



The American Landscape's
"Quieter Spirit"

Early Paintings by Frederic Edwin Church

The American Landscape's "Quieter Spirit": Early Paintings by Frederic Edwin Church is the first in a planned periodic series of small exhibitions designed to focus on landmark works of art in the Seattle Art Museum collection. We gratefully acknowledge the loan of key paintings from the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, and from other private collections.

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We dedicate this exhibition and publication to the memory of Ann Barwick, a trustee of the Seattle Art Museum and a devoted friend of American art.



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How can we appreciate the meaning of a work of art? Knowledge of an object's past enhances our understanding of it. By looking deep inside a work of art, we come closer to the facts of its origin, to the story of the artist and his creation. What inspired this work of art?

But another history must also be considered if we are to understand art's meaning in the world. This is the history that takes place outside the work of art: the story of an artist's audience and of a work of art's public life. Who admired this work of art and why?

A Country Home (figure 1) was one of the most acclaimed paintings of Frederic Church's (1826–1900) early career. It is also one of the great works of art in the Seattle Art Museum. Why? An overview of that story offers, if not definitive answers, then intriguing ways to explore this question. It takes us inside the artist's creative process to examine how the painting developed. It also looks beyond the painting itself to the people who admired Church's art in the 1850s and gave it public meaning. We see by viewing *A Country Home* in the context of related paintings that it was a subject of special meaning, for it persisted in Church's art for several years. We are compelled to wonder why. What motivated the artist to focus almost exclusively on this theme from the outset of his career in 1848 to 1854? And what was the public appeal of Church's popular country home paintings in the period around 1850? This segment of the painting's story can help us to appreciate the place of this work of art in our own time and in our own lives.



Figure 1. Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900). *A Country Home*, 1854; oil on canvas, 32 × 51 in.; signed and dated lower right: *F. Church/1854*. Seattle Art Museum. Gift of Mrs. Paul C. Carmichael (65.80).

Thomas Cole and Frederic Church: Kindred Spirits

Those pleasant days, when his artistic talents were directed by his distinguished master, will ever occupy a large place in the memory of the pupil.

—LOUIS LEGRAND NOBLE (1813–1882), on the impact of Church's apprenticeship with Thomas Cole in 1844–1845¹

The story of the early career of Frederic Church (figure 2), one of the nineteenth century's most gifted painters of landscape, necessarily begins not in his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut, but rather in the Hudson River town of Catskill, New York, at the home and studio of Thomas Cole (1801–1848), Church's teacher. In 1844, when the young artist entered the master's studio as his first apprentice, Cole was at the height of his fame as the country's premier painter of American scenery. He was popularly known as the father of landscape painting in America, his notoriety coming from his sudden and unprecedented success in that genre and from his achievement in establishing landscape painting as an American artist's highest calling. In a period when his countrymen had largely aspired to follow the noble tradition of painting grand allegorical and historical subjects—in the manner of Europe's Old Masters—Cole appeared in New York in 1825 as a painter of American scenic views, and thereafter his reputation soared.



Figure 2. Photograph of Frederic Church, ca. 1860. New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Olana State Historic Site.

Through his art, writing, and lecturing, and by his generous personality and pious devotion to nature, Cole had become a highly revered figure among New York painters and poets of the 1830s and 1840s. Cole's followers were the first generation of American artists to claim a place for their interpretations of American scenery among the noblest traditions of art.

After Cole settled in Catskill in 1836, strong impulses seemed to emanate from that locale, drawing painters to the picturesque countryside around Cole's home and studio there and filling them with artistic ambition. "I have frequently heard of the beautiful and romantic scenery around Catskill . . . it would give me the greatest pleasure to accompany you in your rambles about the place observing nature in all her various appearances," the eighteen-year-old Church wrote to Cole on May 20, 1844, hoping to enter the master's tutelage.² Other aspiring painters felt the lure of Cole's Catskill as well: Sanford Gifford (1823–1880),

as a youth in Hudson, New York, claimed that as he gazed down from the top of Mount Merino and looked out toward Catskill on the opposite shore of the Hudson, he saw Cole's house and studio as a symbolic beacon signaling to his artistic spirit. Especially after Cole's death in 1848, his home, Cedar Grove, was a touchstone for American landscape painters: "The brushes he painted with that last day are there," Jasper Cropsey (1823–1900) wrote after visiting Cole's studio in 1850, "Though the man has departed, yet he has left a spell behind him that is not broken. . . ."³

Cole had many admirers; still he was not inclined to take students. In accepting Church into his studio as his first pupil, Cole must have recognized the young man as a kindred spirit, one who showed promise of exceptional talent.

