Images of Transcience: Nature and Culture in Art

Priscilla Benith
Dickinson College

Meta Duevell
Dickinson College

Ruth Ann Engelmann
Dickinson College

Lacey Gilbo
Dickinson College

Erika Hayden
Dickinson College

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholar.dickinson.edu/student_work
Part of the Art and Design Commons, and the Theory and Criticism Commons

Recommended Citation
Authors
Priscilla Benith, Meta Duevell, Ruth Ann Engelmann, Lacey Gilbo, Erika Hayden, Tara McGeehan, Rebecca O'Donnell, Marney Pelletier, Lenka Podhrazsky, Maureen E. Shimp, Stephanie Stockbridge, Melinda Wilcox Schlitt, and Trout Gallery

This exhibition catalog is available at Dickinson Scholar: http://scholar.dickinson.edu/student_work/12
Images of Transience

Nature and Culture in Art
Images of Transience: Nature and Culture in Art

January 24 – February 22, 2003

Curated by

Priscilla Benith
Meta Duevell
Ruth Ann Engelmann
Lacey Gilbo
Erika Hayden
Tara McGeehan
Rebecca O’Donnell
Marney Pelletier
Lenka Podhrazsky
Maureen E. Shimp
Stephanie Stockbridge
Acknowledgements

The senior Art Historical Methods seminar is unique among undergraduate programs in art history in that it offers students the opportunity to become curators for a semester wherein they select, research, write a catalogue for, and organize a public exhibition in The Trout Gallery. In the short three and one-half months of the semester, this process always seems a more than difficult challenge. This year’s students were outstanding in their diligence and commitment, and rose to the occasion in devoting a tremendous amount of time, energy, and enthusiasm not only to the course material for the seminar, but also to researching and writing the essays for this catalogue. The thematic approach, installation design, and idea for organizing the catalogue are the result of their initiative and creativity and they should be most proud of the quality of the process and final product. Their sustained industry, good humor, and intelligence throughout the semester has made the seminar a pleasure to teach, and I would like to extend my congratulations to them on a job well done.

All of the paintings, prints, and drawings in this year’s exhibition come from the permanent collection of The Trout Gallery, and while each of the donors are thanked individually in the catalogue entries for each essay, the students and I would like to thank them collectively here as well—the exhibition would have never been possible without their generosity.

Many colleagues at Dickinson contributed their time and expertise to the seminar and the exhibition. Without their help and interest, the quality of the seminar and the exhibition itself would not have been possible. The students and I especially thank Prof. Phillip Earenfight, Director of The Trout Gallery and Associate Professor of Art History, for his enthusiastic support of the seminar and exhibition while also acclimating to his first year at the College. Phillip assisted students with particular research problems and provided valuable technical assistance in evaluating several works in the exhibition.

The students were aided in their research by our Art & Art History library liaison Yongyi Song in addition to librarian Kirk Moll, both of whom contributed expertise, enthusiasm, and significant amounts of time in guiding the students through challenging problems and questions. Most special thanks go to James Bouman, Trout Gallery Registrar and Preparator, who made the works available for study by the seminar as a whole and on an individual basis for each student when needed. We are also indebted to Jamie for his advice and supervision of the installation process, which forms an important part of the students’ experience in the seminar, and to his assistants for ably helping in the process. We also thank Wendy Pires for making the exhibition accessible to a wider regional audience through outstanding educational programs offered through the Gallery’s Educational Outreach Program.

In the design and publication of the catalogue, the seminar met with Kim Nichols and Pat Pohlman of the Publications Office. The result of their (and especially Kim’s) guidance, creative suggestions, and visual conceptualization is the quality of the present catalogue. We are similarly grateful to Pierce Bounds for creating photographs and digital images of the works in the exhibition without which this catalogue would have no reproductions.

Without the organization, knowledge, and attentiveness of Trout Gallery Administrative Assistant Stephanie Keifer, neither the final editing of the catalogue, invitations, opening reception, and all issues related to the exhibition would happen.

Finally, the publication of this catalogue was made possible by the generosity of The Ruth Trout Endowment. Ruth’s unflagging commitment to the educational role of the visual arts through The Trout Gallery is one of the most unique and exciting qualities of the liberal arts experience at Dickinson. We thank her for her continued interest, support, and participation.

Melinda Schlitt, Associate Professor, Art & Art History

The Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning, supports The Trout Gallery. In addition, the Gallery is supported by the Helen E. Trout Memorial Fund and the Ruth Trout Endowment. Funding for special projects is provided by the Henry D. Clarke, Jr. Foundation for the Arts.

This catalogue was generously underwritten by The Ruth Trout Endowment.

©2003 The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania All rights reserved
Introduction

In his now-classic book on the problem of historical change, *The Shape of Time*, George Kubler remarked that “a signal trait of our own time is an ambivalence in everything touching upon change. Our whole cultural tradition favors the values of permanence, yet the conditions of present existence require an acceptance of continual change.” Kubler’s provocative discussion centered around the argument that the history of art could be constructed around the study of formal relationships where historical sequence was defined in terms of continual change rather than a linear, or static, understanding of style. I begin with this reference because it underscores well the interpretive and conceptual approach that informed the curators’ choice of a thematic foundation for their exhibition. *Images of Transience: Nature and Culture in Art* addresses the themes of nature as a mutable condition and human culture as an artificial construct in landscapes, still lifes, and one genre scene ranging from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. While landscapes and still lifes represent two of the most familiar and visually accessible genres, they also can pose some of the more difficult challenges for art-historical interpretation precisely because of their deceptive accessibility. In their essays, the curators grappled with the subtleties of compositional structure, artistic innovation, cultural context, and subject matter in formulating plausible meanings for their images within their chosen theme.

As a genre, the landscape has its origins in ancient Greek and Roman painting where artists manipulated natural models into imaginative constructs that were visually believable yet experientially impossible in the real world. This approach was especially cultivated in Roman wall painting for the upper classes of society during the first century AD, as artists created landscapes analogous to the ideal, imaginary places described in the contemporary pastoral poetry of Virgil and Horace, or fictive gardens with vegetation that could never exist in one place at the same time. But in order for these landscape paintings to “work,” the viewer had to be willing to suspend disbelief and allow the formal elements of the artist’s image to dictate the terms of his or her engagement with it—that is to say, the painting itself defined the viewer’s rhetorical enactment. Landscape painting with which we are more familiar, contained within a frame rather than a fresco as part of an architectural space, also requires an active and informed participation from a viewer for its success but is less compulsory than a wall painting—one can choose to look at a framed landscape; it is more difficult to ignore painting that defines the architectural space one is in. Consequently, the curators also considered the various cultural circumstances in which the landscape as a genre was manipulated by artists and understood by audiences over the three centuries of works represented in this exhibition, as well as proposing how these works might be seen as images in the immediate present. What the curators came to realize in the process of developing this interpretive approach, was that there was an important difference between what a painter did and what a painting was; or, more generally, between what an artist did and what an image was.

The still life as a genre, as ancient in lineage as the landscape, posed similar and many shared challenges in interpretation. The very nature of the genre creates a more circumscribed expectation for the kind of subjects artists choose for still life paintings, but it also implies a more visually apparent philosophical subtext to any image that falls within this category. In the act of fixing specifically-chosen objects on a canvas that are by their own definition ephemeral—flowers, insects, glass, and paper, for example—the artist transcends temporality in fixing a single moment in time as perpetual. And, while the subject of a still life may directly evoke themes of ephemerali ty, mortality, and time, the still life as a genre is also ultimately about the problem of representation itself, as is the landscape or, more broadly argued, any pictorial genre. Both artist and viewer know that a painting or print is itself an ephemeral object and will eventually dismantle the illusion it depicts when it is lost, forgotten, or perishes.

In the final class of the semester, the seminar discussed T.S. Eliot’s foundational essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, a work that is of course about the identity and role of the poet but which equally applies to all acts of artistic endeavor. A few passages are worth including here for they summarize the issues the curators came to understand about the purposes and effects of art and the role of the artist during the course of researching and writing about their images: “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense… and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence… The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet [or, artist] cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living.”

*Images of Transience: Nature and Culture in Art* illuminates the process of finding meaning in some of the most familiar pictorial imagery while acknowledging that transience is a fundamental characteristic of the image as both subject and object.

Melinda Schlitt, Associate Professor, Art & Art History

British landscape watercolor painting originated in the early eighteenth century as detailed topographical depictions of the nation’s landscapes. These popular topographical paintings tended to show an elevated perspective of a panoramic view in order to record as much of the scene as possible. However, in the late eighteenth century, new concerns such as atmosphere and aesthetic compositions began to affect the way in which artists portrayed British landscapes. Sharp, well-drawn, and brightly colored views of cities made urban topography popular in Britain in the 1740s. Continuing into the early nineteenth century, watercolor painters became more personally responsive to natural scenes by capturing factual as well as atmospheric details. The new primary concerns for landscape watercolorists included balanced compositions, clarity, order, and the power of light. The translucent quality of watercolor enhanced these atmospheric effects, especially in the rendering of the sky and clouds. Also, new technical advances such as the use of bolder colors and more highlights resulted in the evolution of a more energized and naturalistic style.

William Henry Nutter’s painting, Carlisle, England, demonstrates this nineteenth-century naturalistic style in fine details, bold colors, and atmospheric effects. The middle horizon line balances the composition, and the hill in the lower right is countered by the mass of clouds in the upper left. The work is topographical since it records a detailed description of a specific place and time; however, it captures more than a simple view of the landscape. Carlisle, England depicts a view of the city from 1863 with the rural details of grassy hills, farm animals, and a river in the foreground divided by an arched bridge from an industrial horizon line made up of buildings, smokestacks, and factories. The atmospheric effects of the clouded sky and shimmering river enhance the visual effects of how light transforms the space. Therefore, Nutter combines images of nature and culture that invoke both nostalgia and progress, serving as a transient representation of national identity.

Nutter’s image of the city of Carlisle presents a view from the year in which he created the painting. However, inherent signs of the city’s past are included in the visual imagery of the watercolor. Carlisle, England had survived a tumultuous history of invasions by the Romans, Normans, and Scots. As M.E. Nutter remarked in his historical study, “Carlisle became of little importance as a garrisoned town. No commotions were dreaded from the Scotch and the gates of the city were left always open…Doubtless, there are many soul-inspiring ideas connected with the good old times when strength of arm was the only fortune which many desired, yet there are few in the present day who do not prefer these piping times of peace.”

Nutter presents a view of Carlisle that celebrates this past with the prominence of the centrally located cathedral and the castle on the far right. However, he focuses more on the progression of the city’s history in terms of agriculture and industrialization. In 1745, the first woolen factory was established and by the end of the eighteenth century, Carlisle boasted a dozen factories for calico printing, cotton spinning, and weaving. With the industrial revolution, the population increased and the prosperity of the city flourished. Along with the textile industries, Carlisle was also a railway and market town. The location was easily accessible because of the three surrounding rivers. Most likely, William Henry Nutter’s image is a view from Primrose Bank along the River Eden. The bridge, designed in 1812 by Robert Smirke and which crosses the River Eden, is composed of five sixty-five foot elliptical arches, dividing the rural foreground of the painting from the industrial horizon in the background.

Therefore, this view of Carlisle is factually-based because of the identification of the cathedral, castle, factories, river, and bridge. However, the precise handling of detail along the horizon, subtle washes of color in the sky, and use of complementary colors and forms compose a visually pleasing, as well as historically accurate, view of Carlisle. The naturalistic detail in the sky with the clouds looming into the scene from the upper left and the rays of sun highlighting the city below create a dynamic view. The complementary reds of the cityscape with the greens of the landscape balance the rural and industrial elements of the painting as well as unify the image. A fleeting moment in Carlisle life is captured with images of the river, buildings, animals, factory smoke, clouds, and people. The city is presented as prosperous in both nature and culture and serves as a symbol of Britain. As stated in Elizabeth Helsinger’s introduction to her analysis of the symbolism of land in British art, “Rural scenes as national symbols, then, invoke culture and society—positing a link between agriculture and national culture, or attaching the social sentiments of home, community, and everyday life to the alien concept of nation.” William Henry Nutter successfully portrays Carlisle, England as one of Britain’s thriving city centers. The formal style of bold colors, dramatic atmospheric effects, and unity in composition further promote the positive image which strengthens the concept of England as a naturally beautiful and culturally important nation. Although the view of Carlisle from Primrose Bank has
been altered since 1863, many of the same landmarks have remained throughout its history. Nutter’s transient image of the city remains as a symbol of national pride which transcends historical time.

