









# WINSLOW HOMER

AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

by Natalie Spassky

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART







## Director's Note

An entire gallery in The American Wing of the Metropolitan is devoted to oil paintings by Winslow Homer, one of America's indisputable masters. Homer's commitment to the evidence of his own observations, his development of a technique free from the strictures of academic training, and his unconventional and inventive imagery give his works their special appeal and originality. This publication, which includes not only his oils but also several of the finest prints and watercolors from the Metropolitan's extensive Homer collection, suggests the breadth of his talent.

A number of the Museum's paintings were acquired during the artist's lifetime, or soon after his death in 1910 through his brother and executor, Charles S. Homer. *The Gulf Stream*, perhaps his most famous picture, was the first of the Museum's Homer acquisitions. In 1906, when the oil was exhibited at the National Academy of Design, the academy's jury, which included many of the leading artists of the day, petitioned the Museum to acquire the work, and the Trustees responded affirmatively. Between 1906 and 1911, George A. Hearn—a man who did much to strengthen the Metropolitan's collection of American paintings, including the establishment of a fund for the acquisition of pictures by living artists of American citizenship—gave five paintings, among them *Searchlight on Harbor Entrance*, *Santiago de Cuba* (figure 34), *Northeaster* (figure 25), and *Moonlight*, *Wood Island Light* (figure 22). Charles Homer presented the Museum with the unfinished *Shooting the Rapids*, *Saguenay River* (figure 39) in 1911, following a memorial exhibition of his brother's work at the Metropolitan.

A group of twelve masterful watercolors of primarily tropical subjects purchased in 1910 after the artist's death was a significant addition to the Museum's collection. Although Homer refused all bids for these paintings, it was understood that the Museum would have first choice were the works to be submitted anywhere. Charles Homer offered the Metropolitan any or all of a group of sixteen on generous terms, and twelve were chosen, including six works of dazzling light, color, and spontaneity that are illustrated in this publication (see cover, figures 28, 29, 33, 37, 38).

Homer's achievement as a graphic artist is well represented by some 175 works in the Museum's print collection. Its holdings include many wood engravings from the artist's prolific career as an illustrator for *Harper's Weekly* and other publications; lithographs; etchings; and two chromolithographs printed by Louis Prang of Boston.

The paintings, prints, and drawings discussed in the following pages are testimony to Homer's creative power and versatility. His wide-ranging pictorial style and coloristic genius have earned him a place among America's greatest masters, and the distinctly American spirit of his view of man and nature has won him wide popularity in this country.

Philippe de Montebello  
Director

Cover: *Palm Tree, Nassau* was painted in the winter of 1898 during the artist's second visit to Nassau. The brilliant clarity and depth of color, as well as the effortless spontaneity of execution, displays Homer's mastery of watercolor. Pencil and watercolor on paper, 23 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 15 inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.6

Inside front cover:  
detail of *Camp Fire* (figure 21)

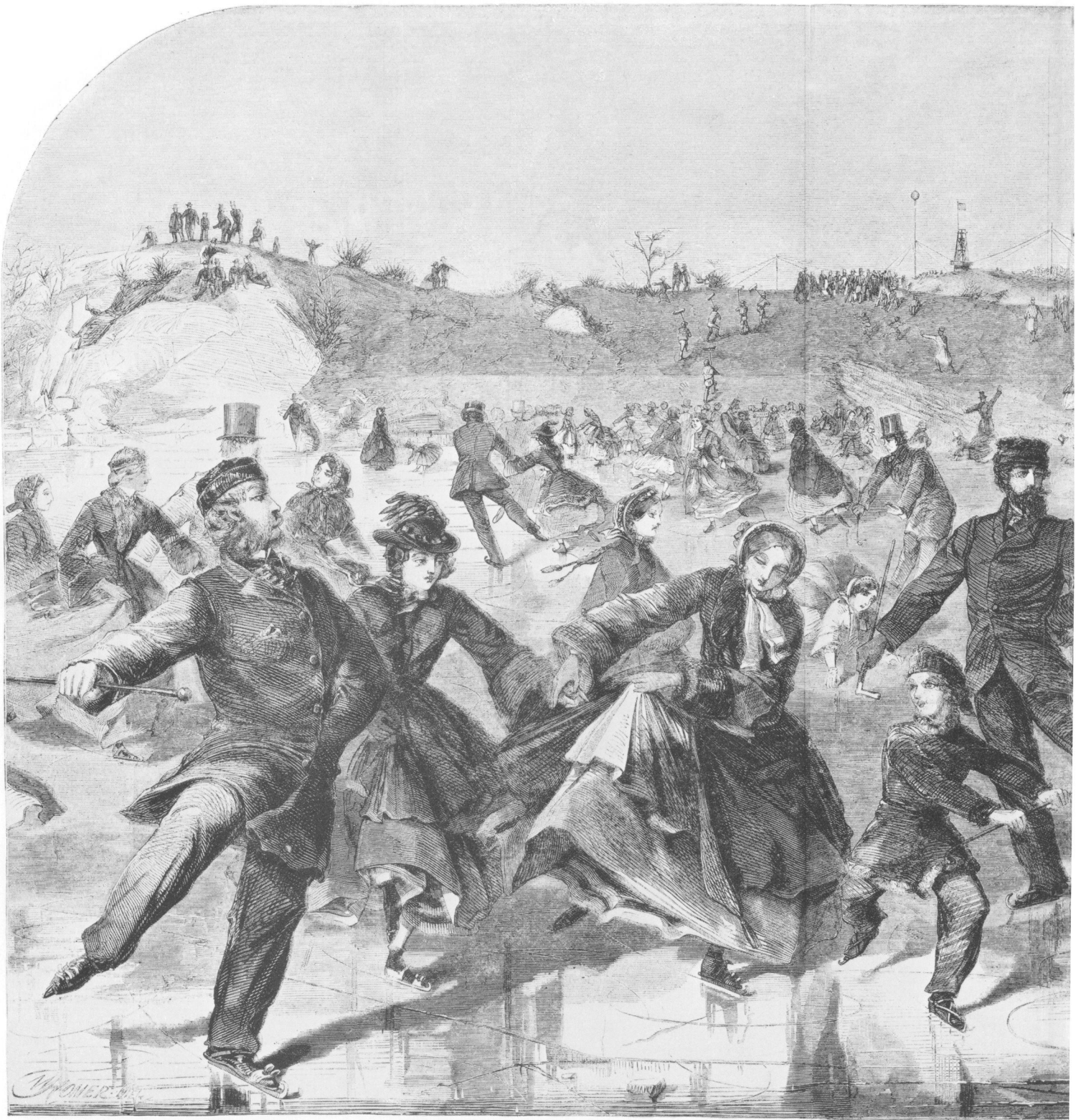
1 • Winslow Homer with his father and his dog, Sam, at Prouts Neck. Photograph taken about 1890. Homer Collection, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.

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2 • After serving a two-year apprenticeship at the lithographic firm of J. H. Bufford in Boston, Homer worked as a free-lance illustrator in New York. *Skating on the Ladies' Skating-Pond in the Central Park, New York*, a wood engraving published in the popular New York magazine *Harper's Weekly*, demonstrates the anecdotal character of Homer's early work as an illustrator. *Harper's Weekly* 4 (Jan. 28, 1860), pp. 56–57. Wood engraving, 13¼ x 20½ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.111.1(3)





# W

inslow Homer, the second of three sons of Charles Savage Homer and Henrietta Maria Benson Homer, was born in Boston in 1836 and attended school in Cambridge, where the family moved when he was six. His early interest in art was encouraged by his parents. His mother, a native of Bucksport, Maine, was a skillful painter in watercolors, whose still lifes of flowers and birds were shown at the Brooklyn Art Association in the 1870s. His father, a Boston-born importer of hardware, sent Homer sets of lithographs by Bernard-Romain Julien and Victor Adam from London to study and copy. Homer was never academically inclined, and his artistic interests required practical application. At nineteen he became an apprentice at the lithographic firm of J. H. Bufford in Boston, where the future painters Joseph E. Baker and Joseph Foxcroft Cole were among his co-workers.

After he completed his apprenticeship at Bufford's in 1857, the twenty-one-year-old Homer supported himself as an illustrator while preparing for a career as an artist. His early illustrations, scenes of everyday life in Boston and farm life in rural New England, were published in 1857 in the Boston weekly *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* and the newly founded *Harper's Weekly* in New York.

In the fall of 1859 Homer moved to New York, taking lodgings at the boardinghouse of Mrs. Alexander Cushman at 52 East 16th Street (now 128 East 16th Street). Asserting his independence, Homer declined an offer of a staff position at *Harper's*. As he told his early biographer George W. Sheldon in 1878, "I had had a taste of freedom. The slavery at Bufford's was too fresh in my recollection to let me care to bind myself again. From the time that I took my nose off that lithographic stone, I have had no master, and never shall have any." Nevertheless, with the exception of two years, he worked for *Harper's* steadily between 1857 and 1875 on a free-lance basis (see figures 2, 4, 15, 16, and 20).

Aside from his apprenticeship at Bufford's, Homer's formal art training was limited. According to Sheldon, Homer attended a drawing school in Brooklyn when he first came to New York. By 1860 he was sufficiently advanced to exhibit for the first time at the National Academy of Design, New York's major art institution, where he showed a work called *Skating on the Central*





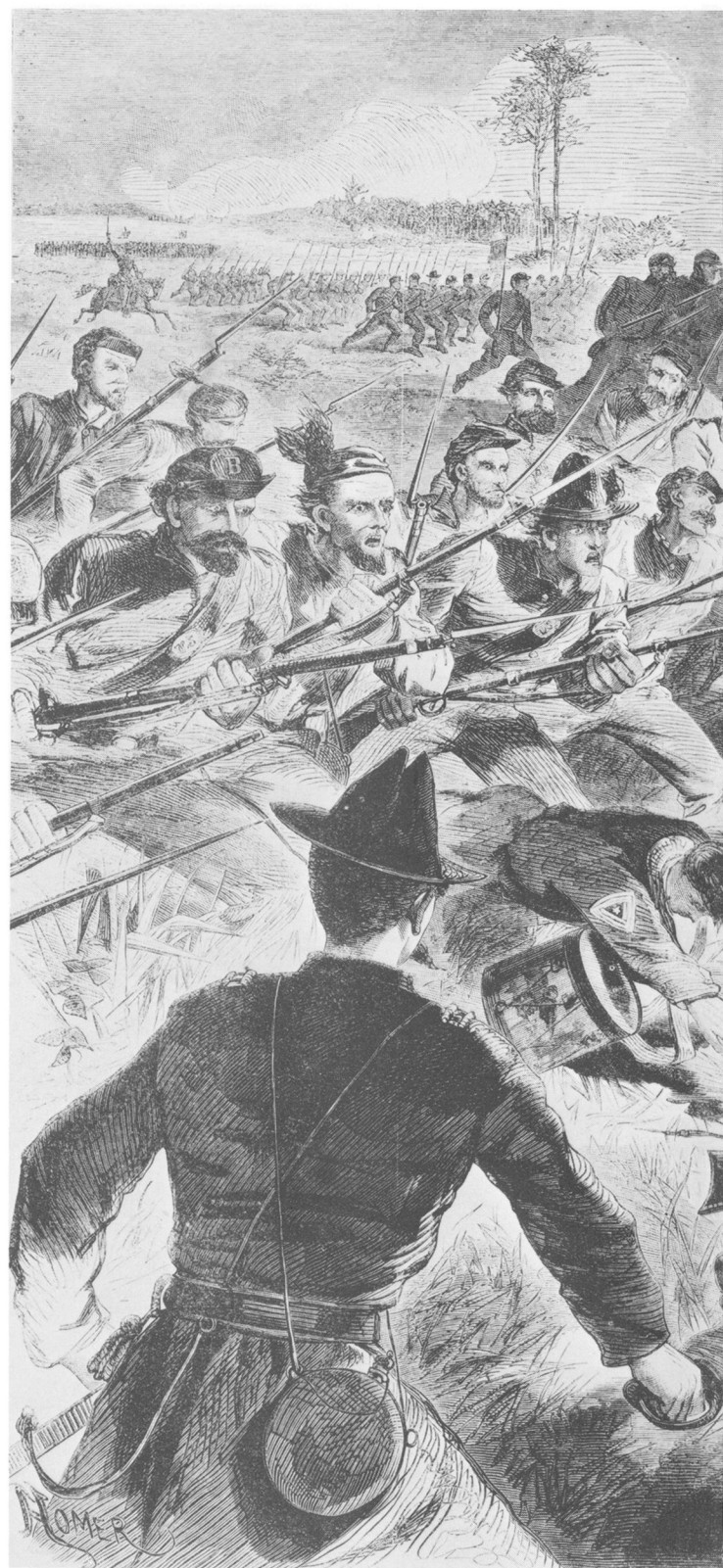
*Park*. Homer attended night classes at the National Academy under Thomas Seir Cummings and took a month's private lessons with Frédéric Rondel, a French landscape and genre painter. "Once a week, on Saturdays [Rondel] taught him how to handle his brush, set his palette, etc. The next summer he bought a tin box containing brushes, colors, oils, and various equipments and started into the country to paint from Nature." In 1861 Homer took a studio in the New York University Building on Washington Square, where the portraitist and genre painter Eastman Johnson also worked. Thomas Bailey Aldrich described Homer's new studio as "altogether too small for a man to have a large idea in."

When the Civil War broke out, Homer became an artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*. Assigned to the Army of the Potomac, he visited its camp in October 1861 and, as military records show, spent a month—from April to early May, 1862—on the Peninsular Campaign.