Cole and the Idea of the American Home in the Wilderness

In what has been said [on the subject of American landscape] I have alluded to wild and uncultivated scenery; but the cultivated must not be forgotten, for it is still more important to man in his social capacity. . . ; it encompasses our homes, and, though devoid of the stern sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations—human hands have wrought, and human deeds ballowed all around.

—THOMAS COLE, "Essay on American Scenery," 1835⁴

American scenery, steeped in history and legend and rich with spiritual associations, fed Cole's imagination and made a storyteller of him. Regarded as the founder of the nation's landscape school, he was in truth a painter of history and allegory, dedicated to a landscape art imbued with moral (and often specifically Christian) overtones. The American landscape was inspiration to Cole not so much for what it revealed about the natural world—what we might usually think of as the lure of landscape—but rather for what it reflected of ourselves. It was a seriousness of purpose that Church hoped to absorb from Cole's art and teaching when he appealed to the master to accept him as a pupil: "My highest ambition lies in excelling in the art [of landscape painting]. I pursue it not as a source of gain or merely as an amusement, I trust I have higher aims than these."⁵

When Church arrived at Cedar Grove in June of 1844, Cole was just beginning work on an ambitious moralizing canvas addressing a distinctly American experience, the

settlement of the wilderness. That painting, *The Hunter's Return* (figure 3), clearly made a deep impression on Church, who would have seen the composition evolve over the ensuing months of 1844 and early 1845.

Though Cole's painting is thoroughly grounded in his experience in various wilderness locales and is based in part on views he sketched in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, *The Hunter's Return* is not a scenic view per se but is an invention, a distinctly New World allegory—"a higher style of landscape," as Cole had once described his conceptions.⁶ It is a peaceful scene of homesteading in the wilderness, a symbol of fundamental human self-reliance and of the American people's pioneer spirit. Father and son are returning from the hunt to their family's rustic home in the woods. They are joyous in their offering of a slain deer, and they are welcomed back lovingly by mother and children. There is something of Eden in Cole's sun-filled vale, where men and women dwell in harmony with nature. The subject is redolent of domestic bliss, yet the many details that lend charm and narrative to the scene also convey the disquieting subtext of Cole's tale: the loss of innocence that the scene foretells. We sense from the artist's intentional placement of brutally cut trees in the foreground that the fall from grace comes with the inevitable defiling of nature, as settlers move ever forward toward civilization.



Figure 3. Thomas Cole (1801–1848). *The Hunter's Return*, 1845; oil on canvas, 40¼ × 60½ in.; signed and dated lower right: *T. Cole/1845*. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

The evocative subject of the home in the wilderness—of the American landscape's "quieter spirit" as Cole had poetically put it—had especially deep personal associations for Church, connections with Cole as teacher and friend. It is no coincidence that this subject dominated Church's art in the years immediately following Cole's death. In developing further a concept of the American landscape and national character that Cole had popularized, Church honored his mentor and gained recognition as the late master's most talented and worthy successor.

Painted Tributes to the Memory of Cole

*Nor is thy dream to COLE'S renown alone
It prophesies, O gifted Church, thine own.*

—HENRY WEBSTER PARKER (1822–1876), from a sonnet on Church's painting, *To the Memory of Cole*, exhibited April 1848⁷

Cole's sudden death in February 1848 brought an outpouring of emotion from his admirers. The intensity of Church's feeling at the loss of his mentor can be measured by the extraordinary work that occupied him in the weeks immediately following: by April he had completed a poignant, richly detailed, symbolic memorial to Cole (figure 4). He must have been driven by a determination to have the painting on display in his studio that spring, when a memorial exhibition honoring Cole—the proceeds of which were to go to the support of his widow and children—would be on view in the same building.

