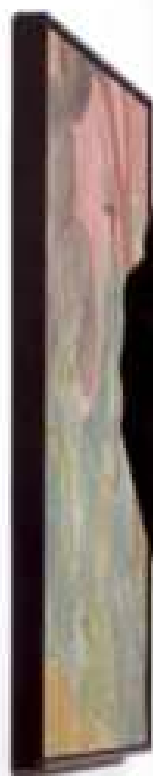


JOHN UPDIKE

**ALWAYS
LOOKING**



Essays on Art

JOHN UPDIKE

Always Looking

ESSAYS ON ART

Edited by Christopher Carduff



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The texts of three of these pieces, “Pictures and Words,” “A Case of Monumentality,” and “Big, Bright, and Bendayed,” are reprinted from *More Matter*, John Updike’s nonfiction collection published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1999.

Excerpts from “The Clarity of Things” were published in *The New York Review of Books* and *Humanities* magazine. The full text of this lecture made reference to sixty-four images projected onscreen while the author spoke; it has been slightly abridged by Christopher Carduff for its appearance here.

The remaining pieces were published, in somewhat different form and sometimes under different titles, in *The New York Review of Books* or *The New Republic*. These pieces were revised by the author for eventual book publication and deposited at Houghton Library, Harvard University, in December 2008, the month before his death. They are printed here in much the form that John Updike left them, and under his preferred titles.

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Cover image: John Updike, in 1989, looking at three paintings by Henri Matisse in the Florence May Schoenborn Gallery, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (from left to right: *View of Notre Dame*, 1914; *Moroccan Garden*, 1912; *Goldfish and Sculpture*, 1912). Photograph © 2012 by Benno Friedman

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The question is not what you look at—
but how you look & whether you see.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU,
Journal, August 5, 1851

“What’s this?”
“What’s what?”
“Why, *look*.”

—JOHN UPDIKE, *The Poorhouse Fair*

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Editor's Note

Always Looking was conceived by Judith Jones of Alfred A. Knopf as a posthumous companion to John Updike's previous collections of art writings, *Just Looking* (1989) and *Still Looking* (2005). Martha Updike, John's wife and literary executor, invited me to put together the book, which I edited in tandem with *Higher Gossip*, a more various collection of Updike's essays and criticism published by Knopf in 2011. Thank you, Judith and Martha, for sponsoring this final set of illustrated "gallery tours," which I've arranged as a highly selective survey of the last two hundred years of Western art, a master class in appreciation conducted from an unabashedly American perspective.

Of the thirteen exhibition reviews gathered here, ten first appeared in *The New York Review of Books* between 1990 and 2007. The reviews of Monet, Miró, and Magritte appeared in *The New Republic* between 1990 and 1993. "Pictures and Words" was published, as "A Bookish Boy," in *Life*, October 1990. "A Case of Monumentality" was written, at the invitation of Edward Hirsch, for *Transforming Vision* (Bulfinch Press, 1994), a volume of essays and poems inspired by works in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Updike delivered "The Clarity of Things," the thirty-seventh annual Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, at the Warner Theatre, in Washington, D.C., on May 22, 2008. Excerpts were published in *The New York Review of Books* and in *Humanities*, the magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Many thanks to my collaborators at Knopf, Peter A. Andersen, Deborah Garrison, Ken Schneider, and Caroline Zancan. I am deeply indebted to Sarah Almond, who, in securing the rights to reproduce the illustrations for this volume, was less a permissions editor than a full partner in bookmaking.

