

https://www.tribstar.com/news/indiana_news/renoir-comes-to-the-swope-show-highlights-impressionisms-influence-on-indiana-artists/article_37e7f319-5c11-5706-9a95-2f95a7450afb.html

FEATURED

TOPICAL

Renoir comes to The Swope; show highlights Impressionism's influence on Indiana artists

Museum welcomes new curator

By Steve Kash

Special to the Tribune-Star

Dec 4, 2021



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza Featured artwork: Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "Flowers in a Yellow Vase" hangs in one of the galleries at the Swope Art Museum on Nov. 26. It will be the featured artwork for the museum's show, "Renoir and the Hoosier Impressionists."

JOSEPH C. GARZA



An original piece of work from one of the most famous painters in the world will highlight The Swope Art Museum's exhibition of impressionist artwork, now through May.

On Friday night, The Swope hosted an enthusiastic crowd for its opening reception of the large exhibition. Most paintings are the works of famous Indiana artists influenced by the French Impressionist art philosophy of the late 1800s. But the show's featured artwork is an original impressionist oil painting by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, on loan to the museum by Kathi Conforti, a former Terre Haute resident.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza You'll see it in the show: Curator Amy MacLennan displays Susan Ketcham's "Young Student" at the Swope Art Museum on Nov. 26. Ketcham's work will be part of the upcoming show, "Renoir and the Hoosier Impressionists."

JOSEPH C. GARZA

Renoir was a French impressionist with a loose and free — seemingly alive-with-light — style that enabled him to make exquisite oil paintings, particularly of women, using vibrant brushstrokes to create splendid touches of color. Renoir oil canvases are on display in the world's finest museums. His artworks are among the most reproduced paintings of all time.

Impressionism is a technique painters use to communicate their direct impression of a moment or scene by the way they paint light and its reflection with short brushstrokes. The style projects a distinctive, almost mystical sensation of colors.

The Swope show's Renoir is titled "Flowers in a Yellow Vase." The name accurately describes his painting's character. The artist painted this piece in 1898. He was 57 and already widely renowned for his genius. Unfortunately for Renoir, this year was personally difficult as he had begun suffering from gout. Sometimes gout prevented him from holding paintbrushes in his hand. His assistants had to tie them to his hands so he could paint.

Notwithstanding, some of Renoir's 1898-'99 paintings have become among his most iconic

artworks, though he had difficulty going on location with easel and brushes to paint in natural settings — a key element of French impressionist artists' technique.

Renoir did at least three flower-in-vase compositions in studio settings in 1898. Always attentive to the positioning of shapes and perspectives, he is esteemed for his knack for adding simple but exquisite flourishes to his paintings.

“Flowers in a Yellow Vase” was purchased in Paris before 1900 by Ambroise Vollard. Subsequent owners displayed the piece at exhibitions with other European impressionist master painters, first in Montreal; later, in London and New York City (1940).

Mary Fendrich Hulman, the wife of Tony Hulman, purchased the painting in 1954 for display in her home on South Sixth Street in Terre Haute. Fendrich Hulman was Conforti's grandmother. While growing up, when she visited her grandmother's home, Conforti saw “Flowers in a Yellow Vase.”

Conforti grew up in Terre Haute, attended city schools, and often went to the Swope with her grandmother, who was on the museum's board of directors. On these occasions, during board meetings, she walked around the museum, browsing the collection of American Regionalism art featuring paintings by artists like Edward Hopper, Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton.

Later in life Fendrich Hulman moved to Indianapolis, took along “Flowers in a Yellow Vase,” and housed it in the family's vault at the Indianapolis 500 Museum for more than 20 years. When Fendrich Hulman passed away, she willed the Renoir painting to her only child, Conforti's mother, Mari Hulman George. When Hulman George died in 2018, her four children decided how to share her personal property.





Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza Part of the show: Swope Art Museum Curator Amy MacLennan talks about John Ottis Adams' painting of a peasant girl and how it will be part of the upcoming "Renoir and the Hoosier Impressionists" show at the museum on Nov. 27.

JOSEPH C. GARZA

Conforti's strong interest in art influenced her to select the Renoir, but she decided against transporting it immediately to her home in California, where she lives with her husband and works as a graphic designer. A friend of Conforti's in Terre Haute suggested she give people in the Wabash Valley an opportunity to enjoy the Renoir painting before shipping it to her California home. Conforti liked the idea and planned in late 2020 with the Swope's Executive Director Fred Nation to hold the painting at the museum until it could be displayed. She also had a Chicago specialist in painting restoration do touch-up work on the painting.