To the Memory of Cole, still deeply affecting by its direct reference to death and the grave, represents Cole in symbolic ways. Church's composition of a lone cross in the Catskill landscape was designed to suggest Cole's remains placed among his beloved Catskill hills, certainly; but it was also suggestive, as many of Church's artist friends knew, of Cole's last unfinished work, an ambitious multi-canvas allegory on the Christian pilgrim's search for salvation—symbolically speaking, his quest for the cross in the wilderness. Church, in his memorial painting, had in a way completed the cycle begun by his late friend, for here the solitary cross and the mortal soul of Thomas Cole, the man, are one. A brooding nature sets the painting's mournful notes: dark storm clouds envelop the peaceful vale for an infinite distance, and in the foreground, elegant bent trees seem to bow in tribute before the grave. Yet the garlanded



Figure 4. Frederic Edwin Church. *To the Memory of Cole*, 1848; oil on canvas, 42 × 49 in.; signed and dated lower right: F. E. Church/April 1848. Private collection, Seattle.

cross receives the warm blessing of the sun, spring flowers arise to adorn the grave, and, as if they were the spirit of the man transformed, the incoming cumulus clouds rise ebulliently upward, filling the heavens. The sentiment of death and resurrection is felt more deeply, perhaps, because of Church's extraordinary realism. In Church's art—much more than in Cole's—the ideal as a concept was rendered as something very real.

The paintings that followed *To the Memory of Cole* in Church's work, while not directly invoking Cole's name, nevertheless continued to honor Cole's legacy. All that he had admired in his teacher and friend continued to come forth in his next paintings, each an exquisitely rendered variation on the late artist's most distinctly American theme, the idea of the home in the wilderness.

The recent discovery of Church's long lost 1849 canvas, *Evening After a Storm* (figure 5), allows us to see how Church began to develop the home-in-the-wilderness theme in just the few months immediately after Cole's death.

After unveiling *To the Memory of Cole*, Church set out on a summer-long sketching trip to some of the most picturesque regions of upstate New York and New England.

He found especially satisfying scenery in the mountains of western Vermont, in the rolling terrain of farm country that lay just to the east of the popular tourist destination of Lake George in New York's Adirondack Mountains. "There are a great many high mountains here, much taller than [Catskill] High Peak and the scenery is very beautiful," Church wrote from Pittsford, Vermont, to Theodore Cole, the young son of the late artist; "I brought my sketch box and Portfolio and employed myself in taking sketches all about."⁸ The studies Church produced were largely compositional sketches in pencil, outline drawings of pleasing vistas which record the profiles of broad-shouldered hills and the gently sloping contours of the surrounding countryside, sometimes with Church's extensive notes detailing qualities of color, light, or texture for key elements. Along with a few highly finished oil sketches that Church also made of distinctive landmarks—expressive oaks, elms, or fruit trees—these studies were to be source material for subsequent paintings, the work that Church would undertake in his New York studio through the late fall and winter.

Evening After a Storm was, presumably, the first major painting to come from Church's extensive 1848 sketching trip. Of all the impressive scenery he had encountered over more than four hundred miles, it was his experience in rural Vermont that he recalled most readily. *Evening After a Storm* is based on several of the compositional sketches that Church made in the area of Pittsford, Vermont, though the painting's utterly amazing realism and stunning light and color effects are quite simply the products of Church's extraordinary visual memory and ability to transcribe on canvas what he held in his mind's eye. From his satisfying weeks of walking among the hills, meeting congenial farm folk, fishing bountiful trout streams, observing stunning sunsets across deep vistas, and making shorthand studies of the pleasing landscape, Church distilled a single image to sum up his summer's experience. His title for the painting, *Evening After a Storm*, implies that Church was not necessarily concerned with depicting place or a specific narrative. Church's subject is, he tells us, the peculiar character of a landscape in a certain light and atmosphere.

Evening After a Storm, one of Church's first pictures in this vein, is arguably the most novel of all the artist's country home compositions, the one least like Cole's earlier models. Church has here combined the familiar elements to far



Figure 5. Frederic Edwin Church. *Evening After a Storm*, 1849; oil on canvas, 25 × 36 in.; signed and dated bottom center: *F. Church/1849*. Private collection.

different effect. The scene is not organized around the rustic cottage; the country home sits almost incidentally at the foremost edge of the scene. We do not look out upon the home in the landscape; we look out onto the landscape from a place within the confines of the cottage's walled kitchen garden. Church had sketched just such a country kitchen garden as he moved among the farmsteads of Pittsford, and he even made notes about its particularly thorny character, detailing its many varieties of vegetable plants and dense weeds. Here he painted an overgrown garden with remarkable fidelity to what he had seen. Church's practice was always to remain resolutely true to the facts of the natural world, describing every element with the accuracy of a close and careful observer. "Church," Cole reportedly said of his student on several occasions, "has the finest eye for drawing in the world."⁹

