



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

PAUL SAMPLE (1896–1974)

*San Pedro Harbor*

Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in.

Signed, dated, and inscribed (at lower right): Paul Sample 37; (on stretcher): Los Angeles / Paul Sample

RECORDED: “Eight U.S. Ports: A Portfolio of Paintings Done for FORTUNE by Paul Sample. and Some Simplified Notes on the Imbroglia of Interport Competition,” *Fortune Magazine* (September 1937), p. 93 illus.

EXHIBITED: Ferargil Galleries, New York, November 1937

EX COLL.: the artist; to Allen Grover (Vice President, Time, Inc.), 1938; by descent to his son, Robinson Alan Grover, Connecticut, 1993–2015; private collection, until the present

It is infrequent, to say the least, that a diagnosis of tuberculosis proves fortuitous, but that was the event, in 1921, that set Paul Starrett Sample on the road to becoming a professional artist. (The best source for

an overview of Sample's life and oeuvre remains *Paul Sample: Painter of the American Scene*, exhib. cat., [Hanover, New Hampshire: Hood Museum of Art, 1988] with a detailed and definitive chronology by Sample scholar, Paula F. Glick, and an essay by Robert L. McGrath. It is the source for this essay unless otherwise indicated.) Sample, born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1896 to a construction engineer and his wife, spent his childhood moving with his family to the various locations that his father's work took them. By 1911, the family had landed in Glencoe, Illinois, settling long enough for Paul to graduate from New Trier High School in 1916. Sample enrolled at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, where his interests were anything but academic. His enthusiasms included the football and basketball teams, boxing, pledging at a fraternity, and learning to play the saxophone. After the United States entered World War I, Sample, to his family's dismay, signed on for the Naval Reserve, leading directly to a hiatus from Dartmouth. In 1918 and 1919, Sample served in the U.S. Merchant Marine where he earned a third mate's license and seriously contemplated life as a sailor. Acceding to parental pressure, he returned to Dartmouth, graduating in 1921. Sample's undergraduate life revolved around sports and a jazz band he formed with his brother, Donald, two years younger and also a Dartmouth student. In November 1933, Sample summarized his life in a letter he wrote introducing himself to Frederick Newlin Price, founder of Ferargil Galleries, who would become his New York art dealer. The artist characterized his undergraduate years as spent "wasting my time intensively." He told Price that that "I took an art appreciation course and slept thru it every day" (Ferargil Galleries Records, circa 1900–63, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, available on line).

In 1920, Donald Sample contracted tuberculosis. He went for treatment to the world-famous Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake, in New York State's Adirondack Mountains for the prescribed regimen of

rest, healthful food, and fresh air. Visiting his brother in 1921, Paul also contracted the disease. Tuberculosis is highly contagious, and had no certain cure before the development of streptomycin in 1946. Even for patients who appeared to have recovered, there was a significant rate of recurrence. Thus, in his letter to Price, Sample avoided the stigma conjured by naming the disease, but wrote “I had a relapse with a bad lung and spent the next four years hospitalized in Saranac Lake.” The stringent physical restrictions imposed by adherence to “the cure” required Sample to cultivate an alternate set of interests. He read voraciously and, at the suggestion of his physician, contacted the husband of a fellow patient for instruction in art. That artist, then living in Saranac, was Jonas Lie (1880–1940), a prominent Norwegian-American painter and an associate academician at the National Academy of Design. Lie had gained renown for his dramatic 1913 series of paintings documenting the construction of the Panama Canal (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; United States Military Academy, West Point, New York). Primarily a landscape artist, Lie had a particular affinity for scenes with water. His paintings, impressionistic, atmospheric, and brushy, never strayed from a realistic rendering of his subject. Sample regarded Lie as a mentor and retained a lifelong reverence for his teacher. Sample’s early paintings very much reflect Lie’s influence.

