

A watercolor painting depicting a landscape view from a terrace. The scene is characterized by bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, and brown. A prominent dark, curved shape, possibly a railing or a shadow, arches across the middle ground. The background features a mix of light and dark tones, suggesting a sky or distant terrain. The overall style is abstract and evocative.

CHARLES HOPKINSON
View from the Terrace

Charles Hopkinson

CHARLES HOPKINSON
View from the Terrace

June 13, 2009 through October 11, 2009

CAPE ANN MUSEUM
ART HISTORY CULTURE
27 PLEASANT STREET GLOUCESTER MA 01930



Charles Hopkinson
Sun and Surf, c.1956
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection

Acknowledgements

The Cape Ann Museum is pleased to present *View from the Terrace: The Paintings of Charles Hopkinson* as part of its ongoing exploration of artists whose work flourished on Cape Ann. Although Hopkinson's sphere of influence extended from Harvard University to Versailles, it is clear that the sea, the light and the landscape of his Manchester home served as powerful sources of inspiration.

The Cape Ann Museum wishes to thank the many individuals who have helped make this special exhibition exploring the life and art of Charles Hopkinson possible. In particular, the Museum singles out the enthusiasm and support of the extended Hopkinson family including Charles Shurcliff, Edie Jane Eaton, Tom and Joy Halsted, Arthur Shurcliff, Mr. and Mrs. John Rive, Isabella Halsted and Mary Clarke. Charles Shurcliff was intimately involved in all aspects of the project, from start to finish, and is to be thanked for his vision and perseverance.

Charles Movalli and Charles Shurcliff have made important contributions to the exhibition catalog and are acknowledged with thanks as is Steve Rosenthal who generously made his photographic talents available for both the catalog and the exhibition. Special recognition goes to curator Martha Oaks whose research on Hopkinson brings to light the intimate connections between the artist and Cape Ann, and is the basis for the essay in this catalog.

Finally, we are grateful to the private collectors who lent to the exhibition and to the following organizations: The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Vose Galleries, Inc.; The Manchester Historical Society; The National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution; and The Tavern Club.

Ronda Faloon, Director



Charles Hopkinson
Heavy Rollers, Dana Island, c. 1910-1915
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Yachts Heeled Well Over, c.1930
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

A Day at *Manch*

In my childhood memories, my grandfather Charles Hopkinson is vigorous and outdoors. Accompanied by his little Welsh terrier John Joiner, he is walking briskly with us to the nearby beach or to The Cove, where he kept a wooden rowboat on a running line. Sometimes we rowed out with him to his sailboat anchored further out (a very small sailboat, one of a lifelong succession whose names ranged from the *Little Nell* to the *Armada*). Then out to sea we would sail perhaps around Egg Rock or other such landmarks. Aboard the sailboat he was in his element. He loved the wind and waves and distant schooners. He could glance at the sky and tell us just how the weather would change. He had grown up sailing as a boy in Maine, and it was in sailing that he often said he got his education and his love for nature and desire to paint the world around him.

And again in my childhood memories, my grandfather is forever painting – in his seventies, eighties, even nineties. Painting was not just his profession but what he did and how he relaxed and how he expressed his joy in this world around him, especially its light and color. He is painting my brother and me in his sunny library or several of my cousins in the living room. He seldom used the attic studio to paint family but loved to paint with the bustle of life going on around him and with the everyday trappings of life as the backdrop. Often our mother or grandmother would be seated nearby reading aloud to keep us from getting fidgety, and often they too were included in the painting. He always painted in his good clothes and to our surprise never got paint on them or the furniture, however slapdash the painting or however many loaded brushes he carried at once.

He would set his easel near us and in no time have his paints all set on his palette — beautiful globs of raw colors from the tubes (or mixed from powders) as well as subtler colors mixed from these. He blocked in the painting all over and then retreated a dozen steps to eye the painting and the sitter together. He almost always worked life size, which helped in this comparison. He would then mix just the right color on his brush and holding

it at the tip end something like a fencer holding an epee, advance and apply it quickly to the canvas and then stand back again to judge and formulate the next color. He worked very fast. Sometimes he finished in a day but usually the portrait took several days, so we grandchildren would come over regularly to assess the progress. Dropping in at the Hopkinson House was a recognized part of the day, as much as climbing trees and boulders and swimming and other pursuits that made our stay at one of the houses nearby on the property the high point of the summer and the year.

We young literalists urged him to put in the buttons on our shirts and sometimes he did – he who spent a lifetime breaking away from just such exactitude and finish that had characterized both his training abroad and the contemporary schools of painting at home. But we also cared about likeness, and here he was ahead of us: he almost always caught a good likeness and somehow the sitter's inner character as well. How did he do it? We were very proud of him. At the same time, we were also nearly oblivious of his real work, the commissioned portraits he painted at the Fenway Studios in Boston and beyond, commuting by train and trolley for nearly sixty years. These portraits were no mere portrayals, like the professional studio photographs of today, but



Charles Hopkinson on the rocks at Sharksmouth, c.1916.
Hopkinson Family Collection



Charles Hopkinson and grandson, Charles H. Shurcliff, July 4, 1955.
Hopkinson Family Collection

again studies of character couched in a larger exploration of color and composition, gesture and vitality, full of “dash” and “go” to use his words. He loved this work.

At the end of the afternoon, even if he had just returned from painting in Boston, he loved to go outside to the terrace or lawn to paint watercolors – and we all liked to watch. Now shadows were long and the light soft. Usually he sat facing southwest, his straw hat pulled low over his eyes. He loved the challenge of trying to paint the glitter on the water and the radiance of the setting sun. From an old canvas traveling bag he took out his brushes

and metal paint box, a bath sponge, a glass canning jar, and rubber hot-water-bottle. This last was his improvisation for carrying his water supply, which he then poured into the jar. In this he dipped his sponge and lightly moistened the paper, which he immediately dried off with his pocket-handkerchief. His watercolor paper was clipped to a board, which he propped opposite him on a chair.

Seeing us watching him, he would ask “What color is that distant part of the ocean over there?” “Blue,” we would answer. Then he would get up and show us how to look at it upside down through our legs — a trick allow-

ing us to see the “real” color with a fresh eye, and sure enough, it was very different from what we had thought. “And which is darker, that headland or the water in front of it?” he next might ask. When we were unsure, he showed us how to squint our eyes to reduce the hodgepodge of different lights and darks in the scene to a manageable three or four gradations. And years later, when some of us grandchildren inevitably became painters ourselves, we realized that in this long-ago time we had been introduced, painlessly, to hue and saturation and brightness, the three properties of any color — and the heart of seeing and painting.

~ Charles H. Shurcliff

Charles Shurcliff, a grandson of Charles Hopkinson, is an artist and a resident of Ipswich, MA.

View From the Terrace: The Paintings of Charles Hopkinson

In September 1916, when the first exhibition at the Gallery-on-the-Moors in East Gloucester opened its doors, Charles Hopkinson's painting *Mother and Child* was found displayed immediately alongside *Gloucester Wharf*, a work by Frank Duveneck that occupied *the* place of honor. Duveneck, who was the recipient of a gold medal the year before at the Panama-Pacific Exposition, was viewed by exhibit organizers as the "Dean of American Art," a figurehead among Cape Ann painters. That Hopkinson's painting had earned such a coveted place alongside Duveneck's would have come as no surprise to viewers in 1916 as by then Hopkinson had earned considerable acclaim throughout the region. Today, while Hopkinson's reputation rests principally on his work as a commission portrait painter, canvases like *Mother and Child* along with his countless watercolor paintings done from his Manchester home, constitute an important part of his long, distinguished career. Moreover, they earn Charles Hopkinson a prominent and well deserved place amongst the ranks of Cape Ann artists.

Charles Sydney Hopkinson was born in 1869 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the second of four children born to John Prentiss Hopkinson (1840-1910) and Mary Elizabeth (Watson) Hopkinson (1842 - 1919). Charles' paternal grandfather had come from a farming family in the western part of Maine and, seeking a better life, made his way to Boston in the mid-1820s and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1832.¹ Charles Hopkinson's father also graduated from Harvard and became a teacher. In 1868, he founded Hopkinson's Preparatory School on Charles Street in Boston, a boys' school which was in operation through 1902 and from which his son Charles graduated in 1887.

