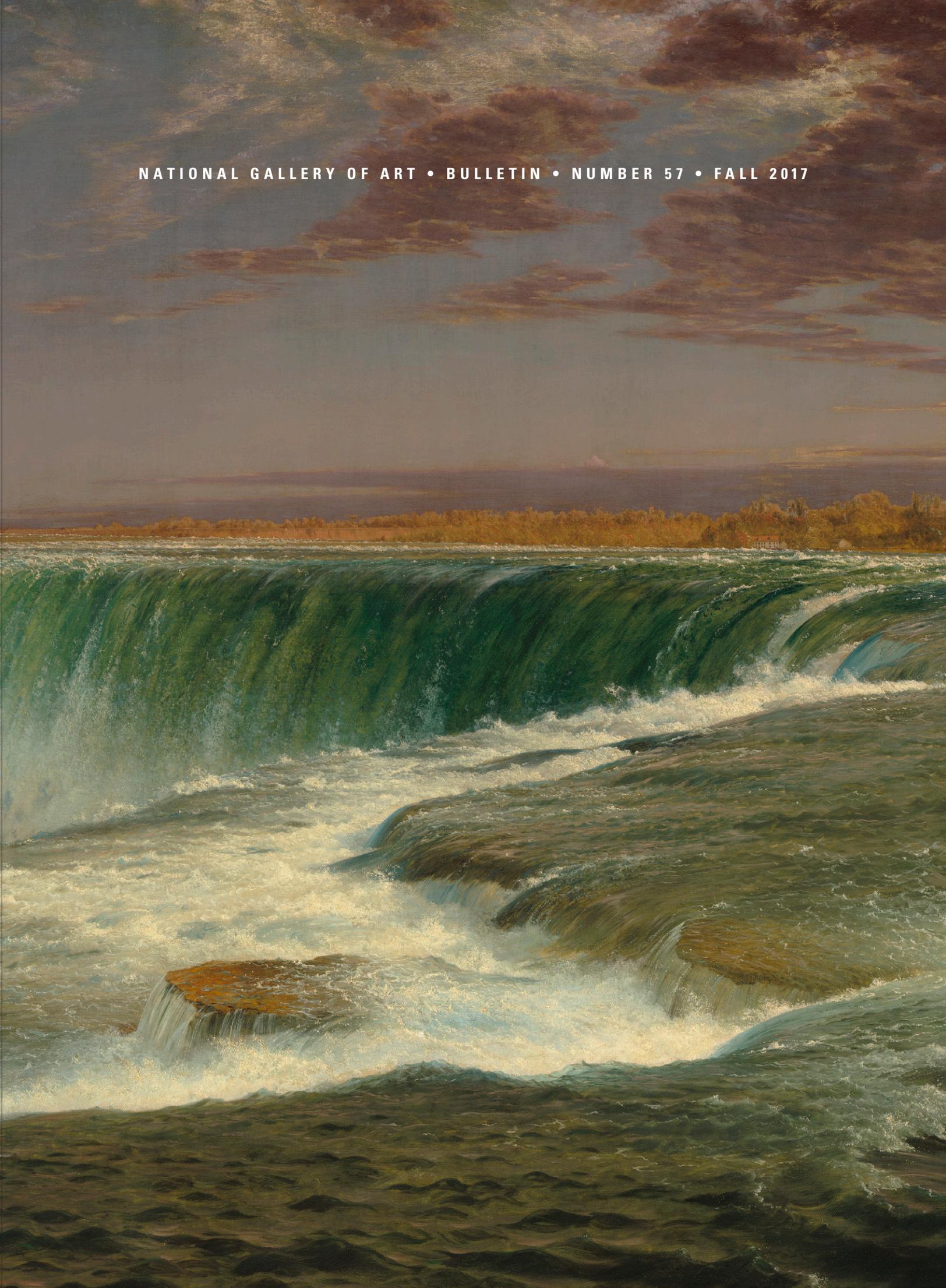


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A Collection Transformed:

• Nancy Anderson, *Curator and Head of the Department of American and British Paintings*



American Paintings at the National Gallery of Art

In 1941, when the National Gallery of Art opened, fewer than a dozen American paintings were on view in three very sparsely hung galleries. Seventy-five years later, the Gallery's collection of American paintings numbers more than 1,400 works with fourteen West Building galleries devoted to American art. Extraordinary gifts from Andrew W. Mellon, Chester Dale, Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, Paul and Bunny Mellon, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, John Hay Whitney, Joan and David Maxwell, John Wilmerding, and many others have contributed to the growth of a collection exceptionally rich in iconic works.

Perhaps no decade, however, has witnessed the addition of more transformative American paintings than that beginning in 2007, when not only the size, but also the depth of the collection increased enormously. A final bequest from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, additional gifts from Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr., initial and promised gifts from William and Abigail Gerdts, and the historic addition of more than 250 stunning American paintings from the Corcoran Collection have elevated an already outstanding collection to one of unsurpassed depth and quality.

