



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

DWIGHT WILLIAM TRYON (1849-1925)

Glastonbury Meadows, 1881

Oil on canvas

16 x 24 inches

Signed and dated lower right: *D.W. Tryon / July 1881*

Provenance: Private Collection Spanierman Gallery, New York Private Collection, Connecticut Exhibited: Storrs, CT, The William Benton Museum of Art, Connecticut and American Impressionism, the Artist and the Landscape, March-May 1980, no. 57 Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA, Dwight William Tryon, June-August 1999, no. 5

Literature: Charles Caffin, The Art of D.W. Tryon, An Appreciation (New York: The Forest Press, 1909) illus. Linda Merrill, An Ideal Country: Paintings by Dwight William Tryon in the Freer Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1990) p. 43. Henry C. White, The Art and Life of Dwight William Tryon (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930) illus.

One of America's finest landscape painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dwight Tryon initiated his career in his native Hartford, Connecticut during the late 1860's, depicting regional scenery while working as a clerk for Brown & Gross, a bookstore. In 1871, he met the writer Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), a frequent customer at the store, to whom he confesses his desire to become a full-time artist. Although Clemens cautioned him that he "would probably starve to death in a garret," Tryon ignored his warning and opened a studio in Hartford two years later.¹ As well as teaching art privately, he spent his summers painting landscapes in Maine, New Hampshire and elsewhere in New England, going on to sell his work to patrons in both Connecticut and New York.

Yet despite his success, Tryon felt the need to refine his skills as a painter. In 1876 he auctioned all of his unsold canvases for \$2,000 and travelled to Paris, where he would remain for the next five years. During the period, he studied at the prestigious Ecole de Beaux-Arts, attended classes at a drawing school run by Jacquesson de la Chevreuse, a former pupil of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and travelled and painted in Normandy, Holland and Italy.

Most importantly, Tryon's sojourn abroad provided him with the opportunity to familiarize himself with the aesthetic strategies of the French Barbizon School. Indeed, he is known to have worked briefly with the Barbizon School painters, Charles Daubigny (whom he wrote about in 1889), Henri Harpignies, and Gustave Guillemet, who were renowned for their poetic depictions of rural France. Tryon also studied the atmospheric landscapes of Camille Corot, and as noted by an early biographer, he saw examples of paintings by Jean-Francois Millet, admiring the fact that the Frenchman's peasants "reeked of the soil."²

¹ Henry C. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 27.

² White, 58.



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His respect for these painters, who emphasized the close study of nature, led him, to describe the “so-called Fontainebleau-Barbizon school...[as] unquestionably the most important epoch in the history of landscape painting which the world has yet known.”³

Returning to America in 1881, Tryon established his studio in the Rembrandt Building on West 57th Street in New York. During the early 1880’s, a transitional phase of his career, he painted his own Americanized versions of “le paysage intimiste,” focusing on the New England countryside he knew so well. Although Tryon would later specialize in pure landscapes, devoid of reference to man or architecture, the works he painted immediately after his return from France include figures, farm buildings and domestic animals—motifs specifically associated with the Barbizon tradition and ones that he conjoined with his enduring love of New England scenery.

Not surprisingly, a number of these early landscapes were painted in Connecticut, among them *Glastonbury Meadows*. The view, which features an expanse of empty pasturelands leading to a picturesque cottage nestles amidst trees, is believed to depict the artist’s family home in Tryontown, on the southern tip of Glastonbury Meadows, just outside of Hartford. The scene also includes a solitary farmer working in the field, bathed in subdued light emanating from an overcast sky.

The impact of Tryon’s exposure to Barbizon School precepts is exemplified in *Glastonbury Meadows* not only in terms of theme, but in style as well. To be sure, he adheres to the simplified composition favored by Barbizon School painters, dividing the image into clearly defined areas of land and sky. Similarly, Tryon defines the scene with fluid, painterly brushwork, eschewing detail and tight contours in favor of a more suggestive interpretation of nature. His low-keyed palette wherein fresh greens and golds merge and mingle with greys and light blues, contributes to the mood of harmony and tranquility that pervades the image and helps convey the effects of muted sunlight.

As revealed by works such as *Glastonbury Meadows*, Tryon’s Barbizon-inspired portrayals of New England played a key role in his development, marking the beginnings of the evocative tonalist style he would evolve during the 1890’s. Admirers of these early landscapes included critics such as Charles Caffin, who noted that although Tryon shared similar thematic concerns with his French counterparts, his work had a uniquely American flavor. He could certainly have had paintings such as *Glastonbury Meadows* in mind when he stated that Tryon’s landscapes convey a “larger feeling than Daubigny would have portrayed...one more bracing in its suggestion of vigorous earth and breezy sky, and more distinctly inspired than Harpignies could have made it, with sentiment of the soil and sky in relation to the life of man.”⁴ He went on, noting that Tryon “seems to have grown up with the smell of the soil in his nostrils as

³ Dwight W. Tryon, *Charles-Francois Daubigny*, Modern French Masters, edited by John C. Van Dyck (New York: The Century Co., 1889), p.157.

⁴ Charles H. Caffin, *American Masters of Painting* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1903). Pp. 159-60



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Millet did, though without the latter's saddened associations; to have been nourished with the brisk New England air, and to have gathered muscle over its ploughed and grassy uplands."⁵

Certainly, Caffin's analysis rings true, for in *Glastonbury Meadows*, Tryon evokes a truly American pastoral, one in which man exists in perfect harmony with his environment. Painted in July of 1881, shortly after his repatriation, this lyrical painting can also be seen as a celebration of the artist's homecoming—an ode to the Connecticut countryside that nourished Tryon's early artistic vision.

⁵ Ibid