

***George M. Bruestle***  
***(1871 - 1939)***

***Native Ground***

Sometimes intimate in scale and mood and at other times sweeping in their breadth, the always vibrant paintings of George M. Bruestle have long been associated with the pastoral landscape scenery of Lyme, Connecticut. Born to German immigrants in New York City in 1871, Bruestle studied art first in New York and then in Paris. His initial sojourn to Connecticut brought him to Essex in 1886, and he was in Hadlyme by 1900, thus establishing him as an early member of the Old Lyme Art Colony. In 1905 he bought a summer home in the Hamburg section of Lyme. Although he continued to maintain a residence in Manhattan, and was an active member of numerous New York City art associations—the Society of American Artists, the National Arts Club, Allied Artists of America, the Salmagundi Club, and the Lotos Club—his signature work was inspired by the rural topography of the Connecticut River Valley.

Bruestle's work suggests myriad influences, from the art of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), to the gestural and graphically dramatic painting of early 20<sup>th</sup> century American realism. What unifies these various strains is Bruestle's consistent fascination with farms, roads, hillsides, rocky croppings and weathered architecture, and the sensuous and richly expressive paint application he employed to sculpt the light-struck forms of his favorite bucolic settings. Over time the artist's sensitive naturalism, reminiscent of the French Barbizon school, evolved into a broader and more dynamic compositional manner. The later paintings feature a freshness of color suggestive of work done *en plein air*, while demonstrating a selection of motifs that may well have been perfected in the studio. In this show each of these strains can be fully appreciated.

A plein air portrait of a magnificent tree, *Meadow Oak* is an accomplished study in the style of Corot. Painted in Essex, Connecticut, and dated 1886, when Bruestle would have been only 15, it is remarkable for its naturalistic observation and confidence of execution. A further essay on the Barbizon theme is the more complex and finely drawn composition *An Old Mill*, a canvas from 1892 which sets the serpentine rhythms of a tree against geometric architecture. An opening between buildings allows for a glimpse of distant landscape.

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*In the Village* and *Summer by the Barns* are no less carefully observed than the earlier paintings. Beautiful works composed primarily of earth tones, *In the Village* reveals a winter landscape gently warmed by sunlight, while the mood of *Summer by the Barns* is established by a dusky sky. Both pictures depict country roads with processions of farm buildings and rustic homes. In their banked coloring and subtle atmosphere they correspond to Tonalism.

*Haystacks* is a prime example of Bruestle's small works on panel, the paint energetically applied to land and sky, luscious strokes of white pigment describing a rapidly moving cloudscape. It also heralds one of the defining aspects of his later paintings, the use of strong sunlight to amplify color and create dramatic effects of illumination and shadow.

The largest work in the exhibition, *Late Spring, A Rocky Hill* is a summation of Bruestle's intentions. Here the generalized tree forms and pastoral setting hearken to Barbizon archetypes of the landscape as a contemplative setting, yet one is taken as much by the robustness of execution as reverie. With its swirling passages of thick paint, the canvas joins intimacy of place to an exultant sense of movement. It also reveals Bruestle's distinctiveness within the Old Lyme Art Colony: while the impressionist painters employed a broken color technique to record specific phenomena, Bruestle utilized his familiarity with the landscape's key elements to create images that are true to the essence of his beloved countryside.

Bruestle exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Corcoran Gallery, Lyme Art Association, National Academy of Design, Paris Salon of 1895, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His works are represented in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Butler Institute of American Art, the Florence Griswold Museum, and the San Diego Museum of Art. He died in 1939 in New Haven, Connecticut.

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July, 2011