WINSLOW HOMER AND AESTHETICISM, 1865-1880

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Winslow Homer and Aestheticism, 1865-1880

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This dissertation explores the introduction of aestheticism to the United States through a close examination of the work of Winslow Homer from 1865 to 1880. I argue that Homer was consistently engaged with aestheticism from its early introduction to the United States in the years immediately following the Civil War. Throughout Homer's career, aestheticism was not antithetical to realism, but an alternative approach to addressing the social and cultural changes of modern life. Homer drew from many cultural precedents and models to create an aestheticism that was not only representative of his individuality, but also uniquely American.

In Chapter One, I explore the introduction of aestheticism to the United States through a review of contemporary writings, particularly that of Homer's friend Eugene Benson, connecting these theories to the building of American cultural standards and institutions, in which Homer was actively involved during this period. Chapter Two examines Homer's early exposure to European aestheticism, including an awareness of aesthetic paintings at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, particularly the works of

James McNeil Whistler. Since many of these early aesthetic works depict female figures, I likewise consider the gender implications of Homer's work in this vein.

Chapter Three examines Homer's work from around the year 1875 when he began exhibiting aestheticist works more public exhibitions. Here, the critical response to his work plays an increased role in defining aestheticism's progress in America. I examine the tensions that emerged in Homer's work that grew from the critical expectation to ground his paintings with moral and realistic overtones while he simultaneously exploring issues of ideal beauty that developed in the aestheticist debate.

Chapter Four studies Homer's tile production from the late 1870s, exploring precedents as well as contemporary uses of tiles and other decorative arts in relationship to Homer's work from this period. It examines the implications of the subjects that Homer used in these new experimental works, arguing that Homer's work in this vein functioned within a complete decorative scheme that reflected the patrons' morals and social fashioning.

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INTRODUCTION

In his recollections of Winslow Homer, John W. Beatty, a friend who visited Homer in Prouts Neck, Maine several times beginning in 1903, recalled a conversation with Homer about the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler:

> Asked what he thought of Whistler, he said, "I am surprised because he did not leave more works." I replied that he left a noble work in his mother's portrait. "Yes," he answered, "I know. His mother's portrait and Carlyle are important pictures, but I don't think those symphonies and queer things Ruskin objected to will live any great while. A few other things are knocking about, but his mother and Carlyle are the important ones.[1]

Beatty further recalled that Homer compared Whistler to his friend John La Farge, likewise commenting on his portraits and decorative works including stained glass. This rare recollection of Homer's interest in the work of another artist highlights the differences that have characterized the treatment of these two artists, who historically have been compared as masters of American art, but most often contrasted in terms of their artistic interests, styles, and demeanors.

Historical commentary on Winslow Homer's interest or knowledge of aestheticism, the movement to which Whistler was most closely associated, has been limited with traditional scholarship focusing on Homer as a realist painter whose late seascapes, painted while relatively secluded in Prout's Neck, Maine, defined him as a mature artist. However, this narrow view of Homer as the reclusive realist limits the interpretation of his oeuvre from the 1870s, a time when he was actively engaged in the New York art scene and painted with the critics and the buying public in mind. In considering Homer this way, much of the early scholarship has placed him in radical

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[1] Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; The MacMillan Company, 1944), 213.

opposition to aestheticism, and particularly to Whistler. This opposition began early on in the historical treatment of the two artists, when Kenyon Cox suggested, "No other American painter of his [Homer's] generation has been so widely recognized except that one who was, in temper and accomplishments, almost his exact antithesis, James McNeill Whistler." He continued to describe Homer as entirely unconcerned with Whistler and his theory of art:

> For, surely, no greatly successful artist ever had less care than Homer for those decorative and aesthetic qualities which Whistler proclaimed, in theory and by his practise [sic], the whole of art. There is nothing gracious or insinuating, hardly, even, anything reticent or mysterious, about the art of Homer.[2]

Cox championed Homer as the quintessential realist, asserting, "He has no lyrical fervor; makes no attempt to express his own emotion or his own mood."[3] Cox defined the differences between the artists that we can still readily see today. Homer has continually been praised for his realism – an objective, accurate expression of the scene without any sense of idealism or sentimentality. In contrast, Whistler is known for his support of the ideals of aestheticism. Rather than painting in a straightforward, realistic manner, artists of the Aesthetic Movement promoted the expression of the beautiful and decorative, emphasizing the pleasure which the beautiful object could provide. Art thus became autonomous, as artists and critics promoted the idea of "art for art's sake." Throughout the twentieth century, writers continued to characterize Whistler as the expatriate aesthete

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[2] Kenyon Cox, "Winslow Homer," in *What Is Painting? "Winslow Homer" And Other Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1988), 46. Cox's essay was originally published in 1914, a time when the American art world was reacting to the introduction of modernism with the 1913 Armory Show. Bruce Robertson has argued that the realist artists of this period increasingly turned to Homer's example as maintaining an American sensibility in light of the encroaching stylistic and theoretical pressures of modernism. It is likely that Cox's praise of Homer over Whistler was in this same light. Bruce Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Art Museum, 1990), 4-5.

[3] Cox, "Winslow Homer," 48.

and Homer as the truly American realist, an opposition that I will be reconsidering. Albert Ten Eyck Gardner wrote a lengthy comparison of the artists, concluding that, "Indeed these two artists present in their lives as well as in their pictures the most extreme contrast. At base they are diametrically opposed, both as men and artists."[4] He also suggested, "[Homer's] pictures are never approached with the purely painterly problems in mind that produced the kind of self conscious precosity [sic] one finds in some of Whistler's work."[5]

On the surface Homer and Whistler seem diametrically opposed. Homer was popularly known in his lifetime for being reclusive. He kept to himself and painted as he wished. Whistler on the other hand was a boisterous, outgoing, somewhat arrogant man who was continually attracting attention to him. He painted and drew an enormous number of self-portraits, which he used to promote himself and his art. He actively engaged in creating a persona for himself through the media, which in turn generated the recognition of his creative artistic endeavors.[6] Homer painted scenes that were repeatedly judged as realistic throughout his life and until today; Whistler abandoned a realist approach to art early on in his career, focusing instead on the aesthetic qualities of art, and upholding the notion of art for art's sake.

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[4] Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, *Winslow Homer, American Artist: His World and His Work* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1961), 134.
[5] Ibid., 84.
[6] For a complete discussion of Whistler's manipulation of his public image see Sarah Burns, "Performing the Self," Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)., pp. 221-246; Andrew Stephenson, "Refashioning Modern Masculinity: Whistler, Aestheticism and National Identity," in *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, ed. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), Sarah Burns, "Old Maverick to Old Master: Whistler in the Public Eye in Turn-of-the-Century America," *American Art Journal* XXII (1990): 28-49.

Beyond the comparisons to Whistler quoted above, scholars for over a century have recognized Homer's paintings as the epitome of American realism. Not only did he engage with the social and cultural themes of his time, but his paintings became known for what has been interpreted as their representation of his clear, direct observations. Scholars who have considered Homer's works from this period have repeatedly defined his work as reflective of the world around him.[7] When more recent historians have attempted to connect Homer to corresponding movements in European modernism, they have looked to movements and styles associated with French Realism and the subsequent Impressionist movement.[8]

Historically, this focus on Homer's realism allowed nineteenth century critics and subsequent scholars to identify American art as distinct from European art in general and

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[7] Take for example, Margaret Conrads who argues that Homer's themes from the 1870s, "were all drawn from current events and topics of contemporary concern." (Conrads 2001, p. 3). In another instance, Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., argues that Homer was dedicated in the early years of his career to expressing a sense of "modernity: that is, the responsibility of an artist to express the life of his own time." ("Modern and National" p. 61.) Scholars who have studied his works from the Civil War, for example, have categorized these paintings as representative of the social and political issues relevant to this period in American history. See, for example, the work of Lucretia Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 3 (1986), Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works", Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "Winslow Homer's "Prisoners from the Front"," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 12 (1977), Marc Simpson, ed. *Winslow Homer: Paintings of the Civil War* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,1988), and Peter H. Wood and Karen C. C. Dalton, *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

[8] Henry Adams, for example, suggests that Homer's exposure to contemporary French painting, albeit not necessarily directly to the works of the Impressionists, led to the development of a similar impressionist style for Homer, where he painted with a lightened palette, often composed his paintings with a Japanese aesthetic, and focused on contemporary subjects Henry Adams, "Winslow Homer's 'Impressionsim' and Its Relation to His Trip to France," *Studies in the History of Art* 26 (1990): 61-83.

to aestheticism in particular.[9] Bruce Robertson in particular has noted that late nineteenth century Americans defined Homer's realism as "big, virile, and American," characteristics that were opposed to the delicate, feminine, European art that was gaining currency in the art world of the time.[10] This sense of bigness was reflective of the era's big business, which embodied an ideology of masculine power that Homer's late paintings, particularly his seascapes and late hunting scenes were believed to display.[11] Homer's late-nineteenth-century admirers were anxious to find a painter that would symbolize these qualities that were being challenged through the importation of aestheticism, which by the 1890s was believed to be a menace to American individuality and morality.[12] Homer's seemingly American scenes, which could be justified as having little European influence due to his lack of European training and depiction of themes that were specifically viewed as native, gave way to the beginning of this stereotyped view of him as the quintessential American realist.[13]

The sharp separation between Homer's realism and European aestheticism began to blur as scholars began to entertain the idea that Homer might have been influenced by the ideas of aestheticism beginning in the mid-1980s. These scholars have looked at the ways in which Homer's works began to move away from the narrative that dominated his

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[9] Randall C. Griffin, *Homer, Eakins, & Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the Gilded Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).
[10] Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence*, 63.
[11] S. Burns, "Winslow Homer and the American Business Spirit" in *Inventing the Modern Artist.* 187-220. Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America*.
[12] S. Burns, "Fighting Infection: Aestheticism, Degeneration, and the Regulation of Artistic Masculinity." *Inventing the Modern Artist*, pp. 79-119. Ibid.
[13] The attacks waged on aestheticism in the United States were not unlike those which Walter Hamilton had defended the movement in his 1882 history, and Homer was not isolated from the affects of aestheticism beginning in the late 1860s and through 1880.

early works, looking instead to ways that Homer engaged with formal questions as well as issues of beauty. Whistler has again figured as a prominent comparison to Homer in defining the potential influences of aestheticism. In his discussion of the Aesthetic Movement in America, Roger B. Stein described *Promenade on the Beach* (Figure 1) as "a Whistlerian harmony in blue and beige in which the abstract organization of the canvas, rather than some narrative or genre situation, controls the vision."[14] Bruce Robertson has suggested a similarity between Whistler and Homer's attention to aesthetic qualities: "Today Homer's debts to James McNeill Whistler seem obvious, as does his study of tonalism, the school of late nineteenth century American painting devoted to softly painted, subdued colors and other similarly quiet aesthetic concerns," though Robertson conceded that Homer's contemporaries were reluctant to recognize these elements in his work – seeing him as "incompatible with ideas of beauty; by definition his work could not be seen as decorative or suave."[15] In the 1996 exhibition catalog *Winslow Homer*, Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly suggested various similarities to Whistler, including Homer's interest in formal qualities and his employing "aesthetically sophisticated designs" that push his paintings to the limits of art for art's sake. In reference to *Blackboard* (Figure 2), for example, Cikovsky and Kelly argue that Homer's work from this period exhibited a visual correlation to Whistler's design work, though they acknowledge that Homer would not have known of these designs. They make further reference to Homer's adherence to art for art's sake and connections to Whistler,

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[14] Roger B. Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 41.
[15] Robertson, *Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence*, 3.

though they provide little evidence beyond simple visual affinities to support their claims.[16]

These scholars have provided an important introduction to the similarities between the work of Homer and Whistler, focusing on works that have reduced narrative elements and formal similarities. Most of these comparisons have examined Homer's works from after 1876, the accepted timeline for the introduction of the Aesthetic Movement to the United States. These comparisons raise an equal number of questions regarding Homer's knowledge of Whistler in these early years, or more broadly his interest in ideas associated with aestheticism. In *Blackboard*, for example, we see clear evidence of the rise of artistic instruction in schools, a reference to contemporary American life, yet the treatment of this work is strongly decorative with the bands of color that divide the background of the composition. By 1877, the year in which Homer painted *Blackboard*, the decorative trends associated with the Aesthetic Movement had been introduced to the United States primarily through the British displays at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Yet, this tendency of applying an aesthetic treatment to more realistic subjects was seen in Homer's work early, such as the 1870 painting *Bridle Path*, which presents a young woman on horseback climbing in the White Mountains, a popular contemporary travel destination. Here, Homer uses a nearly monochromatic palette to define the sun-infused landscape, which he defined through loose brushwork and limited narrative.

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[16] See the discussion of *Milking Time* (p. 118-121) where the authors suggest that Homer was concerned here with issues of art for art's sake. They make further comparisons to Whistler in their discussion of *Portrait of Helena de Kay*, whose pose, they argue, must have been influenced by Whistler's portrait of his mother, *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, (p. 122-23). Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996).

This dissertation examines this tendency in Homer's work, thus offering a reevaluation of Winslow Homer's career from 1865 to 1880 through an examination of potential meanings behind Homer's frequent combination of realist subject matter with an aesthetic approach. This study complicates the traditional separation of realism from aestheticism as I look to answer questions about how and why Homer became interested in aestheticism, the ways in which his art reflects these interests, and the ways that these ideas focused his artistic development in the formative years of his career. I argue that Homer shared a larger interest in aestheticism with artists, intellectuals and other cultural elites from the northeastern United States – one that existed before the recognized introduction of the Aesthetic Movement to America. This aesthetic ideology, rooted in ideas and practices developed by artists and writers from the mid-century, aimed to foster an art that would present a modern sensibility while reifying American ideals of independence, virtue, and national pride. In this way, Homer engaged with the elements of aestheticism early on in his career, aiding in the maturation of his artistic style and identity.

Methodologically, I employ close visual analysis of Homer's paintings to explore his interest in and understanding of aestheticism. I consider a wide range of Homer's works, beginning with his early images of figures within a landscape painted in the years immediately following the Civil War and extending through his watercolors of 1880 painted while living at Ten Pound Island in the Gloucester Harbor. Within this wide range of subjects and media, including figure and landscape paintings, watercolors, formal oil paintings, as well as decorative tiles, I argue that Homer developed his own

form of aestheticism that contended with issues of beauty and morality while maintaining the elements of realism that have come to characterize his work.

From a textual standpoint, I rely on the critical writing in the major newspapers and journals of the time to provide insight into the terminology and definitions of aestheticism used in the American context, as well as to gauge the reactions and public understanding of Homer's paintings. Several reasons emerge for this method. Homer's writing and commentary on his work is extremely limited, leaving his paintings as the best evidence of his artistic interests and ideas. This focus is quite ironic as the ideology of art for art's sake was meant to leave paintings as the record of artistic interest or exploration, with the art standing on its own rather than needing didactic explanation. With this movement away from explanatory text, the role of the art critic came into question in the British movement – a trend that carried over into the American arena at the same time that American critical writing was growing in scale. These critical discussions served as the basis of the growing aestheticism in America – one that adapted European models into a form of aestheticism that was unique to the American environment.

In considering Homer's artistic production and the critical reaction to it, I draw on several recent scholarly works in American art. From the Homer literature, I look to scholars who have tied Homer more closely to the environment in which he worked. Elizabeth Johns' biography *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* provides an important reassessment of the ways that Homer's observations and experiences informed his painting. She places Homer at the center of the evolving American cultural life, not only as a creator of art works but as someone whose work actively participated in the

defining the development of culture during a period of significant change in American history.[17] My reliance on contemporary critical writings as a means to uncover the motives and meaning in Homer's work mirrors the recent work of Randall C. Griffin, whose study of the post-Civil war period, *Homer, Eakins and Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the Gilded Age*, sets these major American artists within their contemporary environment, and argues that the critical environment in post-Civil War New York was important for helping to define an American identity at a time when there was widespread anxiety over the loss of a strong national identity.[18]

My research also builds on the exploration of the critical review of Homer's work presented by Margaret Conrads in both her dissertation and the exhibition catalog *Winslow Homer and the Critics.*[19] Conrads' thorough research provides a strong overview of the critical environment in which Homer exhibited during the 1870s, and suggests the ways that Homer reacted to the critical reviews of his major exhibition work. I build on Conrads' overview of the critical reviews to examine the particular language that the critics developed to articulate the tensions developing within the New York art world, tensions between idealism and realism that were at the heart of American aestheticism. I also draw from the example of Joanne Mancini, whose book *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* argues for the primary role that the art world, including patrons, critics, and artistic

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[17] Elizabeth Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* (Berkeley: Univeristy of California Press, 2002).
[18] Griffin, *Homer, Eakins, & Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the Gilded Age*.
[19] Margaret C. Conrads, "Winslow Homer and His Critics in the 1870s" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1999) and *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

institutions, played in defining what artists created.[20] By simultaneously exploring Homer's paintings and the critical attention given to them, I am able to assign greater meaning to Homer's work as it relates to the development of aestheticism.[21] It is my contention that Homer and the critical response to his paintings worked in conjunction to redefine art's function in the pursuit of cultural elevation as defined by the arts and publishing industries in the mid-1870s.

Before examining Winslow Homer and his interest in aestheticism, we must first define the theories that influenced aestheticism's emergence in Homer's work before 1876. The remainder of this introduction explores the development of European theoretical issues through the writing of art critics and in practice by British painters. It is not meant to be an exhaustive review of the people and ideas that influenced the movement, but rather an overview of what was influential to the development of an American aestheticism. I examine the British movement, summarizing the developments in writing and painting around 1867, when the new ideas of aestheticism began to emerge. Then, I look at the ways that American scholars have considered aestheticism to date, setting the context for the remainder of the dissertation. This introduction sets out to define the key terms, and estabishes the historiographical separation of realism and aestheticism which I am challenging in this dissertation.

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[20] J. M. Mancini, *Pre-Modernism: Art-Worl Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[21] This method also draws on the writing of Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Behonder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3. Fried writes of this method, "it is only by coming to see the appropriateness to a given painting or group of paintings of certain verbal formulations, stylistic devices, and rhetorical strategies … that we are able to attribute to those formulations, devices and strategies a truly crucial significance. The result is a double process of interpretation by virtue of which paintings and critical texts are made to illuminate one another, to establish and refine each other's meanings, and to provide between them compelling evidence for the centrality to the pictorial enterprise."

Defining Aestheticism: A short history of the British Movement

Aestheticism has proved difficult to define throughout the art historical discourse. The term is often used interchangeably with the terms Aesthetic Movement and art for art's sake to define a general interest in aesthetics and beauty that affected the production of a wide range of objects – decorative objects, furniture, textiles, wallpaper, ceramics, and of course painting and other fine arts. The time frame of this interest varies widely in the scholarship as well, with some studies reaching as early as the 1850s with the writings of John Ruskin and the work of artists associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and lasting well into the 1880s in the writings of Oscar Wilde and the widespread production of beautiful, decorative objects for middle-class homes.

The first history of the Aesthetic Movement set the tone for the way that twentieth century historians have approached the movement, and in many ways contributed to the confusion over terminology that has characterized later scholarship. *The Aesthetic Movement in England* written by Walter Hamilton in 1882 provided an overview of the late nineteenth-century understanding of the movement. In his history of the movement, Hamilton himself expressed a sense of unease with the term "Aesthetic Movement," even though he used it as the title of his book: "I have used the title *Æsethetic Movement*, little as I like it, because it is generally accepted and understood, although it incorrectly describes what might be more correctly styled, a Renaissance of Mediæval Art and Culture."[22] This idea of a renaissance, and particularly the focus on medieval art and culture extended back to the artworks and writings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which Hamilton was the first to identify as heralding the Aesthetic Movement. By

[22] Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882), vii.

focusing on the historical bases for the Aesthetic Movement, and by his continued insistence that the movement was driven by a renaissance of medieval culture, Hamilton begged for acceptance and understanding of the movement that was increasingly under attack and ridicule. To counter the attacks by various pundits and writers, Hamilton looked to connect aestheticism to what might have been considered more popular movements, particularly the Pre-Raphaelites who were seen by later nineteenth century writers as ushering in a Renaissance in British art.

Hamilton, likewise attempted to connect a sense of social impact to Aesthetes, who he defined as "they who pride themselves upon having found out what is the really beautiful in nature and art, their faculties and tastes being educated up to the point necessary for the full appreciation of such qualities."[23] Aesthetes did more than just focus on or identify the beautiful things in life. By definition, their status as Aesthetes was the end result of acquiring both knowledge and having a certain amount of discrimination and refinement so as to identify those qualities that can be considered beautiful.[24] Hamilton insinuated, though, that this appreciation for the beautiful could be taught – a concept that was crucial to the dissemination of aestheticism on a wide scale. Once these Aesthetes had established themselves as experts on the beautiful, they were often compelled to become taste-makers of sorts. This shared drive to educate the public provided the basis for the Aesthetic Movement: "The essence of the movement is the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] While this definition of the Aesthete drew from the concept of the connoisseur, a learned person who studied art, the focus on beauty as the value for judgment of a work of art separated the Aesthete from the connoisseur. The understanding of the connoisseur in this period was increasingly connected with the ability to attribute works of art to a particular style based on techniques. Hugh Brigstocke and Harold Osborne, "Connoisseur, Connoisseurship," Oxford Art Online, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e605

union of persons of cultivated tastes to define, and to decide upon, what is to be admired, and their followers must aspire to that standard in their works and lives."[25] Hamilton made some clear assumptions in this definition of the movement, the most obvious of which is that Aesthetes would have followers, or those who would aspire to emulate them. Implicit in this assumption is that art and beauty could impact society. Such assertions indicated the class bias of this generally upper-class or elite movement, whose proponents felt that it was their obligation to preach the benefits of a cultured life to the masses. This seemingly democratic sensibility would prove significant in the importation of aestheticism to the United States, where the American elite looked to develop a cultured society through a variety of means.

While Hamilton's early history outlines the basic structure for the movement under question here, the most recent scholarship on the movement has established a timeline that sets firmer parameters for aestheticism as a movement, convincingly arguing that aestheticism emerged around 1867 and continued into the mid-1880s, albeit undergoing some philosophical changes by the later 1870s.[26] This timeline places the movement in the period immediately following the Pre-Raphaelites when British artists consciously moved away from the Pre-Raphaelite concerns with nature and reality to focus more closely on the ways that art differed from life.[27]

The various terms used to describe the art from this period were applied imprecisely even during the nineteenth century, causing confusion for historians trying to define the movement and its ideas. As I explore below, some distinctions in the terms

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[25] Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, vii.
[26] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008).
[27] Ibid.

emerge, based on a differentiation between painting and fine arts, and the decorative or applied arts. For the sake of this dissertation, I adhere to these distinctions, using aestheticism as a more general term to address the issues of art for art's sake that painters and writers explored beginning in the middle of the 1860s. Aesthetic Movement refers to a second phase of the movement beginning in the later 1870s when the aesthetic ideas became popularized, resulting in a rise in production of artistic and decorative objects. In the latter Aesthetic Movement, on a wide-scale, painting became secondary to decorative arts and objects took over as the means through which people could surround themselves with beauty. For this study I use the two terms separately to distinguish between these phases. For the majority of the dissertation, I use the term aestheticism to identify the earlier phase that focused primarily on an exploration of beauty through the medium of painting. In the last chapter I shift to the term Aesthetic Movement to focus on the more popular manifestation of these issues surrounding beauty and exposure to it.

Historically, writers used the term art for art's sake most frequently to describe paintings beginning around 1867, first appearing in Britain in the writing of Algernon Charles Swinburne.[28] This phrase was most often associated with the most avant-garde and often controversial elements of painting promoted by the artists associated with Swinburne and connected to Dante Gabriel Rossetti during this period. Art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that for these artists, art for art's sake was less a matter of artistic theory, as twentieth century scholars have argued, and "rather it is a matter of exploring a shared artistic problem… that does not predetermine its own answer," resulting in a variety of styles and solutions to this problem of art that exists "for art's

[28] This term was also used in poetry and writing – other "fine" arts, though the focus here is on the application of these terms in discussions of the visual arts, primarily painting.

sake." The result, Prettejohn argues, is "a non-theory or even an anti-theory: It is a set of art practices that are linked by nothing except a common agreement that no theory can ever be devised to link them."[29] The definition of this artistic problem results from the British understanding of both German philosophical aesthetics, or the study of beauty, particularly the writings of Immanuel Kant and the French theories and practices associated with the term "*l'art pour l'art,*" which has long been associated with the British movement. Both theories played a part in the development of aestheticism in Victorian England, through a reaction to and incorporation of language from these French and German theories.

The writings of the eighteenth-century philosopher Emmanuel Kant had defined conceptions of beauty for generations. Kant had defined the beautiful as a subjective judgment of taste, one that is purely contemplative, providing satisfaction freely from any other association, be it moral or utilitarian.[30] Aestheticism's general concern for issues of beauty and taste in relation to art borrowed significantly from Kant's philosophical concepts. Aestheticism, though, differed from the philosophical study of aesthetics in that aestheticism, particularly its manifestation in the United States, did not totally dissociate a beautiful object from other associations. Instead, beauty and beautiful objects came to have a certain power in helping to elevate levels of taste and to promote an agenda for the artists and writers who embraced this idea.

The English literary and art critic Sidney Colvin was the first writer to connect this to painting, by identifying a new tendency, which he defined in his 1867 review of

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[29] Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*, 2-3.
[30] For a concise discussion of Kant and his aesthetic writings, see Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge,2001), 51-65.

painting in England, published in the *Fortnightly Review*.[31] Though he did not use the terms aestheticism or art for art's sake, he identified the key characteristics that were to be associated with the movement and the major figures who were working in this manner. Colvin began by defining art as "the Idealisation of Fact, with the cultivation of our sense of perfection for its object." He further identified this sense of perfection as beauty, claiming it as "the one paramount aim of the pictorial artist." He continued, "The only perfection of which we can have direct cognizance through the sense of sight is the perfection of forms and colours – beauty, in a word – should be the prime object of pictorial art. Having this, it has the chief requisite; and spiritual, intellectual beauty are contingent on this, are something thrown into the bargain."[32] Colvin recognized here the primacy of sight in experiencing painting and that beauty is the only element of perfection that could be found in this art form. He focused on the sensual qualities of beauty and particularly the use of forms and colors in a work of art as the primary appeal – leaving expression and intellect as secondary concerns to the formal elements.

Colvin established the boundaries of this new kind of art by contrasting it to other categories that failed to meet the requirement of beauty as their primary aim. He labeled these categories as "Domestic" art, whose aim was "to *illustrate* for purposes of amusement or edification, and without reference to beauty;" "Anecdotic," which he described as "nineteenth-century epics… in which neither beauty nor attempt at beauty was possible;" "Academic," which "starts with the intention of finding beauty, or some

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[31] Colvin served as the chief art critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette* from 1868 to 1870. In 1873 he became the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge and director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1876. He invited Whistler to present his 10 O'Clock Lecture in 1885. Sidney Colvin, "English Painters and Painters in 1867," *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 2, no. October 1867 (1867): 464-76.
[32] Ibid.: 465.

phantom which it takes for beauty, but it strays hopelessly from the true path toward the object;" and "Scientific," which "occupied itself with Imitation, to the neglect of the not less needful stage of Idealisation."[33] Colvin pointed to examples of each of these styles and genres through the work of popular British artists.

The public popularity of art styles that Colvin identified as failures was crucial to his defining of aestheticism, particularly given the role of the art critic. The public's wholehearted acceptance of these art forms that failed to achieve beauty would change, once the critic was able to explain the significance of the new and better elements of art. He ended his article by arguing that it was the art critic's role to explain to the public the changes that he had identified:

> It is the part of criticism, embodying the judgment of the few in whom these faculties and impulses [for beauty] are not dormant, to endeavour to lead us on, without needless acerbity, from the enjoyment of such trivialities [as illustrative and anecdotic art] to the enjoyment of better things; to endeavour to kindle in the majority the love of beauty, and make us sensitive to such perfection of forms and colours as the higher sort of artists have to show us.[34]

Colvin articulated the important role that the critic was to play in defining this new beauty-focused art style. The critic was to serve as the interpreter for the untrained audience, to see the pleasure that artists interpreted in their work, and to look beyond the "trivialities" found in the representation of everyday life. We will see that American critics would play an equally important role in the development of aestheticism in New York. Homer's colleague and friend Eugene Benson was important in articulating a similar need for art to move beyond the commonplace, as will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

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[33] Ibid.: 468.
[34] Ibid.: 476.

In order to provide a familiar foundation for these new ideas, Colvin identified one group of artists who were "nearer to beauty than their opponents" – the Pre-Raphaelites – thus formalizing the connection that aestheticism had to the earlier school. While acknowledging that these artists had revolutionized British painting, he criticized their insistence on exact realism and for falling "into the natural mistake of over-emphasizing their moral, of teaching and preaching at the expense, in the outset, of beauty."[35] He further faulted them for failing "to produce a sense of repose or to satisfy the love of beauty," for these paintings' reliance on intellectual understanding. But he conceded that one of the Pre-Raphaelites, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom he described as a former leader of the movement, was able to combine "in just balance the passion for beauty with intellectual subtlety and executive mastery. And the name of this painter brings us from the realistic, didactic part of the sequel of Pre-Raphaelitism, the art that seeks edification rather than delight, to the art that seeks perfection of forms and colours – the art whose aim is beauty."[36] While other painters in the "sequel of pre-Raphaelitism" continued to work in the same minutely realistic style, Rossetti had moved on to focus on formal issues that went beyond the moral issues of Pre-Raphaelitism. As we will see in Chapter 1, though, the progression from Pre-Raphaelitism to aestheticism was often the cause of confusion for the American audience, contributing to the ambiguous definition of aestheticism in later scholarship.

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[35] One wonders if this criticism was directed more at John Ruskin, who praised the Pre-Raphaelites for what he saw as the truth in realistic depictions. He likewise insisted on the important moral role that art should play, a point that made his writings particularly important in the American context where they were used to justify the place of art among a generally skeptical audience.

[36] Colvin, "English Painters and Painters in 1867," 473.

Rossetti was the central figure in one of the often overlapping circles of figures associated with the development of aestheticism, of which Colvin was a part. These two circles of artists were based in London in the 1860s – one around Rossetti and including Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Simeon Solomon and James McNeill Whistler; the other around Lord Frederick Leighton and included George Frederic Watts, all of whom Colvin singled out in his article. In these artists' work, he highlighted their "abstract treatment of the female form," an insistence on form over expression, and "a perfection of design, a delicacy of decorative colour, a large grace and harmonious repose" – all formal qualities that were meant to engage the subjective response of the viewer.[37] While these artists never formed a cohesive group dedicated to the pursuit of aestheticism, they travelled in the same social circles and their works shared a concern with exploring the concept of art for art's sake and the attainment of beauty through painting.[38]

Colvin recognized the connection that this new movement held to Pre-Raphaelitism, but as I have noted in his discussion of Rossetti, he observed a shift away from the morally didactic painting of these artists to one that focused on beauty. Colvin suggested, too, that this shift from moralism to beauty necessitated a shift away from contemporary subjects, for contemporary life was filled with ugliness, leaving it too difficult to find beauty in this subject matter. In contrast to contemporary subjects, for

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[37] Ibid.: 473-75.

[38] Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*. Prettejohn investigates this shared exploration of art for art's sake among these artists in *Art for Art's Sake*, which has chapters devoted to ways that each artist addressed this issue in their work.

example, he pointed to the popular success of Frederick Leighton, whose classical subjects were chosen because of their ability to be treated beautifully.[39]

Colvin's call to move past contemporary subjects placed this devotion to beauty in direct contrast to Realism and its various manifestations. In England, this was recognition of the sharp break that this new generation of artists was making from the popularity of pre-Raphaelitism. Specifically, Colvin articulated to a wider audience this movement away from realistic depictions of nature through his deliberate rejection of finish and well-defined form. His lengthy discussion of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, for example, highlighted the artist's drive to attain beauty as the end product of his work. He described Whistler as "another artist who aims at beauty without realism." Colvin set up key terms that would play out in the definition not only of British aestheticism, but particularly in its translation in America – the relationship between the pursuit of ideal beauty and realism. Here, he claims that realism did not have a place in this pursuit of beauty.

His discussion of Whistler focused on the ways in which form and color played a role in creating beauty in a work of art:

> No artist's works more completely mystify the average spectator than his. Every one can perceive his neglect of form, his contempt of executive finish, the apparently slurring method by which he achieves exactly as much as he wishes, and attempts no more; but not every one can perceive in what his real strength lies, his perfect mastery of the rapports of tone, and of what Mr. Rossetti calls the 'delicate aberrances and intricate haphazards of colour.' These, and these alone, are what he attempts to seize, whether in his grey and brown studies of shore and harbor or his brilliant and harmonious compositions of Japanese decorative colour. That these are artistic successes after their kind is undeniable; but it may fairly be urged that as pictures, as idealisations of fact, they lose value by their exclusiveness of aim and one-sidedness of treatment.[40]

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[39] Colvin, "English Painters and Painters in 1867," 473.
[40] Ibid.: 473-74.

Colvin honed in on the tonal qualities of Whistler's works as the key to his success in this new expression of beauty, creating harmony through his use of color. He referred indirectly to Whistler's views of the harbor, such as *Battersea Reach from Lindsey Houses*, which Whistler worked on from 1864-71 (Figure 3). The painting's hazy quality is a clear rejection of distinct form, as the boat in the harbor is defined through short, quick brushstrokes on the surface of the painting. The scene in the distance is obscured through the London fog, which also serves to create a nearly uniformly colored ground, where the water and sky blend together with only the slightest indication of a horizon line. The figures in the foreground are ill-defined forms, created through simple brushstrokes, with paint slightly scraped away to give some definition to the color masses. Whistler's *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony* (Figure 4) could easily fit with Colvin's description of "compositions of Japanese decorative colour." Here, Whistler created an overall harmonious composition by arranging the female figures, who themselves are dressed in Japanese costumes, to explore compositional elements from Japanese woodcuts, including atmospheric effects and subtle tonal variations.[41] Whistler based the composition on the relationships of the color forms on the canvas, moving away from the "idealisations of fact" that had dominated his realist paintings.

In both *The Balcony* and *Battersea Reach* we see Whistler moving away from his earlier explorations of beauty which used more realistic forms and representations. Take, for example, *The White Girl (Symphony in White No 1)* (Figure 5) and *The Little White Girl (Symphony in White No. 2)* (Figure 6), where Whistler began to explore concepts of

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[41] Richard Dorment and Margaret F MacDonald, *James Mcneill Whistler* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995), 89-90.

color and form, but maintained an element of realism in his formal depiction and style. In *The White Girl*, Whistler depicted a young woman standing on a bearskin rug, looking squarely at the viewer. The painting becomes less of a figure painting than an exploration of tonality, as Whistler uses a monochrome white palette to explore spatial relationships that are accentuated by the sharp tilt of the painting's perspective. In the second of the paintings, Whistler depicted a young woman, dressed in an elaborate costume holding a fan, intensely examining a porcelain *lange leizen*, or "long Eliza," named for the attenuated female figures painted on the fine porcelain vase. The reflection of the mirror captures the expression of yearning on her face. When taken in conjunction, these paintings show Whistler's early experiments with color, form, and conceptions of beauty. With the renaming of these works using musical terms and associations in the 1870s, Whistler made a clear connection to the sensual aspects of beauty, and he reassigned the importance of the paintings to the arrangement of colors on the canvas. In *The Little White Girl*, the juxtaposition of the beautiful young woman with the beautiful vase challenged the viewer to consider the similarities between the vase and the canvas itself, focusing on the mood the painting evokes and the beauty of the canvas itself.

But, while Colvin focused primarily on the newer elements in Whistler's work, the works that Whistler created and exhibited in the 1860s maintained some elements of realism. By focusing on "beauty without realism" Colvin defined Whistler's aestheticism in terms of other artistic developments of the time and recognized this shift in Whistler's work as well. Primarily, this assertion verbalized Whistler's sharp break from his teacher and mentor Gustave Courbet, whose manifesto of Realism had articulate the movement

in the late 1850s. Whistler had recently renounced Courbet and "That damned Realism" in a letter to Henri Fantin-Latour in September 1867.[42] In contrast, Whistler's letter identified a strong interest in drawing and color as indicative of a higher quality of beauty rather than being so reliant on the truth of nature, or realistic representation.[43] Whistler's sharp break from realism reflected the influence of Rossetti and his circle, which Whistler had joined upon moving to London in 1863. This period around 1867 was the defining moment when these artists broke from their Realist pasts and dedicated their art to exploring issues of art for art's sake. The artists associated with these circles shifted away from moral messages in their art and dedicated themselves to beauty and idealism in art. They abandoned the precise realism of the earlier group, adopting a softer color palette, softened lines and more decorative patterns and compositions, all stylistic qualities that came to be identified as aestheticism. In this early period, then, Colvin defined the theoretical and artistic focus on the formal qualities of painting as the primary concerns for the emerging aestheticism. He privileged the resulting beauty of these works in contrast to the realistic expression of narratives or facts seen in other paintings from the time.

Aestheticism's sharp contrast to realism presented itself from the beginnings of the theoretical writings regarding the movement and has become the basis of defining realism, too. In American history, for example, David Shi's pivotal book *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought 1850-1920* has traced the emergence of realism in American social and cultural arenas throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In defining the general tendency towards realism in nineteenth century American culture,

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[42] Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, Sept 1867. Translated in Robin Spencer, *Whistler: A Retrospective* (New York: H. Lanter Levin, 1989), 82-84.
[43] Ibid.

he places it in direct contrast with aestheticism, claiming that it "involved a direct confrontation with life rather than the art-for-art's-sake aestheticism."[44] This contrast, though, assumes an extreme articulation of aestheticism, like that of Walter Pater, who looked to promote the use of art and culture as an escape from everyday life, thus appealing to "that inversion of homesickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous."[45] While Pater was referring to aesthetic poetry, these concepts applied equally to literary and visual arts, wherein artists like Whistler and Albert Moore became consumed with the pursuit of beauty for its own sake. Aestheticism was not so severely articulated in America, until perhaps later in the 1880s and 1890s. In its early stages in the United States, there was more of an overlap between the movement toward art for art's sake, with its emphasis on formal elements, and traditional American realism that lent itself to practice by artists like Homer. In this way, I take issue in this dissertation with the stark separation between realism and aestheticism, particularly in the years immediately following the Civil War.

In doing so, I explore a common point of confusion regarding aestheticism, particularly the ways that the highly philosophical and esoteric ideas that developed in the later writings around art-for-art's-sake connect with the more practical, everyday suggestions regarding decorative arts and objects and their inclusion in one's home. Another path developed alongside this extreme expression of aestheticism, wherein cultural critics and writers adopted an interest in beauty as a way of addressing some of

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[44] David E. Shi, *Facing Facts: Realism and Thought in American Culture, 1850-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.
[45] Walter Pater, *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 190.

the social problems associated with the growing Industrial Revolution in England. Several writers looked to art to effect social change, in many ways co-opting the ideas of aestheticism to their own use. John Ruskin and William Morris, for example, who heralded the return to an era before industrialization, championing handcrafted objects over machine innovations. For both Ruskin and Morris, the ideal artistic situation was that of the Middle Ages, when artisans created beautiful things for all to appreciate. Important to this conception was Ruskin's vision of a craftsman's workshop, where artisans worked together to create individually satisfying work that was beneficial to the group as a whole. Another school of thought developed through the shared art curriculum that began at the South Kensington school and that came to be taught at government-supported art schools throughout England. This South Kensington school embraced the innovations that were possible through the use of the machine, seeing it as a way to bring high-quality design to everyone and thus extend the social influence that became associated with the Aesthetic Movement. These schools drew from the same aesthetic philosophies as aestheticism, which privileged exposure to beauty, but in this later manifestation there was a stronger emphasis on a connection to morality, as art or artistic and decorative objects were often credited with moral or inspirational powers. In many ways, this belief in the moral power of art led to a push for the use of arts by a wider audience, resulting in an increase in the production and display of decorative objects and the rise of interior design as a field of study and practice. This adaptation of the ideas of aestheticism to a more practical, social use led to the widespread celebration of beauty that came to characterize the Aesthetic Movement.

As part of this movement, cultural writers encouraged their readers to display objects as a way to surround themselves with beauty, resulting in a better and more civilized life. The British writer Matthew Arnold likewise espoused the importance for "civilized people" to be motivated by a desire to improve the common good. In his influential text *Culture and Anarchy*, first published in 1869, Arnold discussed his solutions to what he saw as "our present difficulties." The solution, he summarized in the preface, should be the pursuit of culture, which he defined as

> a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.[46]

Arnold saw culture as an equalizer, thus promoting the dissolution of classes and pursuit of culture by all men, not just a given elite. "[Culture] seeks to do away with classes," he wrote, "to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, – nourished, and not bound by them."[47] Arnold's theories marked a shift in social writing, one that embraced the study of cultured pursuits such as art and literature as a means of diminishing what he saw as an increasing rift between the cultured elite and the working classes. The seemingly democratic nature of Arnold's theories appealed to Americans who, on the surface, were concerned with providing equal access and opportunity to all citizens, not just those of

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[46] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1869), viii.
[47] Ibid., 49.

the elite class. But, as we will see, in practice this was not always the case, as individual concerns for developing an elite civilization often obscured this push for democratization.

With the translation of aestheticism to the United States, this elitist perspective aligned with the upper-class agenda that was gaining force in the post-Civil War era, carrying implications in terms of racial, gender and class dominance. Art functioned within this agenda as the upper-class white men who made up the ranks of American intellectuals searched for ways to connect a moral sensibility to art. Shi has argued that in contrast to this elitist sensibility, realists developed a "language of rebellion against the genteel elite governing American taste," which was used to "express their disdain for the prevailing modes of idealism dominating thought and expression."[48] This realist language was meant to promote a democratic sensibility, which gave equal exposure to all elements of society, not just the ideals of a few.

Homer's wide choice of subject matter, particularly during the 1870s, lent itself to this democratic definition, because he paid equal attention to subjects along the spectrum of gender, racial and class lines. This variety has been crucial to defining Homer's realism as reflective of contemporary life. Such an interpretation draws from the straightforward definition of realism in works such as Linda Nochlin's concise history of the movement *Realism*. She begins her study by defining Realism's aim "to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."[49] She argues, among other things, that the representation of contemporary subjects in a style that emphasized the truth of

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[48] Shi, *Facing Facts: Realism and Thought in American Culture, 1850-1920*, 6.
[49] Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971; reprint, 1990), 13.

representation was fundamental to the Realist project.[50] This contemporaneity separated Realism from the history painting that had dominated the French art world to this point. She acknowledges, though, that there is often a separation between the representation of realism and the reality of what is represented. This disconnect was often used by artists in late-nineteenth century America to challenge the understanding of the representation of reality, a fact that Michael Leja explores in *Looking Askance*.[51]

For Homer studies, this means that the contemporary critical praise of his work as seemingly truthfully American is often unraveled with closer examination of his treatment of the figures or landscape. While they certainly fall within the parameters of realism, I explore here the ways that they break from that realist tradition, turning to aestheticism as an alternative approach to modern American subjects. In many ways, this involves moving beyond the subject to explore the means of representation and expression that Homer employs. This method draws from the work of Michael Fried, whose *Courbet's Realism*, for example, provides an early reassessment of realism by using close examination to uncover additional meaning within the works themselves.[52] By considering the contexts in which Homer worked, including his participation in the cultural machine that was created and manipulated by the elite classes, I explore how these realistic subjects fit within a larger cultural and aesthetic agenda.

The leaders of this movement often promoted the exposure to art, beauty and other forms of culture as an equalizer, too, particularly during the later Aesthetic Movement. This challenged realism's hold on democratic representation and opened the

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[50]Ibid.
[51] *Michael Leja, Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp (Berkeley, Cal.: Univeristy of California Press, 2004).*
[52] *Michael Fried, Courbet's Realism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).*

way for aestheticism to function in this arena as well. This approach also shifts the focus of American aestheticism from the decorative objects that have been the primary focus of scholarship on the Aesthetic Movement since the major exhibition on the movement *In Pursuit of Beauty*.[53] The catalog's encyclopedic review of the American response to ideas associated with the British movement, devoted much need attention to the America decorative arts, furniture design, and other material elements, with supporting chapters devoted to the cultural context, and its influences in American literature. Doreen Bolger Burke devotes a chapter to the painters and sculptors of the period, arguing painting was secondary to the decorative interests of the movement, and that artists responded by creating decorative objects, depicting them in their paintings as incorporate decorative elements "the effects of line, color and shape," into their works.[54] She likewise associates the challenge to the traditional, more conservative art establishment and a rise in alternative media – such as watercolor and printmaking with the Aesthetic Movement. Jonathan Freedman explores the writings of the American Aesthetic Movement in his contribution, "An Aesthetics of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," which elucidates the connections between American writers of the nineteenth century and their British counterparts.[55] Roger Stein sets the cultural context for the importation of the movement in "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement

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[53] Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).
[54] Doreen Bolger Burke, "Painters and Sculptors in a Decorative Age," in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 295.
[55] Jonathan Freedman, "An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1986), 385-99.

in Its American Cultural Context.[56] While taken together, these chapters provide an important overview of the American interest in the Aesthetic Movement and the artists who participated in these trends, there are limitations to their approach. Both Burke and Freedman focus on foreign influences on American art at the time, which discounts the domestically based debates that helped to foster the rise of support for European ideas.[57]

Other scholars of the Aesthetic Movement have followed the lead of the writers in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, looking to the Centennial as the launch of the Aesthetic Movement in the United States and concentrating primarily on the fifteen years following the Centennial exhibition as the peak of the Aesthetic Movement in the United States. The Centennial Exhibition included tremendous displays by the British, which included beautiful decorative objects and exposed Britain as the center of aesthetic production at the time. Scholars have argued that this exhibition, followed by Oscar Wilde's speaking tour through America in 1882, provided the impetus needed to propel the American public to embrace the decorative craze that was well underway in Britain and France. In part, scholars have associated this with Americans' desire to compete artistically with their European colleagues and to validate their existence on the international artistic front by adopting European ideas.[58]

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[56] Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," 23-51.

[57] Jonathan Freedman does recognize a symbiotic relationship among literary figures in the period, claiming that there was an exchange of ideas across the Atlantic, but this does not carry over into Art, where the lead is given to the European painters and casts the Americans as followers primarily. Freedman, "An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," 386.

[58] *The Quest for Unity: American Art between World's Fairs, 1876-1893*, (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983); *The American Renaissance, 1876-1917*, (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, distributed by Pantheon Books, 1979); Mary W. Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), Griffin, *Homer, Eakins, & Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the*

While it is noticeably true that Americans became increasingly involved in the issues brought on by the Aesthetic Movement after the Centennial, the artistic ideas which the movement championed were prevalent in artistic debate earlier in the century. Americans developed their own aesthetic theories and ideals that were equally influential as those presented by the British at the 1876 Centennial exhibition. In the era leading up to the Centennial, though, some Americans looked to the British example when creating their own cultural institutions and building a cultural environment that would foster creativity and the enjoyment of art. Like Elizabeth Prettejohn's reconsideration of aestheticism in *Art for Art's Sake*, which shifts the development of aestheticism to the study of painting from the late 1860s and early 1870s, this dissertation focuses on an earlier American aestheticism that emerged in American painting during the years following the Civil War.[59] It was these ideas and discussions regarding art, truth, and beauty that took hold during the early 1870s, and later provided a fertile ground for the introduction of the Aesthetic Movement on a larger scale at the Centennial. Therefore, as part of examining the context in which Homer became interested in aestheticism, this dissertation develops a storyline of the emergence of aestheticism in the United States in the decade between the end of the Civil War and the Centennial Exhibition.

The first two chapters focus on defining the issues of aestheticism that emerged in the 1860s, during Homer's formative years. In Chapter One, I connect Homer to his

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Gilded Age, Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), Mancini, *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show*, Kathleen A. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America*. Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern Art in America 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[59] Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*.

friend, the writer and painter Eugene Benson, during the years immediately following the Civil war until the early 1870s. Homer's early works such as *The Initials* and *Waverley Oaks* lace figures in a carefully constructed natural scene, thereby connecting these works to pre-Civil War ideas regarding aesthetic beauty, morality and nature. By considering these works within the context of critical and aesthetic writing of the period, particularly that of Benson, I place Homer in the midst of the nascent American aestheticism developing from in these early years. When viewed in light of the early writings of aestheticism, there is a new sensibility to these works, moving away from the nature-laden aesthetic of the mid-century. I contrast these works to Homer's Civil War paintings and suggest social and cultural reasons why Homer turned to both realist and aestheticist works in his work beginning in these early years.

Chapter Two examines Homer's early exposure to aestheticism, including an awareness of Aesthetic paintings at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. This chapter also explores the stylistic influences reflected in his work, including the early aesthetic paintings of James McNeil Whistler. I argue that ultimately Homer carefully crafted his presentation of aesthetic paintings to create a type of painting that combined the idealism and beauty of aestheticism with a sense of realistic observation. This combination created works of art that maintained a restorative and elevating power amidst the commonalities of modern democracy. Since many of these early aesthetic works depict female figures, I likewise consider the gender implications of Homer's work in this vein.

Chapter Three examines Homer's aestheticism around the year 1875 when he began exhibiting aestheticist works in the more public arenas of the National Academy of

Design exhibition and the American Watercolor Society. In this chapter, the critical response to Homer's work plays an increased role as a gauge of the ways that aestheticism progressed in America. I examine the tensions that emerged in Homer's work and life during the middle part of the 1870s and through the rest of the decade – tensions that grew from a need to ground his paintings with moral and realistic overtones while simultaneously exploring issues of ideal beauty that developed in the aestheticist debate.

Chapter 4 continues the examination of Homer's interest in aestheticism and design by looking at Homer's tile production from the late 1870s. This chapter explores precedents as well as contemporary uses of tiles and other decorative arts in relationship to Homer's work from this period. It likewise examines the implications of the subjects that Homer used in these new experimental works. I argue that Homer's work in this vein functioned within a complete decorative scheme that reflected the patrons' morals and social fashioning.

Chapter One

The Theoretical Basis for Aestheticism 1865-1867

Winslow Homer began exhibiting paintings at the National Academy of Design in 1863. In the first four years of his exhibitions there, he primarily presented Civil War themes, including a pair of oil paintings that would come to represent his work for many years to come: *The Bright Side* of 1865 (Figure 7) and *Prisoners from the Front* (Figure 8) of 1866.[1] Eugene Benson, Homer's friend and fellow artist, considered the paintings as complements, praising them together, as "a comprehensive epitome of the leading facts of our war."[2] Homer must have agreed as he submitted them together as his representation to the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Both paintings received significant attention from the art critics, with *Prisoners from the Front* in particular meeting tremendous acclaim, and adding to Homer's rising reputation for capturing the realities of American life through simple, straightforward compositions.

