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*Archives of American Art*

Robert C. Vose lecture, 1987 May 14

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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following transcript is the result of a recorded lecture by Robert Vose on May 14, 1987. The lecture took place at the Somerset Club, Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is a talk by Robert Vose at the Somerset Club, Boston, Massachusetts, May 14, 1987.

DIANE: —what he has done in the field of American Art. He has spent 50—over 52, now, devoted years to his family business, which was started by his great grandfather back in 1841, and the business, Vose Galleries, of Boston, is continuing on with his sons Terry and Bill. And I had the privilege of working with him, selling paintings with them, so I am extremely honored to be here to introduce you to him tonight, so that you may have a little bird's eye view of what has gone on over the last 52 years, in capsule form, in the American Art market. Mr. Vose has contributed in major ways to many, many museums across the country—in fact, all the major museums he has dealt with, as well as galleries, and he was largely responsible for the new Britain collection in Connecticut, to name a few. He is an expert 18th, 19th, and early 20th-century art, especially in areas of Blakelock and Alvan Fisher, and many other artists. And he's going to refresh us tonight with some of his tales of the business. Well, without further ado, let me introduce to you Robert Churchill Vose Jr. [Audience applauds.]

ROBERT VOSE: Thank you, Diane. [00:02:00] Mr. Bonhoff [ph], Mr. Brown, Mr. Jensen, Mr. Miller, and friends so far, I hope. [Audience laughs.] I saw a poll—I don't know how many of you may have seen it recently—a poll asking people what they dreaded most in life. And number two on their dreaded list was going to the dentist. The only thing above that was speaking to an audience. I just wanted to let you know, I would have voted the same way. [Audience laughs.] I was wondering if any of you have ever noticed those billboards that the Unitarian Universalist churches put outside their buildings, in which they put on scriptural comments or statements, or questions they think would incite serious thinking.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, yes.

ROBERT VOSE: Well, I saw one one time that exactly indicated my feelings, that of this moment. The comment on the sign in front of the church read: "What are you doing here, for Christ's sake?" [Audience laughs.] And I'm just hoping there aren't many of you who will be asking me that in a few minutes. [Audience laughs.] I was wondering, Bob, if I should check with you as to where—how near this thing I should be. Does that sound too loud or too—

AUDIENCE: No, it's fine [audience agreeing].

ROBERT VOSE: How does that sound from back there?

AUDIENCE: Perfect.

ROBERT VOSE: We'll just stick with it. As I have noticed that brevity is the characteristic that most speakers are loved for [audience laughs]. I'm going to set this timer, which I've swiped from my wife's kitchen [audience laughs] to 40 minutes, [timer ticking] so when you hear it ring, you'll know what the [inaudible]. [Audience laughs.] And I should mention before we start, the slides of American paintings, which are really part of this evening, were almost all—99 percent—taken by my brother, Herbert. And they are all of paintings which have passed through our hands, so they should be more or less fresh to you. [00:04:01] I haven't taken them from any museum collections, or bought them in any stores. And before we get into those, I want to just very briefly give you a few-minute history of the gallery, to give you a little background of what we are. We've gone for five generations in our family, so we're pretty old—and, for better or worse, most of us always seemed to look that way. [Audience laughs.] I remember my father once gave a talk in the Denver Museum, and in the course of it he mentioned we had been in business for 120 years. [Audience laughs.] And in all seriousness, a lady came up to me afterward and said, "Isn't your father marvelously preserved?" [Audience laughs.] And later, Marjorie Mills, who was the cooking authority in Boston 30 years ago, asked me to be interviewed on one of her radio programs. She asked me to be there 15 minutes early so we could talk things over, and she'd obviously done her homework the night before, because when I got there, she got out her notes and she said, "Now, let's see Bob, you graduated from Brown in 1896." [Audience laughs.] And I said, "Uh, that was my father." So, we all—

we're very—[audience laughs]. But I hope you'll bear with me if I do use anecdotes throughout this, not only because I remember William Morris Hunt saying that a talk on art was like hash: "To be popular, it need not be nourishing, but it must be easily swallowed." [Audience laughs.] But also, my wife and I used to go to lectures on art, and they're mostly in the dark, and it was hard to make notes, so when we got home, I would try to make notes of the things I'd learned. And after one lecture on Constable, I got out my pad, and the only thing I could remember was that he'd once left a note for his note-man asking him in the future to please leave the note and the water in separate containers. [Audience laughs.] A thing like that really does bring Constable down from the heights—to think, he had problems like the rest of us. [00:06:04] Bob, if we could turn those lights out—I don't know how we put them out, I should have asked ahead of time. I think we have to do it—

ROBERT BROWN: I suppose we just go from lamp to lamp.

DIANE: No, it's down low. It's on the cord.

