



# HAWTHORNE

## Fine Art



### **Fidelia Bridges (1834-1923)**

#### *Coastal Scene*

Watercolor and Gouache on paper

6 x 14 inches (sight)

Unsigned

Fidelia Bridges is known for her exquisitely detailed renderings of flora and fauna seen at close range, particularly in watercolor. Indeed, she is notable as the first and only female member of the American Watercolor Society, a group that was founded in 1866 to promote the art of watercolor painting, and which included such illustrious painters as Samuel Colman (1832–1920) and William Hart (1823–1894). Bridges was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1834 to a sea captain and his wife, but was left orphaned by the age of fifteen. She found work as a nanny in the household of a Salem ship-holder, William Augustus Brown, moving with them to Brooklyn in 1854. It was in Brooklyn that she befriended the sculptor, Anne Whitney, who encouraged her to enroll at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, which she did in 1860. There, she studied with William Trost Richards, an advocate of the hyper-detailed Pre-Raphaelite approach, which would prove a lasting influence on her style. Following the Civil War, Bridges furthered her study of painting in Italy.

Upon her return from Europe, Bridges established a studio in New York City, but continued to reside in Philadelphia. She was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1874, and a full member of the American Watercolor Society the following year. Beginning in 1876, her watercolors were reproduced and sold by lithographer Louis Prang, a testament to her success. She continued to work with Prang until 1899, primarily designing greeting cards. Her illustrations were also published in *Scribner's Monthly* and in various books, such as *Familiar Birds and What Poets Sing of Them* (1886). In the early 1890s, Bridges retired to Canaan, Connecticut, where she remained until her death in 1923.

While renowned for her meticulous rendering of birds and flowers her “inherent fondness for the sea [remained] with her...”<sup>1</sup> Bridges painted a number of beach and coastal scenes. Two such paintings

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Sawtelle Randall “Miss Fidelia Bridges in her Studio,” *The Connecticut Magazine*, Vol VII, (Hartford: The Connecticut Magazine Co., 1902-03) 585.



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exhibited at the American Watercolor Society included “Near the Sea” in 1907 and “A Wide Beach” in 1912.

In *Coastal Scene*, opaque white sails dot the low distant horizon while the vast sky is a wash of transparent color. A narrow stretch of beach in the foreground leads to shallow, reflective pools of water. This combination of transparent and opaque watercolor can be found in several smaller works entitled *Shorebirds*, *Seagulls Diving in the Surf*, and *Terns Diving*.



During her lifetime, Bridges exhibited at the National Academy of Design, the American Water Color Society, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Brooklyn Art Association, the Boston Art Club, the Art Institute of Chicago, the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition, and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. Today, her works can be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Amon Carter Museum in Texas, and the Harvard University Art Museums.



Fidelia Bridges (1834-1923)  
*Shorebirds*, 2.5 x 6.5 inches  
Private Collection

Fidelia Bridges (1834-1923)  
*Seagull diving in the Surf*, 2.5 x 6.5 inches  
Private Collection

Fidelia Bridges (1834-1923)  
*Terns Diving*, 2.5 x 6.5 inches  
Private Collection