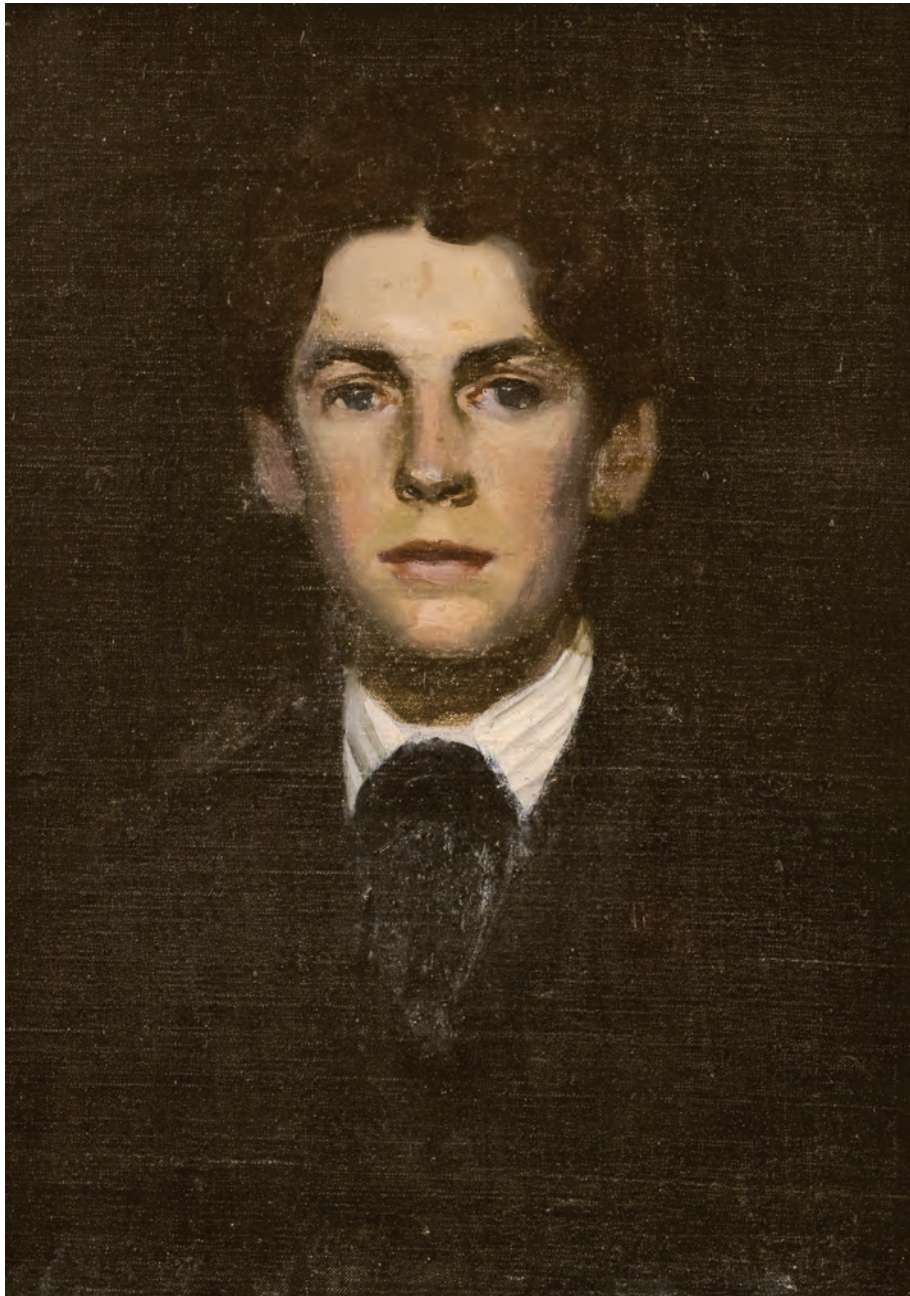
Charles Hopkinson's interest in art began "at an early age, certainly before ten" and led him to draw animals followed by sailing vessels and ships.² His skills as a painter also emerged early when he "realized that by blackening the area around a white disk on the paper and blackening around a white

triangle below the disk [he] could make what looked like... the moon with its reflection on the sea." When he was in his teens, by his own account, Hopkinson "suddenly began to paint dashing watercolors of the sort done by a self-taught painter of Gloucester... [caring] most for effects of light and color derived from looking toward the sun."³ Who the "self-taught painter of Gloucester" was remains a mystery but the concern for effects of light and color looking toward the sun remained a life-long focus.⁴

In 1887, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Hopkinson entered Harvard, graduating four years later with the class of 1891. That summer Hopkinson studied with landscape painter Frederick W. Kost (1861-1923) in a studio built for Kost on the grounds of the extended Hopkinson family's vacation home in Northeast Harbor, Maine. Later that same year, Hopkinson enrolled in the Art Students League in New York. In addition to H. Siddons Mowbray (1858-1928), in New York Hopkinson studied under John H. Twachtman (1852-1902), a landscape painter with important ties to Cape Ann whose work Hopkinson admired for its "subtle delicacy." Throughout his career, Hopkinson remained "*eternally grateful*" to Twachtman "for giving (him), with memorable insistence in his method, a very solid foundation for all (his) subsequent work in art..."⁵ Known



Charles Hopkinson, age 22, at the Art Students League, 1892. Hopkinson Family Collection



examples of Hopkinson's early marine paintings, dating from the 1890s, are reminiscent of Twachtman's work with emphasis placed on horizontal forms and careful attention paid to subtle changes in tonality which were particularly effective at conveying a sense of atmosphere over the water.

In 1893, while still in his early 20s, Hopkinson and fellow Art Students League pupil Angelica Rathbone (1871-1940) of Albany, New York, were married. While the marriage would last just three years, it precipitated a trip to Paris where both Hopkinson and Rathbone studied at the Académie Julian. A full length oil portrait done at this time by Hopkinson of Angelica holding a monkey was exhibited in the 1895 Salon and is representative of the academic style portraits with their subdued palettes and formal compositions that Hopkinson would create during the early years of his career. Before returning to America, Hopkinson traveled to the fishing community of Roscoff on the northern coast of Brittany where he stayed for a year with a local family (who would become friends for life) and continued to paint.

Hopkinson returned to live with his parents in Cambridge in 1897 and focused on his professional career. It was at this time that he first began experimenting with technical approaches to painting including the study of various color theories and the use of geometric principals to strengthen his compositions. Both were subjects which would intrigue Hopkinson throughout his career and influence his work for decades to come. Hopkinson first explored the idea of color theories with Harvard art lecturer and Cambridge neighbor Denman W. Ross (1853-1935). Ross' theory was based on a set palette of pre-determined colors and tones which descended in value, from light to dark, thus allowing for consistent color application across an entire canvas. Later Hopkinson would experiment with other theoretical approaches to color with fellow artist

Charles Hopkinson
Self Portrait, c.1895
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Portrait of Elinor Curtis, 1900
Oil on board
Collection of Arthur and Sylvia Shurecliff



Charles Hopkinson and Elinor Curtis, c.1901.
Hopkinson Family Collection

Carl Gordon Cutler (1873-1945) who advocated a theory based on the “spinning top” technique. For guidance in the use of geometry to enhance his compositions, during the late 1910s Hopkinson turned to Jay Hambridge (1867-1924), a Canadian painter and art theorist who promoted a proportioning system called *dynamic symmetry* which, based on the principles of the Golden Rectangle, guided artists in their efforts to invest their works with a greater sense of strength and balance.⁶ Hopkinson was not alone amongst his contemporaries in his musings over color theory and the more technical aspects of painting. Nor was he hesitant about experimenting with such theories, laying out compositions along set planes and from predetermined perspectives, using colors and combinations of colors in his paintings that formulas told him were correct, but the eye may not have.

Early in 1900, Charles Hopkinson took a studio on Park Street in the Beacon Hill section of Boston.⁷ By this time, he had already received a

smattering of portrait commissions, the earliest in 1897 to paint Episcopal minister Edward C. Cummings and his infant son Edward Estlin Cummings, later known as e. e. cummings. Other early commissions came largely from sympathetic friends and family members interested in advancing the young artist’s career and, along with his continuing interest in marine and landscape painting, set Hopkinson on his way to becoming a full-time professional artist.

With the move into his own studio, Hopkinson began publicly exhibiting his work on a regular basis from his own rooms and from galleries and museums throughout the region. While he had shown his paintings, off and on, during the 1890s, including at the National Academy of Design and at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, with the establishment of his own studio in 1900 Hopkinson’s public exposure increased significantly. From the beginning, exhibits typically included a combination of formal commissioned portraits done in oil, and landscapes and marine views done in either watercolor or oil.

In March 1903, Charles Hopkinson married for a second time to Elinor Curtis (1869-1947), a daughter of Civil War General Greely Stevenson Curtis (1830-1897) and Harriot Sumner (Appleton) Curtis (1841-1923), both of whom were prominent members of Boston society. Charles and Elinor had met in 1900 when Mrs. Curtis commissioned Hopkinson to paint her daughter’s portrait.⁸ According to one of the Hopkinsons’ grandsons, by the time the oil painting of Elinor was finished, capturing her seated on a lush green sofa



Charles and Elinor Hopkinson,
March 14, 1903.
Hopkinson Family Collection

with her arm wrapped around her dog Teaka, the courtship had progressed considerably.⁹ Elinor Curtis had nine siblings, four of them sisters who over the coming years would be painted numerous times by Hopkinson.

Although Charles Hopkinson is known to have visited Gloucester as a child during the early 1870s, it was through his marriage to Elinor Curtis that he gained a foothold in the Cape Ann art community. In 1905, following the birth of their first daughter, Elinor's mother had a summer house built for the growing Hopkinson family on the grounds of Sharksmouth, the Curtis family's summer estate in Manchester, Massachusetts. The third floor of the house was fitted out as studio for Charles. Perched high above the rocky shoreline, with views stretching from Boston to Gloucester and out over Massachusetts Bay, the house and its grounds became a sanctuary for the Hopkinson family. Sharksmouth proved a seemingly endless source of inspiration for Charles Hopkinson and is depicted in his artwork again and again, year after year.

