

CHARLES HOPKINSON

PICTURES FROM A NEW ENGLAND PAST



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Cover: Elly with Larkspur (Cat #8), c.1914

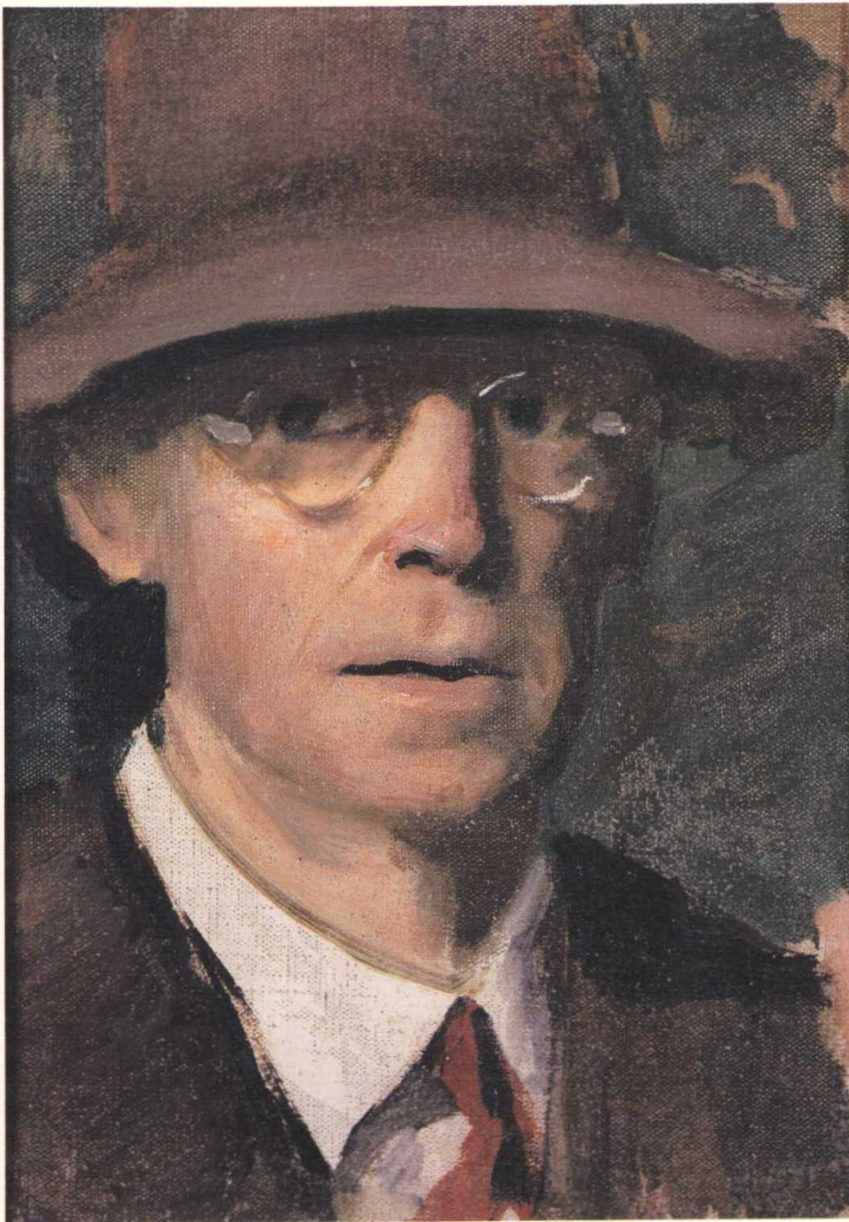


Plate 1. Self-Portrait [Cat. #27], c.1920

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FOREWORD

It is a fact that some artists of interest get less attention from historians than they should. This exhibit, which is the first major exhibition of Charles Hopkinson's work since shortly after his death in 1962, is thus an attempt to refocus attention on a long career of high productivity and sustained quality that has not been previously shown in quite this context. Hopkinson's contributions to the art of New England are many and the fact that he was selected for inclusion in the Armory Show, which heralded the advent of modernism in this country, is only one indicator of his artistic relevance. To be a productive artist for seventy years is an achievement of some importance, and that combined with his sustained exploration of new ways of working is even more remarkable.

The Museum is honored to aid in the reevaluation of Hopkinson's career and is pleased to be presenting such an outstanding array of art for the viewing pleasure of our gallery visitors. A special debt of gratitude is owed to those family members who have guarded his production and kept the memory of his high artistic aspirations alive. This exhibit could not have been organized without the efforts and professionalism of Leah Lipton. The Danforth Museum is proud of the many projects she has done for it in the past, and looks to her future endeavors with anticipation.

Robert J. Evans
Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition would not have been possible without the encouragement and cooperation of the entire Hopkinson family. I am especially grateful to Charles Hopkinson's daughters, Mrs. J. Henderson Barr, Mrs. Isabella Halsted, Mrs. Alfred Rive, and Mrs. William Shurcliff, for their active and generous participation in every aspect of this project, and also to the children of Hopkinson's fifth daughter, the late Mrs. Lovell Thompson: Mrs. Mary Clarke, Mr. John Gibbon, Mrs. Marjorie Masek and Mrs. Alice Saltzman. I thank Thomas Halsted, James Masek and Edith Jane Eaton for helping to assemble the paintings at Manchester. Special thanks are due to Joan Hopkinson Shurcliff and William Shurcliff whose extraordinary archives on Hopkinson were made completely available to me. Their willingness to share their extensive store of information with me is a contribution whose value cannot be overstated.