The war was the subject of Homer's earliest oil paintings. The engraving *The Army of the Potomac—A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty* (figure 3), after a painting described as Homer's "first picture in oils," was published in *Harper's* in the fall of 1862. Homer's friend the artist Roswell Morse Shurtleff reported: "His very first picture in oils . . . represented a 'Sharpshooter' seated in a big top, aiming at a distant 'Reb,' a canvas about 16 by 20. I sat with him many days while he worked on it, and remember discussing with him how much he could ask for it. He decided not less than sixty dollars, as that was what Harper paid him for a full page drawing on the wood."

From 1863 Homer exhibited his paintings at the National Academy of Design on a regular basis, and, in 1865, at the age of twenty-nine, he was elected an Aca-

3 • As a free-lance artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly* during the Civil War, Homer made studies that served as models for illustrations. *The Army of the Potomac—A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty* is based on one of Homer's earliest paintings and exhibits his strong sense of design. *Harper's Weekly* 6 (Nov. 15, 1862), p. 724. Wood engraving, 9 x 13¾ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1929, 29.88.3(5)





4 • Homer's war illustrations depicted scenes from the home front, camp life (sometimes verging on caricature), and the battlefield. *The War for the Union, 1862—A Bayonet Charge*, with its exaggerated gestures and facial contortions, is one of his most expressive treatments of violent confrontation on the field. *Harper's Weekly* 6 (July 12, 1862), pp. 440–41. Wood engraving, 13¾ x 20⅞ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1929, 29.88.3(3)





demician. The same year, which was the year the Civil War ended, he completed *The Veteran in a New Field* (figure 5). In contrast to more traditional postbellum works, such as George Inness's idyllic landscape *Peace and Plenty* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) of the same year, which also celebrates the return to the land and the "reunion of man and nature," Homer's image is unconventional in form and content and bears the original stamp that distinguishes his work. The veteran, a solitary figure shown from the back and symmetrically placed in the immediate foreground, is represented at work with a six-bladed scythe, harvesting a field of grain. The figure is the vertical focal point of a stark horizontal composition arranged in three successive bands. A rich yet restricted palette adds to the intensity of the image and complements the austerity of the composition. The figure is shown under the harsh light of a high sun. This lighting effect, favored by the artist in his early paintings, gives his figures their pronounced sculptural quality. The blue sky, a broadly painted flat expanse, provides a contrast to the rich, glistening, burnished cut grain, executed with vigorous, fine brushwork simulating the texture of fallen stalks. The deliberately shallow space adds to the prominence and monumentality of the single figure. Homer's choice of a back view has been said to contribute to the "anonymous and universal quality" of the image, yet, by introducing a small detail, he identifies the veteran as a former Union soldier. The canteen resting on the discarded jacket on the right bears a red cloverleaf, the insignia of the First Division of the Second Corps. On his trips to the front, Homer was attached to the Sixty-First New York Volunteers, one of the regiments of this division. The red cloverleaf was one of the artist's favorite motifs, as much probably for its personal associations as for its value as a note of vivid color; it recurs in Homer's war paintings and adds a note of authentic detail drawn from the artist's experience in the best tradition of realism.

Homer's sources for the image are problematical. To his friend of Bufford days, Joseph Foxcroft Cole, Homer once observed that "if a man wants to be an artist, he should never look at paintings." Homer's reticence on the subject of sources and influence and his avowed independence place the burden of proof solely on the visual evidence offered by his work.

The extent to which European art, specifically French art, exerted an influence prior to Homer's first trip abroad is debatable. As Peter Bermingham observed, Homer's friends in Boston and New York included the most avid admirers of Barbizon art, and he had ample opportunity to study the subject, if initially chiefly through prints. John La Farge reported that Homer's education, like his

5, 6 • Completed in the year the Civil War ended, *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865) celebrates man's return to the land from the battlefield. The insignia on the veteran's canteen identifies him as a former Union soldier. When published as a wood engraving, the image underwent several changes, including the omission of the insignia, which created a more anonymous image of the veteran retired from war. Upper right: oil on canvas, 24½ x 38½ inches. Bequest of Adelaide Milton de Groot (1876–1967), 1967, 67.187.131. Lower right: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 25 (July 13, 1867), p. 268. Wood engraving, 4½ x 6¼ inches.

own, had "been developed from the studies of especially the French masters of whom there were only a very few examples in the country as far as painting went. . . . We had to depend on the engravings and especially the very wonderful lithographs, which gave us the synopsis of a great deal of European art." Homer's heroic image of the solitary farmer at work bears a superficial resemblance to the theme of the peasant laborer made famous by Jean-François Millet, one of the leading figures of the Barbizon school. However, unlike Millet's idealized representations, which are rooted in the classical tradition, Homer's ingenuous image has all the deliberate imperfections of the factual, which leads to the conclusion that it was in all probability based on Homer's studies from life.

**I**n 1866 Homer completed *Prisoners from the Front* (figure 10), the work that established his reputation. An arresting contemporary statement on America's tragic national conflict, it represents a group of three Confederate prisoners facing their captor, a Union officer. Using a classical friezelike arrangement for his protagonists, Homer demonstrates his illustrative skill in delineating character; in the descriptive detail of the faces, postures, poses, and dress of the figures Homer created a series of psychologically penetrating individual portraits. The drama of the confrontation is heightened by the isolation of these figures from the sketchily rendered dismounted soldiers in the middle distance. The desolate setting, the scene of a skirmish or battle, adds to the drama and provides a description of nature in a ravaged state that sharply contrasts to the landscape in *The Veteran in a New Field*. Although the earlier painting shares several compositional similarities with *Prisoners from the Front* and is a canvas of the same dimensions, it was not intended as a pendant.

The art critic and painter Henry T. Tuckerman described the work as "an actual scene in the war for the Union." The painting was the subject of a comprehensive









7, 8 • *For Rainy Day in Camp* (above), dated 1871, Homer returned to studies made during the Civil War. In this calculated and unconventional composition, the artist used a series of favorite motifs that recur in different arrangements in other paintings and prints: the receding row of army horses and the tethered mule; the camp wagon shown from the back with a horse or mule behind it; a group of soldiers around a campfire; and the figure of the soldier wrapped in his coat to the right of the fire. *Soldiers Around a Camp Fire* (left), a pencil-and-wash drawing made during the war, served as the model for the foreground group. Above: oil on canvas, 20 x 36 inches. Gift of Mrs. William F. Milton, 1923, 23.77.1. Left: pencil-and-wash drawing on brown paper, 4½ x 6¼ inches. Formerly in the collection of Amherst College, Mead Art Museum, Amherst, Massachusetts.



study by Nicolai Cikovsky, who concluded that, while it did not represent a specific incident, it was “an entirely plausible and deeply meaningful blend of reality and fiction, of actuality and artifice.” Recently, however, D. R. Lauter has proposed that it represents Confederate Colonel John A. Baker of the Third North Carolina Cavalry and two southern soldiers captured on June 21, 1864, by Brigadier-General Francis Channing Barlow.

Barlow (1834-1896) was commanding officer of the First Division of the Second Corps from April to August, 1864. A college classmate of Homer's brother Charles and a family friend, Barlow aided Homer during his visit to the front in April 1862 and mentioned the artist in three letters home. An account of Homer's portrait of Barlow (see figure 9), provided by Barlow's son, reveals one typical aspect of the artist's working methods. “In 1893,” Barlow's son reported to the Metropolitan,

my father Francis C. Barlow, a couple of . . . friends, and several other guests of Nelson A. Miles, then commander-in-chief of the U.S. Army, went on a trip out West with General Miles. General Miles and my father had served together during the Civil War, General Miles being directly under my father as both of them were successively promoted. He and my father told many stories about each other. One story which my father told got a very amusing rise out of Miles. During the war Winslow Homer had been at the front and had painted pictures of soldiers there. . . . One of Homer's pictures represented some confederate prisoners being inspected by a Union officer. Miles was a very fine figure of a man, and my father was nothing special in this respect. So Homer got Miles to pose for the officer's figure. Then when the figure was finished, Homer put my father's head on top of Miles's body, apparently merely because my father held higher rank than Miles. At any rate Miles was seriously annoyed.

The enthusiastic reception that greeted *Prisoners from the Front* when it was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1866 firmly established the artist's reputation. The critic of the *New York Evening Post* singled out its “integrity of purpose and directness of statement,” and its “force in rendering character . . . 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,” and concluded: “It is a genuine example of true historical art—the only kind of historical art which is trustworthy in its facts, free from flimsy rhetoric and barbaric splendor; sensible, vigorous, honest.” It was one of two paintings by the artist shown at the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1867, where it received critical acclaim.

Late in 1866 Homer went to Europe for the first time and spent a year in France. “That he visited the Louvre



9, 10 (overleaf) • This pencil study of Brigadier-General Francis Channing Barlow (1834–1896) served as a model for the Union officer in Homer's *Prisoners from the Front* (overleaf). Pentimenti in the painting reveal that Homer originally meant to follow the pose of his study, but subsequently altered it. In *Prisoners from the Front*, a scene of confrontation between a Union officer and three highly characterized Confederate prisoners, Homer presented a novel and original image of the Civil War. Above: *Bust Portrait of an Officer* [Brigadier-General Francis Channing Barlow] and *Insignia on Sleeve of Confederate Soldier*, pencil, 9½ x 13¼ inches. Courtesy of Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design. Overleaf: oil on canvas, 24 x 38 inches. Gift of Mrs. Frank B. Porter, 1922, 22.207

and the Luxembourg and the Cluny and the picture galleries of the international exposition may be taken for granted,” his early biographer, William Howe Downes, reported, “but what he thought of all that he saw there he never told anybody.” In Paris he shared a studio in Montmartre with Albert W. Kelsey, a friend from Belmont, Massachusetts, and probably also met with his colleague from Bufford's, Joseph Foxcroft Cole. Homer visited the Louvre and the Universal Exposition, where *Prisoners from the Front* was on display. He probably also saw the independent exhibition, outside the exposition, of the works of Courbet, the leading exponent of realism, and Manet, whose bold approach, original style, and simplified forms made him a controversial figure in Parisian art circles of the 1860s. It is doubtful that Homer had the opportunity to see any works by the artists subsequently known as the Impressionists, who did not hold their first group exhibition until 1874. Similarities









HOMER 1866







to works of Monet and Degas observed in Homer's paintings probably originate in their common approach to painting—based on observation, the direct study of nature, and an interest in the effects of light on form. Moreover, Homer had in his personal library an 1859 translation of M. E. Chevreul's *The Laws of Contrast of Colour* (a gift from his brother in 1860 and a work he referred to as his "Bible"). But, unlike that of his more controversial French contemporaries, Homer's work is dominated by descriptive elements, a world experienced in a tangible way, and things depicted as separate, distinct entities. Throughout his life Homer's artistic development owed more to direct observation of nature than to the influence of the works of other artists.

The work long known as *Musical Amateurs* or *Amateur Musicians* (figure 11), dated 1867, was painted either in Paris or immediately after Homer's return to New York that year. The painting can be identified as a work originally called *The Studio*, exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1868, where a critic for the *Round Table* grouped it among "the good things." A cellist and a violinist are shown practicing in an artist's studio. A sheet of music inscribed "W. A. Mozart" rests on the floor to the right, canvases are stacked behind the musicians to the left and against the back wall, and easels have been put to use as music stands.

The distinctive French character of this work, often compared with paintings by Degas, is evident in the subject, the composition, and the execution. The subjects of the studio and the musical performance, combined here, were especially popular with the French avant-garde. The informality of the music makers, absorbed in their rehearsal in a studio setting, is strongly suggestive of bohemian life. In addition, the use of a strong overhead light to accentuate the contours of the forms, the technique (pronounced rough and sketchlike by the critics), the bold simplicity of the composition, consisting of diverging diagonals in a rectilinear format, and the fragmentary nature of the image have their counterparts in French art.