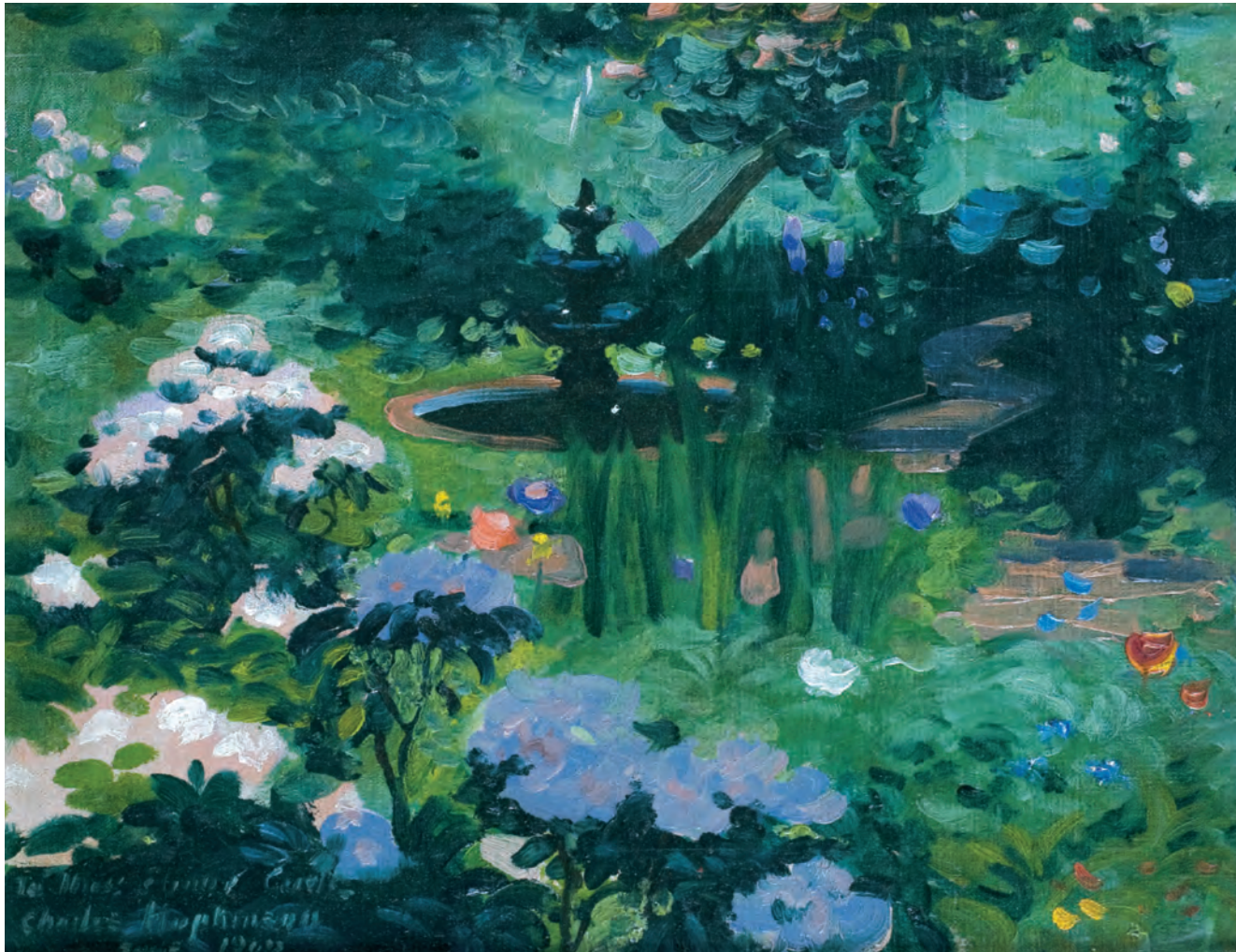
Charles Hopkinson's marriage to Elinor Curtis marked a turning point in the artist's career and, not entirely by chance, coincided with the successful launching of his career as a prolific and highly sought after portrait painter. Not only had he gained a loving wife and companion in Elinor, but also a business partner who, in addition to running a household (which by 1913 consisted of five young daughters), took charge of financial matters and tirelessly promoted her husband's talents to friends and acquaintances. As a result of Elinor's efforts and Charles' talents, the scope and range of his exhibit venues expanded steadily, commission work moved beyond family and friends, and recognition was received with increasing regularity. In 1904, working out of his Park Street studio, Hopkinson held his first solo exhibition, a show which led the press to label him "one of the ablest painters in Boston at the present time."¹⁰ In addition to the Cummings portraits done several years before, the show also included a handful of other portraits, primarily featuring children, and copies of works by Velasquez and Tintoretto which Hopkinson had done during his travels across Europe. The exhibit was rounded out by a small number of landscapes and marine views which drew particularly spirited reviews from the critics who characterized them as "direct ... full of the life, sunshine and air,



Hopkinson House at Sharksmouth, Manchester, MA, c.1905.
Hopkinson Family Collection



Charles and Elinor Hopkinson and their two eldest daughters, Harriot and Mary, c.1906.
Hopkinson Family Collection



Charles Hopkinson
The Garden, 1900
Oil on canvas
Inscribed: To Miss Elinor Curtis. Charles Hopkinson, June 1900
Private Collection

expressed in the fullness and strong veracity of the modern open-air school.”¹¹ In 1905, Hopkinson submitted two portraits to the eighth annual exhibition of the Worcester Art Museum, a show which gave him the chance to display his work alongside that of the leading artists of Philadelphia, New York and Boston. The event was hailed as “among the best exhibitions of contemporary American art in the country”¹² and featured over 220 paintings, including works by Winslow Homer, Henry B. Snell, Mary Cassatt, John Sloan and Charles C. Curran (who also served as a judge). One of the two works Hopkinson submitted, a depiction of his sister-in-law, Harriot Curtis, was praised for its “extreme brilliancy of color” and noted as one of the best works in the exhibition. Also shown in Worcester was Hopkinson’s commissioned portrait of James.

J. Storrow, Jr., the son of Boston financier James J. Storrow and Helen Storrow, a patron of the arts and a close friend of Elinor Hopkinson.¹³ The Storrow portrait took second prize in the show and was heralded as a “genuine piece of work, direct and well painted.”¹⁴ Early successes such as these not only boosted Charles Hopkinson’s confidence but also his profile in the art world.



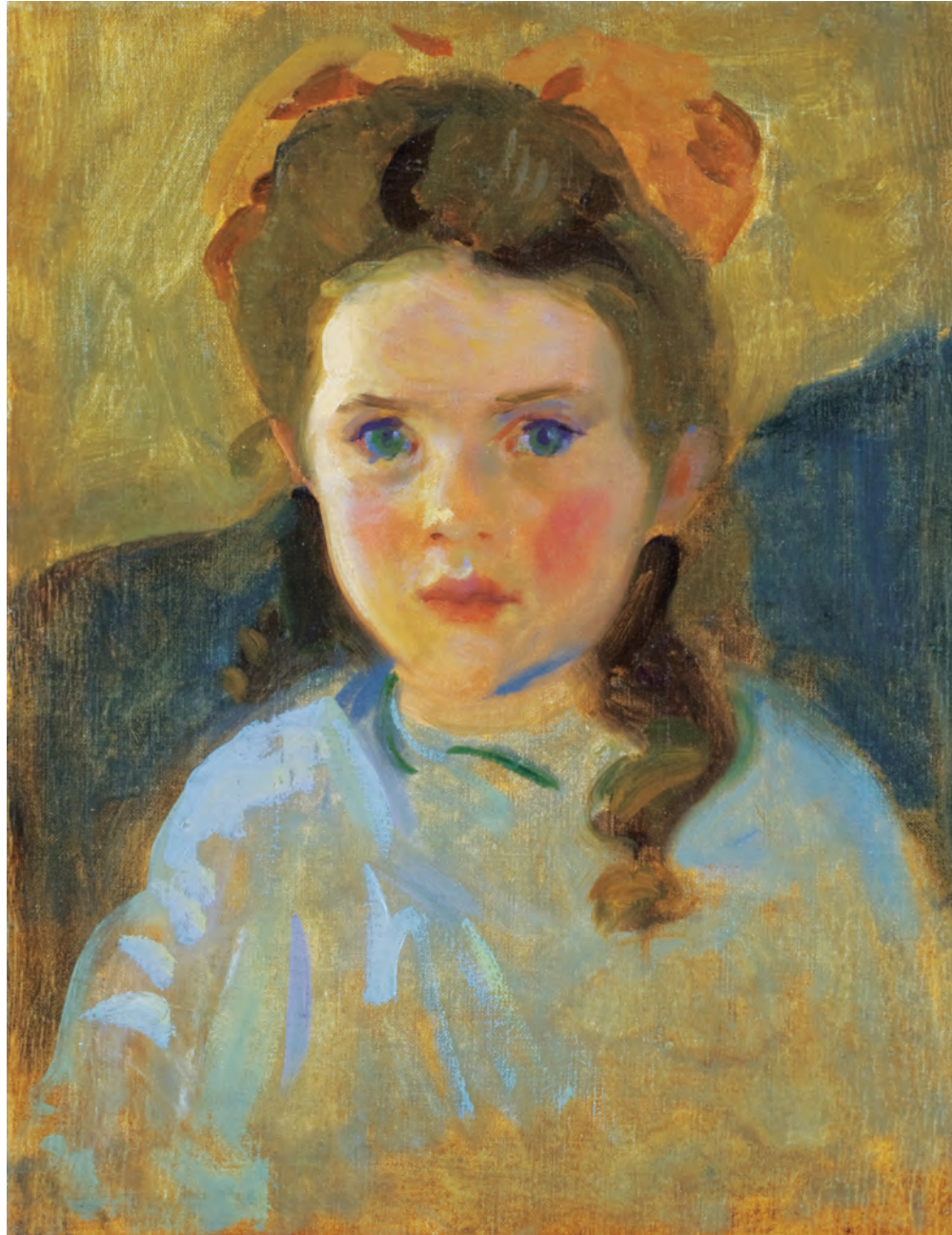
The Hopkinson and Curtis families in front of the Curtis House,
Manchester, MA, c.1910.
Hopkinson Family Collection

