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Dave Dallas
Old Master Specialist

WINSLOW HOMER



Winslow Homer, Feb 1836 – Sept 1910 – American landscape painter and illustrator, known for his marine subjects



Kissing the Moon, Winslow Homer, Oil on Canvas, 76.8cm x 101.6cm

I went to the Winslow Homer exhibition at the National Gallery last week and strongly recommend it to you. It is the first time his work has been shown en masse in the UK and there are no paintings by him in British Public Collections, despite his being a household name in the USA.

He started life painting scenes from the American Civil War and much of his work describes conflict, racial tensions, and other social problems. He also had a real obsession with the sea and spent nearly two years on the Northumbrian coast at Cullercoats, observing and recording the activities of the local fishing community and its struggle with the sea. For Homer, the sea was a source of pleasure, livelihood and terror depending on its mood. He painted numerous scenes of people being rescued from the tempestuous ocean.

I was very struck by a painting executed in 1904, which shows three men wearing sowesters and

waterproofs in a rowing boat where the swell is so immense you can't see the boat, and its title is 'Kissing the Moon'. It reminded me of a passage in Joseph Conrad's novella 'Typhoon,' where the waves are so great the characters in the boat see the moon disappear below the horizon and when it returns to view, appears to be dripping water. I wondered if this book could have had an influence on Winslow, so I googled it! Conrad began the novel in 1899 and it was subsequently serialized in Pall Mall Magazine between January and March 1902. It was first published in book form by Putnam in New York in 1902, two years before Winslow Homer painted the picture. I think I have answered my own question.

Winslow Homers don't come up for auction very often, only 68 in the last 35 years. The world record for him (at auction) was achieved in November 2014, by Sotheby's in New York, when Mrs Paul Mellon's 'Watching the tide go out', a tiny canvas, just over 12 x 16 in, made \$4.5m.

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