Primary Maker: David Edward Cronin
Title: Fugitive Slaves in the Dismal Swamp, Virginia
Date: 1888
Medium: Oil on canvas
Dimensions: Overall: 17 × 14 in. (43.2 × 35.6 cm)
Credit Line: Gift of Daniel Parish Jr.
Object Number: 1914.11

Object Name: Landscape
Classification: PAINTINGS

Curatorial Remarks:
New York illustrator, portrait painter, and political cartoonist David Edward Cronin served in the Union Army as a staff artist for Harper's Weekly and came face to face with the grim realities of slave life. Cronin's painting of a group of desperate fugitives makes reference to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a controversial law that empowered federal commissioners to pursue fugitive slaves in all states and return them to their owners. The painting was likely inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp," first published in 1842: In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp The hunted Negro lay; He saw the fire of the midnight camp, And heard at times a horse's tramp And a bloodhound's distant bay. Where hardly a human foot could pass, Or a human heart would dare, On the quaking turf of the green morass He crouched in the rank and tangled grass, Like a wild beast in his lair. A poor old slave, infirm and lame; Great scars deformed his face; On his forehead he bore the brand of shame, And the rags, that hid his mangled frame…
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