

JOHN SLOAN'S STREET THEATER

In the early twentieth century, John Sloan (1871–1951) emerged as a key figure in the Ashcan School, a group of artists who focused on portraying the unvarnished realities of modern life in New York City. A painter and printmaker, Sloan worked in oil and etching to depict the urban environment around him, adopting both the loose brushwork of his fellow modernists in his paintings and a more intricate style to capture intimate studies of everyday life in his prints. Selected from a collection of over five hundred prints donated to the Brandywine Museum of Art by the late

collector and historian Paul Preston Davis (1931–2021), the more than fifty works in John Sloan's Street Theater survey the American artist's output in this medium.

An inveterate people watcher, Sloan recorded activities across the social spectrum, often making pointed class comparisons while providing a window into a time of technological, political, and cultural change. During his active years, horse-drawn carriages gave way to automobiles; Prohibition came and went; and women's roles evolved, with the emergence of the flapper and a class of young, independent professionals. Sloan

also depicted the excitement of children growing up in the city, seemingly surrounded by endless adventures. By capturing a variety of street scenes, these remarkable prints invite the viewer to experience urban life in early twentieth-century New York City through the artist's eyes.

All prints in the exhibition are by John Sloan and are the gift of Paul Preston Davis in honor of Helen Farr Sloan and in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Brandywine Conservancy and Museum of Art in 2017.

Arch Conspirators, 1917

Etching on paper



Fifth Avenue Critics, 1905

Etching on paper



The Show Case, 1905

Etching on paper



Seeing New York, 1917

Etching on paper



Sidewalk, 1917

Etching on paper



Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Village, 1923

Etching on paper



The "Movey" Troupe, 1920

Etching on paper



The "Movey" Troupe, 1920

Etching on paper



There are slight differences between these two prints. In the print on top, the title is etched into the plate. The title was not yet on the plate when the bottom print was made.

Shine, Washington Square, 1923

Etching on paper



Busses in Washington Square, 1924

Etching on paper



URBAN STAGES

Sloan's first ambitious etching series, *New York City Life* (1905), marked a turning point in his printmaking career. After teaching himself the methods and techniques of etching, Sloan spent several years taking commissions and illustrating novels. His New York work—particularly his choice of subject matter, with its focus on everyday life in the city—struck many in the art world as vulgar and indecent.

The streets and the rooftops of New York provided Sloan with a stage where the human dramas he depicted could play out.

Along the city's avenues, any number of spectacles might be encountered, from genteel to more lively and even lurid. In the titles of many of his prints, Sloan tells us precisely where he made these observations, offering the viewer an insider's knowledge of the cityscape. High above the streets, the rooftops of the city provided a much more intimate setting for Sloan's dramas. New Yorkers treated these rooftops as private havens for sleeping, sunbathing, and romance.

Hanging Clothes, 1912

Etching on paper



Woman and Child on the Roof, 1914

Etching on paper



Woman and Child on the Roof, 1914

Etching on paper



Made from the same plate, these two prints show the work at different stages of development. The print on top is an earlier state, while the one below includes many additional lines. The print on the bottom includes a background scene that does not appear in the earlier version.

Roofs, Summer Night, 1906

Etching on paper



Love on the Roof, 1914

Etching on paper



Sunbathers on the Roof, 1941

Etching on paper



SPOTLIGHT ON THE CITY

As the director of his own street theater, Sloan set many of his scenes at night, with his prints' inky blackness standing in for the sky. The city lights, particularly the blazing glow of electric bulbs, provide spotlights for his urban vignettes. Sloan himself roamed the city streets at night, quietly observing and recording what was taking place under the cover of darkness. In his nighttime prints, he directs the viewer's eye by using the sharp contrast of dark and light that simply doesn't exist during the day.

While some of his actors settle in for the night, others prowl the streets in search of distractions. From the high-end French cuisine at the Lafayette Hotel to the tawdry entertainments of East Fourteenth Street, Sloan reveals the objects of their nocturnal pursuits. Even in the semiprivate setting of *Night Windows*, Sloan turns his viewers into voyeurs who are watching through windows without being seen.

