



The Gift of Art

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November 2 – December 14, 2003

The Sordoni Art Gallery at Wilkes University, established in 1973 and named for the late Andrew J. Sordoni, former State senator from Northeastern Pennsylvania and influential businessman, was founded on a gift of art, specifically a group of paintings from the Senator's private collection. Included in this gift were funds earmarked for the acquisition of additional works, ensuring that the Gallery would be able to continue to expand and enrich its holdings. Since then, the Sordoni Art Gallery, at the very heart of the academic mission of Wilkes University and rich cultural resource for the entire surrounding community, has amassed a permanent collection of around 1,300 objects, including European and American works on paper from the seventeenth century to the present; European art from the nineteenth century; a small collection of American decorative arts; and American paintings from the nineteenth century to the present. Nearly seventy percent of the collection has come as gifts from friends and donors carrying on the Senator and his family's founding vision to acquire, preserve and interpret works of art of the highest quality for this community. As we mark this thirtieth year of our founding, we could think of no better way to celebrate than with this special exhibition highlighting some of the finest examples of the collection and honoring some of our many friends and supporters.



George Luks, *Beggar Woman*, n.d., oil on canvas, Gift of Dr. & Mrs. Sanford B. Sterlieb

The Sordoni Art Gallery 1973–2003



Exhibition installation photograph: Jon Carsman: *Rhythm, Movement, Energy*, 2003

EXHIBITION UNDERWRITERS

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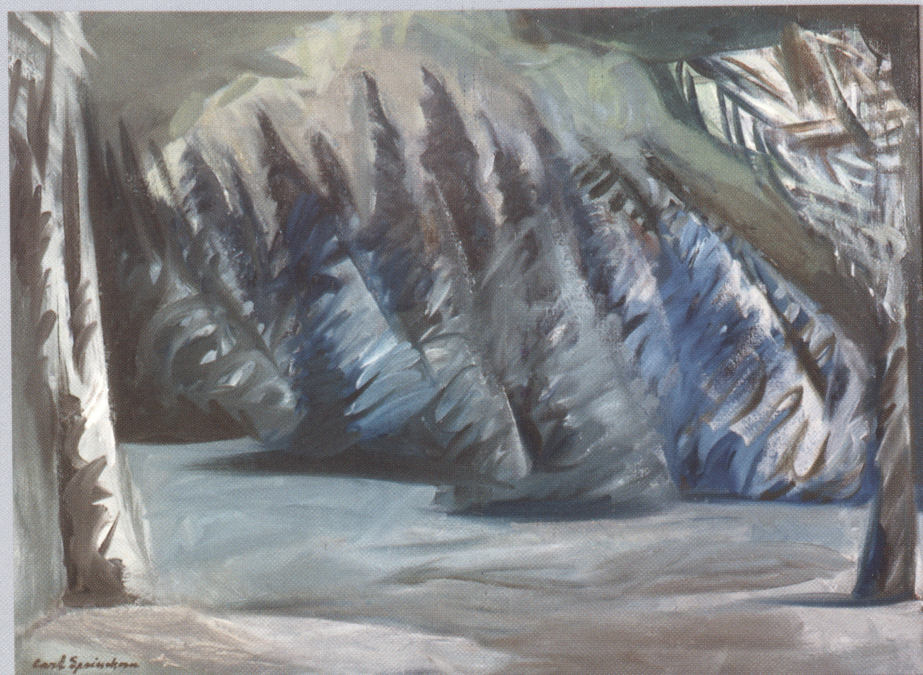
Exhibition curated by
Ronald R. Bernier, Ph.D., Director, and
Karen Evans Kaufer, Associate Director

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Carl Sprinchorn, *The Blizzard*, 1941, oil on canvas, Gift of Dr. & Mrs. Joseph M. Klein

