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## **Three Significant 19th Century Paintings Available For Sale**

Artworks Annuity Group of Massachusetts announces for sale three superb paintings by American Renaissance master John La Farge (1835-1910): “Forest of Fontainebleau” of 1891, “Portrait of William Morris Hunt” of 1870, and his monumental symbolist work, “Adam and Eve” of 1900, all from an third-generation private art collection in Newport, Rhode Island.

This exclusive for sale offering of these three historically significant artworks marks the first paintings by the artist to the marketplace in over two decades. With fewer than 50 extant oil paintings of the 250 oils completed by La Farge in his lifetime mentioned in his 1910 New York Times obituary by his son Henry La Farge, this landscape, portrait and allegorical biblical work represent major achievements in the artist’s career.

Born in 1835, John La Farge studied with Thomas Couture in 1856 where he met Édouard Manet, just three years his senior, a major influence on his work, and in 1859 with American Barbizon painter, William Morris Hunt, both of whom studied directly with Jean-François Millet. A central figure in the American Renaissance, La Farge is considered a master craftsman in multiple media, arguably the greatest stained glass artist of the 19th century, as well as a brilliant writer, watercolorist, illustrator, muralist, interior designer and oil painter.

The most valuable La Farge oil paintings sold, both landscapes, were “Paradise Valley” (1866-68) by Christie’s auction on May 23, 1996 for \$2,202,500 and “The Last Valley-Paradise Rocks” (1867-68) again by Christie’s on November 29, 2000 for \$2,096,000, to the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago and The National Gallery, Washington, DC, respectively.

These three remarkable oils are expected to sell for 2 to 4 million dollars for “Forest of Fontainebleau” and 4 to 8 million dollars for the “Adam and Eve / Hunt” double portrait, with stated preference by the paintings’ private art collector owner for a major museum acquisition.

### **Forest of Fontainebleau, painting:**

One of only three known major landscapes, and with a sight size of 18 x 29 3/4 inches, “Forest of Fontainebleau” is a late work in the French Barbizon tradition. In this evocative forest scene, John La Farge employs the ground glass technique, and a totally original chiaroscuro and

perspective, to evoke the majesty of the French forest of Fontainebleau, a favorite sojourn of Parisians in summer.

This artwork was restored in the early 1960's by Charles Hulett, Hollywood's premier restorer and appraiser till his death in 1971, who mounted and preserved the substantial canvas on museum-grade masonite. Hulett dates the painting to the late 1880's, the most productive and profitable year of John La Farge's career.

Upon investigation in late 2023, by art appraiser Barbara Sussman (Fog Hill & Co.) of original artworks at The Metropolitan Museum, and further research in the La Farge family archives at the The Beinecke Library at Yale University, "Forest of Fontainebleau" was created likely in 1891, after his travels with his friend Henry James in 1890 to The South Seas, upon his last trip to Brittany where his beloved French aunt lived.

### **Adam and Eve / Portrait of William Morris Hunt, paintings:**

In this monumental biblical work, John La Farge intertwines Adam and Eve with the serpent, not The Devil but a white python, as the Tree of Knowledge, whose tripartite leaves recall The Trinity, shields his shame the moment the fruit falls from his hands. The centralized triangular contrapposto, derived from his years of studying the effects of the great Italian Renaissance artworks, creates a perfect dimensional harmony, a sculpture in paint, and we, the viewer, stand in the place of judgment, of God.

This relatively shocking and deeply meaningful canvas painting would have been considered scandalous at the time for its overt nudity, its sensual synthesis of Realism and Symbolism—the two opposing movements of thought that followed Romanticism—into a meditation upon original sin. Though he paints them with different-color hair, the models (likely two of his nine brilliant and bohemian children) have the same features and expression. Those who are familiar with La Farge's stained glass windows in Boston's Trinity Church will immediately recognize these are the eyes and faces of his saints.

Verso, a much earlier but no less brilliant tonalist portrait of his beloved teacher, American Barbizon painter William Morris Hunt (1824-1879), whose sallow visage and emaciated frame fill the canvas with an eerie presence, with full direct gaze like his children Eve and Adam on the other side. Hunt appears as a caveman holding a bamboo pole and adorned only in the hide of a woolly mammoth, a primitive god of painting.

Darwin's theory of evolution was published in 1859, and the first cave paintings were discovered in Spain in 1868. The painting is certainly inspired by these earth-shattering revelations in science, of which a polymath as erudite as John La Farge would have been well aware. William Morris Hunt, who died by suicide in 1879 at age 55, would have been 45-50 years old at the time. Measuring 42 x 30 inches, this double portrait is likely La Farge's most important oil painting, both by its size and brilliant conception.

These three significant artworks—a Barbizon landscape, a Tonalist portrait, and a Symbolist figure painting—reveal the scope and breadth of John La Farge's remarkable technical skills and vision as an oil painter, and the evolution of his highly individual style.

The paintings are available for private and scheduled public viewings in Boston.

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\*The Newport Paintings: Henry James once described the Newport of the 1860s as "the one right residence, in all our great country, for those tainted with the quality and effect of detachment." In Newport, if anywhere, La Farge could meet figures (including James) whose inclinations matched his own. Newport was insular (on an island, in fact), and economically it had never recovered from the devastating effects of the American Revolution. But society there, if not splendid, had remained quaintly aristocratic and imbued with European tastes. There was, for example, an old Frenchman who La Farge took pains to seek out, who had once been a servitor of Marie Antoinette and had lived to see the supporters of John Quincy Adams shouted down by the rabble-rousing followers of Andrew Jackson. And there was the eccentric gourmet, connoisseur, essayist, and dilettante Thomas Gold Appleton, the brother-in-law of the poet Longfellow, who is said to have crossed the Atlantic forty times by 1860. An indication of Newport's European accent is that La Farge's friend John Bancroft, who arrived on the scene in 1863, preferred to discuss painting in French, which he considered more precise than English in its artistic vocabulary. John La Farge, "Essays by Henry Adams, Kathleen A. Foster, Henry A. La Farge, H. Barbara Weinberg, Linnea H. Wren, and James L. Yarnall"