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THE MET 150

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MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES FOR THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM JOURNAL

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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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John Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer*: Censorship, Geologic Time, and Truth

AMY WERBEL

Approaching *A Bachelor's Drawer*, the viewer immediately becomes aware that rummaging is not a possibility, even though a drawer typically offers a cavity that may be explored (fig. 1). Instead, John Haberle's imposing painting presents an impenetrable facade. Measuring three feet in width, *A Bachelor's Drawer* is not only unusually large for a still life painting, but is also the second largest of the artist's career. Even more startling are the subjects in the work. The intimate contents of Haberle's bureau, and there is no doubt that they belong to him, are on full display on the external, vertical surface, rather than inside.

To better understand the origins of *A Bachelor's Drawer*, it makes sense to begin with the bachelor himself, John Haberle, who was born and raised and spent nearly all his life in New Haven, Connecticut. Like so many artists



of his generation, Haberle began his professional career working in lithography studios, first in New Haven and then in Montreal. He also, quite happily, was engaged to draw fossils under the direction of Othniel Charles Marsh at Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History. At the age of twenty-seven, with the goal of "taking up the brush," this son of German immigrants moved to New York in 1884, where he completed two years of training at the National Academy of Design. Even before he finished his studies, Haberle's extraordinarily fine trompe l'oeil effects attracted both favorable attention and profitable sales. Always a proud son of New Haven, he

returned home, where he spent the bulk of his career creating and selling still life paintings.¹

The autobiographical nature of *A Bachelor's Drawer* has never been in question. Haberle began work on the painting in 1890 at the age of thirty-three, about the time he courted his future wife, Sarah Emack. The timing of their romance is somewhat uncertain, but according to census records, Sarah and John were married in 1892, and their first daughter, Vera, was born in 1894, the year the painting was completed.² Lest there be any confusion about the relationship between artist and painting, Haberle included a tintype photograph of himself (fig. 2) as a form of signature at lower right, a



fig. 1 John Haberle (American, 1856–1933). *A Bachelor's Drawer*, 1890–94. Oil on canvas, 20 × 36 in. (50.8 × 91.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Henry R. Luce Gift, 1970 (1970.193)

fig. 2 Detail of *A Bachelor's Drawer* (fig. 1)



trick he had used before, and a pamphlet titled *How to Name the Baby*, above.

In May 1894, a reporter for the *New Haven Evening Leader* interviewed Haberle about his recently finished painting. Included in the story is a thorough accounting of the many items depicted:

A large number of such articles as might be found in the bureau drawer of any bachelor, are reproduced in oil. . . . On the drawer is represented a penny comic valentine which some mischievous niece has probably sent to the "Old Bachelor," who is shown in lithographic crudeness. At the other end is a group of paper currency. . . . An old corn cob pipe, supported by a leather strap, a number of cigarette pictures, several playing cards, a pawn ticket, lottery tickets, several theater seat coupons, [and] horse race tickets, are among some of the objects.³

Out of this cacophonous portrait of Haberle's "bachelor" life, several unifying themes emerge, including censorship, geologic time, and truth.

CENSORSHIP

The 1894 *New Haven Evening Leader* article that detailed the objects included in "Haberle's Masterpiece" noted the depiction of one particularly audacious item from the drawer: "A cabinet photograph of female model with an envelope band pasted across part of it to avoid confiscation by some disciple of Anthony Comstock."⁴ The journalist might fairly have pointed out that in fact, nearly everything visible in the painting represented an item that in 1894 was subject to confiscation by censorious agents of Comstock.

Anthony Comstock is not well known today, but for more than forty years, from 1872 to 1915, newspaper readers across the country were familiar with his exploits. During his long tenure as secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice [NYSSV] and a special agent for the United States Post Office Department, Comstock held broad authority to investigate and prosecute the production and distribution of obscene materials, as well as other crimes of perceived immorality. His powers stemmed from both state and federal laws passed beginning in 1873, which made a vast array of images and objects unlawful. Birth control and abortifacients became illegal for the first time in federal law under Comstock's watch, and he also gained prosecutorial authority when postal service inspectors gained the power to police these alleged crimes.⁵

Although Comstock began his career as a censor with the goal mostly of eradicating pornography and

fig. 3 Annie Sutherland, from Actresses series of trade cards by unknown publisher, ca. 1888. Albumen photograph, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{16}$ in. (9.5 × 5.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick (Burdick 230, N668.114)



birth control, eventually his beat included numerous kinds of gambling and theatrical performances designed to entertain men, which are alluded to by the stubs Haberle painted in the *Bachelor's Drawer* at bottom right. The partial legibility of these tickets allows the artist to reference but not fully implicate his sources of amusement. Haberle's obfuscation was by no means arbitrary. By 1894, Comstock's arrest blotters reveal that he had seized three million lottery tickets, 1.8 million pool tickets used for betting on athletics, and 900 packs of playing cards, and suppressed seven improper plays. More than 1,882 arrests had been made.⁶ Almost all these raids took place in homosocial spheres, populated primarily by bachelors and "sporting men." As a strict evangelical armed with extraordinary powers to ferret out allegedly illegal materials, Comstock had nearly free rein in these domains to try and improve American morals through censorship. He had some success—at the very least, he arrested hundreds of people and destroyed tons of mass-produced materials. In the art world, he had less luck.

