AN AMERICAN ARTIST IN THE NETHERLANDS: ALICE SCHILDE'S RESPONSE TO HOLLAND AND THE HAGUE SCHOOL

A Thesis

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By

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ABSTRACT

The American painter Alice Schille (1869-1955), a native of Columbus, Ohio, had a long and prolific career, distinguished most by her talents as a watercolorist. Her career spanned more than forty years and included a long tenure as an instructor at the Columbus School of Art and prestige as Columbus's premiere oil portraitist to the city's wealthiest and most privileged citizens. During her summer breaks from teaching, Schille traveled extensively to many points across the globe. Many of her finest watercolors hail from these summer travels. These paintings record her fascination with the variety of human life that she encountered through their sensitive portrayal of local inhabitants and surroundings.

The works she created on her travels also reflect her study of several important artistic movements of the early modernist era in Europe. The artistic trends of French Post-Impressionism become particularly evident in her work of the teens and later. The scope of this thesis covers a specific body of paintings that she completed slightly earlier, during visits to the Netherlands in the first decade of the twentieth century. These paintings will be discussed in the context of her career as a whole, considering the ways that
they are consistent with artistic concerns she held throughout her life. This thesis also considers the influence of the Hague School on her Dutch works and finally examines her works in relation to those of some other American artists who worked in the Netherlands at this time.
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INTRODUCTION

Although Alice Schille (1869-1955) is still a largely understudied and underacknowledged American artist, recent years have seen a renewed interest in her work, thanks in great part to the efforts of a few key scholars.¹ These scholars have established Schille as a painter of significant talent, responsible for a large body of striking paintings, created over several decades. Much of Schille’s reputation is based on her watercolors, which are praised for their rhythmic compositions and vibrant colors, exemplified in works such as The Pier fig.1 (1917/18; private collection) and A Tunisian Market fig.2 (1922; private collection).

These qualities, which began to emerge in her art around 1909, becoming prominent by 1915, are attributed to her interest in and receptiveness to French art movements such as neo-impressionism and fauvism.

Schille was exposed to these movements during her numerous visits to France and surrounding countries in the years between 1903-1914. These were important years for

¹Significant research and writing on Alice Schille has been conducted by James and Timothy Keny of the Keny Galleries in Columbus, Ohio, the sole representatives of the Schille estate. Noted scholar of American art Ronald Pisano has also contributed several important essays on Schille that have accompanied recent exhibitions of Schille’s work. Other contributions of note are Gary Wells’ article of 1983 that appeared in Art & Antiques, and Gail Levin’s profile of Schille in the catalog to the 1987 exhibition “American Women Artists 1830-1930.”
Schille as they marked the beginning of a lifetime of summers spent traveling. For Schille, travel provided a wealth of new subject matter and sometimes exposure to styles of painting that would come to influence her own in profound ways. During her summer travels she painted prolifically, usually in watercolor, and almost always seeking out the local inhabitants as her subjects. Her travels were not limited to Europe, but took her also to many points in the United States, Scandinavia, North Africa, and Central America.

The Netherlands was among the countries in which Alice Schille worked in Europe; she painted there on two occasions primarily, during the summers of 1903 and 1907. On her first visit, in 1903, it is likely that she either accompanied or attended William Merritt Chase’s summer art class, based in The Hague. In 1907 she worked in Volendam, a town that attracted many American artists, including Gari Melchers, Cecilia Beaux, and Robert Henri.

The works Schille created in Holland are executed in a range of muted, pale hues, atypical of her works in general and counter to her reputation as an accomplished colorist. Yet this subdued palette does not make her Dutch works as anomalous to the rest of her career as they might at first seem. The influence of this palette did extend beyond her Dutch works for a brief time, in the years immediately preceding the emergence of the French influence, to affect works she created in other countries, including France, England and Dalmatia. More importantly, her Dutch works
employ the same expressive use of color as her later works; she chose colors that evoke the simplicity of her peasant surroundings in Holland and the quality of Northern European light. And though the most significant European influence on Schille’s art takes the form of her seamless integration of post-impressionist and fauvist color use, the palette of her Dutch works bears evidence of her interest in another important European movement of this era, the Hague School.²

Schille’s affinity for the Hague School extends to more than just her choice of palette. Her use of specific subject motifs also suggests a debt to the works of these Dutch painters. The paintings Schille made in the Netherlands record Dutch peasant life. As with those of the Hague School painters, her works are not portraits of specific individuals but observations of people absorbed in the ordinary activities of their daily lives. Often they picture women and children: carrying out chores, visiting neighbors, or absorbed in quiet moments of reading or knitting. Examples include Dutch Interior II fig.3 (n.d.; private collection) and Dutch Village Gossip fig.4 (n.d.; Columbus Museum of Art).

Though her subjects were humble, Schille’s paintings never overtly comment on the quality of their lives. They are not pitying, nor do they patronize or idealize. Considered within the context of the large number of Americans who also painted in the Netherlands at this time, her works are distinctive. As discussed in Annette Stott’s 1986

² The influence of French modernism on Schille’s art is discussed in detail by both James Keny and Ronald Pisano and was the focus of Keny’s 1988 article “The French experience: Alice Schille’s Artistic Legacy” appearing in Timeline, a publication of the Ohio Historical Society.
dissertation, "American Painters Who Worked in the Netherlands, 1880-1914," the majority of Americans sought as their subjects the same peasants as Schille. But unlike Schille, they imposed a preconceived, idealized identity onto the Dutch, one that emphasized the picturesque "Dutch" charm popularized in the United States by Mary Mapes Dodge's novel *Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates* (1865). Schille, on the other hand, portrayed the Dutch in a different light, emphasizing those qualities which they shared with the rest of humanity rather than those that set them apart.

My thesis will examine the small, but distinct, body of paintings created by Schille during her trips to the Netherlands and will thus serve as a contribution to the evolving scholarship on this American artist. I will characterize the style of these works, giving special consideration to the manner in which they differ from her oeuvre as a whole while also highlighting their innate similarities. I will also explore the influence of the Hague School on these works, in terms of both subject matter and style. Lastly, I will address her works in relation to those of other Americans painting in Holland at this time.

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Stott's dissertation is a comprehensive study of the late nineteenth/early-twentieth century popularity of Holland as a destination for American painters. Her discussion includes examination of the cultural and historical sources for this popularity, the reception of American artists by the Dutch, and many of the artists and their work.
Part 1: Biography--Schille’s context to 1903

Alice Schille’s first overseas voyage came about as a result of her desire to broaden her artistic horizons by studying painting in Europe. By 1902, when Schille left for Europe, she had already had several years of training and was well-established as an artist and instructor in Columbus. This additional training was an opportunity for her to fine-tune her skills as a painter, but also to engage in what was considered a highly regarded pursuit for any serious young artist at the time.¹

In the late nineteenth century, it was possible for an art student to obtain a high standard of artistic training in the United States. Many art schools had cropped up over the century, offering complete courses of study that relieved an aspiring young artist from the necessity of going to Europe to seek professional training. The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts had opened its doors in 1805 and would become one of the nation’s most prestigious art schools by the middle of the century. In New York several art schools opened, creating the opportunity for many more students to seek training there. The New York Academy of Fine Arts was one of the first, opening around 1800, with the National

¹ Michael Quick, American Expatriate Painters of the Late Nineteenth Century (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute, 1976), 24.
Academy of Design following in 1825, and the Art Student’s League in 1875.\(^5\)

Prospects for schooling in the arts had improved even for women. The National Academy of Design had begun to admit women to its antique drawing courses as early as 1846.\(^6\) The Pennsylvania Academy admitted women students to its antique and anatomy classes by 1860, and by 1868 were finally permitted to study from live models. In 1893, women made a strong showing at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago where they had their own exhibiting space, the Woman’s Building.\(^7\) By the 1890s women were enrolled in academies in greater numbers than ever before, were exhibiting more, teaching, and serving on juries. And though they still faced opposition and discrimination from the male-dominated art world, women realized conditions certainly were improving.

