

MARCUS ALLEN McCORISON (b. 1926), 1996
Numael Pulido (b. 1939)
oil on canvas
41 x 33 (104.140 x 83.8200)
signed l.r.: "N P 1996"
Commissioned by the American Antiquarian Society, 1995
Hewes Number: 76

Exhibitions:

1997, "Portraits North," Francesca Anderson Fine Art, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Marcus McCorison was named president emeritus of the American Antiquarian Society at his retirement in 1992, after thirty-two years of distinguished service. Appointed the Society's librarian in 1960, he was named director in 1967, a title that was changed to president in 1989. When he retired, a symposium held in his honor described three aspects of his legacy--collection development, access, and research opportunities. 'During his long tenure, he acquired some 115,000 items, ranging from a single letter or broadside to a run of hundreds of issues of a single newspaper title. Numerically speaking, McCorison's greatest legacy as the Society's acquirer lay in the great quantity of nineteenth-century material he acquired, effectively altering the balance of the collections between the colonial and Revolutionary eras and the nineteenth century.' McCorison, a noted bibliographer, greatly enhanced access to the Society's collections through the creation of a machine-readable cataloguing system and encouragement of the production of bibliographies that would include AAS holdings. He laid the foundations for a scholarly community in which AAS staff would play a role through such activities as the fellowship program to draw visiting scholars to Worcester and inauguration of regional seminars and other academic programs that put fellows in touch with scholars in the region.¹ He also enlarged the institution's endowment through well-organized fundraising campaigns and personal appeals to potential donors.

After serving with the United States Naval Reserve during World War II, McCorison graduated from Ripon College in 1950 and earned master's degrees from the University of Vermont (1951) and Columbia University (1954). His academic study was interrupted by U.S. Army service as a first lieutenant in Korea in 1951-52. His first professional position was as librarian of the Kellogg Hubbard Library in Montpelier, Vermont. In 1955 he became the chief of rare books at Dartmouth College. After accepting the position at the Society in 1960,

McCorison moved to Worcester and gradually became involved with most of the historical associations in the region. He was a trustee of Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, Massachusetts, until 1989 and was a trustee of both Old Sturbridge Village and Historic Deerfield. He is a member of the Club of Odd Volumes, the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Historical Society. His professional contributions include service as president of the Bibliographical Society of America, on the Board of Governors of the Research Libraries Group, and as a founder of the Independent Research Libraries Association.

McCorison is also the compiler of bibliographies and author of studies in book trade history. In 1963, after thirteen years of research, he published Vermont Imprints, 1778-1820, listing every known item published in Vermont before 1821. His essay, 'The Annals of American Bibliography, or Book History Plain and Fancy' was published by the University of Texas in 1991, the same year that 'Humanists and Byte-size Bibliography, or How to Digest Expanding Sources of Information' appeared in the Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society. McCorison produced dozens of articles on the history of American printing and printers, several of which were published in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, including 'Isaiah Thomas, The American Antiquarian Society and the Future' (1981), and 'Early American Bookbindings from the Collection of Michael Papantonio' (1983).

In 1995 the Society's Council voted to commission a portrait of the president emeritus and McCorison was requested to select a painter to capture his likeness. With his wife Janet, he went to several galleries on Boston's Newbury Street and looked at the work of contemporary painters. In addition, they searched through dozens of artists' portfolios on file at the Copley Society before selecting the South American painter, Numael Pulido. McCorison admired the attention to detail, softened realism, and high gloss finish typical of nineteenth-century painting styles in Pulido's work.

Pulido was born in Colombia and came to the United States in 1958. He studied painting at the Art Students' League in New York and exhibited his work at the National Academy of Design. In the 1970s, he moved to Hancock, New Hampshire, 'temporarily withdrawing from the gallery world to experiment in depth with the techniques of oil painting.'² Pulido spent the 1980s in Europe, living in London and working as a still life and portrait painter. He returned to the United States in 1989.

Sittings for McCorison's portrait began in August 1995. The artist had originally planned to paint McCorison out-of-doors, standing in front of the Society's building. He remembered, 'Georgia Barnhill [the Society's Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Graphic Arts] and the McCorisons approved of the idea, but Georgia said at one point, rather wistfully, "I guess I will always see him surrounded by his books." I went ahead with my plan, but her remark was working on my mind. I was already quite advanced with sketches and photographs for the painting when one morning I woke up with the clear conviction that Georgia was right. So strong was this impression that I didn't hesitate to reconsider the whole composition.'³

The finished work, depicting McCorison seated at a desk covered with papers, was unveiled for the members of the Society at the 1996 annual meeting. At the presentation, Society President Ellen S. Dunlap spoke of the inspiration drawn from the image. 'The painting is rich in true-life detail. From the canvas, Marcus looks back at us from his work, from which we are clearly interrupting him. We recognize the desk, the chair, the books, even the look on his face. It is as if he is about to speak to us, and we know him well enough to be certain what he is about to say: "Be true to the great mission and purpose of this library." "Raise more money." "Buy more books!"'⁴ The painting hangs in the Council Room in Antiquarian Hall.

¹ John B. Hench, 'Serendipity and Synergy: Collection Development, Access, and Research Opportunities at the American Antiquarian Society in the McCorison Era,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 102 (October 1992): 292.

² Numael Pulido, autobiographical sketch, April 1997, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

³ Numael Pulido to Lauren Hewes, April 6, 1997, American Antiquarian Society Archives.

⁴ Ellen S. Dunlap, 'Report of the Council,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 106 (October 1996): 208-9.

