



## Lee's Letter

### "Goin' Home"

One of my favorite pieces of music is the song, "Goin' Home." The lyrics, which are reminiscent of a traditional spiritual, are set to the second movement of Dvořák's "New World Symphony." Though the melody is slow and the tone is solemn, the song's message is not sad or morose; rather, the singer is describing his joy and peace at once again seeing his family and "all the friends I knew." It is this contrast between message and melody that gives the piece its singular beauty, a beauty that became especially evident to me on a recent visit to Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Though born in Denmark and having lived most of his life in New York, my father always considered Manitowoc, Wisconsin — the place where he grew up — his hometown. For this reason, our family and the members of the Conservancy were extremely gratified by the kind attention that our inquiries received from Mr. Ben Wideman of the Manitowoc *Herald Times Reporter*, who published an extensive article on Johann Berthelsen's Manitowoc years and his art in the Sunday newspaper. This in turn led to conversations with Mr. Greg Vadny, Executive Director of Manitowoc's Rahr-West Art Museum, and plans for

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## A Feature Story sparks plans for a major exhibition



*Central Park with Artist's Family, by Johann Berthelsen*

Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the city in which Johann Berthelsen grew to manhood and which he always considered his hometown, is at the center of a series of events that have sparked plans for a major exhibit of the artist's work.

In the Fall of 2012, Conservancy representatives spotted an article in the "Life on the Lakeshore" section of the Sunday Manitowoc *Herald Times Reporter* concerning works by an important local artist. That inspired an idea, and the newspaper was shortly contacted with regard to the

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*Johann Berthelsen*  
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

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# Restoring Past Grandeur:

For gallery owner and conservator Stuart Pocock, there is a thrill in bringing a painting back to its original appearance



Stuart Pocock

All works that are handed down over generations have one thing in common: at some point, they will require conservation or even restoration. While this is very understandable for “Old Master” artworks that were for years viewed by candlelight in rooms heated with wood and coal, it is equally true of pieces only several decades old which, depending on the materials used to create them and their environment, may have suffered equal or greater damage. Further, earlier attempts at restoration have frequently damaged older works, as less qualified restorers utilized materials and technologies that had the effect of altering the artist’s original intent.

One of the most qualified restorers working today is Stuart Pocock. The proprietor of Pocock Fine Art & Antiques of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, Mr. Pocock specializes in American art, including the paintings of the “Cape Ann School” and the works of Johann Berthelsen.

Mr. Pocock came to the art of restoration through his family. His mother, Pauline, came to the United States in 1980 and

established a gallery (the current Pocock galleries have been located on the same street for 30 years). His sister returned to Florence, Italy, in 1987 and studied restoration at the prestigious Istituto per l’Arte e il Restauro where she worked on multiple significant artworks including a number of Renaissance masterpieces. On her return, she performed conservation work for local museums.

Prior to joining the family galleries some 14 years ago, Mr. Pocock worked as a private consultant. Recently, Mr. Pocock was kind enough to speak with *The Canvas* regarding restoration in general and Johann Berthelsen’s work in particular.

**The Canvas:** What are the first steps you take in restoring a painting?

**Stuart Pocock:** We always try to judge exactly how much is needed. The first things we look for are the obvious — tears, scratches and holes — that must be repaired. Next, we check for earmarks of previous restorations. For instance, some paintings have been over-cleaned to the extent that oil has been removed and the canvas becomes visible. Also, we examine the back of the canvas to determine if the work has been patched or remounted. Once we’ve done a thorough assessment, we can then proceed with the work.



Mylar® Chiffon lining

**The Canvas:** What would be the next step?

**Stuart Pocock:** Depending on the condition and the extent of earlier restorations, we make a determination about what materials were used and how we have to proceed. For instance, in the 19th and 20th centuries, English restorers used wax-based compounds and, once we’ve ascertained that they are a factor, we know what we have to do. What we are looking for is an earlier restoration that can be reversed so that we can re-address the restoration with the latest available technologies.

A common conservation technique is to line the existing canvas with a new backing. This is oftentimes used to repair a damaged canvas but also to address craquelure (cracking of the pigment layer that eventually compromises pigment adhesion). A painting on canvas will generally require such treatment simply based on age, since the bonding of the dried pigment layer to the malleable canvas degenerates over a period of time.



Mylar® Chiffon lining

In the case of a lining or the re-lining of a previously restored work, the canvas is removed from the stretchers or other backing.