Both paintings depict Civil War themes. In *The Bright Side*, Homer portrays five army teamsters, four of whom are resting in camp, hats pulled down over their eyes, backs leaning against the tent. The fifth figure's head emerges from the tent with a pipe in his mouth, engaging the viewer directly as if the viewer has interrupted him, or called out to him. Their charges, the horses, also rest in the background to the left of the figures. *Prisoners from the Front* depicts the surrender of several Confederate soldiers to

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[1] Lucretia Giese first addresses these paintings as a pair in Lucretia Giese, "Winslow Homer: 'Best Chronicler of the War'," in *Winslow Homer: A Symposium*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky, *Studies in the History of Art* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990).
[2] Ibid., 28.

a Union general, identified as General Francis Channing Barlow.[3] In *Prisoners from the Front*, the tension between groups is laid out on the canvas through the stance and demeanor of the figures, a visual representation of the contentious North-South relations that were being debated in the writings of the day. In *The Bright Side*, the northern viewer engages the gaze of the teamster, who could be seen as challenging the northern viewer to consider his place within the changing social environment of the Reconstruction, a fact confirmed by contemporary reactions to the painting.[4]

Alongside Civil War themed paintings, in 1865 Homer exhibited *The Initials* (Figure 9), a small painting depicting a fashionably dressed young woman standing in a pine grove. The painting measures sixteen by twelve inches, an intimate size that forced the viewed to consider the painting quite closely. The title gives the viewer a clue as to what she sees, initials carved into the trunk of the tree, which the young woman traces with her fingers. Though most are unseen from our vantage point, we do see two initials under a heart to the left on the trunk, with the crossed swords of the cavalry insignia above. Lucretia Giese has noted that *The Initials* not only relates to several of Homer's paintings from the period, including *The Red Feather*, and *October Evening* (Figures 10 & 11), but also to the works of several of Homer's colleagues including the writer and painter Eugene Benson and the American Pre-Raphaelite painter, William John Hennessey. Giese concludes, though, that while there are visual similarities here, Homer's painting was essentially about the effects of the Civil War on women at home,

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[3] Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "Winslow Homer's "Prisoners from the Front"," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 12 (1977).
[4] Giese, "Winslow Homer: 'Best Chronicler of the War'" has a full discussion of the published commentary on Homer's painting.

as this young woman "pines" about the soldier whom she has lost to the war.[5] In this way, the figure in *The Initials* serves as another character type, the woman who dealt with the war in her own way.[6] The fact that Homer exhibited *The Initials* alongside *Pitching Quoits* (Figure 12) and *The Bright Side* (Figure 7) supports this conclusion. Alongside his larger canvases at the 1865 exhibition, these images told a complete story of the war – the activities that soldiers participated in during their leisure time, the African American teamsters in *The Bright Side*, and the young woman who has lost her friend or lover in *The Initials*. The Civil war context seems to have been lost on the critics, few of which commented on the picture at all.[7]

One critic did notice this work, but disapproved of the painting, commenting that with it, Homer "laid aside his native force and simplicity, and made an effort such as all young artists make once, at least, and which some have made over and over again, until I, for one, am weary of it. It is the girl in the pork-pie hat who mediates alone in the bosom of nature." [8] This critic highlights several elements that link this work to aestheticism. He sees it as being contrary to the native subjects that Homer had painted, though he is not specific in what foreign influences might have affected the painting. And he suggests that there is something beyond the simple figure in the pine woods. He does connect Homer's representation of this enigmatic woman in *The Initials* specifically to the work of Homer's friend and colleague, commenting "To Mr. Eugene Benson alone is this

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[5] Lucretia Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works," *American Art Journal* 18, no. 3 (1986): 4.
[6] Giese notes the connections that this work had to Homer's *Trooper Meditating Beside a Grave* (c. 1865), which depicts a solder standing in a similarly wooded scene, looking down at a marked grave.
[7] Giese argues that "critics ignored or did not recognize *The Initials* wartime association" Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works," 12.
[8] "Academy of Design," *New York Leader* XI, no. 22: 1.

pensive young lady, who has roved through the National Academic groves and moors some three years, now indebted for a companion."[9] Benson's paintings from this period were characterized by this pensive young woman, often placed in a natural setting. In *Pensive Moment* (Figure 13), for example, Benson painted a young woman seated on a porch bench. She holds her hand to her face, her head is tilted down. She does not engage the viewer – her face is turned away from the picture plane, barely visible – nor is she engaged with anything in the painting. She merely sits, lost in thought. Another critic defined this type in Benson's work *Fading Days* as "a lady in blue, lolling in a chair beside a window, evidently devoured by ennui, and wishing to heavens some one would drop in."[10] Several themes emerge in this commentary, themes that are familiar to the early aesthetic painting, which was characterized by contemplative female figures, seen often alone in settings that give little context to set a moral or narrative tone within the picture. These aesthetically leaning paintings emerge in the 1860s, well before the "introduction" of the Aesthetic Movement to the United States in the late 1870s. This chapter, therefore, sets the cultural context for the emergence of aestheticism through an exploration of Homer's early non-Civil War paintings from this period alongside related theoretical writings that explore concepts of beauty and aesthetics.

A theory of early aestheticism emerges from this discussion in which Homer actively engaged during these early years of his career. There is a strong emphasis in this chapter on the theorectical bases for aestheticism among American writers and cultural elite, a group in which Homer aspired to be included, and to which he was bound through his work in publishing as well as his associations within the art world. This chapter

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[9] Ibid.
[10] "National Academy of Design; West Room Sculpture Room," *New York Times*, 27 June 1865, 5.

explores the translation of European theoretical issues to the United States through the writing of art critics and in practice by American painters. We will see that the translation of these ideas into the United States incorporated aesthetic theories from both France and Britain. The aestheticism that emerged was a specifically American one that developed through a reshaping of ideas and practices imported from abroad.

In the years between the end of the Civil War and the turn-of-the-decade, American art writers showed an awareness of the developments of aestheticism in England. Articles on art for art's sake began appearing in the United States as early as 1865. American journals published articles that had originally been printed abroad, ranging from theoretical articles about art to poems published by the figures associated with British Aestheticism. American writers also began to adopt the language used by foreign writers, not only when reporting on the arts activities of Europe, but also to describe American artists of the time. This chapter explores these writings from American publications to assess the American understanding of aestheticism in its early stages. I then turn to early works by Winslow Homer to show how he engaged with this new direction in American art from its beginnings.

Considering art for art's sake was the basic theory underlying the development of aestheticism, I begin by exploring the use of this term and related ideas in American writing. The earliest appearance in the United States of the term art for art's sake was the 1865 republication of the moralist Frances Power Cobbe's "The Hierarchy of Art," in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*.[11] The essay had originally appeared in the British *Fraser's Magazine*, and addressed art's relationship to beauty and morality at

[11] Francis Power Cobbe, "The Hierarchy of Art. Part 2," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature (1844-1898)* 1, no. 6 (1865): 678-89.

length.[12] Cobbe had been the first to suggest a translation of the French term "*l'art pour l'art*" into the English phrase art for art's sake" and to use the term in a general theoretical sense.[13] She wrote, "Poetry, Music, Sculpture, and Painting, can and ought always to be exercised purely for their own sakes and not for any ulterior purpose. The rule of *de l'Art pour l'Art* is clear and literal as regards them."[14] She continued by introducing theoretical problems that were central to the development of aestheticism, particularly the primary role that Beauty should play in the Arts:

> The *Beautiful* is an end in itself, the true and only end of Art. The *Good*, indeed, and the *True* are so inseparably linked with the *Beautiful* that every work really attaining the Beautiful must partake of Truth and Goodness… When any artist attempts to do so, and makes a poem or picture whose main purpose is to develop scientific facts or enforce moral lessons, the result is an inferior and imperfect work of Art.[15]

Cobbe addressed each of the arts separately, but placed particular emphasis on painting, which she described as "the last great Art – the embodiment of the beauty revealed in nature both through Form and Color…."[16] She further connected the formal qualities of painting with the aim of creating beautiful paintings, using language that Sidney Colvin would use two years later in his discussion of British painting.[17] While Cobbe's use of these theoretical issues predated the development of aestheticism, the key artists associated with the movement, particularly those in Rossetti's circle, were likely was

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[12] The article originally appeared in the January 1865 issue of *Fraser's Magazine*.
[13] An excerpt from Hegel's *Aesthetics* was published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1867, and an article on French Aesthetics appeared in 1866, featuring the term "l'art pour l'art." The term had previously been used in English to discuss French poetry. See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008), 31.
[14] Cobbe, "The Hierarchy of Art. Part 2," 678.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.: 686.
[17] Sidney Colvin, "English Painters and Painters in 1867," *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 2, (1867).

aware of her article, as William Rossetti served as the arts editor of *Fraser's Magazine* at the time Cobbe's essay was originally published. Other British writers also were concerned with the same theoretical issues as Cobbe, as seen in the lecture, "Elementary Principles of Art," published in the British *MacMillan's Magazine*. Here, John Robert Seeley suggested that the underlying principle of Art is that it exists for pleasure, arguing further that "all works of art which have a practical purpose are not properly works of Art."[18] We see here a reaction against the practical, often socially focused art of Realism, a shift that was likewise seen in the art of the artists who would come to be associated with aestheticism.

American artists and writers were also looking for ways that they could make art relevant, and they drew from these ideas that were circulating among the British writers. Henry Tuckerman, for example, quoted from Seeley in the 1867 history of American art, *Book of the Artists: American Artists and Life*: "Not by thinking about it will any one find out beauty; but a sensibility that is weak may be strengthened, and one that is confused may be cleared and purified. Now, the way to make one's perceptions clear in Art is to consider carefully what Art is in general; what is its object; under what conditions it works, and what may be expected of it."[19] Tuckerman set out to establish the role of art in America, in a time when artists and others set out to justify and support the development of art and arts institutions, the result of which would create a "civilized metropolis," in Tuckerman's words.[20]

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[18] J.R. Seeley, "Elementary Principles of Art. A Lecture," *MacMillan's Magazine* XVI, (May 1867).
[19] Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists:* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Son, 1867), x.
[20] Ibid., 11.

The early publication and adaptation of these British writings reinforced Americans' interest in innovative developments in British painting as a model for their own revival of artistic efforts. Artists and writers sought to define American art and its role in society, both of which developed out of the dramatic shifts in American lifestyles within Homer's lifetime. From a social perspective, Americans shifted from an agrarian, small town life to an industrial, urban one. Culturally, Americans became more diverse, with significant differences in the types of people who were living in American cities. And overall, the Civil War challenged and questioned lifestyles and ideals that had been the basis of America's development as a young nation. A complex response to these cultural and social changes developed, with some Americans choosing to separate and ignore the changes in American life, and others stepping right into the hierarchical divide. In this case, the urban elite often tried to control the urban masses, which were becoming increasingly made up of immigrants and "country bumpkins."[21] One way to maintain control was to develop and support cultural institutions that were not accessible to the lower classes. For upper- and upper-middle class men, these organizations were necessary to nurture the developing American culture for the relatively young country. This culture encompassed a sophisticated lifestyle including an appreciation of literature and the arts that was based on a European precedent, and promoted the advancement of

[21] For an overview of these social and cultural shifts, see the following: Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism; Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1973), Michael Broyles, *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven: Yale Univeristy Press, 1992), David S Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1988), Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over the Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1990), Lewis Perry, *Boats against the Current: American Culture between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

an American civilization. These ideals became the foundation for arts and cultural organizations founded in New York during this period, many of which established missions to create a cultured nation with art playing a pivotal role. The Century Association, whose membership included some of the most important artists, literati and businessmen of the time, became a driving force in American literary and artistic culture. It was described by Daniel Huntington, president of the Century from 1879 to 1895, on the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary:

> The purpose to associate men eminent in the various professions and walks of life by the bond of a love for art and literature was a noble one. The sensuous element, good in its place as a promoter of genial good-fellowship, it was intended to keep subordinate to the stimulus of exchange of ideas, and the cultivation of knowledge and taste. Let the pleasures of a cheerful conviviality be held in subservience to the higher object, and the society of accomplished men in every branch of learning, art, and letters give a tone of refinement and thoughtfulness to conversation, and add vigor grace, and charm to our daily lives.[22]

The goal was to help foster a refined lifestyle, one that reflected and effected the civilization being established by these "accomplished men." The Century, a club that was joined by invitation and thus carried with it the exclusivity of membership, provided a space that was separated from the general public – a place where the elite could refine the ideals that they hoped to establish for the country.[23]

While these clubs were exclusive, the ideals that they espoused were not. In fact, the American elite of this period believed it was their duty to cultivate these ideals amongst the general public, and art became a crucial vehicle for this. In the cornerstone

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[22] Daniel Huntington, "Address," in *The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Century and the Adoption of Its Constitution* (New York: The Century Association, 1897), 31.

[23] For more on the club culture of the period and its associations with aestheticism, see Sylvia Yount, "Give the People What They Want: The American Aesthetic Movement, Art Worlds, and Consumer Culture 1876-1890" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

ceremony for the construction of the new National Academy of Design building in 1864, various speakers addressed the role assigned to art in creating a cultured life. Parke Godwin proposed that art should not be seen as "a frivolous pastime" but instead as reflective of the highest pursuits of the "best minds." And while art served to amuse and delight the viewer, "it elevates while it amuses; … it enobles us through that delight; it instructs us, but it informs us, or forms us inwardly, while it instructs."[24] There was a push to make art relevant to all Americans through its ability to to move beyond evoking pleasure and joy to providing a way to elevate one's cultured stature. From this early stage, we see the emergence of aestheticism, where the pleasing qualities of beauty were paramount, being combined with instructional power, a role for art that Americans were reluctant to relinquish.

Artists were a key factor in this instruction, as they were seen as "among those who specially devote themselves to the study of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True; and his creations open to us glimpses into the ideal world."[25] The artist was the interpreter, the one who brought the ideal to the general public. And in turn, as Henry Bellows argued these ideals would bring about "a better and more truly civilized, patriotic, and refined crowd than it could be without them [works of art]."[26] Such was the philosophy behind the establishment of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, founded in 1870, and charged with "encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the

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[24] Thomas Seir Cummings, *Historical Annals of the National Academy of Design* (Philadelphia: G. W. Childs, 1865), 340.
[25] The Honorable George Bancroft in address at the dedication of the new National Academy of design. Quoted in Ibid., 341.
[26] Henry Bellows quoted in Ibid., 343-44.

application of arts to manufacture and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction."[27]

In formulating their thoughts and ideas, Americans were in the habit of looking to their European counterparts who had articulated ideas surrounding the role of art in creating social change. First and foremost for Americans was John Ruskin, whose popularity and influence was widespread, particularly in the antebellum years.[28] Ruskin's theories, particularly those that were promoted in the United States, endorsed the study of nature through direct observation. Artists could identify the truth of nature and its moral message through this study and the resulting artwork. Ruskin had appealed to many Americans who continued to be skeptical about the ways in which art should function in a still relatively new democracy. Ruskin's popularity was based on his combination of art, nature and religion, a connection that was particularly attractive to the American audience.

Ruskin's importance in promoting the upper class agenda – that art should serve this moralizing function – can be seen best in the compilations of his works published by John Wiley, *The True and the Beautiful in Nature, Art, Morals, and Religion* (1859), *Precious Thoughts: Moral and Religious, Gathered from the Works of John Ruskin* (1866). Both volumes were edited by Louisa C. Tuthill, the daughter of an affluent New Haven merchant whose husband, Cornelius Tuthill was a lawyer, minister and literary

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[27] Charter of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, State of New York, Laws of 1870, Chapter 197, passed April 13, 1870 and amended L.1898, ch. 34; L. 1908, ch. 219. Quoted on http://www.metmuseum.org/visitor/faq_hist.htm.

[28] For a complete examination of Ruskin's influence in America, see Roger Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

figure, well established among the cultural elite of New Haven before his death in 1825.[29] Tuthill's choice of excerpts from Ruskin's writings speaks volumes to the agenda that the elite classes set for art and its role in society, particularly given that Ruskin had become so popular and fashionable in America. The excerpts emphasize the moral over the artistic, stressing Ruskin's love of nature and his religious importance.[30]

The cultural elite, such as those who were members of organizations like the Century Association and the National Academy, both of which Homer became a member during the 1860s, believed it was their duty to provide the cultural markers and morality lessons through whatever means possible. The publication of popular magazines of the time, such as *Scribner's*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *Appleton's Journal*, filled this role, reaching a wider audience than the art going public. These journals published literary stories and editorials that provided their readers with examples of how to act in certain morally uncertain scenarios.[31] As a prolific and talented illustrator, Homer was an important player in this presentation to the journal readers.

While American intellectuals continued to view arts and culture as important to the moral elevation of American life, there were several ways that this attention changed after the Civil War, marking a shift in ideology that directed American artists, the public, and the critics toward an appreciation for aestheticism and eventually the Aesthetic Movement. In this regard, published articles about the arts became a major force in

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[29] Lisa Koenigsberg, "Arbiter of Taste: Mrs. L. C. Tuthill and the Tradition of American Women Writers on Architecture, 1848-1913," in *From Amateur to Professional: American Women and Career in the Arts*, ed. Lois Marie Fink (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988). Sarah Allaback, "The Writings of Louisa Tuthill: Cultivating Architectural Taste in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992).
[30] Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900*, 94.
[31] The most complete history of American magazines is Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938).

elevating Americans' cultural awareness. This happened in several ways. First, coverage of the arts became more widespread as attention to art moved beyond small-circulation, specifically targeted journals like the *Crayon*, which had been dedicated exclusively to the arts, and became featured in the weekly and monthly magazines as well as daily newspapers. This change was crucial to the development of a wider audience for art. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the story of aestheticism, the focus of the arts rhetoric shifted away from Nature as the root of beauty to a focus on art itself as the embodiment of beauty.

These emerging ideas related to aestheticism also influenced Eugene Benson, whose writings from the late 1860s reflected this drive for cultural development. He argued intensely that American writing had lost what he called "the literary spirit," as it was made to serve other purposes. While his criticism was aimed primarily at American writers, and particularly the publishing industry associated with popular journals, Benson made tangential reference to the fine arts as falling victim to the same trends as the literary arts. He attacked magazine contributors for lacking "the daring to express life; the artistic sense of the beautiful to protect us from the defilements of reality, and keep us from ignoble subjects; the independence which comes from moral strength." He expressed concern that in these popular manifestations of the literary art, "the aesthetic sense, and the idea of literature vitalized by anything but knowledge has no place in their philosophy."[32] He defined great writers in contrast to this philosophy in their ability and desire "to move us," rather than instruct. He continued, "We are inert, we are indifferent to the beauty of familiar things, everything is commonplace and matter-of-fact to us; but great writers come to brighten the dull face of an old truth and refresh us with the beauty

[32] Eugene Benson, "About the Literary Spirit," *The Galaxy* 1, no. 6 (1866): 487.

that custom has made stale to us."[33] Benson's theory suggests the beginnings of a shift away from the instructive, realist art toward the morally elevating elements of beauty, which evoke emotions and move the viewer to new ideal truths.

Benson's comments resemble those of Sidney Colvin whose 1867 essay defined the emerging characteristics associated with aestheticism, as discussed in the introduction.[34] Colvin encouraged painters to move away from the commonplace, or dull subjects of contemporary life in order to present a stronger representation of beauty through painting. In both theories, engaging the viewer in the work of art became a crucial role for the artists, whose powers to see beyond the everyday and draw out the beauty of a scene would become critical in the theories of aestheticism. Benson's essay was published in July 1866 – over a year before Colvin's essay appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*. We see that in both the United States and England there was an interest in moving beyond the realism and observation prescribed by John Ruskin and practiced by the Pre-Raphaelites. Both young writers were looking to develop a new sense of how art, whether it be literary or visual, should function within the realm of cultural development.

Benson had been developing these ideas since the early part of the 1860s. He embarked on a career as a painter in 1856 with his study at the National Academy of Design, where he also exhibited regularly from 1858 to 1870. He began writing to supplement his income, eventually becoming the regular, though anonymous, art critic for the *Round Table*, a New York weekly magazine, as well as the *New York Evening*

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[33] Ibid.: 488.
[34] Colvin, "English Painters and Painters in 1867."

Post.[35] He published art criticism that exhibited an awareness of the most contemporary trends in European art, as well as social commentary that addressed the development of culture in the United States. He began writing regularly for the *Galaxy* when the journal began publication in 1866. Here, his writings were openly critical of what he viewed as the closed and prudish qualities of American culture, often singling out key figures in the literary world. These early writings pointed to a strong connection between literature and painting, suggesting that both should serve as a means of expressing the cultural progress of American society.

Benson's theories are important to defining Homer's exposure to the emerging aestheticism, as the two men were closely connected in the late 1860s. Scholars have previously identified a close connection between the two men, suggesting that Benson's commentary can stand in place of Homer's thoughts to explain Homer's paintings – particularly in relation to a developing Modernism in the United States.[36] The two artists knew each other well – both lived in the New York Studio Building during these years, and the *New York Evening Post* reported on the closeness of the two artists: "Each has learned through years of friendly intercourse something from the other…. A something, you scarce know what, in their pictures show that they have painted side by side, and

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[35] Reviews and art articles were mostly published anonymously in the *Round Table*. From the language and other similarities, Robert Scholnick has concluded that Benson was the art critic at the *Round Table* until 1866, when he also started regularly publishing at *The Galaxy*. Robert J. Scholnick, "Between Realism and Romanticism: The Curious Career of Eugene Benson," *American Literary Realism* 14, no. Autumn (1981): 242-61.
[36] Nicolai Cikovsky, "School of War," in *Winslow Homer*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 28-30. Lucretia Giese also links Homer's *The Initials* to Benson's *Pensive Moment*, among other similar paintings from this period in her article Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works.".

reveal to you that they are friends."[37] Previous scholars not only have noticed the similarities between these two artists' work from this period, but also have focused on Benson's writing as the basis for study of how Homer's art created a democratic, American art. These earlier studies privileged French precedents for this development in American art. Benson's early writings, however, complicated this focus on French influences and indicate both artists' awareness of the emerging aestheticism in Britain.

As the anonymous critic for *The Round Table*, Benson promoted the types of painting that he admired, and he repeatedly looked to young, emerging artists such as Homer to bring about a much needed change in American art. While Benson looked to European art for examples and models, he fervently supported American artists who showed the least influence of foreign art.[38] He described American art as being "more or less characterized by grace, refinement, love for reality and the human. Common and familiar facts in life and nature have been invested with poetic charm by them, and in their works feeling for the sensuously beautiful has predominated…. The pure, the refined, and the intellectual are characteristic of American art and of American genius."[39] As we will see, though, this wholehearted support for American artists as uniquely American was often complicated by Benson's use of foreign examples for Americans to emulate. A tension evolved around how to use the European example and how to make it truly American. Among the other things that Benson defined for American art, his highlight of the American love for realism was important in defining American art for this post-Civil war era. Realism was something that Americans believed in

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[37] "Interesting Exhibition," *New York Evening Post*, 16 November 1866. It is quite probable that this reporter was Benson, who was known to write art criticism for the *Evening Post* during this period. See Cikovsky, "School of War," 28.
[38] "American Genius as Expressed in Art," *The Round Table*. 1, no. 2 (1863): 21.
[39] Ibid.

wholeheartedly; they saw it as necessary to ground art with a touch of reality, even if there was something unrealistic about it.

While he praised these qualities in American art, Benson eventually concluded that "thus far there has been an absence of passion, of great emotional elements without which art can never embody the greatest…. Passion in art or literature or music implies the presence of magnificent imaginative power allied with great energy, and is required to destroy littleness and confirm progress."[40] This lack of passion limited American art and not until America matured would American art be able to "expect a great and impassioned dramatic painter, until then we must be content with such artists as we now call American – very perfect, very genuine, but not the highest."[41] There was an underlying question here in Benson's writing – how does the artist connect this call for passion and emotional elements with the straightforward realism that Americans loved so much. This dynamic would find itself at the center of the development of American aestheticism.

Benson's assertion that art can evoke the sense or feeling of the elevation to an ideal relied on the same Kantian aesthetic concepts in which British writers showed concurrent interest. It expressed a desire for American art to be better or greater than what was currently being created – an art that would create a culture that rivaled Europe. To encourage his readers, Benson suggested that Americans just needed to be patient, for "France had to wait until the nineteenth century for Delacroix and Gerome and Doré; England had to wait until the nineteenth century for Turner and Millais and Hunt and

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

Rossetti."[42] America, he argued, had not yet matured to create the passion and drama of great art, which he identified here in the works of a variety of European artists ranging from French Romantics to a number of British artists, including some associated with emerging aestheticism.

The idea that art could function in this way – as an agent for connecting to the viewer and affecting him or her in a multitude of ways, was not new to American art. Painters and writers had written of this agency in the antebellum period as the emergence of art criticism allowed for wider documentation and discussion of these ideas.[43] Much of this early criticism began in targeted publications such as the *Crayon*, which served as the printed authority on artistic ideas in the 1850s. Editorially, the *Crayon* established an understanding of the role that art could play in the elevation of American society. Not only did the *Crayon* publish some of the first American art criticism, but it also established the beginnings of aestheticism in the United States. It was particularly influential in promoting the idea of Beauty and its place not only within the broader American cultural development but also in the development of American art and aestheticism. In the opening editorial of the *Crayon*, editors William James Stillman and John Durand outlined the goals of the journal, setting up the elements that would become crucial in the development of a debate surrounding the national style of painting that

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Margaret Conrads outlines the critical developments in relation to Homer's work in her Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Randall C. Griffin, *Homer, Eakins, & Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the Gilded Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), xx-xxi, J. M. Mancini, *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

developed over the next ten years.[44] They wrote, "In the midst of a great commercial crisis, while fortunes of years' growth have been falling around us, and the panic-stricken world of business has been gathering in its resources, to save what it may from wreck, an effort has been organized, having for its object the education of our countrymen to the perception and enjoyment of Beauty."[45] Referring to the economic decline of the 1850s, the editors of *The Crayon* believed that Americans would be much better served by learning to value "Beauty" over the materialism that had come to characterize the achievements of Americans. "So Art," they wrote, "which is Beauty's gospel, lies inert under the cold necessities of a national childhood, and the cares and storms of a political first existence… Beauty deep-rooted in every *human* mind, is its [Art's] vitality, and it must therefore live."[46]

They further proposed that Art was the means of spreading the message of the importance of Beauty, a lesson that would counterbalance the inevitable digressions and stumbles of a young nation. Yet ultimately, the return to an appreciation of Art and Beauty would "widen our sympathies and unite us by a common delight… [I]n the perception of the great harmonies of nature, they would become tranquilized and elevated."[47] The agenda for the magazine thus became to elevate the American public by educating them on the merits and elevating factors of Beauty – a process that relied on

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[44] William James Stillman had studied landscape painting with Frederick Church in the late 1840s before studying in England where he befriended John Ruskin, Turner, and the Pre-Raphaelite painters. He was a member of the National Academy of Design and spent summers during the 1850s in the Adirondacks with his literary friends, including Longfellow and Emerson. John Durand was the son of Asher B. Durand and a devoted art critic and writer. He was one of the founders of the Century Association. After *The Crayon*, he translated several art books by Hippolyte Taine.
[45] "Introductory," *The Crayon* 1, no. 1 (1855): 1.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

Art to serve as the means of exposing a novice American audience to the redeeming qualities of Beauty, a role for Art that proponents of aestheticism and the Aesthetic Movement would later champion.[48]

They concluded their introduction with an anecdote that informed the reader of the last element needed in their formula of cultural identity creation – nature. They tell the story of their experience walking through the streets of New York one autumn day. They had come upon a group of rowdy boys whose "boisterous merriment was checked by the sight of a quantity of flowers – the refuse of a neighboring garden thrown out into the street." Though the flowers were "common," and mere "refuse," they nonetheless had the effect of changing the demeanor of the boys, who marveled at their beauty and began walking down the street with "their voices softened, and their bearing harmonized." Stillman and Durand concluded that this simple brush with nature left the boys "bettered, then better for ever."[49] The boys thus provided a key example for Americans to follow. Just as the natural beauty of the flowers was positively influential on these young boys, the beauty of Nature was a positive influence on the youthful United States. For these Americans, Beauty, and not just any beauty, but that which resided in nature, would thus provide the moral lessons needed to unify and pacify their growing nation.

In a time of crisis, the editors of the *Crayon* encouraged their readers to look beyond the chaos around them, to consider elements beyond materialistic success when considering how to define themselves as Americans. Nature was particularly important in this equation for its connection to American identity, a connection that played into the

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[48] Janice Simon, "'the Crayon' 1855-1861: The Voice of Nature in Criticism, Poetry, and the Fine Arts." (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 1990).
[49] "Introductory," 1.

success of American landscape painting during the middle of the nineteenth century. Asher B. Durand, John Durand's father, had been a key proponent of this in his writing and teaching about landscape painting, where he linked successful American art to the artist's ability to translate America's raw, untouched nature.[50]

Benson's writings from the mid-1860s, another time of crisis, differed from the earlier theories which privileged American nature as the element that provided moral elevation. Now, Benson emphasized the *artist's* role in translating his chosen subject to move beyond representational paintings of nature. In one article, Benson concluded that, "It is to the young and rising men – the men who are being shaped and molded by the tumults and passions of the present – by the grandeurs of struggle, by the sadness of defeat, by the joys of victory, that we must look for an extension of our expressional power. It is to them we must appeal for elements yet wanting in our art and literature."[51] Young American artists were the key to progress in American art, and it was in their hands to create art that would help to transform American culture to a level of maturity that would be on a par with Europe. Given the key role that Benson gave to the artist in this transformation, he promoted a turn to painterly styles and effects that other critics seemed to find less agreeable. These painterly effects provided stronger evidence of the artist's hand in creating and crafting the scene that had the expressional powers necessary for great art.

Benson's discussion of Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (Figure 8) gives us a sense of how he might have applied these theories to specific paintings. Like most of the critics who discussed *Prisoners from the Front*, Benson praised the painting for the way

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[50] Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900*, 14-16.
[51] "American Genius as Expressed in Art," 21.

it displayed the character types – the resistant , defiant, and defeated Southern rebels and the confident Northern General. In the *Post* he wrote, "there is a force in the rendering of character, and a happy selection of representative and at the same time local types of men, in Mr. Homer's picture, which distinguish it as the most valuable and comprehensive art work that has been painted to express some of the most vital facts of our war."[52] In another review, he wrote, "In our judgment, Mr. Homer's picture shows the instinct of genius, for he seems to have selected his material without reflection; but reflection could not have secured a more adequate combination of facts, and they that think more must admit this natural superiority which enabled the painter to make his work at once comprehensive and effective."[53] For Benson, Homer's *Prisoners* succeeded through its truthful representation, a key element of the realism that Homer was developing and on which Homer's reputation would balance for the rest of his career.

Several key words emerge in Benson's commentary regarding *Prisoners* – the descriptor "comprehensive," which he used in both commentaries on the painting, and his focus on the artist's expression of facts, acknowledgement of the role that this painting played in symbolizing more than what was simply represented. The painting did not represent a particular moment, nor did it idealize a battle in the way that traditional history painting might.[54] Regardless of this, critics repeatedly recognized it as truthful and representative of the facts of the war. Clarence Cook's review in the *New York*

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[52] Quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, ed. Abigail Booth Gerdts, vol. I (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), 348.
[53] Ibid., 348-49.
[54] Lucretia H. Giese, "*Prisoners from the Front:* An American History Painting?," in *Winslow Homer Paintings of the Civil War*, ed. Marc Simpson (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 67.

Tribune praised Homer's "loyalty to nature and … faithful study," and Eugene Benson characterized the painting as having "boldness and truth."[55] He depicted what his audience believed to be clear American subjects that were truthfully represented – a truthfulness based on the way that Homer was able to embody the character of the figure types that he presented. It did, however, present a symbolic summary of the war, which had ended the year before. Benson was later known to describe this painting as having "fixed itself in the memory of so many of us as an actual and representative group out of our recent struggle."[56] In this way, *Prisoners from the Front* was the pinnacle of Homer's Civil War paintings, embodying the underlying *feelings* of the war, and solidifying the experiences, emotions, and social issues that his northern audience thought important to remember from the war that had divided the country.

In exhibiting these paintings as representative of his oeuvre, Homer chose works that would play a role in provoking or adding to the debate around certain social issues. His success in this arena stemmed from the stylistic treatment of his subjects, which pared down the details of his works to get to the essence of the scene – thereby leaving much ambiguity about his particular feelings toward an issue that he was addressing. Through these paintings, Homer was becoming increasingly associated with the Civil War, to which he was already closely linked because of his work for the weekly illustrated magazines. The *New York Daily Tribune* critic described him as "the best chronicler of the war," in 1865.[57] These Civil War paintings presented an understanding of the war that resonated with his New York audience and those looking to find an artistic

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[55] *New York Daily Tribune* 3 July 1865, 6, quoted in Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works," 17.
[56] Lucretia Giese, "*Prisoners from the Front:* An American History Painting?," 70.
[57] Lucretia Giese, "Winslow Homer: 'Best Chronicler of the War'."

statement that would aid in the reconstruction of America – not only the political and social reconstruction that was taking place, but perhaps more importantly the reconstruction of American cultural life.

While *Prisoners from the Front* encompassed these feelings about the war – there was a sense, too, that it was time to move beyond contemporary life as the subject for American painting. This did not mean eliminating contemporary subjects, but that when looking to everyday things, to seek the beauty in those communal elements. Not only were artists looking for a way to move away from the war and its aftermath, but these emerging ideas also suggested that Americans were at least beginning to be open to moving beyond the realism that has characterized American art to date. Aestheticism, with its celebration of the beauty of life, provided an alternative to the realities of America, recovering from a Civil War and dealing with the influx of immigrants and the changes of industrialization. Theoretically, critics were adapting the ideals of British writing to their own criticism of American painting, looking for comprehensive works that evoked strong feelings or emotions in the viewer. For Homer's Civil War images, these feelings were related specifically to the northern sense of victory. We shall see, though, that this evocation of feeling was not limited to historical paintings, and Homer's work is exemplary of how these theories were applied to different themes and ideas, particularly as Americans looked to move beyond the war and to rebuild their own society.

The early art of aestheticism

American audiences were introduced to the artists associated with early aestheticism in the review "The Opening of the Royal Academy" published in the *Galaxy*

in 1867.[58] In what amounts to a humorous take on American reactions to this type of painting, the author Ion Perdicaris wrote his review through the eyes of a young man accompanying an American tourist to the exhibition. He first highlighted the paintings with which Americans would have already been familiar, the Pre-Raphaelites. During the years before the Civil War, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was known in the United States through publication of their works in the journal *The Crayon*, published from 1855 to 1861, and the writings of John Ruskin, who championed the British artists for their realistic depictions based on the close study of nature. Ruskin's argument for the connection between art and morality had a strong appeal for Americans who were often skeptical of art's role during this period, and his artistic theories were widely read. In New York, the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin had a direct influence on the founding of the American group, the Society for the Advancement of Truth in Art.[59] This group of artists based their organization on the writings of Ruskin, and even published a letter from the writer in the first issue of their journal, *The New Path*, in 1863.[60] This letter affirmed Ruskin's support of Pre-Raphaelitism as "the only vital and true school of painting in Europe; and its leader, Dante G. Rossetti, to be, without compare, the greatest of English painters now living."[61]

By 1867, though, many of these Pre-Raphaelite painters, particularly Rossetti, were becoming concerned with aestheticism, a change which Perdicaris acknowledged

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[58] Ion Perdicaris, "The Opening of the Royal Academy," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 3 (1867): 358-64.
[59] For a complete discussion of the American Pre-Raphaelite movement, see Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerdts, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum with Schocken Books, 1985).
[60] John Ruskin, "A Letter from Mr. Ruskin," *The New Path* 1, no. 1 (1863), http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.NewPathv1n01.
[61] Ibid.

thus: "The Pre-Raphaelites have not, upon this occasion, absolutely confounded the realistic with the common-place, and do not so pertinaciously insist upon a photographic imitation of the unpoetic in nature as the highest aim of art."[62] Perdicaris recognized the shift away from this insistence on realism that was occurring in British painting, particularly in the work of artists associated with Rossetti. He continued by contrasting the Pre-Raphaelites with what he termed "the Classicalists," who "have ventured upon unusually ambitious subjects, *for Englishmen*, and, in laying aside their timidity, have begun to throw off their drapery."[63] He made an overt reference to Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* (Figure 14), which was on display at the Royal Academy exhibition that year, and which Perdicaris would discuss more specifically later in his review. The painting depicts a young woman who is in the process of disrobing. Her garment hangs on her right arm, which is steadying her against the wall. Her left hand is gently placed on her right knee as she reaches down to remove her sandal. She does not engage the viewer directly, but casts a demure gaze downward. The sensuality of the painting, the first of a series of nudes that Leighton began painting in 1867, were typical of Leighton's paintings from the 1860s, in which he diminished dramatic scenes and narrative in favor of more sensuous subjects, and which many British critics of the time identified as amoral, particularly in contrast to the more historical subjects that Leighton painted. Art critics of the time began to discuss this painting in terms of Leighton's study of form, and the artistic elements of the painting. By concentrating the discussion on formal elements, critics bypassed the moral issues that the painting might have developed

[62] Perdicaris, "The Opening of the Royal Academy," 358.
[63] Ibid.: 358.

amongst the British public.[64] This avoidance of the moral issues was incorporated in Colvin's description of aesthetic painting as "abstract treatment of the female form," where a focus on the formal qualities would trump any potential for immorality that could be attributed to a flagrantly nude female painting.

The American reaction was less veiled, as Perdicaris' story tells of an "American girl" who was shocked by the nude figure. He described the gallery visitor as being comforted by the drapery found in the orientalist paintings of Frederick Goodall. Perdicaris set up an American conservatism that would characterize the move toward aestheticism in the United States. This conservatism was seen in American reviews of Swinburne's volume of poetry, *Poems and Ballads*, which at least one American reviewer berated as immoral and licentious because of its sensual subject matter.[65] While *Every Saturday* published some of these poems in its September 29 and October 6 issues, by March 1867 *The Galaxy* had published a letter to the Editor that focused on Swinburne, telling personal details of him, particularly noting his admiration for Charles Baudelaire, as well as his connection to Rossetti. The letter, written by the British historian W. Winwood Reade, noted that Swinburne succeeded in "flying at the virtue of the British public, seizing it by its throat and bringing it down upon its knees. A splendid example of the power of mind over morality."[66] This British reader wrote a supportive letter regarding Swinburne's revolutionary style in response to the American condemnation of his writing, suggesting that American conservatism would characterize the response to aestheticism in the United States.

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[64] Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Morality Versus Aesthetics in Critical Interpretations of Frederic Leighton, 1855-75," *The Burlington Magazine* 138, no. 1115 (1996): 79-86.
[65] "Algernon Charles Swinburne," *The Albion* 44, no. 36 (1866).
[66] February W. Winwood Reade. Cambridge, "Letter 1 -- No Title," *The Galaxy. A Magazine of Entertaining Reading (1866-1878)* (1867): 682.

Perdicaris' "American girl" also expressed interest in the different paths developing in British art. She asked of the gallery guide, "Do tell me… what is the difference between the pre-Raphaelites and the o*thers*?" who the guide then labeled "The Eclectics." Her guide explained, "The Eclectic is willing to sacrifice, if need be, the parts, in order to enhance the effect of the *whole;* the pre-*Raphaelite* devotes as much attention to the one portion of the canvas as to another, even when the artistic or dramatic effect of the whole suffers in consequence."[67] He continued to describe the differences, using Leighton's *Cadiz in the Olden Time* (*Greek Girl Dancing*) (Figure 15) and Millais' paintings *Sleeping* (Figure 16) and *Waking* (Figure 17) as the chief representatives of each. He identified Millais as failing to focus effectively on his subjects – the artist's daughters – and instead losing them in the intense focus on the details of the satin bedspread and quilted pillows. Perdicaris condemned this attention to detail as "the fundamental flaw in this system of painting. Stuffs, metals, and other artificial objects, may be so closely imitated as almost to deceive the eye; but the varying color, the changing expression, the flitting play of light and shade upon the human form and countenance, one can no more paint than the sun in the heavens…"[68] The figures lost their prominence in this work with its insistence on material details.

In contrast, Perdicaris highlighted the use of formal elements of the "Eclectics," particularly Leighton. He described Leighton's work as "pregnant with the dreamy beauty of early evening," with figures that "lean languidly against the terrace wall, beating time to her song, and breathing in the fragrance of the magnolia blossoms that

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[67] Perdicaris, "The Opening of the Royal Academy," 361.
[68] Ibid.: 362.

melt away into the deepening gloom." He described the viewer's experience as fully enveloping the viewer, providing an engaging sensual experience:

> All these objects steal upon our senses unconsciously. We listen with them to the cadence of the melody, we feel with them the charm of music that dies away upon the perfume laden air. In those subtle harmonies of color and of form there is a symphony that thrills and enthralls! We dream with the poet, we see with the eye of the painter! The Eclectic endows his picture with a sentiment – the pre-Raphaelite paints an object.[69]

Leighton's work engaged the viewer in an experience that captivated the senses through its use of harmonious color and form. Perdicaris' description of this work identified a division between realism or exact replication and the focus on formal elements, the division that marked the shift away from Pre-Raphaelitism by some artists to focus now on the beauty of painting that appealed directly to the viewer's senses. This was the example that Americans needed, as they searched for ways to move beyond traditional realism to something that represented feeling and sentiment beyond the narrative.

While Perdicaris was discussing British painting, his articulation of an American viewer's reaction to these developments suggested the tempered view that Americans had toward art in general, and toward the notion of art for art's sake specifically. While they were looking to move away from intense realism that they associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, like Millet, moving toward the classically inspired work of Leighton had its own issues that Americans were wary to adopt. How then, could Americans negotiate and develop their own art form that would be true to American ideals while incorporating or building on the examples of British artists and writers?

In exploring various options, some American writers covered the emerging elements and artists of aestheticism, highlighting the elements that would appeal to an

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[69] Ibid.: 362-63.

American sensibility. Leighton and others in his cohort remained connected to the Royal Academy, giving them a different kind of exposure to the American audience through reviews of the Academy exhibitions. Not only did their classical themes seem a bit suspect to American sensibilities, but these styles were more like the French academic styles of Bougereau and others who were the key artists that American patrons purchased as French Academic art was seen as the pinnacle of art, and representative of "making it," so to speak. Rossetti's circle had made a clearer break from the Royal Academy, labeling them as more rebellious. This bold move became a theme in the American coverage of the Pre-Raphaelites, who found a renewed interest in the late 1860s, including an article about Rossetti in *Putnam's Magazine*, written by William James Stillman, a member of the earlier American Pre-Raphaelites.[70] His overview identified the Pre-Raphaelites as a reform movement in England, led by Rossetti, Millais and William Holman Hunt. He praised the Pre-Raphaelites for bringing to England a "school" of painting, one that provided much-needed direction for English art, and something that he would have liked for American art. With this article, however, a shift became apparent, separating Rossetti from his Pre-Raphaelite brethren, toward an understanding that aligns with aestheticism. Stillman commented on the usage of the term "pre-Raphaelite" and its application to "minute realization of detail," as being separate from "the element which gave character to the reform, [which was] rather defiance of all thoughtless, conventional representation of nature, Rossetti differing widely in his ideal from his co-reformers, and the body of their followers adopted a diverging path, which has left him alone in the peculiar

[70] William James Stillman, "Rossetti, the Painter and Poet," *Putnam's Magazine.* 6, no. 31 (1870): 95-101.

excellencies, as in the aims, of his art."[71] Stillman singled out Rossetti as particularly focused on a dramatic reform in art, one that left him on a path separate from the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In practice, this characterization aligned with Rossetti's rejection of the Royal Academy and retreat from public life in the late 1860s, whereas Millais and Hunt gained public notoriety for their paintings, which they continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy to great acclaim.

Stillman insisted on Rossetti's individuality, emphasized through descriptions of him as "an exceptionally individual artistic character" and "alone" in his superiority among the Pre-Raphaelites. His treatment placed Rossetti as a new example for Americans who privileged individuality of character, suggesting that American art would benefit from following Rossetti's lead and potentially developing an American school of art. This description likewise noted key elements of aestheticism for his American audience. First, he described Rossetti with qualities that at times seemed paradoxical, claiming that Rossetti was at once mystical and devoted to realism, "satiric and actual, and, by turns, medieval and modern."[72] These paradoxes highlighted the tensions that developed in aestheticism – a desire to be both modern and draw from a past time; a realism that was often based in another world – whether that be a world separated by time or place. Next, he connected Rossetti to elements of beauty, describing his works as "images of sensuous beauty with a passionate fullness and purity which no other painter has ever rendered."[73] The sensual qualities of beauty that were aptly expressed through painting and other forms of art were highlighted here.

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[71] Ibid.: 95.
[72] Ibid.: 96.
[73] Ibid.

Stillman stressed formal elements of painting as key to understanding Rossetti's work, showing the renewed focus on color and form that Colvin also had identified earlier that year in his article about the emerging aestheticism in Britain. Stillman focused on Rossetti's ability to create a unifying composition, which contrasted with the understanding of Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail that Perdicaris had criticized:

> His most remarkable gift is what … I must call spontaneity of composition – that imaginative faculty by which the completeness and coherence of a pictorial composition are preserved from the beginning, so that, to its least detail, the picture bears the impress of having been painted from a complete conception.[74]

The issue of overall unity of a composition and its relationship to the detail of a painting were emerging as key points in the American definition of aestheticism, and were important in Benson's assessment of Homer's *Prisoners from the Front*, discussed above. What changed in this discussion, though was Stillman's emphasis on the harmonies of color as "a means of expression, and only, in a lesser degree, of representation," likening his use of color to "sad strains of some perfect Eastern music, always pure and well-sought in tint, but with chords that have the quality of those most precious of fabrics."[75] The suggestion of musical and poetic qualities in painting addressed the sensual nature of painting that evoked a feeling or expression rather than illustrated a story or instructed the viewer in a moral lesson. Stillman's labeling of Rossetti as a "poet-painter" or "Painter-poet" established an essential connection between poetry and painting within the British circle, where artists worked as both painters and poets, including Swinburne, Morris, and Rossetti. This connection between painting and poetry established a literary connection that would play into later discussions of aestheticism in America and in Homer's work. Stillman's discussion of aestheticism showed that there was an interest among the

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

American art establishment in the developments of aestheticism in England. The publication of this article in a popular journal like *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* indicated a desire by the author and his publishers to share these new art developments and to grow a sense of arts appreciation and understanding among a wider American audience.

The American perception of the shift in British painting toward aestheticism was often complicated by the usage of the term "pre-Raphaelite," which was used to refer to both the excessive realist tendencies that had characterized the American Pre-Raphaelites. Describing an attention to minute details in a painting as "pre-Raphaelite" was not necessarily reserved for the painters and writers associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In an 1866 letter to the editor of *Circular*, the writer described a painting by Gérome that had been on view at the Tenth Street Studio Building, *The King Candaules* (Figure 18). He wrote, "It is an oriental scene of two thousand years ago, and Pre-Raphaelite in accuracy. One would almost think that the artist must have been endowed with perpetual existence, and have been present at the scene itself, so faithfully is the barbaric splendor of eastern royalty depicted on his canvas." [76] While the term here is used to show the attention to detail, it likewise pointed to the truth in representation that characterized an American interpretation of Pre-Raphaelitism – that painters painted what they had observed on site.

Some American writers had strong reactions to the Pre-Raphaelite influence in American art, particularly Eugene Benson. In his review of the 1867 National Academy of Design Exhibition, Benson attributed a shift in American art to "the Pre-Raphaelite idea, which professes nature or nothing… It assumes a morbid form when it attacks

[76] X, "Among the Arts," *Circular*, 24 December 1866, 324.

callow minds and becomes a disease."[77] He expressed a fear that young American artists were getting caught up in what Benson eventually defined as an over-attention to detail. He conceded that this kind of realism should be used to hold "suggestiveness" in check, or else it might lead to "slovenliness," addressing another concern that developed within American art criticism – the prevalence of sketchy, unfinished paintings. While Benson admitted that pre-Raphaelite influence on American art had been limited to this point, he found "morbid conditions" in the work of T.C. Farrer, "who has gone utterly wild upon the subject of representing objects exactly as they appear." He is discouraged by the attention to minutiae in Farrer's painting *October Afternoon*, unknown today, but likely similar to *Mount Holyoke* (Figure 19), where the color seemed too stark, "with no references to the tones and gradations imparted to them by nature's modifying atmosphere." [78] Art, he argued, should do more than recount the particular blades of grass, and should instead express the "truth and harmony" of nature.[79]

Farrer had been associated with the American Pre-Raphaelite movement in the pre-Civil War period, so the continued connection of this label to his work would have been expected. Benson, though, also criticized Elihu Vedder's *Girl with a Lute* (Figure 20) as being under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, a fact that he found troubling. He commented that Vedder's recent return to Europe – he had left for Paris in 1865 – exacerbated the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism that had previously been identified in Vedder's work, but it is unclear from the review exactly what he would have found Pre-Raphaelite in this earlier work. *Girl with a Lute,* the first painting he executed upon his

[77] "Pictures at the National Academy," *The Round Table* 5, no. 118 (1867): 261.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.: 262. Benson's condemnation of Pre-Raphaelitism was limited, however, as he praised Farrer's still life as the appropriate type of painting to include such particular details.

arrival in Paris, depicted a subject or at least a theme that he would return to repeatedly in works such as *Dancing Girl* (Figure 21). The painting shows a young woman dressed in a Renaissance costume, standing before an elaborate tapestry. She holds a lute in her hand, but she is not engaged in playing the lute; instead, she stands pensively, lost in thought. Benson commented on this work:

> This mode of working seems to be a favorite one with artists who admire the 'school,' and it has the advantage, perhaps, of being a manner not very difficult to acquire. But was it absolutely necessary for Mr. Vedder to show his estimation of Dante G. Rossetti by 'going to nature' for so plain, not to say downright ugly, a specimen of feminine humanity as he has here given us?[80]

It is worth noting that this criticism about the beauty of the female figure is the same criticism that Benson would levy against Winslow Homer in his 1870 review of Homer's work at the National Academy of Design, which I will discuss in the next chapter. But here, it is likewise interesting that Benson levied criticism against this "manner" as something that was easy to obtain, a refrain about realism that would be repeated frequently in the critical writing around this time.

Vedder had been exposed to the theories and practices of Pre-Raphaelite painters during his stay in Italy prior to the Civil War.[81] While Vedder had exposure to the Pre-Raphaelites during this period, his work did not immediately show evidence of the

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[80] Ibid.

