



## HAWTHORNE Fine Art

### WALTER LAUNT PALMER (1854–1932)

The son of sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, Walter Launt Palmer was born in Albany, New York, in 1854 and benefited from his father's prominent standing in the artistic community. The young Palmer received his first paints from portraitist Charles Loring Elliot at the age of 12 and soon thereafter studied with Hudson River School artist Frederic E. Church. A family friend, Church kept Erastus Palmer informed of his son's rapid advancement, writing to him in 1871, "Wallie is the coming man so far as I can see and I would like to be of use to him before he gets so far advanced as not to require my aid."<sup>1</sup> Although he worked under Church for less than two years, Palmer learned from him the rudiments of landscape composition and coloring.

In 1873, Palmer accompanied his family on a trip to Europe, spending much of his time in Italy, where he met the young John Singer Sargent. Recognizing Sargent's talent immediately, Palmer wrote in his diary, "He is but 17 & has done a most remarkable amount of work very little in oil – His style is bold & vigorous..."<sup>2</sup> The following year, Palmer entered the studio of Charles-Émile-Auguste Carolus-Duran (1838–1917). One of the most esteemed French masters for American students, Carolus-Duran instructed his students on the rendering of the figure. While he would have preferred painting landscapes, Palmer benefited from Carolus-Duran's progressive curriculum, which emphasized the direct application of paint to canvas with little or no preparatory sketching.<sup>3</sup> The few landscapes that Palmer executed in the early 1880s appear to demonstrate that his impressionistic touch was already developing. Palmer won election to the Society of American Artists in 1881, becoming thereafter a faithful exhibitor at the SAA annual exhibition and even serving on the selection committee in 1886 and 1887.

Walter Launt Palmer was an artist whose convictions were unshaken by early twentieth century changes in taste. Apart from travels to Europe and elsewhere during the latter part of his life, he primarily remained in his hometown of Albany, continuing to paint winter scenes

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<sup>1</sup>. Quoted in Maybelle Mann, *Walter Launt Palmer: Poetic Reality* (Exton, Penn.: Schiffer Publishing, 1984), 12.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth Century American Painters and their Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 189.



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until his death. Despite his remove from New York City, he was unquestionably one of the most prolific exhibitors of his generation. He exhibited his work in both the major national exhibitions of his time as well as some international exhibitions, and he was also a regular contributor to the Society of American Artists and the short-lived Society of Landscape Painters. Most importantly, however, for nearly sixty consecutive years, he contributed at least one painting per year to the National Academy's annual exhibition.