Fig. 1. William Sidney Mount, *The Tough Story — Scene in a Country Tavern*, 1837, oil on wood, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

The welcome addition of so many remarkable paintings during the last decade presented the Gallery's curatorial team with both challenges and opportunities. The challenges emerged immediately — how to show as many works as possible without additional gallery space and without crowding gallery walls. Space restrictions, initially perceived as daunting, soon became the impetus to rethink the entire American installation.

The addition of works by more than eighty artists previously unrepresented in the Gallery's collection meant that important gaps could be filled. Artists once represented by a single work could be shown in career-defining depth. Narratives fundamental to the history of American art could be explored through telling juxtapositions within single galleries. An entire gallery could be devoted to the extraordinary images of women produced by the "Boston School," an important chapter in American cultural history previously untold at the National Gallery.

Over a two-year period, working with colleagues throughout the museum, curators reviewed every wall within the American galleries to select paintings that would significantly broaden and enhance the nation's rich and complex cultural history as reflected in the works of its most gifted artists. More than sixty exceptional American paintings — new to the collection during the last decade — are now on public view.

New Artists

Although the Gallery's collection of American genre paintings has long been viewed as distinguished, several key artists were not represented. Over the years, the absence of major works by William Sidney Mount and Richard Caton Woodville posed an especially difficult curatorial challenge as important paintings by both artists had become exceedingly rare. With the addition of paintings from the Corcoran Collection, however, Mount and Woodville are now represented by signature works that clearly reflect the subtle humor for which both artists are justly celebrated.

In Mount's *The Tough Story — Scene in a Country Tavern* (fig. 1), a patron with his head and knee wrapped in bandages (described by the artist as a "Barroom Oracle") regales the tavern owner with his unending story of personal misfortune. An amused smile on the face of the standing figure eavesdropping on the conversation suggests that the tale merits a skeptical response. Woodville's tavern scene in *Waiting for the Stage* (fig. 2) is far more sinister. A traveling con man (carpetbag at his side) and his accomplice (a supposed blind man reading a newspaper titled *The Spy*) are engaged in cheating a patron whose wedding ring suggests family responsibilities. Woodville, who died at age thirty, completed fewer than a dozen oil paintings during his brief career. The addition of *Waiting for the Stage* fills a gap in the collection of American genre paintings that once seemed insurmountable.

Fig. 2. Richard Caton Woodville, *Waiting for the Stage*, 1851, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, William A. Clark Fund, and through the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Lansdell K. Christie and Orme Wilson)



Fig. 3. Richard Norris Brooke, *A Pastoral Visit*, 1881, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

Fig. 4. Severin Roesen, *Still Life, Flowers, and Fruit*, 1848, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase through the gift of Orme Wilson)

The first painting by Richard Norris Brooke, *A Pastoral Visit* (fig. 3), also entered the collection recently. Painted a short distance from Washington in Warrenton, Virginia, *A Pastoral Visit* is the artist's most celebrated painting. In sparsely populated rural areas, where congregations were unable to provide a minister with a parsonage, it was the custom to invite him to Sunday dinner. By tradition, the parson was served first—the moment captured in Brooke's painting. The artist's Warrenton neighbors served as models for a genre painting as rich in still-life vignettes as it is in historic narrative.

Over the span of many years, the Gallery's collection of American still-life paintings has grown in depth and distinction, yet major figures remained unrepresented. Thus the first work by Severin Roesen, perhaps the most celebrated floral painter of the nineteenth century, was a welcome addition. *Still Life, Flowers, and Fruit* (fig. 4) by Roesen now hangs near two elegantly composed tabletop arrangements by Raphaelle Peale, *Still Life with Apples, Sherry, and Tea Cake* (1822) and *Strawberries and Cream* (1816), both gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. In the same gallery is the first painting by African American artist Robert Seldon Duncanson to enter the collection. The acquisition of *Still Life with Fruit and Nuts* (fig. 5) was made possible with funds provided by Ann and Mark Kington/The Kington Foundation and the Avalon Fund.

Perhaps the most remarkable still-life painting to enter the American collection recently is another work of such rarity that curators might be forgiven for thinking that the addition of such a work by Charles Bird King would depend upon the discovery of a great lost painting. With the addition of the



Fig. 5. Robert Seldon Duncanson, *Still Life with Fruit and Nuts*, 1848, oil on board, Gift of Ann and Mark Kington/The Kington Foundation and the Avalon Fund



Fig. 6. Charles Bird King, *Poor Artist's Cupboard*, c. 1815, oil on wood, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund and Exchange)

Corcoran Collection, however, King's sly masterpiece *Poor Artist's Cupboard* (fig. 6) joined the collection. Before moving to Washington, DC, where he painted portraits of visiting Indian delegations for the war department, King worked in Philadelphia. Although he enjoyed some early success, King's commentary on Philadelphia arts patronage in *Poor Artist's Cupboard* is clear. At the center of the composition is a calling card from "Mrs. Skinflint" inviting the artist to visit "after tea"; nearby are books with titles that include *Advantages of Poverty*, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and *Miseries of Life*. In the upper left corner is an advertisement for a sheriff's sale listing "the property of an artist" including several still-life paintings of sumptuous meals painted "from recollection." In the foreground, stale bread and a glass of water suggest that the "poor artist" of the title enjoys a far less sumptuous meal. Cloaked in humor, King's trompe l'oeil painting is filled with pointed social commentary.