*In the process of cleaning*



*Completed*

We then sand and vacuum the back of the canvas in preparation for the new lining materials. The step is critical as not only does it remove debris or previous adhesives used, but also prepares a non-oxidized and smooth bonding layer for the lining material we will now use. The process is quite involved and if not completed properly, any flaws will be magnified once the lining is completed. Once the canvas is prepared, a lining material is adhered to the canvas with a reversible heat activated adhesive on a purpose-built hot-table.

With the assistance of a slight vacuum drawn on a membrane covering the painting, the adhesive saturates the original canvas through to the pigment layer, bonding it once more to its ground. The process is really state-of-the-art and for my conservation work, I use a Mylar® Chiffon that, through its transparency, shows the original undamaged canvas.

The most common treatment for any work that comes into the gallery, however, is to remove old varnishes and covering layers of soot and nicotine — pollutants that develop over time and darken and yellow the paintings. Most artists

formerly mixed their own varnishes, often with oil additives that became magnets to dirt. Undoubtedly, these varnishes yellowed over time, and that layer of varnish and any accumulated dirt needs to be removed.

The process is rather straightforward. Using a variety of solvents, we ascertain which is best suited for the cleaning that will not compromise the pigment layer. Starting with small test areas on

the periphery of the work, every color is tested for dilution. Once a formulation is found, the cleaning process commences, working again in small areas and neutralizing the solvents as we proceed. It is a tedious process that needs the full attention of the conservator as pigment loss can happen very quickly. It is also a fascinating process as well, as you become intimate with the artist's brush strokes, his use of color, and the techniques he used to create his work. This further gives us an opportunity to study the artist's technique and assess such things as how much paint was used and how he treated his brushstrokes.

**The Canvas:** How do you assess paintings of Johann Berthelsen?

**Stuart Pocock:** I thoroughly enjoy Berthelsen's work, both personally and from a conservation standpoint. There is an underlying level of quality in both the art and the materials that he used. Having conserved a great many of his paintings, I am extremely familiar with his style and periods.

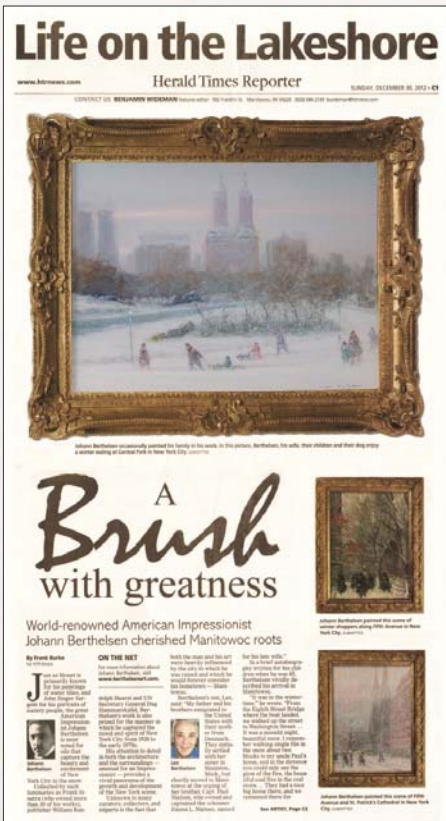
The foreground and upper sky are usually delivered to canvas with the

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*Madison Square,  
by Johann  
Berthelsen*





possibility of running a feature on Johann Berthelsen's years in the city and his eventual artistic career in the East. Mr. Ben Wideman, feature editor of the Life on the Lakeshore section, expressed interest and, after several conversations, a story was prepared and a number of examples of Johann Berthelsen's art, from both his early and later periods, were presented for consideration. On December 30th, the newspaper dedicated the front page of the Life on the Lakeshore section and most of an inside page to an extensive story. (An adaptation of the feature is included in this newsletter. If your copy is missing one, please contact us, and we will forward it to you.)

The feature caught the eye of Mr. Greg Vadny, Executive Director of Manitowoc's Rahr-West Art Museum that is home to a beautiful Berthelsen rendition of the East River and the Brooklyn Bridge.

Endowed by the Rahr and West families, the Museum is housed in a meticulously restored mansion adjacent to the city's downtown area. Under Mr. Vadny's aegis, a number of important exhibitions

have recently been sponsored, including a 150th anniversary exhibit of both art and artifacts commemorating the area's participation in the Civil War and, more recently, a traveling exhibit of home furnishings and other works by Wisconsin native, Frank Lloyd Wright entitled, "Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture of the Interior."