ROBERT VOSE: And also, that slide machine—I'm ashamed to say I haven't set it up. Has somebody set that up? Do you know?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. It should be—

ROBERT VOSE: We're ready to roll? I'm going to show you, first, a slide of the Voses who run the business—the five generations of Voses, who were certainly not a photogenic lot, but anyway it will give you a rough picture of the crew. Should we try the first one? This gallery, where they started, was in Providence, Rhode Island, and my great-grandfather, Joseph, bought the business. And in 1850, my grandfather, Seth, came into the business and ran it for 60 years in Providence. And my father moved to Boston in 1897, when he got out of college, but they ran it more or less together, until my grandfather died. And my grandfather had four partners during his lifetime. None of them lasted more than three years, and one of them almost did him in. When my grandfather was sick, his partner ran away with everything in the till. It was really—it was pretty much a disaster, because he also had run up some high—some large bills in New York, as well. But those are the five generations. My great-grandfather Joe is up there; my grandfather, Seth; and then my father, Robert C.; and my brother Morton and I were partners for 40 years; and now my twin sons, Terry and Bill run the business now. And this dignified building was run by my grandfather, his early galleries in Providence, with his one-horsepower vehicle out front. [00:08:01] And he later on moved up a peg or two to a big house on Summer Street, where he lived over the building. And that really is the ideal situation for an art dealer—to own his own building and to live above it. It makes for long hours, but it certainly is a satisfactory way of doing business. My grandfather's chief claim to fame was in being the first man to put up paintings by the Barbizon School—Corot, Millet, Díaz, Dupré, Rousseau, Troyon, and so forth. This is one of the first Corots he bought—it was the one on which Corot was awarded the Medal of the Legion of Honour, and it was in my grandfather's first Corot show priced at \$1,200—and nothing sold in the whole show. [Audience laughs.] And when my father moved to Boston, he took this picture with him, and he came in one day and the cleaning man had tipped over a chair through the picture, and down on the lower left side, there was a triangle tear, about a foot long each way, which had been repaired. And it's now the most important Corot in the Museum of Fine Arts. And interestingly, when the French catalogue was being written a few years ago, the curator doing it told me that she was astounded to find that more than two-thirds of all the French paintings at the MFA, prior to the Impressionist era, came through the Vose Gallery, which is kind of amazing. This I should have mentioned ahead of time, before we put this gentleman on the screen, that these paintings—[audience laughs]. My grandfather never went to France. He had a friend name Tom Robinson, a painter from Providence, who went over there 29 times buying pictures for him. And toward the end of the 29 trips, Tom got drunk and gambled away over \$100,000 of my grandfather's, but to cover his tracks bought a lot of fakes and sent them back. And when my grandfather spread them out for him to look at, he went home and took poison and committed suicide. [00:10:01] But before that happened, he had sent back this other picture—it's by Géricault, who's a great painter, but my father thought he was decidedly indecent. My grandfather didn't, so he cut the old boy off at the hips, and sold the upper half to Mrs. S.D. Warren, who lent it to the MFA. [Audience laughs.] And 50 years later, when I was cleaning out a warehouse, I found the lower half. [Audience laughs.] Without asking for any tax deduction, I gave it to the MFA. [Audience laughs.] A remarkable operation—they put it back together. [Audience laughs.] This was Father's first gallery on Boylston Street, right next door to where Shreve is now—before they cut Arlington Street through. And that picture on the easel, *In the Roman Campagna* by Inness, which was stolen from him—that's one of the things that happens to the gallery trade as we go through life, sadly. I want to show you how Father moved up from that lowly situation to one of the finest galleries anywhere in the country outside of New York City. He had a building built for himself in Copley Square on Boylston Street across from Copley Plaza Hotel in 1924, and I just want to show you a few pictures to show you what a sumptuous setup this was. This room was almost 30 by 40 feet, and that's the short end of it. And every one of those pictures are important enough to be a centerpiece in a showroom today—going from left to right, there's a Thayer, a Chase, a Weir, a Fuller, and a Duveneck. And let me just mention one thing about the least interesting-looking one of the lot, the Fuller, *The Girl Driving Turkeys*. Father bought that at auction in 1970 in New York and paid \$15,000 for it, which set a world record for any American painting—which is really hard to believe. But Fuller I had always thought of as sort of a sad sack. His pictures are all brown,

