

PATRICIA HILLS
238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

October 10, 2006

Ms. Elizabeth Sterling
American Paintings, Drawings & Sculpture
Christie's
20 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Dear Ms. Sterling:

Re: Eastman Johnson, Maine Interior – Man with Pipe (my new title). Oil on academy board, 11 x 9 inches. Signed LL: "E. Johnson/1865"

I viewed this painting at Christie's, New York, on October 6, 2006. In my opinion the work is by the American genre painter Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), and I plan to include the work in my catalogue raisonné of the artist's work.

I first came across a record of the painting in the photo file of Kennedy Galleries in the early 1970s. At the time it was noted that the work, then called "Nantucket Interior – Man with a Pipe," had been sold on April 10, 1965. Hence, I had no opportunity to examine it at that time. I prefer that the title be changed to Maine Interior – Man with Pipe, because Johnson did not go to Nantucket until 1870. During the 1860s he frequently returned to Maine, the state of his birth, where he painted farmers and his famous series of maple sugar camp paintings.

Johnson frequently painted interiors empty of people and then used that setting, along with its mantle-piece objects, etc. as the background for subsequent genre paintings. He painted one such empty interior in 1865, a work that was sold at auction on April 25, 1980. (I have a photocopy of the tear sheet of the catalogue, supplied to me by Schweitzer Gallery, but no information about the venue of the auction.) The chimney in that empty interior has the same pattern of bricks and includes the large metal bucket on the mantle and a crock tucked into a niche to the left of the chimney. Johnson used this setting for paintings completed in both the 1860s and 1870s, including the so-called Nantucket interiors. I have a record (a photo but not much else) of yet another painting where the identical figure, but reversed, is sitting in that same kitchen. In that instance a greater view of the kitchen can be seen, similar to the empty interior of 1865.

The painting I saw at Christie's on October 6 shows the characteristics of Johnson: the subject's profiled face is in shadow but with touches of highlights, there is a light outline along the silhouette of the figure (note the shoes, the back of the vest, etc.), and the man

seems to be pensively thinking. The precise drawing of the floorboards to create linear perspective can be seen in many of Johnson's paintings. Moreover, the varied brushwork—in parts thinly painted, other parts with impasto—is also characteristic.

We examined the painting under an ultra violet light. There probably was some inpainting in the shadowed area of the sleeve, and some slight work to the right of the hand holding the pipe. But this seems minor and the painting seems to be in good condition.

Sincerely yours,

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Patricia Hills, PhD
Co-Author: Eastman Johnson:
Painting America, 1999