The remarkable growth in the United States of the availability of art training through academies marked a substantial change from the eighteenth century. During the colonial period, for example, those wishing to train as artists had very limited options. The best and most esteemed option, of course, was to travel to Europe to study with an established artist. This option was not practical for a great many people, who could simply not afford the enormous cost of such an endeavor. Other means of obtaining artistic schooling before the age of academies were by studying

\(^6\) Ibid., 94.
manuals and copying prints sent over from Europe, through an apprenticeship with an artist working in the United States, or by studying with a family in which there was already a well-established tradition of painting, such as that of Charles Willson Peale.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the fact that vast improvement in their own country had made European study no longer essential, for many American artists the allure of study in foreign academies persisted. For a great many, it also became more feasible. As steamship travel became more developed and more affordable in the 1860s and 70s, record numbers of Americans traveled to the great art centers of France, Germany and Italy. They went to seek out the revered collections of great masters held in European museums, to gain access to leading contemporary European artists and instructors, and also to develop an association with the great artistic traditions of Europe.\textsuperscript{9} Many students who could not afford the time or money for an entire year (or several) abroad, shorter trips, often in the summer, became a popular alternative. These trips were often organized and sponsored by American academies or instructors and included visits to major museum collections and excursions to outdoor painting grounds.

For women, conditions in European schools had not improved at the same rate as in the United States. Many major art schools, such as the Ecole de Beaux-Arts remained closed to women. The Académie Julian, in 1880, was one of the first to allow entry to women, and in the first decade of this

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 16.
admission they often paid twice the tuition as men, and received half the instruction. Nonetheless, many women also made the voyage to Europe, studying in academies when they could, or otherwise studying with private instructors.

Schille's decision to study in Europe, and her numerous visits during subsequent summers were no doubt partly a response to the trend in American artistic training that still placed a high value on overseas study. She was also likely inspired and encouraged in this direction by one of her New York instructors, William Merritt Chase. While Chase staunchly believed that American art students should be able to obtain a level of training in their own country that was comparable to that available in Europe (and strove to provide this kind of training at his own schools), he also advocated the benefits of European travel to his students.

Chase himself had spent significant time in Europe during his years in training and during the early years of his career. He studied at the Royal Academy in Munich in the 1870s, and made subsequent trips to Spain, England, and the Netherlands. Chase recognized the value that study of the great masters had had on his own development as an artist, and in later years when he organized a yearly summer excursion to Europe for his students at the Chase School of Art, he determined that a significant portion of the course would be spent in study at museums. A New York Times article from 1904 gives further insight into the benefits

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10 Ibid., 17.

11 Every year between 1903-1913, 1906 being the sole exception, Chase organized a summer course in Europe for his students at the Chase School of Art.
that Chase saw in European study. Chase remarked:

The mere change of surroundings to a novel environment enlivens a pupil, and when he gets down to work the fact that he is in a foreign land, where foreign artists are liable at any time to call and see what he is doing, exerts a lively effect on his ambition. 12

Along with this, Chase praised the benefits of seeing famous works in museums, equating exposure to the many great masters with the experiences of European art apprentices. During their "Wanderjahre", these apprentices were required to travel throughout their own countries, and beyond, to gain a sense of artistic standards held for centuries by other countries. Again, Chase: "I fancy that pupils who have been abroad under such auspices learn neither to overrate nor to underrate foreign examples, neither to think that America holds all that is worth while, nor to imagine that residence in Europe alone will make artists of them." 13 Chase also strongly advocated the benefits of continually seeking out new environments in which to paint. Though in 1903 he and his students had enjoyed a successful and productive sojourn in the Netherlands, in 1904 the class ventured to London. As a student of Chase's in the years just prior to the start of his summer programs, Schille could easily have been influenced by Chase's enthusiasm for European study. She herself would seek out many destinations in her future travels.

Schille's interest in art began early in her life, beginning as a childhood love of drawing that later led to a

13 Ibid.
serious course of study after graduating from high school. Schille, who was born in Columbus, Ohio, on August 21, 1869, was the daughter of upper middle-class parents who owned and operated a local soft-drink manufacturing business. Because of her family's comfortable economic status, as a young adult Schille was free to pursue her interest in art. In 1891, four years after graduating from high-school, she enrolled in the Columbus Art School.

Schille studied at the school for two years and was considered by her instructors and peers alike to be a top student. Her talents were affirmed upon graduation when she was offered a teaching position at the school and also at the Ohio Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb. She held these positions until 1897 when she decided to obtain further artistic training, this time under the direction of Chase at the Art Students League in New York City.

Despite her family's wealth, Schille was fiercely independent and was determined to secure her own financial means to pay for this schooling. After doing so, she left Columbus for New York, where she would study for two years. Upon her arrival, Schille learned that Chase had recently left the Art Students League to start his own school, the Chase School of Art (later known as the New York School of Art). Undeterred, Schille immediately enrolled there as well as carrying a full load of courses at the Art Students League.

Unless otherwise noted, the following biographical information in this section comes from the exhibition catalog Lyrical Colorist: Alice Schille 1869-1955 (Columbus, Ohio: Keny and Johnson Gallery, 1988).
The opening of the Chase School of Art in 1896 came close on the heels of one of the most legendary phases of Chase's career as an artist, that of his popular Tenth Street Studio. Opened in 1878, Chase modeled the studio after those of artists he had known in Europe, and planned it to be a place for the creation and exhibiting of his paintings, but also a space to house the many treasures he had collected during his years in Europe. Among the trove of objects were an array of pewter pots, ornate furniture, thick drapery, elaborate eastern rugs, a brimming collection of paintings by other artists that scaled the walls of the studio, and an assortment of odd bric-a-brac. He used these treasures as props and settings in a great many of his paintings and as devices to show off his great talent for painting a variety of textures. The studio was lavishly furnished with these treasures, if not cluttered by them, as can be seen in the many paintings he did in the 1880s that featured the studio's interior.¹⁵

The studio also became, as Chase had always intended, a magnate for wealthy clients. The reputation of his studio grew, often via the press and critics, gradually bringing more and more of the city's refined art patrons to Chase's door, where they were cordially received into a lavish and intriguingly bohemian setting, to purchase works, or to sit

for their portraits. The studio was also used as the setting for many extravagant, formal evening receptions and parties, at which his wealthy guests were entertained by musicians, poets, and performing artists.\textsuperscript{16}

It was in January of 1896 that Chase announced he would be closing his studio and selling off many of its contents at auction. Soon after the auction, Chase and his family departed on a trip to Spain with a group of students, where he set up a temporary painting school.\textsuperscript{17} The group returned in June 1896, and by October of that same year, Chase had established his own school in New York. The Chase School of Art, as with his Tenth Street Studio, was modeled on a European pattern. As stated above, Chase valued European approaches to the teaching of art and desired to make an equivalent available to students in the United States. Specifically, Chase admired, and sought to duplicate, the environment and curriculum, and teaching methods of the Academie Julian in Paris, one of the most popular art schools in France.\textsuperscript{18}

Unlike many European schools, Chase insisted on an open enrollment policy for his school, allowing students to enter regardless of a lack of previous training. Beginning students entered their studies alongside more experienced students. Chase also did away with the practice of requiring beginning students to study the human form from plaster casts before moving on to study from a live model, a practice held to

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 172.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 173.
rigorously by one of New York's major art schools, the National Academy of Design. Along with three or so other instructors, Chase taught a curriculum that in addition to the life drawing courses included instruction in still life drawing and painting, a course exclusively dealing with the treatment of the human head, and others for portraiture, and illustration. Chase arranged to have top student works from the Academie Julian shipped to his school on loan, so that his students could study them and use them as a standard against which to judge the progress of their own work.\(^\text{19}\)

Chase's school quickly became very popular. Every month after its opening, as many as forty or fifty new students enrolled in the school. However Chase, in an effort to keep standards high and encourage only those students serious in their pursuit of art, insisted on a rigorous pace of learning, and nearly half of the new students each month withdrew again after only a matter of weeks. Many of his students were women, often amateurs, but others, like Schille, were dedicated, serious professionals seeking additional training.\(^\text{20}\)

The decision to pursue study with Chase, even though it meant enrollment at two schools, may have been one of the most important Schille made in relation to her career. In Chase she found a supportive and insightful instructor who recognized her talent and who would have a significant impact on both her overall experience as an art student and on her development as an artist. As Schille scholar James Keny

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 174.
notes, "Undoubtedly, Schille's commitment to art was further strengthened by Chase's example and encouragement. His superior technical ability, open-mindedness toward different styles, decorative sense, and love of color were the foundation of Schille's own style."

