



Louine, by Malcolm Stephen Parcell, oil on canvas, acquired 1918. This painting won first prize in the Associated Artists Annual exhibit in 1918. Porter hoped that prize money and the purchase of art by the Friends group would encourage and sustain a community of artists in the region.

All art photos courtesy of The Friends of Art.

The Gift of Art

By Anne Madarasz

The History Center's new exhibition, *The Gift of Art: 100 Years of Art From the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Collection*, features nearly 80 paintings representing the work of predominantly local artists that were given to the Pittsburgh Public Schools to adorn its buildings and inspire its students.

In 1916 a group of community leaders and artists came together and formed the "One Hundred Friends of Pittsburgh Art." Founded by John L. Porter, the President of Union Storage Company, the group sought to both encourage the work of local artists and the appreciation of art by school children.¹ Each member of the group agreed to donate \$10 a year to be used for the sole purpose of buying art at the Associated Artists annual show and donating it to the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). The Friends of Art celebrated their 100th anniversary in 2016, marking a century in this unique partnership with the PPS.



Entrance to *The Gift of Art: 100 Years of Art From the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Collection*.
Photo by Nicole Lauletta.

John Porter played an integral role in the genesis of this effort. He conceived the idea and became a driving force in establishing the committee that raised money and purchased art. With one foot in the business world and the other in the growing art community in Pittsburgh, Porter proved to be suited for the task. Born in Meadville in 1868, Porter graduated from Allegheny College and took a job with the National Transit Company in Oil City. After meeting and marrying Augusta Fuher, he worked in London briefly, then joined his father-in-law managing Union Storage Company. Porter's club memberships — The

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Art Patron Dies



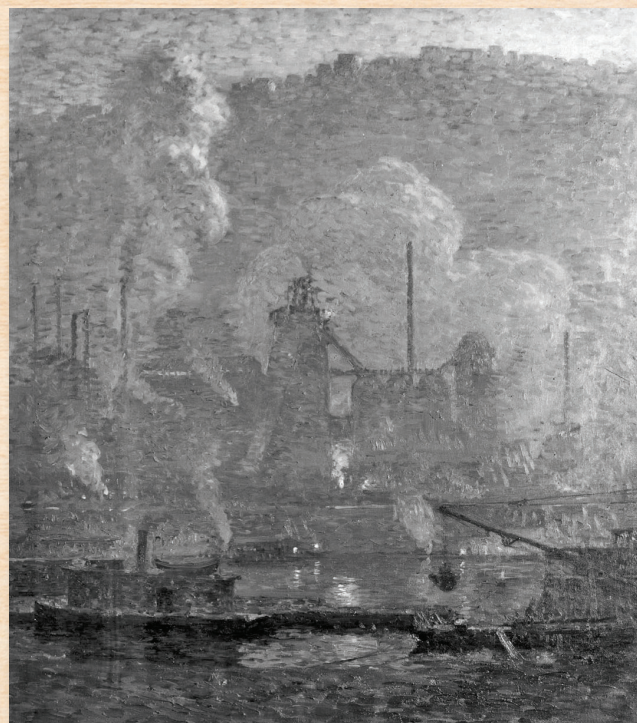
JOHN L. PORTER.
Founder of the One Hundred Friends of Pittsburgh Art and for 16 years chairman of the board of trustees of Carnegie Institute of Technology. Mr. Porter died Wednesday night in the Clifton Springs Sanitarium, N. Y. Funeral services will be tomorrow afternoon in the chapel in Homewood Cemetery.

John L. Porter, c. 1937.
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, August 13, 1937, 14.

Duquesne Club, Oakmont and Fox Chapel Country Clubs, and the Sons of the American Revolution — attest to his status and indicate where he may have befriended the other businessmen who served as leaders of the Friends of Art.²

Porter's personal interest in art also drove this effort. A member of the Fine Arts Committee at the Carnegie Museum, he spent 16 years as the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In addition, he served as the Vice President of the Beaux Arts Salon, a Pittsburgh group founded in 1915, "to promote the fine and applied arts ... and exhibitions where the best examples of artist's work can be sold for the benefit of the artists."³ Porter collected art as well, lending a Childe Hassam painting, *Isle of Shoals*, to a gallery exhibition in 1929 and is noted as a donor to the Carnegie Museum's Patron's Art Fund.⁴ Support for the arts and artists became central to Porter's life and a motivation behind the founding of the Friends of Art Committee.

Those who joined Porter shared his vision and his involvement in the economic and cultural life of the city. W.C. Fownes, an industrialist who built Oakmont Country Club with his father, Charles D. Armstrong, of the Armstrong Cork Company, and James Hailman



The Mill - Evening, by George Sotter, oil on canvas, acquired 1916. This is one of the first paintings purchased by the Friends for the Pittsburgh Public Schools, though its location is now unknown. The motivation for its inclusion may have been to illustrate how artists found beauty in the gritty mills and factories located along Pittsburgh's rivers.

All art photos courtesy of The Friends of Art.



