

Robert Vonnoh, French Impressionist in America

Recognized as one of the leading American impressionist painters, Robert Vonnoh (1858-1933) was a pioneer in adapting the techniques and vision of the French Impressionists, first in France and later in the United States. He ventured to Grez-sur-Loing, just south of the forest of Fontainebleau and not far from Paris, in 1887; this art colony was popular with aspiring as well as practicing artists of various nationalities – particularly British, Scandinavian and American. The prominent Americans there at one time or another included John Singer Sargent, Willard Metcalf, Walter Launt Palmer in addition to Vonnoh. In Grez he painted landscapes notable for their high-keyed palette which established his reputation. In 1892 he returned to take up a teaching post in Philadelphia, and when he married the up-and-coming young sculptor Bessie Potter (1872-1955) in 1899 they settled in New York. She is renowned in particular for her small-scale bronzes of women and children in modern dress. Robert and Bessie frequently exhibited together, and his 1913 portrait of her in the guise of Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun (as she famously portrayed herself), done for a joint exhibition, is an homage to her professional status at a time when she was creating some of her most admired sculptures. This remarkable representation of Bessie Potter Vonnoh is a profound image of the two artists' shared aesthetic and ambition. Collisart is pleased to be showing this painting along with two Robert Vonnoh landscape scenes and a beguiling small Bessie Potter Vonnoh bronze, *The Intruder*, also of 1913.

The Edge of the Garden of 1901 is one of Vonnoh's most adventurous garden scenes, a riot of color that recalls similar compositions of fields of flowers by Sargent. Robert and Bessie had just recently moved to Rockland Lake on the Hudson River near New York City, and Robert took great pleasure in the abundant flowers there. He considered this painting one of his best; it was shown in several major exhibitions and received very positive critical appreciation. As a composition it bears a strong relationship to the French Impressionist paintings he had admired and studied during his years in France.

Landscape Study No.2, Autumn among the Willows dates from Vonnoh's second extended stay at Grez-sur-Loing, from 1907 to 1911. The strong colors, achieved with layers of thick brushwork, are the artist's hallmark. One of his related and well-known paintings of this period is the *Bridge at Grez* in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. Many of them were exhibited in Paris at the Galeries Georges Petit in 1911 before the Vonnohs returned to New York.

Complementing these three Robert Vonnoh paintings is the celebrated Bessie Potter Vonnoh bronze *The Intruder*, featuring a graceful young lady in contemplative mode, gazing into a pool and surprised by the appearance of an unexpected small creature.