



Henry Golden Dearth
American, 1864 - 1918

Flecks of Foam

c. 1911/1912

oil on wood

overall: 45.3 x 55 cm (17 13/16 x 21 5/8 in.)

framed: 62.2 x 72.1 x 5.4 cm (24 1/2 x 28 3/8 x 2 1/8 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Dearth

Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.120

ENTRY

Henry Golden Dearth's career can be divided into two distinct periods. The first, from around 1890 until 1912, is marked by a tonalist style that, in the words of an early critic, was "characterized by paintings of quiet landscapes reflecting a peaceful, somewhat dreamy temper of mind, and executed with a free though more or less conventional technique." [1] The most noteworthy among these early works depicted the landscape around Boulogne and Montreuil-sur-Mer in the Pas-de-Calais, on the French coast of the English Channel, where the artist had a summer home and worked for part of each year. Paintings from this first period of his career have positioned Dearth as a minor member of the American Barbizon school. [2]

Dearth's second period commenced around 1912 and lasted until his untimely death in 1918 at the age of 54. During that brief six-year interval, and probably influenced in part by the unusually painterly and colorful late works of , Dearth's technique underwent what was characterized as an "extraordinary revolution." He began "letting his pigment spurt directly from the tubes onto the canvases, and there manipulating it with palette knife or brush handle, or letting it remain in fresh

jets of pure color as brilliant as a newly set palette.” [3] Dearth was so concerned with disassociating himself from his tonalist style that in 1915 he asked The Metropolitan Museum of Art to substitute a new portrait for an early view of the harbor at Boulogne. The *New York Times* reported that the latter was “not considered by the artist as representative of his work.” [4]

Although Dearth also practiced portraiture and still-life during his later years, his contemporaries most admired his many distinctive representations of rock pools. Most of these, including *Flecks of Foam*, were painted near the artist’s studio in Le Pouldu, a small hamlet in Brittany along France’s northwest coast, where Paul Gauguin (French, 1848 - 1903) and a number of his followers had worked a generation earlier. *Flecks of Foam* is an early and highly representative example of Dearth’s rock pool subjects and demonstrates how ideally suited his new technique was to the task of “commemorating the pebbled shore line of Brittany, with its deep pockets and richly colored rocks.” [5] When the painting was auctioned at the American Art Galleries in 1916 the accompanying catalog described Dearth’s rendering as

a low, rambling, rocky coast [that] is brilliant with spots of color—blue, red, yellow, green, black, pink, brown—on a gorgeous summer day, and a woman in white, sheltered under a red parasol, is seated on a rock shelf looking over a sea that all but laps her feet. The spent waves circling among outlying boulders are foam-flecked; farther away are emerald shallows; and the distant sea is blue under a horizon of faint rose. [6]

At the time of Dearth’s Memorial Exhibition in 1918 the *New York Times* noted: “Generally a human figure is introduced in the composition, a girl perched on the rocks in her Summer white, reading . . . treated abstractly as a decorative unit in the scheme of the picture, but carrying, nevertheless, a charm of human individuality.” The same source also drew attention to the brilliant palette Dearth used in his pool scenes, as well as their flat, decorative quality: “Coral red, purple, gold, and blue are interwoven into a brocade such as a Venetian lady of the Renaissance might have worn at a festival. The effect is less that of a painting than that of an enamel, the color flowing thickly and making no compromise with the third dimension or the envelope of tone from which form emerges full and serene.” [7]

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American Paintings, 1900–1945

The influential critic Charles L. Buchanan of the *International Studio* greatly admired Dearth's new style in the rock pool series, and in 1918 deemed them "one manifestation of Dearth's art wherein he achieved perfection." Dismissing the early tonalist works as ones that "showed him as merely one or more of a myriad of painters who were more or less repainting Barbizon," Buchanan felt that "in his quite strangely new and consummate studies of pools and rocks, and in his marines, Dearth presented us with a kind of beauty of workmanship and originality of conception that placed him among the finest painters of his generation." [8] An additional measure of the painting's importance can be gleaned from the fact that it was initially purchased by Hugo Reisinger, a German-born merchant who was a major collector and early proponent of modern American art. [9]

