

ROBERT PHILIPP  
THE LAST AMERICAN IMPRESSIONIST

BY MARK MEACHEM  
AND MATT KENDALL

*for Ross Peacock  
friend and mentor*

  
KENDALL FINE ART



Photo courtesy of Mr. Peter Lundberg

## INTRODUCTION

Robert Philipp was one of America's top six painters of his generation; he was a National Academician; his paintings were collected by the likes of J. Paul Getty and The Metropolitan Museum of Art; he was commissioned to create portraits for Hollywood Stars and the U.S. Government; his paintings appeared in advertisements for Maxwell House, Lucky Strike, Steinway and others. And yet today he is not a household name in American art.

Perhaps the reason is simply timing. He was painting at a transitional time in art. He was appreciated to be sure, but he was not cutting edge. Instead he was compared to the Impressionists, particularly Renoir. There were new and more exciting expressions that captured the attention of society and ultimately art historians (in 1937 Philipp was the sole American to receive a Carnegie International Award, with George Braque receiving the first prize for his Cubist *The Yellow Cloth*).

Nonetheless, there was no mistaking that Robert Philipp possessed rare talent. He was a master of color and draftmanship, but his success was the result of something more. Philipp had the innate sensitivity and passion to capture the true essence of his subjects. Whether the contemplative female in a private moment in time, an intimate couple at dinner, or a bustling night at the opera, the viewer is transported into the moment, sensing it, feeling it.

"I paint with my heart and my mind, but this is a completely subconscious process," he once said.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Philipp's talent was extraordinary, and captivates us today as it did others before us, but now with a longing nostalgia. We hope this exhibition will reawaken an appreciation for this brazen yet delicately insightful man and allow him to take his rightful place in art history as one of America's great artists.

This tribute to Robert Philipp would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of numerous individuals who share a love of this great artist. Thank you Mr. Peacock for bringing Robert Philipp to life with your words and for inspiring this project. Thank you Mark Meachem for taking on this challenge and employing your expertise to write his story. Thank you Pete Lundberg for sharing your passion for the artist, your knowledge, your ephemera and your collection. Thank you to the numerous private collectors for sharing your wonderful works for all to enjoy. And thank you to the Art Students League of New York, The Corcoran Gallery and The Smithsonian American Art Museum for supporting this project and responding heroically in the eleventh hour of production.

– Matt Kendall

# ROBERT PHILIPP: THE LAST AMERICAN IMPRESSIONIST

## “THE BOY HAS TALENT”

Robert Philipp was born Moses Solomon Philipp in New York City on February 2, 1895 to Paul and Johanna Philipp. The boy, known as Robert, would later legally change his name to that. His father was born in Germany and his mother, Austria; the family seemed to be in constant travel, regularly moving between New York and Europe when Robert was young. Philipp was born into luxury and he always lived comfortably, even if never in one place. He said he attended at least 18 different schools as a child, usually in Germany or New York, and he was fluent in German. In addition, Philipp often had private tutors when it was too hard to enroll him in school.<sup>2</sup>

The cosmopolitan lifestyle to which Robert grew accustomed was in part due to his family’s talent for the arts. His father was a painter early in life and later became a theatrical manager in conjunction with Robert’s uncle Adolph Philipp, an accomplished and successful playwright, composer, actor and singer, who also lived with the family. The two men produced several dozen hits including, *Alma*, *Where Do You Live?* and *The Midnight Girl*.

As a child, Robert had aspirations of becoming a professional opera singer. For a short while in the 1920s he did join his uncle’s opera company as a tenor and performed admirably, but drawing was his first love and Philipp knew why. “I’m not meant to work for bosses. Even in show business – even in opera – you have to take directions and that I never could take,” he once said. “I love art. I love the idea of being left alone and being able to do what I want to do. That’s a wonderful feeling.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Philipp would never feel comfortable mingling in large groups, preferring to be alone or in the company of just one or two trusted friends.

He was attracted to art at an early age, drawing sketches by age three. His family encouraged him to draw and was amazed at his ability. They willingly sat as models for portrait after portrait as he honed his skill. “They believed in me since I was a child,” he would say. “Only once in a while, my father used to think that I ought to take up being a goldsmith – a trade – because a lot of people starved to death painting.”<sup>4</sup>

As he became older, his aunt would take him to the National Museum in Berlin where he was fascinated by the works of German artists such as Max Lieberman and realist Adolph von Menzel.

