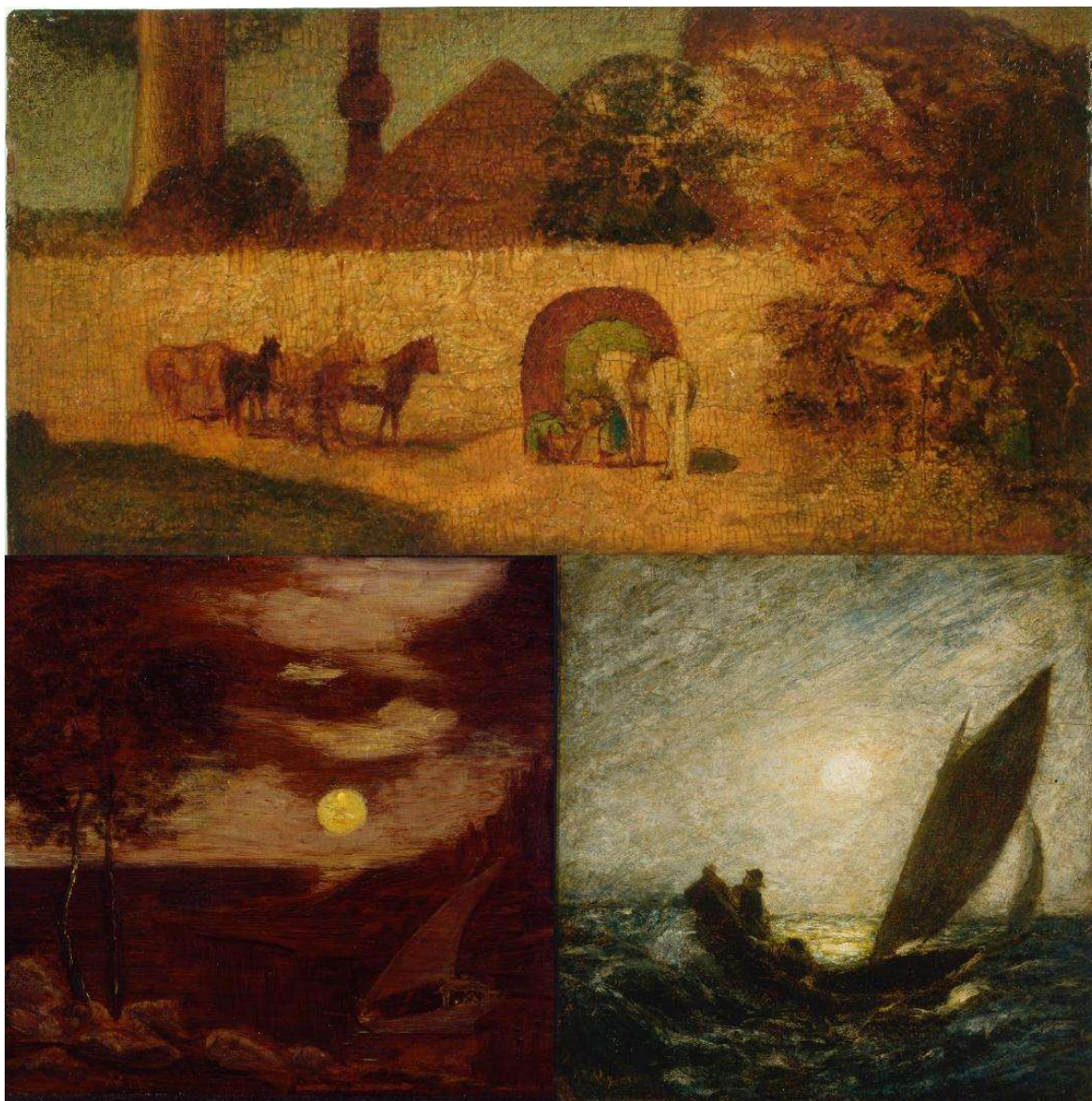


A WILD NOTE OF LONGING: ALBERT PINKHAM RYDER RETURNS TO NEW BEDFORD

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TOP: Albert Pinkham Ryder, "By the Tomb of the Prophet (By the Tomb of the Saint; Oriental Scene)," after 1882, oil on panel. Delaware Art Museum, bequest of George I. Speer. Unframed: 5 3/16" x 11 7/16"; Framed: 15 1/2" x 20 1/2"