Robert Torchia

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NOTES

- [1] "Henry Golden Dearth Memorial Exhibition: Art at Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1919.
- [2] For this reason he was included in Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (Washington, DC, 1975), 134–135, and most recently David A. Cleveland, *A History of American Tonalism: 1880–1929* (Manchester, VT, 2010), 171–172, 310, 468.
- [3] "Henry Golden Dearth Memorial Exhibition: Art at Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1919.
- [4] "Art Museum Gets Two New Pictures," *New York Times*, July 12, 1915.
- [5] "Henry Golden Dearth Memorial Exhibition: Art at Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1919.
- [6] *Hugo Reisinger Sale*, auction catalog, American Art Galleries, New York, Jan. 18, 1916, no. 5; the sale catalog incorrectly states that the painting was purchased from M. Knoedler & Co. in 1902, not 1912.
- [7] "Henry Golden Dearth Memorial Exhibition: Art at Home and Abroad," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1919.
- [8] Charles L. Buchanan, "Henry Golden Dearth," *International Studio* 64 (1918): cxvi–cxvii. Also see Elisabeth Luther Carey, "The Paintings of Henry Golden Dearth," *American Magazine of Art* 10, no. 6 (Apr. 1919): 196–201.
- [9] On Reisinger see Susanne Scharf, "Hugo Reisinger: George Bellows'

Unknown Patron,” in *George Bellows Revisited: New Considerations of the Painter’s Oeuvre*, ed. Melissa Wolfe (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016), 53–69.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was created on a thin, horizontally grained wood panel consisting of a single plank. It was prepared by the artist with a smooth white ground layer. Infrared reflectography revealed a few minor underpainted lines along the edges of the rocks at the right, in the water, and two parallel lines to the right of the figure. Also visible during the infrared examination, a square form to the right of the sitter’s chest could be a book once held by the sitter that was painted out. [1] The paint layer was applied freely and vigorously in high impasto utilizing a brush or a palette knife. Ultraviolet examination shows that the thick, glossy layer of varnish is a natural resin. The varnish is discolored and distorts the tones of the painting significantly. No X-radiographic examination was conducted.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] It was also discovered during the infrared examination that using the J and K filters caused the dark blue paint to become transparent, indicating that the blue pigments are primarily ultramarine or Prussian Blue. Using only the K filter, the red of the umbrella appeared white, suggesting that it is composed of vermilion.

PROVENANCE

The artist; (M. Knoedler & Co., New York); purchased 1912 by Hugo Reisinger [1856-1914], New York;[1] his estate; (his estate sale, American Art Galleries, New York, 18-20 January 1916, 1st day, no. 5); Edward G. O’Reilly [1870-1934], New York and Bridgeport, Connecticut; (sale, American Art Association, New York, 24-26 January 1917, 2nd day, no. 126); Stephen C. Clark [1882-1960], New York;[2] (sale, American Art Association, New York, 30 November 1928, no. 43); Chester Dale [1883-1962], New York; bequest 1963 to NGA.

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[1] The provenance is outlined in the Chester Dale Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington; copy in NGA curatorial files. The Dale Papers record that Reisinger purchased the painting from the April 1912 exhibition of works by Dearth held at Knoedler Galleries. The sale to Reisinger is documented in the M. Knoedler & Co. Records, accession number 2012.M.54, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: Series II; Sales book 10, 1912 February-1916 April, page 24; copy in NGA curatorial files. It is not yet clear whether Knoedler had the painting on consignment from the artist or had already purchased it from the artist.

[2] The copy of the sale catalogue in the NGA Library is annotated "W.W. Seaman - agt. 325". Seaman must have been buying for Clark.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1912 Paintings by Henry Golden Dearth, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1912, no. 11.

1937 An Exhibition of American Paintings from the Chester Dale Collection, The Union League Club, New York, 1937, no. 43.

1943 Paintings from the Chester Dale Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943-1951, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1943 *Paintings from the Chester Dale Collection*. Philadelphia, 1943: unpaginated, repro.
- 1965 *Paintings other than French in the Chester Dale Collection*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1965: 44, repro.
- 1970 *American Paintings and Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1970: 48, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 142, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 157, repro.

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