

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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MRS. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR., GIVES FOLK ART COLLECTION
TO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, announces that Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., has given to its Permanent Collection a very fine small group of American folk paintings and sculpture. The gift is part of Mrs. Rockefeller's personal collection of Folk Art which she has been assembling during the past decade and most of which she has presented to Williamsburg, Virginia.

The gift to the Museum comprises 53 pieces greatly varied in subject and media. Nearly half of the items are on display in the Museum's current exhibition Art In Our Time. Most of the work was done in the 19th century, although a few objects date from the 18th century. The gift also includes a remarkable example of the 20th century, Manchester Valley, painted probably between 1914-1918 by Joseph Pickett, a Pennsylvania carpenter and store-keeper. Not part of the present gift but shown with it is a late example of American folk art, the masterly self-portrait by John Kane, the Pittsburgh house painter who died in 1934. It is interesting to note that most of the pieces in this collection of folk art come from New England and Pennsylvania.

Holger Cahill, foremost authority on American folk art and Director of the exhibition of The Art Of The Common Man held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932, made the following statement in regard to Mrs. Rockefeller's gift:

"That these examples of American folk art are to find a permanent home in the Museum of Modern Art is a matter for congratulation. These works are a reflection of age-old tradition, refreshed and vitalized through the life-experience of the American people. They mirror in terms of painting and sculpture the sense and the sentiment, the ideas, the humor, the simple depth of feeling of the common man in America. I am glad that these works have been given to a museum where they will be shown not as 'quaint antiques' but as part of that living past of American art which has definite and clear relation to contemporary American creative expression."

Among the folk sculpture are several animal weather vanes -- horse, cow, rooster, dove, sheep -- in stamped, hammered and cast metals; there are painted toys carved of wood: deer, dog, whale, rooster, human figures. Two of the finest folk sculptures are a small carving in wood, about 21 inches high, of Henry Ward Beecher standing with a Bible in his hand as though delivering a

sermon; the other is the largest piece in the collection -- a magnificent 5½ foot eagle carved of wood, which is said to have been the sign for a tavern at Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

Among the folk paintings in the gift are portraits of children in oil and watercolor, flower paintings on velvet, watercolors on silk, Pennsylvania German quill drawings, and birth certificates ornamented with drawings and paintings which, in technique and in history, are related to manuscript illumination. There are two "mourning pictures," one in India ink on silk, the other a delicate watercolor showing a graveyard and a weeping willow, with mourners standing beside the gravestones. This painting is a mourning picture for one Polly Botsford and her children.

Most of the work is by anonymous folk artists -- house and sign painters, carpenters, ship builders, workers in metal, girls in "female seminaries," housewives who painted on silk and velvet, and other non-professional artists. Two outstanding examples -- The Peaceable Kingdom and The Residence of David Twining in 1787 -- are by Edward Hicks, the Quaker preacher who at times felt that the painting of pictures was one of the vanities of this world yet could not resist palette and brush. He was a carriage painter and carriage maker by trade, but when the urge to make a picture became too great he modified its worldly nature by confining himself chiefly to religious subjects, although he painted some landscapes and historical pictures. His two favorite subjects were William Penn and his treaty with the Indians and a Biblical allegory illustrating the verse from Isaiah:

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."

Hicks is known to have painted more than forty versions of this subject which he invariably called The Peaceable Kingdom. The painting of this title given by Mrs. Rockefeller to the Museum not only illustrates the Biblical verse but at one side shows Penn and the Indians which he often inserted in his Peaceable Kingdom pictures.

The catalog for the exhibition of Art In Our Time refers to the folk art shown as "a small but fine collection of painting and sculpture by the non-professional artist whose fresh, honest vision and unsophisticated technique has often produced work which is more exciting to the modern eye than that of any but the very best of his professional contemporaries... American folk and popular art has received recognition only in recent years. Modern artists have been its 'discoverers.' But though its discovery is the work of our generation, popular

art has always been part of the background of American culture, as it has of European. Today machine civilization tends to destroy this background of folk tradition. But in art the vision of the common man continues to find expression in certain talented but untrained and isolated individuals - - men who have found in themselves a kind of common pictorial language."