

**Jonas Joseph LaValley (1858 - 1930)**

*Summer Reading*, circa 1905

signed "J.J. LaValley" lower left

oil on board

14" x 20"

Jonas Joseph LaValley was born in 1858 at Rouses Point, New York. He spent his youth on the family farm in New York, later working in the cotton mills of Chicopee, Massachusetts, and he eventually settled in Springfield, Massachusetts. He started his art career while working as a professional barber in Springfield, sketching portraits of his clientele (1), and by 1899 he became successful enough to sell his barbershop and open an art studio nearby. As a skilled painter and instructor, he earned a commanding reputation as Springfield's resident still-life artist (2).

LaValley received instruction in drawing from George Newell Bowers (1849-1909) in New York City, and from Willis Seaver Adams (1844-1921) and Edmund E. Case (1844-1919) in Springfield. He spent six years as a draftsman before he began to paint in oils, and works such as *Summer Reading* reflect this training in the harmonious compositional arrangement and use of line. The scene is spare, with a leather bound book and a bouquet of pink and white flowers set against a dark background and featuring an unidentifiable surface. "He reveals a tender respect for his fragile subjects, painted in shimmering colors, with gentle nuances of color and light and in a quite broad technique" (3). This sensitivity is most apparent in the delicate highlighting with dabs of white paint on the rich-colored petals.

Most of the flowers and fruit featured in LaValley's still-lives at the turn of the century were grown at his farm near Mount Tekoa, where the artist and his family lived for fifteen years. "According to the artist's nephew, the seeds and seedlings cultivated at his country home were carefully selected by the artist himself" (4). He returned to Springfield in 1910. He was a co-founder of the Springfield Art League and in 1918 was elected its first president.

**Provenance:** From a private Connecticut collection to the gallery.

**Bibliography:**

1. Sara J. Orr, ed., *American Art from the Springfield Museum* (Springfield: Springfield Library and Museums Association, 1999), 121.
2. William Gerdtts and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 180.
3. Gerdtts and Burke, 180.
4. Orr, ed., 122.