Talent Against Tradition: The Art and Life of Kate Freeman Clark

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Talent Against Tradition: The Art and Life of Kate Freeman Clark

By
Grace Moorman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2020

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ABSTRACT
GRACE MOORMAN: Talent Against Tradition: The Art and Life of Kate Freeman Clark
(Under the Direction of Dr. Kris Belden-Adams)

This paper explores the art of Holly Springs, Mississippi, painter Kate Freeman Clark, especially in association with the work of her teacher William Merritt Chase. Much of this paper is based on two extensive biographies: Cynthia Grant Tucker’s *Kate Freeman Clark: A Painter Rediscovered*, and Carolyn J. Brown’s *The Artist’s Sketch: A Biography of Painter Kate Freeman Clark*. Using a number of object studies, this paper explores the development of Clark’s work under the tutelage of Chase, highlighting similarities and differences that lead to the conclusion that Clark had a very real talent that she seemed reluctant to claim. This reluctance is also explored by considering what it meant to be an upper-class, Southern female artist in the early-20th century. Thus, I seek to understand the pressures Clark faced as she balanced maintaining the correct level of respectability as a single woman with her desire to create and produce magnificent art. By surveying Clark’s privileged upbringing in Holly Springs, Mississippi and New York City, her artwork produced under the tutelage of William Merritt Chase, and her eventual return to Holly Springs, I seek to also understand why she ultimately gave up her craft.
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Introduction

Between the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the art world changed dramatically. In Europe, the Impressionists introduced magnificent works of art characterized by distinct brushstrokes and careful attention to the depiction of light. Masters like Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet created groundbreaking, convention-defying paintings in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s.

While Impressionism had its roots in Paris, it also was practiced movement in the United States. At the beginning of the 19th century, American artists began to travel to France and practice with “European contemporaries–who were generally deemed to be French artists, and whose outstanding works were to be seen annually in the Salon exhibitions.”¹ U.S. artists were introduced to the earlier movements, such as of Neoclassicism, but they also maintained connections with the styles of French Academies and Salons until they became obsolete. Then, the American artists began to consume examples of the European avant-garde. For this thesis, however, the importance of French art and its effect on the American art scene will be discussed in connection with the later-19th-century Impressionism movement, and its connection to the work of Holly

¹ William H. Gerdts, “American Art and the French Experience,” in Lasting Impressions: American Painters in France, 1865-1915, 13-124 (Evanston: Terra Foundation for the Arts, 1992), 15.; At first, Americans art critics were generally ambivalent about French work. They called Neoclassicism “dry didacticism,” and declared Romanticism too violent. U.S. artists scoffed that women in French paintings were either overdressed or underdressed (17). Even the Barbizon painters were critiqued for having “too little variety” in their paintings (18). Despite these written and verbal censures, U.S. artists increasingly entered into French Academy to learn from “masters” of the 19th-century-art movements.
Springs, Mississippi, artist Kate Freeman Clark, who dutifully studied under portraitist William Merritt Chase and absorbed both his lessons, and those of the Impressionist style.

Named for Claude Monet’s *Impression: Sunrise* (1872, fig. 1), French Impressionism developed as an alternative to French Academic painting, and it embraced painting *en plein air* (outdoors). Impressionists concerned themselves with capturing fleeting moments of light with assertive brushstrokes of color. The effect is a composition that, to some French, 19th-century critics, was unfinished. The movement was relatively controversial, and along with French Realism’s taste for making everyday-life scenes worthy of “high-art” subject matter, it helped mark the start of Modern art and the avant-garde.

U.S. artists followed new French styles such as Impressionism as they had other French movements. Artists including Theodore Robinson, John Twachtman, Mary Cassatt – and most importantly for this paper, William Merritt Chase – all traveled to Paris and encountered Impressionism. Chase studied primarily in Munich, not Paris. His portraits often depicted the darker solidity of the Modern Munich School, a style that championed intense chiaroscuro and somber palettes. He was reluctant to accept the title of “Impressionist,” as he considered himself more of a “Realist.”4 Chase’s paintings

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3 Louis Leroy, “The Exhibition of the Impressionists,” *Le Charivari* (1874); This critical dialogue about the 1874 exhibition in which Claude Monet’s *Impression Sunrise* was displayed gave the “Impressionist” movement its name. In his critique of the exhibition, Leroy remarked that “wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than [Monet’s] seascape.” Leroy’s acerbic critique of the unfinished appearance of the art, contrary to his assumed goals, inspired the movement’s artists to name their movement “Impressionism.” Monet, himself, was aware of the painting’s qualities as well, citing later that “they asked me for a title for the catalogue, it couldn’t really be taken for a view of Le Havre, and I said: ‘Put ‘Impression.’” By his own admission, *Impression: Sunrise* was not to be taken for a realistic view of the harbor, but even for his own self-awareness, Monet and this painting would be criticized heavily by various critics, including Louis Leroy.

4 Gerdts, “American Art,” 75.
depicted “the dark drama of Munich [that] gave way to a more subtle touch and lighter tonalities, visible in the *plein air* paintings, which he appears to have first undertaken in Holland during European summer trips of 1883.”

Two years before, in 1881, Chase made a transformative trip to Paris, during which he was introduced to Mary Cassatt, “then at the height of her involvement with Impressionism.” The avant-garde had an effect on him, as he felt compelled to purchase two paintings by Edouard Manet for U.S. art patron Erwin Davis. As U.S. artists and art collectors increasingly embraced Impressionism, Chase became swept away in the changing tides and leaning into Impressionism. His work, namely his landscapes, began to reflect that. His training in Munich allowed for distinguished and dramatic realism in portraits and still lifes, but in an attempt to embrace a more modern style, Chase began to paint Impressionist-inspired landscapes. One of his earliest, *Mrs. Chase in Prospect Park* (1886, fig. 2), reflects Chase’s turn toward Impressionism. A successful, albeit muted, work of Impressionism, *Mrs. Chase in Prospect Park* is characterized by visible brushstrokes that create the water, the foliage, and the face of Chase’s wife at a park in their hometown, Brooklyn. Though Chase’s portraits and still lifes would maintain much of their connection to the Munich style, his landscapes generally accepted and reflected Impressionist tendencies.

It is not only Chase’s artistic style that was noteworthy to his eventual influence upon Kate Freeman Clark, but also his skill as an educator. Chase fancied himself “the father of more art children than any other living man,” a title that identifies what he felt

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5 Gerdts, “American Art,” 75.
7 Gerdts, “American Art,” 75.
was his most significant contribution to Modern art.\(^9\) Chase mentored many Modern artists who achieved various degrees of fame, including Lydia Field Emmett, Georgia O’Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, and Kate Freeman Clark.

It is, of course, important to note that Clark’s art did not develop in a Chase-shaped vacuum. When she attended the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, she was undoubtedly exposed to masters of French Impressionism. In Clark’s own style, though heavily influenced by Chase, remnants of Monet’s landscapes, Auguste Renoir’s fascination with the figure and the upper class, and Edgar Degas’s distinctive cropping can all be singularly noted. Clark also would have Mary Cassatt’s work and would have assuredly seen something of herself in the native Philadelphian’s upper-class status and career. It seems clear that exposure to the work of the French Impressionists, alongside, Chase’s Munich-inspired art would have led Clark to produce a unique form of Impressionism that drew from all of the aforementioned creatives. There is no doubt, however, that any artist had more influence and effect on Kate Freeman Clark’s work than her own teacher for nearly a decade: William Merritt Chase.

This thesis explores various aspects of Clark’s life, both personal and artistic. Born in the last few years of Civil War’s Reconstruction era, Clark grew up with the protection of wealth and white privilege that afforded her security and opportunity. Her decision to leave Mississippi and formally study painting under Chase in New York City and on Long Island, N. Y., was radical, especially considering her conservative upbringing and Victorian-era gender expectations in the South. Yet while Clark was a woman ahead of her time, she also very much a product of her upbringing. After pursuing

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artistic training and cultivating her skills under Chase and other mentors, she returned as an unmarried, child-less matriarch to Holly Springs, Mississippi, to help maintain the family’s social profile as well-to-do members of the upper class. When she returned, she abruptly put down her paintbrushes – forever. Two biographies – *Kate Freeman Clark: A Painter Rediscovered* by Cynthia Grant Tucker and the more recent *The Artist’s Sketch* by Carolyn J. Brown– have been published on Kate Freeman Clark, and each of these has provided valuable information not only for this thesis but for knowledge of Clark’s life in general. This thesis expands upon already established ideas and places a strong emphasis on stylistically characterizing Clark’s own work and establishing her own stylistic connections to Chase. I also here offer concrete dates for previously undated artworks. This is significant because few of Clark’s pieces are dated. The Freeman Clark Family archives, along with the Kate Freeman Clark Art Gallery, in Holly Springs are a wealth of illuminating information on the young painter, and they are featured prominently in this thesis, as well.