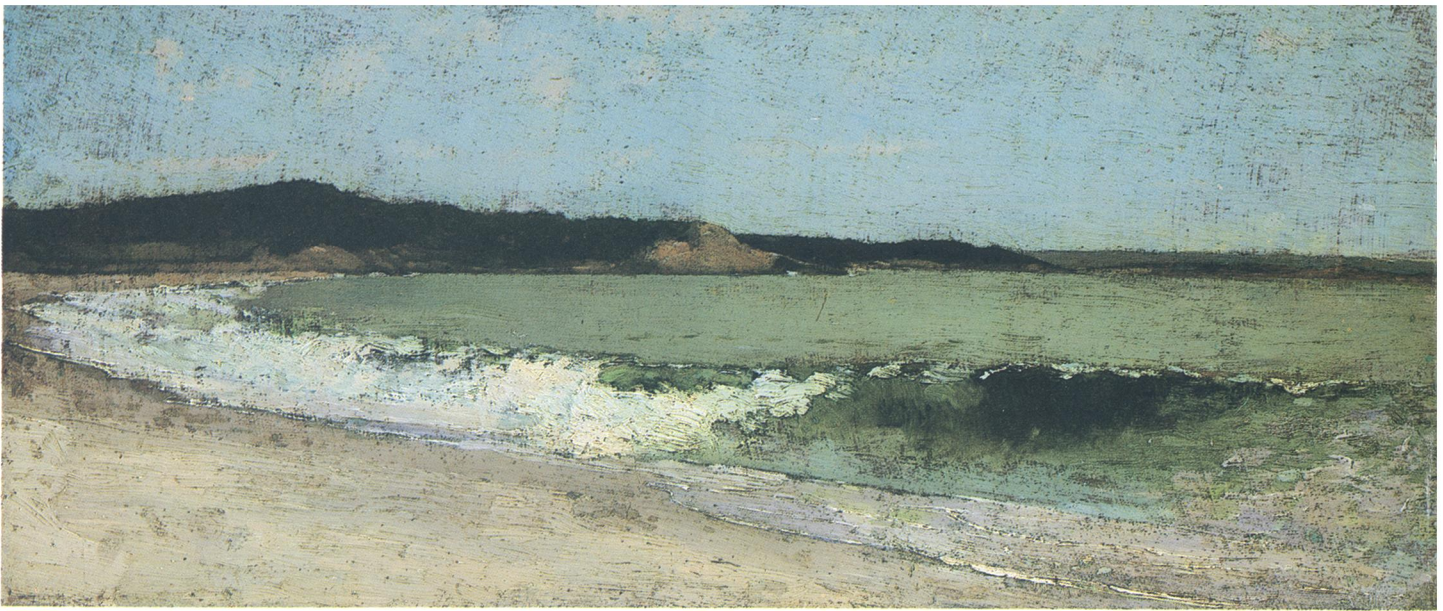
The effect of Homer's trip to France on his painting style was neither profound nor enduring, to judge from the works he painted upon his return. As Lloyd Goodrich observed, it manifested itself for a brief period, chiefly in Homer's use of a lighter or more highly keyed palette

and his broader approach to the application of paint, as exemplified by such works as the painting long known as *High Tide* or *High Tide: The Bathers* (figure 13). Dated 1870, this work was originally called *Eagle Head, Manchester, Mass.* when it was first exhibited at the National Academy of Design in the spring of the same year. *High Tide* represents three women bathers and a dog on a beach. A distant sailboat, two birds in flight, and small figures on the shore at the left add minute notes of anecdotal interest to what is otherwise a desolate scene. The unembellished starkness of the image, the sense of space made tangible, the harsh light, the long shadows, the startled dog, its tail expressively tucked under, and what Barbara Novak has described as the physical proximity yet psychological estrangement of the three figures—two of them are rendered anonymous—contribute to the disquieting quality of the work. Contemporary critics reviewing the academy exhibition found the picture unsatisfactory. With few exceptions its disturbing quality went largely unnoticed, and attention was focused on the subject, Homer's technical shortcomings, and the lack of propriety in the bathers' costumes. The critic for the *New York World*, one of the few noting "the mystery of Eagle Head," remarked that it was "a well-drawn" but "atrociously-colored bathing scene." He concluded that there was "no excuse for the exhibition of Mr. Homer's experiments in originality; experiments which have not yet attained the significance of pictures, but which serve only to convince the critic predisposed to careful study, that the artist is laboring under an aberration of mind."

**I**n 1872 Homer took a studio in the celebrated Tenth Street Studio Building in New York. The painter John Ferguson Weir recalled the period in his reminiscences: "Winslow Homer, E. L. Henry and I, were the three youngest men in the studios. Homer was then drawing for *Harper's Weekly*, and struggling to get out of it to take up more important work. Our relations were intimate; that is, as much so as one could be really intimate with Homer, for he was of reserved manner." Although he lived in the city for some twenty years, the urban scene, with a few exceptions, had no place in Homer's

11 • *The Studio* (1867), painted in Paris or shortly after the artist's return from his first trip abroad, reflects the influence of French art on Homer's work. A cellist in a studio setting is the subject of a related painting by the artist called *The Cellist* (Baltimore Museum of Art), dated the same year and inscribed "Paris." Oil on canvas, 18 x 15 inches. Samuel D. Lee Fund, 1939, 39.14



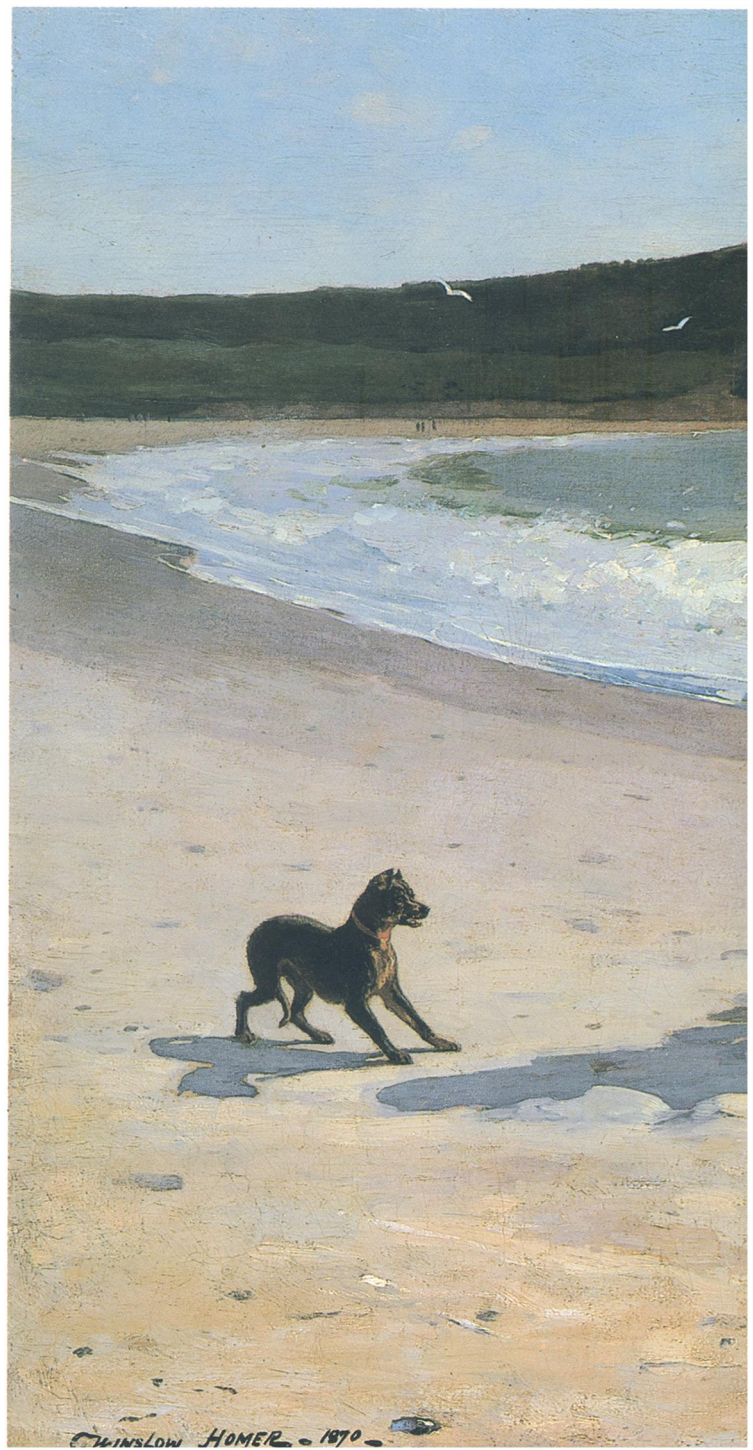


paintings and illustrations. The fashionable diversions of country life and the rural scene were his subjects after the war. Homer explored the world of summer resorts and watering places on summer trips to the White Mountains, Lake George, Saratoga, and Long Branch. The rural scene provided a counterpoint to the more urbane amusements of fashionable resorts, and children were often the focal point of these rustic works.

*Snap the Whip* (figure 17), which represents a group of schoolboys at play, is one of Homer's best-known compositions. The popularity of images of children following the Civil War has been attributed at times to an optimistic prognosis of the nation's future and a nostalgic exercise in lost innocence. What distinguished Homer's handling of the subject in the 1870s from that of all but a few of his contemporaries was his candid objectivity and lack of sentimental undercurrents. In composition, use of light, modeling of form, and painting technique, Homer followed an established formula that characterizes many of his early figure pieces: the placement of figures in the immediate foreground in a friezelike arrangement, which ultimately derives from classical art, and the use of a high, overhead light that defines form, provides sharp contrasts of dark and light, and creates dense shadows.

In *Snap the Whip* Homer provided an exuberant image of rural America that satisfied the growing demand for works of a national character in the aftermath of the Civil War, when America was increasingly conscious of its identity and alerted as well to the growing influence of European art on its artists.

It was works of this type that the anglophile Henry James condemned in a review of Homer's paintings at the National Academy of Design in 1875. Rejecting Homer's choice of subject matter, James nevertheless provided an account of his painting style that was especially perceptive:

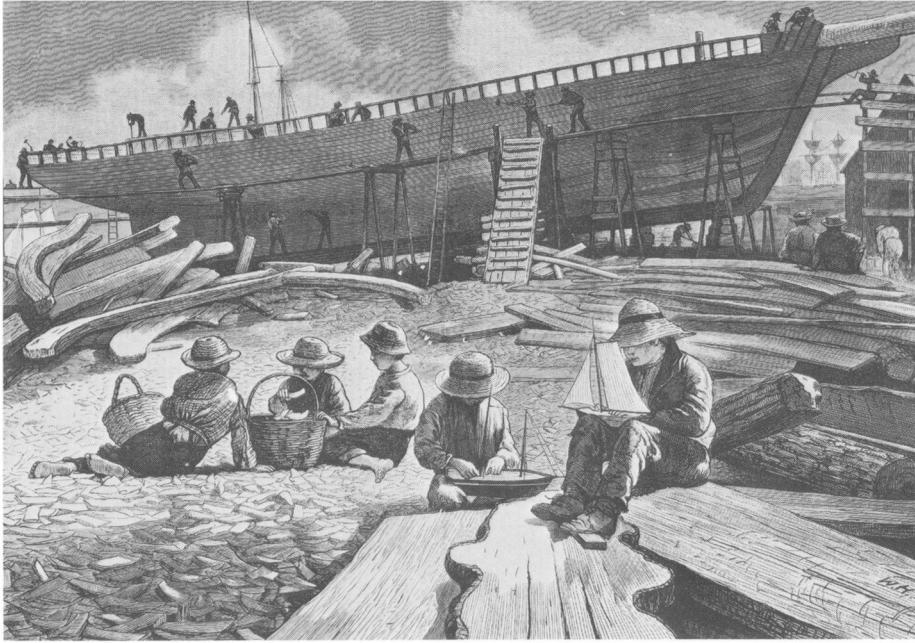




12–14 · Long known as *High Tide: The Bathers* (below), Homer's painting of three curiously estranged figures on a beach has been identified as *Eagle Head, Manchester, Mass.*, shown at the National Academy of Design in 1870. A small oil painting on wood (left) was a preparatory study for the work. Because of either criticism of the picture or the demands of popular illustration, considerable changes were made in the woodcut after the painting (right). The two bare-legged figures were rendered respectable with drawers; the face of the seated figure, given a simpering cupid's-bow mouth, became a more prosaic, fashionably conventional type; the dog was replaced by a bathing cap; the headland was made less prominent; the distant beach was made more hospitable with people and bath-houses; and narrative details were introduced. Left: oil on panel, 9<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. Bequest of Mary Cushing Fosburgh, 1978, 1979.135.1. Below: oil on canvas, 26 x 38 inches. Gift of Mrs. William F. Milton, 1923, 23.77.3. Right: *High Tide—From a Painting by Winslow Homer. Every Saturday* 1 (August 6, 1870), p. 504. Wood engraving, 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 12 inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1930, 30.75.1(1)

