



Mindscape Painter

Bridging Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, Roberto Matta's art opens up vast vistas of inner space.

STORY BY JOHN DORFMAN

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Summer in the City

Santa Fe's art scene is now in high season, offering a plethora of fairs and exhibitions dedicated to works local, national, and international.

STORY BY SHEILA GIBSON STOODLEY

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The Body Eclectic

As artist and teacher, William Merritt Chase showed how American art could take its place within European tradition while breaking new ground for the future.

STORY BY DOMINIC GREEN

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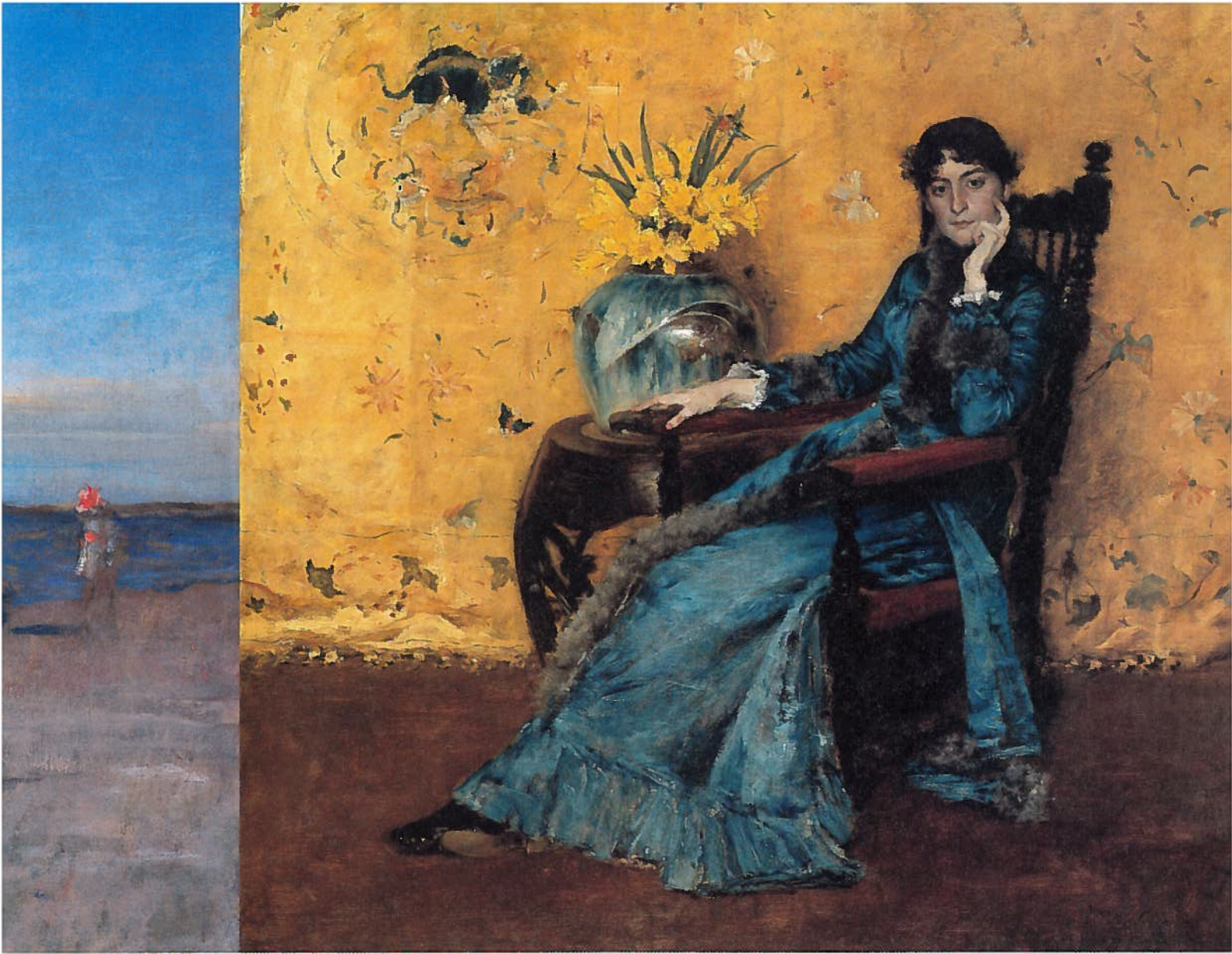
On The Cover: Clockwise from top left: Dean Mabe, *Edge of Time*; John Moyers, *Interstate Through His World*, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches; Don Stinson, *The World Heading West from Zion*, 2016; Mary Long, *In the Heat*.

