



The Hudson River School (Treasures of Art)

Trewin Coppleson

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The so-called Hudson River School has a place of special importance in the history of American painting. Although there were many 'professional' artists working in the early and developing American society from the 17th to the 19th centuries, most of them, apart from the many charming naive practitioners, were itinerant portrait painters or those who looked to Europe for their style and subject matter. It was not until the early 19th century that artists began to consider the landscape which surrounded them as an interesting subject in itself; when they did, they perceived a grandeur, spaciousness and quality of natural beauty which filled them with awe and wonderment.

It was this opening of the eyes of their compatriots to their natural heritage that these painters, who have come to be known as the Hudson River School, initiated. Although, in the first instance, it was the area of the Hudson River stretching northwards from New York that first entranced them, as the American continent towards the Rockies unfolded, the artists followed and produced work that revealed a magnificence of scale—the great lakes, the towering mountains, deep valleys and gorges of the land in which they found themselves. In this way, although the Hudson River was the first area to exert its influence on these landscapists and gave its name to them, their work spread widely to encompass the whole land.

There was also another, transcendental, aspect to their work. they recognized the hand of God in their new environment and accordingly introduced a sense of divine mission into their painting which appealed to the adventurous religious spirit of the early settlers. Through this, their art acquired a new significance which had previously been absent.

The story of the artists and their pictorial crusade is included in this selective survey which, of its nature, can only include a small number of the very many who have been identified with the Hudson River School.

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