



ALEXIS JEAN FOURNIER

A Barbizon in East Aurora

1825-1893

ALEXIS JEAN FOURNIER
A Barbizon in East Aurora

BURCHFIELD CENTER
WESTERN NEW YORK FORUM FOR AMERICAN ART
State University College at Buffalo
1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14222 Tel: (716) 878-6011

This catalogue supplements the exhibition
ALEXIS JEAN FOURNIER
A Barbizon in East Aurora
Burchfield Center, January 21 - March 11, 1979

Published in 1,000 copies January, 1979
Editor: Edna M. Lindemann, Director, Burchfield Center
assisted by Austin Fox, Gloria Bernhard,
Barbara Lewczyk and Micheline Lepine

© 1979, Buffalo State College Foundation, Inc.
All rights reserved.

cover: MILLET'S SHEEP c. 1890
private collection



ALEXIS JEAN FOURNIER

A Barbizon in East Aurora

The great English landscape painter, John Constable, once spoke of sky as "the key note, the standard scale and the chief organ of sentiment" in a painting.

The emphasis on sky in Alex Fournier's painting suggests that he felt the same way. The land in Fournier's landscapes seems to be more a foil for the sky than an equivalent central object in his pictures. They are more nearly skyscapes than landscapes. In commenting about Fournier's painting strategy, an East Aurora friend of Fournier's said, "If Alex got his sky right, he felt he had a good picture."

It is the sky, with its atmosphere and light, that gives his pictures a distinction, and the sky that establishes the spatial dimension and contributes to the sentiment and the tranquility of his pictures.

Most of his adult life Alexis Jean Fournier painted in the tradition and manner of his beloved Barbizon School, that group of 19th century French painters who in about 1847 moved to the village of Barbizon on the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau about 30 miles southeast of Paris. Including Theodore Rousseau, Jean Francois Millet, Charles Daubigny, and Charles Jacque, a cadre of landscape and animal painters formed, and nearby lived Corot. They were escaping poverty and a lack of recognition

in Paris. Fournier is closer to the idyllic rusticity of Rousseau than to the noble peasant renderings of Millet. When Fournier inserted any human figures in his pictures, he made them a part of nature but small and subordinate to nature.

In his movement from his struggles for recognition in Minneapolis and Chicago to the tranquility of the lyric countryside around East Aurora and the nearby Cazenovia Valley that he loved to paint, Fournier may have identified with the return-to-nature aspect of the Barbizon School.

Like the Barbizons too, Fournier became a regional painter. He attempted to render the Romantic and universal elements of nature mostly for a local public that was just beginning to become aware of art. Most of the canvases in this exhibition have been lent by regional owners of his art. A few, however, such as *The House of Honore Daumier at Valmondois* and *The Home of Antoine Louis Barge at Barbizon*, come from institutions. These two belong to The Elbert Hubbard Library-Museum.

Fournier had met Elbert Hubbard in Chicago in 1903, when Hubbard was on one of his lecture tours. Hubbard told him about the Roycroft experiment and urged him to join the community, with its opportunities for artistic expression and its beautiful countryside. Not long afterwards Fournier arrived, eventually taking up residence at 46 Walnut Street, not far from the Roycroft. The home-studio he built and the Bungle House nearby were to be his headquarters for the rest of his life, aside from several trips to Europe and several winters in the Mid-West during his second marriage.

In France, he became so deeply involved in the work of the Barbizons that he later did an extensive book on them called *The Haunts and Homes of the Barbizon Masters*. The following comment appears in an article, "The Work of Alexis Jean Fournier" in the *Arts Journal* for October 1925.

There were originally eighteen paintings in all, and it was the desire of the artist to keep this collection intact, as its historic value is undisputed. He [Fournier] finally consented to sell them individually. A number have already been sold and are in private homes and galleries in various parts of the country.

Two of these were acquired by Mr. William C. Carr of Buffalo: *Along the River Oise* (with Charles Daubigny's house boat in the foreground) and *The Home of Charles Jacque*.

Fournier's Bungle House, which had an apple tree growing up through it, was filled with such curios as a large fishing net and various Indian artifacts. The latter he had collected on a trip to the Southwest in the early 1890's to make sketches for his Cliff Dwellers mural for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. He had made other Western sketches too about this time with the Jay Smith expedition, but, strangely, he never really pursued Western subjects in his art.