Although the Gallery's collection of early and mid-nineteenth-century landscape paintings is exceptionally strong, the impact of impressionism on landscape artists working near the end of the century was less well represented. The collection did not include, for example, a landscape by Abbott Handerson Thayer, one of the most prominent members of the group of artists associated with the artists' colony near Dublin, New Hampshire. A stunningly evocative view of Thayer's favorite subject, *Mount Monadnock* (fig. 7), has now entered



Fig. 7. Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Mount Monadnock*, c. 1911/1914, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Anna E. Clark Fund)

the collection. A naturalist as well as an artist, Thayer deeply admired the transcendentalists, particularly Ralph Waldo Emerson (whose poem “Monadnoc” he knew), and Henry David Thoreau, who climbed Mount Monadnock multiple times and likened the ascent to climbing the steps of a temple.

Like Thayer, Pennsylvania impressionist Daniel Garber became associated with a group of artists later described as a “colony” gathered near New Hope, on the Delaware River. It was there, in the Pennsylvania countryside, that Garber found the landscape subjects for which he is best known. *April Landscape* (fig. 8), a light-filled view of an open field, is a prime example of Garber’s best work and the first landscape by the artist to enter the collection.

In addition to the fascinating links present in paintings created by artists who worked together in like-minded colonies, recent acquisitions include works that illuminate teacher/student relationships. Certainly, Thomas Cole’s influence on Frederic Edwin Church is a story that can be explored in depth given the Gallery’s holdings by both artists. Much less well known is the teacher/student relationship that developed between the influential German-born artist Paul Weber and Thomas Moran. Weber’s *Scene in the Catskills* (fig. 9) is the first work by the artist to enter the Gallery’s collection. Moran, who was a young artist learning his craft in Philadelphia during the 1850s and 1860s when Weber resided in the city, was just one of the artists who benefited from Weber’s instruction. Before Moran journeyed west in 1871 and found his career-changing subject in Yellowstone, he painted eastern landscapes that clearly reflect Weber’s example. Works by teacher and student now hang in the same gallery — Weber’s Catskill mountain scene and Moran’s *The Juniata, Evening* (1864), a gift of Max and Heidi Berry and Ann and Mark Kington/ The Kington Foundation.



Fig. 8. Daniel Garber, *April Landscape*, 1910, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

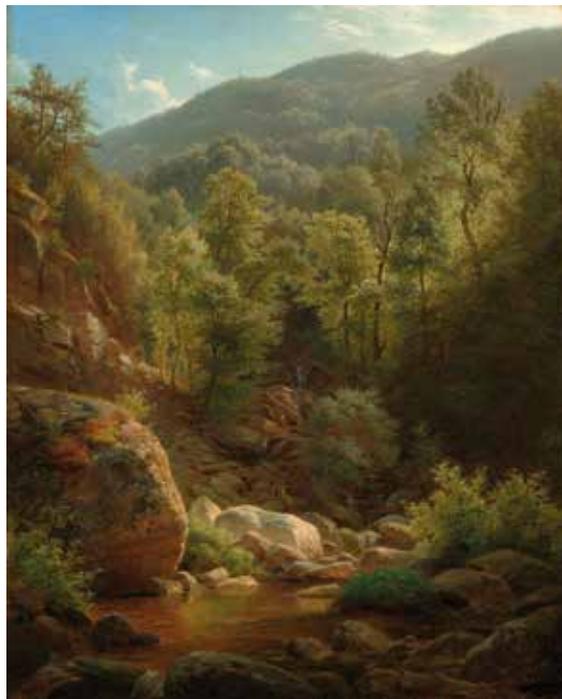


Fig. 9. Paul Weber, *Scene in the Catskills*, 1858, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Gift of William Wilson Corcoran)

With works by so many artists new to the Gallery’s collection, additional discoveries linking teachers and students, artists and patrons, undoubtedly lie ahead.



New Depth

For many years, Thomas Cole's four-canvas series, *The Voyage of Life* (1842), has filled the octagonal gallery that introduces the American collection. As founder of the Hudson River School of landscape painters, Cole has long enjoyed pride of place in the landscape galleries, yet an important gap remained. The Gallery's collection of paintings by Cole did not include a paired set of allegorical works reflecting the artist's continued exploration of two-part narrative — often focused on the passage of time. Two paintings from the Corcoran Collection have now filled that gap in spectacular fashion. *The Departure* (fig. 10) and *The Return* (fig. 11) were commissioned by one of Cole's most important patrons, William Paterson Van Rensselaer, who had admired the artist's five-canvas series now in the collection of the New-York Historical Society, *The Course of Empire* (1836). Acting on his stated goal of creating a "higher style of landscape," Cole conceived of two works in which landscape elements (sunrise and sunset, morning and evening, summer and autumn) were paired with human experience (knights departing and returning from battle, life and death). Cole's crucial role in the development of American landscape painting, including his most accomplished set of paired works, may now be seen at the National Gallery with outstanding examples from all stages of his career.

