Bulletin of the
Rhode Island School of Design

Issued Quarterly

Vol. II | OCTOBER, 1914 | No. 4

Miss LYDIA ALLEN — E. G. Malbone

Bequest of Mrs. H. B. Russell

MINIATURES BY MALBONE.

HORACE WALPOLE, in his discussion of Isaac Oliver, the English miniature-painter, makes the claim that "Hitherto we have been obliged to owe to other countries the best performances exhibited here (in England) in painting; but in the branch in which Oliver excelled we may challenge any nation to show a greater master — if perhaps we except a few of the smaller works of Holbein."* Such an emphasis on English miniature-painting is but natural on the part of an author who was so much interested in the arts of his country, but there is a great deal of truth in the statement. While the art finds its origin in the work in illumination of the previous ages, it was Holbein who laid the foundation in England for that interest in the possibilities of miniature-painting which characterized the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The history of English miniatures presents for consideration a long list of distinguished names in that special field, among these being N. Hilliard, Isaac Oliver, John Hoskins, Samuel Cooper, and Richard Cosway. The interest in this especial branch of artistic production found expression until the introduction of photography offered an easier and less expensive medium for portraiture.

* Horace Walpole, "Anecdotes of Painting," 1828, vol. i., p. 292.

MRS. ANN CRAWFORD ALLEN
By E. G. MALBONE
Bequest of Mrs. H. B. RUSSELL

L. P. S. By E. G. MALBONE
Bequest of Mrs. H. B. RUSSELL

While miniature-painting enjoyed such popularity in England it also was an important feature of the artistic expression of Germany, France, Holland and Flanders, and it was inevitable that the early colonists in America should be interested in the same way. The disturbed conditions in the colonies were hardly conducive to the development of much unusual talent in this direction, except in the case of Edward Greene Malbone (1777–1807). This artist possesses a marked interest for friends of art in Rhode Island through his being one of its native-born citizens, and to the world at large as being probably America's greatest miniature-painter.

Malbone was born in Newport, R. I., in August, 1777, and at an early age gave evidence of his interest in art. So rapid was his advance that in 1796 he was well-known in Boston as a miniature-painter. Here he formed that friendship with Washington Allston which proved so lasting. After four years in Boston, he went to the South, where he worked with encouraging success. This was followed

by a trip to London, where he worked in Benjamin West's studio with such fellow-students as Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull and Washington Allston. In this period he not only absorbed much from the studio-life about him, but learned much from the wealth of portrait-miniatures which were so popular at that time. Following some success in London in his chosen field, he returned to America, to meet his death from consumption on May 7, 1807, in Charleston, S. C.

Although the facts in the biography of the artist are well-known, they bear repetition since they throw so much light upon his training and his associates. Especially is it possible to infer from his London experience something of the way in which Malbone perceived the vital artistic factor in miniatures, that is, the power of simple rendering of character with sympathy and truthfulness. How well he succeeded in this is seen in the tribute paid to him by Washington Allston when he said, "He had the happy talent of elevating the character without impairing the likeness; this was remarkable in his male heads; no women ever lost any beauty from his hand; the fair would become still fairer under his pencil. To this he added a grace of execution all his own." With this in mind, it is interesting to turn to the miniatures by Malbone which are owned by the School of Design and observe the high standard of quality there shown.

In the important bequest received from Mrs. Hope Brown Russell, there were included three examples of Malbone's work, all of them of exceptional quality. The miniature illustrated on the first page is a careful portrait study of Miss Lydia Allen, a lady who interested Malbone very much, but who married Sullivan Dorr instead. Her son, Thomas Wilson Dorr, was well known as Governor of the state in 1841, and was the leading figure in the so-called "Dorr War." The portrait in question, in its carefulness of execution and its subtle treatment, possibly gives a hint of the rather more than usual bond of sympathy between artist and sitter. In the

GEORGE LONG By E. G. Malbone
Recent Gift

Russell room of the Colonial House there is also a large oil-painting of the same young lady by Malbone, which is exactly like the miniature in composition and color. This portrait is, however, unfinished, but it shows that Malbone was more successful in his miniatures.

The portrait of Mrs. Ann Crawford Allen, from the same source, is of equal merit. The lady was the mother of Miss Lydia Allen, and a grand-daughter of Major Crawford. This officer acquired considerable property in Providence in 1676. These two portrait-miniatures possess a great deal of interest, not only because they are extremely good examples of the work of America's finest miniature-painter, who came from Rhode Island, but also for the reason that so many of the old families of the state are directly connected with the charming subjects.

