

An impressionist landscape painting by Clark Greenwood Voorhees. The scene depicts a rugged, grassy cliffside overlooking a vibrant blue sea. In the foreground, a dirt path winds across the golden-brown grass. A small group of figures, including a person in a bright yellow shirt and another in a red hat, are gathered on a rocky outcrop near the edge of the cliff. The background shows distant, hazy islands under a soft, overcast sky. The overall style is characterized by visible brushstrokes and a focus on light and color.

THE LIGHT  
LIES SOFTLY



THE IMPRESSIONIST ART OF  
CLARK GREENWOOD VORHEES  
1871-1933



FIG 1. *My Garden*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right, Collection of Michael W. Voorhees, Granddaughter of the Artist

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December 15, 2009 – February 27, 2010

*Essay by Marshall N. Price*  
*with a Foreword by Jennifer C. Krieger*



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FIG 2. *Apple Blossoms*, Oil on board, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right

## FOREWORD



The first painting that I ever sold on my own was by Clark Greenwood Voorhees [FIG. 1], a delicate, yet strong evocation of poetry within the landscape. This image left an indelible imprint on me, leading me to seek out more works by the artist and to delve into his life's work. Now, as our gallery is mounting a large-scale exhibition on Voorhees, I feel that I have truly come full circle, both as an admirer of the artist and as a dealer with the ambition to rediscover the greatest talents of American art. It is with a true love of Voorhees' unique style that this exhibition was born, a love for the flickering of light, the rich softness of color, and the rippling of texture, all inherent in his touch. While Impressionist pictures often seem most effective when viewed from afar, I urge the viewer of Voorhees' works to inspect them closely and appreciate their tactile delicacy, the warp and woof of the artist's imagination.

An exuberant cyclist, Voorhees first visited and fell in love with Old Lyme, Connecticut, while on a bicycle trip in 1893. He returned several times throughout the 1890s and, in 1896, became the very first of the Old Lyme artists to stay at the now-famous Florence Griswold House, which was soon to become the center of a burgeoning art colony in Old Lyme. By the turn of the century, many other artists had followed in Voorhees' footsteps, setting up studios in Old Lyme and soon forming what American art scholar William H. Gerdt has called "the most famous Impressionist-oriented art colony in America."

Voorhees achieved considerable recognition during his lifetime, exhibiting regularly along with the other members of the Old Lyme Art Colony as well as at exhibitions held by the National Academy of Design, the Society of American Artists, the American Watercolor Society, the Carnegie Institute, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He was also the recipient of several honors, including a bronze medal at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition. *The Light Lies Softly* aims to bring out his talents and reveal the beauty of his distinctive brand of Impressionism, one that was tempered by a lasting allegiance to the tenets of Tonalism.

Clark Greenwood Voorhees' fine coloration and lively brushwork infused every prospect he painted—whether in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Bermuda, or elsewhere—with beauty and energy. I hope that those who visit this exhibition will come away with a renewed appreciation both for Voorhees' oeuvre in particular and for American Impressionism in general.

## Acknowledgments

With great appreciation, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those responsible for making this exhibition possible. First and foremost, the artist's descendants have been most cooperative and helpful. They have kept alive Voorhees' legacy with great care and thoughtfulness. It is with the same consideration for Voorhees' unique talents that Marshall Price wrote his graceful and informative essay printed herein. Professor William H. Gerdtts was very kind and generous to share his comprehensive archives to aid our research. As you will see in the presentation of the works on display, our conservators at Chelsea Restoration and framer Mark Davis did an outstanding job. This catalogue would not have been possible without the hard work of our designer, Rita Lascaro; photographer, Glenn Castellano; printer, Deborah Roy of Colonial Printing; and copy editor, Suzanne Noguere.

I cannot help but recognize the tremendous efforts of our staff. With steadfast focus, piercing intelligence, and more than a bit of Southern grace, Ashley Gallman, Assistant Director, has been instrumental in contributing to all aspects of this exhibition and more fundamentally our gallery's overall growth and development. Olivia Good, our researcher, has also been very industrious and extremely resourceful, not to mention a lovely, calm presence in the gallery. Our clients, family, and friends have been exceptionally supportive. I would like to dedicate this catalogue in heartfelt memory of my friend Michael R. Duffy, whose love of beauty and warm, generous spirit transformed my life over the last decade.

Jennifer C. Krieger  
Managing Partner, Hawthorne Fine Art

# THE LIGHT LIES SOFTLY



MARSHALL N. PRICE

*Now it is midsummer and the scene vibrates with light and heat; then we see the hills turned to russet by the hand of Autumn and a brilliant harvest moon shedding its radiance. Finally we see the silent country covered with a blanket of white. The artist is particularly happy when rendering such scenes: in one picture there is an extraordinary effect of falling snow and in another the effect of a snowy road containing deep ruts is admirable; the artist is able to make us feel the presence of the grass beneath the snow.<sup>1</sup>*

—Albert E. Gallatin writing on Clark G. Voorhees, 1910

When Albert E. Gallatin wrote his succinct but deeply admiring essay on the art of Clark G. Voorhees, he may very well have been thinking of paintings such as Voorhees' *October Mountain in Winter, Lenox, Massachusetts* [FIG. 19]. Voorhees, whose style was often an amalgamation of Tonalism and Impressionism, was not exclusively interested in fidelity to nature, but instead sought a more poetic and subjective interpretation of it. Here, the viewer is presented with a landscape that unfurls in successive billowing folds of white, its middle ground punctuated by successive jagged rows of trees that draw the eye across the valley to the low-lying October Mountain in the distance. The quietude and stillness of winter are underscored by the expansiveness of the scene. While he did spend time in the Berkshires region, in particular Lenox, Massachusetts, home of his wife's family, Voorhees is of course best known and most closely associated with Old Lyme, Connecticut, where, beginning in 1902 until his early death in 1933, he was a leading member of the colony that settled there.

