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EUGENE CARRIERE:  
**shadow & substance**  
 by Sue Powell

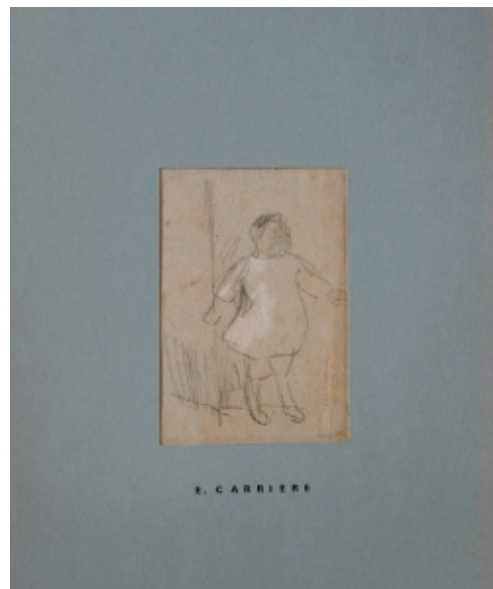
Photography by Alida Duff

“In most exhibitions, most pictures are only painting;  
 in the midst of works by others, [Carriere’s] own seem to be  
 windows open onto life.”

— Auguste Rodin, speaking of artist Eugene Carriere

About five years ago when local physician and art collector Dr. Nick Vlachos peered into one of these “windows onto life,” he found himself touched by the intricacies and delicacies of artist Eugene Carriere’s work. Although a damaged, ripped canvas, the painting of a young girl in a green dress somehow spoke to him, and soon Vlachos had purchased the first of what would be many Carriere pieces.

In one breath, he wonders what possessed him to buy a painting in such disrepair. But in the next breath, Vlachos describes how this master of portraiture had the capacity, “to see into the person he was painting, to create more than just a caricature.”



Today, Vlachos owns the largest private collection of the artist’s work — one exceeding that of any museum in North America, and one that will be displayed exclusively at the Madden Arts Center’s Anne Lloyd Gallery May 3 through June 30.

Long before the new Arts Center opened in June 2004, Vlachos approached the Decatur Area Arts Council (DAAC), eager to share his passion for Eugene Carriere, an artist who had seemingly slipped into oblivion while his contemporaries, the Impressionists, became some of the most noted names in art history. Vlachos’ enthusiasm and commitment to the rediscovery of this once highly acclaimed artist were contagious, and the opportunity for Decatur to celebrate Carriere’s centennial, in tandem with two exclusive and unique international exhibitions in Paris, France, and Tokyo, Japan, was incredible.

Vlachos’ collection has grown to more than 50 oils, drawings, pastels, and lithographs. He acquired most works at auctions throughout the United States and Europe, with several secured from private owners or an occasional find on eBay. Initially very affordable, value of the paintings has since skyrocketed. For example, a single Carriere portrait that cost several thousand dollars five years ago, sold at an English Christie’s auction last year for \$75,000. Through consultations with the Society of the Friends of Eugene Carriere in France, Vlachos also has taken care to authenticate his treasures with additional dates and details.

Decatur's exhibit, entitled "Eugene Carriere: Shadow & Substance," was named by Dr. Shelley Cordulack, Millikin University art historian. Brought on board by exhibit curator Ed Walker, chairman of Millikin's Art Department, Cordulack wrote text for the exhibit's catalog. Carriere, a late nineteenth century French Symbolist who painted his family, mothers, and children in an almost monochromatic palette, received little notice in major textbooks. But as Cordulack studied his actual works, she discovered the surprisingly broad range of universal human emotions and cultural issues Carriere addressed within a narrow range of subject matter and palette. This depth of intellectualism, combined with superior artistic talent, established Carriere as one of the foremost portrait painters of his day.



To glimpse history through one man's original art is a true rarity. Viewers can experience Carriere's work on several levels — reveling in the ways forms emerge from and are composed of shadow areas and delicate tonal contrasts, or identifying with the humanity and spirituality of the figures.

Collaboration between the DAAC and Millikin University to present the Carriere exhibit has created numerous educational opportunities. Millikin students assisted with the catalog design and souvenir reproduction note cards, and graphic arts student Alida Duff designed the official exhibit.

And what started as "just" an incredible art exhibit also has snowballed into a city-wide cooperative effort to market Decatur as the Central Illinois arts destination in May and June. Recognizing a natural arts link, WSOY-AM's Brian Byers, representing the Memorial Day Weekend Lakeside Music and Arts Festival, forged a partnership with the Decatur Area Arts Council, Millikin University, and the Carriere exhibit. With Jones & Thomas Inc. as marketing consultants, the International Arts Experience was born — an effort to promote the many arts-related events occurring in Decatur this spring. Corporate sponsors Archer Daniels Midland, Ameren IP, Caterpillar, and Tate & Lyle, along with the Illinois Arts Council and state tourism agencies, also will help spread the word throughout Central Illinois, as well as to St. Louis, Chicago, and Indianapolis.

The multi-faceted effort started with one man — local resident Dr. Nick Vlachos, whose contagious zeal for Eugene Carriere's work may awaken the rediscovery of an artist who deserves an important place in art history.

Without doubt, it also will spur Decatur to rediscover its own wealth of arts and culture.



## EUGENE CARRIERE: SHADOW & SUBSTANCE

Presented by the Decatur Area Arts Council and Millikin University

**Exhibit dates:** May 3 – June 30, 2006

**One of three International Centennial Exhibitions:** Paris, Tokyo, and Decatur:

- Eugene Carriere, French Symbolist (1849-1906)
- Contemporary of the Impressionists and friend of Rodin, Gaughin, Monet, and Cezanne. Picasso was one of his students.
- One of the foremost lithographers of the time and a prominent portrait painter
- Best known for his images of mothers and children
- Highly regarded by his contemporaries
- While he did not choose to follow the Impressionist's style, Carriere was influenced by them in his early years. His later work is primarily monochromatic.

**Reception:** Friday, May 12

- Speaker: Sylvie Le Gratiot, President of the Carriere Society in Paris
- Music of the time period, hors d'oeuvres, and beverages
- Auction of an original Carriere lithograph

**Exhibit includes:**

- 50 oil paintings, drawings, and pastels from the private collection of Dr. Nick Vlachos, the largest of its type in North America.
- Items related to the artist's life
- Full color exhibit catalog
- Posters and reproduction note cards

Contributor Sue Powell is gallery director for the [Decatur Area Arts Council](#).

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