If Clark appears in our historical narratives, she mostly named as Chase’s protégée; sometimes her truncated artistic career is mentioned, provided she appears at all. Her work, though, is worthy of sustained analysis. While Chase’s Munich-Impressionism style was influential on Clark, a closer look at her work reveals that she more fully and readily embraced French Impressionism, particularly in her landscape paintings. Clark’s skill and dedication make her work to be every bit as worthy of historicizing as Chase’s. She becomes a key figure in the exploration of a U.S.-based Impressionism that interrogated the new United States of America as it was rising and struggling to take form as an industrial and economic powerhouse.
Chapter One: Genteel Beginnings

Born in 1875 in the small railroad town of Holly Springs, Mississippi, Kate Freeman Clark lucked into a life of privilege. Clark’s maternal lineage automatically situated her at the top of the Holly Springs’ social hierarchy and provided her with a comfortable, easy existence. The Walthall family arrived in Holly Springs from Virginia in the 1830s. Kate Freeman Clark’s great-grandfather Barrett Walthall established a law practice and was one of the founders of the town. In fact, Barrett Walthall served as the first mayor of Holly Springs.11 Kate’s grandmother was an important figure in both Holly Springs and in the life of her granddaughter. Kate Walthall, her granddaughter’s namesake, would become the unofficial “First Lady of Holly Springs,”12 and upheld the genteel and Southern values of the Confederate town.

Holly Springs was created by the powers of the Southern, white aristocracy. It owes its once-booming success to the Mississippi Central Railroad, which aimed to connect central Canton, Mississippi (north of Jackson, Mississippi), to Jackson, Tennessee (more than 250 miles to the north).13 Successful cotton farming in and around North Mississippi promoted the construction of the railroad, and three white men – all of whom were from Holly Springs – seized the opportunity to construct the Mississippi

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Central Railroad and made their home “the railroad’s most important town and de facto headquarters.”\(^{14}\) The construction of the railroad would also ensure that Holly Springs would see action during the Civil War as a key trading and supply depot.

For the Walthall family, the results of the Civil War were not so damaging.\(^{15}\) Kate Walthall’s brother, Edward Cary Walthall, furthered distinguished the family with his service as a district attorney, Confederate Major General, and eventual U. S. Senator. Kate Walthall, for her part, married her brother’s law partner, George Freeman, although he died only seven years into their marriage. She never remarried, yet obtained a mass of wealth “in goods rather than [slaves].”\(^{16}\) This allowed her fortune to remain secure through the horrors of the Civil War. She garnered such a sense of respect in her small community that she was known as “Mama Kate,” rather than by the common practice of referring to her as “Miss Kate.”\(^{17}\) As her moniker suggests, “Mama Kate’s” role in the community of Holly Springs was that of a matriarch, her “commanding personality, her intelligence, poise, and tact” all cemented her role as such.\(^{18}\) Despite the loss of her husband at such a young age, Kate Walthall Freeman remained an independent force. It is important to note that her level of status and independence was endowed to her by family

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\(^{14}\) Beck, *Holly Springs*, 56.

\(^{15}\) Claude Gentry, *The Capture of Holly Springs* (Baldwyn: Magnolia Publishers, 1971); Beck, *Holly Springs*, 54-56.; Though relatively small in population, Holly Springs actually saw action during the U. S. Civil War. Union General Ulysses Grant chose Holly Springs as the base of operations for his ongoing crusades to capture Vicksburg. Vicksburg was, and remains today, a critical port city, and controlling it during the Civil War also guaranteed control over the Mississippi River. General Grant and about 62,000 soldiers invaded Holly Springs in 1862, commandeering the railroad depot, courthouse, and other public buildings for storage and housing. Union soldiers rested comfortably there until December of 1862, when Confederate General Earl Van Dorn retaliated and drove the opposing forces out of Holly Springs. The Battle of Holly Springs greatly delayed the Union from marching on Vicksburg, and was considered a major victory for the South. Today, the town commemorates its role in the Civil War with a large Confederate monument on the town square and a street named for Van Dorn.


\(^{17}\) Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 11-14.

\(^{18}\) Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 13.
reputation and the wealth she accrued, and her ability to flourish “like a thrifty plant,”
gifted to her, in part, by the circumstances of her birth. This pattern of comfortable
widowhood – or in Kate Freeman Clark’s case, singlehood – would continue with each of
the women of the Freeman family. Grandmother, mother, and daughter, all of whom were
afforded comfort by inherited wealth, would die as unmarried, Southern matriarchs. For
“Mama Kate,” though, despite the untimely death of her husband, her status as matriarch
was entirely cemented by the birth of her daughter, Cary Walthall Freeman.

Cary Walthall Freeman was born in 1850 and grew up with the same privilege
and security provided to her mother. Cary, however, left Holly Springs for Vicksburg,
Mississippi, with her husband Edward Clark, who established his own law firm in the
Mississippi River city and purchased a cotton plantation. He eventually incorporated it
into the town of Cary, named for his young bride. The young couple had a baby girl on
September 7, 1875, and named her Kate, after her powerful maternal grandmother. Like
her family before her, Kate Freeman Clark was financially secure by means of both her
maternal family’s historical wealth and her father’s well-off law practice and plantation.
Her father, in particular, doted entirely on his young family, and when Cary Clark
whisked her dear daughter off to Holly Springs during the hot and humid Mississippi
summers to get her away from the disease-infested Delta, Edward Clark would pen fond
letters to his young daughter:

I am quite lonesome at home and miss you and mama sadly, but still I am

consoled to think you are far way in the mountains where the air is pure and

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19 Bonner, Like Unto Like, 33.
20 Brown, The Artist’s Sketch, 8.
21 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 14.
healthy and that you are having, at least I hope so, a great deal of pleasure
walking about in the day and dancing in the evening.\textsuperscript{22}

Though Cary Clark claimed it was the climate and sickness of the Delta that drove her
and her young daughter farther north, strong maternal ties to family in Holly Springs also
would have encouraged her to visit.\textsuperscript{23} Like her mother Kate Walthall, Cary Clark was a
force. She had to be convinced to marry Kate Freeman Clark’s father, agreeing to do so
only after two years of Edward Clark’s dedicated adoration towards her.\textsuperscript{24}

Along with his considerable wealth, Edward Clark had notable and significant
connections to those in power in the nation’s capital. Specifically, U. S. Senator L. Q. C.
Lamar was Clark’s former employer and a family friend. Lamar was elected to President
Grover Cleveland’s cabinet as Secretary of the Interior in 1885. In short order, Lamar
wrote to Edward Clark and asked him “to take the place of 1st Assistant Secretary of the
Interior.”\textsuperscript{26} Edward must have emphatically agreed, as he arrived in Washington, D. C.,
before the other two-thirds of his family to await Senate confirmation. Unfortunately, and
in rapid succession, Edward Clark arrived in the Capitol, became sick, was confirmed as
the Senate Assistant Secretary Interior, and suddenly died. In a series of days, the Clark
family lost their patriarch. A series of telegrams sent on March 18th, 1885, by Lamar

\textsuperscript{22} Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 9.
\textsuperscript{23} Margaret Humphreys, “How Four Once Common Diseases Were Eliminated from the American South,”
Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860} (New York: Oxford University Press,
1995), 49-50. Disease was one of the most common causes of death in the humid, muggy Delta.
Mississippians living along the river delta faced the warm climate and stagnant swamps that successfully
bred disease carrying mosquitoes. Likely, these diseases, carried by the biting insects, preoccupied the
young Clark family. Malaria and yellow fever were of particular concern. The 1878 yellow fever epidemic
originated in New Orleans and traveled up the Mississippi River, infecting cities and communities as far
north as Ohio. Only three years old at the time, young Kate Freeman Clark would have been a susceptible
target for the dangerous diseases in Delta.
\textsuperscript{24} Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 8.
\textsuperscript{26} Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 11.; Letter from L. Q. C. Lamar to Edward Donaldson Clark, n.d., Archives
and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.
reflected the hope that Edward Clark would recover from his illness. The first cited that:

“Mr. Clark passed a good night says he is much better this morning,” while the second relayed that “Mr. Clark confirmed by the Senate Assistant Secretary Interior.”\(^{27}\) Whether or not Clark truly did feel that he was recovering became a moot point on the very next day when he died, leaving behind his wife and nine-year-old daughter.

This tragic event was perhaps the greatest catalyst toward art-making in young Kate’s life. Six years after her father’s death, Kate and her mother and grandmother realized Edward’s wishes and relocated to New York City.\(^{29}\) This move, in part inspired by the actions of Kate Freeman Clark’s late father, also was encouraged by the members of the Walthall family who were living in Washington, D.C.. Edward Walthall, Kate Freeman Clark’s great uncle was fulfilling the unfinished Senate term that Lamar left after his resignation in 1885, while another relative was serving as a Naval officer in nearby Baltimore, Maryland.\(^{30}\) A teenage Kate grew restless in Holly Springs, despaired her “adventureless” life in the “sleepy old town,” and begged her mother to “take her somewhere more stimulating.”\(^{31}\) Cary’s own affinity for city life propelled the Clark women to move to New York City in 1891.

