



SOARING SIGHTS

Luminist Landscapes
by Female Hudson River
School Painters (1825-1875)



*“I shall have to look at her pictures. I don’t
even know what sort of work she does yet,
— and I shall have to talk about Art—
Woman’s Art!”*

—Rudyard Kipling

Soaring Sights

LUMINIST LANDSCAPES BY FEMALE
HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL PAINTERS (1825-1875)

An Exhibition and Sale
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Julia Bacon



Julia Bacon (1861-1901), *Hudson River Valley Vista*
Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 inches, signed lower right

A student of the Impressionist painter Edmund C. Tarbell (1862-1938), Julia Bacon was also a member of the Boston Art Students' Association. She exhibited at Copely Hall and the Boston Art Club, and may have also exhibited at the National Academy of Design in New York. Julia Bacon spent much of her life in Boston, Massachusetts. Beyond records of her exhibitions, however, the details of Bacon's life remain obscure.

Hudson River Valley Vista presents an expansive scene, with much more of a stylistic affinity for the realism of the Hudson River School than the Impressionism of Bacon's mentor. Two sailboats in the middle ground represent a mild narrative, striking two bright points against rolling banks of umbrageous trees. Rising from the banks of the central waterway are humped peaks, unidentifiable in shape but reminiscent of similar views painted by contemporaneous Hudson River School painters. Special care is given to the treatment of the sky, which subtly undulates between pink-tinged shades of blue. Rendered in near-textureless brush strokes, the expansive ceiling of sky and light cloud cover is offset by the rough-hewn branches of the lone tree rising to the left.



Susie M. Barstow (1836-1923), *Night in the Woods*, c. 1890-91
Oil on canvas, 20 x 14 inches, signed lower left

Susie M. Barstow

Unique in her artistic practice and her position as a female Hudson River School painter during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Susie M. Barstow not only forged a considerable reputation in a field dominated by men, but she also ventured to the top of mountains in search of authentic subject matter. As a leading member of the Appalachian Mountain Club, Barstow scaled over one hundred and ten peaks in her lifetime. Accompanied by other female explorers and Appalachian Mountain Club members, such as Marian Pychowska and the artist Edith Wilkinson Cook (d. 1902), Barstow embarked on yearly excursions to the White Mountains of New Hampshire and contributed to *Appalachia*, the group's journal.

Night in the Woods was likely exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1891. While the vision of a canopied woodland pathway is not unique in her *oeuvre*, Barstow's decision to paint at night is unusual. The faithful rendering of light from the luminous moon and its reflection in the glassy water of the pond shows the artist's equal consideration to shadow and light.

*We continued our course through the forest,
near the edge of the ravine, finding only one
other fine view-point until we reached the
stream flowing through its centre, where the
outlook was very beautiful ...*

— S. M. Barstow



Susie M. Barstow (1836-1923), *In the White Mountains*, 1872
Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 ¾ inches, signed and dated 1872, lower right

In the White Mountains is a more typical landscape scene for Barstow. It likely depicts Mount Washington as seen from the vicinity of North Conway, New Hampshire. In the distance, two peaks of the Presidential Range are set behind the foregrounding ravine, with White Horse Ledge just barely defined to the left. Barstow's connection to the mountains she so avidly traversed is apparent. The foreground—with bright spots of color on the leaves of autumn-kissed trees, and the subtle reflections in the ravine's brackish waters—provides a contrast to the distant mountain peaks rising in the distance, tinged with purple and set beneath billowing clouds of white and pink.

Julie Hart Beers



Julie Hart Beers (1835-1913), *Landscape with Pond*
Oil on panel, 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, signed lower left

The younger sister of the Hudson River School painters William (1823-1894) and James MacDougal Hart (1828-1901), Julie Hart Beers had the advantage of her brothers' support in her pursuit of an artistic career. Beers produced income from the sale of her paintings, and by leading sketching trips in Vermont and the Adirondacks. Following the death of her husband, Beers was able to independently support herself and her two daughters this way.

As landscape subjects, Beers favored the countrysides of New England, the Hudson River Valley, and the Catskill mountains. Here, *Landscape with Pond* easily demonstrates Beers's careful training. With a balanced composition divided between the dark colors of a forested riverbank and the cool-toned reflections on the waterway's placid surface, a group of cattle draws the viewer's eye to the center of the painting. With thick brush strokes of blues and grays, Beers articulates a thick ceiling of cloud and atmosphere that directs the light and color of the scene, producing the moody and highly poignant anticipation of a sudden summer storm.



