



HIRSCHL & ADLER GALLERIES

CLARENCE HOLBROOK CARTER (1904–2000)

*William Stolte, Ex-Councilman*

Oil on canvas, 50 x 35 1/2 in.

Signed and dated (at lower left): Clarence Holbrook Carter 32

RECORDED: Milton S. Fox, in *The Cleveland News*, April 27, 1932 // Milton S. Fox, in *The Cleveland Sunday News*, May 1, 1932 // Grace V. Kelly, in *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 1, 1932 // Jerome Zerbe, Jr., in *Parade*, May 5, 1932 // Milton S. Fox, in *The Cleveland Sunday News*, May 8, 1932 // *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (May 1932), illus. on cover // *American Magazine of Art* (June 1932) // *Carnegie Magazine* (February 1933) // Penelope Redd, in *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, Feb. 17, 1933 // John O'Connor, in *Carnegie Magazine* (May 1940)

EXHIBITED: Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, 1932, *Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of Cleveland Artists and Craftsmen* // Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, 1932, *Twelfth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oils* // Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1933, *Exhibition of Paintings by Cleveland Artists*, [n.p.] no. 21 // Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1940, *One-Man Exhibition* // Butler Art Institute, Youngstown, Ohio, 1940, *One-Man Exhibition* // Canton Art Institute,

Ohio, 1940, *One-Man Exhibition* // Akron Art Institute, Ohio, 1941, *One-Man Exhibition* // The Lowe Art Museum, The University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, 1974, *Contemporary Portraits by Well-Known American Artists*, [n.p.] no. 15 // Gimpel & Weitzenhoffer, Ltd., New York, 1976, *Early Oils & Water Colors* // Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, University Art Museum, Michener Gallery, The University of Texas at Austin, 1976–77, *Clarence Carter Retrospective* // Center for the Arts, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, 1978, *Clarence H. Carter Retrospective Exhibition*, p. 3 [n.n.] illus. // Southern Ohio Museum & Cultural Center, Portsmouth, 1979, *Clarence H. Carter: Fifty Years of Art, Inaugural Exhibition*, p. 6 no. 4 illus. // Van Wickle Gallery, Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania, 1980, *Clarence Holbrook Carter*, p. 6 no. 5 illus. // Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, 1980–81, *Clarence H. Carter: Works from the 20s, 30s and 40s*, [n.p.] no. 50 // Sierra Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, San Diego State University, California, 1982, *1931 America: The Artist's View* // Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, 1996, *Transformations in Cleveland Art, 1796–1946*, pp. 128–29 no. 52 illus.

EX COLL.: the artist; to his estate, 2000 until the present

In his long and productive career, Clarence Holbrook Carter followed an independent course. He incorporated an unlikely mixture of stylistic influences, drawing from such disparate sources as regionalism and surrealism without strictly cohering to any one school. An experimentalist in the truest sense, Carter produced an *oeuvre* that defies categorization. He attempted nearly every variety of subject, from genre to still life, landscape to portrait, abstract to magic realist. In this sense, his career reflects the changing currents of twentieth-century modernity, in which artists struggled to find an appropriate means of self-expression.

Carter was born in Portsmouth, Ohio, in 1904. He showed an early talent for the arts, taking watercolor classes at the age of nine, followed by cartooning classes at thirteen. In 1923, he enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Ohio, from which he graduated four years later. Carter then set for Europe, where he spent a year traveling to Italy, Sicily, Tunisia, Switzerland, France, England, and Belgium, and spent a summer studying at the Hans Hoffman Summer School in Capri. In 1929, he returned to Cleveland, where the following year he began teaching at the Cleveland Museum of Art. In 1938, Carter was made Assistant Professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he taught until 1944.

From the 1920s through the 1940s, Carter painted prolifically and enjoyed considerable success, exhibiting frequently, including several shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from 1940–42. His style was widely interpreted as Regionalist, since his paintings often represented scenes of ordinary American life. Farmers, fruit stands, street scenes, and factories all appear in works of this period. Paintings such as *Trapeze Artists*, formerly at Hirschl & Adler (1933; see Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York, 1989, *Clarence H. Carter: Early Works*, no. 2 illus. in color), display an interest in the playful innocence of the rural Ohio lifestyle. However, the real-life scenes and places depicted in his paintings from this period, by their straightforward representation, are often laid bare for the viewer to contemplate their inner mysteries.

Beginning in the early 1950s, Carter began painting in a surrealist mode, in which he pursued ideas about time, death, and spirituality in a series of works, called the *Projectives*. These canvases are constructions of images, reminiscent of collage, in which a variety of disjunctive elements appear

together to form elusive, mysterious narratives. By the 1960s, Carter had begun his most well-known paintings, characterized by the incorporation of ovoid shapes, including the *Transections*, *Eschatos*, and *Mandala* series. To Carter, the ovoid symbolizes a transection, or a bridge between life and death. “The shape of the egg affirms life, but biological life in time passes away, becoming spirit. The ovoid becomes simply a void. In death shape remains only in silence—eternal, all encompassing silence” (Clarence Carter, as quoted in Linda Weintraub, “The Egg Symbol in the Work of Clarence Carter,” in Center of the Arts, Muhlenberg College, exhib. cat., *Clarence H. Carter* [Allentown Pennsylvania, 1978], n.p.). Carter remained occupied with these ideas until the end of his life.

Because of the wide range of Carter’s career, critics have had a difficult time placing his work in an art-historical context. Carter perhaps summed it best himself:

My credo is simple and changeable. I may not change radically but if I wish to I have no preconceived theories to hold me back. I feel that theories tend to make an artist academic no matter how advanced and radical these theories appear to be at the present time. My paintings at various times have been termed cubist, surrealist, neo-romanticist, realist, and even oriental, but at no time did I ever follow any school. I have painted my world as I have seen it and felt it (Carter, as quoted in Monroe A. Denton, Jr., “Some notes on Clarence Carter,” in Center for the Arts, Muhlenberg College, *op. cit.*, n.p.).

The artist described the circumstances leading up to the present portrait:

William Stolte was our landlord in Cleveland when we were first married. His wife had died and he had fixed the second storey of his Victorian house to rent. It was very attractive as he had papered and painted it from his own paint and wallpaper store on the property. On the back of the lot he fixed up a former shop into a studio for me. It was all very convenient as I also had a studio on the next corner over a tea-room where I had waited tables when I was a Freshman in art school. This all was on 105th Street which was near the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Wade Park Manor where our good friend, William M. Milliken, lived with his mother. Bill Stolte was very generous and good to us and I enjoyed painting him.

It was a proud day for Stolte when his portrait won first prize at the Cleveland Museum and

gained much critical attention. The museum said that all of his political friends trooped in to see Bill so prominently installed and to pay homage. It was the first time that many of them had ever set foot in the museum.

One summer day tragedy struck. Bill was driving up Lee Road when a truck in front of him stopped suddenly and Bill drove right into the tail-gate that was down and it crushed his chest.

I shall not forget his funeral as I have never seen so many men weep for another. Many of the politicians of Cleveland were there and weeping openly.

Carter's portrait of his one-time landlord and friend is a visually striking homage to small town politics and neighborly intimacy. The pared-down image of the figure and his surroundings might at first be misread as a caricatured indictment of a politician with an ego not easily contained by his britches. But, based on the artist's fond recollections of the sitter, it is more likely an informal, no-nonsense likeness of a plain-speaking man of the people, well-known and loved by his friends and constituents.

The painting was first titled 'former' and later changed to 'ex' as it was shorter.

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