

A Walking Tour

Landscape Paintings

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

COVER: Thomas Cole, *The Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)* (detail), 1839.
National Gallery of Art, Andrew W. Mellon Fund, 1967.8.1

Compiled by William J. Williams, Barbara Moore, and the staff of the education
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Landscape painting in Western art is a relatively recent development, having evolved only during the last five centuries or so. Before anyone could see much point to depicting forests, farmlands, or riverbanks, it was necessary to develop an interest in, if not love of, nature. For most of Western history, however, the natural world had been viewed more as an enemy than as a friend, more a threat than a promise.

With certain exceptions, ancient and classical cultures generally restricted images of nature to individual elements such as fruit trees or birds of prey that were sacred emblems or clan totems. Occasionally, schematic renderings of coastlines or mountain ranges served as settings for narrative subjects or as ornamental diversions in interior decoration.

During the whole millennium we now call the Early Christian era and the Middle Ages, enjoyment of nature was widely considered to be a temptation to sinful excess. Royal courtiers and cloistered monks were admonished against the sensual pleasures to be found in a rose garden. Thus, for medieval artists, depicting the beauties of their environment would contradict prevailing religious beliefs.

These attitudes changed during the Renaissance of the 1400s and 1500s. This rebirth of a scientific interest in humanity's relationship to the world generated an appreciation of nature and the beginnings of landscape as a subject for European art.

At least two older traditions merged to foster the growth of landscape painting during the Renaissance. A literary revival of classical authors such as Pliny and Horace, who praised nature's wonders, inspired scenes with allegorical meanings and poetic moods. And, a new religious interpretation that "God dwells in everything and everything dwells in Him" led to detailed representations of nature, with the minuteness of the depictions paying homage to the Creator.

This interest in the physical environment emerged so rapidly that, by 1533, the Renaissance humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam could exclaim, "What spectacle can be more splendid than the sight of this world!" In the late sixteenth century, there finally came into being pure landscape: depictions of scenery for its own sake, with human figures either absent altogether or present only to give a sense of scale and activity.

Once the significance of nature had entered Western consciousness, however, a theoretical but very real problem arose: Is nature benevolent or savage? From the mid 1500s to the mid 1800s, landscape was approached through certain generally accepted aesthetic preconceptions, ranging from a tamed Utopia to a terrifying wilderness. Philosophers and artists debated endlessly over precise definitions for the emotional terms to describe these experiences, writing treatises and painting scenes of the earth as "heroic," "sublime," "fantastic," "beautiful," "idyllic," "pastoral," "picturesque," or "rustic."

Along with these arguments concerning the poetic idealization of the land were discussions about the relative merits of topographical accuracy in painting specific locations, architectural landmarks, and cityscapes. Such depictions of real places often acquired overtones of national pride, proclaiming the glories of one's own country.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, modern philosophy and inventions had significantly altered Western society. Steamboats and railroads, navigational chronometers, and photography were rapidly increasing access to and use of the environment. The camera in particular, developed in 1839, freed artists from the need to document the land's appearance. So, late nineteenth- and twentieth-century painters could redefine the landscape by exploring personal responses to the world.

The fundamental connection between humanity and nature is at the very core of the land's appeal as an artistic subject, a connection that has shaped and been shaped by the changing circumstances of civilization. Thus it might be argued that landscape painting reveals less about nature than it does about human nature. ❖



Domenico Veneziano
Florentine, c. 1410–1461

***Saint John in the Desert*, c. 1445**

Tempera on panel, .284 x .324 m (11¼ x 12¾ in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1943.4.48

Landscape painting entered Western art very slowly, first serving as a vehicle for religious symbolism. The rugged, mountainous environment in this picture signifies the spiritual drama of John the Baptist's decision to live alone in the wilderness. Its crystalline rocks and scraggy bushes, rendered in the schematic fashion of medieval art, may appear enchanting today. But to Domenico Veneziano and his contemporaries, this desolate setting powerfully communicated the sense of dread and wonder inspired by a deserted place.

Large altarpieces depicting holy personages often included small narrative scenes such as this one arranged in a horizontal band—a *predella*, from the Italian word for “apron”—below the main figures, illustrating episodes from their lives. The principal images, meant

to be seen at a distance above the whole congregation, were rendered in dignified, iconic formats. The predella panels, however, being intended for intimate viewing at close range, permitted both the patrons and the painters a certain freedom in their choices of subject matter and the variety of actions represented.

Saint John in the Desert, from an altarpiece commissioned in the 1440s for the Church of Santa Lucia dei Magnoli in Florence, demonstrates the experimental, expressive nature of predella panels. As John the Baptist discards his luxurious earthly garments in order to don the camel's skin robe of a hermit, he stands in full nudity. Only a golden halo denotes his sanctity.