Night Windows, 1910

Etching on paper



Fashions of the Past, 1926

Etching on paper



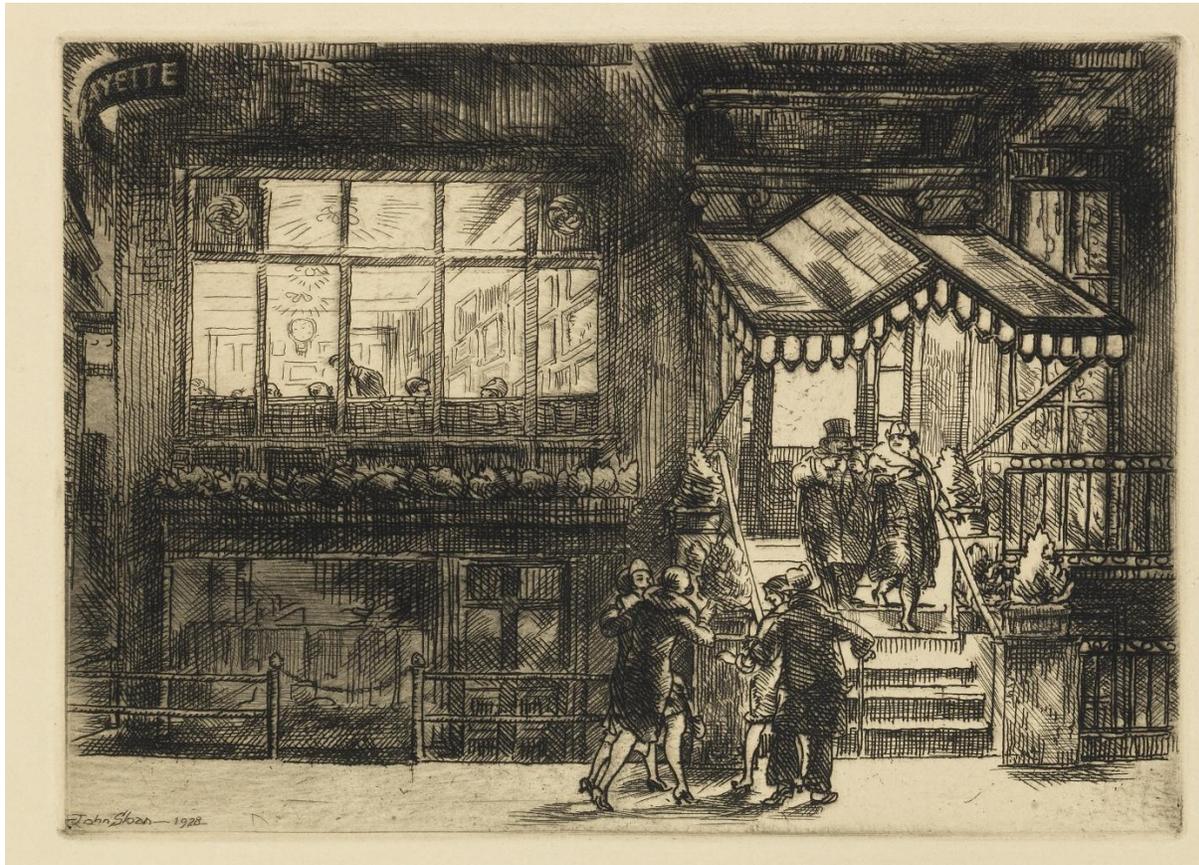
The Lafayette, 1928

Etching on paper



The Lafayette, 1928

Etching on paper



These two versions of the print are likely the same state, with no difference in the line work. The print on the bottom appears to be more heavily inked than the top print, giving it a more nocturnal atmosphere.

Bandits Cave, 1920

Etching on paper



Fourteenth Street, The Wigwam, 1928

Etching on paper



Bonfire, 1920

Etching on paper



Bonfire, 1920

Etching on paper



The print on the top was made with less ink than the one on the bottom. Artists will often experiment with the density of the ink by adding more or wiping the plate down before running it through the press.