When Haberle arrived in New York to study at the National Academy of Design in 1884, Comstock was engaged in touting an early victory in his efforts to police the exhibitions and transactions of artists and art

dealers. The artist cannot possibly have missed the well-publicized legal battle. The case that cracked the door open to art censorship was *People v. Muller*, which originated when Comstock raided an art gallery and seized photographic reproductions of French academic nudes including the *Birth of Venus* by Alexandre Cabanel.⁷ The standard applied by the *Muller* court was derived from an English case, *Regina v. Hicklin* (1868), in which obscenity was defined as anything that had a tendency "to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." If even a single individual—for example a child—might be depraved, then the image could not legally be owned, exhibited, lent, or sold.⁸ Comstock and his agents proceeded to threaten art dealers across New York and other states in the following years, by delivering copies of the decision in *Muller*.

In 1887, Comstock's seizures of photographic reproductions of the nude in art became much more widely publicized when he raided Knoedler's Gallery, the haunt of New York's most prosperous collectors. Many of the city's celebrated artists erupted in protest, including William Merritt Chase, who suggested to newspaper reporters that he was raising money to send Comstock to Europe for "a careful tour of the great galleries" that would improve his "taste and judgment."⁹ With this fiery rebuke in mind, the court ruled in *Knoedler* more narrowly that reproductions of paintings blatantly depicting scenes of prostitution were illegal, but more demure nymphs and Venuses such as Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, generally speaking, were fine.

Haberle did not include any of these types of acceptable "high art" images in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, but instead chose to depict the types of "lowbrow" ephemera and photographs that occupied much more liminal legal terrain. From the top down, the "valentine" depicts a stylish dandy, and a pamphlet advises on naming babies. Publications of this type never were swept up in raids. Here they cleverly allude to the artist's transition from a single man occupied by the details of his dress and grooming to a married man concerned with impending fatherhood.

Below that group is a set of images that held more tenuous status. They are the size and character of cigarette cards, which were cheaply produced as collectible inserts by tobacco companies beginning in the late nineteenth century. The fashionably dressed Gibson Girl offers no hint of scandal. She is superseded to her right by an innocuous image of the new baby enthroned, now howling. Innocence quickly yields to prurience: underneath the baby is a photograph of an actress in tights, an

fig. 4 Jules Lefebvre
(French, 1836–1911). *La Vérité*, 1870. Oil on canvas,
104 × 44 1/4 in. (264 ×
112 cm). Musée d'Orsay,
Paris (RF 1981 29, LUX 169)

fig. 5 Guglielmo Marconi
(Italian, 1874–1937).
Photograph from Life, 1873.
Bibliothèque Nationale de
France, Paris (EO 46 [1]
DL 1873)

image of the sort that occupied censors, detectives, attorneys, judges, and juries for much of the 1880s and 1890s.

Actress cards first became the subject of notable courtroom drama during Haberle's years in New York. In 1884, the photographers Otto and Napoleon Sarony and several of their competitors paid for an expensive legal team to defend a peddler named Charles Conroy, who was charged with selling an obscene image of the actress Annie Sutherland. The specific image at issue in the trial appears not to have survived but court transcripts indicate that the outfit Sutherland wore in the photograph included tights and fringed shorts similar

to Haberle's actress in *A Bachelor's Drawer*. Despite, or perhaps because of, the notoriety caused by the trial, Sutherland went on to an even more successful career posing in her infamous tights and shorts on cigarette cards, including several examples in the Metropolitan Museum's Jefferson R. Burdick Collection (fig. 3).¹⁰

Farther down the face of the bureau drawer, Haberle presents a mounted photograph of a smiling woman, looking directly at the viewer. This is no demure and proper young lady, coyly averting her eyes from a flirtatious gaze. Instead, she could easily be a brothel sex worker, tinted with makeup, wearing a



fig. 6 Guglielmo Marconi.
 Photograph from *Life*, 1873.
 Bibliothèque Nationale de
 France, Paris (EO 46 [2]
 DL 1870 492)

fig. 7 Circle of Thomas
 Eakins. *Thomas Eakins and
 J. Laurie Wallace, Nude from
 Rear, in Front of Boat at
 Shoreline*, ca. 1883. Albumen
 print, 3½ × 4 in. (8.9 ×
 10.2 cm). Pennsylvania
 Academy of the Fine Arts,
 Philadelphia, Charles
 Bregler's Thomas Eakins
 Collection, purchased with
 the partial support of the
 Pew Memorial Trust
 (1985.68.2.454)

flamboyant hat, and thrusting her naked shoulder forward, with a small lapdog suggestive of carnal delights. It is difficult to overstate the ubiquity of these types of provocative images in New York, and Comstock's hopeless efforts to stem their flow. In 1888, a raid on a single supplier netted more than 10,000 supposedly obscene cigarette cards ready to be distributed.¹¹

In the lowest reaches of the painting, Haberle finally shocks his audience with the painted representation of a photograph of a full-length standing nude woman. The journalist for the *New Haven Evening Leader* called attention to the paper envelope band, claiming that it served to render the image innocuous to "some disciple of Anthony Comstock."¹² However, Haberle has fictitiously torn the paper nearly through at exactly the spot that would be most illicit, thus calling attention to the frisson of potential criminality.

Comstock and his compatriots would not have found the slim band in any way exonerating. By 1895, more than 800,000 photographs had been burned under the auspices of the NYSSV—and many were far less revealing.¹³



In his self-portrait near the foot of this provocative image, Haberle stares wide-eyed, perhaps daring the viewer to take action. To his right, a jumbled residue of virtue and vice provides distraction—a burning cigarette, a pen knife, lottery and theater tickets, and a palm card presumably distributed by an evangelical reform society. “When Tempted / When Afflicted / When Troubled / When Sick,” the card reads, but Haberle’s bachelor buries his opportunity for redemption, foregrounding controversial amusements rather than respectable behavior.