The values of the fifteenth-century Renaissance, in reviving humanist ideals from classical antiquity, explain the nude anatomy that Domenico Veneziano derived from ancient Roman sculpture. The importance given to the barren setting also demonstrates the Renaissance's new interest in nature and the landscape. ✎

Giovanni Bellini
Venetian, c. 1427–1516
Saint Jerome Reading
c. 1480/1490

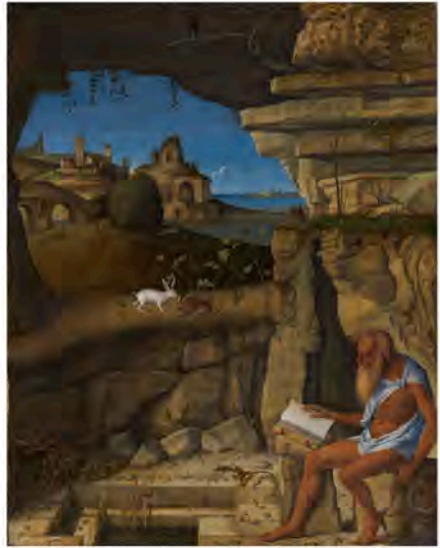
Oil on panel, .489 x .394 m (19¼ x 15½ in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1939.1.217

Like John the Baptist, depicted in Domenico Veneziano's earlier predella panel, Saint Jerome sought solitude in the desert. Giovanni Bellini's landscape setting, being based upon actual observation, shows the result of one more generation of Renaissance inquiry into nature. Rather than relying upon accepted stylistic conventions, Bellini carefully studied the appearance of rocks, foliage, animals, architecture, and atmosphere.

Significantly, too, the artist's center of interest has shifted to the landscape itself. Serene and sunny coastal scenery, viewed beyond a shadowed grotto, dominates the painting. The holy man himself sits contemplatively in a corner of the image.

Classical antiquity preoccupied the Renaissance, and Jerome, as a classical scholar, was exceptionally popular in Renaissance art. The Roman ruins in the distance serve to place the saint in time and to imply the destruction of the pagan world, which his translation of the Bible into Latin helped accomplish.

Bellini's exquisite panel, meant for private devotion and aesthetic appreciation, conveys covert religious messages. The nuzzling rabbits, for instance, recall lust, a temptation Jerome resisted. The lion whom the saint befriended is shown resting beside him like a pet, demonstrating Jerome's purity of spirit. Although Bellini's representations of the creatures and plants contain specific religious symbol-



ism, they are portrayed with a Renaissance commitment to reality.

Around 1450 the artist and theorist Leone Battista Alberti wrote, "Our minds are cheered beyond measure by the sight of paintings depicting the delightful countryside, harbours, fishing, hunting, swimming, the games of shepherds—flowers and verdure." This statement, like Bellini's lush landscape, suggests the pleasures of the physical world and would have been unthinkable before the Renaissance. (Quote from E. H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form* [London, 1966], 111.) ✨

Annibale Carracci
Bolognese, 1560–1609

Landscape, probably c. 1590

Oil on canvas, .885 x 1.482 m (34¼ x 58¼ in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1952.5.58

With paintings such as this one, Annibale Carracci created for the first time the subject of pure landscape in Italian art. Nature here is appreciated for itself and not as the backdrop for a story. Previous landscapes usually acted as appropriate settings for the actions of characters from religion, mythology, literature, or history. Here, though, the figures seem to bear no obvious meaning other than as inhabitants of a landscape.

Brightly clad in red and white, a boatman poles his craft through the shallow water. His passengers take their pleasure in the countryside as if to convey that the onlooker might do the same. The thatched cottage in the foreground and the luminous white city across the lake both seem to offer a respite from life's pressures. The scene is bathed in mellow sunlight that picks out ripples enlivening

the surface of the river. The gold in the treetops suggests a day in early autumn.

In the company of his brother Agostino and his cousin Lodovico Carracci, Annibale made excursions into the country in order to sketch the landscape. From these quick studies made on the spot, he worked up his paintings in the studio. The resulting composition here, although based upon direct observation of nature, is an artful balancing of selected forms. As the river winds its way through the countryside, the hillocks that chart its course are made to recede and project in an alternating rhythm of triangles, marking the recession into the distance. And the bold strokes of dark trees in the foreground form a dramatic screen through which one views the calm, hazy blue of the distant horizon. ✎





Claude Lorraine
French, 1600–1682
Landscape with Merchants, c. 1630

Oil on canvas, .972 x 1.436 m (38¼ x 56½ in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1952.5.44

Classically designed yet emotional in feeling, Claude Lorraine's paintings had an enormous impact on later European attitudes toward nature as an ideal paradise. The Frenchman Claude, the foremost landscape painter of the seventeenth century, arrived in Rome in 1613 and spent his entire career in central Italy. The pastoral beauty of the Roman countryside infused his harmonious landscapes. His compositions, closed on both sides like the wings of theatrical scenery, force the viewer to follow rivers or roads toward misty horizons. In order to convey such subtle atmospheric effects, Claude refined the exacting technique for blending translucent layers of oil paints.

