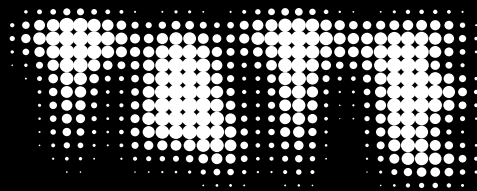


# SARGENT AND FASHION

22 FEBRUARY – 7 JULY 2024

## LARGE PRINT GUIDE



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CONCOURSE

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**Concourse, anti-clockwise from exhibition title**

## **SARGENT AND FASHION**

Fashion was central to John Singer Sargent's (1856–1925) achievements as a portraitist. In a career which coincided with the rise of haute couture, Sargent painted portraits which embraced the creative potential of clothing and costume. In this exhibition, Sargent's work is displayed alongside examples of period fashion, including several original garments depicted in his paintings.

An international artist, Sargent was born in Italy to North American parents. He lived in several European countries as a child, before forging his artistic reputation in Paris. In 1886 he settled in London, although he continued to travel widely, and worked extensively in the US. Sargent embodied the cosmopolitan values of 19th-century high society, to which many of his sitters belonged.

In late 19th-century society circles, luxury clothing was highly coded. North American writer and designer Edith Wharton described it in her novel **The Age of Innocence** as functioning like 'armour' in its ability to bestow social advantage. Similarly, portraits created a lasting public image

of an individual. The sartorial choices involved in this process could make – or break – a sitter’s reputation.

Sargent’s portraits operated in the space between the desires of his sitters and his own artistic ideals. This was a space of collaboration and sometimes of tension, revealing the distinct experiences and personalities of his sitters. This dynamic gives his portraiture its extraordinary life, which speaks to us across the decades.

All works in the exhibition are by John Singer Sargent unless otherwise stated. In keeping with the custom of the time, Sargent’s portraits of married women were exhibited under titles which gave them their husbands’ names. For this exhibition, the birth names of these sitters have been added in parenthesis, in agreement with lenders.

Please scan here to view the exhibition texts online.

**[tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/sargent-and-fashion/exhibition-guide](https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/sargent-and-fashion/exhibition-guide)**





Images, left to right:

John Singer Sargent, **Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth**, 1889, Tate

Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth in 'Macbeth' with dagger wearing the 'beetle-wing dress', Photograph  
© National Trust

John Singer Sargent, **Lord Ribblesdale**, 1902, National Gallery, London

Lord Ribblesdale, 1897, from 'The Queen's Hounds and Stag-Hunting Recollections', Photograph, MFA Boston

John Singer Sargent, **Dr Pozzi at Home**, 1881, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

Portrait of Samuel Jean Pozzi (1846–1918), (surgeon), Photograph, PWB Images / Alamy Stock Photo

John Singer Sargent, **Lady Helen Vincent, Viscountess d'Abernon (Helen Venetia Duncombe)**, 1904, Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama

Lady Helen Vincent, 1899, by Alice Hughes (1857–1939), Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III, 2024

## **SARGENT AND FASHION**

22 February – 7 July 2024

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Media partner **The Times and The Sunday Times**

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## A SARGENT PLAYLIST

### Listen to the music that inspired Sargent

Music played a major role in Sargent's life and work. A talented pianist, he often played the piano to (and sometimes alongside) his subjects during pauses between sittings. He portrayed a number of musicians and composers, some of whom became good friends. He also depicted musical performances, and sometimes hosted musical events in his studio.

Much of the music that Sargent played and admired was documented in the writings of the artist and his circle. These writings provided the basis for this playlist of music assembled to accompany the exhibition. You can listen to it here, or download it to your mobile and listen inside the exhibition, to experience the mix of music and art that was central to Sargent's practice.

Use the Spotify app to listen on your mobile.

Go to 'Search' then scan this code.

[open.spotify.com/playlist/1BCGUoYEHP5msc1XedOAta?si=7-Fl6CAOR00lleEhdG8Fsw&pi=e-4mJN\\_UdLRtKx](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1BCGUoYEHP5msc1XedOAta?si=7-Fl6CAOR00lleEhdG8Fsw&pi=e-4mJN_UdLRtKx)



Ethel Smyth

**Sonata for Violin and Piano in A minor, Op. 7: II. Scherzo.**

**Allegro grazioso**

Performers: Chagall Trio; Source: Meridian Records. 3 mins

Percy Grainger

**British Folk-Song Settings: No. 4, Shepherds Hey**

Performer: Peter Phillips; Source: Novus Promusica. 2 mins

Isaac Albéniz

**Iberia, Book 1:2 (El Puerto)**

Performer: Alicia de Larrocha; Producer: Paul Myers;

Source: Decca Music Group Ltd. 4 mins

Gabriel Fauré

**Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 80: 2. Fileuse. Andantino quasi**

**Allegretto**

Performers: Boston Symphony Orchestra, Seiji Ozawa;

Producers: Hanno Rinke, Werner Mayer; Source: Deutsche Gramophon (DG). 3 mins

Gabriel Fauré

**Dolly Suite, Op. 56: II. Mi-a-ou**

Performers: Katia Labèque, Marielle Labèque; Source: Decca Music Group Ltd. 2 mins

Louis Moreau Gottschalk

**La Gallina, Op. 53**

Performer: Cecile Licad; Source: Naxos. 3 mins

Robert Schumann

**Symphony No. 2 in C Major (version for piano duet): III.**

**Langsam**

Performers: Eckerle Piano Duo; Source: Naxos. 8 mins

Édouard Lalo

**Symphonie Espagnole in D Minor, Op. 21: 2. Scherzando  
(Allegro molto)**

Performers: Orchestre de Paris, Daniel Barenboim, Itzhak Perlman; Producers: Rainer Brock, Dr Steven Paul; Source: Deutsche Grammophon (DG). 4 mins

Emmanuel Chabrier

**España–Rhapsody for Orchestra**

Performers: Wiener Philharmoniker, John Eliot Gardiner;  
Producers: Ewald Markl, Karl-August Naegler, Roger Wright;  
Source: Deutsche Grammophon (DG). 6 mins

Gabriel Fauré

**Piano Quintet No. 2 in C minor, Op. 115: I. Allegro moderato**

Performers: Fine Arts Quartet, Cristina Ortiz; Source: Naxos.  
11 mins

Reynaldo Hahn

**Nocturne in E-flat major**

Performers: Tamsin Waley-Cohen, Huw Watkins;

Source: Signum Records. 7 mins [53]

Image:

Max Beerbohm, **Sargent at Work**, 1907

Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.



## Timeline graphic, left to right

### JOHN SINGER SARGENT

#### 1856

Sargent is born on 12 January in Florence, Italy to North American parents. Many of his early years are spent travelling in Europe.

Frederick Haven Pratt, **Portrait of John Singer Sargent**, 1890, Gelatin silver print print. Private collection

#### 1873

Sargent briefly enrolls at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence.

#### 1874–78

Sargent studies in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts and with celebrated artist Carolus-Duran (Charles-Emile-Auguste Durand).

John Singer Sargent, **Carolus-Duran**, 1879, Oil paint on canvas. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA

## 1877

Sargent first exhibits at the prestigious Paris Salon.

## 1881

Sargent's portrait of Amalia Errázuriz Subercaseaux is awarded a medal at the Paris Salon.

John Singer Sargent, **Madame Ramón Subercaseaux (Amalia Errázuriz)**, 1880, Oil paint on canvas. The Favez S. Sarofim Collection

## 1882

Sargent first exhibits in London when **Dr Pozzi at Home** is shown at the Royal Academy.

John Singer Sargent, **Dr Pozzi at Home**, 1881, Oil paint on canvas. The Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

## 1883

Sargent moves into a fashionable new studio at 41 boulevard Berthier in Paris.

Unknown artist, **John Singer Sargent in his studio**, c.1884, Photographic print. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

## 1884

Sargent exhibits **Madame X** at the Paris Salon. The resulting scandal contributes to his subsequent move to England.

John Singer Sargent, **Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau [Virginie Amélie Avegno])**, 1883–4, Oil paint on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY

## 1886

Establishing himself in London, Sargent takes James Abbott McNeill Whistler's old studio on Tite Street in Chelsea.

## 1887

Sargent achieves his first major success at the Royal Academy with **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose**, which is purchased for the national collection.

John Singer Sargent, **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose**, 1885–6, Oil paint on canvas. Tate. Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1887

## 1888

Sargent holds his first solo exhibition in Boston, US, a city to which he maintained many ties until his death.

## 1893

Sargent's portrait of Lady Agnew is universally acclaimed at the Royal Academy exhibition.

John Singer Sargent, **Lady Agnew of Lochnaw (Gertrude Vernon)**, 1892, Oil paint on canvas. National Galleries of Scotland. Purchased with the aid of the Cowan Smith Bequest Fund 1925

## 1894

Sargent is elected an Associate of the Royal Academy; he becomes a full member three years later.

## 1898

Sargent begins a series of 12 portraits of the Wertheimer family, the largest portrait commission of his career.

John Singer Sargent, **Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Flora Wertheimer**, 1901, Oil paint on canvas. Tate. Presented by the widow and family of Asher Wertheimer in accordance with his wishes 1922

## 1906

Tate acquires **Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth**.

John Singer Sargent, **Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth**, 1889, Oil paint on canvas. Tate. Presented by Sir Joseph Duveen 1906

## 1907

Giving up most portrait commissions, Sargent focuses on landscapes, paintings of friends and family, and major mural projects for the Public Library and Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

## 1917

Sargent paints portraits of John D. Rockefeller and President Woodrow Wilson.

John Singer Sargent, **President Woodrow Wilson**, 1917, Oil paint on canvas. National Gallery of Ireland. Commissioned, the Board of Governors and Guardians, in memory of Sir Hugh Lane, 1917

## 1918

Back in London, Sargent becomes an official war artist for the Allies and travels to the front in northern France. His time at the front results in his monumental painting **Gassed**.

John Singer Sargent, **Gassed**, 1919, Oil paint on canvas. Imperial War Museum, London

## 1925

John Singer Sargent dies in his sleep, following a heart attack, in London on 15 April.

ROOM 1

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## Room 1, clockwise from doorway

### INTRODUCTION

John Singer Sargent not only painted his sitters – he directed and styled them as well. He may have claimed that ‘I only paint what I see’, but what he saw was itself carefully constructed. Not content with simply documenting the fashions of the day, Sargent used them as a catalyst to create compelling paintings. Rather than painting clothes as worn, Sargent carefully manipulated them for pictorial effect. He pinned, draped, tucked and folded his sitters’ garments to create new shapes and textures. One sitter recalled the painful experience of Sargent arranging draperies using pins ‘which often pricked’.

This transformation is evident when comparing the portrait of Lady Sassoon with the opera cloak she wears, both on display here. Sargent manipulated the cloak, wrapping it around Lady Sassoon to foreground the play of light on the fabric. The bright pink lining of the cloak, barely noticeable in real life, creates a sinuous diagonal streak which guides the viewer’s eye across the surface of the portrait.

## **Lady Sassoon (Aline de Rothschild)**

1907

Oil paint on canvas

In this portrait, Sargent posed Lady Sassoon wearing the taffeta opera cloak displayed nearby, to which pink roses were pinned. Her ensemble was completed with a string of pearls, bangles on both wrists, and a spectacular hat of black ostrich feathers. Raised in Paris, highly educated, and a lover of music and the visual arts (she was a talented artist who worked in pastel), Lady Sassoon had much in common with Sargent and they became good friends. Sargent enjoyed working in black on black, a technique he greatly admired in the work of the 17th-century Dutch painter Frans Hals.

**'Modern dress is adroitly arranged to afford an ensemble of great magnificence.'**

**– Athenaeum, 4 May 1907**

Private collection

X75788

Possibly by House of Worth  
France, 1858–1956

## **Opera cloak**

c.1895

Silk taffeta and satin, net, ribbons, and lace

Taffeta is a crisp and thin fabric; it shifts in the light and rustles as it moves. This loose opera cloak falls to the floor in generous folds straight from the shoulders, allowing only glimpses of its bright lining.

