

Oscar Fehrer: Reflecting and Reflections Checklist

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William Philips and Barbara Smith Gallery

Florence Griswold Museum

[Introduction Panel]

Oscar Fehrer: Reflecting and Reflections

Best known as a portrait painter, Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958) arrived in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1918 to establish a summer home for his family, the same year he completed the painting *Reflecting and Reflections*. The painting's broken brushwork and unusual color palette demonstrate a departure from the accomplished academic style of his early career and shows instead the influence of European modernism. This installation presents a selected retrospective of work from every period of Fehrer's career—early charcoal drawings, portraits, and plein air landscapes—to reconsider Fehrer's contribution to the art world on both a local and an international level.

Born in New York to parents who had recently emigrated from Vienna, Fehrer studied art in New York, Munich, and Paris. In 1909 he moved to Munich with his young family and established himself with a convivial group of artists in Germany. When war broke out in 1914, the Fehrer family fled abruptly, leaving furniture and works of art. He returned to New York to set up a studio and became an active participant in the art scene by joining many clubs and exhibiting often. The trajectory of Fehrer's development is considered here against the social context of an anxious America during World War I, the artist's aesthetic reaction to the rise of modernism, and the reverberations of war and identity politics both in the larger New York art world and in a tight-knit community like Lyme.

Reflecting and Reflections also acknowledges the fiercest advocates of Fehrer's legacy, his daughters Catherine and Elizabeth. At her death in 2001, Catherine Fehrer, a longtime trustee of the Florence Griswold Museum, left the institution a generous gift of the historic house where the family lived, including the adjoining five acres of land, and a number of his works of art (many featured in this display). The 2018 centennial of the artist's arrival in Lyme represents an opportune moment for the museum to *reflect* on Fehrer's work and the myriad ways it serves as a *reflection* of its contemporary moment.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Untitled [Self-portrait], 1890s
Oil on canvas
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Oscar Fehrer was born in Brooklyn where he attended public schools, including the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, which began offering art classes in 1887. He enrolled at the National Academy of Design (NAD) in 1882 where he spent three years studying in the Antique School and then in the Painting and Life School. The drawing of an antique head reproduced below was probably completed there. Traditional art training for emerging artists began with copying from antique casts and Old Master works to learn anatomy and practice technique, until the student advanced to sketching from live models. Fehrer applied these skills when he completed this early self-portrait. He faithfully records the distinctive structure of his bony nose, and captures the piercing intensity of an artist's concentration as he strives to improve his craft. In 1894 Fehrer won the Bronze Elliot Medal from the NAD for excellence in figure drawing.

[reproduction on the label]



Oscar Fehrer, *Antique Female Head*, 1889, Black chalk on gray wove paper, 23 5/16 x 18 3/4 in., Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Elizabeth and Catherine Fehrer, 1992.264, Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Bavarian Type, 1895
Charcoal on paper
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Fehrer left New York in 1895 for Munich where he enrolled at the Royal Academy. Drawing portrait heads in charcoal constituted an important part of the Academy's curriculum. The artist's inscription on this work proves that this accomplished study of a mature German model posing as a peasant was completed there. When the artist displayed a number of these charcoal heads in his first one-man show at New York's Collins Gallery in 1907, a critic described them as exhibiting "a vibration, a sparkle, a luminosity in the darks and tonal shading in the lights which add a fullness and a solidity to these drawings which is almost sculptural."



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Figure Study, 1897
Charcoal on paper
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

In 1897 Fehrer left Munich for Paris to study at the Académie Julian with renowned instructors Jean-Paul Laurens and Benjamin Constant. Americans made up the largest number of foreign students, who flocked there to participate in Julian's internationally recognized curriculum of life studies taught by master teachers. In Paris, Fehrer also had access to the collections of French museums, where he could study the Old Masters. The compositional perspective and heavily built up tones of this charcoal drawing indicates it may have been copied from another work of art, such as one of the Louvre's paintings or sculptures. The model's likeness recalls a

popular male type repeatedly used by such artists as Caravaggio and Diego Velázquez.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Bohemian, 1897

Charcoal on paper

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

This portrait study was also completed in Paris while Fehrer studied at the Académie Julian. Using the somewhat challenging medium of charcoal, the artist skillfully captures the wizened texture of his model's skin and the moisture in his expressive eyes. One can sense the energy behind Fehrer's deft hand by the manner in which he swiftly suggests a cowlick of hair. A reviewer of Fehrer's drawings said that his use of charcoal led him to "a certain perfection of drawing impossible with oil."

