

REMEMBERING HELEN

The Sordoni Art Gallery at Thirty-Five

AUGUST 15 - OCTOBER 5, 2008



John Sloan, *Helen in Green*, 1947, tempera and oil glazes on masonite, purchase 1985.2

Inspired

"Inspired educator, accomplished artist, patron of the arts, and remarkable American philanthropist." This is how the *New York Times* summed up the extraordinary life of Helen Farr Sloan in her obituary of December 30, 2005. Add to this profile: devoted supporter and long-time benefactor of the Sordoni Art Gallery at Wilkes University. This exhibition, *Remembering Helen*, honors the memory and generosity of this special friend of the Sordoni Art Gallery, nationally respected center for the study of art named for former State senator from Northeastern Pennsylvania, the late Andrew J. Sordoni.

Helen Farr was born in New York on February 24, 1911, the daughter of Charles Farr, a New York surgeon and Helen Woodhull, who had studied art before marriage. An uncle, Professor Hollon A. Farr, head of the German department at Yale University, encouraged Helen's early interest in art. Graduated from The Brearley School for Girls in 1929, and having studied anatomy at Cornell University Medical school, in addition to taking classes in ceramics, metalwork, wood carving, weaving and jewelry making at the Crafts Students League, Helen enrolled at the New York Students Art League in 1927 at the precocious age of 16. It was there that she first met and studied with celebrated icon of American art, John Sloan (1871-1955), who became her lifelong friend, mentor, and, years later in 1944, her husband. In 1939, Helen, ever the

Helen Farr Sloan standing before a painting by John Sloan, c.1975
image courtesy of the Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum

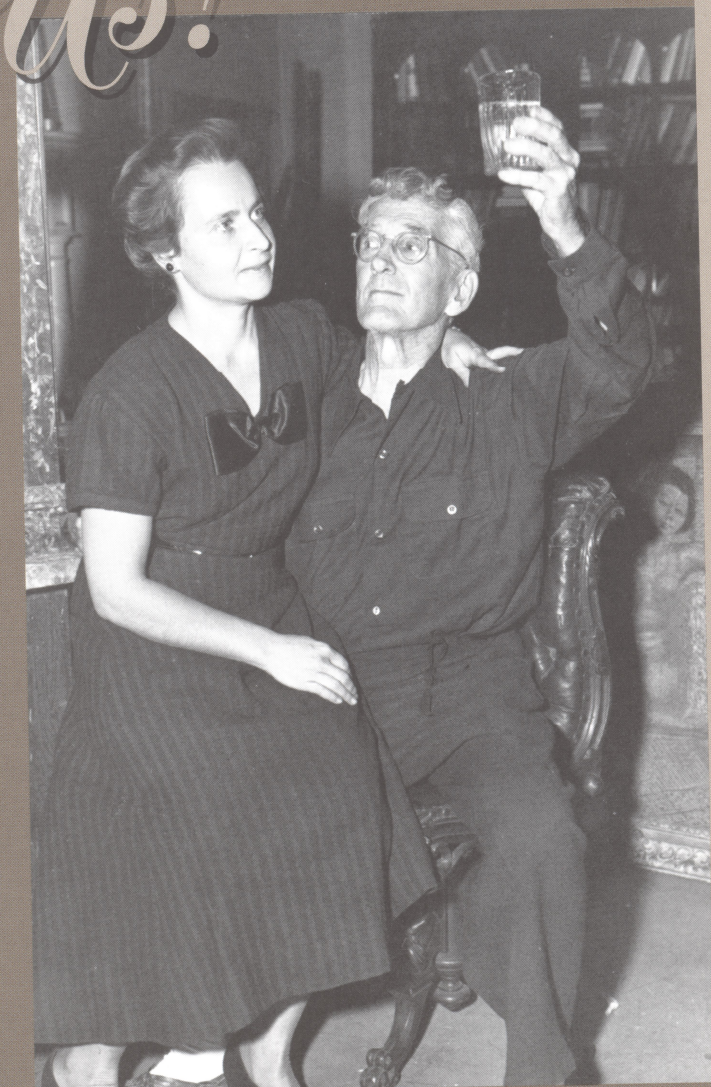
Join Us!

Remembering Helen: The Sordoni Art Gallery at Thirty-Five.

August 15- October 5, 2008

Opening reception:
Friday, August 15, 5-8 p.m.
Third Friday!

