

Basic Detail Report



Title: In the Choir (Organist at the Gloucester Cathedral)

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Date: ca. 1901

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3dcb0

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: Edwin Austin Abbey painted "In the Choir", also known as "Organist at Gloucester Cathedral" for the front cover of the November 1902 issue of the "Ladies' Home Journal". Abbey, one of the foremost American illustrators working in England, was especially known for such antiquarian subjects, and his re-creations of medieval, Renaissance, and eighteenth-century English life were often reproduced in the popular periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

According to the "Ladies' Home Journal", Abbey portrayed in this holiday painting "the spirit of Thanksgiving, placing his message of the voice of a singer. He has given it an Old English setting—a choir gallery in England about 1785. The organ is the fine instrument in the organ loft in Gloucester Cathedral."(1) In order to further promote the painting, the magazine also offered its readers a color reproduction, suitable for framing, for the affordable price of only ten cents. (2) Abbey was trained as a draftsman, but as the publishing industry developed more advanced means of photographic reproduction, the artist began to move away from pen-and-ink illustrations toward the more highly regarded medium of oil on canvas. "In the Choir" displays the artist's subtle understanding of monochromatic values; it is painted primarily in rich hues of brown, black, and white, and blue is reserved exclusively for the ribbons on the sumptuous bonnet that adorns the head of the pretty soprano in the foreground. Clothed in an elegantly trimmed white gown, with a ruffled black cape cascading over her forearms, the singer glances up from her choir book and gazes toward the heavens. Her beautifully proportioned face conveys an appropriately religious mood of spirituality and thanksgiving. Abbey owned a large collection of historic costumes, which provided him with the material for credible re-creations of old English life. Accuracy in historical details was also stressed by the "Ladies' Home Journal", which was careful to mention the organ's actual existence in the loft of Gloucester Cathedral. In the compressed space behind the singer sits an organist actively working the stops of this impressive instrument. Behind him stand three more members of the choir, with powdered wigs and starched shirts, enthusiastically singing along. Abbey's views of the historic and rural England provided viewers with an escape from contemporary urban life in the United States. In a period when Americans perceived their own country as relatively new and without history, such depictions of eighteenth-century England allowed them to recall their links to the English past. "In the Choir" is an idealized scene presented as fact for American viewers desirous of remembering an earlier, simpler, and more traditional time. Bibliography E.V.Lucas, "Edwin Austin Abbey, Royal Academician: The Record of His Life and Work", 2 vols. (London: Methuen; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921); "Catalog of the Memorial Exhibition of the Works of Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A., N.A., exhib. cat. (New York: American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1928); "Edwin Austin Abbey (1852-1911), exhib. cat. (New Haven :Yale

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University Art Gallery, 1974); Lucy Oakley, "Unfaded Pageant: Edwin Austin Abbey's Shakespearean Subjects", exhib. cat. (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 1994). Notes: 1. " Mr. Abbey's Cover Design," "Ladies Home Journal" 19 (November 1902): I. 2. A single Issue of the journal also cost ten cents in 1902. " An Abbey Poster for 10 Cents," "Ladies Home Journal" 19 (November 1902): I.

Dimensions: Frame: 33 x 30 in. (83.8 x 76.2 cm) Image: 24 x 20 1/8 in. (61 x 51.1 cm)