

Two Nineteenth Century Paintings Found In Attic Go To Auction



Another of the Edward Mitchell Bannister paintings that will be offered.



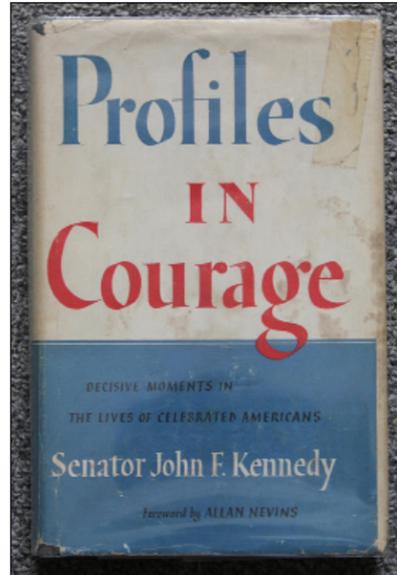
One of two paintings by Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828–1901) that were discovered in a southern New England home.

WARREN, R.I. — Barrington Antique Auction Co. will present a Nineteenth and Twentieth Century art and antiques auction on October 14.

Many treasures stored in a southern New England home are seeing the light of day for the first time in nearly a century. Among the recently unearthed paintings are two by Edward Mitchell Bannister

(1828–1901). Bannister was one of the foremost African American landscape painters of the Nineteenth Century. In 1876, at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, he won first prize bronze medal. He was nearly stripped of the award when it was discovered that he was not white. His fellow artists, however, insisted that the prize be awarded. He soon became very successful and gained national recognition. Though not educated in Europe, he was influenced by the Barbizon School of painting.

Known as Rhode Island's beloved Nineteenth Century landscape painter, Bannister was a co-founder of the Providence Art Club. Originally from Canada, he worked in Boston where he met Christiana Cardeaux, a woman of Narragansett Indian descent. They were married



Autographed copy of *Profiles In Courage* by John F. Kennedy.

and settled in Providence, R.I. He had a small sailboat and was often seen sailing and making sketches in Narragansett Bay. He was known for romantic scenes, and examples of his work hang in the Smithsonian, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and RISD Museum, as well as many other institutions, galleries and museums.

Also featured in this auction are works by noted Nineteenth and Twentieth Century artists Fredrick S. Batcheller, E.L. Smythe, E.L. Swan, rare prints by Gustave Baumann and sculpture by Dante Zoi.

Additional highlights include hooked rugs and paintings by folk artist Molly Nye Toby (1893–1974), a Wallace Nutting harvest table and bench, a signed note by John J. Astor (who died on the *Titanic*), an Asian carved wood screen, autographed copy of *Profiles In Courage* by John F. Kennedy, numerous old books, as well as many other lots of decorative arts, antiques, paper, glass and ceramics.

Barrington Antique Auction Co. is at 91 Main Street. For information, 401-741-1257 or www.artsri.net.

Baltimore Police Uncover Report Of Renoir Theft In 1951 At Museum

BY BRETT ZONGKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Police have located a 60-year-old theft report from the day a Renoir painting disappeared from the Baltimore Museum of Art that matches the description of an artwork that sold for \$7 two years ago at a flea market. Now an art theft expert says the museum has a strong case to get it back.

Baltimore police on September 28 uncovered the report from November 17, 1951. The museum on September 27 said it also found a record in its library that the painting was stolen. The police report noted there was no evidence of forced entry at the museum and that the painting was valued then at \$2,500.

According to the report, James N. Foster Jr, an execu-

tive assistant at the museum, reported that “some time between 6 pm Nov. 16 and 1 pm this date (Nov. 17) someone stole the following painting.”

The brief police report notes the 5½-by-9-inch piece, “On the Shore of the Seine,” was painted by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. It describes “a river scene in pink and blue.” No other items were reported stolen.

Six decades later, a Virginia woman said she bought the painting at a West Virginia flea market in 2010. She kept it in storage for nearly two years — thinking it must be fake — and then decided to have it examined by an auction house in Alexandria, Va.

The Potomack Co. verified it was Renoir’s “Paysage Bords de Seine,” which translates to Banks of the River Seine. The auction house said it checked a worldwide registry of stolen artwork in July, and the Renoir piece had never been reported stolen or missing.

The painting was to be sold at auction for the woman on September 29 and it was expected to fetch at least \$75,000.

The auction was postponed after a *Washington Post* reporter first found evidence the painting had been on loan to the museum from 1937 until 1951.

An expert on art thefts told The Associated Press the museum likely has a strong case to reclaim the painting. Robert Wittman, a former FBI investigator of national art thefts, said the artwork’s dimensions and composition are key in matching it to a stolen piece.

“I just figured it would be a matter of time before somebody made a claim because those things just don’t disappear,” Wittman said of the Renoir found in a box of trinkets.

If there is a legal dispute over ownership of the painting, it would likely be a civil, not criminal, dispute, Wittman said.

The museum’s insurance company from 1951 also might



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, “Paysage Bords de Seine”. Photo courtesy of The Potomack Company.

be able to make a claim, though the museum had not located insurance records to identify the company.

Museum officials were combing through paper records September 28 to learn more about the theft. So far, they have found a record documenting the museum had borrowed the painting from art patron Saidie A. May, who donated many other works to the museum.

The painting was on exhibit at the time it was stolen, said museum spokeswoman Anne Mannix. It is listed in a catalog for the 1951 exhibit, *From Ingres to Gauguin: French Nineteenth Century Paintings Owned in Maryland*.

Susan Helen Adler, a great-niece of May and an art teacher, has written a book about the life of her art collecting ancestor. She said there is no doubt May intended for the Renoir to stay at the museum permanently.

“In her will, every piece of art that had been in the museum was to stay in the museum,” Adler said.

Art records indicate the painting was sold in 1926 by the Bernheim-Jeune gallery in Paris to American lawyer Herbert L. May. The family believes he gave it to his wife, Saidie May, as a gift before

they divorced.

Saidie May began loaning her extensive collection to about six US museums and each year could take a portion of the value off her taxes. Her sister, Blanche Adler, lived in Baltimore and was a trustee at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

“I hope that they figure out how it was taken because it just seems odd,” said Susan Helen Adler. “It is a small piece of art. Maybe that’s how the people were able to get it out of the museum.”

Before the police report was found, the museum’s loan record was its only documentation of the painting being stolen. The card noted the museum had collected \$2,500 from its insurance company after the loss.

“All the way up through 1951 you have it listed in the [museum] card file. Then it disappears ... and the thing shows up in somebody’s garage,” said Wittman, the former FBI agent. “It’s remarkable that the museum would still have that catalog card. That’s fabulous.”

The FBI has confirmed it is investigating. Wittman, who retired in 2008, said investigators would likely go back to the flea market and try to identify who sold it to try to determine where the piece came from.

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