



THE ARCADIAN LANDSCAPE

Nineteenth-Century American Painters in Italy

THE ARCADIAN LANDSCAPE

Nineteenth-Century American Painters in Italy

*cultivated American in Europe and France reflects our strong contrasts to what
needs for its full development a part as well as a future. Our own country supplies
but one of these wants; the imagination craves a more dim outline than the fresh
youth of our land can supply; we mingle our sympathies with the distant experi-
ences of other lands. Thus in proportion to the extent of our reading is our eager-
ness to exchange thought for sight, and the cold page for the living forms. No
Englishman can comprehend the feeling with which a well-informed American
looks for the first time upon Westminster Abbey. It is like the mountaineer's first
sight of the sea, or the seaman's first sight of the mountains. It is to us not merely
a venerable structure, but a new revelation. It wakes to life and clothes with flesh
the dry bones of history. At school and at college, the great vision of Rome broods
over the mind with a power which is never suspended or disputed: her great men,
her beautiful legends, her history, the height to which she rose, and the depth to
which she fell—these make up our hell of a student's ideal world. When we go to
Italy, we seem to be seeing a drama acted which, before, we had only read. The
Tiber, which so long flowed through our dreams, now flows at our feet. The
Capitol, the Forum, the Alban Mount, stand before us in the light of day; and the
imagination easily supplies the forms which are appropriate to the scene—the shad-
owy Acropolis, the legendary*

George S. ...

University of Kansas Museum of Art

November 4 - December 3, 1972

Many persons have cooperated in the organization of this exhibition and catalogue, and their help and encouragement have been instrumental in the realization of our plans. Deserving special thanks are the lenders, listed elsewhere, without whose assistance and generosity in sharing their works the exhibition could never have materialized.

The exhibition and catalogue have been made possible by a generous grant from the Solon E. Summerfield Fund of the Kansas University Endowment Association, to whom we are deeply indebted for their continuing support of our programs.

For their special assistance and suggestions we should like to thank the following: Mrs. Caroline Brennan, The Nelson Gallery, Kansas City; Mrs. Leo. J. Dee, Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design; Mr. Charles Duell, Middleton Place; Mr. Gordon Hendricks; Mr. John K. Howat and Miss Natalie Spassky, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Mr. Wilbur Hunter, Peale Museum; Mr. J. Russell MacBeth and Mrs. June Lollis, Gibbes Art Gallery; Miss Alexandra Mason and Mrs. Martha Kehde, University of Kansas Libraries; Mr. Robert Mayo, Valentine Museum; Mr. Perry Rathbone, former Director, and Miss Laura Luckey, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Prof. Carl N. Schmalz, Amherst College; Mr. Theodore Stebbins, Yale University Art Gallery; Dr. Joshua Taylor and Mr. William Truettner, National Collection of Fine Arts; Mr. Morton Vose, Vose Galleries; and the staffs of the Archives of American Art and the Frick Art Reference Library. Miss Pamela D. Kingsbury and Miss Lea Rosson have conducted extensive research on the artists and works included in this exhibition. Miss Susan Mowder, Mr. William Lew, and Mrs. Evelyn McClave have faithfully attended to the myriad details involved in assembling the exhibition and preparing this catalogue. Mrs. Ruth Lawner has ably coordinated the editing and design of this publication. To all of them we are most grateful.

Lastly, we wish to thank Barbara Novak, who offered the original inspiration for this project. Any examination of this chapter in American art history must begin with E. P. Richardson's and Otto Wittman's pioneering exhibition of *Travelers in Arcadia*. In Dr. Novak's fine history of *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* she noted that "these so-called Travelers in Arcadia, coupling European experience with their own American sensibilities, require a separate study of their own." We are delighted that Dr. Novak accepted our invitation to pursue this study, and her participation from the inception of the exhibition to its final installation has been of utmost importance.

C.C.E.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Charles C. Eldridge
Director
University of Kansas
Museum of Art

1. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918, rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961, pp. 91, 92.
2. Quoted in Nathalia Wright, *Amor on Novels in Italy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965, p. 63.
3. C. Cooke, "A Memoir of George Cooke, Artist," in *Descriptive Catalogue of Paintings in the Gallery of Daniel Pratt*, Prattville, Alabama, 1874, p. 23. (Catalogue in the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.)
4. Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Proceedings by the Way*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1874, p. 121.
5. James Craigh Scott, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Davis Craigh*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917, p. 107.
6. Quoted in *William Luntz, A History of the Art of the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Dover Publications, 1957, p. 114.

