

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



John Singer SARGENT (Florence 1856 - London 1925)

Ryefield Beach, Ironbound Island, Maine

Watercolour and pencil. Laid down.

Signed and dated John S. Sargent 1922 in pencil at the lower right.

395 x 535 mm. (15 1/2 x 21 1/8 in.)

This large sheet is among the last watercolour landscapes painted by John Singer Sargent, when he worked in Maine and New Hampshire during the summers of 1921 and 1922. Sargent spent much of those years working in Boston on his mural paintings for the Museum of Fine Arts and the Widener Library at Harvard, and he grasped the opportunity to take a break from his labours and visit friends in New England. For several days in July of both years he visited his friend, the artist Dwight Blaney and his family – his wife Edith and their two daughters Elizabeth and Margaret – at their summer home on Ironbound Island, in Frenchman Bay in Maine. (The artist also visited other friends in Maine; his cousin Mary Hale and her husband Richard on the island of Mount Desert, and George and Mabel Agassiz on North Haven Island.) Sargent produced several watercolours on Ironbound Island, which is situated in the middle of Frenchman Bay, approximately midway between Bar Harbor in the west and Winter Harbor in the east. Ironbound Island was owned by Blaney, who had the only house on the island. As Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray have written, 'Like his host, Sargent found the solitude and simplicity of the island conducive to art.'

This watercolour was drawn on Sargent's second visit to the Blaneys on Ironbound Island, between the 10th and 26th of July 1922, when he was accompanied by his sister Emily. As Elizabeth, one of the Blaney's daughters, later recalled, 'Mr. Sargent was a terrific worker. He seemed to paint all the time, and quickly, sometimes spending only one or two hours on a picture, and swearing half the time. He walked around the island to find spots where he wanted to paint...He sat on a rubber mat on the rocks at the shore. He was furious when the tide came in and he had to move!...Mr. Sargent told my father that he should always paint in watercolor because his composition was better. Mr. Sargent himself also painted in watercolors at Ironbound...[he] painted watercolors of the Ryefield Beach, our wharf (three times), the woods on the island and a fish weir in the bay – a total of eight pictures during his visit in 1922.'

Ryefield Beach is located on the west coast of Ironbound Island. As Richard Ormond and Elaine

Kilmurray note of the present sheet, 'The view is from Ryefield Point, looking south-east along the foreshore with slabs of rock and stones glinting in the sunlight...The name of the beach is derived from a story that Native Americans purportedly landed their birch bark canoes on the flat ledges and harvested wild rye. The meadow where they did so has long since been swallowed up by fir trees and spruce. The powerful composition of the water-colour shows a landward view of the island in contrast to the many views looking seaward.'

Exhibitions

Boston, St. Botolph Club, Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by John S. Sargent, 1922, no.17 (lent by Dwight Blaney); Paris, Hôtel de la Chambre Syndicale de la Curiosité et des Beaux-Arts, Association Franco-Américaine d'Expositions de Peinture et de Sculpture, Exposition d'Art Américain: John S. Sargent, R.A., Dodge MacKnight, Winslow Homer, Paul Manship, 1923, no.33 (lent by Dwight Blaney); Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Memorial Exhibition of the Works of the Late John Singer Sargent, 1925, no.91 (lent by Dwight Blaney).

Literature:

A Catalogue of the Memorial Exhibition of the Works of the Late John Singer Sargent, exhibition catalogue, Boston, 1925, p.24, no.90; William Howe Downes, John S. Sargent: His Life and Work, with an Exhaustive Catalogue of his Works, London, 1926, p.283 and p.339; Ann Farlow Morris, ed., The Memoirs of Elizabeth Hill Cram, Hollis, 1992, p.70; Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray, John Singer Sargent: Figures and Landscapes, 1914-1925. Complete Paintings, Volume IX, New Haven and London, 2016, p.22, p.275, no.1903, p.319, no.1903.

Artist description:

Born in Italy, the son of expatriate Americans, John Singer Sargent received his artistic training in Paris. He travelled widely throughout France, Italy and Spain, and became established as the leading portrait painter working in England and America in the latter part of the 19th century. Sargent settled in London in 1886, although he continued to make regular trips to the Continent, often in the company of his younger sisters Emily and Violet, and also to New York and Boston. In 1894 he was elected an Associate member of the Royal Academy in London, becoming a full Academician three years later. Although he was arguably Sargent was the most fashionable portrait painter in England and America by the end of the 19th century, he chose to abandon commissioned portraiture in 1907, working instead on landscapes and mural projects as well as working as a war artist during the First World War. This resulted in a monumental canvas of soldiers injured by poison gas, completed in 1919 and today in the Imperial War Museum in London.