

SEEING AMERICA: DeWitt Clinton Boutelle's *The Indian Hunter*, 1846

B

outelle poignantly portrays the impact of Euro-American expansion on Native American culture.



DeWitt Clinton Boutelle (1820 – 1884)
The Indian Hunter, 1846
Oil on canvas
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 84.47
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of
the University of Rochester

The Art

Boutelle places the solitary figure of a Native American hunter in the foreground and illuminates him almost as if by spotlight. With his bow and quiver at hand he leans back against a rock amidst a tangle of trees, sinewy vines, and wild vegetation. The hunter's mouth is downturned, his gaze distant, and his backward leaning posture suggests dejection and resignation.



Follow the man's gaze through the trees, and in the distance he—and the viewer—are able to see the church steeple and tiny buildings of a new village rising in the fertile river valley. The foreground half of the painting belongs to the Native American in his domain of wild trees and untamed vegetation. The strong diagonal lines of the hillside and two huge tall trees isolate him from the sweeping river valley in the background; at the same time, his solitude at the margin of the scene hints at his fading dominance. The sky, a contrast of dark clouds on the left and a golden haze on the right, fills almost half of the painting and reinforces the drama underway.



Thomas Cole (1801 – 1848)
Genesee Scenery, 1846-1847
Oil on panel

Gift of Howard and Florence Merritt, 94.40
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester

Reverence for nature, realistic and detailed portrayals of the land, and the use of landscape as a metaphor for moral, religious, and poetic sentiments are all apparent in this painting. While this particular setting is unknown, the landscape is very similar to the New York State Hudson River valley area near Albany and Troy, Boutelle's home. It is also the country made famous by the most popular writer of the time, James Fenimore Cooper, who in 1826 had dramatized the melancholy fate of the Native Americans in *The Last of the Mohicans*.

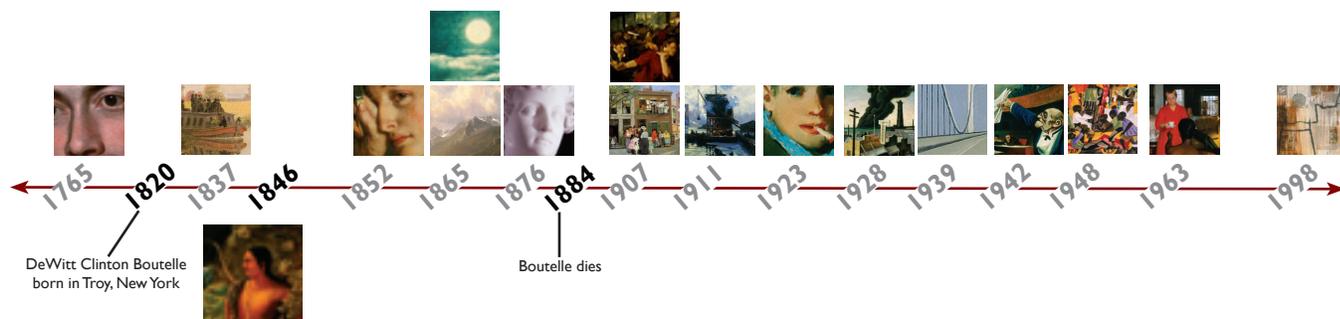
The influence of Thomas Cole, the artist most associated with the **Hudson River School**, can be seen in the trees, representing every phase of the life cycle from sapling to hollowed trunk, thus making the painting a metaphor for the passage of time and the constancy of change. *The Indian Hunter* was perhaps one of the paintings that Boutelle contributed to an exhibition dedicated to the memory of Thomas Cole at the **American Art Union** in 1848, the year Cole died.

This 1846 work shows the hunter with his bow and arrows. In a very similar painting done in 1848, *Hudson River Landscape with Indian*, Boutelle presents the Indian unarmed, with his hand on his heart, viewing the distant scenery from a high vantage point. However, in a third painting done seven years later, the artist presents the Native American with a rifle. Technology is advancing but not, ultimately, to the mutual benefit of Euro-American and Native American cultures.



De Witt Clinton Boutelle
American, 1820–84
Untitled (Hudson River Landscape with Indian), 1848
Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.
Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA, 71.729

The Artist



DeWitt Clinton Boutelle, born in Troy, New York, in 1820, was named after New York's governor, DeWitt Clinton, champion of "Clinton's Folly," the Erie Canal.

The artist was largely self-taught, which was quite common in that period in America. He sold his first painting in 1839 for five dollars (and bought it back years later for fifty dollars). By 1846, when he painted *The Indian Hunter*, he had set up a studio in New York City, and he later moved to Pennsylvania. He was elected to the **National Academy of Design** in 1853.

