



Allen Tucker
American, 1866 - 1939

Madison Square, Snow

1904

oil on canvas

overall: 50.8 x 60.9 cm (20 x 24 in.)

framed: 66 x 76.2 cm (26 x 30 in.)

Inscription: lower left: A. Tucker / 04

Gift of the Allen Tucker Memorial 1971.13.2

ENTRY

Allen Tucker executed this painting in 1904, the year that he abandoned his career as an architect and decided to become a professional artist. The snowy setting, subtle tonal harmonies, and heavily textured paint surface of *Madison Square, Snow* reflect the influence of John Henry Twachtman (American, 1853 - 1902), Tucker's former teacher at the Art Students League. It is an important early example of Tucker's interest in tonalism, done well before he developed his mature expressionist style.

The winter cityscape depicts Madison Square Park, one of midtown Manhattan's small urban oases. Composed from an elevated vantage point, the painting's precedents include the bird's-eye views of Paris produced by several of the French impressionists, such as the well-known *Garden of the Princess* (1867, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH) by Claude Monet (French, 1840 - 1926) and numerous paintings by Camille Pissarro (French, born St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 1830 - 1903) from the last decade of his career. Tucker had certainly seen such French impressionist works during his extensive travels in Europe.

In the United States, Willard Leroy Metcalf (American, 1858 - 1925), Ernest Lawson (American, born Canada, 1873 - 1939), and Childe Hassam (American, 1859 - 1935) painted similar views, in which they represented the city's public parks as genteel, bucolic places of refuge from an otherwise bustling environment. [1] *Madison Square, Snow* is less anecdotal and ingratiating than Hassam's *Madison Square, Snowstorm* [fig. 1] or similar views by other American impressionists. Tucker's approach to the urban park theme instead reflects the growing influence of the snow scenes of Robert Henri (American, 1865 - 1929), such as *Snow in New York*, and successfully combines the monochromatic, tonalist manner of Twachtman with the harsher realism of Henri.

Inspired in part by the French writer Charles Baudelaire's notions of the painter of modern life, Tucker and other turn-of-the-century American painters were drawn to New York because of the many contemporary subjects the rapidly growing urban center provided. Madison Square had been officially designated a public space in 1847. Situated in one of the city's most fashionable neighborhoods, between Madison and Fifth Avenues and extending from 23rd to 26th Streets, the park underwent a dramatic transformation around 1900 when it lost its quiet residential quality and became a major commercial and entertainment center. The area was especially noted for the presence of Madison Square Garden, a popular concert hall, amphitheater, and roof garden that was designed in a distinctive Moorish style by Stanford White and built in 1889. Its tower was surmounted by the bronze nude statue *Diana* by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (American, born Ireland, 1848 - 1907), the dominant feature of Manhattan's skyline. [2] Other significant buildings on the park's perimeter included Henry Janeway Hardenbergh's Western Union Building (1884), Napoleon Le Brun's Metropolitan Life Insurance Building (1892), James Brown Lord's Appellate Court Building (1900), and Daniel H. Burnham's Flatiron Building (1902). Madison Square Park was also distinguished for its outdoor sculpture and was the site of Saint-Gaudens's *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut* (1881) as well as several other important memorials. [3]

Tucker's rendition of Madison Square Park deliberately avoids any distinctive, clearly recognizable view of the park or its environs. Tucker instead represents the park as a vestige of nature engulfed by a rising tide of relentless urban development. The only visible sign of the park is a row of motley, bare trees that protrude through the snow, sandwiched between the foreground rooftops and the tall buildings in the background. Although snow was a favorite device for romanticizing the city and imbuing it with a picturesque quality, here the metropolis

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is rendered more objectively. The smoke and steam rising above the New York skyline manifests the dynamic, often disruptive emerging energies of the new century.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Childe Hassam, *Madison Square, Snowstorm*, 1893, oil on canvas, Collection of the Maryland State Archives

NOTES

- [1] For a discussion of how American impressionist and realist painters approached these urban subjects, see H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of*

Modern Life, 1885–1915 (New York, 1994), 155–188.

- [2] Gerald R. Wolfe, *New York: A Guide to the Metropolis: Walking Tours of Architecture and History* (New York, 1975), 197–211.
- [3] For a discussion of Madison Square Park and various paintings of it by American impressionist artists, see William H. Gerdts, *Impressionist New York* (New York, 1994), 76–84.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is executed on a medium-weight, plain-weave canvas that was preprimed with a thick gray-white ground. The edges are cut with a sharp instrument right through impastos and brushstrokes, which shows that the painting was mounted sometime after its completion. It is now not exactly at its original dimension, although it does not appear that much is missing. The secondary support is a quarter-inch-thick piece of plywood that is painted dark brownish red on the reverse, to which an interleaf of a white-grounded canvas has been glued before mounting of the original support. This additional canvas can be seen at the top edge. The x-radiograph does not show an image on the interleaf canvas and shows very little in the way of artist changes. The paint is applied thickly, in direct impastoed brushstrokes, probably following a rudimentary drawing as the architectural forms are painted side by side, not overlapping each other. The infrared reflectography image suggests the presence of a drawing but does not confirm it. [1]

The painting is in good condition with only a small retouched fill in the upper-left corner and some significant retouching at all the edges except the top. From its light-green fluorescence under ultraviolet light, the thin, slightly discolored, and grimy layer of varnish is probably a natural resin.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] The infrared examination was conducted using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with an H astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

The artist [1866-1939]; by inheritance to his wife, Mrs. Allen Tucker [d. 1944]; The Allen Tucker Memorial, New York; [1] gift 1971 to NGA.

[1] The Allen Tucker Memorial was established in 1944.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1972 Extended loan for use by Secretary Peter G. Peterson, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 1972-1973.

1975 Extended loan for use by the Ambassador, U.S. Embassy residence, Dublin, Ireland, 1975-1978.

1979 Extended loan for use by Secretary G. William Miller, U.S. Department of Treasury, Washington, D.C., 1979-1980.

1981 Extended loan for use by Secretary Donald T. Regan, U.S. Department of Treasury, Washington, D.C., 1981.

1983 Extended loan for use by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, U.S. Embassy residence, The Hague, The Netherlands, 1983-1987.

1989 Extended loan for use by Secretary Louis Sullivan, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1989-1993.

1995 Extended loan for use by Ambassador Jeonnone Walker, U.S. Embassy residence, Prague, 1995-1998.

2005 Extended loan for use by Secretary Margaret Spellings, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2005-2008.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 370, repro.

To cite: Robert Torchia, “Allen Tucker/*Madison Square, Snow*/1904,” *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/52446> (accessed October 19, 2024).