Unfortunately, this unwavering support for his love of art and drawing was not always equaled outside the home and this both confused and bothered the boy.

When he was about seven he attended a school in Berlin. Instead of paying attention to the teacher, Philipp used his teacher as a model and drew a portrait. The teacher became aware of this and, feeling the boy was being disrespectful, the teacher yanked Philipp out his chair, beat his hands with a ruler, slapped his cheeks, spanked him and angrily took the paper away. Meanwhile, as Philipp sat crying from the attack, another teacher had heard the commotion and entered the room. The two teachers then examined the drawing. The boy saw a look of surprise on their faces, and his own teacher's countenance suddenly changed into a wide smile. He overheard their approval to each other – and he could hear the word 'Ausgezeichnet' – meaning "The boy has talent" being murmured over and over. Despite the physical pain he felt, the boy now knew that he had a gift and must develop it.

By the age of 15, Philipp was studying at The Art Students League of New York under the guidance of famed art teachers George Bridgman and Frank Vincent DuMond, who focused on the fundamental principles of art. He mostly did charcoals there and acknowledges that he could not yet handle paint. But being among the youngest students, Philipp remembered more than just the artistic techniques. He recalled how the adults in class would make him sit up front when they were drawing a nude model – just so that they could tease him and watch his embarrassed reactions. A normal, yet ironic, reaction for an artist who, over the course of his life, would deliver hundreds of remarkable paintings and sketches of nudes.

After four years there, he then began studying at New York's National Academy of Design under the watchful eyes of George W. Maynard and Douglas Volk, who trained under Gérôme. It was here that Philipp felt he really started to develop as a painter, becoming more confident in his ability to work with oils.

In 1916 and 1922, Philipp won the Third and Second Hallgarten Prizes, respectively, given by the National Academy of Design to the best painting



*Portrait of My Mother* (1926), oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches  
Permanent collection, The Art Students League of New York

exhibited at the Academy by artists under the age of 35. Philipp, who was only 22 and 27 at the times of the awards, could take great satisfaction, not only that his talent was recognized, but also that he was recognized over many of the older and more established painters at the Academy.

## ON HIS OWN

After his father died in the 1920s, Philipp realized he needed to get away and remove the restrictions he felt from academic painting.<sup>5</sup> In 1924, he left for France, where he shared a studio with another painter and visited the Louvre often. He tried to sell paintings there, but over time his money would run out and he was forced to return to New York. Philipp regretted the missed opportunities in Paris. “I really hadn’t found myself yet at that time,” he said. “I was floundering around. I didn’t have the right direction – which way to go.”<sup>6</sup> In part, Philipp was frustrated that he could not find a way to enter the social circles of the French artists who, he felt, could really help him learn and provide the direction and knowledge he needed. “You have to have friends that you get something out of,” he said.<sup>7</sup>

Once he returned to New York, Philipp struggled – both financially and with his art – and was unable to find a foothold in the art world. His family could not help him financially. His father’s death had not only brought the emotional pain and suffering that one might expect, but it had also marked a financial downturn for the family. Robert’s uncle, Adolph, having lost his brother and business partner, practically retired from public life. And like many other industries the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Depression would be cruel to those in show business. While the family was not in ruin, nor was Philipp ever for want of food, they were not able to live the lifestyle to which they had been accustomed.

Still searching for his identity as a painter, Philipp experimented with his various styles as he attempted to find his place in the New York art scene. His emotional temperament and strongly held opinions about art hurt his chances. The dealers he wanted were not interested in working with him because of his moodiness; the dealers who were open to his style were those with whom he did not want to work.

Yet amidst all the difficulties Philipp faced during this period, fate also brought him help. He would soon meet his best and favorite model. That meeting would seemingly change Philipp’s life and art.



*Rochelle Post and Robert Philipp,*  
Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Negative Number J0002061

## MEETING ROCHELLE

After his return from France, sometime around 1926, Robert Philipp was standing in a New York studio on 58th Street, not knowing that the most important relationship of his life was about to begin.<sup>8</sup> It was there that he first met Rochelle Post, who was an artist herself and a regular model for his good friend and colleague, Robert Brackman.