Gallery 901; Nedra Matteucci Galleries; Gerald Peters Gallery; Ruhlen-Owen Contemporary



THE BODY ECLECTIC

As artist and teacher, William Merritt Chase showed how American art could take its place within European tradition while breaking new ground for the future.



It was Johann Joachim Winckelmann who first applied the ambivalent term “eclectic” to art. In *The History of the Art of Antiquity* (1763), Winckelmann proposed a five-step model of stylistic development in ancient Greece, up from the archaic to the high or sublime style, and then up again to the beautiful style. The “imitative” or “eclectic” style of the Romans was the fourth stage, just before the decline and decadence.

The modern tradition, Winckelmann argued, was on the same path. The archaic preceded Raphael, and Leonardo and late Raphael were the high and sublime style. Correggio was the beautiful, and the Carracci, that industrious family firm from Bologna, the eclectic. Winckelmann identified the onset of decline with the blameless late Baroque of Carlo Maratta, who had died 50 years earlier.

We are more likely to see Maratta as an incipient Neoclassicist. This reflects not just hindsight, but also the chaotic course of the arts after Winckelmann’s day. Throughout the Romantic century, the followers of beauty, the eclectic, and the decadents are frequently the same people. Like travelers on one of Thomas Cook’s less successful tours, they jump back and forth across the chronology and the map,

and usually in search of the archaic or the sublime.

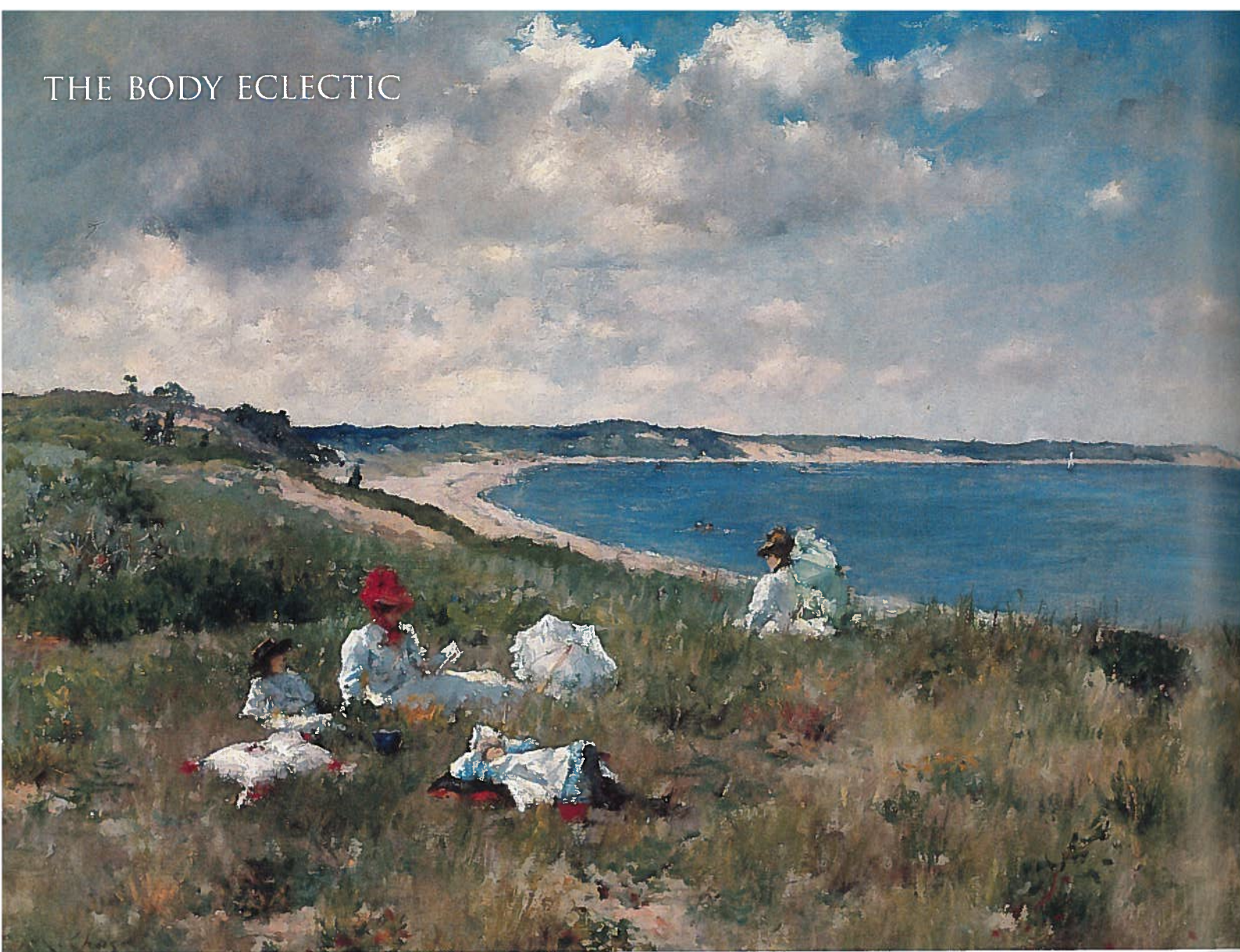
In this productive confusion of styles, the meaning of “eclectic” changed, and its value reversed. Instead of denoting the implication of Classical styles into late Renaissance paintings, it came to describe a general promiscuity of influence and execution, as in the American version of the Aesthetic Movement, in which restraint in its medieval and Japanese forms disappeared in a welter of rosewood adornment. Instead of denoting taste—“eclectic” derives from the Greek *eklek-tikos*, “selective”—it denoted a lack of it.