Kate always had shown an interest in the liberal arts, and from an early age she was drawn to writing. Her earliest journals, written between the ages of twelve and eighteen years old, “show a Kate Freeman Clark besotted with words.”\(^{32}\) Kate stated on January 5, 1892, that she would begin to write her first novel. This resolution became the

\(^{27}\) Two telegrams form L.Q.C. Lamar, March 18, 1885. Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries.

\(^{29}\) Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 20.


\(^{31}\) As cited in: *Kate Freeman Clark*: January 1, 1892, Diary, 1892-1895.; Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 18-20.

\(^{32}\) Brown, *The Artist’s Sketch*, 4.
first two, and only, chapters of a novel inspired by Sir Walter Scott’s *Peveril of the Peak*. “It has always been my purpose to be an authoress,” Clark wrote in a journal, “ever since I was a very little thing...” Her further journal entries, however, reveal that she was frustrated with the writings she did produce, and considered them boring and unoriginal.

When she received a painting kit from her mother’s brother Russell in 1888, her excitement was fresh and genuine: “My Dear Uncle Russell,” she wrote, “You do not know how much I prize the beautiful paintbox you sent me... At last I have a real fine paintbox...” This gift was perhaps the most significant inspiration towards a hobby of painting that the then-twelve-year-old Kate experienced. During the summer of 1893, her internal conflict between pursuing a focus in writing or painting exposed itself: “Shall I be an authoress or an artist or neither? Only a commonplace everyday girl?”

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34 As cited in: *The Artist’s Sketch*: Journal, January 20, 1892, Clark Papers.
37 As cited in: *The Artist’s Sketch*: Journal, July 2, 1893, Clark Papers.
Chapter Two: The Art Students League and Wiles’s Summer School

The Clark women left for bustling New York City at the end of the 19th century, seeking a rapid change of both pace and scenery from their slow-paced hometown in the South. Kate continued her education in the North and enrolled in the Gardner School for Girls, “a finishing school that offered a broad liberal arts curriculum.” At the Gardner School for Girls, Kate studied science, literature, history, and languages - French, German, and Latin. Kate did not protest, and never objected to the privilege she enjoyed, the expectations placed on her, or her sheltered upbringing. She successfully graduated from her finishing school in May of 1894. This was a necessary step in the youngest Clark’s becoming the “correct” type of woman: an upstanding, polite, and sophisticated future member of the upper echelons of society. This education would also have groomed Kate to be an ideal marriage prospect, a path that Kate at one point in her life was interested in pursuing, in accord with societal expectations.

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38 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 21-22.; Brown, The Artist’s Sketch, 16.
39 Brown, The Artist’s Sketch, 15.
40 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 22.
41 Brown, The Artist’s Sketch, 100-101.; Clark’s journals reveal a refined, yet intentional relationship with West Point cadet Hamilton Foley, beginning with their meeting in the summer of 1893. Foley, for his part, seemed entirely intent in pursuing Clark, but “her journals suggest she was not” so interested in him. Her interest in men was not limited to Foley, but she was picky, writing that there were “so many men in sight & none to entertain one & no prospects of there being any.” Foley seemed to be her best option, but for as long as they had known each other, there seemed to be no promises or proposals for the time they were in contact, for 1893-1905. Speculations can only be made as to why the two never married, nor apparently were even engaged. There is no indication that Clark preferred the affections of her own sex, and it seems more likely that it was Foley’s physical distance and intense travel schedule that most prevented their union. He was stationed at West Point, some distance from New York City, and then abroad from 1900-1905, when his correspondence with Clark ended. Her continuously increasing devotion to painting may have also affected how willing she was to pursue their relationship. Eventually, in 1905, the two left each other’s lives completely when Foley was charged with embezzlement. The Clark family could not, and would not, be associated with such a scandal.
By the time she graduated, however, she had become entirely enamored with painting, and while she continued to perform her social duties, including continuing a correspondence with the West Point cadet Hamilton Foley. With her mother and grandmother, Kate took a deliberate and significant step towards a career as an artist and registered for classes at the famous Art Students League. The League was founded as a response to the stodginess of the National Academy of Design in New York City. This, and rumors that the Academy was suffering financially, prompted “a group of artists – almost all of whom were students at the National Academy of Design in New York City and many of whom were women”⁴³ – to champion a new institution that would reflect the tastes of a Modern artist:

...In the post-Civil War era, New York City was rapidly becoming the artistic capital of the nation. However, many young artists, influenced by modern European developments, felt that the Academy’s instruction was too conservative and unsympathetic to their new ideas about art.⁴⁴

The League’s exceptional curriculum, famous teachers, and progressive facilities were among the best in the country. In its most basic form, education at the League followed the form of its predecessor of the National Academy of Design and offered a variety of classes in drawing and painting. The League, however, remained entirely independent, relying on funding for courses solely through membership fees.⁴⁵ This allowed it to remain “a collection of studios, each autonomous and directed by the creative authority

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⁴⁴ “The History of the Art Students League of New York.”
⁴⁵ “The History of the Art Students League of New York.”
and counsel of the individual instructor without interference from the administration.”

It was a radical reaction to the stodgy National Academy, and the League thrived. Its quick and steady growth meant that the League had to move several times before settling at 215 West 57th Street in New York City in 1892.

Despite its apparent radicality, the League maintained a level of genteel decorum that appealed to Kate Freeman Clark; it was an institution that did not threaten the careful polite and respectable nature of the Freeman Clark women. Many of the students at the League were women. A certain level of social decorum was expected of students. Writing in 1893, art critic Charles de Kay asserted that “there is no instance recorded of anything happening at the League which would tend to disgust the women students.” There were “no scenes of riotous fun and horse-play, such as still occasionally break out at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, or at the Julian studios in Paris.” The League thus maintained a careful balance of modernity, radicality, and respectability. Yet another example of this is their choice of models. By allowing women to participate fully in live, nude-model drawing, the League skirted the line of impropriety, but by hiring only “the most respectable persons in the profession,” the League quelled any sense of discomfort felt by their often-genteel audience (fig. 3).

Life-drawing classes with “live” nude-models are essential to the fundamental, traditional training of artists. While men have had easy and ready access to the both male and female nude models throughout history, women have been highly restricted from

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46 “The History of the Art Students League of New York.”
47 “The History of the Art Students League of New York.”
studying and drawing the nude. Even in 1893, female artists were not allowed into the Royal Academy in London for the figure-drawing class. When they eventually were allowed in, figures had to be draped to obscure any “obscenities.”

Similarly, in Paris, women were denied access to life-drawing classes until the 1870s, even though the French Academic system placed the highest possible importance on human anatomy. To promote good morals and protect innocence, women were excluded from live-nude-models until the latter half of the 19th century. Even when access was begrudgingly allowed, the models often were draped to cover their genitals. The Art Students League offered these life-drawing classes to both men and women. Clark, who was from a conservative part of Mississippi, was allowed to attend life-drawing classes, and seeing fully nude models must have been shocking for her. It is remarkable that her mother, who always relayed her opinions freely, left behind no written accounts of ever stopping Clark from attending these classes. As a result, Clark left behind exquisite studies featuring fully-nude male and female models.

Clark’s entrance into the League came twenty years after her birth and the creation of the League. By then, it had been around long enough to have attracted some of the most renowned American Impressionist painters of the time: J. Alden Weir, John H. Twachtman, Kenyon Cox, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and of course, William Merritt Chase. Twachtman became Clark’s first professor at the Art Students League. He oversaw the “antique classes,” which were “elementary classes in drawing.”

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52 “The History of the Art Students League of New York.”
classes Clark settled into her cubicle, lit by a single window and surrounded by “an assortment of geometrical plaster forms, ‘block’ feet and hands, Greek and Roman heads, and antique bas-reliefs.” In this drawing class, Clark was meant to succeed in capturing the three-dimensional forms of the casts by “modeling them in charcoal, using a full range of tones... to convey solidity, and to blend the shades...” Twachtman taught the fundamentals of drawing in this course: perspective, highlighting, shading, and proportion.

Clark’s first semester at the League in the fall of 1894 is recorded on an enrollment form. She was enrolled in three classes: AP, MP, and CS. These three classes - likely “antique preparatory,” “morning painting,” and “sketch class,” respectively - were introductory-level classes and were required of all students before moving into advanced courses. Even in the first months of her enrollment, Clark embraced her role as a “League girl,” and in a letter for her dear Uncle Russell, Clark relished in relaying her busy schedule:

> Go to League at nine— that is, when I can. Leave there at twelve and go to the conservatory and practice two hours, if I can have the piano. Come home, have lunch... At a quarter of one I start to the sketch class, get home about a quarter past six. So you see, I do not always have much time.