Christopher Cardozo
November 2011



LINDA GRACE HOYER UPDIKE *John Updike*, 1941 Gelatin silver print, 5 × 3¹/₁₆" John H. Updike Literary Trust ([Illustration Credit fm2.1](#))

Preface: Pictures and Words

MY MOTHER took this photograph, and dated it precisely on the back: September 21, 1941. I was, therefore, nine years, six months, and three days old. Consulting the perpetual calendar, I find that the date fell, as I suspected, on a Sunday; my little suit coat, my solid laced shoes, and a sabbath gleam in the dappled sunshine suggest a day apart. No amount of peering, even with a magnifying glass, at the photograph revives in me any memory-sensation of the moment that has been preserved, but the site is very familiar. It was one of my favorite places in the world: the side porch of the house at 117 Philadelphia Avenue, in Shillington, Pennsylvania. The house belonged to my maternal grandparents; due to the exigencies of the Depression my parents and I lived there as well. On this long side porch, half of whose length stretches out of sight to my right, I would play by myself or with others—setting up grocery stores out of orange crates and crayoned paper fruit, making cozy houses out of overturned wicker porch furniture. A grape arbor extended outward from the porch roof, throwing its dazzling dapple down upon the steps and a brick patio where ants busily came and went between the cracks. The grapevine's tendrils curled with such intricacy that I imagined they would spell the entire alphabet if I looked hard enough.

The door behind me leads into our kitchen, with its linoleum floor and wooden icebox and soapy-smelling stone sink. The kitchen smelled of vanilla, cinnamon, and shredded coconut. In its glass-fronted cabinets, and of the oilcloth on the little table where we ate, I seated at the corner that prodded me in the stomach. On those days when my mother and grandmother canned, putting up peaches and pears and tomatoes in Mason jars, there was a majestic amount of steam in the kitchen, and a surplus of those fascinating little sealing rings of red rubber. These rings, and clothespins, and spools depleted of thread were common household items in that homely pre-war world, and thriftily became toys.

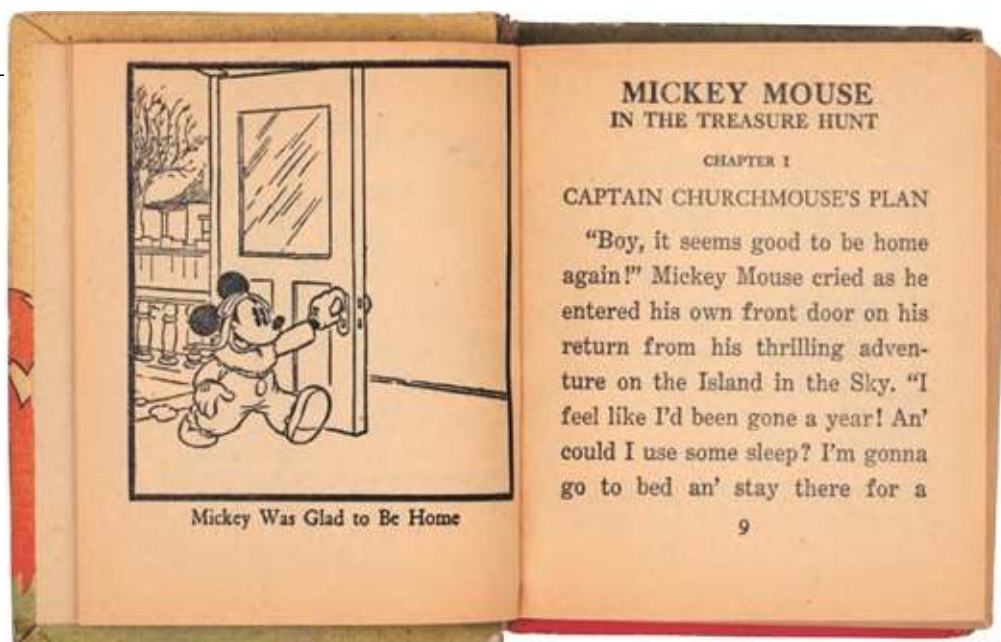
The broom rack is a period detail, and another broom seems to peek in at the left. Sweeping was a constant rite of summer, as was fly-swatting, with its similarly shaped implement. At the end of the porch, against the radiant foliage of our back yard, sits a wire lawn-chair that had a curious destiny. When we moved, in 1945, from this house to a smaller house in the country, the wire chair, a greenish blue in color, somehow came indoors, and joined our living-room furniture. A cushion did not appreciably disguise or soften its metallic mesh. Its springy seat rebounded into convexity, when you stood up, with an audible snap.



WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS *Mickey Mouse in "The Treasure Hunt,"* 1941 3½ × 4 × 1¼" Whitman Publishing Co., Racine, Wisconsin ([Illustration Credit prf.1](#))

The chair eventually migrated to our barn, and I did not notice it there last fall, when more than forty-eight years after she took this picture, my mother died, and I surveyed my inheritance. My mother's old camera had also vanished. The technical excellence of the photograph, there in the difficult dapple, testifies to my mother's skill as she lovingly sought to capture her only child. The camera was an oblong old Kodak with a pebbly black leather skin, an unfolding black bellows, and a broken viewfinder. She would judge the exposure by looking at the sky and determine the focus by pacing off the distance and returning to her photographer's spot. Here she managed a focus so sharp that one can not only read the words MICKEY MOUSE on the cover of the Big Little Book but also the subtitle THE TREASURE HUNT and see that Mickey is wearing a pith helmet.

How I did love Big Little Books! They were chunky little volumes sold for ten cents, made of single panels from a comic strip opposite a short page of narrative text. My transition from wanting to be a cartoonist to wanting to be a writer may have come about through the friendly opposition, that even-handed pairing, of pictures and words. The colorful crispness of the fat flat Big Little Book spines stacked on my bedroom shelf, and on the counters of the Woolworth's and McCrory's where, on Saturday mornings, I went with my hoarded dimes to enlarge my collection, deepened my love of all books and my sense that, whatever else may be, a book is a manufactured item, which should be amusing to look at and pleasant to hold.



WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS *Mickey Mouse in "The Treasure Hunt,"* 1941 3½ × 4 × 1¼" Whitman Publishing Co., Racine, Wisconsin ([Illustration Credit prf.2](#))

An uncanny stillness reigns between the boy's face, with its tiny smile and many freckles and the pages of the open book. His hands, in sunlight, look posed, and indeed a posed quality formalizes the whole. This quality strikes me now as poignant and tender. My mother was so encouraging of my childish artistic interests, so hopeful for me. Here she seems, out of sheer hopes for the future, to have carefully arranged and taken the first picture of me suitable for use on the back of a book jacket—the Author in *Early Bud*, at work in his outdoor study.



JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY *Paul Revere*, 1768 Oil on canvas, 35½ × 28½" Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Joseph W. Revere, William B. Revere, and Edward H. R. Revere, 30.781 ([Illustration Credit 1.0](#))

“The Clarity of Things”

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the Humanities, together with the American Library Association, has launched in this year of 2008 a program that will supply classrooms and public libraries with reproductions of significant American art, one example on each side of twenty high-quality posters, forty examples in all, under the overall title *Picturing America*. It was my idea, invited by the Endowment to give the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, to use some of these forty works, with others, to pose the question “What is American about American art?” The question has often arisen; it was asked in almost these exact same words in 1958, by Lloyd Goodrich, then the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art. His essay was titled “What Is American in American Art?” and began:

One of the most American traits is our urge to define what is American. This search for a self-image is a result of our relative youth as a civilization, our years of partial dependence on Europe. But it is also a vital part of the process of growth.

My impression is that inquiries into an essential Americanness are less fashionable than they were fifty years ago, since they inevitably gravitate, in this age of diversity and historical revision, to that least hip of demographic groups, white Protestant males of Northern European descent. These thin-lipped patriarchal persons figure, as founding Puritans or Founding Fathers, as Western pioneers or industrial magnates, at every juncture of traditional history books, and our diverse, eclectic, skeptical present population may have heard quite enough about them.

Yet my skimming survey of our sensitively diverse set of forty artworks cannot avoid the primal Americans. Let us begin with the first great painter cast up by our art-sparsely-underserved, eastern-coastal New World, a young man as precocious as he was assiduous: John Singleton Copley. Born in 1738 of Irish immigrants on Boston’s Long Wharf, his childhood marred by his father’s early death and then, when he was thirteen, by that of his stepfather, the English artist and engraver Peter Pelham, Copley was all his life a striver and a learner, with what I would like to think of as a typically American trait, a learner.