The Sordoni's permanent collection is, like that of other college or university art museums, eclectic, and pleasingly idiosyncratic, and the works we have selected to highlight these past three decades tell an interesting story. The collection as a whole was shaped as much by the individual tastes of the Gallery's friends and supporters as by its administrative leadership over the years. These private collectors are, for the most part, native or long-term residents of this region, or individuals who otherwise have a special connection to the area. Our collection, as a result, is unique, and, as we began to mine its riches for this project, it proved a steady source of discovery, much of which promises rich opportunities for research, study and enjoyment for years to come. And this is appropriate, as we are, first and foremost, a teaching institution, an educational resource not only for our own resident scholars—faculty and students—but for learners of all ages, interests, and backgrounds that make up our community.

While the collection is indeed diverse, there is a consistent theme that runs throughout. Appropriately setting the tone is George Catlin, Wilkes-Barre native and subject of the Sordoni Art Gallery's premier exhibition thirty years ago. Catlin was one of this country's preeminent American Naturalist painters, transcribing in exacting detail the dignified life and customs of Native American culture. The Sordoni, in fact, has a defining commitment to the tradition of Realism in American art and its many permutations, not the least of which is represented in this exhibition by the distinctive early twentieth-century style of the *Ashcan School*, so named for its unglamorous realism and a subject matter rooted in the grimy vernacular of modern American life. Known collectively as *The Eight*, this group of young rebels, frustrated by the rigidities of the National Academy of Design and its fossilized jury system, and following in the nineteenth-century footsteps of Courbet, Manet, and the Impressionists, scandalized the public with their first and only independent group exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery in New York in 1908, led by Robert Henri and including those artists represented in this exhibition: John Sloan, William Glackens, and George Luks. Their influence continues to be felt in the later work of Bertram Hartman, here in his *No. 1 Wall Street* of 1929, and the recently acquired lithograph, *The Young Smoker*, by Alexander Kruse, protégé of Sloan and Luks.

The lessons of Europe are also in evidence in the Impressionist-inspired canvases of Childe Hassam, Walter Schofield, and Carl Sprinchorn, who, through the time-honored tradition of landscape, explore the complexities of a unique American identity. Fascination with both the figure and nature continue in some of the more recent work by artists like Jimmy Ernst, John Heliker, Philip Pearlstein, and Seymour Lipton. At the same time, the Sordoni is strongly represented by such icons of European Modernism as Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, Pierre Bonnard, Salvador Dalí, and American expatriates, John Singer Sargent and James Abbot McNeil Whistler, in smaller, more intimate works on paper.

While the Sordoni Art Gallery's exhibition program aims to introduce audiences to the broadest range of styles and historical periods, American Realism—in its many forms and interpretations—continues to be our strength and abiding interest. The first major exhibition of this anniversary year, by Wilkes College alumnus, Jon Carsman—*Rhythm, Movement, Energy*—is testimony to this commitment. Indeed, the Sordoni figures within the top ranks of galleries nationally that specialize in this indigenous realist style.

Today, through a vital and ambitious year-round exhibition schedule which features artists of regional, national, and international reputation, and through a commitment to education—both on and off-campus—the Sordoni Art Gallery is proud to have sustained and enhanced its founding vision and to maintain its reputation as a professionally recognized and respected center for the study and appreciation of visual art. And we continue to seek different and innovative ways to expand our public dimension by becoming ever more inclusive and accessible, a place that welcomes and serves multiple and diverse audiences. For students, faculty, and members of the community—for patrons of all ages, backgrounds, and interests—the Sordoni Art Gallery is a different kind of classroom—a place for active looking, talking, learning, thinking, and enjoying. And it is, above all else, a generosity of spirit that has built this unique identity and reputation. We look forward with excitement and a sense of renewed challenge to the next thirty years.

Ronald R. Bernier, Ph.D.
Director
October 2003



Bertram Hartman, *No. 1 Wall Street*, 1929, oil on canvas, Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

SORDONI ART GALLERY



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