

**FOCUS** IN **ON**



# GUY PÈNE DU BOIS' CONNOISSEURS

Richard Hilbert and Donald Myers

Hillstrom Museum of Art



Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958), *Connoisseurs*, 1938, watercolor on paper, 13  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 11  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches, gift of Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom

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## FOCUS IN/ON

FOCUS IN/ON is a program of the Hillstrom Museum of Art that engages the expertise of Gustavus Adolphus College community members across the curriculum in a collaborative, detailed consideration of particular individual works from the Hillstrom Collection. This project considers the Museum's watercolor titled *Connoisseurs* by American painter and prominent art critic Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958), donated to the Museum in 2004 by Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom ('38). The extended didactic text on the painting appears both in this brochure and in the FOCUS IN/ON exhibition. It was written collaboratively by Richard Hilbert, Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology whose research deals with ethnometodology; and Donald Myers, Director, Hillstrom Museum of Art, and Instructor, Department of Art and Art History.

## INTRODUCTION

Incisive observation that at times bordered on sarcasm characterized the work of Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958) in both areas of his career—as a painter who often depicted the art world and the upper crust of society, and as a prominent art critic who, though initially sympathetic to modernist impulses in art, was an enduring champion of realism. The Hillstrom Museum of Art's fine 1938 watercolor *Connoisseurs*, which was donated to the Museum in 2004 by Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom ('38), reflects the artist's tendencies, and examination of it allows consideration of his career and the social circles in which he operated. The painting was made in one of his most fertile, important periods, not long before the realism of Pène du Bois and other top painters of the time was eclipsed by the abstract expressionism emerging after World War II.

Pène du Bois was born in Brooklyn to Laura and Henri Pène du Bois, the latter a writer, literary critic, and journalist whose friendship with French author Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) was the source of his son's name. Raised in a sophisticated environment deeply engaged in the French culture of his father, the artist spoke only French for the first years of his life. This background had an impact on his art, which was heavily influenced by two extended periods abroad in France, the first as a young art student, the second as an established artist when he lived there with his wife Florence Sherman Duncan and their children Yvonne and William from 1924 to 1930.

## ARTISTIC TRAINING AND EARLY CAREER

As a youth, Pène du Bois' natural intelligence and abilities allowed him easy success in school while also having time for independent interests. He not only imitated his father by pursuing writing, but also discovered a talent for drawing that his family encouraged. In 1899, when he was fifteen, his father suddenly announced that he was to be enrolled at the New York School of Art, originally named the Chase School of Art after its founder, painter William Merritt Chase (1849-1916). Chase was a colorful personality who impressed his students with his virtuosic, unlaborated technique of painting, and instilled in them his philosophy of "art for art's sake," which meant that they were to allow art to be art, and to not disguise the way in which images were created by smoothing over their brush strokes in the academic manner.

Chase profoundly influenced Pène du Bois, as did another instructor at the school, painter Robert Henri (1865-1929), who

began there in 1902. Although both wished to break the hold of the academic approach on American art, Henri and Chase were very different artistic personalities. Henri turned Chase's teaching on its head by espousing an "art for life's sake" philosophy. Though in accord with Chase's desire to loosen the tight paint handling so prevalent in American painting (including by forbidding students from using small brushes, to encourage boldness in their creation of forms), Henri was not interested in the preciousity of Chase's impressionistic landscapes or the many still lifes for which he was known. He preferred subjects that came from the real, everyday life. Pène du Bois' 1940 autobiography *Artists Say the Silliest Things* elucidated Henri's ideas, including that "An artist must be a man first. He must stand on his own feet, see with his own eyes...." Henri's appearance at the Chase School caused an "uproar," and Pène du Bois noted how Henri had "Completely overturned the apple cart: displaced art by life, discarded technic, broke the prevailing gods as easily as brittle porcelain. The talk was uncompromising, the approach uns subtle, the result pandemonium."

Pène du Bois admired Henri deeply, and served for several years as the monitor for his class. Yet given his family background and the cultured attitudes of his father, it seems likely that he could never completely follow Henri in rejecting the more refined ideas of Chase, which were in consonance with his father's opinion that the artist must be an "aristocrat." And though he wrote that "Beauty...was seldom mentioned by these painters [i.e., Henri and his followers]," his own painting was frequently filled with elegant beauty.