Impressionism's influence on Indiana artists

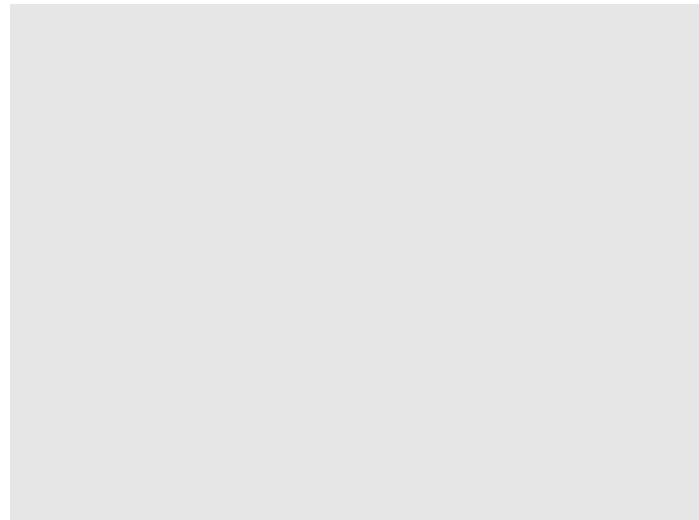
In the summer of 2021, Amy MacLennan applied to become the Swope's new curator. At the time she was an art professor at McKendree University in Illinois and director of the McKendree University Gallery of Art. Originally from Terre Haute, MacLennan wanted to relocate to her hometown and the city where she had lived with her husband, artist Michael Neary.

During MacLennan's hiring process, Nation informed her that if she accepted the curator job, one of her first responsibilities would be organizing an art show featuring "Flowers in a Yellow Vase." He left it for her to decide what art would accompany Renoir's painting in an exhibition.

How best to organize an appropriate art show in Terre Haute around a painting by one of the world's most famous artists? One way the Renoir painting challenged MacLennan was that the Swope is an American art museum and does not have works by renowned French impressionist painters like Claude Monet and Edgar Degas that would fit nicely in a show with "Flowers in a

Yellow Vase.”

When the museum’s original collection was acquired by John Rogers Cox in 1942, during his buying trip to New York City, instead of purchasing a few pricey masterworks by famous European artists, he chose a different strategy and used the funds left in Sheldon Swope’s will establishing a free-to-the-public art museum to purchase the more affordable paintings of talented up-and-coming American regionalism painters like Hopper, Wood and Hart Benton. In the coming years, Cox’s art instincts were proven correct. The most gifted emerging artists whose works he collected for the Swope’s grand opening in 1942 were destined to become as famous as French impressionists.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza Art appreciation: Amy MacLennan is the new Swope Art Museum curator. Here, she stands in front of the Diana statue at the museum on Nov. 27.

JOSEPH C. GARZA

“I thought a lot about what would make an appropriate Swope art show to go with Renoir’s painting,” MacLennan said, “and I decided to use this opportunity to show the public how the painting techniques of Renoir, like other prominent impressionist artists of that era, influenced Indiana artists who lived at the same time as Renoir. Several Indiana artists who learned impressionist techniques became celebrated in the art world by using impressionism in pictures of nature scenes they painted in Indiana.”

The Swope has a strong collection of paintings by some of Indiana’s most outstanding artists. The museum has also curated a bevy of art by painters who came to Indiana in search of artistically promising settings. These artists found many good scenes in the Hoosier state’s fields, forests, ponds and waterways — including an outstanding Indiana Dunes seashore painting by Blanche Canfield Bruce (1880-1945), who though born in Minnesota, often came to Indiana on painting expeditions.

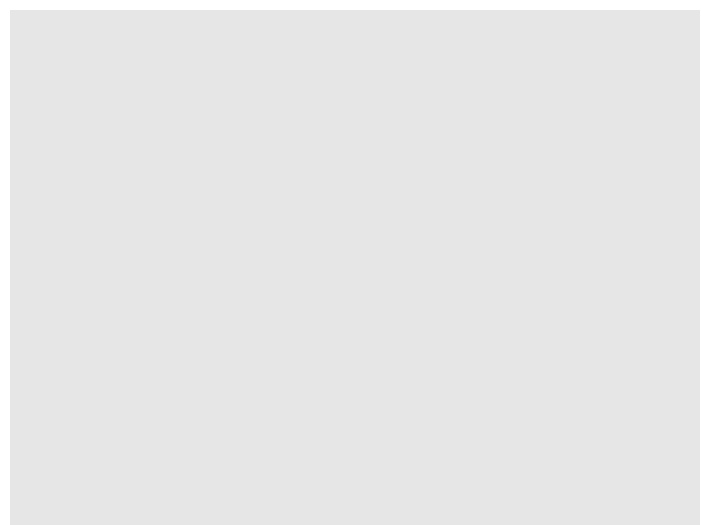
Another prominent American artist whose work will be displayed at the Renoir show — Lilla Cabot Perry (1848-1933) — studied impressionism with Monet. Cabot Perry played an important role in introducing Impressionist style to America. Her painting, “The Harvest,” is considered one

of the finest examples of Impressionist style in the Swope's collection.