From her first year at the League, she was determined to embrace her artistic side fully, spending full and illuminating days learning from the teachers at the League. At the end

58 As cited in: *The Artist’s Sketch*: Kate Freeman Clark to Russell Freeman, ca. 1894, Clark Papers.
of her first year, Clark was “doing finely at the League,” and her “drawings [were] put up from exhibitions & mostly good criticisms.”\(^{59}\) Around the same time, Twachtman signed her application to allow her entry into advanced classes, and unwittingly assured that Clark would continue her education at the League, and perhaps beyond.\(^{60}\)

Before she could begin these new classes, however, Clark had to establish summer plans to keep up her art training. She enrolled in painter Irving Wiles’s Peconic, Long Island, summer class. Wiles was an excellent choice in mentor for Clark, as his “love of nature, aristocratic values, and artistic tastes corresponded” to Clark’s own opinions.\(^{61}\) The choice of traveling out of the city for the summer was a hallmark of Clark’s own social class. Escaping the oppressive heat of New York City for the Atlantic coast was attractive to the upper-class Clarks, who had no responsibilities to keep them in the city. With Clark’s new determination to pursue painting, studying with Irving Wiles at his summer-home-based school was irresistible.

This summer proved enormously transformative for her, in part because she was introduced for the first true time to painting outdoors. She took to it immediately, writing to a friend in Holly Springs:

This is the most ravishingly beautiful picturesque place I have ever been & I am having such a fascinating time that I feel as if I should like to spend a year here and explore every nook in this charming country... I feel almost like a girl in a book.\(^{62}\)

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62 As cited in: *The Artist’s Sketch*: Kate Freeman Clark to Fannie, July 14, 1895, Clark Papers.
Under Wiles’s tutelage, Clark worked primarily with watercolor, and her surviving paintings reflect her true affections for en plein air painting and the Long Island Sound landscape. *Seascape* (n.d., fig. 4) is a wonderful piece depicting several women painting and sketching along the coastline. Here, Clark shows her deft hand at rendering layers of seashore foliage against a cloud-filled sky. In quick work, Clark captures three women under umbrellas, sitting along the shore, likely performing the same activities as Clark. Other beautiful watercolors on display in the Marshall County Historical Museum in Holly Springs reflect similar imagery of the shore (fig. 5). The idyllic pieces reflect the quietude and calmness she would always feel when on Long Island.

Clark’s romantic opinions about the Long Island landscape never truly faded and were reinvigorated over each of the six consecutive summers she spent on the island after 1895. This first summer proved to be, arguably, the most influential in her trajectory toward becoming an artist, following the introduction to the man who would become her guiding light through her artistic career. Following the rejuvenating summer spent outdoors, Clark returned to the Art Students League for the 1895-1896 school year with the intent to spend the next summer again on the island where she found so much productivity and happiness.

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63 This painting, though officially undated, may be able to be traced to Clark’s first and only summer with Irving Wiles in 1895. After this one summer, she embraced oil painting under William Merritt Chase. It seems likely that this watercolor, as well as others featuring seascape imagery were composed during the summer of 1895.
Chapter Three: Landscapes and the Shinnecock Summer School

During this 1895 summer, Clark experienced another influential event in her trajectory towards becoming an artist: she met with William Merritt Chase at Shinnecock Summer School. Founded by the well-to-do amateur landscape painter/illustrator Janet Hoyt, the Shinnecock Summer School would become a gathering place for upper class artists who sought to spend the hot summer months away from the city. Hoyt was determined to make “the most famous, popular, and influential summer outdoor painting school in America.” Hoyt’s friendship with Lydia Field Emmet and Dora Wheeler, both then pupils of Chase, allowed Hoyt the opportunity to meet Chase. Hoyt wished to recreate the en plein air technique and atmosphere, and she found that Shinnecock was among the best places to do so. She convinced him to champion her new project, and the result was the summer art community on Shinnecock.

Having been successfully founded by an influential member of the upper class, the Shinnecock school was an immediately respectable place for young men and women of similar class to gather; in part, it was this deeply appropriate and genteel society that attracted Clark and her family. At the school, she was surrounded by the men and women of equal social standing to her, and she always was properly accompanied, most often by her own mother. The genteel nature of her company is reflected in numerous paintings.

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featuring smartly dressed women engaging in polite practices such as tea drinking, portrait painting, embroidering, and casual strolls under parasols. These behaviors offered no threat of impropriety, so both painting the scenes and engaging in the activities proved a safe and proper form of entertainment. For Clark, painting these scenes allowed her to engage in polite socialization all while honing and practicing her own beloved craft.

*Afternoon Tea or Idle Ease* (n.d., fig. 6) is a masterful capture of light dappling through trees on a calm afternoon, *Portrait on the Porch* (n.d., fig. 7) and *Lady Embroidering* (n.d., fig. 8) capture Clark’s fellow female artists working at their own craft, and *Ladies with Orange Parasols* (n.d., fig. 9) depicts women in a moment of peaceful reverie. Each of these paintings remarkably renders warm afternoon light in an idyllic setting, likely that of Shinnecock, and each is a decided peek into the company of Kate Freeman Clark during her summers at Shinnecock.65

Clark was so affected by this single summer working with Chase that both of her biographers, Cynthia Grant Tucker and Carolyn J. Brown, dedicate many pages to the event. Clark, her teacher Wiles, and her companions entered into Chase’s studio in the Art Village on Southampton. In front of an easel and ready to lecture “stood the man Kate Clark had come to see”:.66

With his firmly chiseled nose and perfectly shaped, grey Van Dyke beard, Chase was, she wrote later, an unforgettable figure, a debonair gentleman “who looked more like a tastefully dressed millionaire than the proverbial artist.” He wore a dark blue serge Norfolk jacket, a white vest, white trousers, and white yachting

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65 Knowing the activities and company that Clark kept while at Shinnecock, along with the knowledge that she painted the majority of her landscapes on the island, help establish the hypothesis that the aforementioned pieces were created during her summers there.

66 Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 33.
cap with patent leather visor. He had a red geranium in his button hole, his eye
glasses on a wide black ribbon, and at his neck, a white tie caught together with
an antique ring.\textsuperscript{67}

In her account of Chase, Clark paid such close attention to the details in his appearance
that it offers a glimpse into her upper-class grooming and societal expectations. In Chase,
Clark found a patriarch that seemed to have come from the same world she did. This
impression, so etched in Clark’s mind, not only persuaded her to follow Chase and his
school of thought, but her summer at Shinnecock prompted her to make a decided switch
from watercolor to oil paint. “Perhaps,” wrote Clark, “I subconsciously realized from the
immaculateness of… Mr. Chase’s attire that it was possible to paint ‘in oils’ & yet remain
unspotted from the brush.”\textsuperscript{68} Clark’s aversion to the messiness of oil paint is fitting with
her upbringing in the higher echelons of society. It would have been improper for young
Clark to emerge from painting, covered in paint. Therefore, watercolor was the much
more genteel and socially accepted medium of art for a woman of her status. When she
saw oil painter Chase looking unblemished and refined, Clark leaped toward trying oils.
Of her impressive life’s oeuvre, the majority of her works are oil paintings, reflecting
Chase’s influence. This also marked a turn in her career from a watercolor art “hobbyist”
to a serious oil-painting fine artist.

It was at Shinnecock that Clark was happiest and felt most fulfilled. She painted
the rolling coastal hills and idyllic seashore that inspired so many to attend the summer

\textsuperscript{67} Tucker, \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}, 33.; As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: “Recollections of Shinnecock and of Mr. Chase.” (October 12, 1921). Unpublished essay, Clark papers. n.p.; The essay is almost certainly written by Kate Freeman Clark herself.

\textsuperscript{68} As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: “Recollections of Shinnecock and of Mr. Chase.” (October 12, 1921). Unpublished essay, Clark papers. n.p.
school. It is difficult to determine which paintings were created during her time at Shinnecock and during other summers, because her works were generally untitled and often undated.69 Along with the several paintings known to have been created in Shinnecock, there are others which can be carefully attributed to being painted on the island because, largely because of their country setting or glimpses of the sea in the background.

Her works from Shinnecock deeply reflect Chase’s influence, and some of her landscapes are almost indistinguishable from Chase’s. Chase’s form of Impressionism was derived largely from the French, who so successfully painted quickly, brush *en plein air* landscapes. Clark clearly admired the American Impressionism master, and directly acknowledged Chase’s styles and preferences. A comparison of Clark’s *My First Sky, Shinnecock* (1896, fig. 10) to Chase’s *Sunlight and Shadows, Shinnecock Hills* (1895, fig. 11) offers a glimpse into this relationship.

Likely painted within a year of each other, these two pieces are spectacularly similar. Though Clark’s piece is catalogued as undated, it is likely that the piece was created in the summer of 1896 during her first summer with Chase at Shinnecock. Both Shinnecock landscapes capture a well-worn path leading toward blue waterways. Each has a distinct horizon line and a similar composition, while the distinct fore-, middle-, and backgrounds are so similar to Chase’s painting’s layout that it suggests Clark was using Chase’s landscape as a direct example.

