

THE CLEVELAND SCHOOL: ARTISTS OF THE WESTERN RESERVE

William G. Scheele
Northeast Ohio Art Museum

Artists included in the exhibition:

William Sommer (1867-1949)
Henry Keller (1869-1949)
Abel Warshawsky (1883-1962)
Frank Wilcox (1887-1964)
Paul Travis (1891-1975)
Carl Gaertner (1898-1952)

This exhibition focuses on six of the most prolific of the "Cleveland School" painters who were prominent during the first half of the 20th Century. They are: William Sommer (1867-1949), Henry Keller (1869-1949), Abel Warshawsky (1883-1962), Frank Wilcox (1887-1964), Paul Travis (1891-1975) and Carl Gaertner (1898-1952).

These men were dominant forces in the art world of the Western Reserve region during its most formative years, from the turn of the century through World War II. It was a time when the School of Design for Women evolved into the coeducational Cleveland School of Art. All but William Sommer were educated at CSA, and most went on to further training in Europe. Keller, Wilcox, Travis and Gaertner each taught at CSA for several decades, with Wilcox owning the longest term of 44 years. The school provided excellent basic art instruction in design, drawing, sculpture and painting.

The Cleveland Museum of Art was founded in 1916, providing the area with a fine collection of world art, as well as exhibition space for traveling shows. In 1919, William Milliken started what was to become Cleveland's annual "May Show." The emphasis was to encourage the support of local artists through the purchase of artwork in the show. With the exception of Warshawsky, all of these painters won numerous awards at the May Shows and acknowledged its positive effect on their careers. Keller and Wilcox were awarded special prizes for maintained excellence in 1919 and 1920. Beginning in the thirties, the best work of the May Shows travelled to other cities across America, giving these artists national exposure.

Many Clevelanders exhibited in other competitive shows in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York. Their work was shown with that of prominent national artists like Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Rockwell Kent and Edward Hopper.

During the first two decades of this century, Cleveland was attractive to artists as a place of employment. Steel and other major industries flourished and grew even faster with the needs of World War I. There were interior decorating jobs in the houses of the wealthy industrialists and several lithographic printing companies needed well-trained artists. As the great depression came about, the federal government helped many local artists through its Works Progress Administration Projects. Many of the murals and sculptures still adorn the city today.

As the interest in art grew in Cleveland, many art clubs and societies came into existence. The early "Old Bohemians" had been established back in the late 1800s, by Archibald Willard, Otto Bacher, Louis Loeb and Frederick Gottwald. Following them, in 1912, William Sommer and other local commercial artists founded the Kokoon Arts Club. The clubhouse provided space for private studios, drawing and modeling classes, lectures and exhibitions. Their annual "Bal

Masques" were notoriously wild affairs, shocking Cleveland society with nudity and frivolous behavior. The affairs lasted several decades and become the highlight of the social season. By contrast, the Cleveland Society of Artists was a more conservative group of "fine artists," concerned with the pure study of art.

Even the downtown business section had its cultural nooks, such as Richard Laukhuff's bookstore, in the Taylor Arcade. It was there that all kinds of art and philosophy was informally discussed and many friendships made. Hart Crane and Bill Sommer first met there, and Abel Warshawsky, Bill Zorach and Max Kalish were frequent visitors, as well as exhibitors.

Several downtown art galleries exhibited new works by local and international artists. The Taylor, Korner & Wood and Rorimer Galleries constantly premiered works by the six painters shown in this exhibition. The diverse talents of each of these artists combines to present a good cross-section of the "Cleveland School."

Let us now look at each artist chronologically, with some brief biographies.

William Sommer was born in Detroit, Michigan in January of 1867. As a young man, he apprenticed as a lithographer at the Calvert Company in Detroit. In the late 1880s, Sommer worked as a journeyman lithographer in Boston (the Buford Co.) and in New York City (the Ottman Co.). By 1890, Sommer made his way to London, England to work for the Dangerfield Brothers. During the following year, he studied at Professor Hertericks School of Art, in Munich.

In 1892, Sommer was back in New York City, working for the Ottman Company. He married Martha Obermyer in 1894 and had three sons, William, Edwin and Raymond. Sommer moved to Lakewood, Ohio in 1907 to work for the Otis Litho Company. He was interested in all the arts, including music, literature and philosophy, and frequented Laukhuff's bookstore and the Kokoon Arts Club for continued inspiration and the company of Hart Crane, William Zorach and Abel Warshawsky.

