



**Leonard Ochtman (1854 - 1934)**

*Mianus River, Cos Cob, CT, 1897*

signed lower left

oil on canvas

24" x 36"

Leonard Ochtman settled with his wife and former student Mina Fonda Ochtman (1862-1924) along the Mianus River in Greenwich, Connecticut in 1891. He told an interviewer that “all about the town ... there are splendid materials for sketching ... You can get fine marine views, and wooded bits back in the country ... pretty roads, woods and delightful shore and sea views” (1). As a landscape painter, Ochtman was attracted to the unspoiled and varied scenery found within the borders of the town and spent the rest of his life poetically capturing the intricacies of his surroundings.

Born in Holland, Ochtman’s father, a decorative painter, brought the family to Albany, New York in 1866. The aspiring artist was apprenticed to a wood engraver at the age of sixteen, but was unable to afford a formal art education until he enrolled at the Art Student’s League in New York nearly ten years later. He opened a studio upon his return to Albany in 1880 where he offered traditional academic instruction. His reputation grew “slowly but steadily” as he began to exhibit with the National Academy of Design and sold his first painting, *An Autumn Thought*, in 1884 (2).

A trip overseas to Holland and Amsterdam in 1885 defined a considerable shift in the artist’s style. Influenced by Dutch Tonalists based in the Hague, who expressed fidelity to nature by painting *en plein air* and valued emotional evocation, Ochtman began to use the pale tones and private views that came to characterize his finest work, such as *Mianus River, Cos Cob, CT*. Painted in 1897, *Mianus River, Cos Cob, CT* also displays the use of a feathery brushstroke, referencing his absorption of the American Impressionist techniques he was introduced to through his association with the Cos Cob Art Colony. While he espoused the tenets of these styles, his paintings also express a distinctive “individuality which belongs to him as to all men whose education has been self-won” (3).

*Mianus River, Cos Cob, CT* offers a scene of the resort town in repose. The buildings harmonize with their environment as the brightly hued hills and tall grass blend with the suburban topography. The broad horizon and elevated vantage point lends a contemplative mood to the composition. He often painted between the hours of dusk and dawn, times which offer a ready-made tonalist quality as the landscape is bathed in a naturally opalescent light. Like John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902), who arrived in Cos Cob the same year as Ochtman, he also enjoyed painting winter scenes in which he could explore the subtle variations of a snow-covered landscape. In her analysis of a strikingly similar painting by Ochtman owned by the Bruce Museum and entitled *On the Mianus River*, Susan Larkin makes note of his range “over the spectrum visible on a sunny afternoon. The ebullient mood, high key colors, and broken brushstroke reveal him as a full-fledged, if temporary, Impressionist” (4).

Ochtman’s career is marked by a number of prestigious memberships, exhibitions, and honors. Most notably, he was elected to the Society of American Artists in 1891 and received both its Samuel T. Shaw Fund Prize and Webb Prize. He received the George Inness Gold Medal from the National Academy of

Design in 1903, where he exhibited until his death as an Associate and then an Academician. He was also an incredibly instrumental member of the Greenwich Society of Artists, and, in effect, the first art curator of the Bruce Museum (5). He is remembered as a prominent artist in the history of the American landscape, as well as a beloved member of Greenwich's cultural community.

**Provenance:** From a private Ohio collection to the gallery.

**Bibliography:**

Susan G. Larkin, *The Cos Cob Art Colony: Impressionists of the Connecticut Shore* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 10.

Susan G. Larkin, *The Ochtmans of Cos Cob* (Greenwich: The Bruce Museum, 1989), 14. The painting *An Autumn Thought* is part of the collection of the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut.

Alfred Trumble, "Leonard Ochtman: A Painter's Progress" in *The Year's Art as Recorded in The Quarterly Illustrator for 1894* (New York: Harry C. Jones, 1894), 50.

Larkin, *The Ochtmans of Cos Cob*, 21. *On the Mianus River* is dated as 1896.

Larkin, *The Cos Cob Art Colony*, 28.

