Cornelius Krieghoff Biography

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Biography

Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) was a Dutch-born Canadian painter and the good-humored observer of life in and around Quebec City in the mid-19th century.

Cornelius Krieghoff was born in Amsterdam, the son of a German father and a Dutch mother. His boyhood was spent in Düsseldorf and Schweinfurt, and at an early age he and a friend made the tour of Europe, supporting themselves by painting and making music. In 1837 he sailed for New York and enlisted for service in the Army against the Seminole Indians in Florida. The sketches he made during that campaign and the canvases he painted from them for the War Department have since disappeared, but this first contact with Indians made a lasting impression on the artist.

About 1840 Krieghoff met Louise Gautier, a French-Canadian woman, in New York. After they married, they moved to Montreal. However, Krieghoff found Montreal a difficult place in which to sell his pictures of *habitants* and Caughnawaga Indians, and he had to turn his hand to sign painting.

His friend John Budden, a young auctioneer from Quebec City, persuaded Krieghoff to move to the old capital in 1853. Quickly he became one of a close-knit circle of friends and recorded on one canvas after another their high-spirited adventures as they hunted, tobogganed down the ice cone of the Montmorency Falls, or celebrated at the inn of J. B. Jolifou. A theme which he repeated many times was "bilking the toll," which records the mischievous custom of driving the sleigh at full speed past the gate without paying the toll collector. Other pictures depict aspects of *habitant* life, Indians shooting the rapids and hunting, landscapes, and still lifes. Krieghoff also made skillful copies of European paintings on a visit to London and Paris in 1854.

In the genre pictures especially, such as *Merrymaking,* the wealth of detail makes a valuable document of the period, and the lively action and vivid characterization of the individual figures create an entertaining narrative, to be read like the incidents in a novel. In this respect Krieghoff closely resembles 19th-century genre painters of the Düsseldorf school and their 17th-century Dutch and Flemish predecessors.

After 1864 Krieghoff seems to have lost much of his creative energy. About 1868 he joined his daughter Emily in Chicago. Krieghoff returned to Quebec only once after that, in 1871, and painted four or five good canvases under the inspiration of Budden. He died in Chicago.