



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

CHARLES COURTNEY CURRAN (1861 - 1942)

The painter Charles Courtney Curran was well known for his sunlit portraits of women and girls. While academicians have aligned his style with the leading movements of the era (as he is most often classified as a realist and an impressionist) Curran more than any other artist fostered a style based on assimilation. In his paintings, Curran merged a cosmopolitan sensibility with his midwestern background, and incorporated elements of his diverse training in both America and France. Throughout the 1880's, Curran trained in New York at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League, before spending three years in Paris at the Académie Julian. In his paintings one can quickly see the ways in which influences of naturalism and symbolism were fused with the plein-air style of both French and American Impressionism. With great talent and versatility, Curran quickly established a unique and steadfast stylistic sensibility that evades adherence to a specific movement. Curran retained his clear vision and pursued it unwaveringly throughout the art-world upheavals that came with the fin de siècle and the advent of modernism.

It was the work Curran produced during the summers he spent with his family in the Shawangunk Mountains, at the artist colony of Cragmoor, New York, that came to truly define his nuanced aesthetic. Curran was first invited to visit the colony by the artist and explorer Frederick Dellenbaugh in 1903. Seven years later, in 1910, Curran built a cottage at Cragmoor, and would return to summer at the hamlet every year for the remainder of his life. The retreat was also a haven to artists such as E.L Henry, J.G. Brown, Arthur Keller, George Innes Jr., and Helen M. Turner, with whom Curran likely socialized. These summers provided an idyllic setting for Curran to develop his trademark works: scenes of young women bathed in the light of a warm summer's day, carefully painted against Cragmoor's bucolic landscape.

While one can clearly see the influence of the Impressionists in Curran's treatment of light and his plein-air technique, his mastery of the human figure and careful rendering of the scene are unique; his pursuit was one of an ideal, feminine beauty, which he executed through careful compositions enhanced by diffuse light and crafted with an exacting hand. Few other painters at the turn of the twentieth century have approached this level of coalescence between technical skill and symbolic unity, and even fewer have done so with such conviction.