COPLEY *Charles Pelham*, c. 1753–54 Oil on canvas, 36 × 28" Private collection ([Illustration Credit 1.1](#))

Colonial Boston, a town of fewer than sixteen thousand, accounted for 40 percent of the colonies' shipping; it abounded in shops and skilled craftsmen but was devoid of art schools and museums; European art entered its homes, if at all, in the form of fine consumer goods and inadequate monochrome prints. Copley was to complain in letters that his fellow colonials "generally regard [painting] no more than any other useful trade, as the sometimes term it, like that of a Carpenter, tailor, or shew [shoe] maker, not as one of the most noble Arts in the World," and that his native land offered him "neither precept or example, nor Models." Peter Pelham was proficient in the art of mezzotint, and Copley's first known work, done when the boy was fifteen, skillfully imposed the head of one clergyman, the Reverend William Welsted, upon the torso of a portrait print his stepfather had executed of another, the Reverend William Cooper.

Copley's oil portrait of his stepbrother, Charles Pelham, executed a year or so later, is a typical stiff portrait of the period, with a totally indecisive background and a tabletop in one-point perspective, yet with a pleasing care in such details as the pen and the vest and an arresting liveliness to the young subject's glance. By 1756, the teen-age artist attempted, in the portrait of Ann Tyng, a nearly full-length female figure, a landscaped background, and an apparatus of pastoral conceit; by the next year, in that of the aristocratic Theodore Atkinson, Jr., who still wears a wary stiffness in the pose and expression, the painter achieved a wonderful virtuoso realism in the white silk waistcoat embroidered with silver thread.

A canvas of Epes Sargent, the seventy-year-old owner of half of Gloucester, shows the textural brilliance of another sort, in the thoughtful aged face and the puffy, wrinkled hair set off against a coat of plain gray broadcloth. The painter's voracious eye even notes the little snowfall on Sargent's shoulder from his powdered wig. By the year of this painting, Copley, not yet thirty, was already recognized as a worker of visual miracles, the supreme portraitist not only in New England but in all the colonies, combining a preternatural skill in mimicking fabrics—as marvellous in pastel, as we see in his rendering of the merchant prince Jonathan Jackson and his blue-green silk morning coat, as in oil—with an increasing power in conveying the inner life behind the faces of his New World aristocrats. For instance, in the portrait of Mrs. James Warren, née Mercy Otis, a colonial rarity, a female intellectual, poet, and future playwright and historian, her facial expression is as complex as the folds and lace

trimmings of her voluminous blue satin dress, painted when Copley was only twenty-five.



COPLEY *Epes Sargent*, c. 1760 Oil on canvas, $49\frac{7}{8} \times 40\frac{1}{16}$ " National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Avalon Foundation, 159.4.1 ([Illustration Credit 1.3](#))



COPLEY *Mrs. James Warren (Mercy Otis)*, c. 1763 Oil on canvas, 49⁵/₈ × 39¹/₂" Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Winslow Warren, 31.212 (Illustration Credit 1.2)

The Copley example chosen by the *Picturing America* series is his 1768 portrait of successful Boston silversmith, Paul Revere, whose name, thanks to an 1861 poem by Longfellow, would come to reverberate in the legend of the American Revolution. It is Copley's only portrait of a craftsman in shirtsleeves, and the painting itself shows some of the merely craftsmanly qualities. The shirt is splendid, but the hand on the chin appears too big for the face, and the reflection of the fingers of the other in the silver of the teapot seems surreally artful. Whatever Revere is thinking about, it is most probably not the midnight ride he will undertake in seven years' time but the job he will undertake tomorrow morning, in the meticulous graving and polishing.

This painting, and one several years later of the rising firebrand Samuel Adams, might lead one to associate Copley with the colonies' cause of independence, but in fact he married the daughter of Richard Clarke, principal agent for the British East India Company; it was Clarke's tea, largely, that was dumped into Boston Harbor by revolutionaries painted as Mohawk Indians. In the coming crunch, Clarke was a Tory, and by 1776 Copley had settled with his wife, children, and father-in-law in London's Leicester Square. But, for a decade before this, Copley had been seeking to make his painting more English. He wrote in a letter of yearning "to acquire that bold free and gracefull stile of Painting that will, if ever, come much slower from the mere dictates of Nature, which has hither too been my only instructor."

