

Advertisement for *John Sloan's Etchings*, ca. 1912 Lent by the Caxambas Foundation, Janesville, WI

John Sloan's fascination with the New York scene after relocating to the city from Philadelphia in 1904 provided the subject for his first uncommissioned series of etchings executed between 1905 and 1906. At first, he conceived of doing a connoisseur series, as evidenced by the first two prints in the *New York City Life* set—*Connoisseurs of Prints* and *Fifth Avenue Critics*. However, the sights of his 23rd Street studio's surroundings in the seething Tenderloin district soon entered his work in the third etching of the series, *The Show Case*. By early 1906, Sloan had completed ten etchings offering glimpses of everyday, urban life in New York City which he then began to market as an integral set available to the public at low cost. Later, he did three more prints in roughly the same horizontal, 5 x 7 format—*Girl and Beggar*, *Night Windows*, and *Picture Buyer*—and generally considered them as part of the *New York City Life* series.

Despite the originality of Sloan's *New York City Life* prints, both in concept and execution, the set initially met with mixed critical and public reception. Liberal artists and critics praised the honesty of the prints. In a review for *The Craftsman* magazine, Charles Wisner Barrell applauded Sloan's "brilliant relentless little etchings which give us such vivid glimpses of New York life." Charles Mielatz, secretary of the New York Etching Club, invited Sloan to exhibit the series at the 1906 annual exhibition of the American Watercolor Society. However, the common subject matter proved too controversial for many; four of the ten prints were rejected by the exhibition's hanging committee as "vulgar" and "indecent." Despite Sloan's repeated mass-marketing attempts, such as this illustrated circular, sales of the set were limited as well.

The impact of John Sloan's *New York City Life* etchings on fellow realist artists working in New York cannot be overemphasized. The city-life prints by Sloan's friends and followers on view in this exhibition are a testament to Sloan's pioneering vision of social life in New York's streets, subways, tenements, galleries, arenas, and amusement parks as a subject for art.