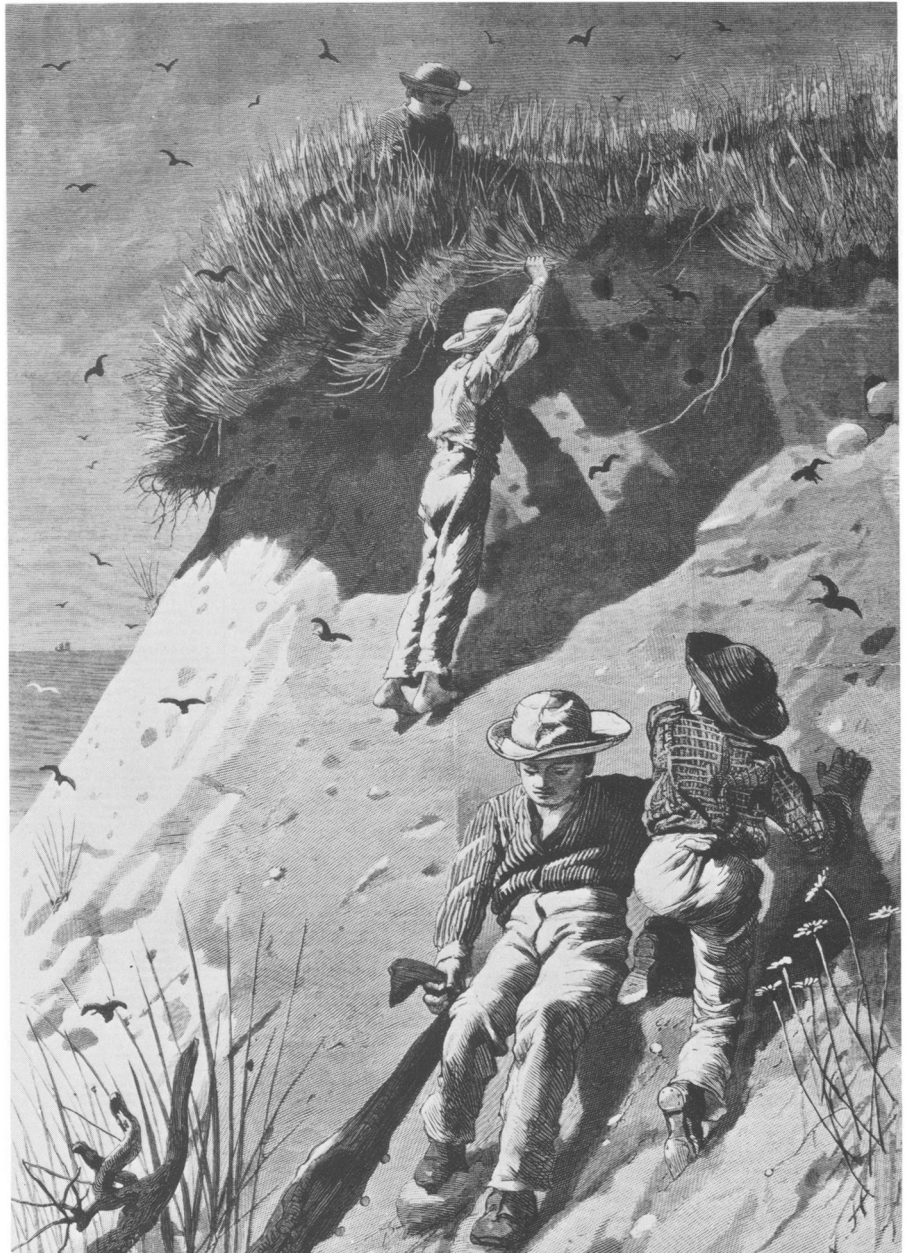






15 • Homer continued to create illustrations for *Harper's Weekly* on a free-lance basis until 1875. He spent part of the summer of 1873 at Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he began to experiment extensively in watercolor. Many of the illustrations of that year, including *Ship-Building, Gloucester Harbor*, above, are based on watercolors and paintings from this visit to Gloucester. *Harper's Weekly* 17 (Oct. 11, 1873), p. 900. Wood engraving, 9 x 13¾ inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1929, 29.88.9(8)

16 • Published in 1874, the year preceding Homer's last contribution to *Harper's*, *Raid on a Sand-Swallow Colony*—"How Many Eggs?" is among his best works in the graphic medium. A more deliberate approach to composition and the studied disposition of contrasting values of light and dark distinguish his illustrations of the 1870s. The importance of cast shadows and their function in creating the illusion of volume is evident in many of Homer's illustrations and paintings, including this engraving. With the strong diagonals formed by the figures and the vertical format, this is one of the artist's most successful compositions. *Harper's Weekly* 18 (June 13, 1874), p. 496. Wood engraving by Lagarde, 13¾ x 9 inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.111.6(5)





Mr. Homer goes in, as the phrase is, for perfect realism. . . . He is a genuine painter; that is, to see, and to reproduce what he sees, is his only care. . . . He is almost barbarously simple, and, to our eye, he is horribly ugly; but there is nevertheless something one likes about him. What is it? For ourselves, it is not his subjects. We frankly confess that we detest his subjects—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, his calico sun-bonnets, his flannel shirts, his cowhide boots. He has chosen the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization; he has resolutely treated them as if they were pictorial, as if they were every inch as good as Capri or Tangiers; and, to reward his audacity, he has incontestably succeeded. . . . Mr. Homer has the great merit, moreover, that he naturally sees everything at one with its envelope of light and air. He sees not in lines, but in masses, in gross broad masses. Things come already modelled to his eye.

**T**he lives of black people were treated by Homer in a series of works drawn from the artist's experience of the Civil War and Reconstruction and travels in the West Indies. About 1875, a year before the celebration of America's centennial—which itself sparked a renewed interest in art of a recognizably American character—Homer returned to Petersburg, Virginia, where he made studies of blacks, which served as the basis for a group of paintings produced chiefly in 1876 and 1877. One of these was *The Carnival* (figure 19), called *Preparing for the Carnival* when it was shown in Boston in 1878 and *Dressing for the Carnival* when it was offered for sale in New York in 1879. The picture is dated 1877 and was presumably painted from sketches made in Virginia some two years earlier. The focal point of the composition is a rather grave, preoccupied young man, flanked by two women, who, with equally disquieting solemnity and intense concentration, are putting the finishing touches on his harlequin costume. The fierce, pipe-smoking woman on the right, a dominant figure by virtue of her position and her eloquent, expansive gesture in working her thread, is among the more memorable figures in Homer's works and one of his rare fully realized character studies. This group of three central figures is subject to the scrutiny of a cluster of children depicted in various stages of awe, barely suppressed elation, and expectancy. Two of the children carry American flags, which led Harry B. Wehle to conjecture that the scene represents preparations for the celebration of Independence Day. Moreover, the contrasting character of the

adults and children and the somberness of the man preparing to play the clown suggest undercurrents of meaning beyond the simple preparations for a holiday. Stylistically the painting displays several features characteristic of Homer's early works. The figures are again placed in the immediate foreground in the essentially friezelike classical format Homer favored in his early figure compositions. The friezelike arrangement is reinforced by the wooden fence, which extends along the width of the painting in the middle ground. The dense foliage in the background, interrupted at the right by a group of frame houses with tall red-brick chimney stacks, also serves to minimize the illusion of depth. Homer's use of a harsh overhead light to model forms and to give his figures their sculptural quality is another characteristic feature. Perhaps the most distinguishing element in the work is Homer's use of color. In contrast to the rather muted, low-keyed background, the foreground figures are painted using a wide-ranging palette and contrasting colors in their most saturated intensity. The patchlike application of paint effectively complements the brilliantly colored decorative patches of the harlequin costume, which provide an ironic contrast to the utilitarian patches on the clothes of the onlookers.

Homer's first recorded visit to the Adirondacks was made in September 1870. Accompanied by the painters Eliphalet Terry and John Fitch, he stayed at a farm belonging to a family named Baker, near Minerva, New York. In succeeding years he returned frequently to the Adirondacks, often in the company of his brother Charles, with whom he shared a love of fishing, hunting, camping, and the outdoor life the wilderness offered. Both were charter members of the North Woods Club, founded near Minerva in 1886. According to the painter Roswell M. Shurtleff, *Camp Fire* (figure 21), dated 1880, was painted in Keene Valley, New York, in the Adirondacks. Shurtleff reported that the painting "was so real, a woodsman could tell what kind of logs were burning by the sparks that rose in long curved lines." The painting was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1880 and discussed in the April 1880 issue of the *Art Journal*. Emphasizing Homer's preference for painting directly from nature out-of-doors, Sheldon reported that Homer occasionally improvised to achieve a desired effect:

His "Adirondack Camp-Fire" is almost an example in point. He painted it out-doors; but the large tree on the [right], the line of which answers to the line of one of the poles of the tent, is not in the original scene. He found it elsewhere, built a fire in front of it, observed the effect, and transferred it to the canvas. With this exception, the composition is a general transcript of the surroundings of a fire lighted one night while he was camping in the Adirondacks.





17, 18 · A chalk drawing (below) served as the model for two versions of *Snap the Whip* (Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art) painted in 1872. The Youngstown version differs from the Metropolitan's painting (above) in the addition of another figure and a mountainous background. Homer's image of boys at play in

front of a schoolhouse celebrates the world of childhood with the uncompromising candor that distinguishes his work. Above: oil on canvas, 12 x 20 inches. Gift of Christian A. Zabriskie, 1950, 50.41. Below: *Snap the Whip*, black chalk on green paper, 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches. Courtesy of Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design







19 • Dated 1877, *Preparing for the Carnival* (also called *The Carnival* and *Dressing for the Carnival*), is one of a group of paintings of black American life that Homer made from studies done on a trip to Petersburg, Virginia, in about 1875. Arranging his figures in friezelike fashion (a favorite compositional formula that the artist also used in *Snap the Whip*), Homer presents an enigmatic work that seems to suggest more than the simple preparations for a carnival. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1922, 22.220

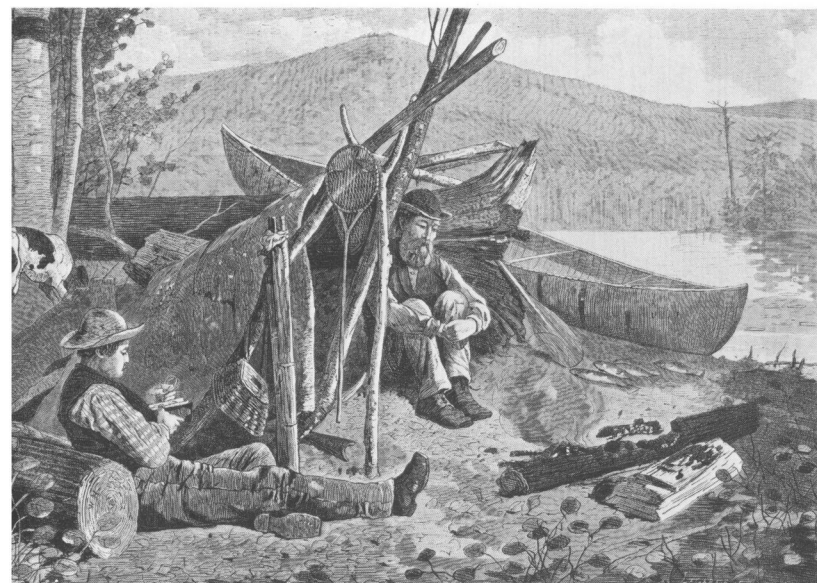
The accuracy of Sheldon's report is debatable. Many of the major elements of the painting are found in Homer's wood engraving of some six years earlier called *Camping Out in the Adirondack Mountains*, published in *Harper's Weekly* on November 7, 1874 (figure 20).

A quality of alienation similar to that seen in *High Tide* is apparent in this work. The fishermen are isolated in their separate preoccupations. The individuality of the self-absorbed seated figure at the right suggests that it

might be a portrait—perhaps of Homer's brother Charles. *Camp Fire* demonstrates Homer's skill as a colorist and his strong sense of surface design. The shower of shooting sparks issuing from the campfire, the ornate yet severe decorative detailing of berries and foliage, and the forceful compositional diagonals of the shelter and the fallen tree create a surface pattern that is equalled only in such works as James McNeill Whistler's *Nocturnes*. Albert T. Gardner observed in *Camp Fire* a prime example of the influence of oriental art on Homer's work and suggested that the artist was familiar with Japanese prints of fireworks.

Unlike his contemporaries who flocked to Paris during the 1880s, Homer, on his second trip to Europe in 1881, traveled to England and settled at Cullercoats, a village on the North Sea not far from Tynemouth and Newcastle. The two years spent in England were almost entirely devoted to watercolor painting, and the studies Homer produced of the life of the North Sea fishermen and their

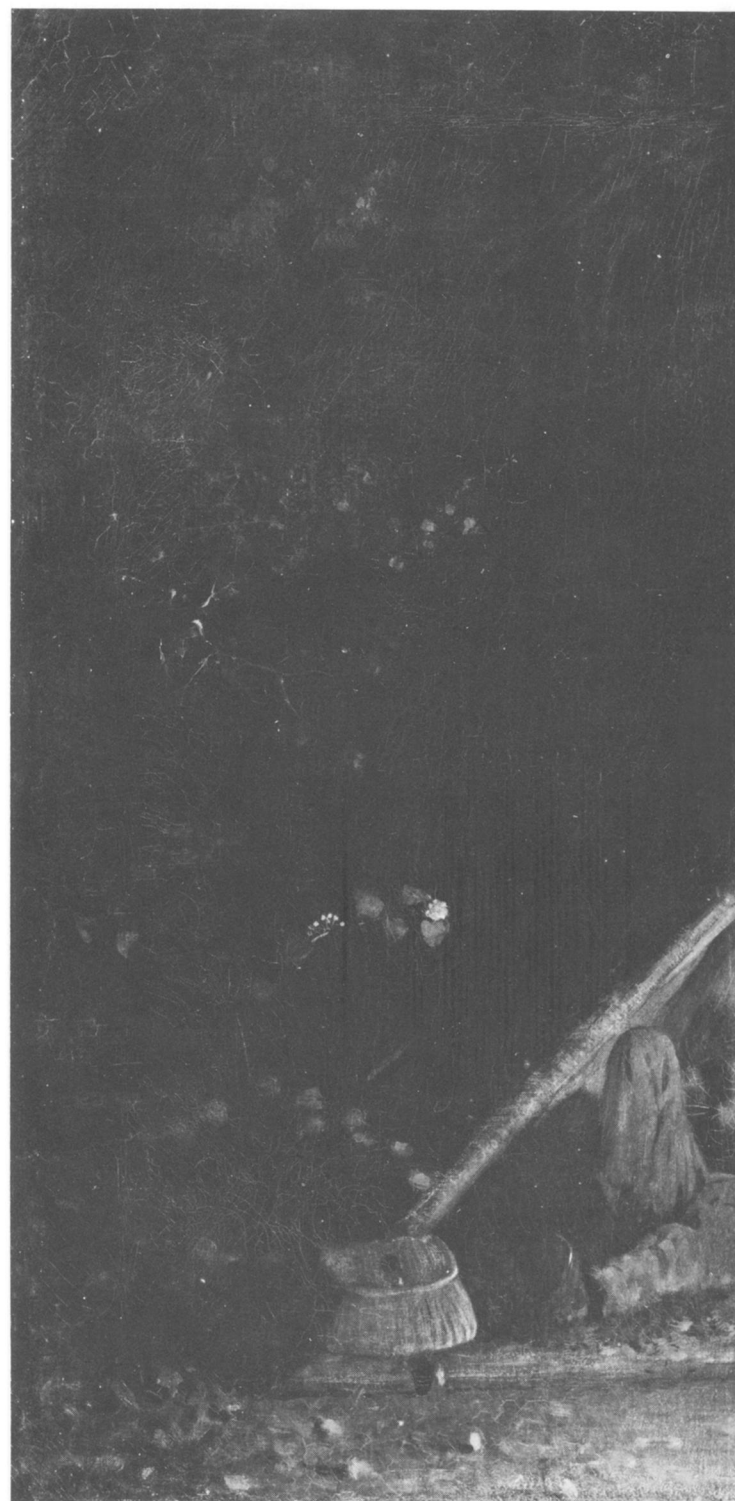




families furnished thematic material for a series of watercolors, paintings, and etchings executed in the years following his return to America. Noting Homer's "natural and unstudied adherence to literal truth" and his "power or faculty of seeing things in their integrity, and of rendering that aspect of them in pictures," William Howe Downes remarked that "the entire Tynemouth series of watercolors was precisely as true to English facts, conditions, and character as the American pictures had been to American facts, conditions, and character."