In 1765, seeking better instruction, he submitted a painting of his half-brother Henry Pelham, titled *Boy with a Squirrel*, to the 1766 exhibition of the Society of Artists in London.

His friend Captain R. G. Bruce, who had carried the canvas to England, sent back the approbation of Joshua Reynolds, the leading British portraitist of the day and soon to be the first president of the Royal Academy. In Bruce's paraphrase, Reynolds said, "Considering the Dissadvantages ... you had laboured under, that *it was a very wonderful Performance*" despite "a little Hardness in the Drawing, Coldness in the Shades, An over minuteness."

The same mail brought Copley word from Pennsylvania-born Benjamin West, who in three years of London residence had apparently mastered English artistic style and manners. West wrote of "the great Honour the Picture has gained you," though he and some fellow artists had found fault with it as "being too liney, which was judged to have arose from there being so much neatness in the lines." Reynolds, by way of Bruce, encouraged Copley to come to England "before your Manner and Taste were corrupted or fixed by working in your little way at Boston," and the Society of Artists elected him a fellow on the strength of the "liney canvas; the contemporary art authority John Wilmerding points out that it was the "first major work painted by an American artist for himself, rather than on commission, and it also became the first American picture to be exhibited abroad." Copley, Tory or not, was the George Washington of American art, and, rather disconcertingly, he knew it, writing his half brother in 1775 from England's shores, "It is a pleasing reflection that I shall stand among the first of the artists that shall have led that Country to the Knowledge and cultivation of the fine Arts."



COPLEY *Boy with a Squirrel* (Henry Pelham), 1765 Oil on canvas, 30³/₈ × 25¹/₈" Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of the artist's great-granddaughter, 1978.297 ([Illustration Credit 1.4](#))

This picture's transatlantic intentions give it a schizophrenic quality: the mahogany tabletop, the water glass, gold chain, and the tiny pet flying squirrel all have a dramatic minuteness, but the subject's face, unlike that of Copley's usual hard-faced colonials, is creamy, dreamy, and in romantic profile. Copley's customers for portraits among the colonial gentry put up with an absence of flattery, a refusal to glamorize, that British sitters of comparable status might not have accepted; even here, Copley's warts-and-all portrait policy is permanized in paint his half-brother's oddly folded ear, as well as, elsewhere, Nathaniel Allen's hairy moles and Miles Sherbrook's acne scars.

Copley's next submission to the Society of Artists, for the 1767 exhibition, was titled *Your Lady with a Bird and Dog*. This time, Benjamin West complained that the girl looked "disagreeable," and conveyed Reynolds's opinion that

Each Part of the Picture [is] Equall in Strenght of Coulering and finishing, Each Making to[o] much a Picture of its self, without the Due Subordanation to the Principle Parts, viz they head and hands.

What Reynolds meant is shown by his own portrait of Horace Walpole. Here light is sharply focused on the head and one hand. Incidental details are confined to papers, for Walpole is a writer, acting out his role on a minimalist stage. In Reynolds's more elaborate portrait of Warren Hastings, the first governor general of India, the proficiently painted details of clothing and furniture do not usurp attention from the casually posed nobleman and agent of empire, but frame him, in his relaxed dignity; he has a good opinion of himself, and the portrait agrees.



SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS *Horace Walpole*, 1756 Oil on canvas, 50 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ " National Portrait Gallery, London ([Illustration Credit](#))



REYNOLDS *Warren Hastings*, 1767–68 Oil on canvas, 49¾ × 39¾" National Portrait Gallery, London (Illustration Credit 1.6)

The confident theatricality of English portraits, when Copley attempts it, seems to embarrass his down-to-earth colonial subjects, and turns their expressions ironical; see, for example, Sylvester Gardiner's in his 1772 portrait. If their poses are stiff, it is an honest, wooden stiffness; in Copley's paintings of English gentry, the stiffness is burnished to metallic lustre, and rings hollow. Even in his most admired and ambitious English painting, *The Death of Major Peirson*—a historical tableau in the approved Grand Style, completed in 1784—the central pictorial incident, with its single drop-shaped drop of blood, feels staged to the point of farce. And the dying hero's flowing hair, and the spruce details of the uniform crowding around him, seem, well, "liney."

