

ISLES OF TRANQUILITY



PAINTINGS OF BERMUDA BY
CLARK GREENWOOD VORHEES

1871-1933



FIG. 2. *Looking Toward the Dockyard from Somerset*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches, Estate stamp verso

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INTRODUCTION BY JENNIFER C. KRIEGER

ESSAY BY CAROLINE L. GILLASPIE



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FIG. 3. *Church Bay*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches, Signed lower center

INTRODUCTION



JENNIFER C. KRIEGER

THROUGH HIS ART, Clark Greenwood Voorhees fully celebrated the rich natural beauty of Bermuda, as well as the graceful way it was inhabited by its citizens. Each painting in this exhibition instantly becomes a portal into the sub-tropic archipelago Voorhees encountered in the early twentieth century with an eye attuned to both science and beauty.

Voorhees depicted the isles in a variety of moods and in an abundance of views. Some images allude to the presence of man (figural or architectural) and others are simple meditations on the interaction between the land and sea and the physical wonders they have produced over thousands of years. In each work, Voorhees delivers forth a felt sensation of the area, whether it is the soft whisper of a nocturne with air perfumed by bougainvillea and enshrouded by dark cedars, or the calls of sea birds echoing over an extension of lush rocky cliffs and pink sand beach saturated by the brightest of sunlight.

It is interesting to note that Voorhees named his Bermudian home, "Tranquility." From its calm vantage point he was able to truly advance as an artist, to step back and see the landscape with greater dimension and more fully grasp the intricacies of light and the depth of forms. In contrast to his New England subjects, Voorhees's Bermudian scenes have a more elemental format that juxtaposes bold shapes and vibrant colors with an abstract sophistication. It is our hope that this exhibition will have the same effect on the viewer; that in observing Voorhees' detailed studies of Bermuda, one can enjoy an elevated respite and approach the world in a new light.



FIG. 4. *South Shore*, Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 36 inches, Signed lower right

IMPRESSIONS OF PARADISE



CLARK GREENWOOD VOORHEES IN BERMUDA

CAROLINE L. GILLASPIE

CLARK VOORHEES'S first one-man show was mounted at the Folsom Galleries in New York City in the fall of 1920. This well-received exhibition featured paintings of the Connecticut mansion and landscape subjects Voorhees was known for, as well as colorful new sites in Bermuda. The magazine *American Art News* celebrated Voorhees's ability to capture the "remarkable effect of sunshine and shadow," saying, "The canvases he shows, of varied subjects, have fine quality, lovely color and rare sympathy, and his choice of subjects reflects a cultured mind. Every work carries a message, all are different and each truthfully exhales the atmosphere of its locale."

Always enthralled by the colors of the New England springtime, Clark Voorhees was doubly inspired by the remarkable natural scenery and mild climate of Bermuda. Beginning in 1919, the artist began wintering on the island, allowing for extensive experiments with light, shade, and movement, and intensive explorations of the saturated, jewel-like tones of the island landscape. The works chosen for *Isles of Tranquility* demonstrate an incredible variety of subject matter and chart two decades of artistic development and changing techniques.

Clark Greenwood Voorhees was born in 1871 in New York City to Charles Henry Voorhees and Marion Greenwood. He developed a passion for both art and the natural sciences, earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Yale University in 1891 and a master's degree, also in chemistry, from Columbia University in 1893. Despite an academic devotion to science, Voorhees also indulged his passion for art through part-time classes at the Art Students League in New York. Then, in the summer of 1895, Voorhees studied with the Long Island-based Impressionist Irving Ramsay Wiles (1861–1948), who brought Voorhees to the summer studio of William Merritt Chase (1849–1916) in Shinnecock, Long Island. Seeing the workspace of a leading American master clearly inspired the young artist and may have contributed to Voorhees's later Impressionistic approach to coastal subjects.

By 1896, Voorhees had abandoned a career in chemistry and began to work as an artist full-time. He trained with the Impressionist painter Leonard Ochtman in Connecticut and, the following year, at the Académie Julian in Paris. Under the tutelage of Benjamin Constant and Jean-Paul Laurens, Voorhees's academic training included traditional classes of drawing from plaster casts and life models. Frequent bicycle excursions in France and Holland enabled him to discover and study the natural world in a new, artistic capacity.

