

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

April 16, 2018

Katherine Baumgartner  
Godel & Co. Fine Art  
506 East 74<sup>th</sup> Street, 4W  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Ms. Baumgartner:

Re: Eastman Johnson, *Maine Interior: Man Smoking Pipe*, 1868. Oil on board, 18 ¾ x 14 ½. Signed lower left: "E. Johnson. / -68." Also on the image of the box on the shelf, above the figure: "E. Johnson" Provenance provided by Godel & Co.: W. Latimer Small, great grandfather of the present [2018] owner. The painting is in its original gilt frame with the name of the artist inscribed along the bottom edge.

I viewed this painting at Godel & Co. in New York on March 28, 2018. 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.

It makes sense to title the painting *Maine Interior: Man Smoking Pipe*, since it is a later version of the 1865 *Maine Interior: Man with Pipe*, which sold at Christie's in 2006.

Johnson often did pictures of rustic interiors, which he would draw from when making compositions with figures. One called *The Vacant Chair* was sold at the Estate Sale in 1907 at Anderson Galleries. I examined this work in 2014 and noted it was dated 1865. The 1907 catalogue description read as follows: "An old arm-chair with a patchwork seat, and a foot stool with an embroidered and fringed cushion, stand near a small rough brick fireplace, with glowing coals on the hearth. On the rude shelf of the fireplace are various dishes, a bayonet hangs on the chimney above, and on the right is a brick bread oven in the door of which stands a brass candlestick and a tin pail." The work was also at a Sotheby's sale on April 25, 1980.

Based on this scene, Johnson painted three more pictures: 1) *Grandpa's Pastime* (1865? or 1869?) with the addition of an older man sitting in a chair to the right (facing left) and smoking a pipe. That painting, whereabouts unknown, is somewhat larger, 18 1/2 x 23 inches. 2) *Maine Interior: Man with Pipe*, the Christie's 2006 version; and 3) *Maine Interior: Man Smoking Pipe*, at your gallery. None of the works are exact copies of each other. Johnson always varied the objects, as he has done with the arrangements of objects on the mantel.

The execution of the work is typical of Johnson's work. There is graphite outlining along the back of the figure. Deft brushwork, with warm highlights on the nose, cheek, forehead, and ear. Grey highlights can be seen on the chair, objects on the mantel. Translucent shadows in the

fireplace, and with careful looking the right andiron becomes visible. Careful and realistic painting of the brickwork, without being overly fussy. The eye and the right fist of the man is lightly done to give the atmospheric effect of a dim light. He sits in a low chair with a patterned cushion. To the left of the fireplace is a space that holds a box on which is stenciled "E. Johnson" and some other indecipherable letters, along with a blue patterned large jar. Above those objects are a number of handsaws. To the far left under the door is a sliver of grey light. The handling of the fabric is all typical; for example, on the sleeve the red-brown undertone represents the middle tones to contrast with the crisp whites and darker shadows. These middle tones also are used for some of the objects on the mantel; the effect is a wonderful rendering of objects in the half light.

The outstanding quality of Johnson's work is that he could paint objects as we see them emerging from the light. It is a camera vision of seeing light and not objects. When we think of artists who did this, we think of later artists such as John Singer Sargent, an artist I studied in depth with I did the large Sargent exhibition for the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1986-87. The details show this; note particularly the objects on the mantel in this *Maine Interior*. Like Sargent later, Johnson paints primarily the highlights.

And with this modern way of looking Johnson combined the folksy "American" subject matter that was so appealing to a country coming out of a major civil war. In short, it is a fine painting and superb example of his 1860s interior scenes.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills, PhD  
Director, Eastman Johnson  
Catalogue Raisonné Project

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