Not only were these elements the foundation of her style but they were to become prominent features of her art throughout her career. In his lectures to his students Chase urged them to experiment freely with the styles of other artists, not in an effort to copy them, but as a legitimate way to build a style. Ronald Pisano, in an essay on Schille written in 1991, included in his discussion of this same feature of Chase's teaching tenets an important comment from Chase: "Originality is found in the greatest composite which you can bring together." This attitude had a profound impact on Schille. She has been quoted as saying, "There is too much of interest to confine myself. There would not be any incentive to work without change." For the rest of her career, but particularly during her visits to Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century, Schille actively sought out and experimented with many of the most prominent contemporary European art movements of the time.

French art was to have a particularly important effect on her career, ultimately providing the source for Schille's fully developed use of bright, vibrant color, a trademark

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22 Coe Kerr Gallery, Alice Schille Watercolors (New York: Keny Galleries, Columbus, Ohio, 1991), 11.
feature of her career. The influence of French art began to 
emerge in her works during the years 1909-1914, first as 
traces of neo-impressionism around 1909 that became stronger 
by 1911 as her interest in Cezanne developed. The influence 
of neo-impressionist styles such as fauvism became especially 
prominent in her work after 1915, when she experimented 
boldly and actively with expressionistic color and reduction 
of forms, edging her style closer to the avant-garde 
movements of her artistic models. A work such as Gloucester 
Cottages fig.5 (1916-18; collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph 
May) bears the obvious influence of pointillist brush 
technique and the liberal use of color favored by the 
fauvists. The Square, Mexico, fig.6 (1923; private 
collection) also possess the uninhibited freedom of fauvist 
color use, as well as exaggerated forms (as in the swerving 
trees and curving postures of the men) reminiscent of an 
artist such as Derain or Vlaminck.

Chase’s strong commitment to beauty and decorative 
elegance in art was a sentiment that Schille shared with her 
mentor. Without exception, to Schille the creation of an art 
work was also the creation of a thing of beauty. The small 
group of watercolors that Schille painted in New York City in 
1915, works such as Gay Spots of Color on the East Side, New 
York fig.7 (1915; Private Collection) and East Side 
Clotheslines, New York fig. 8 (1915; Collection of Mr. and 
Mrs. H.E. Schmidt III) are exemplary in this regard. These 
works are painted with an instantly recognizable pointillist 
brush technique and render the tenements and inhabitants of
New York’s teeming lower east side in a palette of lively bright colors.

_Cay Spots of Color on the East Side, New York_ is a scene of daytime activity in a typical, crowded street in one of New York’s east side immigrant neighborhoods. The viewer looks straight down the middle of the street, from an elevated perspective, at multitudes of people shopping, walking, and sitting in one block. What in reality would have been a setting made dark and shadowed by the closely built tenements is here painted to look airy and sunny. The buildings and street are rendered with loose daubs of paint, plenty of paper is allowed to show through between daubs. A plentiful, even smattering of reds, blues, yellows, and greens represent awnings and clothes hanging on lines. Occasional bursts of pink and purple add variety. Thin slips of figures rendered in simple black strokes and daubs give the sense of the rapid, continuous movement of people around the street. Other figures, such as the group in the center of the street, are suggested only by dark circles suggesting heads, their bodies making up a continuous mass of white, with no lines defining their forms. Finally, a large expense of light sky stretching over the buildings, and down the center of the picture to meet up with the lightness of the cobbled street further enhances the sunny, joyful feeling of the scene.

These works exist in marked contrast to those of many of her American contemporaries also painting in New York. Artists such as Robert Henri, in _West 57th Street_ fig. 9,
(1902; Yale University Art Gallery), John Sloan, in *Sixth Avenue and Thirtieth Street* fig. 10 (1907; Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin), and even Schille’s fellow Columbustite George Bellows, in *Cliff Dwellers* fig. 11 (1913; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), painted the same subjects, the streets and inhabitants of New York, but chose to concentrate on the social element of the subject matter over purely aesthetic concerns.

A painting dealing with nearly identical subject matter to that of Schille’s *Gay Spots of Color on the East Side, New York*, Bellows’ *Cliff Dwellers* set out to give a very different impression of life for inhabitants of the crowded ghettos of New York. The perspective in this work is from the street, with tenements painted in smoky browns and dull beiges, rising up and casting shadows. No light from the sky makes its way through the huddled buildings, which form an impenetrable dark maze that recedes continuously into the background.

Like Schille’s work, Bellows’ painting is filled with people, but here the feeling is that they are crammed together, almost unable to move through the street amidst their density. But whereas in Schille’s canvas, there is a sense of the productive business of people going about their day, here the story is that of the confines of poverty. In an effort to escape the stifling summer heat of poorly vented tenements, throngs of people had poured out into the street. And though banners of clothes hang across lines, and peddlers sell wares to passersby, Bellows has painted these elements,
as with the building, in a dull, monotonous array of browns, blacks, and dirty whites, adding to the gloom and squalor of the scene.

Bellows, along with other members of Henri's New York based painters' group, often revealed the gloomier, bleak side of life in New York City. Schille's works, with their commitment to aesthetic beauty, are more in the spirit of Maurice Prendergast and Ernest Lawson, who painted in a more impressionistic manner, concentrating on the fleeting sense of a passing moment rather than socially charged subject matter. Within the context of these New York works, Schille remains closely allied to the artistic philosophy of Chase, who deplored artists such as Sloan and Henri, whom he called "Depressionists." 24

Beyond what he taught her in the studio, Chase provided important financial support to Schille by allowing her to attend his classes at the cheaper yearly rate usually reserved for full-time students, despite her only part-time status at his school. Chase also offered her a scholarship in 1898 to attend his summer painting school at Shinnecock. But Schille, always insistent on self-sufficiency, refused his offer; she was opposed to the concept of taking something for nothing. She did, however, attend the Shinnecock school the following summer at her own expense.

Chase was famous for this sort of financial generosity. He awarded many prizes of free tuition, occasionally bought students' works, and willingly wrote letters of introduction.

for many of his students. Chase’s practical support of Schille’s artistic ambitions, the offer of tuition assistance, was vital recognition and endorsement of her talent, talent he deemed worthy of encouraging. This kind of support from an instructor would have been invaluable to any art student, but especially to a female art student, who faced a number of obstacles in her quest to become an accomplished and acknowledged artist.

Though conditions and opportunities for female art students had improved over the course of the nineteenth century, women still faced resistance from an art world dominated by men. They were seldom afforded status as serious artists, as it was a widely felt societal belief that art could serve only as a pass-time for women rather than a serious professional or intellectual pursuit. Women were expected to place priority on their homes and families. In fact, many women did have to place domestic priorities above artistic ones, which seriously undermined many women’s chances for successful careers as artists. Access to academies was limited for women, and once admitted, women were not always allowed to enroll in all classes, and study from live models was not always allowed. Women also faced greater challenges than men in their bid to be included in exhibitions and sales of their work.

Therefore, the recommendation and encouragement of a well-respected artist such as Chase would have given legitimacy to Schille’s endeavors, boosting her credibility

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25 Bryant, 188.
26 Huber, 27.
in both American and European art circles. His endorsement of her continued studies would have said to those interested that Schille was a woman who had both the talent and presence of mind to pursue an artistic career at a level on par with her male colleagues.

After finishing her study in New York, in 1899, Schille returned to Ohio and resumed her role as an instructor at the Columbus Art School. At this time she also submitted several of her watercolors to exhibitions in New York, beginning a pattern of actively showing her works that would continue throughout her life. Schille’s talents did not go unnoticed, and she won many portrait commissions in Columbus. Yet despite her rapidly developing reputation as a serious artist in the Midwest, a reputation that had already secured her a position as an art instructor, Schille was not content to rest on these laurels. She aspired to attain the level of European training deemed important for an artist of serious intent and desirous of a well-respected reputation. Being the ambitious person that she was, she set off in 1902 to achieve her goal, and stayed in Europe until the fall of 1904.

Schille was accompanied on this voyage by her friend and fellow artist Ella Hergesheimer, whom she met up with in England. Hergesheimer was herself traveling through Europe on a scholarship that she had won as a student of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts.27 The two young women embarked in late summer on a lengthy tour of famous art centers throughout Europe, spending the most significant

27 “Five Pictures in the Paris Salon: Miss Alice Schille, Columbus Artist Wins Unusual Honors.” Columbus Citizen, 19 October 1904.
amount of time in Germany, Italy, and Spain. They sought out the works of great masters, making notes and sketching paintings where allowed by artists such as Velasquez and El Greco.

