

238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
July 8, 1994

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

RE: Eastman Johnson, Negro Life in the South (small version),
oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Property of [REDACTED].

I examined this painting at my home in Cambridge on July 7,
1994.

In my opinion this work was painted by the American genre
painter Eastman Johnson (1824-1906). I previously wrote to you
on November 14, 1991, and confirmed then that I was of the
opinion that the painting was by Eastman Johnson. (Please refer
to that detailed letter.)

The painting was restored in 1986 by the conservator Charles
Olin of Great Falls, Virginia. I had seen the painting in May
1984 when the painting was in poor condition; at that time I had
many questions about the work. When I saw the painting again in
May 1986 I was convinced that it was by Eastman Johnson. I
believe that Mr. Olin had done an excellent job of restoration.
Shortly thereafter I also received a copy of his report.
Looking at the painting again yesterday, I was impressed by the
beauty of the work.

When you were at my home yesterday, I telephoned William
Truettner, the Curator of Painting at the National Museum of
American Art. He had seen the painting in Washington on several
occasions (one time with me) and reiterated his opinion that the
work was by Eastman Johnson.

Regarding the recent examination by the Fogg conservator and the
letter to you from the museum director (whose name you did not
give me) who raises questions about authorship: It would have
been helpful to both that conservator and the museum director if
you had shared Mr. Olin's report. He clearly states in
paragraph 7 that he attached the original canvas to a lining
canvas and then "both canvases were sealed in a mylar
envelope..." The museum director might have mistaken this for
the "pre-primed canvas" that was "wrapped over the edges"--the
observation that led the museum director to theorize that it was
not done by Johnson. (At this point I do not know when pre-
primed canvases came into general usage, but I intend to find
out. However, I believe the question is moot in this case.)

I mentioned to you that there seems to have been a print called
"The Old Kentucky Home," issued by H. Bencke of 207 Fulton

Street in New York and dated 1876. A private collector who owned the print in 1974 provided this information to me, however, the right corner of the print was torn away so that the name of the artist was missing as well as the "Home" in the title. I have not been successful in contacting the present owner of the print in order to take measurements of the image of that chromolithograph.

Johnson also made a version of Negro Life at the South that seems to have no figures. See p. 123 of my Eastman Johnson (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1972). It was typical of Johnson to paint an interior scene without figures, and then exhibit other versions with figures added.

Earlier I mentioned to you that the records I have pulled together seem to indicate that there were two versions of Negro Life in the South, also called Old Kentucky Home. See my letter of November 14, 1991.

To repeat: Johnson's "Rustic Scene in Kentucky," lent [redacted], was included in the 1867 Exposition Universelle held in Paris from April 1 to October 31, 1867. When the American paintings returned to New York they were exhibited at the American Society of Painters in Water Colors. The catalogue seems to be dated 1867-1868; the owner listed is again [redacted]. (See Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues, #49479.)

However, we know that the large NYHS version was sold for \$6,000 at the sale of the [redacted] collection on March 18, 1867, also called "Old Kentucky Home." [redacted] of New York purchased the painting at the sale.

I would question how a painting could be in Paris (or on the boat enroute) for an April 1 opening and also be at the same time on the auction block in New York on March 18. Moreover, the New-York Historical Society records do not indicate that an "[redacted]" was at any time an owner of their larger painting. Of course, one might argue that the painting got there late, the Derby notation in the two catalogues was a mistake, etc.

Your version might have been the painting given to the printer when the chromolithograph was made in 1876. And/or it might have been the version that went to the Paris Exposition, although it is odd that it does not have a signature.

Again, to reiterate, I plan to include your painting in my forthcoming catalogue raisonné.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills
author Eastman Johnson