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ART 362

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“A Shared Legacy” Exhibition Review

The painting I am critiquing is Henry Dousa’s “The Farm of Henry Windle”, created in 1875. I will be critiquing this piece from the viewpoint of an academic art critic. The first thing I would notice is the lack of proper one-point perspective in this piece. While I can understand that the tree line behind the house is in the background and the gate entrance is in the foreground, it is very flattened. The fencing seems to recede into the background in a decently logical manner, but the way the circular path appears is not very logical. The width of the path closer to the foreground is about the same width of the path as it recedes into the background. There are also odd proportions to the cow, horse, and farmer. The farmer is about as big as the horse, and judging by the placement of the cow on the canvas, the cow is several times bigger than the farmer is. The farmer’s head is just as big as the horse’s head. On the piece description, it mentions how the “cow” is actually a prized shorthorn bull that weighs 2500 pounds. While that is an impressive weight, the way the bull is drawn does not follow the proper anatomy of a bull. The shadows and highlights used throughout this piece is not accurate to how we perceive the world. The shadows from the large tree on the left does not match the angle of the shadow of the farmer. I am also unsure if the horse has a shadow at all, as I do not see any shadow attached to his feet. The shadow on the tall tree in the middle of the piece does not even cross over the path, where realistically, the path should be shaded by that tree. The painting overall is very flat, having no really realistic shading or highlighting. The subject matter of this piece is of a landscape, which is not common for an academic artist. A true academic artist would paint a historical painting or something involving the human form. At the very least, the human form would be the main subject of the painting. Here, the focus is on the large estate. The brush strokes are visible in the crops, the lawn, and the path in front of the fence. The way the shorthorn bull is painted also has very obvious brushstrokes, especially in the brown parts of his body. The brush strokes are kind of smooth, and the leaves on the trees look pretty close to how they appear in real life. However, the grass’s brushstrokes are still very visible. The sizing of the birds throughout the piece are all about the same. The two birds on the fence in the bottom left appear the same size as the ones over by the estate and the ones by the shorthorn bull. This does not help with the already flattened perspective, as the birds being all the same size do not help me perceive this realistically.