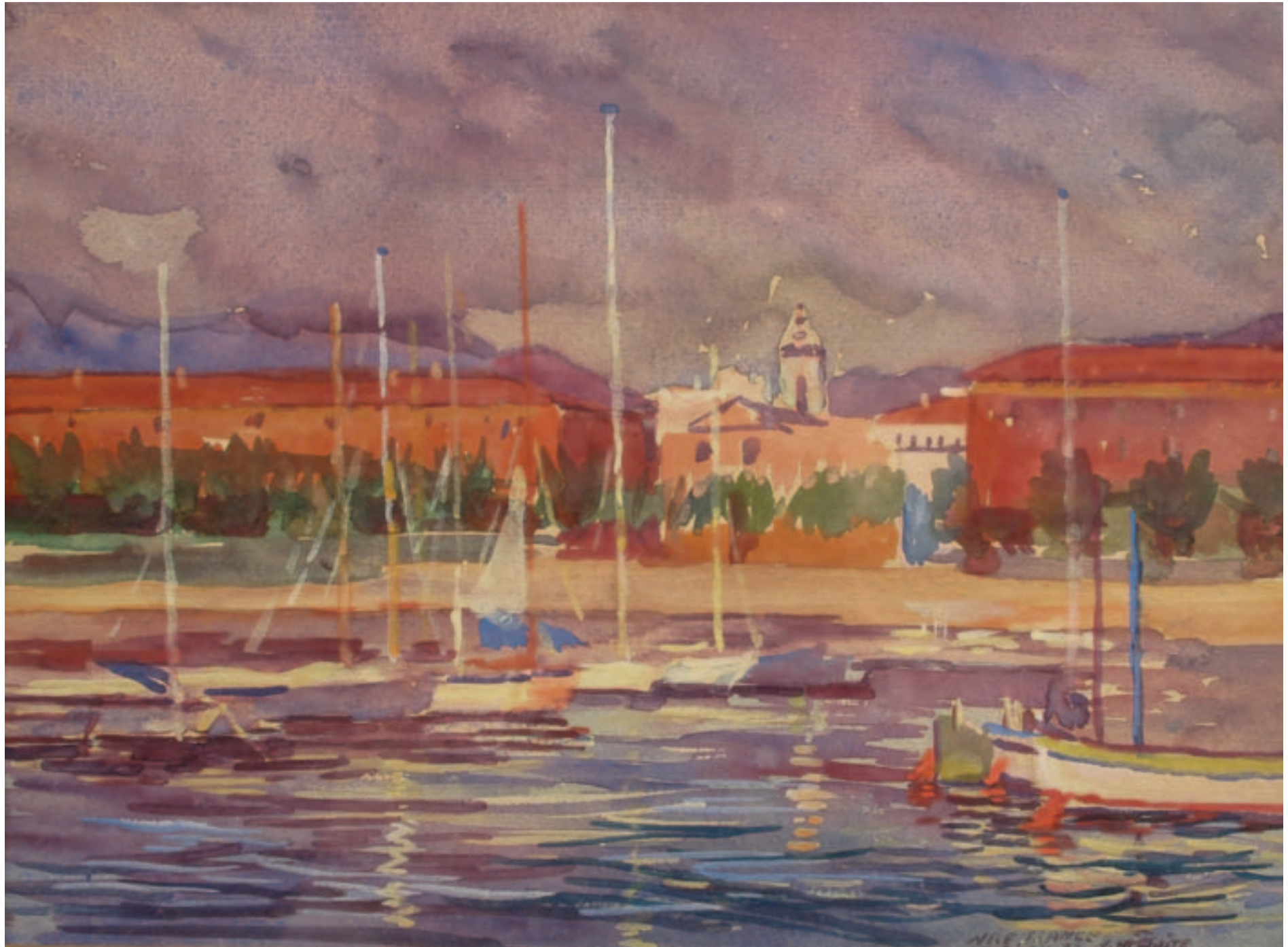
Oil on canvas, 2011



Venice

4 x 9 inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



Nice, France

9 x 16 inches

Watercolor, 1982



Healdsburg, California

4 x 9 inches

Oil on canvas, 2009



Sunset

4 x 9 inches

Oil on canvas, 2010



Mashomack Point

20 x 48 inches

Oil on canvas, 2010



Viareggio

4 x 11 inches

Oil on canvas, 2010



Nantucket Harbor

4 x 9 inches

Oil on canvas, 2005



Massarella, Italy 4 x 9 inches Oil on canvas, 2010



The Riviera Of Versilia 6 x 4 inches Oil on canvas, 2011



The Royal Palm 6 x 4 inches Oil on canvas, 2011



Sea and Sky, Nassau 4 x 9 inches Oil on canvas, 2011



Nassau, Bahamas

9 x 12 inches

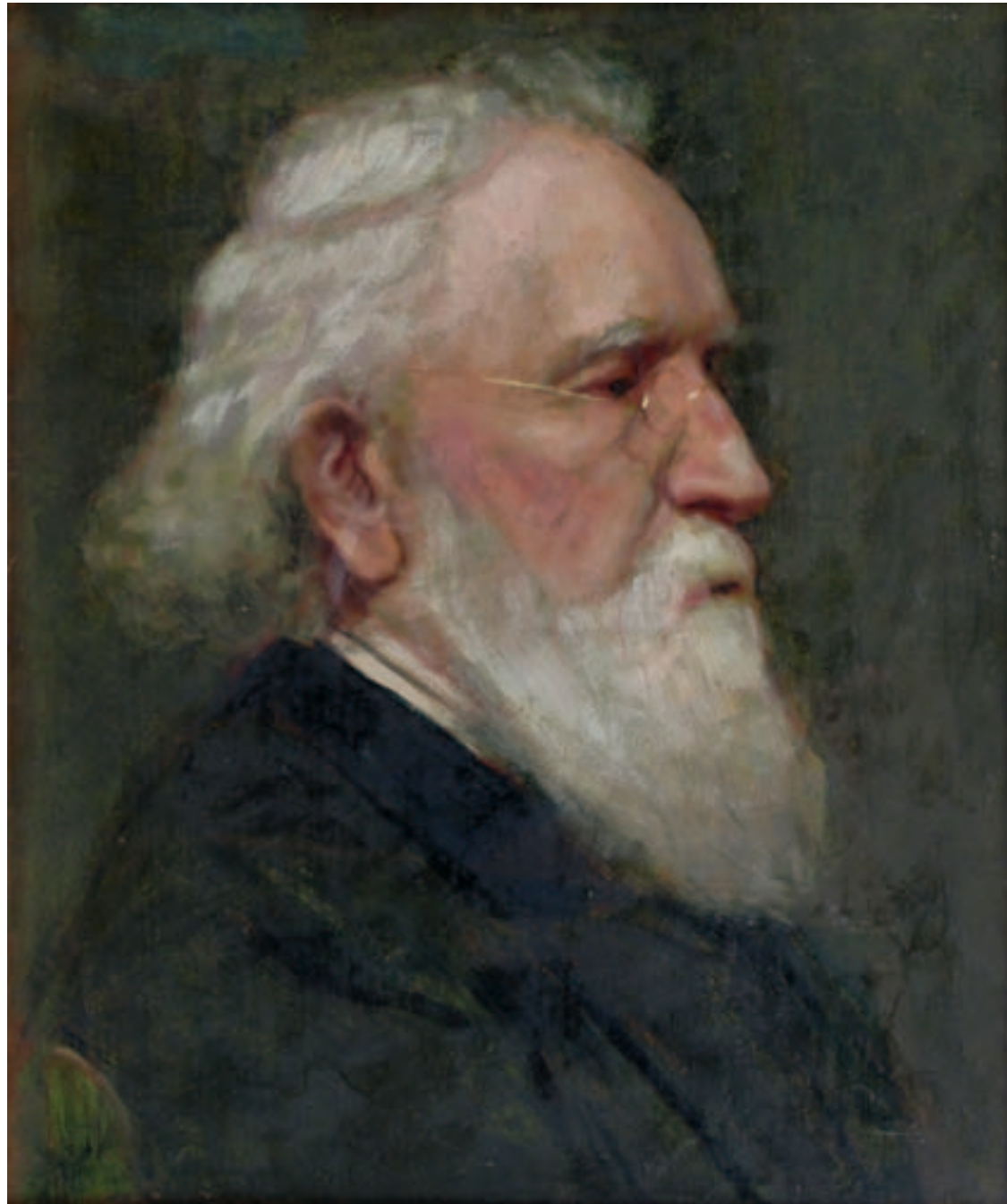
Oil on canvas, 2011



Sea and Sky

9 x 16 inches

Oil on canvas, 2011



The Old Man
by Henry Cooke White

17 x 14 inches

Oil on wood, 1878



Clearing After Storm - New London
by Henry Cooke White

18 x 24 inches

Oil on wood, ca. 1903



The Basin, Sterling Creek – Long Island, NY
by Nelson Cooke White

10 x 14 inches

Watercolor, 1927



The Peonies
by Nelson Cooke White

12 x 16 inches

Oil on wood, ca. 1930

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Henry Cooke White
(1861-1952)

The Old Man, 1878
Oil on wood, 17 x 14 inches

*Clearing After Storm -
New London*, ca. 1903
Oil on wood, 18 x 24 inches

Nelson Cooke White
(1900-1989)

*The Basin, Sterling Creek -
Long Island, NY*, 1927
Watercolor, 10 x 14 inches

The Peonies, ca. 1930
Oil on wood, 12 x 16 inches

Nelson Holbrook White
(b. 1932)

The Marsh – Waterford, CT,
ca. 1980
Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

Nice, France, 1982
Watercolor, 9 x 16 inches

*Dering Harbor -
Shelter Island, NY*, 1998
Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

Samedan, Switzerland, 1999
Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

The North Shore - Greenport, NY,
2001
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

Evening on the Dune, 2002
Pastel, 7¾ x 20 inches