Isabella Bissett (1830-1870), *Catskill Landscape*, c. 1850's
Oil on canvas, 7 x 13 inches, signed on stretcher



Isabella Bissett (1830-1870), *Hudson Valley Landscape*, c. 1850's
Oil on canvas, 7 x 13 inches, signed on stretcher

Isabella Bissett

While few details survive of the Scottish-Canadian painter Isabella Bissett's life and career, census records follow her early years in Scotland—as a miniature painter and, apparently, the sole supporter of her family following the death of her father—through her immigration to Peterborough, Canada sometime between 1851 and 1858. While other details of Bissett's life (for example, her artistic training, exhibitions, sales, and records of travel) are lacking, the present pair of paintings show topographic similarities to contemporaneous paintings of the Hudson River Valley and the Catskills, and a close alignment with the stylistic ethos of the Hudson River School painters.

The topography of *Hudson River Valley* is reminiscent of similar views surrounding the Hudson River Highlands and Storm King, which were popularized in the mid- and late-nineteenth century by Bissett's American contemporaries. *Catskill Landscape*, similarly, evokes the popular Catskill sites and compositions of the second-generation Hudson River School painters, as well as their favored cattle motifs. In canvases that show a well-practiced development of color and method, and balanced compositions with great attention to detail and faithfulness to her subjects, Bissett's compositions show a great affinity for the Hudson River School style. The juxtaposition of her paintings' small size with their illusion of depth makes for highly compact and intimate scenes, and their scope conveys much of the attraction to the natural world that would have led Bissett to settle in such an undeveloped area as Peterborough.



Agnes Brown (1847-1932), *Landscape with White Birch*
Oil on board, 13 5/8 x 10 1/4 inches, signed verso

Agnes Brown

Agnes Brown and her husband, the landscape painter John Appleton Brown (1844-1902), made a formidable artistic pair. The two traveled and painted together constantly, beginning in 1874 with an extended trip to France where they were exposed to the Barbizon painting of Camille Corot (1796-1875) and his contemporaries. The couple returned to the United States the following year, where they settled in Boston. In the company of such American Barbizon painters as William Morris Hunt and Joseph Foxcroft Cole, the Browns honed their pastoral renderings of the New England landscape.

As the wife of a well-respected painter, Agnes Brown benefited from her husband's reputation, encouragement, and lifestyle. However these same privileges tend to obfuscate Agnes Brown's independent legacy in the historical record as a painter in her own right. While Agnes Brown is rarely considered outside of the context of her husband, however, her paintings retain significant authority on their own. *Landscape with White Birch*, for example, carries weight as a stand-alone vignette. In Brown's choice of an arched frame and use of expressive brush strokes to render surprising detail, this pastoral summer scene of a New England landscape ranks among those of her husband and other predominantly male members of the American Barbizon school.

