

Augustus John:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	John, Augustus, 1878-1961
Title:	Augustus John Art Collection
Dates:	1903-1946
Extent:	1 box (10 items)
Abstract:	The Collection consists of ten portraits on paper (drawings, etchings, and reproductive prints) of well-known English contemporaries of John, including James Joyce, Ottoline Morrell, and W. B. Yeats.
Call Number:	Art Collection AR-00131
Language:	No linguistic material present
Access:	Open for research. A minimum of twenty-four hours is required to pull art materials to the Reading Room.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases (R938, R1252, R3785, R4731, R5180) and gift (R2767)
Processed by:	Helen Young, 1997
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Augustus Edwin John was born January 4, 1878, at Tenby, Pembrokeshire, to Edwin William John and Augusta Smith. In 1894 he began four years of studies at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where he worked under Henry Tonks and Frederick Brown. During his time at the Slade School, John also studied the works of the Old Masters at the National Gallery. After suffering a head injury while swimming at Pembrokeshire in 1897, the quality of John's artwork, as well as his appearance and personality, changed. His methodical style became freer and bolder, and his work started to gain notice. In 1898, John won the Slade Prize for his *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*.

John left the Slade School in 1898, and he held his first one-man exhibition in 1899 at the Carfax Gallery in London. Later that same year he traveled on the continent, part of the time with a group consisting of the artist brothers Sir William Rothenstein and Albert Rutherston, William Orpen, Sir Charles Conder, and Ida Nettleship (a fellow Slade student). In France, he was influenced by the work of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Pablo Picasso.

In 1901, John married Ida Nettleship, and he took a position as an art instructor at the University of Liverpool. Here he produced many etchings, and also befriended the University Librarian, John Sampson, an authority on gypsies. John became interested in gypsy culture; he later traveled with gypsies and learned their language and customs.

In 1902, John moved to a studio space in London, where he started to paint more portraits in order to support his growing family. That same year, he also began a relationship with Dorothy McNeill (to whom he gave the gypsy name Dorelia), a friend of his sister, Gwen John. After Ida's death in childbirth in 1907, Dorelia became the artist's wife in all but name. Also in 1907, he met James Dickson Innes, another Welsh painter with whom he traveled in Wales. It was this friendship that inspired John to paint landscapes in a more modern and impressionistic style. While John's oil paintings still showed the influence of Rubens and other Old Masters, his strongest works during this time were his drawings.

After World War I, John became best known for his portraits of literary and society figures, in part because there was a great demand for his portraits, but also because he needed the income. As a result, John had little time to work on the large-scale imaginative paintings in which he was more interested.

In his later life, Augustus John wrote two autobiographical books, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography* (1952) and *Finishing Touches* (1964, published posthumously). He died October 31, 1961, in Fordingbridge, Hampshire.

Sources:

Easton, Malcolm, and Holroyd, Michael. *The Art of Augustus John*. Boston: D. R. Godine, 1975.

The Dictionary of National Biography, 1961-1970 (8th Supplement). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Scope and Contents

The Augustus John Art Collection consists of ten portraits on paper (5 drawings, 3 etchings, and 2 reproductive prints) of well-known English contemporaries of John, including James Joyce, Ottoline Morrell, and W. B. Yeats. These works are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Related Material

The Art Collection also has an additional sketch by John, a portrait of Nancy Cunard drawn on a piece of table cloth, which is part of the Nancy Cunard Art Collection. The Manuscripts Collection holds papers of Augustus John, including letters to Dora Carrington, Edward Gordon Craig, and Ottoline Morrell.

- Accession Number: 65.140** Aleister Crowley. 1946. 1 drawing (charcoal), 50.5 × 37.9 cm. **Box**
1.1
- Accession Number: 65.141** [Ronald Firbank]. 1914. 1 drawing (pencil), 42.8 × 32.7 cm. **Box**
1.2
- Accession Number: 79.53** Thomas Hardy, O.M. 1924. 1 reproductive print, 45.4 × 37.9 cm. **Box**
1.3
- Accession Number: 65.338** [James Joyce]. Circa 1930. 1 drawing (pencil), 46.2 × 31.5 cm. **Box**
1.4
- Accession Number: 70.64** [James Joyce]. Circa 1930. 1 drawing (pencil), 46.2 × 31.6 cm. **Box**
1.5
- Accession Number: 72.80** [T. E. Lawrence]. Circa 1919. 1 print (collotype), 25.6 × 19.4 cm. **Box**
1.6
- Accession Number: 73.509** Percy Wyndham Lewis. Circa 1903. 1 print (etching), 17.8 × 13.8 cm. **Box**
1.7
- Accession Number: 67.25** [Ottoline Morrell]. Circa 1908. 1 drawing (pencil), 45.8 × 30.5 cm. **Box**
1.8
- Accession Number: 69.28** W. B. Yeats. Circa 1907. 1 print (etching), 17.7 × 12.7 cm. **Box**
1.9
- Accession Number: 75.157.4** W. B. Yeats. Circa 1907. 1 print (etching), 17.8 × 12.6 cm. **Box**
1.10