Most intriguingly, the artist has done almost nothing to lessen the shock of the nude; to the contrary, Haberle used his distinctive technique of building up the edges of the represented subject with gesso, to make the photograph appear with even more extraordinary three-dimensionality.¹⁴ The model’s nipple and armpit hair make clear that she has not powdered and shaved herself as was customary to approximate classical statuary and therefore claim the status of art rather than pornography. Instead, Haberle presents the most contested form of nude photography existent at the time of his painting.

Photographs of nudes were made in a variety of contexts in the United States in the late nineteenth century, from medical and scientific efforts such as those by Eadweard Muybridge that were deemed legal, to explicit scenes of sexual activities typically shot in brothels. Haberle shows neither of these, but instead depicts what was most often called a “photograph of a living model,” referring to images made for artists as preparatory studies for figurative works. Haberle’s reproduced cabinet photograph fits neatly into this category, in which models were unshaven and typically posed with even lighting and only slight decorative use of props. No narrative theme is suggested other than that of a model holding a pose. Photographs of living models mostly were made in Paris and few artists, with the notable exception of Thomas Eakins, bothered to produce them in the United States.¹⁵

The reluctance of most American photographers to create images of nudes for study purposes stemmed not only from the strict Comstock-inspired obscenity laws, but also from the fact that French photographers like Louis Igout offered voluminous, high-quality catalogue cards of multiple scenes, from which artists could order larger mounted cabinet versions. The enormous variety of subjects in these images derived from both classical and modern artistic sources and also effectively perpetuated them for new generations. In France, this reciprocal effect was nearly seamless, as demonstrated by the close relationship between Jules Lefebvre’s *La Vérité* (fig. 4) and the same stance held by the model in a

photograph by Guglielmo Marconi (fig. 5). This photograph, dating three years after the painting made its celebrated appearance in the 1870 Salon in Paris, illustrates the way models studied and reproduced the poses in famous works as well as serving as inspiration for them.

Despite the obvious intended purpose of photographs of living models, their erotic possibilities were unavoidable and cast them into a fragile legal status nearly everywhere they were distributed and viewed. Even in France, photographers including Igout and Marconi were careful to clear and register their photographs with official French censors in the years before 1881. In many cases, the photographers were compelled to declare their intended audience and purpose in bold letters on the surrounding mounts, as Marconi does in his portrait of a muscular male model (fig. 6). After 1881, more liberal politicians essentially eliminated art censorship in France and photographers rarely were disturbed by the possibility of an obscenity prosecution.¹⁶

Photographs of living models were sold in the United States in large numbers during Haberle’s career, and they appear in several court cases involving well-known artists, with mixed results. In 1885, a judge allowed John La Farge to keep his photographs of nudes when his holdings were liquidated during bankruptcy proceedings, on the basis that they were never meant to be seen by anyone other than the artist. The following year, the New York photographer Frank Hegger was convicted of selling French photographs that had received a stamp of approval in Paris, a crime for which he paid a considerable fine in addition to losing the value of his stock.¹⁷

In Philadelphia, Comstock raided a series of artist’s supply stores that sold photographs of living models, also in 1886. At the trial, the defense attorney noted that the photographs were imported, had passed through the Customs office, and a duty had been paid on them as works of art. He further provided justification for their use, stating: “It was too expensive for artists to obtain living models for their work and photographs were substituted.”¹⁸ Eakins testified as a witness for the defense, less than a year after he had been fired from his position at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for making his own versions of these photographs, many with students (fig. 7). Fortunately for the art dealers, the judge dismissed the cases, informing Comstock that “it seems absurd for New York detectives to come over here and try to demonstrate that recognized works of art are obscene. . . . There may be a higher standard of virtue than in New York which we here do not have.”¹⁹

fig. 8 Kenyon Cox
(American, 1856–1919).
Diana, n.d. Oil on canvas,
30 × 18¼ in. (76.2 ×
46.4 cm). Chazen Museum
of Art, Madison, Wisconsin,
Gift in memory of Harold G.
Laun (1995.45)



fig. 9 Louis Saint-Gaudens
(American, 1854–1913).
Study for World's Columbian
Exposition Commemorative
Presentation Medal
(reverse), 1892–93. Cast
plaster, 8 in. (20.3 cm).
Harvard Art Museums/Fogg
Museum, Gift of Agnes
Mongan (1974.63)



As a result of such incidents, it is no surprise that American artists and photographers routinely condemned and ridiculed Comstock. The Society of American Artists issued a harsh rebuke to his efforts in 1887, and from that point on relations between artists and censors steadily deteriorated. In 1893, at the same time Haberle was at work on *A Bachelor's Drawer*, the subject of art censorship once again flooded newspapers, thanks to the defiant displays of artists and performers at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. While belly dancing was famously shocking audiences on the lowbrow Midway Plaisance, American artists were staging their own rebellion in the loftier spheres of the White City by displaying abundant nudes, from Augustus Saint-Gaudens's *Diana* atop the Agricultural Building,²⁰ to Kenyon Cox's *Diana* (fig. 8) on view indoors.

