



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

LOUIS REMY MIGNOT (1831–1870)

*View of the Fishkill Mountains from Highland Grove*

Oil on canvas, 25 x 49 in.

Signed (at lower left): Mignot

Painted circa 1855

RECORDED: Katherine E. Manthorne and John W. Coffey, *Louis Rémy Mignot: A Southern Painter Abroad*, exhib. cat. (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996), pp. 49, 55–56 // Katherine E. Manthorne, *Worlds Between: Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot*, exhib. cat. (Catskill, New York: Thomas Cole National Historical Site, 2012), p. 9

EXHIBITED: National Academy of Design, New York, 1856, *Annual*, no. 180, as “Fishkill Mountains: from ‘Highland Grove’”

EX COLL: [Mark LaSalle Fine Art, Albany, New York, 1996–97]; [Hirschl and Adler Galleries, New York, 1997]; to private collection, 1997, until the present

An “indefatigable student of nature,” Louis Remy Mignot was a peripatetic landscape painter who drew inspiration from a variety of locales, ranging from North and South America to Holland, Switzerland, and England (“Extract from the Brighton Gazette, of September 16th, [1876],” in Tom Taylor, *Catalogue of the Mignot Pictures with Sketch of the Artist’s Life and Opinions of the Press* exhib. cat. [London: The Pavilion, 1876], p. [i]). Lauded for his masterful handling of color and light, Mignot possessed a “remarkable facility” for capturing the “vague, but, therefore, more interesting expression of a scene,” an aspect of his approach, informed by the romantic tradition, that set him apart from his Hudson River School contemporaries (Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists. American Artist Life* [New York: G. P. Putnam & Son, 1867], p. 563). Despite the brevity of his career—he died at age thirty-nine—Mignot created a diverse body of work (over 100 paintings are extant) that underscored his cosmopolitan outlook and secured him a place in the annals of nineteenth-century American art. (See Katherine E. Manthorne, *Worlds Between: Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot*, exhib. cat. [Catskill, New York: Thomas Cole National Historical Site, 2012], p. 5. This publication incorporates recently discovered information and new paintings not included in the author’s earlier study cowritten with John W. Coffey, *The Landscapes of Louis Rémy Mignot: A Southern Painter Abroad*, exhib. cat. [Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1986].)

Mignot was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 3, 1831, the son of Rémy Mignot, a French-born confectioner and plantation owner, and his wife, Elizabeth. He began making landscape sketches as a boy, and by age sixteen, much to the dismay of his father, he had decided to pursue a career as an artist. In the autumn of 1848, shortly after the death of Rémy, Mignot traveled to The

Hague, going on to refine his skills as a draftsman at the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten. He also trained in the studio of Andreas Schelfhout, a leading painter of romantic landscapes, including winter scenes, who taught his students the importance of direct observation of nature. Inspired by his teacher's example, Mignot likewise explored winter subjects, selling one such work, *Winter Scene, Holland*, to the American Art Union in New York in 1850. During his sojourn in Holland, Mignot met and became friendly with Eastman Johnson, a fellow American artist with whom he collaborated on *Doorway in a Castle in Winter* (1852; Lawrence E. Bathgate II), wherein Mignot painted the landscape elements while Johnson rendered the figures. (Mignot would also later collaborate on paintings with Thomas Rossiter.)

Eager to establish himself in the New York art world, Mignot sent three of his European subjects, including *Birth Place of Rembrandt*, to the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1853. At some point in the late fall or early winter of 1854, he left The Hague and settled in New York, establishing his studio in the Art-Union Building at 497 Broadway, where Frederic Edwin Church, a leading member of the Hudson River School, also maintained a workplace. In the ensuing years, Mignot painted views of upstate New York, Maryland, Virginia, and the Susquehanna River region, exhibiting his oils at the national annuals in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Critics responded favorably to his work, especially his skillful portrayal of the “brilliant autumnal and winter effects of [the] North American landscape” (Taylor, p. 2).

A pivotal moment in Mignot's career occurred during the spring of 1857, when he accompanied Church on a four-month trip to Central and South America—steamy tropical locales that appealed to his southern sensibility. During his visit, Mignot made drawings and oil sketches of winding rivers,

snow-capped mountains, and misty lagoons that would serve as the source material for the easel paintings he would create back in New York. Notable for their lush colors and deft melding of detail and expressivity, paintings such as *Landscape in Ecuador* (1859; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh) exude a sense of poetry and reveal Mignot's interest—unique for its time and place—in capturing the elusive effects of sunrise and sunset, or, as one commentator put it, his “great fancy for nature's exceptional aspects” (*Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 3 [December 1859], p. 233). Mignot's reputation was further enhanced when he was elected an associate member of the venerable National Academy of Design in 1858 and a full academician two years later. Through the efforts of his fellow painter, John Frederick Kensett, Mignot was likewise inducted as a member of the prestigious Century Association. His ties with the local art establishment were further solidified when, in December 1857, he moved into the newly constructed Tenth Street Studio Building, along with friends and colleagues such as Church and Sanford Gifford. During this period, Mignot was patronized by a coterie of leading citizens from New York (such as Elias Magoon) and beyond, among them Dr. Chapin R. Harris, a leading physician and dentist from Baltimore whose daughter, Zairah, married Mignot on January 11, 1860.

