

Evoking Lleanor



Educators' Resources

About Fitchburg Art Museum

Founded in 1929, the Fitchburg Art Museum is a privately-supported art museum located in north central Massachusetts.

Art and artifacts on view (partial list):

- *Discover Ancient Egypt*
- *Evoking Eleanor* (about Fitchburg native, painter Eleanor Norcross)
- *Moving Objects: African and Oceanic Art from the FAM Collection*
- Temporary exhibitions of contemporary art

Museum Hours

Wednesdays-Fridays, 12 – 4 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays

Admission

Free to all Museum members and children ages 12 and under.

Free to Fitchburg Public Schools staff and students

Free to Fitchburg State University staff and students

\$9.00 Adult non-members, \$5.00 Seniors, youth ages 13-17, and full-time students ages 18-21



The Museum is wheelchair accessible.

Directions

Directions to the Museum are on our website.

Address and Phone Number

185 Elm St, Fitchburg, MA 01420 978-345-4207

Visit our website for more information:
www.fitchburgartmuseum.org

To Schedule a Tour

All groups, whether requesting a guided tour or planning to visit as self-guided, need to contact the Director of Docents, Ann Descoteaux, to schedule their visit.

Guided tours need to be scheduled at least three weeks in advance.

Please contact the Director of Docents for information on fees, available tour times, and additional art projects available for youth groups.

Museum Contacts

Main Number: 978-345-4207

Director of Docents: Ann Descoteaux, 978-424-4542
adescoteaux@fitchburgartmuseum.org

Director of Education: Laura Howick, 978-424-4505

Preparing for Your Visit

Teacher or Leader Preparation

- If you wish to preview any of our exhibitions before your class visits, please call the Museum's Director of Docents or Director of Education for a free pass to use for that purpose;
- If anyone in your group needs a wheel chair, please call the Museum before your visit and one will be reserved for you;
- Prepare pre- and post-visit activities to strengthen what students learn at the Museum. There are suggested activities later in this document.

Preparing the Students

- Shortly before the visit, discuss:
 - Have you ever visited a museum? What museums have you visited?
 - What is the purpose of an art museum? (To collect, preserve—for your grandchildren's grandchildren--, and educate the public about artworks)
 - What do you already know about the exhibition topic, if anything?
 - Read (or have the students read) the information pages in this packet
 - Show them some of the exciting things they will be seeing (photos in this packet);
- Share any learning goals you have for the visit, if appropriate;
- VERY IMPORTANT: Review the visit's agenda. Make sure they know there will be time to use the bathroom, have a snack, or go to the gift shop (if applicable). Try to give the students some choice and control over the visit by asking their input on the visit's agenda. If visiting as a self-guided group, ask students what they want to see, learn about, or experience on the visit, and in what order they want to do things. Include time for bathroom and snack breaks, going to the gift shop, and self-directed exploration.
- If visiting as a self-guided tour of Discover Ancient Egypt, Moving Objects, or the contemporary art exhibition in the upstairs galleries, decide when students will be allowed to do the interactive activities – while they're in each section of the exhibition, or after the entire tour? – and make sure all students understand this before the tour. Guided tours usually allow 10 minutes for this purpose at the end of the tour.
- Review museum etiquette:
 - Please do not run in the museum (the student or the artwork could be hurt);
 - Please do not touch the artworks (oils and salts in our skin damage art);
 - Listen respectfully to others' responses to the art (because you may hear something that surprises you, a new way of looking at the artwork.)

Preparing for Your Visit, *continued*

Tell students they may want to bring:

- A camera or camera-equipped cell phone;
- Paper and pencil to record their favorite objects or experiences (Please, no pens or markers)

PHOTOGRAPHY POLICY:
Photography without a flash is allowed in
the Museum.

The Day of the Visit

- **Review the agenda for the day again** (explaining when they'll be taking the tour, playing the interactive games and taking pictures, eating a snack, etc.) Research has shown this step allows students to focus on learning once they are at the museum.
- **Please remind them of museum etiquette** and the Museum's photography policy
- Students will be asked to leave backpacks and coats in the lobby

About Evoking Eleanor

In honor of our founder, Evoking Eleanor is a permanent exhibition; however there may be some items or additional art works that transition in the space.

