

## **GEORGE INNESS, JR.**

**1854 – 1926**

**Painter / Philanthropist**

**Tarpon Springs**



George Inness, Jr. was one of America's foremost figure and landscape painters and a respected philanthropist. He is recognized as a great Florida artist for his depiction of the state's unspoiled landscapes full of the flora and fauna of his time.

Born in Paris, France, on January 5, 1854 to the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century American painter George Inness, George Inness, Jr. was raised to be an artist. He grew up in the United States but accompanied his father on lengthy painting excursions in France and Italy. As a result, he spent much of his youth in European art circles, studied with French artist Léon Bonnat and was influenced by the *Barbizon School* of landscape painting. Returning to the US, he developed a career as a magazine illustrator and painter of bucolic and hunting scene.

During the Gilded Age, he became a man of great wealth with his 1879 marriage to Julia Goodrich Smith, heiress to one of America's largest publishing empires, the Century Publishing Company. He no longer had to worry financially about advancing his artistic career.

Upon his father's death in 1894, 41-year-old Inness, Jr. returned to France in search of a style different from his father and began a formal study of painting at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. His education in the French Academy included the study of classical art, formal design, color theory, anatomy, and drawing, followed by examinations, letters of recommendation and apprentice training. Inness, Jr. excelled in this environment and gained confidence and recognition. Inness, Jr. opened a studio in Paris, created paintings in the academic style and sought membership in the French Academy. He participated in the annual *Salon de Paris*, won awards from the *Société des Artistes Français*, and in 1902 was named an Officer in the *Académie des Beaux Arts*, a rare distinction for an American.

Two of his award-winning academic paintings, *The Centurion* (1897), and *The Last Shadow of the Cross* (1898), were large pictorial scenes painted with smooth brushstrokes and attention to detail, including realistic replications of Biblical landscapes. Both paintings were exhibited in the Louvre Museum in Paris for over a quarter century. These paintings are now in the collection of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Tarpon Springs.

With Inness, Jr.'s return to the United States came recognition in American art circles. His European contacts furthered prestige in the publishing business. His formal education at the Academy influenced his illustration work and provided a springboard to evolve his passion for

spiritual landscapes of soft-edged, mid-range tonality. These paintings were a departure from the brooding, dark atmospheric landscapes associated with his father and thus represented his own aesthetic voice. A signature green color used by Inness, Jr. in his late work, often referred to as “Inness green,” evoked rebirth and the spiritual presence in nature.

His new paintings were awarded a Silver Medal at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition (an official World’s Fair), and Gold Medals from the 1902 Art Society of Philadelphia and the Society of American Artists. Inness also became a Trustee of the Century Publishing Company. He used his editorial voice for essays, opinions and brochures on art. He wrote several books, including the 1917 biography, *Life, Art and the Letters of George Inness*.

Inness, Jr. first came to Tarpon Springs in the 1890s to visit and work with his father. He returned in 1902 to establish a winter residence to which he would return every year up until his death in 1926. Inness, Jr. expanded his property over the years into a 27-room house, complete with a large painting studio and artists’ cottages. Many early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, including Charles Curran, Winfield Scott Clime and Rachael Hartley, were invited to Tarpon Springs to create paintings of the area under his sponsorship. Inness Manor grew to become an artist colony. Inness, Jr. also built a rustic retreat and studio along the Anclote River, calling it Camp Comfort. He loved the solitude of its location and found inspiration for many of his paintings in the beautiful landscape of its river basin.

The story of George Inness, Jr. and the Unitarian Universalist Church began in 1918, when a dangerous storm blew out windows in the church’s sanctuary. Because construction materials and craftsmen were in short supply at the end of World War I, the church was unable to replace the windows. Inness, Jr. offered to create paintings to fill in the spaces where the sanctuary windows were lost. Today eleven of George Inness, Jr.’s most significant paintings are located within the historic church, painstakingly restored in 2018-2019:

- Two large triptychs, specifically painted for the church in 1918 and 1922;
- *The Lord is in His Holy Temple (1926)*, a summation of the spiritual solace found in nature, completed just days before he died;
- Two award-winning paintings, *The Centurion (1897)*, and *The Last Shadow of the Cross (1898)*, shipped to the church by Inness Jr.’s widow Julia after his death;
- *Sunset on the Bayou (1925)*, a well-known and historic panorama of Tarpon Springs’ famous Spring Bayou; and
- *The Only Hope (1924)*, symbolizing a call for brotherhood and world peace following the devastation of World War I. Celebrated in newspapers and reproduced in magazines, President Calvin Coolidge declared it should remain on permanent display in the US Capitol Rotunda; but Inness said it must return to the church on Spring Bayou after completing its tour of the United States.

Since Inness, Jr.’s death, the church has provided public access for tens of thousands of visitors to the largest public collection of Inness, Jr.’s work. Because of the artistic legacy of George Inness, Jr., Tarpon Springs is often referred to as a “City of the Arts.” For the 1987 Tarpon Springs centennial, a major Inness symposium was hosted with art scholars from around the country. In 2012, the booklet *Celebrating Community – Tarpon Springs: Reflections on 125 Years* dedicated a chapter to the Inness legacy. Today, publicity materials from the City and Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce, and internationally distributed by Visit Florida, all recognize the role of George Inness, Jr. in the cultural development of Tarpon Springs.

George Inness, Jr. was not only regarded as an artist, but an arts leader, advocate and philanthropist. In life, he was elected to the Society of American Artists in 1880, made a full member of the National Academy of Design in 1899 and founder and president (1901-1903) of the Salmagundi Club (NY), one of the most prestigious art organizations in the US. Both Inness, Jr. and his wife, Julia, were prominent citizens in Tarpon Springs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; their influence and philanthropy are well documented in Tarpon's history. Julia Inness, Jr. founded the Tarpon Springs Public Library in 1916.

Today Inness, Jr.'s work can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (NY), the Museum of Fine Arts (MA), Montclair Art Museum (NJ), and the Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art (Daytona Beach), with a majority held in private collections. In 2014, the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art in Tarpon Springs organized a major exhibition, *An Arts Legacy: George Inness, Jr. in Tarpon Springs*, which added to national scholarship on the artist. In 2018, photograph archives of George Inness, Jr.'s works were transferred to the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, providing research access for art historians.

The State of Florida designated George Inness, Jr. a Great Floridian 2000 in recognition of his lifetime distinguished artistic, personal and philanthropic contributions to the state's history and culture.

---Written for the Florida Artists Hall of Fame 2019 by Barbara Kotacka, Chair of the Inness Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tarpon Springs, and Lynn Whitelaw, founding director of the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art at St. Petersburg College and curator of *An Arts Legacy* **GEORGE INNESS, JR. IN TARPON SPRINGS** (May 4 – August 31, 2014).

Related Links:

*An Arts Legacy: George Inness, Jr. in Tarpon Springs*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oiahvZEJRk&feature=youtuve>

An Arts Legacy in Tarpon Springs: George Inness & George Inness, Jr., by Lynn Whitelaw, (Chapter 4, p. 36-45), *Celebrating Community, Tarpon Springs: Reflections on 125 Years*, 2013.  
<http://tarponarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CelebratingCommunity.pdf>