



# HAWTHORNE

## Fine Art

### **WILLIAM HART (1823–1894)**

*Autumn Brook*, 1876

Oil on board

6 ½ x 11 inches

Signed and dated 1876, lower left

### ***Provenance***

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of General and Mrs. Maurice Hirsch, accession no. 71-55.

The rivulet, late unseen,  
Where bickering through the shrubs its waters run,  
Shines with the image of its golden screen,  
And glimmerings of the sun.

But 'neath yon crimson tree,  
Lover to listening maid might breathe his flame,  
Nor mark within its roseate canopy,  
Her blush of maiden shame.

Oh, Autumn! Why so soon  
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad;  
Thy gentle wind and thy fair sunny noon,  
And leave thee wild and sad!

*Autumn Woods*, William Cullen Bryant

It was in the same spirit of a celebration of the beauty of the American woods in autumn expressed in Bryant's poem above that William Hart drew this painting and the series of exceptional vertical autumnal views to which it belongs. Critics and patrons celebrated Hart's brilliant compositions of woodland streams overarched by stately white birches and crowned in rich foliage.

William Hart was a Hudson River School painter of major import. According to an early biographical account, "His first studio was a rude shed on a side hill near Troy [New York]."<sup>1</sup> Born in Paisley, Scotland, William was the older brother of fellow landscapists James Hart and

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<sup>1</sup> Tuckerman, 546.



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Julie Hart Beers. After emigrating from Scotland in 1831, the family settled in Albany, New York, along the Hudson.

At an early age, Hart sported all the trappings of a successful painter. In 1848, just twenty-five years old, he had already had two paintings exhibited at the National Academy of Design. Ten years later he became a full member of the Academy. Upon viewing his submission to the 1856 National Academy Annual, a critic for *The Crayon* reported, “There are some excellent studies from nature—the chief of which is that by William Hart.”<sup>2</sup> Collectors were equally effusive when it came to Hart’s paintings. In 1879, critic G. W. Sheldon stated that Hart’s landscapes “may be found in almost all the auction-rooms where pictures are sold, and in almost all the principal private collections in the Atlantic cities.”<sup>3</sup> Taken even further, Hart’s paintings now reside in the distinguished collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and the White House.

It is in *Autumn Brook* that Hart’s sentiments for the beauty of fall color truly culminate. The flash of bright reds and golds in the foliage matches the drama created by the contrasting serenity of the grazing cows below and the approaching threat of the dark clouds above. Hart is sure to add rich details throughout the composition, the encircling crimson vines, the delicate lines of the many colorful trees, the articulated rocks, and the passage of reflective water. The painting is equally an ode to autumn as it is an ode to the aesthetic of the Picturesque.

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Sullivan, Mark, *James and William Hart: American Landscape Painters* (Philadelphia: John F. Warren, 1983) 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Sullivan, 6.