Dr. Brucia Witthoft, my colleague at Framingham State College, read the manuscript for this catalogue and offered welcome and valuable suggestions. At the Danforth Museum of Art, I especially want to thank curator Elizabeth Wylie, who unfailingly provided much needed assistance with grace and competence, and to acknowledge the rest of the Danforth staff, especially Sarah Catalano, Gerrye Paradis and Matt Kierstead. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the director of the Danforth Museum, Robert Evans, for his superior problem-solving abilities and his wise counsel.

Leah Lipton
Framingham State College



Figure 1. View from Piazza at Manchester [Cat. #38], n.d.

CHARLES HOPKINSON

1869-1962

Charles Hopkinson enjoyed an active and successful painting career that spanned more than sixty years and brought him honors and acclaim. Today, his reputation rests largely upon the commissioned portraits of prominent men which are now in public collections: university presidents and professors, lawyers, bankers, philanthropists, poets. Often called the "court painter of Harvard" because of the thirty or more portraits he produced for that institution, he found original and vivid ways to paint the conventional official portrait. But Hopkinson was equally well-known in his lifetime for his bold and innovative watercolors, and his evocative portraits of children. Both are virtually unknown to today's public because most of these paintings are in private and family collections. This exhibition provides an opportunity to acquaint ourselves with these two facets of his talent, and to reassess, in modern terms, an important Boston artist.

From as early as 1900, Hopkinson's work was frequently exhibited and widely reviewed, almost always in superlatives. His 1928 one-man show at the Montross Gallery in New York was called "the outstanding watercolor event of the year, and this includes the Marin exhibition. . . . the most dazzling conjuring of color and form in the new expressionistic mode that any American artist has accomplished in this medium." Henry McBride, the noted critic for the *New York Sun*, wrote in May, 1925, "It appears that he is our best . . . it would be difficult to discover in our midst a portraitist of more all round competence." Again in the *Sun*, in January, 1931, a second reviewer declared, "About the strongest card we have to play against the avalanche of French art that confronts us this week is Charles Hopkinson, the ace of American portrait painters." His popularity did not diminish throughout his long life. In 1948, *Time Magazine* called him "the Dean of U.S. portraitists," and *Boston Globe* critic Robert Taylor echoed this phrase in 1953, adding that Hopkinson was, at the age of eighty-four, "just as revolutionary, in his own way, as the vanguard of the latest style."

The rare negative view was expressed by fellow-artist Philip Leslie Hale, who, in the *Boston Sunday Herald* in 1906 found Hopkinson's colors "dingy", his children's cheeks too red, and their character vague and incomplete. In a passage that perhaps reveals more about Hale than it does about Hopkinson, he writes, "It is evident that Mr. Hopkinson likes to paint children. He seems to feel a sympathy with their cold, nervous, capricious, adorable little natures." And Henry McBride, in the review quoted earlier, compared Hopkinson unfavorably with John Singer Sargent. He thought Hopkinson lacked Sargent's "magic" with the brush,

and complained that in his treatment of women, "[Hopkinson] concentrates on making them seem good. Ladies far prefer being dangerous."

Charles Sydney Hopkinson was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on July 27, 1869. His father, John Prentiss Hopkinson, founded and was headmaster of the Hopkinson School in Boston. Charles later claimed that his interest in art emerged at the age of ten, when he began drawing cows grazing along the edges of the sidewalks near his Craigie Street home, and that his first successful picture was a symbol of a barking dog.

After four years at Harvard, distinguished chiefly by his drawing cartoons for the Harvard *Lampoon*, he spent a summer in desultory travel in England and Europe. In the autumn of 1891 he enrolled at the Art Students League in New York, where he studied briefly with J.W. Twachtman (1852-1902). He married Angelica Rathbone, a fellow-student, in 1893, and, together they went to Paris to study at the Académie Julian. Hopkinson later recalled his encounter there with the French painter William-Adolphe Bougereau (1825-1905) who, he reported, would approach each student to murmur, "C'n'est pas mal, mais c'n'est pas assez" (It's not bad but it's not enough) and then move on to the next. (Hopkinson, *Atlantic Monthly*, 73) It was at the Louvre that he learned the most, he said, making copies of old masters that he later exhibited in Boston.

Charles and Angelica separated in 1896, and he returned to his family in Cambridge until his divorce in 1899. The only fruit of their marriage is the full-length portrait of Angelica holding a monkey in her arms, exhibited in Paris in 1895. (Pvt. Coll., Ottawa)

In 1901 he travelled to Holland where he was impressed especially with the group portraits of Frans Hals, and to Spain, where he copied paintings by Velázquez at the Prado in Madrid. During this time, he also spent several winters in Roscoff, a small, stony village on the north shore of Brittany, living with a carpenter and his family and painting dark scenes of Brittany fishermen.

While in Cambridge, Hopkinson had developed a close association with Denman W. Ross, a Craigie Street neighbor fifteen years older than himself. A lecturer on design at Harvard and a collector of fine arts, Ross had formulated a color theory based on a "set palette," a rather elaborate arrangement of predetermined colors and tones from which a painting would be made. Hopkinson wrote in a 1951 unpublished memoir, "I owe a very great deal of my aesthetic education to him; and to him the almost life-long habit of arranging the colours (sic) on my



Plate 2. The Piazza Door [Cat. #5], 1911



Plate 3. Three Little Girls [Cat. #6], 1911



Figure 2. Self-Portrait [Cat. #25], c.1900

palette in a systematic fashion, as well as following principles of more or less geometric pattern in composition."

