

Introduction

My collection of paintings are all depictions of the natural world when it appears untouched by humans. This collection is meant to show how nature looks when it supposedly isn't touched by man as well as only consisting of paintings done with oil on canvas and in the mid to late 19th century. I chose paintings only from this time period as there was a large amount of landscape paintings being done at the time and many painters searched for places without any man made structures. The settings of all of these paintings remain similar as well, they aren't just depictions of the natural world, but more specifically depictions of forests and bodies of water in wooded areas. I wanted this collection to truly feel like a set which is why I only selected art from the same medium and time period. I felt that too many different mediums and styles would make the collection look less like they went together and more like a miss matched set of art. The time period for these paintings is important as well as they each feel nostalgic and classic when you look at them and fit into the 19th century era of landscape paintings. I wanted to be sure that they were all realistic as well and not abstract as I wanted the collection to really show the natural world. The paintings I have selected for this collection also all show the same time of day when it's broad daylight, my idea with this concept being that there could be multiple smaller collections in one larger one showing the different times of day and night, almost like a timeline of nature that people can observe through art. This collection is still growing, which is why I write this as I hope to add Asher B. Durand's painting, *Landscape: Wood Scene* (figure 1) to my collection.

Art of the 19th century

The 19th century had many wonderful different movements of art, but I've always found that the landscape paintings created during this time to be both incredibly beautiful as well as my personal favorites. The landscape paintings by Asher B. Durand has always captured the 19th century era of landscape paintings, and fit perfectly with the collection based around the natural world that I am curating. His painting *Landscape: Wood Scene*, which depicts a heavily wooded section of the Catskill Mountains in New York. It shows nature when it's left undisturbed by people by having a lack of any fields of crops and manmade structures. The softer and natural colors and soft brush strokes make the painting feel both peaceful and nostalgic. The realism of the painting almost makes it look like a photograph and gives the viewer a real sense of the natural world, it truly looks like nature was just pulled from the real world and put onto a canvas. The time of day also helps to give the painting its softer and more peaceful look as the early morning, but not quite dawn that is depicted gives a warm glow to the entire piece. This painting also has somewhat of a theme to it outside of just the natural world. When looking from left to right on the painting, we see a tree stump and a living, thriving tree. I find that this also helps to tie this painting to the theme of the natural world through depicting life and death, both very important parts of nature and an interesting theme to tackle in any painting, but especially something less symbolic like a landscape painting. The shapes shown in this painting also stay very natural and avoid being abstract, bringing together that this painting isn't trying to be any sort of symbolic representation of nature, but a true raw image of the natural world and its beauty, especially when left undisturbed by people and the structures that we build over time.

Asher B. Durand's work

Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) is well known for his depictions of nature in his landscape paintings, his focus on the interiors of the woods gives the viewer more of a presence in his works and allows them to see all of the fine details that he includes. He became president of the major art institution of its time, the National Academy of Design, during 1845. Durand was also a member of the Hudson River Valley School and became the leader of the New York Landscape painters in 1848, following the death of Thomas Cole. The landscape paintings done by those in the Hudson River Valley School, a group of New York based landscape painters, all capture the natural world in a realistic way that avoids being abstract and gives off a nostalgic feeling. Durand, as a member and as its leader, is one of the best examples of what landscape paintings are, and not just those made by the members of the Hudson River Valley School.

My collection

The goal of my collection is to showcase natural landscape paintings just like this. Durand's story also makes him a great fit as he was an artist in the 19th century, and also strongly believed in painting directly from nature which helped him to create highly detailed depictions of trees, foliage and other natural objects. When talking about painting in detail, Durand himself states "Each leaf must be defined as far as seen, or at least a great portion of them, and with the same precision with which you express the scoring of its trunk," (Ferber pg 240). This explanation of his helps to give an insight into

his thought process for painting and can be seen throughout the great amount of details in all of his paintings.

Wood scene by Durand

This painting truly represents both themes of the natural world and the era of landscape paintings in the 19th century, making it a perfect fit for my collection. The non abstract shapes, realistic depiction and clear time of day work perfectly with the rest of my collection. Some of the other works in my collection include Jasper Cropseys' *Autumn on the Brandywine River* (figure 2), Warren C. Briggs' *Forest Interior with Birch Tree* (figure 3) and finally, Frederick Stone Batchellers' *Steps, Pools and Riffles* (figure 4). All of these paintings follow the theme of the natural world and all depict beautiful natural landscapes with no human structures or interference. The collection is a mix of both horizontal and vertical paintings to allow for a less uniform and neat appearance as nature is rarely ever neat and organized. All of the pieces mentioned, including the one I wish to acquire are also all from the same time period, movement and use the same medium.