From the moment Philipp and Rochelle met, there was an emotional pull that drew them together and Rochelle would eventually become Philipp's wife and most-painted model.

Rochelle vividly recalls the first time she met the broad, six-foot-tall painter with thick sandy hair and gray-blue eyes. She noticed the paradox in the man



*"My Wife and Myself"* (1936), oil on canvas, 32 x 38 inches, Private collection, Madison, Wisconsin

immediately. He seemed reserved at first but as they spoke, Rochelle saw a vitality and fire within the man that drew her to him. Philipp could at the same time seem relaxed, yet intense. He was natural and unpretentious, yet brooded and could be arrogant. He had an outgoing manner and deep infectious laugh, yet he was shy and unusually introspective. It was his big smile and passion that encompassed Rochelle and she immediately felt an attraction to him that she had never felt before.

Coincidence or not, as his friendship with Rochelle developed, Philipp's star began to rise. He sold more paintings and gained the attention of museums and private art collectors.

Rochelle recounts one such encounter with a collector during which Phillip realized his works were growing in stature. Sitting in his rented Lincoln Square studio, Philipp, who had very few visitors at the time, heard a knock at the door. When he answered it, he saw two well-dressed women. Speaking in a thick

German accent, one of the women eschewed any greeting and abruptly asked him, “Are you starving?” Philipp was stunned and did not know what to say. The woman, annoyed by a lack of response, asked again, “Are you starving?” This time Philipp collected himself and said, “No, I am not starving.” With that the woman shrugged her shoulders and replied, “If you are not starving, what’s the use?” Seeming displeased, the woman grabbed her friend’s arm and they turned and walked away.

Uncertain of what had just taken place, Philipp closed the door. But curiosity got the best of him, and he ran quickly down the hall to catch the two women and ask who they were and why they had come to his studio.

The first woman spoke again; she introduced herself as Baroness Hilla Rebay and said her friend was Mrs. Moses. Moses was interested in buying some art. The two women had come to see him because they had heard from a framer that Philipp was starving, but since he was not, there was nothing to discuss. Finding it odd having to apologize for his adequate nutrition, Philipp convinced the women to return to his studio and the women purchased a painting from him.<sup>9</sup>

Rebay, a well-known avant-garde artist, was a confidant of Solomon Guggenheim. She eventually became Guggenheim’s chief art adviser, and later the first director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting and its successor, the Guggenheim Museum.

## 1930s – RISING STAR

The 1930s were perhaps the most important years in the maturity of Philipp as an artist. Philipp had become an established portrait painter of nudes and still lifes; he had discarded pastels for oils; and he was elected to the National Academy as an Associate.

Many of his paintings seemed to glow with a soft, hazy light. His strong use of light and bold colors make his pictures stand out from others of his period. Nonetheless what most observers notice when they examine his portraits is the almost eerie ability of Philipp to uncover the personality of the model through the painting. His nudes often struck a serene, contemplative pose that provides the viewer with a glimpse into the models’ soul. Indeed, many of Philipp’s portraits, mainly of women, went beyond the realistic and somehow captured the model’s inner character, the realism only serving as the excuse for the subject matter. “I didn’t like my paintings to look too human,” he once told *Life* magazine. “Then you miss other things.”<sup>10</sup>



*In a Pensive Mood* (before 1935), oil on canvas, 34.1875 x 40.125 inches  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Terry De Lapp in Memory of Yrma Marcus  
Photograph ©2005 Museum Associates/LACMA, Museum Number M.81.197

Philipp seemed at ease painting people and it was as though he could see the innermost depths of the people he painted. He had a poet's eye that provided an intuitiveness to see through the reality of both the figure and scene. "I know that my reality is not realism but my perspective of it, and a commentary upon it. The past, and the present, and the future, become a blend," he said.<sup>11</sup>

During this time, his work also took on more stature; his lines became bolder and his works more intense. Philipp, it seemed, was developing a new and looser style, shaking off the Masters who influenced him, such as Rembrandt, Reubens, and Renoir. Paintings such as *Speakeasy*, *Derelicts* and *My Uncle in Rehearsal* offered up scraps of daily life and emotions that he had noticed.

