

At the Forefront of Feminism:

William Merritt Chase and the American New Woman

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*Sarah Wagner, April 10, 2017*

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American painter William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) was known for his teaching abilities, Old Master influence and his portrayal of powerful women. My research focuses on Chase's depiction of powerful women, specifically the American New Woman, in the 1880s until his death in 1916. The American New Woman, discussed in detail later, was a movement that question stereotypical gender roles. While there were other male artists working during Chase's time, they showed women lacking the empowerment Chase gave them. When the New Woman movement occurred, women could break free from their traditional role of a housewife and pursue both a college education and job, which allowed them to decide when they wanted to get married rather than having to settle down immediately out of a need for financial support. In being able to choose their own path these New Woman became empowered. Besides the New Woman movement, the American art scene is examined and finally, this thesis examines how Chase's wife, Alice, aligned with the New Woman movement and contrasted the way other women were depicted by leading male artists.

While Chase has been studied and admired by numerous scholars for his still life paintings,<sup>1</sup> influence in American art,<sup>2</sup> his work as an American Impressionist,<sup>3</sup> and talent as a teacher,<sup>4</sup> his wife, Alice Gerson Chase, has not been examined and this is where this thesis adds to the already expansive research available on the artist. Alice played an integral role in Chase's professional life and served as his most frequent model,<sup>5</sup> however scholars have yet to write

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Fox, "Chase on 'Still Life,'" *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* 1 (January 1915): 197-200.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Helen Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Paintings of Modern Life, 1885-1915*, (Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> June L. Ness, "William Merritt Chase and the Shinnecock Summer Art School," *Archives of American Art Journal* 3 (1973): 8-12.

<sup>5</sup> Elsa Smithgall et al., *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master*, forw. D. Frederick Baker, (Washington: The Phillips Collection, 2016), 25.

about Alice as a New Woman or her role in Chase's paintings. While it was common for artists to paint their families, Alice provides a constituency in Chase's work that let's this thesis examine his depiction of the New Woman throughout his career.

In order to look at Alice in Chase's work and how he showed women differently, it is important to first know Chase's history. Born in Williamsburg, Indiana to David Hester Chase and Sarah Swaim Chase, William Merritt Chase was the eldest of six children.<sup>6</sup> His father was an entrepreneur who made harnesses for horses, which led to a stable, safe life for the Chase family, even through the American Civil War (1861-1865).<sup>7</sup> As a child, Chase would often become distracted from chores and would draw or paint instead.<sup>8</sup> When asked why he started painting Chase replied, "It may have been that the first thing my infantile eyes saw was a brush and pigments... the desire to draw was born in me."<sup>9</sup> Mr. Chase brought William Merritt Chase to artist Barton S. Hays. Hays was not a highly-esteemed artist in his day, but provided Chase with some formal training and Indianapolis gave the young artist exposure to cultural experiences in the form of art stores and fairs.<sup>10</sup> In 1869 Chase moved in New York to continue his art education.

This move allowed Chase to befriend more artists working in the city and the opportunity to meet architect Captain W.R. Hodges and Samuel Dodd, a merchant from St. Louis. Hodges and Dodd, along with other patrons, sent Chase abroad to continue studying and to look for

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald G. Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: 1849-1916*, (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1983), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 24.

European paintings for their collections.<sup>11</sup> Chase settled on Munich after hearing from artist John Mulvaney that it offered “the most adventurous and least doctrinaire course of study available.”<sup>12</sup> Chase studied at the Royal Academy of Munich between 1872 and 1877 before returning to New York.<sup>13</sup> While in Munich, Chase visited the Alte Pinakothek where he encountered paintings by Dutch artist Frans Hals and Diego Velasquez according to Ronald Pisano, an art historian, curator and leading scholar on William Merritt Chase.<sup>14</sup> Hals and Velasquez proved inspirational to Chase when completing his own work. Without this patronage and encouragement to go to Munich, Chase may have been influenced by other artists. With that being said, Hals and Velázquez were popular during Chase’s time. Other painters such as James Abbott McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent admired Frans Hals and Velázquez, who was even called the “hero of Chase’s generation”<sup>15</sup> by art historian Elsa Smithgall. Critics during Chase’s time noticed the similarity to the works of these Old Masters and commented on it, including William Brownell, who mentioned, “If one cannot *be* Franz Hals, he can, nevertheless, if he be as clever and sympathetic as Mr. Chase is, show very plainly the success with which Hals’s manner and method may be studied and applied to one’s own purposes.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, scholar Alicia G. Longwell wrote an essay on Chase and the incorporation of Old Master techniques in his work.<sup>17</sup> She does so by looking at the formal elements of his paintings and those of Old Masters to draw out the similarities present. While this thesis does not examine his use of Old Master compositional elements, it is important to note this aspect of Chase’s work. Many scholars have

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Alicia G. Longwell, *William Merritt Chase: A Life in Art*. cont. Maureen C. O’Brien, (Water Mill: Parrish Art Museum, 2014).



written about his incorporation of Hals and Velázquez and this theme frequently appears when studying Chase.

Chase returned to New York in 1878 to become a teacher for the Art Students League.<sup>18</sup> Even though Chase doubted his teaching ability, his skills and personality quickly made him the most popular teacher in America.<sup>19</sup> Throughout his career he moved throughout different artists' circles including, the Society of American Artists, The Ten, the Brooklyn Art Association, and the Art Club.<sup>20</sup> According to Pisano, Chase had a winning personality and from his extensive research, Pisano describes Chase as someone who “beyond his convivial nature, which endeared him to many, he had qualities of a true leader: strong beliefs, which he expressed boldly and articulately, assertiveness; tremendous energy; and great wit.”<sup>21</sup>

Chase continued to make frequent trips to Europe but lived in New York for the remainder of his life. Throughout the rest of his career, Chase taught at numerous schools and founded one, originally called the Chase School, but known today as Parsons: The New School for Design.<sup>22</sup> Chase spearheaded this new institution with a group of Progressives, who seceded from the Art Students League, due to their desire for a more “individualistic expression.”<sup>23</sup> In addition to this school, Chase spent his summers teaching in Shinnecock at a school created by entrepreneur Janet Hoyt.

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<sup>18</sup> H. Barbara Weinberg, “William Merritt Chase (1849-1916)”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified July 2011, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd\\_chas.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd_chas.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Pisano, *Chase*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> “History,” *Parsons: the New School*, accessed March 22, 2017 <http://www.newschool.edu/parsons/history/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

A progressive business woman, Hoyt was termed “the veritable inventor of Southampton” in 1890 by the *New York Herald*. Hoyt recruited Chase to teach at her school, where she received funding from a group of so called “patronesses.” These patronesses included other strong women prominent in New York society such as Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, Louise Whitfield Carnegie and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.<sup>24</sup> With Hoyt’s additional talents as philanthropist and real estate investor,<sup>25</sup> the Shinnecock school had twelve successful summers of programming.<sup>26</sup> During his time teaching both in New York City and in Shinnecock, Chase instructed numerous women artists, including Georgia O’Keeffe. When asked why he pushed his female students as hard as his male students Chase stated, “Genius has no sex.”<sup>27</sup> When thinking about Chase as a teacher and his support of female artists understanding his teaching methods is critical. Chase was a zealous teacher who cared about his students and their passion for art. In 1916, the same year he died, Chase gave a talk at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and said,

“I believe I am the father of more art children than any other living man, and they are a well-behaved lot – really! It is one of my consolations in life that wherever I go I see my children, and some of them really do care to see me. Do you know why? I know. It is because I am keenly in sympathy with every effort they make. I think there is nothing in the world which takes the place of what is termed the ‘kindred spirit.’”<sup>28</sup>

Georgia O’Keeffe is quoted as saying, “There was something fresh and energetic and fierce and exciting about him that made him fun.”<sup>29</sup> Knowing Chase’s passion for his students and zest

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<sup>24</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Cynthia V.A. Schaffner and Lori Zabar, “The Founding and Design of William Merritt Chase’s Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art and the Art Villiage,” *Winterhur Portfolio* 44 (2010): 306, doi: 10.1086/657165.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>27</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> “William M. Chase as a Teacher,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 11 (Dec., 1916): 251-252, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3253798>.

