

36 Harrison Street  
Brookline, MA 02146  
September 15, 1983

Dear [REDACTED]

Regarding your Eastman Johnson sketch Child and Rabbits which you brought by for me to see on September 13:

The sketch might possibly be No. 40 in the estate sale, Works of the Late Eastman Johnson, N.A., held at the American Art Galleries on February 26, 1907.

The entry for No. 40 reads as follows:

Child and Rabbits

"A small girl is just opening a narrow door, apparently to feed her five pet white rabbits, which have assembled at the sound of her footsteps and stand in various attitudes of expectation, eagerly welcoming their little mistress. On the back of this panel is a fragment of a picture showing a little girl seated in a kitchen chair, holding a pet white rabbit in her lap."

The catalogue notes that the work is signed at the lower right, E. J.

However, the measurements given for this No. 40 are 20 by 11 inches. Your little sketch is 11½ x 6 5/8 inches. Perhaps the measurements in the catalogue are wrong? Perhaps there is a more finished version of yours that measures 20 by 11 inches which also has a fragment of "a picture showing a little girl..." If the latter were the case, that would be an unusual coincidence.

I do not have any records of any larger picture by Johnson which fits this description of a small girl opening a narrow door to feed five pet white rabbits.

Your work would fall into the category of a first sketch to rough out an idea which Johnson had for a composition. There are not many such extant sketches; therefore, I particularly look forward to receiving a good black and white photograph of it.

Regarding the sketch on the reverse of your painting: A more finished version of this is No. 19 of the estate sale, which reads as follows:

Child Holding Pet Bunny

"This is the study of a little girl seated in a kitchen chair, cuddling her pet white rabbit in her lap, holding him tightly with both hands, and at the same time gazing affectionately at the animal. She wears a gray dress with red at the sleeves, a broad white collar, blue stockings and high shoes. The figure is lighted strongly from the upper left, and a deep shadow is cast upon the background, which is the plastered wall of a room."

This work was reproduced in Hirschl & Adler Galleries, The American Scene, 1969, No. 52, as "Ethel Johnson and Her Rabbit."

TO: [REDACTED]

- 2 -

September 15, 1983

Johnson painted at least 12 paintings of children in barns between 1877 and 1879, while visiting his sister Harriet May and her husband, the Reverend Joseph May (Unitarian), who summered with their children in Kennebunkport, Maine. Johnson's own daughter Ethel, then about 6 or 7 years old, would have been a likely model for your painting (both the front and the reverse).

Paintings in public collections relating to this series include:

The Confab, 1877, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford  
Children in the Barn, not dated, Montclair Art Museum  
In the Hayloft, not dated, The Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego  
Barn Swallows, 1878, Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Two Children in Barn, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University

For references to Johnson's life, you might look at my Eastman Johnson, published in 1972 by the Whitney Museum of American Art and Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. or my Genre Painting of Eastman Johnson: The Sources and Development of His Style and Themes published by Garland Publishing, Inc. in 1977.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills

P.S. I look forward to receiving the good quality black and white photographs of the front and back of the painting.

Should you sell the work or give it away, please let me know the name of the new owner for my records. Thank you.

cc: Jay Carter, Christie's 12/23/83