



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

CHARLES COURTNEY CURRAN (1861 - 1942)

Apple Perfume, 1911

Oil on canvas

22 x 18 inches

Signed and dated "CHARLES C. CURRAN-/1911" lower right

Titled, signed, and inscribed in pencil on the stretcher

PROVENANCE: Through the collection of William Knickerbocker Wallbridge (1882-1979) of Connecticut, by descent to prior owner

*The fragrance of the apple blossom reminds me of a pure and
innocent and unsophisticated country girl bedecked for church.*

— Henry David Thoreau¹

The painter Charles Courtney Curran was well known for his sunlit portraits of women and girls. While academicians have aligned his style with the leading movements of the era (as he is most often classified as a realist and an impressionist) Curran more than any other artist fostered a style based on assimilation. In his paintings, Curran merged a cosmopolitan sensibility with his midwestern background, and incorporated elements of his diverse training in both America and France. Throughout the 1880's, Curran trained in New York at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League, before spending three years in Paris at the Académie Julian. In his paintings one can quickly see the ways in which influences of naturalism and symbolism were fused with the *plein-air* style of both French and American Impressionism. With great talent and versatility, Curran quickly established a unique and steadfast stylistic sensibility that evades adherence to a specific movement. Curran retained his clear vision and pursued it unwaveringly throughout the art-world upheavals that came with the *fin de siècle* and the advent of modernism.

It was the work Curran produced during the summers he spent with his family in the Shawangunk Mountains, at the artist colony of Cragmoor, New York, that came to truly define his nuanced aesthetic. Curran was first invited to visit the colony by the artist and explorer Frederick Dellenbaugh in 1903. Seven years later, in 1910, Curran built a cottage at Cragmoor, and would return to summer at the hamlet every year for the remainder of his life. The retreat

¹ Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, eds., 14 vols., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 5:169.



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was also a haven to artists such as E.L. Henry, J.G. Brown, Arthur Keller, George Innes Jr., and Helen M. Turner, with whom Curran likely socialized. These summers provided an idyllic setting for Curran to develop his trademark works: scenes of young women bathed in the light of a warm summer's day, carefully painted against Cragmoor's bucolic landscape.

Apple Perfume was painted in 1911, one year after Curran and his family had established their permanent summer home. His choice in subject—a child, likely his daughter Emily, who was a favorite recurring subject and who would have been about seven at the time—is an endearing representation of the feminine archetype that Curran frequently sought to convey in his work. Her childlike beauty and radiance is readily apparent, accentuated by the luminous, dappled sunlight breaking through the leaves. Rendered with fine brushstrokes and executed with a bright palette of summery hues, one can almost feel the coolness of the shade or smell the sweetness of the leafy enclosure. With her back turned to the viewer, the girl is absorbed in the simple pleasure of a fresh-picked, fragrant apple; she is the epitome of childhood innocence.

On a broader level, *Apple Perfume* also belongs to the tradition of the painted apple in 19th and early 20th century American painting. The apple itself had, by the early 1800s, become a staple of the American diet and a source of pride for the American people. Apples and children went hand-in-hand, as sayings such as, “children love an apple more than gold,” and, “as sure as God made little apples,” became common. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the pervasive and iconic American apple trees, their blossoms, and the fruits themselves, had found new significance as the subject of many still lifes and genre scenes. Worthington Whittredge, Levi Wells Prentice, De Scott Evans, Winslow Homer and Eastman Johnson were only a few in an extensive history of American painters who immortalized the humble fruit.

Curran is no exception to this tradition, though his style and treatment of the scene sets him apart from convention. While one can clearly see the influence of the Impressionists in Curran's treatment of light and his *plein-air* technique, his mastery of the human figure and careful rendering of the scene are unique; his pursuit was one of an ideal, feminine beauty, which he executed through careful compositions enhanced by diffuse light and crafted with an exacting hand. Few other painters at the turn of the twentieth century have approached this level of coalescence between technical skill and symbolic unity, and even fewer have done so with such conviction.