[81] While there, he befriended several British artists, including John William Inchbold and Jaine Eleonor Benham Hay, whom he would later describe as "strong Pre-Raphaelite and a woman of great talent… a lover of the clear dawn and the bright day, and of Fra Angelico." Inchbold, a follower of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, professed to be in search of truth in Nature during his stay in Italy, but Vedder later wrote that he questioned what this meant, and was never able to get a description of Pre-Raphaelitism from Inchbold. Vedder, *Digressions of V.*, quoted in Joshua Charles Taylor, *Perceptions and Evocations: The Art of Elihu Vedder* (Washington: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1979), 43.

intense realism that Americans associated with pre-Raphaelitism.[82] Instead, he created works that drew their subject matter from fantasy and the imagination, such as *Lair of the Serpent* and *Roc's Egg* (Figures 22 and 23). Unlike his later *Girl with a Lute*, Benson had praised Vedder's mystical work *Listening to the Sphinx* (Figure 24) in his 1864 review of the National Academy of Design exhibition, praising these works as having "value as *expression* which few imitative pictures can claim. They express moral and intellectual moods." He praised the artist who "succeeded in quickening thought, in arousing feeling. The best art cannot do more."[83] While this initial assessment about the expressive power of art was conveyed in regards to Vedder's mystical paintings, *Prisoners from the Front* was seen as having a similar power – it evoked the collective feelings and established a memory of the war that was crucial to the redevelopment of American culture in the post-war era. Benson continued, arguing that art played a role beyond evoking feeling: "We might love the artist if he elevated us if he excited in our soul the feeling of the beautiful."[84] Here, Benson further develops his aesthetic theory that addressed the role of beauty in art, suggesting that Vedder would be even more successful if his work dealt with more beautiful subjects, rather than the mystical elements seen in his works.

In these earlier works, Vedder provided an example for Benson, who directed young artists to move beyond simply "pleasing the people by our renderings of the sweet and familiar face of ordinary nature. Let us now aim to elevate them and teach them; for, again, to quote [English writer Thomas] De Quincey, 'the fine arts have now come to be

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[82] Ibid.
[83] "Art. Exhibitions of the National Academy of Design," *The Round Table* 1, no. 19 (1864): 296.
[84] Ibid.

regarded rather as powers that are to mold than as luxuries that are to embellish, and artists are valued more by the elaborate agencies which they guide than by the fugitive sensations of wonder of sympathy which they evoke.'"[85] He suggested that great writers and artists could move their audience beyond the inertia that had set in to contemporary life. Art had a purpose; not one that was important only in terms of affecting social conscience, but also in invigorating the viewer himself and engaging him with the work of art through the feelings that it evoked in him.

While Benson identified some elements of this purposeful painting in Vedder's mystical paintings, *Girl with a Lute* moved away from art as having some other purpose. Russell Sturgis, a writer and painter who had been associated with the earlier pre-Raphaelite movement in the United States, expressed a similar concern. While he praised Vedder for his skill and technical ability, he worried that Vedder's painting had become just a demonstration of technical skill without any substance. He was hoping, instead for something that would be more reflective of the national identity that he attributed to art. He had opened his review of the 1867 National Academy of Design exhibition with a quote from Ruskin and an extended reasoning of the effects of art and culture on the status and stature of a nation. He quickly turned, though, to the theory of Hippolyte Taine whom he summarized as believing that "the artist is the embodiment of his era."[86] Sturgis's focus on the nation-building power of art emphasized the fundamental differences in Americans' use of art, which was to build civilization and culture in an era that had been shattered by the Civil War. This prohibited Americans from entirely

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Russell Sturgis, "American Painters," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 2 (1867): 226.

relinquishing their hold on the moral implications of art or its didactic function, even when seeking the beauty and culture associated with aestheticism.

Homer's paintings might be seen as an alternative, particularly works like *The Initials*. Like *The Girl with a Lute*, Homer depicts a young, female figure, but the subtle references to the Civil War provide enough sense of connection to the representation of truth about the Civil War. The stylistic treatment of the figure, with her bright blue dress which contrasted to the brown pine grove in which she stands, accentuates the formal elements of the paintings, while the Civil War references, the crossed swords above the initials on the tree, are downplayed within the composition. Homer's works contained enough realistic elements to temper the turn to aesthetic concerns, including the reduced narrative and the focus on evocation of mood and feeling through the works.

The critics picked up on these aesthetic concerns, particularly the notion of evoking feeling and emotion through the work itself, not based on the narrative or moral message but on the simple representation of a solitary woman in a pine grove. When comparing Homer's works such as *The Initials* to his Civil War themes, it might not seem surprising that the critics considered *The Initials* a misstep for Homer. This small, intimate scene was something that seemed picayune and of minimal importance, given the more grandiose themes he presented in his larger works. It might have had something to do with "exciting in our soul the feeling of the beautiful," a concept that Benson had promoted in his discussion of Vedder, and that over the next decade would come to characterize aestheticism. We know, however, that Homer carefully calculated his submissions the National Academy of Design exhibitions, so it would seem that he had

presented this small painting alongside others of the Civil War in a way that expressed an alternative path for his work, particularly in 1865, as the war was coming to an end.

The similarity to Benson's own painting, too, seems to imply that paintings with grander themes, such as *Prisoners,* were not the sole means of evoking a feeling in the viewer, and that there were other ways to achieve the kind of painting that he felt Americans were destined to create. Benson's representation of the solitary figure, such as *Pensive Moment* (Figure 13), which he exhibited at the 1865 National Academy of Design with the title *A Mood of Spring*, connect this type of painting to Benson's evolving theories regarding the role of art in America.[87] *The New York World* reviewer commented of this painting: "[The figure is] lolling in a high-backed chair and calling through every feature of her face, and every tone of her complexion for a dose of Townsend's sarsaparilla. Now, sarsaparilla is a good thing to be taken in certain "moods" no doubt, but are those "moods" worthy subjects of the painter's art?"[88] Sarsaparilla was a well-known tonic, promoted in this time to cure many maladies. Advertisements for the tonic promoted its ability for "cleansing the blood and expelling poisonous matter from the system," resulting in being cured from all sorts of "debilities," including fainting spells, dizziness, and weakness.[89] One ad promoted it though a catchy poem that claimed: "To wan, pallid cheeks, it imparts the rich glow/ Of health, as all those who

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[87] Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting "The Initials": A Litte-Known Drawing and Related Works," 18 note 26.
[88] Quoted in Ibid.
[89] Dr. J.C. Ayer & Co. Ayer's sarsaparilla. J.C. Ayer's & Co. Lowell, Mass. U.S.A. "Grandma, see what I've brought you." Electronic access: Series: American broadsides and ephemera. no. 27746.

have used it can show."[90] It is unlikely, though, that Benson's pensive woman was recovering from weakness or ill health – at least not the physical type.

She might, however, be contemplating nature to recover from the intensity of modern life, as Benson recommended in his writings from this period. In his essay "Solitude and Democracy," published in *The Galaxy* in June 1867, Benson argued that "solitude is the best *point d'appui* of life. It is absolutely essential to form a spirit corrective of our excesses and liberating to our sympathies."[91] He expressed concern over the progression toward modernism that was occurring in America, particularly what he viewed as a trend towards the commonplace, rather than the elevation to a higher, newer life for Americans. For Benson, solitude provided the escape from modern life needed to revitalize Americans from the "indifference or the intolerance which it begets in the common mind."[92] He connected solitude to contemplation and reverie, which he described as "the two-essential conditions of philosophy and poetry," concluding that solitude "is the source of all ideas that ennoble man and address his highest nature."[93] The fine arts – in this case, philosophy and poetry – would also play a crucial role in the elevation of man beyond the ordinary in everyday life, and one could only create these if he or she sought the restorative power of solitude.

Benson based his concern for the lack of solitude and the decline of man in modern society on the ability of Americans to develop a culture that would stand the test of time, the way that ancient civilizations had been able to do. He contended that "the

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[90] E.P. George & Co. Ayer's sarsaparilla ... For sale by E.P. George & Co., West Fairlee, Vt. [1870-1890] [electronic resource] Electronic access: Series: American broadsides and ephemera. no. 22696.
[91] Eugene Benson, "Solitude and Democracy," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 2 (1867): 165.
[92] Ibid.: 166.
[93] Ibid.

men of contemplative genius, the men of sympathy, of movement, of imagination (the only permanent elements), will remain, and their works will strike the senses with the freshness and give versus the exhilaration of nature."[94] Americans, who were disadvantaged by their disconnection from ancient or medieval Europe, were particularly susceptible to returning to the ordinary elements of modern life, jeopardizing their ability to maintain a permanent culture based on the sympathy and emotion cultivated through contemplation and appreciation of more than modern life provided.

Benson's suggestion of solitude was closely connected with the ideas and practices of the Transcendentalists, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne, a movement that he would champion again later the same year.[95] In a later article, Benson argued that the Transcendentalists had embraced a culture that allowed for a "beautiful life and to resent the ignoble tendencies of their time."[96] He was concerned about what he identified as a period of "moral and intellectual apathy which succeed an intense mental and moral life" and that "civilization and society, although adding to our comforts, corrupt us and induce moral inertia."[97] While Benson did not specifically call for a return to the intense focus on moral and religious connection for which the Transcendentalists advocated, he indirectly suggested a need to return to this kind of moral life, through his criticism of modern life:

> We have not one rising man of letters devoted to the aesthetic or animated by the moral spirit; all are intent on the mere exercise of their talent, and speak to the average sense of the public. They are inert before the ideal, and we look in vain for a group of men like that formed by Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Theodore

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[94] Ibid.: 166.
[95] Ibid.: 170. Benson addressed this issue again in Eugene Benson, "To-Day," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 7 (1867): 815-22.
[96] Benson, "To-Day," 815.
[97] Ibid.: 815-16.

> Parker; like them sincere, ardent, untrammeled, and above and beyond their contemporaries.[98]

While this expressed Benson's frustration with a lack of connection between contemporary life and the moral spirit, it also suggested a connection between that moral spirit and an interest in the aesthetic, a connection between the ideal and the aesthetic that would be at the center of American aestheticism.

The moral heart of the Transcendentalist social critiques focused on the fact that customs and practices inhibited the individual, proposing solutions that were meant to liberate the individualistic spirit of the American. Historian Jonathan Freedman has suggested that American writers such as Emerson, Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and Edgar Allan Poe influenced the writers who were leaders in the development of early British aestheticism, including John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and particularly Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose early writings about art for art's sake borrow directly from Baudelaire's discussions of Edgar Allan Poe.[99] In the literary world, a cross-cultural exchange also emerged between American and British writers, such that Americans both influenced and were influenced by British aestheticism.[100] As a budding writer and critic, Benson looked to the example of Transcendentalism while simultaneously looking to Europe for other successful ways that culture – both literary and artistic – could create a beautiful life. His hope was that society would not be stifled by civilization, but would embrace it as the means to achieve that beautiful life. We see here, then, similarities in

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[98] Ibid.: 820.
[99] Jonathan Freedman, "An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1986), 384-99, Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting*, 48-51.
[100] Freedman, "An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement," 388.

the cultural influences as both Benson and Swinburne pulled from French and American writers to develop the thoughts and ideas of American and British aestheticism respectively. So even if Benson, and by extension Homer, were not fully cognizant of the developments in British aestheticism, similarities emerged in the simultaneously developing artistic theories.

Benson's theories of art promoted the development of a moral and intellectual mood or the evocation of feeling in the viewer that could mold and create a new beginning for American cultural life. The best way to accomplish this was through solitary contemplation in or of nature. Benson used his paintings to present these theories. Given the closeness reported between these artists, it is highly likely that Homer's paintings from this period also incorporated this notion of contemplation of nature as a means of representing the development of culture in America. For example, Homer's painting *The Waverley Oaks* (Figure 25) presents the viewer with an example of this connection with and contemplation of nature. Homer focuses on the natural environment and light conditions that are created by the forest and the clearing in which the women stand. Two well-dressed women walk through a path in the woods, engaged in conversation, as they turn to each other, but their identities are undefined, as Homer's focus is clearly on their surroundings. The painting is dominated by the brown and green from the trees. The blue sky peeks through the tops of the trees as sunlight pours into the clearing from the left hand side of the painting. It picks up on a few yellowing leaves on the mostly bare tree in the foreground, setting the time of year as late autumn. In *Waverley Oaks*, Homer depicts a common, everyday scene of two young women walking through the woods, but he moves beyond the everyday event to evoke the mood of the

scene, which he accomplishes through the dramatic treatment of the light coming through the trees and highlighting the area in front of the women. The figures themselves are inactive in evoking this mood, as their backs are to the viewer, limiting any sense of mood evoked through facial expression or other personal details.

The critical response to this work gives some sense of the mood that the nineteenth century audience might have seen in the work. *Waverley Oaks* was noticed by the *Nation*'s art critic when it was exhibited at Samuel Putnam Avery's gallery in November 1866. In the opening of the review, the critic commented generally on Homer's work, identifying many of the qualities that Benson had prescribed in his earlier writing: "Here is a painter, his pictures say, who can set down what he imagines; can draw as well as think, and paint as well as dream; and who sees, moreover, much in common things that generally passes [sic] unseen or half seen."[101] This critic noticed Homer's painting for its attention to realism, identified with his strong ability in drawing. More importantly, however, was Homer's ability to find something more in "common things," and to move beyond what he observed to incorporate the artistic imagination or even dreams. He commented specifically on *Waverley Oaks* marveling at Homer's ability to make the everyday "fashionable dress" of the women 'look so well in a picture.'"[102] Homer has here take a common experience of a walk in the woods and created a picture that evokes a feeling of the restorative power of nature, and of art. He does this through his cohesive treatment of the painting, which balances fine drawing with atmospheric treatment of the landscape.

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[101] "Fine Arts," *The Nation* (1866): 396.
[102] Ibid.

The critic noted specifically the way that the two figures relate to the landscape – that they are a "small part of the picture" but "who are not more brilliant in color or more perfectly painted than other parts of the picture… and yet the picture, taking proper precedence over the landscape, not because the landscape is subordinated, but because it is necessarily subordinate in the presence of human figures equally well painted with itself."[103] These comments reflect the critical understanding of aestheticism outlined above. This critic showed an awareness of the shift away from the overwhelming detail of the Pre-Raphaelites, suggesting here that all of the elements in the painting have equal attention. He concluded that this technique left the paintings "full of power and the evidences of power," even despite their small size and apparent lack of finish related to Homer's broad handling.[104] This broad handling, though, was meant to add to the sense of overall equal attention to all elements of the painting, while also providing visual evidence of the artist's hand in creating the beauty of the scene. It certainly called attention to the formal aspects of the painting, including Homer's concern with light and shade and the forms created by the dramatic lighting within the trees. Homer's interest and expression of these formal qualities would become enhanced in the subsequent years, as we will see in Chapter 2.

Closely related to this type of painting was Homer's *Croquet Player* (Figure 26), the first in a series of paintings that he devoted to the depiction of the game of croquet, which grew in popularity in the years following the war.[105] A woman stands in a manicured lawn that has been set up for a game. She has paused ready to croquet the ball

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] David Park Curry, *Winslow Homer: The Croquet Game* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1984).

of her companion, a move that is allowed when the player's ball strikes that of her opponent. She then aligns her ball next to her opponents, and with one foot on her ball, strikes the ball, sending it often widely out of play. Homer's young woman is engaged in this defensive move, but the mood that is evoked in the painting seems to be more important that any specific description of her tactical moves or a description of a course of play. In fact, she stands alone on the course leaving the narrative here quite uncertain. While she holds the mallet, a symbol of modernity particularly for women, the ambiguity of the painting challenges this sense of modernity. She stands alone, lost in thought in the large swath of green grass rather than actively engaged in the defensive move that has been set up. Her contemplative stance in a natural setting overpowers any particular representation of modern life and its progress. The painting seems to be more about the enigmatic feeling that it evokes in the viewer, rather than a narrative about croquet and its contemporary practice.

The ambiguity of this painting is more apparent when compared to Homer's other croquet paintings. His 1865 painting *Croquet Players* (Figure 27) depicts a group of ladies and gentleman engaged in the actual playing of a game. A small group of fashionably dressed young women is actively engaged in the game on the right hand side of the painting. The figure in white approaches the ball with her mallet raised, ready to send the ball through the wicket in front of her. To the left of this group, and just slightly left of the center of the painting, stands a well-dressed gentleman who looks over toward the players on the right. Behind him, stand a couple more intent on their conversation than on the game. In this version of the subject, Homer presented a more narratively focused scene, intent on depicting the social circumstances of the modern croquet

game.[106] *Croquet Scene* (Figure 28) repeats some of the same figures from *Croquet Players*, but here Homer focused in on a trio of women and their companion who bends down to instruct them in a game tactic. The figures dominate the composition, taking the focus away from the landscape that had dominated the earlier *Croquet Player.*

Homer's paintings of solitary figures from the mid-1860s engaged with the emerging American theories of aestheticism. His friend and fellow artist Eugene Benson became a voice for these emerging theories in the years immediately following the Civil War. The origins and influences on these theories indicate a broader influence on both Homer and Benson than the French influence that has been well documented. As Homer continued to search for a new direction in his career, he heeded the advice and suggestions of Benson. The two men prepared to leave the United States in the fall of 1866, with a joint sale of their works to raise money for the trip to the Paris Exposition of 1867, where Homer's exposure to aestheticism would continue.

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[106] Ibid, Sarah Burns, "Winslow Homer's Ambiguously New Women," in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase and Sargent*, ed. Holly Pyne Connor (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 2006), 41-76, Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 61-62 and 70-71.

Chapter Two

Winslow Homer and Early American Aestheticism

In 1870, Homer exhibited three major canvases at the National Academy of Design exhibition: *Eagle Head, Manchester, Massachusetts* (Figure 29), *The Bridle Path, White Mountains* (Figure 30), and *Manners and Customs of Seaside* (unlocated). All depict contemporary young women on a scale that would have rivaled Homer's earlier Civil War paintings in size and severity of subject. *Eagle Head* depicts three young women on the beach having just finished swimming. *The Bridle Path* shows a young woman on a horse, descending a path on the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Other tourists surround her, but she takes the path alone. *Manners and Customs of Seaside*, though unlocated, is known through contemporary description, and also showed young women at the beach, crossing the sand with other bathers behind them at the shoreline.

Analysis of these works has focused on Homer's representation of women in leisure pursuits as a marked change in Homer's choice of subject matter. David Tatham has argued that with *The Bridle Path*, Homer announced a sharp departure from his previous Civil War subjects and croquet paintings for two reasons: its completion immediately following his trip to France in 1867, and its size. While the croquet paintings might seem to be related to *The Bridle Path* as both depicted leisure pursuits, Tatham links them to the war, arguing that they "might easily have been taken as allegorical representations of the return of peace to America in which people engaged in genteel

contests with mallets and balls rather than bloody ones with mortars and shells."[1] Art historian Holly Pyne Connor has linked Homer's women from these post-Civil War paintings to the emergence of the "new woman" who was "shown in assertive, bold, and even aggressive poses that in previous art had been seen only in portraits of men."[2] Nicolai Cikovsky connects Homer's depictions of women to his friend Eugene Benson's arguments that a "'modern and democratic form of art' depicted 'the actual life of men *and women'* in the nineteenth century," arguing that Homer's women are "clearly to be understood as Modern Women: active, independent, and self-assured, the products Benson said, of the age of emancipation."[3] Sarah Burns aligns Homer's interest in this type to a growing sense of independence and freedom among women of the time, including the beginning of the women's suffrage movement in 1869.[4]

By viewing these works through the lens of social history, these scholars have considered Homer's reaction to the world around him, a response that aligns Homer with the typical realist assessment of his work. While the subject was new to Homer's paintings, he continued to depict contemporary types in these works.[5] As an illustrator, Homer had been accustomed to presenting contemporary society in his imagery, and he translated this practice to his large scale oil paintings with these canvases. In addition,

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[1] David Tatham, "From Paris to the Presidentials: Winslow Homer's "Bridle Path, White Mountains"," *American Art Journal* 30, no. 1/2 (1999): 37.
[2] Holly Pyne Connor, "Not at Home: The Nineteenth-Century New Woman," in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase and Sargent* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 2006), 1-2.
[3] Nicolai Cikovsky, "Modern and National," in *Winslow Homer*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 63.
[4] Sarah Burns, "Winslow Homer's Ambiguously New Women," in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase and Sargent*, ed. Holly Pyne Connor (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 2006), 41-76.
[5] Sarah Burns argues that this presentation of types "announced Homer's intention to observe and paint modern life as modern history, more specifically, modern *female* history." Ibid., 54.

depictions of contemporary life and social types in his Civil War paintings had given Homer his first taste of success. It is logical that he would continue to present this type of painting to the United States art market, even if he changed the gender of the figures that he painted.[6]

Homer's paintings, however, go beyond these gender and social issues that scholars have identified, particularly in their treatment of composition and the backgrounds on which the figures are placed. Benson's review of these paintings sheds a different light on the way that Homer might have thought about these paintings, including how Homer's paintings fit within the growing interest in aestheticism in the United States. In his review of the 1870 National Academy of Design exhibition, Benson devoted a significant portion of his discussion to Homer's work, singling out each of the three major paintings in his commentary. Benson began with high praise for his friend stating that "The best, the most natural and original figure or genre painting of the exhibition is by Mr. Winslow Homer; … Mr. Homer is one of the few young men who appear to have a manly aim, and to be in directly personal relations with nature; other young painters seem feeble or affected or groping."[7] Benson highlighted the elements of Homer's work that critics would praise throughout the 1870s – its originality, individuality and use of subjects that appeared to be "natural" or the result of direct observation of a scene. Benson continued to praise Homer in his review of *Bridle Path*, which he described as "so real, so natural, so effective, so full of light and air; it is so

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[6] Ibid. These paintings also fit into a public exploration of the types of women that were emerging in this era, found in both paintings and illustrations. Sarah Burns explores the ways in which Homer explored these modern women throughout his paintings of the 1870s and 1880s.

[7] Eugene Benson, "The Annual Exhibition of the Academy," *Putnam's Magazine.* 5, no. 30 (1870): 702.

individual; it is so simply, broadly, vigorously drawn and painted;…she is so truly American, so delicate and sunny…This is something of contemporary nature, something that will never become stale."[8] In this description of *Bridle Path* Benson commented quickly on the contemporary element of Homer's painting, particularly the way in which Homer used his powers of observation to record the fresh elements of contemporary life. Benson's initial description of Homer's painting emphasized what scholars have identified recently as well – that Homer depicted a modern, American type that exhibited his own attraction to the style of realism, which dealt with the present, not the past, and exhibited the artist's ability to capture what he perceived.[9]

The rest of Benson's analysis, however, placed Homer in the midst of a rising concern over painting and its relationship to beauty – a concern that served as the basis for aestheticism. Benson continued his praise of *The Bridle Path* by contrasting Homer's work to that of the aestetic painters: "This is the picture of a man who has the seeing eye – an eye which will never suffer him to make pictures that look like 'sick wall-paper,' the elaborate expression of mental imbecility and a mania for pre-Raphaelite art."[10] Benson juxtaposed the modern character of this American young woman to what he perceived to be an overly decorative element seen in British painting.[11] This passage has been used

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Tatham, "From Paris to the Presidentials: Winslow Homer's 'Bridle Path, White Mountains'," 41-43. Tatham connects this approach to the Realism of Courbet and other French painters in the 1860s. See also Cikovsky, "Modern and National," 61. Cikovsky connects Homer to Benson's critical focus on modernism.
[10] Benson, "The Annual Exhibition of the Academy," 703.
[11] As was discussed in Chapter 1, Benson's use of the term Pre-Raphaelite to discuss these aestetic painting showed that Americans were often confused about the changes that were occurring with the development of aestheticism, particularly given the involvement of Rossetti in aestheticism's development. He continued to be associated with Pre-Raphaelitism in the United States and the terms were often used interchangeably by American writers.

frequently by scholars to reinforce the differences between Homer's paintings and those of his British contemporaries. Benson, however, concluded his discussion of Homer by claiming that "as an artist, he has yet to reach the exquisite and beautiful; he is now in the good and true. He has invention, he is fresh and just in his observation, and he has but to attain the beautiful to become our master figure-painter."[12] Benson expressed high hopes for his friend, hopes that were based in the rhetoric of aestheticism, where art aimed to reach a high state of beauty, moving past the truthfulness of realistic observation.

This chapter explores these tensions in greater depth by following Homer's artistic development and engagement with the ongoing translation of aestheticism to America that I began in Chapter 1. This chapter focuses on Homer's paintings leading up to the 1870 National Academy of Design exhibition and how they incorporate ideas from Pre-Raphaelitism and aestheticism among other various European influences. I specifically explore his reaction to the works of James McNeill Whistler which he saw on exhibit at during his visit to France in 1867.[13] This provided his first direct exposure to the emerging aestheticism in England, with which Whistler was associated. The resulting paintings combine an exploration of formal issues with realistic or truthful subject matter, reflecting an American adaptation of aestheticism. The paintings that exhibit the most aesthetic tendencies – strong formal experiments and reduced narrative elements – received the sharpest criticism during this period, a fact that affects Homer's exploration of aestheticism through the 1870s. The American aestheticism which Homer helped to develop through his work was based on the idea that through reality, one could reach the ideal beauty that would help to elevate American culture.

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[12] Benson, "The Annual Exhibition of the Academy," 703.
[13] As was discussed in Chapter 1, 1867 was a key year in the emergence of aestheticism with the publication of Sidney Colvin's essay introducing the new trends in British art.

Paris Exposition 1867

The inclusion of Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (Figure 8) in the American exhibition at the Parisian Exposition Universelle of 1867 bolstered Homer's reputation. The exhibition was heralded as representative of the top in American art, and included what we now consider the great masterpieces of the day. Art historian Carol Troyen has described the exhibit as "America's last unabashed display of native pride before succumbing to the courtly muses of Europe."[14] When compared to the industrial exhibitions, where Americans were awarded top prizes in numerous categories, and to the success of the other artistic exhibitions, the American display was considered a tremendous failure.

Homer was one of the few Americans to receive positive criticism for his work and its representation of true American life, thereby escaping the generally scathing reviews of the American exhibition.[15] But despite his positive reception, Homer must have been affected by the poor response that his American colleagues received. Except for the silver award given to Frederick Church's meticulous rendering of *Niagara*, the American landscapes did not receive any attention in French or British press.[16] Other American paintings were criticized for being too much like British art. This negative attention toward the American display must have affirmed Homer's desire to study the art of Europe. He finally had the opportunity to travel abroad, an opportunity that he had put off because of lack of funds and serious opportunity before this.[17] Homer took the

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[14] Carol Troyen, "Innocents Abroad: American Painters at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, Paris," *American Art Journal* 16, no. 4 (1984): 4.
[15] Ibid.: 13.
[16] Ibid.: 6.
[17] Elizabeth Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* (Berkeley: Univeristy of California Press, 2002), 52-53.

opportunity to explore new material and treatments in his paintings. The paintings from his time in France and the years immediately following his trip have been widely recognized as exhibiting characteristics of French Realism and the Barbizon painters, styles that Homer would have known before his trip to Paris through his connections with John La Farge and William Morris Hunt. Some scholars have even compared them to the Impressionists, but history has not provided us with the specific influences he encountered during his trip abroad.[18]

Whistler's painting would have been a striking contrast to the American paintings included in the Exposition. One American writer, possibly Eugene Benson, noted the unique paintings exhibited by Whistler at the Exposition, in correspondence from the exhibition to the Round Table.[19] His mention of Whistler was in passing with a hope to return to him in a subsequent letter, which was never published. Benson had referred to Whistler's innovative art previously in an 1865 article about the changes and progress evident in British art, defining him as "the man of highest genius and most daring eccentricity in the new school."[20] Benson described this new school of British painters as those who had begun to separate from the influence of Ruskin and work "under new influences, and showing tendencies that without subverting the truths so eloquently

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[18] A. T. Gardner associates Homer with Impressionism because of his visual affinity with Japanese prints and plein air painting. Adams succinctly argues that his exposure to impressionism was likely very limited and any potential influences in France would have confirmed possible directions that Homer already had experience in the US prior to his trip to Paris. Henry Adams, "Winslow Homer's 'Impressionsim' and Its Relation to His Trip to France," *Studies in the History of Art* 26 (1990): 60-89.

[19] "Correspondence," *The Round Table* 5, no. 120 (1867): 295-96. Given that he had been the art critic for Round Table, it is possible that this anonymous correspondent was Eugene Benson.

[20] Eugene Benson, "A New Art Critic," *The Atlantic Monthly* 16, no. 95 (1865): 325.

expounded by Ruskin, supplement them."[21] While Benson does not expand on the specific elements of these British paintings, his reference to Millais, Hunt and Rossetti later in this article pointed to his awareness of the current trends in British art and the developing aestheticism in the mid-1860s. By associating Whistler with aestheticism and highlighting that he was American, Benson insinuated that other Americans could consider these new trends in their own artistic development. Given that Benson and Homer together prepared to travel to France for the Exposition, Benson could easily have encouraged Homer to seek out Whistler as an example of ways that Homer could continue to develop an art that would supplement the truthful representations that he was already depicting.

Homer continued to paint contemplative women while in Paris, including at least three paintings that depict a similar woman with a demure look, eyes cast down, and her hands crossed in front of her.[22] *Paris Courtyard* (Figure 31) was possibly his first rendition of this figure while in France. She wears a white, diaphanous gown, walking through a courtyard, surrounded by gray buildings. Homer transferred the pensive woman who had appeared in the works leading up to his travel abroad, into a new European setting. The setting itself shows a marked difference from the nature-laden subjects of his American women. There are a few trees that hang over the courtyard above, but overall, the space is abstracted into the flat gray planes that define the buildings surrounding the courtyard.

The figure's diaphanous gown contrasted sharply with the popular, crinolined dress that appeared in Homer's illustrations of Paris, such as "A Parisian Ball – Dancing

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Speculation on the identity of this woman is made in R. Ragan, "A Roll in the Hay?," *Magazine Antiques* 154, no. 6 (1998): 775.

at the Mabille, Paris," which Homer illustrated for *Harper's Weekly* (Figure 32).[23] Instead, the gown is similar to the white dress seen in James McNeill Whistler's *The White Girl* (Figure 5) one of the four paintings that Whistler exhibited as part of the American exhibition. The painting depicts a full-length portrait of Whistler's mistress Jo Heffernan in his studio. The canvas has only hints of color – the red of Jo's hair and the blue patterned carpet – with the rest of the canvas shown in shades of white. Jo wears a white, loose fitting gown that is similar to those seen in the aesthetic paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites. By the time of its inclusion at the Exposition Universelle, *The White Girl* had been refused exhibition at the Royal Academy in London and the Paris Salon. Whistler had exhibited the work several times in London to mixed reviews and it was then included at the 1863 Salon des Refusés.

Despite its having already been exhibited in France, the general critical response to *The White Girl* at the Parisian Exposition was not positive, with only the French critic Paul Mantz conceding that "we were once compromised in the service of that lady; her face is intolerably ugly, but there are charming harmonies in the white of her dress and the blue of her patterned rug."[24] Mantz's comments acknowledged, perhaps unknowingly, Whistler's developing ideas of aestheticism while remaining tied to his realist background. The critical response to *The White Girl* when it was first exhibited in 1863 tied it to both French and British traditions, a split that confirmed Whistler's ties to the realism of Courbet, including the roughly painted surface and the depiction of a contemporary figure while reaffirming his new ties with the British, given the flowing red

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[23] Published in *Harper's Weekly* November 23, 1867.
[24] Quoted in Troyen, "Innocents Abroad: American Painters at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, Paris," 9.

hair and sensuous features that had come to characterize Pre-Raphaelite painting, particularly that of Rossetti.[25]

While *The White Girl* was not exhibited with the title *Symphony in White No. 1*, as it is known today, Whistler likely referred to it with this name by 1867.[26] Whistler's use of musical terms added to his goal of eliminating all sense of color, emotion, and narrative, which he accomplished in *The White Girl* through his use of a limited color palette and the representation of a figure who stands quite listlessly without any expression on her face.[27] Homer's *Paris Courtyard* likewise adopts a limited color palette giving little sense of context to the work, as the gray almost windowless buildings fill the canvas, and the figure's expressionless face limits the narrative elements for the viewer to read anything into the picture.

Homer returned the figure to a natural setting in *In the Wheatfield* (Figure 33) and *Coming through the Rye* (Figure 34). These two paintings depict the woman in a field, surrounded by tall stalks of grain. Again, her head is declined as she stands in the field, her hands crossed in front of her, without any expression or engagement. She wears a darker dress in *In the Wheatfield*, one that matches the darker, more somber tone of the sky behind her. The composition is repeated in *Coming through the Rye*, here wearing a lighter dress. While the subject matter is related to the Barbizon paintings that influenced Homer from this period, these two paintings stand apart from Homer's other explorations

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[25] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008), 164-65. Prettejohn argues that the "The painting's singularity was the result of it beng *both* English *and* French at once, in an amalgam so thorough that it appeared essentially different from either."

[26] Richard Dorment and Margaret F MacDonald, *James Mcneill Whistler* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995), 78, 81.

[27] Ibid., 77.

of the Barbizon mood, such as *Return of the Gleaner* (Figure 35).[28] Here, the woman stands firmly with her pitchfork over her shoulder. The wind catches her skirt, giving the painting movement. In comparison to the woman in *Coming through the Rye*, the gleaner is more monumental, and we see an early example of Homer's exploration of this strong, resilient woman that he would return to later in his trip to Cullercoats in the early 1880s. In *Coming through the Rye*, though, the strength that Homer attributed to the working women of France is eliminated. He depicted a well-dressed contemporary woman, as opposed to the peasant woman of the other paintings. Her downturned head further separates her from the monumental working figures, creating a passive view of a modest figure.

In these Parisian works, Homer's exploration of aestheticism maintained elements of his earlier work in this vein. He depicted contemporary women, in sparse settings. Neither the details of the figures nor her surroundings tell us much about her nor do they relate any sort of story or moral. Of all of Homer's paintings to date, these figures move the farthest from the realistic figure types that he had painted in his Civil war paintings, particularly with the hold that those works had on contemporary subjects. These young women, with the exception of perhaps their clothing, could be from anytime – they were not necessarily contemporary. In their depiction, Homer maintained some element of realism – they were natural, everyday figures, or at least seen as such by the critics – but they are abstracted from their everyday lives and placed in universal settings. This idealization of realism was similar to Whistler's paintings from the Exposition, particularly *The White Girl*, which held onto elements of realism that remained important

[28] These monumental figures also show the influence of Jean-Francois Millet, whose *The Gleaners* was also on view at the Exposition Universelle.

to Homer's artististic sensibility – particularly the depiction of contemporary women, unlike the classical or medieval subjects of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, or other aesthetic painters. The enigmatic woman like that in *The White Girl*, which was only later reinterpreted as an exploration of color harmonies, became an important figure in Homer's exploration of aestheticism throughout the 1870s, particularly in the ways it combined elements of realism and aestheticism.

Upon his return to the United States from Europe, Homer initially moved away from these contemplative figure paintings, even after the suggestion by the critics in 1866 that works like *The Waverley Oaks* had an appealing strength. In the 1868 NAD Annual, he exhibited *The Studio* (Figure 36), which received the typical praise that Homer had received to date with his figure paintings, but he also exhibited a pure landscape painting, *Picardie, France*, (most likely *Cernay-la-Ville – French Farm*, Figure 37), a new exhibition subject for Homer.[29] He followed up in the spring of the following year with one more landscape painting – *Manchester Coast*, likely *Rocky Coast and Gulls* (Figure 38), which depicts the large rocks at the edge of the water. A group of seagulls alight on the beach, likely in search of food, suggested by the fish skeleton on the right side of the canvas. The water breaks against the rocks, with hints of the white splash of the water above the edges of the rocks. The relatively small painting presages Homer's seascapes from his later career, which likewise explored the abstract elements of nature. Homer continued to investigate these landscape scenes and their decorative qualities throughout this year, including *Sandy Beach with Breakers* (Figure 39) a small horizontal canvas that exhibits the characteristics of these explorations. It is comprised of three horizontal

[29] Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11-15.

bands – a sandy tan band that shows the beach, a mottled blue band at the top that shows the cloudy sky, and a band in the center that has the white of the breaking waves among the dark grayish blue of the rocks and sea. Homer's landscape based paintings from the years immediately following his trip to Paris explored the painterly qualities that landscape painting afforded.

It is not particularly clear why Homer might have turned to landscape painting. As we have already seen, his reputation to date had been based on figure paintings that were seen as characterizing grand themes associated with the Civil War. He had experimented with other types of paintings – particularly figures of women – but these paintings were not major exhibition pieces. His paintings do not relate directly to the landscape tradition among American painters, which featured specifically American scenes that were used to embody and represent American culture – from the beauty of native landscape to the divine associations with landscape. Homer also moves away from the realistically represented landscape that had characterized the call for truth to nature that Ruskin had promoted and that had come to distinguish Hudson River School painting, particularly the teachings and theories of Asher B. Durand. In many ways, his paintings suggest a new direction for landscape painting, one that held to the abstract truths of nature's forms, not to the true representation of a specific place.

The formal exploration of paint on the canvas became the focus of criticism against Homer's landscape-based works, which were repeatedly criticized throughout this period as being unfinished. One critic said of *Picardie*, that "In it there is some fine color, but with not enough elaboration even to give an idea of what the artist was trying

to do."[30] The critics were unsure how to interpret this work, and what to explain to their readers, particularly as works with such limited or non-existent narrative content challenged the need for some kind of moral instruction through painting. The result was for critics to put forth that Homer had presented these sketches as finished works, a claim that was made repeatedly throughout this period, even when the works were not marked as sketches in the accompanying catalogs.

Clarence Cook was particularly upset by Homer's paintings in this vein, writing in 1868, chiding Homer for his representation of landscape: "Mr. Winslow Homer's Picardie, France is naught in naught. Nature is loyal to herself in Picardie as well as in New-Jersey, Mr. Homer, and she couldn't make a landscape like this even if she were to try." Cook, a well-known devotee of Ruskin, was concerned at the direction that Homer was taken as this work moved away from being true to nature – a shift that was occurring in British painting, too. The following year, he was outspoken that with *Rocky Coast*, Homer failed to live up to the expectations he had set out with *Prisoners from the Front*, which he noted as being acclaimed by a French painter as showing great promise.[31]

These American critics were not ready for such an extreme manifestation of these aesthetic ideas. Benson had reflected on this tendency in American criticism, particularly in reference to figure painters, which he felt critics expected to show pristine finish in their work: "So much so, in fact, that the very presence of a brush-mark is likely to bring

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[30] Goodrich &Gerdts, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, vol. I, 53.
[31] Clarence Cook in *Watson's Art Journal*, quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, ed. Abigail Booth Gerdts, vol. I (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), 105. Cook would again comment that Homer had failed to live up to his promise in his criticism of his watercolor painting in the mid-1870s, as discussed in Chapter 3.

out the reproach, 'not finished enough.'"[32] The rough delineation of the landscape in these works emphasized the broadly defined but decorative forms found in nature, not unlike Whistler's landscapes that Homer would have seen at the Exposition Universelle in 1867. Whistler exhibited three landscape paintings at the 1867 Paris Exposition. *Wapping* (Figure 40), a painting of the docks of London, and entitled after the neighborhood seen in the far distance of the painting. This poor neighborhood was renowned for its unkempt houses and high crime rate.[33] In following with Whistler's early experiments with Realism, he depicted a bluntly ordinary scene of figures in a bar, presenting an ambiguous relationship between the figures in the foreground. *Brown and Silver: Old Battersea Bridge* (Figure 41) also depicts an ordinary view from Whistler's Chelsea studio of the wooden bridge across the Thames. Working men stand on the shore below, preparing their vessel; a cart carries produce across the bridge to the watermen on the other side who would transport it down the river to the heart of London; and one man has already set off down the river. Though this painting fits the characteristics of a realistic scene, we begin to see Whistler's shift in style, moving away from the influences of Courbet, with whom he had studied in France, and towards an almost monochromatic palette, shifting his concerns from realistic imagery to more formal and compositional ones. The third of his submissions, *Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso* (Figure 42), takes this one step further. While the painting depicts ships involved in the battle at Valparaiso, Chile as part of the Chilean fight for independence from Spain, Whistler was more concerned with the harmony of the purple and blue sky at twilight and its play on the green water below. The paintings

[32] Eugene Benson, "Old Masters in the Louvre, and Modern Art," *The Atlantic Monthly* 21, no. 123 (1868): 117.
[33] Dorment and MacDonald, *James Mcneill Whistler*, 103.

present a timeline of his development from his study of realism to a more marked interest in decorative forms and design, likely an intentional retrospective presentation, given Whistler's calculated approach to presenting his art.

By 1867, he had developed a theory of landscape that pulled the viewer between the direct representation of a naturally observed scene and the decorative elements of which that scene was composed.[34] In *Wapping*, he placed the viewer in direct relationship with the scene that he had observed, representing the perceptual end of this theory. In contrast to this perceptually based representation, Whistler eventually saw landscape painting as an opportunity to explore the decorative qualities in nature seen in *Valparaiso*. Art historian John Siewert describes this division of types as interrelated: "[Whistler] increasingly worked at uncovering nature's intrinsically decorative properties and cultivating from their interaction a hybrid pictorial form, a process of discovery and synthesis that culminated in events and images in 1867," including the inclusion of these paintings in the Exposition Universelle.[35]

Within the context of so-called Hudson River School landscape paintings with which these paintings were presented, Whistler's starkly new approach to painting must have marked him as an avant-garde painter whose concerns as an artist were more closely aligned with aesthetic and formal interests, despite the realistic elements in these early works. Art historian John Siewert argues that these early landscape paintings presented everyday subject matter, "endowed with pictorial qualities that elevated a mundane

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[34] William M. Rosesetti records Whistler's discussion of these types in a diary entry in 1867. For a complete discussion see John Siewert, "Whistler's Decorative Darkness," in *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, ed. Susan P. Casteras (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1996), 101. I rely here on Siewert's definition of this dichotomy.

[35] For a complete discussion of Whistler's early interests in the decorative and its progression through the 1870s, see Ibid., 93-108.

subject to the higher order of Art" and thus placed Whistler as "an appealing talent who seemed to be offering a fresh & promising perspective." [36] This elevation of everyday, common subjects was something for which Homer's American colleagues were encouraging young artists to strive, as seen in Chapter 1 of this study. Whistler's inclusion in the American exhibition provided a potential example for Homer on how to approach landscape subjects that would differ from what was increasingly seen as a staid, outdated approach of the New York School.

While Whistler served as a visual example for Homer, Eugene Benson continued to offer written guidance for exploring formal elements of landscape subjects. In his article "Old Masters in the Louvre and Modern Art," Benson commented on America's disadvantage due to their being disconnected to the tradition and history of old Europe, particularly in this case the Old Masters from the Louvre. In turn, Americans emphasized knowledge and reason over the enjoyment and perception that he saw in Old Master paintings.[37] After a long discussion of particular works in the Louvre, Benson concluded that "the true painters of to-day are not figure-painters, but landscape painters."[38] To Benson, figure painters relied too much on the scientific and literary recounting of details of story-telling through their work, losing the feeling and passion seen in the old master works. Landscape painters in contrast "hold the subject subordinate, they are simple men of the brush… All these men *paint*, - use the brush splendidly; and it is thus this use of the brush (which distinguishes *the* painter), that contemporary figure painters seem most deficient. "[39] Benson privileged the painterly qualities which the landscape subject

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[36] Ibid.: 100.
[37] Benson, "Old Masters in the Louvre, and Modern Art," 111.
[38] Ibid.: 117.
[39] Ibid.

allowed these painters to investigate, qualities that had been a crucial part of his theories of aestheticism which he began to articulate several years earlier. For Benson, it came down to the subject – for modern painting, subject became the most important thing, a fact that limited the freedom that a painter had because of his need to include a subject that would resonate with his viewer. His tone in articulating this, though was one of frustration at the loss of painter's

Homer's next turn suggests a potential solution to Benson's call for contemporary figure painters to focus on the painterly qualities rather than the subject of their work. Beginning in 1869, we see Homer beginning to combine the landscape experimentation of the preceding years with the figure painting with which he had become well known. He began to populate these decoratively composed landscapes with contemporary figures. He first exhibited one of these paintings, *Low Tide*, at the 1869 Winter exhibition at the National Academy of Design. The painting was destroyed soon after its exhibition, likely by being cut into the two paintings known today as *Beach Scene* (Figure 43) and *On the Beach* (Figure 44).[40] An illustration in *Every Saturday: An Illustrated Journal of Choice Reading*, published August 6, 1870 (Figure 45), likewise gives a sense of the composition of the painting as it was exhibited. The illustration was marked as being from a painting by Homer, and was printed alongside the companion to *Low Tide* entitled *High Tide*, based on the painting that Homer would exhibit that following year at the National Academy (*Eagle Head Massachusetts*, Figure 29). The marked difference between the original *Low Tide* and the fragments that exist today is the inclusion of the three girls in the foreground of the illustration, which gives the

[40] Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 81-83.

illustration a more narrative tone. This was a common practice for Homer, who would often include more narrative elements in illustrations based on his paintings, recognition of the differences between these media, and the audience's expectations of each.

The *Evening Mail*'s review gives a full description of the painting as exhibited:

> Here we have three grand horizontal layers of color – like rock strata. The upper is of brownish gray and dirty white with a suggestion of vermilion now and then – like the marble of Brachificari. This is the sky. The next lower level is of dark greenish blue, like some coal layers we have seen. On this there are dashes of flake white here and there which remind us of the story of how the artist succeeded in getting the foam on the mouth of a mad dog he was painting – by throwing his dirty sponge in indignation at the canvas. This second layer is the sea. The third is a belt of brown of many shades, and this is the beach; and to do it justice it looks like a beach, but it is the only division of the picture which taken apart has any evidence of design to it.[41]

The layered approach to rendering the landscape, which this reviewer described in detail, resembles Whistler's decorative approach to his landscape scenes, particularly in the later works such a *Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso*. The landscape becomes reduced to its formal qualities, with the brushwork and other formal components used to define the landscape. In this way, Homer explored the formal qualities of the painting itself with his use of flat bands of color that extend across the length of the canvas. As in *Sandy Beach with Breakers*, for example, the effect is to flatten the picture and create very little perspective in the scene.

The figures seen in the existing fragments *Beach Scene* and *On the Beach* have been added to this abstract foundation with simple dabs of flat color, and very little modeling of form. The critic continues disparagingly:

> The rest suggests unhappy accident on canvas only. On the wet sand, and on the dry sand, and further out toward those mysterious white places, are children bathing or about to bathe. Many of these are charmingly posed little pictures in

[41] "Fine Arts. The Winter Exhibition of the National Academy of Design," *New York Evening Mail*, 6 November 1869.

> themselves – it would not be the work of Homer if it had not a lurking charm somewhere. But among these figures is one to whose presence we object. It is of a young lady, with her back towards us and her hair in charming negligee, who stands close to where the water is supposed to be coming in and looks on. We don't object to her presence because here back is towards us, but because of her height – she is seven feet high. [42]

Not only does this painterly brushwork show Homer responding to Benson's push for pure painting through expressive landscape paintings, but also, as we have seen, Whistler was exploring this type of abstract brushwork to delineate forms and objects in his paintings, such as *Old Battersea Bridge*. It is possible, then, that Homer was responding again to the work that he had seen in France during the Exposition, experimenting with these early conceptions of aestheticism and uses of color alone on the canvas while simultaneously depicting a contemporary subject, in this case young children at the water's edge.

The dramatic composition of *Low Tide* left it particularly susceptible to the critics' disapproval, calling it everything from "a Watering-place deformity" to "unworthy of any collection of works of art."[43] Several critics responded positively, but even when they did, they found fault in something of the composition. The *Evening Post* commented that "Winslow Homer … seems to be at high tide in the matter of color. We like this picture because it indicates power beyond that of such an odd and imperfect conception."[44] The *Evening Express* described it as "Perhaps one of the most original pictures in the collection," continuing by saying:

> Mr. Homer has here flown in the face of all the accredited rules of art; his color is cold and crude and his drawing is bad… Yet, with all this there is an irresistible

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, "National Academy of Design. Third Winter Exhibition," *New York World*, 6 November 1869, 12.
[44] "Fine Arts. National Academy of Design," *New York Evening Post*, 24 November 1869, 1.

> something in the whole that rivets the beholder, when he might in all probability pass by a picture more carefully finished, but lacking in force. The great secrets of the work are its force and its originality.[45]

While overall the critics' reaction was negative and concerned with Homer's choice in this work, there was some sense that Homer's work was powerful and unique, establishing a sense of Homer's originality set him apart from other Americans. This originality was based on Homer's inventive approach to color and simple observation that translated into a representation based on elements of aestheticism. Homer's *Low Tide* was not a specific representation of a place, nor was it representative of a didactic narrative. Homer's scene of children at the beach presented a study of formal elements, brushstrokes of color placed on the canvas to suggest the basic elements of the scene. In this way, Homer attempted to present a painting of the day – one that moved away from the details of storytelling and toward the feeling and passion that Benson had identified in landscape painting and the Old Masters.

It is likely that Homer removed *Low Tide* from the National Academy of Design's winter exhibition, replacing it with *Long Branch, New Jersey*, (Figure 46).[46] With this work, Homer addressed some of the issues that the critics had identified in *Low Tide*, while maintaining the formal elements that he was exploring. There are numerous similarities between the works, including the subject of contemporary figures at the beachside resort of Long Branch. The composition of the landscape, though, is perhaps the most similar. Like *Low Tide* and Homer's other landscape scenes, he has used broad masses of color to define the areas of the composition. The shelters at the dune are defined by a grouping of flat geometric shapes along the edge of the canvas. The light

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[45] "Art Matters. Third Winter Exhibitino of the National Academy of Design. Second Article," *New York Evening Express*, 24 November 1869, 1.
[46] Goodrich and Gerdts, *The Record of Works by Winslow Homer*, vol. 2, 140.

blue of the ocean blends into the sky, with a horizon defined by dabs of paint that define the boats on the horizon. The most dramatic of these areas is the dune itself, comprised of a large expanse of tan, accented with darker dabs of paint that define the sandy dune atop which two fashionably dressed young women stand. These foreground figures appear to be the difference that led the critics to praise *Long Branch*, despite the treatment of the background figures, who are defined by touches of paint.

One critic recognized this, describing *Long Branch* as being composed "with groups of expressively drawn figures in the foreground and a perspective exemplified by subtle gradations of color with marvelous power and reality."[47] He attributed the less-defined treatment of these smaller figures to the realistic effects of perspective. In this way, Homer accentuated the realistic elements that his critical audience had come to expect. The main figures represented a modern character type – in this case two young women at the beachside, and a specific beach at that. Long Branch was known during this period as a beach that attracted characters of all type, unlike the more wealthy beaches of Cape May, New Jersey or Nahant, Massachusetts. With the small details of the painting such as the lap dog that accompanies one of the figures and the pince-nez which the other holds, Homer calls into question the pretensions of the middle-class visitor to the beach.[48] The connection to contemporary social practices eased the reception of his unique compositional strategies, and set up a new direction for his exploration of contemporary themes in his work. While he approached these contemporary themes in his exhibitions works around 1870, he did not abandon the shift away from moral commentary and narrative paintings. Instead, particularly in his images

[47] Lloyd Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer* ed. Abigail Booth Gerdts, vol. II (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), 109.
[48] Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation*, 63.

of women, he continued to explore formal elements of paintings and themes that would serve to elevate his viewer through their exposure to the work itself, not necessarily any particular message that it contained. These works strike a balance between existing for their own sake and the presentation of social types that reflected a truthful American scene.