<sup>29</sup> Erica E. Hirshler, *William Merritt Chase*, (Boston: MFA Publications, 2016).

when teaching better explains why he pushed his female students as hard as his male students. He believed in passionate students and wanted all of his “children” to succeed.

Knowing Chase’s teaching style and his background with empowered women and appreciation for them lets scholars comprehend why the American New Woman became a frequent subject in Chase’s paintings. While discussed in more depth later-on, in summary, the New Woman was a female who was educated, had a job and was able to support herself. In the words of scholar Lorelee MacPike, who has written extensively about women in the arts and popular thoughts on childbearing,<sup>30</sup> the New Woman “was very real, and she challenged traditional views on almost every front.”<sup>31</sup>

Other scholars have noted Chase’s incorporation of powerful women in his paintings. Art historian Erica E. Hirshler commented that Chase was an influential artist during his time by challenging typical thought, such as a woman’s place in society.<sup>32</sup> For example, Hirshler highlights how Chase’s women are “occupied with the world of the mind,”<sup>33</sup> which contrasts traditional views of women. In the words of a newspaper advertiser from 1885, “the women today are thinking, thinking, thinking, as women did not think in the old times.”<sup>34</sup> Further, scholar Karal Ann Marling notes that Chase’s portrayal of female artists, specifically Dora Wheeler, leaves “the twentieth century a document of great importance to the history of

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<sup>30</sup> Her other published works include: Nancy Main Henley, Maryanne Horowitz, Lorelee MacPike, and Suzanne W. Hull, *The state of the art in women's studies including perspectives from eleven disciplines and overviews*, (San Marino, California: S.W. Hull, 1986).

and Lorelee MacPike, "The social values of childbirth in the nineteenth-century novel," *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 3 (1980): 117-130.

<sup>31</sup> Lorelee MacPike, “The New Woman, Childbearing, and the Reconstruction of Gender, 1880-1900,” *NWSA Journal* 1 (1989): 372, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4315921>.

<sup>32</sup> Hirshler, *Chase*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

American feminism.”<sup>35</sup> Another scholar, Alicia G. Longwell, comments on Chase’s paintings as a way for him to lift women up from mere accessories.<sup>36</sup> While these are only three examples, Chase’s ability to lift women up to be more than accessory objects or images to be looked is widely seen in the work of scholars writing about Chase. However, none have focused on Alice’s role in Chase’s artistic process or her involvement, if any, in the New Woman movement.

Chase married Alice Gerson, whose father managed a large lithography firm, in 1886. She proved to be an inspiration for Chase throughout the rest of his life and frequently appears in his work.<sup>37</sup> While other artists painted family members as well, having Alice as a common theme throughout Chase’s body of work allows scholars to study her as a subject that remains consistent throughout his career. Chase was closely tied to his family and Alice often played more than the “typical” role as his wife. Normally her work would consist of “keep[ing] his house; Writ[ing] his letters; Visits for his benefits; Ward[ing] off intruders; ... Always an encouraging and impartial critic.”<sup>38</sup> Alice assumed this role but was also an active player in Chase’s creative process by “suggest[ing] creative motifs... propos[ing] and creat[ing] decorative costumes, ma[king] photographs, and handl[ing] most of his business arrangements.”<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, even with the wide breadth of research on Chase, there has not been anything written on his wife, Alice Chase, as a common outlet for him to depict the American New Woman. Intrigued by this idea, this thesis argues that William Merritt Chase was at the forefront of depicting empowered women in American art and pushed this agenda through the paintings of his wife, Alice Chase, as the American New Woman. His approach contrasts the

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<sup>35</sup> Karal Ann Marling, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Miss Dora Wheeler,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 65 (February 1978), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25159564>, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Longwell. *Chase*.

<sup>37</sup> The meeting of Chase and Alice, as well as their relationship, is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>38</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

representations of females completed by other prominent male artists during that time by placing the emphasis on the women's authority instead of on her body or other feminine attributes.

## Chapter 1: “In need of little protection”: Chase’s American New Woman

Chase utilized compositional techniques when depicting images of the American New Woman in order to enhance the authority of the female shown. The genre of the New Woman was a trend in the 1880s-1900s that helped spark the women’s suffrage movement in the 1920s.<sup>40</sup> The “New Women” individuals started the fight for women’s rights by “challeng[ing] existing gender relations and the distribution of power”<sup>41</sup> and were considered, as one critic wrote when looking at Chase’s *Ready for the Ride* (Image 1), “a distinctly American phenomenon.”<sup>42</sup> This chapter examines the American New Women and what brought about this movement as well as the ways Chase showed this trend in his work.

Before the rise of the New Woman movement, there were signs leading up to this moment of female empowerment. Before the Civil War during the Antebellum Period (1815-1861), women volunteered and participated in other activities as a means of getting out of the house.<sup>43</sup> This was a way of encouraging women to take on more roles and responsibilities, however, by doing volunteerism, these new positions were always in the form of self-sacrifice instead of self-assertion.<sup>44</sup> Contrastingly to the New Woman movement that happened less than 50 years later, these women in the Antebellum Period were not empowered. Their responsibilities were meant to encourage them give to others instead of focusing on themselves and what they wanted.

During this period, art was also an essential part of a woman’s upbringing. It was thought that artistic pursuits would tame the younger girls and instill a lifelong passion for beauty and

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<sup>40</sup> MacPike. “The New Woman,” 368.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

culture.<sup>45</sup> However, there was another purpose for these pursuits in the domestic sphere; since women were not allowed to participate in political or business endeavors, artistic pursuits, such as painting, literature, dance and music, were a way for women to claim something as their own.<sup>46</sup>

Coinciding with this desire was the change in women's property rights, which occurred about 1850. Scholar Norma Basch argued, though, that while property rights changed, they had no revolutionary effect.<sup>47</sup> The change let women get equitable settlements but there was an issue: the husband had to agree to the settlement otherwise it would be deemed fraudulent.<sup>48</sup> If men did not sign these agreements, however, they were ruin them financially so there was an incentive for them. In order for the arrangements to be made legal, the husband showed that "his assets exceeded his liabilities by at least the amount he settled on [with his wife]."<sup>49</sup> Not signing could indicate his lack of financial security, which harmed his reputation. Even with these laws being passed around 1850, women did not see a growth in property ownership until roughly thirty or forty years later since these laws did not act retroactively.<sup>50</sup> This means that women's property ownership spiked in the 1880s and 1890s, right when the New Woman movement occurred. While this may be a mere coincidence, although unlikely, having property passed on by family members adds to one's financial stability and helped a New Woman become independent.