The central feature of the painting is the blinding late afternoon sun that fills the sky as dark clouds seem to be passing nearly over our heads as we look out upon the vista, an effect likened by one viewer in 1849 to a lifting curtain. From the vantage of the garden, the viewer is treated to a glorious theatrical display of light and shadow patterns playing across the broad lawn far below. The pictorial thrust of the work is strongly outward from the center—this landscape does not beckon us to enter. The setting sun casts long shadows forward, which make the intervening trees appear to climb steadily up the sloping hills toward us.

Church had witnessed a similar spectacle near Pittsford one evening in September 1848, what he recorded as a "singular sky."¹⁰ He had seen something extraordinary in the everyday experience of nature, and he chose to paint that. With *Evening After a Storm*, the objective of the artist seems perfectly clear: to engage the senses with a wealth of visual stimuli and elicit an emotional reaction. Even without presenting a narrative it makes a very clear statement: landscape, this painting reminds us, is that much more beautiful after a rain. That sentiment is not in and of itself a moral lesson, but it does conjure universal moral equivalents. Nature's cycle of cleansing and renewal has symbolic parallels, after all, in the spiritual life, the progress of humankind, and the course of history. With *Evening After a Storm* the artist created his own distinct version of Cole's "higher style of landscape." The expressive elements of American scenery are no longer background for a larger

human drama but here serve as potent conveyors of meaning in and of themselves.

Evening After a Storm proved a critical success. It was purchased from the artist by the American Art-Union, a popular organization dedicated to promoting contemporary American art by sponsoring exhibitions and purchasing outstanding works for distribution by lottery to its large membership. Even long after Church had reached preeminence among America's painters, *Evening After a Storm* continued to be cited by critics as a pivotal work in the young artist's career, a painting that signaled by its technical brilliance and originality of conception the greatness that was to come from this prodigious talent.

About the time he created *Evening After a Storm*, Church conceived of another pastoral landscape, one also based on his experiences in rural Vermont in the late summer of 1848. That work, known today only by a descriptive title, *New England Landscape* (figure 6), is more specifically Cole-influenced in its composition than is *Evening After a Storm*. Yet, interestingly, since this canvas entered the collection of the Amon Carter Museum in 1973, *New England Landscape* was believed to be Church's 1849 exhibition picture, *Evening After a Storm*, so closely did its key elements seem to match those of the latter as described by nineteenth-century commentators. Today, viewing these two very different paintings side by side, it seems impossible that these compositions could be described in the same terms. The fact that this was so testifies to how standardized the pictorial elements of New England scenery had become since Cole first popularized them. *New England Landscape* is an exquisitely rendered, glistening sunset panorama, its diverse features illuminated by a distinctive rosy glow. This scene is an idyllic one of a mill by a stream. The composition is open, and the scene is welcoming to the onlooker in a way that *Evening After a Storm* is not. At center the lone figure of a picnicker rows quietly across a placid pond, an expressive element that Cole had regarded as especially picturesque in depictions of American scenery for its association with peace and tranquility. There are no unsettling storm clouds here. A sunset, the magnificence of which Church painted as no other American landscape painter could, is here the heartwarming "wreath of glory daily bound around the world," as Cole had once described it.¹¹ Church's other work had been a dramatic sunset sky study, but this highly detailed painting reveals that the artist's

interest in this instance extended to every element of the greatly varied scene.

This is an ideal representation of rural New England, one lacking even a hint of the pessimism about the bold act of cultivating wild nature that Cole had earlier displayed in *The Hunter's Return*. As a composition, it is a thoroughly harmonious whole, a completely satisfying view—and by extension, it seems a perfect realm of humankind and nature. The peaceful rural settlements Church encountered in Vermont provided him with especially appealing models for the noble American landscape subject.

Vermont as a setting retained a hold on Church's imagination for years. He made a second extended sketching trip there in 1849 and returned time and again in the next three decades.

American Scenery and Nationalistic Spirit

What in the rural New England landscape specifically did Church and his audience find so compelling, so worthy of great art, of art befitting their place and time? How did the rural landscape come to represent what was, for many, the quintessential idea of America in the late 1840s?

