BOSTON, UNITED STATES

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: Masterpieces

Twenty works, from Giotto to Sargent, in the collection Isabella Stewart Gardner built and arranged in Boston



Isabella Stewart Gardner arranged the paintings, furniture and objects in her Boston museum so that each room would be seen as a whole. The museum preserves much of that arrangement, and the collection remains closely tied to her tastes and to its personal history.

The twenty works chosen here run from a panel by Giotto to John Singer Sargent, who appears more often than any other artist. They include Titian's Abduction of Europa, two works by Botticelli and Piero della Francesca's Hercules, a detached fresco. Gardner herself is here as well, in Anders Zorn's portrait of her in Venice, and so are his pictures of passengers on an omnibus and of a woman washing by the water. A few threads run through the later works. Music and dance link Sargent's El Jaleo and his portrait of the musician Charles Martin Loeffler with Léon Bakst's two costume designs, for Ida Rubinstein and Anna Pavlova. Venice connects Zorn's portrait with John Ruskin's study of the Casa Loredan.

Artline chose these works from documented museum holdings, independently of the museum. A work's place in the collection does not mean it will be on view: any of these works may be on loan or off display, and works on paper are not always shown. Where a record qualifies a date or an attribution, that qualification is kept here.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/isabella-stewart-gardner

The selection · 20

1. The Abduction of Europa
   Titian · 1559 - 1562
2. The Story of Lucretia
   Sandro Botticelli · 1496 - 1504
3. El Jaleo
   John Singer Sargent · 1882
4. Hercules
   Piero della Francesca · 1465
5. The Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple
   Giotto di Bondone · 1320
6. Madonna and Child with an Angel
   Sandro Botticelli · 1470
7. Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville
   James Abbott McNeill Whistler · 1865
8. The Omnibus
   Anders Zorn · 1892
9. Isabella Stewart Gardner in Venice
   Anders Zorn · 1894
10. Juana of Austria with a Young Girl
    Sofonisba Anguissola · 1561
11. The Roman Tower, Andernach
    J. M. W. Turner · 1817
12. The Casa Loredan, Venice
    John Ruskin · 1850
13. Love's Greeting
    Dante Gabriel Rossetti · c. 1861
14. Ida Rubinstein as Saint Sebastian
    Léon Bakst · 1911
15. Anna Pavlova in Oriental Fantasy
    Léon Bakst · 1913
16. Charles Martin Loeffler
    John Singer Sargent · 1903
17. A Tent in the Rockies
    John Singer Sargent · c. 1916
18. Incensing the Veil
    John Singer Sargent · 1880
19. A Young Lady of Fashion
    Paolo Uccello · Early 1460s
20. Morning Toilet
    Anders Zorn · 1888

01 / 20

The Abduction of Europa

Titian

1559 - 1562 · Oil on canvas · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Titian. Abduction of Europa. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/titian/rape-of-europe-1562 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Europa is struggling to keep her balance as the white bull, Zeus in disguise, carries her out into the water, and Titian shows the effort in her limbs and in her clothing. Rubens later made a copy of the painting.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

The Story of Lucretia

Sandro Botticelli

1496 - 1504 · Tempera on panel · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Sandro Botticelli. The Story of Lucretia. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/sandro-botticelli/the-story-of-lucretia-1504 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Botticelli tells several episodes of the Roman story of Lucretia within a single architectural view. The buildings divide the panel into separate zones of action, but they also hold the episodes together in one space. The open square at the centre carries the weight of the story. There, a body and the gesturing crowd around it turn a private injury into a public matter.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

El Jaleo

John Singer Sargent

1882 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



John Singer Sargent. El Jaleo. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Hard light from below catches the dancer's skirt and arms and throws her face into shadow, while her own enormous shadow carries the movement up the wall. Sargent sets her sharply angled body against the seated musicians behind her, whose repeated poses keep up a regular rhythm. The painting is more than three metres wide, but it has almost no depth. Dancer and musicians alike are pressed into a shallow foreground, so the picture's great width plays out across its surface.

