



STAGESTRUCK:
EVERETT SHINN,
THE THEATER AND VAUDEVILLE,
AND *MAGICIAN WITH SHEARS*

Micah J. Maatman and Donald Myers



Hillstrom Museum of Art



Everett Shinn (1876–1953),
Magician with Shears, c. 1907,
oil on canvas, 12 x 9 7/8 inches,
gift of the Reverend Richard
L. Hillstrom

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FOCUS IN/ON

FOCUS IN/ON is a program of the Hillstrom Museum of Art that engages the expertise of Gustavus Adolphus College community members across the curriculum in a collaborative, detailed consideration of particular individual works from the Hillstrom Collection. This project considers the oil painting *Magician with Shears* by American painter and theater lover Everett Shinn (1876–1953), donated to the Museum in 2003 by the Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom '38. The extended didactic text on the painting appears both in this brochure and in the FOCUS IN/ON exhibition. It was written collaboratively by Micah J. Maatman, associate professor and chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance; and Donald Myers, director, Hillstrom Museum of Art, and instructor, Department of Art and Art History.

INTRODUCTION

Interest and involvement in theatrical activities permeated the life of American artist Everett Shinn (1876–1953) from his youth, intertwined with evidence of his artistic abilities.

As a boy, he loved the spectacle of the circus when it came to his hometown of Woodstown, New Jersey, and he became adept at acrobatics following that example. His earliest job was making posters for shows at the Woodstown Opera House, managed by his older brother Warren. Creating these posters would have put Shinn in contact with the world of performance, perhaps including George M. Cohan (1878–1942), later one of the great vaudeville stars, when he appeared there in about 1889.

In his maturity, Shinn’s dual involvement in visual art and in theater continued, and not only was his fame as an artist closely tied to his imagery of the stage, but also he gained a name for himself as a writer and producer of plays. Described as “stage-struck” by Ira Glackens, son and biographer of Shinn’s close friend and fellow Ashcan School painter William Glackens (1870–1938), the artist became known for his depictions of theater subjects, particularly those from vaudeville, the new form of popular entertainment that developed in the same years as Shinn. The Hillstrom Museum of Art’s oil painting from around 1907 titled *Magician with Shears*, a donation in 2003 from the Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom, is one such work. This arresting image of a vaudeville performer engaging his audience in the drama of his magic act is the subject of this extended study, which will trace both Shinn’s interest in the theater and his successful career as an acclaimed artist.

EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING

The artist was recognized early for his drawing ability. Some of Shinn’s preserved childhood school books are doodled with figures, and he drew pictures in notes to his teachers. When about ten years old, he decorated a room in the family home, drawing a ship on a stormy sea and then painting it on one of the walls. This was a precursor to his later work as a decorator for acquaintances from the theater world such as playwright Clyde Fitch (1865–1909), actress and later interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe (1859?–1950), and famed Broadway producer David Belasco (1853–1931).

When Shinn was fourteen, he left Woodstown to enroll in the Spring Garden Institute, a technical school in nearby Philadelphia where he studied mechanical drawing for two years. This led to employment by the Thackeray Gas Fixture Works in Philadelphia, designing light fixtures. Shinn claimed that he had not intended to become an artist, noting that his interest in

mechanics had dated to his earlier youth when he was inspired by an article in *The Scientific American* to make a model of a submarine. But his continued activity in artistic drawing was his undoing at Thackeray when he was fired for making unrelated drawings, in the margins of his work designs, of such things as pedestrians or horse-drawn cabs. His supervisor suggested that, given his evident ability, Shinn should seek employment drawing for a newspaper or magazine.

Soon after, in 1893, the young Shinn was hired as an illustrator for the *Philadelphia Press* newspaper, the first of numerous positions as a newspaper artist. It was at this time that he met four of the others who with him made up “The Eight,” the group of artists who rebelled against the hegemony of the National Academy of Design and staged their famous 1908 breakaway exhibition at Macbeth Gallery in New York. Three of these artists, George Luks (1867–1933), William Glackens (1870–1938), and John Sloan (1871–1951), like Shinn, worked at different times as illustrators for the *Press* as well as rival Philadelphia papers the *Inquirer* and the *Ledger*. The group, sometimes known as the “Philadelphia Four,” became friends with each other and also with Robert Henri (1865–1929), who became the leader of The Eight and the offshoot Ashcan School, and who influenced Shinn and his cohorts significantly.

