George Luks:
An American Artist

George Luks

Table of Contents

Lenders to the Exhibition 3

Introduction and Acknowledgements 4

George Luks (1866-1933): A Biography by Stanley L. Cuba 7

George Luks: An American Artist by Judith O'Toole 51

George Luks: Artist/ Reporter/Illustrator by Nina Kasanof 91

Checklist of the Exhibition 101

George Luks:
An American Artist

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Essays by Stanley L. Cuba, Nina Kasanof, and Judith O'Toole

Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
May 3 through June 14, 1987

Delaware Art Museum
Wilmington, Delaware
July 3 through September 6, 1987

The Hunter Museum
Chattanooga, Tennessee
November 14, 1987 through January 17, 1988

Kraushaar Gallery
New York City
February 10 through March 5, 1988



This book is fondly dedicated to Helen Farr Sloan whose unflagging commitment to promoting the achievements of The Eight and their circle has done much to keep their art alive.

We are deeply grateful for the vital support she has given young scholars and artists of subsequent generations. Many of us have found the impetus to continue, strengthen, and expand our work through her steady encouragement and unshakable belief in the supreme importance of Art.

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"This world never had but two great painters . . . Frans Hals and George Luks!" It was George Luks that had said it. Unabashed he had uttered it . . . Swung his fists to accent it . . . Thrust the wedge of a determined look to fasten it on his hearer's consciousness . . . Snapped his teeth in finality . . . "Any of you guys want to make anything of it?"
—("Everett Shinn of George Luks: An Unpublished Memoir," Archives of American Art, v. 6, no. 2 (April 1966), p. 1.)

Introduction and Acknowledgements

It is hard not to talk about George Luks in cliches; certainly enough have been repeated throughout the body of critical information on him. In fact Luks himself demanded it, for his speech was filled with epigrams. Yet in his life, as in his art, Luks brought sincerity and vitality to the most hackneyed of subjects.

In December of 1932, a little more than a year before his death, Luks was asked to address a meeting of the Artist's Co-operative Market. Instead of demonstrating the painting of a portrait as had been scheduled, he decided to lecture the audience on his ideas of art. Throughout his deliberately shocking, bombastic tirade could be heard the very real frustration of an artist who wants desperately to have his theories understood:

> I can paint and you know it. Now shut up and listen to me . . . It's time America woke up to the realization that it is the greatest country in the world, with the greatest artists, the most common sense, and the least appreciation of its own strength.

In part because of this speech, and in part because of Luks pride in having contributed to the establishment of a "truly American art," we have given this exhibition and catalog the title, *George Luks: An American Artist*.

Luks, who often expressed his disdain for institutions, came to be admired and accepted by the members of many. This young rebel was in the roster of the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers; the National Association of Portrait Painters; The Boston Art Club; and The New York Water Color Club, among others. In his later years he was sought out by the press for his opinions on everything from art to women to proper beer drinking techniques. After his death a ship was christened the S.S. George Luks in recognition of his service as one of America's first war correspondents.

The circumstances of his death in 1933 in the doorway of a New York pub indicated violence and may have been brought on by his alter-ego, "Chicago-Whitey," the boxer. (Luks was fond of starting bar room brawls, ducking out at the right moment leaving others to finish the quarrel.) The official cause of death was heart failure. The newspapers reported that he had been out all night to record the effects of dusk and dawn on the elevated train near his studio in Greenwich Village.

It is astonishing that a man so public could have so many mysteries, distortions of fact, and untruths perpetuated in his life story. It is these that we have attempted to penetrate and correct. This catalog is meant to do more than document an exhibition. It is the first attempt to provide a substantive monograph on the artist.

The inspiration and guiding force for this project has been Helen Farr Sloan, as our dedication states. It was she who three years ago proposed the idea of an exhibition for George Luks and the simultaneous publication of a scholarly document on his life and art. Antoinette Kraushaar and Carole Pesner of the Kraushaar Gallery in New York were also involved from the beginning, graciously and patiently answering our questions and giving us access to their extensive files. (Luks exhibited with the Kraushaar Gallery from 1913 to 1924.) The descendants of George Luks, especially Daniel and Andrea Luks, provided valuable biographical information along with an insight to Luks' personal life. Their clipping files and scrapbooks yielded much that was new to our study.

The staffs of many museums and libraries provided assistance but in particular we would like to recognize: Catherine Shappert of the Farley Library, Wilkes College; Roland Elzea, Elizabeth Hawkes, Mary Hollohan and Lenora White of the Delaware Art Museum; Paul Schweizer, Sara Clark-Langager and Patricia Serafini of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute; William Henning of The Hunter Museum of Art; Clyde Singer of The Butler Institute of American Art; and Michelle Fondas of The Phillips Collection. Arthur Lewis, an author whom I hope will someday write a complete biography on Luks, also shared information with us. Cynthia Seibels, an independent researcher in New York, provided information on specific paintings.

Support for the project also came from Wilkes College and the Advisory Commission of the Sordoni Art Gallery. From Wilkes College I would like to thank those who recognized the importance of this project, Christopher N. Breiseth, President; Richard F. Charles, Vice-President for Advancement; and my assistant Jean C. Adams. Constant encouragement came from Andrew J. Sordoni, III, Chairman of the Sordoni Foundation, and Lou Conyngham, Chairman of the Gallery's Advisory Commission.

Without the cooperation of the museums and private collectors who agreed to loan their works to the exhibition, this project would never have come

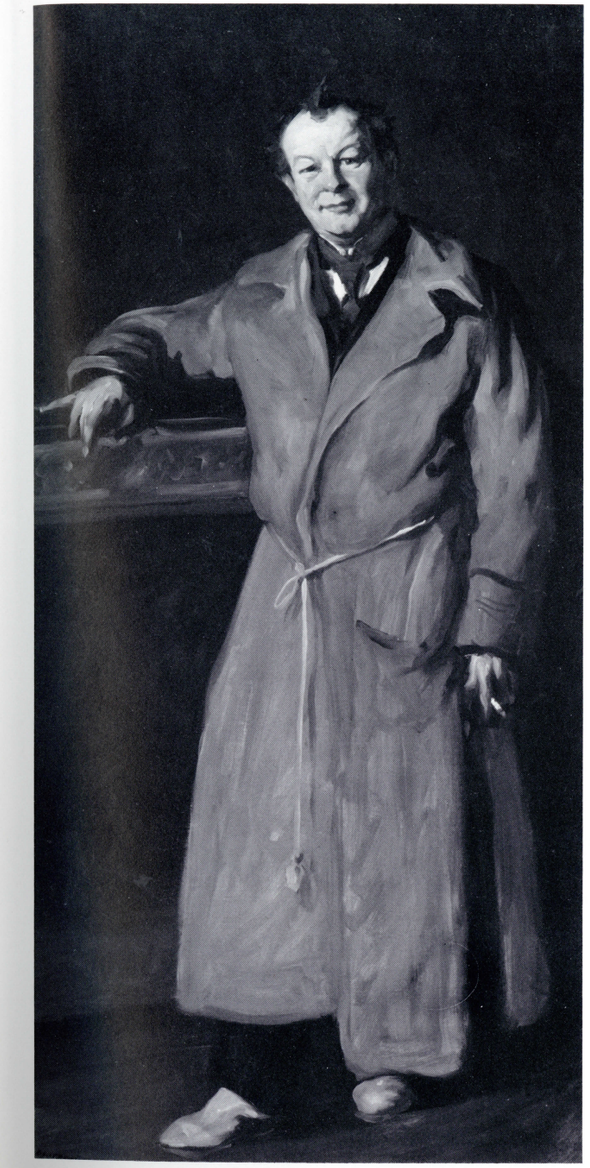


Fig. 13. Robert Henri, *Portrait of George Luks*, 1904 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

about. In this era of limited lending policies we are deeply grateful to those who generously allowed their works to travel and be seen by a greater audience. This must be seen as an important tribute to the generous spirit of the artist himself.

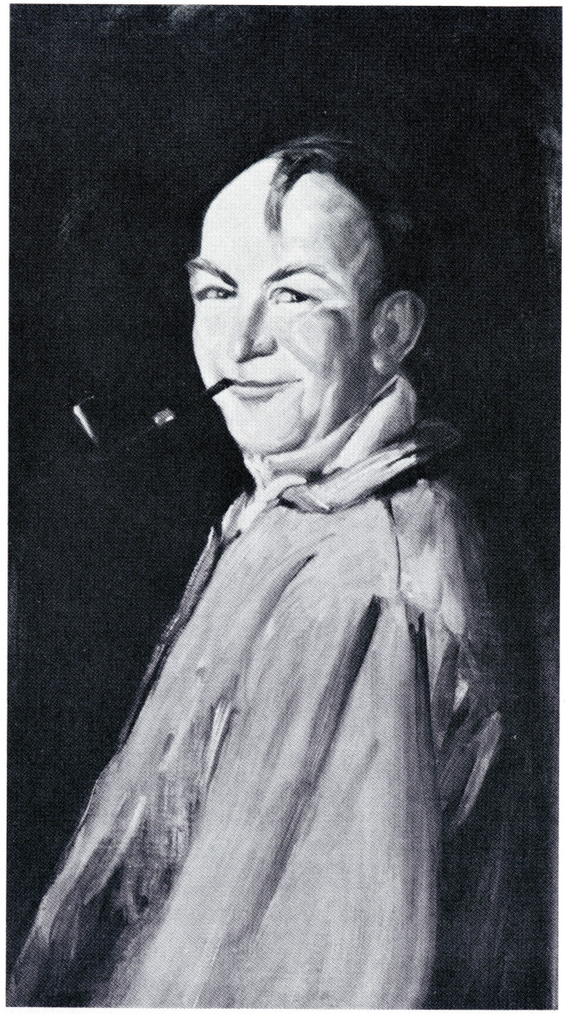
Special, supplemental funding for this catalog was provided by Mr. and Mrs. David C. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Maslow, Sandy and Arnold Rifkin, and an anonymous friend with a matching grant from the Sordoni Foundation.

Finally, the collaborators in this work and I agree with Everett Shinn when he wrote:

> Only through gratitude for a man that kept me laughing have I attempted this work. Only deep appreciation for a man who has given me the keenest of thrills, that of paint-magic in its application to a flat surface that vibrates and tells me of life.

("Everett Shinn on George Luks: An Unpublished Memoir," *Archives of American Art*, v. 6, no. 2 (April 1966), p. 12.)

Judith H. O'Toole, Director
Sordoni Art Gallery
Wilkes College



Self Portrait, 1907, (oil on canvas)

GEORGE LUKS (1866-1933)

"There are only two great artists in the world — Frans Hals and George Luks." This boast, which Luks most likely uttered in his cups, frequently has been cited to accentuate his Rabelaisian mystique to the detriment of his prodigious artistic output. His antics and posing have made for entertaining reading and colorful copy, which he himself often cheerfully and obligingly manufactured. It permeates all facets of his life and renders more difficult an accurate compilation of his biography.

Luks' boast also mirrors the observation of Duncan Phillips, a collector of his work and founder of The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC: "[Luks] is an individualist with a bouyant belief in his own genius and a gusto in his copious enjoyment of his chosen subjects." [1] Luks' love of life was expressed in his art through bold feeling and rollicking color. At the same time he had great contempt for conventionality, snobbishness and dilettantism — a direct result of the empathy he developed for the common man while growing up in the Pennsylvania coal fields.

Luks' stature as one of the most pronounced individual painters of modern times coincides with America's industrial and political coming of age at the turn of the century and with the development of a truly national art. In an era marked by inoffensive tonalist landscapes and drawing room portraits of the new plutocracy, Luks sensed the power residing in the native environment and sought to paint "110 per cent American." It was therefore no accident that he belonged to the New York "Eight" in 1908 and participated five years later in the landmark Armory Show. The subject matter and technique of "The Eight," though shocking to many of their contemporaries, nonetheless heralded modernism in American painting and its eventual liberation from the dictates of European art.

James Huneker, a prolific New York writer, critic and Luks' fellow revolutionist in thought, felt that

> it is absolutely impossible to set down on paper any adequate description of . . . [Luks]. He is Puck. He is Caliban. He is Falstaff. He is a tornado. He is sentimental. He can sigh like a lover, and curse like a trooper. Sometimes you wonder over his versatility; a character actor, a low comedian, even song-and-dance man, a poet, a profound sympathizer with human misery, and a human orchestra. The vitality of him![2]

With its inherent limitations, the following essay summarizes the colorful and controversial career of "little old George Luks," as its protagonist referred to himself on more than one occasion with a twinkle in his eye and a devilish smile.

George Benjamin Luks was born into a genteel and lettered family in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, on August 13, 1866.[3] His father, Emil Charles Luks, had immigrated to the United States prior to the

American Civil War. He may have been part of the wave of Central European exiles dislocated by the Revolution of 1848 in Europe. This is suggested by his political sympathies in the 1870's with the striking miners in the Pennsylvania coal fields. Emil came to Pennsylvania via Gdansk (Danzig), Poland, an old Hanseatic port on the Baltic Sea with a mixed Polish and German population. Orphaned at a young age, he had been adopted and raised by a minister. A quiet and gentle man, Emil Luks learned to speak more than half a dozen European languages fluently and later served as an interpreter for the miners in the courts in Pennsylvania.[4] (Fig. 1)

George's mother, Bertha Amalia von Kraemer, was of noble origin. Born in Bavaria, she was the daughter of August von Kraemer von Firstentroy, a major in the Bavarian Army. He had married outside of his social class, as his wife, Amalia, who died early in their marriage, was not of noble birth. Educated in schools in France and Switzerland proper to her father's station, Bertha had come to the United States in the 1850's with her elder sister, Emma, who married Dr. Francis J. Kern and settled in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. It may well have been through her brother-in-law that Bertha met her future husband.

The first six years of George's life were spent in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where his younger brother, Will, was born in 1868. Williamsport, which incorporated itself as a city the year of George's birth, is located on the Susquehanna River in north central Pennsylvania. The city became an important lumbering center in the second half of the nineteenth century. Emil Luks served there as a public health doctor and shared an apothecary shop on Market Street with a druggist named Yetter.[5] The Luks family was among the most cultured in town. The six children performed at home musicales. (Fig. 2) George's father was a good draftsman, while his mother was a competent amateur painter who imparted to her children a love of art, music and literature in a very supportive family circle. Emil gave George the precepts he followed all his life: "Be honest with yourself. Remember, you have good blood."

When George was about six years old the family moved to Shenandoah from Williamsport around the time of the "Sawdust War." Put down by the militia, it had erupted in Williamsport in 1872 when its lumbermen sought a ten-hour working day. In contrast to Williamsport, Shenandoah was a large coal mining town with schools, a newspaper, volunteer fire companies and a number of ethnic churches to serve the various immigrant groups who lived in the town and whose livelihood largely depended on the local coal companies.

At that time the anthracite coal fields in Pennsylvania were home to the Molly Maguires, a secret Irish organization who sought to redress the miners substandard working and living conditions. They engaged in strikes and violence, but were often the victims as well as the victimizers.

The Lukses sympathized with the Mollies and aided their widows. When making house calls at night the Mollies advised Emil to drive a white horse with his buggy so that they would know it was him and would not attack him. His wife, Bertha, was friendly with the Mollies' widows and children. The sympathy and support shown the Mollies by George's parents formed his social consciousness at an early age and helps to explain why he later eschewed painting the more popular drawing room subjects in favor of New York street scenes and neighborhood characters.

In her husband's waiting room at Shenandoah, Bertha Luks kept a large parrot who spoke both English and German. To the surprise and delight of Dr. Luks' patients the bird would say from its unobtrusive corner perch, "Please come in. The doctor will be with you in a moment." Shenandoah also provides a glimpse of George's first artistic efforts: ". . . He painted signs, houses, wagons — everything that he could lay a brush on. His chalk drawings on the school blackboards were the amazement of all who saw them, and people came many miles to look at them."[6]

The Lukses also resided for a time in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, where George worked at Clemens Drug Store on Centre Street. He later recalled that "his greatest amusement in those days was to put on

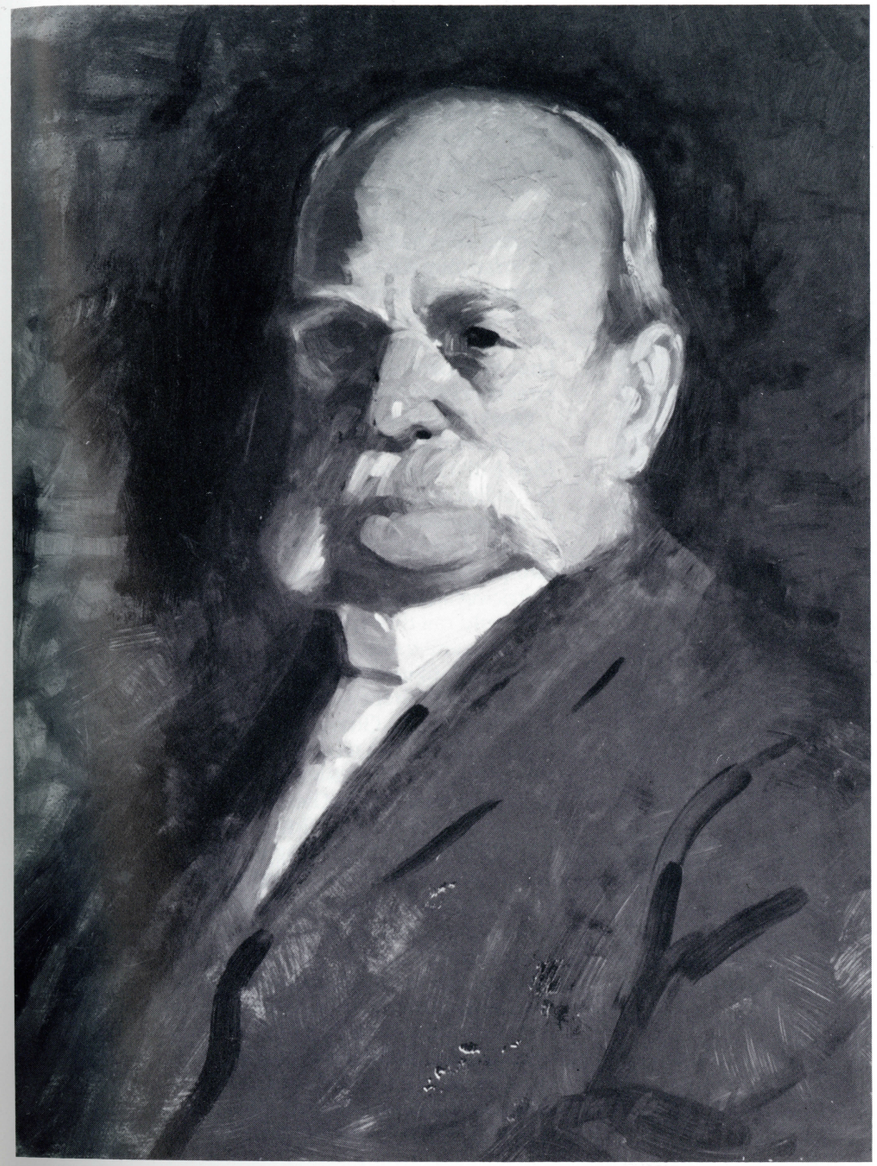


Fig. 1. Portrait of Emil Luks by George Luks, 1919 (oil on canvas), painted in Reading, Pa. Courtesy, LFC.



Fig. 2. The Luks family performing at home about 1875. George Luks second from left (?). Courtesy, LFC.

his little 'Fried Egg Hat' and stroll down to the old Atkins Homestead on South Centre Street and 'stick my pug nose through the iron fence and watch the fountain play."[7]

During a brief period when the Luks family lived in Vineland, New Jersey, George worked as a delivery boy in a small local store and gained experience sketching the customers. The owner, who would leave the shop in George's care, would ask him upon her return who had been in. His answer was a sketch on wrapping paper of a procession of customers whom the store owner easily recognized.[8] Luks would perfect his quick-sketch talent as a staff artist on several Philadelphia newspapers in the 1890's and later in depicting a variety of human types on the streets of New York.

One of the few extant pieces from his youth is a sketch with an artist's palette signed "Shenandoah March 1883." It was done the year before he enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. George remained there only for the month of April, 1884 during which he took the night antique class.[9] His temperament was ill-suited to the restrictive academic art environment against which he would rail throughout his professional career.

For several years after his stint at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Luks teamed up with his brother, Will, in the traveling act of Buzzey and Anstock (Fig. 3). George and Will toured the areas of northeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey with minstrel show entertainment. They sang, played the guitar and told jokes. Their lighthearted presentation was enhanced by their "Mutt and Jeff" appearance. George later drew on his vaudeville circuit experiences when producing illustrations and vignettes for the theater review in *The Verdict*, a satirical weekly published in New York at the turn of the century.[10]

In 1889 Luks set sail for Düsseldorf, Germany, where he enrolled at the Staatliche, Kunstakademie. It was one of several trips to Europe he would make over the next fifteen years.[11] Luks may have traveled to Düsseldorf with Louis (Lewis) Herzog (1868-?), son of the landscapist, Herman Herzog, since both young men enrolled in October 1889 in the elementary class

conducted by Professor Heinrich Lauenstein (1835-1910) at the Düsseldorf Academy.[12] As at the Pennsylvania Academy in Philadelphia several years earlier, Luks did not stay the semester at Düsseldorf. He quickly tired of the hierarchical academic system and did not particularly care for his professor, who was a religious history painter and church decorator. Luks later summed up the training he received on this trip to Europe — the extent of his formal art instruction — by saying that he had studied under "Lowenstein, Jensen, Gambrinus and some Frenchmen, from whom I never learned anything, always excepting Renoir, who is great any way you look at him."[13]

From Düsseldorf Luks went to Paris and London where he stayed with his father's family. In both European capitals he derived the most benefit from wandering on his own through the museums and galleries. Apart from Renoir, he fell in love with the works of Rembrandt, van Steen, and Frans Hals whose influences are apparent in his painting after 1900. Luks nevertheless observed that many of the palette classics were overrated and he did not hesitate to declare that "50 per cent of the master canvases in the collections of the world are fakes."[14]

Luks returned to the United States sometime in 1890 or in early 1891 when he produced drawings for *Puck* and did a number of others in both black-and-white and color for *Truth*, a satirical magazine published at that time in New York. These early pieces not only demonstrate Luks' skill as a comic draughtsman, they also are precursors of the "Yellow Kid" comic strip he would do for the *New York World* and of the political cartoons he would publish in *The Verdict* at the turn of the century.

In late May 1892 Luks headed back to Europe for another visit which lasted approximately a year. Luks' second trip to Europe included a visit to Spain and the Prado in Madrid. There he saw firsthand the works of Velasquez and Goya, two artists — apart from the Dutch and French painters — whom he came to admire. He traveled via the Azores to Spain on the steamship "Fulda." In early June in sight of the Azores he executed a series of ink and pencil sketches of some of his fellow passengers from Philadelphia,



Fig. 3. George and Will as the comic team of "Buzzy and Anstock." Courtesy, LFC.



Fig. 4. George Luks (on the left) in a staged boxing match at 806 Walnut Street, Philadelphia. Directly behind Luks are John Sloan (with glasses) and Everett Shinn. Courtesy, Sloan Collection, Delaware Art Museum.

New York, Boston and Albany. (Nine sketches: Men and Women including *Dari, Unknown Party, The Rev. Bruce,* and *Mrs. Minis,* 1892. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.)[15]

Enroute back to the United States in 1893 from his second trip to Europe Luks painted a watercolor, *Penta [Ponta] Delgada,* one of his earliest extant works in this medium (Luks Family Collections). It was done on the island of Ponta Delgada, the main one in the archipelago of the Portugese Azores, possibly in the fertile area between the chief town of the same name and Caldeira das Sete Cidades, a large volcanic crater.

In July 1894 the artist Robert Henri, whose influence on his own work Luks was reluctant to acknowledge, wrote enroute to Gibraltar to their mutual friend, John Sloan, in Philadelphia: "The Azores seemed to have entirely recovered from the ravages of Luks and [William] Walsh. We arrive in Gibraltar at about ten o'clock . . . . My next letter will be written in Spanish."[16]

Following his second trip to Europe Luks joined the *Philadelphia Press* as a newspaper artist shortly after the beginning of 1894. Over the next year he met Robert Henri, John Sloan, William Glackens, and Everett Shinn who together formed the nucleus of "The Eight" a decade later in New York. The nature of their work as newspaper artists "gave them both an eye for significant gesture in transitory events and an interest in the modern American city and its human variety as subjects of value equal to, if not greater than, what were commonly held to be more proper subjects of artistic contemplation."[17] Except for Henri, Glackens, Luks, Shinn and Sloan all worked as artist correspondents for various Philadelphia newspapers in the 1890's.

During this decade the artist-reporter was in vogue until replaced by the photograph and the halftone process used to produce it. "The artist-reporter was assigned to translate into drawings what the news reporter put into words. He was called upon to sketch every type of event that made news, from a coal-mine disaster to a holiday parade. His work had to be factually accurate, yet executed with the speed demanded by newspaper work."[18]

Everett Shinn summarized the importance of Philadelphia newspaper work for himself and his colleagues:

> The art department of a newspaper of 1900 was a school far more important in the initial training of the mind for quick perception than the combined instruction of the nation's art schools . . . .
>
> The four mentioned men [Glackens, Luks, Shinn and Sloan] and many others who had the schooling of newspaper pictorial reporting have been forever grateful for the rigid requirements that compelled them to observe, select and get the job done. Day by day and year by year they accumulated a valuable library of reference, not catalogued in cumbersome cabinets and files but in readiness in the lighter and more easily transported compact cells of the mind.
>
> They carried envelopes, menu cards, scraps of paper, laundry check rendered bills or frequently nothing to their work.[19]

Soon after Luks joined the *Press* he approached Shinn about sharing the latter's one-room flat at Eighth and Chestnut, accommodations only two blocks away — they would learn — from the companionship at Henri's studio. Shinn readily accepted, but his life of solitude was permanently disrupted by Luks' antics. Shinn recalled that:

> One morning . . . I was awakened by a bellowing voice. Heavy-eyed, I staggered to the bathroom door. Luks' silky blond head was slowly emerging from the depths of the tub. Gripping the bathtub rim, he yelled, "Captain Rufus Mizzen, you mistook your man this time. Little did you know when you read the burial service over me that I was alive. Ha ha, alive! Ha ha, for the past month I have lived on the barnacles on the hull of this slave ship. I have come up to tell you that I have fastened the rudder so that you will sail in a circle to the end of your days. Ha ha!" and he went under again . . . .[20]

Although Luks stood under 5½ feet tall, his style of dress more than compensated for his lack of height.

