Gilbert Munger
Quest for Distinction
Organized and circulated by the Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth

E X H I B I T I O N I T I N E R A R Y

Tweed Museum of Art
Duluth, MN
July 26-October 12, 2003

The North Point Gallery
San Francisco, CA
January 14-March 6, 2004

Lyman Allyn Art Museum
New London, CT
Sept 24 - Dec 5, 2004


Background image: Unknown Photographer, Nice, France, 1890, Studio Portrait of Gilbert Munger, Published as the frontispiece in Memoir: Gilbert Munger, Landscape Artist, 1836 (sic)-1903, New York: DeVinne Press, 1904. Oval image: Massimiliano Contini (Italian, born ca. 1850); Bust Portrait of Gilbert Munger, 1891, cast bronze, 24 x 16 x 9", Collection of St. Louis Historical Society, Duluth, MN.
Minnehaha Falls, 1868, oil on canvas, 108 x 72; Collection of Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, CA

The first monumental canvas Munger ever painted, together with a large version of Niagara Falls completed just before his death, form the exhibition’s “bookends.” After his brothers moved to Minnesota in 1859, Munger established a studio in St. Paul. It was there that he produced this view of Minnehaha Falls, an upper Midwest landmark made legendary by Longfellow’s 1855 poem “The Song of Hiawatha.” Exhibited in St. Paul, Chicago and San Francisco, it was purchased by the California real-estate developer William Chapman Ralston. The painting was hung on the main staircase of his mansion, where it conveniently advertised Munger’s artistic abilities to a constant stream of Ralston’s wealthy, high society guests. The mansion is now Ralston Hall at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont. This exhibition marks the first time the painting has been moved from that location in over 130 years.

As the details of this once-forgotten artist’s life become clear, an engaging narrative emerges. And like all great stories, this one is colored by youthful dreams, the search for hero-mentors, dogged pursuit of a far-off goal, hard work, risk, and sacrifice, career-building encounters and associations, a pinnacle of achievement and success, and in the end, a descent into obscurity.

Exactly one-hundred years after his death, this long-overdue study reveals Gilbert Davis Munger as a man who could not only create compelling images, but who promoted and advanced his art by forging his own path into a late-nineteenth century “high society” of artists, collectors, critics and scientists. The son of a Connecticut laborer whose artistic ambitions would later be recognized by European nobility, Munger was the ultimate self-made man of his time. He taught himself to paint, and almost single-handedly fashioned and managed a highly successful career, first in America and later in Europe. Self-supporting, unmarried, ambitious and energetic, Munger traveled freely, beginning at age thirteen with a move from New Haven to Washington, D.C., where he apprenticed to an engraver for the Smithsonian Institution. He remained in Washington through the Civil War, studying art and painting nearby landscapes on his own. There he paved the way for his first “big break,” which came in 1869 with an invitation to paint in the American West with geologist Clarence King’s “Survey of the 40th Parallel.”

Between 1869 and 1877, Munger established a solid reputation in New York, St. Paul and San Francisco as a skilled painter of landscapes that were both scientifically accurate and aesthetically pleasing. On the advice of English patrons, he relocated to London, where his fame grew even greater. Painting in France in the mid-1880s, Munger successfully negotiated a stylistic transformation, from the distant and detached views of the Hudson River School, to the intimate, moody and emotional style advocated by artists of the Barbizon School. The paintings Munger created in the last decade of his life, after he had returned to America, clearly demonstrate his success at absorbing, mastering, and often surpassing, the stylistic conventions of his day.

With due credit to pioneering essays on Munger by J. Gray Sweeney and Hildegard Cummings, this is the first time that Munger’s work and career have been analyzed and contextualized in great detail for modern audiences. Featuring seventy paintings gathered from public and private collections nationwide, the exhibition presents many works never publicly seen, and certainly never before exhibited and published together in a way that sheds light on their stylistic development, and places them accurately in the context of American and European-influenced art, social and scientific history. Our sincere thanks go to the individuals and institutions who graciously lent works to the exhibition, to The Henry Luce Foundation, and to Michael D. Schroeder and J. Gray Sweeney, whose extensive monograph so aptly brings those paintings, and their creator, so alive for us.