Following initial conversations, Mr. Vadny traveled to Milwaukee to view Lee Berthelsen's collection of his father's art. The scope and variety of media, subject matter and interpretation led to further conversations on the details of a possible exhibit and which theme or themes should be emphasized.

Mr. Vadny suggested that the Fall of 2014 might be the most opportune time, as a Fall/Winter exhibit would be

consonant with the Berthelsen snow scenes. Greg states, "The scope of Johann Berthelsen's interests and talent was so wide that attempting to organize an exhibit is extremely challenging. Our first thoughts, of course, centered about his Manitowoc upbringing and the influence that would have on his later career. The historical aspect is also fascinating in that the paintings capture not simply the details but the spirit and feeling of a time and place. Of course, beyond just the snow scenes, the pastels translate the artist's eye and feeling into an entirely different medium."



Mr. Lee Berthelsen with Mr. Greg Vadny

The Rahr-West Art Museum



Bestemor's Garden in Manitowoc, circa 1910, by Johann Berthelsen



East River and United Nations Building, by Johann Berthelsen





*Wisconsin Woods Near Manitowoc 1915,*  
by Johann Berthelsen

Lee Berthelsen comments, "I believe that this exhibit will provide an excellent opportunity to familiarize the public with my father's skill in the various media of pastels, oil, watercolor, and monotype. In the pastels especially, we can see both the discipline and the subtlety of coloration that was so important when he progressed into oils."

Both the Rahr-West Art Museum and The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy are working toward the goal of developing the exhibit so that it could be utilized by museums and galleries in other locales. We invite expressions of interest from museums and galleries. In the words of Lee Berthelsen, "One of the Conservancy's prime goals is to share my father's work with a wider audience — and especially with those who have not yet seen it. The proposed Rahr-West exhibition is a major step toward that end."

We invite any galleries or museums among our readers to inquire regarding future participation in the exhibit.



*5th Avenue Looking South at 60th Street,*  
by Johann Berthelsen

palette knife and retain thicker layers of impasto. The application of pigment in the middle passages is more controlled, the artist relying on glazes punctuated by brushstrokes to delineate details. The technique is wonderfully controlled and brings a sense of dimensionality to Berthelsen's paintings that is really quite outstanding. These middle passages are also the most delicate to clean, the light application of pigment in some areas being fleeting. I would recommend that only conservators who are experienced with Berthelsen's works tackle the cleaning of the artist's paintings.

Berthelsen did go through periods where his style changed. But, once he nailed his brush-stroke techniques, those changed little over time. I find that the greatest change is in the coloration of the palette, migrating to a more tonal pastel-like palette and perhaps a tightening of his brushstroke in the early 1950s. Generally, the more saturated palette is preferred, but some scenes benefit greatly by the subdued nuance of the latter works.

When it comes to restoration, in all cases, we're extremely careful. For example, if we have to use a cleanser, we experiment on the edge of the work to make certain that we are using the proper compound. I like to say that in working on Johann Berthelsen's paintings, we have learned to caress the brushstroke so as to appreciate the sense of three dimensions that he imparts to his work.

**The Canvas:** What do you feel is the most difficult aspect of working on a Berthelsen painting?

**Stuart Pocock:** There is a tremendous amount of subtlety in Berthelsen and especially in the skies of the snow scenes and, of course, his nocturnes. As many as I have worked on, they are still capable of surprising me in the way he transitions from one color to another. The technique is so masterful that, in viewing it casually, it is difficult to detect.

**The Canvas:** In your career, you have worked on a great many paintings — especially by Americans who were contemporaries of Berthelsen.

*In the course of a lifetime in the Arts, Johann Berthelsen became acquainted with many extraordinary individuals. In this feature, we will introduce them to you.*



Photo courtesy of The Paley Center for Media

## William S. Paley

An exhibit currently on tour between San Francisco, Portland, Maine, and Quebec consists of 61 paintings, sculptures and works on paper from the personal collection of the late William S. Paley, founder and former president of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). Titled “The William S. Paley Collection: A Taste for Modernism,” the works include major pieces from the permanent collection of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which were bequeathed by Paley on his death in 1990. Artists represented include Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne, Degas, Renoir and other major names. Though Paley pursued some of the major figures of French impressionism, he also patronized, collected and helped publicize the work of an artist who was both his contemporary and

a major American impressionist — Johann Berthelsen.

William Paley’s father, Samuel, was a Ukrainian immigrant and self-made millionaire. His son, William, born in 1901, was educated at private schools and received his degree from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Early on, it was clear that his father was grooming him for an active role in the management of the family cigar business.