In part, growing appreciation for pastoral scene paintings stemmed from a generational shift with regard to the American landscape that had been underway since the first decades of the nineteenth century. To Cole's generation, America's untouched woodlands had been sacrosanct: for nature poet William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), for example, they were "God's first temples," as he put it in 1825.¹² By 1850, however, the favorite view of the American landscape had dramatically changed. In 1851, the daughter of novelist James Fennimore Cooper (1789–1851), writing in one of the most popular books on American scenery, was just one thoughtful observer who believed that it was the noble action of the American pioneer that sanctified the country's landscape:

*The hand of man generally improves a landscape. The earth has been given to him, and his presence in Eden is natural; he gives life and spirit to the garden. . . . Generally the grassy meadow in the valley, the winding road climbing the hillside, the cheerful village on the bank of the stream, give a higher additional interest to the view.*¹³

The cultivated landscape of old New England offered a congenial view of America as a land of peace, plenty,



Figure 6. Frederic Edwin Church. *New England Landscape*, ca. 1849; oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.; signed lower left: *F. Church*. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

simplicity, piety, and domesticity. Was this not an ideal that would be transplanted to still unsettled reaches of the continent? Did New England's bountiful landscapes represent America's destiny as a nation?

In 1850 one commentator on the American art scene, in reviewing the annual exhibition of new paintings at the National Academy of Design in New York, found reason to complain that American landscape art did not represent what he considered the defining national experience:

Is there any striking representation here of one of the controlling passions and ideas of our own time and country? We are unable to find on these walls any expression of the American courage which seeks out at a day's notice a new home thousands of miles distant; of the American self-reliance which defies the wild beast and savage, and plants a corn-field in the remote prairie; . . . of the chivalric respect for woman which adorns the rudest log cabin beyond the mountains; of the sublime march of that broad column of civilized men which slowly advances year by year into the vast and silent regions of the West. There is no adequate record of these great facts which moved our thoughts, which fire our hearts, which shape and control our everyday life.¹⁴

Between 1850 and 1854 Church sent three magnificent variations on this precise theme of the American pioneer experience to the National Academy of Design, while sending other similar works to the major exhibitions elsewhere, at the American Art-Union and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. These ambitious works proved to be the most acclaimed paintings Church had exhibited to that point in his career.

In 1854 Church sent two paintings of rural New England scenery to the National Academy of Design exhibition, which opened in New York in late March. Both canvases were derived in part from Church's 1848 sketches. The larger of the two paintings was the impressive *A Country Home*, which as it turned out, would be the artist's last work on the home-in-the-wilderness theme.

Church's 1854 *A Country Home* appeared, coincidentally, in the same year that Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) published *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, the account of his solitary months of seclusion in a cabin on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts. The sentiments that Church and Thoreau embraced in their respective celebrations of the solitary life were expressed by other

thoughtful artists and writers in this period as well, as Americans came to consider the implications of the country's rapid urban and industrial growth. And yet, though it represented a widely popular theme in painting and literature, *A Country Home* was perhaps an odd choice for a major new landscape from Church in 1854, when he had, in fact, a new, vastly different experience of landscape within him. In the spring of 1853, Church had set off for South America with his close friend, Cyrus Field (1815–1896), a wealthy and adventuresome young entrepreneur who was at the time contemplating a plan to lay a telegraphic cable across the Atlantic, a feat that he would achieve a decade later. Away for months, Church was back in New York in October. That winter, as he set about developing sketches into paintings for the Academy's spring show, he might have turned to his South American studies, for this exotic landscape would surely have attracted wide public attention for Church. But having only a few months in which to produce new work, Church once again took up American scenery, returning to a subject that was by this time well-rehearsed. He referred again to the pencil sketches he had made years earlier, in the summers of 1848 and 1849 in Vermont, and created *A Country Home*.

Evening After a Storm displays a dramatic sunset effect, and *New England Landscape* has great variety in its scenic elements, but *A Country Home* is a more unified whole than either of the two earlier paintings. The composition is centered on the simple, picturesque farmstead, and though the visual effects are dazzling, Church's sunset glow here works to integrate all the diverse elements of the landscape. "His earlier efforts were really cloud pictures, remarkable in the main for this specialty," one critic noted in praising *A Country Home*. But Church's new production was, he added, remarkably different, not in subject certainly, but in overall effect: "All that it contains—and there are no striking subjects introduced—lies under the same atmospheric influence."¹⁵ Whereas the earlier pictures focused attention on singularly beautiful moments in the evening sky and light, *A Country Home* brings us down to earth, focusing on the rustic simplicity of the pioneer homestead. More than any of Church's previous compositions, *A Country Home* emphasizes the pleasure of domestic tranquility. The characters here are a pioneer family at their ease—father and son fish and mother dutifully attends to household chores, carrying a water bucket up from the pond.



