



# Corcoran Gallery of Art

### AMERICAN PAINTINGS TO 1945









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in collaboration with Emily Dana Shapiro

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1906



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Front and back covers: Albert Bierstadt, Mount Corcoran, detail, 141

Page 1: Joseph Blackburn, Portrait of a Gentleman, detail, 49; Gilbert Stuart, George Washington (26.172), detail, 59; Joshua Johnson, Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia Grace, detail, 63; William Sidney Mount, The Tough Story—Scene in a Country Tavern, detail, 83

Page 2: Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, detail, 114–15; Alfred Jacob Miller, *Election Scene, Catonsville, Baltimore County*, detail, 125; George Peter Alexander Healy, *Abraham Lincoln*, detail, 122; Worthington Whittredge, *Trout Brook in the Catskills*, detail, 139

Page 3: Worthington Whittredge, *Trout Brook in the Catskills*, detail, 139; Charles Ulrich, *In the Land of Promise, Castle Garden*, detail, 167; Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Moonlight*, detail, 169; Willard LeRoy Metcalf, *May Night*, detail, 193

Page 12: Albert Bierstadt, Mount Corcoran, detail, 141

Page 46: Willard LeRoy Metcalf, May Night, detail, 193; John Sloan, Yeats at Petitpas', detail, 201; Frank Weston Benson, The Open Window, detail, 217; Emil Carlsen, The Picture from Thibet, detail, 225

Page 47: Guy Pène du Bois, Pierrot Tired, detail, 239; Aaron Douglas, Into Bondage, detail, 247; Edward Hopper, Ground Swell, detail, 249

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## Contents

- 6 Director's Foreword Fred Bollerer
- 7 Acknowledgments
- "Encouraging American Genius": Collecting American Art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art Sarah Cash
- 44 Notes to the Reader
- 48 Featured Works
- 254 Notes to Essays on Featured Works
- 285 Illustrated List of American Paintings to 1945, Excluding Featured Works
- 327 Index
- 335 Photographic Credits
- 336 Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design Board of Trustees

### Director's Foreword

he Corcoran Gallery of Art's American Paintings to 1945 is a landmark publication for this institution. As the first volume in nearly half a century to extensively research, document, and interpret the Corcoran's outstanding collection of American paintings, it fills a substantial void in scholarship on our many canonical works of American art as well as the history of art patronage and institutional collecting.

Begun in 1850 and donated to the institution nearly twenty years later, William Wilson Corcoran's private collection has grown to become one of the nation's finest and most important holdings of historic American art. Comprising more than five hundred objects dating from 1718 to 1945, the collection now includes a remarkable number of iconic works in all genres of American painting from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. This list includes Samuel F. B. Morse's *The House of Representatives* (1822), Rembrandt Peale's *Washington before Yorktown* (1824–25), Thomas Cole's *The Departure* and *The Return* (1837), Frederic Edwin Church's *Niagara* (1857), John Singer Sargent's *En route pour la pêche* (1878), Thomas Eakins's *Singing a Pathetic Song* (1881), Albert Bierstadt's *The Last of the Buffalo* (1888), George Bellows's *Forty-two Kids* (1907), and Aaron Douglas's *Into Bondage* (1936). It also boasts outstanding breadth and depth in Hudson River School painting, nineteenth-century portraiture and genre painting, American Impressionism, and early-twentieth-century realism.

This catalogue and its companion section of the Corcoran's website document years of research by many scholars, highlighting the institution's commitment to the study and display of its permanent collection. It offers the most comprehensive and up-to-date interpretation of the museum's renowned collection of historic American paintings. Special thanks must go to Bechhoefer Curator of American Art Sarah Cash, who conceived this project in 2003 and has since served as project director and editor of this volume. Her introductory essay provides the first in-depth examination of the institution's long history of collecting and supporting American art.

Such a project could not have been completed without the support of a number of foundations, institutions, and private contributors. The Henry Luce Foundation provided the first crucial gift, which allowed this project to take shape. The foundation's generosity was followed by major contributions from the Getty Grant Program and the National Endowment for the Arts, among many others. Each was essential to support the exhaustive research that underpins the essays published in this book. Their philanthropy has been rewarded by a publication that will enlighten readers for generations to come.

Fred Bollerer
Director and Chief Executive Officer
Corcoran Gallery of Art/Corcoran College of Art + Design

# Acknowledgments

his catalogue of the Corcoran Gallery of Art's historic American paintings, which comprises the present volume and an accompanying section of the Corcoran's website, featuring exhaustive documentation on individual paintings, was conceived in 2003 as a publication that would fill a long-acknowledged need for scholarship on the museum's signature holdings. It builds on the several fine publications that have addressed aspects of the collection over the years, while presenting the first thorough scholarship. The only modern catalogue of the collection was published in two volumes, in 1966 and 1973. The result of pioneering efforts by curator Dorothy W. Phillips, it illustrated in black and white only a few of the works included and limited discussion to biographical information on the artists represented. Most important, the present volume is dependent on the remarkable vision of the individuals who have built the Corcoran's world-renowned American paintings collection, beginning with William Wilson Corcoran and the gallery's first curator, William MacLeod, and continuing to the dedicated later-twentieth-century curators Phillips and Linda Crocker Simmons.

A project of this scope, duration, and complexity necessarily incurs many debts. Fred Bollerer, the Corcoran's Director, Paul Greenhalgh, President and Director from 2006 to 2010, and Philip Brookman, Chief Curator, along with the Board of Trustees, have strongly supported this vital collections documentation project.

My most important debt of gratitude is to Emily Dana Shapiro, who served as Assistant Curator of American Art from 2004 to 2008. Emily came to the Corcoran as a Research Fellow in 2003, shortly after the project's inception, and assisted with nearly every aspect of its development, from selecting featured works to soliciting essayists to reading the final manuscript. Emily was also responsible for helping develop and supervise the extensive, multiyear endeavor of thoroughly researching the provenance, exhibition history, and historical context for each of the featured paintings. I am also deeply grateful to Lisa Strong, who joined the catalogue in early 2009 as Project Manager, energetically embracing complex details of budgeting, schedule management, organizing photographs, and cataloguing data at a critical juncture. This volume simply would not exist without Emily's and Lisa's tenacity, intellectual mettle, and unwavering collegiality and friendship.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art staff, present and former, has provided invaluable support with every aspect of this publication, beginning in its earliest stages. In particular, I would like to thank Jennifer Adams, Mario Ascencio, Michael Baltzer, Amanda Bloomfield, Kate Denton Earnest, Ila Furman, Kate Gibney, Cory Hixson, Andrea Jain, David Jung, Douglas Litts, Janice Marks, Debbie Mueller, Pat Reid, Brian Sentman, Jacquelyn Days Serwer, and Nancy Swallow.

Dare Hartwell, Director of Conservation, spearheaded the enormous task of performing technical examinations on each of the 102 works featured in the catalogue. In this effort she was aided by several expert colleagues who examined paintings within their area of expertise: Sian Jones, Lance Mayer, Gay Myers, Barbara Ramsay, and Elizabeth Steele. Marisa Bourgoin, Corcoran Archivist from 1993 to 2007, assisted with countless research questions, deftly located documents for Research Fellows, and shared her unsurpassed knowledge of William Wilson Corcoran and the history of the institution with me as I prepared the introductory essay.

I am very grateful to the contributing authors, who are listed on the title page. A number of these writers also served as Research Fellows over a period of four years: Jenny Carson, Adam Greenhalgh, Randall McLean, Laura Groves Napolitano, Katherine Roeder, Emily Dana Shapiro, Lisa Strong, and Jennifer Wingate. The vast amount of new information compiled about the history of the collection, including the recovery of more than fifty original titles, dates, and attributions, and thorough provenances for all of the featured works, is the legacy of their skillful and dedicated work.

A number of talented young Corcoran interns also provided invaluable assistance over the course of this project: Matthew Bacon, Margaret Carragher, Aaron Cator, Andrew D'Ambrosio, Abigail Davis, Emma Dent, Diana Kaw, Margaret Morrison, Michael Raven, Heather Saeger, Ingrid Seggerman, Elizabeth Shook, Amy Torbert, and Victoria Yetter.

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I am also grateful to the manuscript's readers, Emily Dana Shapiro and Margaret C. Conrads, for their insightful comments on the essays. Their keen eyes and sharp intellects helped to bring clarity to the disparate voices showcased in the catalogue. I was delighted to collaborate once again with Fronia W. Simpson, who brought her matchless copyediting skills to the entire volume.

Ed Marquand and his team at Marquand Books expertly guided this volume to fruition. Managing Editor Brynn Warriner, Image Librarian/Media Manager Sara Billups, and Production Manager Keryn Means saw to myriad details and kept the book on schedule, and Jeff Wincapaw translated its many components into a clear and elegant design.

Deepest appreciation is due to the individuals and organizations that generously provided funding for the project. The seminal gift from The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., whose long-standing support of American art research and publication projects has been essential to undertakings such as this one, was followed by contributions from the Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art; the Getty Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; The Page and Otto Marx, Jr., Foundation; Martha A. Healy; Ambika Kosada, James Atwood, and Richard Atwood in memory of Joyce Rose Atwood; and Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Inc. Additional support was provided by the Peters Family Art Foundation; Catherine Dail; James Graham and Sons; Max N. Berry; Debra Force Fine Art, Inc.; Conner•Rosenkranz, New York; Ted Cooper; Maryann and Alvin Friedman; Betty Krulik Fine Art, Limited; Arthur J. Phelan; Richard D. Chalfant; Diana Kaw; Lawrence W. Chakrin; and Marjorie S. Lindemann. Each of these gifts was essential for supporting the comprehensive biographical, provenance, and exhibition research that underlies each of these essays. Support for the photography of original frames included in the catalogue was provided by Eli Wilner and Company.

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As the director of the catalogue, I would like to offer a personal reflection. Over its years of preparation, a number of friends have offered unwavering support; besides Emily Shapiro and Lisa Strong, who provided daily collegiality and reinforcement, those at a greater distance include Teresa A. Carbone, Margaret C. Conrads, Erica E. Hirshler, Thayer Tolles, and Sylvia Yount. Closer to home, this project has been a presence in my life nearly as long as my son, Colin; to him and to my husband, Glenn R. MacCullough, I owe deep gratitude for their patience and support.

I have been deeply honored to oversee a project that renders the Corcoran's fascinating history and holdings accessible to the field of American art and to future generations of museum visitors. As such, I hope this contribution to the tradition of collections stewardship upheld with such dedication by my predecessors will inspire all who have the good fortune to mine the rich American paintings collection of this distinguished institution.

Sarah Cash Bechhoefer Curator of American Art Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. January 2010

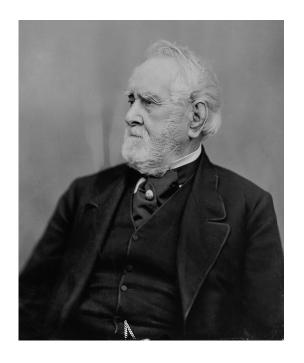


Sarah Cash "Encouraging American Genius": Collecting American Art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art



he Corcoran Gallery of Art occupies a unique and venerable position in the history of American culture. Founded in 1869 with the personal art holdings of the Washington banker and philanthropist William Wilson Corcoran (1798–1888), it was the country's first cultural institution to be established expressly as an art museum. Moreover, it was the first gift of an art museum of substantial size to the American public by a single individual and, as such, established a paradigm for cultural philanthropy in the young nation. Its successful charter was testament to the vision, perseverance, and generosity of its namesake, particularly in a city that, relative to New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, was something of a cultural backwater in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since the gallery's founding, its core holdings of American paintings and sculpture, complemented by European examples, have expanded to become a world-renowned collection that also encompasses works of art on paper, photography, media arts, and decorative arts. The American paintings collection—the focus of this catalogue and its companion component on the Corcoran's website—traces its roots to the start of Corcoran's collecting of American art, which had begun by at least 1850. In that year he made his first known acquisition of an American canvas, Daniel Huntington's Mercy's Dream, close on the heels of his first European art-buying trip, in 1848. What began modestly with a few European paintings, followed by the purchase of the Huntington and of a handful of genre scenes and Hudson River School landscapes, soon evolved into one of the premier private collections in nineteenth-century America. This essay traces the development of the Corcoran's holdings of American paintings and sculpture, beginning with Corcoran's earliest acquisitions and continuing through the publication of this volume. Since no such account can be comprehensive, this one highlights the most important

FIG. 1 Mathew Brady, Mr. William Wilson Corcoran, 1883. Collodion print. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Brady-Handy Photograph Collection, LC-BH832-1100



episodes in the fascinating history of the institution.<sup>3</sup>

William Wilson Corcoran (Fig. 1) was born in Georgetown on 27 December 1798 to Thomas and Hannah (Lemmon) Corcoran, the second-youngest of the couple's six surviving children. Thomas Corcoran (1754–1830) had immigrated from Limerick, Ireland, to Baltimore in 1783, to work as a clerk in his uncle William Wilson's shipping business. After several voyages abroad on his uncle's behalf and his marriage to Hannah Lemmon (1765/66–1823), Thomas Corcoran settled in Georgetown in 1788 and set up a leather and tanning business. He quickly became one of the town's leading citizens, serving as magistrate, mayor, and postmaster. His connections to prominent Georgetown and Baltimore families made through his political and civic activities and real estate holdings would prove of great benefit to his youngest son.<sup>4</sup>

As a boy, William Wilson Corcoran attended primary schools before enrolling in Georgetown College in 1813. After one year there, he completed his formal education at the Reverend Addison Belt's school and in 1815 joined his brothers James and Thomas in their dry goods store. After a few years they helped him establish his own business, which prospered until the panic of 1823. Although Corcoran tried to settle his debts, his firm declared bankruptcy, and he went to work for his father, managing Thomas Corcoran's real estate holdings and other affairs. At the same time, he began to learn more about the banking business, assisted by his father's relationships with local bankers such as Elisha Riggs (1779–1853) and his brother Romulus (1782–1846) of Baltimore. His first formal position was as a clerk at the Bank of Columbia, the oldest bank in Washington. When the bank failed in 1828, its assets were taken over by the Bank of the United States, which engaged Corcoran to manage its real estate and suspended debt holdings. 6

Busy with his father's affairs and his burgeoning banking career, Corcoran also had an active civic life. Like his father and brothers, he was awarded commissions in the local militia by a succession of presidents, culminating in the rank of colonel. Early on, Corcoran was interested in cultural matters: in 1829, for example, he was a member of a committee charged with planning a new theater in the city, established in 1835 as the National Theatre.8 He led a busy social life as well, although he remained a bachelor until nearly age thirty-seven, long after many of his friends had married. His courtship of Louise Amory Morris (1818-1840), the daughter of Commodore Charles Morris and Harriet Bowen, was marked by parental objections and forced separations—Morris disapproved of the twenty-year difference in the couple's ages and worried about Corcoran's financial prospects—but eventually the two eloped to Baltimore on 23 December 1835. Just five years later, Louise, never in good health, died of tuberculosis, a month shy of her twenty-second birthday. She left behind the couple's second daughter and only child to survive infancy, Louise Morris Corcoran (1838-1867), and their son, Charles Morris Corcoran, who died the following August at the age of thirteen months. Corcoran never remarried and mourned his wife's death for the rest of his life.

When courting Louise, Corcoran had to reassure her that her parents were wrong about his prospects: "I am not the beggar they would fain to persuade you."9 In the late 1830s he began to prosper, finding new opportunities after the closure in 1836 of the Washington branch of the Bank of the United States. Turmoil in national financial markets lent itself to entrepreneurship, and for several years, Corcoran served as a currency broker and stockbroker, exchange dealer, and collections agent. In 1837 he moved his office from Georgetown to Washington, where he solidified his connections with his mentor and patron, Elisha Riggs, and his family. In 1840 Corcoran and George W. Riggs (1813–1881), Elisha's son, formed a new firm to combine the advantages of Corcoran's political connections and social acumen with Riggs's access to capital and his experience in the family business. Corcoran & Riggs quickly became a major player in government finance, and this success afforded Corcoran a measure of financial comfort—enough so that in 1847 he was able to repay his creditors from the 1823 bankruptcy. The firm's biggest triumph occurred in 1848, when Corcoran traveled to Europe to sell United States bonds to finance the Mexican-American War, the market for them in the United States having declined. The sale made the partners wealthy men and established Corcoran as the leading international banker in the U.S. He retired from business in 1854, although

he continued to act as a financial agent and adviser to the firm, thereafter known as Riggs and Company.<sup>10</sup>

As Corcoran's fortunes grew in the 1840s and 1850s, he began to apply them in the service of religious, educational, and cultural causes in Washington, continuing the family tradition of civic duty established by his father.<sup>11</sup> He also could not help but be aware of the remarkable benefactions, beginning in the 1850s, of George Peabody (1795–1869). Peabody, the first great modern philanthropist, had been the business partner of Elisha Riggs in Baltimore in the 1810s and 1820s and became Corcoran's great friend. Corcoran's donation in January 1841 to Washington's orphanage for girls—in his wife's memory—is among the first of his documented philanthropic gestures.<sup>12</sup> His first major gift was the establishment, by act of Congress in 1849, of Georgetown's picturesque Oak Hill Cemetery. This interest in urban beautification extended to the landscaping of Lafayette Square in the 1850s and the establishment of the Washington Horticultural Society, of which he was the first president. He also often helped the less fortunate: in the late 1860s he established the Louise Home, in memory of his wife, to help Confederate widows and others destitute after the war; provided private pensions to a number of individuals; and was a vice president of the Washington Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor. His charity toward churches included the Ascension Church at 12th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., and St. John's Church near his home on Lafayette Square. He was generous toward educational causes, including the Columbian University, now the George Washington University. Following a famous meeting with Peabody and Robert E. Lee in 1869 in which the men discussed sectional reunion and the reviving power of education, Corcoran made generous donations to Virginia universities left damaged and in need.<sup>13</sup> At the time of his death, it was estimated that he had donated more than five million dollars to various causes during his lifetime. 4 As he wrote to his grandchildren at age eighty, he had, "from early youth to old age, endeavored to be . . . generous to the deserving" and regarded his uncommon wealth "as a sacred trust for the benefit of knowledge, truth, and charity."15

#### Early Collecting

Little is known of Corcoran's early knowledge of, or interest in, art. There is no evidence that he was influenced in the 1830s and 1840s by other collectors in the area or the country, although he may have known of the several prominent patrons of European art in nearby Baltimore, one of whom, Robert Gilmor, Jr. (1774–1848), had been amassing American paintings and sculpture in addition to old masters well before Corcoran began to collect; in 1874 Corcoran would acquire Gilmor's painting by William Sidney Mount, *The Tough Story — Scene in a Country Tavern* (1837). Men such as Edward Carey (1805–1845) in Philadelphia, also a collector of American and European art, and Luman Reed (1785–1836) in New York, who focused almost exclusively on American art, were others whose collections Corcoran may have known through newspaper accounts or business connections. The seems more likely, however, that he was inspired to begin amassing the art collection that would become his founding gift to his eponymous gallery as a result of his growing philanthropic interests. These, in turn, were closely intertwined with the mores of the Victorian era, when

successful individuals were proud of American achievement and deeply mindful of their responsibilities for the country's social and cultural improvement. By the mid-1840s Corcoran's considerable means and his evolving prominence in Washington society led him to support art and architecture projects in the nation's capital.

Corcoran Gallery of Art records, compiled by the museum's first curator, William MacLeod, state that Corcoran's first purchase was a small battle scene thought to be by the Flemish artist Jan Brueghel the Elder, from Commodore Stephen Decatur (1779–1820), but Decatur seems an unlikely source for the painting. 18 Since Corcoran was only twenty-two when Decatur died, and without much disposable income or evident interest in art, it is probable that he received the painting somewhat later from Decatur's widow, Susan, a friend for whom he acted as financial advisor in the 1830s, when she faced the burden of her late husband's large debts.<sup>19</sup> If Corcoran acquired the battle scene then, it would have been around the time he commissioned an unidentified artist—probably in Baltimore—to paint his portrait in miniature as a gift for Louise during their courtship.<sup>20</sup> This present appears to have been in exchange for the miniature self-portrait she herself painted and had given to him by July 1835.21 His next acquisitions probably were some paintings once at Mount Vernon that he owned by 1845, although nothing is known of their precise nature.<sup>22</sup> By the late 1840s Corcoran was buying contemporary European paintings fairly regularly, often while traveling abroad on business and sometimes directly from artists. Although the records of many of his early purchases do not survive, according to MacLeod, Corcoran's first purchase of a work of art (apart from the Brueghel) was a portrait of a lady attributed to the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Peter Lely that he acquired in London in 1848 "on the recommendation of a connoisseur." 23 The following year, while traveling in Brussels, Corcoran purchased a pastoral scene directly from the Belgian artist Henri Robbe.24 As early as 1849 Corcoran acquired more space for himself and his daughter, Louise, as well as his growing art collection: in March he purchased his friend Daniel Webster's home from the orator. At 1 Lafayette Square (at the intersection of H Street and Connecticut Avenue, N.W.), it was situated at the northwest corner of the park opposite the White House

FIG. 2 Moses P. Rice, William Wilson Corcoran reading in the library of his home on the northeast corner of H Street and Connecticut Avenue, N.W., c. 1886. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

FIG. 3 William Wilson Corcoran's home on the northeast corner of H Street and Connecticut Avenue, N.W., c. 1905. Photograph. Historical Society of Washington, D.C., General Photograph Collection, CHS 02868





**FIG. 4** Anton Raphael Mengs, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1764–65. Oil on canvas,  $104 \times 60$  in  $(264.2 \times 152.4 \text{ cm})$ . Corcoran Gallery of Art,

Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.75



(Figs. 2, 3). By 1855 Corcoran had opened the private picture gallery in his residence to the public at least two days each week.<sup>25</sup>

Corcoran seems to have purchased his European paintings on the advice of friends, business associates, and political allies (or with such individuals acting as his agents).26 The South Carolinian Thomas G. Clemson (1807–1888), who served as U.S. chargé d'affaires in Belgium from 1844 to 1851, greatly influenced Corcoran's early taste for contemporary Belgian painters and in 1850 sent him two landscapes by Robbe and a floral still life by "the celebrated French artist Baptiste." In the letter alerting Corcoran to the shipment, Clemson remarked that the best Belgian painters "are as much esteemed as any of the ancient masters" and that "[plersons that have money here in Europe think it is a good investment to purchase paintings . . . of those artists, as they increase in value with time." While abroad, Clemson also purchased a Christ Bound for Corcoran, said to be by Anthony Van Dyck.<sup>28</sup> In 1850 and 1851 Corcoran bought two Swiss scenes from Baron Friedrich von Gerolt (1797–1879), the German ambassador to the United States.<sup>29</sup> It was you Gerolt who introduced his friend the German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) to Corcoran in 1855.30 Another Washington diplomat, Lewis Cass, Jr. (c. 1814-1878), who served in Rome from 1849 to 1858, made several purchases for the collector in that city about 1853.31 Corcoran's dealings were not restricted to diplomats, since he also bought paintings from military officers residing in Washington.<sup>32</sup> Sometime in the late 1840s or early 1850s, these forays into collecting European art culminated in Corcoran's purchase of a massive canvas by the German Neoclassical painter Anton Raphael Mengs entitled Adoration of the Shepherds (Fig. 4).33

These European purchases show Corcoran, like other collectors active in the antebellum period, to be quite traditional in his tastes, concentrating primarily on paintings by French, German, and Belgian academic artists popular at the time. As MacLeod later recalled, Corcoran "never professed to be a thorough judge of pictures but his taste was a natural one that never led him to purchase an indifferent one for the gallery," noting that the collector often remarked that he "liked what was pleasing and beautiful and recoiled from works of a tragical and painful character."34 Also like many of his peers, he exhibited an interest in older European paintings, though he acted wisely by restricting his purchases in that area and relying heavily on the advice of friends and associates in selecting works. Before the 1880s most dealers and auction houses were unreliable and sometimes disreputable, leading to frequent transactions involving copies or fakes. In the 1857 catalogue of Corcoran's collection compiled by the Washington landscape painter and writer Charles Lanman, the collector recognized the limitations of his knowledge: the catalogue records a seascape "supposed to be by [the eighteenth-century marine painter] Joseph Vernet, and certainly in his style," a View of Venice and a Seaport "attributed to 'Canaletti' [sic]," and a "copy after" Rubens.35

Corcoran's interest in the art of his own country developed nearly concurrently with his collecting activity in the European realm, and in 1857 about one-third of the eighty-three works listed in Lanman's catalogue were by American artists. In 1850 Corcoran made his first known acquisition of an American painting, a subject picture equal in importance and scale to the Mengs. This was Daniel Huntington's second version of his acknowledged masterpiece, *Mercy's Dream* (1850), based on

John Bunyan's popular *Pilgrim's Progress*, purchased from the New York gallery Williams, Stevens & Williams. The artist hoped that Corcoran would also buy his pendant to *Mercy's Dream*, but Corcoran—who later generally limited his acquisitions by any given artist—declined the second work.<sup>36</sup>

Sentimental scenes like Mercy's Dream were very popular with American collectors in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and the conservative nature of Corcoran's first American purchase forecast his collecting pattern over the next twenty years. Indeed, the acquisition was not only conventional but was most likely inspired by another collector. In 1841 the Philadelphian Edward L. Carey had commissioned the first version, which became famous through engravings. Corcoran's taste for historical and religious scenes was closely aligned not only with the interests of Carey but also with those of Corcoran's friend Abraham M. Cozzens (d. 1868), a New York collector and president of the American Art-Union; both men were buyers from that organization's important sale in 1852. Tozzens (who owned a small, undated sketch for Mercy's Dream) favored elaborate scenes by Emanuel Leutze, Louis Lang, and Henry Peters Gray as well as landscapes by John F. Kensett—all artists whom Corcoran patronized in his early years of collecting.<sup>38</sup> Corcoran's contacts with fellow collectors at this time extended to other East Coast cities besides New York, including, for example, Samuel Gray Ward (1786-1858), a Boston financier and founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>39</sup>

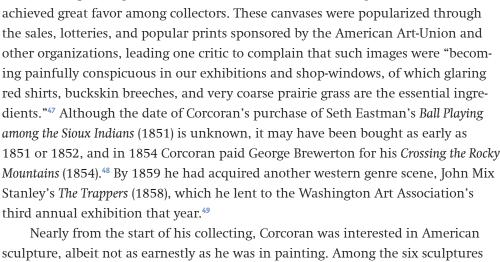
Corcoran's acquisition of the small Kensett oil Sketch of Mount Washington (1851) in 1852 attests to his growing interest in collecting American landscapes by already established artists. 40 One year earlier, in the fall of 1851, he had made his first known purchase of an American landscape painting, Christopher Pease Cranch's Castel Gondolfo, Lake Albano, Italy (1852) after visiting the artist's studio in New York. 41 This was followed by the acquisition of Thomas Doughty's View on the Hudson in Autumn (1850, from the New York dealers Williams, Stevens & Williams in the summer of 1852) and by the American Art-Union purchases just mentioned. 42 By March 1853 Corcoran had purchased—from the New Yorker William P. Van Rensselaer (1805-1872), who had commissioned them, or his intermediary—what would remain the most significant American landscape paintings in his collection, Thomas Cole's allegorical pair The Departure and The Return (1837). 43 By the time Lanman compiled his catalogue in 1857, Corcoran had acquired thirteen American landscapes, including not only the Kensett, Cranch, Doughty, and Coles but also those by Jasper Francis Cropsey, Alvan Fisher, George Inness, and the French-born Hudson River School painter Régis Gignoux.44

In the same year that he began collecting American landscapes, Corcoran commenced acquiring American genre paintings, though in slightly lesser numbers. In genre, too, he patronized reasonably well-established artists such as the vastly popular William Tylee Ranney; in 1851 he lent the painter's *The Retrieve* (1850) to the National Academy of Design annual. In 1856 or 1857 he bought Eastman Johnson's *Girl and Pets* (1856), and by 1859 he had purchased from the Baltimore artist Frank Blackwell Mayer his morality scene *Leisure and Labor* (1858). In 1854 Corcoran added another historical painting by Leutze to his collection, purchasing *Evening Party at Milton's, Consisting of Oliver Cromwell and Family, Algernon Sidney, Thurlow, Ireton, &c.* (1854) from the artist. By the middle of the decade, he began to add a



FIG. 5 Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, modeled 1841–43; carved 1846. Marble, 66 × 19 × 17 in. (167.6 × 48.3 × 43.3 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 73.4

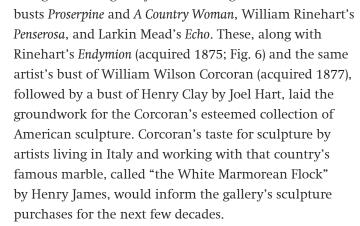
**FIG. 6** William Henry Rinehart, *Endymion*, modeled by 1870; carved c. 1874–75. Marble,  $27^{1/4} \times 53 \times 19^{1/4}$  in. (including base), (69.2  $\times$  134.6  $\times$  48.9 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Museum Purchase, 75.9



few western paintings, which, like Hudson River School and genre scenes, had

he donated to the gallery in 1873 was one of his most momentous purchases in any genre, and the work that surely sparked his interest in expanding his sculpture holdings. This was his acquisition in 1851 of the first of five replicas of Hiram Powers's renowned The Greek Slave (Fig. 5), the original of which earned Powers instant fame when it was exhibited at the Great Exposition of 1851 in London's Crystal Palace.<sup>50</sup> Placed on view in Corcoran's home on Lafayette Square for the first time at his annual Christmas party in December 1851, the marble engendered reactions of shock at the figure's nudity yet acclaim for the collector's good taste in acquiring the most celebrated sculpture in antebellum America. Indeed, many writers promoted the figure's innocence; a copy of an oft-quoted poem written in 1847 by H.S. Chilten, the first line of which reads, "Naked, yet clothed with chastity, she stands," was kept by Corcoran with his letters until his death.<sup>51</sup> The sculpture's tremendous significance to the collector was manifested not only in this momentous unveiling—and in the special octagonal gallery he later commissioned to showcase it in his gallery but also in the central role it played in his personal life. In 1859 his daughter, Louise, married George Eustis, a Louisiana congressman, in the Corcoran home with The Greek Slave serving as their altarpiece.<sup>52</sup>

Soon after purchasing *The Greek Slave*, Corcoran acquired Alexander Galt's *Bacchante*, another sculpture he gave to the gallery in 1873 along with Powers's



Governing Corcoran from the start was his interest in supporting Washington artists and arts organizations.



This aspect of his considerable local philanthropy was particularly well aligned with his background. The son of immigrants who had made his fortune from scratch through various business opportunities, Corcoran apparently was eager to "discover" contemporary American artists and to support them by financing their study, purchasing their paintings, and providing them with commissions. Corcoran heavily patronized local artists active in the short-lived but exceedingly influential Washington Art Association (1856-60), of which he was an honorary member.<sup>53</sup> By the time of Lanman's 1857 catalogue, Corcoran had purchased works from several of the association's annual exhibitions (1857-60) as well as directly from local members Oscar Bessau (born in France), William Brenton Boggs, Eastman Johnson, Seth Eastman, John Mix Stanley, Charles Lanman, Emanuel Leutze, William MacLeod (a painter as well as the gallery's first curator), and William D. Washington.<sup>54</sup> Washington, who served as the association's vice president for two years, sold his 1854 canvas The Huguenot's Daughter to Corcoran in that year when he was supported by the collector while studying with Leutze in Düsseldorf.55 Works by G.P.A. Healy, also a resident member and director, like those by many of the association's nonresident members of significant national reputation—the painters Albert Bierstadt, George Caleb Bingham, John W. Casilear, Frederic Edwin Church, Asher B. Durand, Huntington, Kensett, Charles Bird King, Rembrandt Peale, and Thomas Sully and the sculptor Henry Kirke Brown—had been or soon would be acquired by Corcoran or his gallery.

### The Formation of a Gallery of Art

In 1859, having amassed and catalogued a fairly substantial collection, Corcoran began construction of his own art gallery at the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., a prominent—and carefully chosen—location diagonally across from the White House and directly across from the War Department (now the Old Executive Office Building). Corcoran's strategic placement of the gallery reveals his ambition to shape his holdings into the core of a national collection for the capital city. As Alan Wallach has observed, Corcoran was the only nineteenth-century American collector who showed no hesitation in developing such an institution and, indeed, briefly succeeded in doing so; his gallery existed as the capital's only art museum until the opening of the Phillips Collection in 1921 (which was followed by that of the National Gallery of Art a long two decades later).<sup>56</sup> Although there are few known statements by Corcoran outlining his specific plans for collecting art and establishing a gallery, his letter to the trustees in 1868 suggests his intent to formulate a national collection—one meant for the nation, that would tell its history through portraits, inspire patriotism, and showcase the best examples of American talent. He expressed his wish that his gallery would provide "a pure and refined pleasure for residents and visitors at the National metropolis . . . and something useful accomplished in the development of American genius."57

The short-lived Washington Art Association's mandate and activities, with which he was intimately familiar, must have inspired Corcoran's development of his gallery. As expressed by the association's president, the sculptor and physician Dr. Horatio Stone, the group's goals were "to advance the fine arts in regard to comprehensive national interests . . . and to establish a gallery of art at the seat of Government," a gallery, in Stone's words, "having in view not only local and temporary

interests but those of the whole country and the far future." The demise of the association, as well as that of earlier and ongoing endeavors to establish Washington as an art center, surely lent impetus to Corcoran's initiation of his gallery. It might even be said that he assumed as a personal mission what one writer deemed an important objective of the association: "to excite our public men to constitute themselves the true patrons of the living genius of the land."

Corcoran chose the New York architect James Renwick, who had won the commission to design the building for the Smithsonian Institution in 1846 (when Corcoran became involved with that body), to design his gallery. Renwick had recently completed several commissions for Corcoran, including the Corcoran Building at 15th and F Streets, N.W. (1847), the 1849 chapel for Oak Hill Cemetery, and the renovation and expansion of his Lafayette Square home in order to accommodate his growing art collection. Corcoran asked Renwick to design a gallery in the Second Empire style modeled on the new wings of the Musée du Louvre, added during the reign of Napoleon III, which evidently had impressed Corcoran when he visited Paris in 1855.<sup>61</sup>

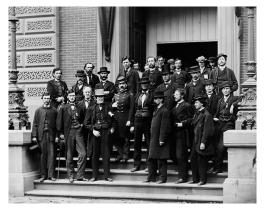
Work on the new building proceeded rapidly, according to contemporary accounts, and the exterior—including the words "Dedicated to Art," one of the first decorative elements added to the facade—was largely complete by early 1861 save for some decorative details. However, the interior remained unfinished, and on 10 April 1861, Corcoran advised Renwick to suspend work on the project owing to the "present state of the country." 62 Corcoran felt that politicians had brought the country to the unavoidable impasse that led to the Civil War and consequently realized it was not advisable, from either a political or a practical standpoint, to move forward with such a visible project in the heart of the nation's capital. His political views were such that he did not endorse the perpetuation of slavery—in 1845 he had freed his thirty-five-year-old slave Mary and her four children and may have left her money in his will—but he upheld the right of Southern states to secede. Moreover, having managed the finances of several Confederate leaders and entertained other Southern sympathizers at his home, Corcoran became the target of hostility from government officials. Against his protests and demands for rent, the government soon appropriated most of his property for federal use—the incomplete gallery building became the Quartermaster General's Department, a center for storage and distribution of clothing, until the close of the war (Figs. 7, 8). Left with little choice, Corcoran fled to Europe with his assets in October 1862 and remained there for the duration of the war. His hopes for a gallery undaunted, he traveled extensively, met with artists about his plans, and continued to buy European art.

Corcoran's return to Washington in 1865 was not an easy one, since the secretary of state was attempting to bring charges of tax evasion against him. Corcoran continued to pledge loyalty to the South despite its defeat, donating money to Southern causes. For example, in 1870 he presided over the Washington, D.C., memorial service for Robert E. Lee and in 1873 was made vice president of the Southern Historical Society in Richmond, an organization of Southern men dedicated to promoting the Confederacy's vision of the Civil War. [4] Ignoring continued animosity toward him, Corcoran revived efforts to build his art collection, purchasing the John George Brown pendants *Allegro* (1864) and *Penseroso* (1865) as well as landscapes such as

FIG. 7 "Clothing Dep:, Corcoran's Private Art Building," 1861. Woodcut. From Paul Fleury Mottelay, T. Campbell-Copeland, and Frank Leslie, Frank Leslie's The Soldier in Our Civil War: A Pictorial History of the Conflict, 1861–65 (New York: Stanley Bradley Publishing Co., 1893), 1:158–59. Historical Society of Washington, D.C., General Photograph Collection, CHS 04663

**FIG. 8** Group at Quartermaster General's office, Corcoran's Building, 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., April 1865. Photograph. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, lot 4188





Doughty's *Landscape* (c. 1849) and Church's *Tamaca Palms* (1854) from the estate of his friend A.M. Cozzens in 1868. <sup>65</sup> *Tamaca Palms* surely reminded the collector of his friendships with Cozzens and Humboldt, whose influential book *Cosmos* (begun 1845) had inspired Church to visit the tropics.

