

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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WINSLOW HOMER'S SECRETS OF THE WATERCOLOR MEDIUM REVEALED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE ART INSTITUTE

Largest Exhibition of American Master's Watercolors in More Than Two Decades

Art Institute Sole Venue for *Watercolors by Homer: The Color of Light*

The Art Institute of Chicago announces a groundbreaking exhibition of watercolors by one of America's most revered artists.

Watercolors by Winslow Homer: The Color of Light presents 130 works that reveal Homer's astounding mastery of watercolor, exploring how he unlocked the secrets of the medium over a period of more than three



decades. In preparation for this exhibition, curators, conservators, and conservation scientists at the Art Institute spent years closely examining Homer's watercolor techniques and materials, using the museum's own collection as a basis for their inquiries. The resulting exhibition, with its accompanying catalogue, provides an intimate look at the artist's evolving relationship with this flexible and luminous medium. Offering the most comprehensive exhibition of Homer's watercolors in decades, *Watercolors by Winslow Homer: The Color of Light* is organized by and mounted exclusively at the Art Institute. The exhibition will be on view **February 16–May 10, 2008**, in the museum's **Regenstein Hall and Galleries 271–273**.

"A much richer picture of Winslow Homer as a practicing artist emerges from this exhibition," said Martha Tedeschi, curator of prints and drawings at the Art Institute and

the exhibition's curator. "Homer's watercolors have often been characterized as free, spontaneous images captured outdoors during fishing trips or in moments of leisure. Indeed many of them do have that feeling—which is exhilarating. But what we found as we investigated more closely using a variety of analytical conservation technologies is that he often put a great deal of thought and careful planning into his watercolors, sometimes changing his mind and making radical alterations to the image. And as this exhibition and its catalogue demonstrate, watercolor was the artist's favorite way to experiment with new ideas about color and light, two of his central preoccupations. In many ways, Homer's watercolors reveal him at his most modern, most daring, and most passionate moments. They also speak movingly about his love of nature and offer profound insights about humanity's place in."

American painter **Winslow Homer (1836–1910)** created some of the most breathtaking and influential images in the history of the watercolor medium. He was, famously, a man who received almost no formal artistic education. Acknowledged in his own day as America's most original and independent watercolorist, he had an intuitive relationship with this challenging medium. Between 1873 and 1905, he created nearly 700 watercolors—an astonishing number. A staple of his livelihood, watercolors were quick drying and portable. The medium became his movable classroom, a way for him to learn through experimentation—with color theory, composition, materials, optics, style, subject matter, and technique—far more freely than he could in the more public and tradition-bound arena of oil painting.

Watercolors by Winslow Homer: The Color of Light is arranged in thematic sections, organized around the different sites where the artist worked. These invite viewers both to look closely at Homer's watercolor techniques and also to step back in order to appreciate the way he adapted his light effects and color palette to the unique characteristics of the settings where he worked. In an almost uncanny way, Homer's watercolors nearly always ring true, vividly capturing the tangible sensations of each environment. A total of 130 watercolors, oils, drawings, and prints from public and private collections throughout the United States tell the story of Homer's development as a watercolor artist, chronicling his techniques, materials, and his responses to dramatic settings—the rocky, deserted coast of Maine, the lush habitats of the Adirondack

Mountains, and mesmerizing vistas in the Caribbean and Florida. The exhibition demonstrates the central role that watercolor played in helping the artist achieve the fresh, immediate, light-filled scenes that have become his most enduring legacy to American art.

The exhibition is the result of a collaboration among curators, researchers, conservators, and conservation scientists, who used the latest analytical technology to examine the Art Institute's watercolors. The research yields new information about his pigments, his experiments with color theory, and his varied, unconventional use of watercolor. The alteration of his colors over time due to light exposure is also considered, in order to arrive at a new understanding of his original intentions. An interactive Web component will allow visitors to explore this research—as well as learn about cutting-edge conservation techniques—at their own pace, scrutinizing details under high magnification and learning firsthand about the materials, pigments, and techniques Homer used to achieve his astounding effects. Available in February, www.artic.edu/aic/research/homer will provide high-resolution images and in-depth analysis of the museum's methods and findings.

A beautifully illustrated catalogue accompanies *Watercolors by Winslow Homer: The Color of Light*. Published by the Art Institute in association with Yale University Press, the 228-page volume presents essays written by Tedeschi and by Art Institute paper conservator Kristi Dahm. The catalogue also includes major contributions by Homer specialist Judith Walsh, associate professor of conservation at Buffalo State University, and by exhibition research assistant Karen Huang. The catalogue will be available in February for purchase in the Museum Shop and online at www.artinstituteshop.org.

Watercolors by Winslow Homer: The Color of Light is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago. Terra Foundation for American Art is the Lead Foundation Sponsor as part of American Art American City, a Chicago celebration of historical American art. Harris is the Lead Corporate Sponsor. Additional support has been generously provided by the Jane Ellen Murray Foundation, the Community Associates of the Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Norman C. Bobins, and Mr. and Mrs. William C. Vance. Support for the catalogue has been generously provided by The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation.

IMAGE CREDIT: Winslow Homer. *The Water Fan*, 1898/1899. Gift of Dorothy A., John A., Jr., and Christopher Holabird in memory of William and Mary Holabird.

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FALL/WINTER HOURS:

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Thursday. Target Free Evenings after 5:00 p.m.

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday.

Free all day, every day in February.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

Please check www.artic.edu before your visit.

Admission: Adults, \$12.00; children 12 and over, students, and seniors, \$7.00; children under 12 free; members always free. Target Free Evenings are free to all, except for certain special exhibitions that may require full or extra admission fee. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Check Us Out" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago. Members always have free, unlimited access to the museum, including ticketed exhibitions. Join today at www.artic.edu/aic/joinnow

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The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.