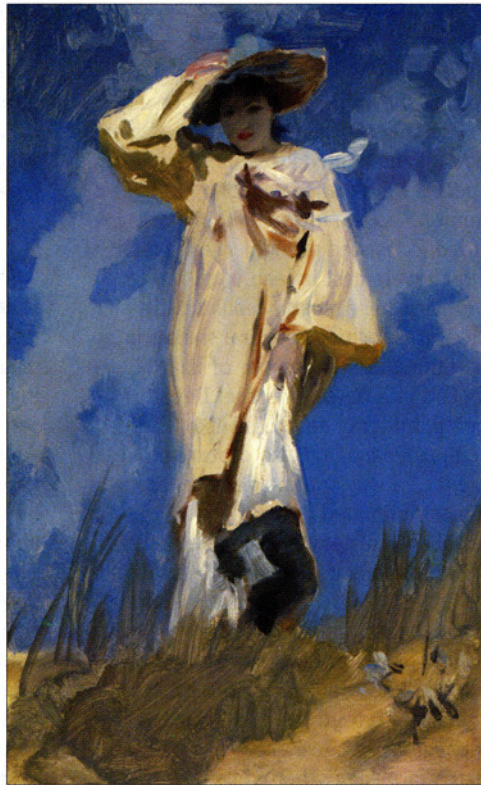


ARTnews



John Singer Sargent, *A Gust of Wind*, ca. 1883, oil on canvas, 24¼" x 15". Adelson Galleries.

'Sargent and Impressionism'

Adelson Galleries

Henry James once pronounced "summer afternoon" the two most beautiful words in the English language. It's a sentiment John Singer Sargent seems to have shared, as this show of 31 enchanting, largely bucolic scenes made plain. After the public outrage that greeted the exhibition of his *Madame X* in Paris in 1884, Sargent fled to England, abandoning formal portraiture when commissions dried up and turning to landscape painting in the Impressionist manner. He established a warm correspondence with Claude Monet and made several visits to Giverny. Although the influence of the Impressionist master's slashing, broken brushstrokes could be seen in many paintings here, the shimmering surfaces that were so much a part of the Frenchman's greatness were absent.

No matter. Sargent always excelled at

painting more lucrative subjects, such as the children of wealthy clients. The gorgeous *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885–86), on loan from the Tate, features two children at dusk amid flowers and glowing Japanese lanterns. It was that painting that set the tone for this show, in which elegant women in long white dresses could be seen napping or reading in riverboats and profusions of vivid and juicy flowers appeared as if they'd just blossomed.

Many scenes looked dashed off, such as *A Backwater at Calcot Near Reading* (1888) or *A Gust of Wind* (1883), while others were more finished and calculated, like *Paul Helleu Sketching with His Wife* (1889), in which the interplay of boat, canvas, palette, and artist sets up a pattern of knifing angles. Faces in these works are rarely more than a blur, although occasionally they reveal Sargent's impulse toward portraiture. The figure in *Autumn on the River* (1889) appears to be a dreamy but recognizable likeness of his sister, swaddled in blankets and furs and caressed by fall sunlight in the prow of a boat. It's a lovely farewell to blissfully idle summer afternoons.

—Ann Landi