His 1935 painting, *In a Pensive Mood*, was especially important. While it later served as his diploma work for acceptance as a member of the National Academy of Design, it created an immediate reaction when it was exhibited. Shown in the window of a Fifth Avenue gallery, it appealed to a variety of tastes in the crowds of people who daily would gather around the showcase, drawn to it by its subtle beauty. There were many bidders for the painting and Rochelle would later regret that it was sold, wishing she could have kept it herself.

As the *New York Post* noted in 1935, regarding this painting:

“Mr. Philipp’s work has a quality of sensuous vitality, the glowing colors of flowers...the graceful relaxation of bodily pose unhampered by the exigencies of the relating figures with interior inharmonious composition.”<sup>12</sup>

His paintings were more spontaneous now and Philipp firmly believed that true inspiration came from nature itself. If an artist ignored what was naturally inside him and rather let cerebral thought enter into the picture, it would result in a cold, lifeless painting. Artists, Philipp would say, should not be afraid to be themselves. “Of course it would seem that a mature talent could not be swayed by art fashions. But people who paint are only human and do deviate from themselves, thus setting their progress backward immeasurably,” he said.<sup>13</sup>

It was also during this time that Philipp received one of his most glowing reviews, one that followed him throughout his career. During his 1935 one-man show at the Grand Central Galleries, famed *New York Sun* art critic Henry McBride ranked Philipp among the top six contemporary painters. “He is among our best draughtsman,” McBride wrote, “he knows how to put a picture together and make it seem complete.”<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile the *New York World-Telegram* said of that same show:

“He is a recorder rather than an interpreter, yet he is a million miles removed from that suave, slick, flashing technique, or that vacuous reportorial rendering which have ruined so many gifted artists.”<sup>15</sup>

The mid-1930s also brought about three major events in Philipp’s life, ones that would have a profound influence on his art as well. In 1935, he married Rochelle, who would become his model in hundreds of paintings and sketches. Philipp saw her as a perfect model, incapable of making an ungraceful move. She had a magnetic presence that both artist and observer could not deny. More importantly, Rochelle was the missing piece to Philipp’s personal life, his connection to others. The two would spend many nights together at The Russian Tea Room and at nightclubs in New York City – the center of sophisticated social life in the 1930s and 1940s. His memories of these moments were often captured in paintings such as *The Lunch*, *Theater Party*, *Tea Time*, and *The Gourmet*.

Artistically, Philipp captured the First Prize and Logan Gold Medal at the Chicago Art Institute for his well-known work, *Olympia*, the painting of a disenchanted semi-nude sitting at a table. Again, Philipp captured the contemplative, eternal woman who is watching life go by. The observer sees a more classical element here and the picture’s fluid brushstrokes and luminous color are tremendous. *Olympia* was later purchased by financier and Philipp collector, J. Paul Getty, a regular collector of Philipp’s paintings.

## SURPRISING RENDEZVOUS

Getty had a strong interest in Philipp's art and his first acquisition of a Philipp picture showed how far he would go to get what he wanted. According to Rochelle, Philipp's well-known painting *Rendezvous* was on exhibit at the time at the Mystic (Connecticut) Art Association. The painting depicts a happy and colorful café scene with two young women, a blond and brunette, both being posed by Rochelle. Getty had apparently seen the picture and sent a representative to buy it for him, but the man did not reveal Getty's name to the Philipps.

One Saturday morning, the representative telephoned Rochelle asking if he could purchase the painting. When Rochelle advised the man to contact the gallery in Connecticut, the man responded that he had already done that but they claimed a museum was already interested in purchasing it. For some reason, Rochelle decided to ask the man if he had seen the painting. The man answered, "No, I haven't seen it, I just want to buy it." Not realizing the caller was serving as a liaison for a buyer, Rochelle began to think the call was a fake.

But the caller persisted. He said he had already insured the picture and had sent the gallery a deposit but he still wanted to see Philipp at once to be sure he would secure the picture.

When Rochelle told her husband about the call, he too thought it strange but they told the man he could come to their home to discuss the matter. Once they hung up, Rochelle called the Mystic Art Association and was told that the same man had called them repeatedly and was anxious to have *Rendezvous* before he lost it to a museum.

