

Percival Leonard Rosseau (1859 - 1937)

On the Scent, 1910

signed "P.Rousseau" and dated "1910" lower left

oil on canvas

12" x 18"

Percival Leonard Rosseau, an avid bird shooter, was one of America's leading painters of hunting dogs on the scent. Born of French descent in Louisiana, Rosseau studied for six years in Paris in the 1890s but was unable to attain commercial success with his academic work. His fortunes changed just after the turn of the century when his paintings of hunting dogs achieved modest acclaim at the 1903 and 1904 Paris Salons, prompting sales and numerous commissions from owners of thoroughbreds (1). One of his patrons was Percy Avery Rockefeller, who commissioned paintings of his favorite dogs at the Rockefeller's private hunting club in North Carolina. The magnate eventually built Rosseau a winter home, studio, and kennel on the grounds (2).

Rousseau divided his time for many years between France and the United States, settling in New York City in 1915 and spending summer months working at Old Lyme. While at the Academie Julian, he studied under Jules Lefebvre (1836-1911) and Tony Robert-Fleury (1837-1912) who were figurative painters. He was most influenced, however, by the Barbizon School of painting, which promoted a romanticized vision noted for its soft, subdued tones and painterly style. When producing paintings such as *On the Scent* he painted en plein air, and incorporated the subject for which he was best known. Said the artist, "A man should paint what he knows best, and I knew more about animals than anything else. I have run hounds from childhood, and have at my fingertips the thorough knowledge of dogs necessary to paint them faithfully" (3).

On the Scent features a group of vivacious hunting dogs exploring a richly textured and tawny landscape. This timeless scene conveys a proximity to nature that was fundamental to the Barbizon movement. The foreground holds a particular immediacy for the viewer, as though they were standing in the tall grass within an arms length of the passing hounds. The stone wall separates the foreground from the subtly defined forestry of the middle ground and background. The use of color is nearly prismatic in its combination of autumnal tones flecked with soft pinks and blues.

Provenance: From a private Connecticut collection to the gallery.

Bibliography:

1. Steve Shipp, *American Art Colonies: 1850-1930* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 78.
2. Brooke Chilvers Lubin, "Percival Leonard Rosseau" in *Gray's Sporting Journal*, August 2008.
<http://grayssportingjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=981&Itemid=76>
3. Chilvers Lubin.