A Seamless Web

A Seamless Web:
Transatlantic Art in the Nineteenth Century

Edited by

Cheryll L. May and Marian Wardle

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A Seamless Web: Transatlantic Art in the Nineteenth Century,
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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5034-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5034-6

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This volume emerged from the decade-long determination of Dr. Marian Wardle, curator of the American collection, to do justice to the unparalleled Weir Family Collection housed at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art. The Weir collection arrived at BYU in 1959 as part of a gift-purchase arrangement with the family of Utah-born sculptor and painter Mahonri Young to obtain his collection of works. Young's wife, Dorothy Weir, predeceased him, and he inherited over a thousand works by Dorothy's father, the impressionist Julian Alden Weir, and also works by Julian's father, Robert Walter Weir, and his brother, John Ferguson Weir. The Young collection, which includes the Weir holdings, became the foundation of the American collection of the BYU Museum of Art when it opened in 1993.

Wardle's systematic study of the works of father Robert and sons John and Julian led her to an interesting conclusion. Each of these quintessentially American artists had strong and enduring ties to Europe. Robert and Julian took years of training in European capitals, and John was tutored in the principles of the European academic tradition by his father. John and Julian made multiple trips to England and the continent to study European works, to keep up with current trends and to paint European subjects. The two brothers also displayed their works in European Salons and galleries and, like their father, taught their many American art students the skills they had learned, introducing them to the European atelier system. In the exhibition based on Wardle's research, *The Weir Family, 1820–1929, Expanding the Traditions of American Art* (November, 2011–May, 2012), Wardle explored not only the family dynamics among the three influential artists, but also the dense web of artistic connections between America and Europe in which they were enmeshed. In the volume that accompanied the exhibition, Wardle and six other distinguished scholars examined several aspects of these transnational connections.[1]

In keeping with the presentation of such a significant exhibition, an international symposium was planned to further explore the themes Wardle had introduced. She and Herman du Toit, exhibition educator, decided to expand the exhibition's theme, which focused on the Weirs' interchanges with Europe. The symposium's theme was embodied in its title: "Transactions: Transnationalism and the Formation of American Culture." After Dr. du Toit retired in early 2011, I took over his duties, preparing educational materials

for the show and organizing the symposium. The very successful symposium featured presentations on a wide range of transnational cultural phenomena, including not only painting and sculpture but also photographs, cartoons, and stained glass windows. Two of the papers illuminated the cultural significance of World's Fairs and Wild West shows. Another analyzed the "export" of American heiresses to marry impoverished European noblemen.

In the wake of the symposium, Cambridge Scholars Publishing agreed to publish a book of essays based on a group of the papers presented at that gathering, and I was asked to serve as Senior Editor. It has been a great pleasure to work with each of our ten authors as they developed the ideas more briefly presented in the symposium.

We are grateful for the support of many others who made this book possible. The BYU Museum of Art Administration under Director Mark Magleby has given enthusiastic support to the project. Dr. Herman du Toit allowed us to benefit from his years of experience organizing symposia and preparing volumes for publication. BYU MOA Design Director Jeff Barney spent hours mentoring us on the publication layout program and designed the book cover. Museum Educator Lynda Palma lent her superb copy-editing skills to the project. Finally, student interns Carli Hanson and Sadie Klein have done superb work laying out the manuscript, arranging the complex process securing publication permissions for images, and preparing the index. They are both a credit to the BYU English Department's editing program.

—Cheryll May

Notes

[1] Marian Wardle, ed., *The Weir Family, 1820-1920, Expanding the Traditions of American Art* (Provo: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, in association with Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2011).

Introduction

> Rome! Rome! . . . I am really here, am actually in it! But, Oh! What a ruinous, dirty, filthy, profligate . . . place it is!!! . . . But now for the beautiful. Rome is again the most delightful place I have ever been in. . . . Every street has its fountains, every palace its statues, every church its pictures, and every ruin its history.

So wrote twenty-two-year-old Robert Walter Weir, an American artist studying in Rome in April of 1826. Young Robert had just removed to the eternal city after a year of study in Florence. His comments reflect the ambivalence of many nineteenth-century American artists studying in Europe. Robert and his sons John and Julian were among the most prominent and influential American artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. All spent considerable time in Europe honing their artistic skills. But they, like the thousands of other nineteenth-century American artists who traversed the Atlantic to study fine art, were selective in what they brought home from their travels. While mastering European artistic techniques and conventions, they put them to different purposes back in the New World, laying the foundation for the not-too-distant day when New York City would replace Paris as the center of the Western art world.

In recent years, the term "transnationalism" has come to describe the complex web of human interactions that underly the majority of important artworks and other cultural phenomena. Labeling a piece of artwork as simply "American" or "French" has served as an increasingly unsatisfactory explanation of its multiple and interlaced origins. In November of 2011, the Brigham Young University Museum of Art opened a major exhibition highlighting its superb collection of works by Robert, John, and Julian Weir. The exhibition was titled *The Weir Family, 1820-1920: Expanding Traditions of American Art.* In the exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Curator Marian Wardle stressed the transnational encounters and exchanges in the Weirs' lives and art. Their thousands of students were instructed in the principles of the European academic tradition and, later, the impressionist techniques that Julian came to favor in the latter decades of his life. The three artists introduced to America the atelier system of instruction they had learned on the continent.

Wardle points out, however, that the influence went both ways. By the 1870s, when Julian studied in Paris, art students, who supplied substantial income to landlords, provisioners, and art academies, were a major American export to France. The Weirs and other artists displayed their works in European salons and galleries and helped to interest their countrymen in

collecting European art. Indeed, in the latter decades of the century, American collectors became the dominant group purchasing European artworks.

