

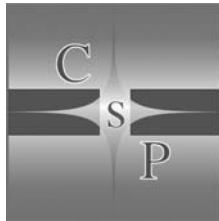
Searching for America

Searching for America
Essays on Art and Architecture

Edited by

Robert Sheardy Jr.

With an Introductory Essay by David Sokol
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PREFACE

The fourteen essays in this collection were presented as papers at the 2006 annual conference for the Art and Architecture Area of the American Culture Association. As Area Chair for Art and Architecture I put out a call for papers with no specific theme in mind. I was indeed pleased when the proposals began coming in. All seemed to address in one way or another the general theme one might best describe by way of a question: "What exactly is American Art?" This is, in fact, a question that has been much debated over the past few decades but more especially, lately. I would say that the theme of "identity" is paramount in many areas of study across the United States of late as Americans once again find themselves embroiled in conflicts in far away places with strange sounding names. Of course, we don't have to leave our shores to find ourselves thus embroiled. Our nation is a land of immigrants. We all came here from some other place sometime within the last ten thousand years or so. Relatively speaking, we are all newcomers, and our numbers increase everyday, as more newcomers arrive and settle in.

"What is American art?" as a question, echo's the more profound question, "What *is* America?"

Each of the essayists selected for inclusion in this anthology is addressing these same questions, not with the intention of answering them, but of offering possibilities, suggestions, that one might consider when pondering this complex issue. And each speaks with a unique voice, from a unique point of view. As a whole, the writers represent many different sides of American society; white male, female, black, Hispanic, Asian, immigrant; retiree, student, and some in between! This seeming cacophony of voices *is* in fact the voice of America.

The American Culture Association was founded in 1979 as an adjunct to the Popular Culture Association. It is an international organization dedicated to exploring all aspects of all of the Americas. The Art and Architecture Area was initially promoted by David Sokol in 1993 as a forum for historians of American art. Area Chairs Sokol and Joy Sperling have since contributed much to the building and preserving of this organization.

I wish to thank both David and Joy for their professionalism, their dedication, and their cherished friendship, in seeing me through my first years with the ACA. This publication would not have been possible without the

guiding lights of their foresight, their creative energy, and their high standards. I also thank Dr. Oliver Evans, president of Kendall College of Art and Design, for his support, both financially and professionally in this project. I consider him my friend as well as my mentor.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this publication to one who will never know how much of an inspiration she was to me during our long friendship. Dr. Phoebe Lloyd, professor of art history at Texas Technical University and long time contributor to the American Culture Association conferences, will be much missed by her students, her friends and her colleagues.

R.T.S. 14 August 2006

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AMERICAN ART?

DAVID SOKOL

The question, “what is American Art” has been part of the intellectual and artistic dialog concerning culture, in this country, since soon after the creation of the new nation. But, more than that, it was also part of three larger, related, and equally self-conscious questions: “what is America,” “what is the United States itself;” and “what is the role of government in supporting the arts?”

All three questions were posed as soon as the newly formed federal and state governments began to contemplate paintings and statues commemorating revolutionary era heroes and leaders, and the battles and events in which they participated, and to decorate the interiors of the fledgling government's offices and meeting rooms. There was no question as to the subject matters to be portrayed or the messages conveyed, as the royalists had already fled (or decided to make the best of the reality of the new country), so celebratory and patriotic subjects were those of choice. None-the-less, sides were immediately taken as to whether the “best” foreign artists should be hired, or whether native-bred white artists of European descent should be granted the modest opportunities of public patronage available. And even that question was complicated by the fact that almost all of the available American artists had been trained in England in the circle of Benjamin West, so those political leaders who appreciated the help and support of France during the Revolution were inevitably attracted to the position of hiring French artists and Italian stone carvers and decorative artists. The art created in other parts of the continent, not yet part of the new nation, was totally ignored.

As the major figures of the War either retired from their positions in federal and state government, or died, and as the building programs matured, this issue became more prominent. For every statue of Washington, smaller or larger battles were fought as to whether to have a work by French sculptor Houdon or one of his followers, or by a native sculptor. Similar arguments accompanied each decision to commission a painting that documented the role

of the state militias in helping secure independence from England. For those who favored the least government interference in any sector, there was the added question of the appropriateness of either national, state, or local government involvement in art patronage, if at all.

The issues had been outlined by the end of the eighteenth century, but received their starkest and surest articulation in the first third of the nineteenth. Slowly, native pride was winning out against perceived foreign sophistication, and even Thomas Jefferson supported the aspirations of native—but European and British trained—artists by the end of his term as president. Unfortunately, the superbly French-trained painter, John Vanderlyn, was supported by Aaron Burr, and the combination of that unfortunate patronage and the artist's own predilection for what were perceived as elitist and irrelevant themes, helped the British trained artists gain the lion's share of commissions. But even when the British trained John Trumbull gained the largest and most prestigious commission of all, the right to paint four large historical scenes with life sized figures for the unfinished Capital Rotunda, in 1817, the voting in Congress was along partisan lines.