It was not until 1869 that the Renwick-designed building was restored to Corcoran. Feeling that his relationship with the government had improved to the point that he could resume work on his museum, he deeded the building, grounds, and his private collection to the first nine members of a self-perpetuating board of trustees, thereby founding the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Among the trustees were Corcoran's business partner George W. Riggs and his friend William T. Walters (1819–1894), later to be cofounder of the Walters Art Gallery (now the Walters Art Museum). In the deed and charter, Corcoran planned for the majority of his art collection to form the nucleus around which the gallery, to be "dedicated to Art," would develop; the gallery was to be "used solely for the purpose of encouraging American genius, in the production and preservation of works pertaining to the 'Fine Arts' and kindred objects." Also according to the charter, the trustees would ensure the "perpetual establishment and maintenance of a Public Gallery and Museum for the promotion and encouragement of the arts of painting and sculpture and the fine arts generally." 66

Reconstruction and adaptation of the building for the purpose of displaying art were largely accomplished by February 1871, when Corcoran opened it temporarily for a ball to benefit the Washington Monument Society, of which he was a founder (in 1859) and for many years its vice president. However, with the exception of portraits of Corcoran, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay, there were few works of art on view; many had not yet been transferred from Corcoran's home, and he and the trustees must have wanted to further enrich the collection before a public opening. In 1873 Walters, who chaired the trustee Committee on Works of Art, was charged with that task—a responsibility he held until 1877 and in which he was assisted by his friends, the premier art agents and collectors George Lucas of Baltimore (1824–1909) and the New Yorker Samuel P. Avery (1822–1904). It is not

known how Corcoran met Walters. However, since both men were Southern sympathizers and Walters was the only major art collector in the vicinity and, at that, one with strong connections to the international art market through Lucas and Avery, he was a natural choice for the Corcoran's board.<sup>69</sup>

To fill the large rooms of the new gallery and to complement Corcoran's extensive holdings of American paintings and small-scale European pictures, Walters went on a buying trip abroad and purchased a number of large-scale paintings, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme's monumental *Dead Caesar* (1859–67), as well as bronzes by Antoine-Louis Barye, the extremely popular French animal sculptor and water-colorist whom he had patronized and promoted since the early 1860s. <sup>70</sup> Corcoran advised the trustees on certain opportunities, such as the 1873 sale of part of Avery's New York gallery. <sup>71</sup> By the fall of 1873 the board completed the

FIG. 9 First Corcoran Gallery of Art building, at the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. (now the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution). Undated photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives



organization and staffing of the institution, which opened to the public in three stages the following year. On 19 January 1874, fifteen years after construction began, the galleries for paintings and bronzes, as well as an octagon designed for *The Greek Slave*, opened (Fig. 9). On 29 April still more galleries could be visited, and by December all of the spaces were accessible to the public and displayed about 350 objects, including 112 paintings—nearly double the number catalogued by Lanman in 1857.<sup>72</sup>

### Growth of the Gallery, 1874-1888

While it is unknown whether Corcoran or Walters collaborated on the installation of the works of art, the execution of such plans was likely overseen by William MacLeod (1811-1892; Fig. 10), who served from 1873 to 1889 as the gallery's first curator. The son of Scottish immigrants, the Alexandria, Virginia, native attended the University of Glasgow and soon discovered his talent for painting. Beginning in the late 1830s, he traveled in New York, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and what is now West Virginia in search of landscape scenes to paint, and in 1843 his work was included in the Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Artists' Fund Society in Philadelphia, his first known exhibition. After returning to Washington in 1854, he taught painting and draftsmanship at the school he established and continued to exhibit his work. When the Civil War forced his school to close, he became a clerk at the Treasury Department from 1861 to 1873, after which he began to work as the Corcoran's curator. He was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the gallery, including hanging and arranging the works of art, receiving new acquisitions, overseeing copyists, handling correspondence, and maintaining the catalogue of paintings and sculpture.73 Corcoran purchased MacLeod's Great Falls of the Potomac sometime before 1869, including it in his original gift (Fig. 11). The Corcoran now owns two more of MacLeod's oil paintings as well as several works on paper.

From the outset, visitors to the Corcoran Gallery were meant to view American paintings and sculpture as a continuation of the great tradition of Western art.<sup>74</sup> To that end, the ground-floor sculpture hall on the north end of the building (Fig. 12) welcomed visitors with replicas of dozens of famous sculptures in the collections of

FIG. 10 Probably Moses P. Rice, William MacLeod, c. 1866. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

FIG. 11 William MacLeod, *Great Falls of the Potomac*, c. 1869. Oil on canvas, 34 × 45 in. (86.4 × 114.3 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.47









the Musée du Louvre, in Paris, the British Museum, in London, and the Vatican, in Rome, including the Discobolus, the Venus de Milo, the Laocoön, and the Apollo Belvedere. Soon after the January opening, plaster casts "made by a new process . . . to perfectly reproduce the originals" of the Elgin Marbles from the British Museum and the frieze from the Parthenon—a portion of which adorns the south atrium of the 1897 building today—were installed in the main sculpture gallery. Also included was a gallery of casts of Renaissance sculptures such as Lorenzo Ghiberti's doors of the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence and Michelangelo's Medici tomb figures, from the Laurentian Library in Florence. Yet another gallery featured the Barye bronzes, American marble sculptures, majolica, and electrotype reproductions of Roman silver, medieval and Renaissance armor, and European decorative arts objects from the South Kensington Museum, London (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). After ascending the grand staircase, visitors could visit the octagonal gallery specially designed to house Powers's magnificent *Greek Slave* (Fig. 13), which was joined by Galt's *Bacchante* and the *Veiled Nun* by an unknown European sculptor.

This sweeping survey of the history of Western art, deftly interspersed with examples of American painting and sculpture, continued directly above the sculpture hall on the north side of the building. Here was the museum's greatest feature its vast Main Gallery of Paintings, showcasing ninety-odd canvases hung floor to ceiling in the Salon style characteristic of the period. These, in turn, surrounded Charles Loring Elliott's centrally placed 1867 portrait of the gallery's benefactor, visible through the doorway in a stereoscopic photograph of the octagonal gallery (see Fig. 13) and on the right-hand wall in a photograph of the Main Gallery (Fig. 14). American works hung alongside examples from the Corcoran's growing collection of portraits of American presidents.<sup>76</sup> The American paintings, in turn, were interspersed with European ones, almost certainly to demonstrate, as Wallach observes, that native art could hold its own against Continental examples." The two large canvases anchoring the east and west ends of the hall were Gérôme's Dead Caesar and The Drought in Egypt by the Belgian painter Jean-François Portaels. 78 A critic for the Washington Star also noted paintings by the French artist Ary Scheffer and the Scotsman Thomas Faed, and works by American artists, including the Coles, Leutze's Evening Party at Milton's, Sully's portrait of Andrew Jackson (1845) and Jane Stuart's of George Washington (c. 1854), Huntington's Mercy's Dream, and Church's Tamaca Palms. 79

Corcoran must have been exceedingly pleased with the opening of his gallery, and a portrait commissioned from around this time is a telling likeness (Fig. 15). It

FIG. 12 Sculpture hall, first Corcoran Gallery of Art building, c. 1885. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

FIG. 13 The Greek Slave exhibited in Octagonal Gallery, first Corcoran Gallery of Art building, c. 1877. Stereoscopic photograph, detail.
Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives





FIG. 14 Main Gallery of Paintings, first Corcoran Gallery of Art building, 1880s. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

FIG. 15 William Oliver Stone, William Wilson Corcoran, c. 1870. Oil on canvas, 96 × 60 in. (243.8 × 152.4 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gift of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. 52.29

shows the proud founder standing in front of his new building—positioned, appropriately, on the entrance steps of a nearby structure that offered a number of artists' studios—with the Capitol seen over his left shoulder. Strategically positioned between his "pleasure for residents and visitors at the National metropolis" and the structure housing Congress, whose attention he constantly courted, the benefactor all but touts the "national" quality of his museum. Corcoran's stated desire to establish a gallery to encourage American genius in the nation's capital seemed to be realized. Key to reinforcing his plan was the interest of the Smithsonian regents, who issued a statement noting that the gallery would be "an important means of improving the intellectual and moral condition of the citizens of Washington." Notably, the Smithsonian secretary Joseph Henry filled a vacancy on the Corcoran's board in 1873, and the organization transferred several works of art to the gallery, carrying out in small measure a plan from a decade earlier to shift its entire art collection to the Corcoran so it could stay focused on its scientific mission.

Even more significant for spreading the word of Corcoran's patriotic goals was the popular press. As early as 1869, and building to a crescendo when the gallery opened in 1874, critics far and wide resoundingly emphasized the national nature of the institution. In 1869 a writer for the *Philadelphia Bulletin* anticipated that the gallery-to-be would be "fit to make a highly creditable Louvre . . . [facing] President's Square" and hailed Corcoran as "an American Mecænas." Writing in 1872, a critic for the *Daily Patriot* was explicit in his hopes for the gallery, certain that it would "have a direct and happy influence on the General Government of the nation." He continued:

After looking upon genuine works of art . . . produced by men of worldwide fame and illustrating important historical events, or depicting the wonders of physical nature, our Congressmen would find it hazardous and inexpedient to waste the public money, as they have frequently done in times past, upon second or third-class productions. 85

The *Patriot* writer went on optimistically to predict that the gallery "will be visited by people from every section of the country, and the ideas thus obtained will naturally permeate the body politic at home, and the time may come when . . . Congress . . . will be instructed to vote for good pictures or statues, rather than for political measures of doubtful policy." The words of a columnist for the *Aldine* in 1874 echoed

those of the *Philadelphia Bulletin* writer five years earlier, stating, "Washington may now pride herself upon a National Gallery of Art." Illustrations, too, like one in the *New York Daily Graphic*, delineated the gallery's patriotic nature (Fig. 16). A writer for the *New York Times* further noted that the gallery was "a benefaction to the whole country. . . . fitly located at the capital, . . . a Gallery of Fine Arts which will rival the most famous collections in the world." A writer for the *Washington Evening Star* observed that *The Greek Slave* "mark[ed] our first success in National Art" and lavished praise on the gallery's premier status among American art establishments and its key role in presenting a comprehensive history of Western art. He exulted, while acknowledging New York's newly opened Metropolitan Museum of Art: "In one year from this time we shall have the best collection south and west of the Hudson"; "ten years from this time we shall have the second gallery in rank in the United States."

All of this critical and official praise, as well as the public's enthusiastic attendance at the new gallery, must have bolstered Corcoran's stated aim of "encouraging American genius." Almost immediately after opening the Renwick building to the public in 1874, he set in motion a plan to cement the reputation of his new museum as the first successful national gallery—one that would, by virtue of its location and its presentation of works by nationally recognized American artists within the great continuum of Western art, educate, inspire, and engender patriotic fervor in its local and national visitors. Moreover, the plan undoubtedly was also based on Corcoran's desire to demonstrate his patriotism and return himself to national favor after his flight to Europe during the Civil War and his continued support of the defeated South.

Corcoran's plan was two-pronged. The institution would incorporate a national portrait gallery, and its patriotic nature would be enhanced by the acquisition of additional major landscapes and genre paintings by contemporary (or near-contemporary) American artists. By 1874 Corcoran already had a substantial corpus of official likenesses on which to build his portrait gallery. Among his founding gifts to the gallery were Jane Stuart's copy of her father's full-length portrait of Washington, bought in 1858, and Thomas Sully's 1845 likeness of Andrew Jackson, purchased by 1867 from John F. Coyle, editor of the *National Intelligencer* newspaper. In 1873 Corcoran presented a portrait of Henry Clay by an unidentified artist.

Between its 1874 opening and 1885, the gallery—often with Corcoran's encouragement—expanded its portrait collection to include portraits of all the United States presidents as well as many statesmen and other notable Americans. <sup>90</sup> To ensure the success of his plan, Corcoran remained deeply involved in shaping the direction of the gallery's acquisitions. He often bought works for the gallery and served as a conduit of information to the trustees, despite the fact that he officially vested all purchasing power in them in accordance with the gallery's charter; <sup>91</sup> the gallery's scant early accounting records do not reveal how acquisitions were funded. <sup>92</sup> In 1875, for example, he bought Chester Harding's portrait of John Randolph of Roanoke, which was acquired immediately by the gallery. <sup>93</sup> Also in 1875 he eagerly paid for an important group of likenesses that the Library of Congress declined to acquire: 818 profile portrait engravings of distinguished Americans by the French-born artist Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin.

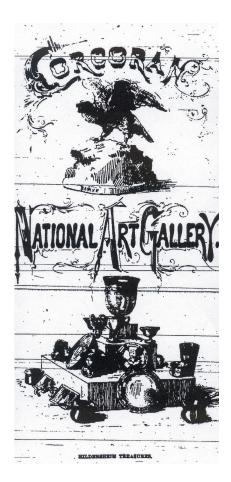


FIG. 16 "Corcoran National Art Gallery," New York Daily Graphic, 21 March 1874. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The most significant acquisition of a group of official portraits occurred in 1879, when Corcoran purchased for his gallery a collection of fifteen presidential likenesses by G.P.A. Healy from the Chicago businessman and philanthropist Thomas B. Bryan. 4 The series, which included portraits of all the presidents through Abraham Lincoln save for George Washington (already represented by the Jane Stuart portrait) and William Henry Harrison (whose portrait by Eliphalet Andrews was added the following year), was updated by additions in 1882 and 1883 and continued as new presidents were elected, up until the turn of the century.95 This acquisition fostered the collector's continued goal to garner the government's financial support, and he requested that MacLeod write a "good article . . . about them . . . to show Congress how national in character the institution is."96 "This interesting and valuable series of portraits of our Presidents," MacLeod wrote dutifully in the Washington Evening Star, "shows the determination of Mr. Corcoran and the trustees to make national portraiture a strong point in the gallery." The curator made plain that in this case "national" meant that the gallery should be representative of American history in the country's capital:

As our great men pass away, it is well not only to have authentic portraits of them, but to gather them in such an abiding-place as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, here in the metropolis of the nation, where so many of them figured in its history, ever to remain on free exhibition to the public.

Perhaps to accommodate his growing national portrait gallery, Corcoran tried to purchase key lots for a major expansion from Samuel Phillips Lee (1812–1897) in 1879-80. However, Lee, a rear admiral in the Union navy, refused to sell, causing an uproar in the press.98 Undeterred, Corcoran continued to build the collection, and the single most important acquisition of a presidential likeness occurred several years later. In 1884 Phebe Warren Tayloe (1804-1884), widow of the Washington diplomat and collector Colonel Benjamin Ogle Tayloe (1796-1868), bequeathed to the gallery its first of two Gilbert Stuart Athenæum-type portraits of George Washington.99 Showing the first president wearing a shirt with a linen ruffle under his jacket, the painting is one of about seventy-five replicas Stuart made after his wellknown life portrait of Washington, painted in Philadelphia in 1796. Curiously, Corcoran had been offered a Stuart likeness of the first president in 1875 but was then not interested in acquiring it, writing to Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston that the "Gallery [was] supplied" and not in need of the "very valuable portrait," asking if she might "know of a purchaser . . . among . . . your millionaires." Whether Corcoran owned another Stuart portrait of Washington in 1875, had known after Tayloe's death that his widow would bequeath the portrait to the gallery, or simply favored the Jane Stuart portrait he had purchased in 1858 is unknown. 101

The second prong of Corcoran's plan, implemented following the opening of the Renwick building, was to expand the gallery's collection of American art more generally, obtaining major landscapes and genre paintings by artists not already represented. As with the portrait acquisitions, Corcoran often played a direct and sometimes an advisory role. At the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia, for example, he purchased several paintings, now unlocated, for the gallery.<sup>102</sup>

Durand's *The Edge of the Forest* (1868–71), James McDougal Hart's *The Drove at the Ford* (1874), and Worthington Whittredge's *Trout Brook in the Catskills* were all bought directly from the painters, continuing a tradition Corcoran began in the 1850s;<sup>103</sup> William Sidney Mount's *The Tough Story* was acquired from Freyer & Bendann, a Baltimore dealer that had acquired the painting from the nephew of the Baltimore collector Robert Gilmor, Jr.<sup>104</sup> At the famous 1877 sale of Robert M. Olyphant's collection, Avery brokered the Committee on Works of Art's purchase of two Kensett landscapes to complement the small 1851 *Sketch of Mount Washington* that Corcoran had acquired in 1852—*View on the Genesee near Mount Morris* (1857) and *Autumnal Afternoon on Lake George* (1864)—as well as a third major Thomas Cole painting for the collection, his 1831 *Tornado in an American Forest*.<sup>105</sup>

In 1876 the gallery attempted to add another painting by the renowned landscapist Frederic Church to the collection to complement Tamaca Palms, which Corcoran had bought in 1868. Given Corcoran's friendship with and fondness for Alexander von Humboldt, the collector no doubt played an influential role when in April 1876 the trustees, led by Riggs, planned to buy the artist's homage to the naturalist, the massive Heart of the Andes (1859, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). They agreed to bid as much as \$8,000 at the William T. Blodgett collection sale in April 1876; the painting sold for \$10,000, the highest price paid to date for a work by a living American artist. Just eight months later the trustees resolved to purchase Niagara (1857) from the John Taylor Johnston collection. Walters asked MacLeod's opinion of the canvas, noting that if it could be secured, it "would make others of small importance," to which MacLeod replied, "urging the expediency of getting [the Church] at any expense, within our reach"; the bid was successful, at a price of \$12,500.106 Just as famous, if not more so, than the Heart of the Andes, Niagara made an interesting—and perhaps not entirely coincidental—purchase for the museum during the country's celebration of its centennial year. The painting proved ever more popular after its acquisition; just four years later, for example, MacLeod hosted the visit of Jicarilla Apache delegates, who posed in their native dress in front of the indelible icon of Manifest Destiny (Fig. 17).

If Corcoran's role in the acquisition of *Niagara* was so minor as to be undocumented in the museum's records, the situation two years later was quite different. Albert Bierstadt, Church's greatest rival in the American landscape marketplace, was surely chagrined when Corcoran and his museum purchased works by other prominent living artists such as Church, Durand, and Kensett. Despite protest from MacLeod, in 1878 Bierstadt succeeded in selling Corcoran his massive scene titled *Mount Corcoran* for \$7,000, one-half his original asking price; the painting entered the gallery collection later that year.

Despite the trustees' interest in owning multiple paintings by Church and a few other artists, by the mid-1870s Corcoran and the trustees became more selective in their acquisitions, often rejecting offers of paintings by artists who were already well represented in the collection, including Sully, Stuart, Leutze, and Cropsey.<sup>107</sup> Offers of Stuart portraits of Washington were particularly numerous.<sup>108</sup>

FIG. 17 Jicarilla Apache delegation at the first Corcoran Gallery of Art building, 1880. Albumen photograph. National Anthropological Archives and Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution, INV 02064500



The steady collecting of contemporary American paintings in the 1870s was articulated as policy by Corcoran in 1879, when he firmly stated that "it is not the design of the institution to purchase old works, but for the encouragement of American genius."109 His proclamation came at the end of a decade that had witnessed an enormous increase in the number of artists and photographers living and working within just a few blocks of the gallery, a trend that must have greatly pleased him. In 1871 the New Yorker Joseph B. Varnum built Vernon Row at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., a Second Empire building boasting twenty-three rooms that provided studio, teaching, and exhibition space for more than fifty artists and architects and hundreds of students. 110 Its first tenant arrived in 1873, and by 1875 it was considered Washington's studio building and receiving considerable notice in the press as the "centre or nucleus in and about which many of the knights of the pencil and palette . . . are gathering."<sup>111</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, in 1875 Corcoran razed his 1847 office building at 15th and F Streets, N.W., to build one twice its size that housed many artists' studios into the 1880s. 112 Among the artists occupying Vernon Row was the Warrenton, Virginia, native Richard Norris Brooke, whom Corcoran had helped by offering studio space and later recommending for a portrait commission. Brooke served as vice principal of the Corcoran School of Art from 1902 to 1918. Corcoran also helped the Richmond-born Moses Jacob Ezekiel, a Confederate soldier turned sculptor, after he completed eleven portraits of famous artists for the Corcoran's facade niches in the 1870s and early 1880s while he was working in Rome. 113

The 1880s saw a marked upswing in Corcoran's purchasing activity on behalf of the gallery, perhaps in part due to the conclusion, in 1877, of Walters's term on the Committee on Works of Art in 1877. The gallery trustees bought Brooke's A Pastoral Visit, undoubtedly on Corcoran's recommendation. On 16 April 1881 Corcoran supplied funds for the acquisition of Sanford Gifford's last important painting, Ruins of the Parthenon (1880), the first canvas by the artist to enter an art museum. 114 Gifford had tried unsuccessfully to place the picture, which he considered the crowning achievement of his career, in a museum collection before his death.<sup>115</sup> Corcoran bought the painting from the artist's estate auction in New York, perhaps after visiting or learning of Gifford's memorial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the fall of 1880.<sup>116</sup> In 1883 the gallery followed this important purchase with a commission to William Trost Richards to paint his majestic On the Coast of New Jersey (1883). In the mid-1880s Corcoran continued his pursuit of portraits of American statesmen by buying Joseph Wright's 1782 likeness of Benjamin Franklin and tried to acquire Chester Harding's portrait of Corcoran's friend Daniel Webster. 117 Corcoran bought a handful of other American and European paintings for the gallery in the 1880s. 118

Perhaps nearly as important for understanding the institution's history is an examination of those works that Corcoran or the trustees declined to buy. In the spring of 1882, for example, Corcoran expressed a strong desire to acquire a work by John Singer Sargent, the ambitious young portraitist to the American and European elite. He asked Harper Pennington, an American artist then living in Paris, what Sargent had for sale (and, prudently, about the prices) and when Sargent could paint something for him on commission. 119 Yet the gallery would not acquire a work by Sargent until 1917, with the purchase of his masterpiece *En route pour la* 

pêche (Setting Out to Fish) of 1878. Rivaling the gallery's failure to buy Church's Heart of the Andes in 1876 was Corcoran's refusal (for unknown reasons), in December 1885, to acquire George Inness's Peace and Plenty (1865, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) from the New Jersey statesman Cortlandt Parker (1818–1907), which would have well complemented the early Italian landscape by the artist he had bought in the 1850s.<sup>120</sup>

William Wilson Corcoran may be characterized as a collector who made acquisitions in order to echo his accomplishments as a self-made man and to embrace the culture of philanthropy prevalent in his era. Like the few other East Coast collectors of American art during his era, Corcoran amassed American paintings and sculpture in tandem with European examples and was of a more independent mind in selecting American works than he was when purchasing European ones. <sup>121</sup> Unlike some collectors, however, Corcoran did not forsake American for European art after the Civil War but rather increased his American purchases, to develop his national gallery and to demonstrate his patriotism. <sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, his taste for American

art was never radical or adventurous, nor was it particularly varied: he accomplished his goals by collecting portraits, landscapes, genre, and historical works by the leading artists of his time and did not collect still-life paintings or colonial portraits. Later on, the gallery's board, with Corcoran's guidance, also declined to acquire such paintings and portraits.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps most important, unlike other nineteenth-century American patrons, Corcoran ensured that his collection had a permanent home in his gallery. 124 Additionally, the education of the nation's artists, or the "encouragement of American genius," as stated in its charter, played a critical role in the gallery's history from the very beginning. When it opened its doors, art students immediately flocked to the gallery to observe, sketch, and paint copies of the collection's famous works, especially its casts after antique sculpture. 125 In 1878 Corcoran donated additional funding to establish a school associated with the gallery. In 1890, two years after his death, the Corcoran School of Art officially opened when a small annex to house students was constructed on the north side of the building, furthering the gallery's burgeoning identity as a place for education in the arts (Fig. 18). 126

### William Wilson Corcoran's Legacy: The Twentieth Century and Beyond

Following William Wilson Corcoran's death on 24 February 1888, his legacy endured in the museum he had created for the city of Washington and the nation. The gallery steadily continued, through gift and purchase, to make acquisitions that furthered its core mission, to "encourage American genius." By 1891 the expanding collection, the demand for more space for the new School of Art, and the desire for a special exhibitions program led the trustees to use money from Corcoran's will to buy a larger lot three blocks south of the Renwick building, at 17th Street between New York Avenue and E Street, N.W., and commissioned the architect Ernest Flagg to design a building to house both the museum and the school. Ground was broken for the Beaux-Arts style building on 26 June 1893, and the finished building opened

FIG. 18 Students visiting the first Corcoran Gallery of Art building, 1890s. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives



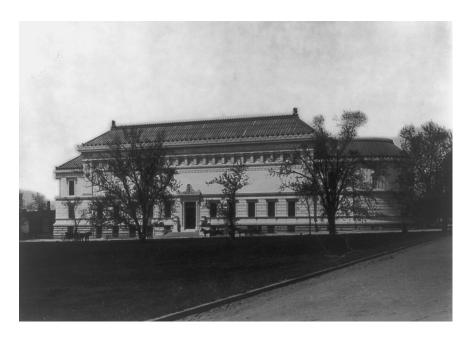




FIG. 19 Corcoran Gallery of Art, present building, east facade, c. 1897. Photograph. Library of Congress, negative number USZ62-87608

FIG. 20 Corcoran Gallery of Art, present building, atrium, c. 1940. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

to the public on 8 January 1897, with President Grover Cleveland and his cabinet in attendance at the festivities (Figs. 19, 20). By this time the collection included approximately 1,850 works of art.<sup>127</sup>

While in its inaugural building, the gallery had been able to display only its permanent collection supplemented by a small number of loans from artists and private collectors. The new, much larger facility allowed the museum both to expand its collection and to pursue other activities, such as temporary exhibitions. Although the Corcoran's holdings did not grow dramatically in the years around the turn of the century, there were several very significant additions. The gallery's second curator, P. Sinclair Barbarin, purchased George Inness's commanding Sunset in the Woods (1891) as well as postbellum genre paintings in the academic style. These included J.G. Brown's The Longshoremen's Noon (1879) and Charles Frederic Ulrich's In the Land of Promise, Castle Garden (1884), purchased at the 1900 sale of works belonging to the important collector of American art William T. Evans (1843-1918). Also in that year, shortly before Barbarin's death, the gallery acquired its first American Impressionist painting—Theodore Robinson's 1897 The Valley of the Seine, from the Hills of Giverny (1892). This prescient purchase, made at a time when American Impressionism was just beginning to unfold, forecast the active acquisition of such work in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1905, under its third leader and first director, Frederick B. McGuire—in 1900 the position of curator officially shifted to that of director<sup>128</sup>—the Corcoran also became the first museum to buy bronzes by the western master Frederic Remington, purchasing Off the Range (Coming through the Rye) (modeled 1902, cast 1903) and The Mountain Man (1903) from the sculptor's New York dealer, Knoedler. <sup>129</sup> Despite these successes, the turn of the century brought an acquisition disappointment reminiscent of those in the 1870s and 1880s, and once again involving the Corcoran's rival museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1897 the gallery attempted to acquire a third Leutze painting for its collection—his massive Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851)—but the trustees were outbid in a vigorous battle at the estate sale of the wealthy New York merchant Marshall O. Roberts by none other than Samuel P. Avery, who had assisted with so many Corcoran acquisitions in the 1870s. Avery was bidding for John S. Kennedy, who immediately made the painting a gift to the Metropolitan. 130

If acquisitions were few during this period, the museum was ambitious in mounting special exhibitions. In the tradition of its founder, many were annual displays promoting contemporary Washington artists' organizations, such as the Washington Water Color and Architectural Clubs, the Capital Camera Club, the Society of Washington Artists, and, of course, the students of the Corcoran School of Art. 131 The popularity of such shows led to the establishment, just ten years after the opening of the Flagg building, of the nationally recognized Biennial Exhibitions of Contemporary American Painting, which became the institution's single most important vehicle for the acquisition of American paintings. 132 The biennials were almost certainly inspired by those begun a century before by the nation's first art academies, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design, but also surely resulted from several concrete factors: the strong interest in contemporary art espoused by the gallery's founder; the presence of the Corcoran School of Art; and the fact that the Corcoran, as the only art museum in Washington until the Phillips Collection opened its doors in 1921, was the logical venue for such exhibitions.<sup>133</sup> As McGuire, who proposed the exhibitions in 1906, wrote to the trustees the following year, the program would be "of great advantage to the Gallery and a distinct factor in awakening public interest in it; it would prove highly beneficial to contributing artists; and at the same time, [it would be] instructive and interesting to art lovers, students, and the public at large."134

The large exhibitions immediately became a nationally recognized forum for the display, examination, appreciation, and debate of the latest ideas in contemporary American painting. One important way this was accomplished was to include examples by lesser-known artists, whose work was juried and eligible for prizes, and work by more recognized painters (who were invited to exhibit without the threat of rejection but also without eligibility for prizes).<sup>135</sup> The First Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings, which comprised 397 works, opened to enormous fanfare in 1907 and attracted an astonishing 62,697 visitors during its thirty-three-day run. 136 Under McGuire's leadership, the Corcoran purchased half of the 26 paintings sold from the exhibition, which included work by a wide range of artists, from the academically trained realist Thomas Anshutz to the American Impressionists Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, Gari Melchers, and Edward Redfield, to the Taos painter Albert Groll. Also purchased by the gallery was Willard Metcalf's 1906 nocturne May Night, depicting the Old Lyme, Connecticut, gathering place for American Impressionists, Winslow Homer, invited to exhibit alongside Metcalf and other juried artists, submitted his equally commanding canvas A Light on the Sea (1897). Its purchase marked a particularly progressive moment for the institution, only the third American museum to collect the artist's work.137

The first exhibition set a high standard for those that followed, which continued to show the work of some of the country's most important painters. The number of purchases made from the exhibitions decreased after the first show, although the quality and variety of works remained astonishingly high. The second exhibition, for example, yielded nine acquisitions, again by a variety of artists ranging from the academically trained Charles Sprague Pearce to the expatriate Impressionist Mary Cassatt and the Boston School painter Edmund Tarbell. Cassatt's endearing *Young Girl at a Window* of about 1883–84 and Tarbell's intimate portrait of his daughters,



FIG. 21 Installation view of the front galleries, Eleventh Biennial Exhibition, Corcoran Gallery of Art, present building, 1928. Photograph. Corcoran Gallery of Art Archives

*Josephine and Mercie* (1908), have endured as masterworks in the permanent collection. <sup>138</sup>

By and large the biennial acquisitions were, like the exhibitions themselves, representative of the best living artists of the time. However, both were comparatively conservative in nature, usually recognizing major styles such as American Impressionism, the urban realism of the Eight, and regionalism, well after their heyday (Fig. 21). Around the time of the Eight's momentous debut exhibition in 1908, works by the American Impressionists—sometimes intermixed with paintings by academically trained and Taos school artists—dominated Corcoran biennials and their resulting purchases. Works by members of the Eight generally

were not acquired until much later: for example, in 1923 Robert Henri's *Indian Girl in White Blanket* (1917) was acquired from the Ninth Exhibition, in exchange for a work much more representative of the height of that artist's career in New York, *Willie Gee* (1904, Newark Art Museum, N.J.), which had been bought from the Sixth Exhibition in 1919. This was not the only instance in which Corcoran trustees upgraded biennial purchases when they deemed it appropriate: Cassatt's *Woman and Child* was purchased from the First Annual Exhibition and returned to her dealer Durand-Ruel in New York in 1909 as partial payment for *Young Girl at a Window*. <sup>140</sup>

As the museum's acquisitions and visibility increased as a result of the biennials, so did the variety of its other exhibitions, some of which yielded important additions to the collection. In 1910, when the gallery mounted the first solo exhibition of the work of the Gilded Age sculptor Bessie Potter Vonnoh, it purchased her Day Dreams (1903), and the artist donated a cast of Enthroned (modeled 1902, probably cast 1911). Indebted to the Corcoran for this exhibition opportunity—as well as for her second solo show, in 1919—and delighted that the museum was attached to a school where students might benefit from studying her work, Vonnoh bequeathed twentyfive of her bronzes to the Corcoran in 1955. 141 The Vonnoh exhibitions were just two examples of the new program, which continued some of the annual club exhibitions but also featured other displays, providing exposure to nationally recognized American painters. For example, in late 1908 the work of the late sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens was presented, and 1912 alone saw monographic exhibitions of the work of the painters Cecilia Beaux, Birge Harrison, Childe Hassam, Jonas Lie, Walter Elmer Schofield, Gardner Symons, and Charles Morris Young. Major exhibitions of American Impressionist painters were held in the 1910s and 1920s, into the tenure of the gallery's fourth leader, C. Powell Minnegerode, including one-person exhibitions of Benson, Frieseke, Daniel Garber, Redfield, Tarbell, and John F. Carlson and a joint show for Redfield and Tarbell in 1918. An important milestone occurred in 1919 with the final exhibition of the Ten American Painters, who had shown together annually since 1898. Another took place in 1922, when Hassam exhibited his flag paintings created during World War I. Important memorial exhibitions were held for John White Alexander (1916), Abbott Handerson Thayer (1922), and William Merritt Chase (1923).

In the early twentieth century, other important additions to the collection complemented acquisitions made from the biennials. In 1909 Bierstadt's widow gave

the Corcoran the artist's final great western painting, The Last of the Buffalo (1888). In 1911 the gallery purchased Samuel F.B. Morse's massive The House of Representatives of 1822, and in 1917 it bought Sargent's En route pour la pêche (1878) and Chase's masterful portrait of the Corcoran's benefactor William Andrews Clark, Jr. (1839–1925; Fig. 22). Clark, one of the richest men in the world in his day, was responsible for greatly enhancing the museum's collections, physical plant, and financial security. He made a fortune in banking, mining, and railroads—earning fame as one of the "Copper Kings" of Butte, Montana—and later became U.S. senator from that state. 142 He became involved with the Corcoran while serving in the Senate (1901–7) during McGuire's tenure as curator, primarily due to his friendship with Charles A. Glover, a trustee of the gallery and longtime friend of Corcoran. 143 In addition to supporting the biennials with prize money (in the form of the William A. Clark Prizes and their corresponding medals) and donating purchases he made from them, Clark ultimately established an endowment of \$100,000 for the awards. This act of generosity was repeated following his death by his widow, Anna E. Clark, who established another endowment to defray the costs of organizing the biennials and to support acquisitions. Proceeds from both funds have been used to purchase American paintings for the collection over the years. The William A. Clark Fund has supported the acquisition of such popular paintings as George Bellows's Forty-two Kids (1907) and Edward Hopper's Ground Swell (1939), and the Anna E. Clark fund has been used to buy John La Farge's Flowers on a Window Ledge (c. 1861) and Thayer's Mount Monadnock (probably 1911/1914).

Senator Clark also played a key role in perpetuating William Wilson Corcoran's desire that American viewers see their native art alongside European examples. He bequeathed to the gallery nearly two hundred examples of European art as well as seven major American paintings, including his portrait by Chase and canvases by Edwin Austin Abbey, Ralph Albert Blakelock, John Francis Murphy, and Gilbert Stuart (the second Athenæum-style portrait of Washington to enter the collection), as well as a sculpture by the Vienna-born American Isadore Konti. Under the direction of Minnegerode, the new wing to house Clark's collection, designed by the architect Charles Platt and completed with funds donated by the senator's family, nearly doubled the size of the museum when it opened in early 1928.

In the years since the Clark wing was completed, many individual donors have followed in Corcoran's footsteps though their gifts, bequests, and funding for purchases. A 1941 bequest by the Cleveland businessman James Parmelee (1855–1931), a Washington resident later in life, added a broad range of significant American paintings, sculptures, and works of art on paper to the collection, such as Sargent's late landscape *Simplon Pass* (1911) and James McNeill Whistler's *Battersea Reach* (c. 1863). In 1949 Mrs. Francis Ormond, the sole surviving sister of John Singer Sargent, deeded more than one hundred drawings and one painting by her brother. This gift, together with the gallery's six other oils, two watercolors, and one bronze, makes Sargent one of the best-represented artists in the collection. One of those oils, *Seascape with Rocks* (c. 1875/77) joined the collection in 2009, on the occasion of the Corcoran exhibition *Sargent and the Sea*.

The Corcoran continues to expand its outstanding collection of American paintings through purchase, gift, and bequest. In the 1980s two important early American



FIG. 22 William Merritt Chase, William Andrews Clark, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 50½ × 40¼ in. (128.3 × 102.2 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Gift of William A. Clark, 17.3

portraits joined the collection: Joshua Johnson's likeness of the McCurdy family (c. 1806) and John Singleton Copley's portrait of the Boston distillery owner Thomas Amory II (c. 1770-72). In 1995 and 2004 Olga Hirshhorn, the widow of the modern art collector Joseph Hirshhorn, generously donated several hundred works of American and European modern and contemporary art. A significant gift of thirty works by twenty-eight African American artists, as well as an important, large archive and library intended to aid scholarship on American art and African American art, were the 1996 gift of the local collector and gallerist Thurlow Evans Tibbs, Jr. (1952–1997). Tibbs presided over an artistic and literary salon in his family's historic home located just off the famous U Street corridor, which was a cultural hub of Washington for several decades. The most important group of historic American art and reference materials to be donated to the gallery in decades, the gift contained paintings by Henry O. Tanner, Loïs Mailou Jones, Hale Woodruff, and others as well as important photographs by James Van Der Zee and Addison Scurlock. Tibbs acknowledged the Corcoran's important legacy as not only Washington's community museum but also one with vast potential, noting that it "has the opportunity to leap generations ahead of any other institution in the country and I want to see that happen in my home city. I think that generations to come will say how this is forward thinking."145 That same year, Aaron Douglas's 1936 mural Into Bondage came to the Corcoran from the Evans-Tibbs Collection (named for the gallery he operated in his home) as a museum purchase and partial gift from the Washington collector. 146

Also in the late twentieth century, significant attention was given to acquiring preparatory and related works that serve the invaluable purpose of contextualizing iconic paintings in the collection. The display and study of Bierstadt's *The Last of the Buffalo*, for example, have been greatly enhanced through several acquisitions: the 1994 purchase of three oil studies for the figures and horse; the 2003 acquisition of two previously unknown sketchbooks that document the artist's trips to Yellowstone and that include pencil studies for the completed canvas; and the 2002 purchase of a rare chromolithograph after the painting. In the spring of 2009 the Corcoran purchased the only known oil study for J. G. Brown's *The Longshoremen's Noon*. The acquisition of historically and stylistically appropriate American frames has been another priority, and three major paintings in the collection have been reframed to better feature them in the galleries: Mary Cassatt's *Young Girl at a Window* (frame purchased in 1998), Winslow Homer's *A Light on the Sea* (frame purchased by the Corcoran Women's Committee in 2000), and John Singer Sargent's *En route pour la pêche* (frame also purchased by the Women's Committee, in 2009).

Through his generous gifts, gallery purchases made with his guidance, and multiple legacies to the institution that bears his name, William Wilson Corcoran succeeded in pioneering a landmark in the nation's cultural history. He was alone among nineteenth-century American collectors to establish a school of art as well as a museum that would become one of the most important and historically significant repositories of American painting, sculpture, photography, and works on paper in the world. During its distinguished history, now well into its second century, the institution has continually and enthusiastically renewed its founder's aspiration that it be "used solely for the purpose of encouraging American genius."