To expand the discussion of cross-cutting currents of cultural influence in the nineteenth century, the BYU Museum of Art sponsored an interdisciplinary symposium in January of 2012 titled *Transactions: Transnationalism and the Formation of American Culture.* The essays in this volume are expanded versions of selected papers presented at this highly successful symposium. Mediums examined in these articles range from paintings and photography to architecture and stained glass windows. Several authors probe "transnational" literary works, while others explore the fascinating cultural phenomena of world's fairs, international congresses, and Wild West shows.

Professor François Brunet, in his lead article, explains how some of the artworks that appear to be most authentically "American" were highly influenced by European precedents. He begins with an analysis of American landscape art, reviewing the scholarship of recent decades. This research makes clear that "nativist" American art, such as the works of the Hudson River School, was not, as James Flexner's standard history would contend, "local in origin, each artist laboring to express those aspects of the nature he best knew and loved." Instead, the works of Thomas Cole and most other mid-century American landscape artists were "transnational, . . . permeated by complex transactions where 'American' originality produced itself not only by imitation of or reaction against 'European' influences . . . but as critical mirroring and incorporating of 'European' images—images of all sorts, painted or imagined, public or private." He concludes with a discussion of the classic photographic surveys of the American West displayed internationally in the 1870s to great acclaim, pointing out that they followed the stylistic conventions established by European landscape photographers more than a decade earlier.

Several scholars in this volume have documented the movement of artworks and ideas as they crossed back and forth across the Atlantic. In some cases, American works were virtual copies of their European originals. Virginia Raguin's article on nineteenth-century American stained glass windows addresses works in this category. She describes the total dominance of European styles and craftsmanship in this medium throughout the long nineteenth century (1780–1920) and explains that churches were considered by immigrants to be havens for the language and artistic styles of the Old Country. Catholic churches usually adopted the French Gothic style based on medieval prototypes. The windows came directly from France or from American studios employing the French style. Churches with Germanic origins generally adopted the Nazarene style of German Romanticism, and those with an English heritage chose windows in the English Aesthetic/Pre-Raphaelite style ordered from English studios or their American branches.

Raguin points out that these windows were "some of the most public of the pictorial arts," as they were viewed regularly by millions of congregants.

Josephine Landback's study recounts the "fascinating translation" of Jules-Adolphe Breton's *Song of the Lark* "from French genre painting to an American icon." When the well-known French genre painter of peasants first displayed the painting in the 1885 *Salon*, French critics attacked it as an overly sentimental and idealized depiction of peasant life, denying its harsh and oppressive reality. Like many other Breton works, it was quickly snapped up by a prominent American collector, and by the end of the century became one of the most popular works in the collection of the new Art Institute of Chicago. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the work was reproduced in thousands of American posters, primers, and post cards. In 1934 it was voted "America's Best Loved Picture" by readers of the *Chicago Daily News*. The work played a central role in two prominent coming-of-age novels of the period: Willa Cather's *Song of the Lark* and Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel: A Story of a Buried Life.* Landback notes that in both works, "the moment of appreciation of the painting acts as an aesthetic awakening of exceptional, artistic individuals, allowing their differentiation from rural origins and consequent removal to the urban center."

Sometimes it was the Europeans rather than the Americans who reconstructed cultural elements from across the Atlantic to achieve their own ends. Steven Bradley, in his study of the Western novels of German author Karl May and the "I Like America and America Likes Me" performance of twentieth-century German artist Joseph Beuys, points to occasions when representatives of an idealized American subculture are appropriated by European artists to achieve their ideological goals. For both the literary and visual artist, the American Indian represented the "uncorrupted man" whose cultural values could lead the world to a peaceful future. May's Winnetou trilogy reflects his deep commitment to the European Peace Movement of the late nineteenth century. Beuys again points to American Indian culture (this time embodied by a live coyote) as the symbol of the untamed and undefiled spirit of the American West. Beuys's performance piece represented the utopian ideas of the German philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

One of the articles in this volume questions the assumption that exposure to other cultures automatically enriches understanding and promotes tolerance and respect. Robert Rydell addresses the burgeoning number of contacts between Americans and Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in the context of world's fairs, Wild West shows, and the Weirs. He points out that cosmopolitanism, at least as defined as exposure to alien peoples and cultures, was a mass phenomenon. Over 100 million people attended the world's fairs and Wild West shows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But attendance at these productions and expositions could not be said to have fostered "an appreciation for cultural

diversity." The "natives" exhibited in these fairs and shows were often treated as "specimens," presented in zoo-like "villages" or asked to perform in action dramas where the "white guys" always won. The context of these presentations was one in which visitors were made to feel no discomfort with the prevailing international patterns of colonialism and imperialism.

Even among many artists and intellectuals (such as Robert, John, and Julian Weir), years of European training and participation in many world's fairs seemed to reinforce, rather than mitigate, attitudes of white Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Rydell maintains that the Weirs largely "erased people defined as 'others' from their corpus of artistic production." He also presents evidence that John and Julian subscribed to the ideas of the eugenics movement that gained great currency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, claiming a scientific basis for Caucasian racial superiority.

Several symposium scholars focus on the lives of individual Americans who spent notable amounts of time in Europe. These "cosmopolitans" fell into two general categories: those who went home again, and those who never really did. The Weirs were among those who traveled from their American homes to secure training in their profession from those acknowledged to be the best in their field, and then returned home to pursue their careers while firmly maintaining their American identity.