The imaginary vistas devised by Claude usually capture an all-pervading effect of dawn or dusk light. Here, while a distant city peacefully basks in the morning sun, merchants oversee their cargo of musi-

cal instruments, luxurious furniture, potted plants, and barrels of wine. This union between industrious people and bountiful nature reflects Arcadian themes of the ancient poet Virgil.

Virgil's *Eclogues*, written in the first century B.C., extol the wonders of nature. His *Georgics*, praising toil and industry, emphasize humanity's relationship to a fruitful world. In the epic *Aeneid*, Virgil recounted the origins of Rome, inferring the poignancy of change from a now-vanished glory. As with Virgil's poetry, which recalls a mythic golden age in the past, Claude's paintings, even when set in his contemporary world as is this work, reflect a nostalgic yearning for an uncomplicated time long ago. ✎

The Italian tradition of religious and literary allegory in landscapes was paralleled in the Low Countries by an interest in precise, detailed representations of nature. This guide now takes a step back in time to the Renaissance in the Netherlands.

Rogier van der Weyden
Netherlandish, c. 1399/1400–1464
Saint George and the Dragon
c. 1432/1435

Oil on panel, .152 x .118 m (6 x 4 7/8 in.)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1966.1.1

The meticulous precision of this panel resulted from a religious conviction held by northern Europeans during the Renaissance: that the physical things of this earth are manifestations of God's creation. Underscoring the importance of contact with the world of the senses, Saint Thomas Aquinas had written in the thirteenth century, "Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee received." Rogier van der Weyden and many of his fellow artists thus believed that knowledge of God might be obtained by understanding and minutely depicting nature in all its wondrous variety.

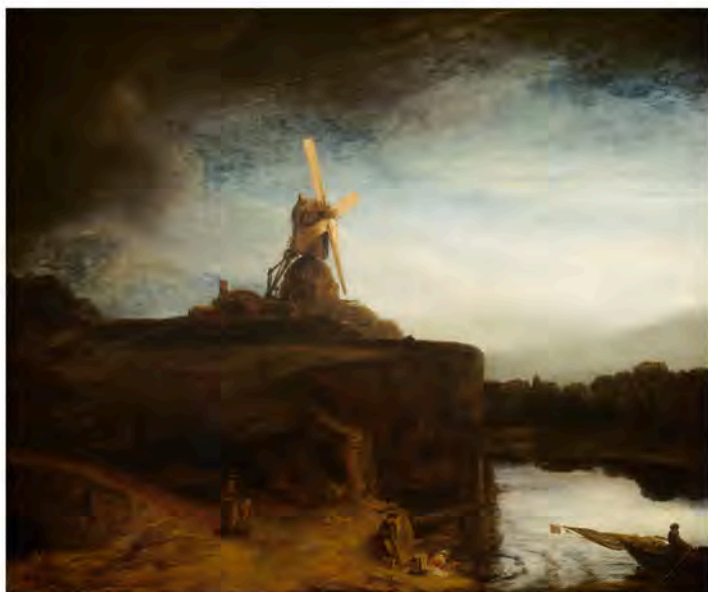
Certainly intended for private devotions, this exquisite panel is so tiny it could easily be held in the viewer's hands. On this small surface the artist created an entire world in microcosm, covering miles

of space from the bones lying in the foreground to the glowing sky over the sea.

In this painting the legend of Saint George, the Christian soldier who rescued a princess from a dragon, has been transferred from its setting in ancient Turkey to the fifteenth-century Belgian countryside. Beyond a series of overlapping hills one comes upon a walled city surrounded by a bay of the ocean and dominated by a castle perched atop a fantastic mountain. Thrusting forward, the overhanging crags defy gravity as does George's prancing steed, eternally fixed in midair. Although the geology and anatomy of the scene are impossible, Rogier van der Weyden made the picture believable through his attention to realistic textures and a clear, luminous atmosphere.