Voorhees was born in 1871 in New York City to Charles Henry Voorhees and Marion Greenwood, both from prominent families of modest wealth. This advantage allowed him to engage in activities he might not

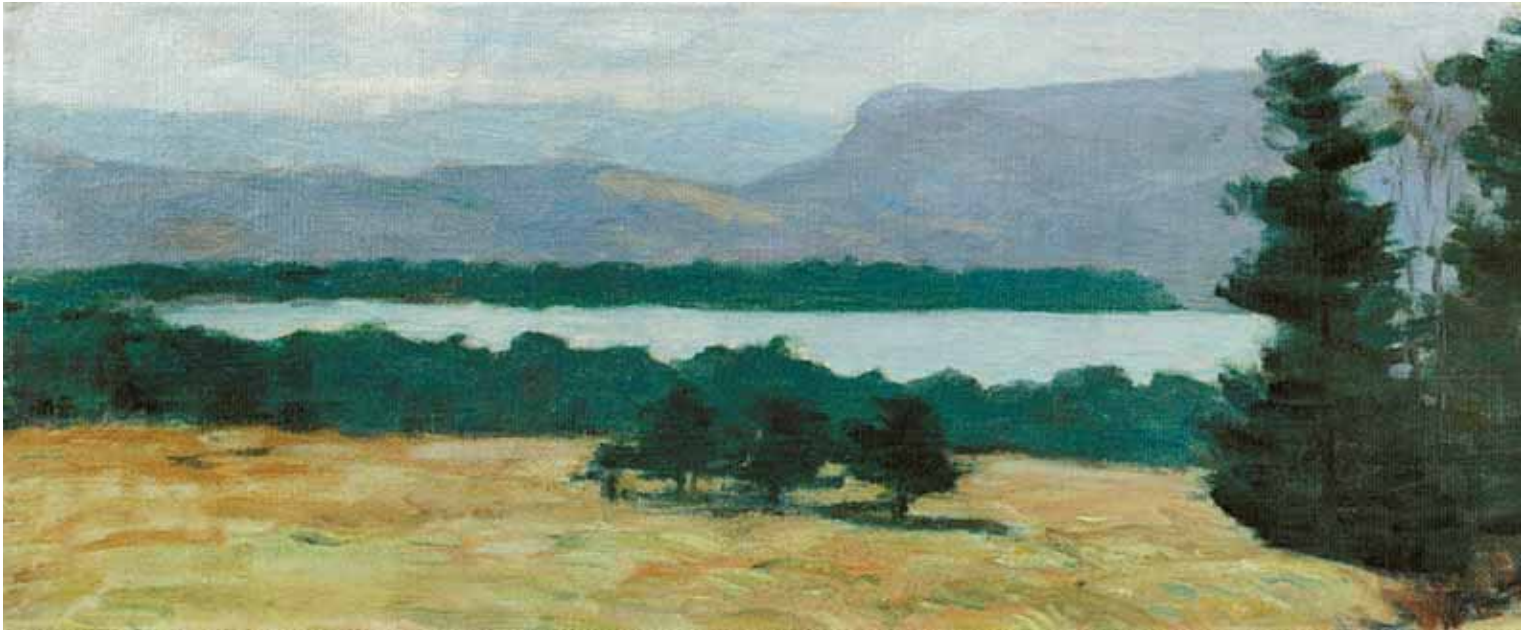


FIG 3. *The Four Seasons*, Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 56 inches, Estate stamp, verso

have otherwise and likely contributed to his decision to pursue a career in art. Voorhees had a life-long interest in the natural sciences, which no doubt gave him a fuller appreciation of the landscapes of New England and Bermuda to which he was inextricably tied.<sup>2</sup> In addition, his perception of landscape was further informed by his indefatigable enthusiasm for cycling. He cycled endlessly around the Northeast region, between Paris and its environs during his sojourns in France, and surely around Bermuda later in life on what he lovingly referred to as his "wheel." This mode of transportation provided both an immediate and intimate interaction with the land not found in other forms of long-distance travel. While he never expounded on how this experience may have shaped his relationship to landscape painting, his paintings stand as a testament to his adoration of the infinite subtleties that it presented him.

Voorhees received his B.A. in chemistry in 1891 from the Sheffield Scientific School of Yale University. He continued his studies in chemistry by pursuing a master's degree at Columbia University, but frequent entries in his diary at this time indicate a growing frustration with chemistry and a greater interest in the





field of art.<sup>3</sup> He graduated from Columbia in June 1893 and shortly thereafter undertook a bicycle trip from New York to Rhode Island, during which he visited Old Lyme, Connecticut, for the first time. In January the following year, Voorhees began his formal, if tentative, study of art by enrolling part-time at the Art Students League in New York. Over the next couple of years he was divided between pursuing a career in the scientific field for which he was trained and pursuing one in the arts for which he was passionate. In the meantime, he continued sporadic studies in art, spending July 1895 in Peconic, Long Island, with the Impressionist Irving Ramsay Wiles. In addition to instruction in painting, study under Wiles included a visit to the studio of prominent painter William Meritt Chase.<sup>4</sup> The following year Voorhees finally decided to abandon chemistry and follow a career in art full-time, subsequently studying during the summer months under the tutelage of the New England Impressionist Leonard Ochtman in Riverside, Connecticut.

In 1897, now fully committed to art, Voorhees traveled to Paris to continue his studies at the Académie Julian, where he trained under French academic painters Benjamin Constant and Jean-Paul

Laurens. His training most likely included the traditional method of drawing from the plaster cast and from the figure, which would provide an important foundation for his art. However, it was his investigations into the surrounding areas of Paris and, soon after that, forays into the Dutch countryside that would have the most lasting impact on him.<sup>5</sup> Voorhees returned to the United States in the spring of 1898, staying for nearly a year before returning to Paris. Not long thereafter, the artist completed his studies and returned to America in 1900. He would settle in Old Lyme in 1902, purchasing a house there and beginning to show his work in national exhibitions at the National Academy of Design, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Society of American Artists, the American Watercolor Society, and in 1904 the St. Louis World's Fair, where he won a bronze medal.