Kalisha Roberts Grimsman focuses on another such traveler: Ellen Day Hale. Grimsman's intensive study of a single, arresting self-portrait—completed toward the end of Hale's art studies in Paris—explores the complex internal "negotiations" the young artist engaged in to effectively present herself to her potential American patrons. Grimsman discerns in the work a balancing act that Hale and other European-trained American artists had to perform. They needed to demonstrate that they possessed skills comparable to their European masters; at the same time, they had to show that they hadn't "sold out" to a European culture which most Americans saw as jaded and decadent. This was particularly important for Ellen Hale, whose family was of relatively modest means. She knew that to be a successful working artist, she had to be perceived as highly skillful but reliably "American."

In her illuminating study, H. Christian Carr points out that Indiana Fletcher Williams, another young American woman travelling extensively in Europe in the 1840s, had notably different motivations. As heiress to a considerable fortune, she was not impelled to prepare herself for a career. Nevertheless, her two-year odyssey through Europe in her late teens was the formative experience of her life. From the time she returned from her European travels until her death more than a half century later, Williams played the role of the cultivated aesthete dedicated to bringing the best of European arts and culture to America. Soon after returning to her Virginia home, Williams supervised the transformation of Sweet Briar, her family estate, into an Italianate villa. She then filled it with a multitude of European and European-style treasures.

After her marriage at age thirty-seven to an Episcopal minister from New York City, Indiana furnished her New York townhouse in a similar manner. Carr notes that after attending the Japanese Exhibition at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Williams became an enthusiastic convert to the rage for Japonesque works then sweeping the country, and added many pieces of Japanware to her Sweet Briar collection. Williams exemplifies the corps of rich Americans who became the chief patrons of European artists in the last half of the nineteenth century. As a leader in society, she also became a model for thousands of for how an enlightened and cultivated American should behave.

Emily Burns studies a large cross section of the thousands of American art students who poured into Paris in the last half of the nineteenth century. She points out that most of these students did not adopt the bohemian lifestyle for which Parisian artists were known. They rather defined themselves against these practices, adopting a steadfast work ethic, a sparse, unadorned working space, and an insular attitude, interacting mostly with other American artists of similar disciplined persuasion. They were active in several American art clubs and decried what they saw as the laziness and moral laxity of the Parisians. Stung by criticisms that their art was derivative and that they had learned their Parisian lessons too well, these students embraced several "naïve" subjects (Puritans, cowboys, and Indians) that were distinctively American. The great majority of these students were secure and confident in their American identity, proud of their democratic heritage, and eager to show their independence.

Interestingly, when these students returned to America, they celebrated many aspects of the French culture they had eschewed while studying in Paris. Back in the safe environs of home, they felt free to celebrate French food, fashion, art, and architecture. However, most of these former students still shunned the anti-establishment attitudes and lifestyle that characterized the Paris Left Bank bohemian culture.

Adrienne Baxter Bell explores the artistic career of an American expatriate artist, Charles Caryl Coleman. Prominent in his time though now relatively obscure, he was raised in Buffalo, New York, and served briefly in the Civil War before emigrating to Italy, which became his adopted home. Bell focuses on a group of nineteen large still lifes that Coleman completed in the late 1870s and early 1880s. She contends that this collection of works, in which decorative objects from a large variety of cultures and historical epochs are harmoniously assembled, manifests a philosophy that is transnational, and indeed, post-national in character. Coleman's work, in Bell's insightful study, appears to transcend the bonds of nationality and even the bonds of time and space.

Peter Gibian examines the cadre of American artists and writers "with lives based on constant international movement, in semi-permanent exile

from their home culture," the primary example being John Singer Sargent. Gibian notes the long line of influential American writers, beginning with Washington Irving, who seemed to see their country most clearly when viewing it from a geographical distance. Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, and Henry James are some of the giants in this literary tradition. Mary Cassatt, James McNeil Whistler, and Sargent (with Coleman as one of the lesser lights) are some of the most prominent of the expatriate painters. Gibian suggests that these literary and visual artists have often functioned not as "a definer and defender of unicultural coherences, but as an intercultural ambassador."

Gibian distinguishes a notable difference in approach among these "travelers between worlds." While many followed Washington Irving's *Sketchbook* example of assuming the stance of the distanced, uninvolved observer, others became deeply engaged with the people and places they visited. He contends that with at least two categories of his works, Sargent displays deep, personal engagement. The first is with fellow expatriates. In his analysis of *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit,* Gibian suggests that Sargent perceives "his own felt experience as a child of an aspiring artist always on the move through foreign worlds." The portrayal of the four young girls, says Gibian, points out the "disquietedly unbounded" world of children with no established home. Gibian also points out Sargent's sympathetic depictions of humble artisans pursuing their professions. He shows that the prominent artist clearly sees himself in the pursuits of these workers (bead makers, marble cutters, etc.), portraying them as "foreign reflections of his own self-image and aesthetic engagements."

The work of each of these scholars demonstrates that following single national threads in seeking to understand Western art in the long nineteenth century will inevitably lead one astray. Each essay casts light on a separate aspect of the constant "conversation of cultures" that contributed to the remarkable outpouring of artistic creativity on both sides of the Atlantic that continues to inspire millions of readers and viewers throughout the world.