The Dune Viareggio, 2002
Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches

Nantucket Harbor, 2005
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

The Fish, 2005
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches
Private Collection

The Farm, 2006
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

Healdsburg, California, 2009
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Kitching's Point, 2009
Oil on canvas, 12 x 20 inches

Bagno Artiglio, Viareggio, Italy,
2010
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

Haven, 2010
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches

Mashomack Point, 2010
Oil on canvas, 20 x 48 inches

Massarella, Italy, 2010
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Sunset, 2010
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Viareggio, 2010
Oil on canvas, 4 x 11 inches

Yellow Umbrella, 2010
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

Bagno La Salute – Viareggio, Italy,
2011
Oil on canvas, 40½ x 70¾ inches

Nassau, Bahamas, 2011
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches

Pond Lilies, 2011
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

The Poppy Field, 2011
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

The Riviera of Versilia, 2011
Oil on canvas, 6 x 4 inches

The Royal Palm, 2011
Oil on canvas, 6 x 4 inches

Sag Harbor, NY, 2011
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Sea and Sky, 2011
Oil on canvas, 9 x 16 inches

Sea and Sky, Nassau, 2011
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Sea and Sky, Viareggio, 2011
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

Self-Portrait, 2011
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches

Venice, 2011
Oil on canvas, 4 x 9 inches

*Due to spatial constraints of the gallery, some artworks listed in the catalogue may not appear in the exhibition.

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Opening Reception
Thursday, July 12, 2012
5:30 - 8:00 p.m.

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