Other aspects of female life changed leading up to the New Woman movement as well. For example, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the widely popular *Godey's Lady's Book* magazine, often

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Carol Shammass, "Re-Assessing the Married Women's Property Acts," *Journal of Women's History* 6 (Spring 1994): 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 17.

pushed for women's education and that woman should pursue jobs such as teaching and medicine.<sup>51</sup> However, her views were framed in a traditional mindset in that she believed an educated woman made a better wife and mother. Additionally, women were seen as more pious and pure, making them the perfect candidates for teaching and medicine. Even though these views were formed with a traditional belief, Hale helped fund the women's school, Vassar College, when it opened in 1861.<sup>52</sup> Even with higher education women were still portrayed differently than men. Looking at an image from Vassar in 1879 (Image 2) as an example, the viewer sees a large, majestic academic building partially covered in ivy.<sup>53</sup> In front of the building stands groupings of women talking, playing croquet and two sitting on the ground; they wear long dresses, some have hats and one has a parcel. While they are women in an academic location, they seem like they have been dropped in front of the background and belong in a country club or other bourgeoisie outdoor setting. The women are not shown as intellectuals or individuals who care about their studies. Contrastingly, an image from Harvard (1892) (Image 3)<sup>54</sup> shows men sitting in a classroom and many of them do not look at the camera, preoccupied by the scholarship taking place. This image presents a very different story from the one seen in the Vassar photograph. Even with these varying perceptions, access to higher education was one of the corner stones of the New Woman movement. It allowed them to pursue careers that helped women support themselves before settling down.

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<sup>51</sup> "Sarah J. Hale (1788-1879)," National Women's History Museum, accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/sarah-hale/>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> "Vassar College Astronomical Observatory with Students, 1879," Vassar College Digital Library, accessed March 22, 2017, <https://digitallibrary.vassar.edu/islandora/object/vassar%3A10390>.

<sup>54</sup> "Harvard Psychological Laboratory, students studying the effect of sound and attention on color, photograph, 1892," Harvard University Archives Photograph Collection: Subjects: an inventory, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://ids.lib.harvard.edu/ids/view/3483082?buttons=y>.



During the Antebellum Period, art groups were only for men. These men bonded through travel and study, which led to the first American art academies, groups and clubs;<sup>55</sup> normally centered around drinking, painting and outdoor life. Interestingly, these men were characterized as being “as comfortable with a ‘hammer, compass and rifle’ as with the brushes that marked their trade.”<sup>56</sup> These exclusive boy’s clubs barred women from entry but there was a shift in perspective from that time to the New Woman. In the Antebellum Period women were not seen as serious artists or being able to produce said serious art. Art critic James Jackson Jarves may have summed up the mentality against women best when he said,

“Art looks to America with open arms. How is it to be carried out here? Not be (sic.) misses who run over Europe and bring back a cabin-load of new bonnets, with dresses and trinkets to match; neither by women whose aim is to display and ruling principle vanity... We need Art-students, men of sincerity and labor, who will not hesitate to go on their backs and knees, if need be, in the dust, to read the soul language of the mightiest minds in Europe.”<sup>57</sup>

This mentality is seen in work produced in popular publications, such as *Godey’s Lady’s Magazine*. For example, an image from the magazine<sup>58</sup> entitled *The Fair Artist* (N.D.) (Image 4), shows a woman sitting at an easel, right arm dropped to the side of her body holding a brush while the left hand holds a pallet and rests limply on her leg. The male instructor stands over her, looking down and holding up a hand. His stance and hand gesture is similar to the position often seen by parents and teachers when telling children how to fix their mistakes. This posture in conjunction with the female’s relaxed, almost doll-like position makes her appear like a small child that needs to be instructed where to paint and how and shows that she lacks intelligence and competency. Even though this image is undated, *Godey’s Lady’s Magazine* ran from 1836

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<sup>55</sup> McCarthy, *Women’s Culture*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>58</sup> “The Fair Artist, from *Godey’s Lady’s Book*,” Ackland Art Museum, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.unc.edu/ackland/collection/?action=details&object\\_link\\_id=L87.55.705](http://www.unc.edu/ackland/collection/?action=details&object_link_id=L87.55.705).

until it was sold in 1877<sup>59</sup> and eventually died out in 1896 so the image must fall within that range. The magazine was “one of the most influential magazines of the 19th century,”<sup>60</sup> which emphasizes the image of *The Fair Artist* as a typical portrayal of female painters during this time. However, when Chase became a teacher, he became known for pushing his female students to be as good, if not better, than their male counterparts.

America in the 1880s and 1890s underwent drastic changes. New technology, such as telephones and typewriters, made industry more efficient,<sup>61</sup> meaning there was higher production at a lower cost for the American people, an increased economy of scale and rise of the middle class<sup>62</sup> as luxuries became more common day items.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, after the American Civil War, women made up the majority of the population, which meant they were more present in the work force and had more power there than ever before.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the number of women in the workforce rose from 2.6 million to 8.6 million between 1880 and 1900.<sup>65</sup>

Against this backdrop, the New Woman emerged in American and while Europe was aware of her, the New Woman “represent[ed] one of the most significant cultural shifts”<sup>66</sup> of her time in United States and as such the American movement is the only one examined in this argument. This New Woman “challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power.”<sup>67</sup> She

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<sup>59</sup> Sydnee C. Winston, “Before ‘Cosmopolitan’ and ‘Glamour’ there was ‘Godey’s Lady’s Book,’” National Women’s History Museum, accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.nwhm.org/blog/before-cosmopolitan-and-glamour-there-was-godeys-ladys-book/>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People & A Nation: A History of the United States* (Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 2008), 504.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>64</sup> Holly Page Connor, *Off the Pedestal: New Woman in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>65</sup> Norton et al., *A People*, 506

<sup>66</sup> Martha H. Patterson, editor, *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1

<sup>67</sup> MacPike, “The New Woman,” 368.

worked to dismember the construction of gender in society through her connection to her sexuality and childbearing.<sup>68</sup> Starting in 1839 with Oberlin, women could have the same chance at higher education as men, which prepared them for the careers they needed in between childhood and marriage. This also gave them an outlet for journalism and political activity.<sup>69</sup> Then in 1885 the Contagious Diseases Act was repealed, which allowed women to have more control over their own bodies through birth control.<sup>70</sup> This access, as well as women's ability to pursue different interest, led to the decline of the population for the white middle- and upper-class and women were largely blamed.<sup>71</sup>

Scholar Erica Hirshler<sup>72</sup> points to *Ready for the Ride* (1877) (Image 1) as Chase's first depiction of the New Woman. This work diverges from more typical representations such as *The Boudoir* from *Godey's Lady's Magazine* (N.D.) (Image 5), Winslow Homer's *Summer* (1874) (Image 6), and Mary Cassatt's *The Loge* (1878-1880) (Image 7). In all three of these images, the women represented are shown as feminine and passive, unlike in *Ready for the Ride*. Completed to announce his return to the United States from studying abroad in Munich,<sup>73</sup> *Ready for the Ride* shows a young woman standing in profile facing the viewer's right. Her head turns three-fourths of the way to make eye contact with the onlooker. She finishes putting on her brown right-hand glove while also holding the other glove and a decorated stick or staff in her left hand; it can be assumed her puts the glove on, as appose to taking it off, due to the upward tug visible in the folding around the wrist. She wears a black, tall, wide-brimmed hat with a buckle and ribbon visible right above the brim with her light-brown hair only partially visible under the hat. The

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 369.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>71</sup> Connor, *Off the Pedestal*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 22.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

rest is tucked into the hat or simply concealed from the audience. A wide, white-ruffed collar extends up and around her neck; hiding it from the viewer.

Even though the outfit is completely black, draping is visible around her bottom to help indicate the style of the dress. The background is a dark black-brown color with no details visible to indicate her setting. However, the background does serve a purpose: it forces the viewer to confront the woman on the canvas while simultaneously pushing her up against the foreground of the image. This confrontational encounter and her downward gaze put her in an empowering position. Creating such imagery flips the script putting the woman in charge of her body and directly engaging with the viewer. Continuing to look at the figure and the iconography of the image, the viewer next examines her outfit.

