
PRESS RELEASE

PRENDERGAST IN ITALY

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

October 10, 2009 – January 3, 2010

For the first time in Italy, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection pays tribute to the American artist Maurice Prendergast (St. John's, Canada, 1858 – New York, USA, 1924) hosting the exhibition *Prendergast in Italy* (October 10, 2009 – January 3, 2010) curated by Nancy Mowll Mathews, Eugénie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art, and Elizabeth Kennedy, Curator of Collection, Terra Foundation for American Art. This exhibition is organized by Williams College Museum of Art in partnership with the Terra Foundation for American Art. Terra Foundation for American Art is the lead sponsor with additional funding from the Eugénie Prendergast endowment. *Prendergast in Italy* first opened at the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts, July 18 – September 20, 2009, and travels after Venice to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, February 14 - May 9, 2010.

Maurice Prendergast spent his youth in Boston where, like his contemporary the Impressionist Childe Hassam, he began his career in graphic design. In 1891, he travelled to Paris determined instead to become a painter. He studied at the Julian and Colarossi academies and became acquainted with the art of the Nabis and Whistler. Upon his return to the States in 1894 he had his first successes as an artist. By the time of his death in 1924, Prendergast was celebrated as one of the most important American Modernists of the early 20th century, and in particular the first to respond to the post-Impressionist art of Cézanne.

This exhibition assembles more than seventy of the paintings, watercolors, oils, and monotypes that Prendergast made during his two trips to Italy. In June 1898 he travelled to Italy remaining for 18 months, visiting Venice (the main focus of his trip), Padua, Florence, Siena, Assisi, Orvieto, Rome, Naples, and Capri, before returning in late 1899. He returned to Italy in August 1911-January 1912 and once again visited Venice. The exhibition features a corpus of unique works dedicated to Venice, represented by the artist with evocative views of its modern, daily life. While Whistler's etchings of Venice focus on the picturesque decay of the city, and Sargent with few exceptions painted its monuments, its interiors and its poorer inhabitants, Prendergast instead was attracted to its modernity—to wealthy visitors in fashionable dress, to processions and *feste* which were in part the expression of historic tradition and in part a response to international tourism. Prendergast chronicles *la Serenissima* with Impressionist, picturesque views crowded by colourful pedestrians walking through *calli*, *campi* and bridges. In addition to his watercolors and oils, archival materials will be on view, such as photographs, letters, guidebooks and travel advertisements belonging to the Prendergasts, now in the Williams College Museum of Art collection. All of which create a strong impression of Italian topography, manners and society c. 1900. Furthermore, two Japanese prints on view show the influence by Japanese coloured woodcuts—whether of landscape or urban scenes—by Kuniyoshi and Toyokuni.

Prendergast's prolific work on his first trip to Italy consolidated advances provoked by his previous acquaintance with the Parisian avant-garde and catapulted Prendergast to national attention in 1900. His experience on his second trip to Venice shifted his work towards a more formalist style, with Symbolist content showing how the concepts of Modernism that had emerged in the work of 1898-99 came to fruition during the crucial first decade of the twentieth century. Taken as a whole, Prendergast's Italian works are, arguably, the most visually sumptuous and aesthetically challenging pieces he ever produced and their presentation in Italy where they were created offers a new point of interest, and contributes to the comprehension of what characterized Modernism in the early 20th century and of the role Prendergast played in the development of Modern art in America.

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Prendergast in Italy highlights a selection of the collection of over four hundred works by artist-brothers Maurice and Charles Prendergast in the Williams College Museum of Art. In addition to artworks from WCMA and the Terra Foundation for American Art, the exhibition features loans from over fifty institutions and private collections in the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The catalogue, published by Merrell Publishers, London, is focused on Prendergast's major Italian works and is an enduring contribution to the scholarship of modern American art. The main essay of the book is written by Nancy Mowll Mathews, with an additional essay by Elisabeth Kennedy. 250 illustrations of art, photography, maps, and documents give a complete context of Prendergast's Italy.