When Voorhees arrived in Old Lyme, the town was in the midst of becoming a burgeoning artistic center. It is presumed that it was through Voorhees, familiar with both the town and Miss Florence Griswold from trips he took to the area as early as 1893, that Henry Ward Ranger, leader of the American Barbizon School of landscape painting, came to discover the Connecticut town.<sup>6</sup> Ranger took up residence in the Griswold House in 1899 and, along with other prominent artists who soon followed, founded the Old Lyme Art Colony. In 1903, a younger influence began to take hold with the arrival of Childe Hassam. Hassam's distinctive Impressionist style, a movement away from the Tonal style that was previously associated with the colony, would have a sweeping effect on artists of the region, including Voorhees.<sup>7</sup> While he excelled at the more tonal winter scenes for which Gallatin had praised him, Voorhees was particularly drawn to the explosion of color found in spring, a season that naturally lent itself to a more impressionistic style. In paintings such as *Early Spring* [FIG. 8], *Spring Blossoms* [FIG. 26], *Apple Blossoms* [FIG. 2], and *White House in a Spring Landscape, Old Lyme, CT* [FIG. 27], there is a greater abundance of coloration in the landscape as Voorhees adopted a lighter palette and an unmistakably Impressionist touch in rendering the reawakening of life after winter. Absent in these particular paintings is the subjugation of his palette to an overriding tonality that so characterized artists of the Hague School and had been transmitted to a younger generation of American artists by Ranger and others.

It is in a series of paintings of houses within the landscape, including his best known painting, *My Garden* [FIG. 1], that Voorhees' use of an Impressionist touch is greatest. He was one of the first artists to purchase a house and establish a permanent residence in Old Lyme; and his wife, Maud, whom he married in 1904, was an avid gardener. Indeed, by 1914 the journal *Country Life in America* detailed many of the artists' residences in Old Lyme and described the Voorhees house and garden thus: "The gambrel-roof cottage, like so many of the old New England houses, is close to the street, but it is a few feet below the sidewalk level, and what with the draw wall, the hedge, and the slope of the grounds, there is an admirable



FIG 4. [LEFT] *Winter Trees*. Etching, 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Signed lower right  
FIG 5. [RIGHT] *Bermuda Cedars*. Etching, 6 x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, Estate Stamp, verso

note of seclusion.”<sup>8</sup> The painting *My Garden* is a literal explosion of colors, depicting one of the Voorhees children among the vibrant flowers in the middle ground. Voorhees also painted the house of William Chadwick, his Old Lyme colleague, with a similar treatment. In *Chadwick House, Old Lyme* [FIG. 7] the perspective is from below and the white house is tightly nestled among the sun-dappled yellow, white, and lilac flowers in bloom.

The artist’s *Cliff Walk, Newport, RI* (c. 1916, cover) is another of his quintessential Impressionist works and one that was undoubtedly composed, if not completed, en plein air. Here Voorhees has traded the banks of the Lieutenant and Connecticut Rivers for Rhode Island’s eastern shore. The painting displays none of the opulent mansions for which the seaside resort is known but instead shows the artist’s family enjoying a picnic on the brilliant golden grass overlooking the emerald-blue ocean. The coast recedes gradually into the middle distance. The painting shares a kinship with William Merritt Chase’s Impressionist exemplar *Idle Hours* (1894, Amon Carter Museum). It is possible that Voorhees had that painting in mind and, indeed, may even have seen it in person when he visited Chase’s studio in 1895. Here in *Cliff Walk, Newport, RI*, the artist’s wife and three children are gathered just above a meandering pathway that disappears over a small rise and presumably continues along the cliff’s edge.

By 1919 Voorhees and his family began to spend winters in Bermuda, drawn there by the warm

climate. He was part of a small group of fellow Old Lyme artists, including Will Howe Foote and Harry Hofmann, who made the British territory a second home.<sup>9</sup> Voorhees purchased and renovated a house and studio, which he named “Tranquility,” and certainly the paintings completed there show a paradise in colorful palette. *Bermuda House with Child* [FIG. 24] depicts the artist’s residence with a child in the foreground. The composition is drawn tightly to the central image of the house, and Voorhees incorporates Ranger’s device of illustrating the background, in this case the brilliant subtropical region of the Atlantic Ocean, through a keyhole opening in the trees. The simple house illustrates the hallmarks of Bermudian vernacular architecture with a low porch, pastel-colored walls, and simple columns.

Although Voorhees’ more vibrant, warm scenes display the full influence of the American Impressionists who came to Old Lyme, the tenets of Tonalism would remain present in one form or another throughout his career. Voorhees chose not to defect unequivocally to Impressionism but instead frequently performed something of a stylistic alchemy unparalleled by his contemporaries. He assimilated aspects of Hassam’s colorful striated style and blended them with earlier Tonalist influences to create uniquely sensitive renderings of the landscape of New England and Bermuda. This synthetic tendency, combined with the fact that few of Voorhees’ paintings are dated, makes it difficult to chart his stylistic progression.

Voorhees would find in moonlight the ideal vessel for his distinct style. Nocturnal scenes became a specific interest for the artist, and he would continue to paint and exhibit them throughout his career. Like Hassam, fellow Impressionist Willard Metcalf also provided inspiration for the younger Voorhees, whose *Moonlight Mystery* [FIG. 18] is directly related to Metcalf’s best known painting, the award-winning *May Night* (1906, Corcoran Gallery of Art). Both paintings depict the front of the Florence Griswold mansion, also known as the “Holy House,” the center of colony life in Old Lyme and a refuge for many of the artists who came there.<sup>10</sup> While Voorhees’ *Moonlight Mystery* does not have the floating ethereal female figure found in the foreground of Metcalf’s painting, it possesses an equally majestic mystery in the velvet-like quality of the dark blue sky and the vegetation surrounding the Griswold mansion.

