



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

CHILDE HASSAM (1859–1935)

*A Wet Day on Broadway*

Pastel on paper mounted to fine-weave linen, 18 x 21 7/8 in.

Signed and dated (at lower left): Childe Hassam 1891

EXHIBITED: probably Doll & Richards Gallery, Boston, 1891, *Exhibition and Private Sale of Pastel and Watercolor Drawings by Childe Hassam*, no. 7, as “A Wet Day on Broadway” // New York Water Color Club, New York, New York, 1893, *IVth Annual Exhibition*, no. 39, as “Broadway, Rainy Day”

EX COLL: [Doll & Richards Gallery, Boston, 1891]; Dwight Blaney, Brookline, Massachusetts, until 1944; by descent in the Blaney family, until 1993; to sale 7684, Christie’s, New York, May 26, 1993, no. 118, as “Horse Drawn Cabs, New York;” to Mr. and Mrs. Cal Palitz, New York, 1993–2000; to Mrs. Anka Palitz, New York, until the present

One of the most prolific and creative exponents of American Impressionism, Childe Hassam applied his distinctive vision to a range of themes, including landscapes, figure subjects, and the floral

environment. An artist who attained both critical and financial success, he was also among the first American impressionists to focus his attention on the urban environment, depicting aspects of modern life in New York and Boston, as well as in locales abroad. Hassam's aesthetic versatility was also manifested through his choice of media, which ranged from oil and watercolor to pastel, etching, and lithography.

A proud Yankee who hailed from Dorchester, Massachusetts, Hassam was the son of Frederick F. Hassam, a Boston cutlery merchant, and his wife, Rosa P. Hawthorne. He initially worked for the Boston publishing firm of Little, Brown and Company before embarking upon an apprenticeship with George E. Brown, a local wood engraver, at age seventeen. During the late 1870s, Hassam attended evening classes at the Boston Art Club in addition to studying artistic anatomy with William Rimmer at the Lowell Institute. He also received private art lessons from Ignaz Marcel Gaugengigl, a figure and portrait painter who had trained in Munich. Throughout this period, Hassam supported himself by doing illustration work in watercolor and gouache for Daniel Lothrop & Co., a Boston publisher, as well as for national magazines such as *Scribner's*. He also painted colorful, loosely rendered watercolors on his own, exhibiting fifty-one of them in his first one-man exhibition, held at the galleries of Williams & Everett in Boston in the autumn of 1882.

In 1883, Hassam made his first trip to England and Europe, during which time he produced a group of watercolors that he exhibited at Williams & Everett in 1884. He also worked in oil, creating Barbizon-inspired landscapes such as *A Back Road* (1884; Brooklyn Museum, New York). Most significantly, Hassam also turned his attention to mood-filled views of the city's streets, avenues, and parks, executed in a subdued tonalist manner. His skills in conveying natural phenomena, as

well as his penchant for dramatic compositional devices such as plunging perspectives can be seen in key early works as *Rainy Day, Columbus Avenue, Boston* (1885; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio), one of the many “rainy day” pictures he would produce there and in New York. As Hassam later recounted, it was while living on Columbus Avenue that he discovered that an asphalt street was “very pretty when it was wet and shining, and caught the reflections of passing people and vehicles,” as well as the “movements of humanity in the street” (Childe Hassam, as quoted in A. E. Ives, “Talks with Artists: Mr. Childe Hassam on Painting Street Scenes,” *Art Amateur* 27 [October 1892], p. 116).

Intent on refining his skills as a figure painter, Hassam returned to Paris in 1886, enrolling in classes at the Académie Julian, where he studied under Gustave Boulanger and Jules Lefebvre. During this period, Hassam enhanced his familiarity with Impressionism, which he adapted to his own purposes, exploring the aesthetic potential of a heightened palette and broken brushwork in relation to the depiction of outdoor effects but eschewing the radical dissolution of form favored by orthodox impressionists such as Claude Monet. Feeling a kinship with Impressionism’s emphasis on the portrayal of contemporary subjects, Hassam painted Parisian streetscapes such as *Grand Prix Day* (1887; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which won a gold medal at the Paris Salon. A rising star on the international art scene, he also participated in the Internationalen Kunstausstellung in Munich in 1888, and in 1889 he won a bronze medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. Throughout his sojourn abroad, Hassam continued to paint watercolors, sending groups of them back to Boston in 1887 and 1889 in order to support himself while abroad.

