

# *What Lies*

---

# Beneath



Masonite and American Art of the 20th Century

# *What Lies*

---

# Beneath

## Masonite and American Art of the 20th Century

In the early years of the last century, technology was providing artists with resources that were as new as their modern styles. Masonite was one of the most prevalently used of the new materials. This manufactured hardboard, which lies beneath the paint of innumerable 20th century artworks, was invented in Laurel, Mississippi, in 1924 by William H. Mason. In celebration, the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, founded in Laurel in 1923, presents this exhibition of American paintings on Masonite. As the material was an invention of the South, we have gathered work from several Southern museum collections, including our own, and many of the featured artists have ties to our region. The exhibition and this accompanying publication tell the story of William H. Mason, the invention of his hardboard, its numerous applications, and the ways in which artists and art restorers used it in the 20th century.

William Horatio Mason (fig. 1) was born in Summer County, Virginia in 1877, and in 1884 his family moved to Lewisburg, West Virginia.<sup>1</sup> After being educated by private tutors, he attended the Virginia Military Institute and Washington and Lee University. In 1896, he went to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, leaving two years later to serve in the United States Navy during the Spanish War as an engineering officer. After the war, in 1899, Mason became a draughtsman at the Edison Laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey. He worked in various capacities and locations for Edison until 1916, when he took a position as General Superintendent in charge of construction at the Merchants Shipbuilding Corporation in Bristol, Pennsylvania. Next, he worked at General Motors in Detroit to develop a hydraulic transmission for automobiles, for which he acquired patents.

While working for Edison, Mason married Marian Alexander Dana, whose family business was the Wausau-Southern Lumber Company. Based in Wisconsin, the company followed in the footsteps of the Eastman, Gardiner, and Rogers families from Iowa, and began buying large tracts in the Piney Woods of Mississippi. These Midwest industrialists opened mills in the town of Laurel, which became known as the “Yellow Pine Capital of the World.” While on visits to the Wausau-Southern sawmill in Laurel, Mason noticed the large amounts of waste materials produced by the lumber business, including sawdust, wood chips, and resin. Determined to

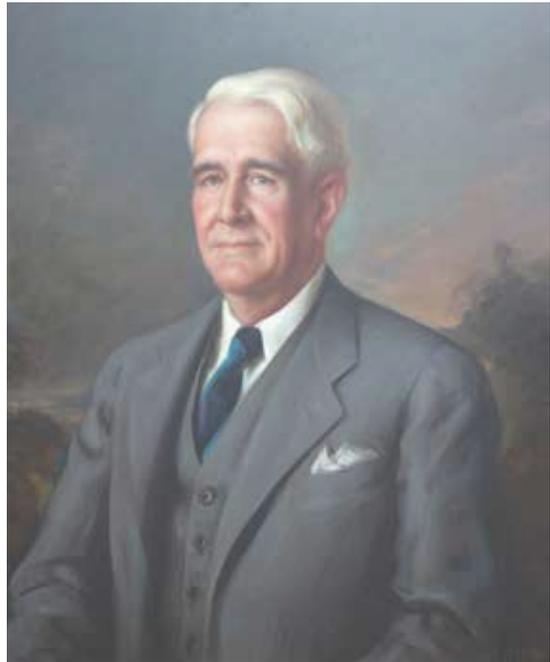


Fig. 1: Nicholas Basil Haritonoff (Russian/American, 1884-1944), *William H. Mason*, 1939, oil on Masonite, Collection of Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Charles White Gamble, 78.7

find uses for these waste products, in 1920 he moved his family to Laurel to build an experimental plant to extract naval stores, such as turpentine and pine oil, from sawn lumber. Financed by Wausau-Southern, he built a number of these plants in the South. The business eventually turned unprofitable due to declining demand for naval stores during the postwar years and the fact that the lumber mills were running short of pine.

During his years in the shipbuilding industry, Mason had been intrigued by the capability of wood to bend when subjected to steam. Moreover, he wanted to find a use for the waste wood slabs and edgings. In the early 1920s, he focused his experiments on exploding wood with high pressure steam, and in 1924 he developed a method of using



Fig. 2: William Mason examining the Masonite press, c. 1939

steam as a propellant to shoot wood chips out of a small muzzle-loaded cannon. Unlike methods that cooked or ground the chips, Mason's process preserved the fiber structure of the wood without the loss of cellulosic lignin, the natural bond that holds the fibers together.

Mason thought the fiber could be pressed into paper or insulation board, and he was able to convince the Wausau investors to pay for the construction of a small insulation board plant and for further research. A fortuitous accident occurred during one of his experiments when he left for lunch and forgot to

release a press that happened to have a leaky valve. This caused heat and pressure to be applied for an unusually long period of time, and upon his return, Mason found that the fibers had been pressed into a thin, dense, hard sheet.