Strange, too, that Fournier never seemed to gravitate toward the subjects or style of the Pre-Raphaelite painters despite his long exposure to the medieval, Roycroft theories which Hubbard had derived from those of the English Pre-Raphaelite, William Morris.

Fournier's visit to Italy during one of his European trips inspired a series of Renaissance Italian scenes, of which his large painting in the salon of the Roycroft is an example. The Italian pictures contain hints of Canaletto and of Turner - "airy visions painted with tinted steam," as Constable once described the style of his contemporary Turner.

Although Alex Fournier never seems to have been employed by the Roycroft, he

became the court painter of the Institute, doing murals for the Inn, selling paintings to Roycroft visitors, and conducting art classes for local people. The local painting club he headed, called the Paint and Varnish Club, used to boat down Cazenovia Creek looking for painting subjects. He also liked to go out painting by himself or with his close friend, the architect Bob North, who was also a painter.

Fournier always admired Elbert Hubbard, even adopting the flowing black Windsor tie that Hubbard affected. A slim, dapper, black-mustached Gallic-looking man, Fournier always wore a coat and tie even in the heat of summer. Like Hubbard, Alex seems to have been a common-sense, non-academic, non-intellectual individualist, and his book on the Barbizons may have been inspired by Hubbard's *Little Journeys to the Homes of the Great*.

Fournier's friends all speak of his bonhomie and his jocularly. He loved a practical joke, he enjoyed putting himself or his friends down, he liked telling Italian dialect stories (before ethnicity was such a sensitive subject), and he responded to a good joke by doubling up with laughter and whacking his thigh. At the time of one of Tony Sisti's professional boxing matches, Alex sent Tony a humorous telegram to be delivered to Tony at ringside just before the fight.

Here are the vital statistics about Fournier according to *Who's Who in America of 1950*. He was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on July 4, 1865. He studied at the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts under Douglas Volk. With the money he earned at the Chicago World's Fair, he continued his studies at the Julian Academy in Paris. His work appears in the collections of such places as the Minneapolis Art Institute, the St. Paul's Art Institute, and the Detroit Art Institute, as well as in numerous private collections. He died in January, 1948 in East Aurora. Fournier was twice a widower. His third wife, the former Carol T. Lawrence (a writer for the Hubbard publications) survived him - as did a daughter, Mrs. Horace D. Cottom; a son, Paul; and a brother, F. Wilfred Fournier of Minneapolis.

AUSTIN M. FOX



TRIBUTE TO ALEXIS JEAN FOURNIER

My remembrances of Mr. Fournier fall into two separate periods. The first occurred when I was a young thing and looked with awe at the great ones that gathered about the Roycroft at that time. The second began when Howard and I came to live here in East Aurora when the First World War was still smoldering.

I can remember when the murals were put up in the Inn (in what was then called the Salon). One by one the pictures came from the studio on Walnut Street. The Salon at that time was planned as a room of beauty, where quiet and peace would promote the appreciation of art and stimulate great ideas. The art was furnished by Mr. Fournier. The murals depicted the nations of history: England, Greece, Rome, India, and the most prominent was the great scene of Venice. That is the one I remember most vividly. The Grand Canal with a ship riding on its breast, a magnificent ship which for all my many days represented to me the majesty of Venice when she was Queen of the Mediterranean. Well! When that was installed at the east end - the podium end - of that lovely room, there was excitement and rejoicing.

Another remembrance that keeps green in my memory is an incident in which Mr. Fournier was the chief actor. It happened this way: In the vigorous years of the Roycroft, there took place each July a lively ten days known as the Roycroft Convention. The Inn was crowded, all of the ordinary residents moved out of their rooms and found space elsewhere to sleep - these same residents turned to and washed dishes or did other extra-curricular chores. There were lectures, music, and dances on the peristyle.

One of these hectic days, father hunted up Alex and said, "I need a sparking-up for tomorrow afternoon. Can you think of something other than those Indian dances?"

"Certainly," said Alex. "I've something in mind, but I shall need a pianist - a reliable pianist."

"Take your pick," said father; "we have several pianists in residence. Take your pick."

