

**HELEN ACHBAR COOPER TO RETIRE IN MAY 2014 AS THE HOLCOMBE T. GREEN CURATOR OF AMERICAN PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE, YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY**

*Cooper has built one of the preeminent museum collections of American art over 39 years*



*New Haven, Conn. – January 21, 2014 –* Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery, announced that Dr. Helen Achbar Cooper, the Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, will retire in May 2014. “Helen Cooper has served the field of American Art as one of its finest curators for almost 40 years, leading the Yale University Art Gallery’s Department of American Paintings and Sculpture for 34 years with great distinction,” Reynolds says. “She also steadied the Gallery as its acting director during the year before I came to Yale, and has consistently been a fount of knowledge and sage advice to me and all of us who love working at this venerable teaching museum.”

During her 39-year tenure at the Gallery, 34 of which she served as senior curator of the department, Helen Cooper has demonstrated an impressive range and depth of knowledge of American art history. The remarkable scope of Cooper’s expertise, from colonial portraiture to modern American painting, has helped form what is now considered one of the preeminent museum collections of American art in the country.

During her term as curator, Cooper has enriched many areas of the collection and has also moved it in new directions. She has added selectively to the 19th-century holdings, among them landscapes by Thomas Cole, Jasper F. Cropsey, Sanford Gifford, George Inness, John Frederick Kensett, and Fitz Henry Lane, and still lifes by Joseph Decker and John F. Francis. In an underrepresented area of the collection – folk art – undisputed masterpieces have been acquired including John Brewster’s portrait of Comfort Starr Mygatt and his daughter, and Ammi Phillips’s portraits of the Wilbur Sherman family. The area of greatest growth has been in modernist paintings and sculpture of the first half of the 20th century, with acquisitions of exceptional works by Thomas Hart Benton, Oscar Bluemner, Alexander Calder, Ralston Crawford, Stuart Davis, Henry Koerner, Walt Kuhn, Gerald Murphy, George L. K. Morris, and Charles Sheeler, among others.

In addition to growing the American art collection in significant ways, Cooper organized several important exhibitions that reveal an equally impressive scope and command of the field, including: *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter* (1982), *Winslow Homer: Watercolors* (1986), *Childe Hassam: An*

*Island Garden Revisited* (1990), *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* (1992), and *Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures* (1996), all of which were accompanied by important scholarly publications.

Cooper received her B.A. from Syracuse University, and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Yale University. She is the recipient of several outstanding honors, including an appointment in 2002 as Member of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House. In this and all other professional endeavors, Cooper has contributed her time and expertise to the larger and growing field of American art history.

Upon hearing of her retirement, the renowned historian David McCullough, B.A. 1955, declared, “Helen Cooper is a treasure of the Yale University Art Gallery – as a scholar, a curator, and an inspiration to people of all ages.”

### **About the Department of American Paintings and Sculpture**

Yale’s celebrated holdings of American paintings and sculpture include art from the 17th century to about 1945. The collection began in 1720, when the college acquired its first American painting, a *Portrait of Reverend John Davenport* (1670). By 1830 the number had burgeoned to 23, including two undisputed masterworks, John Smibert’s famous *Bermuda Group* (1728) and John Trumbull’s monumental portrait, *General George Washington at the Battle of Trenton* (1792). For many decades, growth was largely in gifts of history paintings and colonial and Federal portraits by such luminaries as John Singleton Copley, Ralph Earl, Charles Willson Peale, and Benjamin West. Francis P. Garvan’s gift in 1932 of the “Whitney Collection of Sporting Art,” in memory of his college friends Harry Payne Whitney and Payne Whitney, brought 49 American paintings and 20 sculptures, including the first paintings by Thomas Eakins to come to the campus, *Taking the Count* (1898) and *John Biglin in a Single Scull* (1874). The gift of the Société Anonyme Collection in 1941 established a presence in American abstract painting of the early 20th century. Stephen Carlton Clark’s bequest in 1961 brought fine 19th-century landscapes, and genre and still life paintings, including works by George Bellows, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, and Edward Hopper. Theresa Heinz’s gift in 1992 of 14 paintings that included three midcentury genre pictures brought more depth to this area of the collection.

### **Yale University Art Gallery**

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present. In addition to its world-renowned collections of American paintings and decorative arts, the Gallery is noted for outstanding collections of Greek and Roman art, including artifacts from the ancient Roman city of Dura-Europos; collections of early Italian paintings; the Société Anonyme Collection of 20th-century European and American art; modern and contemporary art and design; Asian art; African art; art of the ancient Americas; and Indo-Pacific art.

In December 2012, the Gallery completed a comprehensive expansion and renovation project which united its three buildings – the landmark Louis Kahn building (1953), the Old Yale Art Gallery building (1928), and Street Hall (1866) – into a cohesive whole with a rooftop addition by Ennead Architects (2012). The Gallery is both a collecting and an educational institution, and all activities are

aimed at providing an invaluable resource and experience for Yale faculty, staff, and students, as well as for the general public.

**General Information**

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at [artgallery.yale.edu](http://artgallery.yale.edu).

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