Paley’s interest in broadcasting began in 1927 when his father and other partners purchased the Columbia Phonographic Broadcasting System network of 18 stations, primarily as an advertising vehicle. When Paley doubled sales within a year, his father bought out the partners, and young Bill expanded the network to include over 114 affiliate stations. By providing advertisers with the ability to cover multiple major markets through the “network,” Paley developed a system that greatly enhanced advertising efficiencies and became extremely popular.

To grow his audience, Paley sought first-class talent and invested money in a variety of entertainment formats. A stellar lineup, including such stars as Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Kate Smith and Al Jolson, not only built loyal audiences but facilitated an easy transition when the new medium of television became available in the late 1940s.

Paley also realized the value of the news division, both in terms of attracting listeners (later viewers) and adding to the network’s credibility. Edward R. Murrow’s broadcasts from London generated immense listenership in World War II and later propelled Murrow to a series of other news genres including commentary and interview programs. Paley also diversified CBS into such fields as recording, publishing, film production, and others. By the

time of his death in 1990, CBS had established a reputation as “the Tiffany Network,” both in terms of its success and profitability.


The superb taste that characterized Paley’s choices in programming was also evident in his affinity for art. In the late 1930s, he was personally introduced to Johann Berthelsen, probably through one of the galleries that handled Johann’s paintings. Paley had already purchased several oils and, on meeting the artist, realized his potential in yet another medium.

His prior work in opera and concerts had honed a stage presence that was very much a part of Johann’s personality. His speaking voice was well modulated and pleasing and his articulation perfect. Appreciating talent when he found it, Paley proposed that Johann appear on the CBS network in a most unusual format. He would paint a picture in the presence of a studio audience while describing his method and technique to radio listeners. Lee Berthelsen recalls, “Because he had to perform before an audience, my parents were extremely concerned about my father’s appearance. The Depression was at its worst, money was very tight, and food for the children came first. Little or nothing was left to replace clothing that was tattered or which, at best, had seen better days. So, my mother sewed shirtfronts and shirtcuffs into my father’s suit so that he would appear well dressed during his demonstration.”

The show was evidently a success, and Johann’s good friend, Wayman Adams, was invited to appear in another segment. Unfortunately, the demonstration of a visual medium that lacked in-person presentation could not continue for very long. Although regarded today as a footnote in Johann Berthelsen’s artistic career, the experience paved



the way for such shows as “Learn to Draw with John Gnagy” in the 1950s and other master-class and artistic demonstrations that continue to the present day.

It is significant, however, that William S. Paley — who relied on his own taste when selecting artworks and would eventually purchase such masterpieces as Picasso’s “Boy Leading a Horse” and Matisse’s “Odalisque with a Tambourine” — also valued and collected the work of Johann Berthelsen and, through the medium of radio, introduced him to a wider public in a way that might well have attracted other collectors. 

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Visit The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC at  
[www.berthelsenart.com](http://www.berthelsenart.com)

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*“Restoring” continued from page 5*

Where do you feel that he stands in comparison to them?

**Stuart Pocock:** Over the years, I have felt that Berthelsen was extremely underrated. Fortunately now, as the market already had demonstrated until the beginning of the recession, we are experiencing renewed demand and higher value placed on his paintings. Although he is occasionally compared to Guy Wiggins, I believe it is an invalid comparison, as Wiggins’ paintings tend to be more representational, while Berthelsen’s burst with color and action. I feel that it is a privilege to work on his paintings because, as I like to say, he “cast a poetic veil over the City of New York.”

**The Canvas:** So, you believe his paintings will continue to appreciate?

**Stuart Pocock:** For a work of art to be considered investment quality, four elements are necessary. The artist must be recognized; there must be an underlying quality to the artistic expression of the work; the artist must have been prolific and, in his lifetime, produced enough work to create a market; and the work must have been accomplished with quality materials so that it will last over time. Berthelsen paintings have always qualified on the last three conditions; and, at this time, he is rapidly receiving the recognition that informed connoisseurs have always held for him and that is now spreading among a wider public.

His paintings are not only an excellent investment but a delight to own and enjoy.

Stuart Pocock can be reached at Pocock Fine Art & Antiques at 954-525-3400 or by e-mail at [stuart@pocockfineart.com](mailto:stuart@pocockfineart.com).