Details, such as the citizens in the town and the blades of grass, are depicted on such a small scale that they are all but invisible to the naked eye. Indeed, it has been suggested that a magnifying glass was used to paint them. These microscopic details derive from the medieval tradition of illuminations painted in manuscript Bibles and prayer books. (Quote from Eugene TeSelle, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith and Reason* [Nashville, 1988], 54.) ✱





Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606–1669
The Mill, c. 1650

Oil on canvas, .876 x 1.056 m (34½ x 41½ in.)
Widener Collection, 1942.9.62

Artists in seventeenth-century Holland, a republican nation that was largely Protestant, found little patronage for royal or liturgical themes. Instead, Dutch painters competed in an open sales market by appealing to the tastes of middle-class buyers. Thus many artists specialized in subject matter drawn from daily life.

Rembrandt was unusual among his Dutch colleagues in that he worked in a wide range of subjects. He is famous for his portraits as well as his historical or biblical paintings. Landscapes and still lifes also intrigued this versatile genius. *The Mill*, like the dozen or so other landscapes from his studio, represents an imaginary scene. Its distant range of mountains, for instance, does not exist in low-lying, sea-level Holland.

The exact meaning of the painting is uncertain, but the dramatic

focus on the mill suggests Rembrandt intended it to have an allegorical character. The sky, with storm clouds competing with sunshine, evokes cosmic forces of evil and goodness in its clash between darkness and light. The Dutch sometimes compared windmills, operating continuously to pump water or grind grain, to governments working tirelessly for their people; so, the allegory may have political overtones, too.

The Mill is one of those rare paintings that are significant not only for their beauty but also because they have profoundly influenced the history of taste. As a part of important art collections, *The Mill* has been well known to generations of connoisseurs and artists who valued it as one of Rembrandt's greatest creations. The nineteenth-century British landscapists Turner and Constable, for instance, were ecstatic in their praise, and both made free use of the picture's composition in their own works. ✪



Jan van Goyen
Dutch, 1596–1656
View of Dordrecht from the Dordtse Kil, 1644

Oil on panel, .647 x .959 m (25½ x 37¼ in.)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1978.11.1

Landscape paintings served as metaphors of national pride in seventeenth-century Holland, then a newly created country. Seascapes were also popular because the United Netherlands was a great trading power that depended on shipping for its wealth and prestige. On the open ocean and through the inland network of canals and rivers, Dutch ships carried goods and passengers for trade and commerce. Jan van Goyen perfectly captured this bustling traffic; in his view of the harbor city of Dordrecht, a sailing ferry unloads and takes on passengers from rowboats.

Van Goyen was one of the foremost early landscape specialists, being particularly adept at suggesting the moods of the land in different seasons or under varying weather conditions. Here the sky is overcast and the water calm, an atmosphere carefully created

through Van Goyen's subtle range of ochers and grays that also serves to unify the color scheme.

A glance around this room gives evidence of the amazing variety among Dutch landscapes. In addition to Van Goyen's topographically correct cityscape, there are moonlight nocturnes, winter snow scenes, storms at sea, and picturesque woodlands. The view of an ancient obelisk and domed church in Rome by Saenredam, moreover, recalls the extent of Dutch contact overseas. Such foreign and exotic vistas also reflect Holland's primary position during the seventeenth century in science, exploration, and the publication of books and maps. ✱



Pieter Jansz. Saenredam, Dutch, 1597–1665
Church of Santa Maria della Febbre, Rome, 1629
Oil on panel, .378 x .705 m (14¾ x 27¼ in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961.9.34

Thomas Gainsborough
British, 1727–1788
Mountain Landscape with Bridge
c. 1783/1784

Oil on linen, 1.130 x 1.334 m (44½ x 52½ in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.107

Thomas Gainsborough, though he was London's most fashionable society portraitist, preferred his beloved English countryside. "I'm sick of Portraits," he lamented, "and wish very much to . . . walk off to some sweet Village, where I can paint Landskips." In spite of his romantic longing for nature, he seldom if ever painted actual views. In accordance with much eighteenth-century art theory, Gainsborough was convinced that nature in the raw was an unsuitable subject. Only after an artist had refined a scene through his sensibilities could he begin to paint.

Gainsborough's late works, such as this vista of butter-yellow clouds

wafting through a mauve sky over a verdant valley, are fantastic reveries. Such idyllic scenery and extraordinary colors do not, of course, exist in the real world; so, Gainsborough invented them in his studio. He experimented with theatrical lighting effects, illuminating his subjects with candles shimmering through colored fabrics.