nobody cares much about them, and most people have never even heard of him today. [00:12:02] This picture is in the Los Angeles County Museum, by the way. But anyway, I recently bought a thesis that a Princeton student wrote on Fuller. Now, I haven't yet had time to read it, but last week I just opened it up, and the first page I found entirely changed my opinion of old George. As a young man, he travelled around western Massachusetts as an itinerant portrait painter, and one of his ads read: "Portraits of pretty girls, \$20. Somewhat older, \$30." [Audience laughs.] "With wrinkles, \$40." [Audience laughs.] But he wrote a wonderful letter to his brother, who was also a painter, [cough] saying, "I haven't turned out many paintings lately. I did go to a party last night where I kissed enough girls, I thought, to hold me for a fortnight. But within 24 hours"—parentheses—"believe it or not"—end of parentheses—"I am as anxious as ever to press ruby lips." [Audience laughs.] So, he wasn't the sad sack I thought he was. [Audience laughs.] And on Father's second floor he had what he called a private gallery, where he'd put paintings on individual easels like this, with drapery hung over them, so you could cover one painting and show it to a client at a time. Again, every one of these in a museum. So, this is in a museum—this is an Inness, a Remington, Bellows, a Duran, and a Charles Willson Peale. This is quite a set up. Father had three overstuffed chairs in the middle of this room, with a buzzer on the arm of one. And one of us young fry would sit outside the draped doorway, and when he wanted a picture moved, he'd press the button and we'd leap in and change it. And I tell you, my kids have never leapt around like that—[audience laughs]. This is the staff in 1957—my father seated, my cousin Charlie Thompson, who worked for us for 48 years behind, and my brothers. Both of those pictures are at the museum still. Then the top floor—because this is all one building we're talking about—the top floor was this gallery. [00:14:01] And this is a show that my brothers and I put on in honor of our father on his 64th birthday. And we borrowed back pictures we thought he would enjoy seeing, that he had sold previously—a couple of Turners on the left. Imagine finding a couple of Turners like that today. Over on the right-hand side is a Nicholas Marsh at the Fogg Museum. But the centerpiece is a Rembrandt. So I wanted to show you in larger scale—Father sold this in 1931 to Robert Treat Paine. He had found it out in a preacher's house in Hollywood Hills. And it's such an interesting story—my brother Morton made an hour-long talk on it, just on this one painting, and his talk is good enough so he's been asked to repeat it another of times. I wish I could go into the detail. But anyway, Paine lent this to the Museum of Fine Arts, and it was stolen at gunpoint out of the museum—I think that's the only time anyone's ever stolen a painting during the daytime from the museum—recovered, and in December of last year, the Paine family put it up at auction in London, and it broke an all-time record for any kind of painting: \$10 million. That record was very quickly shattered by a Manet that brought \$11 million, and now, of course, the Van Gogh at \$40 [million]. But anyway, I can remember the day father sold that. Mr. Paine came down on the elevator, and I came in from college. And father said, "Oh, Robert, this is Mr. Paine. He just bought our great Rembrandt." And I said, "Oh, nice." And they went out to the Rolls Royce. And father came back and said, "Robert is that all you can say, is 'Oh, nice?'" [Audience laughs.] But this was the same room, with a Benjamin West and a couple of Copleys and a [inaudible]. But the lady by Copley, a Mrs. Greene, was the first painting the Cleveland Museum bought when they built the museum, for \$4,000—not a bad buy. Close to \$1 million today. And that's so much for the building, but just one more picture before we get into the Americans. I have always been an early riser, and I was in New York City one morning at eight o'clock, with—nobody was open, of course. [00:15:55] And not willing to stand out on the street corner, I rang the bell of an English wholesale dealer named Mickey Doward, who was like what you'd think—sounds like—he had a big saber scar across his forehead, and he'd been a cavalry officer. Anyway, he came to the door with his undershirt and shaving cream on his face, and after a lot of profanity—what I was doing [audience laughs] over there—he said, "Why don't you come in? There's some coffee on the stove, and I'll finish shaving." So there was a big pack—stack of pictures at the end of the room, and I could see about a quarter of this—above the pile. And I said, "That looks like a Gainsborough." And he said, "It is, but what do you do with a white elephant like that? It's nine feet high." Anyway, we—allowed us [inaudible] had an idea. And he sent it up—we had to ride it up to the gallery on the top of the elevator. And we sold it to the Museum of Fine Arts for a magnificent sum of \$15,000. Can you believe—this seems hard to believe. Anyway, they, at that time, had their new paintings in a room where they put new acquisitions, on the Huntington Avenue side, and Father wanted to go down and see the Gainsborough in the new acquisition room. So I took him down in his wheelchair, and we wheeled in the room just as Ralph Lowell, who was president of the museum, standing back to us, in front of the picture, said to a visiting dignitary, "We just stole this one." [Audience laughs.] We were tempted to go up and tap him on the shoulder and say [inaudible], but we quietly beat a retreat before he saw us. [Audience laughs.] Then, from now on, these are the American pictures, which I hope you will enjoy. This is the earliest American painting ever sold—1670, *The Mason Children*—and also one of the most valuable I ever sold. It's now in the San Francisco Museum. We sold it to John D. Rockefeller III, and he gave it to the museum. And I think that Mary Black has identified this—I don't know whether you remember the name, Jeff—does that ring a bell? Anyway, I can't think of it at the moment. It's a terrific picture. John Smibert was the most important New England painter in the first half of the 18th century. And this is a painting of Judge Sewall, one of the witchcraft judges, who was one of the most important men of the time. [00:18:03] And my wife and I own this picture. And it really—that really is a jewel, to have a good example by the finest painter of his day, by one of the greatest men of his day—you know, how could we lose? We didn't want to sell it. By that time, Tom Maytham was in the department of paintings at the MFA, and he kept telling me that we should sell it to them, that that's where it belonged. But he finally called me one day when I—I remember distinctly—had a terrible migraine headache, and he talked me out of it, and the museum now owns it. But thinking of Tom Maytham, he never had a title at the museum, because Perry Rathbone was director, and

