

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition of Hudson River School paintings, entitled American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School, was shown in the American Wing from October 4, 1987 through January 3, 1988. It was organized by the Department of American Painting and Sculpture under the leadership of John K. Howat, department chairman, and a specialist on American nineteenth century landscape painting.

The first major exhibition on the subject in over 40 years, American Paradise traced the development of American landscape painting from about 1825 to 1875 and examined the intellectual, political, and cultural forces that led to its rise and eventual demise.

The exhibition brought together over 85 works of art by 25 artists including masterpieces by Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederic Church, John F. Kensett, and Albert Bierstadt. Hudson River School pictures from the Metropolitan's extensive holdings of American art were augmented by generous loans from some of the country's major art museums, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the National Gallery as well as from a number of important private collections.

The installation began with the Catskill landscapes of Thomas Cole, acknowledged to be the founder of the Hudson River School and, for the most part, continued chronologically covering the work of Cole's successor Asher B. Durand, on to Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church, who moved beyond the Hudson Valley to capture the beauty and force of nature in the American West and South America. The work of the second generation of Hudson River School artists followed with significant pictures by John F. Kensett, Martin Johnson Heade and Jasper F. Cropsey among others. Examples of works by George Inness, Jervis McEntee, and Worthington Whittredge were also represented. Sculpture busts on period pedestals of the artists and their patrons complemented the exhibition.

American Paradise, which was shown only at the Metropolitan, was made possible by the Chrysler Corporation Fund. Additional support was received from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Museum also received a grant from the Hudson River Foundation towards the publication of the exhibition catalogue.

The 347 page catalogue was prepared by members of the Museum's department of American paintings and a number of contributing scholars. A total of over 10,500 copies were sold during the exhibition and subsequent demand has required a second printing of approximately 4,000 hardcover copies. In addition, the catalogue was selected from among many other 1987 Museum publications on special exhibitions and permanent installations for distribution to about 11,450 upper category members. The publication contains four in-depth essays; biographies of the artists and entries on the pictures displayed; a list of lenders; and a bibliography.

The four catalogue essays were written by the curatorial staff of the Metropolitan's department of American paintings. These works examine topics of relevance to the "Hudson River School": Kevin Avery, Research Associate, writes on the genesis of the term "Hudson River School" and the cultural and critical environment in which these artists worked; Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, Associate Curator, discusses the origins of American landscape painting amid contemporary philosophical writing and teaching; John K. Howat considers the New York cultural and social milieu that nurtured these artists (and includes period photographs of them); and Doreen Burke, Associate Curator, and Catherine Voorsanger, Research Associate, look at American and European trends and how they impacted American landscape painting following the Civil War.

A broad range of educational support material accompanied the exhibition in an effort to enhance the viewers appreciation and understanding of the subject. Educational offerings included gallery talks by Museum educators, a special "Sundays at the Met" series consisting of films and lectures, and a Friday afternoon lecture series. These programs were outlined in the Museum's descriptive brochure of the exhibition, which was distributed to approximately 230,000 people. (See attached.) In addition, the Metropolitan produced a recorded audioguide tour of the exhibition that was narrated by Philippe de Montebello and was available to all of our visitors. The Museum also presented a film entitled The Hudson River and Its Painters that was shown routinely in the Uris Center Auditorium free of charge. All of the above programs were well attended and applauded by the public.

A two day symposium, organized by the Museum's Office of Public Programs and chaired by Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, was held at the Museum on Friday and Saturday, December 11 and 12, 1987. The guest speakers and their lecture topics are listed in the enclosed brochure on the symposium.

The exhibition and its catalogue were extensively reviewed by the media. Reviews appeared in daily papers across the country, the newsweeklies (Newsweek, Time), and a full range of general interest magazines (Life, New York). More importantly, the reponse was enthusiastic and commendable. Mr. Howat was interviewed by the major networks and appeared on prime time radio and television broadcasts.

Visitor attendance at the exhibition set a record over all previous American Wing exhibition attendance figures. During its thirteen week run, it was seen by over 320,000 people. This total figure incorporates the twenty six elementary school groups (over 850 students), and approximately 20 high school groups (about 580 students) who were able to tour the exhibition.

We are deeply grateful to the Hudson River Foundation for its support of this landmark project.