While his clothes were no more blatantly loud in their revolt against the mode than those of most of his associates at the *Philadelphia Press,*

> admittedly he was responsible for the shearing away of all trousers below the knees in conformity with the "peg tops" of the Latin Quarter of the Parisian capital.
>
> His were shadow plaids of huge dimension, the latest word in suburban reality maps. Little alteration was attempted on his coats. Vests, however, were featured, cream-colored corduroy, like door mats laid out in strips of a hawser's thickness or bark-stripped logs on a frontier fort stockade. A flowering black tie like a soot-dyed palm tree splayed out under his high and immaculately clean minstrel collar. A bowler, usually black, tilted in a cocky slant over his blond hair. Once he wore a white one with a black band; this one he might have found at a race track.[21]

At the *Philadelphia Press* Luks and Shinn got to know Glackens, who was also employed there. When Shinn moved over to the *Inquirer* he met John Sloan, who already was on its art staff. Through Sloan, Luks and Shinn began attending the informal Tuesday evening discussion group inaugurated by Robert Henri at his studio at 806 Walnut Street. This group was the successor to the short-lived Charcoal Club established in the Spring in 1893 by Henri and Sloan, due to their dissatisfaction with the Sketch Class at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The club actually was an evening sketch class held at a photographer's rented studio on 9th Street in Philadelphia. The club offered a model and camaraderie for one-half the tuition charged by the Pennsylvania Academy. Sloan served as the club's secretary and Henri, its president, offered free critique. However, the club fell victim to the financial Panic of 1893.[22]

At the Tuesday discussion group Henri, a born teacher, urged his listeners to follow Walt Whitman's dictum to "see America" as a place and a country of personalities. Henri likewise encouraged his students to be interested in the dignity of man and the wonder of life. According to Sloan, these informal weeklies at Henri's studio at which their participants sat around to smoke and to talk also "gave numbers of men who had gotten into newspaper and illustrative work the beginning of a desire to express themselves in paint."[23] Luks, however, never admitted that Henri influenced him in this respect.

Although Luks and Shinn did not regularly attend the Tuesday evenings at Henri's studio, they never missed the parties. Luks became an instant success at them and assumed the role of a type of mascot eager to perform at the drop of a hat. No evening would be complete without Luks' mimicking each man in the room. "On one occasion . . . mounted on a chair atop a table with a frying pan over a gas jet, [Luks] made Welsh rarebit, carrying on a stream of farcical remarks while a dozen of us waited our turn to be served."[24]

One of Luks' favorite performances was that of a pugilist, which enjoyed wide currency even after his death. The "legend" began as a mock encounter staged around 1895 at one of the parties at 806 Walnut Street for the benefit of a photographer (Fig. 4). Stripped to the waist, Luks crouched in a sparring pose. Over the years he used a number of boxing aliases such as "Chicago Whitey," "Lame-em-Luks," "Socko-Sam," "Curtain-Conway" and "Monk-the-Morgue."

> Once [Luks] tapped a light jab to Sloan's shoulder and queried, "Did I ever tell you about the time I licked Fitzsimmons?" Sloan then smiled, then sought the twinkle in Luks' eyes. "Since when have they put Fitzsimmons on a postage stamp?" Sloan quipped . . . .
>
> Luks wasn't really anything of a fighter. He would often pick a fight in a saloon, say something nasty and get things going and then leave the place, with people who had nothing to do with the argument left to finish the fracas.[25]

By June 1895 the Tuesday evenings at 806 Walnut in Philadelphia underwent a change with the departure of Henri and Glackens for Paris where Henri would observe the faults of the academic system in France. On the occasion of their *bon voyage* party in Philadelphia, Luks did a caricature of Glackens with rhymed text by Sloan which hung on the wall in the *Press's* Art Department (Fig. 5).

In December 1895 Luks left Philadelphia for Cuba in the company of writer Maurice O'Leary of the *Evening Bulletin.* Employed by the same Philadelphia newspaper as a staff artist, Luks was to illustrate O'Leary's stories for publication about the Cuban revolt against Spanish rule, which has broken out in February of that same year and was a prelude to the Spanish-American War in 1898.

Like the other reporters sent by American and European newspapers and magazines to cover the rebellion and thereby boost the circulation of their respective publications, Luks and O'Leary were restricted to Havana by the Spanish authorities who censored all outgoing reports. As Luks wrote to Everett Shinn, "Half my sketches have been taken by officials. Consequently . . . I have to smuggle them out in order to insure myself of their safe arrival." Those sketches which did get through took ten to fifteen days to reach Philadelphia and appear in print.[26]

Because of the restrictions imposed by the Spanish authorities in Cuba, Luks' illustrations necessarily were "pieced together from official government reports and rumors received from insurgents in the field. These limitations did not stop Luks and others from fabricating stories and exaggerating actual events. This practice is reflected in the captions on some of Luks' illustrations such as 'An insurgent scout . . . overtaken by Spanish troops . . . fire upon him and the Bulletin artist . . . sketches him as he falls from the saddle.'"[27] Luks' illustrations, while fresh and lively, nonetheless show a certain comic exaggeration, recalling his earlier work for *Puck* and *Truth;* but they lack the authentic quality of personal experience.

Possessing a vivid imagination and an enormous ego, Luks lived to boast in Cuba that he "was the only man here who's got the sand to go out with the soldiers." However, he demonstrated his tidity in the company of war correspondents Stephen Crane and Richard Harding Davis, who were also in Cuba to cover the uprising. "Along with other

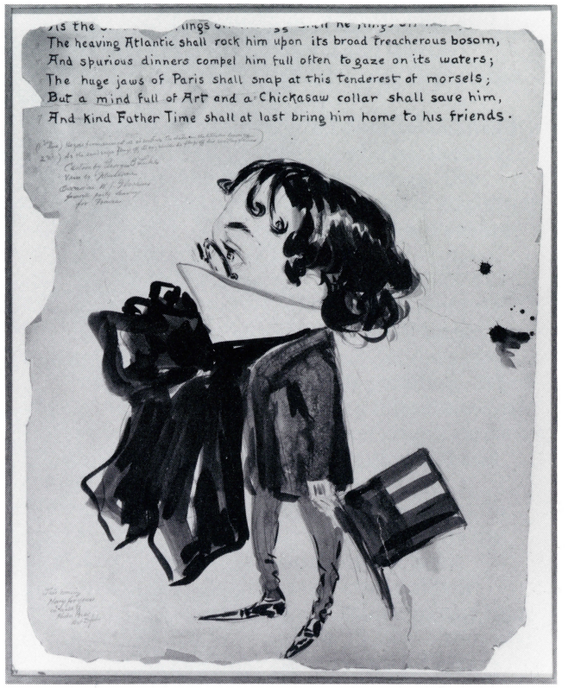


Fig. 5. Sketch of William Glackens by George Luks 1895 (ink on paper). Courtesy, Delaware Art Museum.



1. *Boys with Dog, Cuba,* 1896

newspapermen, they had been rolling along in a rickety train when an abrupt volley of gunfire burst out far in the distance. Luks reacted automatically by diving under his seat, then looked up to see the others unmoved. 'You fellows sit up there,' he challenged. 'I have a future.'"[28]

Although Luks and his fellow correspondents spent most of their time in Havana enjoying bars and bordellos, George did paint some good oils and watercolors of street types in the Cuban capital. An extant example of this is *Boys with Dog, Cuba,* 1896 (Cat. no. 1).

By March 1896 Luks' drawings sent from Cuba ceased to appear in the *Philadelphia Bulletin.* He reportedly was fired on account of drunkenness and failure to regularly submit his work. When the *Bulletin* reported O'Leary's capture in Cuba the following month, Luks circulated a fabricated version of his supposed imprisonment and brush with death in order to explain his exit from Cuba: "The Spiggoties slammed me in the cooler, put me away with the rats and the Cubans, and deliberated whether to shoot me at dawn or sundown."[29]

Luks arrived back in New York one evening in April 1896 wearing a linen suit and a battered straw hat. Cold, hungry and broke he spent a chilly night on a park bench. The next day he joined Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* as an illustrator. Luks got the job through the newspaper's managing editor, Arthur Brisbane, whom he had met several years earlier on board ship enroute back to the United States from Europe. Luks reminded Brisbane that he had advised him at that time to do illustration work to earn his livelihood instead of existing as a starving artist.

Luks soon became the *World's* "premiere humorist artist" for his comic strip "The Yellow Kid," which debuted in the paper in the Fall of 1896 (See Cat. nos. 37, 38). The comic strip had been originated by fellow staff artist, Richard Fenton Outcault, at the direction of Mr. Pulitzer. While single cartoons had been published in American newspapers from the earliest days, "The Yellow Kid" represents the beginning of the modern comic strip and comic-strip characters.

Despite the immediacy and popularity of his caricatures and illustrations which provided him with a comfortable income, around 1900 Luks began to enjoy some commercial success from the sale of his canvases. It was ''at Glackens' suggestion that Luks started painting in 1898, although George would never acknowledge that such was the case."[30] In 1896 Glackens had returned from his trip to Europe. Through Luks he got a job doing comic drawings for the Sunday supplement of the *New York World.* After about six weeks he left the *World* and worked exclusively for the rival *Herald* through September 1897.[31]

For a time he and Luks shared a studio in an old Manhattan brownstone. The floor below them was occupied by a dealer in ladies' trimmings. The tenants' names were posted on a series of signs in the entry and callers on the artists read with pleasure:

LUKS & GLACKENS
FURS & FEATHERS.

Glackens recorded their studio in an oil painting, *The Artist Luks at Work.* Luks later sold it to William Preston Harrison, who had visited George's New York studio and selected one of his paintings. When Mr. Preston mentioned that he also intended to call on Glackens and acquire one of that artist's canvases, "I have a Glackens!" Luks said, produced it and successfully concluded the sale.[32]

Like Glackens, Shinn also worked briefly at the *New York World* as a result of Hearst's raids on the staffs of rival papers. Luks' suggestion to his superiors at the *World* of Shinn's availability if additional pay was forthcoming served to lure him away from the *Philadelphia Press.* In 1900 Shinn left the *World* to pursue illustration work for *Harper's Weekly* and *The Critic.*

One snowy night, on his way to his Manhattan studio, Shinn met Luks on a Lexington Avenue street corner. The chance encounter remained memorable for Shinn and illustrates Luks' general love of the comic.

> The instant we were close enough for recognition, [Luks] started one of his hilariously amusing impromptu melodramas. I braced myself against the wind and snow and felt the tears that came from laughing freeze on my cheeks. Luks, in the full flight of

his exciting presentation, was frantically lashing an imaginary string of straining wallowing huskies while he held fast to a careening dog sled.

Under his power of suggestion Lexington Avenue took on the endless waste of the Yukon. Northern Lights blinked from a baker's window and a passing snow plough swirled out the realism of an avalanche. Luks, with exaggerated desperation, pushed ahead, cracking his whip, answering its stinging lash with the huskies' growl of servile resentment. He rode his sled, guided it through narrow defiles, lost its security and caught up with it again. "Mush, Mush!" he yelled.

Suddenly he stopped, whirled about and knocked an imaginary hand from his shoulder. "What? You here, Pierre La Tooth?" Then in the patois of a Canadian woodsman, Luks hissed, "Some mistake, me fren. I am Pere Gaspan, ze mission Padre." Luks waved the snow aside and peered closer. "Liar, I shall know you for the thief you are, Pierre La Tooth, when the storm clears."

Anger flashed from his eyes, there was a sudden splintering of Luks' cane across the lamp post. He staggered under a heavy blow and went to his knees, then, on his feet again, a vicious uppercut and Luks peered over the gutter's edge looking down. He shuddered, then whispered, "Two thousand feet, poor devil," then leaped across the sidewalk and pressed his nose close to a fish market's window where huge salmon flashed their silver sides. He cried, "The seal fisheries! Puget Sound. I must be getting close to the post." He then shifted his gaze to another window that held a boulder of roast beef. "Ha, at last! The stockyards. I'm on the outskirts of Chicago." Then, on his feet again, thrashing the floundering dogs, he staggered across the sidewalk and straightened his body in a stiff salute in front of a dentist's sign where an electric bulb in a black velvet cavern illuminated the gleaming whiteness of a gigantic set of false teeth, "Captain Lancaster, Sergeant Hawkins reporting." Luks then slumped in a rubbery quiver, a travesty of superhumanly sustained endeavor. Quickly he turned his back on the dentist sign and quietly stroked a mustache that seemed to have suddenly grown from his clean upper lip. Then, in another voice, precise in an English accent sharp with authority, "Sergeant Hawkins, the Northwest Mounted Police can well be proud of you. Wounded and alone you have brought back the stolen pelts."

Luks staggered and clutched his side. "I'm done in, Captain Lancaster. Done . . . done . . . done . . . diddy done . . ." He sung the last and fell on his face in the gutter . . . .[33]

When Luks established himself of New York in 1896 — and prior to the time he roomed with Glackens — he lived in a boarding house at 13 Charles Street in Greenwich Village. Run by a Mrs. Delanoy, it was popular with young journalist and newspaper artists like Luks. Mrs. Delanoy's daughter, Anabelle, became engaged to George, that is, until his younger brother, Will, came up for a visit during summer vacation from Baltimore where he was in his last year of medical school at Johns Hopkins University. Anabelle quickly transferred her affections to Will Luks and the two were married shortly thereafter. This precluded Will's completion of his studies and necessitated his taking a permanent position at the Northern Dispensary, a pie-wedge-shaped building at Waverly Place and Grove Street in Greenwich Village. In 1905 Will became superintendent of the Dispensary (at which Edgar Allen Poe had once been treated for a cold) and remained there for more than forty years until his retirement in 1939.[34]

Despite the loss of his fiancee, George maintained good relations with his brother and sister-in-law. He treated their children as his own, often taking them to dinner at old New York gourmet establishments like Delmonico's, Brevoort's and the Holland House where he relentlessly sketched on menus and tablecloths to the annoyance of the waiters. On walks



62. *Street, East Side, New York,* n.d.

through Greenwich Village with his nieces and nephews — he rarely took cabs in New York because he felt he wasn't "Going any place in particular, except to hell" — Luks would mimic passers-by on the sidewalk and do humorous sketches of them based on his first impression of them.

After losing his fiancee, Anabelle, to his younger brother, George rebounded and married at the turn of the century. Lois, the first of his three wives, was the daughter of one of Luks' Philadelphia newspaper colleagues; she later became Mrs. Frank Crane. Apparently George was not quite ready to give up his freewheeling bachelor ways for a respectable, settled existence. While Lois was pregnant with their son, Kent, Luks walked out on her and went to Europe in 1902 to seek a respite from the pressures of married life. In later years Kent, Luks' only child, took the name of his stepfather and had almost no contact with his natural father because of the way George had treated his mother.

Luks' desire to go to Europe — chiefly France — in 1902 was reinforced by Shinn's presence in Paris. The titles of Luks' paintings serve to document his itinerary: *The Louvre, Paris, Evening* and the *Luxembourg Gardens* (Cat. nos. 3, 4). At the suggestion of Robert Henri, who had visited France several years earlier, Luks also traveled and painted along the Marne River. This is confirmed by Luks' oil, *On the Marne,* in the collection of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York. This work, plus Luks' familiarity with boating pictures of La Grenouille redone by Renoir and Monet on the Seine River near Paris, later found expression in George's *Holiday on the Hudson* (Cleveland Museum of Art).

Luks traveled through the Champagne region and went as far as Verdun in northeastern France. There he did a watercolor showing the town which during World War I became a national symbol of French resistance under the command of General Petain. (The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.)

According to American artist, Eugene Higgins, Luks' sojourn in France in 1902-03 was not without incident. ". . . Luks' gusty, untamed spirit led him into all sort of incredible exploits. He and [John] Noble once brought on half of Paris' police department when they decided to shoot out the electric lights in a boulevard cafe. This was . . . Luks' method of showing the Parisians what American life was like, cowboys and all."[35] Luks used Noble as the model for his portrait, *Whiskey Bill,* now in the Phoenix Art Museum. According to James Huneker, Noble was a "once well-known personage in the American Parisian colony . . . a great violinist and also a profound alcoholic . . . ."

Luks also sampled the delights of the Parisian "boulevardienes." He recorded one such encounter in a large drawing in which he is shown boldly exposing himself to two female onlookers (Cat. no. 40). Luks belonged to the

> generation of painters who were in Paris in the days when the Left Bank meant something. These were men who used to see Whistler and Wilde and Verlaine in the cafes; who talked all night over their absinthes; who returned to America full of ambition and bombast and intolerance and Impressionism and talent.[36]

Luks returned to New York from France via England in 1903, since he sent Henri an illustrated postcard inscribed: "Dear Henri. Greetings from London. The Fag Artist on the Street. George."[37] The following year Luks made a brief trip to Paris, perhaps to arrange his marriage to John Noble's sister, Emma Louise, who became George's second wife when he came back to the United States from France. Luks' 1904 trip is documented by a fine little painting, *Closing the Cafe, Paris.* "The Gilder" in *Town Topics* observed that:

> Surely anyone with any degree of sensibility must see in . . . [this painting] . . . the kind of beauty which Keats reminded us abides in melancholy. There is something so ineffably tender and exquisite in this picture as a piece of color as to make enjoyment poignant to the point of pain. This was the Paris Conrad Warrener sought for in his quest of his youth in Leonard Merrick's story, the place where the roses of youth bloom as nowhere else.[38]

Luks and his second wife settled in a combination apartment and studio on West 56th Street in New



40. *Paris Scene,* c. 1902

York. On Sunday afternoons Will Luks and his young family would come uptown for a visit via the old Sixth Avenue E1. Will remained George's best and greatest critic to whom he seriously listened. George would change something in a painting if Will didn't like it. Will's critical eye derived from his multiplicity of artistic interests — poetry, music and theater. At the same time, he had a gift for painting which, if it had been equally developed, might have made him as famous as George. "But," as Will observed in an interview in *Parnassus* after George's death, ". . . one painter in a family is plenty."[39]

After his trip to Paris in 1904 George became more visible in the artistic cafe life of New York. Much of it was centered in and around Greenwich Village, which at the turn of the century had started to become a focal point for all manner of artists seeking an American renaissance. One of the most popular gathering places for the nucleus of the future "Eight" was Mouquin's, a red-plush French restaurant under the Sixth Avenue E1 near Twenty-Eighth Street in Manhattan.[40]

Mouquin's became a nightly rendezvous spot for the Henris, Sloans and Glackenses, who lived nearby



44. *The Orator,* c. 1920

and who all had relocated to New York from Philadelphia. Often they were joined by Luks, Jimmy and May Preston, or Frederic Grueger, all of the old Philadelphia gang. A major attraction at Mouquin's was the lively discussions on art held almost nightly at John Flanagan's table between critics Charles Fitzgerald and Frederick James Gregg, both of whom wrote for the *New York Evening Sun* and later would champion the "Eight" in print. Fitzgerald, who became Glacken's brother-in-law, was one of the first critics to recognize Luks' talent as a painter. Mouquin's also proved a favorite of James Huneker, with whom Luks engaged in bouts of self-expression on art.[41]

With Julian Hawthorne, Brander Matthews, and others, Huneker and Luks were charter members of an informal group called "The Friendly Sons of Saint Bacchus," who met at Maria's, a bohemian basement cafe located on MacDougal Street (later on West Twelfth Street) in Greenwich Village, where they entertained each other with songs, poems, monologues and jokes.

About 1908 Benjamin DeCasseres, a critic for the *New York Herald Tribune,* met Luks for the first time at Maria's and later published his recollections of George and his sharp opinions on art gleaned from that discussion.

> At a table when I entered were seated some painters whom I knew. One whom I had never seen before was filminating — a somewhat handsome-faced . . . fellow, with benignly ironic eyes, a comedian's mouth, a high forehead and black-rimmed nose-glasses leashed to a long professorial string which dragged its length in the glass of sauterne in front of him.
>
> He caught my name when I was introduced.
>
> "Latin — eh? Where do those European guys get off to teach us anything? . . . . Art! — my slats! . . . . I can paint with a shoestring dipped in pitch and lard . . . . Tell those bimbos from across the big pond that the future of art lies right here . . . . None of those *!# !!* *!* has got anything for us! . . . . Technique, did you say? My slats . . . . Say, listen, you *!! it's in you or it isn't!"
>
> "What phrases these bimbos from the schools use: Static, Dynamic, Abstruse, Abstract — a vaudeville team, the Catch-Phrase Quartet! . . . Man is inoculated at birth with art intelligence or he isn't . . . . Ha! Ha! He needs a north light? — the nance! . . . . Say, I can paint in a mole hole . . . ."
>
> And he peered at me again — the best-natured, the most human, the most down-to-earth face I've ever looked at.
>
> "Like Mozart, I began my art career when I was barely out of diapers," George admitted to me with that perfectly simple and naive egoism which makes him the delight of his friends, including 3,000 of the old school bartenders, who used to listen to George until their handle-bar mustachios grew up the sides of their faces like Virginia Creepers.
>
> Beneath all this fury there is a master craftsman, a man so consumately sure of himself that he can clown with perfect safety, a robust ego that knows there is only one George Luks . . . He loves his art more passionately than any man, working in any of the arts I have ever met. He sees everything in the world in terms of color, light, composition. He's a human brush. And he can paint the town or a canvas red at a moments notice — or both simultaneously . . . .[42]

In direct competition to Mouquin's James B. Moore opened the Cafe Francis at 53 West Thirty-Fifth Street, which he advertised as "New York's Most Popular Resort of New Bohemia." Moore was an independently wealthy bachelor for whom the restaurant business was merely a hobby. Moore lured Mouquin's chef to his own establishment, which began to attract the artists — including Luks — who had previously patronized Mouqin's. About 1906 Luks did a large canvas, *Cafe Francis* (Cat. no. 6), showing its proprietor with one of his "daughters," as he preferred to call his female companions. The

painting represents a sequel to Glackens' *Chez Mouquin* from 1905.

When the Cafe Francis closed, its furnishings auctioned to the premises in 1908 to satisfy Moore's creditors, the artists sometimes got together at Petitpas, a rooming house and restaurant run by three French sisters on West Twenty-Ninth Street in Manhattan. Around 1910 it hosted John Butler Yeats of Dublin, who became the center of a small and admiring coterie of artists and writers headed by John and Dolly Sloan, who were fascinated by his brilliant conversation. Like Sloan, Luks also preserved an evening with Yeats in a watercolor, *John Butler Yeats at Petitpas* (Cat. no. 54).

In the years between and after Luks' trips to France in the early 1900's his paintings were included in several group shows in New York and Chicago. His canvases from the first decade of the twentieth century constitute some of his finest work for which he is justly acclaimed.

In 1903 Luks showed for the first time with the Society of American Artists in the group's 25th annual exhibition held at the American Fine Arts Society Galleries on West Fifth-Seventh Street in New York. The Society, founded in 1878 to protest the lack of progressive vision by the National Academy of Design, had initially been the most vital art force in its day in America. It featured, for example, Mary Cassat and Whistler in its early exhibitions and encouraged American collectors to extend their patronage to their fellow countrymen instead of to their English, French and German contemporaries. Inclusion in the Society's annuals was important for young artists like Luks, since in the early 1900's New York had only a small number of commercial galleries where artists could exhibit and receive public notice.

By the turn of the century the Society of American Artists had become more academic and conservative in its outlook and in 1906 merged with the National Academy. As a result, Luks' *East Side, New York,* hardly academic in style but accepted for the 1903 exhibition through member Robert Henri's influence, shared the "skyline" with Glackens' painting of a ballet dancer and did not get the best viewing light. However, Luks' entry did not escape the notice of Charles Fitzgerald, art critic for the *New York Evening Sun,* who wrote:

> Here is the painter of corner-boys and "toughs," street urchins, ragamuffins, and all kinds of low types employed as a subject that cannot by any possibility be called low, unless indeed we apply that term to the works of God — the waters, the clouded, stormy sky of a winter's day, the drifting snow, the eternal struggle of man against the elements.

In his review Fitzgerald also questioned the practice of always hanging the canvases of Luks and others in the darkest corners at exhibitions:

> Once more the blind leaders of the blind take refuge in their last ditch: "This is not nature as we see it." To the jury of the Society we make a present of this motto from Swift: "When a true genius appears, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are in confederacy against him."[43]

Following the 25th annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists, Luks showed in a "very refreshing" exhibition of "Paintings by New Men" held in May, 1903 at the Colonial Club in New York.

> A number of the things shown, the best of them, in fact, would probably not find a place in an Academy or Society exhibition, unfortunately for said exhibitions, and so the public should be all the more grateful for this chance to see them . . . .
>
> Men like Messrs. Lukes [sic.], Glackens, Lawson, Linden, Perrine, Blashki and Steichen are capable of making contributions that should be welcomed in any exhibition.[44]

In 1904 Luks showed with the nucleus of the future Eight at the National Arts Club in New York in an exhibition arranged by Robert Henri. A review, which billed them as "Six Impressionists," noted the lack of space generally accorded these non-academic artists:

> Regular exhibitions must demand certain standards from which they cannot derrogate at the peril of their own existences as



31. *Child with a Wagon (Snow Kid),* n.d.

organizations. Therefore it is that we must look to private, one-man shows or to club exhibits for the work that we must miss at the annual gathering because they fail, must fail, to find favor in the eyes of Acceptance Committees for some technical quality which the committees miss. Yet this is work that gives a great deal of enjoyment both to those who denounce it as the degeneracy of silly minds and those who regard it as the last screech of genius.[45]

The audacity of Luks' canvases and the rougher side of life they depicted occasioned his rejection from the Spring 1907 exhibition at the National Academy of Design. When his sole entry, *Man with Dyed Mustachios,* a vigorous, rough-hewn portrait, was placed on the studio easel for the jurymen's consideration Academician Kenyon Cox shouted "To hell with it!" Not even the opposition of fellow Academician, Robert Henri, could reverse the vote. Luks took the whole matter in stride: "I don't look on this thing from a personal point of view . . . I am trying to do things; if they don't understand them, I don't care anymore for them than I do for a bottle of turpentine. I don't propose to berate them. After all, it's a question for Father Time."[46]

Word quickly spread about the fate of Luks' painting, which he promptly displayed at the Macbeth Gallery in New York. "There all the other youthful outlaws foregathered to enjoy the picture and also to enjoy the discomfiture of most of Mr. Macbeth's staid customers who ventured down into the cellar [gallery] only to retire in quick confusion." About this time Luks "made a wonderful and much appreciated beau geste. He raised the price upon his pictures $1,000 each. He had not sold any, but he used gravely to tell his intimates that 'Prices were going up' and they as gravely spread to news still further about."[47]

Luks' rejection by the Academy and the ensuing feud between Henri and some of the conservative academicians was discussed in the New York press and in national publications like *Harper's Weekly* which wrote:

Only once in many years, if memory serves, has the Academy or Society accepted a picture by George Luks — one of the most original and accomplished painters in America, but still, at forty, absolutely unknown to the general art public. Once or twice he has figured in club loan exhibitions, but the man's own studio is the only place, at present, where one may see much of what he has done. Portraits, character studies, dissolute folk of the night, children, cabmen, dock rats, wise old Russian Jews sipping their coffee in dingy restaurants . . . these are some of Luks' subjects.

What, then, will be the Academy's future attitude toward Luks and Henri and the ever-growing throng of new painters with inventive powers which they are not afraid to trust? Will the Academy help to shape and publish these most hopeful new elements in American art? Or will it continue hostile, and thus force this unconquerable new expression to seek or make some quicker channel?[48]

The channel sought by The Eight — as James Huneker dubbed them — was a show at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908. It quickly became a benchmark in the history of American painting. The Macbeth Gallery was a logical choice since part of The Eight — Henri, Luks, Davies, Lawson and Prendergast — had already exhibited there. Unlike most of the handful of private galleries in New York which at that time dealt in European imports, Macbeth's basement gallery on lower Fifth Avenue solely concerned itself with the exhibition and sale of American pictures from the day it first opened its doors in 1892. Consequently, it "quickly became a haven for the more individual among the American painters."[49]

In May 1907 The Eight set their show at Macbeth's for the following spring with a $500 guarantee plus 25 percent of the sales. On May 15, 1907, the *New York Evening Sun* broke the news of the forthcoming exhibition:



Fig. 6. Sketch by George Luks of "Henri and His 8, 1907," (ink on paper). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul.

