

## SPRINGFIELD'S RICH ARTISTIC LEGACY



The art historian William Gerdts, in his three-volume epic, *ART ACROSS AMERICA*, claims, “Of all the states between the East and West coasts, it was Ohio that developed the greatest and most continuous artistic tradition...Ohio’s achievements had greater longevity, and the work of Ohio’s artists had, on the whole, a greater national impact”...than that of all of the other states between our country’s bordering oceans. Indeed, Ohio’s location at the crossroads of our emergent nation ensured that many artists of significance during the nineteenth century, if not born here, at least at some time either passed through or spent time in the state. And, Springfield, itself located at the crossroads of Ohio, has likewise seen its share of notable artists live and work within and around its environs.

For example, Thomas Worthington Whittredge, born just east Springfield in Harmony Township in 1820, moved to New York as a young man and became, among other things, one of the founders of the Hudson River School of landscape painting, a member of the group of men who were to establish what was to become the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and, in an interesting historical footnote, the model for the figure of George Washington in his friend, Emmanuel Leutze’s, great, iconic painting of “Washington Crossing the Delaware River”.

The Frankenstein family of painters moved from their native—and, infamous—home in Bavaria early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first to Cincinnati and eventually to Springfield, where Godfrey, Gustavus, John and Mary painted images of the city and its inhabitants until the end of the century. They traveled and painted elsewhere as well; Godfrey’s nearly one hundred images of Niagara Falls became the inspiration for Frederic Edwin Church’s famous panorama of this natural wonder.

Frank Myers Boggs left his native Springfield as a boy, moved to Paris in 1876 and became one of America’s finest expatriate painters. James Roy Hopkins settled in Mechanicsburg, just north of the city, after a career during which he first headed the Cincinnati Academy of Art, and later moved to Columbus, where he established the Department of Art at Ohio State University. And, Berenice Abbott, born in Springfield in 1898, went on to become America’s foremost woman documentary photographer during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is against the backdrop of this rich artistic legacy that the visual arts in Springfield flourish today.

The Springfield Museum of Art ([www.spfld-museum-of-art.org](http://www.spfld-museum-of-art.org)), established in 1946, has been the home of the community’s artists and arts groups for over fifty years. Its founding members included the notable Ohio artists Ethel Cook, Ralston Thompson, Helen Bosart Morgan, Paul Samuelson and E. C. Bradshaw. It is home to the Western Ohio Watercolor Society and the Springfield Photographic Society. The Museum boasts an important permanent collection of historical and contemporary American art, and its schedule of ten temporary exhibitions each year is widely regarded as an important bellwether for emerging Ohio and regional artists. In tandem with the Museum’s exhibition program is its fine arts school, which has been offering classes and workshops in the visual arts since the organization’s inception. Today, some 1,600 students each year learn painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, glass, basketry, digital art, photography, as

well as other media and age-appropriate classes, from twenty-five professional artist-instructors. The Museum also offers tours of its collections and exhibitions, maintains an active outreach programs to the region's schools and is host to a variety of community events.