The dress is one that traditionally appears in works by Frans Hals,<sup>74</sup> an artist greatly admired by Chase, and as such, gives a Dutch feeling to the painting and demonstrates the type of art Chase was looking at while in Munich. However, there are other iconographic elements and feminist undertones to the dress as well. The exact style of the outfit is called “en amazone,” which refers to ancient warrior women, and was a popular style of dress during this time.<sup>75</sup> Due to all of these iconographic and compositional elements, the woman in *Ready for the Ride* embodies the American New Woman, which can be summed up as follows:

“[The New Woman] was a middle-class, youngish, single woman, typically a child of the bourgeoisie. She had some education, and she was able to support herself. She might share housing with other New Women. She had the means to dress well[...] she seemed, and often was, in little need of protection. In all, she was an attractive, active and... was very real, and she challenged traditional views on almost every front.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> MacPike, “The New Woman,” 371-372, the author also notes, “and because she was not in the marriage market in the same way as the traditional young lady, she might choose to please herself about dress and companions. She was more likely than ordinary women to ride a bicycle, smoke cigarettes, use slang

Images of this American New Woman can be seen in pictures produced during this time. One such example comes from *Scribner's Magazine*, a publication that first ran from 1887 until 1939 and worked to introduce new writers through short publications.<sup>77</sup> In June of 1895, *Scribner's Magazine* showed the iconic Gibson Girl in the form of the New Woman enjoying the “strenuous physical activity” of riding a bike.<sup>78</sup> The Gibson Girl was created by Charles Dana Gibson, Howard Chandler Christy and Harrison Fisher. Their creation was meant to represent a “modern woman, unencumbered by bustles or convention.”<sup>79</sup> The image shown in *Scribner's Magazine* (Image 8) depicts a woman riding a bike in a hat, shirt with long, puffy sleeves, a billowing skirt and closed-toe shoes. The figure looks off into the distance with a blank stare, which emphasizes how at ease she is while doing this physical task. This confidence and modern activity highlight traits seen in the New Woman. However, unlike in many images created by Chase, this woman's waist is highly accentuated, which emphasizes her figure. Often the viewer is unable to make out the womanly figure of Chase's subjects, which removes them further from other images of women typically seen during this time.

Many were afraid that the New Woman would not choose men or childbearing and that this would endanger life as it was then known. However, in 1900 motherhood was glorified and the notion of the “social role of motherhood as a way of meeting national needs” was

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travel, and be sexually active. A man might find her more willing (and more able) to discuss issues of the day, and he often found her to be a good buddy rather than a romantic interest because...”

<sup>77</sup> “The Gibson Girl's America: Drawings by Charles Dana Gibson,” Library of Congress, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.scribnermagazine.com/scribner-magazine/>.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Lynn D. Gordon, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Higher Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920,” *American Quarterly* 39 (Summer, 1987): 211; Chase went so far as to call his *Portrait of Mrs. C (Lady with a White Shawl)* (Image 21), “The original Gibson Girl;” Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 22.

emphasized.<sup>80</sup> While the general trend of the New Woman died in the 1900s, there were still women actively pursuing women's rights throughout the country.<sup>81</sup> Chase would continue to paint this motif of the New Woman throughout his career contrasting other prominent male artists during this time, such as those mentioned in the next chapter.

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<sup>80</sup> MacPike, "The New Woman," 395.

<sup>81</sup> One such woman was Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) who dedicated her life to social justice and continued pushing for women's suffrage, education and property rights even after the New Woman movement ended at the turn of the century; "Biography of Susan B. Anthony," National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://susanbanthonyhouse.org/her-story/biography.php>

## Chapter 2: “Monstrous lampoon:” William Merritt Chase and the American Art Scene

American art in the 1880s was not as intellectually elevated as in Europe. There were art societies but America lacked the formal mechanisms Europe had in place that helped artists find patrons. William Merritt Chase came to play an active role in this scene and, along with other prominent male artists, help raise up American art. This chapter examines the state of American art during Chase’s time as well as the ways Chase differentiated himself from other prominent male artists during the period.

Chase’s rise to prominence in the American art scene started shortly after his return from Munich. For example, critic M.G. Van Rensselaer wrote about an exhibition in 1877 that Chase took part in, saying, “[T]he men whom it brought to light are the names Shirlaw, Duveneck, and Chase.”<sup>82</sup> In Rensselaer’s opinion, few American artists were willing to experiment, which caused Chase to stand out at the exhibition. By 1881, Chase had risen to the top of this exclusive list of painters and was praised for his depiction of the “real woman.”<sup>83</sup>

Chase played a crucial role in the development of the American art scene in the 1880s and did so through his involvement in The Society of American Artists, and The Ten. The Society of American Artists, a group of artists who hosted exhibitions, re-elected Chase as president in 1885.<sup>84</sup> While this position took up a considerable amount of time for Chase, he managed to have his first solo show at the Boston Art Club in 1886 as well as sell ninety-eight of his paintings in 1887, even though the sale was a low \$10,000 total.<sup>85</sup> Chase continued teaching and working throughout the 1880s and 1890s. In 1897 a group, called The Ten, seceded from

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<sup>82</sup> M. G. Van Rensselaer, “William Merritt Chase,” *The American Art Review* 2 (Jan., 1881): 93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20559771>.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>84</sup> Pisano, *Chase*, 68.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

the Society of American Artists. These artists did not want to start a rival society but rather exhibit their work in a more harmonious manner. They were not happy being members of a large organization “governed by form and tradition.”<sup>86</sup> Journalists speculated that The Ten did not think the Society showed progressive art in America, which was its original intent, and that is why they separated.<sup>87</sup> By the time Chase was invited to join The Ten in 1905, the artistic landscape had shifted and The Ten and the Society of American Artists worked amiably alongside each other. In fact, there was talk of the Society of American Artists, The Ten, and the National Academy of Design all joining together to become one group.<sup>88</sup>

This seemingly ever changing landscape hints at the fact that the United States Academy system was not well defined. In Europe, the Royal Academy and Salon system had been in place for years.<sup>89</sup> These systems allowed artists to receive fame and recognition as well as find patronages to help support their artistic endeavors. In the mid-nineteenth century, new salons began to appear and the importance of the Royal Academy seemed to dwindle. However, the structure and esteem of the European art community remained intact while America worked to catch up.

In this changing art scene there were four other key players at the time, they were John Singer Sargent, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, both of whom were known to Chase, Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. Historian Ronald G. Pisano comments on Chase’s affinity for Sargent and Whistler saying, “Undoubtedly John Singer Sargent and James Abbott McNeill Whistler were the artists [Chase] most admired. In fact, in Chase’s portraits one can easily

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>89</sup> Jason Rosenfeld, “The Salon and Royal Academy in the Nineteenth Century,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, last modified October 2004, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sara/hd\\_sara.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sara/hd_sara.htm).



recognize the influence of both these painters.”<sup>90</sup> John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), though born in Italy, maintained deep ties to New England. Throughout his career, he showed in the Paris Salon and gained fame for his portrait paintings. Similar to Chase, Sargent’s greatest influences included Hals and Velázquez and nods to those artists can often be seen in his work. He ended his career in Boston fascinated by mural paintings and doing commissions for the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>91</sup> James Abbott McNeil Whistler (1834-1903) grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia but decided to move to Paris and pursue his painting career in 1855. His success came from his portrait paintings in which he displayed strong silhouettes and his signature monogram. He continued to gain fame and success throughout his career until his death in 1903.<sup>92</sup>

In 1881, Chase and Sargent met in Europe and became lifelong friends. Chase’s friendship with Whistler was rockier due to the Whistler’s unpredictability.<sup>93</sup> When Chase introduced himself to Whistler in 1885 in London, Chase’s reputation preceded him as he had already gained an international status. Upon meeting, Whistler suggested they paint portraits of each other, perhaps due to their high ranks as artists or due to their mutual affinity for Velázquez, which helped spark their friendship.<sup>94</sup> Chase created the painting *James Abbott McNeill Whistler* (1885) (Image 9) using monochrome tones seen in Whistler’s *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1* (1871) (Image 10) and commonly seen in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch paintings. While the intention was to flatter Whistler, he was appalled and called the portrait a “monstrous lampoon.”<sup>95</sup> In

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<sup>90</sup> Pisano, *Chase*, 153.