When the United States Senate Quadro-Centennial Committee rejected Louis Saint-Gaudens's design for a commemorative medal on the basis that it displayed a nude male figure (fig. 9), the sculptor proclaimed to newspapers on behalf of the Society of American Artists that its annual exhibition for 1894 would be filled with nudes so that he would be "triumphantly vindicated."²¹ Saint-Gaudens's prediction was premature by a year; while the 1894 exhibition was fairly demure, the works displayed in 1895 fully lived up to his threat. The catalogue broke with tradition by illustrating three paintings of nudes: Cox's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Joseph De Camp's *Nude with*

a Globe, and Herbert Denman's *Nymphs and Swans* (figs. 10a, b, 11). Other institutions responded with more nudes. In 1894, the conservative National Academy of Design joined the cause, displaying two of Napoleon Sarony's hand-colored photographs of nudes, called "living pictures," in its Annual Exhibition (fig. 12).²²

Given that Haberle studied at the National Academy of Design in 1884 and 1885, visited New York exhibitions regularly in following decades, and attended the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, he undoubtedly knew about many of these trials and increasing displays of nudes, or at the very least was well aware of the questionable legal status of photographs of living models.²³ His inclusion of this controversial type of image, surrounded by other mementos of questionable morality, represents Haberle's personal contribution to the artistic resistance against censorship so prominent in 1894. At the end of his *New Haven Leader* interview that year, Haberle went so far as to promise that he would thenceforth "devote himself entirely to broader work and will make a specialty of figure composition."²⁴ Although he did not carry out that pledge, his comment nevertheless may be read as expressing his defiant interest in continuing to paint nudes at that moment. If *A Bachelor's Drawer* represents the artist's contribution to the resistance against puritanical censorship, it also reveals his very particular ideological vantage point in doing so.

fig. 10a, b Illustrations in Society of American Artists 1895

fig. 11 Illustration in Society of American Artists 1895

fig. 12 Napoleon Sarony. "The Wave, After P. Dupuis," in Sarony 1894, pl. [8]



10a



10b



11



12

GEOLOGIC TIME

One of the more striking aspects of *A Bachelor's Drawer* is its eccentric arrangement, with most of the dramatic elements located on the right side of the canvas. As Edward Nygren perceptively observed, the bawdy items are displayed "like so many poker or black-jack hands on the front of the drawer."²⁵ Alternatively, the unusual compositional choice may be understood as a meditation upon time, rather than an evocation of chance. More specifically, Haberle's configuration suggests an autobiographical reflection upon the concept of geologic time.²⁶

A unifying theme on both sides of *A Bachelor's Drawer* is the seemingly random placement of the

objects, almost all in layered stacks. Against the orderly horizontals and perpendiculars of the drawer's false front, Haberle's subjects are strewn across the canvas as a series of rectangular shapes, set off-kilter, a mass of detritus signifying a man who has neither time nor interest in straightening the piles, or disposing of garbage. There are no tools to correct this crooked situation; the handles once used to open the drawer are gone, leaving just the shadows of their former placement, and the key to the drawer is nowhere in sight. Although the thermometer records a temperature of 74 degrees Fahrenheit, the situation seems far less temperate.

In *Time and Eternity*, painted in 1889, Haberle experimented with a similarly unbalanced composition (fig. 13). On the spare, left side of the picture plane, time is represented as measured and quantified by the mechanical operations of the stopwatch. The cracked glass suggests the damage caused by age and use. A news clipping placed below the stopwatch, as in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, calls attention to censorship, although in a different mode than the more celebrated work he would begin the following year. The clipping reads "TIME AND ETERNITY. / Bob Ingersoll. / PROVIDENCE, July 4. - In the county jail." The terse fictional headline is laden with significance.

Robert Ingersoll, a celebrated attorney, writer, and lecturer, was famously called "The Great Agnostic," for his fierce defense of religious freedom, and especially the freedom of those who did not believe in any organized religion. In 1886, he defended an atheist named C. B. Reynolds, who was charged with the crime of blasphemy under an antiquated New Jersey law. Reynolds was convicted and received a fine of twenty-five dollars; nevertheless it served as a ripe opportunity for Ingersoll to publicize his brilliant oratory on behalf of free expression.²⁷ Haberle's fanciful choice of the site of "Providence" and the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence for Ingersoll's visit to a "county jail" in his fake news clipping calls attention to perennial American conflicts between church and state exacerbated by censorship campaigns.²⁸



fig. 13 John Haberle. *Time and Eternity*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 14 × 10 in. (35.6 × 25.4 cm). New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, Stephen B. Lawrence Fund (1952.01)

The right side of *Time and Eternity* confirms that these were issues about which Haberle deeply cared. Hung up to the right of the watch and clipping are suggestions of the passage of time on earth as seen through a religious lens, as a series of choices of vice or virtue. A cigarette card with a coy photograph of a pensive female model, hair down and possibly unclothed, lies beneath tickets to plays and horse races, money spent and cards played, and finally, keeping all the *memento peccari* ("remember that you will sin") in place is a crucifix hanging from rosary beads, perhaps a symbol of the cycle of sin and repentance in the Catholic faith. The unpainted wood board against which this battle takes place is a symbol of the corporeal reality of the tree's growth over time, complete with knots and veins.

Haberle's subsequent composition, *A Bachelor's Drawer*, extended the theme of time's passage in a more brooding and elliptical meditation on scientific versus religious chronologies. His fascination with epistemological approaches to time had deep roots. In his "Recollections," Haberle mockingly wrote:

It is a pity that the [apple] that caused the fall of Adam did not fall on his old CoCo, as it did on Sr. Isaac Newton's and demonstrate the theory of the central force of gravity of the earth, and then if later on the great master (who is supposed to have possessed a spiritual body which could overcome a certain natural law) had told us something about the shape of the earth, we would now be much further advanced in science.

Later on, he noted: "My best time before I took up the brush was while I was at the Yale Peabody Museum, drawing the old fossils which Professor Marsh was having made for publication. I was there when the great biologist, Huxley, was the guest of Yale and Professor Marsh."²⁹ These disparaging references to the Bible, and glowing references to Marsh and Huxley, demonstrate Haberle's attraction to theories that elevated scientific knowledge over theological narrative. During Haberle's life and career, the nature of time was central to this debate.