The story only began to make sense once the man arrived at Philipp's apartment. The man was an attorney and his client wished to purchase the picture. The lawyer was adamant about fulfilling his client's mission and wanted to give Philipp a certified check, drive to the gallery, and take it back with him. Although *Rendezvous* was supposed to have remained for the duration of the exhibit, Philipp received permission from the gallery to substitute another one in its place. Still there was another reason for concern. Since it was a Saturday, all banks were closed. The name on the check was "J. Paul Getty" but that meant nothing to the artist at the time. The small bank that issued the check was in Hoboken, N.J., rather than New York, which also raised doubt with the artist. Rochelle called the bank and was surprised to find an employee there. When she explained the story, she asked if the check from this man named Getty was good. The voice on the other end laughed and assured her the check was authorized. With that, the three drove to Mystic and withdrew the painting and Getty had his first Philipp for his renowned collection.<sup>16</sup>



Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Negative Number J0002051

## DRAMATIC DEPARTURE

That same year, Philipp's mother died. This was especially devastating to him as he always had a special solidarity with his mother. His uncle Adolph, who had lived with and cared for Philipp's mother after Philipp's father died, then moved in with Philipp and Rochelle. But only six months later, Adolph also passed away, leaving Philipp without the three closest patrons from his early years.

The impact of the loss of his mother and uncle clearly leaked into Philipp's art. The funerals of both relatives haunted him for a year. His painting *Dust to Dust*, depicting a gloomy, rainy burial site, struck a far more somber chord than his previous works. Gone were the softer colors and warmth found in his portraits, replaced with darker tones -- more grays and blacks. The observer feels a strong emotional plea. The work captured First Honorable Mention, the only American painting to capture a prize that year, at the 1937 Carnegie International Art Show.

Rochelle made special note about how this painting emerged from Philipp's mourning as she witnessed him paint it.

"One day I saw him grab a life-size canvas, turn it horizontally and lash into the empty linen with fervent and energetic brush. I watched the picture emerge. He painted tirelessly without rest from early morning until twilight became night, and it was finished. A brooding dramatic expression of a mood had been transmitted. It was not realistic. It was not abstract. It was a mood. Black umbrellas made melancholy patterns over the masses of black that somehow were figures."<sup>17</sup>

Critics were also quick to recognize this change in his style and themes. As one *New York Times* reviewer noted in 1937:

"A distinct departure from his earlier works is evident...The departure is manifold -- in subject matter, which is more dramatic; in composition, which is stronger; in palette, wherein a seemingly dominant hazy rose has been abandoned for earth colors and darker hues; in personal quality, which is marked positively by a deepened sense of human values and a new breadth."<sup>18</sup>

As the decade came to an end, Philipp received yet another honor. In 1939, I.B.M. awarded him the Honorary Medal for Distinction and Contribution to American Art. During the 1930s, Philipp attained the unusual position in the art world -- that of being popular with both the public and the critics. But Philipp was not concerned with the critics' reviews. He never let himself get too high or too low when criticisms came his way. As he would later say, "A critic has never sold a picture for me."<sup>19</sup>

## WESTWARD HO

Though he loved New York City, the 1940s marked a time when Philipp would experience areas beyond the Hudson River. In the spring of 1940, Philipp was invited by Hollywood movie mogul Louis B. Mayer to paint portraits of the MGM stars. Philipp's friend and longtime art dealer, Ross Peacock, recalls that this opportunity had special significance to Philipp. Mayer was a powerful figure and his studio carried unmatched clout. This request was a chance for Philipp to enhance his reputation and career. Mayer was remarkably hospitable and provided Philipp and Rochelle with a home and studio while he was visiting California.

Philipp painted stars such as Clark Gable and Shirley Temple. The portraits were not a test of Philipp's artistic ability and they often ended up as a gift from the studio to the star. But there was one encounter that Philipp experienced that stood out among the rest and offered a perfect glimpse of his spiritedness, strong will and humor.

As Peacock retells it, Philipp was warned that diva and noted actress Merle Oberon would use her imperious attitude to put him down. At the exact appointed time, Oberon pushed right through the door without a knock. She made no acknowledgment of Philipp but rather walked straight toward the window and offered a dramatic profile against the light, saying, "Many artists have asked to paint me but I rejected all the portraits of those I agreed to pose for, since they made me look too Eurasian."

Philipp examined the beautiful woman with her exotic face and almond eyes and realized that even if God himself undertook a painting of her, the starlet would not be happy with it. So Philipp decided it would be absurd for him to try. After a long silence, Philipp replied, "Madame, you shall not have the privilege of rejecting my portrait of you since I refuse to paint you."