<sup>91</sup> H. Barbara Weinberg, “John Singer Sargent (1856-1925),” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, last modified October 2004, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sarg/hd\\_sarg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sarg/hd_sarg.htm).

<sup>92</sup> H. Barbara Weinberg, “James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903),” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, last modified April 2010, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/whis/hd\\_whis.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/whis/hd_whis.htm).

<sup>93</sup> Pisano, *Chase*, 77.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Weinberg, “Chase,” [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd\\_chas.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd_chas.htm).

terms of the portrait of Chase, it is possible that Whistler never finished it<sup>96</sup> and threw it out due to his anger with the portrait completed by Chase.<sup>97</sup>

It is important to note that while Chase was influenced by these artists, his work still had notable differences. Chase seems to understand the changing role of women in United States society, while Sargent's *Miss Helen Duinham* (1892) (Image 11) and Whistler's *Arrangement in Black, No. 5 (Portrait of Lady Meux)* (1881) (Image 12) hold fast to traditional stereotypical ideas. As an example, when looking at Chase's *Meditation* (1886) (Image 13), the audience sees an empowered Alice Chase while images by Sargent and Whistler lack a certain weight. The dresses cling to the bodies of Sargent's and Whistler's women showing off their figure and the texture of the garments entices the viewer to reach out and touch the fabric. They either turn away from the audience or look as if waiting for the viewer's approval. By contrast, *Meditation* depicts Alice in the position of authority with the focus on her face and mind. Chase's image is analyzed in greater detail later in this chapter but for now it is important to note the immediate authority Alice possess upon first glance.

The two other artists, Winslow Homer (1836-1910) and Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), are not recorded as having known Chase, however with Homer living in New York and Eakins involvement with teaching, one can speculate that Chase was at least aware of these two painters even if they never met in person.

Winslow Homer has been regarded as "the greatest American painter of the nineteenth-century."<sup>98</sup> He began his career as a commercial printmaker and spent the 1860s and 1870s in

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<sup>96</sup> Pisano, *Chase*, 78.

<sup>97</sup> Weinberg, "Chase."

<sup>98</sup>H. Barbara Weinberg, "Winslow Homer (1836-1910)," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, last edited October 2004, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/homr/hd\\_homr.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/homr/hd_homr.htm). All biographical information from this source.

New York City building a name for himself as a painter and working as a magazine illustrator. Also during that time in the 1870s, Homer often painted “women at leisure and children at play or simply preoccupied by their own concerns.” His work shifted in the 1880s, when, in a quest for solitude, Homer ended up in the small English town of Cullercoats, located on the North Sea. He became acutely aware of the difficult life the women led there and regularly showed them cleaning fish, fixing nets and waiting for their husbands to return. While these images of hard working women do allude to a sense of female empowerment, the images of women waiting for their men show an underlying current of dependence. His greatest success came from his watercolors in the mid-1870s and his depictions of powerful seas and man’s battle against them, done after returning to America later in the 1880s.

Thomas Eakins dedicated his career to the human figure in various mediums, including oil, watercolor, sculpture and photography.<sup>99</sup> He traveled from Philadelphia to Paris in 1866 and was amongst the first painters to transition American art from landscape to figure drawings. He returned to Philadelphia in the 1870s and became teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1876 and helped the school become a leading art institution. However, Eakins’ easy acceptance of the human nude was not as accepted by others and caused Eakins to resign. During the time of his teaching, Eakins painted brooding women in shadowed interiors and from 1887 until his death, Eakins focused on the isolated sitter and their analytical candor.

Additionally, images by Homer and Eakins show females lacking the empowerment shown in Chase’s *Meditation*. Homer’s *Girl Seated* (1880) (Image 14) shows a female sitting outside on what appears to be a ledge. Due to the lack of color, it cannot be completely determined if the

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<sup>99</sup> H. Barbara Weinberg, “Thomas Eakins (1844-1916): Painting,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, last edited October 2004, accessed March 22, 2017, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/eapa/hd\\_eapa.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/eapa/hd_eapa.htm). All biographical information from this source.

ledge is in fact grass but the texture indicates that it is; she stares off into the distance with a look of worry on her face. Similar to Chase's image, the body of the girl is hidden from the viewer even though a hint of her waist is seen in the negative space between the girl's arm and her chest. What makes her less authoritative than Alice though is her face: the look of worry also suggests vulnerability, neither of which were not traits associated with the New Woman nor seen in the powerful gaze of Alice. Eakins' *Portrait of Maud Cook* (1895) (Image 15) shows a woman from the chest up, head tilted to her right, looking away from the viewer. She seems to be deep in thought, unaware of her surroundings and that someone is viewing her. The woman becomes an item for the audience to examine and speculate what exactly she is looking at off the canvas.

The women shown are on display and hold true to traditional renderings of women. However, the image completed by Chase has the clout lacking in the other paintings. *Meditation* depicts his wife, Alice Chase, seated with her left elbow leaning on the arm of the chair with the hand holding up her face. She gazes directly at the viewer with a strong jaw and downward tilted head. Her loose-fitting jacket and skirt hide her body from the viewer, indicating that she is not a sexual object. In addition, she wears a hat covering her hair and a black hand muff hiding her right hand. Covering up every piece of skin and hair, which are normally shown off to highlight and woman's sexuality, makes the viewer look only at her face. The overall composition asserts her authority and the title *Meditation* reflects her intellect, implying that she is deep in thought. *Meditation* shows the New Woman in America, a woman who is strong and independent and chooses her own path, and embodies the movement in the 1880s and 1890s.

### Chapter 3: “A document of great importance to the history of American feminism:” Alice Gerson Chase as the New Woman

This final chapter merges the ideas and concepts examined in chapters 1 and 2. It looks at how Chase depicted the New Woman in the form of his Alice Gerson Chase and how it contrasts what Whistler, Sargent, Homer and Eakins did when painting females. Before examining the artwork done by all five artists it is imperative to reiterate how Chase consistently support females and why the term “feminist” can be attached to him.

As mentioned in the introduction, Chase was known for supporting female artists even with the stigma against women as “serious artists” still prevalent in society. Chase pushed his female students to be as good, if not better, than their male counterparts. When asked why he did this, Chase is known for saying, “Genius has no sex.”<sup>100</sup> Besides teaching students, Chase also formed friendships with them and would often paint them, an example being his *Portrait of Dora Wheeler* (1883) (Image 16). The image shows Wheeler sitting in a chair, resting her left hand on her face and gazing at the viewer. As with *Meditation*, the female body is hidden from the audience, causing the viewer to focus on her stare and her mind. In the words of scholar Karal Ann Marling,

“By depicting a female artist... Chase left the twentieth century a document of great importance to the history of American feminism – a painting which records the attainment of full professional status in the visual arts by women at the precise moment of its occurrence.”<sup>101</sup>

Such praise emphasizes how unique Chase’s work was in comparison to the other images of women being produced by prominent males of this time.

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<sup>100</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Karal Ann Marling, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Miss Dora Wheeler,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 65 (February 1978), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25159564>, 48.