The third portrait is one which easily bears witness to the truth of the words of Allston, quoted above. Unfortunately, the School of Design is as yet unadvised of the identity of the lady, the only clew being the initials L. P. S. which are engraved in a monogram on the back.

The portrait of George Long is the latest addition to the miniatures in the possession of the museum. The person

delineated was one of considerable importance in the early days of the colonies. He was born in Portsmouth on July 4th, 1762, his father being Col. Pierse Long, Jr., who was a prominent merchant of Portsmouth, and who early allied himself with the Revolution. As a result of this he was one of the delegates to the first provincial Congress, which convened at Exeter. George Long was well-known as a successful shipmaster until 1789, when he retired to become a wealthy merchant. He died in 1849, at the age of eighty-seven. This recent acquisition is the gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke, and presents an example of Malbone's most finished work. In it, as in the others, we see the delicacy of touch, the easy rendering of line, the craftsman's technique and the softness of color which give his work distinction.

The four miniatures under consideration not only represent Malbone at his best, especially in his mastery of subtle flesh-toning and of the art of stippling, but they insure to the Museum a nucleus about which will probably be brought together in years to come other important examples of the early American period, both by Malbone and other masters of the art of miniature-painting. L. E. R.

GILBERT STUART AS A CRAFTSMAN.

THE works of Gilbert Stuart are peculiarly interesting to the student of the mechanics of painting, for the reason that his method was unique.

From contemporaneous accounts Stuart would appear to have been a decided character, witty, clever and altogether an interesting man. This account is surely borne out by the personal record left in his work for him who wishes to read. He did not care about anything except to paint a head, all other things in his portraits being merely accessories. This rule was rigidly adhered to with the exception of a few cases where the well-modeled arms and hands of a female sitter attracted him from his life work of painting heads. At other times, driven by the need of money, he accepted an order for an ambitious picture, such as the Washington on Dorchester Heights, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This painting is a splendid example of dexterous use of glaze color, but is open to criticism on certain grounds. One writer is not entirely wrong in insisting that the horse in the picture runs a close second to the famous Horse of Troy for "woodenness." Aside from that he finds much to admire in the picture. Stuart's daughter, an artist of considerable ability herself, tells us that the head of Washington in this picture was painted from the famous uncompleted head, and that the whole picture was done in nine working days.

There have been most curious accounts written of the technique of this man. We are informed that "Stuart never used glaze," and that he paid no attention to old pictures and did not consider or study them. This information, it would seem, is not of great value or importance, since he was the only American artist who ever mastered a true glazing method. It is beyond the bounds of possibility that any man alone and unaided could have reached the perfection of use of transparent color (glaze) which this man did. This method in his later works was almost identical with the method of some of the great Italians of the Renaissance. He must have admired and studied their technical perfection.

Stuart's first pictures were done in an opaque manner, just as portraits are painted to-day; that is, lead or zinc white was mixed with nearly all the colors and

In view of the unusual opportunity presented in the galleries at present to study the work of the early American painters, the Bulletin is glad to publish this article on Stuart, as presenting many points of new interest regarding Rhode Island's most distinguished artist. It also illustrates in a most helpful way the fact that there is a wealth of interest for the student and connoisseur in the study of the union of craftsmanship and artistic expression in American art as well as in European. The January issue will contain a more detailed treatment of Stuart's methods.— Ed.

the picture was more or less directly painted, an attempt being made from the very first to approximate the various colors and values of the face, hair or clothing as they appeared to the painter.

There was a transition period where he saw or thought he saw the error of his ways, and began to experiment with a top layer of transparent or semi-transparent color upon an opaque underground. There are left several portraits in which he had only a partial success in the mastery of his new "trick." These pictures are curious in that the effect is of a drawing in variously colored lines upon a warm monochrome-like foundation. The lines composing and modeling the features have sharp edges, and do not blend or fuse with the rest of the picture, but remain as a sort of superimposed line drawing.

