



All About the Sunshine

In *Lady in a Garden*, Frederick Carl Frieseke nearly dissolves the material world in a flurry of colorful brushwork.

IF HIS PAINTINGS are any indication, Frederick Carl Frieseke's existence was dedicated primarily to watching women take tea and loll about, clothed or otherwise. His was the domestic world of the boudoir and garden. From 1906 to 1919, the

garden that featured prominently in Frieseke's work was at his summer home in the French village of Giverny, next door to Claude Monet.

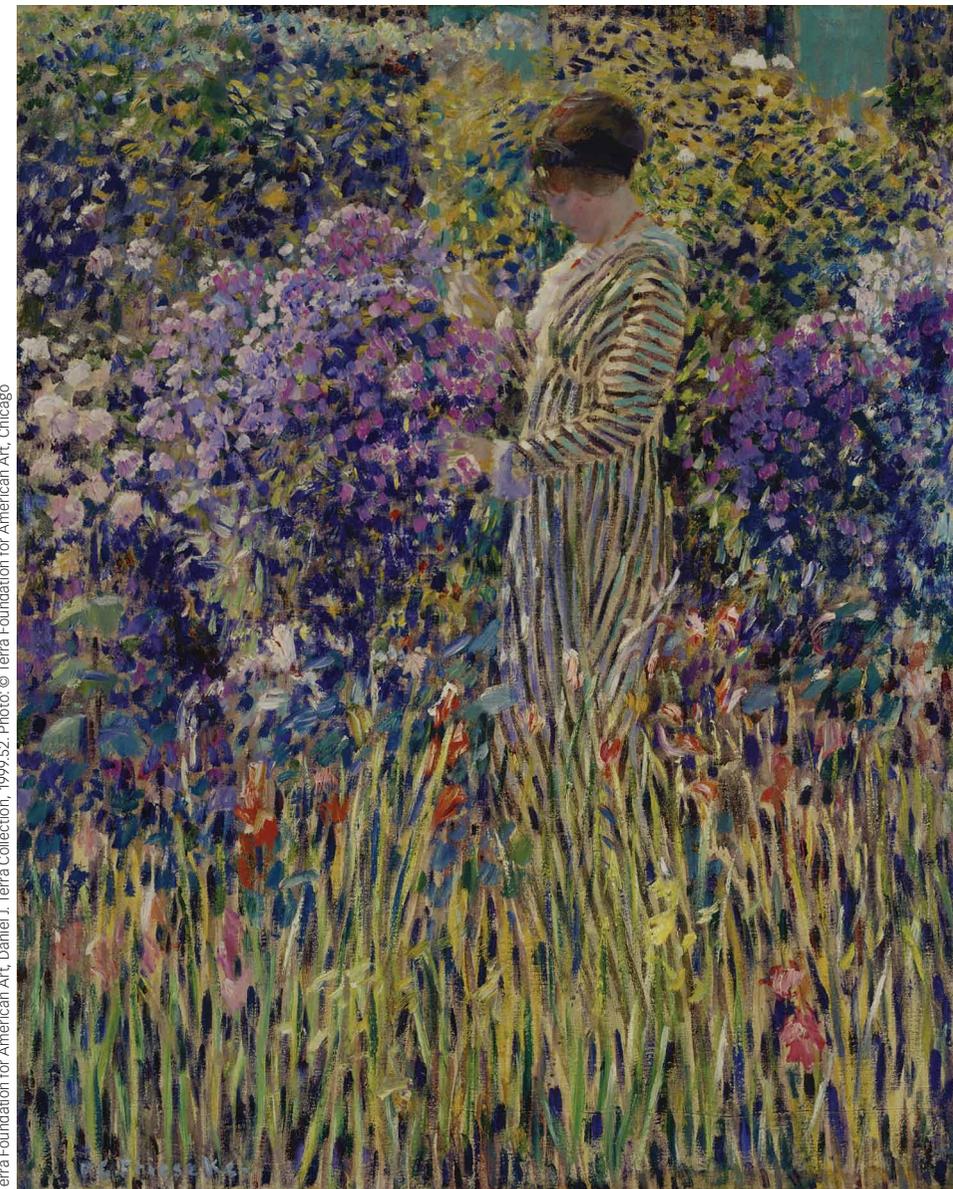
Frieseke was very well trained, having studied first at the Art Institute of Chicago, then the Art