—Cheryll May

Part I:

Cultural Transactions across the Atlantic

Chapter One

Toward a Transcultural History of American Landscape Images in the Nineteenth Century

François Brunet

The history of American art seems destined to adopt increasingly international, intercultural, and global narratives, and the present paper will contribute to this trend through the example of landscape photography. At the outset, however, it may be useful to recall that just fifty years ago the dominant trend in writing on and teaching American art, and especially landscape art, was the opposite. In the 1940s and 1950s, a series of landmark literary essays that gave rise to the field of American studies emphasized the role of the land and nature in shaping American culture.[1] For the history of American art, the definitive text in this trend was James T. Flexner's *History of American Painting*, published in three volumes over a period of fifteen years (1947–1962).[2] While the second volume, titled *The Light of Distant Skies, 1760–1835* (1954), stressed the influence of Europe on the formative period of American painting, the third one, *That Wilder Image: The Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer* (1962), would for some time serve as the standard text for the nativist interpretation of American art. A short commentary on Flexner's text will serve to introduce the transcultural theme that the present paper intends to develop.

Flexner's foreword opened as follows:

> In the mid nineteenth-century, painting was more popular in America than at any other time in our history. The interest was not inspired by the importation from abroad of already famous masters. The rage was for works of living American artists. (xi)

The following pages elaborated this point further:

> Some of the most effective exemplars of the Native School never went abroad. Those who did cross the ocean set out, even if quite young, not as

> raw students. They were practicing professionals, pleased with what they already possessed. They had no desire to be born again. (xii)

Warning readers against what he called "French eyeglasses," Flexner insisted, in almost Turnerian fashion:

> Landscape has always been local in origin, each artist laboring to express those aspects of nature he best knew and loved. . . .
>
> The Native School can be explained only secondarily through the influence of painters on painters, of pictures on pictures. The typical styles, even when they paralleled developments abroad, were more the result of inventions individually and collectively made in response to broad environmental forces. (xiv)

The Nineteenth-Century Nativist Interpretations of American Landscape Art

Flexner's narrative did not invent the nativist theme *ex nihilo*, nor was it invented at the mere instigation of literary studies. His argument was steeped in the nineteenth-century pictorial and textual sources of the "native school." His title, *That Wilder Image*, and his epigraph were quotes from a poem penned by William Cullen Bryant, one of the fathers of the American picturesque, friend and patron of Robert Weir: "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe," a sonnet dedicated to Thomas Cole in 1829 on the eve of his departure for England. The sonnet is not very memorable as poetry, and without Flexner it might have been forgotten. But it is worth quoting here as an illustration of both the nativist doctrine and Flexner's particular treatment of the theme:

> Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies:
> Yet, Cole! thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand
> A living image of thy native land,
> Such as on thy own glorious canvass lies.
> Lone lakes—savannahs where the bison roves—
> Rocks rich with summer garlands—solemn streams—
> Skies, where the desert eagle wheels and screams—
> Spring bloom and autumn blaze of boundless groves.
> Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest—fair,
> But different—every where the trace of men,
> Paths, homes, graves, ruins, from the lowest glen
> To where life shrinks from the fierce Alpine air.
> Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim thy sight,
> But keep that earlier, wilder image bright.[3]

Overlooking Thomas Cole's English birth, Bryant contrasted the "glorious," "boundless," colorful, bursting with young life, "living image of thy native land"[4] (i.e., America), with a "fair, but different" European scene ridden with "the trace of men" and death, "where life shrinks," even, he warned, in the sublime but "fierce" Alps. The final injunction, "keep that earlier, wilder image bright," and the poem as a whole, are consistent with a range of artworks and texts that promoted American scenery as a new beginning, a vital source for the rise of a true American art. Along with Cole's paintings and those of Asher B. Durand and Robert Weir, several important texts contributed to the self-definition of a "native school": William Dunlap's chapter on Thomas Cole in his *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834)—which, however, sketched out a much larger and older history of art in America—Cole's own *Essay on American Scenery* (1836), and, not to forget, Louis Legrand Noble's *Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (1853).

Flexner's title, however, interestingly excised the adjective "earlier" from Bryant's phrase, "that earlier, wilder image," just as his epigraph chose the softened version "our own bright land" over the more radical "thy native land." In so doing, the art historian obscured the paradox that was very much part of the nineteenth-century nativist theme: the fact that America could serve as "native" land even for immigrants. According to Louis Noble's narrative, Thomas Cole, even as a young boy in England, had longed after the landscapes of the Ohio Valley, as shown in illustrated books.[5] Once his family settled there, these landscapes fascinated him so much that he quickly forgot "the scenes of childhood, the show and noise of cities, the tame loveliness of long-pastured fields."[6] America was, in this narrative, so much the "earlier image" indeed that it had taken precedence over England before Cole had even seen it.

We know, especially from the work of Angela Miller and Alan Wallach,[7] that not only was Cole an immigrant, like many American landscapists of the nineteenth century, but that his English social, cultural, intellectual background, his later trips to Europe, as well as his aspiration to become an American (though not a Jacksonian American) were all components of his love of the Catskills and the Hudson. Throughout his work, and more so towards the end of his life, Cole alternated and mixed "American" and "European" motifs; compare, for example, *Indians Viewing Landscape* (1827) and a later picture, which is the one painting by Cole held by the Louvre Museum today, *The Cross in the Wilderness* (1845). This scene, inspired by an English poem, shows an Indian man with a Roman cross mourning the missionary who converted him. Much of Cole's life and work was about the complexities of conversions and cultural transactions. Flexner's foreword, however, tended to erase not only the complexities we have learned about since 1962 but the temporal dimension contained in

Bryant's poem and Noble's account. Casting America as the "native land" and the "earlier image," Bryant depicted Cole as the young American painter going on a tour in Europe, like other aspiring painters, already "trained" by his visual encounter with grand American vistas. American scenery was not the earliest image, perhaps, but the earlier one in his apprenticeship as a painter. Indeed, by 1829, the very wildness of that image was, for Cole, a cultural object: an illustration from his childhood, a painterly theme, and a story, as shown in his illustrations of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Thus, inadvertently or not, William C. Bryant pointed in his poem to the transnational and transcultural dimensions of landscape paintings in America: the poem was transnational because these works were permeated by complex transactions where "American originality" manifested itself not only by imitation of or reaction against diverse "European" (or national) influences but as critical mirroring and incorporating of "European" images—images of all sorts, painted or imagined, public or private. It was transcultural in the sense that Cole's work encoded a conversation of cultures not only national but social, regional, political, textual, and pictorial—a conversation constantly engaging the native with the non-native and the wild original with intertextual, intericonic, or intermedial subtleties.

For each image there is always an earlier image—and a later one as well—as the Weir family's collected works demonstrate so spectacularly. In nineteenth-century American art, the "native" was permeated, not only by European precedents, but by the "influence of pictures on pictures." I am obviously not claiming any originality for this observation. Since Angela Miller's *The Empire of the Eye* (1993), much serious historical work has revised the nativist argument.[8] For the English art historian Tim Barringer, "American art" is "a powerful retrospective construction" and a "pervasive myth" masking "the complex and dynamic interrelationship that existed between the United States and Europe."[9] Whether or not "American" features must be denied altogether, recent scholarship has established the importance, not just of transnational trends and ethnic and regional differences, but also of the interaction of art values with political goals, commercial enterprises, professional logics, and so on. This paper follows such a "revisionist" art history, while addressing the broader realm of *images*.

The history of images is broader than the history of art, and not just because it encompasses more pictures. A history of images cannot be built on the formalist notion of a self-contained work. Historically, images are found in circulation through various media as pictures and events, rather than mere visual forms. Pictures belong to social practice, economy, history, culture, as much as they belong to aesthetics. A history of images must therefore concern itself firstly with the *relations* of images, and as such it is transcultural. Here these themes will be addressed with respect to the history of landscape and survey photography in nineteenth-century America.[10]

The Development of American Landscape and Survey Photography

Throughout the nineteenth century, landscape imagery constituted, in the United States especially, something larger than art. Landscape crossed over a great variety of practices: surveying, mapping, place naming, interactions—sometimes brutal—with native inhabitants, collecting, archiving, and displaying specimens and artifacts; illustrated publishing, the print business,

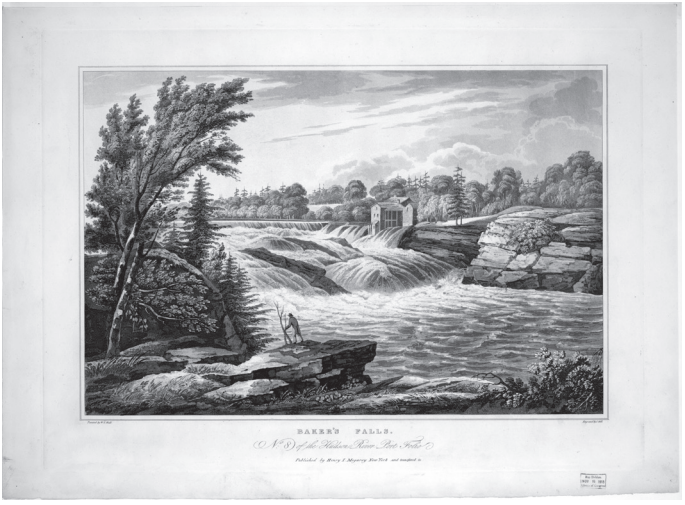

Fig. 1–1 John Hill, *Baker's Falls*, aquatint engraving after a painting by W. G. Wall, ca. 1821–1825. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

publicity and propaganda, education and scholarship; landscape literature, painting, gardening and preservation. Though grounded in the local, as Flexner insisted, this culture of landscape was always transnational as well. As David Lowenthal, Simon Schama, and others have shown, the observation of "landscape" was always connected to the memory, European or biblical, of landscape, landscape painting, and literature.[11] The American Romantics were part of what Aaron Sachs has called the "Humboldt current."[12] Many of the topographical illustrators who worked in the West, some of them pupils or protégés of Alexander von Humboldt, came from Germany and Switzerland. The fantastic work of the German-born draughtsmen Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen, Arthur Schott, Paulus Roetter, and George Engelmann on the Pacific Railroad and Mexican Boundary Surveys is a prime example of the intercultural character of Western imagery in the mid-nineteenth century (fig. 1–2). Others, taught by Robert Weir at West Point, were no less steeped

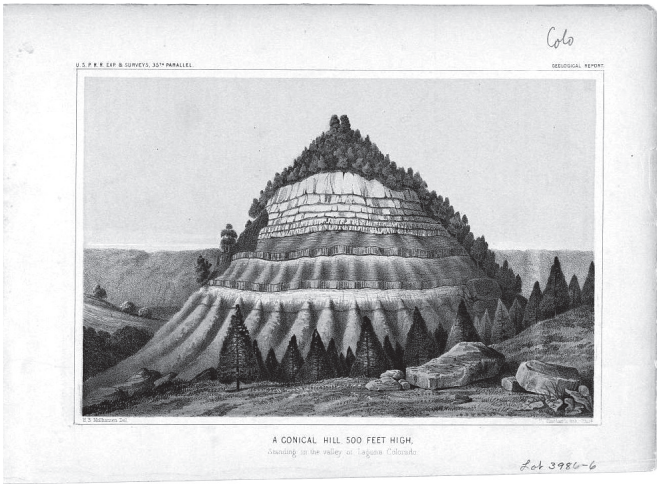

Fig. 1–2 Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen, *A conical hill 500 ft. high standing in the valley of Laguna, Colorado*, lithograph by Thomas S. Sinclair, from Pacific Railroad Survey Reports, ca. 1855. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

in the traditions of the picturesque and natural history. In addition, pictures were meant and made to be circulated, and often landscape pictures circulated nationally and internationally more than they did locally. Landscape pictures thus served to illustrate larger entities than the scenes they depicted, and became associated with national "images" or "self-images"; American images created images of "America" by virtue of being displayed abroad. But, there were more intrinsically transnational and transcultural elements and less "true American" elements in the photographic landscape.

