

## In Your Image: *Iceberg* to *The Artist in Greenland*.

Scott Ferris

There has been some confusion regarding Rockwell Kent's painting *The Artist in Greenland*. It has been assumed that the latter was painted in 1935 when in fact it was not created until 1960, as, in part, a copy of his painting *Iceberg*, as I will clarify below.

In a manner of prefacing... I possess a set of 35mm slides that depict Sally and Rockwell Kent hosting the annual birthday party for Rockwell, in June of 1960: a party which was attended by several people, including their friends Jacquie and Dan Burne Jones. In one slide, shot in the Kents' bar, the painting *Iceberg* is displayed on the wall. Obviously the Joneses saw this painting. Having seen it they wished to add it to their growing Kent collection, however, it was already promised to J.J. Ryan, the artist's major benefactor at the time.



Photo of Kent's birthday party, 1960. Sally Kent second from left. *Iceberg* on the wall behind.  
Collection of Scott Ferris

What transpired next is that Kent decided to copy this painting, for the Joneses, though with some additions, as the artist clarified in his 31 July 1960 letter to the Joneses. In this letter Kent states: "I have removed the picture from the bar... I have begun work on the copy and am happy to learn that you give me a free hand with the dogs." In this same letter he finishes by saying: "I will end this letter and go back to work on the iceberg picture." He continues, after referencing J.J. Ryan and commenting on transferring *Iceberg* to him: "I would like to have the picture in shape for him to take back with him." *Iceberg* is the painting that RK

was copying for the Joneses. In Kent's 10 July 1960 letter to Ryan he said: "The bar picture, which I had not intended to send, is marked as yours—for, since you would talk price, two thousand dollars." (The sale and transfer of *Iceberg* is completed in September, as per an exchange of letters between Ryan and Kent on the 19th and 22nd.)



*Iceberg. Private Collection. 1935*



*The Artist in Greenland. 1960. Baltimore Museum of Art*

Continuing with the discussion about the development of what would eventually be titled *The Artist in Greenland*, Kent writes to the Joneses on 1 September 1960: "The recovery of my strength and energy, though steady, has been so slow that I have not yet been able to finish the iceberg picture." Yet by 10 September 1960 he states: "On yesterday's noon train from Au Sable Forks the two pictures, SUN GLARE and THE PAINTER IN GREENLAND [The Artist in Greenland]—packed, I believe, securely—left for their Chicago home with you. As I recovered my accustomed strength I was able to work more and more on the Greenland picture and finished it. And both pictures are so nearly like the originals—except for the dogs and me in the foreground of your picture, replacing and outnumbering in dogs the dog-team of the other—that I would find it quite impossible to detect the difference between the original and the copy." (Herewith illustrated, you can see how Kent applied the landscape from *Iceberg* as a backdrop for *The Artist in Greenland*, yet added, as he said in his above letter, the figures.)

As a general statement regarding Kent's practices, he mentions in his 31 July 1960 letter: "The original, like many of my paintings, is mounted on ply-wood." *The Artist in Greenland*, unlike *Iceberg*, is not mounted on plywood. Other Greenland paintings that exemplify this practice can be seen in my book, *Rockwell Kent's Forgotten Landscapes*. As you will read in the captions, all of the

Greenland paintings are backed with plywood, except one. Having said that, I know of one instance where a painting that was mounted on board was removed, by a conservator, from the same. The documentation thereof and the remnants of its previous "life" are extant. There is no evidence of the same with regards to *The Artist in Greenland*.

Another practice common to this artist is that if he significantly altered a composition (which he often did) he would acknowledge the change by re-signing and sometimes re-dating the painting: sometimes burying the original inscription with over-paint or allowing both inscriptions to appear. There is no second signature on *The Artist in Greenland*.

In summation of the above evidence, I am confident that *The Artist in Greenland* was inspired by and thus became (in part) a copy of the painting *Iceberg*.

*The Artist in Greenland* has resided at the Baltimore Museum of Art since 1991; and *Iceberg*, is no longer in the J. J. Ryan Collection/Oak Ridge Estate, having sold at Christie's in 2016.