

**An Impressionist Painter in Italy**  
**Biography of Richard Hamilton Couper (1887-1918)**  
By Greta E. Couper, Ph.D., copyright © 2018 Rev. 1, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.27001.31840

**“Open my heart and you will see, graved inside of it, *Italy*”**

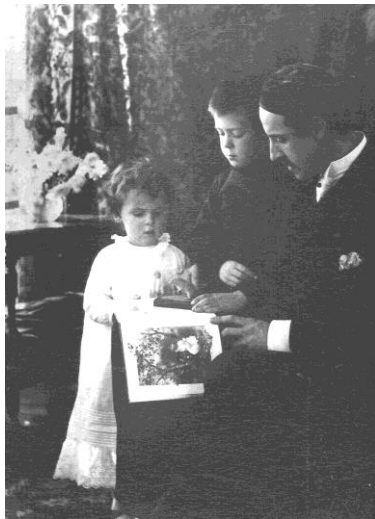
-- Robert Browning

Such a fitting poem for American impressionist painter Richard Hamilton Couper who spent most of his life in Italy, traveling the countryside from Venice to Capri, painting beautiful landscapes. Born of American parents, he lived his youth in Florence, Italy, in the sculptor studio of his grandfather Thomas Ball and father William Couper. “Villa Ball” was one of the primary destinations for vacationing tourists, musicians, artists, and dignitaries, and was fully involved with the Anglo-American Artist Colony in Firenze. Located across the Ponte Vecchio and just outside the Porta Romana, near Piazza Michelangelo and the Pitti Palace, the area was home to many expatriates including Robert and Elizabeth Browning, John Ruskin, Hiram Powers, Frederick Turner, Christina Rossetti, Julius Rolshoven, William Dean Howells, Daniel Chester French, and many others. Richard, often called Dick, was born in Norfolk, Virginia, on July 5, 1887, during a family vacation. His mother was Eliza Chickering Ball, an accomplished musician from the Chickering piano family. Richard spent his childhood watching artists work on sculpture and paintings, and at art and music receptions.

When a teenager Richard went to New York to study at the Art Students League; then returned to Paris and Rome where he studied with Beronneau, and was a member of the Circolo Artistico. In Paris he met and subsequently married Mildred Cooper, a quarter-tone composer and pianist from Argentina. They lived in the Palazzo Sonnino in Rome, and had frequent showings at the American Academy, under director Frederic Crowninshield. While Richard displayed his landscape paintings, monotypes, and etchings, Mildred entertained the visitors with tea and music. These events were mentioned twice in Burnham’s book *Rome: Then and Now* (pp 121, 146). The Coupers frequently hosted artist Julius Rolshoven, whom they called *Giulio*. He was a mentor to the couple. When their son Clive was born they found a larger apartment at 25 via della Lupa, off via Condotti near the Spanish Steps. A daughter Rosalind soon followed. They usually spent summers on the island of Capri and the Amalfi Coast, or in Florence or Venice, where Richard painted landscapes.

With the outbreak of World War I the Coupers returned to the U.S., as conditions in Europe became hazardous. Richard continued to paint landscapes in the rural areas of New York. His favorite medium was tempera, and he became so interested that he invented a new formula, and started to manufacture tempera colors in 1915. But he died of pneumonia in New York at the age of thirty-three, during the world-wide Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918. Although he had some art showings in America, especially at the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey, Richard was better known in Europe where many of his paintings still exist.

**Family Photos**



Richard and Tom with their father

Family in New Jersey home of William Couper




Villa Ball



Portrait by Julius Rolshoven

PHONE 9037 CHELSEA



**COUPER  
TEMPERA  
COLORS**

**RICHARD H. COUPER**

161 WEST 23RD STREET  
NEW YORK CITY

STUDIO

N. 1529

**MINISTERO DELLA PUBBLICA ISTRUZIONE**  
Direzione Generale per le Antichità e le Belle Arti

Tessera personale di libero ingresso nei musei, nelle gallerie, negli scavi di antichità e nei monumenti nazionali, concessa al Signor *Richard Hamilton Couper - Vittore*