This claim may seem counter-intuitive: nothing would appear more native, original, or "wild" than the photographs of the West by Carleton E. Watkins, Timothy O'Sullivan, or even Ansel Adams. What has been called the rise of landscape photography in America, or in the American West,[13] has been associated, particularly since John Szarkowski's exhibitions at the MoMA in the 1960s and 1970s,[14] with American "terrain," "reality," or "experience," and thus as a continuation of the native school of landscape art. Jonathan Green, in his critical history of twentieth-century American photography (1984), wrote that Timothy O'Sullivan was a quintessential American photographer, because he focused on "the reality of the world," that he was a "primitive" who "worked on the frontiers of America and on the frontiers of sight."[15] This neo-nativist theme reappears in the recent essay by Toby Jurovics accompanying the excellent catalogue to *Framing the West*, the major exhibition devoted to O'Sullivan by the Smithsonian and the

Library of Congress in 2010. Taking issue with various critical theses that since the 1980s have accentuated O'Sullivan's enigmatic character, Jurovics maintains that O'Sullivan was "responding to the American terrain," and that his photographs reflect "both the demands and the opportunities of the western landscape."[16] This latest wave of reevaluations of O'Sullivan—with both the Smithsonian show and the show of the King Survey work, curated by Keith Davis, mounted in 2012 at the Chicago Art Institute[17]—is welcome for many reasons. Still, there is something to be gained, even granting the obvious pull of the native element, by envisioning landscape or survey photography along transcultural lines of interpretation.

A first element to consider is the compared chronologies of landscape or survey photography on the two sides of the Atlantic. In the 1850s, American photography clung to the daguerreotype and the portrait business, and for that reason was considered "behind" in landscape. This was a complaint within the profession until well into the 1860s. At the Paris World's Fair of 1855, French and English photographers vied for prominence in landscapes and monuments,[18] while the American show was judged to be poor in contrast to the "excellence" demonstrated by Mathew Brady and other portraitists at the Crystal Palace in 1851. The incipient stereoscopic business testified to the same gap. Although the Langenheim brothers published stereo views of Niagara Falls from 1854 on, it was the London Stereoscopic Company, leader of the international market, that marketed in 1859 the first comprehensive "American series," based on the many striking images collected on a special trip by its chief photographer, aptly named William England.[19] The success of this series was one motivation for the New York firm of Anthony Brothers to launch their own series in 1859 –60, including their famous "instantaneous" views of Broadway, with an eye to the transatlantic market. At the same time, in San Francisco, Carleton Watkins, Charles L. Weed, and others entered the landscape business with both large views and stereo views of Yosemite Valley and the Big Trees, competing for national and international distribution.[20] In 1867, both Watkins and his competitor Thomas Houseworth would earn medals at the Paris World's Fair while the Federal government was launching, with the "great surveys," the largest enterprise yet known in the United States either in geography, photography, or landscape culture.

The Great Surveys, as they are known, constituted a massive new program of exploration of the West in close coincidence with the needs of Western settlement, radical reconstruction, and a reshuffling within the federal government. The War Department's role in the West was modernized and (temporarily) reaffirmed. This was the context for the creation, in March 1867, of the US Geological Survey of the Fortieth Parallel, under the aegis of the War Department and carried out by highly trained civilian personnel directed by the young geologist Clarence King. This survey was by far the

most ambitious and the most modern to date, with its dual emphasis on large-scale triangulation and in-depth geological investigation. The inclusion of a salaried photographer was another innovation, contrasting with the antebellum reliance of the Corps of Engineers on the draftsmanship of West Point-trained officers, and possibly reflecting an awareness of American belatedness.[21]

Modern as it seemed to the War Department, the vast photographic program inaugurated by the King Survey was, indeed, behind not only European models but the Californian experiment. What is considered today the golden age of "expeditionary photography," particularly in the Middle East and in Asia, occurred mostly before 1860, with European photographers usually employed by either governmental or academic institutions, or both.[22] The famous photographs of the Alps by the Bisson brothers were mostly taken before 1865. Moreover, it was European sponsors who fostered some of the earliest examples of systematic photographic documentation in North America. The French photo-explorer Désiré Charnay photographed in the United States and Canada before receiving a French government commission for a survey of pre-Columbian ruins in Yucatan (where he had, however, been preceded by the Anglo-American tandem of Stephens and Catherwood). Another example is the collection of portraits of Native Americans accumulated, with the help of Washington studio photographers, by the English millionaire William Blackmore from about 1863 on, and then loaned for copy to the Smithsonian Institution.[23] In 1867 at the Paris World's Fair, the main examples of American landscape or topographical photographs shown were *not* federally sponsored: Watkins's and Houseworth's images of Yosemite were commercial, Theodore Lilienthal's views of New Orleans had been commissioned by the city, and other exhibited American views issued from private concerns. In 1867, "government photography" (as it came to be called around this time in the United States[24]) was not yet a reality in the United States. It became one, with the Great Surveys, largely because of Clarence King's personal taste for landscape and photography.