Oberon now turned to face him with her eyes blazing fire. "If looks could kill, I'd have been a dead man," Philipp later said. Without a word, she strode out of the room and slammed the door for her dramatic exit. After collecting himself, Philipp, feeling as if he had just been a part of a movie scene, realized the cameras often missed the greatest theatrical performances of Hollywood stars.<sup>20</sup>

That same spring, Philipp received a letter from the University of Illinois, Urbana informing him that they received a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to establish a visiting teaching position and Resident Painter on campus each year.



Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Negative Number J0084349



*Homage to Sargent* (1956), oil on canvas, 60 x 80 inches  
Permanent collection, The Art Students League of New York

The faculty had voted to ask Philipp if he would be willing to accept the position. Philipp did, and in the fall of 1940 he and Rochelle again left the confines of their West 57th Street apartment to spend a year in Illinois. That Christmas, during the semester break, Philipp and Rochelle drove to New Orleans to escape the cold and ice of the Midwest. Along the way, as the temperature began to rise and they drove deeper into the South, the two travelers took note of the stark conditions of the many black share-cropping families who lived and worked in the fields along the roads. Once in New Orleans the couple fell in love with the city and had a memorable vacation. Amazingly, Philipp never made a note or a sketch during the entire journey. However, over the next few months, he would paint more than 20 canvasses derived from what he saw on that trip, including some depicting the life of the sharecropper. Though he had made no sketches, Philipp's remarkable memory for detail allowed him to recreate the scenes as if he were there. A few years later, to commemorate the holiday the two spent there, Philipp gave Rochelle a 30 x 46 canvas called *Southern Landscape* as a Christmas present.<sup>21</sup>

In the mid 1940s, Philipp earned the Thomas B. Clarke prize at the Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design for his work, *Seated Nude*. Soon after, Philipp received the honor of becoming a full member of the National Academy.

America at this time was in the midst of World War II, and even Philipp could not keep that from influencing his art. His work *Chaos* was part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit called “Artists for Victory,” which was organized to encourage American artists and sustain public interest during wartime. The exhibit brought together the best American artists of the time and occupied 24 rooms of the museum. His picture was a powerful and intense commentary on the evils of war. The canvas is full of emotion and pathos that grips the observer and visually sends him to the battlefield.

Still, portraits were Philipp’s strength and, like many great painters, he honored other great portraitists. In his painting *Homage to Sargent*, a tribute to the influence John Singer Sargent had on American portrait painters of the early 20th century, Philipp and many of his contemporaries – John Carroll, Robert Brackman, Louis Kronberg and others – sit in a studio with Sargent’s self-portrait in the background. This is strikingly reminiscent of the French post-Impressionist painter Maurice Denis’ turn-of-the-century *Homage to Cezanne*, in which Denis and Cezanne’s followers stood admiring Cezanne’s work.<sup>22</sup>



Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Negative Number J0002056

## PHILIPP AS TEACHER

As he grew older, Philipp was asked to pass along his experiences and ideas of art to aspiring students. Besides his work in Illinois, Philipp spent part of the 1940s teaching at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the American Art School in New York. He would spend the final decades of his life teaching at the same places where his own art studies began: The Art Students League and the National Academy of Design. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Philipp piled up awards and honors from the National Arts Club, the Audubon Artists Society, American Watercolor Society, Allied Artists of America and more. In addition, he was named a fellow at the Royal Society of Art in London.

Philipp found teaching a wonderful outlet. He enjoyed working with students and did not try to push them to follow his style of art, but rather encouraged them to find their own style. Perhaps he recalled his time as a young man in France, when he wished for guidance and longed to find mentors who could prod him and help him harness his skill. He understood that trying to imitate other artists would do more harm than good and stressed that each student must entice the artist to come forth from within them naturally. Philipp himself was very broad-minded in appreciating other styles of art. He admired



Photo courtesy of the Art Students League of New York

the Cubists, especially Picasso, and he also appreciated the Surrealists. This open mind to different styles helped Philipp be open to any ideas that came to him while painting. He felt it was a mistake for a painter to only expose themselves to art similar to their own style because it was like a horse wearing blinders. A painter's growth, like a writer, comes from his intellectual tolerance and awareness of the macrocosm that surrounds him. "Just because I paint a certain way doesn't mean I want everybody to paint that way," he said. "It would be a horrible world if everybody would paint the same way."<sup>23</sup>

Philipp did not want to lecture the students about art, rather he would show them the basics and let them understand how easily art can come if you trust yourself. Philipp spent much of the time showing the students the fundamentals of drawing. "They have to know how to draw first before they begin to paint. That is the most important thing and they don't realize that," he said.

