

# Basic Detail Report



**Title: The Bird Cage**

Date: c. 1910

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@284af

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: By the summer of 1910, when "The Bird Cage" was probably painted, the Friesekes had been summering for five years in the village of Giverny, forty miles northwest of Paris, and Frieseke had staked his claim on the subject of the female figure outdoors, nude, or in costume. When weather permitted, he painted on

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the bank of the small river Epte or in the garden of the two-story house he occupied next to that of the distinguished elderly painter Claude Monet. Although hardly in competition with the extravaganza of florals displayed next door, the Frieseke garden, enclosed on three sides by high walls, offered an array of roses, clematis, passion vines, and hollyhocks as backgrounds for the artist's subjects. Frieseke's wife, Sarah, posed for him wearing one of the old costumes they bought at the Paris flea markets. It is Sarah Frieseke, wearing the same dress, who figures in a larger painting representing the theme of a woman and bird cage, "The Open Window" (private collection), which was widely exhibited in Europe and the United States, beginning with its appearance in the salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris in spring 1911. The subject in *The Bird Cage* is probably Jeanne, a professional model who came from Paris to work for Frieseke and other American painters who summered in Giverny. The mores of Giverny would not have allowed for a woman from the village to model nude, that being a sophisticated urban phenomenon. Even the exposed shoulder of this model, whatever the design intention of the artist, proposes a degree of intimacy that, in 1910, hinted at the nude. Design was indeed at the forefront of Frieseke's intentions. "Repeated patterns of figural shapes, patterns on costumes, patterns on the curtains and coverings of furnishings, patterns of flowers and dappled sunlight were integral to his art" and placed his work squarely within the realm of Post-Impressionist aesthetics. (1) The choice of a square format serves to flatten the space depicted within its frame, further reinforcing the artist's intention to treat the canvas as a series of shapes. The brushwork is varied. Elongated strokes make up the lines of the gown, contrasting markedly with the daubs of yellow and blue in the background and the highly finished areas of the woman's neck and arms. Only a slight profile of her face is revealed. The focus is her coiffure of side braids bedecked with flowers and her blue dressing gown accentuated by a sheer collar and cuffs. She represents a woman at home, surrounded by her beautiful but confining surroundings, much like the birds in the cage she holds. By 1910 Frieseke's initial difficulties with painting outdoors, not the least of which are the racing changes in the subject as the sun moves, had been resolved. He approached the many design problems offered by his subject with absolute confidence. In "The Bird Cage" the drawing is graceful and accurate; the shimmering colors of turning leaves are vivid and convincing. Within this dazzle of color and the anomalous planes of fabric and foliage, the strength and volume of the model's body are inferred, while the viewer's eye is led to the tender details of sun spots, captive birds, and the transparent crimson of the fingers on her right hand as it touches the top of the hanging cage. Even though Frieseke showed regularly in important group exhibitions in his own country, his commercial success in the United States lagged well behind the notice his work received in Europe. He had captured many prizes on both sides of the Atlantic and had been featured at the Eighth International Biennale in Venice in 1909, but it was not until 1912 that Frieseke was taken on by Macbeth Gallery in New York. "The Bird Cage", consigned

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to Macbeth in January 1913, figured in the gallery's second Frieseke exhibition. NK  
Bibliography: Moussa Domit, "Frederick Freiseke, 1874-1939: A Retrospective",  
exhib. cat. (Savannah, Ga.: Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1974); Bruce W.  
Chambers, Frederick C. Frieseke: Women in Repose, exhib. cat. (New York: Berry-  
Hill Galleries, 1990); William H. Gerds, "Monet's Giverny: An Impressionist Colony"  
(New York: Abbeville Press, 1993); Bruce Weber, "The Giverny Luminists: Frieseke,  
Miller and Their Circle", exhib. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1995). NOTES:  
1. William H. Gerds, American Impressionism (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p.  
266.

Dimensions: Frame: 32 x 32 in. (81.3 x 81.3 cm)