Another moonlight subject that strays from a strictly impressionistic depiction and retains a more tonal effect in coloration is *Winter Moonrise*. A winter landscape with a full moon rising above the horizon behind a line of barren trees, this painting is most certainly the one shown in the seventh annual Lyme Art Annual in 1908 that an anonymous reviewer in the *New York Times* described as

*a moonlit snow scene, with a row of leafless trees stretching across the picture in the middle distance, and the crooked little brunette stream that finds its way into so much of the Lyme painting winding bright and dark between the blue banks. The light lies softly on the snow, and*

through the branches of the trees is seen a cool sky. The picture is so large, so simple, and quiet that at first glance it has a look of emptiness, but its dignity and spaciousness grow upon one with every moment of attention given to it.<sup>11</sup>

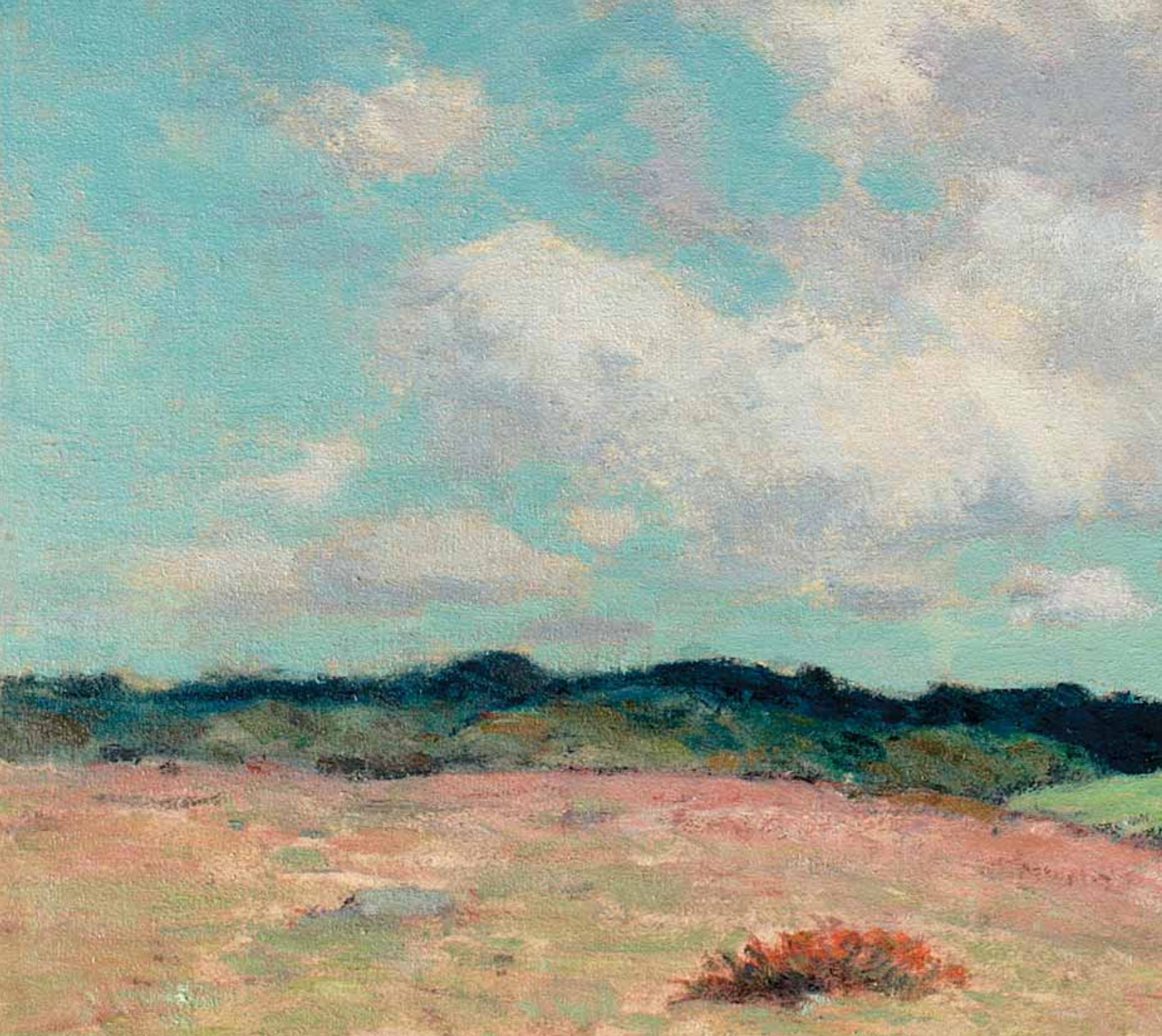
These words, “the light lies softly,” title of this exhibit, embody the skill with which Voorhees rendered the gentle fall of moonlight upon the snow. Such was the delicacy he could express through the fusion of the myriad styles he had absorbed and transformed.

This exhibition presents an opportunity to rediscover one of the more prominent and certainly most active members of the Old Lyme colony. It only hints at a legacy that is much greater than simply the paintings and prints gathered here. In addition to exhibiting with and helping to found the Lyme Art Association, Voorhees served as a volunteer fireman, was a trustee at the local library, and in 1921 was instrumental in establishing a permanent exhibition space for the Lyme group.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is his depictions of the various seasons of New England and the lush subtropic environment of Bermuda for which he will be remembered. In these he found an inexhaustible source of subject matter from which to draw and reveled in the endless possibilities it offered him.

