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MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

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NEW YORK

PAINTINGS

by

CHARLES H. DAVIS, N.A.

1856-1933

Harold

Mar. 27 - Apr. 16

1934

MACBETH GALLERY

15 East 57th Street  
New York



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CHARLES H. DAVIS, N.A.

1856-1933

March 27th-April 16th, 1934

MACBETH GALLERY

15 East 57th Street  
New York



By LOUIS BLISS GILLET

## TITLES OF THE PAINTINGS

- |                                    |       |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. EVENING ROSE                    | 10x12 |
| 2. THE BONFIRE                     | 20x27 |
| ✓ 3. SUMMER IN THE HILLS           | 25x30 |
| 4. BELOW THE HILL                  | 17x21 |
| 5. CLOUDS                          | 25x30 |
| Lent by Charles C. Riggs, Esq.     |       |
| 6. THE PURPLE BUSH                 | 17x21 |
| 7. EARLY SUMMER                    | 25x30 |
| 8. THE FIRST SNOW                  | 17x21 |
| ✓ 9. SUNNY HILLSIDE                | 40x50 |
| Awarded Saltus Medal, N.A.D., 1921 |       |
| 10. WINTER MORNING                 | 17x21 |
| 11. CLEARING IN JUNE               | 29x36 |
| Lent by Arthur S. Dayton, Esq.     |       |
| ✓ 12. SPRING ON THE HILLSIDE       | 29x39 |
| Lent by Mrs. Henry A. Everett      |       |
| 13. SUMMER EVENING                 | 20x27 |
| 14. SPRINGTIME                     | 13x16 |
| 15. GREEN SUMMER                   | 25x30 |
| 16. AUTUMN                         | 20x27 |

(Continued on next to last page)

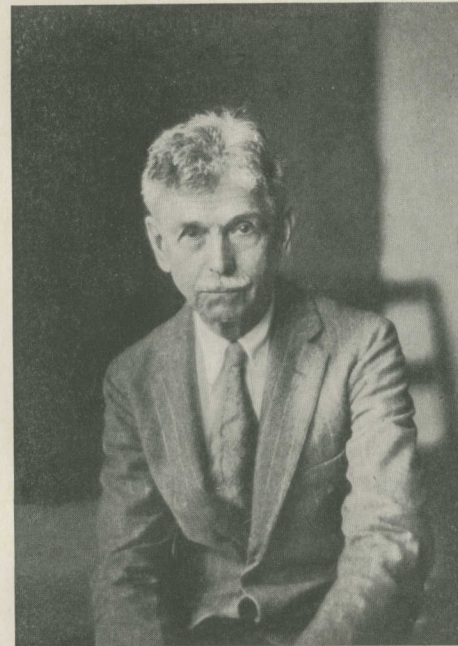
UNTIL high summer of last year there lived and worked quietly in our midst a man who contributed as much to the landscape painting of America as any other artist of his generation. No man was ever more passionately devoted to his art, more assiduous and untiring in the pursuit of it, and the harvest of work he left to succeeding generations is rich and varied.\* The kind of landscape for which Charles H. Davis is best known—green rolling hilltops shep-

be based on sound craftsmanship, in his utter self-forgetfulness in the result striven for, in the unstinted amount of time and pains devoted to its achievement, he was like the old masters. But, on the other hand, despite his early residence in France, he never sacrificed one jot of his Americanism. He looms large as one of our most out-and-out American artists, with least obligation to foreign influences.

He was born in Amesbury, Massachusetts, where he grew up a vexatious and delightful young neighbor to the Quaker poet. After leaving school at fifteen he worked for five years in a carriage factory. Love for music—he played the clarinet—led him into art. A crude, romantic landscape displayed in a shop window arrested his attention; he did some experimenting with water colors and decided that he wanted to learn to paint. His good schoolmaster father thereupon agreed to pay his expenses, at considerable sacrifice, for two years' study at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The proficiency he showed there and the earnestness of his aspiration led a big-hearted business man of his native town into what proved to be the best-paying investment of his life. He advanced young Davis a thousand dollars with which to go to Paris to complete his art training.