So the next afternoon, a large and curious audience gathered at the piano. Then in came a young man carrying an easel, which he put in place near the piano. Finally arrived Alex, French beret at an angle, complete in painter's smock, palette in one hand and blank canvas in the other. He placed the canvas on the easel, and turning to the audience announced, "This is a duet of the arts! Now listen and watch! Mr. von Liebict (speaking to the pianist), may we have some music of early spring?" So the pianist played a lovely few dozen bars of something that did indeed sound like spring. Alex listened for a minute and then began to sketch in pencil. "I need hills!" he exclaimed. "A few low hills." The pianist managed. "Now the valley - thank you. A little creek in the valley perhaps."

A creek appeared.

Alex's brush and paint now came into play.

"Could you give me a bit of blue?"

"Certainly," said Mr. von Liebict.

The blue went on the hills.

"And some green, now." No one could tell how it was done, but somehow there was green. And Alex brushed it on the now fast developing picture.

"I need yellow for the big willow tree that is just showing leaf."
Yellow became a reality on the piano, and the willow became a reality on the canvas.

"That's about it for a first splash. We'll finish it sometime."

And this astonishing performance - this tour de force - took place about 1908 under the shadow of the great picture of Venice - a picture that had taken many weeks to create.

Ten years later my husband and I came to East Aurora to live on a farm - a poor farm which meant hard work - in an old house that needed much repair. A frequent visitor, Alex was of inestimable help in supplying advice on restoring what is now our home.

Every fall we were invited, along with a group of writers and artists, to come to his studio and see what he had been painting that season. Neither my husband or I was an artist in any sense, and we were honored to be included. We looked forward with great delight to those sessions.

One fall Alex announced, "I don't know what you will think of this batch. As art, I guess the best comment you could make honestly is that 'they are interesting.' I'll explain. I found I was painting too easily - I had a style that was becoming too routine. So I decided I had to do something drastic. I cleaned up all my brushes, and put them away - out of temptation, as it were. All this year I have been painting with a palette knife. And it has not been easy. Here the jobs are. See what you think of them. Say it. You won't hurt my feelings."

The pictures were different, indeed, but they had a vigor. Thinking about it afterwards, we were a bit in awe of the courage and determination of a fine artist who, having become too comfortable in his achievement in good work, decided that he could do better. His self-discipline was to make him an even finer artist.

One summer evening Alex was having supper with us on the lawn. There was nothing remarkable about that because he often did. I do not remember the year, but our now very grown up children recall being there. We were looking south, across the meadow land to the woods.

Suddenly Alex jumped up. "It won't last, but look, look! It's the golden light."

We all ran to the edge of the lawn and looked. It was indeed a golden light. We stood there silent, even the children, seeing something we had never noticed before, though of course it had been there for us to see many times. Slowly the light dimmed and twilight crept softly over the meadow and touched the woods.

It was Alex who taught us to see. None of us ever forgot. On summer evenings, near sunset we often wait for the golden light. It is not frequent, but when it comes, we watch until it fades - in quiet.

To know Alex was an experience. I was always discovering something new about him. Once, I remember, he said he did not paint in July and August.

"Why?" I said. "Nice weather - wild flowers around everywhere, lots of leaves?"

Alex said, "Too dark green. No contrasts. Everything on just one note. Tiresome."

But come spring or autumn, off he went to hunt for that spot where there were contrasts and nuances of color.

What can one say about the God given capacity for perception of beauty? Alex can point out the beauty of his pictures, and we can see it, where before we saw only the July-August colors he disparaged. We of lesser and duller perception learned to

share his glimpse of beauty.

A gentle person, a kind friend, a generous teacher, a challenging artist - Amen.

MIRIAM HUBBARD ROELOFS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It seems impossible for the Burchfield Center to acknowledge suitably the aid and encouragement of all the people in the area who have helped with an exhibition that is as regionally orientated as this one. Where a chain of inquiry led to the loan of a picture or an interesting piece of information, it is not always possible to recall or acknowledge all the links.

However, we would particularly like to thank Mrs. Miriam Roelofs for her charming memoir of Fournier which appears in this catalogue; Mr. Walter Meibohm, for his professional consultation and practical assistance; and Mrs. Gloria Bernhard for her aid to the Director in organizing the exhibition. We are very grateful to the lenders to the exhibition some of whom are identified in the last line of each catalogue entry.

