

Florence Griswold Museum Overview

The Florence Griswold Museum portrays an extraordinary era in our nation's history, when in 1899 a group of the country's most accomplished artists gathered at Florence Griswold's boardinghouse to record their impressions of the countryside surrounding Old Lyme. Inspired by the diverse natural beauty of the local landscape, artists flocked to this pastoral spot on the banks of the Lieutenant River and forged a flourishing artist colony that would become America's best-known center of Impressionist painting.

By the late 1890s, the Museum's namesake, Florence Griswold (1850-1937) was nearly fifty years old and virtually alone in the world. As the youngest child of a once prosperous sea captain, she outlived her parents and siblings, and faced the future as an unmarried woman with few economic prospects. She inherited the family home along with its debts. To survive, she chose to take in boarders, a common and socially acceptable occupation for women at the time. Fortunately, during the summer of 1899, one of her visitors was Henry Ward Ranger, a New York artist looking to establish an art colony in the New England countryside. Under Ranger's leadership, Old Lyme was, for a time, designated the "American Barbizon." With the arrival of Childe Hassam in 1903, the colony's focus shifted from Tonalism to Impressionism and became known as the most famous Impressionist colony in America, the "American Giverny."

In the years to come, other artists such as Willard Metcalf, Matilda Browne and William Chadwick would transform the stately Late Georgian house into the home of the Lyme Art Colony. Inspired by the beauty of the New England countryside and charmed by Miss Florence's gracious hospitality, the Colony flourished for over three decades. As Hassam put it, this was just the place for "high thinking and low living." Here some of the most noted names in American Impressionism would create many important paintings.



Built in 1817 by the Hartford architect Samuel Belcher (1779-1849), the Griswold House was one of the largest homes in Old Lyme. The impressive exterior boasts a colossal pediment atop four columns capped with Ionic capitals. The temple-like structure captured the imagination of the artists. Considered one of the finest examples of Late Georgian architecture in America, the design has a center hallway with symmetrical rooms on either side.

The Florence Griswold Museum stands as a nationally recognized center for American art and history encompassing both modern galleries and historic buildings. With an eye toward the integration of art, history and landscape in all of its program plans, the Museum has spent the last 10 years redefining itself as a central part of community life –building



an education center for hands-on experiential programs, constructing an award-winning exhibition gallery for its collections, and completing a thorough restoration of the Griswold House as a boardinghouse for artists, c. 1910.