Sarah Cole

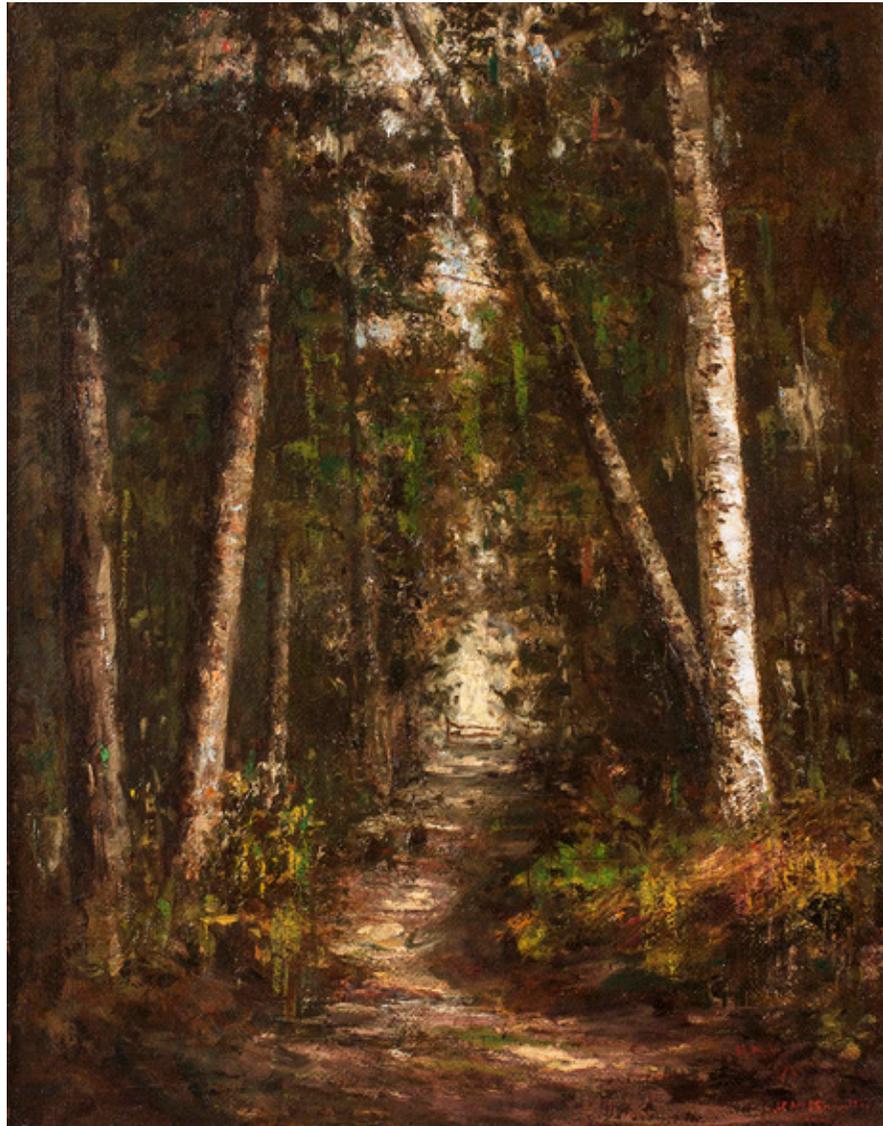


Sarah Cole (1805-1857), *Ancient Column Near Syracuse*, c. 1848
Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

Sarah Cole's career as a landscape artist is most often overshadowed by that of her older brother, the influential history painter and founder of the Hudson River School style, Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Due to many of the artistic freedoms and advantages that came with her older brother's success and influence, Sarah Cole was able to make summer sketching trips to the Catskills, producing both original and copied works along the way.

Sarah Cole rose to some notoriety in her lifetime, and cultivated a patron base that spanned New York and Pennsylvania. She exhibited at the National Academy of Design alongside some of the best Hudson River School artists of the time.

Cole likely copied *Ancient Column Near Syracuse* from her elder brother's *Column of Ancient Syracuse*, which was displayed at his memorial exhibition in 1848. Cole's composition here plays with allegory in the inclusion of the column and satyr, evoking symbols found in old master paintings and motifs of classical architecture that reflect the enduring influence of her famous brother.



Helen Mary Knowlton (1832-1918), *Figures in the Forest*
Oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 22 ½ inches, signed lower right

Helen Mary Knowlton

The painter, art critic, and educator Helen Mary Knowlton studied in Boston with William Morris Hunt (1824-1879) from 1868-71, and in Munich with Frank Duveneck (1848-1919) in the early 1880s. Knowlton was one of Hunt's class of female students, whom he asked to take over as instructor in 1871. Due to their close working relationship during these years—as Hunt still visited the class for critiques after Knowlton took over—Knowlton produced an instructional book based on Hunt's teachings, entitled *Hints for Pupils in Drawing and Painting*. In addition to teaching and pursuing her own artistic career, Knowlton wrote as an art critic for the *Boston Post*, an appointment she held throughout her career.

Figures in the Forest, while unique in the context of this exhibition as an enclosed space, nonetheless places an emphasis on the effects of light as an element that interacts with and among natural forms. In the middle ground, the two roughly-rendered figures that traverse the woodland path offer context and scale to the lofty, cathedral-like enclosure of foliage. With judicious use of a subdued color palette, Knowlton uses highlights to suggest the cool air of the leafy enclosure and, with splashes of blue and pink, to hint at an expansive sky just beyond the vaulted ceiling of branches. With a nod to the techniques of the Impressionist luminist painters and a subdued palette befitting of her teachers, Knowlton's painterly execution of light and atmosphere offers more in the way of suggestion than overt representation.