Perry liked to run the painting department, so he just called Tom unassociated, in the department of paintings. So Tom was never very happy about this. He finally got fed up and went to the Seattle Museum. As he was leaving, they had a small party for him, and Morton and I—my brother and I—were the only outside people there. And Perry got up and said the usual thing—nice thing—about how, what a pleasure it had been working with Tom over the last 10 years, and, "We're sorry to see him go," and all that. And Tom got up and said, "Perry, thanks for the kind words. I've just been here eight years—it just seemed like 10 to you." [Audience laughs.] Joseph Badger was one of the earliest American-born portrait painters, born around 1708. And he's one of my favorite people, because he's completely American. He was self-taught. He was a house painter. And right in the middle of the century, about 1750, when Smibert and Pelham both died and Feke left, they left a vacuum here, and nobody was here to paint portraits, so this little old house painter, who lived right on the back side of Beacon Hill there, in a tiny, three-room house, got to paint some portraits, and I think they're great. I had hoped at one time to write a book on him, and I went around taking a lot of photographs, so I have quite a sheaf of photographs, but I couldn't find much of anything to write. But in the course of my work, I wrote to a man down South and said, "Do I understand correctly that you have a Badger?" And he said, "No, I don't have a badger, but I have a raccoon." [Audience laughs.] [00:20:05] But this, this is a great painting by John Singleton Copley, an unidentified subject. But I had the job of entertaining one of the leading Dutch dealers one winter weekend here. He was over here with a show with us and had nothing to do, and I was trying to think of some French paintings to show him, and I knew the ex-governor, Alvan T. Fuller, up in New Hampshire, had some beauties—Monets and [inaudible] and all of those people. So I called the governor and I said, "I know your house is shut, but is there any way we can get to seeing these on Sundays?" He said, "Sure, the houseman will show you around." So we went up there. And the houseman did a magnificent job—he showed us everything, from the cellar to the attic—every bathroom, every closet. [Audience laughs.] On the top floor, with the clothes all stored for the winter, each dress or suit in its own bag, I could see the edge of a beautifully carved, big accessory frame. I asked if he'd pull it out, and it was a picture. So it obviously wasn't being used, so I asked the governor if we could possibly buy it. And after a lot of haggling, he finally sold it to us. And I took it out to Stockbridge, where I knew that Ima Hogg, from Houston, was spending her vacation, and showed it to her. It was the first market painting that Ms. Ima had ever bought. And she bought quite a lot more from us. She was a truly great lady, and left her house and collection to the city. But after she died, her friends bought this Ralph Earl from us in her memory. Ralph Earl was a Connecticut painter, and a royalist, so he spent the war in London, and came back here, and nobody knows where he was finally buried. Alcohol probably did him in, because he was a heavy drinker. And a wealthy man came to our place a few years ago and said he had always felt badly about Ralph not having any monument, so he bought a plot in Connecticut and put up a monument to him. [Audience laughs.] And I've often, if they ever have to move that graveyard, they'll have trouble finding Ralph. [Audience laughs.] [00:22:02] This wonderful lady is Duxbury—I live in Duxbury, and this is our greatest 18th-century claim to fame. Rufus Hathaway, again, a self-taught man. This is painted in 1791. And he's known to have painted about 30 paintings, and did most of them in 1793, right in Duxbury. But this was a fantastic find for me. I was asked to appraise 620 American primitives out in Newton, in the estate of a Mrs. Gunn. And I found this picture in a closet. Nobody knew who did it. Anyway, I sold the entire collection—I shouldn't say for what a pittance, but it really is pretty pitiful to think now—and this picture is worth 10 times what we sold the whole 620 for. The cream of the collection is now in New York State, the New York State Historical Association, and she's in the Met—Edgar Garbisch gave it to the Metropolitan Museum. Gilbert Stuart, for the first quarter of the 18th century—of the 19th century, I beg your pardon—from 1805 to 1828, when he died—was, without question, the number-one portrait painter in the United States, as you all know, I'm sure. Absolutely the opposite of Copley, who thought his pictures were good in direct proportion to the time he spent on them—sometimes 60 sittings on a portrait—Stuart, on the other hand, said—was quoted as saying he paints the works of God and left the clothes to the tailor. He didn't bother with background material, except in those big, full-length Washingtons there's some. Anyway, he was a character, and you could really—you could make a very entertaining hour's talk on Stuart. The anecdotes are great. And one of them involves a portrait of a lady who may have looked something like this. Her husband came in during the sittings and objected that his wife was not more beautiful. And Stuart is supposed to have said, "Well, if you bring me a potato, I can't give you a peach." [Audience laughs.] [00:24:03] This is by Mather Brown, who was a somewhat younger American painter, who also studied in London and was over there when Stuart had his own set-up. And he used to hang around Stuart's studio, trying to pick up tips, and he got to be a darn nuisance. And one day, he was approaching Stuart's house. He saw Stuart in the second-floor window, rang the bell, and asked the servant if he could see Mr. Stuart. The servant said, "No, I'm sorry, sir. He's not at home, sir." And Brown said, "Not at home? I just saw him in the window." And the servant said, "Yes, sir. He saw you, too, sir. He's not at home." [Audience laughs.] This fellow is Arkwright, who invented the spinning jenny. This is in the New Britain Museum. This is my father, taking off in 1941 for Los Angeles, where he spent exactly one full year. And I wanted to mention at this point, these slides are not exactly in chronological order, but that's not always considered important by all dealers, as evidenced by this little story. An antique dealer was offering a loveseat to a dowager, and the very one on which Napoleon made love to Cleopatra. And she thought that over a bit and said, "But wasn't Cleopatra a great deal older than Napoleon?" [Audience laughs.] And he shrugged his shoulders and said, "What difference does it make, as long as they loved each other?" [Audience laughs.] My father—I should mention, before passing on from this, that my father's greatest accomplish, he thought, when he was in Los Angeles, was the sale of a Mrs. Quinn. He sold her a group of 18th-century British portraits—

