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October 13, 2006

Ms. Kendall Scully  
American Paintings, Drawings & Sculpture  
Sotheby's  
1334 York Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Ms. Scully:

Re: Eastman Johnson, The Peddler. Oil on academy board, 18 x 22 ½ inches. Signed  
LR: "E. Johnson/1873"

I viewed this painting at Sotheby'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.

This is a new picture for me. There seems to be no firm record of it in the literature, so it was a special pleasure to see it.

This rustic interior scene represents a standing young woman, modestly dressed, who is in the act of removing a hairpin from a packet of pins, which she has presumably received from the old gentleman with the silk top hat. He sits in a Windsor chair with hands clasped over his woven basket and look up at her. On the chair next to him are objects that he has brought, including some small hats, stockings, a sheet of white buttons, an ink bottle, perhaps bars of soap, etc. A sleep dog sits on the floor. Between the two figures is another small basket on which rest a box (or boxed book?) and mittens. On the left is a pot-bellied stove with vents that emit a bright orange-red glow. The painting is filled with such details, all of which are characteristic of Johnson's interiors of the 1870s.

The work is painted somewhat more thinly than is usually the case with Johnson, but that does not detract from the delicate rendering of the figures, their faces and the other plethora of objects. The graphite underdrawing, sometimes visible in Johnson's paintings, is clearly evident in many places. There are many other characteristics of Johnson's paintings: the delicacy of the woman's hands, the fact that her face is turned slightly away, the texture of the back wall, wainscot, the worn look to the door, the highlights as slight touches here and there (eg. the hatpins).

TO: Sotheby's, Re: The Peddler

- 2 -

October 13, 2006

The pot-belly stove appears (but with differing lengths of stove pipe) in other pictures, including Girl Warming Her Hands by Stove. The same stove can be seen in several other paintings, specifically Isn't It Cold of 1876, that was in Sotheby's May 24, 1990 sale.

The model for the older man appears to be Captain Nathan H. Manter (1818-1897), one of the "old sea captains" whom Johnson met on Nantucket. Johnson painted several of these old gentlemen into his genre scenes. According to my records (but I have not confirmed it), he is the subject of a small painting, 13 x 10 inches, in the collection of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. My photocopy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum picture shows the same three-quarter view tilted to the right, as we see in The Peddler. The features are identical.

We examined the painting under an ultra violet light. There were just a couple of small spots in the background where some conservation had been done. This beautiful painting, one that showcases Johnson's finesse as a painter, seems to be in very good condition.

Sincerely yours,

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

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