Figure 7. Frederic Edwin Church. *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860; oil on canvas, 40 × 64 in. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund. (Not in exhibition.)

A Country Home was praised by critics, with one observer calling it nothing less than “the great work of the year, [which] fairly justifies the utmost that has been anticipated from this true artist.”¹⁶ The picture immediately found a buyer: General Joseph Gardner Swift (1783–1865) of Geneva, New York, a country gentleman himself.

A Country Home was not a change of direction for the artist, but it was a refinement of an idea that he had been developing since 1849, and the public responded enthusiastically. Perhaps Church considered the work his chance to make a summary statement on American scenery, anticipating that he would soon move on to paint other New World realms.

New World Vistas in a Changing World

Perhaps the strongest feature of this modern civilization is its restlessness—its lack of repose—even in my secluded Mountain Home I feel daily the restless waves beating.

—FREDERIC CHURCH, 1879¹⁷

Frederic Church wrote these words as his career was waning, twenty-five years after painting his highly acclaimed *A Country Home*. That picture represented an ideal that Church increasingly held dear, one that even inspired his own rural retreat, the home he built in the 1870s on a hilltop overlooking the Hudson River and pastoral Catskill, New York. The idea of *A Country Home* obviously held enduring personal meaning for Church, and this particular painting had been pivotal to his early success. Yet it would be the last picture in which he so lovingly created the calm and perfectly harmonious world of rural New England. Why did Church in 1854 turn away from a theme that had persisted in his painting for some five years, that had established his soaring reputation, and that accorded with something fundamental within his character?

Having traveled to South America in the summer of 1853, Church must have begun to feel the conceptual limitations of New England scenery and the lure of new realms. The fact that one writer in 1854 harshly criticized the repetition that he believed now characterized Church’s productions surely would have been a catalyst to further motivate the artist to explore other subjects:

*Another sunset with a solitary house, another twilight with a reflecting pool, another thunderstorm and a clearing up, another rural scene with penciled clouds, placid waters, and well-shaped trees that the winds of heaven have never visited too roughly, ‘Bravo!’ they cry, ‘that is better than the last! How very pleasing—how delicious!’ And so it goes, until artistic manhood is enslaved and crushed, in the effort to fashion nature in a mould that would flatter the taste of picture lovers, who have never looked at her infinite and varied splendors with the student’s eye. . . .*¹⁸

In South America, Church had himself seen more of the varied splendors of the natural environment, and he had studied them with a student’s eye. The exotic in nature was suddenly appealing to him in a way that the familiar landscape had been hitherto.

When Church did return again to New England scenery in 1860, it was not with the same sense of pleasure and optimism that he conveyed in his picturesque views of the country home. Now he seemed to paint with a sense of paradise lost, for his subjects were the dark and desolate wilderness (figure 7). These paintings must reflect the mood of an artist whose nation was wracked by civil war. Even scenes of South America's sleeping volcanoes—Chimborazo and Cotopaxi (figure 8)—which Church produced in the early 1860s, seem to us today subjects more in sync with those turbulent civil war years than any further celebrations of America as an enduring land of peace and plenty could have been at that time.

Epilogue

“The spirit of the age, the spirit of the nation, should form the soul of the artist,” declared a writer for the popular magazine *Home Journal* in 1853.¹⁹ A strong nationalistic current runs through much of the commentary about American painting in the middle of the nineteenth century. That sentiment had fueled the public's enduring veneration of Thomas Cole, and it would ensure a measure of success for any other painter of American scenery. And Frederic Church quickly came to surpass them all. Before 1853, Church had not yet traveled abroad. His soul was still fired by the rural landscapes that had first stirred his imagination. At least for a few years after he left Cole's tutelage in Catskill, Church was content to paint what his audience desired to see—awe-inspiring landscapes based on his summertime rambles in upstate New York, rural New England, and wilderness Maine. In painting time-honored New England scenery, Church, by his combination of realism and idealism, managed to set a new direction for American art.

