

**Henry Bill Selden (1886 - 1934)**

*On the Canal, Venice*, 1925

signed "Henry Bill Selden, Venice" and dated "1925" lower right  
oil on board  
12" x 16"

Henry Bill Selden's parents wanted their son to become a doctor. He enrolled at Princeton University in 1905 with the intention of following his family's plan. After two years, however, he inexplicably disappeared. The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, hired by his frightened parents, found the young man at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where he had been happily pursuing a career of his own choice (1). He remained there for one year before transferring to New York City to take classes at the Art Students League.

Selden's favorite subjects included peaceful New England landscapes, Maine coastlines and harbor views, and vibrant Venetian architecture such as that featured in *On the Canal, Venice* from 1925. His lyrical style and use of light was almost certainly influenced by his association with the Old Lyme Art Colony, where he most notably enjoyed the company of William Robinson (1861-1945), William Chadwick (1879-1962), Charles Ebert (1873-1959), and Gregory Smith (1880-1961) (2). *On the Canal, Venice* was created with a high key palette and loose brushwork. In every instance the scene is bathed in light, which highlights the harmonious relationship between the composition's warm and cool tones. The all pervading light reveals fractured reflections of the brightly hued facades in the canal, defined by quick dashes of color interspersed on the water's surface.

He began to partake in exhibitions while still a student, with submissions to the Pennsylvania Academy and National Academy of Design in 1911. In 1915, he became the founder and director of the art department at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, a program that was "revolutionary in its time. [The college] was one of the first in the country to give credit for art courses such as painting while requiring art history and a firm general liberal arts background" (3). He remained in this position, while simultaneously painting and exhibiting in Pennsylvania and New York, until his death in 1934.

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

**Bibliography:**

1. *Connecticut Masters: The Fine Arts and Antiques Collections of The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company* (Hartford: Hartford Steam Boiler, 1991), 147.
2. Old Lyme Impressionists, Inc., *Henry Bill Selden (1886-1934): American Impressionist* (New London: Lyman Allen Museum, 1981), 9.
3. Old Lyme Impressionists, Inc., 6.