



John Marin
American, 1870 - 1953

Bather Seated on Rocks

1951

oil on canvas

overall: 55.8 x 71.4 x 1.9 cm (21 15/16 x 28 1/8 x 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Marin 51; across upper left and center of top stretcher bar reverse: (Bather on Rocks) 1951 22 x 28

SR#404 NBM 1/13/84 PALETTE ART; lower right on stretcher bar reverse: 5201 / 94

Gift of John Marin, Jr. 1986.54.11

ENTRY

John Marin painted this oil on canvas in 1951, just two years before his death, probably near his summer home on Cape Split on the Atlantic coast of Maine. An unidentified woman sits on a rocky outcropping by the sea and focuses her attention on a seagull flying at the upper right near the horizon line. Over the last two decades of his life the artist produced a number of figural subjects of nudes posing by the ocean, well-known examples of which are *Bathers* (1932, Dallas Museum of Art, Texas) and *Bathers, Addison, Maine* (1941, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The Gallery's painting may represent a family member or acquaintance. Marin was drawn to portraiture from about the mid-1940s on and produced *Marie Jane Hughes Marin (Mrs. John Marin)*, *The Spirit of the Cape: Susie Thompson* (1949, private collection) and *Portrait of Roy Wass with Apologies* (1949, private collection). Ruth Fine has suggested that following the deaths of his wife in 1945 and close friend Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864 - 1946) in 1946, and in light of his own failing health, "it was the sense of personal loss that directed Marin to portraiture or perhaps an urge to establish a new link to tradition." [1]

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The motif of *Bather Seated on Rocks* inevitably evokes the famous images of bathers by the great painter Paul Cézanne (French, 1839 - 1906). Cézanne's explorations of the underlying structure of visual experience had profoundly influenced the artists who congregated at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery early in the 20th century. Before becoming associated with Stieglitz, Marin had encountered Cézanne's works during his time in Paris. By midcentury Cézanne's presence was ubiquitous in American museums, exhibitions, and publications. Cézanne's influence on Marin is evident in comparisons with monumental oils such as *The Large Bathers* (1906, Philadelphia Museum of Art) as well as such minor works as the Gallery's small sketch *Seated Bather [verso]*.

In *Bather Seated on Rocks* Marin has taken the lessons of Cézanne and applied them to his own distinctive perception of the natural world. Marin emphasizes the interrelationship of the bather and the sea by situating them within an overarching geometric scaffolding akin to Cézanne's crystalline visual structures. Typical of Marin's final phase of artistic development, he has reduced pictorial elements such as the waves and wind to expressive calligraphic lines that convey a sense of rhythm and motion. Other than the bright red horizontal stripes on the woman's bathing suit, Marin has reduced his palette to a few subdued colors and allotted a prominent role to the white ground layer. White paint in and around the figures of both the woman and the seagull highlights them as focal points of this enigmatic composition. If Cézanne looked deeply into the permanent, timeless aspects of nature, Marin acknowledged its more ephemeral, contingent moods.

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

NOTES

[1] Ruth E. Fine, *John Marin* (Washington, DC, 1990), 251.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The plain, tabby-weave support was unlined and remains mounted on its original stretcher. The original tacking margins are present. The artist applied paint thinly and rapidly so that much of the commercially prepared, off-white ground is

Bather Seated on Rocks

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exposed. Alterations are visible around the figure's left arm, right hand, and the outline of the legs and feet. The painting was unvarnished, and a considerable amount of grime has accumulated on its surface.

PROVENANCE

The artist [1870-1953]; his estate; by inheritance to his son, John C. Marin, Jr. [1914-1988], Cape Split, Maine; gift 1986 to NGA.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1970 Reich, Sheldon. *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné*. Tucson, 1970: no. 51.3 (as *Bather on Rocks*).
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 233, repro.
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