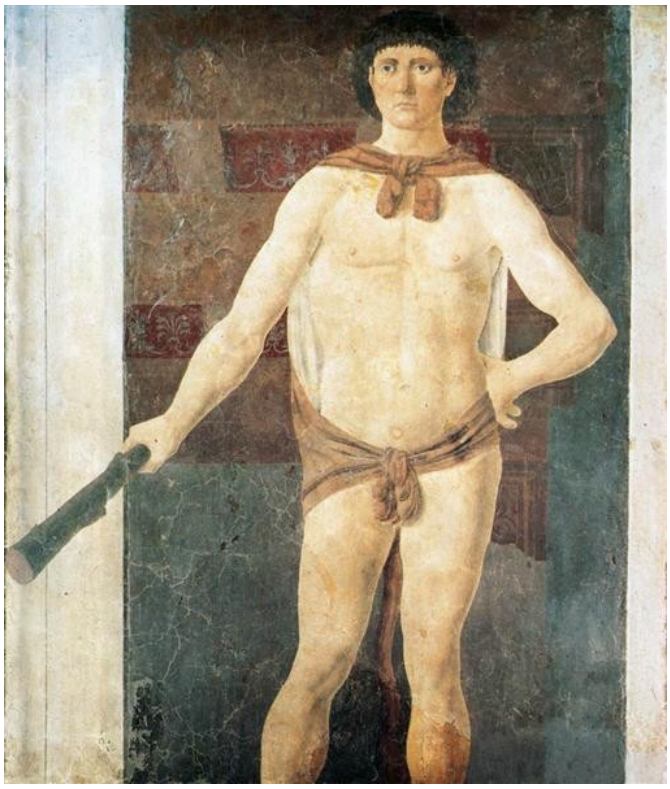
Object source · Open artwork

04 / 20

Hercules

Piero della Francesca

1465 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Hercules. WikiArt; Piero della Francesca. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Piero della Francesca painted this Hercules in fresco, and it has since been detached from its original setting. The club identifies him. Beyond that, Piero gives him nothing to do: none of the labours or enemies from his story appear. The nearly nude figure simply stands, firmly planted, in a shallow architectural niche that his proportions seem calculated to fill.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

The Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple

Giotto di Bondone

1320 · Tempera on panel · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple. WikiArt; Giotto di Bondone. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

The earliest work in this selection turns on an exchange of gestures. Adults reach across a small altar, and the infant reaches back; Giotto measures the moment of sacred recognition by the distance between their hands. The pointed canopy and compact architecture give each participant a distinct place, and the child's reaching gesture cuts across that order.

Object source · Open artwork

06 / 20

Madonna and Child with an Angel

Sandro Botticelli

1470 · Tempera on wood · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Sandro Botticelli. Madonna and Child with an Angel. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/sandro-botticelli/madonna-and-child-with-an-angel · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Giotto's child reaches out across an altar, while Botticelli's is being held. Madonna, infant and angel are packed into a close group with their heads inclined, and behind them there is only a narrow glimpse of landscape. The panel was made for devotion, yet much of what it shows is the practical business of holding a small body, and the whole group is arranged around that task.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville

James Abbott McNeill Whistler

1865 · Oil on canvas · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville. WikiArt; James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Whistler's title names the colours before the place, and the painting has the same priorities. Sea, shore and sky are given closely related tones, so the horizontal bands differ only slightly from one another. A small standing figure breaks into them and supplies a measure of distance. Otherwise very little happens on the beach at Trouville. What holds the view together is the fine adjustment of colour from band to band.