#### **Notes**

Unless otherwise specified, all works of art acquired by the Corcoran referenced in this essay remain in the museum's collection. Of those, all of the American paintings are catalogued in this volume. 1. Other early institutions were not established expressly as art museums. For example, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts was founded in 1805 to acquire art and to educate artists but, unlike the Corcoran, did not begin with a collection or a museum building. What is today the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art was founded in 1842 as an atheneum. The founding of the Corcoran was soon followed by that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870. opened in 1872) and of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (opened in 1876). For an excellent history of the evolution of the art museum in the United States. see Alan Wallach, "Long-Term Visions, Short-Term Failures: Art Institutions in the United States, 1800-1860," in Wallach, Exhibiting Contradictions: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 9-21.

2. Corcoran may well have begun buying American paintings before this date, since Huntington, in a letter to the collector regarding Corcoran's interest in Mercy's Dream, makes note of "that collection which you are forming"; Huntington to William Wilson Corcoran (hereafter WWC), 28 August 1850, Incoming Letterbook 7, no. 7689, W.W. Corcoran Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter WWC Papers). Transcriptions of these letters, made in the spring of 2006 by Lisa Strong and Katherine Roeder, are maintained by the Department of American Art, CGA. Corcoran's outgoing letters for the years 1849-50 did not go to the Library of Congress collection and are unlocated, so the date of his first purchase cannot be documented. 3. Little on the history of the Corcoran has been published before the present essay. Substantial (yet largely undocumented) accounts of the history were compiled by Davira Taragin, a George Washington University graduate student in the 1970s, who wrote Corcoran (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1976), which accompanied the exhibition The American Genius (24 January-4 April 1976), and an undated draft for her master's thesis, on which Corcoran is based; CGA Curatorial Files. When he was curator of American art at the Corcoran in the late 1980s, Franklin Kelly wrote an unpublished essay, "William Wilson Corcoran and the Encouragement of American Genius";

CGA Curatorial Files. See also Holly Tank,

"Dedicated to Art: William Corcoran and the Founding of His Gallery," Washington History 17, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 2005): 26–51.

4. W. W. Corcoran, A Grandfather's Legacy, Containing a Sketch of His Life and Obituary Notices of Some Members of His Family, Together with Letters from His Friends (Washington, D.C.: Henry Polkinhorn, Printer, 1879).

5. Ibid., 5-6.

6. Ibid., 6.

7. Ibid.

Papers.

8. Daily National Intelligencer, 4 February 1829, 3. On the National Theatre connection, see Mark L. Goldstein, "Washington and the Networks of W. W. Corcoran," Business and Economic History On-Line 5 (2007): 7, at http://www.thebhc.org/publications/BEHonline/2007/goldstein.pdf (accessed 20 June 2010).
9. WWC to Louise Morris, 24 February 1835, Unbound Family Papers, WWC

10. For more detailed analysis of Corcoran's business life, see Henry Cohen, Business and Politics in America from the Age of Jackson to the Civil War: The Career Biography of W. W. Corcoran (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publish-

ing, 1971).

11. Corcoran's philanthropy is documented in "The Story of His Life,"

Washington Post, 25 February 1888, 1;

Holly Tank, "William Wilson Corcoran:

Washington Philanthropist," Washington

History 17, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 2005):

52–65; and in Cohen, Business and Politics in America.

12. G.M. Cassin to WWC, 9 January 1841, Unbound Family Papers, WWC Papers. 13. The meeting, to discuss resuscitating education in the antebellum South, occurred at the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, in the summer of 1869; I am grateful to William R. Johnston of the Walters Art Museum for bringing this to my attention. See Franklin Parker, "Robert E. Lee, George Peabody, and Sectional Reunion," Peabody Journal of Education 37, no. 4 (1960): 196, 199, 200. In this vein, Corcoran supported Washington and Lee University, the College of William and Marv, the Virginia Military Institute, and the University of Virginia. See "The Story of His Life," 1. 14. "The Story of His Life," 1. 15. WWC, A Grandfather's Legacy, letter from Corcoran to his grandchildren, 1 luly 1878, preface, n.p. 16. Other Baltimore collectors close in time to Corcoran's own included Thomas Edmondson (1808-1856), whose collec-

tion held only American works of art;

Johns Hopkins (1795-1873); S. Owings

Granville Sharp Oldfield (1794-1860);

Thomas Swann (1809-1883); and, of

Hoffman; George A. Lucas (1824-1909);

passim and 10-13. See also A Century of Baltimore Collecting (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1941); and William R. Johnston, ed., The Taste of Maryland: Art Collectina in Maryland, 1800-1934 (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1984). 17. Others who collected American and European art at this time were the Philadelphian Joseph Harrison (1810-1874), New Yorkers John T. Johnston (1820–1893) and George A. Hearn (1835–1913), and George Walter Vincent Smith (1832-1893) of Springfield, Massachusetts. Corcoran began collecting at nearly age fifty, placing him among peers of his generation and the next. These men may be seen in contrast to Reed's and Corcoran's friend of later years, the New Yorker Abraham M. Cozzens (d. 1868), as well as the later collectors William T. Evans (1843-1918) and Thomas B. Clarke (1848-1931), whose collections comprised mostly American art, and Robert M. Olyphant (1824-1918), who collected it exclusively. See Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of American Painting, 1813 to 1913," American Art Review 3, no. 6 (November-December 1976): 122, 128. 18. "Register of Paintings Belonging to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1869-1946," Curatorial Records, Registrar's Office, CGA Archives (hereafter "Register of Paintings"), 2, records that Corcoran purchased the "Velvet Brueghel" battle scene copper ( $4^{1/2} \times 7$  in.) from Commodore Decatur. It was deaccessioned in 1979. "Register of Paintings," 5, records that Susan Decatur gave Corcoran an oval entitled The Coquette, brought from Naples. This, too, was deaccessioned in 1979, as a painting by an unidentified European artist. 19. See Susan Decatur to WWC, 15 September 1832, Unbound Family Papers, WWC Papers. 20. WWC mentions plans to go to Baltimore to find an artist to execute his likeness; WWC to Louise Amory Morris,

course, William T. Walters (1819-1894),

who in the 1870s, as Corcoran's friend,

was instrumental in building the collec-

tion of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Walters began collecting about 1855

(though he did not begin collecting

American paintings until 1858, nearly

a decade after Corcoran). Corcoran

collection due to financial reversals.

Johnston, William and Henry Walters:

with the Walters Art Gallery, 1999),

may have known of Gilmor's plans to

bequeath his holdings to the Smithsonian

Institution and the 1848 sale of his large

By 1856 Corcoran was acquainted with

Edmondson (see n44 below). For more on

these Baltimore collectors, see William R.

The Reticent Collectors (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, in association

1 July 1835, Unbound Family Papers, WWC Papers. He enclosed the miniature (now unlocated) in his letter to her of 6 September 1835; ibid. In another letter to Louise, WWC notes that the miniature had been painted by an Italian artist; 30 August 1835, ibid. I am grateful to Marisa Bourgoin, Corcoran Gallery of Art Archivist from 1993 to 2007, for bringing this portrait miniature to my attention.

21. WWC refers to having Louise's miniature in a letter to her, 23 July 1835, Unbound Family Papers, WWC Papers. The miniature is now in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
22. In 1845 Corcoran was persuaded by Robert E. Lee to return the pictures to Lee's father-in-law—and George Wash-

ington's step-grandson—George Washington Parke Custis; George Washington Parke Custis to WWC, 2 April 1845, Incoming Letterbook 6, no. 7369, WWC Papers. Although the nature of the works and how and when he acquired them are not known (nor their current locations), Corcoran's interest in art—and Washington relics—seems to have its roots in this early episode. I am grateful to Marisa Bourgoin for bringing this to my attention. Even from the age of fourteen, Corcoran had taken notice of Washingtoniana. Years later, he recalled seeing the White House painting of George Washington—thought by many to have been cut from its frame by Dolley Madison to protect it from the British during the War of 1812—hidden in Georgetown. WWC to F. Fitzgerald Esq., 20 December 1879, Outgoing Letterbook 77, no. 635, WWC Papers. See also William MacLeod, "Some Incidents in the Life of the Late Wm. Wilson Corcoran," manuscript and typescript, MS 325, William MacLeod Papers, 1839-1890, Folder 2, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., 3. 23. "Register of Paintings," 8. 24. Ibid., 3.

25. Crayon 1, no. 6 (7 February 1855): 88. The house was demolished in 1922 to make way for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce building. See Keith D. Mackay, "The Corcoran Mansion: House of Feasts," White House History, no. 27 (Spring 2010): 32-43. I am grateful to Corcoran docent Terry Adlhock for bringing this article to my attention. 26. Despite his reliance on friends and associates to make purchases abroad, Corcoran sometimes refused to buy paintings he could not see. This was the case for a painting by Sir Edwin Landseer in 1853, about which WWC wrote to the artist Joshua Shaw (20 May 1853, Outgoing Letterbook 32, no. 249) and, in 1857, when he was offered a (Charles)

Le Brun, *Judith and Holofernes* (WWC to Francis Brinley, 5 January 1857, Outgoing Letterbook 39, no. 20), both WWC Papers.

27. One of the Robbe landscapes was surely the one recorded in the 1857 catalogue of Corcoran's collection compiled by the Washington landscape painter and writer Charles Lanman, and the other was a copy after a painting by the German painter Andreas Achenbach or his brother, Oswald. Baptiste may have been the seventeenth-century French flower painter known only by that surname or Martin Sylvestre Baptiste (French, 1791-1859). Thomas G. Clemson to WWC, 24 August 1850, Incoming Letterbook 7, no. 7687, WWC Papers. Charles Lanman, Catalogue of W. W. Corcoran's Gallery (Washington, 1857), in CGA Archives. 28. "Register of Paintings," 5. Christ Bound

was deaccessioned in 1979. Clemson, like Corcoran, left Washington when the Civil War began because of his Southern sympathies; Clemson had served as secretary of agriculture in 1860-61 in the Buchanan administration but resigned his post in 1861 to return to South Carolina, his adopted state after 1838. 29. "Register of Paintings," 3, records that Corcoran bought a Swiss Landscape (1850) from Baron von Gerolt, and ibid., 5, records that he bought a Swiss Mill Scene (1849) by C. Fribel from the baron (deaccessioned 1979). Gerolt was friendly with such eminent artists as Albert Bierstadt and Samuel F.B. Morse as well as the collector Alexander T. Stewart and the poet William Cullen Bryant, all of whom were present at the dinner marking his retirement from his position of German ambassador to the U.S.; see "Baron von Gerolt; Farewell Banquet to the German Diplomat—Brilliant Assemblage and Eloquent Addresses," New York

Times, 17 May 1851, 1. 30. Von Humboldt to WWC, 16 October 1855, Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8037 (English translation; original, Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8089). The following year Corcoran purchased a portrait of the naturalist by the Boston painter Emma Gaggiotti-Richards and a bust depicting him by the German sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch: WWC to Emma G. Richards, 7 March 1856, Outgoing Letterbook 37, no. 242, and 2 November 1856, Outgoing Letterbook 38, no. 704, both WWC Papers. The portrait appears in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery, as a painting by "Mad.[ame] G. Richards." On the bust, see Rauch to WWC, 23 August 1856, Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8079, mentioning its completion; and WWC to Mr. J.M. Schmidt, 24 January 1857, Outgoing Letterbook 39, no. 999, regarding its shipment, both WWC

Papers. The German artist Eduard Hildebrandt, a friend of von Humboldt's, painted Moonrise at Madeira for Corcoran at the behest of the naturalist. [WWC's secretary Anthony] Hyde to J.C. Carpenter, Esq., 22 January 1871, Outgoing Letterbook 61, no. 261 and enclosure for no. 260, WWC Papers. The Hildebrandt was deaccessioned in 1979. 31. Cass served as U.S. chargé d'affaires to the papal states from 1849 to 1854 and U.S. minister to the papal states from 1854 to 1858, when he purchased for Corcoran a port scene by "Canaletti" [sic] ("Register of Paintings," 3, and Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery); this work has not been linked to one in, or formerly in, the Corcoran's collection, Either during that post or while U.S. minister to the papal states, he purchased for Corcoran a seascape said to be by Joseph Vernet ("Register of Paintings," 4, deaccessioned in 1989); an oval painting of Iris (ibid., 8; deaccessioned 1979); and an 1856 coastal scene by an unknown painter (ibid., 9, not linked to a work in, or formerly in, the collection). Corcoran wrote to Cass in September 1853 regarding pictures Cass purchased for him and bills for those pictures (mostly illegible letter, Outgoing Letterbook 33, no. 63, WWC Papers). Corcoran may have known Cass's father, Lewis Cass (1782-1866), twice U.S. senator from Michigan and secretary of state under President James Buchanan, since in 1885 Corcoran was asked to recommend a sculptor to create a statue of Cass for the U.S. Capitol (WWC to P. Parsons, Esq., 24 June 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 87, no. 651, WWC Papers). Cass's advocacy of popular sovereignty aligned with Corcoran's support of states' rights. 32. Corcoran purchased a small portrait of Napoleon I from General Winfield Scott (1786-1866), a Mexican War hero; see "Register of Paintings," 6. From a Colonel Maynardier, likely the soldier by that name who served in the Mexican War, he bought a Virgin and Child. "Register of Paintings," 5, lists it as "said to be by Murillo . . . from a church in Valparaiso." On Maynardier, see James M. McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 216n2. The "Murillo" was deaccessioned in 1979. 33. In an unpublished gallery talk draft text entitled "A Gift from the Past." dated 9 December 1981, CGA Curatorial Files, Joanna Degilio indicates (2-3) that the painting was owned by Joseph Bonaparte and sold in a public auction in September 1845 after his death. After the sale, "we know nothing about the painting's whereabouts until it was purchased

by William Wilson Corcoran from a

Mr. Whelan of Philadelphia for about

34. MacLeod, "Some Incidents in the Life of the Late Wm. Wilson Corcoran," 1. Corcoran's letters reveal little of his knowledge of contemporary trends or of the history and literature of art; in 1880 he owned Art Treasures of America (17 July 1880, Outgoing Letterbook 97, no. 348) and subscribed to the Magazine of Art for eleven months in 1885 before canceling his subscription (A. Hyde to Messr. Caswell and Co., 16 January 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 87, no. 44, and 21 October 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 324), all WWC Papers. 35. Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. On the work listed as by Vernet, see n31 above. The two works attributed to "Canaletti" [sic] (one of them surely the one purchased by Cass, see n31 above) and the copy after Rubens have not been linked with works in, or formerly in, the Corcoran's collection. 36. Huntington to WWC, 28 August 1850, Incoming Letterbook 7, no. 7689, WWC Papers. The pendant, Christiana, Her Children, and Mercy, is now in the collection of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida (SN405). The first versions of the two Pilgrim's Progress paintings are in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. It is interesting to note that, according to the "Register of Paintings," 3, Huntington also sold Corcoran a hunting scene by "M. Gouquet."

37. Corcoran purchased Leutze's The Amazon and Her Children for \$600 (as well as a landscape by Leutze, which does not appear in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery). Cozzens apparently purchased Kensett's Sketch of Mount Washington (1851) on Corcoran's behalf (or bought the canvas and sold it to him shortly thereafter). See "Special Auction Sales," New York Evening Post, 13 December 1852, 3. According to the New York Daily Times, 18 December 1852, 6, Cozzens purchased the Kensett, and Corcoran paid for Leutze's The Amazon and Her Children. WWC or MacLeod recollected this differently; "Register of Paintings," 4, notes that The Amazon and Her Children was bought for Corcoran in New York by Cozzens from the artist at the 1852 Art-Union sale.

38. On Cozzens's study for Mercy's
Dream, see Crayon 3 (April 1856): 123;
and Catalogue of the Paintings of the Late
Mr. A. M. Cozzens, Clinton Hall Galleries,
New York, 22 May 1868, cat. no. 4.
WWC's Louis Lang painting, Norma
(1853, 69.78), is recorded in Lanman,
Catalogue of Corcoran's Callery. "Register
of Paintings," 19, says Henry P. Gray's
1861 The Judgment of Paris was among the

lots WWC bought at the Olyphant sale on 26 December 1877, brokered by Avery. 39. WWC to Samuel G. Ward. Esq., 19 May 1852, Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 939, WWC Papers. WWC decided not to purchase a picture or pictures from Ward, the American representative of Baring Brothers, the English banking firm that was later to finance the U.S. purchase of Alaska. He resided in Europe for a time, collected engravings after the old masters, and lived in Washington late in his life. See his obituary in Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican, 23 November 1907, 7. I am grateful to Thayer Tolles, Curator, American Paintings and Sculpture, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for her assistance with this. 40. He also purchased directly from

artists and from New York dealers, in particular Williams, Stevens & Williams. Corcoran also sold at least one picture through the gallery. See WWC to David Austen, Jr., 10 January 1853, Outgoing Letterbook 31, no. 561, WWC Papers. 41. WWC to Cranch, 17 October 1851, Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 535, WWC Papers (here and below), mentions WWC's plans to visit Cranch's studio at the end of the month; WWC to Cranch, 5 November 1851 (Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 575) encloses a check for \$150 "on acct. of the picture"; WWC to Cranch, 25 February 1852, Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 806, encloses a check for \$150, "which completes the price of the Picture." 42. Corcoran bought the Doughty in

Iuly 1852 from Williams, Stevens & Williams; WWC to Williams, Stevens & Williams, 13 July 1852, Outgoing Letterbook 31, no. 61, WWC Papers. "Register of Paintings," 11, notes that the Doughty, which cost \$450, "was painted for Mr. Corcoran." In 1851 and 1852 WWC made at least two more purchases from Williams, Stevens & Williams, possibly the Seth Eastman, Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians, the William Benton Boggs, On Catskill Creek (1850), or the Walter M. Oddie, Lake near Lenox, Massachusetts (1850). WWC to Williams, Stevens & Williams, 25 March 1851, Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 52, records a payment for \$899; and WWC to Williams, Stevens & Williams, 25 February 1852, Outgoing Letterbook 30, no. 805, both WWC Papers, mentions another payment. The Eastman, Boggs, and Oddie paintings appear in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. 43. Davira Taragin, undated draft for George Washington University M.A. thesis, CGA Curatorial Files, 23, notes that the Coles were acquired by spring of 1851, but her Corcoran, 13, omits them. Ben Perley Poore, "Waifs from Washing-

ton," Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room

Companion (1851-1854) 4, no. 11 (12 March 1853): 167, notes the acquisition. 44. The Gignoux works, A Winter Scene and Lake Scene, are recorded in Crayon 1, no. 6 (7 February 1855): 88, and are surely the two Gignoux canvases recorded in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. A Winter Scene was, like Leutze's Amazon and Her Children and Kensett's Mount Washington, sold at the 1852 American Art-Union sale; its purchaser was B. Buckingham, who probably sold it to Corcoran soon thereafter. Corcoran may also have bought the second Gignoux at the sale. See New York Daily Times, 18 December 1852, 6. In 1856 Corcoran purchased Alvan Fisher's Autumnal Landscape with Indians (1848), the payment for which he mentioned in a letter to T. Edmondson of Baltimore (probably the collector Thomas Edmondson [1808-1856]), probably dated 23 March or May 1856 (no Letterbook or number), WWC Papers, Corcoran may have purchased the 1851 Cropsey, Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington, Rockland Co., New York (1851), from Williams, Stevens & Williams on 15 April 1854; Outgoing Letterbook 33, no. 6331/2, WWC Papers. It was still in the artist's collection in early 1853, when he lent it to the First Semi-Annual Exhibition at the Massachusetts Academy of Fine Arts, Boston (24 January-1 May 1853, cat. no. 16). Cropsey may have consigned it to Williams, Stevens & Williams, since a sale to WWC does not appear in the artist's account book (1845-68, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, microfilmed at Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). The early (c. 1852) Italian landscape by George Inness is recorded in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. 45. Johnson's Girl and Pets is included in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. Corcoran's purchase of the Mayer for \$175 is recorded in the artist's account book (1842-62), John Sylvester, Jr., Collection, Waynesboro, Georgia. On 8 November 1859, WWC wrote to Mayer saying that "the picture has arrived in good order"; Outgoing Letterbook 44, no. 635. WWC Papers. 46. The purchase of Evening Party at Milton's involved numerous parties. On 13 October 1854 Corcoran paid A.M. Cozzens \$90.72 for "the painting forwarded by Mr. Leutze to your care"; Outgoing Letterbook 34, no. 597, WWC Papers. On 15 December 1854 Corcoran wrote to William D. Washington in Düsseldorf that the painting had been in New York for three months, that he is waiting for a response to his letter to Leutze of 5 September (presumably about the price) to have it transported

to Washington, and that he likes the painting except for the figure of Milton; Outgoing Letterbook 35, no. 157. Corcoran paid \$2,500 for the painting to Mr. Herman Lachins, New York, on 9 February 1855; Outgoing Letterbook 35, no. 377. "Register of Paintings," 6, notes that "the original price asked was \$5,000 but the painting was bought for \$2,500. The painting's transfer to Washington apparently was handled by Williams, Stevens & Williams, since Corcoran wrote to them on 17 February 1855; Outgoing Letterbook 35, no. 395, requesting that the painting be shipped immediately for exhibition in the Metropolitan Mechanics' Institute Fair, held in the Patent Building in Washington, 3-19 March 1853; all WWC Papers. 47. Literary World, 1 May 1852, 316, quoted in Elizabeth Johns, American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 81. I am grateful to Lisa Strong for bringing this passage to my attention. 48. WWC to Brewerton, 6 February 1854, Outgoing Letterbook 33, no. 436, WWC Papers, with a payment of \$100. The Eastman appears in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery. 49. Catalogue of the Third Annual Exhibition of the Washington Art Association (Washington, D.C.: William H. Moore Publishers, 1859), reprinted in Josephine Cobb, "The Washington Art Association: An Exhibition Record, 1856-1860," in Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C., 1963-1965, ed. Francis Coleman Rosenberger (Washington, D.C.: Columbia Historical Society, 1966), 168. 50. Corcoran purchased the sculpture from I. d'Arcy of New Orleans, who had won the marble from the Cincinnati Western Art Union drawing in January 1851. See "Art-Union Drawing," Cincinnati Gazette, 22 January 1851, 2; and "Town Facts and Fancies, by the Local Editor; More of the Arts Union," Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, 22 January 1851, 2. 51. The poem, noted as being by R.S. Chilton, is preserved in Incoming Letterbook 28, no. 12613, WWC Papers, and appeared in the Knickerbocker 30, no. 4 (October 1847): 365, as by R. S. C. According to the Knickerbocker 48, no. 6 (December 1846): 650, its contributor Robert S. Chilton, Esq., was "of the State Department at Washington" and as such may well have been acquainted with WWC. Robert Seager II, ed., The Papers of Henry Clay (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 9:353, notes that Chilton was a clerk in the State Department during and after the Civil War. 52. See Lauren Lessing, "Ties That

Bind: Hiram Powers's Greek Slave and

 ${\sf Nineteenth\text{-}Century\ Marriage,''}\ American$ Art 24, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 41-65. The discussion of the wedding is on 41-44. 53. Corcoran provided space for the first two annual exhibitions of the Washington Art Association in his building on H Street, "opposite the second Presbyterian Church"; see Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 122. In 1852 he also helped establish the association's forerunner, the Metropolitan Mechanics' Institute, with a \$1,000 donation. 54. The Washington Art Association members are detailed in Cobb, "The Washington Art Association." Lanman's Lake George and MacLeod's Mount Vernon are recorded in Lanman, Catalogue of Corcoran's Gallery, Mount Vernon must have been the painting of "inferior value" that MacLeod later exchanged for Great Falls of the Potomac, 1873, by permission of the trustees (there are now three paintings by MacLeod in the collection). See "Register of Paintings." 7. Corcoran lent Oscar Bessau's Little Falls of the Potomac (1856) to the association's 1857 exhibition and purchased the Germanborn Paul Weber's Scene in the Catskills from the 1858 show. The catalogues of the four association exhibitions are reproduced in Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 139-90. 55. "Register of Paintings," 8, notes that the Washington was purchased by WWC in 1858, but in a letter of 11 July 1854 to Washington in Düsseldorf, Outgoing Letterbook 34, no. 233, Corcoran asks that the artist send him the painting when he has finished it. On 15 December 1854 WWC writes to Washington acknowledging that the picture "has been sent"; Outgoing Letterbook 35, no. 157. Washington (in Düsseldorf) to WWC, 3 July 1855, Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 7997, makes reference to the completed painting and also notes his "appreciation of [Corcoran's] kindness" and the desire to show Corcoran pictures on which he is working; all WWC Papers. 56. See Alan Wallach, "William Wilson Corcoran's Failed National Gallery," in Wallach, Exhibiting Contradictions, 22-37. 57. William MacLeod, Catalogue of the Paintings, Statuary, Casts, Bronzes, & c. of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, 1878), 6. This quote derives from WWC's 10 May 1868 letter to the trustees. See Tank, "Dedicated to Art: Corcoran and the Founding of His Gallery." 40. 58. Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 124. 59. The Washington Art Association played a critical role in establishing

Washington as an art center, spawning

the National Art Association (which soon

Archives.

led to the creation of the United States

Art Commission) and the National Gallery and School of Arts, begun in 1860 only to dissolve before decade's end. However, the Washington Art Association lapsed as a result of divergent political views, with Stone active in the Union cause and Washington, the vice president, supporting the Confederacy; Cobb. "The Washington Art Association." 135. For a summary of other endeavors to create art museums in the capital, including those relating to the Smithsonian, see Wallach, "Corcoran's Failed National Gallery," 23-25. 60. Mary J. Windle, Life in Washington, and Life Here and There (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1859), 147, quoted in Wallach, "Corcoran's Failed National Gallery." 30. 61. Corcoran visited Europe in 1855, as evidenced by a letter of introduction from Joseph Henry, secretary of the Smithsonian, dated 11 July 1855, Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8005, WWC Papers. 62. WWC to lames Renwick. 10 April 1861, Letter 47, p. 63, WWC Papers. 63. WWC to Negress Mary & Children [Delia, Mary, Alfred, and Hudson], Recorded 29 September 1845, Records of Manumissions, vol. 3, Records of the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia, Record Group 60, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. It is possible that this Mary (or her daughter Mary) is the Mary Neale "once owned by me, & long since manumitted" mentioned in Corcoran's will as the intended recipient of \$200; CGA Archives. As the executor of his father's estate. Corcoran sold two of his father's slaves to Roger Jones, who broke his guarantee they would not be sold down the Potomac. In 1839 Corcoran sued Jones for the return of the slaves but lost the court case; see The Federal Cases Comprising Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit and District Courts of the United States (Saint Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1894), book 6, 544-45, case no. 3,229. I am grateful to Marisa Bourgoin for this information. 64. "The Funeral of Gen. Lee," Washington, D.C., Critic-Record, 15 October 1870. On Corcoran's involvement with the Southern Historical Society, see WWC. A Grandfather's Legacy, 428. 65. Church had shown his painting at the Thirtieth Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1855. For Doughty, see "Register of Paintings," 2; for Church, ibid., 3, Ibid., 11, erroneously says the Browns were purchased in 1867 for \$150. See Catalogue of the Paintings of the Late Mr. A. M. Cozzens, Leavitt, Strebeigh & Co., New York, 1868, cat. no. 49. 66. Deed and Charter of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 10 May 1869, CGA

67. See "The Ball of the Season: Festive Celebration of Washington's Birthday, Brilliant Scene at Corcoran Art Building," Daily Patriot, 21 February 1871, 2. In 1871 WWC was the largest stockholder in the Daily Patriot; see "Mr. Corcoran's Newspaper," Washington Post, 25 February 1888, 1.

68. Johnston, William and Henry Walters,

69. I am grateful to William R. Johnston for his views on the question of how Corcoran and Walters became connected. Although Corcoran and Peabody were acquainted through the Riggs family and served on a committee to revive education in the South following the Civil War, Johnston has not been able to determine a direct connection between Walters and Peabody. Emails to the author, 11 and 12 January 2010, CGA Curatorial Files.

70. For paintings Walters purchased at the Vienna Weltausstellung in 1873, of which he was a commissioner, as well as those he purchased elsewhere from 1873 to 1875 (from Samuel P. Avery and Goupil in New York and the 1874 Paris exposition), see "Register of Paintings," 17, 18, 19. Sixty-four Barye bronzes were acquired in 1873, and thirty-one in 1874. The Gérôme was deaccessioned in 1951. 71. WWC to Avery, 7 May 1873, Outgoing Letterbook 64, no. 22, WWC Papers, referring to a sale of "part of [his] gallery" on 13 and 14 [May].

72. William MacLeod, Catalogue of the Paintings, Statuary, Casts, Bronzes, & c. of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, 1874). The copy of the catalogue preserved in the CGA Curatorial Department Library is annotated in pencil: "December 23, 1874" and presumably documents all that was on view by the end of that calendar year (including the Parthenon sculptures). The Corcoran collection database records 141 objects acquired from the first accession in 1869 through the end of 1874, suggesting an unsurprising discrepancy between modern collection records and nineteenth-century inventories. 73. MacLeod maintained a fascinating

73. MacLeod maintained a fascinating journal recording these responsibilities, detailing the daily activities happening in the gallery and in the city of Washington. His journals for the years 1876–84 and 1886 have survived and remain in the CGA Archives. The Corcoran has begun a project to transcribe, annotate, and publish these journals.

74. Wallach touches on this in his "Corcoran's Failed National Gallery," 32. 75. "Art in Washington," New York Times, 17 January 1874, 3. See also MacLeod, Catalogue of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1874), 187.

76. This patriotic installation is reminiscent of Frederic Church's 1864 display of his *Heart of the Andes* (1859), which Corcoran would attempt to purchase in 1876. When it was shown in the New York Metropolitan Fair in aid of the Sanitary Commission, the painting was displayed under a trio of portraits of the nation's first three presidents, Washington, Adams, and Jefferson; see Kevin J. Avery, *Church's Great Picture: The Heart of the Andes* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), fig. 20 (following p. 31).

77. Wallach, "Corcoran's Failed National Gallery." 35.

Gallery," 35. 78. "The Corcoran Gallery: An Hour's Stroll through the Collection." Washinaton Evening Star, 17 January 1874, 1, cites the gallery's 1874 purchase of the Portaels, and the painting's gold medal at the Crystal Palace exhibition, as noted in the London Art Journal for January 1874. The Portaels was deaccessioned in 1951. 79. "The Corcoran Gallery: An Hour's Stroll through the Collection." 80. The apartment building containing some artists' studios was located at the southwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 17th Street, N.W., and the studios in it were called, informally, the Barbizon studios; it was torn down in 1902 to make way for the construction of the Mills Building (itself razed in 1964). The artists Max Weyl and Wells Sawyer had studios there. I am grateful to Mark Herlong for this information. 81. MacLeod, Catalogue of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1878), 6.

82. Smithsonian Institution Annual Report, 1874, 44, quoted in Tank, "Dedicated to Art: Corcoran and the Founding of His Gallery," 39.

83. See Tank, "Dedicated to Art: Corcoran and the Founding of His Gallery," 40.
84. Gaius Maecenas was a wealthy, generous, and enlightened patron of the arts during the reign of Caesar Augustus. "Art in Washington: The Corcoran Gallery, 'Dedicated to Art'; Have We a Louvre among Us?" *Philadelphia Bulletin*, 17 May 1869 [page number unknown], preserved in WWC's Scrapbook no.
80.187, CGA Archives.

85. "The Corcoran Art Gallery," *Daily Patriot*, 15 August 1872, preserved in WWC's Scrapbook no. 80.133, CGA Archives.

86. Aldine, no. 6 (June 1874); and "Art in Washington," New York Times, 20 January 1874, 3.

87. "The Corcoran Gallery: An Hour's Stroll through the Collection."
88. Jane Stuart's portrait was shipped to Corcoran after 18 October 1858, when WWC wrote to J. R. Thaer and Co. in Boston regarding payment and shipment; Outgoing Letterbook 42, no. 596, WWC

Papers. "Register of Paintings," 8, notes the painting was purchased from Miss Stuart at Newport in 1854. Coyle was one of the buyers of American art from the Washington Art Association; Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 130. Corcoran's possession of the Sully portrait of Jackson was contested in 1867 when Jacob Thompson, secretary of the interior under President Buchanan, attempted to claim ownership. No author or addressee, but likely written by WWC, "Picture of Gen'l Jackson," 18 November 1867, Outgoing Letterbook 93, no. 404, WWC Papers. See also William MacLeod's Curator's Journals, 19 June 1876, Director's Records, CGA Archives; and MacLeod. "Some Incidents in the Life of the Late Wm. Wilson Corcoran," 2. 89. The portrait (73.12) is attributed to Henry Inman in "Register of Paintings," 12. which notes that Corcoran purchased it from H.N. Barlow(?). Also in 1873 the gallery received as a gift a Henry Kirke Brown marble bust of John C. Breckinridge, vice president under James Buchanan, from the New York State congressman George Taylor (1820-1894). Corcoran surely was acquainted with Taylor, who had lectured at the Washington Art Association on the influence of Hinduism on American art; see Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 130. 90. A number of other portraits filled out the collection. For example, in 1877, the year following the acquisition of his Niagara, Frederic Church gave the Corcoran (through Samuel P. Avery) a portrait of President James Madison by Thomas Sully; "Register of Paintings," 26. 91. By mid-June 1869 Corcoran is informing art dealers that he is referring purchases to the trustees of the art gallery; see WWC to Mr. Geo. A. Macile(?), 10 lune 1869. Outgoing Letterbook 56. no. 196; A. Hyde to Geo. Bourdely(?), 29 July 1869, Outgoing Letterbook 56, no. 281; WWC to Juan Thyson(?), Esq., 24 September 1869, Outgoing Letterbook 56, no. 380; and WWC to Mr. A. Clements, 19 October 1869, Outgoing Letterbook 56, no. 431, all WWC Papers. 92. In a letter of 6 January 1875, Hyde chastised MacLeod for submitting bills to WWC that had not been approved by a gallery committee, thereby suggesting that WWC alone paid the gallery's expenditures; Outgoing Letterbook 67, no. 424, WWC Papers. However, in another instance. WWC apparently paid half the purchase price for Bierstadt's Mount Corcoran, while the gallery paid the remaining amount. 93. WWC to Mr. Leigh R. Page, 5 Novem-

ber 1875, Outgoing Letterbook 69,

no. 299, WWC Papers. WWC followed

the same pattern in 1878 with Thomas

Le Clear's portrait of William Page. On

28 June 1878 Corcoran's secretary, Anthony Hyde, wrote to Mrs. Thomas Le Clear in New York enclosing payment of \$200 for Le Clear's William Page (1876, 78.5), which Hyde calls "Portrait of Page the Artist"; Outgoing Letterbook 75, no. 83, WWC Papers. 94. WWC to G.P.A. Healy, 3 May 1879, photograph of letter in CGA Curatorial Files for Healy, Lincoln. A note by curator Linda C. Simmons states that the original letter is in the WWC Papers, but the letter was not among those transcribed by Corcoran researchers in 2006. Healy had received a commission from King Louis-Philippe of France to produce a series of portraits of distinguished American statesmen, but the Revolution of 1848 and the king's subsequent abdication scuttled the project. When Bryan purchased the group in 1860, he commissioned additional portraits to update the collection. For the French commission. Healy painted several posthumous presidential portraits from originals by Gilbert Stuart, Jean-Jacques Amans, and John Vanderlyn as well as portraits from life, such as those of John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, John Tyler, and James K. Polk. The purchase also included a portrait of Martha Washington (after Stuart) and one of George

95. The Healy acquisitions continued into 1884, when Corcoran donated the artist's 1884 portraits of President Chester Arthur and Vermont senator Justin Smith Morrill (as well as John Adams Elder's 1876 portraits of Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson). 96. William MacLeod's Curator's Journals, 26 April 1879.

Fifteen Portraits of Presidents by Healy," Washington Evening Star, 3 May 1879, [1]. 98. See "Impeding a Noble Design," Washington Post, 19 January 1880, 2. 99. Tayloe, secretary of the U.S. legation to London and, like Corcoran, a homeowner (and slaveholder) on Lafayette Square, was a buyer from the Washington Art Association annual exhibitions; Cobb, "The Washington Art Association," 130. His widow conveved the deed to her husband's collection to the Corcoran in 1878, and at her death in 1884, the collection was relocated to the Corcoran in accordance with her will. In 1902, after a legal disagreement regarding Phebe Tayloe's estate, the painting was formally and legally accessioned into the collection. See Adam Greenhalgh, provenance summary for the Tayloe Washington, CGA Curatorial Files. 100. WWC to Mrs. [illeg.] Gardner

[Boston], 20 May 1875, Outgoing Letterbook 68, no. 358. A few days earlier, WWC had written to Samuel P. Avery, who had repaired the portrait (that Corcoran then had framed), asking for his help in "disposing of it"; 17 May 1875, Outgoing Letterbook 68, no. 349, both WWC Papers.

101. The first mention of the Tayloe collection coming to the gallery at Phebe Tayloe's death was in February 1877; William MacLeod's Curator's Journals, 23 February 1877.

102. A news clipping, possibly an enclosure in an undated note from George Bancroft (see Incoming Letterbook 28, no. 12542, WWC Papers), mentions Corcoran's purchase of "several pictures at Philadelphia for his Art Gallery." The clipping also cites WWC's unsuccessful efforts to procure the collection of marbles, bronzes, jewels, and majolica assembled by Alessandro Castellani on view at the centennial; he lost the Castellani collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; see "A New Art Acquisition: The Castellani Collection." New York Times, 30 December 1876, 2. Corcoran also purchased two large Japanese vases from the centennial; see MacLeod, Catalogue of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (1878), cat. nos. 1 and 2.

103. "Register of Paintings," 15, records the Durand as purchased from the artist on 14 April 1874 for \$3,000. Ibid., 16, records the 3 July 1874 purchase of the Hart from the artist for \$1,200. Ibid., 19, records the sale of Trout Brook in the Catskills from the artist for \$750 on 29 May 1875. The "Register" does not indicate if the purchases were made by the gallery or by Corcoran himself. 104. The Mount descended to Gilmor's nephew before being sold to the Corcoran on 20 October 1874 by Freyer & Bendann. See Curator's Report, 31 December 1874, Board of Trustees Meeting Reports, 1869-1885, CGA Archives.

