



HAWTHORNE
Fine Art

JAMES FAIRMAN (1826-1904)

Twilight, Factory on the Hudson, 1870

Oil on panel

6 5/8 x 16 inches

Signed and dated lower right.

“The many person who, during the last few years, have studied the fascinating works of this American artist ... have recognized him as one of the great living masters of landscape and marine painting. In power of depicting the glories of the sunlight, and producing the illusions of nature, especially in her phenomenal aspects, he has, in truth, no equal. This is the confession of European art students of the highest rank, as well as of intelligent judges generally, who finds [sic] his works a refreshing contrast with the crudeness and inanity of much that we are called upon to admire in American landscape painting.”¹

The painter James Fairman was born in Scotland to Swedish and Scottish parents. Following the death of his father around 1830, Fairman moved to New York with his mother and older brother. Fairman, who showed early signs of artistic talent, enrolled in classes at the National Academy of Design in 1842.

Fairman's artistic studies were interrupted, however, when he joined the militia. Having an adept military mind, he rose through the ranks to become Colonel of the New York Seventy-third, a position he held through most of the 1840s. Although he painted intermittently over the next decade—in addition to becoming a platform speaker in the anti-slavery movement, studying law, becoming an elected member of the New York City Board of Education (1858), and running as a Congressional candidate—it wasn't until the 1860s that Fairman began to wholly pursue his art.

After officially leaving the army in 1863 due to injuries, Fairman rented a studio in New York City and began to paint. Fairman, who was largely self-taught, was an ardent critic of institutions like the National Academy of design. He saw these organizations as, “pretentious coteries whose only purpose was to secure a leadership for commercial ends, sacrificing the true mission of a noble profession ...”² Fairman operated uniquely for an artist at that time, supporting himself with commissions and clientele unconnected to the major art groups or institutions.

In 1871, Fairman departed for Europe with the intention of spending eight months painting commissions. However, inspired by his travels, Fairman lengthened his stay in Europe, where he spent the following decade studying in Dusseldorf (3 years), Paris (3 years) and London (2+ years). Following Fairman's decade in Europe, the artist W. Cave Thomas was inspired to publish his observations of Fairman's unique, hybrid style:

¹ Thomas, W. Cave. “Biographical Sketch of Col. James Fairman, A.M., the American Artist and Art Lecturer.” *Art Journal* (1880): 3.

² *Ibid.*



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“I have just seen some very vigorous sketches from nature ... by the American landscape painter, Mr. James Fairman. They are finished and truthful, without sacrifice of boldness There is fine form, too, in some of the larger compositions, and a power of expressing sunlight. Colonel Fairman, although he has visited all the schools in Europe, preserves his originality; his style is peculiarly his own, it is neither English, French, nor Belgian. In his discourses upon art he is exceedingly eloquent, and shows that he has deeply pondered over art questions.”³

Twilight, Storm King on the Hudson was painted in 1870, one year prior to Fairman's departure for Europe. Fairman's composition builds on Samuel Colman's iconic *Storm King on the Hudson* from a few years prior in 1866, which also displays a large industrial cluster resembling a barge in the background framed by a small rowboat in the front [fig. 1]. According to scholar Kenneth W. Maddox, the barge sitting on the horizon in both paintings represents a type of “rig” that was constructed after the discovery of an old iron cannon in the Hudson.⁴ The cannon “created its own romance” as it was “claimed to be part of a sunken ship containing immense treasure.”⁵ The rig or “cofferdam” constructed over the supposed sunken ship included a steam engine with large driving pumps and though the project was soon abandoned, the surrounding folklore endured.



Fig. 1 – Samuel Colman (1832-1920), *Storm King on the Hudson*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 59 7/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1929.6.20.

³ Thomas, “Biographical Sketch of Col. James Fairman,” 3.

⁴ Maddox, Kenneth W. *In Search of the Picturesque: Nineteenth Century Images of Industry Along the Hudson River Valley* (New York: Edith C. Blum Art Institute, 1983), 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*