



‘This Land is Your Land’: American Landscape Painting
Kevin Murphy, Associate Curator of American Art

Outline of Volunteer Academy Class 6, October 26, 2009

1. Why Landscape?

- a. British Philosophical Background
 - i. Sublime, Beautiful, Picturesque
 - a. Groombridge, *The Woodlands*, 1793.
 - 2. Edmund Burke
 - 3. William Gilpin
 - 4. Uvedale Price
 - ii. Looking exercise—identify aspects of the Picturesque in Frederic Church’s *Chimborazo*
- b. American Cultural and Aesthetic Background
 - i. Prohibition on religious imagery.
 - ii. Inappropriateness of mythological/history painting for new nation.
 - iii. Wilderness as defining characteristic of North America.
 - 1. Land as symbol of God’s benevolence to American colonists and reward for their constancy. Tangible proof of Puritan’s new covenant.
 - a. Thomas Doughty, *River Rapids*, 1825
 - 2. Garden of Eden.
 - iv. Specific 19th century conditions: Political, Economic, Religious/Spiritual, Cultural, Scientific
 - 1. Manifest Destiny [Political]
 - 2. Ideals of Jeffersonian Democracy
 - a. Land ownership as freedom from “wage slavery”.
 - 3. Economic Expansion [Economic]
 - a. Land as resource.
 - b. Tourism.
 - i. Kensett’s *Rocky Landscape*, 1853.
 - 4. Transcendentalism [Religious/Spiritual]
 - a. Shift toward persona relationship with God.
 - b. Nature as reflection of divine.
 - 5. “Culture of Detail” [Cultural]
 - a. John Ruskin
 - 6. Surveys and Scientific Exploration [Scientific]
 - a. Alexander von Humboldt
 - b. William Bradford, *Near Midnight, Labrador*, ca. 1880

2. Frederic Church’s *Chimborazo* 1864

- a. Biographical information
- b. Travels in Ecuador 1853 & 1857
 - i. Following in Footsteps of von Humboldt.
- c. Church’s style
 - i. Fusion of picturesque with Ruskinian attention to detail and strong overlay of spirituality and science.



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- d. Church and Nationalist Enterprise
 - i. Effect of Civil War
 - 1. Escapism
 - ii. Expansionist ideology
 - e. Church's paintings as events.
 - f. Framing Frederic Church
- 3. Applying what we have learned—What is American about American Landscape Painting?**
- a. Theodore Robinson, *Nettie Reading*, ca. 1894
 - b. Edward Hopper, *The Long Leg*, ca. 1930
 - c. Charles Sheeler, *Bird's Nest*, 1944
 - d. Richard Diebenkorn, *Berkeley #24*, 1954

Recommended Reading:

Asher B. Durand's "Letters on Landscape Painting" from *The Crayon* (1855).

You can find them in the Appendix of the recent exhibition catalogue *Kindred Spirits: Asher B Durand and the American Landscape* (ND237.D86)