Patricia Junker
Curator of American Art



Figure 8. Frederic Edwin Church.
Cotopaxi, 1855; oil on canvas,
28 × 42 in. Smithsonian American
Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Gift of Mrs. Frank R. McCoy.
(Not in exhibition.)

FOR FURTHER READING

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- Huntington, David C. *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*. New York: George Braziller, 1966.
- Kelly, Franklin, and Gerald L. Carr. *The Early Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church, 1845–1854*. Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum, 1987.
- Kelly, Franklin. *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988.
- Kelly, Franklin, et al. *Frederic Edwin Church*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

- 1825** Thomas Cole's first landscape paintings are exhibited in New York and purchased by eminent artists.
- 1831** Charles Darwin embarks on five-year voyage aboard HMS *Beagle* as ship's naturalist; Nat Turner leads unsuccessful slave revolt in Southampton County, Virginia.
- 1836** Cole publishes "Essay on American Scenery" to inspire landscape painters; Ralph Waldo Emerson publishes *Nature*.
- 1844** Church enters Cole's studio in Catskill, New York, becoming Cole's first pupil; Samuel F.B. Morse sends first telegraph message: "What hath God wrought!"
- 1848** Cole dies suddenly in Catskill, on February 11.
- 1849** Scottish missionary David Livingstone begins explorations on the African continent.
- 1850** Fugitive Slave Act enacted by U.S. Congress.
- 1853** U.S. Congress authorizes survey for transcontinental railroad; Church makes first visit to South America.
- 1854** Henry David Thoreau publishes *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*; Church exhibits *A Country Home*.
- 1857** Church makes his second visit to South America.
- 1859** Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species*; Church exhibits monumental canvas, *Heart of the Andes*.
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln elected 16th U.S. President; South Carolina secedes from the Union; Church paints *Twilight in the Wilderness*.

Notes

1. Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1853), ed. Elliot S. Vessel (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 272. Hereafter cited as Noble.
2. Church to Cole quoted in Franklin Kelly, *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 1. Hereafter cited as Kelly 1988.
3. Cropsey, quoted in "'The Brushes He Painted With That Last Day Are There. . .': Jasper F. Cropsey's Letter to His Wife Describing Thomas Cole's Home and Studio, July, 1850," *American Art Journal* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 81.
4. Cole's "Essay on American Scenery" first appeared in the *American Monthly Magazine* for January 1836; quoted in John W. McCoubrey, ed., *American Art, 1700–1960; Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 100. Hereafter cited as McCoubrey.
5. Church to Cole, May 20, 1844, quoted in Kelly 1988, 1.
6. Cole to patron Robert Gilmore, Jr., May 21, 1828; quoted in Franklin Kelly, *Thomas Cole's Paintings of Eden* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1994), 17.
7. Parker's poem first appeared in the *New-York Tribune* for June 5, 1848; quoted in J. Gray Sweeney, "Endued with Rare Genius': Frederic Edwin Church's *To the Memory of Cole*," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 48.
8. Church to Theodore Cole, September 11, 1848, quoted in Gerald L. Carr, *Frederic Edwin Church: Catalogue Raisonné of Works of Art at Olana State Historic Site*, 2 vols. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), I, 135. Hereafter cited as Carr, *Catalogue Raisonné*.
9. Cole, quoted in Noble, 272.
10. Church's note on a dated drawing descriptively titled *Sunset Near Pittsford*, in the archive now at the artist's home, Olana; recorded and reproduced in Carr, *Catalogue Raisonné*, II, no. 212.
11. Cole, "Essay on American Scenery"; quoted in McCoubrey, 100.
12. William Cullen Bryant, "A Forest Hymn" (1825), in *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant* (New York: D. Appleton, 1910), 79.
13. Miss Cooper, "A Dissolving View," in Washington Irving, et al., eds., *Home Book of the Pictureque* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1856), 82.
14. From a piece signed N. N., in *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, May 1850, quoted in Kelly 1988, 58.
15. "Fine Arts. National Academy of Design," *The Albion* 13, no. 15 (April 15, 1854): 177.
16. *Putnam's Magazine* for May 1854, quoted in Kelly and Carr, 127.
17. Church to J.B. Austin, August 27, 1879, quoted in Kelly and Carr, 3.
18. *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 22, 1854, 6.
19. "The Fine Arts in America," *The Home Journal*, 1853; quoted in Kelly 1988, 53.