*Inside the Bar, Tynemouth* (figure 23), dated 1883, one year after the artist's return to America, is based on material gathered in the fishing village. A characteristic feature of Homer's English studies is his monumental and idealized figure of the North Sea woman, who appears here as the focal point of a studied and somewhat self-conscious composition. Working in a somber palette of blue, brown, and gray watercolor used opaquely, the artist recorded the changing climatic conditions of the North Sea coast. Such works of the early eighties mark a departure in subject matter and style from Homer's early genre paintings and illustrations and anticipate the superlative marines of his later years.

Homer spent the early summer of 1883 in Atlantic City, where he made the acquaintance of members of the lifesaving crews. *The Life Line* (Philadelphia Museum of Art), a dramatic painting of a rescue scene at sea, was completed in 1884. Two months later Homer began *The Life Line* (figure 24), the first in a series of eight plates made between 1884 and 1889 (see figures 26, 27) after his paintings and English watercolors. The etchings produced during this period represent a major new phase in the artist's graphic work. Homer's style in these works, perhaps under the influence of his training as an illus-



20, 21 • *Camp Fire* (above) of 1880, according to one contemporary critic, was painted from life in the Adirondacks. Many of its features appeared some six years earlier, however, in a wood engraving called *Camping Out in the Adirondack Mountains* (left). As is often the case with prints related to Homer's paintings, it has a more pronounced anecdotal character. In *Camp Fire*, the tackle basket and net remain to identify the fishermen, but many of the narrative elements present in the print—the lake, canoe, dog, and fish—have been eliminated. The seated fisherman in the





painting strongly resembles both the central figure in *Shooting the Rapids, Saguenay River* (figure 39) and an early watercolor portrait of the artist's brother Charles. Homer's strong sense of surface pattern and design, evident in the bold effect of the shooting sparks, finds counterparts in Whistler's Nocturnes and Japanese prints of fireworks. Left: *Harper's Weekly* 18 (Nov. 7, 1874), p. 920. Wood engraving by Lagarde,  $9\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928, 28.111.6(11). Above: oil on canvas,  $23\frac{3}{4} \times 38\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Gift of Henry Keney Pomeroy, 1927, 27.181

22 (overleaf) • *Moonlight, Wood Island Light* was painted in 1894, some ten years after Homer had settled at Prouts Neck, Maine. The subject of this work is precisely described in its title. The moon is hidden by clouds, but the effects of moonlight are dramatically captured in the barely perceptible graying of the sky, the light-tinged clouds, and the reflections on the water, which are boldly suggested with broad, eloquent brushstrokes. A red light on the horizon from the lighthouse on Wood Island supplies the contrasting touch of red that Homer frequently introduced into his works. Oil on canvas,  $30\frac{3}{4} \times 40\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Gift of George A. Hearn, in memory of Arthur Hoppock Hearn, 1911, 11.116.2













trator, was chiefly dependent on line. As Lloyd Goodrich observed, dark areas or tonal variations were achieved by a concentration of line rather than by selective wiping or inking of the plate in the final printing process. Although his eight plates represent a major achievement in the medium, Homer used conservative techniques and did little experimenting, with the exception of the last known image, *Fly Fishing, Saranac Lake*.

One of his largest and finest etchings is *Eight Bells* (figure 27), dated 1887 and based on a painting of the same title from the preceding year (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover). During 1888 Homer produced three more plates, *Perils of the Sea* (figure 26), *A Voice from the Cliffs*, and *Mending the Tears*, using compositions of three of his English watercolors in reverse.

Homer stayed part of the summer of 1883 at Prouts Neck, a rocky peninsula on the Maine coast, several miles south of Portland, and soon afterward settled there permanently. It was at Prouts Neck that he found the subjects for some of his most powerful works. There the artist produced a series of marine paintings centered wholly on the drama of water, coast, and sky. These seascapes,

powerful and immediate expressions of nature (often presented in its less amiable moods) established Homer's reputation as America's major marine painter.

*Moonlight, Wood Island Light* (figure 22), done in 1894, is one of this group of major seascapes. Downes provides this account of Homer's work on the picture:

One night in the summer of 1894, he was sitting on a bench, smoking, with his nephew, in front of the studio. It was a beautiful evening, with quite a sea running, but not much wind. Of a sudden, Winslow Homer rose from his seat, and said: "I've got an idea! Good night, Arthur!" He almost ran into the studio, seized his painting outfit, emerged from the house, and clambered down over the rocks towards the shore. He worked there uninterruptedly until one o'clock in the morning. The picture called "Moonlight—Wood Island Light," was the result of that impulse and four or five hours' work. . . . It was painted wholly in and by the light of the moon, and never again retouched. The very essence of moonlight is in it.

Homer dealt with the subject of moonlight, one of the staple themes of romantic imagery, on many occasions





23 • The studies Homer made in Cullercoats, England, in 1881–82 of North Sea fishermen and their families provided subjects for works in later years such as the painting at the left. Dated 1883, it was originally called *Inside the Bar* when exhibited in the same year at the American Water Color Society. The focal point of the rather contrived and slightly asymmetrical composition is Homer's figure of a fisherwoman with basket in hand. The flanking boats are said to be typical of Cullercoats, although the work was long thought to represent Tynemouth. Working chiefly with blue, brown, and gray opaque watercolors and interjecting his characteristic red note in the woman's neckerchief, the artist captures the unpredictable climatic conditions of the North Sea coast. A departure in subject matter from his earlier genre pieces, such works inspired by his English trip prefigure the superb marines of later years. Pencil and watercolor, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 28 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Gift of Louise Ryals Arkell, in memory of Bartlett Arkell, 1954, 54.183

24 • In 1884 Homer completed *The Life Line* (below), the first of a series of eight plates etched between 1884 and 1889 after his paintings and English watercolors. *The Life Line* is based on a painting (Philadelphia Museum of Art) Homer completed in 1884. The subject was suggested by Homer's study of rescue operations in England, and of those at Atlantic City in the early summer of 1883. It is a vivid representation of man's struggle with nature, one of the artist's recurrent themes. Etching, 12 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924, 24.39.1

25 (overleaf) • *Northeaster* (1895), a work that captures the savage force and beauty of the turbulent sea, is one of Homer's unquestionable masterpieces. It also demonstrates Homer's coloristic skill and his consciousness of surface design, apparent in the asymmetrical composition and almost ornamental treatment of the central cresting wave and the burst of spray at the left. Oil on canvas, 34 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 50 inches. Gift of George A. Hearn, 1910, 10.64.5















26 • *Perils of the Sea* (left), one of three etchings Homer made in 1888, is based on a watercolor of 1881 (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts), executed during the artist's visit to Cullercoats. A crowd of men scans the stormy sea while two women wait on the walk for the return of the fishing fleet. The Watch House, a Victorian lifeboat station built in Cullercoats in 1879, which figured in several of Homer's works, is seen on the right. The original plate for this etching is one of five in the Museum's collection. Etching, 16½ x 22 inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924, 24.39.5

and in diverse ways. *Moonlight*, *Wood Island Light*, created with extraordinary economy of brushstroke and an equally restricted palette, is one of the artist's most effective and powerful representations of moonlight, sea, and sky. Large, bold strokes of white paint heavily applied in calligraphic fashion represent reflections of the light of the moon, which, as Downes pointed out, is not shown in the painting. A red light on the horizon, from the lighthouse off Biddeford Pool on Wood Island, provides the vivid note of contrasting color—invariably red—that Homer frequently introduced into his works and gives the picture its name.

Painted at Prouts Neck in 1895, *Northeaster* (figure 25) was exhibited the same year at M. Knoedler and Company, New York, but it remained unsold and was returned to the artist. In December 1900, Homer again shipped the painting to Knoedler and wrote: "You have already had it in your show window five years ago. I have painted on it since & it is better." Acquired by George A. Hearn, who subsequently presented it to the Metropolitan, *Northeaster* was exhibited in 1902 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where it was awarded the Temple Gold Medal. One of Homer's most powerful images of the sea, *Northeaster* demonstrates the artist's superb sense of pictorial design and his gift for grasping the essential character of the sea in one of its most turbulent moods. The broadly painted, dynamic composition, the proximity of the rocky shore in the foreground, and the use of a high horizon convey the immediate force of the breaking surf. The leaden sky, the seething white foam, the heaving green-blue water against the slate gray, brown, and mauve-colored rocks demonstrate Homer's skillful use of a limited palette to powerful effect. His virtuoso sense of surface design is





27 • *Eight Bells* (below) was etched in 1887 and based on a painting of 1886 (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts). Unlike *The Life Line* (figure 24), whose impact derives from its dramatic content, *Eight Bells* effectively interprets the routine activity of two seamen taking observations with a sextant and a chronometer. The asymmetrical composition, the translation of forms to patterns of light and dark, and the sculptural quality of the figures give this work a monumentality that distinguishes it as one of Homer's finest etchings. Etching, 19 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 25 inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924, 24.39.4

28 (overleaf) • *A Wall, Nassau* (1898) epitomizes Homer's complete command of the watercolor medium. With transparent washes and parts of the white paper left in reserve, Homer suggested the play of tropical sunlight on the irregular surface of a wall. Vivid-red frangipani, painted with a quick brush and expressive economy, provide rich punctuations of contrasting color against the blue sky and reflect Homer's fine decorative sense. Watercolor and pencil, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.9











Dec 31 1898  
Nassau





29 · One of twelve watercolors purchased by the Metropolitan after the artist's death from a group he considered his best, *Sloop, Bermuda* dates from a trip to that island in the winter of 1899. Here, Homer suggests an approaching storm in the swift gathering of dark clouds and captures the spectacular effects of tropical waters. Watercolor and pencil, 15 x 21½ inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.3





most evident in the almost purely ornamental flourish of the cresting wave at right of center and the calculated form of the cloud of spray dominating the left side of the asymmetrical composition.

Beginning in 1884 Homer often went south to Cuba, Nassau, Bermuda, or Florida to escape the harsh northern winters. He devoted most of his time on these trips to fishing and watercolor painting. The watercolors dating from his trips south during the 1880s, the 1890s, and the early years of the twentieth century are characterized by brilliant coloristic effects and, along with his watercolors of the Adirondacks and Canada, represent Homer's finest work in the medium. One group of watercolors, which Homer considered his best work, was kept at Prouts Neck, and the artist refused all offers to part with these pictures. After his death, twelve of these works, including *Palm Tree, Nassau* (cover), *Hurricane, Bahamas* (figure 33), and *A Wall, Nassau* (figure 28), all dated 1898, *Sloop, Bermuda* (figure 29) and *Flower Garden and Bungalow, Bermuda* (figure 38), of 1899, and *Fishing Boats, Key West* (figure 37), of 1903, were purchased by the Metropolitan. *A Wall, Nassau* dates from Homer's second visit to Nassau, in 1898. The brilliant clarity of color, the effect of the dazzling light and atmosphere of the tropics, and the effortless spontaneity of execution demonstrate Homer's mastery of the watercolor medium. Homer varies the saturation of his strong, clear colors from the opacity of the foliage to the transparent washes of the sky and the wall. The opulent contrast of red frangipani against the blue sky demonstrates Homer's acute sensitivity to the effects of contrasting color. The wall, rendered with transparent washes of gray and the white of the paper, dominates the composition of this unusually luminous watercolor. In *Palm Tree, Nassau* and *Hurricane, Bahamas* Homer deals with the tropics in a different mood. In the best romantic tradition, the vivid beauty of the tropics in *Palm Tree, Nassau* contrasts sharply with the suggestion of impending violence evident in the windblown palm tree and the red flag in front of the distant lighthouse signaling a storm warning. Using a low-keyed palette in *Hurricane, Bahamas*, Homer successfully captures the ominous character of a tropical storm, which transforms the scene with gathering gray clouds and windswept palms executed with a quick, fluent brush above a clustered complex of rooftops.

