

LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMED

A WASHINGTON, D.C. TRADITION

Landscape Transformed focuses on a contemporary group of Washington artists who create inspired landscape imagery. It is not just the depiction of the landscape but the experience of the city of Washington's unique site and place in history that influence these artists. Some of the artists use elements of nature to transform their images of reality into expressive personal statements. The expansive presence of the horizon, where earth meets sky, permeates Washington's landscape. The horizon is used in some of the work by contemporary artists chosen for the show as an organizing principle. Another organizing principle for the depiction of landscape is the point of view adopted by the artist. The works in the exhibition present a variety of vantage points: the panoramic view, bird's-eye and worm's-eye views of the earth's surface and depict both high and low horizon lines. The classical landscape tradition is well represented: landscape elements such as planar recession in depth, enframement of space using stately trees or buildings, and diminution of size to suggest depth and scale, are used by many Washington artists. The transparent light of Washington and its many public places filled with trees and grass are poetic inspirations which artists have incorporated both directly and indirectly into their work. Even objects from nature are occasionally incorporated directly into the work, as in assemblage. We have been careful to present a range of media in which to examine the expressive variety of landscape subject matter.

The effect of planar spatial organization on the city of Washington, its open vistas carefully built to harmonize the horizon line, and the highly saturated colors produced in Washington's vivid sunlight and reflected off its buildings, have been attributed to the growth of a strong colorist painting tradition in Washington. The Color School painters, linked by their use of pure color as both subject and image, are in harmony with contemporary landscape painters. As a point of comparison, Alma Thomas' work *Nature's Red Impressions* is related to the art of this group, in the abstract organization of pure color patches which cover the canvas in a vertical stripe configuration. She once said of her work that sunlight, flowers, leaves, and vistas from airplanes were the basis for her abstract compositions of dancing colors.

This exhibition posits the conception of a continuum between the established tradition of local landscape painting and non-objective color field painting in Washington originally suggested by Andrew J. Cosentino and Henry H. Glassie in *The Capital Image: Painters in Washington, 1800-1915*. In addition, Ben Forgey's thoughtful essay in *The Washington Show* catalogue (The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), elaborates on the former curators' theories by citing the city's plan, light, museums and art schools, political climate, and hospitable treatment of southern artists as other factors influencing the character of indigenous art. Could the complex and subtle interaction of cultural forces noted in these commentaries be visually demonstrated in an exhibition? This notion provided the impetus for the research and curatorial selections for *Landscape Transformed*. As with last year's area invitational exhibition (TOUGH REALISM, The Dimock Gallery, October-November, 1987), related art works from the University's permanent collection are incorporated into this exhibition, demonstrating a long tradition of acquiring landscapes by local artists.

The artists in the exhibition address the landscape theme in different ways. They use color in strongly definitive ways: highly saturated hues, colorful shadows, and outlined forms create a sense of atmosphere and place. Woodward, Francis and Wright depict atmosphere filled with light and color, water and sky, in a most palpable way. McCoubrey Olmsted and Findikoglu share a romanticized and personal interpretation of the real world. Their paintings are arcadian and dream-like at the same time. Horowitz's black and white photographs stretch the horizontal format print's ability to express abstract relationships between organic form and imaginary space. Likewise, Feldman's intensely colorful spatial interpretations of earth's topography, like the patchwork landscapes we see from the air, use a flattened horizon line to construct a visual surface pattern. Dunlap has experimented with mixed media and simultaneously juxtaposed images in his landscape panoramas. Goodman's pencil drawings express relationships between interior and exterior spaces which are inspired by the interpenetration of outdoor and interior urban spaces.

Lenore D. Miller
Curator of Art

September 8 - October 7, 1988

The Dimock Gallery • Lower Lisner Auditorium • 21st and H Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20052 (994-1525)

GALLERY HOURS: T,W,Th,F: 10-5, Sat: 12-5
Sun and Mon: Closed to the public

The Beginnings of a Washington, D.C. Tradition: 1800-1930

"The transformation of the landscape from colonial record to cultural myth is the American experience," writes Edward J. Nygren.¹ Indeed, for in surveying the history of the depiction of the American landscape, one easily finds the visual proof necessary to concede to Nygren's assertion. *Landscape Transformed: A Washington, D.C. Tradition* affords the viewer selected highlights of this "American experience" in the Washington area as evidenced in the works produced by some of the local artists who shared in the shaping of a landscape tradition.

William James Bennett's aquatint of *The City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard* (done after George Cooke's painting of 1833), ca. 1834; and Edward Sachse's *Panoramic View of Washington City*, 1852, are exemplary of the early topographical views and landscapes produced in the nation's capital and elsewhere in America. Many of the early topographical views and landscape paintings revealed artists, many of whom were itinerants,² expressing a desire to capture not only the burgeoning city of Washington, but to record its untouched areas as well, primarily the Potomac River and Rock Creek Park. These early topographical works, in large number, were produced not merely for personal enjoyment, but for widespread benefit from their inclusion in histories, travel books, and other publications. Bennett's depiction of Washington is expansive: the viewer witnesses a scene of pastoral richness combined with grand buildings and commercial shipping.

