

238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
March 13, 1997

FAX 212/606-7039
Ms. Susan Imbriani
American Painting, Drawings
and Sculpture Department
Sotheby's
1334 York Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Ms. Imbriani:

Re: Eastman Johnson, Musical Instinct, oil on board mounted on board, 13 3/8 x 10 5/8 inches. Signed L.R.: "E J 186[?]"

I examined this drawing on November 8, 1996, at Sotheby's. In my opinion it was executed by the American genre and portrait painter, Eastman Johnson (1824-1906). I will include the painting in my forthcoming catalogue raisonné.

The features of the face of the young African American girl are barely discernible but suggested with nuance, and the articulation of her fingers and details and highlights of the banjo are quite exquisite. The variety of colors and textures is characteristic of Johnson's style; for example, the bright smooth red of the banjo, the rough impasto of the wall behind, the folds of her dark yellow dress and red underskirt, the metallic glow of the pail and the brown wooden door. The surface looks like fine sand under varnish; it is a surface that I have seen on other Johnson paintings.

During the 1860s Johnson painted several paintings of African Americans, and, indeed, of all the New York painters, he was the most consistently sympathetic, without being sentimental, to the plight of the slaves.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills, art historian
and author of Eastman Johnson

P.S. I do have a letter in my file from Patrick Coffey, dated January 2, 1975, in which he reminded me that the painting was exhibited at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1972 at the time of the Eastman Johnson exhibition. However, at the time I received the letter (1975) I noted on my file card that even then I did not recall having seen it earlier.