#### NOTES

1. A. E. Gallatin, *Modern Art at Venice and Other Notes* (New York: J. M. Bowels, 1910), 57–58. Gallatin is best known as patron, collector, abstract painter, and founder in 1927 of the progressive Museum of Living Art.
2. Willard Leroy Metcalf, Voorhees’ slightly older colleague and friend, also had a life-long interest in the natural sciences. See Amy Ellis, “Natural Wonder: The Willard L. Metcalf Collection at the Florence Griswold Museum,” in Bruce W. Chambers, *May Night: Willard Metcalf at Old Lyme*. Exh. cat. (Old Lyme, Conn.: Florence Griswold Museum, 2005), 85 et passim.
3. Barbara J. MacAdam, *Clark G. Voorhees, 1871–1933*. Exh. cat. (Old Lyme, Conn.: Lyme Historical Society, 1981), 8.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 10.
6. See Harold Spencer, Susan G. Larkin, Jeffrey W. Andersen, *Connecticut and American Impressionism*, Exh. cat. (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1980), 117. Also see, Barbara J. MacAdam, *Clark G. Voorhees*, 11.
7. Deborah Epstein Solon, *Colonies of American Impressionism*. Exh. cat. (Laguna Beach, Calif.: Laguna Art Museum, 1999), 51.
8. H. S. Adams, “Lyme—A Country Life Community,” *Country Life in America* (April 1914), 92.
9. William H. Gerdtz, “East Hampton, Old Lyme, and the Art Colony Movement” in William H. Gerdtz, Jeffrey W. Andersen, and Helen A. Harrison, *En Plein Air: The Art Colonies at East Hampton and Old Lyme, 1880–1930*. Exh. cat. (East Hampton, N.Y. and Old Lyme, Conn.: Guild Hall of East Hampton and Lyme Historical Society, 1989), 22.
10. It is possible that *Moonlight Mystery* may date from circa 1906, around the same time as Metcalf’s *May Night*. In 1906 Childe Hassam wrote to J. Alden Weir “We are all doing moonlight pictures. The weather has been so bad that we have been forced to it.” Quoted in Bruce W. Chambers, *May Night*, 116.
11. “Exhibition of the Paintings by Lyme Artists,” *New York Times* (September 6, 1908), 6.
12. Harold Spencer, Susan G. Larkin, and Jeffrey W. Andersen, *Connecticut and American Impressionism*. Exh. cat. (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1980), 176.

FOLLOWING SPREAD. *September, PM* (detail), Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right



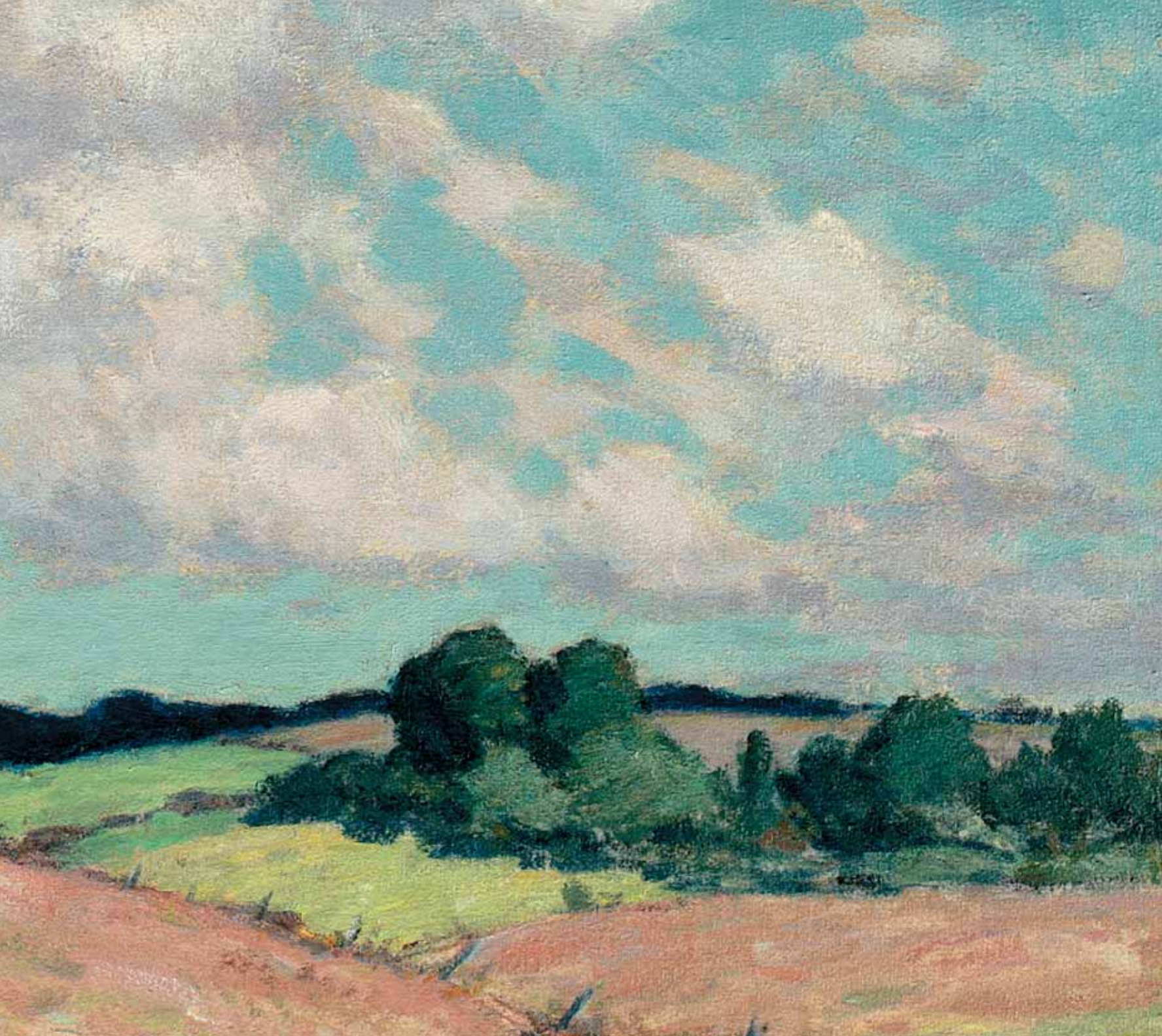




FIG 6. *In September, 1914*, Oil on panel, 6 x 8 inches, Signed lower right, Private Collection