Boutelle was among the artists promoted by American Art Union. Founded in 1839 with a mission to foster an emerging national art, the Union used subscriptions from members to fund exhibitions, in turn providing the subscribers with engravings and prints of paintings, and later with books and a

Glossary

Hudson River School: Mid-19th century American art movement in which painters celebrated the landscape of Hudson River Valley and nearby areas.

American Art Union: Organization started in 1839 to promote the exhibition and sale of American art to all people regardless of their wealth or social status.

National Academy of Design: Founded in 1825, as a professional organization of artists, its annual exhibition in the 19th century was the premier venue for American artists to show their work.

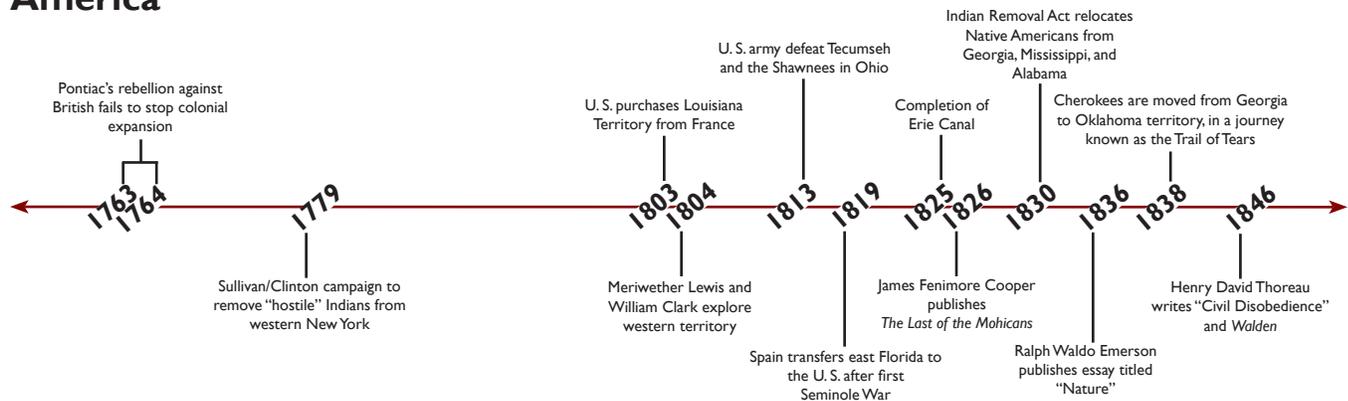
monthly art journal. Through this membership, Boutelle became aware of the work of his contemporaries like Thomas Cole and John Frederick Kensett, another of the Hudson River School painters. The American Art Union purchased seventy-one of Boutelle's paintings, more than from any other artist.

The influence of Thomas Cole is especially evident in Boutelle's paintings of the 1840s and 1850s. As was true for other members of the Hudson River School, much of Boutelle's work was of Hudson River Valley scenes, the Catskills, the Adirondacks, and the region around Albany, renowned for dramatic, densely wooded hills and ravines. These artists would sketch during expeditions out of doors, and return to their studios to produce their finished paintings. Many eventually went beyond New York, into New England, New Jersey, and the Far West, for inspiration.



John Frederick Kensett (1816 – 1872)
A Showery Day, Lake George, ca. 1860
 Oil on canvas
 Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 74.29
 Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
 University of Rochester

America



The first half of the nineteenth century was a fertile period for philosophical, economic, social, and aesthetic movements in the United States. Technological inventions and projects—such as New York State's 1825 Erie Canal, which linked the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes—changed the landscape, opened up new economic opportunities, and created new wealth for many Americans. State and federal governments made land ownership west of the Hudson River affordable by reducing the price per acre as well as the minimum size of the parcels. Thousands of people migrated into western New York and the Ohio Valley in the 1820s, and then steadily farther west, displacing the indigenous people.

In the 1840s and 1850s, many Americans believed it was their national destiny to extend control—and civilization—from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. **Manifest Destiny** idealists believed it was God's will that expansion should bring freedom and democracy to the western lands; more pragmatic expansionists wanted to extend the slave states, or reap agricultural and mineral resources.

The new unspoiled spaces also appealed to **Transcendentalists** Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, philosophers who wrote of the purity of a direct experience of nature and found in that experience moral imperatives about how to live respectfully. The Romantics emphasized new emotional, spiritual, and intuitive responses to the natural world.