Eight Independent Painters to Give an Exhibition of Their Own Work Winter: A group of eight painters who have been expressing their ideas of life as they see it in quite their own manner, and who therefore have been referred to often as "the apostles of ugliness" by a larger group of brother artists who paint with a T square and plumb line, have formed themselves into a body, it was announced last evening, without leader, president, or formal organization.[50]

Guy Péne du Bois, Henri's student and recently appointed art critic for the *New York American,* succinctly referred to The Eight as "a group of men who would say 'sweat' when they meant sweat, anywhere, even in the parlors of people who righteously denied the existence of perspiration."

Polemics grew in the New York press as the various art critics chose sides before the opening of the exhibition at Macbeth's. As part of the preparations each of The Eight sat for a publicity portrait at Gertrude Kasebier's photo studio. Prior to the show

Luks sent Henri a humorous postcard of "The Eight" (Fig. 6). The Eight are depicted as a chorus. Luks (far right) sits next to the bottle of rye whiskey, while Sloan, the group's treasurer, is shown beating a drum decorated with dollar signs.[51]

The exhibit of The Eight opened at the Macbeth Gallery on February 3, 1908.

> An apprehensive William Macbeth began welcoming the first visitors to his domain as both of the 19-by-23 foot rooms rapidly filled. Soon three hundred people an hour were estimated to be filing past the sixty-three works. "The show . . . is creating a sensation," observed an elated Henri. "It was packed like an Academy reception from early morning to night . . . ." Undeterred by snowy weather, crowds continued to surge through the gallery, and it was estimated that seven thousand people saw the show during its two-week run.[52]

Luks' work was favorably reviewed in *The Script:*

> The most expressive, if not the most impressive, group was that belonging to Mr. Luks whose revelry in strong deep hues gives to his exhibit an effect of sumptuous splendor by the side of which even his brilliant companions somewhat pale. His *Macaws* is of the richest dye and resembles an Eastern necklace or bracelet set with burning jewels in its most barbaric and altogether superb beauty. *The Pigs* and *The Pet Goose* combined a quaint interpretation of animal life with the same magnificence of color.[53]

While James Huneker, Charles Fitzgerald and Guy Péne du Bois expectedly came out in favor of The Eight, the group, as Glackens had predicted, "got an awful roasting from some of the papers." A review in *Town Topics* reflected the bitterness of the rival camp:

> Vulgarity smites one in the face at this exhibition, and I defy you to find anyone in a healthy frame of mind who, for instance, wants to hang Luks's posteriors of pigs, or Glackens's *At Mouquin's,* or John Sloan's *Hairdresser's Window* in his living rooms or gallery, and not get disgusted two days later . . . .[54]

Critical furor over Luks' painting of the pigs prompted the pupils at the Art Students League to inset a large, comic illustration of the artist executing the portrait of a pig in the 1908 edition of the Society of American Fakirs catalogue.[55]

After their landmark show in New York, Sloan scheduled The Eight for month-long displays in eight other cities beginning in the Fall of 1908 — Chicago, Toledo, Detroit, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Bridgeport, Pittsburgh and Newark. He partially reassembled the paintings from the original Macbeth show, although other pieces had to be substituted for those sold in the interim.[56] The traveling show introduced the art of The Eight to audiences outside of New York.

As it drew to a close in 1909, Luks and his colleagues were included in a group show of American art, which opened in March of that year at the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin and which later moved to the Art Society in Munich. Luks represented by *New Jersey Peonies,* which was the first time his work had been sent abroad.[57] The American show had been organized by Hugo Reisinger, a German immigrant who had done well financially in the United States and who had previously brought an exhibition of contemporary German pictures to the Metropolitan Museum.

Although The Eight were not homogeneous painters and they never exhibited all together again, their show at Macbeth's helped to effect an important change in America's artistic values.[58] In a style of briskly-painted realism The Eight nucleus — Henri, Luks, Glackens, Shinn and Sloan — demonstrated a sensitivity to ordinary subjects unsentimentally presented and drawn from the America urban environment, which later earned them the appellation of "The Ash Can School." From the perspective of several generations The Eight emerge as spiritual forerunners of the New York School of the post-World War II era.

Through their exhibit The Eight successfully challenged the power structure of the academic art exhibition in America and pointed the way to a new



7. *Woman with Goose,* 1907

direction in American painting. Because their show threatened — and did — overshadow the Spring 1908 exhibition of the National Academy of Design, the academicians voted to replace the time-honored Hanging Committee with a single organizer. He was Harrison Morris, former director of the Pennsylvania Academy, who devoted one gallery in the 1908 exhibition to The Eight and a number of Henri's students, which less sympathetic academicians labeled "the freak wall."

The Eight likewise promoted liberalized exhibition opportunities for less conventional artists which, in turn, "opened the door for a much broader exchange of ideas and tastes." This was manifested in the Independent Show held in April 1910 in New York, which the *New York Evening Sun* heralded as "the largest opposition exhibition of paintings that has been held since the union of the National Academy and the Society of American Artists . . . ." The no-jury Independent Show, the first one in New York's history at which the police had to regulate visitors' movements, was a smashing success and later became the annual showing of the Society of Independent Artists formed in 1916 and headed for three decades by John Sloan.

Luks was the lone member of The Eight who did not participate in the 1910 Independent Show. Despite the pleading of his colleagues, he did not want to detract from his first one-man show held at the Macbeth Gallery from April 14-27, 1910.

An outgrowth of the 1910 Independent Show was the Association of American Painters and Sculptors headed by Arthur Davies. The newly-formed association, which numbered Luks and others of The Eight among its twenty-five members, had been organized to present an expanded version of the 1910 Independent Show.[59] The result was the now-famous International Exhibition of Modern Art, or the Armory Show, held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York in 1913. More than one thousand works of art constituted a microcosm of modern art and on a broad scale introduced contemporary European — especially French — art to the American public. Luks was represented by six entries, among them *Ten Sketches in the Bronx Zoo* and *A Philosopher.* The latter piece was one of a relatively few works to be reproduced and sold in postcard form at the Armory Show. *A Philosopher* was inspired by Pissarro's *Self-Portrait* (1873), which Luks saw at The Louvre during one of his trips to France in the early 1900's.

Nine days after the Armory Show closed Luks' one-man show opened at the Kraushaar Gallery in New York. It marked the beginning of a decade-long association during which Luks would win some important national prizes and would become an elder statesman of American art. He became affiliated with the gallery through John F. Kraushaar, who occasionally played on a scrub baseball team on Long Island for which Luks was the left fielder. The two men came to know and respect each other because neither of them had any use for affectation.[60]

In reviewing Luks' first one-man show at Kraushaar's, New York critics observed that the "apostle of radicalism in painting" and "art's bad boy who used to frighten timid members of juries at the Academy of Design" had mellowed considerably and had become a "poet on canvas" who dropped his boisterous manner to depict the hearts of children.[61]

The reviewer for *The Globe* noted: "Whatever Mr. Luks was, or is, or will be, one thing is certain, he is invariably entertaining and interesting, and, though you may disagree with him, or question his taste, or wish he would be a trifle more serious at times, you cannot ignore him. He is a factor in our modern art."[62]

The following year Luks had another "stirring one-man show" at Kraushaar's, the focal point of which was the large, striking canvas, *The Polo Game,* a.k.a. *The Stroke.* It depicted an exciting moment between the American and British teams at the international polo match held at Meadow Brook, Long Island, in 1913. Although critical opinion differed on the merits of the painting, various reviewers applauded the spontaneity and draughtsmanship of the twenty preliminary drawings Luks made of polo ponies and their riders. Some of these sketches also appeared in the July 1914 issue of *Vanity Fair* and inaugurated Luks' twenty-year association with the popular monthly which published a number of his drawings and watercolors.[63]



5. *Allen Street,* c. 1905



Fig. 7. Luks' upper Manhattan studio near High Bridge Park which he used from 1912-mid 1920's. Courtesy, LFC.

By the time he had his initial one-man show at the Kraushaar Gallery in 1913, George and his second wife had moved from West 56th Street to a spacious studio-residence in the upper part of Manhattan at Edgecombe Road and Jumel Place, one block east of Amsterdam and 170th Street (Fig. 7). The Luks' home was a five-minute walk in one direction to the drives along the Hudson River and in another to High Bridge Park and Washington Bridge spanning the Harlem River. Both of these sites figured prominently in Luks' work in the second decade of this century.

James Huneker's *Bedouins* preserves one of the few firsthand descriptions of Luks' Jumel studio-residence:

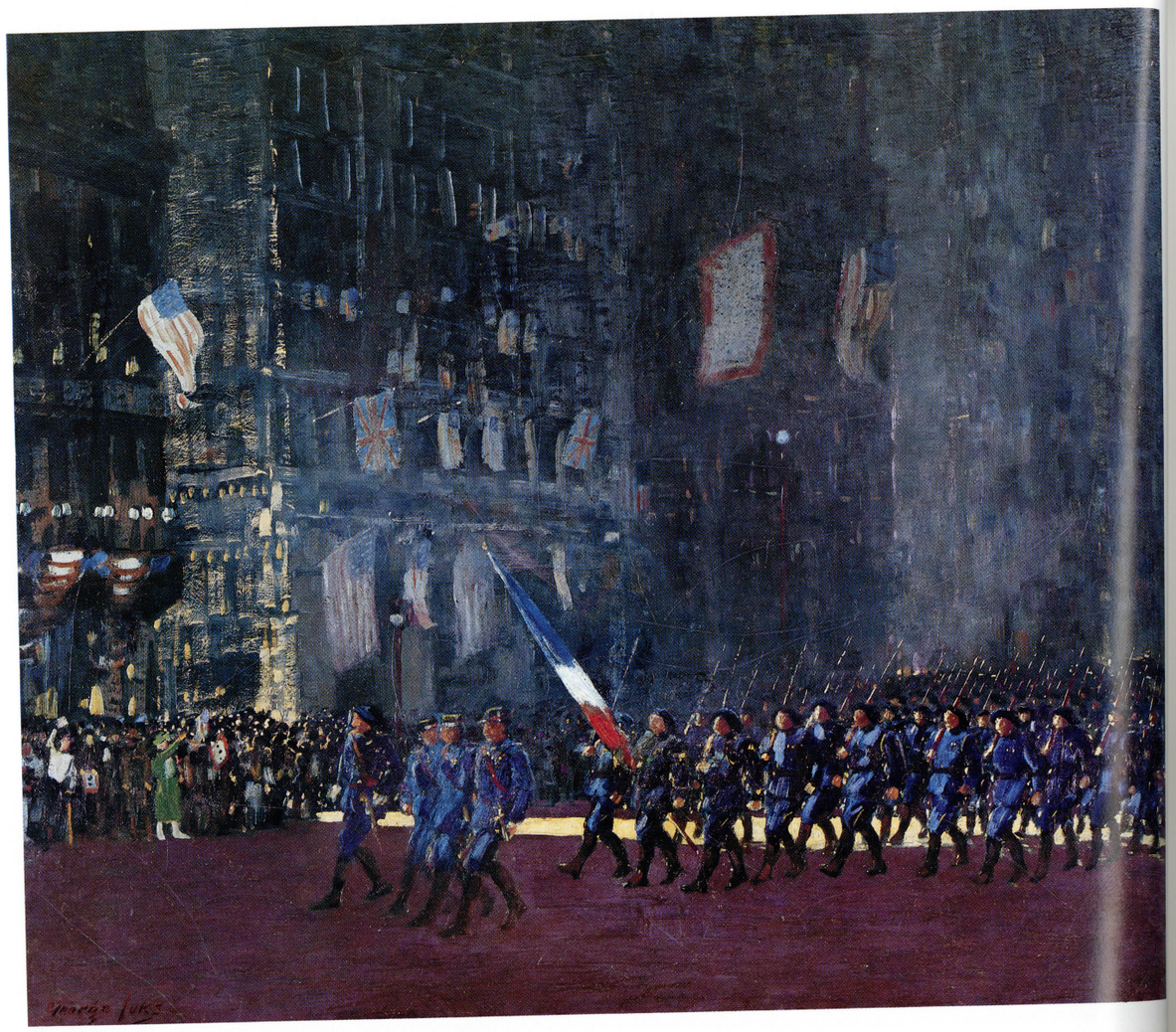
> Here are domestic comfort, a north light, and plenty of models across the road in the open air, splashed by sunshine or shadowed by trees; babies, goats, nurse-girls, park loafers, policemen, lazy pedestrians, noisy boys, nice little girls with hoops and the inevitable sparrows. Rocks are in abundance. The landscape "composes" itself. And you are not surprised, when ushered into the great studio on the second floor, to be confronted by canvases registering various phases of the vibrating world hard-by. Since he moved from down-town the painter is becoming more of a plein-artiste.[64]

Luks' Jumel studio proved popular with his niece, Lore. She liked to visit, put Hawaiian records on the phonograph and dance around the room to George's delight. At the studio he gave lessons to Edward W. Root, a quiet young man, an art collector and later professor at Hamilton College. Luks had met him after painting a portrait of his father, Elihu Root (1847-1937), Secretary of State under President Theodore Roosevelt and later one of the American lawyers who helped to set up the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague.[65]

At his Jumel studio in 1917 Luks painted the portrait of John F. Kraushaar's daughter, Antoinette, in her graduation dress (Cat. no. 14). However, the plain white expanse of the unadorned dress was too much for the artist, so from his studio corner he got a piece of old, blue cloth which he draped over Miss



26. *Gloucester, Massachusetts,* n.d.



15. *Blue Devils on Fifth Avenue,* 1917

Kraushaar and the color of which adds a great deal to the portrait.[66] It was part of Luks' one-man show at the Kraushaar Gallery in 1918, which American Art News termed "the strongest and most successful of 'one-man' shows thus far of the season." The portrait was described as a ". . . beautiful presentment of a young girl whom one would like know, alive and youthful emotion, yet exhaling a charm of restraint and careful breeding . . . . It speaks eloquently of developing womanhood, and the presence of a thoughtful, growing mind."[67]

A few days after the closing of his one-man show at Kraushaar's, Luks participated in a group exhibit of "indigenous" art at the Whitney Studio (the forerunner of The Whitney Museum) where he had first showed in 1916. The pictures were done on the spot on canvases of various sizes and shapes for which the artists drew lots and then painted all at the same time. The marathon came off astonishingly well and no one disgraced himself.[68]

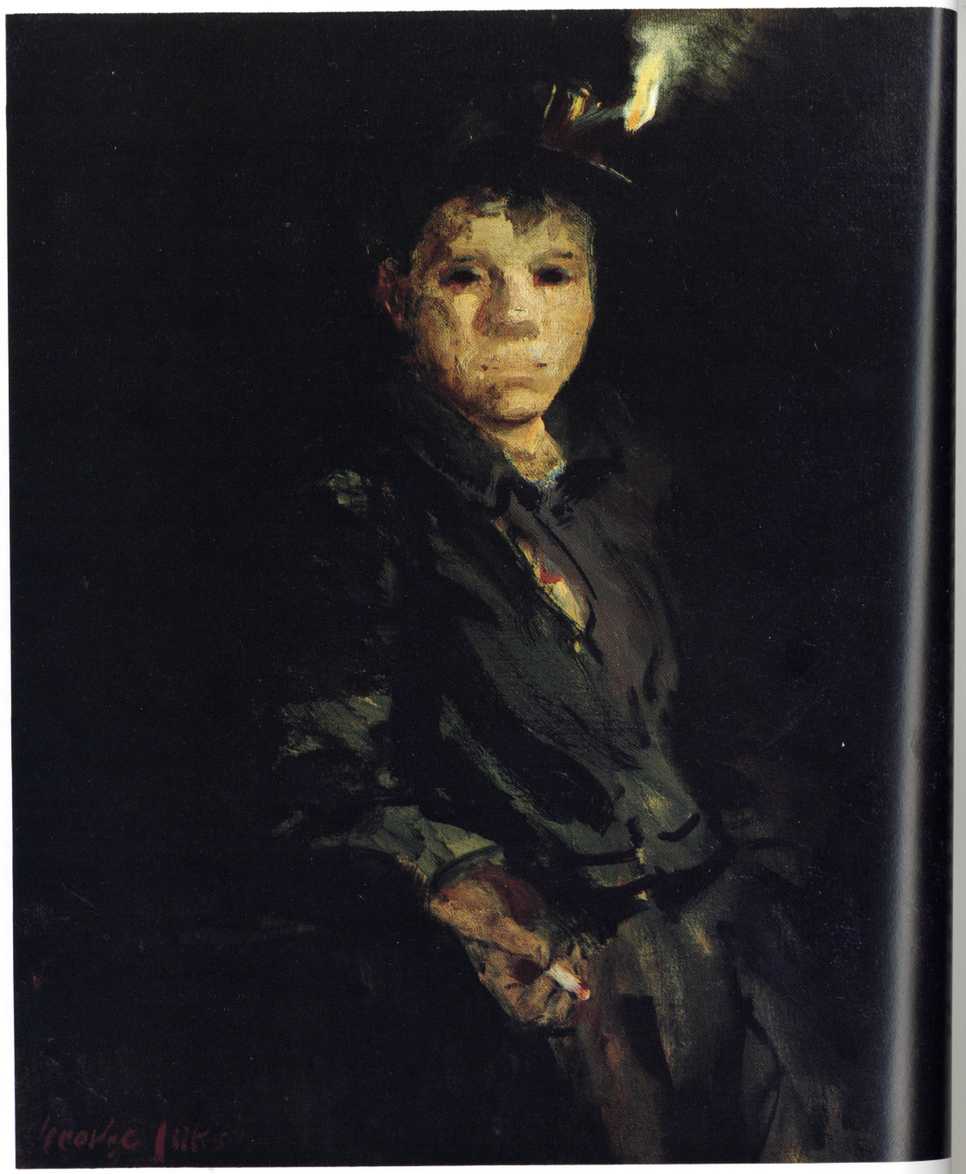
By 1918 the United States was deeply involved in World War I in Europe. The war effort at home and abroad provided sources of new iconographical material for Luks and his contemporaries, although their work in this genre constitutes only a small part of their creative output and did not change the direction of American art. Premiere among Luks' work done during World War I is *Blue Devils On Fifth Avenue* (Cat. no. 15). He personally witnessed the parade of this platoon of French veterans in New York on July 10, 1917. They had come over to assist in the Liberty Loan Drive and did much to arouse the American fighting spirit. The Blue Devils are shown passing by the corner of 45th Street and Fifth Avenue about 9 a.m. against the background of Delmonico's Restaurant, the Harriman National Bank and the Jewish synagogue.[69]

Unlike many of the ceremonial pieces produced during World War I by Luks' contemporaries, *Blue Devils* transcends the propagandistic requirements of the moment and the need to spur patriotic sentiment. This was the opinion of Henry McBride who reviewed a show of paintings on war subjects held at the Kraushaar Gallery in June 1918. Most of them had been done for the ill-fated patriotic exhibition planned by the National Arts Club and gathered by Duncan Phillips, but

> . . . which was abandoned when it was thought that the contributions had not reached as high . . . a standard as had been hoped for . . . . The exception in the present Kraushaar collection is provided by George Luks; [*Blue Devils*] . . . . The electric feeling that seems to float from the crowd and through the crowd on especially sympathetic occasions seems to have got the artist this time, and the Blue Devils march across his canvas as though to the strains of the "Marseillaise."[70]

To the same exhibition at Kraushaar's Luks lent *In the Service,* which depicts a Red Cross nurse against the background of the American flag. The following year Luks' contribution to the Library Loan Show at Kraushaar's was *Fight to Buy,* which presented a new version of Uncle Sam with a chinbeard and long hair in back. The *New York Herald* wrote:

> It was characteristically courageous of George B. Luks to evolve a new conception of Uncle Sam as one of his contributions in the decoration of Fifth Avenue for the Liberty Loan campaign.
>
> This painting, now on exhibition in the window of the Kraushaar Galleries, has evoked extraordinary expressions of opinion from the populace. Some seemed to think that the artist had gone too far in representing the old gentleman in anything but his familiar uniform, especially in war time. Of course, the object of the artist was to remind spectators that there are two sides to the character of this symbolical personage, and that he is very much of a businessman at present, seeing that he has to bestir himself that the supplies of all sorts may be kept up to the mark.
>
> Mr. Luks' Uncle Sam might be a United States Senator, a member of House of Representatives or the Governor of a Western state. That he is a person of determination



18. *Breaker Boy,* 1921

> must be evident to anybody who brings any psychological gifts to the study of the picture. We should hate to have Mr. Luks' subject ask, "Have you bought a bond?" and have to answer in the negative.[71]

Luks' friendship with Gutzon Borglum (1871-1941), the sculptor of Mount Rushmore, resulted in several other wartime paintings on Czech subjects done on Borglum's estate near Stamford, Connecticut, in the Fall of 1918. Their friendship predated World War I when Luks wrote the preface to the catalog of Borglum's sculpture exhibit at Columbia University's Avery Library in February 1914.

When Czechoslovakia became an independent country in 1918 the Czechs in America organized some 3,000 men to go help defend the new republic. Prior to their departure they were encamped on Borglum's estate where Luks was visiting at the time. The colorful costume of one of the recruits inspired Luks' *Czechoslovak Chieftan* (1919) now in the Newark Museum. At the camp the artist met Lieutenant Frank Danielovsky, who had just arrived from Siberia and whose firsthand descriptions of service in the Czechoslovak army there furnished the basis for the *Czechoslovak Army Entering Vladivostok,* formerly in The Phillips Collection and now in the Los Angeles County Museum.

Beginning in 1919 and continuing through the early 1920's Luks expanded the range of his subject matter beyond urban New York to Nova Scotia, Boston, Maine and the coal mining region of Northeastern Pennsylvania where he had grown up. The Nova Scotia oils and watercolors were the product of the summer of 1919 which George spent fishing and hunting in the eastern Canadian province. They were exhibited at Kraushaar's in January 1920 and drew much favorable comment, which noted the artist's entry into a new field (Fig. 8).

Critic Frederick James Gregg cautioned viewers against typecasting Luks as a painter of waifs and strays in the slums.

> Those who were in the habit of harking back to his earlier work and discussing Mr. Luks, with a sort of implication that the best part of his career was safely behind him, will

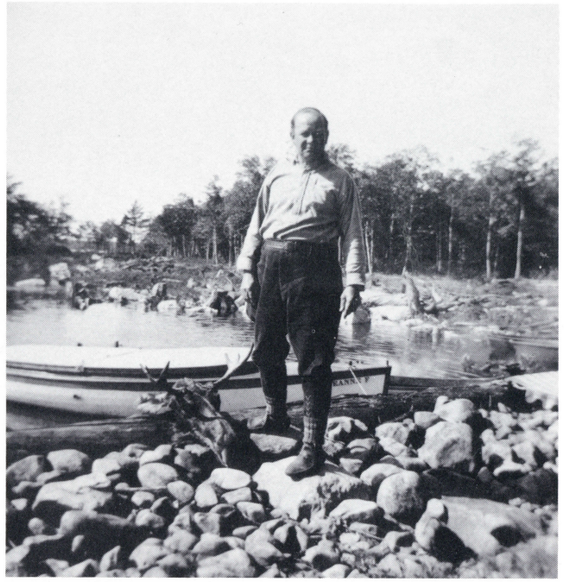


Fig. 8. George Luks in Nova Scotia, 1919. Courtesy, Kraushaar Gallery.



30. *Hannaford's Cove,* n.d.

find it necessary to reconsider that conclusion. It is now demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that he has plenty of surprises up his sleeve for the future and before the time when he joins the ranks of American "old masters."[72]

In 1922 Luks became quite ill and had to spend some time in a sanitorium.[73] To seek relief from his illness and from the domestic problems that ended his second marriage, Luks also lived and painted in Boston in 1922 and 1923 as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Q. A. Shaw McKean.[74] Mrs. McKean was Margaret Sargent, Luks' patron and a sculptor in her own right. She had studied sculptor with Gutzon Borglum and drawing with Luks of whom she did a bronze bust that was exhibited at the Philadelphia Academy in 1918 and later acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago.[75] Luks produced some half dozen canvases of Boston cityscapes whose titles indicate where he painted: *Bullfinch Houses — Beacon Hill, Mount Vernon Street* and *Commonwealth Avenue.*[76]

In connection with his Boston visit Luks ventured up to the Maine seacoast in 1922 to paint at Pond Cove on Cape Elizabeth. He had learned of the area three years earlier when he took the ferry from nearby Portland to Nova Scotia. Through his work at Pond Cove Luks joined artists and writers like Winslow Homer, Robert Henri and Frederick Waugh, who since the turn of the century had been discovering and appreciating the wonderful scenery of Maine.

While based at a little old farmhouse in Pond Cove, Luks was interviewed by Emma W. Moseley for the Portland newspaper. She described him as "the only one of his kind and it is safe to say that there will be no infringement of the copyright." In addition to his epigram-laden conversation, Luks also expressed his delight with the new material the Maine seacoast and its inhabitants provided him:

> Talk about the chalk cliffs at Cornish, talk about the "wonderful scenery" anywhere in Europe, Maine has is it over them. Here you have that wonderful gray that is found only in such a climate as that of Maine and your rocks and shores are so rugged and bold that they make other rocks and shores seem pretty and puny in comparison; and your characters, there are real American types here — types that you find nowhere else . . . I intend to paint them in all their strength and ruggedness and I shall be happy as a king for I shall find plenty of material here with which I can work.[77]

In October 1922 Luks showed the results of his Maine sojourn at the Kraushaar Gallery. Like his previous Nova Scotia exhibit, this one revealed his ever-varying search for material. The *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that:

> Mr. Luks, like other artists, has marveled at the conflict of the giant ledges valiantly withstanding the onslaughts of the sea, but he has, unlike the majority of his confreres, transferred to his canvases the sense of the contrasting forces and the grandeur of these Titans. Sometimes he has set his easel along the quiet shore of some cove or inlet and has transcribed, with a weather eye for color effect, some incident in the fisherman's life, as the beautiful, pale vermillion dory being dragged ashore or the burnt-sienna seaweed clinging to the exposed rocks.[78]

To mark a decade of Luks' association with the Kraushaar Gallery, he was given a retrospective there in January 1923 which included thirty-nine works and comprised loans from a number of private collections. In his introduction to the catalog Guy Pène du Bois noted that

> Luks' gusto is not . . . merely a matter of mannerism. His sledge hammer drives spikes that could be driven with no other implement. His style is an invention of necessity. The man is . . . a dynamo . . . . And his art which appears to be an essentially masculine or manly affair has all the instinctive force of a feminine guess. The man will paint the decadent viciousness of a character like the Duchess and the virtue of a blonde girl with equal understanding . . . . He records the pathos as well as the joy in

children . . . . He will force the evidence of reality until it is impossible for those of duller reactions to miss it.[79]

Town and Country felt that Luks' retrospective at Kraushaar's confirmed his place in American art history:

> Mr. Luks' exhibition seems a record of Mr. Luks' enjoyment of himself. Which is merely to say that he is a man well fitted for his job. Although he is notoriously self-appreciative, it is this confidence in himself which enables him to produce a work of such sheer strength as *The Wrestlers,* and one of such technical affection as *Lollypops.* It is confidence founded on experience and much hard work. The man who can range from the monasterial attitude of *The Old Dominican* to the ornamental bravura of the *Czechoslovak Chieftan* and at the same time produce such pieces of precious painting as is found in *The Little Madonna,* the *Boy with the Guitar* [a portrait of Will and Dan Luks] and *The Spielers* has a right to some conviction as to his rightful place in our serious art history.[80]

Luks' last year with the Kraushaar Gallery was 1924. It was marked by a one-man show of twelve pieces in which the artist expressed a preference for "crabbed age and youth." The *New York American* opined that:

> Perhaps Luks likes youth and age because they seem to be what they actually are. In middle age we wear masks, but the child has nothing to conceal, and the old man cannot conceal if he would, for what he is has become written indelibly on his countenance.[81]

In 1925 Luks began an affiliation with the Frank K. M. Rehn Gallery in New York that lasted until the artist's death eight years later. Luks' first show there comprised work he had done that same year in the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania — one of several forays he made in the 1920's back to his childhood haunts.[82] In the summer of 1925 Luks set up a temporary studio for two months in Pottsville where as a boy he had worked as a drugstore clerk. He produced some thirty oils, watercolors and numerous drawings which were first displayed at the Pottsville Public Library to which he donated a notable series of drawings before the exhibit moved that November to the Rehn Gallery in New York (Cat. nos. 49, 50).