Perhaps this duality can be a basic key for understanding Pène du Bois, who as an artist often inhabited the fringes of the very social world he frequently depicted and who, as a person, seemed to be a mix between a snobbish aesthete and a salt-of-the-earth, regular guy, valued as a deep, devoted friend. Comments by acquaintances and friends illustrate this dichotomy.

On the one hand, painter Raphael Soyer (1899-1987), who admired Pène du Bois and studied with him at the Art Students League in New York (where he taught during several different periods in the 1920s and 30s), described him as "sardonic" and "caustic" (in an interview recorded for the Archives of American Art). Similarly, Swedish-American artist Carl Sprinchorn (1887-1971) noted that the difficult hazing period he underwent in Henri's class as a foreign artist with poor English was especially due to cruelty shown by class monitor Pène du Bois, whose "attacks were accompanied by his perennial smile...almost a leer..." (recorded in an unpublished manuscript by Sprinchorn at the University of Maine, Orono).

On the other hand, painters Jerome Myers (1867-1940) and Edward Hopper (1882-1967), both close and devoted friends of Pène du Bois (and, like Soyer and Sprinchorn, both represented

with works in the Hillstrom Collection), spoke highly of him and his friendship. Myers, in his autobiography (titled *Artist in Manhattan* and published the same year as part of a series that included Pène du Bois' *Artists Say the Silliest Things*), described him as a “wise friend” and a “spiritual comrade.” And Hopper (about whom Pène du Bois wrote a 1931 monograph), in a letter to Pène du Bois’ daughter Yvonne following his death, noted that her father’s “brilliant mind” and “affectionate nature” both “drew many friends to him.” Hopper continued, “He certainly was the best friend I had in art.”

After several years studying at the New York School of Art, Pène du Bois’ father once again surprised him by deciding that the two of them would go to France where his son could further his artistic education. They departed in April of 1905. Pène du Bois, now an adult, was largely left to his own devices, while his father traveled around Europe. He briefly studied painting at the Atelier Colarossi in Paris, took private lessons from painter Théophile Steinlen (1859-1923), and made his exhibition debut at the 1905 Paris Salon. Most important from his time abroad, however, was Pène du Bois’ development of a lifelong habit of observing and sketching people in their social interactions. He frequented Parisian cafes and discovered that concert halls were also good places to sketch. This carefree existence continued until he received word that his father was very ill. Soon after, they attempted to return to America, but Henri Pène du Bois died just a few days out to sea.

At this turning point, Pène du Bois, no longer able to rely on paternal patronage, now had to support himself and it seemed natural that, like his father, he too should become a writer. He began his writing career as a general reporter for the *New York American*, the paper owned by William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) that had employed his father. After an uninspiring beginning, Pène du Bois evolved into an effective art critic. One especially notable effort in this role was for the journal *Arts and Decoration* (for which he worked for many years), serving as editor for a special edition dedicated to the 1913 Armory Show, the landmark exhibit that introduced modern European and American art to the American public. Pène du Bois’ article in that issue, “The Spirit and the Chronology of the Modern Movement,” considered the roots of modern art its culmination in French post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), whose work he had seen in Paris. Besides this literary effort for the Armory Show, he also contributed by exhibiting six of his own works.

## FROM CRITIC TO PAINTER

Though at this time he had to write to make a living, he did not abandon his goal of becoming a full-time painter. Soon after returning to the U.S., Pène du Bois began showing his work in

group exhibits, including his first showing at the Whitney Studio Club in 1917, where the following year he had his first solo exhibition. The Studio Club was the progenitor to the Whitney Museum of American Art, both supported by artist, socialite, and patron of the arts Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942), who had taken an interest in Pène du Bois a few years earlier. She was crucial in the development of his career, and those of many other American artists, by not only hosting exhibitions but also by connecting them with potential patrons, especially through social events to which artists were invited.

Pène du Bois was involved with others in the upper levels of society in this period as well, including acquiring art for his former employer William Randolph Hearst. He was associated with wealthy art collector Chester Dale (1883-1962), who became his “best patron” (according to an entry in the artist’s diary on May 3, 1924). Dale at one point had an option on all of the artist’s work, according to recollections in *Artists Say the Silliest Things*, and he later supported Pène du Bois with advances on commission for paintings when the artist returned to France in 1924. While there, he accompanied Dale on an art-buying excursion in Paris, racing from one shop to the next with him. Among many works Dale commissioned from the artist was an elegant portrait of him and his wife Maud. It was eventually donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of many paintings by the artist the collectors gave to major U.S. museums.