National Academy of Design 1870

Homer exhibited a record number of paintings at the 1870 NAD exhibition. Eight of the eleven canvases were presented as studies or sketches, and all depicted nature subjects.[49] These paintings carried over some influence of Homer's experience in Paris. In *Lobster Cove* (Figure 47), for example, Homer depicted the view of the cove in Manchester, Massachusetts, a town north of Boston. In the foreground of the small oil painting, two lobster fisherman climb across the large boulders on the shore of the cove. They are dwarfed, however, by the landscape around them. Homer has focused the viewer on the atmospheric effects of the twilight sun and its reflection on the water below. With canvases such as this, Homer changed his approach to this landscape-based aestheticism, instead presenting these explorations of aesthetic issues as studies. This move made them more appealing to the American viewers who were reluctant to accept the sketchiness of Homer's paintings as finished.

Homer's major canvases also exhibited a shift of focus from landscape-based paintings back to figural paintings, *Eagle Head, Bridle Path* and *Manners and Customs at the Seaside,* (Figures 29 and 30). In all of these paintings, Homer focused more directly on large-scale figures within the landscape, including more of a didactic element

[49] The eight paintings included *Lobster Cove, White Mountain Wagon, Sawkill River, Pennsylvania*, Sketch from Nature, *Mount Adams*, *Sail Boat*, *Salem Harbor*, and *As You Like It?*. Five of these are unknown today.

than the previous year's paintings. They also contrasted to the figures included in his sketches, such as *Lobster Cove*, where the figures are dwarfed and overpowered by the landscape. In these larger exhibition canvases, the figures appear monumental and more in line with the character types with which Homer had previously found success. This return to larger figure paintings appealed to the critics' expectation of his work, they still had strong association with contemporary figure types. In these new works, though, Homer appropriated many of the strategies of aestheticism, combining them with the expected narrative elements found in his earlier work.

Benson's review of Homer with which we began this chapter was one of the first extensive reviews of Homer's work, and in it he compared the work of other artists to that of Homer in a way that singled Homer out of the crowd. Benson described *Bridle Path* as "simply, broadly, vigorously drawn and painted," a quality that not only emphasized Homer's individuality but also encouraged the viewer to respond to the painting in a direct and engaging way:

> You should surrender yourself to the pleasure of her breezy, health-giving ride; you look at her with gusto; you see she is a little warm, perhaps too warm, from her ride up the mountain; but then she, like us, lets herself be refreshed with all the coolness and light about her, with the rising vapors that make a white, dazzling veil between her and the shining, glittering valleys, all hidden by mist, and, as it were, under a river of life.[50]

The perceived passion of Homer's vigorously handled paint was meant to evoke in the viewers a response that carried them to the top of the mountain, where they could feel the breeze and become refreshed by the misty vapors and glittering sun.

With this ability to engage the viewer in this refreshing experience, Benson contrasted Homer's painting with the "sick wall-paper" of the Pre-Raphaelites and the

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[50] Benson, "The Annual Exhibition of the Academy," 702.

"flavorless figure, as if from English illustrated magazines."[51] Benson maintained that the power of Homer's painting relied on the same expression and passion that was evoked through the broad and vigorous handling of paint that create the "large and obvious relations" within the painting. This overall effect of the painting was influenced by Homer's monochromatic palette, which in many ways recalls the mostly white palette of Whistler's *White Girl*.

The painting's level of finish played a large part in Benson's characterization, too. He described Homer's finish saying, "generally it falls below the standard of finish and detail which is within the reach of our most childish and mediocre painters, and which misleads many, and deceives painters with the thought that by going from particular to particular, of itself insures a fine result in art."[52] Benson not only criticized the close attention to detail of Pre-Raphaelitism, but also suggested that Homer was attempting to change figure painting by moving away from this attention to detail and toward a focus on the expressive qualities of brushwork. Any amateurish painter could create work that imitated the details of objects. Homer created a complete scene without being overly detailed and which resulted in evoking emotion and understanding in the viewer. The lack of detail and sketchier brushwork facilitated a more immediate relationship with the viewer who was able to see evidence of the artist's work through the brushwork on the canvas. These elements were indicative of how Homer was presenting more mature, seasoned paintings that would rival European art with its feeling or the mood that it inspired. This focus on the evocation of mood had evolved throughout the theoretical discussions of the 1860s. Homer had now taken them up in his paintings.

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[51] Ibid.: 702.
[52] Ibid.: 703.

Homer's work throughout this period shifted from his successful characterization of contemporary figures, through a period of experimentation with landscape and its formal qualities, to a combination of both, where he placed contemporary figures in these abstracted landscapes. These early works combine subject matter that is connected to realism with scenes from contemporary life, with an aesthetic approach to painting that emphasized the rendition of feeling or mood through a variety of elements in the painting, including the light of the scene and the placement of brushstrokes. He likewise moved away from narrative and moral commentary through his works, only to be called back through the critical reaction to the more aesthetic works. During the years between 1867 and 1870, Homer responded to both the aesthetic precedent of Whistler, while looking to adhere to American theoretical elements that were explored in chapter 1.

Benson was quick to separate Homer from what he viewed as the negative sides of aestheticism – the overly decorative elements that he referred to as "sick wall-paper." He consistently attached him to realism, claiming for him a "seeing eye," that connected Homer to his observations of the contemporary world. Benson was still concerned with beauty in a way that realism was not, particularly in his criticism of Homer's women, who should be the epitome of beauty. Given his praise for this work, particularly in comparison to the "ugly" women of *Eagle Head*, *Bridle Path* seemed to be most successful of Homer's works in the 1870 exhibition. The painting met all of Benson's requirements for successful American art. It took an everyday subject and rose above the monotony of it through its ability to transfer or evoke the feeling of being in the mountains through the simple application of paint and representation of the scene. The figure in *Bridle Path* does not engage the viewer directly. Instead, the viewer is engaged

by the painting itself – the way that the light envelopes the scenes, and it is the depiction of the overall composition effectively transports the viewer to the location. This passive involvement of the viewer became characteristic of Homer's aestheticism.

Homer's Women of the 1870s

Another point of Benson's reviews from 1870 bears specific mention, for it influenced the direction of Homer's aestheticism for the rest of the decade. In response to the Homer's figures in *Eagle Head*, Benson wrote, "the three girls on the beach in the large picture in the north gallery are not beautiful; their legs are not well drawn, nor are they fine or elegant in form."[53] Benson continued, though, to describe the use of women within painting – a use that aligned with the growing interest in aestheticism. He wrote, "The moment a painter selects a girl for a subject, the lovely, the beautiful is his object."[54] Benson expressed concern that Homer's attempt to be natural rendered these beautiful objects "awkward" and uninteresting. He continued, "Mr. Homer may be called a downright painter of nature; as an artist, he has yet to reach the exquisite and beautiful; he is now in the good and true. He has invention, he is fresh and just in his observation, and he has but to attain the beautiful to become our master figure-painter."[55] For Benson, it was up to the painter to employ artistic license to interpret nature and make it beautiful, and "to use his faculties, through organs that have been disciplined to produce beautiful and enchanting things, and which beguile us from the stupid and barren and monotonous conditions of mere order and imitation to which we are commonly committed."[56] Homer, instead, presented modern female figures, evidenced by their modern swimsuits and

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

independent nature, causing him to miss the mark when it came to presenting paintings of beauty – a crucial element in Benson's call for the restorative power of art that had echoed through his writing throughout the 1860s.

Throughout the 1870s, Homer repeatedly returned to the solitary female subject in several series of paintings. The first were painted around 1872 and feature a young woman dressed in a dramatic black dress with a lace color. (Figures 48-51) She sits in a dark interior setting by a window. The second related group, from the same year, shows a young woman in a white dress, outside in a shaded grove of trees. (Figures 54-56) He returned to the subject again in 1875, this time in watercolor, where he painted a series featuring a young woman, this time in a white dress with a decorative leaf trim. (Figures 62-64) He began painting the last series in 1876, featuring a similar female figure in a variety of settings that played with different formal and aesthetic elements. (Figures 2, 65 and 66) These paintings are linked by several factors – few of the early paintings were exhibited, and when they were, it was in the small, more intimate settings of the Century Association's monthly meetings, or to other more private audiences, particularly in the early part of the decade. The later pictures were exhibited at the Watercolor Society exhibitions. In all of these images, Homer reduced the narrative potential of the images, particularly as the decade progressed.

In the first group of oil paintings from 1872, Homer set out to investigate issues of light and shade through the repeated depiction of a figure in an interior space. The series included at least four paintings – *An Open Window, Reverie* (Figure 48), and *At the Window* (Figure 50), and *Salem* (Figure 51). All show the same figure wearing a black dress with a white ruffled collar. She is seated or standing in a chair beside an open

window which floods the space with light. In *At the Window*, potted plants sit at the window, and the dark-clad figure blends into the shade of the room beneath the window. This contrasts with her face which is brightly lit on the side closest to the window, and cast into shadow on the other. In the closely related *Morning Glories* (Figure 52), she is seated in the same window, but viewed from the exterior, casting the interior space into severely dark shadow. She holds a vine in her hand, closely studying the leaves.

This series of paintings has a strong similarity to Dutch genre painting of the seventeenth century, particularly in the dress and raking light used to illuminate the dark interiors.[57] There was a strong interest in Dutch genre painters among late-nineteenth century collectors, who increasingly favored the Old Masters over contemporary art. Dutch art had a unique appeal to the American audience for the belief that it not only was the beginning of the modern era, but also because of its purported realistic representation. Dutch art was believed to elevate everyday subjects – genre, landscape, and portraiture – to a higher status in the artistic hierarchy, one that had previously been attributed to history painting. This turn to everyday subjects was something that American theorists had encouraged artists to do in this period, and which Homer had been working since the late 1860s, to find a subject through which he could find ideal beauty in the everyday. Dutch art was believed to have these qualities, finding beauty in realistic depictions of everyday life.[58]

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[57] Nicolai Cikovsky notes Homer's reference to Dutch interiors with this series, particularly given the dress of the sitter, which resembles the severe black and white clothing of 17th century Dutch genre paintings. See Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 123-25.

[58] Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art & Culture* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1998), 24.

Homer's interest in Dutch art can possibly be linked to Benson's travels to Holland in the summer of 1871. He reported on these travels in a series of articles about Holland and Dutch art published in *Appleton's Journal* in the fall of that year. While Benson found the Dutch people to be old and stodgy, he wrote about the art of the Dutch masters with admiration, describing artists such as Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Jan Steen as "the parent pictures of modern art; they mark a new epoch in painting, and show a triumph of *fact* over *symbol*, of life over allegory, of the familiar or common over the exceptional and noble."[59] In the early 1870s, Benson's ideas about art became increasingly focused on the ways that art could best represent a national identity, and he upheld the Dutch example as appropriate for a democratic society in the way it embraced the everyday and familiar. This article likewise indicated a shift for Benson who now was privileging the scientific fact over symbols in art, a shift from his critical focus on scientific knowledge in the late 1860s.

While Homer's paintings certainly depict figures that resemble the starkly clad Dutch of the seventeenth century, the overall feeling of these paintings is quite different. Dutch genre paintings, like Vermeer's *YoungWoman with a Water Pitcher*, recorded the daily activities of the Dutch people, whereas Homer's women sit in deep thought or contemplation. Dutch portraits were more staid and solemn than the genre paintings, but Homer does not present these paintings as specific portraits. Instead, Homer combined the Dutch-like figure with the contemplation that Benson had promoted earlier as necessary for the elevation of modern Americans beyond the common elements of life.

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[59] Eugene Benson, "A Dutch Capital and Dutch Art," *Appleton's Journal* 6, no. 125 (1871): 216.

Beyond the democratic representation of everyday figures, these figures also serve as objects through which Homer explores technical and aesthetic exercises, challenging in some ways the democratic feeling that one might expect. The figures seem closed and caged when compared to Homer's earlier contemplative women. Here, they contemplate nature, but through an open window, or in the form of potted plants, not the open expanse of the woods or fields that we had seen in Homer's paintings just a few years before. Even when the figure is outside and engaged in reading, as in *Girl Reading on a Porch* (Figure 53), the composition closes her in. She is held in the frame of the doorway with the open expanse of nature only seen in the slight opening of the door on the opposite side of the house. This painting is similar to Homer's other aesthetic works in that it encloses and entraps the figure within the space of the picture. This contrasts his more public display of the New Woman at a time when women were fighting for greater independence.

Salem (known also as *Looking Out to Sea, and Female Figure in Black near a Window*, Figure 51) helps to explain the function of these works within Homer's oeuvre. There is no doubt that this painting belongs to the group that explored the effects of sunlight coming through the window, as this painting shows the sharpest contrast between the dark, black shadows in which the young woman sits and the brightly lit scene through the window. The floral symbolism in this painting, however, makes a statement about the figure and her situation. Homer's potted plant, a geranium which symbolized gentility and expected meeting, indicate that this painting is one about longing and lost love, as the woman sits, gazing longing out the window to the scene

beyond.[60] This inclusion of a theme or symbol, though, does not negate the aestheticism of this painting, a fact that would come to characterize Homer's interests in aestheticism. Unlike some of his British peers such as Whistler, Homer's aestheticism never separated entirely from incorporating a message in his paintings. At the very least, he left the interpretation of his paintings open enough that they could be read on multiple levels, incorporating symbolic uses of certain imagery like flowers, while simultaneously exploring the formal elements in his paintings.

Homer continued his aesthetic study in a series of paintings, including *Butterfly* (Figure 54), *Sunlight and Shadow* (Figure 55), and *Summer Afternoon* (Figure 56), all from 1872. Here, Homer again studied the effects of light and shade, this time in a garden setting. The young woman poses in a seated profile position in *The Butterfly*. She is dressed in a flowing garment, and holds a decorative fan in her hand. A butterfly has alighted on her hand, and she bends her head to study the delicate beauty of this creature. Homer created an interesting composition with the background of the painting in bright sunlight, almost eliminating the details of the fence and brush in the back left. On the back right, we see the sharp contrast of shadow cast on the trees and brush. The figure sits in the shade as well, with the brightly lit area in the middle ground. In *Sunlight and Shadow*, Homer depicts the same young woman dressed in the same clothing, yet this time she lounges in a hammock. Her feet are thrown over the side of the hammock and she reads a book. In *Summer Afternoon*, we find her again, this time standing in front of the hammock with the fan hanging from her wrist. She tilts her chin to her chest, hands extended to grab the hammock that is stretched between the trees behind her. In *Summer*

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[60] Judith Walsh, "The Language of Flowers and Other Floral Symbolism Used by Winslow Homer," *Magazine Antiques* 156, no. 5 (1999).

Afternoon and *Sunlight and Shadow*, Homer places the woman in the shady spot under the trees where the hammock is stretched. The paintings are dominated by the play of light on the leaves behind the figure, which creates an all-over composition. The lack of horizon line focuses the viewer on the surface of the painting, across which the hammock creates a band of gold. In *Sunlight and Shadow*, the brightest point in the center of the painting is the reflection of the sun off the woman's dress, peeking out above the edge of the hammock.

Sarah Burns has suggested that the model for these outdoor studies was Helena DeKay, whom Homer painted in a portrait from around the same year (Figure 57).[61] Homer's portrait of Helena de Kay shows a striking resemblance to Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1: Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (Figure 58).[62] Both portraits display the female figure seated in profile, as did the painting *Butterfly* from Homer's 1872 series of oil paintings. Whistler's mother wears a black dress as she had since her husband's death in 1859. She is placed between two frames with a curtain hanging on the left side of the painting. The painting is composed primarily in shades of grey and black, with some accents of white. An underlying geometric structure creates the sense of space. The curtain to the left provides a vertical emphasis that counteracts the verticality of the sitter who is placed off center, to the right. There is very little

[61] Scholars have debated the date of this portrait. The painting itself is dated 1874, the date of DeKay's marriage to Richard Watson Gilder, but there is evidence that it was painted much earlier – see Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 122-23. For the identification of DeKay as Homer's model, see Sarah Burns, "The Courtship of Winslow Homer," *Magazine Antiques* 161, no. 2 (2002): 68-75.

[62] Homer was possibly aware of Whistler's *Arrangement in Black and Grey* through a photograph in the collection of Samuel Putnam Avery. Avery and Whistler established a strong friendship during the early years of the 1870s. Avery documented in his diary a visit to Whistler during the summer he was painting this portrait, and also a record of returning the next year, on the date which the photograph was signed by Whistler's mother.

perspective differentiation in between the wall, the baseboard, and the floor. The chair seems almost to be floating in space. De Kay is also dressed in black and is placed in a stark room, though the space seems more clearly defined than in Whistler's portrait. She slumps in her chair with a book on her lap, and a rose fallen to the floor.

This portrait also resembles the 1872 interior studies, and Helena's role as the model suggests an alternative influence on Homer's exploration of formal elements through this series. Much has been speculated about a potential love between De Kay and Homer, which was thwarted when De Kay married the writer Richard Watson Gilder in 1874.[63] It is believed that Homer met Helena De Kay after his return from France in late 1867, as her brother Charles De Kay occupied Homer's studio in the University Building while Homer had been away. During this time, De Kay was studying at the Women's Art School at Cooper Union with the hopes of becoming an artist. At the very least Homer and Helena established a friendly relationship that was built around their artistic aspirations. In the early 1870s, Homer offered to instruct De Kay on drawing for illustration and is known to have met with her during their separate vacations away from New York City during the summer of 1872, when Homer painted these works.[64] If De Kay was in fact the model for these studies, it is quite possible that she also played a role in introducing and exploring issues of aestheticism. She was actively involved in the avant-garde artistic movements in New York, particularly after her marriage to Gilder. The two became the leaders of a small artistic circle and were involved in the founding of the American Art Association, which would become the Society of American Artists in 1877 in reaction to what was felt to be the stodginess of the National Academy of Design.

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[63] Burns, "The Courtship of Winslow Homer," 73.
[64] Ibid.: 71.

Regardless of the identity of the model, one might consider that these bright, outdoor paintings depict the leisure pursuits of a young middle-class woman. Yet, even as a group they do not spell out a particular narrative in terms of a continuous story of a young woman's pursuits. Homer's exhibition of the works seems to indicate that they were not meant to be seen together in terms of a series that would narrate a particular experience. There is no record of the exhibition of *Summer Afternoon* during the 1870s, but both *The Butterfly* and *Sunlight and Shadow* were exhibited at monthly meetings of the Century Association – *Butterfly* in March and *Sunlight and Shadow* in April of 1873.[65] The exhibition of these works in consecutive monthly exhibitions seems to indicate that Homer was interested in showing them as different approaches to his study.

Significant, too, is the fact that Homer exhibited them at the Century, rather than another major exhibition of the day. These small, intimate meetings provided an environment for Homer to explore the reception of these studies, and indicate an interest among the Century's members in the exploration of more advanced or avant-garde aesthetic issues. This was true of Homer's interior studies as well. *At the Window,* and possibly *Reverie,* were exhibited at the Century during 1873, as well. One reviewer described the painting and its emphasis and interest in studying light and shade: "Winslow Homer contributed a strongly-painted and admirably drawn interior, with the figure of a young lady seated at an open window. Flowering plants are growing upon the window-seat, and the landscape out of doors appears dressed in the foliage of early summer. The picture is particularly brilliant in the effect of light and shade."[66] Homer seems to be more wary about where he exhibited these paintings. Given the negative

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[65] Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer* 185.
[66] Quoted in Ibid., 178.

reactions to his aesthetic showings in 1869, it is no wonder that Homer did not exhibit these aesthetic exercises beyond the relatively safe confines of the Century, where the audience was known, and perhaps was even discussing such themes related to aestheticism.

The positive response that these paintings received must have encouraged Homer to exhibit more paintings in this vein, which he did throughout 1873, including the presentation of six paintings that exhibit the trend toward aestheticism in an auction held at Somerville Art Gallery in May of 1873. Homer included either *Sunlight and Shadow* or *Summer Afternoon* in this sale, along with *Coming Through the Rye* (the figure in a wheat field that Homer had painted during his travels to France in 1867), *Waiting for a Partner* (Figure 59), *Apple Blossoms* (currently unidentified) and *Crossing the Bridge* (Figure 60). *Crossing the Bridge*, also known as *The Fisherman's Wife*, shows a young woman and a young boy crossing a bridge that cuts across the canvas. Homer had exhibited the closely related painting, *The Morning Bell* (Figure 61) at the 1872 National Academy exhibition. Whereas the context is clearly given in *The Morning Bell*, the close-up view of this small oil panel eliminates the contextual details of the painting, focusing in on the figure who carries a small satchel in her left hand. She and the young boy look away from the viewer, leaving the viewer with little opportunity to gauge the context through their facial expressions or interactions. Furthermore, the bridge creates two sharp diagonals across the surface of the painting at the intersection of which the woman and her young companion stand. By eliminating the context, Homer effectively shifted the focus of painting away from a narrative about the young woman walking to the factory for work. The dominance of the boards in the bridge challenged the viewer to

focus on the surface of the painting, which is also emphasized by the lower horizon of the painting.

The aesthetic elements of *Coming through the Rye* were highlighted by the reviewer for the *Arcadian*, when Homer exhibited the painting in 1873: "Less pleasing [than Homer's girl in the hammock], because of its pre-Raphaelitism gone wild, is his picture – a small one – of a girl gathering blossoms. She is very May-fly of the kind with which anglers betray the speckled trout. Ephemeral, unreal, but angelic."[67] By 1873, the *Arcadian* reviewer connected Homer to the idealism of aestheticism that Homer had begun to explore in this early moment as he moved away from reality and inclusion of the fleeting elements of beauty and design through the representation of an ideal woman. The pursuit of this ideal woman continued through Homer's watercolor paintings in the mid- to late-1870s. Beginning in 1875, he painted the solitary female figure in an even sparser setting than in the early part of the decade. *Portrait of a Lady* (Figure 62), for example, depicts a young woman in a distinguished white dress, trimmed with a patterned detail. She wears a black scarf at her neck, a dark belt at her waist and a black ribbon in her hair. She appears again in *Trysting Place* (Figure 63) this time holding a decorative fan, awaiting the arrival of her boyfriend, as indicate by the title of the work. *Portrait of a Lady* gives the viewer some sense of the courtship theme, or love gone wrong, was she holds a flower, the traditional symbol of love, and it has pricked her finger, suggesting some sort of trouble in love.

The compositional treatment of both of these works emphasizes Homer's shift away from the narrative context. Homer created a dense, green background by layering transparent washes of watercolor to achieve the varied green elements of the foliage

[67] Ibid., 51.

behind the figure. It modulates from a deep, almost black-green at the bottom right, flecked with light green leaves, to a lighter green touched by darker leaf-like forms at the top. The intense green area of the background contrasts to the white of the dress, the folds of which have been defined by grayish-blue tones. The contrast between the dark background and the brightness of the figure serves to focus the viewer's attention on the woman. She stands in a garden, looking at her finger, which the rose branch has just pricked.

The same figure appears in a series of watercolors that Homer painted in 1875, believed to be painted on his first trip to Prouts Neck, Maine, which would later become his home. He had spent time there during the summer of 1875 with other members of the Homer family, including his brother Arthur, who had recently married Alice Patch, who some believe could have been the model for these watercolors. The varied treatment of the figure and her surroundings in these watercolors indicates that Homer was experimenting with the variety of techniques and possibilities that the watercolor medium provided. Homer took a sketchier approach to some of these watercolors, like *Fiction* (Figure X) where an ambiguously defined background surrounds the figure who sits in a small chair, reading a novel. The graphite of his outline drawing is still seen through the transparent watercolor washes, and helps to define several details of the figure. The folds of her dress are highlighted with bright white areas, but the specific textural qualities of the fabric are ill-defined, leaving only an impression for the viewer.

In the next few years, Homer continued to explore aesthetic studies using this same figure. He places her in a variety of settings, each of which is an exploration of color and the watercolor medium. He exhibited several of them at the 1877 exhibition of

the American Society of Painters in Water Colors, including *Blackboard*, *Backgammon*, *Lemon*, *Book*, and *Rattlesnake* (Figures 2, 65, and 66). We can see in the three of the four surviving paintings that stylistically these paintings are truly decorative. Their subject matter also lends them to be interpreted as decorative, for all of the women are engaged in leisure activities. *Backgammon* depicts two women seated on a stiff sofa, involved in a game of backgammon, one holding a fan. Homer utilizes Japanese aesthetic devices, including the clever positioning of his signature on the far right of the painting and the silhouette of the group created by eliminating the back legs of the sofa. The women are also engaged in a leisure activity, holding a beautiful fan. In *Lemon*, we see another decorative scene that depicts a woman seated on an ornately carved ottoman peeling a lemon. The space around her is defined by a light yellow backdrop that associates with the title and the woman's activity. Though she is occupied with the lemon, the activity can be associated with leisure as she is dressed fashionably and seated on a nice chair. Such leisure activity was only possible to upper-middle class women who could afford such fashionable clothing and furniture. In *Book*, Homer shows a woman reclining in non-descript landscape, reading. She is again engaged in activity, yet it is unclear what the book is about. Though the current title, *The New Novel*, suggests that the young woman is reading from the newly popularized novel that was produced for women's enjoyment and leisure, Homer does not give any visual clues as to the nature of the book. He associates it with the background through the color of the bookcover, creating an overall harmony between the figure and the ground.

So we can see that Homer, stylistically is working with aesthetic problems. Critics of the Society's exhibition also noticed these aesthetic interests. Of *Book*, the *Art*

Journal critic writes of the harmonious palette: "a rich and agreeable palette of colour, composed of greens cool and warm, yellows of peculiar shades, composing textured material positive and charming, and this combination was keyed and emphasized by deep, dark blues and iron-colour."[68] *The Nation* reported that in *Lemon* "Mr. Homer has combined not alone expressive action of the human form, but he has accomplished in it a scale of refined colour and tone which even his warmest admirers could hardly have anticipated from his brush."[69] The critics noticed Homer's movement toward more aesthetic concerns, a trend that the Society and watercolor in general were picking up on. The contemporary audience felt that watercolor was a medium that easily lent itself to more decorative and aesthetic concerns: "Water-color painting seems so especially adapted for happy thoughts, pretty bits of landscape, clever turns of figure that are not quite worth perpetuating in the gravity of oils."[70]

Homer however does not present entirely aesthetic paintings in this group of watercolors. *Blackboard* is visually aesthetic and in this way is similar to the other three paintings. We see a teacher in front of a blackboard with geometric figures inscribed on the board. Homer uses a relatively monochrome palette and arranges the wall into zones of color which virtually eliminate any sense of depth and make the figure appear to be floating in space. In design, the painting seems highly aesthetic. However, the subject is obviously connected to the recent developments in education including the position of women as teachers and the introduction of art lessons into school curricula. The painting can also be interpreted within the constraints of the Aesthetic Movement, and the conservative gender ideals of separate spheres. Walter Smith, a recent British immigrant,

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[68] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 154.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *New York Times*, January 21, 1877, p. 7.

introduced the teaching of drawing in Massachusetts, a lesson that was seen as valuable to a male, industrial education.[71] However, Roger B. Stein suggests that Smith also "believed that by allowing women to explore their 'thoroughly feminine' aesthetic impulses, women's art would become a hedge against 'woman's rights and radicalism.'"[72] By teaching women artistic principles, they were giving them an important role in society as decorators. In this way women were placated and at least temporarily kept out of the public sphere.[73]

There existed a tension in the Aesthetic Movement and its promotion of art education that Homer seems to embody in this painting. In light of the tension, the viewer can read *Blackboard* as representing a seemingly independent schoolmarm, described by the New York Times critic as "so still, and individual," as being trapped within the composition and within the position in which she has been placed.[74] Her expression displays a sense of melancholy as she is caught, almost hovering within the space. Though the painting appears, stylistically to be aesthetic, the underlying story creates a tension about the aesthetic principles which he upholds in the design. Though Homer is using the stylistic devices of the aesthetic world, he allows his paintings to be interpreted on numerous levels, creating a narrative and making a statement through his work.

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[71] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 154.
[72] Roger B. Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 30.
[73] This idea backfired, as the feminization of the art world that resulted from this movement led to a radical change in the art world during the early decades of the twentieth century.
[74] *New York Times*, January 22, 1877, p. 6.

Throughout the decade, then, we see Homer creating paintings of women that adhere to the decorative and aesthetic qualities associated with aestheticism. The critics continued to see these works as important to defining American characteristics. The women in these scenes seemed to be everyday women – their costumes are not overly ornate or embellished, and their costumes figured prominently in the critical argument for the American qualities of Homer's representations.

While Homer's paintings participated in this aesthetic agenda, using the female figure as the object through which he explored formal issues of light and shade, color effects, and other decorative elements in his painting, all of his works differ from the later works of the tonalists, such as Thomas Wilmer Dewing. In Dewing's work, such as *A Garden* (Figure 67), we see that he has adapted an aesthetic style that creates a world evocative of another place and time. When he did paint contemporary figures, as he did in the late 1890s in both interiors and landscapes (Figures 68 and 69), they became ethereal and otherworldly, not the common, everyday figure that Homer painted. Dewing's women were the refined women of the upperclass, represented at a time when, as Kathleen Pyne has argued, "that segment of society was striving to maintain its hegemony in American culture."[75] Dewing's paintings seem to be the epitome of a move along this elite evolutionary path that Homer had begun in the mid-1860s. Nearly fifteen years later, Dewing and other American artists more wholeheartedly embraced this European-based aesthetic. Homer, on the otherhand, maintained a dedication to the "beauty of the actual," a concept which *The Nation's* critic had suggest Dewing adhere to more successfully in 1883.

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[75] Kathleen A. Pyne, "Evolutionary Typology and American Women in the Work of Thomas Dewing," *American Art* 7, no. 4 (1993): 16.

Homer's exploration of the beauty of the common elements, though studies of formal qualities of painting into the mid-1870s continued an interested in aestheticism that arose out of his relationship with Eugene Benson. Benson articulated early on an American aestheticism that attempted to stay true to America's individualistic spirit while elevating the role of painting within American society. His early encouragement of young artists to seek painting that would raise Americans from the common nature of Democratic life mirrored the developing British Aestheticists, whom Benson reported on in his art criticism. His particular notice of the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler laid the foundation for Homer's turn to exploring formal elements in his painting more intensely in the years following the 1867 Parisian Exposition Universelle. These paintings maintained an element of social relevance, even when they attempted to explore formal, painterly qualities in a way that reflected Homer's unique understanding of aestheticism. The critical response to Homer's painting in the early 1870s, however, indicated a conservative approach by American critics toward the aesthetic treatment of landscape and figure painting, at least in Homer's work. Homer's attempts at combining the two underwent significant criticism. It would seem that many critics were reticent to see how Homer's work was evolving and changing from *Prisoners from the Front*, the painting which had warranted Homer's earliest and most positive response. Homer, however, pushed on, continuing to explore aestheticism in his work throughout the 1870s, and the critical response to this work continued to shape the definition of aestheticism in America.

Chapter Three

Realism and Aestheticism in Homer's 1875 Exhibition Works

In the years immediately following the Civil War, Winslow Homer incorporated ideas related to an emerging American aestheticism into his paintings. Throughout the early 1870s, he continued to explore these issues in smaller, more intimate paintings that were exhibited in smaller exhibition spaces. By 1875, however, Homer's major exhibition pieces exhibited a bolder expression of the aesthetic issues he had earlier explored on a smaller scale. The critical response to Homer's work during this period was widely varied, but the fact that he was receiving criticism, and lengthy discussions at best, indicate the importance that his work had in the development of American artistic ideas and ideologies.

The ability to spark a critical discussion was gaining greater importance in the judgment of artistic merit in the mid-1870s. Eugene Benson had noted the crucial role that the critic and his writing made in the acceptance of an artist and his work:

> Modern art has become so dependent upon literature, that is to say, the written statement of it has become so necessary to complete or herald its influence, that a picture not criticized, a painter incapable of starting a discussion, or of generating in the mind of a writer his own sentiment of nature, may be said to be impotent; such a painter is the mere beginning, the echo or ghost of some fact in art, but not an issue, not a radiant incarnation of beauty, not a striking expression of personal force.[1]

This role for the critic was reiterated in 1875 in a review of paintings by Henry James, of which Homer was a focus. James's review provided a voice for Homer's continued and intensified aestheticism in the middle years of this decade. It also articulated a larger

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[1] Eugene Benson, "Exhibition of the Academy of Design," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* 15, no. 30 (1870): 699-709.

tension growing within the American art world regarding the success of a work of art. On the one hand, success was defined by a painting's truthful representation based on close observation. When it came to truthfulness, most critics agreed that it was a necessity for good art, yet they often disagreed on the ways that this truthfulness was achieved artistically.

Many critics held true to the Ruskinian notion that truthfulness lay in the specificity of what was represented in the painting and that truth to nature was above all. The other point of view stressed that the value of a work of art should instead be based on the subjective experience of the viewer, rather than the particulars of the representation. The importance of a subjective response grew from the continued American interest in the evolving theories of aestheticism. Excerpts from Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* were printed in American magazines in 1873, introducing to the United States his notion of aestheticism. The "Literary Department" of *The Independent* published a review of the book, quoting Pater's questioning of the personal reaction to a work of art: "What is this song or picture to *me*? Does it give me pleasure? And, if so, what sort of degree of pleasure?" This writer described Pater's conclusion as forwarding the notion that "good art is the *unconscious* expression of a given life in form. It is not the result of conscious seeking after the luxurious embellishments of living."[2] *Scribner's Monthly*'s review of Pater more explicitly expressed this developing theory of art for art's sake, stating that "multiplied consciousness and intense enjoyment are most surely to be found in art for art's sake."[3] Pater's theory explicitly connected the experience of art to the subjective reaction of the viewer, assigning meaning to the work itself rather than its

[2] "Literary Department. Mr Pater and the Renaissance," *The Independent* 25, no. 1281 (1873): 778.
[3] "The Renaissance," *Scribner's Monthly* 6, no. 4 (1873): 506.

role in telling a story or relating a moral lesson. With the introduction of this theory to the United States, the split continued with the importance of subject and narrative on one side, painting and expression on the other. Homer's paintings fell in the middle of these critical debates, for he tended to push the envelope further than any of his fellow artists. His works could be interpreted in both ways, with strong subject and narrative elements combine with expressive, painterly elements. This challenge to the status quo made him a leader in the development of American aestheticism in the mid-1870s.

This chapter explores these developments through a close examination of Winslow Homer's works and the critical response to them. I examine Homer's watercolor paintings and the ways that Homer's turn to watercolor not only provided greater exhibition opportunities through the American Watercolor Society, but also gave him greater freedom to explore aesthetic issues, particularly formal elements. His contributions from the Watercolor Society's exhibition, the first in 1875, not only marked Homer's dedication to watercolor and their aesthetic qualities, but also aligned the medium of watercolor with the problem of art for art's sake. Not only was Homer able to exploit the tactile qualities of watercolor to serve his experimentation with form and color, but also the critical response to these early watercolors established the language that the critics used in defining aestheticism during this period.

Out of this discussion, I turn to Homer's painting, *Milking Time*, exhibited at the 1875 National Academy of Design exhibition, examining closely the critical discussion around this painting. In this new phase, Homer's aesthetic paintings combined broad brushwork and compositional style with a sense of realism that engaged the viewer in a self-conscious act of looking. In doing so, he connected the subjective response of

aestheticism with the questioning of truth in representation that marked this period. In his book *Looking Askance*, Michael Leja has defined this uncertainty or skepticism of visual reality, as "a way of looking" and "a way of thinking about looking," where audiences and artists worked within a system that questioned the validity of representation. Within this system of looking, Leja argues, "Seeing becomes a more self-conscious act, and that self-consciousness would prompt meditations on vision's finiteness and fallibility."[4] As we will see, this questioning of the truth of vision underlies the critical commentary of aestheticism during this period.

Watercolor and Aestheticism

The 1875 exhibition was just the second year of Homer's contributions to the American Society of Painters in Water Colors annual exhibition. For his initial presentation the year before, he exhibited the product of his summer travels in Gloucester, Massachusetts where he lived and worked from late June through August of 1873, to the Catskills in the early fall and other trips throughout New England.[5] On the whole, these paintings presented straightforward, realistic works that depict themes upon which Homer had already built a reputation with his illustration work. To this end, Homer scholars have long concluded that he turned to watercolor to fill the void left by

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[4] Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley, Cal.: Univeristy of California Press, 2004), 12.

[5] While these exhibitions were Homer's first major public display of watercolor paintings, watercolor was certainly not a new medium for Homer. His mother was a talented amateur painter of watercolor, who, it has been assumed, taught Homer to paint as a youngster. In addition, Homer would have been adept at using watercolor in creating his wood engravings, where washes of color were used on the preparatory drawing to indicate tone and shading. See Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 394;Kathleen Adair Foster, "Makers of the American Watercolor Movement 1860-1890" (PhD diss., Yale Univeristy, 1982), 402 note 8.;Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, *Winslow Homer, American Artist: His World and His Work* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1961);Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; The MacMillan Company, 1944), 2.

his abrupt withdrawal from illustration, particularly since watercolor provided him with greater control over the outcome of his work. [6] More recently, they have begun to identify a connection between Homer's watercolor painting and illustration suggesting a simple transition from using watercolor in preparing illustrations, to a more serious use of the medium as an exhibition medium.[7] Watercolor was being progressively more accepted as a medium in and of itself, not just the medium for sketching scenes onsite. The decade of the 1870s proved to be the most dynamic in terms of the development of watercolor painting. The American Watercolor Society, founded in 1867, became the arena through which artists of various backgrounds and ideologies met on the same stage.[8] With its roll book increasing in the early 1870s, its membership included the leaders of developments in arts education, industrial arts and design, as well as the fine arts. From the standpoint of marketability, watercolors provided middleclass buyers with more affordable works of art. For Homer, the consummate businessman, this meant another means of reaching his audience. Critical reviews of the watercolor exhibitions highlighted this role of watercolors, as well, commenting that they were more easily accessible and affordable to all readers.

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[6] Foster, "Makers of the American Watercolor Movement 1860-1890", 51-52.
[7] Kathleen Foster, in her pivotal work on the rise of watercolor painting in American art, identifies the close connections between watercolor and illustration during the 1870s, first noting that watercolor was an important part in the process of illustration, and "like Homer, many [professional illustrators] found the transition from pen and ink to brush and ink, or wash, to be a natural one." Ibid., 49. Art historian David Tatham argues, "when Homer adopted watercolor as a serious medium of expression in the summer of 1873, the relationship between his paintings and illustrations grew even closer. His use of the medium since the 1850s had been to sketch and add tone to drawings, but now he used it much more freely. It ceased to be a subsidiary tool and became a means of creating works for exhibition." Tatham likens Homer's use of watercolors to the quick and subtle washes used in the preparation of his illustrations. David Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Pictorial Press* (Syracuse, N.Y. : Syracuse University Press, 2003), 184.
[8] Foster, "Makers of the American Watercolor Movement 1860-1890".

It is not entirely clear, however, that Homer's watercolors from the summer of 1873 were anything more than just another means of culling material for his illustration. The *Gloucester Telegraph* noted that "Winslow Homer, the artist, has been spending the summer at the Atlantic House, and the pages of 'Harper's Weekly' have been heightened by his seaside sketches."[9] Many of the works found their way into the illustrated weeklies, including *A Clam Bake* (Figure 70) and *A Basket of Clams* (Figure 70), which Homer combined to create the illustration "Sea-side Sketches – A Clam Bake," published in *Harper's Weekly*, August 23, 1873 (Figure 72). In another case, *How Many Eggs?* (Figure 72) was painted that summer of 1873, and later translated into print in the form of "Raid on a Sand-Swallow Colony – 'How Many Eggs?'" published in *Harper's Weekly*, June 13, 1874 (Figure 74). Homer slightly changed the watercolor in the illustration, adding two figures in the foreground and opening up the composition by showing more sky to the left of the figures and a glimpse of the open ocean. Both cases exhibit Homer's well-documented working method of taking elements from different sketches or other works to create the final work, a pattern of repetition that is seen throughout his early work in both paint and illustration. And both of these illustrations appeared prior to Homer's exhibiting the watercolors (*How Many Eggs?* and *A Basket of Clams* were both included in the 1875 Watercolor Society exhibition). When he first exhibited the watercolor production from this 1873 summer trip, he presented them as *Leaves from a Sketchbook*, a conservative approach similar to the titling of his sketchy oil paintings from the 1870 National Academy exhibition. The critics reacted positively to Homer's watercolor works in the 1874 exhibition, which they characterized as fresh and

[9] Quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 394.

innovative, a quality which critics repeatedly identified in Homer's work – whether it be oil or watercolor.

While Homer originally used these watercolors to capture quick sketches that would later be used for illustration, these works became another way for him to include watercolor in his aesthetic repertoire. This was in line with the popular understanding of watercolor, as Shinn articulated in his 1875 review of the Watercolor Association exhibition: "Aquarelle is a method of art which goes to the adornment of homes, and it partakes largely of the spirit of a decoration or object of furniture; it is more agreeable in proportion as it frankly confesses this quality, leaving to oil the manufacture of great gallery pictures and pieces of didactic authority."[10] As watercolor became associated with bringing art into homes, critics looked to the decorative qualities of the medium, leaving oil paintings for more powerful narratives and moral messages. In chapter 4, I examine the relationship of watercolor to decoration and the decorative arts within the domestic setting. For now, I look to the ways that Homer used watercolor as a medium through which he would explore in a much freer way the formal issues that he had earlier explored in his oil painting.

The quick washes of color in Homer's early watercolor paintings related directly to the formal explorations of color as well as light and shade that Homer had painted in 1872, including *The Butterfly* and *Sunlight and Shadow* (Figure 54 & 55). By the summer of 1874, his paintings of solitary women moved to watercolor where he continued to explore issues of light and air in paintings such as *In the Garden* (Figure 75) and *Summer* (Figure 76). *In the Garden* features a young woman standing in the midst of

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[10] "Fine Arts. The Water-Color Exhibition -- Loan Exhibition of the Union League," *The Nation*, no. 501 (1875): 84.

a floral garden. Her back is toward the viewer and her head is slightly bent to smell the flower that she holds in her right hand. Her apron is draped over her left arm and the viewer is left to think that she has pulled it up to gather flowers from the garden. Her pink floral dress complements the green of the garden around her. We see continued evidence here of Homer's interest in color theory, using complementary colors to create a dynamic surface of the painting. In *Summer*, Homer shows another young woman, perhaps even the same as *In the Garden*. This time she faces the viewer, as she peers into the small basket that holds potted plants above the densely filled garden. She is dressed in a dark, more sophisticated garment than the somewhat rustic dress of the woman in *In the Garden*. In both paintings, Homer created visual interest by focusing on the application of the watercolor. He used dots and quick brushes of paint to create the feeling of flowers on the densely painted green background. In other areas, colors merge with one another as the wetness of the watercolor created a melding of forms.

Homer experimented with related effects with his oil paintings of this year. In *Girl in the Orchard* (Figure 77), we see the same figure that he had depicted in *Waiting for an Answer* (Figure 78), but now she is seen without her companion, thereby eliminating any sense of narrative associated with the scene. She wears the same rustic dress of the figure in *In the Garden*, and here she faces the viewer, though her head is down. The painting is composed of rough patches of color, with the sunlit sky created by a sharp, cutting brush of peachy yellow between the dense leaves of the tree and the green of the mountains in the distance. The rough application here accentuated the way that the paint sits on the surface of the canvas. Homer's use of a nearly monochromatic palette throughout the rest of the painting accentuates this broadly painted area as well.

While both his oil paintings and watercolors from this period emphasized this element of facture and brushstroke as the basis of his exploration of aestheticism, the watercolor medium lent itself to a more varied range of application.

At the American Watercolor Society Exhibition of 1875, Homer showed a different level of dedication to the medium as a means of exploring formal elements. In *A Clam Bake* (Figure 79) Homer used the watercolor to give further definition to the pencil drawing, allowing the pencil lines to show through and strongly delineate the figures and their surroundings. The lightly painted surface, such as the rocks and sand in the foreground, takes advantage of the transparency of the medium with great success. And the thin blue wash that delineates the ocean shows through the even lighter wash of darker blue to create depth and dimension. Other watercolors exhibited that year were more densely painted. Take, for example, *The Sick Chicken* (Figure 80), where Homer uses watercolor and gouache to create densely painted fields of color which define the young woman's apron, the grassy yard where she stands, and the surfaces of the farm house behind her. In *Waiting for a Bite (Why Don't the Suckers Bite?)* (Figure 81) the color is again densely applied, but here Homer paints the scene with subtle variations of color to indicate the changing fall leaves, the fallen tree, and the boys. In yet other works, such as *In Charge of Baby* (Figure 82), he uses such a light stroke of the brush that the underlying paper shows through seemingly indicating the light dancing across the surface of the painting. With the wide variety of techniques that Homer employed in these works, he presented himself as an artist who was unafraid of experimentation and innovation in this relatively new field.

While Homer's submissions to the exhibition showed a variety of subject matter – from fishermen to the sea and farm life to men in the woods – the main subject of these works were the children that Homer so frequently depicted in his illustrations. He depicted them engaged in a variety of activities: looking for lobsters, a clam-bake, fishing in a wooded setting, feeding chickens and other farm activities. Typical of these entries was *Children on a Fence* (Figure 83), where Homer depicted four youngsters seated on a fence. Across the tall-wheat field sit two tall old trees whose dominance creates a sense that this type of scene is long-standing and permanent. The trees frame the buildings behind and draw the viewer's eye to the windmill and chimney set between the arches of the tree and silhouetted against the white sky behind them. The oldest of the children, who at first glance appears to be well dressed, is barefoot, seemingly preparing for an afternoon of play. This subject matter, which Homer knew was palatable to his audience from its wide popularity in illustration and other painting, gave him the freedom to explore the watercolor technique.

Homer also included at least one sheet that depicted the solitary woman who had featured in his earlier aesthetic work: *The Sick Chicken*. In this small painting, which measures only 9 ¾ inches by 7 ¾ inches, Homer shows a young woman walking across the farmyard. She bends her head to look at the small chick that she holds in her hands. Her face is cast in shadow from the large, floppy hat that she wears. Her surroundings are roughly defined by broad washes of color – a mottled green for the yard and variations of light brown for the building behind her. Homer used simple dabs of paint to indicate the ivy growing on the wall of the house, creating decoratively applied details.

Aesthetically, this painting uses many of the same elements that Homer had utilized in his work to this point.

Homer's contributions stood out to the critics at the American Watercolor Society exhibition in 1875. The sheer number of his works caused notice among the critics who interpreted his hefty submission as anything from over-enthusiasm about the new medium to a sense of desperation. The critical attention to his work further set Homer apart from his colleagues by commenting about his submissions as a group rather than as individual works, with broad terms rather than specific interpretations.[11] *Appleton's Journal* portrayed the works as "sparkling, broad sketches" which were "bold and free, alive with spirit" and "acquiring a positive and full tone," descriptive words that other critics echoed throughout the reviews. [12]

Two reviewers paid closer attention to Homer's work, describing it in greater detail in an effort to place these works within their understanding of Homer's oeuvre. The first of these was Earl Shinn, a French-trained artist who had turned to criticism in the 1870s and served as the art editor at the *Nation* from 1874 to 1879. His anonymous review of the watercolor exhibition appeared in the *Nation*:

> Mr. Winslow Homer, with rapid ease and photographic breadth, plants his flattened figures against a great variety of landscapes and coast-reaches. He contributes very copiously, and it is hard to say which of his sketches is the best when none are bad. Perhaps that of two smug and innocent fisher-boys, conveying

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[11] Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 68.

[12] "The Arts. The Water-Color Exhibition," *Appleton's Journal* (1875): 216. "Mr. Winslow Homer is fairly represented by half a dozen bright little sketches, in which we see much more to admire than in some of his larger works. "Riding at Anchor," Seems to be the most carefully drawn and finished and certainly the best in color." "The Fine Arts. American Society of Painters in Water Colors.," *New York Times*, 7 February 1875.; "'How Many Eggs?' by Winslow Homer, which is certainly one of the best of his many spirited sketches;" "The Fine Arts; the Water-Color Exhibition Concluding Notice," *New York Times*, 14 February 1875.

> a basket of clams, and just unconsciously swerving from the path at sight of a strange fish lying on the sand, is as characteristic as any. The pleasure with which we recognize truth-evidence in every study of Mr. Homer's is, however, marred by a really poignant feeling of regret. Seven or eight years ago this artist seemed to be preparing to paint pictures, and not mere effects; at present his highest exercise is to lay silhouettes of pasteboard on a ground of pasteboard differently tinted, and with these admirably-cut jumping jacks to go through the various elements of life as given 'in the flat.'[13]

While his statement was relatively broad in reference to Homer's submissions, he singled out *Basket of Clams* (Figure 71) as the best, or at least "as characteristic as any." He recognized the "truth-evidence" in all of Homer's work – the underlying sense that the painting was representative of a scene that Homer had observed. In addition, his reference to Homer's "photographic breadth" recognized the wide variety of subjects that Homer painted and likewise highlighted the perception that the scenes were true to life, a perception about photography that held true for most viewers in the nineteenth century.[14] For Shinn, Homer's realism was the source of his success to date, and again in this new medium of watercolor. Shinn objected, however, to the style of Homer's work overall, particularly what he viewed as Homer's presenting "mere effects" of paint and flattened figures on the surface of the painting. Homer's concentration on the formal elements of the medium distracted from his ability to present a truthful picture. Shinn recalled Homer's paintings of the late 1860s, but regretfully found the strength of those paintings to have been replaced by the exploration of the effects of paint and objects on the surface of the painting itself. Shinn's review set up a growing split between a sense of truth in painting as evidenced by adherence to principles of realism and the decorative qualities

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[13] "Fine Arts. The Water-Color Society's Exhibition," *The Nation* (February 18, 1875): 119.

[14] This notion of photographic realism, though, was beginning to be challenged during this period, as artists and photographers undermined the truth that had been associated with photography. See Leja, *Looking Askance*.

that were increasingly identified with aestheticism. While Homer's paintings exhibited these decorative qualities, Shinn looked for Homer's work to depict realistic American subjects that his audience had come to expect from him.