Luks' work presented a slice of life unfamiliar to many New York gallery goers. He considered that region of Pennsylvania to be the "West of the East," with all the picturesqueness of frontier life or of the Gold Coast of the "Forty-Niners." His *Breaker Boy* (Cat. no. 18), included in the 1925 show, constitutes the painterly equivalent of Lewis L. Hines' photographic studies of the Pennsylvania mining region, which also date from the early 1920's.

Luks culminated his work on coal mining subjects in 1927 with a large mural commissioned by Henry Sheafer and presented as a gift to the Necho Allen Hotel in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. It hung for many years in the hotel's lounge until it was restored some ten years ago and transferred to the Pottsville Bank and Trust Company where it can be seen today. Consisting of a large central panel flanked by two smaller ones, the mural depicts an eighteenth-century lumberman, Necho Allen, who is said to have discovered coal in the anthracite region, and later-day miners going to and from work — all against the rich and luminous autumnal colors characteristic of the countryside.[83]

In addition to seeking new subjects in Nova Scotia, Massachusetts, Maine and Pennsylvania in the 1920's, Luks also purchased a farm in the Berkshires at Old Chatham, New York. It was beautifully situated at Irish Hill on some twenty-six orchard-studded acres. Since Luks spent summers painting in the vicinity, he purchased a Ford station wagon and learned how to drive, as he proudly related in a letter to his nephew, Kraemer.

Two of that artist's neighbors at Old Chatham appeared in his paintings exhibited at the Twenty-Ninth Carnegie International in Pittsburgh in 1930 where they caused some excited comment. One of them, Mrs. Gamely, was 110 when the artist painted her simply dressed, cradling a white



29. *Boy with Bugle,* n.d.

cockerell in her arms. Luks' other subject was Ann Pratt of Malden Bridge (Cat. no. 23), New York, an antique dealer, whom Luks described in a letter to his former student, Edward W. Root, as a "great character . . . a good, old fashioned New England type and collector of early 'Americana.'"[84] From Ann Pratt Luks bought a large number of early American antiques before they were deemed fashionable, as well as Oriental block prints and temple jars. However, if visitors to George's New York studio expressed admiration for a particular antique, he was not above giving it to them because it saved him eventual warehouse costs.

By the mid-1920's Luks was divorced from his second wife, who later became Mrs. W. V. Frankenberg and who — much to his dismay — got a number of his works in the settlement. He necessarily gave up his spacious Jumel studio-residence and moved back to midtown Manhattan. In 1927 he married Mercedes Carbonell, a handsome and intelligent Cuban girl almost forty years his junior, whom he inexplicably ignored in his last will, as did his only son, Kent.

Beginning in 1920 Luks taught at the Art Students League in New York, but his classroom antics and ribald language in critiquing students' work resulted in his separation from the League four years later. Reaching back into his own artistic experiences, Luks advised his students to "Get away from copying, or, like a liar and a thief, you will be found out. Surround yourself with life, fight and revel, and learn the significance of toil. There is a beauty in a hovel or a grog shop. A child of slums will make a better painting than a drawingroom lady gone over by a beauty shop."[85]

In the same vein Luks felt that:

> If painters don't study the period they live in how will they ever show people a thousand years from now that we were people who really did things, too? . . . . It's up to us to show them and so we can't be too painstaking in observation . . . . They don't study life, some of these young fellows nowadays, they don't know what people look like. They just know their wives and the elevator boy by sight and that's about all. They need to get out and get kicked round a bit. They need less "sophistication" and more observation of the world around them . . . .[86]



Fig. 9. Photography of George Luks with his famous pince-nez, c. 1920s. Courtesy, LFC.

After leaving the Art Student League Luks started his own school, which was located on the top floor of a dilapidated building at 7 East 22nd Street in New York. According to an extant prospectus:

> The George Luks School of Painting was founded . . . in response to the spontaneous demand for a virile school of Living American Art. With the present trend in art to modern forms, more serious artists and students feel a need for a center . . . [of] frank discussion of the view point and philosophy of our present day . . . .
>
> It is George Luks' policy to develop the individuality of the student and to give him a sound knowledge of the craft of painting, building up each student with sympathetic and wise counsel so that they see and think for themselves.[87]

Hastily daubed signs on cardboard pointed the way up the dark stairs to the Luks School where the artist taught in an informal French manner with little attempt to regulate classes, models or working hours. "This pays for all my living expenses," Luks said, "and so I don't have to give a damn if my paintings sell or not."[88] Colorfully attired and wearing pince-nez glasses with a black ribbon, Luks strode among his students "emanating life, personality, vigor and confidence." (Fig. 9) According to Everett Shinn, "Here, in his classroom, there was offered the two opportunities that interested him most: to paint and to have an audience."[89]

At the end of the school year Luks arranged a show of his students' best work in a New York gallery. At the Anderson Galleries in May 1926 he anonymously exhibited as a practical joke his own unsigned work labeled, *Still Life by Crow*.[90] Somewhat against his inclination, George's brother, Will, was persuaded to view the exhibit where he purchased the still life for $15.00, although he could not find a signature on it nor could anyone in the gallery tell him the artist's name. Later on George told his brother that he had painted it and signed it for him.[91]

The same opinionated exuberance Luks displayed at his school continued unabated in the last years of his life. In 1932 he won the first William A. Clark Prize and Corcoran Gold Medal at the Thirteenth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings in Washington, D.C., for his *Woman with Black Cat*. It harkens back to the canvases he had done in the early 1900's and depicts an old beggar woman whom he saw on the street in New York and asked to pose for him.[92]

The Corcoran Gold Medal, the last in a long line of honors he received for his art, induced Luks to say, "I've [got] more medals than a swivel-chair Major General." All of them were awarded in this country, for he received none from abroad and was not represented in any European museum or gallery in his lifetime. This was most appropriate for an unflagging champion of American art who wished that

> . . . every American who cares for art would fill his house with American paintings, if for nothing else to show the foreign visitor what we can do instead of boring him with the fourth rate examples of the contemporary art of his own country, as we so often do . . . . No country was a success without art. That is one thing we must never forget.[93]

While Luks' work was on display at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., he presented an expose of art on December 21, 1932, at the Artists Cooperative Market at 16 East 34th Street in New York. Although Luks had been widely advertised to paint a demonstration portrait of ballerina Doris Humphries for charity and give a lecture on "What About American Art?", Luks elected to do neither. Instead, as the *Herald Tribune* wrote, he "took his colleagues and their profession by the horns and shook them before a horrified audience of 500 guests with the gusto and delight of a child tearing apart his mother's most favored tapestry." Before the evening was over Luks succeeded in driving most of the audience from the hall.

Luks refused to don the painter's smock offered him by Milton Gray, secretary of the Market, and plainly advised Miss Humphries to stay off the model's stand. Upon taking the platform, the artist said:

> I'm George Luks, and I'm a rare bird. You people stick with me and you'll have a good time . . . .

I'm here in the interest of a movement that wants to introduce art to the American public . . . . This country has been imposed upon by French superior salesmanship. It is the victim of cheap little lawyers who become diplomats, and financiers who let their wives buy pictures from dealers who perfume them with bombast and saddle them with trash. I'm here to tell you that it's time America woke up to the realization that it is the greatest country in common sense and the least in appreciation of its own strength.

When the audience refused to listen to Luks and a large-sized man called him a fakir and a braggart, the artist seized him and said,

> You can't talk to me like that . . . I'm old enough to be your father, but I'll lay you cold if you don't apologize . . . . You're not talking to George Luks now, you're talking to "Chicago Whitey," the best amateur boxer and barroom fighter in America . . . . Don't make any mistake about that. I've lived and I'm living. You and the rest of these hypocrites are only waiting to die. Stay here and I'll show you something. If you don't like my talk get out, and the sooner the more of you that go the better.

When most of the scandalized audience had left Luks painted a "skillful little sketch" for the benefit of a few adoring disciples and then sat down to chat with them and to laugh at the scene he had created.[94]

Luks' abruptness and plain speaking resulted in his death less than a year later in New York. Although some newspapers romantically reported that he had suffered a heart attack during an early morning walk on October 29, 1933, to observe the dawn on the Sixth Avenue E1 for a picture he planned to paint, Luks actually died of injuries sustained in a speakeasy fight. Patrolman John Ginty found him in a doorway at 1322 Sixth Avenue near 52nd Street. He was identified through letters found on his person and later verified by his attorney, Harrison Tweed. Luks was clad in his favorite gray suit with a short blue overcoat, while slightly askew on his head was a large sombrero-like black fedora.

Emil Siebern, a Greenwich Village sculptor, made a death mask of Luks prior to the simple service held for the artist at 6 p.m. on October 31 at Campbell's Funeral Church at Broadway and 66th Street in New York.[95] More than 300 attended, including fellow artists John Sloan, Ernest Lawson, William Glackens and Everett Shinn of The Eight, Jonas Lie, Leon Dabo and Jerome Myers, dealers John F. and Antoinette Kraushaar, Benjamin DeCasseres and Gene Tunney, as well as collectors, friends and a number of Luks' former students. At the head of the flower-banked coffin Right Rev. William A. Nicholas, titular Bishop of Washington for the Holy Orthodox Church, read the brief service after which Luks' body was interred the following day in the family plot at Royersford, Pennsylvania. Luks "was buried in an embroidered eighteenth-century waistcoat which had been his pride and joy, and with him went from American art a certain quality which has not yet returned."[96]

Some of Luks' last works — a series of twelve black and white oil sketches called *Scenes of Revelry in Old New York* — were reproduced in the January 1934 issue of *Vanity Fair.* They depict some of Manhattan's old drinking places and document the role played by the saloon in American life at the turn of the century. Luks' "blithesome and boisterious sketches," which bear such colorful titles as *Paddy the Pig's, Siesta Time in the Tub of Blood,* and *High-Tide in Luchow's,* were made as illustrations for Benjamin DeCasseres' book, *O'Keg, America!* It contains tales of the saloons "when Bucchus, Gambrinus and John Barleycorn walked New York, lifesized and unshackled."[97]

The essence of George Luks was perhaps best captured by Benjamin DeCasseres in a piece, "Fantasia De Luks," based on his last visit to the artist's studio a few weeks before his death.[98]

> He was "Lusty Luks." He was thews and sinew, mentally, artistically and physically. He was bawling, robustious, pithy, gritty. His language smoked and crackled with all the words you will find in Rabelais plus some of the most curious and exotic combinations of the lewd and blasphemous that it has ever been my pleasure to hear . . . .
>
> He invented the most fantastic yarns . . . . You believed him at first and then disbelieved him; and found that he was most fascinating and companionable when you disbelieved him . . . . Luks was not a liar; he was a dramatic comedian who acted everywhere in his own interminable twenty-minute plays . . . .
>
> Each one of us is an approximation to his other self, his idea-self, his bovaryzed self. Not so with Luks. He was not split into object and subject. He was Absolute Luks. He was Luks precisely as Luks wanted to be now and in any questionable eternity of time. So he believed, so he acted in life . . . .
>
> Stanley L. Cuba

Notes

1 **Duncan Phillips,** *George Luks,* in *ex. cat., Exhibition of Paintings of George Luks,* November 2-29, [1926], Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D.C.

2 **James Huneker,** *Bedouins* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 108.

3 **Photocopy of birth certificate from the Lutheran Church, Williamsport, PA, courtesy Andrew King Grugan, Curator of the John Sloan Memorial Collection, Lock Haven, PA. For some unknown reason Luks later changed the year of his birth to 1867, the one generally cited in published sources about him.**

4 Luks' family opinions differ regarding Emil's European origins. Some recall that he was from Konigsberg (now Kaliningrad, USSR), which would account for Lithuanian being one of the languages he spoke. Others in the family maintain the Emil hailed from Gdansk. Per Arthur Lewis, a writer doing research on Luks, Emil's U.S. naturalization papers dated 1892 list "Poland" as country of origin. This indicates Emil's ethnic identification, since between 1795 and 1919 the Polish state officially did not exist but was partitioned among Russia, Prussia and Austria.

5 Information courtesy Andrew K. Grugan. Nearby Lock Haven, PA is the birth place of John Sloan whose friendship with Luks began in the early 1890's when both worked as newspaper artists in Philadelphia and lasted until Luks' death in 1933.

6 Quoted in Robert B. Koslosky, "George Benjamin Luks, 1866-1933: 'The Painter of the Anthracite Region'," October 20, 1979, p. 2. At Shenandoah in 1876 George's father purchased a burial plot at the Odd Fellows' Cemetary (Cemetary Deed, *Luks Family Collections;* hereinafter cited as *LFC.)* Most of the Luks family is buried at Royerford, PA.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

8 Philip A. Cumin, "A Luks Reminiscence," *New York Times,* November 12, 1933.

9 Information provided by Cheryl Leibold, Archivist, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

10 *Cf.* In Vol. I, #17, April 10, 1899, p. 7, Luks' vignette of two clowns for "Last Week at the Theatres." George's brother, Will, continued to perform in other vaudeville troupes as evidenced by a program *(LFC)* for the City Opera House in Watertown, NY, December 3, 1892, announcing his appearance on December 8 with Hamilton's Comedians in "Ermine or the Two Thieves."

11 Although various sources note that he was in Europe for a continuous ten year period, evidence indicates that these European trips lasted a year or two at most.

12 *Entry 39, Student Record Book 1888/1889, Staatliche Kunstakademie, Hochscule fur Bildende Kunste, Düsseldorf;* courtesy, Ingrid Kessel, Librarian, October 30, 1985. According to Arthur Strawn, *op. cit.*, Luks stayed in Düsseldorf with a distant relative, a "retired lion-tamer." This may have been his maternal uncle, Eugene Leonhard, who according to his letter to his sister, Bertha, had been employed at the Royal Court Theater in Munich.

13 *New York Herald Tribune,* October 30, 1933. Lowenstein is Henrich Lauenstein and Jensen is Joseph Jansen (1829-1905), a landscape painter; Gambrinus may be Giovacchino Gamberini (1859?).

14 *New York Times,* October 30, 1933.

15 Acc. 1976. 33.5 reproduced as 950 in Linda Crocker Simmons, *et. al., American Drawings, Watercolors, Pastels and Collages in the Collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art,* p. 142.

16 Letter postmarked July 19, 1894, to John Sloan at 806 Walnut Street, Philadelphia; courtesy, John Sloan Archives, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

17 Bruce W. Chambers, *The High Museum of Art: A Bicentennial Catalogue* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1975), p. 76.

18 Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight. American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show, 1870-1913* (Cincinnati: North Light Press, 1979), p. 52.

19 Everett Shinn, "Life on the Press," "Artists of the Philadelphia Press," *Philadelphia Museum Bulletin*, Vol. 41, November 1945, p. 9.

20 "Everett Shinn on George Luks: An Unpublished Memoir," *Archives of American Art*, Vol. 6, no. 2, April 1966, p. 9.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

22 Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight and its Influence*, The Art Students League of New York, January 9-29, 1983, p. 6.

23 John Sloan, "Memorial Tribute for William Glackens Given at the Society of Independent Artists 1939," p. 4; courtesy, John Sloan Collection, *op. cit.*

24 John Sloan, "Artist of the Press," *Philadelphia Museum Bulletin*, Vo. 41, op. cit., p. 8.

25 Perlman, *The Immortal Eight*, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Luks once tried to pick a fight at James J. Corbett's bar in New York with pugilist Mike Gibbon whereupon "Gentleman Jim" himself removed Luks by the seat of his pants and deposited him in a waiting hansom cab. Recounted in "Everett Shinn on George Luks," *op. cit.*, p. 10. Luks' obituary notice in the *New York Herald Tribune*, *op. cit.*, prints an unsubstantiated story that he played professional football in Philadelphia in the 1890's.

26 A total of thirty Luks illustrations appeared in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* published in scattered issued between January 15 and March 28, 1896. Luks also sent Shinn letters from Cuba illustrated with a series of sketches as restitution for his appropriation of Shinn's eight-dollar pipe and velvet case prior to George's departure. In one letter Luks depicted himself with General Garcia, who was smoking Shinn's pipe with the following caption in a balloon of smoke over the rebel leader's head, "Pass George Luks anywhere he wants to go and give him the key to Cuba." Recounted in "Shinn on Luks," *op. cit.*, p. 12.

27 Perlman, *The Eight* (1979), p. 63.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

30 Perlman, *The Eight* (1979), p. 77. However, Huneker in *Bedouins*, *op. cit.* p. 108, opines: "I believe it was Arthur Brisbane who first suggested to . . . [Luks] that he should go in for painting in oils."

31 Glackens, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17, 97. The museum sold the painting for acquisition funds at Sotheby's in New York on December 5, 1985; cat. #197. About 1899 Glackens also painted a portrait of Luks, which is reproduced in Glackens, *op. cit.*, following p. 50.

33 Shinn, "George Luks," *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7. In a similar vein Ira Glackens, pp. 97-98, recalls that "Luks invented several fine names, and he brought them into the conversation from time to time, so that these imaginary personages became almost aspects of George himself . . . He liked to give an imitation of a wedding. First he made the sound of a deep, rumbling organ, full of emotional quivers, wonderful to hear; and then, in the same rumbling, quivering, emotional tone, the minister's voice began, 'Augustus Smearcase, do you take this woman . . .' etc. The effect was very powerful . . . Another of [Luks] . . . favorite names was John W. Beeswax, which he employed as a sort of John Doe."

34 The following is based on the author's interview with Mrs. Lore Vanden Heuvel and Mr. & Mrs. Dan Luks, August 29, 1986. "Will Luks," *The New Yorker*, February 15, 1936, pp. 14-15.

35 "New York Day and Night," unidentified clipping, *LFC*. Luks did a portrait of Eugene Higgins, which in 1978 was owned by Hirschl & Adler Gallery in New York.

36 *Vanity Fair*, January 1934. In Paris Luks did a portrait of Paul Verlaine, the French Symbolist poet, which Arthur E. Egner of South Orange, NJ, one of Luks' important collectors, purchased from the artist. The portrait is reproduced in the catalog of Sotheby's sale, October 21, 1983, lot #289.

37 Chappellier Galleries, New York. Reproduced in Mahonri Sharp-Young's book on The Eight, p. 122.

38 "Palette and Brush" column, unidentified clipping, Kraushaar Gallery, New York. "Closing of the Cafe" was included in Luks' retrospective at the Kraushaar Gallery in 1923.

39 Marquita Villard, "Dr. Will Luks on the Luks Brothers," Vol. VI, no. iii, March 1934, p. 5.

40 The following discussion is taken from Perlman, *The Eight* (1962 ed.), p. 131, and Arnold T. Schwab, *James Huneker: Critic of the Seven Arts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), pp. 112-113.

41 Luks and Huneker so enjoyed each other's company because, like Luks, "Huneker loved human nature with the same passion as Walt Whitman. I have stood for hours with him while [like Luks] he talked to bartenders, cabbies, policemen, gamblers and porters. He was curious of everything that God had created . . . Life was good because it was an adventure." Benjamin DeCasseres, *James Gibbons Huneker*, (New York: Seven Arts Publishing Co., 1925), p. 33.

42 Benjamin DeCasseres, "The Fantastic George Luks," *New York Herald Tribune* (Sunday Magazine), September 10, 1933. In addition to Luks, Huneker, Hawthorne and Matthews, the other charter members of the 'Friendly Sons of Saint Bacchus" were Henry James, Bob Davis, Henry Tyrrell, Rip Anthony and Roy McCardell.

43 *New York Evening Sun*, April 3, 1903. Fitzgerald also took exception to the placement of a Henri canvas in the Society's 1902 exhibition; *cf.* Perlman, ibid., p. 144. Luks exhibited *The Spielers* (#432) and *Portrait* (#213) in the Society's 27th annual in 1905, but was not included in the 1906 show. *Cf. Society of American Artists 1905 Exhibition Catalog*, pp. 71 and 46, respectively. In January 1905 Luks also showed *A Child of the Slums* in the "Exhibit of American Figure Paintings Arranged by the Committee on Art" at the Lotos Club in New York.

44 *Art Notes Published in the Interest of the Macbeth Gallery*, #2, May 1903, p. 347. The collection was formed by Mr. C. C. Ruthrauff, Chairman of the Art Committee.

45 *New York Art Bulletin*, Vol. III, no. 12, January 23, 1904, p. 3. In October 1904 Luks showed *Portrait, Boy with a Shovel, Whiskey Bill, Prize Fighter, Butcher Boy* and *East Side, New York* In the 17th Annual Exhibition of Oil Paintings and Sculpture by American Artists at the Art Institute of Chicago, the same institution which awarded him the Logan Medal in 1920 for *Otis Skinner as Colonel Bridau* (The Phillips Collection) and again in 1926 for *The Player* (Canajoharie Library and Art Gallery). In January 1908 Luks and Sloan were included in a "Special Exhibition of Contemporary Art" at the National Arts Club.

46 Perlman, *The Eight* (1962 ed.), p. 162.

47 Henry McBride, "Luks, Once 'Outlaw' Painter, Now Has Exhibition Here," *New York Herald*, January 14, 1923.

48 Undated clipping [1907], p. 536, courtesy the Kraushaar Gallery, New York.

49 Unless otherwise noted, the following is based on Perlman, *The Eight* (1962 ed.).

50 Ira Glackens, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

51 Sloan also did a pencil sketch, *Four of the Eight* (Henri, Luks, Sloan and Prendergast; 15 by 11 inches), which is reproduced in *American Art Selections by the Chapellier Galliers* [New York], undated, p. 5.

52 Quoted in Perlman, *The Immortal Eight and Its Influences*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

53 Vol. III, no. 6, March 1908, p. 203. In 1918 Charles F. W. Mielatz showed his aquatint, *Woman and Macaws — After the Painting by George Lukes [sic]*, in the Third Annual Exhibition of The Brooklyn Society of Etchers; *cf.* exhibition catalog. Luks also did a portrait of Mielatz before World War I.

54 Perlman, *The Eight* (1962 ed.), p. 179.

55 *American Art at Amherst: A Summary Catalogue of the Collection at the Mead Art Gallery* (Middletown [CT]: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), p. 129.

56 *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by Eight American Artists, March 5-31, 1909, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh*, contains eight Luks' paintings (nos. 28-36): *Suter Johnny, Children of the Street, Five O'Clock, Pagliacci, Feeding Pigs, Girl with Doll, Closing [the] Cafe, Paris*, and *Consul General Buenz.*

57 The painting is reproduced in "Paintings, Watercolors & Drawings by George B. Luks," Parke-Bernet Galleries (New York) auction catalog, October 24, 1951, p. 7. *American Art News*, Vol. VIII, no. 23, March 19, 1909, p. 1.

58 The following is based on the "Significance of The Eight," in "An Exhibition of Paintings by The Eight," Wilkes College Sordoni Art Gallery, March 9-April 1, 1979, pp. 3-4. According to Perlman, *The Eight*, (1962 ed.), p. 202, the term "Ash Can School" first appeared in print in 1934 when Holger Cahill and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., employed it in their book, *Art in America.*

59 In March 1911 Davies, Luks and Prendergast of The Eight participated in the Rockwell Kent Independent in New York, together with Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Alfred Maurer and six Henri students. Henri himself rejected the idea of Kent's Independent, because the young artist stipulated that "no one who exhibits with us may show at the Academy." Perlman, *The Eight* (1962 ed.), pp. 206-207.

60 Guy Pène du Bois, "John Francis Kraushaar," *Arts Weekly*, Vol. I, no. 9, May 7, 1932, p. 197. John took over the gallery business after his brother Charles died in 1917. Du Bois notes that "[John Kraushaar] knew an honest man when he saw one and an honest picture . . . He takes no new man's work without first putting it through the test [of living with it himself] . . . . His feelings are strong. He likes and dislikes with equal fervor. He is not afraid of his own opinion and cannot invent one even to suit a diplomatic exigency."

61 "Art's Bad Boy Now a Poet a Canvas," unidentified clipping, March 24, 1913; *Kraushaar Scrapbook I*, p. 21.

62 "Arts and Artists," *The Globe* [New York], March 25, 1913; *ibid.*

63 Several of Luks' polo drawings were also published in Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., *et. al.*, *The American Spirit in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 533.

64 *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

65 Luks painted the portrait of Elihu Root in 1909. It was shown at the Macbeth Gallery in New York in May of that year before it was sent to the State Department in Washington, D.C., where "it has received much favorable comment. It is considered by Mr. Root's family an excellent likeness . . ." *American Art News*, Vol. VII, no. 32, June 12, 1909, p. 3.

66 Miss Kraushaar to the author, August 1985. Luks also painted a portrait of C. W. Kraushaar that was included in the 1913 exhibition of the National Association of Portrait Paintes (of which Luks was one of the twenty-three original members). *Cf. New York Evening Mail*, February 6, 1913.

67 "Art and Artists: Exhibition of Oils and Water Colors by George Luks," — *and Commercial Advertiser* [New York], January 31, 1918; and Lula Merrick, "New York Art Galleries," *The Spur*, February 15, 1918; *Kraushaar Scrapbook I*, pp. 90 and 93, respectively. Miss Kraushaar's likeness is #1. "Portrait" in the catalog.

68 "Indigenous Art is Shown," *New York Sun*, February 5, 1918. Some of the other participants were Glackens, Sloan, du Bois, Max Kuehna, Luis Mora, Stuart Davis and Mahonri Young. In 1921 Mrs. Whitney arranged a show of contemporary American painters at the George Petit Gallery in Paris. Critic Jean Gabriel Lemoine writing in *L'Instransigent* was particularly struck by Luks' portraits. "The national trait . . . [Luks] discerns in this group is a knack for 'signing up' . . . the humorous aspect of things." Quoted in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, September 17, 1921, p. 2.

69 "Luks File," The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. *Blue Devils* was used as the frontispiece for A. E. Gallatin's *Pictures*

Painted during the Great War and is also reproduced in *Allied War Salon,* intro. by A. E. Gallatin (New York: American Art Galleries, 1918).

70 *New York Sun,* June 2, 1918; clipping courtesy the Kraushaar Gallery, New York. Guy Pène du Bois termed *Blue Devils* a great rich thing of vitality . . . an inspirational document which convinced the observer of its worth almost by main force . . ."

71 October 13, 1918; clipping courtesy the Kraushaar Gallery, New York. In April 1919 Luks traveled to Washington, D.C., to paint the portrait of General Peyton Conway March (1864-1955; Chief of Staff in World War I) for the National Portrait Foundation. *American Art News,* Vol. XVII, no. 29, April 26, 1919, p. 5. The portrait is reproduced in "The Kirby Collection of Historical Paintings Located at Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania," n.d., p. 41. General March was an alumnus of Lafayette College.

72 "George Luks Shows Work of a Year," *New York Herald,* January 11, 1920.