BOTTOM LEFT: Albert Pinkham Ryder, The Lovers' Boat, ca. 1881, oil on wood. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of Alastair B. Martin. Unframed: 11 3/8" x 12", framed: 25" x 26 7/8" x 2 3/4". BOTTOM RIGHT: Albert Pinkham Ryder, With Slipping Mast and Dipping Prow, ca. 1880-1885, oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard. Smithsonian American Art

With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow, ca. 1888-1890, oil on canvas mounted on mdf board at Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of John Gellatly. Unframed: 12" x 12", framed: 18 1/2" x 17 3/8" x 2 5/8". All images courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum

by Sawyer Smook-Pollitt

"The only American master who interests me is Ryder," said Jackson Pollock, and he was not alone in that sentiment. Generations of artists took inspiration from Albert Pinkham Ryder. Now, for the first time in 31 years, Ryder's work is once again on display.

"A Wild Note of Longing: Albert Pinkham Ryder and a Century of American Art," on display in the Wattles Family Gallery at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, bridges the gap between past and present by showing Ryder's paintings alongside contemporary artists inspired by his work.

Ryder has not been seen on this scale since a 1990 retrospective at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Elizabeth Broun, director emerita of the Smithsonian, had a hand in curating both shows.

"It was all meant to be, it felt cosmic," said Broun at a press conference, describing the exhibit's opening night, a homecoming for the New Bedford-born artist.

Twelve of Ryder's paintings are on loan from the Smithsonian, making up the "kernel of the show," said Broun. Other works are loaned from private collectors and museums. One, a simple landscape, is owned by the Whaling Museum.

The exhibit spans the range of Ryder's career from his early paintings of pastoral scenes to his later series of rough ocean waters and biblical epics.

Paintings like Ryder's "With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow," capture bleak, dark loneliness in both composition and texture. Ryder has a way of capturing the mystery and majesty of the natural world. His earlier works give a true-to-life glimpse of nature through a hazy lens, with figures obscured or blending into sepia-toned backgrounds.

A part of Ryder's appeal is his dedication to his craft. Ryder's painting, "Jonah," took 10 years to complete. He built up layers upon layers of paint to capture a moment of the ocean's fury as Jonah is swept to sea. However, Ryder's dedication runs deeper than just how long he spent on each piece, he was able to achieve a level of depth and truth in his work that sets him apart from other painters of his day.

“Am I as truthful in my own work on all these levels? Can I be as singular in my vision?” asked Emily Auchincloss, a contemporary painter who is featured alongside Ryder. Auchincloss, like many others, sees Ryder’s work as a benchmark for comparison.

According to a placard nearby a reproduction of Ryder’s “Dead Bird,” which depicts a yellow songbird dead on its side against a muddy textured background, this painting and others, “became a standing challenge to later artists, something to emulate to see if they could imbue it with a similar emotional charge.”

For Broun and fellow curators Christina Connett Brophy, gallery director and vice-president of curatorial affairs at Mystic Seaport; and William C. Agee, professor emeritus of art history at City University New York, it was important to represent the lasting legacy of Ryder’s work.

These “legacy pieces” provide valuable context to the contributions that Ryder made to the expressionist movement in painting and even to photography and sculpture. Ryder’s influence runs so wide that, according to Auchincloss, it may be easier to determine which artists are not a part of Ryder’s lineage.

The connection between old and new brings life to Ryder’s century-old paintings. “A Wild Note of Longing” is more than a retrospective, it is forward-looking. It charts a timeline that begins with Ryder and has no clear end.

(“A Wild Note of Longing: Albert Pinkham Ryder and a Century of American Art” is on display through October 31 at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, 18 Johnny Cake Hill, New Bedford, Massachusetts. The museum is open daily from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. For more details and to purchase tickets, visit whalingmuseum.org.)

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