The Life & Work of Winslow Homer

NAPOLEON SARONY, PHOTOGRAPH: WINSLOW HOMER TAKEN IN N.Y., 1880, BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART
Early Life

• Winslow Homer was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1836.
• Homer’s mother enjoyed watercolor painting and was his first painting teacher.
• Homer grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
• Homer was an average student in school, but his talent for art was evident at a young age.
A Career Begins…

- Homer’s first job after graduating high school was working for a lithographer. He worked for two years printing sheet music covers.
- Homer then worked as a freelance illustrator for 20 years. He mostly produced engravings of urban and country scenes.

Lithographers produce a picture or writing using a specially prepared stone, with some greasy or oily substance, and of taking ink impressions from this.
An Artist Emerges

• In 1859 Homer moved to New York City and opened a studio. At the time, New York City was the artistic and publishing capital of the United States.

• From 1859-1863 Homer took painting classes at the National Academy of Design.

• Homer became well-known for his work with oil paints.
American Civil War (1861-1865)

- Homer was sent to the front lines of the American Civil War.
- He sketched battle scenes and camp life. He focused on both quiet moments and times of battle.
- His sketches included the camp, commanders and the army stationed at the banks of the Potomac River in October of 1861.
- His sketches also included images of the impact of war on families at the time.
- Several of his war sketches became paintings once he returned to his studio.

Off to Paris, France!

- In 1867 Homer traveled to Paris, France. Here he practiced landscape painting while also painting scenes of life in Paris.
- While in France, Homer painted about 12 small paintings. His focus was peasant life.

Prisoners on the Front, this image was on view in Paris.

Winslow Homer, *Prisoners on the Front*, 1866, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.207
Back in the United States

• Throughout the 1870s Homer painted scenes focusing on rural farm life, children playing and rural African American life while visiting Virginia.

• Homer began doing a lot of work with watercolors during a stay in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1873.

• Homer showed his work frequently at the Boston Art Club beginning in 1877.
Time in Europe

• Homer spent two years, from 1881-1882 on the coast of Europe in the villages of Cullercoats, Tyne and Wear.

• During this time he painted scenes of working men and women, representing them in their daily lives.

• He painted mostly with watercolors while in Europe.
Settling in Maine

- Homer returned to the United States in 1882 and shortly after, in 1883, moved to Prouts Neck, Maine (in Scarborough).
- During the rest of the 1800s, Homer painted scenes of the sea. These scenes tended to be dramatic in nature. He painted scenes of rescues, ocean storms, ships, etc.
- From 1884-1885 he spent the winter months in Florida, Cuba and the Bahamas where he painted beautiful scenes of blue skies and oceans.

Travels of Winslow Homer

- Homer spent much of the rest of his life traveling. He spent time in...
  - Adirondack Mountains of New York
  - Canada
  - The Caribbean
- Homer died in 1910 at his studio in Maine. He was 74 years old.
- His studio in Maine is now owned by the Portland Museum of Art and is a well known historical landmark.
Acknowledgements

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