



THE CHARLES HOSMER
MORSE MUSEUM
of American Art

January 10, 2018
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Catherine Hinman
(407) 645-5311, ext. 109
chinman@morsemuseum.org

A Monumental Bierstadt Landscape from Charles Hosmer Morse's Hometown Begins a Five-Month Visit to the Morse in February

Note to editors: High-resolution images are available by contacting us at pubaffairs@morsemuseum.org.

WINTER PARK, Fla.—*The Domes of the Yosemite*, the largest existing painting by Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), will be exhibited at the Morse this winter and spring through a special loan from the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum in Vermont.

The monumental painting, having just received conservation treatment in Miami, debuts at the Morse February 13 and will be on view through July 8 before returning to Vermont. The 1867 oil-on-canvas, almost 10 feet by 15 feet, has not been shown outside the Athenaeum since its first installation there in 1873.

“*The Domes of the Yosemite*, said Morse Museum Director Laurence J. Ruggiero, “is a virtuoso performance by one of the most beloved painters of America’s natural beauty—sweeping, sumptuous, dramatic and luminous.”

“The painting perfectly complements the Morse’s collection of 19th-century American art,” he said. “It will be an unforgettable experience for our community and all our visitors. It is a privilege to be able to make this landmark American painting available to them.”

Charles Hosmer Morse, the industrialist and philanthropist for whom the Morse is named, is a native of St. Johnsbury. The Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation—which has provided significant grants to Morse’s school, the St. Johnsbury Academy—gave \$100,000 toward the Athenaeum’s *Domes* Project, which includes the painting’s conservation as well as the

installation of an HVAC system in the Athenaeum, structural repair to a gallery viewing balcony, and the conservation of frames in the collection.

“With age, the canvas had become weak where it wrapped around the stretcher, so much so that there was significant distortion in the upper left corner,” said Athenaeum Director Bob Joly.

“Also, the surface was coated with a synthetic varnish in the 1950s, which becomes harder to remove the longer it remains. When it returns, *The Domes* will be appreciated for its beauty and its great condition.”

Treatment of the work at ArtCare Conservation Studio in Miami, where it arrived in mid-October, has included repairing the tears around the perimeter, flattening the distortions, and removing surface grime and varnish.

“The painting is the most important piece in the Athenaeum’s collection and a major work of 19th-century landscape painting,” Joly said. “It is our job to preserve it for the generations to come.”

Bierstadt, a German-American artist, was lauded for grandiose landscape paintings, particularly those that captured the newly accessible American West. His work represented the maturation of the great American landscape tradition, and his painting of the Valley of the Yosemite in California has been called his crowning achievement.

Originally commissioned for \$25,000 for the Connecticut home of American financier Legrand Lockwood, *The Domes* was showcased in New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston before its installation in Lockwood’s mansion. After Lockwood’s death in 1872, it was purchased by Horace Fairbanks of the E. and T. Fairbanks Company in St. Johnsbury. Fairbanks—whose brother, Franklin, was an early investor in Winter Park land and a charter trustee of Rollins College—founded the Athenaeum in 1871, financed its building, and provided for its library and art collection. In 1873, he added the art gallery to accommodate *The Domes*. Morse joined the Fairbanks Company in 1850, ultimately becoming the controlling partner in Fairbanks, Morse & Co. headquartered in Chicago.

“Charles Hosmer Morse’s connection to St. Johnsbury is the reason the Athenaeum offered the painting for temporary display at the Morse Museum,” Joly said. “We are delighted to share this national treasure with the Central Florida community, where Morse’s legacy has meant so much.”

The Morse Museum is known today as the home of the world’s most comprehensive collection of works by American designer and artist Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933), including the chapel interior he designed for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and art and architectural objects from Tiffany’s celebrated Long Island home, Laurelton Hall. The museum's holdings also include American art pottery, late 19th- and early 20th-century American painting, graphics, and decorative art.

The museum is owned and operated by the Charles Hosmer Morse Foundation and receives additional support from the Elizabeth Morse Genius Foundation. It receives no public funds.

Public hours are 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday. From November through April, the galleries are open until 8 p.m. on Fridays. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$1 for students, free for children under 12, and from November through April, free for all visitors after 4 p.m. on Fridays. For more information about the Morse, please visit www.morsemuseum.org.

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