Davis soon gravitated to the Barbizon country, which accorded so well with his developing art that a landscape which he painted there was accepted for the Salon the following spring. This was the beginning of the honorable recognition, in the form of prizes and awards, that followed him to the end of his life. He met with the experience, unusual with young artists, of realizing enough money from the sale of pictures sent home to remain abroad nearly ten years.

The landscapes that he was painting at the time of his return to the United States in 1890 were almost pure Barbizon: simple in composition, solidly drawn, sombre and severe in tonality, but already characterized by nice relation of planes and an aim at expression not bounded by realism. If you compare these early canvases, of which the "Evening" owned by the Metropolitan Museum is an example, with the landscapes of the last phase



CHARLES H. DAVIS

herded over by clouds in illimitable blue—has made his name almost synonymous in our minds with the joy and spiritual effect of our cleared days in summer. Mr. Davis lived for over forty years in a quiet little Connecticut town, finding inspiration in the familiar New England countryside he had known from boyhood. In his insistence that all art must

\* Charles H. Davis died at Mystic, Connecticut, August fifth, 1933, in his seventy-seventh year. The Memorial Exhibition, retrospective as well as summary of his latest work, is being held at the Macbeth Gallery, New York, this month.





*Courtesy of the Estate of Charles H. Davis*

CHARLES H. DAVIS: LOOKING SEAWARD

of his art you will need no further evidence of the range of his development. After 1894 he tended to a more luminous style, purer color, and more striking opposition of tones. But, although he had a period of broken, hatched technique, struggling for light, which may in part have been the influence of the Impressionists, he never adopted their "separated color." One thinks of Manet and Twachtman in connection with Davis far more than of Monet or even Sisley.

In a nature as loyal as Mr. Davis's to the predilections of instinct and taste you might expect a conservatism inhospitable to change. But the reverse was true. His sympathy with present-day movements in art was pronounced; much in his later method shows the influence of the moderns: with him, too, it was "the older, the bolder." All his later paintings were imaginative creations, in which what interested him most was the mystic abstraction that lay behind the representative embodiment. Though as indigenous as Whittier and Robert Frost to New England, which he loved as a

son, and with as discerning an eye as Miss Reese's for the poetry in everyday life, he had, like all the greater poets of nature from Theocritus to Wordsworth, as much understanding of the larger import of the familiar as for its narrower interest. He was universal as well as local in his appeal. He will live as the poet-painter not only of New England but of nature in the large.

Soon after his return to America, Mr. Davis had been attracted to the town of Mystic by its name, and had bought there a fine old New England house. Here he lived for the rest of his life, content with domestic privacy and books, and refreshed by the visits of friends and younger artists. I can see him now, standing in his spacious studio, as central in his home as the hearth, with hands brought lightly together but not clasped, head slightly bent and absorbed in self-detached study and appraisal of some canvas on the easel before him. A lean, sinewy man with the face of a dreamer and an alert, very keen, dark eye.



CHARLES H. DAVIS: CLOUDS AND HILLS  
THE CITY ART MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS





Courtesy of the Estate of Charles H. Davis

CHARLES H. DAVIS: AUTUMN IN CONNECTICUT

Davis will take his place with Hardy, Millet, Tolstoi, with the artists who have depicted nature as it is interrelated with human lives. Animals, figures, and buildings never assume an important place in his landscapes, were used only as a means to an end, but the subject he prefers is never far from the habitation of men. However forlorn and remote the scene, you feel that things have happened there, that not far off, though no building be in sight, once stood the fireside hearth with all its homely associations. Men have long walked and worked and loved these orchards, meadows, and uplands. His countryside is the retentive, if unresponsive, repository of all the varied and changeful experience of life.

Mr. Davis would have agreed, I think, with Sir Joshua Reynolds in the following:

"There is an absolute necessity for a Painter to generalize his notions; to paint particulars is not to paint Nature, it is only to paint circumstances. When the artist has conceived in his imagination the image of perfect beauty

and the abstract idea of forms, he may be said to be admitted into the great council of Nature." For though Mr. Davis knew intimately every salient feature of the New England landscape, and had painted all these faithfully from nature, his great pictures latterly were all created in the studio. He sharply distinguished between a sketch and a picture. All things noted afield had, for a picture, to be harmonized in accord with some preconceived idea of beauty. His method of landscape painting is therefore opposite to the realists, who are satisfied if they can exactly reproduce the bit of nature immediately before their eyes. "I do not think," Mr. Davis once said, "that a piece of nature in a frame, though wonderfully well done, is very desirable as a picture effect;—eloquent arrangement, I may say, is for me the first thing to strive for." He was always more concerned about fidelity to mood than fidelity to naturalistic detail. All his greatest pictures were in this way imaginative creations.

Some fifty years ago Mr. Davis exhibited



CHARLES H. DAVIS: UNDER SUMMER SKIES  
CANAJOHARIE ART GALLERY, NEW YORK

a small upright canvas in the pale blue sky of which hovered a lovely white cloud, of such ethereal lightness that you watched to see it dissolve and float away. It attracted the critics' attention; upon it they centered their praise; and from the innate love and skill shown there derives what has probably been the outstanding element in Davis's landscape—clouds in every variety of sky and weather, serenely poised, wind-whirled, soaring, but always amazingly buoyant and live. They are the most dramatic element in his work as well as that which shows, perhaps, his most individual technical proficiency.

Davis's predilection was for rich, subtle, subdued rather than high-keyed or gorgeous color. It was the sumptuous pattern in autumn that engrossed him rather than the heyday of its splendors. Even the cloud-ranging summer skies, which he painted again and again and so variously, are often quiet-toned rather than shot through with brilliancy of sunshine; sometimes these blue skies, and the look of the earth under, like our northern

days, are even bleak in tone. Best of all he loved those sober, expectant, gray seasons of the year, between winter and spring, or between the fall of the leaf and the fall of snow. And nowhere is the nicety of his genius better seen than in the differentiation of these various moods of late autumn and earliest spring. Aspects of November and March are very similar; often one not intimately versed with nature would be at a loss to tell which was which; yet of each Davis has made a separate and distinct identity. He loved these graver interims, and never tired of meditating and capturing them. That the public did not respond to them as promptly and generally as it did to his summer pastorals disappointed him because he believed these moody and reflective phases as true an expression of himself and his art, and a rarer landscape revelation.

Davis always had a profound sense of the fundamental, of the ground as in a relation almost metabolic to everything it supports. He mastered the relationship between the tree and the soil whence it grew, and between the



larger elements of landscape and the underlying, all-sustaining earth.

The aspects of snow which he painted are unique, as different from other American painters of snow as you would expect with the idiosyncrasy of true genius. Davis loved the delicate "dawning-soft," hushed snow scenes, with little of the rigor of winter about them. In the interpretation of no other season is the sensitiveness and subtlety of his feeling, his lyricism, more pronounced. His subtlety also shows itself in his moonlight pictures, wistful and entranced romances of shadow and gleam—not half so well known as they deserve to be—, but best of all in his tender idylls of spring.

For form Davis had a veritable passion. Mrs. Davis tells a story of her husband at the Metropolitan, in the absence of the guard, running his hand over one of the torsos for sheer delight in the exquisiteness of its form. Naturally, then, one of the outstanding merits of his landscape painting is his effective mas-

tery of planes. On a visit to Spain he was impressed by El Greco's habit of composing by carefully considered arrangement and contrast of color rather than by linear perspective and construction in the ordinary way. Henceforth interplay of color with Davis was in itself an instrument of form, and he came to depend upon a pattern of lights to weld his composition into a unity.