Tara McGeehan

2 Wilton and Lyles, 80.
5 Nutter, 17.
7 Nutter, 19. In comparison to an etching by M.E. Nutter, *Carlisle From Primrose Bank*, William Henry Nutter’s view shares a similar viewpoint including landmarks such as the arched bridge, castle, and cathedral.
8 Nutter, 22.
Although a landscape painter for the British Royal Academy and King William IV (1830-1837), Henry William Burgess was most well known among his contemporaries as a great draughtsman. The twenty years prior to Burgess’ appointment to the King in 1833 were spent drawing trees in the parks of noblemen for the sons of the house.\(^1\) It is in the very latest part of Burgess’ exploration of noblemen’s trees that Landscape with Pond and Ducks was rendered.

Burgess’ graphite drawing can be viewed as a reflection of nineteenth-century British artistic interests in ordering the natural world through imagery. In his essay relating land to British national character, Michael Rosenthal writes, “Landscape, in its English forms and uses...designates a relatively local extent of land that has been shaped and designated for someone positioned to face it.”\(^2\) The ordering of nature in artistic imagery suits the aesthetic needs of the person viewing the imagery and further asserts the nineteenth-century British interest in possessing the natural world.

Burgess’ intimate graphite drawing orders the land by framing the view. Reflecting his interest for the individual characteristics of trees appearing in his previous works, Burgess places the focus of the view on a large group of trees in the foreground on the right. The remaining areas of the curving trunk and leafy branches of the nearest tree have been excluded from view, allowing for the great expanse opening into the distance on the left. Jutting up from the sweeping view is a small village. If we assume that Burgess’ drawing, like many works created prior to 1833, is a depiction of a nobleman’s property, the landscape may stand as a testament to the fact that a nobleman owned these trees, pond, and the view of the distant village. All of these elements have been carefully positioned within the frame possibly to display the grandeur of what is owned by the country gentleman. In Landscape with Pond and Ducks, Burgess has encapsulated and ordered a vast natural area to achieve a balance and harmony between nature and what is owned.

Burgess also organizes Landscape with Pond and Ducks through his individualized and unique drawing technique. In his drawings, Burgess used “pencils made expressly for him” which were sharpened to a chisel edge to create his signature “broad and effective style.”\(^3\) Outlined in bold lines, the bushes and trees surrounding the pond are given depth and dimension through many diagonal strokes of various densities. Burgess’ quick and long diagonals imbue the landscape with a strong sense of motion and energy while also restricting and caging the natural elements, adding to the roughness of Burgess’ unique depiction of a well-calculated moment in time.

The tension created within Burgess’ dynamic and restricted landscape as well as the desire to represent an owned and ordered view allude to the inherent temporality of nature and culture. Like all forms of life, natural scenery is subject to change. Burgess’ lush trees contain such a dynamic force that they seem to strive to break free from the frame and appear as though they will change appearance at any moment. Likewise, the wispy clouds, shadows, swimming ducks, and reflections in the pond have been rendered at a calculated moment and can be seen to refer to the ephemerality of nature within art. Burgess’ control over the rhythmic natural elements may express the need to place order and regularity over that which is momentary and fluctuating.

The plausible private ownership of Burgess’ view also tells of the changes within nature. Humans often represent their possessions for the purpose of documentation, and Burgess’ depiction of a nobleman’s property may serve the same meaning and purpose. The elements within Burgess’ drawing are sure to change, and if the framed view itself can be regarded as an indicator of the possession of the land, Burgess’ depiction halts natural change and immortalizes the landscape and its natural elements. Landscape with Pond and Ducks preserves a passing view through the energetic display of the intrinsic ephemerality of culture and nature.

Lacey Gilbo

---

Jacob van Ruisdael was born in 1628 in Haarlem into a family of artists and was probably taught by either his father or his uncle, the painter Salomon van Ruysdael. In 1648, Ruisdael entered the Guild of St. Luke in Haarlem which included some of the best Dutch landscape painters, the preeminence of which Ruisdael would soon surpass himself.

This painting’s attribution to Ruisdael, perhaps the greatest Dutch landscape painter of the seventeenth century, is unconfirmed but well-founded. The theme, motifs within the theme, materials and technique, link it to Ruisdael’s work during the late 1640s and early 1650s at the early stages of his career. Ruisdael painted very few landscapes on panel after 1650 when he began to use canvas exclusively. Visual effects indicative of a technique revealing dry bristley brushes and grainy paints, both of which were used by Ruisdael early on in his career, are easily visible in the sky and cloud.

Ruisdael painted his first wooded landscape that included a body of water, Two Oaks by a Pool, in 1649. Figures Fishing by a Resting Stream is a slight variation on that theme and shares compositional similarity with Two Oaks by a Pool. In Figures Fishing by a Resting Stream, Ruisdael interestingly divides the space among all three natural elements: water, land, and air. On the right side of the composition nothing beyond the mass of foliage and plant life can be seen, whereas the left side offers a far more extensive view of a hamlet in the distance. Ruisdael separates top from bottom in a similar fashion. The elements of human existence, the small figures in the immediate foreground, and the hamlet in the distance occupy an insignificant space in the whole of the composition. The sky dominates the top portion of the panel. However, Ruisdael unites this lateral division with the resting stream that weaves from one side to another, and top and bottom are united compositionally by the impressive tree standing in the near center of the composition, reaching up from the embankment to the clouds. A dramatic light is a characteristic element of Ruisdael’s work and is evident in this painting as well. The time of day is recognizable as mid-afternoon and the cumulus clouds may indicate that either a rain shower has just passed or is approaching. The time of day and the light and clouds have been caught at such a precise moment that the inevitability of a shift in the winds and movement of the clouds is palpable. There is great contrast between dark and light, even though the effect is lessened by the darkening of the painting over time. Ruisdael makes no attempt to glorify nature and there is absolutely no impression that human beings are somehow separated from their environment. Stechow describes the naturalism one finds in Dutch landscape as, “characterized by that intense enjoyment of things in their external appearance by that undisturbed belief in the reality and importance of all earthly matter.” The human figures in the foreground find comfort and pleasure in their woodland and treat nature as something to be enjoyed in such a manner.

A common problem that arises in the interpretation of Dutch landscapes is the balance between the “pure” approach and the “iconographical” method. Critics such as Eugène Fromentin, who wrote in the nineteenth century, asserted that Dutch landscape paintings are faithful portraits of observable actuality; that is, that they were self-evident celebrations of the Dutch countryside. John Walford argues, “The more closely an image approximates to natural appearances, the more easily one can overlook the modes of perception that inevitably influence the transformation of landscape into art.” This crucial balance applies to one’s own interpretation of this painting as well as any one of Ruisdael’s paintings. Ruisdael’s works promote a variety of responses that reflect the “broader discussion of character and essence of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape paintings.” Art historians today discuss the natural and representative images within each work. The magnitude of literature regarding Ruisdael’s work indicates that he was both an important artist among his contemporaries as well as a provocateur of public responses.

The naturalism evident in Ruisdael’s early works, including this painting, has been suggested to be a clever vehicle for conveying deeper meaning. Some art historians prefer the iconographical interpretation of Ruisdael’s work. For example, Walter Gibson’s interpretations of Ruisdael’s common motifs are far more suggestive of enounced meaning than Seymour Slive’s more conservative approach. Gibson views Ruisdael’s “realism” as a skillful means of creating apparently uncomplicated paintings for conveying deeper and perhaps ambivalent meanings. For example, in Ruisdael’s View of Egmond on the Sea, which includes motifs such as decaying vegetation and dead and broken trees that can be seen in Figures Fishing by a Resting Stream, Gibson finds iconographic references. The dead trees and stumps in View of Egmond on the Sea play a significant role in the composition as well as the meaning. They rise from thriving plant life or stand starkly against the bleak sky. Gibson questions whether these elements of life and death have symbolic meaning: “They are dead. … it is questionable if they symbolize death in some carefully pre-
meditated allegory of human transience. Ruisdael employed a visual rhetoric more potent than traditional symbolism.” Slive, by contrast, rejects such speculation insisting that any moralizing symbolism that may have been apparent to seventeenth-century viewers was too unspecific to be subject to “programmatic decoding” by later critics.

Ruisdael’s “visual rhetoric” within Figures Fishing by a Resting Stream can be seen in compositional elements and motifs. The elements of nature, both thriving and decaying, dominate the foreground. Human presence is comparatively insignificant in both the figures fishing in the stream and the small hamlet receding into the distant horizon. The interaction between human life and nature can be seen as having a deeper meaning. Ruisdael depicts an ephemeral moment in Figures Fishing by a Resting Stream. The balance between humankind and nature is in constant flux.

Erika Hayden

1 Wolfgang Stechow, Dutch Landscape Painting of the Seventeenth Century (London: Phaidon, 1966), 3. Stechow warns about the absence of any signature on a painting attributed to Ruisdael, as those without are often considered spurious.
3 Stechow, 189. A complex fluctuation of more and less spacious vistas and a struggle with basic problems of composition emerge as a decisive feature in Ruisdael’s art. He was constantly experimenting with composition, always searching for new ways to resolve spatial problems.
4 Stechow, 8.
5 Bos, 329.
7 Walford, 15.
8 Walford, 15.
10 Gibson, 166.
CARL PHILIPP WEBER (1849-1921),
German/American

*Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village)*, 1878

Oil on canvas, 35 11/16 x 49 3/8 in. (90.7 x 125.5 cm.)

As a German/American landscape painter, Carl Philipp Weber created works in the German Romantic landscape tradition in emphasizing an imaginative approach towards nineteenth-century German artistic interests in idyllic and naturalistic everyday scenes. Although he emigrated to Germantown, PA in 1853, Weber received his artistic training in Darmstadt, Munich, and Nuremberg. Under the instruction of his renowned uncle, Paul Weber, and sculptor and muralist August von Kreling, the young Carl Philipp doubtlessly studied the techniques and themes of accomplished German landscape painters such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Wilhelm von Kobell, Caspar David Friedrich, and Friedrich Lessing from the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. Weber’s continuation of the early nineteenth-century German Romantic landscape interest in everyday views of country life inspired *Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village)*.

During the 1820s, German landscape art became divided into a multitude of themes, styles, and interests. Despite their growing differences, artists and their works were unified through verbally and artistically expressed interests in historicism, which was understood as the tendency to view their themes and imagery as reflective of the general process of cultural development. During the early nineteenth century, the emerging genre of historical landscape often acted as a synonym for the “heroic” landscape, which conveys enduring and universal ideas. In an early draft of *Moderne Konstchronik*, written between 1812 and 1815, landscape painter Joseph Anton Koch signalled a break between heroic and historical landscapes. He stated, “Many history painters such as Titian, Rubens, Domenichino, the Carracci, and particularly Poussin have painted so-called historical landscapes, which are distinguishable from the normal, intellectually empty landscape art by their relationship to ideas.” The connotation of “ideas” in 1815, in relation to historical landscape, is directly related to interests in historicism by displaying the idea of differences across time and the history of a culture.

For German historical landscape painters of the early nineteenth century, the display of cultural development over time is most clearly found in artistic depictions of medieval German culture and the everyday reality of the medieval period. Many artists presented realistically-rendered cultural artifacts and events of the German Middle Ages reflecting the rising nineteenth-century belief in a northern European unity throughout the medieval period. During the early 1800s, German artists and philosophers found German medieval culture to be unified through Christianity while sharing origins of a common Germanic ethnicity, which in turn formed the roots of modern Western society. Carl Philipp Weber’s work demonstrates this *Alteutsch,* or “Old German” style, which typically focused on representations of medieval folk culture.

In *Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village)*, Weber explores early nineteenth-century interests in medieval German culture through his imagery. The most obvious medieval aspect of the view is the large and overpowering castle ruin upon the bluff. Weber bathes the stately castle in a contrasting light extending from the horizon. Depicting the light from the setting or rising sun upon the castle emphasizes the importance of the monument. Throughout the medieval period, German provinces were united under a theocracy that built monuments such as Weber’s castle. Weber’s highlighting of this grand medieval castle may reflect the early nineteenth-century belief in the unification of the early German states and the rise of western culture. This interest in medievalism as a foundation of culture is further displayed by the sleepy village at the foot of the castle. Rising above the village, the castle physically dominates the homes of local Germans and, as a symbol for theocracy, serves to tie the inhabitants of this small village to the whole of medieval German culture.

