

John Singer Sargent



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John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), the famous portrait painter, spent his childhood traveling around Europe with his American expatriate parents. After studying at Paris's Ecole des Beaux Arts, he launched his career at the Paris Salon. But scandal ensued after he exhibited his most famous portrait, Madame X. The daring (at the time) picture of a beautiful socialite in a provocative dress, her shoulder strap slipping off, created such a stir among its viewers that Sargent eventually repainted the strap into a more proper position and relocated to London. There he continued portrait painting. Creating lush images full of light and incredible brushwork, "[He] breathed new life into the tradition of grand manner portraiture. Like his great predecessors he made his sitters look nobler, more beautiful than they were in reality.... What Sargent brought to the tradition that was new and different was his ability to infuse into his portraits a sense of the immediate and the actual, as if what we see before us is life unfolding as it really is." In 1907, the portraitist abandoned the craft and focused primarily on mural commissions, like the one for the Boston Public Library, and landscape painting. This book, the catalog to a traveling exhibition that hits the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, among other venues, includes three essays on Sargent's life and work and detailed background information for all the paintings shown.

It is a manageable 285 pages, with 171 color and 85 black-and-white images.

--Jennifer Cohen