Biographies of King, "the ideal American" according to Henry Adams, have been spectacularly augmented by Martha Sandweiss's revelation of King's double life, after his time as explorer, when he secretly married and maintained in a house in Queens a former slave from Georgia.[25] It was during his stint with the California Geological Survey, between 1863 and 1866, that King discovered the powers of photography and the appeal of large landscape photographs—such as those of Carleton E. Watkins—as well as his own vocation as a future leader of US science.[26] That Clarence King was impregnated with European art, science, and literature is evident from his writings and his artistic tastes. That he was aware of expeditionary photography around the world is probable, as suggested by a page from one of his notebooks listing noteworthy foreign landscape photographs.[27] What King brought to exploration of the West and to the use of photography was

a rich, diverse, scientific, and cultural vision, nourished by Charles Lyell, John Ruskin, J. M. W. Turner, Spanish art, French and German literature, European photography, and the burgeoning California culture. Whether or not Timothy O'Sullivan, the veteran photographer of the Army of the Potomac, suited King's tastes, their collaboration was the beginning of a great moment for landscape photography, which illustrates the transcultural hypothesis in more ways than one.

True to King's Californian roots, the California Geological Survey chose to work eastward along the Fortieth Parallel, from northeastern California to Wyoming. In 1867, the party proceeded from Central Pacific Railroad installations to western Nevada, to winter in Virginia City exploring the gold and silver mines. In the Trinity Mountains, the Survey paid close attention to geological evidence of volcanic activity, as shown by many descriptions, sketches, and photographs. One range they named Montezuma, a name inspired by the Aztec emperor and popularly associated with gold. The name was given to many places in the United States, where it metaphorically signified the rise of a white-American empire by way of a reference to a bygone "Indian" one. Within this range they stopped in front of a ridge of crumbling basalt "columns," which King would describe in his final report in these terms:

> The columns are seen to incline from the center outwardly, while at the middle of the ridge they are tossed into a variety of angles, but approach the vertical. The steep slopes are formed of sharply divided columns, still in situ, resembling a pile of architectural ruins and suggesting the name of Karnak.[28]

Here O'Sullivan took at least two stunning large format photographs (figs. 1–3 and 1–4), both labeled "Karnak, Montezuma Range, Nevada" in the Library of Congress albums of King Survey prints (but labeled differently in other sets, for instance, in the Ashburner collection at the Bancroft Library, "Rhyolite ridge, Trinity Mountains"[29]). In these handwritten captions, "Karnak" is written between quotation marks, indicating perhaps a sense of jocularity. "Karnak, Montezuma Range, Nevada" is a perfect example of the transcultural business of "naming the view," in Alan Trachtenberg's phrase,[30] of which Nevada and Utah bear so many examples today. Nevada is Spanish and American; Karnak is Egyptian, monumental, and scholarly; Montezuma is Aztec and more popular. These names together erase Native American memories. The place itself, on the evidence of the image, is rugged, barren, and even gloomy. Meanwhile, on the second image we see O'Sullivan's stereo camera amidst the "columns." "Karnak, Montezuma Range, Nevada" indeed opens up many transcultural avenues.

The Karnak images have been privileged examples of the now famous "catastrophist" reading of O'Sullivan's photographs, first ventured by James

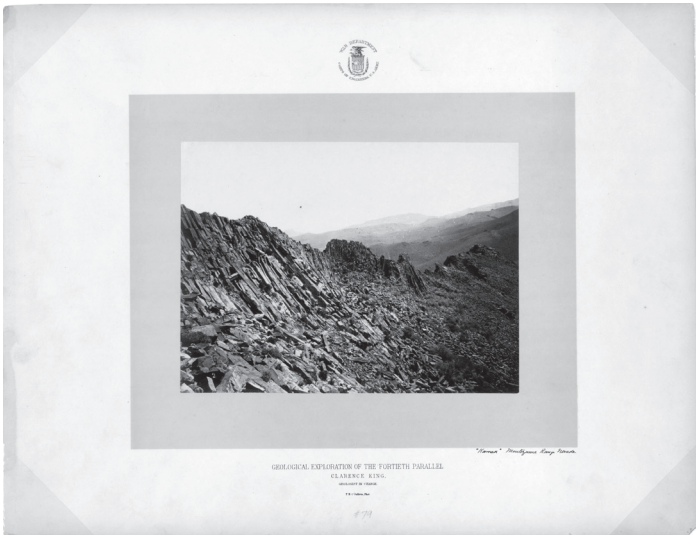

Fig. 1–3 Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *"Karnak," Montezuma Range, Nevada*, albumen print on card mount. Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, 1867. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