Returning to America in October 1889, Hassam settled in New York, renting an apartment and

studio at 95 Fifth Avenue. In the ensuing years, he made seasonal painting trips to a variety of New England locales, from the sunlit flower gardens of the writer and poet Cecilia Thaxter on the island of Appledore in the Isles of Shoals, to the picturesque coastal towns of Gloucester and Provincetown, Massachusetts. During the rest of the year, Hassam remained in Manhattan, where he focused his attention on the “new New York,” portraying the borough’s parks, squares, and bustling thoroughfares under varying weather conditions. To be sure, despite the allure of Paris, London, and Boston, Hassam was of the opinion that New York was “the most beautiful city in the world” (“New York, The Beauty City,” *The Sun* [New York], February 23, 1913, p. 16). He was especially drawn to the bustling streets around his neighborhood in Union Square, the city’s busiest shopping district, which boasted an array of department stores and specialty shops, as well as cafes and restaurants.

Hassam’s many views of Union Square and its environs were painted from various perspectives, sometimes from an elevated vantage point, as in such well-known works as *Winter in Union Square* (about 1892–92; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and *Union Square in Spring* (1896; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts). He also created more intimate, street level views of the neighborhood, among them *A Wet Day on Broadway*, wherein, like many of his earlier views of Boston and Paris, he conceived the thoroughfare as a slanting diagonal that leads the viewer’s gaze from the carriages in the lower right to the cluster of buildings in the upper left quadrant of the composition—its tight cropping imbuing the scene with a vital sense of spontaneity. (Hassam adhered to a similar composition in his smaller watercolor, *Horse Drawn Cabs at Evening, New York* [about 1890], in the collection of the Terra Foundation in Chicago. Related works also include *New York Street Scene [Rainy Day, New York]*, a watercolor from 1892 [private collection, New York] and an etching, *Union Square* [1896–1916], an example of which can be found at The

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.) The rain-slicked surface, of course, was now part and parcel of Hassam's urban iconography, his penchant for this motif prompting one commentator to suggest that he was "much happier with a wet sidewalk than with a mass of flowers" (The Saunterer, "Saunterings," *Town Topics* 29 [February 2, 1893], pp. 14–15).

*A Wet Day on Broadway* serves as an important pictorial record of this section of Lower Broadway as it looked during the Gilded Age on a drizzly springtime day. The row of buildings on the right include the shop of A. A. Vantine & Co., a fashionable wholesale and retail importing house then located in the Hoyt Building at 877–879 Broadway (between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets) where, as noted in one contemporary account:

all the products of the Orient are assembled in richest profusion and choicest magnificence, in the mammoth establishment, which is one of the sights of New York. Everything is found here, from rugs and carpets to silks and embroideries; household draperies and furnishings to carved furniture; every sort of ornament for the house ... that could be dreamed of; all manner of rare China, bronze and other Oriental wares, jewelry and table delicacies (*The Finance and Commerce of New York and the United States* [New York: New York Tribune 1903], p. 94.

(For a history of the firm, which closed its retail operation in 1921, see Yumiko Yamamori, "Japanese Arts in America, 1895–1920, and the A. A. Vantine and Yamanaka Companies," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15 [Spring–Summer 2008], pp. 96–126.)

Hassam also underscores the mercantile aspect of the district by including another prominent structure further south. Indeed, in keeping with his belief that the city's skyscrapers possessed a special beauty when seen not up close but "melting tenderly into the distance" is evident in the misty background, which is dominated by the distinctive domed silhouette of the Domestic Sewing

Machine Building, located on the southwest corner of Broadway and Fourteenth Street in Union Square. (The Domestic Sewing Machine Building also appears in other Union Square subjects by Hassam, including the aforementioned *Winter in Union Square*.) This early seven-story skyscraper was designed by the English-born architect Griffith Thomas (1820–1878) and built during 1872–73 on the site of the former mansion of Cornelius Roosevelt. The tallest cast-iron facade building erected in New York thus far, it was much admired for its height, its balustraded balconettes, its large display windows, and its high corner Mansard domed cupola, as well as the fact that it boasted a passenger elevator. (The Domestic Sewing Machine Company occupied the building until 1895, after which it accommodated various small shops and businesses. It was torn down in 1927 to make way for a new twenty-story office tower designed by architect Emery Roth. See Joseph J. Korom, Jr., *The American Skyscraper, 1850–1940* [Wellesley, Massachusetts: Branden Books, 2009], pp. 51–52.)