The exhibition benefits from the support of the Regione del Veneto and of Intrapresae Collezione Guggenheim. Additional support has been received from Vodafone, that will produce an innovative audio-guide for the exhibition, downloadable directly to visitors' mobile phones. Hangar Design Group created the graphic design for communications. Radio Italia and Corriere della Sera are media partners for the exhibition.

On October 5, 14 and 28, at 7 pm, a series of 3 free lectures related to the exhibition will take place at the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, Venice. On October 5 the curators Nancy Mowll Mathews and Elisabeth Kennedy will discuss the exhibition.

The programs of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection are made possible thanks to the support of the Advisory Board of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection and:

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FACT SHEET

TITLE	PRENDERGAST IN ITALY
VENUE AND DATES	Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice October 10 2009 – January 3, 2010
PRESS CONFERENCE	Friday, October 9, 12 noon
CONTENTS	This exhibition will assemble for the first time paintings by American artist, Maurice Prendergast (St. John's, Canada, 1858 – New York, USA, 1924), created during two trips to Italy (1898-99 and 1911-12): a body of work that is one of the most attractive and revealing in the story of American art. The exhibition presents more than seventy of his Italian watercolors, oils, and monotypes as well as photographs, films, guidebooks, and travel advertisements that situate the work within the new visual culture that Americans had embraced by 1900. The presentation of Prendergast's works in Italy, where they were created, offers a new point of interest and contributes to the comprehension of what characterized Modernism in the early 20th century and of the role Prendergast played in the development of modern art in America.
CURATORS	The exhibition is curated by Nancy Mowll Mathews, Eugénie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art and Lecturer in Art, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts and Elizabeth Kennedy, Curator of Collection, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Illinois.
CATALOGUE	Merrell Publishers, London will issue the comprehensive, fully-illustrated catalogue in English and Italian. Contributors include: Nancy Mowll Mathews; Elizabeth Kennedy; Kimberly J. Nichols, Associate Paper Conservator, Department of Prints and Drawings, The Art Institute of Chicago; Carol Clark, William McCall Vickery 1957 Professor of the History of Art and American Studies, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts; Alessandro Del Puppo, Università degli Studi di Udine, Udine, Italy; Jan Andreas May, Assistant Curator, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany; Olga Płaszczewska, Chair of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.
NATIONAL TOUR	Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts (July 18 – September 20, 2009) Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas (February 14 - May 9, 2010).
SPONSORSHIP	This exhibition is organized by Williams College Museum of Art in partnership with the Terra Foundation for American Art. Terra Foundation for American Art is the lead sponsor with additional funding from the Eugénie Prendergast Endowment. In Venice the exhibition benefits from the support of the Regione del Veneto and of Intrapresae Collezione Guggenheim. Additional support has been

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ENTRANCE TICKET TO THE COLLECTION

Regular euro 12; seniors euro 10 (over 65); students euro 7 (under 26 or with a student ID card); children 0-10 yrs and members free entrance (further information on membership: membership@guggenheim-venice.it)

Entrance tickets allow the public to visit the permanent collection, the Gianni Mattioli Collection, the Nasher Sculpture Garden, the exhibition. Free guided visits of the temporary exhibitions, daily at 3:30pm. Reservation is not requested.

OPENING HOURS

daily from 10 am to 6 pm, closed on Tuesday and December 25

INFORMATION

info@guggenheim-venice.it
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BOOKINGS

tel. 041.2405440

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HOW TO ARRIVE

From Piazzale Roma - Ferrovia (train station): vaporetto no. 2 towards Lido, get off at the Accademia stop (25 minutes); vaporetto no. 1 towards Lido, get off at the Accademia stop (30 minutes). From St. Mark's Square: vaporetto no. 1, 2 towards Piazzale Roma-Ferrovia, get off at Accademia stop (5 minutes).