The initial plans for the insulation board factory were expanded to include the manufacture of this hardboard product. The Mason Fibre Company was formed in 1925, and production began in 1926. The name of the company was changed to Masonite Corporation in 1929, and was based in Chicago with product development at its Laurel plant (figs. 2 and 3). At first, the operations

utilized only wood waste, but with the company's growth it became necessary to augment the refuse with wood specifically cut for operations. Longleaf pine and southern gum were primarily used, but spruce and other hardwoods could be employed, as well; Robert M. Boehm, Masonite's Director of Research, stated in 1930, "As yet we have found practically no species of wood which is not suitable for the manufacture of Masonite products."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the company's early years, a variety of products were

introduced, including Masonite Roof Insulation, Masonite Insulating Lathe, Masonite QuartRBoard (a wall board), Masonite Cushioned Flooring, Masonite Presdwood, Masonite Tempered Presdwood, and Masonite Temprtle (Tempered Presdwood with score lines to produce the effect of tile). Presdwood was a hardboard that was smooth on one surface and textured on the back due the use of a screen used in the manufacturing process. Tempered Presdwood was made by treating standard Presdwood with oil and baking it at high temperatures, which increased



Fig. 3: Masonite Corporation, Laurel, MS, c. 1940

its strength and impermeability. Both products could be finished with paint, stain, lacquer, and varnish.

In 1928, the insulation board manufacturer Celotex Company began to produce hardboard similar to Masonite's. In the litigation that followed, Masonite successfully defended its patents, and in the early 1930s the company entered into contracts with several companies that allowed them to sell Masonite products as "agents" under their own labels at uniform prices set by Masonite. In 1940, the Anti-Trust Division of the U.S. Justice Department claimed that these agreements violated anti-trust laws, and in 1942, the U.S. Supreme

Court ruled in the government's favor. As the price-fixing clause was the only part of the agreements that was considered an infringement, the companies signed similar contracts without requiring set prices. Masonite eventually cancelled these agreements in the early 1960s because the patents had expired and the company was beginning to focus production on pre-finished products such as pegboard, siding, and doors. By the late 1960s, most of Masonite's hardboard was not being sold in commodity form, and by the mid-1970s sales were minimal. Today, there are a few hardboard manufacturers in the United States and abroad, including Ampersand Art Supply in Buda, Texas. Due to the fact that Masonite invented the hardboard process and virtually held a monopoly for decades, the term "Masonite" has become a proprietary eponym, which is a general word that was originally a proprietary brand name. Conservator Alexander W. Katlan stated in 1994 that, "All hardboards today are basically Masonite-process boards."<sup>3</sup>

In the early years, Masonite sold more board insulation than hardboard because the latter was a new product, and its properties and applications were not widely known. However, a myriad of uses were quickly found for Presdwood. A Masonite ad in *Scientific American* of June of 1928 says, "We don't know ourselves where this grainless wood will be used next: nobody does. Its workability and adaptability are truly astounding... Week after week we hear of new uses!" (fig. 4)

June 1928 SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN 149

## Where will this grainless wood be used next?

First produced two years ago. Now standard material in an ever-widening range of industries. New uses being discovered almost every day. Send for large, free sample, and put it to the test yourself!

Ever since the dawn of history, man's favorite material has been wood. Surely, it was assumed, this wonderful product of nature itself would not be improved. Yet two years ago, this ancient material was actually advanced, and then sent forth into the world as **Masonite Presdwood**—a genuine all-wood board that won't crack, check, split or splinter; is fast, a grainless wood!

Not is that all. Presdwood possesses remarkable workability and uniform strength. Very dense and tough, it is also highly resistant to moisture. It has a very smooth, attractive surface on the face side, and requires no paint for protection. It takes any finish beautifully.

Because Presdwood contains no grit or foreign substance, it does not damage tools. It can be used in any woodworking machinery: saws, planes, sanders, shapers. It can be cut with hand tools, file cut and drilled.

And when we say Presdwood is all wood, we mean just that. It is genuine wood and making this wood more useful and put together again.

The first step in the manufacture of Presdwood is to replace knots, about three times from grain at a velocity of about 4,000 feet per second. The long fibers thus gathered are then thoroughly felted together to bring them placed in hydraulic heated presses and subjected to hundreds of tons of pressure. The finished product is returned to a finished by treatment.

**We don't know ourselves**

We don't know ourselves where this grainless wood will be used next; nobody does. Its workability and adaptability are truly astounding. For such things as covering of all kinds, stone facings, gutter and interior advertising signs, and a host of uses, we are proud to be planning mills and woodworking plants. It is already in very wide demand. It is also showing prominent acceptance as the ideal lining for bank vaults, telephone booths, vaults, fire alarms, closets and trunks. Thousands of feet of it, too, are used in making motors and for insulation, parking signs, window boards, coffee boxes and much more for ready factories.

Did you know that a contractor in California is using Presdwood for restaurant furniture? Did you know that some of the boats have been made of it? Or that some of the Illinois have that it makes an excellent flooring for dance halls and parlors, and that it is in daily service at the Chicago Art Institute as artist's boards. We certainly didn't—at least until a few short months ago.

And work after work, so here of new uses! Just recently a manufacturer of landing alloys became interested in Presdwood. Another unexpected demand is its use as slatting for Dutch Colonial houses. It is also being made into clothes hangers, hand boxes, painted dairy containers, bathroom stands, bedroom screens and metal trays.

Where will this grainless wood be used next? Nobody knows. For its range of adaptability seems to have almost no limit!

**Send for sample—try Presdwood yourself**

Users of Masonite Presdwood—and there are now thousands of them—have found that it shows other marked advantages, such as doing away with the expense of painting, reducing the number of manufacturing processes, and eliminating waste in setting. They have found, too, that it is very easy to work with, and that it is entirely free from knots and other defects.

Why not get Presdwood on the first moment? It may be exactly the material you are looking for. It may make it possible for you to improve your own product in a number of workable ways or to cut down your operating costs. Or both.

In any event it will cost you nothing to find out. For we will gladly send you a large sample of Masonite Presdwood without placing you under any obligation. Send for it today.