105. "Register of Paintings," 19, states the lots bought at the Olyphant sale on 26 December 1877, were the Kensett, Lake George, the Cole, Henry P. Gray's Judgment of Paris, and [Arthur Fitzwilliam] Tait's Quail and Young. Ibid., 26, records that Kensett's View on the Genesee near Mount Morris was acquired on 29 December 1877 from Avery 106. MacLeod's Curator's Journals.

14 December 1876. Walters was also interested in the Swiss sculptor Vincenzo Vela's 1871 marble Dying Napoleon in the sale and had sent MacLeod a marked catalogue. The Vela was deaccessioned in 1982.

107. See WWC to William A. Brvan. 7 January 1880, Outgoing Letterbook 78, no. 16, rejecting another portrait of Andrew Jackson by Sully. Several letters decline offers of portraits of Jackson by unspecified artists: WWC to Mrs. M.E.

Morsell, 26 May 1880, Outgoing Letterbook 78, no. 537; WWC to Mrs. Forstall, 5 July 5 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 15; and WWC to Jas. E. Woodman, 21 November 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 434. Letters rejecting works by Leutze are WWC to John Sartain, [no day] February 1879, Outgoing Letterbook 76, no. 130; WWC to Mrs. S.G. Wheeler, 8 March 1880, Outgoing Letterbook 78, no. 269; WWC to Mrs. Cornelia Talbot, 10 June 1884, Outgoing Letterbook 86, no. 33. Regarding Cropsey, see WWC to Mrs. J.F. Cropsey, 25 March 1887, Outgoing Letterbook 91, no. 149, mentioning that the "[t]rustees will not care to duplicate works of the same artist"; all WWC Papers.

108. See n100, above. See also WWC to Mrs. Ellen L. School, 6 May 1882, Outgoing Letterbook 82, no. 91, declining to purchase a portrait of Chas. Ridgely by Stuart, stating that "the Gallery now contains several studies of Gilbert Stuart and the Trustees do not desire to add to their number"; WWC to Miss Carrie Jenkins Harris, 18 March 1884, Outgoing Letterbook 85, no. 385, regarding "one of eight original portraits of Washington by Gilbert Stuart . . . the Gallery is already supplied with such a work"; and WWC to C.P. Williamson, 4 July 1884, Outgoing Letterbook 86, no. 108, all WWC Papers, declining offer of Stuart's Washington, adding that "I have to state that the Gallery has Stuart's study of Washington and does not wish to duplicate it." 109. A. Hyde to H.E. Brown, Esq., 6 February 1879, Outgoing Letterbook 76, no. 146, WWC Papers, with regard to the offer of sale to Corcoran of a painting entitled Io and Jupiter.

110. See Mark Herlong, "Vernon Row: An Early Washington Arts Community," MS, emailed to the author, 19 April 2006, CGA Curatorial Files.

111. "Art Notes," Washington Star, 18 December 1875, 1, quoted in ibid., 4. 112. Tank, "Corcoran: Washington Philanthropist," 55, 56.

113. Ezekiel's facade sculptures, begun in 1873 or soon thereafter (WWC to William T. Walters, 16 December 1873, Outgoing Letterbook 65, no. 203), apparently were complete by 1885, when WWC began to recommend the sculptor for commissions. See WWC to P. Parson, 24 June 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 87, no. 651, mentioning the completed sculptures and recommending Ezekiel for a commission to sculpt General Lewis Cass for the House of Representatives, and WWC to Ezekiel, 27 February 1886, Outgoing Letterbook 89, no. 144, trying to get him a commission for the Confederate monument to be erected at Montgomery, Alabama. WWC also purchased antique sculptures from Ezekiel; WWC

to Ezekiel in Rome, letters of September and October 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 88. no. 77. and 18 December 1885. Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 525; all WWC Papers. The facade sculptures were sold soon after the Corcoran's Flagg building opened in 1897 and since the early 1960s have been in the Norfolk Botanical Garden in Norfolk, Virginia. See James Goode, Historic American Buildings Survey, Corcoran Art Gallery, Northeast Corner of Seventeenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington, District of Columbia, D.C., 1971, 7-8, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ D0071 (accessed 21 June 2010). 114. The National Academy of Design acquired Gifford's diploma picture, Huntington River, in about 1854 and in 1865 received his Mount Mansfield, Vermont (1859) as part of the lames Suydam bequest. However, the National Academy was not founded as a museum. nor did it operate with one as part of its program until the late twentieth century. I am grateful to Bruce Weber, Senior Curator, National Academy of Design, for his assistance. Despite the fact that it mounted the Gifford memorial exhibition in 1880, the Metropolitan Museum of Art did not acquire a painting by the artist until 1912.

115. See Franklin Kelly's essay on the painting by Gifford in this volume. 116. On 16 April 1881 Hyde wrote to Thomas E. Kirby enclosing a check in the amount of \$5,106 for the Gifford, purchased for the gallery by "Mr. Kauffman, one of its Trustees" (Outgoing Letterbook 80, no. 2442); in 1881 he also exerted his decision-making powers by declining a George Caleb Bingham painting (Outgoing Letterbook 80, no. 347) and by buying a portrait of a lady (A. Hyde to Mr. Porter, 3 January 1881, Outgoing Letterbook 79, no. 496, all WWC Papers) 117. The purchase of the Wright portrait

is documented in a letter from A. Hyde to Henry Stevens and Son, London, of 13 October 1885 (Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 296); Corcoran's interest in a portrait of Webster by Harding is cited in his letter to Rice W. Payne, 15 February 1883 (Outgoing Letterbook 83, no. 286) and in WWC to Mrs. Virginia Semmes Payne, 8 December 1884 (Outgoing Letterbook 86, no. 523), all WWC Papers. 118. In 1885 he bought two paintings from the American Art Association for \$10,800; A. Hyde to the Association, 8 April 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 87, no. 310, WWC Papers. The European purchases included some paintings in 1883 from Knoedler in New York; A. Hyde to Knoedler, 18 March 1883, regarding a "Battle on the Sea Shore" by

the Dutch artist R[ichard] Burnier (Outgoing Letterbook 83, no. 369); A. Hyde to Knoedler, 28 March 1883 (Outgoing Letterbook 83, no. 472), and a Corot, for which he paid Thomas E. Kirby \$15,000 on 18 March 1886 (Outgoing Letterbook 89, no. 213), all WWC Papers. This was likely The Wood Gatherers, deaccessioned in 1966.

119. WWC to Harper Pennington, 6 May 1882, Outgoing Letterbook 82, no. 90,

WWC Papers. 120. WWC to Cortlandt Parker, 31 December 1885, Outgoing Letterbook 88, no. 586, WWC Papers. The provenance for Peace and Plenty does not mention Cortlandt Parker, yet the owners and precise dates of ownership between 1866 and George A. Hearn's donation of the painting to the Metropolitan in 1894 are not fully known. See Michael Quick, George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné. 2 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 1:241. 121. As Frederick Baekeland, "Collectors of American Painting, 1813 to 1913," 120, has noted, newly wealthy men may have felt more comfortable collecting American art, and the work of relatively unknown American artists, than amassing numerous examples of European art as did their more elite counterparts from older, more conservative families. 122. His friend William T. Walters, for example, who began collecting American paintings in 1858, sold his American works by non-Baltimore artists (as well as some European paintings) in February 1864, including Church's epic Twilight in the Wilderness (1860, The Cleveland Museum of Art). Johnston, William and Henry Walters, 39 and 252n59. I am grateful to Lisa Strong and William R. Johnston of the Walters Art Museum for sharing their knowledge of Walters. 123. As more evidence that he followed contemporary collecting trends, Corcoran chose not to acquire American colonial portraiture, which did not become popular until much later. In 1856 and 1859, for example, he declined to pursue opportunities to purchase a portrait by John Singleton Copley. See D.W. Alvord(?) to WWC. 17 February 1856 (Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8055), referring to a portrait of General Ioseph Warren by Copley; one regarding the same portrait from Edward Everett to WWC dated 15 March 1856 (Incoming Letterbook 8, no. 8060); and one from WWC to D.N. Allard(?) of Mansfield, Mass., 13 October 1859 (Outgoing Letterbook 44, no. 585), regarding a Copley portrait of Samuel Warren (surely the same portrait as referenced in the 1856 letters, likely Copley's Joseph Warren, c. 1765, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), all WWC Papers.

124. William T. Walters and his son Henry Walters made their collection available for public viewing at various venues in Baltimore, but the Walters Art Museum did not fully become a public institution until Henry Walters bequeathed the collection and several buildings to the City of Baltimore at his death in 1931. 125. The many copyists are noted in "Our School of Design," Washington Post, 4 April 1879, 1. The most popular painting amongst copyists, according to this article, was Charlotte Corday in Prison by the French academic painter Charles Louis Müller; the painting was deaccessioned in 1979.

126. Owing to the construction of the annex. 1890 is considered the founding date of the school. However, the school's first principal, Eliphalet Fraser Andrews, was engaged by the trustees to offer instruction as early as 1887. Later, in the 1930s, despite difficult economic times, the school saw enough growth to continue expansion and began offering commercial art classes, scholarships, children's courses, ceramics facilities and courses, weekend classes, and summer learning opportunities; it also instituted a library. The school became a member of the National Association of Schools of Art in the mid-1970s and in 1978 awarded its first BFA degree. The school became fully accredited in the 1980s, formally changed its name to The Corcoran College of Art + Design in 1999, and has established itself as Washington's only four-year accredited institution for education in the arts.

127. The Corcoran's collection database records 1,856 works of art acquired between 1869 and the end of 1896, including a number of photographs and the Saint-Mémin portrait engravings. The old building was sold to the U.S. government in 1901 and since 1972 has been known as the Renwick Gallery, where it has housed the Smithsonian American Art Museum's craft and decorative arts program.

128. Corcoran Gallery of Art Annual Report, 1900, CGA Archives.
129. McGuire may well have known of the several one-man shows of Remington's work begun at Knoedler in 1905, and in March 1905 *Collier's* magazine showcased Remington's latest works by devoting an entire issue to the artist and

130. "Painting to Remain Here," New York Times, 21 January 1897, 12. See also Raymond Stehle, "Washington Crossing the Delaware," Pennsylvania History 31, no. 3 (July 1964): 291. I am grateful to Kevin Avery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Jochen Wierich of Cheekwood for bringing these citations to my attention.

131. Compilation of exhibitions held at CGA, CGA Curatorial Files.

132. The first and second exhibitions were annual competitions; the biennial tradition began with the third exhibition. The annuals and biennials, though displaying a broad spectrum of contemporary American art, generally included prominent painters (such as Cassatt, Hassam, and Homer) who also showed in the annual exhibitions of the National Academy of Design and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The exhibition juries at all three institutions were made up largely of artists. See Peter Hastings Falk, ed., The Biennial Exhibition Record of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1907-1967 (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press. 1991); Falk, ed., The Annual Exhibition Record of the National Academy of Design, 1901-1950 (Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1990); and Catalogues of the Annual Exhibitions (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts).

133. Annual exhibitions began at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1811 and at the National Academy of Design in 1826. These were modeled on the annual European academic exhibitions such as the Paris Salon (dating to the seventeenth century) and the Royal Academy of Arts annual in London (begun in the eighteenth). Annual exhibitions were occasionally mounted by small art clubs and associations such as the Washington Art Association and the Boston Art Club, both founded in the

134. F. B. McGuire to the Board of Trustees, 1 January 1906, CGA Archives, cited in Linda Crocker Simmons, "The Biennial Exhibitions: The First Sixty Years from 1907 to 1967," in *The Forty-fifth Biennial: The Corcoran Collects, 1907–1998* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1998), 17.

135. This two-tiered exhibition system remained in place for the next sixty years. A complex two-phase, multicity jury system for the first two contemporary exhibitions—four separate juries of four men each, working in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, vetted the initial submissions, followed by groups of five who made the final decisions on awards and the arrangement of paintings in the galleries—was simplified in time for the third biennial in favor of a single jury. The juries primarily comprised practicing artists until 1949, when staff members such as director Hermann Warner Williams, Jr., were added, although artists continued to serve until the early 1960s. The juries included some of the best-known artists of the time, from Childe Hassam to Edward Hopper, who were often accompanied by esteemed art historians and museum

professionals such as Lloyd Goodrich and Charles Parkhurst.

136. The show opened on the evening of 6 February 1907, with President Theodore Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, members of the cabinet, senators and representatives, and foreign dignitaries in attendance along with artists, patrons, and others.

137. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,

acquired its first two Homer canvases in 1894 and 1896, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired three in 1906. 138. This tradition continued, averaging twelve acquisitions from each exhibition in the early part of the twentieth century. For an excellent overview of the Corcoran biennials, see Simmons, "The Biennial Exhibitions"; see 35 for the reference to the popularity of Sargent and Melchers. The tradition of purchasing biennial works continued through the early twenty-first century, with major additions by Ida Applebroog, Robert Mangold, Sean Scully, Jessica Stockholder, and others. The Corcoran Women's Committee, founded in 1953, has supported many purchases, often those made from the biennials, and acquisitions were an important motivation in the 1961 founding of the Friends of the

139. Works by other members of the Eight represented in the Corcoran's collection—Arthur B. Davies, William Glackens, George Luks, and Maurice Prendergast—were not acquired until the Ninth Exhibition in 1923-24 (Prendergast's 1921 Landscape with Figures). the Eleventh Exhibition in 1928 (Davies's c. 1927 Stars and Dews and Dreams of Night and his 1925 The Umbrian Mountains), the Thirteenth in 1932-33 (Sloan's 1910-c. 1914 Yeats at Petitpas' and Luks's 1932 Woman with Black Cat), and the Fifteenth in 1937 (Glackens's Luxembourg Gardens, 1906); Simmons, "The Biennial Exhibitions."

Corcoran

140. Reine Lefebvre Holding a Nude Baby (1902) was purchased in 1909 by the Worcester Art Museum. Such exchanges also occurred in the Second (Schofield), Third (Symons), Fifth (Redfield), Seventh (Frieseke and Henri), Eighth (Ufer), Ninth (Johansen), Eleventh (Garber), Twelfth (Grabach), and Eighteenth (Weisz) exhibitions.

141. According to the Vonnoh expert Julie Aronson, the sculptor's good friend (and estate executrix) Lulette Thompson (Mrs. Robert Rowe Thompson) mentioned her two shows and her pleasure that students could study her work to Aronson on several occasions and confirmed it during an interview on 23 September 1989. Aronson, email to the author, 5 January 2010, CGA Curatorial

Files. Nine of the bronzes were deaccessioned in 1955.

142. For an excellent history of Clark's collecting, see Laura Coyle and Dare Myers Hartwell, Antiquities to Impressionism: The William A. Clark Collection, Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, in association with Scala Publishers, London, 2001). 143. The fascinating story of Clark's involvement with the gallery is recounted in Laura Coyle, "A Golden Opportunity: The William A. Clark Collection at the Corcoran Gallery of Art," in ibid., 28-33. 144. In 1929 Violet Ormond and Emily Sargent had planned to donate a selection of their brother's work to the National Gallery of Art, but since that museum's building did not open until 1941, the works were stored at the Corcoran for safekeeping. However, the National Gallery was not able to accept the sisters' gift, and in 1949 Violet Ormond deeded it to the Corcoran. 145. "Corcoran Gallery of Art Presents the Evans-Tibbs Collection: Prints, Drawings and Photographs by African-American Artists, September 12-January 6, 1997," CGA press release, 28 August 1996. See also Jo Ann Lewis, "Corcoran to Be Given African American Art," Washington Post, 8 May 1996, sec. A. 1.

146. After his death in January 1997, several more works were received by the Corcoran as gifts in Tibbs's memory, most notably a group of prints by Hale Woodruff donated by Tibbs's friends E. Thomas Williams, Jr., and Auldlyn Higgins Williams.

# Notes to the Reader

his catalogue is divided into two sections. The first features 102 paintings selected by the editor for their importance within the collection and within the history of American art more broadly. These works are discussed in essays by authors who offer a range of interpretations as well as a variety of methodologies. These featured works are organized chronologically. Works of the same date are ordered alphabetically by artist's last name; those begun in the same year are arranged according to the earliest date of completion. Frames known or believed to be original are reproduced in the colorplates; technical information about them may be found in the essay endnotes or in the apparatuses on the Corcoran's website (see below). The second section presents all of the Corcoran's American paintings executed from about 1718 to 1945 (excluding the featured works) in illustrated list form, arranged alphabetically by artist's last name.

An apparatus, containing information related to the full history of the object, was prepared for each of the featured works. In addition to facts about the painting's physical nature—medium, dimensions, and inscriptions, which have been included with each essay—the apparatuses also contain a comprehensive history of the object's title(s), provenance, exhibitions, and references plus technical notes, related works, and information on frames. These exhaustive apparatuses, published separately on the Corcoran Gallery of Art's website, support the research and interpretations found in the essays.

The abbreviation CGA (for Corcoran Gallery of Art) has been used throughout the endnotes.

The Union List of Artist Names (ULAN) was used as a guide to artists' names. The title of each featured work has been restored to the original title that the artist gave it, the title used during the artist's lifetime, or the title under which the object was first exhibited or published (when such titles have been discovered). Where the original title of a painting or sculpture is in a foreign language, it appears in parentheses following the title in English. In rare cases, a painting has been so well known by a certain title that it has been retained to avoid confusion; in others, errors in transcription, spelling, or nomenclature in original titles have been corrected and explained in the endnotes. A portrait that was not given a title by the artist is referred to by the sitter's proper name at the time of the sitting and is identified as fully as possible. If a female sitter was married at the time of the sitting her married name appears in parentheses, after the primary title. Honorifics, such as "General" or "President," and courtesy titles, such as "Mr.," have been omitted from the titles of all portraits and are instead acknowledged in the accompanying entry. Dimensions for featured works were measured separately in both inches and centimeters, height before width; those that fall within a range are listed by their largest dimension.

The following conventions have been used for dating.

1840 executed in 1840 before 1840 executed before 1840 after 1840 executed after 1840

by 1840 executed in or before 1840 c. 1840 executed sometime about 1840 1840–42 begun in 1840, finished in 1842

1840/1850executed sometime between 1840 and 18501840; completed 1850begun in one year, set aside, completed in

another year

1840; reworked 1850 completed in one year, purchased, published,

or exhibited, then reworked at a later date

n.d. date unknown

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## FEATURED WORKS







## Portrait of a Gentleman, c. 1760

Oil on canvas,  $50^{1}\!/_{56} \times 40^{1}\!/_{8}$  in. (127.2  $\times$  102 cm) Signed middle left: I: Blackburn Pinx Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 66.25

In this handsome portrait by the English painter Joseph Blackburn, a gentleman wearing a light blue waistcoat with silver embroidery stands in a formal pose near an open window, his body turned to the viewer's left. His dark brown coat and dark wig provide a foil for the brilliantly painted waistcoat, and he holds a tricorner hat in his right hand. Behind him to our right is a green drape. Although the portrait is signed, its date and provenance before 1956 are not known, nor is the sitter identified. This lack of information raises unresolvable questions: Did Blackburn paint this portrait during his ten years in Bermuda and New England; during his years in England, either before his arrival in Bermuda in 1752; or after his return to the British Isles about ten years later? If it was painted before 1752, it would be his earliest known work, since nothing at all is known of Blackburn—his birth, training, or early work—before he went to Bermuda that year.

Blackburn painted about twenty portraits in Bermuda during his two years there. His sophisticated compositions indicate training with a professional English portraitist, who remains unidentified. By 1754 he had moved to Rhode Island, where he painted a small number of portraits. In Boston in 1755–59 he painted at least sixty likenesses of merchants, public officials, military men, and their families. His portraits were admired for their decorative qualities: Mary Cary Russell praised his ability to paint "such extreme fine lace and satin, besides taking so exact a likeness." In Boston his work was a major influence on the young American artist John Singleton Copley, an aspect of their careers that deserves further study. 4 In

1760 and 1761, perhaps because of competition from the more talented, younger artist, Blackburn moved from Boston to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he painted about twenty portraits. He was last documented there on 12 July 1762 by the payment for the portrait of Sarah Sayward (Mrs. Nathaniel Barrell, Historic New England, Boston). By January 1764 he was back in England; his remaining fifteen portraits are dated 1767–77 and depict sitters in the west of England and Ireland.

The Corcoran Gallery's Portrait of a Gentleman is first recorded in a letter from John P. Nicholson dated 20 February 1956 to the Corcoran Gallery, when the dealer, writing from New York, offered the painting for acquisition: "A number of American pictures have been turning up in England of late. I bought a very nice signed Blackburn portrait (50 by 40 inches) there that must have been painted when he was over here, about 1760 I would say."6 His dating may have been based on the notable similarity of the background to Blackburn's portrait of Hannah Wentworth Atkinson (Fig. 1), which is signed and dated 1760 in very small letters along the ledge to the left. The window and masonry ledge, the green trees, and the curtain to the right are identical in the two portraits. Other works from the late 1750s and early 1760s have similar settings, including his portrait of Margaret Lechmere Simpson (1758, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Portraits of men are seen in similar poses or in coats decorated with braid, notably sitters from Portsmouth, including Governor Benning Wentworth, in a full-length portrait (1760, New Hampshire Historical Society, Portsmouth),



Fig. 1. Joseph Blackburn, Hannah Wentworth Atkinson, 1760. Oil on canvas,  $49\times39$  in. (124.7  $\times$  99.3 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust, 919.1005



Fig. 2. J. Aberry, after Thomas Hudson, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 1749, 1753. Engraving, image,  $14\%\times10\%$  in. (37.8  $\times$  27.1 cm). The British Museum, 1880, 1113.1319 (recto)

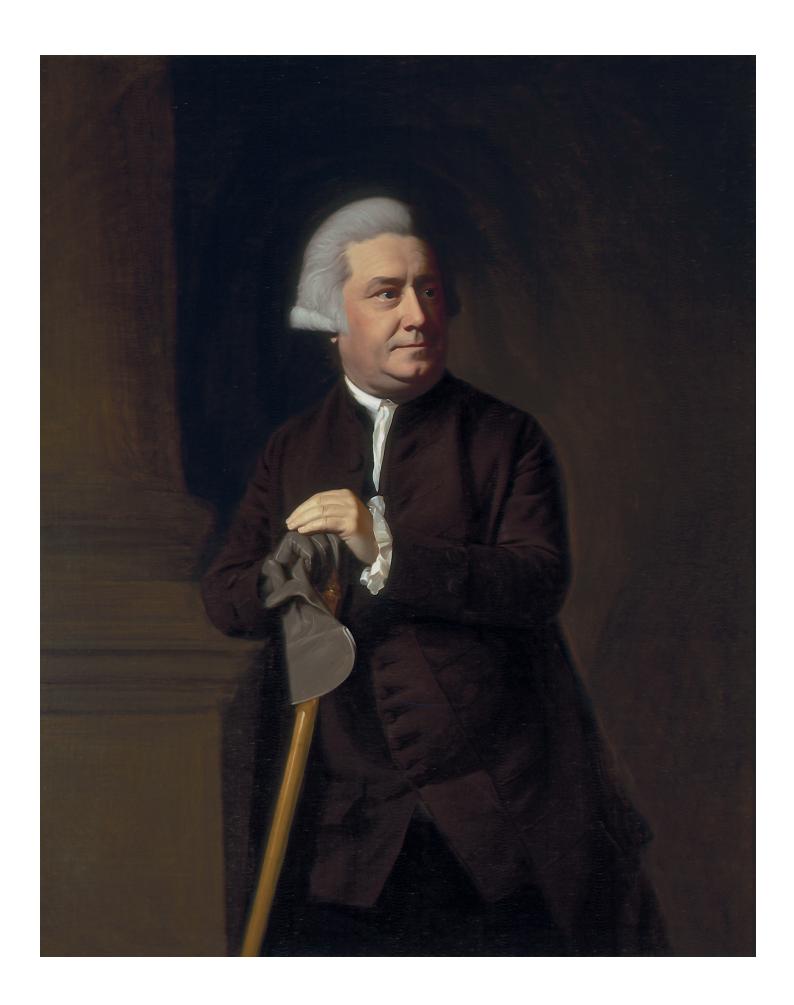


although none has such an elaborately embroidered waistcoat.<sup>7</sup> The American clothing historian Linda Baumgarten observes that "the way Blackburn renders the waistcoat with a loom-woven subpattern in the blue silk suggests that he was working from a genuine garment—it is very accurately observed." Its unusual scalloped coat cuff, a style called à *la marinière*, was fashionable in England from at least the 1730s into the 1760s. According to Baumgarten, a date of 1745–55 is most likely, although "it is equally possible that it is from around 1760 and shows a conservative man in equally conservative clothing."

Yet it is difficult to pin down a date based solely on these compositional features. While the portrait's similarity to Blackburn's later American work strongly suggests a date about 1760, the portrait could have been painted soon after his return to England. The discovery of the portrait in England referred to by the dealer John Nicholson when he wrote to the Corcoran in 1956 supports an English origin. Also possibly pointing to an English origin is the size of the signature, which is quite large in comparison to signatures on

his American work. The signatures on portraits of Hannah Atkinson (Fig. 1), Governor Benning Wentworth, Mary Sylvester (1754, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), and many others are so exceedingly small as to be almost inconspicuous. The least likely date would be before Blackburn left England for Bermuda in 1752, although similarities to his work in Bermuda in terms of technique or to the work of the English artist Thomas Hudson suggest that earlier date. The closest portrait in Hudson's work is his painting of Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 1749, which was etched by J. Aberry in 1753 (Fig. 2). Whether Blackburn had studied with Hudson, a painter from Exeter whose career was primarily in London, is not known.<sup>10</sup> The similarity to the print could also be evidence that Blackburn imitated English prints when painting his American sitters. Because of these uncertainties, a date of about 1760 seems reasonable. Because of the great interest among contemporary scholars in trade and commerce in the broader Atlantic world, Blackburn is an artist deserving of close study.

EGM



#### Thomas Amory II, c. 1770–72

Oil on canvas,  $49^{11}/_{16} \times 39^{3}/_{10}$  in. (126.2  $\times$  101 cm) Museum Purchase, through the gifts of William Wilson Corcoran, 1989.22

Born in Boston, John Singleton Copley by the early 1760s had established himself as the preeminent portrait painter in colonial America. Before relocating to London in 1775, Copley painted more than 350 portraits of New Englanders and New Yorkers. Some, like Paul Revere and Samuel Adams, were destined for fame, but most of Copley's sitters were ordinary citizens: men, women, and children from the merchant and business classes. Sizable fortunes were being amassed in the prosperous years before the American Revolution, and having one's portrait painted by Copley was an unmistakable indicator of wealth and social prestige.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Amory II was born in Boston on 23 April 1722, the eldest son of a successful merchant and distiller of rum and turpentine. His father died when he was just six, leaving his mother to run the business.<sup>2</sup> Amory attended Harvard and initially intended to enter the ministry but acceded to his mother's wish that he take over the family business; he ran it with considerable acumen. In 1764 he married his cousin Emily Coffin, daughter of a competing distiller, thus uniting his family's fortunes with hers. Amory became a well-known and admired member of Boston's merchant society, a gentleman who was said to have manners "typical of his social group."<sup>3</sup>

The Amory family first engaged Copley's services in 1763, when Amory's sister-in-law (Katharine Greene) had her portrait painted (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), and Amory's brother John commissioned his own portrait from Copley five years later (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). By 1770 or so, Amory had ordered a half-length portrait of himself and a bust-length portrait of his wife (location unknown). Copley often painted pendant portraits during these years, and it is curious that Amory chose not to have his wife's portrait painted in the same size as his. In 1770 Amory acquired a large house at Washington and Harvard Streets in Boston, and once he had received his portrait from Copley, he hung it in the entrance hall.

Copley's portrait of Amory is one of his most successful exercises in restrained elegance. In many other paintings of the same period, Copley lavished attention on the rich fabrics worn by the sitters or situated them in the opulent settings that were often largely imaginary (an example is his portrait of Amory's close friend Nicholas Boylston at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Amory was about fifty years old at the time, and he is shown wearing a brown coat and a simple white shirt, posed against a dark background and leaning on the base of a column. His left hand is bare and his right, gloved hand holds his other glove while resting on a walking stick with a gold cap. He seems to have stopped for a moment on one of the walks he regularly enjoyed with his brothers along Boston's streets. Gazing thoughtfully off to his left, he is illuminated by a strong light that draws the viewer's attention to his ungloved left hand and to his head and face. We are left with the impression of a sympathetic, dignified man who has surely attained a measure of wisdom from life's experiences.

Although a staunch loyalist who once faced down an angry mob that had gathered outside his house, Amory never actively opposed the quest for independence. He remained in Boston during the war and kept his business interests secure. When the colonials retook the city, he was denounced and sent for two months' detention in Waltham, Massachusetts. Undaunted, Amory returned to Boston after his release from prison, and, following his death on 18 August 1784, he was able to leave his family businesses in good shape and his children comfortably provided for. His portrait remained in the family's possession for more than two centuries until it was acquired by the Corcoran in 1989. It has survived in exceptionally fine condition.

FK

## Cupid, Stung by a Bee, Is Cherished by His Mother, 1774

Oil on canvas, 48 × 48¾6 in. (121.9 × 122.4 cm) Signed and dated lower left: B. West. / 1774– Gift of Bernice West Beyers, 63.29.1

Benjamin West, the first American artist to earn an international reputation, was one of the most influential painters of his day.1 One of ten children born to Quaker parents in rural Pennsylvania, he had few early educational or economic advantages. In his desire to become a painter, he actively sought out instruction from several artists, the most influential being the English itinerant William Williams. Williams lent him theoretical tracts on the art of painting as well as paintings to copy. Supported by generous patrons, West traveled to Italy in 1760 to further his artistic education. There he became acquainted with the German artist and theorist Anton Raphael Mengs, who encouraged him to paint stories from mythology, ancient history, the Bible, and famous works of literature. After three years in Italy, West traveled to London, where his mythological paintings found favor with the British artistic community. His novel paintings of classical subjects and his innovative history pictures drew the attention of King George III, with the result that the king was a regular patron of the American for several decades.

Although much of West's career was occupied with the execution of large-scale history paintings, he also produced a number of smaller-scale works, such as landscapes, portraits, genre scenes, and mythological pictures. *Cupid, Stung by a Bee* is one of at least twelve paintings of Cupid that West completed during his career in London, which lasted almost sixty years. It likely combines scenes from two poems about the young god: "Cupid Wounded," the fortieth ode of Anacreon, translated from the Greek and published in London by Francis Fawkes in 1760; and the nineteenth idyll of the Greek poet Theocritus, "The Honey Stealers," published in a collection of poems also translated by Fawkes several years later. In "Cupid Wounded," the poem illustrated in the foreground of the picture, Cupid plays on a bed of roses, unaware of a bee lurking in one of the blossoms. After the bee stings his finger, the young god cries out to his mother in pain. As Venus comforts her son, she gently reproaches him,

Dry those Tears, for shame! My Child; If a Bee can wound so deep, Causing Cupid thus to weep, Think, O think! What cruel Pains He that's stung by thee sustains.<sup>3</sup>

West depicts Cupid being consoled by his mother as he gazes with tear-filled eyes at his wounded finger. The deep red of the velvet cushion, Venus's blue drapery, and the dark green backdrop emphasize the marblelike flesh of the foreground figures. Venus's arms cradling Cupid suggest a sense of intimacy between mother and son that is enhanced by the painting's circular composition. The round shape of this canvas calls to mind any number of Renaissance devotional images of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child that West would have seen during his stay in Italy in the early 1760s. The artist used a similar format for several paintings of his wife cradling their young son Raphael, from about 1770.4

The background scene is possibly inspired by Theocritus's "The Honey Stealers," a poem that tells the story of Cupid being stung by a bee as he attempts to steal honey from a hive. As in "Cupid Wounded," in "The Honey Stealers" Venus comforts him

while she compares his behavior to that of a bee. Deviating from the text, West includes several putti in the background,<sup>5</sup> two of whom seem to be struggling on the ground while a third runs toward them clutching a bit of yellow drapery over his head.

West's apparent use of the works of Anacreon and Theocritus reflects the growing interest in England in classical art and literature during the second half of the eighteenth century. While paintings featuring Cupid and Venus had been popular in France for some time, the subject was not shown to the British public until 1765, when West's *Venus and Cupid* (The Parthenon, Nashville, Tenn.), also a circular composition, was included in the annual exhibition of the Society of Artists.<sup>6</sup> Nine years later, when West painted the Corcoran's picture, he had firmly established his reputation as a painter of mythological subjects.

By 1805 the Irish landowner Agmondisham Vesey purchased *Cupid, Stung by a Bee* for Lucan House in Dublin, a large home designed entirely in the Neoclassical manner.<sup>7</sup> Although Vesey was a member of the Irish Parliament, he and his wife spent every other winter in England, where they kept company with leading intellects of the day. In addition to the Corcoran's picture, the couple also purchased West's *Agrippina and Her Children Mourning over the Ashes of Germanicus* (1773, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Fla.) for Lucan House.<sup>8</sup> Both paintings probably hung in the house's dining room until the family collection was dispersed in 1925.<sup>9</sup> The Veseys' patronage of West reflects the fashionableness of his Neoclassical pictures and may have inspired his return to this theme over the next several decades.

JC



### Elizabeth Stevens Carle, c. 1783-84

Oil on canvas, 381/8  $\times$  315/8 in. (96.8  $\times$  80.3 cm) Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 50.20

Elizabeth Stevens Carle (1761-1790) was the daughter of Thomas and Catherine Smith Stevens of Baker's Basin, New Jersey. This portrait represents her in her early twenties, around the time of her marriage to Israel Carle of Ewing, New Jersey, in nearby Trenton Township.<sup>1</sup> When the portrait was acquired by the Corcoran in 1950, Israel Carle was described as a Hessian soldier with the British army during the American Revolution. The legend held that, during troop movements that took place between Trenton and Princeton, he caught sight of Elizabeth at her family's home and "fell in love at first sight, saved the home and family and returned after the war to marry her."<sup>2</sup> It turns out, however, that Carle was not a German mercenary. Instead, he was the son of Trenton Township landowner Jacob Carle, a resident of the colony and an elder in the Presbyterian Church of Ewing, New Jersey. During the Revolution, Israel Carle served as a captain in the New Jersey Light Horse cavalry unit that was formed in 1777. He and Elizabeth were married sometime between 1779 and 1786.3

Elizabeth's seated pose, especially the position of her elegant hands, has been interpreted as showing the influence of an early-eighteenth-century English portrait of Anne, Countess of Sutherland by Jacopo d'Agar, which was engraved by John Simon.<sup>4</sup> American colonial portrait painters often used English portrait mezzotint engravings as models when planning their compositions. The artist may also have been following a print source for the sitter's pale blue dress, which was frequently done for portraits of women. The tight, low-cut bodice, the lack of a center-front closure, and the full sleeves are reminiscent of styles twenty years earlier, in the 1760s, and the pearls on the sleeves hint at decoration that imitates fashions seen in seventeenth-century English portraits. However, the lower square neckline of the dress was in style in the 1780s.<sup>5</sup> Her elaborate hair, powdered and decorated with pearls and pale blue feathers, is in the fashionable mode known at the time as à *l'hérisson* (like a hedgehog).<sup>6</sup>

Her right hand gesturing toward her heart has a specific meaning: she has tucked a portrait miniature into the bodice of her dress. A faint cord around her neck that dangles downward hints at its secret location. The fashion of wearing a miniature on a cord, close to one's heart, can be seen in other late-eighteenth-century American portraits. Some miniatures are visible, such as the one worn by Mrs. Thomas Lea in the Corcoran's portrait by Gilbert Stuart. Other miniatures are hidden, such as those belonging to several women depicted in the 1770s by the American portrait painter and miniaturist Charles Willson Peale; they include Mrs. James Carroll (c. 1770-75, Yale University Art Gallery) and the unknown sitter in his Portrait of a Woman (1775, Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.). The art historian Robin Jaffee Frank observes, "in many paintings of adult women, the black cord drawing the eye from an exposed throat to a lace-covered bosom concealing a portrait alluringly implies romance."

At the time of its acquisition, the portrait was attributed to Matthew Pratt, a Philadelphia artist who studied with Benjamin West in London and returned to the colonies before the Revolution.<sup>8</sup> The portrait can now be reattributed to Joseph Wright, a younger

artist and a native of New Jersey, the son of the wax modeler Patience Wright of Bordentown.<sup>9</sup> After receiving his training in London at the Royal Academy and with West, Wright settled in Philadelphia in 1782.