In November of 1903 Schille had settled in Paris to begin formal classroom studies at the Academie Colarossi and private study with three highly regarded European painters, L.J.R. Collin, G.C.E. Courtois, and R.F.X. Prinet. This was apparently a productive and successful period of study for Schille because in the spring of 1904 five of her paintings were selected for exhibition in that year’s Salon.\textsuperscript{28}

Just prior to beginning these studies in France, Schille spent four months, during the summer and early fall of 1903, living and painting in the Netherlands. Little is known of the exact circumstances surrounding Schille’s extended four-month stay in the Netherlands in 1903. Her visit did coincide with the presence of a summer course in Holland led by her former instructor, Chase, and it is very likely that she was a participant in at least some if not all of the events of the class.\textsuperscript{29} Even less is known of her 1907 summer trip to Holland, other than that she spent part of it painting in Volendam, a picturesque village popular with many American artists who painted in Holland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Cecilia Beaux, Robert Henri, and Elizabeth Nourse. Despite the uncertainty regarding the details of her trips, it is clear

\textsuperscript{28} Keny, "The French Experience", 24.

\textsuperscript{29} The details of the class will be discussed in part four, especially in relation to Schille’s interest in the Hague School.
that while in Holland at this early point in her career, Schille opened her style up to the new cultural and artistic environments she encountered there, and the result was a unique body of works.
Part 2: The Dutch Works, a general introduction

The works that Schille painted in the Netherlands are mostly watercolors, though there are a few oils. Their exact number is not known but is likely to be quite high given the rapid rate at which they could be produced and the not insignificant period of time that she worked there. Only a handful of her Dutch works will be discussed in this thesis, as its purpose is to give a general discussion of their major characteristics, not to provide a comprehensive catalog list.

Ascribing precise dates to Schille’s Dutch works is difficult. She herself did not always date them, and as they are all painted in a similar style it is not possible to base dates on subtle differences in style from year to year. The Keny Galleries of Columbus, Ohio, have assigned approximate year dates, all 1903, to three works: Dutch Interior I fig.12 (c.1903; Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Dudley C. Richter), Coffee Drinkers, Holland fig. 13 (c. 1903; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) and Flemish Interior fig. 14 (c. 1903; Private Collection). Though this last work was painted in Belgium, not in the Netherlands, it is appropriate to include within the context of this thesis because it is identical in style and treatment of subject matter to her Dutch works.
Within the context of the rest of her career, Schille's Dutch works differ most noticeably in terms of their soft muted palette, as will be seen when comparing them to examples of her subsequent works. Despite this difference the function of the muted colors in her Dutch works is similar to that of the vivid post- and neo-impressionist inspired colors of some of her other paintings. "Each time she traveled to a different region or country," Keny notes, "she adjusted her style in one way or another in response to new subject matter and, more significantly, in sympathy with the spirit of the culture she examined and portrayed."30 She varied her painting style in an effort to bring out what to her were the unique characteristics of the environment she found herself in. The expressive colors she employed after 1909 were used, for example, to accentuate the brilliant look of a Gloucester garden on a summer afternoon, Gloucester Garden fig.15 (c. 1916-18; Private collection) or the sultry tones of Tunisian side street at night, Evening, Africa fig. 16 (1922; Private collection) so too did the soft, muted colors in her Dutch works signify something important about her impression of Holland. Pale browns, purples, and greys, intermixed with fleeting sunlight yellows, describe the climate of northern Europe during her visits, especially the softness imposed by a sunlight most often enshrouded in clouds.

For example, in Dutch Village Gossip Schille responded to a Dutch village square by accentuating its prominent

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30 Keny and Johnson Gallery, Lyrical Colorist, 16.
features: the modest, understated quality of the architecture, the soft cloudy daylight, and the muting effect it has on all that it illuminates. To convey these characteristics she used a range of muted pastel colors: milky browns, pinkish reds, and white for the buildings, an expanse of yellowish brown for the bricks of the village square, and a soft, pale grey for the sky. The square is depicted from a somewhat distant perspective so that the figures are small in scale and indistinct. Those figures who stand or sit in shaded doorways are rendered in dark monotone, while those in full light are described with only minimal details and color differentiation. Her unembellished description of this typical Dutch village square also reflects her sensitivity in rendering the Calvinist modesty of Dutch culture, a culture which preferred plain functionality to ornate, luxurious environs.

Similarly, in Dutch Interior I a predominance of greyish browns, beiges, and moss greens are use to render the interior of a cottage, depicting the color variations of the wooden floor, wooden furniture, and wooden door and window frames. In their understatedness these colors also underscore the simplicity of these surroundings.

In comparison Schille’s later response to light and environment often took greater liberties with naturalistic color, but still retained its mission to evoke what to her seemed to be the spirit of a place. A striking example of this is Taos Indian Pueblo fig. 17 (1919; Private collection). Here, a bright rainbow explosion of colors is
used to depict what in reality would have been a scene of
desert tones. The square, earthen structures of the Pueblo
buildings are rendered in a wild array of purples, greens,
oranges, aquas, yellows and reds. This color combination
suggests an intensified version of the vast array of colors
occurring in the clay of the buildings and in the surrounding
land. Though not possessed of a liberal color scheme like
that of the Taos Indian Pueblo Schille’s Dutch works’ subdued
palette does reflect a similar concern for finding exactly
the right blend of colors to suggest Holland.

While traveling, Schille learned to look at the life of
the lower classes for inspiration. She often painted en
plein-air, recording scenes of local inhabitants going about
their lives. Favorite settings over the years were lively
market scenes, village squares, and surrounding countrysides.
Among the earliest examples of this new subject matter were
her Dutch works, which nearly always featured the interior of
a peasant home. The inhabitants are usually engaged in their
every day domestic activities as in Dutch Girl Knitting
fig.18 (n.d.; Private collection), or The Blue Door fig.19
(n.d; Private collection). Dutch Interior II depicts an
ordinary moment in the lives of two peasant women. One sits
at a table, the other stands folding a large piece of cloth,
in what appears to be the dining area of a modest home. One
infant sits in a highchair at the table while another sits at
the feet of the seated woman.

The development of this preference for peasant topics
was in contrast to the works she produced at home in Columbus
and marked a broadening of her subject matter. In Columbus Schille worked as a portraitist, painting careful, flattering likenesses of her wealthy patrons that also strove to bring out her sitters' personalities. In her portrait of Frank Constans fig.20 (1902; Private collection), for instance, Schille has painted a captivating image of a young boy with a cherubic face and a crop of tousled, blond curls. By using a plain monotone background, painting the subject from the bust up, and cleverly situating the boy so that he looks out over his left shoulder, Schille has concentrated the viewer's gaze onto the boy's face. His patient expression conveys his effort to harness his childlike energy while sitting for his portrait. Such charming portraits helped to establish her reputation in Columbus, but, more important probably, provided Schille with a market that paid well. Whereas in her portraits Schille emphasized the sitter over background or settings, in her Dutch works the setting was at least as important as the figures. Her travel works were never portraits of specific individuals, but rather she used both setting and figures to paint her impressions of a place.

Among her travel paintings, the major difference between her Dutch works and later ones is that most of the former are interiors. Only a few outdoor works exist from her Dutch period, whereas exterior scenes were in the majority in the paintings that she did in other countries. A 1904 article from the Columbus Citizen, sheds light on the reason beyond Schille's frequent choice of interior subjects while in Holland. The article, written shortly after Schille's return
to Columbus in October, 1904, reports on the itinerary that she followed during her European stay. The article tells us that Schille spent her time in Holland "...working indoors and out, though the bad weather made the study of interiors often a necessity." It seems that in many cases the unpredictability of summer weather in Holland drove her to rely upon indoor subjects. During her other summer travels, Schille worked in countries where such inclement weather was much less of a threat, countries such as Spain, France, Dalmatia, Morocco, and later the countries of Central America.

