Video Description

This symposium was offered in conjunction with the special exhibition *Homer at the Beach: A Marine Painter’s Journey, 1869-1880*, which was an exploration of the earliest marine works of Winslow Homer (1836-1910). On Friday, October 4 at 6:00 pm, Dr. Sylvia Yount, Lawrence A. Fleischman Curator in Charge of the America Wing, Metropolitan Museum of Art, presented the keynote lecture and discussed the development of Homer scholarship in terms of past and future exhibition themes and publications.
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Transcript

Oliver Barker, Director

I wanted to share that, obviously, tonight's group is probably a group I don't need to speak too much about Homer or to tell you too much about the Homer at the Beach exhibition. But I did want you to know that the exhibition is an integral part of the museum's mission to illuminate the diversity of life on Cape Ann by collecting, preserving and presenting interconnected stories of our industry for almost 400 years. I wanted to also take this moment to share with you that the successful presentation of our exhibition and its accompanying catalogue includes partnerships with many collectors and many institutional lenders, some of whom are in the room tonight. And we’re very grateful for those loans and for that support and for that belief in us as an institution, it's your faith in us comes at a very important time and a pivotal and strategic moment in this Museum's history. I would like to highlight that this is going to be one of a number of really important initiatives that we as a museum will be embarking upon between now and 2023, which is our 150th anniversary. And before introducing our keynote speaker, Dr. Sylvia Yount, I wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge the sponsors for the Homer at the Beach exhibition. We are very grateful to the Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Horwitz Foundation for the Arts and for their lead sponsorship of the exhibition. And I would also like to acknowledge Ann Rogers Haley and Jack Haley Jr., and John Rando Jr. for their important support of the exhibition. Furthermore support was greatly received from 57 additional donors. I'm not going to read all their names tonight because I know we are here to hear the lecture, but I did just want to draw attention to a few. I'd like to thank Ted and Jan Charles, Beth and Linzee Coolidge, Janet and William Ellery James, Bill and Ann Kneisel, Leslie and Angus Littlejohn, Gail and Ernst von Metzsch and Corinna and Ronnie Waud.

0:02:37

As some of you know and perhaps have heard me speak previously, we have 52 institutional private lenders here who have allotted works to the exhibition. So please join me also thanking them for their support.
0:02:55
I wanted to take a moment, having spoken a little bit about Homer at the beach, just to say that our exhibition, of course is uniquely timed with Winslow Homer: Eyewitness, an exhibition concurrently on view at the Harvard Art Museum. We are most honored to be joined tonight by the exhibition’s co-curator, Ethan Lassa, as well as with Martha Tedesci, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. We’re delighted that both colleagues will also be contributing presenters to tomorrow's symposium. This evening and tomorrow's symposium would not have been possible without the hard work and collaboration with many colleagues and the museum's wonderful docents. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Homer at the Beach’s guest curator, Bill cross, and my colleagues Courtney Richardson and Martha Oaks as well as the 10 colleagues and scholars who will be presenting at tomorrow’s symposium. So please join me in thanking all of them.

0:04:00
Our guest speaker tonight, Dr. Sylvia Yount, is the Lawrence A. Fleischman Curator in Charge of The American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In this capacity Dr. Yount is responsible for the administrative and curatorial oversight of the Department of Historical African American, Euro American, Latin American and Native American art from the colonial period to the early 20th century. Before moving to the MET, Dr. Yount held leading roles at both the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the High Museum of Art. Dr. Yount has organized major exhibitions on Cecilia Beaux, Maxfield Parrish, and American Modernism, among other topics focused on women and artists of color in regional and national contexts. She is currently working as co-curator on exhibitions of Jacob Lawrence, the late 19th century New York artwold and Winslow Homer. It is a great honor to have Dr. Yount join us this evening and I asked you all to please join me in welcoming her to the podium.

