



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

RALPH ALBERT BLAKELOCK (1847-1919)

Ralph Albert Blakelock was born in New York on October 15, 1847. He originally planned to follow in his father's footsteps and enter the medical profession; however, he soon decided to abandon his medical studies in order to pursue painting. Blakelock was largely self-taught, but he did undergo a few semesters of rigorously academic artistic training at the Free Academy of the City of New York. His drawing teacher there, Hermann Koerner, was comically referred to as 'points in space' because of his insistence upon perfectly orchestrated perspective.¹ The lessons Blakelock learned in draftsmanship and spatial design never left him; indeed, even his most mystical and expressive paintings are notable for their carefully wrought compositions and perspectival accuracy.

Beginning in the 1870s, Blakelock largely abandoned the more precise, academic style of his early work and embrace a more emotional and evocative approach to the depiction of nature. The artist exhibited a particular talent for crafting richly painted twilight and moonlight forest scenes. His friend and colleague Harry Watrous (who would later become president of the National Academy) believed strongly in the aesthetic power of Blakelock's work and proclaimed that there were three great landscape painters working in America: George Inness, Alexander Helwig Wyant, and Ralph Albert Blakelock.²

In 1899, Blakelock, who had long struggled to earn enough money through painting to support his family, suffered a mental breakdown and was admitted into an asylum in Middletown, New York. Far from relegating the artist to obscurity, however, Blackelock's confinement seems instead to have increased his fame. In 1913, his *Moonlight* (now at the Corcoran Gallery of Art) sold for \$13,900, the most ever paid for a painting by a living American artist at that time. This record was topped in 1916 at the Catholina Lambert sale, where his *The Brook by Moonlight* sold for \$20,000. The public was fascinated by Blakelock's image as a tortured genius and finally began to appreciate his artistic output. As Abraham Davidson observed at the time, "The view of Blakelock as the dreamer, as the painter of the inner image rather than of outward appearances, had taken hold. Now he was not only appreciated but was nearly venerated."³

¹ Abraham Davidson, *Ralph Albert Blakelock* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 30.

² Davidson, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.