As well as demonstrating Hassam's penchant for depicting everyday life in the modern metropolis, *A Wet Day on Broadway* underscores his facility with pastel, a medium that he began to use during his visit to Paris, as apparent in works such as *Grand Prix de Paris* (1887; Corcoran Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). Like many of his contemporaries, including French impressionists such as Edgar Degas and American expatriate painters such as James McNeill Whistler and Mary Cassatt, Hassam was no doubt attracted to pastel's wide array of hues, its easy portability, and its dry, velvety quality, which allowed the artist to manipulate it according to the spontaneous effects he or she wished to achieve. Hassam continued to use pastel after moving to New York, joining the short-lived Society of American Painters in Pastel in 1890. He subsequently exhibited in its fourth and final show, held that same year, at which time a reviewer for *Art Amateur*

noted that his success with the medium was “remarkable” (“The Pastel Exhibition,” *Art Amateur* 23 [June 1890], p. 4). Hassam’s virtuosity as a pastellist soon evolved to the extent that, on the occasion of an exhibition of his oils, watercolors, and pastels at the Blakeslee Galleries in New York in December 1891, a writer for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* observed: “In whatever medium he chooses to work Mr. Hassam is vivid and eccentric, though he lets himself out with rather more of a swing in pastel than in anything else” (“Gallery and Studio: Childe Hassam’s Oils, Aquarelles and Pastels at Blakeslee’s,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. December 27, 1891, p. 9).

Larger in size than most of Hassam’s pastels, *A Wet Day on Broadway* dates from 1891, the year in which Hassam’s interest in using pastel surged. A major work in his pastel oeuvre, it is likely the piece exhibited as *A Wet Day on Broadway* in Hassam’s exhibition of pastels and watercolors held at Doll & Richards in November 1891. (See *Exhibition and Private Sale of Pastel and Water Color Drawings by Childe Hassam*, exhib. cat. [Boston: Doll & Richards Gallery, 1891], n.p.). Of the nineteen pastels on display, this was the only one clearly identifiable as a New York subject.) Local critics found his pastels particularly attractive, one pundit describing them as “delightful... [Hassam’s] use of color is lavish, abundant and intelligent; he makes it sing for him in all sorts of keys” (“The Fine Arts—Exhibition of Pastels and Watercolors by Mr. Childe Hassam,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 16, 1891, p. 6). This comment would certainly apply to *A Wet Day on Broadway*, the artist’s spirited handling, along with his cool palette—in which an array of blues merge and mingle with softer mauves, greys, greens, and touches of white—effectively conveying the distinctive atmospheric conditions at hand (especially the glimmer of light on the dampened street) while giving us a sense of the transitory moment.

*A Wet Day on Broadway* was also among Hassam's contributions to the annual exhibition of the New York Water Color Club held during late November–early December 1893—lent to the show courtesy of its first owner, the artist Dwight Blaney (1865–1944). (See *New York Water Color Club: IVth Annual Exhibition* [New York: New York Water Color Club, 1893], p. 15.) A good friend of Hassam's and a fellow member of the New York Water Color Club, Blaney hailed from Brookline, Massachusetts. (For Blaney, see Benjamin Blaney, "Dwight Blaney An American Impressionist," *American Art Review* 19 (January–February 2002), pp. 184–87; and Elizabeth Stillinger, "Dwight Blaney: Portrait of a Collector," *The Magazine Antiques* CXVIII [October 1980], pp. 748–57.) As a young man, Blaney honed his drawing skills by working in a tombstone-maker's shop, gaining the expertise that led to his later employment as a draftsman for the Boston architectural firm of Peabody and Stearns. While traveling in Europe in 1891, he met Edith Hill, also of Brookline, an heiress to the Eastern Steamship Company fortune. Following their marriage on June 14, 1893, Blaney—now a man of independent means—went on to become a "gentleman" artist, painting landscapes and seascapes in an impressionist-inspired manner. He was also a pioneering collector in the field of early American antiques, dispersing his acquisitions between his two homes in Boston, his house in Weston, Massachusetts, and his summer residence on Ironbound Island, Maine. A congenial man whose interests also included books and natural history, Blaney fraternized with a coterie of prominent artists that included John Singer Sargent, John Leslie Breck, William McGregor Paxton, and Hassam, who painted Edith's portrait in 1894. It is unclear as to when Blaney acquired the present pastel. However, its inclusion in the New York Water-Color Club annual in 1893 as a loan from Blaney, suggests that he may have acquired it in the wake of his marriage, perhaps as a wedding gift from Hassam or as a purchase from an art lover who now had the means to build a collection.



