

OBJECT
of the **month**

July 2020



BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hello, this is Violette-Anne, Museum Guide at the Dayton Art Institute. Our talk today is about a painting by an American artist from Indiana, Samuel Richards, titled *Blissful Hours*, dated 1885.

Let's look at this picture's composition, which is the way the different elements are arranged on the canvas. What strikes me first are the different shades of white, expertly juxtaposed with black and browns for contrast and stacked from foreground to background, stressing the artist's mastery of hue subtleties.

Notice how he also ties the composition together lengthwise, with the use of orangey-brown tones, from the seat of the empty chair, to the flower pots, the pin cushion, the woman's shawl and the picture on the wall, as well as the shadows on the floor.

The use of backlighting and earthy colors is typical of the works of artists of the Royal Academy of Munich in Germany where Samuel Richards went to study for several years. He made quite the impression while there, winning gold medals in drawing and painting, and one of his professors is even claimed to have said

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that ‘no other American had ever been to Munich who gave such promise as he.’ It is there that he painted *Blissful Hours* and also painted his most famous painting, *Evangeline*, now at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

What details do you notice? Do any of these details provide a more realistic, lived-in look to the painting, such as the pin cushion resting partly off the table or the paper hanging at an angle to the left of the window?

Blissful Hours has a sentimental subject matter typical of late 19th-century storytelling genre of painting. We can tell by the two teacups and the empty Italian-style chair that the woman is either expecting a visitor or has just said goodbye to one. Which do you think it is?

According to the artist’s letter to the painting’s original buyer, “a village maiden is busy with the last touches on her bridal dress [while] waiting for her lover who will come now any moment.” But to me, this scene appears to take place *after* the fiancé has gone. One: the spoon being in the cup shows it’s been used, otherwise it would be lying on the table next to the cup. Two: the cups would be grouped together if the tea had not been poured yet. Three: if the maiden were expecting her fiancé, I would think she would have disposed of the fallen leaves and petals littering the table and the glass of water to show her perfect housekeeping skills.

Thank you for listening and make sure to see *Blissful Hours* in-person in gallery 207 of the American collection next time you visit the DAI.

END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) for full multimedia presentation.

RESOURCES

www.daytonartinstitute.org
www.dia.org
<http://collection.imamuseum.org>
<https://www.adbk.de/en/akademie-en/archive/chronicle.html>

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