All but one painting in the exhibition, in addition to the Renoir, are part of the Swope's collection. On loan from the Indianapolis Museum of Art is "The Canal — Morning Effect," a Richard Gruelle painting considered his masterwork. This picture shows the Indianapolis canal from the vantage point of the south side of Miller Park. Indiana's statehouse and other features of the Indianapolis skyline are in the background behind the canal.

Five Indiana impressionists who worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are known as the "Hoosier Group": T.C. Steele, Gruelle (his son Johnny wrote "Raggedy Ann"), William Forsyth, J Ottis Adams and Otto Stark came from various backgrounds. All but Gruelle went to Europe to study art as impressionism was becoming a phenomenon. Most enrolled in the early- and mid-1880s at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, but Stark, who was from Indianapolis, became interested in Impressionism when he studied in Paris.

The irony of art world trends happened in the decade after the Hoosier Group men moved home to Indiana. As these men popularized impressionism's techniques in the American Midwest, French and European artists trended away from impressionism to neo-impressionist, and later cubism and other painting styles not emphasizing a subject's beauty. Yet, even as impressionism's popularity faded in Europe, it remained strong in Indiana and the Midwest.



Tribune-Star/Joseph C. Garza The art is in good hands: Amy MacLennan holds Anthony Buchta's "Endless Acres of Field and Heaven" on Nov. 26 at the Swope Art Museum.

JOSEPH C. GARZA

Some "Hoosier Group" artists whose impressionist art is displayed at the Swope exhibition passed on artistic legacies still making an impact in 2021.

Forsyth (1854-1935), who entered the art academy in Munich in 1882, returned to Indiana and inspired many young artists with his teaching. He was instrumental in founding the Herron School of Art in Indianapolis. Throughout his life he loved traveling around Indiana looking for good sites where he might set up his easel and paint outside in nature instead of in the confines of his studio. A favorite Forsyth

destination was Brown County.

Often considered the best spokesman for the creative spirit of the Hoosier Group, Forsyth wrote the essay “Art In Indiana,” for Indiana’s centennial celebrations in 1916: "...To live out-of-doors in intimate touch with nature, to feel the sun, to watch the ever-changing face of the landscape, where waters run and winds blow and trees wave and clouds move, and to walk with all hours of the day and into the mysteries of night through all the seasons of the year — this is the heaven of the Hoosier Painter!"

Steele (1847-1926), perhaps Indiana’s best-known artist, has paintings in the Swope’s collection, and his art is prominently exhibited in the gallery room showing Renoir’s “Flowers in a Yellow Vase.”

One hundred years ago, the genius of Steele’s paintings influenced artists from Indiana and the Midwest to join him in what is now called the Brown County Art Colony. By the time Steele made his way to Brown County, its colorful hills, valleys and forests were scenic attractions but relatively few people had traveled there. Steele was the first Hoosier Group painter to build a cabin in Brown County’s Peaceful Valley. For Steele, this valley was a virtual artist’s Eden where he would come across many promising settings for nature paintings. Eventually, at least 18 Impressionist artists from Indiana and beyond established permanent residences near Steele’s cabin. They offered artworks for sale in Nashville area galleries. Paintings by the Brown County Art Colony transformed Nashville from a sleepy little country town into one of Indiana’s foremost tourist destinations.

“People like to take pride in the place where they live,” said MacLennan, “The beauty of the art we are displaying in our exhibition with Renoir’s picture will make people proud of the natural beauty that can be found here in Indiana.”

The Swope renovated its first-floor gallery for the Renoir-inspired exhibition. The unique parquet floor in the downstairs reception area and galleries has been restored. The room’s walls have been painted a foggy gray to help bring out colors in paintings.

“We believe this is one of the more impressive exhibitions ever put on by the Swope,” said MacLennan. “If civic, school or church groups want guided tours describing Renoir’s painting and the Indiana impressionist art we are exhibiting, we will oblige them.”

The museum is located at 25 S. Seventh St. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Admission is always free. For more information, visit Swope.org.

TRENDING VIDEO

Tribune-Star Events

 [See All Events](#) [+ Add your event](#)

Mon, Dec 06

Mon, Dec 06

Mon, Dec 06

Mon, Dec 06



**Indiana State University
Surplus Website**
Indiana State University

**Live Jazz & Open Mic at
The Verve**
The Verve

**Live Jazz from *:30 -
10:30 followed by Open...**
The Verve

AIAnon Support Group
Enter on the east side...



MON
6

TUE
7

WED
8

THU
9

FRI
10

SAT
11

SUN
12

MON
13

TUE
14

WED
15

THU
16

FRI
17