The Princess and the Unicorn, by Norwood Hodge MacGilvary, oil on canvas, acquired 1923. An artist and teacher at Carnegie Tech, MacGilvary painted in two different styles during his lifetime. Realism predominated, but here he explores the magical world of fantasy in a painting that has captivated students for years.

Hailman and Thomas Hartley, highly placed members of the Citizens Committee for city planning, are all listed in leadership positions of the group. In addition, John Beatty, an artist and the first director of the Carnegie Museum of Art, and Mary Thaw Thompson, a supporter of the arts and culture, rounded out the One Hundred Friends of Art executive committee. Moving in the same business and social circles, this group likely shared a belief in the power of

art and arts education to signify the status of their city as a place of culture, and to battle the social problems caused by rapid urbanization and industrialization.

The establishment of the One Hundred Friends of Art in 1916 mirrored similar efforts in cities across the country. This “Progressive arts outreach” linked art patrons with urban public schools to provide an aesthetic of the beautiful that contrasted with the environment

in which many city children lived.⁵ The hope was that arts education would encourage an appreciation of art as well as “contribute with other influences to aid us in recovering from our unrest of extravagance, excitements, sexual abandon in dress, bad manners, disrespect, and irreverence.”⁶ Just as members of the Progressive Movement built settlement houses to provide services to newly arrived immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, so too

did art educators and art lovers begin to use the arts to effect positive community development. As Porter said, “Imagine if you can the effect of this movement upon our community.... Can squalor exist in the surroundings of children brought into daily contact with beauty?”⁷

Chicago had a Public School Art Society as early as 1894 that welcomed visiting teachers, many women who belonged to amateur art clubs, to share reproductions of art, provide decorative murals for hallways, and instruct school students in the arts. Other major cities followed suit with public school arts education programs springing up in California, New York City, Massachusetts, and even in smaller cities such as Tacoma, Washington, where 175 framed photographs of old master paintings were provided to schools by the Aloha Club.⁸

***Pittsburgh Landscape*, by Olive Nuhfur, oil, acquired 1936.** This painting captures a classic Pittsburgh landscape with homes clinging to the hillside and the smoke from a steel factory rising in the background. Likely an image of Hazelwood, the scene would have been familiar to city school students.



Each effort took its own form, but most featured a partnership between a citizen group and the public schools and a vision that exposure to art could positively impact young lives.

Pittsburgh’s effort is unique in that it has lasted for more than 100 years. Born when the city reigned as the eighth largest in the nation, this initiative joined other social service programs for youth, such as the playground movement, spearheaded by citizens. The city’s population had doubled in size between 1890 and 1910, with more than 26 percent of residents being foreign-born. Public schools became a place to reach and teach these new Americans.



***Southside Church*, by Robert Schmertz, watercolor, acquired 1934.** At least three paintings of churches were added to the collection in the 1930s. They pictured an important neighborhood institution for families struggling to survive during the Great Depression.

In the first year of the partnership, the 100 Friends purchased two paintings, a portrait, *Vera*, and a piece by George Sotter, *The Mill – Evening* that features an industrial scene. Within a decade the group had raised almost \$10,000 and purchased 49 paintings for display in the city’s schools. Paintings remain the primary objects in the collection.

Until 1935, when the Associated Artists added crafts as a category, the group’s annual exhibits featured mostly oil and watercolor works. Acrylics began to appear in the 1950s when that paint became available commercially and the PPS collection received its first gift of sculpture, *Family Tree*, in 1962. As the work of regional artists has evolved, so too has the collection. In the past 25 years, photography, fiber art, mixed media, and even video installations have been added.

The Friends of Art collection captures the evolution of art and culture in the region. Most of the major art movements of the past century are represented, demonstrating the connection