0:05:18
Dr. Sylvia Yount
Thank you, Oliver. Thank you, Courtney. Can you hear me well? I'm not sure how many mics I'm using here. It is such a pleasure to be here this evening. Welcome all. A great pleasure to help launch this day and a half or almost full two days. Symposium Winslow Homer: New Insights at the Cape Ann Museum. And I'm very privileged to be here, especially in the company of so many American art scholars, old and new friends and colleagues, those who have long thought about Winslow Homer and others who are asking new questions about this evergreen artists in larger cultural contexts, and we'll hear from many of them tomorrow. I hope you'll be able to join us tomorrow as well. Tonight though, I'd like to share some reflections inspired by this thoughtful exhibition and just want to congratulate everyone working on the project again, especially Bill Cross. I know this was a labor of love for him, and also to outline how Homer scholarship has developed over the decades, where it's been where it's going in a seemingly unending process of reconsideration. And we will look at some images, I promise.
I thought I’d begin on a personal note, I’ve always been interested in lesser studied artists. In
many instances, those who have been left out of the traditional canon of art history. For
example, women, as Oliver mentioned, artists of color and others, who don’t fit neatly or at
least complicate popular American narratives in aesthetic and cultural terms. But that does not
mean that I don’t also revere such iconic figures as Winslow Homer, whose work I would hazard
in this company casts a long shadow on our collective lives. I have strong childhood memories
of seeing books, perhaps some of you had the famous set The World of set of time life art
books in your home, as well as reproductions of Homer’s most celebrated art and of being
drawn to his paintings on early visits to museums. Yet as I came of age as an art historian, I find
that I found myself gravitating toward aspects of Homer’s production that seemed more
surprising or lesser known when compared to his famous Civil War paintings and Maine
seascapes that, honestly, I found a bit intimidating given how much ink had been spilled about
them.

Instead, what caught my attention were the African American and modern women subjects of
the 1870s in both oil and watercolor, as well as his short lived experiments with decorative tile
work and book illustration, given what they revealed of Homer’s attentiveness to the market as
well as his active role in the postbellum New York art world, specifically his membership in the
Tile Club artists organization and I was so thrilled to see Bill include a whole vitrine of some
wonderful tiles. We don’t know that work as well, we don’t get, it's not seen in as many Homer
exhibitions, so that's a real treat. And then in graduate school, I actually considered, briefly
considered, writing a dissertation on Homer’s images of women across his career, and
undertaking that ultimately morphed into a broader cultural study of the American aesthetic
movement, which I believe in formed his art and life in many ways.

I was also intrigued by various scholars focused attention to biography. For example, Sarah
Burn’s interest in the artists love life, which surfaced in her 2002 magazine Antiques article.
Though, I admit, I was a little less convinced by the extent of her overarching Helena de Kay
argument you made the exquisite portrait that Homer did have Helena, member of the New
York art world guilder circle future remember the guilder circle. The only portrait we formal
portrait in oil, we knew by him. And then there was Elizabeth John's deeply personal and
sweeping biographical study from the same year, 2002, Winslow Homer the Nature of
Observation, which revealed then current psychosocial interests in the emphasis on identity
and relationships. John’s, full disclosure my doctoral advisor, she’s not here though, drew from
developmental and identity theories of Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson to tackle the challenge
that has confounded many when it comes to Homer. Specifically, she investigated and
infamously reticent artists through his copious personal correspondence in order to reveal
more about his inner life and social world. Using the critical record that discussed Homer is
existing between two artistic generations to explore how his profile was viewed in terms of
popular philosophical understandings of realism and nature. John’s illuminated various
dimensions of Homer’s career. Her study clarified a number of critical points for me. For example, the centrality of women and the artists of in life, his ongoing personal and professional struggles and his fundamental interest in the artistic theme of social relations.

10:18
Despite the example of such well received investigations of Homer’s biography and career wide production, a periodization approach has continued to dominate the exhibition scholarship, yielding key insights into the elusive man and his compelling work and it remains very popular, very popular in our field. I would place the Cape Ann effort in this company, a focus look at Homer’s formative years as a marine painter, primarily centered on Gloucester and the importance of place in socio historical context, but also addressing the motif of sand and sea over a decade of his career. This emphasis on regional specificity lends the Cape Ann exhibition great resonance in recognition of its pride of place setting, while also opening our eyes to how this foundational period inform the artists later more ambitious, informal and narrative terms, maritime subjects.