Pène du Bois’ presence in France was the result of his determining to devote himself fully to painting. He moved there with his family and established a studio in Gernes, some twenty-five miles outside of Paris, only relocating back to the U.S. after the stock market crash of late 1929 made remaining abroad financially unfeasible. The years in France were very productive ones. The artist continued his observation and sketching people and their social interactions and postures, particularly emphasizing their dress, which he felt signaled much about his subjects and their aspirations. Pène du Bois, in fact, had tendency to generalize the human form to the point where it sometimes seemed like a mannequin upon which to hang a socialized identity, something that was noted frequently in the critical literature on him.

The stay in France was largely supported by Pène du Bois’ dealer, Kraushaar Galleries of New York, which began handling his work in 1913. The head of the firm, John Kraushaar, offered him a stipend based on the strength of his sales. Pène du Bois continued to be represented by the firm until 1947, not long after Kraushaar’s death. The Hillstrom Museum of Art watercolor *Connoisseurs* had been in the personal collection of John Kraushaar, and it was acquired, in 1959, by Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom.

## CONNOISSEURS AND THE ART WORLD

In late 1938, the year *Connoisseurs* was painted, Kraushaar had a solo retrospective exhibition of Pène du Bois' oil paintings (the Hillstrom work, a watercolor, was naturally not included). Prominent *New York Times* art critic Edward Alden Jewell, who two years earlier had placed the artist among "our most beguiling savants of the brush," reviewed the exhibit, describing him as "distinguished" and citing the particular strength of works from that year. The following year, *Connoisseurs* was shown in a group exhibition at Kraushaar, the only watercolor included by the artist. An annotated copy of that exhibit checklist (in the Archives of American Art) records the painting's price as \$100. It apparently did not sell, and John Kraushaar perhaps decided that he'd like it for his personal collection.

Kraushaar also owned a painting titled *The Little Redon*, which depicts a wily art dealer (certainly not meant identified as Kraushaar, whom Pène du Bois fondly portrayed in a gently-caricaturing watercolor of 1927). It and *Connoisseurs* are examples of the many times the artist essayed the art world. Sometimes he depicted artworks as merely a part of his setting, but frequently they functioned as important foils to the main scene, as in the 1922 oil painting *Chanticleer* (San Diego Museum of Art) featuring a dandy in top hat and tails strutting past framed paintings that serve as status markers; or *The Art Lovers*, another oil from that year (private collection) in which two formally-dressed gentlemen stand near a group of paintings but, ironically, do not look at them. In all these works, the artist was interested in the social pretensions that, like the works of art, are on display.

Two additional works considering the art world are related to the Hillstrom painting. Like it, they are watercolors from 1938. *At an Exhibition* (private collection) features two men closely examining a portrait on the wall before them, one leaning in to get a closer view of some interesting detail, the other drawing back to consider the whole. *A Group of Artist Friends* (New Britain Museum of American Art) is especially closely related to the Hillstrom *Connoisseurs* in its size and the handling of the broadly-brushed forms. It shows a group of men at an exhibition, and five of the six present have been identified as prominent artists contemporary with Pène du Bois (including his friend Jerome Myers (1867-1949), Leon Kroll (1884-1974), Ernest Lawson (1873-1939), Mahonri Young (1877-1957) and William Glackens (1870-1938), all of whom who are represented in the Hillstrom Collection).

*Connoisseurs* depicts a group of unidentified gentlemen in what appears to be an exclusive club. In the foreground, uninvolved with the main action, a man stretches out in a comfortable chair, reading a newspaper that has the words "NEW TIMES" legible across its

top. Two other men, also elegantly dressed, stand by the fireplace and appear to discuss the framed artwork above the mantle, perhaps a depiction of a sailboat. The man on the right seems to lead the discussion. His face is shown in profile and his aquiline nose, raised eyebrow, and general expression suggest superiority, of intelligence and perhaps also of social standing, to the man next to him—whose facial features are coarser and whose dress and bearing are less refined. The title *Connoisseurs* suggests, perhaps, that the two men are aficionados of art, although it's possible that they are not even discussing art and that they are connoisseurs of something altogether different.

