



HAWTHORNE Fine Art

HOBART NICHOLS, JR. (1869-1962)

On the Beach

Oil on panel

8 x 10 inches

Signed lower left

Hobart Nichols was born in Washington, DC to Indiana Jay and Henry Hobart Nichols, a prominent wood engraver during the Civil War. An artistic streak ran through the Nichols family, as the artist's mother, Indiana, had an interest in art and was skilled at drawing, and Hobart's brother, Spencer Baird Nichols (1875-1950), would later become a portrait painter and illustrator. Both brothers married artists and their descendants continue to paint.

After attending Shortledge College in Pennsylvania, Nichols began his artistic training at the Art Students League of Washington under Howard Helmick (1845-1907) and Edmund Clarence Messer (1842-1919). Like many artists of his generation, Nichols then decided to travel to Paris to further his training at the Académie Julian, where he studied with Caludio Castelucho (1870-1927). He also studied at the Froebel Institute in Germany.

Upon returning to the United States, he became an illustrator with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of American Ethnology. He kept this job for fifteen years, from 1889 until 1895, building his fine art career in his spare time. In 1895, he married the painter Wilhelmina von Soschm, who was also from Washington, DC. The couple had two daughters, Hildegard, born in 1896, and Leonora, born in 1897. In 1908, the family moved to New York City, where they remained until 1910 when they bought land in Lawrence Park, a growing artists' colony in Bronxville, New York. Nichols would remain in the vicinity of Bronxville for more than fifty years until his death in 1962. During World War I, Nichols served as a camouflage artist for the United States Navy.

Many of the artist's paintings featured the local landscape along the Bronx River, often in winter, where he explored the nuanced effect of light on snow. Nichols' *On the Beach* shows a continuation of this fascination with the effects of sunlight on white surfaces. Here, the bright white clothing of the women and children in the midground is rendered in cool blue tones highlighted with pure white pigment that stands out against the wide expanse of the sandy beach. The sun shines directly on the pink-faced child in



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the foreground, who is collecting the white seashells, rendered in thick impasto, that have scattered along the shore. Nichols' impressionistic adeptness for color and light effects is perhaps most effectively captured in the sand in the foreground, which is skillfully rendered in tones of pink, blue and green. The horizontality of the overall composition and the thick visible brushstrokes that undulate across the painting help to emphasize the soft wind blowing across the beach that blows the standing woman's skirt blows forward as she looks out toward the gently rolling waves. *On the Beach* is a charming example of the rich color and luminous palette that Nichols is known for.

Nichols enjoyed professional success in his lifetime, exhibiting his artworks frequently in Washington, DC and in New York City with the Salmagundi Club (where he was president), and at the Grand Central Galleries. He also became a leader in the art community, serving as assistant to the director of the United States Art Commission for the 1900 Paris World's Fair. In addition to exhibiting at the National Academy of Design, he also served as president of the organization for ten years, from 1939 to 1949, and was awarded the Altman Prize for his landscape paintings on three occasions. Nichols also served as the director of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation from 1939 to 1959. Today, Nichols' work is in many prominent collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Phillips Collection and the Corcoran Gallery.

References:

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