



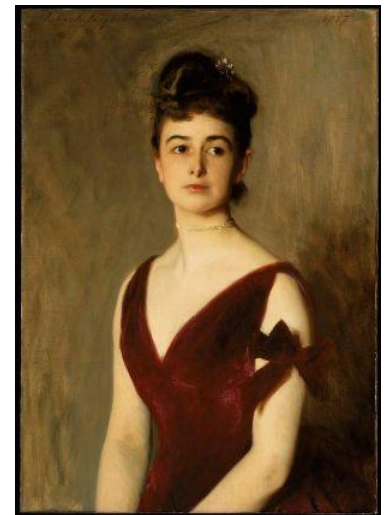
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TIES THAT BIND: BOSTON & JOHN SINGER SARGENT

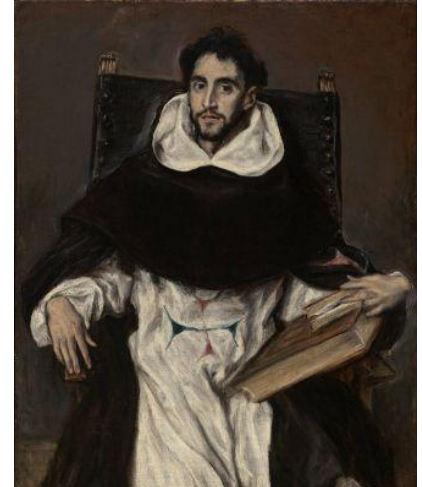
Born in Italy to American parents, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) lived his life as an expatriate. However, he considered Boston to be his American home, maintaining many ties to the city and its citizens. Sargent held his first solo exhibition in “the Hub” and painted many of its most prominent individuals—society leaders, artists, musicians, and collectors. All three of Sargent’s decorative cycles for public buildings are in the area, ensuring that his works are always on view. And over the years, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), has been committed to the artist, buying its first oil in 1905, a suite of watercolors in 1912, and commissioning him to decorate the Museum building. The MFA has also presented major exhibitions of his work, including a memorial exhibition in 1925, his first comprehensive retrospective in 1999 and the first display dedicated solely to his watercolor paintings in 2013. As Sargent put it, describing the disposition of his watercolors, he would be pleased to think “that their home would be in Boston, where so many other things of mine belong.”

- In early 1888, Sargent held his first-ever solo exhibition at Boston’s St. Botolph Club—for gentlemen interested in the arts—which featured several works now on display at the MFA, including *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882) and *Mrs. Charles E. Inches* (Louise Pomeroy) (1887).
- Sargent’s masterpiece, *El Jaleo*, was a hit at the Salon, an exclusive art exhibition held annually in Paris, and was acquired there by Bostonian T. Jefferson Coolidge. On view in Boston galleries in 1882, Coolidge later lent the painting to Isabella Stewart Gardner, who then convinced him to part with it; today it is dramatically displayed at Gardner’s museum.
- Sargent’s portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner (shown in the 1888 St. Botolph Club exhibition) drew many comments due to the forthright pose and revealingly tight dress worn by Boston’s most avid patron of the arts. Her husband, upset by the attention the portrait was receiving, refused to allow the work to be shown in public again during his lifetime. Today it is on view in Boston at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.



Mrs. Charles E. Inches (Louise Pomeroy), 1887, was displayed in Sargent’s 1888 solo exhibition at Boston’s St. Botolph Club

- While visiting Boston, Sargent often stayed with friends, among them Mrs. Gardner, Sarah Choate Sears and the Fairchilds (all of whom he painted). When not with friends he stayed at Boston's best hotels, including the Hotel Vendome (located on Commonwealth Avenue) and the Copley Plaza Hotel.
- Sargent became an important art consultant for not only private collectors, but also for the MFA. He recommended many purchases to the Museum, including El Greco's *Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino* (1609), acquired in 1904.
- When in Boston, Sargent often borrowed studio space from friends. He painted in fellow artist Frederic Vinton's studio on Newbury Street and in the Gothic Room of Mrs. Gardner's Fenway Court. For the MFA's murals, however, he needed a much larger space, and rented a studio in the Pope Building, at 221 Columbus Avenue in the South End.
- Sargent's commitment to Boston, and the city's conviction that he was the greatest artist of his day, is apparent in his creation of what he considered the most important works of his life—his murals. In 1890, Sargent was commissioned to paint a major scheme of mural decorations for the Boston Public Library, in what is now referred to as Sargent Hall. The work, *Triumph of Religion* (1890-1919), altered the whole tenor and focus of his life by adding public art as a pillar of his career. By 1916, the MFA had approached him to decorate their new building on Huntington Avenue. His allegorical murals and bas-reliefs depict classical mythology and emphasize the museum's role as the guardian of fine arts. In 1920, Harvard University commissioned him to craft a World War I memorial at Widener Library.
- Sargent had plans to leave from London for Boston on April 16, 1925 to oversee the installation of the final murals he created for the MFA—sadly, he passed away in his sleep on the eve of his departure.
- On November 3, 1925, the MFA honored Sargent with a memorial exhibition and unveiled the last works he completed before his death, the majestic murals in the Museum's Colonnade.
- In 1999, the MFA offered the first modern retrospective of the artist's work, *John Singer Sargent*, which included 160 of Sargent's greatest oils, watercolors and studies for mural paintings. Works on display included *Madame X* (1883-4), *Isabella Stewart Gardner* (1888) and *Carnation Lily Lily Rose* (1885-86). Also in 1999, the Museum completed an extensive conservation and restoration project of Sargent's murals in the Rotunda and Colonnade.



Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino, 1609, El Greco, was purchased by the MFA in 1904 on the recommendation of Sargent

- In addition to the MFA, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Boston Public Library, Sargent's work is included in many other area collections, among them the Harvard Art Museums, the Boston Athenaeum, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Worcester Art Museum, the Addison Gallery of American Art, the Peabody Essex Museum, and The Sargent House Museum, located in Gloucester, MA. The house, built in 1782 for Judith Sargent Stevens Murray, was the home of sea merchants, patriots and community leaders. John Singer Sargent, a descendant of Judith, loved the house and its ties to Post-Revolutionary Gloucester.

*The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), is recognized for the quality and scope of its encyclopedic collection, which includes an estimated 450,000 objects. The Museum's collection is made up of: Art of the Americas; Art of Europe; Contemporary Art; Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa; Art of the Ancient World; Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Textile and Fashion Arts; and Musical Instruments. Open seven days a week, the MFA's hours are Saturday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 4:45 p.m.; and Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 9:45 p.m. Admission (which includes one repeat visit within 10 days) is \$25 for adults and \$23 for seniors and students age 18 and older, and includes entry to all galleries and special exhibitions, including **John Singer Sargent Watercolors**. Admission is free for University Members and youths age 17 and younger on weekdays after 3 p.m., weekends, and Boston Public Schools holidays; otherwise \$10. Wednesday nights after 4 p.m. admission is by voluntary contribution (suggested donation \$25). MFA Members are always admitted for free. The MFA's multi-media guide is available at ticket desks and the Sharf Visitor Center for \$5, members; \$6, non-members; and \$4, youths. The Museum is closed on New Year's Day, Patriots' Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For more information, visit mfa.org or call 617.267.9300. The MFA is located on the Avenue of the Arts at 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.*

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