He had always been sensitive to rhythm and grace of line. He watched and studied the movement and pose of his two handsome Maltese cats as Rodin watched the models in his studio. His later compositions were characterized more and more by organic rhythm. Of the rhythmical relationship between earth and sky he had always made a special study. The secret of the charm of many a landscape lies in the integrating correspondence between rhythm of cloud formation and contour of ground, disposition of lights, or pattern of stone wall and thicket on the earth beneath.



CHARLES H. DAVIS: WINTER MORNING  
COLLECTION OF A. E. NOLDER



*Courtesy of the Estate of Charles H. Davis*

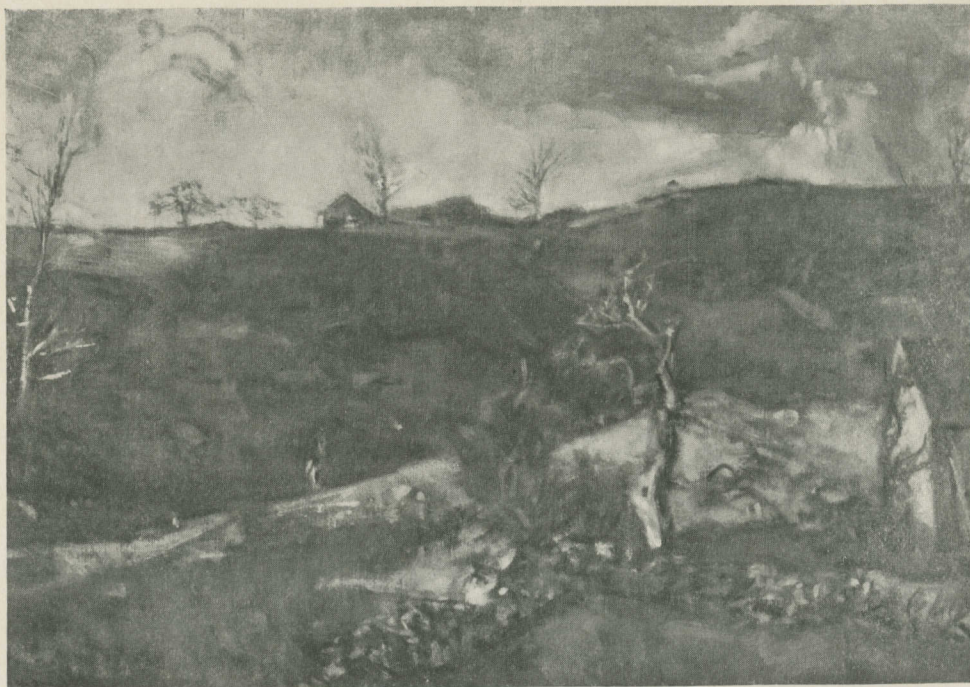
CHARLES H. DAVIS: GROWING COLDER

From the study of the moderns Davis learned the rugged strength that may be given a composition through the use of angles and the angular line. His canvases were not only increasingly freer and bolder in brush stroke, but richer in texture of surface. In depth and richness of tone his impressionism is in sharp contrast to Twachtman's. Davis made frequent use of a trick of vertical accent which he taught himself in the early days of his painting, to give an upward thrust to his compositions. This often accentuates to good purpose the upward sweep of his landscapes, especially when they mount up to magnificence of cloud pageantry. He frequently worked for days on his skylines alone, and many a carefully studied detail there—tiny white spire midst horizon elms or distant tree etched against glowing cloud—not only gives scale but provides a focus for the whole canvas.