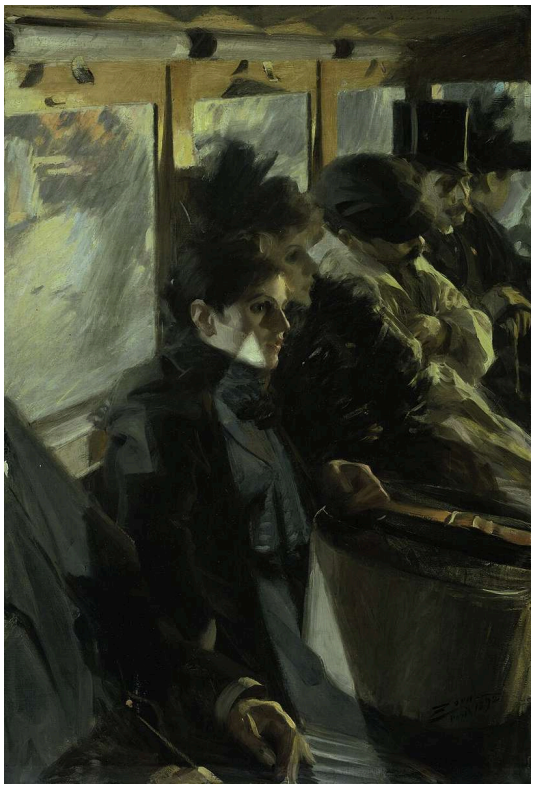
Object source · Open artwork

08 / 20

The Omnibus

Anders Zorn

1892 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Anders Zorn. The Omnibus. Image credit: Anders Zorn; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anders_Zorn_-_The_Omnibus_-_P3e1_-_Isabella_Stewart_Gardner_Museum.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Zorn's passengers are packed into a cramped omnibus, but they do not form a group. Light from the window picks out some faces and bits of clothing; other figures fall into shadow or are partly hidden. They sit pressed together, yet their attention never meets.

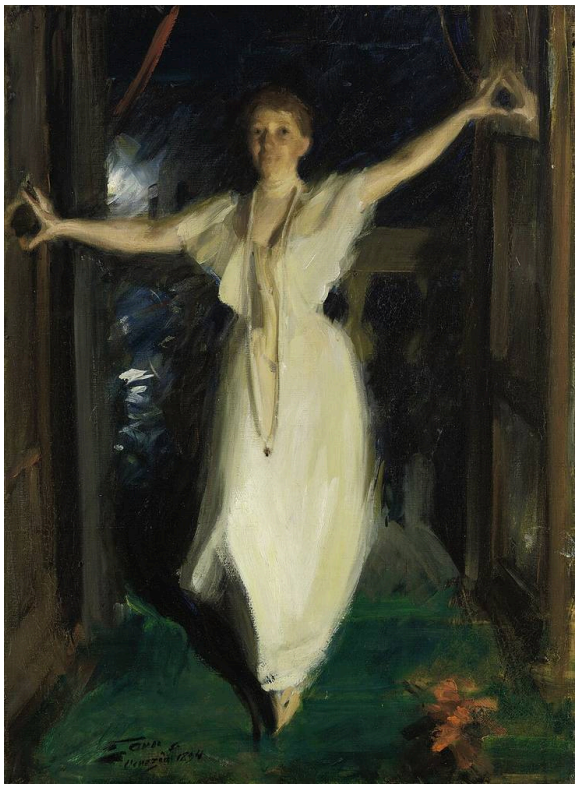
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P3e1

09 / 20

Isabella Stewart Gardner in Venice

Anders Zorn

1894 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Anders Zorn. Isabella Stewart Gardner in Venice. Image credit: Anders Zorn; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anders_Zorn_-_Isabella_Stewart_Gardner_in_Venice_-_P17e10_-_Isabella_Stewart_Gardner_Museum.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

According to her husband's diary, Gardner had been watching fireworks and was calling the guests outside to see them. Zorn paints the invitation as it happens. Brightly lit, she stands in the doorway between the interior and the dark Venetian balcony, caught mid-gesture, with her arms stretched towards the open doors on either side.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P17e10

10 / 20

Juana of Austria with a Young Girl

Sofonisba Anguissola

1561 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Sofonisba Anguissola. Portrait of Juana of Austria with a Young Girl. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title names Juana of Austria but calls her companion simply "a Young Girl", and the painting follows the same order. The difference in height sets up a hierarchy at once, and the formality of their clothing reinforces it. Anguissola keeps both expressions contained against the dark setting. Neither of them smiles, and they share no activity. Whatever bond exists between them has to be read from their closeness, from small adjustments of posture and from where the girl is placed.

Object source · Open artwork

11 / 20

The Roman Tower, Andernach

J. M. W. Turner

1817 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



J. M. W. Turner. The Roman Tower, Andernach. Image credit: J. M. W. Turner; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The Roman tower of the title rises as a strong upright among the riverside buildings at Andernach, but Turner gives so much of the view to the broad sky that the tower never dominates it. Lower down, boats and figures keep the water busy.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P1e12

12 / 20

The Casa Loredan, Venice

John Ruskin

1850 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



John Ruskin. The Casa Loredan, Venice. Image credit: John Ruskin; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Ruskin was studying the Casa Loredan, not making a finished drawing, and the sheet shows where his attention went. Some parts of the Venetian façade are given colour and detail, while others are left as light outlines. Turner places his tower at Andernach inside a wide river view. Ruskin goes close to a single building and is selective even there, moving from arches to ornament. The barely drawn areas may be forms he needed only for positioning the details he wanted to examine more closely.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P17e32