Henri had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and he attracted numerous artists through his Charcoal Club, a short-lived, casual organization of newspaper artists and Academy students who met spring through autumn of 1893 for sessions of sketching and painting and for critiques by Henri and Sloan. After the Club’s dissolution, Shinn began his short and, to his mind, unsatisfying period of study at the Academy. An alternative to the Charcoal Club arose soon after, when Henri began hosting meetings in his studio, which solidified friendships and brought young artists together for instruction and comradery. Shinn, like others, fondly admired Henri, and later said that the older artist “kept an open house in his heart.”

A TASTE FOR ACTING

It was in this period that Shinn had his debut as an actor. The group around Henri put on several annual amateur stage productions in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan. One of these was *Twilbe*, a farcical spoof of the highly popular novel *Trilby* by George du Maurier (1834–1896) about three bohemian artists in love with the title character, an artist’s model and singer under the sway of Svengali. *Trilby* had been published serially in *Harper’s Monthly* magazine in 1894, and in December that year Henri and others staged their play. By this time, their entertaining productions had gained popularity and the group was invited to present at the Pennsylvania Academy instead of in

Henri's studio. The playbill described *Twillbe* as the "Third Grand Christmas Effusion of the P. A. F. A. Students," a play in "four acts and one spectacle." Sloan, in drag, played the heroine, while Henri was Svengali. Glackens and other artists also participated, with Shinn playing two roles, "Taffy," described as "A Welsh Apollo, in love with Twillbe" and based on one of the artists of the novel, and "James McNails Whiskers," a parody of American expatriate artistic sensation James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). The production's exuberant playfulness was recorded, including when Sloan recalled how his false breasts fell out of his feminine costume and Henri, with a grand, theatrical gesture, kicked them aside.

By the time *Twillbe* was staged, Shinn had been attending the Pennsylvania Academy for over a year, in his third of four terms there. He did not care for the academic approach of the curriculum, which stressed drawing from antique casts followed only later by drawing from live models. Shinn described the Academy as just a "clubhouse," noting that he and his friends did little actual work. He felt that his most important training was from his work with the newspapers, which required keen observational skill and strong ability to recall and accurately record salient reportorial details in order to provide a visual complement to newspaper prose.

One important benefit of Shinn's time at the Academy, however, was his introduction to fellow student Florence "Flossie" Scovel, whom he married in January 1898. Late in the previous year, Shinn had been lured to New York to work on the *World* newspaper. His fellow Ashcan artists Luks and Glackens earlier had taken newspaper jobs in the City, and later Sloan and then Henri would follow them to New York. Shinn continued at the *World* for a little over a year until the beginning of 1899, when he entered a period of working for magazines, initially as art editor for the literary periodical *Ainslee's Magazine*. The previous year, Shinn had begun a campaign to get his illustrations in *Harper's Weekly*, a highly desirable assignment that typically went to well-established illustrators. Shinn was turned away every week, then after a year he was finally allowed to meet editor and publisher George Harvey. Noting the preponderance of New York street scenes, the imagery that then dominated Shinn's output, Harvey asked if the artist had a color drawing of the Metropolitan Opera House and Broadway in a snowstorm. Shinn said he thought he did and agreed to return with it the following morning. Having no such drawing, he rushed to obtain necessary supplies and worked through the night. When Harvey viewed the completed work, he offered the artist the impressive sum of \$400 for publishing rights for the drawing, which became the magazine's first color center spread, in the February 17, 1900, issue.

SUCCESS

The more relaxed environment of working for a magazine was to Shinn's liking, and it was during this period that he had significant breaks in building his career. In early 1899, he showed five pastels back at the Pennsylvania Academy's annual group exhibition, receiving positive press notice and, more importantly, making his first sale, of his *Street Scene*. This was to prominent artist and teacher William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), who had become an instructor at the Academy after Shinn had left. Chase's ownership of Shinn's work was certainly an honor, and this was noted in the catalogue entry for the pastel when it was shown again the next year in Shinn's first one-person exhibit. This opened at New York's Boussod, Valadon and Company in February and featured over forty of the artist's pastels, which was his primary medium at this time, and which must be viewed as an extension of his drawing. Shinn likely was introduced to pastel during his years at the Academy. Much of his work in oil painting postdates the pastel work, and he exhibited his first oil, a theater subject titled *The Ballet Dancer*, in 1901.