What did Benjamin West mean by this word? A line is a child's first instrument of depiction, the boundary where one thing ends and another begins. The primitive artist is more concerned with what things *are* than what they look like to the eye's camera. Lines serve the facts. Folk art tends to be "liney," as we can see in two American portraits done well before Copley: one of the centenarian Anne Dison, of Boston; the other of the eighteen-year-old Lavinia Van Vechten, of Catskill, New York. Such portraits, executed as a "useful trade" like sign painting and printmaking, were the sole genre of high art widely practiced in America before the nineteenth century brought in Romantic landscapes. They share a resolute attempt at likeness and an honest notation of such details as fabric patterns, but lack a convincing atmosphere and a third dimension; they are, as it were, two-and-a-half-dimensional, and so was Copley's early work. The conventions of illusionistic painting, providing through tint and brushwork the sense of recession in space and of enclosing atmosphere, are not demanded by every culture. In the art-sparse, mercantile world of the

American colonies, Copley's lavish literalism must have seemed fair dealing, a heaping measure of value paid in shimmering textures and scrupulously fine detail. "Over minuteness could scarcely exist, as it did not exist for Holbein or Jan van Eyck.



ANONYMOUS *Mrs. William Pollard (Anne Dison)*, 1721 Oil on canvas, 27³/₄ × 22³/₄" Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston

(Illustration Credit 1.7)



ATTRIBUTED TO NEHEMIAH PARTRIDGE *Lavinia Van Vechten*, 1720 Oil on canvas, 40¼ × 34½" Brooklyn Museum. Dick S. Rams Fund, 43.46 (Illustration Credit 1.8)



COPLEY *Portrait of the Artist*, 1769 Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 17½ × 23¾" Winterthur Museum, Delaware. Gift of Henry Francis du Pont, 1957.1127 (Illustration Credit 1.9)



COPLEY *Portrait of the Artist*, 1780–84 Oil on canvas, diameter 18" National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, NPG.77.22 (Illustration Credit 1.10)

In the wake of the great Copley retrospective in Boston in 1966, the critic Barbara Novak ascribed Copley's sensibility not to any artistic predecessor but to a "conceptual bias" present in Puritanism. Jonathan Edwards wrote of "the clarity of 'things,' " of things as the mediator between words and ideas, between empirical and conceptual experience. "The manifestation of God makes of Himself in His works," Edwards wrote, "are the principal manifestations of His perfections, and the declaration and teachings of His word are to lead to these." The first great painter of American landscapes, Thomas Cole, who also perpetrated a number of religious pictures and large allegorical canvases, lamented that the public preferred "things, not thoughts." Moving from America to England, Copley passed from an art whose soul was empirical to one whose soul was conceptual, societal, and theatrical.

Two self-portraits record his inner migration: a pastel at the age of thirty-one shows, by the touch of vanity in the elegant, leisurely costume, an enigmatically bland young man with his eyes watchfully on you. A tondo in oils after a decade in London paints in dashing brushstrokes a faintly haggard man of fashion in his forties. His eyes, directed away from you, are those described by an observer, not long after he had left America, as "small eyes, which after fatigue, seemed a day's march in his head." Always laborious in his painstaking methods—sitters, including the younger daughters of George III, complained of being "wearied during the many sittings Copley demanded—he had left behind the land that had rewarded him with unchallenged eminence and what he described as a "pretty living" of three hundred guineas a year, for an England where he always struggled to prove himself. Lloyd Goodrich's essay puts it bluntly: "America lost her greatest artist, to add another good painter to the British school."