11:15
As Bill Cross eloquently puts it out of the particular Homer mind meaning given giving his art at Universal Power. Other recent and notable examples of this site specific focus include Tom Denenberg’s, Weatherbeaten: Homer and Maine of 2012 and Elizabeth Athens and Brandon Ruud’s Coming Away: Winslow Homer and England from 2017. Some of you may have seen it the Worcester Art Museum just two years ago, and both of these also underlines the regional and international character of Homer’s art and life in various ways.

11:50
In the museum world, some of the reasons for this circumscribed approach has to do with the very real challenges and costs of securing major loans of the artists work from across his five decade career. In fact, a full scale retrospective look at Homer has not been attempted since 1995 when Nicholai Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly organized the magisterial effort at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, an exhibition that featured more than 200 works mostly oils and watercolors, and traveled to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to the MET in 1996. And I remember as a young curator at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at that time, how difficult it was to live without the Fox Hunt for almost a year. So we did have some lovely loans from Boston and from MET as a little compensation.

12:43
Using the time honored monographic decade-by-decade approach to survey Homer’s prolific career from his roots as a popular illustrator and artists reporter during the Civil War years of the 1860s to his sublime main seascapes of the first decade of the 20th century that codified his old master status as a figure of lasting value. The National Gallery milestone attempted to cover the full scope of his expansive production and reception. Coming some 25 years after Lloyd Goodrich’s in 1973 undertaking at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Cikovsky and Kelly’s ambitious blockbuster, a word we don't hear as much in museums anymore, do we, but one
that certainly define the 1990s. This blockbuster drew from a variety of different approaches brought to bear on Homer’s art in those intervening years. The end result revealed a more multi-dimensional artist whose powerful work could not easily be reduced to that the uncompromising realist as Goodrich would have had it and did have it. And yet the curators determined focus or dominant focus on homers heroic genius as quote “America's greatest and most national painter”, dictated the exhibition narrative in a traditional modernist trajectory of masculine genius, innovation and originality. Well, Sarah Burns who reviewed the exhibition for the American Quarterly criticized this canonizing tendency, which inevitably glossed over the more complicating and vexing issues of gender, race and class in Homer’s life and art. She also admitted that the sheer abundance of work afforded by the effort made it easy to overlook the limiting interpretive framework and simply revel in the pure pleasures of looking and I think we can all share that experience anytime there's a Homer exhibition just being in front of those works is really an extraordinary experience.

14:36
As National Gallery director, Earl Rusty Powell intoned, in his foreword to the catalog. It is not possible to see too much of Winslow Homer or to see too much in him.

Burns read in the exhibition’ storyline and emphasis on a career development that increased in greatness as the work moved away from the specific anecdotal narratives of the every day to more metaphoric universal almost abstractions. And I think we'd all agree that this one way linear approach to understanding Homer’s complex artistic vision reduces the fascinating ambiguities and contradictions of his work to minor footnotes. Indeed, many of us would argue that it's those unresolved tensions that continue to make Homer compelling and relevant for contemporary viewers.

