

## Transitional Moments

Three newly discovered paintings by George Caleb Bingham help to reassess the artist's work and career

**Through August 30**  
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A portrait of a young girl that has been in the family of the sitter for the last 175 years is one of three recently rediscovered George Caleb Bingham paintings that are now for sale through Rachael Cozad Fine Art in Kansas City, Missouri.

Miss Sarah Helen Rollins, the younger sister of Bingham's best friend and life-long patron Maj. James Sidney Rollins, is one of the most important early works by the artist as it highlights a transitional moment between his more folk-art style portraits and his professional work. Up until now, the painting was only known by a bad black-and-white image that appeared in the Bingham *catalogue raisonné*. This is the first time it has been reproduced in color and it has never been publicly exhibited.

"Bingham learned from the art he could see in his area," says Cozad, who opened Rachael Cozad Fine Art last year after spending the past 11 years as the director and CEO of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City. "His early work has a folk-art feel but this painting represents probably the first time he painted a full figure and the first time he painted hands."

Painted in 1837, this portrait of Miss Sarah Helen Rollins—who was



George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879), *Miss Sarah Helen Rollins*, 1837. Oil on canvas, 60 x 32 in.



George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879), *Horse Thief*, 1852. Oil on canvas, 29 x 35 3/4 in.

probably 10 or 11 years old at the time of the sitting—represents a major transition for Bingham.

"Rollins was Bingham's greatest benefactor and encouraged Bingham to break out of his style and paint a full figure; he challenged him to rise to the occasion and paint this portrait of his younger sister," says Cozad. "It is a folk-art picture but it is so stunning and such a frontier-fashion statement. This portrait was probably a vehicle for Bingham to take himself to the next level in terms of abilities and accomplishments."

And while Bingham is mainly known for his genre scenes depicting life and commerce along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, this portrait shows his adeptness at painting the portrait as well as his ability to look at and learn

from other artists.

"This is a gorgeous picture in the sense of not only the folk-art feel but also the sculptural elements of the neck and shoulders," says Cozad. "It's as if someone set them down on top of the dress. The background is minimal but contemporary and this is an interesting time for a picture like this to emerge. There is so much interest in fashion in art right now and her outfit is quite a fashion statement for a little girl visiting Missouri from her home in Kentucky."

Cozad also feels the size of the painting will help to change attitudes toward Bingham's work moving forward.

"At 60 inches high, we have never seen anything like this from Bingham before," says Cozad. "This painting presents an opportunity for Bingham

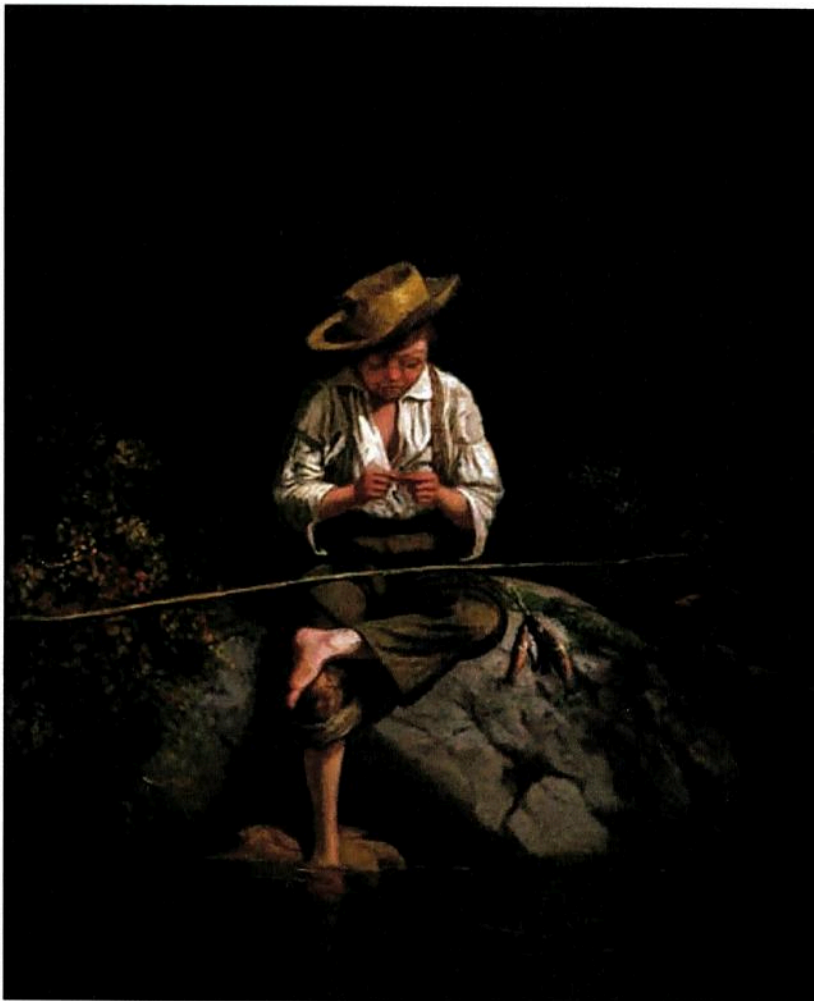
to be recontextualized in museum collections that have only focused on his raft paintings, which were always thought to be the apex of his career."

Another newly surfaced painting is *Horse Thief*. *Horse Thief* probably was originally sold out of Goupil & Co. in New York around 1852 and may be related to a work by Asher Brown Durand titled *God's Judgment Upon Gog*, that was done according to art historian Fred R. Kline in a "grandiose fire and brimstone biblical allegory." According to Kline, the Durand painting was on exhibition at the National Academy of Design in 1852 while Bingham was visiting New York City.

The theme of *Horse Thief* was of incredible importance to Bingham at the time as the idea of frontier justice was something that Bingham could not



Rachael Cozad Fine Art is located in Kansas City, Missouri. Cozad has more than 25 years experience in the visual arts including 11 years as director and CEO of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri. Prior to this, Cozad was executive director and chief curator of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Foundation in Los Angeles.



George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879), *Baiting the Hook*, ca. 1841. Oil on canvas, 28 x 23 in.

tolerate on a very personal level.

“It had to have been an incredibly important and personal painting for him,” says Cozad. “He was a very religious man and at one point considered taking up a religious vocation. And, you can see through his writings a continual mention of faith. This notion of vigilante justice going on with the expansion of the West, the idea of people taking matters into their own hands and lynching horse thieves was something that Bingham was very much against. Bingham was a man of the law and was very religiously and politically engaged in what was going on around him. This is a heartfelt subject for him.”

Since 2005, 15 newly authenticated paintings by Bingham have been added to his established body of some 500 recorded paintings, many of which are still unlocated. ■