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69 Because Clark dated little to none of her work, creating a comprehensive timeline of her stylistic development is difficult. Dating is based on presumptions about the sort of work she would have been focusing on at different schools and locations.
Like many of her landscapes, *My First Sky, Shinnecock* promotes a hazy nostalgia for the summer months she spent at Shinnecock. A pale-blue sky shifts into a faded, warm green. The yellowed grey of the clouds is almost lost against the sky in the green background. A strikingly similar green completes the sliver of water that is framed one end by a thick layer of clouds and on the other end a thin yellow line of sand. Situated just above the distinct horizon line on the right edge of the painting, the water is a simple and inconspicuous addition.

Clark’s terra firma is overwhelmingly brown, although a closer look reveals her reliance on subtlety to distinguish between plants. The hazy foliate foreground, with its orange hue, is interrupted by another plant, this time taller and of a purple hue. Her subtle use of complementary colors here is not lost on the viewer; it works to create a visual harmony of warm colors with the distinctive yellow of the footpath dividing the composition. A sliver of pale green earth allows for an easy transition to the cool sky above.

Chase’s colors in *Sunlight and Shadows* are vibrant and more prismatic than those in Clark’s landscape. The clear blue sky shifts easily between dark and light. Like the thick line of clouds that Clark articulates in *My First Sky*, the lower line of clouds in Chase’s painting hovers, almost indistinguishable from the blue surrounding it. While Clark’s green sea is only identifiable because of the separating clouds, Chase’s water is a relatively visible addendum to the left background of his composition. His grassy foreground is flecked with orange, yellow, and white wildflowers, although the painting’s dominant color is a pale, muted green. Notably, Chase masterfully implements chiaroscuro, creating beautifully defined areas of shadow and sunlight. In this aspect,
Chase has achieved a level of mastery of detail articulation that Clark has yet to accomplish. His manipulation of the paint to create areas of light and dark to give the painting with more depth reminds the viewer that he is, in fact, the teacher.

Clark’s *My First Sky* is a rather flat painting that relies on the defined ground lines to imply depth. Without the alternating shadowed and sunlit ground, the painting misses the visual movement that encourages the eye to travel deeper into a work like Chase’s. In contrast, his sunlit middle-ground draws the eye toward it, prompting the viewer to examine the space before and behind the lit area. It is a masterful manipulation of the oil paint, and an example of a technique that Clark later would implement in her own work. Nevertheless, the result of what may have been one of her first *en plein air* paintings is remarkable. *My First Sky* speaks to an innate talent that needed only to be encouraged by Chase.

Her talent was fostered as Clark continued to produce magnificent landscapes inspired by the scenery of Shinnecock. Of the paintings known to have been created in Shinnecock, each is an attempt to capture the beauty of the place around her, and paintings like *The Piazza* (1902, fig. 12) do so, while acknowledging both Clark’s artistic progress and prowess. This piece, unlike some of her others, is well-documented and was understandably treasured by the artist. This piece and the events surrounding it were the subject of an entire essay Clark wrote in 1921—almost twenty years after the fact—recalling that fateful Monday critique in 1902 on Shinnecock. Identifying herself as “the girl-in-pink,” Clark narrates the day; her painting of a “stately Colonial dwelling with tall white columns” stood up against fellow student Rockwell Kent’s painting of the same
subject, the last two pieces to be critiqued for the day. Hers, full of warm light, positioned against his, “in low rock tones, most beautiful in harmony.”

A remarkable “one very high in key, full of sparkling sunlight,” her piece is evidence to Clark’s increasing talent. The way that Clark is able to render the light, so soft and warm, to capture the long shadows thrown by the sun is a true testament to her skill; and when compared to the relative flat and harsh light of My First Sky, this piece is obviously the result of continued practice and strengthening ability. This painting impressed Chase, as well. Her painting, alongside that of Kent, was on “the final board,” a place of high honor for the Shinnecock students. Chase’s critiques began with the beginners, working through them quickly to end with the more advanced work. Clark’s place at the end of the critique reflects a moment of high praise that she scarcely had time to revel in before fears set in:

Then doubts, would enter in, –so the study would not possibly be as good, after all, in fact it was quite bad. Yes, utterly horrible, she did not know she could ever do anything half so dreadful.

Despite her dramatized and self-demeaning recount of the events, Clark received a complimentary critique, complete with applause from the audience. As exciting as this moment must have been for Clark, when Chase awarded “the weekly prize for the most original composition, to the high-toned study of the house, and... [kept] the winning picture for his own collection, an added honor far greater than the award of the prize,”

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Clark must have been simply beyond words. Her greatest influence, her devoted teacher, chose her work to incorporate into his own private collection. As further reward, Chase gave Clark a portrait he painted of her in the distinct Impressionist style to which she was so beholden.

Though the further repercussions of this event were not further cataloged in her essay, they are easy to imagine. This boost in morale, a direct and tangible compliment from her teacher, must have done wonders to her confidence. This event, in tandem with the other happy moments spent on Shinnecock, prepared Clark for the rest of her year spent in bustling New York City, where she would continue her education under the watchful eye of her beloved mentor.

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Chapter Four: Still Life Studies and the Chase School

Clark’s experiences with Chase extended beyond the shores of Long Island. After the summer of 1895, she immediately decided “to take up oils and study with the Master [Chase] in the fall” at his new school, the Chase School (today known as the Parsons School of Design). Chase began to have irreparable disagreements with the pedagogy of the League, and wanted instead to teach the inherent “connectedness” of drawing and painting. He coached Chase School students to learn “the principles of drawing, color, and composition simultaneously and have them learn to ‘draw’ with the brush.” He also argued against the classic “antique” drawing classes that so many beginner students, including Clark, had to take. He found them dull and uninteresting, and assumed that his young students would too. His academically liberal agenda was enticing to many students and teachers alike. He recruited faculty from the League, including Irving Wiles. Naturally, Clark followed Chase.

Here Clark learned to paint. More specifically, she learned to paint like Chase. She enrolled in his still-life painting class, a subject Chase touted as the best way to gain control over “form and color technique.” Clark embraced this class wholeheartedly, and understandably must have been beyond thrilled when she received what she translated as a major compliment. On the first day of class, Chase commended her attempt at capturing

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79 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 35.
80 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 35.
the likeness of a small brown pitcher with a broken lip. Chase “predicted a future for her,” citing “that [she] started out with a great deal of courage and would make a painter if [she] made the effort.” Clark was determined to make the effort, and her saved still life paintings, many of which were likely completed in this first year under Chase, are “so typically Chase in [their] subject and brilliant execution that [they] could be taken for…the Master’s own canvases.” He seemed to pay her compliment after compliment on her still lifes, even commending her for having “the best bit of glass he had seen, a green hyacinth bottle, and [her] copper kettle was boldly and frankly done.” Unsurprisingly, Clark’s still lifes are often almost entirely comparable in skill with that of her teacher, reflecting her undeniable skill and total devotion to Chase. An outstanding example of this is reflected in Chase’s *Still Life with Tangerines* (1900, fig. 13). According to Cynthia Grant Tucker, this still life painting was attributed to Clark until it was conserved and Chase’s signature was revealed in the upper left corner.

Clark developed a decided affinity for florals, evident in her numerous still lifes and in her careful landscape renderings. In *Silver Watering Can* (n.d., fig. 14) and in *Bouquets of Orange and Blue* (n.d., fig. 15), Chase’s influence is inescapable. But as in her other works, Clark’s own tastes and tendencies began to emerge as she trained at the Chase School. Often, her brushstrokes are wider than Chase’s as she fully and truly embraced the Impressionist tendency to paint with assertive, unblended brushwork.

For example, in *Silver Watering Can*, her brushstrokes are bold yet disconnected from the structures of the painting in such a way that her flowers awkwardly hang limply

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81 As cited in: *Kate Freeman Clark*: Undated entry, Diary, 1896-1898.  
82 Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 36.  
83 As cited in: *Kate Freeman Clark*: Undated entry, Diary, 1896-1898.  
84 Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 37.
and confusedly from their perch. *Bouquets of Orange and Blue*, a larger and more ornate painting, was an early attempt at rendering flowers that reflects not only a mastery of the lighter colors, but a true devotion to the dark, moody background that Chase often used. Her brushstrokes here are more controlled, accentuating the individual flowers rather than dashing them off as an afterthought – as she did in *Silver Watering Can*. With *Bouquets of Orange and Blue*, Clark has mastered the small, delicate brushstroke, which was perfect for outlining and detailing flowers. In *Silver Watering Can*, the flowers are less emphatically defined and the overall effectiveness of the composition is weakened. Chase considered “[flowers] ‘the most difficult things’ to paint,”85 his admiration for Clark could have only increased alongside Clark’s progressing talent.

In Clark’s *Silver Watering Can*, the emphasis on the color against the dark and moody background is a resounding declaration of Chase’s influence (see, for example, Chase’s *Still Life: Flowers* (n.d., fig. 16). This technique, inspired by Chase’s time in Munich, Germany, is evident in his portraits, and occasionally in his still lifes. Chase, for his part, has entirely mastered the skill by the time he taught Clark, and in *Still Life: Flowers*, his red flowers are less stark against their background, preventing the so-called “riot of color” that he disliked.86 His preference for subtle color shifts are obtained in the warmth and red she incorporates into this background. Against it, his bold flowers do not outshine the rest of the piece, but instead, work to visually connect the composition. Clark masters this technique in *Bouquets of Orange and Blue*. Though still colorful, her palette is now carefully subdued to effectively create a cohesive mood. The blues, oranges, and whites all fade quietly into the background.