Shinn's continued involvement with the theater world is already evident with his 1900 Boussod, Valadon and Company exhibit, which included pastel portraits of three important acquaintances, playwright Clyde Fitch and actresses Elsie de Wolfe and Julia Marlowe (1865–1950). English-born Marlowe was famed for her Shakespeare interpretations, and Shinn seems to have been smitten with her. He recorded standing in the wings at one of Marlowe's performances in Fitch's popular drama *Barbara Frietchie* when the actress told him she was not feeling well, and a little later, when it appeared that Marlowe might faint, Shinn actually stepped on stage, extending his arms to catch her. He was visible to only a few in the audience and Marlowe acknowledged his concern with a forgiving smile. A 1901 pastel self-portrait (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.) is inscribed by Shinn "To Miss Marlowe" and depicts the artist as broodingly handsome. Marlowe's first marriage had ended in 1900, and although Shinn's marriage to Flossie was to last until their divorce in 1913, he may have wished for a relationship with the actress, especially since his wife was reported to be afraid of childbirth and, therefore, averse to sex. And when they divorced, the reason given was that Shinn had committed adultery three times. Shinn made several depictions of Marlowe, one of which was purchased by Clyde Fitch.

The artist's association with Fitch, to whom he was introduced by Marlowe, was also the impetus for a number of works, including a pastel portrait he showed in the 1900 solo exhibition, which he had earlier sent to Fitch for consideration and which was published in *The Critic* magazine in 1903. Fitch,

one of the most popular Broadway playwrights of the time, hired Shinn to help decorate his newly built home, resulting in paintings for ceilings, sideboards, and two pianos.

Fitch was a close friend of Elsie de Wolfe, who was an accomplished actress before gaining fame as the first interior decorator. Shinn portrayed her several times, and she called upon him for decorative artistic work on numerous occasions. And it was through Fitch and de Wolfe that the artist became acquainted with producer and playwright David Belasco. Known as the “Bishop of Broadway” for his elevated and authoritative status as well as for his penchant for wearing clerical style collars under black coats, Belasco was a particularly important patron for Shinn in his role as a decorator when he hired the artist to paint murals for the impressively grand new theater he was building. When it opened in 1907, the Stuyvesant Theatre (later renamed the Belasco Theatre) and its many murals by Shinn of allegorical figures were widely admired, including by the press.

Elsie de Wolfe was also responsible for introducing Shinn to famed architect Stanford White (1853–1906) of the firm McKim, Mead and White, the person responsible for bringing about Shinn’s first solo exhibit. Shinn records that White was impressed with his pastels, calling them “splendid,” and told him that he ought to have an exhibit at Boussod, Valadon and Company. Shinn explained that he had been trying with no luck, to which White responded that the artist should return to the gallery the following day and tell them White had sent him. White’s prestige and influence with the gallery opened the door to a series of important, well-received solo exhibitions.

The gallery continued supporting Shinn for a number of years, not only with their exhibitions of his work but also by their sponsorship of a 1900 trip abroad he and Flossie made to Paris and London. There the artist solidified his admiration for the work of French master Edgar Degas (1834–1917), and the obvious kinship of Degas’ theatrical images to Shinn’s work has been rightly noted, including the way that both artists frequently used interesting angles that highlight the importance and participation of the audience in theatrical spectacle.

PRIMACY OF THEATER

After his return from Europe, Shinn increasingly embraced theater subjects, deemphasizing the gritty city scenes that had been prominent for him and that define the Ashcan ideal. It has frequently been assumed that Shinn’s theater scenes were anomalous and that works like his *New York by Night* drawings—begun in 1899 as an extensive series intended to be published in book form and featuring renderings of both beautiful and sordid aspects of city life—were typical. However, by the time of the legendary 1908 exhibition at Macbeth Gallery that established

The Eight as a radically modern group of artists, Shinn was so devoted to the theater that all eight works he showed were theatrical images rather than street scenes.