Hopkinson retained an active interest in a theoretical approach to color through the 1920s, stimulated by the work of Carl G. Cutler, a fellow artist whose technique of the "spinning disk" he adopted for awhile. This involved placing paint on a small cardboard disk impaled on a peg that was rapidly turned by a battery-driven motor. The resulting blend of colors on the turning disk was seen in terms of light rather than pigment, with unexpected results. For example, a disk painted orange might have part of its edge painted black, thus blotting out the light from this section. As Hopkinson explained it, "when this disk is rapidly spun, you see the center of the disk a bright orange, but the edge appears a reddish dull brown, the value and tone of a shadow cast on any orange-colored object. Three shadow colors of different degrees can be obtained in this way." He discovered that wedges of blue and yellow spun together on the disk appear to the eye as violet, rather than the green which would result from blending blue and yellow pigments. The artist would then match in paint the color his eyes saw on the spinning disk, and place the mixture on his palette to use when appropriate. Highlights were determined by painting the edges of the disk with white or with colors representing reflected light of sky, sea or nearby objects, and, again, the results were mixed in advance. He said that this method enabled him

to work quickly and get immediately life-like results. His use of this method can be seen in the painting *Family Group* (Cat. #14), and in the three portraits of the signers of the Versailles Peace Treaty, in the National Museum of American Art.

Even after he stopped using the spinning disk, he retained a vital interest in color theory. His letters to his daughters, and especially to Isabella (called Ibbby) while she was at the Art Students League in New York, are full of instructions and exhortations. (Archives of American Art) On February 22, 1928, he wrote to her, "Isn't it a grand and glorious feeling to put the white value on and feel yourself creating a form? But it's more so when you have just the right tone for a highlight on your brush and presto! You've done it." At times his instructions became lengthy and specific, yet he always conveyed his pleasure both in painting and in thinking about *how* to paint. For example, this discussion of how to achieve form through color, written to Ibbby on February 6, 1929: "The shadow of anything is the same color (or we say hue) in shadow that it is in light. What you see on the light side is the *local color* plus reflected blue-white light (if it comes through a skylight) that makes a pinkish-grey orange. Now the complementary of pink, which is violet-red, is green. So you *think* you see greenish color in the shadow . . . Oh! It is so interesting and makes painting so exciting. My, what a dull world for bankers and brokers and matinee girls!" In an undated letter from this same period about his interest in the spinning disk, he stated that in *Family Group* he faithfully used this method, "and you know what existence those figures have." Then, perhaps feeling that his opinions might be causing her conflicts at school, he cautions her not to try to explain this to her teacher, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and not to argue with him, but to learn from him all she can.

Hopkinson strongly believed that a portrait should have a deliberately chosen color *scheme*, not merely be an attempt by the artist to reproduce the colors he sees before his eyes. "Think of it as a keyboard of a piano," he said, "high notes and low notes with almost innumerable modulations. . . . These tones must all be arranged in order on the palette as well as in the mind." (Watson, 35) He further held that "a portrait should exist in a world of art and should not resemble a reflection in a mirror; [that] its shapes and outlines should as much as possible . . . be in a geometric pattern in harmony with the dimensions of the canvas on which it is painted. . . . The artist who paints merely to hit off a likeness or, what's worst, to please the sitter, is lost." (Watson, 72)

That Hopkinson painted with his mind as well as his eye can be demonstrated in this exhibition. *Three Little Girls* (Plate 3) and *The Piazza Door* (Plate 2) were both painted in 1922 when his daughter Mary (Maly) was six years old. She is the child standing at the

table in *Three Little Girls*. In *The Piazza Door*, which is conclusively dated to 1911 by a description of it in a newspaper review of that year, the same child appears to be nearer nine or ten. The artist has elongated her, stretched her out, in order to make her body fit the vertical composition of the painting and fill the space created between the green shutter and the glass. This was clearly an artistic decision, outweighing the need to represent the child as she actually appeared. It was more important to produce a satisfying abstract design and to conform to the principle of harmonizing the subject with the dimensions of the canvas.

Hopkinson's professional career had been launched with portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cummings and their infant son, Edward Estlin (later the poet e e cummings), painted in 1896. (Mass. Hist. Soc., Boston) In that same year he was invited to send a picture to the Annual International Exhibition at the newly opened Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, giving him an opportunity to widen his horizons beyond Boston. He was included annually in that exhibition for the next fifty years, and served several times as a juror for the show.

Charles Hopkinson had married Elinor Curtis (1869-1947) on March 14, 1903. Her father was Greely Stevenson Curtis, and her mother, Harriot Sumner Appleton, was the daughter of Nathan Appleton, one of Boston's most prominent citizens. Harriot's half-sister was Fanny Appleton Longfellow, wife of the poet. After a four-month honeymoon in Europe, the young couple lived on Mount Vernon Street on Boston's Beacon Hill, where, in January 1904, their first daughter, Harriot (known as Happy) was born. Late in 1903, Charles rented a studio at 5 Park Street, where he held his first one-man show, but he soon moved into the new Fenway Studios at 30 Ipswich Street. He was one of the first artist-occupants of this famous building, which is still a home for artists today, and he maintained a studio there for the rest of his life.

