



Samuel Bell Waugh, *The Bay and Harbor of New York*, c. 1855, Museum of the City of New York. Gift of Mrs. Robert M. Littlejohn, 33.169.1

PRESERVATION IN PROGRESS: PICTURING IMMIGRATION

Special Installation Offers Behind-the-Scenes Look at An Ongoing Painting Restoration
Opening April 12, 2024

NEW YORK, NY (March 2024) - The **Museum of the City of New York**, the city's storyteller for over a century, is thrilled to announce the upcoming exhibition, *Preservation in Progress: Picturing Immigration*. This installation offers visitors an exclusive peek into the conservation of one of the museum's prized possessions: **Samuel Bell Waugh's** monumental painting, *The Bay and Harbor of New York*. **Opening on April 12th**, timed to coincide with the anniversary of April 17th, 1907 – the busiest day recorded at Ellis Island – this exhibition explores the painting's significance as one of the earliest depictions of immigration to the United States and a historical document.

Approaching its 170th year, Waugh's masterpiece has been impacted by the ravages of time, prompting the Museum's commitment to its preservation. "Conservation is pivotal in preserving the essence and vitality of artworks," notes **Sarah Henry**, Robert A. and Elizabeth Rohn Jeffe Chief Curator at Museum of the City of New York. "A big part of our job is to steward these irreplaceable documents of our shared history as New Yorkers. With this special installation, the public is invited to witness this process firsthand and gain insights into the meticulous care and specialized techniques employed to safeguard this cultural treasure and others within our collection – and, ultimately, preserve the importance of New York City's history."

Throughout the exhibition, Conservator **Gary McGowan** will be on site, actively working on the painting in the gallery on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, providing visitors with an immersive experience of the project to clean and stabilize the painting, which includes efforts to restore the parts of the work to the artist's original vision. An overhead camera will allow viewers to zoom in on this intricate project of care and detective work. Visitors will also have the opportunity for hands-on activities, delving into the challenges of looking after materials and museum objects, and exploring the measures employed by museums to safeguard their collections.

Before the proliferation of photography and the advent of cinema, stand-alone paintings and panoramic scrolls captivated audiences and documented images of life during that time. Waugh's "The Bay and Harbor of New York," depicting the bustling waterfront, complete with Irish migrants disembarking at Castle Garden, served as the final installment of a larger panorama titled "Italia" – an engaging narrative series that toured the U.S. in

the late 19th century. Waugh's painting captures a dynamic scene of New York's bustling waterfront in the years just before the Civil War. Curator **Lilly Tuttle** characterizes the work, a "rare document of New York's history, one that transmits the unique energy of the city at a transformational moment."

Stephanie Hill Wilchfort, the Ronay Menschel Director and President of the Museum of the City of New York, remarks, "Beyond its aesthetic appeal, 'The Bay and Harbor of New York' embodies a pivotal chapter in our city's narrative – one of the largest periods of immigration in our country's history. As contemporary discussions on immigration dominate headlines, this exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of how past immigrants have profoundly influenced the identity of our city and our nation."

About the Museum of the City of New York

The Museum of the City of New York, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2023, fosters an understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. *Time Out New York* named its blockbuster centennial show, *This Is New York: 100 Years of the City in Art and Pop Culture*, as the best exhibition of 2023. Moreover, the Museum previously earned the title of "Best Museum" in *Time Out New York's* "Best of the City 2021" as well as multiple American Alliance of Museums (AAM) awards. To connect with the Museum's award-winning digital content, visit www.mcny.org, or follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumOfCityNY and on Facebook at [Facebook.com/MuseumOfCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumOfCityNY).

Press contact: Meryl W Cooper, mwcooper@mcny.org, 917-974-0022