

# Sargent

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# Foreword

*“There is no greater work of art than a great portrait - a truth to be constantly taken to heart by a painter holding in his hands the weapon that Mr. Sargent wields.”*

— Henri James

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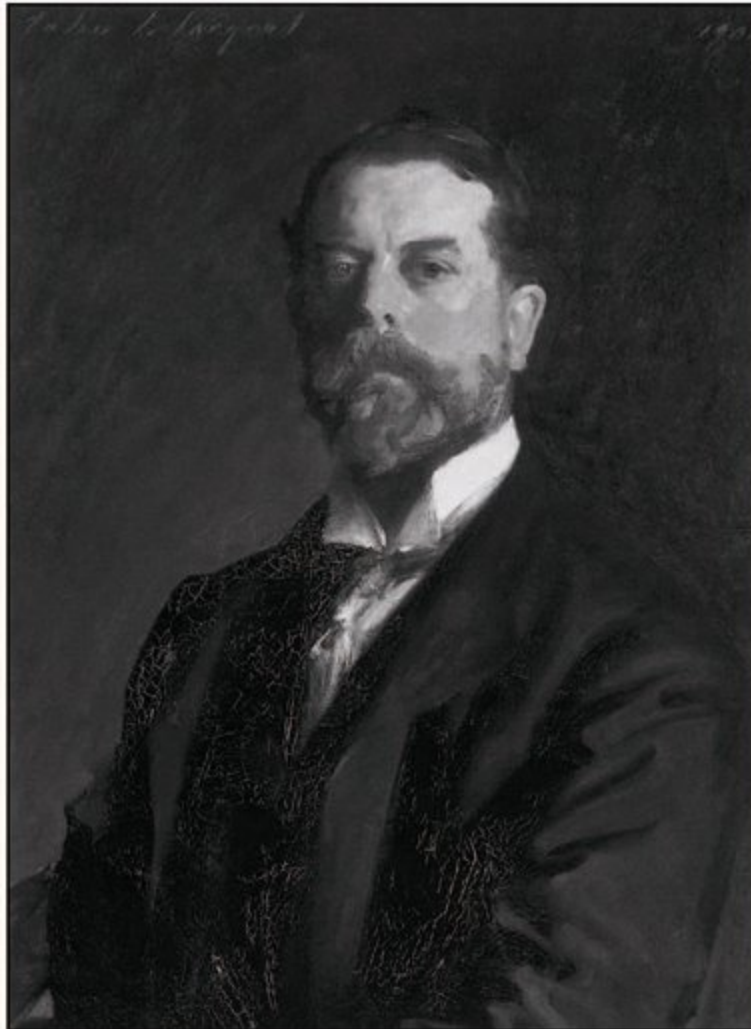
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*Self-Portrait, 1907.*

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Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm.  
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

# Biography

**1854:** Sargent's family takes up residence in Europe.

**1856:** John Sargent is born on 12 January in Florence.

**1857:** The Sargents have a daughter, Emily.

**1865:** Studies drawing and watercolour while travelling throughout Europe with his parents.

**1870:** Begins drawing classes at the Academia delle Belle Arti, Florence. The Sargents have a second daughter, Violet.

**1874:** Moves with the family to Paris. Sargent begins painting classes, first at the studio of Emile Carolus-Duran, then with Adolphe Yvon at the Ecole des beaux-arts.

**1876:** Visits the United States with his mother and sister Emily. He confirms his U.S. citizenship. He returns to Paris and continues to study.

**1878-9:** Travels to Spain and Morocco. He sees works by Velázquez and Goya.

**1880-1:** Begins a six-month stay in Venice. Joins mother and sisters in Nice.

**1882-4:** Paints *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*. He exhibits his portrait of Madame Pierre

Gautreau, *Madame X*. He meets author Henry James.



John Parsons

**1885-6:** Moves to London and there paints his first portrait of *Robert Louis Stevenson*.

**1890:** He accepts a commission to create mural decorations in Boston.

**1894:** Is elected as an associate of the Royal Academy. He exhibits the first completed part of the Boston mural.

**1903:** Goes to Boston for the installation of the first panel of the Boston Library mural. He paints a portrait of *Theodore Roosevelt*.