In Paris, Fehrer also completed as part of his studies remarkable figure drawings like the one reproduced below. His nudes exemplify the artist's talent for drawing from the live model. That Fehrer's signature includes an acute accent (*l'accent aigu*) speaks to the young American artist's experimentation with a European identity.

[reproduction]



Oscar Fehrer, *Male Nude with Staff*, Charcoal on cream laid paper, 24 5/8 x 18 13/16 in., Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Elizabeth and Catherine Fehrer, 1992.277, Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Portrait of the Artist's Mother, ca. 1900

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

In this work, Fehrer sensitively renders the pigments of his mother's skin, her strong brow, piercing eyes, and tightly pursed mouth to produce a wholly psychological portrait. Like academic drawing, painting portraits of one's family served as a kind of rite of passage for a young artist like Fehrer. Around this time, James McNeill Whistler won acclaim for the portrait of his mother, which was purchased by the French government in 1891 and later became iconic in American culture.

Fehrer's parents, Catherine Thomann and Carl Fehrer, emigrated from Vienna to Brooklyn where they married. Catherine's fondness for the arts led her to recognize the early signs of Oscar's artistic talent. She encouraged him to study piano, leading him to consider a musical career before deciding to become a painter. Carl passed away in 1893, and when Oscar decided to enter the Royal Academy in Munich two years later, his widowed mother accompanied him. Catherine continued on with Oscar to Paris in 1897 where they stayed with her relatives. Catherine Thomann Fehrer died in 1903 and was buried with her husband in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
May, ca. 1900
Charcoal on paper
Collection of Matthew Greene

In June 1905, Fehrer married Mabel Estelle Vanderbilt. The couple travelled abroad during the first years of their marriage, spending time in Holland and Spain where Fehrer could study masterworks in museums like the Prado. Comparison of this charcoal portrait with archival photographs of the young Mabel reveals a resemblance. Fehrer might have used “May” as a term of endearment for his new wife. He was obviously proud of this portrait, as he exhibited it as late as 1952 at the Salmagundi Club’s “Black and White Exhibition.”



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Untitled (Portrait of the Artist's Wife), 1906
Oil on canvas
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Fehrer painted this portrait of his wife shortly after their marriage, which took place in Brooklyn. The couple made their first home at 15 South Portland Avenue. Their daughter Catherine described her mother’s heritage as descended from Vanderbilts, but “not the wealthy ones.” Census records show that Mabel’s father, James, was a self-made man who developed a real estate business, and her mother, Elizabeth, was English-born. Nevertheless, Mabel’s inheritance kept their family comfortable, especially when Oscar wasn’t selling much work. He paints her here in elegant riding attire in a manner evocative of esteemed American gilded-age portraits. The compositional arrangement of her weighty costume and her confident, broad shoulders also recalls Dutch portraiture that Fehrer would have been familiar with. His fidelity to her features also recalls his contemporary, Thomas Eakins, whose

realist portraits were well known in the American art world. Compare this depiction to archival photographs of Mabel Vanderbilt Fehrer in the case nearby.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Untitled, ca. 1909–1914
Oil on canvas
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Oscar and Mabel Fehrer returned to Munich with their infant daughter, Elizabeth, in 1909 where he established a studio and joined a convivial group of international artists. Munich attracted many rising American art stars including William Merritt Chase and Frank Duveneck, whose work Fehrer admired. The style of this portrait and a German address inscribed on the back of the painting signal that Fehrer likely executed it while the family lived in Munich. The couple's second daughter, Catherine, was born there in 1912. She remembered their German governess and stories of her father socializing at German cafés and going on bicycle trips through the Bavarian countryside to sketch.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Flower Shawl, 1913
Oil on canvas
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Flower Shawl marks a departure from Fehrer's earlier realist portraiture. He has replaced the careful modeling of form with short, planar brushstrokes. This new style demonstrates the artist's knowledge of European modernism and reveals his own experimentation with abstraction. He mixes his paint directly on the canvas, where the model's hair melds into the skin of her face. And, like other artists captivated by *japonisme* (the craze for Japanese art and culture) such as Henri Matisse, Fehrer plays up the exotic colors of his model's kimono by laying thick strokes of paint side-by-side to form a rainbow of contrasting paint stripes.

Although he had not dated his works so conspicuously before, 1913 was the same year as the infamous Armory Show in New York (where European abstract works like Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase* made a scandal). Perhaps the prominent dating acknowledges Fehrer's attention to the art world's dramatic shift. He exhibited this work frequently and submitted it to the National Arts Club in 1915 as his diploma picture.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

In the Garden, 1914

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

On September 22, 1914, the *New York Times* announced that Fehrer was among 4,498 refugees to arrive from the war zone in Europe: "The majority of them were German-Americans, and resolutions were adopted acknowledging the courtesy shown to Americans in Germany and expressing doubt about alleged atrocities." Fehrer was listed among the passengers who signed the resolutions, which were sent to President Wilson. Although his parents had immigrated from Vienna and he was American-born, this mention is the first of many that routinely associate Fehrer with Germany. Soon after his arrival, as if to combat any misunderstanding of his allegiance to the United States, Fehrer painted this American girl in a sailor suit. When he exhibited this work in 1915, the press mistakenly described the artist as "Oscar Fehrer, whose adopted home is New York...."

In addition to navigating the confusion of his nationality during wartime, Fehrer also faced criticism of his new modern style. One critic remarked, "His is the work of an impressionist that has been affected by cubism." Fehrer went on to exhibit this

painting in the most avant-garde event of the season, the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, where Duchamp's *Fountain* (a "readymade" urinal) was also on view.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Sand Dunes at Provincetown, 1916
Oil on Masonite
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer



Sand Dunes, Provincetown, 1916
Oil on pressed board
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Fehrer and his family spent the summer of 1916 in Provincetown, Massachusetts, an art colony located on the tip of Cape Cod, where he made these landscapes. That season the small fishing village experienced an influx of artists, writers, thespians, and socialites who found camaraderie and sanctuary from the traumatic First World War. Artist and poet Marsden Hartley immortalized it in an oft-cited essay called, "The Great Provincetown Summer," where he recalled the presence of avant-garde figures like Mary Heaton Vorse, John Reed, Eugene O'Neill, Hutchins Hapgood, Charles Demuth, and William and Marguerite Zorach. That year Fehrer was a founding member of the Beachcomber's Club (his original signature sits above William Zorach's on the founders' papers) proving his propensity to participate in progressive art world clubs of all kinds.

While Fehrer had made a career as a portrait painter, he took the summer to experiment with landscapes studying the mammoth Provincetown sand dunes.

Finding an ideal subject for his new planar style of painting, Fehrer built the sand dunes with diagonal brushstrokes.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Reflecting and Reflections, 1918

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer

In this work Fehrer takes his portraiture to an unprecedented monumental scale to grapple with the subject of “reflection,” thereby placing himself alongside greats like Diego Velázquez (*Las Meninas*, 1656) and Édouard Manet (*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882). Fehrer positions his model in front of a mirror, which reflects the artist’s studio but conceals his own body behind the canvas. Beside the reflected image of the painting hangs a diminutive framed work, a reference to Rembrandt that signals the artist’s ambition. Building form with the short, Cézannesque brushstrokes he had adapted five years earlier, this work conveys a new maturity. A reviewer described Fehrer’s technique, “The result is a succession of more or less irregular zigzag waves, which produce a sense of vibration, carrying a movement of energy throughout every part except the face. This is painted more flatly, so that its expression is quiet and thoughtful, while the suggestion of its thought pervades the surroundings.”

Reflecting and Reflections is an apt title and subject for a year filled with change for the artist on both a personal and international scope. In 1918 Fehrer first arrived in Lyme to establish a summer studio and home for his family. And, in November, an armistice between the Allies and Germany halted fighting on the Western Front.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Trying on Her Glove, ca. 1918

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer

In *Trying on Her Glove*, Fehrer pays homage to the Dutch master Johannes Vermeer with his own take on the subject of a woman at her toilette in a spare interior. The artist blends his academic knowledge of dissected anatomy, shown in the drawing made at the Académie Julian reproduced below, with modernist technique. The glove, dish, and table still life recall those of Cézanne, where the play of form and color take precedence over the artist's fidelity to accurate perspective and naturalism. Fehrer showed the work in several exhibitions. At least one review was tinged with anti-German sentiment, signaling the ongoing challenge that faced the artist: "*Trying on Her Glove* by Oscar Fehrer, has the special kind of cleverness that used to be admired, before the war, upon the covers of *Jugend* [a German, art nouveau magazine]. In the present case Mr. Fehrer's figure would be quite acceptable if the face only had more life."

[reproduction]



Oscar Fehrer, *Study of a Flayed Right Arm*, Charcoal on brown wove paper, fixed, 17 13/16 x 13 in., Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Elizabeth and Catherine Fehrer, 1992.272, Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College

German Beer Stein
Ceramic, glaze, metal
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

German Beer Stein
Ceramic, glaze, metal
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

These steins come from the Fehrer house residence on Beaver Brook Road in Lyme. Oscar and Mabel Fehrer owned many such steins that they likely collected during their European travels. Fehrer's daughter Catherine continued to live in the house until the end of her life. During her time there, the stein with the man imbibing was displayed in the kitchen, which was decorated with coordinating green and white colors. Elsewhere in the house, the blue and gray stein was part of a collection of books and antiques gathered during the family's time abroad (as seen in a photograph in another case nearby).



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)
Three of a Kind, ca. 1920s
Oil on canvas
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

In the early 1920s some of Fehrer's portraits began to resemble the murky palette of his early Munich period. Not coincidentally, these paintings coincide with Fehrer's return to Germany, when in 1921 he travelled to Munich to retrieve the artworks and personal belongings the family left behind in 1914 when they fled at the outbreak of war. Critics noted the artist's shift and likened it, "much as [William Merritt] Chase and [Frank] Duveneck used to paint during their Munich period, simply and solidly darkly...."

The piercing quality of these men's gazes also recalls the psychological quality of Fehrer's early work. Although these models are unidentified, the man on the left resembles German-born Albert Einstein, whose Theory of Relativity won him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921. (Einstein later spent a summer in Old Lyme in 1935.)



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Yellow Bonnet, ca. 1925

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

During this period Fehrer painted in various modes and styles, which was noted by a reviewer without kindness: “If all [of his paintings] were upon the level of the two or three best ones he might be hailed as sure of a future, but unfortunately the remaining pictures show a contentment with commonplace standards that is disconcerting.” The technique Fehrer utilized in this character study seems to hover between the Munich style and the proto-abstract quality of works on display nearby. Critics continued to reference the war and, reading between the lines, questioned the artist’s affiliation with Germany: “His style suggests Munich and the covers of the publication *Jugend* which we used to see before the war. That is to say it is clever.”

[Section intro]

Lyme & the Landscape

In 1918 Fehrer ventured to Lyme, Connecticut to paint at the suggestion of his friend, George Bruestle, a Lyme Colony artist. When the Fehrers purchased property on Beaver Brook Road they joined an environmentally-conscious community that valued preservation of the land. Mabel Vanderbilt Fehrer, whose father was involved in real estate, was especially motivated to buy up land in Lyme. Later, her daughters’ donations of 285 acres of the Fehrer domain to The Nature Conservancy for the Pleasant Valley Preserve ensured the protection of the town’s rural quality of life, which had been treasured for generations. Today, half of all land in Lyme is preserved in perpetuity for future generations. Lyme would be a different place without the Fehrer family’s contribution.

Oscar and Mabel’s second daughter, Catherine, dedicated her life to affirming her father’s talent and legacy. As a professor of romance languages at Suffolk University,

she was a well-respected scholar of the Académie Julian, where Oscar studied in Paris, and a pioneer in the history of women at the school. Determined to bring recognition to her father's work, Catherine published her research and organized exhibitions to critical acclaim. She also dutifully maintained his collection of paintings, drawings, archives, and the contents of their property in Lyme, which she donated to the Museum at her death. Catherine suspected that her father's relationship with the Griswold House artists was remote, but Fehrer exhibited regularly at the Lyme Art Association. Works in this section show the results of Fehrer's evolution from an early academic draftsman and realist into an artist who experimented with proto-abstract techniques when representing Lyme's landscape.

Today the Museum continues to preserve and steward the Fehrer House as a temporary residence for visiting scholars and artists. Where appropriate, period furniture and decorative arts from the Fehrer House have been employed in the furnishing plan for the Griswold House to evoke the heyday of the art colony.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Secluded, ca. 1950

Oil on panel

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

While Fehrer had made his artistic reputation as a portraitist, in Lyme he joined colleagues like George Bruestle and Robert Vonnoh by also painting landscapes. Works like *Secluded* reveal Fehrer's exposure to the American art world's recent introduction to abstraction. Here the planar, unmodeled forms and unmixed paint (as in the blue river) recall artists like Marsden Hartley, whom Fehrer could have met during his time in Provincetown.

The lone house appears enveloped and protected by Lyme's rolling hills. The title, *Secluded*, gives some credence to Catherine Fehrer's feeling that her father may not have been welcomed by some Lyme Colony artists. However, the colony's early convivial spirit had changed by the time Fehrer arrived, when many artists had purchased their own homes. He did, however, exhibit at the Lyme Art Association nearly every year between 1918 and 1929. Like others, perhaps Fehrer cherished the seclusion of Lyme's landscape as an environment conducive for work and rest.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

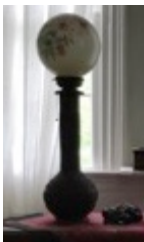
Sisters, ca. 1920s

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

This painting of Fehrer's daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth hung in the Fehrer house at the time of Catherine's death in 2001. (Elizabeth died in 1999 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease.) Catherine recalled that the family first arrived in Lyme when she was eight years old to summer in the 1737 house located where Beaver Brook joins the Eight Mile River a few miles north of Old Lyme. For eighty-three summers she made it her home.

Catherine and Elizabeth posed often for their father. In this work neither the models nor the artist felt it necessary to conceal the girls' boredom with this task. Fehrer combines his portraiture specialty with a still life arrangement that evokes his knowledge of Cézanne, with whom he was often compared in critical reviews. Included in Fehrer's extensive literature collection is Willard Huntington Wright's *Modern Painting* (1915, on view nearby), which discusses and reproduces Cézanne's work. This painting was exhibited at the Salmagundi Club and at the National Arts Club in New York.



Furniture and Decorative Arts from the Fehrer House

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

This table, lamp, and other objects come from the Fehrer House collection. In recent years the table has been used to furnish the Artists' Bedroom in the Griswold House. Jenny Parsons, the Museum's Assistant Curator, especially admired the lamp while she lived in the Fehrer House during 2016-17. She found it amusing to consider the binoculars used by Catherine Fehrer to survey her family's property.

Jenny and her husband enjoyed living in the Fehrer house until they found and purchased their own home. "Living amongst so many of Fehrer's belongings was an immersive introduction to the culture and community of Lyme. We came to love many of the house's quirks, such as the phrenology head that welcomed us into the basement. The environment of the property, with its grassy marsh and enormous old trees was peaceful and restorative in all seasons. We enjoyed the short walk to Pleasant Valley Preserve where we often appreciated a leisurely hike through the dense forest, which was alive with wildlife, babbling brooks, and other residents out to breathe the fresh air."



George Bruestle (1871–1939)

Lyme Landscape

Oil on board

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company



Lyme Landscape

Oil on board

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company

Like Fehrer, George Bruestle was a student of the Académie Julian and an active member of many art clubs in and around New York City, where the two first met. Bruestle was one of the first Impressionist artists to come to this area in 1900, and purchased land in the Hamburg section of Lyme in 1905. He subsequently encouraged his friend Oscar Fehrer to visit Lyme, which brought him here in 1918. Bruestle, who was the son of German immigrants, perhaps found common ground with Fehrer because of their European heritage. Here Bruestle captures Lyme's

characteristic terrain of rocky, rolling hills and valleys punctuated by trees and farmhouses.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

The Pool

Oil on panel

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

This landscape sketch demonstrates a similar technique Fehrer utilized in his portraits, where short, varied brushstrokes loaded with paint are laid down in a planar, quasi-abstract manner. In addition to Fehrer's association with Germany during wartime and his reported feud with the Vonnohs, his tendency toward a modern, abstract style could have contributed to his isolation from the art colony. In general, the group at Florence Griswold's house was conservative and perhaps Fehrer was considered too avant-garde for inclusion. While Catherine's feelings about her father's exclusion were genuine, the exact nature of Fehrer's relationship to the art colony remains uncertain.



Robert W. Vonnoh (1858–1933)

Pleasant Valley, Lyme

Oil on canvas

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Jennie E. Stark

At the turn of the century Pleasant Valley was a rural enclave of farming families, some of whom took in painters as boarders or, eventually sold properties to such artists as Fehrer, Eugene Higgins, and Robert and Bessie Potter Vonnoh. Robert Vonnoh painted this view looking north of his home to show the Baptist Church (now Lyme's Town Hall) with its parsonage, and the one-room schoolhouse there.

