

## Rae Sloan Bredin: Harmony and Power

by Louise Feder

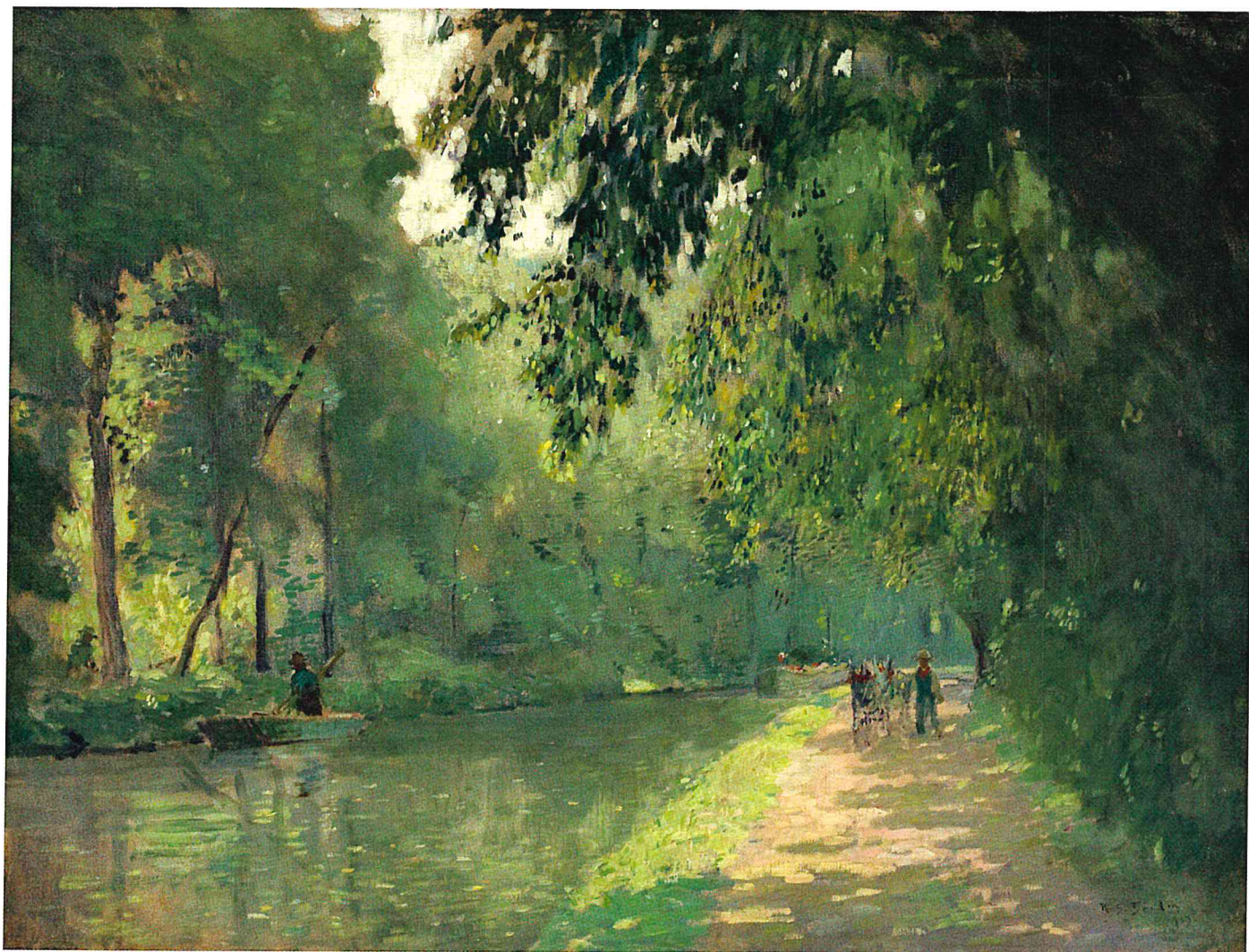
When asked to name Pennsylvania Impressionist painters, Daniel Garber, Edward Redfield and William Lathrop come to mind without hesitation. However, the name Rae Sloan Bredin (1880-1933) may give one pause. He is left out of books that contend with the legacy of American Impressionism and is only included in works that deal specifically in the Pennsylvania Impressionists. And, even when Bredin appears in this subset of resources, such as Brian Peterson's seminal

*Pennsylvania Impressionism* (2002) and Thomas C. Folk's *The Pennsylvania Impressionists* (1997), his life and work are discussed only briefly.

