

'In a New Light' at the Heckscher

Making a good Impression

BY MARY GREGORY
Special to Newsday

Though avant-garde in its time, Impressionism is now one of the most beloved styles of painting. What started in France, as a way to capture the sense of a specific moment through rapid brushwork and atmospheric qualities of light, was quickly adopted by American artists.

“American Impressionists are a little different from French Impressionists,” says Kerrilyn Blee, curatorial assistant at the Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington. “They added a recognizably American quality to their work. They wanted to capture places that communicated a sense of national identity . . . American landscapes and scenes of American life. They put their sense of nationalism and pride into the landscape. It wasn’t as idealized and calm and serene as a Monet or Pissarro.”

Those similarities and differences are on view in the exhibit “In a New Light: American Impressionism 1870-1940,” on loan from the Bank of America Collection, running Saturday through Aug. 18 at the Heckscher.

It’s been about a decade since the entire museum has been given over to one exhibition. While five dozen paintings fill the galleries, Blee and Lisa Chalif, who co-curated “In a New Light,” had to narrow the original show, which traveled to a number of museums, by about half. They arrived at a collection suited to the Heckscher and Long Island, focusing mainly on New York area painters and scenes, but included works that give a sense of arts colonies in Pennsylvania, San Francisco, and Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico. To welcome the paintings, they’ve repainted the galleries a grayish-mauve “in the Impressionist feel,” Blee says.

The show features landscape paintings made between 1870 and 1940, by which time Impressionism had made way for more modern styles. Highlights include “The Old Farmyard, Toodleums” by George Bellows, mostly known as a painter of boxing scenes; Albert Bierstadt’s mountainous West-



Gifford Beal's "Garden Beach" (circa 1925) is one of the works on exhibit at the Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington.



Childe Hassam's "Old House East Hampton" is also on display.

ern landscapes; C.K. Chatterton's sun-bleached clapboard houses in “September Afternoon,” and George Inness’ idyllic, verdant “Meadowland in June” topped by fluffy, white clouds. Blee and Chalif made sure to bring in Childe

WHAT “In a New Light: American Impressionism 1870-1940,” from the Bank of America Collection

WHEN | WHERE 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, runs Saturday through Aug. 18, Heckscher Museum of Art, 2 Prime Ave., Huntington

INFO \$6, \$4 seniors and students, free ages 9 and younger; 631-351-3250, heckscher.org

Hassam’s “Old House East Hampton,” bathed in blue-green reflections, with bright spots of yellow — day lilies in bloom. Hassam was a key figure in American Impressionism and one of the best known. “It’s rendered in a truly

Impressionist fashion with super-vibrant colors,” Blee says. “And it’s a Long Island scene.”

The inclusion of several women artists is a treat. “It was very common for women to visit arts colonies and paint with the male artists,” Blee says. “They’re just not as well known.” Though their names might not be familiar, Felicie Waldo Howell’s “Wall Street, The Noon Hour” and Theresa Bernstein’s “Armistice Day, The New York Public Library, 1918” will be instantly recognizable to New Yorkers. Gertrude Fiske’s sunlit “Copp’s Hill” is bold and bright, with flattened blocks of color and simplified forms that presage things to come. Says Blee, “Her work has definitely a more modern feel to it.”