

The Board of Trustees of the Columbia Museum of Art today announced the most significant single addition to the Museum's collection in its history.

ACQUIRED by purchase made possible from the bequest of the late Dr. Robert W. Gibbs is the large canvas by the important South Carolina artist, Washington Allston, "COAST SCENE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN", which was painted in 1808-1811.

This painting will go on exhibition in a special setting in the Museum's Reception Hall today during the Museum's hours of public opening from 2:00 to 6:00 P.M.

The late Dr. Gibbs repeatedly urged the civic growth of the collections of art at the Columbia Museum, and set a pattern of applying that ideal in his personal will. Scholar of discriminating taste that the doctor was, he still did not seek to have his choice confine the Museum's Board in its planning the art growth of the institution.

Doctor Gibbs' will stated that "said money shall be used for the purchasing for the Museum a painting of outstanding distinction and beauty, not concerned with any historical event or individual, nor shall it have any religious significance. A lovely and satisfying landscape or seascape would suit admirably. A port or harbor scene on the order of the fine harbor scene, which is in the home of Mrs. W. Bedford Moore, would be most pleasing."

A committee composed of Miss Katherine Hayward, former Chairman of the Columbia Museum of Art Commission, Mr. R. Beverly Herbert, present Chairman, and Dr. John Richard Craft, Museum Director, was designated by Dr. Gibbs to make the selection.

"CAST SCENE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN" is an oil painting which might have been created to fit the wishes of the late Museum Patron.

DEFINITIVE HISTORY

THE DIRECTOR of the Detroit Institute of Arts wrote the definitive history of South Carolina's Washington Allston, published in 1948. He eloquently describes in detail the personal style and mood which distinguish this painting. "As in all Allston's landscapes, nature is seen through the veil of memory. It is the coast of Tuscany or Latium. In the foreground are Italian peasants bargaining with the fishermen of their catch, and a carter loading casks which seem to have come off the galley lying at the pier. Beyond are fishing vessels, a brig and a lateen-rigged galley whose guns flash in the distance, as the sun sinks in splendor into the Tyrrhenian Sea.

"The sky is the real hero of the piece. The sun raying light upward from the horizon and downward over the water, the rose and violet clouds spreading over the sky cool yellow below and cool blue above - all are painted with great coloristic subtlety. The harmony of the whole, created by a rich range of tone, a fine economy of color and a delicate contrast of warm and cool is most characteristic of Allston. The violet and rose tone of the clouds is carried down in charming transitions through the violet-brown sails to the warm brown ships and shows in the foreground, where some touches of red in the peasants' costumes give it a final fillip. The cool light of the sky is also carried down through the reflection of the ships into silvery whites of the peasants' clothes and the white horse at the right.

"The mood here is one of reverie which a hidden intensity of feeling makes somewhat poignant and dramatic. It is interesting to compare Allston's mature art of light and aerial tone here with Turner's contemporary studies... There can be no question of influence since Alls-

ton was out of touch with British painting after 1803, so that the similarity in their approach shows how strong was the urge in romantic painting to create an art of color and light."

Visitors to Columbia's Museum will have ample opportunity to compare their reactions.

F. A. Sweet, Curator of Paintings of the Art Institute of Chicago, in his catalogue of the Hudson River School exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1945, considered that Allston had probably started this painting while waiting for his boat at Leghorn in April, 1808, to return to America where he probably completed the canvas in Boston during the succeeding three years. This is probably the same seapiece which provoked the punster in Gilbert Stuart to observe that he did not think anybody could beat Mr. Allston in Making water.

LYRICAL MOOD

All Critics of "COAST SCENE" have been unanimous in stamping Allston among the greatest of America's romantic stylists, "Italianate in feeling," Sweet describes the canvas, "but conceived in a lyrical rather than a grandiose mood. Lighting effects and tonal qualities make this well-knit composition most effective."

