Born the third of eight children to Philip C. Johnson and Mary Chandler Johnson, Eastman Johnson and his family lived in Fryeburg, Maine, and then Augusta, where his father held positions in the state government. In his late teens (1839–44), Johnson worked in an Augusta dry-goods store and a Boston lithography shop and began sketching portraits. When Johnson's father moved to Washington, D.C., young Johnson joined the family and established himself drawing notable Americans, such as John Quincy Adams and Dolley Madison. In 1846 he returned to the Boston area, where he drew portraits of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his circle.

Eager to advance in oil painting, Johnson sailed for Europe in 1849 for further training. He spent two years in Düsseldorf, then a leading art center, where he studied with Emanuel Leutze. In the late summer of 1851 Johnson moved to The Hague and became a professional portrait painter. However, he felt the need for additional training in figure and genre painting and, in August 1855, moved to Paris to study with Thomas Couture. This sojourn was cut short by news of Johnson's mother's death, and in October 1855 he returned to the States.

For the next three years (1855–58) he painted in the Washington, D.C., area; in Superior, Wisconsin, where he sketched the local Ojibwa; and in Cincinnati, where he executed portrait commissions. In April 1858 he settled into a studio in the University Building in New York. Although he had submitted paintings to the American Art-Union as early as 1849 and to the National Academy of Design beginning in 1856, his first real success came when his *Negro Life at the South* (1859; New-York Historical Society) received rave reviews at the academy's 1859 annual exhibition. Elected an associate of the academy that year, Johnson became a full academician the following year.

During the 1860s and 1870s Johnson was the leading genre painter in New York and consistently received praise both for his subjects of American life and for his skillful style of painting. During the Civil War he followed the Union troops in search of interesting subjects and painted several pictures sympathetic to the newly freed slaves, such as *The Freedom Ride* (1863; Brooklyn Museum). During the 1860s he was active in the National Academy of Design and the Artists' Fund Society and also participated in organizations that brought together artists and their patrons, such as the Century Club and the Union League Club; he was a founding trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Johnson married Elizabeth Buckley in 1869, and, beginning in 1870, the couple with their daughter, Ethel, began summering in Nantucket, off the Massachusetts coast. On Nantucket Johnson painted typically "American" rural subjects, such as cornhusking bees and cranberry harvests.

By 1881 Johnson was painting fewer genre scenes, as he turned his energies to portrait commissions. For the next twenty years he painted business and political men such as John D. Rockefeller, Jay Gould, William H. Vanderbilt, and presidents Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. When Johnson died in his New York home in 1906, he was mourned by both the older artists and the younger men who felt he held views sympathetic to their generation.

P. H.

Bibliography Walton 1906. Brooklyn 1940. Hills 1972. Hills 1977. San Diego et al. 1990.