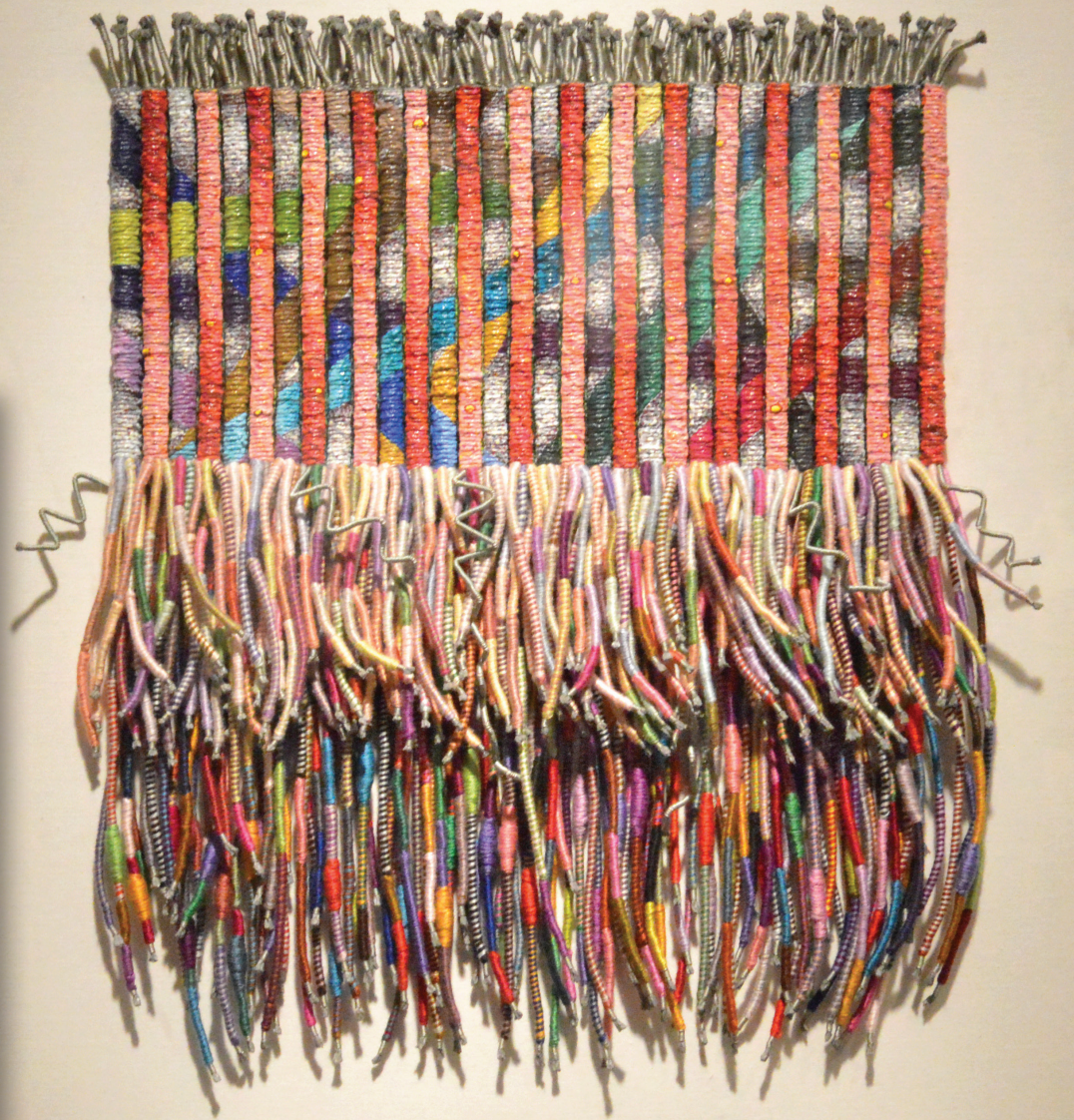
Gibsonia Woodland, by Will J. Hyett, oil on canvas, acquired 1917. Most of the early pieces acquired for the collection are either portraits or landscape paintings. This bucolic setting, foreign to many city residents, demonstrated the beauty of nature.

of artists in this region to the larger world of art. But the collection also stands as a record of the subject matter that inspired the Associated Artists and, not surprisingly, some of that is regional in nature. The landscape that defines this region is a theme that artists in the collection have returned to time and again. So too are the people that have settled here. The collection serves as both an educational tool and as an illustration of the type of art being created locally over the past century.

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Mosaic #1, by Russell Twiggs, oil on Masonite, acquired 1951. The collection ventures beyond realism, teaching about the stylistic changes occurring in the larger world of art. It teaches students to understand as well as appreciate many different forms of art.



Breakup, by Amy Lipshie, painted and woven fiber, acquired 1991. As artists embraced new materials, the collection came to reflect that change—including pieces of mixed media and fiber art.

Photo by Liz Simpson.

The Gift of Art commemorates a vision conceived a century ago to beautify the lives of Pittsburgh school children, but also to use art as a tool of social and cultural change. Shared with tens of thousands of school children over the last century, it is now shared with the public in a museum for the first time. The collection offers a compelling perspective on the work of regional artists and the subjects that have inspired them. It also opens a door to the past and the use of art to educate, to uplift, and to acculturate the city's youth.

The Gift of Art: 100 Years of Art From the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Collection is now open on the fifth floor Barenfeld Gallery and closes on June 11, 2017.

Anne Madarasz is the Director of the Curatorial Division, Chief Historian, and Director of the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum.

¹ John L. Porter obituary, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 13, 1937, 14.

² Ibid.

³ *American Art Annual*, Volume 14, 1918, 257, and Porter obituary, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 13, 1937, 14.

⁴ Helene Barbara Weinberg and Elizabeth G. Barker, *Childe Hassam, American Impressionist* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 401.

⁵ Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994), 86.

⁶ John L. Porter, "An Art Collection," *Pittsburgh School Bulletin*, May 1926.

⁷ John L. Porter, *Art and Archaeology*, 1922 quoted in Mary Brignano, *The Associated Artists of Pittsburgh 1910-1985: The First Seventy-Five Years* (Pittsburgh, 1985), 20.

⁸ Blair, 86-88.



Laughing Man with Green Hat, by Robert Villamagna, deconstructed metal cans, acquired 2008. The artist says “The message of my work is: to have fun, be creative, laugh, and reflect on the past occasionally.” Students connect with playful pieces such as this one.