



**John Singer Sargent** (1856-1925)  
*Henry James*, 1912  
 Charcoal

The Royal Collection © 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The American-born writer Henry James is best known as the author of *The Ambassadors*, and his influence on twentieth century English literature is undisputed. Sargent and James were close friends. They met in Paris in 1884 and it was James who persuaded Sargent to move to London.

Sargent presented this charcoal portrait to King George V in 1916, two weeks after James's death in July. James had been given the Order of Merit by King Edward VII, and this drawing has been kept with a collection portraits of other honourees.

Sargent first drew James in 1885 but he considered that portrait a failure and destroyed it.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

John Singer Sargent is known for his portraits of eminent or socially prominent people of the period. He was born in Florence, Italy, of American parents. He studied art in Italy, France, and Germany, receiving his formal art education at the École des Beaux-Arts and in the Paris studio of the noted French portraitist Carolus-Duran.

He spent most of his adult life in England, maintaining a studio there for more than thirty years and visiting America only on short trips. In about 1907 Sargent tired of portrait painting and accepted few commissions. He then worked chiefly on European scenes in watercolour, in an Impressionistic style.

## STUDENT FOCUS QUESTIONS

- John Singer Sargent moved from oil paint to charcoal in the execution of his portrait work – why do you think he made that shift?
- Sargent was dissatisfied with this portrait. Given this, why do you think he ultimately gifted the work to King George V?
- How has Sargent used tone to create form in this work?

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

<http://www.jssgallery.org/Biography/Biography.htm>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/sargent/>

<http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/smithsonian/issues99/feb99/sargent.html>