THE HERRING NET, 1885
WINSLOW HOMER, AMERICAN, 1836-1910
The Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection

The Herring Net is one of the great series of oils painted at Prout's Neck, Maine, during the period of 1885-1896. The Fog Warning, Eight Bells, Cannon Rock, Northeaster, and The Look-out, All's Well are others of this well-known group. Homer's understanding of the nobility of the lives of fishermen has been compared with Millet's attitude toward the peasants of France. The dignity of expression and emphasis on essentials are similar in the work of the two artists.

In The Herring Net we see Homer at his best in these qualities and in composition and color as well. Two fishermen in sou'westers are shown in a dory, hauling in a net full of herring. While one man stands amidships emptying the fish from the net into the bottom of the boat, his mate, sitting on the gunwale, pays out the empty net at the left. The form of the pyramid made by the two figures and the net is repeated by the blades of the oars crossed against the bow, by the crests of the waves, and by the sails dimly seen against the horizon.

This painting done at the height of Homer's power has none of the weaknesses of some of his earlier work. His color, sometimes ineffective in his oil paintings, is here silvery in tone and subtle in its harmonies. The warm greys of the sky and soft greens, blues, and violets of the sea make an effective background for the iridescence of the fish, the silvery red of the buoy, and the darker values of the figures and the boat. The painting is one of those which sum up the artist's greatness: the epic quality of his attitude toward the toilers of the sea, the perhaps unconscious power of composition, and the dignity and simplicity of his rendering of a subject which he knew thoroughly.

Painted in 1885, awarded a gold medal at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, shown in the Century of Progress Exhibitions at the Art Institute in 1933 and 1934 and at the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco in 1939, The Herring Net has completed a half century of popularity and with its ageless appeal bids fair to be a favorite for many years to come.

WINSLOW HOMER
American, 1836-1910

Although in the long line of great painters in the history of art Winslow Homer does not stand out as a Titan, he remains one of the greatest of our purely native painters in oil and water color. Thoroughly American in his ancestry, he was born in Boston in 1836. One is tempted to suggest that his love of the sea came from his seafaring grandfather and his talent for painting from his mother who as a young lady in Bucksport, Maine, is reported to have had "a pretty talent for painting flowers in water colors."

The typical New England boyhood of those days was varied for Homer by the fact that he drew well at the age of eleven and at nineteen was apprenticed to a lithographer. He learned wood engraving at the same time and at twenty-one began his work as an illustrator. To produce numerous realistic drawings for Harper's Weekly was perhaps the best training he ever had. In 1859 he moved to New York and made his home there for the next twenty-five years. During his first years in the city he had his only art lessons, some in a night class at the National Academy of Design and a few with an artist named Rondel.

He first exhibited at the Academy in 1860 and during the Civil War spent three months at the front drawing illustrations for Harper's. He learned slowly and in his own independent way. In 1867 a year in Paris seemed to influence his style not at all. "If a man wants to be an artist he must never look at pictures" was his opinion. A later sojourn abroad in 1881, spent at Tynemouth, England, where he studied and painted in water color the fisher folk, the sea, and the fogs had a far greater effect on his work.

In 1884 he began his most important series of oils at Prout's Neck, Maine, where he moved to be near his father and brothers and to retire to the simple life of a bachelor who lived only to paint. After this he painted the scenes that he loved in Maine in summer, in Nassau, Cuba, the Bahamas, and the Adirondacks on his trips during the other seasons.

In 1893 when fifteen of his paintings were hung at the World's Columbian Exposition, the one here shown won the gold medal and in 1900 the same honor was awarded

A Summer Night when it was bought by the Luxembourg in Paris.

During the years before his death in 1910 he continued to paint but many of his greatest works belong to the Prout's Neck series of which The Herring Net is one.

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WINSLOW HOMER
THE HERRING NET, 1885
Drawing in black and white crayon and Chinese white on grey green paper.
Cooper Union Museum, New York

A quick preparatory sketch, probably more realistic in detail than the finished painting. Notice the position of the buoy at the right, the prominence of the sail boats, and the three gulls in the sky, all of which are changed in the later version. This elimination increases the starkness of effect achieved.

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WINSLOW HOMER
THE HERRING NET, 1885
Water Color
Collection of C. R. Henschel, New York

A preparatory sketch in a medium in which Homer was probably the greatest American artist of his day. Here the shape of the panel, the composition, and the values are practically the same as in the oil painting.

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H.F.M.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH

September, 1940

"The Herring Net" by Winslow Homer

Books on display table in
Reference Room - Ryerson Library

705.1 A78d — Art Digest. Vol. 13, No. 12, March 15, 1939, p. 26

705.1 A792 — The Arts. Vol. 14, No. 9, May, 1930, p. 630

759.1 B91 — Bryant, L. M. - American pictures and their painters. 1917

759.1 C12a — Caffin, C. H. - American masters of painting. 1902

759.1 C12s — Caffin, C. H. - Story of American painting. 1907

759.1 H76pi — Garnegie Institute - Winslow Homer. Centenary exhibition. 1836-1936

S 708.1 C53b — Chicago. Art Institute - Bulletins: Vol. 17, No. 6, September, 1923, p. 56 and Vol. 32, No. 1, January, 1938, p. 4-5 Paintings in the Ryerson gift.

759.1 C82 — Cortissoz, Royal - American artists. 1923, p. 119

P 759.1 H76c — Cox, Kenyon - Winslow Homer. 1914, p. 34

751.1 H76i — Index of Twentieth Century Artists. Vol. 1, No. 2, November, Winslow Homer Painter

759.1 I79c — Isham, Samuel - History of American painting. 1927

759.1 M17 — McSpadden, J. W. - Famous painters of America. 1907

705.1 M18 — Magazine of Art. Vol. 31, No. 2, February, 1938, p. 98

750.4 M42 — Mather, F. J. Jr. - Estimates in Art. 1931

759.1 H76n — New England Museums Association - Winslow Homer. 1936-1937

Masterpiece of the Month, September, 1940
Books on display table in Reference room, Ryerson Library

759.1 H76nm — New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art - Winslow Homer. A picture book. 1939

759.1 H76p — Pennsylvania Museum of Art - Winslow Homer. 1916. No. 16

O 759.1 H76pr — Prouts Neck, Maine Association - Winslow Homer. Century Loan exhibition. 1936

C 759.1 H76nw — Whitney Museum of American Art - Winslow Homer. Centenary exhibition. December 15, 1936-January 15, 1937