The mid to late nineteenth century heralded the beginning of "traditional" or "easel" type landscape painting in America, and "no less than elsewhere during the late nineteenth-century, Washington achieved its greatest triumph in landscape art."³ In this period of Washington's art history, its landscape artists expressed two prominent areas of interest. The first reflected the inspiration of the Hudson River

school tradition and is made palpable in the works of William MacLeod and Charles Lanman. Both Lanman and MacLeod spent time in New York, in the Hudson River area, and painted landscapes in the manner of the Hudson River school painters. Lanman, in fact, studied with Asher B. Durand, a key member of the Hudson River school.⁴ John H. Drury, John Ross Key, and Gilbert Davis Munger, also Washington artists, painted in the grand manner of Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran: they sought to capture the vast wilderness and unspoiled nature of the American West, especially its great Rocky Mountains.⁵

The 'Washington Landscape School,'⁶ founded in 1880 by artists including William Henry Holmes, James Henry Moser, Richard Norris Brooke, Edmund Clarence Messer, Reuben Le Grande Johnston, and Max Weyl, represented the other primary area of interest shown by Washington landscape artists. The "Washington Landscape School" was generally influenced by contemporary Dutch painting and the Barbizon school, a group of mid-nineteenth century French artists who painted rural life and landscapes *en plein air* in the village of Barbizon in Fontainebleau Forest, near Paris. Though the Barbizon artists characteristically painted the realistic and beautiful aspects of nature, landscape images are in accord with and define these artists' subjective interpretations.

Several members of the "Washington Landscape School" painted realistic scenes of nature but some of these interpretations were less subjective than those of the Barbizon masters. William Henry Holmes', a fine landscape painter and watercolorist,⁷ *Untitled* summer landscape, 1927, completed towards the end of his career, is a case in point. Likewise, on a small scale, William Woodward's watercolors capture the dazzling presence of light and atmosphere in the same medium.

Holmes was an acquaintance of Walter Paris, born in England, and probably came under the influence of the latter's art through their associations. Paris painted many scenes of Washington's urban life, but he was also adept at landscape painting. The small

⁴ Cosentino and Glassie, pp. 101-110.

⁵ Cosentino and Glassie, pp. 110-117.

⁶ Cosentino and Glassie, pp. 157 and 201.

⁷ Cosentino and Glassie, p. 214.

¹ Edward J. Nygren, *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), p. 3.

² Andrew J. Cosentino and Henry H. Glassie, *The Capital Image: Painters in Washington, 1800-1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), p. 29.

³ Cosentino and Glassie, p. 201.

Landscape Transformed: A Washington, D.C. Tradition

Checklist of the Exhibition

Washington, D.C. Tradition: 1800-1930

WILLIAM JAMES BENNETT
(1784-1844)

- I. *The City of Washington from Beyond the Navy Yard* (after George Cooke), ca. 1834
Published by Lewis P. Clover, New York, 1834
Colored aquatint
18" x 24"
GW Permanent Collection; W. Lloyd Wright Collection of Washingtoniana, 1950

WILLIAM HENRY HOLMES
(1846-1933)

- II. *Untitled* (summer landscape), 1927
Watercolor
5 1/2" x 7 3/4"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Overstreet, 1985

REUBEN LE GRANDE JOHNSTON
(1850-1918)

- III. *Landscape with Sheep*
Oil on canvas
19 1/2" x 29"
GW Permanent Collection

ALEXIS B. MANY
(1879-1937)

- IV. *Reflection No. 1*, ca. 1930
Oil on canvas
24" x 27"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Richard Drum Engel, 1955

ELEAZER HUTCHINSON MILLER
(1831-1921)

- V. *View of Washington from Georgetown Heights*, 1874
Etching
6 1/2" x 10 1/4"
On loan from the Kiplinger Washington Collection

- VI. *White House*, 1883
Etching
7 1/4" x 15 1/2"
On loan from the Kiplinger Washington Collection

JAMES HENRY MOSER
(1854-1913)

- VII. *Untitled* (landscape)
Watercolor
10 1/4" x 20 1/4"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mrs. Katherine McCook Knox, 1969

EDGAR HEWITT NYE
(1879-1943)

- VIII. *Newlyn* (harbor scene)
Watercolor
19" x 23"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Overstreet, 1985

- IX. *Untitled* (landscape with pond), 1919
Watercolor
28 1/2" x 22 1/2"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Overstreet, 1985

WALTER PARIS
(1842-1906)