“His mind was in the best sense eclectic,” William Ewart Gladstone wrote of Homer in 1876, “and he had a strong, ingrained repugnance to the debased.” Fifty years later, eclecticism meant debasement by mass production: elephantine Eastlake furniture, and *Strawberry Thief* wallpaper by Morris & Co. The Modernists kicked all of this into the lumber room in the name of fresh air and sunlight, even though the roots of Modernism lay in the overstuffed sofas and ebonized side tables. The specializations and subfields of the academy and the art market confirmed this revaluation of “eclectic.”

William Merritt Chase was the great American eclectic of his age.

By Dominic Green

THE BODY ECLECTIC



Previous spread, from left: William Merritt Chase, *At the Seaside*, c. 1892, oil on canvas, 20 x 34 in.; *Portrait of Dora Wheeler*, 1882–83, oil on canvas, 63 x 65 in. This page: *Idle Hours*, c. 1894, oil on canvas, 25.5 x 35.5 in.

He remained so after he had outlived it, and refused to acknowledge that “eclecticism” had become a dirty word. “Originality,” he argued shortly before his death in 1916, “is found in the greatest composite which you can bring together.” A century later, the originality of Chase’s great composites are starting to be recognized again. So too are the range of his abilities, his centrality to a steam-powered network of trans-Atlantic friendships and influence, and his pioneering of advanced art training in the United States. In Winckelmann’s schema, he was a Roman, an energetic inheritor reworking the sublime style for an imperial age.

“William Merritt Chase: A Retrospective,” now at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. (through September 11), is the first Chase retrospective to be held in the United States since 1983. The exhibition is a great composite, too, with four curators: Elsa Smithgall of the Phillips Collection, Erica Hirshler of the MFA Boston, Katherine Bourguignon of the Terra Foundation, and Giovanna Ginex, who is affiliated with the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia. After moving on to the MFA Boston in October 2016, in February 2017 the exhibition will go to the International Gallery of Modern Art in Venice as the first Chase retrospective to travel—as

Chase did so fruitfully—beyond the borders of the United States.