The first painting by Winslow Homer to enter the Gallery's collection, *Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)* (1873–1876), was

Fig. 10. Thomas Cole, *The Departure*, 1837, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Gift of William Wilson Corcoran)

Fig. 11. Thomas Cole, *The Return*, 1837, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Gift of William Wilson Corcoran)



Fig. 12. Winslow Homer, *A Light on the Sea*, 1897, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

acquired in 1943 with funds provided by the W. L. and May T. Mellon Foundation. Since that time more than eighty paintings, drawings, and prints by Homer have been added to the collection, including five oil paintings acquired during the last decade. In the Fall 2014 issue of the *Bulletin*, Franklin Kelly discussed *School Time* (c. 1874) and *The Flirt* (1874), two works from the bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon with important links to other works by Homer already in the collection. Two paintings from the Corcoran Collection, *A Light on the Sea* (fig. 12) and *Sketch of a Cottage Yard* (c. 1876), are the most recent additions to the Homer collection.

An enigmatic late painting, *A Light on the Sea*, joins several other works by Homer in the collection featuring an isolated female figure at the center of the composition. With a fishing net over her shoulder, Homer's mysterious figure walks along a rocky shore. Startled, perhaps by an unidentified sound, she twists, somewhat awkwardly, to look over her shoulder. Considering the dominant position of the figure, it is surprising that Homer referenced two other compositional elements when he chose *A Light on the Sea* as the title of the painting. The ominous light behind the figure is as mysterious as the woman. Is the moon the source? Does



Fig. 13. Albert Bierstadt, *Buffalo Trail: The Impending Storm*, 1869, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, through the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lansdell K. Christie)

the light herald a coming storm? Homer left multiple questions unanswered. Of all the works by Homer in the collection, only *Right and Left* (1909), completed one year before the artist's death, bears a later date. The addition of these works, together with John Wilmerding's promised gift of *Sparrow Hall* (c. 1881–1882), has created a collection of such depth that Homer's entire career can be traced at the National Gallery with works of exceptional quality from each of the five decades that mark his mature career.

Gifts from private collectors and additions from the Corcoran Collection have added depth to the Gallery's holdings for many artists, but perhaps no artist has benefited more than Albert Bierstadt. The timely rediscovery of the long-lost *Lake Lucerne* (1858) in 1990 and its subsequent acquisition with funds provided by Richard M. Scaife and Margaret R. Battle in honor of the Gallery's 50th anniversary, allowed the first work by Bierstadt to enter the collection in dramatic fashion.

The first of Bierstadt's celebrated six-by-ten-foot panoramic landscapes, *Lake Lucerne* was much admired when first exhibited in New York in the spring of 1858. Within months of its debut, the painting was purchased by businessman

Alvin Adams of Watertown, Massachusetts, who opened his private art gallery to the public one day a week. Following Adams's death in 1877, *Lake Lucerne* disappeared for more than a century. The painting resurfaced in Rhode Island when the widow of the painting's hitherto-unknown second owner died and *Lake Lucerne* was discovered wedged between the floor and ceiling of a bedroom in her home.

Bierstadt's stunningly beautiful Swiss landscape was an important addition to the collection, but shortly after completing the painting, the artist joined Frederick W. Lander's survey expedition to the Rocky Mountains and in the American West found the subject for which he is best known. The absence of a western landscape by Bierstadt constituted a major gap in the collection. With the addition of six paintings by Bierstadt from the Corcoran Collection, the artist is now represented by outstanding examples of his best work from the 1850s (*Lake Lucerne*), the 1860s (*Buffalo Trail: The Impending Storm*) (fig. 13), the 1870s (*Mount Corcoran*) (fig. 14), and the 1880s (*The Last of the Buffalo*) (fig. 15). The full scope of Bierstadt's contribution to American landscape painting may now be studied in depth within the Gallery's collection.

In 2004 John Wilmerding, former curator of American art and deputy director at the National Gallery, announced his extraordinary gift to the nation of more than fifty American paintings and drawings. Among

Fig. 14. Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Corcoran*, c. 1876–1877, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

Fig. 15. Albert Bierstadt, *The Last of the Buffalo*, 1888, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Gift of Mary Stewart Bierstadt [Mrs. Albert Bierstadt])



Fig. 16. George Caleb Bingham,
The Jolly Flatboatmen, 1846, oil on
 canvas, Patrons' Permanent Fund

these was the first painting by George Caleb Bingham to enter the collection, *Mississippi Boatman* (1850). Born in Virginia but raised in Missouri, Bingham learned his craft from an itinerant portrait painter. Although he completed numerous portraits of prosperous settlers, Bingham's finest work is focused on the more colorful aspects of frontier life along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers at midcentury. By far the most celebrated of these paintings is *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (fig. 16), one of the most recent and most important additions to the collection during the last decade.