INTRODUCTION

Charles C. Eldredge

Director

University of Kansas

Museum of Art

ALTHOUGH AMERICAN ARTISTS have been discovering Italy since the middle of the eighteenth century, they were scarcely the first travelers to have been attracted to the region. Italy had been a mandatory stop, indeed the focal point, of the Grand Tour for generations of European travelers before them. But when Benjamin West arrived in Rome in 1760, "to visit the fountainhead of the arts,"¹ he gave the first suggestion of a shift of American artists' attention away from England. Although West left Rome in 1763 to go to London, it was but a short time later that John Singleton Copley followed his path to Italy. Arriving in 1774, Copley studied in Rome for a year before he too moved to London to join West. These pioneering American artists were, within a few years, followed by increasing numbers of their countrymen. In Italy the Americans found an attraction which was not afforded by any other part of Europe, and by the second quarter of the nineteenth-century Italian study had become an essential part of many American artists' training.

Unlike the earlier attraction to Sir Joshua Reynolds' London, or the later migrations to the schools of Munich and Düsseldorf and Paris, the appeal of nineteenth-century Italy was not based upon the activities of contemporary Italian artists. There was no native "School of Rome" to which American artists flocked. Indeed, Thomas Cole was emphatic in deriding the work of nineteenth-century Italian painters. "What shall I say of modern Italian art?" he asked. "I am afraid you will think I looked at all with a jaundiced eye. . . . I can only speak as I have felt. Italian painting is perhaps worse than the French, which it resembles in its frigidity. In landscape it is dry, and, in fact, wretched. There are a few German and English artists in Rome, who paint with more soul than the Italians. It would scarcely be credited, that, surrounded by the richest works of the old schools, there should be a total ignorance of the means of producing brilliance and transparency; and that, among the greater part of the Italians, glazing is unknown: and the few who, from seeing the English at work, have acquired some knowledge of it, use magilps and varnishes as though they were deadly poisons. —Indeed, of all meagre, starved things, an Italian's palette is the perfection."²

Instead of Italian artists, it was the Italian landscape, its historic and artistic environment, which created such excitement among the American tourists. It was in Italy that the artists from this new nation could immerse themselves in the great cultural centers of Western civilization. It was on the basis of Roman models that Thomas Jefferson and others helped fashion a neoclassical architecture befitting an emerging American society. It was in Italy that American sculptors developed their most exaggerated concern for neoclassical sculpture, a style which had been first introduced into this country by Houdon and Cerracchi. It was in the great collections of Florence, Rome, and other Italian cities that American students were first surrounded by the fabled works of the Old Masters, from whom so many lessons were to be learned. And it was in the "many-memored landscape" of Italy that these American travelers could lose themselves in reverie.

There in Italy, and especially in Rome, the American could step back in time, indeed, out of time, to a world unknown on this side of the Atlantic. "Rome could not be fitted into an orderly, middle-class, Bostonian, systematic scheme of evolution," wrote Henry Adams. "No law of progress applied to it. Not even time sequences—the last refuge of helpless historians—had value for it. . . . Rome was a

1. John Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West*, London: Cadell and Davies, 1820, p. 84.

2. William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, II, 1834, rpt. Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1918, p. 155.

complex of ideas, experiments, ambitions, energies; without her the Western world was pointless and fragmentary; she gave heart and unity to it all; yet Gibbons might have gone on for the whole century, sitting among the ruins of the Capitol, and no one would have passed, capable of telling him what it meant."³

By no means, of course, did every American artist make the long and often arduous journey. And there were those, like the novelist Theodore Fay, who dissented from the popular attraction to Italy. Writing from Florence, Fay objected that "I do not like to live in the midst of moral abasement, of despotism, a domineering aristocracy of birth rather than talent; and I prefer a place where the men and women are better, though the statues and paintings may be worse."⁴

Fay's chauvinistic attitude was, however, for most of the nineteenth century, a minority opinion. By far the majority of artists, even those for whom the dream of Italian travel was never realized, shared the enthusiasm and awe with which George Cooke anticipated his first Atlantic crossing. On the eve of his departure for Italy in 1826, the painter wrote to his brother: "I have long felt it my duty to go—a good Providence has given me the means—and I am sure he will direct and bless the end. My anticipations are lively in relation to what I shall see, and learn, and know. I shall see the very spot where Paul was a prisoner for the truth of the gospel of Christ; where thousands have perished under pagan and papal despotism for this faith; the scenes that inspired Virgil's verse, Angelo's chisel and Raphael's pencil."⁵

Once there, the travelers' enthusiasm was generally maintained. Frequent was the exclamation "I would rather be poor in Italy, than rich in any other country in the world."⁶ Although there were complaints about travel, accommodations, and the annoying habits of the Italians themselves—whose easy lifestyle was frequently regarded with puritanical disdain by Americans—these inconveniences seemed only to add to the exoticism of the Italian sojourn. Like Mrs. Christopher Cranch, many Americans were "willing to put up with anything for the sake of living in Rome."⁷