Opera cloaks were popular for both men and women. Usually made of dark fabrics and lined with a bright contrasting colour, they could be simple capes or could include hoods, as in this case. Lady Sassoon probably acquired it in Paris, where she travelled frequently.

Private collection

X75789

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ROOM 2

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## Room 2, clockwise from entrance

### WOMEN IN BLACK

Black dresses became fashionable for women of all ages during the late 19th century. While black clothing retained its association with mourning during this period, codes of etiquette relaxed to make it wearable in a range of contexts. This shift is reflected by the prevalence of black in Sargent's portraiture. During the 1880s, in fact, he painted almost half his female sitters, of different ages, wearing black gowns. Some of these works are on display here.

The contemporary vogue for black clothing enabled Sargent to create portraits that were both modern and in dialogue with this tradition. The introduction of aniline (synthetic) dyes in the mid-19th century resulted in an intense pure black, patented in 1863, that enabled a new depth of colour. Sargent's heroes, meanwhile, included two 17th century masters of black: Spanish painter Diego Velázquez and Dutch artist Frans Hals. Indeed, the colour was so integral to his work that, when visiting his friend, French artist Claude Monet, Sargent was unable to work upon learning that Monet did not have any black paint.

## **Mrs Edward L. Davis (Maria Robbins) and her Son, Livingston Davis**

1890

Oil paint on canvas

Maria Davis poses outside with her seven year-old son, wearing a long black walking dress and jabot (neck accessory) held in place by a broach. The severe tailoring of her costume and her assertive pose project an assurance that was associated with modern North American women in the writing of the day. She contrasts with Livingston, who sports a white sailor suit. Sargent painted this portrait in Worcester, Massachusetts, where Davis and her husband were prominent society figures. It was made during Sargent's second working trip to the US.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Frances and Armand  
Hammer Purchase Fund

X75780



## **Vitrine caption**

George Keiswetter  
worked 19th century

Allen Fan Company  
1885–1910

### **Fan**

1885–1910

Silk satin, wood, pigment, brass, paper, cotton

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Oldham Collection  
X86016

## **Mrs Adrian Iselin (Eleanora O'Donnell)**

1888

Oil paint on canvas

When Sargent came to see Eleanora Iselin about her portrait, she had her maid display several of her most fashionable Parisian gowns. But Sargent decided to paint her in what she happened to be wearing: a black day dress suitable for receiving visitors at home. To capture its distinct sheen of silk satin, Sargent used broad strokes of rich dark black paint, with a lighter grey black to indicate folds in the sleeve. Flicks of white paint record how the beads of the elaborate jet appliqué reflected light. Iselin's hand rests on a mahogany table. Many years later, Sargent recalled: 'of course, I cannot forget that dominating little finger!'

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Ernest Iselin,

1964.13.1

X75782



Adrian and Eleanora O'Donnell Iselin with their grandchildren in front of Souci, their home on Davenport Neck (detail)  
Courtesy of Westchester County Historical Society

## THE SALON OF 1884

Sargent's portrait of Virginie Gautreau was first exhibited in 1884 at the Salon, held at the Palais des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

The painting originally showed one of the jewelled straps of the sitter's dress slipping off her shoulder, as can be seen in the photograph nearby. Sargent insisted he painted Gautreau 'exactly as she was dressed', and Gautreau herself described the portrait as a masterpiece in a letter to a friend. Nonetheless, at the Salon the painting was ridiculed by both critics and the public, and many commentators denounced the 'indecent' of the dress as a bid for attention. Gautreau's own mother lamented the cost to her daughter's reputation. The strap was subsequently repainted and Sargent left Paris soon afterwards, his own reputation also somewhat damaged.

The portrait can also be seen as a daring intervention into the conventions of Parisian society by two ambitious figures of North American origin. Sargent kept the portrait until after Gautreau's death in 1915, when he sold it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In a letter to the institution's director, Sargent wrote 'I suppose it is the best thing I have done'.

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'The precise image of a modern woman scrupulously drawn by a painter who is master of his art.'

– Judith Gautier

## **Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau [Virginie Amélie Avegno])**

1883–4

Oil paint on canvas

In this work, Sargent paints Virginie Gautreau in a statuesque pose reminiscent of classical sculpture. Born in America but resident in France, Gautreau was admired in Parisian social circles for her appearance, which she enhanced with striking gowns and exaggerated white make up. Sargent convinced her to pose for a portrait, saying he would make 'an homage to her beauty'. The designer of her satin and velvet dress has not been identified, although Gautreau often employed the prestigious Parisian fashion house Maison Félix.

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1916 (16.53)

X75779



An earlier state of the painting **Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)** by John Singer Sargent, 1884  
Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum, New York  
Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence

## Study of Virginie Gautreau, born Avegno

c.1884

Oil paint on canvas

This painting is an unfinished replica of **Madame X**, displayed nearby. Sargent probably began to paint it before the 1884 Paris Salon as a possible replacement for the much-worked-on completed version, before abandoning this idea.

The right shoulder strap is missing, suggesting that Sargent was uncertain about its position. In the finished, exhibited picture, the strap was originally painted off the shoulder and subsequently repainted. Sargent kept this painting until his death. It was acquired by Tate shortly thereafter.

Tate. Presented by Lord Duveen through the Art Fund 1925  
N04102



## **Mrs Edward Darley Boit (Mary Louisa Cushing)**

1887

Oil paint on canvas

Mary Louisa ('Isa') Boit's brother-in-law described sittings for this painting as follows: 'She wears a black silk waist (with elbow sleeves) but pointed and open showing neck and bosom. The underskirt is pinkish with round black spots, and the pink shows again at her bosom ... Gray hair with pom-pom of pink feathers.' Polka dots, most often seen on walking dresses and daywear, suited Isa's lively personality: author Henry James wrote that she was 'brilliantly friendly' and 'eternally juvenile'. Isa Boit and her husband Edward, an amateur artist, divided their time between Boston and Paris, where they met Sargent in the 1870s.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Miss Julia Overing Boit  
X77256

## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **Hair Ornament**

c.1905

Black and peach-coloured feathers on black silk chiffon

This ornament is similar to that worn by 'Isa' Boit in her portrait nearby, and rendered by Sargent in exuberant flickers of paint. Ornaments, hats and entire garments made of feathers – or even whole birds – had been prized for centuries around the world. They became immensely popular in Europe and the Americas in the late 1800s: 'There are estimated to be about 10,000,000 ladies of bird-wearing age in the United States today,' announced one 1897 journal. The toll fashion took upon nature became a rallying cry for reform.

Fashion Museum Bath

X87166

**'She is wonderful and of a living! ... She not only speaks – she winks.'**

– Henry James



A. Chaillot, **Costumes de Madame Turl**, from **Journal des Demoiselles**, 1885. Art World / Alamy Stock Photo

## Jane Evans

1898

Oil paint on canvas

Jane Evans, who ran a boarding house at Eton College, wears a tailored black wool suit relieved only by a gold fob-chain, a symbol of her position. Evans was described as able to 'see through a boy as if he were a pane of glass', and her clothing, masculine in its style and severity, conveys her air of authority. The names of former students of her house, some of whom commissioned the portrait, are recorded on the wooden panels behind her. Sargent later recalled his surprise at 'the honesty, directness and power of her personality'.

Lent by the Provost and Fellows of Eton College

X75783

ROOM 3

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## Room 3, Clockwise from entrance

### SITTING FOR SARGENT

Many of Sargent's sitters were involved with the visual arts as collectors, gallerists or practitioners. A number documented their experience of sitting for him, aware of the significance of the event and their role as collaborators. Sargent himself was scrupulously private, but his sitters left numerous accounts of what it was like to sit for him.

Sargent and his sitters thought carefully about the clothes that he would paint them in, the messages their choices would send, and how well particular outfits would translate to paint. The rapport between fashion and painting was well understood at this time: as one French critic noted, 'there is now a class who dress after pictures, and when they buy a gown ask 'will it paint?''

After settling in England in the 1880s, most of Sargent's portraits were painted in his London studio. The paintings in this room, however, were made in a range of spaces in Britain and the United States, where demand for his work was also substantial.

## **Dorothy Barnard**

c.1887

Graphite on paper

## **Polly Barnard**

c.1887

Graphite on paper

The models for the two children in **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose** were Alice (Polly) and Dorothy (Dolly) Barnard, the children of the illustrator Frederick Barnard. Every evening they would interrupt their play to pose during the short twilight period when the light was as Sargent wanted to capture it for the painting. These drawings, which relate closely to the children's poses in the painting hanging nearby, appear to be presentation sketches made after the painting was completed. They were reproduced in an art magazine in 1888, and Sargent gave them to his two models.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Dorothy Barnard 1949

A00850, A00851



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## **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose**

1885–6

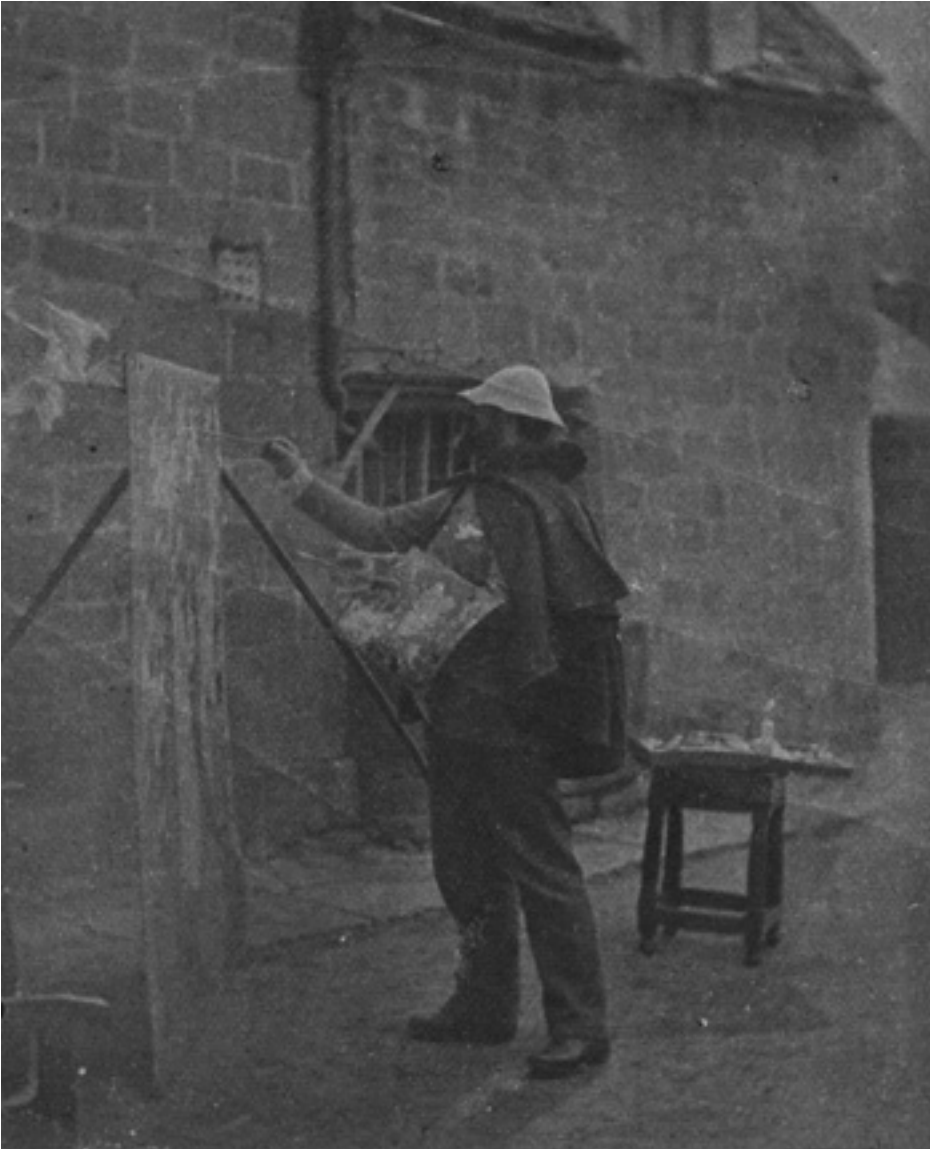
Oil paint on canvas

This is one of the first paintings Sargent made after moving from Paris to London, and it helped make his reputation in Britain when it was purchased for the nation through the Chantrey Bequest. The painting was made over two years, mostly painted outdoors when the light was precisely as Sargent wished to capture it. He painted the work in Broadway, in the Cotswolds, where he was staying with his friends, the Millets. The sight of Chinese lanterns hanging among trees and beds of lilies was his initial inspiration, to which he added the figures of two girls lighting the lanterns, wearing white dresses specially made for the painting.