In 1902, after returning to the United States, Voorhees purchased a home and settled into the burgeoning artist colony of Old Lyme, Connecticut. He had visited this location throughout the 1890s and was familiar with both the area and with Miss Florence Griswold, who opened her home to other artist-boarders of the Lyme Art Colony. The art colony attracted many prominent American Impressionist painters including Willard Metcalf (1858–1925), Henry Ward Ranger (1858–1916), and Childe Hassam (1859–1935), whose frequent visits and distinct styles proved especially influential. Indeed, the colony's aesthetic shift from Tonalism to Impressionism is reflected in the development of Voorhees's own career. By 1903, he began to incorporate a lighter palette into his work and a distinctly impressionistic brushstroke to better capture the changing seasons of New England. The artist's vibrant Impressionist paintings often depict the flourishing springtime gardens at his home in Old Lyme or the changing fall foliage of Connecticut.

After nearly two decades in the Old Lyme colony, Voorhees, his wife, Maud, and their children began wintering in Bermuda in 1919. Eventually, they purchased and renovated a house on Somerset Island, which Voorhees named "Tranquility" and used as a studio. This second home, represented in "*Tranquility, Somerset Parish* [FIG. 20], possessed the pastel-colored exterior walls and white roof typical of Bermudian architecture. Clark and Maud Voorhees were not alone in their discovery of Bermuda, and were frequently joined by other Old Lyme painters, including Will Howe Foote (1874–1965) and Harry Hoffman (1871–1964). By the 1930s, Old Lyme artists were exhibiting annually in Bermuda alongside local artists, and had even begun to develop an official art association on the islands.

This refreshing locale infused Voorhees's developed artistic practice with new sights and new colors. Artists have long used travel to new and exotic places to inspire both subject and style, and Voorhees's annual trips to Bermuda proved an opportunity to incorporate the different artistic ideas and influences he had acquired over a lifetime of study and exploration. The artist and collector Albert E. Gallatin had praised Voorhees's earlier use of the Tonalist manner in his winter scenes, but in Bermuda the artist created a hybrid of Tonalism and Impressionism in his tropical landscapes. The islands, then, provided a crucible in which Voorhees's mature style was reinvigorated and reformed through new subject matter.



FIG. A. *Trees*, From *Bermuda Sketchbook*: 1919–1930.
Graphite on paper, 5 x 7¹/₈ inches



FIG. B. *Beach View*, From *Bermuda Sketchbook*:
1919–1930, Graphite on paper, 5 x 7¹/₈ inches

As in France, Holland, and New England, Voorhees frequently rode his bicycle, or “wheel” as he called it, throughout the Bermuda landscape. His drawings and paintings depict a scientist’s eye for tree varieties, such as cedar and pawpaw (or papaya), as well as the atmospheric effects of tropical light and weather. In this way, Voorhees continued his youthful balancing act, combining his scientific interests with a poetic representation of the natural world. This romantic interest in nature echoes the teachings of Hudson River School artists, such as Thomas Cole (1801–1848) and Asher B. Durand (1796–1886), which promoted artistic exploration through physical contact with nature.

The artist’s island wanderings are reflected in the numerous sketchbook pages containing graphite drawings and one watercolor included in *Isles of Tranquility*. These sketches were completed *en plein air* during Voorhees’s excursions, and demonstrate the artist’s quick hand in rendering the landscape and structures he encountered. A sense of movement and vitality is captured in the drawing *Trees* [FIG. A] in which Voorhees employed swift scribbles to represent the rustling leaves. By contrast, the sparseness of *Beach View* [FIG. B], in which the artist rendered only basic composition and forms, imparts a sense of quiet stillness. This drawing was probably used in preparation for *Church Bay* [FIG. 3], which likewise offers a scene of quietude in the stretch of beach, gently rippling water, and seemingly motionless sky. In the watercolor sketch, *Seascape*, Voorhees juxtaposed this rapid application of media in the foreground grasses with gently layered washes of color in the background. This creates a sense of depth, yet provides a stabilizing sense of tranquility as the ocean seamlessly transitions into the sky.