15:24
So from where did this surprisingly durable characterization derive of Homer as a mythic American artist, shared by Goodrich and ultimately Cikovsky and Kelly, and how did he entered the pantheon of art history as an undisputed luminary of realist painting, in some circles sharing a stage with Thomas Aikens? In fact the terms were fixed at the turn of the last century by critics, including Sadakichi Hartmann describing the so called American School at the Paris exposition of 1900. At that World's Fair, both Homer and Aikens, were celebrated for their striking virility and sincerity, their poetic rawness, particularly evident it was argued in the artists late production. In Homer’s case this meant his dramatic Prouts Neck seascapes for example, the METs Maine Coast, and in Aikens case such moving portraits as the Cello Player. Hailed for injecting masculine brutality into native painting, though, according to some late 19th century critics had become ‘too French’, Homer and Aikens were held up as, “exemplars of the American character, strong, simple, honest, true, and by the power of those qualities profoundly moving”. The early 20th century canonization of the painters, especially Homer, was largely built on these then commonly shared national ideals.
16:50
So what are we to make of this very figure with the talent for distilling precise cultural moments who so many Americans continue to revere and who have sought and found an identifiable Homer for their respective times. The emphasis on his manly individuality set comfortably in the turn of the 20th century so called strenuous age of American imperialism. Just as American art historian Rebecca Bedell’s thoughtful new study of sentiment, Moved to Tears: Rethinking the Art of the Sentimental in the United States, locates Homer’s greatness in his power to express, “a common and shared humanity and ideal urgently desired, I would say, in today’s painfully polarized culture”. In between, we’ve had accomplished studies of Homer the proto feminist, the proto environmentalist, and less convincing psychosexual explorations of Homer, the repressed misanthrope, countered by welcome count uncoverings of his collegial sociability and extended family life in New York in Maine. In each case, the most revealing accounts tease multiple meanings out of the artists compelling pictorials, strategies, and wide ranging subjects.

18:08
David Park Curry was one of the first American art curators to focus attention on a self contained genre of Homer's production, the intriguing croquet pictures of gendered courtship, painted soon after Appomattox, which Curry highlighted first in a scholarly article and then in an exhibition in 1984. This then less valued body of work was placed in a rich socio historical context and approach that Bill Cross is cited as an important model for the Cape Ann project.

Following a loose chronology of my own devising next came Helen Cooper's regulatory Winslow Homer Watercolors, an exhibition I was actually lucky enough to see at the Yale University Art Gallery before I was formally studying art history. That rare and important effort proved for many viewers, Homer’s famous quote about his legacy, “You will see in the future I will live by my watercolors”. Then there was Mark Simpsons, who I believe just gave a talk here right? Mark Simpsons 1988 focused exhibition of Homer's Civil War paintings that explored how this imagery helped to really shape America's collective memory of the national rupture. Simpsons project appeared in the same year as Winslow Homer’s Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years. That exhibition and accompanying catalog was curated not by a Yale trained art historian, as Curry, Simpson and Cooper were but actually, I should say Homer has never been the exclusive province of any one school of scholarship as nearly every generation of leading Americanists have found their way to his studio, including the Harvard trained John Wilmerding, who contributed to the Cape Ann catalog as well as Jules Prown along with their students and their students, students who continue to investigate his work today. But instead for that other show the Winslow Homer’s Images of Blacks, it was Peter Wood a historian, a Harvard trained graduate, Harvard Graduate working with the art scholar Karen Dalton, who brought a new perspective an intentional degree of seriousness to his interpretation of Homers’ equally moving and confounding representations of Southern blacks. And what has continued to be drawn to these enigmatic works publishing slim poetic volumes on such iconic paintings as the Metropolitan Museums the Gulf Stream as well as the lesser-known Near Andersonville in the collection of the Newark Museum.
This focus on issues of gender and race and Homer’s production perhaps unsurprising given the more expansive approach of art history since the 1980s, can also be found in more recent exhibitions centered on single master works in context, so called dossier shows. For example, Kathleen Foster’s Shipwreck! Winslow Homer and The Life Line of 2012 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art...and we’re thrilled Kathy’s with us tonight and tomorrow. Or efforts marking new additions to permanent collections. Namely the 2013 gift to the Bowden College Museum of Art of an English made camera belonging to Homer that inspired Frank Goodyear’s and Dana Byrd’s 2018 project Winslow Homer and the Camera: Photography and the Art of Painting. Both of these important undertakings went beyond a focus on subject matter alone to investigate homers practice and process his ways of seeing and painting, incorporating conservation studies into their interpretive scope. Similarly, Martha Tedeschi’s 2008 exhibition of Homer’s watercolors at the Art Institute of Chicago an extraordinary collection of watercolors subtitled, The color of Light, built on Helen Cooper’s research in partnership with another of our speakers tomorrow, in addition to Martha, Judith Walsh, to dazzle us anew with fresh analyses of pigment paper and purpose. And I would be remiss not to mention Kathy Foster's landmark and not to be repeated 2017 survey, American Watercolor in the Age of Homer and Sargent, which set the former’s distinctive work in the broader light alongside that of his mother, Henrietta Benson Homer, as well as John Singer Sargent, and those were some wonderfully favorite moments of Kathy's installation.

