

CUMING, Beatrice Lavis

Beatrice Lavis Cuming was born in 1903 in Brooklyn, New York and died in 1974 in Uncasville, Connecticut. Ms. Cuming studied locally at the Pratt Institute Art School before departing for Paris to attend the Academie Colarossi.

Within two years, she was back in New York working as an illustrator and attending classes at the Art Students League in 1928-29. Following a four-year sojourn to France and North Africa, Cuming again returned to New York where she came under the influence of Charles Burchfield, Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth.

In 1934, Cuming moved to New London, Connecticut, where she remained for the balance of her career, participating in the Public Works of Art and WPA Federal Art Projects, teaching art classes and directing the Young People's Art Program at the Lyman Allen Museum from 1937 through 1967. She exhibited widely, including solo exhibitions in New York City at the Guy Mayer Gallery (1942) and Contemporary Artists Gallery (1946) as well as various Connecticut venues culminating in retrospectives at the Lyman Allen Museum in 1968 and 1990.

The present work is reminiscent of Sheeler in its focus on the industrial environment and of Edward Hopper in its sense of urban isolation. The three figures in the middle ground of the painting serve in one sense to provide scale and in another to underscore industrial dominance. "Her typical subjects are buoys, drydock cradles, industrial plants, bridges, storage sheds," wrote New York Times critic Edward Alden Jewett. "Miss Cuming paints a man's world, and she does so with uncompromising vigor."

Various features of the painting provide inconsistent evidence regarding its origin. The presence of a 1931 date on the stretcher is difficult to explain, as Cuming was then in Europe. There is also a Socony (Standard Oil Company of New York) billboard on the right side of the composition. Although the artist was commissioned by Standard Oil Company in the 1940s to paint watercolors depicting company plants in Philadelphia and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, there is no evidence that the commission included oils and the Socony billboard is an inconsequential aspect of the composition. Finally, there is another separate stretcher inscription containing the artist's name above a reference to "New London," the Connecticut city to which Cuming moved in 1934. The similarity of the subject matter to some of her other New London industrial landscapes of the period suggests that the work was most likely done in that city in the mid- to late Thirties.

Museums:

Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA

Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, CT

Mystic Art Association Gallery, Mystic, CT

Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR

"New York Times" art review of February, 3 1942, courtesy Ira "Bud" Hillyer of Palm Springs, California.

Biography courtesy of Roughton Galleries, www.antiquesandfineart.com/roughton