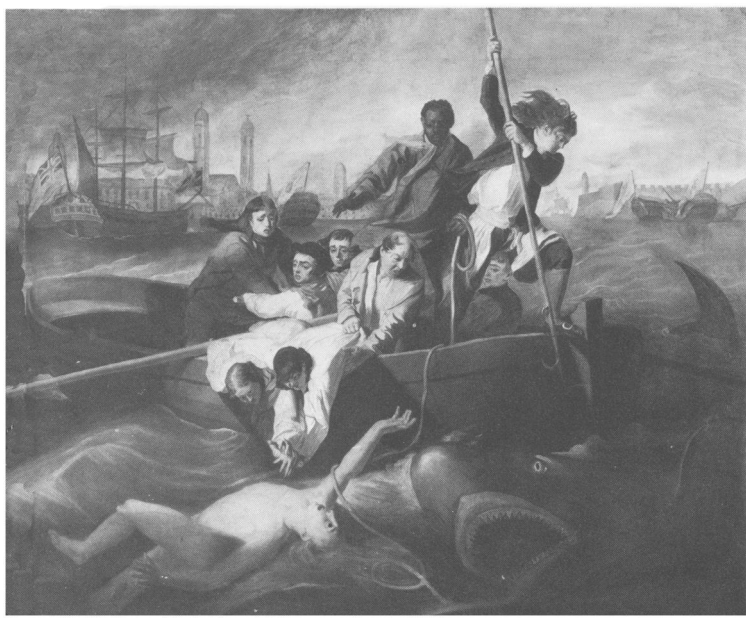
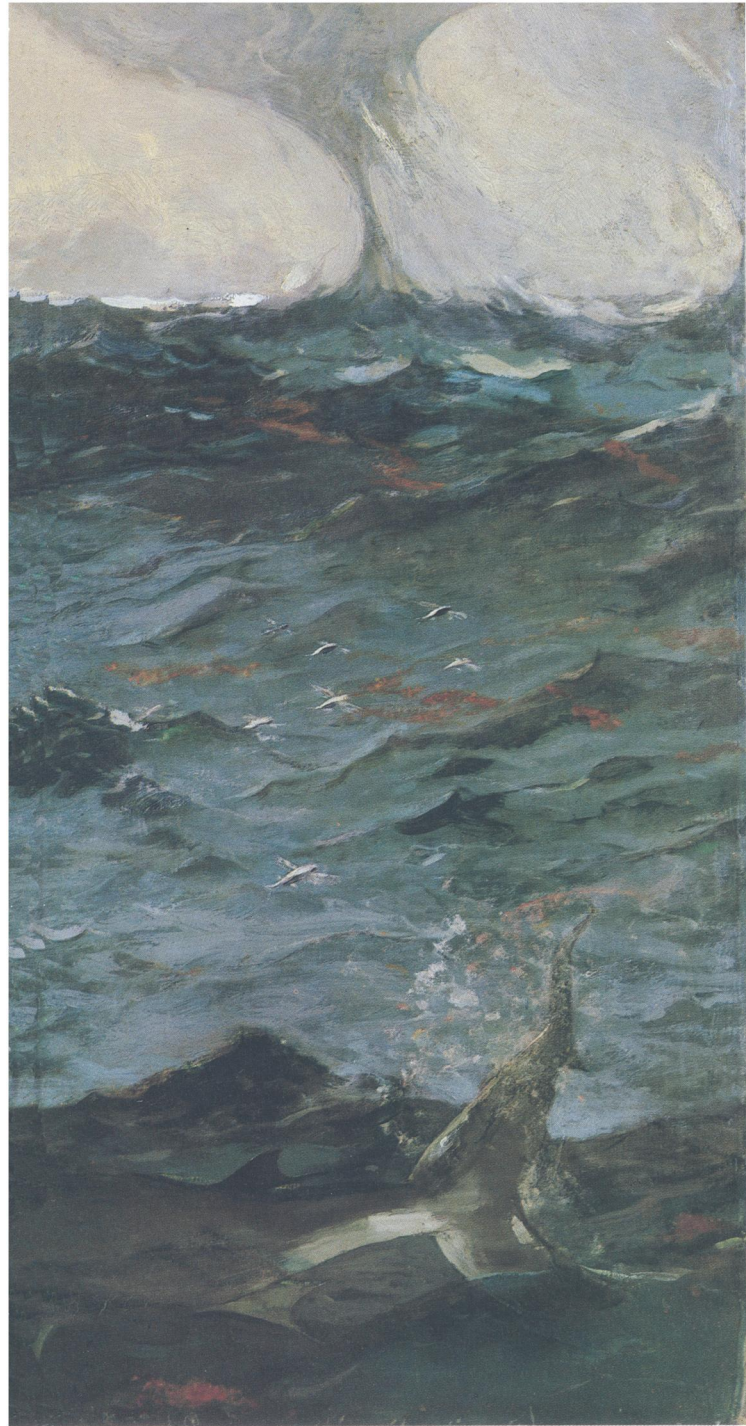
Dated 1899, *The Gulf Stream* (figure 30) was based largely on studies Homer made during his first trip to the Bahamas in the winter of 1884–85 and on what is thought to be his second visit to Nassau, in the winter of 1898–99. The painting, however, was not begun until September of 1899, when in a letter to John W. Beatty, Homer reported: "I painted in water colors three months





30–32 · *The Gulf Stream* (1899) was based on studies Homer made in the Bahamas and Nassau. A deliberately enigmatic and romantic work, it presents some striking parallels to earlier representations of catastrophes at sea such as J. S. Copley's *Brook Watson and the Shark* (right) of 1778 and J. M.W. Turner's *The Slave Ship* (left), exhibited in London in 1840. Homer was undoubtedly familiar with both. Although he avowed that the subject of *The Gulf Stream* "is comprised in its title," the provocative nature of the scene suggests more than a prosaic depiction of the North Atlantic current. Above: oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 49 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Wolfe Fund, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, 1906, 06.1234. Left: oil on canvas, 35 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 48 inches. Henry Lillie Pierce Fund, 99.22. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Right: oil on canvas, 24 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Gift of Mrs. Gordon Dexter, 1942, 42.71.1





last winter at Nassau, & have now just commenced arranging a picture from some of the studies."

In *The Gulf Stream* Homer returned to the theme of the confrontation of man and nature, which found its chief expression in his works dealing with the sea. A theatrical work in the romantic tradition, replete with the narrative detail that recalled Homer's early work as an illustrator, *The Gulf Stream* shows a black man adrift on a dismantled sloop circled by sharks and threatened by a distant waterspout. The aura of impending tragedy in the dazzling sun-drenched brilliance of an otherwise idyllic tropical setting and the man's stoic resignation to his fate heighten the pronounced, almost excessive, pathos of the drama.

At the urging of Harrison S. Morris, then secretary and managing director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, who telegraphed Homer that "the greatest American Art Exhibition can not open without an example from the greatest American artist," Homer sent the canvas for exhibition in 1900, together with a note instructing Morris not to "let the public poke its nose into my picture." In September 1900 several months after the close of the exhibition, Homer wrote Beatty: "I have painted on the picture since it was in Philadelphia & improved it very much (more of the Deep Sea water than before)." A comparison of the work as it now appears and a photograph of the painting before reworking, reproduced in the catalogue of the Pennsylvania Academy exhibition and elsewhere, shows that Homer's changes were not solely confined to the sea. In addition to changes at the upper left, which made the assertive design of the baroque composition more subtle, the starboard gunwale, shown intact in the early version, is now broken, and a sail has been added over the gunwale; the waterline, formerly continuous and possibly originally delineated in black, has been replaced by a dash of vivid red. The name of the vessel—ANNA KEY WEST—now clearly appears on the stern, and a ship has been introduced on the distant horizon at the left. The changes Homer made strengthened the already strong narrative character of the work. Exhibited in this altered final state at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in 1900–1901 and then in New York with a record asking price of \$4,000, the painting did not sell, either because of the price or the nature of the subject. A request for an explanation of the work provoked a characteristic response from the artist, who wrote Knoedler in February, 1902:

I regret very much that I have painted a picture that requires any description. The subject of this picture is comprised in *its title* & I will refer these inquisitive schoolmam'ms to Lieut. Maury [presumably Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806–1873), a Virginia-born oceanographer and naval of-





33 · Dark clouds and windblown palms towering above a group of rooftops evoke the violence of a tropical storm in *Hurricane, Bahamas*, of 1898. The brilliant colors that characterize Homer's Caribbean works are muted in this expressive watercolor. Watercolor and pencil, 14½ x 21 inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.7





ficer, whose classic studies of wind and ocean currents and publications on navigation earned him an international reputation]. I have crossed the Gulf Stream *ten* times & I should know something about it. The boat & sharks are outside matters of very little consequence. *They have been blown out to sea by a hurricane.* You can tell these ladies that the unfortunate negro who now is so dazed & parboiled, will be rescued & returned to his friends and home, & ever after live happily.

*The Gulf Stream* remained unsold until 1906, when it was shown in the winter exhibition of the National Academy in New York. A petition to the Metropolitan Museum was drawn up and signed by all the members of the Academy's jury, urging "the acquisition of this picture as a most notable achievement of American art," and the Museum responded by purchasing the painting.

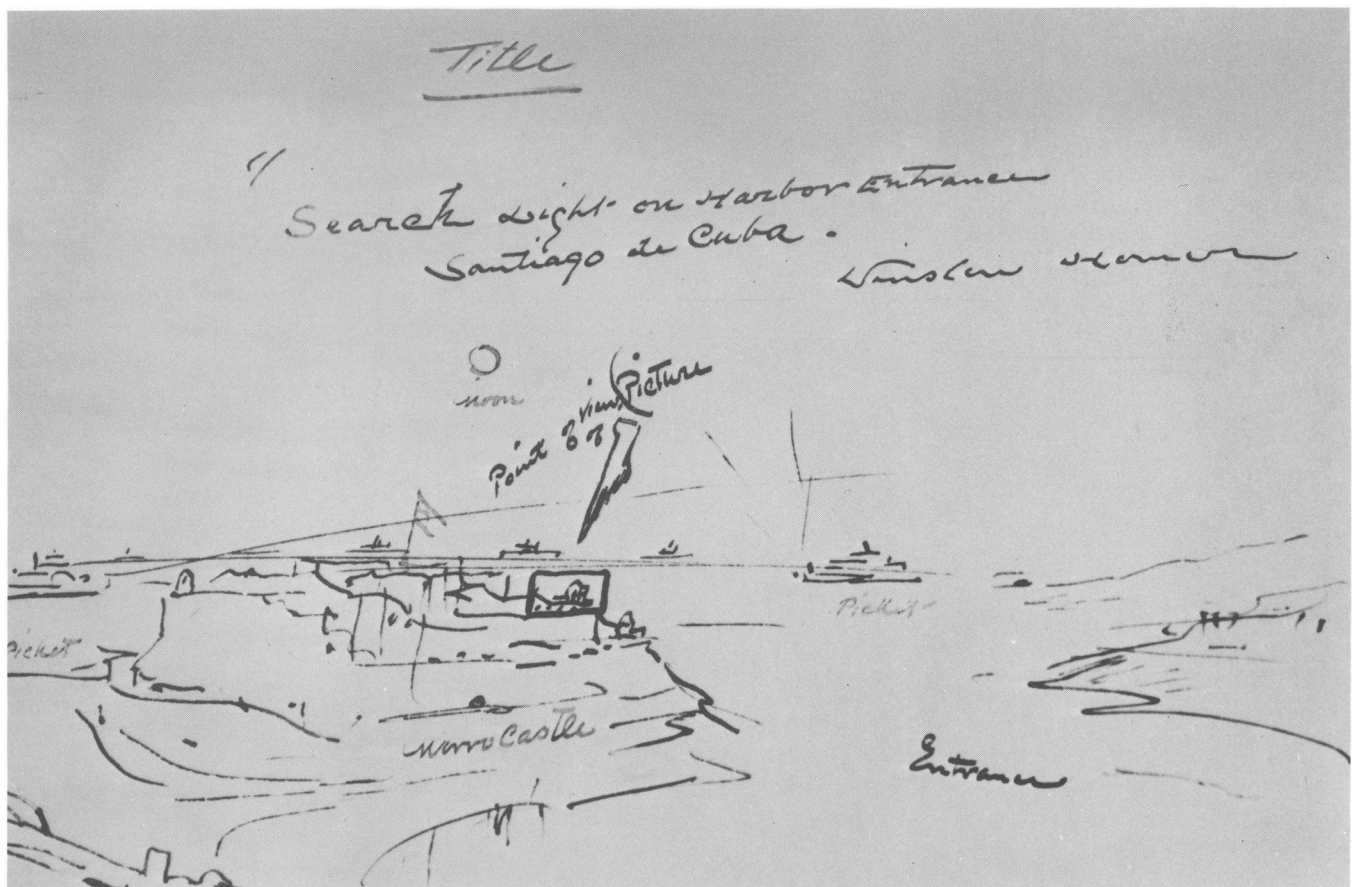
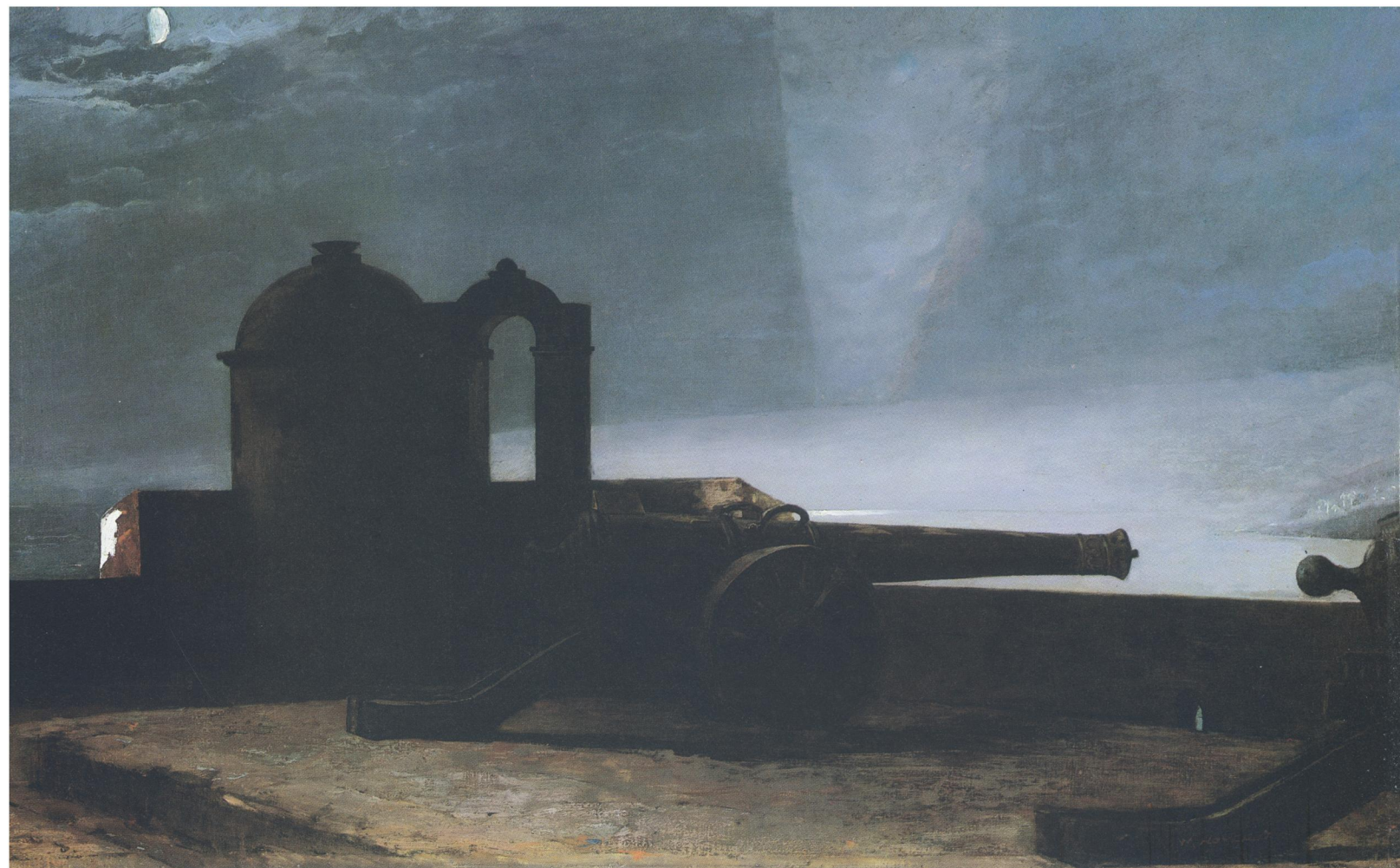
Reviews of the work at the Academy exhibition were mixed. Some critics devoted as much attention to the Museum's role as an arbiter of contemporary taste as to a discussion of the painting. The *New York World* noted that it was "naturally the center of attraction" because the Museum purchased it, "but it was by no means the best painting on view." The *New York Herald* reported: "The selection and purchase of *The Gulf Stream*, artists believe, is an indication that the Metropolitan Museum realizes its duty toward contemporary American art."