Clarence Cook of the *New York Tribune* was even more specific in describing how Homer's paintings had not lived up to expectations, specifically referencing Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* as his most successful work nine years after its exhibition. He praised Homer for his "uncommon skill in portraying human character in his world," concluding that "Mr. Homer has never painted more than one important picture, the 'Prisoners at the Front,' and is only known by a cloud of sketches like those in the present exhibition."[15] While Cook was partially complimentary of the American country-boy who dominated Homer's work in the exhibition, he was critical of Homer's treatment of the subject: "Homer allows us a reality which remains sober prose, no matter how earnestly art may wrestle with it."[16] He contrasted what he saw as Homer's stubborn realism to the work of French genre painter Edouard Frère, who was known for his sentimental depictions of the lower classes, which he depicted in a Realist manner. The writer Moncure Daniel Conway had linked this realistic style to what he defined as a "sympathetic art" in an 1871 article published in *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*.[17] John Ruskin had developed the notion of "sympathetic art," an art whose basis was in moral lessons, rather than aesthetic concepts. Conway introduced this idea to an American audience by defining Ruskin's philosophy on how art must function within the social sphere: "To build up a beautiful and characteristic art the work must not be begun

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[15] "Fine Arts. The American Society of Painters in Water Colors - Eighth Annual Exhibition," *New York Daily Tribune*, 22 February 1875.
[16] Ibid.
[17] M. D. Conway, "Edouard Frère and the Sympathetic Art in France," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 42, no. 258 (1871): 801-14.

with aesthetic but with moral criticism; it is not to come of taste and culture, but of political and social reform."[18] For Ruskin, beauty was found in the simple life of the poor children depicted in Frère's work, a life believed to be "happy and content" and thus ripe for the beauty of art.[19] By the middle of the decade, Cook's devotion to Ruskinian ideology was fueled by a sense of nostalgia for a life that he believed to be simpler than the one lived by contemporary middle and upper-classes.

Cook's essay explicitly identified the qualities which he sought in good painting, referencing contemporary French artists including Jean-Francois Millet, Gustav Courbet, and Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, and citing specifically "manly thoughts and feelings, and experiences – with convictions in short, and not mere craftsmen, however clever."[20] He was looking for mature or "manly" artists who would represent scenes that evoked mature feelings, and would not just represent effects of painting. Given the properties of the watercolor medium, and the contemporary critics understanding of the watercolor school's focus on playing with the variety of effects in their paintings, Cook challenged the role of watercolor as an effective medium for serious art. He privileged the more somber methods of the French Realists and genre painters, whose intentions seemed more aligned with the moral or social messages that Cook was looking for in Homer's art.

The moral connections of Realist art contrasted to the developing theories of aestheticism, which were increasingly focused on aesthetic issues as the primary focus of the work of art, with any moral or social implications following as secondary in importance. Cook set up the dichotomy between these two types of work in this review

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[18] Ibid.: 802.
[19] Ibid.: 803.
[20] "Fine Arts. The American Society of Painters in Water Colors - Eighth Annual Exhibition."

of the American Watercolor Society exhibition, in which he contrasted these French realist works to the craftsman-like "technical skill and glittering broken color" of artists such as Mariano Fortuny the Italy-based Spanish artist. Moreover, he specifically linked these artists to aestheticism:

> As our readers know well enough, the latest doctrine is, "Art for the sake of Art," and it is shouted down from certain studios with all the zeal of a Muezzin calling us to prayer from the minaret. We hear a good deal more in these days of "brush-work," of "Handling," … of this, that and the other technical trickery and tour-de-force, than seems to us profitable;...[21]

Cook articulated directly the connection of the art for art's sake doctrine with loose brushwork and the perception of technical trickery, a connection that other critics from this year subtly implied, particularly in regard to Homer's oil paintings, as we will see. His comparison of the "zeal" for art for art's sake to the Muzzein's call was likely a reference to Fortuny's and his fellow Spanish watercolorists' choice of subject matter. In works such as *Moroccan Man* (Figure 83) and *Café of the Swallows* (Figure 84), Fortuny's broken brushstroke was used to define not only the figures but also their surroundings. Other American reviewers praised the watercolors by Fortuny and his colleague José Villegas, whose *Moorish Bazaar* was praised for its display of effects when exhibited in the 1875 Watercolor Society exhibition. The *Appleton's* reviewer, for example, described the canvas as "literally crammed with effects of color and contrasts of hard forms with aerial hues."[22] The reviewers seemed, then, to set up a double standard, praising or at least tolerating art for art's sake in its application to the orientalizing subject matter of Fortuny and Villegas, but expecting something different from Homer,

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Quoted in Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale Univeristy Press, 1997), 93.

whose realistic style and representation of true American values was something that they valued in his work.

The insistence on effects of art and technical tricks that these critics equated with art for art's sake established an uncertainty about the basis of truth in painting. Cook was particularly bothered by this trend:

> We are tempted, in discontented moods, to wish people wouldn't confound Art and Artifice as they do to our seeming, or, at least, if we must have the Artifice, that it might be exercised about something for whose sake we could neglect the Artifice when we were tired of it.[23]

While he praised their skill in execution, he was critical of these Spanish artists and their application of this style to their subject matter, particularly in the falsity that it presented: "It is, that they are not real people in real surroundings. The artist didn't care for his subject…, he has cared much more for his bric-a-brac than for his man and painted it a deal better too."[24] Cook was critical of the art for art's sake ideology and the fancy brushwork that he attributed to Fortuny and his counterparts. He credited the style of these works for the inability to represent the subject with proper sensitivity.

While he did not explicitly connect Homer to what he saw as the trickeries of art for art sake, he was likewise critical of the way that the sketchy finish of Homer's watercolors affected his talent at observation and subsequent ability to present those observations to his viewer. Cook wrote, "What is the reason that all this force, this cleverness, this ability to see, almost never concentrates itself, or gets beyond the limits of a sketch, and a sketch of the slightest kind."[25] For Cook, the unfinished quality of

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[23] "Fine Arts. The American Society of Painters in Water Colors - Eighth Annual Exhibition."
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

Homer's works inhibited his strong sense of observation and ability to represent truthful representations.

Homer, on the other hand, did not meet the standards that Frère exemplified through his sympathetic imaging of the lower classes. Even though he depicted country children, Homer's painting failed to evoke the feeling that he felt necessary for this type of work. While Cook felt that the less-destitute American youngsters themselves were partially responsible for this lack of sentimentality, Cook equally faulted Homer's handling and finish for the paintings' inability to evoke sympathy and compassion in the viewer. He described the submissions as "hardly sketches" rather than completed works, concerned that his technique was too reliant on quick brushes of color, rather than a foundation of strong drawing.[26] He expressed exasperation at Homer for neither living up to his talent as a draftsman nor his ability to present a completed picture.

Both Shinn and Cook identified in Homer an ability to capture the realities of modern life, yet there was an increasing skepticism in the mid-1870s as the idea of reality was being challenged. This challenge to the perception of truth was found on many levels of American life, from deception in advertising to the prevalence of confidence men. Throughout American culture, there was a fascination with illusionistic representations that seemed real on the surface, but often unraveled upon further

[26] "These twenty odd sketches of his are the slightest things Mr. Homer has as yet sent to any exhibition, and while they give a comfortable notion of his industry, and of both his acuteness of observation and his quickness in noting down what he sees – they are disappointing in not showing us anything that does justice to the known talent of the man. Indeed we do not like to think how long it is since Mr. Homer showed us a finished picture – the record of art a few years back shows us only sketches, wood-cuts, and scraps like these that for the most part hardly deserve the name of sketches." Ibid.

examination.[27] The deception of the viewer was based on the understanding of realism as presenting an objective view of reality. It seems, though, that the criticism of Homer was coming at this misrepresentation of reality from a different angle. They were encouraging Homer to return to his realistic depictions of true American life. These critics saw the open and rough brushwork of Homer's paintings as a different kind of trick – something that questioned the ultimate truth that they continued to identify with Homer because of his the sensitive portrayal of types that he represented in his early post-Civil War work. While his style mirrored that of painters whom critics connected to art for art's sake, they were reticent to recognize the aestheticism developing in Homer's work as well. Style of representation continued to the basis of judgment regarding the effect of a work of art. As we turn now to his oil paintings, we see how this tension between Homer's formal experimentation and the critical expectation of his realistic representation helped to define Homer's brand of aestheticism even further.

***Milking Time* and Aestheticism in 1875**

At the 1875 National Academy of Design Annual, Homer exhibited paintings with subjects that appealed to the public with their rustic subject matter. He showed four oil paintings: *Landscape* (Figure 85), *The Course of True Love* (location unknown), *Uncle Ned at Home* (Figure 86), and *Milking Time* (Figure 87). The exact painting exhibited as *Landscape* is unknown, though the *New York World* reported in their "Studio Notes," that Homer had prepared the four works for the upcoming exhibition, describing the landscape as "another farm-yard scene, with green grass, a hay-stack and horse, and

[27] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982);T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981);Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*.

boys on the grass with sunlight lying about them."[28] This painting is possibly the work now known as *Haystacks and Children* (Figure 88), where the central grouping is of five young boys, three of whom sit on a plow pulled by the other two. Behind the boys are two horse and two haystacks with a barn in the far back on the left side.[29]

As the key exhibition in New York's season, the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition was one of the most important means for artists to reach the public. Homer had used it throughout his career to make statements about the direction of his painting, and to highlight his latest and best works. Having not exhibited in 1874 when he served on the exhibition committee, Homer chose to submit four works to the 1875 Annual, all of which depicted scenes of everyday farm life, a subject that his audiences were becoming accustomed to see from Homer. This fact did not go unnoticed by the critics, many of whom commented on the typical nature of works that Homer exhibited that year. One reviewer commented that "Mr. Winslow Homer has always been a favorite with the public from the spirit and freshness of his delineations of New England life." He characterized Homer's figures as "all excellent representations of his type of a New England farmer."[30] Another critic highlighted the consistency in Homer's work as something often lacking in American art:

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[28] "Studio Notes," *New York World*, 22 March 1875, 5.

[29] Margaret Conrads suggests that this is *Haystacks and Children*, 1874, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, yet she readily admits that "*Landscape* was not discussed beyond a cursory mention of its existence. The only qualitative remark came from the *Daily Graphic*, which noted it had few of the excellent points usually found in Homer's painting. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 225, note 81;"Fine Arts. A Glimpse of the Pictures at the Academy of Design. Second Article.," *Daily Graphic*, 16 April 1875, 347. Henry James specifically mentions Homer as being represented with three paintings.

[30] S.N.C., "The Academy Exhibition. Iii. Genre and Fancy Pictures," *New York Evening Post*, 1 May 1875, 1.

> … a prime difficulty in this country is, that there are very few men upon whom we can depend with certainty to strike their peculiar note each time. We constantly come upon painters who are themselves one month, and only half themselves the next: in one picture they have an individual touch and tone, in another the key, though pressed, makes no response. Homer and [Jervis] McEntee, however, though uneven, have an abundant individuality that makes their assistance at exhibitions always valuable.[31]

Critics frequently noted Homer's individuality, and praised his consistent ability to present something that was unique, true in its representation and dependable in terms of subject. Critics often disagreed on Homer's style, but this was not enough to change their opinion of him. Overall, the critics gave Homer's paintings considerable attention in 1875, marking the first observations about his oil paintings in the press since his 1872 submission of *The Country School* (Figure 89).[32]

The Course of True Love exemplified the "typical" nature of Homer's presentation in 1875. Though the painting is currently unlocated, the review in *Appleton's Journal* adequately reveals the subject of the painting:

> On the edge of a cornfield, a New-England farmer and a country-girl are sitting shaded by the tall grain. Ears of corn are scattered on the ground, and the woman, a true type of New England, is chewing, in country fashion, on a bit of straw she holds in her hand, and at the same time, apparently, she is chewing the cud of disagreeable thoughts. Her lover, a manly looking fellow, is twisted about, embarrassment peeping, from every feature and even from the toes of his cow-hide boots.[33]

Of Homer's four works in the Academy exhibition, *The Course of True Love* received the most critical attention, giving us plenty of other details about the painting. For one, it depicted the same woman as *Milking Time*, who was described in the context of this

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[31] "Culture and Progress," *Scribner's Monthly* 10, no. 2 (1875): 252.
[32] Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 78.
[33] "The Arts," *Appleton's Journal*, 8 May 1875, 599.

painting as "a good-looking but rather hard-featured Yankee, in a homely calico gown."[34] The painting was closely related to some of Homer's work that had been publicly exhibited in the earlier part of the decade, including *Waiting for an Answer* (Figure 78) exhibited at the Somerville Gallery in 1873, and *A Temperance Meeting* (Figure 89), shown at Leavitt's Art Rooms and at the Palette Club Exhibition in March 1874.[35] All three paintings represent farm-yard courting scenes, a theme that Homer had been working on throughout the early part of the decade. In all of these works, the woman's demeanor reflects a sense of irritation or worry, thus creating an emotional detachment between the young couple that is exacerbated by the strained distance between the figures themselves. Interestingly, Homer had not presented these earlier paintings at the National Academy exhibitions, instead presenting them at smaller venues as a means of gauging the public reaction to his treatment of this subject. It would seem then that by 1875, he finally felt confident enough in its treatment to present it to the Academy's wider audience.[36]

The praise of *The Course of True Love* showed a critical bias toward Homer's more traditional subject matter. The critics looked for Homer to present to the public genre scenes that related to the nostalgic themes of life away from the city. In this

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[34] S.N.C., "The Academy Exhibition. III. Genre and Fancy Pictures," 1. The *Daily Graphic* notes that "Winslow Homer has in this room a characteristic sketch called 'Milking-Time,' in which a young woman, identical in dress and appearance to the one concerned in 'The Course of True Love' in the South Room,' is the central figure." "Fine Arts. A Glimpse of the Pictures at the Academy of Design. Second Article.."

[35] "Fine Arts. American Art - the Palette Club Exhibition," *New York Times*, 9 March 1874.

[36] Margaret Conrads suggests that he consciously chose not to display works like *A Temperance Meeting* at the National Academy of Design earlier in the decade, noting that "such behavior raising the question of whether he was uncomfortable with his position within the Academy hierarchy. The potential for financial gain at dealers' auctions may have also been enticing." Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 58.

regard, the critics identified *The Course of True Love* as Homer's best entry, calling it "the most dramatic and interesting" and claiming "the treatment is very good indeed."[37] One critic identified Homer and this work in particular as part of a class of painting that "is remarkable for its unity and simplicity, which are so modest and unprententious [sic], that only persons conversant with art can know how good they are."[38] Homer must have been relieved to receive a positive critical reaction to this work, as it appears to be the culmination of his working through the representation of a theme. These elements – unity, simplicity, modesty, a lack of pretention – were not necessarily elements associated with aestheticism, and might even be seen as contrary to the cultured European circles out of which aestheticism arose. In this way, *Course of True Love* steered away from the elements that had begun to creep into his other works from this exhibition – and thereby affirmed for the critics that this was indeed Homer's best work for it was "typical."

At first pass, *Milking Time* might also fit into this category of Homer's tried and true subjects. The painting depicts a young milkmaid standing before a fence holding a small wooden stool and a bucket. She stands with her body slightly turned away from the picture plane, with her face turned entirely away, as she looks over her left shoulder over the fence. Her gaze follows that of the boy who is standing to her right on the lowest rung of the wood fence with his back to the viewer and one leg raised as if he has paused

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[37] "Fine Arts. A Glimpse of the Pictures at the Academy of Design. Second Article.," 303;S.N.C., "The Academy Exhibition. Iii. Genre and Fancy Pictures," 1.

[38] "The Arts," 599. The writer first comments on Mr. Wilmarth's painting: "The picture, like so many of the best Dutch paintings, is remarkable for its unity and simplicity, which are so modest and unprententious [sic], that only persons conversant with art can know how good they are. The pictures of this class, which have made more impression than any others, perhaps, are the works of Winslow Homer. The best of these, and there are several exhibited, is called, 'The Course of True Love.'"

while climbing to look into the horizon. In his hand, he holds a switch that points down into the woman's bucket. The two figures are joined in the foreground by a rooster who bends over pecking at the ground just below and to the right of young boy's feet. On the other side of the fence stand eight cows, three of whom stare back at the viewer.

The subject matter again relates to Homer's earlier works, and he even depicts the same figure seen in his 1874 watercolor *In the Garden* (Figure 75). Critics commented on what they saw as Homer's signature subject here, the New England type that he also depicted in *The Course of True Love.* The *Scribner's* reviewer, whose reactions to Homer were altogether positive, saw *Milking Time* as "full of his healthy coloring, and frank, fresh way of looking at things," as did *Appleton's Journal*, which described the work as "another of these fresh, racy paintings."[39] Both critics identified this painting as "fresh," a remark that characterized other reactions to Homer's work, as well.[40] This description indicated that Homer had a new way of looking at things, that though they might be typical of Homer, they were not necessarily typical of other painting. This freshness plays out by comparing Homer's painting to the related one by Enoch Wood Perry, whose *The Old Story* (Figure 90) was also featured in the 1875 exhibition.[41] Perry's painting, known today through its illustration in George William Sheldon's *American Painters*, has many of the same elements as Homer's work.[42] The milkmaid stands in the barn, holding the same bucket and wearing the same dress as Homer's figure. In *The Old Story*, though, she stands listening to the tale being told by the figure

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[39] "Culture and Progress," 251-52. "The Arts," 599.
[40] See comment on Homer's contributions quoted above from the *New York Post*: "Mr. Winslow Homer has always been a favorite with the public from the spirit and freshness of his delineations of New England life…"
[41] Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 80.
[42] G. W. Sheldon, *American Painters* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 68.

in the stall of the barn. The interaction and engagement between the figures creates a narrative element that was key to the genre painting that Perry was known to paint, a type that was described by Sheldon as being "domestic, simple, perspicacious."[43] Perry's insightful and wise style presented a clear scene of simple, daily life to the viewer. Homer, however, approached his subject differently. While the title, *Milking Time*, indicated a time of day that relates to the daily chores of the farm, the figures are not engaged in this task, nor are they engaged with one another. There is something else that lies at the core of the painting, something more than a simple representation of the task at hand. But what in particular makes this painting "fresh?"

Continued examination of the *Appleton's* commentary lends some insight into what made Homer's painting different. The writer described the painting:

> "Milking-time" is another of these fresh, racy paintings, and the after-glow of twilight is reflected back from the country-folds, the rail-fence, and the silent cattle, lighting up a key of paint which is not soft nor sweet, but which has a sort of peculiar harmony of its own: resembling, though in a different way, the mixture of aromatic, salt and earthy odors of the New-England country air – air which, too, has its whiffs of pleasant clover scents and fragrance of orchards. Many persons object to Mr. Winslow's paintings on account of their color; we do not want him to change it, for we believe it suits his subjects as truly as the smack of checkerberry-leaves or birch-bark agrees with those hardy growths of northern woods.[44]

At the center of this reaction to the painting was Homer's use of color and representation of light, elements that created "a peculiar harmony" and evoked the freshness of the New England country air. In this way the critic assigned value to Homer's use of color – value in the way that it translated a simple, direct scene into an element of transformation, taking the viewer to the scene. This critic was concerned by the combination of subject or scene and the color used to evoke the feeling of actually being there – or in the terms

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[43] Ibid., 70.
[44] "The Arts," 599.

of Pater, to create an alternative consciousness that develops a different awareness of the scene in the viewer. The painting went beyond the static record of facts that the artist observed, by calling up a multi-sensory response that moved past visual elements to include smells of the "pleasant clover scents and fragrance of orchards."

The key role of artistic devices was not limited to Homer's use of color. Other critics felt strongly about the unique composition of *Milking Time*, including Earl Shinn in the *Nation*. In his general comments about the 1875 Annual exhibition, Shinn noticed Homer's works, which he described as exhibiting "a very different talent – the manly, open-air, sincere art of Mr. Homer." He continued to praise Homer's freshness, as other writers had also done, going on to describe Homer's paintings as "novelties of effect that strike the eye like revelations."[45] The freshness of Homer's paintings related to the effects that stopped the viewer and revealed something unseen before. For Shinn, as we will see for many of the critics who commented on this painting, the effects were important to the way that Homer engaged the viewer with the painting. Engaging the viewer with his paintings had been a hallmark of Homer's aestheticism since the late 1860s; now the critics were starting to take notice.

Shinn continued to point to Homer's successful use of compositional and formal elements. His discussion of *Milking Time* highlighted Homer's unusual treatment of a subject that was familiar:

> Another artist, for instance, would hardly think of making a motive (sic) out of the horizontal stripes of a fence, relieved against a ground of very differing value, so as to make the group at the fence appear like a decoration wrought upon a barred ribbon; yet that is the problem very effectively wrought out in his milking-picture.[46]

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[45] "Fine Arts. Fiftieth Annual Exhibition of the Academy of Design. I," *The Nation* 20 (1875): 265.
[46] Ibid.

The severe compositional elements of *Milking Time* set Homer apart from other American artists. Shinn highlighted the sharp division of the scene by the horizontal rails of the fence and what he described as the "decorative" placement of the figures as setting up a "problem." The decorative or surface-related placement of the figures is even more apparent now as the fading of the dress leaves *pentimenti* indicating that Homer placed the figures on top of the painted fence, which now shows through the dress of the female figure.

Shinn's choice of the word "problem" to define the purpose of Homer's painting signals the emphasis here on the aesthetic issues in the painting – or effects – and not on the subject. The critics in this way were crucial for defining in words the issues that Homer was grabbling with in his paintings, and while all of them did not agree with or like these artistic elements, they became the focus of their criticism. For many of them this connected to the effect that the painting had on the viewer, which Shinn identified as "striking the eye with revelations." These effects were cause for the viewer to pause and take notice of the work, even if they were ultimately displeased by Homer's presentation.

Unlike Shinn, the critic for *The World* did not have any praise for Homer's work, commenting that *Milking Time* and *The Course of True Love* were "simply exasperating." Beyond the description of the *Milking Time* as having the "tender grace of a gridiron," this critic saw Homer as having "played the same dismal tricks with God's blessed light in which Mr. Hennessy took such delight."[47] While Shinn highlighted these revelatory effects as being the cause of Homer's fresh eye, *The World* critic saw them as creating

[47] "The National Academy of Design. Second Notice," *New York World*, 15 May 1875.

something artificial, manipulating the reality of nature. He continued, suggesting that Homer put too much into the effects of color, form, and design:

> Perhaps it is not all of art to interest and to please; but it certainly is no part of art to bore and to disgust. And Mr. Homer, with all his unquestionable cleverness as a draughtsman, a cleverness, to be sure, which would scarcely attract attention in France, but which is a rare and notable thing among our own painters, is in very imminent danger of becoming one of the most tedious and repulsive of painters. He is confounding whims with fancies in the conception, and strokes of chromatic legerdemain with brilliancy in the execution of his pictures. It is deplorable that an artist who might do so much if he would but do less should persist in spluttering his talents away.[48]

This critic suggested that Homer should stay away from what he saw as the artistic sleight of hand that dominated the painting, and encouraged him to stay consistent with the truthful representation that he knew Homer was able to produce due to his strength as a draftsman. Homer's strength in drawing connected him to a sense of truth in representation.[49]

The World's critic accused Homer of doing too much, combining multiple artistic devices to the detriment of his success. He found Homer's manipulation of color, which other critics had seen as "fresh" and "racy," as too far removed from "God's light," moving away from the naturalistic realism that he sought in Homer's work. The compositional "fancy," which while not specifically named was likely the dominating element of the fence combined with Homer's rough finish, which he likened to artistic

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[48] Ibid.

[49] While this critic does not explicitly connect this element of draftsmanship to illustration, it is possible that he was considering Homer's recent move away from magazine illustration work, which he had grown a reputation for drawing in his wood engravings. Illustration was important to the cultural agenda of providing a mass audience to artistic stories which provided exposure to moral narratives through realistic representations. Homer had made a conscious choice to move away from illustration, focusing instead on his paintings, which allowed for greater experimentation and presentation of the Aesthetic issues that he had been exploring to date through his paintings in both oil and watercolor. Homer was consciously moving away from the realistic draftsmanship that this critic praised.

"legerdemain," a sleight of hand that he felt Homer confused with providing his works with a sense of brilliancy in execution. All of these elements together took away from the strength that he saw in Homer's work, and he encouraged Homer to do less if he wanted continued success.

In addition, this critical language of 1875 indicated a new sense of wariness about Homer's painterly brushwork and artistic effects. While this lack of finish had been a focus of the critical reaction to his work since the mid-1860s, now Homer's loose brushwork and imprecise representation were linked to a sense that something was not straightforward in his representation. The *World* critic's choice of words, describing the works as "fancies" and "strokes of chromatic legerdemain," was suggestive of the sense of technical trickery that Clarence Cook had identified in the works by Spanish-Italian painters that he reviewed earlier that year. Cook had directly connected these painters to art for art's sake, in contrast to the sympathetic realism that he had hoped for in Homer's work. For all of these critics, Homer's movement toward aestheticism indicated a possible trick, something that challenged the basic truth of representation, which was believed to be at the heart of a good painting.

Embedded in this critical interpretation was an increasing concern with or awareness of the possibility of deception, a growing cultural phenomenon in modern America that began to question the validity of truth in representation.[50] This skepticism about reality and its representation was found in the work of other American painters from this period, including the work of William Harnett, who pushed the boundaries of

[50] For a complete study of this phenomenon, beginning in 1869, see Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*.

realism and illusionism in his *trompe l'oeil* still-life paintings.[51] In another example, Thomas Eakins turned to a scientific understanding of figures, motion, and perspective to create paintings that he presented as true and realistic. In both cases, the painters established a system of illusion that engaged the viewer in different ways. For Harnett, the viewer was often intrigued enough by the *trompe l'oeil* illusion to reach out and touch the painting, or at least have a visceral reaction that tempted him or her to touch the paintings.[52] Eakins, on the other hand, used his scientific knowledge to create a realism that his viewers would understand as real, not a deception. Yet, Eakins's use of scientific knowledge was selective, showing that while he wanted to base his realism in scientific awareness, there were limits to its effectiveness in creating something that the viewer perceived as real. For example, in his *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)* (Figure 91), Eakins represented the horses in the stop-action motion that was detected in the contemporary photography of Edward Muybridge. At the same time, though, he shows the wheels of the carriage in motion, with the spokes blurred as if they were viewed by the natural eye.[53] Harnett and Eakins show two ways that American painters engaged with the cultural penchant for skepticism in this period. For both of them, the act of painting established a mechanism through which the painter was able to engage the viewer in the painting.

The critical response to Homer's works suggests that Homer, too, was involved in some sort of trickery, which they linked to the artistic effects of aestheticism. For Homer and his critics, the shift of focus was away from the subject of the painting to the

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[51] Johanna Drucker, "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice among the Proto-Modern Americans," *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (1992): 37-50.
[52] Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*, 125-52.
[53] Ibid., 67-71.

aesthetic effects and how they were perceived by the viewer. For Harnett and Eakins, the illusion of their realism drew the viewer in as they question the reality of what is presented, including the disconnection between the perception and reality of the constructed painting. Aestheticism engaged the viewer in a different way, one that used the formal elements of painting to appeal to the viewer's sensual experience, rather than the sentimental emotion Americans often associated with realism.

The critic for the New York *Sun* more explicitly commented on the ways that Homer's work parted from the traditional realism that was meant to appeal to the viewer's emotions. He noted the realism of *Milking Time,* calling it "literal enough to have been painted on the spot, and at a single sitting. A work so void of sentiment and so coarsely executed affords a disagreeable example of realistic art and nothing more."[54] This critical response not only echoed Clarence Cook's comparison of Homer to Edouard Frère, but also embodied the tension in the challenges to realism during this period. Here, Homer's work is seen as overtly literal, and solely realistic, despite its rough execution. Instead of a painting whose subject should have been full of nostalgic emotion, pulling the viewer into the painting by its appeal to his longing tendency for the farms of New England, Homer effectively moved away from the moralistic goals of traditional genre painting and the didactic illustration that he had abandoned just a year before. By focusing on the formal qualities of his paintings, Homer was able to engage directly with the viewer's response based on the painting itself, not on a reaction to a narrative. By moving away from the subject as the focus of the work, Homer was then able to use the aesthetic elements of color, form and composition to pull the viewer into an interaction with the painting. These movements away from the moral control toward

[54] "The National Academy of Design," *New York Sun*, 21 April 1875.

the pleasure evoked through an experience of beauty were at the heart of the project of aestheticism. How then, can we reconcile Homer's continued realism with this move toward aestheticism?

While many American critics were concerned with this turn away from straightforward Realism, Henry James not only looked for more of these subtle tricks of artistry in Homer's work, but also connected them even more explicitly to aestheticism. In his review of American art "On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited," published in *The Galaxy* in July 1875, James laid out what the other critics just touched upon: that to his eye American art in general, and Homer's work in particular, did not stand up to European art. His review repeatedly returned to Homer's work, and eventually concluded that "if it [Homer's painting] had a good many more secrets and mysteries and coquetries, he would be, with his vigorous way of looking and seeing, even if fancy in the matter remained the same dead blank, an almost distinguished painter."[55] Given James's understanding of European aestheticism, and his thorough review of Homer and his colleagues' work, I turn now to an intense examination of James's thoughts on American art and Homer's place within it to give us a sense of where Homer's paintings fit within the international context.

In response to what he termed a "standing quarrel" between critics and artists, James began his review by commenting on the link between criticism and painting, emphatically justifying art criticism, claiming its necessity for artists' success because "it keeps the question of art before the world" thus bringing forward more patrons and admirers of the arts.[56] He set up a dichotomy between art and criticism, one based on the

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[55] Henry James, "On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited," *The Galaxy* 20, no. 1 (1875): 94.
[56] Ibid.: 89.

critics' judgment of art by literary standards. Beyond this divide between artists and critics, James lashed out against the state of American art, claiming that "Art, at the present day, is being steadily and rapidly vulgarized…; it appeals to greater numbers of people than formerly, and the gate of communication has had to be widened, perhaps in a rather barbarous fashion."[57] James set up an interesting dynamic here. He praised criticism for its ability to bring a larger audience to the art world, yet clearly disapproved of the mass appeal that art was trying to make through the rise in art criticism in papers and magazines and the growing popularity and turn to watercolors, a more affordable medium.

At the root of this dynamic was James's growing allegiance toward European art, particularly toward the elitism and distancing of art from the commoners that was found in the ever-changing British Aestheticism of the 1870s. James became increasingly enamored with Europe, deciding eventually to move there permanently following this period in New York. James's elitism, or cultural dominance, was in line with the cultural aspirations of American publishers and critics, and part of a wider cultural agenda to imbue art with the social role of developing a shared appreciation of beauty for its role in cultural development.

Knowing that this bias characterized James's mission for his article, we can see that his judgment of Homer was written with respect to the aesthetic issues that dominated the European circles in which he traveled. He defined the particulars of this bias by praising artists whose works could be read as "more literary than their most erratic critics," and again recognizing Spanish artists such as Mariano Fortuny and Eduardo Zamaçois as leaders of this type of work which "is founded upon a literary taste,

[57] Ibid.

upon a smattering of culture, upon a vague, light diffusion of the historic sense."[58] He likewise singled out artists associated with aestheticism, including Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Frederic Leighton, praising their works for the need "to have a learned sonnet, of an explanatory sort, affixed to the frame" to explain the subtle representation of high literature within their painting.[59] James advised his American readers to continue to turn to European paintings as precedents for their developing an art that would be equally edifying.

The quality that James privileged most throughout his review was the inclusion of "intellectual charm" which he goes on to describe as "that thing which, when it exists, always seems more precious than other merits, and indeed makes us say that it is the only thing in a work of art which is deeply valuable."[60] He further defined this "intellectual charm" as inclusive of a sense of "imagination, intellectual elevation, [which] cannot be studied, purchased, acquired." This was in contrast to the artistic elements, like a strong use of color, which could be acquired through study and practice. James privileged elements that he felt would distance art from the commonplace elements that he saw in American painting. In many ways, he articulated a theory that harkened back to Benson's arguments from the end of the last decade. James, however, suggested that art should distance itself from the commonplace of modern life, rather than Benson's suggestion that art should find the beautiful or ideal within the commonplace.

Imagination and intellectual stimulation were at the heart of James's criticism of Homer, which he balanced with praise and hopeful conclusions about Homer's future.

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[58] Ibid.: 90. Homer had been praised in 1874 as the "American Fortuny." Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*.
[59] James, "On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited," 90.
[60] Ibid.: 91.

James singled out Homer throughout his article, describing his paintings at the Academy annual as "the most striking pictures in the exhibition," and his watercolors at the 1875 American Watercolor Society Exhibition as "among the American performances, our best entertainment."[61] Yet, he also placed Homer in direct contrast to the qualities that he praised in European works, claiming that "Mr. Homer's pictures, in other words, imply no explanatory sonnets; the artist turns his back squarely and frankly upon literature."[62] This connection between literature and paintings had been intensely promoted by Rossetti's circle, yet Homer lacked the lyricism and subtlety of literature, instead presenting works that were frank and straightforward depictions of what he observed.[63] Writers had identified a strong sense of observation as a force in Homer's work beginning in his own time, an assessment that continues through twenty-first century studies of his work. To James, though, Homer's work came short of moving beyond these observations to something higher and better, more ideal and elevating and thus relating to aestheticism.

At the crux of James's disappointment in Homer's work was the attention to subjects that James described as "his barren plank fences, his glaring, bald, blue skies, his big, dreary, vacant lots of meadows, his freckled, straight-haired Yankee urchins, his flat-breasted maidens, suggestive of a dish of rural doughnuts and pie…."[64] James saw Homer's New England type, which other critics had praised, to be the root of his

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.: 90.
[63] Elizabeth Prettejohn writes that Rossetti and his colleagues "reveled in creating interrelationships between poetic texts and pictorial works," a tendency that she likewise terms "Baudelairean." Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2008), 190.
[64] James, "On Some Pictures Lately Exhibited," 93.

downfall, acknowledging that "if it had a good many more secrets and mysteries and coquetries, he would be, with his vigorous way of looking and seeing, even if fancy in the matter remained the same dead blank, an almost distinguished painter."[65] Ultimately, James concluded that Homer's lack of subtlety and imagination, his penchant for more common subjects, and his reliance on realism kept Homer from meeting the standards of elegance and beauty that were crucial to James's conceptions of aesthetic painting. This marked a difference from other critics that felt Homer moved away from realism in these works.

The Galaxy review highlighted Homer's relationship to aestheticism in several ways, the most obvious of which was James's insistence that Homer cared little for the issue of beauty, representing a scene or figures that James described as "ugly." For James, like Benson before him, Homer avoided the artistic devices that would allow his paintings to transcend the realism of the subject matter and thereby create an image worth contemplating for its beauty alone. He hinted at this developing conception in this review when stating that, "a picture is, for those who own it and look at it, essentially a diversion."[66] Homer's realism precluded his ability to provide a diversion for the viewer. We see here a shift in the focus of American aestheticism away from its basis in realism, as it had been in earlier American theories. Now realism was a burden to reaching the diversion of aestheticism. At the base of this assertion, though, was the issue of the viewer's engagement with the work of art. For James, the viewer should look to the work of art to provide a diversion from the realities of modern life, and works that were too realistic might prohibit this diversionary goal.

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[65] Ibid.: 94.
[66] Ibid.

What can we make of this split reaction to Homer's work, where James saw Homer's paintings as too real and others saw it as incorporating too many effects? James seemed to miss the way in which Homer provided a diversion for his subjects, one that highlighted the effects that other critics linked to the artistic devices that distracted from Homer's realism. In a very literal way, he depicted a scene where the figures engage with the beauty of nature. In many ways, the American critics picked up on the formal elements that Homer subtly emphasized through the work itself. Homer focused the viewer's attention on the act of viewing through his witty use of the cows, the only figures in the painting that engage with anyone – and in this case it is the viewer. He further emphasized the importance of looking through the placement of the figures, who hold their tools yet are not engaged in farm work. The figures look as the viewer does, into the horizon where the lemon-yellow sky is flecked with bits of blue, giving the feeling of light coming up at dawn or just setting at dusk. To the left of their gaze across the field is another boy who runs toward a small tree, his arms raised, echoing the form of the cow's horns. But the foreground figures are not interested in this other bit of action in the background. They seem almost mesmerized by the beauty of the sun-kissed sky. With two minor exceptions, everyone in the painting is looking, an act that Homer accentuated with the dramatic compositional focus on the triple-rail fence, forcing the viewer to consider the flat surface of the painting as an object, rather than any didactic or moralistic narrative. In this way, Homer boldly asserted his evolving concerns with design elements of form and composition, while drawing the viewer in to participate in the act of looking and contemplation. The fence helps to facilitate this by placing the main figures in the space of the viewer. They serve as examples for how the viewer

should interact with the illusionistic painting beyond the flat fence. Homer continued the engagement of the viewer with the landscape and the picture space that he had begun in his landscapes a decade earlier. Now, this engagement was more direct and on a larger scale.

In *Milking Time*, Homer embedded his ideas about the function of painting within the context of the painting itself, encouraging his viewer to engage with his painting in a new way. His use of more decorative pictorial elements, which emphasized the surface of the painting added to the new ideology of the painting as an object. He took a commonplace scene, the daily task of milking, paused the action and focused on the compositional and formal elements. The "striking effects," as the critics described them, were meant to stop the viewer too, whose contemplation of the scene beyond mirrored the figures on the surface of the painting. In this way Homer created an aestheticism that differed from the British Aestheticism to which James compared him. While Homer incorporated the aesthetic effects that were increasingly important in British Aestheticism, he did so in combination with elements of realism that emphasized the element of observed reality that had become important in his work. More than anything the differing critical reactions to Homer's paintings in 1875 indicated uncertainty about the relationship between the viewer's involvement with the painting and its truth of representation. They felt uncomfortable with Homer's challenges to a simple, realistic presentation. Likewise, each critic brought to the table their understanding of the shifting nature of Homer's work – away from the literary realism that had tied Homer to the tradition of illustration, and toward a greater interest in pictorial concerns.

As if in response to the variety of critical responses to his work, Homer presented five paintings at the 1876 exhibition: *A Fair Wind* (Figure 92), *Cattle Piece (Unruly Calf)* (Figure 93), *Over the Hills (Rab and the Girls)* (Figure 94), *Foraging* (Location Unknown), and *Old Boat*. Of these, *Over the Hills* follows many of the same conventions as *Milking Time*. Homer flattened the space of the composition with the broadly defined areas of the landscape – three areas defined by the yellow sky, the mountain, and the green meadow. On top of these broad bands, he places two female figures who seem to be set on top of the bands of color rather than really inside the landscape. The dog, who engages with the viewer in a way that is similar to the cows in *Milking Time*, was not mentioned in the critical reviews of the work, leading to the conclusion that he was not present when the painting was first exhibited.[67] The two young women wear similar dresses that identify them as middle-class women – on the left, an elaborately appliquéd coat, with a vertically striped skirt that had appeared in other of Homer's paintings. On the right, she wears a belted dress with dark trim at the sleeves that coordinates with her belt. The pair enjoy a leisurely walk in the mountains. The figure on the left holds a four-leaf clover in her gloved hand, showing the item to her companion, who has collected a bough of autumn leaves. In contrast to the milkmaid of *Milking Time*, there is no sense that these women are meant to be engaged in anything but leisurely pursuits. Homer featured more sophisticated women, perhaps in response to

[67] Margaret C. Conrads, "Winslow Homer and His Critics in the 1870s" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1999). and Sarah Burns, "Rab and the Girls: A Riddle in Paint," in *Winslow Homer: An American Genius at the Parthenon: The Move toward Abstraction* (Nashville, Tenn.: The Parthenon, 2000).

critics who saw a disconnection between the "bumpkins" of his earlier painting and its aesthetic intentions.[68]

Critics continued to react to the combination of realism and aestheticism in Homer's work, often describing his paintings in decorative terms like Earl Shinn did in his review of *Over the Hills*, but concluding as art historian Margaret Conrads does that "subject and artistic treatment equally vied for attention."[69] They saw the works of Homer's friend John La Farge quite differently. In 1876, he exhibited the landscape *New England Pasture-Land*, which was praised by critics for encompassing beauty and truth of America. Conrads suggests that, "Although La Farge's canvas shares basic compositional features with *Over the Hills*, the fact that La Farge's image is pure landscape (and perhaps hallowed because of its identification as New England) seems to have enabled these critics to enjoy the visual impact of the design without reservation."[70] Homer's inclusion of figures in his landscape showed a continued interest in the combination of figure and landscape that he had begun in the late 1860s. The critics of this period, though, showed a bias toward what they expected to see from certain artists, and the critics expected this kind of aesthetic and decorative treatment from La Farge. To them, Homer's promise lay in his ability to depict American subjects, such as *A Fair Wind*, which they identified in 1876 as having the vitality and promise of an American subject.

This goal to combine stylistic and formal interests with an American subject characterized Homer's development of aestheticism. While critics associated art and

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[68] His one exception was the use of the early American shepherdess, a topic which I address in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
[69] Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 100; "Fine Arts. The National Academy Exhibition," *The Nation*, 20 April 1876.
[70] Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, 100.

artifice with the stylistic qualities that they identified in Homer's work, they were discouraged by Homer's movement away from character types, which they saw as his primary talent. Homer, on the other hand, embraced the shift to focus on formal devices to call into question the truth of realism, or at least to raise the questions of vision's role in modernity. With *Milking Time*, he presented his audience with a work meant to create in the viewer an awareness of the act of viewing. Throughout the remaining years of the decade, Homer would increasingly turn toward these aestheticist elements, as his work became more distant from the narrative realism of his earlier works and toward unique compositions and decorative treatments of subjects.

Chapter Four

Homer's Tile production 1878-1880

I have thus far characterized Homer's pursuit of aestheticism as an element that affected his stylistic approach as well as his choices regarding the subjects and exhibition of his works. In this way, he participated in developing the ideologies of American aestheticism during the early 1870s. By 1876, the hesitant attitude toward aestheticism had shifted to one of acceptance and a wider audience of American art incorporated its tenets and philosophies. The aestheticism that I have identified in Homer's work to this point really became a movement with widespread appeal and adherence to its principles. The Aesthetic Movement took hold in the late 1870s, largely fueled by the exhibition of decorative items at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, which highlighted the production of decorative objects from around the world. In recognition of this shift, this chapter connects Homer more fully to the growing American Aesthetic Movement, as opposed to a more loosely defined aestheticism with which he had experimented throughout his career as a painter thus far.

With aestheticism's introduction into popular culture, Homer expanded his interest beyond aesthetic and pictorial issues in his paintings to include an interest in design elements including the creation of decorative tiles, which Homer painted during the years between 1878 and 1881. He created at least two fireplace tile sets – *Pastoral* (Figure 96) with a shepherd and shepherdess flanking the fireplace, and *On the Shore* (Figure 97), a re-depiction of his 1871 drawing *Evening on the Beach* (Figure 98), a two-tile set of the *Resting Shepherdess* (Figure 99), and another *Shepherdess* tile from 1878

(Figure 100). In addition he served as one of the early members of the Tile Club which began in the fall of 1877.

Previous scholars have touched on Homer's tile production without fully addressing the questions that it raises. Lloyd Goodrich's 1944 biography sets the standard treatment for Homer's tile production, describing this period in Homer's career as "a curious bypath" which was "inspired by the Tile Club."[1] He quoted from the article "The Tile Club at Work," arguing that male artists had reclaimed the paints and materials that women had taken up as a hobby of painting on ceramics to "do something decorative, if we would not be behind the times."[2] Goodrich further suggested that Homer's treatment of the tiles, including the multi-colored palette and the more precisely designed motives, "suggest that he may have done them in his studio," rather than actually at Tile Club meetings.[3] Other scholars have come to the same conclusion about Homer's tiles – that they were a more serious pursuit than the other members of the Tile Club undertook.[4] While the numerous extant tiles indicate Homer's seriousness, the pursuit of tile production certainly related to concepts and ideas that he would have

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[1] Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; The MacMillan Company, 1944), 60.
[2] William Mackay Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," *Scribner's Monthly* XVII, no. 3 (1879): 401.
[3] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, 61-62.
[4] Nancy Owen comments, "Winslow Homer was the only Tile Club member who seems to have taken the trouble to learn the unique properties of the medium and to have mastered its special nature…. In addition, its detail and modeling suggest that Homer took his task far more seriously than did many of the other Tilers." Nancy Owen, review of *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America*, *Studies in the Decorative Arts* IX, no. 1 (2001-2002): 157. Ronald Pisano came to the same conclusion: "Homer was clearly one of the most adventurous of the Tile Club members. Aside from being daring with regard to color, he was prolific, completing at least six known single tiles, one plaque, and two elaborate fireplace surrounds (the only ones known to have been completed by a single member of the club. Ronald G. Pisano, *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 25-26.

encountered through his exposure to the various members of the Tile Club. Homer's involvement in the club, while limited in time, exposed him to ideas regarding the decorative arts and the field of design that would extend beyond the weekly club meetings to encompass a greater interest in decoration.

The conclusions regarding the significance of Homer's tile production remain much the same throughout the Homer literature, although the tone in which these works have been considered has changed throughout the scholarship. Goodrich's assessment of these tiles was particularly disparaging:

> All these bodices, ruffles, knee breeches, floating ribbons and shepherd's crooks seemed strange conceits for Homer, showing the devastating effect of the decorative mania on even the most hard-shelled Yankee of them all. Here, for the first time in his art, were an idyllicism and a decorative intent that were fully conscious. The result, with all its absurdity, had a surprising inventiveness and charm, while the clear-cut draftsmanship set these tiles apart from the feeble decorative efforts that most of his colleagues produced.[5]

Goodrich clearly privileged painting over the decorative arts, a presumption which reflects the art historical bias of the 1940s. He felt that while Homer seriously and consciously took part in the craze for tile production for this brief period in his career, ultimately this was simply a strange, "absurd" and "devastating" turn for Homer, even if he believed that Homer's work in this medium was better than his colleagues.[6]

In the last twenty years, though, the biases toward various media that characterized Goodrich's approach to Homer's tile production have slackened as art historians have looked to the work done in the often overlapping disciplines of material culture studies and visual culture studies. With these newer approaches, the hierarchy of

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[5] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, 62.

[6] While Goodrich's assessment addressed the gendered history of tile production, I seek to reconcile Homer's pursuit of what has been considered a more "feminine" hobby to further complicate the judgment of Homer's "hard-shelled Yankee" exterior.

traditional art history is broken down by placing fine art into the wider social context and including it as a counterpoint to more popular forms of art. In visual culture studies, all visual documents are given equal value in demonstrating the values and intentions of a wider slice of the population.[7] In material culture studies, the object, whether it be a piece of furniture, a home design, or a painting, becomes the primary source for uncovering cultural production and meaning.[8] This shift has allowed for a study of the production of art within a broader social and historical context and considers often varying messages coming from the popular arts and traditional high arts.

Homer was a member of both worlds. As an illustrator, he had been part of the mechanism that crafted the messages that the publishers presented to their mass audience. The fine art world, in which Homer was well established by 1876, appealed to an elite audience from the beginning, primarily because of the cost of purchasing art. By the middle of the 1870s, though, a conscious effort was undertaken to make art more accessible to a wider audience, through a variety of means including watercolor painting and decorative arts production. Technologies in both print and industrial production allowed for a wider dissemination of ideas and products that could bring aesthetic items into someone's home. Media responded with the publication of handbooks for creating decorative arts as well as domestic handbooks to guide women in the decoration of one's home.

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[7] On the issue of material culture studies in the context of American art history, see Patricia Johnson, *Seeing High & Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2006). She notes the rise of visual culture studies in the 1990s.

[8] Key figures for material culture studies include Jules Prown who helped to define the field in such works as Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman, *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000). and Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Consideration of these broader cultural documents has shifted the discussion of Homer's tile production away from Goodrich's criticism of them as unimportant or unrelated. In the Metropolitan Museum's *In Pursuit of Beauty* catalogue, which documents extensively the Aesthetic Movement in America and the resulting production of decorative arts, Doreen Bolger Burke comments on Homer's tiles in her chapter, "Painters and Sculptors in a Decorative Age."[9] She argues that the Aesthetic Movement was reflected in American art by artists' turn to creation of decorative arts, as well as the primary role that objects played in their paintings during this period. Burke uses Homer's tile work as an illustration of the ways in which an artist's decorative art style differs from his usual painting style. She notes a flattened and simplified style in Homer's tile painting.[10] In considering these types of work, Burke maintains a stark separation between Homer's paintings and his decorative art, so while each is valued, they are not seen as connected.

This chapter instead explores Homer's tilework by placing it within the history of decorative tile production and other decorative work, exploring his patrons in this work and how they used the decorative arts within both a professional and domestic space to present a particular message about themselves. Through an examination of the reviews of his watercolor paintings which have the same subject as the tile sets, I examine how Aestheticism manifested itself in Homer's work in the late 1870s. To this end, I build on Sarah Burns' recent essay, "The Pastoral Ideal: Winslow Homer's Bucolic America in Context," which argues that Homer's fireplace tile *Pastoral,* created for the home of his brother, Charles Savage Homer, Jr., relates to the pastoral theme that we find in Homer's

[9] Doreen Bolger Burke, "Painters and Sculptors in a Decorative Age," in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).
[10] Ibid., 312.

paintings from around 1878. Burns argues that Homer's pastoral imagery, seen in paintings such as *Fresh Air* (Figure 101), presented clean, refreshing scenes of an American Arcadia that transported the modern city dweller away from the hustle of American life. Such idyllic settings relied on the nineteenth-century belief in an American history that Burns refers to as "innocent" and "whole," even if this was just a construction. This reading supports critics and scholars who have routinely identified Homer's works as nationalistic. [11]

What changes, though, when this imagery is considered within the context of the domestic interior? While one could argue that Homer's paintings were also meant to be displayed in a domestic setting, the tiles were intentionally created for a specific domestic space, and in the case of his fireplace tiles, commissioned for particular locations.[12] In the late nineteenth century, the domestic environment played a strong role in the definition of identity, including the definition of national identity. With the advent of the colonial revival around the time of the Centennial Exhibition, Americans turned to colonial objects or replications thereof as representative of an American identity. The definition of what constitutes an American identity becomes problematic in the context of the Aesthetic movement, when upper- and middle-class American women drew on other cultures and their decorative production to create rooms in their homes. This chapter further complicates Homer's work in defining an American cultural identity through the domestic space, by considering the ways that the development of a national culture

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[11] Sarah Burns, "The Pastoral Ideal: Winslow Homer's Bucolic America," in *Frederic Church, Winslow Homer and Thomas Moran: Tourism and American Landscape*, ed. Gail S. Davidson (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 124-26.

[12] *Pastoral* was exhibited at the Century Association, but it was created for his brother's homer in West Townsend, Massachusetts. The other fireplace tile set was created for the home of an artist friend.

functioned in conjunction with other Aesthetic Movement trends in the late nineteenth century.

