



# The Gilbert Stuart

## Birthplace and Museum

Spring 2009

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www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org

### Seven Story Market at the Spring Fair

Susan Letendre of North Kingstown began her *Seven Story Market* selling wares from south of the border. The basic premise of her business is fair trade: artisans of villages in Mexico and Guatemala are assured a living wage for their ware that is intended to not only pay them for their labor but to benefit their villages as well. Seven Story Market also seeks to insure that working conditions are healthy and culturally appropriate; materials used are ecologically harvested, and production methods protect the environment.

Susan Letendre works with the Maya in the Western Highlands of Guatemala and the south of Mexico. For this year's Gilbert Stuart Museum *Spring Fair* event, she will be showing and selling small woven items from families in Panabaj, a pueblo destroyed by a mudslide in 2005. Since that catastrophe, these brave women have scooped the mud out of their homes and, with the help of the people from the next village, bought new thread and looms and have again begun creating their wares. Susan will also have table runners from several different pueblos located around Lake Atitlan, Chichicastanenga, and close to the volcanoes surrounding La Antigua. These table runners are hand-woven on ancient backstrap looms; these looms go back thousands of years and based on their antiquity, have a central place in the Mayan creation mythology. Susan will also show exquisite and colorful bead jewelry, products of two associations in Santiago Atitlan, where widows and orphans of a 36-year war earn fair wages to support their families, send their children to school, and feed elderly women who have no families. Another group of weavers whose shawls and scarves will be featured have revived, and teach, the art of dyeing natural fibers with local plants and minerals. Susan will bring stories and photographs of the communities and artisans with whom she works. "I am blessed to know and be part of supporting the work with these extraordinary women," says Susan. "Their hope, courage, and creativity in crafting a new, fairer world for themselves, their children, their communities are deeply inspiring. What a joy it is to tell their stories!"

Please come to the Gilbert Stuart Museum's Spring Fair and see for yourself. The Museum's Spring Fair will be held on April 26<sup>th</sup>, from 1:00 to 4:00pm.

Harriet Powell



Tz'utujil children in everyday dress, Santiago Atitlán



Susan visiting weavers, San Antonio de Agua Caliente

### Spring Fair at the Birthplace

Sunday April 26, 2009

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Adults \$5, Children (below 12 yrs.) \$2,  
2009 Members Free

"Fish on the Run" river herring presentation by DEM  
Corn Grinding in the Hammond Gristmill  
Jonnycakes

"Art and the Natural World: R I Connections" Art Exhibit/Sale  
Seven Story Market Exhibit/Sale  
Steinhagen Redware Pottery  
Spinning, weaving, rug hooking presentations

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We are still optimistic that we will be able to raise the funds through grants to complete the urgent repairs to the Birthplace and the renovation of the Center. The Birthplace will, of course, take precedence over the Center if need be. The Museum buildings, like any structures, need constant maintenance; we have been fortunate to have solid leadership in the past, which has given us an excellent foundation to move forward with.

As I approach the halfway point of my tenure as President, I am still amazed at the amount of energy and talent that the committees bring to the table, along with the unwavering vision of our Executive Director, Peg O'Connor. I extend gratitude to each and every one of them. Finally, I thank you for being part of our Museum family; I look forward to seeing you in the coming months.

Sincerely,

**Dan Bell**  
**President of the Board of Trustees**

**President's Message Spring 2009**

Dear friends of the Museum,

I am pleased to report that we are off to a great start for the 2009 season; all of our committees have been extremely active, tracking through the snow at the Museum to assure another successful year. We are actively pursuing new membership and are in the process of putting the finishing touches on our special events for 2009. In addition, our fundraising committee has been working very hard to secure grants for the funding of some much-needed work on the Birthplace. With a little luck, we hope also to obtain a grant for the renovation of the Welcome and Education Center.

The Building and Grounds Chairperson, the incoming President, the Executive Director, and I have been interviewing, meeting, and receiving valuable input as to how to approach the Birthplace repairs. We have had on-site visits with experts from the Newport Preservation Society, Mr. Tom Paske, a restoration specialist from Westfield Massachusetts, and Mr. Ray Clidence, of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Woodworks, the contractor who has done much of the recent restoration work at the museum. The experience has been very interesting, to say the least; with each successive meeting, we continue to learn how to best perform the replacement of the roof, and at the same time take steps to brace and repair other structural problems. We have spent many hours to assure that we do everything possible to protect and preserve the Birthplace. The last major repairs were performed in the mid 1990s. The Welcome Center was completed in 2000.

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ITTSY BITSY COCHINEAL

*In the Fall 2007 newsletter, I wrote an article about cochineal, which is a beetle that appears on prickly pear cactus pads. When pulled off and mashed, a brilliant red stain will appear on your fingertips. This spectacular crimson dye was used to color garments, as a food coloring, for rouge, etc. This is a continuation of the Fall 2007 article.*

Was this brilliant red dye used by the colonists and particular those of Gilbert Stuart's time? If colonists used it, it would have been after Gilbert Stuart's time – perhaps in the middle and late 1800's. Europeans used the brilliant scarlet cochineal dye especially in the mid 1700's and 1800's. It was mostly imported from Mexico, Canary Islands, and countries in North Africa and Mediterranean. The Spanish purposely promoted the misconception that the dye came from berries or the like to discourage New World natives from acquiring it and producing it. In fact, by 1600, cochineal was second to silver as the most valuable import from Mexico. Because cochineal textiles were in demand, the Navajos in the American Southwest, who had no red in their original weavings, traded for cochineal dyed flannel blankets of the Spanish soldiers. The blankets or *bayetas* were unraveled and threads were then reused in Navajo textiles.