Another painter recorded that Gainsborough "framed a kind of model of landskips, on his table; composed of broken stones, dried herbs, and pieces of looking glass, which he magnified and improved into rocks, trees, and water." Here, shiny hard coal may have served for the wet banks of the brook, a crushed mirror for the glistening ripples, and broccoli and brussels sprouts for the foliage. Thus, from a scale model, Gainsborough did indeed "magnify and improve" nature, creating a quiet escape from life's travails. (Quotes from *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough*, ed. Mary Woodall [Greenwich, Connecticut, 1963], 115, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* [1797 edition], ed. Robert R. Wark [New York and London, 1966], 220.) ✎



John Constable

British, 1776–1837

Wivenhoe Park, Essex, 1816

Oil on canvas, .561 x 1.012 m (22¼ x 39¾ in.)
Widener Collection, 1942.9.10

This English country estate belonged to some of John Constable's closest friends, who commissioned him to record their home's appearance during August and September 1816. Constable's picture demonstrates his stated wish to be "a natural painter" because it was created almost entirely outdoors in front of the motif.

Centered in the panoramic design, the red brick manor house is accentuated by a vertical line of light that reflects from the pond and shines on the lawn between stands of elm trees. This brilliant sunshine warmly dappling the cool shade of the woods and glowing on the meadows gives evidence of the artist's careful observation of the characteristics of the actual site. The magnificent cumulus clouds scudding across the sky, for example, place the scene near the coast and reveal the source of the moisture that makes the terrain so fertile.

Constable's realist painting marvelously evokes the look and feel of Wivenhoe Park. The estate itself, however, was a cleverly calculated, man-made landscape. Its parklike grounds, enlivened by cattle and swans, look like a pastoral painting by the seventeenth-century master, Claude Lorrain. And, when Wivenhoe Park had been laid out in 1777, that is precisely what it was designed to recall. Full-grown elms were transplanted into seemingly random groves, and streams were dredged and dammed for picturesque ponds.

Cultured Europeans in the 1700s and early 1800s had decided that nature was too natural for their tastes and, instead, must imitate the well-groomed idylls of Claude's art. In their romantic gardens, meandering brooks and rolling fields replaced the geometric planting beds and symbolic sculpture of earlier, formal garden styles. The new landscape architecture, called English gardening, appeared in locations as far-flung as Catherine the Great's palaces in Russia and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Virginia. ✪





Joseph Mallord William Turner
British, 1775–1851

Mortlake Terrace, c. 1826

Oil on canvas, .921 x 1.222 m (36¼ x 48¼ in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.109

William Turner's *Mortlake Terrace* documents the view from a London garden overlooking the river Thames. Like John Constable's *Wivenhoe Park* it was commissioned by a wealthy property owner, and both landscapes recall the worship of nature that imbues the literature of their contemporaries, the romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley. There, however, the similarity ends. Constable, who often worked outdoors, preferred straightforward depictions of rural scenery. Turner, who painted in the studio from imagination and sketches, infused his seascapes and landscapes with daring drama.

A gleaming disk of white-hot paint here represents the setting sun in the western sky. Most earlier landscapists would have masked its brilliance behind clouds or trees, but not Turner. The sun's forceful

rays glare from the river and then flash over the top of the embankment, visually dissolving the very substance of the stone wall.

Mortlake Terrace demonstrates a major shift in humanity's relationship to nature because it depicts a new kind of habitation, suburbia. The river's north bank still reveals an expanse of open fields and woods, but its south bank is crammed with suburban town houses.

After the late 1700s, a population explosion accompanied Enlightenment science with its inoculations against disease and knowledge of public hygiene. Simultaneously, the Industrial Revolution forced many workers to abandon their farms and settle densely around factories. These urban people found themselves cut off from experiencing the countryside except during excursions. Many of the nineteenth century's most productive schools of landscape painting would cluster around huge metropolises such as London, New York, and Paris, as artists supplied city dwellers with reminders of fresh air, far horizons, and quietude. ✎



Thomas Cole
 American, 1801–1848
*The Notch of the White Mountains
 (Crawford Notch)*, 1839

Oil on canvas, 1.016 x 1.560 m (40 x 61½ in.)
 Andrew W. Mellon Fund, 1967.8.1

As early nineteenth-century Americans sought ways to express their emerging national identity, painters and writers turned to images of their vast land. The wild beauty of unspoiled areas, such as the mountains and river valleys of the northeast, became emblematic of the young country's future. The promise of seemingly inexhaustible territories and resources was tempered, however, by economic and political conflicts as soon as the United States began to expand.

Crawford Notch in New Hampshire had gained notoriety in 1826 when a catastrophic avalanche took nine lives. To commemorate the tragedy, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short story that may have spurred Thomas Cole's interest in the locale. The painter, rather than concentrating on the human drama, minimized the figures to underscore man's insignificance in the face of nature's power. Amid vivid autumn foliage, the barely discernible settlers, a lone rider, and the stagecoach passengers all seem oblivious to any possible impending cataclysm. Only brood-

ing storm clouds hint at a disaster that may come.

