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LET'S PARTY LIKE IT'S 1899
Life's Pleasures: The Ashcan School's Brush with Leisure, 1895-1925
at the Detroit Institute of Arts March 2-May 25

February 5, 2008 (Detroit)—Hairstyles and fashions are different, and there are more options today—movies, the internet, video games—but in some ways, Americans spend their leisure time much as they did 100 years ago. People still hang out at bars, eat in restaurants, walk in the park, watch sporting events, attend concerts and go to the theater. *Life's Pleasures: The Ashcan School's Brush with Leisure, 1895-1925*, a special exhibition on view March 2-May 25 at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) explores how city-dwellers at the turn of the last century spent their leisure time through 80 paintings by American artists known collectively as the Ashcan School. The exhibition is organized by the DIA, and has traveled to Nashville and New York.

The Ashcan school refers to a group of artists centered around artist/teacher Robert Henri, who instructed his students to “paint what is real.” These artists were men of their times, fully engaged with the urban environment; they painted what they lived. Many works feature bars and cafes where they hung out or depict performances they attended. Several were former newspaper illustrators used to sketching events while they were happening, to capture a vivid sense of the “real.”

Much of the Ashcan artists' subject matter dealt with the grittier side of city life. While working as an illustrator at the socialist newspaper *The Masses*, George Bellows drew a picture of bums taking scraps from a garbage can and titled it “Disappointments of the Ash Can.” The editor was offended by Bellows' portrayal of the downtrodden and his failure to embrace the moral socialist cause. He wrote about Bellows and the other artists who worked there: “They want to run pictures of ash cans and girls hitching up their skirts in Horatio Street . . . For my part, I do not care to be connected with a publication that does not try to point out the way out of a sordid materialistic world.” The term “ash can” stuck, even though the artists' work is far broader than the label suggests.

The Ashcan artists also painted another side of urban life—that of leisure-time activities of varying social classes. From parks, prizefights and performances to bars, beaches, ballet, and everything in between, *Life's Pleasures* brings together works by Robert Henri, George Bellows, Alfred Maurer,

William Glackens, John Sloan, George Luks, Guy Pène du Bois, and others, that bring the art of having fun to life.

“Visitors will find these painting by America’s first modern painters truly engaging,” said Graham W. J. Beal, DIA director. “The overall picture is one of zest for life and delight in the pleasures of modern urban America—very different from the grim and grimy images of downtrodden immigrants often associated with the Ashcan circle.”

What is remarkable about the works in the exhibition is that they realistically capture not only the people and activities, but also evoke the atmosphere surrounding them. In one of the more famous paintings in the exhibition, the DIA’s own *McSorley’s Bar* by John Sloan, the viewer is transported to a dusty, dark bar where one can almost smell the damp, smoky air. George Bellows, a former newspaper illustrator, painted a scene from a famous prizefight between Jack Dempsey and Luis Angel Firpo. Bellows was in the audience when Firpo sent Dempsey flying out of the ring, and his painting captures the excitement and drama of the moment.

Other leisure-time themes include Dining Out, Fine and Performing Arts, Sports and Recreation, and The Outdoors.

A fully illustrated 250-page catalogue published by the Detroit Institute of Arts and Merrell accompanies the exhibition.

Tickets, which include museum admission and an exhibition audio tour, are \$12 for adults, \$6 for ages 6-17, DIA members free.

A complementary exhibition drawn from the DIA’s collection, *Give it a Rest: People at Play in American Prints and Drawings, 1895-1945* will be on view April 2-August 3. These approximately 100 works on paper are dominated by the prints of John Sloan, George Bellows, Glenn O. Coleman, and Martin Lewis. Their images form a rich reflection of casual times in daily life. Grouped around these scenes of play and leisure are images by other artists such as Childe Hassam and Guy Pène du Bois. The early era is represented by several colorful lithographs created for popular magazines by Edward Penfield and William Carqueville and the range of the exhibition is expanded to include works made by artists during the late 1930s who were employed through the Works Progress Administration. This exhibition is free with museum admission.

Programs and Special Offerings

On Saturdays at 4 p.m. from March 15 to April 19, the DIA’s Detroit Film Theatre will present **Celluloid Pleasures: American Pastimes of the Silent Era**. The free matinees will feature live musical accompaniment. These include films featuring Douglas Fairbanks, W.C. Fields, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd.

Circa 1900: Celebrating American Turn-of-the-Century Arts – March 27-31

This national symposium includes a day and a half devoted to the Ashcan School with receptions at the Manoogian collection and the Scarab Club. Arts and Crafts will be the focus of the next two days, with lectures, visits to Pewabic Pottery, the Guardian Building and other architectural gems. A day-long trip to Cranbrook rounds out the symposium. Call 313-833-4025 for information or to register.

Beginning Saturday, April 5, artist **Richard Lewis** paints a portrait from a live model in the same vein as Ashcan painters such as Robert Henri. He will complete the portrait over the next four Saturdays while visitors watch him work.

Frank Deford, National Public Radio commentator and senior editor at Sports Illustrated, will give a talk entitled “Sports: The Hype and Hypocrisy” on April 6 at 2 p.m. This is a ticketed event.

Friday Night Live will feature different music groups configured from paintings in the show. For example, a painting by George Luks depicts a guitarist, flute player and vocalist. The same type of trio will perform live.

During the April 9 **Friday Night Live**, special **Gallery Moments** will feature the **Aerial Angels**, a female circus act performing tightrope walking, an aerial hoop and other daring feats.

CafeDIA will serve ale from **McSorley’s Bar**, shipped in specially from New York.

Guided tours of works in the DIA collection dealing with leisure time will also be available as are Speakers Bureau talks for adult groups (call 313-833-1510).

Hours and Admissions

Museum hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m.–10 p.m. Fridays, and 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$4 for ages 6-17, and DIA members are admitted free. For membership information call 313-833-7971.

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The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), one of the premier art museums in the United States, is home to more than 60,000 works that comprise a multicultural survey of human creativity from ancient times through the 21st century. From the first van Gogh painting to enter a U.S. museum (*Self Portrait*, 1887), to Diego Rivera's world-renowned *Detroit Industry* murals (1932–33), the DIA's collection is known for its quality, range, and depth.

Programs are made possible with support from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit.