

Impressionist Giverny

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FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM, OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT

In Giverny, France, artists filled the dining room of the Hôtel Baudy with their paintings, a tradition continued in Old Lyme. Learn more at FlorenceGriswoldMuseum.org.



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Old Lyme The American Giverny

At the turn of the last century, artists flocked to villages around Europe to paint the landscape *en plein air* in the company of friends. But the popularity of art colonies was not confined to the Continent; by 1900, the international trend spread to the United States through artists who had enjoyed life in these rural enclaves in England, Holland, and France. The exhibition *Impressionist Giverny: American Painters in France, 1885–1915* offers the opportunity to

consider one of the best-known European art colonies—Giverny—in the context of its American counterpart at Old Lyme, Connecticut.

Fifteen years after the first American painters arrived in Giverny, another group of artists congregated at Florence Griswold’s boardinghouse in Old Lyme. The Lyme Art Colony shared much in common with Giverny; both communities were near larger urban centers and offered easy access to rural scenery and inexpensive accommodations presided over by gracious hosts.

In 1900, Louis Paul Dessar was the first artist from Giverny to visit Old Lyme. Like other early arrivals, he came to town on the recommendation of colony founder Henry Ward Ranger. Dessar had spent long stretches of time painting in the French countryside, including nearly a year in

Giverny. Even after he returned to New York, he visited rural France in the summers, stopping only after his introduction to Old Lyme. Here, he found a working agricultural landscape where he could paint pictures of peasants and livestock as he had in Giverny. He purchased a large farm in Old Lyme in 1901. Like the artists who rented or bought private homes in Giverny but continued to socialize at the Hôtel Baudy, Dessar still took part in the communal life of the Lyme Art Colony. He even appears in Henry Rankin Poore’s *The Fox Chase*, a gentle parody of the group painted over the fireplace in the Florence Griswold House.

Other previous inhabitants of Giverny imported some of that colony’s traditions to Old Lyme. Most significantly, Willard Metcalf suggested that the select group of artists boarding in the Griswold House paint

the wood-paneled dining room walls, which had been a common practice at the Hôtel Baudy. Several former Giverny artists took part in this endeavor at Old Lyme, including Dessar, George Glenn Newell, Allen B. Talcott, and Charles Morris Young. Their paintings can still be seen in the Griswold House dining room.

By the time of Metcalf’s arrival in Old Lyme in 1905, it had become a full-fledged art colony whose communal spirit doubtlessly reminded him of Giverny. Metcalf had flourished in Giverny in the 1880s but struggled artistically after his return to America. At Old Lyme, he found vital encouragement from Florence Griswold and his fellow painters as well as inspiration in his natural surroundings. He not only resumed his practice of collecting birds’ eggs—a favorite hobby in France—but

completed his most acclaimed painting to date, *May Night* (Corcoran Gallery of Art).

In its second decade, the international character of Old Lyme began to resemble that of Giverny, which had hosted painters from around Europe in addition to large numbers of American artists. Painters Lucien Abrams, Martin Borgord, Edmund Greacen, Lawton Parker, and Ivan Olinsky had extensive European experience before joining the Lyme Art Colony, often not long after leaving Giverny. Following two years in Giverny, Greacen and his family summered in Old Lyme, where Florence Griswold’s gardens and the nearby Lieutenant River reminded him of Monet’s flower gardens and the River Epte. Similarities between the idyllic settings of the two colonies also enticed artist Lawton Parker to paint nudes outdoors in Old Lyme as he had in Giverny. He and Greacen

exhibited their works together in New York in 1910 as members of the “Giverny Group” in addition to showing their paintings each summer with fellow artists from the Lyme Art Colony.

Although each colony possessed a distinct identity, Giverny and Old Lyme share surprising connections. Not only was there a continuity of membership between the two, but the desire to immerse themselves in rural life by painting *en plein air* drew artists to both places. Having experienced life in European colonies, artists in Old Lyme revived the spirited social interactions, joint art projects, and sense of mutual support for each others’ work that made such communities vital to artists’ professional and personal lives in the early twentieth century.

Amy Kurtz Lansing, Curator

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Impressionist Giverny

American Painters in France, 1885–1915
Selections from the Terra Foundation for American Art

Welcome to the Florence Griswold Museum! I hope you enjoy this special exhibition devoted to the contributions of a group of leading American artists who found inspiration in the small Normandy village of Giverny, France, where the French Impressionist Claude Monet and his family lived. After you have seen the exhibition, be sure to visit the Florence Griswold House, the former boardinghouse of the Lyme Art Colony, where I think you will find many fascinating parallels to the story of Giverny. As described here, the two colonies shared many of the same artists and aesthetic aims and, over time, Old Lyme was even referred to as the “American Giverny.” Our sincere thanks to our colleagues at the Musée d’Art Américain, Terra Foundation for American Art, for giving us this extraordinary opportunity to bring Giverny and Old Lyme together in this way. *Jeffrey Andersen, Director*



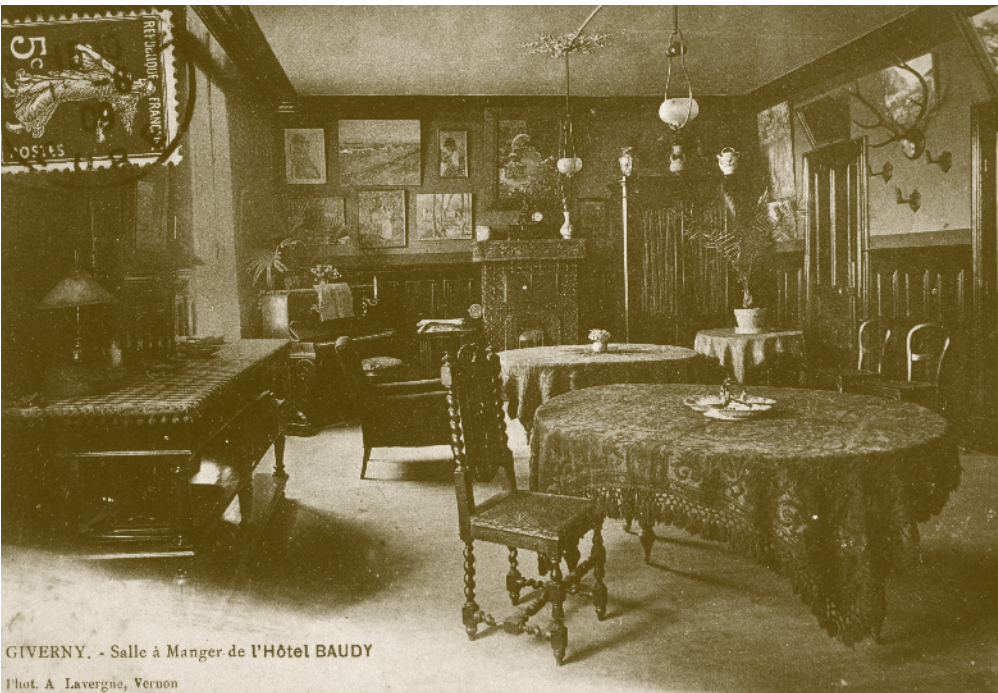
The Hôtel Baudy



The Griswold Boardinghouse



Florence Griswold in the dining room at the Griswold Boardinghouse



The dining room at Hôtel Baudy