A work rooted in the romantic tradition, *The Gulf Stream* looks back to such celebrated epic treatments of maritime disasters as John S. Copley's *Brook Watson and the Shark* (National Gallery of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, figure 32; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Detroit Institute of Arts) and J. M. W. Turner's *The Slave Ship* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, figure 31), works that Homer unquestionably knew and that provide some tantalizing parallels to *The Gulf Stream*.

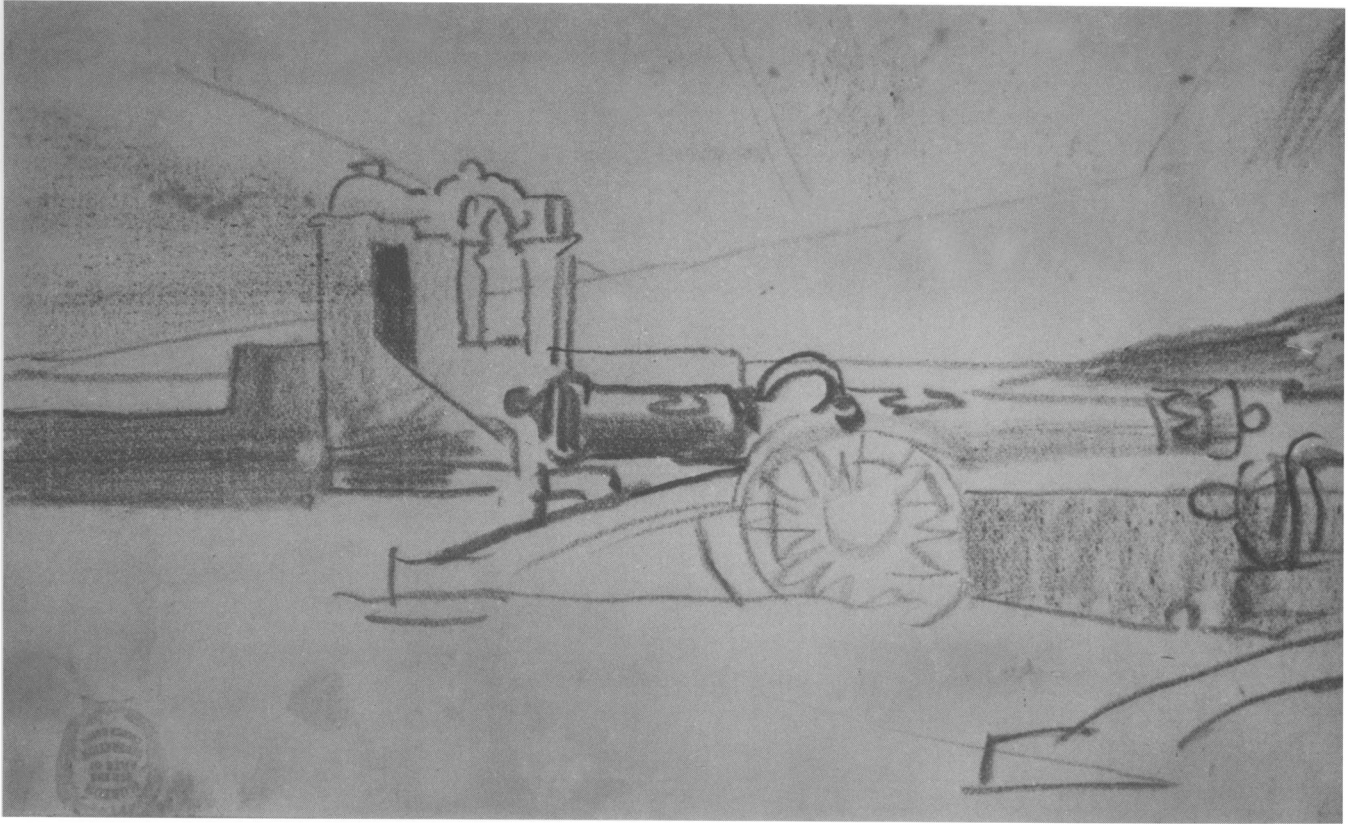
Copley's well-known history painting, executed in London in 1778, was based on an incident from the life of the English merchant Brook Watson, who lost his leg to a shark in the Havana harbor in 1747. Copley's realistic approach, the romantically gruesome subject, the expressiveness of the baroque composition, the Caribbean setting, the presence of a black figure in the rescue boat, and the resemblance of the shark at the right to one in Homer's work are among the features Copley's work shares with *The Gulf Stream*. Moreover, it is highly likely that Homer was familiar with Copley's painting, since the Metropolitan's version was exhibited in Boston in 1874, and the version now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was acquired by that museum in 1889.

J. M. W. Turner's *The Slave Ship*, originally called *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and the Dying—Typhoon Coming On*, was first exhibited at the Royal Academy









34–36 · In 1885, Homer made several studies of Morro Castle, the Spanish colonial fort at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. These works, including the drawing above, in 1901 served as models for Homer's unconventional painting (upper left) of Santiago under blockade by the United States Squadron during the Spanish-American War of 1898. In a 1901 letter to a patron, Homer enclosed a sketch (lower left) that indicated the picture's "point of view" in the context of the entire harbor but gave little warning of the artist's unusual representation. Showing the parapet of the old fortress with its obsolete cannons and a watchtower in the light of the moon and the searchlight of the blockade, *Searchlight on Harbor Entrance, Santiago de Cuba* was as novel and innovative a depiction of a recent historical event as *Prisoners from the Front* (figure 10) and demonstrated the originality of Homer's best works. Upper left: oil on canvas, 30½ x 50½ inches. Gift of George A. Hearn, 1906, 06.1282. Lower left: Winslow Homer to Thomas B. Clarke, postmarked Dec. 30, 1901. Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, Miscellaneous Manuscripts: Homer. Above: *Ramparts of Morro Castle, Santiago de Cuba*, pencil on paper, 4⅞ x 7⅞ inches. Courtesy of Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design.

in 1840, within a month of the opening of the Anti-Slavery League Conference in London. For twenty-eight years, *The Slave Ship* was in the collection of John Ruskin, a leading force on the international cultural scene, who extolled its merits in numerous publications. In 1873 it entered the New York collection of John Taylor Johnston and subsequently a Boston collection. On loan for several years to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, it was purchased by that museum in 1899, the same year Homer painted *The Gulf Stream*. Homer was undoubtedly familiar with Turner's celebrated painting, and *The Gulf Stream* shares several features with *The Slave Ship*: the spectacular beauty of the setting and the horror of the subject and the parallel suggested between the receding ship in Turner's work and the ambiguous ship on the horizon in *The Gulf Stream*.

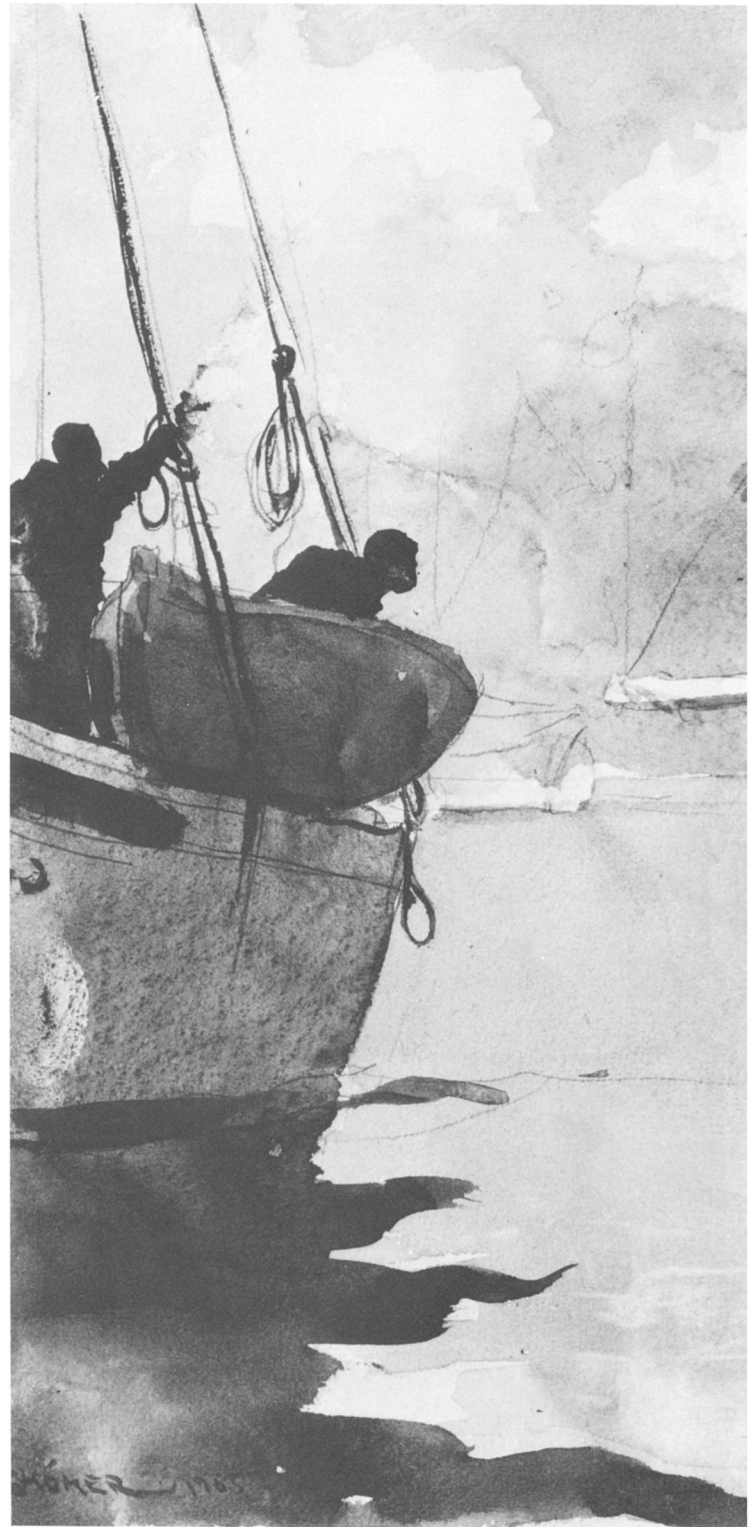
Despite Homer's insistence that the subject of his picture "is comprised in its title," *The Gulf Stream* presents what Sidney Kaplan described as the "masterpiece of the black image—the deathless Negro waiting stoically, Homerically for his end between waterspout and white-bellied shark." A deliberately enigmatic work, *The Gulf Stream* presents an unresolved drama, which, as Bryson Burroughs observed, "assumes the proportion of a great allegory if one chooses." Although for its time the painting is curiously reactionary in its romantic character and