MASONITE CORPORATION  
Sales Office: First Floor, 110 E. Washington St., Chicago, Illinois

FOR ADVERTISING PURPOSES: Write: Joseph H. Robinson, 110 E. Washington St., Chicago, Illinois

**Masonite PRESWOOD**  
Made by the makers of MASONITE FUNCTIONAL INSULATION

Fig. 4: "Where will this grainless wood be used next?", advertisement in *Scientific American*, June 1928, p. 549.



Fig. 5: "Masonite Flooring used in Warner Bros.' 'Juarez' featuring Bette Davis, Donald Crisp, and Brian Aherne," from Frank. C. Lesniak, "Masonite; Takes a Tree Apart Fiber by Fiber and Puts it Back Together in a More Usable Form," *Baldwin-Southwark*, 4th qtr., 1939, p. 8. LRMA Archives.

Masonite stated that Presdwood could be used "as wall and ceiling paneling, exterior walls or roofs in certain types of construction, truck bodies, building forms for concrete constructions, for signs and billboards, display cases and cutout or panel display in stores, in millwork products, and in many manufacturing industries such as furniture, toys, shipping containers, radio cabinets, and many others."<sup>4</sup>

In 1930, Richard Boehm remarked that, "When you look at some 'million dollar set' from Hollywood, whether it depicts a ballroom scene, a palace, or an exterior, the chances are great that you are looking at Presdwood." (fig. 5) Tempered Presdwood could be used in the same places as Presdwood, but

was recommended for uses where more strength and moisture resistance were needed, such as dies for automobile and airplane parts and concrete form boards.

The remarkable versatility of Masonite's products was revealed at the Century of Progress International Exposition, held in Chicago from 1933 to 1934, where vast amounts were used for various functions. As Lisa D. Schrenk observes:

Over 300,000 feet of Tempered Presdwood flooring covered the plywood subfloors in the Hall of Science and the Electrical Building. Builders also used regular Presdwood in the interiors of many of the pavilions, including the reading room in the Time and Fortune

Building, and in the Schlitz Garden and Mueller Pabst restaurants. The entire bridge of the Swift Bridge and Open Air Theatre was built of Masonite panels, as were all the ticket booths, more than 100 Orange Crush and Citrus Fruits stands, and numerous individual display booths. Masonite was also used for the sound chamber of forty-five loudspeakers and for every official sign. Engineers specified two and one half miles of Tempered Presdwood for structural panels lining the shore of Lake Michigan and for the fountain at the center of the lagoon.<sup>5</sup>

The company also demonstrated their products' utility in its Masonite House (fig. 6). Designed by the Chicago architects Frazier and Raftery, the dwelling included a front hall, living room, kitchen, bathroom, study, and bedroom, all built with Masonite products. This modern and forward-looking home was one of the most popular features of the fair.

A 1935 Masonite publication describes in detail how, room by room, a home could be made "finer, more modern, more beautiful, if you wisely decide to make use of Masonite products in it."<sup>6</sup> For example, in the kitchen (fig. 7), the lower cabinet is topped by Masonite Tempered Presdwood that functions as a work

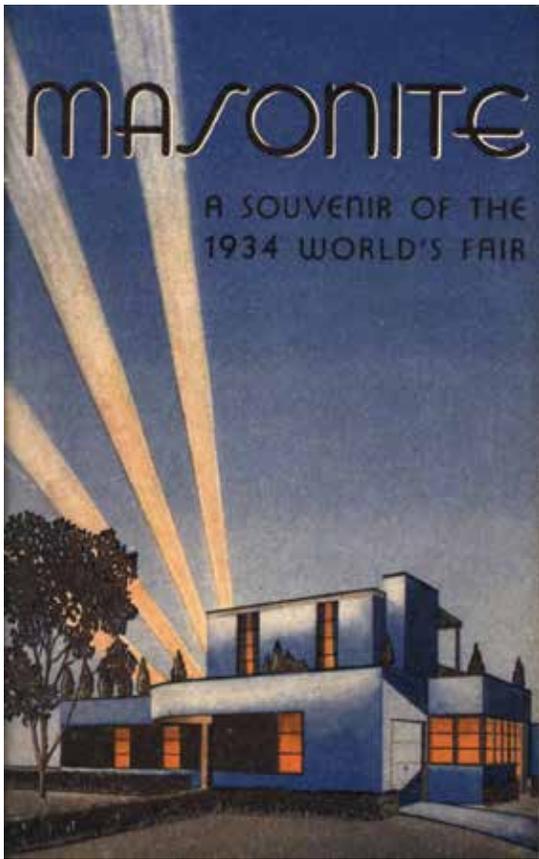


Fig. 6: *Masonite: A Souvenir of the 1934 World's Fair*, 1934 booklet, cover. From the collection of Jablonski Building Conservation.