This juxtaposition of movement and stillness enlivens his oil compositions as well. In *Springfield Courtyard by Moonlight* [FIG. 1], Voorhees composed his image by defining the geometric shapes of the solid architecture and delineating the shadows that fall across the pure white surface of the walls and roof. Surrounding the building is light dappled grass that seems to quiver in the wind. While working in Old Lyme, some of Voorhees's most celebrated works depicted New England mansion houses nestled within the landscape. This theme travelled with him: in addition to *Springfield Courtyard* and the painting of "Tranquility," the artist captured many Bermudian homes amid the beachside settlements in a seeming effort to continue this popular subject matter while experimenting with new architecture and atmosphere.

Voorhees luxuriated in the striking colors of Bermuda, and brilliantly transmitted the dazzling hues of the aquamarine ocean, sandy pink shores, and vibrant green grasses. As in many of his New England paintings, Voorhees illustrated the shifting, almost animated colors of vegetation; his Impressionistic brushstrokes and color juxtaposition to create mottled swaths of grass [See *Sand Dunes—South Shore*, FIG. 9] can be compared to his representations of his wife's springtime garden or the radiant foliage of the Connecticut autumn. However, his diverse approaches to rendering the pure, azure ocean sometimes take the form of a hazy stretch of color in the Tonalist manner, as in *Looking Toward the Dockyard from Somerset* [FIG. 2], or a harsher, brushier, and more varied arrangement of color, as in *Somerset Parish—Islands with Cottage* [FIG. 8]. The layers of blue and green that comprise the ocean in *Somerset Parish* serve to enhance the sharpness of the rocks, trees and grasses. This effect generates a lively, pulsating composition in contrast with the softer, velvety ground and sea of the *Dockyard*.

Clark Greenwood Voorhees's work vibrates with a subjective, emotional response to nature. His scientific approach to representations is marked and moderated by a unique personal style that shifts from Tonalism to Impressionism. During his time at the Lyme Art Colony, his palette brightened and his brushstrokes became shorter and thicker as he emerged from moody winter scenes to colorful explorations of the changing seasons. The extraordinary body of work that Voorhees produced based on his winter trips to the islands of Bermuda continued these formal experiments, both tonal and impressionistic, while incorporating the exciting new colors, climate, and architecture of this place. Having composed New England subjects that captured the experience of his Connecticut life, Voorhees used his idiosyncratic artistic process to integrate the experience of a new environment and make it a second home.



FIG. 1. *Springfield Courtyard by Moonlight*, Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches. Signed lower right