The soft, muted colors, delicate technique, and elegant formality of the pose are hallmarks of Wright's work. The portrait of Mrs. Carle is especially similar to his slightly smaller depiction of Hannah Bloomfield Giles, who wears a feathered headdress identical to Mrs. Carle's and a black dress with white sleeves. Wright painted her portrait and that of her husband, James Giles, in 1784, the year they were married. That pair of portraits places Wright in New Jersey, since Hannah Bloomfield was from nearby Burlington, New Jersey, and James Giles had studied law with her father, Joseph Bloomfield. Wright was also in New Jersey the previous year, 1783, when he might have had the opportunity to paint Mrs. Carle's portrait in the early fall. He was then in nearby Rocky Hill, New Jersey, at work on a painting and life mask of George Washington. 10 Her mother may have been painted at the same time; a portrait of her, attributed to Pratt, was recorded at Knoedler's in 1963 by Corcoran director Hermann Warner Williams, Jr.11 Elizabeth died childless on 12 March 1790, and the portrait, later owned by her great-niece, was neither published nor exhibited until it was acquired by the Corcoran in 1950. Portraits of her husband, his second wife, Lydia, and their daughter Eliza Ann, painted in 1807 by the New Jersey artist John Paradise, are still owned by descendants.12

EGM



## Edward Shippen, 1796

Oil on canvas,  $29 \times 23^{3}$ /4 in. (73.7  $\times$  60.3 cm) Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 74.8

## Sarah Shippen Lea (Mrs. Thomas Lea), c. 1798

Oil on canvas,  $29^{1/8} \times 23^{15/16}$  in. (74 × 60.8 cm) Anonymous Gift, 1979.77

Edward Shippen (1729–1806), a member of the prominent Shippen family of Philadelphia, was trained as a lawyer in London's Middle Temple and served on Philadelphia's Common Council before siding with the American cause in the Revolution. In 1791 he was appointed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, where he served as chief justice from 1799 to 1805. This portrait, one of Gilbert Stuart's earliest in Philadelphia, was painted at the request of his daughters, one of whom was Sarah Shippen Lea, also portrayed by Stuart.<sup>1</sup>

Shippen's undocumented introduction to Stuart must have occurred fairly early during Stuart's decadelong stay in Philadelphia. After returning to America from Dublin in 1793, Stuart painted portraits for a year and a half in New York City before going to Philadelphia, the temporary capital of the United States, in November 1794 specifically to fulfill his goal of painting a portrait of the president, George Washington. His first sittings with Washington, in 1795, resulted in the group of bust-length portraits known as the Vaughan portraits.<sup>2</sup> A comparison of the portrait of Shippen with one of these (Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Del.) reveals many similarities. In both, Stuart has depicted his sitter in bust length in front of a red curtain, with a suggestion of a distant landscape with blue sky and pink reflections on clouds. Both sitters wear a black suit and look directly at the viewer. Shippen's blue-gray eyes engage the viewer with a forceful directness, and his rosy face and pursed lips endorse that intensity. Stuart's quick brushwork gives Shippen's features, powdered hair, and lacy white shirt frill a

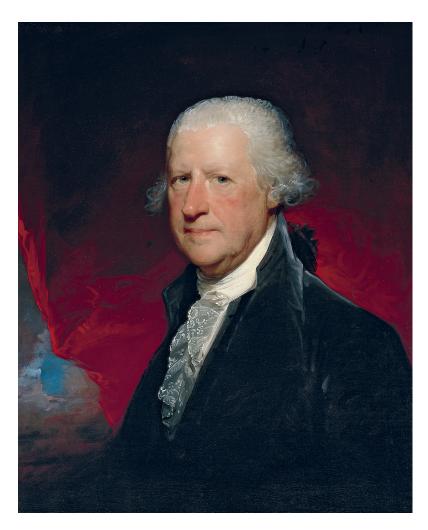
sense of life, energy, and spontaneity. Behind him, the folds of the red curtain catch a bright reflected light coming from the left.

Shippen wrote to another of his daughters, Margaret ("Peggy"), on 20 January 1796 in London, where she and her husband, General Benedict Arnold, had fled at the end of the war after his dramatic switch of allegiance to the British side. Shippen told her that he planned to send her a copy of the portrait, which "is thought to be a strong likeness. I have therefore employed a Mr. Trot a young man of talents in that way to take a Copy of it in miniature. When finished I shall embrace the first good Opportunity of transmitting it to you, as I flatter myself it will be an acceptable present." The copyist was the American miniaturist Benjamin Trott; the miniature is unlocated today. The portrait was also copied by the English engraver David Edwin, in a print that Stuart praised. The engraving, inscribed "Edward Shippen, L L D. Chief Justice of Pennsylvania AE.74," was first reproduced in *The Port Folio* magazine in 1810, after Shippen's death.

After painting Edward Shippen, Stuart was commissioned to paint his daughter Sarah Shippen Lea (1756–1831). Stuart was "said to have spoken of her as one of the most beautiful women he ever painted." Sarah married the Philadelphia merchant Thomas Lea in 1787. The mood of the portrait is a striking contrast to that of her father. Her expression is both sweet and sad, her heavy eyelids closed slightly over her blue eyes, her bright pink cheeks and lips conveying good health perhaps artificially. Her hair is loosely fashioned in the



Fig. 1. Adolph-Ulrich Wertmüller, Robert Lea, 1796. Oil on panel,  $10\times81/2$  in. (25.4  $\times21.6$  cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1979.78





French style with the brown curls piled high and cascading onto her shoulders. Her black Empire-style dress has a low-cut bodice and tight-fitting long sleeves. A gauzy fichu, or scarf, draped over her shoulders slightly covers her soft flesh. Its edges, sketched in strokes of black and white, are so loosely painted on her right side that they appear almost cloudlike. Behind is a tree with golden brown leaves that catch the sunlight from the left.

Mrs. Lea's portrait is traditionally dated to about 1798, but it could be closer to the date of her father's portrait. At the very least, it must have been painted after August 1795, the date of a portrait of her son Robert that she wears as a miniature at the end of a large gold chain. The original oil portrait (Fig. 1), painted on a wood panel about ten by eight and a half inches in size, is larger than the miniature that Stuart has depicted. He has taken license with the original, which is the work of Adolph-Ulrich Wertmüller, a Swedish artist who had gone to Philadelphia in 1794.

This group of family portraits demonstrates how such images cemented and expressed close family relationships. Sarah Shippen had lost her husband in 1793, and her mother in 1794. Her son Robert died in 1801, at which time his grandfather described him to his aunt Peggy as "a beautiful child about 8 or 9 years old." As Margaretta Lovell explains, the miniature "performs the function of mnemonic for Mrs. Lea in the same fashion that her full-scale image on the wall in her home points its viewers to her face, her form, her role, and her position within a family web." 11

Stuart's portrait of Edward Shippen descended in the family, a memoir to his children and grandchildren of the family patriarch. His great-granddaughter Jane Pringle offered it for sale to William Wilson Corcoran: "It has been reckoned one of Stewart's very best paintings and is in all respects in perfect preservation—the wonderful flesh tints being as well preserved and as fresh as if painted yesterday. I should like it to belong to a public institution safe from all the risks and chances of private ownership in the South."12 After the portrait was acquired by the Corcoran Gallery in 1874, Corcoran curator William MacLeod described it to George C. Mason, who was compiling the first biography and checklist of Stuart's work, at the request of Stuart's daughter Jane Stuart, as "among the finest of Stuart's works, and when in New York to be cleaned, elicited the greatest admiration from [Daniel] Huntington and other artists."13 The portrait of Sarah Shippen Lea was acquired as a bequest from her descendants more than one hundred years later.

EGM

#### George Washington, c. 1800

Oil on canvas,  $28^{13}\!/_{16} \times 23^{13}\!/_{16}$  in. (73.2  $\times$  60.5 cm) William A. Clark Collection, 26.172 (left)

#### George Washington, probably 1803

Oil on canvas, 29\%  $\times$  24\% in. (74  $\times$  61.5 cm) Gift of Mrs. Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, 02.3 (right)

These portraits of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart are two of approximately seventy-five similar paintings that the artist made of the first American president between 1796 and 1825.¹ Collectively known as the Athenæum portraits, they are replicas (copies an artist makes of his own work) of Stuart's famous life portrait of Washington, painted in Philadelphia in 1796 (Fig. 1).² The popular name of the life portrait is derived from that of the Boston Athenæum, the private library that acquired it and the pendant portrait of Martha Washington soon after Stuart's death in 1828. Martha Washington commissioned the original portraits in 1796 at the end of Washington's second term as president. They were left incomplete by Stuart, who at Washington's retirement believed he had the president's permission to keep them in order to satisfy the demand for copies. Stuart referred to the portrait of Washington as his "hundred-dollar bill" because he charged that sum for each replica that he painted.³

The marketability of portraits of Washington had been very much on Stuart's mind when he returned to the United States from Ireland in 1793, having been out of the country since 1775. Stuart knew of a number of English and Irish admirers of Washington and told an Irish friend, the artist John Dowling Herbert, that he was returning to America for the purpose of making a portrait of the president. "There I expect to make a fortune by Washington alone. I calculate upon making a plurality of his portraits, whole lengths . . . ; and if I should be fortunate, I will repay my English and Irish creditors." He went to Philadelphia from New York in 1795 and first painted Washington that winter. This initial portrait and its replicas, in which the president faces to the viewer's right, are known today as the Vaughan portraits after the original owner of one version, now at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Stuart soon had commissions for thirty-nine replicas. This success led Martha Washington to commission a second portrait and one of herself, intending them, when finished, to be displayed at Mount Vernon. Instead, the second portrait of Washington was so successful in its characterization of the president as a heroic leader that it quickly became the preferred version for the replicas. Stuart asked permission to retain it, too, to make the copies, with the result that he kept both portraits in his studio for the rest of his life.

The American artist William Dunlap later wrote about the challenges Stuart had faced when painting the first president: "Stuart has said that he found more difficulty attending the attempt to express the character of Washington on his canvas than in any of his efforts before or since. . . . He was more fortunate in the second attempt, and probably not only had more self-possession, but had inspired his sitter with more confidence in him, and a greater disposition to familiar conversation." The second, an Athenæum portrait, is a more idealized image of Washington than the Vaughan and evokes the sitter's moral character by its emphasis on his broad brow. The replicas of the portrait, which show more of the figure than the unfinished original, are abbreviated bust-length images that depict Washington in a black velvet suit, which he wore for public

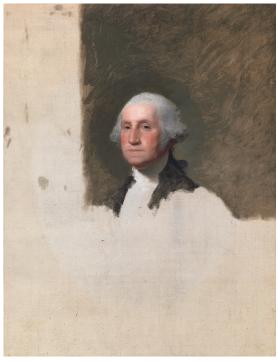
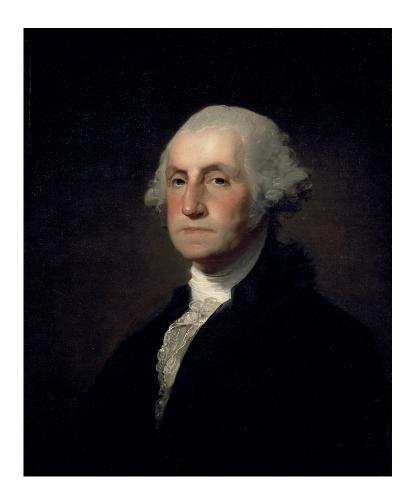


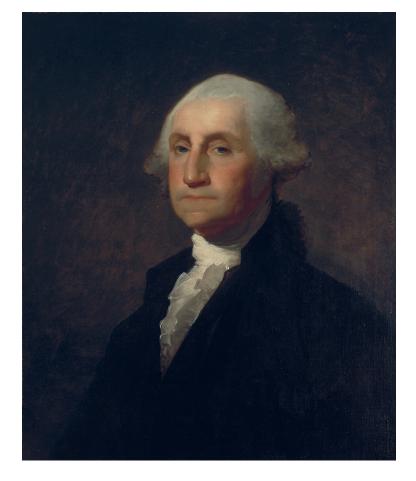
Fig. 1. Gilbert Stuart, *George Washington (Athenæum)*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 48 × 37 in. (121.9 × 94 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; owned jointly with Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. NPG.80.115

occasions during his two terms as president (1789–97). His powdered hair is tied back with a black ribbon that is barely visible in the shadows at the back of his head. Turned to the viewer's left, looking out, Washington holds his lips firmly closed around a new set of false teeth.

Stuart's copying technique may have included a tracing cloth, and he probably relied on assistants to draft the essentials of the composition. However, Stuart completed each replica, and his handiwork is visible in the technique. In the two examples owned by the Corcoran, he painted the lighter tones of the face and shirt with a thick impasto or pastelike paint, returning when it had dried to refine the modeling and add darker details with more fluid brushwork. The shadows under Washington's chin and darker areas of the coat and background are more thinly painted, and the hair is created with wisps of paint over a light-colored ground. The darker background, which was painted last, was brought up to the contours of the figure.

Stylistic details of these portraits help to date the paintings.<sup>7</sup> Over the thirty years that Stuart made copies of the Athenæum





portrait, he put less and less effort into the painting process itself. It is apparent from such details that both of the Corcoran's portraits were among the earliest replicas, which makes it likely that they were painted in Philadelphia. The amount and type of detail in the example from the Clark collection suggests a slightly earlier date than the second portrait owned by the gallery, whose first owner was the Washington resident John Tayloe. In the Clark version, whose history before 1895 is unknown, Stuart painted a lacy shirt ruffle, a feature it shares with several other early replicas, including one owned by Thomas Lloyd Moore of Philadelphia (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.).8 By contrast, the plain linen shirt ruffle in the portrait that belonged to Tayloe required less effort to paint and thus indicates a slightly later date.9

Despite this broad chronology, establishing firm dates for the two portraits is not possible. Without knowing the identity of the early owner of the portrait from the Clark collection, a Philadelphia provenance cannot be firmly established. Onflicting comments about the provenance of Tayloe's Washington appear in the earliest published references to the portrait. Gilbert Stuart's daughter Jane

wrote in 1876 that the portrait was painted for John Tayloe, whereas George C. Mason, Stuart's first biographer, asserted in 1879 that Stuart brought the portrait with him "as a specimen of his skill as an artist" when he moved to Washington from Philadelphia in 1803 and subsequently sold it to Tayloe. In either case, Tayloe, builder of the Octagon House, probably acquired the portrait when he and his wife, Ann Ogle Tayloe, had their own portraits painted by Stuart in 1804. No doubt these portraits of Washington were treasured by their early owners as evidence of the continued importance of the first president even after his death in 1799.

EGM





#### Thomas Corcoran, c. 1802–10

Oil on canvas,  $36\frac{1}{2} \times 26\frac{9}{16}$  in. (92.5 × 67.5 cm) Gift of Katharine Wood Dunlap, 47.14

#### Hannah Lemmon Corcoran (Mrs. Thomas Corcoran), c. 1802–10

Oil on canvas,  $36 \times 26\%$  in. (91.3  $\times$  66.4 cm) Gift of Arthur Hellen, 47.15

Thomas Corcoran (1754–1830), the father of banker, art collector, and gallery founder William Wilson Corcoran, was born in Limerick, Ireland, in 1754.¹ He went to Baltimore in 1783, where his mother's brother William Wilson had become one of the city's principal shipping merchants. In 1788 he married his second wife, Hannah Lemmon, of Baltimore (1765/66–1823).² They settled in the thriving Potomac River port of Georgetown, where he began a shoe and leather business and also purchased tobacco and flaxseed for his uncle. In 1801 Corcoran was appointed to the Levy Court of the District of Columbia as a justice of the peace by the recently elected American president Thomas Jefferson. This tax court, on which he served until his death, made important decisions about the governing of the city. He was also mayor of Georgetown for four different terms and a founder and trustee of Columbian College, which subsequently became the George Washington University.

The Corcorans' likenesses were painted by Charles Peale Polk, nephew of the American portrait painter and museum founder Charles Willson Peale.<sup>3</sup> Orphaned at ten, Polk grew up at his uncle's home in Philadelphia and studied painting with him. His earliest works include numerous copies of Peale's portraits of George Washington. Polk married Ruth Ellison in about 1785, and in 1791 the family settled in Baltimore. He painted portraits there and in western Maryland and northern Virginia during the following decade. Polk's portraits feature oval faces and gracefully posed bodies, imitated from his uncle's work, as well as a continued fondness for the decorative elements of clothing and backgrounds. His technique is more linear than his uncle's: he usually outlined elements of the composition, notably the sitters' features.

By the time of the presidential election of 1800, Polk was living in Frederick County, Maryland. A supporter of Jefferson and his party, Polk found that his liberal politics were at odds with those of the residents, who were conservative Federalists. Seeking a political appointment in Washington, he wrote to James Madison that the people who could afford portraits were "a Class of Citizens, whose political principles seem to have forbidden . . . the encouragement of those who dared to differ in Opinion from them."4 After he and his family moved to Washington in 1801, he received an appointment as a clerk at the Department of the Treasury. In Washington, Polk continued to paint portraits on occasion until his last dated work of 1810; among these were the Corcorans. Polk and Corcoran shared political views as supporters of President Jefferson. They may have met at the Presbyterian Church, which the Corcorans belonged to until 1804. Polk attended services there for three years and painted portraits of several sitters who were pew holders.

As is true of Polk's earlier portraits, those of the Corcorans showcase the artist's careful attention to detail. Husband and wife are seated and turn slightly toward each other. The fringed green curtain behind each figure helps to form a symmetrical setting when the pendants are hung as a pair. Corcoran, who was probably approaching fifty years of age when he was painted, wears a russet red suit with metal buttons and a double-breasted white vest with a diamond-shaped pattern in the fabric. Its folds reveal the curve of his stomach. At his waist he wears a watch key and a seal on a chain.

His wife, in her thirties, wears a dress in the new French Neoclassical style, with a high waist and low-cut bodice. It is made of a delicate white fabric, probably cotton, with a woven pattern of small rose-buds. She modestly wears a white fichu tucked into the bodice of the dress. A white cap covers her brown hair, and her pink cheeks radiate her good health. She holds a pink rosebud in her right hand, and on the table nearby is a vase with two pink roses in full bloom and two pink rosebuds. The five flowers may refer to the Corcorans' five children: James, born in 1789; Eliza, in 1791; Thomas, 1794; Sarah, 1797; and William Wilson, 1798. If so, the portraits were painted before 1807, when their sixth child was born.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Corcoran holds a document that has been folded in three that reads in part, on the center section: "United States House of Representatives . . . day April 24. Debate On the bill from the Senate." On the right section of the paper, the word "Virginia" is visible. Linda Simmons believed that this document was the announcement of Corcoran's appointment as a justice of the peace on the Levy Court of the District of Columbia by President Jefferson in 1801.6 However, the document is not worded as an executive appointment. Instead, the text and the tripartite configuration of the paper indicate that it is a legislative document, folded when in use during congressional meetings. The writing on the center section is the endorsement page, which identifies the legislation, while the text would be on the reverse side.7 Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the paper in Corcoran's hand, despite a search through the published journals of the United States Congress for a Senate bill that was debated by the House of Representatives on 24 April of any year from 1797 through 1810. The closest debate took place in the Seventh Congress in the spring of 1802 and concerned the "Act to incorporate the inhabitants of the City of Washington, in the District of Columbia." No legislative business was conducted on 24 April 1802, which was a Saturday, but the legislation had been voted on by the Senate when, on Tuesday, 27 April, the House passed an amended version. The Senate passed the amended act on 3 May 1802.8 Corcoran's role in this legislation, if any, is not known. However, his position on the Levy Court gave him a significant role in the new government, and his public role is clearly referred to here, just as his wife's maternal, private role is implied in her portrait. The paintings were valued by later generations, who gave them to the Corcoran Gallery, founded by Thomas and Hannah Corcoran's son.

EGM

## Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia Grace, c. 1806

Oil on canvas, 435/8 × 387/8 in. (110.8 × 98.8 cm)

Museum Purchase through the gifts of William Wilson Corcoran, Elizabeth Donner Norment, Francis Biddle, Erich Cohn, Hardinge Scholle, and the William A. Clark Fund, 1983.87

This engaging record of a mother and her two young daughters is among the nearly one hundred works by Joshua Johnson, America's earliest-known professional black artist, that have come to light since his rediscovery in the late 1930s. The son of a white man and an unidentified slave woman, Johnson was apprenticed to a Baltimore blacksmith before being freed sometime between 1782 and 1784. In the years around 1800, the apparently self-taught portraitist received commissions from a number of prominent families in Baltimore. Besides these particulars, several addresses for the artist, and two newspaper advertisements for his business, little else of Johnson's life is known save for his remarkable portraits.

In the Corcoran's canvas, Johnson portrays the prominent Baltimore matron Grace Allison McCurdy (1775–1822),<sup>4</sup> accompanied by her children, Mary Jane (c. 1802–1866) and Letitia Grace (1797–1875).<sup>5</sup> Grace had married the prosperous Baltimore merchant Hugh McCurdy (c. 1765–1805) in 1794,<sup>6</sup> and several years later the couple ordered the first of two portraits from Johnson, a full-length likeness of young Letitia (Fig. 1). As the Johnson scholar Carolyn Weekley has noted, the birth of Mary Jane in about 1802 likely explains the rather unusual circumstance of a second McCurdy portrait commissioned from the painter within such a short span of time. It is also possible that the triple portrait originally was planned as a likeness of all four family members, but that Hugh's untimely death in 1805 altered that arrangement, effectively making the image one that memorializes the family patriarch through his absence.<sup>7</sup>

Stylistically, the McCurdy family likeness bears all the hall-marks of Johnson's distinctive manner and specifically what Weekley defines as his middle period (1802–13/14). The stiffly posed figures feature bodies and clothing with little or no modeling and faces with carefully delineated, if somewhat formulaic, details. The Sheraton-style horsehair sofa framing the family is dotted with brass tacks, and, as in many of the artist's other compositions, the subjects' heads are haloed against a somber, unadorned background. The mother and older daughter delicately grasp strawberries (both loose and in a basket) and a parasol, decorative props of the type Johnson often used. Finally, the painting's subdued palette, enlivened by brilliant accents, is typical of the artist's work.

In his portrait of the McCurdys, Johnson integrates these characteristic traits into a strikingly simple arrangement unified by subtly complex details. The straightforward, if somewhat awkward, female bodies nearly fill the picture plane. Johnson suggests their corporeality through their full-skirted Empire dresses and ample, columnar arms9 while conveying their individuality through particularities of pose, visage, and costume. 10 He relates the figures one to another by means of relatively sophisticated compositional elements. Grace's hand rests on Mary Jane's shoulder while the girl returns her mother's gesture, and the sisters are connected by their parallel arms and by the green parasol, which continues the folds of Mary Jane's dress.<sup>11</sup> The three are linked by the repetition of their white dresses and by the slope of the sofa, which echoes the rising line of their heads. They are also integrated by the recurrence, along a roughly horizontal axis, of the red accents of strawberries and slipper. Together, the picked fruit, basket, and parasol imply that the trio



Fig. 1. Joshua Johnson, Letitia Grace McCurdy, c. 1800–1802. Oil on canvas,  $41 \times 34 \frac{1}{2}$  in. ( $104.1 \times 87.6$  cm). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Acquired by public subscription on the occasion of the centennial of the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum with major contributions from The Fine Arts Museums Auxiliary, Bernard and Barbro Osher, the Thad Brown Memorial Fund, and the Volunteer Council of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1995.22

has just returned to their parlor from an outdoor activity, a narrative sequence unusual in the artist's work. <sup>12</sup> In this, one of his most captivating portrayals—at once unassuming and intricate—Johnson has succeeded in expressing his subjects' individuality as well as their appealing familial closeness.

The ambitiousness of compositions like the McCurdy portrait is among the primary reasons for scholarly hesitation to accept Johnson's description of himself as a "self-taught genius." Another is the extraordinarily rich artistic milieu in Baltimore, which included the prolific Peale family of painters, particularly Charles Peale Polk, who may well have influenced Johnson. Hinally, there is evidence to suggest the painter's exposure to artists even farther afield, particularly since his whereabouts are unknown from the time of his manumission, between 1782 and 1784, to the mid-1790s, when he probably became active in Baltimore.

Whatever Johnson's artistic training and exposure may have been, the McCurdys chose him, rather than one of his Baltimore colleagues, for two of their portrait commissions. By 1800, the approximate date of the artist's important first commission from the family, the McCurdys certainly would have been aware of the



painter's presence in Baltimore; Johnson's first newspaper advertisement, in 1798, suggests that he had been active there for several years. <sup>16</sup> One of his contemporaries may have introduced him to the family; Rembrandt Peale, for example, had painted Hugh McCurdy's portrait in 1798. <sup>17</sup> Moreover, by 1800 Johnson had begun to develop what appears to have become a specialty in children's portraiture, judging from the many such likenesses among his located works.

Before ordering Letitia's portrait, the McCurdys may have met Johnson independently or via an introduction from a common neighbor, since in the late 1790s both families lived near the intersection of Hanover and German Streets in Baltimore. There may well have been political and social motivations behind the commission of Letitia's portrait and, subsequently, that of the Corcoran's portrait (as suggested above, this may have been ordered before Hugh McCurdy's premature death). Many of Johnson's patrons both

lived in this vicinity and were leaders of Baltimore's burgeoning abolitionist movement; they sought the painter's services, at least in part, because they wished to support his success as a freedman.<sup>19</sup> McCurdy may have shared the abolitionist leanings of many of his family's neighbors, among whom was his brother-in-law, the patriot and abolitionist James McHenry,<sup>20</sup> as well as those of Johnson's abolitionist patrons living outside this immediate area, such as Dr. Andrew Aitken, a member of the newly formed Abolition Society.<sup>21</sup> Although the manner in which the McCurdys met Johnson and their motive or motives for engaging his services may never be uncovered, *Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia* presents a sensitive and appealing likeness of the three McCurdy females from a fascinating, pivotal era in the social and cultural history of federalist Baltimore.

SC

## Poor Artist's Cupboard, c. 1815

Oil on panel, 29<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 27<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (75.7 × 70.7 cm) Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund and Exchange, 55.93

In Poor Artist's Cupboard, Charles Bird King introduces his audience to the sad story of the fictional artist C. Palette. King's trompe l'oeil (fool the eye) panel is painted to resemble a niche containing a revealing assortment of Palette's possessions. A case of drafting tools—with compass and protractor visible—is at the center, flanked by a crust of bread perched, ironically, on the richly bound tome Lives of Painters and a humble glass of water. Just below are two calling cards, each addressed to Mr. C. Palette. One, from a parsimonious patron, Mrs. Skinflint, requests that he visit her after tea, and a second records a debt of five dollars that Palette owes to a lover of the "Arts of Painters." Above, lying horizontally, are two thin volumes whose handwritten titles were proverbs about poverty: "We Fly by Night" and "No Song, No Supper." On top of them lies a stack of unpaid bills. Surrounding these objects is a host of books with inauspicious titles: Miseries of Life, Advantages of Poverty - Third Part, and Cheyne on Vegetable Diet.3 Opening this sad tableau at the upper left is an advertisement for a sheriff's sale, which lists the "property of an artist": a few articles of clothing, a peck of potatoes, and several still lifes of rich repasts painted "from recollection."

King's painting contains several references to the city of Philadelphia, where he lived from 1812 to 1816. The sheriff's sale takes place there, and the painting includes a perspective view of the city jail (Fig. 1), which housed debtors. King makes pointed reference to the state of the arts in Philadelphia, as well. A tally of paintings sold in Philadelphia, which peeks out from the red portfolio, records a large number of portraits, the most popular but least artistically challenging genre of the period. Mrs. Skinflint's invitation suggests the stinginess of art patronage in Philadelphia, and a book titled *Choice Criticism on the Exhibitions at Philadelphia*, at the very bottom, is noticeably thin.

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Fig. 1. Charles Bird King, Poor Artist's Cupboard, detail

King himself had little professional success in Philadelphia. After four years in the city, he is documented as having sold only two portraits.<sup>5</sup> But he was not, in the truest sense, a starving artist. Born in Newport to a wealthy family, he always had independent means and appears never to have relied on sales for his livelihood. As a result, art historians have theorized that Poor Artist's Cupboard is not a statement on his own experience as a struggling artist but a meditation on the impoverishment of American cultural life, symbolized by the tattered books.6 But King may also have had a more pointed statement to make about artists' role in their penury. Despite his means, he chose to live in self-imposed privation. When a student in London, for example, he and the portraitist Thomas Sully made a pact to share a small, one-room apartment and subsist on bread, milk, and potatoes to stretch their budgets.7 King's parsimony went hand in hand with his desire to live an ascetic life. His landlady in London told the visiting American critic John Neal that King curiously slept on the floor even though he was provided with a bed.8

Given that private art patrons in America were few and public patronage almost nonexistent, the expensive tastes of King's fictional artist—note the stylish beaver felt top hat at center right—and his grand artistic ambitions, suggested by the sixteen-by-twenty-foot history painting *Pursuit of Happiness* advertised in the sheriff's sale, reveal that Palette is unrealistic and unwilling to compromise.<sup>9</sup> King's painting has also been understood within the context of Dutch still life paintings, particularly the niche paintings of the *fijnschilders* (fine painters) of Leiden as well as the tradition of *vanitas* paintings, the meditation on the fleeting pleasures of life.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the tattered books and the cylinder of papers, which, when viewed obliquely, resembles a skull, suggest decay and death.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 2. Charles Bird King, Vanity of the Artist's Dream, 1830. Oil and graphite on canvas, 35½ × 29½ in. (89.2 × 74.9 cm). Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum, Gift of Grenville L. Winthrop, Class of 1886, 1942/193



Palette's vanity and the vanitas theme also play a role in King's second installment in the tale of C. Palette, the allusively titled Vanity of the Artist's Dream (Fig. 2), now in the Harvard Art Museum, Fogg Art Museum. In that painting, C. Palette's name reappears as a signature in a sketchbook, as an inscription on a last-place medal, in a news article announcing the closing of an unsuccessful exhibition of his works, and in a letter from his patron, A. Skinflint, who now complains that a carpenter painted three of her doors for less than the price of one of Palette's paintings.<sup>12</sup> Details suggest that Palette's circumstances have worsened. Twenty or more "inscriptions" appear on the painting's trompe l'oeil frame, including notes about debts and forgoing milk, butter, and cab rides, and copies of the same books pictured in Poor Artist's Cupboard show considerably more wear. The artist's imprudence, however, persists. A sheriff's sale notice, again in the upper left, lists a painting of King Croesus, known for his vanity and who is usually pictured among luxurious goods. A note on the frame also indicates that Palette was long missing his second volume of Human Prudence.13

A curious detail in the picture at Harvard raises an intriguing question about the provenance of the two paintings. Wrapped around a scroll, prominently placed in the center, is a letter to Palette from the Boston Athenæum. The part that is visible reads,

"I regret to inform you that the picture you *lent* to the Boston Athenaeum for their exhibition is sold (by mistake at half-price) to Mr. Fullerton who refuses to relinquish it or pay your price." James Fullerton, a Boston collector, likely saw the Corcoran's *Poor Artist's Cupboard* when it was exhibited at the Boston Athenæum in 1828 alongside two works from his own collection. 15 By 1832 he owned a version of King's painting, which he exhibited at the Boston Athenæum under the title *Poor Artist's Study*. Scholars have always assumed this was the painting now at Harvard, and that its trompe l'oeil letter was a teasing reference to the picture's owner. But the situation recounted in *Vanity of the Artist's Dream* may also be true, and the Corcoran's painting was the one Fullerton purchased from the Boston Athenæum at half price. 16

In 1818 King moved to Washington, D.C., where he found great success as a painter of society portraits and diplomatic portraits of visiting Native American delegations. He also ran a for-profit gallery in his home on 486 12th Street, between E and F Streets, on and off from 1824 to 1861. There he exhibited about two hundred of his own paintings. *Poor Artist's Cupboard* was likely among the works on exhibition during the gallery's first decade, an enduring token of leaner times.<sup>17</sup>

## Mishap at the Ford, 1818

Oil on panel, 27% × 35½/16 in. (70 × 91.3 cm)
Signed and dated lower center: A. Fisher, Pinx. Feb 7 1818
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 57.11

Alvan T. Fisher was one of America's first landscape and genre painters. He received his early training in the studio of John Ritto Penniman, a Boston painter who specialized in a variety of artistic enterprises including portraiture, ornamental painting, and stage design. After approximately two years with Penniman, Fisher established his own portrait studio in Boston at the age of twenty. According to his own account, this is when he "truly became a painter," and over the next few years he earned a reputation as a painter of portraits, animals, landscapes, and rural scenes of everyday life.1 Mishap at the Ford is one of Fisher's earliest extant genre paintings, and it epitomizes the thematic range of his oeuvre. In this humorous scene, a carriage with four well-dressed travelers becomes stuck in the mud while attempting to traverse a ford. As the figures in the carriage gesticulate wildly, a man up to his knees in the water attempts to free one of the wheels, while another on shore tries to calm the four frantic horses. Just behind the carriage, three laborers or fishermen stand in a small, flat-bottomed boat, as an unlucky fourth man, likely knocked from the vessel into the water as a result of this mishap, is being pulled back in. Fisher's painting implies that this was a peaceful scene in the country before the elegant city folks arrived.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, genre paintings featuring farcical or moralizing stories had become popular with the American art-buying public. While these paintings were inspired by English art, particularly humorous paintings and prints by such artists as William Hogarth, David Wilkie, and Thomas Rowlandson, their subject matter was tailored to appeal to an American audience.<sup>2</sup> The foursome in Mishap at the Ford is likely on a sightseeing jaunt, a subject that reflects the growing popularity of tourism in America during this period.<sup>3</sup> The carriage pictured is a barouche, an expensive vehicle that typically was used for short pleasure outings. Although Fisher's New England landscapes are generalized, his audience would probably have recognized the familiar plight of the passengers; many roads at the time were suitable only for horses and walking, not elegant wheeled vehicles.5 Additionally, the military uniforms worn by the gentlemen in the barouche readily identify them as United States Army officers; the soldier in the front appears to be a junior officer, while the hat of the other identifies him as an officer of high rank.<sup>6</sup> The members of the military provide the narrative with an additional touch of humor, since the present circumstances render these trained professionals helpless.

Like other genre painters of his generation, Fisher tells his story through figural placement and exaggerated gestures.<sup>7</sup> The figures in the carriage stand unsteadily, the soldiers' arms are outstretched, and the woman in the rear recoils in fear. The man on shore attempting to calm the horses waves his arms frantically, conveying a sense of urgency to the scene and probably scaring the horses even more. Fisher developed the figural elements and composition for *Mishap at the Ford* in a series of preparatory drawings in several sketchbooks dating from about 1818; these are the earliest of his preliminary sketches that can be linked to a specific painting.<sup>8</sup> Once the artist developed a composition he deemed successful, he often repeated it. He was apparently pleased with *Mishap at the Ford*, for he made at least one other almost identical version of this picture dated May 1818, approximately three months after the 7 February date on the Corcoran's canvas.<sup>9</sup>

JC



## A Landscape after Sunset, c. 1819

Oil on canvas, 17% × 25% in. (45.5 × 64.3 cm) Museum Purchase, William A. Clark Fund, Gallery Fund, and gifts of Orme Wilson, George E. Hamilton, Jr., and R. M. Kauffmann, 63.9

A Landscape after Sunset is one of a trio of landscapes Washington Allston made after his return to Boston from England in 1818. Like Moonlit Landscape of 1819 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and Landscape, Evening of 1821 (IBM Corporation), it is more dream than place, a product of memory rather than observation. A mysterious traveler follows his dog along a meandering path toward a pool of water, where cattle drink in the dim light of the magic hour, that time between sunset and nightfall when objects start to blur into tonal oneness. A shadowy hill town in the middle distance suggests Italy, but it is, deliberately, not meant to be anywhere in particular. Working in London (1811-18), Allston had initially endeavored to paint historical narratives, but his enthrallment with the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge turned him in a new, poetic direction.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, Allston became preoccupied with the human imagination and with what it means to create. He turned his attention away from the external, empirical world and moved, in the words of biographer Elizabeth Johns, toward "making art about the internal life of the mind." A Landscape after Sunset, in its visual and narrative indeterminateness, exemplifies Allston's newfound aesthetic. Instead of painting the here and now (at the time he was living in a neighborhood near Boston), he conjured up memories of Italy, a ruminative process that to him fulfilled the poetic possibilities of painting.

Allston's writings elucidated his thinking. His gothic novel, Monaldi, which he completed in 1822, opens with a scene much like A Landscape after Sunset, "when the peculiar features of the scenery are obscured by the twilight."4 The main character, Monaldi, who is Allston's alter ego, is an artist of inner "depth and strength" who wants to "shut out" the external world "and to combine and give another life to the images it had left in his memory; as if he would sleep to the real and be awake only to a world of shadows." Monaldi "looked at Nature with the eyes of a lover" and, instead of transcribing its beauties, "treasured [them] up in his memory." His antagonist, Maldura, embodies the values Allston despised: for Maldura, "the world, palpable, visible, audible, was his idol; he lived only in externals, and could neither act nor feel but for effect."6 In his Lectures on Art, Allston's summa on aesthetics, he further articulated his argument against artists like Maldura, who make "a mere mechanical copy of some natural object." Would any viewer "be truly affected by it," he asked? If nature is rendered as "faithful transcripts," that is, with information that has not been processed through the imagination, then "feeling," which was to him the supreme purpose of any art or literature that claims to be poetic, "will not be called forth." True art should not be confused with nature, the former possessing a "peculiar something," a "considerable admixture of falsehood." When seen in Allston's own terms, ALandscape after Sunset is a mysterious image that forsakes the temporal and visible in a poetic quest for the spellbinding. Margaret Fuller, the Transcendentalist, thought that Allston's landscapes were his truest subjects, ones that had "a power of sympathy," where "Nature and Soul combined; the former freed from slight crudities or blemishes, the latter from its merely human aspect."9



Fig. 1. Claude Lorrain, Landscape with Tobias and the Angel, 1663. Oil on canvas,  $45\frac{1}{2} \times 60\frac{1}{2}$  in. (116  $\times$  153.5 cm). The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, GE-1236

As much as Allston's visual poetry—that dark inexplicitness that suggests quiet emotional rapture—shows the influence of Coleridge, it was also the result of his intensive study of the sixteenth-century Venetian masters and the seventeenth-century French painter Claude Lorrain. 10 "Titian, Tintoret and Paul Veronese absolutely enchanted me," he told William Dunlap, not because their technique served their subjects, but because, remarkably, he thought their technique "took away all sense of subject." To Allston, whatever the subject, whether biblical or portrait, the Venetians' color and glazing (thin films of transparent color) not only obscured details but also produced the mystifying effect of light from within that he valued: "it was the poetry of color which I felt."12 Surely he knew Claude's Landscape with Hagar and the Angel (1646, The National Gallery, London), which was owned by his friend and patron, Sir George Beaumont. A Landscape after Sunset, however, more closely resembles Claude's Landscape with Paris and Oenone (Musée du Louvre, Paris) and Landscape with Tobias and the Angel (Fig. 1). Yet Allston does not seem to want to imitate Claude as much as he wants to top him: more moody, less structured, more ambiguous, less composed than the old master's work. Claude paints sunsets; Allston moves the clock ahead toward darkness. Claude animates trees with a delicate breeze; Allston silences and stills them as if the picture were a memorial rendering of nature. Claude masses his delicate foliage; Allston makes it wispy and insubstantial. Claude organizes around a story line, but Allston's blurry figure and static cattle wander in the residue of the day, slowly and dimly, like indistinct poetic forms.