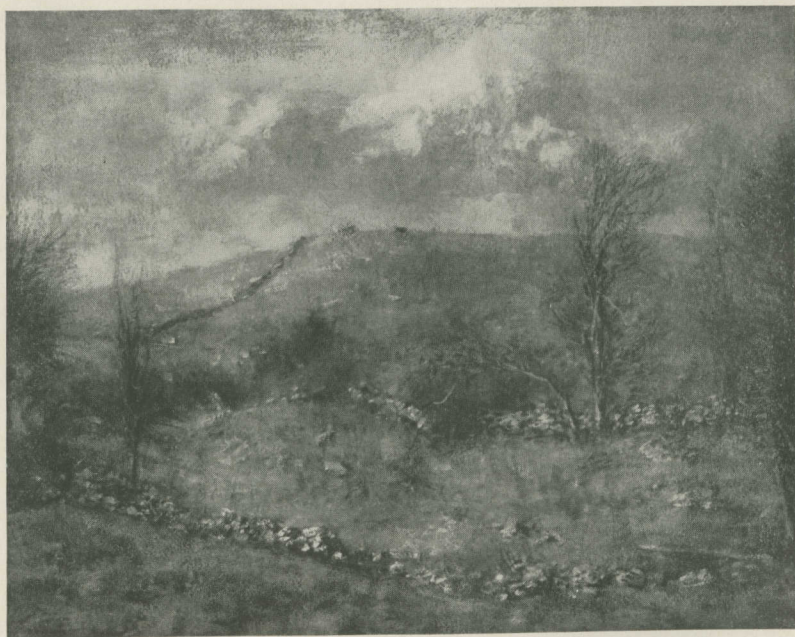
In insight Davis's pictures are unsurpassed by those of any other American landscape painter. If you are a bit skeptical of some intensely blue pool dropped into a foreground, or find yourself wishing that some of

the properties, so to speak, of a landscape, some cow or horse or tree, had been more immediately studied from nature, or perhaps that there might be a little more out-of-door brilliancy of sunlight, you are always won over in the end by what his painting as a whole succeeds in expressing. What he catches to a unique degree is the intangible thing—the temper of the weather, the turn or mood of the season, the peculiar character of a country. In his masterpieces, it went even further than this, for Davis was a mystic at heart. They, like the greatest pictures generally, always impress you with what lies behind them. It is the spirit or mystery lying behind each scene or mood of nature that he was constantly making the study of his thought. That was the abstraction his art was always pursuing, and of which he aimed to make each of his paintings the living and speaking embodiment. In this way Charles H. Davis came to be the inspired revealer of hidden realities, not only in New England field, hill, and sky, but also in the great nature common to all.





CHARLES H. DAVIS: SUNLIGHT'S INTERVAL  
FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION



CHARLES H. DAVIS: SPRING ON THE HILLSIDE  
COLLECTION OF MRS. HENRY A. EVERETT, LENT TO THE CLEVELAND  
MUSEUM OF ART

## TITLES OF THE PAINTINGS

(Continued from page 2)

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|--|-------|
| 17. ON THE WEST WIND   | 29x36 |
| 18. BLITHE JUNE<br>Lent by Bartlett Arkell, Esq.                             | 30x25 |
| 19. JOYOUS DAY   | 29x36 |
| ✓ 20. GROWING COLDER   | 20x27 |
| ✓ 21. IN EARLY MAY<br>Lent by W. J. Johnson, Esq.                            | 25x30 |
| 22. NORTHWEST WIND<br>Lent by Art Institute of Chicago                       | 50x40 |
| ✓ 23. NOW APRIL'S HERE<br>Lent by Bartlett Arkell, Esq.                      | 25x30 |
| 24. WINTER TWILIGHT  | 20x27 |
| 25. ABOVE THE SOUND  | 25x30 |
| 26. TIME OF THE RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD<br>Lent by Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts | 29x36 |
| 27. EDGE OF THE WOOD   | 25x30 |
| 28. WINTER MORNING   | 20x27 |
| 29. AUTUMN MOSAIC  | 25x30 |

All of the pictures not lent for this exhibition are the property  
of the Estate of Charles H. Davis and are for sale.