In 1914, Sommer left the lithography profession and moved his family to rural Brandywine, Ohio, south of Cleveland. It was here that he found inspiration in the surrounding farmland countryside and its animal life. Watercolor painting became his favorite medium, and he showed great flair with the color influences of Cezanne and the modernist Europeans. His numerous portraits of friends and relatives reflected "the inside on the outside" personality traits that have made them so uniquely expressive. He became known as the "Sage of Brandywine."

During the mid-thirties, Sommer painted murals around northeast Ohio for the WPA projects. Some of the best exist in the Cleveland Public Hall and Library. He continued to work on paintings in his schoolhouse studio until his death in 1949.

Henry Keller was born at sea, en route from Germany to the United States, in 1869. His family settled in Cleveland, and he later attended the School of Design for Women, initially listed as a janitor to gain entrance.

In 1890, Keller began his European studies in Munich, with well-known animal artist Hermann Baisch. For the following eight years, Keller worked as a lithographer at the Morgan Company in Cleveland. He married Imogene Leslie in 1893 and had two sons, Henry and Albert. During four seasons around the turn of the century, Keller travelled around Europe and studied in Dusseldorf, with Julius Bergmann and in Munich, with Heinrich Zugel.

Returning to Cleveland in 1902, Keller began his long teaching career at the Cleveland School of Art. At the same time, he started a six year stint at the Carnegie Institute, in Pittsburgh. He

taught design, drawing and painting, always with an eye on the European trends. His interest in impressionism and "en plein air" painting led him to teach summer classes outdoors in Berlin Heights, Ohio from 1903 to 1916. He was one of the few "Cleveland School" artists to exhibit in the famous Armory Show, in New York, in 1913.

From the mid 1920s on, Keller travelled extensively throughout the American southwest and northeast, Canada, Puerto Rico, Spain and other parts of Europe. He painted the sea and landscapes of all places visited, and later worked in California until his death in 1949.

Both William Sommer and Henry Keller were given memorial exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1950, a great tribute to these pioneers of the "Cleveland School."

Abel Warshawsky was born in Sharon, Pennsylvania in 1883. His family moved to Cleveland's East Side and Abel began art classes at the Cleveland School of Art. He went to New York for further training at the Art Students League and later, the National Academy of Design. Louis Loeb and Leon Kroll were favorite instructors.

As a teacher in New York in 1907, some of his students were William and Marguerite Zorach, Max Kalish and his brother Alexander. In 1908, fellow Clevelander Louis Rorimer funded Warshawsky to study in Europe. For the next thirty years, he lived in France, painting in the impressionist style of the times. He made frequent trips back to Cleveland and New York to exhibit and sell his oil paintings.

In the late thirties, Warshawsky moved back to the United States permanently. He settled in Monterey, California with his wife Ruth, and continued to teach and paint in his traditional impressionist style.

Frank Wilcox was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1887. He was schooled in Cleveland and graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1910. Immediately afterwards, he left for Paris and began studies at the Academie Callorossi. He spent an entire year there and received a full dose of French impressionistic influences.

In 1913, Wilcox began teaching at the Cleveland School of Art in design, drawing, painting and printing. He also taught at the John Huntington Polytechnic Institute, at night school, from 1918 through 1953. He worked with Henry Keller in Berlin Heights, on printmaking and painting.

Wilcox was always interested in his homeland Ohio, and led him to research, illustrate and write books on the "Ohio Indian Trails" (1933, 1970), "Weather Wisdom" (1949), and "The Ohio Canals" (1969). Refusing to learn to drive, he walked all over Ohio to map out and sketch the land and its inhabitants.

Throughout his entire life, Wilcox travelled whenever he could, from the Gaspé peninsula in Canada, to Europe in 1914 and 1926, and all across America. His subtle techniques would change, but his overall boldness of style gained for him the title "Dean of Cleveland Painters." He was one who thrived in the medium of watercolor painting and promoted its usage.

For the last decade of his life, he painted small (5" x 9") pen and watercolor sketches from memory, depicting history as he had seen it. Norman Kent (Editor, *American Artist Magazine*) dubbed these paintings the "Little Big" watercolors of Frank Wilcox.

Paul Travis was born in Wellsville, Ohio in 1891. He graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1917 and went to France during World War I, teaching art to the Army, in LeMans. Upon returning to the States, Travis began teaching drawing and painting at the Cleveland School of Art in 1920.

Beginning in art school, and lasting a lifetime, was a strong friendship between Travis and Charles Burchfield. A reverence for nature was shared by the artists. Later, Travis realized a dream by spending a sabbatical year from school in Africa (1927-28). He wandered along Stanley's trail collecting artifacts, sketching and filming the people and places visited. It was an experience that affected the man's entire life.