Other outstanding thematic exhibitions that gave us a clear understanding of Homers, critical reputation and legacy at the beginning and end of his career include Margaret Conrad's 2001 Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s drawn from her PhD dissertation, which I had the privilege of installing at the Hyde Museum as my first project when I arrived there. And also Bruce Robertson’s Reckoning With Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings in Their Influence, which debuted earlier in 1990 and positioned Homer at the beginning of a lineage of painters stretching from Robert Henri to Rockwell Kent, to Marsden Hartley. And I'm actually surprised that we've yet to see an extensive effort that puts Homer in dialogue with more contemporary artists today, utilizing different frames of reference. Perhaps that's in the work somewhere.

My own curatorial relationship to Homer's art took on a new dimension when I had the privilege of overseeing a distillation of Kevin Sharp’s 2009 exhibition Bold, Cautious, True: Walt Whitman and American Art of the Civil War era at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. There was something deeply meaningful about considering in the former capital of the Confederacy, the turbulent art of the 1860s against the poetry of one of the conflicts chief scribes.
Homer was important to that exploration of themes of slavery and service loss in memory. Indeed, lesser-studied works like the haunting Trooper Meditating Beside a Grave, here at right, offered an apt pairing of word and image as both Whitman and Homer examine the country's collective pain and grief as a metaphor for the death of national innocence. Whitman's poem, As Toilsome I Wander'd Virginia Woods, first appeared in his 1865 volume, Drum Taps, and it shares uncanny resonance with Homer's intimate scene painted around the same time. The poems narrators perhaps not unlike the painters, Solitary Calvary Man, describes coming across a makeshift grave marker, inscribed with the epitaph Bold, Cautious, True and My Loving Comrade, the source of Sharp's title for the exhibition. For me, this small vertical, it's 16 x 8 inches, this canvas by Homer is particularly revealing representation of the national crisis painted with a palpable sadness that foregrounds the psychological as well as physical costs of war. And we know from that famous letter from Homer's mother just how deeply scarred the artist himself was from his experiences in the war-torn South returning, as she wrote, a changed man.

Working with Virginia's collection, including such confounding images as Army Teamsters, as left a pendant to the better known the bright side in San Francisco's collection, which revealed much to me about Homer's artistic and personal development, I came to better understand his complicated and evolving attitude toward the representation of race. And I brought that same nuanced sense of place and regional specificity to the MET, where I landed in 2014 and encountered with a new set of Virginia eyes, a gallery of Homer's Civil War icons painted in the Commonwealth, a professional transition that profoundly changed how I read those canonic paintings and the cultural work they perform both then and now. In fact, that's one of the reasons I was excited by Ethan Lasser's proposal to bring the METs prisoners from the front bring that together with Harvard Art Museum's the Brush Harrow, a lesser known work, but to civil wars subjects of nearly equal size that both hung up the National Academy of Designs spring annual of 1866. Ethan's dossier idea became Eye Witness, which many of us had the great pleasure of enjoying today and going through as a group; it's wonderful. This focused and revealing exhibition explores how Homer supposedly on the spot repertoires work for Harper's Weekly during the Civil War. And just after, and the tensions that imagery embodies, informs his later pictorial strategies and storytelling and other media namely oil and watercolor. As Sebastian Smee, art critic for The Washington Post formerly of Boston Globe, observed in his highly complimentary review of the Harvard and the Cape Ann Homer efforts. “Both exhibitions share subject themes of artistic training and practice, as well as poignantly felt expressions of loss.” And I know we'll hear more from Ethan and Bill tomorrow about those projects. Smee also gives a well-deserved shout out to Rebecca Bedell's new scholarly study on sentiment that I mentioned, which I thought was a great rarity in most journalistic art reviews, mentioning scholarship, but viewing those two exhibitions as quote, an opportunity to think not only about why we like Homer so much, but about what we want fundamentally from art. How much feeling not false feeling but powerful emotion tethered to reality, can we take. Bedell's argument finds Homer deeply and profoundly empathetic, often tender and her sensitive
depiction or discussion of the Brush Harrow particular is quite effective in these terms, pointing to a range of new readings and narrative ambiguity and psychological tension in the art. It'll be interesting to see how other scholars and curators will follow along that line.