Certainly, this is not due to a lack of interest or a question of quality from either the authors or their readers. Bredin worked slowly and thoughtfully on each one of his paintings and passed away at a young age, making for a significantly smaller pool of work to find, research, and display, unlike the more ample legacies of his peers. When describing Bredin's process, one critic remarked, "He is not a quick painter. He

*Rae Sloan Bredin: Harmony and Power* is on view through July 15, 2018, at the James A. Michener Art Museum, 128 South Pine Street, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, 18901, 215-340-9800, [www.michenerartmuseum.org](http://www.michenerartmuseum.org). The exhibition is accompanied by a 91-page hardcover catalogue.

turns out pictures very slowly so that each study shows the result of the most painstaking work and attention to detail." While obviously Bredin's deliberate process made for spectacular end results, it was not exactly a recipe for a prolific career.







ABOVE: *Lawn Shadows* (alternatively titled *Girl with Parasol*), 1924, o/c, 42 x 52, private collection.

RIGHT: *The Spring House*, c. 1915, o/c, 25 x 30, private collection.

LEFT: *After the Rain*, c. 1913, o/c, 30 x 40, James A. Michener Art Museum, Museum Purchase funded by the Janus Society.



Bredin was an exceptionally talented artist whose idyllic landscapes and stylish portraits were in demand by collectors both during his life and after his death, compounding the issue of public access to his work. In fact, *Rae Sloan Bredin: Harmony and Power* is Bredin's first solo exhibition since a Memorial Exhibition mounted the same year of his death, and it is thrilling to re-present Bredin's life and work to the public eighty-five years later.





Rae Sloan Bredin was born on September 9, 1880, in Butler, Pennsylvania, to Catherine Sloan and Stephen Lowrie Collins Bredin, the local physician. The youngest of five, Rae spent his primary school years in Franklin, Pennsylvania, before relocating to New York. There, he attended the Brooklyn Preparatory School, from which he graduated in 1896, and then the Pratt Institute High School, also in Brooklyn, from which he graduated in 1899.

He showed an early facility for drawing, and spent many evenings at Krashner's Gallery, at 28th and Broadway, learning directly from their exhibitions. Seeking to improve his skill, Bredin enrolled in the New York School of Fine Arts in 1900, immediately following his high school graduation. While there he



RIGHT: *Portrait of Mrs. S* (Jane P. Sienkiewicz), o/c, 36 x 30 1/2, The Sienkiewicz Family.

BELOW RIGHT: *Where the Canal Widens*, o/c, 25 x 30, Thomas and Karen Buckley.

LEFT: *The Picnic*, 1930, o/c, 40 x 48, Bob and Amy Welch.

BELOW LEFT: *Canal in Winter*, 1917, o/c, 25 x 30, private collection.

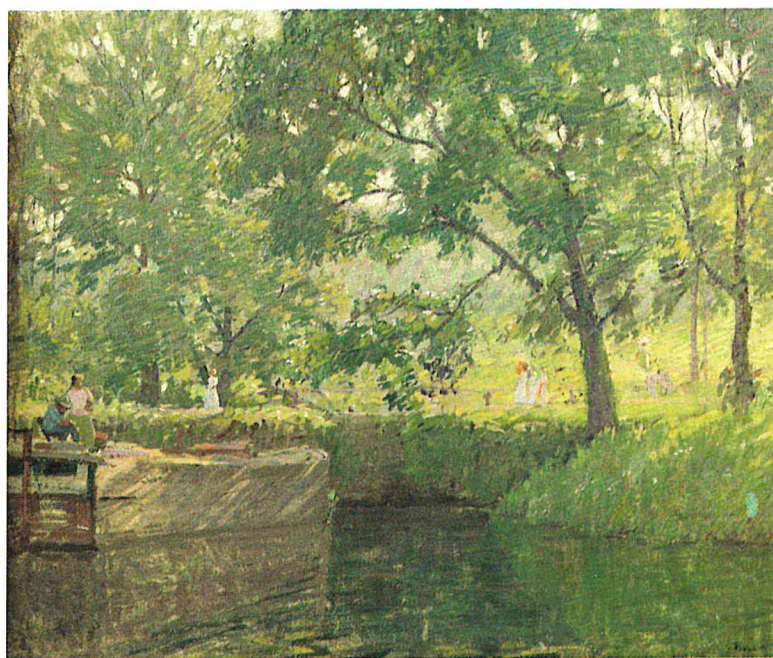
studied intensely with William Merritt Chase and Frank Vincent Du Mond for two and a half years.

