

Frank Alfred Bicknell (1866 - 1943)

Souvenir of the Coast of Maine, circa 1905

signed lower right

oil on canvas

20" x 24"

When Frank Bicknell's family relocated from Augusta, Maine to present-day Brockton, Massachusetts in 1870, the aspiring artist had some small success doing scenes for the *Brockton Illustrated* and illustrations for *New England Magazine*. Living in Brockton also afforded him access to nearby Annisquam, where he spent his summers painting alongside such notable painters as William Picknell (1853-1897), Robert Vonnoh (1858-1933), and Hugh Bolton Jones (1848-1927). Within a decade, Bicknell moved to New York, where in 1889 he exhibited in a gallery show alongside William Merritt Chase (1849-1916). For all his new-found glory, New York remained a temporary stop. In 1890, it was on to Paris where he enrolled in the Academie Julian. Upon his return to the city in 1894, Bicknell occupied a full-floor studio in Stanford White's infamous tower attached to Madison Square Garden. His choice of residence placed him among New York's aesthetic elite and he enjoyed a steady social schedule. By the time of his 1895 trip to California and Japan, paintings by Bicknell could be found in the National Academy of Design, the Boston Arts Club, and the Philadelphia Academy.

Bicknell first visited Old Lyme in 1902, but it was not until 1908 that his name was regularly associated with the Old Lyme Art Colony. He was devoted to Florence Griswold (who allegedly was romantically fond of him), referred to other members of the colony as his "family," and established a relationship with the artist Louis Cohen, who upon his death willed his home on Sill Lane to Bicknell. As a testament to his significant reputation, Bicknell was invited to paint one of the panels in Miss Florence's celebrated dining room. He chose for his subject, appropriately enough, mountain laurel.

Bicknell returned to Maine intermittently throughout his career, particularly to Ogunquit and Monhegan Island, which were popular locales for fellow art colony members such as Charles Ebert, William Chadwick, Wilson Irvine, and Ernest Albert. Bicknell's *Souvenir of the Coast of Maine* depicts the rocky coastline and crashing waves with broad avenues of color. A negligence of perspective creates a heavy foreground image that delights in the two-dimensionality of the canvas.

Between 1910 and 1920, Bicknell fully occupied his role as a leading member of the American art community. He was named an associate of the National Academy and was an influential member of the Salmagundi, Lotos, and National Arts clubs. From 1919 to 1925, Bicknell served as an associate professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie Mellon University. The artist eventually returned to Old Lyme where he stayed in the Cohen house until too infirm to live on his own. He moved to a retirement home in nearby Essex, where he died in 1943.

Provenance: From the trade to the gallery.

Bibliography:

Elizabeth Magee Cloutier, *Lyrical Impressionist: Frank A. Bicknell (1866-1943)*, unpublished manuscript, 1996.

Jeffrey W. Anderson, et al., *Connecticut and American Impressionism* (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1984), 152.