PS



## The House of Representatives, completed 1822; probably reworked 1823

Oil on canvas,  $86\% \times 130\%$  in. (220.7  $\times$  331.8 cm) Signed and dated lower left: S. F. B. MORSE. pinx / 1822 Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 11.14

When Samuel F.B. Morse painted The House of Representatives, he was in the second decade of a twenty-six-year career as an artist, a profession that would end in disenchantment when he abandoned painting in 1838 to embrace a future built around his invention of the electromagnetic telegraph. But in 1821 he felt there was an urgent need to produce a significant artistic statement. When he was a student at the Royal Academy in London, his teachers had encouraged him to paint historical subjects that were large, idealized, complex, and capable of transmitting moral lessons. Morse saw pictures like that cropping up across the East Coast after he returned to America: Benjamin West presented an epic Christ Healing the Sick to Pennsylvania Hospital in 1817; Morse's mentor, Washington Allston, exhibited Dead Man Restored to Life by Touching the Bones of the Prophet Elijah at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1816 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) and began his ambitious Belshazzar's Feast in 1817 (The Detroit Institute of Arts); Thomas Sully sold his Passage of the Delaware (p. 74, Fig. 2) to a Boston frame maker in 1819; and John Trumbull's four pictures on the subject of the American Revolution, which were commissioned by the federal government in 1817 for installation in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol, earned him a princely thirty-two thousand dollars. Perhaps the most spectacular example of the "grand" picture was Rembrandt Peale's Court of Death (1820, The Detroit Institute of Arts), a gothic carnival of suffering that attracted thirty thousand viewers across the East Coast between 1820 and 1822 and brought Peale more than nine thousand dollars in ticket sales.2

At the age of thirty, Morse felt it was time to paint his own summa. Yale-educated, Calvinist-raised, deeply pious, and always

correct, Morse avoided an impolite subject like Peale's by coming up with the high-minded idea of painting the Congress of the United States, to be accompanied later by canvases on the Senate and the Executive Branch—a Washington trilogy to match Trumbull's Revolutionary quartet. In principle, his plan should have worked. Few Americans in 1822 could imagine what the federal government looked like, let alone what it did or who was there. Washington was a largely unseen, unvisited city, at a hopeless distance from population centers. Wouldn't citizens of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia be enthralled to see the center of American politics and power come to life? After all, the Capitol had just been majestically rebuilt by Benjamin Henry Latrobe after the devastating sack of the city by the British in 1814.

Morse arrived in Washington from New Haven on 6 November 1821, obtained permission to set up a studio in rooms just off the House floor, and began an oil sketch of Latrobe's new House chamber (Fig. 1). He decided on a view that put the Speaker's chair on the far left, with the half dome and colonnade swinging off to the right. Morse admitted—and the sketch confirms—that he was having trouble getting the perspective of the room correct. In January 1822 he started taking small, rough portraits of the men—including the Corcoran's sketch of Joseph Gales, a reporter for the *National Intelligencer* who appears in the finished painting at the far left (Fig. 2)—whom he would call away from the House floor and into his studio for about an hour at a time.³ He talked about his work schedule in a letter to his wife: waking at dawn, breakfast, prayer, painting until 1:00, fifteen minutes for lunch, more painting until 8:00.4 Every day. Except Sundays. By February he was on his way back to his home

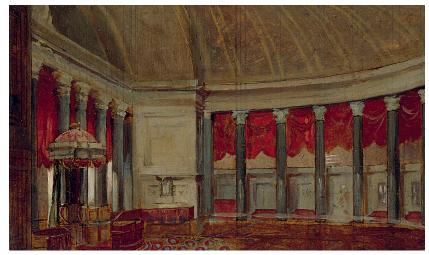


Fig. 1. Samuel Finley Breese Morse, Study for *The House of Representatives*, c. 1821. Oil on panel,  $8\% \times 13\%$  in. (20.9 × 35 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through a grant from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, 1978.166



Fig. 2. Samuel Finley Breese Morse, *Joseph Gales*, 1821–22. Oil on panel, 5½ × 3½ in. (14 × 8.9 cm). Corcoran Gallery of Art, Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 51.23

and family in New Haven. By July 1822 he had most of the architecture and objects in place on the seventy-six-square-foot canvas and then began folding in the ninety-four figures.<sup>5</sup> With unrelenting effort, he had it all finished in January 1823, fourteen months after he started.

The picture shows the Seventeenth Congress at the beginning of an evening session. Congressmen mill about the saucerlike depression of the room in strings and clusters that knit the picture together. A box for sorting mail, located in the right foreground, tosses light toward the center. The primary illumination, though, comes from a large Argand chandelier that is the nexus of the picture. The composition spins outward from the oil-fired rings that the silhouetted doorkeeper, Benjamin Burch, ignites while balancing on a ladder. Congressmen mingle with clerks; the Supreme Court, which was then housed in the Capitol, gathers at the back of the room; two journalists stand attentively on the far left. Everyone is informal, caught chatting, reading, reclining, and walking. In the visitors' gallery on the far right is the artist's father, the Reverend Jedidiah Morse, an impeccable Calvinist minister who was in Washington to see Congress accept his report to Secretary of State John C. Calhoun on the state of Indian affairs. Seated next to him is Petalasharo, a Pawnee chief who was part of a diplomatic delegation there to see President James Monroe. The chief wears a medal given him by Miss White's Female Seminary for Select Young Girls, in recognition for saving a Comanche woman from being burned at the stake.

However, Morse's genteel scene is not an accurate representation of Congress at the time. In reality, by 1822 Congress had grown to include the distant states of Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, and Missouri, and the congressmen from those rural areas threatened the elite leadership from the eastern states. Men less polished and more demagogic recognized how the new demographics, in concert with emerging white male suffrage, were shifting power away from the old guard. The Congress that Morse actually saw in 1822 was a "scene of confusion" filled with "hortatory outcry in milling throngs."6 The English travel writer Basil Hall saw "desk drawers banged, feet shuffled on the floor, bird dogs from the hunt bounding with their masters, yapping accompaniment to contenders for attention, contenders for power" when he visited.7 In her controversial and highly critical Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832), the English expatriate Frances Trollope described how she was aghast to see "this splendid hall fitted up in so stately and sumptuous a manner, filled with men sitting in the most unseemly attitudes, a large majority with their hats on, and nearly all spitting to an excess that decency forbids me to describe—a Cosmos of evil and immorality."8

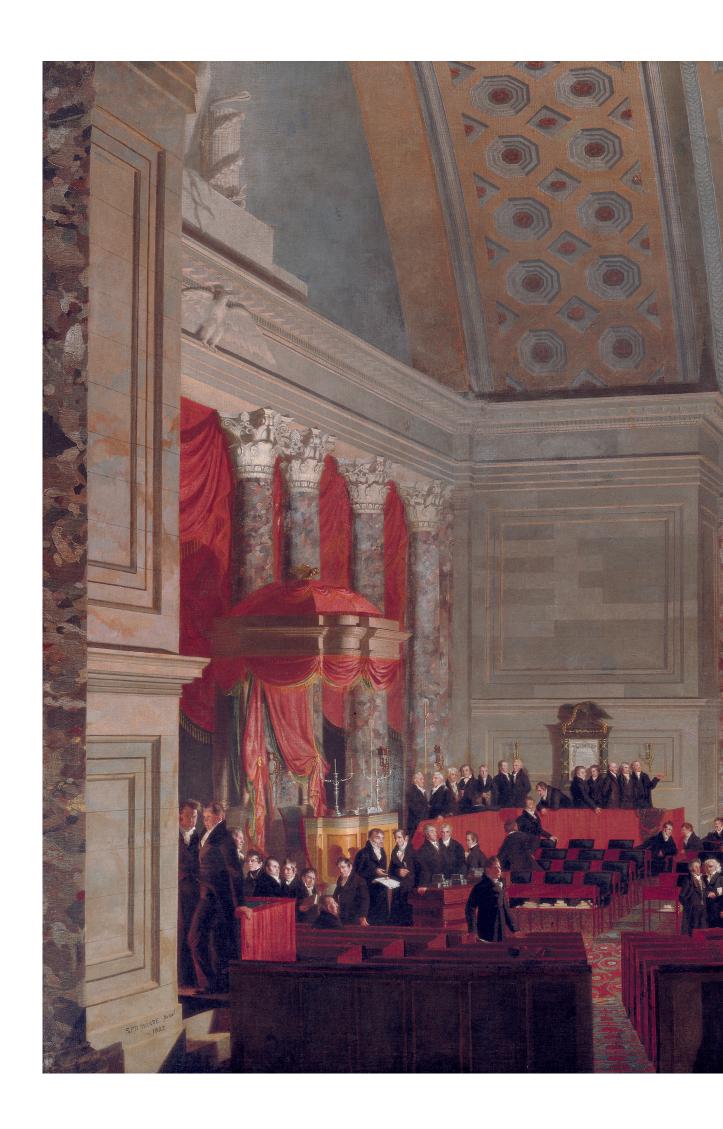
The House of Representatives is not a picture of Congress as it was but Congress the way Morse wanted it to be. His compulsion to depict it as harmonious, courteous, and tranquil, to stress institutional civility, spatial clarity, and architectural magnitude, was an effort to vanquish the present and recuperate the past. The artist's polite, homogeneous, capacious image of the American political system, which he believed was fast decaying into factious debate, crude behavior, and democratic boorishness, stemmed from his own conservative belief in patrician rule, now on its way out.

Morse took his giant picture (and its ideology), packed it in a crate, and shipped the 640-pound package to David Doggett's Repository in Boston for exhibition in February 1823. Admission was 25 cents, 50 cents for the season; the guidebook cost 12½ cents. He then had his agent, Henry Cheever Pratt, distribute five hundred handbills

on the streets of the city. He augmented the pictorial effects of the canvas by placing six tin lanterns on the floor in front of it.9 But Bostonians stayed away, preferring other attractions, such as the tightrope-walking baboon at the Grand Menagerie of Living Animals on Hanover Street or the wax figure of President Monroe at the City Museum. Morse had no choice but to close the show in April. After the painting appeared briefly at the Essex Coffee House in Salem, Massachusetts, he shipped everything to a gallery at 146 Fulton Street in New York. But there he had to compete with Peale's spectacular Court of Death and Sully's Passage of the Delaware as well as a hippopotamus on Nassau Street and an Egyptian mummy at Scudder's Museum. "Should a man paint Hercules strangling serpents," wrote Morse's brother-in-law, "he would please New York. But . . . the owner of a lion, bear, or monkey would realize more money and receive greater applause [than you]."10 Giving up on cities, Morse had C.M. Doolittle take the picture to Albany; Hartford and Middletown, Connecticut; and Springfield and Northampton, Massachusetts. Then he abandoned the tour. In 1828 Morse rolled up the canvas and sent it to his friend and fellow artist Charles Robert Leslie in England, who tried to sell it to the eccentric art patron George Wyndham, third Earl of Egremont, who was wholly indifferent to it. "Had it contained a portrait of Jefferson, Madison or Adams," Leslie told Morse, then "it would have interested [Egremont] more." 11

What had gone wrong? All of Morse's efforts to civilize Congress led to a picture that looks like an inventory of a place and thus lacks eventfulness. 2 Short on drama, its small, static figures and uncomplicated egalitarian ethics could hardly compete with the varied spectacles vying for the public's attention. To be sure, he could have done more with his subject: Congress had recently been producing major legislation, such as the Slave Trade Act of 1820 and the Missouri Compromise of 1821, that pitted proslavery congressmen against abolitionists, both of which had dramatic possibilities as subjects. But Morse seemed intent on a picture that avoided the debates and votes that would have demonstrated the tensions built into the two-party system, and at the same time he steered clear of spotlighting famous individuals. His idealized image of collegiality and collectivity whitewashes the rancor and factionalism that permeated the House floor. Instead of a dramatic event, which was a hallmark of large-scale historical painting, Morse substituted a colossal panorama of objects and people, with the result that scale, space, and calmness dominate the viewing experience. In the end, his House resembled interior pictures, such as François-Marius Granet's popular Choir of the Capuchin Church of Santa Maria della Concezione in Rome (1815, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) more than Trumbull's narrative pictures of the Revolution. Even in his accompanying pamphlet, Description, Morse declared that the picture is meant only to be a "faithful representation of the National Hall."<sup>13</sup> He mentions no figures by name, except in the dispassionate key that accompanied the Description, nor does he cite an eventful moment. Instead, he describes the architecture and gives the dimensions of the room.

Morse's gambit—to expel harsh democratic realities and create in their place a pantheon of political idealism—was his nostalgic way of claiming the superiority of the old ruling class, of willing a mythic past into modern existence. If only, as Morse wished, pictures ruled the world, then concordance, rationality, and high purpose would triumph over contingency, dissent, and the erratic behaviors of men. As much as the past was irretrievable, the future was not to be derailed by a painting, however big and heartfelt it might be.





#### Washington before Yorktown, 1824; reworked 1825

Oil on canvas, 137 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 120 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (3.5 × 3 m) Signed lower left: Rem: Peale Gift of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Mount Vernon, Virginia, 44.1

In 1795 Rembrandt Peale painted his first portrait of George Washington, from life, when he was the seventeen-year-old student of his illustrious father, Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia. He returned to the president only in 1823, with *Patriæ Pater*, a magisterial image (Fig. 1) meant to tap into the nostalgia for the Revolutionary generation at the time of the nation's semicentennial. For the remainder of his long career, Peale built his reputation and business on the nearly eighty replicas and variants of that picture.

He painted *Washington before Yorktown* the year after *Patriæ Pater*, and, not surprisingly, the heads and demeanors are nearly identical.¹ Even the celestial light that arcs over Washington in the Corcoran canvas corresponds to the circular aura surrounding the president in *Patriæ Pater*. In both works, Washington is seen as the man of gravitas, the calculated result of Peale's assiduous study of the iconic portraits by Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, Jean-Antoine Houdon, and his own father.

Yet the pictures are different. The giant *Yorktown* canvas is more than four times larger than the other, the composition is multifigured and complex, and Washington is set within an energetic historical narrative.<sup>2</sup> His eyes angle horizontally instead of upward, and the presidential head of the mid-1790s is transported back in time, unaltered, to 1781, when General Washington led American and French troops into the concluding battle of the Revolution. Peale's goal in the 1820s had been to establish the definitive image

of Washington—the "Standard likeness," as he put it—that would be immediately recognizable and unchanging. Here, that meant representing the forty-nine-year-old general in the physical form of the sixty-odd-year-old president.<sup>3</sup>

When Washington was painted with a horse in the founding era, he was typically shown standing to the side, the horse's head bowed so as not to detract from the man. It was a type of Enlightenment portrait best typified by Charles Willson Peale's *Washington at the Battle of Princeton* (1779, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts). If a battle was nearby, Washington was distanced from it, shown as the thoughtful coordinator or gentlemanly victor but not the leader of his troops. The major exception to that is John Trumbull's *The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton* (1787, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven), which shows Washington leading his troops in the midst of furious fighting. In *Yorktown*, Peale elected to show Washington battle-ready. The idea may have sprung from Thomas Sully's equally huge *Passage of the Delaware* (Fig. 2), which puts Washington on a skittish horse preparing his troops to cross the river in the winter of 1775.

The three-week siege of Yorktown occurred during the early autumn of 1781. Washington controlled a total of fourteen thousand troops from the Continental Army and the French Expeditionary Force under the command of the marquis de Lafayette and the comte de Rochambeau as well as twenty-four French warships under the

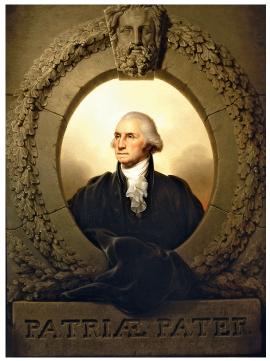


Fig. 1. Rembrandt Peale, George Washington (Patriæ Pater), 1823. Oil on canvas,  $71\frac{1}{2} \times 53\frac{1}{4}$  in. (181.6  $\times$  135.3 cm). U.S. Senate Collection, 31.00001.000



Fig. 2. Thomas Sully, Passage of the Delaware, 1819. Oil on canvas,  $146\frac{1}{2}\times207$  in. (372.1 × 525.8 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of the Owners of the old Boston Museum, 1903, 03.1079



comte de Grasse. Washington commands his restless white horse—either Blue Skin or his Arabian, Magnolia—and while holding a cocked hat in his extended right hand, he swivels his upper body backward to Lafayette and three other mounted officers: Henry Knox, Benjamin Lincoln, and Rochambeau. The notoriously impulsive Alexander Hamilton, a lieutenant colonel and Washington's aide-de-camp, is "galloping off to execute" orders, perhaps the assault that he led on a British stronghold during the siege.

Equally significant to the imagery is the spirited mullein plant in the foreground. Shining in the sunlight below Washington, it was meant as a symbol of Washington's character. A medicinal herb,

mullein was used to treat a variety of ailments and, according to folklore, to cast out evil spirits. Known colloquially as Aaron's rod, it was named after the brother of Moses who is described in the book of Exodus as stretching out his staff to inflict the first three plagues on pharaoh's Egypt. Symbolically, the mullein was Peale's reference to Washington smiting George III's England. Next to the mullein, a creeping weed grows in the shadows, in effect, the British presence in North America, which Washington's horse crushes, finally, under its hoof.

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## View of the Delaware near Philadelphia, 1831

Oil on canvas, 40½ × 60¾ in. (101.5 × 152 cm) Signed and dated lower left: Tho⁵ Birch / 1831 Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 55.83

Born in England, Thomas Birch came to the United States at age fifteen with his father, William Russell Birch, a miniaturist and engraver. Father and son settled in Philadelphia in 1794, and several years later the pair collaborated on a series of topographical paintings and engravings of the city and its surrounding countryside.1 Moving beyond the topographical tradition that occupied his father, Thomas Birch was among the first painters in America to specialize in local landscape paintings and marines.2 In View of the Delaware near Philadelphia, a group of well-dressed city dwellers stands on the river's shore, presumably having gone there to enjoy the area's bucolic scenery. Commercial ships sail up the Delaware River in the distance, reminding the viewer of Philadelphia's thriving port and commercial activities. The artist combines his knowledge of ship portraiture with landscape and genre painting, thereby highlighting both industrial commerce and the popularity of local tourism among Philadelphia's leisure class during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

In the Corcoran's painting, four well-dressed women, a man, and a young girl have apparently just disembarked from a rowboat, since two ferrymen are still securing the craft. The group pauses onshore, and, although two of the women turn back toward the water, their gestures, as well as the dog running inland, suggest the visit has only begun. The women's scarves blowing inland echo the excitement of the little girl and dog as they run toward the path on the left. Birch draws our attention to the civilized aspects of this landscape: the fence, the Philadelphia skyline barely visible along the distant horizon, and the ships on the water. Additionally, the other rowboats beached farther along the shore indicate that these visitors are not the only ones enjoying this rural spot. Yet in this cultivated tourist spot, the decaying log and stump in the left foreground recall more rugged aspects of American scenery at a time when many citizens lamented the growing disappearance of wilderness areas along the country's eastern seaboard.

In his harbor and river views that include sailing vessels, Birch was likely influenced by his father's collection of prints after marine paintings by the Dutch Baroque artists Jan van Goyen and Jacob van Ruisdael.<sup>3</sup> In View of the Delaware near Philadelphia, Birch reveals his familiarity with the Netherlandish marine tradition in the lowered horizon line and the ships placed in profile against a sky filled with rolling clouds, which make patterns of light and shadow on the land below.4 These same ships appear in a number of Birch's harbor views, indicating that he used a stock collection of drawings to work up paintings in his studio. A review of View of the Delaware near Philadelphia when it was exhibited at the annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts indicates Birch's reputation as a painter of ships: "The water is very transparent and aerial perspective excellent. The figures in the foreground attract the eye from the most pleasing part of it, the vessel in the distance." The ships in this painting include a topsail schooner on the left and a merchantman at the far right. The Birch scholar Richard Anthony Lewis has suggested that the artist's precise, idealized delineation of the sails and masts celebrates commerce while sanitizing the growing encroachment of urban industry as well as the sometimes harsh conditions of labor tied to the shipping industry.6

In the same way that he separates industrial labor from the commercial ships he depicts, in this picturesque painting Birch downplays problems of urbanization. By the 1830s travel along the eastern seaboard had become a popular pastime. Thanks to improvements in transportation, artists and laymen alike could visit the rugged landscapes of New York and New Hampshire. Although the scenic charms of the Delaware River were not widely known during this period, the spot was a popular destination among Philadelphians.7 This interest in visiting the countryside coincided with a period of unprecedented commercial and industrial growth in the region. Although it trailed New York, Baltimore, and Boston in commercial activity, by 1825 Philadelphia was beginning to suffer from urban blight because of its thriving coal and steel industries.8 By 1831, the same year Birch painted this picture, civic groups were advocating for Philadelphia's Delaware riverfront to be restored to its former bucolic beauty by tearing down structures along its shore and creating a tree-lined avenue.9

View of the Delaware near Philadelphia is an innovative painting that incorporates elements of the genre, landscape, and marine traditions. Birch's earlier scenic views focus on specific locales in and around Philadelphia, usually featuring well-known landmarks and monuments. 10 In the Corcoran's picture, however, we are provided with a more generic view of the Delaware River and only a hint of the Philadelphia skyline, barely visible in the middle of the horizon in the form of several small towers of varying height. Additionally, most of Birch's paintings that include people are essentially pictures of a harbor or landscape with an added incidental narrative, but here that emphasis is reversed. The figural grouping in the foreground draws the viewer's attention, thereby reducing the city and boats to secondary consideration. While this painting marks a high point in the artist's career, by the end of the decade, Birch's picturesque views of the American countryside and harbors would be eclipsed by the growing popularity of the Hudson River School's grandiose vistas.

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#### The Departure, 1837

Oil on canvas,  $39\frac{1}{2} \times 63\%$  in. (100.5  $\times$  161.6 cm) Signed and dated lower center right: TC / 1[8]37 Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.2

### The Return, 1837

Oil on canvas,  $39\% \times 63\%$  in. (100.3  $\times$  161.4 cm) Signed and dated twice, middle left and lower center right: T Cole / 1837; T Cole. 1837 Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.3

In December 1836 William Paterson Van Rensselaer wrote to Thomas Cole to commission two landscapes.¹ Earlier in the year the artist had enjoyed critical and popular success for his epic five-canvas series, *The Course of Empire* (1836, The New-York Historical Society), and in his letter, Van Rensselaer expressed his "great admiration of the high genius exemplified" in that work. Other than specifying that the pictures represent morning and evening, he left the details entirely to the artist, which, Cole replied, "is gratifying to me, and is a surety for my working con amore."² The resulting paintings, *The Departure* and *The Return*, were completed in early December 1837 and delivered to Van Rensselaer in New York; Cole received two thousand dollars for his work. They are among the most beautiful and moving paintings of his entire career.

Born in England in 1801, Cole immigrated with his family to America when he was in his teens. In the early 1820s he began working as a landscape painter and soon rose to prominence in the field. His early reputation was based on dramatic views of wild American scenery such as *Sunrise in the Catskills* (1826, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), but Cole was aware that purely topographical

landscape traditionally ranked low among the various types of painting. By contrast, history paintings—works that depicted human figures and took their themes from history, mythology, literature, religion, or other sources—ranked at the top as the greatest artistic challenge. Cole determined to create what he called "a higher style of landscape," which would integrate narrative elements into landscape.3 Figures would play a role in these narratives, but so, too, would elements from nature—trees, rocks, streams, mountains, clouds, light, time of day, and the seasons. Cole realized that making paired paintings would allow him to extend the narratives even further, encompassing changes in time and/or physical space; in 1828 he made his first attempt at pendant historical landscapes, The Garden of Eden (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth) and The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Van Rensselaer may have known those pairs, but he unquestionably would have been familiar with the two companion landscapes his father, Stephen Van Rensselaer III, had commissioned from Cole early in the artist's career, Lake Winnepesaukee (1827 or 1828, Albany Institute of History and Art) and View near Catskill (1828, private collection).4



With other commissions ahead of Van Rensselaer's, Cole was not able to start work on the pictures until the summer of 1837. In July he wrote to his patron, explaining that he wanted to produce something worthy of the generous commission:

Sunrise & Sunset will be the Seasons of the pictures: but I shall endeavor to link them in one subject by means of Story, Sentiment & Location. It will perhaps be as well not to mention more explicitly the subject, until the work is about completed. The size of the pictures you left in a measure to me & I hope the canvasses I have chosen will not be found too large, as I think the subject requires the size, which is about 5 ft long. I shall now proceed with the pictures, I hope, without interruption. But I must ask your indulgence in time. I am afraid the pictures cannot be finished before the Autumn.<sup>5</sup>

Cole wrote again to Van Rensselaer in October, apologized that the pictures were still not completed, and offered a detailed description of them:

Having advanced so far, I thought it might be agreeable to you to learn something of the work which I am about to offer you. I have therefore taken the liberty to give you a hasty sketch of what I am doing; at the same time, let me say, that a written sketch can give but an inadequate notion of my labors.

The story, if I may so call it, which will give title, and, I hope, life and interest to the landscapes, is taken neither from history nor poetry; it is a fiction of my own, if incidents which must have occurred very frequently can be called fiction. It is supposed to have [a] date in the 13th or 14th century.

In the first picture, Morning, which I call The Departure, a dark and lofty castle stands on an eminence, embosomed in the woods. The distance beyond is composed of cloud-capt mountains and cultivated lands, sloping down to the sea. In the foreground is a sculptured Madonna, by which passes a road, winding beneath ancient trees, and, crossing a stream by a Gothic bridge, conducting to the gate of the castle. From this gate has issued a troop of knights and soldiers in glittering armour; they are dashing down across the bridge and beneath the lofty trees, in the foreground; and the principal figure, who may be considered the Lord of the Castle, reins in his charger, and turns a look of pride and exultation at the castle of his fathers and his gallant retinue. He waves his sword, as though saluting some fair lady, who from battlement or window watches her lord's departure to the wars. The time is supposed to be early summer.

The second picture—The Return—is in early autumn. The spectator has his back to the castle. The sun is low; its yellow beams gild the pinnacles of an abbey, standing in a shadowy wood. The Madonna stands a short distance from the foreground, and identifies the scene. Near it, moving towards the castle, is a mournful procession; the lord is borne on a litter, dead or dying—his charger led behind—a single knight, and one or two attendants—all that war has spared of that once goodly company.

You will be inclined to think, perhaps, that this is a melancholy subject; but I hope it will not, in consequence of that, be incapable of affording pleasure. I will not trouble you with more than this hasty sketch of my labors. I have endeavored to tell the story in the richest and most picturesque manner that I could. And should there be no story



understood, I trust that there will be sufficient truth and beauty in the pictures to interest and please.<sup>6</sup>

Cole's choice of a medieval theme for these pendants was consonant with the growing fascination with the Middle Ages during the 1830s in England and America. Buildings and furniture in the Gothic Revival style began to appear, and the literary works of such writers as Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Gray were increasingly popular. Van Rensselaer's initial reaction was not, however, entirely positive. He replied to Cole on 19 October:

As I said nothing on the subject matter of the paintings before you commenced but left it entirely to your discretion, it does not become me to say anything about it now, but my first impression on reading your letter was that I did not like the 13th century & the knights; upon reflection I am much pleased with the general idea of the piece and I know I shall not be disappointed. The agreeable impression made by a picture depends upon the artist entirely: I remember an old painting very much admired & praised representing a man at work on a corn on another's toe and so I have read a fine poem abounding in beautiful passages on a buck-wheat cake. I intended to make you a visit at Catskill but I am prevented by my father's illness, and I wish to know whether you could order the frames in New York, you know what would be most suitable, & if it is convenient to you I should be pleased to have the pictures delivered also in New York.7

Cole must have been concerned by this somewhat less than enthusiastic reception and apparently wrote (the letter is missing) that he was worried Van Rensselaer would be disappointed by the pictures. The patron replied with reassuring words:

Had my unfavorable impression been left upon my mind from your description I would have said nothing about it but would have waited until my opinion would have been made up by actual study & inspection of the subject. You need entertain no fears that I shall be disappointed with your creations for I have such confidence in your taste & judgment that I am determined to be pleased with what [I] have ordered.8

Cole was still struggling to finish the pictures when he wrote to Asher B. Durand on 2 November: "I am still at *the* pictures— when will they be done?" He also asked Durand to order two frames "to be massy, covered with small ornament, no curves or scallops, resembling the frames in [*sic*] the Course of Empire, though not necessarily the same pattern—the best gold, not the pale." Cole finished the pictures by the end of the month and arranged to deliver them to Van Rensselaer in New York, who hung them in his parlor and invited friends and members of the press to see them.

The Departure and The Return were Cole's first major paintings to follow The Course of Empire. As such, they were subjected to particular scrutiny to see if they measured up to his previous achievement. The reviewer for the New-York Mirror was duly impressed by Cole's skills both in depicting the natural world and in telling a story, writing:

If, after expressing our opinion, as we did some months past, of Mr. Cole's five pictures on "The Progress of Empire," we were now only to say that he has *equalled himself*, we should, to those who have seen that series of paintings, appear to bestow great praise. But we can do more: we can say that, in our opinion, he has, as far as the subjects would admit, *outdone himself*, and produced two more perfect works of art. These pictures represent Morning and Evening, or Sunrise and Sunset; and are, merely from that point of view, invaluable. They contrast the glowing warmth of one,

with the cool tints and broad shadows of the other; and to do this is the work of a master, who has studied nature and loves her. But the painter has added the charm of poetick fancy and the Gothick structures of the middle ages to that profusion of beauties, which nature presents at all times. Not only this is done, but a story is told by the poet-painter, elucidating at once, the times of chivalry and feudal barbarism, and the feelings with which man rushes forth in the morning of day and of life, and the slow and funereal movements which attend the setting of *his sun*.<sup>11</sup>

Cole drew from a variety of literary and visual sources in realizing The Departure and The Return, but, in the end, what he achieved was very much his own creation.12 In particular, his depictions of the castle in the former and the chapel in the latter, although not based on any actual structures, are meticulously rendered. Infrared reflectography reveals underdrawing that indicates Cole (who had aspirations as an architect) carefully planned them using ruled lines on the ground layer before painting them.<sup>13</sup> Yet what most distinguishes The Departure and The Return in conception from The Course of Empire is the focus on a single story—with the protagonist the lord of the castle—over a far shorter span of time. Whereas in The Course of Empire, Cole imagines the rise and fall of a civilization over the centuries, the drama in the 1837 paintings occurs between early summer and autumn of one year (the shepherd and young girl who appear in both paintings seem little changed). The writer for the New-York Mirror understood perfectly well that this is an allegory of a different, more personal nature, with life and death pertaining to an individual, not to an entire civilization. The grandeur and historic sweep that form the basis of The Course of Empire are succeeded in The Departure and The Return by an elegiac sense of human loss and futility.

William Paterson Van Rensselaer clearly appreciated the meaning and sentiments of Cole's painting. In July 1839, following the death of his father, he wrote to Cole with a second commission for a pair of pictures:

If it is in your power just now and will not interfere with other engagements, I should be pleased to give some employment to your pencil. My mother and sister intended in the autumn giving up the manor house as their residence and they naturally would like to take with them some representation of the home scenes with which they have become so familiar and which are endeared to them. I know of no one who can do justice to nature like yourself and if you can soon visit Albany, that is before the season changes, and take some . . . sketches you will convey a favor. 14

Cole immediately replied: "It will give me great pleasure to make the sketches of which you speak. . . . I feel gratified that you should wish to employ me, for it seems a proof that what I formerly did for you has not ceased to give pleasure."15 The paintings that resulted (both now in the Albany Institute of History and Art), Gardens of the Van Rensselaer Manor House (1840) and The Van Rensselaer Manor House (1841), are topographically accurate representations of the house and grounds, but they also manage to evoke a palpable mood of loneliness and nostalgia. The former is set in summer and the latter in autumn, a seasonal contrast that Cole had employed to such effect in The Departure and The Return. The death of Stephen Van Rensselaer III, the departure of his widow and daughter from the estate that had been in his family for generations, and the division of that property between his sons marked the end of an era for the Van Rensselaers, the setting of the sun on what had once been a virtual New World empire. William Paterson Van Rensselaer would surely have seen the parallels between what Cole had expressed allegorically in The Departure and The Return and what had now taken effect in his own life and that of his family.

FK



## The Tough Story—Scene in a Country Tavern, 1837

Oil on panel, 16¾ × 22 in. (42.6 × 55.9 cm)
Signed and dated lower left: W™ S. Mount- / 1837
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 74.69

In the decades before the Civil War, William Sidney Mount was America's most celebrated painter of genre, or scenes of everyday life. His paintings delighted audiences with their humor, complex verbal puns, and stereotypical American characters. Mount was usually reluctant to explain the narratives of his paintings. Many of his works from the 1830s and 1840s in particular were veiled political and social allegories as well as comic images, and their power to entertain and surprise resulted in part from the knowledgeable viewer's ability to discern Mount's jokes for themselves. In the case of The Tough Story, however, Mount wrote a letter to his patron, the prominent Baltimore collector Robert Gilmor, Jr., providing a detailed explanation of the painting's subject. He identified the scene as a Long Island tavern and the man puffing on a pipe as "a regular built Long Island tavern and store keeper." The artist, who was born on Long Island and trained in New York, had settled in Stony Brook in 1827 and thereafter made middle-class Long Islanders his subject. According to Mount, the standing figure behind "is a traveler . . . , and is in no way connected with the rest, only waiting the arrival of the Stage—he appears to be listening to what the old man is saying."2 Mount continues with a fuller explanation of the central figure, "the old invalid," who sits on a broken chair, his head and knee wrapped in bandages. He is

A kind of Barroom Oracle, chief umpire during all seasons of warm debate, whether religious, moral or political, and first taster of every new barrel of cider rolled in the cellar; a glass of which he now holds in his hand while he is entertaining his young landlord with the longest story he is ever supposed to tell, having fairly tired out every other frequenter of the establishment.<sup>3</sup>

Mount invites his audience to laugh along with the eavesdropping traveler at the captive tavern keeper's plight. Insofar as his painting is the story of a loquacious storyteller, Mount's declaration in his letter to Gilmor that the painting is a "conversation piece," a scene portraying people in conversation, may have been tongue in cheek. But we should also take the artist at his word when he wrote that his painting is fundamentally about conversation, albeit one-sided. Indeed, Mount does not just show a conversation; in the composition, coloring, and other formal properties of *The Tough Story*, he seeks to capture the total effect of the conversation. <sup>5</sup>

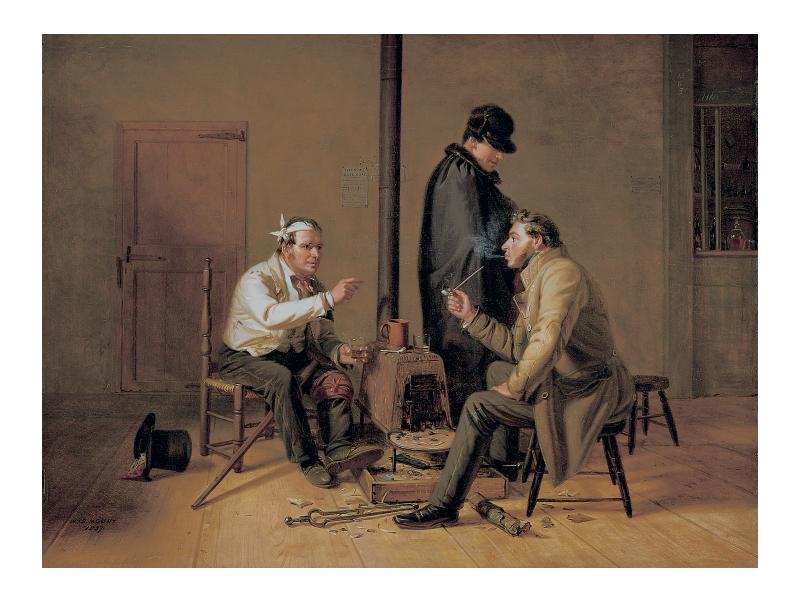
Mount was obsessed with painting technique. He kept extensive diaries documenting his experiments and observations about such topics as the layering of glazes and recipes for varnishes, copying into his diaries entire texts of art instruction manuals. He even describes the particular means of lighting he used when painting another tavern scene, *Barroom Scene* (Fig. 1): "two windows (in winter) a curtain to divide the two lights. The artist by one window & the model by the other." Such attention to details was not an empty exercise for Mount. Sound technique could maximize the narrative impact of a painting. "The story must be well told," he instructed himself in his journal, with "[c]oncentration of idea and effect." This was to be achieved not just through outward manifestations

of inward thoughts, as expressed by the poses and gestures of the figures, but throughout the painting, in such aspects as the coloring, lighting, and compositional arrangement.<sup>9</sup>

In The Tough Story, Mount provides us with the outlines of the narrative, but it is the rendering of the tavern itself that offers the most compelling gloss on the scene. Mount presents the conversation unfolding against the empty space of the room. Antebellum American taverns were characteristically sparsely furnished, usually containing a bench, some chairs, a stove, and perhaps a carriage schedule, like the Long Island Railroad notice pinned to the back wall here. 10 Such is the case in Barroom Scene, but the empty room also characterizes the "long" or "tough story," presumably the invalid storyteller's account of his injuries and misfortunes.11 Compared with Barroom Scene, The Tough Story is rendered in a narrower range of tones. Dull in its buff and beige color, monotonous in its row of broad plank floorboards (broader than the planks in Barroom Scene), and boring in its expanse of bare walls, it mimics the long and tedious story that is the subject of the painting. Indeed, Edgar Allan Poe complained of The Tough Story, "What can be more displeasing . . . than the unrelieved nakedness of the wall in the background . . . ?" He accused Mount of sacrificing aesthetics to story line. 12 Critics also faulted the painter's use of the stovepipe that divides the space from the top down.13 The stovepipe, however, separates the downand-out barfly's side with its signs of damage and decay—the broken chair, the cards falling from a worn hat, and the bandaged storyteller himself-from the more comfortable side with the traveler and tavern keeper, the stove, and the stocked tavern shelves. The wood chips scattered on the floor before the barfly may also allude to



Fig. 1. William Sidney Mount, Barroom Scene, 1835. Oil on canvas,  $22\% \times 27\%$ 6 in. (57.4 × 69.7 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, The William Owen and Erna Sawyer Goodman Collection, 1939,392



woodcutting as the punishment for public drunkenness. <sup>14</sup> The men might be engaged in conversation, but it is a conversation born of circumstance and compromised by the one-sided joke enjoyed by the tavern keeper, traveler, and viewer at the expense of the barfly. Just as humor relies on the wry distance between audience and comic spectacle, so the painting's humor—and legibility—rests with the emphatic distinction between those laughing and the person at whom they laugh.