In 1906, Charles Hopkinson was one of the first artists to rent studio space in the newly constructed Fenway Studios on Ipswich Street in Boston's Back Bay. The building was designed and constructed following the fiery destruction of the Harcourt Building in 1904 which had housed the studios of numerous Boston artists. The Fenway complex consisted of 46 units, each featuring amenities considered essential for modern studio space: proper layout and utilities (including heating and plumbing); north light; a convenient location; and a sliding rent scale.¹⁵ While some artists would live in the building as well as work in it, making the facility a social center and an artistic one, Hopkinson used his fourth floor space, along with his Manchester studio, solely for work. Among the initial wave of artists to move into the facility with Hopkinson were several prominent members of The Boston School, a conservative group of artists most often associated with the Museum of Fine Arts. They included William Paxton, Edmund Tarbell and the husband and wife team of Lilian Westcott Hale and Philip Hale. Hopkinson maintained his Fenway Studio throughout the rest of his

Charles Hopkinson
Portrait of Margaret Curtis, c.1903
Oil on board
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Winter Landscape at Sharksmouth, c.1906
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Portrait of Katharine Sturgis, c.1908
Oil on canvas
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum



career and from most accounts gravitated towards and established friendships with the more progressive artists who also worked out of the building.

Although Fenway Studios met a majority of its tenants' needs, it did not offer a central exhibition space, leading Hopkinson to continue showing works at sites scattered throughout greater Boston, along the North Shore and at venues farther afield. In the fall of 1906, his paintings were featured in a solo exhibition at the venerable St. Botolph Club; the following year the 20th Century Club, also in Boston, exhibited his works including many done at Sharksmouth which were noted as "the best works in the show... remarkable for charm of color, as well as originality in composition."¹⁶ In the spring of 1910, Walter Kimball & Co. Gallery, also located in Boston, presented another solo show of Hopkinson's works, many of them landscapes done in Manchester in the aftermath of the "Christmas Blizzard" of 1909 which blanketed the North Shore in snow and caused extensive flooding. Among the portraits shown at Kimball & Co. that year was *The Claude Lorraine Glass*, Hopkinson's depiction of his sister-in-law Harriot Curtis which was cited for its "daring color values," particularly its greens which one critic rather oddly commented "few men would have the nerve to paint."¹⁷

As time went on, perhaps because of friendships forged at the Fenway Studios, Hopkinson began showing his work increasingly in the company of others. In the spring of 1911, he joined with Maurice B. Prendergast (1858-1924) and fellow Fenway tenant Charles Hovey Pepper (1864-1950) to exhibit paintings at The Copley Gallery on Newbury Street in Boston. Hopkinson submitted two formal portraits to the show, three landscapes which were all marine scenes, and an oil painting entitled *Arranging Flowers* which depicted his wife Elinor seated at a table with flowers and vases spread before her. The exhibition was deemed "exceptional" and Hopkinson's *Arranging Flowers* along with one of his landscapes entitled

Charles Hopkinson
The Claude Lorraine Glass, c.1908
Portrait of Harriot Summer Curtis (1881-1974)
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

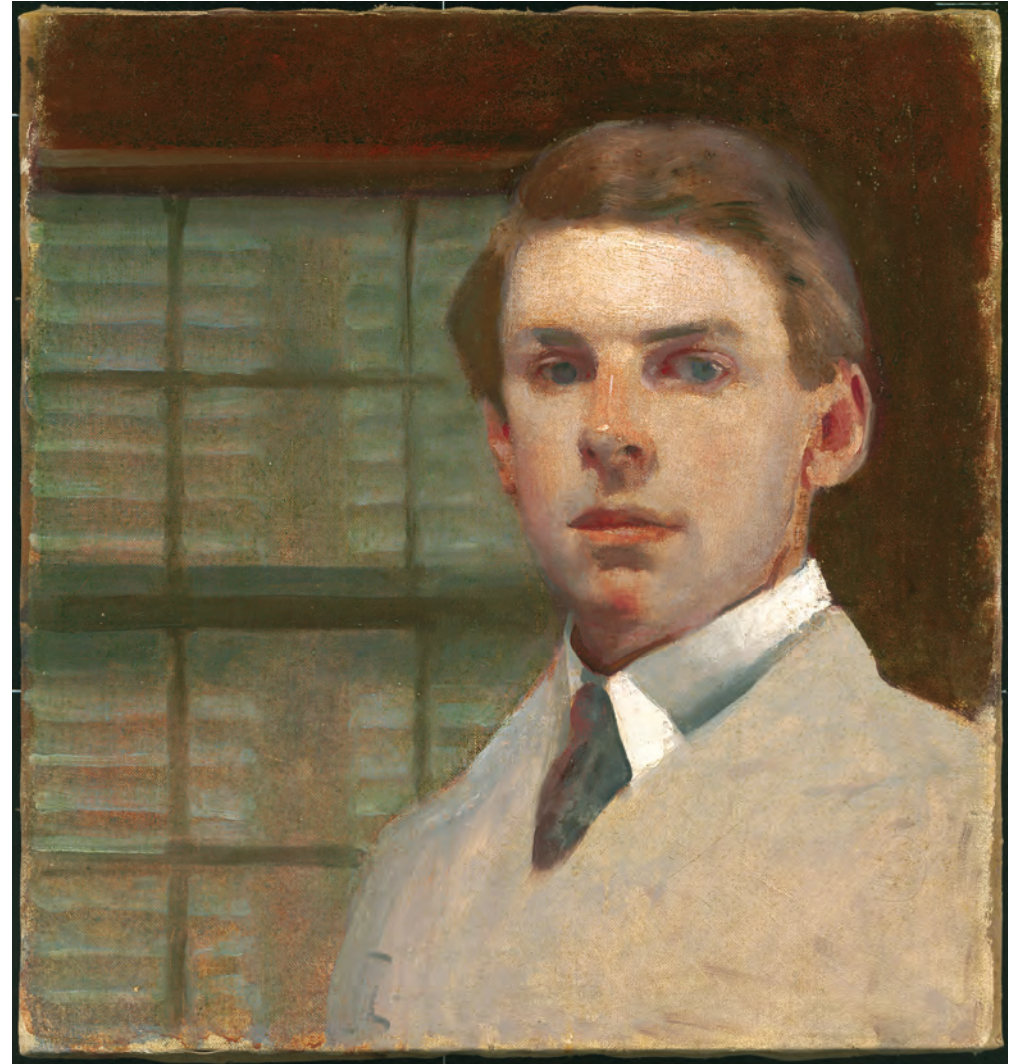


Charles Hopkinson
Group of Children, 1911
Portrait of the artist's daughters—Harriot, Mary and Isabella
Exhibited in The Armory Show, New York City, 1913
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

The Wonderful Island were singled out as being “superb in color and of great distinction in style.”¹⁸ One critic went so far as to say that although Maurice Prendergast, who included five paintings in the show including one of Salem Willows, could typically “hold his own...in any company,” in this particular exhibit Charles Hopkinson overshadowed not only Charles Pepper but Prendergast as well.¹⁹ Exhibits such as the 1911 one at The Copley Gallery and the 1910 show at Kimball & Co. were significant because of the attention they drew to Hopkinson’s paintings of his family. More animated and colorful than his earlier portraits, particularly those done on commission, works like *The Claude Lorraine Glass* and *Arranging Flowers* were heralded by critics of the day. Now, almost a century later, they continue to stand as strong, evocative works of art.

While the entire scope of Hopkinson’s work was well received by Boston art critics during these early exhibitions, it was his success as a portraitist, rather than as a landscape painter, which propelled him into the spotlight during the first quarter of the twentieth century. After a decade of producing paintings of family and friends, in 1908 Hopkinson was asked to paint a portrait of Charles W. Eliot (1834-1926), his maternal uncle, but more importantly, president of Harvard. The finished work (which was the first of no less than six Hopkinson would do of his uncle) showed Eliot in formal attire seated at his desk writing. Upon exhibition at the Boston galleries of Walter Kimball in January 1909, the finished portrait was noted as “a work of art of marked superiority.”²⁰ Together with other early portraits, including his 1914 depiction of Dr. Francis S. Watson, a faculty member at Harvard Medical School, Hopkinson’s portrait of President Eliot drew the attention of local art critics and other Harvard dignitaries desirous of having their portraits painted. Within 20 years, Hopkinson would paint more than 50 portraits connected to the Harvard community, earning him the title of “Court Painter of Harvard.”

