



## **CHARLES HARRY EATON (1850—1901)**

*Sunset on Lake Huron River, 1889*

Oil on board

19 x 8 inches

Signed lower left, "Chas. Harry Eaton Chicago 1889"

Charles Harry Eaton (also known as Charles Henry Eaton) was a self-taught artist whose watercolor and oil landscape paintings were highly regarded in the art world at the turn of the century. Some of his accolades include a silver medal at the Boston Art Club in 1887; gold medals at the American Art Association in 1888 and the Philadelphia Art Club in 1900, in which he exhibited *The Willows*, which was then included in the Paris Exposition in 1889 and again at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Today, his work can be found at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Detroit Institute of Arts, Amherst College's Mead Art Museum, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, among others.

Eaton was born in Akron, Ohio, in December 1850. When he was eight years old, he and his family moved to Cleveland, and then on to Detroit, Michigan. After his father died, he invested his inheritance in the Great Lakes shipping industry, but quickly lost it. It was at this juncture that Eaton took up painting as a self-taught amateur. In 1867, he formed a partnership with the portrait painter, James Emery Maxfield, Jr. (1848--?), to form the artists' firm Maxfield and Eaton, which operated until Eaton moved to Holly, Michigan in 1878. He was in Chicago by 1881, but then moved to New York the following year and began to operate in East Coast art circles and cultivate a reputation as a prominent Tonalist painter. In 1892, he built a home in Leonia, New Jersey, where he remained until his death in 1901.

Although Eaton moved to the East Coast in the early 1880s, he regularly returned to the



Midwest, oftentimes sketching landscapes for inspiration for his watercolor and oil paintings. *Sunset on Lake Huron River*, painted while travelling in Chicago in 1889, is the result of such a trip. We can sense the affection Eaton maintained for his childhood home in the tenderness with which he depicted this quiet bend in the Lake Huron River, whose head waters are located northwest of Detroit and meanders throughout southern Michigan to the mouth of Lake Erie. Eaton demonstrates an extraordinary command of light in this painting, made all the more impressive by the fact that was self-taught. The river's shores are bathed in a warm, hazy glow, and the foliage, described by gestural yet detailed brushstrokes, shows a mossy texture that implies greater detail obfuscated by a lingering atmospheric haze. It is clear that despite finding success on the East Coast—1889 was also the year that his work appeared at the Exposition Universelle in Paris under the shadow of the newly constructed Eiffel Tower—he still considered the wild landscapes of Michigan to be the source of his artistic inspiration.

**Selected bibliography:**

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