28:14
Another valuable contribution Bedell makes is to reject the rigid separation between Homer’s early and late work that many art historians have traditionally described, valuing the profound on allegorical, almost meditations on the human condition associated with the Prouts Neck period, more than the nostalgic and anecdotal scenes of vigorous boyhood, or one room schoolhouses, and their teachers of the 1870s. Instead, she argues that sentiment remains the foundation of Homer’s art throughout his career, a belief I share.

28:50
So we’ve explored Homer’s studies past and present, but what about future? Thanks to the impressive decades in the making catalog raisonne in a work of Lloyd Goodrich heroically continued to completed by Abigail Booth Gertz in 2014, the Artist's career spanning production can now be studied in full. The multi volume publication has been momentous for Homer scholarship, allowing one to trace themes and motifs across as of and more efficient and informed ways. For example, a focus on foreshadowing connecting Homer’s early to middle to late periods, which characterizes the Cape Ann effort. It primarily in the catalog given the strategic checklist of works from 1869 to 1880, I don’t think would have been possible without the publication of the catalog raisonne. And this opportunity, coupled with a seemingly unending series of new questions and theory, theoretical approaches to his art are yielding innovative readings and understandings. And tomorrow you will hear from many scholars who are doing just this, who are finding darker nodes, aural and visual of alienation isolation and inequality in Homer’s art, who uncover new commercial actuarial and conservationists dimensions to his life and work and who revealed primary source evidence of the artist savvy self-promotion and deep family ties. I can't wait for those talks.

30:18
A body of Homer’s work that continues to receive less attention includes the handful of unique watercolors, both sketches and fully realized compositions he did of indigenous North Americans between 1874 and 1895. These appear to range from a visit to the small Montauk community in East Hampton Long Island to an extended stay in [?], Quebec, where Homer produced at least six watercolors of the Montagnais or Innu people. The anomalous composition at right depicting what is likely a Seminole, dates from an 1886 to 1886 trip to the Florida Everglades and is now in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I guess it has been for a while, Erica, right?.

31:03
These intriguing drawings were unknown to me before the publication of the catalog raisonne and as I would guess, maybe the case for many of you. Though they are in the collections, as I mentioned Boston, they’re in the collection of major museums. This pair at the Huntington and
the Cleveland they just have not gotten the same visibility in the exhibitions that have occurred thus far. And they are of particular personal interest given my recent curatorial work with historical Native American art at the MET. Knowing little of Homer’s experience with or attitude to these subjects besides the presence of a few relevant histories of Native America in his library. Should we read them as a form of the exotic picturesque, the view some have taken of Homer’s images of African Americans in Virginia? I think not given the work’s detailed Expression of Place, which reveal the artists observe and attention to changing and displays populations are marginalized groups challenge with uncertain futures something we’ve seen throughout his career. These little studied works complicated our understanding of Homer’s artistic interests of the 1870s, 80s, and 90s, linking a rare subject for him, Native Americans with other contemporary experiments. For example, the first known drawing he produced of an indigenous figure, the one I showed just earlier, the 1874 portrait sketch of David Pharaoh, The Last of the Montauks, may bear some relation to the artists membership in the Tile Club, which paid a visit to that ailing indigenous leader on Long Island a few years after he did the sketch. Also in a more direct relationship, Bill cross notes in the Cape Ann catalog that Homer’s Uncle, Arthur W. Benson, purchased in 1879, 11,000 acres of Montauk and Shinnecock lands at the South Fork of Long Island sovereign Native territory of which he later sold 5000 acres to the Long Island Railroad in a very lucrative deal. So, what might that information reveal about Homer’s images of these and other indigenous subjects and contexts?