86 Brown, *The Artist’s Sketch*, 102.
The other elements of these still lifes are restricted and few. Chase’s rendered fabric on covering the table reflects his taste for the ornate and detail. The richness and silky quality of this fabric is communicated by the painted peaks and valleys of the cloth. Clark, in contrast, avoids articulating such detail by painting a dark, wooden surface out of necessity. She takes no delight in painting such minutiae. Likewise, in Clark’s *Silver Watering Can*, the surface is identifiable only by the off-canvas light source casting a gentle glow against it. In *Bouquets of Orange and Blue*, Clark does render a more defined table, this time choosing to highlight corner and edge of a deep brown wooden table. Here, again though, the table is articulated by a single light source off the canvas. Still lifes by Chase are often ornate in all aspects, while Clark shies from such challenges and chooses instead to focus on flowers and their colors.

Interestingly, in *Silver Watering Can*, the namesake object, while clearly there, is not a central point of the composition. Clark placed it to the side and muted its shining silver in favor of portraying bright flowers. A similar vase in Chase’s *Still Life: Flowers* masterfully and emphatically captures the light shining against it. The silver vase in this painting is meant to speak to and equal the strength of Chase’s flowers, tablecloth, and smaller glass vessel. Whether driven by a lack of skill or a deliberate choice, Clark’s *Silver Watering Can* is less emphatic than her red and pink bursts of color. Edging on cool whites and grays, the watering can is a distinct departure from the warmth of the rest of the composition. The effect is not one of total cohesivity, but it does speak to the influence of Chase’s penchant for shine and ornateness, as seen in *Still Life: Flowers*. Here, Clark eschews that style and emphasizes slight and delicate color shifts instead.
Chase’s influence on Clark is not limited to her floral works. Her *Untitled* (n.d., fig. 17) still life featuring a gaping fish and silver pitcher is one of many still lifes that she likely painted under the tutelage of Chase. Chase’s *Still-Life* (ca. 1913, fig. 18) is emblematic of this genre of moody compositions again inspired by his time in Germany. In both Clark’s *Untitled* and Chase’s *Still-Life*, a distinct light source casts a warm glow over the paintings, streaming in from an unknown source on the left of the canvas. Clark’s composition is more simplified than her teacher’s. Chase’s work features two fish, a skate, a golden kettle, and a stark white bowl. Clark’s composition is streamlined, focusing its attention on the Impressionistic rendering of the fish.

Clark’s *Untitled* painting does include other elements, but it is clear through their subdued colors that the focus of the painting is the fish and its platter – which is so close in color to the fish that it offers no distraction. What is most remarkable in *Untitled* is the distinct, thick brushstrokes that articulate the fish. Shifts in grays are interrupted by the occasional pale mauve peak of flesh and lip. The resulting rendering is clumsy, with the pink lip of the fish almost jarringly out of place and oversized. On the other hand, the central fish in Chase’s *Still-Life* is clearly the work of an Impressionist, with a rough texture that sweeps the eye backwards. In his persisting attention to detail, though, Chase is disinclined to completely embrace Impressionism. However, Clark seems to lack the same qualms as Chase, and *Untitled* obviously takes the initiative to begin impressing upon the world her own tastes and preferences for brushwork over naturalistic detail.

Chase’s influence on Clark is evident in almost every aspect of her oeuvre, but within the context of her still lifes, Clark immaculately merges Chase’s tastes for the dark, somber palette of Dutch still lifes with her own inclination towards the loose
Impressionist brushstrokes. The result of this hybridization is a distinctive and often successfully composed still life, unique to its creator and a testament to her own painterly skills.
Chapter Five: Portrait Painting and Life After School

Clark first studied portraiture under the tutelage of Wiles (who also studied under Chase), and he thus taught Clark a style that was heavily Chase-influenced. She continued to study portrait painting directly under Chase, who himself was educated in Munich. Studying alongside Americans Frank Duveneck and John Henry Twatchman (who was also a teacher of Clark) at the Munich Akademie, Chase initially adopted the Munich School’s dark, somber palette—which offered an alternative to that of the popular Parisian Impressionist movement. The style focused on intense chiaroscuro and fixated on a naturalistic depiction in paintings. Chase, for his part, adopted “the avant-garde manner of Wilhem Leibl, a dramatic bravura technique,” while continuing to emphasize his high level of technical skill (fig. 19). Leibl, “the most radical among the Munich Realists,” drew inspiration from Gustave Courbet, and Jochen Wierich writes that “to be part of the Munich School in the 1870s meant to be at least indirectly under the influence of that French Champion of Realism [Courbet].”

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87 Katherine Metcalf Roof, The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917). Among other influences, Chase was inspired by Diego Velasquez, the Spaniard’s influence most directly seen in the portraits of Chase’s young daughters modeled after members of the Spanish Royal family (96-97). His indoor scenes and portraits nod to the ornate decorative features of Japanese art and are evocative of the work that Mary Cassatt was producing in the late-nineteenth century—work that Chase was familiar with (277). For all of his non-American influences, however, Chase was in part responsible for creating his own form of American Art, one that embraced aspects of various cultures. Art, for Chase, seemed to become American because of its geographical creation location and its creator’s nationality. As far as Chase was concerned, his form of American Art could not have developed without the influences from abroad.

Chase adapted what he learned in Munich “to show his pupils how to adapt the old Munich school techniques to the depiction of contemporary life,” to the best of his ability. In Chase’s Munich-inspired portraits, his regal sitters are rendered in fine clothing, and positioned against a dark, stark background, often staring directly into the eyes of the viewer. The overall effect is sumptuous and refined, reflecting the contemporary life of the upper class that Chase, and Clark for that matter, were adamant to depict.

Chase eventually embraced a more Impressionistic style and taught both the moody Munich portraiture and Impressionism, and hybrids of the two approaches. This is evident in the portraits Clark produced. From Chase, Clark learned to manipulate color. A veritable master with his careful and refined use of color, Chase “never attempted to manipulate a ‘riot of color.’... His taste was rather for the reserves of color, the finer tones and juxtapositions, ... with the significant accenting touch of light or dark.”

Clark, in her usual awe of Chase, expressed a deep appreciation for his technique in her essay “Recollections of Shinnecock & of Mr. Chase”:

So exhilarating & exciting was it to watch the magic creation of his brush. That, I found myself quite unable to sleep… He possessed a marvelous dexterity & quickness of brush & a hand & eye so true that almost never was a touch or tone altered after once it was placed with an incredible swiftness. … I recall one day, ten minutes after the six foot canvas had been started, the full length standing figure… shoot before us complete, in monotone… Then commenced, the

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90 Tucker, Kate Freemen Clark, 42.
91 Roof, The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase, 282.
painting, the putting on of the color, on top of the wet tone – “drawing in paint”...  

Clark evidently was bewitched by every movement Chase made, and it is unsurprising that her portraiture bears similarities to his. Her stunning *Lady in Yellow Dress* (n.d., fig. 21) bears resemblance to Chase’s portraits in many respects, especially when compared to Chase’s *My Daughter Dieudonne* (ca. 1902, fig. 20), an example of his Munich-influenced work.

Chase’s *My Daughter Dieudonne* has a plain, dark background, dramatic lighting, and a muted palette. Both *My Daughter Dieudonne* and Clark’s *Lady in Yellow Dress* feature women in a full-length portrait, both dressed in decadent gowns signifying upper-class status. The status of these women is further confirmed by the knowledge that significant funding would have been paid to artists to produce portraits of such a large size. Both paintings are lit dramatically from a single off-frame source. The effect of chiaroscuro, particularly in Clark’s piece, is emphasized. The dramatic effect of the lighting lends a focus to the singular figure in each painting. The dark background against which the women seem to float further emphasizes their forms. Diagonal lines lead towards the faces of each woman, though the face of Chase’s daughter is the clearest part of his rendering, while Clark is determined to obscure her sitter’s face in the shadow of her coiffed hair.

Chase all but submerges his figure in white fabric and feathers; the body of his daughter is entirely swallowed by her dress, save for her defined facial features. Chase paints a young woman who appears entirely modest, genteel, and appropriate in her

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depiction. This portrait of the young Chase daughter perfectly embodies the ideals of an upper class, early-20th-century woman. Here, she is an object to manipulated and portrayed as her father sees fit; it follows, then, that Chase depicts his own child in such modest terms.