In 1925, “cured,” Sample left Saranac Lake for what proved to be a brief stay in New York City, where his veteran’s benefits financed a commercial art course. The family, however, had moved to California, in the futile hope that the climate would benefit Donald. Sample joined them and after Donald’s death, remained in California, taking classes at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. In Sample’s account to Price, “I couldn’t stomach the practice of painting a lot of High Sierras and desert flowers which seemed to be the only kind of pictures that were sold here so I got a job teaching drawing and painting at the art

school of the University of Southern California.” Initially hired as a part-time instructor, Sample progressed to full-time status and ultimately, by the mid-1930s, to the post of Chairman of the Fine Art Department. Sample, however, did not want to wind up as a professor. “Teaching is all right in small doses,” he wrote, “but I have a horror of drifting into being a college professor and nothing more.” At the same time as he taught, Sample began to exhibit his work in a variety of venues at first locally, then nationally. Though he confessed himself “a terrible salesman,” and though occupied with continued learning and teaching, Sample was nonetheless, ambitious. In 1927, he wrote in his diary, “I am eventually going to be a painter and a damned good one. And what is more, I am going to make money at it” (as quoted by Glick, p. 15). In 1928, Sample felt sufficiently solvent to marry his long-time love, Sylvia Howland, who had also been a patient at Saranac Lake. The Howland family were rooted New Englanders and in summertime the Samples regularly traveled East for family reunion vacations.

While the 1930s brought serious hardship to many artists, for Paul Sample it was a decade of success. Buttressed by the financial safety net of his teacher’s salary, he painted realist depictions of the American scene. While his work addressed depression-era conditions with a sympathetic eye, Sample avoided the anger and tinge of bitterness that characterized much contemporary realist art. Beginning in 1930, Sample began to exhibit regularly in juried exhibitions at important national venues, garnering prizes along the way. In 1930, *Inner Harbor* won an honorable mention in the Annual Exhibition of the Art Institute of Chicago. That same year Sample was also represented in a show at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo and at the Biennial Exhibition of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. In 1931, *Dairy Ranch* won the second Hallgarten Prize at the Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, in New York. Sample also made his first appearances at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh,

and The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. In 1936, *Miner's Resting* won the Temple Gold Medal at the Pennsylvania Academy's Annual Exhibition. Always interested in watercolor, in 1936, Sample began to send works on paper to exhibitions at the Whitney Museum, New York.

While participating in juried exhibitions, Sample also cultivated commercial possibilities. His first New York art dealer was the prestigious Macbeth Gallery in New York, which included his work in a November 1931 exhibition. In 1934, Sample joined the Ferargil Galleries in New York, after Fred Price arranged the sale of Sample's *Church Supper* to the Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1937, The Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased Sample's *Janitor's Holiday* from the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, a notable honor.

As prestigious as this exhibition schedule may have been, by far Sample's most visible presence in the 1930s and 1940s was the result of his relationship with Henry Luce's burgeoning publishing empire, Time, Inc. Sample's first contribution to a Luce publication appears to have been another *San Pedro Harbor, Los Angeles* which illustrated a *Fortune* article debating the merits of international trade versus home-grown industry as the best route for recovery from the economic depression that continued to grip the nation. It appeared in September 1934 (p. 62) above the caption "Industry Faces the Sea." In 1935, again illustrating an article on a New Deal-related topic, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Sample contributed *Norris Dam* (New Britain Museum, Connecticut) above the caption "Work in Progress." In December 1936, and January 1937, *Fortune* ran two articles, "Anaconda I," and "Anaconda II," both with original oil paintings by Sample. "Anaconda I" focused on the landscape around the Anaconda

copper factory in Butte, Montana. “Anaconda II” featured oil paintings of the process of copper smelting inside the factory. (Butte had been one of the stops on the family odyssey in 1902, when Paul was six years old.) In September 1937, “Eight U.S. Ports” appeared in *Fortune*, subtitled “A portfolio of paintings, done for FORTUNE by Paul Sample[,] and some simplified notes on the imbroglio of interport competition.” The ports (in the order in which they appeared in the article) were: Los Angeles, California (the present picture); Stockton, California; Seattle, Washington; New Orleans, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; and Boston, Massachusetts. Sample’s public profile was further enhanced that November when Luce’s *Life* magazine ran an illustrated feature article, “From Football and Boxing to Painting is the Strange Career of Paul Sample,” with a photo of the artist and his wife relaxing at home and reproductions of six oil paintings including *Norris Dam* (November 15, 1937, pp. 42–44). The “Eight Ports” commission marked a major change in Paul Sample’s life. In 1936, he had received an honorary Master of Arts degree from Dartmouth. In 1937–38, Sample took a sabbatical year from the University of California. Completing the sketching tour for the ports he was planning to paint for *Fortune*, in spring 1938, the Samples traveled to England, Belgium, France, and Italy where Sample had the opportunity to see firsthand the work of the artist he cited as his chief source of inspiration, Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Upon returning home, in autumn 1938, Sample took up the newly-created post of Artist-in-Residence at Dartmouth. In late 1939, the Sample’s only child, Timothy, was born. Sample remained at Dartmouth, except for his World War II years as an artist war correspondent, until he retired in 1962. He continued to live in Vermont and paint until his death in 1974.