List of my collection

The first painting I already have in my collection, Jasper Cropseys' *Autumn on the Brandywine River* (figure 2), depicts a landscape in either early morning or late day during the fall season. A large amount of the painting is taken up by the Brandywine river, which almost melts into the cloud as it flows into the background of the painting.

The lighting caused by the time of day compliments the autumn colored leaves, giving the painting a warmer look and feeling. Like the painting I wish to acquire, there are no man made structures in sight as well as no fields for farming. This painting depicts a scene that is purely natural with little to no human influence, making it a great example of the natural world.

The second painting I already have in my collection, Warren C. Briggs' *Forest Interior with Birch Tree* (figure 3), depicts a landscape from the view of someone inside the woods. The major differences in the size of the trees and other foliage dotting the landscape help to give the viewer a presence in the piece rather than making them feel as if they're looking from the outside in. Like the other pieces mentioned, the time of day the painting is set in gives a warmer lighting to the painting, although in this one, the trees help to create some extra shadows, allowing the painting to feel softer and cozier. The layout of this painting is also very similar to Durand's piece (figure 1), as both have a large tree closer to the viewer and a natural path laid out in front of them, although in this painting it is a small stream with some rocks dotting across it. Although not an easily walkable path, it can still be seen as a natural path that guides the viewer's eyes up through the painting.

My third and final piece in my collection, Frederick Stone Batchellers' *Steps, Pools and Riffles* (figure 4), shares a lot of similarities with the piece mentioned before (figure 3). Both feature a stream traveling up through the painting, although it's a bit larger and more present in this one. Like the other painting (figure 3), this painting (figure 4) uses its stream shown as a natural path for the viewer which can help guide their eyes up through the painting as they look at it. The lighting in this painting is also

similar to figures 1 and 2 as it is brighter, while still depicting a time earlier in the morning or later in the day. The lighting and the autumn colored leaves give the painting a warmer and softer look, similar to the other two I just mentioned.

Landscape: Wood Scene (figure 1) is a great example of 19th century landscape paintings. Nature and art are very important to each other, and I feel like this is best shown in paintings, especially landscape paintings. John W. Beatty wrote in his book *The Relation of Art to Nature* that “the chief value of a work of art lies in its power to give aesthetic pleasure” (Beatty pg 2). Landscape paintings are great examples of value through aesthetic pleasure as they don’t often have any symbolism or meaning behind them and just exist to be beautiful and fascinate the viewer.

Despite these paintings typically not having a deeper meaning, they are still very important not just in a historical or artistic sense, but in a preservationist way as well. A lot of the natural world today has been harmed or even destroyed by humans, in the book *Landscape Biographies*, it states “Nature is unruly, continually causing problems through flooded rivers and perfect storms and, of course, receding glaciers and global warming. In the modernist language of mainstream ecology, things spin out of control.” (Hermans pg 51). With beautiful paintings for people to observe, they may feel more sympathy for nature if they hadn’t already, and helped the natural world heal after years of being harmed by humans.

Conclusion

With this explanation of my collection and what it stands for as well as my prior knowledge of Asher B. Durand's painting *Landscape, Wood Scene* (figure 1), I hope

that you'll consider my offer to add this wonderful painting to my collection. I think it would be a wonderful fit and work nicely with the other paintings I have already acquired. I hope the points I made about the themes of not only Durands work, but also of the themes of the current paintings in my collection give a good image of what the goal of my collection is as well as both the knowledge and respect I have for these works, including the one that I wish to acquire.

Endnotes

1. Avery, Kevin J. "The Hudson River School." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 1, 2004. <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-hudson-river-school>.
2. Ferber, Linda S. *Kindred spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American landscape*. London, New York: Brooklyn Museum ; in association with D Giles Limited, 2007.
3. Beatty, John W. *Relation of art to nature*. Staten Island, New York: OUTLOOK VERLAG, 2020.
4. Büttner, Nils, and Russell Stockman. *Landscape painting: A history*. New York, New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006.

Bibliography

Avery, Kevin J. "The Hudson River School." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 1, 2004. <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-hudson-river-school>.

