



HAWTHORNE  
Fine Art

**CLARK GREENWOOD VOORHEES (1871-1933)**

Clark Greenwood Voorhees was a founder of the Old Lyme Art Colony and a talented landscapist who melded Tonalism with Impressionism to extraordinary effect. The son of a stockbroker, Voorhees was born on May 29, 1871, in New York City. He was originally drawn to the sciences, earning a B.A. in Chemistry from Yale and an M.A. in the same subject from Columbia. Increasingly unfulfilled by laboratory work, Voorhees, who had always been dedicated to observation and study of the natural world, began devoting more and more of his time to sketching out-of-doors. While still at Columbia, he enrolled in classes at the Art Students League; a few years later, in 1897, he moved to Paris in order to study art at the famed Académie Julian under J.P. Laurens and Benjamin Constant.

Voorhees first visited and fell in love with Old Lyme, Connecticut in 1893. He returned several times throughout the 1890s and was one of the very first of the Old Lyme artists to stay at the now-famous Florence Griswold House, which became the center of the Old Lyme colony's artistic life. Soon after the turn of the century, many other artists followed in Voorhees's footsteps, setting up studios in Old Lyme and forming what American Art scholar William Gerdtz has called "the most famous Impressionist-oriented art colony in America."<sup>1</sup>

Voorhees achieved considerable recognition during his lifetime, exhibiting regularly along with the other members of the Old Lyme Art Colony as well as at exhibitions held by the National Academy of Design, the Society of American Artists, the American Watercolor Society, the Carnegie Institute, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He was also the recipient of several honors, including a bronze medal at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.

In 1903, Voorhees purchased an eighteenth-century home in Old Lyme, becoming an established resident. He played a very active role in the community, becoming a charter member of the town's volunteer fire department and eventually, president of its library board. Unsurprisingly, then, many of Voorhees most characteristic oils, depict Old Lyme subjects. Voorhees also spent quite a bit of time in the Berkshire region when visiting his in-laws, the Folsoms, in Lenox, MA and seems to have preferred capturing the area during the Winter season.

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1 William H. Gerdtz, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 221.



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Beginning in 1919, Voorhees, his wife, and their three children spent most winters in Bermuda. Like many of his fellow-painters, Voorhees was drawn to the island partly because its climate allowed for painting in plein air even during the winter months, and the paintings he produced there employ the brilliant hues associated with the island's tropical climate and holiday atmosphere. Voorhees's Bermuda scenes were very well-received during his lifetime—in 1928, the *New York Times* described *The Peacock Sea*, another one of Voorhees's Bermuda compositions as “permeated with haunting, unforgettable beauty.”<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, two important recent exhibitions held at Hawthorne Fine Art highlighted Voorhees' major works that have been hidden in the collections of his descendants. *The Light Lies Softly: The Impressionist Art of Clark Greenwood Voorhees (1871-1933)* took place between December 15, 2009—February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010. It was followed three years later by a show that focused solely on Voorhees' rare Bermudian landscapes, *Isles of Tranquility: Paintings of Bermuda by Clark Greenwood Voorhees (1871-1933)*. Both exhibitions met with sparkling reviews.

In her review of *The Light Lies Softly*, Sylvia Hochfield of ARTnews (March 2010 issue) wrote:

What is certain is that these landscapes painted in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Bermuda and Newport, RI reflect a sensitive response to light and atmosphere. Voorhees could capture the warmth of sunlight on a nippy Spring morning or the chill of a cloudy day in winter. The title of the show, *The Light Lies Softly*—the phrase comes from an anonymous 1908 review in the *New York Times*—could not have been more apt.

In his review of *Isles of Tranquility*, Dr. Edward Cecil Harris, MBE, JP, PHD, FSA, Executive Director of the National Museum at Dockyard wrote in his Heritage Matters column of the Bermuda Royal Gazette (January 5, 2013 issue):

Collections such as Voorhees' are not only of artistic value, reflecting 'varied subjects, have fine quality, lovely colour and rare sympathy,' but are of significance to the historian and archaeologist, and indeed the natural scientist, for the artist captured the nature of the place, but without any intention that an historic state was being embedded in ink and paint on his canvas.

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2 “Another Show at Lyme,” *New York Times* (August 5, 1928), 102.



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Thus they are unbiased images of the Past. Some of paintings record the landscape before the demise of the Bermuda cedar and the advent of the pernicious Mexican Pepper and the dreaded Australian Casuarina.

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