If Mount attempted to tell his story as effectively as possible, he appears to have succeeded. Gilmor, who provided his own interpretation of the painting in an earlier, now lost, letter to Mount, accurately determined "with but a slight difference," the painting's story just by looking at it. The painting was also the inspiration for a story by the humorist Seba Smith, which was illustrated by a line engraving after Mount's painting in the 1842 edition of *The Gift: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1842*. Smith's narrative was almost identical to Mount's, although Smith, of course, could not have known of the painter's letter. That Mount achieved this success by marrying form and content is attested to by critics. "His great skill," wrote one in response to *The Tough Story*, "is to tell history in

the most forcible and familiar manner. To this end, color, light, and shade, and composition are all made to bend."<sup>17</sup> Another praised Mount for producing "by far the most finished composition of its kind, of any American artist. . . . It is a difficult thing to draw or color well, and with truth; and still more difficult to paint a complex scene of various attitudes and expressions, each personage preserving his own character and costume and each contributing to the formation of the collective thought which the subject presents."<sup>18</sup> This effective marriage of form and content is likely what Mount referred to when he closed his letter to Gilmor by saying, "I agree with you that it is my most finished painting yet."<sup>19</sup>

LS

## Richard Mentor Johnson, 1843

Oil on canvas,  $29\% \times 24^{13}/16$  in. ( $76 \times 63.3$  cm) Gift of Mrs. Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, 02.4

John Neagle, the son-in-law of Thomas Sully (see Andrew Jackson), was already a very successful Philadelphia portrait painter when he was commissioned in 1842 by a group of Whig Party members to paint a full-length life-size portrait of Henry Clay (The Union League of Philadelphia) to serve as the political icon of the Germantown (Pennsylvania) Clay Club during the Kentuckian's bid for the presidency. According to Robert Torchia, Neagle's recent biographer, "The fulllength of Clay was an immense success among the hospitable Southerners, who provided their visitor with a host of commissions. He stayed in Kentucky much longer than expected, and did not return to Philadelphia until early April 1843." While in Kentucky, Neagle painted this smaller portrait of Richard Mentor Johnson in Frankfort on 9 March 1843, a date recorded in an inscription on the back of the canvas that is no longer visible.2 Neagle's preparatory drawing of Johnson (Fig. 1)—inscribed "Saturday Feby-11th-1843 Col. R.M.J."—helps to date the first sitting.3

Neagle's image of Colonel Johnson is lively and romantic. Johnson looks off to the viewer's right, into the near distance. He wears a dark blue jacket over a bright red vest, colors that are echoed by his bright blue eyes and ruddy cheeks. The soft curls of his wispy gray hair seem softly blown by a breeze. Behind Johnson is a tree with reddish leaves, and a distant landscape on the left appears to depict a setting sun and possibly a body of water. A few days before Neagle left Kentucky at the end of his long visit, his portrait of Johnson was praised in an article in a Frankfort paper: "friends of the old soldier . . . will never see another picture of him with which they will be so well pleased. The singular taste of the Col. in a scarlet vest, was adroitly met by the artist. He compelled a harmony of coloring by throwing in the background, against the blazing scarlet, a scene of green woods, the best color in contrast with red."4

In 1843 Johnson (1780-1850) was nearing the end of a long, distinguished political career. Born in Beargrass, Kentucky, now part of Louisville, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1802. He was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1806, in part for his support of Kentucky farmers' title to their lands. During the War of 1812, he organized a Kentucky regiment of mounted riflemen and as colonel served in the Canadian campaign. When the American forces attacked the British and their Indian allies at the battle of the Thames River on 5 October 1813, the Indian leader Tecumseh was killed in close fighting. Johnson, wounded badly, was later credited with killing the Shawnee leader. He returned to Congress and served in both the House and the Senate until 1836, becoming a major supporter of Andrew Jackson before and during Jackson's eight years as president. For that support, Johnson was selected as vice presidential candidate in 1836. After he and Martin Van Buren served for one term, they lost the 1840 election to William Henry Harrison. Johnson was a member of the Kentucky State Legislature again in 1850, the year he died.

Neagle's visual references are to Johnson's fabled wartime feat, credited to him throughout his years. His red waistcoat was a trademark piece of apparel that was seen by contemporaries as a reference to the death of Tecumseh. A clue to its meaning was published years later, in 1878, when Corcoran curator William MacLeod wrote

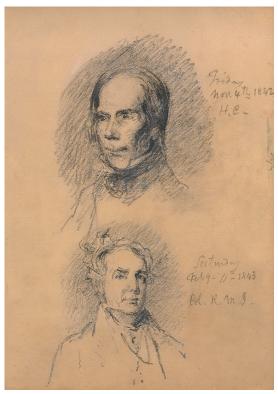
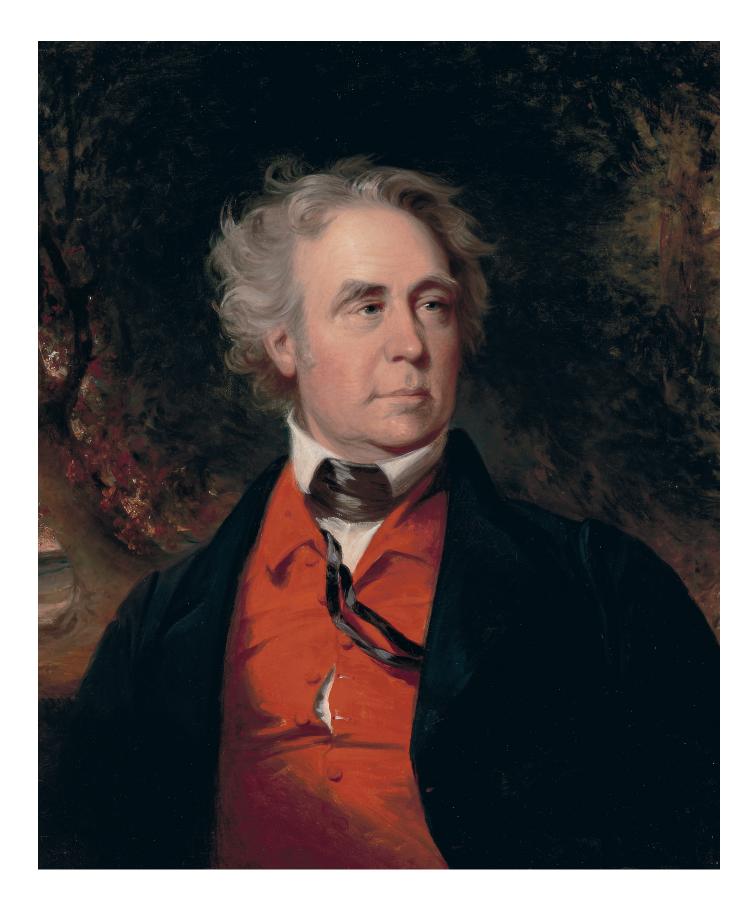


Fig. 1. John B. Neagle, *Henry Clay and Richard Mentor Johnson*, 1842–43. Graphite on cream, textured, wove paper, 12¾ × 9½ in. (32.4 × 23.2 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; acquired through the generosity of the Director's Circle, NPG.2003.33 b

about a life-size marble sculpture, The Dying Tecumseh by Ferdinand Pettrich (modeled c. 1837-46, carved 1856, Smithsonian American Art Museum), then on view at the Corcoran. Describing what he thought was proof that Johnson had killed Tecumseh, MacLeod wrote: "It would not be a bad idea for the Corcoran Gallery to secure, and hang above this statue a capital portrait of Colonel Johnson, painted by Neagle, showing his rugged, plain features, and the familiar red vest alluded to in an old political song—'He always wore his waistcoat red / Because he killed Tecumseh." The setting, with the tree and the distant river, may also be references to the battle, since Pettrich's sculpture depicts Tecumseh lying wounded at the base of a tree. MacLeod was, at this time, assertively promoting his wish to acquire Neagle's portrait of Johnson for the gallery along with the rest of the extensive, very important collection of paintings, sculpture, and historical items belonging to Washington resident Phebe Warren Tayloe, the widow of Benjamin Ogle Tayloe.6

In 1851, soon after Johnson's death, Neagle had tried to sell the portrait to the state of Kentucky for the state capitol. On 19 November he wrote to George Robertson, the speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives, offering to sell portraits that he had painted of Clay and Johnson. "As I prefer that the two paintings



offered should be preserved to posterity in the Legislative Hall of Kentucky, and as the amount of a return in a pecuniary light is not so much an object with me as the honor of such a destination for my pictures, I have concluded first to offer them to your State." Neagle wrote Robertson again on 21 December to ask if the government had decided to acquire the portraits. The portraits were not, in the end, sold to the state of Kentucky.

The paintings of Clay and Johnson that Neagle offered to the state of Kentucky could have been replicas painted by the artist especially for the legislature. There is a second life-size full-length

portrait of Clay (United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.) as well as a second portrait of Johnson that is virtually identical to this one. The Corcoran's painting, which had remained in the artist's collection and was in his estate before being acquired by Tayloe, later served as the source for a marble bust of Johnson that was carved by James Paxton Voorhees on commission from the United States Senate in 1895. The artist was the son of Senator Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana, a member of the Joint Committee on the Library, which had authorized the purchase of a bust of Johnson. 10

EGM

#### Boston Harbor, 1843

Oil on panel, 16% × 24% in. (42 × 61.7 cm) Museum Purchase and Exchange, through the gift of the Honorable Orme Wilson, 55.14

Robert Salmon's *Boston Harbor* opens a window onto a scene of Boston Harbor in about 1840 as merchant, fishing, and tourist vessels sail past Fort Independence on Castle Island. This painting offers more than a pleasant view of a busy day in Boston long ago; it also reflects on the history of England and the United States in addition to the life of the artist who painted it. At the time he completed this painting, the British-born Salmon had recently returned to England from a fourteen-year sojourn in Boston. *Boston Harbor* later found its own place in American history.

By about 1800 the young Salmon was becoming an accomplished ship painter.<sup>2</sup> He left his native port town of Whitehaven about 1806 to travel to Liverpool and London, as well as Greenock, Scotland, where he painted harbor scenes, ship portraits, panoramas, and sets for plays until he left for America more than two decades later.<sup>3</sup> Salmon's carefully delineated style demonstrates the influence of maritime masters from the previous century such as the Englishman Samuel Scott, the Italian Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), and their seventeenth-century Dutch precursors Willem van de Velde the Elder and the Younger, whose works he could have seen in London and Liverpool.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Salmon represented sails and rigging so exactly that some speculate he had been a sailor or shipbuilder.<sup>5</sup>

Salmon sailed from Liverpool to New York in June 1828.<sup>6</sup> By the middle of August of that year he had settled in Boston, where he would remain for most of his time in America.<sup>7</sup> Salmon became the leading maritime painter in that city and one of the top-ranking ship painters in the United States. His most notable follower, Fitz Henry Lane (see *The United States Frigate President Engaging the British Squadron*, 1815), seems to have been particularly influenced by Salmon's more serene harbor scenes.<sup>8</sup>

While in America, Salmon painted many scenes of Boston Harbor from different viewpoints, concentrating variously on towering frigates or the details of the city's wharves, warehouses, and prominent structures. Salmon's friend Henry Hitchings recalled decades later that the artist's studio "was at the lower end of the Marine Railway wharf, and directly over a boat builder's shop. . . . . He had a bay window built from his studio, and overhanging the wharf, which was so arranged that it gave him not only a direct view across the harbor, but also an opportunity to see both up and down stream." 9 Not only did his studio give Salmon excellent views of his nautical subject matter, but he was also able to obtain views from the water after trading paintings for a boat and sails. 10

The Corcoran's painting takes virtually the same viewpoint as one of Salmon's most spectacular paintings, Boston Harbor from Castle Island (Ship Charlotte) (Fig. 1), although the latter is much larger and places more emphasis on ships sailing in the harbor. 11 In both paintings, Fort Independence on Castle Island, which stands at the southwestern edge of Boston's outer harbor, appears at the left edge, while the dome of the Massachusetts State House can be discerned in the distance. The Corcoran's panel brings the viewer closer to a smaller group of vessels nearer shore and thus focuses more attention on the stone walls of the fort. At the center are a schooner sporting an American flag as it heads toward the harbor and a three-masted ship sailing out of the harbor toward the viewer. The latter ship's flag is mostly hidden by its sails, but enough of the red ground appears to suggest that it may be British, and the row of gun ports and the figures in the blue coats and black hats of naval officers hint that it may be a military frigate. For the British-born artist newly returned



Fig. 1. Robert Salmon, Boston Harbor from Castle Island (Ship Charlotte), 1839. Oil on canvas,  $40 \times 60$  in. (101.6  $\times$  152.4 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Williams Fund, 1973, 73-14



from America, American and British ships, one arriving and the other departing, would have formed a parallel to his own life.

The Corcoran's painting, in which an armed foreign ship sails peacefully through an American harbor, may have reminded viewers that twenty-seven years before this, the United States and Great Britain had been enemies. During the War of 1812, American trade embargoes and the powerful British fleet trapped hundreds of American ships in Boston Harbor, where they rotted at anchor. Only slowly did the ill feeling between the two countries fade after the war.<sup>12</sup> Fort Independence had played a modest role in the Revolutionary War and never fired its guns during the War of 1812, but its mighty presence prevented the British from attacking Boston by sea.<sup>13</sup> After 1815 Boston entered a period of thriving prosperity. <sup>14</sup> Emphasizing the lack of military threats, Salmon shows boats bringing tourists to walk and fish on the shores of Castle Island in the shadow of Fort Independence. Beginning in 1836, the fort underwent renovations, which continued, with some interruptions, until 1851. Since no evidence of construction appears in the painting, Salmon's picture apparently shows the massive fort during one of the hiatuses in building.15

Salmon's sunny view of Boston Harbor enjoyed a moment on the national stage 120 years after it was painted, when the Corcoran Gallery of Art lent it to the White House. President John F. Kennedy displayed the panel in his office among a profusion of nautical paintings and ship models. The Corcoran's painting was ideally suited for this new role, for it reminded visitors of President Kennedy's World War II naval service and glowingly depicted the Kennedy family's hometown. Salmon's harbor scene appeared over President Kennedy's left shoulder in well-known photographs, including ones showing presidential announcements to the press about civil rights and the Cuban missile crisis, as well as charming images of young Caroline and John romping in their father's office.

APW



#### Cottage Scenery, 1845

Oil on canvas, 25½ × 30 in. (65 × 76 cm)
Signed lower left: G. C. Bingham.
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund and gifts of Charles C. Glover, Jr., The Honorable
Orme Wilson and Mr. and Mrs. Landsell K. Christie, 61.36

The year 1845 was an auspicious one for the rural Missouri-born painter George Caleb Bingham. That December, the American Art-Union—an important early force in the promotion and distribution of contemporary American art, based in New York City—accepted four of his paintings for display in its annual exhibition. The Art-Union's purchase of this group of works, which included *Cottage Scenery, Landscape: Rural Scenery* (Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York), *The Concealed Enemy* (Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Tex.), and the now iconic *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), marked the beginning of a long and fertile relationship between Bingham and the pioneering arts organization.<sup>1</sup>

The largely self-taught Bingham began his career as a portrait painter. With limited early exposure to the arts as a child living on the frontier, Bingham was inspired by the itinerant American portraitist Chester Harding, who took up temporary residence at Bingham's father's Franklin, Missouri, inn in 1820 while painting portraits of an aging Daniel Boone, who lived sixty miles south.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1840s, encouraged by the popular success of genre paintings by such artists as William Sidney Mount (see *The Tough Story*) and fellow Missourian Charles Deas, Bingham expanded his repertoire to include subjects from everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Bingham's contributions to the American Art-Union in 1845 are among the earliest examples of his investigation of western themes, a subject he treated for more than a decade.

Bingham's choice of subject for Cottage Scenery may have been specifically intended to appeal to the interests of the American Art-Union and its largely urban membership. The Art-Union's 1844 annual report encouraged American artists to create native landscape pictures: "To the inhabitants of cities . . . a painted landscape is almost essential to preserve a healthy tone to the spirits. . . . Those who cannot afford a seat in the country . . . may at least have a country seat in their parlors; a bit of landscape with a green tree, a distant hill, or low-roofed cottage." Eighteenth-century English rustic cottage views, numerous examples of which would have been readily available to the artist through drawing books and imported landscape prints, are a possible compositional and thematic source for Bingham's canvas. Another likely influence is the work of the British-born, Philadelphia-based painter Joshua Shaw, whose popular picturesque landscapes Bingham likely encountered on one of his numerous trips to the eastern seaboard, beginning in 1838.

Bingham's unique perspective as a frontier-born artist with political aspirations—a background that would increasingly shape his subject matter in the later 1840s and 1850s—also informs *Cottage Scenery*. The scholar Nancy Rash has argued that Bingham's vision of the West "grew quite decidedly out of the artist's Whig ideas about the importance of promoting development, economic growth, and civilization." Domesticated landscapes such as *Cottage Scenery*, with its winding dirt road leading to an inhabited cottage, "represented the kind of settlement that Bingham had known in his early days in Missouri and that he felt was essential for the establishment



Fig. 1. George Caleb Bingham, Country Politician, 1849. Oil on canvas,  $20\% \times 24$  in. (51.8 × 61 cm). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.16

of civilization."<sup>6</sup> The art historian Christine Klee posits that the cows lolling in the pasture in the right background of *Cottage Scenery* can also be tied to western settlement, as "signs of husbandry and the productive labor of the white man."<sup>7</sup>

Even if the intriguing connection of Bingham's landscapes to the Whig party and its nationalist advocacy of westward expansion cannot be confirmed, the compositional structure and narrative component of this early work clearly formed the basis of Bingham's later, more explicitly political paintings. The pose and costume of the three triangulated figures in the middle ground of *Cottage Scenery* mimic those of the protagonists in canvases such as *Country Politician* of 1849 (Fig. 1). Here, as in many of Bingham's mature works, the artist adapted the more generic device of the informal conversation to a scene in which public discourse and political engagement are the explicit subjects.<sup>8</sup>

It is only fitting that Bingham's politically engaged images of the American populace often reached that audience through the quasi-populist forum of the Art-Union, which guaranteed its members one engraving a year as well as the chance to win one of the original paintings featured in the annual exhibition, a prize that was awarded by lottery. James D. Carhart of Macon, Georgia, was the recipient of this canvas, which descended in the Carhart family until 1960, a provenance that accounts for its scant history of exhibition and publication. When the Corcoran Gallery of Art purchased Bingham's *Cottage Scenery*, it became the first painting by the artist to enter the collection of a Washington, D.C., museum. <sup>10</sup>

EDS

#### Andrew Jackson, 1845

Oil on canvas, 98 $^{4}$ /16 × 61 $^{5}$ /16 in. (246.6 × 155.7 cm) Signed and dated lower left: TS 1845. Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.49

The Philadelphia artist Thomas Sully painted Andrew Jackson from life on two occasions, in 1819 and 1824. From these, he made at least eleven paintings as well as three related drawings and watercolors.1 The Corcoran's triumphant image is the largest and most heroic and one of the artist's last works. The dramatic full-length, which is signed and dated in the lower left "TS 1845.," exhibits the lifelong talents that made Sully the leading portraitist of the Jacksonian era. Painting confidently and with little reworking, using dry brushes as well as brushes heavily loaded with medium-rich paint, Sully depicted General Jackson as the artist imagined Jackson would have appeared after the battle of New Orleans on 8 January 1815, at the end of the War of 1812. Jackson's historic defeat of the British army prevented the capture of New Orleans by the enemy. His leadership at the battle made him a military hero and led ultimately to his presidency (1829-37). In Sully's depiction, Jackson, in uniform with a military cape, stands near a cannon and a tent as the nearby battle rages and smoke swirls around him. He pauses while writing on a large piece of paper and looks off to the viewer's right. He wears one riding glove; the other has fallen to the ground.<sup>2</sup> Soldiers marching to battle can be seen in the lower left.

The portrait, painted thirty years after the battle and a month after Jackson's death on 8 June 1845, is based on a life study that Sully had painted in December 1824. That, however, was not Sully's first encounter with Jacksonian imagery. In 1817 he had designed the allegorical image of Victory and Peace for the reverse of the Congressional medal awarded to Jackson after the battle.3 Two years later Sully had his first opportunity to paint Jackson from life, on the invitation of the Association of American Artists, a Philadelphia group. The portrait (Fig. 1), painted when Jackson visited Philadelphia in February 1819, differs in pose and imagery from the later full-length. It shows the general in three-quarter length, in uniform, facing the viewer and looking off to the left. Jackson rests his right hand on his sword hilt and his left arm on the saddle of a white horse that stands behind him.4 Five years later Sully had a second opportunity to paint Jackson from life, in December 1824, in Washington, D.C.5 Sully had gone to the national capital to paint a likeness of the marquis de Lafayette and while there seized the chance to paint Jackson (private collection) and John Quincy Adams (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). The two men had been candidates in the November presidential election, and the outcome was not yet decided.

Sully returned to the 1824 painting for the image of Jackson's face when he painted the Corcoran's posthumous full-length portrait more than twenty years later. He also returned to the concept of the victorious general. Although we do not know why Sully painted the full-length portrait, the occasion was closely tied to a commission from Francis Preston Blair, editor of the pro-Jackson newspaper in Washington, D.C., the *Globe*, for a copy of the 1824 life portrait of Jackson, which he owned by this time. Blair, who had commissioned Sully to paint portraits of his wife and daughter in 1840 and 1843, also commissioned a portrait of himself, two of his son Montgomery Blair, and one of his son-in-law Samuel Phillips Lee. After Jackson's death, Sully painted a second replica of the 1824 portrait for his



Fig. 1. Thomas Sully, Andrew Jackson, 1819. Oil on canvas,  $46\frac{1}{2} \times 37$  in. (118.1 × 94 cm). Clermont State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, CL.1974.1.a.b

friend Francis Fisher Kane of Philadelphia (R. W. Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, La.).8 He began work on the full-length on 8 July 1845, finishing it three weeks later, on 31 July. He listed the price in his Register of Paintings as eight hundred dollars. On 2 August he "sent whole length of Jackson to Gallery," referring to the commercial gallery that he co-owned with the carver and gilder James S. Earle, who may have made the frame, as he had for many of Sully's portraits. The portrait was on view at the Artists' Fund Society Hall in the Tenth Annual Exhibition of the Artists' Fund Society and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, both in Philadelphia, for a week that fall, from 27 October through 1 November 1845.

In 1857 the portrait, still owned by the artist, was sent to Washington, D.C., for the first annual exhibition of the Washington Art Association, from 10 March to 19 May. William Wilson Corcoran was a member of the association's board and a lender to the exhibition. After the exhibition closed, the portrait was placed on loan at the National Institute Museum, in the Patent Office Building. Before Corcoran acquired it, however, the portrait was purchased by Jacob Thompson, secretary of the interior in the administration of James Buchanan. Later, perhaps during the Civil War, it became the property of John F. Coyle, a Washington collector and patron of the American artist Eastman Johnson. By 1867 Coyle



had sold the portrait to William Wilson Corcoran, who by this time could have been planning a national portrait gallery, a goal made public a decade later. To Corcoran later rejected Thompson's claim to the portrait, as he reported to William MacLeod, the curator at the gallery in 1876:

Mr. Corcoran gave some interesting information about the Jackson portrait by Sully, which I never had before. He bought it from John F. Coyle for \$350, paying further sums for its repair. Jacob Thompson, Ex. Secy of the Interior under Mr. Buchanan, . . . claims again—as he has before—

this Jackson portrait from Mr. C. on the plea that it belonged to him, & was only deposited with Coyle. Mr. C. says his reply was as before that if he (Thompson) would repay the price of it & its repairs, he might take it. Which Thompson won't or can't do. . . . It seems Coyle declared Thompson's wife gave him the picture. Mr. Corcoran also adds that Thompson thinks he ought to get thousands for it, whereas he offered it once in Paris to C. for \$500.

After the portrait was placed on view at the newly opened Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1874, it became a favorite of many visitors.<sup>19</sup>

EGM



## Still Life, Flowers and Fruit, 1848

Oil on canvas, 36 × 26 in. (91.4 × 66 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: S. Roesen/1848.
Museum Purchase through the gift of Orme Wilson, 61.20

Still Life, Flowers and Fruit is the earliest work signed and dated by Severin Roesen after the artist arrived in New York in 1848. Little is known about his life before he immigrated, but art historians have posited that he was born near Cologne and began his career as a painter of fruit and flower designs on porcelain.¹ Roesen quickly established himself in New York, submitting two paintings (one of which was possibly the Corcoran's still life) to the 1848 American Art-Union exhibition. He would exhibit and sell at least nine more fruit and flower pieces in New York before moving to Pennsylvania in 1857.

Still Life, Flowers and Fruit shows an opulent assortment of irises, tulips, cabbage roses, bluebells, and dahlias alongside an apple, orange, half a lemon, grapes, pear, peach, Italian plums, and a delicately painted stem of red currants, each at their peak of bloom or ripeness. The art historian William H. Gerdts has noted that these fruits and flowers are never at their best in the same season. Moreover, the sheer abundance of produce would have had Roesen painting long after his models began to decay. Because of this, Gerdts postulates that Roesen used some form of template, possibly intricate stencils or patterns of fruits and flowers, in composing his paintings.2 Bolstering this claim is the fact that several motifs repeat throughout Roesen's oeuvre. The downward-facing peony with a smaller peony to the left and the rose in profile above, which appear at the lower left in the Corcoran's painting, also can be seen in Still Life - Flowers in a Basket (Fig. 1), Still Life of Flowers and Fruit with River Landscape in the Distance (1867, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth), Still Life with Fruit and Flowers (c. 1855, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), and Victorian Bouquet (1850-55, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston). The composition of one painting, Still Life (1848, Worcester Art Museum, Mass.), exists in twelve different iterations.3 The gray marble slab with a rounded projection in the Corcoran's canvas likewise is an element in many of Roesen's early paintings.4

Roesen was the first American painter to draw in earnest on the tradition of seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings, which offered profuse arrays of fruits and flowers crisply rendered in richly saturated, vibrant colors. As with his Dutch models, Roesen's painting includes such ephemeral items as waterdrops, on the petal of the pink rose at center left, a ladybug on a leaf at center right, and two butterflies poised before flight: a brown-and-blue brushwing variety on the edge of the marble slab and a small white butterfly clinging to a flower stem above the grapes.<sup>5</sup> Such elements suggest the transience of life by representing a single, passing moment. The small nest of eggs at the lower left, which appears in many of Roesen's paintings, was an emblem of fertility and abundance in Dutch still-life paintings, and the fly perched on the perfectly ripe peach was a common emblem of decay.<sup>6</sup>

Until Roesen's arrival, American art boasted only the austere assemblages of fruit, vegetables, crackers, or meat painted by members of the Peale family. Roesen's lush compositions appeared at an auspicious time, as historians have noted, since the rich abundance portrayed in these works appealed to midcentury American taste for elaborate decoration.<sup>7</sup> Although the artist was relatively unknown during his lifetime and may have left New York City in 1857 for want



Fig. 1. Severin Roesen, Still Life – Flowers in a Basket, 1850s. Oil on canvas,  $30 \times 401$ 4 in. (76.2 × 102.2 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, M. and M. Karolik Fund, 69.1228

of commissions, Roesen indirectly but profoundly influenced the history of American still-life painting. In the years following Roesen's career in New York, there was a slow but marked increase in the number of fruit and flower still lifes exhibited there, particularly larger-scaled works. Examples of the genre produced by the next generation of American artists, including Fannie Palmer, F.E.D. Smith, and John Adams, include features that seem to have been modeled on those in Roesen's painting, and the slightly older still-life painter John Francis changed his style later in life to Dutchinfluenced tableaux of abundant fruit and flowers, possibly inspired by Roesen.9

Roesen enjoyed more financial success after moving to Pennsylvania and settling in prosperous Williamsport. There he became a fixture of the arts community, taking on students and painting many still lifes as well as portraits and landscapes. <sup>10</sup> His last signed painting was executed in 1872. After that date, he disappeared from the Williamsport directory, and art historians have been unable to locate any further documentation of his whereabouts. Some have speculated that he may have set out for New York to attend his daughter's wedding in 1872 but died en route.

LS

## View on the Hudson in Autumn, 1850

Oil on canvas,  $34\frac{1}{8} \times 48\frac{1}{4}$  in. (86.5  $\times$  122.5 cm) Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.70

Thomas Doughty, a pioneer of American landscape painting, was born in Philadelphia in 1793 and lived there until 1828. Little is known about his formal education, but he apparently displayed a strong talent for drawing at an early age. When he was fifteen or sixteen, Doughty was apprenticed to a leatherworker, and by 1814 the city directory listed him as a "currier." Two years later, he was described as a "painter" when he exhibited a landscape at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Doughty's early career as an artist seems to have met with little success, and in 1818 to 1819 he returned to making his living as a leather currier. It was not until 1820 that he made landscape painting his full-time career.

Doughty formed his style by studying and copying European landscapes that he saw in the Pennsylvania Academy and in collections such as that of his early patron, Robert Gilmor, Jr., of Baltimore. From such paintings and prints, Doughty mastered the main conventions of the European landscape tradition and gained a working knowledge of the styles of such old masters as the Frenchmen Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin as well as the Italian Salvator Rosa. He also made regular sketching trips in the eastern United States, especially during the early years of his career, to gather material for his paintings. Indeed, as one observer noted: "From his earliest boyhood he loved the woods, the streams, the



Fig. 1. Thomas Doughty, View of Baltimore from Beech Hill, the Seat of Robert Gilmor, Jr., 1822. Oil on wood panel,  $12\% \times 16\%$  in. (32.7 × 42.3 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Michael A. Abrams, BMA 1955.183

hills, and the valleys. He dwelt with them—he felt their power—he made them his study and delight." Many of his works of the 1820s were topographical, such as *View of Baltimore from Beech Hill* (Fig. 1). Gilmor, for one, found Doughty's works in this manner particularly pleasing, for, as he wrote to Thomas Cole: "As long as Doughty *studied* and *painted* from nature (who is always pleasing however slightly rendered in drawings or paintings made on the spot) his pictures were pleasing, because the scene was real, the foliage varied and *unmannered*, and the broken ground & rocks & moss had the very impress of being after *originals*, not *ideals*." However, by the mid-to-late 1820s Doughty had begun to move beyond the purely topographic in favor of grander, more ambitious landscapes. His travels took him farther afield now, with trips to more rugged, mountainous areas in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and upstate New York.

In 1828 Doughty moved to Boston, but he had resumed residence in Philadelphia by 1830. There, for the next two years, he and his brother John edited a monthly magazine called *The Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sports*, which also published Doughty's hand-colored lithographs of animals. The magazine ceased publication in 1832, and Doughty returned to Boston, where he enjoyed considerable success exhibiting and selling his works and teaching drawing and painting. He made his first trip abroad in 1838, visiting England, and between 1845 and 1847 he returned to England and also visited Ireland and France. The last years of his life were spent in New York.

Doughty classified his works in three distinct types: "from nature," "from recollection," and "composition." Painted late in Doughty's career, *View on the Hudson in Autumn* may have had its origins in an actual place he once visited. However, it was more likely based on his memories of many experiences of the river's scenery over the years. Nothing suggests the specific; the house is a generic country cottage, and the contours of the river's banks and the distant mountains do not evoke any particular topography of the Hudson River valley. The mood is idyllic, even nostalgic. This is a pastoral panorama of American scenery at its most beautiful and benign, in which American citizens are comfortably integrated into the natural world.

View on the Hudson in Autumn is among the most accomplished of Doughty's late works. Its composition is balanced and orderly, and its effects of light and atmosphere convincing and effective. Doughty's palette throughout his career was generally subdued, and he tended to favor a restrained tonal approach.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, his use of bright colors to capture autumn's hues is particularly notable. William Wilson Corcoran acquired View on the Hudson in Autumn in 1852, relatively early in his collecting of American works of art.<sup>6</sup>

FK



#### Mercy's Dream, 1850

Oil on canvas, 89% × 66 in. (227.6 × 167.6 cm)
Signed, inscribed, and dated lower left: D Huntington /
This 2nd picture of Mercy's Dream / painted 1850.
Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.67

The source for Daniel Huntington's *Mercy's Dream* is *The Pilgrim's Progress* by the seventeenth-century English writer and Protestant theologian John Bunyan. Among antebellum American audiences, few books surpassed the popularity of this allegorical tale of Christian struggle and salvation, and its fame in turn made Huntington's painting one of the most acclaimed and widely circulated of its day. Though also renowned for his landscapes and society portraits, the artist aspired to be remembered for his works in the tradition of the old masters, particularly history paintings and large-scale, multifigure religious subjects like this seven-by-five-foot canvas. At the time, Huntington's ambitions confronted widespread ambivalence toward religious art, but he shrewdly appealed to Victorian taste for sentimental subjects in order to neutralize potential misgivings among his patrons and expand the American market for works like *Mercy's Dream*, which harmonize beauty, learning, and belief.

Over the course of two volumes (published in 1678 and 1684), *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* narrates the journeys of an Everyman hero and his family along an obstacle-ridden earthly road to spiritual redemption. Their party includes a young neighbor woman named Mercy, who experiences a vision in which an angel comforts her with a glimpse of heaven and its splendors. She tells her friends:

I was a-dreamed that I sat all alone in a solitary place, and was bemoaning of the hardness of my Heart. . . . I looked up, and saw one coming with Wings towards me. So he came directly to me, and said, Mercy, what aileth thee? Now when he had heard me make my complaint, he said, Peace be to thee. He also wiped mine eyes with his Handkerchief, and clad me in Silver and Gold: he put a Chain about my Neck, and Ear-rings in mine Ears, and a beautiful Crown upon my Head.<sup>1</sup>

Huntington paints the moment of Mercy's coronation, when the angel descends into the dark landscape under a beam of celestial light toward the young woman who reclines on the ground with eyes closed in a rapturous trance. "It is truly a *blissful reverie*," wrote one early reviewer. "The figure and face of Mercy are transcendentally beautiful, and fully convey the fine classic taste of the artist."<sup>2</sup>

This "classic" appreciation for beauty and refinement was a product of Huntington's thorough liberal arts education at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, and his artistic training at New York University with Samuel F.B. Morse and Henry Inman. After finishing his studies with a tour of Italy in 1839–40, he debuted the first version of *Mercy's Dream* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia) at the American Art-Union's 1841 annual exhibition in New York. This early *Mercy's Dream* was bought by the Philadelphia publisher and collector Edward L. Carey, and prints and copies emerged throughout the ensuing decade. Concerned about weaknesses and inaccuracies in these reprisals of his work, Huntington arranged for the production of a high-quality mezzotint by the engraver Alexander Hay Ritchie, executing a second version of the painting to be used for this project. When Ritchie's prints were finished, the Philadelphia Art-Union distributed them as a

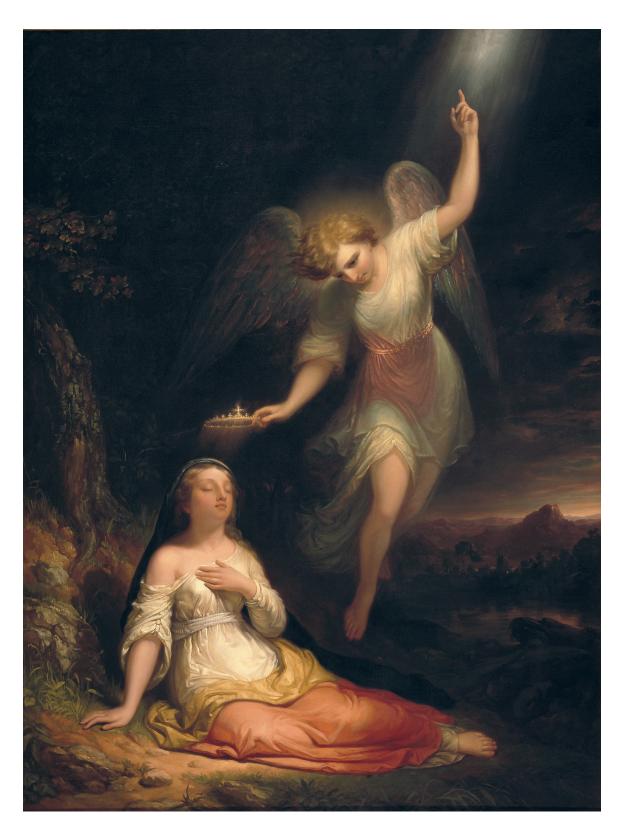


Fig. 1. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647–52. Cornaro Chapel, Sta. Maria della Vittoria, Rome, Italy. Scala/Art Resource, NY

subscription gift for all members, and Huntington sent the painted 1850 version of *Mercy's Dream* to the Broadway art dealers Williams, Stevens & Williams, from whom William Wilson Corcoran purchased it soon thereafter.<sup>3</sup>

Learning of Corcoran's interest in *Mercy's Dream*, Huntington urged him to buy *Christiana*, *Her Children*, *and Mercy* (John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Fla.), its pendant scene from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote: "I am very desirous the two pictures, which are perhaps the best and certainly the most pleasing I ever painted, should have a place in that collection which you are forming." Corcoran nonetheless bought only *Mercy's Dream*, perhaps preferring it, as did many critics, for the freedom of imagination that dream imagery afforded the artist and encouraged in viewers. The painters Thomas Cole and Emanuel Leutze, both also represented in Corcoran's collection, had recently experimented with dream subjects, and William H. Gerdts suggests that this trend determined Huntington's selection of this scene, despite its being a minor episode within Bunyan's lengthy book.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps more important, *Mercy's Dream* displays Huntington's skill as a figure painter and his admiration for Italian Renaissance and Baroque art, particularly the biblical scenes and depictions of saints he had studied in Rome. In 1851 he delivered a public lecture entitled "Christian Art" at the National Academy of Design, praising this "highest class of art" as practiced by both the old masters and European contemporaries like Johann Friedrich Overbeck, a German who lived in Rome and painted Christian subjects mimicking the style of Raphael. His lecture responded to widespread distaste among Americans for Roman Catholic subject matter, which many regarded as overly sensual and corrupt. Furthermore, as Sally Promey has elaborated, there existed in the 1840s a complicated



"pictorial ambivalence" among American Protestants, the result of xenophobic anti-Roman Catholic campaigns, lingering Puritan traditions of shunning material excess, and other conditions.<sup>8</sup>

Huntington therefore sought ways to present religious imagery in terms that would appeal to Protestants, guided, as Wendy Greenhouse has argued, by his own moderate convictions as an Episcopalian. Mercy's Dream was the most successful of these feats, displaying in the soft features of the girl and angel the stylistic influences of Raphael and Guido Reni. More provocatively, its composition echoes another famous work of art in Rome, The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, which depicts a sixteenth-century nun's mystical experience of an angel piercing her with a fiery arrow (Fig. 1). Although Bernini's sculpture notoriously disgusted most American viewers, Huntington evidently recognized its merits as an evocative

representation of contact between a human and an angel, made more powerful by the theatrically visible shafts of light. His painting therefore reworks Bernini's figural grouping and astutely negates its potentially offensive erotic tension by presenting no physical contact between Mercy and her handsome celestial visitor. The maiden's unconscious gesture of modesty, clutching her blouse tightly to her chest, further bespeaks her purity and that of the picture. Through these references, Huntington affirms that the combined influences of Protestant piety and Italian artistic training could ennoble paintings that also celebrated the sensual beauty of the human body. The success of *Mercy's Dream* thus results not only from the popularity of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* but also from the painting's ability both to please the eye and to nourish the soul.

