



HAWTHORNE  
Fine Art

**MARY FAIRCHILD LOW** (1858-1946)

*Battleships on the Hudson River, 1919*

Oil on canvas

22 x 29 inches

Signed and dated 1919, lower right

**PROVENANCE:** Commissioned by Mr. Alfred E. Waller, son-in-law of the artist; passed by descent in the family to Marjorie MacMonnies Young, 1984.

**NOTES:** Includes signed note with indication of provenance.

Though less well-known than her first husband, the sculptor Frederick MacMonnies, Mary Fairchild Low was a well-respected Impressionist painter of portraits and landscapes, who received major commissions and was the recipient of numerous awards throughout her career. Born in New Haven, Connecticut and the daughter of a miniature portrait painter, Mary Fairchild enrolled in art classes at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts in the early 1880s. Her mentor, Halsey C. Ives, was the director. Ives appointed Fairchild to an assistant position in 1882, making her the first woman on the University faculty. Upon being awarded a three-year scholarship for study abroad, Low enrolled in classes at the Académie Julian in Paris. She studied with painters William Bouguereau (1825-1905), Jules Lefebvre (1836-1911), Gustave Boulanger (1824-1888), Tony Robert-Fleury (1837-1991) and Carolus-Duran (1837-1917) at the Académie, and for a summer in England with the landscapist Harry Thompson (d. 1901).

Low's first exhibition at the Paris salon was in 1886, and she showed annually until the end of the century. In 1889 and 1900, she was awarded bronze medals at the Paris Exposition Universelle. Low met the Beaux-Arts sculptor Frederick MacMonnies (1863-1937) in 1887, and the two were wed the following year. Together they cultivated successful art careers, had two daughters, and purchased a home in Giverny. In 1893, the two artists each received artwork commissions for the Chicago Exposition. Low's mural in the Woman's Building faced another by Mary Cassatt.

Despite their successes and family together, the couple divorced by 1908. One year later, Mary Fairchild MacMonnies became Mary Fairchild Low upon her marriage to the artist and widower Will Kickcock Low



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(1853-1932). The two artists, along with Mary's two children, relocated to America in 1910 to settle in Bronxville, New York.

Despite exhibiting in the 1904 World's Fair with the support of her old mentor Halsey Ives, Low achieved middling success in a flagging art market as American tastes changed and interests in Impressionism declined. Today, however, her paintings are owned and collected by museums and other collecting institutions, such as Sheldon Swope (Terre Haute, Indiana), the National Academy (New York City), and the Musée Vernon (France).

Low's work experienced shifts in style and motif through different phases of her life. During her years at the Académie Julian, her work reflected the bright styles of her professors. In later years her work muted, with a greater emphasis on atmosphere and tonality, and her canvases darkened further following her second marriage. By the end of her career, however, her paintings show a resurgence of the bright, airy, Impressionistic style with which she excelled.

*Battleships on the Hudson River* is primed as a mid-career, tonal work with a hazy atmosphere and constrained palette. Painted in 1919, the scene depicts the United States fleet on the Hudson River at the close of World War I. The even spacing of anchored battleships and the precision of their ominous forms creates an eerie juxtaposition of hard lines against the fluidity of the landscape. Low's engagement here with a vision of national defense is unusual in her *oeuvre*, indicating an interest in historic subjects and wartime advancements alongside the natural forms typically favored by her Impressionist counterparts.