

Basic Detail Report



Title: The Fisher Boy

Date: 1908

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e482

Medium: Oil on canvas on board

Description: Hawthorne's favorite and most characteristic subject was the hardworking fisherfolk of Cape Cod, whom he began painting about 1899. His works are monumental images of human toil and of man's struggle against nature, yet they are also portraits of individuals surrounded by the tools of their trade. Encased in Hawthorne's thick glazes and dark, Old Master tonalities, these humble fishermen

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possess poise and dignity. Provincetown cod fishermen typically spent the summer months off Newfoundland's Grand Banks, storing the daily catch in salt and returning home in September when the salt ran out. (1) "Fisher Boy" is one of a number of single-figure portraits of these local fishermen, many of which capture events or introspective moments surrounding the fall return of the fishing boats. Against a foggy background, through which the sails and masts of a fishing vessel are visible, a teenage boy surveys his home after months at sea. Slung over his left shoulder is a bag; under his right arm is a beautiful blue-glass jug, which may have held water--or wine--during the journey. (2) Hardworking immigrants were a favorite subject of a number of realists painters, such as Robert Henri, Jerome Myers, Hawthorne, and others, who disdained the upper-class genteel subject matter preferred by the conservative art world. Contemporary critic Charles H. Caffin appreciated such pictures as a "natural and wholesome reaction from the vogue of frippery, tameness, and sentimentality" that characterized many of the visual images of the era, which kept art far removed from actual experience. (3) For other reviewers, Arthur Hoeber among them, Hawthorne's images conveyed the immigrant's attempt to build a new life in a new country through back-breaking work. More than simply picturesque characters, Hawthorne's Portuguese fisherfolk were depicted as "real, tangible human beings, full of hope, ambition and the struggle for existence." (4) MAS Bibliography: Duncan Phillips, "Charles W. Hawthorne," "International Studio 61" (March 1917): xix-xxvi; Charles W. Hawthorne, "Hawthorne on Painting: From Students' Notes Collected by Mrs. Charles W. Hawthorne" (New York, 1938; reprint, Dover, 1960); Elizabeth McCausland, "Charles W. Hawthorne: An American Figure Painter" (New York: American Artists Group, 1947); Edgar P. Richardson, "Hawthorne Retrospective", exhib. cat. (Provincetown: Chrysler Art Museum, 1961); Janet Altic Flint, "Charles W. Hawthorne: The Late Watercolors", exhib. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1983). Notes: 1. On Provincetown fishing practices in the early twentieth century, see Nancy W. Paine Smith, *The Provincetown Book* (Brockton, Mass.: Tolman Print, 1922); and Wesley George Pierce, *Goin' Fishin': The Story of the Deep-Sea Fishermen of New England* (Salem, Mass.: Marine Research Society, 1934). 2. Portuguese wine, to be exact (Robyn S. Watson, Provincetown Art Association and Museum, to the author, February 19, 1996). Fishermen reused these jugs, and many of their descendants display them in their homes. 3. Charles H. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting* (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1907), p. 378. 4. Arthur Hoeber, "Charles W. Hawthorne," *International Studio* 37 (May 1909): lxvi. Dimensions: 39 1/8 x 39 1/8 in. (99.4 x 99.4 cm)