In the years between 1908 and the late 1940s when he stopped taking commissions, Hopkinson produced more than 450 portraits including,



Charles Hopkinson
Self-Portrait, c. 1910
Oil on canvas
Collection of the National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution; gift of the artist’s daughters

by one count, portrayals of “18 university presidents, 50 university deans and professors, and many nationally known lawyers, bankers, industrialists and philanthropists.”²¹ Regarding this remarkable feat, Hopkinson once theorized that at the root of his success lay his strong belief that a portrait should “not merely represent a reflection in the mirror,” but “should exist in the world of art.”²²

During this time, and indeed throughout his life, when he was not working on commissions, Hopkinson painted self-portraits and pictures of his own family. Painting himself was something Hopkinson began doing while still an art student in the 1890s. His earliest canvases were dark and somber likely done to test theories and work through challenges. In time, like the pictures of his children which he did with increasing frequency, Hopkinson’s self-portraits would become lighter and more vibrant, his compositions more intimate and thought provoking. During the course of his life, Hopkinson produced more than 70 self-portraits, a remarkable assemblage documenting a lifetime devoted to art.

In 1913, in an event which proved to be a great boost for his reputation, Charles Hopkinson was asked to submit works to the International Exhibition of Modern Art, an invitational exhibit to be held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City. The Armory Show, as it came to be known, consisted of works by European and American artists and was organized by a group of American painters who had traveled abroad and were committed to the progressive art movement they saw there. It was the first time works by the French modernists were exhibited in this country. Among the four works Hopkinson showed was a 1911 oil on canvas of his three eldest daughters. The girls were shown in an intimate quiet scene, Harriot reclining in an armchair covered in a floral slipcover, Mary standing with pen in hand at a table draped with a richly colored cloth, and Isabella sitting on the carpet with a doll and collection of feathers. Art critic Frank Jewett Mather, who found many of the works included in The Armory Show “militant” in atmosphere, was enamored with Hopkinson’s portrait of his daughters, singling it out as a “delightful group of children, all tea-rose and pale blue.”²³



Charles Hopkinson with his painting *Three Dancing Girls*, on the lawn of the Hopkinson House at Sharksmouth, c.1918.
Hopkinson Family Collection

While The Armory Show heightened Hopkinson’s stature, it also underscored the appeal that paintings of his family, which he had done for his own enjoyment, had for public audiences. Two years after Hopkinson’s success at The Armory Show, he began work on what is considered one of his finest paintings, *Three Dancing Girls*, an oversized oil painting depicting three of his daughters dancing on the lawn of the Hopkinson house with the ocean in the background. The painting is infused with light and motion and conveys a captivating sense of spontaneity, belying the eight years it took to complete. Like many of his works, *Three Dancing Girls* was carefully composed by Hopkinson, a successful melding of his aesthetic sensibilities and his skill at adapting the various technical approaches with which he had experimented. On a visit to the Hopkinson’s Manchester home, John Singer Sargent is reported to have admired the painting which was in progress and to have made two recommendations to Hopkinson – that he add a fourth figure to the composition and that he make the figure on the



Charles Hopkinson
Three Dancing Girls, 1915-1923
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
H. H. & Her Sister, 1914
Portrait of the artist's daughters Harriot and Mary
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

right (Hopkinson's daughter Harriot) be curtsying rather than standing upright. While preliminary oil sketches reveal that he considered both of Sargent's suggestions, in the end, Hopkinson incorporated just the curtsy and omitted the fourth figure.

The same year Hopkinson began work on *Three Dancing Girls* (1915) he entered *H.H. and Her Sister* in an exhibition of contemporary American oil paintings at the Boston Art Club. The painting, which is perhaps more traditional than contemporary, portrays two of his daughters standing in the corner of an unadorned space, Harriot in the foreground holding a book in one hand while fingering a necklace she wears around her neck with the other. Slightly behind Harriot is her younger sister Mary. Meticulously composed yet sparingly adorned, the painting immediately caught the attention of art critics who labeled it "masterly...a powerful picture, original in treatment, exquisitely painted and modeled."²⁴ Hopkinson exhibited the same painting again in 1916 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and in the 1952-1953 Century Association exhibition in New York City.²⁵ With the success of these two paintings, *Three Dancing Girls* and *H.H. and Her Sister*, it was clear that while Hopkinson was heralded as one of the region's finest portrait painters, his greatest pleasure lay in painting his daughters.

In August 1916, Charles Hopkinson was again asked to submit works to an invitational exhibition and while this one did not carry the stature of The Armory Show, it opened the door to his direct involvement in the Cape Ann art community. The event was the inaugural exhibition at the newly constructed Gallery-on-the-Moors in East Gloucester. The invitation was received by Elinor Hopkinson over lunch from artists Louise Upton Brumback (1872-1929), Susan H. Bradley (1843-1928) and Margaret Redmond (1867-1948). The Gallery was built with the financial backing of William and Emmeline Atwood as a central place for artists to display their works – the first such place on Cape Ann. The Atwoods, with the help of artists like Brumback, Bradley and Redmond, selected the works of art to be shown in the opening exhibition. In a letter dated August 15, 1916 to her husband Charles, who was in New York working on a commission, Elinor Hopkinson recounted the lunchtime meeting, making it clear that

she not only thought the exhibit was a good opportunity but that she had already given thought to which paintings should be submitted:

Mrs. Brumback, Mrs. Bradley & Miss Redmond have been here to lunch & I have undertaken for you that you will send two pictures to an exhibition in the new gallery at Eastern Point, built by Mr. Atwood. Now the point is which? Mrs. Brumback thinks one portrait & one landscape – & she wanted me to tell you that it is really going to be a good show—Miss Beaux, Randall Davey, Jonas Lie, Gardner Symons, & so on – and they all act as if you were the biggest toad in the puddle...the pictures must go over on Thursday the 31st so I think you'd better come home on Wednesday the 30th to decide. Do you think Maly & Ib & the slipping snow from the other house? Or the green waves that was in Phila.? Or Hap knitting?...²⁶

In the end, Charles Hopkinson did as Louise Upton Brumback recommended and sent a portrait and a landscape to the Gallery-on-the-Moors inaugural exhibition. The landscape was entitled *An Island* and was described as "a brilliant sunlit marine."²⁷ For a portrait, which would be prominently displayed immediately alongside Frank Duveneck's *Gloucester Wharves*, Hopkinson chose a picture of his wife



Gallery-on-the-Moors inaugural exhibition, September 1916, showing Charles Hopkinson's painting *Mother and Child*, directly under the wreath to the left. Frank Duveneck's *Gloucester Wharves* is to the right. Collection of the Cape Ann Museum



and daughter, Elinor, a canvas which the year before had been shown at the National Academy of Design in New York. In reviewing the Gloucester exhibition Boston *Herald* art critic F. W. Coburn praised Hopkinson's picture of his wife and daughter, boldly asserting that if awards were being given out, he surely would receive a "gold medal for the best figure painting" in the show.²⁸ Hopkinson went on to exhibit at the Gallery-on-the-Moors the following four summers and in 1920 served on the Gallery's first official jury. Other jurors, all of whom had also been exhibitors, included painters Jane Peterson, Paul Connoyer and Henry B. Snell, and sculptors Anna Vaughn Hyatt and Charles Grafly.

Although he exhibited with the Gloucester Society of Artists during the summer of 1923 and maintained friendships with a number of Cape Ann artists over the years including Leon Kroll, Paul Manship and Walker Hancock, Charles Hopkinson's direct involvement in the Cape Ann art scene did not extend far beyond 1920. With portrait commissions coming in at a steady pace and galleries and museums throughout the region exhibiting his works, Hopkinson's attentions were drawn elsewhere. Despite this, Hopkinson's place among Cape Ann artists had been secured – a place alongside the very best men and women to have worked in the area.

During the summer of 1919, while three of his paintings were hanging at the Gallery-on-the-Moors in Gloucester, Charles Hopkinson traveled to Paris as part of an eight member team of artists selected to create portraits of delegates to the Versailles Peace Conference, convened at the end of World War I. Hopkinson's inclusion in this project proved a major boost for his career and gave him a prominence few other artists on the North

Charles Hopkinson

Portrait of Mary Hopkinson, c.1918

This painting appeared on the cover of *Town & Country* magazine on February 1, 1926.