Abigail Tyler Oakes



Abigail Tyler Oakes (1823-1898), *View of the Hudson River*, 1854
Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 inches, signed and dated lower center

Though few details of her early life are available, it is known that Abigail Tyler Oakes moved to New York City from Charlestown, Massachusetts in her early twenties, where she married and began a family. Throughout her life Oakes resided alternatively in Boston and New York, traveling abroad intermittently to London, England and Havre, France, where she may have pursued artistic training. Oakes exhibited during her lifetime at the National Academy of Design and at the Brooklyn Art Association, where she was also a member.

Though her level of artistic training is unclear, Oakes' *View of the Hudson River* implies the deep influence of her Hudson River School predecessors and contemporaries. Using deceptively simple compositional devices, the scene allows for a variety of depth and visual diversity, with the foreground characterized by extreme detail and the furthest reaches articulated in atmospheric effects. In the foreground a small group of grazing cattle are flanked by lush vegetation, and mountain peaks break through in the distance to command and direct the viewer's eye over the hint of a city along a winding river bank. Though her works are rare, Oakes' skill is wholly condensed, making her paintings weighty in their representation of her skill with the brush.

Ella Ferris Pell



Ella Ferris Pell (1846-1922), *Hudson Highlands*
Oil on canvas, 7 ½ x 9 ½ inches, signed lower right

Most active in the area of Beacon, New York during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Ella Ferris Pell graduated from the Design School for Women at Cooper Union in 1870, where she had studied with the figure painter William Rimmer (1816-1879). In 1872, Pell departed for five years spent in Europe, the Near East, and North Africa. Pell would travel abroad again in the late 1880s to France, where she studied with Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921), Jacques Fernand Humbert (1842-1934) and Gaston Casimir Saint-Pierre (1833-1916). While abroad, Pell exhibited in the 1889 and 1890 Paris Salons. In the early 1890s, Pell again returned to New York City. In addition to painting scenes of the Hudson River during summers spent at her family's home in Hunter, New York, she also made a living by illustrating books and producing works for lithographic reproduction.

Most likely painted in the vicinity of Beacon, New York, *Hudson Highlands* depicts an unconventional, yet balanced composition. In the foreground, a small tributary leads the viewer's eye to the white canvas of the sailboat at the painting's center—which grounds the scene—yet symmetry lies in the tension between two vastly different land forms: that of the group of trees to the right, juxtaposed with the equal-yet-opposite mass of mountain faces to the left. With attention to detail and a resistance to idealizing the form of her subjects, Pell's rendering produces a compositional tension that embraces the dynamism of the natural world.



Virginia Chandler Titcomb (1838-1912)
In the Catskills, Looking Towards Hunter Mountain
Oil on canvas, 9 x 14 inches, signed on stretcher, verso

Virginia Chandler Titcomb

Virginia Chandler Titcomb, originally from Otterville, Illinois, was an active painter and writer in New York during the late nineteenth century. In 1884, Titcomb founded and served as the president of the Patriotic League of the Revolution. She was also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sorosis Club. Titcomb was a contributor to prominent publications such as Harper's Bazaar and Demorest's. She exhibited her paintings at the National Academy of Design and at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.

In the Catskills, Looking Toward Hunter Mountain is a rare example of Titcomb's work as a painter. While she lived in Brooklyn and Long Island for much of her adult life, it is plausible that she enrolled in classes and traveled north on sketching trips as many of her contemporaries did. *In the Catskills* conveys a unique perspective of the Catskill Mountains, which can be seen in the distance. With attention to the varied quality of the scene's light and atmosphere, the painting's zig-zag composition makes for an engaging scene of idyllic tranquility.



Mary Josephine Walters (1837-1883), *Study of Ferns*
Oil on canvas, 6 x 8 inches, signed lower center



Mary Josephine Walters (1837-1883), *Autumn River with Punt in the Reeds*
Oil on canvas, 13 ¼ x 23 ¾ inches, signed on stretcher

Mary Josephine Walters

Although little is known about the life of Mary Josephine Walters, her artistic pedigree is undisputed. In a biography of his father, Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), John Durand describes Walters as his father's favorite female student. Works such as *Study of Ferns* illustrate this affinity of style; Durand was known for his arched woodland thickets, from which Walters' composition seems to take its cue. The small size of *Study of Ferns* creates an intimate portrait that begs careful study. Intricately detailed and carefully composed, her use of warm colors and the impression of filtered light lends a somewhat paradoxical grace and sophistication to the rugged-edged slab of rock at the painting's center.