Fig. 7: from *Masonite Insulation..Presdwood..Quartboard..Lath..Tempered Presdwood..Temptrile..Cushioned Flooring* booklet, 1935, p. 8. LRMA Archives.

surface and a drainboard. The material is also used for the panels and shelves of the china cabinets, the panels of the cupboard, and the ceiling. The author of Masonite's *The ABC of Successful Building & Remodeling* remarks that, "Science can contribute new building materials. The architect ...who combines the skills of engineer and artist... can devise perfect plans. Yet the final quality of every building rests with the skill of the men who build it."<sup>7</sup>

Masonite's hardboard became an important and heavily used material during World War II as a substitute for metals in a variety of applications, thus virtually taking it off the non-military market. Moreover, the Army and Navy used large quantities to construct housing in the form of Quonset huts throughout the European and Pacific war theatres (fig. 8). As a result,

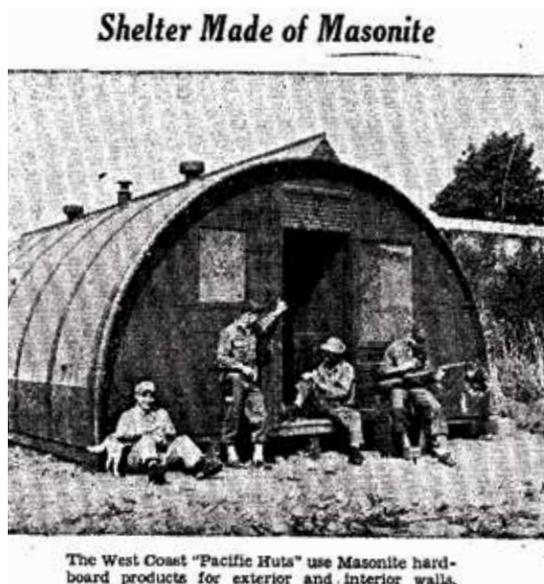


Fig. 8: "Shelter Made of Masonite," from *Leader-Call*, Laurel, Mississippi, Tuesday, February 2, year unknown. LRMA Archives.

Masonite Corporation was given three Army-Navy Production Awards. Other companies used Masonite hardboard in their contributions to the war effort. The Chicago firm of W.L. Stensgaard was involved in the defense furnishings market, and Henry P. Glass designed "a group of low-cost defense housing furniture, made of nonessential materials, namely plywood and bent Masonite."<sup>8</sup> Due to this military work, Glass had access to Masonite when other designers did not because of war shortages. He took advantage of his experience with the material after the war, using Masonite hardboard in both institutional and domestic furniture, notably in his award-winning 1951 line of "Swingline" children's furniture for the Fleetwood Furniture Company of Grand Haven, Michigan (fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Henry Peter Glass (Austrian/American, 1911-2003) for Fleetwood Furniture Corporation, Grand Haven, Michigan, *Swing-Line Child's Wardrobe*, 1952, painted Masonite and wood, Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Henry P. Glass, 2000.133



Fig. 10: Charles Eames (American, 1907-1978) and Ray Kaiser Eames (American, 1912-1988) for Herman Miller Furniture Company, Zeeland, Michigan, *Eames Storage Unit (ESU)*, designed 1949-50, birch plywood, zinc-plated steel, perforated metal, plastic laminated plywood, lacquered Masonite, and rubber, St. Louis Art Museum, Friends Fund, 17:1994.

The noted designers Charles and Ray Eames also used Masonite hardboard in their postwar, modernist furniture. For example, their low-cost Eames Storage Units, or ESUs, designed for Herman Miller, Inc. of Zeeland, Michigan, had interchangeable parts that were constructed of wood and steel, and brightly colored Masonite fronts added a touch of whimsy (fig. 10).

Not only did architects and furniture designers find uses for Masonite's hardboard. Presdwood was commonly and widely used by painters from soon after it was invented and throughout the rest of the 20th century. In the 1928 advertisement mentioned above, Masonite states that Presdwood was "in daily service at the Chicago Art Institute as artist's boards." However, this early

reference is the only example that this author has found in which the company itself mentions the material's use by fine artists. Nevertheless, the hardboard was well suited for use as a painting support. Throughout the centuries, artists have used a variety of painting supports, including walls, wood panels, stretched canvas, glass, and paper. Before canvas came into general use at the end of the 16th century, wood panels were most often used for mid-sized paintings produced on an easel. The wooden supports were durable and could be easily sourced from locally found timber. Even after canvas was regularly used after the 16th century, wood panels were still valued because they could provide a smooth, texture-less surface. A big drawback to wood panels are their tendency to warp, shrink, expand, split, and becoming infested with insects.

For artistic purposes, Masonite's hardboard was an improvement over wood panels as a rigid support for oil and tempera painting. It was available in large sheets and was easily sawn; it was inexpensive in comparison to other support material; it had no grain or knots and would not crack or split; it was resistant to moisture and was not as sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity; and if correctly prepared, it did not warp. It was also readily obtainable; in a souvenir brochure for the 1934 Century of Progress, Masonite claims that, "Genuine Masonite products are sold by nearly 10,000 retail lumber dealers throughout the country."

Although Masonite does not seem to have promoted their hardboard to artists, art experts gave them technical advice about how to use it. As examples,

we will look at the writings of three authorities: Ralph Mayer, Frederic Taubes, and Reed Kay.<sup>9</sup> They are unanimous in their estimation of Masonite Standard Presdwood as an excellent choice for a rigid support, with Mayer calling it a “superior brand” of hardboard<sup>10</sup> and Taubes remarking that “it is more reliable as a support for paintings than any panel made of wood.”<sup>11</sup> There is consensus that Presdwood was the best Masonite product to use, and that the Standard was more suitable than the Tempered version, as the surface treatment that gave the latter more strength also prevented optimal adhesion of priming coats. They recommended using the 1/8” thick type, as thicker versions were too heavy to be handled easily. Taubes does mention that thicker varieties could be used for small paintings up to 12” x 16”.<sup>12</sup> The experts agree that because large panels tended to bend and curved under their own weight, they needed to be braced with strips of wood attached to the back along the four edges. What constitutes a large panel varies for these experts, however. Mayer specifies pieces larger than 24” as large,<sup>13</sup> Taubes those over 20” x 24”,<sup>14</sup> and Kay defines those over 24” x 30” as large.<sup>15</sup> Mayer remarks that some painters reinforced all of their panels, no matter the size,<sup>16</sup> and Kay relates that in order to save time and effort, some painters only braced the paintings that they considered successful, or they left it up to the purchasers of the work to do so when it was in their possession.<sup>17</sup>

