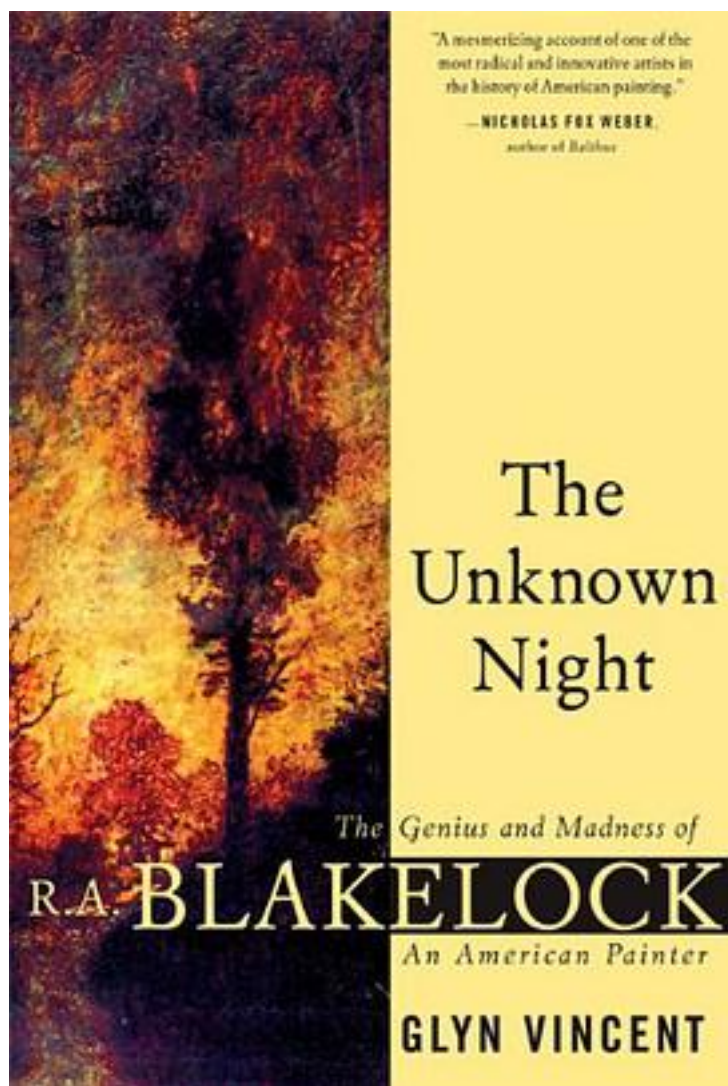


The Unknown Night



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In the early 1900s Ralph Blakelock's mysterious paintings were as sought after as the works of such American masters as Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent. In 1916, his haunting landscape, *Brook by Moonlight* was sold at auction for \$20,000, a record price for a painting by a living American artist. The sale, his second record price in three years, made him famous. The newspapers called him America's greatest artist; thousands flocked to exhibitions of his work. Yet at the time of his triumph, Blakelock had spent fifteen years confined in a psychiatric hospital in upstate New York while his wife and children lived in poverty. Released from the asylum, Blakelock fell into the dubious care of an eccentric adventuress, Beatrice Van Rensselaer Adams, who kept him a virtual prisoner while siphoning off the profits of his success, entangling the artist in one of the most heartless scams of the century. This is the first complete biography of Blakelock's dramatic life (1847-1919), spanning a tumultuous period of American history. Unprecedented in its comprehensiveness and authority, *The Unknown Night* chronicles the life, times, and madness of one of America's most celebrated and exploited painters, whose brooding, hallucinogenic landscapes anticipated abstract expressionism by more than half a century. With unfaltering historical detective work, Glyn Vincent unearths the facts of Blakelock's childhood in Greenwich Village; his youthful journeys among the Sioux and Uinta Indians, his mystical leanings, and the years in which he struggled to support his family by peddling his canvases door-to-door and playing piano in vaudeville theaters. He explores the nature of Blakelock's mental illness and his radical shift away from the Hudson River School of art toward a more expressive style of painting that, ultimately, defined Blakelock's true place in the pantheon of American art. This book is a portrait of a vanished world, particularly of New York in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a city of artists' studios and spiritualists' salons, shantytowns and millionaires' mansions, a city where the line between obscurity and adulation was treacherously thin. Filled with human drama and vivid period detail, *The Unknown Night* is a seductive mixture of scholarship and storytelling.

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