Autumn River with Punt in the Reeds, similarly, shows close alignment with both the detailed landscapes of Durand, as well as the Hudson River School in general. The presence of the abandoned punt in the foreground suggests an absent human element and narrative, while the winding path draws the viewer's eye and concentration deeper into the scene.

Walters was a member of the Ladies' Art Association, where she also exhibited. Her work was shown at the National Academy of Design and the Young Men's Christian Association.



Laura Woodward (1834-1926), *Home in the Wilderness*, 1877
Oil on panel, 8 ¼ x 10 ½ inches, signed and dated lower left

Laura Woodward

Laura Woodward, a New Jersey native, once shared a New York studio building with the Hart siblings, as well as pioneering female painters such as Eliza Pratt Greatorex (1819-1897), Sara Bascom Gilbert and Hannah Jane Blauvelt. While Woodward would ultimately become well-known for her mid- to late-career *plein air* paintings of the undeveloped Florida wilderness, her success in doing so was predicated on the reputation she forged among the ranks of the male-dominated Hudson River School during the 1870s and 1880s.

Painted in 1877, while she was still living in New York City, Woodward's *Home in the Wilderness* is an example of her early work. Most likely painted in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the rustic cottage at the composition's center implies a sentimental narrative about the bucolic simplicity of frontier life. Woodward's fine attention to detail in the rendering of wood and foliage is indicative of her typical fresh air studies, and is an exercise in the representation of nature's sensory abundance.

Woodward exhibited annually at the National Academy of Design, the Brooklyn Art Association, the Pennsylvania Academy of Design, and the Boston Art Club. She also participated in Expositions, including Louisville (1873-75, 1878, 1885), Cincinnati (1874), Chicago (1875, 1878), and Philadelphia (1876), in addition to numerous galleries.

Checklist

1. Julia Bacon (1861-1901), *Hudson River Valley Vista*. Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 inches, signed lower right.
2. Susie M. Barstow (1836-1923), *Night in the Woods*, c. 1890-91. Oil on canvas, 20 x 14 inches, signed lower left.
3. Susie M. Barstow (1836-1923), *In the White Mountains*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, signed and dated 1872, lower right.
4. Julie Hart Beers (1835-1913), *Landscape with Pond*. Oil on panel, 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, signed lower left.
5. Isabella Bissett (1830-1870), *Catskill Landscape*, c. 1850's. Oil on canvas, 7 x 13 inches, signed on stretcher.
6. Isabella Bissett (1830-1870), *Hudson Valley Landscape*, c. 1850's. Oil on canvas, 7 x 13 inches, signed on stretcher.
7. Agnes Brown (1847-1932), *Landscape with White Birch*. Oil on board, 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, signed verso.
8. Sarah Cole (1805-1857), *Ancient Column Near Syracuse*, c. 1848. Oil on canvas, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches.
9. Helen Mary Knowlton (1832-1918), *Figures in the Forest*. Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, signed lower right.
10. Abigail Tyler Oakes (1823-1898), *View of the Hudson River*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 inches, signed and dated, lower center.
11. Ella Ferris Pell (1846-1922), *Hudson Highlands*. Oil on canvas, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, signed lower right.
12. Virginia Chandler Titcomb (1838-1912), *In the Catskills, Looking Towards Hunter Mountain*. Oil on canvas, 9 x 14 inches, signed on stretcher, verso.
13. Mary Josephine Walters (1837-1883), *Study of Ferns*. Oil on canvas, 6 x 8 inches, signed lower center.
14. Mary Josephine Walters (1837-1883), *Autumn River with Punt in the Reeds*. Oil on canvas, 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, signed on stretcher.
15. Laura Woodward (1834-1926), *Home in the Wilderness*, 1877. Oil on panel, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, signed and dated lower left.

CATALOGUE DESIGN & TEXT Courtney Lynch, M.A., M.S.

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FRONT COVER

Abigail Tyler Oakes (1823-1898), *View of the Hudson River*, [detail], 1854. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 inches, signed and dated lower center.

INSIDE FRONT COVER

Julia Bacon (1861-1901), *Hudson River Valley Vista*, [detail]. Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 inches, signed lower right.

BACK COVER

Virginia Chandler Titcomb (1838-1912), *In the Catskills, Looking Towards Hunter Mountain*, [detail]. Oil on canvas, 9 x 14 inches, signed on stretcher, verso.



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