53
Worthington Whittredge, 1854

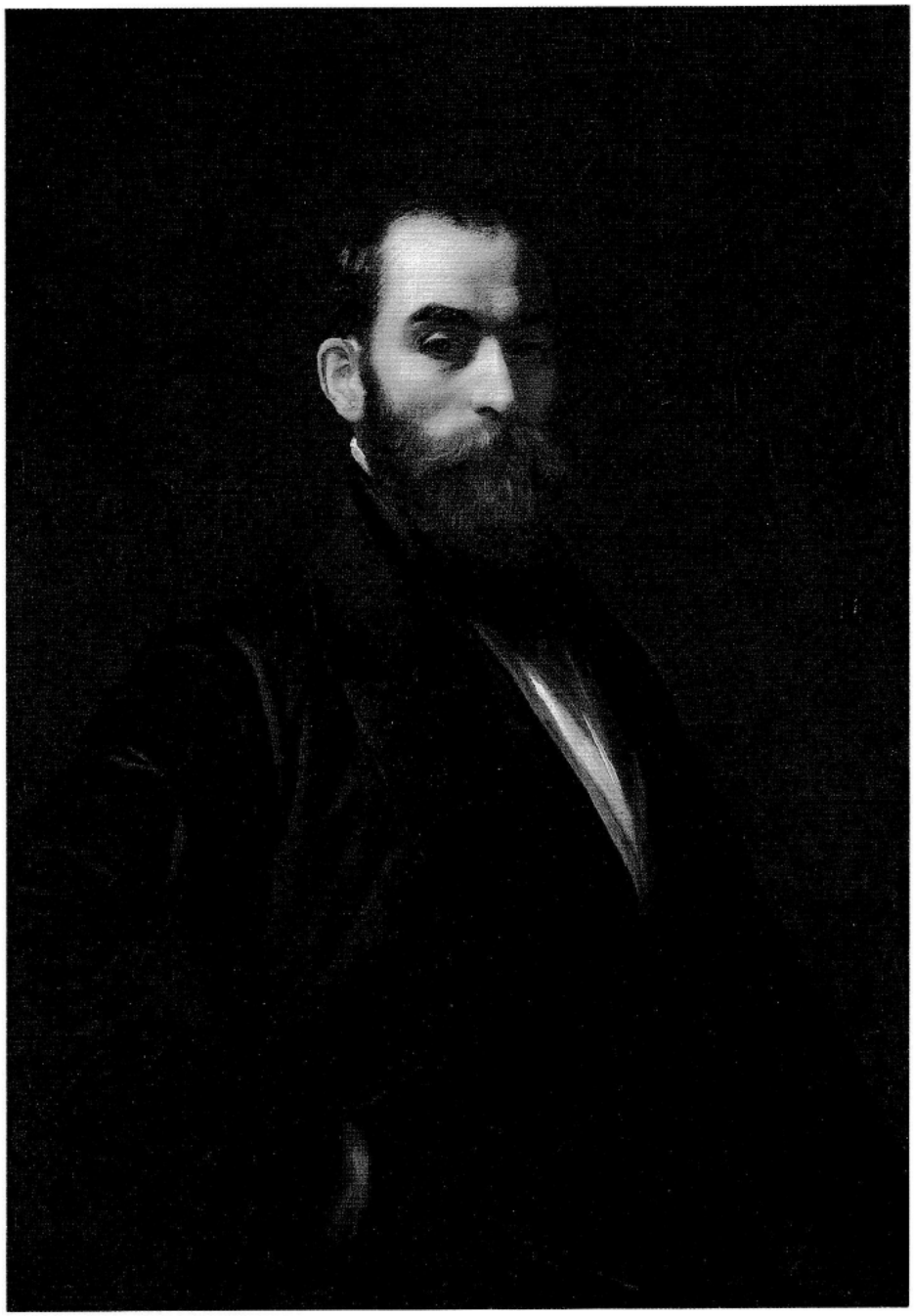
Oil on canvas
94 × 66.7 cm (37 × 26¼ in.)
Founders Society Purchase, Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., Fund (60.83)

Eastman Johnson and the artist Worthington Whittredge (q.v.) both arrived in Düsseldorf in 1849 and became fast friends. The magnetic personality of the German-American artist Emanuel Leutze inspired them, and they worked together in Leutze's Düsseldorf studio. Whittredge posed as Washington and as the steersman in Leutze's famous *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), while Johnson made a small oil copy of the painting for the engraver.

Whittredge stayed in Düsseldorf to study landscape painting until 1857, when he moved to Rome. Johnson, however, became less than satisfied with the dry method of the Düsseldorf style. After a trip to Holland and to London in the summer of 1851 to see the International Exposition, Johnson decided to move to The Hague, where he remained until mid-1855. During this time he made copies after Rembrandt and Van Dyck, painted genre pictures of cardplayers and Savoyard boys, and took on portrait commissions. Through the American ambassador, August Belmont, Johnson acquired a clientele of distinguished Americans and Europeans. According to the biography that William Walton wrote shortly after the artist's death, Johnson was offered the position of court painter, but by then he had decided to leave The Hague for Paris (Walton 1906, 268).