In summary, there are a few key points to consider in relation to Schille’s Dutch paintings. First, dating from early on in her travel experiences, these works are among the earliest examples of her use of peasant subject matter. Thus, along with works she was creating in France at the same time, they represent the emergence of what would become a prominent feature in all of her future travel works. Her Dutch works are primarily watercolors, marking them also as early examples of a shift to a medium that she would continue to prefer during her travels. And in most cases, her Dutch works were executed in mild, understated earth tones, with subtle accents of bright color inserted to lighten the overall effect.

This choice of muted colors and the specific subject motifs that she used in her Dutch works reveal an important

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"Five Pictures in the Paris Salon: Miss Alice Schille, Columbus Artist Wins Unusual Honors." Columbus Citizen, 19 October 1904.
connection to her later works. As we have come to see, Schille avidly experimented with emerging modernist styles of painting, especially in France, becoming particularly engaged with the vivid colors of fauvism. But although French art undoubtedly had the most significant influence on her overall style, her Dutch works show that even at the beginning of her European years she was successfully culling elements to enhance her own works. In this case, she was looking to the group of popular nineteenth century painters known as the Hague School for inspiration. The manifestations of this inspiration will be examined in what follows.
Part 3: The Hague School, a brief history

The Hague School, famous for its landscapes and peasant interior scenes, emerged in the Netherlands around 1870 and remained active until the first World War. During the years between 1885–1900, when the school was at the height of its success and recognition, it consisted principally of two generations of artists. The older group was composed of Josef Israels, Johannes Bosboom, and Jan Hendrik Weissenbruch, who were all born around 1820. The second generation was made up of younger artists who worked closely with the older artists and shared many of their aesthetic affinities. The artists most commonly associated with the second generation are Gerard Bilders, Bernard Blommers, Paul Gabriel, Anton Mauve, Hendrik Willem Mesdag, Albert Neuhuys, and the brothers Jacob, Mathijs, and Willem Maris. All eventually became members of the Pulchri Studio, an artists' club founded in 1847, in part by Israels and Weissenbruch. The Pulchri Studio provided a vital and popular contact point for the artists of the Hague School to critique each other's works.12

While it is not accurate to suggest that the Hague School style was consistent and homogeneous amongst all of its members, there were a few basic characteristics common to

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all and from which they developed their own variations. The years between 1870 and 1885 are commonly referred to as the movement’s “grey period,” when its trademark style developed out of the realist/romantic tradition that characterized the majority of Dutch art during the early and mid-nineteenth century. As suggested by the term “grey period,” choice of colors ran towards the subtle and subdued and thus was very much reflective of a frequent climate in locations in which these artists painted.

Though color was obviously important for descriptive value, equally important was the way the artists actually applied color to the canvas. As one art historian has observed,

The grey palette of the School...should not simply be equated with a preference for that colour...What it really meant was a preference for tonal painting, in which bright, contrasting colours were replaced by a range of subtly ranging tones that would create an impression of total harmony."

_Fishing Boat_ fig. 21 (1878; Haags Gemeentemuseum), painted by Jacob Maris, typifies this use of color. A large fishing boat is pulled ashore in a seascape composed entirely of varying shades of pale grey. The moist, silver-colored sand and gently billowing sea blend together harmoniously, topped by a sky thick with a layer of white cloud cover. Maris has created a strong atmospheric effect through his choice of a careful selection and gradation of grey hues.

While oil paint was widely used, one of the school’s most distinctive features was the popularity of watercolor as a medium for finished works. Watercolor became popular with

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"Ibid., 18-19."
Dutch artists in the latter half of the nineteenth century, largely due to the influence of painter Andreas Schelfhout, who earlier in the century began to advocate it as an ideal tool for outdoor landscape sketches. Schelfhout (1787-1870), also from The Hague, was one of the group of artists in the first part of the nineteenth century that was pivotal in the development and popularity of Dutch Romanticism. At this time, Schelfhout was considered the greatest of the many landscape painters from The Hague. His panoramic winter and summer landscapes enjoyed praise and popularity in Holland and many other foreign countries.

Many painters of the Hague School had been students of these Dutch Romanticists. Schelfhout's watercolor sketching techniques had a profound influence in particular on painters such as Weissenbruch, Mesdag, Gerard Bilders, and the Maris brothers. Israels also turned to watercolor as an alternate medium, using it to produce copies of his most popular oils but also to create original compositions. The Hague School painters enjoyed the speed of application that this kind of paint gave them but they also valued it for its inherent fluidity. This feature offered them greater ease in achieving the fine color gradations and loose brushwork that they desired in their quest to imbue a subjective element into their paintings. Loose brushwork enabled them to render form in a simplified, reductive manner, another means of shifting emphasis away from descriptive details to the work's atmospheric qualities. We see watercolor used in these terms

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34 Ibid., 23.
35 Ibid., 42.
to its fullest advantage in works such as Gabriel’s *Windmill by the Water* fig. 22 (n.d.; Collection of A.A.M. Ruygrok) or Weissenbruch’s *The Nieuwkoop Lakes at Noorden* fig. 23 (n.d.; Collection of A.A.M. Ruygrok). Weissenbruch’s *The Nieuwkoop Lakes at Noorden* employs a blurry wash to convey the impression that this is a climate thick with the moisture of an approaching storm. The town buildings are depicted in rapidly applied, simple areas of paint, their fuzzy appearance suggestive of a mist hovering in the distance between viewer and town. Marsh grasses appear as masses of grey and brown, only rarely defined by thin brush strokes.

The Hague School artists persistently strove to paint images that conveyed the atmosphere or the mood of an environment, whether indoors or out. They desired to paint the emotive effect of dark, stormy, cloud-filled skies, the drowsy haze of a sunny summer day, or the peace and security of a warm cottage. The presence of a strong subjective element in their works is usually attributed to the indirect influence of English artist John Constable, passed down to them from the Barbizon painters.\(^\text{36}\) Constable had admired the works of the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painters and carefully developed a style of his own that combined their attention to the details of topography and light with his own desire to record the effect these elements had on him personally.\(^\text{37}\) Constable’s method for suggesting this effect was in part through the adoption of bold, vigorous brushstrokes, and reduced detail. His method had a

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 16.

noticeable effect on the French realists and Barbizon painters, upon whom many of the Hague School painters looked with admiration and respect.

Eventually achieving success, the Hague School initially met with indifference or disdain from most critics in Holland and elsewhere in Europe. It was not until foreign critics and collectors, mostly from Canada, Scotland, and the United States, began to admire and collect Hague School works that the movement began to receive much attention in Europe. A recent article by Dieuwertje Dekkers titled, "'Where are the Dutchmen?' Promoting the Hague School in America," informs us that Hague School works began making their way to the United States in the early 1870s, shortly after the school took form in the Netherlands.18 Among the earliest dealers of Hague School works in the United States were New York gallery owner Michael Knoedler and Scottish art dealer Daniel Cottier, both of whom bought Hague School works from Goupil & Co. in Paris, to sell in the United States.

In 1876, the Hague School was represented at the Universal Exhibition in Philadelphia by a handful of painters. In 1877 Cottier began to feature the Hague School prominently when he opened a gallery showcasing European art. Many of the Hague School works that made it to the United States were watercolors and generally sold for prices cheaper than oils. This made them popular with collectors, who

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18 Dieuwertje Dekkers, "'Where are the Dutchmen?' Promoting the Hague School in America, 1875-1900." Simiolus, Netherlands quarterly for the history of art. (vol. 24 no.1 1996) 58.
enjoyed the greater selection and the opportunity to acquire in greater numbers.

When the importation of Hague School works into the United States began to pick up speed around the 1880s, collectors and critics could see the works at prestigious establishments such as Moore Auction House and the showrooms of Frederick Keppel & Co. By the late 1880s the Hague School painters had achieved wide recognition and praise in the United States and a prominent American critic, Clarence Cook, included an entire chapter of his 1888 book *Art and Artists of Our Time* to the Hague School. The Hague School's continued popularity with American critics and collectors secured it a noticeable presence at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. With this strong appearance at the Exposition, the Hague School reached new heights of popularity in the United States. As demand for Hague School works rose during the years 1895-1905, so did the prices, which only began to decline again around 1920.39

The popularity of Hague School works that grew out of the 1893 Exposition resulted in the organization of the "First Annual Exhibition in the United States of the Society of Painters in Watercolors of Holland". In its first year the exhibition was held in New York, at the galleries of

39 The above information about the Hague School's presence in American Expositions and Galleries was taken from Diewwertje Dekkers 1996 article "Where are the Dutchmen? Promoting the Hague School in America, 1875-1900."
Boussod Valadon & Company, and was accompanied by a catalog for which Josef Israels wrote the introduction.\textsuperscript{40}

Once critical support got underway in Europe it was strong. The Hague School was even credited with reviving the spirit of the great seventeenth-century tradition of Dutch art, a spirit that many critics felt had been lost during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{41}

Ironically, it was in Holland that the Hague School had the most difficulty gaining appreciation. This was in large part due to the Hague School’s rejection of the strict academic style of painting popular in Holland during most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet in Holland, too, once acceptance and admiration for the Hague School had set in, it was very strong. The Hague School became a leading force in Holland’s art world, a position it held until around the start of the first World War, long after its popularity in other European countries had ceded to newer artistic movements.