Decorative Arts and Tile Production in the United States

In the 1870s, the production of artistic, decorative tiles was a fairly new pursuit in the United States – an essentially international pursuit that Americans took up with great interest. The long-standing use of tiles throughout Europe dated as far back as ancient Egypt and Persia, a fact highlighted by writers in the nineteenth century who became fascinated with and subsequently romanticized the history of tile use.[13] It is worth recounting this history here, since by 1878 Americans drew upon this history in justifying their own turn to the practice of tile painting. Early tile work consisted of mosaic-style patterning where multicolored tiles were laid in a variety of patterns to create visual interest in the floors and on the walls of early buildings. Itinerant workers kept the tradition of tile use alive during the medieval period, as they traveled to cathedral construction sites to prepare and install tiles in the buildings. We see in this period the development of linear surface decoration that was either incised on the tile or stamped. During the Renaissance, the Spanish-derived technique of majolica, where a tin-based glaze applied over an opaque white glaze to create vibrantly colored tiles, became widely practiced in Italy. Itinerant Italian artisans carried this technique throughout Europe, and by the mid-sixteenth century, tile production was centered in Antwerp. With the fight for Dutch independence, many of these artisans moved north, shifting the center of tile

[13] You find great variety in the use of the idea "tile." William James Furnival, *Leadless Decorative Tiles, Faience, and Mosaic* (Staffordshire: W. J. Furnival, 1904). John C. L. Sparkes, *Hints to China and Tile Decorators* (Boston: S. W. Tilton, 1877; reprint, America ed.). For a brief history of tile production, see "Tradition and Sources" Kathryn Huggins and Tony Herbert, *The Decorative Tile in Architecture and Interiors* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 8-41.

production to the cities of Delft and Utrecht among others. During the seventeenth century, tiles began to be used widely in the home, as they created a more hygienic environment while also adding color and decoration to the interior spaces.[14] The rise of the Dutch tile industry also saw a shift away from floor tile, which had henceforth been the primary use of tiles, to the use of wall tiles, which are characterized as thinner than floor tiles and were more highly decorated. The hand painted designs focused on scenes of everyday life in the mode of Dutch genre painting.[15] Around 1630, Dutch tile makers began to look to the blue and white designs of Chinese ceramics and the traditional blue and white Dutch Delftware evolved.

By 1730, the focus of Delft tile production had shifted from Holland to England, where the production of delft tiles had been introduced in the late seventeenth century and for the most part mirrored the Dutch models early on. By the late 1750s, the English manufacturers had developed the technique for transfer printing, one of the first steps toward the mass production of decorated tiles. Herbert Minton eventually perfected this process in the 1840s.[16] In addition to the introduction of transfer printing, mass production of tiles was accelerated by the industrial revolution. Innovations including a new technique to press tiles from clay dust allowed for economic mass production of tiles decorated with relief decoration or molding. With the onset of mass production, tiles became more affordable and by the mid-1870s they began to have high fashion appeal, particularly in the decoration of one's home. Minton, in particular, had an appeal in the

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[14] Hans van Lemmen, *Decorative Tiles Throughout the Ages* (New York: Crescent Books, 1988).
[15] J & B Austwick, *The Decorated Tile: An Illustrated History of English Tile-Making and Design* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 16-17.
[16] Ibid., 21., Huggins and Herbert, *The Decorative Tile in Architecture and Interiors*, 39-40.

United States, as they had been chosen to design and produce the decoration for the mid-nineteenth century renovation and addition to the United States Capitol building.

In England, the demand for tiles was met by the founding of numerous tile production houses. There was a variety of styles and processes used in creating the tiles to meet the demand. In 1871, Minton China Works and Art Pottery Studio was established in Kensington Gore. Here, the director W. S. Coleman fostered an environment where artists and designers created designs for individual tiles that were mass produced in the Stoke factory.[17] Minton, Hollins and Company became the largest tile factory in England and produced a wide variety of tiles ranging from simple colored tiles used for mosaics to hand-painted tiles. Maw and Company was established in the late 1850s as a serious competitor to Minton. Like Minton, it created both transfer-printed and hand-painted tiles. Most of the major tile companies used the designs of free-lance designers in addition to their own staff designers, but in all, the goal was mass production of tiles to meet the high demand from the public.

The home had taken center stage in this period because of the view that the home was reflective of the owner's values and principles in addition to the place where one would retreat from the sins of the industrial age. Visual cues became important markers in the uplifting role that the household interior was asked to play in the late nineteenth century, a role that we have seen assigned to painting and other fine arts to this point. While mass produced items helped to fuel the popularity of the decorative arts, the elite tastemakers expressed concerns over the increased industrialization of decoration. Much of the debates surrounding decorative objects and their use within the home were rooted

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[17] Austwick, *The Decorated Tile: An Illustrated History of English Tile-Making and Design*, 45.

in the reform movement in England, a movement that looked to beauty as an important moral component of life, and therefore stood as the basis for aestheticism. It eventually became a question of to what end artists and decorators should go to provide a beautiful environment for the consuming public. Was it simply enough to have beautifully decorated objects, regardless of exactly how they were produced? Or was it exposure to handcrafted objects that brought about the moralizing benefits that were sought in the aesthetic interior? In answer to this question, many Victorians began connecting concepts of art to the more utilitarian objects of material culture – furniture and other forms of decoration – as a way of counteracting what they saw as the poor quality of workmanship associated with industrialized products.

Two schools of thought regarding aesthetic decoration emerged. John Ruskin's writings once again proved important in the American context, as they had been since the 1850s. Ruskin's *The Two Paths, Being Lectures on Art and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacture*, published in 1859, was immensely successful in America with nineteen American printings between 1859 and 1891.[18] Ruskin encouraged his readers to "get rid, then, at once of any idea of Decorative art being a degraded or a separate kind of art."[19] In this way, he equated the importance of artists and designers, thereby encouraging artists, who he saw as the great decorators, to look at design work as an important pursuit.[20] On the other side of the theoretical debate lay the theorists and teachers of the South Kensington School, who promoted the specialization of designers who would be concerned with the creation of what they considered industrial arts. In

[18] Catherine Lynn, "Decorating Surfaces: Aesthetic Delight, Theorectical Dilemma," in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 54.
[19] Quoted in Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 59.

addition, for these design theorists, naturalism in decoration, which had always been championed by Ruskin, was replaced by an emphasis on visual logic. They deemed fraudulent the decorative arts such as wallpaper and textiles that included realistically depicted scenes that used a sense of perspective or that seemed to stand out from their backgrounds. In this school of thought, more abstract design was privileged over the realism and naturalism Ruskin promoted.

While begun in a British context, these theories were quickly adapted by Americans as the decoration of one's home began to have greater importance in this period because, like the British, Americans believed decoration to be a means for moral teaching and elevation. While the theoretical sides were distinct in Britain, they were less so in America, where the idea of aesthetic design and decoration began to emerge in the mid-1870s. After the Centennial exhibition many British writers' works were reprinted in the United States, either serially in magazines or as complete books with American introductions. We often see in these reproductions a combination of ideas that reflects both the Ruskinian ideas as well as those promoted by the South Kensington School. In the 1877 edition of *Hints to China and Tile Decorators* by John C. L. Sparkes, director of the Lambeth School of Art and the Headmaster of the National Art Training School at South Kensington, the American editors introduced Sparkes' text about technique by espousing Ruskinian ideas about design. They offer the book as "a more advanced treatise" and "an onward step in art" since they felt "the love of decoration, and the desire to give tangible and permanent expression to that quality of our nature, is universal among mankind."[21] Not only did they see the need to decorate as a universal desire, it was also one that "assumes a distinctive national character – an individuality, influenced

[21] Sparkes, *Hints to China and Tile Decorators* 9.

by the natural scenery of the country, and by religious ideas."[22] For these editors, art was the key means of expressing a country's intrinsic values and pottery decoration was the best embodiment of these national customs.

The displays at the Centennial Exhibition, held in Philadelphia in 1876, reinforced these messages to the American audience. Here, a wide American audience was exposed to the decorative objects being created throughout the world. Reviews of the exhibition encouraged Americans to take the time to see what was continually referred to as the best display of ceramic art ever amassed in the United States. The strongest reaction to these exhibitions was a feeling that Americans were terribly behind in this element of their cultural production. A writer for the *New York Times* encouraged Americans to look and learn from the exhibition. He highlighted the production of ceramics and pottery as an arena where Americans were severely deficient and contrasted this to the tremendous American successes in machinery and other industrial products.[23] Writers highlighted the extravagant ceramic displays by the British as the examples to examine.

Tiles and their use in fireplace design were a main feature of the exhibition. The main exhibition hall featured numerous fireplace designs, including full mantels like the oak mantel on display by Doulton & Watts (Figure 102), as well as exhibitions of just the fireplace grates, such as the display by Steel & Garland (Figure 103), which showed several fireplace grates decorated with painted or printed tiles. By far the most extensive displays of tiles and of fireplace design were those presented by Minton, Hollis & Co. and their subsidiary Minton's China Works. Minton & Hollis's main display of tiles (Figure 104) included a wide variety of tiles and plaques – large, multi-tile

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[22] Ibid., 10.
[23] "The Centennial as a Study," *New York Times*, 4 June 1876, 6.

representational scenes of cranes and flowers. Others were smaller vertical tile arrangements that were often used on the sides of fireplace surrounds, while still other tiles were more abstract in their design. Minton's China Works included a grand display of a mosaic tile fireplace design that combined a wide variety of the tiles seen in their other display (Figures 105-107).[24] The fireplace design included a conglomeration of types produced by Minton. The central panel featured a multi-tile set that replicated a painting featuring a young woman holding a baby in her arms with another child looking over her shoulder. The subject is reminiscent of the French genre paintings of Jean Simeon Chardin (Figure 108). The tile set is framed by decorative mosaic tiles and then further surrounded by vertical tile columns that depict birds and floral motifs, which are repeated in slightly different form in the vertical tile groupings that surround the fireplace grate. On either side of the fireplace, in the lower register, another abstract decorative design is used. The entire mantelpiece is topped by a portrait of George Washington.

While Minton's grandiose display was impressive, the more intimate parlor space exhibited by Howard & Son's (Figure 109) is closer to the type that an American audience would eventually embrace. The photographic record of the exhibit, taken specifically for *Harper's Weekly*, presents a woman seated in the parlor reading. The fireplace in the center was decorated with tiles that were set into the grate. The tiles were just one component in a room in which the complete decoration, including furniture and wall treatment worked together to create a particular tone. The room is decorated with elaborate wood paneling and shelving, on which various pottery items were displayed. The room also included luxurious fabrics and wall decorations such as Persian rugs. The photograph was reproduced in *Harper's Weekly* as the lead illustration to their issue

[24] The motif was reproduced and widely distributed in American journals.

dated October 14, 1876. The accompanying article featured descriptions of the British art furniture displays in the exhibition's main building, commenting that these new techniques would soon be available to Americans of any income level, since the process was "so marvelously cheap."[25] Through this image and short article, *Harpers* presented to their audience the ideal of creating beautifully decorated spaces that would provide a welcoming environment.

Harper and Brothers embraced this hospitable tone and incorporated it into the design for its offices. In January 1878, the trade publication *Crockery and Glass Journal* reported that Homer, along with several other artists who worked as illustrators at *Harpers*, participated in the decoration of the newly renovated offices at the Harper's Building on Franklin Square. While pictorial documentation of the room has not been found, the decorative scheme was described extensively in the *Crockery and Glass*. The architect J. Cleaveland Cady coordinated the design of the space, which was Dutch in theme, in honor of Elizabeth Coyler, the mother of the four original Harper brothers who was a Dutch woman. The room was to function as "a reception-room and luncheon-parlor," and it was designed to make the visitor feel as if he or she had been transported back to the Hague in the seventeenth-century. The design included stained glass mosaic windows depicting Dutch motives, a parquet floor, and solid mahogany furniture, which the article noted as being created by carpenters from the architectural drawings of Cady. The *Crockery and Glass* writer described the room as "so quaint and unmodern, so honest and comfortable," and a means through which the publishing house could extend its reputation for hospitality.[26]

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[25] "Frontispiece," *Harper's Weekly*: 827.
[26] "Private Office Decorations," *Crockery and Glass Journal*, 17 January 1878, 10.

The "chief attraction of the room" was its paneled frieze with works by artists such as Homer, Alfred Fredericks, Edwin Austen Abbey, Charles Stanley Reinhart, Thomas Nast, Alfred Parsons, and Frederick Stuart Church. On one wall, the panels, which alternated in size, began with Gutenberg and traced the history of printing through to the Harper brothers themselves. The *Crockery and Glass* author described them as "painted on gold backgrounds with strong back outlines, and in masses, for the most part, of unbroken color," a style that was reminiscent of tile painting and meant to bring the paintings in line with the overall Dutch theme. The other main wall depicted the history of New York, including the key role of the establishment of the settlement of New Amsterdam by the Dutch colonist Peter Stuyvesant, and again connecting the Harpers to this history. The smaller wall included "fanciful" depictions of Dutch figures between the windows.[27]

The fireplace, the first thing seen upon entering the room, was described as "a great yawning fireplace, a broad chimney breast, and a rising mass of red brickwork, giving the idea of welcome and hospitality as nothing so well as a liberal fireplace can." Its tall construction included chiseled brick details and shelves made to hold "choice specimens of Delft or tobacco pot and pipe crates." Despite the contemporary understanding that "a Dutch fireplace is commonly supposed to be incomplete without [tiles,]… Mr. Cady purposely omitted them as being likely to mar the tone of mellow quietness which he wished to give the room."[28] While Americans were increasingly interested in drawing on other precedents, as Cady did with the Dutch theme of this room, the notion of artistic choice, in which he used only those which he felt were

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

appropriate to the particular situation, was increasingly associated with the development of an American style in design.

Henry Hudson Holly advocated such selective cultural borrowing in his *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country*. In the introduction, he outlined his project as looking for an "*American style*" [his italics] continuing that "Doubtless we may introduce from abroad methods of design which meet our requirements, but we must not hesitate to eliminate those portions for which we have no use, or to make such additions as our circumstances demand."[29] The creation of an American identity through the display of decorative objects was increasingly based on a borrowing of visual elements from a variety of cultures and examples. The idea of America as untouched by outside influences was past. Now, this sense of borrowing and selection was key to creating an American design. Kristin Hoganson has termed this borrowing, particularly for the display of objects within a home, as "cosmopolitan domesticity," a philosophy about design and display that relied on the use of other cultural products to express an American understanding and appreciation of beautiful objects from around the world.[30] In many ways this related to the growing globalization of the nineteenth century as Americans traveled more widely, but also became increasingly dependent on other cultures for their cultural development. Americans felt insecure about their own cultural production, particularly when compared with those of their international colleagues, even while they claimed American superiority and advancement in progress.[31]

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[29] H. Hudson Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), 17.
[30] Kristin Hoganson, "Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002).
[31] Ibid.

With its nostalgic theme and decorative treatment, the new offices for Harper and Brothers connected the Harper brothers themselves to their Dutch colonial past as well as to a printing history that predated industrialization, while simultaneously celebrating the industrial advances that made the firm so successful. The company's interest in reaching a wider audience, made possible through printing technologies on which the company relied for the advancement of its business, combined here with the yearning for an historical past that was quaintly simple. This combination seemed particularly appropriate to this paradox of superiority in technical pursuits, but insecurity when it came to art and design. Though Homer's paintings from this setting have not survived, the fact that he participated in this project indicates that he was at least aware of the concept of themed rooms in which painting, decorative arts, furniture and architectural detail functioned collectively to present a message through the interior decoration of a particular room.[32] This method would characterize his tile paintings and design in the same years.

The message presented by Harper & Brothers both in their own offices and in their representations of the Centennial Exhibition anticipated the sentiments that writers of advice manuals later espoused. Following the Centennial exhibition publishers including Harper & Brothers viewed home design and decoration as an important element in the elevation of American culture to a level that would rival the Europeans to whom they looked for examples. Ceramics was to play a large role in this development because of the belief that it was crucial in the development of artistic taste in the United States.

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[32] Abigail Gerdts notes that Lloyd Goodrich had looked unsuccessfully to find evidence of Homer's participation in this interior project. Lloyd Goodrich, *Record of Works by Winslow Homer* ed. Abigail Booth Gerdts, vol. II (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), 26-27.

The writer Phillip Sandhurst credited the international exhibitions for raising Americans' awareness of the benefits of industrial arts and their products, placing a special emphasis on "pottery and porcelain, for it is peculiarly well adapted to foster art tastes."[33] Just a few years earlier in his report recounting the exhibitions at the 1873 Vienna Universal Exhibition, published in 1875, William Blake claimed that Americans' success in these fields was not due to a lack of materials or skill. He wrote, "What is now needed is not so much the possession of materials, of knowledge, or even of artistic skill, as the elevation of the public taste, so as to create an appreciative and large demand for the products of higher efforts and greater skill."[34] This sentiment echoed that which art critics had expressed during the 1870s. Unlike fine arts, though, ceramics and pottery, though, had the potential to reach a wider audience because of their lower price and the ability to mass produce. The promotion of ceramics more easily fit the agenda of the American tastemakers who hoped to raise cultural awareness through exposure to beauty. Editors and art writers attempted to raise this knowledge through the volume of publications – in both books and popular journals – that praised the elements of pottery that were beneficial and desired.

Manuals and other handbooks allowed for a wider dissemination of ideas beyond the artists themselves, to educate the public whose appreciation of artistic products would ultimately lead to the elevation of culture. Of the ceramic arts, publishers promoted tile production and decoration as playing a key role in this path to cultural elevation. The Boston-based publishing house S. W. Tinton took on the publication of Sparkes' *Hints to*

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[33] Phillip T Sandhurst, *The Great Centennial Exhibition: Critically Described and Illustrated* (Philadelphia and Chicago: P. W. Ziegler & Co., 1876), 188.
[34] William Phipps Blake, *Ceramic Art: A Report on Pottery, Porcelain, Tiles, Terra-Cotta and Brick* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1875), 9.

China and Tile Decorators as a means of encouraging Americans to beautify their homes and subsequently elevate and foster a sense of taste and culture:

> Believing as we do that the study and practice of ceramic decoration is one of the simplest, most pleasing and most profitable forms of art can assume for the amateur, that it adds to the charm of the home, and fosters the development of pure taste in every other department of the household art, we confidently comment this little work to your attention."[35]

The same was true for Harper & Brothers, which published another handbook by Sparkes in 1878, *A hand-book to the practice of pottery painting*, in hopes that "it should conduce to the spread of a wider appreciation and practice of the beautiful and fictile art, that has from the most ancient times been the object of admiration to legions of persons of taste and of cultivated mind."[36] Decorative objects including pottery and tile served within the system through which the American cultural elite could expose their middle-class readers to the benefits of beauty. Americans were now at end of the long line of cultures that had turned to the appreciation of the beautiful as a means of creating high taste and a better lifestyle.

While many writers placed Americans at the end of a long line of cultures that produced great decorative arts, they likewise acknowledged that the current state of American production in these areas was sub-par, as Harper Brothers did in the 1878 handbook: "It is well known and seen that the ancient works, and those of the Renaissance, excel our own in their taste, artistic freedom, and wealth of ideas; and in these particulars we have still much to do to equal, still more to do to excel, these old-world productions of the potter's art." [37] Within a year, though, Jennie J. Young had

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[35] Sparkes, *Hints to China and Tile Decorators* 13.
[36] John C. L. Sparkes, *A Hand-Book to the Practice of Pottery Painting* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1878), 8.
[37] Ibid.

published a long history entitled *The Ceramic Art*, ending with a chapter on the United States. She wrote of the tremendous progress that Americans had made in a short period since they began to seriously work in the field. She attributed this success to "a limitless wealth of material at his command, and gifted with enterprise, originality, and taste," concluding that, "the American artist can look confidently forward to taking his place beside the best the world has produced."[38] Americans were used to being placed in the forefront of innovation and success in technical expertise, and with the acceptance of the Aesthetic Movement, it is no wonder that American writers chose to depict Americans once again triumphing in the production of decorative arts.

The decorative arts played a key role in the elevation of taste and culture that drove the popularity of the Aesthetic Movement. The proper use of these objects was the focus of many household manuals that were published in the period, including Clarence Cook's *House Beautiful* and Henry Hudson Holly's *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration*. Both books reprinted articles on home design that had previously been published in popular magazines. Cook's writings had originally appeared as a series of articles entitled, "Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks," published in *Scribner's Monthly*, the first of which was printed in June 1875.[39] Holly's articles first appeared in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in a four-part series entitled "Modern Dwellings: Their Construction, Decoration and Furniture" published May through August of 1876. Holly, an architect and designer, had been a leading authority on domestic design since the

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[38] Jenny J. Young, *The Ceramic Art; a Compendium of the History of Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), 442.
[39] Clarence Cook, "Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks," *Scribner's Monthly* 10, no. 2 (1875): 169-82.

publication in 1863 of *Holly's Country Seats*, which printed domestic designs for houses of all types.[40] In his 1878 book, Holly outlined his conception of the design and decoration of a home: "It has been said that he who designs the outside of a house should also design the interior. I would go a step farther, and claim that, in order to secure harmony, the same mind that conceives the original structure should guide the arrangement of all its details, including color, decoration, furniture, and carpets."[41] Like J. Cleaveland Cady in his design of the Harpers offices, Holly promoted a model of complete design and decoration, believing that the design of a room – including the placement of paintings – would ultimately bring about the best expression of good taste and decorum.

The Tile Club

While Homer possibly had a general knowledge of the concept of complete home design published by Holly and others, there was a more direct way in which he would have been exposed to ideas about home design and decoration – the Tile Club. A small group of artists, writers, illustrators, and architects, including Homer, created The Tile Club in the fall of 1877. The diverse make-up of the club embodied the collaborative nature of design from the Aesthetic Movement, and would have been the ideal location for creating a greater understanding about the role of art in design and vice versa. Homer was a founding member of the Tile Club. The specific details of his early involvement are a bit uncertain, given the secrecy with which the club was treated in both the popular press and by its members. The purported history of the Club marks the first

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[40] H. Hudson Holly, *Holly's Country Seats: Containing Lithographic Designs for Cottages, Villas, Mansions, Etc, with Their Accompanying Outbuildings* (New York: D. Appleton, 1863).
[41] Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration*, 158.

meeting at the studio of the painter Walter Paris and attended by Edward Wimbridge, the British architect. Painter and Illustrator Edwin Austen Abbey and illustrator Charles Stanley Rhinehart were present at the second meeting and were later joined by several others: William R. O'Donovan, a sculptor, William M. Laffan, a journalist, the painters Arthur Quartley, R. Swain Gifford, J. Alden Weir, Earl Shinn, who was also a journalist, F. Hopkinson Smith, author and artist, and Winslow Homer.[42] Homer is believed to have hosted the first Tile Club annual dinner.

Largely based on several articles published in *Scribner's Magazine*, as well as a self-published book about the club, historians have categorized the Tile Club as a bohemian club whose members were not as concerned about tile production as much as about promoting themselves as artists.[43] A close examination of the make-up of the original members of the club, however, suggests an alternative original intent. While the twelve original members were an eclectic group, they set the tone for the early meetings of the club and the course that it would take early on. Several of them had histories in design and decorating, including Arthur Quartley, who worked in the family-owned decorating firm of Emmart & Quartley in Baltimore from 1862 to 1875. In addition, Wimbridge studied architecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects and Walter Paris had studied at the Royal Academy schools in London. In his article about the club, William Laffan described one member, probably Paris, as "a disciple of Mr. William Morris and Mr. Alma Tadema" thus linking the American group to the British painters

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[42] Pisano, *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America*, 14.
[43] See for example, Linda Henefield Skalet, "Bohemians and Businessmen: America Artists' Organizations of the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 85-95.

and writers most closely associated to the Aesthetic Movement.[44] They also had at least a cursory understanding of the writings of Charles Locke Eastlake, whose *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details* carried immense influence in the United States after its first American publication in 1872, having been republished in various formats from excerpts in popular journals to American reprints of his books.[45] These early club members shared an interest in taking on the task of decoration in a way that would not follow the Club past about 1880.

Edward Wimbridge has been credited with the Tile Club's choice of tiles as the medium for entering this new decorative age.[46] His designs and writings provide insight into the mentality surrounding the role of tiles at this time. His *A Tile Man's Design* (Figure 110), published in "The Tile Club at Work," presented an elaborate mantelpiece that becomes almost a piece of furniture replete with carved pilasters and two mantels. The tile scheme and other decorative items that surround the fireplace complement the furniture elements. The eighteen individual tiles are each painted with a separate design ranging from floral and animal motives to figurative subjects. The tile designs are echoed in those of the other decorative items around the mantel. The floral motives are repeated on the decorative chair rail that leads out from the mantel as well as on the fan and many of the ceramic pieces that sit atop the bi-level mantel. The central panel over the mantel depicts two costumed figures. Wimbridge's design profiled the refined taste and elegance that American writers called for in the domestic interior of the late

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[44] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 402.
[45] For the tile club connections to Eastlake, see Pisano, *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America*. For Eastlake's influence in US, see Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 423.; Mary Jean Smith Madigan, *Eastlake-Influenced American Furniture, 1870-1890* (Yonkers: Hudson River Museum, 1973).
[46] Pisano, *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America*, 14.

nineteenth century. The grand mantelpiece with its dark wood color provided the perfect location for display of pottery and painted tiles, with an elaborate image in the center. The pottery elements and the tiles created a display that was cohesive and beautiful.

Beyond the decorative appeal of this type of work, Wimbridge promoted the role that craft and industrial arts, including tile design and production, could take in promoting a cultural identity. This was particularly true for non-Western cultures, as Wimbridge promoted in an 1879 article published in *The Theosophist* entitled "Technical Education." In speaking of development in India, Wimbridge advocated for the development of technical schools, singling out the need for a school of design that would educate in "the drawing of patterns for the calico printer, the carpet weaver, and the manufacturer of shawls, and textile fabrics in general; designing for metal work, wood work, and wood carving; drawing on stone (Lithography); drawing and engraving on wood, and engraving on metal."[47] Wimbridge encouraged his Indian audience to support general training in practical arts, which would promote "Arts and Industries [that] should be national and pure."[48] On the surface, Wimbridge's philosophy presented ideas that John Ruskin had explored and Americans had adapted in their interpretation of aestheticism regarding the national focus of arts and particularly decorative arts. He likewise encouraged the artists of India to learn skills that would help to build their export business. This conflict points to this sense of cosmopolitan domesticity that permeated the western ideology of the Aesthetic Movement. On the one hand, these Indian artisans were encouraged to present imagery that was representative of their national sensibility, and objects that were seen as truly representative were the most

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[47] E. Wimbridge, "Technical Education," *The Theosophist* 1, no. 1 (1879): 28.
[48] Ibid.

highly praised. Western collectors of decorative objects, however, often purchased and displayed exotic items as a means of displaying their growing levels of civilization and gentility. This fell in line with the emphasis on the collection and display of eclectic cultural objects in American homes.

The American cultural borrowing was not always from contemporary or non-Western cultures, either, as Americans also looked to other periods within their own cultural history to develop the eclectic styles of the Aesthetic Movement. Edwin Austen Abbey, for example, drew upon the Dutch colonial visual tradition in his fireplace surround scheme that was published in "Tile Club at Work" (Figure 111). Abbey's design, signed and dated 1878, features a woman dressed in an eighteenth-century Dutch costume. Her right hand is outstretched across the top of the fireplace opening toward a small group of birds and her left hand reaches up behind her head. This design seems to derive from early Dutch fireplace design, where the smoke hood of the fireplace was often supported by pillars that were often carved with elaborate caryatid designs.[49] In the seventeenth century, as Dutch tiles had become more popular, the painted designs began to replicate these caryatids and flattened tile designs replaced the sculptural pillars.[50] The late 1870s saw a rising interest in Dutch colonialism as a way of identifying with early American culture and heritage, eventually leading to the Holland Mania that came into full swing in the 1880s.[51] Nineteenth century audiences viewed the Dutch Republic, with

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[49] Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).
[50] Huggins and Herbert, *The Decorative Tile in Architecture and Interiors*, 56;Jan Pluis, *The Dutch Tile: Designs and Names, 1570-1930* (Leiden: Nederlands Tegelmuseum, 1997), 584;Jan Daniel Van Dam and Pieter Jan Tichelaar, *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984), 162.
[51] Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art & Culture* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1998).

its traditions of personal and religious freedoms and its prominence in the arts, as a model for the kind of civilized, cultured lifestyle that Americans desired.[52] Given these cultural affinities, the Dutch example proved to be a good model for the selective borrowing that characterized American design.

Tile decoration was also connected to early American interiors and the values that America associated with the country's early founding. Holly encouraged Americans to include tile in their fireplaces because of their connection to early American interiors:

> These [tiled] fireplaces were very common about the time of the Revolution, and may yet be found in some of the old colonial houses. At this time of Centennial reminiscences, it would seem fitting to revive the fashions of "those good old colony days," and let the rising generation see the wainscoted chamber of the ancient manor-house, with oaken floors and the traditional old chimney-piece, with its quaint, pictorial tiles around the border. Interiors such as these have been the theme of many artists of the present century, prominent among whom is Mr. E. Wood Perry, whose pictures are mostly drawn from the real. One of these, entitled "Fireside Stories" we have taken the liberty of engraving.[53]

This nostalgic view of the colonial era had characterized the reception of British Aestheticism in America and flavored much of the American response and retooling of the British ideologies, particularly as Americans looked back to the founding of the country with the celebration of the Centennial.[54]

Perry's *Fireside Stories* (Figure 112) depicts a young mother who sits in front of a fireplace, her son at her side. She points at the illustrated tiles that surround the fireplace, indicating that she is explaining to her son, who listens intently, the details of the story

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[52] Annette Stott, "The Dutch Dining Room in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Winterthur Portfolio* 37 (2002); Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art & Culture*, 219-38.
[53] Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration*, 191.
[54] Sylvia Yount, "Give the People What They Want: The American Aesthetic Movement, Art Worlds, and Consumer Culture 1876-1890" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

and their moralistic messages. The tiles are individually illustrated with didactic scenes, a scheme that was typical of early American fireplace tiles, which often featured biblical stories and the like. The details of the room, including the imported rug and turned details on the chair, give the viewer an understanding that we are looking at a middle class family. The subject presents a long-standing belief that the hearth was the center of the home. Here, Perry goes one step further with the idea by presenting the mother – and women in general – as the caretakers of the family's home life, which was the basis of a family's moral life.

Late nineteenth-century domestic advice manuals continued to place a particular emphasis on the fireplace and the mantelpiece as the focus of their homes. In one case a domestic advice writer went as far as encouraging those who did not have a fireplace or mantelpiece to create the illusion of one through draped fabric and shelves. She argued that "the addition of a tasteful mantel will at once, change the whole aspect of the room, and give it a new dignity."[55] The hearth had been the traditional symbol of domesticity and continued to serve as the most important part of the home for its association with hospitality, warmth, and comfort. Industrial innovation eliminated the primary heating role of the fireplace, a fact that architect Holly lamented in his 1878 architectural manual: "So, too, the superseding of the spacious fireplace and hearthstone in our family sitting-room by the modern hot-air furnace is an abomination grievous to be borne by those who remember fondly that ancient symbol of domestic union and genial hospitality."[56] Holly encouraged his readers to carefully consider the decoration of their fireplace so as not to

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[55] Henry T. Williams and Mrs. C. S. Jones, *Beautiful Homes, or Hints in House Furnishing* (New York: Henry T. Williams, 1878).
[56] Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration*, 75-76.

lose its traditional associations. He recommended wood over marble as the material for the mantel, surrounded by a border of stone or tile to protect it from any potential damage, the latter being preferable because of its ability to "enhance the beauty of our rooms. In this way tile may be made to play its legitimate part in household decoration."[57] For Holly, tiles were functional around the fireplace, but they would also add to the beauty of the room, an element that was crucial during the rise of the Aesthetic Movement. Clarence Cook also discussed the new function of the fireplace in *House Beautiful*, emphasizing how beautiful objects displayed on the mantel enhanced the fireplace as the spiritual center of the home:

> The mantel-piece ought to second the intention of the fire-place as the center of the family life – the spiritual and intellectual center, as the table is the material center. There ought, then, to be gathered on the shelf, or shelves, over the fire-place, a few beautiful and chosen things – the most beautiful that the family purse can afford, though it is by no means necessary that they should cost much, the main point being that they should be things to lift us up to feed thought and feeling, things we are willing to live with, to have our children grow up with, and that we never can become tired of, because they belong alike to nature and to humanity.[58]

Beautiful objects were now incorporated into the traditional association of the fireplace as the spiritual center of the home. The decoration of this central space was important in conveying the moral and spiritual elevation that had always been associated with the fireplace. In this way, tile transferred the idea of aestheticism that had been most traditionally associated with painting, where beauty served to uplift the viewer, to this new placement within the home.

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[57] Ibid., 193. For Holly, tiles were most appropriately used for providing beauty through its utility in spaces like the fireplace, washstands and bath-tubs, but should not be used for table top design or set into wood paneling.

[58] Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds an Tables Stools and Candlesticks* (New York: North River Press, 1980), 121.

This American sentiment was adapted from the writings of Charles Eastlake, who in his *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and other Details* described the mantle as a "little museum," where it would "remain a source of lasting pleasure to its possessors seeing that 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.'"[59] Eastlake depicted his ideal mantelpiece in the book, too, where beautiful decorative arts were displayed (Figure 113). Cook's interpretation differed because of his focus on the elevating quality of these decorative objects, which is not readily apparent in Eastlake's descriptions. In this way American writers continued to be extremely reticent to relinquish the moral elements associated with art. Not until well into the 1880s do we see this shift in American thought. By 1884, *American Architect and Building News* described this shift: "A man's house that used to be his castle, is now his museum, and the purist understands that things are to be considered as unticketed specimens, the tokens of the collector's prowess or the souvenirs of his travels."[60] The display element that had originated in the fireplace now extended to the entire house, which was shifting away from a place of refuge from the modern world to a place to express the owner's identity to his guests. In the late 1870s, though, Americans were less willing to surrender to the power of beauty alone. Tastemakers encouraged Americans to look to the design and decoration of their house as a reflection of their values and mores, which were focused by now on becoming progressively refined and gentile. Holly conceived of houses as "truly refined and chaste, with all the conveniences that comfort demands, without superfluities." The decorative interior, Holly continued, was important in defining an image for the family who lived

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[59] Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*, Seventh American, from the latest English ed. (Boston: The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1883), 139.
[60] "American Interiors," *American Architect and Building News* 16, no. 450 (1884): 63.

there: "The interior must be suggestive of the refinement of the occupants, not necessarily ornamental or showy, but in every respect tasteful and elegant."[61] Journals cautioned of over-doing the display of these elements, such as the cartoon from *Scribner's Monthly*, "Arabella's Reception Room," published May 1877 (Figure 114). Here, we see the young woman arranging her eclectic collection of vases, fans, and other decorative objects. The scene was described in its caption as not being a museum, but simply her reception room, dryly commenting, "She is slightly touched with the fashion for old china, Majolica, Fayence, etc., etc., etc., etc., etc."[62] Instead, handbooks and other instructive publications included illustrations such as "Home Decoration" printed on the frontispiece of William Prime's *Pottery and Porcelain of All Times and Nations* (Figure 105), where the diverse collection is less cluttered and provides a relaxing space where the young woman can sit by a fire, reading her novel, similar to the model room that *Harpers* had published from the Centennial.

A refined and beautifully decorated interior would have appealed to Martha French and Charles Savage Homer, Jr., Winslow Homer's brother and sister-in-law, for whom the artist designed the fireplace surround known today as *Pastoral* (Figure 96). The surround was installed in the dining room of their home in West Townsend, Massachusetts. Charles and Mattie maintained an affluent home, typical of those with their wealth. Mattie had come from a prosperous family from West Townsend, and Charles had found tremendous financial success as a chemist for Valentine Varnish Company, where he developed the varnish Valspar. The commercial success of Valspar

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[61] Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country Adapted to American Wants and Climate with a Treatise on Furniture and Decoration*, 30.
[62] "Arabella's Reception Room," *Scribner's Monthly* 14, no. 1 (1877): 128.

provided the Homers with substantial income that fueled a luxurious lifestyle, which would have been reflected in their choice of household decoration.

Homer's tile set abandoned the didactic function seen in the colonial-style tile surround that Perry included in his painting. Now, the tiles served the ornamental purpose that domestic advisors such as Henry Hudson Holly had prescribed. The scene depicts two costumed figures – a shepherd and shepherdess – each holding a staff and looking away from the fireplace opening in the center. They are dressed in matching blue and yellow costumes reminiscent of eighteenth-century costume. The figures stand in a scene of a rolling green hill, the top of which peaks over the fireplace opening. Atop the hill sit two shady trees and a few of the sheep that the foreground figures should be tending. The rest of the flock is seen behind the legs of the male figure on the left. Below each figure the tile has been split such that the top half completes the ground on which the figures stand, and the bottom half has been transformed into a decorative abstract plane. The two fields are separated by a modified egg and dart motif.

Homer's style emphasized the decorative qualities rather than a realistic representation of the figures and landscape. He used flat color blocks to define the figures, with minimal shading and modeling of the forms, a stylistic approach that mirrored the developments in his paintings as early as 1875. It likewise heeded the suggestions of the American editors of Sparkes' *Hints to China and Tile Decorators*, who encouraged their readers to avoid "the naturalistic,… that form of decoration where the artist attempts a literal copy of nature" and when naturalistic forms, particularly human or animal forms were used, "they should only be treated in outline or flatly, without relief by shading, without foreground or distance; and all appearance of perspective should be

avoided."[63] Sparkes' editors also encouraged their American audience to "go to Nature as she has shown herself on this continent if we are ever to arrive at an individual American art."[64] Such sentiments recall the post-Civil War aestheticism with its emphasis on nature as the truly American subject that presented beautiful scenes that maintained a moral element. Now, though, artists were encouraged to look to nature as the basis for decorative elements in their work, not just as the subject. Nature continued to play a large role in the American mindset, but in the post-Civil War era, it was often used as a foil to the progress of industrialization. Its decorative treatment throughout the Aesthetic movement allowed artists and artisans to connect with something considered truly American, while still integrating ideas about decoration and aestheticism into their way of thinking.

In addition, exposure to nature became increasingly important, as a means of restoring the elements of culture that were believed to have been lost in the post-Civil War era. The subject for Homer's tiles appealed to this call for a return to nature, advice that was given as a remedy or respite from the hectic pace of modern life, and the overcrowded unhealthy conditions of American cities.[65] This drive to escape the modern lifestyle led to the rise of tourism to the areas of the country that would allow for this escape, including many areas in upstate New York. The stylized shepherd and shepherdess that Homer depicted in *Pastoral* ultimately derive from sketches and watercolors painted during his own summer vacation from city at Houghton Farm, the Mountainville, New York farm of Lawson Valentine, his patron and friend. These summer sketches, such as *Boy and Girl in a Landscape* (Figure 116) and *Girl in a*

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[63] Sparkes, *Hints to China and Tile Decorators* 12.
[64] Ibid., 13.
[65] Burns, "The Pastoral Ideal: Winslow Homer's Bucolic America."

Sunbonnet (Figure 117) featured the young children from a neighboring farm who Homer paid to sit as his models. In order to achieve a more picturesque feel in his paintings, a feeling that would further separate these figures from modern life, Homer requested that his sitters wear their simple work clothes, rather than dressing up for the occasion.[66] The quaint costumes reinforced the idea that this lifestyle was much simpler and rustic. Urban audiences would have associated this rustic ideal with a life lived closer to nature, far from the modern one that the middle-class viewer led. In this way, nature was linked with the nostalgic remembrance of an earlier time in America, while it was also seen as restorative, allowing for more productive lives once returning.[67] Homer's choice of this idyllic subject was far from the modern farm practices that Valentine implemented at Houghton Farm, yet Homer was attracted to the nostalgic element of a farm setting, evoking an era prior to modernization.

The figures from *Pastoral,* however, are even further removed from contemporary American life. Their fanciful dress, and those on several other tiles by Homer, was derived from the conception of a shepherdess that Homer created. In the sketches and drawings from 1878, the young girl often is dressed as Bo-peep, in a costume that Homer either provided or imagined. For these decorative watercolors, such as *Girl on a Garden Seat* (Figure 118) or *Bo-Peep* (*Girl with Shepherd's Crook Seated by a Tree*) (Figure 119), Homer places these young figures in very passive scenes, watching and waiting for sheep.

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Gail S. Davidson, "Landscape Icons, Tourism, and Land Development in the Northeast," in *Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape* (New York: Smithsonian Institution, 2006), 68.

The Bo-peep imagery was derived from popular eighteenth century figurines produced by the German firm Meissen (Figure 120). These figures maintained their popularity throughout the nineteenth century, and as a contemporary writer explained, they were "found in almost every house of wealth in America and in Europe."[68] Reviewers even noted that Homer's figures related to these decorative figurines, where the coquettish shepherdess is often seen accompanied by a shepherd. The critic for the *Sun* noted that Homer's figures had "all the daintiness of the true and original porcelain, distinctive in their own way as the shepherdesses of Watteau were in theirs."[69] Despite Homer's use of a type that related to these eighteenth-century figurines, critics who reviewed these scenes overwhelmingly characterized these works as "truly American." Charles De Kay's review for the *New York Times* was characteristic of the critical reception. He compared Homer's paintings to other painters who he described as "foreign-bred Impressionists":

> Winslow Homer's little shepherdess standing on a winding hill is a very wholesome home-bred article. She stands rather awkwardly with her toes together, and is plainly a thorough rustic – tan, freckles, shabby clothes, and all. She is as natural as Brennan's women are artificial, and as carelessly in earnest as they are elaborately smiling. The picture is as well named "Fresh Air."[70]

De Kay saw this as American, even though Homer had derived his imagery from a historical and foreign model. While the interpretation of its "fresh" character aligned with the way that critics had seen Homer's innovative work in *Milking Time*, the imagery here was quite different from the rustic subject of that painting. Why did this imagery

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[68] Henry J Winser, "Dresden China. The Royal Saxon Porcelain Works at Meissen," *Scribner's Monthly* 15, no. 5 (1878): 693.
[69] Quoted in Burns, "The Pastoral Ideal: Winslow Homer's Bucolic America," 126.
[70] "The Water-Color Society. A Brillant Show at the Twelfth Exhibition," *New York Times*, 1 February 1879, 5.

seem “home-bred?” What made it appeal to the characteristically rustic and individualist nature of America?

In one way, these objects – both tiles and paintings – functioned within a visual code of establishing a cultural identity through the display of objects. The tiles’ placement in the dining room signals the role that they were to take within the Charles Homer family. Until the 1870s, the dining room had been a space dominated by men, decorated with furnishings and accoutrements that indicated men’s dominance and aggression, including hunting and fishing themes. Beginning in the 1870s, though, American women became more dominant in the decoration and planning of the dining room. The idea of beauty associated with the outfitting of space with decorative objects now extended past the parlor into the dining room, as culture makers such as Henry James called for women’s increased role as a means of brining civility to all aspects of life, countering what many saw as the aggressive and cutthroat nature of American businessmen.[71] Domestic advisor Harriet Spofford recommended that dining rooms be fashionably decorated and comfortable, emphasizing the importance of “an ample chimney-place… either with tiled jambs and hearth and great shining fire-dogs to hold the logs, or with the old Franklin fire-frame and its polished brasses” to provide a welcoming and relaxing environment.[72] It was here that Spofford suggested the most money be spent on decoration because of its importance as a place to entertain guests of all sorts, including business guests.

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[71] Stott, "The Dutch Dining Room in Turn-of-the-Century America."
[72] Harriet Prescott Spofford, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 192.

Like Cook and Holly, Spofford suggested to her female reader that the best decoration of the dining room fireplace was the inclusion of small shelves or cupboard used to display ceramics and other items that were not used daily, including

> the mugs of '76, porcelain pepper-boxes, little old-fashioned gilded decanters –all these enviable trifles that some inherit and others 'pick up.' Such things as the strange shell may have place there too; the bit of coral which some roving member of the house may have brought from the sees at the other side of the globe; a fantastic little idol; a Greek jar -- now turned out very satisfactorily in our own potteries.[73]

She indicated a wide-variety of objects – from those related to the Centennial to those related to the person's travel and domestically produced replicas. All of the items that she suggested were meant to spark conversation or provide for a moment of thought after breakfast. But this was also the place to present family values and profiles, as Spofford suggested that the dining room mantle was the "place for carving of mottoes and crests also, rather than elsewhere."[74]

The inclusion of this tile set in the home of Charles and Mattie Homer suggests a role that Mattie and Winslow Homer shared in mellowing the masculinity of Charles Homer, whose personality has been characterized as more dominant and aggressive than his brother's.[75] Mattie, with whom Homer maintained a close friendship, was known to spend lavishly on fine objects, and it is likely that her taste affected Homer's painting for her dining room.[76] The subject, deriving from Homer's time spent at the Valentine's Houghton Farm represented a shared connection between Charles, Winslow and Lawson Valentine, who was not only Charles' business associate, but was also a childhood friend

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[73] Ibid.
[74]Ibid.
[75] Elizabeth Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* (Berkeley: Univeristy of California Press, 2002), 10.
[76] Ibid., 113.

of the Homer brothers. The nostalgic subject perhaps reminded both Homer brothers of their childhood in the suburbs of Boston. Ultimately, though, the tile set served as an indicator of the civilized lifestyle and affluence that Charles and Mattie Homer wanted to present to visitors in their home.

While this line of reasoning explains how the tile set might have functioned within the particular environment in which it was installed, it does not necessarily address the American nature of the imagery, which De Kay highlighted in his review of the watercolors. Homer's earlier rustic imagery, or even the other imagery from this period that shows the young figures in the landscape, was easily labeled as American and provided a nostalgic view of the rural lifestyle that was increasing being lost in the 1870s. The shepherdess figure of the tiles and *Fresh Air* was entirely contrived, as the girl no longer wears her everyday clothes as she did in the earlier sketches. One might argue that by drawing from outside cultural models Homer showed an awareness of the cultural borrowing that was at the heart of the American Aesthetic Movement, with domestic advisors encouraging the borrowing and display of objects from a multitude of cultures and periods. This argument would be more easily applied to the tile design by Abbey with a Dutch theme (Figure 111), given the strong cultural interest in Dutch colonialism during this period. Homer's shepherdess seems quite different.

The artifice of Homer's representation, particularly its overtly constructed quality, suggests an even more overt move on Homer's part away from the realism that had been attributed to his work. In this more decorative work, Homer replaced the sentimental longing for an American past that was seen in *Milking Time* with an alternative world through which the viewer could escape from the realities of modern life. He took a

natural American setting, which had been an element in his aesthetic work since the late 1860s, and combined it with a figure type that would appeal to the cosmopolitan desires of the American elite, who by 1878 had embraced the elements of aestheticism that they had cautiously identified in Homer's work before. This gathering of elements drawn from different cultures had now come to exemplify the American cultural identity, a fact that De Kay recognized in his review of *Fresh Air*. Homer's time with the Tile Club exposed him to these ideas and issues that were developing more readily in the writings and practices of decorative artists and interior designers associated with the rise of the Aesthetic Movement. The inclusion of the tile set *Pastoral* in a setting that most likely included decorative objects with this motif, further links these works to the Aesthetic Movement that had taken hold in the United States by 1878.

Conclusion

I began this study with Roger Stein's commentary that Homer's *Promenade on the Beach* (Figure 1) represented a Whistlerian harmony in which the abstract organization of the canvas "controls the vision."[1] This comment, said in an overview of the Aesthetic Movement, was quickly discounted as just an "aesthetic moment" for Homer, contrasting to "years of specifically American genre work often with a strong implicit narrative content." Stein concluded that now, "style as the abstract organizer of material from various cultures triumphs over the female subject, depersonalizing her and distancing the viewer, frustrating the search for some cultural meaning and resolving the experience of the picture only in aesthetic terms."[2] He further suggested that Homer abandoned this aesthetic impulse with his extended stay in Tynemouth, on the coast of England, suggesting that he then returned to the genre-based paintings of life in this fishing village.

In contrast to seeing Homer's aestheticism as a fleeting moment in his career, this study has shown that Homer's interest in aestheticism was a strong and continuous interest that began in the early days of his career as a painter. *Promenade on the Beach* and the related watercolor from that same year, including *Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks* (Figure 121) and *Schooner at Sunset* (Figure 122) in many ways presents a culmination of Homer's aestheticism that began in the years immediately following the Civil War. He was first introduced to notions of aestheticism through the writings and

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[1] Roger B. Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, ed. Doreen Bolger Burke (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 41.
[2] Ibid.

paintings of his friend Eugene Benson around 1867, when the ideas of aestheticism were still developing in Britain. From its beginning, this aestheticism was tempered by America's wariness about the role that art would play in the young nation, recently rocked by a Civil War. The cultured elite, while attempting to cultivate a sense of democracy and equality among all Americans, looked to the arts as a means through which all Americans could live a more cultured life.

Guided by the theories of John Ruskin, pre-Civil War American artists looked to nature for its elevating effects. In the years immediately following the Civil War, Homer's aestheticism was closely based on this pull toward nature. His paintings were closely aligned with the theories of his friend Eugene Benson, whose writings and paintings promoted a return to nature for its restorative properties, particularly as modern culture was becoming hectic and unforgiving. In these early years of his painting career, Homer established a connection between nature and the figures in his painting that explored this element of restoration as the basis of aestheticism. These early paintings of women in natural settings created ambiguous scenes that were not driven by a narrative theme. Following his travels to Paris in 1867, Homer turned to paintings that explicitly investigated the formal elements of painting, particularly his landscape-based works, which featured figures that were defined by quick brushstrokes on the canvas. These paintings have strong affinities to the work of James McNeill Whistler, whose work Homer would have seen during the Paris Exposition.

More than visual affinities, Homer's work from this period engaged with issues of aestheticism, where he attempted to combine landscaped-based formal experiments with the representations of figures through short, quick brushstrokes. The critical reaction to

these works, though positive in terms of Homer's individuality and unique abilities, focused on what the critics defined as Homer's lack of finish. This lack of finish, seen in Homer's work primarily through his sketchy brushwork, was at the heart of the discussions around aestheticism, which was contrasted to the precise realism of the Pre-Raphaelites. This reaction to his work established a dynamic that continued throughout the 1870s in which Homer was often identified as presenting a unique, modern vision that was hampered by his technique and lack of finish. Most critics were reticent to see Homer's sketchy technique as much more than a distraction from his realism.