The Eight never exhibited together again as a group, and Shinn grew apart from some of them, though he remained close with William Glackens for the rest of his life. The Shinn family had become friends with Glackens and his wife, Edith, and they played an important role in the next major chapter of Shinn’s association with the theater. A few years after their marriage, the Shinn family purchased a town house in Greenwich Village just off Washington Square, at 112 Waverly Place. An article from the December 1902 issue of *House Beautiful* described the lavish home, and had photographs of the many paintings and drawings displayed on the walls as well as luxurious furniture that had come to Shinn from Clyde Fitch. The Shinn family lived in this house until their breakup, and the studio in the back yard was fitted out as a theater—complete with stage, proscenium, red velvet curtains, lights, and so forth—in which a series of plays written, staged, designed, and directed by Shinn were acted out by “The Waverly Place Players.” This group consisted of the Shinn family and several of their friends, mostly non-theater people including artists such as Glackens and Edith, and Jimmy Preston (1873–1962), whom they knew from their time in Philadelphia. Others in the Players included Wilfred Buckland, an assistant of impresario David Belasco who was to be associated with Shinn in his brief stint as an art director for the movie industry in the late 1910s and 20s, a natural offshoot of his involvement in theater.

Shinn had had earlier experiences in acting including not only the play *Twilbe* back in Philadelphia but also, more recently, in a 1905 pageant play in Cornish, New Hampshire. One of the founders of the art colony there was American neo-Renaissance sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907) and during one of several summers spent in Cornish by Shinn and Flossie, the colonists staged an elaborate musical pageant play titled *Masque of “Ours”*: *The Gods and the Golden Bowl*, in which classical gods elect Saint-Gaudens to succeed Jupiter as their leader. This enterprise was commemorated in a relief plaque the ailing sculptor made to present in gratitude to participants, which has a lengthy inscription naming Shinn and the many others involved in the festival.

The plays presented at the Waverly Place Theater included important roles for Flossie and also for Shinn himself. Three of Shinn’s farces are known to have been staged there: *Ethel Clayton, or Wronged from the Start*; *Hazel Weston, or More Sinned Against than Usual*; and *Lucy Moore, or The Prune Hater’s Daughter*. The last two both were actually the subjects of reviews in the *New York Times*, and *The Prune Hater’s Daughter* was also covered in the *New York Sun*, which referenced Winthrop Ames, the originator of the “Little Theatre”

concept—of very small, intimate theatrical venues—from around this time and noted the innovative nature of Shinn's enterprise. The Waverly Theater has, in fact, been cited as the first “Little Theatre” in Greenwich Village, and the concept was praised by Robert Henri, who possibly had Shinn's theater in mind as an example.

Shinn continued his involvement with the theater even after he no longer had his own stage at Waverly Place. His three plays had an afterlife in vaudeville, being produced by Arthur Hopkins, who later was responsible for Shinn being hired as an art director for films produced by Goldwyn Pictures Corporation (a forerunner of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer). Shinn wrote numerous settings or scenes for additional plays, though it's unclear if any of them were seriously considered for production, and there exist letters of rejection from publishers the artist approached.

The artist's devotion to the theater was characterized later in his life in the 1943 catalogue of an exhibition commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the original exhibition of the Eight. Shinn was closely involved in the organization of the show at the Brooklyn Museum. Each artist was given a brief biography, and that for Shinn, likely written in close consultation with him, stated that his “particular interest has been the theater, which has provided the subjects for many of his paintings. He has also designed, decorated and written for the theater.” The exhibition catalogue features an essay Shinn wrote analyzing each of The Eight (most of whom were dead by then). In the last paragraph of his own section, Shinn wrote of himself, “His interest in the theater went deeper than merely drawing its action. He never meant to be a playwright, yet emerged from his own studio theater with three vaudeville acts, two having played eighteen years, one in six different languages.”

The highly popular vaudeville theater rather than the so-called legitimate theater was Shinn's primary concern, even though his early portraits of theater subjects were those from the second. Vaudeville had sprung out of earlier, less family-friendly forms of entertainment such as “variety” theater and it was the idea of entrepreneur Tony Pastor (1837–1908) to clean up unsavory or offensive elements from those shows to create respectable diversion that anyone, especially the middle class, could feel comfortable viewing. Indeed, vaudeville has been cited, along with the press of the day, as an important socializing force around the turn of the century. Audiences often comprised immigrant populations and the individual acts relied heavily on clowning, acrobatics, dance, singers, comics, and animal acts, in an effort to bring more than the educated elite to performances. As an artist of everyday life, it was natural that Shinn would turn to vaudeville, and this can be viewed as an extension of his

exploration of city life rather than, as is sometimes perceived, something at odds with it. As early as 1899, in a small exhibition at Elsie de Wolfe's home, Shinn showed the pastels *Fourteenth Street Theatre* and *Interior Keith's*. “Fourteenth Street Theatre” was the principal vaudeville showcase established by Tony Pastor in New York in 1881, while “Keith's” was the important theater established at Union Square in New York by B. F. Keith (1846–1914), who was perhaps the most important promoter of vaudeville after Pastor.

