Group with Parasols

John Singer Sargent -- American painter
c. 1905
Collection of Rita and Daniel Fraad
Oil on canvas
55.2 x 70.8 cm (21 3/4 x 27 7/8 in.)
Inscribed to my friend Ginx and signed John S. Sargent, l.r.

Giovanni Boldini (1845 -1931)
Italian-French portrait painter

Painting of Peter Harrison and his brother Ginx Harrison with two women, possibly Dos Palmer and Lillian Mellor.

Portrait of the Artist: Lawrence Alexander "Peter" Harrison

From: Sothebys
The 1905 trip to GIomein included Peter Harrison, his brother Leonard “Ginx” Harrison, Alma Strettell (Peter’s wife), Dos Palmer (Peter’s mistress), Polly Barnard and Lillian Mellor. Sargent routinely spent the days in the countryside painting under the shade of large white umbrellas and in the evenings, enjoyed music, chess and reading with his entourage. Sargent’s group frequently modeled for him on his sketching expeditions, and he enjoyed painting them in their idle moments of repose. Mr. Ormond notes, “Sargent’s pictures of sleeping and resting figures, which are such a feature of his Alpine output over a ten year period, conjure up an imaginary world of luxuriant ease and passive indolence. They are not a record of how the Sargent party spent their time in the mountains (active expeditions were the order of the day), but a deliberately invented world of dreamy reverie” (John Singer Sargent, Princeton, New Jersey, 1996, p. 244).

Group with Parasols (A Siesta) is a beautiful example of the ‘world of dreamy reverie’ and is evocative of the newfound intimacy in Sargent’s work. The painting captures the Harrison brothers Peter and Ginx, Dos Palmer and Lillian Mellor enjoying a mid-afternoon slumber amid the grassy hills of the region. The closeness of the figures, the fluid intertwining of limbs and the juxtaposition of male and female represents an unusual familiarity between the sexes that would have challenged Victorian convention. Mr. Ormond writes, “There is a deliberate contrast between the two sides of the composition, softly rounded contours and delicate materials for the women, angular knees, elbows and creased trousers for the men. At the same time the rhythm of the curving bodies, arms, and heads unites the figures in a tightly interlocking group” (John Singer Sargent, p. 244). Ilene Susan Fort notes that the Alpine Pictures “display contradictions in time, gender orientation, and degree of sexuality that can be understood only within the social context of the age. Sargent was a personality not only aesthetically progressive but also socially bohemian; his opinions and taste were sometimes at odds with, and too modern for, the strictest Victorian society” (Sargent in Italy, Princeton, New Jersey, 2003, p. 142).

The intimacy of the subjects is further emphasized by the essentially closed composition in which the surrounding landscape is closely cropped and bordered. Ms. Fort observes, “Sargent placed his models in an intimate and virtually anonymous outdoor environment, thereby creating the notion of a ‘landscape interior.’ He repeatedly depicted a small forest glade that marked the boundaries of his personal domain. By cropping and deleting horizons, Sargent made the landscape appear to be pushed forward, parallel to the picture plane. His models exist in this limited space with no suggestion of a world beyond the painted scene” (Sargent in Italy, p. 148). The intimate subject and setting of Group with Parasols (A Siesta) was revisited in several watercolors of the period, including the strikingly similar Siesta, also of 1905 (figure 1) and Simplon Pass: The Green Parasol (figure 2).

A strong component of the unusual visual effects the painting produces lies in Sargent’s treatment of the picture’s surface, its heavy application and active handling of paint create a richly patterned composition punctuated by highlights of dappled light and sunlit passages. Mr. Ormond writes, “The brushwork has a dynamic energy and a life of its own so that the picture could be read as blocks of colour or patterns of light and dark, independent of the forms which they describe. This is where the modernity of Sargent’s vision lies, in the suppression of detail, and in the concentration on surface texture and expressive brushstroke” (Richard Ormond, John Singer Sargent, p. 244).
Ms. Fort writes, “The Alpine paintings sit outside Sargent’s usual work, evincing neither the painterly academism of his portraits nor the full Impressionism of his landscape and figure paintings created in Broadway, England…The Alpine works as a whole do evince a new, more progressive boldness, particularly in design, that demonstrates a daring level of experimentation.” (Sargent in Italy, p. 141) Group with Parasols (A Siesta) is at once the artistic embodiment of Sargent’s daring style, conjuring the pictorial effects of light and shadow for which he is so well known, and a uniquely compelling and intimate look into the artist’s inner circle.

**Note:**

**Bibliography**

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Sargent and Italy, Los Angeles, California, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2003, p. 154, illustrated in color pp. 150-51

**Exhibitions**


(possibly) London, England, Royal Academy of Arts, British Paintings since Whistler, 1940, no. 460

Brooklyn, New York, The Brooklyn Museum; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts, Phillips Academy, American Painting: Selections from the Collection of Daniel and Rita Fraad, June-November 1964, no. 30, p. 38, illustrated in color, also illustrated in color on the cover


New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 100th Anniversary of Impressionism, December 1974-February 1975
Designed to offer shade, in a city as sunny and hot as Seville*SPAIN, and so make the square which used to operate as a parking lot more livable and upbeat, offering an array of functions equally for residents and tourists. Do you think Metropol Parasol by J. MAYER H. Architects could establish itself as Seville’s landmark?