33:15

Other fruitful areas of research and future Homer scholarship could include how themes of race and class weave throughout his production from the early Virginia scenes to the late Caribbean subjects. As the Cape Ann catalog notes in passing, Gloucester’s own diversified marine industries in the mid-19th century included vessels that transported Southern cotton, raising questions about the harbor town’s connection to plantation economies. And this mentioned underlines why attention should still be paid to the importance of place in Homer’s art broadening it hemispherically to encompass the Atlantic world. This was the thoughtful idea proposed a few years ago by my American Wheaton colleague, Assistant Curator Stephanie Herdrich, who’s here tonight. Stephanie hoped to develop an exhibition that’s situated the MET’s iconic the Gulf Stream, viewed by a majority of Homer scholars and scholars as the artists most complex, consequential and modern works in the broader context of his late Caribbean watercolors. The pictures the artists felt would define his legacy. By linking the literal inspiration of the MET’s tropical painting the warm Atlantic ocean current known as the Gulf Stream, to many of the locales where Homer painted, the Florida Keys, Cuba, Bahamas, Bermuda, Maine and England. Stephanie wanted to complicate our understanding of his production, his late production, especially the watercolors, and building on Dana Byrd’s recent scholarship, as they have often been interpreted as mere touristic souvenirs and dismissed as his so-called winter work.
This idea will now be the centerpiece of a larger more textured exhibition planned for the spring of 2022, co-curated by Stephanie and me, Winslow Homer: Cross Currents will examine the theme of conflict across the artist’s long career and ongoing attention to struggle throughout the arc of his production from the Civil War and Reconstruction paintings to the epic seascapes suggest lifelong concerns with race, nature and the environment that we believe will resonate with contemporary audiences. Indeed, I would argue that what continues to draw viewers to Homer’s work is not only the powerful reservoir of emotions expressed in it, Bedell’s recent argument, but the tension between that feeling and the pronounced sense of conflict apparent in both the compositional and narrative structure of the work. As Homer’s production explores specific and pivotal social and political issues of his era, for example, slavery, war, imperialism, in addition to more universal concerns with human existence and the dominance of nature. This exhibition will be expansive but critically focused, asking fresh questions about the deeper meanings of the artist’s Atlantic world imagery, contextualized in his broader of the MET exhibition will offer the largest overview of Homer’s career since the 1995 National Gallery retrospective and appropriately ambitious project for a leading repository of the artist’s wide ranging output, a responsibility we take very seriously at the MET.

So based on these past, present and future efforts, it seems we will continue to be captivated by Homer’s art, delving further seeing clear and perceiving more acutely, the formal artistry and interpretive sophistication of this enduring American artist, as complex as the country that challenged and inspired him. Thank you.

I’m told there’s time for questions. I’m happy to take some questions here formally or informally. Or any thoughts? There's going to be so many great questions coming out of tomorrow. I know this was your like impressionistic, laying the groundwork, overview.

Unknown Speaker
You mentioned an upcoming exhibition in 2022, was it?

Dr. Sylvia Yount
Yes, opening in March 2022. Stephanie, right? March 2022? There you are.

It takes some time to develop these exhibitions. And I know this exhibition here happened very quickly. When did we first start talking Bill? A year and a half ago. This was very impressive.

Unknown Speaker
I was struck by the enormity of the way people can interpret Homer. And it’s almost like, is he the artist like Shakespeare was to literature? So in each age of generation, though what we look at, that we can interpret and that's a sign of real greatness?
Dr. Sylvia Yount
I think there's truth to that. I think we do see different things in his art at different moments and just couldn't try to trace that historiography of it, you can see that. It's an unending interest right? I mean, there's so many I'm looking at all my colleagues in the audience here tonight who I think we're still kind of confounded by a lot of these works and it's what keeps us coming back to the works and they're also just very beautifully made objects right and then we love to stare at those watercolors and really think how did he do that?