He also felt students looked desperately to others for ideas and motivation. His advice to students was simple. "The thing to do," he said, "is to just pick up the brush and paint."<sup>24</sup>

## A TERRIBLE URGE

Philipp loved spending time in his studio and to him it may have been his personal stage. Sometimes while there, as if channeling his uncle's musical talent, he would listen to symphonic music, waving his brush in his right hand as if it were a conductor's baton and the canvas his sheet music. He would paint like this for periods at a time, Rochelle said, unaware of his dramatic movements because he was so absorbed in the work of art.

Philipp always worked on several canvases at the same time. This allowed him to move on, should he find the Muses going silent with a particular painting. "Once you are bored you are dry and no good will happen," he said. "So move on to another painting." Philipp's Carnegie Hall studio was always scattered with half-finished canvases. If he had a problem with a painting, he would cast it aside and forget about it for months or even years. Then one day, when he would be searching for an idea of what to paint, he would rummage around his studio and find an old canvas to work on. That canvas would infuse him with new energy and ideas – allowing him to compose his next lyrical piece.<sup>25</sup> He would not throw paintings away but rather kept them, knowing eventually he would strike the right note. His art dealer Ross Peacock recalled Philipp's tremendous reluctance to ever give up on a painting. He would tinker and adapt the image until it was just as his mind saw it. Peacock said Philipp once began a portrait of the artist's mother in 1917. Never perfectly happy with the results, he revisited the painting from time to time. He finally completed it in 1977, 60 years later.

Like all artists, Philipp had his occasional dry periods when he had difficulty coming up with new ideas and felt his work was stale. But he strongly believed that there were no tricks or gimmicks to ending these dry times. Eventually, with persistence, the ideas would come crashing into his mind. "You all of a sudden get that terrible urge to paint again," he said.<sup>26</sup> When the urge arrived he would spend entire days in his studio with no one around except perhaps Rochelle, who had an adjoining studio. Just Philipp, Rochelle and his art – this was all he had needed, or wanted, throughout most of his life.



*From My Terrace*, oil on canvas, 46 x 23.5 inches  
Private collection, Atlanta, Georgia

## EXPERIENCING ETERNAL BEAUTY

In 1970, Rochelle became ill and needed constant care. Philipp spent his days caring for her – taking her to doctors and administering several daily medications. Her death in 1971 devastated Philipp and, as he had earlier in his life, he used his art to help him through the loss. His *Rochelle on her Deathbed* is a somber and poignant expression of his grief. The painting, with its black background, shows only the faint outline of a face against what appears to be white sheets. Philipp expresses the emptiness he feels as his true love begins to slip away and he perhaps recognizes that she is now, physically, a pale outline of what he knew her to be. On the back, the painting reads, “Never will I forget you my love.”

Even after his model was gone, he continued to paint her. In 1972, he painted *Last Happy Moment*, depicting Rochelle and Philipp relaxing at a patio table with a lake behind them. She strikes a familiar contemplative pose for the artist who is preparing to sketch her.

Philipp would continue painting and teaching for another decade before he died in November 1981. He tried to paint everyday, always working to capture the beauty we so often overlook in the simple glances and simple moments of life. Ross Peacock once read Philipp a quote inscribed on a watercolor by French painter Felix Ziem. “Art is the universal tongue, which expresses the situations of the heart and human spirit. It leave us the living traces of all those who have loved and experienced eternal beauty.”<sup>27</sup> Philipp found solace in the words and was in total accord with Ziem’s expression of art’s responsibility.

One only need to view a Philipp painting, such as *Summer Landscape* or *Rochelle the Daydreamer*, to realize that he understood love and saw eternal beauty where others so easily passed it by.



*Rochelle on Her Death Bed* (1971), oil on canvas, 12 x 14 inches