In this work, Cole, the first important artist of the Hudson River school, portrayed civilization encroaching upon the wilderness. *Crawford Notch* reflects a prevailing belief that the destruction of America's virgin forests was tantamount to sacrilege. By juxtaposing gnarled trees with freshly hewn stumps, Cole underscored the environmental consequences of man's conquest of nature.

A later painting in this room, George Inness' *Lackawanna Valley*, can be read as another eulogy for the rapidly vanishing wilderness or as an enthusiastic affirmation of the new technology. Commissioned in 1855 as an advertisement by a railroad company, it shows an entire forest felled around Scranton, Pennsylvania, partly in order to fuel the city's factories and trains. Note that logs, not coal, fill the engine's tender. ❖



George Inness, American, 1825–1894
The Lackawanna Valley, 1855, oil on canvas
 .860 x 1.275 m (33¾ x 50¼ in.), Gift of Mrs.
 Huttonston Rogers, 1945.4.1

Martin Johnson Heade
American, 1819–1904
***Cattleya Orchid and Three
Brazilian Hummingbirds*, 1871**

Oil on wood, .348 x .456 m (13¼ x 18 in.)
Gift of The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz
Foundation, 1982.73.1

In this small treetop landscape viewed high above the jungle floor, Martin Johnson Heade offers an intimate glimpse into the hidden recesses of nature's secret garden. A blue-gray mist veils the distant rain forest, silhouetting birds' eggs in a nest and the mosses and lichens clinging to dead branches. Perhaps inspired by the writings of Charles Darwin and other nineteenth-century scientists, the artist studied topography, climate, and species of orchids and hummingbirds during several expeditions to South America, painting them later in his New York studio.

The precisely rendered flora and fauna seem to come alive in their natural habitat. While Heade took great pride in his first hand observations, his paintings are not merely objective, scientific illustrations. The exotic, tropical setting estab-

lishes a luxuriant mood enhanced by flowing forms and vibrant hues.

Just as Heade's painting defies strict categorization as still life or landscape, so educated people were becoming aware of the fascinating but bewildering interrelationship among nature's elements. Ecology, the study of organisms and their shared environment, found its earliest major expression in *Cosmos*, written by the nineteenth century's preeminent naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt.

At the start of his global explorations in 1799, Humboldt wrote, "I shall try to find out how the forces of nature interreact upon one another and how the geographic environment influences plant and animal life. In other words, I must find out about the unity of nature." In 1859, the year that the last volume of Humboldt's *Cosmos* appeared, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. Complexity and controversy, not to mention increased specialization, came to characterize scientists' and artists' perceptions of the world. (Quote from Douglas Botting, *Humboldt and the Cosmos* [New York, 1973], 65.) ✧



Gustave Courbet

French, 1819–1877

La Grotte de la Loue, c. 1865

Oil on canvas, .984 x 1.304 m (38¼ x 51½ in.)

Gift of Charles L. Lindemann, 1957.6.1

In nineteenth-century France, a series of political and artistic revolutions shifted both the discourse and the definition of landscape painting. Gustave Courbet exemplified the challenge posed by the avant-garde to the conservative arts establishment of France during this tumultuous period. He depicted rural events and scenery, based primarily on peasant life, in a direct style that emphasized forthrightness and physicality. By presenting seemingly raw subjects in his rough technique and placing them on the heroic scale usually reserved for idealized, instructive subjects

from history, Courbet affronted the canons of the official art world.

Long interested in the natural history of his region, including its geology, Courbet was scrupulously accurate in *La Grotte de la Loue*, representing a famous site near Ornans, his native village in the remote, mountainous region near the Swiss border. The setting is the source of the Loue River and its surrounding massive rock formations, which offered a scene of intense and primitive beauty. Eliminating all but rocks and water in his densely geometrical composition, Courbet heightened the contrast between the dark cavern and still water inside and the rugged limestone rocks and flowing white cascade outside the cave. Except in the diminutive spear fisherman, Courbet used the unorthodox palette-knife technique, troweling on irregular layers of pigment to create a roughly worked surface that imitates the textures of the setting and evokes the physical presence of the terrain. ✱





Claude Monet
French, 1840–1926
The Bridge at Argenteuil, 1874

Oil on canvas, .600 x .797 m (23¾ x 31¼ in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, 1983.1.24

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the communities in the Seine River Valley—places such as Bougival, Louveciennes, and Argenteuil—were increasingly accessible via new railroad lines. The region was gradually transformed from rural and agricultural to suburban, serving also as a weekend recreation site for Parisians of all social classes. Fierce debates ensued over what was happening to the French countryside as industries sprang up and city folk flocked there on day trips to “enjoy” nature. Landscapes of the Paris environs by the French impressionists, fusing the contemporary scene with new, prismatic color techniques, seem to absorb the confluence of people, progress, and place that defined these rapidly changing times.