Others who have helped in various ways with the exhibition come readily to mind, Nancy Hubbard Brady, Dr. A. Wilmot Jacobsen, Rix Jennings, Robert North, Jr., Tony Sisti, Lawrence Truesdell, Andrew Bergman and Austin Fox.

EDNA M. LINDEMANN

CATALOGUE

— Measurements are in inches, height precedes width.

— All works are oil on canvas, composition board or wood unless otherwise noted.

- 1 ALONG CAZENOVIA CREEK**
Cazenovia Valley reminded Fournier of France. It was one of the reasons he gave for coming back here
16 x 20
Private Collection
- 2 ALONG GREEZY CREEK, BROWN COUNTY, INDIANA**
24 x 30
Private Collection
- 3 AN AUTUMN MORNING IN BROWN COUNTY, INDIANA**
24 x 26
Private Collection
- 4 AUTUMN REFLECTIONS**
20 x 24
Private Collection
- 5 THE AWAKENING**
36 x 40
Private Collection
- 6 THE BARNYARD (Normandie), 1894**
pencil on paper, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$
Mr. & Mrs. Walter Meibohm
- 7 BARRELS IN GROUPS**
pencil on paper, 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$
Private Collection
- 8 CHANGING PASTURES, c. 1918**
Painted on a farm looking toward the East Hills and Cazenovia Creek
24 x 30
Private Collection
- 9 CLEARING AFTER RAIN, c. 1920**
19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 25
Private Collection
- 10 CLOUD SHADOWS**
24 x 26
Professor & Mrs. Byron Koekkoek
- 11 CLOUD STUDY, FRANCE, 1901**
8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6
Private Collection
- 12 THE DOME, CATSKILLS**
10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$
Private Collection
- 13 EARLY SPRING, 1923**
15 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$
Mr. & Mrs. John Neville
- 14 THE FARM**
13 x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Norton
- 15 THE GARDEN AT EVENING**
View of Roycroft Bindery painted from the artist's backyard on Walnut Street
23 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$
Mr. & Mrs. Allan H. Quinby
- 16 GOLDEN AUTUMN**
23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29
Liberty Bank, East Aurora
- 17 THE GRAND CANAL, VENICE**
18 x 24
Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Freudenheim
- 18 GRANT DAKE'S BARNYARD, c. 1915**
9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{3}{8}$
Private Collection
- 19 THE GREEN GLADE, 1948**
Completed the day prior to the day of the artist's death
18 x 24
Mr. & Mrs. George C. Strouse
- 20 HARVEST TIME IN NORMANDY, No. 2**
8 x 12
Private Collection
- 21 THE HAUNTED MILL - PICARDIE**
This painting is an enlargement from a small painting of the same subject
77 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 44
Private Collection
- 22 THE HOME OF ANTOINE LOUIS BERGE AT BARBIZON, FRANCE, 1909**
30 x 40
The Elbert Hubbard Library-Museum