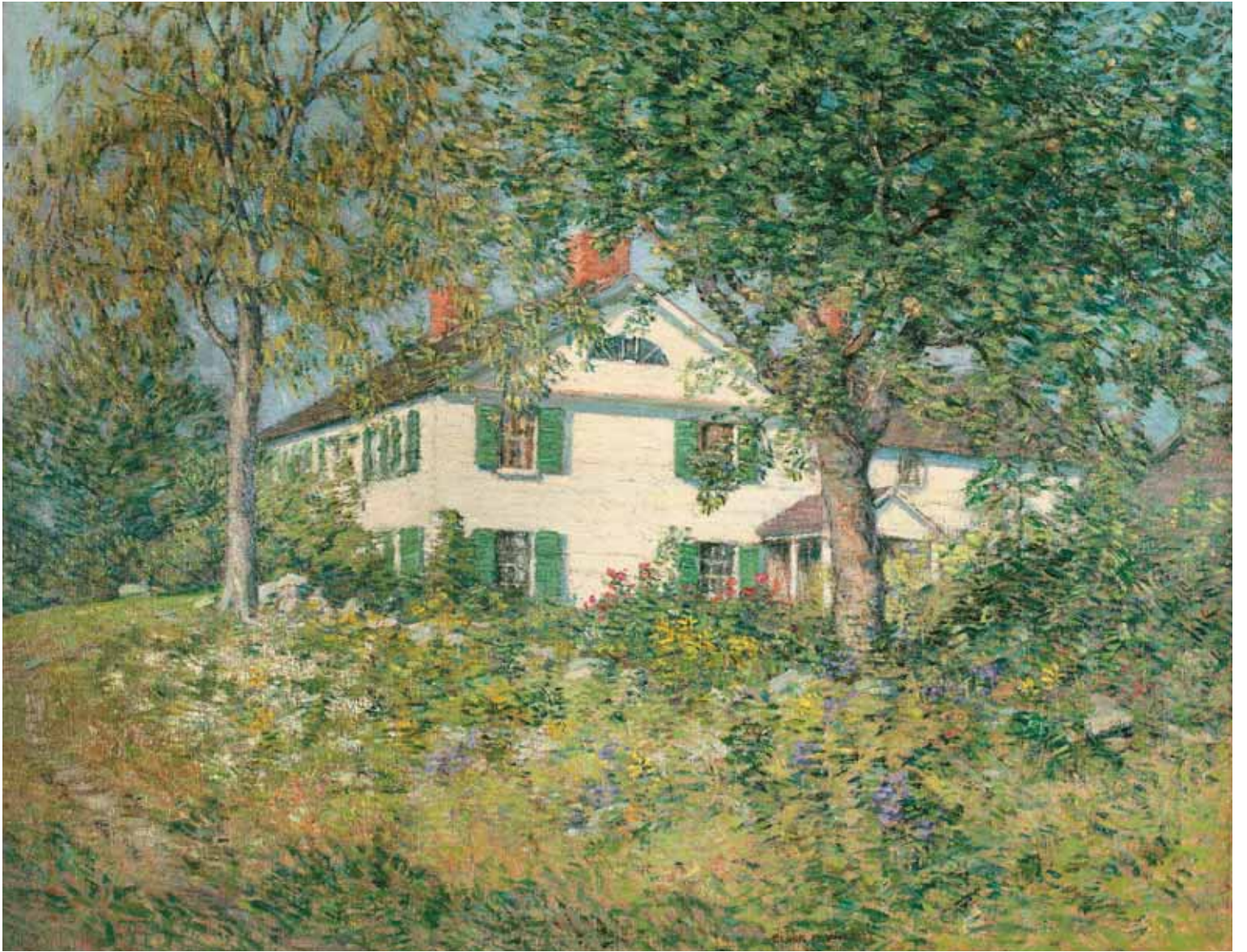


FIG 7. *Chadwick House, Old Lyme*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right