One of Claude Monet’s important subjects was Argenteuil. A suburban town still surrounded by

vineyards, it was being transformed by gypsum quarries and other industries and by its reputation as a leading center for boating and sailing. Monet lived there for six years during the 1870s, making more than 150 paintings of the town and its river during this, his defining period.

In this painting the artist combined life and land into a vibrant, cohesive view. While river and sky occupy much of the canvas, the toll bridge over the Seine also commands an important place. Small figures stop there to look out over the river, where a mast and three other boats identify leisure activity. The atmosphere of the day, however, is the organizing principle of the image: clouds scattered across a bright blue sky and sparkling reflections of light on the waves remind us of the impressionists’ central devotion to fresh, seemingly spontaneous views of nature’s light and atmosphere. Also contrived to seem “natural” is the point of view, in which scale corresponds more to artistic than objective qualities and we, like Monet, occupy an undefined position on the riverbank over the water. ✎



Claude Monet

French, 1840–1926

***The Japanese Footbridge*, 1899**

Oil on canvas, .813 x 1.016 m (32 x 40 in.)

Gift of Victoria Nebeker Coberly, in memory of her son John W. Mudd, and Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1992.9.1

In 1883 Claude Monet rented a farmhouse and two acres of land where he painted some of his greatest work. This was at Giverny, a hamlet some thirty-five miles farther from Paris than Argenteuil. At Giverny the fields and meadows near Monet's house were crisscrossed by intimate tributaries and ribbons of willows and poplars. Monet planted the property (which he bought in 1890 and expanded later) with spectacular gardens and created a pond (subsequently ornamented with a Japanese footbridge) that came to serve as his ultimate subject.

The Japanese Footbridge is one of eighteen paintings in Monet's first series depicting the pond and gardens on his property, subjects that gradually absorbed all of his artistic

and horticultural interests. Here the artist carefully observed reflections of irises, willows, and other plantings on the border of the pond as well as the lily pads and blossoms floating on its surface. Noting the pond's textures and colors with deft variations of touch, he distinguished reflected foliage, painted in choppy, vertical strokes, from the actual presence of flowers and lily pads, which he painted in horizontal drags of unblended pigment. Also recorded across the very bottom of the painting is the arc-shaped mirror image of the footbridge.

Monet's other serial paintings, examples of which hang in this room, explore individual themes of impressive range. Two of his thirty extant views of Rouen Cathedral (completed and shown in 1894) and three images of Waterloo Bridge and one of the Houses of Parliament from his London campaigns of 1900–1904 hint at the way Monet's late subjects shift from depictions of places and things to artistic concerns of color, atmosphere, and mood. ✨

Paul Cézanne
French, 1839–1906
Le Château Noir, 1900/1904

Oil on canvas, .737 x .966 m (29 x 39 in.)
Gift of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer, 1958.10.1

Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne's birthplace in the south of France, and nearby sites such as the famous mountain of Sainte-Victoire figure prominently among the artist's landscape subjects. But late in his life Cézanne sought out isolated locations around Aix, where the land was more rugged, remote, and perhaps indicative of his own moodiness. The subject of this painting, an unfinished, abandoned house set in dense, rocky woods, had a haunting quality that appealed to the artist.

In this view Cézanne presents an intense vision of the steep, solitary woods east of Aix. Treetops, trunks, and jagged branches form an interwoven screen that both conceals and reveals the house on its site against the foothills of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Cézanne manipu-

lated the composition through color, using cool tones in the foreground that shift with the warmer hues of the house and promontory to produce an enlivened yet disturbed image.

Cézanne knew the region of Aix intimately; he had walked it and painted it throughout his life. Particularly in his mature work, he evoked the fundamental order as well as the essential restless and chaotic quality of nature. Part of the genius of Cézanne's art comes from his ability to capture these simultaneous yet seemingly irreconcilable aspects of his motifs. His classic vision was a link that united naturalist and realist treatments of the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries with the ordered views of nature made by the old masters, while also providing a direction for painters of the early twentieth century. ✱



André Derain

French, 1880–1954

Mountains at Collioure, 1905

Oil on canvas, .813 x 1.033 m (32 x 39½ in.)
John Hay Whitney Collection, 1982.76.4

As it had been for Paul Cézanne, the French landscape was a primary inspiration for the group of early twentieth-century artists including André Derain and Henri Matisse who were later called *fauves*, or “wild beasts.” The term, originally used by a critic, referred in part to their vivid colors and free, vigorous application of paint on canvas.