CAM

## The United States Frigate "President" Engaging the British Squadron, 1815, 1850

Oil on canvas, 28 × 42 in. (71 × 107 cm) Signed and dated lower right: F. H. Lane 1850. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lansdell K. Christie, 61.7

This rendition of a fierce naval battle is profoundly at odds with what one expects from Fitz Henry Lane. The artist is best known for his placid views of harbors with towering ships floating silently on glassy waters, such as *Boston Harbor* (Fig. 1). His painting *The United States Frigate "President" Engaging the British Squadron*, 1815 demonstrates that the artist could take a very different approach to a subject that demanded it.<sup>1</sup>

Through the influence of the British-born maritime painter Robert Salmon, whom he encountered in Boston, Lane became part of the long tradition of British and American nautical painters.<sup>2</sup> The War of 1812 began appearing in naval art during the war itself and continued for decades thereafter.<sup>3</sup> While Lane was training in the Pendleton lithography firm in Boston in the 1830s, he presumably was exposed to popular prints of the war. In this painting, Lane perhaps drew on those memories when he made the unusual choice to look back thirty-five years to the War of 1812, a conflict he is known to have depicted in only one other painting.<sup>4</sup> Lane may have been working for a now-unknown patron, but the artist also had his own memories of the conflict, which had raged while he was growing up in Gloucester, Massachusetts, devastating the local economy. A Stephen Lane, who may have been Lane's older brother, died serving in the local militia.<sup>5</sup>

Although he could have portrayed one of many American naval victories, Lane instead painted the devastating loss to the British of the *President*, one of six frigates constructed about 1800 as the foundation of the American navy. The painting focuses on the *President* as the ship fights alone against a squadron of British vessels. Lane placed the American ship in the foreground riding a rough sea and firing its cannons at the British (a ship to the *President*'s right appears in the middle ground, while smoke from the *President*'s cannons indicates another ship outside the canvas to the American vessel's left). A dismasted hulk almost lost in the smoke

of battle is all that remains of a vessel the Americans have already defeated, while a fresh British ship emerges from the distance to join the group confronting the beleaguered *President*. American sailors swarm through the rigging of their ship to replace torn-away sails, heedless of the missiles that splash into the waves just short of the *President*'s hull. Although the distant British ships are sketchily painted and shrouded in smoke, Lane's crisp brushwork and clear lighting accentuate the heroic Americans in the foreground.

Lane's vision of the *President*'s final battle seems inspired by American accounts. The Boston Athenæum, where Lane exhibited paintings and whose library he probably used to do research, owned contemporary books that included the incident.<sup>7</sup> Lane probably knew Abel Bowen's popular book *The Naval Monument*, which had been in the Athenæum's collection since 1816.<sup>8</sup> Bowen related the tale of the battle through letters from Commodore Stephen Decatur, captain of the *President*, to the secretary of the navy. Lane was accustomed to making painstakingly precise renderings of ships at peace; here he applied this exactitude to narrating the particulars of the battle.

In early 1815 the British maintained a naval blockade of New York Harbor, trapping the USS *President*. As a strong west wind diverted the British squadron from the coast, Decatur attempted to run the blockade, precipitating the events shown in Lane's painting.9 Decatur wrote that on the morning of 14 January 1815, "the ship in going out [of the harbor] grounded on the bar." The ship was badly damaged, but high winds prevented its return to port. The *President*, once off the bar, was chased by four ships that fired on her. The American attempted to retreat from her pursuers, increasing her speed by jettisoning water, anchors, and other heavy objects. Lane therefore depicts the American vessel riding high in the water but with an anchor still at her bow. The British ship *Endymion* (the dismasted vessel in the background) caught up to the *President*, and the



Fig. 1. Fitz Henry Lane, Boston Harbor, c. 1850-55. Oil on canvas  $26 \times 42$  in.  $(66 \times 106.7$  cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815-1865, by exchange, 66.339



two ships exchanged fire. The American vessel, too crippled by its grounding to maneuver well, was unable to board the *Endymion* with its marine force. The fight continued until many of the *President*'s crew were injured or killed and her rigging badly damaged, as shown in detail by Lane. In the painting, the *Endymion* fires what must be some of her last shots before Decatur's ship "disabled and silenced" the British vessel. The British ships *Pomone* and *Tenedos* approached and fired on the Americans, as seen in Lane's painting. In the face of this new force, Decatur stated, "We were of course compelled to abandon her [the *President*]."

Decatur wrote to the secretary of the navy, "It is with emotions of pride I bear testimony to the gallantry and steadiness of every officer and man I had the honor to command on this occasion . . . almost under the guns of so vastly a superior force, when . . . it was . . . self-evident, that whatever their exertions might be, they must ultimately be captured." Lane, in showing the *President* engaging two British ships and having already defeated a third, chose the most heroic moment from the battle, when the Americans fought on in the face of inevitable defeat.

Lane's image accords with the words of the court of inquiry that investigated the loss of the *President*. The president of the court wrote to the secretary of the navy, "[The crew of the *President*] fought with a spirit, which no prospect of success could have heightened. . . . In this unequal conflict the enemy gained a ship, but the victory was ours." Lane celebrated, not an American triumph, but a more complex and tragic event. The praise of bravery even in defeat accords well with the romantic aura of his more contemplative paintings.

APW

### The Retrieve, 1850

Oil on canvas, 30% × 40% in. (76.4 × 102.4 cm) Signed and dated lower center: W Ranney / 1850 Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.62

The Retrieve was the third of at least eight paintings of duck hunting William Ranney made over an eight-year period.¹ The artist was an enthusiastic hunter whose scenes were likely inspired by his experiences on the salt marshes near his home and studio in West Hoboken, New Jersey.² In an interview, the artist's grandson Claude J. Ranney identified the location of *The Retrieve* as the Hackensack Meadows, which Ranney could see from his studio. The model for the kneeling figure was Ranney's younger brother Richard, and that for the standing figure may have been a neighbor's groomsman who often sat for Ranney.³

The artist's first foray into the subject, *Duck Shooters* (Fig. 1) was an instant success when it was exhibited at the American Art-Union in 1849, the year it was painted. The Art-Union purchased it and offered it in the institution's raffle.<sup>4</sup> Ranney recognized the popularity of duck hunting as a subject and followed *Duck Shooters* with what became his most successful composition, *On the Wing* (1850, private collection). This dramatic scene shows hunters stalking ducks that fly unseen beyond the canvas's edge. The painting was widely praised by critics when it was exhibited at the National Academy of Design, and the Art-Union subsequently purchased it for engraving and distribution to members. Ranney may have painted as many as four more versions of the scene about 1850.<sup>5</sup>

In 1850 Ranney also executed *The Retrieve*. Here the artist shifts the focus from the human hunters to the hunting dog, which is seated in the foreground with a canvasback duck in its mouth. The art historian Linda Bantel has noted the artist's paintings often model proper hunting practices. In *The Retrieve*, the dog delivers the bird directly to his master, as a well-trained hunting dog should do. Indeed, the title under which the painting was first exhibited in 1851 specifies that Ranney's subject is the dog's act of retrieval rather than duck hunting more generally. Likewise, Ranney's *On the Wing* shows hunters stalking birds in flight. Shooting a bird in the air, or on the wing, was considered both the most challenging and the fairest means of bringing down a bird. In the same of bringing down a bird.

Ranney's sport paintings likely owed their popularity to the artist's observance of such codes. Sport hunting had grown in favor among the American middle class by midcentury, and Ranney's audience undoubtedly knew such prescriptions. Bantel has described how even art critics commented on Ranney's observance of the duck hunters' code of conduct. For example, critics pointed to a particular, if small, anomaly in both *Duck Shooters* and *Duck Shooter's Pony* (1853, private collection): a pink-toned sky that seems to indicate warm weather, whereas the ideal weather for hunting ducks is the cool of late fall or early winter. Ranney apparently sought to correct this mistake by setting *The Retrieve* in the fall. He rendered the landscape in shades of ocher and brown and clothed the hunters in thick coats. Indeed, one writer noted that "[t]he sky wears the autumnal dark, the gray and purple shades." <sup>10</sup>

Ranney's attention to details of the marsh grasses, the glassy water, and the carefully observed, dark gray stratus clouds recalls the work of such Hudson River School artists as Asher B. Durand



Fig. 1. William Tylee Ranney, *Duck Shooters*, 1849. Oil on canvas,  $26 \times 40 \frac{1}{3}$  in. ( $66 \times 101.9$  cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Maxim Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815-1865, 1948, 48.470

and John F. Kensett, who were at the peak of their powers in the 1850s. Ranney's venture into landscape suggests his range of subject matter. In his brief career, Ranney, who appears to have been almost entirely self-taught, tackled portraiture, genre painting, religious scenes, history paintings, and western scenes. Although western subjects made up only a fifth of his oeuvre, over time their notoriety eclipsed that of his other subjects, and he became known as a western painter.

William Wilson Corcoran purchased The Retrieve sometime before the annual exhibition in 1851 of the National Academy of Design, whose catalogue lists him as the lender.<sup>11</sup> He may have purchased the painting through Williams, Stevens & Williams, a New York dealer that sold him other paintings and that also sold works for Ranney, although there is no documentation of this particular sale.<sup>12</sup> Corcoran was likely familiar with Ranney's work through one of the New York art institutions that promoted it, such as the National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union. Over the seven years it was in operation (1844-51), the Art-Union purchased more than one-third of Ranney's paintings, three of which it selected for engraving and distribution to its members.<sup>13</sup> Ranney also enjoyed steady sales to middle-class buyers as well as to major collectors. The artist was so well regarded within the art community that when he died of tuberculosis at forty-four, the artists George Caleb Bingham and A.F. Tait completed two of his unfinished canvases. These, along with more than one hundred other works from Ranney's studio and about one hundred painted and donated by fellow artists, were auctioned for the benefit of his widow and two young sons.14

LS



## Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington, Rockland Co., New York, 1851

Oil on canvas,  $22^{13}/_{16} \times 27^{3}/_{4}$  in. ( $58 \times 70.5$  cm) Signed and dated bottom center: 1851 / J. F. Cropsey Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.17

Jasper Francis Cropsey's 1851 painting *Tourn Mountain*, *Head Quarters of Washington*, *Rockland Co.*, *New York* celebrates both the landscape and the history of his home state, New York. Cropsey was born on Staten Island in 1823. He studied art and painted in England, France, and Italy from 1847 to 1849. In July 1849 he returned to the United States, where he devoted himself to painting scenery in and near his native state, as he would for most of the rest of his career.<sup>1</sup>

Kenneth W. Maddox has identified four paintings that Cropsey made during the 1850s depicting Torne Mountain along the Ramapo River valley in the far southeastern corner of New York State: *Tourn Mountain, Rockland County, N.Y.* (1850, The Saint Louis Art Museum),<sup>2</sup> Winter Scene, Ramapo Valley (1853, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.),<sup>3</sup> American Harvesting (1851, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington), and the Corcoran's view of the mountain.<sup>4</sup> This suite of works depicts an impressive mountain with a rocky crest, shown dramatically framed by foreground trees and background clouds in a manner distinctly reminiscent of paintings by Cropsey's idol, the leading Hudson River painter Thomas Cole.

Cropsey's *Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington* is full of life, with every form implying motion, from the spreading trees to the mist and the flight of birds rising off the hills at the right. The choppy surface of the stream is evocative of a brisk breeze that tosses the tree branches leaning over the water. A little house appears in a pool of sunlight in the middle ground of Cropsey's painting, serving

by its modesty and stillness to heighten the grandiosity and vitality of the mountain behind it. Torne Mountain catches the eye with its bold shape and the jagged forest that covers it, with occasional particularly tall trees standing up against the sky and bleached dead trunks catching the sun among their darker brethren.

Cropsey's Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington is based on a pair of drawings Cropsey made, dated "September 16, 1846," which Maddox notes are two halves of a single scene (Figs. 1a, 1b). It was not unusual for Cropsey to base his paintings on drawings he had made some years earlier. Among many other instances, drawings made in 1853 were sources for his 1865 painting of Starrucca Viaduct, near Lanesboro, Pennsylvania. For his 1851 painting, Cropsey made a number of changes from his drawings of Torne Mountain; for example, the single house as depicted in the painting is smaller than either of the two houses in the two drawings. The painting's simpler composition thus leads the eye more directly to the mountain than is the case in the two drawings. The outline of the mountain in the painting remains very close to that seen in the drawings, while Cropsey's other paintings of Torne Mountain exaggerate its profile.

The rickety fence and untended yard around the small white house on the riverbank, which appear more dilapidated in the painting than in the drawing in the collection of the Newington-Cropsey Foundation, draw attention to the damage wrought by the passage





Fig. 1a. Jasper F. Cropsey, Study for *Tourn Mountain*, *Head Quarters of Washington*, *Rockland Co.*, *New York* (left side), 16 September 1846. Pencil and whiting on blue-tinted paper,  $1034 \times 8$  in.  $(27.3 \times 20.3$  cm). The Newington-Cropsey Foundation

Fig. 1b. Jasper F. Cropsey, Study for *Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington, Rockland Co., New York* (right side), 16 September 1846. Pencil and whiting on blue-tinted paper, 10¾ × 8 in. (27.3 × 20.3 cm). Private collection



of many years. Certainly Cropsey was thinking of this location's past when he visited Torne Mountain in 1846. The artist noted in his journal that he went on "an excursion to the peak of the Torne Mountain. . . . The view from the mountain is very extensive. It is said that from here Gen. Washington watched the motions of the armies during some of those Revolutionary strugles [sic] that passed off in contention for the Hudson River." The American Revolution had figured in Cropsey's art before; in 1845 the artist had made a sketching excursion to Fort Ticonderoga.

The importance of these historical connections is confirmed by the exhibition of Cropsey's Corcoran painting under the lengthy title Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington, Rockland Co., N.Y. in the 1853 First Semi-Annual Exhibition of Paintings in the Gallery of the Massachusetts Academy of Fine Arts. <sup>10</sup> In the only known critical response to Cropsey's painting, an unidentified reviewer in Dwight's Journal of Music made the request that "Cropsey of New York must send us a better specimen of the landscape talent, for which he is justly distinguished." <sup>11</sup> Cropsey apparently responded to this slighting reference, for the following month the same publication included a statement from an unknown writer, "C," that "J. F. Cropsey... has sent us

(since your notice of the opening) a large canvas, with 'Recollections of Italy,' as its title." <sup>12</sup>

The more intimate American view appealed to William Wilson Corcoran, who had acquired Tourn Mountain, Head Quarters of Washington, Rockland Co., New York by 1857, when it appeared in a catalogue of his gallery. By this time confusion had already accumulated around the locale shown in the painting, for it was listed as Washington's Headquarters on the Hudson River. 13 This title wrongly identified the house in the painting as one of those used by the general during the Revolutionary War. Washington used several headquarters in New York State during the Revolution, but the house in the Corcoran's painting is not known to have been one of them. Cropsey never identified the house in this way on his sketches or in his journals.14 Simple confusion transferred the identification with Washington from the mountain to the small structure. With this correction in place, viewers can now appreciate Cropsey's painting, not as the portrait of a little historical house, but correctly as a tribute to picturesque and historic Torne Mountain.

APW

## Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians, 1851

Oil on canvas, 28% × 40% in. (71.5 × 103.3 cm) Signed and dated lower right: S. Eastman / 1851 Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.63

Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians shows a group of Santee in a vigorous game that was a precursor to lacrosse. The men, wielding long sticks with a small mesh hoop at one end, pursue a small clay ball, which the artist highlights against a patch of dirt in the center foreground. The dramatic landscape is loosely based on the area near Fort Snelling, a military post near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, where Captain Seth Eastman, a career army officer and topographic artist, was stationed from 1841 to 1848. An important outpost, Fort Snelling represented the military's northernmost peacekeeping presence among the Santee (or Eastern Dakota) and Ojibwa. While serving as post commander, Eastman became fluent in Santee and over the course of seven years sketched more than four hundred scenes of life in the seven neighboring villages of the Mdewekanton, a subgroup of the Santee. He also made early use of daguerreotypes to document and compose his subjects.<sup>2</sup> In 1849 his active duty was temporarily suspended, and he returned to Washington, D.C., where he devoted himself to painting scenes based on his time at Fort Snelling, among them Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians.

In the mid-nineteenth century American viewers appreciated scenes of Native American sport because they offered points of imagined comparison between Native and non-native Americans. Eastman had already painted two such scenes. *Indian Women Playing Ball on the Prairie* (Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Tex.) was exhibited at the American Art-Union, New York, in 1849, and *Ballplay of the Dakota on the St. Peters River in Winter* (1848, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth) was shown at the same venue in 1850 and engraved for distribution in 1852.<sup>3</sup> Eastman was surely familiar with Dakota ball-playing from his time at Fort Snelling, but the art historian Sarah Boehme has pointed out that he likely relied on his rival George Catlin's portrayals of ball-play, particularly *Ball Playing of the Women* (Fig. 1) from Catlin's influential *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (1841), for his friezelike arrangement as well as for some of the poses.<sup>4</sup>

Native American peoples across the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest had engaged in ball-play for centuries, but relatively little historic documentation of the games' rules of play or larger meaning exists. Written and visual descriptions provided by observers such as Eastman and Catlin offer some of the few accounts that historians have. Ball-play probably had spiritual or ceremonial significance. Sacred substances were worked into the ball and sticks, miniature sticks were at times used for divination, and heroic players were interred with their equipment. Moreover, games between rival tribes or nations served as surrogates for warfare, hence the nickname "little brother of war." Indeed, the Ojibwa, longtime enemies of the Santee, occasionally met the Santee in battle near Fort Snelling.

Eastman's painting shows the players dressed in traditional buckskin hunting shirts and fringed leggings worn by the Santee but also includes a figure in a striped calico shirt and a plumed red turban, who may represent an Ojibwa man.<sup>8</sup> Other ballplayers wear a mixture of clothing traditional among different Native American peoples. The figure in the center with the yellow-belted shirt also has a sash decorated with silver conchas from the Southwest. Such silver

items, obtained through circuits of Native American trade that predated white contact, were fashionable among the peoples living in the Upper Missouri region in the mid-nineteenth century. Eastman carefully rendered the details of their shirts, jewelry, and hair ornaments in relatively thick impasto but painted their lower limbs very thinly, apparently by design. 10

Eastman portrays the ball game as a violent and dangerous activity. Several figures purposefully shove one another in an attempt to gain advantage, while others wave their sticks overhead despite being far from the ball. The early anthropologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, in his multivolume history of the North American Indians (1851-57), described how "[t]heir ball-plays are manly, and require astonishing exertion," and noted, "[l]egs and arms have often been broken in their ball-plays, but no resentments follow an accident of this kind."11 Eastman's wife, Mary Henderson Eastman, wrote several books about the Dakota based on her experiences at Fort Snelling. She reported that the games could last several days. The matches were fiercely contested because the winners received food and prizes, like the striped and patterned calico cloths some of the ballplayers are shown wearing.12 Summer games, such as the one pictured in Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians, were consequently less serious because the need for food was not as great. Describing the engraving Ball Play on the Prairie, a variation on Ball Playing among the Sioux Indians that illustrated one of her books, she wrote, "the Indian cannot enter into the spirit of the game, in summer, on the plain, with the same delight he feels when he performs it in midwinter, when he performs it on the ice; he needs the music of the north wind to animate him, and his limbs are not so active as when

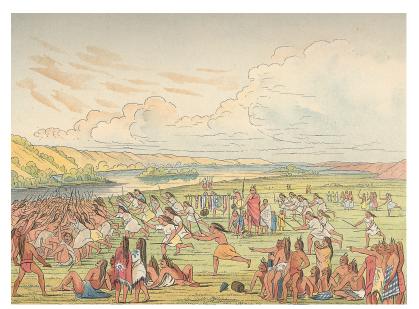


Fig. 1. George Catlin, Ball Playing of the Women, engraving, from Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), 2: facing 146



his system is invigorated by cold. While the grass is green and the warm sun shines above him, he cares little for the offered stakes—the food and the clothing."<sup>13</sup>

William Wilson Corcoran purchased this work for his collection by 1857, perhaps after seeing it in Eastman's studio, at 333 G Street, or possibly in conjunction with Eastman's work as a director for the Washington Art Association, of which Corcoran was a patron and honorary member. Corcoran's purchase of this and other western subjects, including John Mix Stanley's *The Trappers*, acquired by 1859, and Albert Bierstadt's *Mount Corcoran*, acquired in 1877 (see essays in this catalogue), helped reinforce the idea that his collection was a national one by broadening its geographic scope and expanding its range of subjects to include a people who, in spite of racial prejudice, were long regarded by Europeans and Americans alike as a unique and defining part of the nation. 15



## Waiting for the Stage, 1851

Oil on canvas, 15 × 18½ in. (37.6 × 46 cm)
Signed, dated, and inscribed lower right: R. C. W. 1851. / PARIS
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, William A. Clark Fund, and through
the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Lansdell K. Christie and Orme Wilson, 60.33

In his brief life, Richard Caton Woodville painted fewer than fifteen oil paintings and left no diaries or account books and little correspondence to document his career. Born in Baltimore to one of its most prominent families, he was educated at St. Mary's College, where he may have received early art instruction. He also likely studied with Alfred Jacob Miller (see *Election Scene, Catonsville, Baltimore County*). He later enrolled in medical school but abandoned his studies after an early work, *Two Figures at a Stove* (1845, private collection), was included in the prestigious National Academy of Design annual exhibition and purchased by the prominent New York collector Abraham M. Cozzens. Following this triumph, Woodville moved to Düsseldorf, Germany, where he studied at the academy and honed his skills in genre painting. He spent the next four years painting in Paris and London; he died in London from an overdose of medicinal morphine in 1855.

Although he spent the decade of his mature career abroad (he painted *Waiting for the Stage* in Paris), his most famous paintings depict life in his hometown of Baltimore. Waiting for the Stage shows people in a tavern, a site that often served as a waiting room for stagecoaches, playing cards to pass the time. The man seated with his back to the viewer, a carpetbag at his side, is clearly a traveler and likely a conman who conspires with the figure standing behind the table. The standing figure wears the glasses of a blind man, but his newspaper, cheekily titled *The Spy*, betrays his condition. From his vantage point, he can see both men's cards and could easily telegraph the competitor's hand to his accomplice. B

Like his contemporary William Sidney Mount, whose work Woodville was familiar with from Baltimore collections (such as that of Robert Gilmor, Jr., who owned The Tough Story, also in the Corcoran's collections), Woodville liked to paint colorful characters in narratives of humor and deception.9 An earlier work, The Card Players (1846, The Detroit Institute of Arts), similarly shows three men attempting to cheat one another at cards, while his Politics in an Oyster House (1848, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore) more subtly implies the persuasive powers of a young conman over his older companion.10 Woodville's paintings, however, are darker in tone than Mount's sunny stories of talkative barflies or dancing drunks. As one art historian has noted, "no one ever really gets hurt in Mount's paintings."11 In Woodville's, however, trusting and naïve figures such as the bearded cardplayer run the risk of real financial loss. The ring prominently displayed on his hand implies the existence of family members whose well-being is imperiled by their patriarch's poor judgment.

Woodville's darker narratives are echoed in his compositions. Whereas Mount used a broad, expansive space to characterize his protagonist in *The Tough Story*, Woodville's spaces are typically small and cramped, with a wealth of apparently reportorial but actually superfluous objects rendered in minute detail: the sooty cigar lying on the floor in the foreground, the ashes scattered across the stove's bib, the caricature doodled on the chalkboard hanging to the right, and the red spittoon, an object that appears in at least three other



Fig. 1. Richard Caton Woodville, Self-Portrait from a Carte de Visite, c. 1853. Oil on panel,  $12 \times 914$  in.  $(30.5 \times 23.5 \text{ cm})$  (framed). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.2644

of his Baltimore genre scenes.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the spaces themselves are difficult to read. Woodville often adopts a raking angle that imaginatively traps the viewer in the corner of the room, offering only tantalizing peeks at spaces opening up through doors or cupboards. Indeed, an 1851 print after *Waiting for the Stage* captures this effect in its title, *Cornered!*<sup>13</sup>

The art historian Justin Wolff has taken particular note of the doodle on the chalkboard, noting that its pointy beard and ears make the face resemble Woodville's own, as portrayed in Self-Portrait from a Carte de Visite (Fig. 1).14 According to Woodville family lore, the artist frequently inserted himself or family members in his paintings. 15 By including a caricatural self-portrait, Woodville instigated a private joke that resonates on several levels. As Wolff notes, the chalked face looks devilish, as if to suggest the artist himself created a waiting room that, if not quite hell "with its fiery-hot woodstove and corrupt gamblers, is certainly the devil's workshop."16 But the rough caricature on a slate is an artistic creation twice over, both a crude representation and a very sophisticated, trompe l'oeil one. The chalkboard, particularly if we understand the face to be Woodville's, reminds us that the work as a whole is a painted construction. In that sense, Woodville's self-portrait could also serve ultimately as a warning to his viewers: Don't mistake this painting for a mirror of reality, or you risk being conned yourself.<sup>17</sup>

LS

#### Tamaca Palms, 1854

Oil on canvas,  $26\frac{3}{4} \times 35\frac{15}{16}$  in. (68  $\times$  91.4 cm) Signed and dated lower left: CHURCH 1854 Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.16

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1826, Frederic Edwin Church initially studied with two local artists. In 1844 his father arranged an apprenticeship for him with Thomas Cole, America's leading landscape painter. From the first, Church showed a remarkable talent for drawing and an inclination to paint in a crisp, tightly focused style. In 1845 he made his debut at the National Academy of Design in New York, where he showed throughout his career. In 1849, at twenty-three, he was elected to full membership in the National Academy, the youngest person ever so honored.

In the early 1850s Church received critical and popular success with a series of North American landscapes that included such works as West Rock, New Haven (1849, New Britain Museum of American Art, Conn.) and New England Scenery (1851, George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Mass.). Although he could have easily, and profitably, continued to produce similar works, in 1853 he decided to go to South America in search of new subject matter; it was a bold move. Few Americans were familiar with the tropics, and there was no certainty that paintings of such scenery would appeal. He was, however, powerfully inspired to undertake the project by the eloquent writings of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Of particular influence was the summary work of Humboldt's career, Cosmos: Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe, in which Humboldt attempted to synthesize existing scientific knowledge about the world into a grand theoretical system. While formulating the ideas expressed in Cosmos, Humboldt had made extensive tours in South America, studying the region's extraordinary diversity of landscape environments. Humboldt felt that an understanding of the full range of nature could be achieved only by seeing such scenes. He called on painters to visit South America and create detailed depictions that could convey these wonders to a wide audience.¹ Church took up this challenge with such determination that, in a few years, he became known as "the very painter Humboldt so longs for in his writings."2

Church left New York for South America on 28 April 1853, traveling with his friend Cyrus W. Field. Church made numerous sketches in oil and in pencil, recording the landscapes they traversed before returning to New York, on 29 October.<sup>3</sup> Once back in his studio, Church used his studies to create four tropical paintings that were displayed at the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition in the spring of 1855; one of them was *Tamaca Palms*.<sup>4</sup>

Tamaca is a now obscure, but once common, name for *Acrocomia aculeata*, a species of palm native to tropical regions of the Americas, found from southern Mexico and the Caribbean south to Paraguay and northern Argentina. Church made a drawing of the tallest tree at the left in *Tamaca Palms* while traveling on the Magdalena River in Colombia, carefully recording its features (Fig. 1). He likely used the same sketch for the shorter palms, varying the arrangement of the fronds for each. He also sketched the distinctive boat in the foreground, a type of watercraft known as a *champan* or *bongo*. In the drawing (Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum), the figure at the front and the one on the roof are shown in the same positions as in the painting; Church also added an inscription describing the "fireplace in the bow."

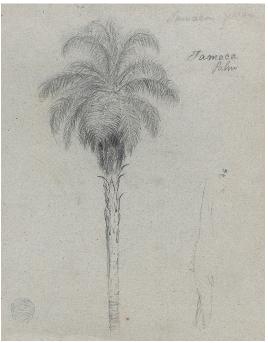


Fig. 1. Frederic Edwin Church, Botanical Sketch Showing Two Views of the Tamaca Palms, probably May 1853. Graphite on gray paper, 11% × 8% is in. (28.2 × 21.5 cm). Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York, NY, Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-107

In *Tamaca Palms*, as in his other early South American works, Church depicted the rich diversity of the tropical world Humboldt had described in *Cosmos*. William Wilson Corcoran surely appreciated this, having formed a close friendship with Humboldt during his 1855 trip to Europe. In 1876, when Church's masterpiece, *The Heart of the Andes* (1859, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), a much larger but essentially similar view of South American scenery, was sold at auction, Corcoran lobbied the museum's Committee on Works of Art to purchase it (to his disappointment, the bid authorized was not sufficient to secure it). *Tamaca Palms* also held another personal significance for Corcoran, having been first owned by the New York art collector Abraham M. Cozzens, who had helped him greatly during his early years of collecting.

Late in 1876 the Corcoran's curator William MacLeod observed that the sky in *Tamaca Palms* was becoming disfigured by "dingy" lines, and he wrote to Church seeking a remedy. Church replied that the painting was "suffering from the improper use of sugar of lead in the preparation of the canvas" and noted that it "only affects thinly painted parts of a picture." Such vertical streaking is seen in many American paintings of the mid-nineteenth century, including works by Fitz Henry Lane and Martin Johnson Heade. In February 1877 the painting was sent to Church's studio in New York; it was returned to the Corcoran in early March. According to the dealer Samuel P. Avery, Church, "Besides going over the streaks



in the sky . . . [also] scumbled the mountains giving more atmosphere and altogether improving the picture." MacLeod noted that the painting "was found in fine order, the sky repaired by being repainted & the mountains and middle-ground scumbled so as to show a charming hazy effect. It is like a new picture."

The retouchings Church made to *Tamaca Palms* are no longer visible, nor is there any obvious streaking in the sky (there is some darkening in the valleys of the canvas threads, but it is not especially noticeable).<sup>8</sup> There is no earlier paint layer under the present sky, which indicates that it is the original Church painted in 1854; likewise, although mists are depicted in the lower slopes of the mountain, the "charming, hazy effect" described by MacLeod is not evident. When Church repainted the sky of *Niagara* (see entry) in 1886, he admitted that he would have allowed himself "more freedom" if the picture were not so well known through reproductive prints. That was not the case with *Tamaca Palms*, and Church may have felt free to change it. His painting style in the 1870s was quite different from what it had been in the 1850s, and in works such as

El Rio del Luz (1877, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), he created vaporous, diffuse atmospheres that suggest the "hazy effect" noted by MacLeod. Church must have done the repainting of *Tamaca Palms* on top of an existing varnish that was later removed (possibly in 1890, when Corcoran records note the painting was treated). The painting in its present state is perfectly consonant in style and handling with Church's other works of 1854.

FK

# Evening Party at Milton's, Consisting of Oliver Cromwell and Family, Algernon Sydney, Thurlow, Ireton, &c., 1854

Oil on canvas, 60<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 84 in. (153 × 213.5 cm) Signed, inscribed, and dated lower right: E. Leutze. Dsdf. 1854. Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 69.32

The success of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851, one version at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) secured the reputation of Emanuel Leutze as America's premier history painter, generating dozens of commissions throughout the 1850s and 1860s. These include *Evening Party at Milton's*, one of several works in which Leutze addresses the English Civil War and the complicated, often violent, interplay of politics and religion in mid-seventeenth-century Britain. Despite its impressive scale, on a five-by-seven-foot canvas, this is no grand scene of military triumph, belonging instead to a subcategory of history painting that illustrates minor anecdotes from the domestic lives of famous individuals. By narrating history primarily through psychology and interpersonal drama, *Evening Party at Milton's* encourages viewers to associate these past events with contemporary political concerns.

Many Americans of Leutze's generation regarded the Puritan Revolution as an important prefatory chapter in the history of the United States, making it a popular subject among artists.<sup>3</sup> In the 1640s Oliver Cromwell and fellow supporters of a Parliamentary government (nicknamed the Roundheads) gradually wrestled military and political control of England away from King Charles I and his royalist allies (the Cavaliers). They publicly executed Charles for treason and created the short-lived Commonwealth of England (1649–60), governed first by Parliament, then principally by Cromwell as a military dictator with the title Lord Protector.

Widely read histories of England and biographies of Cromwell prepared Leutze's audiences to understand the context and cast of Evening Party at Milton's. Its specific inspiration may be the evocative concluding passage in Thomas Babington Macaulay's oft-reprinted "Milton" (1825), a reverential fantasy of encountering the great poet, best known as author of Paradise Lost (1667), in precisely this setting: "We can almost fancy that we are visiting him in his small lodging; that we see him sitting at the old organ . . . that we can catch the quick twinkle of his eyes, rolling in vain to find the day; that we are reading in the lines of his noble countenance the proud and mournful history of his glory and his affliction." As Macaulay suggests, Milton's "affliction" is blindness, here figured by the deep shadow across the center of the painting that obscures all but his gracefully curving silhouette at the right.<sup>5</sup> Joining viewers in admiration and sympathy is Cromwell, seated in a high-backed chair and flanked by his family and his chief military and political assistants. 6 Milton, his Latin secretary, allegedly performed private organ recitals during which the Puritan leader, a vociferous opponent of all High Church pomp and liturgy, briefly set aside his legendary asceticism and took pleasure in the inspired music making.

This moment of Cromwell's indulgence is the fulcrum of *Ewning Party at Milton's*, which transforms it from a simple anecdote of power paying homage to art into a sermon on tolerance and freedom of expression. The bodily comportment of the two protagonists visually registers this drama. Cromwell's stiff posture suggests the notorious inflexibility of his religious views, while his forceful, double-handed grasp on his sword mimics his iron grip on England as Lord Protector. With this authority, he enforced Puritan codes of morality and stripped churches of their art and ornamentation

(including organs). Milton is the foil for Cromwell's misdirected zeal, and his dynamic organ playing enacts his rejection of doctrinal rigidity in favor of creativity, liberty, and imagination. Similarly, Macaulay describes the poet as reconciling Puritan self-discipline with a pious appreciation for beauty: "In his character the noblest qualities of every party were combined in harmonious union." Leutze invites viewers to compare the two figures, study Cromwell's face, and ponder whether the heart of "Old Ironsides" has truly softened under the influence of Milton's melodies.

Early commentators understood this theme: "It represents the Power of Music," wrote the reviewer for the *Crayon*, America's leading art magazine. The following year, an essay entitled "The Mystery of Music" proclaimed, "In all time and to every heart [music] speaks one and the same language." Its author then lists ten remarkably disparate famous individuals from history, including Milton, Cromwell, and King Charles II, asserting that "all, while agreeing in no other point of belief, united to pay true, hearty homage to the science of music."

In this way, Leutze's domestic anecdote resonates beyond Milton's parlor, proposing music and the arts as peacemakers for contemporary conflicts. Viewers might reimagine the lessons of the Puritans and Roundheads in terms of the growing animosity between North and South in the United States, then on the eve of its own civil war. Leutze lived in Düsseldorf, Germany, while creating this picture, and it may also concern strife in that region between the predominantly Catholic local population and the Protestant monarchy in Berlin. 10 The German-born painter identified closely with both countries, having immigrated to America as a young boy and later returning to study at the prestigious Düsseldorf Art Academy. He remained there through the failed 1848 movement for unification and reform, subsequently leading his German colleagues in founding an artists' club that deliberately mingled their professional and political goals. Named the Malkasten (Paintbox), this club strove to create a diverse but harmonious brotherhood of artists of all creeds and from all corners of the German states. It organized both exhibitions and social events, including sports, festivals, and concerts, thereby fostering an ideal community around the values expressed in Evening Party at Milton's.

William Wilson Corcoran evidently recognized the serious motives within this painting, despite its quiet, familial setting. He purchased it from the artist shortly after its completion, and within a year, *Evening Party at Milton's* had been exhibited in New York and Baltimore and praised on both sides of the Atlantic. <sup>11</sup> Like Milton's music, this painting has a higher motive than sheer aesthetic pleasure. It is a masterful conjunction of two themes prominent throughout Leutze's work: the relevance of the past to current events, and the potential of artists to be agents of positive social change.

CAM