The nineteenth-century regard for folk culture as a primary aspect of medieval Germany depicted in art not only reflects attractions to medieval culture, but also historicism and the temporality of culture within nature and art. The small shepherd on the shaded bluff confronts the expanse of nature as well as the majesty of the highlighted and ruined castle. When proposed as a contemporary depiction of German landscape, Carl Philipp’s shepherd gazes upon the ruins as if in contemplation of medieval German culture. Through this gaze, the viewer may determine that the rural lifestyle of the shepherd is a necessary aspect of medieval Germany. Yet, the fact remains that the castle is a ruin and that this medieval culture has declined and passed. All that remains of medieval Germany are the ephemeral qualities of medieval culture represented by Weber.

Likewise, the shepherd and mountains speak of the brief existence of human life within nature. In his *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting* from 1831, Carl Gustav Carus stated that “it [the resilience and long life of mountains] seems all at once to deny every transitory vanity of human
The mountains in Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village) can be seen to allude to the ephemerality of human life that Carus found in earlier nineteenth-century German historical landscapes. The great expanse of the mountainous view cradles and overwhems the small shepherd through scale, which creates an awareness of the insignificance of human life within the great expanse of the natural world. Like the temporality of the castle and medieval culture, this perception of human existence can further reflect the inherent transience of human life which perishes more readily than the resilient mountains. Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village) relates early nineteenth-century artistic interests in medieval culture to the inherent ephemerality of culture and human existence within the natural world.

Lacey Gilbo
In this floral painting, the viewer is presented not with a faithful depiction of a bouquet of flowers, but rather with an idealized construction of timeless beauty. The flowers have been snatched out of their natural environment, torn away from the earth and real time, and given a new life. Saved from death and decay, these flowers have been immortalized. They will not see their death here as they would in real life. Placed on a pedestal and trapped in a painting, they withstand the hands of time.

If we consider the French term for still life, “nature morte,” we find that the literal translation, “dead nature,” signifies a much different meaning. The term still life does not fully express the idea of death or the ephemeral, but rather suggests a pause in the life cycle. However, every one of the flowers in this painting are in a different stage of metamorphosis. The wilting tulip in the left foreground, the falling petals in the right foreground, and the bright red open bloom in the center of the painting suggest this idea. The term nature morte, instead, explicitly reminds the viewer of the transient nature of the objects represented in this painting. The idea of transience is projected onto the painting by the viewer and along with it, a sense of melancholy is attached to each of these flowers. In turn, the viewer is reminded of his or her own ephemeral existence.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts from Holland can give some insight into the symbolic expectations of the time. Variety in the blooms depicted in still lifes was of high concern. The artist’s knowledge of botany and his skill in painting flowers was demonstrated by the depiction of many different varieties of flowers. As some of these texts demonstrate, if flowers were of the same species, the use of different color, position, and phase in metamorphosis was preferred. For example, if a bouquet of the same color hyacinths were painted with near perfect rendering, it would not have gained much popularity. One’s eye needed to be excited by different colors and shapes, otherwise, the uniformity of the bouquet would not appeal to many viewers. Formal arrangement was also important to the artist in the seventeenth century, and this idea is clear in this painting.1 The unity of composition is an essential component of this painting’s visual effect.

Flower paintings were quite a challenge to artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A plant would have withered long before the artist could have completed painting it. Dutch artists would often use common botanical drawings to pick and choose which flowers they wanted to represent.2 So, what appears to be a natural bouquet of flowers could not, in fact, exist in nature, as many of these flowers were from different seasons and climates. The idealization and artificiality of this bouquet will impress itself upon the viewer when one considers the impossible combination of flowers, convincing light, and rich details that the artist was able to render in this painting.

It is difficult for us to look at flower paintings with the eyes of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century viewer without an understanding of what created the demand for so many flower and still life paintings. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Holland, the introduction of new flowers aroused much excitement and passion, and provided a continual source of enthusiasm for the Dutch. The best example of this excitement was seen with the introduction of the tulip from Turkey into Western Europe in the late sixteenth century by the botanist, Carolus Clusius. In 1593, no Dutchman had ever seen a tulip. By the seventeenth century, horticultural experimenting created many different breeds of tulips. Their rarity and beauty caught the public’s eye. Tulips were flaunted by aristocrats as signs of power and prestige, and quickly became all the rage in Holland. This new flower stirred up so much excitement that the middle and upper classes would pay extreme amounts of money or, in some cases, even steal them. Price lists from florists in Holland during the 1630s show us that only the wealthy could have afforded to have these flowers in their gardens. This era of the tulip bulb-trading frenzy came to be known as “Tulipomania.”3

Of the various breeds of tulips, the “flamed” or striped tulips were the most prized, and different colors were ranked. The lowest-ranked tulips were yellow with either red or purple flames, also known as “bizarres.” Above these were the white tulips with purple flames. The white tulip with red flames was the pinnacle of desirability.4 Three different varieties of flamed-tulips are represented in this floral painting.

The pleasure one got from viewing choice blooms such as the tulip was not the only concern or interest of the artist or the viewer. As Paul Taylor stated in his book, Dutch Flower Painting, “Flower paintings could be seen as depictions of luxury commodities, as collections of exquisitive coveted blooms, as reminders of the fleeting nature of time, as emblems of the power of art, or as bearers of messages from God.”5 One of the most common symbols of the seventeenth century in still life painting was that of vanitas, or, the comparison of the brief life of the flowers to the brevity of human life. This idea can be seen in the falling petals on the right side of this bouquet. The rapid passing of beauty was a theme also found in much of the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The
use of flowers as emblems of transience is evident in the following eighteenth-century poem about the death of a child, Isabel le Blon, by the Dutch writer Joost van den Vondel:

Here sleeps Isabel le Blon,
Who, like a small rose in the sun,
Stood happy on her stem,
And called out with a dewy mouth,
‘What is beauty? What’s the glory
Of youth other than a flower?’
This was the first and last lesson she gave;
Then she fell silent, and spoke no more.6

Priests would even use floral transience imagery in their sermons to remind people of the necessity of virtue.7 It may not have been the artist’s intention to include a message of morality or vanitas in his painting, but he nonetheless knew it could have been read that way. Allusions to the power of art to conquer time were also present in poetry. Many poems about flower paintings would describe how real flowers wilt with time, but painted flowers last forever. A typical example of this ideal is Jan Vos’s poem, “Flowers painted by Van Aelst”:  

His talented hand has painted the leaf of this plant
with a sheen which will never fade. Foliage that
can survive hot and cold will last forever.8

There are a variety of ways a contemporary viewer of this painting could have read the symbolism. For some, the rarity and beauty of the flowers could have been most appealing. For others, a religious or vanitas symbolism may have been preferred. However, these meanings were not the main reason for such popularity of and demand for floral paintings; the artist’s ability to create illusion was what sold the paintings. To convince the viewer that a believable and natural bouquet of flowers was in front of him or her must have been exciting for both the artist and the viewer. The abstract and timeless beauty of the flowers appeals to the sensibilities of modern viewers as much as it did to the tastes of seventeenth-century viewers.

Priscilla Benith

3 Taylor, 2-10.
4 Taylor, 2-10.
5 Taylor, 77.
6 Taylor, 56-57.
7 Taylor, 43-44.
8 Taylor, 47-51.
Carl Philipp Weber was born in Darmstadt, Germany June 28, 1849 into a family of painters and musicians and at the age of four, he moved to the United States with his father and mother, Carl and Eleonore Weber. It was believed that sometime during the 1860s, Philipp Weber moved back to Germany for his artistic training in Nuremberg and Munich under the sculptor/muralist August Von Kreling and his uncle Paul Weber. It was there that he was inspired by the artists of the Barbizon School and the Romantic movement. The Romantic movement reared its head during the nineteenth century with a concentration on subjective responses to nature where “the painter lends the light-filled air a body, and breathes his soul into it.” It was during this period of revival in landscape painting that Carl Philipp Weber began exploring his “truth” in painting nature.

After his primary training in Germany, Weber returned in 1874 to Philadelphia to live with his father, a musician, and his large family. While living in the United States he exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design, achieving national reputation as well as awards in London and Australia. After Philipp Weber’s move to Philadelphia, it is unknown whether or not he traveled back to Europe from America to paint his Landscape (River Rapids and Mill) in 1878. One can speculate, however, that if he indeed remained in the United States he most likely used his imagination and various sketches to recreate his past memories. One is inclined to believe that this scene does not represent the countryside of America because in looking at the architecture, one notices houses, a mill, and a church that are similar to the style of buildings found in the European countryside. Thus, one is inclined to believe that this landscape is perhaps his representation of nostalgia for his homeland. In creating a specific moment in time from memory and sketches, the artist may be trying to capture and recreate the ephemeral aspects of nature.

Just like any other atmospheric quality, nature is unpredictable and often times violent. In Landscape (River Rapids and Mill), the river seems to engulf the rocks in a manner that is turbulent, yet it is obvious that Weber was conscious enough of the surroundings so that the water did not completely overpower the image. Although all aspects of nature are impermanent, water seems to embody the meaning of an uncontrollable and transient condition. In painting water in movement, one is inclined to believe that Weber is attempting to control the temporal. This control of the temporal exists not only because the viewer’s vision is controlled by the artist’s representation, but also because Weber has made an unpredictable aspect of nature permanent. Even though the buildings, which seem to hint at a town, have become a part of the natural world, their existence still exemplifies the processes of industrialization and the meditated manner in which the landscape was developed. Thus, this landscape is not only structured to please the viewer visually, but it represents the artist’s attempt to control the momentary character of the “picturesque” in which natural phenomena is vividly infused with a personal characteristic.

In looking at Philipp Weber’s other works, like the Landscape (Castle on Bluff above Village), featured in this exhibition, there is reason to believe that his Landscape (River Rapids and Mill), although darkened, was actually represented in warm tones and brighter colors. In addition to the vibrant coloring that probably lies beneath the darkened varnish, the painting of the “natural” is also an obvious characteristic of the German Romantics. Their ideas were derived from a “heightened sensitivity to the natural world, combined with a belief in nature’s correspondence to the mind,” the evidence of which can be seen in “sentimental longing or nostalgia.” This longing could often have been an influential factor in painting not only what exists in front of the artist, but also in illustrating the emotional response of the artist at the time the painting was made. Thus, “it was not the objective reality that should be reproduced, but a reality transformed and clarified through our experience, the experience of a meeting between I and the world.”

Even though Weber may have made the scene in paint, there is a constant reminder that “the ruins of time are all about us.” This idea of temporality is evident in the mill with the thatched roof. Although the building stands strong, nature and time have obviously worn it away. In addition, one can discern that the church in the background represents religion, thus highlighting that humanity is close to God because like the transitory aspects of nature, humankind too is impermanent.

There exists a heightened awareness of nature, in which the individuality of the trees and the water emphasizes the infinite differences that reside in nature and the beauty that exists in each separate being. Landscape (River Rapids and Mill) exemplifies the construction of the
impermanent with the aim of representing the beauty experienced by the artist in his attempt to make the landscape timeless.

Meta Duevell

1 Frank S. Schwarz & Son, *A Century of Philadelphia Artists* (Philadelphia: Frank S. Schwarz & Son, 1988), 34, 42. It is believed that Paul Weber was also the teacher of Thomas Moran and Edmund Darch Lewis, two artists whose work is also featured in this catalogue.
3 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23.
JOSEPH STIRLING THOMAS (active 1864-1880), American

Flowers on a Tabletop, c. 1876
Oil on canvas, 7 3/4 x 9 3/4 in. (19.7 x 24.8 cm.)
Unsigned
Purchased in memory of Milton G. Flower, 1998.1

Limited biographical information exists on Joseph Stirling Thomas. Little is known outside of the dates during which he worked—1864 through 1880—and that the artist resided in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. According to the exhibition records of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Thomas exhibited portraits and still lifes, some executed in crayon, at their annual exhibition in 1876, and again in 1877.1

The roots of the western floral still life genre, as we know it today, are traceable to mid-fifteenth-century Holland. The first known flower drawings were botanical studies intended for use in illustrated herbals. In addition to herbs, flower sketches and engravings served as tools for the communication of botanical discoveries within the scientific community. Artists began to use these studies as models for paintings. Not only did the sketches not wilt like their impermanent, organic counterparts, but also the cost of rare and more exquisite flowers could often surpass the actual cost of the commission. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, flowers successfully moved from background ornamentation in fruit still lifes and portrait paintings to main subject matter.2

The seventeenth century found painters consulting religious scripture and emblem books for information on the symbolic significance of individual flowers, in addition to possible meanings for specific placements within a painting. The poetic idea of nature representing the Divine increased the production of floral still lifes, a form that married the popular subject of flowers to religious devotion. Flowers generated intense emotional responses, usually those of awe, curiosity, and appreciation of natural beauty which were interpreted by Christian readers to mean praise for God and Creation, specifically for human beings.3

The patronage and interest necessary to develop the popularity of floral still lifes in America was not raised until the early-middle-nineteenth century. Scholars argue the presence of isolated pieces before this point provides evidence for the knowledge and occasional imitation of European florals by American artists.4 Floral still life paintings appeared on the art scene in the 1850s, replacing the previously reigning fruit still lifes, with the 1860s seeing the emergence of artists specializing in floral painting.5

American floral paintings focused on the themes of youth and beauty, not the physical beauty of the flowers themselves, as was the case with the Dutch tradition. Wilted flowers represented death and indicated to the viewer the memorial or posthumous nature of the painting. Fallen petals denote the passing of time or a loss of virtue and were generally used by artists in works intended as social commentary.6 The concept of the five senses became closely associated with the genre. Beyond their individual meanings, flowers became affiliated with the pleasures of life and transience. The budding, blooming and eventual wilting of flowers developed into a romantic metaphor for the life of human beings.