Authorities on artistic technique recommend that before beginning a painting, the Presdwood panels should be roughened up with sand paper, scrubbed with alcohol and ammonia,

and then coated with primer or gesso. If unbraced, both sides need to be coated in order to keep the panels from curving. This will also reduce the amount of acidic vapors that are emitted. Ragged edges can be smoothed with a file or sandpaper, and rounding or beveling the edges will reduce disintegration of material and loss of paint at the corners. If one wanted the rigidity of hardboard and the texture of canvas, the latter could be mounted to Presdwood panels using glue. Mayer comments that ready-made braced panels that are coated with gesso can be purchased from retailers or made to order.<sup>18</sup> After Presdwood was no longer produced in great quantities at Masonite’s plants in the United States, for a time it was still being produced abroad,<sup>19</sup> and in 1981, Mayer relates that it was being imported from England and sold by an art supply store, Arthur Brown and Brother in New York.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous American painters used Masonite’s hardboard products throughout the last three quarters of the 20th century, employing the material as a support for paintings in oil (fig. 11), egg



Fig. 11: Maltby Sykes (American, 1911-1992), *Shrimp Boats*, 1953, oil on Masonite, The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 2007.05.03



Fig. 12: William C. Baggett, Jr. (American, born 1946), *Cage*, 1991, egg tempera on Masonite, Collection of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Hallie and C.G. Hull, 98.28

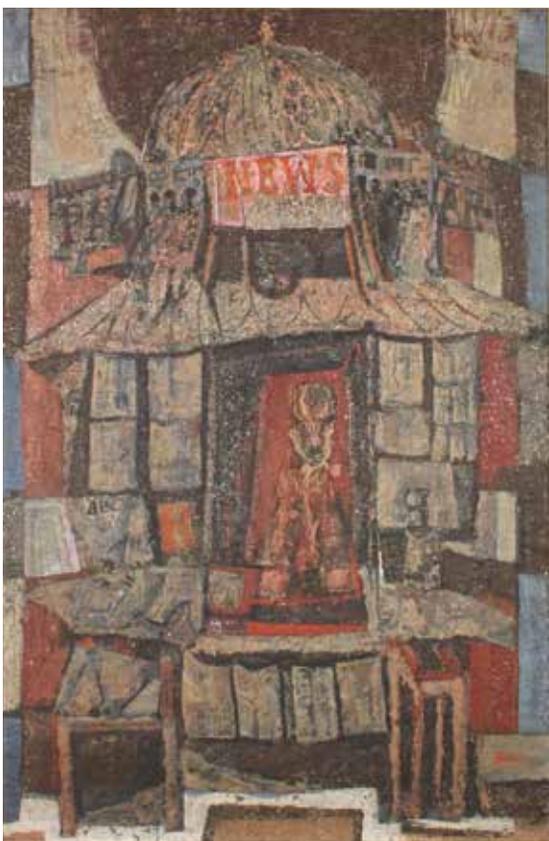


Fig. 13: Karl Zerbe (German/American, 1903-1972), *Kiosk I*, 1951, polymer tempera on Masonite, Collection of the Columbus Museum, Georgia, Gift of Estelle and Martin Karlin, G.2011.57.1

tempera (fig. 12), acrylic, and polymer tempera (fig. 13), among other media.<sup>21</sup> Early modernist artists such as John Storrs (fig. 14) were among the first to utilize the material. Reginald Marsh went against normal practice by painting on the screen side of Presdwood to produce his gritty *East River* (fig. 15). Taubes remarked the rough side is “unsuitable for painting because of its ugly texture,”<sup>22</sup> but the ugliness seems to have suited this Ashcan painter’s objectives. Artists working for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Depression, including Pedro



Fig. 14: John Storrs (American, 1885-1956), *Nebulous*, 1933, oil on Masonite, Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries



Fig. 15: Reginald Marsh (American, 1898-1954), *East River*, 1952, oil on Masonite, a Lauren Rogers Museum of Art Purchase, 98.2

Cervántez (fig. 16), were encouraged to work in less expensive materials, and Masonite's Presdwood fit the bill. In 1939, Masonite Corporation answered a letter from American Regionalist artist John Steuart Curry explaining how to attach Quarterboard to a brick wall, perhaps as part of a mural project.<sup>23</sup> To produce works in his Geometric Abstraction series *Homage to the Square* (fig. 17), Josef Albers usually painted on Masonite boards. He felt that canvas was too soft and absorbent for his purposes, and that the rigid panels allowed a perfectly flat effect and permitted the colors to project to a greater degree. Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock produced a series of paintings on the screen-texture sides of Masonite boards (fig. 18). These approximately 22" x 22" panels were left over from the manufacture of a baseball board game and were given to him by his brother, a commercial screen printer. The fact that most Masonite materials were purchased at the lumber yard suited self-taught artists like Clementine Hunter (fig. 19), who used



Fig. 16: Pedro Cervántez (American, 1915-1987), *Casita*, c. 1935-1942, oil on Masonite, Courtesy of the Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General Services Administration; WPA, Federal Art Project, 1935-1943

other supports not typically procured at an art supply store, including cardboard and window shades.

