

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Excerpt from the introduction by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to the catalog of the Memorial Exhibition for Miss Lizzie P. Bliss held in May 1931 at the Museum of Modern Art.

"To write impersonally of Miss Bliss' collection after having known Miss Bliss is very difficult. For those who were her friends something of her gentle and courageous spirit lingers about the paintings which she loved so much and which she left, perhaps reluctantly, in this world.

Although she possessed well-chosen works of earlier and later periods, the most important part of her collection is the magnificent group of French paintings and drawings of the latter half of the 19th Century. Degas, Renoir, Cezanne, ~~P~~issarro, are included and, among a generation slightly younger, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Redon - almost the entire roster of those pathfinders whose present fame is equalled only by the neglect or contempt which they endured so often when they were alive. Even fifteen years ago Miss Bliss, at that time one of the few American collectors who found their work admirable, received little sympathy for her enthusiasm - but today how amply is her courage vindicated!

Her superb Daumier "Laundress", her Renoir "Landscape", most of her 19th Century "old masters" as well as her excellent contemporary paintings by Picasso, Derain and Matisse, were in a way a background, a complement, to the work of the two French artists whom she especially admired - Cezanne and Seurat.

Her eleven oils and ten watercolors by Cezanne give an almost complete picture of the work of the artist who has most influenced contemporary painting. His "Self-Portrait" in a lawyer's hat painted during the sixties is an excellent example of his crude, rather labored but vigorous early style. The grandeur with which, during his maturity, he could invest even an awkward human figure is demonstrated in the "Bather" of about 1880. The small interior with the seated figure of the collector, Chocquet, is a jewel of the most precious quality in surface and color. The portrait of

the artist's sister and two watercolor studies for "bather" compositions round out a remarkable series of figure paintings.

Outstanding among her five Cezanne still-life paintings are the unfinished but magnificent "Apples", formerly in the Kelekian collection, and the sombre "Oranges" which glow like coals in a dark hearth. The early "Landscape", painted under the influence of Pissarro, the extraordinary "Pines and Rocks", are supplemented by a half dozen watercolors, among them a study of foliage which conveys as clearly as any work by Cezanne the patience and intensity of his observation and his unflinching sense of color.

After she had completed her group of Cezannes, Miss Bliss turned increasing attention to Seurat, perhaps the last of the great artists of the 19th Century to win general recognition. Unfortunately his meticulous technique and the brief decade of his painting career have made his work extremely rare and recently extremely costly. In spite of these difficulties, Miss Bliss succeeded in adding to her single oil by Seurat what is probably the largest group of Seurat drawings in America. Had she lived she might also have added (as she desired to) the most important of Seurat's landscapes."

Miss Bliss did not neglect American painting in her bequest. The sensitive "Italian Landscape" by Arthur B. Davies, the "Wine Press" by the same artist and "Jeannette" by Walt Kuhn are among the pictures left to the Museum.