IN THE ninety-eight years that went by between Copley's birth and that of Winslow Homer, o

Boston's Friend Street, into the family of a well-to-do hardware merchant, Boston still had acquired no art school and very little of an artistic community. When young Winslow, whose mother was a dedicated amateur watercolorist, expressed a desire to be an artist, the best his indulgent father could do for him was to purchase, on a business trip to England, some instructive lithographs and to arrange for his son's apprenticeship to an acquaintance, the commercial lithographer John H. Bufford. Winslow Homer did not speak well of his two years with Bufford; he called working ten hours a day for five dollars a week "bondage" and "slavery" and a "treadmill existence." On his twenty-first birthday, he left Bufford's and set up shop in Boston as a free-lance illustrator; he caught on very quickly, first with *Ballou's Pictorial* and then with *Harper's Weekly*, in New York.



WINSLOW HOMER *The Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*, 1862–63 Oil on canvas, 12½ × 16½" Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Gift of Barbra and Bernard Osher, 1992.41 ([Illustration Credit 1.11](#))

In 1859, Homer moved to Manhattan, to be closer to his main source of income; there, what had become the country's most vital artistic center, he took lessons in painting and enrolled in life classes. His artistic education, however, was interrupted by the Civil War; in late 1861, *Harper's* sent him as a "special artist" to "go," he wrote his father, "with the skirmishers in the next battle." Instead of going to Europe, as he and his family had intended, he went to war. One of the many wood engravings based on the special artist's work that *Harper's* published in the next two years is titled *The Army of the Potomac—A Sharp-Shooter on Picket Duty*; it appeared in the issue of November 15, 1862, with the attribution "From a Painting by W. Homer, Esq." This was his very first painting, done in his late twenties. His friend Roswell Shurtleff attested that he "sat with him many days while he worked on it," in Homer's studio in New York's University Building. It is, in its careful delineation of pine branches and rumpled trousers, "liney," though the darkness that swallows the marksman's head expressionistically conveys the "horror of that branch of the service" which Homer shared with ordinary foot soldiers.

The painting by Homer chosen for the NEH portfolio, *The Veteran in a New Field*, also concerns that most deadly of American wars, but from the happier perspective of disarmament. Painted in 1865, the canvas was used for a woodcut in an issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* of July 1867, illustrating an article celebrating the widespread return of armies from the fields of battle as a triumph of a democratic society. The woodcut is liney

stalk by stalk, but the painting is not; the field being harvested forms a wall of solid golden brown, and the stalks already cut in the foreground are indicated by a quite loose sprawl of dry brushstrokes. A close friend of Homer's, the painter Eugene Benson, also the art critic for the *New-York Evening Post*, asserted of this painting that its style was "an effective protest against a belittling and ignoble manner in art"—that is, of the American followers of the English Pre-Raphaelites—and "a sign of that large, simple and expressive style which has made the names of Couture and Millet ... so justly honored."

French art had replaced English as the model; the peasants dignified in the images of Jean-François Millet and the landscapes of the Barbizon School, freed of mythological apparatus, prepared the ground for Impressionism and its vivacious brushwork—"the touch, the sweet dash of the brush," Benson wrote. Without these, "no man can be called a great painter." In late 1866, Homer and Benson sailed for Europe, and Homer spent nearly all of 1867 in France, near Paris; it has been said, in a tone of complaint, that Homer paid insufficient attention to the newest French art, and returned with no sign of French influence; but even a painter as self-willed and individual as Winslow Homer needs courage, and he returned to his studio at the University Building with a braver style.

An oil like *Croquet Scene* in 1866 has the static liney-ness and posed "human interest" of his woodcuts. A holiday seaside scene such as *Long Branch, New Jersey*, of 1869, strikes quite another note—breezier, vaster, with a deep perspective and an overall palette so bright we involuntarily squint. *Crossing the Pasture*, of 1872, epitomizes the Homeric country idyll—the open meadow splashed with wildflowers, the monumental children caught in a moment of reverie. With little or no recourse to French models, Homer has developed an American impressionism—the floating daubs of the flowers, the brilliantly painted tin pail, the dazzlingly white shirt, the dashes of complementary green on the sun-reddened faces.

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