Not only did artists view Masonite hardboard as an exciting new material, but painting restorers used it throughout the 1950s and 60s in various ways, as well. One technique to preserve damaged

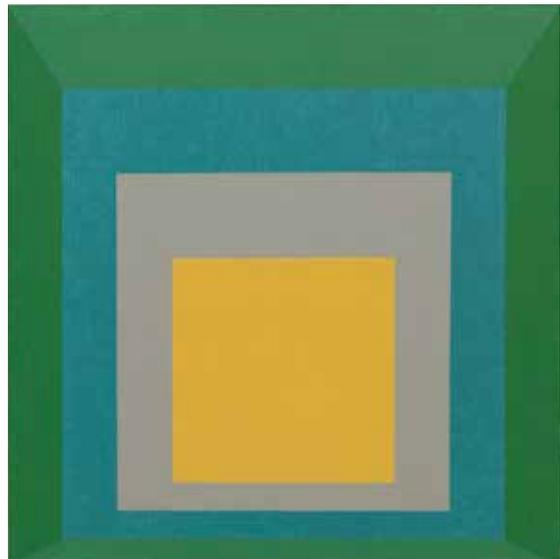


Fig. 17: Josef Albers (German/American, 1888-1976), *Homage to the Square: Apparition*, 1959, Collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 61.1590, © The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019



Fig. 18: Jackson Pollock (American, 1912-1956), *No. 15*, 1950, oil on Masonite, Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum Associates Purchase Award, M.51.5.7, © Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

oil paintings on wood panels was to carefully separate the paint and ground layers from the wood panel in one, intact sheet, and reapply it to a piece of Masonite.<sup>24</sup> An alternate method called partial transfer was considered a lesser evil than the complete transfer and involved severely thinning the panel from

the back and adhering the portion that remained to a new, thicker panel. In the 1930s, Masonite hardboard began to be used as this new panel, but by the 1950s, the long-term stability of such treatments were questioned, and the practice became less popular.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 19: Clementine Hunter (American, 1886/1887-1988), *Funeral Procession*, c. early 1960s-1988, oil on Masonite, The New Orleans Museum of Art: Bequest of Yvonne Ryan, 99.110.10

Masonite was also frequently used in the restoration of paintings on canvas. Ralph Mayer pointed out in 1941, however, that mounting canvases on wooden panels was considered an inappropriate alteration of an original work and could lead to blistering and cracking of the paint. Moreover, further restorations are made difficult because it restricts access to the reverse of a mounted work.<sup>26</sup> He goes on to say that, “When additional rigidity is desired for any special reason, a wellbraced Presdwood panel is better than wood.”<sup>27</sup> In her 1965 publication, *A Handbook on the Care of Paintings*, Caroline K. Keck says that she does not approve of the practice of mounting a painting on canvas directly onto a solid support such as Masonite unless the painting has first been “relined” with a backup layer of canvas that was affixed to the reverse side of the painting.<sup>28</sup> A painting in the collection of the

Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, *Milton on the Hudson (Close of a Rainy Day)* by George Inness (fig. 20), was treated with this method. Like partial transfer, this technique is not practiced by conservators today.

Just as standards of restoration are changing to make sure that artwork can stand the test of time, there are efforts to use technology to develop new painting supports that are stable and enduring from material such as aluminum, flexible PVC and ABS (acrylonitrile butadiene styrene).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps another happy accident such as the one that produced Mason’s hardboard will generate the next innovation for “what lies beneath.”

---

KRISTEN MILLER ZOHN  
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions  
Lauren Rogers Museum of Art



Fig. 20: George Inness (American, 1825-1894), *Milton on the Hudson (Close of a Rainy Day)*, c. 1883-1886, Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite, Collection of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Lauren Chase Eastman, 27.19

## Endnotes

1. Biographical information has been taken from: Letter from William H. Mason to Alyce Daniels, dated November 11, 1936, LRMA Archives and "Biography - William H. Mason," LRMA Archives.
2. "The Masonite Process," *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* (Vol. 22, May 1930, pp. 493-7), 494. For more history of the Masonite process and company, see: John Hebron Moore, "William H. Mason, Southern Industrialist," *The Journal of Southern History* (Vol. XXVII, No. 2, May 1961, pp. 169-83); John M. Coates, "Masonite Corporation: The First Fifty Years 1925/1975," Corporate History published by the Masonite Corporation, 1975, in the LRMA Archives; Frank. C. Lesniak, "Masonite; Takes a Tree Apart Fiber by Fiber and Puts it Back Together in a More Usable Form," reprinted from *Baldwin-Southwark* (4th qtr., 1939, pp. 1-10) in the LRMA Archives; and "Insulation Board Manufactured from Sawmill Waste," reprinted *American Lumberman* (June 19, 1926), in the LRMA Archives.
3. "Early Wood-Fiber Panels: Masonite, Hardboard, and Lower Density Boards," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* (Vol. 33, No. 3, 1994, pp. 301-306), cool.conservation-us.org/coolaic/jaic/articles/jaic33-03-005.html, accessed 12 Apr. 2019. Today, Masonite International Corporation employs over 9,000 people worldwide. It is one of the world's largest manufacturer and merchandiser of commercial and residential doors. A producer of over 120,000 interior and exterior wood, fiberglass, and metal doors per day, it has operations in more than 60 facilities in 12 countries in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.
4. "The Story of Masonite Products," 1933 publication in the LRMA Archives.