COMUNICATION AND PRESS OFFICE

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Please, once published, send the article to: press@guggenheim-venice.it

BIOGRAPHY

MAURICE BRAZIL PRENDERGAST

Born in 1858 in St. Johns, Newfoundland, Maurice Brazil Prendergast grew up in Boston, where he completed high school at age fourteen and went to work for Loring and Waterhouse, a dry goods firm. His initial involvement in the arts was working in advertisement design for over 10 years. Prendergast did not receive a formal art education until he was in his early thirties, when he went to Paris and enrolled in the Julian and Colarossi academies. During his three years abroad, Prendergast's emerging style was influenced by Japanese prints, Art Nouveau, and the art of James McNeill Whistler and the Nabis artists Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis. He was also influenced by the circle of Anglo-American artists that congregated at the "Chat Blanc" café. By 1896, Prendergast's art was selling well, holding exhibitions regularly in Boston and other cities. In 1898 he made an extensive tour of Italy, visiting Venice, Siena, Florence, Orvieto, Padua, Rome, Naples and Capri. At that time, his work became more complex and spatially integrated. Prendergast returned to Boston amidst increasing recognition and acclaim. In 1900 he was given a one-man show at the Macbeth Galleries in New York. This success was followed by a bronze medal in the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, and successful exhibitions at the Detroit and Cincinnati art museums.

Prendergast was initially an urban genre painter. His concentration on leisure activities of the middle-class in public spaces reflected the interests of his patrons, as well as the influence of French Impressionist artists Claude Monet and Edgar Degas. His signature theme was the crowd, composing of anonymous figures and distinctive clothing, with each individual engaged in their own specific activity within the context of the group. In contrast to the anecdotal viewpoints of his American contemporaries, John Sloan and William Glackens, Prendergast's remote, disengaged viewpoint displays a closer affinity with the French Impressionists. Prendergast's colorful paintings have a mosaic- or tapestry-like quality related to the pointillist style developed by Georges Seurat. They present flat, bold areas of color combined with a compression of perspective and scale.

Prendergast's affiliation with "The Eight" began when he exhibited his work with the group in 1904 and 1908. By August 1911, Prendergast revisited Italy to meet younger brother Charles, who had arrived a month earlier to study framing techniques and medieval art. His return presented a much different Venice than what he had left 10 years earlier. Tourism had greatly increased, distinctive fashion had been lost, and Italian culture and modernism were no longer novel sentiments with the increase of Italian immigration to the United States. Consequently, Prendergast's focus transitioned to unassuming bridges and canals with broader brush strokes and less defining characteristics.

Prendergast's second stint in Italy concluded in the winter of 1912. Once in New York, he became involved in organizing the famous Armory Show of 1913, an event that played a major role in introducing modern art to American viewers and patrons while enhancing Prendergast's own stature as an artist. Following the Armory Show, he was persuaded by friends and colleagues to move to New York City. He was elected President of the American Association of Painters and Sculptors in 1914 and settled into a highly productive and lucrative period. Prendergast emerged as a significant figure in American modernism as his work shifted from Fauvism into increased formalism, culminating in a semiabstract style. The artist died in New York City on February 1, 1924.

Prendergast participated in four installments of the Venice Biennale, exhibiting via the American Pavilion. In 1920, at the 12th International Art Exhibition, Prendergast exhibited *Sulla Spiaggia*, in 1924 he participated with the work *Ponte della Paglia a Venezia*, in 1930, after his passing, *Presso Nahant, Massachusetts* was exhibited, and finally in 1948 with *Central Park*.

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Paintings and works on paper by Prendergast are represented in major public art collections throughout the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; and Saint Louis Art Museum.

CURATORS

NANCY MOWLL MATHEWS

Nancy Mowll Mathews is the Eugénie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art at the Williams College Museum of Art. She oversees the Prendergast Archive and Study Center at WCMA, which conducts research and organizes exhibitions and publications on the Prendergasts and their era (1850–1950). She is co-author of the Prendergast catalogue raisonné and author of three other books on the subject. In 2005, Dr. Mathews organized *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880-1910*, which explored the interconnections between the new technology of film and the visual arts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She is an authority on the work of Mary Cassatt and has published five books about the artist. In addition, she was part of the curatorial team for the Guggenheim's *Art in America: Three Hundred Years of Innovation* (see below). Dr. Mathews received her Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts, N.Y.U., and has been at Williams College since 1988.