Reynolds, Romney, Gainsborough, and so forth. And when she died, she left her living room to the Huntington Gallery in San Marino, which had the greatest collection of British paintings in America, now at Yale, at outdistanced them [ph]. [00:25:57] But that time, they had Reynolds, *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, and Lawrence's *Pinkie* and some great Gainsboroughs, too—*The Market Cart* and so forth. Anyway, Father had gotten a letter from them saying that they were happy to have that room, including these portraits, because the portraits were of the same quality as their own collection, which he thought was the greatest compliment he could have been given. I want to just see if I can get that one—go back to it. No, darn it all, that's definitely stuck. But anyway, I can tell you about the one we're missing. It's by Alvan Fisher. And he was one of my favorite people. He was one of the first non-portrait painters in the country. He lived in Dedham, and I lived a few doors from where he lived. His family still lived in the same house, so I got intrigued by him. And the picture I was going to show you, we sold it to Maxim Karolik. And if that name doesn't ring a bell, he was an indigent Russian opera singer who came over here and married a wealthy Codman lady from Newport who was 30 years his senior and a semi-intuit [ph]—and wealthy. But evidently, really, it was a very happy marriage, and according to all reports, he was very kind to her. But it was one of the greatest things that ever happened for Boston, because he and she became among the greatest benefactors that the MFA has ever had. They bought three separate collections for the museum. And the Fisher I was going to show you he bought from us in about an hour. But every time he ever came in, he always had some bon mots. And he was a highly entertaining man, in other words. I just wanted to give you two. But by the way, if you ever want a lecture of Maxim Karolik, Perry Rathbone has one, and I understand it's very entertaining—it will take about an hour. But Karolik—one of his favorite stories was his definition of a two-legged wolf, which he certainly was. [Audience laughs.] He said, "A two-legged wolf is a man who loves life, liberty, and the happiness of pursuit." [Audience laughs.] When you think of a Russian émigré, to be able to twist English around like that, it's really pretty damn good. [00:28:02] And when the satin dresses came in—he thought they were terrible, and somebody asked him why. He said, "Well, when the waist is busted, the bust is wasted." [Audience laughs.] But getting on with this—Thomas Cole, we found this right here in the Back Bay, a few doors from our gallery. It's a picture of about 70 by 50 inches, the Arch of Nero in Italy, and we sold it to the Newark Museum for the fantastic sum of \$5,000—which, again, is just hard to believe. But Cole is credited as being the founder of the Hudson River School, which is possibly not a school, but he was one of the earliest landscape painters of note. Oh, there's the picture I—that's the picture of a corn-husking bee that—Karolik asked me what was going on, and I told him that if a man found a red ear, he could kiss any girl he wanted. Karolik shrugged his shoulders and said, "We don't waste time on things like that in Russia." [Audience laughs.] This is one of the greatest landscapes we've ever had. It's Asher B. Durand's masterpiece, as far as genre subjects go, called the *Dance of the Haymakers*. It's in a private collection. We've sold it twice. But he was president of the National Academy. It ranks right up with Cole. And the big six of the Hudson River School that I consider was Cole, Kensett, Church, Durand, Bierstadt, and Gifford. What a picture. This is by Jasper Cropsey, who would rank just slightly below that top tier of men. And we got a call one day from a young man up on the side of a mountain in the Adirondacks. He said he just bought a house, and left in the garage was a big picture of a castle, and he wanted to know if there was any market for castles nowadays. I said, "Well, who painted it?" He said, "I don't know, but I'll go and look." So he came back, he said, "There's a big tablet that says 'Cropsey' on it." So we allowed us how maybe it might be valuable. And we expected to see a moving van come down with a big picture in a heavy frame. [00:30:00] But the fellow arrived with it tied on the top of his car, which I couldn't believe. [Audience laughs.] Anyway, we found out that it was the most exhibited picture Cropsey ever painted. It's now in the National Gallery in Washington. And the young man has the price of his house back, and quite a nice dividend on top. Which, that's the kind of thing that's fun. Albert Bierstadt was one of those big six, and I would think he might correspond to Andy Wyeth today as far as being a business success [inaudible]. When he was in his 30s, he was getting \$30,000 average for his paintings. This is *The Falls of Yosemite*, and it's in the Timken Gallery in San Diego. I want to show you one other Bierstadt, because he typifies one of our theories, that the styles, fashions, and taste in paintings goes in waves of 30 or 40 years. And Bierstadt exactly typifies this. Here he was in the mid—in the '50s and '60s actually riding the crest of the wave. He lived until 1902, but by 1900 he was absolutely forgotten and he was practically broke. And then in another 30 years, he's back again. And this picture really typifies it, because in the early—this was earlier in this century—my father sold for \$250. And it hung it what then was the Metropolitan Theatre downtown for years; then it became the Music Hall; now it's the Wang Center. But in its change over to the Music Hall, they sold all the pictures, so we bought it back and we sold it to the New Britain Museum for \$5,000. But that really is fascinating. And our boys are capitalizing on following this wave. We shouldn't have given this away. I think it's general knowledge now, really. I think that we—the kids get sick of what they've grown up with in their house; they put in the attic; and their grandchildren find it in the attic and think it's great and bring it down. This is Sanford R. Gifford, who was the sixth man in that big six, in my opinion. [00:31:59] And this story is so absolutely unbelievable that even I find it hard to believe. This is the biggest painting so far ever located by Gifford. It's around—over six feet long. And I bought all of the paintings in a four-story brick downtown house in Hudson, New York for \$300. Now this is really hard to believe—including this, there was a Kensett there, and there was a big picture of Niagara by Thorpe, and lots of others—in fact, so many I had to send a moving truck out to get them. But we restored this and we framed it and sold it to the Toledo Museum for \$800, which we thought was a pretty good deal. But another smaller Gifford which we sold a few years ago has just been sold to Mr. Terra out in Chicago for a reported \$1 million even. And little, little Giffords—16 by 30 inches or so—running