## HOW IS A VIEW OF THE PAINTING POSSIBLE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

In fact, the title *Connoisseurs* suggests to viewers far more basic matters than one might suspect. What would viewing the painting be without the title? Can a painting speak for itself?

A group of Gustavus Adolphus College students enrolled in various recent social science courses were invited to write about the painting under several fictitious titles—*War Declared*, *Anticipation*, *Back from the Ski Slopes*, *Working Class Trouble*. In every case, students had no trouble seeing more happening in the painting than is depicted: under *War Declared*, attention was drawn to the newspaper and to possible topics under discussion; one student saw that the men are "professional, possibly some branch of the military." Under *Back from the Ski Slopes*, some students saw a fire in the fireplace, one noting that one of the men is "looking" at it; one student saw a "party," yet another a "smoking room." Under *Working Class Trouble*, a student noticed a woman "going back to the kitchen;" another saw a "maid;" yet another saw a discussion about "the failing economy." Under *Anticipation*, a student saw an "early morning meeting;" another saw strategizing, possibly plotting. In this manner, the title of a painting does not simply name or describe the painting but serves as instruction for viewing, telling how to see what is depicted.

Yet even without instruction, viewers necessarily see more in a painting than is literally on display. A second group of students was asked to write about the Pène du Bois painting without benefit of any title whatsoever. Notably, these students could still see a typified scene that connects to other typified scenes throughout wider society. Themes indexed by these viewings include such as: elitism, wealth, sexism, privilege, leisure. Arguably, there is no alternative to such viewing in order to see any painting at all: if this is a room, we know that there are other rooms nearby. If this is indoors, we know there is another view from the outside. If these are men, we know that they have biographies and anticipated

futures beyond the scene shown. One student wrote that events depicted apparently took place after another event elsewhere in the house. In such a manner, the painting documents or stands for background patterns and partially formulated recipes for viewing not just this scene but any scene—as what we presumably knew all along are the kinds of things that can go on in a society.

A third set of students was asked to assign a title to the painting in light of what it is about. Offerings included: *Discussion, Just a Couple of Bros, Universal Communication, The Captains, White Privilege, Fun Times Discussing Art, Cigars, Afternoon Meeting, Fortunate Sons, Afternoon Chat, Old Boys Club, The Dreamer, The Sailboat, How Privilege Looks, and Men of Importance*. While titles and other instructions for viewing a painting cannot reduce ambiguity to crystal clarity, so likewise is it impossible for a painting to designate its own title or inform as to how instructions for viewing it should be specified or named. That students were able to know what time of day it is or see cigars in the painting is a remarkable accomplishment.

So what can we say about a painting independent of such interpretive practices? Yet a fourth group of students was asked to describe the Pène du Bois scene cold, so to speak, without interpreting it, without mobilizing background assumptions or consulting common sense to guide them in their course (which for purposes of the exercise were characterized as bias, prejudice, and unwarranted subjectivity). Assume nothing, they were told. Some of the students behaviorized the scene. Yet when it was shown to them that their mere recognitions of behavioral routines—sitting, standing, reading, talking—were themselves accomplished via background recipes for viewing, students were stunned, stupefied concerning what was being asked of them in “Describe the painting”—the task was “impossible,” or nothing was really being asked. (A subset of these students took refuge in describing lines and shaded areas on the page, mimicking a school of philosophy that has characterized the pre-interpreted world as a chaotic mess of swirling sense-data, as though such concepts are not themselves already rooted in culture, language, and tradition.)

## HOW THE SOCIAL SCIENCES VIEW SOCIAL SCENES

Throughout their 200-year history, the social sciences have been endlessly preoccupied with trying to describe human behavior objectively, without bias, hidden assumptions, or practical or political agendas. Famed sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011) called this vast array of collective efforts “the worldwide social science movement,” and he summarized their commonalities under the rubric “Formal Analysis.” While claiming no critique of the social sciences, and declaring nothing less than enthusiasm

