



Philadelphia Cultural Landscapes: The Sartain Family Legacy

Katherine Martinez

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In their day, from 1830 to 1930, the Sartain family of Philadelphia were widely admired as printmakers, painters, art administrators, and educators. Since then, the accomplishments of three generations of Sartains - John, children Samuel, Henry, Emily, and William, and grand-daughter Harriet -- have become obscure. This wide-ranging collection of essays aims to rectify that situation. The patriarch of the family -- John Sartain -- came to Philadelphia from London in 1830 seeking success as a mezzotint engraver. Mezzotint was a sophisticated means of popularizing the work of well-known painters, and as an English-trained engraver John was in great demand. He became influential, not just as a pictorial engraver, but as a painter publisher, and administrator. He even designed monuments and furniture. And he passed on his skills and learning to his children. One of John's daughters and three of his sons went on to become equally celebrated. Emily, with her friend Mary Cassat, became a well-known painter and principal of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, precursor of the Moore College of Art and Design. As an art educator, she spearheaded the women's art movement, traveling widely as a speaker and delegate. John's sons Samuel and Henry worked with their father as engravers and printmakers and were early photography enthusiasts. Son William moved to New York, where he became an associate of the National Academy of Design, a founder of the Society of American Artists, and president of the Art Club of New York. Henry's daughter Harriet followed her aunt Emily as head of the School of Design, where she advocated broad popular access to art appreciation training. The Sartains were important not just for who they were but for who they knew and influenced. They were in the vanguard of the movement to democratize art and art education. Among their associates were Judd Sartain, a successful homeopathic physician who financed her niece Emily's professional training; poet and short-story writer Edgar Allan Poe; painter Thomas Eakins, Emily's one-time beau; and industrialist and art collector Joseph Harrison, Jr. Lavishly illustrated with 113 duotones and 8 color plates, Philadelphia's Cultural Landscape is a fascinating book at a century in which the production and promulgation of art was seen as everybody's business, and at a family that epitomized that spirit.

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