- X. *Untitled* (landscape of stone manorial farm buildings)
Watercolor
6" x 9 1/2"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Overstreet, 1985
- XI. *Untitled* (landscape with stone farm buildings and carriage), 1893
Watercolor
5 1/2" x 9 1/2"

LUCIEN WHITING POWELL
(1846-1930)

- XII. *Untitled* (autumn landscape)
Watercolor
12 1/2" x 19"
GW Permanent Collection; gift of Mr. and Mrs. William C. Overstreet

EDWARD SACHSE
(1804-1873)

- XIII. *Panoramic View of Washington City*, 1852
Published by Casimir Bohn, Washington, D.C.
Lithograph
18 1/4" x 32 1/2"
GW Permanent Collection; W. Lloyd Wright Collection of Washingtoniana, 1950

MAX WEYL
(1837-1914)

- XIV. *Washington Seen from Rosslyn*
Oil on canvas
15 1/2" x 23 1/2"
On loan from the Kiplinger Washington
Collection

Landscape Transformed: Contemporary Artists

WILLIAM DUNLAP

1. *Aqua Garden/Fish and Flowers*, 1987
Oil and powdered pigment on paper
60" x 86"
Courtesy Robert Brown Contemporary Art

ALINE FELDMAN

2. *Afternoon Sonata*, 1988
(diptych)
Woodcut, 1/25
32" x 96"
Courtesy Marsha Mateyka Gallery

ZEKI FINDIKOGLU

3. *Mountaintop*, 1988
Oil on canvas
40" x 30"
Courtesy Franz Bader Gallery

MICHAEL FRANCIS

4. *Downtown*, 1988
Oil on canvas
60" x 72"
Courtesy Gallery K
5. *View of Washington*, 1988
Oil on canvas
28" x 96"
Courtesy Gallery K

JANIS GOODMAN

6. *Georgetown View*, 1987
Colored pencil on paper
43" x 31"
Courtesy the artist
7. *Studio: Interior/Exterior*, 1987
Colored pencil on paper
43" x 31"
Courtesy the artist

JASON HOROWITZ

8. *Untitled* (circle and mussel shell), 1988
Silver gelatin print
25" x 60 1/2"
Courtesy Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery

9. *Untitled* (seaweed), 1988
Silver gelatin print
17 1/2" x 53 1/2"
Courtesy Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery

SARAH MCCOUBREY OLMSTED

10. *Washington City Garden*, 1988
Oil on birch panel
11 1/2" x 24"
Courtesy Robert Brown Contemporary Art
11. *Washington View*, 1988
Oil on canvas
16" x 35"
Courtesy Robert Brown Contemporary Art

ARTHUR HALL SMITH

12. *Q Street Bridge*, 1979
Sumi drawing
30" x 40"
GW Permanent Collection

JEAN RANEY SMITH

13. *Washington View: Midnight*, 1979
Oil on canvas
23 1/2" x 35 1/2"
On loan from the Kiplinger Washington
Collection

WILLIAM WOODWARD

14. *Harbor Springs, Michigan*, 1988
Watercolor
10" x 14"
15. *Inside the Reef*, 1987
Oil on canvas
32" x 42"
16. *Speyer's Farm*, 1988
Watercolor
10" x 14"
17. *Speyer's Pond*, 1988
Watercolor
10" x 14"

FRANK WRIGHT

18. *The Mall at Sunset: The First Nice Day in Spring*, 1986
Oil on canvas
20" x 50"
Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Mickelson
19. *Study for the Inauguration of Teddy Roosevelt*, 1987
Wash drawing heightened with white
13" x 18"

untitled works on view here attest to this fact. Like Holmes', Paris' classical and poetic landscapes share a timeless mood.

Eleazer Hutchinson Miller was not a member of the "Washington Landscape School," but his *View of Washington from Georgetown Heights*, 1874; and *White House*, 1883, are very appealing images. His familiar scenes, such as *View of Washington from Georgetown Heights* capture the picturesque rural aspect of the city.

Lucien Whiting Powell, born in Virginia, studied with Thomas Moran at the Pennsylvania Academy of The Fine Arts and was inspired by the dramatic and forceful work of Joseph M.W. Turner.¹ In his *Untitled* autumn landscape, the warm color and sketchy brushstrokes modestly recall those used by Turner.

James Henry Moser's *Untitled* landscape possesses an oddly oriental appearance; however, its inspiration seems to derive from the Hudson River school tradition, but on a smaller scale. Though it is framed on either side by a convex mound of sand dunes and green trees and shrubbery, the view is expansive, as suggested by the faint white sailboats dotting the distant blue ocean. The low horizon line establishes a definitive horizontality to the scene. Moser also taught watercolor painting in Columbian College and exhibited at The George Washington University.