Following his time at the New York School of Fine Arts, Bredin continued studying painting and drawing through classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Around this time, he exhibited in a group exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York, and was subsequently invited to exhibit in four more group shows. He also found work as a professional illustrator, mainly for *Harper's Magazine*. Bredin appears to have led a full, cosmopolitan life in New York during this period, working regularly and spending a significant amount of time at the historic Salmagundi Club at 14 West 12th Street, where he was a member.

In 1909, Bredin accepted a teaching position at the University of Virginia Summer School. Bredin seemed to have genuinely enjoyed teaching in a classroom setting as he had a relatively robust teaching schedule throughout his career. Later teaching appointments would include serving as co-director for the Manhattan School of Fine Art and as a faculty member for the New York School of Fine Arts as well as the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art & Design).

Sometime around 1911 Bredin first came to New Hope to visit Charles Rosen, his friend and former classmate from the New York School of Fine Arts. In addition to a social visit, he likely also came to study with William Langson Lathrop, who had moved to the area in 1899 and had been teaching landscape painting for several years. Robert Spencer, another New York School of Fine Arts classmate, also lived in the area and Bredin may have visited him as well.

Bredin seems to have made great many more trips to New Hope in the following years. He is remembered as "a frequent visitor of the Rosens, arriving by train from New York and walking to the Rosens







ABOVE: *Italian Steps* (alternatively titled *Steps in Italy* and *Morning Visitors*), c. 1914-15, o/c, 20 x 16, private collection.

ABOVE LEFT: *Baby Barbara*, 1920, o/c, 14 x 13, private collection.

LEFT: *May Day*, o/c, 14 x 14, Bonnie O'Boyle.

ABOVE RIGHT: *The Stamp Collectors*, 1929, o/c, 36 x 54, private collection.

RIGHT: *Penna. Canal—October*, o/c, 12 x 14, The Sienkiewicz Family.

up the towpath from New Hope.” The reasons for his regular escapes from the city were many: to see his friends and to continue his studies, but also, perhaps chiefly, to have more opportunities to get to know Alice Rachel Price, the daughter of a Philadelphia lawyer.

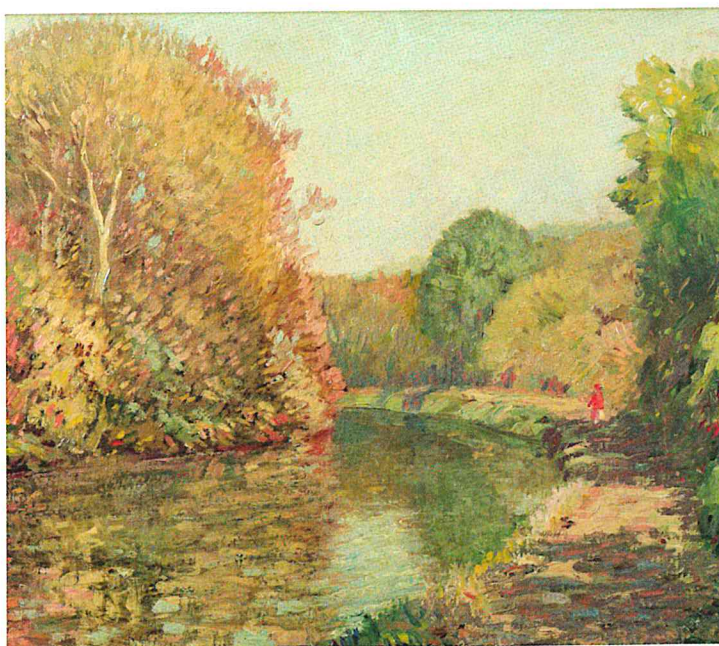
Rae and Alice were married on April 14, 1914, in a ceremony at Primrose Farm in Solebury. The couple must have been in the highest of spirits as they set off for their honeymoon to France and Italy; Bredin’s painting *Midsummer* had recently won the Second Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy of Design in New York, which would have been exciting enough on its own. However, just ten days before the