Charles and Elinor had five daughters, and she was his companion in travel, his business and financial manager, and a devoted source of support through a forty-four year marriage. Elinor Curtis had four unmarried sisters. With Charles's three sisters, and their own five daughters, Charles Hopkinson lived a life surrounded by caring women.

Elinor Hopkinson's parents had property in Manchester, Massachusetts, on a high bluff overlooking the sea. The family built a house there for the young couple to rent. They called it Sharksmouth, after the configuration of the rocks below the house. The house stands on the edge of a promontory with a 180° view of water and small islands. Marblehead harbor and even the Boston skyline are visible on clear days. This view became

an unending source of inspiration for many of Hopkinson's watercolors. (Cat. #30-39)

Early portrait commissions came to Hopkinson primarily through neighbors and friends. He was a member of the Tavern Club, a group of artists, writers, doctors and other men interested in the arts and good conversation. The painting which he regarded as his "first really vigorous and living portrait" was of Dr. Francis Sedgwick Watson (1853-1942), a fellow-member of this club, and a former student at John Hopkinson's school for boys. The success of this portrait attracted others.

A major boost to his career was his inclusion in the famous 1913 Armory Show in New York. This exhibition, organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, is remembered today as the first public showing in America of the work of the French modernists, including Cezanne, Van Gogh, Picasso and Duchamp, but a group of notable Americans were also invited to participate. Hopkinson had four works in the show, the *Three Little Girls* of 1911, and three watercolors, unidentified today. Although most viewers found the American art timid and provincial when compared to the European section, conservative critic Frank Jewett Mather, writing on March 13, 1913 in the *Nation*, called the American contribution "representative only of the extreme left of our art." Included were works by George Luks, George Bellows, John Sloan, Maurice Prendergast, and John Marin. Mather spoke of the "militant atmosphere"



Figure 3. Self-Portrait [Cat. #29], 1961



Plate 4. Story-time [Cat. #1], 1909



Plate 5. Three Dancing Girls [Cat. #3], 1910

of the American exhibit and complained that, aside from a few older men like Albert Ryder, Childe Hassam and Alden Weir, "only 'progressive' work was admitted." He criticized the strident color of the post-Impressionists, saying, "if you crave the new, why, you are entirely welcome to it." Apparently he found Hopkinson's work less threatening than most because toward the end of the review he remarked, "Charles Hopkinson shows a delightful group of children, all tea-rose and pale blue."

Perhaps even more important than the Armory Show in advancing Hopkinson's career was his selection as one of eight American artists chosen by a specially appointed National Art Committee to paint the members of the Versailles Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. The resulting collection of portraits was intended to serve as a nucleus for a new National Portrait Gallery as part of the Smithsonian Institution. In addition to Hopkinson, the selected artists were Cecilia Beaux, Joseph De Camp, John Johansen, Jean MacLane, Edmund Tarbell, Douglas Volk, and Irving Wiles.

The eight painters were sent to Paris in the summer of 1919, when the confusion of the post-war period was at its height, and the process of making peace was still in progress. Since Hopkinson was somewhat less well-known than most of the others, he was assigned the less important subjects. Tarbell painted President Wilson, Herbert Hoover, and Marshall Foch; Douglas Volk was given General Pershing and Lloyd George; and Cecilia Beaux painted Premier Clemenceau. Hopkinson painted Premier Ionel Bratianu of Romania, Prince Saionji Kimmochi of Japan and Premier Nicola Pasic of Serbia, and, as it happened, this proved to be an advantage, since the three men delegated to him were able to give him more time than the more active participants, and their colorful backgrounds and appearance presented opportunities particularly suited to his talents.

In 1921 the Versailles portraits were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, as well as in several other cities. Contemporary newspaper accounts agree that the results were largely disappointing. The portraits were called conventional, dull, fumbling and colorless — all, that is, except for the Hopkinson paintings. The *New York Herald* called them "the three liveliest and most intelligent portraits in the collection;" the *New York American* reported, "The surprise of the exhibition is the extraordinary work of Mr. Hopkinson . . . too much can not be said for his achievement;" and F.W. Coburn, writing in the *Boston Sunday Herald*, called the exhibition a "triumph for Hopkinson." He found in these three paintings a "thrilling interest, both on account of the psychological revelation of the personalities and because each is a beautiful piece of decoration." W.G. Dooley, in the *Boston Globe*,

spoke of the "deadly prosaic dullness of feeling in these [Versailles] paintings," but singled out Hopkinson's work as "the real outstanding artistic successes of the collection."

In fact, although they are in storage today at the National Museum of American Art (not the National Portrait Gallery, whose collection is restricted to American sitters) the Hopkinson paintings are exceptionally beautiful. The artist has treated each man differently. Prince Saionji's portrait has the delicacy, tonality and subtle geometry of Japanese art. The romantically portrayed Bratianu sits in an ornate gold chair before a baroque blue and gold drapery. The portrait of Premier Pasic uses multi-colored maps as important decorative elements in a very abstract composition. Moreover, Hopkinson cut the canvas of the Pasic picture into shapes and then glued the pieces onto a panel, creating an unusual and highly modern effect. In all three, the color, based on the spinning disk theory, is original and fresh.

Hopkinson enjoyed this assignment enormously. His memoir speaks of "slash[ing] off the portraits freely and vigorously." He asked Prince Saionji to write his name in Japanese characters directly on the canvas. Of Bratianu he said, "He looked like my idea of a grand turk, with sensual red lips, black eyes and grey hair . . . a picturesque devil." These paintings are among Hopkinson's finest and most original achievements.