Stuart developed a surety and directness of touch that was absolutely marvellous. He could produce a bit of lace with the fewest possible strokes, yet have the object as complete in its essentials as the most labored lace collar in a good Dutch portrait. It is possible that he was seeking some way to use this cleverness and surety, and left the direct method to develop a system of using glaze. However, he discovered or rediscovered a method of producing pictures combining the maximum of result with the minimum of effort. This system finally resulted in a beautiful soft and glowing bit of color while the features kept all the charm and decisive quality of any bit of painting or sculpture done on first impression.

There are varying moods shown in his work. Some portraits were most carefully and thoroughly done, every bit being made with elaborate caution, but in others he seems to have covered the surface of his canvas with the utmost ease and abandon, apparently finishing the pictures in three or four sittings. In these portraits his skill in the rapid, sure stroke may be most clearly seen.

His method finally developed so that the whole envelope of the face is simply drawn in fast sweeping strokes, yet these strokes do not have unpleasant edges or in fact any that are discernable. They merge into tones automatically, and we find the man modeling in pure color.

Stuart's position as an artist is far inferior to what it should be, because of the favorite task he set for himself, namely, painting a head alone. When he strayed from this somewhat narrow path the results were not always happy. One is forced to the conclusion that he did not take these strayings too seriously.

We venture the prediction that in time to come, when our artists again investigate method in painting, Stuart will be more highly considered as a painter, though even now his works are being sought after as those of an early and great master of America. H. E. T.

IN the death last June of William M. R. French, the Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, America has lost one of its noblest workers in the cause of art.

In the years since he became Director in 1878, the Art Institute has grown to realize the ideal of its founders to make it a "neighborhood center for all the people." Mr. French was the clear-headed executive in charge of its many activities. It has become the third of American museums in the value of its possessions. Its school numbers more than three thousand students. Its library is constantly used by a large number of visitors, and over 925,000 persons visited its collections and exhibitions in the past year.

To his ability as an executive Mr. French added great kindness and generosity to all who sought his help. In common with many other museums, the Rhode Island School of Design has many reasons to hold him in grateful remembrance.

A work of art is of little value except it springs from a natural and spontaneous emotion, that gives it a human quality. —Cyrus E. Dallin.

THE AMES COLLECTION OF VENETIAN GLASS.

THE recent gift to the School of Design from Mrs. Frank L. Mauran and Mr. John O. Ames of two hundred pieces of Venetian glass is one which should prove of interest to the many visitors to our galleries. The modern emphasis upon a complete union between the arts and the trades requires that every expression of such union be recognized and welcomed by the thinking citizens of to-day, especially when it is of a quality which warrants its exhibition in an art museum.

It is of special interest that this fine collection of Venetian glass should have been brought together by General William Ames. This noble citizen of Rhode Island was interested in all the good works of the state and was an earnest supporter and friend of the School of Design. Realizing what the institution and its work meant to the city and state, he always showed a spirit of enthusiasm and helpfulness which benefited not only the institution in general, but its students in particular. While preferring to work in a quiet way, he has given valuable service on several committees, and otherwise given evidence of his interest in many ways.

The gift of Mr. Ames' collection of glass by his children was doubtless determined to a large degree by the father's interest above mentioned. But the gift has another side which bespeaks a delicate appreciation of the difficulties which confront the museum of to-day. With a consideration somewhat unusual in donors of work of art interest, the gift was offered without condition, and with perfect freedom to the institution to use the material as it saw fit.

The study of the subject of glass is one that has much of interest in it for everyone, whether connoisseur or amateur collector. As one of the five materials from which have been created objects for household, table and decorative purposes, glass has received much attention from the arts for centuries. The presence of vitreous paste in Egypt on and before the twentieth century B. C. is proof of its use in antiquity. The countless bottles and dishes from Egyptian, Greek and Roman graves bear witness to the technical difficulties which were overcome, and the mastery over this ductile and viscous material in a heated state, while Early Christian and Byzantine craftsmen continued its use and experimented in their turn. The extraordinary demand in the Renaissance for objects of beauty was met with a corresponding increase in the manufacture of glass, but it remained for Venice to develop to a marked degree an industry for glass manufacture which added greatly to the wealth and prestige of the city.