BEATTY, JOHN W. *Relation of art to nature*. Staten Island, New York: OUTLOOK VERLAG, 2020.

Büttner, Nils, and Russell Stockman. *Landscape painting: A history*. New York, New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006.

Ferber, Linda S. *Kindred spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American landscape*. London, New York: Brooklyn Museum ; in association with D Giles Limited, 2007.

Hermans, Rita, Jan Kolen, and J. Renes. *Landscape biographies: Geographical, historical and archaeological perspectives on the production and transmission of landscapes*. Amsterdam, North Holland: Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

Inchbald, Elizabeth. *Nature and art: By mrs. Inchbald*. Dublin, Leinster: Printed by William Porter, for P. Wogan, P. Byrne, J. Milliken, J. Rice and 4 others in Dublin, 1796.

Art Referenced

Figure 1: Asher B. Durand. *Landscape, Wood Scene (Sketch in the woods)*. 1854. Oil on canvas. 24 × 18 in.

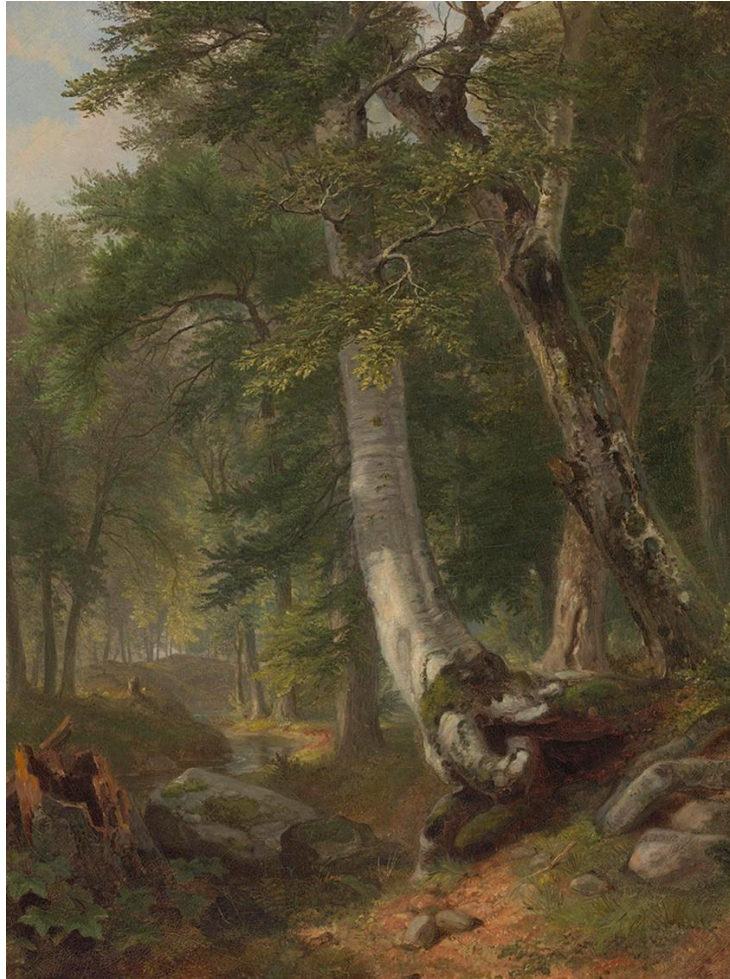


Figure 2: Jasper Cropsey. *Autumn on the Brandywine River*, 1887. Oil on canvas. 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.



Figure 3: Warren C. Briggs. *Forest Interior with Birch Tree*. Oil on canvas. 21.5 x 17.25 in.



Figure 4: Frederick Stone Batcheller. *Steps, Pools and Riffles*. Oil on canvas. 11.5 x 8.5 in.



Photographs



Asher B. Durand (1796–1886)
***Landscape, Wood Scene (Sketch in the Woods)*, ca. 1854**

Oil on canvas
 Gift of Amanda K. Berts, 1980

This painting is one of several studies of a woodland interior Asher B. Durand made in 1854, in the Catskill Mountains. From these studies and sketches, he composed a larger finished work, *In the Woods* (1855), now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The date of 1856, by his signature, marks the date the painting was sold, not when it was created.

Durand is a major figure in the Hudson River School of American landscape painters. In this carefully composed study, he expressed his view of nature as an embodiment of God, conveying the cycle of life through the contrast of the lush living forest and the decaying trees.