In the next two decades, many portrait commissions came his way. A 1917 portrait of Barrett Wendell (1855-1921), Professor of English at Harvard University, initiated the long series of Harvard portraits. Among them, the portrait of Hopkinson's uncle, Charles William Eliot (1834-1926), who was president of Harvard from 1869 until 1909 is particularly notable. Painted in 1921, it was given to Harvard University by a group of students in honor of Eliot's ninetieth birthday in 1924.

Hopkinson became known as an exemplary portrayer of men and women in academic life. Twenty-one of his "Portraits of American Educators" were exhibited at the Arden Gallery on New York's Park Avenue in 1935. Included were Roscoe Pound, dean of the Harvard Law School, Professors George Kittredge, Bliss Perry and Samuel Eliot Morison of Harvard, Frank Aydelotte, president of Swarthmore College, and William Allan Neilsen, president of Smith. A group of men in somber black robes might have resulted in a visually dull exhibition, but the portraits were enlivened and humanized through telling details: the flashing color of scarlet and blue academic hoods, the subtle warmth of old books in the background, and bits of unexpected whimsy, as in President Neilsen's green socks and matching green tie. In each picture, the professor is shown in action — writing, looking through a rack of

paintings, rising to greet a friend – rather than simply sitting for a traditional portrait, and each composition is original and lively.

Hopkinson's career flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. He painted Calvin Coolidge in the last year of the ex-president's life (1932), staying with the Coolidge family in Northampton, Massachusetts, for the ten days required for the sittings. Among his other well-known sitters were John D. Rockefeller Jr., George Eastman, John Masefield, and Charles Evans Hughes. He often referred to his painting of famous people as "big game shooting", saying that sitters "fell prey" to his brush. He considered that his biggest "game" was Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose over life-sized full-length standing portrait he painted in 1930. Then in his eighties, Holmes could only stand for ten minutes at a time to pose for the immense 8' x 5' portrait. It was intended to be a companion piece to a portrait of Chief Justice John Marshall painted by Chester Harding in 1828. Both hang today at the Harvard Law School.

Hopkinson's fee for a portrait at this time ranged from \$2000 to \$5000 or more, according to the orderly account books kept by his wife. Even during the depression years of 1929-1935, he averaged \$35,000 per year in portrait commissions. Hopkinson thoroughly enjoyed his life as an artist. For more than sixty years he followed a disciplined daily regimen, painting at fixed times every day. His family remembers that he customarily sat with a sketchbook and a pencil in his hands, recording the activities of the people around him, or sketching sailboats out on the water.

When he was not working on commissioned portraits, he painted his family or himself. There are more than sixty self-portraits still in the studio on the top floor of the Manchester house. He seems to have used these not only as direct and honest records of his changing appearance, but also as vehicles for problem-solving, for testing ideas relating to light and shadow, brush techniques or methods of modelling the human face. The self-portraits in this exhibition include both the earliest known example, painted before the turn of the century (Cat. #24), and the last, a brutally honest work painted in 1961, when the artist was in his ninety-first year (Fig. 3).

Although not offered for sale, Hopkinson's pictures of his children were a staple of his exhibitions in the first decades of the twentieth century. One of the artist's children said recently, "We all thought it was the duty of every child to sit quietly while her father painted her." She recalled that her mother would read aloud to them as they sat, and when they got too "wiggley," they were allowed to get up and move around for a while. The sittings, she thought, lasted about an hour at a time.



Figure 4. *The Cheerful Pomona* [Cat. #9], c.1916

In the cool, rather Whistlerian *Story-Time* (Plate 4), painted around 1909, Hopkinson recreates such a scene.

Family legend gives credit to John Singer Sargent for suggesting the theme of *Three Dancing Girls* (Plate 5) to Hopkinson, after seeing the girls dressed in old-fashioned costumes, dancing on the rocks at Manchester. Sargent visited the Manchester house in 1916 while he was in Boston working on the murals at the Public Library. A postcard from one of Mrs. Hopkinson's sisters to another, written on August 20, 1917, confirms a second Sargent visit, in the company of Isabella Stewart Gardner. Harriot Curtis writes, "John Singer [Sargent] admired it extremely! [a reference to the dress worn by one of the girls] He and Mrs. Gardner, no less, came by tother (sic) day to see how the painting he insisted on Charles painting came on. He likes it but says there must be four, not three, children, and Happy must be definitely curtseying." Although Hopkinson did not add a fourth child, there is evidence in a study he made for the painting that he did change the position of the child in the foreground in response to Sargent's suggestion.

Hopkinson's paintings of his children reflect the changes in the artist's style. In general, his palette lightened and brightened. His paintings of Brittany, done in the 1890s, were dark and atmospheric. In this exhibition, the work closest to that style is the



Plate 6. *On the Terrace* [Cat. #12], 1917



Plate 7. Happy Blowing Bubbles [Cat. #2], 1910



Plate 8. Three Sisters [Cat. #7], c.1912

earliest self-portrait, c.1890-93 (Cat. #24). *Story-Time*, with its flat, even light and close color tonality, and *Happy Blowing Bubbles* (Plate 7), of 1910, still show evidence of a dark palette. Stronger color contrast and wider value range can be found in the paintings of 1911, such as *Three Little Girls* and *The Piazza Door*. We also see a growing interest in the effects of light upon three-dimensional forms.