**1907:** He announces that he wants to stop painting commissioned portraits.

**1913:** Paints a portrait of *Henry James*.

**1916:** Completes the installation of his murals in Boston. Takes on a commission to decorate a ceiling of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

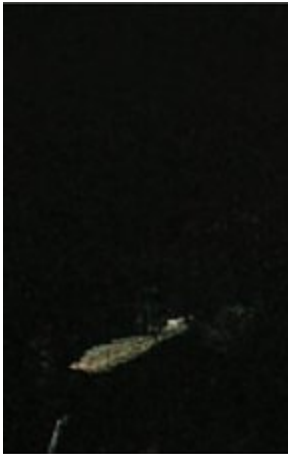
**1917:** Paints a portrait of *Woodrow Wilson*.

**1918:** Returns to Europe and visits battlefields in France.

**1921-2:** Returns to Boston for the unveiling of mural decorations in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Installs a commissioned mural for a library at Harvard University.

**1924:** Attends a retrospective of his work in Manhattan. Returns to London.

**1925:** Dies on 4 April. Memorial service is held at Westminster Abbey and later at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



## Introduction

In 1854, Americans Dr. Fitz William Sargent and his wife Mary planned a short visit to Europe. He was a surgeon from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was an amateur painter who loved travelling and experiencing different cultures. They had lost a child shortly before arriving in Europe. A vacation abroad would be a way for the couple to cope somewhat with their grief. However, instead of a brief stay, they gradually took up residence in Europe and returned to America only for short visits.



### **Man Wearing Laurels**

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1874-1880

Oil on canvas, 44.4 x 33.4 cm  
Mary D. Keeler Bequest  
Los Angeles County Museum of  
Art, Los Angeles







Two years after arriving in Europe, their son John was born on 12 January, 1856, in Florence. The following year John's sister, Emily, was born. When she was four, an accident damaged her spine. Early in life she came to rely on John, who lovingly cared for her thereafter. Another sister, Violet, was born in 1870, also in Florence. Throughout his life, Sargent would rarely travel without his mother or sisters. He and Emily would never marry.



**Portrait of Frances Sherborne Ridley  
Watts  
(Portrait of Mile W.)**

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1877

Oil on canvas, 105.9 x 81.3 cm  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wharton  
Sinkler  
Philadelphia Museum of Art,  
Philadelphia





He did not have a mistress, although many men of his time with the means did so. Moreover, Sargent apparently never had a serious love affair with a woman, even though he became a cult figure in social circles, and there were many women among his admirers. Those fans, as well as models, would visit him often at his studio. He did, however, have special friends, including Violet Paget, whom he met in Nice. She was a writer who used the pen name Vernon Lee.



### **Fishing for Oysters at Cancale**

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1878

Oil on canvas, 41 x 61 cm  
Gift of Miss Mary Appleton (1935)  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston







Her letters, which include memories of Sargent, were privately printed in 1937. Sargent would also later become a friend of Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, the beautiful model who posed for the famous *Madame X* portrait.



Sargent showed musical talent early in life and played the piano, but drawing was more obviously his passion. Starting when only nine years old, Sargent continually sketched and used watercolours while the family travelled throughout Europe,



### **Oyster Gatherers of Cancale**

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1878

Oil on canvas, 96.8 x 123.2 cm  
Corcoran Gallery of Art,  
Washington, D.C.





visiting the major art centres of London, Paris, Rome, Florence, Nice, as well as holiday locations, including Pau in the French Pyrenees. When his father was in America on business, his mother would take the children to Lake Como, the Tyrol, Switzerland, Salzburg, Milan, Catalonia and Andalusia. It is not surprising that Sargent's art would reflect his wide experience and exposure to many cultures.



**Head of Ana, Capri Girl**

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1878

Oil on canvas, 22.9 x 25.4 cm  
Private collection





After he settled in Dresden, Sargent continued his formal classical education there and then later in Florence.

In 1870 he began drawing classes at the Accademia delle Belle Arti, while working at the studio of the German-American landscape painter, Carol Welsch, who gave Sargent his first formal painting lessons. However, his first portraiture lessons were from the Scottish painter Joseph Farquharson (1846-1935), who was in turn influenced by Peter Graham (1836-1921).



**Carmela Bertagna**

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c. 1879

Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 49.5 cm

Bequest of Frederick W.

Schumacher

Colombus Museum of Fine Art,

Colombus