Contributing to the Hague School’s eventual demise was the death of several key older painters at the turn of the century. At this point, many younger artists working in the Hague School style gradually resorted to little more than the uninspired repetition of the motifs and subjects of their more famous predecessors, leading the movement into stagnation and death. The decline in the Hague School’s


market popularity, around 1920, both in Europe and abroad, was also the result of the boom for impressionist and post-impressionist works. Impressionism, which had emerged at roughly the same time as the Hague School, always eclipsed it in both critical and market realms.
Part 4: Schille’s introduction to the Hague School

It is highly likely that Schille had exposure to the paintings of the Hague School before going to Holland, both in Ohio and as a student in New York. The Hague School had made its way to the Midwest by the time that Schille became an art student. The Society of Midwestern Artists, a group formed to promote the production of art and the bringing of fine exhibitions to the region, made works by Dutch artists, and works by Americans working in Holland, a prominent part of its annual exhibitions which toured the states of the Midwest, including Ohio. Boston and Cincinnati were two cities in which Dutch paintings found their greatest popularity.\footnote{Annette Stott, “American Painters Who Worked in the Netherlands, 1880-1914.” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1986.) 7.}

Paintings created in the Dutch city of Laren were a common feature in the Society of Western Artists’ exhibitions. Laren was favored by many Hague School interior painters, both for its abundance of ideal interior settings and the ready availability of peasant subjects. Painters such as Israels and Neuhuys painted numerous interiors in Laren and found that these works had their greatest appeal with American markets. Laren also became a popular painting ground with many Americans. Works painted here, sent back to
the United States for sale, were acquired by American collectors who could not keep up with the rising prices of paintings by the best known Hague School painters, such as Israels and Mauve. But other Dutch painters such as Neuhuys and Blommers who had painted in Laren also found popularity with U.S. buyers unable to afford the higher prices commanded by the more famous Hague School painters.\footnote{Ibid., 207.}

During her years in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, Schille may have seen the works of Hague School artists in the various galleries that featured the Dutch work. An even more likely link to the Hague School during her New York years would have been her instructor Chase. Chase had been an admirer of the Hague School since the mid-1880s (as well as an acquaintance of Hendrik Willem Mesdag), and because of his high regard for the movement he made study of the Hague School a part of his lectures on European art.\footnote{Katherine Metcalf Roaf, \textit{The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase}, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) 206.}

And though his Tenth Street Studio had closed down only recently before Schille's arrival in New York, and many of the objects and paintings in its content sold off at a fund raising auction, Chase's students, such as Schille, would have no doubt seen the many paintings of his studio. If his students ever saw the amusing photographs of their beloved instructor dressed in 17th century period costume, donned for
costume balls held at the Tenth Street Studio, they would have been certain of his enthusiasm for Dutch art and culture.\(^4\)

Chase also made study of the Hague School a featured part of the curriculum of his summer course in Holland. While in Haarlem the class made visits to the studios of two prominent Hague School artists, Mesdag and Josef Israels. Shortly after their arrival in the Netherlands, Chase's students went to the studios of Mesdag and his wife Sientje, also an artist, and were treated to a tour of Mesdag's extensive personal collection of French, Belgian, and Dutch art.\(^5\) His collection contained many paintings by his fellow Hague School artists, including eight by Josef Israels, fourteen by Anton Mauve, and seven by Bernard Blommers. That same year, Mesdag donated his entire collection to the Dutch state, the bulk of which today is housed in the Mesdag Museum in The Hague.

When the students went to Israels' studio, they met and conversed with a recognized leader of the Hague School. Israels, who had long opened his studio to visiting artists and students, was well known for his hospitality and his generous willingness to critique his guests' art work.\(^6\)

For Chase, years earlier, similar favorable exposure to the Hague School had left a distinct mark on his landscapes. Chase first went to Holland in 1884, in order to paint with

\(^{45}\) Bryant, 71.
\(^{46}\) Roof, 206.
\(^{47}\) Frank M. Collins. "A visit To Joseph Israels By Two Young American Painters, through whom the Famous Hollander Gives Some Excellent Advice to Ambitious Art Students." Art Amateur (33, 1985) 80.
his friend and fellow artist Robert Blum, who had rented a small house in Zaandvoort. Chase stayed with Blum during the summer months, painting mostly outdoor scenes and landscapes. His use of certain compositional techniques, namely the use of a prominent middle horizon line and diagonal lead-ins across the picture plane, suggest an interest in the works of Hague School artists Anton Mauve and Paul Gabriel, whose works he would have likely seen on one of his visits to The Hague.

In the painting, A Dutch Landscape fig. 24 (1884; John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art), the landscape is equal parts moody, cloud-filled sky and expanse of receding field, delineated by a prominent horizon expanding across the length of the composition. A bold, purposeful waterway cuts across the meadow, providing an element of interest, that if absent would have resulted in a monotonous, dull painting. Mauve employed a similar treatment to render landscapes, as in Changing Pasture fig. 25 (1887; Taft Museum). This painting bears a very similar division by a prominent horizon line of cloudy sky and sprawling land. Mauve has here used a wide dirt roadway to break up the large expanse of earth. In both Chase and Mauve’s paintings the placement of occasional scrubby bushes, trees, and far distant buildings on the long, flat horizon line helps to add texture and interest to the work.

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48 Roof, 109.
49 Mary Anne Goley made these observations of Chase’s landscapes in her catalog essay to the 1983 exhibition “The Hague School and its American Legacy.”

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These compositional techniques are still evident in many of Chase’s stunning later landscapes, painted during the summers at Shinnecock in the mid and late 1890s. In Over the Hills and Far Away fig. 26 (1897; Henry Art Gallery) the gentle, rolling landscape of eastern Long Island, cut across by an old, well-worn path, lies beneath a sky thick with silvery cloud cover, in a manner very similar to the treatment Chase used in A Dutch Landscape. The work was painted at Shinnecock only two summers before Schille’s enrollment at Chase’s summer school on Long Island, attesting to the enduring impact of Dutch art on this particular part of his oeuvre, and raising the probability that he would have passed the lessons of Dutch art, particularly the Hague School on to students such as Schille.

As will be discussed in the following section, Schille’s Dutch paintings also exhibit similarities to certain elements found in Hague School works. But it is unlikely that their occurrence in her art came about solely as a result of exposure to them in The Hague. Many of the traits that make these works like those of the Hague School, such as color use and handling of paint, could also be said to be qualities that she had already developed an affinity for via Chase, both in general and via his teachings of the Hague School to his students. It seems plausible that having developed an affinity for certain types of paint use and color through her study with Chase that the occurrence of similar techniques in the Hague School would have appealed to her. Therefore it is not accurate to attribute their
occurrence in her Dutch works solely to her discovery of them in the Hague School. It is perhaps more accurate to say that her study with Chase had primed her to work that way already, and that she felt an affinity for the Hague School works in their similarities to these traits of her own. Though the next section of this thesis will examine the extent of the influence of the Hague School on Schille, consideration will also be made for the original source of certain elements of these works.
Part 5: Schille’s Dutch works and the influence of the Hague School

The works that Alice Schille painted in the Netherlands bear strong affinities to the Hague School in terms of subject motifs, but also in their handling of paint, and color scheme. As I noted earlier, the subjects of Alice Schille’s Dutch paintings are, with rare exceptions, interior domestic scenes of Dutch peasants, primarily women and children. Not portraits, these works capture families and children at random moments in the course of an ordinary day. Having up to this point already favored human subjects, treated as candid and posed portraits, she now painted works that have a connection to the sensitive, sympathetic interior scenes of the Hague School interior painters.