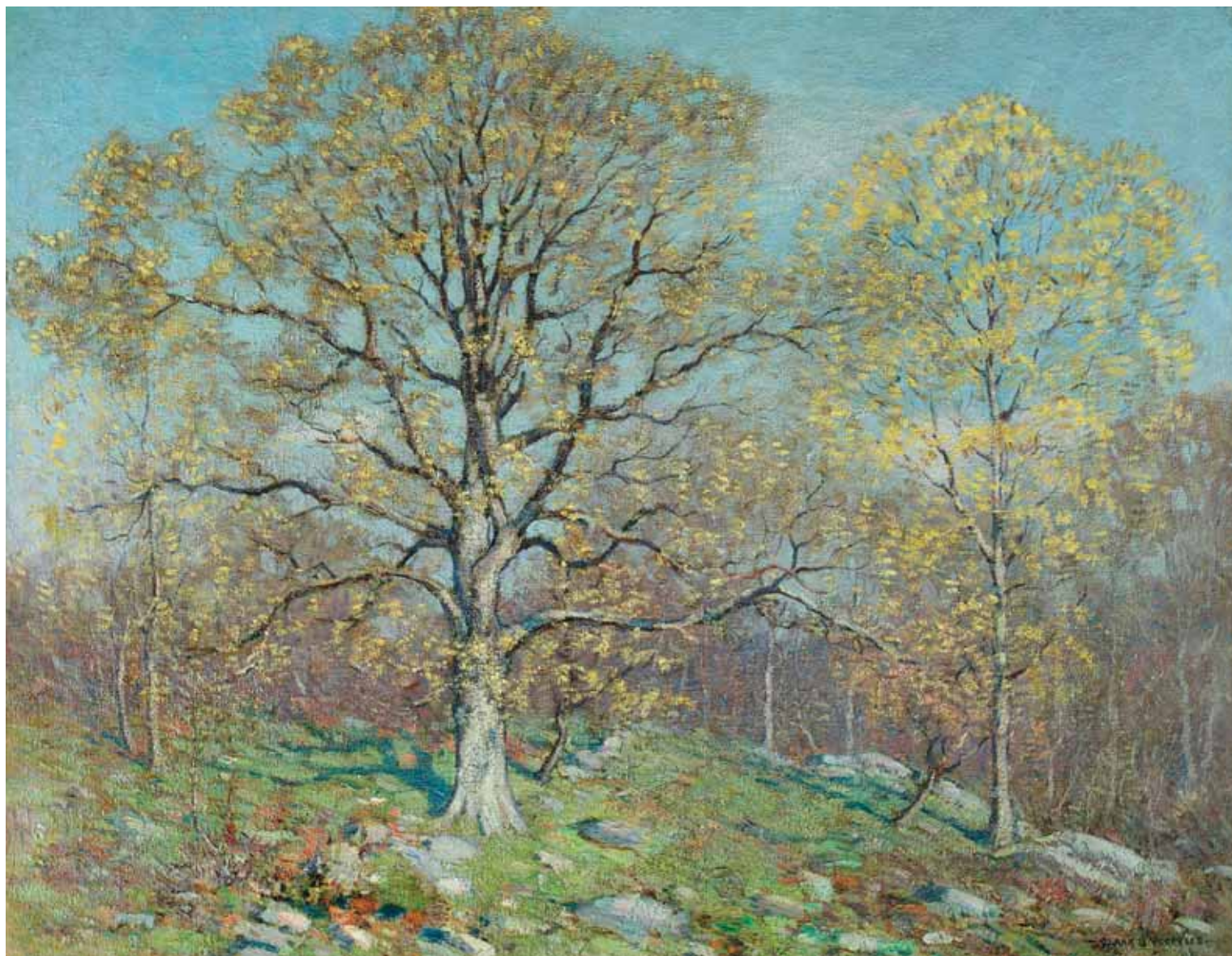


FIG 8. *Landscape, Early Spring*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 9. *Sill Lane, Old Lyme*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower center

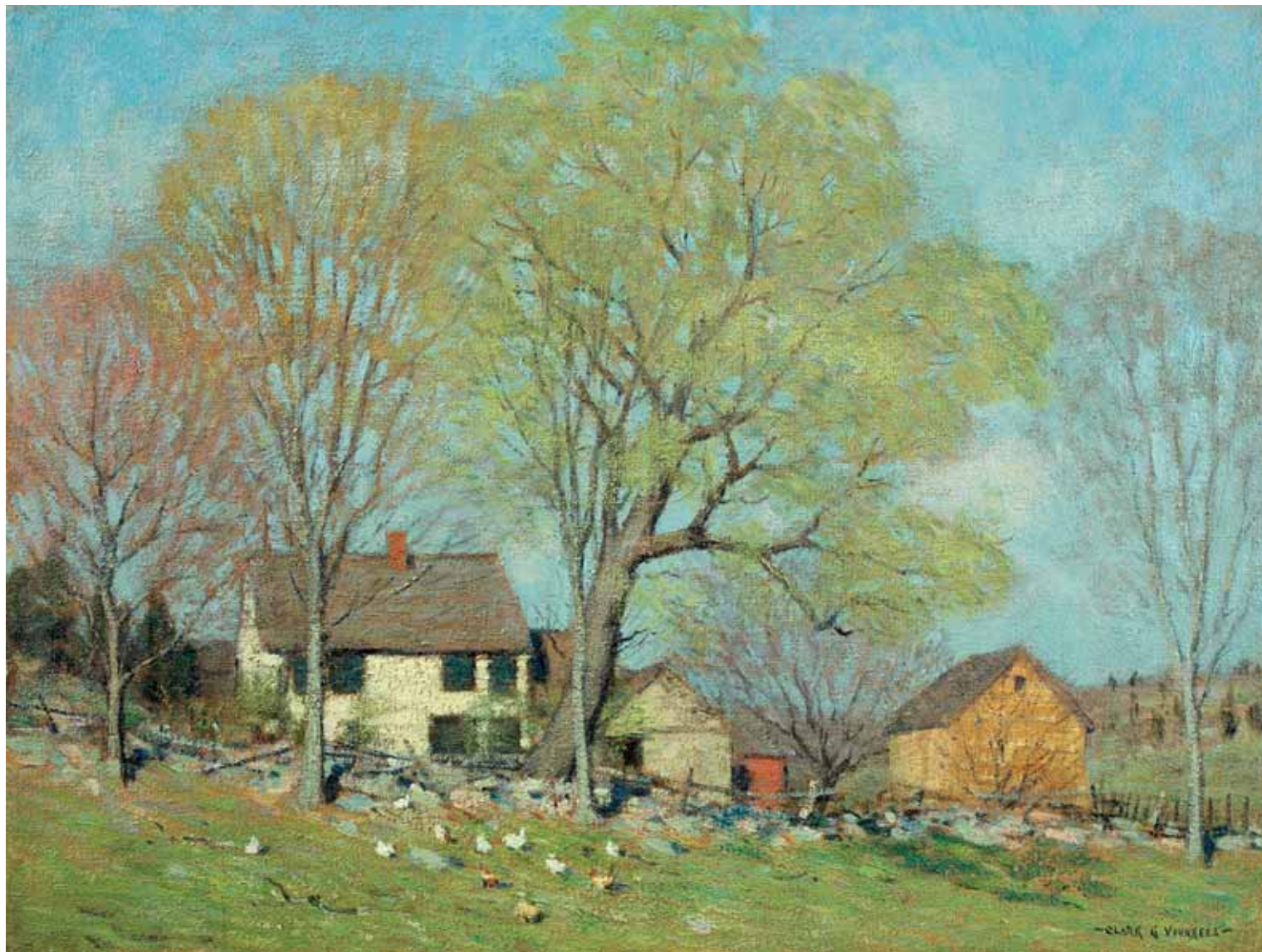


FIG 10. *House, Old Lyme*, Oil on board, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 11. *The Cliff Walk, Newport, R.I.*, c. 1916, Oil on board, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 12. *Quiet Landscape*, Oil on panel, 5 x 9 inches, Signed lower right, Private Collection



