



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

JOHN FRANCIS MURPHY (1853-1921)

The Little Village

Oil on canvas

10 5/8 x 14 1/16 inches

Signed lower left

PROVENANCE

Estate of the artist, until 1926

Hersey Egginton (sold: American Art Galleries, New York, "Paintings and Drawings by J. Francis Murphy," November 26, 1926, lot 199)

Private Collection (sold: Davis Galleries, New York, 1964)

Private Collection, until 2014 (acquired by descent)

John Francis Murphy was born in 1853 in Oswego, New York. His family moved to Chicago in 1868 where Murphy began working as a scene painter in a local theater. Though he was largely self-taught, he took a few classes at the Chicago Academy of Design where he was elected a full member of the Academy in 1873. Through private art lessons and sales of his paintings, Murphy was able to finance a three-month sketch trip to the Adirondack Mountains. It is here that he met Winslow Homer (1836-1910), who was painting in the Keene Valley.

Murphy moved to New York City in 1875. He exhibited his first work at the National Academy of Design annual exhibition in 1876 and was made a full member of the Academy in 1887. While Murphy occasionally sold paintings, he primarily supported himself through illustration work during the early phase of his career. After joining the Salmagundi Club in 1878, he began to exhibit more widely.

Murphy was initially drawn to the exacting naturalism of the Hudson River School painters, and his early works reflect the influence of William Hart (1823-1894). However, Murphy would later alter his brushstrokes to a more loose and painterly style, which appealed to buyers and collectors, earning him more commercial success. He eventually became a leading tonalist of the American Barbizon School, often referred to as the "American Corot," due to the similarity in style of his landscape paintings to Camille Corot (1796-1875), one of the leading Barbizon painters in France.

In 1883, Murphy married fellow painter Adah Clifford Smith (-). The couple made their first trip to Europe in 1886 to tour Paris and the French countryside. From June to October, they settled in the village of Montigny in Normandy, where *The Little Village* was certainly painted. Reflecting his mature style, *The Little Village* shows Murphy's masterful ability to achieve tonal harmonies in a limited range of hues through wispy brushstrokes in thick, impasto paint. The picture is described in the Murphy sale catalogue as: "The Little Village. A hamlet of French aspect, of low cottages with gray walls and brown roofs, and standing among green trees, presents itself in tranquility beneath a darkening gray sky. Green turf and a gray picket fence surround the houses, beyond a brown plowed



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field."¹ He painted a similar view of the village in 1886.² After returning to the United States, Murphy and his wife built a house and studio in Arkville in the Catskill Mountains.

Murphy went on to earn numerous prizes for his paintings, including a Gold Medal in 1910 from the National Academy of Design, two awards from the Society of American Artists in 1887 and 1902, and medals from the Pan-American Exposition in 1904. He was a member of a number of artistic societies, including the Rochester and Brooklyn Art Clubs, and the American Watercolor Society. His work can now be found in many prestigious collections in the United States, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the National Gallery of Art, both in Washington, D.C., as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

¹ American Art Galleries, New York, "Paintings and Drawings by J. Francis Murphy," November 26, 1926, lot 199

² A similar view, dated 1886, is illustrated in color as pl. IV, no. 31, in J Francis Murphy: The Landscape Within (1982).