Stirling’s loose, slightly impressionistic style discourages any secure identification of the flowers or symbolic references, but it is clear that they are in different states of bloom. The two large flowers, first and second from the left are beginning to wilt—the petals have started to lose their elasticity, and the stigmas of the flower second to the left hang downward. Two smaller flowers are only beginning to emerge from their buds, and the center right flower is in full bloom.

A series of movements and counter-movements in background development for floral paintings took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The concept of the background seen in this painting was introduced in the 1870s. The idea of a solid, typically black, background was meant to highlight the decorative aspect of the flowers and the genre itself.7 In addition to the strong light source in Stirling’s painting, the flowers are brought close to the picture plane, further focusing our attention on the subject matter.

The subject of surface is addressed by the painter. The highly polished tabletop on which the flowers rest as well as the leaves beneath the flowers, are significant in terms of style and date. The early floral still lifes sat on bare supports of various kinds. The style of 1850s introduced marble tablecloths into still life paintings, where artists sometimes incorporated tablecloths and napkins.8 Wooden tablecloths subsequently replaced the highly ornate marble. The plain tabletop was made to look more luxurious through the addition of a highly polished finish, as exemplified in Flowers on a Tabletop. The leaves on which the flowers lay activate the tabletop, accentuate the fragility of the flowers, and highlight their temporality—a central concept in nineteenth-century still life paintings. Patterns commonly used on tablecloths were intended to animate and add complexity to the paintings. Stirling utilizes a dark pattern on the wall behind the blossoms, introducing a heightened sense of depth to the picture plane.

Lenka Podhrazsky
Religious texts and books in the time were filled with associations between Christian representations and flowers. In religious paintings, forty different variations of flowers are not an uncommon amount. Other arguments suggest that these paintings were original European paintings brought to America by wealthy immigrants. The argument questions the willingness of American artists in the face of their own aesthetic independence to copy older European styles.
Bacher was fortunate to meet an artist he held in particular, and the artist's talent was etching. In 1880, while in Venice, Bacher's own temperament and personal style suited Munich style of etching and concentrated upon the architectural elements within his subjects, and Bacher concentrated upon human nature in each Venetian scene. His most characteristic plates show working-class people of the city at their daily labors. The profound influence of Whistler on Bacher's style is most evident in this series. Techniques such as combining etching with drypoint to create different textures and tones, the quality of the line, and the atmospheric effect indicate models in Whistler. Bacher describes Whistler's unique and ever-changing style and technique in his autobiographical account of his time with Whistler in Venice: “[Whistler’s] new method involved a ‘retoussage’ which consisted in making the ink rise out of the lines and spread itself upon the plate. The plate with such treatment yields rich, soft tone. Whistler went beyond this method, leaving much more ink on the surface of the plate which gave an added depth of tone to the water or other parts.”

Such new techniques and keen observations of daily life and nature are apparent in Bacher’s etching, The Lido, part of his Venetian series. The Lido depicts an expansive stretch of a popular resort in Venice. Bacher’s composition is slightly diagonal following the lines from the land into the water. From the left, rough vegetation and a figure in the immediate foreground lead into clean white sand dunes sloping to the beach and the sea beyond. A darker contrasting area of wet sand, vegetation, and figures enjoying the resort area sweep from the foreground into the distance in a long crescent curve. Loose drypoint and etching and retoussage techniques achieve the stylistic qualities of the water and sand—these are then echoed in the sky and clouds above. Art journalist and editor, Sylvester Rosa Koehler, wrote of Bacher, “[As a result of] his endeavor to reproduce the general effect only . . . one cannot help, after all, taking immense delight in these etchings. If they were neatly drawn according to rule they would fail to produce in us that sense of movement produced in nature.”

Bacher creates a foggy effect in the area along the crescent curve that could be interpreted as mist. The viewer observes the scene from a similar perspective to that of a lone, cloaked figure in the foreground viewed from the rear carrying what appears to be a rifle slung across his shoulders. The Lido depicts an incredibly vast area, and the view extends to the distant horizon. Bacher’s depiction through his use of line and placement of the shadowy figure evokes solitude. Rather than emphasizing bathing houses and social attractions which would commonly be found in such a resort area, Bacher is clearly focused on the lone figure as well as some minor figures along the shore.
in the distance. Bacher’s attention on the lone figure and his use of atmospheric effects pique the viewer’s interest in the elements of humankind pictured in other aspects of the scene. Bacher’s *The Lido* presents the audience with an image of solitude and leisure. We view *The Lido* as the lone figure views it: as an expansive resort area.

Erika Hayden

3 Andrew, 16.
4 Andrew, 17.
5 Andrew, 30.
OTTO HENRY BACHER (1856-1909), American

On Staufa Bridge, 1879

Etching, paper size: 9 3/8 x 12.7/16 in. (23.8 x 31.6 cm.)
Plate size: 4 x 8 13/16 in. (10.2 x 22.4 cm.)
Signed in plate: Auf Staufa Bruck Sept. 5 79 Otto
Unknown donor, 1994.7

Otto Henry Bacher was born on March 31, 1856 in Cleveland, Ohio. He began his artistic training with a local painter at the age of sixteen. After a brief period of study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, he enrolled in the Munich Royal Academy in the late 1870s. In 1879, Bacher abandoned the Academy and left to study under Frank Duveneck. Along his European travels with Duveneck, Bacher met James McNeill Whistler while in Venice. Bacher became his pupil and close friend and they worked together while he completed his series of Venetian Etchings.

The two artists greatly influenced each other: Whistler taught Bacher ideas about concept and handling of line while Bacher taught Whistler many of his technical methods. Throughout the remainder of his career Otto Bacher traveled between America and Europe establishing himself as one of America’s first Impressionists, working as a painter, printer, and illustrator. As James Watrous remarked, “For most of the American etchers, however, an indispensable requisite for a successful career was to have etched, at least once, a ‘series’ of views of Italy, France, England, Germany, or London, Paris, and Venice in the manner of Otto Bacher, who had ‘done Europe’ so well in the 1880s and 1890s.” The success of Bacher’s career is evident in his status as an associate member of the National Academy of Design, a member of the Society of American Artists, and a founding member of the Society of Illustrators.

Bacher’s impressionistic style is evident in his etching On Staufa Bridge. The gestural scene composed of wispy clouds, shadowed figures, and a centrally-located hill rising towards the bridge succeeds in representing the “infinite.” Since the medium of etching relies mainly on line to build images, values, and tones, this element is the strongest formal component of Bacher’s print. He uses line freely to create atmospheric effects in the sky, fine detail in the vegetation, and gradations in value and light. By using this loose style and controlled handling of line, he succeeds in capturing his spontaneous view of the ephemeral scene. Also, the panoramic framing of the scene presents the audience with a wide, expansive impression of the landscape. The centered high point of the hill set slightly above the centered horizon line creates a balanced and somewhat symmetrical organization of the landscape. Therefore, On Staufa Bridge demonstrates Bacher’s technical skill and simplicity of composition.

The landscape is mainly rural, but the finely detailed horizon line includes buildings and images of city life. Bacher shows a view approaching the bridge instead of a side view of the actual structure. Therefore, without the title On Staufa Bridge, the viewer is not fully aware of the river and bridge and focuses more on the rising hill that dominates the picture. All of the figures in the painting are moving across the bridge, leaving the rural landscape, and heading towards the city. This combination of natural and cultural images implies a cultural and societal appreciation of the rural landscape, but also a value of it during the late nineteenth century. James O’Gorman writes, “As people lived far away from the land, residing in cities, spending their days in shops, offices, and factories, they increasingly saw the outdoor life as an idealized state. Nature was not taken seriously enough to let consideration of it interfere with the cause of progress, but it continued as a popular aesthetic and cultural icon.” Therefore, while Bacher’s image of Staufa Bridge presents a charming rural scene, it also includes aspects of culture and the incorporation of figures and architectural structures.

Otto Bacher’s panoramic view of the landscape in On Staufa Bridge is an image of transience. The etching preserves a specific moment in time at a known location. The figures standing on the hill and walking up towards the bridge are stopped and eternally portrayed in Bacher’s “snapshot” image. Although the present day view of this location is not the same as Bacher’s nineteenth-century representation of it, the audience is able to experience the scene as Bacher originally conceived it. The vantage point places the viewer at the artist’s point of observation, looking up towards the peak of the hill scattered with figures, trees, and structures. Therefore, although On Staufa Bridge represents a believable rural landscape, the fleeting scene is remembered only through the survival and appreciation of Bacher’s print.

Tara McGeehan

4 Falk, 26.
THOMAS MORAN (1837-1926), British/American

Sunrise, 1880

Etching and drypoint, paper size: 8 7/16 x 11 13/16 in. (21.4 x 30.0 cm.)
Plate size: 4 7/16 x 7 1/8 in. (11.3 x 18.1 cm.)
Signed l.l.: (monogram) TYM
Gift of Eric Denker, Class of 1975, 1986.32.2

Even though Thomas Moran was born in Bolton-le-Moor, Lancashire, England, he moved to Philadelphia in the spring of 1844 and was later known as the “dean” of American painters. Moran was not, however, a painter from the start. Rather, he began his apprenticeship in 1853 with the wood-engraving firm of Scattergood and Telfer. There, he started his initial ventures in etching in 1856 to later realize in 1861, through the influence of a variety of Romantic painters including James Hamilton, J.M.W. Turner, and Edward Moran (Thomas’ brother), that he wanted to travel exploring the “unknown” through painting.1

In travelling abroad to England with Edward Moran, he began to explore the styles of many European painters including Turner and Constable. Moreover, he studied the perspectives held by the English critic, John Ruskin, in his Modern Painters (1843), a text with sections dedicated to landscape painting and which was found “in every landscape painter’s hand.”2 In addition to other artists reading Ruskin, Moran believed, like Ruskin, that “true” art was not imitation of nature because “the man must exhibit himself in his pictures…Eyesight is nothing unless backed by brains…I have to have knowledge. I must know the rocks and trees.”3 So, in returning to America, Moran worked for corporate sponsors in exploring and documenting the West, yet all the while travelling on his own to Mexico, Italy, Cuba, France, and the British Isles. In all media in which he worked, Moran was always in the process of experimenting to portray his perception of a region. In speaking with G.W. Sheldon, he stated, “I place no value upon literal transcripts from nature. My general scope is not realistic; all my tendencies are toward idealization. Of course, all art must come through nature or naturalism, but I believe that a place, as a place, has no value in itself for the artist only so far as it furnishes the material from which to construct a picture.”4

Thomas Moran was always in search of nature’s variety and sought out various areas from which to represent what he believed to be as “great” scenes of nature because he was interested in the “absolute truth…caught and fixed in the splendour of picturesque art.”5 The term “picturesque” can be adopted in discussing the art of Thomas Moran as referring to his subjective portrayal of the “authentic” in nature.

After much travel in the West and abroad in Europe, he and his wife Mary Ninimo Moran, also an etcher, decided to settle down in East Hampton, Long Island where he began etching again in 1878. It is unclear whether or not he picked up etching again because he needed to make extra money through selling his illustrations to various magazines such as the American Art Review, to which he sold his Sunrise, or because of the painter-etcher movement which had begun in 1877. Whatever the reason for Thomas Moran’s heightened interest in etching, it is clear that the scenery of East Hampton represented an area of quiet nature in which he could concentrate on qualities of light and changing atmospheric conditions.