over [\$]100,000 apiece. And you think of this for \$800, that's really hard to understand, how things could change that fast. This is another Gifford. It's down in the museum in Duxbury. I just wanted to show you—it's quite a different type. Oh, no, that—I had the right one the first time. This is by William T. Richards [ph]. He's one of my favorite people, not only because he was a nifty painter, but because he was completely unflappable. And I think people admire other people who are—who have characteristics they lack themselves, and I am certainly flappable. One—just one example. There are lots of wonderful examples of his complete relaxation. He went out with an army crew, an army column, exploring the West, and the commanding officer told him not to stray far away, because there were Indians lurking in the area. So, undaunted, he went up to the top of a hill, set up his white parasol—of course, you could see it from miles around—and started painting. And pretty soon, he was conscious of an Indian lurking around behind him. But that didn't bother him; he kept right on painting. [00:33:58] And after a while, the Indian was standing right behind him, leaning over his shoulder. He still kept on painting. You wanted to tell me something bad, Bob?

ROBERT BROWN: Not at all.

ROBERT VOSE: I should change something? Anyway, the Indian stayed there, right close to him, looking over his shoulder for a while, and finally, he said, "*Harper's Weekly*?" [Audience laughs.] Fitz Hugh Lane, who lived up in Gloucester, was the number-one man of the school now referred to as Luminists, who really—who were particularly interested in the effects of light. He was paralyzed from the waist down, and at the time, they felt it was from eating green apples, but he probably had polio, I suppose. Anyway, he did travel up and down the coast by boat, and painted wonderful harbor scenes. Such as this—this is Gloucester. We found this in Gloucester. This is 30 by 60 inches. One of the finest Lanes we ever had. And it's in the Metropolitan Museum. Robert Salmon was of the same era—Englishman who came over here in 1828, stayed here until 1841, and lived right down on the Boston Harbor waterfront. This is a scene in Boston Harbor. I think it's one of his greatest paintings. It's in a frame that's obviously by John Doggett, who lived in Dedham, right near Alvan Fisher. And Salmon kept a daybook, in which he showed who bought what and for how much did he trade—he was a great trader—traded pictures for hats and for boats and for frames—a lot with John Doggett. And my father was a great trader, too—he used to trade for all our doctor's bills, club memberships, and all that stuff. And I remember, he once gave a doctor an American painting in trade for taking out my appendix. And when the doc got my appendix out, he found out there was nothing wrong with it, but he kept the painting anyway. [Audience laughs.] This picture is in the Virginia Museum. Great painting. When Bob Campbell, a Boston dealer and a good friend of ours, died, the one painting mentioned in his obituary was that he once bought this painting at auction. [00:36:02] George Caleb Bingham, from Missouri—you may have read about his *Jolly Flatboatmen* bringing \$6 million recently—painted this little picture. This is a story proving that money sometimes is the root of all evil. A young couple down in Pennsylvania, in a little town, bought a house for \$10,000, complete with the furnishings, and this picture was in an upstairs hall. They both worked, and when the gal thought she'd take it down to the office for decoration, she found the label with "George Caleb Bingham" on the back. And with great research, nobody in their library ever heard of him, but she finally found a man who had written a book and tracked him down and eventually sent the painting to us. And we sold it to John D. Rockefeller for multiple hundreds of thousands. It's now in the San Francisco Museum. And the little couple got cut by all their friends. They were the wealthiest people in the group then, so they sold the house, moved up to Maine, got divorced. It ruined everything. [Audience laughs.] It's really a sad story. This—one more Bingham. As I said, I live in Duxbury, and I found this in a tiny house in Marshfield. It was heated by those space kerosene heaters, the kind you pick up—the round tall ones you set in the middle of the room—so everything in the house was covered with grease. And we sold this to the Museum of Fine Arts, and the lady, I'm sure, could move to a much better house. Probably the greatest American landscape we ever had—also had a story that could go on at great length. A good friend from Litchfield, Connecticut, Peter Tillou, found this in England, and he had it shipped over to Kennedy Airport and went down to take it off the plane. It didn't come off the plane. And I—if I had been in that position, I would have gone back and called the people in England and asked them if it had really been shipped and so forth, but Peter very smartly called a policeman right there, on the airport, and they rode around the airport, and they found this stashed in a little box, in a little shed out in the back of the airport by some machinery. [00:38:03] But the darn fool who shipped it had put [\$]250,000—the value—on the box. It was just like a red flag to the robbers. And we put a price on [\$]400,000 on it, which was absolutely unheard of. No American painting had ever sold that high, and all the dealers in New York laughed at us. And we sold it to the Timken Gallery for our first [ph] which was the highest price any American painting had ever brought at that point. Of course, it's nothing, because I suppose this picture would be worth a couple of million. Oh, this little lady by Winslow Homer had had a rough life. She was owned by a man here on Beacon Hill who put her in a warehouse which burned to the ground. And the frame was ruined by water, the mat was ruined, and happily, the painting itself came through unscathed. It belongs to Jo Ann and Julian Ganz in Los Angeles. And when they had their collection shown in the National Gallery, this little lady was on the poster outside the building. So we were really delighted to see our little friend get some recognition. Homer was a great man. He started out as pretty much of a dandy, and loved society, but in his later life, he became pretty much a recluse, up in Maine. And one of the Mills [ph] brothers, dealers in New York, told me once that he had a client in the middle of the winter who desperately wanted a Homer, so he took the train up to Prouts Neck and walked out to Homer's studio. It hadn't been shoveled, because it snowed up to

