

F. Claggett Wilson & son

AMONG THE ARTISTS

Claggett Wilson, Boston's Most Recent Acquisition



Claggett Wilson. The Guggenheims, the Rossins, the Lewisohns, and other New York patrons can find him here at 11 Hereford Street

ON walking out of Princeton University two days after he entered, — thus ending what his father called the most expensive and the briefest education ever known, — Claggett Wilson was left with the obligation to his family of following some sort of worth-while career. Having always thought pleasantly on painting as a profession (not that he had ever shown any precocity — he had scarcely drawn at all), he now felt that the only remaining course was to dig into the career of an artist, willy-nilly. In his first *concours* at art school he received an Honorable Mention, and accordingly the family, duly impressed, sent him abroad. Another surprising upward turn — his first winter in Paris he had a picture accepted in the Salon. So after four art-spent years he came back to this country to instruct in the Fine Arts and Architectural departments at Columbia.

Wilson admits that the only desire he had to go to Princeton came from juvenile visions of getting on the crew. A physique he certainly has, more that of a football tackle than a crew man; although not so colossal as Primo Carnera, the Italian boxer, he would nonetheless have made an excellent understudy to Victor McLaghlen, the huge hard-boiled top sergeant in *What Price Glory*.

There is something rather fascinating about watching and hearing Wilson give a lecture on some ultraprecious subject, such as his talk to the Copley Society on Hellenistic Art — a brute of a man in a tail coat, cupping one hand,

looking up at the ceiling in rapt intensity, talking of the opalescent hues of the tactile values of the *Erechtheum*, at the same time using the most pristine, pearl-like words that ever came out of any aesthete's mouth.

WILSON was a marine in the Great War, a lieutenant; his battalion was the first to be sent into action at Belleau Wood. He was one of the few survivors of that famous attack, but later on in the war he was drenched with mustard gas and blinded for some time from the effects. When the marines tramped into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation, Wilson bought some German paints and paper, and painted in the tiny town of Niederbiber his collection of War Paintings. These were the pictures, anything but peacelike, for which, curiously enough, he was recommended for the Nobel Prize. Miss Anne Morgan, Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, and Elsie de Wolfe (Lady Mendl) hoped that the Gobelin factory would weave them into a tapestry series, but out of consideration for the feelings of the former enemy the idea was abandoned. Alexander Woollcott, in an appreciation in the front of the book of Wilson's drawings, says, 'They have the smell of carrion in the June sun, the cold of trench ooze, the intolerable shock of

bursting shell, the tearing rendezvous of bayonet and belly.'

Wilson is now living in Boston at 11 Hereford Street, at his brother-in-law's house, working on New York commissions, finding Boston as restful as he expected,