Exhibition Components

- Impressionist Oil Paintings by Eleanor Norcross
 - Portraits, still lifes, and interiors painted by the museum's founder while she lived in Paris during the end of the 19th century.
- Decorative Arts from the Collection of Eleanor Norcross
 - Ceramics, furniture, and architectural elements from Eleanor Norcross' private collection.
- Living Artist Interventions (Intermittently)
 - Local artists create and display work inspired by Eleanor's paintings.

Themes

- A celebration of cultural history of the city of Fitchburg and the role played by the Norcross family in building up the local community

Curriculum Connections

The artwork in this exhibit provides an excellent starting point for discussing:

- Impressionist art
- Romantic era art and literature
- The relationship between decorative and fine arts
- History of Fitchburg
- Local examples of civic engagement
- How cultural institutions are founded

Connections to Art Classes

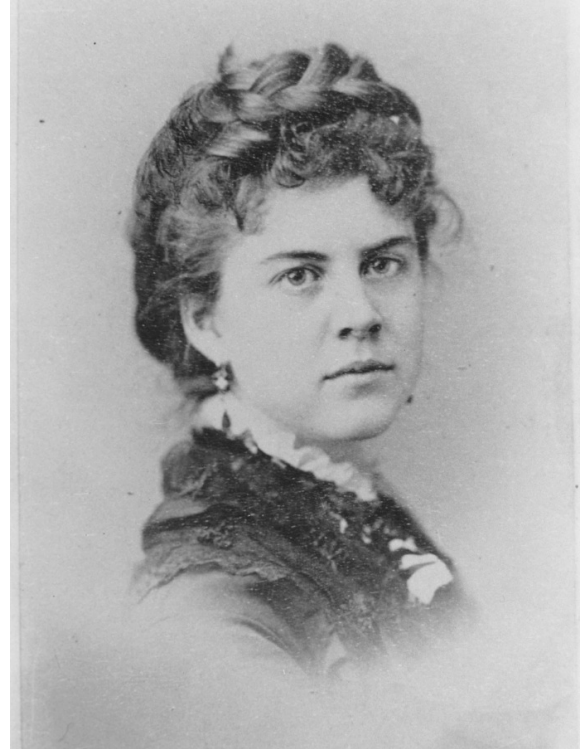
In this exhibit there are examples of the following artistic concepts:

- Portraiture, still life, and interior paintings
- Fine Arts, especially oil paintings
- Decorative Arts
 - Including: dishware, furniture, architectural details, and glassware

History, English Language Arts, and Fine Arts connections can be found in our Suggested Activities section, which includes preparatory, in-gallery and follow up activities.

Who was Eleanor Norcross?

Eleanor was born in 1854 in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Unfortunately, her young life was marked by tragedy, with the death of her younger brother, followed by the death of her mother. After these events, she became extremely close to her father, Amasa Norcross, who was a politician and community leader. At the encouragement of her family, she was educated at the Wheaton Seminary, where she was an excellent student. However, she didn't begin studying art until she attended the Massachusetts Normal Art School. She went on to teach drawing in the Fitchburg School system until her father was elected to the House of Representatives in 1877. She stayed with him, splitting her time between Washington D.C., New York City, and Fitchburg. In New York, she continued to study



art at the Art Students League of New York. In Washington D.C. she became well known for her intelligence, beauty, and friendliness.

Eleanor never sold her paintings because it would have been considered improper for a wealthy young woman. Instead she gave them away as gifts and her father supported her financially throughout his life.

In 1883 her father left the House of Representatives and moved back to Fitchburg, and Eleanor moved to Paris, France. She and her father would travel to see each other a few times a year. Eleanor enjoyed French culture, absorbing opera, ballet, and impressionist art. She took some time away from painting after the death of her father in 1898. When she did resume painting regularly again around 1900, she exclusively painted interior scenes, often of the Louvre Museum. Eleanor passed away during a visit to Fitchburg in 1923. Two of her good friends worked to ensure that she would be proud of her legacy, setting up the funding and original collection for the Fitchburg Art Museum in 1925.