FIG 13. *A Spring Morning*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 14. *More Snow Coming*, Oil on board, 12 x 16 inches, Signed lower right, Inscribed with title verso, Collection of Michael C. Davis





FIG 15. *Winter Scene, Old Lyme*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 34 inches, Signed lower left, Descendant of the Artist



FIG 16. *Autumn, Old Lyme, Flat Rock Hill*, Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches, Estate Stamp verso



FIG 17. *At Hawk's Nest Beach, Old Lyme*, Oil on board, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 18. Moonlight Mystery, Oil on canvas, 18 x 23¼ inches, Signed lower right, Collection of Michael W. Voorhees, Granddaughter of the Artist



FIG 19. *October Mountain in Winter, Lenox, MA*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right, Stockbridge Art Exhibition label, verso



FIG 20. *Hartley House*. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Signed lower left, Descendant of the Artist



FIG 21. *Winter Forest*, Oil on board, 6 x 9 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 22. *Sand Dunes, Bermuda*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right





FIG 23. *Portrait of a House, Bermuda*, Oil on artist board, 12 x 16 inches, Signed lower left



FIG 24. *Bermuda House with Child*, Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right, Descendant of the Artist



FIG 25. *September, PM*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 26. *Spring Blossoms*, Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 27. *White House in a Spring Landscape, Old Lyme, CT*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right



FIG 28. *Arrive at Sunny Ridge*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Estate stamp verso

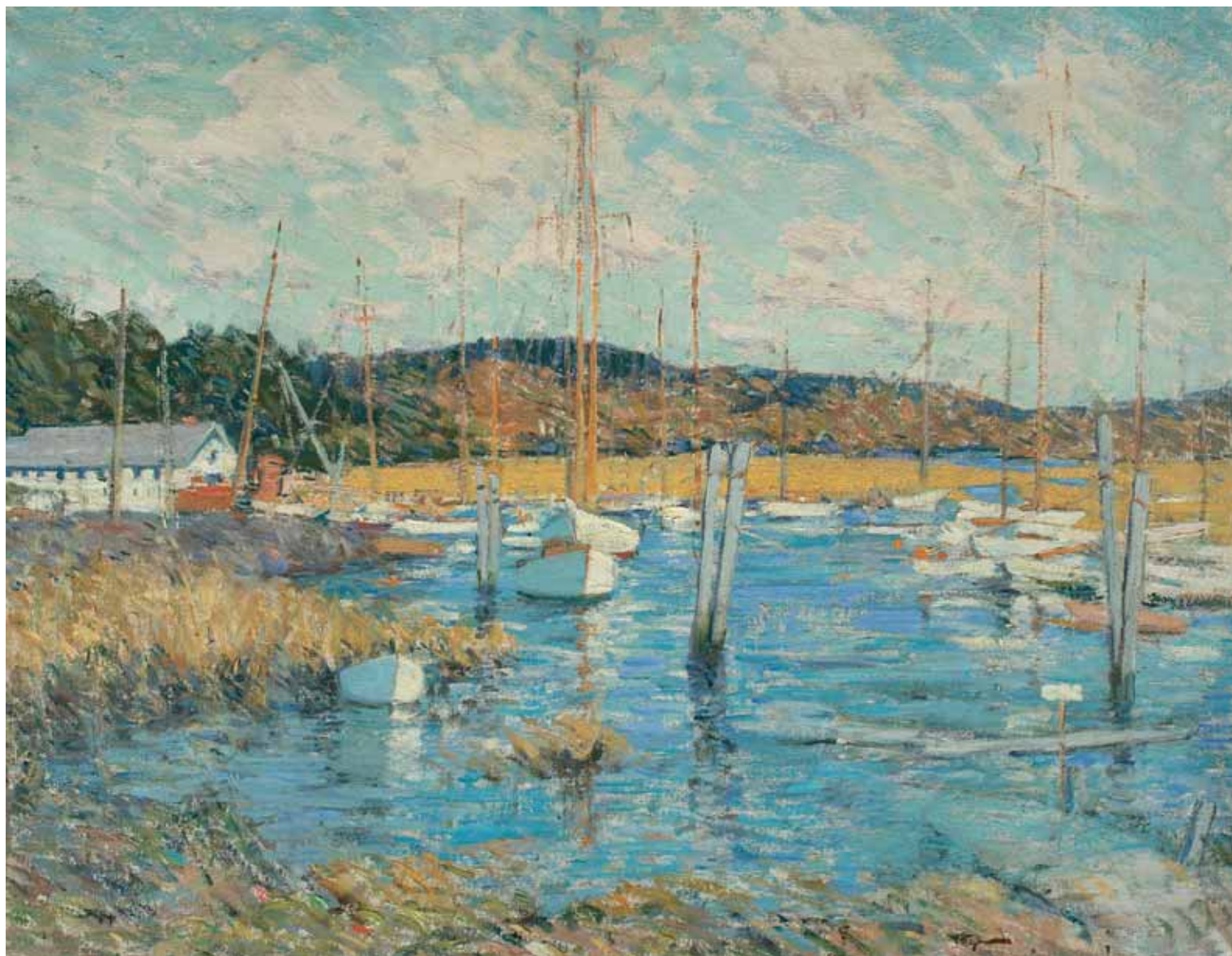


FIG 29. *Essex Harbor*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right, Descendent of the Artist



BACK COVER: *Winter Moonrise*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Signed lower right

FRONT COVER: *The Cliff Walk*, Newport, R.I., c. 1916, Oil on board, 18 x 24 inches, Signed lower right