Beside teaching during the traditional school schedule, Chase also taught over the summers at a school in Shinnecock. This school was founded by female entrepreneur Janet Hoyt and funded by a group of prominent New York City female socialites including: Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, Louise Whitfield Carnegie and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Chase's dedication to teaching at a school both created and funded by women shows his support of the female as an intellectual and businesswoman, which were qualities seen in the New Woman.

Besides just teaching women, Chase also collected distinguished female artists including: Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), Eva Gonzalés (1849-1883), Maria Oakey Dewing (1845-1927), Rosalie Gill (1867-1898) and Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones (1885-1968).<sup>102</sup> It is important to note that the three American artists in this group, Maria Oakey Dewing, Rosalie Gill and Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones, were either still painting the traditional female image, as can be seen in Gill's *Orchid* (19th century) (Image 17), not painting figures at all, which is true of Dewing,<sup>103</sup> or were active after the time period this thesis explores, as is the case with Sparhawk-Jones. It is unclear as to why these American women were not portraying the New Woman; it could be due to the way they were taught or, as is the case with Dewing, felt they would never succeed as a figure painter.<sup>104</sup> Chase's collection of female artists emphasizes the claim that he supported women in a non-traditional way. Additionally, it highlights why this thesis focuses on other male artists during this time and why that allows the research to better examine key players in American art when discussing how they depicted women.

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<sup>102</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> "Maria Oakey Dewing." *Smithsonian American Art Museum Renwick Gallery*, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=1246>.

<sup>104</sup> Married to Thomas Wilmer Dewing, who was a successful figure painter, Maria Oakey Dewing felt she could never succeed so switched from figure painting to depicting flowers; *Ibid*.

The final example of Chase's support of women comes in the form of his wife, Alice Geron Chase. Alice not only kept the traditional artist's wife role, which included "Keep[ing] his house; Writ[ing] his letters; Visits for his benefits; Ward[ing] off intruders; ... Always [being] an encouraging and impartial critic,"<sup>105</sup> but also became an active player in Chase's creative process by "suggest[ing] creative motifs... propos[ing] and creat[ing] decorative costumes, ma[king] photographs, and handl[ing] most of his business arrangements."<sup>106</sup> Chase's dedication to female capabilities and mind seen in these examples is reflected not only in his personal and professional life but also on the canvas of his paintings.

Before examining Alice in Chase's images, it is important to know how she embodies the New Woman and explain her life with Chase. Alice Gerson and her sisters saw Chase's *Ready for the Ride* when it appeared at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Completely enthralled with the image, they wished to meet the artist who created it. Even though Chase declined the meeting at first, he eventually gave in and went to the Gerson home and it was there that he first saw his future wife.<sup>107</sup> Before leaving, Chase inquired if Alice might pose for a painting, which she often did for various artists, including Frederic Edwin Church, when they could not afford real models. The painter grew close to Alice and the rest of the Gerson family, even leaving his dog with Alice while away in Europe one summer.<sup>108</sup>

Eventually the two married in 1886, after which Alice adopted the role of artist's wife but also took on additional roles, becoming more active in his career than most, as mentioned previously. Through this active role, Alice maintained her confidence and ability as a New Woman and this can be seen in other aspects of her life as well. According to scholar Katherine

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<sup>105</sup> Smithgall et al., *Chase*, 24.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Roof, *Chase*, 69.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

MetCalf Roof, a pupil of Chase's, and the one whom Chase hoped would write his biography, one summer Alice almost shot her husband. The couple was staying at Bath Beach in Brooklyn when Alice had been startled by the behavior of an employee and decided to sleep with a revolver that night. Not knowing this, Chase came home on a late train and decided to come in through the bedroom window so as not wake-up Alice. Hearing someone coming into the room, Alice pulled out her gun and was about to shoot when she saw Chase's wedding ring and realized that it was just her husband.<sup>109</sup> Interestingly, ads during the 1880s-1900 show women out hunting alone, seen in the ad *Armed with a Marlin Repeater* (1898) (Image 18). The ad shows a female wearing an elegant dress holding a rifle in her left hand, her paper target in the right and surrounded by four men. The ad, as scholar Laura Browder mentions, shows that women with good shooting skills can remain feminine and can attract numerous men.<sup>110</sup> It was not until around World War I that guns were advertised as a way for men to teach women how to protect themselves at home.<sup>111</sup> This means that Alice's aptitude for using a revolver puts her slightly ahead of her time.

Alice demonstrated her ability to think on her feet and intellect on other occasions as well. Once when in Spain, Chase ran into a shop leaving Alice alone on the street at night. Knowing the dangers of being a woman alone at night, she started slowly walking back to where the couple was staying and persuaded her way in past the watchmen. Eventually a very frazzled Chase returned to find his wife content in their room.<sup>112</sup> This event highlights Alice's confidence to fend for herself and not feel like she needs the protection of a man, which was a trait aligned with the independent New Woman.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>110</sup> Laura Browder, "Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America," *University of Richmond* (2006): 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>112</sup> Roof, 170.



Chase seemed to admire his wife's independence and intellect; in the introduction for Roof's biography, Alice recounts, "In his last illness his favorite amusement was to review with me the European galleries, asking me to recall what I thought was the most interesting thing in each canvas."<sup>113</sup> Chase cares about her opinion on art, as can be noted in Alice's active role in his career. It is perhaps this dual role of independent, intellectual woman and mother that makes Alice best suited for the role of a New Woman. She found balance in the traditional duties of a wife but also fended for herself when needed and Chase's understanding and affinity for that side of her can be seen in the images he created of her.

Focusing on three examples by Chase, *Reflections* (1890) (Image 19), *Mrs. Chase* (1890-95) (Image 20) and *Portrait of Mrs. C (Lady with a White Shawl)* (1893) (Image 21), the viewer sees the influence of the New Woman in Alice. Chase's *Reflections* shows Alice sitting and reading in a large wicker chair. She looks up at the viewer through a mirror, clearly not planning on being disturbed. Her body is hidden behind the chair, with only her left arm and head visible to the onlooker. Hiding her as such does not allow the viewer to objectify her body and instead they must meet her gaze and this puts her in a position of power. Additionally, before meeting her stare, the viewer first looks at the bright back of the chair, almost like they are looking down and away from her gaze. The clips in her hair resemble a small crown when looking at her reflection, which again alludes to her importance. Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 2 (The Little White Girl)* (1864-65) (Image 22) and Eakins' *The Artist's Wife and His Setter Dog* (1884-89) (Image 23) show different women completely. Whistler's woman stands leaning against a mantle with her left hand on the structure and right hand by her side holding a fan. She looks down with a melancholy expression that is reflected in the mirror above the mantle she leans on.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., v-vi.

Unlike Chase's image, the female shown does not engage with the audience and her slim waist is accentuated by the white ribbon pulling in the otherwise loose dress. Her passive gaze downward makes her appear vulnerable and an object to be observed. Eakins' figure engages with the viewer as she sits with her body in profile and a book in her hands and dog laying at her feet. Eakins' woman tilts her head down almost like she is bowing, which when combined with her slumped posture and sagging shoulders, puts her in a submissive role. It is the combination of assertive gaze and strong body position seen in the mirror that initially highlights Alice's alignment with the New Woman in Chase's image. However, when looking deeper the viewer notices the newspaper in Alice's lap. Reading about current events happening around her alludes to her intelligence and desire to be an informed intellectual, which New Women valued. Additionally, as mentioned before, her position in the image shows she is not posing for anyone and that the image is about her and her desire to read. Such self-assurance and the desire for knowledge exemplify the confident, educated person the New Woman movement inspired in America.