During the 1890s, Hassam's star rose quickly in New York and beyond. He exhibited his oils, pastels, and watercolors widely, at venues ranging from the venerable National Academy of Design and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts to the Society of American Artists. In 1893, he showed watercolors and won a prize for painting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. One year later, his illustrations illuminated the pages of *An Island Garden* (1894), a memoir by Cecilia Thaxter of her summers on Appledore. In February 1896, a two-day auction of over two hundred paintings, watercolors, and pastels from Hassam's studio was held in New York at the American Art Galleries. This sale prepared the way in late 1896 for Hassam to leave New York and return once again to Europe for an extended stay. Traveling first to Italy, he progressed north to France where, in 1897 and 1898, he worked extensively in both Paris and in Pont-Aven, Brittany, painting a series of canvases depicting the rustic life of local peasants in the latter locale. Many of these oils reveal Hassam's new concern for the expressive brushwork and vibrant palette of Post-Impressionism, as evident in canvases such as *Pont-Royale, Paris* (1897; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio) and *Tuileries Gardens* (circa 1897; The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia). In later oils, such as *The Bathers* (1904; Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, New York), Hassam synthesized the decorative concerns of Post-Impressionism with elements of Symbolism as exemplified in the work of Puvis de Chavannes. His new interest in painting the female form is also apparent in his New York Window series, a highly decorative group of pictures of women in diaphanously lit interiors. At the age of fifty-six, Hassam also took up printmaking, creating etchings, drypoints, and lithographs that demonstrate his enduring predilection for linear form.

In 1898—dissatisfied with the restrictive practices of the Society of American Artists—Hassam

helped establish The Ten (also known as Ten American Painters), an informal exhibiting organization comprised of mature, successful painters from New York and Boston who banded together to exhibit their work. For the next two decades, the group, which included Hassam's friend, J. Alden Weir, and prominent Bostonians such as Edmund C. Tarbell and Frank Benson, enjoyed the freedom to exhibit what they wanted, when and where they wanted. (Members of The Ten also included John Henry Twachtman, Joseph Rodefer Decamp, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, Willard Leroy Metcalf, Robert Reid, and Edward Emerson Simmons. Following Twachtman's death in 1902, his place was taken by William Merritt Chase.)

After the turn of the century, Hassam made regular summer trips to the artists' colonies at Cos Cob and Old Lyme, Connecticut, where he painted images of colonial churches and old houses, as well as seascapes. He made his final visit to Europe in 1910, essentially recapitulating the itinerary of his 1897 sojourn, with the exception of Italy. In Paris, he depicted the Bastille Day celebrations, a patriotic theme that served as an antecedent to his critically acclaimed flag series (1916–19), which featured views of the American and Allied flags that adorned New York's Fifth Avenue following the country's entry into the First World War. Notable for their emphasis on light, pattern, and movement, they attest to Hassam's continuing interest in translating the fleeting moment into paint.

Throughout his lifetime, Hassam dismissed the "impressionist" label, preferring instead to view himself as a painter of "light and air" who formed part of the lineage of English watercolorists such as James Mallord William Turner and John Constable. Hassam's mature work is typically American in that it is so stylistically varied—the product of an artist who freely combined strategies, devices, and influences in an eclectic mix to suit his immediate purpose. A prolific, outgoing, and highly

opinionated artist who “lived with gusto, smoked a pipe, played golf, kept a good cellar ... and worked joyously until his last illness,” Hassam died at his summer home at East Hampton, Long Island, on August 27, 1935 (“Childe Hassam, 75, Noted Artist, Dies,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1935).

This pastel retains its original gilded oak Doll & Richards frame.

*A Wet Day on Broadway* will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Hassam’s work in preparation by Stuart P. Feld and Kathleen M. Burnside.

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