wedding, he received a letter from John Beatty, Director of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, eagerly requesting it for exhibition, and preemptively reserving "a space for it on the wall."

The pair returned home at the end of summer to New Hope, where they moved into a house previously occupied by fellow painter and craftsman Morgan Colt. Just north of Rabbit Run Bridge and one mile north of New Hope proper, the pair settled into a cottage so nestled into the hill, one could only see the top of their roof from the towpath. Their first child, Jean Elizabeth Bredin, was born on May 1, 1915, and two more children soon followed: Barbara Alice Bredin and Stephen Price Bredin. With the arrival of the children, the Bredin family outgrew the cottage and replaced it with a larger house they built and lovingly











ABOVE: *The Little White House* (alternatively titled *The Whitewashed House*), 1915, o/c, private collection.

LEFT: *The Little Bridesmaid* (alternatively titled *Portrait of Jean and Flower Girl*), 1925, o/c, 40 x 30, Kathy and Ted Fernberger.

named Lawn Shadows.

His work from those first few years following his permanent move to Bucks County reflect an eagerness to capture his immediate surroundings. The canal was a favorite subject, and it appears in numerous paintings in all seasons and types of weather, as seen in *The Little White House*, *Canal in Winter*, *Where the Canal Widens* and *Lower Locks*. Bredin's keen sensitivity to light of all types and tones—morning and afternoon, direct and dappled—allowed for

the creation of landscapes made more beautiful by shadows, each carefully chosen and deliberately placed. No matter the painting, Bredin's work is typified by an underlying sense of calm; his viewers are prompted to rest a while and take in the gentle tableaux laid out before them, just as Bredin must have done when he created each piece.

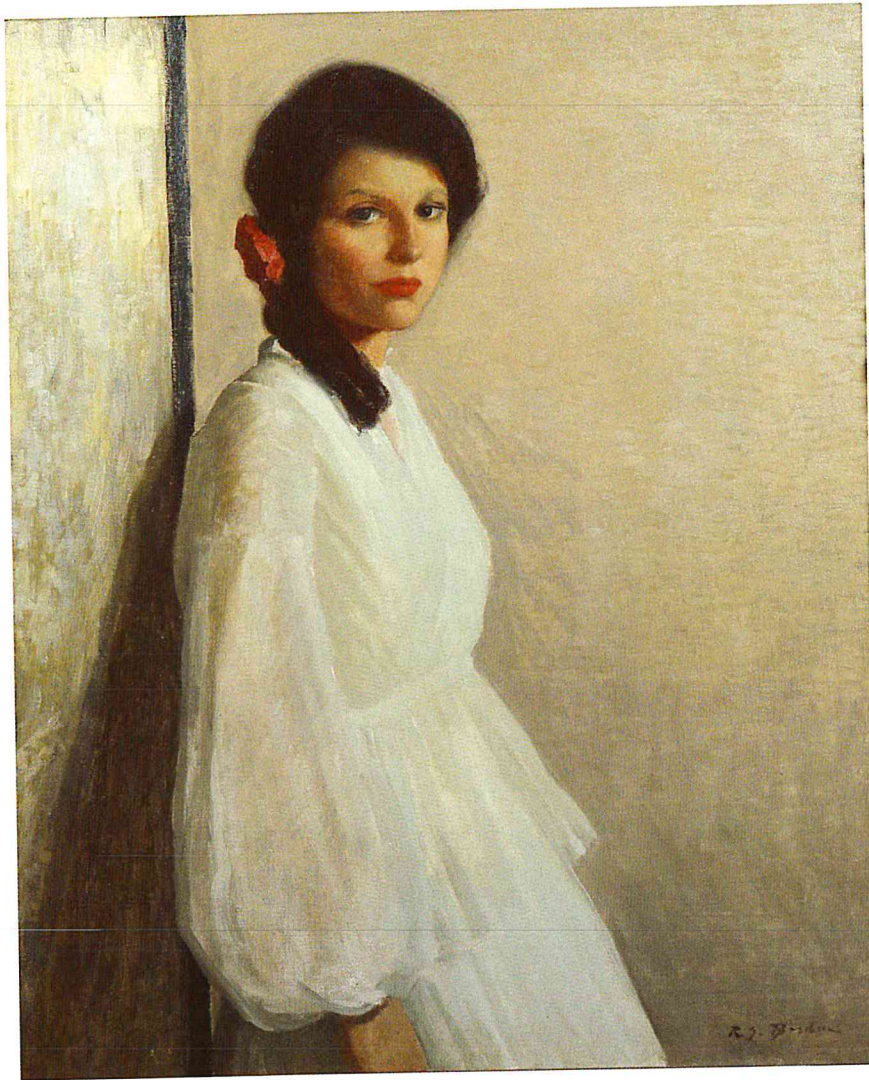
Bredin's love of place comes across strongly in his work and was noticed by collectors and jury members not at all local to New Hope. In 1915, Bredin won a bronze medal in the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco and in 1917 he again received letters from the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh requesting two other paintings, *Morning Promenade* and *Lady Day*, for their annual exhibition.

