

The Sportsman, n.d.

Joseph Crilley, b. 1920

oil on canvas

25 x 22 inches

Collection of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit
#22, Pennsylvania



Biography

Joseph Crilley may be your neighbor! This Bucks County artist and educator has lived in New Hope, Pennsylvania, since 1948. He first came to Bucks County from Philadelphia as a boy scout on a camping trip to Bowman's Hill. As a young man he went to night school at the Philadelphia School of Industrial Arts (University of the Arts), but his studies were interrupted when WWII broke out. He enlisted as a paratrooper and later toured Europe, where he made pen and ink sketches of the great cathedrals and local street scenes. He taught art for many years in the New Hope-Solebury High School, where he helped students create a yearbook that was described as a work of art. He also inspired students to produce an antiestablishment satire called *People Please!* He later left teaching to become a full-time photographer. However, he continued to paint and show his work, which was known for its vibrant color and lifelike detail. He was influenced by the great Dutch masters Vermeer and Rembrandt, as well as the Italian Renaissance, and French and English painters. Local art critics compared his work to that of the American Scene painters, such as Thomas Hart-Benton and Edward Hopper.

Crilley's photographs were included in over four hundred catalogues, brochures, and admissions and department pieces in colleges and universities, as well as museum exhibitions, books, and magazines. He created illustrations and covers for *The Quaker City Scout* magazine, *The Pennsylvania Angler*, *Yankee*, and the *Atlantic Salmon Journal*. Remember the names of these publications since they will give us a clue about Crilley's favorite pastime.

There are many museums that have photographs and paintings by Joseph Crilley, including the New Jersey State Museum, the Newark Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Winterthur Museum.

How big is this painting?

This painting is 25 by 22 inches, not very big as paintings go. But, size matters! The technique used by the artist is called *trompe l'oeil*, French for "fool the eye." Paintings completed in this style are meant to bring the viewer in close to the subject matter.

Tricky eyes?

Look closely at Crilley's painting. Does it look as if the objects in the painting are so real that you could touch them? This style of painting, sometimes called illusionism, is better known as "*trompe l'oeil*." This is a French term that literally means "trick the eye," and it



gives the appearance of three-dimensional or photographic realism. Renaissance painters mastered the art of creating images that fooled the eye through the use of linear perspective.

Is he “goin’ fishin’”?

Can you guess what Crilley enjoyed doing part-time or as a hobby? Yes, fishing was his passion, and this sport found its way into his photographs, written articles, and paintings. Look closely at his painting. What can you guess about the artist? Where does he fish? In the ocean, a lake, or streams? What does he catch (if he is lucky!)? How did he learn to fish? What kind of bait does he use to catch fish? Where does he put the live fish after they have been caught? Does your family like to fish?

Why not use a camera?

Many American artists painted still life pictures using the technique of trompe l’oeil-such. Those artists include William Michael Harnett, John Frederick Peto, and George Cope. Their artwork is created not so much to record images but rather to engage viewers in the question of reality. When trompe l’oeil refers to sculpture or other three-dimensional work, it often means that the artwork is made so much like the subject that it can fool the viewer into thinking that it is the real subject. Sculptures using this technique have been created by Duane Hanson and John DeAndrea.

Is an illustrator considered an artist?

Most illustrators consider themselves artists and have had formal art training. They often supplement their income by creating paintings, drawings, and graphic designs for books, journals, and media publications. Crilley and his contemporaries Norman Rockwell, N.C. Wyeth, and Charles Hagen created illustrations that helped give them national recognition.

Learn More

How can a still life tell a story? Try the activity “Still Life Stories,” below.

What is a still life? Where did that term come from?

A still life is a picture of inanimate objects—ones that could never move by themselves, or ones that are now dead—like animals. This type of painting became popular in the early 1500s. Before that time, most paintings were religious paintings or portraits. Many painters today do still life paintings as well as other types of paintings. Max Vanka is another Bucks County painter that produced several modern still life works of art. See *Winter Afternoon* at the website of the James A. Michener Art Museum, www.michenerartmuseum.org.

I thought people today fish from boats and use big nets. What kind of fishing is Joseph Crilley doing?

Mr. Crilly’s painting shows the kind of fishing equipment needed for someone who is going to enjoy the art of angling. Angling is a very old word, and means using an angle. This is what people used to call a fishhook. Today, the hook and line are usually attached to a pole with a reel. The reel controls the amount of line that goes into the water. The



hook is usually attached to a lure. See the yellow feathers in the painting? They would be a part of a lure-to lure the fish to bite. Sometimes fishermen use worms, or other things like leeches, minnows, maggots, and other natural food as bait.

That looks like a straw shoulder bag in the painting. Why would it be in a painting with fishing things?

The straw purse is really a fishing creel! A creel is fishing basket that is woven in many forms and made of wicker and willow or of birch bark sheets. Most have a hole on the lid that allows you to easily put a newly caught fish into the basket.

Related Images

Joseph Crilley painted many kinds of paintings. Some of them are still life paintings but others are landscapes. Many of them are on The Bucks County Artists Database of the James A. Michener Art Museum at www.michenerartmuseum.org. One, titled *Overview – Lambertville*, even looks like an aerial view.

Joseph Crilley designed the seal for the New Hope Borough at www.newhopeborough.org. Look carefully. Can you find a large home, an anchor, a barge boat, and an artist's palette?

Joseph Crilley liked the colors and light of the Dutch Masters. Vermeer and Rembrandt were his favorites. Study their works at www.essentialvermeer.com and www.rembrandtpainting.net.

Claudio Bravo is a contemporary trompe l'oeil painter. It is exciting to see how realistic his paintings are. Read about him at www.artlex.com.

There are also trompe l'oeil sculptors, such as Duane Hanson and John DeAndrea. Their works are in major art museums around the world, including Hanson in the Saatchi Gallery in London at www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk and the DeAndrea in the Denver Art Museum in Denver, Colorado, at DenverArtMuseum.org.

Related Links

Trompe l'oeil paintings sound interesting. Have they been around for a long time?

There is an ancient Greek story about a contest between two painters to make the most life-like painting. The first one did a painting of flowers so real that insects and birds were attracted to it. The second one brought his painting covered with a cloth. When the first artist tried to lift the cloth, he discovered it was the painting! Who do you think won the contest? We don't know what the painting of the flowers looked like.

The National Gallery of Art hosted an exhibition called *Deceptions and Illusions, Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting*, in 2002-2003. The exhibition highlights are fantastic! Learn more at www.nga.gov.

With seventy major paintings from museums and private collections all over the world, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, together with the Cleveland Museum of Art, presents the first overall survey of still-life art in the Netherlands. Learn more at www.rijksmuseum.nl.



There is a lot of symbolism in still life paintings throughout history. Mirrors, skulls, flickering candles, and maps all had meaning. Learn more about the symbols in *vanitas* paintings at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, www.rijksmuseum.nl.

