

Albert Fitch Bellows (1829 - 1883)

Will He Reach It?, circa 1860

signed lower left

oil on panel with an arched top

8 ½" x 6 ¼"

Albert Fitch Bellows was born to an old New England family in 1829 and grew up in Milford, Massachusetts. After serving as principal of the New England School of Design, Bellows passed more than a year abroad at the Royal Academy in Antwerp studying genre painting. Upon his return to New York in 1857, he was made an associate of the National Academy of Design and an Academician in 1861.

Will He Reach It? belongs to a group of lush, pastoral landscapes from the earlier part of his career which Frederick Baekeland referred to "generally quiet, harmonious scenes of rural life" (1). The composition focuses on three young figures, one of which is reaching into the stream in an attempt to retrieve something. The animation brought by the well-articulated figures, bright atmosphere, and luxuriant vegetation provide an open, idyllic view of the countryside. The mode of dress appears more European than American, a reference to his experience abroad, but the landscape itself seems to have derived from New England sketching trips Bellows made in the 1850s. As noted in the November 1858 issue of *Crayon*,

Bellows has been procuring material in Vermont, among the green mountains, not far from the village of Bellows Falls. His sketches represent picturesque old houses and mills... he also shows us transcripts of beautiful passages of brook scenery, many fine old ash trees, and mountain background (2).

Bellows developed a keen interest in watercolors in 1865 and was a founder of the American Society of Painters in Watercolor, which published his famous treatise, *Water Color Painting: Some Facts and Authorities in Relation to its Durability*. He also went abroad to England to expose himself to leading watercolor talents and in Antwerp was admitted as an honorary member of the Royal Belgian Society of Painters in Water Color. After the artist returned from Europe, many of his works were burnt in a fire that destroyed his Boston studio in 1872. He then moved his studio to New York and continued to exhibit at the National Academy, Brooklyn Art Association, Boston Art Club, Boston Athenaeum, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His works are now held in the collections of Brooklyn Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, Birmingham Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum of Art, National Academy of Design, and the New York Historical Society.

Provenance: From a private Connecticut collection to the gallery.

Bibliography:

1. Frederick Baekeland, *Images of America: The Painter's Eye* (The Birmingham Museum of Art, 1991), 48.
2. "Domestic Art Gossip," *Crayon* (November 1858).