



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Art Librarians Honor Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent with 2020 George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award**

WESTFORD, Massachusetts – The exhibition catalogue *Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent* has been recognized by the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) for excellence in art publishing

Established in 1980, the Wittenborn Award honors the memory of George Wittenborn, a premier New York art book dealer and publisher who was a prominent supporter of the Society in its formative years.

*Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent* inaugurates a new chapter in the history of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Being the first to focus on images of a black man and the first to address the history of African American experience in Boston. Featuring drawings given by Sargent to Isabella Stewart Gardner, published in full for the first time and accompanied by an impressive variety of perspectives from artists, curators, and scholars. Published in association with Yale University Press and edited by the William and Lia Poorvu Curator of the Collection Nathaniel Silver, the publication was the output of a distinguished group of contributors: Trevor Fairbrother, Paul Fisher, Nikki A. Greene, Erica E. Hirshler, Lorraine O'Grady, Casey Riley, Nathaniel Silver, and Colm Tóibín. The museum's Elizabeth Reluga served as project manager, and Alejandro Nodarse was the research assistant. Laura Grey provided a sensitive and sympathetic design, and Conti Tipocolor was the printer and binder. Funding was provided by Amy and David Abrams, Bank of America, and the Henry Luce Foundation. Additional support was provided by the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Charitable Foundation, Chauncey & Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

In 1916, John Singer Sargent met Thomas Eugene McKellar, a young Black elevator attendant, at Boston's Hotel Vendome. McKellar became Sargent's principal model for a set of murals in the rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, murals in which McKellar's poses



were transformed into gods and goddesses.

Sharing McKeller’s story and the preparatory drawings for the first time, the catalogue explores the intersection of the model’s life with Sargent, serving as an overdue and welcome reassessment of the relationship between two men, artist and model. The catalogue’s contributors examine intersections of race, gender, and identity, using archival records to piece together the life of McKeller and firsthand accounts of African American experience in early twentieth century Boston. The essays present the reader with the museum’s exploration of their complex past while shedding light on their equally complex present, inclusive of marginalized voices not reflected in traditional histories. In addition to the textual content, the catalogue is saturated with rich images of Sargent’s drawings of McKeller, which highlight the detail of the line drawings and the intimate relationship of artist and model. Reproductions of archival documents and enlarged handwritten letters fill book pages. Back matter in the form of maps of the Museum of Fine Art’s murals, a selective index, and an extensive bibliography round out this exquisite production.

This volume beautifully exemplifies the Wittenborn Award ethos through its emphasis on scholarly content paired with thoughtful design.

The members of the 2020 ARLIS/NA George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award Sub-Committee were: Andi Back (Chair), M.J. Poehler, Thomas Young, Megan Macken, Andrea Degener, Skye Lacerte, and Jennifer Akins.

**About the Art Libraries Society of North America**

Founded in 1972, the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) is a dynamic, international organization of close to 1,000 individuals devoted to fostering excellence in art and design librarianship and image management in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The membership includes architecture and art librarians, visual resources professionals, artists, curators, educators, publishers, students, and other interested in visual arts information. To serve this diverse constituency, the Society provides a wide range of programs and services within an organizational structure that encourages participation at every level.

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