Like much of Moran’s etchings from the East Hampton vicinity, his Sunrise of 1880 represents a panoramic scene on a personal scale. Thomas Moran combines and arranges nature to represent an idealized impression of nature’s beauty and power. It is obvious in this etching that the permanence of nature prevails even among the impact of humanity and the passing of time. This condition can be seen through the road that starts in the center of the print and moves off into the distance to the left. Not only has this road been downtrodden, but also the wooden stakes, creating an irregular fence, show the signs of nature’s harsh and unyielding impact. As the fence deteriorates, nature continues its everyday life through the sunrise and new sprouts of plants on the outskirts of the scene. Moran’s landscape acts as an arena for the everyday beauties and dramas of nature, yet like many Romantic artists such as J.M.W. Turner, Moran approaches his landscapes as nature seen through his temperament. Instead of concentrating on a topographical representation of nature, “his mission was to produce in the spectator of his work the same impression which nature had produced in him,”6 thus conveying a personal reaction to nature.

Although it can be said that all works of art are constructs of nature because the artist creates what he sees, Moran has taken this idea to a different level. He directs the viewer to see and experience the world in a pictorial manner in which he conveys the idealization of nature rather than its topography. The image does not represent an exact replica of the scene itself, because the key was to represent ever-present nature through the eyes of the artist. This idea can be seen in the lightly etched lines of the birds, sky, water, and the heavily-concentrated etched lines of the road and fence which suggest the illusion of limitless space and human impact in the realm of the natural.

In creating this perspective, it was necessary for Moran to put some thought into the composition so that factual accuracy becomes less significant than the emotional
quality of the work. Without disturbing the reality in nature, his “aim was to bring to the public the character of that region.” This character, however, was experienced by Moran and is therefore “true” to the scene at the moment he experienced it. Thus, this definition hints that this character is bound to change as each separate person views the same scene and as the atmospheric changes take place. In a subtle manner, Sunrise is not just representing nature the way Thomas Moran saw and interpreted it, but it reveals an awareness of and an ability to capture the ever-changing atmospheric qualities present in nature while allowing a viewer to do the same.

Meta Duevell

7 Truettner, 254.
View of the Pemigewassett at North Campton, 1863

Oil on board, 13 11/16 x 9 1/2 in. (34.8 x 24.1 cm.)
Signed: l.r.: F.D.Williams 1863
Unknown donor, 190.4.1

Williams painted a naturalistic scene of the White Mountains and the Pemigewassett River with close attention to detail. His naturalistic style can be understood better by examining the tradition of American landscape painting that preceded Williams, particularly the work of Thomas Cole (1801-1848), one of the most respected landscaped painters in the nation.

William Cullen Bryant, a poet and dear friend of Cole, established a common opinion in American art criticism, “that a purity, a specialness and a uniqueness of type sets Cole, and his followers, and their works apart from the somehow untrustworthy and ungodly sophistication of the European art world.” Many of Cole’s followers rejected the manipulated and distorted landscape paintings of European Romantics.

Cole’s Essay on American Scenery (1836) had a great impact on American landscape painting. He mentioned in his essay that “American scenery that deserved the artist’s attention...provided points of reference during the next fifty years for almost all American landscape painters who consulted it with regularity and diligence.” The White Mountains of New Hampshire, pictured here by Williams, was one of the glorious locations mentioned in Cole’s essay, along with Tiny Echo and Eagle Lakes, which are in close proximity to the Pemigewassett River in New Hampshire. Therefore, the style and location that Williams depicted in View of the Pemigewassett suggests that he was influenced by Thomas Cole.

Nature’s transience is well represented here in Williams’ work. The painted upper left and right corners create an arc that frames the painting and mimics the contour of the land and foliage around the river. Williams created a tranquil and believable rendering of the White Mountain National Forest. The earth-toned, harmonious colors that he used suggest that the painting is a summertime view, and the mid-day light emphasizes the forest and its colors. The season will change and the leaves will fall because nature is always changing seasons. Because there are no visual references that could imply human intervention, nature is at her purest, untouched form. The birds gliding just above the water in the right portion of the painting’s foreground will only remain there for a moment before they take off. Some of the trees at the left center and right center in the painting show age in the size, while young blossoms were painted at the bottom left corner. The composition suggests that the river and mountains are the most important elements of the painting because the river was placed at the center of the foreground and leads the viewer’s eyes from the trees at the front left back into the mountains. View of the Pemigewassett captures nature at a fleeting moment that can only exist once.

Although Williams avoided idealizing nature, the painting represents an important American ideology. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 isolated the United States from European colonization, giving Americans a sense of national pride and confidence in their expanding nation. America was still relatively new, and therefore, artists like Thomas Cole who worked close to the time of the doctrine, held the nation’s natural beauty in high regard. However, View of the Pemigewassett was done during the Civil War four decades after the doctrine’s declaration, which divided the nation and destroyed much of its beautiful land. This particular part of New Hampshire that Williams chose to capture exemplifies the serene wilderness of New England, and it is a particularly patriotic region because the White Mountains are home to an important American icon, the bald eagle. Although the artist’s intention cannot be known, the peaceful scene painted during wartime existed in strong contrast to the nation’s then current state of affairs.

F.D. Williams’ View of the Pemigewassett at North Campton represents an area of the United States that had nationalistic sentiment in the past as well as in the present. The painting is an example of how nature and wildlife are important aspects of American culture. As a landscape, the painting will always suggest a transient moment in time.

Maureen Shimp

3 Howat, 386.
4 Howat, 387.
6 Howat, 386.
7 The White Mountain National Forest is still an important part of America today. The forests and river are popular for camping, hiking, fishing, and bird watching.
The Susquehanna at Hunter's Gap, 1873

Stipple engraving, paper size: 8 1/4 x 10 3/4 in. (21.0 x 27.3 cm.)
Plate size: 5 1/4 x 8 7/8 in. (13.4 x 22.6 cm.)
Signed in plate: l.l.: G. Perkins; l.r.: R. Hinshelwood
Dated in plate: Entered according to Act of Congress, A.D. 1873 by D.
Appleton and Co. in the office of the Librarian of Congress Washington
Gift of Charles Coleman Sellers, 190.6.4
Exhibited: Nineteenth Century Susquehanna River Scenes (Carlisle, PA: The
Cumberland County Historical Society, 1984); Exploring the ‘Language’ of
Line, Value and Color: The Representation of Water in Prints (Carlisle, PA: The
Trout Gallery, 1987); An American View: From Country to the City (Carlisle,
Published: Nineteenth Century Susquehanna River Scenes exh. cat. (Carlisle, PA: The
Cumberland County Historical Society, 1984-1985), n.p.; Lisa
Fleming, Exploring the ‘Language’ of Line, Value and Color: The Representation
Anna Ruehl and Mary-Hunter Sperow, An American View: From Country to the

The nineteenth century saw a major growth in landscape paintings and achievements in the graphic arts of steel engraving, wood engraving, and lithography. These achievements are evident in the detail and delicate use of lines in this stipple engraving from 1873 by Granville Perkins, who studied under marine landscape painter James Hamilton in Philadelphia. Perkins worked most of his life as a landscape painter and book illustrator. He often made use of the stipple engraving technique to add a quality of realism to his compositions.

The Susquehanna at Hunter’s Gap was first published in a book of American landscapes called Picturesque America (1872), edited and compiled by William Cullen Bryant, a well-known poet of the time. This book was the culmination of the nineteenth-century American ‘view’ or ‘gift’ book. The opening of the West aroused curiosity amongst Americans. Various types of engraving techniques allowed for endless prints to reach many people who were curious about the West. Much of what the average American during the latter part of the nineteenth century knew about the geography of the United States came from the text and illustrations in this work which included most of the popular parts of the country, from coast to coast. Oliver Jenson wrote in the preface of the 1974 edition, “…this is ‘Picturesque’ America, the wonders and achievements that an optimistic age wished to show as its face to the world. And in that sense it is realism heightened, distilled, and brought to life by art.”

Hunter’s Gap is located just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. As stated in Picturesque America, “From the cupola of the Capitol not only can one survey all the city with its climbing spires, its massive manufactories and their aspiring chimneys, but the bold scenery of the northward comes into view and one has a distant though most beautiful view of Hunter’s Gap and the range of mountains through which the Susquehanna has to fight its way.” In this engraving, the viewer enters Hunter’s Gap from a much different direction. Through the center of the rocks, as if walking through a path, the viewer approaches the river. The foregrounding of rocks is a standard feature of nineteenth-century travel prints. The rocks could possibly stand as tokens of the roughness and wildness found in nature. The rocks, as the last thing that the viewer would see when approaching the river, act as a contrast to the calm and vast river ahead. The river spills out into the center of the foreground and extends through the mountains, the grandeur of which is inescapable.

The scene depicts a man in the center of the foreground pulling his boat toward the shore. When looking at the man, the viewer cannot help but be reminded of the man’s ephemeral existence when comparing him to the mountains behind him. Both the viewer and the man depicted cannot escape the power and vitality of nature in this landscape. This is what the “optimistic age wished to show as its face to the world,” as Jenson stated. One could not find any represented landscape that depicts a scene literally. Even a photograph would not do justice to the original landscape. It is this “heightened realism” that William Cullen Bryant spoke of in Picturesque America. This engraving depicts both a carefully chosen view of the American landscape and the ideals of the nineteenth century.

Typical of most nineteenth-century American landscapes, this represents the interaction between humanity and nature. In this image, however, the only human presence is this man. There is no smoke from factories visible in the background or tops of buildings from the neighboring city. The river is both a source of leisure and retreat for this man and many other people of Harrisburg. Away from the noise and business of the city, individuals can relax and contemplate the scenery without being reminded of the hustle and bustle of their daily lives.

The stipple engraving technique allows Perkins to create an intense contrast between the trees and rocks in the foreground and the mountains in the background. Thick and heavy lines tightly packed together give a sense of immediacy to the objects in the background. In contrast, very thin lines allow the artist to create clouds and mountains that recede far into the background. This effect gives the illusion of an immense amount of space. Framed by trees and rocks on the left and mountains on the right, the river occupies the middle-ground of the composition engulfing the deliberately minimized figure. Again, the viewer is reminded of the man’s transience when juxtaposed with his powerful surroundings.

Priscilla Benith
3 Mark Roskill, *The Languages of Landscape* (University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 1997), 123.
4 Bryant, n.p.
The late nineteenth-century American artist, Reynolds Beal stated: “I came to appreciation of the prismatic beauties of the earth and sky and the sea, the relation between men and the ocean, ships and sailors, wind and weather, and the wonders of the tide” in regards to his collection and adoration of seascapes. While Seascape is not attributed to any specific artist, the style, technique, color, and subject matter mirror many works by late nineteenth–century American artists such as Reynolds Beal, Winslow Homer, James Whistler, and William Merrit Chase. The small watercolor painting represents an unknown location, but it is plausible that the harbor resides in New England because the northeast had a high concentration of shrimping gales and fishing vessels. For three-hundred years, New England had been dependent on fishing and maritime trading. The natural coves, harbors, and bays made New England perfectly suited to build a large fishing enterprise. Many of the above-mentioned artists from the 1880s painted the sea because it was a part of their daily lives. William Merrit Chase and Reynolds Beal, in particular, both admired boat mechanics and the awesome ability to harness the ocean’s power. For the coastal communities that dedicated their lives to the sea, the mid-nineteenth century posed a new threat to their way of life. The emergence of the steam-powered and large steel boats replaced many of the graceful and traditional sailboats. The ocean was as much a part of the beautiful landscape as it was an economic staple. Seascape focuses on the ephemeral quality of the ocean and the fleeting moment of time when sailboats dominated the water.