his hips. He walked up to the door and knocked on the door and Homer said, "Who's there?" And he says, "Mills from New York." Homer said, "Go away." [Audience laughs.] A sad ending. This delightful little Homer is only about 12 by 10 inches. We sold this twice, too. And boy, I'd love to have it again, but not much chance, because it belongs to Baron Thyssen over in Europe. But that's—for a tiny picture like that, that really is a big painting. [00:40:04] This is the greatest Frederic Remington that we've ever had. And I know—I shouldn't go into all the details—anyway—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Do that [ph].

ROBERT VOSE: —I used to know it hanging in a second-floor hallway in a house in Albany where I frequently spent the night, and when the gentleman died, we bought it from his children and sold it to a museum, who traded it off, and another dealer recently sold it to the Stark Museum down in Orange, Texas, for a reported \$2 million. But truly a great painting. George de Forest Brush lived up in Dublin, New Hampshire and was a highly impractical man. He never really had much money, but he never had much respect for money, either—as shown by this painting. He had a commission to paint a lady, a wealthy lady who had a special fancy gown made for the portrait. And he felt the gown was terrible, so he painted this dress on the portrait. And when the picture was finished, she took a look at it and was furious. She insisted that he put her dress back on. So as soon as she left, instead of putting on a new dress, he put his daughter's face on it. [Audience laughs.] We sold it to the museum in New Britain, Connecticut. William Merritt Chase was a dandy, and a terrific painter, and a great teacher—but a very peppery man. And he asked my father once if he'd be his agent. And Father, who was also peppery, decided that not a very smart idea, and so they never did get together. Oh, something's stuck, I guess. Oh, that's too bad. I don't know what—there we go. Let me see if I can—this is supposed to be an Inness coming up. [00:42:01] Maybe—well, here's one. We skipped one. That's—I'll try that one again. No. That's all right. I think we had two Innesses, so this will do. I'll try it again. George Inness was the greatest landscape painter of the latter half of the 19th century, a very eccentric man, and, we think, one of—my father and my brothers and I think he really was the greatest man of his day. And I was going to show you an Inness which my father sold and which was left to the Boston Museum, which I had admired there for many years. And this one came along, and we offered this to the museum some years ago, and they didn't buy it, so we sold it to a dealer in California. And then Ted Stebbins came to the museum as curator, and he thought this was a great picture, as we did, and he wanted to buy it. Of course, by that time, it was twice as valuable as it was when they turned it down the first time. So he had to sell something to get money to buy this, so he sold my favorite picture that Father had sold before, and I now am the happy owner of it. But I wanted to mention that Inness is one of the most worst-faked of all American painters. He and Ralph Blakelock are probably the worst—we've kept track of Blakelocks, and he's sort of a specialty of ours—as Inness is. And one year, we had 112 Blakelocks sent to us for authentication, of which only one was genuine, which is quite sad. But this staining business reminds me of one story—these crazy stories about forgery and art really are not overdone. You wouldn't believe what's going on today, well, Jeff would, but nobody else would. Anyway, the story goes that a young soldier was in Italy during World War II, and he went into an antique shop and wanted to buy an Old Master. And the boss said he was sorry, he couldn't sell that to him, because it was sold valuable, we'd never let it out of the country. But then as they were talking for a while, the boss said, "You know, I have an idea that might work. [00:44:01] I could have someone paint a portrait of Mussolini over it, and you could ship it home and have that portrait taken off, and you'd be home free with an Old Master." So he thought that was great. So he followed up and sent the painting to a cleaner or a conservator here and waited a couple of weeks, called him up, and asked how he was doing. And the conservator said, "Well, a little better than I expected." And the soldier said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, Mussolini came off all right, but so did the Old Master. There's a portrait of Mussolini under that." [Audience laughs.]