While Sample studied briefly with the modernist, Stanton McDonald Wright, in California, in his early years as a painter he remained unwaveringly a disciple of his first teacher, finding inspiration in harbor scenes rendered very much in the spirit of Jonas Lie, atmospheric, impressionistic views of small boats anchored in placid waters. Two works in particular, *Inner Harbor* (1929, Irvine Museum Collection at the University of California, Irvine) and *Fish Harbor* (1930, *Sample*, pl. 3 illus)., are views of different areas of San Pedro Harbor, very much in the spirit of Jonas Lie. The waterfront area called Inner Harbor, at the Wilmington shoreline was improved in the late-nineteenth century by dredging and the building of a seawall. Fish Harbor, nearby, was created in 1928 on Terminal Island to facilitate the tuna fishing industry. Fish Harbor was home to a tight-knit community of Japanese-American tuna fisherman whose catch supplied the adjacent tuna fish canneries. (The community was razed in 1941 immediately following the forced internment of the entire population by the United States Government.) When Sample returned to San Pedro for his 1934 *Fortune* commission, his interest was dramatically different. He was no longer interested in small fishing boats resting in calm waters. His purpose was to convey the power of a maritime industrial seascape.

The Port of Los Angeles lies some 20 miles south of downtown L.A. on the southern end of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, facing west across San Pedro Bay and looking twenty-five miles across the Pacific at Santa Catalina Island. It is the Port of Los Angeles by dint of a 1906 political maneuver that annexed a five-mile wide ribbon of land, aptly called “the shoestring addition,” connecting downtown Los Angeles with the town of San Pedro. San Pedro and Catalina both owe their present names to Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, a Portuguese explorer working for the Spanish crown who, in 1542, “discovered” San Pedro on the feast day of St. Peter of Alexandria and Santa Catalina on the following day, the feast day of Saint

Catherine of Alexandria. Native peoples continued to live there peacefully, as they had for millennia, until European settlement began in 1769. “New Spain” passed from the Spanish monarchy to the fledgling nation of Mexico in 1821. After the Mexican-American War of 1848, the area was part of the territory that Mexico ceded to the United States. The harbor at San Pedro, shallow and muddy, but protected against wind and waves, had long attracted local shipping, smugglers eluding Spanish commercial regulations, and a modest fishing community.

In 1851, Phineas Banning, an energetic entrepreneurial Delaware native keen on making his fortune in the California gold economy, arrived in sleepy San Pedro. Beginning as a shop clerk, Banning built a stagecoach transportation network connecting the port at San Pedro to Los Angeles. The larger town to the north, with a population of about 2,000 people, had been the previous capital of Mexican California. It was an unprepossessing local agricultural center with links to the rest of the western territory including, after 1848, the gold fields of southern California. Banning acquired land in San Pedro and what is now Wilmington (named for his birthplace). At the beginning of the Civil War, Banning, a staunch unionist disturbed by secession sentiment in Los Angeles, donated land in Wilmington for the Federal government to build a fort. Patriotism, as usual, proved good business, bringing people and trade to the area. Banning was not only industrious, but also visionary. He saw a glorious future when dusty San Pedro would serve as the port for a splendid city of Los Angeles. Acting on that, he dredged a channel in the harbor to accommodate ocean going vessels. As importantly, in 1868, Banning built the first railroad between San Pedro and Los Angeles, facilitating freight traffic as well as passenger service. Though Banning died in 1885, he is credited as the father of the present-day Port of Los Angeles, a dream his sons and heirs worked to realize. It required, however, a monumental political struggle in the



1890s to establish San Pedro as the port. Railroad magnate Collis Huntington invested his money and influence to support Santa Monica as the site of the future port. In a dramatic battle in the United States Senate, Huntington lost, and, in 1899, the Federal government began to build the breakwater that initiated the process of serious port construction at San Pedro.

In 1906, Los Angeles annexed the shoestring, never more than eight city blocks or half a mile wide. In 1909, the independent towns of San Pedro and Wilmington were incorporated into the city. (In 1985, the “shoestring strip,” was given a “proper” neighborhood name, “Harbor Gateway.”) President Woodrow Wilson declared San Pedro the home of the U.S. Navy Pacific Battle Fleet in 1919, a designation that endured until 1940 when the Fleet moved to Honolulu, Hawaii. As Banning, Huntington, and the leading citizens of Los Angeles had believed in the nineteenth century, the Port of Los Angeles became and continues to be a major engine in the economic success of the city. Together with its neighbor and rival, the Port of Long Beach, these adjacent ports constitute the premier container shipping hub in the United States, through which passes the bulk of American Far East trade.

