

J. Appleton Brown (1844 - 1902)

In May, circa 1890

signed lower right

pastel on board

18" x 22"

Henry David Thoreau felt that the “flowers of the apple tree are perhaps the most beautiful of any tree's, so copious and so delicious to sight and scent” (Thoreau). John Appleton Brown clearly shared this affinity, and his penchant for the subject earned him the nickname “Apple Blossom Brown” (Weber). Born in 1844 in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Brown enjoyed a lengthy career as a premier Impressionist painter of the New England littoral and landscape. His education as an artist began in 1865 when he traded the north shore for Boston, a move that soon led him to Europe where he studied in earnest.

Inspired by work of Barbizon artists, Brown spent 1866 and 1867 in Paris mastering landscape painting. He returned to Boston in 1868 as a painter of some reputation and married fellow artist, Agnes Bartlett. The couple made two additional trips overseas. In 1874 they returned to France, and in 1886 they went to England where Brown mingled with John Singer Sargeant (1856 - 1925), Edwin Austin Abbey (1852 - 1911), Francis Millet (1846 - 1912), and other artists of similar caliber. Back in the United States, Brown spent significant time at the Impressionist colony in Old Lyme and with Childe Hassam (1859 - 1935) at the salon of Celia Thaxter on the Isle of Shoals off the coast of New Hampshire. He enjoyed the apex of his popularity in the late 1880s, when he was among the first American artists to expose Boston to the Impressionist movement. Brown was elected to the National Academy in 1896.

The tonally oriented *In May* is a vibrant springtime landscape which reflects the artist's affinity for trees in bloom. Brown's soft and feathery brushstrokes mimic the movement of the petals and freshly sprung grass in the warm breeze. The shallow stream which reflects the blossoming trees creates an inviting avenue into the scene for the viewer. The product of Brown's radiant palette and intense treatment of light is a shimmering surface with an ethereal quality, the most defining visual characteristic of this highly poetic composition.

Provenance: From a private Connecticut collection to the gallery.

Bibliography:

Henry David Thoreau, *Excursions* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1863), 271.

Bruce Weber, *The Apple of America: The Apple in 19th Century American Art* (New York: Berry-Hill, 1993), 12.