ELIZABETH KENNEDY

Elizabeth Kennedy is the Curator of Collection at the Terra Foundation for American Art in Chicago. In 2006 she co-organized the groundbreaking exhibition, *American Artists and the Louvre*, the first exhibition of historic art of the United States to be shown at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. The following year, as part of a Guggenheim Museum and Terra Foundations partnership, Dr. Kennedy was part of the curatorial team for the Guggenheim's *Art in America: Three Hundred Years of Innovation*, the first major exhibition of American art in China, which opened in Beijing in February 2007 and traveled to the Shanghai Museum, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and the Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum in Spain. Currently, she is organizing the exhibition *The Eight and American Modernisms* with the Milwaukee Museum of Art and the New Britain Museum of American Art in Connecticut scheduled for 2009. Dr. Kennedy earned her Ph.D. in the history of art from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

WALL TEXTS

Italy, the land of the past, seemed an unlikely destination for an American artist who specialized in the styles and subjects of the present. Maurice Prendergast's experiences here challenged his assumptions about art, inspiring him to produce his greatest body of work and the basis for his future experimentation with modern styles.

In this exhibition, the range of watercolors and monotypes from his first trip (1898–99) as well as watercolors and pastels from his second trip (1911–12) have been brought together for the first time since they left Prendergast's hands.

PRENDERGAST IN CONTEXT

By the time Maurice Prendergast (1858–1924) traveled to Italy, he had been a practicing artist for almost twenty-six years. Beginning his career in commercial art at the age of fourteen, he had made the leap into fine art with an extensive study trip to Paris. Soon after his return in 1894, he was recognized as one of Boston's most progressive artists and secured funding for his first trip to Italy in 1898. His work was based on French Impressionism, but like most American artists he also studied James McNeill Whistler's atmospheric style, particularly in preparation for Venice.

In 1900, after a year and a half in Italy, Prendergast exhibited the Italian works in New York, and the positive reception cemented his standing in the American modern art community. However, he still kept an eye on developments in Paris. After spending about six months abroad in 1907, he adopted the increasingly abstract styles of Cézanne, Matisse, and the Fauves. He applied this new approach to the watercolors of his second trip to Venice in 1911 and continued to experiment with combinations of old and new in the monumental oils painted during the last decade of his career.

THE FLAGS OF SAN MARCO

In most of his views of the *piazza*, Prendergast features the three grand flags that fly in front of the church of San Marco. While these green, white, and red abstract shapes play a role in the composition, their importance does not end there. They also signify the identity of Venice as part of the unified Kingdom of Italy and show the crest of the House of Savoy in the center, removed from the flag after World War II.

For the proud Venetians, the flag of Italy aroused mixed emotions. On the one hand, it displaced the flag of Venice that had flown in front of San Marco for five hundred years in favor of a flag from Rome, Venice's ancient enemy. On the other hand, it signaled the new prosperity of Venice as the official port of Italy after a century of humiliating poverty. Because the flags were only hoisted on Sundays and holidays, the festive qualities of the bright banners perhaps overshadowed the uncomfortable political message. Prendergast uses them to bring the old 'stones' of Venice into the present day.

FESTIVALS AND PROCESSIONS

When Venice was liberated from Austrian rule and joined unified Italy in 1866, the old festivals and religious processions were revived. The city had always celebrated religious and civic holidays, and each parish had its own church and family ceremonies. When Prendergast was here, the festivals had emerged as one of the top tourist attractions. Commentators noted the lack of local participants in the nightly musicales on the Grand Canal.

Prendergast, skilled at depicting the urban crowds in Paris and Boston, noted the processional character of the Venetian crowds, combining the banners and festive dress of the participants with the observers. Tourists, flowing through the city on sight-seeing pilgrimages, created a new version of that old Venetian tradition.

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LOCAL COLOR

Venice offered Prendergast not only a spectacle of colorful effects throughout the city but galleries full of Venetian Old Masters whose fame rested on their mastery of color. As a color specialist himself, Prendergast spent about a year studying the art and the motifs that he found here. In a city of 150 canals and 378 bridges, he had ample opportunity to craft the reflections, boats, pedestrians, flags, and *palazzi* into compositions of pure form and color.

