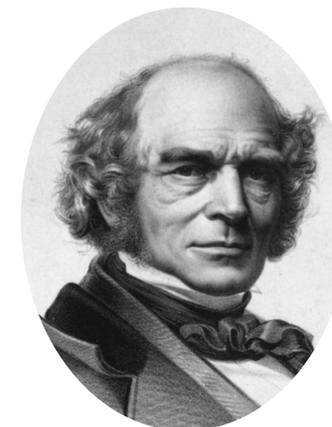




THOMAS COLE, n.d. After the daguerreotype by Mathew B. Brady, c. 1845, in Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life*, 1867

# ASHER B. DURAND

## *Kindred Spirits*



WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, 1850. Lithograph by Charles G. Crehen after Philip Haas, Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Upon the death in 1848 of Thomas Cole—America’s first important landscape painter—Asher B. Durand was commissioned by collector Jonathan Sturges to create a commemorative work. Sturges requested that Durand depict Cole and his close friend William Cullen Bryant, the renowned American nature poet, as “kindred spirits.” The unusual proposal was inspired by the words of English poet John Keats, whose “Sonnet to Solitude” celebrates the restorative aspects of nature and concludes:

*Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,  
Whose words are images of thoughts refin’d,  
Is my soul’s pleasure; and sure it must be  
Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,  
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.*

Durand, who began his career as an engraver, had been inspired by Cole in the 1830s to take up landscape painting. At the time of his death, Cole had become the acknowledged leader of a loosely knit group of American landscape painters that became known as the Hudson River School. His unexpected death, just days after his forty-seventh birthday, was a shock

to this group of artists and to America’s greater artistic community. In New York, Cole was honored with a memorial exhibition and a commemorative service highlighted by a eulogy delivered by Bryant.

Durand’s *Kindred Spirits* was completed in 1849 and delivered as a gift to Bryant in recognition of his friendship with Cole. It shows the poet and Cole standing on a ledge in the Catskill Mountains of New York, where both had been inspired to create some of their finest works. Although executed in the detailed and realistic style that Durand championed for American landscape painters, its composition brings together several sites—including the Clove of the Catskills and Kaaterskill Falls—that could not be seen from a single vantage point. As such, it was intended as an idealized tribute to American nature and to the two men whose art had celebrated its special beauties. *Kindred Spirits* was immediately hailed as a masterpiece of landscape painting, and it remains one of the most admired and beloved American works of the nineteenth century. Bequeathed to the New York Public Library by Bryant’s daughter in 1904, it was sold by that institution in May 2005 to the Walton Family Foundation, which has generously made it available for display here.

ASHER B. DURAND’S *Kindred Spirits* IS ON LOAN TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART COURTESY OF THE WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION, INC.