During the early 1860s, Mignot continued to paint South American scenes, in addition to scenery he encountered in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and western New York State. However, with the advent of the Civil War, Mignot realized that continuing his career in the North could be problematic. Indeed, despite his success as a transplanted Southerner in antebellum New York, Mignot was sympathetic towards the Confederate cause. For this reason, and the fact that a move back to South Carolina was not possible because of the war, he decided to go abroad, securing the funds for his trip by selling forty-seven paintings and sketches at an auction

conducted by Henry H. Leeds & Co. in May 1862. A few months later, after making a journey to western New York to make sketches of Niagara Falls, Mignot sailed to England, where he was later joined by his wife and son.

Although Mignot initially planned to travel to India to paint views of the Himalayan Mountains, an abundance of commissions and the demands of family life kept him in London, where he painted views of North and South American scenery, including *Lagoon of the Guayaquil River, Ecuador* (1863; Detroit Institute of Arts) and *Niagara* (1866; Brooklyn Museum), considered his masterwork. He also created landscapes in which he captured the tranquil beauties of rural England, as well as views inspired by visits to the Swiss Alps. As in New York, Mignot found a ready market for his work, which was featured at venues such as the Royal Academy and the British Institution, as well as in provincial exhibitions in Glasgow, Liverpool, and Bristol. While Mignot continued to adhere to a realist approach for a number of years following his move to England, he eventually adopted a more fluent style inspired by Whistlerian aestheticism and his exposure to the atmospheric landscapes of Joseph Mallord William Turner. He also associated with the Rossetti circle of Pre-Raphaelite painters and with cultural figures such as Tom Taylor, the editor of *Punch* who was both a friend and patron.

Beginning in 1867, Mignot spent part of his time in Paris, where his work was handled by dealers such as George Lucas and Samuel Avery. He made what turned out to be his one and only appearance at the Paris Salon in the spring of 1870, exhibiting *Lever du soleil, sur le fleuve Guayaquil* (*Sunrise on the Guayaquil River*) and *Le givre* (*Hoarfrost*). Sadly, when the Franco-Prussian War broke out that July, Mignot contracted smallpox while fleeing Paris. Accompanied by

his family, he subsequently made his way to Brighton, where he died on September 22, 1870. Six years later, Mignot's widow organized an extensive exhibition of her husband's unsold pictures, initially displaying them at 25 Old Bond Street in London before installing them in the Masonic Rooms at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton.

Writing in 1879, the journalist and diplomat Samuel G. W. Benjamin deemed Mignot "one of the most remarkable artists of our country"—a painter who delighted in "rendering the varied aspects of nature" whether at home or abroad ([Samuel G. W. Benjamin], "Fifty Years of American Art, 1828–1878," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 59 [July 1879], pp. 256–57). In the ensuing years, however, Mignot's accomplishments were largely forgotten. His reputation was later revived with the publication of Katherine E. Manthorne and John F. Coffey's *The Landscapes of Louis-Rémy Mignot: A Southern Landscape Painter Abroad*, which remains the standard source for Mignot's life and work.

*View of the Fishkill Mountains from Highland Grove* was painted in the wake of Mignot's move to New York when, aware of the demand for images of native scenery among local collectors, he began exploring the pictorial offerings of the Hudson River Valley. The painting features a panoramic view of the picturesque countryside in Highland Grove, a valley in the rural town of Fishkill in Dutchess County, New York, with sweeping views of the Fishkill Mountains (today, preserved as part of Hudson Highlands State Park) to the south. Indeed, in contrast to Hudson River School painters such as Church, who explored the concept of the sublime in relation to the untamed wilderness, Mignot was drawn to more serene settings, particularly the civilized landscape where man and nature co-existed in harmony. This aspect of his work is apparent in the present example, in which the artist

juxtaposes a line of distant mountains with verdant meadows and pastures, alluding to the presence of man by including two figures, a woodpile, and some sheep in the lower right side of the composition, and on the far left, a pair of cottages.

In *View of the Fishkill Mountains from Highland Grove*, Mignot combines the descriptive realism of the Hudson River School with a sense of poetry that reflects his earlier exposure to European Romanticism. Consistent with his academic training, he depicts the fore- and middlegrounds with firm, carefully controlled brushwork, effectively capturing the myriad textures in the landscape while adhering to a smoother application of pigment in the sky. Mignot's growing penchant for expressive color is manifested here in his rich palette, the greens, pinks, yellows and earthy hues of the landscape elements forming a contrast with the soft pastel tones used to denote the delicate veil of atmosphere that envelopes the faraway peaks, contributing to the mood of tranquility that pervades the image. Mignot was obviously pleased with *View of the Fishkill Mountains from Highland Grove*, for he elected to debut it at the thirty-first annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, which opened on March 12, 1856. The first American subject Mignot exhibited at the academy, it was aptly described as a "fine picture" that was "well-painted"—praise that the young artist from the South, eager to make his mark in the highly competitive art world of New York, would surely have appreciated ("Exhibition of the National Academy. First Article," *The Crayon* 3 [April 1856], p. 118).