Tate. Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1887  
N01615

**'The beauty of light playing on the varied surface of things,  
that is his matter.'**

– R.A.M. Stephenson



Sargent painting **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose** at Broadway in  
Worcestershire

Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Museum, Gift of Mrs Francis  
Ormond © President and Fellows of Harvard Collection

## **Mrs Robert Harrison (Helen Smith)**

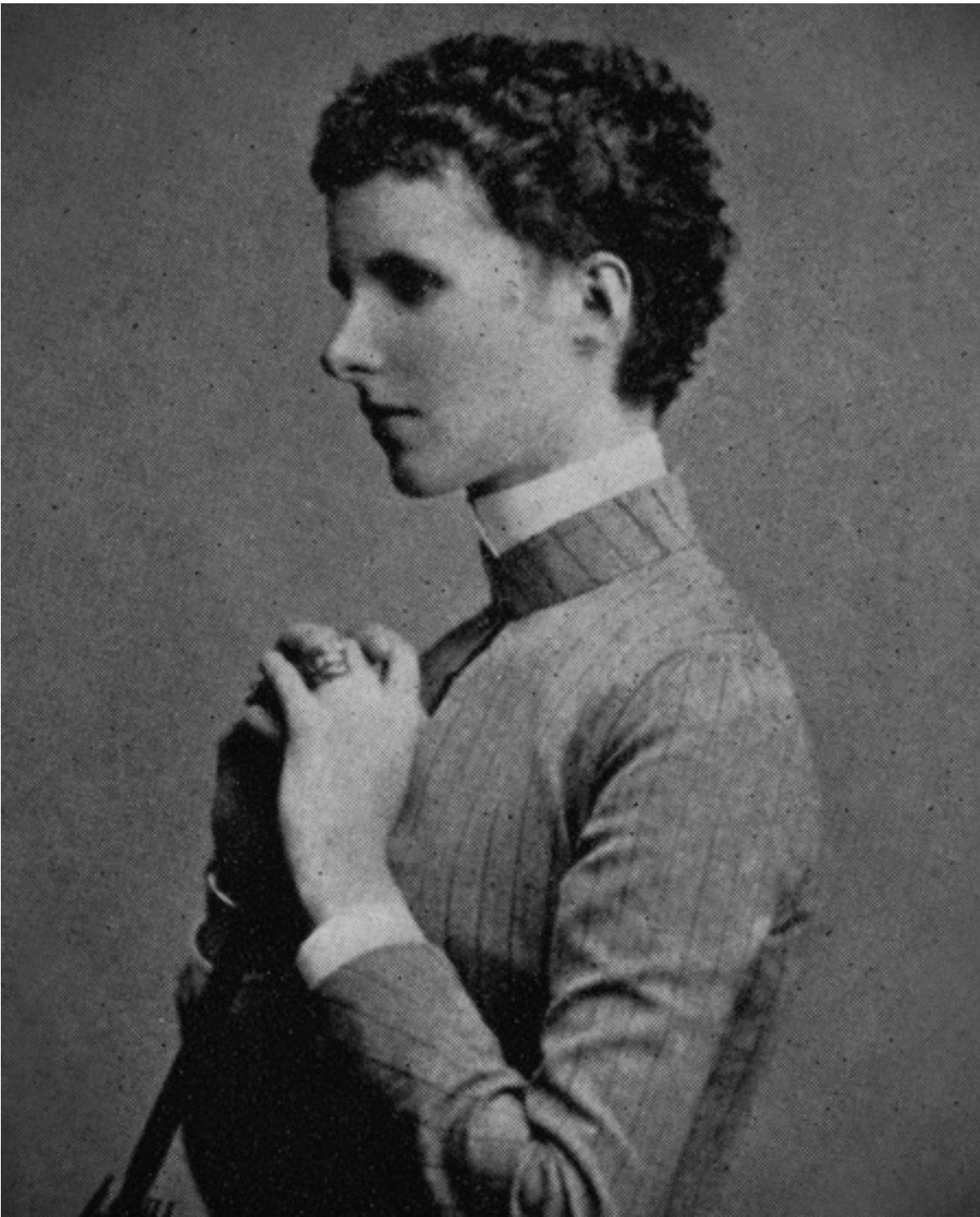
1886

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent was a friend of Helen Harrison and her husband Robert, sharing their passion for music. In this work – one of his first British portraits – he paints Helen in a white organza gown encased by an unusual and dramatic scarlet cape. The portrait was criticised in the London press for being ‘eccentric’ and ‘violently keyed’, while one writer described Helen’s cape as looking ‘as though about to expand and convey her to the regions of Mephistopheles’ (Hell). These writers may have conflated Sargent’s image with their feelings about the sitter, who, in her sister’s recent divorce case, had herself been accused of extramarital affairs.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss P.J.M. Harrison 2000

T07693



Helen Harrison

From Roy Jenkins, **Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy**,  
1958

## **Mrs Hugh Hammersley (Mary Frances Grant)**

1892

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent became good friends with Mary Hammersley, who regularly hosted him at her London home alongside artists including Walter Sickert and Augustus John. She wears a cherry silk velvet gown trimmed with gold lace at the cuffs, hem and neck. Her glittering standing collar is modelled after the paintings of 17th-century Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens, but the nervous intensity of her pose is wholly modern. Mary recalled of sitting for Sargent that 'some days he would work the whole time without ceasing, as one possessed, whilst others were spent playing the piano, which he did charmingly!'

**'Think of a cherry-coloured velvet filling half the picture.'**

– George Moore

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglass Campbell, in memory of Mrs. Richard E. Danielson, 1998 (1998.365)

X79228

## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **Fragment of velvet from the dress of Mrs Hammersley**

c.1890

Silk velvet, handwritten note, ribbon

Mary Hammersley kept this fragment as a souvenir of the velvet gown she wore in the adjacent portrait. The fabric is silk velvet, brightly coloured with a combination of natural and aniline dyes (cochineal and mauveine), which Sargent captured precisely in his portrait.

After Hammersley's death, her sister used black-edged mourning stationery to label the swatch 'part of the gown in which my beloved Sister, Mrs. Hugh Hammersley, sat to Sargent'.

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (N.A.2021.3.1a–c)  
X86703

## Helen Sears

1895

Oil paint on canvas

Helen Sears, six years old at the time of this portrait, was the daughter of Sarah Choate Sears, whose portrait and clothing are displayed nearby. Like **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose**, it shows Sargent exploring the mingled effects of light on a white dress and flowers. Sarah took a photograph of Helen wearing what appears to be the same dress and beribboned shoes, which reveals how Sargent simplified elements of Helen's dress. She sent it to Sargent, who replied: 'how can an unfortunate painter hope to rival a photograph by a mother? Absolute truth combined with absolute feeling.'

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. J. D. Cameron  
Bradley  
X77255





Sarah Choate Sears (1858–1915), **Helen Sears with Japanese Lantern**, 1895, platinum print  
Descendants of Sarah Choate Sears

## **Vitrine caption**

House of Worth  
France, 1858–1956

### **Dress**

c.1880  
Pearl-embroidered white bengaline

The House of Worth was famous for its custom designs, luxurious fabrics and intricate decorations. This evening dress belonged to Sarah Choate Sears and is made from bengaline, a shiny, ribbed fabric made from silk, or silk blended with cotton. Characterised by its low neckline and lack of sleeves, it is embellished with hundreds of faux pearls, each individually attached. Such gowns could be very expensive, costing up to £25,000 in today's money.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. J. D. Cameron Bradley. X86717

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## **Mrs Joshua Montgomery Sears (Sarah Choate Sears)**

1899

Oil paint on canvas

Sarah Choate Sears was a Boston-based painter and photographer who collected works by French impressionist artists, owned works by Sargent, and supported local artists and musicians. Sears first approached Sargent for a portrait in 1890, finally sitting for him nine years later. By this time he had already painted her daughter Helen. Her white dress in this work may have been chosen to complement Helen's portrait, or to indulge Sargent's love of painting white. This, however, does not hint at Sarah's own love of colour, as shown by her electric green evening gown displayed nearby.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by George R. Brown in honor of his wife, Alice Pratt Brown, 80.144

X77267



'Mrs. J. Montgomery Sears' (1903), photograph by Gertrude Käsebier

University of Delaware, Museums Collections, Gift of Philip B. and Laura T. Shevlin, 1994

## **Vitrine caption**

House of Worth  
France, 1858–1956

### **Evening dress**

c.1895  
Silk damask

The brilliant, acidic colour of this dress stands in stark contrast to Sargent's portrait of its owner, Sarah Choate Sears, displayed nearby. He portrayed her in white, but contemporary accounts and her surviving dresses reveal that she wore many different colours as well as stripes and sequins. This gown, with its pattern of long-stemmed roses aligned meticulously across every seam, demonstrates the renowned skill of the cutters and seamstresses of the House of Worth. Large, puffed sleeves are characteristic of women's fashions during the 1890s.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. J. D. Cameron  
Bradley  
X77268

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## THE HOUSE OF WORTH

Charles Frederick Worth (1825–95) was a designer who dominated Parisian fashion in the second half of the 19th century. Born in Lincolnshire, England, he moved to Paris following an apprenticeship in London. He set up his fashion house in 1858, initially with Swedish businessman Otto Gustav Bobergh, and quickly built up a prestigious clientele including queens and princesses. By the 1870s Worth employed over 1,000 people, and by the late 1880s he had established many of the traits associated with the modern couture house. These included presentations of seasonal collections, the display of new lines on living models, and the branding of exclusive designs with the couturier's name.

Worth's most successful years coincided with the height of Sargent's career as a portraitist. Like Sargent, Worth increasingly catered to British and American customers, and many of Sargent's sitters wore outfits from the designer.

Worth cultivated the image of the couturier as artist, saying 'I have Delacroix's sense of colour and I compose. A toilette [a complete ensemble, from the French word *toile*, cloth] is as good as a painting'.





Marie-Adrienne Coefier, Portrait of Charles Frederick Worth, 1890. GRANGER - Historical Picture Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

## **Ena and Betty, Daughters of Asher and Mrs Wertheimer (Flora Joseph)**

1901

Oil paint on canvas

Ena and Betty Wertheimer were the eldest daughters of Asher Wertheimer, a successful London art dealer, and his wife Flora. Their father commissioned paintings of the entire family, making him one of Sargent's most important patrons. The two women posed for Sargent in the drawing room of their home. Betty wears a red velvet evening gown and holds an open fan. Ena, who is dressed in shiny white satin, began studying at the Slade School of Art shortly after this portrait was painted. She later ran a gallery in London.

Tate. Presented by the widow and family of Asher Wertheimer in accordance with his wishes 1922

N03708

**‘The alert and ultra-modern mind expressed so wonderfully.’**  
– Zaida Ben-Yusuf



Ena Wertheimer (far right) and others painting at the Slade  
From **Sladey Ladies**, Michael Parkin Fine Art, 1986

## Flora Priestley

c.1889

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's friend Flora Priestley wears a shot silk afternoon dress with a high collar and a tightly sashed waist. The whiteness of her skin contrasts with her clothes, as in Sargent's earlier portrait of Virginie Gautreau, hanging in the previous room. Like many in Sargent's circle, Priestley had a penchant for dressing up in costume. Her sideways glance and unusual pose, with her wrists bent backwards, contribute to the theatricality of the portrait. Priestley and Sargent had known each other for many years, and the portrait indicates an informality and comfort between the two.