At the time Othniel Charles Marsh was the most famous paleontologist in America—a professor at Yale University, president of the National Academy of Sciences, and a leader of the U.S. Geological Survey.³⁰ Marsh was one of the first American converts to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In this belief, he followed his guest at Yale during Haberle's tenure there, Thomas Henry Huxley, renowned as "Darwin's bulldog," and one of his first English adherents. In 1876, Huxley

fig. 14 Bones of scapular arch and sternum of *Hesperornis regalis*, in Marsh 1880, pl. 6.



traveled to New Haven to see the extraordinary collection of fossils that Marsh had amassed in the American West and Midwest. His son and biographer described the visit as “a revelation . . . ‘Professor Marsh would simply turn to his assistant and bid him fetch box number so and so,’ until Huxley finally exclaimed, ‘I believe you are a magician; whatever I want, you just conjure it up.’” Darwin himself wrote to Marsh to praise him for his work on toothed birds, which, he said, “afforded the best support to the theory of Evolution, which has appeared within the last twenty years.”³¹

Haberle’s work at the Peabody Museum of Natural History in the 1870s, at the time of Huxley’s visit, included drafting illustrations for the precise volume Darwin praised: Marsh’s generative work *Odontornithes: A Monograph on the Extinct Toothed Birds of North America*, published in 1880.³² The preface to the impressive tome described the landscape that had yielded the unprecedented collection of fossils: “Along the eastern

slope of the Rocky Mountains, and especially on the adjoining plains in Kansas and Colorado, there is a series of Cretaceous strata remarkably rich in vertebrate fossils. The deposits are all marine, and, away from the mountains, they lie nearly horizontal. . . . here have been found the extinct Birds which form the subject of the present memoir.”³³

By the time of his publication, Marsh no longer needed to specifically explain the concept of geologic time that these remarks relied upon. The observation that rocks and fossils were laid in horizontal strata with older deposits found at deeper levels had been accepted by geologists since the early eighteenth century. Well before the 1870s, the aim of paleontologists and geologists had shifted to refining their chronological periodization of the earth and its inhabitants, rather than considering alternative theories.

In *Odontornithes*, Haberle contributed to illustrations of the excavated fossils in plates such as number VI,

Hesperornis regalis, in which the fragmentary remains of the toothed bird were viewed from above on the surface of the page (fig. 14). In *A Bachelor's Drawer*, Haberle's similar inversion of his surface and inclusion of the "remarkably rich" fossilized remains of his own bachelorhood are evocative of the products dug out of the "Cretaceous strata" Marsh described. Analyzing *A Bachelor's Drawer* in relation to the conceptual architecture of geologic time provides new insight into Haberle's thought process when composing the painting.

Imagining geologic time as an organizing framework within the picture suggests two ways of "reading" the work. Moving from the bottom of the picture plane to the top, the work could be understood as Haberle's personal evolution, from the remains of his life as art student and bachelor, signified by the photograph from life and theater tickets, to his more presentable occupations as a well-groomed and eligible bachelor above. In the topmost "strata," Haberle finally deposits the accoutrements of his life as husband and father, signified by the baby-naming pamphlet. In this sense, *A Bachelor's Drawer* evokes the concept of geologic time, measured in detritus deposited in layers with past below and present above.

Geologic time in *A Bachelor's Drawer* may be read in another way as well. In a visceral sense, the appeal of trompe l'oeil paintings has always relied upon the viewer's awareness of just how much time was required to produce the ruse. For Haberle, as well as his kindred trompe l'oeil painters William Michael Harnett and John Frederick Peto, there were never any rapid gestures or scumbled distant backgrounds. Even judged against the work of these other consummate practitioners, *A Bachelor's Drawer* reveals its extraordinary consumption of the artist's time in a resounding manner.

Haberle worked on *A Bachelor's Drawer* for four years, adding objects on top of objects, so that the viewer may metaphorically excavate sedimentary deposits not only from bottom to top, but also from surface to substrate. The out-of-date currency at left ranges from Reconstruction-era "fractional currency" on the top of the heap, to an early Connecticut twenty-shilling note at bottom.³⁴ On the opposite side, the baby rests atop the dandy, and spades atop the hearts—in short, time outplays all. In this sense, Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer* revisits the themes of several previous works, including *Time and Eternity*, as well as *Changes in Time*, which pairs pictures of long-defunct currency with a paraded "frame" of past Presidents of the United States. These works all remind viewers

that human lives will pass into oblivion on par with the toothed birds of the Cretaceous Era—a position distinctly at odds with the evangelical censors of his day, including Comstock, who proselytized a much different version of the "truth" of human existence and afterlife.

TRUTH

In his epistolary account of "Recollections" addressed to his daughter Vera in 1925, Haberle remarked: "Your father, owing to his religious disbeliefs, might be taken for a bad man, but as bad men smoke, drink, gamble, and dissipate generally, he cannot be classed as one. . . . To enter wedlock he would have neither priest, minister, or rabbi . . . a justice of the peace was good enough for holy matrimony." Haberle continued to include a variety of complaints against religious dogma, including quips such as "The Bible miracles were all possible, but not probable," in addition to several more supportive claims to the power of faith.³⁵ In this short statement, Haberle allied himself with the central argument of the agnosticism of Robert Ingersoll, whom he had referenced in *Time and Eternity*, and of Thomas Huxley, whom Haberle remembered long after his visit to New Haven while the artist was working for Othniel Charles Marsh.

Besides his extraordinary contributions to the fields of biology and paleontology, Huxley also grappled with the philosophical shifts that accompanied the extension of Darwinian ideas to the story of humanity. For his efforts, he was called out as an infidel by creationists, who believed that evolutionary theory challenged the centrality and agency of God.³⁶ Despite the fierce rationality of agnostic thought, or perhaps because of it, backlash from Christian conservatives once again involved censorship at the precise moment Haberle was painting *A Bachelor's Drawer*.