The Venetian archives have yielded evidence which has cast much light on the guild of glass-workers and the development of the furnaces on the island of Murano where most of the Venetian glass was made. It has been shown that Venice was famous for this industry for at least seven hundred years, but it was in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the highest standards of quality and design were sought for. The eighteenth century finds a very great decline in the quality of material, decoration and workmanship, but in the early nineteenth century, Signor Antonio Salviati became the leader of a revived interest in this branch of art, and since his time Venice has again become noted as a center for the production of glass of merit. As might be expected from their intimate connections with the Eastern Mediterranean, the Venetians learned much from the Syrians, and their ware was distinctly a "soda-glass." To this the glass-workers of Murano have clung for centuries, while it remained for Northern Europe, especially England, to develop the other type, "flint," or "lead-glass."

During the height of the period of production we find the Venetians developing many varieties of shape and texture-treatment which gave distinction to their work. Among these is the "Cristallo" or clear-white, the frosted or crackle, the "Latti-

VENETIAN GLASS. Nineteenth Century AMES COLLECTION
Gift of Mrs. FRANK L. MAURAN and Mr. JOHN O. AMES

cinio" or milk-white opaque glass, the "Vetro di Trina," or lace glass, and the "Calcedonio" or opalized glass. To these must be added the ruby and blue glass, and the imitation of classical ceramics and Roman millefiori glass. It must also be borne in mind that the clear glass was produced in many colors and that numberless varieties of surface-treatment such as effects of gilding and appliqué of moulded decoration were developed. This latter is perhaps the most dangerous of them all, for with a facile material at hand the tendency was in the direction of over-decoration. Flower and animal forms received plastic shape until in some cases the vases have lost their original purpose and are but examples of the ability of the workman to imitate form.

It is to be expected that in the revival of interest in the production of Venetian glass which is noted above as beginning in the early part of the nineteenth century, the workmen should study the achievements of their predecessors at Murano, should emulate their achievements, and that their productions should bear the same characteristics. It might even be stated that in the matter of over-decoration, in many cases, the glass-workers of Venice of the last century apparently tried to surpass the craftsmen of the past. Fortunately, however, considerable emphasis was laid upon the production of practical vases of quiet but dignified form, of beauty of surface-treatment, and excellence of material.

The Ames collection merits detailed study in that it is a well-rounded group, with nearly all of the principal types of Venetian glass to be found there. In date, practically all of the examples in the collection are nineteenth century, although several may be eighteenth. In view of the extreme difficulty of securing authentic examples of Venetian glass of the finest period, owing to the fact that the best have already found permanent homes in the European museums, there is a relatively small opportunity for the collector to secure many of the earlier examples.

With this in mind, the value of the Ames

collection becomes even more apparent, especially in view of the fact that the School of Design possesses so many examples of the English lead-glass for comparison. Not only is the technical skill there shown reminiscent of the master craftsmen of Venice in her glory, but it retains a great deal of that quality which influenced Thomas Coryat in 1611 to write of Murano as the place "where they make their delicate Venice glasses, as famous over al christendome for the incomparable fineness there of." L. E. R.

The Bulletin of the
Rhode Island School of Design
Providence

All communications should be addressed to the General Editor, Mr. L. Earle Rowe.

Entered as second-class matter January 16, 1913, at the post office at Providence, Rhode Island, under the Act of August 24, 1912.

ADMISSIONS.

Hours of Opening.— The galleries are open to the public on every day of the year, with the exception of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and the Fourth of July. From July 1st to September 15th the hours are from 1 to 5 P. M. on week days and from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays; from September 15th to July 1st the hours are from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. week days and from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays. The Pendleton Collection is open from 2 to 5 P. M. daily.

Twenty-five cents admission to the museum is charged on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the museum is free on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Free transferable tickets admitting four persons on pay-days are sent to all members of the corporation. Art students and artists, on application to the authorities, may obtain free tickets of admission for pay-day. Teachers with pupils of both public and private schools will be admitted without payment upon application.

PUBLICATIONS.

Four quarterly bulletins are issued and are sent free of charge to the members, and, on written request, to alumni of the institution.

The year-book of the school containing detailed information regarding its many activities, and presenting conditions of admission and a list of the courses given in its several departments, will be forwarded free of charge to prospective students and others who are interested in the institution and its work.

COPYING.

Permission to copy or photograph in the galleries of the museum may be obtained in the office. Such permits will not be issued for Sundays or legal holidays.

LIBRARY.

The Library contains 2,461 volumes, 13,500 mounted photographs and reproductions, 1,404 lantern slides, and about 1,066 postcards. During the months of June, July and August the library is closed.