Key Events in the Life of Eleanor

Early Years 1854–1869

Eleanor was born Ella Augusta on June 24, 1854 in Fitchburg to Amasa and Susan Norcross.

By 14 years old, both her mother and her only sibling had passed away.

Eleanor studied at Fitchburg Academy and then Wheaton Female Seminary in Norton, MA.

Art Education 1870s

After Wheaton, Eleanor attended Massachusetts Normal Art School in Boston. Between earning her certificates, Eleanor taught art in Fitchburg public schools.

In her 20s, Eleanor spent time in Washington, D.C., where her father served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Eleanor continued her art education in New York at the Art Students League under William Merritt Chase. At age 29, she went to Paris and studied under Alfred Stevens.

Artist & Collector 1880s–1890s

Eleanor's paintings were first exhibited in 1886 at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She went on to exhibit in many other prestigious galleries.

Eleanor lived in Paris, often returning to Fitchburg for the summers.

Later Years 1899–1922

In 1899, Eleanor began donating her collection to the Worcester Art Museum and Wheaton College.

Legacy 1923–today

In October 1923, at the age of 69, Eleanor died of kidney disease while visiting Fitchburg. She had exhibited her work approximately 40 times over 39 years in 5 major cities.

Eleanor's bequest of decorative objects, paintings, and \$10,000, plus funds from the city, founded the Fitchburg Art Association. The new art center opened to the public in 1929.

In 1951, 28 years after Eleanor's passing, the Fitchburg Art Center became the Fitchburg Art Museum. Today, we honor her life and legacy in this exhibition.

The Golden Age of Fitchburg

Before Fitchburg was officially an independent city, it was settled as a part of the town of Lunenburg in 1730. In 1764 the town was incorporated and named after a founding resident, John Fitch. A major railway connected Fitchburg to Boston and Albany. In the early 1800s, the city expanded as a part of the industrial revolution. The Nashua River and access to railroads made the city ideal for manufacturing a wide range of everyday items such as textiles, paper, bicycles, shoes, and machines.

In 1872, Fitchburg was recognized as a city and Amasa Norcross became the first mayor the following year. As a bustling industrial area, Fitchburg's social life blossomed and the downtown area featured libraries, shopping, and an opera house. Eleanor lived in a prosperous urban center, surrounded by a golden era of arts, technological innovation, and civic engagement. She moved to Paris to study art in 1883. After the death of her father in 1898, she was not as involved in local culture or politics, however she still visited Fitchburg frequently until her death. The development of automobiles resulted in Fitchburg's population moving into suburban areas, and economic development moved towards western Massachusetts. By 1900, the city began to struggle with changes in manufacturing and poor political leadership.



Fitchburg Public Library, ca. 1907

Suggested Activities

These activities are meant to provide a range of possibilities to help build lesson plans that fit within core standards and help structure learning around the exhibit.

Pre-Visit:

- Research Paris at the turn of the century, often called The *Belle Époque* (1871-1914), including examples of technology, politics and architecture.
- Research one gallery at the Louvre and have students share with the class.
- Look at examples of impressionist art and discuss famous practitioners. Have students make their own work based on a theme from that era.
- Review museum policies, schedule for the day, and expected behavior.

In-Gallery, for groups not participating in a guided tour:

- Sketch one of Eleanor's works using pencil. Please bring clipboards.
- Brainstorm ways you could use things you love to help your community.
- Look at a painting and chose 6 adjectives or short phrases you would use to describe that work in particular, or her works in general.
- Pick a painting and imagine you are standing there in that room. Use your 5 senses to describe being in that space.
- Ask students to pick a work that inspires an emotion. Ask them to tell the class why they picked the work and what they're feeling.
- In small groups, have students create a short scene based on a painting and perform it for the class.

Post-Visit:

- Compare and contrast Eleanor to another painter from the same period.
- Compare and contrast romantic era painting to another art form, like ballet, opera or classical music.
- Compare two different artistic styles, like impressionism and abstraction.
- Write a letter from Eleanor in Paris to her father in Fitchburg. Include what types of things she might be doing, where she might go and what she might want to know about Fitchburg.
- Draw like Eleanor: Pick a room in your house/at school and draw details.
- Alternatively, take the class to a different part of the school (or a nearby approved space, like a park) and have them draw on site.