His national exposure was likely aided

by Bredin's active role in the New Hope Group. This collective of exhibiting artists was founded in 1916 by Bredin along with Colt, Lathrop, Rosen, Spencer, and Daniel Garber. Their group exhibitions, which travelled beyond Bucks County, were designed to help further New Hope's reputation as an active art colony, enticing ever more painters and sculptors to Bucks County to live and create. Given Bredin's regular receipt of awards, memberships, and exhibitions from this period, it is fair to assume that the New Hope Group was successful in their mission.

In spite of Lawn Shadows' seemingly untouchable peace, World War I raged on overseas and finally into Bredin's life. In 1918, as the Great War entered its final chapter, Bredin joined a social service of





LEFT: *Jean in White*, c. 1932, o/c, 36 x 30, Carol and Louis Della Penna.

BELOW LEFT: *The Carroll Price Farm (New Hope)*, c. 1910, o/c, 25 x 30, Colette and Michael Tomeo.

RIGHT: *Lawn Fete* (alternatively titled *Lawn* and *The Lawn*), c. 1920, o/c, 40 x 48, private collection.

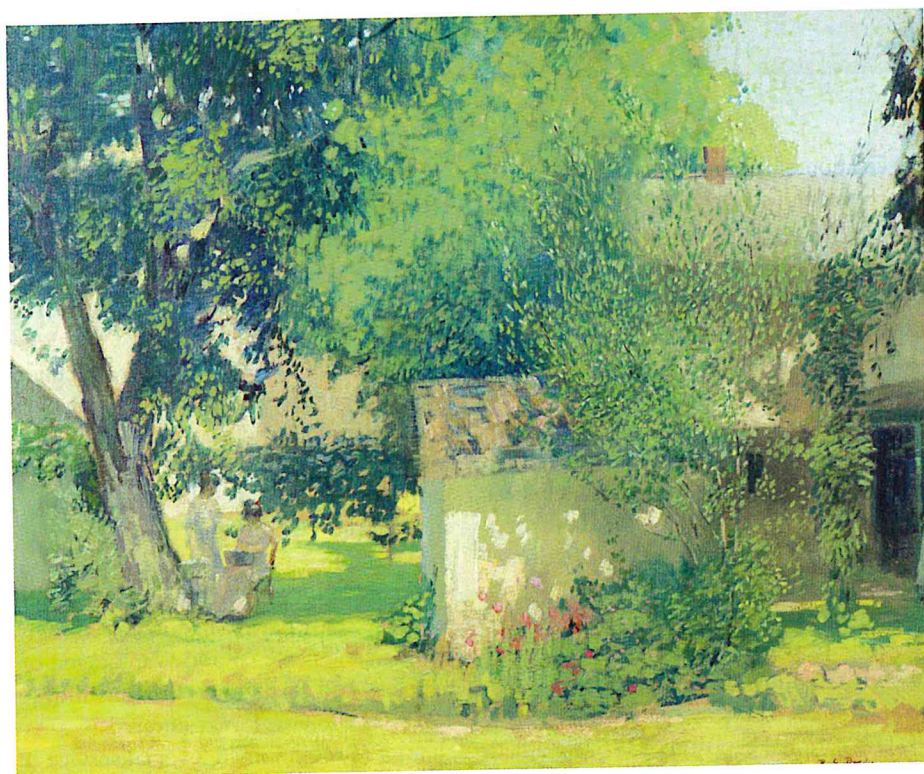
the French Army known as the Foyer du Soldat to serve as regional director and interpreter. He returned home safely in 1919, his sketchbook brimming with drawings of the recovering soldiers.