Until the acquisition of works by Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, John Mix Stanley, Alfred Jacob Miller, and Seth Eastman during the last five years, westward expansion was not a story that could be told in the American galleries at the National Gallery. Now, important works by the major artists who journeyed west, recorded what they saw, and subsequently introduced new landscape and genre subjects to American art are now on view — introduced by George Caleb Bingham's masterpiece, *The Jolly Flatboatmen*.



New Narratives

In 1997 the plaster version of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's magnificent monument in honor of Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment was installed in the American galleries. A memorial to the first African American regiment formed in the North following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and one of the most popular and important objects in the collection, the sculpture is on long-term loan from the Saint-Gaudens Historic Site in Cornish, New Hampshire. For many years, the gallery in which the sculpture was installed, together with a selection of preliminary clay models, was focused entirely on the monument and its creator. Two paintings, both from the Corcoran Collection, have now been added to the gallery, expanding the narrative to include images with broader Civil War resonance. George Peter Alexander Healy's moving portrait of president-elect Abraham Lincoln and William MacLeod's wartime view of Harpers Ferry are both steeped in contemporary history.

Abraham Lincoln was elected president on November 6, 1860. Three weeks before the election, eleven-year-old Grace Bedell from Westfield, New York, sent candidate Lincoln a letter in which she wrote that his appearance—as well as his chances for election—might be improved if he grew whiskers. On October 19, 1860, Lincoln replied, noting that since he had never worn whiskers the change might be viewed as an “affectation.” Nevertheless, Lincoln began to grow a beard and when traveling from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington, DC, for his inauguration, he made a point of stopping in Westfield where he asked to meet Miss Bedell. Several newspapers reported that Lincoln spoke to the young girl and delighted in showing her his newly grown whiskers.

The portrait of Lincoln by George Peter Alexander Healy (fig. 17) that now hangs opposite the Shaw Memorial was the first life portrait completed after Lincoln was elected president in

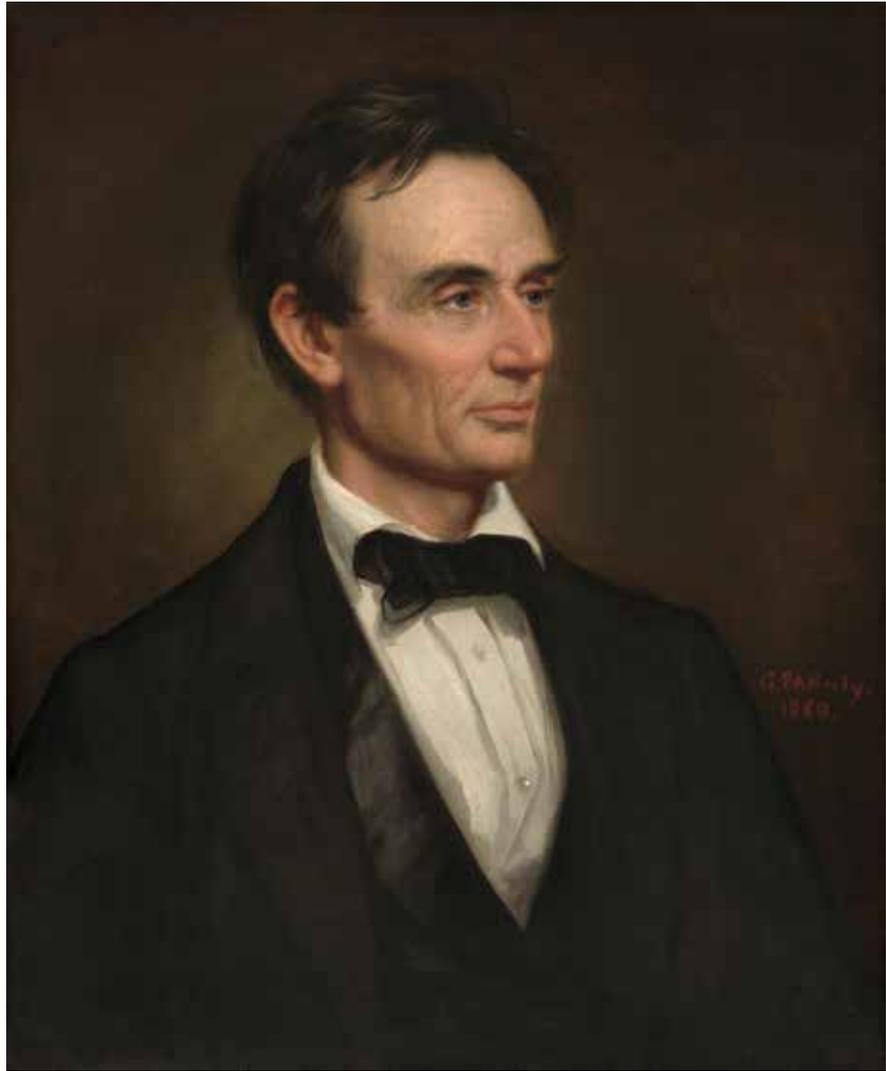


Fig. 17. George Peter Alexander Healy, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1860, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)



Fig. 18. Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

1860 and also the last to show him without a beard. The portrait was commissioned by Thomas B. Bryan, a Chicago businessman and philanthropist, who was assembling a collection of presidential portraits and who knew Lincoln personally. Four days after the election, Bryan sent Healy to Springfield with a letter of introduction asking Lincoln to sit for a portrait. Lincoln agreed and Healy began without delay. The president-elect reportedly shared Bedell's letter with the artist while sitting for his portrait. By November 15, 1860, nine days after the election, Healy had completed the portrait of Lincoln now at the National Gallery.