about their discoveries and accomplishments, he nevertheless maintained that their commonality resides in their unwillingness to see standard social order, the real and actual society, in the empirical material on hand, what he called “the concreteness of things.” Rather, they find order as outcomes of methodological procedures by which they transform “the concreteness of things” into categorical phenomena legislated by the terms and protocols of their respective disciplines, including their theoretical concepts, methodological categories, and limitless seen-but-unnoticed background expectancies. Without irony, these are the same social practices everyday members of society count on to find themselves in familiar scenes and common-sense situations of choice. Everyday members of society are not only skilled in these practices but are the very definition of virtuosity-without-alternative. Indeed, skill in these practices takes an inevitable priority over their more rarified applications, known to practitioners as special competence, including all manner of professional competence and competence in the discovering sciences. Garfinkel named these practices “members’ methods,” or “ethnomethods,” and proposed investigations into these practices as a topic in their own right, investigations he termed “ethnomethodology.”

That social order self-organizes in this way returns us to the *sui generis* quality of society anticipated by French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) in the late 1800s, what Garfinkel has called the “incarnate” character of accountability. Members’ methods are practiced inside social settings while at the same time are accountable to those very settings; likewise the settings to which members’ practices are accountable are exactly-what-they-are as an ongoing accomplishment of those very practices. More simply stated, a description is part of the setting it describes and vice-versa, a phenomenon indexed by Garfinkel’s use of the term “reflexivity.” Efforts to teach reflexivity to new cohorts of graduate students during the 1970s often included two identical drawings of a three dimensional opening on a two dimensional chalk board accompanied by the terms “in” and “out” written into them. The pedagogical point of these drawings was not to show the possibility of optical illusion but rather that the descriptive terms “in” and “out” could serve as instructions for seeing the intended sense of the illusion in alternative ways, neither of which would be possible with the drawings alone. Moreover, the placement of the terms in juxtaposition with the drawings helps the drawings to reveal the intended sense of the terms that would not be available from the terms written on the board alone. Finally, the placement of the terms inside the drawings shows a sense in which the two make up a self-organizing *Gestalt* which cannot be analytically separated into the description versus the thing described, popularly known as “subjectivity” versus “objectivity.” Thus whatever a viewer says about the Pène du Bois painting—a title, a description, an analysis, whatever anyone could possibly raise as relevant to

viewing the painting—is part of the objectively available painting on hand for inspection even as the objective painting-as-described informs as to what the viewer could possibly be talking about.

Vast energy has been expended by social scientists to defeat reflexivity, to overcome common-sense practices and to replace them with professional practices, all to no avail. To treat the sloppiness of everyday accountability as troublesome or as something to be repaired or eliminated, Garfinkel wrote, is like trying to tear the walls of a room down to see what holds the ceiling up. Social scientists implicitly realize this but often find it disturbing. When conducting research, they continually recognize a familiar gap between what they are writing about and what they actually have on hand. When they occasionally acknowledge this gap professionally, it's considered a methodological problem to be fixed in future research, or it's attributed to the youth of their disciplines or to human error, or it's handled in footnotes or methodological appendices. Inevitably, though, whenever they discuss this familiar gap, it chronically reasserts itself in familiar ways that escape description even in the very texts in which they write about it.

An important difference between describing events in a painting such as Pène du Bois' watercolor, as opposed to describing actual social events, is that nobody inside a painting is actively producing the depicted routines in real time even as they, perhaps, can be *seen* to be actively producing them. For example, although the men in *Connoisseurs* appear to be talking about topical relevancies, our inability to access transcribed tapes of the discussion is not simply a technical limitation but an essential one: nothing is, in fact, being said. This turns the entire focus on “what’s really happening in the painting” over to us, the viewers. It can also turn the focus to the intended sense of the artist insofar as we the viewers have access to relevant knowledge of Pène du Bois that we can mobilize strategically in the production of here-and-now practical, that is, accountable, viewing.

## HOW THE HUMANITIES VIEW PAINTINGS

Historically, the humanities have been more tolerant of natural ambiguity than have the sciences or the strictly rational professions. Hence art critics and historians will not despair of an inability to describe a painting objectively or in a once-and-for-all manner. And yet there remain professionally presumed standards for negotiating, case by case, a for-all-practical-purposes rational clarity when evaluating the quality of an interpreted gloss—that is, not just any view of a work of art is judged equal to any other view. Special resources are mobilized for *informed* viewing, including knowledge

of art, art history, what artists in general try to convey in their works, what this particular artist generally tries to convey and might be conveying here in light of his or her other works, the artist’s biography and personal detail, the artist’s place in history—the list is essentially without limit and without pre-determination concerning what kinds of matters might become relevant in the course of an informed discussion about an artist’s work.