**'She wears an iridescent violet dress on which a bunch of poppies blaze forth.'**

– Vittorio Pica

Tate. Presented by Miss Emily Sargent in memory of her brother through the Art Fund 1929

N04465

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## **Mrs Fiske Warren (Gretchen Osgood) and her Daughter Rachel**

1903

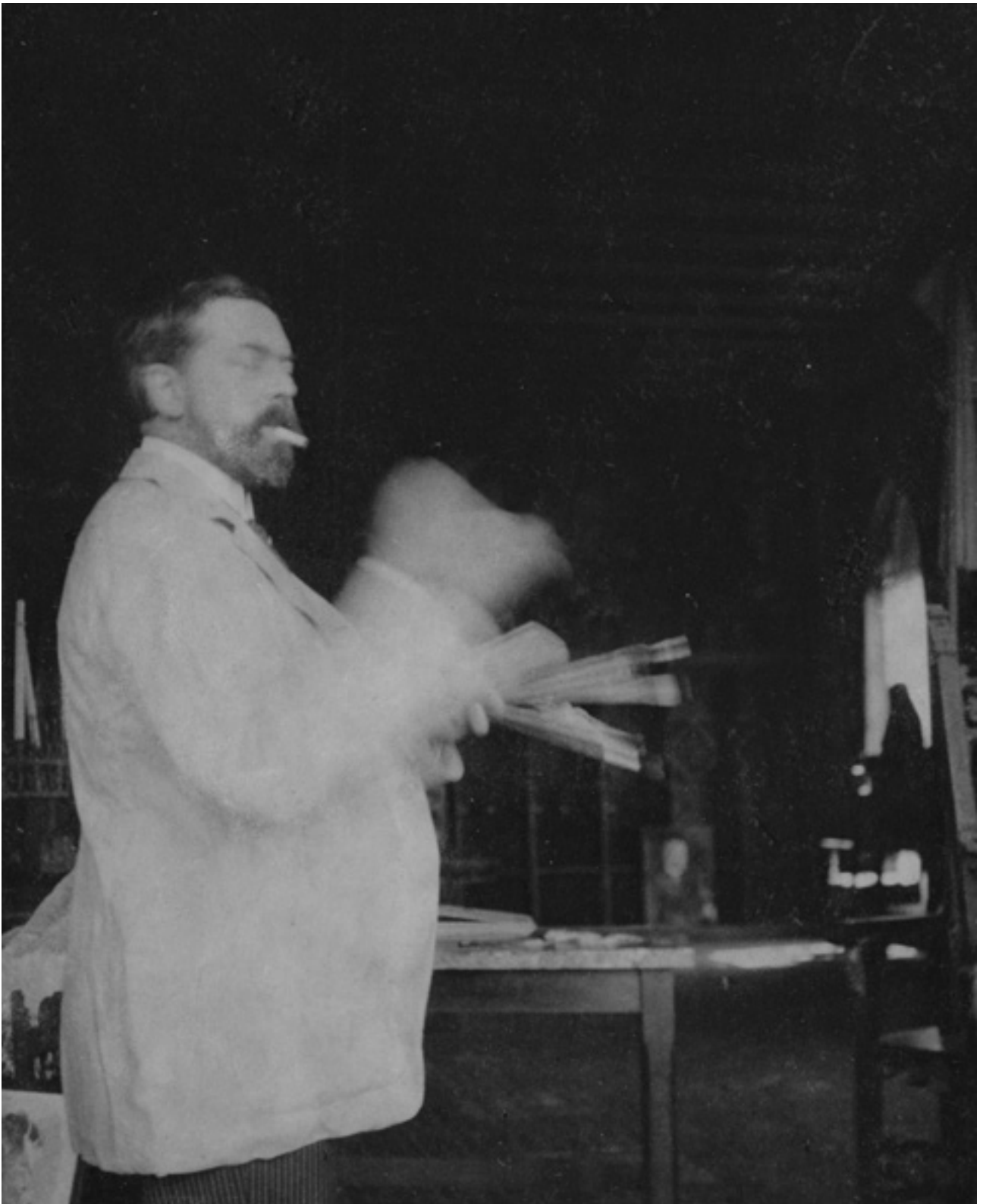
Oil paint on canvas

Sargent painted the poet and scholar Gretchen Warren and her daughter Rachel at Fenway Court in Boston, soon after Isabella Stewart Gardner opened her museum there. Gretchen supposedly intended to wear a favourite green velvet gown, but Sargent insisted she wear pink, thinking of her colouring against the red and gold splendour of the setting. She apparently borrowed her sister-in-law's gown, which did not fit, and Sargent draped a piece of pink fabric around Rachel and styled it as a dress. Bold strokes of whites, pinks and greens zigzag across the canvas, but the clothing is not rendered in detail.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. Rachel Warren Barton and Emily L. Ainsley Fund  
X75787



John Singer Sargent Painting in the Gothic Room, 1903  
Photo: John Templeman Coolidge © Isabella Stewart Gardner  
Museum, Boston



John Singer Sargent Painting in the Gothic Room, 1903  
Photo: John Templeman Coolidge © Isabella Stewart Gardner  
Museum, Boston





John Singer Sargent Painting in the Gothic Room, 1903  
Photo: John Templeman Coolidge © Isabella Stewart Gardner  
Museum, Boston

**Mrs Joseph Chamberlain (Mary Crowninshield Endicott)**

1902

Reproduction of oil painting

Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

Z89438

## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **Hair Ornament**

c.1902

Black feathers and beads on velvet

House of Duvelleroy

founded 1827

### **Fan**

1888

Cream-painted silk in cherub design with inset lace and mother of pearl sticks and guards

These two objects are depicted in Sargent's 1902 portrait of Mary Crowninshield Endicott Chamberlain, reproduced here. The fan was a present she received when she married British politician Joseph Chamberlain in 1888. It was given to her by Sargent's patron Isabella Stewart Gardner and her husband John.

Fashion Museum Bath. X87167, X87168

## Central freestanding wall

### Miss Elsie Palmer, or A Lady in White

1889–90

Oil paint on canvas

In this work, 17-year-old Elsie Palmer wears a white satin tea gown, suitable for daywear at home. Such gowns, which were less formal and structured than typical day or evening wear, were popularised by Liberty's, a clothing and furniture shop in London. The symmetry of Sargent's composition, interrupted only by a pale lavender shawl, creates a hypnotic effect. This portrait was painted in the Tudor chapel at Ightham Mote, a 14th-century manor house in Kent. Palmer's pleated dress echoes the linenfold panelling on the wall behind. Progress on the portrait was slow, as she lamented in her diary.

Collection of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College, Museum Purchase Fund Acquired Through Public Subscription and Debutante Ball Purchase Fund, FA 1969 3.1.  
X75769



Elsie Palmer, London, age 17, 1889

Photograph by Henry van der Weyde. William J. Palmer  
Family Photograph Collection, PP88-40 NO. 50, Colorado  
College Special Collections

## **Sargent's studio at 31 Tite Street**

c.1922

Image courtesy of Museum of Fine Art, Boston

## **Central vitrine**

Sarah Choate Sears 1858–1935

### **Portrait of Helen Sears and Persian Ceramic Pot and Lilies**

c.1893

### **John Singer Sargent Drawing Ethel Barrymore**

1903

#### **Facsimiles**

Sarah Choate Sears was an artist who worked in various media, perhaps most notably photography. She exhibited and published her work widely at a time when photography was becoming established as a fine art medium. In 1904 she joined the Linked Ring, an influential group of fine art photographers based in Britain. Sarah's daughter Helen, whose portrait by Sargent hangs nearby, was a frequent subject, while Sarah was also one of few photographers to capture Sargent at work.

Z89109, Z89119, Z89311

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ROOM 4

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## Room 4, Clockwise from entrance

### **'WONDERFUL POSSIBILITIES'**

Fixed ideas of masculinity and femininity exerted a strong influence on the society in which Sargent worked. He conformed to these expectations in commissioned portraits such as that of the Harvard benefactor Henry Lee Higginson, who appears as the epitome of virile manliness. In his more personal works, however, Sargent was drawn to sitters who used clothing to subvert these conventions, and embraced the expressive possibilities of clothing. Male sitters were depicted in traditionally feminine spaces or in unconventional clothing. Women in his paintings often wore clothes associated with men, either as playful masquerade or as wholesale rejection of gender conventions, such as Vernon Lee, on display here.

Another sitter, Graham Robertson, recalled of his experience sitting for Sargent that 'it was a pity that Oscar Wilde opposite was not looking out of the window: the "wonderful possibilities of Tite Street" were yet unexhausted'. Wilde, one of Sargent's neighbours in London, had previously used this phrase to link Sargent's work with the artistic milieu they shared.

## **Ena Wertheimer: A Vele Gonfie**

1904

Oil paint on canvas

Ena Wertheimer takes on the role of a cavalier, her weapon a broomstick and her cloak perhaps merely a length of fabric. 'A Vele Gonfie' is Italian for 'in full sail', or 'with gusto', and Sargent was inspired to create this unusual portrait by Wertheimer's enthusiasm when she entered his studio. Her costume is said to have been improvised from the robes of the Duke of Marlborough, who Sargent was painting at the same time. The critic Robert Ross described this portrait as 'the only fantastic, and in many ways, the most inspired', of Sargent's 12 portraits of members of the Wertheimer family.

Tate. Bequeathed by Robert Mathias 1996

T07104

**'Nothing but her head shows above a great velvet cloak.'**  
– **Guardian**, 3 May 1905



**'Call yourself a soldier! Look at me!'**  
**'The Pick of the Pictures', Punch**, 10 May 1905

## W. Graham Robertson

1894

Oil paint on canvas

'The coat is the picture. You must wear it'. These were the instructions Sargent gave to the sitter in this portrait as he wrapped a long slim overcoat around him in spite of the summer heat. Robertson was an artist, writer, collector, and a member of the artistic circle around writer Oscar Wilde. Sargent asked to paint him, attracted by 'the lines of [his] long overcoat'. With its twisting pose, jade-handled cane and fluffy poodle, Robertson's portrait was seen by several critics as the epitome of the late 19th-century dandy.

Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson 1940

N05066



'How long! How long!' Portrait of a blasé youth. Even his cane is jade-d'

**Punch**, 11 May 1895

## **Mrs Charles Thursby (Alice Brisbane)**

c.1897–8

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent portrays Alice Thursby as active and engaged, wearing a tailored two-piece walking dress and high-necked shirt. Thursby was brought up in Paris, the daughter of a socialist philosopher whose progressive views she inherited. When she married a British engineer, Thursby was noted as 'discarding the ordinary bridal paraphernalia', dispensing with bridesmaids and wearing a fitted grey dress. Another of Sargent's sitters with a strong interest in art, Thursby studied painting in Paris and later became a notable collector of modernism.

**'She looks like an 18th-century coachman, very dainty.'**

– Clementina Anstruther-Thomson

Newark Museum. Purchase by exchange, 1985. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Pitney, Emilie Coles from the J. Ackerman Coles Collection, Mrs. Lewis B. Ballantine, Mrs. Owen Winston, and the Bequest of Louis Bamberger

X79232



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## Henry Lee Higginson

1903

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent presents Henry Lee Higginson as the embodiment of respectable North American masculinity. He sits at ease in a loosely fitted, brown wool day suit, bathed in golden light. The lighting highlights a scar on Higginson's cheek, which, together with the blue military cloak on his lap, testifies to his service in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry during the American Civil War. Sargent was commissioned to paint this portrait for the new Harvard University Union, largely funded by Higginson, which provided a communal area for Harvard undergraduates. This portrait was no doubt intended to present Higginson as an inspiration to the men of Harvard.