So infatuated with Italy were some Americans that they chose permanent expatriation. For the great majority of American artists, however, the Italian journey was an important but not permanent leave-taking from this country. They may not have shared in the extreme patriotic fervor of Theodore Fay, who felt that "New York is built of burnished silver, and strewn with roses washed in dew, contrasted with the receptacles of Europe";⁸ but most of them were more likely than not to retain their loyalties to their native land. Curiously, the American tourist often saw similarities in the Italian landscape to that of his own country. Nathaniel Willis found the Florentine parks along the Arno to be "more like a half-redeemed wild-wood in America than a public promenade in Europe,"⁹ and he wrote that the view from Monte-Cimina "reminded me strongly of the country about the Seneca lake of America."¹⁰ For Thomas Cole, walking on the Pincian Hill, "every sunset takes my heart with it to my distant home."¹¹

By mid-century, American tourism in Italy had reached its high point. Shortly after that time, the political and social instability of Italy occasioned the return of many Americans to their "distant home." Although Margaret Fuller chose to stay with her Italian husband, and to be active in the Civic Guard of the Republic through the siege of Rome in 1849, she could nevertheless understand her fellow

3. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918, rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961, pp. 91, 93.
4. Quoted in Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965, p. 63.
5. C. Cooke, "A Memoir of George Cooke, Artist," in *Descriptive Catalogue of Paintings in the Gallery of Daniel Pratt*, Prattville, Alabama: 1853, p. 23. (Catalogue in the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.)
6. Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Pencilings by the Way*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1852, p. 321.
7. Leonora Cranch Scott, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Pearse Cranch*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917, p. 107.
8. Quoted in Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
9. Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
11. Louis L. Noble, *The Course of Empire, Voyage of Life, and Other Pictures of Thomas Cole, N.A.*, New York: Cornish, Lampert and Co., 1853, p. 314.

INTRODUCTION

Charles C. Eldredge
Director
University of Kansas
Museum of Art

Americans' decisions to leave Italy. As she replied to one friend: "I was very glad to have you write that you are going home, for . . . this is no time for an artist to be here, nor is there any strong probability of tranquillity at present. Few people would come, Pearse would have but few and scanty orders, and . . . you might have too trying a time, and become old!"¹²

The outbreak of Civil War in this country also caused many Americans to leave Europe. Although not all of the artists were actively involved in the struggle, nevertheless significant numbers of them did return, if not to fight at least to be with family and friends during the ordeal.

Following the war, and after the unification of Italy, Italian tours regained some of the popularity they had enjoyed in the pre-war years. During the third quarter of the century, travel on the peninsula was considerably easier than it had earlier been. More than one tourist marveled at the change: "Yes, five old frontiers passed without ever seeing a soldier or undergoing a stoppage! To a traveler unions are something."¹³ But for William Dean Howells, the opening of frontiers and the advent of rail travel had a disastrous effect upon the Italian tour. "Indeed, it seems to me," he wrote, "that all moisture of romance and adventure has been wellnigh sucked out of travel in Italy. . . . Much of local life and color remains, of course; but the hurried traveler sees little of it, and, passed from one grand hotel to another, without material change in cooking or the methods of extortion, he might nearly as well remain at Paris."¹⁴

In fact, during the last quarter of the century, Paris did become the great magnet for American artists. While many continued to travel through Italy, the earlier generations' adoration of the country was somewhat lacking among the younger painters at the end of the century. When they did return to Italy, it was increasingly to Venice, the impressionistic city of water, that the Americans were drawn. Venice had been a part of the Italian itinerary for many earlier travelers. But the city, with its Byzantine and Gothic splendor, was both psychologically and geographically remote from the center of Western civilization which the Americans had located in the region between Tuscany and the Campagna. The attraction of Venice was different from that of the historic lands of central and southern Italy.

The change of focus from Rome to Venice could be seen not only in the artists' works, but also in the accounts of the tourists. As early as 1867, Howells could declare that "Venice is, and remains, the most beautiful city in the world. . . ."¹⁵ Revisiting the city in 1881, Christopher Cranch realized with some surprise that Venice "seems even more wonderful for its picturesqueness than it did seventeen years ago."¹⁶ And in 1890, James Russell Lowell confided to a friend that "A longing has been growing in me for several years now, chiefly, I confess, for Venice, but with subsidiary hankerings after Rome and Florence."¹⁷

But if, in 1890, Rome and Florence were "subsidiary" for Lowell, they had for nearly a century been central to an American's appreciation of Italy. It was there, in daily acquaintance with the reminders of Italy's past greatness and with the evocative landscape of the region, that the American painters had found suggestions and solutions for their art which, upon their return to this country, had been instrumental in bringing to maturity a native American landscape school.

12. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
13. William Arthur, *Italy in Transition: Public Scenes and Private Opinions in the Spring of 1860*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1860, p. 216.
14. William Dean Howells, *Italian Journeys*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1867, pp. 157, 158.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
16. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 327.
17. Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, II, 1903, rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1957, p. 296.