In 1892, Congressman Hilary A. Herbert of Alabama gave a speech on the House floor decrying the expense of government funds on an edition of *Odontornithes* produced by the U.S. Geological Survey. Calling the work "atheistic rubbish," he then organized a cut to the budget of the organization.³⁷ Both Haberle's subject matter and his compositional choices suggest that the debate between these two epistemological stances was on his mind. His own ideological stance is indisputable. Haberle was so proud of his contributions to *Odontornithes* that he always kept one of the plates hanging on the wall of his studio, with his name on an adjacent label.³⁸ Truth, for Haberle, lay in strata, not sermons.

The artist's fascination for debates regarding the determination of truth extended to his engagement

with the concept of *trompe l'oeil* painting, as well as to his numerous, complex depictions of currency. Throughout his career, Haberle, like Harnett and Peto, grappled with disdain from America's fine-art elite. For critics like John Ruskin and his many followers, eye-fooling images bore nothing of the imaginative spirit required for art. Instead, they were termed "mechanical feats" that required audiences only to think about what was real or fake, rather than to ponder loftier ideals. Paul Staiti amply documents the torrent of criticism *trompe l'oeil* paintings received from critics like Clarence Cook and artists like George Inness, all of whom were deeply invested in the project of proving the worth of American painting. *Trompe l'oeil* seemed to these observers devoid of the seriousness, feeling, expression, and interpretation required of true art.³⁹

The prejudice against *trompe l'oeil* had significant ramifications for artists practicing this ancient genre. On the basis that the paintings were not real art, but rather were deceptions, they often were, as Gertrude Grace Sill writes, "exhibited and sold in art supply and frame shops, bars, hotel and theater lobbies, and fairs and exhibition halls. . . . Haberle himself referred to his painting style as 'artistic mechanics.'"⁴⁰ Rather than taking offense, the artist delighted in provocatively playing upon the concepts of deceit and truth. This playful spirit is especially evident in Haberle's depictions of currency.

Money is a common element in nineteenth-century *trompe l'oeil* paintings, as it provided an opportunity to test the artist's skill at depicting counterfeit. Calling attention to this popular play between fake and real,

Haberle scrawled upon the topmost "fractional currency" in *A Bachelor's Drawer* the following suggestion of criminality: "This note with a lot of counterfeit money and detectives from New York . . . claim this to be genuine." With tongue firmly in cheek, Haberle's "detectives" vouched that the artist's forgery was true.⁴¹

Haberle's predilection for teasing audiences to debate the veracity of his painted currency has been noted by other art historians. Sill pointed out that the artist tackled the subject early and often in his career, after seeing Harnett's *Still Life—Five-Dollar Bill* on exhibition at the National Academy of Design in 1885 (fig. 15). Harnett's exquisite depiction of American currency famously had earned him a visit from the United States Secret Service, which investigated the possibility of counterfeiting, and Haberle courted the same profitable controversy as early as 1889.⁴² In a related argument, Michael Leja contends that Harnett's paintings enticed viewers to distinguish real from fake through analysis of the "mechanisms" involved in the artist's visual tricks, which provided a form of comfort in an age of rampant fraud and corruption.⁴³

The matter of fraudulent currency in a more literal sense also was a matter of Comstockian campaigns during the years Haberle painted *A Bachelor's Drawer*. In May 1893, the *New Haven Morning Journal and Courier* reported that Comstock had arrived in nearby Bridgeport "and assumed personal charge of the effects of the 'green goods' men who opened quarters and commenced operations in this city last week."⁴⁴ The "green goods" ruse involved mailing circulars, typically to rural men, who were promised large quantities of



fig. 15 William Michael Harnett (American, 1848–1892). *Still Life—Five-Dollar Bill*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 8 × 12½ in. (20.3 × 30.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Alex Simpson, Jr., Collection, 1943 (1943-74-5)



fig. 16 Herbert F. Denman (American, 1855–1903). *Nymphs and Swans*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 26 × 36 in. (66 × 91.4 cm). Private collection

perfectly forged currency in exchange for a much smaller amount of legal cash. In contrast to Comstock's raids on art, which were widely unpopular, his suppression of these types of schemes involving the postal service garnered broad support, and numerous, sensational stories across the country. A son of New Canaan, Connecticut, Comstock and his adventures were covered with special attention and interest in Haberle's shared home state.⁴⁵

Although Haberle painted nothing in *A Bachelor's Drawer* as obviously illegal as green goods circulars, his inclusion of legally liminal subjects complicates the supposedly simplistic relationship viewers had to the trompe l'oeil canvas as imagined by Ruskin and others. Are viewers supposed to peer closely at the surface of the picture, determining if the nude photograph and actress card are real? If so, then in the context of 1894, they were engaging in not only an immoral act of looking but also potentially in a violation of the law. At the very least, Haberle invites mixed company to scrutinize the underbelly of a bachelor's life, including pictures that were meant to be seen and enjoyed only by men. The artist appears to use his practice of deception to provide a more complete truth than "high art" painters were willing to expose.

In his own manner of rejecting Comstockery, Haberle engages in deceit that is vastly more honest than the concoctions of artists like Herbert F. Denman, whose *Nymphs and Swans* displayed at the Society of American Artists in 1895 was undoubtedly viewed as a form of courageous defiance (fig. 16).