Johnson must have painted Whittredge on a return visit to Düsseldorf in 1854. The handsome oil portrait exhibits Johnson's mastery of the medium. The figure of the bearded Whittredge emerges from a dark brown background, and the strong chiaroscuro dramatizes the intelligent visage of a self-assured professional artist.

Other notable portraits of Whittredge exist. Johnson also made a smaller painting (oil on board, 11 × 8 in.; unlocated) that represents the head and shoulders of Whittredge looking to the right. While the smaller painting is not dated, it was



Worthington Whittredge

probably done at the same time as Detroit's larger version, since Johnson often made smaller, more sketchy oil studies in preparation for larger portraits. Two years later, in Düsseldorf in 1856, Leutze painted a three-quarter view of Whittredge dramatically dressed as a Spanish cavalier (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), and he made two more portraits in the 1860s (National Academy of Design, New York; and private collection).

P. H.

Inscription At lower right, *E. Johnson / Dusseldorf / 1854*

Provenance The sitter. His daughter. Wildenstein & Co., New York, 1959. Acquired in 1960.

Exhibitions New York et al. 1972, no. 13. Grand Rapids 1977, no. 57.

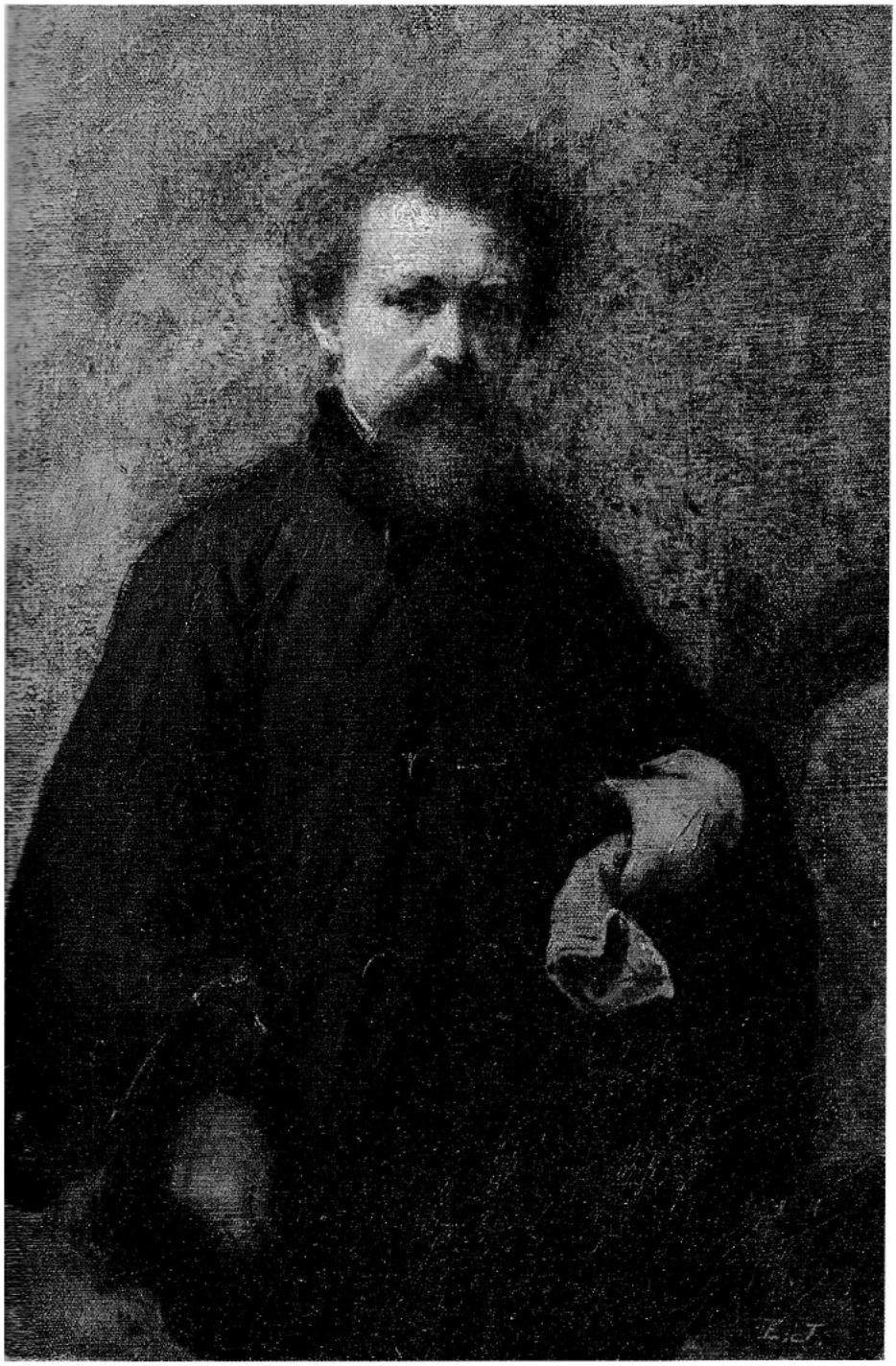
References Hills 1972, 17, ill. 20. Hills 1977, 43, fig. 27, 203.