Easter Eve, Washington Square, 1926

Etching on paper



John Sloan, 1926

John Sloan
1926

Return from Toil, 1915

Etching on paper



Up the Line, Miss?, 1930

Etching on paper



Up the Line, Miss?, 1930

Etching on paper



Sloan labels the top print as a “working proof,” meaning he is testing the plate and still making adjustments. The print on the bottom is the version at which the artist ultimately arrived, often called the final state.

Subway Stairs, 1926

Etching on paper



Bob Cat Wins, 1924

Etching on paper



Mars and Bacchante, 1915

Etching on paper



Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, 1908

Lithograph on paper



Fifth Avenue 1909, 1941

Etching on paper



STARRING ROLES

The characters in Sloan's theatricals include a wide range of societal types. Finding the humor more often than the tragedy in his players, Sloan did not generally critique society in his prints; instead, he reveals its humanity. Two important types emerged in Sloan's work: young, independent women and children growing up streetwise in New York. Both roles convey a youthful side to the city: people exploring new opportunities in the urban space. The modern women of his streetscapes enter the public sphere in a way that may have shocked their

grandmothers. Unaccompanied by men, making their way to and from their workplaces, and wearing skirts that showed progressively more leg, the women in Sloan's prints represent an ordinary part of the urban infrastructure. Children, also typically unaccompanied, roam the streets in packs, making the city their playground and seeking excitement in all manners of dangerous activities.

Growing Up in Greenwich Village, 1916

Etching on paper



Fire Can, 1920

Etching on paper



Swinging in the Square, 1912

Etching on paper



Girls Sliding, 1915

Etching on paper



Boys Sledding, 1920

Etching on paper



Washington Arch, 1923

Etching on paper



Sculpture in Washington Square, 1925

Etching on paper



CASE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Above

*Of Human Bondage, volume one, by W.
Somerset Maugham, with an introduction by
Theodore Dreiser and sixteen etchings by
John Sloan*

Printed for the Members of the Limited
Editions Club at the Printing Office of the
Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1938
Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021

Of Human Bondage

himself, but only through a literary atmosphere, and he was dangerous because he had deceived himself into it. He honestly mistook his sensuality for romantic emotion, his vacillation for the artistic temperament, and his williness to philosophic calm. His mind, vulgar in its effort at refinement, saw everything a little larger than life size, with the outlines blurred, in a golden mist of sentimentality. He had never known that he lied, and when it was pointed out to him said that lies were beautiful. He was an idealist.

30



PHILIP was restless and dissatisfied. His forward's poetic allusions troubled his imagination, and his soul yearned for romance. At least that was how he put it to himself.

And it happened that an incident was taking place in Frau Erlin's house which increased Philip's preoccupation with the matter of sex. Two or three times on his walks among the hills he had met Fräulein Cäcilie wandering by herself. He had passed her with a bow, and a few yards further on had seen the Chinaman. He thought nothing of it; but one evening on his way home, when night had already fallen, he passed two people walking very close together. Hearing his footstep, they separated quickly, and though he could not see well in the darkness he was almost certain they were Cäcilie and Herr Sung. Their rapid movement apart suggested that they had been walking arm in arm. Philip was puzzled and surprised. He had never paid much attention to Fräulein Cäcilie. She was a plain girl, with a square face and blunt features. She could not have been more than sixteen, since she still wore her long fair hair

