



# HAWTHORNE

## Fine Art

### WINSLOW HOMER (1836-1910)

*Fishing*, 1878

Charcoal and watercolor on paper

8 13/16 x 10 9/16 inches

Signed lower right, "W.H."

### PROVENANCE

John G. Pierce, Milton, Massachusetts, n.d.

Mrs. John G. Pierce, Milton, Massachusetts, by bequest, n.d.

Fessenden School, Newton, Massachusetts, by gift, c. 1960

John Nicholson Gallery, 1967

Private Collection, n.d.

ACA Galleries, n.d.

Herbert A. Goldstone, New York, n.d.

ACA Galleries, 1998

William Vareika Fine Arts, Ltd., Newport, Rhode Island, 1999

Private Collection, 2002

Private Collection, 2007 (sold: Sotheby's, New York, May 23, 2007; sale 8322, lot no. 5)

Winslow Homer, the noted landscape painter and printmaker, is one of the foremost figures in nineteenth century American art. Having made quite a name for himself as a painter of marine subjects, the self-taught artist's oeuvre extends far beyond these paradigmatic examples; the scope of his work is extensive in its breadth and depth, broaching a wide range of subject matter and traversing a range of mediums with ease.

Drawn in New York on a farm in Hempstead, Long Island, *Fishing* is the source for one of Homer's mid-career watercolors of the same title and year, which he later translated into the oil painting, *Fishin'* of 1879. Though prior to the 1870s Homer had employed the watercolor medium only intermittently, the year of 1873 marked a turning point in his use of the medium. From this point, works in watercolor suddenly came to encompass the majority of his output, and the following year marked Homer's first exhibition at the American Society of Painters in Watercolors; shortly thereafter, he became a full member.

Building upon the larger theme of man in harmony with nature, Homer commonly painted children in idyllic natural settings. Rural subjects, scenes of farm life, or children playing featured prominently in his work throughout the 1870s, and for American collectors of the late nineteenth century, offered a desirable alternative to images of the urban realities of industrialism. In a review of his paintings exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1875, the American writer and critic Henry James described Homer's children as "freckled, straight-haired Yankee urchins" with their "calico sunbonnets and flannel shirts." James continued: "He



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has taken the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization...has resolutely treated them as if they were pictorial...and he has uncontestedly succeeded.”<sup>1</sup>

*Fishing* is one of many of Homer’s works depicting the activity of fishing. Here, a girl and boy languidly hold their rods above a tranquil pond. Homer has emphasized the stillness of the water’s surface through daubs of white paint, indicating the mid-afternoon sunlight on a calm summer day. He carefully captures the streaks of light along their slender poles and across their straw hat and bonnet, which protect the children from the heat of the sun’s rays. In the watercolor and oil iterations, Homer expresses the effects of sunlight along their rose, blue and yellow garments. Though the positioning of the figures is largely consistent across the drawing and the paintings, Homer replaces the flat open farmland of the drawing for a more lush tree-filled setting in the later paintings. This vegetation evokes a more natural setting, untouched by human intervention, and the curve of the dark tree branch spreading horizontally across the canvas closes off the composition and brings focus to the figures in the foreground. Yet, Homer keeps the tall plant from the left side of the drawing, whose height causes it to bow gently over the head of the girl. He uses this plant as a framing device for the figures in the paintings, yet adds additional leaves to emphasize the rich greenery of the pond’s environs.



Winslow Homer, *Fishing*, 1878, watercolor and gouache on paper, 7 x 8.5 inches. Colby College Museum of Art.



Winslow Homer, *Fishin'*, 1879, oil on canvas, 7 ¼ x 9 3/16 inches. Rhode Island School of Design.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James. “On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited,” *Galaxy* 20, July 1875, pp. 93-94.



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A native Bostonian, Homer was born in 1836 and attended school in Cambridge. His mother, a watercolor painter in her own right, likely taught Homer to paint and later encouraged his professional pursuits. After graduating high school, Homer entered into an apprenticeship at J. H. Bufford, a local lithographic firm, where he remained for two years. In 1857 Homer left his apprenticeship to move to New York. He supported himself as a freelance illustrator, producing drawings which appeared in weekly publications—such as *Ballou's* and *Harper's Weekly*. Homer, who had no formal artistic training, built his experience on his apprenticeship at Bufford's and enrolled in night classes at the National Academy of Design. In addition, he was able to arrange a month of study with the French genre painter Frederick Rondel (1826-1892), who was living in New York at that time.

With the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, Homer was employed as an artist correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*, during which time he produced series of illustrations depicting daily life at camp. From 1863 on, Homer exhibited regularly at the National Academy of Design, and was eventually elected an academician (1865). Homer's most notable painting of the Civil War, *Prisoners from the Front*, was completed the following year; it was exhibited at the National Academy (1866), as well as at the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1867), effectively establishing Homer's reputation.

Homer traveled abroad in 1866, spending much of his time in France. Though little is known of the time he spent there, it is likely that he spent a great deal of time taking in contemporaneous art movements and integrating himself into Parisian artist circles. After returning to New York the following year, Homer established his studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building and became a founding member of the Tile Club. Although he lived in New York City for nearly two decades, the city itself did not tend to enter into his artwork. Instead, Homer made frequent summer trips to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Lake George, Saratoga, and the Adirondacks in upstate New York, and Long Branch in New Jersey in search of subject matter. Homer often integrated children into his scenes of rural life, eschewing the over-wrought sentimentality of many genre painters in favor of a gentle realism.

Homer spent two years in England in the early 1880s, at Cullercoats, where he produced numerous studies of village and fisherman life. After returning again to the United States, Homer settled in Prouts Neck, Maine. He remained there for the rest of his life, venturing south during the winters to warmer locales such as Cuba, Florida, Nassau and Bermuda. Homer died in Prouts Neck in 1910, at the age of seventy-four.