



Cameron Booth, *Portrait of a Soldier*, 1918, oil on board

This extraordinary early painting by Cameron Booth, one of Minnesota's best known twentieth-century artists, portrays a somewhat gaunt, uniformed soldier with a piercing gaze. It is signed with somber formality: "George Cameron Booth, A.E.F. [American Expeditionary Force] France, 1918."

Booth was born in Pennsylvania in 1892 and studied at the Art Insti-

tute of Chicago from 1912 to 1917. Following his service in World War I, he accepted a teaching position in 1921 at the Minneapolis School of Art and made Minnesota his permanent home. Throughout his lengthy career, he exhibited widely and received recognition for both his art and teaching ability.

So, is this a portrait of an anonymous soldier or the artist himself?



Booth was, indeed, in France in 1918. The formal signature reads more like a title (or an epitaph), and the description on Booth's draft registration card (bald, blue eyes) matches the person in the painting. But the artwork's history after its creation is mostly unknown. Before arriving in Minnesota, it was in a private collection in California and misidentified as a portrait of another Minnesota artist, Adolf Dehn. The painting has been shown to a number of people who knew Booth in his later years, but the results of these inquiries have been inconclusive.

The earliest image of Booth in the Minnesota Historical Society's photograph collection is from the late 1930s—nearly 20 years after the portrait was painted. Similarities between the portrait and the photograph certainly exist, but until a picture of Booth from the World War I era is located, the work will be identified simply as *Portrait of a Soldier*.

This 2008 acquisition, a generous gift from Eva and Michelle Terrell, is the fifty-fifth painting by Cameron Booth in the Minnesota Historical Society's fine art collection of more than 6,000 works.

—Brian Szott, curator of art



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