In an interview for American Artist shortly before his death, in 1985, R. H. Ives Gammell Wright referred to himself as a "fool." However humorously intended, it was a poignant remark. He had devoted a long and productive career to perpetuating the time-tested traditions of Western painting while he had seen modernism gradually take possession of the contemporary cultural arena, in which artists like himself were increasingly regarded as mere anachronisms.

Born in 1907, the youngest son of a prominent Rhode Island family, Gammell was reared in the patrician New England society that was both patron and subject matter to the fashionable Boston painters of the turn of the century. That small group of artists, thoroughly trained in their profession, staunchly maintained the old standards of craftsmanship, at a time when the avant-garde forming in New York and Philadelphia had begun to reject such standards. Gammell received his most important training from the Boston painters. His principal mentor, William McGregor Paxton, had studied with the eminent French academic painter Cézanne, whose teacher, in turn, had been a pupil of the great Jacques Louis David.

Despite their close ties to the French academic tradition, the Boston painters, including Paxton, were essentially impressionists; that is, they passed scenes from life into art by studying light, atmosphere, and the subtle use of color. Unlike the French Impressionists, however, they did not repudiate academic technique, with its rigid emphasis on drafthoodsmanship and its more deliberate approach to execution.

Gammell became fairly adept in the Boston style of painting. As the 1925 retrospective of The Boston Painters showed, his early works are strong, with little of the impressionism that characterized the older generation.

By the early 1930s, Gammell had developed a distinctive style that was his own. His paintings are characterized by a sense of drama and drama and by a remarkable sense of light and atmosphere. His portrayals of the human figure are often tragic and despairing, and his landscapes are often haunting and mysterious. His work is powerful and moving, and it is a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit.

Gammell's work is often compared to that of the great masters of the past, and his influence has been felt in the art world for many years. His paintings are in the collections of many museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Phillips Memorial Association, and the Wadsworth Atheneum.

In conclusion, R. H. Ives Gammell was a true artist, whose work continues to inspire and influence generation after generation. His paintings are a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit and to the enduring appeal of the art of painting.
R. H. Ives Gammell
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concomitant suppression of academic art.
Finally, Gammell also blamed the collapse of painting on the growing influence of art experts, critics, and amateurs who "specialize[d] in the art of painting without having mastered its craft" and who "ceased to rely on their instinctive reactions of liking or disliking ... a painting, but tried to estimate its merit according to self-conscious, elaborated aesthetic principles." Their "misplaced artisticism imposed on ignorant execution," he said, "is the guiding principle of painting today."

The remedy, Gammell proposed in the concluding chapters of Twilight of Painting was a return to the atelier method of training, with its intensive, systematic program of individualized instruction. Moreover, some years later, he opened his own studio to a select number of talented students and devoted the next three decades of his life to providing such instruction. A number of today's most accomplished painters studied with Gammell or with his students. And several of them, in turn, have set up ateliers of their own.

Following Twilight of Painting, Gammell wrote a monograph on one of the finest of the late-nineteenth-century Boston painters, Dennis Miller Bunker; compiled and edited Shop Talk of Edgar Degas; and wrote a collection of essays posthumously published as The Boston Painters 1900-1930—apart from much still unpublished material. Evident in his writing are some of the qualities that must have contributed to his effectiveness as a teacher of painting: breadth of vision, clarity of thought and expression, enthusiasm without pomposity, and above all a passionate dedication to the art of picturemaking—a dedication informed by a virtually encyclopedic knowledge of the history and methodology of Western painting.

By all accounts, Gammell was a strict, often crusty, teacher, but he was also extraordinarily generous. He took no fees from his students, and frequently defrayed their studio expenses as well as their room and board, in addition to ensuring that they were exposed to a broad cultural program (a la at his expense, which he considered essential to the development of an artist. In the final pages of Twilight of Painting Gammell had written:

There are painters who, though having an excellent command of many of the abilities needed for the making of pictures, are unable to utilize these very effectively in making their own. Their pictures may be intelligently put together, competently made and skillfully executed, and yet be lacking in artistic interest of a high order. ... These painters have learned to make the maximum of their limited talents and in so doing have come to a deeper understanding of their own way of working than is always possessed by greater artists, who are able to rely on instinct to pull them through. For this reason (such painters) ... are often excellent teachers. It may well be that they are the best teachers of all.

The words could apply to Gammell himself. For, undoubtedly, he was as a teacher and a critic and commentator, rather than as a painter, that he made his most significant contribution.

Indeed, if the great painting tradition that is one of the glories of Western civilization survives and flourishes into the twenty-first century, it will be due in no small measure to R. H. Ives Gammell's teaching and writing. If this art be loved and understood as well. [A]