Sordoni Art Gallery
Wilkes University
150 South River Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766
Tel 570-408-4325
Fax 570-408-7733
wilkes.edu/sordoniartgallery
Gallery Hours: Noon – 4:30 p.m., daily.



Helen Farr and John Sloan, c.1938
image courtesy of the Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum



George Luks, *High Tide at Luchow's*, c.1944, oil on board, gift of Helen Farr Sloan 1987.8 (detail)

devoted student, had published the many notes from her teacher's studio instructions and classroom philosophies in *The Gist of Art*, still the unrivaled text for scholars and enthusiasts of Sloan's aesthetic. In 1944, on a trip to Santa Fe to visit her mentor who was then recuperating from ill health and the death of his first wife, Dolly, the previous year, the 33-year old Helen proposed to the painter forty years her senior, "think about marrying me." She further recalls: "On the morning I was due to return to school, the phone rang, and he said he had seen a great light the night before and talked things over with his housekeeper – and wanted me to go back to New York as Mrs. John Sloan."

After Sloan's death in 1955, Helen returned to a teaching career, continued to paint, and devoted her remaining years to supporting research about her husband and his preeminent role in American art history, and to distributing his estate and contents of his studio and library to various institutions nationally - a treasure

trove of philanthropic giving. Among the recipients of her generosity were the University of Delaware, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Gallery of Art, the New York Historical Society, the Boston Film and Video Foundation, and the Sordoni Art Gallery. Beginning in 1961, and continuing throughout her life, Helen Farr Sloan developed an especially close relationship with the Delaware Art Museum, and it is because of her gifts and scholarships that over the years the DAM has received more than 5,000 works representing every stage of Sloan's career, making the DAM the leading repository for the study of John Sloan and turn-of-the-century American realism.

At Wilkes Helen was appointed as one of the original members of the newly instituted Sordoni Art Gallery Advisory Commission. Since its inception the Gallery has built a noteworthy permanent collection of more than 1,200 works of art which span historically from the 17th century to the present, a significant portion of which is the direct result of Helen Farr Sloan's



Violet Oakley, *Sarah Logan*, n.d., conte crayon on paper, gift of Helen Farr Sloan 1986.6.44



Helen Farr Sloan painting a portrait of John Sloan in Santa Fe in 1944, image courtesy of the Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum

generosity and her leading position in the history of American art. More than 300 objects – paintings, sculptures, and works on paper – have entered the collection as gifts and bequests from Helen or as purchases and gifts made by friends and associates in her honor. A particular strength of that collection, examples of which are on view in this exhibition, is artwork from the so-called Ashcan School. Named for a group of disaffected artists who had worked at the turn of the 20th-century as artist-reporters in Philadelphia, these young men, upon moving to New York City, used their talent for rapid on-the-spot sketching to depict scenes of modern everyday life, often the seedier side of slum life and gritty reality. Known collectively as "The Eight," these young painter rebels, led by John Sloan, had been frustrated by the conservatism of then-current art instruction at the National Academy of Design where artistic experimentation was discouraged, and where they were often excluded from official public exhibition. Scandalizing the public in 1908 with their first and

only independent group exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery in New York City, these "moderns" included those artists represented here: John Sloan, William Glackens, Everett Shinn, and George Luks. Their leadership at the vanguard in American art is felt in their influence on and mentorship of many of the other artists in this exhibition.

Helen Farr Sloan's interests as a collector were many and varied, and the legacy of her vision is marked in this exhibition which pays tribute to both her memory and her important role in this 35-year achievement in exhibition and art education at the Sordoni Art Gallery. We could think of no better way to observe this significant milestone in the history of this cherished institution than a celebration of the many contributions from Helen herself and from those who, over the past three and a half decades, inspired by her generosity and spirit, have wished to honor her with gifts of their own.

Ronald R. Bernier, Ph.D.
August 2008

On December 13, 2005, at the age of 94, Helen Farr Sloan (1911-2005), passed away in Wilmington, DE.