Peter F. Spooner, Curator
Exhibition Checklist

(All works by Gilbert Davis Munger, unless otherwise indicated. Paintings are listed chronologically within categories. Not all works appear at all venues.)

Early Works: East Coast and Minnesota

1. *Cattle Watering in a Placid River*, 1866, oil on canvas, 14 x 24”
   Private Collection

2. *The Great Falls of the Potomac River*, n.d. (ca. 1860-66), oil on canvas, 16 1/2 x 22”
   Collection of Alice Jamar Kapla

   Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of the Orcutt Family in memory of Robert S. Orcutt

4. *Minnehaha Falls*, 1867, oil on board, 17 x 14”
   Collection of The Warren Jamar Family

5. *Minnehaha Falls*, 1868, oil on canvas, 108 x 72”
   Collection of Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, CA

6. *Niagara Falls*, 1870, oil on canvas, 25 x 36”
   Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Melville Silvey

7. *River Scene*, 1870, oil on board, 7 x 5 1/4”
   Private Collection

8. *Duluth, Minnesota*, 1871, oil on canvas, 25 x 50”
   Collection of City of Duluth, Duluth Public Library, Minnesota

Duluth, Minnesota, 1871, oil on canvas, 25 x 50”; Collection of City of Duluth, Duluth Public Library, Minnesota

Realizing the potential for a railroad and port at the westernmost point accessible to ships from the East, Roger Munger moved to Duluth in 1869, having relocated to St. Paul from Connecticut a decade earlier. He established some of Duluth’s first industries, and assisted in constructing the shipping port and canal on the Minnesota side of the harbor. As he had in St. Paul, Gilbert visited his brother in Duluth, and in 1870-71 he painted two panoramic views of the city and harbor from its hillside. In an effort to convince congress to fund development of the port and connecting railroad, one of the paintings was sent to Washington, D.C., where it was hung in the Wormley Hotel, a popular meeting place for politicians and influential leaders of the day.

Carleton Watkins, Clarence King, Frederick Clark and Gilbert Munger at Mt. Shasta Camp, photograph, 1870. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University

One of Munger’s early career “breaks” was his association with geologist Clarence King, who later became director of the U.S. Geological Survey. Munger’s participation in King’s famous “Survey of the 40th Parallel” is documented in the diaries of the party’s second-in-command, Samuel Franklin Emmons. Munger’s travels with King gave him access to stunning mountain scenes in Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada and Utah, ten of which were used as illustrations in King’s *Systematic Geology*, the most important publication of the time on the geology of the American West. Photographers as well as painters were increasingly employed to provide important documentation of Western exploration. During his Western sojourns, Munger is known to have traveled with the photographers Timothy O’Sullivan, Andrew Russell, Carleton Watkins and Charles Savage. Comparison with their works attest to the geological and topographical accuracy of Munger’s Western paintings.
9.  Lake Lal and Mt. Agassiz, Unita Range, Utah, n.d. (ca. 1869); oil on canvas, 18 x 30"
    Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of the Orcutt Family in Memory of Robert S. Orcutt

10. Mt. Tamalpais from San Raphael, 1870, oil on canvas, 30 x 57"
    Collection of Alfred Goldyne

11. Mt. Tamalpais from San Raphael, n.d. (ca. 1870), oil on canvas, 19 1/2 x 33 1/2"
    Private Collection

12. Mt. Shasta, (ca. 1870), oil on canvas, 19 x 34 1/2"
    Private Collection

13. Mt. Hood from Hood River, n.d. (ca. 1870), oil on canvas, 11 x 22"
    Private Collection

14. Yosemite Valley from Old Inspiration Point, n.d. (ca. 1870), oil on canvas on board, 16 x 24"
    Collection of Mr. and Mrs. George C. Rough

15. View from Inspiration Point, Yosemite, n.d., oil on canvas on board, 14 x 20"
    Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of the Orcutt Family in memory of Robert S. Orcutt

16. Glimpse of the Pacific, 1870-71, oil on canvas, 24 x 42"
    Collection of Heidi and Ward Carey

17. Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, n.d. (ca. 1870-73), oil on paper on canvas, 14 x 20"
    Collection of Arthur J. Phelan

18. Yosemite Valley from a Cliff, n.d. (ca. 1870-75), oil on cardboard, 27 x 19 1/2"
    Collection of Eldon and Susan Grupp

19. The High Waterfall, Yosemite, n.d. (ca. 1870-75), oil on cardboard, 27 x 19 1/2"
    Collection of Eldon and Susan Grupp

20. Redwood (Sequoia) Forest, n.d. (ca. 1870-75), oil on cardboard, 27 x 19 1/2"
    Collection of SBC Communications, Inc.