Schille’s paintings of Dutch children bear a clear affinity to some of Israels’ works, such as Baby in a High Chair fig. 27 (n.d.; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen) and Pick-a-Back fig. 28 (c. 1872; Taft Museum). In Blue Door, Dutch Girl Knitting, and Dutch Interior I, Schille has rendered children in a manner very similar to that used by Israel, one in which faces are indistinct and emphasis is placed on the plump softness characteristic of most young children. Unlike her fellow American artist Robert Henri, whose own paintings of Dutch children, such as Dutch Joe fig. 29 (1910; Milwaukee
Art Museum) suggest the influence of seventeenth century painter Frans Hals through their emphasis on lively, distinct facial characteristics, Schille’s children have faces reduced to round, flushed cheeks in a manner strikingly similar to those in Israels’ works.

The pastime occupying the figures in Schille’s works, forms one of the most important aspects of the painting. This is especially true in her paintings of children, though the activity be only playing with a kitten, knitting, or contemplating a cup that sits on a table. And like Israels, Schille has treated the subject of children deftly and with intuition, showing them absorbed in their own thoughts and activities. In Baby in a High Chair, Israels has focused the viewer’s attention on the playful interaction occurring between a very young child and a small cat. Minimal detail is used in the description of the toddler and its environment, but a carefully directed light source illuminates the child, highlighting its white bonnet, and the white fur of the kitten.

As Israels has done in Baby in a High Chair, Schille in Dutch Girl Knitting depicts a charming, candid scene of a child absorbed in activity, here a knitting project. She sits in a small wooden chair with her back to a door, bathed in the sunlight that streams through its window. The room is austere, as are all of Schille’s Dutch interiors, epitomizing her astute underdevelopment of details as a means of concentrating the viewer’s focus on the quaint occupation of her subjects.
A similar concern is attended to in Dutch Interior II where, by down-playing traditional costumes, Schille has shifted emphasis to the human element of her subjects. The figures are dressed in plain dark clothing that bear no distinctively Dutch features. Only bulky wooden clogs give the figures away as being Dutch peasants. Yet even the shoes have been blurred through loose brushwork and are thus not immediately obvious.

Besides children, Schille drew on another popular Hague School motif, that of a figure or group of figures seated indoors by a window. Schille may have been inspired by any of the many works that treated this subject, such as Albert Neuhuys’ Cobbler fig. 30 (n.d.; Mesdag Museum), which was one of the works owned by the Mesdag Museum, or Philip Sadee’s Interior fig. 31 (1894; Mesdag Museum). In these Hague School works, a figure or figures is shown seated, bent over a task of sewing or shoemaking, their work illuminated by the light streaming in from the window. As in Cobbler, where a father is seen diligently plying his trade while his child sleeps peacefully in a nearby cradle, the mood in these works is quiet yet purposeful.

We see Schille employing a similar subject and mood in Coffee Drinkers, Holland, Flemish Interior, and Dutch Girl Knitting. Coffee Drinkers, Holland is a small oil painting that depicts three people seated around a table engaged in a popular Dutch pastime. The work is dark, executed mostly in heavy browns, with subtle red and beige highlights. The
figures are seated by a window, which is the only source of light in the painting, and the only area of the work treated with light colors besides the swirling steam rising from the peasants’ mugs. The figures bent over their coffee evince a somberness, as if to suggest that these peasants may have just come inside from a severe storm, or are silently savoring a cup of pre-dawn coffee before embarking on their daily chores.

_Flemish Interior_, also done in oil, depicts four figures in a room of a peasant home. Two women sit mending while an elderly, stooped-back man stands to their left, peering over their tasks. A young child in the foreground occupies herself by riding on a rocking horse. There is an open door in the back of the room through which light streams in. The left-hand side of the room is sun-filled, accenting the pale cream colored walls and mustard yellow floor. The use of light emanating from a single, limited source, such as a window or open doorway, is an integral feature of this particular subject motif and one that also served to focus attention on the human interaction or activity occurring in these works.

Through her study with Chase, Schille had already developed a preference and facility for bold, free brushwork. With her exposure to the Hague School Schille would have seen that many of these artists used a similar style of brush technique. Many Hague School works such as Jacob Maris’ _Gardens near the Hague_ fig.32 (n.d.; Haags Gemeentemuseum) are rendered with free, almost impressionistic brushwork.
The heavy cloud cover, the dirt road, and the buildings far off in the distance of this work are painted with thick, short brushstrokes not unlike the kind Schille had been known to use in her own oil works before traveling to Holland. Seeing a similar technique being used by Hague School artists may have made the School’s style more appealing to Schille as one to experiment with in her own works.

While the purpose of this section has been to instruct and guide the reader in understanding the various influences of the Hague School on Alice Schille’s Dutch works, I feel it is important to emphasize that she was not derivative. Her intent was not to learn to paint like a Hague School artist, but to explore in her own works those elements of the Hague School that were related to her own artistic sensibilities. As we have seen in this section the Hague School clearly appealed to Schille, and led to similarities between her works and those of the Hague School artists. However, there are also some important differences. A discussion of these points will make up the final section of my thesis.
Part 6: Distinctive elements

Schille's works retain their individuality in large part due to her instinctive impulse to create works that, while technically proficient, were also at all times decorative and visually pleasing. This is not to say that these qualities were unimportant to the Hague School artists, for certainly they were. But whereas for the Hague School painters the subjective element discussed earlier sometimes preceded concerns over how beautiful a painting was, for Schille aesthetic appeal was always a foremost factor in her art making.

In *Dutch Interior I* and other works such as *Flemish Interior* and *The Blue Door* Schille remained consistent with her decorative impulse through a frequent use of subtle accents of purples, reds, and blues. In *Flemish Interior* a pillow rendered by a daub of bright turquoise paint and the soft lilac dress of the woman on the right add a visual spark to a painting that is otherwise overwhelmingly beige in tone. In *The Blue Door* a long door in a shade of pale blue is flanked on either side by edgeboard of an almost pink shade of red. While these areas of color are pale and applied in a thin wash, they nonetheless add a bright note to the simplicity of this interior.
In Dutch Interior I Schille also used the surface of the paper in her composition, allowing areas of white to show through. These unpainted areas were used to suggest the bright glare of sunshine on the sills of windows, the wooden floorboards, the glass lantern, and glints in the child’s blond hair. These accents of light and color are never obtrusive but do serve to lighten the visual impact of the works in a way that it is seldom encountered in Hague School paintings.

Also, while Schille clearly found the peasant subjects of the Hague School appealing, to the point that she used several motifs for inspiration in her own works, her treatment does differ slightly. While certain Hague School artists, Israels in particular, could be given to adding dramatic elements to their work, or investing them with a story line, Schille refrained from going this far. True, she was drawn to themes of motherhood and the quaintness of children, but she only took the appeal of these themes to a certain point in her works, never allowing them to make a forceful statement in her paintings. As with any of the works discussed in this thesis, Dutch Village Gossip, for instance, Schille’s interest in the fall of light and the beauty of the fluid watercolor paint application are as important as the figural element.

Israels, on the other hand, often made emotional content the prime feature of a work. He often chose to paint subjects with tragic overtones and gave these works titles
that enhanced the sense that a story was being told. In The Burial fig. 33 (n.d.; The Preyer Collection, Schevningen) a newly widowed woman grieves openly, her children gathered at her feet, while a funeral party is in attendance in an afternoon. Even the family dog stands with his tail down and head cocked quizzically at the solemn proceedings going on around him. A work such as this, or Israel’s Growing Old fig. 34 (n.d; Haags Gemeentemuseum), a portrait of the frailty and loneliness of old age, are clearly meant to tug a viewer’s heartstrings. Schille’s works never go to this extent to forge emotional connections between the viewer and the painting. Except in the possible case of two works, Weary and The Little Nurse, whose locations and appearance remain unknown to me, Schille’s Dutch works never address the dark side of peasant life. And from the written descriptions of these two paintings, I sense that their subjects, a woman holding a baby and a little girl attending to her sick mother, were once again vehicles to emphasize the charm of mother and child relationships.\(^5^0\)

I believe that the relative lack of emotional involvement that exists in her Dutch works, also notable in a large portion her later travel works, is born out of a few key factors. First, because Schille preferred to paint with watercolors during her travels she found herself using a medium that necessitated speed of production. Watercolor

\(^5^0\) Edna M. Clark in her 1932 book Ohio Art and Artists gives a detailed description of The Little Nurse. Ronald Pisano offers a very brief description of Weary in the catalog essay to the exhibition “Alice Schille Watercolors” held at the Coe Kerr Gallery in New York City.
paint dries rapidly, and is unforgiving of error. To embark on the task of painting anything other than quick, impressionistic scenes may have been difficult for her in this medium. But even in the few oils that she produced during this time she preferred to paint with quick, rapid brushstrokes to give an impressionistic look to the composition.