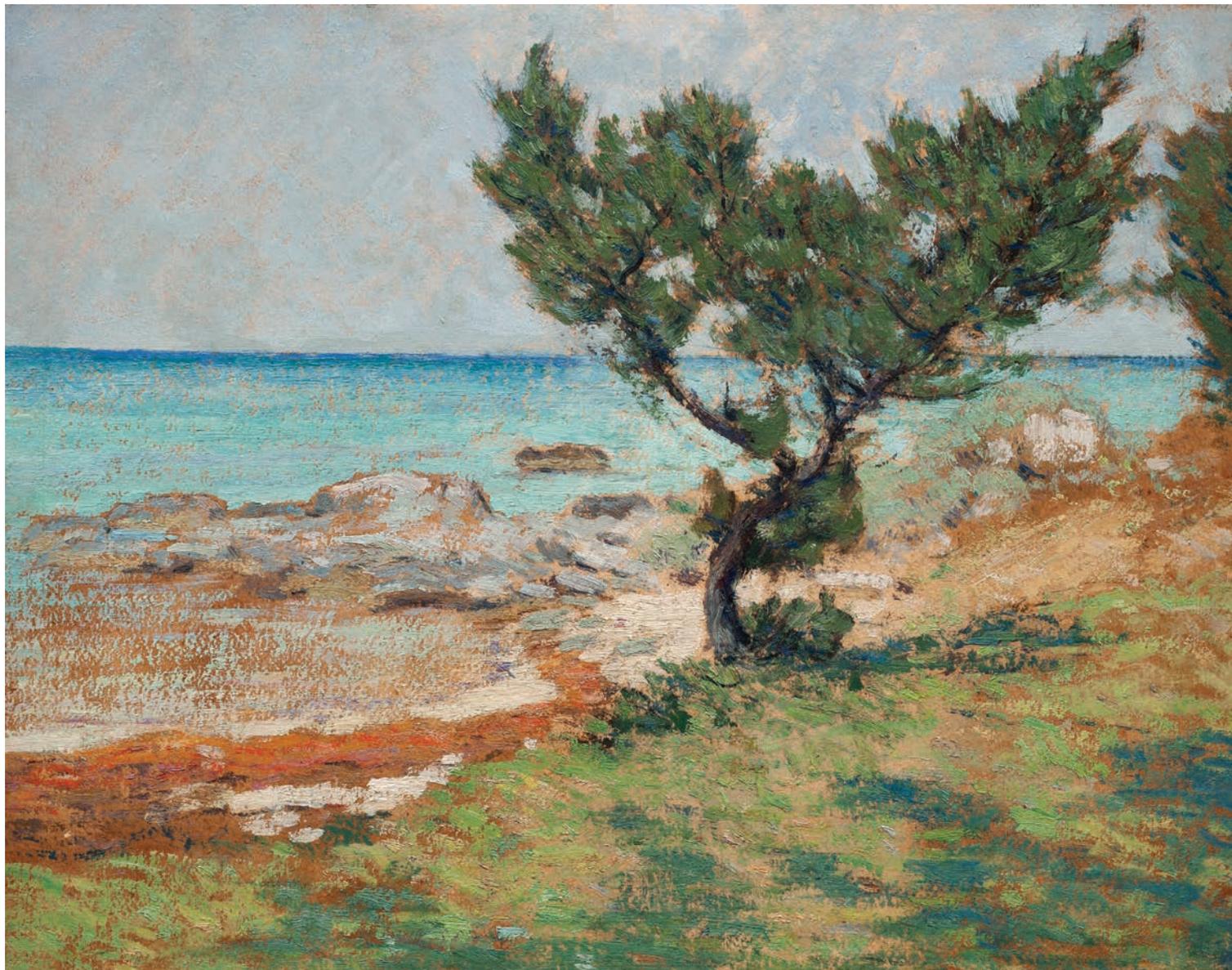


FIG. 5. *Single Cedar Tree on Ireland Island*, Oil on board, $17\frac{7}{8} \times 23\frac{1}{2}$ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 6. *Cedar Trees at Whale Bay*, Oil on board, $17\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{13}{16}$ inches, Signed lower center



FIG. 7. *Looking Toward the Dockyard, Sketch (and reverse)*, Oil on board, $8\frac{7}{8} \times 12\frac{1}{8}$ inches