The Impressionist period of art focused on movement, light, shadows, and color, which are also exemplified in this seascape. Reynolds Beal, the American artist, included many Impressionist traits within his works, like the fluid and spontaneous strokes in this watercolor. Beal also enjoyed depicting the interactions between civilization and the forces of the ocean and weather. Seascape shows the interaction of human forces acting upon the ocean in the midst of storm through the watercolor medium and Impressionist style. Instead of bright, glassy colors, the unknown artist focuses on emotive and restless brushstrokes and uses secondary soft colors of pale green and dusty-brown. A cream-colored boat rests in the center of the painting which breaks up a continuous horizon line. Light strikes the lower left corner as well as the upper right corner of the image, leaving a dark diagonal stripe that jets through the subject of the watercolor, which is the sailboat and the expanding storm. The choppy and tumultuous waves are painted quickly and lightly with many colors of blue, subtle green, and gray. The smaller shrimping gale in the foreground is fighting the wind as the ominous grey and white cumulus cloud surges upwards in the distance. Both the small shrimp boat and the three-masted ship in the distance are caught in the quick development of the storm. The gale actually looks like it is trying to come back to the docks because its bow is facing the shore. However, the sails are billowing out to sea by the strong wind. Seascape effectively evokes the precariousness of the tiny boat within the vast, violent, changing ocean.

Humans can change the land, build upon it, and strip it for resources, but the ocean can be affected by humans as well. Industrialization destroyed many precarious ecosystems and habitats, largely due to the pollution generated by combustion engines and chemicals in the atmosphere and the sea. The sailboat is the closest and most natural method to capture the ocean’s power, but beyond that, the sea is uncontrollable, which largely leads to its universal appeal. It is constantly changing from second to second, with a uniqueness and evanescence that will never be the same from second to second. Humans can affect what they place upon the surface of the crests and shores, from sailboats to modern steel boats, but the ocean is very susceptible to modern changes and industry. Seascape expresses the duality of the human dream to capture the power of the ocean and our inability to sustain its use when an outside force, the weather, interferes and disrupts the delicate balance of the wind. This unknown artist tapped into the uniqueness of the sea and delicately depicted the fleeting collision of human and natural forces.

Ruth Ann Engelmann

Originally from St. Mary’s County in Maryland, George E. Cooke began as a merchant in the early nineteenth century selling groceries and chinaware in Georgetown. When his business eventually failed in 1818, Cooke moved west and began painting professionally, completing 130 portraits in twenty-eight months within the first five years. After residing in Richmond, Virginia from 1824-1826, he traveled to Europe where he studied in Italy and France until August of 1831. Upon his return to the states, Cooke spent the last sixteen years of his life surviving on his portraits of predominantly white, upper-class southerners.1

Cooke’s struggles exemplified the typical career of an artist working in antebellum America, wherein he traveled to Europe to acquire the training needed to produce more personal, creative works for profit, but was distracted by monetary difficulties and was forced to respond to the contemporary demand for portrait painters.2 Nonetheless, Cooke’s true passion was reflected in his landscapes and history paintings, and his fascination with important American locations. Through these works, “Cooke sought to define the American character and its contradictions by representing the sublime in a manner that demonstrated his deep reverence for the past.”3

*View on the River Schuylkill Near Philadelphia* depicts the view from the west end of the famous Laurel Hill Cemetery in Montgomery County, a short distance from the city boundary.4 Designed in 1836 by John Notman, the park-like rural cemetery was the first of its kind to be professionally planned in the United States. The Department of the Interior, upon its designation as a National Historical Landmark in 1998, stated, “Laurel Hill stands as a landmark in American social and cultural history, as an essay in the evolution of our nation’s architecture, landscape design and funerary art.”5

The cemetery’s location on the east bank of the Schuylkill, the 100-mile long river with a drainage area of 1,915 square miles, provided an important site of commerce for Philadelphia and was inevitably populated in the years directly following its construction.6 However, Cooke’s print presents an appealing topographical view of the area before the effects of immigration and industrialization. In his landscapes, Cooke often desired to create a beautifully ideal and realistic vision of America, resisting any notion of industrial progress.7

Stylistically, the work effectively carries the viewer throughout the imagery, zig-zagging from left to right as accomplished by the overlapping of hills and cliffs, and through the current of the river. The detailed setting reveals a close articulation of natural elements, emphasizing their beauty and significance. Cooke’s landscapes often depended on the convergence of parallel lines to direct the viewer to important features in the scene. Cooke, among a garden of vibrant foliage, often included himself in the foreground of his paintings in an effort to support its depiction as an accurate record of the area. The middle ground typically reveals a commercial or cultural presence, while the background fades into a remote, atmospheric setting beyond the realm of vision. These elements, held together by such intense diagonal lines, create a compelling view of nature, and, consequently, an ideal moment in time.8

Cooke’s poetic vision of nature and the realistic topographical record of the location before its inevitable inhabitation effectively capture this scene at a moment of perfection, a perfection that seems to resist any notion of corruption or change. At the same time, the landscape suggests the temporality of its beauty with the initial presence of civilization in the middle ground. This contradiction reflects the artist’s attempt to define newfound American ideals grounded in a capitalistic society, and his deep reverence for the purity of nature as it originally existed. Nonetheless, both of these elements effectively create an image of transience in the inevitable deterioration of the purity of nature.

Rebecca O’Donnell

---

3 Keyes, 5.
7 Keyes, 37.
8 Keyes, 35.
The nation had entered the second year of its bloody struggle when artist James Wells Champney painted this *Sunset Landscape*. Sharing in the general enthusiasm, nineteen-year-old Champney enlisted with Company "G" of the forty-fifth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers at the outbreak of the Civil War and on November 4, 1862, he left home to fight. His attitude quickly changed when he found himself on the overcrowded and uncomfortable gunboat, The Huron, stationed off the shore of Newbern, North Carolina. Most of his time in service was spent in the Carolinas on garrison duty. The following year, he fought at the Battle of Gettysburg and later was discharged for his contract malaria.

Champney's interest in light is evident in the soft tonalities of the sunlight that fill the evening sky, bathing the hills with a warm radiance and reflecting off the surface of the water. The treatment of light and color and the intimacy with nature seen in this painting are all typical of the Luminist tradition. Luminism is the name given to the particularly American consciousness of light and atmosphere in mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting. By and large, “Luminist” paintings were horizontal works, typically showing water or expansive terrain constructed to mimic the format of a vast panorama in which light and atmospheric tonality were principal features. Particular to the paintings of this tradition is the idea that nature appears to have momentarily stopped, thus creating an atmosphere of spirituality in a world that transcends our own. Spectators are urged to conceptualize their size and enter into the transcendent space, becoming an inhabitant rather than an onlooker, and partake in a moment of contemplation.

The act of contemplation and of looking became an act of devotion; the silent conversation was the means to experience and enjoy not only the goodness of nature, but also the goodness of God and to become reunited with one’s self and one’s spirituality. Literary figures of the time, such as Thoreau and Emerson, criticized the state of things—Emerson claiming that “the reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist until he satisfies all demands of the spirit.” Thoreau wrote, “To the highest communication I can make no reply; I lend only a silent ear,” in describing the meditative “surrender of self” achieved through the ponderings and musings of the natural world. Luminist paintings were an answer to these claims and function in a very similar way to earlier altar-pieces or devotional paintings found in churches. Light and water, much like the use of gold, are reflective elements that represent the spirit and show a divine presence in nature.

Stephanie Stockbridge

Moshe Barasch, in his book *Theories of Art*, discusses the Platonic idea that art should not be an overt illusion devoid of all truth. While it is true that painting is always an illusion, it is also acceptable for a painting to be specifically about fantasy and idealization. *A Venetian Lagoon* is likely by the eighteenth-century artist, Francesco Guardi. The majority of Guardi’s paintings reflect the beauty of Venetian architecture coalesced with an almost fairyland, transient quality of golden light and imaginary shadows. This particular oil painting reflects a more haunting, romantic, and ethereal moment within Venice.

Francesco Guardi took a more romantic approach in depicting Venice, unlike his teacher Antonio Canaletto and his brothers Antonio and Nicolo Guardi. In over one thousand paintings and drawings, the obvious progression of Guardi’s art and style changes from that of a more traditional landscape painter of parades, society, and architecture to the *capricci* scenes which represent imagination and fantasy.

*A Venetian Lagoon* was likely painted during the late 1760s when Guardi began to focus on the *capricci* paintings. There are two likely reasons for Guardi’s sudden change from traditional views of Venetian bridges, churches, political ceremonies, and commercial life, to more ephemeral scenes that contain imaginary ruins from the past. Canaletto had died in 1754 which gave Guardi the opportunity to experiment with Venetian images. Under Canaletto’s guidance, Guardi had been restricted to paint what was popular within artistic circles, which were objective, realistic images of Venice. Guardi adored Venice as much as Canaletto, but he simply saw the city differently and was not as concerned with catering to the tourists. The second motive for the change in Guardi’s style occurred in 1755, when Venetian theatre began to focus on fantasy and fairy tales. This new movement may have prompted and intrigued Guardi to experiment more imaginatively.

In describing Guardi’s drawings, J. Bryan Shaw states: “Even now in Venice…in some unpredictable moment to catch a sensation of a dream: so, looking at the most exquisite of Guardi’s drawings, whether they are visions of reality of fancy, you may live a little while out of the earth; for indeed fancy itself is not more unreal than that enchanting city, whose magic he understood so well.” This observation describes both the natural light and a traveler’s response to the magical quality of the Venetian landscape which is so carefully depicted within *A Venetian Lagoon*. Venetian culture revolves around the sea and celebrations. Masks, costumes, festivals for the Doge or the patron saint, St. Mark, were regular events. For visitors, the city seems implausible, for it is built on water and is arranged in a labyrinth of bridges, canals, and islands.

The subject of *A Venetian Lagoon* is the crumbling tower that rests on a corner of a peninsula. Intermixed with ancient and more recent buildings are gauzy white sails and tents along the foreground and against the hazy distance. The sails and atmosphere are typical of Guardi’s late style, which consists of a pinkish brown atmosphere and draping sails, devoid of the laws of gravity. Light shimmers upon various surfaces as if the paint were freshly applied. The water is made of delicate blues, greens, and pale purples, and yellows that, in perspective, extends for miles. People were very rarely the focus of Guardi’s work except when he was showing a traditional ceremony, ritual, or parade. *A Venetian Lagoon* realistically depicts certain aspects of Venice and society by incorporating Venetian architecture and the citizens interacting with the sea. Water was the life-line to the Venetian economy and culture for centuries and the majority of Guardi’s paintings express the Venetians adoration for the sea. Overall, however, this painting is more a fictive representation of a moment in Venetian life. While Guardi commonly signed his work, *A Venetian Lagoon* lacks his signature.

The most likely location of this scene and the church in the middle ground is along the Canale della Giudecca, which separates the heart of Venice, the Desoduro, and S. Marco from the island of Giudecca. This canal was once the major causeway for maritime commerce. Two of Guardi’s previous paintings, *Canale della Giudecca con la Zattere and La Salute con Punta di Dogana*, share similar elements to *A Venetian Lagoon*. *Canale della Giudecca con la Zattere* has a similar cupola with vertical windows along the base of the dome; however, the church has an intricate crown for the dome that is not present in *A Venetian Lagoon*. The wall looks like it could be a part of the Dogana region painted in *La Salute con Punta di Dogana*, but the angle of the church and the open sea never aligns correctly to modern topographical maps. Guardi liked to experiment and by the time he was older, he may have wanted to combine favorite elements of various churches and mesh them together.

The people in *A Venetian Lagoon* appear to be wandering aimlessly. They don’t seem to be conducting business or to be in a resting state by the shore. The fact that they are wandering, and lack direction, was a common problem in Venice due to a series of social changes. By 1700, Venice had switched from an empire based upon the sea to one of land and agrarian life. Between these economic changes,
Venice also lost ownership of Crete to the Turks and a plague ravaged the city, killing thousands. All these changes resulted in a 13 percent increase of unlicensed beggars, and a 5 percent increase in licensed beggars. The magic and unique prosperity of the city was drifting away.

In a broad sense, the ephemeral, luminous quality of the lagoon corresponds to the fleeting Venetian culture that Guardi witnessed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

The application of loose, quick paint, the absence of a definitive location, and the crumbling medieval tower suggest that the painting represents a single, imaginary moment in time. Francesco Guardi witnessed the last “fleeting” moments of the republic before it was occupied by Napoleon in 1794. Civilizations and republics can fade away like light. Guardi painted Venice with an ephemeral quality to express the message that nothing lasts forever. The remnants of the past fade away like the light upon the canals.