A second work, *Maryland Heights: Siege of Harpers Ferry* (1863) by William MacLeod, has also been added to the Shaw gallery. MacLeod, who had studied painting in Europe, was working at the Treasury Department in Washington during the Civil War. Harpers Ferry, often described as Washington's "back door," was strategically located at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers just sixty miles from the nation's capital. In June 1863,

Robert E. Lee launched his second northern campaign leading the Army of Northern Virginia from Richmond into Maryland and later Pennsylvania. Anticipating an attack, Union forces fortified Maryland Heights, the highest defensive position above Harpers Ferry and the subject of MacLeod's painting. Lee, however, did not attack, choosing instead to continue his march north without delay.

With the addition of Healy's historic portrait of Lincoln and MacLeod's military landscape, the Shaw Memorial is given broader historical context. It was Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 that precipitated the formation of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment just six months before Lee's army, marching north near Harpers Ferry, met Union forces on the battlefield at Gettysburg.

Another gallery transformed by the addition of multiple new works is the room devoted to mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting. Frederic Edwin Church's magnificent *Niagara* (fig. 18), perhaps the most famous painting in the Corcoran Collection, now hangs opposite the artist's last



large-scale tropical view, *El Rio de Luz (The River of Light)* (fig. 19). Completed twenty years apart, the two paintings represent one of the richest pairings in a gallery designed to offer visitors and educators many narrative options.

Before the discovery of Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls was America's most celebrated natural wonder. Numerous artists had attempted to capture the grandeur of the falls before Church made his first visit in the spring of 1856. Before the end of the year, he made three additional visits completing numerous pencil and watercolor sketches from multiple vantage points. Surviving studies suggest that the artist considered numerous compositional strategies before deciding, boldly, to eliminate the foreground. A radical break from traditional renderings that

offered viewers the illusion of solid ground from which to survey the falls, Church's inspired choice placed the viewer amidst rapidly moving water about to plunge over the falls. Exhibited to much acclaim at home and abroad, *Niagara* won Church an international reputation.

El Rio de Luz, the South American landscape Church completed two decades after *Niagara*, could hardly be more different. The two paintings, now installed across from one another, offer visitors, educators, and docents numerous comparative options. The roar of cascading water that implicitly accompanies Church's vertiginous view of Niagara Falls is absent in his late tropical view. Instead, heavy moist air suffused with filtered light weighs on still water only slightly disturbed by birds taking flight. Quiet replaces roar with

Fig. 19. Frederic Edwin Church, *El Rio de Luz (The River of Light)*, 1877, oil on canvas, Gift of the Avalon Foundation



Fig. 20. South wall of West Building Main Floor gallery showing paintings by Worthington Whittredge, John Frederick Kensett, Frederic Edwin Church, and John La Farge



Fig. 21. North wall of West Building Main Floor gallery showing paintings by William Stanley Haseltine, Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran

even the implied sound of tropical birds muffled by humid air. Described by one scholar as the artist’s “last and perhaps greatest psychic landscape,” *El Rio de Luz* was composed by Church from memory and from sketches completed on his trips to South America years earlier. Now Church’s last great tropical landscape hangs across from his greatest North American subject and just steps from Thomas Cole’s four-part series *The Voyage of Life*. As Cole’s only student, Church may have had his mentor in mind when he placed a single figure in a small boat sailing into undefined space on the distant horizon in *El Rio de Luz*.

Niagara and *El Rio de Luz* anchor the north and south walls of the midcentury

landscape gallery and serve as the defining works for two distinct yet concurrent artistic pursuits. On the south side of the gallery (fig. 20), on either side of *Niagara*, are works by John Frederick Kensett, Worthington Whittredge, John La Farge, Fitz Henry Lane, and Alfred Thompson Bricher—all superb examples of a type of New England landscape characteristic of second-generation Hudson River School artists. Often described as representing the “still small voice” of landscape painting, these works frequently feature the rocky New England coastline, figures engaged in leisure activities, and a wide range of lighting effects. On the north side of the gallery (fig. 21), on either side of *El Rio de Luz*, are paintings by William Stanley Haseltine, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran that testify to the simultaneous artistic pursuit of exotic subject matter. Four of the seven paintings in this grouping are new to the Gallery’s collection—an early tropical view by Church, *Tamaca Palms* (1854), Bierstadt’s *Buffalo Trail: The Impending Storm*, and Gifford’s *Ruins of the Parthenon* (fig. 22), all from the Corcoran Collection, and Moran’s *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming* (fig. 23), a gift of the Milligan and Thomson families. The artists who created these works traveled great distances, often under harsh conditions, in search of subject matter they could claim as distinctly their own.

