



A painter of appealing impressionist works who is best known for his vibrant early twentieth century cityscapes, Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937) is currently the subject of a bicoastal museum exhibition examining his similarly multifaceted career. Long popular among collectors, Cooper’s work will be brought to a much wider audience with this retrospective (which opened at the Hecksher Museum in Huntington, New York, and now is on view at California’s Laguna Museum of Art through June 3, 2007) and its extensive accompanying catalogue by scholars William Gerdts and Deborah Epstein Solon.

Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937)

by Lisa Bush Hankin

The son of a well-to-do Philadelphia surgeon, Cooper studied under Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He began spending long stretches of time abroad after about 1885, and much of his



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT:

Fig. 1: Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), *Concarneau*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 19½ x 28 inches. Courtesy of Vincent Vallarino Fine Art, New York.

Fig. 4: Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), *Spanish Garden*, circa 1890s–1910s. Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 15 x 17½ inches. Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of Spanierman Gallery, LLC, New York.

Fig. 2: Colin Campbell Cooper (1850–1937), *Metropolitan Life Tower*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches. Private collection. Courtesy of MME Fine Art, LLC, New York.

THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:

Fig. 3: Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), *Hunter College, New York City*, circa 1915. Oil on canvas, 40 x 25 inches. Courtesy of Spanierman Gallery, LLC, New York.

Fig. 5: Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), *The Temple of Art, San Francisco*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 25 x 35 inches. Courtesy of The Redfern Gallery, Laguna Beach, California.

early work focuses on the architecture and scenery he encountered in his travels through Holland, Belgium, Spain, Italy, and France (Fig. 1). It was in Europe that Cooper's enduring interest in architecture took hold, and his views of centuries-old cathedrals and townscapes anticipate the magnificent skyscraper works that would bring him his greatest fame. Cooper's European works are his most affordable, according to New York dealer Debra Force, because American collectors generally gravitate toward his American subject matter.

After his 1897 marriage to Emma Lampert (1855–1920)—an accomplished artist in her own right—Cooper's interest gradually shifted to American subjects, though he continued to paint and travel abroad until almost the end of his life. In 1904, he established his base in New York, where his midtown studio location offered him ample opportunity to observe firsthand the dawn of New York's skyscraper era. Though Cooper's New York works (Figs. 2, 3) were created at largely the same place and time as those of the Ashcan School artists, Cooper's light- and color-filled urban scenes celebrated city life and the forward march of progress rather than emphasizing its grittier side.

Colin Campbell Cooper	
Record Prices for Work at Auction	
Present	\$147,500
2005	\$147,500
2000	\$129,000
1995	\$77,000
1990	\$77,000

Although Cooper's celebrated views of skyscrapers and New York landmarks are also his most sought after by collectors, interestingly,



this is not reflected in the auction prices for Cooper's work. His figurative paintings (not the area upon which his artistic reputation rests) have brought his two highest auction prices. But as Debra Force explains, "The best New York paintings Cooper produced have not come up at auction, and rarely

become available. The market for these is on the rise and should continue to do so."

Though most closely linked with New York and, after 1921, California, Cooper also produced views of other American cities at the turn of the twentieth century: Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, and Emma Lampert Cooper's native Rochester, New York, which he considered his second home. In addition, he worked extensively in watercolor (Fig. 4), often exhibiting highly finished works of the same subjects he would later depict in oil.

The Laguna exhibition catalogue, *East Coast/West Coast and Beyond: Colin Campbell Cooper, American Impressionist*, illuminates some heretofore unexplored facets of the artist's life that offer collectors some

intriguing areas to pursue. For instance, Cooper visited Taos in 1881, and was among the first painters to discover this now-legendary New Mexico art colony. The exceedingly rare southwestern scenes he produced are highly desirable, notes Debra Force, given the avid interest in Taos works