And, once again, her training with Chase may have influenced her in this instance too. Chase urged his students to avoid imbuing their works with a story element, suggesting that how well an artist could display his skill in a work was a far more important consideration. This same element of detachment that distinguishes her works from those of many of the Hague School works also distinguishes them from those by many of her American compatriots who were also working in Holland at this same time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Holland and its inhabitants became the focus of many American artists. America became a popular destination for a growing number of American painters in the 1880s for several reasons. Many artists desired to travel to Holland to see and study the works of the great Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. At this same time, the Hague School was growing in popularity and works of these artists became a popular feature of an artist’s visit to the Netherlands. With the publication of Sketching Rambles in Holland in 1885, a traveler’s guide to the Netherlands written by George Boughton and illustrated by Edwin A. Abbey that became very popular in the United States, curiosity

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51 Bryant, 186.
about this quaint little country, inhabited by solid, stable citizens grew immensely. Many artists were inspired to travel to the Netherlands to make picture stories of the landscape and towns, and the plenitude of peasants who still wore distinctive costumes.  

Also, during the 1880s, a trend in historical writing had begun that asserted and analyzed perceived connections between the national character of Holland and that of the United States. Historians such as John Lothrop Motley in his four volume study entitled *History of the United Netherlands* (1867) and Douglas Campbell, in his two volume work *The Puritan in Holland, England and America* (1892), set out to attribute the Netherlands as the source of certain qualities that Americans of the nineteenth century valued most highly and liked to consider as a defining elements of their own national identity. These qualities included a strong democratic society where honesty, loyalty, hard work, and religious freedom were prominent features.  

The major historians of this train of thought asserted that the puritans, as a direct response to the twelve years that they spent in Leiden before embarking for America, brought these qualities with them and that they thence became the foundation for American culture and society. Much credit

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52 The reasons behind the American interest in Holland as an artist's destination are discussed in Part I of Stott's dissertation.  
53 Stott discusses the late nineteenth century interest in the historical connections between Holland and the United States in a chapter of her dissertation entitled "Holland as American History."
was also given to the original Dutch settlers in America who had also brought many of these same qualities with them when they settled in this land in the seventeenth century. With the growing popularity of this intellectually based connection between the United States and the Netherlands, Holland became an even more popular destination for many American artists, who were eager to make this imminently respectable land and its stalwart citizens the subjects of their narrative paintings.

The Americans who flocked to the Netherlands often went to visit or live in artists' colonies that had cropped up across Holland during the last two decades of the century. Some colonies were small and short in duration and others attracted large numbers of painters and lasted nearly 30 years. Among the most prominent and successful of the Americans who worked in Holland at this time were George Hitchcock and Gari Melchers, the two artists who founded the highly popular painting colony at Egmond.\(^4\)

Both Hitchcock and Melchers concentrated on peasants as subjects, the most popular subject with Americans who were more interested in painting characters who embodied the qualities mentioned above than in painting the Dutch landscape. Hitchcock became especially known for his paintings of Dutch women, women who in his paintings became the very embodiments of the simple, yet important qualities that artists like himself praised in the Dutch.

A prime example is the painting *Blessed Mother* fig. 35

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\(^4\) The Dutch careers of Hitchcock and Melchers are discussed in detail in Stott's dissertation.
(1892; Cleveland Museum of Art). In the realistic, carefully rendered painting style he was known for Hitchcock has exalted a humble peasant mother to the symbolic status of Madonna. A young woman, plain of feature but garbed in rich elegant costume, sits cradling her young baby in a sunlit garden bordered by flowering trees. The painting is rife with religious allusions that strengthen Hitchcock’s message that Dutch peasant women, in their solid religious beliefs, unshakable moral character, and devotion to motherly duties, deserve this lofty association as earthly madonnas. A circular lace headdress frames the young mother’s face to suggest a halo, and with the sunlight behind her filtering through the lace of her headdress and softening the edges of her cape, she appears almost as a heavenly apparition. With the baby cuddling at her breast, and the calf feeding at the trough behind her, the scene makes references to the nativity. But here, we the viewers take the place of ancient kings, travelling to humble surroundings to bear witness to the divine nature of motherhood.

In a number of his own paintings, Gari Melchers also focused on the importance of religion to the strong moral character of the Dutch. The Sermon fig. 36 (1886; National Museum of American Art), while somewhat humorous in its presentation ultimately has a serious message. The plain interior of protestant Dutch church is filled with reverent Sunday occupants. The eyes of all save one young woman are trained attentively on an unseen figure delivering a sermon.
The sole exception has fallen asleep in her chair, and now unknowingly has become the subject of an older woman's admonishing stare. Though Melchers, like Hitchcock, was a realistic painter who carefully recorded all details of costume and facial features, the message of the painting, the importance of upholding religious faith, is the key element of the work.

In an oil painting of 1887 entitled In Holland fig. 37 (1887; The Gari Melchers Memorial Gallery), Gari Melchers has typified the American ideal of Holland as a place that had remained unscarred by the onslaught of the industrial era. Holland was seen by many Americans as a country that had been able to preserve its preindustrial economy and along with it, the strong moral ideals rooted in an agrarian culture.55

The two young women in In Holland still use the simple farming implements that had been a feature of their country for centuries, and both are strong enough to remain erect under the weight of heavy wooden tools and milk pails. Pride in their distinctive regional identity is evidenced in the ornate costumes worn regardless of the heavy nature of their work. And not by accident does a proud, stout windmill look out over them from its exalted vantage on a small, its cross-like panels alluding to the unflagging presence of Christianity in their society.

Another painter who worked in Holland was Schille's fellow Ohioan, Elizabeth Nourse. Nourse, from Cincinnati, never became a longterm resident of one of the painting colonies in Holland but did spend one productive summer, in

55 Stott, 43.
1892, painting in the town of Volendam. Nourse, who had worked steadily in Europe, mostly in France, since the late 1880s, became well known for her commitment to painting women and children of peasant communities with an eye towards conveying their strength and goodness.

In Volendam, a fishing community on the southern end of the Ijsselmeer, Nourse painted works such as *Sur la digue a Volendam* fig. 38 (1892; location unknown). In this painting a group of Dutch fisherwives stand at the edge of the sea with their children keeping vigilant watch for their husbands' still distant boats. These woman have braved the threat of crashing waves, heavy rain, and ceaseless wind to keep a brave watch. In doing so, they come to symbolize strength and fortitude, loyalty to family and trade, qualities of the Dutch peasantry esteemed by Americans.

When put in the context of the paintings by other Americans of the Dutch, Schille's present quite a contrast. Works like those of Hitchcock, Melchers, and Nourse were by far the norm rather than the exception among those produced by Americans in Holland at the time. Works loaded with the moral and religious associations, and featuring the ruddy, quaintly dressed peasants were a favorite subject with many American artists and became enormously popular with American art audiences.

Schille had ample opportunities for gaining exposure to works by other Americans working in Holland before ever embarking on her first trip to Europe. In particular, her residence in Ohio gave her access to the exhibits of the
Society of Western Artists and her proximity to Cincinnati would have put her in touch with the craze there for Hague School works and paintings by Americans who had worked in Holland. This is important because it means that despite a likely awareness of the common impression of Holland and the Dutch that was circulated to American audiences by these American artists, she did not respond to this trend in her own art. She resisted the popular trend to load her works with the typical associations and stereotypes of the Dutch. In fact she downplayed the reference to specific Dutch details of costume in her works. Schille’s talent lay in her ability to strike at the commonalities of the human experience, to recognize similarities rather than differences, and to create visually appealing, impressionistic, glimpses of the lives of the people she observed in her travels.
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