Mountains at Collioure dates from the summer of 1905, when Derain joined Matisse to paint landscapes at the French Mediterranean fishing port of Collioure, located at the foot of the Pyrenees. In a period of intense collaboration and experimentation the two artists worked side by side, producing some of the most astonishing art of the twentieth century.

Here, Derain’s exuberant view of

olive groves and mountains inland from Collioure is a classic example of fauve style. The foreground field, trees, and foothills are rendered in choppy strokes of intense colors—green, blue, mauve, and pink notations that suggest a highly charged experience of the natural world. The mountains are conceived as flat areas of unmodulated color in alternating warm and cool tones, and the whole scene is set beneath an active sky of jade and turquoise.

Derain’s bold brushwork in the trees and grasses, defined by the white priming layer visible on the canvas, energizes the surface of the painting while endowing it with a bright, interior light. His unabashed composition realizes the power of “deliberate disharmony” but not disunity, for through rhythmic color and interwoven line Derain tied his painting together into a brilliant, luminous whole. (Quote from Derain’s letter to Maurice de Vlaminck, *Lettres à Vlaminck* [Paris, 1955], 154–155.) ➤





Joan Miró
 Spanish, 1893–1983
The Farm, 1921–1922

Oil on canvas, 1.238 x 1.413 m (48¼ x 55½ in.)
 Gift of Mary Hemingway, 1987.18.1

Joan Miró's love for his parents' summer home at Montroig, a peasant village in northeastern Spain, established his custom of spending summers there and winters in Paris. This charming landscape's rural motifs—goat and donkey, plow and ax, furrowed field and fenced poultry yard—represent Montroig, where he began the picture. Its stylistic sources, however, are to be found in the avant-garde art of Paris, where Miró completed the painting.

Emphatic geometry and shifting perspectives reveal Miró's debt to cubists such as Pablo Picasso. The

brilliant palette owes much to André Derain, Henri Matisse, and the other fauves. By combining such sources with his own taste for complex, repetitive patterns, Joan Miró created an aura of fantasy.

The innumerable objects included in this crowded scene sum up Miró's memories of his earlier years at Montroig. Miró later came to see *The Farm* as a key work in his career, declaring it to be a bridge to his mature surrealist style. Surrealism goes beyond surface reality and logic to express subconscious feeling and dream imagery. Hot sunshine characterizes Mediterranean Spain, for instance, but here this blazing light strangely casts no shadows at all upon the ground. Moreover, the sun in the midday sky is rendered as a glowing circle that, oddly, is silvery gray, the color normally associated with the moon. ✎



Anselm Kiefer
 German, born 1945
***Zim Zum*, 1990**

Oil, crayon, ashes, sand, lead dust, and clay dust on lead and canvas, 3.803 x 5.601 m (149 1/4 x 220 1/2 in.)
 Gift of the Collectors Committee 1990.82.1

Anselm Kiefer's name is virtually synonymous with the revival of figurative expressionism that swept European and American art at the beginning of the last decade. While much of the neo-expressionism of the 1980s involves the probing of individual psychological states, Kiefer has taken on the drama and tragedy of world history, especially the violent events in twentieth-century Germany.

Kiefer is best known for his landscapes—dark, sweeping panoramas that allude to the destruction of Europe in the two World Wars. Many of Kiefer's works combine broad, deeply textured brushwork with highly symbolic materials and various techniques of collage while incorporating subjects that range across European political and intellectual history, mythology, and systems of faith.

The monumental landscape *Zim Zum* is composed of horizontal sheets of lead that are textured, torn, wrinkled, corroded, and col-

ored with paint, crayon, sand, dust, and ash. Affixed across the lower half is a landscape painting on tattered canvas that depicts a vast plain and a lake that recede sharply into the distance.

This is one of several objects Kiefer has made since the mid-1980s that relate to the Kabbalah, a mystical and esoteric theology of Judaism. Its title *Zim Zum* (scrawled across the top of the work) refers to the divine "contraction" of God, likened to a drawing in of breath, that allowed for Creation but also for the possibility of evil. Kiefer's landscape, like others in which he investigates the relationship between spiritual and earthly realms, may be a meditation on the coexistence of good and evil, which the Kabbalah sought, in part, to reconcile.

While the title *Zim Zum* refers to the act of creation, the scorched landscape (the artist actually burned his canvas) implies destruction on an apocalyptic scale. Kiefer underscores this thematic duality by incorporating materials such as ash, dust, and lead, traditional symbols of disintegration and transformation. Typically, landscape functions as the agent for Kiefer's exploration of history and of nature's capacity for destruction and renewal. ✎