Chase was one of those impossibly energetic and productive Victorians. Like his eclectic English contemporary Frederic, Lord Leighton, he was as eclectic in life as in work: a traveler and a teacher, a committee man and a publicist. Unlike Leighton, Chase also found the time to marry, and father eight children, too. The son of a shoe dealer from Williamsburg, Ind., Chase studied at the National Academy of Design in New York, and then, from 1872 to 1878, at the Royal Munich Academy. There, Chase met the *Liebl-Kreis* (Liebl Circle), the group of young dissidents around Wilhelm Liebl.

Like their French contemporaries Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet, whom Liebl had met in Paris in 1869, and like the French literary Realists of the 1850s, the Liebl Circle aspired to depict contemporary subject matter without sentimentality or idealism. The painting that made Chase’s name was “*Keying Up*”—*The Court Jester*. The influence of his idol Velázquez is everywhere in the slightly muted reds and slightly glowing browns, as well as the courtly freakishness of the subject. But the furtive toper who pours a quick glass of wine in order to force out a laugh has a Parisian desperation.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, BEQUEST OF MISS ADELAIDE MILTON DE GROOT (1876–1967), 1967; THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF MRS. BOUDINOT KEITH IN MEMORY OF MR. AND MRS. J. H. WADE; AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, FORT WORTH, TEXAS



The Jester is not a joke, but a modern tragedy like the alcoholic rag-picker in Manet's first major work, *The Absinthe Drinker* (1858), and Picasso's homage to Manet, *Buveuse Accoudée* (*Leaning Drinker*, 1901). He leans over his glass like a red-nosed music hall turn. The little man is mocked by his miniature image: his life is ruled and ruined by the stick figure tucked under his arm as surely as Golyadkin is ruled by his *Doppelgänger* in Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846).

Manet's *Absinthe Drinker* was his first submission to the Paris Salon, and it was rejected. Chase's *Jester*, however, won a medal at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, the year that Gladstone praised Homer's eclecticism. Returning to the United States in 1878 with a teaching appointment at the Art Students' League of New York, Chase quickly assumed the role that he would play for the rest of his life. Already a mature talent, and convinced that American art was about to take its rightful place among the inheritors of the European tradition, he became a personal and artistic link between America and Europe—a conduit both on the canvas and in the teaching studio for the experimental ideals of Aestheticism and Impressionism, as well as the traditional technical virtues of an Academic training.

Chase returned with a professional persona, the costume of a dandy *maitre*—the sharply tailored cutaway coat, the carnation in the lapel, the jeweled stickpin in the tie—and a sharp eye for the profession. He exhibited *Ready for the Ride* (1878) at the newly founded Society of American Artists (SAA). He joined Winslow Homer and Arthur Quartley in the Tile Club, a group ostensibly devoted to the collective painting of tiles in the Aesthetic manner, but practically occupied with the convivial exchange of professional gossip.

In Munich, Chase had collected paintings, textiles, furniture, and bric-à-brac for what would become one of the first European-style studios in the United States. As soon as he returned to New York, he secured the best atelier in the best building in the city,



From left: *Spring Flowers (Peonies)*, by 1889, pastel on paper, prepared with a tan ground, and wrapped with canvas around a wooden strainer, 48 x 48 in.; *The Turkish Page (Unexpected Intrusion)*, 1876, oil on canvas, 41 x 37 in.

Albert Bierstadt's double-height studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building. The studio was a social and professional forum, and also a gallery for the display and sale of Chase's work. He painted amid guests and friends, as if emulating Courbet's *L'Atelier du peintre* (1855). The female figures in *Studio Interior* (1882) and *The Tenth Street Studio* (1880) are placed like stage properties, their naturalism as careful a contrivance as the drawing room comedy or the department store window.