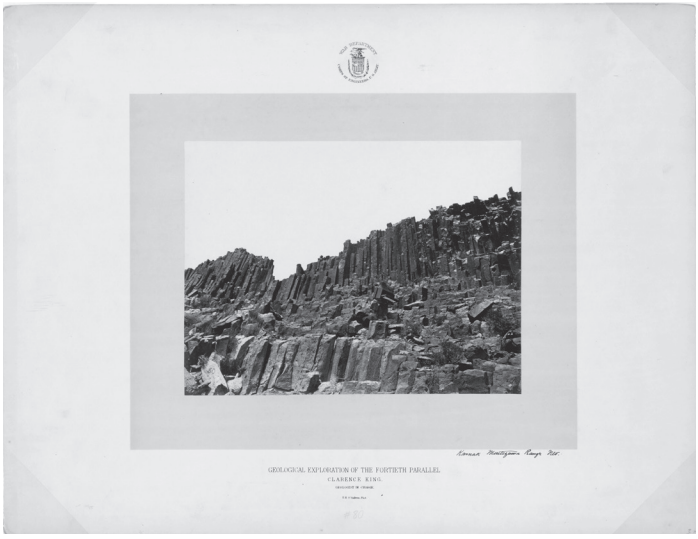

Fig. 1–4 Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Karnak, Montezuma Range, Nevada*, albumen print on card mount. Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, 1867. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Wood in 1975 and much debated since then.[31] In this reading, the starkness and pictorial unconventionality of O'Sullivan's views were inspired by Clarence King's tastes for the sublime in landscape and for the cataclysmic in geology. The claim seemed to gain support when photographer Rick Dingus showed in his repeat photographs that in these and other views O'Sullivan had willfully tilted his camera,[32] as if to accentuate the dramatic "geological" force of the terrain. There have been many counter arguments: photographer Robert Adams insists that photographers do not spend their energies with view cameras and wet collodion glass plates to prove theories. Toby Jurovics in *Framing the West* grants that O'Sullivan's photographs often coincided with King's catastrophist views; but he interprets this catastrophism as an affirmation of Americanism, quoting in this connection a sentence from King's 1871 article "On Catastrophism and Evolution": "The mild affirmations of the uniformitarians, that existing rates of change and indefinite time are ample to account for the past, are flatly and emphatically contradicted by *American facts*." [33]

What I find most problematic about the catastrophist contextualization—impossible to prove by written sources—is that it projects O'Sullivan's photography into a learned, even erudite, realm of culture, which one is at pains to reconcile with the photographer's viewpoint and social status. King was a Connecticut patrician, a prolific writer, an aesthete with an inclination for "dark complexions" as well as dark forces and metaphysical geological mechanisms; O'Sullivan was born in Ireland to a working-class family, is described by the few existing testimonies as a rather uncouth character, and has left close to zero writings.[34] It is tempting and not difficult to show affinities between O'Sullivan's stark views of the Rockies and King's awe-filled narratives, either literary or geological, of the formation of the Rocky Mountains; but doing so contributes, in my view, to displacing or transforming the photographer's historical status. One can only agree that O'Sullivan was no theoretician, but a gifted picture-maker responding directly, "honestly," and creatively to the Western terrain. Honesty, however, does not mean a uniformly serious attitude or a uniformly "American" viewpoint.

Robin Kelsey, in *Archive Style*, has developed a stimulating interpretation of nineteenth-century topographical imagery by showing how O'Sullivan, Arthur Schott, and other topographical artists of the nineteenth century tried to incorporate the codes and demands of surveying into their visual production, while inscribing within these official iconographies more or less subtle markers of their personal contexts, whether in terms of ethnic origin, social class, gender, or personal idiosyncrasies.[35] Such would be one possible meaning, according to Kelsey, of the unique series of subterranean images of miners—possibly Irishmen—that O'Sullivan took in Virginia City, as if he had been photographing "comrades." His frequent insertions of himself, his

camera, or traces of either one into his "geological" landscapes seem also to point in this direction—as if the "government photographer" had discreetly inscribed visual signatures onto the official discourse of the Survey.

Moreover, just as the caption "Karnak, Montezuma Range" collapses different realms of culture, O'Sullivan's photographs often seem to oscillate between different polarities in the landscape culture—high-brow and low-brow, or serious and playful. In northern Utah, for instance, the Witches Rocks and other popular formations along Echo and Weber Canyons were a visual subject that could satisfy different tastes, ranging from the geological to the grotesque—tilted camera or not. Such peculiar rock formations were a favorite subject of the photographers working along the Union Pacific route. And the playful landscape mode produced more than mere depictions of grotesque rocky formations.

Many of the King Survey photographs exist in different collections with different captions, and sometimes, as in the Ashburner collection (Bancroft Library), with "alternative" captions, which were unofficial ones written on the mounts themselves.[36] One O'Sullivan photograph of a miner at Virginia City is unofficially labeled "Honest Miner—Savage" (referring obliquely to the name of the Savage Mine). Portraits of the survey members are affixed with "funny" captions, some in vernacular Latin (*Rex Ipse Jimque, Facilis Descensus*) and some in burlesque style (*Intent on Duty, Trooly Rooral*). One photograph of an "extinct hot spring" with just the head of a Survey member protruding at the top of the cone—obviously composed for this effect—is labeled, in the alternative caption, "Hot spring erupting a man." Whether this picture was taken in Nevada, as the official caption at the Bancroft would have it, or rather in northern Utah, as physical evidence would indicate, is not clear. What is clear is that the picture—and not just the caption—is a joke. These burlesque artifacts were not necessarily the work of the photographer—rather they seem to have been collective running jokes, of a rather masculine kind. But certainly they reveal the plurality of the landscape culture in which the King Survey evolved, and the fact that photographs lent themselves to a remarkable range of semantic play.[37]

Survey photographs, and landscape pictures more generally, are not usefully approached as "pure" images. Pictures never come without text and context, primary and secondary; often the secondary contexts brought on by critics blur, or at least complicate, historical photographs more than they elucidate them. The method used in the examples cited in this paper looks for evidence of the historical meaning (i.e., readings or uses) of these images in close textual contexts, such as captions or fragments of written descriptions, on the one hand, and broad historical contexts on the other. With respect to such broad historical contexts, it is possible, but uncertain, to compare the style of O'Sullivan's photographs of the Rockies to that of pictures taken shortly before by the British firm Bourne & Shepherd in