Clark, on the other hand, accentuates the body of her model, drawing her shape inward to a defined hourglass waist, and then softly curving outward into the swirling, soft yellow dress. This definition of the womanly form, along with the exposed collarbone and shoulder, is radical and deeply evocative of John Singer Sargent’s Portrait of Madame X (1884, fig. 22), a piece that greatly shocked those who viewed it. Both Chase and Clark were known fans of Sargent’s work, so the possibility of his influence here is not entirely unfounded. Clark’s and Sargent’s artworks are deeply similar in composition with their standing figures, vulnerably glancing to the side with their shoulders exposed. The is certainly a departure from Chase’s depiction, and Clark’s painting is remarkable for its quiet rebellion against her teacher’s genteel image. However, Clark’s sitter looks off and down towards the ground, contrasting with the steady gaze of Chase’s daughter in My Daughter Dieudonne. While daring, the gaze in Clark’s portrait is uncertain and insecure of asserting her own opinions, perhaps echoing the sentiments of Clark herself.

In Lady in Yellow Dress, Clark loosening brushstrokes are evidence of her interest in Impressionism. The loosely defined folds of the yellow dress, indicated by thick swaths of muted yellow, along with the simple flecks of purple to indicate flower

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93 John Singer Sargent was a close friend of Chase’s and was asked to paint a commissioned portrait of Chase. Clark considered the resulting portrait, “one of the finest Sargents in America.”; As cited in: The Artist’s Sketch: “Recollections,” n.d., Clark Papers.
appliques, are hallmarks of the Impressionist fondness for unabashed use of broad strokes and blocks of color. The limbs of the woman, for all that is exposed, are obscured at her wrists, and melt into the warm background. The dress and the background prevent this piece from becoming a “riot of color,” and instead work alongside one another, muting the piece and emphasizing the direct contact of light: both of which were important defining characteristics of a Munich-style portrait. The result of this is a portrait that, while bearing resemblance to Chase’s Munich style, begins to explore a more Impressionistic approach to portraiture. The piece also asserts a slight radicality that we do not see often in Clark’s work. It is remarkable, and a testament to her own independent, developing ideas about art.

In her later portraits, Clark would adapt the direct gaze of Munich style into her own work, posing “her sitters unequivocally,” yet she also applied “great slashing strokes and loaded brush to endow them with power and vitality.” Her Lady with Red Shawl (n.d., fig. 23) is an example of Clark’s hybrid of Munich style and Impressionism. Situated against a dark, sterile background, a woman with her dark hat almost indiscernible against the background stares resolutely directly from the canvas. Her direct eye contact with the viewer is softened by the subtlety in color change between her eyes and the shadow surrounding her face. Striking against the dim setting is the red of the shawl and the white of her billowing sleeves. Here Clark embraces the Impressionist tendency to use lines of color to build up her sitter’s clothing. Distinguishable brushstrokes craft the beautifully rendered shawl to be transparent, falling off the subject’s shoulder and down the back. The subject’s well-illuminated face is contrasted

94 Tucker, Kate Freeman Clark, 46.
against the dark hat and background. Clark also offers subtle shifts in color—the dark hat and skirt of the sitter are almost indistinguishable from that of the background—that are marks of the Munich style. However, the shirt and shawl of the sitter are decidedly less reserved in brushstroke and color choice, and appear Impressionist-influenced. In this way, the styles are almost at conflict with one another, creating a disharmony perhaps indicative of her own struggle to decide which of the two styles she wished to pursue.

Interestingly, Clark’s numerous self-portraits are all deft works of Impressionism, with only a small emphasis placed on the Munich style as she continued to incorporate the stylistic dark backgrounds. A self-portrait housed in the Kate Freeman Clark Art Gallery features a young, smartly dressed Clark positioned against a dark wall (fig. 24). A deft piece of Impressionism, this painting expertly depicts Clark built up of colored brushstrokes, with even the dark background showing distinguishable strokes. The background is unique in this piece as it does not appear solid; but instead, it appears to encircle Clark’s face, drawing the eye towards the brighter features of her flowered hat and deep blue jacket. In this self-portrait, the flowers are a clear testament to her talent and affinity towards the subject; they are the most colorful aspect of the painting and compliment the dark blue of her jacket. It is evident that this self-portrait with its use of Impressionism speaks to Clark’s own affection for the style over the Munich style.

Furthermore, in the several portraits painted of Clark by Chase, he chose to depict her in an Impressionist style. Even her beloved teacher knew of her embrace of Impressionism.

It is then unsurprising that we remember Clark as an Impressionist painter. From 1895 until 1903, Clark was a student of Chase’s, and absorbed everything he taught. She was exposed to his own fluctuations between the Munich and Impressionist styles art, and
as a devoted student, her own work emulates this artistic conflict. Clark, for her part however, does more fully embrace aspects of Impressionism that Chase seemed uncomfortable with embracing. Her brushy paint strokes and clear affection for *en plein air* landscapes place her work beyond that of Chase, in terms of Impressionist tendencies. These years spent with Chase were her most productive. In just the six summers she spent at Shinnecock, she produced over three hundred canvases.\(^{95}\) Many were made *en plein air*, and account for many of the works she produced during what she considered the “the happiest and most satisfying” years of her life.\(^{96}\) Her schooling at the Art Students League and Chase School of Art reflect her dedication to not only painting, but also to Chase. Her closeness to Chase, in part, made her departure from the realm of academia all the more significant.

Inspired by her accomplishments at school, Clark decided to depart from school in search of own, independent successes. Part of this new-found freedom involved Clark experimenting with different artistic styles beyond the influence of Chase. The most significant of the experiments are the paintings obviously inspired by the Ashcan School and Robert Henri (figs. 25 & 26). With its depictions of the working class (a world so very different from Clark’s own), the Ashcan School was a contradiction to the pleasant, uncontroversial American Impressionism that Clark’s own upper class favored. In the images painted by Clark, she clearly sought out scenes so different from the portraits of leisure and landscapes of idyll. Figure 25 features young men shoveling snow surrounded by the smog of the inner city; Clark had no reason to associate herself with these working-class members of society, but in her attempt to explore other artistic styles, she

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\(^{95}\) Brown, *The Artist’s Sketch*, 99.

\(^{96}\) Tucker, *Kate Freeman Clark*, 48.
produced a watercolor that is noteworthy in its stark departure from most of her other paintings. Figure 26 captures a night scene, rendered in the quick, loose strokes of the Ashcan style. It depicts a scene from the new modernity, the elevated train, and it pays homage to a changing social order, an order in which the working class now featured prominently. This painting is Clark’s acknowledgement of art styles outside of American Impressionism and Chase. Despite her obvious talent for depicting the scenes, it seems that Clark was never totally comfortable producing them, and it was likely that this was in large part to the genteel society with which she was accustomed.

While Chase and Henri knew of each other and were cordial until their 1915 schism, Chase’s—and by extension Clark’s—tastes for the polite, clean structures of the upper-class dissuaded them from depicting the gritty lives of the working class. And then, when Chase and Henri exchanged hostilities in 1907 over the direction of American Art—Chase’s tastes were firmly rooted in the upper-class and seemingly unwillingly to embrace new forms of Modernism, while Henri “took him themes from the harsher realities of city life, developing new ideas about Modernism.”97 Dedicated truly to Impressionism only, Clark left any notion of embracing Henri’s style behind and returned to her beloved Impressionism.

The years following her departure from school saw Clark submit work to various exhibitions across the United States.98 Her various exhibitions began to accumulate into a rather impressive list, including shows in Buffalo, New York; Spokane, Washington; and Dallas, Texas. All of these successes though were not entirely inspiring to Clark. A

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98 A complete list of her exhibition history is listed in the Appendix.
product of both her time and her upbringing, Clark was never entirely able to embrace life outside of academia.

Her ties to the South never entirely disappeared. Comments from family members and neighbors reminded Clark that she should “bow to the vogue in all respects,” never disrupting the natural order of things.\(^99\) The natural order of things, of course, was a world where women were content in standings and did not seek to invade the “spheres of life which belong to men.”\(^100\)

Clark tried to compromise in her art and social life, submitting pieces under the name Freeman Clark so that she could exhibit work more easily for two reasons. First, this name would—and was—gendered male, so there was no possibility that Clark may be denied entry based on her sex. Furthermore, it assured an immediate level of respect to her as an artist, if she were assumed to be male. Secondly, her pseudonym would have undoubtedly eased the minds of her mother, grandmother, and extended family. It is unclear what Clark, herself, thought of her pseudonym. It was her choice to sign and submit work under this name, but at the same time, it seems that she was already accepting that her art would never amount to the fame that would require her to publicly present herself as a female artist. To add to the list of contradictions, Clark accepted any offer of money for her work. Clark’s painting at the Texas State Fair in 1910 won a cash prize, but she refused to accept the money, perhaps in part because of her mother’s determined disapproval

\(^{99}\) As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: Edward Russell Freeman to Clark, October 16, 1897; This letter from Clark’s uncle is indicative of the external pressures against which Clark struggled.

