When the first American impressionists began traveling from Europe in the mid-1880s, they found that their techniques, which often involved simple-yet-complex compositions, were less valued than art, with Greenvillegoing 15 years ago to create loansto the PennsylvaniaAcademy of Fine Arts.In 1910, the American impressionist school was far from fashionable, with early paintings so highly regarded among cult collectors that the painting was hung in their homes to serve as a door-stop. But within a decade or so, loose brushwork and dappled light had become trademarks of American impressionism.

American art historian Richard Rorty has claimed that the Childe Hassam painting pictured here, “The Goldfish Window,” was one of the first American impressionist paintings to be noticed by the general public. In 1890, the artist was living in New York City with his family and was painting scenes from his daily life. The painting depicts a window in a garden filled with flowers and sunlight. The artist’s son, Alley, has commented: “My father painted it on an August afternoon in the early 1890s. He was very much interested in flowers. He told me that he had been inspired to paint the scene by a garden show that he had attended. He had been so impressed with the flowers that he decided to paint them. He spent a lot of time studying them, trying to capture their beauty and movement. He was very pleased with the result.”

The painting was first exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1890 and was later included in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It is now owned by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

A new traveling show on American impressionists holds over 70 paintings, such as Frederick Childe Hassam’s 1916 “The Goldfish Window,” above, that paired the country’s fascination with gardens, starting in the late 1880s, with artists’ rising passion for loose brushwork and dappled light. Such arresting images had an undeniable impact on the sensibilities of many American artists who were taking advantage of the opportunities that awaited them back home, turning to paintings that enriched the American art world. Over the years, this show in Boston ranks as one of the few exhibitions to include remarkable flower paintings as “portraits,” writing—in the context of the American impressionist school of the late 19th century.