**MAJOR EXHIBITION OF 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN PAINTINGS  
OF THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL  
TO OPEN AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM IN OCTOBER 1987**

**Exhibition dates:** October 4, 1987 - January 3, 1988  
**Exhibition location:** The Joan Whitney Payson Galleries, The American Wing  
**Press preview:** Monday, September 21, 10:00 a.m. - noon

The first large-scale exhibition in over 40 years to be devoted exclusively to paintings of the Hudson River School will be on view in The American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 4, 1987, to January 3, 1988. American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School will contain 88 works by renowned masters of 19th-century American landscape painting, notably including Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederic E. Church, John F. Kensett, and Albert Bierstadt. Among the highlights of the exhibition are Cole's The Oxbow, Durand's Kindred Spirits, Church's Niagara, Kensett's Lake George, and Bierstadt's A Storm in the Rocky Mountains--Mt. Rosalie. Some of the paintings exhibited are from the Metropolitan Museum's own holdings, but the majority are on loan from other major public and private collections.

American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School has been made possible through the generosity of the Chrysler Corporation Fund. Additional funding has been received from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The pioneer of American landscape painting and the so-called father of the Hudson River School was Thomas Cole, whose vision of the American wilderness as a new Garden of Eden informed his own work and that of the painters who followed in his footsteps. In 1826, the year Cole painted Falls of Kaaterskill, the earliest painting in the exhibition, America had been independent for fifty years, but the American people were struggling to establish their own national identity. The Constitution established political

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independence, yet the country was still looking for cultural independence--seeking to establish a form of art and literature that would be truly indigenous in character. The distinctly American style and subject matter of the Hudson River School were therefore enthusiastically welcomed by the public, and the group became recognized as the first native school of landscape painters.

From about 1825 until 1875, the artists of the Hudson River School flourished in New York, the port city of the river for which their group was named. Cole had a house in Catskill, New York, and many of his followers built great residences overlooking the Hudson. Their favorite sketching haunts were close to the river, especially where the Catskills border its shores. Close affiliations with New York's most enduring cultural institutions, the National Academy of Design and The Century Association in particular, made the painters prominent figures in the city's social and artistic hierarchies. Two of them--Frederic E. Church and John F. Kensett--were founding trustees of the Metropolitan Museum.

In the second half of the 19th century, as settlers and industrialists expanded the frontiers of civilization, the characteristic subject matter of the Hudson River School--grand, panoramic views of the wilderness and intimate glimpses of American scenery--widened in scope; its artists began to depict different aspects of the land as well as the landscapes of other regions. Works like Jasper F. Cropsey's The Valley of Wyoming and George Inness's Delaware Water Gap exemplify the idealism and love of country still inherent in the school's younger generation, and can be perceived as part of a tradition continuing to develop yet maintaining its uniquely American integrity. Other paintings, including Sanford R. Gifford's Hunter Mountain, Twilight of 1866, focused on the destruction of the wilderness, as had Cole's View on the Catskill--Early Autumn almost 30 years earlier. Such views of the pillaging of the national heritage helped to focus attention on the need to safeguard the land, attracting the first conservationists and eventually resulting in the creation of wilderness preserves, among them Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

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Other paintings were of more exotic locales, as American artists--Church, Martin Johnson Heade, and Louis Rémy Mignot among them--traveled to other parts of the Western Hemisphere and depicted grandiose panoramas that captured the imaginations of a whole generation of their countrymen. When Church unveiled his Heart of the Andes as a single-picture exhibition, charging an admission fee and attracting masses of viewers, he reaped critical and financial rewards and became a national celebrity; when his picture was sent on tour in Europe, his international reputation was secured. He began a trend that was followed successfully by several of his colleagues, including Albert Bierstadt, with his majestic canvases of the American West, and Jasper F. Cropsey, with his representations of the American autumn, both of whom were hailed in this country and abroad as spokesmen for the glories of American nature.

The works of the Hudson River School brought to the people of the 19th century a glimpse of the richness and vastness of the New World. Today, though that world has radically changed, the ideals that motivated the hands and brushes of the artists and the beauty that they memorialized are still impressive and perhaps even more meaningful. American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School, designed to demonstrate the wide sphere of influence exerted by the group on the art of its day, will afford a new generation of viewers the opportunity to examine the works of these first native landscapists and to judge the quality of their accomplishments.

The exhibition was selected and organized by members of the Departments of American Art, who also prepared the accompanying book, containing scholarly essays, descriptions of over 85 masterpieces of the Hudson River School, color plates of the paintings, and biographies and bibliographies of the artists. The book is published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and is available in hardcover (distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc.) and paperback editions.

The exhibition installation was designed by Roy G. Campbell, Museum Designer.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION please contact John Ross or Elyse Topalian,  
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SEPTEMBER 1987  
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