



Guy Pène du Bois
American, 1884 - 1958

Hallway, Italian Restaurant

1922

oil on canvas

overall: 64 x 51 cm (25 3/16 x 20 1/16 in.)

framed: 80.7 x 68 x 3.2 cm (31 3/4 x 26 3/4 x 1 1/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Guy Pène du Bois / 22

Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.137

ENTRY

Guy Pène du Bois painted *Hallway, Italian Restaurant* in 1922, approximately one year after he had bought a house and studio in Westport, Connecticut, where, far from the social and professional distractions of New York, he had hoped to spend his summers concentrating on painting. Despite his good intentions, the early 1920s was generally a fallow period in the artist's career during which Pène du Bois found his creativity—whether he was residing in New York or Westport—stymied by incessant partying. [1] Emerging from this dissolute time, *Hallway, Italian Restaurant* was one of the most popular works Pène du Bois executed prior to his departure for France in 1924. It was often reproduced during his lifetime, and he included an illustration of it in both a contemporary article and later in his autobiography. [2]

The subject is a couple who stand facing each other in a hallway. A *New York Times* critic characterized the figures as “youth at last without much of the beauty of the dawn, but youth none the less.” [3] The shallow background is enlivened by the wallpaper's decorative interlocking square pattern. Elegantly posed and well dressed, the woman rests her left hand on a cane she holds outstretched behind her and looks at a nondescript man wearing a hat and an unbuttoned overcoat who stands close at her right side. His hands are thrust in his pockets. An element of mystery is introduced by the fact that the figures' hats conceal their facial expressions, so the viewer must scrutinize their body language in order to devise a narrative context for the scene. The encounter has distinctly sexual overtones. But

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rather than the commercial transaction implied in other works by Pène du Bois, such as *La Rue de la Santé*, the theme is more one of flirtation. The tilt of the man's head suggests that he is anticipating an answer, and the woman seems to be making a decision. The light that illuminates what little is visible of her profile suggests that her response is imminent. Her distinctive pose suggests that she is attracted to the man and is unsuccessfully attempting to remain aloof. One ultimately reaches the conclusion that the couple has just dined and are in the process of deciding how to spend the remainder of the evening.

Although nothing in the composition particularly suggests an Italian restaurant setting, an early critic wrote that the scene "fairly smells of Italian cooking. A man and woman enter silhouetted against pink wall paper; they are sixth rate urbanites preferring a succulent meal enlivened by a florid orchestra—vulgar but harmless seems to be their label." [4] *Hallway, Italian Restaurant* reveals Pène du Bois to be an exceptionally keen observer of the subtleties of human nature who skillfully deployed nuanced gestures to suggest the elusive personalities and predicaments of his subjects. The simple two-figure composition and volumetric forms are characteristic of the style the artist would continue to refine in Paris.

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

NOTES

- [1] Betsy Fahlman, *Guy Pène du Bois: Artist About Town* (Washington, DC, 1980), 198.
- [2] Guy Pène du Bois, "Guy Pène du Bois," *International Studio* 75 (June 1922): 245, and Guy Pène du Bois, *Artists Say the Silliest Things* (New York, 1940), 273. It was also reproduced in Royal Cortissoz, *Guy Pene du Bois* (New York, 1931), 42; and Edward Alden Jewell, "My Choice of Contemporary American Painting," *Studio* 107 (Mar. 1932): 118.
- [3] "The World of Art: That of South and North America, Including Canada," *New York Times Book Review and Magazine*, Apr. 16, 1922, 20.
- [4] Catherine Beach Ely, *The Modern Tendency in American Painting* (New York, 1925), 75.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The medium-weight fabric support was originally lined and then later infused with a wax-resin adhesive. The tacking margins were removed, and the support was mounted on a nonoriginal stretcher. Cusping is present only on the right side. Oil paint was applied with strong brushwork and low impasto, both wet into wet and wet over dry, covering an earlier composition. It is apparent that there was formerly a problem with insecure and flaking paint between the original painting and the present one, and some retouching is present. The surface was coated with a relatively clear layer of varnish.

PROVENANCE

The artist; (Kraushaar Galleries, New York); sold 26 February 1923 to Chester Dale [1888-1962], New York; bequest 1963 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1922 A Collection of Paintings by Modern Masters of American and European Art, C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries, New York, 1922, no. 12.

1922 Paintings by Guy Pène du Bois, C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries, New York, April 1922, no. 5.

1938 Paintings by Guy Pène du Bois from 1908 to 1938, C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries, New York, 1938, no. 15.

1965 The Chester Dale Bequest, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1965, unnumbered checklist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1922 Pène du Bois, Guy. "Guy Pène du Bois." *International Studio* 75 (June 1922): 245, repro.
- 1925 Ely, Catherine Beach. *The Modern Tendency in American Painting*. New York, 1925: 75, repro.

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- 1931 Cortisoz, Royal. *Guy Pène du Bois*. New York, 1931: 42, repro.
- 1932 Jewell, Edward Alden. "My Choice of Contemporary American Painting." *Studio 107* (March 1932): 118, repro.
- 1940 Pène du Bois, Guy. *Artists Say the Silliest Things*. New York, 1940: 273, repro.
- 1965 *Paintings other than French in the Chester Dale Collection*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1965: 55, repro.
- 1970 *American Paintings and Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1970: 50, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 145, repro.
- 1981 Williams, William James. *A Heritage of American Paintings from the National Gallery of Art*. New York, 1981: 214, repro. 215.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 258, repro.
- 2004 Fahlman, Betsy. *Guy Pène du Bois: Painter of Modern Life*. New York, 2004: 23-24.
- 2012 Brock, Charles. "George Bellows: An Unfinished Life." In *George Bellows*, edited by Charles Brock. Exh. cat. Royal Academy of Arts, London; National Gallery of Art, Washington; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2012-2013. Munich, 2012: 24-25, color fig. 15.

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