Roma, 31 luglio 1913

FIRMA DEL LATORE IL MINISTRO

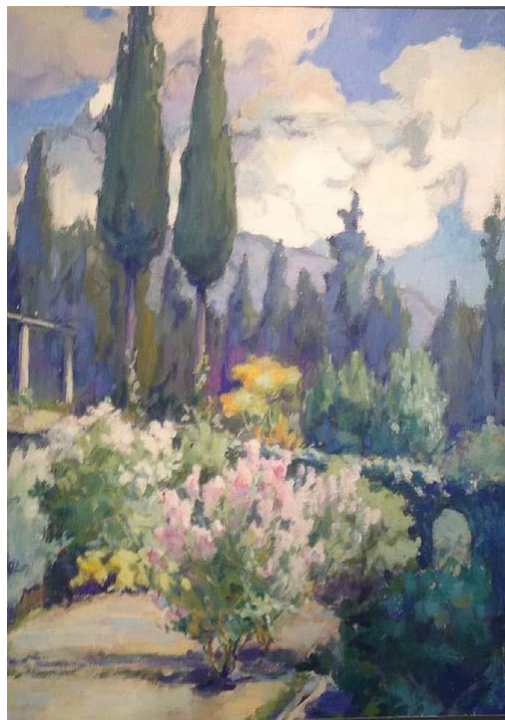
*Richard Hamilton Couper* *[Signature]*

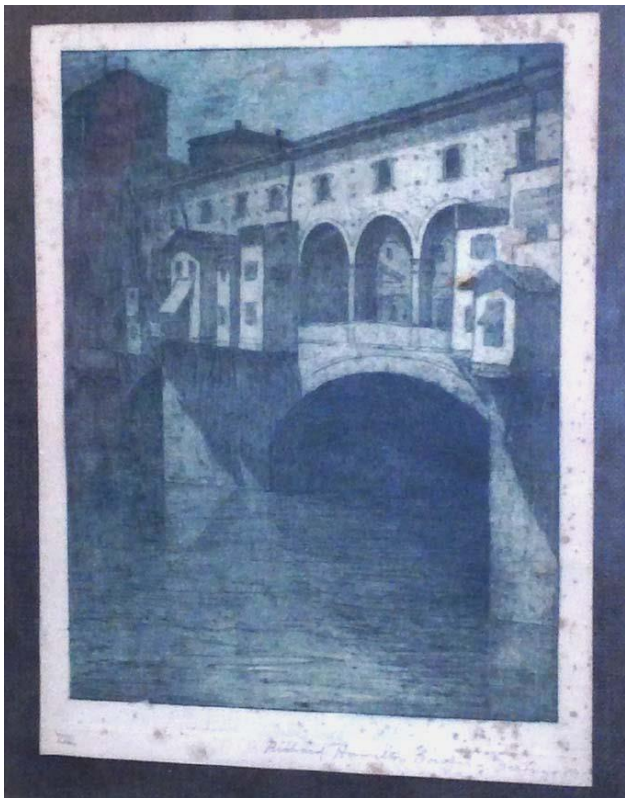
Vale dal 1911 al 30 giugno 1914

YOU ARE INVITED TO VISIT AN EXHIBITION OF COLOURED  
DRAWINGS OF THE PRINCIPAL VIEWS OF ROME,  
ETCHINGS AND OIL-PAINTINGS,  
BY MR. RICHARD HAMILTON COUPER  
WHICH WILL BE HELD DAILY FROM TUESDAY DEC. 16<sup>th</sup>  
TO WEDNESDAY DEC. 24<sup>th</sup>  
10 A.M. TO 5 P.M.  
AT 25 VICOLO DELLA LUPA (PIAZZA BORGHESE)