In various ways, *Connoisseurs* can be seen as typical of Pène du Bois’ paintings. He was particularly fond of painting people together in public places, places he had visited, and he painted mostly from memory without live models. According to art historian Betsy Fahlman, whose many publications on the artist rank her as the authority, the artist showed little interest in painting still lifes or nature scenes, and his interest in social settings seems focused on dramaturgical aspects of settings available for immediate viewing, as opposed to documenting more global themes, for example political categories such as social justice. But he does appear to have a wit about him that perceived people locked into social roles out of which they can scarcely find their way. As Fahlman has noted, Pène du Bois “occasionally depicted his figures as mannequins, deliberately emphasizing the inflexibility of the possible courses of action open to them.” Indeed, one of the students asked about the Hillstrom *Connoisseurs* saw it as a painting of a wax museum display, while another saw the men who were standing as trying to figure out what to do with the dead body in the chair. Featured urban settings for finding such rigid displays include restaurants, theaters, and other public places, but particularly conspicuous among Pène du Bois’ work are his many paintings depicting the art world.

It will surprise no one that an artist would inhabit the art world, but, as with Pène du Bois, there is often tension in the artist’s relation with that world: is he in and of it, a true native to it, or does he stand outside it viewing it with a kind of anthropological detachment? It seems that we have both here, a kind of ambivalence—Pène du Bois enjoyed associating with the artistic elite, but he often worked in solitude and relative anonymity. His ingratiations to the art community can hardly be doubted—he began his career as an art critic, became a full-time artist, and then later returned to writing about art when changing fashions limited sales of his paintings. He was a regular at artistic gatherings and major literary and artistic events, and he had routine access to artists, galleries, dealers, museums, and, especially, patrons. At the same time, however, one can hardly doubt his simultaneously detached view of the art community. After all, the name of his autobiography was *Artists Say the Silliest Things*, where, as Fahlman points out, his commentary about art galleries borders on social criticism: the luxuriousness of these environments “were designed expressly for ‘the captivation of tycoons,’ who sought to be as successful as collectors as they were in business.”

Fahlman aptly compares the tone of Pène du Bois' paintings and commentary—"ironically humorous rather than bitingly sarcastic"—to the tone of *The New Yorker* magazine. That *The New Yorker* caters to the economic elite can be discerned just from perusing the gift suggestions and ads for \$20,000 bracelets. It also caters to the well-educated, as indexed by literary references, and even cartoons that are occasionally impossible to decipher without insider knowledge. Yet the magazine is directed to general audiences and seems to make well-targeted fun of the very culture in which it travels. It is a well-intentioned, self-denigrating fun, and it is the kind of fun general audiences like to see being made of the cultural elite. Tending to the left of the political spectrum it is a "people's magazine," but it is also an artifact of privilege to which most of its readership could not possibly aspire. Occasionally it publishes articles explaining previously indecipherable cartoons, but it does so in a high cultured way that does not appear to denigrate any reader's intelligence.

Against this backdrop, *Connoisseurs* comes into renewed focus. It is a painting of the very world that gives rise to paintings. It might be criticism, it might be endorsement; probably it is neither, or both. In any case, it is about art, and it is about men who view art in luxurious settings and talk about it, or analyze it, or critique it, or show off their knowledge about it to one another, or pretend to esoteric knowledge, or just...appreciate it. Then again, we cannot see distinctly the inner painting that the men are talking about...if we can see it at all: is this a sailboat, something else entirely, or do we see light reflecting off of the glass, concealing any possible knowledge at all of the inner painting? And whatever it is, is this a quality piece? Or could it be a knockoff collectors' item such as a Thomas Kinkaid painting, or the kind of thing one finds hanging in motel rooms? Do the "connoisseurs" even know or care about the quality of the painting they are examining? And either way, do these men like the painting or might they be faulting it or laughing at it? Arguably no amount of background information or extrinsic material can disambiguate this painting to absolute clarity, and that includes whatever commentary the artist himself might have provided.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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## Hillstrom Museum of Art

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