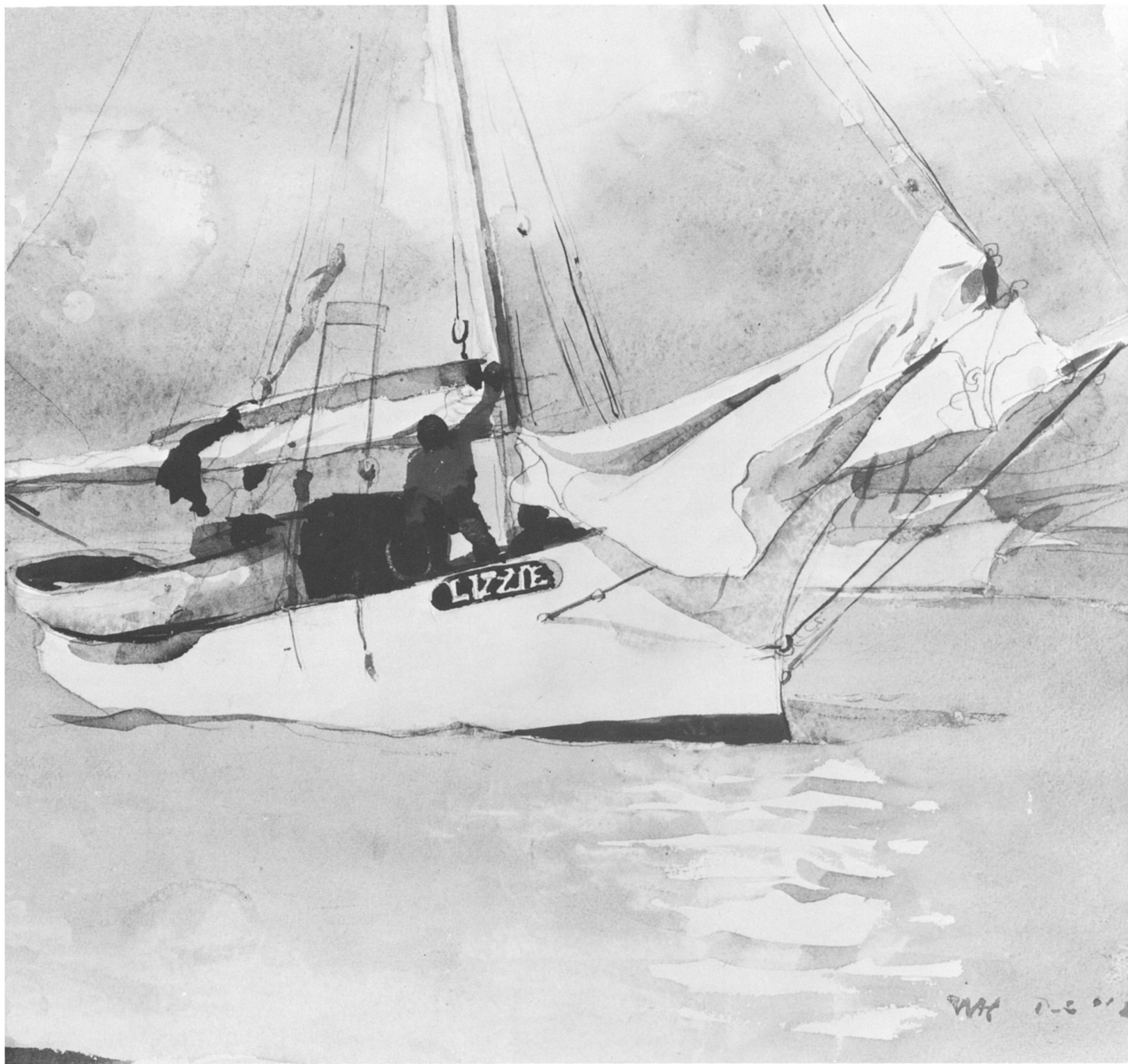
almost excessive narrative concerns, it is nevertheless a work of calculated audacity and elemental power in subject, in the intensity of color, and in the unrestrained energy of execution.

**D**uring Homer's visit to Cuba in February and March 1885, he made several studies of Morro Castle (Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York; Army Mess, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York), the late sixteenth-century fort built by the Spanish at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. It was not until 1901 that Homer returned to the subject, using his studies for an unconventional painting of Santiago under blockade by the United States Navy during the Spanish-American War of 1898 (figure 34). The Spanish fleet was defeated, but a controversy arose over which American naval officer—Winfield Scott Schley of the Flying Squadron, widely acclaimed as the popular hero, or his superior, William Thomas Sampson of the North Atlantic Squadron—should be credited with the victory. A court inquiry was convened and testimony heard from September 12 to December 12, 1901. Ultimately Sampson, who had been in official command, received recognition. The court inquiry, extensively covered in the press, provided a virtual replay of the events of the blockade. It was the month-long vigil of the American squadron that Homer proposed to paint in 1901. In a letter to Knoedler's dated December 30, he reported that he was about to ship his painting, adding, "This is just the time to show that picture as the subject is now before the people."

In a letter postmarked December 30, 1901, to Thomas B. Clarke, one of Homer's major patrons and the chairman of the art committee of the Union League Club in New York, where the painting was first shown, Homer reported that the painting was finished and he was "sending the *Title* to the work." He enclosed a sketch (figure 35) inscribed "*Title*/'Search Light on Harbor Entrance/Santiago de Cuba./Winslow Homer" and added a postscript: "If you think that this is too much of a title—you may call it—'Harbor Entrance Santiago de Cuba.'" Carefully labeled with the words "picket," "Entrance," "moon," and "Morro Castle," the sketch showed picket boats, including one with a searchlight deployed around the harbor entrance of Santiago, a full moon, and Morro Castle, part of which was set off with a frame and inscribed "Point of view of Picture." In what was a rare act for Homer, he provided a literal key to the painting in this sketch, but, characteristically, one that in no







37 · *Fishing Boats, Key West* dates from a visit of 1903. The brilliantly dazzling effects of sunlight on water and the white boats and the radiant quality of the high-key palette Homer used in this work are characteristic of his series of watercolors from Key West. Watercolor and pencil, 14 x 21¼ inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.1



way prepared Clarke for the actual unconventional representation.

Homer's work presents a view of the parapet of the old colonial fortress, with its obsolete cannons and a watchtower illuminated by the light of a half moon, and the glare of the searchlight, which represents the blockade. The searchlight, an intrinsic feature of Homer's painting, was vividly described by Sampson, who noted in an article published in 1899: "The scene was a very impressive one, the path of the search-light having a certain massiveness, and the slopes and crown of the Morro cliff being lighted up with the brilliancy of silver." The essentially monochromatic palette of black, gray, slate blue, and white, the austerity of the pared-down forms, and the asymmetrical composition—which, with the abrupt cropping of one cannon, betrays Homer's familiarity with the radical compositional format favored by the Impressionists—contribute to the monumental effectiveness of the work. One of Homer's most abstract compositions in the romantic tradition, it presents a stark image of ominous calm.

Shown at the Union League Club in New York from January 9 to 11, 1902, the work attracted considerable critical attention. The *New York Evening Sun* reported: "It was an impossible subject, and we will not say that Mr. Homer, with all his genius, has made it beautiful, for beauty is hardly the word to describe the rude force that is in this silent old fort about which the searchlight sweeps. But if it is not at all beautiful within the meaning of the word it is almost everything else." Homer, in a letter to Knoedler's, dated January 14, 1902, replied: "That Santiago de Cuba picture is not intended to be 'beautiful.' There are certain things (unfortunately for critics) that are stern facts but are worth recording as a matter of history as in this case. This is a small part of Morro Castle & immediately over the Harbor entrance which is only about 400 feet wide—& from this point were seen all the stirring sights of June & July 1898. *I find it interesting.*" He requested \$2,200 for the work "with regret, as," he noted, "I should have more money, but the doctors & lawyers must take the cake as the Artists are mostly D—F—."

Both an aesthetically powerful work and an unusual history painting, *Searchlight on Harbor Entrance, Santiago de Cuba* was perhaps intended to suggest more than the mere facts of the blockade of Santiago. The contemporary art critic and historian Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., summarized it succinctly:

The strange beauty of *Searchlight, Santiago* pretty well defies analysis. . . . For me this is one of the most fascinating pictures painted in my time. Most of Homer's work has







38 • A vibrantly colored, sunny view of the tropics, *Flower Garden and Bungalow, Bermuda* was painted in 1899 on a winter visit to Bermuda (see inside back cover). In this and other watercolors made during his winter trips to the south, Homer succeeded in capturing the brilliance of tropical light. Pencil and watercolor, 14 x 21 inches. Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1910, 10.228.10





39 · Begun in 1905, *Shooting the Rapids, Saguenay River* was based chiefly on two watercolors (one now in the Brooklyn Museum, the other unlocated) that Homer made of the Saguenay River in 1902 on his last known visit to Canada. The artist's brother Charles may well have served as the model for the passenger. Although the work is unfinished, the major elements of the dynamic composition have been established and the figures nearly completed. The background mountains and the rushing river are blocked out as broad masses, and the shooting spray topped with white crests is painted with quick brushwork in some areas and is refined into stylized decorative forms in others. Despite the calculated character of the work, Homer effectively conveys the unrestrained energy of the sweeping rapids. Oil on canvas, 30 x 48¾ inches. Gift of Charles S. Homer, 1911, 11.57





a wholesome, often a heroic obviousness, and overtones are generally absent. Here there may be overtones, and even symbolism, in the contrast of the handsome old guns which are no longer weapons, but which are museum pieces, with the sharp beam of the searchlight which tells of the sinister efficiency of modern scientific warfare. While such a thought may not have been in Homer's mind as he planned this masterpiece, it does not seem alien to his thinking.

At the time of Homer's death in 1910, the painting *Shooting the Rapids, Saguenay River* (figure 39) was left unfinished in his studio. The work, with contemplated revisions in the foreground water and in the position and pose of the figure in the stern indicated in chalk, provides a rare example of Homer's working methods.

Homer first visited the province of Quebec, in which the Saguenay River is located, in 1893. Drawn by the excellent fishing and a wilderness more isolated and remote than the Adirondacks, Homer and his brother Charles joined the Tourilli Fish and Game Club, a sportsman's haven near Saint Raymond on the shores of Lake Tourilli several miles northwest of Quebec City. On a subsequent excursion to the Canadian province Homer discovered Roberval on the south shore of Lake Saint John some 120 miles north of Quebec City. Accessible by a canoe trip up the Saguenay River, it became a favorite haunt.

Homer's first trip to the Canadian wilderness in 1893 was apparently primarily confined to fishing. Later visits were devoted to both painting and fishing. The Canadian wilderness, anglers playing fish, canoes shooting the turbulent rapids, and the life of the French Canadian woodsmen and Montagnais Indians were subjects of a series of watercolors and monochromes dating from 1895 to 1897. In these works Homer demonstrated his comprehensive command of the medium and caught the characteristic qualities of light, color, and atmosphere of the Canadian wilds with the same veracity as he used to characterize the north woods and the tropics. During his last known trip to Canada, in August, 1902, Homer painted a group of watercolors at Lake Saint John and on the Saguenay River. Several of these works later served as models for *Shooting the Rapids*, one of his last oils.

A self-sufficient and reserved man, Homer first realized his desire for a solitary life in his retreat to Maine in the 1880s. His satisfaction with this life is expressed in many letters to his family and friends. In a letter of 1893, recorded by Goodrich, to the Boston lithographer Louis Prang, Homer wrote: "I deny that I am a recluse as is generally understood by that term. Neither am I an unsociable hog. . . . This is the only life in which I am permitted to mind my own business. I suppose I am today the only man in New England who can do it. I am perfectly happy & contented."



# NOTES

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- " . . . free-lance basis": Ibid., p. 11, and Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Winslow Homer* (New York, 1979), p. 36.
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- 6 Ibid., p. 28.
- "In 1861 . . .": Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, p. 12.
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- A military pass issued in Homer's name, dated Oct. 15, 1861, is in the Strong Museum, Rochester, New York, and illustrated in David Tatham, "Winslow Homer's Library," *American Art Journal* 9 (May 1977): 96, fig. 4. A second pass, dated April 1, 1862, is in the collection of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, and illustrated in William Howe Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer* (Boston, 1911), opp. p. 34.
- R[oswell] M[orse] Shurtleff, letter to the editor, *American Art News* 9 (Oct. 29, 1910): 4.
- 8 "reunion of man and nature" and "anonymous and universal quality": John Wilmerding, *Winslow Homer* (New York, 1972), p. 47.
- red cloverleaf: Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "Winslow Homer's Prisoners from the Front," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 12 (1977): 160–61, fig. 7, identifies the insignia as it appears in Homer's *Prisoners from the Front*.
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- R. S. Barlow, April 4, 1938, note in Department of American Paintings and Sculpture archives, Metropolitan Museum.
- New York Evening Post*, April 28, 1866, p. 1.
- Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer*, p. 59.
- 15 M. E. Chevreul: Tatham, "Winslow Homer's Library," p. 93.
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- Goodrich, *Winslow Homer*, p. 41.
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