152

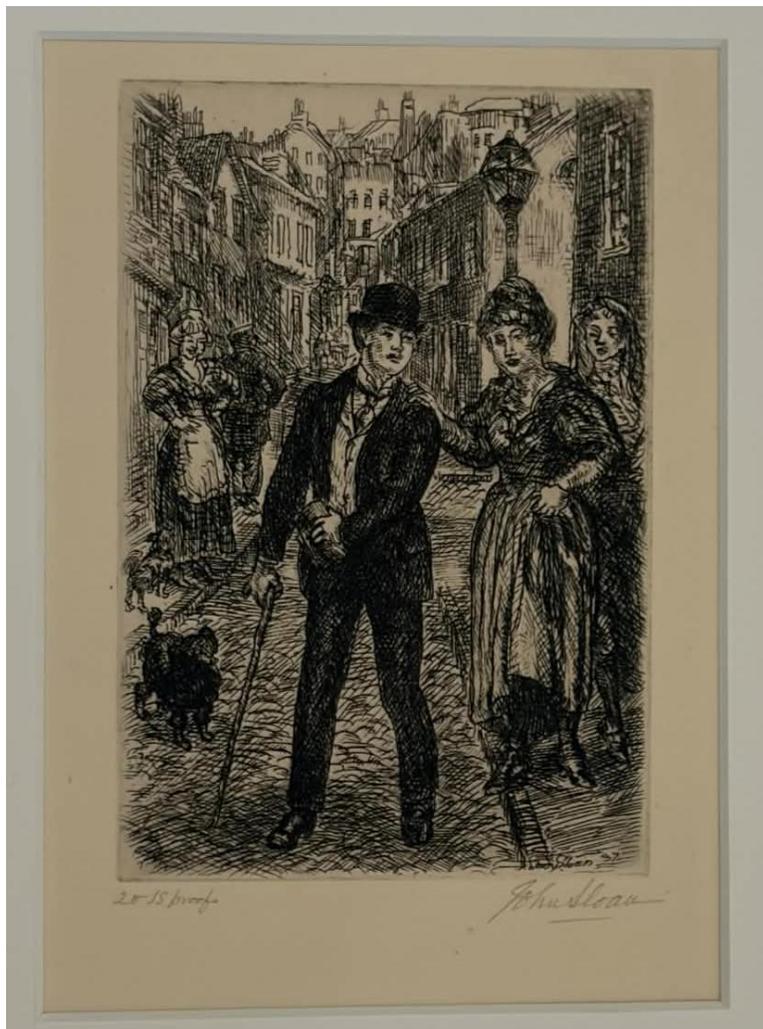


Philip in . . . the little street near the old bridge.

Below

Of Human Bondage, Chapter 29, 1937

Etching on paper



Above

*Of Human Bondage, volume one, by W.
Somerset Maugham, with an introduction by
Theodore Dreiser and sixteen etchings by
John Sloan*

Printed for the Members of the Limited
Editions Club at the Printing Office of the
Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1938
Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021

Of Human Bondage

always did when she was caught in a lie; then the flash of anger which he knew so well came into her eyes as she instinctively sought to defend herself by abuse. But she did not say the words which were on the tip of her tongue.

"Oh, I was only going to see the show. It gives me the hump sitting every night by myself."

He did not pretend to believe her.

"You musn't. Good heavens, I've told you fifty times how dangerous it is. You must stop this sort of thing at once."

"Oh, hold your jaw," she cried roughly. "How d'you suppose I'm going to live?"

He took hold of her arm and without thinking what he was doing tried to drag her away.

"For God's sake come along. Let me take you home. You don't know what you're doing. It's criminal."

"What do I care! Let them take their chance. Men haven't been so good to me that I need bother my head about them."

She pushed him away and walking up to the box-office put down her money. Philip had threepence in his pocket. He could not follow. He turned away and walked slowly down Oxford Street.

"I can't do anything more," he said to himself. That was the end. He did not see her again.

IIO

HRISTMAS that year falling on Thursday, the shop was to close for four days: Philip wrote to his uncle asking whether it would be convenient for him to spend the holidays at the vicarage. He received an answer from Mrs. Foster, saying that Mr. Carey was not well enough to write himself, but wished to see his nephew and would be glad if he came down. She

718



... at the corner of Oxford Street she . . . crossed over to a music-hall.

