Both Otto Charles Wigand and Adeline Albright Wigand have been described as living family members as modest, retiring and unswerving to thrust themselves forward into the limelight in order to seek fame. The circumstances surrounding the couple’s decision to move to Staten Island near Otto’s family in the years around World War I are unclear. Both artists were by then over the age of fifty and were facing an art world which had changed dramatically after the landmark Armory show of 1913, that signaled the final death knell of Academic painting, so the pleasant, comparatively quiet life on a thorny-wood Staten Island may have been appealing. Although both artists made interesting tentative steps towards more modern styles, their basic adherence to their traditional training meant that their work grew unfashionable over time.

Professional disadvantages of her sex, may have discouraged Adeline from pursuing a larger career as a society portraitist. On occasion, the couple would collaborate on a single canvas, such as the domestic dual portrait of the Table, in which each artist painted the other. Although the Wigands never rose to the first rank of American painters, their strengths are obvious. Adeline’s mastery of portraiture, her elegance of line, and, experiments with ‘Tonalism and dramatic light effects merits reconsideration. The female subjects in Adeline’s œuvre works like Woman Reading a Letter and dazzling Polly (which latter points to unexplored skills as an animalier) create an interesting existential anxiety in some of her later paintings. Otto’s œuvre reflects little of the modernism of Paul Gottlieb and the artists at Fontaine who worked alongside, but at his best, his skills as a draftsman and his impressionistic landscapes and genre scenes reveal a variety of touch and sincere charm that avoids slavish imitation. His love from the couple’s Staten Island home are among his most arresting.

This exhibition features works from the Permanent Collection of the Staten Island Museum and loans from:

1. Adeline Albright Wigand
   • Portrait of My Mother
     c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 38 x 31 in.
     Collection of the Staten Island Museum

2. Adeline Albright Wigand
   • Portrait of Otto Wigand
     c. 1895. Oil on artist board mounted on wood, 11.25 x 9 in.
     Collection of Robert C. Wigand

3. Adeline Albright Wigand
   • Portrait of a Young Girl
     Oil on canvas, 62 x 34 in.
     Collection of James R. Wigand

4. Adeline Albright Wigand
   • Portrait of Mademoiselle X
     c. 1886. Oil on canvas, 21 x 19.25 in.
     Collection of Timothy Simonson

5. Otto Charles Wigand
   • Untitled
     c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 36.5 in.
     Collection of Helen Bolton

6. Adeline Albright Wigand
   • Roses in Vase
     c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 14.5 x 11.5 in.
     Collection of Robert C. Wigand

7. Otto Charles Wigand
   • Still Life with Bowl
     c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 23.5 x 26 in.
     Collection of Robert C. Wigand

8. Otto Charles Wigand
   • Woman Sewing
     c. 1888. Oil on canvas, 13.5 x 10.5 in.
     Collection of Charlotte Maeck

9. Adeline and Otto Wigand
   • At the Table (The Wigands)
     c. 1901-1910. Oil on canvas, 21.5 x 22.25 in.
     Collection of Robert C. Wigand

10. Otto Charles Wigand
    • The Morning News
      n.d. Oil on board, 12.25 x 9.5 in.
      Collection of Mrs. Tina Kaasmann-Dunn

11. Adeline Albright Wigand
    • Polly
      c. 1915-1920. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.
      Collection of the Staten Island Museum

12. Otto Charles Wigand
    • Untitled
      c. 1904. Oil on canvas, 17.5 x 23.75 in.
      Collection of Marion Wigand

13. Otto Charles Wigand
    • View of Stapleton
      c. 1930. Oil on canvas, 19.75 x 23.75 in.
      Collection of Kenneth Smith

14. Adeline Albright Wigand
    • Portrait of Henry Julian Mullin
      c. early 1880s. Oil on canvas, 10.5 x 9 in.
      Collection of the Staten Island Museum

Cover:
• Woman Reading a Letter
  c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 29.5 x 23.75 in.
  Collection of Robert C. Wigand

The exhibit and program are made possible, in part, by the following supporters:

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Mr. Timothy Simonson
Dr. Jonathan D. Wall
Mr. James R. Wigand
Mr. John T. Wigand
Ms. Marian Wigand
Mr. Robert C. Wigand

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Beauty Rediscovered:
Paintings & Adeline Albright Wigand &
Otto Charles Wigand

From the glorious nineteenth century landscape paintings of Hudson River School artist Jasper Cropsey, to the postmodern feminist sculptures of Louise Bourgeois, Staten Island Museum explores a vast array of American art from 1800 to nearly the present day. This remarkable artistic couple rapidly fell into near total obscurity in the greater art world after their deaths in 1944.

I still remember the first time I saw Adeline Wigand’s Portrait of My Mother. In 1997 I was newly employed at the Staten Island Museum, eagerly exploring the storerooms, and charged with coming up with new exhibitions. I was struck by the canvas’s soft tones, delicate brush strokes and wistful reverie. The painting brought to mind Whistler’s Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist’s Mother, but was certainly a more empathetic, if not as daring, composition. Adeline Wigand was an artist who clearly had loved the old woman sitter. The painting was a valuable reminder that on occasion a talented, if little known, artist reaches to produce something wonderful.

A quick trip to the files revealed that the painting had most recently been shown at the Smithsonian in an exhibition dedicated to women in art, at the 1903 Chicago World’s Fair. I had never heard of the artist. Adeline Albright Wigand was the step-sister of sister-in-law of Thomas Whistler, whose mother was his father’s sister. Whistler’s paintings were not at all difficult to find; but Adeline’s had eluded me.

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Unfortunately, biographical information about both artists remains frustratingly sparse. Few written documents from the artists testify to their working lives, but the broad outlines of Adeline’s life can be fleshed out in a few telling anecdotes. Learning deep into a shadowy painting, I was immediately struck by the canvas’s soft tones, delicate brush strokes, and wistful reverie. The painting brought to mind Whistler’s Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist’s Mother, but was certainly a more empathetic, if not as daring, composition. Adeline Wigand was an artist who clearly had loved the old woman sitter. The painting was a valuable reminder that on occasion a talented, if little known, artist reaches to produce something wonderful.

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