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ROBERT VOSE: —he was a terrific painter. A young man—showing that these things still happen. Just a very few years ago, a young man bought this in a junk shape. It had a heavy, ornate frame, and he wanted the frame for a mirror. But before he threw this away, he brought it around to see if it might have any value. I should mention that Bunker's [ph] sell it for over [\$]100,000 or [\$]200,000 without much trouble. Anyway, he—as a result, he made a down payment on a condominium, which is one of the happy stories. This, by Edmund Tarbell, is one—I think is probably Tarbell's masterpiece. Tarbell was one of the leaders of the so-called Boston School. This picture is about six by five feet. It's called *In the Orchard*. And it was one of the prized exhibits in the National Museum of American Art for many years, in Washington. It's in a private collection in California. But what a piece of painting! He—Tarbell and Frank Benson—this, unfortunately, is not a good example of Benson; it's really just a sketch, but I couldn't come up with a good transparency at the moment—because those two men went to school together here and in France, and taught in museum school together, and they really were the leaders of that Boston group in the 1920s. One story about Benson—when George Edgell was director of the Boston Museum, he went into a house out in Norwood with one of my brothers, and the house was full of Bensons, and he sort of shook his head and said, "What a shame. Poor old Frank has been phased out by time." Well, he sure has been phased in again now. Andy Wyeth's father, N.C. Wyeth, who was the greatest illustrator back in the '20s. And this is one of the 12 illustrations he did for *Treasure Island*, which he and Andy think is one of the best things he ever did. He got \$1,000 apiece for them, and with that \$12,000 he built the house that Andy lives in now in Chadds



Ford. [00:01:58] We—I got this set out in [inaudible] New York in a club and sold them for \$800 apiece. Andy bought two of them. I think that's a terrific picture. We're getting toward the end. Don't give up. I can give you that [inaudible], but it must have. Did you hear that ring?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: No.

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT VOSE: I didn't think so.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Would you like a drink of water?

ROBERT VOSE: Maxfield Parrish was the greatest and most successful illustrator of the early 20th century. And some of his pictures—his picture of *Daybreak*, for instance, sold more reproductions than anything ever has in history, including the—Van Gogh's painting. But at the time that he died, his family came to us wanting to know if we had the estate. At that time, people will literally holding their nose when you mentioned Maxfield Parrish—he was the lowest man on the totem pole—you know, strictly [inaudible], and people couldn't stand him—mainly because they had grown up with him and got sick of him. Anyway, we said, "Why don't you try the Childs Gallery down on the next block?" So, half an hour, they came back and said, "Childs said, 'Why don't you try Vose?'" [Audience laughs.] So we said, well, we'd give it a try, and we put together a show of about 60 paintings, and sent them out to 24 museums around the country in a two-year tour. And by the time they got back, they were breaking records of attendance. And we sold every scrap of 250 pictures, including *Daybreak*. *Daybreak*, by the way, is on the market again, at [\$]750,000. But just one more anecdote before I leave you free. When Mr. Parrish was 90, he asked his son Max to take him down to New York to the St. Regis Hotel to see the Old King Cole mural, which he had painted 50 years before. So they went in at about three o'clock in the afternoon in the lounge. There was no one there, and they had a martini. And the waiter came back to them in a while and she said, "Would you like another round?" [00:03:57] And Mr. Parrish Sr. said, "No, thanks, but I'd like to sit here a little longer and look at the picture, because I painted it." And Max Jr. said the waiter went back to the bartender and he heard him say, "If that old geezer asks for another drink, you'd better cut him off. He thinks he's Maxfield Parrish." [Audience laughs.] But I just wanted to show you a glimpse of our pleasant quarters. It's a long step down from my father's elegance. And Father was still living when we moved here in 1962. And he went up the steps on his crutches [ph], took a look in the door and shook his head, and he said, "Boy, you'll never make it living in that little place." [Audience laughs.] But he'd be delighted to see what our sons are doing. And lastly, these—this is the present—the present owners: Terry on your left, Bill on the right, and Bill's wife Marsha next to him—she's treasurer. And the lady in black is Elsie Oliver, who's an absolutely remarkable lady who has been with the gallery. She's now working for her third generation of Voses—44 years—a terrific person. And the picture behind is by Colin Campbell Cooper. It's now in the Terra Museum in California. So with that, I will let you go, because what am I doing here anyway? [Audience laughs.] [Audience applauds.] Did we get out in time, Bob?

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[END OF LECTURE.]