\(^{100}\) As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: Edward Russell Freeman to Clark, October 16, 1897.
Clark’s desire to be an artist required that she promote herself and accept any and all forms of praise. Yet she often was unwilling and unable to indulge such flattery, which went against the teachings of her genteel upbringing and education. There was no room for both the socialite Clark and the artist to coexist. For Clark, it was too difficult to tear herself from the bonds of her family and her Southern traditions, so her career outside of academia began to fail, despite a relatively impressive string of exhibitions. The world was moving in a rapidly progressive direction that left Impressionism behind, and it was not one that Clark could bring herself to embrace.
Conclusions

The edgy, gritty, working-class focus of the New York City-based Ashcan School could not have been more foreign and improper to the upper-class sensibilities shared by both Chase and Clark. Moreover, the 1913 Armory Show brought a new wave of avant-garde European Modernism across the Atlantic to New York City. Chase found this particularly troubling, for “the sponsors [of the show] did not ask for a single canvas from him.”\(^{101}\) Students he taught participated in the famous show, while his sweet, idyllic Impressionism seemed to have no place in the future of art.\(^{102}\)

While Chase claimed to be receptive to the changing tides of the art world, “he could not publicly abide the strong currents unleashed in the United States by the Armory Show.”\(^{103}\) Modern avant-garde works by Henri Matisse and Marcel Duchamp were horribly shocking in their experimental, progressive spirit to Chase. As a result, these styles were undoubtedly just as troubling to Clark. This show arguably marked the beginning of the end of Chase’s career. Although he clung to his distaste of the burgeoning art movements, the time for the softness and pleasantry of American Impressionism had passed.

\(^{103}\) Brown, *The Artist’s Sketch*, 123.
Chase died on October 25, 1916, and although Clark did not write about her reaction for posterity, it is easy to imagine how devastated she may have been. This was an especially difficult time for Clark because Chase’s death, along with the declining health of her grandmother and the darkness of World War I, “brought Clark’s painting to a virtual halt.”\(^\text{104}\) A year later though, a determined Clark, in 1917, after having not “touched a brush” in a long while, tried to return to the Art Students League in New York City, but she found it irredeemably changed.\(^\text{105}\) The League was now dedicated to teaching avant-garde practices, and the time for \textit{en plein air} landscapes or brushy portraits was in the past. Clark claimed she “did not see anything she was willing to call ‘good’ or ‘promising’ work, and she doubted the school would turn out as many artists as it once had.”\(^\text{106}\)

In 1919, Clark’s dear grandmother died, and so did her love for the speed and excitement of New York City. Clark undoubtedly was fatigued from the loss of her beloved teacher and her ever-present grandmother, in quick succession. Art brought her little solace. When Clark’s mother died just three years later in 1922, she found she had no teacher to guide her, no love for the emerging styles of art, no chaperone to accompany her through the streets for New York, and no more of her beloved female family members. After three decades spent in the bustling city, Clark could bear its energy no longer and returned to the quiet, unchanging streets of Holly Springs, where she lived for the rest of her life.

\(^{104}\) Tucker, \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}, 78.
\(^{105}\) As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: September 7, 1917, Diary, 1917 to 1918.
\(^{106}\) Tucker, \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}, 82; As cited in: \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}: November 12, 1917, 1917 to 1918.
Numerous undated pencil drawings and watercolor sketches left on small receipts and papers from her later life in Holly Springs emphasize that the love of art was still alive, even if she was unable or unwilling to produce work similar to what she did in New York.\footnote{Tucker, \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}, 86.} Clark fell easily back into the role of keeping the family’s social profile, and took tea and lunch with other upper-class women in Holly Springs. As she aged, her memories of her years as an artist faded until “the impression that remained was of an eccentric old woman with lots and lots of cats.”\footnote{Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 154.} Fewer and fewer people knew of her thirty years spent in New York City, and it was something she rarely discussed. Clark brought little to none of her artwork back to Holly Springs. She had few reminders of the idyllic landscapes, precise still lifes, and the powerful portraits that she was once capable of producing.

The breadth and depth of her oeuvre was only revealed after her death on March 3, 1957, when her will revealed that she “left to the city of Holly Springs all the paintings that had been stored in a warehouse in New York.”\footnote{Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 156.} Today, her paintings are installed and stored at the Kate Freeman Clark Art Gallery, a mere minute’s walk from the ancestral Walthall home. The gallery has done what they can to preserve her work, though it leaves much to be desired as hundreds of unframed canvases lay stacked on shelves, relying on only the small climate-controlled room to keep them. The gallery has successfully conserved and restored some of her works, but because it keeps such an untapped wealth of paintings and other works of art, far more of her work deserves to be

\footnotetext[107]{Tucker, \textit{Kate Freeman Clark}, 86.}
\footnotetext[108]{Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 154.}
\footnotetext[109]{Brown, \textit{The Artist’s Sketch}, 156.}
conserved and shown to the public. Perhaps because of her status as a Holly Springs citizen, she is overly sacred, meant to be shared with those in the South who can truly appreciate and understand Clark’s own thoughts and tendencies. It does her a disservice, however, to not seize every possible opportunity to further introduce her and her work to the contemporary world outside of Holly Springs. Clark’s work has a minimal internet footprint, something that is almost required of any artist working today. This is largely due to the fact that the keepers of the Kate Freeman Clark Art Gallery are not technology savvy, nor do they have the budget to hire staff to conserve, research, catalog, and curate the collection.

Clark was born into a time of change and lived through periods of volatile shifts in history, in artistic styles, and in modernity. The Civil War ended a mere ten years before her birth, and her Southern home was in the midst of Reconstruction in 1875. Her wealthy, white family afforded her the comfort and prosperity that was not guaranteed to many in the late nineteenth century, and so doted-upon was she that she faced few challenges. Perhaps her easy upbringing did little to prepare her for the heartache that she would experience at the end of her career, but it certainly allowed her to produce hundreds of brilliant, inspired pieces of art that deserve the care and affection given to a few of them only recently. Few women in art history have had the access to quality training that Clark enjoyed as a result of her social standing and family wealth.

Her inability to overcome the rapid succession of debilitating losses in the late 1910s – and her unwillingness to embrace new, emerging styles of art – proved obstacles that she could not surmount. Clark’s return to Holly Springs to live as a socialite was an unfortunate conclusion to a promising artistic career that could have been, and almost had
been, a sparkling success. She should be remembered for her talents, her remarkable dedication to Chase’s teachings and processes, her grand renderings of the peaceful Shinnecock countryside, for the endearing portraits of her friends and family, and for her exceptional still lifes that rival that of her teacher.

Art is fickle in who it chooses to embrace in its historical canon. Women frequently do not make the final draft; Southern women make it even less frequently. Luckily, the art-historical canon does leave space for a rewrite that should include, and is including, a vastly more diverse range of people. For all the quietude surrounding her post-New-York-City life, Clark deserves to be embraced by an art history that looks towards the future, where females are valued not for physical sheer beauty and grace alone, but for their fierce talents and desires to create something spectacular.
Appendix

1907  Clark exhibited *Neighbors* at the **Corcoran School of Art** (Washington, D.C.).

1908  Clark showed *Oh, Happy Days of Innocence and Ease* at the **Carnegie Institute** (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

1910  Clark showed *Entrance to the Orchard* at the **Buffalo Fine Arts Academy** (Buffalo, New York). She exhibited two works at the **Ladeveze’s Gallery** (Spokane, Washington).

1904  Clark exhibited *The Lower Field* at the 79th **Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design** (New York City, New York).

1905  Clark had work accepted into the **Boston Art Club** (Boston, Massachusetts) and the **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

1906  Clark exhibited *Entrance to the Orchard* and *Oh, Happy Days of Innocence and Ease* at the **Corcoran School of Art** (Washington, D.C.). **Rochester Art Club** (Rochester, New York) also listed three of Clark’s paintings, *Locust and Wild Aster, In Blossom Time*, and *Columns – Cosmos* in their 24th Annual Exhibition Catalog.

1912  Clark exhibited *Laurel* in the Fourth Exhibition of Oil Paintings by Contemporary American Artists at the **Corcoran School of Art** (Washington, D.C.). She also submitted *Laurel* to the **Texas State Fair** (Dallas, Texas) and won a prize for the painting.

1914  Clark showed *Summer Afternoon* in the Fifth Exhibition of Oil Paintings by Contemporary American Artists at the **Corcoran School of Art** (Washington, D.C.).

1915  Clark was awarded her first one-woman show at the **Braus Gallery** (New York City). She showed *The Climbers* at the **Panama-Pacific Exposition** (San Francisco, California). She had her second one-woman show with nine paintings displayed at the **Riverside Branch of the New York Public Library**. Clark exhibited *Silver and Gold* at the **Detroit Museum of Art’s** first annual exhibition.

1918  Clark had her third and final one-woman show that featured sixteen paintings at the **Men’s City Club** (New York City).

1922  Along with other Shinnecock Summer School students, Clark participated in a memorial exhibition of Chase’s paintings at **Memorial Hall** (Southampton, New York), submitting *Summer Afternoon*.\(^{110}\)

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\(^{110}\) The information regarding Clark’s exhibition history is borrowed from Carolyn Brown’s *The Artist’s Sketch*. 

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Bibliography


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