Over 100 years ago in somewhat similar vein a Miss Elizabeth Peabody wrote in 1839 for the Salem, Mass. newspapers that: "I never saw such triumphs of individual genius as in the subduing . . . of that Magnificent Scene on the Meditterrean to the Allstonian tone. . . . Looking the sun itself in the face, he commands him to veil his proud beams and acknowledge a master." Even allowing for a certain Victorian hyperbole, the hypnotism of the painting's communication makes itself felt.

Washington Allston was the first truly Idyllic American painter, the embodiment of "gothic" romanticism of the early nineteenth century, and recognized as among the greatest masters on two continents. Into the traditions of American art he introduced the strains of the dramatic and lyric sentiment, of quiet reverie and meditation upon the past, which had produced so much of the greatest art in other lands.

BORN NEAR GEORGETOWN

Allston was born at Brook Green Domain on the Maccamaw River in All Saints Parish, District of Georgetown, South Carolina, November 5, 1779. First educated at Mrs. Calcott's school in Charleston, for reasons of health he was sent to Newport, Rhode Island, at an early age to prepare for Harvard, which he entered in 1796, graduating in 1800. Immediately afterwards he came back to Charleston and obtained the family permission to sell his share of the family property (now famed Brookgreen Gardens) to finance his study of art in Europe.

In company with the well known miniaturist, Edward Malben, Allston sailed from England to study there at the Royal Academy for the next two and one-half years. Later with the artist, John Vanderlyn, he went to Paris to study at the Louvre, and then down to Rome.

There at the Caffee Greco frequented by the Northern Europeans and the few Americans who go to Italy, he must have made friends with Shelley, Keats, Hans Christian Anderson, the Danish sculptor Thorwaldson, Turner, James Fenimore Cooper and many others of note. There were Alexander Humboldt the explorer and Madame De Stael, the brilliant French woman whose writing on Germany was so influential in attracting the attending of English and American Scholars to German Brilliance. Allston became the best of friends with Washington Irving and introduced the writer to painting. Samuel Taylor Coleridge met Allston

early in his stay in Italy, and each profoundly influenced the other. Coleridge, a most capable literary and art critic, considered Allston of the highest genius as a painter, poet and philosopher.

PRAISED BY HOLMES

Typical of the many famed names who judged Allston an artist of major interest was Oliver Wendell Holmes who assessed him the best artist America had then produced.

On his second trip to Europe in 1811, Allston took Samuel F. B. Morse, who had engaged himself to the South Carolina artist as his student. A South Carolinian of more than passing fame to study with him later was James DeVeaux. Locally the latter is well known from paintings at both the University of South Carolina and the State Capitol. In connection with the Gibbes family itself, the name of DeVeaux also features, since the artist was sponsored in his European studies by Dr. Robert Wilson Gibbes, who also wrote his biography.

GENIUS IN LANDSCAPES

Allston's genius lay in his landscapes. In it he "struck the first vibrant note of romanticism in American painting." The romantic element of his nature is sometimes ascribed to his childhood in South Carolina, where his favorite amusement, as he related, was to make little landscapes under roots of trees and to convert stalks of wild fern into men and women by winding them with colored yarn. He also wrote: ". . . even these delights would sometimes give way to the stronger love for the wild and marvelous, I delighted in being terrified by the tales of witches and hags, which the Negroes used to tell me; and I well remember with how much pleasure I recalled these feelings on my re-

turn to Carolina; especially in revisiting a gigantic wild grape in the woods which had been a favorite swing for one of these witches."

In the exhibition of "Romantic Painting in America" in 1943 at the Museum of Modern Art, James Thrall Soby and Dorothy C. Miller attributed Allston the genius to guide American Painting to maturity of scope and vision, to broaden the narrow colonial tradition which had limited our 18th century artists to portraiture. "In so doing he carried over American Romantic Painting from one century into the next, from England and the school of Benjamin West to this country and an indigenous art."

A parenthetical footnote of interest came out only after negotiations for the painting had been undertaken by the Museum. The connection of the Allston family with the Gibbes has always been very close. Mr. William Hazell Gibbes of Charleston, direct ancestor of the late donor, indeed has the half sister of Washington Allston as his first wife. Many descendants of the Gibbes family throughout the years have carried names which evidence the close family ties.