



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

Maurice Brazil Prendergast (1858-1924)

Harbor-Finistère

Oil on board

5 ½ x 8 5/8 inches

Signed lower left

Provenance

Kraushaar Galleries, New York

William B. Jaffe, 1951

Babcock Galleries, New York

R. Phillips, purchased from the above: May 21, 1955

Descent within the family of the above until 2006

Literature

Clark, Carol, Nancy Mowll Matthews and Gwendolyn Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Williams College Museum of Art, 1990) p. 647, no. 1831.

Perhaps even more than his associates, [Prendergast] transformed the mundane world of city parks and day-trip beaches into glorious feasts of movement, color and pattern.

-Arlene Katz Nichols¹

As stated above, Maurice Brazil Prendergast could distill the magic from everyday life, making the most public settings at once intimate and elegant. A brilliant vignette, *Harbor-Finistère* displays this idea perfectly. Prendergast's initial meaningful exercises in public observation took place in Paris. With the intention of becoming an artist, he left Boston for Paris in 1891 with his brother, Charles (a talented frame maker and artist), enrolling at the Académie Julian and the Atelier Colarossi. Art historian, Carol Clark later documented his early exploits as an artist-flâneur:

While in Paris Prendergast filled dozens of sheets of paper with a single subject, that of women walking ...He captured the fashion of the day in the world's fashion capital—sweeping skirts, small waists assured by boned corsets, full sleeves and pert capes, elaborate hats and veils....These images set forth Prendergast's discerning attention to dress and carriage, for although he did not individualize them by facial characteristics, he observed anew each figure's comportment.²

Prendergast's touch for female beauty finds delicate expression in *Harbor-Finistere*. The painting is characteristic of the artist's early style of the 1890's fresh with the imprint of his Parisian *flanêurie* and potent with the influence of James McNeill Whistler, who the artist emulated. A mother fixes her daughter's bonnet before the dreamy harborscape filled with sailboats and awash in an azure light. The two are dressed elegantly in diaphanous gowns, captured with a soft refinement. Even before he went to Europe and was working in the Boston dry goods shop of 'Loring and Waterhouse,' Prendergast exhibited a talent in portraying feminine accouterment, as he "sketched women's dresses that stood about the shop."³ In this work, the artist captures the essence of his figures' graceful posture and genteel fashion. It is not only the dress that is stylish, but also the locale. Americans were drawn to the sophistication of French coastal towns and emulated the artists that captured it, such as Boudin in his silvery depictions of Deauville and Trouville and Monet in his sun-drenched scenes of Saint-Adresse.⁴

¹ In Weinberg, Barbara, Doreen Bolger and David Park Curry, *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885-1915* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994) 354.

² Clark, Carol, Nancy Mowll Matthews and Gwendolyn Owens, *Maurice Brazil Prendergast, Charles Prendergast: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Williamstown, Mass: Williams College Museum of Art, 1990) 24.

³ Clark, 23.

⁴ Weinberg, 100.



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In its high horizon and artful flatness, the depiction of the harbor borrows from Japanese woodblock techniques, another noted early influence. In many ways, the painting encapsulates the crux of Prendergast's style and merges an Impressionist gentility with a Realist facture. Scholar, Milton Brown notes "his early oil paintings were done on small wood panels or canvas, very much in the style of his watercolors.... The drawing is a kind of shorthand, capturing the moment and the gesture... paint patches do not coincide directly with the drawing.... The surface pattern so characteristic of his style is already set in these early works as is his emphasis on flatness.... His general predilection for the high horizon adds to the flatness."⁵ Prendergast's early endeavors were matched with early praise. In 1899, Macbeth Galleries gave him first solo show. A Bronze medal was handed to him at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901, the same year the Detroit and Cincinnati Art Museums held exhibitions of his work.⁶

⁵ Clark, 19.

⁶ Clark, 19.