Travis taught at the Cleveland School of Art through 1957, and was revered as one of its liveliest, most influential teachers. Travis used a very direct approach to painting and teaching, usually working on a large scale. His work jumps out at you with the most advanced, abstract attitude of all the "Cleveland School" painters. In the late forties and throughout the fifties, he produced numerous drawings and watercolors of tigers, abstractions and fantasies. Upon retirement from the Art School, he stopped painting and took up violin making.

Carl Gaertner was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1898. He graduated from the Cleveland School of Art in 1924 and began teaching painting there a year later.

He travelled a great deal during the twenties and thirties, visiting Bermuda, Cape Cod, Canada, and the American West. Midway through the thirties, he focused on a gouache style of painting that lasted until his death and became his trademark. A dark, somber mood was reflected in most of this work, mostly depicting local landscapes.

During the forties, Gaertner rode the train (Empire State Express) to New York, sketching all the way to the gallery appointments (Macbeth in New York City). He was President of the Cleveland Society of Artists (1935-38) and a member of the National Academy of Art.

"THE CLEVELAND SCHOOL: ARTISTS OF THE WESTERN RESERVE"

1) William Sommer (1867-1949)

- * U S Mail
watercolor 35 x 20"
- * Ohio Farmland
watercolor 35 x 20"
- * Brandywine Farm
watercolor 11 x 14"
- * Two Cows and a Stump
watercolor 18 x 24"
- * Tiger Boy
oil 26 x 22"
- * Three Graces
watercolor 12 x 16"

2) Henry Keller (1869-1949)

- * Sheephead
gouache 15 x 20"
- * Vermillion Lagoon
gouache 14 x 17"
- * Port Huron
gouache 13 x 10"
- * Romantic Landscape
oil 16 x 20"
- * Make Ready for Your Cue
oil 36 x 47"
- * Moroccan Market
oil 54 x 78"

3) Abel Warshawsky (1883-1962)

- * Rocky Coast, Maine
oil 22 x 28"
- * The Lone Fisherman
oil 32 x 32"
- * Brittany People
oil 59 x 77"

4) Frank Wilcox (1887-1964)

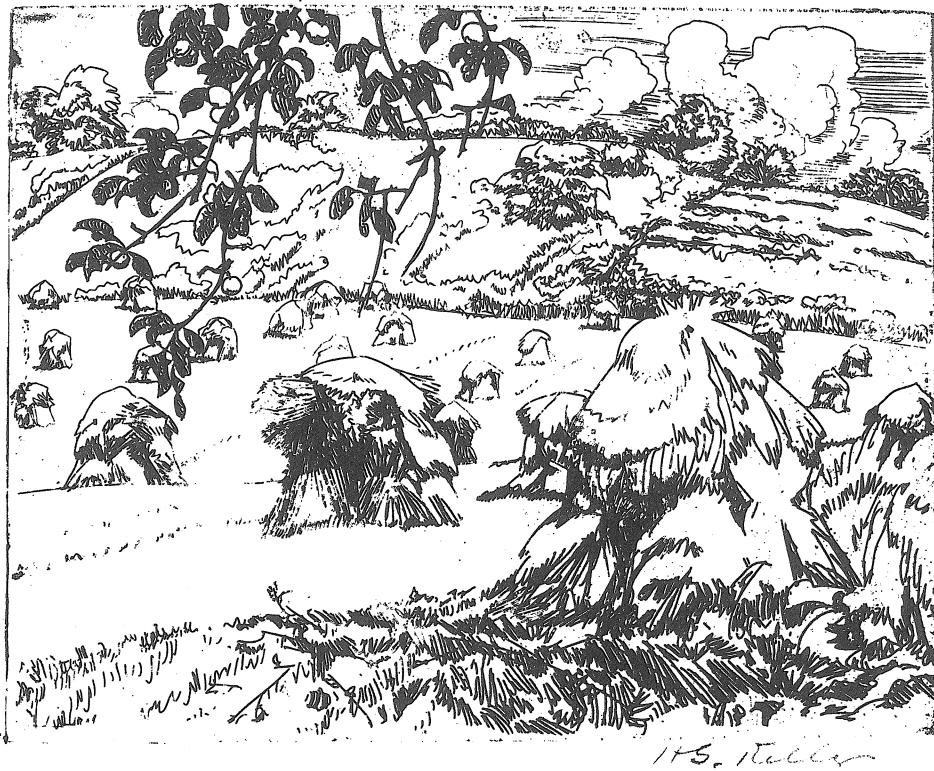
- * The Reunion
oil 36 x 38"
- * The Reunion
oil 8 x 10"
- * Brecksville Road
watercolor 22 x 30"
- * The Last Canal Lock
watercolor 22 x 30"
- * Coal Wagons in Winter
watercolor 22 x 30"
- * Fisherman
screenprint 8 x 11"
- * Cod Fishermen, Gaspe
watercolor 14 x 19"
- * Perce Rock, Gaspe
etching 8 x 10"

