



HAWTHORNE Fine Art

FREDERICK JAMES BOSTON (1855-1932)

Casting the Rod, c. 1885

Oil on canvas

20 x 16 inches

Sighed lower right

Though understudied today, Frederick James Boston was a well-known and respected teacher and painter during his lifetime who was very active in art circles in New York City and Brooklyn in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. He was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1855 to Mary (Sanborn) and William Boston. Little is known of his formal artistic training, but he is thought to have studied with the renowned French genre and portrait painter Carolus-Duran (1837-1917).

Boston had moved to New York City to further his artistic career, settling in Brooklyn where he became a leader in the local art community. In addition to being the first instructor of art at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, he taught painting from his studio on Montague Street, which adjoined the rooms of the flourishing Brooklyn Art Guild (located in modern day Brooklyn Heights).¹ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* newspaper lauded Boston for his innovative painting class that focused on costume and the rendering of delicate textiles draped on the model, stating that “This is quite a new departure in studio work in this country and the idea will meet with favor and will gather in many pupils to its ranks.”² Indeed, Boston was widely-known throughout the region in this period for his figure paintings of children and young women in colorful frocks participating in leisure activities, such as reading or sewing. In describing a painting of a young woman “enveloped in sable fur” from 1891, a critic celebrated the depiction of her “charming chin” and “sweet oval face, delicate in outline, with its arched brows and dark fringed lashes, from under which looked forth eyes full of beauty and character.”³ A similar delicacy is evident in the facial features of the young girl sitting in a rowboat in *Casting the Rod*. While the serene landscape of the tranquil pond and leafy tree behind the girl is painted in sketchy, impressionistic brushstrokes, Boston pays particular attention to the subject’s clothing – the pale yellow of her bodice is set against the vibrant red of a skirt patterned with thin yellow vertical stripes. The artist’s interest in texture and fabric is emphasized in the translucency of her red skirt that shows the outline of her petticoat, as well as in the delicate swiss dots that pattern the sheer white kerchief around the neckline of her bodice. As she gazes

¹ June 7, 1891

² Local Artists: What They are Doing and Proposing to Do, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 18, 1891, p. 13 –

³ Local Artists: What They are Doing and Proposing to Do, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 18, 1891, p. 13 –



HAWTHORNE Fine Art

down to bait her hook, the young girl exudes an air of contentment that is similar to Boston's contemporaneous paintings of women and children at leisure.

While figural studies and genre scenes dominate Boston's work from the 1880's and 90s, he also produced a number of floral still lifes during this period. Writing for a newspaper in 1897, a critic praises the artist as a "rose painter" of high caliber whose "flowers are very broadly painted and rich in color."⁴ If his subjects were not already posed in a garden, Boston frequently incorporated floral elements into the sitter's clothing in the form of a corsage or hair ornament, as in the small rose worn in the brunette's hair in *Casting the Rod*.

Boston held frequent exhibitions of these figural works at Sherk's Gallery in New York throughout the first decade of the 1900s. However, beginning in the late 1890s he became increasingly focused on his landscapes, which he frequently painted in suburban Kings County in the Flatlands and the vicinity of Cowenhoven Farm. He exhibited these landscapes alongside a figural work of two children reading in an 1898 exhibition in Rohlf's gallery in New York. Writing for *The Brooklyn Eagle* in 1902, a critic praises a group of Boston's landscape studies painted in Milford, Pennsylvania as "full of zest and interest."⁵ Into the 1910s, visitors to Boston's studio in the Ovington Building make frequent mention of the numerous landscape studies housed there.⁶ In 1914, Boston showed a Pennsylvania landscape entitled *Morning Mist, Delaware Valley* in a special exhibition of works of American painters held at Murray Hill Art Galleries on West Thirty-first Street.⁷ Boston became increasingly experimental and began dabbling in printmaking. The artist's 1917 exhibition at the Schultheis Gallery on Fulton Street concentrated on his prints, which were all made from plates that the artist cut himself. Here, he showed a series of ten wood-cut impressions to show the progress of a single print. The exhibited scenes were mostly country landscapes and moonlit scenes that captured "evanescent atmospheric effects."⁸

⁴ Local Art Notes, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 21, 1897, p. 26

⁵ In *Local Studios: New canvases by Frederick Boston, George Dwinell and Max Hermann*, July 20, 1902, p. 19

⁶ See for example the several landscapes mentioned in "In *Local Studios, Pictures by Frederick Boston and Louise Mansfield at the Ovington Building – Central Sketch Club*" – Dec 20, 1910, p. 12.

⁷ *Miscellaneous Notes, Brooklyn Life (Brooklyn, NY)*, Dec. 12, 1914, p. 30.

⁸ "Notes of Art Galleries: Frederick Boston Exhibition" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 2, 1917, p. 34.



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

In addition to exhibiting at the National Academy of Design between 1885 and 1899, Boston also founded and served as president of the Painters and Sculptors Club, while frequently exhibiting his artworks with the Brooklyn Art Association, the Brooklyn Society of Artists, the Society of Independent Artists and the Salmagundi Club. In May 1918, Boston was an honorary committee member and participant in an exhibition at the Anderson Galleries on Park Avenue to benefit soldiers who were blinded or disfigured during the First World War. Boston died in Brooklyn in 1932.