

Permanent address:
238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
March 3, 2006

Ira Spanierman
Spanierman Gallery
45 East 58th Street
New York, NY 10022-1617

Dear Ira:

RE: Eastman Johnson, Ice Skater/Child Warming Hands, oil on canvas, 24 ¼ x 20 ¼ inches. Signed on box lower right, vertical "E. Johnson." Dated below signature: "1879" I examined this painting at Spanierman Gallery on February 25, 2006.

In my opinion the work is by the genre and portrait painter Jonathan Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), and I will include it in my forthcoming catalogue raisonné.

The subject is one of Johnson's favorites, of which he did at least four other versions. The two most like yours in terms of composition were listed in the estate sale of Johnson's work held at the American Art Galleries, New York, from February 26-27, 1907. They were Catalogue #68 and #132. Both are initialed "E.J." The description of #68 is as follows: (#132 is similar).

"No. 68. A little child, in winter dress, seated on a packing box near a red-hot cylinder stove, is resting her feet on a platform and warming both hands. She wears a knitted hood, with pink ribbon, blue dress and linen collar."

The estate paintings were those paintings that Johnson still had in his studio when he died. They were probably initialed (by his widow or someone she authorized) before the 1907 sale. (See the Sheldon Keck article about these initials.) Paintings with full signature generally are those which he sold during his lifetime.

The painting now in your gallery has all of the Johnson characteristics: the sensitive portrayal of her face and hands, the handling of the paint in the background, the highlights on the skates, the buttons of her coat, and the key on the wall. The glow of the stove balances the composition. It is not beyond reason to think that the model might have been his own daughter, Ethel, who would have been about eight years old in 1879. She certainly figures in many of his genre paintings done in the 1878-80 years.

With the aid of an ultra-violet light I noticed that there has been some minor conservation on the painting, but it has been done with a sensitive touch.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills, PhD
Author: Eastman Johnson
pathills@bu.edu