Ruth Ann Engelmann

3 Shaw, 56.
By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Netherlands had ended the Eighty Years War against Catholic Spain and Dutch society was experiencing a period of peace and prosperity marked by economic and political change. The art of the period often reflected these changes of a new, highly individual culture that had developed based on the twin pillars of commerce and reformed morality.¹

The Netherlands rose to become one of the greatest commercial and maritime powers in the world, rivaling both Britain and Spain. Its merchant fleets took hold of colonial possessions throughout the world, spanning from the East to the West Indies and resulting in a flourishing overseas trade. The establishment of the Wisselbank saw the issue of stable coinage necessary to foreign trade, as well as the establishment of credit accounts and bills of exchange for merchants, allowing for cashless, large sum transactions.² As the republic became wealthier, the Dutch people shared in prosperity. This was a society in which it was possible to advance socially through the accumulation of wealth, and a rapidly growing middle class was evidence of this condition.³

The Dutch Protestant Church provided the other half of the social framework, working to uphold morality amongst the people by the encouragement of virtue and the admonition of vice. Money and its proper use was an issue of importance in this center of commerce, and the church severely censured the vices of unpaid debt and bankruptcy.⁴ Economic virtue and moral behavior were equally held in high esteem.⁵

Traditionally, the Catholic Church played a large role as a patron of the arts, spending lavishly on religious paintings for the decoration of its places of worship. This was not the case with the Protestants coming out of the Reformation. Such lavish expenditures were seen as wasteful signs of corruption, and images were viewed as idolatrous. Thus, the unique paintings that emerged from the Netherlands during this period are not the result of church patronage, but were intended for a very different audience. Paintings were mass produced by artists and sold through an anonymous art market fueled by the middle class. To ensure personal success, artists had a tendency to specialize in a particular genre of painting, depending on their talent and the demand of the market.⁶

On the surface, these paintings appear to be merely reflections of daily life within Dutch society—landscapes and interior genre scenes, portraits and still lifes. Beyond the surface, one finds them to be moralizing images embedded with broad cultural messages and moral lessons. The mentality of the Dutch people is reflected in their artwork. This was certainly a God-fearing society which stressed the importance of virtue and a “clean” soul, but one that was not afraid to express these ideas in an uninhibited manner.

Artist Jan Miense Molenaer specialized in genre paintings representing both the upper classes of society and peasant scenes. He began his career in Haarlem but moved to Amsterdam with his wife, artist Judith Leyster, in 1636 due to financial problems.⁷ The Procuress was probably painted shortly after this move. Molenaer was known to intertwine themes of impurity, vanitas, and worldliness in many of his paintings, such as Woman at Her Toilet (1633), a painting of a young woman seated in an interior setting having her hair brushed by an old woman. She holds a ring and mirror in her hand and is seated beside a table that is covered with jewels and trinkets.⁸ The Procuress is another such example, but one which contrasts to the scene of luxury and comfort seen in Woman at Her Toilet. The Procuress illustrates a business transaction that takes place inside of a brothel. A man has just paid an old procuress for the services of a younger woman, and the two saunter away as the old hag shakes her pouch of money with glee. On the table before her lie coins, jewelry, and possibly the bills of exchange traded by a foolish merchant. These all make references to trade and banking, two industries in which the majority of the working population was involved.

Women were often used as a vehicle for distinguishing between economic virtue and vice. In this painting, the prostitute acts as a model for improper expenditure of money.³ To squander money on earthly temptations and lustful desires such as gambling, drink, and women was not only seen to be dishonorable and shameful, but was also not the means by which one could accumulate wealth and advance in a society centered around commerce and trade. Paintings such as these served as warnings and reminders of not only how to be virtuous, but also how to manage one’s funds, an issue that was a matter of daily concern in many Dutch households.

Intertwined with the warning against improper use of one’s financial resources, another meaning of The Procuress can be suggested as alluding to transience and the brevity of life. Earthly riches and temptations, and ultimately life in general, will eventually pass away and fall under death’s shadow. It is important to resist the attractions of lust and
wealth and to keep one’s soul untainted by leading a moral and virtuous life. The shiny coins and jewelry on the table will eventually tarnish and death will come to all of the characters.

Stephanie Stockbridge

3 North, 43.
4 Wheelock, 40.
LUDWIG RACH (1853- ?), German

Vanitas, 1876

Oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 39 1/8 in. (174.0 x 99.4 cm.)
Signed l.r.: “Rach, Munchen, ’76”
Unknown donor, 1986.13
Not previously exhibited
Unpublished

The painter, Ludwig Rach, was born in 1853 in the German town of Hattersheim. He studied in Munich, the capital of the art world in the middle to late nineteenth century, and which boasted the leading art schools on the continent. Rach eventually moved to New York where he continued to paint.

Vanitas, Latin for “vanity,” is a particular type of still life depicting objects that represent the brevity of human life and the temporality of material goods and achievements. The objects Rach used in his Vanitas—a skull, extinguished candle, a lute turned against the picture plane, a globe, dead foliage, and letters, are common images in vanitas paintings. These items, in addition to clocks, flowers, hourglasses, gold coins or jewelry, and a shifting flame have symbolic references originating from the fifteenth century when there was an interest in representing mortality and transience. We might think of this interest as perhaps a reference to the European casualties of the Bubonic plague that ravaged Europe between the mid-fourteenth century and the early 1600s. For this reason, these images are called “momento mori,” reminders of death. Vanitas painters from the seventeenth century such as Jacques Linard, Pieter Claesz, and Jan Davidsz de Heem, utilized these images as they guided the viewer to an introspective and self-questioning state of mind. Because the success of a vanitas painting depended on the communication of transience, vanitas painters, unlike other still life artists, were restricted to symbolic objects that reinforced themes of didactic morality.

Vanitas paintings served as emblems of religious meditation.1 The religious and the moral foundations of vanitas paintings earned the theme a popular place in religious art.2 The theme originated in northern Europe, and remained popular in both Holland and Germany, eventually becoming a major subject in seventeenth-century Dutch still life painting.3

A major construct of vanitas painting is time. The primary goal of the genre was not only to remind viewers of their own mortality, but also to communicate a warning to use what time was left wisely. Time plays a deciding role in the inclusion and exclusion of objects in vanitas paintings. The objects artists painted in still lifes were included because of the uncertainty and fragility of their existence, as metaphors for human life. The symbolic significance of Rach’s Vanitas extends beyond the objects in this painting. Rach’s placement of the objects represents the contingent nature of life and perpetuates the message of warning in vanitas paintings. The candle metaphorically represents the passage of time through the melted wax and sudden death in the extinguished flame. The globe is symbolic of the living world and stands in opposition to the skull, the only direct image of death around which all of the objects are organized. The structural aesthetics of a skull do not reveal race, gender, or age and easily represent the concept of mortality.4 The dried plant stalks are symbolic of the decaying effects of time and old age, and the lute symbolically reminds the viewer of the spiritual dangers or perdition associated with the abuse of earthly, and specifically carnal, pleasures.5 The unsealed letters that cover the table unceremoniously represent lives opened and finished. The letter towards the back of the picture plane is written in illegible scribble while the other supports semi-legible German print, suggestive of relevant informational content.6

The dark colors and the heavy use of shadow relates the somber and serious mood of the subject matter, and create associations in the viewer’s mind with death and mortality. A directed light source originates from the left side of the painting and is strengthened by the strong contrast with the background. This light source can allude to spiritual salvation as a light in the darkness, illuminating the pitfalls and illusions of the material world.

Lenka Podhrazsky

2 Vanitas paintings have been found on the backs of numerous portraits from the Counter Reformation (1560-1648). Donny Willett, “Vanitas by: Ludwig Rach” (Unpublished research paper, Dickinson College, 1984), 1.
3 Willets, 2. The seventeenth century witnessed the slight evolution of the traditional vanitas theme from a carefully arranged still life to a breakfast scene, usually showing peeled fruit, leftover food, a broken glass, and overturned plates, sometimes with a pocket watch nearby. This scene alluded to a meal interrupted by death, reminding the viewer of the transience and precariousness of existence.
4 Burke and Gerds, 90. “...the skull into which the gaze is not admitted, subject to immobile fixity.”
5 Burke and Gerds, 116. Calvinists believed that music, when not played during liturgies or for other religious purpose, led the mind away from religion displeasing God. Music was also associated with hearing, one of the five senses—an overlapping theme in vanitas paintings. Carnal pleasures were associated with sin and immorality.
6 Of the decipherable writing, I could not find definitions that matched these words exactly. This could be a result of spelling changes made over the century, or perhaps what the German used in the letter is written in a dialect. “Sitig,” close to “sittlich,” meaning moral or decent, “weidervorbereden,” close to “vorbereiten,” meaning to prepare for, or in context, to prepare again.
During the nineteenth century, Alexander Panton was a well-known British artist as he exhibited sixty-nine works with the Society of British Artists at Suffolk Street and was a member of the British Institution and the Royal Academy from 1866–1888. Inspired by the natural world around him, Panton’s seductive painting, Landscape, most likely represents a view of Kent or Surrey since he reproduced many scenes of these areas near London that capture the ephemeral and suggest the harmonious relationship between nature and culture.

Panton’s canvas is an idealized and manipulated window onto the world in which he framed a calculated temporal moment. He eternalized the view by sketching out-of-doors and then, in his studio to complete a more finished work, preserving the constantly changing environment as was the practice of his generation. Constable, with whom Panton would have been familiar since they exhibited in the same area, thought that in order to capture the beauty of nature the artist had to “walk in the fields with a humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see nature in all her beauty.” Furthermore, one can recognize the influence of Constable in Panton’s Landscape through the changing atmospheric effects that are depicted. Constable believed that “painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature,” as every artist believed that “painting is a science, and should improve life physically, socially, and morally.”

Although the composition is not overburdened with evidence of civilization, the images of the castle, house, boats, figures, fence, and beaten road imply the harmonious and unifying relationship between nature and culture. There are no factories, machinery, tree stumps, or evidence of a village—the water is crystal clear, and even the decaying castle and fence suggest neglect that occurred over an extended period of time rather than through purposeful destruction. The autumnal-colored foliage and vegetation are in full, vibrant bloom reflecting the point before death as fall will turn into winter reinforcing the continuance of the life cycle as all will be reborn in the spring. In addition, humanity is shown in the petite scale of the typically dressed figures, the castle, boat, and house that are not considered intrusions on the land, but are embraced, integrated, and fused into it. Moreover, the river represents a universal symbol for rural and urban areas that attest to the development of a prosperous British economy as many artists, including Turner and Constable, also included rivers in their paintings. The countryside itself played a vital role in society as it harbored the traditions and roots of Britain that the citizens used as a place of leisure and retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life as it was thought that one could receive healthful benefits from fresh air that improved life physically, socially, and morally.

Stylistically, the picturesque qualities evident in Panton’s Landscape are also based on the idea of travel for pleasure in that many individuals began to visit remote areas in search of the overwhelming and awe-inspiring “sublime” experience that was based on the vastness, immensity, and beauty of the landscape. Panton is able to evoke this “sublime,” sensuous, and contemplative encounter through the images of the neglected, beaten-down road, the overhanging trees, the crumbling castle perched high on the cliff, and the depiction of the remote scenic spot. These images create a sense of wonder and mystery that is further intensified by the evenly distributed artificial lighting that especially illuminates the branch and part of the road in the foreground, cascades onto the house and castle in the middle ground, and eventually extends and explodes into the vast skyline that consumes half of the canvas in the manner of Turner and Constable. The maps of lights and darks and varying hues of color throughout, along with the contrast of Panton’s loose and expressive brushwork in the highly detailed and texturized foreground, and the softer lines of the more obscure background, transport the viewer beyond the frame and into the sublime.

Landscape not only was an observation of the natural and the transient but was also a manipulation of the truth.
that was based on Panton’s own experience. By leading the viewer on a visual expedition through the tranquil and contemplative scene, Panton emphasizes the integration and unification of culture as the viewer becomes part of the land.