THE HILLSTROM MAGICIAN WITH SHEARS

When Shinn became increasingly active in oil painting, the vaudeville subject was one he continued to explore, quite explicitly in *The Vaudeville Act* from 1902–1903 (Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania State University), which shows two stage-lit performers from a vantage behind the orchestra pit. The Hillstrom painting *Magician with Shears* is stylistically akin to this work, and it is even closer in facture to *Keith's Union Square* (Brooklyn Museum), another depiction of B. F. Keith's famed vaudeville theater, believed to date between about 1902 and 1906. Like the undated Hillstrom oil, that painting has significant amounts of dark greens for its background, and the highlights are brushed on in a rich and “juicy” manner (to apply terminology from a prominent scholar of Shinn's work). Shinn's style of painting was influenced by Robert Henri, who exhorted his followers to brush on the pigment freely. Two additional comparative oils, both shown in the 1908 Macbeth Gallery exhibition of The Eight, include the 1908 *Revue* (Whitney Museum of American Art), which features a female performer on stage, with green tones for the background and bright highlights against relatively dark, shadowed areas on the performer; and the 1906 *Theater Box* (formerly called *Gaité Montparnasse*; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York), which is closer in size to the Hillstrom work and which has a female figure that is quite similar to the *Magician with Shears* in both its lighting effects and its handling of paint.

Stylistically the Hillstrom painting seems to date from the same general period as the Brooklyn, Whitney, and Albright-Knox oils, and its dating can be more precisely inferred from two dated drawings of magicians by Shinn. The earlier of these is a 1906 red chalk titled *The Magician* (Saint Louis Art Museum) that was published in *Harper's Weekly* in January 17, 1914. It depicts a magician from the back, standing before the visible audience as he does a trick involving the rabbit in his right hand and a top hat on the floor next to him. The table behind him looks to be identical to that depicted in a charcoal dated 1907 (location unknown), which features a similarly-

dressed man holding a top hat. He is seen here from the front, and it seems likely that he is the same man as in the earlier drawing. He has dark hair and an impressive mustache, and his facial features are similar enough to those of the magician in the Hillstrom painting as to suggest that it is the same person, hence the assignment of *Magician with Shears* to around 1907.

Although in his vaudeville images Shinn rarely identified the specific players depicted, it seems likely that the magician in all three of these works is “The Great Albini” (1859–1913), born Abraham A. Laski, a strong presence in the vaudeville theater of the era. Magicians were a regular and popular part of the lineup of vaudeville acts, and Albini is known to have played at Tony Pastor’s Fourteenth Street Theatre, well known to Shinn. Several photos of Albini exist and in some his right eye appears to be more widely opened than the left, a characteristic emphasized by Shinn in the Hillstrom painting, and one undated photo of Albini, from before his hair was white, seems particularly similar to the *Magician with Shears*. The effect of the magician’s eyes in the Hillstrom work is important and serves to engage the imagination of the viewer.

PLAYS AND PLAY

Nurturing the virtues of imagination and play were important aspects of Shinn’s life and work. The plays staged at 112 Waverly Place in Manhattan are a case in point. These were exaggerated and flamboyant, including in their subtitles *The Prune-Hater’s Daughter*, *More Sinned Against than Usual*, and *Wronged from the Start*. Photographs from performances show Shinn and friends looking more like figures from silent films of these years than from the theater being produced a few blocks north on Broadway. These photos show archetypal set designs of intriguing or mysterious spaces. The costumes and makeup look overstated to the point where one could understand the expression in the villain’s exaggerated caterpillar eyebrows from over in Brooklyn. The photographs also show Shinn’s complete involvement in his acting, his stances often very energetic and playful, recalling his boyhood involvement in acrobatics. In contrast, nearby Broadway productions were more and more often finding realism, or even naturalism, as the dominant forms of performance. The overstated style Shinn and his friends used to tell their stories was more typical of the vaudevillian performances of the time, which were attended by less affluent audiences and were thought of as less distinguished.

