



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

LEMUEL E. WILMARTH (1835-1918)

Still Life with Peaches

Oil on canvas

9 ¾ x 13 ¾ inches

Signed lower left

Lemuel Wilmarth was born in Attleboro, Massachusetts in 1835. Raised in Boston, Wilmarth worked as a watchmaker by day as he pursued his art education at night. He studied first at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia in the 1850s before later moving on to the National Academy of Design in New York City. In 1859, he fully-devoted himself to art and went to Germany to study at the Munich Royal Academy of the Fine Arts under Wilhelm von Kaulback, the muralist and book illustrator, from 1859 to 1862. Wilmarth then traveled to Paris to train at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he became the first American student to study with the famed academic artist, Jean-Léon Gérôme. Upon his return to the United States in 1867, he taught at the Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts from 1868 until 1870. At this time, Wilmarth also became the first full-time instructor at the National Academy of Design School in New York City where he was instrumental in developing and implementing a structured curriculum. Notably, he also worked to establish a women's life drawing class.

Wilmarth's association with the National Academy became tumultuous, however, when financial necessity required the elimination of Wilmarth's position at the end of the 1874-75 school year. Devoted students supported their beloved professor, and met in Wilmarth's studio to rebel against the National Academy and organize the Art Students League, appointing Wilmarth as the organization's president. Though Wilmarth and most of the instructors at the Art Students League were academicians, it became known as a more progressive school.

Wilmarth returned to his position at the National Academy in 1877, where he taught an innovative life drawing class that introduced the concept of quick poses, which rejected the more deliberate and meticulous study of his own academic training in favor of a quicker rendition that captured an immediate perception. He also introduced timed composition exercises that required students to complete their sketches quickly within a set timeframe.



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Wilmarth left his position at the Academy in 1889 and his poor eyesight necessitated his retirement from painting in 1892. The artist died in Brooklyn, New York in 1918.¹

While Wilmarth painted numerous sentimental genre scenes, likely inspired by his Germanic training, he is also known for his meticulous still lifes, which are rooted in the Netherlandish tradition of the 16th and 17th centuries. In their exceptional finish and paint handling, Wilmarth's still lifes reflect his academic training with Gérôme. Yet, the abundance of works in this genre produced by Wilmarth can also be considered a rejection of the Academic institution that trained him, which relegated still lifes to the lowest rung of artistic recognition in its "Hierarchy of Genres." Wilmarth's still lifes elevate his subject through the careful depiction of sumptuous textures, exact finishing and *trompe l'oeil* details.



Lemuel E. Wilmarth. *Still Life with Peaches and Grapes*. Oil on canvas, 1888, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.



Lemuel E. Wilmarth. *Peaches and Ribboned Basket*. Oil on canvas, 1888, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.²

Wilmarth produced numerous works featuring peaches in various informal compositional arrangements. He likely favored peaches as his subject due to their intricate soft and fuzzy texture, which allowed him to showcase his talent for detail. Here, Wilmarth paints an array of yellow and white peaches and their leafy stems atop a wooden cabinet. White peaches, sweeter in taste, are more delicate, thereby making them more expensive and more difficult to acquire, especially in the nineteenth century.

¹ Biographical information from "Lemuel Wilmarth," *askART*, accessed Sep. 14, 2017, http://www.askart.com/artist_bio/Lemuel_Everett_Wilmarth/22604/Lemuel_Everett_Wilmarth.aspx.

² Images courtesy of *askART*.