Instead of presenting nudes that are waxed and bathed in bleaching sunlight, Haberle delivers a painting that more deeply questions the difference between falsehood and veracity.⁴⁶

Returning to Haberle's bachelor years, it is worthwhile to point out that they were longer-lasting than most. Census records document the average age of first marriage in 1890 to be twenty-six years old for men; Haberle waited almost an extra decade, to age thirty-five, before marrying a woman more than fourteen years younger.⁴⁷ The detritus of all those bachelor years, strewn across the picture surface of *A Bachelor's Drawer*, offers the portrait of a flourishing subculture of material, visual, and theatrical amusements enjoyed by the nation's single men, typically out of public view.

Like counterfeit currency, cigarette cards, and lottery tickets, the precarious legal status of photographs of living models and actress cards was abundantly clear, yet also absurd given the enormous numbers of these images, which were viewed by men behind closed doors and then buried in bachelors' drawers. Censorship efforts did not diminish their circulation, but only relegated the images to cloistered spaces in which they were viewed in acts of homosocial solidarity and empowerment. In light of this context, Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer* may be viewed as an act of honest unveiling of men's hidden visual culture and entertainments, as well as a portrait of a personal transition.

In 1894, as he took on the responsibilities of fatherhood, Haberle shed the privileges of bachelorhood and brazenly exhibited them on canvas. In doing so, he joined a generation of artists and activists, working on the cusp of the Progressive Era, who were devoted to overthrowing the outdated puritanism of past centuries, and embracing a more truthful and egalitarian American culture. Unfortunately for Haberle, however, there was no patron willing to purchase *A Bachelor's Drawer*. Despite numerous efforts to sell his most striking work—in New Haven, Springfield, Detroit, and New York—it languished in his home and studio until Vera (the baby in the picture) sold it in 1960, when she cleared the house in which she had lived continuously since childhood. The Metropolitan Museum acquired the painting a decade later.⁴⁸

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NOTES

- A version of this paper was first presented at the Wyeth Foundation in American Art Conference at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2018.
- 1 Sill 2009, pp. 3, 16. Gertrude Grace Sill's exhibition catalogue is the most comprehensive source of information on the artist.
 - 2 The 1910 Census lists the Haberles' ages as: John (53), Sarah (39), Vera (15), and Gladys (12). The couple is listed as having been married for 18 years. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population," Connecticut, New Haven Township and City, Ward 15, District 0443, Sheet No. 3A. Accessed at Ancestry.com, November 12, 2018.
 - 3 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3. For the most complete description of each of these objects, see Sill 2009, pp. 37–39.
 - 4 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 5 The history of Anthony Comstock and nineteenth-century censorship in the United States is covered in much greater detail in Werbel 2018. Comstock's empowerment in 1873 is discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 66–76.
 - 6 New York Society for the Suppression of Vice 1894, p. 21. The NYSSV was a private, evangelical moral reform society that nevertheless held authority to order arrests by virtue of powers granted to it at the time of its incorporation in New York State.
 - 7 MMA 94.24.1.
 - 8 Werbel 2018, pp. 128, 190–203; see also Gillers 2007.
 - 9 *New York Herald*, November 15, 1887, p. 4; quoted in Beisel 1998, pp. 170–71.
 - 10 Werbel 2018, pp. 150–59.
 - 11 "Report of Persons Arrested under the Auspices of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice," MSS 34587, vol. 2, pp. 112–13, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Lynn Pritcher, "Emergence of Advertising in America, 1850–1920: More about Tobacco Advertising and the Tobacco Collections," John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, & Marketing History, Duke University, <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/ea/tobacco.html> (accessed October 10, 2016); "The Art of American Advertising: National Markets," Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, <https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/artadv/national-markets.html> (accessed October 10, 2016). See also Abramovich 2016.
 - 12 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 13 New York Society for the Suppression of Vice 1894, p. 20.
 - 14 For a description of this technique, see Sill 2009, p. 18.
 - 15 For a comprehensive analysis of Eakins's photographs, see Danly and Leibold 1994.
 - 16 Dawkins 2002, pp. 7–85.
 - 17 Werbel 2018, pp. 174–86. The other works Comstock seized in the Hegger raid remained in the original package in which they had arrived, addressed from the firm of Adolphe Braun & Co. in Paris. In 1883, the Braun firm had been designated as the first official photographer of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, with the sole license to photograph and circulate copies of the museum's many treasures. The photographs received from Braun undoubtedly included many paintings and sculptures of the nude as their subjects. "Art Works and Their Photographic Reproduction," Musée d'Orsay, 2006, https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/exhibitions-archives/browse/8/article/oeuvre-dart-et-sa-reproduction-photographique-4241.html?S=1&print=1&no_cache=1&.
 - 18 The sequence and content of the testimony in the Philadelphia cases suggest that Eakins was the customer who had made the initial request to Frederick Weber to order *académies* (academic nudes) from France in 1881. This was the same year Eakins began to create his own versions. In its coverage of the testimony, the *Public Ledger, Philadelphia* (1888, p. 4) recounted: "The defence [*sic*] claimed that it was as necessary to have pictures of this character to study the fine arts as it was to have a dead body for the study of anatomy." This conflation of artistic and medical approaches to the body was precisely Eakins's argument in his own defense two years earlier. McCauley 1994, p. 38; Werbel 2007, pp. 131–32, 186–90.
 - 19 *Public Ledger, Philadelphia*, 1888, p. 4.
 - 20 MMA 1985.353.
 - 21 *Washington Post* 1894, p. 15, quoted in David S. Shields, "Carnal Glory? Nudity and the Fine and Performing Arts, 1890–1917," Broadway Photographs, University of South Carolina, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://broadway.cas.sc.edu/content/carnal-glory-nudity-and-fine-and-performing-arts-1890-1917>.
 - 22 Sarony exhibited *Night and Birth of Venus*; Naylor 1973, vol. 2, p. 822.
 - 23 A postcard Haberle sent home from the Exposition is preserved in John Haberle Papers, 1882–1985 (bulk 1882–1931), box 3, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.
 - 24 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 25 Nygren continues, "As humorous as the composition is, the juxtaposition implies that money is corrupting, an analogy employed at the time by other artists." For both quotes see Nygren 1988, p. 140.
 - 26 James H. Miller addresses a different aspect of geological time in his excellent article "The Flow Will Return: Geological Time in Winslow Homer's Work" (2019). Miller and other art historians addressed in the article are principally concerned with the depiction of geological elements in landscape paintings, and their evocation of concepts including the age of the earth. My approach to Haberle relies upon similar analysis of the influence of physical sciences on American art, but with a contrasting focus in terms of subject matter and aesthetics. The terms "geologic time" and "geological time" are often used interchangeably, with the former used more consistently in Haberle's era.
 - 27 For a comprehensive study of Ingersoll, see Jacoby 2013.
 - 28 Alfred Frankenstein first suggested in 1965 a connection between Haberle's work at the Peabody Museum of Natural History and his paintings: "He was a member of the technical staff at the paleontological museum of Yale University, and the 19th century controversies of science and religion are hinted at in a number of his paintings, notably the irreverent *Time and Eternity* (No. 65), with its rosary beads, its playing cards, and its reference to Robert Ingersoll, the atheist printer." Introduction to Frankenstein 1965, unpaginated.
 - 29 The full text of Haberle's recollections is published in Sill 2009, pp. 1–5.
 - 30 See Cohen 1980.
 - 31 Conniff 2016.
 - 32 Edelson and Narendra 1987.
 - 33 Marsh 1880, p. 2.
 - 34 Sill 2009, pp. 37–38.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.
 - 36 For a nuanced view of these debates, see Gilley and Loades 1981. See also Huxley 1889, p. 21.
 - 37 Moore, Decker, and Cotner 2010, p. 133.