In *Elly with Larkspur* (Cat. #8, cover), painted around 1914, he was in a phase where he saw green in the shadows. This painting illustrates his dictum that a painting should have a color scheme imposed upon it, chosen in advance. In *Three Dancing Girls* of 1917, we see the artist very involved with the effect of light penetrating the scene from behind, and revealing itself through the fabric of the little girls' dresses. This emphasis on dramatic light is especially marked in *Winter Afternoon* (Cat. #13), painted in the same year. Then in the paintings of the 1920s, the influence of the spinning disk experiment becomes apparent. The best example is the *Family Group* of 1923, where the application of areas of pre-determined color makes for a strongly modelled and spatially convincing picture.

By the time Hopkinson began to paint his grandchildren, in the late 1930s and 1940s, his style had taken on many of the qualities of modern realism. The color is bolder, even somewhat strident, and the contrast of light and dark is sharp and emphatic. Paintings like *Schatzie and Johnny* (Fig. 9), or *The Granddaughters* (Fig. 8) are firmly connected to the sensibility that moved George Bellows, Bernard Karfiol, or the Soyer brothers at this same time.

What distinguishes Hopkinson's paintings of children is his respect for their integrity and individuality, and his accurate portrayal of their remarkable sense of composure and dignity. A description from a review in the February 11, 1918, *New York American* is apt: "He recognizes their independence of character and never sentimentalizes or condescends. Several of his paintings are of little girls, of the ages 9 to 14, when individuality and conviction begins to assert itself strongly but shyly in a sensitive child. . . . They would rather hide their strongest feelings than lay them bare to patronage or ridicule and to have learned the secret of this . . . is no common achievement."

While pre-eminently a portrait painter, Charles Hopkinson painted watercolors all his life, for his own pleasure, as a relief from the pressures of accomodating a client, and as an intense personal response to the landscape and the sea. Although they were widely exhibited and well received, he was reluctant to sell them, and most of them are still in the hands of family and friends. Perhaps half of them were inspired by the dramatic view from his house in Manchester and the others document an equally strong response to nature in many places

around the world. Among the more than 700 extant watercolors are scenes from California, Hawaii, Bermuda, Venice, Paris, New Zealand and Ireland.

Hopkinson's expressed goal in painting the watercolors was to capture the "heart" of the scene. Foreground details, he said, had to be seen "out of the corner of the eye," while the focus in the center must be portrayed with vigor and accuracy. His is a highly selective style which rejects the non-essential and casts aside clichés. He painted very quickly, making rapid decisions. Although some of the early works are factual and descriptive, most of his watercolors are rapid distillations of the essence of the scene. In *Kite Flying Day, Ipswich* (Cat. #40), for example, the gaiety of a crowd of people is conveyed by a few swiftly applied flecks of color.

He tried, he said, to see with the "innocent eye, not the intellectual eye," that is, to allow the impact of the scene before him to determine his approach. In 1928, he instructed his daughter Ibby that one must have "nothing but humbleness before nature, an intelligent humbleness, an emotional response. . . ."

Because of his willingness to experiment to achieve the effects he wanted, the watercolors vary greatly in style and technique. *View from the Piazza at Manchester* (Fig. 1) has the stylized look of modern American painting in the third and fourth decades of this century, recalling both Matisse and Marin. *Norman's Woe, Gloucester* (Fig. 10), by contrast, is strongly oriental in character, resembling the hanging landscape scrolls of the Yuan and Ming dynasty that Hopkinson saw and admired at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Compositional elements enter the space from the sides, and climb the picture plane vertically rather than receding in typically western perspective. Waves are indicated by a delicate calligraphic shorthand, and the blank paper reads as brilliant sunlight reflected on the water.

Between 1948 and 1957, the artist made five trips to New Zealand and two or three to Ireland on visits to his eldest daughter and her diplomat husband. *Stepaside, near Sally's Gap, Ireland* (Fig. 12), was probably one of his last works. Painted when he was in his eighties, this vigorous delineation of rocks and flowers shows no evidence of a diminution of ability. The rocks are a brilliant violet, and the clumps of flowers in the lower right foreground are vibrant yellow ringed with blue. A perceptive critic for the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote on February 7, 1923, that a Hopkinson watercolor appeared "as though one had opened his eyes for a moment and then shut them quickly, the single vivid and forceful impression remaining." In 1957, the impression was just as immediate and forceful.

He challenged himself with the "unpaintable" — the dazzle of sun on water, or a startling sunset over

a small island — without ever resorting to trite sentimentality. The public was often confused by his loose, rather wild-seeming watercolor style, especially in contrast to the more easily understood portraits, but critics were highly appreciative of his work, and often commented on the “modernist” qualities they found there.

Hopkinson’s merits were recognized by election to American art’s most distinguished societies. He was a member of the American Watercolor Society, the Philadelphia Watercolor Club, and the Guild of Boston Artists. He was a fellow of the National Academy of Design, the Society of American Artists, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as the American Academy of Letters. In 1927 he helped to found the Boston Society of Independent Artists, an organization formed to challenge the supremacy of the so-called “Boston School.” Predominantly teachers from the Boston Museum School, the “Boston School” was a group of somewhat conservative but very capable and highly popular painters, like Edmund Tarbell, Frank Benson and William Paxton, whose work was dominating the local art scene. The Independent Artists mounted large annual exhibitions which were open to anyone willing to pay the five dollar membership fee, thus providing opportunities to younger artists who felt they were being excluded from the more established galleries.