Oil on canvas

Collection of Mary Clarke



Charles Hopkinson working on the portrait of his daughter Mary in the living room of the Hopkinson House at Sharksmouth, c.1918. Hopkinson Family Collection

could devote to sitting for the artist. In 1921, upon completion, the 23 Peace Treaty portraits were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. A review of the show at the time of its premiere singled out Hopkinson's depictions of Bratianu and Pasic for their "strong contrasts...elaboration of decoration and brilliancy of color" while his portrait of Prince Saionji Kimmochi was praised for its "simplicity of color and line."²⁹ After closing in New York, the exhibit made a two year tour around the country before becoming part of what is now the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. While many critics, particularly those working out of New York, found most of the Peace Treaty portraits uninspiring, Hopkinson's three works received recognition and praise, particularly from the Boston *Herald's* F. W. Coburn who hailed his work as a "triumph."³⁰

Portrait commissions from prominent citizens came quickly in the wake of

Shore enjoyed during their lifetimes. The other artists selected for the project were amongst the most esteemed of their day: Cecilia Beaux, Edmund Tarbell, Joseph DeCamp, John Johansen, Jean MacLane, Douglas Volk and Irving Wiles. Hopkinson's assignments were Prince Saionji Kimmochi of Japan; Ionel Bratianu, the premier of Romania; and Nicola Pasic, the Serbian premier. Hopkinson enjoyed the project, remembering years later that his three subjects were among the less prominent delegates to the Conference and as such had fewer constraints on the time they

the Peace Treaty exhibition, and along with Harvard's seemingly insatiable desire for portraits, kept Hopkinson busy throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Careful records kept by his wife Elinor track her husband's work (and his income), revealing that 1929, the eve of the Great Depression, was the peak of Hopkinson's success in terms of commission work. In the span of just 12 months she handled funds related to the production of 21 portraits including those of Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison, Charles A. Richmond, president of Union College, and George Eastman, founder of

Eastman Kodak Company. In coming years, additional commissions would be received to paint Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1930 and 1931, former President Calvin Coolidge in 1932, and George Blumenthal, president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1933. In addition to commissions, Elinor Hopkinson's carefully kept records show that during this time Charles Hopkinson sold an occasional watercolor, gave painting lessons (privately and for many years at the Museum School and the Child-Walker School, both in Boston), served on juries and lectured on art at area museums. Hopkinson's busy work load, along with his family's wealth, saw him through the Depression, a period during which many other artists fell on hard times. In fact, in the spring of 1938, when an exhibition of artwork created under the umbrella of the Federal Art Project of Massachusetts opened at the Federal Art Gallery in Boston, rather than being an exhibitor, Charles Hopkinson and his wife were noted as being "patrons."³¹



Charles Hopkinson, c.1920. Hopkinson Family Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Five in the Afternoon, c.1926
Oil on canvas
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Bathing Place at Sharksmouth, c.1920s
Watercolor on paper
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

While few would argue that the basis of Charles Hopkinson's career and his reputation rests on his success as a portrait painter, his watercolor landscapes, which tie him most closely to the Cape Ann art scene, stand as a remarkable body of work, "intimate, luminous delights – untrammelled expressions of his 'ecstasy and awe' in the presence of natural beauty."³²

Watercolor was a medium that Hopkinson experimented with and enjoyed throughout his career and like the many pictures he painted of his wife and children, they were labors of love, exhibited often but rarely sold. Working outdoors with rapid, broken brushstrokes, Hopkinson's watercolors are direct and spontaneous, fresh reactions to the scene around him. While his compositions can seem deceptively simple, as in the case of many of his works done at Sharksmouth, each was thoughtfully conceived and executed with careful attention to capturing a sense of depth and perspective. Foregrounds are frequently defined by the rugged shoreline, a windswept tree, the edge of the piazza jutting off the house. Backgrounds are dominated by swirling ocean waters, the sun-drenched sky and the islands dotting the Manchester coastline. In his watercolors Hopkinson's focus is on color, transparent and opaque hues, colors that complement each other and colors that clash. Frequently, in a manner reminiscent of some of Twachtman's work, Hopkinson left portions of his paper untouched, purposely making blank spaces part of his composition. Hopkinson often noted that his work in watercolor "invigorated him," freeing him from the studio and the demands of creating paintings to satisfy others.

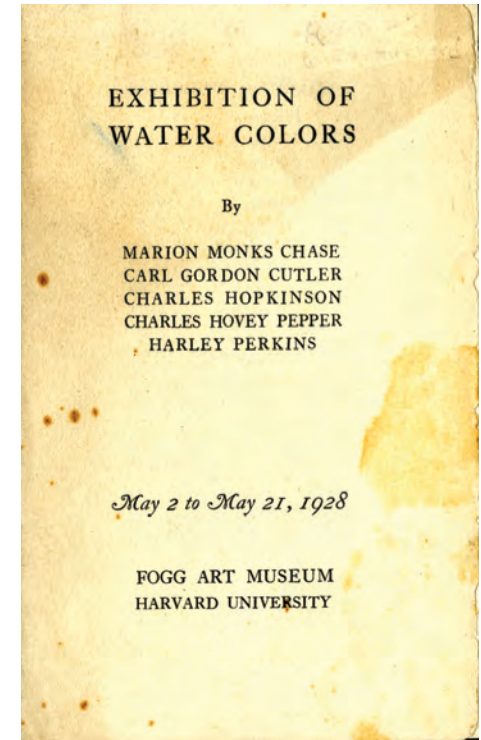
The contrast between Hopkinson's commissioned portraits and his watercolors is startling. Portraits were all done in the studio. Their colors are muted, the light is dim, and the settings are carefully composed and frequently formal. By contrast, his watercolors, virtually all of which were done outside, are infused with light and motion. Rather than laboring to capture precise details as he did with his portraits, in his watercolors Hopkinson worked quickly, distilling scenes down to their essence. In an interview in *Time* magazine in the late 1940s, Hopkinson commented that in his watercolors he was "concerned with the flow of line in a mountain or a tree – the gesture of the thing" and that to capture it, he worked faster than many painters, using rapid strokes and vibrant colors. While some of

his watercolors can at times seem almost abstract, Hopkinson "being a sentimentalist," always made certain that his technique and enthusiasm did not prevent viewers from experiencing the same pleasure he did in viewing nature.³³

Critics and commentators were quick to acknowledge Hopkinson's "two widely differing styles."³⁴ Some theorized that one style complemented the other, that the confines of commission portrait painting were balanced by the freedom offered by watercolors, that watercolors gave the artist the opportunity to advance new subject matter with "explorative vigor."³⁵ And while some were at a loss to explain how an artist could create such diverse work, many lavished praise on his watercolors, including this commentator who viewed the artist's work in a New York show in the early 1920s:

Mr. Hopkinson's water colors are spontaneous, felicitous ...broad statements of moments along the Manchester shore when color and light enveloped her headlands and shores with prismatic beauty ... (he) instinctively creates color harmonies of distinction...He brings a strong sense of essentials into these free renditions of nature and suggests often the dashing line of the Japanese print maker, Hokusai, who summarized so succinctly his native landscape....³⁶

During the mid-1920s, after exhibiting the range of his works en masse for years, Hopkinson began showing just his watercolors with a group of simi-



Exhibition notice from a show of watercolors by The Boston Five held at the Fogg Art Museum, May 1928.
Hopkinson Family Collection



Sharksmouth Tunnel, undated
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection

larly minded progressive artists who came to be known as “The Boston Five.” In addition to Hopkinson, the group included Marion Monks Chase (1874-1957), Carl Gordon Cutler (1873-1945), Charles Hovey Pepper (1864-1950), and Harley M. Perkins (1883-1964). Like Hopkinson, each member of the group had, by the 1920s, earned a respectable reputation in the art community, and, perhaps most importantly, each used the medium of watercolor, rather than oil, for their purposefully modernist work. Pepper, Perkins and Cutler maintained work space at the Fenway Studios along with Charles Hopkinson at various points in their careers.

The Five held their first exhibition in 1924 at the Boston Art Club where Hopkinson had successfully displayed *H. H. and Her Sister* almost ten years before.³⁷ The Club was one of the earliest organizations in Boston to open its doors to modern art and in 1917, in a break from its conservative past, appointed Charles Hovey Pepper head of its art committee and Charles Hopkinson and Carl Cutler as members of the exhibition committee. After testing the waters by inviting several progressive artists from outside Boston to exhibit their works at the Club, in 1924 Hopkinson and The Boston Five staged their own exhibition, referring to themselves as a “Society of Water Color Painters.” The fact that each of the artists was already known within Boston art circles meant that, despite their skepticism, critics and viewers could not ignore the new direction the group was taking. Writing in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, art critic W. H. Downes called the show’s opening “auspicious” and the group members “venture-seeking seekers for new truth, fearless explorers of uncharted regions.” Of Hopkinson, Downes went on to say that his “sense of light, color, movement...is unexcelled.”³⁸ In coming years, The Five showed their works together frequently including exhibits at the Arden Gallery in New York late in 1924 and at Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum in the spring of 1928. Although their individual styles were different, they shared the common goal of promoting modern art in Boston.

Although Boston’s art community was in general slow to embrace modern art, especially when compared to New York, during the 1920s through the efforts of The Boston Five and others interest in more progressive forms of artwork began to emerge in the city and throughout the region. Between



Charles Hopkinson and family at the Hopkinson House at Sharksmouth, 1931. To the right, being painted, is the artist’s daughter Elinor. To the left, his daughter Mary and wife Elinor.
Hopkinson Family Collection

1927 and 1936 interest had grown to such a level that modern art was institutionalized in Boston through the establishment of several new art organizations. They included the Boston Society of Independent Artists, established in 1927 with Charles Hopkinson serving on the founding board of directors; the New England Society of Contemporary Art, founded in 1928 with Hopkinson as its first president; and in 1936, the Boston Museum of Modern Art, which evolved into the Institute of Contemporary Art. On Cape Ann, a similar institutionalization occurred with the founding of the Gloucester Society of Artists in 1922, a group which in 1948 evolved into the Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists and which throughout its existence maintained a free and open exhibition policy, never relying on the services of a jury.