Marney Pelletier

5 Conrad, 23.
7 Hemingway, 27, 63.
EDMUND DARCH LEWIS (1835-1910), American

The Susquehanna at Duncannon, 1872

Oil on canvas, 36 x 60 1/4 in. (91.4 x 153.1 cm.)
Signed: l.r.: Edmund D. Lewis 1872
Gift of Mrs. Boyd Lee Spahr, Jr., 1955.1.1


Philadelphia born and raised, Edmund D. Lewis became a prolific artist during the nineteenth century and painted much of the local scenery including areas in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Although Lewis is best known for his watercolor seascapes, he took a particular interest in framing the areas along the prosperous banks of rivers including the Susquehanna, that corresponded with the rapid expansion of industrialization occurring at the time. Furthermore, his idealized and manipulated images that suggest the harmonious relationship between nature and culture are instilled in the transient moment Lewis represented.1

Susquehanna at Duncannon depicts a location just south of Duncannon at the junction of Sherman’s Creek and the Susquehanna River. From a northeast view, the small prosperous town is positioned on the left as Peters Mountain rises to the right of the viewer who is situated at the highest point in the foreground. The inclusion of figures, including the artist sketching out-of-doors and a geologist surveying the land, suggests the importance of capturing a true-to-life rendition of the earth from its inner skeletal frame to its visible outer core, hence the reason for possibly including a self-portrait in the work. By fusing art with science, Lewis was able to construct a plausible representation of Duncannon and beautify the scene by using artistic license in manipulating and framing certain images. For instance, Peters Mountain is shown with a jagged, alpine peak rather than the rounded crest and gentler slopes it possesses as seen in Lewis’ earlier painting of the same area, Susquehanna River with Bridge.2 Also, the ripples in the water are caused by the presence of resistant rocks on the riverbed, but the bridge in the distance with a small train pluming smoke is a fictive addition since the nearest bridge to the location during the 1870s was upstream a short distance.3

By exercising artistic license, Lewis created an idealized window onto the temporal world, locking a unique moment into eternity as the position of the figures, passing clouds, flowing water, and puffing smoke of the train and factory are made permanent. Moreover, in time, the transition from day into night will occur, the weather will alter, and the seasons will fluctuate causing changes to the view and land. Stylistically, even Lewis’ loose brushstrokes allude to the ephemeral in creating continuous movement throughout the detailed and orderly composition that is based on the formal layout employed by Claude Lorrain. In order to direct the viewer’s eye from his or her contemplative position amongst the colorful foliage and vegetation of the darkly framed foreground, Lewis adds a tranquil river that meanders into the endless and engulfing horizon of the background. Lewis evokes a sensuous experience in the painting through the seductive representation of nature and through the planar transitions of the work that transport the viewer into the landscape.4

As one moves past the picture frame and into the composition, he or she becomes unified and integrated into the landscape, emphasizing the cultural aspects of progress that seem minute in comparison to the vast panoramic landscape, but nevertheless denote harmony between nature and culture. Lewis seems to comment on the technological advances of the time and the great prosperous boom by picturing the railroad, factory, and town that are along the bank of the Susquehanna River. The locomotive itself played a role in the economic enhancement and growth of the area as it transported materials, supplies, and individuals to and from Duncannon. Lewis’ many sketchbooks that are stocked with images of nearby areas prove that he was an advocate of the train as he utilized it and followed the railroad lines in search for more worthy images to paint.5 Also, the factory alongside the river shows how industrialization was seen in a positive light for the nation as the structure unobtrusively rests next to the riverbank with smoke gently bellowing from its stacks. In comparison, the fumes protruding from the train are neither black nor intrusive but dissolve into the pure, clean, and drifting clouds, which suggests that the smoke is not harmful to the environment and humanity, and that industrialization and civilization harmoniously co-exist together. Furthermore, the small-scaled figures and domestic structures of the town propose integration rather than interference as they are dwarfed by the land and expansive atmosphere, relying that culture is secondary in scale, time, and age to the magnitude of nature.6 The suggested unity and relationship between civilization and wilderness does not refer to deliberate destruction of the land as there is an
absence of tree stumps, black smoke, and a rising metropolis. Lewis is most likely illustrating abundance and bountifulness through the plush grass and vibrant trees that reach for the clouds in full bloom.

Even though *Susquehanna at Duncannon* may have been a celebratory image promoting and embracing the age of progress, industrialization eventually reared its ugly head as a highway and railroad tracks have overrun and consumed the once pastoral foreground shown in the painting. Lewis’ canvas may have been an idealized and calculated view of Duncannon, but the vastness of the landscape and the fleeting moment allow the viewer to become one with nature and to be eternalized along with Lewis’ scenic view.

Marney Pelletier

---

2 Illustrated in *Susquehanna: Images of the Settled Landscape* exh. cat. (Binghamton, NY: Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences, 1981), 96, fig. 36.
Henry Boese was a native New Yorker whose landscape and portrait paintings were exhibited at the National Academy of Design in the mid-nineteenth century. Although little information exists about Boese’s training, the Valley of the Cumberland reveals a picturesque, detailed depiction of a landscape in the Barbizon School tradition.

With the end of the French Revolution in the beginning of the nineteenth century came a time of civic revolt and personal expression in France. Artists took full advantage and outwardly rejected the orthodox Salon system of painting, risking financial hardship to establish their own style. The tiny town of Barbizon, forty miles southeast of Paris, became the birthplace for an essentially new form of landscape painting in Europe.

The artists of the Barbizon School came together through a common sentiment toward their position in the predominantly bourgeois society. Subject to constraints governing eighteenth-century France, they found themselves in a frustrating situation as a product of the Salon system, forced to compete with other artists already well established in their careers. Rejecting conformity in every realm of the artistic world at the turn of the century, the Barbizon painters chose to focus on landscape painting in a style that had yet to be officially recognized in Europe. To personalize the genre further, these artists sought to incorporate their own philosophical ideas and individual attitudes “so that the painting would not simply be the view of a particular scene but the expression of a state of mind in response to that scene.” However, the essence of the Barbizon School was defined by the urge to rebel against an increasingly industrialized, money-hungry society that gradually corrupted the eternal beauty and purity of nature.

The Valley of the Cumberland encapsulates the stylistic and contextual elements of the European Barbizon tradition, as it records an American scene untouched by the effects of colonization and industrialization, revealing a moment of calm before the storm. The vast expanse of space with a few trees in the foreground, together with the image of the cattle watching the travelers from across the stream, are common images in Barbizon paintings. The carefully framed, hospitable space creates an artistic window through which the viewer is only allowed to observe the event, and whose participation is limited by a sense of inaccessibility created by the foliage in the foreground. The scenery seems to roll past the viewer in a wide stretch of land as it once existed, untouched by civilization. The storm clouds moving in from the left generate a sense of impending doom, a condition which can be connected with the men on horseback illuminated by a ray of sunlight.

The darkness of the storm and the concentrated sunlight add an element of drama to the scene. The placement of the clouds over the animals and the dilapidated forest to the left, with a benign light originating from some point along the trodden path, suggests a distinct association between the natural elements and cultural intrusion.

The land of the Cumberland Valley, since its early settlement in the first half of the eighteenth century, was subject to massive cultural and economic conflict. Immigrants from the New World rapidly began to move West to find fertile land and resources, eventually approaching Indian territory. Initially, the government often purchased land from the Indians, which was then divided and sold to individual settlers. Property that the Indians were not willing to sell was superficially secured by a series of treaties. However, such a rapid and incorrigible settlement of the West led way to undocumented inhabitation as immigrants wildly began to secure land for themselves, and hundreds of thousands of acres of the valley’s best land were illegally claimed. The influx of European settlers not only banished the Indians from their own land, but the unruly colonization debased the beauty of the American landscape.

The infiltration of European immigrants, the new American “bourgeoisie” class, in the early to mid-eighteenth century parallels the cultural changes in France after the French Revolution. The idea of the stronger, wealthier classes imposing themselves upon a weaker society, and the industrialist ideals with which they associate, was the primary source of unrest that governed the Barbizon School of thought. Boese’s image of the wealthy white men on horseback in contrast to the natural elements residing under a dark storm cloud suggests the inevitable colonization of the land and the destruction of nature. The scene captures the final moments of natural purity, while foreshadowing its eventual demise.


3 Bouret, 9.

4 Bouret, 12.

5 Bouret, 13.

6 Bouret, 21.


8 Wing, 21.
Although *Floral Still Life* has no attribution or date, stylistic comparison suggests that this painting was produced by an artist from the Antwerp Guild during the first half of the eighteenth century, possibly Jan Frans van Bredael (1683-1750). Historically known as the Guild of Saint Luke, the guild housed a number of great master painters, including Jan Brueghel the Elder, Jan Davidz de Heem, and Jan Peter van Bredael and sons. Jan Frans was the grandson of Jan Peter van Bredael, a master and dean of the guild during the 1680s. Technically, the precise application of paint and nearly invisible brushstrokes used to create the flowers parallel the technique used in the naturalistic style that Dutch masters sought. Although he was better known for painting religious and military subjects, Jan Frans van Bredael copied the style of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), who was nicknamed “Flower” Brueghel for his great floral still life paintings.1 De Heem was a great floral painter from Antwerp during the second half of the seventeenth century, and *Floral Still Life* shares many stylistic qualities with his paintings and many other painters of still lifes from the late seventeenth century.2

Prior to the late sixteenth century when flowers became a painted genre in their own right, flowers served as religious symbols in paintings and had predetermined religious meaning, based on iconographic tradition. The blue iris, one of the flowers pictured in *Floral Still Life*, would have served as a royal symbol of The Madonna during the fifteenth century, but in the seventeenth century, this was not always the case.3 Therefore, religious meaning cannot be assumed (or ruled out) without a record of the painting’s commission.

*Floral Still Life* encapsulates nature, mortality, and the culture of seventeenth-century Holland. The precise, naturalistic rendering of the flowers in a glass vase and the central, closed composition suggest that these majestically painted flowers held a great deal of importance for the Dutch nobility, for whom these paintings were largely commissioned. After the introduction of the tulip to Holland in the sixteenth century, three of which were painted in the center of *Floral Still Life*, Tulipomania became a popular term used to describe the overwhelmingly high demand for the rare tulip bulb, most notably among the aristocracy. Burglars ripped bulbs out of private gardens and ridiculously high prices were paid at the height of Tulipomania (1636) for the *Semper Augustus*, the red and white striped tulips that were the most prized because of their rarity.4 Because of their extreme value and the scandal and crime associated with tulips, these flowers became objects of (im)morality and folly, as well as symbols of wealth and aristocracy.5

The vanitas, the theme of humanity’s fleeting existence, was predominant during the Golden Age of Holland and gave flowers a more universally moralizing meaning rather than a religious meaning. The reflection of a street scene on the vase in *Floral Still Life*, a common characteristic of De Heem and other Antwerp floral painters, serves as a window onto Dutch life much as the entire painting does. Whether or not the painting was intended to serve a religious purpose, the floral still life evokes a moral message about the transience of earthly existence. The three tulips, which are depicted as a tightly closed bud, a blossoming flower, and a fully bloomed tulip at its last hours of life, can symbolize the three stages of life. Because of the noble history that these flowers possessed to the Dutch, they suggest that all, even the powerful and wealthy, will perish. Roses, a symbol of love, suggest the transience of beauty and the inconstancy of love.6 Here, at the bottom left corner of the painting, three tiny red and pink roses can serve as a reminder of the beauty but short life of human love.

The sumptuously painted flowers in *Floral Still Life* are alluring reminders of the beautiful temptations in life as they preserve the decadence but also the decay of all that lives. Most of the flowers at the top of the painting point upwards and they are in their most beautiful and vibrant state. As the viewer moves towards the center of the painting the flowers are in full bloom at their final moments before they begin to wilt and droop. Nearly all of the flowers at the bottom of the painting are pointing downward, suggesting death, illness, or sorrow; they are at the end of their lives. Ironically, however, these flowers in the painting will live forever because they were frozen in time by the artist.

Flowers are obvious symbols of transience because of their short lives, but nothing else in *Floral Still Life* suggests longevity. The delicate glass vase on a hard, cracked, concrete surface can be seen to represent the fragility of life. Tiny details, such as the water droplets and insects hold equal importance with the flowers. The water will evaporate as the day progresses and insects live extremely short lives in relation to human life. Although all of the insects in the painting are images of transience, they also suggest individual themes. Flies were carriers of the plague and can represent evil, or they can stand for obstinacy and the difficulties of life since they torment humanity. Caterpillars were often symbolic of man on earth until he is “resurrected” into a butterfly. Ants symbolized daily, hard work.7

Paintings like *Floral Still Life* hold a wealth of meaning.
in their symbolism. They can be seen as a social and moral commentary. The majority of people in seventeenth-century Antwerp believed that “the world had been made significant by God,” and “objects were teachers” that “told of God’s power, divinity, wisdom, and goodness.” Therefore, whether or not this painting was meant to serve a religious purpose, *Floral Still Life* was probably a moralizing image. As Taylor notes, “flowers were reminders of death, bearers of Divine messages, complex historical objects.”

Maureen Shimp

---

2 For visual comparison, see Mitchell, 132-135.
3 Mitchell, 13.
5 For further details on the effects of Tulipomania, see Taylor, 14.
6 Taylor, 56-57.
7 Taylor, 75-76.
8 Taylor, 1.
9 Taylor, 1.