The juxtaposition of Gifford’s painting of the Parthenon and Moran’s western landscape, both installed on the north side of the landscape gallery, offers one of the most instructive comparisons in the room. Long before Gifford visited the Acropolis in 1869, artists had journeyed to Greece, Italy, and other European sites to marvel at the ruins of ancient civilizations, often lamenting the lack of such ancient markers in the New World. It was not until the discovery of “ancient” landscapes in the American West, that a

Fig. 22. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Ruins of the Parthenon*, 1880, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)



Fig. 23. Thomas Moran, *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming*, 1881, oil on canvas, Gift of the Milligan and Thomson Families



Fig. 24. William Merritt Chase,
A Friendly Call, 1895, oil on canvas,
Chester Dale Collection

Fig. 25. Daniel Garber, *South Room —
Green Street*, 1920, oil on canvas, Corcoran
Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)



negative became a positive. America had ancient history — ancient geologic history laid bare by the forces of wind and water in Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and, as in Moran's painting, the sculpted cliffs of Green River, Wyoming. Together, the paintings by Gifford and Moran speak of man's ancient history in the Old World and ancient geological history in the Americas.

Stories abound in the American paintings collection, but perhaps none is more poignant than the visit Sanford Gifford made to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1880. His brother James, who accompanied him on this visit, later reported that when they reached the space where Church's *Niagara* was on view, Gifford said, "There would be a good place for my *Parthenon*" — the painting he had labored over during what were, unexpectedly, the last months of his life. The two paintings now hang a short distance apart in the same gallery.

New Chapter

As plans for the reinstallation of the East Building began to take shape in 2014, curators proposed that American paintings often described as early modern (works by George Bellows, Edward Hopper, Robert Henri, John Sloan, Marsden Hartley, and others) move from the West Building to a new set of galleries in the East Building where they might join a broader narrative devoted to the advent of modernism. When all agreed that such a change was highly desirable, the West Building gallery in which the early modern works had traditionally been on view became available for reinstallation. An entirely new chapter in the history of American art at the turn of the century could now be told.

In 1943 Chester Dale gave the National Gallery one of William



Merritt Chase's finest paintings, *A Friendly Call* (fig. 24). The painting is a superb example of a subject — women in domestic interiors — explored by a number of artists near the end of the nineteenth century. Long a favorite among visitors, *A Friendly Call* was rarely off view. However, the painting lacked context. The famous Boston School of artists — painters who explored the women-in-interiors theme in great depth — were unrepresented in the Gallery's collection. With the addition of numerous works by these artists from the Corcoran Collection, Chase's great painting may now be seen in revealing context.

Chase completed *A Friendly Call* in 1895 at his summer home on Long Island. Alice Gerson Chase, the artist's wife, is seated on the right conversing with an unidentified visitor in her husband's studio. A large mirror on the wall above the beautifully attired women reflects the wall on the opposite side of the studio. In the new installation, hanging near *A Friendly Call*, are paintings by two artists, Daniel Garber

Fig. 26. Edmund Charles Tarbell, *Josephine and Mercie*, 1908, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

and Edmund Charles Tarbell, whose carefully composed interior views of their own homes also include family members. In *South Room — Green Street* (fig. 25), Garber's wife, Mary, and daughter, Tanis, appear in the parlor of the family's Philadelphia row house. A large mirror at the left duplicates the color and shape of the window; a second mirror behind Tanis reflects her golden hair.

Edmund Charles Tarbell's *Josephine and Mercie* (fig. 26), another interior view featuring members of the artist's family, also hangs near *A Friendly Call*. Described by one of his contemporaries as "the poet of domesticity," Tarbell often used his home as a setting where he arranged family members as carefully as the well-chosen furniture. The artist's daughters, Josephine and Mercie, are engaged in leisure activities in the sitting room of the

Fig. 27. Gari Melchers, *Penelope*, 1910, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

family's summer home in New Castle, New Hampshire.

A third interpretation of the subject, Gari Melchers's *Penelope* (fig. 27), now hangs in the same gallery. In Melchers's painting, the artist's wife, Corinne, and parlor maid, Kierie Blok, are seen in the sitting room of fellow artist George Hitchcock's home in



Egmond, Holland. Like other members of the Boston School, Melchers was an admirer of seventeenth-century Dutch art, especially the domestic interiors of Johannes Vermeer. Nowhere is Vermeer's influence more apparent than in William McGregor Paxton's *The House Maid* (fig. 28), also on view in the final American gallery. With elegant simplicity, Paxton echoed Vermeer's example, placing an isolated figure amidst objects eloquent in their reflection of cultural values. With feather duster tucked under her arm, Paxton's housemaid stands above a table filled with precious objects. Porcelain jars and porcelain skin are rendered with equal attention. Just slightly beneath the surface are questions of class and the role of women — topics of much debate at the turn of the century and topics that can now be explored in depth at the National Gallery. Of the fourteen paintings now installed in the final gallery in the American suite, twelve have been added to the collection within the last two years.

