



"La Toilette" (The Bath) by Mary Cassatt, purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1910.

How to Order a Print of "La Toilette"

Through special arrangement, Family Weekly is able to offer its readers handsome color prints of this famous painting for the low price of \$1.95 plus 30¢ each for packing and shipping. Prints are 23¼ x 15¼ inches, lithographed in six colors on heavy stock, and suitable for framing and hanging in your home. To order, send your check or money order for \$2.25 per print to Prints, Family Weekly, P.O. Box 2152, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N. Y.

Mary Cassatt

America's Greatest Woman Painter

by Frederick A. Sweet

Curator of American Painting and Sculpture,
The Art Institute of Chicago

MARY CASSATT is by far the best woman painter that America has ever produced, and "La Toilette" is, in my opinion, the best example of her mature work. These two superlatives should be established at once because she has been, if not an altogether neglected artist in her native land, at least a highly underrated and underpublicized one.

Today's belated recognition of Miss Cassatt's talent is almost apologetic because of the apathy shown her for so many years. It should not, however, make anyone feel sorry for her, because Mary Cassatt was an entirely self-sufficient woman.

A spinster, she was decidedly opinionated, stubborn and prudish, yet capable of extreme devotion, especially for children who appeared again and again in her best works. Adulation would not have changed her outlook on life nor her views on painting, as indeed inattention never did.

Adversity had nothing to do with shaping her sturdy nature, because Miss Cassatt led a serene and cultured existence. Born in 1844 into a well-to-do family in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, she was never in want nor forced, as many young artists were, to earn her daily bread. Her father, once mayor of Allegheny City, was a banker, and a brother, Alexander, became president of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

As a girl, she traveled with her family in Europe, where she first became acquainted with the great works of art. She later returned there to settle permanently because Europe had the best art schools and artists of that era.

"La Toilette," painted about 1892, is unusual and yet, in many ways, typical of her best work. It was preceded by a long period in her career during which she was under the influence of the French Impressionists, notably Degas, a close personal friend. Among these artists, and in France generally, she was as highly regarded as she was ignored at home.

In 1890 an event took place which influenced her later career and led directly to "La Toilette." She and Degas attended an exhibition of Japanese prints held in Paris and were profoundly impressed by their style.

Within two years she produced a series of color prints and paintings, including "La Toilette," which showed the influence of the Japanese—the strong feeling for line, flat pattern and careful arrangement of subject matter within a given space.

"La Toilette," however, has many of the same characteristics associated with most of Miss Cassatt's works. She never painted a landscape, considering it dull. Only people interested her, and they were the only subjects she painted. Yet, as far as anyone knows, she never did a commissioned portrait—perhaps because a wealthy patron might demand that she compromise her artistic ideals to make the portrait more flattering. And, outside of a few members of her immediate family, Mary Cassatt never used an identifiable model. Usually they were untrained and unsophisticated peasant women, especially in her mother-and-daughter pictures, a favorite theme of hers.

So the simple scene shown here was posed for by simple people, but with more than simple technique. Though the mother and child may remain forever anonymous, they were immortalized for all time by the spinster from Pennsylvania.

Frederick A. Sweet is the author of "Sargent, Whistler and Mary Cassatt," the story of three American expatriate artists, and has also written the forthcoming biography of Miss Cassatt, "Miss Mary Cassatt, Impressionist from Pennsylvania."