*Mrs. Chase* also shows Alice sitting in a large chair. Unlike *Reflections*, this image has her facing the viewer directly with the same downward tilted chin, locked jaw and authoritative gaze. Interestingly, even though she faces the audience, her body still remains hidden under her black dress, which once again stops the audience from objectifying her physique. Additionally, her hair piece resembles a crown, giving her the air of a powerful ruler. Further, the fur draped over her chair and shoulders alludes to luxury and monetary possession. Contrastingly, John Singer Sargent's *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* (1892) (Image 24) and Winslow Homer's *At the Window* (1872) (Image 25) show women sitting but they lack the empowerment Alice possesses. Sargent's *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* gazes up at the viewer with her slim waist accentuated by the

purple ribbon tied around it, grabbing the audience's attention, and her dangling necklace drawing the viewer's eyes to her breast. Lady Agnew looks up slightly and appears subservient and expectant in this image and with a heightened sexuality not seen in Chase's painting. In Homer's *At the Window*, the viewer once again sees a woman sitting in a chair but her expression and demeanor is much different than that of Chase's woman. She sits staring away from the viewer with her eyes cast down and a look of worry on her face. She seems helpless and melancholy, clearly lacking the authority and power seen in *Mrs. Chase*. Additionally, the bright green appearing through the window draws the attention of the viewer making the woman a second thought. Looking back to Chase's painting the difference in the females shown once again becomes apparent. Alice's slightly tilted posture gives her an air of casualness and that she does not care how she looks in that moment; she is unwilling to pose and look pretty. Forcing the viewer to confront her dominant stare makes the image about her power and mind as oppose to her feminine figure.

Another example is Chase's *Portrait of Mrs. C (Lady with a White Shawl)*. In this image, Alice stands three-fourths angled to the front with her head tilted slightly back and looking over her left shoulder. Like the previous image, Alice locks eyes with the viewer and the turned-up head makes it so she is looking down her nose at the audience. This authoritative position is added to by the large, bulky garments that reach from to her neck to the floor and cover her body. This fabric stops the viewer from taking in her form and materializing her body; instead, the viewer must meet her gaze. Interestingly, her wedding ring is barely visible under her shawl on her left hand. This may denote her dual position as wife and powerful woman. By contrast, Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1 (The White Girl)* (1861-62) (Image 26) and Eakins' *The Concert Singer* (1890-92) (Image 27) show women standing but lacking the empowerment seen

in Alice. Whistler's figure stands three-fourths angled toward the viewer with a blank stare on her face. While she makes eye contact with the audience, it does not hold the power that Alice's gaze possesses, instead she seems to look right through the onlooker. Additionally, her shoulders slump forward making her seem small and weak, which contrasts Alice who stands with her chest out and shoulders back. Finally, Whistler's female blends into the background instead of standing out and immediately grabbing the attention of the audience the way Alice does. When looking at Homer's singer, she too has slumped shoulders and seems to close in on herself. While she sings, she looks away from the audience, not engaging with whomever she sings for, even though her body angles front. The hand of the conductor, visible in the bottom left corner, emphasizes that she is performing and being told what to sing and when. She does not have control over her choices but is shown as an object. Once again, the viewer sees Chase showing Alice as assertive and uncompromising. She embodies the New Woman, which Chase captures exquisitely in his art.

Chase puts himself at the head of feminism through the depiction of the American New Woman, especially through the images of his wife Alice. While other artists were working during this time, they were not showing females with the same empowered position seen in the paintings done by Chase. His ability to make the viewer focus on the subject's face and authoritative gaze through compositional techniques sharply contrasts other artists who depicted women in a more traditional manner with a focus on feminine attributes and beauty. Further, Alice Chase aligns with many of the traits characteristic of the New Woman, making her an integral example when discussing Chase and his depiction of the New Woman movement. As his most frequent model,<sup>114</sup> Alice remains a consistent throughout Chase's life and his frequent

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<sup>114</sup> Smithgall et al., Chase, 25.

renderings of her as a New Woman emphasizes his admiration for the opposite sex. Chase truly diverges from other painters during that time and in his portrayal of the New Woman, shows himself to be at the forefront of feminism.

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## Images

Image 1



William Merritt Chase, *Ready for the Ride*, 1877.  
Oil on canvas. 54 x 34 in. Museum of Fine Arts,  
Boston.

Image 2



*Vassar College  
Astronomical  
Observatory with  
students*, 1879. Vassar  
College Digital Library.

Image 3



*Harvard Psychological Laboratory, students studying the effect of sound and attention on color, photograph, 1892. Harvard University Archives Photograph Collection.*

Image 4



*The Fair Artist, from Godey's Lady's Book, n.d. Engraving. Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

Image 5



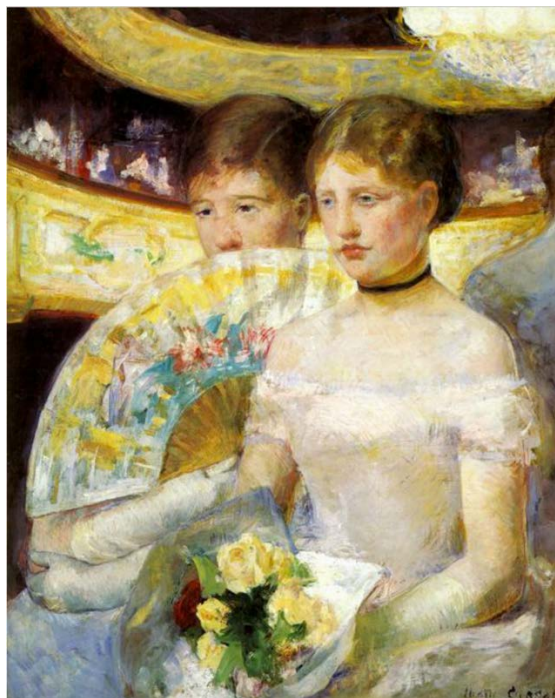
W. E. Tucker, *The Boudoir*, from *Godey's Lady's Book*, n.d. Engraving. Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Image 6



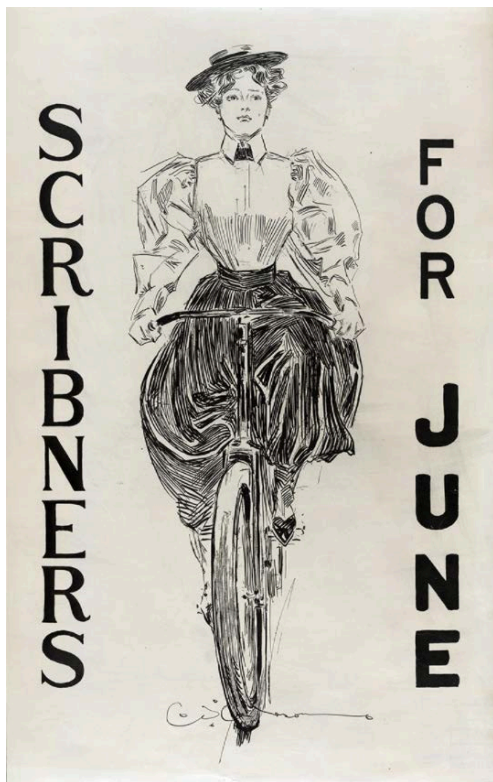
Winslow Homer, *Summer*, 1874. Gouache, watercolor, and graphite on cream woven paper. 8 5/8 x 4 3/8 in. The Clark Art Institute.