EXHIBITION	EXPOSITION
<p>M.<sup>r</sup> RICHARD HAMILTON COUPER IS GIVING AN EXHIBITION OF HIS MONOTYPES; THE EXHIBITION WILL BE OPEN EVERY DAY FROM 2 - 4 P. M. FROM THE 19<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 27<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY AT THE ARTIST'S APPARTMENT, VIA DELLE TRE CANNELLE 1<sup>a</sup> (NEAR PIAZZA VENEZIA).</p>	<p>M.<sup>r</sup> RICHARD HAMILTON COUPER DONNERA UNE EXPOSITION DE SES MONOTYPES; L'EXPOSITION SERA OUVERTE CHAQUE JOUR DE 2 - 4 P. M. DU 19<sup>IÈME</sup> JUSQU'AU 27<sup>IÈME</sup> JANVIER, DANS L'APPARTEMENT DE L'ARTISTE, VIA DELLE TRE CANNELLE 1<sup>a</sup> (PRÈS DE PIAZZA VENEZIA).</p>
<p>=====  <span style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">I</span> NVITATION          =====</p>	

Landscapes and Etchings in Tuscany

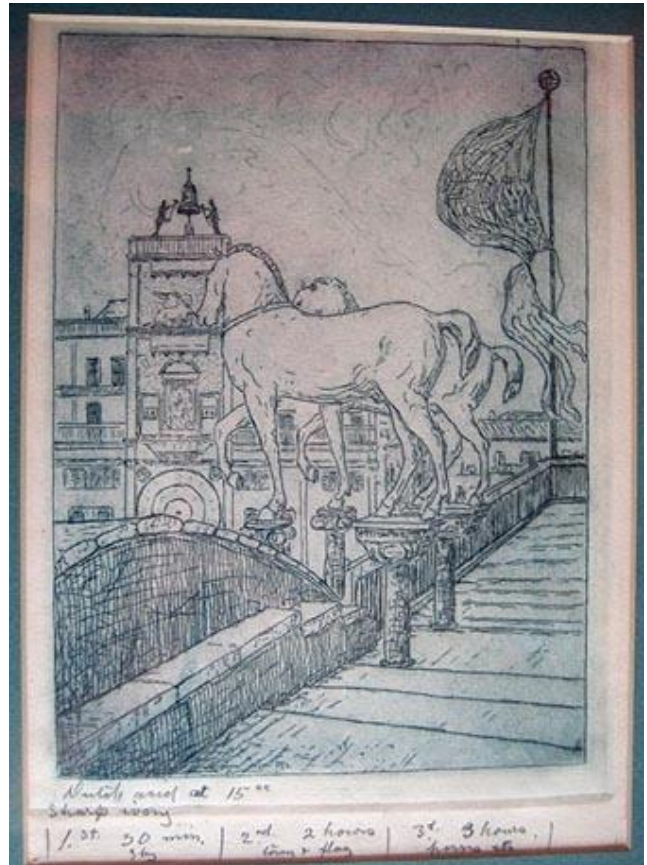


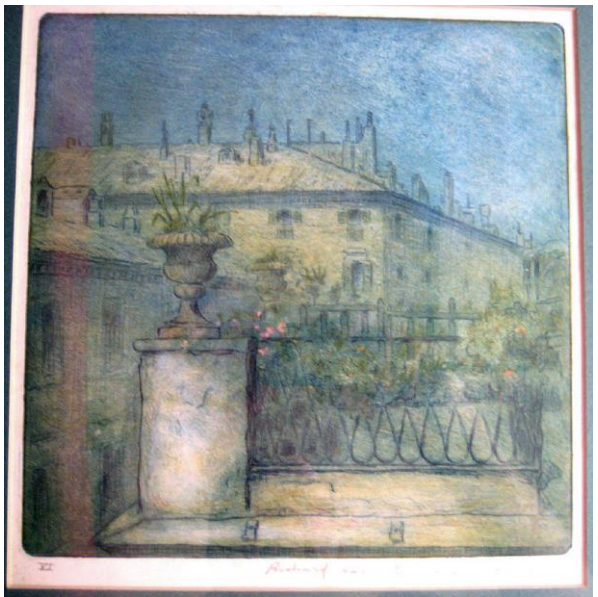


Landscapes in Capri and the Amalfi Coast



Landscapes and Etchings in Rome and Venice





Landscapes in New York





## Appendix

A loan exhibition of paintings and sculpture by Julius Rolshoven, William Couper and Richard Hamilton Couper was held in the Montclair Art Museum during the month of April. Mr. Julius Rolshoven is a Detroit artist of wide reputation; Mr. William Couper is a native of Montclair and has produced sculpture of a very distinctive character; Mr. Richard Hamilton Couper is the son of William Couper, and was represented in the exhibition at Montclair by paintings in tempera and oil, monotypes and colored etchings.