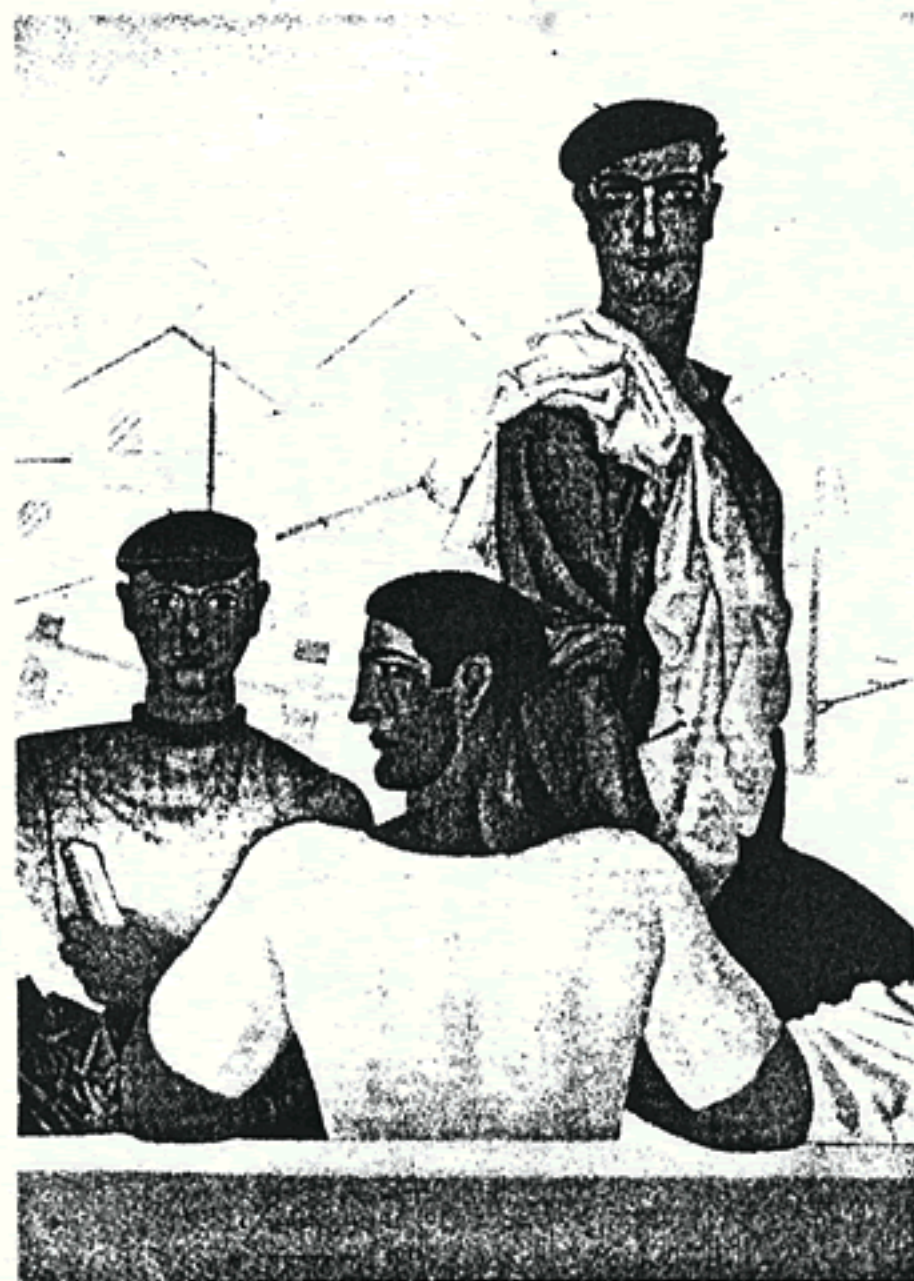
but withal surprisingly stimulating. In the past he has so regulated his life as to be abroad about six months out of every year, spending most of his time away in the Basque Country in Spain.

The Metropolitan has one of his paintings; the Brooklyn Museum, America's Luxembourg, owns several Wilsons, including a very large oil. He is best known for, and most prolific in, his murals. A room in the Lewisohn house in New York (Lewisohn, Jr., the son of the collector of moderns) was done by Wilson in which to exhibit their Cézannes, Picassos, the Matisse, El Grecos, the Daumier drawings, and what not. Matisse, on viewing this room, said, 'It is perhaps the most ideal background for my paintings I have yet seen.'

His most recent output has been a series of murals for the new Lynn Fontanne-Alfred Lunt house, a delightful, fairy-tale creation in the hills of Wisconsin. The first Wilson effusion is the entrance hall, brilliant yellows, blues, and reds. Next imagine a kitchen done by Wilson in 'peasant rococo,' an

extravagance of yellow and gold colored panels with huge swags of pink and coral cabbage roses. For the full effect of contrast, painted without thinking into the dining room, a trim, restrained room, what he calls 'peasant Louis XIV' with garlands of neat, well-groomed little flowers, a slender-hipped vase holding bright, voluminous, but chaste bouquets between marbleized pilasters painted directly into the plasterwork as in the old fresco process.

White is Lynn Fontanne's bedroom, entirely white; a white sheepskin carpet on the floor, white damask furnishings, white lacquer, glass, and crystal — here and there pewter and silver. Wilson has done large panels in white and off-white tinged with 'faint blush of powder blue' (his own words), 'primrose yellow, lettuce green, light, light coral.' Add to this great vases of flowers set about with *chinoiserie* figures in whimsical attitudes, a modernized mixture of baroque and rococo, and you have Claggett Wilson, painter-maker of murals, and decorator at his best.



Basque Sailors, a brilliantly toned oil by Claggett Wilson. In his European travels, Wilson has favored the Basque Country of Spain by frequent visits