Below

Of Human Bondage, Chapter 109, 1937

Etching on paper



About the Donor

Collector and historian Paul Preston Davis (1931 – 2021), whose gift of more than five hundred prints by John Sloan made this exhibition possible, also contributed his library and related research materials to the Brandywine's Walter and Leonore Annenberg Research Center. This display case contains selections from the Sloan archival and special collections material in this gift, including a signed first edition book by Sloan and rare exhibition catalogs and brochures. Davis dedicated decades of his life to the study of Sloan and worked closely with the artist's widow, Helen Farr Sloan (1911 – 2005), in amassing his

collection. Davis's other major research interest revolved around the artist and educator Howard Pyle (1851 – 1911) and his many students. The Brandywine is honored to be the recipient of Davis's collected research on Pyle in addition to his gift of Sloan materials.

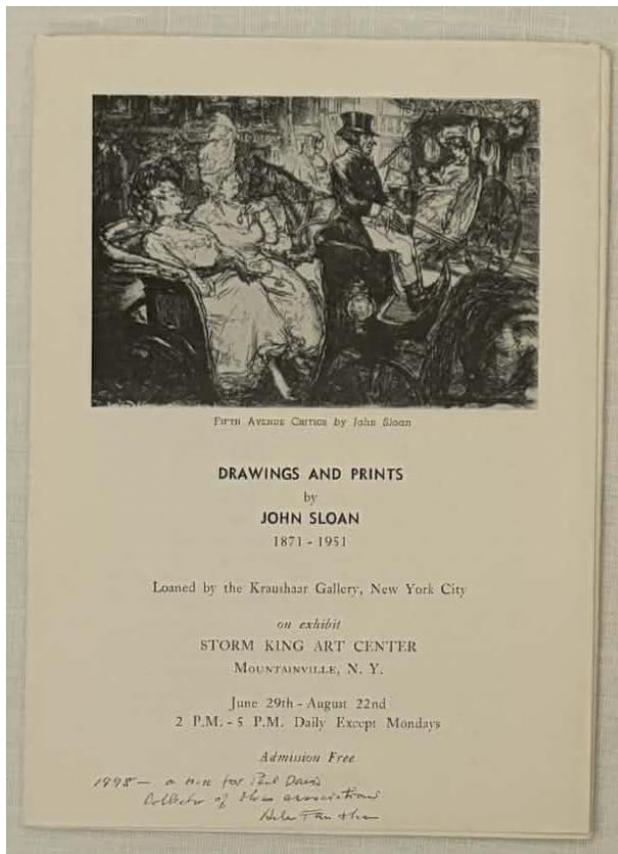
Drawing and Prints by John Sloan, 1871 – 1951. Loaned by the Kraushaar Gallery, New York City, on exhibit, Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, N.Y., June 29th – August 22nd

Mountainville: Storm King Art Center, 1963

Inscribed "for Paul Davis" by Helen Farr

Sloan

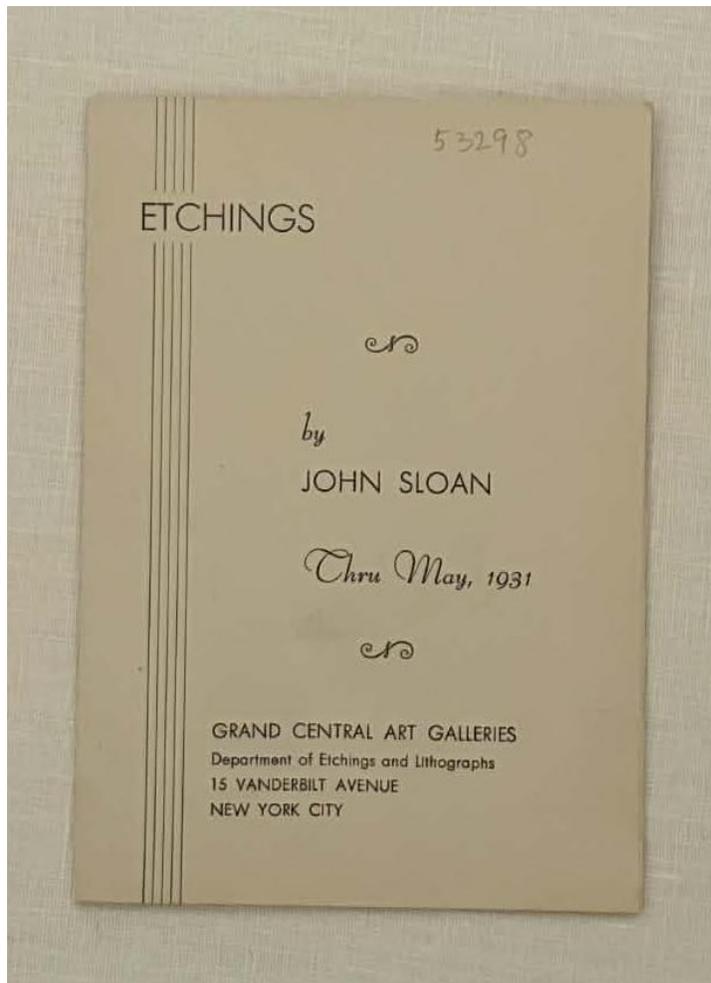
Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021



