



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

WILLIAM HART (1823 - 1894)

Montezuma Marsh, 1872

Watercolor on paper

20 ¼ x 30 inches

Signed and dated 1872

An esteemed and significant second-generation Hudson River School painter, William Hart is primarily known for his finely detailed, bucolic American landscapes. Born in Kilmarnock, Scotland in 1823, he immigrated with his family to Albany, New York when he was eight years old. His younger siblings, James McDougal Hart (1828–1894) and Julie Hart Beers (1835–1913), also went on to become accomplished landscape painters. The Hart brothers began their artistic careers painting decorative side-panels for a coach-maker in the Albany-Troy area. Around the age of eighteen, William pursued a career as a portrait painter, touring the Midwestern states in search of commissions. In 1849, with funding from one Dr. Ormsby, he departed to Scotland to study landscape painting.

Upon his return to the United States in 1853, William Hart established his studio in New York City. His landscape paintings, which skillfully blend realism of detail and idealism of spirit, soon captured the interest of art critics and collectors. He received positive reviews in *The Crayon* and *The Cosmopolitan Art Journal*. These journals also published notes on his whereabouts and activities, a level of attention reserved for the most renowned of American painters, such as Frederic Church, John Kensett, Jasper Cropsey, and Asher Durand—a testament to Hart’s rising importance.

Hart was elected as an associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1855 and a full member in 1858. He served as the first president of the Brooklyn Academy of Design in 1865, and as the founding president of the American Society of Watercolorists. By 1879, his landscape paintings of New York, Maine, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Michigan, according to one contemporaneous critic, could be found “in almost all the principal private collections in the Atlantic cities.”¹ Hart’s paintings now reside in the distinguished permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., among many others.

1 Mark Sullivan, *James and William Hart: American Landscape Painters* (Philadelphia: John F. Warren, 1983), 6.



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While watercolor has been used throughout art history primarily for botanical and wildlife images, as well as topographical drawings, it became acceptable as a high form of fine art in the nineteenth century beginning in England. In 1866, the American Watercolor Society was created with eleven founding members including William Hart. The Society kept its membership limited to only the finest watercolor painters, and held annual exhibitions. *Montezuma Marsh* demonstrates Hart's fine control over the challenging medium, and his brilliant use of tonal, neutral colors to express a sense of solitude and the unknown. The still pool of water is lined by a variety of grasses, the landscape is dotted with sporadically clustered trees, and the clouds create a hazy blanket over this mysterious landscape. The Montezuma Marshes are located at the north end of Cayuga Lake, in New York State's Finger Lakes region, and take their name from the palace and Aztec emperor Montezuma. As can be seen in Hart's image, the shallow shoreline is lined with broad-leaved cattail. Varieties of water birds such as herons, egrets, ducks, and geese congregate in the marsh, which is located on the Atlantic Flyway used by migratory birds. Hart celebrates the ecological significance of this place by including a representative of these waterfowl who take refuge in the marshes during the fall and spring migration seasons.