73 His sanitorium stay is noted in a letter dated March 27, 1923, from Homer Saint-Gaudens, Director of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, to Dwight Clark in Washington, D.C., regarding the possible loan of *Sulking Boy* from Duncan Phillips, since the artist was too sick to send Saint-Gaudens his picture, *Cages.* Letter in Luks File, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

74 This was not Luks' first contact with Boston, for in 1921 he had exhibited with fellow honorary members of the Boston Art Club — Kroll, Lie, Hassam, Beal, Henri and Lawson. *Cf. Boston Evening Transcript,* November 30, 1921.

75 Katherine K. Crosby, "Painting by Margaret Sargent, Boston Artist, to be Shown in New York Soon . . .," *ibid.,* December 20, 1929: "Seeing some of . . . [Mrs. Sargent's] earlier work, George Luks remarked on their quality of color and line and urged upon her the career of a painter." Mrs. Sargent's drawing of Luks was reproduced in *ibid., c.* 1923; undated clipping courtesy the Kraushaar Gallery. In 1926 she had a one-woman show at Kraushaar's.

76 They are reproduced in Cary, *George Luks, op. cit.,* pp. 35, 39 and 43 respectively.

77 "George Luks, Noted Artist and Philosopher, Says Maine Leads Them All in Scenery," unidentified clipping from Portland, Maine, newspaper; courtesy the Kraushaar Gallery.

78 "George Luks and his New Marines — a Rubens Sketch," October 9, 1922.

79 "Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings by George Luks," C. W. Kraushaar Art Galleries, 680 Fifth Avenue, New York, January 8-27, 1923.

80 February 1923 (?), *Kraushaar Scrapbook I,* p. 219.

81 Ex. cat., "Recent Paintings, Water-Colors and Drawings Done in the Anthracite Coal Regions of Pennsylvania by George Luks," Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries, New York, November 7-28, 1925. *JAMA,* Vol. 242, No. 13, September 28, 1979, pp. 1338 & 1393.

83 *International Studio,* February 1928, p. 82; "A Painting by George Benjamin Luks Presented by Pennsylvania National Bank and Trust Company," n.d., *LFC;* Catharine Bright, "Necho Mural is One of Luks' Most Famous," *Pottsville Republican,* March 19, 1970, p. 16. The center panel of the mural measures 9'x7½', while the two flanking panels are 7'x40'.

84 Letter courtesy *LFC.* The following is largely based on interviews with members of the Luks family and on an unidentified clipping, "Luks Pictures Tell of Rural Contacts," *LFC.*

85 Some of Luks' antics are described in Glackens, *op. cit.,* p. 100.

86 Helen McCloy, "Color and George Luks," *Parnassus,* Vol. VI, 111, March 1934.

87 Prospectus, *LFC.*

88 Strawn, *op. cit.,* p. 34.

89 "Shinn on Luks," *op. cit.,* p. 6.

90 The following is based on *The New Yorker,* July 24, 1926, and on Mariquita Villard, *op. cit.,* p. 4.

91 Will half suspected that George had painted the still life — one of the relatively few he produced — because he "noticed it hadn't been touched up like the rest . . . I imagined him in class just showing 'em how to paint a still-life, picking up somebody's handy wet brushes and without stopping to mix fresh paint, simply wiping them off on the canvas and producing this thing in about five minutes." Villard, p. 4.

92 Dorothy W. Phillips, *A Catalogue of the Collection of American Paintings in The Corcoran Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1973; Vol. 2, *Painters Born from 1850 to 1910).*

93 *Parnassus, op. cit.,* March 1934, p. 3.

94 "Luks Speaks Up," *The Art Digest,* Vol. VII, No. 7, January 1, 1933, pp. 12 & 29.

95 The Luks death mask whose present location is unknown is reproduced in the January 1934 issue of *Vanity Fair. Cf.,* too, "Friend Makes Death Mask of Luks," *New York Journal,* October 30, 1933.

96 The foregoing is based on Glackens, *op. cit.,* p. 101; Schwab, *op. cit.,* p. 112; obits dated October 30, 1933, in the *New York Times* and the *New York World Telegram;* Dorothy Grafly, "American Art Parade. George Luks: Paint's Bad Boy," unidentified clipping, *LFC.*

97 "Luks' Last Work," *The Art Digest,* April 1, 1934, p. 12. These twelve sketches are reproduced in "The Old Swinging Door," *Nugget,* February 1958, pp. 21-23. These sketches were later acquired by Renfield Ltd., a Manhattan Liquor importing firm, which in 1958 planned a traveling show of them; *cf. Time,* September 4, 1950, p. 49. An inveterate tavern-goer and the champion seidel-holder of his time, Luks illustrated the right and wrong way to quaff beer in the *New York American,* March 22, 1933. See also, Norman Klein, "Purist Thumbs Down Art of Seidel 'Side-Wheeling'," *New York Evening Post,* March 18, 1933.

98 *Panorama,* May 1934, p. 7.



17. *Boy with Bowl,* c. 1921



20. *Three Top Sergeants,* 1925

George Luks: An American Artist

With characteristic egotism, Luks once said, "Like Mozart, I began my art career when I was barely out of my diapers."[1] He was fond of saying that an artist was born, not taught and you either had it in you or you didn't. George Luks was a natural artist — his talent came easily to him.

Luks made pictures from the time he was a young boy when he reportedly painted everything he could get his hands on. These early impulses to draw whenever he could and on any improvised surface with any available implement continued throughout his life. Later, as a teenager in New Jersey, he put his work to more purposeful results while working as a clerk in a drugstore. When the proprietor was out he would sketch the customers who came in so he could show her who had called. Luks was also a practical man.

Everett Shinn remembered that Luks drew continuously using anything within his reach — to the dismay of waiters when he used tablecloths, menus and napkins. The masses of sketches which cluttered his studio were a visual diary of his daily routine. Drawing was as easy for him as writing was for others. "He chuckled as he worked, winked and drew an audience about his flying pencil point."[2]

He was ambidexterous and once demonstrated this to a friend on the staff of the *New York World* by drawing an illustration for "the Yellow Kid" with both hands simultaneously:

> While his right hand was busily engaged building up one of the characters in the full page drawing, his left hand drew accurately barrel after barrel piled high up the left margin in pyrdmidal form labeled with dollar signs. Barrel upon barrel piled higher reaching the top edge of the paper. Then over and down as his arms crossed while still more barrels fell on the right margin. Not mere scratches of his pencil but any of them good enough for a Bock Beer advertisement. When the barrels could fall no further he shifted his hand and signed his name as the right hand traced a plaid vest on the Yellow Kid.[3]

Later, Forbes Watson observed that one of the flaws in Luks' style was that his natural gift discouraged him from working toward improvement. Watson felt that when an artist's talent came too easily he relied on his gift and fell short of achieving his best work.[4] Although Luks was not a lazy painter, indeed he was prolific, he lacked the patience and discipline to accept formal training, feeling instead that continuous work would be his teacher.

A hinderance in any study of Luks' life and work is the elaborate screen he built around himself with fantastic stories of being a boxer, pro-football player, and more. He was an artist who liked to strike poses.

A reporter once noted that his speech "sparkles with epigrams."[5]

> There was a Baron Munchausen in Luks. He invented the most fantastic yarns. He spun them while you waited like some old German tale-teller who wandered from town to town in past centuries. He needed but a word, a hint, a memory, a name, and he was off, riding on a twinkle in his eye to some adventure that was made out of the legend-patterned Luks-cloth . . .[6]

Dramatic in his dress, bearing, and manner of speech, he strode around New York wearing a broad-brimmed black hat, a stray curl of hair dangling on his forehead, and a pince-nez with a black ribbon perched on his nose. In short, he enjoyed playing to the crowds both in the studio and out. Again, Forbes Watson noted that a younger artist often feels the need to hide his insecurity behind a pose, but that by maturity an artist should drop the charade so it will not pull energy away from his work.[7]

George Luks never quit being an actor and therefore opened himself up to the criticism that his popularity was due in part to his character role. He so immensely enjoyed the egotism of his act that he risked making his art secondary. However, while the work of an artist of weaker ability would fade after his death and likewise after the end of his "performance," Luks' work has continued to stand in quality. While his personality might have put at risk his being taken seriously as an artist, it was also responsible for the incredible dynamism and emotion communicated through his work. "In Luks' work is the same spirit that flowers forth from the speech of a great preacher and the stage presence of a great actor."[8] Luks' character was the source of his arts' strength.

Similarly, Luks responded to character in his subject matter. Like Sloan and Henri, he was bored by the typically placid interiors, still-lifes, and landscapes of the Impressionists and academicians who were his contemporaries. Instead, he looked for people and places that had what he called "edge." In particular he looked for people who could express an individual view of life and so subjected everyone he met to an intense visual analysis. "His keen, earth-level eyes took in everything. He looked you up and down in an eye-shot. He caricatured you in his brain instantly. You were a busted bubble, and he knew that you knew that he knew it . . ."[9] He wanted to portray the immense comedy and tragedy of life with as much primitive energy as he could find in himself and in his subjects. When he found an image that moved him he responded with his best work. As John Sloan said, "His finest works were produced by strong emotion driving the paint before it to the end his heart desired . . ."[10]

In all this Luks avoided the pitfalls of trite sentimentality. His pictures are never dependent on anecdote because they tell a story that is as global as it is specific. His subjects manage to be both straightforward and complex, blunt and subtle in their psychological revelations. They have the ability to grasp the viewer at first glance yet maintain interest beyond the first impact. As one critic noted:

> He sees life and paints it. It is not a life without vulgarity, it may be, but it is the vulgarity of ordinary mankind . . . sane and healthy and beautiful for all those who can see beauty in what is generally classified as ugliness.[11]

Today, however, his subjects and those of the rest of the so-called "Ash Can School," do not shock us. We have since seen the bitter social satire of artists like Jack Levine and Paul Cadmus and by comparison can recognize the underlying optimism and gentle humor in the work of Luks, Sloan, and Bellows, which their contemporary audiences could not.

Once Luks began painting he quickly fell into a style which would change very little over the next thirty-five odd years. He was not an artist who, like Arthur B. Davies, went through a sequence of stylistic experimentation and change. A general exception to be discussed later in this essay is that Luks' later canvases became brighter in palette and more substantially defined in form. (Compare cat. nos. 7 and 23.)

This overall continuity is deceptive, however, because Luks did have stylistic variations in his work.



8. *Beggar Woman in Moonlight*, 1907

However, these appear to be the results of stimuli generated from the subject matter rather than from a conscious reaction to new aesthetic theories or painterly techniques. In his portrait of Antoinette Kraushaar (cat. no. 14) his brush work has the same civilized flourish that characterized the portraits of John Singer Sargent or William Merrit Chase because his subject is the personification of youthful innocence and delicacy. In contrast, the roughly drawn areas of color and mosaic-like treatment of form in *Allen Street* (cat. no. 5) are appropriate to the optical movement evoked by a bustling street scene.

When it suited his purpose, Luks experimented with style. In 1910 a reviewer for the *New York Evening Post* noted that:

> George Luks is nothing if not versatile. Such a raw and drastic study as "The Wrestlers" would cause a shudder at every tea-pouring in Manhattan. On the other hand, long-haired lecturers will some day pounce upon the Whistlerian mystery and loveliness of the "Little Gray Girl" . . . He makes all methods [of paint] his as he needs them . . .[12]

Driven by an urgent need to make images of life around him, Luks believed that the artist was a "sensitized plate, gathering impressions from an environment, from the voice of a people and a place and giving them out again . . .[13] He never intended his work to be a social commentary; like Sloan he felt that was not the role of an artist. He sought out the bums and street characters because they were real to him and provided a more vibrant subject than any other. Above all he wanted his work to truthfully reflect life so that subsequent generations would be moved.

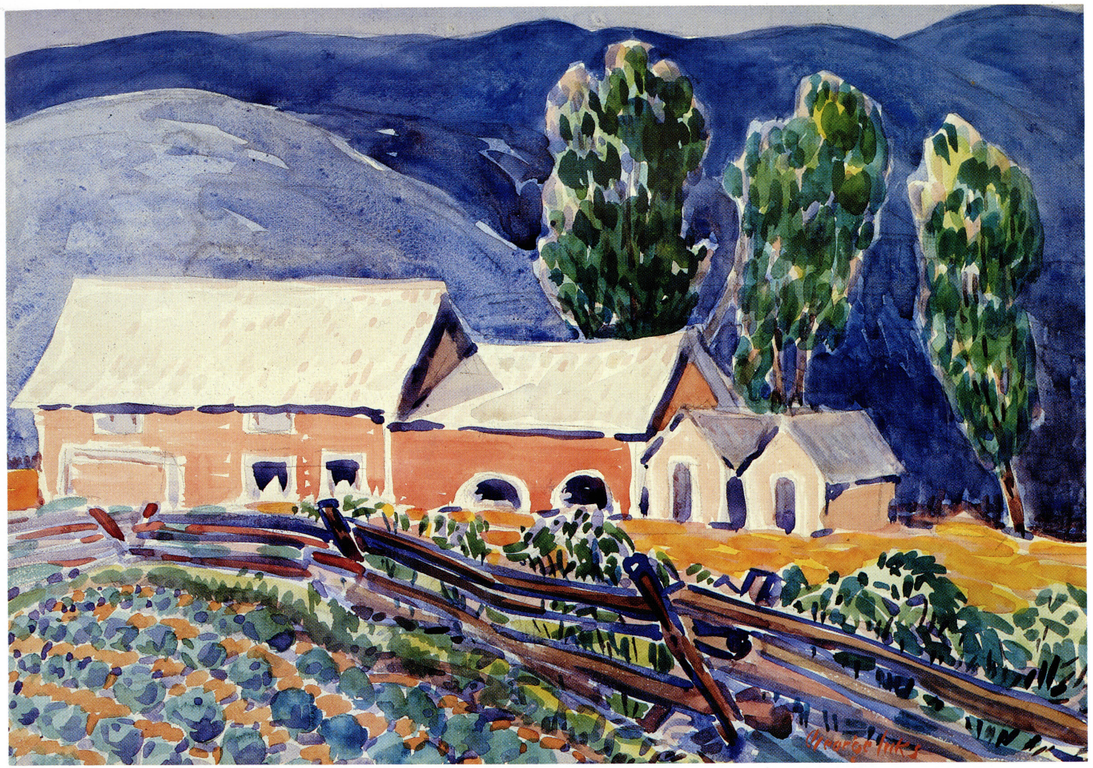
* * *

Luks had essentially no formal training in art. In fact, after lasting only one month at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) in Philadelphia in 1884, it seemed that he had given up the visual arts in favor of the theater. He teamed up with his brother Will (who later became a physician) and toured Pennsylvania and New Jersey as the minstrel act, "Buzzey and Anstock."

Later, when Luks won the Temple Gold Medal at the PAFA in 1918, he poignantly recalled in an acceptance letter to the then secretary, John Meyers, that Anshutz had been a great teacher.[14] This must have been a polite lie or a convenient fabrication since Luks could not have had much exposure to Anshutz in a month of evening classes at the Academy. In another light, though, the statement could have been an acknowledgement of Anshutz's indirect impact on his style through Henri. Certainly there is much of Anshutz in Luks' work — the dark palette, painterly technique, and emotional introspection — but this came to Luks second-hand from his Philadelphia comrades and first-hand from his own interaction with the paintings of the Dutch masters.

In 1888, four years after his brief stay at the PAFA, Luks tried once more to study art, this time at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany. But it appears that Luks' temperament was completely unsuited to the regimen of the academy. Both in Philadelphia and Düsseldorf, Luks was enrolled in beginners' classes which consisted of copying from antique plaster casts, a tedious course of study necessary to develop good draftsmanship and familiarity with the human figure but which had nothing to do with creativity. Luks lacked the discipline and the patience to follow through. However, Luks is not entirely to blame: the academic program also had its critics. James Huneker later noted that the instruction at Düsseldorf would have stifled the creative impulses even of a Manet!

In the late nineteenth century in Germany Luks would have encountered the prevailing style of academic genre painting also popular in the United States. However, he would have also seen the more realistic paintings of a new school whose followers painted anecdotal scenes of the petit-bourgeois which had comic and sometimes moral overtures. The proponents of these realistic vingnettes of everyday life were in direct contrast to the "official" style which dealt in historic generalities, favoring heroic legend above ordinary life. This conflict foreshadows Luks' own dissension with the academic community of his own country in 1907.



52. *Red Barn, Berkshire Hills,* c. 1930



27. *Laughing Nude,* n.d.

Luks used his time in Europe (both on this and subsequent trips) to look at the work of other artists and learn his techniques from these eloquent examples. Knowing Luks' passion for sketching, it would seem likely that he made studies from those canvases which particularly interested him. Though no sketchbooks have survived, a photograph of a painting made by Luks after Goya's *The Infanta Margaret* has survived to prove that Luks did indeed copy the old masters.[15]

Although he complained of disappointment in the work of many of art history's great artists, he later talked about those who had impressed him; foremost among these was the Dutchman, Frans Hals (1581/5-1666). Luks was extremely fond of telling people that there were only two great artists of the world — himself and Frans Hals!

Hals, like Luks in his later years, was primarily a protraitist. He was active at a time when Dutch artists were beginning to paint genre scenes — subjects taken from ordinary life. In fact, the subjects chosen by the artists of the "Ash Can" school were very similar to those of the Dutch Little Masters in their century.

As one of the first artists of Europe to paint directly on the canvas without elaborate underpainting or preparation, Hal's brushwork sparkled with spontaneity — loose, lush, and painterly. He attempted to capture a particular moment through expressions which would ordinarily pass in an instant (Fig. 10). Consequently, the particular effects and impressions of the exact moment in which he looked from sitter to canvas were of utmost importance and were captured spontaneously. His subjects are apparitions of real life with whom we can interact even now. The same quality is an important park of Luks' work. Two late canvases, *Laughing Nude* (cat. no. 27) and *The Fly Weight* (cat. no. 19) are good examples.

Hals also shunned an elaborate backdrop or stage set for his sitters. Instead, he used a plain, roughly painted background (which was usually dark) and relied on his subjects' personality to create interest. Therefore his canvases do not have a "story line" but are sagacious character studies and lively



Fig. 10. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Gentleman,* c. 1650/1652 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection.



2. *Gramps*, c. 1900

monologues. The genius of Hals is his ability to create "intimate confrontations" and capture "the minute expressional movements by which, in everyday life, we appraise the man across from us."[16] The same must be said of Luks. The old gentleman Luks captured in *Gramps* (cat. no. 2) can communicate the lessons culled from an entire lifetime of hard living through the expression of his eyes and the slope of his shoulders.

Luks also looked at the work at Rembrandt van Ryn (1606-69) whose subjects were often as introspective as those of Hals were extroverted. Despite the dazzling pyrotechnics of his brush, Hals fell short of his greater contemporary in the area of psychological insight. Luks' paintings combine the animation of Hals with the deeper sympathy toward human nature of Rembrandt.

Luks' portraits of street characters, such as *Beggarwoman in Moonlight* (cat. no. 8), reflect the limited palette and dramatic, chiaroscuro technique of Rembrandt. The figure of the beggarwoman steps forward to separate herself from a nondescript background, the truncated shadow cast by her crippled figure providing the only anchor and sense of ground. The lack of background detail eliminates peripheral distractions and the often detrimental, sentimentalizing effects of establishing a scenario, forcing the observer to concentrate on the solitary force of the figure. In this painting the realism of Hals and the psychological investigation of Rembrandt combine to evoke an image which is close to life. When viewed by the audiences of 1907, the painting was deemed ugly by the majority of society who were used to the romantized, and therefore prettified, versions of peasants as depicted by the then popular Italian school.

Guy Pène du Bois set forth an interesting theory when he explained why Luks was moved by the masters of the Dutch Baroque rather those of the Italian. As du Bois pointed out, they are both flamboyant — the term du Bois felt also epitomized Luks. Holland, however, was a republic and Italy was an aristocracy. Therefore the dynamic technique of Italian masters, created for an "extravagant aristocaracy," appears hollow when compared to the sincere vitality of the Dutch, inspired by the middle class. Luks, a proletarian at heart, could not be moved by the Italian flourish which was

> . . . purely stylistic, a thing which takes no account of economy in language or of simplicity in idea, a thing made for a sophisticated upper class requiring the bizarre to pull it out of its boredom. The republican brand of flamboyance, you will find it in Swift, and in Sterne's "Tristram Shandy," is fatter, richer and more fluid. No stylistic ruffles are added to the body of the dress unless they may be shown to have a definite economic utility.[17]

Another artist in whom Luks found inspiration during his several trips to Europe was Francisco Goya (1746-1828). The carefully composed, deeply disturbing psychological portraits of this Spanish master make those of Frans Hals look superficial. Goya's sitters are exposed in a tragic/comic manner that makes them epical. In portraits like *Ann of Malden Bridge* (cat. no. 23), Luks has evoked this same element by combining pathos with absurdity. The huge woman sits in her Sunday best, grinning before an unseen audience, "so true to a strongly accentuated personality eloquent of shrewd sophistication, as to verge upon the surcharged truth of caricature."[18]

Luks' work championed the basic goodness of human nature even when he sometimes revealed its frailties, whereas the cynicism of Goya pointed to the cold, dreary banality of the human condition. The balance Luks achieved in his combined attitudes of sincere optimism and stark realism reinforced his style and kept it from degenerating to the production of weak and sentimental images.

Goya's work deeply inspired that of the Frenchman Edouard Manet (1832-83), a true poet of modern life, who in turn influenced Henri and his circle. Though Luks does not mention him, there are similarities in their work. Manet is now the subject of controversy among scholars who are debating the amount of symbolic content in his work. Manet, like Goya, used subjects from life around him to create universal equivalents. Though the sitters come from modern



23. *Ann of Malden Bridge*, 1930

France, they too take on a heroic quality. This characteristic is responsible in part for the eloquence with which the subjects of Manet and Luks speak to a modern audience.

Manet's brushwork was not as loose and heavily weighted with paint as some of his contemporaries. His compositions were carefully arranged and his sitters deliberately posed. He was an artist of contrasts in his use of rich darks against brilliant lights, bold areas of color against sections of duller tone. He worked with strong sure masses of color to create a stark, frontal and distinctly two-dimensional image. He was not interested in the tricks of perspective and shading to create a convincing, three-dimensional illusion. Nor did he care to render each minute and insignificant detail of a subject. Instead he selected elements for their pictorial properties and their symbolic relevance to the subject. This is also an important factor in Luks' work.

In summary, Luks' work embodies Hals' painterly technique and subject matter drawn from everyday life (usually embued with a Rabelasian character); from Rembrandt he learned the impact of dramatic lighting and the versatility of a limited palette; Goya taught him to look beyond the surface for a more complex psychological impact; and Manet taught him to be direct and forceful with form and color and to think about the universal in the specific.

This leaves only one other artist whom Luks often talked about as someone whose work he always liked — Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). It would have helped if Luks had been one to elaborate in this case, because a comparison between the canvases of these two artists is difficult. Renoir painted life around him, to be sure, but with a shimmery, often pastel palette which has little to do with Luks. The brush stroke, typically Impressionist, is flickering and light while that of Luks is heavy and bold albeit painterly. Renoir's subjects were of the middle class and reflected a secure, contented, and almost always, leisurely lifestyle (although Renoir himself was quite poor). The people Luks choose to paint were the idiosyncratic, often wretched characters who reflected the uneasiness of the Industrial age. The



Fig. 11. William Glackens, *Chez Mouquin*, 1905 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, The Art Institute of Chicago, Friends of American Art Collection.

common link between the two men's images could be the underlying optimism of both.

However, Luks' admiration for Renoir could also have been a reflection of the interest given the Frenchman by William Glackens, Luks' close friend and fellow painter. Glackens was one who encouraged Luks to paint and would have shared his enthusiasms with the other artist. Interestingly, a painting by Luks which can be compared to Renoir is *The Cafe Francis* (cat. no. 6) which in turn has been called a response to Glackens' earlier canvas of another New York night spot, *Chez Mouquin*, 1905 (The Art Institute of Chicago, fig. 11). The two restaurants were rivals for the patronage of New York's artistic set.

Both canvases show a well-dressed couple enjoying an evening's frivolity, a subject reflective of the cafe-concert theme so popular with the French Impressionists. Other Impressionist devices Luks employed are the brushwork in the woman's fur piece and bodice which dissolves into flickering touches of luminous paint and the figure of a man to the far right cut off by the edge of the canvas so he seems to intrude upon the scene like an unwanted observer (an element used frequently by Lautrec and Degas). Luks' palette, as usual, tends more to the monochromatic than either Glackens or Renoir with the brilliant exception of the scarlet and pink plume of the woman's hat.

Another Impressionist subject is that of *Pavlova's First Appearance in New York* (cat. no. 10) which shows none of that movement's techniques, even as translated by Glackens and Everett Shinn in their theater pictures. The figure of Pavlova is a diminuitive sketch on the darkened stage which conveys none of the drama of a spectacular debut. The scene is recorded in an ordinary manner as if through the eyes of a newspaper reporter. (Luks' years as a newspaper artist and illustrator are discussed in a separate essay in this catalog, therefore commentary on them here will be restricted to a cursory examination of their impact on Luks as a painter.)

The results of his early years of work for various newspapers in Philadelphia and New York are obvious. They accentuated his powers of observation and made him aware of necessary and unnecessary detail. He learned to work quickly and accurately whether from pressure on the scene or under deadline at the office. His impatient nature was compatible with this.

In both his news illustrations and his comic drawings, Luks learned to adopt a generic style which was flexible according to subject. In fact he scoffed at artists who felt that commercial work would taint their style:

> I have utterly no patience with the fellows whose "style is ruined" if they must make drawings for newspapers or advertisements, whose "art is prostituted" if they must use it to get daily bread. Any style that can be hurt, any art that can be smirched by such experience is not worth keeping clean. Making commercial drawings, and especially doing newspaper work, gives an artist unlimited experience, teaches him life, brings him out. It is doesn't, there was nothing to bring out, that's all.[19]

Another important effect of the newspaper years was one for which the seeds had already been planted in Luks' childhood. Luks' compassionate empathy for the common man and even for the underdog, instilled in him by his parents, was further developed during these years. He brought a humanist approach to the streets when recording his daily news assignments and later used it when he chose his subjects for easel painting.

Further, Luks was a lover of action. He enjoyed the excitement and turmoil of the streets and was bored by any subject that was refined and therefore non-emotional. If there were not enough action, then Luks would often provide it either by getting involved at the scene or by enhancing the details later. His need for drama made him well suited to become a reporter/illustrator and subsequently a keen observer of life through his paintings.

The four artist/reporters who were a part of the "Philadelphia Five," Luks, Everett Shinn, John Sloan, William Glackens, had what many of them considered to be their most important artistic training



6. *The Cafe Francis*, c. 1906



14. *Portrait of Antoinette Kraushaar,* 1917

in the early years together at the art rooms of the *Philadelphia Press.* After hours, they got together again at Sloan's studio where they sketched from the model and painted. Henri, the fifth member who sometimes joined their gatherings, and Sloan encouraged their friends to paint life with truth and emotional perception as it manifested itself in ordinary scenes and common people. This was something that Sloan and the others had learned first-hand through the newspapers. Luks joined the evenings at 806 Walnut Street after Henri had left for Europe and Sloan had taken over the apartment, so his contact with the older artist and charismatic teacher was indirect.

Sources give three people who first encouraged Luks to paint — Robert Henri, William Glackens, and Arthur Brisbane (managing editor of the New York World). Henri's influence came through Sloan and the others after Luks joined the studio group in Philadelphia in 1894-5. Though Luks did not attend regularly, this was his first contact with a group of serious young painters, and as such it must have had an effect. Glackens shared a studio briefly with Luks when the latter returned from Cuba and settled in New York. Brisbane hired him at that time and may have seen his talent as a painter and encouraged him to pursue it.