As Henry James wrote in 1882, "I simply see a narrow canal in the heart of the city, a patch of green water and a surface of pink wall." The modern emphasis on color to evoke 'ordinary' Venice was also felt to be a continuation of Old Master technique. Prendergast especially admired Carpaccio, whose works he saw in the Accademia, for his ability to use jewel-like colors to depict the Venice of his day.

VENICE

Venice was Prendergast's primary destination in 1898 and again in 1911. By the 1890s, it had become the cultural capital of modern Italy, attracting modern artists as well as tourists and expatriates, especially from the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. Bostonian art patrons, such as Isabella Stewart Gardner and Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Curtis, hosted American salons in Venice, and writers like William Dean Howells and Henry James wrote vividly of the city they knew intimately.

Prendergast's trip was funded by the modernist artist and patron, Sarah Choate Sears. On his first trip, he chose a variety of motifs, from the familiar sights to hidden corners of canals that are still difficult to identify with certainty. On the second trip, he concentrated mainly on bridges and many sites here in the 'sestiere' of Dorsoduro.

VENICE REVISITED

Prendergast returned to Italy in 1911 with his brother Charles, a well-known maker of hand-carved and gilded frames. They came because a painting by Maurice was included in the International Art Exhibition in Rome that year. Arriving in Venice in the fall, he settled down to paint the canals and bridges once again. Although illness prevented him from creating as extensive a body of work as on the first trip, he nevertheless painted about twenty-five watercolors.

The watercolors, sometimes heightened with pastel, show the influence of Cézanne and the Fauves, which had transformed Prendergast's work after 1907. They also show 20th-century Venice, in that Italy had lost much of its romanticism in the intervening decade. Not only had tours to Italy become increasingly available to middle-class Americans, but Italians had become the most numerous immigrants to the United States, making Italian culture much less exotic to Americans.

In his 1911 work, Prendergast celebrated the shapes and colors of Venice but gave less emphasis to the people in their now ordinary dress and activities. Although the second Venetian series did not have the impact of the first, it reinforced Prendergast's place in the modernist circles of New York, where transgressive art was increasingly valued. As one critic wrote in the *New York Times* when these watercolors were exhibited in 1912, "They are like a cluster of red-cheeked hoydens bursting into a mid-Victorian assembly of anemic ladies."

SIGHTSEEING

When the cold dampness muffled Venice in December of 1898, Prendergast headed south to paint in the rest of Italy. He stopped in Padua, Florence, Siena, Orvieto, Assisi, and Rome on his way to and from the island of Capri, where he recovered from the intense period of study and painting of the previous fall. By the beginning of the summer, he was back in Venice, where he stayed until his

WALL TEXTS

departure for home in December 1899. Although he probably sketched in all of the cities he visited, we can now only identify finished works from Siena, Assisi, Rome, and Capri. As in Venice, Prendergast was on the lookout for the recognizable motif of each of these places. Traditional boats, flags, and special articles of dress (such as shawls) marked each location and can be seen carefully depicted. Oddly missing, however, are the flags of the Kingdom of Italy, which evoked the uneasy political situation of modern Venice. Perhaps Prendergast was not as interested in the 'modern' situation in the rest of Italy. On this trip he may have been content to leave modern effects to his art and enjoy the subjects of the picturesque past as much as any tourist.

THE ITALIAN MONOTYPES

Prendergast produced over 200 monotypes in less than a decade. He can be considered the only American painter of the time to integrate the monotype fully into his artistic production. Approximately 150 Prendergast monotypes survive, presumably all executed between 1891 and 1902--the earliest and latest dates inscribed in his 'colored prints,' as he preferred to call them. The exhibition history of Prendergast's monotypes indicates that he regarded them as serious and fully independent works of art. Sixteen monotypes are linked to his first Italian trip either by the title, which he inscribed on the plate, or by subject matter. Despite their small number, they are critical to exploring the complexities of the artist's entire monotype production because of their experimental nature. Their muted colors and expressionistic style vary considerably from his meticulously detailed and high-key Italian watercolors, and display some of his most innovative and diverse aesthetic techniques.