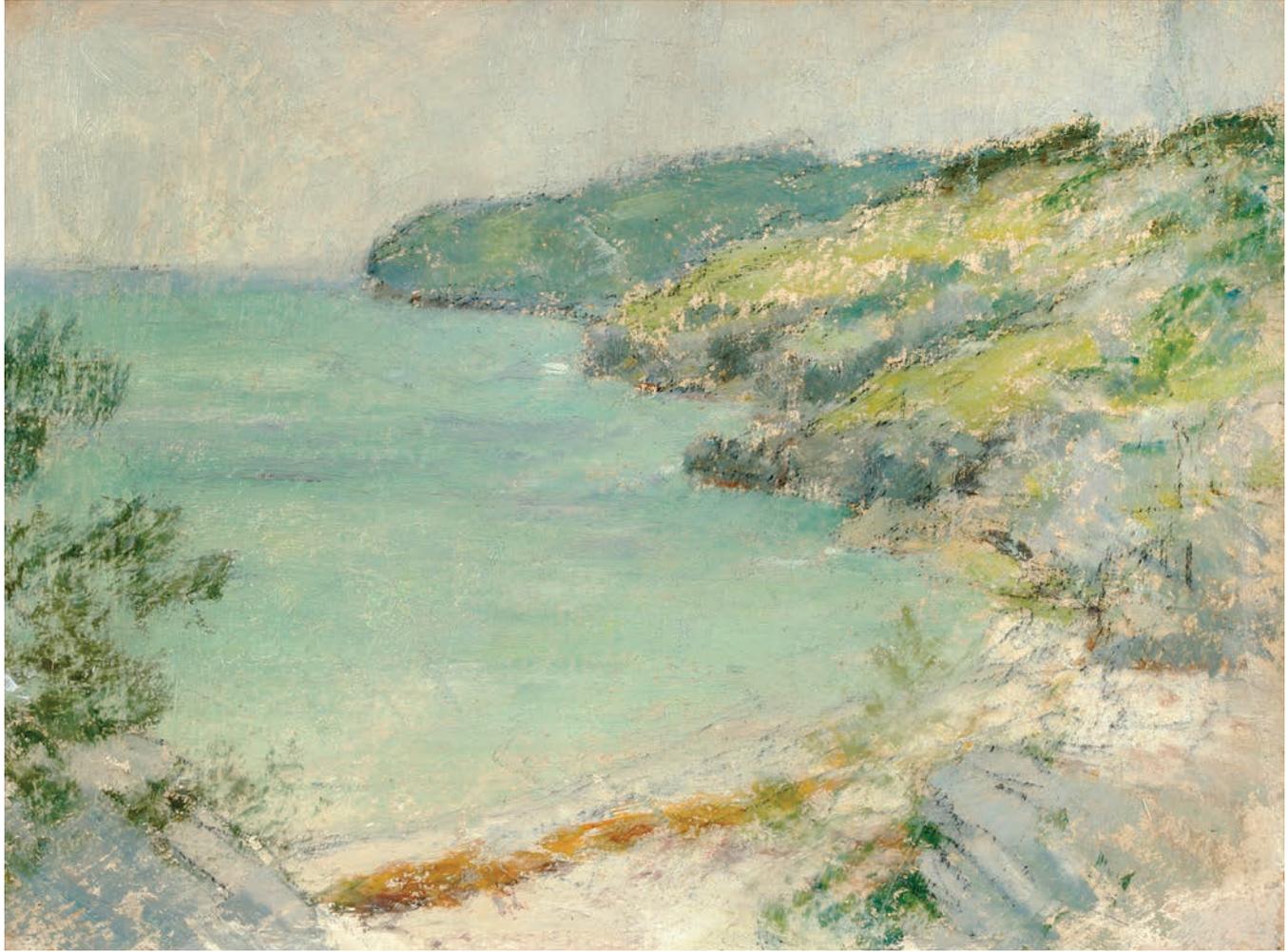


FIG. 7A. Reverse of *Looking Toward the Dockyard Sketch*, Oil on board, $8\frac{7}{8}$ x $12\frac{1}{8}$ inches



FIG. 8. *Somerset Parish—Islands with Cottage*, Oil on board, 8⁷/₈ x 12 inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 9. *Sand Dunes – South Shore*, Oil on board, 9 x 12 inches, Signed lower right,



FIG. 10. *Rocks Framing Beach Scene*, Oil on board, 8⁷/₈ x 12 inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 11. *Rock with Water*, Oil on board, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 11\frac{7}{8}$ inches, Signed lower right



FIG. 12. *Cedar with Ocean View*, Oil on board, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 6$ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 13. *Rocky Hill with Ocean View*, Oil on board, 4 ³/₈ x 6 inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 14. *Ocean View*, Oil on board, $4\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 15. *Beach View*, Oil on board, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 6$ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 16. *Shore View*, Oil on board, $4\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{8}$ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 17. *Lone Cedar*, Oil on board, $4\frac{1}{16} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 18. *Beach with Rocky Cliff*, Oil on board, 4 x 5¹³/₁₆ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 19. *Landscape with Beach and Ocean*, Oil on board, 4 x 5⁷/₈ inches, Estate stamp verso



FIG. 20. "Tranquility," Somerset Parish, Oil on board, $4 \times 5^{13/16}$ inches, Estate stamp verso



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