When Paul Sample painted his pictures of San Pedro, the shoestring strip was rural, but the port was already an important player in the national economy. The *Fortune* commissions mark an artistic and personal watershed in Sample’s career. After his sabbatical in 1937–38, Sample never returned to California to live. Sample’s affiliation with Time, Inc. continued into the 1940s. For the February 1939 edition of *Fortune*, he contributed eight pictures, a mix of oil and watercolor to illustrate a lengthy essay on the life and economics of the Hoisington family farm in Vermont. These proved the keynote of the bulk of Sample’s later work: Brueghel-inspired depictions of rural life in New England. Sample was

involved in the war effort during World War II as an artist/correspondent for *Life* magazine. His oil painting, *Shell Factory*, a view of a munitions plant in Detroit, appeared in the July 7, 1941 issue of *Life* (U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, see *Sample*, no. 39 illus in color). From March through July 1943, and again from September through December 1944, Sample traveled with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific Theater documenting life on board ship, on a submarine, and at the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines. The result was a series of striking oil paintings, watercolors and drawings of the wartime life of American troops. As with his earlier work for *Fortune*, the magazine exposure meant that a wide audience of viewers experienced important current issues through the lens of Sample's artistic sensibility.

The Time, Inc. commissions gave Paul Sample the opportunity to create what is arguably his most important body of work. Sample joined a distinguished company of writers, photographers, and artists hired to shape the content of *Fortune*, Henry Luce's business publication launched in 1930. In one respect Sample's work for *Fortune* is deeply personal. The pictures of ports, of the Norris Dam, and of the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. in Butte, Montana serve as reminders that Paul Sample's father was a civil engineer. Moving from the personal to the professional, in themes, conception, and execution, Sample's works recall the epic series of views of the Panama Canal under construction that established Jonas Lie's reputation as a major painter. Lie had utilized the device of the aerial view to convey the grandeur of the engineering feat, a perspective that Sample found equally useful. While European impressionism had scandalized critics for its choice to paint the heroics of everyday life, American impressionists found rich subject matter in such topics. Two of the artists in Robert Henri's circle of urban realists, Ernest Lawson and George Bellows, painted memorable views of the construction of

Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan. While Lie, Bellows, and Lawson all used the technical language of American impressionism for their depictions. Sample, painting three decades later, used a visual language filtered through precisionism to convey the same appreciation of American progress and industry for a Depression-era audience. The change in style is forcefully illustrated by Charles Sheeler's river view of the Ford Motor Plant on the Rouge River near Detroit, *American Landscape* of 1930 (Museum of Modern Art, New York), a water view with an entirely different kind of romance than previous centuries of art. Sample's style of the 1930s was part of a broad stream generally categorized as "social realism."

Art history and art criticism lives through labels. Labels have not served Paul Sample well. He dipped into, at various times, American impressionism, photo realism, social realism, surrealism, regionalism, mannerism, precisionism, and the American scene style. In all of these he was not trying to paint to fit the parameters of one school or another, but to find the best expression for the subject at hand. He never considered himself an illustrator, but an artist. He was adamantly an interpreter, not a recorder, of what he saw and how he understood it. Sample was well known and well respected during his lifetime, with a slew of academic honors. He never stopped painting. But his quite deliberate choice not to embrace modernist abstraction meant that, by the time he died in 1974, he had become a marginalized figure in American art. While he is well represented in museum collections, the bulk of these works are the New England rural scenes that come to mind when his name is mentioned. It is paradoxical, then, that his large major works, produced primarily for popular media, are now rarely available to the public. The provenance of *San Pedro Harbor* offers a partial explanation. It was purchased from Sample by Allen Grover, an executive vice president of Time, Inc. in 1937 and remained in his family until very recently.

(A copy of the original purchase agreement accompanies the picture.) It seems likely that many of Sample's major works continue to be held privately. *San Pedro Harbor* bears witness to its time. It is a carefully composed and executed statement of faith in the American present and future by an artist who was committed to painting his reality as he understood it and sharing that understanding with his fellow Americans.

.APG 8962    AKN    PS8962