1-1-2013

Weather Beaten: Winslow Homer’s Studio Restored

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Repository Citation

Published Citation

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Celebrating the re-opening of Winslow Homer's studio at Prouts Neck, newly accessible, in an exclusive, private community with guarded, limited access.

Like a rugged sentinel protecting the tempestuous coastline of American art, Winslow Homer's newly restored studio home at Prouts Neck beckons for our attention. Beyond a tourist site, it's a guardian of the past, a disquieting vault full of secrets, and a beacon of hope upholding the basics of great art.

Embraced by an extensively genuine group of staff members from the Portland Museum of Art, one can't help but feel penetrating into a protected preserve of privilege to inhale its rarified air – and views! Even Homer would have marveled at the vast abundance of admirers pouring into this art historical landmark.

Reductive, resilient, and intentionally mysterious, the studio's enchantment is a contemplative session of Homer's own hand-painted, poisonous hex sign posted – "Snakes, Snakes, Mice!" Installed like a reliquary above the mantelpiece, its message was to deter the constant an annoyance of inquisitive souvenir seekers at the height of his fame.

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the Studio as it was during Homer’s time and discover the actual location where he created his best-known paintings,” notes PMA Director Mark H.C. Bessire. “The studio is truly a cultural treasure.”

This was not achieved without the combined intelligence and flat out moxie to mount a $10.8 million national campaign. Engaging leading architects, art historians, and skilled craftspeople, the studio bears enough authenticity to grasp Homer’s vantage points for several pivotal paintings. Most thrilling is a gentle, overgrown winding pathway down to the craggy, weatherbeaten spit of rocks.

This geological vestige of the last glacial ice age circa 40,000 years ago left its slashed out sculpture for Homer to memorialize in watercolor and oils. Its iconography was first known to me as a 10 year old schoolboy gazing at Homer’s majestic Prouts Neck paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The awesome power of “Northeastern” (1896) with its Japanese/Impressionist “Ukiyo-e” like plume of foaming waves, has been indelibly stamped. Thanks to the good folks at the Portland Museum of Art – that transcendent image sprang to life. A lifelong notion in my minds’ eye was the terra firma I was now magically standing upon.

For next season’s fortunate visitors, they too will be rewarded as they embrace this most secret destination. Here, you will come to experience the physical sensations, blinding sunlight, wild flowers, and tortured rocky coast forming the inimitable language of Homer’s visual poetics.

Hurry – It’s not too early to make your reservations, as last summer’s limited access sold out quickly. Open between April-December.

For advanced reservations and instructions: call the Portland Museum of Art – (207) 775-6148. Tickets are $55/$30 for members.

Tour duration: about 2.5 hours, transported by private van into the site. Please visit: www.portlandmuseum.org.

Photographs courtesy of Portland Museum of Art.