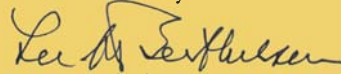
*“Lee’s Letter” continued from page 1*

a major exhibit on the life and art of Johann Berthelsen to take place in late 2014. Now, years after his passing, his art is ‘goin’ home.’ (Coincidentally, the Rahr family, who endowed the Art Museum, were cousins on my father’s side; and my father frequently visited their home.) The extent of interest and appreciation from the residents of his hometown would have pleased my father very much. And, for my part, there is a sense of connection each time I visit Manitowoc, see the house where he and my grandmother lived, and walk the streets and waterfront that he knew as a boy and a young man.

I thought again about “Goin’ Home” in another context. An earlier issue of our newsletter made reference to the Salmagundi Club in New York, of which my father was a member from 1935 on. Dedicated to art and education, the Club is one of the City’s most beloved landmarks. A story in this newsletter recounts in detail the return of a Johann Berthelsen pastel to the Club after many years.

On reflecting on both these instances, it struck me that symmetry is as important in life as it is in art and architecture. Going back to the place from which we came gives a perspective on where we have been and perhaps where we are going next. Many of the collectors of my father’s paintings enjoy them because viewing them returns them to scenes that live in their memory — or even in their imagination. More than that, by taking the time to appreciate a work of art, we are sharing in the artist’s gift and experience, and adding that to the fabric of our own lives. And, by adding this richness to our fund of experience, we can better appreciate the value of the moments allotted to us between starting out and ‘goin’ home.’

Yours sincerely,



Lee Berthelsen

Chairman

The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

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# Back Home at the Salmagundi Club

Bob Mueller

The weather was foul in New York City on the evening of June 7th (2013) with a heavy wind-driven rain, yet at the membership meeting in the Upper Gallery of the Salmagundi Club there was reason to celebrate — one of its own had come home. It was also the first meeting under the newly elected officers and board of directors signaling a time of change, abundant with opportunity.

For myself, as Chief Curator of the Club's collection, it was the first step toward the fulfillment of a personal dream — the recovery of some of our long-lost treasures. It saddened me a bit that the man who had made this moment possible, Lee Berthelsen, could not be there to share in its joy. Standing before the membership I directed their attention to the work displayed on the easel before them — an exquisite pastel nocturne by Johann Berthelsen. Exactly when and how it initially came into the collection is unknown, but it had been over four decades since it was last seen at 47 Fifth Avenue. As they heard the story of how it had been deaccessioned and later recovered by Lee, their gazes at the work became more studied.

As a scholar of American art, I am familiar with the paintings of Johann Berthelsen, and how they are often compared with those of his contemporary, Guy C. Wiggins (whose son was in attendance). Yet nothing in Berthelsen's oils prepared me, as well as those in the room, for the glorious subtlety and delicate touch exhibited in the pastel before us. At the turn of the twentieth century, Salmagundi was a center for painters of what is today called the tonalist movement. These artists created works full of atmosphere and visual poetry, capturing nature's quiet moments. Here was a cityscape fully expressing that beautifully lyric aesthetic.

The vantage point of the viewer is from a meadow somewhere in Central Park;



*Central Park Evening, by Johann Berthelsen  
(The Hampshire House on left and the Essex House on right)*

a heavy atmosphere created by either fog or light rain softens the lights of the city beyond as we view it through the treetops. The subtle variations in tone and color beautifully dissolve the farther buildings in an effect that is nothing less than ethereal, while the lightness of his touch, where the color seems to barely float on the surface of the paper and sometimes above it, establish a remarkable depth of field. Overall, it is a truly stunning and accomplished piece of the pastellist's art. To make it even more interesting, the work is double sided, with a view toward the Plaza Hotel drawn on the back!

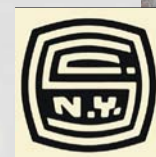
As Lee and I discussed the details of his presenting the work back to the Club, I had the opportunity to visit the Conservancy's website, where many of these beautiful and rarely seen pastels are on view. They show a completely unknown side of this sensitive artist which has increased my appreciation of him tremendously.

In closing my report I expressed Lee's thoughts that his father would have been very pleased to know that this

work had finally made it back to where it belonged, which was met by a hearty round of applause from all present. On behalf of the Club, I wish to express how deeply grateful we are to Lee for his steadfast dedication to his father's life and art, and in so doing, enriching our lives in the process.

For those who wish to visit Salmagundi and see this work, I'm sorry to say you'll have to wait a while. It is currently stored offsite with the cream of our collection while our Upper Gallery and heating system get a major overhaul. Lee will be kept posted as to when it's coming back.

*The Salmagundi Club website is  
[www.salmagundi.org](http://www.salmagundi.org).*



*The  
Salmagundi  
Club*

