

238 Putnam Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
May 13, 2003

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

RE: Eastman Johnson, Feather Duster Boy, oil on board mounted on plywood, 24 x 16 inches. Inscribed lower left "Eastman Johnson/1880." [The date, although difficult to read, does seem to be "1880."]

I examined the painting at my home in Cambridge on May 8, 2003. In my opinion the work is by the genre painter Jonathan Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), and I will include it in my catalogue raisonné.

There is another version of this painting, not quite as finished, in the collection of the Butler Institute of American Art. That version is also oil on board, but the measurements are 22 x 16 inches. The figure, however, seems to be the same size; I believe the Butler painting is just two inches shorter at the top. I am enclosing a photocopy of the essay I wrote on their picture for their catalogue: Irene S. Sweetkind, ed., Master Paintings from the Butler Institute of American Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with The Butler Institute of American Art, 1994), p. 86-87.

Your painting has many of the characteristics of Johnson's paintings. The face is finely painted, with delicate traces of pencil lines along the nostrils and upper lip. The eyes are wide, the lips are well shaped, and the skin is unblemished. The hands are very well done, with knuckles clearly articulated. (By way of contrast, in the Butler version, the hands of the boy are barely sketched.) The techniques Johnson used also includes scumbling, that is, the dragging of paint over the surface. That is evident in the floor, especially at the right side. The feathers of the dusters are represented with little flecks of color. Johnson chose the techniques to suit the subject.

Because I have no ultra violet light at the present moment, I was not able to examine the painting with this tool. However, it is clear that restoration was done on the painting at one point in its history. Some crackling has been filled in and a crack has been repaired. In my opinion, the restoration in no way adversely affects the surface.

It was a pleasure to see such a good painting, and to examine the back of the frame as well. I made a note of the remnants of labels, and I will let you know if my further researches reveal anything.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills  
co-author, Eastman Johnson:  
Painting America, 1999