Meanwhile, outside his studio, Chase was prolific and prodigiously energetic. In the early 1880s, he joined fellow "Tilers" in *plein air* explorations of upstate New York, and began working in pastels. In March 1884, he contributed to the first of four exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Pastel, of which he was a co-founder. Then, he was off on his annual summer expedition to Europe. Crossing the Atlantic, he exhibited *The Young Orphan* in the inaugural exhibition of the Belgian avant-garde group Les Vingt, a show that also included Sargent's *Dr. Pozzi at Home* (1881) and Whistler's *Miss Cecily Alexander* (1872–74). Returning to New York at the end of the summer of 1884, Chase displayed *The Young Orphan* and *Portrait of Dora Wheeler* at the SAA.

In January 1885, he became the SAA's president, a post he was to hold for a decade. He returned to Europe in the summer. After communing with the shade of Velázquez in Madrid, he met Whistler in London; the *Retrospective* catalogue includes a splendid photograph of the top-hatted dandies Whistler, Chase, and the Whistler acolyte Mortimer Menpes in a London street. Next,

THE BODY ECLECTIC



Clockwise from top left: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 1885, oil on canvas, 74 x 36 in.; *Portrait of a Lady in Pink*, c. 1888-1889, oil on canvas, 70 x 40 in.; Lydia Field Emmett, 1892, oil on canvas, 72 x 36 in.; *The Open Air Breakfast*, c. 1888, oil on canvas, 37 x 57 in.

Whistler and “The Colonel,” as Whistler had dubbed Chase, went on to Antwerp, where they admired Alfred Stevens’ contributions to an international exposition, and then Chase went on alone to Amsterdam before taking ship for New York.

Somehow, in this period Chase created the 133 works that he exhibited in late 1886, at his first one-man show at the Boston Art Club. His friendship with Whistler ended badly, like most of Whistler’s friendships, but it lasted long enough for Whistler to suggest that they paint each other’s portrait, and for both to complete the work. Chase’s *Whistler* (1885) is an eclectic assimilation of Whistler’s method: the elongated body, the lively brushwork, the muted palette, the ambiguous and shallow space. Whistler, in his fashion, called this a “monstrous lampoon.” His portrait of Chase is lost; he probably destroyed it in revenge.

This did not stop Chase from further experiments with Whistler’s shimmering, monochromatic color schemes, and lively but indeterminate spaces. *Ready*



For a Walk: Beatrice Clough Bachmann (1885), Lydia Field Emmet (1892), and *Portrait of Mrs C.: Lady with a White Shawl* (1893) are society portraits for the Gilded Age. Chase, like John Singer Sargent, was an accomplished gilder. In the late 1880s, he moved from portraits of artistic young women to portraits of rich men and their younger wives, and domestic scenes sprung from the world of Edith Wharton and Henry James, like *A Friendly Call* (1895).

Chase was not just following the money. He had married Alice Gerson in 1887—the tender, subtle blues and grays of the pastel portrait *Meditation* (1886) testifies that the union was about more than her dowry. She and their multiplying brood of children became his subjects and models, too, notably in at their summer home in Shinnecock, Long Island. He also started painting Impressionist landscapes around this time. Perhaps Chase, like Sargent, chafed at the limitations of the commission in the grand manner, the rendering of small minds as larger-than-life personalities.



From top: *Self-Portrait in 4th Avenue Studio*, 1915–16, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 63.5 in.; *Just Onions (Onions; Still Life)*, 1912, oil on wood panel, 21 x 26 in.

At Shinnecock, Chase launched yet another teaching venture, an incubator of American Impressionism. There was now, though, something of the *Jester* about the artist. He had acquired a taste for schnapps and beer as a student in Germany, and remained a heavy drinker. His liver hurt; on one of his trips to Venice, Alice sent along a bottle of good Scotch for the pain. He died of cirrhosis in 1916.

In 1899 at Shinnecock, Chase and his wife had posed their daughter Helen Velasquez Chase in 16th-century costume for *My Infanta* (1899). The execution, however, was modern. The artist's explanation was quintessentially eclectic.

"I saw in a new light the sublime example of Velázquez," Chase said in 1903. "What was so important for me was that Velázquez—with all his acquirement from the masters who had gone before him—felt the need of choosing new forms and arrangements, new schemes of color and methods of painting, to fit the time and place he was called on to depict." 