During the 1940s and into the ’50, as Charles Hopkinson moved through his seventies and into his eighties, he was honored with several solo exhibitions throughout the region featuring both his portraits and his watercolor paintings. In the spring of 1942, the Addison Gallery of American Art featured Hopkinson’s works as part of their “contemporary New England Artists” series, designed to bring audiences “the work of ... artists who have



Charles Hopkinson
Manchester, The Nut Tree, c.1930
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Three Scudding Sailboats, c. 1935
Watercolor on paper
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum



Charles Hopkinson at The Fenway Studios, c.1940.
Hopkinson Family Collection

already attained distinction in their profession.”³⁹ Literature accompanying the show pointed out that although most of the works on display were done “during leisure moments,” they vividly reflected Hopkinson’s “mastery of the medium...(and his) superb command of color.”⁴⁰ In 1945, Vose Galleries of Boston held the first of many exhibitions featuring Hopkinson’s work, and in 1952, portraits and watercolors were shown at the

Century Association in New York City. The Institute of Contemporary Art honored Hopkinson with a retrospective in 1953. In 1965, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, organized a show which featured watercolors, interspersed with no less than 12 self-portraits. Later the same year, an exhibition was also held at Saint-Gaudens Museum in Cornish, New Hampshire.

Following the death of his wife Elinor in 1947, Charles Hopkinson stopped doing commission portraits but continued to write and lecture on art and traveled to stay with his daughters and their families as far distant as New Zealand. As the years went by, Hopkinson never lost touch with Manchester, the place he lived so much of his life. Nor did he stop painting—watercolors from the terrace at Sharksmouth and from his travels to other areas and oil paintings of his grandchildren as they came along. In fact, he continued to paint right up until his death in October 1962. As noted by friend and colleague Gardner Cox, “his daughter Ibby would put up his sketching easel on the terrace of his beloved Sharksmouth in Manchester, and he would huddle in his chair and once again pay homage to the beauty of that place, that coast, that sea he had so long loved.”⁴¹

Throughout his life, from most accounts, Charles Hopkinson enjoyed the privilege of living his life according to his own plan. Born with the proper temperament and a curiosity which kept him open to new ideas, endowed with an excellent education and training, and blessed with a supportive family, Hopkinson’s life and his chosen career unfolded without a hitch. Writing to his daughters shortly after his death, Manchester neighbor and fellow artist Katherine Lane Weems (1899-1989) summed up Hopkinson’s life this way: “Seen as a whole, your father led a life which was probably about as perfect as could be wished for an artist – or anyone for that matter...in a setting of great natural beauty, surrounded by an enchanting family, loved, understood, and admired...”⁴²

Sometime around 1920, while on a day trip along the North Shore, John Singer Sargent paid a visit to friend and fellow artist Charles Hopkinson. Standing together on the wind-swept promontory at Sharksmouth, with Hopkinson and his family surrounding him and the ocean ever present, Sargent is reputed to have asked, “Charles, what right have you to live in Paradise?” *Paradise indeed.*

~ Martha Oaks

Curator, Cape Ann Museum



The Hopkinson family at Sharksmouth, 1944.
Hopkinson Family Collection



Charles Hopkinson
Midday Sun Dazzle over the Water, undated
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection

Endnotes

- ¹ Arthur A. Shurcliff, *The Artist and his Wife: The Lives of Charles Sydney Hopkinson and his wife, Elinor Curtis Hopkinson*, (Manuscript, 2008).
- ² Charles Hopkinson, *My Life as an Artist*, an autobiographical sketch written in 1951 by Hopkinson “in hope that some of my descendants may find it interesting.” Hopkinson’s daughter Joan Shurcliff and her husband William established an informal collection of Hopkinson papers including an inventory of nearly 2000 portraits and landscapes, photographs, reviews, essays and correspondence. The collection, hereafter referred to as SC, remains in the possession of the Shurcliff family.
- ³ Charles S. Hopkinson, *My Career as an Artist written for my Children and Grandchildren*. A handwritten, earlier version of *My Life as an Artist*, noted above. (SC)
- ⁴ Writing to his daughter Joan Hopkinson Shurcliff in 1947, Charles Hopkinson recounted what was probably his first visit to Cape Ann, a sojourn which occurred in 1873 when he was just a child. “I can remember a long walk across the whole of Eastern Point to the sea the surf when I was 4 years old and we boarded at Niles’s Beach (when you dip down from the town). I can this minute see the high bush blueberry bushes towering over my head. It was all a wilderness then ...” (SC)
- ⁵ See note 3.
- ⁶ A heavily worn copy of *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* by Jay Hambridge is part of Charles Hopkinson’s personal library.
- ⁷ A. Shurcliff, op .cit., ch.4, p.3. Shurcliff dates Hopkinson’s taking of studio space at 5 Park Street to February 1900.
- ⁸ Author’s interview with Arthur Shurcliff, a grandson of the artist, April 19, 2009.
- ⁹ A. Shurcliff, op.cit., ch. 4, p.4-5.
- ¹⁰ “Mr. Hopkinson’s Studio Exhibition,” 1903 newspaper clipping. (SC).
- ¹¹ “A Boston Portrait Exhibit,” newspaper clipping attached to a card announcing the opening of the January 1904 exhibit at Hopkinson’s Park Street studio. (SC).
- ¹² “The Fine Arts: Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Worcester Art Museum,” 1905 newspaper review. (SC).
- ¹³ Helen O. Storrow (1864-1944) was a close friend of Elinor Curtis Hopkinson and the financial backer of the Saturday Evening Girls Club, an early 20th century organization which grew out of the North Bennet Street Industrial School and was devoted to giving poor women a chance to better their lives, intellectually and artistically, through the study of ceramics. In 1907, Storrow had two building erected in the Wingersheek section of Gloucester, one for her own use and the second as a “vacation home” for young ladies from the School.
- ¹⁴ See note 13.
- ¹⁵ Nancy Allyn Jarzombek, “Fenway Studios, The Evolution of an Artists’ Community in Boston,” in Nancy Allyn Jarzombek, *Mary Bradish Titcomb and her Contemporaries* (Vose Galleries, 1998), pp.23-54.
- ¹⁶ “Hopkinson’s Pictures at 20th Century Club,” 1907 exhibit review by John Nutting. (SC).
- ¹⁷ “Charles Hopkinson Showing Portraits, Marines and Landscapes” an undated review of Hopkinson’s solo exhibition at the galleries of Walter Kimball & Co., 19 Arlington Street, Boston, March 28 through April 9, 1910. (SC).
- ¹⁸ “The Fine Arts: Hopkinson, Pepper and Prendergast Joint Exhibition,” newspaper clipping, author unknown. (SC).
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ “New Portrait of Charles W. Eliot,” a January 7, 1909 newspaper clipping. (SC).
- ²¹ Joan Hopkinson Shurcliff and William A. Shurcliff, *Portraits by Charles Hopkinson: An Informal Catalog*, February 1991 draft. p.1.
- ²² Charles Hopkinson, “The Portrait Painter and his Subject” in *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1955, p.72-75.
- ²³ Leah Lipton, *Charles Hopkinson: Pictures from a New England Past*. Danforth Museum, 1989 exhibition catalog, p.11.
- ²⁴ “Exhibition at the Art Club of American Work – Some Vigorous Landscapes and Striking Portraits Shown,” newspaper clipping, April 1, 1915. (SC).
- ²⁵ See note 21.
- ²⁶ Letter from Elinor Hopkinson, who was in Manchester, to Charles Hopkinson, who was in Long Island, New York, dated August 15,1916. (Arthur Shurcliff archives).
- ²⁷ “Gallery on Moors showing of 74 Paintings and 22 Pieces of Sculpture from Studios Along the North Shore,” Boston Advertiser newspaper article dated September 7, 1916. (SC).
- ²⁸ “Gloucester’s First Summer Art Show has a Brilliant Opening,” F. W. Coburn in *The Sunday Herald*, Boston, September 10, 1916. (SC).
- ²⁹ “Peace Paintings on Exhibit Here: Allied and American Leaders at Versailles Shown at Metropolitan Museum.” Undated newspaper clipping. (SC).
- ³⁰ Ibid, page 12
- ³¹ Exhibit pamphlet, *Federal Art Project of Massachusetts*, exhibition opening at the Federal Art Gallery, 50 Beacon Street, Boston, April 5, 1938. (SC)
- ³² Gardner Cox, “Charles Hopkinson, 1869-1962,” from *The Saturday Club*, 1957-1986 by T. B. Adams.
- ³³ “Finding the Fine Things,” article in *Time*, November 1, 1948.
- ³⁴ “Master Portrait Painter Shows His Other Talents” by William Germain Dooley, in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 6, 1937. (SC).
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Undated (c.1922/1923) newspaper clipping in Shurcliff archives reviewing a show of watercolors in New York that included works by Hopkinson. (SC).
- ³⁷ For this initial exhibit, the work of John Goss (1886-1963) was also included.
- ³⁸ “New Society Water-Colorists,” by W. H. Downes. *Boston Evening Transcript*, Saturday, November 8, 1924. page. 8. (SC).
- ³⁹ See exhibitions pamphlet in Shurcliff archives.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Cox, op.cit. p.58.
- ⁴² Katherine Lane Weems handwritten letter to all five of Charles Hopkinson’s daughters, dated October 24, 1962. (SC).