### MONTCLAIR

#### MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM MONTCLAIR ART ASSOCIATION

Bloomfield and South Mountain Aves., Montclair

CHARLES BULL.....	President	JULIAN F. TINKHAM.....	Treasurer
FRANCIS T. MEYER....	1st Vice-Pres.	MRS. M. M. LEBRUN.....	Secretary
MRS. HENRY LANG....	2d Vice-Pres.	8 South Mountain Ave., Montclair	
KATHERINE INNES, Director			

*For foundation see Vol. XI, p. 195.*

Organized 1910; building opened 1914. Permanent collection and frequent loan exhibits. Annual meeting in February; board meetings second Monday each month. Annual dues \$10. Membership 257.

Co-operates with the schools in interesting the pupils in an appreciation of art. Two lectures and three musical evenings in 1915-16. Attendance in 1915-16 was 10,793; total sales \$2,881.

#### Exhibitions

Oct., 1915—56 etchings by Whistler; 19 prints and 35 wood engravings by Timothy Cole; 22 prints by S. Arlent-Edwards.

November—Oriental rugs lent by members; 34 textiles and 7 photographs of table decorations lent by Marshall Fry.

Dec., 1915 and Jan., 1916—36 paintings lent by National Arts Club; 12 wax portraits by Ethel Frances Mundy.

February—59 water-colors by New York artists; 45 pieces decorated porcelain by Margurite A. Cameron and Mary E. Harrison.

March—24 paintings by F. Ballard Williams; 15 pieces Chinese ceramics lent by J. W. Hart.

April—18 paintings by Julius Rolshoven; 9 water-colors by William Couper; 14 tempera paintings, 3 oil paintings, 14 etchings and 5 monotypes by Richard Couper.

May—35 paintings by contemporary artists of New York City; exhibition of handicraft from schools of the vicinity.

June to September—Annual summer exhibition of paintings by artists of Montclair and vicinity; exhibition of handicraft from schools.

Note written from camp on tree bark, 1902

Friday, Aug. 22, 02.

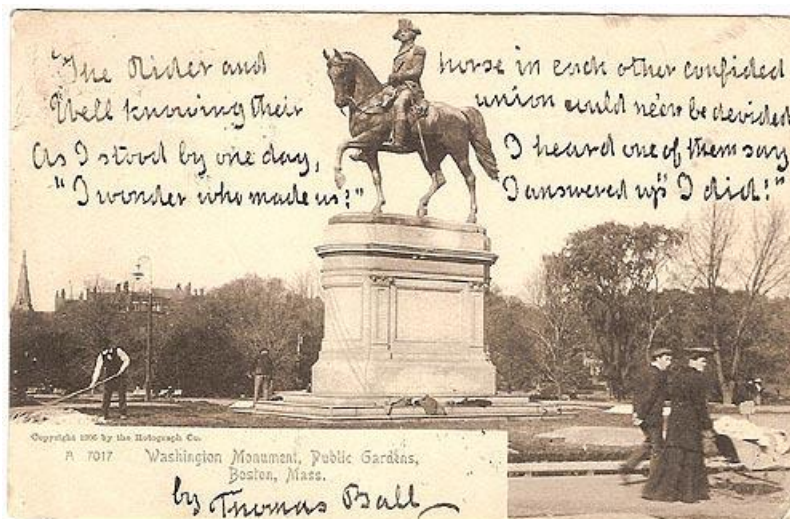
Dear Mother

We have changed the date for coming home. we leave the island on Monday Sept. 1 and arrive in Montserrat Sept. 5, some time between ten and 4 o'clock.

There are so many things and trips that we have gone and paid for, that I am quite in need of some money and I think that I will need about \$2.50 to pay my expenses, and if you will please send it by a registered letter.

Give my love to Grandpa and to all the rest at home.

I am your loving son  
John



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