Luks never acknowledged a debt to Henri in his art. As Sloan noted later, this may have been because Henri's influence on Luks was more indirect than with the others in the group.[20] They were men of similar spirit in many ways. Both had strong personalities and enjoyed being the focus of attention. Henri was the more serious and had a charismatic presence that made him an extremely effective teacher. Luks disliked ponderous "art talk;" he preferred making art to talking about it.

Henri and Luks were passionate humanitarians. When Henri spoke of painting from the heart first and organizing with the mind second, Luks agreed. To him, art was for communicating the human condition with a basic sense of optimism and sympathy. Later, when Luks spoke of having contributed to the making of a "truly American" art, it was this quality of democratic humanism, shared with Henri, that made it so.

Of all the "Philadelphia Five," Luks was the one who throughout his life most consistently followed Henri's ideas. Sloan began to work with the relationship of line and mass in a non-traditional manner as a concession to what he called the "ultra-moderns;" Shinn's later work was given over to slick formula; Glackens was always more the Impressionist, both in palette and subject. Although Luks and Henri considered themselves rebels, and they were to a certain extent, their art was also based in art history and came from a tradition that began with the Dutch masters.

When Henri spoke about technique in *The Art Spirit,* many of Luks' canvases can be evoked as examples:

> Insist then, on the beauty of form and color to be obtained from the composition of the largest masses, the four or five masses which cover your canvas. Let these above all things have fine shapes, have fine colors. Let them be as meaningful of your subjects as they possibly can be.[21]
>
> When later you come to the painting of the features of the face, consider well the feature's part in the relation to the idea you have to express. It will not be so much a question of painting that nose as it will be painting the *expression* of that nose. All the features are concerned in one expression which manifests the state of mind or the condition of the sitter.[22]
>
> Work with great speed. Have your energies alert, up and active. Finish as quickly as you can. There is no virtue in delaying . . . . Do it all in one sitting if you can. In one minute if you can.[23]

Henri's portrait of a young Irish boy, *Cori Laughing* (fig. 12) is an excellent example of this last directive. It is also a portrait similar in spirit to those of Luks and, in fact, to those of Frans Hals. Interestingly, Henri made the portrait in Haarlem, Holland where Hals had worked in the seventeenth century.



19. *The Fly Weight*, 1925

In 1902 Luks painted Henri's portrait following the older man's advice for technique.[24] The face is a mass of short, active brush strokes left unblended and raw — a virtuoso performance in paint. Henri's expression is stern yet introspective as if Luks caught himself in the act of analyzing a student's work. Shoulders and collar are roughly mapped in using large shapes to suggest form rather than describe detail.

Henri returned the compliment by painting Luks' portrait two years later in what must have been one of his subject's favorite positions — standing in a dramatic, full-length pose, wearing a painter's smock or dressing robe (the neck reveals a coat and tie underneath), right elbow resting on a mantle, left hand holding a cigarette, right foot thrust forward (fig. 13). Luks' characteristic hairline, with a center lock outrageously curled so it thrusts up and out like a cock's comb, frames the features of an elfin raconteur. He seems to be pausing between stories, perhaps caught in a rare moment of listening to someone else while working on his next oration.

It is difficult to say when Luks began to take painting seriously. At sixteen he knew enough of technique to mimic the bucolic landscape of the Hudson River School but he was not yet thinking of creating his own images.[25] His mother was an amateur painter providing Luks with an early knowledge of materials which, coupled with a natural talent, made creating images easy.

The first signs of Luks' developing personal style appear in 1889 when he was in London with his father's family and painted *London Bus Driver* (Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester) which already exhibits Luks' mature strength as a portraitist and his interest in personality. The image of the good-natured driver as captured by Luks was later described as "florid, assertive, rakish, friendly . . . [a] symbol of a now vanished London." The critic went on to talk about Luks' style "enriched by his distinctive sympathy with 'powerful uneducated persons,' a vast brood hovering unseen behind this picturesque representative and lending mass support to his image; a brood to which Luks never has become indifferent."[26] A sketch of the cabby, *Man with*



Fig. 12. Robert Henri, *Cori Laughing*, 1907 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc.

Basket (cat. no. 39) shows a less self-assured side of the driver's personality perhaps because he has stepped down from the comfortable perch of his rig.

Among Luks' earliest paintings were those made in Cuba where he had been sent to cover that country's rebellion against Spain. Apparently unable to go on assignment where the battles were being fought, he filled his time by making oil sketches and watercolors of Cuban peasants. There are no landscapes or even cityscapes from this period, further emphasizing Luks' interest in people and the stories they had to tell.

The dating of Luks' European and Cuban pictures is complicated by the fact that he often made watercolors after sketches (and oils after watercolors) several years following the original experience. Therefore paintings such as *Boys with Dog, Cuba* 1896 (cat. no. 1), although an accurate record of Cuban life, may have been painted later in Luks' New York studio. The rough, hurried handling of the paint and the "stop action" poses of the two boys and their dog all indicate a painting made *in situ*. But Luks had been trained to remember detail and recall emotion from a few pencil scrawls in a notebook, all of which he later reassembled on canvas.

Luks' move to New York in 1896 was a new beginning which included an increased interest in easel painting as opposed to illustration. He continued the latter to support himself but gradually withdrew as soon as his canvases began to sell. Some of his earliest canvases reflect the philosophy of the Ash Can School.

When Luks went back to Europe in 1902 and made oil sketches of Parisian cafes and gardens (cat. no. 4) he used the dark palette of the "Black Gang" for subjects associated with the bright pastels and primary colors of the Impressionists. His brushwork, though an unrefined shorthand, was also not the abbreviated dot-and-dash method of Monet and his followers.

Returning to the United States Luks painted some of his finest city scenes in the decade between 1900 and 1910. *The Butcher Cat*, 1901 (The Art Institute of Chicago) makes use of rich earth tones for the overall image, punctuated by the bright green of wagon slats and the deep red bellies of slaughtered hogs. Buildings and people in the background are indicated by rectangular marks and the texture of opposing brush strokes. *Hester Street*, 1905 (The Brooklyn Museum) and *Allen Street*, c. 1905 (cat. no. 5) are rougher and more schematic than any of Sloan's paintings of similar subjects. Sloan paid more attention to detail and spent more time on the modelling of his figures.

The same year, 1905, Luks created *The Spielers* (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy), a painting of two dancing street urchins which has become one of his most popular works (fig. 14). It was chosen by Alexander Eliot, a critic for *Time* magazine, when he was asked in 1952 to name his ten favorite American paintings of the twentieth century. An uncanny representation of a specific moment of childish exhuberance, Everett Shinn called it Luks' "masterpiece of gamin' life" — a work even Frans Hals would have to salute![27] When is was exhibited in 1908 at the National Arts Club it was described as follows:

> . . . the color warm, bright bodices, dingy skirts, boots down at the heel, mouths distended in the unbridled laughter that from time immemorial has heralded youth, red hair and yellow hair flying, and all about these joyous dancers, embracing them, caressing them, a dim floating atmosphere lending to the total effect a mystery not to be found in the work of other men . . . .[28]

By 1904 the last member of the "Philadelphia Five," John Sloan, had moved to New York. With Henri now a member of the National Academy and a respected teacher, the friends were optimistic about their future. These were the years leading up to the storm of 1907 resulting from the academic jury's rejection of Luks' paintings and the subsequent formation of "The Eight" and the "Independents" as alternate groups through which artists could organize non-juried exhibitions.

As noted by a later critic, the original Ash Can School was relatively mild despite the great public fuss made over their inappropriate subject matter. "They were dreamers, Impressionists, poets, and



Fig. 14. George Luks, *The Spielers*, 1905 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy.



22. *The Polka Dot Dress,* 1927

good painters."[29] Like the Impressionists, they met in the evenings at local bars and restaurants. A record of these nights is shown in Luks' watercolor, *John Butler Yeats at Petitpas'* (cat. no. 54). Sloan also painted Yeats, a "charming conversationalist, artist, and philosopher," who was the father of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats. Petitpas' was a pension and restaurant run by three French sisters on West Twenty-ninth Street where Yeats stayed and gathered around him a crowd of "young poets, painters, writers and actors who eagerly enjoyed his talk."[30]

Sloan and his group encouraged Romany Marie, the "gypsy queen" of Greenwich Village and former business manager of the Ferrer Art School, to open a cafe to accommodate the artists, which she did. Luks, who enjoyed his drinking, was thrown out of this establishment for rowdy behavior his first visit there. He was allowed to return only after promising good behavior. Marie later complained that artists have since become too "grimly literary" and that Sloan's group had "found gaiety and even humor in the worst of our slums."[31]

Luks saw his world through the lens of his belief in humanity. He cast a soft, sympathetic light on his subjects rather than holding them up to a harsh, bare light bulb so as to shock the rest of humanity.

> George Luks' art was an expression of a robust love of life. His work affirmed his enjoyment of the world and his delight in translating it into paint. Humanity was the center of his art; he was interested in men and women more than he was in his own emotions. A spontaneous human sympathy pervaded everything he did, and gave even his meanest subjects a warmth and glow that were entirely personal. He loved character more than formal beauty, and enjoyed painting the least conventional aspects of the life around him, finding something picturesque in the crudest and commonest themes. A pioneer of realism in this country, he helped to introduce into the somewhat genteel art world of his youth a more frank and masculine attitude towards life.[32]

The argument Luks and Sloan had with the Academy was not directly with the style of art it supported but the manner in which it did it. By monopolizing the annual exhibitions through the jury system, the Academy effectively removed the best opportunity an artist had for showing his work. Luks always stated that he simply wanted to be allowed to work and show his art.

The proponents of the Academy felt Luks' subjects to be inappropriate for easel painting, while Luks' painted his gutsy, American topics because he felt it was absurd to follow the academicians in recreating Millet's peasants in the middle of New York City — "the result is doomed to failure."[33] Mistakenly accused of being socialist painters, none of the Ash Can School chose their subjects because they felt an obligation to society — "The idea that art is propaganda and should serve the contemporary generation is a fallacy."[34] They painted what they saw around them because it was real and it was something they knew about, not because they wanted to promote a certain social cause. More than once they stated that their intention was to put real life back into art.

Even before the highly publicized dismissal of his canvas from the National Academy's exhibition in the fall of 1907, Luks had been accustomed to rejection.[35] Maurice Prendergast wrote to a patron in 1904 about a Luks which had been removed from the competition, remarking upon its "superiority over a Sargent which was accepted."[36] When Luks' canvases were accepted they were hung near the ceiling where they could neither by well lit nor easily seen. Guy Pène du Bois provided this summation of the jury system and Luks' relationship to it:

> Art is too generally confused with artisanship by the conception that it is made in three parts of good taste . . . . This is true to a nearly intolerable extent in the prize-winning examples, and in their case is an evidence which cannot be taken lightly, for prizes are usually awarded by a consensus of opinion.
>
> George Luks begins by having the bad taste of the braggard and goes on with a mad

extravagance in untempered garrulousness and the impertinence, quite unconsidered on his part, to exhibit canvases fat in form and luscious in color to a people accustomed to the cramped works of painters with whom good taste is a dominating idol.[37]

In 1905 Luks began a canvas which he told Sloan would "vindicate Henri in his fight for my work on the National Academy juries."[38] But he refused to include *The Wrestlers* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, fig. 15) in the famous Macbeth show of 1908, which would have provided a perfect occasion for Luks' retort to the Academy. Luks intended the ambitious canvas to demonstrate his knowledge of anatomy, the lack of which he had been criticized for earlier. The challenging, straight-on view from the mat of two contorted and entangled bodies does display a knowledge of human masculature and an accurate sense of perspective. However, when the painting was finally shown in 1915 at the Kraushaar Gallery, the disturbing reality of the powerful scene overwhelmed audiences to a point where Luks' triumphant technical abilities were overlooked and his point missed. Guy Pene du Bois pinpointed the cause for objection when he noted that this was not a classical, idealized painting of two athletes engaged in a battle over good and evil: "The conqueror in this bout will not stand up and crow. His great strength will be exhausted for the moment.[39]

Luks first tried to exhibit *The Wrestlers* in London at the Anglo-American Exposition of 1914. A polite letter from the chairman, Hugo Reisinger explained why he would rather it not be included:

> While I admit that this picture represents you splendidly and while I agree with you that it is one of the finest things you ever did, I feel somewhat timid about exhibiting it in London, where, you know, they are not as far advanced in art as we or the German or the French are.
>
> Would it not under the circumstances be better if you would give smaller pictures, which will be less startling to the English people than your "Wrestlers" surely would be.
>
> Should you, however, after due consideration, think the "Wrestlers" should be shown, I am quite willing to do so.[40]

Luks has been called a "guts" painter, not only because of his gritty subject matter and vigorous painting style but also because he resisted formal training. His dismay with traditional art and instruction was that it lacked *life*, but Luks understood the formal aspects of composition and the foundation of his paintings was solid draughtsmanship and sound modeling. Shinn wrote that you could turn a canvas by Luks on its head and its "color alone will free your mind to evolve fantasies in the rush of those sweeping color blends."[41]

The decision to have a show at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908 was made after Luks' *Man with Dyed Mustachios* (whereabouts unknown) was one of the works by colleagues and students of Henri rejected from the National Academy's exhibition of 1907. The "Philadelphia Five" — Henri, Luks, Sloan, Shinn, and Glackens — invited Maurice Prendergast, Arthur B. Davies, and Ernest Lawson to join them. The fun and camaraderie shared during the planning for the show is reflected in Luks' postcard to Henri showing their mentor as a conductor with Sloan providing percussion and the others forming a chorus (fig. 6). Luks is seated next to a jug of rye.

Luks exhibited six paintings at Macbeth's: *Street Scene, Macaws, The Duchess, Pigs* (a.k.a. *Feeding the Pigs*, cat. no. 9), *The Pet Goose* (a.k.a. *Woman with Goose*, cat. no. 7), and *Mammy Groody.*

In *Feeding the Pigs*, Luks noted that he "was an allegorist for once in my life," meaning, perhaps, that the consumers of art were no better than these rotund barnyard animals.[47] An accurate picture of the surprisingly provincial, critical attitude prevailing at the time is provided by the fact that audiences were as disturbed by the "vulgarity" of Glackens' *Chez Mouquin*, a pleasant cafe-concert theme, and Sloan's humorous street scene, *Hairdresser's Window*, as they were by Luks' painting of pigs' posteriors.[43]

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney purchased four paintings from the exhibition, including *Woman with Goose* by Luks. The painting in reminiscent of Rembrandt both in character and technique. Three



Fig. 15. George Luks, *The Wrestlers*, 1905 (oil on canvas). Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Charles Henri Hayden Fund.



16. *Trout Fishing*, 1919

bright spots in an otherwise darkened canvas show the wrinkled and smiling face of an old woman, her pet goose which she carries with care in the crook of her elbow, and, in the lower left corner, the goose's water dish. Economy of information still relays a surprising amount of emotion and detail while again demonstrating Luks' ability to paint a picturesque subject — a feeble old woman and her cherished pet — without coy sentimentality.

A quality much talked about in Luks' work, both by himself and later critics, is the aspect of "Americanism." What exactly does this term mean when applied to art? That it is not derived from European sources? — Luks' favorite artist was the Dutchman, Frans Hals. That the subject matter is purely American? — This would apply too generally to many groups of artists by the time of the early 1900s. The critic Ameen Rihani raised these questions in 1920 when there were numerous other art movements beginning to call themselves "truly American."[44] For Luks it must have meant the spirit of democratic humanism, as defined earlier, but it also had to do with a certain amount of "Yankee Doodle" bravado, pride, and forthrightness.

As early as 1900 one critic writing for *The Bookman* identified the concept of Americanism in the work of five young artists including Luks, Shinn, and Glackens by commenting that the "sincerity and actuality that Messrs. Glackens, Shinn and Luks impose in the vibrant expositions of the masses of life are truly American in their originality and treatment. The obviousness of a native art is surely beginning to be recognized."[45] He attributed this in part to the fact that artists were beginning to rid themselves of foreign dominance and talk about an American School of Art in which the influence of Europe — and especially of Paris — would no longer be the automatic ticket to success.

An article written in 1907 during the National Academy's annual exhibition — for which Luks' canvases had not been accepted — remarked that the exhibition suffered from the artist's absence and praised him, as the title of the article states, "An American Painter of Great Originality and Force." It went on to quote Luks:

> Above all, Luks is American. He believes sincerely, passionately in the future of America and American art. "Our young painters of promise should stay at home and work instead of going abroad . . . . Let them go to Europe if they must to study the originals of great masters not otherwise accessible to them, but let them work here . . . . What need of going to other lands in quest of subjects to paint? In a single city block, a mile of New Jersey or New England, a Pittsburgh factory, or a single Western landscape, the true artist will find enough material for a lifetime, enough to fill a hundred years."[46]

On the occasion of Luks' first one-man show in 1910 at the Macbeth Gallery, the comparison between Luks, "the American," and artists of European derivation came up again:

> Luks is a reflection of our American life as it is today, crude, vehement, inconsiderate though not without tenderness at times. Yet the people who buy pictures can not see it that way . . . . They want an art for their drawing rooms, daintily and knowingly made. They do not want to be reminded of the bitterness of life, and have not yet learned to see beauty in the common and the modern — in the expression of vulgar and vagrom life. Better than anyone Luks has discerned this inadequacy of our art and he has painted it in a dozen pictures — pictures so powerful and true that I can not believe the world will willingly let them die.[47]

At the meeting of the Association of American Artists in May, 1914, three members of "The Eight," Luks, Sloan, and Henri, resigned over issues raised by the famous Armory Show of 1913. Among other things, Luks and his associates felt that the group should not have sponsored an exhibition of international art at a time when the three felt it was important to establish an American school. To them it had reinforced the notion that an artist must take his lessons from Europe and that collectors should continue buying the work of modern European



21. *Coal Miner,* 1926

artists. Eventually, this widened the rift between the realist painters of the Henri circle and Steiglitz's modernists who were clearly linked to European abstraction.

* * *

Luks worked from a model whenever he could arrange it. He once brough an entire fruit cart and its vendor into his studio to paint what he called "the Great Experiment." One of Luks' favorite stories was when a truck driver from the Art Institute of Chicago showed up at his door to pick up a painting for exhibition. Luks, having forgotten about the show, invited the truck driver to have a seat and quickly dashed off his portrait which was then carted off wet to Illinois. Luks boasted that the canvas won the Logan Medal but the painting which was given that award was *Otis Skinner in "The Honor of The Family"* (The Phillips Collection) thereby neatly disproving Luks' fabricated, though colorful, version of the incident. Nonetheless, in an article by the *Herald Tribune* in 1932, Luks repeated the story and it was published under the headline, "Sit Down Mug."[48]

Luks went back to his boyhood home in Pennsylvania during the early and late 1920s, where he drew prodigiously from local models. However, a revealing article in the Pottsville paper told how Luks had borrowed clothes from a miner but the sitter for some of the sketches was actually a janitor from the public library. A reason for this was not given but it must be that Luks liked the janitor's face and thought it looked more like that of a miner than other available models. Therefore we know that Luks was capable of manipulating his images to fit his own preconception. *Coal Miner* (cat. no. 21) and its preliminary sketch (cat. no. 49) are two of the works he completed in Pottsville.

When James Huneker visited the artist's studio on Jumel Place near High Bridge Park he noted that there was a profusion of models right outside the door. Luks often painted the nannies and their wards (cat. no. 41) in bright sunlit colors. He also painted the drab industrialism of *Roundhouses at High Bridge* (Munson-Williams-Procter Institute, Utica) in an atmospheric, Whistlerian manner which, in the dawn light, transformed the pinks and greys of billowing smoke into a romantic evocation of technology's power.

The Old Duchess, 1905 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), a "slattern old hag" Luks invited into his studio, is one of his most brutally revealing portraits showing the plight of the city's lower class. The title is both ironic and sympathetic — the portrait is done with sympathy and compassion.

Luks also painted from the copius sketchbooks he filled everyday, a more convenient method if less immediate. A critic for *Harper's Weekly* wrote:

> Who else joins so closely the observation of his themes with realization in note-book and on canvas? Mr. Luks get his material first-hand. In the crooked and the dark streets, in the bright sunlight of a windswept Hudson River dock, in the drawing-rooms, in theatres, everywhere he goes, this artist never tires of studying living creatures and their surroundings. His powers as a draughtsman are something more than remarkable, as his sketch-books and his paintings testify. His pictures are the personification of creative energy, tempered to the mood of the subject . . . . Humor, keen analysis, fearless good nature and a genuine tenderness on occasion help make George Luks' painting about as vital an art as one can imagine.[49]

When a reporter for the *Portland Evening Express* interviewed Luks in his studio in 1922, she came away and wrote, "He talks in headlines and works in the same breezy, energetic, forceful, manner."[50] Watching Luks work was like taking in a stage show. In fact, he was glad to perform both on an impromptu basis and, later, on the lecture circuit. Many people described the way he worked:

> [he] took a broad and lust[y] swing at the canvas with his brush. The canvas quivered, as if life had been breathed into it, and the homunculus of paint seemed to breath[e].[51]
>
> He painted with broad, sure strokes, holding the brushes in his left hand, dancing and jumping about the canvas while it quivered under his thrusts. To him terms like

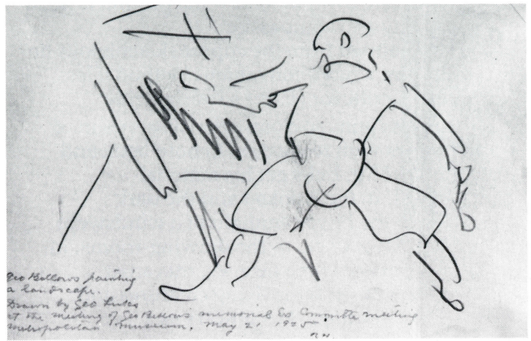


Fig. 16. George Luks, *George Bellows Painting a Landscape,* 1925 (pencil drawing). Courtesy, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College. Gift of Anne Bellows Kearney and Jean Bellows Booth.

> "dynamic symmetry" were bunk. So were school and theories of art. Either one could paint or one couldn't; that was all.[52]

A portrait of Luks in action (whereabout unknown) by one of his students, A. Z. Kruse, shows him lunging toward the easel, legs spread wide, with his left hand raised and armed with a brush. Clenched in his right hand are more brushes. His distinctive, broad brimmed hat suggests the costume of a rugged frontiersman fighting for survival. Kruse's painting was made for the Golden Jubilee of the Art Student's League in 1925, an event at which Luks was asked to paint a model dressed as a Hawaiian dancer for an audience of about five hundred people.[53] Luks' sketch of George Bellows at work in 1925 (fig. 16) looks much like a self-portrait.

Luks' early disgust with rigid academic formulae was reflected in his work. He attacked the canvas in any way he could get the desired results. His famous statement regarding process and theory was often repeated: "Art my slats! I can paint with a shoestring dipped in pitch and lard . . . . Technique did you say? My slats! Say, listen you — it's in you or it isn't. Who taught Shakespeare technique? Guts! Life! Life! That's my technique."[54] Luks' great strength was this sense of spontaneity and a good, natural eye for formal elements such as color and composition.

Sometimes insecure despite his bravado, Luks got his spectators to participate in the work. "He asks your opinion continually — 'Don't you like that line? Out she comes!' He puts another in — 'Like that?'"[55]

Péne du Bois frequently watched Luks paint and noted that he could be indecisive in his work style, perhaps due to his lack of schooled discipline and dependance on artistic "inspiration."

> He will go to a great canvas with an enormous brush loaded with color and make and unmake numberless starts in one day. He will fight himself; wipe out a moment of timidity with a house painter's brush or the boast of a Gascon. Human, all too human. He will be sloppy and he will be strong. A magnificent picture will be born in his studio one day and a puerile one the next. His worst is the worst of all bad pictures: mighty strokes brushed around a non-existent structure, a braggard's castle in Spain.[56]

Shinn disagreed that Luks' canvases ever lacked structure even when they were hastily executed or overworked. But he also acknowledged that sometimes Luks could fail: he "could make very bad pictures . . . . However, there were no signs of the amateur even in these unworthy products, for dexterity was there without a purpose."[57]

Luks believed that by working too long on a canvas you could kill the life in it. He once said that Leonardo was not a great artist because "any man who takes twelve years to paint a picture is cuckoo."[58] But he did not always take his own advice, therefore, an unfinished canvas by Luks can often be a work of tremendous power and beauty. *Society Lady* (cat. no.



24. *Society Lady,* c. 1932



42. *The Screecher, Lake Rossignol,* 1919

24) is a late painting which Luks may not have been entirely finished with as it is not signed. The raw sensation of color — vivid blue, gold, and red — laid on in wide, strong brush strokes is remarkably modern. One notices individual points, the deep sockets of her eyes, the delicate tracery of her fingers, the abstract pattern of wrinkled cloth across her rib cage, and the impetuous mark with bisects her right elbow. The painting is fresh, powerful, and monumental.

James Huneker may have been exaggerating when he said that Luks seldom finished a canvas but did note seeing hundreds of half-begun paintings stowed away in Luks' studio near High Bridge Park. "He [Luks] displays an infernal impatience, that chief sin of heresiarchs . . . . And the corollary of impatience is haste in execution."[59]

Anther writer shed a more positive light on the disorder of Luks' studio by describing it as "not a decorative *mise en scène,* but a mental workshop where the anvil is hot and the sparks fly."[60] Luks would have accepted this account as high praise not only because he would have liked the comparison to rugged, menial labor, but because he thought the impeccably decorated studios of society painters like William Merritt Chase and Kenyon Cox ridiculous.

When Luks stopped teaching at the Art Student League, he began to take students privately in his studio and later developed the George Luks School of Art. He taught in the "French, informal manner, with no attempt to regulate classes, models, or working hours."[61] Student paid for the opportunity to paint in Luks' studio, watch him work, and accept his criticism.

Luks was an enthusiastic instructor in part because it gave him the opportunity to paint in front of an audience — a situation he thrived upon. Often his criticism or instruction would be in the form of a demonstration on the student's own canvas: "He seizes a brush from a timid hand and with a broad 'swish' puts life and art on an otherwise pallid canvas."[62] Shinn recorded a comic instance when he watched Luks, "his long handled paintbrush, held at arm's length, dart[ing] and parr[ying] like a fencing foil," about to touch up the features of a student's portrait head when suddenly he went instead to the navel "yelling as he snapped back ten feet from the canvas, 'Son, always start painting a nude from the navel out. Nature starts that way."[63] He continued in this manner, dancing around the studio, "correcting" the canvases of his students with his own brush.

Luks' teaching technique was a result of his own impatience and belief that you were born to paint or you were not. He took students because he loved having people around him and sincerely wanted to tell others how he felt about art. He lived for art and wanted his art — not just his paintings but his ideas — to outlive him. It is quite possible that a number of the weaker canvases attributed to Luks, which show his genius in the face but nothing of his hand in the rest of the picture, are products of his classroom demonstrations.

* * *

So far this discussion has concerned George Luks as a oil painter because that is how he is better known. But he also worked in watercolors and produced some of his finest work in this medium.[64] His early watercolors were no more than cartoon line drawings, such as an episode for the "Yellow Kid" (cat. nos. 37, 38) which was executed in pen and ink and filled in later, color-book style. When he made the gradual transition from newspaper work to easel painting, he continued to use watercolor as a sketching medium. Several watercolors from his early travels in Spain, France, and Cuba indicate that he was comfortable with producing finished images in this medium before he became involved with oils. (See *Havana, Cuba,* 1896, The Brooklyn Museum; and *Verdun, France,* 1902, The Phillips Collection as examples.)