The astonishing growth of the American collection during the last decade promises many rewards. Exhibitions focused on key works are planned, an entirely revamped guide to the collection for teachers is in production, digital features that explore historical context for individual paintings or groups of works are being developed for the Gallery's website, conservation studies have begun, and primary research focused on the life stories of the women featured in the Boston School paintings is underway. At every turn, educational opportunities abound.

The transformation of the American paintings collection at the National Gallery of Art during the last decade is cause for celebration. With the addition of nearly three hundred remarkable works, the nation's cultural history has been enriched beyond measure. •



Fig. 28. William McGregor Paxton, *The House Maid*, 1910, oil on canvas, Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund)

Opportunities for Giving

The National Gallery of Art relies on a partnership of public support and private philanthropy to fulfill its mission to exhibit, preserve, and enhance through acquisition our nation's art collections. Opportunities abound to support the Gallery's efforts at various levels, and we welcome your involvement, now or in the future. You may lend your support to a variety of projects in art acquisition and conservation, scholarly and scientific research, exhibitions, educational outreach programs, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts. The following initiatives also offer avenues for participation.

Fund for Art Acquisition

Because the Gallery relies solely on private gifts to acquire works of art, a secure source of art acquisition funds has been established to sustain the growth and quality of the nation's collections in the future. For more information about how you can support the Fund for Art Acquisition, please call the Development Office at (202) 842-6372.

Fund for the International Exchange of Art

The Fund for the International Exchange of Art plays a critical role in furthering the Gallery's mission as America's cultural ambassador to the world by supporting international exhibitions and exchange projects. Frequent international exhibitions share great works of art among nations, and many other programs find an international audience, such as publications, symposia for scholars, fellowships, and educational resources. By participating in the Fund for the International Exchange of Art, individuals, foundations, and corporations help the Gallery meet these goals.

Planned Gifts and Charitable Annuities

By making a donation to the National Gallery of Art through a bequest of cash or property, gift of art, trust arrangement, charitable gift annuity (CGA), or other estate plan provision, you can help provide for the Gallery's future while meeting your current financial goals. For example, a CGA, which provides you guaranteed, fixed payments for life, can offer additional benefits such as increased income over traditional investments, capital gains tax avoidance, investment diversification, a generous income tax deduction, and the opportunity to designate your gift to support a specific Gallery program. Friends who make a planned gift will be invited to become a member of The Legacy Circle. For more information about The Legacy Circle, a personal illustration of a charitable gift annuity, or other options for including the Gallery in your estate plan, please contact the Gallery's Office of Planned Giving at (202) 842-6372 or email plannedgiving@nga.gov.

The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art

Members of The Exhibition Circle provide the Gallery with a crucial source of spendable funds for its exhibition program with annual gifts of \$20,000 and above. Each year, revenue from The Exhibition Circle is allocated to support special exhibitions at the Gallery. Members of The Exhibition Circle enjoy a variety of privileges, including special invitations to openings for exhibitions sponsored by The Exhibition Circle and recognition in select exhibition catalogs. For more information about joining The Exhibition Circle, please contact the Circle office at (202) 842-6450, email circle@nga.gov, or refer to the enclosed reply card.

The Circle of the National Gallery of Art

Circle members play a substantive role in the life of the Gallery, as their annual gifts of \$1,000, \$2,500, \$5,000, \$10,000, and above provide a much-needed source of unrestricted funds for a broad spectrum of activities. The benefits of membership include invitations to curatorial and other events, special exhibition previews, and much more. For more information about joining The Circle, please contact the Circle office at (202) 842-6450, email circle@nga.gov, or refer to the enclosed reply card.

The Tower Project

The Tower Project provides support for the In the Tower series of modern and contemporary exhibitions in the East Building. Through an annual gift of \$2,500, Tower Project members will be invited to opening events for exhibitions sponsored by The Tower Project. Members will be recognized in related exhibition materials and invited to take part in special curatorial lectures, tours, and receptions. Additionally, Tower Project members are entitled to all Contributing-level Circle benefits. Should you wish to join or have any questions, please contact the Circle office at (202) 842-6450 or email towerproject@nga.gov.

Patrons' Permanent Fund

The Patrons' Permanent Fund (PPF), an endowment for art acquisition, is a vital resource in building an art collection of the highest caliber. More than 3,400 works of art have been acquired through the PPF, including paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, photographs, and other media. For more information about making a gift to the PPF, please call the Development Office at (202) 842-6372.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Challenge Grant

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded the National Gallery of Art a historic challenge grant to secure \$75 million in new endowment funding. We are immensely grateful for this opportunity to strengthen the Gallery's work in several crucial areas—digital engagement, conservation, scholarship, and educational programming. We hope you will join this endeavor by making a gift of your own. Your contribution supporting the Gallery's endowment will be matched by the Mellon Foundation. For further information, please call (202) 842-6372, visit us online at nga.gov/support, or write to the Development Office at 2000B South Club Drive, Landover, MD 20785.

The National Gallery of Art is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax-deductible.