- 38 Edelson and Narendra 1987, pp. 25–30.
- 39 Staiti 2002, pp. 100–102.
- 40 Sill 2009, p. 7.
- 41 See Nygren 1988. The frequent inclusion of money in nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil paintings also has been interpreted by previous scholars as a nod to corruption and commodification pervasive in the Gilded Age, as well as the “moral temptations and the dangers of being enticed to reach for easy money.” Staiti 2002, p. 95.
- 42 Sill 2009, pp. 15, 25. Edward Nygren proposes that Haberle's inclusion only of “worthless and disintegrating bills” may have been a way of avoiding government scrutiny, and “may have also been intended in part as a commentary on the uncertainty of paper money not backed by specie.” Nygren 1988, p. 140.
- 43 Leja 2006, pp. 145–47.
- 44 *Morning Journal and Courier* 1893, p. 3.
- 45 In New Haven's *Morning Journal and Courier* between 1890 and 1894, Comstock's name appears at least six times. Comstock's raid in Bridgeport in 1893 was extensively and favorably described across the country, as for example in the *Topeka Daily Press* 1893, p. 2.
- 46 Mark Mitchell notes that Haberle's *The Changes of Time* (1888) “is as much about history itself as it is about the American past.” Mitchell also points out that Haberle makes a claim through newspaper clippings included in the work that he “perpetrated” his deceptions “honestly.” Mitchell 2015, p. 204.
- 47 “Historical Marital Status Tables,” November 2019, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html>.
- 48 Object file for MMA 1970.193 in the American Wing. I thank Sylvia Yount, Lawrence A. Fleischman Curator in Charge of the American Wing, and Lillian Paulson for facilitating my visit to examine the file.

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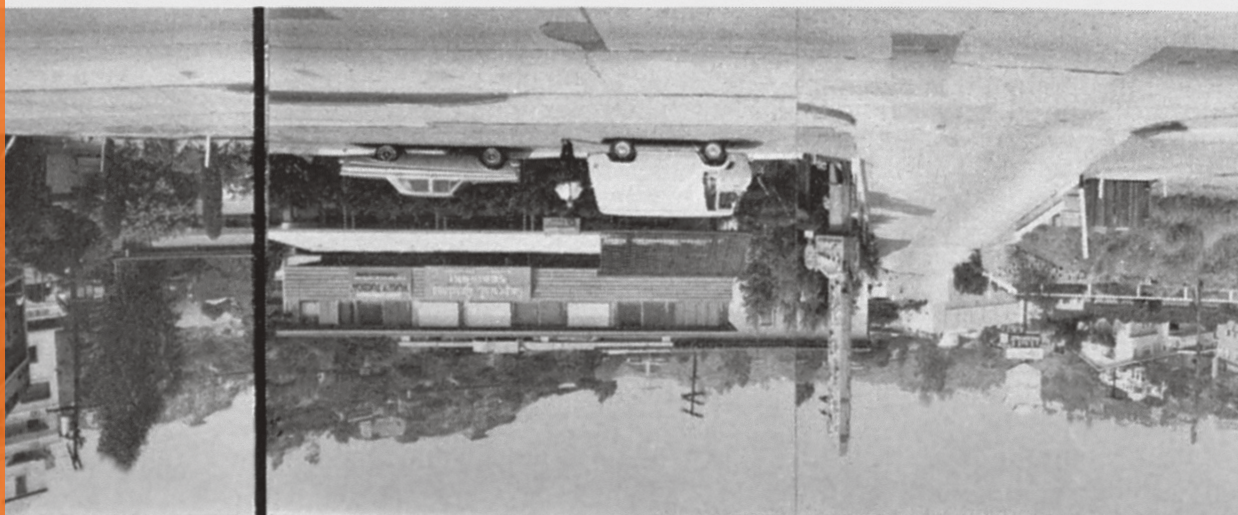
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