



**JOHN WILLIAM CASILEAR (1811-1893)**

*Mountain Lake*

Oil on canvas

11 ¼ x 21 inches

Estate stamp verso

**PROVENANCE:** Spencertown Art and Antiques, Spencertown, NY; to private collector, 1986.

*The rectitude of his character and the refined accuracy of his original profession are exhibited in his pictures. They are finished with great care, and the subjects chosen with fastidious taste; the habit of dealing strictly with form, given a curious correctness to the details of his work; there is nothing dashing, daring, or off-hand; all is correct, delicate, and indicative of sincere feeling for truth.<sup>1</sup>*

-Henry Theodore Tuckerman, 1867

*His skies are luminous, and his distances tender and melting ... there is a poetic pastoral charm in all his work.<sup>2</sup>*

-Benjamin Champney, 1900

John William Casilear, who made a name for himself in the mid-nineteenth century as a

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<sup>1</sup>Tuckerman, Henry T. 1966. *Book of the artists; American artist life comprising biographical and critical sketches of American artists, preceded by an historical account of the rise & progress of art in America*. New York: J.F. Carr.

<sup>2</sup>Champney, Benjamin. 1977. *Sixty years' memories of art and artists*. [New York]: [Garland Pub.].



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prominent second-generation Hudson River School painter, began his career as an engraver in New York City. Apprenticed first to Peter Maverick (1780-1831), Casilear ultimately studied under the noted Hudson River School painter Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), who remained a friend and mentor to Casilear throughout his life. Casilear was a talented engraver, and in 1832 established his own banknote engraving firm in partnership with his brother. His earliest exhibited pieces (1833 and 1834) at the National Academy of Design were engravings.

By 1840, however, Casilear's interests turned to landscape painting. In that year, he traveled abroad, accompanied by Durand as well as fellow painters John F. Kensett (1816-1872) and Thomas P. Rossiter (1818-1871). Casilear began his travels in London with Durand, before visiting Rome to study the Old Masters. He then traveled to Paris with Rossiter and Kensett, exploring France and Germany before returning to New York in 1843.

Upon his return to the United States, Casilear again took up engraving—albeit to different ends. While he had been a talented banknote engraver previously, by the mid-1840 his interests had shifted; Casilear now expanded his practice to include engravings of paintings, which he produced for distribution to such organizations as the American Art-Union. By 1854, Casilear set aside engraving entirely in order to become a landscape painter, sojourning throughout New England on sketching trips in search of his subject matter. He returned to Europe for a period of two years (1857-9), where he studied, sketched and painted in England, France and Switzerland. While in Switzerland, Casilear spent much of his time sketching studies of the Swiss Alps, which have been said to have influenced both his European and American mountainscapes thereafter.



Upon his return to New York, Casilear took up a space at the now-famous Tenth Street Studio Building. In the 1850s Casilear was elected as an academician to the National Academy of Design, where he exhibited annually for the remainder of his career. Casilear was well-liked by his colleagues and fellow artists, remaining an active member of the Academy, the Century Association, and the Artists Fund Society through the end of his life. Following his death in August of 1893, Casilear's eulogy was noted in the Academy's minutes of October 9:

*He was a capital draughtman [sic] and in certain tender silvery effects of light over quiet woodland and river scenes he was especially happy, his works being charged by a certain refinement of color and softness of atmospheric effect that won for him considerable distinction. Those of us who have been associated with him for so many years will always remember his cheerful, manly ways, his bright conversations, and keen interest in art, so that our sense of loss can hardly be conveyed by a formal resolution.<sup>3</sup>*

The current painting is likely a scene of Lake Geneva, painted during Casilear's 1857-59 travels through Europe. Though the exact vantage point is unknown, the topography of the visible mountain peaks indicates the viewpoint as the northeastern shore of Lake Geneva, on the Swiss side, between Lausanne and Vevey. Identifiable Casilear's rendering are the peaks of the Tour d'Ai, the Tour de Mayen, and the Rochers de Naye to the left. To the right, one can make out the Grand

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Dearing, David Bernard. 2004. *Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of the National Academy of Design*. New York: Hudson Hills Press.



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Muveran, Dents de Morcles, and the Grammont.