The contrast between aestheticism and realism was seen in the British development of the movement as Rossetti and his circle moved away from their Pre-Raphaelite past toward the ideals of beauty based on the theories of art for art's sake. This contrast, though, became the heart of the development of aestheticism in the United States, particularly for Homer. Throughout the 1870s, Homer painted works that presented realistic scenes of women, often solitary, mostly contemporary, that also experimented with formal elements of painting. These paintings progressed in their innovation, early on using the representation of these figures in nature to transport the modern viewer away from the realities of modern life into the scenes that he depicted. The critical commentary and descriptions of these works indicated the ways that viewers should interact with these works. In *The Bridle Path* the critics encouraged the viewer to experience the fresh air and hazy sunlit mountain atmosphere that enveloped the figure on horseback. In *Milking Time* their descriptions of the painting took the viewer to the fresh, country setting by evoking the smells and sights of a farm. By engaging the viewer with the painting on various levels, Homer was able to establish an aestheticism that

involved the viewer in the interaction with the painting, appealing to his or her senses through the visual elements of the painting, while also presenting a scene that adhered to the principles of realism. In the process, he created a tension in these works, one that the critics articulated in their reviews. On one hand, they saw Homer's work as completely unrelated to the aesthetic tendencies to which the formal elements of his paintings pointed. On the other hand, they were strongly drawn to his subject matter, which they repeatedly referred to as American, even when it was unrelated to contemporary American life.

By the time that the Aesthetic Movement was in full swing at the end of the 1870s, Homer easily moved along with the American public and other artists and designers to incorporate even more aesthetic and decorative elements in his work, including the tile production, watercolors, and eventually the grand-scale oil painting *Promenade on the Beach*. As a culmination of his aesthetic exploration, Homer presented an enigmatic scene of two women who walk along the beach. Homer's *Promenade* represents a scene that was similar to his earliest aesthetic paintings, such as *Waverley Oaks*. Both paintings show two young, fashionably dressed women out for a stroll, in the woods in one case and along the nighttime shore in another. For both, he has used this fairly common activity as the basis for his exploration of aesthetic issues. Like the figures in his other aesthetic paintings, the women in *Promenade* do not engage with each other, but with nature, as they look out to sea at something outside of the picture frame. Homer left the viewer unsure of what exactly catches their attention, a fact that left the contemporary audience unsure of the goal of the painting or even what it

represented.[3] The figures, though, are subordinate to the formal elements that dominate the painting. Like his earlier landscape-based paintings, Homer here has created bands of color, the dark blue band of the night sky, which he contrasts to the light sand, a color that is echoed in the sails of the boat on the horizon, in the dress of one of the women, and again in the clouds of the sky. The harmonious color scheme of the nocturnal scene and the inclusion of *japoniste* elements warrant comparison to Whistler, a conclusion that Stein readily made in his introduction to Homer's aestheticism. Yet, they also suggest a sense of the cosmopolitan Aesthetic Movement that had influenced Homer's turn to decorative arts and decorative painting in the late 1870s.

Homer's watercolors from this period, which have been compared to Whistler's nocturnes, likewise reflect a return to some of the earlier aesthetic landscape ideas that he had explored in the late 1860s.[4] While he painted some familiar subjects that summer during his stay on Ten Pound Island in Gloucester Harbor including solitary women in natural settings and images of young boys playing on the beach, the most dramatic of the watercolors from this period feature deeply saturated colors, created through thick washes of color that seeped into the surface of the painting. In the most dramatic of the works from that summer, he presents the dramatic effects of the setting sun on the water: *Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks*, *Schooner at Sunset*, *Gloucester Sunset*, and

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[3] The collector George Walter Vincent Smith wrote to Homer asking for an explanation of the painting. Homer's reply was just as enigmatic as the painting itself: "My picture represents the Eastern shore at sunset. The long line from the girls is a shadow from the sun. The Girls are 'somebody in particular' and I can vouch for their good moral character. They are looking at anything you wish to have them look at, but it must be something at sea & a very proper object for Girls to be interested in. The schooner is a Glouscester fisherman. Hoping this will make everything clear." Quoted in Nicolai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 196.

[4] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 200.

Sunset Fires, (Figures 121-124). These paintings juxtapose striking effects of color and brushstroke with the calmness often associated with sunsets on the water, a contrast that most viewers and critics found unsettling when these works were exhibited.[5] Like Homer's earlier watercolors, he uses the fluidity of the medium to his advantage in exploring the aesthetic qualities of the scene. The viewer is drawn into the painting through the application of paint, not a narrative subject, which is as close to pure landscape as Homer had painted since his experiments in the late 1860s.

The comparison to Whistler's nocturnes is logical, as both Homer and Whistler used these nocturnal scenes to explore aesthetic qualities in their work. Marc Simpson has recently explored these works, and convincingly shown that Homer would not have had access to any visual reproductions of Whistler's nocturnes, though he would have read about Whistler's nocturnes, and particularly *Nocturne in Black and Gold: Falling Rocket*, in the coverage of the 1878 Whistler v. Ruskin trial. Given Homer's earlier interest in Whistler, particularly his landscape scenes from the late 1860s, it is likely that Homer's interest was piqued by the coverage of the trial and the related discussions surrounding Whistler's work. He seems to have, then, tried his own hand at a nocturnal image that depicts the fireworks over the harbor. The resulting work is innovative in its technique, which included first soaking the paper with water onto which he applied the washes of color, portions of which were soaked up to create lighter areas.[6] Simpson argues that the comparison of *Falling Rocket* with Homer's *Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks*, lends to Homer some sense of the "revolutionary and melodramatic aura" of

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[5] Marc Simpson, "Homer's Wine-Dark Seas," in *Winslow Homer: Poet of the Sea*, ed. Sophie Levy (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2006).
[6] Helen A. Cooper, *Winslow Homer Watercolors* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 73.

Whistler's work, and establishes Homer as equally concerned with the distinctly modern aestheticism of Whistler. [7]

Considered, though, as the culmination of a long-standing engagement with issues of aestheticism, these watercolor seascapes exhibit a consistent approach by Homer to take common scenes and create a powerful image through which he employed his materials to their most aesthetic extent. At least one critic noticed this:

> "Without anywhere showing an effort to produce a powerful result, he has given a new interpretation to the ordinary and dignified the commonplace. His materials are always at hand, and… he has produced a dozen works, each of which is a revelation…. [These include] a schooner … standing in silhouette against the flames of sunset – such are the subjects in which Mr. Homer delights, and to which his genius gives a vigorous life."[8]

The transformation of the everyday scene to something aesthetic and ideal, moving beyond the reality of what he presented was characteristic of Homer's aestheticism from the late 1860s, when he was strongly influenced by the writings and theories of Eugene Benson. We see here, though, that this much later interpretation of his work continues to recognize Homer's adherence to these earlier ideas surrounding aestheticism.

This study of Homer's work from 1865 to 1880 has shown, though, that Homer's work held an important role in defining aestheticism in the United States. This aestheticism drew from many cultural precedents and models to create an aestheticism that was not only representative of Homer's individuality, but also uniquely American.

My aim in this dissertation has been to contextualize the paintings that Homer scholars have often discounted as aberrations in his long career by defining them through Homer's engagement with aestheticism. My study leaves several implications for the future of study of Homer in particular and of the study of American art in general. It

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[7] Simpson, "Homer's Wine-Dark Seas.", 34-37.
[8] Quoted in Ibid., 30.

certainly begs the question of which other American artists might be considered as working within the context of an emerging aestheticism in the fifteen years immediately following the Civil War.

As one of the key realists for the period, Eastman Johnson come to mind as examples of artists who might possibly have drawn from aestheticism even in creating realistic paintings. In the late 1860s, Johnson was used as an example by American critics to show how painters could move beyond the real to the ideal. Russell Sturgis's review of Eastman Johnson's *The Pension Claim Agent* (Figure 125), for example, suggested a way that American painters might move from paintings with substantive subject matter to something ideal. He praised Johnson as being "of those few American pictures which seem to have sufficient subjects… His work, taken together, is more truly representative of one class of his countrymen (because almost completely representative of one class of his countrymen in their quiet lives), than any painter's work that I know."[9] Johnson's works lived up to Sturgis's desire for an art that reflected the artist and country that created it. He hoped, though, for a bit more from American art, and Johnson's truth and realism would serve as the foundation of this development over time. "This is true realistic work," he asserted, "out of which, in good time, comes true work of all sorts. We should find that the painter who has painted the real with all his strength, and has mastered it would paint the ideal, too. We do not know of what conceptions of angelic or superhuman beauty Mr. Johnson is capable, but, whatever he might have, he could paint; and that is a great step gained."[10] For Sturgis, realism stood as the basis of beautiful and ideal work, and the mastery of this realism would eventually lead to the ideal beauty of

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[9] Russell Sturgis, "American Painters," *The Galaxy* 4, no. 2 (1867): 230.
[10] Ibid.: 231.

aestheticism. Not only does this progression mirror that which happened with Rossetti and many of the Pre-Raphaelites, but it also holds onto the realism that was at the basis of American painting. Sturgis attempted here to establish an American aestheticism that would maintain a foundation in the art style which Americans had already accepted. American artists did not have the same history of an art-loving audience that was found in Europe. This new aestheticism was a way for American artists and tastemakers to continue to develop an appreciation among a wider public, who were becoming more accustomed to realistic works through illustrations and prints published in journals.

Sturgis also highlighted the formal qualities that were the bases of beautiful, ideal works. He concluded, "In the hands of a true painter, a picture grows to be a jewel, a bright and beautiful thing, whether it have or have not much meaning in it. Practice of the true painter is based upon study of color for itself alone."[11] Not only does Sturgis's analysis suggest that color should become the basis of artistic judgment, but we see here the first subtle reference to the notion of art for art's sake, as Sturgis alluded to a meaning in painting beyond illustrative purposes. Quoting again from Ruskin's Rede Lecture entitled "On the Relation of National Ethics to National Arts," delivered at the Senate House, Cambridge in May 1867, Sturgis argued, "If it be true that 'every painting, in which the aim is primarily that of drawing, and every drawing in which the aim is primarily that of painting, must alike be in a measure erroneous, then this charming picture of the claim agent falls within the latter class as being less of a design in color than in light and shade, although passing for a fully realized picture."[12] Sturgis conflated Ruskin's ideas with those of the later aestheticism, focusing in this case on the way that

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[11] Ibid.: 232.
[12] Ibid.

the painting used formal elements – light and shadow – as the primary elements, even though it passed for a realistic picture.

This articulation of an American aestheticism not only bears upon Homer's explorations of aestheticism during the 1870s, as his paintings were often explorations of light, shadow, and effects of color, but also suggests that Johnson was another figure through which aestheticism exercised some influence in the United States. To that end, several of Johnson's paintings of women relate visually to Homer's work from the same period, including *Woman Reading* (Figure 126) and *Catching the Bee* (Figure 127), suggesting further avenues of exploration of Johnson's aestheticism during the period after the Civil War.

For Homer's work in particular, I have stopped here with the paintings from 1880, just before Homer left for Cullercoats, a biographical marker that is often seen as the end of a period of experimentation for Homer, and the beginning of a new direction that connected him more closely with the sea – the subject to which he would devote much of his painting for the rest of his career. There are elements of these later paintings, though, whose surface elements warrant further investigation in terms of further influence of aestheticism. In his work from Cullercoats, for example, while the subject matter is of the contemporary women of the seaside town, he often turns to classical compositional elements, a practice which resembles the contemporary work of Albert Moore and Frederick Leighton, whose works were concerned with arts for art's sake through the depiction of classical themes and compositions. Homer's later seascapes, such as *West Point, Prouts Neck* (Figure 127), also make use of a dramatically reduced narrative, focusing on the raw elements of nature, not unlike the earlier landscape paintings.

Within the years that this dissertation considers, there are other elements of social context that would enhance the discussions provided here in this dissertation, particularly regarding the post-Civil War cultural issues that are implicated in a study of this period. For Homer, this means a reassessment of his images of later African-American subjects, which to date have been read as sympathetic to African Americans, in contrast to their treatment, or the lack of treatment by other artists.[13] In works like, *Taking a Sunflower to Teacher* (Figure 129) and *The Cotton Pickers* (Figure 130), Homer aestheticizes the African American figure in much the same way that he does with images of women from the same period. In *Taking Sunflower to Teacher*, Homer depicts a young African American child who has paused on his way to the school, carrying a sunflower for the teacher and sitting beside his blackboard, which would have been used in his studies. From a social standpoint, the painting speaks to the complicated issues surrounding education during Reconstruction, believed to be an important step in transforming southern culture.[14] Homer's treatment of this figure using traditional symbols of the Aesthetic Movement, the sunflower and the butterfly, raises questions about how sympathetic this image might be. In *The Cotton Pickers*, like the woman in *Milking Time*, the figures do not engage in their activity but are paused in thought. This aestheticizing of these figures reflects the ambiguity of the African American and their life during reconstruction.

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[13] Mary Ann Calo, "Winslow Homer's Visits to Virginia During Reconstruction," *American Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (1980), Peter H. Wood and Karen C. C. Dalton, *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), Marc Simpson, ed. *Winslow Homer: Paintings of the Civil War* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,1988).

[14] David Park Curry, "Homer's *Dressing for the Carnival*," in *Winslow Homer: A Symposium* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 96-98, Wood and Dalton, *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years*, 82.

While these avenues are open for further exploration, I have shown in this study, that Homer was consistently engaged with aestheticism from its early introduction to the United States in the years immediately following the Civil War. Throughout Homer's career, aestheticism was not antithetical to realism, but an alternative approach to the addressing the social and cultural changes of modern life. Homer drew from many cultural precedents and models to create an aestheticism that was not only representative of Homer's individuality, but also uniquely American.

Figure 1:

Winslow Homer
Promenade on the Beach
1880
Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 1/8 inches
Springfield Museum of Art

Figure 2

Winslow Homer
Blackboard
1877
Watercolor, 19 ¼ x 12 ¼ inches
National Gallery of Art

Figure 3

James Abbot McNeill Whistler
Battersea Reach from Lindsey Houses
c. 1864-1871
Oil on canvas, 20 1/8 x 30 1/8 inches
Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery (Scotland)

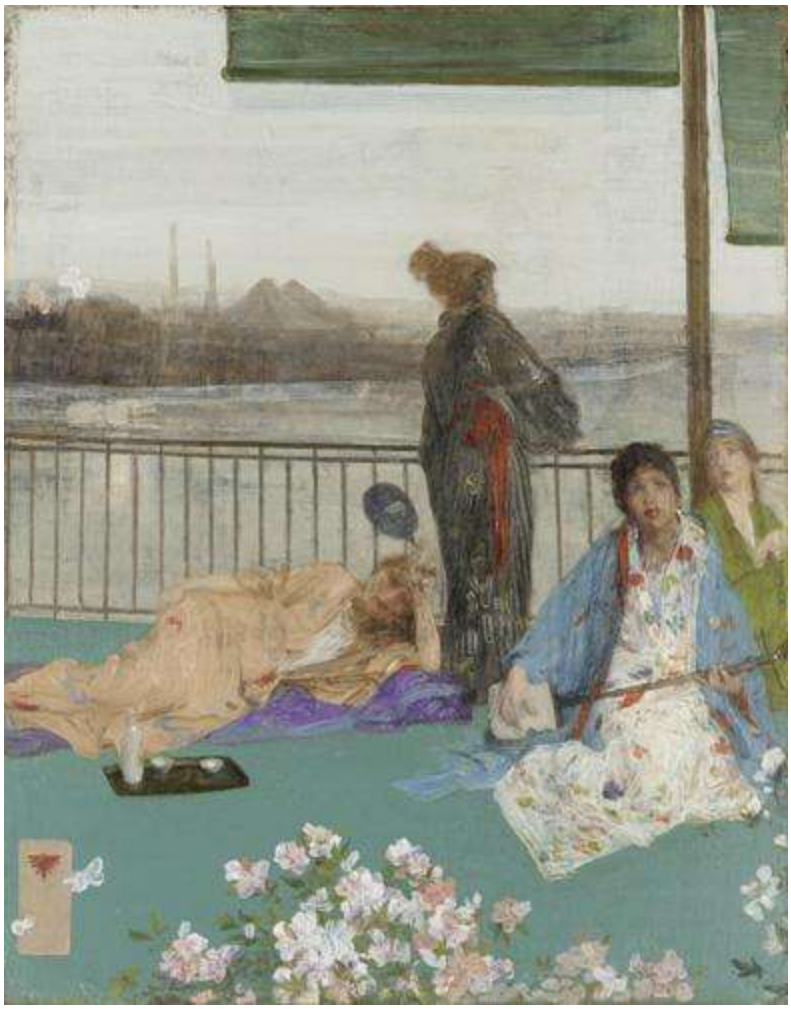


Figure 4

James Abbot McNeill Whistler,
Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony
1864-70
Oil on wood, 24 x 19 inches
Freer Gallery of Art

Figure 5
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Symphony in White No. 1 *(The White Girl)*
1863
Oil on canvas, 84 ½ x 42 ½ inches
National Gallery of Art

Figure 6
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Little White Girl (Symphony in White #2)
1864
Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches
Tate Gallery, London

Figure 7
Winslow Homer
The Bright Side
1865
Oil on canvas, 12 ¾ x 17 inches
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Figure 8
Winslow Homer
Prisoners from the Front
1866
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 inches
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 9
Winslow Homer
The Intitials
1864
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 ¼ inches
Private collection

Figure 10
Winslow Homer
The Red Feather
1864
Oil on canvas, 16 ¼ x 12 inches
Wadsworth Athenaeum

Figure 11
Winslow Homer
October Evening
1865
Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 inches
Collection, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Walton

Figure 12
Winslow Homer
Pitching Quoits
1865
Oil on canvas, 26 ¾ x 53 ¾ inches
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University

Figure 13
Eugene Benson
Pensive Moment
1865
Oil on canvas, 12 x 10 inches
Private Collection

Figure 14
Lord Frederic Leighton
Venus Disrobing for the Bath
1867
Oil on canvas, 79 x 35 ½ inches
Private Collection

Figure 15
Lord Frederic Leighton
Cadiz in the Olden Time (Greek Dancing Girl)
c. 1867
Oil on canvas, 34 x 54 inches
Private Collection

Figure 16
John Everett Millais
Sleeping
1865
Oil on canvas, 35 x 27 inches
Private Collection

Figure 17
John Everett Millais
Waking
Oil on canvas, 39 x 33 inches
1865
Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Perth and Kinross Council, Scotland.

Figure 18
Jean-Leon Gérôme
King Candaules
1859
Oil on canvas, 26 ½ x 39 inches
Museo d'Arte, Ponce, Puerto Rico

Figure 19
T.C. Farrer
Mount Holyoke
1865
Oil on canvas, 16 ¼ x 24 ¼ inches
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

Figure 20
Elihu Vedder
Girl with a Lute
1866
Oil on paper, 16 x 9 ¼ inches
Private Collection

Figure 21
Elihu Vedder
Dancing Girl
1871
Oil on canvas, 39 x 20 inches
Reynolda House, Museum of Art

Figure 22
Elihu Vedder
Lair of the Serpent
1864
Oil on canvas, 21 ½ x 36 5/8 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 23
Elihu Vedder
Roc's Egg
1868
Oil on canvas, 7 ½ × 16 1/8 inches
Chrysler Museum of Art

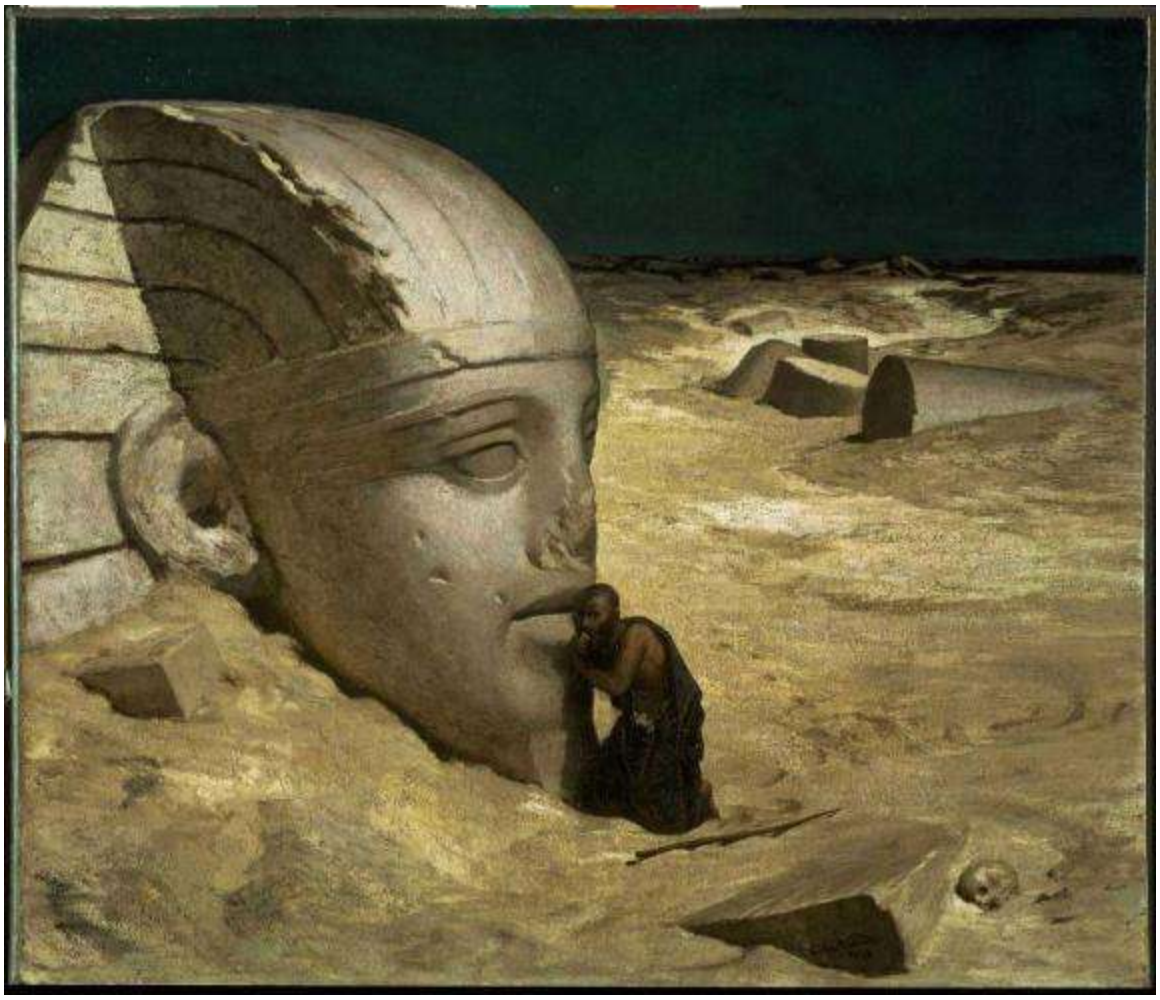


Figure 24
Elihu Vedder
The Questioner of the Sphinx
1863
oil on canvas, 36 x 42 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 25
Winslow Homer
The Waverley Oaks
1865
Oil on paper, 13 ¼ x 10 inches
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Figure 26
Winslow Homer
The Croquet Player
1865
Oil on canvas, 8 ¼ x 12 ¼ inches
National Academy of Design

Figure 27
Winslow Homer
Croquet Players
1865
Oil on canvas, 16 x 26 inches
Alrbight-Knox Gallery

Figure 28
Winslow Homer
Croquet Scene
1866
Oil on canvas, 5 7/8 x 26 1/16 inches
The Art Institute of Chicago

Figure 29
Winslow Homer
Eagle Head, Massachusetts (High Tide)
1870
Oil on canvas, 26 x 38 inches
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 30
Winslow Homer
The Bridle Path, White Mountains
1868
Oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 38 inches
Clark Art Institute

Figure 31
Winslow Homer
Paris Courtyard
1867
Oil on canvas. 16 ¾ x 12 inches
Randolph Macon Woman's College. Maier Museum of Art.

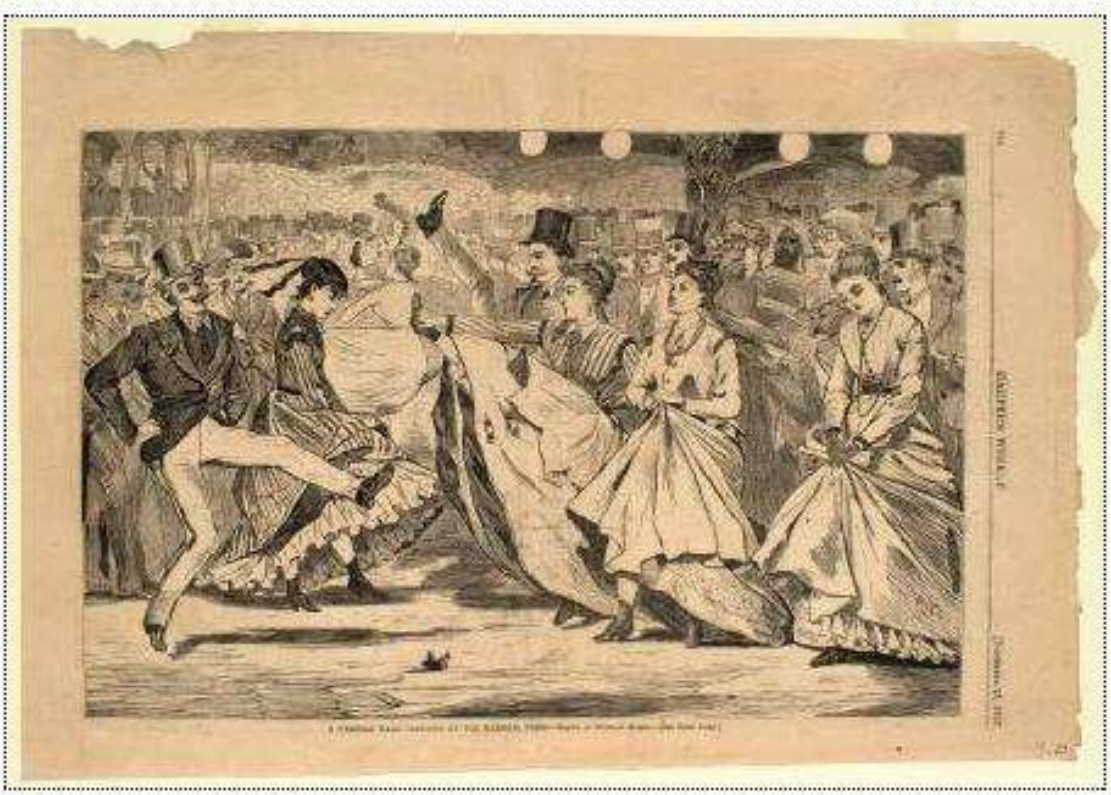


Figure 32
A Parisian Ball—Dancing at the Mabille, Paris
Publ. *Harper's Weekly*, 23 Nov. 1867
Wood engraving
Drawn by Winslow Homer.

Figure 33
Winslow Homer
In the Wheatfield
1867
Oil on canvas, 18 x 12 inches
Davenport (IA) Museum of Art

Figure 34
Winslow Homer
Coming Through the Rye
1867
Oil on canvas, 16 ¾ x 11 5/8 inches
Private Collection

Figure 35
Winslow Homer
Return of the Gleaner
1867
Oil on canvas, 23.8 x 17.9 inches
Berry-Hill Galleries

Figure 36
Winslow Homer
The Studio
1867
Oil on canvas, 18 x 15 inches
The Metropolitan Museum

Figure 37
Winslow Homer
Cernay La Ville – French Farm (Picardie, France)
1867
Oil on panel, 10 9/16 x 18 1/16 inches
Krannert Art Museum

Figure 38
Winslow Homer
Rocky Coast and Gulls(*Manchester Coast)*
1869
Oil on canvas, 16 ¼ x 28 1/8 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 39
Winslow Homer
Sandy Beach with Breakers
1869
Oil on canvas, 10 ¼ x 21 ¾ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Figure 40
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Wapping
1860-1864
Oil on canvas, 28 3/8 x 40 1/16 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Figure 41
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Brown and Silver: Old Battersea Bridge
1863
Oil on canvas, mounted on masonite; 25 1/8 x 29 15/16 inches.
Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy

Figure 42
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
Crepuscule in Flesh Color and Green: Valparaiso
1866
Oil on canvas, 23 x 30 inches
Tate Collection

Figure 43
Winslow Homer
Beach Scene
1869
Oil on canvas, laid on cardboard
11 ½ x 9 ¾ inches
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Figure 44
Winslow Homer
On the Beach
1869
Oil on canvas,
The Arkell Museum at Canajoharie

Figure 45
Low Tide, from a painting by Winslow Homer
published in *Every Saturday* August 6, 1870
wood engraving

Figure 46
Winslow Homer
Long Branch, New Jersey
1869
Oil on Canvas
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

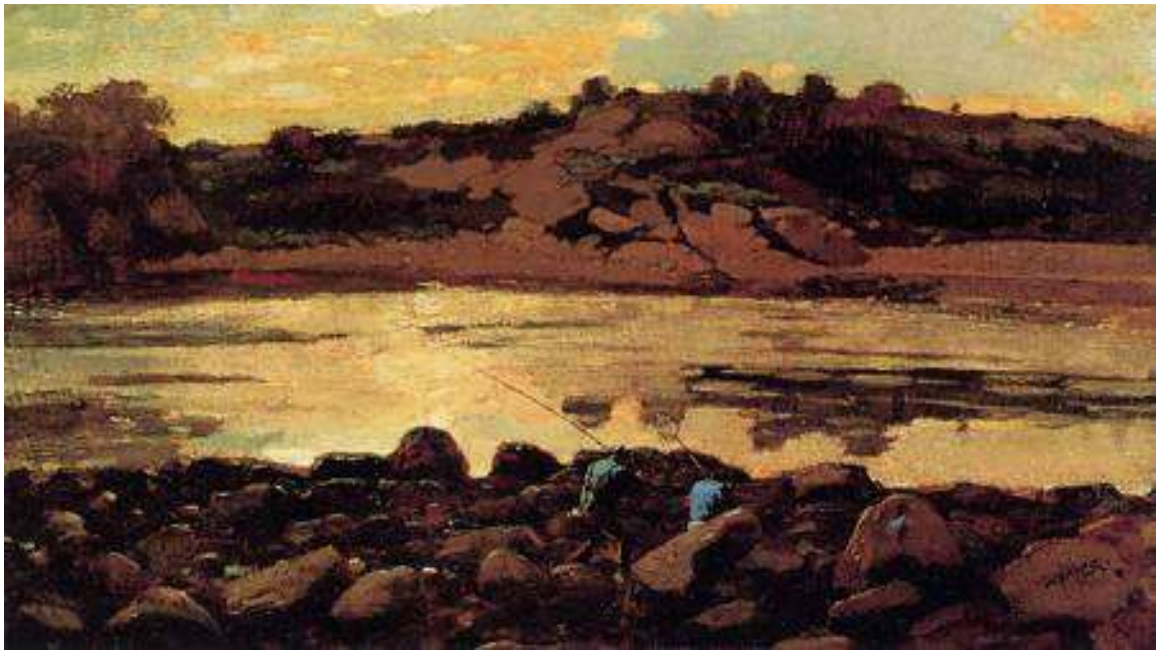


Figure 47
Winslow Homer
Lobster Cove, Manchester, Massachusetts(Fishmen at Sundown)
1869
Oil on panel, 12 ½ x 21 ¼ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Figure 48
Winslow Homer
By the Shore
1870s
Oil on canvas, 9 ½ x 10 inches
Private Collection

Figure 49
Winslow Homer
Reverie
1872
Oil on canvas, 22 x 13 ½ inches
Private Collection

Figure 50
Winslow Homer
At the Window
1872
Oil on canvas, 22 5/8 x 15 ¾ inches
Princeton University Art Museum

Figure 51
Winslow Homer
Salem (*Looking to the Sea*)
1872
Oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Private Collection

Figure 52
Winslow Homer
Morning Glories
1873
Oil on canvas, 19 5/8 x 13 ¼ inches
Private Collection

Figure 53
Winslow Homer
Girl Reading on a Porch
1872
Oil, 5 7/8 x 8 ¼ inches
Private Collection

Figure 54
Winslow Homer
The Butterfly
1872
oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 22 ¾ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

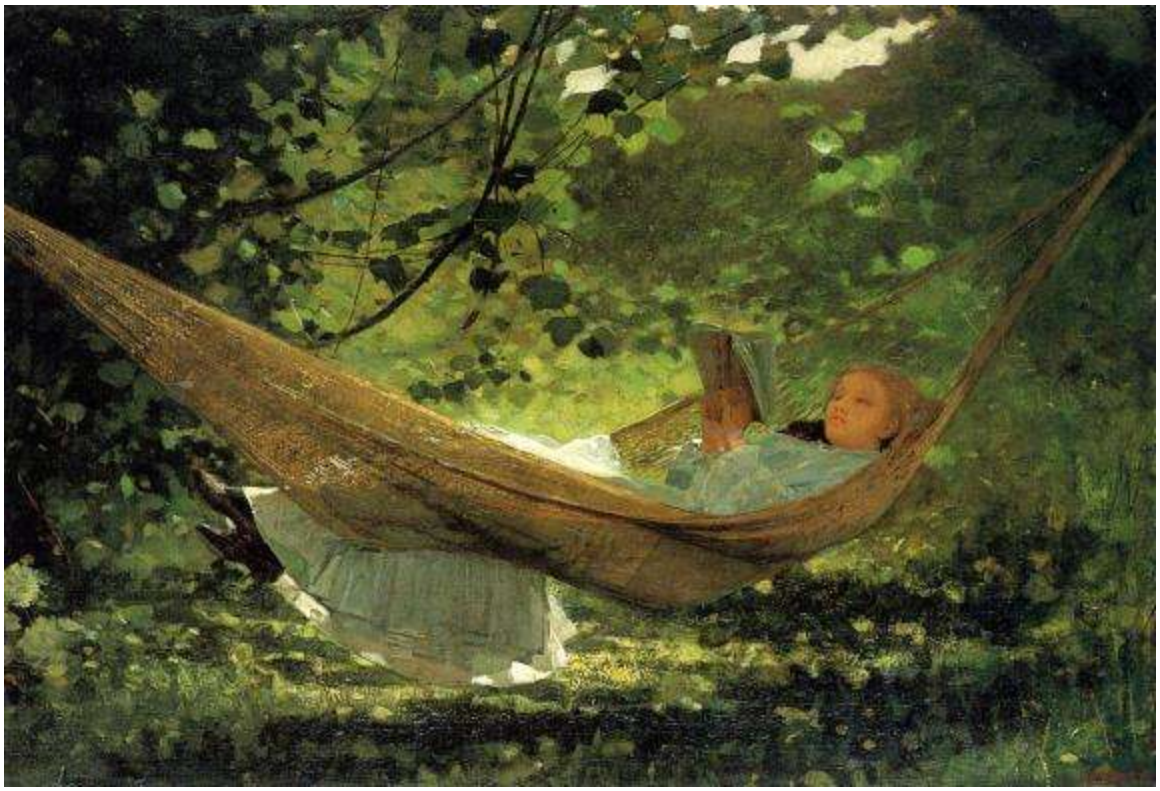


Figure 55
Winslow Homer
Sunlight and Shadow
1872
Oil on canvas, 15 ¾ x 22 ½ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Figure 56
Winslow Homer
Summer Afternoon
1872
Oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Figure 57
Winslow Homer
Helena DeKay
1874
Oil on canvas, 12 3/16 x 18 ½ inches
Thyssen-Bornemisza

Figure 58
James McNeill Whistler
Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother
1871
Oil on canvas, 56 4/5 x 64 inches
Musée D'Orsay

Figure 59
Winslow Homer
Waiting for a Partner (*Waiting for an Answer*)
1872
Oil on canvas, 12 x 17 inches
Peabody Art Collection

Figure 60
Winslow Homer
Crossing the Bridge (*The Fisherman's Wife*)
1873
Oil on panel, 9 x 6 ½ inches
Lauren Rogers Museum of Art

Figure 61
Winslow Homer
Morning Bell (*The Old Mill*)
1871
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 1/8 x 1 in.
Yale University Art Gallery

Figure 62
Winslow Homer
Portrait of a Lady
1875
Watercolor on paper, 12 x 8 inches
Private Collection

Figure 63
Winslow Homer
Trysting Place
1875
Watercolor on paper, 13 ½ x 9 7/8 inches
Princeton University Art Museum

Figure 64
Winslow Homer
Fiction
1875
Watercolor on paper

Figure 65
Winslow Homer
Lemon (*Woman Peeling a Lemon*)
1876
Watercolor on paper, 18 7/8 x 12 inches
Clark Art Institute

Figure 66
Winslow Homer
Book (The New Novel)
1877
Watercolor on paper
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts

Figure 67
Thomas Wilmer Dewing
A Garden
1883
Oil on canvas, 16 x 40 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 68
Thomas Wilmer Dewing
A Reading
1897
Oil on canvas, 20 ¼ x 30 ¼ inches
Smithsonian American Art Museum

Figure 69
Thomas Wilmer Dewing
In the Garden
1892-1894
Oil on canvas, 20 5/8 x 35 inches
Smithsonian Americana Art Museum

Figure 70
Winslow Homer
A Clam Bake
1873
Watercolor on paper, 8 3/8 x 13 7/8 inches
Cleveland Museum of Art

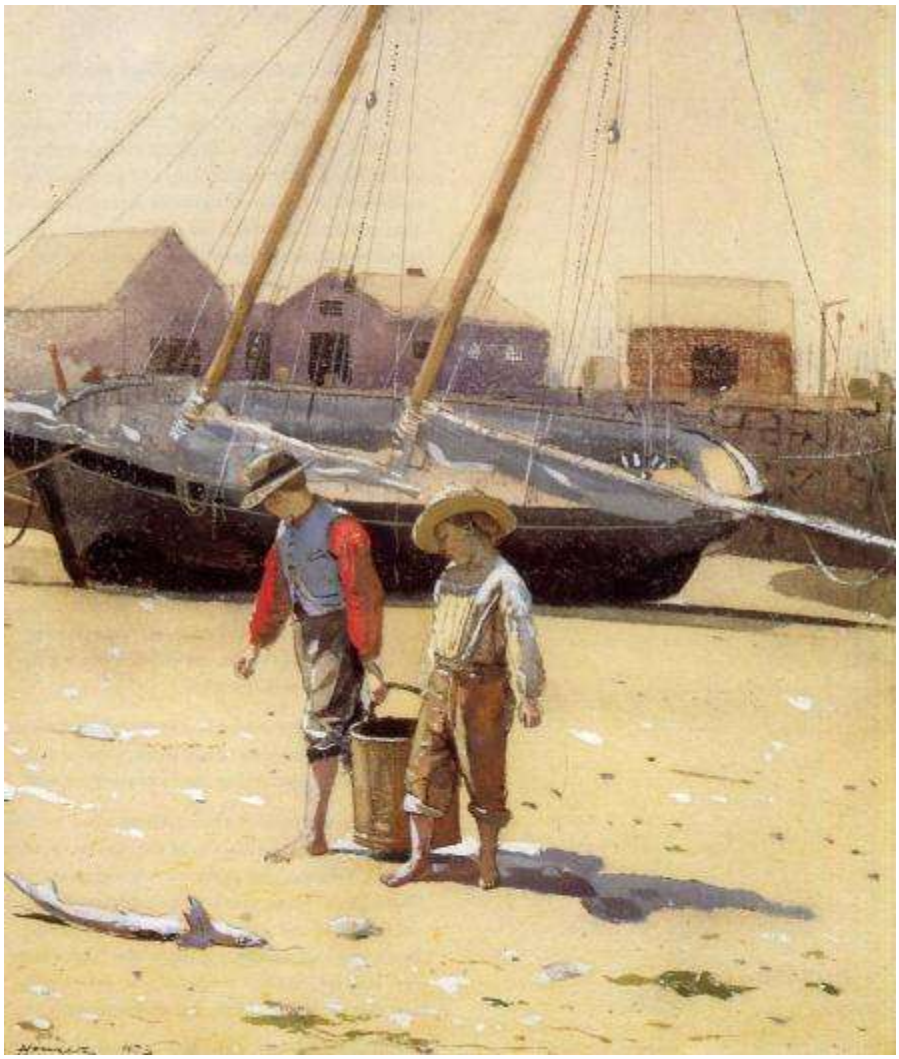


Figure 71
Winslow Homer
A Basket of Clams
1873
Watercolor on paper, 11 1/2 x 9 3/4 in
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 72
"Sea-side Sketches – A Clam Bake"
Wood Engraving after Winslow Homer
Harper's Weekly, August 23, 1873

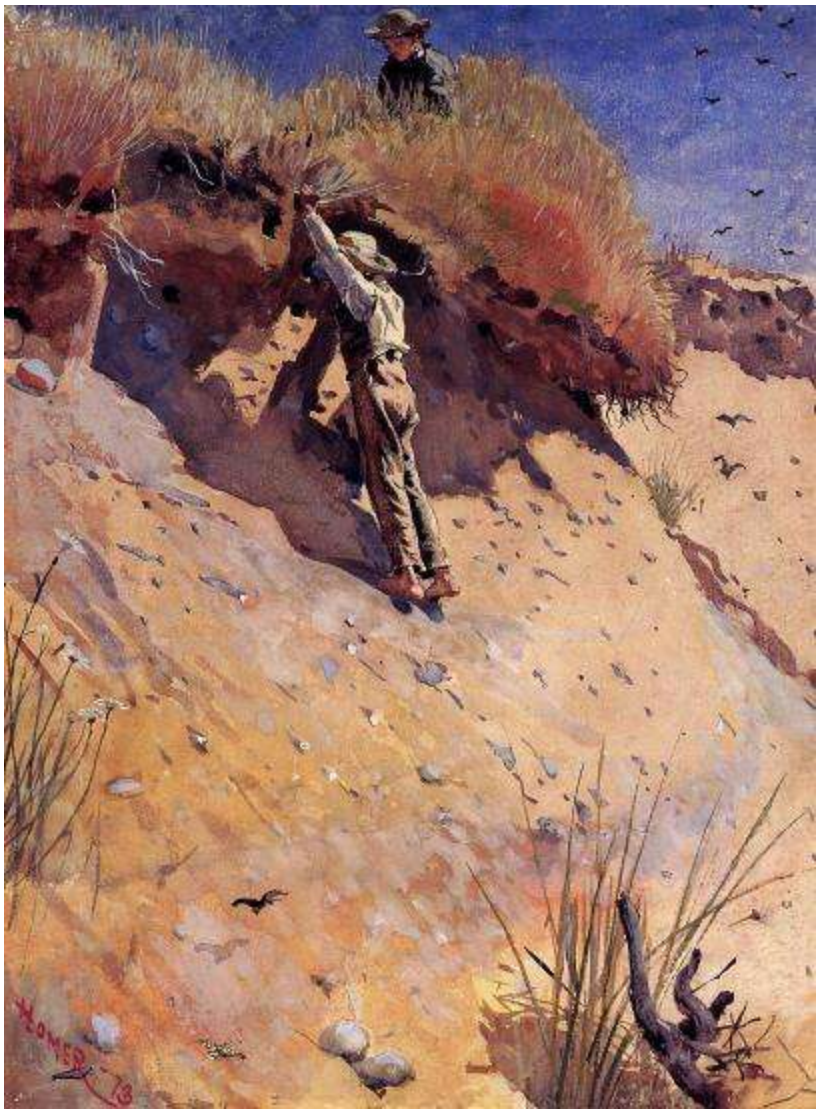


Figure 73
Winslow Homer
How Many Eggs?
1873
Watercolor on paper, 13 x 9 inches
Private Collection

Figure 74
"Raid on a Sand-Swallow Colony – 'How Many Eggs?'"
Wood engraving after Winslow Homer
Harper's Weekly, June 13, 1874

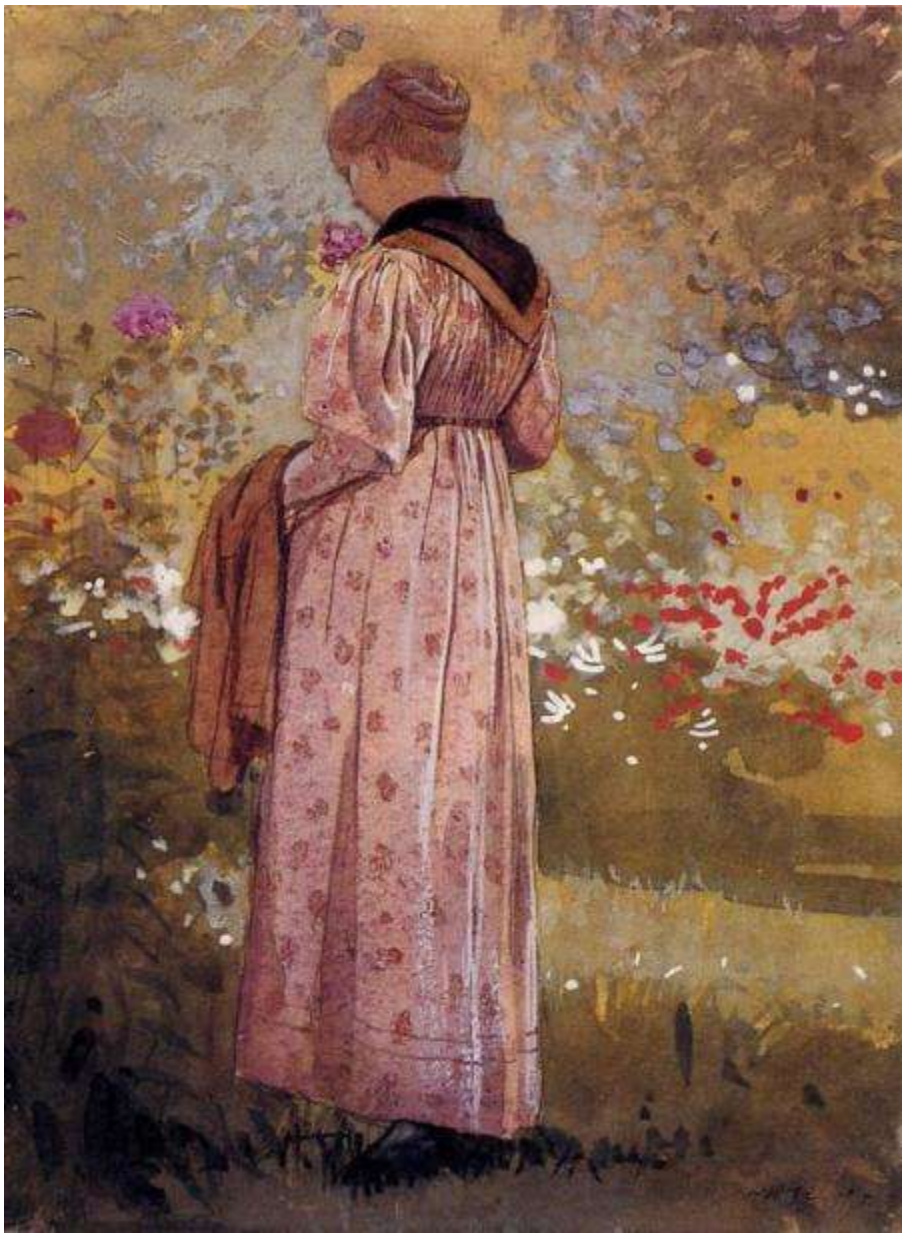


Figure 75
Winslow Homer
In the Garden
1874
Watercolor on paper, 9 1/16 x 6 11/16
Private Collection

Figure 76
Winslow Homer
Summer
1874
Watercolor on paper, 8 2/3 x 4 1/3 inches
Clark Art Institute

Figure 77
Winslow Homer
Girl in the Orchard
1874
Oil on canvas, 15.6 x 22.6 inches
Columbus (OH) Museum of Art

Figure 78
Winslow Homer
Waiting for an Answer
1872
Oil on canvas, 12 x 17 1/8 inches
Peabody Collection, Maryland Commission on Artistic Property of the Maryland State Achives, on extended loan to the Baltimore Museum of Art

Figure 79
Winslow Homer
The Sick Chicken
1874
Watercolor, gouache and graphite on paper, 9 ¾ x 7 ¾ inches
National Gallery of Art

Figure 80
Winslow Homer
Waiting for a Bite (*Why Don't the Suckers Bite?*)
1874
Watercolor on paper, 12 x 20 inches
Private Collection

Figure 81
Winslow Homer
In Charge of Baby
1873
Watercolor on paper, 9 ½ x 13 ½ inches
Private Collection

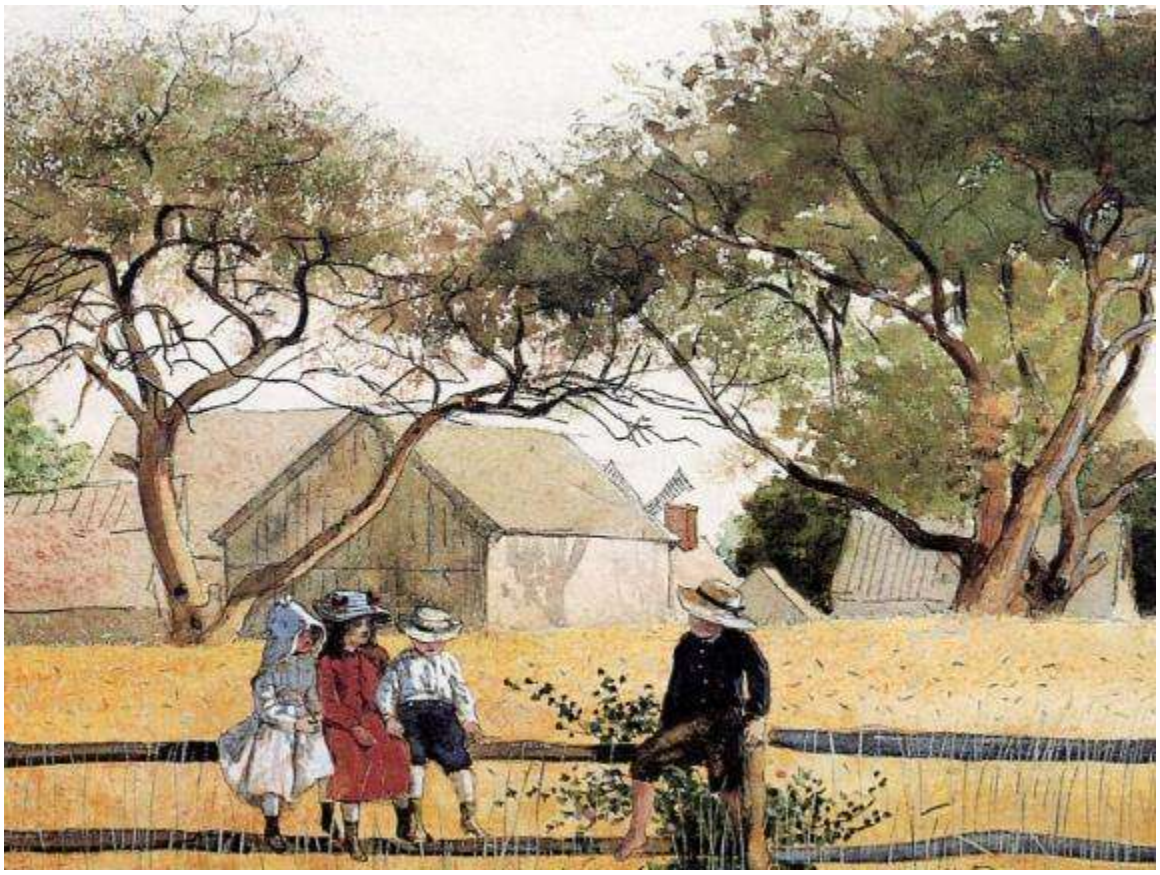


Figure 82
Winslow Homer
Children on a Fence
1874
Watercolor over graphite on white-wove paper, 7 x 12 inches
Williams College Museum of Art