Etchings by John Sloan Thru May 1931

New York: Grand Central Art Galleries, 1931

Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021

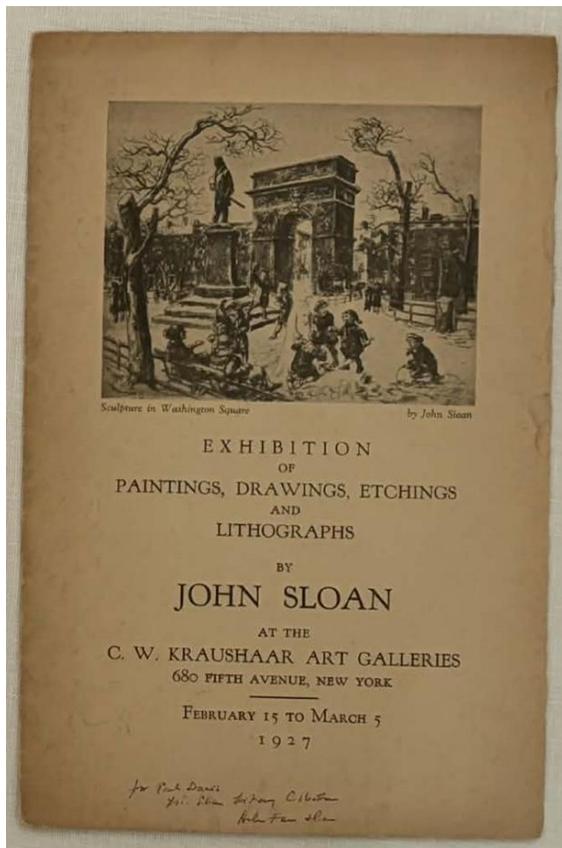


*Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, Etchings,
and Lithographs by John Sloan, February 15
to March 5, 1927*