Luks became a member of the American Watercolor Society in 1911 with this first exhibition there. The first award Luks ever received in any medium was the Hudnut Award for Watercolors for *On the Marne,* (whereabouts unknown) an impressionistic work dated 1902.[65] By 1918, when Luks was exhibiting at the Kraushaar Gallery in New York, he mounted a show with sixteen watercolors and fourteen oils, further indicating his seriousness about the medium.



41. *Highbridge Park*, c. 1912

Luks' watercolors were often made after pencil sketches which had been done *in situ*. The watercolors themselves might later become an oil painting as in the case of *Holiday on the Hudson* (The Cleveland Museum) and *Mahanoy City* (whereabouts unknown).

In watercolor, Luks took every advantage of the versatility of the medium. They could be atmospheric with a dark, subdued palette as in *Daughter of the Mines* (cat. no. 48) or tightly controlled and highly colored as in *Highbridge Park* (cat. no. 41) which shows the influence of Maurice Prendergast. As Talcott remarks in his thesis on the watercolors:

> In his watercolors Luks was an experimenter. He worked with the clear washes of tradition, with opaque colors, and these combined with pastels and with ink. In technique he ranged from pseudo-oil to expressive, two-dimensional patterns of the most modern simplicity.[66]

Again, Luks seemed to let his subject speak to him and dictate technique. It is appropriate to the subject that *Daughter of the Mines* should be executed in washes of earth tones, creating a mood of stubborn reliability and dreary realism. In this he used a traditional oil technique of laying down dark colors first and building forms with an overlay of brighter highlights. He may have been looking at the watercolors of such masters as Winslow Homer (1836-1910) and Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) who also used a more traditional approach.

More cheerful subjects like the nursemaids of Highbridge Park were more suited to an airy, staccato-brush technique using dashes of pure color in a mosaic-like effect. These, like those of Prendergast, create a rich, two-dimensional design which is modern in feeling. Luks, more than his fellow member of The Eight, was apt to interject a few passages of wash to indicate three-dimensional form. He would also go back into a watercolor after it had dried and add stronger daubs of color over the original strokes, again to create depth.

A critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* noted that Luks' watercolors of Maine were summary impressions "dashed down with repertorial zest and brevity and are in the painter's happiest vein."[67]

One of the reasons for the success of the watercolors must have been the fact that he could not over-work them even when he went back into them. The translucency of the medium did not allow any serious overpainting so the images are fresh and spontaneous — Luks at his best. His insecurity, which sometimes marred his oils, could not affect these. As an anonymous critic for *The New York Times* noted when he compared the watercolors of Luks to those of the Fauvist painter, Maurice Vlaminck, "the lighter medium invites a franker color and a livelier touch."[68]

Luks produced both oils and watercolors of Nova Scotia. A review in the *New York Tribune* called them "souvenirs" of Nova Scotia, reflecting their ability to recreate the feeling of his subject but perhaps also noting that they have less of an emphatic statement than the city scenes and portraits. However, the vitality and piercing depth of color in these pieces make them among the strongest of Luks' images. "There is zest in the subject and there is zest in Mr. Luks' impression of it.[69] (See cat. nos. 16, 42, 44).

Critics often used the word "impression" in discussing Luks' work. This is not to link him with the Impressionist school except in the respect that both were interested in registering the momentary. This goes back to Henri and to Hals who felt that the emotion of an instant was expressive of the whole. In his portraits and his landscapes Luks sought to maintain spontaneity.

* * *

The critics disagree about Luks, as they do with any artist — only more vehemently. They argue about whether his images are sentimental or if they always narrowly avoid this pitfall of the emotional painter; about whether his paintings are too crudely made to have any subtlety or if their finest aspect is their lack of "polish;" about his character and its positive and negative impacts on his work.

One writer said, "He prays . . . as well as profanes; but he never drools."[70] Another felt that "[Luks' paintings] cry out against the snug and complacent sentimentalism of life . . . ."[71] But subject matter is crucial in this point. Luks' images of beggarwomen and coal miners are defiantly lacking in sentimental



11. *Jack and Russell Burke,* 1911-c. 1923

overtones though that aspect of their character is often played upon by other artists. Luks rejected any element of tenderness in these personae because he did not feel any. Instead he felt admiration for the elemental reality of their lives and, in part, for their simplicity and directness. Yet in some of his portraits, especially of children, he sometimes came too close to the heart strings for some critics' comfort. As his work matured, he was able to combine the raw strength of his character studies with a compelling sense of tenderness. On the occasion of his first one-man show at Kraushaar's in 1913, a critic wrote:

> Without wishing to deprive Mr. Luks of any of his laurels as a comedian, for they are well deserved, or to mitigate the terrors his name is still supposed to strike among the "standpatters" in art, it may nevertheless be submitted that he has set a standard in his latest exhibition that even the most fragile members of the American Water Color Society could scarcely call violent. Without losing his enviable vigor, or perhaps it might be better called his latent strength, Luks has attained here in several of his figure subjects something profoundly loving and delicate, something possible only to the really strong, whose powers are under full control.[72]

Guy Pène du Bois admired Luks' work for its feminine as well as masculine quality. By this he meant the artist's intuition and penetrating understanding of personality; his ability to capture decadence in one sitter and innocence in another. "He will go, like Dickens, from Bill Sykes to Little Nell."[73] And as an anonymous critic wrote, "Mr. Luks may be uneven . . . but when the thing comes off as he sees it, he steps right into the front rank of American painting."[74] Two artist/critics were the hardest on Luks in this respect. Du Bois and Shinn felt that in his single-minded vision of life Luks sometimes missed. "[His] figures either exist tremendously as people, or do not exist at all."[75]

Luks' technique was once most succinctly described as painting "as though he were still engaged in the charge of the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill."[76] At first glance the results are bold and crude; one sometimes makes the mistake of thinking that they can be absorbed during one encounter. After another look (and they always draw the viewer back) they reveal subtlety and depth in both form and emotion.

Contemporary critics sometimes felt that Luks did not offer enough information to the viewer. "He dots no i's and underlines no feature. In faces only the eyes detain him and this is the defect of his quality. His brush gliding scornfully over the nonessential does miss now and then the quintessential."[77] For those who can look beyond faces that are sometimes mask-like and bodies which, when scrutinized, are not always anatomically accurate, the artist's ability to minimize detail and emphasize form is the essence of Luks' brilliance.

When interviewed on this sixty-fifth birthday, Luks looked confidently to the future and said that artists produce their best work after sixty. Though the statement smacks of Luks' love of boast and bombast, he had often remarked to friends that he would be a late bloomer. "A man's just out of school at sixty . . . . All the solid and enduring work in art is done by men who have lived long enough to master their metier and life itself . . . . I'm just getting started."[78]

The statement tells us that Luks felt his late work to be at least as good if not much better than his early work. Although he was an artist who developed a style quickly and did not alter it much throughout his active life, some changes do occur in the later work. His forms became simpler and more solid while his palette became brighter, more varied and less mottled, forcing the overall effect to become bolder and, in a sense, quite modern. Technically, his style became more compact and controlled as he tightened both his brushwork and his compositional structure. Compare for example the restricted palette and indistinct form of *Woman with Goose,* 1907 (cat. no. 7) and the colorful image of *Ann of Malden Bridge,* 1930 (cat. no. 23).

Jack and Russell Burke (cat. no. 11), begun in 1911 and altered in 1923, shows these later stylistic changes through its transformation. The original composition showed a large jack-o-lantern at the lower left of the composition, obscuring the legs of



12. *Telling Fortunes*, 1914

one little boy. The removal of this element and the addition of a table with fruit in the background and a strip of ochre flooring under their feet accentuates the two figures as the focal point and creates a solid space in which they can exist. Edward Root, who bought the painting described it thusly:

> It shows an exceptionally well sustained feeling for the physical and mental liveliness of small boys, for analogies of rich, intense color and for sharp contrasts of atmospheric values skillfully employed to appeal to our tactile sense of mass. It is a successful work by an artist who fails too often for lack of due reflection, and its success may be attributed in part to the fact that it is a repainting and in part to the fact that it represents a conjunction of lively spiritual, vital and formal motives with a lively, vigorous and expressive artistic temperament.[79]

Elizabeth Cary noted that his later paintings evoke a restrained emotion which has a great sense of poise and deliberate dignity which comes with maturity.

> The pictures he paints today [1931] show the ebullience and directness of a young mind . . . yet their essential likeness lies in the quality to be found only in a mind that has been young a long time; a quality of sustained taste, of preferences at once flexible and stable.[80]

Oddly enough, the series of paintings that Luks was working on when he died was a group of twelve canvases showing New York pubs and restaurants painted with a palette reduced to black, grey, white, and brown. In this and in their anecdotal subject matter — one shows a gentleman being soundly booted out the swinging doors of "Casey's Hole in the Wall" — they are a throwback to the days of his newspaper illustrations.

Like many of his fellow members of the "Philadelphia Five," but especially like Henri, Luks railed against modernist painting. This former radical spoke up against the new ideas in painting not because of their newness but because he thought them to be cold and lifeless. Luks felt that American artists did not need abstract and abstruse terms to communicate their ideas. The preponderance of new "isms" created many late-night discussions on the nature of art and its communicative powers. Luks never tolerated ''art talk;" he wanted action. To him, the amount of theory involved in Modernism detracted from the work itself; artists were distracted by their ideas and this in turn hindered their imaging making, so Luks believed. He once said that "Modernism and mediocrity are synonomous." Like many of this time, he believed that the new art was an art of the educated elite and not of the people. "[Luks] cannot play with intellectual abstractions. He will force the evidence of reality until it is impossible for those of duller reactions to miss it."[81]

As in many progressions from one period in art to the next, it is ironical that the new who become the old often criticize the next generation in the same way that they themselves had been criticized. When "The Eight" had their showing at the Macbeth Gallery, critics screamed that the artists did not paint nature as it was. Their technique was too bold and painterly; their canvases did not look finished. Some people had real difficulty making out the subject matter. Just as Luks had difficulty looking at Matisse, Dove, or O'Keefe.

— Judith H. O'Toole

Notes:

1 Benjamin DeCasseres, "The Fantastic George Luks," *New York Herald Tribune,* September 10, 1933.

2 "Everett Shinn on George Luks: An Unpublished Memoir, "*Archives of American Art Journal,* April, 1966, p. 2.

3 Ibid, p. 14.

4 Forbes Watson, "George Luks: Artist and 'Character'," *Arts,* January, 1935, p. 24.

5 Emma Mosley, (Interview with George Luks), *Portland Evening Express,* August, 1922.

6 Benjamin DeCasseres quoted in *Catalog of an Exhibition of the Work of George Benjamin Luks,* a memorial exhibition held at The Newark Museum, October 30, 1934 to January 6, 1935, p. 12.

7 Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

8 William B. McCormick, "George Luks, Agitator," *Arts and Decoration,* July, 1914, p. 334.

9 DeCasseres, Newark catalog, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

10 John Sloan quoted in a flyer for an exhibition at ACA galleries, 1967.

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12 Quoted by Ira Glackens in "Little Old George Luks," *George Luks 1866-1933,* Museum of Art, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute (Utica, New York), 1973, p. 7.

13 Guy Pène du Bois, "George B. Luks and Flamboyance," *New York American,* March, 1904, p. 110.

14 Joseph S. Trovato, "About the Exhibition," Museum of Art, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, op. cit., p. 14.

15 Photograph file, Kraushaar Gallery. Luks went to Spain on a subsequent trip to Europe in 1892.

16 *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* (Fifth Edition), New York, 1970, p. 582.

17 Du Bois, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

18 Elizabeth Luther Cary, *George Luks* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art), n.d., p. 11.

19 "A Luks Reminiscence," *The New York Times,* November 12, 1933 (LFC).

20 John Sloan, "Artists of the Press," *Artists of the Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1945), p. 8.

21 Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1923), p. 22.

22 *Ibid,* p. 23.

23 *Ibid,* p. 26.

24 *Portrait of Robert Henri,* 1902, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches. Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska — Lincoln, Gift of Mrs. Olga N. Sheldon.

25 Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight* (Connecticut: North Light Publishers) 1979, p. 77.

26 Cary, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

27 Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

28 Cary, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

29 James W. Lane, "From the Ashcan into the Incinerator," *Art News,* January 1, 1942, p. 13.

30 Note attached to John Sloan's painting, *Yeats at Petitpas,* 1910, The Cocoran Gallery of Art. Henri thought Yeats was the best British portraitist of the Victorian era. Sloan painted the portrait from memory after Yeats' death.

31 Helen Worden, "Romany Marie says Artists of Today are too Realistic," *World Telegram,* (undated clipping, LFC).

32 Lloyd Goodrich quoted in the Newark catalog, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

33 John Spargo, "George Luks, An American Painter of Great Originality and Force," *The Craftsman,* September, 1907, p. 6012.

34 John Sloan's unpublished diary (50-23), Sloan Archives, Delaware Art Museum.

35 Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

36 Letter from Maurice Prendergast to Mrs. Oliver Williams, Archives of American Art, Esther Williams Papers.

37 Du Bois, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

38 Sloan diary quoted in Perlman, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

39 Du Bois, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

40 Letter dated March 11, 1914, Courtesy Kraushaar Gallery.

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45 "IV. The Typists: McCarter, Yohn, Glackens, Shinn and Luks, "*The Bookman,* Vol. CXI, no. 3, pp. 250-251.

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48 *Herald Tribune,* August 14, 1932, LFC.

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50 Mosley, *op. cit.*, n.p.

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54 ACA, Danenberg.

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62 *Ibid.*

63 Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

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65 Arthur Egner dated this work based on one of Luks' trips to Europe. Luks clipping file, Museum of Art, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

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67 "George Luks and his New Marines — a Rubens Sketch," *Christian Science Monitor,* October 9, 1922.

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69 "Exhibitions by Some Artists Who Think for Themselves: A Type of Ambiguous Veracity," *New York Tribune,* January 11, 1920.

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71 Hartman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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75 Du Bois quoted in the Newark catalog, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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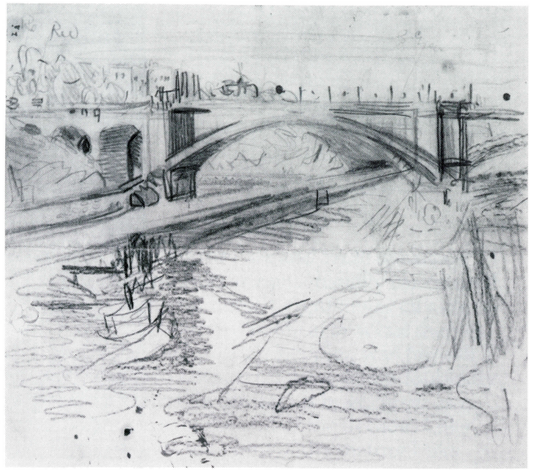
77 Cary, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

78 *Herald Tribune,* August 14, 1932, LFC.

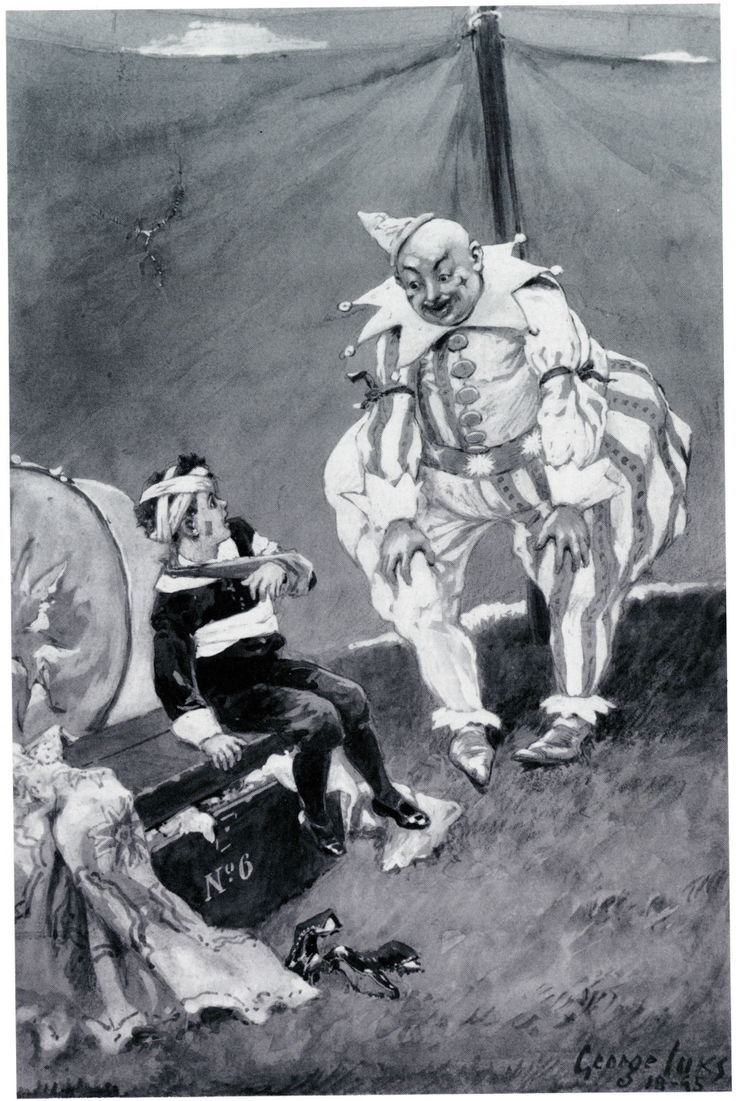
79 Edward Root papers, Uncatalogued, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute.

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61. *The Bridge,* n.d.



36. *Circus Scene,* 1895

George Luks
Artist/Reporter/Illustrator

George Luks' place in the history of American art is defined by his paintings of the early decades of this century — paintings which depicted the look of the urban world in which he lived. It was the force of these paintings that made his contribution to the exhibition of "The Eight" so vital. His early career, however, was that of an illustrator and cartoonist, and the majority of graphic work that he produced during his lifetime was aimed for publication.

Through Luks' graphic works we can see the evolution of his style and subject matter. As he learned to communicate a theme with increasing economy of pen stroke or lithographic crayon, his characteristic boldness of gesture emerged — a gesture which translated similarly into paint on his canvases. The illustration assignments he received necessitated careful observation of individuals as well as the identifying look of different ethnic or class groups. The choice of everyday subject matter was further strengthened by Robert Henri's influence on Luks and his Philadelphia realist friends: Sloan, Glackens and Shinn. Henri exhorted them to paint the people and scenes from the America they knew.

Luks' first published works appeared in *Puck* in 1891, and in *Truth* in the following year. 1891-92 also marked Luks' debut as a book illustrator, when he produced some tentative, undistinguished drawings to accompany James L. Ford's novel, *Dr. Dodd's School.*

Luks' illustrations for *Puck* and *Truth* consisted mainly of pen-and-ink cartoons, usually caricatured in style, depicting humorous vignettes of city life, or even occasionally current political or social themes. The founder of *Puck,* Joseph Keppler, was himself a cartoonist, whose satirical lithographs undoubtedly influenced Luks' style during his brief career as a political cartoonist at the end of the decade. Luks' early cartoons give little hint of the mature Luks' style, and are similar in manner to countless other cartoonists' work in humorous journals of the period. It is possible, however, to detect Luks' characteristic delight in farcical situations, which he enacted in real life as well as in his work. In "Practical Reciprocity" (*Puck,* July 1, 1891), Luks shows the two main figures, as they appear in the fifth frame, in a vaudeville-like strut, victoriously leaving a saloon from which they have just finagled a free lunch. Perhaps the dramatic poses and gestures of the cartoon derive from Luks' own early stage experience. A *Truth* cartoon, "The Turning Down of Jack the Hair-Clipper" (September 25, 1893) (Cat. no. 34) also makes use of exaggerated comic poses. Neither we nor the criminal "hair-clipper" are immediately aware of the snake intertwined in the proposed victim's braid, but the attitudes and facial expressions of the characters are sufficient to express the humorous effects. Occasional depictions of street urchins in these illustrations

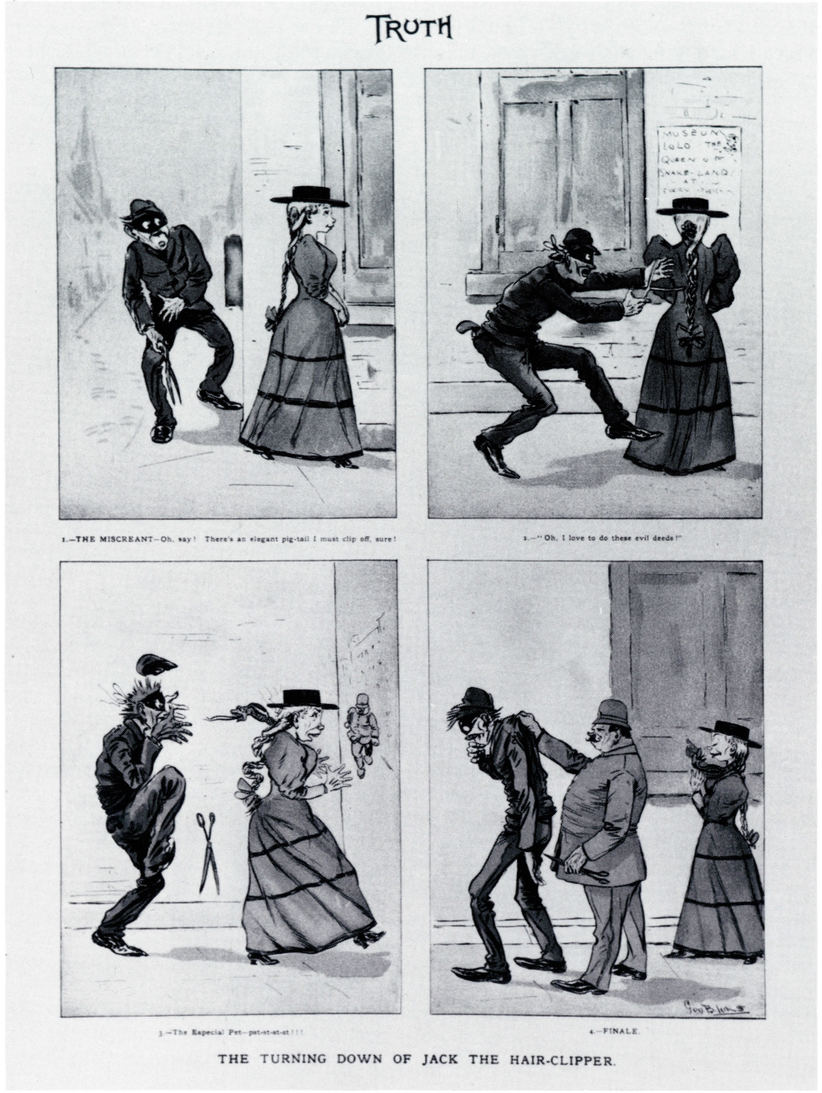
presage their later appearance in Luks' "Yellow Kid" cartoons for the *New York World*.

In 1894, Luks began work as an artist-reporter for the *Philadelphia Press*. It was there he met Everett Shinn, who had been working for the *Press* since the previous fall; the two men became friends, and shared living quarters. They also met John Sloan and William Glackens, similarly employed by Philadelphia newspapers. Actually, all four artists worked for the *Press* in 1895, although not at the same time. Nevertheless, they assembled in the *Press* art department, along with other artist-reporter friends, in a convivial atmosphere of discussion and amicable rivalry that helped develop their artistic ideas and training. Robert Henri's Thursday evening social gatherings at his studio provided a further gathering place, as well as inspiration, for the young artists.

The job of artist-reporter was a function of the 1890's when various newspapers, following the *New York World's* lead, began to employ artists to illustrate news stories. They served in the role that newspaper photographs were soon to supplant; by the end of the 1890's, the halftone process had been developed to a point which enabled the newspapers to use photographic reproductions instead of the earlier photoengraving method. Artist-reporters were sent out on assignments to cover newsworthy events, and to make a pictorial record, usually on the scene. Typical stories illustrated included fires, accidents caused by streetcars, runaway horses, or bicyclists, and criminal trials. Of necessity, the artists had to make rapid sketches, noting only the essentials of episode and setting. Back at the newspaper the drawing would be completed, with most of the details put in from memory. Such work trained the artists to observe quickly, to execute the drawing rapidly and spontaneously, and to retain mental images for further use.

Luks' early newspaper illustrations, unfortunately, are difficult to attribute. The Philadelphia papers, as well as others, favored an anonymous, generalized style of drawing. Because an illustration was often started by one artist and finished by another, or even worked on in sections by several artists, it was deemed most practical to surpress individualized stylistic mannerisms, and for artists to work as similarly to each other as possible.[1] The *Press* seems to have preferred their artists not to sign their work. In 1895, Luks moved to the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin;* the drawings he produced for that publication are signed, and to some extent, notorious. The *Bulletin* sent him to Cuba in December of 1895, along with reporter Maurice O'Leary, to cover the Cuban rebellion — a series of events leading to the Spanish-American War. Luks was assigned to supply drawings to accompany O'Leary's written accounts, and did in fact send back thirty drawings which were published by the *Bulletin* between January and March of 1896. The illustrations, though sometimes crudely done, have a sense of on-the-scene veracity, vitality and drama. Captions further suggest that the drawings were eyewitness accounts of events. "In Hot Pursuit of a Scout" is a particularly vivid image, in which Luks depicts a Cuban revolutionary shot off his horse by Spanish troops. Horse, falling rider, and shadows provide dynamic diagonal compositional elements. The legend underneath the illustration reads in part: "'The Bulletin' artist in Cuba sketches him as he falls from the saddle."

Only one of Luks' Cuban illustrations was acknowledged as being based on an insurgent's battlefield sketch; all the other captions imply or state outright that Luks made the drawings from life. The truth seems to be, however, that Luks based the illustrations on verbal accounts of the events, or drew from his imagination. Luks clouded the issue by embellishing on his Cuban experiences in recounting them to his friends. He told of an occasion when he and other war correspondents, including Stephen Crane and Richard Harding Davis, were riding a train through Cuba. When gunfire broke out, Luks supposedly ducked under the seat, saying to the others, "You fellows sit up there, I have a future."[2] Luks knew how to tell a good story, but in fact neither Crane nor Davis was in Cuba at that time. Davis, a correspondent for the New York *Journal,* did not arrive there until January of 1897, accompanied by illustrator Frederick Remington; and Stephen Crane, on assignment for *McClure's,* went to Cuba in 1898.



34. *The Turning Down of Jack the Hair-Clipper,* 1893



37. *New Year's Celebration in Hogan's Alley,* 1896

Luks himself was back in America by April of 1896, having been fired by the *Bulletin.* Another of Luks' Cuban stories told how he disguised himself as a dog in order to elude Cuban spies, and ran through the Havana streets, holding his drawings in his mouth, like a bone. As Guy Pène du Bois put it, "His tales are Arabian Nights naturalized in America."[3] Years after his return to the United States, Luks told friends that he had actually been confined to Havana, along with other correspondents, and that he had made his drawings in Havana saloons.