John Gast
American Progress, 1872
 Museum of the American West
 Autry National Center for the American West,
 Los Angeles; 92.126.1

Glossary

Manifest Destiny: 19th century self-proclaimed belief that the United States was divinely ordained to expand across the North American continent.

Transcendentalism: American movement in the mid-19th century which focused on reaching an ideal spiritual state through a person's own intuition.

America's artists, heirs to the Hudson River School philosophy, responded to this interest in both the beauty and spiritual value of nature and the landscapes of the West. They followed the trappers and pioneers, and their paintings, shown in the galleries back East, excited a generation of Americans to go west, to be thrilled by the opportunities and vistas of the unspoiled frontier.

See also Marlene Hamann-Whitmore, "DeWitt Clinton Boutelle, *The Indian Hunter* (1846)," in Marjorie B. Searl, ed., *Seeing America: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 47–50.



Albert Bierstadt (1830 – 1902)
The Sierras Near Lake Tahoe, California, 1865
Oil on panel
Clara and Edwin Strassenburgh Fund and
Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 92.78
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester

Classroom Activities: Seeing America Through Artists' Eyes

Observing Detail

What clues in the painting tell you where and when this is?

How does the artist draw the viewer's eyes to the background? What is there?

How does knowing the title, *The Indian Hunter*, shape the meaning in this painting?

What questions would you ask the artist?



Comparing and Contrasting

Compare the two paintings by DeWitt Clinton Boutelle: *The Indian Hunter* (1846) and the 1848 painting *Untitled (Hudson River Landscape with Indian)*. What important similarities and differences do you find? How has the artist's emphasis changed? Consider the subject, the figures, the composition and the rendering of the natural environment.



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Oil on canvas

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American, 1820–84

Untitled (Hudson River Landscape with Indian), 1848

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Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.

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Exploring the Context

Artists are keen observers and commentators on the world in which they live. Use *The Artist and America* timelines to consider the effect of American history and art history as reflected in their artwork. In what ways did the artist capture or reflect the events, mood and/or values of his/her America? In what ways did the artist continue or alter the American art traditions he/she would have seen?

Exploring the Context

Compare the DeWitt Clinton Boutelle *The Indian Hunter* from the mid-19th century with later interpretations of the Native American.



Randolph Rogers (1825 – 1892)
Indian Group – The Last Shot, 1880
Bronze

Extended loan to the Memorial Art Gallery from the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City;
Bequest of Henry H. Cook, 1905, 11.87L



Frederic Remington (1861 – 1909)
The Cheyenne, 1901
Bronze

Bequest of Mrs. Merritt Cleveland, 2003.104
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester



DeWitt Clinton Boutelle (1820 – 1884)
The Indian Hunter, 1846
Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 84.47
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940)
Famous Names, 1998

Oil, acrylic, collaged photographs and mixed media on canvas
Gift of Thomas and Marion Hawks, by exchange, 98.39
Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
Courtesy of the artist

Exploring the Context

DeWitt Clinton Boutelle and the Hudson River School artists wanted to capture the beauty of nature before it was destroyed by human touch. Explore artists' history of romanticizing the American landscape. What effect did the artists have on Americans' attitudes toward the land and ecology?



John Frederick Kensett (1816 – 1872)

A Showery Day, Lake George, ca. 1860

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 74.29

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



Asher Brown Durand (1796 – 1886)

Genesee Oaks, 1860

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Women's Council in honor of Harris K. Prior, 74.5

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823 – 1900)

The Hudson River, New York, 1857–1858

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 73.39

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
University of Rochester



DeWitt Clinton Boutelle (1820 – 1884)

The Indian Hunter, 1846

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 84.47

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the
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Thomas Cole (1801 – 1848)

Genesee Scenery, 1846–1847

Oil on panel

Gift of Howard and Florence Merritt, 94.40

Collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

Reading and Interpreting Visual Language/Comparing and Contrasting

The plight of the Native American in the wake of westward expansion was a familiar theme to the artists of the 19th century. Compare writer William Cullen Bryant's use of words in the final two stanzas of this poem with painter DeWitt Clinton Boutelle's use of visual imagery.

"An Indian at the Burial-Place of His Fathers"
William Cullen Bryant, 1824

Before these fields were shorn and tilled,
Full to the brim our rivers flowed;
The melody of waters filled
The fresh and boundless wood;
And torrents dashed and rivulets played,
And fountains spouted in the shade.

Those grateful sounds are heard no more,
The springs are silent in the sun;
The rivers, by the blackened shore,
With lessening current run;
The realm our tribes are crushed to get
May be a barren desert yet.

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