Figure 83
Mariano Fortuny
Moroccan Man
1869
Watercolor on paper, 12 ½ x 7 4/5 inches
Museo del Prado

Figure 84
Mariano Fortuny
Cafe of the Swallows
1868
Watercolor on paper
Private Collection

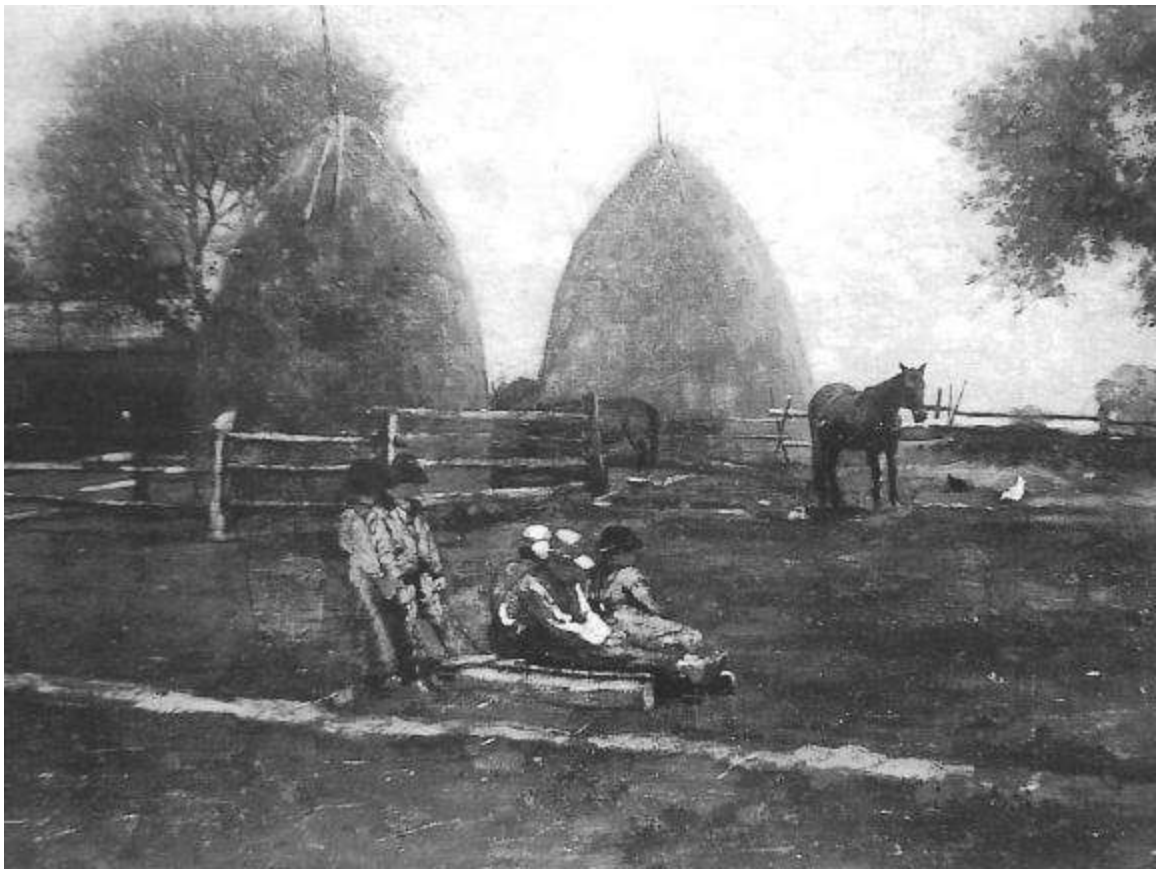


Figure 85
Winslow Homer
Haystacks and Children
1874
Oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 22 ½ inches
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

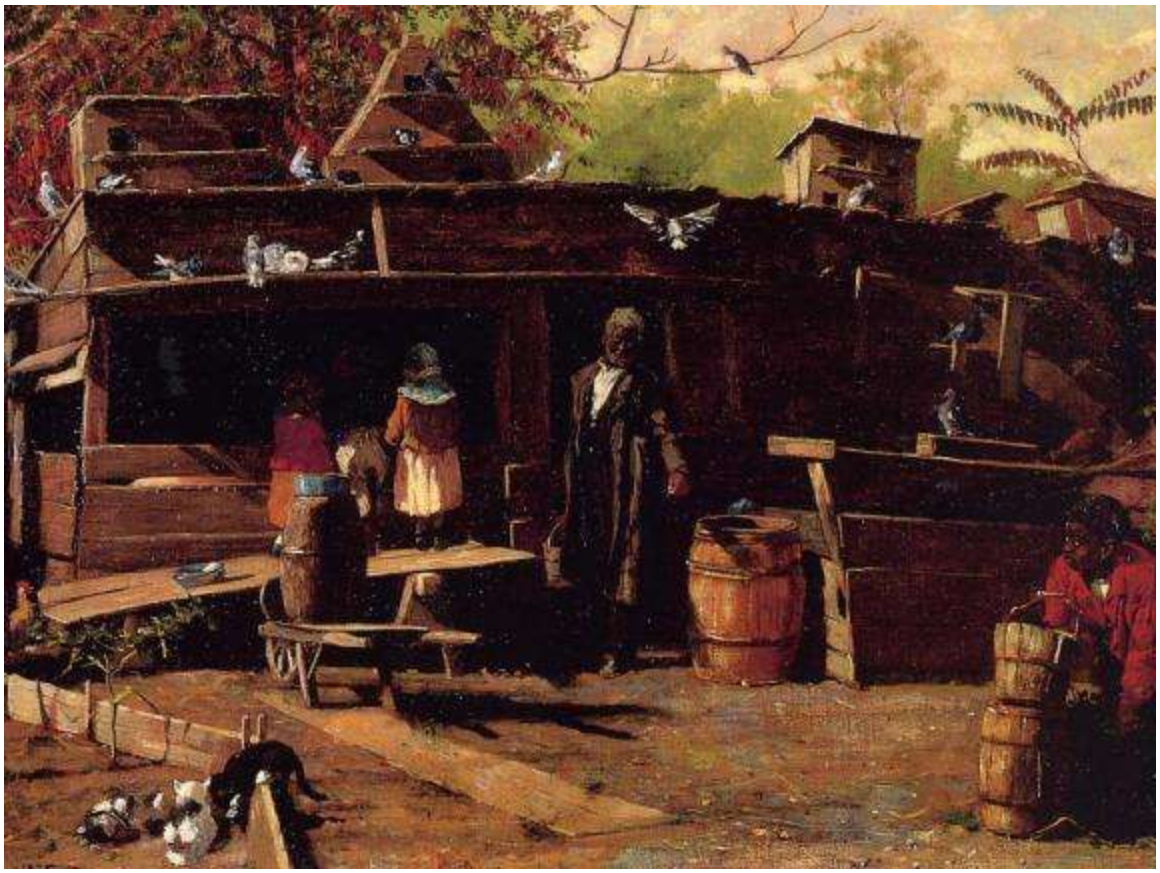


Figure 86
Winslow Homer
Uncle Ned at Home
1873
Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 inches
Private Collection

Figure 87
Winslow Homer
Milking Time
1875
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 ¼ inches
Delaware Museum of Art

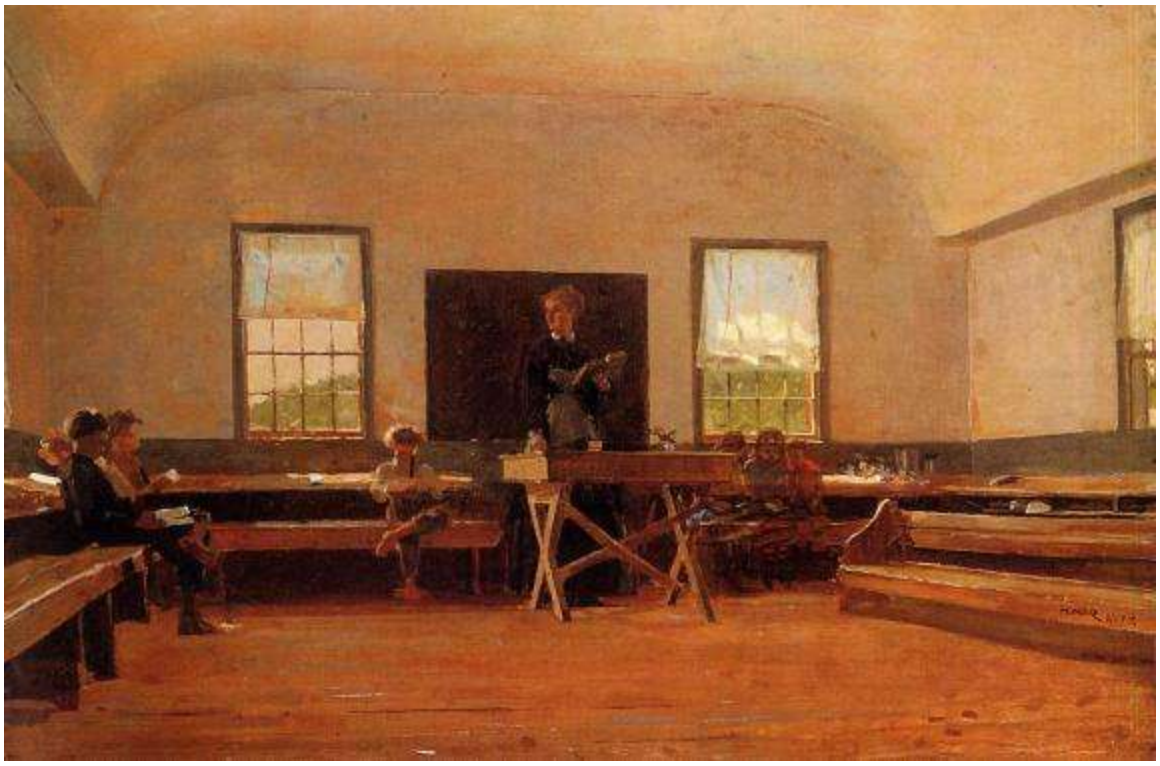


Figure 88
Winslow Homer
The Country School
1871
Oil on canvas, 30 x 45 inches
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy

Figure 89
Winslow Homer
A Temperance Meeting (*Noon Time*)
1874
Oil on canvas, 52 2/3 x 76 ½ inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Figure 90
Enoch Wood Perry
The Old Story
1875
Wood engraving after oil painting
Published in George William Sheldon's *American Painters* (1880)

Figure 91
Thomas Eakins
A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)
1879
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Figure 92
Winslow Homer
A Fair Wind (*Breezing Up*)
1873-1876
Oil on canvas, 24 3/16 x 38 3/16 inches
National Gallery of Art

Figure 93
Winslow Homer
Cattle Piece (*Unruly Calf*)
1875
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 inches
Collection, Mrs. Norman B. Woolworth

Figure 94
Winslow Homer
Over the Hills (*Rab and the Girls*)
1875
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 inches
Parthenon

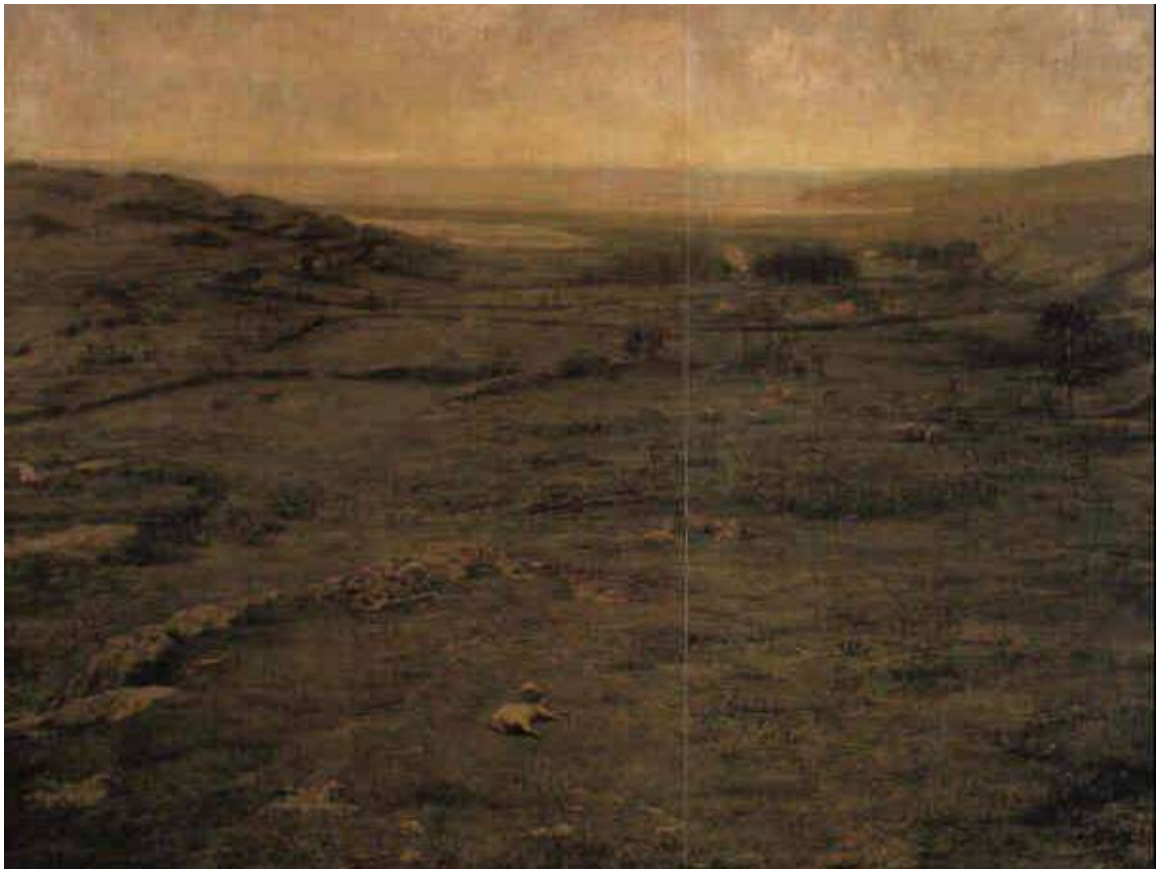


Figure 95
John LaFarge
New England Pasture-Land
Oil on canvas, 32 ¾ x 42 ¼ inches
Private Collection

Figure 96
Winslow Homer
Pastoral (*Shepherd and Shepherdess*)
1878
Painted and glazed tiles, twelve tiles 8 x 8 inches each
Metropolitan Museum of Art

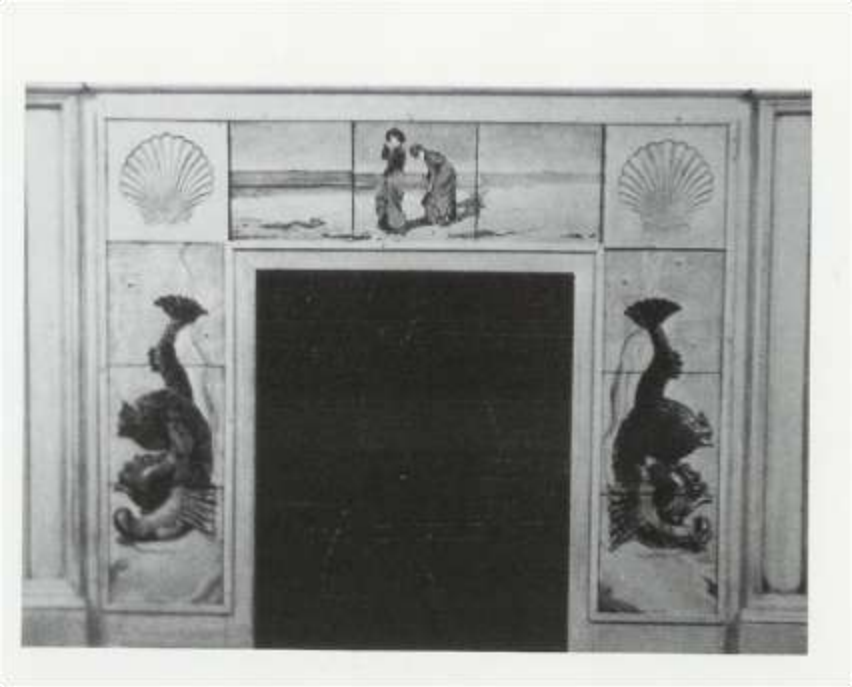


Figure 97
Winslow Homer
On the Shore
Painted and glazed tiles, 8 x 8 inch each
Private Collection

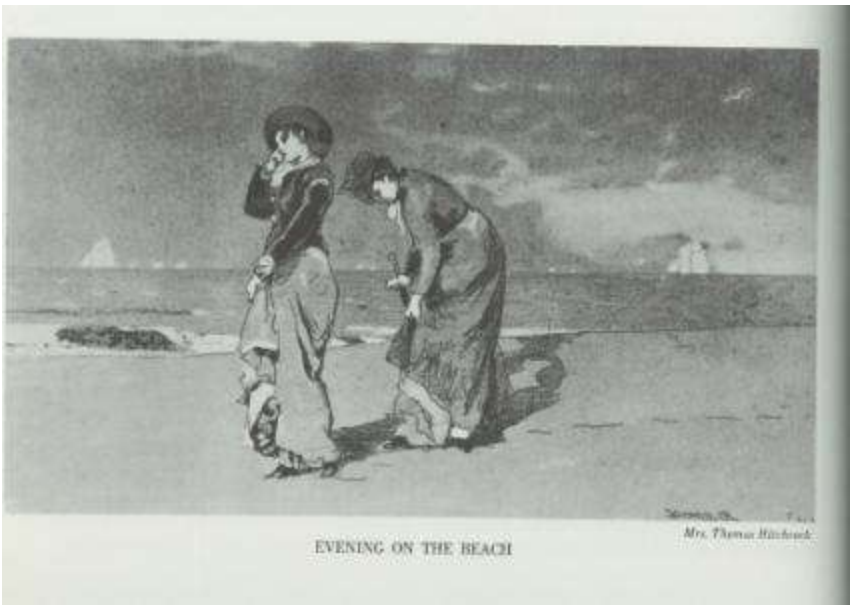


Figure 98
Winslow Homer
Evening on the Beach
1871
Crayon and Chinese white on paper, 8 ¾ x 11 inches
Collection of Mrs. Thomas Hitchcock

Figure 99
Winslow Homer
Resting Shepherdess
1878
Painted and glazed tiles, 8 x 16 inches
Heckscher Museum of Art

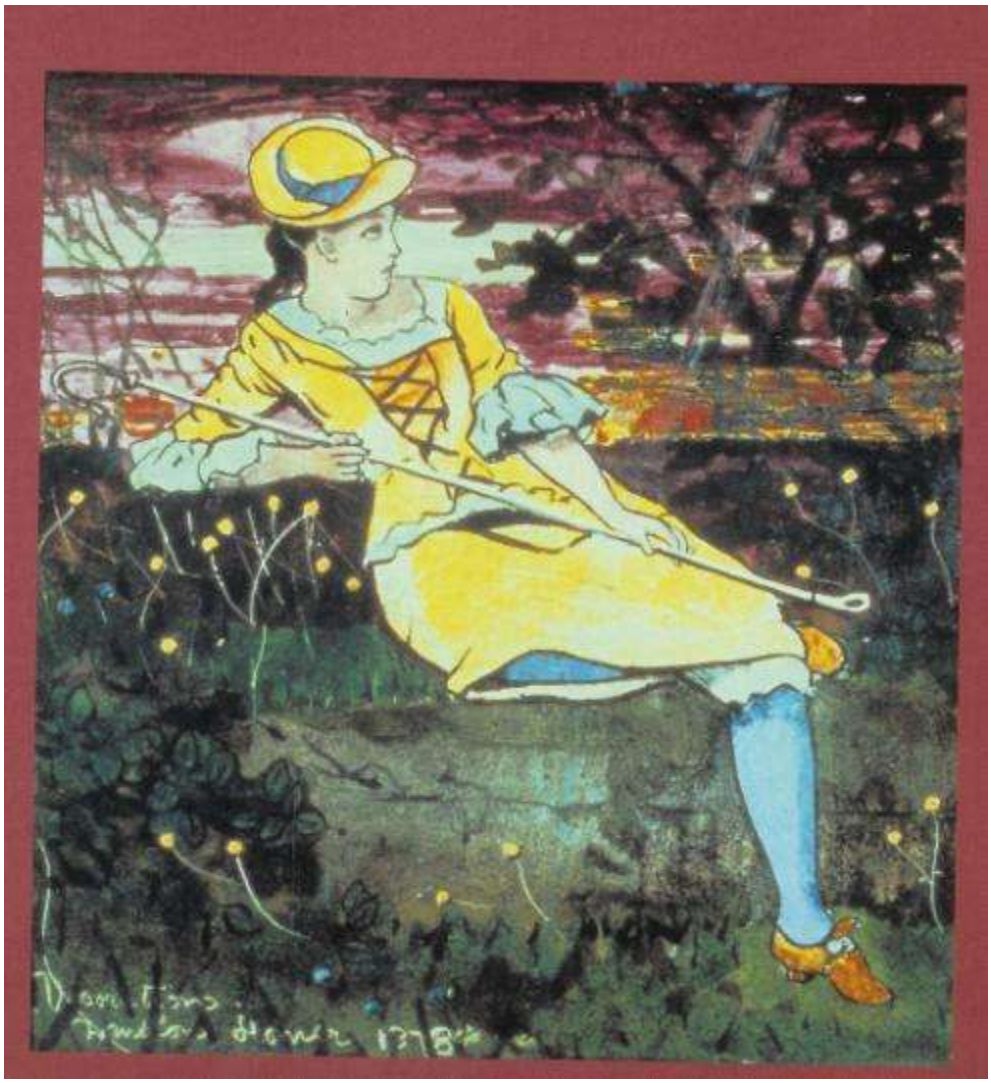


Figure 100
Winslow Homer
Shepherdess Tile
1878
Ceramic tile, 7 ¾ x 7 ¾ inches
Lyman Allyn Art Museum

Figure 101
Winslow Homer
Fresh Air
1878
Watercolor over charcoal on paper, 20 1/16 x 14 inches
The Brooklyn Museum

Figure 102
Centennial Photographic Co.
Doulton & Co., London, Exhibit #85, Main Exhibition Building, Bldg. #1.
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

Figure 103
Centennial Photographic Company
Steel & Garland's exhibit-Main Building
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

Figure 104
Centennial Photographic Company
Minton's tile mosaic mantelpiece-Main Building
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

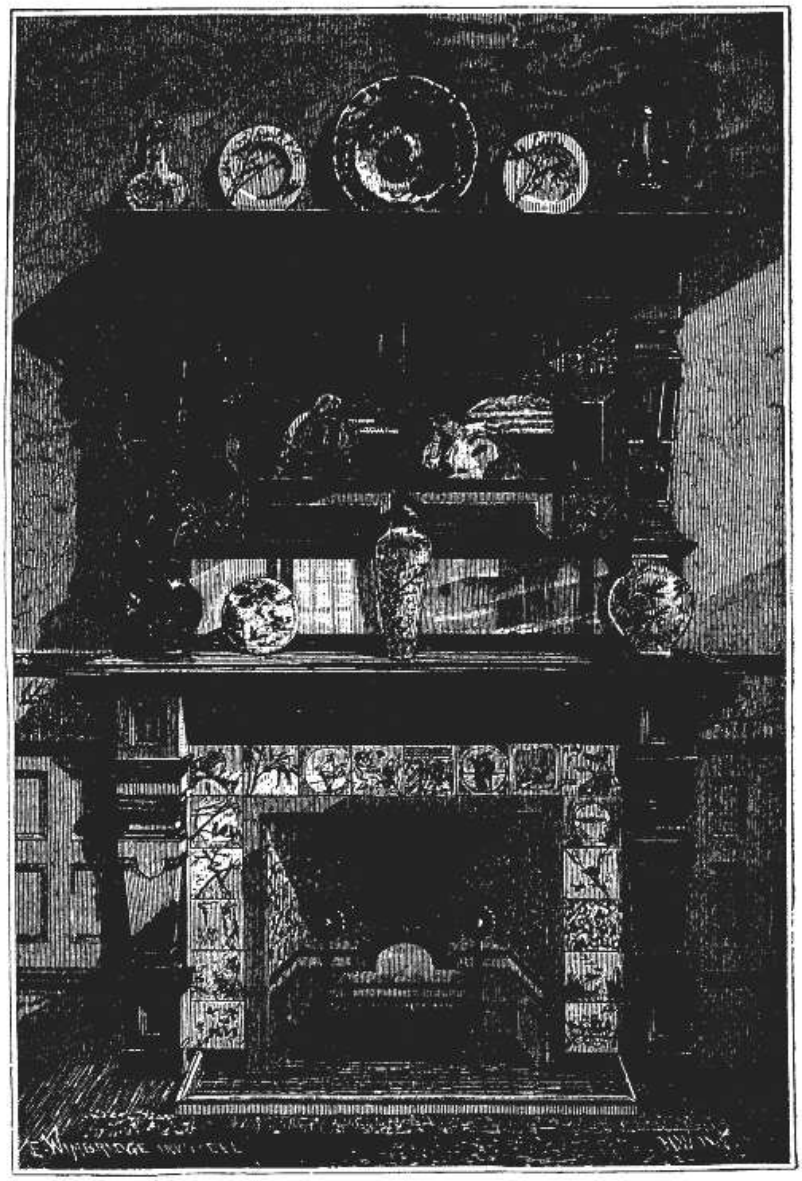
Figure 105
Centennial Photographic Company
Minton's tiles
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

Figure 106
Centennial Photographic Company
Minton, Hollins & Co.'s tile exhibit-Main Bldg
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

Figure 107
Centennial Photographic Company
Minton, Hollins & Co.'s tile exhibit-Main Bldg
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection

Figure 108
Jean-Siméon Chardin
The Washe woman
1733
Oil on canvas, 14 5/8 x 16 3/4 inches
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Figure 109
Centennial Photographic Company
Howard & Son's Exhibit
Albumen Print
Free Library of Philadelphia's Print and Picture Collection
Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection



A TILE MAN'S DESIGN FOR A MANTEL-PIECE.

Figure 110
Edward Wimbridge
A Tile Man's Design for a Mantel-Piece
Published in "Tile Club at Work"
Scribner's Monthly, January 1879, page 407

"THIS is a decorative age," said an artist. "We should do something decorative, if we would not be behind the times."

"Stuff!" said another. "It will all be over soon. It is only a temporary craze, a phase of popular insanity that will wear itself out as soon as a new hobby is presented to take its place. Of course it has interfered with the sale of our pictures. I don't dispute that; but would you have us make old brass fenders and andirons, or paste paper jimcracks on old ginger-jars?"

Figure 111
Edwin Austen Abbey
Tiles for a Mantelpiece
Published in "Tile Club at Work"
Scribner's Monthly January 1879, Page 401

Figure 112
Enoch Wood Perry
Fireside Stories
1869
Reproduction after painting, published in George Sheldon *American Painters*

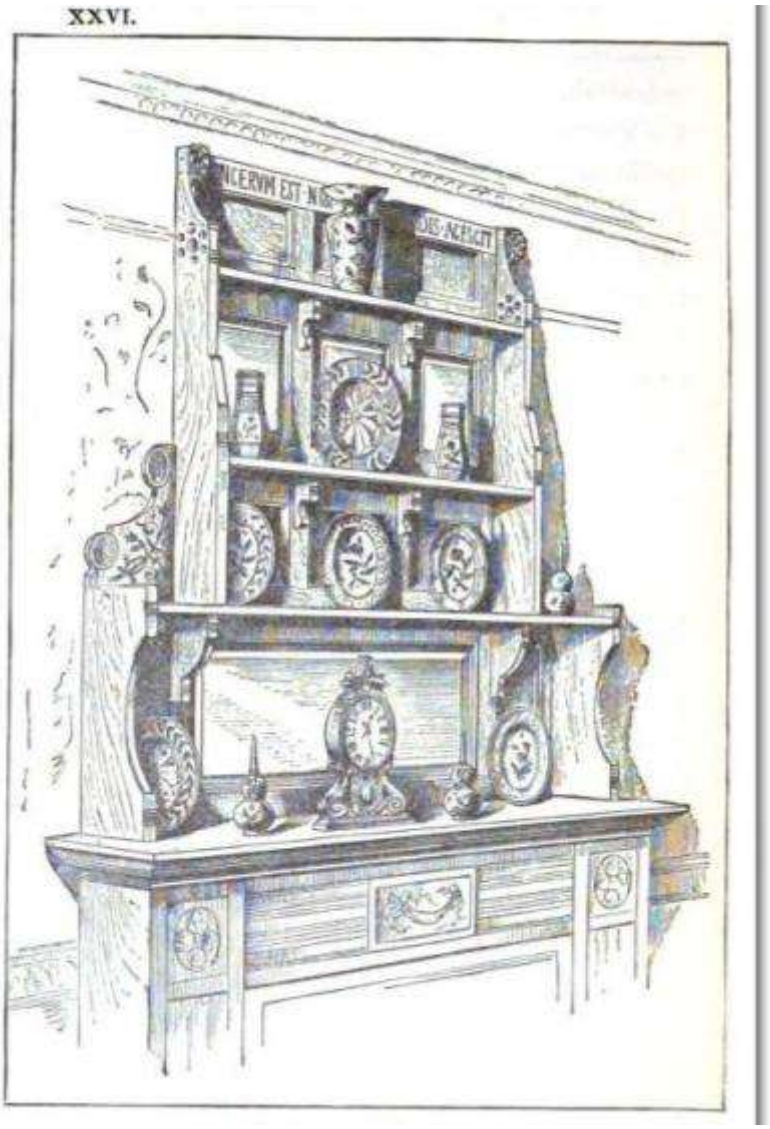


Figure 113
Charles Eastlake
Mantlepiece Shelves
Published in *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and other Details*
Pg 138
Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883

This is not a museum, nor a crockery store, but simply Arabella's reception-room. She is slightly touched with the fashion for old china, Majolica, Fayence, etc., etc., etc., etc., etc.

Figure 114
Arabella's Reception Room
Published in *Scribner's Monthly*, May 1877

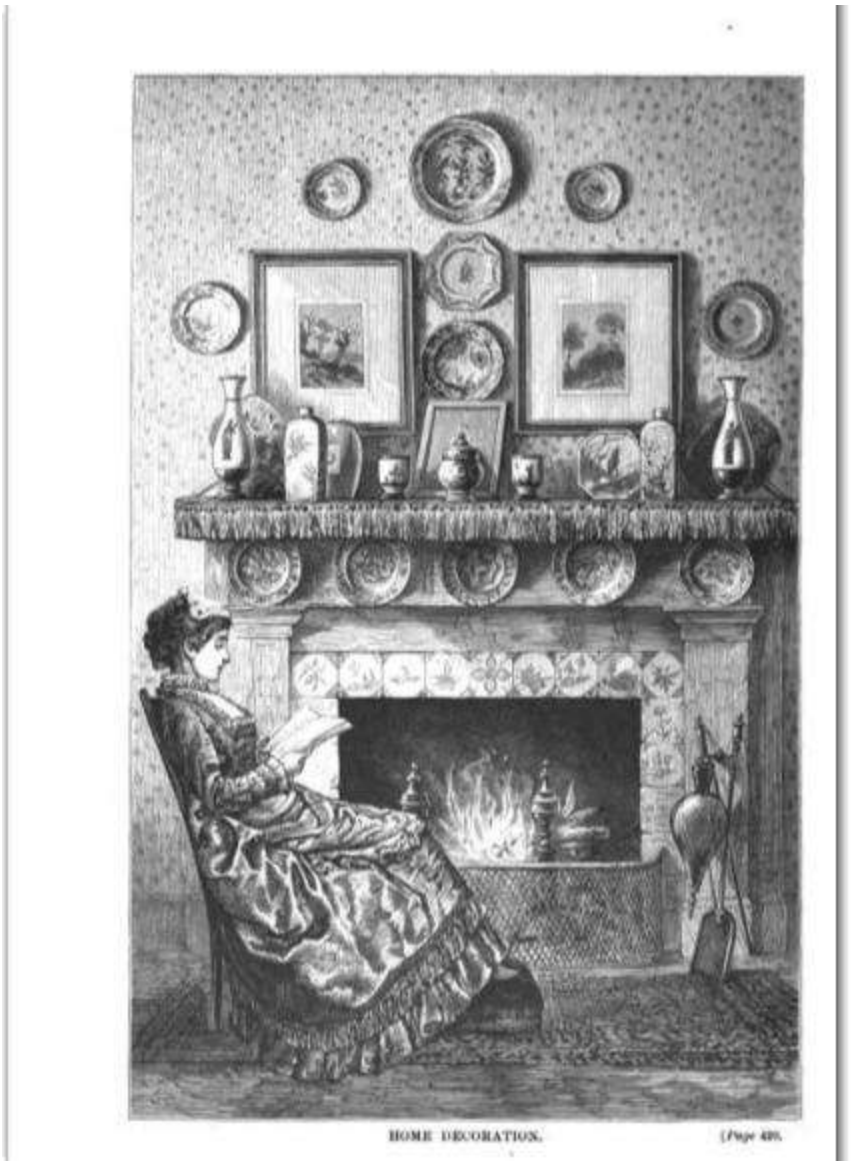


Figure 115
Frontispiece
William Prime, *Pottery and Porcelain of All Times and Nations*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878.

Figure 116
Winslow Homer
Boy and Girl in a Landscape
1878
Pencil, Chinese white and ink wash on paper, 8 ½ x 7 inches
Private Collection

Figure 117
Winslow Homer
Girl in a Sunbonnet
1878
Pencil, Chinese white on paper, 8 ½ x 6 inches
Private Collection

Figure 118
Winslow Homer
Girl on a Garden Seat
1878
Watercolor on paper
McNay Art Museum

Figure 119
Winslow Homer
Bo-Peep(*Girl with Shepherd's Crook Seated by a Tree*)
1878
Watercolor over graphite on paper, 7 x 8 ¼ inches
Private Collection

Figure 120
A Meissen Blue and White Porcelain Shepherd and Shepherdess Group,
c. 1865
Porcelain, 19cm high
Private Collection

Figure 121
Winslow Homer
Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks
1880
Watercolor and white gouache on white wove paper**,** 9 5/8 x 13 11/16
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University

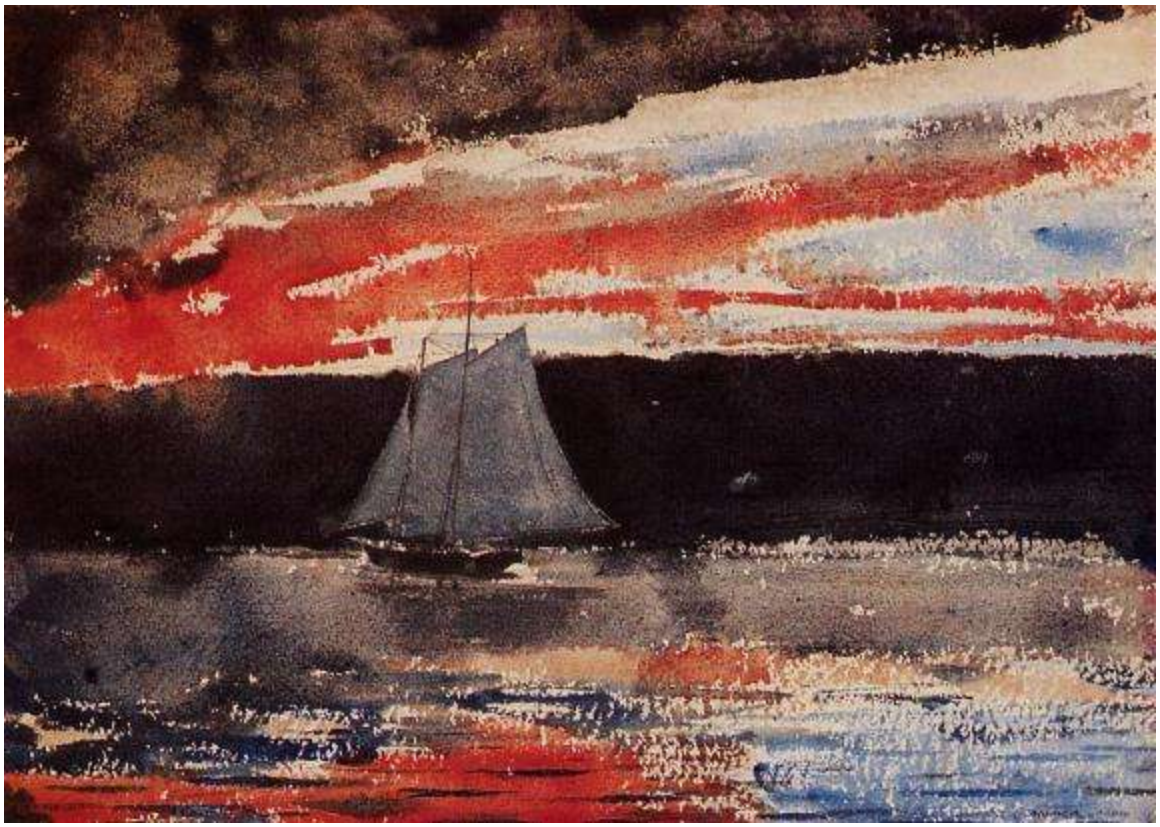


Figure 122
Winslow Homer
Schooner at Sunset
1880
Watercolor on paper, 9 ¾ x 13 5/8 inches
Westmoreland Museum of Art

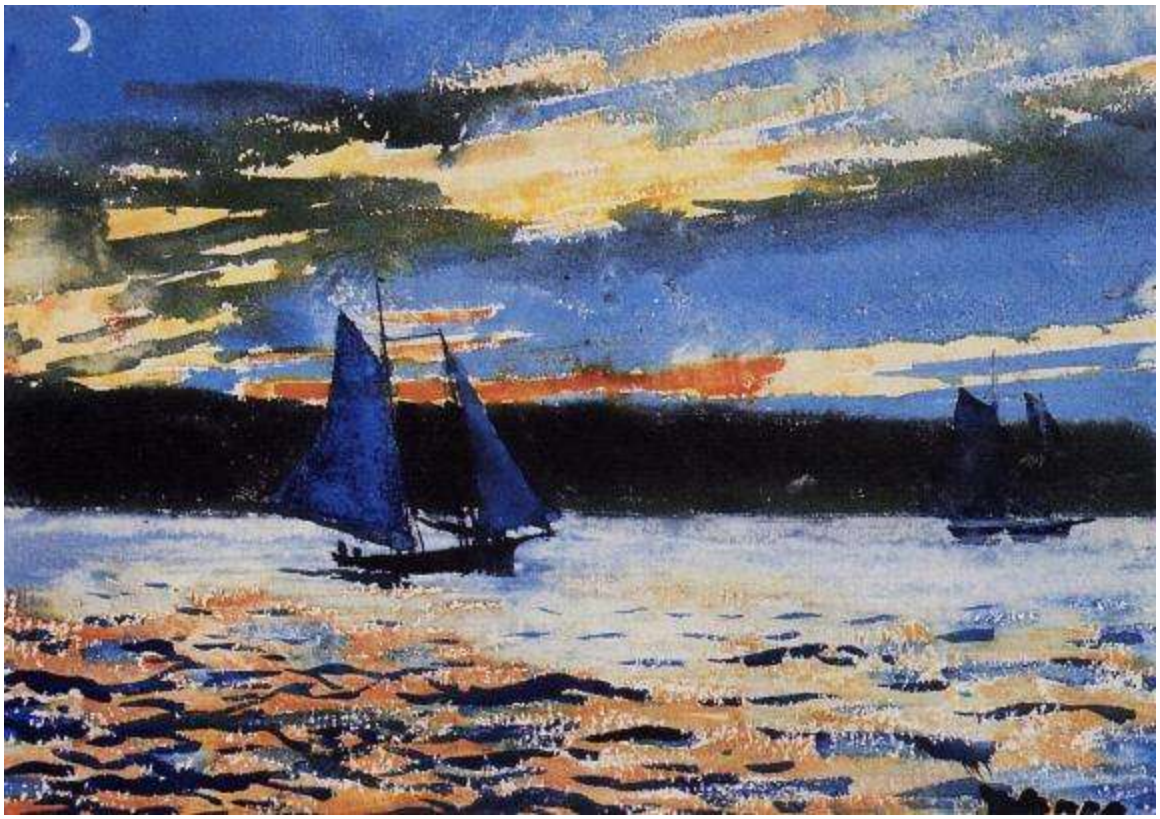


Figure 123
Winslow Homer
Gloucester Sunset
1880
Watercolor on paper, 9 ½ x 13 ½ inches
Private collection

Figure 124
Winslow Homer
Sunset at Gloucester
1880
Watercolor on paper, 13 x 23 ¾ inches
Addison Museum of American Art

Figure 125
Eastman Johnson
Pension Claim Agent
1867
Oil on canvas, 25 ¼ x 35 3/8 inches
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

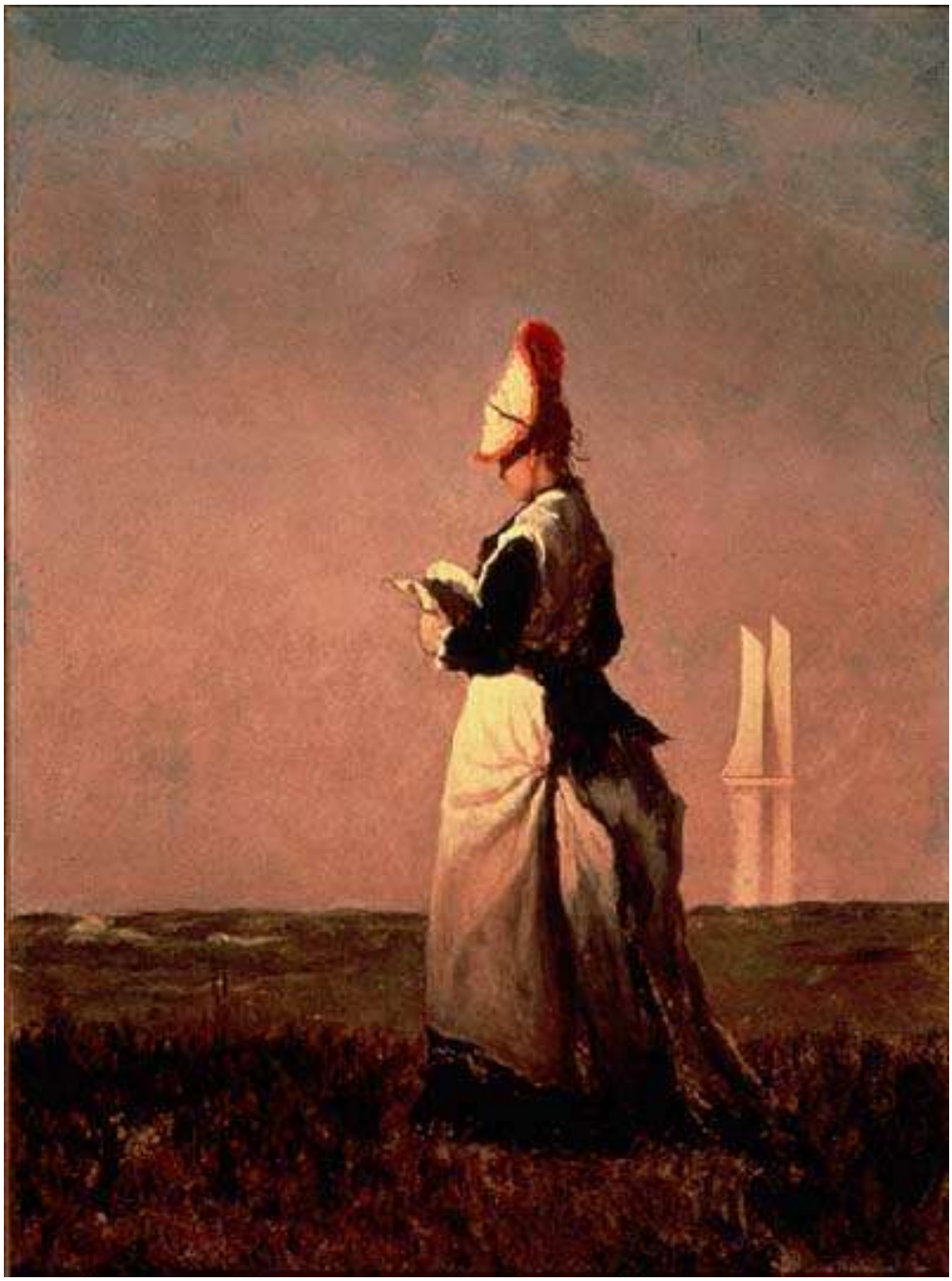


Figure 126
Eastman Johnson
Woman Reading
1874
Oil on board, 25 x 18 2/3 inches
San Diego Museum of Art

Figure 127
Eastman Johnson
Catching the Bee
1872
Oil on canvas, 23 4/5 x 13 ¾ inches
The Newark Museum

Figure 128
Winslow Homer
West Point Prouts Neck
1900
Oil on canvas, 30 1/16 x 48 1/8 inches
Clark Art Institute

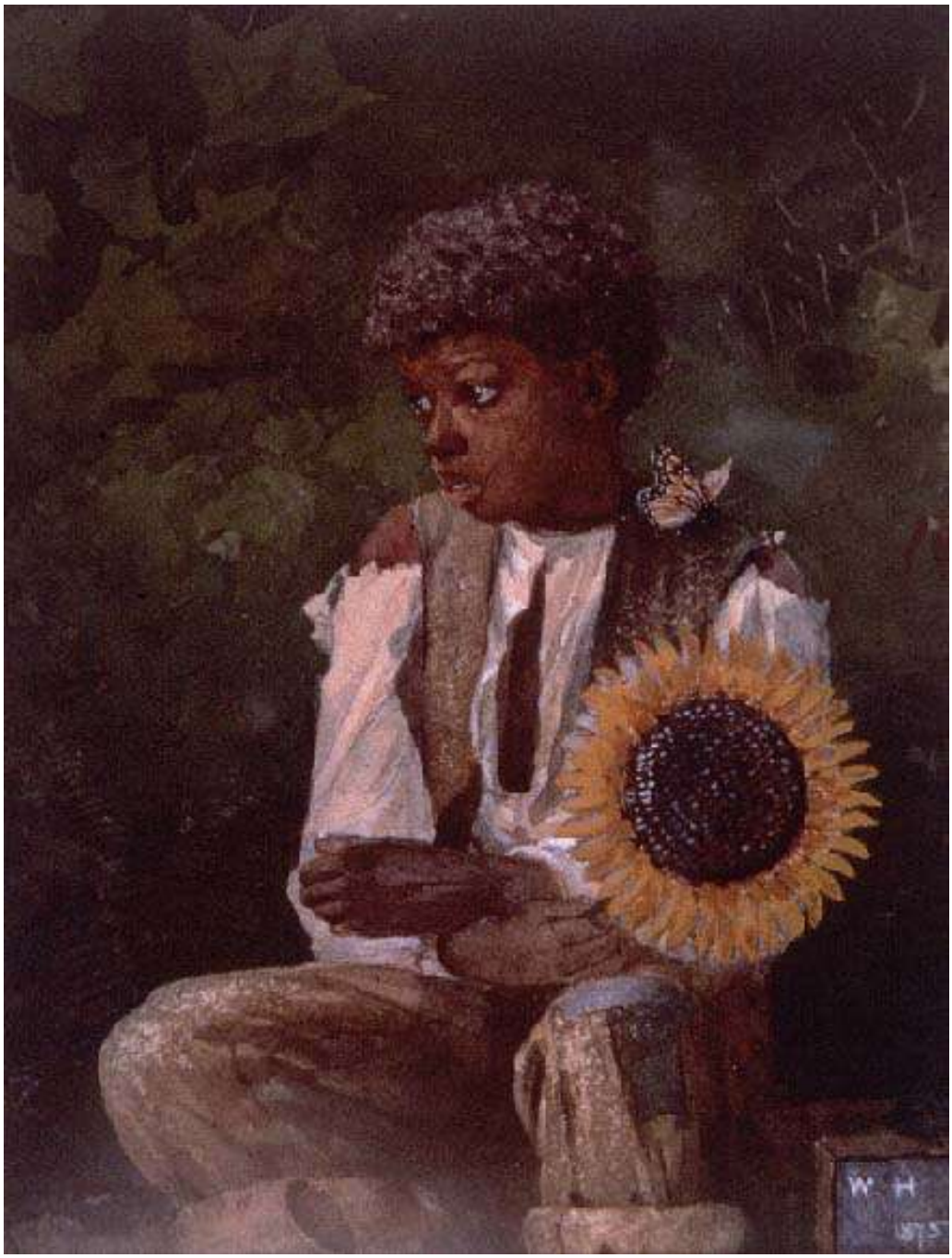


Figure 129
Winslow Homer
Taking a Sunflower to Teacher
1875
Watercolor on paper,
Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Figure 130
Winslow Homer
The Cotton Pickers
1876
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 1/8 inches
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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1995-1997	UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETSS, AMHERST Masters of Arts in Art History
1990-1994	DUKE UNIVERSITY Bachelor of Arts in Art History Certificate of Study in Women's Studies

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

2002-2004	Teaching Assistant, Department of English, Expository Writing (instructor of record)
Summer 2001	Part-Time Lecturer, Department of Art History, Modern Art: Twentieth Century (instructor of record)
Spring 2000	Part-Time Lecturer, Department of Art History, Introduction to Art History, Ancient & Medieval (instructor of record)
1998-1999	Teaching Assistant, Department of Art History, Introduction to Art History

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MUSEUM AND GALLERY EXPERIENCE

2001-2009	JOHNSON & JOHNSON, Curator and Art Administrator
1999-2001	THE JANE VOORHEES ZIMMERLI ART MUSEUM, Graduate Curatorial Assistant
Summer 1996	MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE ART MUSEUM, Curatorial Intern

PUBLICATIONS

"Varied Voices: Transcultural Artists in the Johnson & Johnson Collection," *Transcultural New Jersey: Diverse Artists Shaping Culture and Communities*. Volume 2. Ed. Marianne Ficarra, Isabel Nazario, and Jeffrey Weschler. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Office for Intercultural Initiatives.

The Sum Is Greater than the Parts: Collage and Assemblage in the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union. Exh. Cat. New Brunswick, NJ.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001.

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