New York: C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries,
1927

Inscribed "for Paul Davis" by Helen Farr
Sloan

Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021



Gist of Art: Principles and Practice

Expounded in the Classroom and Studio by

John Sloan, recorded with the assistance of

Helen Farr, First Edition

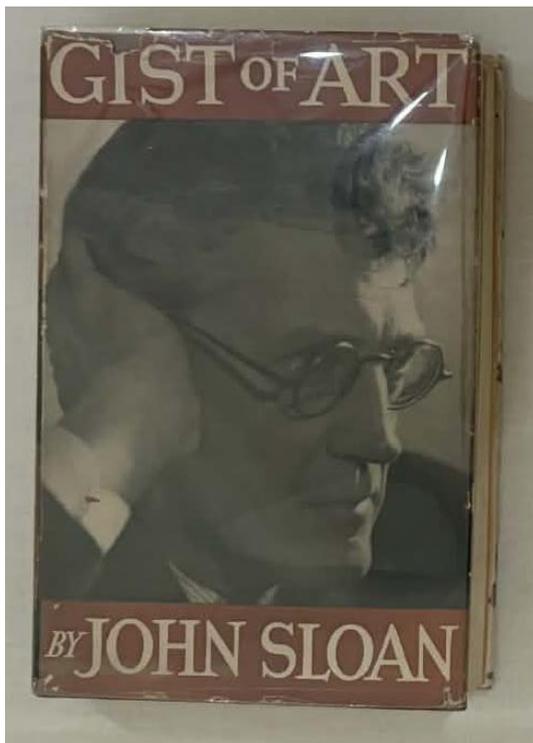
New York: American Artists Group Inc.,

1939

Inscribed by John Sloan and Helen Farr

Sloan

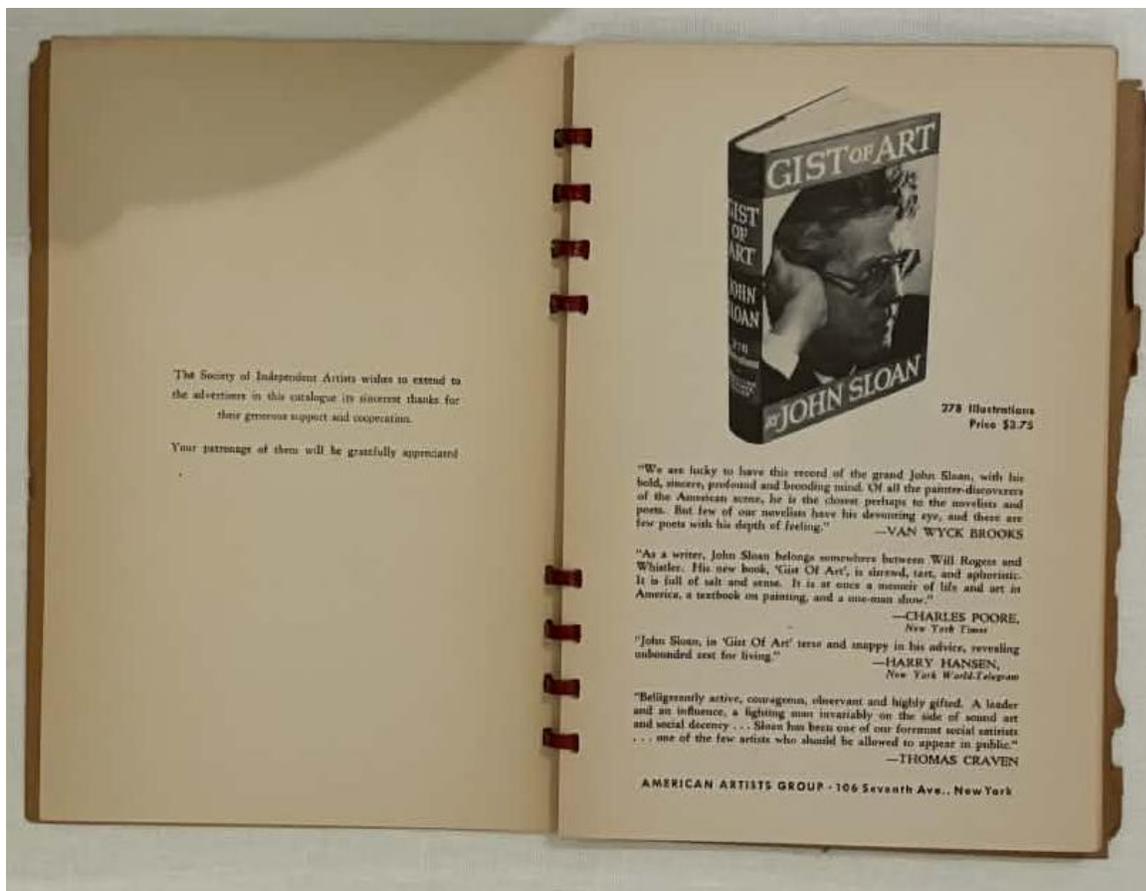
Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021



Society of Independent Artists: Twenty-Fourth Annual Exhibition

New York: Society of Independent Artists Inc., 1940

Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021



*John Sloan, American Artists Group,
Monograph Number 1*

New York: American Artists Group Inc.,
1945

Gift of Paul Preston Davis, 2019 and 2021