## Endnotes, continued

5. *Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago's 1933-34 World's Fair* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007), 136.
6. "Masonite Insulation..Presdwood..Quartboard..Lath..Tempered Presdwood..Temprtle..Cushioned Flooring," 1936, <https://archive.org/details/HomeOwnersCatalogsMasonite>, accessed, 16 Nov. 2017.
7. Publication in the LRMA Archives, c. 1940.
8. Quoted in Carma R. Gorman, "Henry P. Glass and World War II," *Design Issues* (Vol. 22, No. 4, Autumn, 2006, pp. 4-26), 16.
9. Mayer (1895-1979) was a prominent authority on the craft of painting, publishing multiple books on the subject. His books include *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* (1940), *The Painter's Craft* (1948) and a *Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques* (1969), each of which went through several editions. Taubes (1900-1981), who was known for his research and writing on oil painting, wrote 40 books on art history, criticism, and technique. Mayer and Taubes were editors for the *American Artist* magazine and contributors to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Reed Kay (born 1925), Professor Emeritus of Art of the Boston University College of Fine Arts, is the author of numerous books on painting technique. Kay's publications include *The Painter's Companion: A Basic Guide to Studio Methods and Materials* (1961) and *The Painter's Guide to Studio Methods and Materials* (1983).
10. Ralph Mayer, *The Painter's Craft: An Introduction to Artists' Methods and Material* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 68.
11. Frederic Taubes, "Masonite," *The Painter's Dictionary of Materials and Methods* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1971), 148.
12. Ibid.
13. Ralph Mayer, *The Painter's Craft* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1966), 71.
14. Frederic Taubes, *The Technique of Oil Painting: A Discussion of Traditional Oil Techniques for Use by the Contemporary Painter* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1941), 9.
15. Reed Kay, *The Painter's Companion: A Basic Guide to Studio Methods and Materials* (Cambridge, MA: Webb Books, 1967), 149.
16. Mayer, *The Painter's Craft*, 71.
17. Kay, 149.
18. Ralph Mayer, *The Artists' Handbook of Materials and Techniques* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 238.
19. March 13, 1973 letter from P.W. Berg, Product Manager, Commodity and Special Inventory Products, Masonite Corporation, to Susan E. Meyer, Editor, *American Artist* (Yale University Archives, Ralph Mayer Papers, MS 1710, Box 19, Folder 12).
20. Ralph Mayer, *The Artists' Handbook of Materials and Technique*, 254.
21. Noted European artists used Masonite, as well, including Jean Dubuffet (French, 1901-1985; see, for example, *Jean Paulhan*, 1946, collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Joan Miró (Spanish, 1893-1983, who in 1936 he produced a series of 27 abstract paintings on Masonite, known as "the wild paintings").
22. *Oil and Tempera Painting: 500 Questions and Answers* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1957), 20. Mayer said that effect from doing so "is seldom liked by artists," (*The Painter's Craft*, 71), and in a 1968 letter to Jean Chenier, he remarked "Some like the smooth side, others the rough; it's a matter of choice. I dislike the rough side, it looks to me like a cheap and unsuccessful imitation of linen canvas and it has bumps, the lines are too mechanical. But if it suits your particular style of work it is technically o.k." (Yale University Archives, Ralph Mayer Papers, MS 1710, Box 15, Folder 6).
23. In the John Steuart Curry and Curry Family Papers at the Archives of American Art, Box 4, Folder 22. The letter from Curry to Masonite is unlocated, and this author is unsure of what project this was in aid.
24. Curtis Rist, "How to Heal a Masterpiece," *Discover Magazine* (April 1999), <http://discovermagazine.com/1999/apr/masterpiece>, accessed 7 May 2019.
25. Carol Prisant, *Antiques Roadshow Primer: The Introductory Guide to Antiques and Collectibles from the Most-Watched Series on PBS* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1999), 120.
26. Ralph Mayer, *The Artists' Handbook of Materials and Technique*, 472-73.
27. Ibid, 473.
28. *A Handbook on the Care of Paintings* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1965), 76-77.
29. Rhett Roy Lucas, "New Painting Surfaces for a New Age," *American Artist* (February 1995, 52-55).

# What Lies

---

# Beneath

Masonite and American Art of the 20th Century

August 13 – November 17, 2019

## Checklist of the Exhibition

Josef Albers (German/American, 1888-1976)

*Day and Night VII*

1963

Lithograph

Collection of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Beth Boykin in memory of Curtis Ray Boykin, 2002.4

William C. Baggett, Jr. (American, born 1946)

*Cage*

1991

Egg tempera on Masonite

Collection of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Hallie and C.G. Hull, 98.28

Gifford Beal (American, 1879-1956)

*Bandstand, Salem*

c.1930

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries, New York

Pedro Cervántez (American, 1915-1987)

*Casita*

c. 1935-1942

Oil on Masonite

Courtesy of the Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General Services Administration; WPA, Federal Art Project, 1935-1943, FA160

Carroll Cloar (American, 1913-1993)

*Gentleman Fishermen*

1977

Oil on Masonite

Collection of Stover Smith, Laurel, Mississippi

Carroll Cloar (American, 1913-1993)