13 / 20

Love's Greeting

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

c. 1861 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Love's Greeting. Image credit: Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Love's Greeting is an encounter that leaves almost no room around itself. Rossetti joins his figures tightly and fills nearly all the remaining space with flowers, patterns and an inscription, so the scene is enclosed and removed from any recognisable setting. Most of the picture's intensity comes from that ornament, since there is little action or setting to carry feeling otherwise. The effect is precious, in both senses of the word.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P1w8

14 / 20

Ida Rubinstein as Saint Sebastian

Léon Bakst

1911 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Léon Bakst. Ida Rubinstein as Saint Sebastian. Image credit: Léon Bakst; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

This costume design for Ida Rubinstein as Saint Sebastian is worked out for the theatre. The broad blue cloak makes the figure a strong silhouette before any decorative detail can be made out. Bakst sets it against red clothing and leaves the rest of the sheet blank. A costume has to read from a distance as well as close to. Here the large, simple shape would carry across an auditorium, and the pattern inside it is left for anyone nearer.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 3.1.o.91

15 / 20

Anna Pavlova in Oriental Fantasy

Léon Bakst

1913 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Léon Bakst. Anna Pavlova in the Ballet 'Oriental Fantasy'. Image credit: Léon Bakst; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

Compared with the Rubinstein design, this one is all movement. The arms extend and the feet and limbs angle in opposing directions. The short skirt flares and a long scarf trails behind, so the fabric enlarges every action of the dancer who would wear it. In the "Oriental Fantasy" of the title, fantasy is the accurate word. This is theatrical invention, and it tells us nothing reliable about any particular culture's dress.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 3.1.o.92

16 / 20

Charles Martin Loeffler

John Singer Sargent

1903 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Τζον Σίνγκερ Σάρτζεντ. Charles Martin Loeffler. Image credit: John Singer Sargent; Source credit: https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/10870. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

In El Jaleo Sargent painted musicians at work, but Charles Martin Loeffler is not playing. Enough of the instrument shows to identify him as a musician. Sargent turns the pale face away from the viewer and lets the dark clothing keep most of the body in reserve.

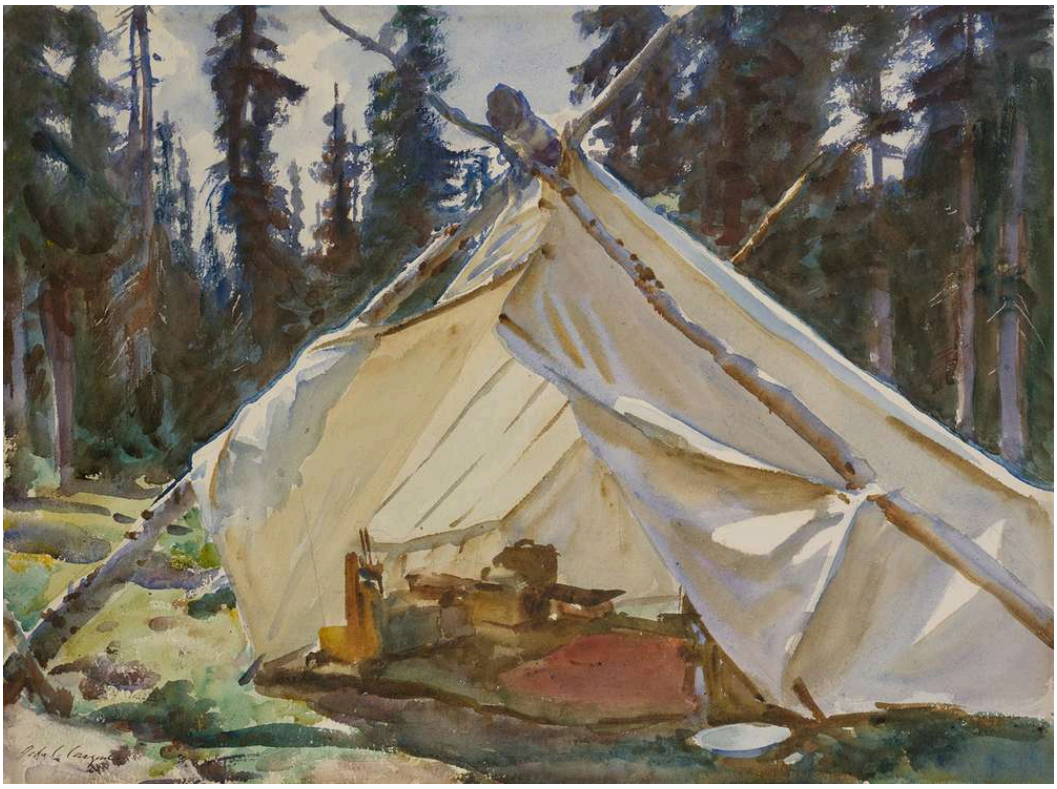
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P1w6