The colonists of Gilbert Stuart's time probably used madder root to produce the red coloring for dying fabrics and such rather than cochineal. But that is for another article.

**Peggy Todd**



**Mrs. Richard Yates by Gilbert Stuart 1793-1794.**  
*National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*

### Catherine Brass Yates

Leaving unfinished paintings and debts behind, Gilbert Stuart left Ireland with his family in 1793 after almost twenty years in Britain. Stuart felt the time was right to return to America because he believed he could make a fortune by painting "a plurality of portraits" of George Washington. The family took up residence in New York City and Gilbert was soon painting portraits as a result of introductions by Chief Justice John Jay. The artist soon had enough commissions for a year. The portraits he painted in that period displayed his total range of talents as if in a portfolio for future commissions.

The Yates family - husband, wife, brother, daughter and son-in-law - all sat for Gilbert Stuart in 1793-94. They were prosperous New York merchants, importing goods from Europe and East India. Richard's portrait is considered of conventional excellence, not of a handsome man but one who was straightforward and vigorous.

With Catherine's, the artist "performed a miracle" according to the author, Richard McLanathan. "One of the finest characterizations produced by an American artist" says the National Gallery of Art about the portrait of Mrs. Richard Yates by Gilbert Stuart.

In this remarkable portrait, Catherine Brass Yates is seated sideways with her angular face turned to the left. The tall, gauzy mobcap elongates her thin, bony face into one of spare elegance. Catherine's long nose leads the viewer's eye to the point of the needle held in

Save the Date  
**Join us on the beautiful grounds  
of the museum for an evening fun!**  
**"Raising the Roof"**  
**August 7, 2009**  
**5:30 -7:30 p.m.**  
**Music, wine, hors d'oeuvres**  
**Artists-in-Residence Art Sale**  
**Help support our fundraising efforts for structural  
repairs and a new roof for the Birthplace.**

her slender, graceful hands. One's eyes are led by the thread to the other hand, down her arm and back up to her face where she continues to hold the viewer in a confident gaze.

The silvery surface of the silk dress that Mrs. Yates wears, the linen textured fishu around her shoulders, and the velvety texture of the red chair that she occupies demonstrates Stuart's brilliant brushwork. Her skin glows with realistic transparency. The techniques here have been compared with Valasquez.

Gilbert Stuart's portraits did not flatter his subjects as English artists did, but portrayed them with factual accuracy. Therefore, we see that Mrs. Yates' right eye droops a bit. And is that darkness above her lip a hint of a mustache? A critic might say that he painted his subjects flaws too closely. Stuart's rejoinder might have been "What a business is this of a portrait painter! You bring him a potato and expect he will paint you a peach."

In writing about the portrait of Mrs. Yates, various authors quote Gilbert Stuart himself. "In England my efforts were compared with those of Van Dyck, Titian and other great painters - here they are compared with the works of the Almighty!"

**Gail Shields**

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**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED Call 401-294-3001**

**Gardens:** We need several volunteers to come occasionally and maintain our garden beds.

**Junior Docents:** We are looking for interested youths to participate in this volunteer program.

**Docents & Office Volunteers**

*Many thanks to all who generously give of your time, talent, and monetary support to preserve and keep vital this National Historic Landmark!*

### Members' Appreciation Day

Sunday, June 28, 2009 ~ 1:00-3:00pm  
*Open House and refreshments to show our appreciation for your support.*  
*Bring a friend!*

### Gilbert Stuart Museum Spring 2009 Calendar

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| April 1 – April 25, 2009                   | Grounds open 11:00 am – 4:00 pm for viewing of Herring<br>Museum buildings closed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| April 17, 2009 (Friday)                    | 5:00pm ~ Docent and Volunteer “Welcome Back” Meeting                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| April 19, 2009                             | Open House for prospective Junior Docents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| April 20 – May 1, 2009                     | Museum open Monday through Friday by appointment for school groups (reservations required)                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| April 26, 2009 (Sunday)                    | <u>Spring Fair at the Birthplace</u> 1:00 – 4:00<br>Fish on the Run Program by DEM’s Fish and Wildlife experts<br>Corn grinding in the Hammond Gristmill<br>Jonnycakes by Bob and Diane Smith of Carpenter’s Grist Mill<br>“Art and the Natural World: Rhode Island Connections” Exhibit/Sale<br>Demonstrations |
| May 4, 2009 (Monday)                       | Museum and Gallery open for the season:<br>Thursday – Monday, closed Tuesday and Wednesday<br>Tours given on the hour from 11:00-3:00 (Sunday 12-3)<br>Art Exhibit and Sale through July                                                                                                                        |
| May * 2009 (Saturday)                      | *Dates to be announced. Bird walk(s) 7:00 am. Call for reservations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| June 11 – 15, 2009<br>nmJuly 16 – 20, 2009 | <u>Artists-in-Residence Programs</u> : Grounds open for painting and photography<br>Thursday – Monday during Museum hours or by special arrangement.                                                                                                                                                            |
| June 28, 2009 (Sunday)                     | <u>Members Appreciation Day</u> 1:00-3:00pm<br>Open House for all museum members and those interested in becoming members. Bring a friend!<br>Refreshments.                                                                                                                                                     |
| August 7, 2009 (Friday)                    | <u>Raising the Roof</u> 5:30-7:30<br>Gala Fundraiser & Art Sale: Come and celebrate the Museum’s 78 <sup>th</sup> year with an evening of music,<br>fine food, and art. Sale of works by our Artists-in-Residence.                                                                                              |