*Luella and the Baby*

1962

Tempera on Masonite

A Lauren Rogers Museum Purchase, 67.9

William Halsey (American, 1915-1999)

*Third Floor Light*

Unknown date

Oil on Masonite

The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 2005.0802

Nicholas Basil Haritonoff (Russian/American, 1884-1944)

*William H. Mason*

1939

Oil on Masonite

Collection of Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of Charles White Gamble, 78.7

Carl Robert Holty (German/American, 1900-1973)

*Horse and Rider*

1949

Oil on Masonite

Collection of the Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, Museum purchase, 1994.2

Emil Holzhauer (German/American, 1887-1986)

*Macon*

1949

Oil on Masonite

The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, SC, 2005.04.06

Clementine Hunter (American, 1886/1887-1988)

*Funeral Procession*

c. early 1960s-1988

Oil on Masonite

The New Orleans Museum of Art: Bequest of Yvonne Ryan, 99.110.10

Clementine Hunter (American, 1886/1887-1988)

*Plantation Scene*

c. early 1960s-1988

Oil on Masonite

The New Orleans Museum of Art: Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert F. Ryan, 85.84

## Checklist of the Exhibition, continued

George Inness (American, 1825-1894)  
*Milton on the Hudson (Close of a Rainy Day)*  
c. 1883-1886  
Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite  
Collection of the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Gift of  
Lauren Chase Eastman, 27.19

Warren (Pete) Jennerjahn (American, born 1922)  
*Adventures of Red #1*  
c. 1949-51  
Oil on Masonite  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina,  
2010.06.03

Alex Katz (American, born 1927)  
*Studies for "Six Women"*  
1974  
Oil on Masonite  
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Gift of the  
Artist, 92.6.29-31

Reginald Marsh (American, 1898-1954)  
*East River*  
1952  
Oil on Masonite  
A Lauren Rogers Museum of Art purchase, 98.2

Anna Mary Robertson Moses (American, 1860-1961)  
*The Daughter's Homecoming*  
1947  
Oil on Masonite  
A Lauren Rogers Museum of Art purchase with partial  
funds by the Steber Foundation, 76.14

Anna Mary Robertson Moses (American, 1860-1961)  
*Over the River to Grandma's House on Thanksgiving  
Day*  
1947  
Oil on Masonite  
Collection of the Hunter Museum of American Art,  
Chattanooga, Tennessee; Gift of Karen G. and Paul  
John Kruesi III in honor of Ruth S. and A. William  
Holmberg, 2007.8

Priscilla Roberts (American, 1916-2001)  
*Marengo*  
1986  
Oil on Masonite  
Collection of the National Museum of Women in the  
Arts, Washington, DC; Gift of the Honorable Joseph P.  
Carroll and Mrs. Carroll, 1992.92

Edward Rosenfeld (American, 1906-1983)  
*City Improvement*  
1937  
Oil on Masonite  
Courtesy of the Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General  
Services Administration, Treasury Relief Act Project,  
1935-1938, FA129

Helen Farr Sloan (American, 1911-2005)  
*The White Dog (New York Saloon)*  
1947  
Oil on Masonite  
Collection of the National Museum of Women in  
the Arts, Washington, DC; Gift of the Studio Group,  
Wilmington, Delaware, 1992.42

Theodoros Stamos (American, 1922-1997)  
*Thaw III*  
1950  
Oil on Masonite  
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Bequest of  
Fannie and Alan Leslie, 2006.21.18

John Storrs (American, 1885-1956)  
*Nebulous*  
1933  
Oil on Masonite  
Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries, New York

Maltby Sykes (American, 1911-1992)  
*Shrimp Boats*  
1953  
Oil on Masonite  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina,  
2007.05.03

Eugene Thomason (American, 1895-1972)  
*The Wrestlers*  
1968  
Oil on Masonite  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, SC, 2006.03.17

Robert Louis (Bob) Thompson (American, 1937-1966)  
*Untitled Abstract*  
c. 1958-1966  
Oil and sand on Masonite  
The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; Gift of  
Walter P. Chrysler, Jr., 0.3147

Mildred Wolfe (American, 1912-2009)  
*Morning on Royal Street*  
c. 1960  
Oil on Masonite  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina,  
2013.12.02

Edmund Yaghjian (American, 1903-1997)  
*Park Street Grocery*  
c. 1975  
Polymer on Masonite  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, SC, 2003.12.09

Karle Zerbe (German/American, 1903-1972)  
*Kiosk I*  
1951  
Polymer tempera on Masonite  
Collection of the Columbus Museum, Georgia; Gift of  
Estelle and Martin Karlin, G.2011.57.1

# *What Lies*

---

# Beneath

Masonite and American Art of the 20th Century

*is generously sponsored by*



**MASONITE.**

Open to extraordinary.



Mississippi Power

**Morgan Stanley**

**GEORGE OPENSHAW  
FINANCIAL ADVISOR**

The Jean Chisholm Lindsey  
Exhibition Endowment Fund

*Front Cover*

Maltby Sykes (American, 1911-1992), *Shrimp Boats*, 1953, oil on Masonite,  
The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 2007.05.03



**LAUREN ROGERS**  
MUSEUM *of* ART

5th Avenue at 7th Street  
Post Office Box 1108  
Laurel, MS 39441-1108

[www.LRMA.org](http://www.LRMA.org)  
601.649.6374