Hopkinson’s life, from all accounts, was apparently without shadows, marked by economic security, social position, a caring family and a successful career. John Singer Sargent reputedly stood on the promontory at Manchester, looked out at the spectacular view, and asked, “Charles, what right have you to live in Paradise?”

Hopkinson was very aware of his good fortune. Even in his most troubled moment, immediately after the death of his wife in 1947, the then seventy-eight year old artist wrote to his eldest daughter, “Haven’t we had a joyous life?” (Archives) All the more remarkable, then, are his industriousness and discipline, his constant experimentation, and his prolific output of portraits and watercolors.

In 1958, when the artist was eighty-nine years old, Edgar J. Driscoll Jr. reviewed an exhibition of his work at Childs Gallery for the *Boston Globe*. He wrote, “As usual, his watercolors are bursting with vitality and clear singing color, belying his august years.” He concluded the review by saying, “All the zest of an inquiring spirit, the sure color of a gifted artist, and the discipline of a remarkable talent are here in force. Per usual, it’s quite a show.” Thirty years later, as life expectancies increase and the number of older Americans grows markedly, we can re-examine the work that this prolific and long-lived artist produced over a period of some seventy years and repeat with Edgar Driscoll, “. . . it’s quite a show.”

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Figure 5. *Happy Holding a Kitten* [Cat. #4], c.1911



Figure 6. Study for "Five in the Afternoon"
[Cat. #36], n.d.