- 23 THE HOUSE OF HONORE DAUMIER AT VALMONDOIS NEAR DANBRYNY'S AT AUSUES**
30 x 40
The Elbert Hubbard Library-Museum
- 24 HOUSE OF NARCISE VIRGIL DAIZ AT BARBIZON, FRANCE**
17½ x 23
Private Collection
- 25 ILLE ADAM - ON THE RIVER OISE, FRANCE, 1901**
7 x 5
Private Collection
- 26 IN MINNESOTA, 1890**
18¾ x 12¼
Mr. Milton Cederquist
- 27 IN PICARDIE - FRANCE**
monoprint, 12 x 7⅞
Mrs. Howard Roelofs
- 28 IN THE FOREST**
oil on burlap, 26 x 32
Private Collection
- 29 INNSBRUCK, 1902**
6¼ x 9½
Private Collection
- 30 JUNE**
10 x 13
Private Collection
- 31 LES ANDELY, c. 1910**
8 x 9½
Mr. & Mrs. Robert North, Jr.
- 32 MATERNITY, 1902**
monoprint, 7¾ x 11½
Antiques from Roycroft Inn
- 33 MILLET'S SHEEP, c. 1890**
Painted in his pasture by Fournier when a young man
5⅞ x 9⅞
Private Collection
- 34 MORNING IN BRITTANY**
12 x 16
Private Collection
- 35 MOONLIGHT NEAR BARBIZON**
30 x 40
East Aurora Public Library
- 36 NIAGARA FALLS, 1926**
26½ x 13¾
Private Collection
- 37 OLD GREEN BARN**
Looking north from Fournier's Bungle House
19 x 23½
Private Collection
- 38 THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE**
print, 8¾ x 13¼
Antiques from Roycroft Inn
- 39 PASTORALE**
14 x 11
Private Collection
- 40 PORTION OF THE SALON MURALS**
oil on burlap, 30 x 40
Private Collection
- 41 THE RAINBOW ALONG THE OISE, 1901**
6½ x 9
Private Collection
- 42 RHYTHMIC STUDY OF GEESE, c. 1900**
Painted in France
6¼ x 9⅜
Private Collection
- 43 ROYCROFT CHAPEL, 1903**
18 x 23¾
Mrs. Howard Roelofs
- 44 RUINS OF THE OLD CANAL NEAR MT. MORRIS**
pencil on paper, 9⅞ x 7⅞
Private Collection
- 45 SELF-PORTRAIT**
Part of a letter
pencil on paper, 10 x 8
Private Collection
- 46 SILVERY DAY**
17 x 19
Mrs. John Domster
- 47 SILVERY MOONLIGHT, VAULAUGIS**
30 x 38
Private Collection
- 48 SNOW, c. 1922**
monotype, 8½ x 12½
Mr. & Mrs. Robert North, Jr.
- 49 SPRING PLOWING**
19 x 29½
Private Collection
- 50 SPRINGTIME IN THE CATSKILLS**
10 x 13
Private Collection
- 51 SUMMERTIME**
24 x 30
Mr. & Mrs. George C. Strouse
- 52 SUNSET ALONG THE OISE, FRANCE**
watercolor, 8½ x 11½
Burchfield Center Permanent Collection
Gift of Tony Sisti
- 53 A TOUCH OF AUTUMN**
Cazenovia Creek
20 x 24
Mrs. Howard Roelofs
- 54 THE TWO STUDIOS OF DAUBIGNY AT ANVERS SUR OISE, FRANCE**
29½ x 39½
East Aurora Village Hall
- 55 UNTITLED, c. 1900**
Highly influenced by Corot
4½ x 7
Private Collection
- 56 UNTITLED, 1903**
Painted on cigar box cover
4½ x 7½
Professor & Mrs. Byron Koekkoek
- 57 UNTITLED**
watercolor, 9½ x 13½
Private Collection
- 58 UNTITLED**
9½ x 13⅞
Mrs. Harriet Price Denbo
- 59 UNTITLED**
24 x 25
Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas Serio
- 60 VENICE, 1901**
pencil on paper, 12 x 16
Private Collection
- 61 VENICE, 1901**
28½ x 35½
East Aurora Village Hall
- 62 THE WILLOWS**
Just outside East Aurora and along Cazenovia Creek
30 x 40
Private Collection
- 63 THE WILLOWS**
East Aurora
23⅞ x 25⅞
Mr. & Mrs. Walter Meibohm
- 64 WINTER, 1912**
19⅞ x 15⅞
Mr. & Mrs. John Neville
- Works by other artists:*
- 65 Gausta, H.**
PORTRAIT OF ALEX FOURNIER, 1903
27½ x 21½
The Elbert Hubbard Library-Museum
- 66 Senseney**
UNTITLED, 1890
Dedicated to Fournier
etching, 4¾ x 5¾
Private Collection
- 67 Unknown associate of Fournier**
PORTRAIT OF ALEX FOURNIER, 1914
30 x 24
East Aurora Public Library

ADDENDA

Catalogue
Number

- 68 Alexis Fournier
EAST AURORA MEADOW (Southside)
11-5/8" x 15½"
Mrs. Floyd B. Case
- 69 Alexis Fournier
UNTITLED
5½" x 10½"
Mr. & Mrs. Clifford Vogelsang

ERRATA

- 38 THE OLD SWIMMIN' HOLE
print, 8-3/4" x 13¼"
Antiques from Roycroft Inn
- 60 VENICE, 1901
pencil on paper, 12" x 16"
Private Collection
- 66 Senseny
UNTITLED, 1890
dedicated to Fournier
etching, 4-3/4" x 5-3/4"
Private Collection

Alexis J. Fournier Exhibition
January 21, 1979 - March 11, 1979

