ROSENBERG, Henry Mortikar

Henry Mortikar Rosenberg spent the majority of his professional life working in Halifax, Nova Scotia (approximately 37 years) where he had considerable influence as a painter, printmaker and educator. He was Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design (now known as NSCAD) from 1898 to 1910.

A first generation Polish-American by birth, Henry Rosenberg went to Munich in 1878 as a pupil of the German-American painter Frank Duveneck. He studied with Duveneck for one year in Munich, before accompanying him to Paris and Florence in 1879, and finally to Venice in 1880. Here, during the summer months both he and Duveneck lived and worked in the same rooming house as James McNeill Whistler, the Casa Jankovitz on the Riva degli Schiavoni. Although Whistler was primarily in Venice to work on a series of commissioned etchings, he did provide informal lessons and creative guidance to some younger artists that summer, including Rosenberg. This experience not only encouraged Rosenberg to pursue his interest in etching, it had a lasting effect on his painting (most noticeably in his later seascape paintings like Halifax Harbour 1909 in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia), and his interest in the potential value of fine art to modern society1.

Upon completing his studies in Europe and contributing one work, Consolation, to the 1885 Paris Salon Henry Rosenberg moved to New York City, where he maintained a studio and contributed regularly to numerous exhibitions including the 1883, '91, and '95 annual exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the 1888, '91, '95-'96 annual exhibitions at the Boston Art Club, the 1891, '94 and '97 annual exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago and, the 1891 annual exhibition at the Brooklyn Art Association.

While it is not known when Henry Rosenberg first went to Halifax or who introduced him to the city2 it is certain that he had been there by 1889. (This is the date of his earliest known Nova Scotian painting, Halifax Harbour, in the collection of the Nova Scotia Museum). It is also certain that he maintained some connections with the city after his 1889 visit. For example in 1894 he lent four of his own works, Autumnal, Early Autumn, Breton Girl’s Head, and A Wayside Waif to an exhibition at Dalhousie University. Therefore it is possible, although not certain, that he continued to visit Halifax before finally moving there in 1897 and that Beehives (the work presented here)

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2 According to Stacey and Wylie EightyTwenty, p.41 and Jeffrey Spalding Atlantica: The View from Away (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 2004), p.16 Henry Rosenberg’s first trip to Halifax was likely initiated by James Roy, a Halifax businessman who (like Henry Rosenberg) was a member of New York’s Salmagundi Club. Other possibilities include his New York colleagues Stephen Parrish (1846-1938), a printmaker who frequently worked in the Maritimes and the Halifax born painter Ernest Lawson (1873-1939).
was painted during one of those visits. Regardless of whether or not this is true, *Beehives* is certainly a very fine example of Rosenberg’s skills as a painter and it does date from the time he became acquainted with Nova Scotia.

*Beehives* depicts a row of wooden hives flanked by a tree in an overgrown field. It was painted with a subdued palette dominated by soft shades of brown and green. Rosenberg applied the oil paint in very thin layers over a freehand drawing on the canvas. Several tiny areas of the canvas have been intentionally left exposed (most significantly in the foreground) and are nicely incorporated into the composition. As Robert Stacey and Liz Wylie note in their 1988 historical survey of NSCAD instructors, Henry Rosenberg had a preference for painting small works such as this, often in horizontal compositions. The delicate tonality of *Beehives* has much in common with the landscape paintings of his instructor, Duveneck.³

In 1898 Henry Rosenberg was appointed Principal of the Victoria School of Art and Design, a position that gave him considerable influence over the local art community. As principal, Rosenberg struggled to improve the school as a training place for those concerned with the aesthetic value of art. Unlike some members of his board of directors, he had limited interest in expanding the curriculum to train commercial artists or offer expanded courses in applied graphic design (despite the fact that he had done commercial work himself, and felt graduates should expect to put their skills as artists to practical use). In 1903 he succeeded in moving the school to a larger and more prestigious building, and in 1908 he became a charter member of the Nova Scotia Museum of Fine Arts. In 1909 he married Emily Scarfe, a wealthy heiress from Dartmouth. Upon returning from his honeymoon in January 1910 Rosenberg resigned as Principal in the face of mounting pressure to introduce a more commercially driven curriculum. After his resignation he continued to teach at the Victoria School of Art & Design as a special instructor in lithography⁴ and to paint in Halifax and Dartmouth until 1934 when his wife passed away and he retired to Citronelle, Alabama.

Henry Rosenberg was made Honorary President of the Nova Scotia Society of Artists and contributed to their annual exhibitions from 1930 to 1935. Although he was not a member of any Canadian art societies outside of Halifax he did submit works to the Royal Canadian Academy’s annual exhibition from 1905 to 1921, the Art Association of Montreal’s spring exhibition in 1906, and to the Ontario Society of Artists annual exhibitions from 1915 to 1923.

Please cite in the following manner:

Steven McNeil, Acquisition Proposal for Henry Mortikar Rosenberg’s *Beehives*, accession #41465, Curatorial File, National Gallery of Canada.

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³ See: Frank Duveneck (New York: Chapellier Gallery, 1972) no. 33 *Polling Landscape* 1881 and no. 54 *Indian Courtyard* 1886.

⁴ Stacey and Wylie *EightyTwenty*, p.42-43