



American Federation of Arts

For Immediate Release

Contact: 212.988.7700

FIRST MAJOR CRITICAL RETROSPECTIVE OF MAXFIELD PARRISH BEGINS NATIONAL TOUR IN PHILADELPHIA

Maxfield Parrish, 1870--1966

(April 1999)-**Maxfield Parrish, 1870--1966**, the first major critical retrospective devoted to one of the most popular artists of this century, begins its national tour on June 19, 1999 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where it remains on view through September 25 (see below for tour itinerary). Comprising over 100 paintings, drawings, prints, models, photographs, and ephemera, the exhibition is organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and The American Federation of Arts.

Major funding has been provided by The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Sylvia Yount, Chief Curator, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, arranged the exhibition chronologically, highlighting the various phases of Parrish's prolific 70-year career, to examine the artist's reputation among colleagues, critics, and the public, within the context of American culture. The exhibition considers Parrish's historical importance, his enduring influence, and provides a critical reappraisal of the artist's work after his death.

Frederick Maxfield Parrish was born into Philadelphia's Quaker elite and encouraged from childhood to develop his talent by his father, Stephen (1848--1938), an acclaimed etcher and landscape painter. A student at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1892 to 1894, Parrish came of age during a time when there was a flowering of artistic practices, including painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts as well as decorative arts, architecture, and landscape design. In her essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Dr. Yount writes, "Encompassing both the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, this phenomenon [the so-called American Renaissance] challenged traditional artistic hierarchies of fine and applied arts, reconsidered the relationship between amateur and professional, and prompted a great deal of experimentation and collaboration in the art world. That Parrish's expansive artistic sensibility found expression in all these forms throughout his career marks him as an exemplary product of his age."

designing magazine covers and posters. He illustrated books by L. Frank Baum and Kenneth Grahame, and a cover for a book by Edith Wharton. Iconic works, such as *Princess Parizade Bringing Home the Singing Tree* (1906), reveal his remarkable narrative skills and craftsmanship. *School Days (Alphabet)* (1909) and *The Idiot* (1910), commissioned by *Collier's* magazine, showcase his ingenious manipulation of formal layering and optical effects.

His lifelong interest in architecture, the decorative arts, and the theater informed his art. Although he frequently worked with amateur groups creating backdrops and set designs, his last known involvement with professional theater was a production of *Snow White*, for which he created the free-standing *Gnome* (c. 1916),

The 1920s witnessed an explosion of popular culture, from comic strips to jazz, and an accord between "low" and "high" art forms. This was a period of artistic experimentation in which Parrish achieved great success

with his dream worlds and fantastical images of exotic and erotic innocence, typified by *Interlude (The Lute Players)* (1922). In 1925, three of his best-known paintings, including *Daybreak* (1922), sold for ten thousand dollars each, setting a record at the time for a living American artist.

Parrish's fame continued to advance as his color reproductions were mass-produced and broadly circulated. He saw himself as a "public" artist and worked diligently to democratize art. Soon, his girls on rocks bathed in golden light, breathtaking landscapes, and images of youthful abandon were ubiquitous in American households. In 1936, *Time* magazine commented on his extraordinary public recognition with the report, "as far as the sale of expensive color reproductions is concerned, the three most popular artists in the world are van Gogh, Cézanne, and Maxfield Parrish."

From the 1930s and 1940s and until his death, his sole interest was in landscape painting, his first love. (His last figurative composition was a caricature of himself, *Jack Frost*, in 1936.) He focused on two distinctive regions associated with national authenticity, New England and the Southwest, to create a visual definition of American quintessence and a pairing of the Old World with the New.

Parrish's posthumous revival occurred during the decade of Pop Art and the current postmodern period. According Dr. Yount, Parrish endures as "a Peter Pan figure in the art world—captivating the 'young at heart' of all ages."

PUBLICATION

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Harry N. Abrams, Inc. published *Maxfield Parrish, 1870--1966*. This richly illustrated catalogue addresses the artist's place in the history of American art and culture, challenging the artistic boundaries of "high" and "low" art. Dr. Yount's lead essay examines the enormous popularity of Parrish's work during his lifetime and today. Mark F. Bockrath, Paintings Conservator, the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, discusses the working methods and techniques used by the artist. 160 pages, 9 x 12", 81 color illustrations; softcover, \$24.95; hardcover, \$39.95.

NATIONAL TOUR

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

June 19--October 3, 1999
Philadelphia, PA

The Currier Gallery of Art

November 6, 1999--January 23, 2000
Manchester, NH

Memorial Art Gallery

February 19--April 30, 2000
Rochester, NY

Brooklyn Museum of Art

May 26--August 6, 2000
Brooklyn, NY

*As museum schedules are subject to change, please confirm dates before going to press.

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS

Founded in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is the nation's first art museum and school of fine arts. Over nearly two centuries, it has educated some of the greatest artists in this country, including Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, Cecilia Beaux, John Sloan, Charles Sheeler, John Marin, and Louis Kahn, all of whom are represented in the permanent collection. Other notable artists in the collection are Charles Wilson Peale, Georgia O'Keeffe, Horace Pippin, Robert Motherwell, David Smith, Richard Diebenkorn, and Andrew Wyeth. In addition to its renowned collection of art, the Museum features an ongoing schedule of

contemporary and historical exhibitions of national importance. Both Museum and School today continue their vital and unique contribution to the shape of American art.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

Celebrating its 90th anniversary in 1999, the AFA is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. The AFA provides its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art.