Unlike with his work as a visual artist, Shinn’s productions with the Waverly Place Players do not look as though they were meant to contribute to the advancement of American theater as an art form. Rebuking the show’s lack of professionalism, the *New York Times* review of *The Prune Hater’s Daughter* is

subtitled “Everett Shinn Players Out-Burlesque Burlesque at ‘Lucy Moore’ Rehearsal.” However, overall the article is positive, as the critic is able to find the real reason that Shinn and his friends have turned his back yard into a performance venue: “This is the second production of the Waverly Place Players, and they do it just for the fun of the thing. A regular performance is to be given to-morrow night, and perhaps there will be another on Saturday, and then, when they get around to it, they will produce another play.” Since the Waverly Place Players’ cast and crew was made up entirely of family, friends, and fellow artists, it can be imagined that the rehearsals for these productions were as much about socializing as they were about creating art with peers; and not overly important or well-financed art, but playing that was satisfying for their social group while keeping their artistic sensibilities limber. This performance troupe was a secondary artistic outlet for many of those involved, one that was perhaps pursued less vigorously and with less attention paid to current practices and more paid to what was fun, impulsive, and creatively engaging.

Attendance at a 112 Waverly Place production was by invitation only. Audiences were made up of friends, family, and peers—patrons who knew the artists outside of their canvases and stage productions. One can imagine that there were inside jokes written into the action of the plays, and things their social group found particularly interesting or amusing. If performing is defined as an exploration of social listening, playing, and exploring interaction, then Shinn took this exploration a step further by formalizing his friends into a troupe to share their exaggerated stories, discoveries, and playfulness. The photographs indicate that watching these plays would have been a boisterous and exuberant event, only heightened by familiarity with the artists involved.

Shinn fosters a playful and imaginative creative process through his exploration of performance with his friends. These theatrical efforts show Shinn placing virtue on playing, imagination, and fun. Shinn probably found the *Times* comparison to burlesque complimentary, as the burlesque of this period originated in parody and frivolity (only later was the scantily clad female incorporated, leading to our modern connotation of the performance style). The values of the vaudeville and burlesque stages placed a high premium on spectacle, laughter, surprise, and applause. In his investigation of performance with his friends and within his investigation of performance on canvas it is clear Shinn connects his work to similar ideals.

In his numerous paintings of performances and tableaux of New York vaudevillians, Shinn painted intriguing performers, dancers, acrobats, clowns, and musicians in the gaslight of the stage as the audience stares. The audience members, frequently

depicted, are aghast or fearful or applauding as they watch the spectacles being performed for them. In these works the artist captures the light-heartedness of the performance, and both performer and audience are enjoying a moment of shared delight and amusement. One can see the imaginative wheels turning as audience members gape like children at the feats unfolding before them. These paintings show Shinn celebrating with his brush the thrills and joy being exchanged between performer and audience.

Shinn's paintings of performers and the stage frequently put the viewer in one of the audience seats or as a peeping stagehand spying the audience through the performers. These scenes are viewed as a purposeful voyeur, as part of the performance. He asks the viewer to get swept up in the moment, to be vulnerable to her or his own imagination, to be open to childish discovery. And it is here that the *Magician with Shears* is found.

The magician in the Hillstrom painting is a man of drama. The job of such a performer in the vaudeville offerings was to amaze the audience, and magic acts were often strategically placed in the roster of performers to keep the general level of excitement high. Shinn's *Magician with Shears* stares out of the canvas, engaging the viewers, pulling them in with anticipation. Shears and cloth poised, the magician stands ready as his audience gazes into his unrelenting stare, eager to witness the supernatural.

Shinn and his magician are playing with the viewer. With his stare, the mysterious figure invites one in, but he is also inscrutable and challenging. His face is a mask of alternating light and dark, making him both understood and shadowy at once. One can almost feel the gaslights flickering off his features and thereby manipulating his facial structure. Perhaps this is part of his ruse, drawing in viewers with his potent glare only to confuse them as they work to decipher and understand his features. Stillness settles over the audience, and the moment of anticipation rises higher in the consciousness of both viewer and magician; something is about to happen. Knowing glances are exchanged between magician and viewer. The glint of the shears momentarily distracts—those slender

blades ready to flourish and reveal . . . what? The secret penetrates the imagination, and the viewer muses about the possibilities; something fantastic, flamboyant, mysterious, and magical is approaching.

And this is where Shinn leaves it, with the viewer dreaming about what will happen next. He readies and invites the imagination to play with his subject and asks the viewer to enjoy a moment of shared fun, to play, to muse, to explore, and to be open to discovery—much in the same way he played with his friends at his 112 Waverly Place Theater. Standing in front of the magician, Shinn pushes the viewer to enjoy a moment of childlike, theatrical wonder.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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