Curricular Connections

These connections are for the museum visit. Other frameworks may be applicable when considering pre- and post- visit activities.

Visual Arts, Grades K-12

- Learn and use relevant vocabulary
- Classify artwork into appropriate categories, compare works, describe imagery and meaning of works, analyze a body of work
- Asking questions about artwork, interpret meaning in historic context, see artwork combining practicality and beauty
- Discuss the role of artists in history, learn about art careers, discuss community cultural organizations, learn about local museums
- View historic art forms from Europe, classify works by period
- Compare visual arts to music or dance, see a cultural institution

English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3 and Up

- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners in small and larger groups.
- Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics under discussion.
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases.
- Use words and phrases acquired through conversations.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task purpose, and audience.
- Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.
- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured sequences.

History and Social Science, Grades 3 and Up

- Explain what governments do, how local governments are organized in Massachusetts, and how people participate in and contribute to their communities.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze primary sources, including texts, maps, diagrams, works of art and architecture.

Special Note: This exhibit does not contain French language text or audio, however the topic of Parisian life, arts, and culture is discussed and may present an appropriate environment for French language learners to gain culturally relevant knowledge.

Vocabulary

Decorative arts: Anything that is a useful, everyday item that is also made to be especially beautiful. Common examples of decorative art include furniture, dishes, vases, wallpaper, and storage boxes.



Cup And Saucer (France), made by the Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory, ca. 1780. Smithsonian Design Museum.



Eleanor Norcross (American), *Mrs. E. R. Miller*, Oil on canvas. Fitchburg Art Museum.

Fine arts: Art made for purely decorative purposes. Common examples include oil paintings, tapestries, drawings, sculptures, and photography.

Portrait: An artistic representation of a person or other living thing, often one where their face is visible.

Interior: This word refers to the inside of a building, particularly furniture and decorations in a room. As an art style, it is a work of art that depicts the inside of a room.

Gallery: A room for the display of artworks. This exhibit is in a gallery, and Eleanor often painted interior galleries at the Louvre Museum.



Apples and Grapes by Claude Monet (French).
Oil on canvas, 1879-1880. Metropolitan
Museum of Art.

Still Life: A painting of inanimate, non-living objects, such as a bowl of fruit, dishware, or flowers.

Impressionism: A popular art movement starting in the 1860s in France that focused on the emotion and feeling of a painting rather than trying to depict things accurately. They often use light, color, and texture to try and communicate the experience of a place to the viewer through a painting. Famous impressionist painters include Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Collection: All of the items that a museum owns. The museum is responsible to keep these items safe and display these items for public viewing. A collector is someone who gathers many similar items. Eleanor Norcross was an art collector, who bought many works of art in her lifetime, and she left those works to us as the start of the FAM art collection.

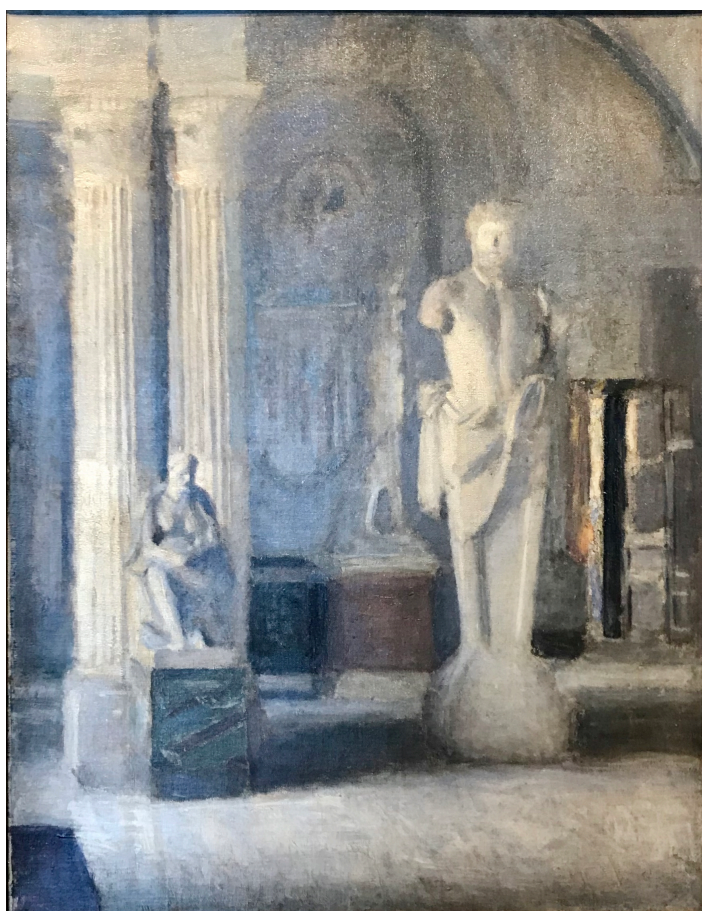
The Louvre: A celebrated museum in Paris, France where many famous works of art are on display. It is the largest art museum in the world, and it receives over 10 million visitors a year. It opened in 1793 after the French Revolution. In 1982, the museum added a glass pyramid as the new entrance. Famous works of art you can see at the Louvre include: Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, the *Venus de Milo* statue, and a complete Egyptian mummy.