21. Yosemite Valley, n.d. (ca. 1870s), oil on canvas, 28 x 48"
    Collection of Nick and Mary Alexander

22. Golden Gate, 1871, oil on canvas, 18 x 33 1/2"
    Private Collection

23. Lake Marian, Humboldt Range, Nevada, 1871, oil on canvas, 26 x 44"
    Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Pollack

24. Lake Marian, Humboldt Range, Nevada, 1872, oil on canvas, 17 x 30 1/2"
    Collection of St. Louis Historical Society, Duluth, MN

25. Along the Monterey Peninsula, 1873, oil on canvas, 13 x 23"
    Private Collection

26. Glacier Lake, King's Canyon, California, 1876, oil on canvas, 20 x 28"
    Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Davies

27. Yosemite Valley Scene, 1876, oil on canvas, 20 x 28"
    Collection of Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA, Museum Donors Acquisition Fund

28. Royal Arches, Yosemite, n.d., (ca. 1876), oil on canvas on board, 18 x 31 1/2"
    Private Collection

The High Waterfall, Yosemite, n.d. (ca. 1870-75), oil on cardboard, 27 x 19 1/2"; Collection of Eldon and Susan Grupp

One of a pair of vertical paintings, this close-up and cropped-in view of Yosemite's high waterfall stresses its vertical height, placing the viewer quite literally in the scene. This pair of paintings may have been Munger's response to Albert Bierstadt's Domes of the Yosemite, which was exhibited to great fanfare in 1867, just as Munger was beginning his career. Munger would later paint with Bierstadt in the Sierra Nevada mountains.
Moving to London in 1877, Munger befriended John Everett Millais, whose connections in the European art world helped the newly arrived American painter establish himself. In a letter to Samuel Franklin Emmons dated Christmas Day, 1877, Munger wrote "London is pleasant this time of year for the [art] workers are here, distinguished men whom it is a pleasure to meet. I am getting into quite a literary and artistic circle by degrees, and already feel more at home here than I did in New York." His acceptance, comfort and success in Europe led Munger to remain there for sixteen years.
Munger painted this work in America after sixteen years of living and painting in Europe, and it certainly bears the stamp of the French Barbizon aesthetic. The softness, moodiness and latent emotionalism of the “portraits of trees” and forest interiors painted by Rousseau, Diaz de la Pena, Daubigny and others practitioners of the Barbizon style had a strong effect on all the work Munger produced after the early 1880s.
Return to America: The Late Paintings

63. Berkeley Springs, 1894, oil on canvas, 25 x 30"  
Collection of Lester E. And Ann H. Shervy

64. Cazenovia Hay Field, n.d. (ca. 1900), oil on canvas, 17 x 22 1/2"  
Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of the Orcutt Family in Memory of Robert S. Orcutt

65. Cazenovia Wheat (Corn) Field, n.d. (ca. 1900), oil on canvas, 34 x 58"  
Collection of Alice Jamar Kapla

66. Cazenovia Wheat (Corn) Field, n.d. (ca. 1900), oil on canvas, 30 x 45"  
Collection of St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, MN

67. Cazenovia Old Mill, 1900, oil on canvas, 44 x 36"  
Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Melville Silvey

68. Pastoral Scene at Fontainebleau, 1900, oil on linen, 20 x 30"  
Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Melville Silvey

69. Fontainebleau (Three Trees), n.d. (ca. 1901), oil on canvas, 28 x 36"  
Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Melville Silvey

70. Forest of Fontainebleau, 1901, oil on panel, 11 x 15 1/2"  
Collection of St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, MN

71. Two Trees, 1901, oil on canvas, 44 x 36"  
Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, Gift of Pilgrim Congregational Church, Duluth, MN

72. Niagara Falls, n.d. (ca. 1900-1903), oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 48"  
Collection of Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, MD.  
Gift of Walter W. Patten, Jr., in honor of Mrs. Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy

73. Niagara Falls, 1902-03, oil on canvas, 72 x 103"  
Collection of Michael F. McNutt

Related Photographs and Objects

Andrew J. Russell, Camp in Uinta Mountains, Utah, photograph, 1869  
(enlargement of original photograph) Courtesy of Union Pacific Railroad Museum, Omaha, NE

Carleton Watkins, Clarence King, Frederick Clark and Gilbert Munger at Mt. Shasta Camp, photograph, 1870  
(enlargement of original photograph) Courtesy of Stanford University, CA

Clarence King, Systematic Geology, Vol. 1, published 1878, with ten chromolithographs after paintings by Gilbert Munger  
Collection of Michael D. Schroeder

(enlargement of original photograph) Courtesy of Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Honorary Medals bestowed upon Gilbert Munger, 1880-90, in red leather, velvet and sateen case, with text.  
Collection of Alice Jamar Kapla. Promised Gift to Tweed Museum of Art

Massimiliano Contini (Italian, born ca. 1850)  
Bust Portrait of Gilbert Munger, 1891, cast bronze, 21 x 13 x 9"  
Collection of St. Louis Historical Society, Duluth, MN

Two originals, one with an inscription, of a book compiled by James Cresap Sprigg; 21 pages, 7 illustrations.  
Collection of Michael D. Schroeder / Collection of Tweed Museum of Art

Unknown Photographer, Nice, France, Formal Studio Portrait of Gilbert Munger, 1890  
Published in Memoir: Gilbert Munger, Landscape Artist, 1836 (sic)-1903, New York: De Vinne Press, 1904.  
(enlargement of original photograph) Collection of Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth

Background image: Niagara Falls, 1902-03, oil on canvas, 72 x 103". Collection of Michael F. McNutt. Shortly before his death in 1903, Munger returned to a subject he had painted earlier in his career. It is the last work he ever painted.
When Gilbert Munger died in 1903 his brother Roger brought his body to Duluth for burial in the family plot. Having moved from their Connecticut birthplace to Minnesota in 1859, Roger and Russell Munger unwittingly set into motion the chain of events that caused the largest known body of their brother’s work to be deposited at the Tweed Museum of Art in Duluth. Gilbert Munger never married, and when his brother settled his estate, many paintings came from Washington, D.C. to Duluth. Descendants of Roger and Russell Munger had the foresight to preserve Gilbert’s paintings, many of which were donated to the museum.

Lenders to the Exhibition:

Nick and Mary Alexander  
The William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs  
Mr. and Mrs. Ward Carey  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Davies  
City of Duluth, Duluth Public Library, MN  
Wanda M. Fish  
Alfred Goldyne  
Eldon and Susan Grupp  
The Warren Jamar Family  
Alice Jamar Kapla  
Michael F. McNutt  
Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, OH  
Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture / Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane  
Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, CA  
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Mr. and Mrs. Daniel A. Pollack  
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Pomphrey  
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St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, MN  
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Michael D. Schroeder  
Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota Duluth  
Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City  
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagarstown, MD

Major financial support for this project has been provided by The Henry Luce Foundation. Additional support was provided by the Alice Tweed Tuohy Foundation, and from Alfred C. Harrison, David Henry and Matt Taylor, Michael D. Schroeder, Patricia N. Smith, and Alice Jamar Kapla. Exhibitions and programs at the Tweed Museum of Art are made possible with funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board through an appropriation from the Minnesota State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts, from Tweed Patrons and Subscribers, UMD Student Services Fees, and from Alice Brickson O’Connor. In support of the book Gilbert Munger: Quest for Distinction, Afton Historical Society Press acknowledges the generous support of the Henry Luce Foundation, the Alice Tweed Tuohy Foundation, Lucy MacMillan Stitzer, Katherine MacMillan Tanner, Alexandra MacMillan Daitch and Sarah Stevens MacMillan in memory of their mother Sarah Stevens MacMillan; from Mary A. Anderson in memory of William R. Anderson, and from Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Pomphrey.

The Tweed Museum of Art is one of five units in the School of Fine Arts, University of Minnesota Duluth, an equal opportunity educator and employer.

Background image: Great Salt Lake City and The Wasatch Mountains, n.d. (ca. 1877); oil on paper on canvas, 18 x 28"; Collection of Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. Gift of Donald M. Burns.