Unknown Speaker
Yeah, a related question. When you're going through that historiography, was there ever a lull?

Dr. Sylvia Yount
You know, not since the 80s. That's a great question. Well, not really. I'm looking to someone else who has been I know Stephanie's been looking at this too. I mean, certainly, you know, Goodrich was 73. But Goodrich, his cannon of three great American artists came right out of the 1900s criticism. Homer and Aikens, Kathy and then Albert Pinkham Ryder for good measure thrown in there by Goodrich but there really wasn't, not like Sargent, right? We were talking about this just two days ago that there was a real drop off for some of the expatriate artists Sargent, certainly Cecilia Beaux, Cassatt, little bit, Whistler a little bit. Homer, Aikens? Yes, we know Aiken didn't have the appeal in his lifetime that Homer did, certainly but Homer struggled as well earlier in his career. But it seems to be that nationalists in the modern moderns certainly became more of the characterization in the 20s and 30s. But I think different parts of the career became more interesting as well. This is what we were talking about earlier, that what was the moment that we see the Adirondack scenes, you know, the muscular scenes that were certainly more popular when Flexner wrote his Time Life book to which was what I think late 40s 50s. And then it was reproduced again in the 60s.

Unknown speaker
There was never a time never drop. Homer was famous in his lifetime famous in his death. Immediately big show’s celebrating him after his death. And a continual drumroll of exhibitions, he’s never been ignored.

Dr. Sylvia Yount
40:32
Or out of favor. We've just We've just overlooked different parts of his production. I mean, I think that's been more of the shift that you know, in the 80s and 90s. We're starting to look at the works that have been dismissed like the croquet pictures. I mean, David was the first to really look at that work seriously and give it serious attention.

Unknown Speaker 40:48
I'm struck by the disconnect between Homer and it's, it's, you know, his work and Homer the man and to create all of the diverse pieces and the changes he made in the struggles that he
went through, as you say, the conflict and the pain and suffering and the power of the war against nature. And all of these huge subjects. And yet he, what was he like? I mean, there was a disconnect. I mean, how did he do it without showing in the man? Did he show it in the man?

Dr. Sylvia Yount 41:34
I would say that it is in the work. Absolutely. But the biography is there. Well, we just don't know as much about him. He was famously reticent. We don't have the letters, he's one of the least documented, we don't have his own words. And those that we have are often presented kind of ironically, I mean, they're not. So it's, I think it's a lot of interpretation, a lot, a lot of projections and readings into the work because we don't really know the intention. I mean,

Unknown Speaker 42:03
Which makes me crazy.

Dr. Sylvia Yount
It makes you crazy? That’s what art historians do, we love it, it’s like canvas.
Yes.

Unknown Speaker 42:12
Sylvia, I thought it was beautiful. I even talked about leaving Virginia and saying goodbye to the arts, and going home to imagine how that transformed your perception of certain pictures. Could you talk about that a little more?

Dr. Sylvia Yount
Well, it was just, I, like everyone, you know, who studies Homer in this room, I've known those paintings all my life, and I just had not really thought of where they were painted. And what that represented and the different view that we bring to that if you know exactly where they were painted, and what was happening on kind of both sides. So it just, I remembered having this really bizarre encounter when I came in to see that gallery and, you know, certainly, presence from the front, we think is, Spotsylvania. There's the Yorktown picture that I showed. ? in the new field. We don’t really know those are kind of abstracted spaces. But I mean, I thought about the reconstruction pictures a lot that way too, of course. So it just shaped my vision and my understanding in a different way. And I think it could just complicate it more, because they were exhibited in New York, of course, and when we think of them as being such New York pictures by this northern artist, and yet they have really deep resonance, and some of them were discussed in southern newspapers, certainly. And he had a reputation in the South as well. Well, thank you all for coming. I hope you'll stay I think there's still food and drink, I gather to enjoy.

Oliver Barker 43:34
Please do stay and continue to enjoy the reception, and thank you again, Sylvia.
Dr. Sylvia Yount 43:37
You’re very welcome. See you tomorrow.