54
Self-Portrait, ca. 1860–63

Oil on canvas
46.4 × 31.1 cm (18¼ × 12¼ in.)
Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr. (40.34)

EASTMAN JOHNSON painted about two dozen self-portraits during his long career. Some, like the Detroit study, are small in scale, while others are life-size full-figure renderings. Some of them show Johnson costumed and holding props, and others focus on the head alone.

Johnson probably did this self-portrait with gloves sometime between 1860 and 1863. The face in the painting most clearly resembles in age the self-portrait that he presented to the National Academy of Design when he was elected to membership in 1859 and the self-portrait, dated 1863, belonging to the Art Institute of Chicago. Like the portrait of his friend Worthington Whittredge (cat. no. 53), the painting is dramatically



lit with the face looming out of dark shadows. The Chicago self-portrait shows Johnson as an artist, in his studio with his palette hanging on the wall, and as a bon vivant, dressed in a smoking jacket, slowly uncorking a bottle of champagne.

Johnson applies the paint to the surface of the canvas in the Detroit self-portrait with deft touches. Characteristic of many of Johnson's paintings, particularly the ones not shown at the major exhibitions, the background is painted somewhat thinly with the red-brown ground serving as the middle tone for the parts of the forms situated midway between the highlights and the deepest shadows. The result, much like the effects of Thomas Couture, was to merge the face and figure with the surface of the painting. Thus the face seems to emerge from the fabric of the canvas itself, and from a distance it seems almost Rembrandtesque. The gray-green leather gloves with red trim give a dash of color to this concentrated and exquisite study of the artist.

P. H.

Inscription At lower right, *E. J.*

Provenance Purchased from John Hanna, Inc., Detroit. Acquired in 1940.

Reference C. Burroughs 1940, 3–5, ill.

Self-Portrait

55
In the Fields, ca. 1878–80

Oil on board
45.1 × 69.9 cm (17¾ × 27½ in.)
Founders Society Purchase, Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., Fund (38.1)

From the mid- to the late 1870s Eastman Johnson made pencil sketches and oil studies of cranberry pickers on Nantucket. It was a typically American and rural subject that appealed both to Johnson and to those patrons who preferred subjects that would take them away from the industrial and urban realities of the post–Civil War years. His biographer William Walton understood the subject's appeal only too well when he praised Johnson's ability to represent the pleasing aspects of rural life:

> His conception of the rendering of "the life of the poor," of "the tillers of the soil"... preaches no ugly gospel of discontent, as does so much of the contemporary French and Flemish art of this genre; his Nantucket neighbors know nothing of the "protestation douloureuse de la race asservie à la glèbe"; there is no "cri de la terre" arising from his cranberry marshes or his hay-stuffed barns. The happy combination of right feeling and sound technique is manifest in all the details. (Walton 1906, 270–271)

Although Johnson did sketches of pickers bent over cranberry bogs as early as 1875, most of the studies were probably done in 1878 and 1879. That year Johnson arrived in Nantucket late in the summer, and he wrote to his friend Jervis McEntee on October 26, 1879: "I have been industrious enough since here. I was taken with my cranberry fit as soon as I arrived... and I have done nothing else" (San Diego et al. 1990, 39). That year he stayed in Nantucket until mid-December to "get through with things begun," but he enjoyed the quiet and experienced "something very peaceful and satisfactory in our life here" (San Diego et al. 1990, 66).

The majority of the studies fall into two groups: those associated with the most finished version, *The Cranberry Harvest* (1880; Timken Art Gallery, San Diego), and those with the unfinished version, *Cranberry Pickers* (ca. 1878–79; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.). The Detroit painting relates to the Timken group, for it contains a woman standing taller than the surrounding pickers. This motif characterizes at least three other studies (Arizona State University, Tempe; Manoogian Collection, Detroit; private collection). That same motif of the standing woman looking into the distance over the heads and bent backs of her companions had earlier defined the composition of Jules Breton's popular painting *The Weeders (Les Sarcleuses)* (1860; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha), exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867. Another version was owned by the Cincinnati collector Henry Probasco in 1868. We have no firm evidence that Johnson knew either of these works, but he was familiar with the popular French painter, since earlier, about 1865, he had made a copy (Santa Barbara Museum of Art) after Breton's *Village Perambulator.*

The Detroit painting shares with many of Johnson's other studies of the 1870s its bright sunlit highlights flashing off the edges of the figures. While some scholars have identified such a focus on lighted contours as proto-impressionist, it is a technique that can be seen to have come from Thomas Couture, whose book *Méthode et entretiens d'atelier* (Methods and conversations of the studio) was published in 1867. Albert Boime has discussed the influence of Couture in France, but Couture's impact on America was equally strong. Couture advised painters to make a sketch of their initial impression, laying in the places of the lightest lights and the darkest darks:

> You must establish what I call "dominants" for light and shade effects. Look carefully at your model, decide which is its brightest light, and situate the light in your drawing at the place it occupies in real life. Having made this your dominant, you will of course make sure that all other lights are subordinate to it. The same applies to shadow: find your strongest and deepest black and use it as a guide or tuning-fork to establish the values of your other shadows and half-tones. (quoted in Boime 1971, 28–29)

Couture was not the only established painter, however, who attempted through the placement of light and dark values to represent a lifelike realism. John Singer Sargent, a student of the fashionable French painter Carolus-Duran, also emphasized the strong lights skipping along the edges of forms in his smaller version of *The Oyster Gatherers at Cancale* (1878; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), shown at the inaugural 1878 exhibition of the Society of American Artists, which Johnson would have seen.

But Johnson's *In the Fields* is sketchier than Sargent's painting, and he would never exhibit his studies as finished works They were intended as preliminary aids to the final version. The sketch/finish debates raged through most of the nineteenth century, but as Boime observed: "Until deep into the nineteenth century... this [sketch/finish] conflict was controlled by confining original and spontaneous works to the privacy of the atelier, and placing only the polished painting on exhibition" (Boime 1971, 88). Johnson kept his sketches in his studio until his death, and, as one obituary noted, "he liked to keep his sketches, and knew they were better" (Hills 1977, 133). In fact, *In the Fields* was one such study that hung on his studio wall, documented in a photograph reproduced in Edgar French's tribute to Johnson, published in *World's Work* in 1906.