The Louvre on a Monday Morning by Melissa Kravitz. Photograph, 2017. Forbes Magazine.

Endowed/Endowment: To endow a museum, means to leave money or artwork in order to support the museum. An endowment is the money or art that is used for that purpose. Eleanor Norcross endowed the museum with both money and art.

Images of Objects in the Exhibition



Eleanor Norcross, *Museum Interior with Sculpture*. Undated. Oil on canvas.



Eleanor Norcross, *Untitled (Studio with Flowers)*. Undated. Oil on canvas.



Eleanor Norcross. *Studio Interior: Avenue Victor Hugo, Paris*. Undated. Oil on canvas.



Eleanor Norcross, *Woman in a Garden*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas.



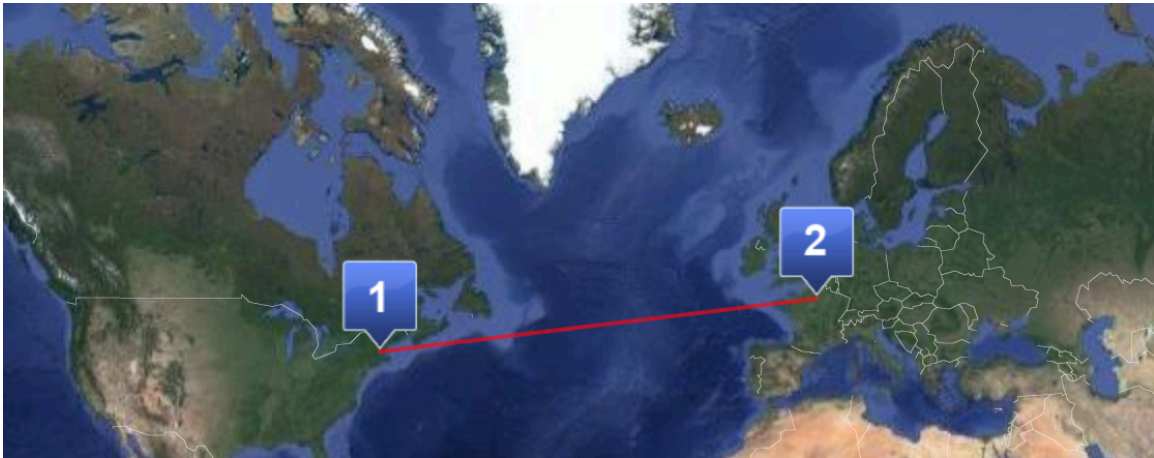
Examples of decorative arts from the personal collection of Eleanor Norcross.

Additional Resources: Politics and Geography

Geography: Fitchburg to Paris

As a straight line, the distance between Fitchburg and Paris is more than 3,400 miles! Eleanor Norcross traveled between the United States and France on steam ships, which would have taken 7 days one way.

Today, a flight directly between Boston and Paris takes only 7 or 8 hours.