17 / 20

A Tent in the Rockies

John Singer Sargent

c. 1916 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Τζον Σίνγκερ Σάρτζεντ. A Tent in the Rockies. Image credit: John Singer Sargent; Source credit: https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/10882. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Sargent paints the tent with the same loose strokes as the trees and ground around it, so its sunlit fabric, with its shifting light and shadow, becomes one more surface in the landscape. The open entrance makes it plain that this is only temporary shelter in the Rockies.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P3w17

18 / 20

Incensing the Veil

John Singer Sargent

1880 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Τζον Σίνγκερ Σάρτζεντ. Incensing the Veil. Image credit: John Singer Sargent; Source credit: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Incense smoke, hanging fabric and pale clothing together blur the boundary between figure and room, and the body can be made out only through successive veils. The smoke is part of the ritual named in the title. It also controls what can be seen, diffusing the light and softening every edge.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P3w33

19 / 20

A Young Lady of Fashion

Paolo Uccello

Early 1460s · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Paolo Uccello. A Young Lady of Fashion. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title describes the sitter by her clothes, and this portrait, attributed to Paolo Uccello, largely does the same. She is held in strict profile and never turns towards the viewer. Her pearls and patterned sleeve speak of status and of how she wished, or was meant, to be seen. Her face stays composed and reserved.

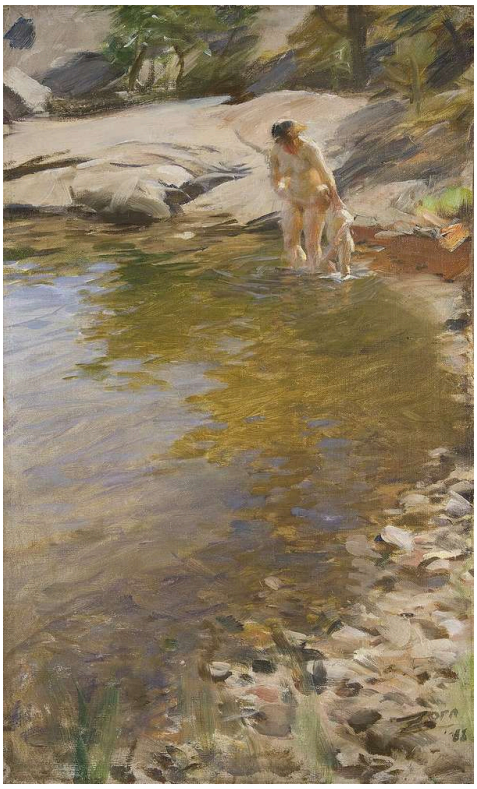
Object source · Open artwork

20 / 20

Morning Toilet

Anders Zorn

1888 · Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



Anders Zorn. Morning Toilet. Image credit: Anders Zorn; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anders_Zorn_-_Morning_Toilet_-_P25e13_-_Isabella_Stewart_Gardner_Museum.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

A woman bends to her morning washing beside rocks and shallow water. Zorn keeps her posture clear, so the action can be read at once, and lets the light around her break into scattered reflections.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P25e13

Rooms and order

At the Gardner, a room's architecture and furnishings can change a painting's apparent scale and associations as much as the neighbouring pictures do, so a work seen there may look rather different from its description here. This selection is ordered by theme, not as a route through the building.

Further reading

A Treatise on Painting

Leonardo da Vinci; translated by John Francis Rigaud · Read free · English

Leonardo's treatise, here in John Francis Rigaud's English translation, sets out working principles for painters, including notes on gesture and on arranging figures. Those notes raise questions worth putting to the Italian paintings in this selection. Try them first on the still, single figure of Piero's Hercules and the compact group in Botticelli's Madonna, and then on the many intersecting actions spread across The Story of Lucretia.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