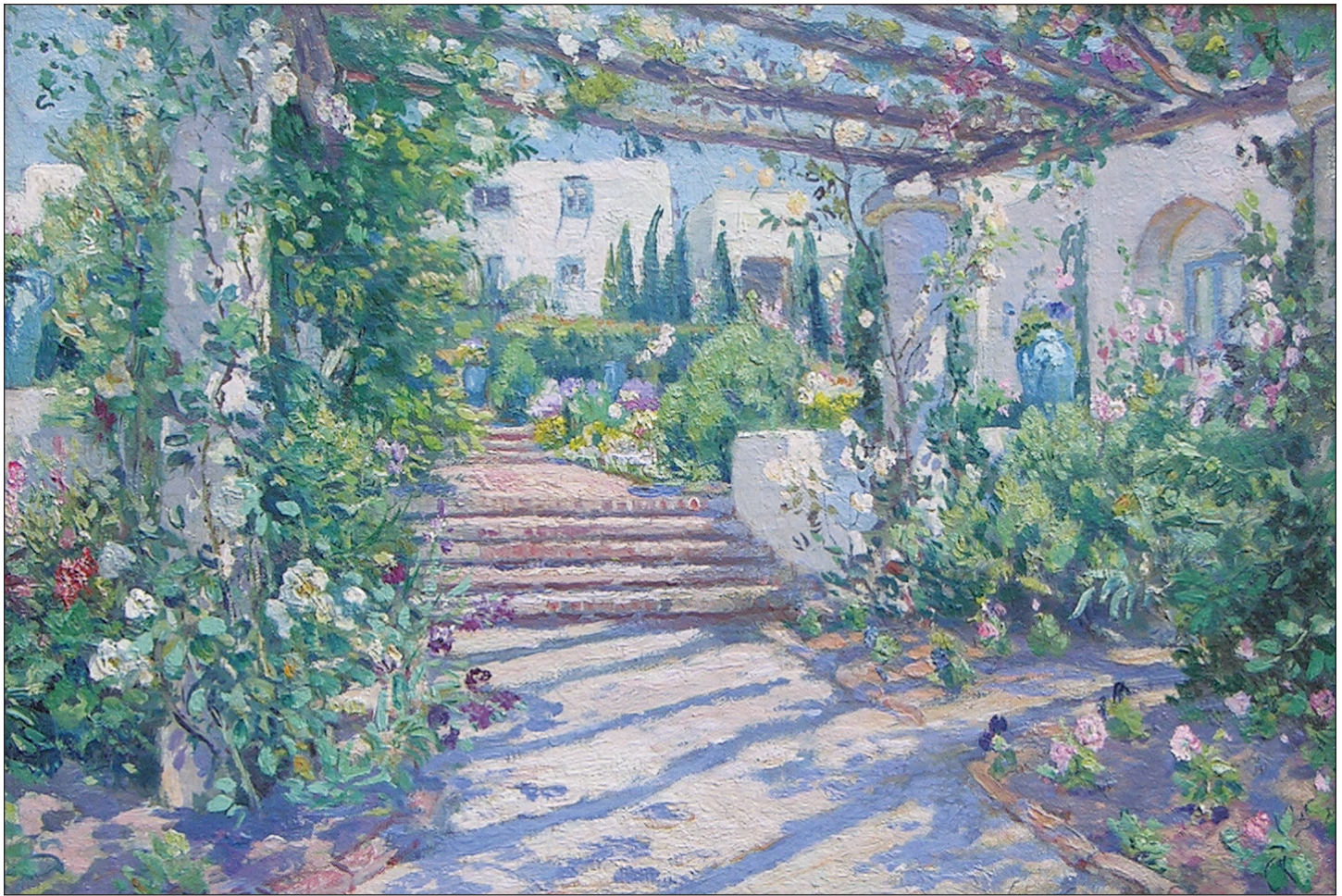


Fig. 6: Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937), *Terrace at Samrakand Hotel, circa 1923*. Oil on canvas, 14 x 20 inches. Courtesy of The Redfern Gallery, Laguna Beach, California.

by any artist. “The Orientalist views resulting from Cooper’s 1913–1914 trip to India,” Force says, “are also extremely collectible.” Still other less familiar areas of Cooper’s oeuvre include engaging views of the historic architecture in cities such as Annapolis, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Salem, Newport, and on the islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard.

Cooper’s trip to the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco resulted in a fascinating series of works that depict the various buildings created for the fair (Fig. 5), and his travel to southern California afterward undoubtedly stirred the interest that culminated in his permanent move there after Emma’s death in 1920. In Santa Barbara, Cooper enjoyed a second act in his career,

delving into new subject matter, serving as leader of the local art community, and writing plays, a number of which were produced for the stage during his lifetime. Working with renewed creative vigor, Cooper produced a body of work that includes not only dazzling views of the area’s gardens (Fig. 6) and local architecture, but also a return to the figural painting for which he had earned early praise but had all but abandoned in his New York period. Ray Redfern of the Redfern Gallery in Laguna Beach, who has handled Cooper’s work for over thirty years, considers him one of the top five California artists, due to the quality and consistency of his work. “Cooper has always had a huge following among California collectors,” Redfern remarks, “and there isn’t a whole lot of difference in the prices between the best of his California and the best of his East Coast works. The California works turn up, but not in great quantity.” Collectors prize site-specificity in

Cooper’s California paintings, according to Redfern, and will pay more for works where the location—often one of Santa Barbara’s distinctive hotels or plazas—can be pinpointed. A fair number of Cooper’s California works have traded in the mid \$200,000 range, but, as Redfern notes, “If one of the artist’s major West Coast paintings were to become available at this point, it would likely cross the half-million dollar mark.”

East Coast/West Coast and Beyond: Colin Campbell Cooper, American Impressionist running at Laguna Art Museum through June 3, 2007, offers aspiring collectors of Cooper’s work a rare opportunity to view many of the artist’s best works together in one place. @

Lisa Bush Hankin is director of research at Adelson Galleries in New York, where she specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American fine art.