

**Patricia Hills  
60 Plaza Street East, #1H  
Brooklyn, NY 11238**

September 18, 2017

Elizabeth Goodridge  
Head of Sale  
Bonhams  
580 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Ms. Goodridge:

Re: Eastman Johnson, *Copy after Louis Gallait's "Art et Liberté."* Previously known as *The Violin Player (Savoyard Fiddler)*. Oil on canvas, relined, 13 ½ x 10 inches. Inscribed L.R. "E. J."

The subject is a three-quarter view of a man in an interior, holding a violin with his left hand and a bow with his right. He is dressed for the outdoors in somewhat ragged clothing: a dark brown cloak over a white shirt. He wears a hat that one associates with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. To his right (our left) is an opening in the wall that has a ledge with a pile of paper, a quill pen and ink bottle. Also are branches of leaves coming into the top part of the opening as well as patches of sunshine.

I viewed this painting at Bonham's in New York on September 8, 2017. In my opinion the work is by the American genre and portrait painter Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), and I plan to include the work in my catalogue raisonné of the artist's work.

Although Johnson was a skilled, professional portrait draughtsman, he felt the need for European study. He sailed for Europe in 1849 and went on to Düsseldorf, which at the time was a leading center for art instruction and where he studied with Emanuel Leutze. After two years, he decided to move to The Hague where he could study the old masters, especially Rembrandt. In the spring of 1855 he left The Hague and moved to Paris. His sojourn was cut short when he heard of his mother's death, and he left Paris at the end of 1855. During this time he made copies after other painters, a practice he continued even as a mature artist.

Louis Gallait (1810-1887) was a Belgian artist, well known as the painter who brought about a revival of history painting. His famous *Art and Liberty*, 1849, was shown in the Paris Salon of 1851, the large annual exhibition of international painting (but mostly French) that Johnson most likely saw. The period 1849-51 was a time in Europe of radical political activity. Gallait's painting is about 59 x 43 inches (150 x 110 cm) and is owned by the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. The art historian Baron Serge Le Bailly De Tillegem who wrote a monograph, *Louis Gallait (1810-1887): La Gloire d'un Romantique*, has praised it for its nuances of whites, beiges, and greys. I have not done research on Gallait, but the title (*Art and Liberty*) leads me to

suspect that this might be a romantic version of Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle at a moment when he is about to play the marching song he composed that became known as La Marseillaise. The song itself was controversial—at times banned and at other times made the national anthem. The prominent display of quill pen, ink bottle, and sheafs of paper on the ledge to the left of him suggests the subject is also a writer. (A good image of Gallait's painting is included in the Wikipedia entry on Gallait and also in De Tillegem's book).

Johnson's work is considerably smaller, and he probably kept it as a reminder of an artist he admired. It is a very close copy, but what strikes me are not only the nuances but also the picturesqueness with which Johnson handled the folds of the violinist's shirt and the raggedness of the cloak and hat. Throughout his career Johnson also did small history paintings; *The Prisoner of State* is one such painting. The handling of paint on the figure and the background wall is very characteristic of Johnson's paintings at this time and could be compared to the several versions of the *Savoyard Boy*, the most well-known of which is in The Brooklyn Museum.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills, PhD  
Director, Eastman Johnson  
Catalogue Raisonné Project

[pathills@bu.edu](mailto:pathills@bu.edu)