5) Paul Travis (1891-1975)

- * The Offering
oil 56 x 39"
- * The Offering
lithograph 15 x 10"
- * The River
oil 55 x 40"
- * African Landscape
watercolor 21 x 28"
- * African Fish
watercolor 20 x 27"
- * Mt Kilimanjaro & Baobab Tree
etching 5.5 x 7"
- * Mt Kilimanjaro & Baobab Tree
drawing 5.5 x 7"
- * Bullfight at Bodie, California
oil 30 x 48"

6) Carl Gaertner (1898-1952)

- * Freshwater Pond
oil 21 x 36"
- * Dark Town
oil 35 x 41"
- * Corner in the Flats
oil 30 x 41"
- * Winter Street Scene
oil 35 x 41"



wheat field

Fig. 1 — Henry Keller

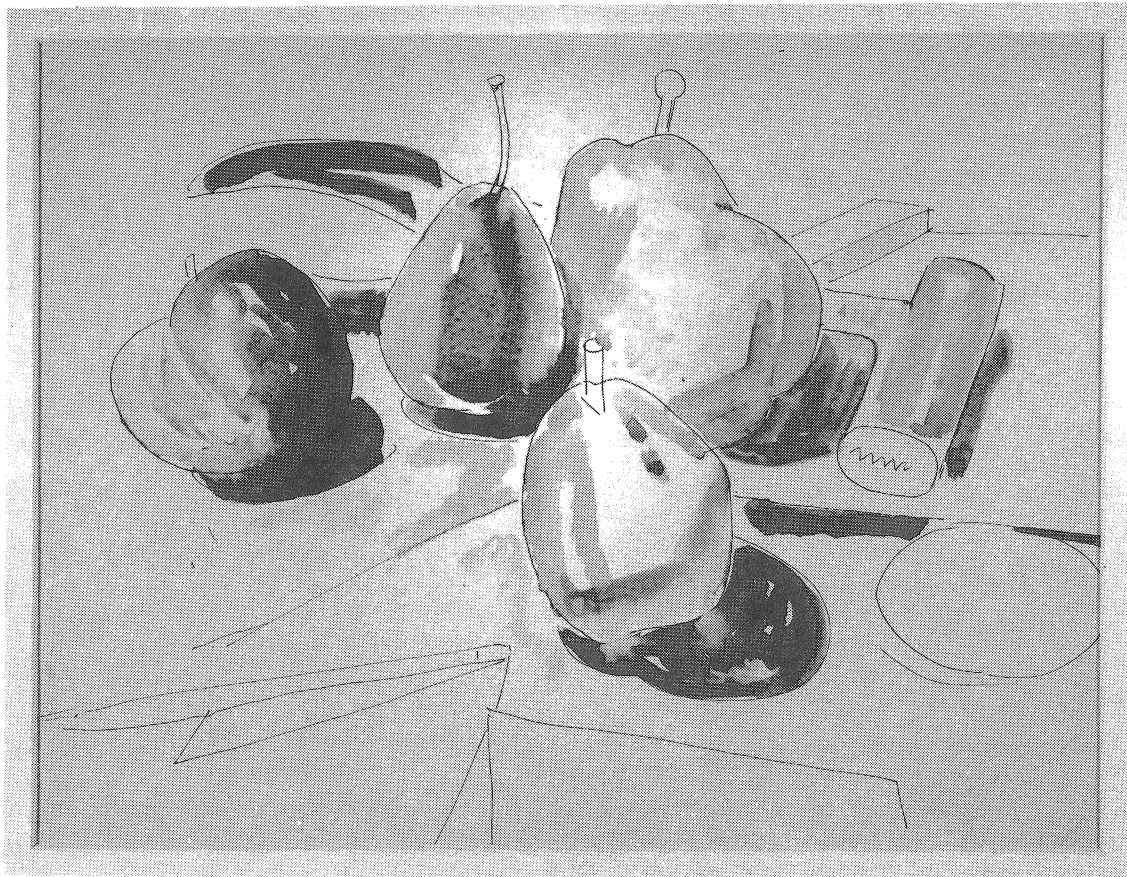


Fig. 2 — William Sommer



Fig. 3 — Frank Wilcox



Fig. 4 — Paul Travis