In the Fields

The initials at the lower left may have been done by another hand. The conservator Sheldon Keck, at the time of the Eastman Johnson retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum in 1940, subjected the *E. J.* initials on another cranberry-subject painting *(Woman on the Hill,* Brooklyn Museum) to a technical examination. He also examined other Johnson paintings with similar initials. He concluded that although the paintings were genuine, many of the initials were added at a later date, perhaps by Johnson's widow (Keck 1942, 79).

P. H.

Inscription At lower right, *E. J.*

Provenance Purchased from Frederic Frazier, Inc., New York. Acquired in 1938.

Exhibitions Brooklyn 1940, no. 64. Milwaukee 1960, no. 10. Hamilton 1961, no. 34. New York 1964, no. 18. New York 1970, no. 145. New York et al. 1972, no. 87. Buffalo et al. 1976. Moscow et al. 1987. San Diego et al. 1990, no. 13.

References *BDIA* 1938, 2. Crosby 1944, no. 6. Hills 1972, 99. Williams 1973, 149, fig. 133. Hills 1977, 241, fig. 105.

56
Catherine Butler Dusenberry (Mrs. Allan) Shelden, 1885

Oil on canvas
92.4 × 78.1 cm (36⅜ × 30¾ in.)
Bequest of Mrs. Allan Shelden III (1985.27)

By the mid-1880s Eastman Johnson was almost exclusively engaged in painting portraits. And while he was considered a painter of men, he also did handsome portraits of women, such as Mrs. Allan Shelden.

Mrs. Shelden, née Catherine Butler Dusenberry, married Allan Shelden in 1859 in New York State. Her son, Henry D. Shelden, was governor of Michigan (1885–1887) when she sat for her portrait. It is not clear where Johnson painted her. He is not known to have traveled to other cities to execute his commissions, although he sometimes brought unfinished portraits with him to Nantucket to complete. Hence, it was probably completed in his New York home and studio at 65 West 55th Street. Another version, almost identical in size and pose but sketchier in execution and not dated, is owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Philadelphia picture was included in the first large retrospective of Johnson's work held at the Brooklyn Museum in 1940.

Johnson frequently did two versions of portraits. One would be a study with a delicate but sketchy treatment of the features and clothing, and with the barest indication of setting. The background would often consist of a thin layer of red-brown (perhaps burnt sienna) color. These rarely receive Johnson's full signature, although often the initials *E. J.* are inscribed at the lower edge (see cat. no. 55 regarding the question of authenticity of the initials). Many such sketches remained in Johnson's possession. For the finished portraits—and a good example is Detroit's portrait of Catherine Dusenberry Shelden—Johnson was careful to exercise a delicate chiaroscuro on the face and to delineate the features and hands. Typically, such finished versions are signed *E. Johnson* followed by the date.

Detroit's version of *Catherine Butler Dusenberry (Mrs. Allan) Shelden* shows Johnson at his best as a portrait painter. He paints with a dry brush and scumbles the paint to give an effect of richness; it was a technique practiced as well by the French painter Thomas Couture. Johnson declined to introduce wet-into-wet painting, the *a la prima,* bravura style of such celebrity portraitists as John Singer Sargent. Johnson and his patrons seemed to prefer his more sober and conservative renderings, which are not without liveliness. The highlights on the tacks of the green upholstered armrests give additional sparkle to the painting and bracket the figure within a three-dimensional space. Mrs. Shelden's brown velvet dress with the ecru lace collar introduces an element of femininity that sets off her face, yet the calm composure of her intertwined fingers and her eyes looking off to her right express a woman of intelligence. It is a mark of the family's satisfaction with the portrait that it remained in the Shelden family until given to the museum in 1985.

P. H.

Inscription At lower left, *E. Johnson / 1885*

Provenance Henry D. Shelden, Sr. Allan Shelden III. Mrs. Allan Shelden III, Detroit. Acquired by bequest in 1985.

Reference Brooklyn 1940, 72, no. 261.

Mrs. Allan Shelden