One may have expected Bredin's work to change following his wartime service abroad, perhaps to reflect the suffering he witnessed or to reflect a world forever changed by the war thought to end all wars. Rather, once home, Bredin returned to familiar subjects: his home and its surroundings. It must have been a comfort to exercise his technical skill and once again paint that which he loved so much. Bredin later remarked in an interview, "When I returned here and contrasted the beauty of the Delaware Valley, I realized there was nothing like it in France."

Just a few months following his return, Bredin was already creating new canvasses to sell. He also forged new relationships as he was put in touch with Frank Knox Morton Rehn of the Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries by Bredin's friend, fellow painter and co-director at the Manhattan School of Art, Edmond Graecen. This proved to be a fruitful relationship, as Bredin first sent Rehn two paintings (*Lilacs* and *The Little White House*) and later the spectacular *Lawn Shadows* with a dry note jokingly saying, "I hope you can do something with it."

Still later in that same year Bredin submitted *By the River* for inclusion in the Carnegie Institute's 1920 Exhibition and at the close of 1920 accepted an invitation by saying he would "contribute one or two of my canvasses to the forthcoming exhibition of Carnegie Institute next spring and shall send my most important work for it."

However, in the interim, Bredin's painting *Young Lady in White* won the prestigious Maynard Prize at the National Academy of Design, which did not go unnoticed by Beatty at Carnegie, who wrote Bredin with a strong suggestion in March of 1921. "I saw your painting, number 143 [*Young Lady in White*], which took the







Maynard Prize at the Academy, when I was in New York last week. If you desire to enter this picture it may come in after the close of the Academy exhibition." Bredin, of course, acquiesced.

As one of the rare Pennsylvania Impressionists to frequently paint the figure, Bredin seems to have enjoyed the challenge of capturing the character of each of his sitters; while all his figural works are idealized, their respective ideals are tailored individually. For instance, in *The Little Bridesmaid*, once referred to as the "most touching child's portrait of all time," Bredin's daughter Jean is sweet and tender; she is the picture of calm. The room around her is bathed in golden light, and in the mirror behind her one can catch a

glimpse of the interior space with more warm light gently coming in through the window beyond. Her massive pink bow is perfectly puffed, her white dress pristine, and an array of flowers charmingly arranged in her basket.

Yet, what could be saccharine instead comes across as graceful and poised. Jean's slight, somewhat nervous, smile reveals her reverence for and joy in this special occasion—she does not take her role as bridesmaid lightly. The pose Bredin has painted also hints at her future as a bride several years on without taking a moralist tack. Jean is presented as a beautiful young girl, full of promise and reverence for the marriage about to take place. I am sure that, no matter how demure Jean actually was on

the day, her bow likely deflated, her dress wrinkled, and she may have lost a few flowers, but those less-than-perfect facts are of no interest to Bredin—his goal is to present a delicate and complex emotional state through this aesthetically pleasing version of his daughter.

In the subsequent years, Bredin continued to exhibit widely. He earned honorable mention at both the Philadelphia Arts Club and the Art Institute of Chicago in 1921 and 1922 respectively. He won the Vezin Prize at the Salmagundi Club in 1923 and later that same year was invited to exhibit at the Memorial Art Gallery in New York. He also exhibited once again at the Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries in 1924. He was

(continued on 110)