If Luks was fabricating his news illustrations, he was not alone in this practice. The Cuban situation provided precious material for use in the circulation rivalry between newspapers. Many publishers, like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, encouraged reporters and artists to create exaggerated and misleading accounts and illustrations, aimed at capturing the public's imagination.[4]

Luks probably was fired by the *Bulletin* for irregularities in completing his assignments, but he dramatized the departure, stating that he had been imprisoned by the Spanish, and had barely escaped with his life.[5] By April of 1896, he had been hired as an illustrator by Arthur Brisbane, the *New York World*'s managing editor. His first assignments for the *World* were pictures accompanying news stories, and single cartoons. Subject matter included incidents from the Cuban rebellion, as well as other current events. By the fall, Luks had pretty much left news illustration behind him as he turned his energies to the Sunday comic supplement of the *World.*

Although Luks' cartoons form the bulk of his illustrative *oeuvre,* they are often passed over quickly by art critics and historians. This is due in part because his paintings brought him greater fame, and in part because his most famous cartoon series, the "Yellow Kid," was drawn as an imitation of, and in competition with, the original "Yellow Kid," created by Richard F. Outcault for the *World.* More properly entitled *Hogan's Alley,* the series dealt with slum children. The hero, a street urchin, almost invariably appeared in a nightshirt. When the *World* purchased a four-color rotary press, the foreman wanted to test the yellow dye on a suitably empty space, and chose the "Kid's" nightshirt. The result was the hue that helped make the cartoon character famous, and the nightshirt, forever after yellow, was often used as a kind of placard or message board, bearing part of the verbal humor of the cartoon.

Because of the enormous popularity of "The Yellow Kid," the cartoon became a pawn in circulation battles between *World* publisher Pulitzer and Hearst, publisher of the New York *Journal.* Hearst had no scruples about stealing personnel from Pulitzer, and lured away the *World*'s Sunday supplement staff, who returned to the *World* when Pulitzer offered them more money. Hearst promptly made a counter offer, and the staff went over to the *Journal.* Outcault brought *Hogan's Alley* with him, so that the comic strip now appeared in the *Journal.* Pulitzer, undaunted, assigned George Luks to continue the series in the *World,* as if no interruption had occurred. The resulting two "Yellow Kids" became part of lawsuits, but despite the litigation, both "Yellow Kids" continued to flourish. Other papers referred to the *World* and the *Journal* as "Yellow Kid journals," and soon dropped "kid" from the phrase, so that "yellow journalism" came into common parlance, referring to the competitive sensationalism of the press.[6] There was virtually no stylistic difference between the two versions of the cartoon. Luks was able to duplicate Outcault's manner exactly. The humor depended partly on the caricatured figures, and partly on the verbal massages spread throughout the drawing. Almost all the verbal style was done in the dialect of the streets, replete with the misspellings we would expect of the semi-literate.

When Luks took over the *World*'s version of the "Yellow Kid," he added two characters to those invented by Outcault: these were the young twin brothers, "Alex" and "George." He was to use them later, in other cartoons. "New Year's Celebration in Hogan's Alley" (December 27, 1896) (Cat. no. 37) includes Alex and George, as well as the "Yellow Kid" and other habitues of the alley. Figures tumble into the scene in a cascade of humanity set against an urban, wintry background. Luks also created a new strip, entitled *Mose, the Great Trained Chicken,* which

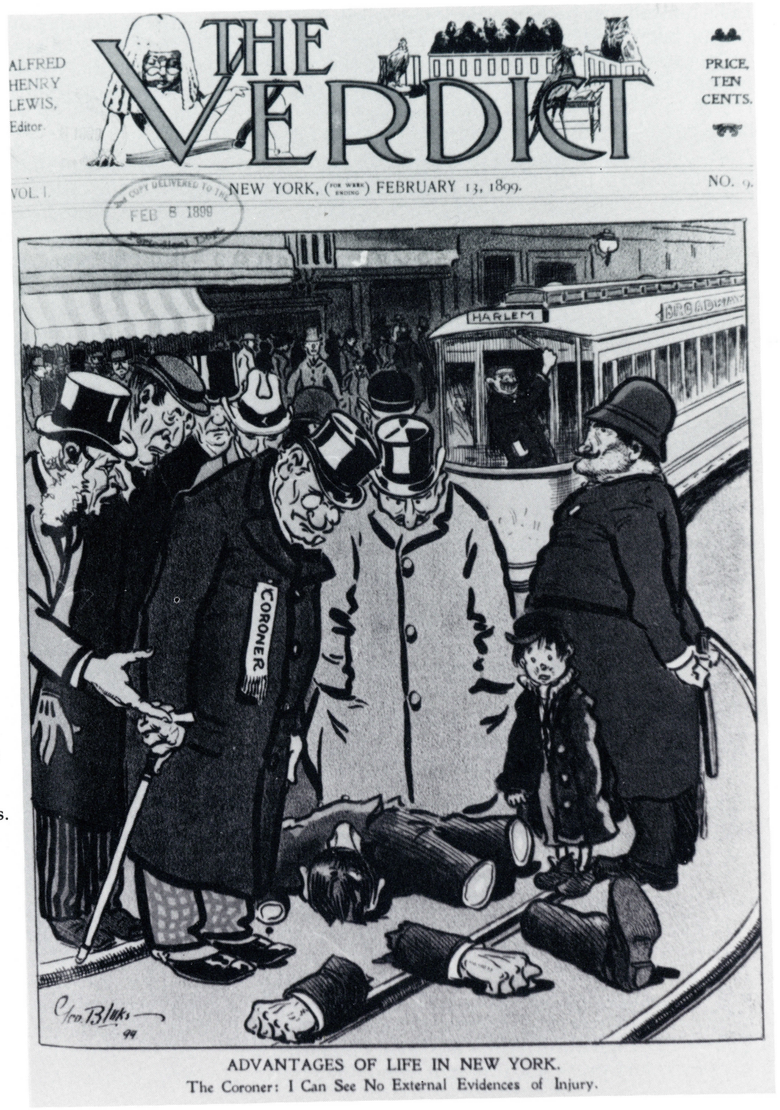


Fig. 17. George Luks, *Advantages of Life in New York*, illustration for *The Verdict*, February 13, 1899. Courtesy, the Library of Congress.

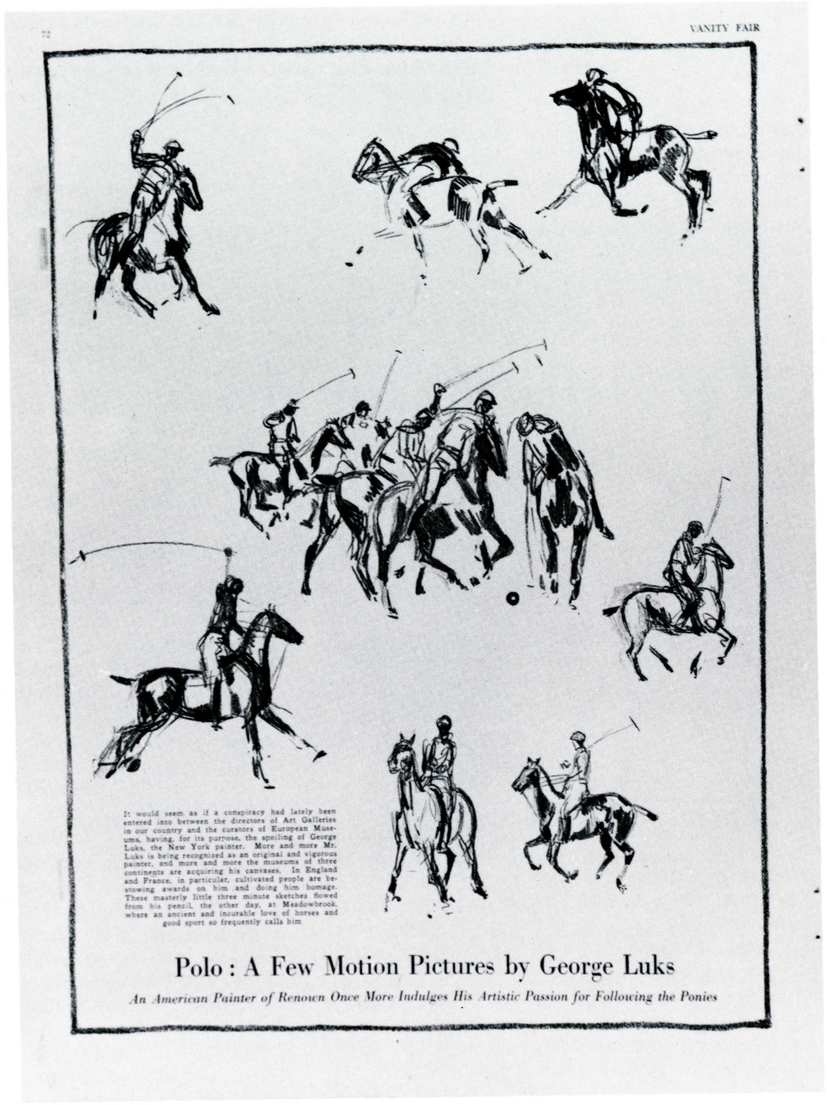
began on June 27, 1897. "Mose" appeared concurrently with the "Yellow Kid," and after Luks stopped drawing the "Kid," in December of 1897, "Mose" continued under variations of title until April of 1898. "Mose," unlike the "Yellow Kid," was the inhabitant of a rural setting. The comic aspects depended on stock negro characterizations derived from vaudeville and the popular fiction of the day. In addition to the big chicken "Mose," other characters included "Uncle Remus" and the "Kalsomine family." (In an analagous rivalry to that of the two "Yellow Kids" of Luks' and Outcault's, "L'il Mose" was created for the New York *Herald* by Outcault in 1901, seemingly in imitation of Luks' series.) The ethnic caricatures that are employed in the "Mose" series occasionally appeared in the "Yellow Kid" also, extending to various minorities. The stereotypical images used by Luks should not be perceived as personal insensitivity on his part, but rather as an indication of his participation in the commonly held attitudes of his time.

In Luks' comic series, themes of poverty and lower-class life were expressed in a manner made palatable to the public. The "Yellow Kid," incredibly popular, generally utilized as background realistically drawn tenement slums. It is interesting that when similar depictions appeared in the paintings of "The Eight," they were not as easily acceptable to the art public. It was left to the popular arts such as comic strips, magazine illustrations, movies and theater, to show the seamier sides of American life. Such subject matter violated notions of what *fine* art should depict.

Luks left the *World* in 1899 to become the chief cartoonist for *The Verdict*. *The Verdict* was a weekly periodical backed by Oliver H. P. Belmont, and edited by Alfred Henri Lewis. It was a highly political, democratic, satirical paper, whose cartoons mirrowed its editorial policy. In its brief existence (1898-1900), the magazine fought against the power of the trusts in general, attacking with special vigor the Vanderbilt interests, and Cleveland, McKinley, and Mark Hanna. Luks' new position proved to be a showcase as well as a catalyst for his graphic abilities. *The Verdict*'s large format allowed generous scope for the full page color cartoons which illustrated the front and back covers, as well as the double page centerfolds. The lithographic process used produced rich hues which visually enhanced even the most savage satires. Luks worked at *The Verdict* from January 2 to October 30, 1899, producing marginal pen-and-ink drawings as well as sixty-three large lithographs. In these works we can see the emergence of Luks as a powerful graphic artist. Bold descriptive lines contrast with finely hatched areas and patches of simple, flat color. Backgrounds to caricatured figures are often realistically depicted and are even sensitive evocations of urban or other appropriate settings. The overall effect of the cartoons is usually one combining wit and strength.

The most familiar of *The Verdict* cartoons depict the corpulent form of political boss Mark Hanna, showing him as ape-like, with dollar signs adorning his earlobe and thumb. From such images we can perceive some of the formative influences on Luks' political cartoon style. Needless to say, he was aware of the work of contemporary editorial cartoonists on newspaper and magazine staffs. As mentioned previously, he had also encountered the lithographic style of Joseph Keppler while working for *Puck*. Luks' exaggeration of the grossness of Mark Hanna's body finds its most famous antecedents in Philipon's pear-shaped Louis Philippe and Daumier's subsequent lithographs emphasizing that monarch's unfortunate form. The over-fed politician type was perpetuated in America with Thomas Nast's dollar-emblazoned, obese "Boss" Tweed caricatures, done for *Harper's*. Echos of Daumier and Nast turn up in several of *The Verdict* cartoons.

One of *The Verdict*'s "crusades" dealt with transportation problems in New York City, and Luks produced three cartoons on the subject of the perils of trolley cars. "The Annual Parade of the Trolley Cripple Club" (*The Verdict*, March 30, 1899) presents a sinister burlesque. Against a realistic backdrop of city buildings, crowds swarm around trolley cars. People are swathed in bandages; some use crutches, or wear eyepatches. The trolley motormen are grinning skeletons. The nightmarish, teeming scene has an Ensor-like quality. "How the Police Facilitate Traffic at the Broadway Crossings" (*The Verdict*, Feb. 6, 1899)



45. *Polo. A Few Motion Pictures by George Luks*, 1922

shows a policeman giving mixed and confusing signals to the traffic. Three horse cabs and a trolley are involved in collisions. The bodies of a cab driver and a pedestrian lie under one cab; another victim's feet appear at the lower left edge of the lithograph. The rotund policeman has a jolly, grinning countenance, which adds a particularly macabre effect. The top of the print is filled with a melee of cab drivers hauling back on the reins in an effort to pull up their horses and avert further disaster. The third of the traffic cartoons appeared on the cover of *The Verdict* (Feb. 13, 1899) (Fig. 17). In this version a Broadway streetcar has run over a man, whose neatly dismembered corpse lies across the tracks. The coroner and several top-hatted colleagues discuss the incident, while a policeman, an urchin, and passers-by look on. The trolley conductor grins unconcernedly. The caption reads: "Advantages of Life in New York: The Coroner: I can see no external evidence of injury."

The anti-trust cartoons usually incorporate portraits of the leaders of finance and industry, as for example, Havemeyer, Morgan, Rockefeller, Whitney and Vanderbilt, as well as Hanna and McKinley. Seldom flattering, these depictions show Luks' ability to capture the essence of a portrait likeness with a few strokes of the crayon.

By the time Luks left *The Verdict*, he was gaining success as a painter. His career turned in that direction, and he left full-time illustration behind him. From time to time, however, he published some notable examples of his graphic skill. One such occasion occurred when the publishing firm of Frederick J. Quinby of Boston decided to produce an illustrated American edition of the novels of Charles Paul de Kock, a somewhat racy French novelist popular during the nineteenth century.

The Quinby Company commissioned William Glackens to undertake the project, which comprised a series of fifty volumes. Because of the extent of the job, Glackens invited his friends to share the work, and Luks, Shinn, John Sloan, James Preston and Frederick R. Gruger all participated. Involved in legal problems, the publisher never finished the anticipated edition, but several volumes were printed, including the two volumes of de Kock's *Gustave* (1904), which Luks illustrated with etchings and drawings. In preparation for the de Kock commission, the friends researched appropriate illustrations of the period in order to gain knowledge of fashions, settings, and the look of contemporary book illustration. Of the group, Luks' illustrations seem the most caricatured and the most free of obvious artistic influences. Perhaps we may detect a touch of Gavarni's satiric touch, and, particularly in the etchings, some Goya-like strength of characterization. Luks' cartoonist background is also an element, especially noticeable in the vignettes.

In the decades that followed, Luks occasionally contributed drawings to *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*. The subject matter in these late illustrations is usually of polite society and its interests, rather than the harsher realities shown in his works of the 1890's. The *Vanity Fair* subjects included sports such as polo and baseball, depicted with spontaneous, quick, bold, gestural lines. In one such illustration, *Vanity Fair*'s caption of "Polo: A Few Motion Pictures" (September 1922) underscores Luks' ability to capture a moment of action with a virtuoso economy of means (Cat. no. 46). Other drawings, also in the same sketchy style, show scenes of the park, restaurants, art studios, etc., often peopled with humorous types. *The New Yorker* sketches likewise suggest the rapidity of execution of the trained observer who was once an artist-reporter.

In summary, many of the aspects of George Luks' paintings style may be seen evolving in his graphic work, from its first tentative beginnings to the sureness of approach manifested in his works of the turn-of-the-century and later years. A delight in depicting personality, in observing individual mannerisms as well as the American scene in general, an understanding of the life of the urban masses, and the ability to describe these themes with simple, forceful gestures, are characteristics which imbue his entire artistic output.

Nina Kasanof

Notes

1 John Sloan, *Notes*, 1950, p. 20. These unpublished notes exist in typescript in the John Sloan Trust, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.
2 Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight*, Westport (Connecticut), 1979, p. 63, recounts the Cuban train story, discussed in conversation with Guy Pène du Bois on September 5, 1952.
3 Guy Pène du Bois, *New York American*, March, 1904, p. 32.
4 Charles Henry Brown, *The Correspondent's War*, New York, 1967, v-vi, and 11, describes the fabrication of news reports from Cuba as a consequence of the newspapers' rivalry. When Richard Harding Davis and Frederick Remington arrived in Cuba in 1897, Remington wired publisher Willaim Randolph Hearst: "Everything is quiet. There is no trouble. There will be no war. I wish to return." Hearst wired back: "Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war." (Brown, 78.) Brown further recounts a scandal occasioned by a Davis report which was embellished by the *Journal* (February 12, 1897) so as to reveal: "Indignities Practiced by Spanish Officials on Board American Vessels . . . Refined Young Women Stripped and Searched by Brutal Spaniards While Under Our Flag on the Olivette." (Brown, 80-81.) Remington's illustration for the story showed a nude female standing amid the "Brutal Spaniards." Remington later admitted the drawing was a product of his imagination, done in the New York newspaper office. He added that he knew some "of the Cuban war news is manufactured on the piazzas of the hotels of that town [Key West] and of Tampa by utterly irresponsible newspapermen who accept every rumor that finds its way across the gulf to the excitable Cuban cigarmakers of Florida, and who pass these rumors on to some of the New York papers as facts and as coming direct from the field." (Brown, 82-83.)
5 Perlman, 64, n. 70.
6 Brown, 15.



33. *Two Bums*, c. 1890

George Luks: An American Artist
Checklist of the Exhibition

All dimensions in inches; height preceeds width. "n.d." signifies no date.

Oils

1. *Boys with Dog, Cuba*, 1896
Oil on canvas, 24 x 30
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. C. Harry Foster

*2. *Gramps*, c. 1900
Oil on canvas, 24 x 20
Signed on back "Gramps/George Luks"
Private Collection

3. *The Louvre, Paris, Evening*, 1902
Oil on panel, $6\frac{1}{8}$ x $8\frac{5}{8}$
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Edward W. Root Bequest (1957)

4. *Luxembourg Gardens, Paris No. 2*, 1902
Oil on panel, 6 x $8\frac{1}{2}$
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Edward W. Root Bequest (1957)

5. *Allen Street*, c. 1905
Oil on canvas, 32 x 45
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Hunter Museum of Art
Gift of Miss Inez Hyder

6. *The Cafe Francis*, c. 1906
Oil on canvas, 36 x 42
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Butler Institute of American Art

7. *Woman with Goose*, 1907
Oil on wood, 16 x 20
Whitney Museum of American Art
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney

8. *Beggar Woman in Moonlight*, 1907
Oil on canvas, 24 x 18
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin

9. *Feeding the Pigs*, c. 1908
Oil on canvas, $20\frac{1}{4}$ x 28
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Collection of Mead Art Museum, Amherst College
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Adler

10. *Pavlova's First Appearance in New York*, c. 1910
Oil on canvas, $16\frac{1}{2}$ x 20
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute



43. *Guide Fishing,* 1919

11. *Jack and Russell Burke,* 1911-c.1923
Oil on canvas, 45 1/8 x 39
Signed "George Luks" upper left
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Gift of Edward W. Root (1954)

12. *Telling Fortunes,* 1914
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16
Signed "George Luks" lower right
The Phillips Collection
Acquired 1926

13. *Brooklyn Bridge,* 1916
Oil on canvas, 14 x 19
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin

14. *Portrait of Antoinette Kraushaar,* 1917
Oil on canvas, 60 x 40
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Collection of Miss Antoinette Kraushaar

15. *Blue Devils on Fifth Avenue,* 1917
Oil on canvas, 38 7/8 x 44 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower left
The Phillips Collection
Purchased from the artist, 1918

16. *Trout Fishing,* 1919
Oil on canvas, 25 x 30
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Mrs. Alfred E. Bissell

17. *Boy with Bowl,* c. 1921
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Lehigh University Art Galleries Permanent Collection

18. *Breaker Boy,* 1921
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis;
John T. Baxter Memorial Collection of American Drawings, 1949

19. *The Fly Weight,* 1925
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sigmund H. Hyman

20. *Three Top Sergeants,* 1925
Oil on canvas, 30 x 36
Signed "George Luks" lower right
The Detroit Institute of Arts
Purchased from the artist, 1925

21. *Coal Miner,* 1926
Oil on wood panel, 14 3/4 x 9 1/4
Signed "G. Luks" lower right
Courtesy of Childs Gallery, New York City

22. *The Polka Dot Dress,* 1927
Oil on canvas, 58 1/8 x 37
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Mrs. Howard Weingrow

23. *Ann of Malden Bridge,* 1930
Oil on canvas, 60 x 40
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Private Collection

24. *Society Lady,* c. 1932
Oil on canvas, 43 x 33 1/2
Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College

25. *Cat and Kittens,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 22 1/4 x 27
Signed "Geo B Luks" lower right
Collection of Mrs. R. B. Humphreys

26. *Gloucester, Massachusetts,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 26 1/4 x 30
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc.

27. *Laughing Nude,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Private Collection

28. *Lowing Heifer,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 1/8
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute

29. *Boy with Bugle,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries



48. *Daughter of the Mines,* 1923



25. *Cat and Kittens,* n.d.



60. *Study for "Cat and Kittens,"* n.d.

30. *Hannaford's Cove,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 16 x 20
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sanford I. Feld

31. *Child with a Wagon (Snow Kid),* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 16 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries

*32. *Beggar Woman,* n.d.
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Private Collection

Works on Paper

33. *Two Bums,* c. 1890
Pen and ink on paper, 17 1/2 x 14
Signed "Geo B Luks" lower left
Private Collection

34. *The Turning Down of Jack the Hair-Clipper,* 1893
Illustration (color), 13 1/8 x 10
Truth, September 23, 1893
Collection of Clyde Singer

35. *Children Nowadays,* 1893
Illustration (color), 13 1/2 x 10 1/4
Truth, March 18, 1893
Collection of Clyde Singer

36. *Circus Scene,* 1895
Gouache on board, 17 x 11 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College

37. *New Year's Celebration in Hogan's Alley,* 1896
Newspaper illustration for the "Yellow Kid" (color), 18 x 24 1/4
The World, Sunday, December 27, 1896
Collection of Clyde Singer

38. *The Little Nippers . . .,* 1897
Newspaper illustration for the "Yellow Kid" (color)
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

39. *Man with Basket,* 1889
Ink, 12 x 9
Signed "George Luks" lower center
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute

40. *Paris Scene,* c. 1902
Chalk with charcoal on paper, 26 1/2 x 35 1/2
Signed "Geo B Luks" lower left
Private Collection

41. *Highbridge Park,* c. 1912
Watercolor, 16 x 19
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Westmoreland Museum of Art, Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Gift of Walter Read Hovey

*42. *The Screecher, Lake Rossignol,* 1919
Watercolor, 8 1/4 x 9 3/16
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute

43. *Guide Fishing,* 1919
Watercolor on paper, 13 3/4 x 19 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Delaware Art Museum
Gift of Titus C. Geesey

44. *The Orator,* c. 1920
Crayon on paper, 8 1/4 x 11 1/2 (sight)
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Former collection Frank Cranenshield
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Grugan

45. *Polo, A Few Motion Pictures by George Luks,* 1922
Illustration (black and white), 12 1/2 x 9 5/8
Vanity Fair, September 1922
Collection of Clyde Singer

46. *Batter Up!,* 1922
Illustration (black and white), 12 1/2 x 9 5/8
Vanity Fair, August 1922
Collection of Clyde Singer

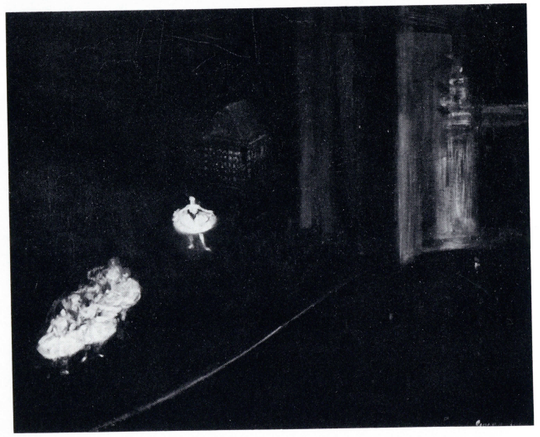
47. *Houses (Pottsville, PA?),* c. 1922
Crayon on paper, 10 1/4 x 7 7/8
Private Collection



28. *Lowing Heifer,* n.d.



53. *Sculptor,* n.d.



10. *Pavlova's First Appearance in New York,* c. 1910

*48. *Daughter of the Mines,* 1923
Watercolor, 14 1/8 x 20 1/16
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Edward W. Root Bequest (1957)

49. *Young Miner,* c. 1926
Charcoal on paper, 17 x 11 (sight)
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Pottsville Free Public Library
Gift of the artist

50. *Miners Descending a Slope,* c. 1926
Conte crayon on paper, 11 1/4 x 17 1/4 (sight)
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Pottsville Free Public Library
Gift of the artist

51. *Artists that Bloom in the Spring,* 1928
Illustration (black and white), 12 1/2 x 9 5/8
Vanity Fair, July 1928
Collection of Clyde Singer

52. *Red Barn, Berkshire Hills,* c. 1930
Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 19 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University

53. *Sculptor,* n.d.
Pastel, 7 1/2 x 16
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Museum of Art Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Edward W. Root Bequest (1957)

54. *John Butler Yeats at Petitpas',* n.d.
Watercolor, 11 1/8 x 14 1/2
Signed lower right
IBM Corporation, Armonk, New York

55. *Shanty Shacks with Coal Breaker,* n.d.
Watercolor, 14 x 19
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Courtesy of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, New York

56. *Parker House, Rockefeller Proprietor,* n.d.
Watercolor, 14 x 19
Signed "George Luks" lower right
Courtesy of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, New York

57. *A Day at the Zoo,* n.d.
Watercolor on paper, 10 x 7 3/4
Signed "George Luks" upper right
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sanford I. Feld

58. *Theater Scene,* n.d.
Crayon on paper, 6 3/4 x 4 1/4
Private Collection

59. *Study of Men Reading,* n.d.
Crayon on paper, 10 1/4 x 6 15/16
Private Collection

60. *Study for "Cat and Kittens,"* n.d.
Pencil, 4 x 6 1/2
Signed "George Luks" lower left
Westmoreland Museum of Art
Gift of Hirschl and Adler Galleries, New York

61. *The Bridge,* n.d.
Pencil on paper, 14 x 9 1/4 (sheet)
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn

62. *Street, East Side, New York,* n.d.
Pencil on paper, 5 1/4 x 7 1/2
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn

* Exhibited at the Sordoni Art Gallery only.



9. *Feeding the Pigs,* c. 1908

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SORDONI
ART GALLERY
WILKES COLLEGE

Wilkes College
150 S. River St.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766

The Sordoni Art Gallery
announces that the exhibition,

George Luks: An American Artist

will be presented by the
Kraushaar Galleries, New York City
September 16 through October 10, 1987.
(This reflects a change in schedule from
the previously advertised opening in
January, 1988.)

For further information on the exhibition, please contact the
Sordoni Art Gallery at (717) 824-4651, ext. 388.

Illustrated catalog available.

Verso: George Luks (1867-1933), **Society Lady,**
c. 1932, oil on canvas, 43x33 1/2
Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College.