Harvard University Portrait Collection, Gift by student  
subscription to the Harvard Union, 1903

X77254



Higginson as Major of Cavalry, 1863  
**Life and Letters of Henry Lee Higginson, 1921**

## Dr Pozzi at Home

1881

Oil paint on canvas

Samuel-Jean Pozzi was a Parisian doctor and specialist in gynaecology with links to avant-garde arts circles. In public, Pozzi dressed in fashionable tailored suits. Sargent chose to show him 'at home', subverting the conventions for portraits of professional men by depicting the intimacy of domestic space. Wearing a crimson dressing gown and Turkish slippers, he stands before a dark red curtain, as if he were nonetheless on stage. This was the first of Sargent's works to be exhibited at the Royal Academy in London, where his friend Vernon Lee described it as displaying 'an insolent kind of magnificence, more or less kicking other people's pictures into bits'.

The Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

X75771

**'The man in the red gown (not always), a very brilliant creature.'**

– John Singer Sargent



Samuel Pozzi photographed by Paul Nadar  
Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Images

## Sir Philip Sassoon

1923

Oil paint on canvas

Slim and elegant, Philip Sassoon wears a stylish dark suit, loosely tailored, with a white waistcoat and cravat suitable for day wear. Sassoon was known for his flamboyant tastes, but there is little trace of these in this portrait. Sassoon, the son of Aline (Rothschild) and Edward Sassoon, was a politician, an army officer, and a voracious collector. Besides owning a large collection of Sargent's work, he organised exhibitions of artists including 18th-century British painters Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough at his London residence, helping to restore their reputations at a time when their work was neglected.

Tate. Bequeathed by Sir Philip Sassoon Bt 1939

N05052



Philip Sassoon at Port Lympe, 1929

Photo: Howard Coster

Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London

## **Vitrine caption**

Friedman Sternheimer  
late 19th century

## **Folding fan**

after 1888

Glazed cotton leaf, wood handle, brass

Fans are held by many of Sargent's female sitters, but they have long been used by men as well. This man's folding fan was patented in 1888. Although the material looks like handsome leather, the fan is made from stiffened cotton. The leaf folds into thirds and the handle slides up, allowing the fan to be easily carried in a suit pocket.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Oldham Collection  
X86017



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## **Albert de Belleruche**

c.1883

Oil paint on canvas

'Baby Milbank' was Sargent's nickname for his friend, the artist Albert de Belleruche. As a young man Belleruche, who was eight years younger than Sargent, assumed the name of his stepfather, Harry Vane Milbank. Sargent painted him several times, occasionally in costume. In this bold study, he wears a square-necked tunic. Sargent's original intention was to depict Belleruche in historic Italian dress holding a two-handed sword, as recorded in a related drawing. This portrait hung in Sargent's dining room in London, a testament to his affection for Belleruche.

Stevenson Scott Kaminer

X84377



John Singer Sargent, **Standing Figure with a Spear**, c.1883  
Yale University Art Gallery. Gift of Miss Emily Sargent and  
Mrs. Francis Ormond (through Thomas A. Fox)

## Vernon Lee

1881

Oil paint on canvas

Born Violet Paget, Vernon Lee chose her name because 'it has the advantage of leaving it undecided whether the writer be a man or a woman'. Her preference for severe, almost masculine clothing – usually black dresses with standing 'Gladstone' shirt collars – indicate her refusal to conform to contemporary patterns of femininity. Sargent had known Lee since their childhood, and she recalled that he made this vivid sketch in an hour. Sargent painted Lee the same year she published **Belcaro**, a collection of her essays on aesthetics, that she dedicated to writer Mary Robinson, her romantic partner.

Tate. Bequeathed by Miss Vernon Lee through Miss Cooper

Willis 1935

N04787

**'Certainly more like me than I expected anything could –  
rather fierce and cantankerous.'**

– Vernon Lee



Carte de visite of Vernon Lee, 1877  
Colby College Libraries, Waterville, Maine

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ROOM 5

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**Room 5, clockwise from entrance**

## PERFORMANCE

Portraits are performances, negotiated between sitter and artist. Outfits are selected, poses devised, and the outcome observed by an audience. Some of Sargent's sitters, such as Ellen Terry and Carmencita, were professional performers who appealed to Sargent's love of music and theatre. Others, such as Lord Ribblesdale, were society personalities who paid fastidious attention to their daily comportment – the performance of everyday life.

In Sargent's time, dressing up in clothing other than one's usual attire was not limited to professional actors on stage. It was also a popular form of entertainment in costume balls, masquerades and amateur theatre. Inspiration came from art, history, mythology, folk traditions, and Asian and North African cultures. While Sargent was concerned with the painterly possibilities of clothing, paintings such as the portrait of Almina Wertheimer invite consideration of what it means to wear the dress of a culture that is not your own. This gallery includes portraits of people dressing up – both onstage and off – within their own traditions, as well as sitters wearing clothes from other cultures. Each presents a different, often complicated, story about identity.

## Lord Ribblesdale

1902

Oil paint on canvas

The politician and huntsman Thomas Lister, who succeeded his father to become fourth Baron Ribblesdale, personified Edwardian aristocracy. Sargent supposedly asked to paint Ribblesdale, who was fastidious about his appearance (it was said that 'he never stepped out of his picture frame'). After much deliberation, Sargent depicted Ribblesdale in the unconventional hunting costume known as 'ratcatcher' that Ribblesdale habitually wore, rather than a conventional riding habit. The dandyism inherent in the image was satirised in a caricature of the painting exaggerating the proportions of his silk tie and breeches.

The National Gallery, London. Presented by Lord Ribblesdale in memory of Lady Ribblesdale and his sons, Captain the Hon. Thomas Lister and Lieutenant the Hon. Charles Lister, 1916.  
X75781

## Vitrine caption

Cooksey and Co., Hatters

### Hat

late 19th century

Silk

London was the international centre of 19th-century menswear, celebrated for its tailors, shoemakers and hatters. Cooksey had a shop, but also marketed its hats through display and retailers around the world. Top hats, originally made from beaver skin, first became fashionable in the late 18th century. By the 1830s, when the animals had become endangered and their fur expensive, top hats were increasingly made from silk plush. Through the first half of the 20th century, they were symbols of masculine status and respectability, as shown in the portrait of Ribblesdale nearby.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mr William B. Childs  
X86015

## TITE STREET

After moving from Paris to London in 1886, Sargent became part of an aesthetic and artistic circle that included actors, composers, writers and artists. His studio at 31–33 Tite Street in Chelsea had formerly been occupied by the painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Sargent's portrait of the actress Ellen Terry, on display here, encapsulates this creative milieu.

Among Sargent's neighbours was the writer Oscar Wilde, who lived opposite Sargent at number 34. Wilde celebrated the unique character of Tite Street after Sargent painted Ellen Terry:

'The street that on a wet and dreary morning has vouchsafed the vision of Lady Macbeth in full regalia magnificently seated in a four-wheeler can never again be as other streets: it must always be full of wonderful possibilities.'

'The green and blue of the dress is splendid.'

– Ellen Terry

## Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth

1889

Oil paint on canvas

Ellen Terry was a celebrated British actor, particularly known for her Shakespearean roles. She was also an inspiration for numerous artists and writers. Sargent attended the opening night of a production of **Macbeth** on 27 December 1888, and immediately resolved to paint Terry as Lady Macbeth. Having originally planned to depict a scene from the play, Sargent decided to paint Terry in a dramatic pose emphasising her spectacular costume. Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones saw it in progress and made suggestions about the colour, which may account for the difference between the blues of the painting and the greens of the actual dress, on display nearby.

Tate. Presented by Sir Joseph Duveen 1906

N02053

**'From a pictorial point of view there can be no doubt about it – magenta hair!'**

– John Singer Sargent



Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, c.1889

Courtesy of National Trust, Smallhythe Place

## **Vitrine caption**

Alice Laura Comyns Carr  
1850–1927

### **Cloak for the 'Beetle Wing Dress' for Lady Macbeth**

1888

Velvet, silk damask, cotton, metal, glass

### **'Beetle Wing Dress' for Lady Macbeth**

1888

Cotton, silk, lace, beetle-wing cases, glass, metal

National Trust Collections, Smallhythe Place (The Ellen Terry Collection)

X81296, X75773



Alice Comyns Carr was a costume designer, writer, and champion of Aesthetic dress (loose, relaxed clothing). She was Ellen Terry's chief costumer and created this dress, her most famous work, in collaboration with Terry and the designer and dressmaker Ada Nettleship. The dress is crocheted from green yarn and blue tinsel, giving an impression of chain mail. The iridescent wings of jewel beetles add further lustre to the garment. The ensemble is completed with a purple heather cloak ornamented with lions. On stage, it created 'a swim of strange and glorious colour'.

**'You and I ought to have signed that together ... for I could not have done it if you had not invented the dress'.**

– John Singer Sargent to Alice Comyns Carr

## **Almina, Daughter of Asher and Flora Wertheimer**

1908

Oil paint on canvas

Almina Wertheimer wears an entari (a Turkish robe) and a turban decorated with pearls and a feather, and holds an Indian sarod. As a friend of the artist Almina would have collaborated with Sargent on the choice of outfit, and her direct gaze conveys a sense of agency. In this period, European women often wore West and South Asian clothing styled with little regard for their cultural history. At the same time, Ashkenazi Jewish women like Almina were often exoticised within British culture, and associated with stereotypes of a generalised 'East'.

Tate. Presented by the widow and family of Asher Wertheimer in accordance with his wishes 1922

N03713

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## Vitrine caption

Unknown maker

### Üçetek Entari

early 19th century

Silk brocade, metallic lace

As part of their everyday indoor wear, women in the Ottoman Empire would wear an entari, or robe, layered on top of a şalvar (loose, baggy trousers) and a gömlek (chemise). The entari would have been held closed by a belt or shawl and the sleeves extended beyond the fingertips of the wearer. The high slits at the sides of this garment identify it as an üçetek (three-skirt) entari. This particular pattern is associated with silk workshops in the Istanbul neighborhood of Üsküdar. This entari is similar to the one that appeared in some of the paintings Sargent made of friends and family.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. John W. Elliot Fund

X86712



A Jewish lady, from the **Zennaname** of Fazıl Enderunlu, wearing an entari. On paper. © The Trustees of the British Museum

## Vitrine caption

Unknown maker

### **Costume for Carmen Dauset Moreno (Carmencita)**

c.1890

Embellished satin silk

With its relatively short, bell-shaped skirt, 'bolero' jacket, and beaded shawl, the dress in which Sargent painted Carmencita resembles the costumes she wore in other paintings, illustrations, and on film. Sargent kept the dress and, years later, sent it to his friend Sybil Sassoon to wear for an event: 'I have had every cupboard and box ransacked & the Carmencita dress is found ... it is very dirty besides being very tawdry & clinquant [flashy]', Sargent wrote. Afterwards, he congratulated her: 'I am so delighted that the reincarnation of the Carmencita was such a triumph.'

**'He [Sargent] gave me the lovely yellow Carmencita dress & I have it still.'**

– Sybil Sassoon

Private collection. X76910

## **La Carmencita (Carmen Dauset Moreno)**

1890

Oil paint on canvas

Carmen Dauset Moreno (better known as Carmencita) was a Spanish dancer who performed across the United States, Europe, and South America. Sargent found her 'bewilderingly superb', and saw her perform on multiple occasions in New York, where he painted her in a borrowed studio. She also danced at a private party at his studio in 1895. Carmencita was renowned for her whirling, twisting movements, captured in the original footage nearby. Sargent, however, painted her in a statuesque pose. The liveliness of the portrait comes from Sargent's depiction of her shimmering gold and white dress.

Paris, Musée d'Orsay

X75776

Thomas Edison

1847–1931

## **Carmencita Dancing**

1894

Video

Duration: 21 seconds

Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and  
Recorded Sound Division

Z89120



## THE 1889 PARIS EXPOSITION

Sargent's painting **Javanese Dancer**, displayed on the far right of this wall, was inspired by his visit to the 1889 Exposition Universelle – a world's fair held in Paris. Over 32 million visitors attended. Like other 'universal exhibitions' of this type, it represented culture from around the world through a colonial lens. Writer Edward Said described these exhibitions as events in which cultures 'were exhibited before Westerners as microcosms of the larger imperial domain'.