Charles Hopkinson
Looking West from the Hopkinson House, c. 1950
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection

An Artist at Work: Charles Hopkinson Portrait Painter

It is amazing that an artist with the skills of Charles Hopkinson has been so little known for so long a time. The reasons for this are many: his avoidance of the New York scene; his knack for finding work through word-of-mouth; his hesitancy about self promotion. Whenever Hopkinson's work did appear in an exhibition, however, it was universally praised.

Over the years, Hopkinson has had some fine commentators most notably Leah Lipton who was very interested in the artist's use of color theories, an interest the artist shared with his contemporaries including George Bellows.¹ Hopkinson was particularly taken by Denman Ross' work, postulating the theory that the great painters of the past all worked from pre-mixed palettes.² Hopkinson believed that "Ross was the first man hereabouts to formulate the colors of the spectrum into a language and system which could be taught."³ As Ross saw it, the Masters took the standard pigments of their time and made a series of related color mixes on their palettes. They painted their pictures from these premixed mounds. As a result, realism of color was sacrificed to unity of color. This is one of the points that particularly appealed to Hopkinson. Whether he used the approach scientifically or emotionally, he felt that a good "color scheme" was more important than literal truth: "the painter should not try to reproduce the colors he sees in the sitter."

Some of the complications of Denman Ross' ideas are daunting and when Gardner Cox asked Hopkinson's friend and protégé, Peter Pezzati, to explain the method, Pezzati wrote that Hopkinson's process was "too complex" to talk about in a letter.⁴ As an example of the possible complications involved in creating such a palette, we can imagine Hopkinson's starting to "fix" his palette by first mixing a color that would act as the principle light in the painting. According to the system, he then found the exact scientific complement of the color which would be used in the shadows. With a color like red this is an easy process as we all learned when using the color wheel in school, the complement of red is green. However, with a more subtle color, Hopkinson could find the complement by putting the mix on a disk and leaving the perimeter unpainted. When the disk is spun quickly, the eye works in

such a way that the complement appears in the unpainted area. This method could be used to determine the other principle light and shadow colors of the painting. Though a rather mechanical process, it led to some interesting results, particularly in Hopkinson's self portraits in which a fixed palette often led to extraordinarily modern-looking compositions.

Hopkinson was not always this scientific and there are much more accessible ways to approach his work. As he put it, "my chief theory is that a portrait should exist in the world of art and should not resemble a reflection in a mirror."⁵ It becomes — in words that could equally apply to Hopkinson's daring watercolors — a description rather than a facsimile. In short, there is more to a painting than subject matter: "no picture is really good which has not the element of design." For Hopkinson, design elements are (1) a pattern of shapes, (2) masses and contrasts of light and dark, (3) harmonies and contrasts of colors, (4) gestures and (5) lines, which would include edges and "a geometrical pattern in harmony with the dimensions of the canvas." It is the interplay of each of these elements in Hopkinson's work which makes them fun to look at and at the same time valuable learning tools for the student. A careful study of a good Hopkinson sketch is a fine way to learn how to paint a head.

Hopkinson was articulate in explaining his approach to painting. Take a "pretty" face, for example: what counts, he says, is that the "curve" of the girl's nose is the "the reverse of her chin and jawbone but the repetition of the curve of her eyebrow." Add curls which "repeat the curve of her nose," and you have much of the explanation for the "pleasure of the sight of her." Similarly, when doing a commissioned portrait, Hopkinson sought out and exaggerated — he called it doing a subtle "caricature" — the elements that defined the pose: "a crossed leg repeating the diagonal line of a shoulder against the light background" or the "tilt of a head echoing in the reverse direction the gesture of the hand, or the slant of the body."

These elements work subtly in Hopkinson's finished paintings and are barely discernable. However, he left behind a hoard of preliminary sketches in

which his attempts to analyze his subject in a way that was “as forceful and simple” as possible can be clearly seen. Hopkinson notes that his sitters sometimes rebelled at the sight of the caricature—like studies, one notable refusing to sit if the artist planned to paint “a thing like this.” As a learning tool, we can manipulate these images in order to emphasize the dynamic construction of the painting. Eliminating the distracting color and exaggerating the value contrasts, may lose many subtleties of edge and modulation. But the aim is to clarify the most obvious of Hopkinson’s methods — his innumerable other fine points are left for the viewer to discover by studying and enjoying his work.

As an example, by mechanically adjusting the exposure of his portrait sketch of a young woman (figure I), we can easily see how Hopkinson dramatized the crispness and sharpness of the young face by reducing his dark, descriptive notes to an absolute minimum. The rhythmic but expressive curves of the hair, eyebrows, ears, the shadows around the collar, and the shadow under the chin, all echo each other — and are emphasized by the straight, contrasting accents along the neck and the whisps of hair at her ears. These straight lines, taken with the brusque outlining of her hair and the forceful symmetry of the pose, add strength to the sketch and suggest the presence of an athletic young woman. All this described with nothing but a bit of dark at the corner of a mouth, one nostril, and two dots for eyes.

In his two sketch portraits of older academics (figures II & III), Hopkinson uses different descriptive symbols. In figure II, the artist characterizes the face of a rounder, older and decidedly less athletic sitter. Everything in the face is circular: the forehead, the chin, the direction of the mustache, the lid of the eye, the light-struck cheeks, the line of the glasses, even the round eye-balls. These shapes in themselves give us a sense of the plumpness of the sitter by ignoring the “accidental reflections” that Hopkinson says often camouflage the important forms of the head. The sitter in figure III has quite a different sort of body type and Hopkinson exaggerates the difference by using sharp angular lines, describing the features with a few crisp brushstrokes around the eyes, a slash under the nose, another longer one to define the mouth, and then sharp straight edges around the outline of the head. These contrasting sketches illustrate Hopkinson’s belief that it is not the job of



Figure I: Oil sketch of Martha Bigelow Eliot painted by Charles Hopkinson in 1925. Private Collection



Figure II: Oil sketch of Edward Channing painted by Charles Hopkinson in 1929. Private Collection

the painter to “copy” what is before him; on the contrary, he must “re-create” his subject. He must choose from “among the innumerable characteristics of what he is looking at” only those which he can use “to make his picture.”

As a final, and even more striking example of the importance Hopkinson placed on rhythm, movement, repetition and the other elements which give a work vitality and make it part of the world of art, we can look at one of his self-portraits (figure IV). Hopkinson painted self-portraits all his life, doing



Figure III: Oil sketch of Marcus A. Coolidge painted by Charles Hopkinson around 1938. Private Collection

his last at age 91. Here he was free to experiment to his heart's content. Most of these extremely interesting works revolve around problems posed and questions answered. By again manipulating the exposure, we can exaggerate the way in which a strong side-light gives the artist an excuse for a virtuosic juggling of circular rhythms. Hair, chin, ears, and eyeglasses—the movements are both musical and visceral. He avoids any sense of softness, however, by the sharp outlining of the head and the crisp straightness of the collar, neck,



Figure IV: Charles Hopkins Self-Portrait. Private Collection

nose, and angular shadow on the forehead. Even more tellingly, he adds brusque, right angles—like something out of Franz Kline—to the background. These lines contradict the dominant circular rhythms and add further strength to the characterization.

Charles Hopkins's astuteness at capturing the essence of his subject, his ability to go beyond the facsimile and to create an expressive description of his subject, these skills are evident in everything he does, both in his portrait

work and even more obviously in his watercolors. Our discussion touches on only the most basic of his methods. His work, effortless as it often appears, rewards close scrutiny. As for his own view of his work and what he sought to accomplish, Hopkins was able to summarize his thoughts in the same straightforward way he summarized the most important design elements in a head: "To create a sensation of life. To do a first rate job, to vie with the great and splendid painters of the past, to try to make beauty," and most importantly, "to try to find new ways of doing it."

~ Charles Movalli

Charles Movalli is a well known painter, teacher and author with a passion for Cape Ann art.

¹ Leah Lipton, *Charles Hopkins: Pictures from a New England Past*, exhibition catalog, Danforth Museum January 29, 1988.

² Denman Ross, *On Painting and Drawing*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912.

³ Unless otherwise stated, all comments on Hopkins's method comes from his seminal article "An Artist at Work," *The Examiners Club*, October 1947. This and other Hopkins material was supplied by the family through Charles Shurcliff, an artist and grandson of the painter who generously opened the family archives for this project.

⁴ Peter Pezzati, letter to Gardner Cox, April 8, 1964. (Shurcliff archives).

⁵ The following quotes are from "The Portrait Painter and his Subject," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October, 1955.

View From the Terrace: A Photographic Essay by Steve Rosenthal, 2009



A view from the terrace of the Hopkinson house at Sharksmouth.



Two views of Charles Hopkinson's studio at Sharksmouth.



Window at the Curtis house at Sharksmouth.



Another view from the terrace.



Sharksmouth, Manchester, MA.

Steve Rosenthal, a resident of Manchester, MA, is one of the region's most well regarded architectural photographers.

Cover photo:
Charles Hopkinson, *Seascape*, 1957, Watercolor on paper
Collection of the Cape Ann Museum

Steve Rosenthal photographs ©2009 Steve Rosenthal



Support for this catalogue was provided through a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which promotes excellence, access, education and diversity in the arts, humanities and interpretive sciences, in order to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents and to contribute to the economic vitality of our communities.



CAPE ANN MUSEUM

ART HISTORY CULTURE

27 PLEASANT STREET GLOUCESTER MA 01930