The winding waterway is Beaver Brook, which divided the properties owned by the Fehrers and the Vonnohs on Hamburg and Beaver Brook Road.

Catherine Fehrer perpetuated a story that her parents had a falling out with the Vonnohs over the sale of land, causing his isolation from the art colony. She remembers that Robert Vonnoh was vindictive because her mother, Mabel, did not want to sell a piece of land that the Vonnohs desired to purchase, causing a rift. She recalled that her family was isolated and lonely in Lyme.



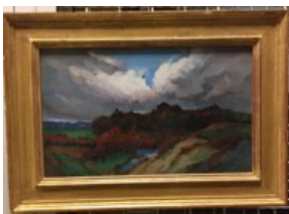
Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Winding River, early 1920s

Oil on wood panel

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

This work exhibits the characteristic attributes of Lyme's landscape with its lush green pastures, tall grasses, meandering rivers, and rolling hills. The scene's similarity to the painting by Robert Vonnoh nearby suggests that it, too, was painted in Pleasant Valley, on or near the Fehrer property. Given the scale of these works, it is likely that Fehrer completed them outdoors, *en plein air*. He exhibited this work at the National Arts Club's Exhibition of Small Paintings in 1928.



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Storm Clouds, ca. 1945

Oil on panel, 8 3/4 in. x 13 1/8 in.

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer, 1993.19.17

[Case labels]

Oscar Fehrer posing with portrait of Mabel Vanderbilt Fehrer
Archival photograph, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Mabel Vanderbilt
Archival photograph, Mabel Vanderbilt Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Fehrer family
Archival photograph, Mabel Vanderbilt Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

"Oscar Fehrer's Charcoal Drawings," *The Collector and Art Critic*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Nov. 1906): 21-22

National Arts Club Plaque
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

National Arts Club flyer for "Open Table," January 29, 1917
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Oscar Fehrer with Statue of Liberty
Archival photograph, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Elizabeth and Catherine Fehrer in Paris
Archival photograph, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Fehrer House, ca. 1920s
Reproduction of original archival photograph
Florence Griswold Museum

Mabel Vanderbilt Fehrer in boat
Archival photograph, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Elizabeth and Catherine Fehrer in Pleasant Valley, Lyme
Archival photographs, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Oscar Fehrer's copy of Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (New York: John Lane Company, 1915). Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Early Spring, 1920

Oil on wood panel

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Landscape with Rocks

Oil on canvas board

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer



Oscar Fehrer (1872–1958)

Old House in Connecticut

Oil on panel

Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer and Miss Elizabeth Fehrer

As children, Catherine and Elizabeth loved to swim in a wooded stretch of the Eight Mile River. “Father damned a swimming hole,” Catherine recalled, “and there was a flight of steps going down to the river.” Perhaps it was while his daughters were taking a swim in the river that their father painted this scene.

Pleasant Valley Preserve is important not only for its natural beauty and recreational potential, but also for ensuring the purity of Eight Mile River, a valuable resource that flows into the Connecticut River and the estuary that is one of The Nature Conservancy’s principal targets of concern and conservation. Catherine and Elizabeth’s gift protects a watershed from pollution and a landscape from development. Through her additional gift of the collection and house to the Museum, she preserved the history of the place and the role of her family in Lyme.

Oscar Fehrer with farm hands in Lyme
Archival photograph, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Elizabeth or Catherine Fehrer in Pleasant Valley, Lyme
Archival photographs, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

Later in life, Catherine Fehrer described: "We were isolated in Pleasant Valley. My sister and I knew no one in Old Lyme. We played together, climbed the ledge opposite our house and wandered in the fields. We went swimming every day in the Eight Mile River where my father found a place to swim and even built a dam to make it deeper. We felt isolated and sometimes lonely."

Fehrer House exterior and interior, 1980s
Archival photographs, Catherine Fehrer Papers
Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of Miss Catherine Fehrer

"Preserving a Landscape on Canvas and in Deed: Catherine Fehrer," *The Nature Conservancy, Connecticut Chapter*, October 2001

Fehrer House on Beaver Brook Road, 2016–2017
Photographs by Jenny Parsons, Assistant Curator, Florence Griswold Museum