The 'Exposition des Colonies', representing the cultures of colonised peoples, was held on a site separate from the majority of the exhibition. One of the most popular elements was situated here – the kampong javanais. This was an enclosed recreation of a village from the island of Java in Indonesia, then under Dutch colonial rule. 60 people were brought from Java to participate in the exhibition including four young dancers from the Mangkunegaran court: Seriem, Soekia, Taminah and Wakiem, aged 12 to 16 years old. They performed an episode from the Javanese epic Damarwulan.

Sargent and several other artists, writers and musicians were inspired by their experience of visiting the kampong. Sargent produced a number of sketches and paintings of the dancers whose performances he witnessed.

Unknown maker

## **Jarik rujak senthe**

20th century

Cotton decorated with batik process

The garment on display here has a very similar design to that painted by Sargent, hanging on the right. It has been decorated using the batik technique, widely practiced in central Java where the garment was made. In batik, hot wax is used to create patterns on cloth. When the cloth is then dyed, the wax resists colouring. In Sargent's painting the jarik appears gauze-like, showing the dancer's legs through the fabric. The fabric worn by the dancer would have been more robust, as recorded through contemporary photographs and prints. Sargent did not attempt to render the elaborate pattern in detail, but focused on the strong diagonal lines of the design.

Private collection. X89970



Émile-Antoine Bayard, **Javanese Dancers at the 1889 Exposition**. Look and Learn / Illustrated Papers Collection / Bridgeman Images

## Javanese Dancer

1889

Oil paint on canvas

This is a depiction of a dancer from Java, Indonesia. Sargent saw Javanese dancers perform at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris but, although we know their names, it is unclear if this painting is a portrait of a specific individual. She wears a jarik (unsewn skirt cloth) around her waist, a mekak (bodice) on her upper body, a helmet and armlets (likely both of gilded leather), and a highly decorated sampur (sash). In his attempt to capture the slow and elegant gestures of the dancer, Sargent rendered her left arm and hand twice. Despite its scale, this is an unfinished sketch for an unrealised composition.

Private collection

X84961



Four women dancers in the Javanese Village, Paris Exposition  
1889

Retrieved from the Library of Congress

## **Robert Louis Stevenson and his Wife (Frances Van de Grift Osbourne)**

1885

Oil paint on canvas

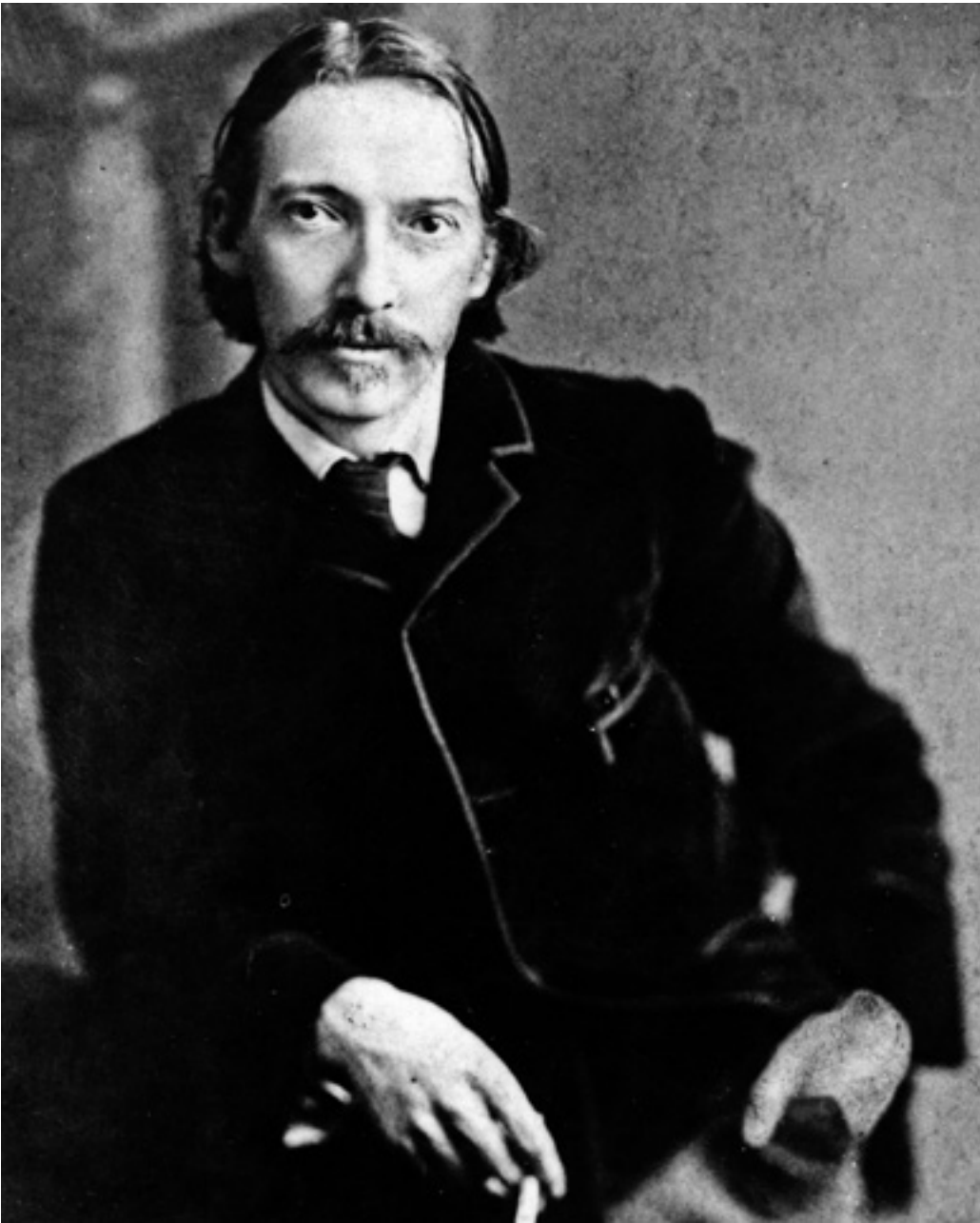
Both a portrait and a staged scene, this painting shows two writers at their home in Bournemouth, England. Robert Louis wears a velveteen jacket; Frances (Fanny) is dressed in South Asian clothing. 'I had put on the dress to show it to [Sargent] and he could not resist putting it into the picture.' During the Victorian era, many people wore clothes from other cultures. Regardless of the wearers' intentions, they often betrayed a disregard for the cultures from which the garments originated. The couple face in opposite directions with Fanny almost out of the frame, creating an uneasy dynamic between them.

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville,  
Arkansas, 2005.3

X83529

**'One blaze of gold and colour and white lace.'**

– Frances Van de Grift Osbourne



Robert Louis Stevenson by James Notman, c.1890–94  
[wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Robert\\_Louis\\_Stevenson-1.jpg](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Louis_Stevenson-1.jpg)

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ROOM 6

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## Room 6, clockwise from doorway

## CUTTING A FIGURE

Clothing can convey status and authority. This is true of military uniforms and robes of state, but it can also be said of designer gowns. Then, as now, sartorial choices at social events were carefully scrutinised and viewed as a reflection of one's social standing. Some of the figures in this room, like Lord Londonderry, came into hereditary titles. Others cultivated social, cultural or political status.

Compelling portraits attracted large crowds, were widely discussed, and frequently reproduced. This in turn accrued social status for those portrayed. Sargent's work was much in demand from sitters seeking an authoritative image of themselves. It is a measure of Sargent's achievement that, while the lives of many of his sitters are little-known today, his images of them endure.



Max Beerbohm, 31 Tite Street, 1908  
Courtesy Museum of Fine Art, Boston

## Édouard Pailleron

1879

Oil paint on canvas

Édouard Pailleron, one of Sargent's first patrons in Paris, was a French poet and playwright. He wears a dark workman's jacket and a loose, white smock-like shirt with red trim and a drawstring collar. His clothing, combined with his casual pose and the dog-eared pamphlet he holds, projects the image of a nonchalant bohemian. Édouard's daughter Marie-Louise contrasted the portrait with another Sargent painted the same year, of his artistic mentor Charles-Émile-Auguste Durand (Carolus-Duran). For Marie-Louise, Carolus-Duran was a bourgeois 'dressed up' in an 'awful starched collar', whereas her father's casual outfit amounted to an 'infraction of the rules'.

Paris, Musée d'Orsay

X75777

## **Madame Ramón Subercaseaux (Amalia Errázuriz)**

1880–1

Oil paint on canvas

Amalia Subercaseaux and her husband Ramón were among Sargent's first clients in Paris. They shared creative interests with Sargent – Amalia played the piano while Ramón was an artist as well as a diplomat. Sargent presented Amalia as a woman at the height of fashion, at ease in her elegant home. Her smart white afternoon dress, with its long, buttoned bodice and pleated organza skirt, is trimmed with black velvet, ribbon and lace. Amalia's pose, sitting at the piano but turned to face the viewer, showcases the train of her dress for maximum decorative effect.

**'A white dress, milky greys, fresh flowers, china decorated with bright Delft blue.'**

– Paul Mantz

The Faye S. Sarofim Collection

X79230

## **Edith, Lady Playfair (Edith Russell)**

1884

Oil paint on canvas

This is among the first portraits Sargent painted in Britain, after he began to explore the potential market in London in the wake of the 1884 Paris Salon. Raised in Boston, Lady Playfair moved to England after marrying the politician and chemist Lyon Playfair. Sargent gave her an imperious pose and matched the chrysanthemums beside her to the tones of her black and gold afternoon dress. He focuses on the lustrous silk satin of her tight-fitting, boned cuirass bodice – so-called because it resembled armour – and the detail of her black velvet choker. The profile view of a dress with a large bustle is unusual in Sargent's work.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Edith, Lady Playfair  
X79231



## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **Evening dress**

c.1885–7, restyled c.1902

Silk velvet with silk plain weave lining

This elegant velvet gown was worn by Louise Inches in her portrait displayed nearby. Comparison of the dress and the painting help to understand Sargent's interventions – note how the dress has two bows on the arms, not one as painted. Inches was pregnant with her third child when she sat for the portrait, and this gown was made with detachable panels to accommodate her changing body. Owing to the cost of fabrics, dresses were often adapted over time in keeping with changing fashions, or to fit another woman.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Anonymous gift in honor of Louise B. Seton

X81297

## **Mrs Charles Inches (Louise Pomeroy)**

1887

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent painted the society hostess Louise Inches in Boston during his first working trip to the US. There, patrons were attracted by the combination of modernity and classical elegance in his work. The painting was exhibited in Boston in 1888, where it provoked much commentary, both admiring and acerbic. 'I think Mrs Inches looks as if she would bring you the head of Holofernes for the asking' wrote one observer, referencing the beauty and hauteur of the portrayal. Like Amalia Subercaseaux, Inches was a talented pianist who is said to have played duets with Sargent during sittings.

**'One of the most brilliant pieces of coloring that has been painted since the days of Titian.'**

**– Boston Evening Traveller, 8 February 1888**

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Anonymous gift in memory of Mrs. Charles Inches' daughter, Louise Brimmer Inches Seton X79237

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## **The Duchess of Portland (Winifred Anna Cavendish-Bentick, born Dallas-Yorke)**

1902

Oil paint on canvas

In his later career Sargent mostly undertook commissions at his London studio, but this portrait was painted at the Portland estate, Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire. The creation of the portrait was laborious – after two weeks of work Sargent destroyed his first attempt and started again – but the result is one of his grandest later paintings. The Duchess of Portland, who was an active philanthropist and president of the RSPB for many years, wears a velvet cloak over a satin evening gown, showcasing Sargent's ability to paint contrasting fabrics.

Private collection

X75775

**'Modernity seen at its best and in the happiest circumstances.'**

– Roger Fry



**The Duchess of Portland by Keturah Collings, 1908**

**RSPB Bird Notes and News (vol. III No.1)**

Image provided by RSPB Library

## **Lady Helen Vincent, Viscountess d'Abernon (Helen Venetia Duncombe)**

1904

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent began this portrait in Venice, posing Lady Helen on the balcony of her apartment overlooking the Grand Canal. She was wearing a white satin dress, but towards the end of their sittings, Sargent scraped it all out and quickly repainted her in black. Both the dress and the pink satin wrap may be products of Sargent's imagination rather than actual clothes. Sargent wrote at this time 'I am in the thick of dress making & painting', making explicit the convergence of art and fashion in his work. During the First World War, Lady Helen became known for her work as a nurse and anaesthetist.

Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama;  
Museum purchase with funds provided by John Bohorfoush,  
the 1984 Museum Dinner and Ball, and the Museum Store.

X84553

**'I am in the thick of dress making & painting.'**

– John Singer Sargent



Lady Helen Vincent, 1899, by Alice Hughes (1857–1939)

Royal Collection Trust

© His Majesty King Charles III, 2023

## President Woodrow Wilson

1917

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's portrait of US President Wilson shows the more relaxed, less ostentatious way he depicted powerful North American men compared to their British counterparts. It was painted during the First World War, when Sargent submitted a blank canvas to a fundraising effort for the British Red Cross. Sargent agreed that he would paint a portrait if someone offered £10,000. The successful bidder had to nominate who would be the sitter. Irish dealer and collector Sir Hugh Lane offered to pay the amount, but died before the painting was made. He left his estate to the National Gallery of Ireland, who decided on President Wilson.

On loan from the National Gallery of Ireland

X84962



**'My sitter is interesting looking, not at all like the Kodaks of him in the papers.'**

– John Singer Sargent



Woodrow Wilson, c.1919

Library of Congress

**Charles Stewart, Sixth Marquess of Londonderry, Carrying the Great Sword of State at the Coronation of King Edward VII, August, 1902, and Mr W.C. Beaumont, his Page on that Occasion**

1904

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent declined a commission to paint Edward VII's coronation in 1902, but made this portrait two years later at the request of the Londonderry family. Lord Londonderry holds the Sword of State, which symbolises the monarch's authority and is held pointing upwards during coronations. Installed among ancestral portraits in Londonderry House, the portrait cemented Londonderry's place within the family lineage.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of an American Private Collector and Museum purchase with the generous assistance of a friend of the Museum, and the Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, M. and M. Karolik Fund, Harry Wallace Anderson Fund, General Funds, Francis Welch Fund, Susan Cornelia Warren Fund, Ellen Kelleraan Gardner Fund, Abbott Lawrence Fund, and funds by exchange from a Gift of John Richardson Hall, Bequest of Ernest Wadsworth Longfellow, Gift of Alexander Cochrane, The Hayden Collection – Charles Henry Hayden Fund, Anonymous gift, and Bequest of Maxim Karolik. X75772



Photograph of **Lord Londonderry and his Page** in the ballroom at Londonderry House (detail). Bridgeman Art Library

## **Colonel Ian Hamilton, C.B., D.S.O.**

1898

Oil paint on canvas

This, Sargent's first portrait of an officer in military uniform, was commissioned by the sitter to accompany a portrait of his wife Jean (on display in the next room). Hamilton appears as Commander of the Third Brigade of the Tirah Expeditionary Force (a campaign fought on the North-West Frontier of British-controlled India, now a province in Pakistan). His brigade had recently quashed a local rebellion to enable the British Raj to regain control of the Khyber Pass, an important trade route. Hamilton, however, was absent from the battle due to a broken leg. He wears a dark blue army greatcoat over his full dress uniform, medals and regimental braid gleaming, hands resting on the hilt of his sword.

Tate. Presented by Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton 1940

N05246

**'The picture might be labelled "Imperialism":'**  
– Art Journal, 1899



Sir Ian Hamilton, c.1910

[wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_Hamilton\\_\(British\\_Army\\_officer\)](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Hamilton_(British_Army_officer))

## Sir Frank (Athelstane) Swettenham

1904

Oil paint on canvas

Swettenham was a British colonial administrator, and governor of the Straits Settlements (most of which now forms part of Malaysia) at the time this portrait was painted. Next to a large globe, Swettenham wears the brilliant white uniform of his post in the tropics, a chivalric star on his breast and a glinting sword on display at his side. He firmly grasps a cascade of red and gold Malayan brocade. This is a smaller version, made for Swettenham, of a large portrait commissioned by the Straits Association. Swettenham's confident pose gives no hint of the tensions that led him to take early retirement that same year.

Lent by the National Portrait Gallery, London

X25292

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## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **The Londonderry Garter**

1814

Diamond motto, set on blue silk, mounted in silver

### **Star of the Order of the Garter**

c.1840

Diamond set motto on blue guilloche enamel ground, cushion cross ruby five stone cross mounted in gold and silver

### **Star of the Order of the Garter**

c.1870

Diamond star with diamond set motto on a blue guilloche enamel ground with central calibr -cut ruby cross mounted in silver and gold



These stars and garter were worn by Lord Londonderry at the Coronation of Edward VII, and in Sargent's portrait nearby. The stars are not painted in detail by Sargent, but recede into the gold embroidery of Londonderry's uniform. The garter on his left leg, however, stands out from the white of his breeches, assuming a particular prominence in the picture as Londonderry thrusts his leg forward.

Victoria and Albert Museum. On loan from The Marquess of Londonderry X87163, X87164, X87165

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ROOM 7

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## **Room 7, clockwise from entrance**

### **'THE VAN DYCK OF OUR TIME'**

Sargent's career in Britain coincided with a revival of interest in historic portraitists such as Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, and Sargent adapted his style to resemble the opulence of the 'grand manner' portraiture they exemplified. The sculptor Auguste Rodin described Sargent as 'the Van Dyck of our time', referencing the 17th-century Flemish artist who became the leading painter of the British court.

Compared with these artists, however, Sargent painted relatively few members of the British aristocracy. His clientele was international, and many of his sitters derived their income from finance, commerce, the arts, or the sciences. During a time of uncertainty for the British aristocracy due to social change and the rise of new sources of wealth, Sargent's work was sought-after by a diverse clientele. A portrait by Sargent might serve as a reassuring symbol of a historic lineage, or announce the arrival of more recently wealthy people into the upper echelons of a changing society.

## **Vitrine caption**

Unknown maker

### **Lace collar**

c.1730s

Linen Argentan needle lace

Fashion Museum Bath

X88824

Blank page

## **Mrs Leopold Hirsch (Mathilde Seligman)**

1902

Oil paint on canvas

Mathilde Hirsch and her husband Leopold were avid collectors of old master paintings, furniture, tapestries and decorative arts. Their passion for art and history seems to have informed Mathilde's gown. Lacemaking was becoming mechanised in the early 20th century, and stylish dresses of the day often featured lace trimmings, but Mathilde's collar is made of antique needle lace. Her outfit and three-quarter pose evoke 17th-century Spanish artist Diego Velázquez's portrait of Philip IV.

Tate. Lent from a private collection 1994

L01713



**'Conceived without imitation ... yet in the true spirit of the old masters.'**

**– Daily Telegraph, 22 February 1921**



**Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, King Philip IV of Spain, 1644**

©The Frick Collection

## Sybil Sassoon, The Countess of Rocksavage

1913

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent painted this portrait as a wedding present for his friend Sybil Sassoon, who married the Earl of Rocksavage, George Cholmondeley, in 1913. He wrapped her in a cashmere shawl (another item he gifted to her), draping and bunching it to painterly advantage. The portrait consciously evokes the work of the late 17th-century painters Peter Lely and Godfrey Kneller, whose work graced the walls of Sassoon's new home, the Palladian estate Houghton Hall. Sassoon undertook an ambitious restoration of Houghton, and played an important role in the Women's Royal Navy Service during the First World War.

Private collection

X88825

**'In the style of Lely, but with all the dexterities of modern times.'**

**– Spectator, 9 May 1914**



**Peter Lely, Two Ladies of the Lake Family (detail), c.1660**

Tate

## **Mrs Frank Millet (Elizabeth Merrill)**

1885–6

Oil paint on canvas

Elizabeth (Lily) Millet and her husband Frank, a painter of historical genre scenes, were both North Americans who spent much of their lives abroad. She later ran an interior design firm in New York. The Millets were part of the group of artists and writers who gathered in the village of Broadway, in the Cotswolds, where Sargent painted **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose** (for which their daughter Kate was the first model). Sargent stayed with the Millets while working on that painting. When he saw Lily wearing the blue shawl, he is said to have insisted on painting her immediately.

**'The lady in the twisted shawl.'**

– Henry James

Private collection

X79234

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## Freestanding wall

### Lady Agnew of Lochnaw (Gertrude Vernon)

1892

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent visited Lady Agnew in her London home to discuss her portrait and consider several different gowns, finally choosing one of white silk with sheer organza sleeves and lavender trimmings. He painted quickly (the work was completed in just six sittings), using long diagonal strokes to render her purple sash and the lights and shadows that define the cloth on her lap. This portrait was a great success when exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1893, and cemented Sargent's position in Britain. Soon after he was elected as a member of the Royal Academy.

National Galleries of Scotland. Purchased with the aid of the Cowan Smith Bequest Fund 1925

X75786

**'Sharp as nature, this combination of blues and violets with its acid flavour, as of wild fruit.'**

– R.A.M. Stevenson



Photograph of Gertrude Vernon by John Edwards, 1889  
By kind permission of Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw Bt

## The Honourable Pauline Astor

1898–9

Oil paint on canvas

Born in New York, Pauline Astor moved to Britain with her parents in 1891, where her father William Waldorf Astor purchased the grand homes of Cliveden and Hever Castle. Carefully avoiding motifs that might signify nouveau-riche style and wealth, Sargent paints Astor in the manner of 18th-century British portraitists such as Thomas Gainsborough. Unlike most of his female sitters, she is painted not in an opulent interior but in a landscape reminiscent of Cliveden. She wears a white silk gown and lilac shawl – elements Sargent used in his earlier portraits of Lady Agnew and Lily Millet nearby – and holds a fur muff.

On loan from a private collection

X81086





Thomas Gainsborough, **Portrait of Elizabeth Beaufoy**, c.1780  
The Huntington Art Museum, California

## **Mrs Carl Meyer (Adèle Levis) and her Children, Frank Cecil and Elsie Charlotte**

1896

Oil paint on canvas

This portrait, which echoes French artist François Boucher's portrait of Mme de Pompadour, is opulent in every way. Against a background of rococo panelling, Adèle Meyer sits on a Louis Quinze sofa. Her voluminous satin skirt spreads across the canvas, while her pearl necklace is tangled around her feet. Meyer was passionately interested in music, theatre and opera, and became good friends with Sargent. She said, of sitting for this portrait, 'that summer of sittings and talks with Sargent has ever been one of my most cherished memories'.

Tate. Bequeathed by Adèle, Lady Meyer 1930, with a life interest for her son and grandson and presented in 2005 in celebration of the lives of Sir Anthony and Lady Barbadee Meyer, accessioned 2009

T12988



François Boucher, **Madame de Pompadour**, 1756, Bavarian State Painting Collections – Alte Pinakothek Munich

## Vitrine caption

Unknown maker

### Fan

c.1870

Chantilly lace, red tinted abalone sticks

Of all the 'jewels of feminine ornamentation, the Fan ought to have priority', declared popular French journalist and fashion writer Octave Uzanne, who devoted a book to the subject in 1882. Fans were standard accessories for women, and they appear in the hands of many of Sargent's sitters, including Adèle Meyer, exhibited nearby. Pine trees, palm trees, insects and animals appear on this elegant French example. Chantilly lace, handcrafted using bobbins, is renowned for its delicacy.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Oldham Collection

X86018

## Vitrine caption

Adèle Meyer

1862–1930

Clementina Black

1853–1922

## Makers of Our Clothes

1909

Book

The opulence of Sargent's portrait of Adèle Meyer belies the social conscience which led to her involvement in numerous causes once her children had reached maturity. Meyer and the writer and activist Clementina Black were both involved with the Anti-Sweating League, which campaigned against poor working conditions. Together they wrote **Makers of Our Clothes**, which documented 'an investigation ... into the conditions of women's work, in London, in the tailoring, dressmaking, and underclothing trades'. In 1910 Meyer referred to herself as 'a humble social worker'.