Politics: Amasa Norcross

Amasa Norcross was born in New Hampshire and moved to Fitchburg as an adult. He was a lawyer who practiced in Worcester until he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1877. In 1872, when Fitchburg first became a city, he was elected the first mayor. He prioritized recovering from the financial crisis of 1873 and building modern infrastructure, like sewers, to improve public health. He was elected to the House of Representatives, where he served from 1877-1883. After he returned to Fitchburg, he continued to support education and fiscal responsibility in his hometown. He passed away while visiting Eleanor in Paris in 1898. During his career he was very concerned with improving his local community, an interest that he passed on to Eleanor.



Additional Resources: Art in Eleanor's Paris

Eleanor arrived in Paris at time when many famous artists also worked and lived in Paris. Here are some of her contemporaries:

Alfred Stevens (1823 – 1906): A Belgian painter known for his paintings of women. He taught in Paris and Eleanor Norcross was one of his students. He studied at the Academie Royal des-Beaux-Arts and created realistic portraits.

Claude Monet (1840-1926): He was a French painter known for starting the impressionist movement. He often painted flowers, gardens and other natural settings. He is one of the most famous artists in European art history.



A Musician by Alfred Stevens (Belgian), oil on canvas, 1868-69. Harvard Art Museums.



At the Seaside by William Merritt Chase (American), oil on canvas, ca.1892. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

William Merritt Chase (1849-1916): An American impressionist painter who was one of Eleanor Norcross's teachers. He is famous for introducing impressionism in America as well as educating a number of well-known artists.

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926): American artist who made prints and paintings. Born in Pennsylvania, she lived her adult life in France. She focused on images of women, often with children, engaged in everyday life activities.

Music and Theater of the Time

Eleanor loved music and lived in Europe during the Romantic Era. Romantic music is a style of classical music popular around the 19th century. Music from this period is dramatic and emotional. Other famous composers from this era include: Ludwig van Beethoven, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Giuseppe Verdi.

Student-Friendly Examples of Romantic Era Music and Theater:

Orchestral Music:

- *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns (1886)
Recommended: The Swan, Fossils, Aquarium, The Elephant, Finale
- *Hungarian Dances No. 5* by Johannes Brahms (1869)
- *Flight of the Bumblebee* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1899)

Opera:

- *Les Contes de Hoffman* by Jacques Offenbach. (1881) “Les Oiseaux dans la Charmille” (Interpretations of short stories written by E.T. Hoffman)
- *Rusalka* by Antonín Dvořák (1901) “Song to the Moon” (A water nymph falls in love with a prince; very similar to The Little Mermaid)

Ballet:

- *The Sleeping Beauty* (Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky) (1890)
 - “Rose Adagio” or “The Blue Bird and Princess Florine”.
- *Don Quixote* (Music: Ludwig Minkus) (1871/1900)
 - “Act I Finale” or “Kitri Variation”



Swan Lake Production, 1895. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Further Reading

Clarke, John Badger. "Hon. Amasa Norcross" from *Sketches of Successful New Hampshire Men*. Manchester, NH. 1882.

Inventory of the Eleanor Norcross Papers. From the Archives and Special Collections at Wheaton College. More information:
http://library.wheatoncollege.edu/findingaids/NorcrossE_MC021.xml

Emerson, William Andrew. *Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Past and Present*. Press of Blanchard and Brown, Fitchburg, MA. 1887.

Fitchburg Art Museum. *Eleanor Norcross*:
<https://fitchburgartmuseum.org/eleanor-norcross/>

Fitchburg Historical Society Website: <http://www.fitchburghistoricalsociety.org/>

Fitchburg Historical Society. "Eleanor Norcross" and "Amasa Norcross" from *Legendary Locals of Fitchburg*. Arcadia Publishing, Mount Pleasant, SC. 2014.

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Richman-Abdou, Kelly. "How Impressionists Changed the Art World" *My Modern Met*. 2019. Online: <https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-impressionism-definition/>

Schofield, Hugh. "La Belle Epoque: Paris 1914" *BBC News Magazine*. January 2014. Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25619822>

Weinberg, H. Barbara. "William Merritt Chase (1849-1916)." from the *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 2000. Online: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd_chas.htm