

HISTORY IN ART

John Singer Sargent 1856–1925

15 June 2022

1856 – John Singer Sargent is born in Florence, Italy on 12 January, the eldest surviving child of Dr Fitzwilliam Sargent and his wife Mary Newbold Singer, originally from Philadelphia. John is brought up to speak French, Italian and German as well as English, and travels widely with his parents to southern France, Rome, the Alps, and encouraged to appreciate European arts and culture.

1874 – Sargent studies briefly at the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence but moves on to Paris and the studio of fashionable portraitist Carolus-Duran. He also studies drawing at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Carolus-Duran invites Sargent to assist him on a commission for a ceiling decoration at the Palais de Luxembourg.

1877 – Sargent begins exhibiting at the Paris Salon and is admired for his innovation.

1878 – He exhibits the *Oyster Gatherers of Cançale* at the Salon – his first publicly exhibited landscape.

1879 – Sargent's portrait of Carolus-Duran is exhibited in the Paris Salon. Like Carolus-Duran and his friend Manet, Sargent visits Spain and becomes fascinated with and influenced by Velázquez. He paints *The Spanish Dance* and *El Jaleo*, also exhibited at the Salon.

1880 – Sargent visits the Netherlands to study the Dutch masters, particularly Frans Hals. He also visits and paints in Venice.

1882 – He paints *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, an unconventional portrait of four girls.

1884 – He paints his notorious portrait of Madame Pierre Gautreau, which provokes hostility from critics and public.

1885–6 – Sargent moves to London. He finds it difficult to sell his work in England, because he is considered too avant-garde. His failure to find portrait commissions encourages him to concentrate on landscapes. He paints *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, which is exhibited at the Royal Academy summer exhibition and is praised by the Academy's president, Sir Frederic Leighton, but critics are lukewarm.

1887–90 – Finds great success in America and receives some lucrative commissions.

1890s – Sargent becomes hugely successful as a portraitist in London and among the aristocracy.

1900s – Travelling regularly to the Alps and Italy and Spain, he moves away from traditional portraiture towards landscapes and scenes of local life. He rarely sells any of these but continues to take some portrait commissions.

1914–16 The First World War brings an end to Sargent's travels in Europe and he moves back to America, where he is feted yet again. He paints landscapes in Florida and the Rockies, and also important portraits of John D. Rockefeller and President Wilson.

1918–19 Paints a major work as a War Artist, *Gassed*, showing the effects of gas on soldiers.

1925 – Sargent dies of heart disease at his Chelsea home.