Image 7



Mary Cassatt, *The Loge*, 1878-1880. Oil on canvas. 79.8 x 63.8 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Image 8



*Scribner's For June*, 1895. Lithograph and letterpress poster. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Image 9



William Merritt Chase, *James Abbott McNeill Whistler*, 1885. Oil on canvas. 74 1/8 x 36 1/4 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Image 10



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1*, 1871. Oil on canvas. 144.3 x 162.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay.

Image 11



John Singer Sargent, *Miss Helen Duinham*, 1892. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

Image 12



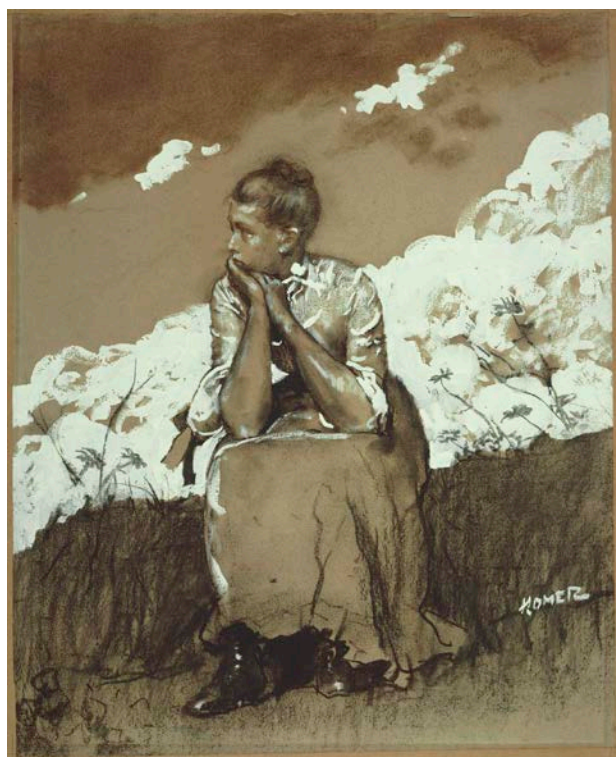
James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Black, No. 5 (Lady Meux)*, 1881. Oil on canvas. 76 1/2 x 51 1/4 in. Honolulu Museum of Art.

Image 13



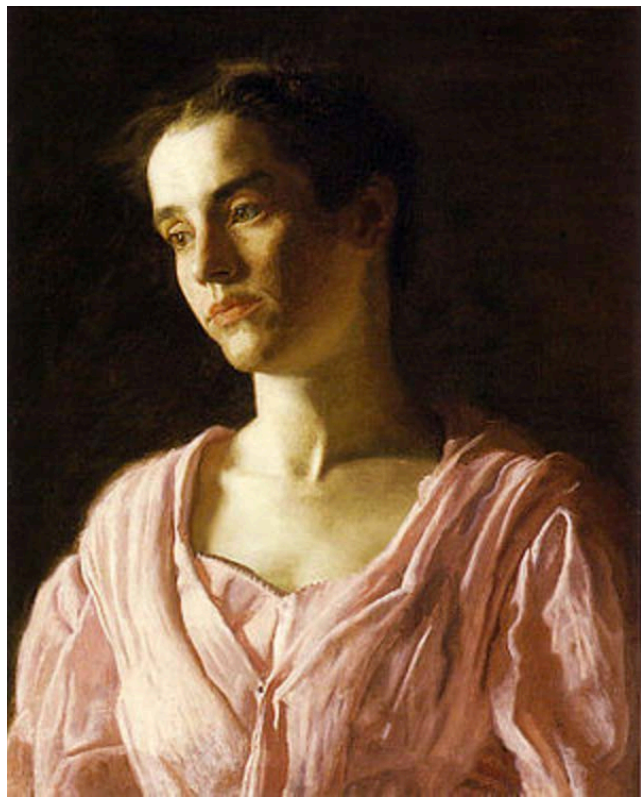
William Merritt Chase, *Meditation*, 1886.  
Pastel on canvas. 25 3/4 x 19 1/4 in. Private  
collection.

Image 14



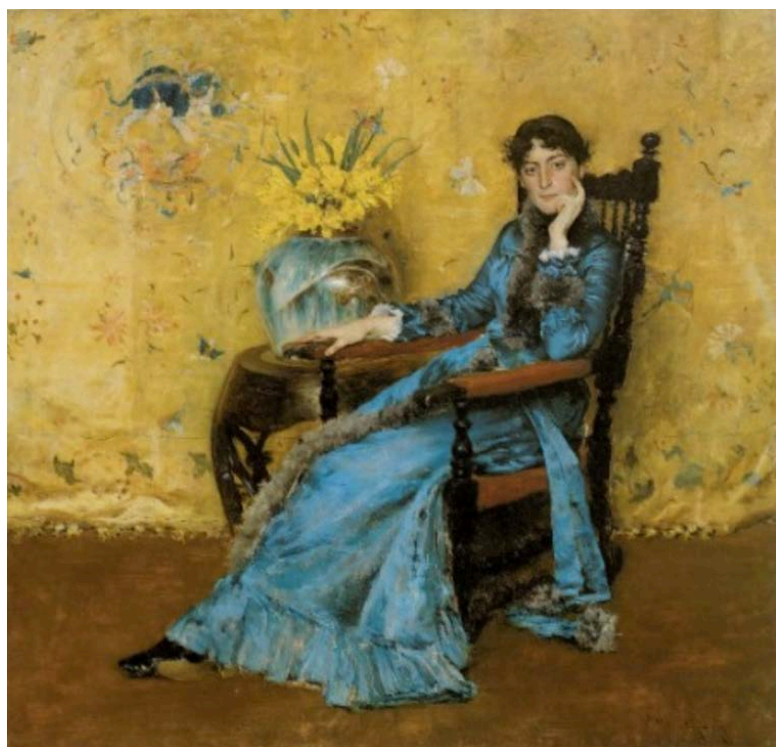
Winslow Homer, *Girl Seated*, 1880.  
Charcoal and opaque white watercolor  
on light brown paper. 46.7 x 37.7 cm.  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Image 15



Thomas Eakins, *Portrait of Maud Cook*, 1895. Oil on canvas. 24 x 20 in. Yale University Art Gallery.

Image 16



William Merritt Chase, *Portrait of Dora Wheeler*, 1882-83. Oil on canvas. 159.8 x 165.5 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art.



Image 17



Rosalie Gill, *Orchid (Portrait of Mother and Child)*, 19<sup>th</sup> century. Oil on canvas. 81 x 42 in. Maryland State Art Collection.

Image 18



*Armed with a Marlin Repeater*, 1898. Ad from "Field and Stream."

Image 19



William Merritt Chase, *Reflections*, 1893. Oil on canvas. 25 x 18 in. Private collection.

Image 20



William Merritt Chase, *Mrs. Chase*, 1890-95. Oil on canvas. 72 1/4 x 48 1/2 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Image 21



William Merritt Chase, *Portrait of Mrs. C (Lady with a White Shawl)*, 1893. Oil on canvas. 75 x 52 in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Image 22



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2 (The Little White Girl)*, 1864. Oil on canvas. 765 x 511 mm. Tate Gallery, Britain.

Image 23



Thomas Eakins, *The Artist's Wife and his Setter Dog*, 1884-89. Oil on canvas. 30 x 23 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Image 24



John Singer Sargent, *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw*, 1892. Oil on canvas. 127 x 101 cm. National Galleries Scotland.

Image 25



Winslow Homer, *At the Window*, 1872. Oil on canvas. 57 x 40 cm. Princeton University Art Museum.

Image 26



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 1 (The White Girl)*, 1861-1862. Oil on canvas. 213 x 107.9 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Image 27



Thomas Eakins, *The Concert Singer*, 1890-1892. Oil on canvas. 190.8 x 137.8 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.