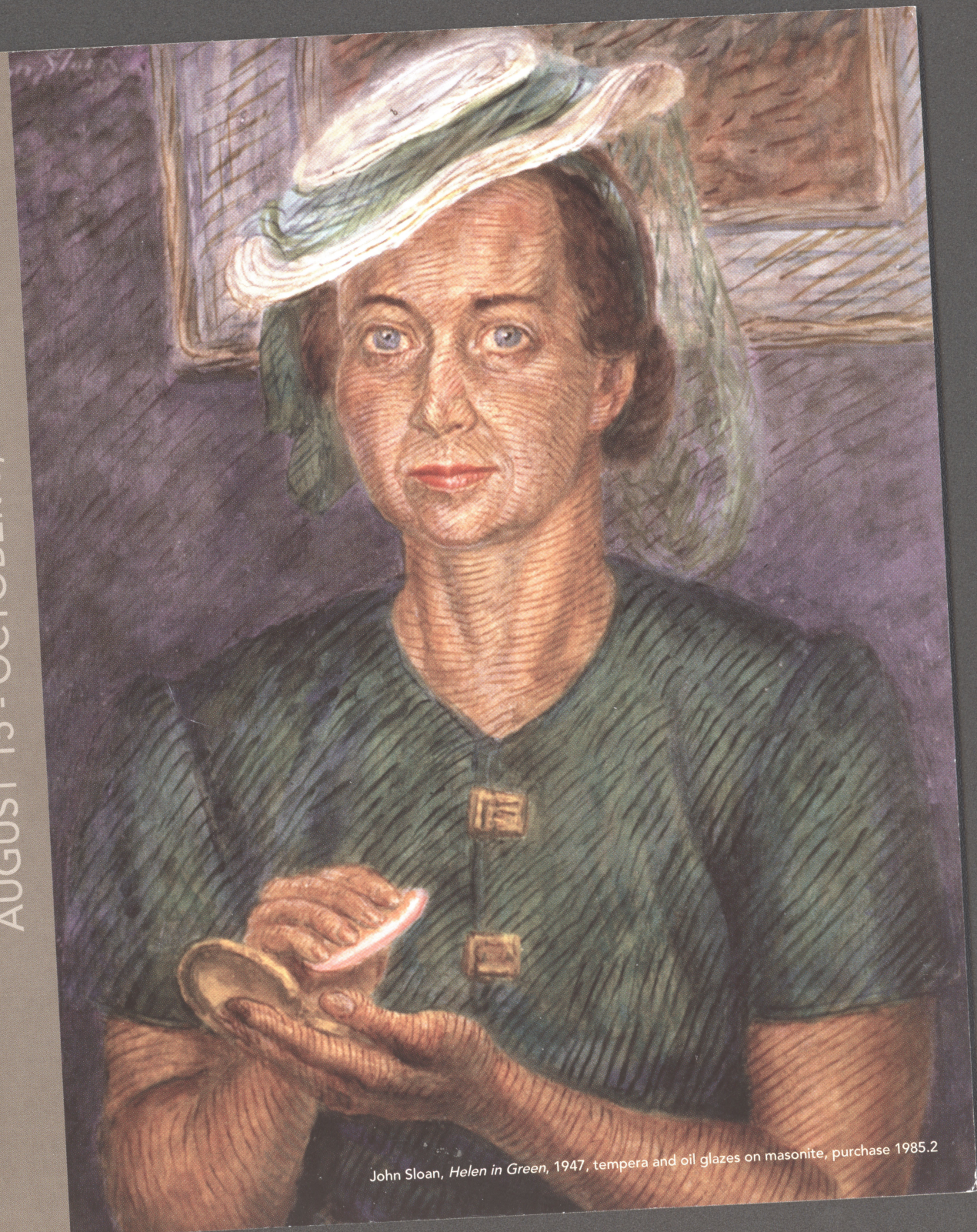


Helen Farr Sloan, n.d. image courtesy of the Helen Farr Sloan Library, Delaware Art Museum

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SORDONI ART GALLERY

About the Gallery



Established in 1973, and named for the late Andrew J. Sordoni, former State senator from Northeastern Pennsylvania and prominent businessman, the Sordoni Art Gallery holds a permanent collection of more than 1,200 objects that include European and American works on paper from the 17th century to the present; European art from the 19th century; a small collection of American decorative arts; and American paintings from the 19th century to the present. Through an ambitious year-round exhibition schedule which features artists of regional, national, and international renown, and through a commitment to education, the Sordoni Art Gallery has earned a reputation as a professionally recognized and respected center for the study and appreciation of visual art. For students, faculty and members of the community, the Sordoni Art Gallery is a different kind of classroom – a place for active looking, talking, learning, thinking, and enjoying.

This project is supported, in part,
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SORDONI ART GALLERY

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150 South River Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766

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