Reuben Le Grande Johnston's *Landscape with Sheep* reveals a debt to the Barbizon school, particularly in the subject matter--sheep and cattle were favorite subjects of the Barbizon artists--and in the impasto of the brushstrokes, and in the soft light enveloping the image. Johnston, like Powell, was born in Virginia.²

Another member of the "Washington Landscape School," and perhaps the most widely known, is Max Weyl.³ His work is closest in spirit to that of the Barbizon master Daubigny, who specialized in French river scenes and in capturing the effects of changing light, accomplished by traveling up and down the river in northern France on a special boat outfitted as a "floating studio."⁴ Weyl's *Washington Seen from*

1 Cosentino and Glassie, pp. 221 and 270.
2 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 264.
3 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 201.
4 Konstantin Bazarov, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Mayflower Books Inc., 1981), p. 128.

Rosslyn captures the same kind of atmospheric quality of a river scene. Weyl often painted many scenes of the Potomac and Rock Creek Park.

Major private Washington collections proved to be an impetus and source of study for local artists. The collection of the real estate broker Thomas E. Waggaman contained more than eighty-five works of art, primarily contemporary Dutch and Barbizon paintings; the work of Millet, Corot, Troyon (whose work was a major influence on Johnston), Daubigny, Rousseau, and Constable was present in Waggaman's collection.⁵ The authors of *The Capital Image: Painters in Washington, 1800-1915*, Andrew J. Cosentino and Henry H. Glassie, state that "the Waggaman collection is a trenchant index of the painters most admired by Washington artists," and the writers add that "the finest productions of late nineteenth-century Capital painters--particularly the landscapes and genre--are indebted to the Dutch and Barbizon masters" included in the collection.⁶

The private collection of the financier and art patron William W. Corcoran, included paintings by the Hudson River school painters and others, including Church, Cole, Durand, Kensett, and Inness.⁷ Corcoran's collection also contained many contemporary Washington landscapes, as well. Ultimately, the Corcoran Gallery was built to contain his private collection, and it officially opened to the public in 1874; however, the collection was made available to viewers in his home prior to this opening.⁸

Another Washington collector, Duncan Phillips, opened his private home as The Phillips Memorial Art Gallery to the public in 1921.⁹ Like Waggaman's and Corcoran's, Phillips' collection played a major role in educating Washington artists about the contemporary European and American art scenes. The Phillips

5 Cosentino and Glassie, pp. 137-138.

6 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 138.

7 The Corcoran Gallery of Art, *A Catalogue of the Collection of American Paintings in The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Vol. I: Painters Born before 1850* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1966), n.p.

8 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 125.

9 The Phillips Collection, *Master Paintings from the Phillips Collection* (Fort Lee, New Jersey: Penhurst Books, Inc., 1981), p. 9.

Collection, in fact, was the first American museum devoted to modern art.¹

Edgar Hewitt Nye, a major early twentieth-century Washington landscape painter, was influenced by Cézanne, whose work was represented in the Phillips collection. Nye was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1879. He was in France from 1914 to 1920, and his two works, *Newlyn* and *Landscape with Pond* reveal the inspiration of Cézanne and his contemporaries. Geometric shapes of the houses, broken brushstrokes in blues, and greens, and the paper support left unpainted, suggest a kinship to Cézanne.

Nye, along with others of his contemporaries, was a key member of the Landscape Club of Washington, D.C., founded in 1913.² Understandably, these artists felt a need to share their ideas about landscape painting and create a basis for exhibiting their work. Nye also exhibited extensively at the Society of Washington Artists, founded in 1890.³

Alexis B. Many's *Reflection No. 1*, ca. 1930, has been described as "modified Impressionism."⁴ It is composed of an array of soft pastel colors laid directly on the canvas in a fresh and airy way. In its impressionistic capturing of light and surface texture, the painting can be compared to Frank Wright's treatment of dappled light.

Washington has always had a conservative air about it, a quality present even today as we approach the last decade of the twentieth century. In terms of Washington's art, the alignment with tradition is evident in the synoptical discussion of earlier landscape painting set forth in this essay. The Washington experience, with regards to the history of the city's landscape painting, from the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, is one based thoroughly and thoughtfully upon tradition and art history, particularly that of Europe--and understandably so. The landscape tradition in Washington is long and well entrenched. We can see that the desire to comprehend, experience, and interpret the European landscape tradition has been one goal of artists cited in this discussion. Washington artists have, as well, an American

sensibility to which this city's history and sense of place has contributed a unique perception of landscape. It is this tradition that persists into modern times.

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Lenore D. Miller, Curator of Art
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1 The Phillips Collection, p. 9.

2 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 229.

3 Adams Davidson Galleries, Inc., *Edgar Nye* (Washington, D.C.: Adams Davidson Galleries, May 3-June 23, 1979), n.p.

4 Cosentino and Glassie, p. 229.