Students League of New York. After a few years he moved to Paris, enrolling at the Académie Julian and the Académie Carmen, the latter run by James Whistler. Upon leaving school, an American expatriate specializing in the figure had two

basic stylistic choices: he or she could continue in an academic mode that relied on careful drawing and solid modeling or try the Impressionistic technique, in which forms are dissolved in light (this was, in effect, a continuation of the Renaissance argument between Florentines and Venetians—of drawing versus color). A compromise between these approaches was not always successful: Childe Hassam, perhaps the greatest American Impressionist, encountered unfortunate results when he inserted poorly drawn nudes into his landscapes.

This was not a problem for Frieseke. After nearly seven years in art school—take note, impatient students—his real training began once he struck out on his own. With time his skill in painting the figure increased and, even though his vision was indebted to Impressionism, he admitted only to having

LEFT: *Lady in a Garden* (oil on canvas, 31½x25) by Frederick Frieseke



Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1999.52. Photo: © Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago

been influenced by Renoir. He was adaptable, sometimes painting the figure as a sensual, solid form indoors; sometimes allowing the body to retain its solidity in an outdoor setting; yet other times dissolving it into sun-dappled surroundings en plein air.

Lady in a Garden is one of Frieseke's best canvases of the last type. The model is nearly engulfed in a stream of painted dots and dashes, emerging like a striped extension of the tall grass—a canny design. The painting is based on a color contrast of yellow-green and violet, broken up and invigorated by red, pink and white blossoms. This flurry of color and brushwork culminates in the woman's indistinct portrait, her skin tone steeped in reflected light and crowned by her warm red-brown hair and black hairband.

Frieseke moved to France, in part because the environment was congenial to an artist who wished to paint nude models out of doors, something that couldn't be done back home in the States. He befriended other artists who hailed from the Midwest, and several of them found homes in Giverny, where they painted the same themes in a similar style. Frieseke, along with Richard E. Miller, Louis Ritman and Lawton Parker, constituted the second generation of American painters to descend upon Monet's village. Monet didn't particularly like all the new arrivals, but Frieseke's wife spoke French, and that facilitated congenial relations between the households.

For Frieseke, Giverny was the perfect place to work out compositions that captured the charm of

women and gardens. "It is sunshine," he wrote, "flowers in sunshine; girls in sunshine; the nude in sunshine, which I have been principally interested in for eight years, and if I could only reproduce it exactly as I see it I would be satisfied." Well, there's nothing in Frieseke's work to suggest an objective reproduction of what is seen—that endeavor was more apt to play out on the other side of the garden wall, at Monet's pond. *Lady in a Garden* is an appeal to the senses, an appreciation of feminine beauty and sunlight. This may be as good as visual exactness, and it surely sounds like more fun. ■

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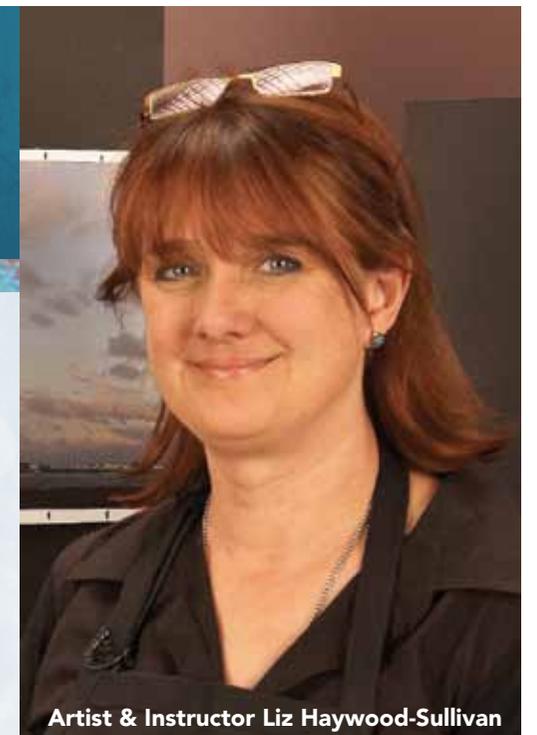
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