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SEX AND CITY LIFE: WINSLOW HOMER AND THE DEMI MONDE**Abstract:**

Winslow Homer (American artist, 1836-1910) began his career in 1857 as a freelance artist in Boston. A cosmopolitan city by mid-nineteenth century, Boston was known at its founding as the city on a hill whose example of communal charity, affection and unity would be a model to the world. When Homer arrived to set up shop, Boston had grown into to a city known as much for its prostitutes, pick pockets and thieves as for its churches and halls of justice. Claiming throughout his life that he was a realist, we expect to find evidence of this new urban reality identified in Homer's work. True to his word, viewers are introduced to Boston's underworld veiled in images of respectability and supported for its viewers with a subtext of visual dialogue. Homer continues this exposition in New York City several years later. Fortunately for Homer and the 21st - century researcher, the publishing industry shifted its format and presentation in the 19th century from long columns of text-heavy print to illustrated weeklies that could be read even if its subscribers were illiterate. In the illustrations based on his drawings, Homer identified a culture of women who moved between the night life of their professions and the respectable activities of daily life in the city. As viable members of the community, the women were key players in its culture and in its cultural identity. Enterprising and successful, the women of the demi-monde financially contributed to their communities. Homer presented the women in the context of the urban environment and followed the demi-monde as they vacationed in upstate New York, visited the north shore, enjoyed morning promenades, day excursions into the country and to the race track. We are invited into an elegant Brownstone as the women gather to celebrate the New Year. It is difficult but not impossible to identify the women of the demi-monde. Homer often presented the evidence in such close proximity to viewers that we have become accustomed to looking past it; and, we continue to repeat mistakes of misinterpretation. But, you may ask, how did Homer get away with such imagery and why did the editors of the illustrated weeklies allow such indecency? How have we missed the message all these years? This presentation will show how Homer secured for us the active presence of the demi-monde in the cosmopolitan and urban environments of the 19th century.

Keywords:

nineteenth century, prostitution, Winslow Homer, American Culture, demi-monde