

HOMER

(1836–1910)

Winslow Homer is rarely left off of any comprehensive list of artistic greats. He is a resounding favorite among artists, a true painter's painter, both in his own time and today. This is not only because of his varied body of work that continually changed and improved over the course of his life but also for the enviable qualities he possessed that allowed him to reach his full potential: natural talent, courageousness, independence, and dedication.

In many ways, Homer is the quintessential American realist painter, and several of his iconic images, such as *Snap the Whip* and *The Fog Horn*, have become treasures of genre painting. Like the Hudson River School painters, Homer captured a national identity by painting the quickly progressing civilization of our newborn nation, highlighting mankind's intrinsic tie to nature. Unlike the Hudson River School painters, Homer steered away from academic and romantic sensibilities and moved toward simple, honest expressions of human existence, while still imbuing his work with ever-evolving passion and power.

Homer loved the sea, and it was a trip to Tynemouth, England, in the

summer of 1881 that would jumpstart a new direction in his life and art. Tynemouth is a small fisherman's community off the coast of the North Sea. While he was there, Homer observed and painted people whose lives were deeply connected to the ocean: fishermen wrestling the dangerous and tumultuous waters for

the catch of the day; wives standing at water's edge anxiously awaiting their husbands' return; rescuers launching a lifeboat to save sailors from a foundering ship. All of the drama, beauty, and melancholy of man against nature satisfied Homer's visual longing—he had found his subject matter. Upon his return to the America,

Homer set up a home and studio in Prouts Neck, Maine, and remained there for the next 25 years, continually inspired by the rocky coast's similarly dramatic displays of calm and chaos. It is during this time that he created the greatest work of his career.

What is most memorable about Homer? Certainly his early iconic

American genre imagery; his ability to continually challenge himself and never get too comfortable with any one subject or style; and, most of all, his unrivaled pursuit of artistic truth, which was a constant undercurrent throughout his work but surfaced with the greatest crescendo in the last years of his life. —*A.M.*

The Fog Warning, Halibut Fishing

1885, oil, 30¼ x 48½. Collection Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Boston, Massachusetts.

Homer was so dedicated to authenticity that for this 1885 painting he had a rowboat set on a beach against a bank of sand and hired a local fisherman to sit in it, holding the oars, so that he could accurately render it. Homer then waited months for the right sky to appear to complete the picture.