Tate. Purchased 2023. Z88953

## Jean, Wife of Colonel Ian Hamilton (Jean Muir)

1896

Oil paint on canvas

Jean Hamilton was a collector and patron whose husband, Sir Ian Hamilton, was also painted by Sargent (his portrait hangs in the previous room). Sargent's portrait of Jean uses the same format as his celebrated **Lady Agnew of Lochnaw** on display nearby. The chair, drawing from Sargent's repertoire of studio props, is the same in both pictures. Hamilton chose the colours of her home to complement her paintings, and her husband wrote that 'the gleaming white satin [of her gown] ... was shown off by the jade green walls of her drawing room' where this painting hung.

Tate. Presented by Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton 1940

N05247

**'How many other painters could produce such solid and convincing modelling ... using only these light tones?'**  
– **Spectator**, 16 May 1896



Jean Hamilton in Worth coat, from **Jean**, 1942, by Ian Hamilton

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ROOM 8

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## Room 8, clockwise from centre partition

### OUTSIDE FASHION

Throughout his career, alongside the formal portraiture for which he is most celebrated, Sargent produced another kind of painting. In these works, figures are situated in landscapes and are not identified by name, pointedly distinguishing them from portraits. Here, in seemingly casual but meticulously arranged compositions, Sargent experimented with fabric and texture in ways not possible within the strictures of society portraiture. He explored light and shadow, using long, broad strokes of thick paint for a highlight, or shorter, drier touches to capture the sparkle of sunlight.

Sargent travelled extensively during the summer months, and made many paintings of his 'intertwingles' – as he called the travelling companions he depicted in various configurations. In these works he luxuriates in an abundance of both fabric and paint, transforming garments into imaginary landscapes made from whole pieces of cloth. The figures in these paintings are nonchalant or occupied, allowing the clothing to take centre stage.

## Freestanding wall

### Lady Fishing – Mrs Ormond (Violet Sargent)

1889

Oil paint on canvas

'I am beginning to work on a picture of my sister dressed in white against a background of blue water with clouds reflected in it', wrote Sargent to his friend Claude Monet the year this work was painted. It was started in Fladbury, Worcestershire, but left unfinished; a faint horizontal line marks Violet's fishing pole. With its large size and flattened perspective, it seems less a portrait than a decoration. The folds of Violet's dress echo the reflected clouds, and the decorative lines at the bottom of her skirt repeat the ripples in the water at the top.

Tate. Presented by Miss Emily Sargent in memory of her brother through the Art Fund 1929

N04466

## **In a Garden, Corfu**

1909

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's friend and fellow painter Jane de Glehn reads in the garden of the Villa Soteriotisa in Corfu, where Sargent and his sister Emily spent several weeks with a group of friends. The two women either side of her are both Eliza Wedgwood, indicating that the composition is Sargent's invention. De Glehn wears a stiff blue-white taffeta skirt owned by Sargent. It was completely out of fashion in 1909, when skirts were becoming slimmer and were usually made of softer fabrics, but Sargent loved the shapes it created, and included it in a number of paintings.

**'It is ... above all the bold rhythm of the composition that arrests us.'**

– Claude Phillips

The Middleton Family Collection

X77262

## Cashmere

c.1908

Oil paint on canvas

Seven figures, wrapped in the same Kashmiri shawl, pass from left to right in a carefully staged composition reminiscent of an ancient frieze. Sargent's niece, Reine Ormond, who studied art at the Slade School, London and later became a collector, modelled for them all. Dorothy Barnard, one of the two children in **Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose**, also modelled some of the drapery. Rather than conveying character, Sargent's concern here was with the rhythm of the procession. Here, perhaps more than in any other of his works, a garment of clothing is the protagonist of the painting.

**'A procession of young girls clad in a white cashmere shawl – a harmony in grey and white.'**

**– Westminster Gazette, 1 May 1909**

Private collection

X77265

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## The Pink Dress

c.1912

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's niece Rose-Marie Ormond, Violet's daughter, poses for her uncle in a wooded landscape in the Alps. More than half the composition is given over to her dress, its voluminous skirts spread around her like a lily pad. Related watercolors reveal that the pink dress had flounced sleeves and a layered skirt, both edged with black trim. Sargent omitted almost all of those details here, instead concentrating on a landscape of folds, and of light and shadow, rendered in a calligraphic, abstract assortment of brushstrokes.

Private collection

X77261





Rose-Marie Ormond, 1911, from Karen Corsano and Daniel Williman, **John Singer Sargent and his Muse**, 2014

## Group with Parasols (A Siesta)

1904–5

Oil paint on canvas

The **Daily Telegraph** remarked that this scene of two women and two men showed 'a magnificent disregard of the conventional proprieties'. A group of friends, Dorothy ('Dos') Palmer lies at the left; her lover, Lawrence ('Peter') Harrison (wearing a panama hat and white shoes) reclines at the right. His brother Leonard ('Ginx') Harrison, in brown trousers, lies next to him, his head in the lap of Lillian Mellor. The figures are almost indistinguishable from the grassy Alpine bank upon which they rest. Casual and informal in both clothing and pose – as well as in Sargent's loose application of paint – the scene seems spontaneous, uninhibited and erotically charged.

The Middleton Family Collection

X86714

**'The flannel trousers, the brown boots, the sunshade, are accessories perfectly rendered.'**

**– Illustrated London News, 30 June 1906**



Sargent painting **Simplon Pass: Reading**, 1911 from Karen Corsano and Daniel Williman, **John Singer Sargent and his Muse**, 2014

## Nonchaloir (Repose)

1911

Oil paint on canvas

Rose-Marie Ormond reclines, perhaps asleep, on a sofa in an elegant, unidentified interior with gilded French furniture and a very large, framed painting. But the chief character here is cloth. A dark patterned fabric covers the sofa, its design echoing the motif of the Kashmiri shawl wrapped around Rose-Marie. The stiff skirt may be Sargent's bluish taffeta studio prop, which appears in other paintings in this room. The French title 'Nonchaloir' translates as indifference, or a lack of concern. Sargent may also have been punning on the French word 'châle' (shawl).

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Curt H. Reisinger,  
1948.16.1  
X75790

## The Black Brook

c.1908

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's niece Rose-Marie sits alone with her thoughts near an alpine stream. Although she is recognisable, this is not a portrait. Her face and torso are lost in shadow and rendered with only summary strokes. Sargent paid much more attention to the sunlit expanse of her white skirt, and the shawl wrapped around her elbows which spreads away to her right. This particular item is one of a number of Kashmiri shawls which Sargent owned. They feature in several of the paintings in this room. All but one of these shawls, on display nearby, have been lost.

Tate. Purchased 1935

N04783

## Two Girls in White Dresses

c.1911

Oil paint on canvas

Sargent's Alpine paintings were confections, in which his companions wore sturdy boots and hiking skirts to traverse the countryside, then changed outfits as he directed. As in other paintings in this room, the same person (Sargent's niece Rose-Marie) modelled for both figures in this unusual, foreshortened composition. It was first exhibited under the title 'Falbalas', the French word for flounces, which conveys the way that Rose-Marie's dress and shawl fill the composition. Critics compared the image to 'a flowing mountain stream', and a 'liquefaction of clothes'. This painting once belonged to Philip Sassoon, whose portrait by Sargent is also in the exhibition.

Private collection

X75791

## The Chess Game

1907

Oil paint on canvas

In 1907 Sargent travelled to the Italian Alps, bringing with him an assortment of garments that he may have acquired on his travels in West Asia. Here, playing chess beside a brook, Rose-Marie wears a Turkish entari, pink slippers and pantaloons, and a wrapped cashmere shawl. The man in the cap – dressed in Turkish şalvar (loose trousers) and a long jacket – is Sargent's valet Nicola d'Inverno. As generations of European artists had done before him, in this painting Sargent is using traditional West Asian clothing to create a fantasy scene, far removed from the original context of these garments.

Allen Family Collection

X77264

## **Femme en Barque (Lady in a Boat)**

c.1885–8

Oil paint on canvas

This painting, probably painted during Sargent's first years in Britain, is an early example of the figures in landscapes assembled in this room. His model is appropriately dressed for a summer day, in a lavender blouse and white skirt. She wears a straw hat and keeps a parasol by her side. Already Sargent seems focused on the folds and play of light and shadow across her skirt. In later paintings of figures in landscapes Sargent would become more adventurous and experimental in the clothing and poses that he depicted. This painting was once owned by Sarah Choate Sears, whose portrait by Sargent is in this exhibition.

The Middleton Family Collection

X86715



## **Vitrine caption (centre)**

Unknown maker

### **Shawl**

c.1908

Goat hair (pashmina) twill tapestry

Indian shawls were frequently exported to Britain by the East India Company (a powerful British trading company that advanced imperialism) from the late 18th century. Their popularity as fashionable wear led to the manufacture of imitations in British towns. These included Paisley, in Scotland, whose name became commonly used to describe imitation Indian shawls and their characteristic 'inverted teardrop' or pinecone design. By the time of Sargent's series of paintings depicting shawls they had fallen out of fashion in Britain.

Private collection

X77266

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ROOM 9

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## Room 9, clockwise from entrance

### POSTSCRIPT

By 1907 Sargent had effectively stopped painting commissioned portraits. Much of his later career was dedicated to large-scale mural projects in Boston, for the Public Library and Museum of Fine Arts. He also served as a war artist during the First World War, when he made his largest oil paintings. Fashion was changing too. From the 1920s, the widespread availability of ready-to-wear clothing for women offered wider access to fashionable clothing, as well as less-fitted styles than those painted by Sargent.

Sargent still occasionally painted portraits, usually of his friends. He was particularly close to the Sassoon family, several of whom he painted over an extended period. Sargent's final portraits are those of an artist with nothing left to prove. His late portrait of Sybil Sassoon is an expression of the intimacy and affection developed over many years between artist and sitter.

Max Beerbohm

1872–1956

## **John S. Sargent**

1910

Watercolour, graphite and ink on paper

Sargent painted few self-portraits. Our image of him is largely provided by others, such as Max Beerbohm, who frequently caricatured the artist.

Sargent was diffident and reserved in public, and favoured the sober suits of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Encountering Sargent in 1899, the poet Wilfred Scawen Blunt described him as 'a rather good-looking fellow in a pot hat, whom at my first sight I took to be a superior mechanic'.

Tate. Presented by Sir William Rothenstein in memory of Gerard Chowne 1917

N03199

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## **The Countess of Rocksavage (Sybil Sassoon)**

1922

Oil paint on canvas

This is one of very few portraits painted by Sargent after the First World War, and a measure of his attachment to Sybil Sassoon, an earlier portrait of whom is also in this exhibition. Another homage to the historic portraiture that Sargent loved, this painting resembles a 16th-century portrait of Anne of Austria, Queen of Spain. The distinctive gold brooch in the shape of a double-headed eagle is the Habsburg insignia, and the jewel appears in both paintings. Sybil's brother Philip owned the brooch, while the rope of pearls she is wearing had belonged to their mother.

Private collection

X79859





Bartolomé González after Anthonis Mor, **Queen Anne of Austria**, c.1616

© Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado

## **Vitrine caption (centre)**

House of Worth

France, 1858–1956

### **Fancy dress costume for Sybil Sassoon, Countess of Rocksavage**

c.1922

Silk velvet, silk satin, metal thread lace

In addition to providing elegant gowns at the height of fashion, the House of Worth also supplied 'fancy dress' for its upscale clientele to wear for costume parties, masquerades, and other diversions. Sargent commissioned this dramatic lace-trimmed black gown and matching cape. Sybil Sassoon had a penchant for dressing up – she once borrowed the dress formerly belonging to Carmencita (on display in this exhibition), owned by Sargent, to wear to a fancy dress ball.

Private collection

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## **Sargent and friends at Port Lympne, August 1920**

Clockwise from top left: John Singer Sargent,  
Sybil Sassoon, Philip Sassoon and George Horatio Charles,  
5th Marquess of Cholmondeley

Image courtesy of Houghton Hall

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