Figure 7. The Young Corinthian [Cat. #18], c.1945



Figure 8. The Granddaughters [Cat. #22], 1952



Figure 9. Schatzie and Johnny [Cat. #16], c. 1943



Figure 10. *Norman's Woe* [Cat. #41], c. 1918

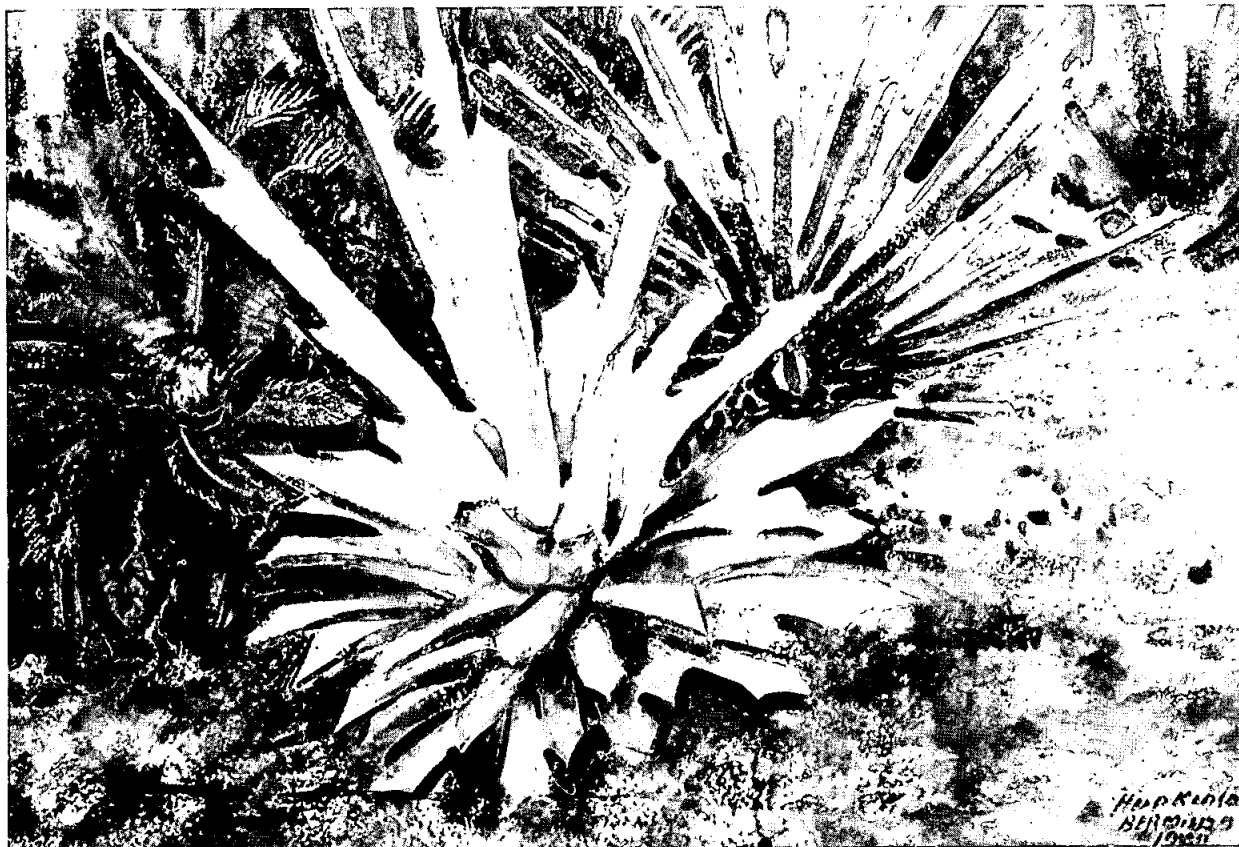


Figure 11. Agave and Spanish Bayonet, Bermuda [Cat. #44], 1940



Figure 12. Stepside, near Sally's Gap, Ireland [Cat. #48], c.1957

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

1. STORY-TIME, 1909
oil on board
40 x 50"
Private Collection
2. HAPPY BLOWING BUBBLES, 1910
oil on canvas
30 x 24½"
Private Collection
3. THREE DANCING GIRLS, 1917/23
oil on canvas
65½ x 77"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
4. HAPPY HOLDING A KITTEN, c.1911
oil on canvas
25 x 17½"
Private Collection
5. THE PIAZZA DOOR, 1911
oil on canvas
65½ x 45"
Coll. John Gibbon, Mary Clarke,
Alice Saltzman, Marjorie Masek
6. THREE LITTLE GIRLS, 1911
oil on canvas
46 x 31"
Private Collection
7. THREE SISTERS, c.1912
oil on board
19½ x 29½"
Coll. John Gibbon, Mary Clarke
Alice Saltzman, Marjorie Masek
8. ELLY WITH LARKSPUR, c.1914
oil on canvas
38½ x 28"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
9. THE CHEERFUL POMONA, c.1916
oil on canvas
40 x 30"
Private Collection
10. PORTRAIT OF ELLY, c.1917
oil on canvas
39¼ x 28"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
11. WADING IN SURF AT DANA BEACH, 1910
oil on board
13 x 18"
Collection of Mary G. Clarke
12. ON THE TERRACE, 1917
oil on board
44½ x 32½"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
13. WINTER AFTERNOON, 1917
oil on canvas
24 x 29"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
and Isabella Halsted
14. FAMILY GROUP, 1923-24
oil on canvas
51½ x 64½"
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Mrs. J.H. Barr, Mrs. Isabella Halsted,
Mrs. Alfred Rive, Mrs. William A. Shurcliff, and Mrs. Lovell Thompson.
1980.661.
15. NELL HALSTED, c.1938
oil on canvas
20 x 15"
Private Collection
16. SCHATZIE AND JOHNNY, c.1943
oil on board
59½ x 36"
Collection of John Gibbon and Mary Clarke
17. BELLA HALSTED, c.1944
oil on canvas
23 x 19½", oval
Private Collection
18. THE YOUNG CORINTHIAN, c.1945
oil on canvas
30 x 32"
Collection of Thomas Halsted
19. MALY WITH MAGGY, c.1949
oil on canvas
40 x 30"
Collection of Marjorie Masek
20. CHARLES AND ARTHUR, 1949
oil on canvas
23½ x 38½"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
21. CHARLES HOPKINSON HALSTED c.1951
oil on canvas
27½ x 19½"
Private Collection
22. THE GRANDDAUGHTERS, 1952
oil on canvas
29½ x 49½"
Collection of Mary Clarke, Alice Saltzman,
Marjorie Masek
23. PORTRAIT OF JOHN GIBBON, 1942
oil on canvas
19½ x 15½"
Collection of John Gibbon
24. SELF-PORTRAIT, c.1890-93
oil on canvas
22½ x 17½"
Collection of Hopkinson Family

25. SELF-PORTRAIT, c.1900
oil on canvas board
23½ x 17½"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
26. SELF-PORTRAIT, c.1900
oil on canvas
23½ x 13½"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
27. SELF-PORTRAIT, c.1920
oil on canvas
13 x 9½"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
28. SELF-PORTRAIT, c.1952
oil on canvas board
15 x 11"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
29. SELF-PORTRAIT, 1961
oil on board
16 x 12½"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
30. DANA ISLAND IN SEPTEMBER, n.d.
watercolor
14½ x 21"
Collection of Mary G. Clarke
31. GARDEN AT MANCHESTER, n.d.
watercolor
15 x 22"
Collection of Mary G. Clarke
32. SHARKSMOUTH, n.d.
watercolor
17 x 22"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
33. SHARKSMOUTH IN AUTUMN, n.d.
watercolor
14½ x 21½"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
34. SNOW-COVERED DANA ISLAND, n.d.
watercolor
10¾ x 15"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
35. SNOW AND OAK LEAVES, 1941
watercolor
14½ x 22"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
36. STUDY FOR 'FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON', n.d.
Opaque watercolor
20 x 14"
Collection of John Gibbon
37. SURF AND SAND, MANCHESTER, c.1956
watercolor
15 x 22"
Collection of Elinor Moore
38. VIEW FROM THE PIAZZA AT MANCHESTER, n.d.
watercolor
21½ x 14½"
Collection of Marjorie Masek
39. WINDMILL POND, 1930
watercolor
14½ x 21"
Private Collection
40. CEDAR PASTURES, MAINE, 1888
watercolor
6½ x 10"
Collection of Hopkinson Family
41. NORMAN'S WOE, CAPE ANN, c.1918
watercolor
21½ x 14½"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
42. SQUAM LAKE, 1925
watercolor
10½ x 14½"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
43. TUILERIES GARDEN, PARIS, 1926
watercolor
21½ x 21½"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
44. AGAVE AND SPANISH BAYONET, BERMUDA, 1940
watercolor
14½ x 21"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
45. THE PINK TENT, NEW ZEALAND, 1951
watercolor
14½ x 22"
Private Collection
46. TENT ON LAWN, LOWRY BAY, 1951
watercolor
14 x 21½"
Private Collection
47. KITE-FLYING DAY, IPSWICH, c. 1956
watercolor
14 x 21"
Collection of Mrs. William Shurcliff
48. STEPASIDE, NEAR SALLY'S GAP, IRELAND, c.1957
watercolor
16 x 21½"
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Barr
49. STILL LIFE, n.d.
opaque watercolor
21½ x 29½"
Collection of Tom and Ramelle Adams



Figure 13. Portrait of Elly [Cat. #10], c.1917

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