More importantly, John Adams, already long retired from the presidency and an old friend of Trumbull and his family, sounded a caution against government financing of the arts when he responded to the artist's written request for support in his petition to Congress to be granted this commission. The now elderly second president informed the artist that he would indeed support his request, but cautioned him, "that the Burin and the Pencil, the Chisel and the Trowel, have in all ages and Countries of which we have any information, been enlisted on the side of Despotism and Superstition." Further, he noted that, "Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, and Poetry have conspir'd against the Rights of Mankind."¹ The rhetoric and the quaint spelling have changed over the years, and the issues of support of dictatorship were replaced by the opponents of the WPA in the 1930s and by the congressmen who voted to eliminate the National Endowments in more recent years; but government suspicion of the arts and a feeling that support for the arts should come from the private sector very much remains part of the discussion of the place, role, and type of art suitable for America and Americans.

But politics has usually trumped ideology in American history, and by the time that Congress was ready to decide who should be given the opportunity of filling the remaining four niches in the Capitol Rotunda, sectionalism and political maneuvering combined to make sure that the four artists who obtained the commissions in the 1840s represented different areas of the country and that they painted subjects that represented those areas.

Dramatic narratives were acceptable to both politicians and the public, as long as they were confined to subjects from American history, but those

artists who tried to expand the tastes of their countrymen with allegorical, moralizing, or literary subjects usually received criticism and public indifference or scorn. Such was the fate of Vanderlyn, Washington Allston, and others who dared step beyond conventional portraiture and the "local" in historical subjects. And, even those who attempted to convey the accepted subjects in a "high" or European style were equally rejected, as the sculptor Horatio Greenough was to discover when he presented George Washington in the guise of a Greek God, late in the 1830s.

By the middle of the 1820s, the country had seemed to come to the position that the American landscape was not only an appropriate subject, but was a defining aspect of the country; depicting a landscape was not only commemorative and symbolic, as in presenting a scene from the Revolution, for instance, it represented the nation and its values. The story of Trumbull's recognition of the importance and value of the landscapes of Thomas Cole has been exaggerated in both importance and impact, but it is none-the-less true that the American landscape was recognized as *the* subject, par excellence, for American artists. Major exhibitions have explored the impact of British botanical art, military artists, commercial engravings, and various landscape traditions in Britain and in Europe, and scholars have noted the pioneering role of Washington Allston in introducing the romantic landscape to this country, but it was the American landscape itself—American nature—that became the bedrock symbol of this country in the nineteenth century.

In addition, the relationship between our "native" philosophy of Transcendentalism and the nature depicted in the landscapes of the Hudson River painters, their followers, and those depicting other aspects of the flora and fauna, have been long noted. But also noted has been the tension between artists' desire to emulate and handle the same subjects as those depicted by their European teachers and the artists whose work they saw for the first time in the great museums and collections of Europe. In spite of the success that Thomas Cole was having with his landscape paintings of American scenes, and although both critics and collectors enthusiastically purchased his canvases, William Cullen Bryant's message to him was well placed. The poet had written a sonnet to the young artist, "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe," with the opening lines of:

Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies:
 Yet, Cole! Thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand
 A living image of our own bright land,
 Such as upon thy glorious canvas lies.

And, at the end of the poem, warning him not to be seduced by the great sights of Europe, he concluded:

Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim thy sight,
But keep that earlier, wilder image bright.

The message was two-pronged: the American landscape is the most suitable subject for the native artist, and America is pure and unsullied. That latter belief, and its expansion into the concept of *American Exceptionalism* became the fulcrum and platform on which landscapes were created and admired.² Mankind fit into that nature, but was almost always dwarfed by it, while the notion of progress hung in delicate balance with the belief that the landscape, itself was being despoiled by its human inhabitants. This view held sway for much of the nineteenth century, despite the introduction of new styles, new influences from England, France, and Germany, and drastic changes in the system of patronage after the Civil War. Gradually, the dramatic landscape replaced the more intimate one, while the size of the works reflected the reality of the mansions in which they were to be housed. Yet, whether the artist was a Dusseldorf-trained and detail-oriented painter of giant canvases of the American west, or a watercolorist of the Pre-Raphaelite persuasion, fidelity to nature and to American subjects remained the declared norm. Given that context and that belief, it is not surprising that even much of our literary and genre art is set within what might reasonably be called the landscape, rather than in the carefully contrived interiors of European genre painters and printmakers.

By the late nineteenth century, French trained artists were self-consciously introducing new styles of art, but the American landscape was still the major subject for American Impressionists, Tonalists, etc., as scenes of everyday life took on greater importance in both official and renegade exhibitions. Artists like John George Brown and Thomas Waterman Wood painted highly successful depictions of street urchins, but they also showed country life with a similar touch. And though we tend to classify and sort artists by subject, as well as style, many of the artists we think of as genre artists also created landscapes. Portraiture always had a place in American art, and paintings, prints, sculptures, and photographs, both by specialists and by landscape artists who supplemented their incomes with portrait work, continued to be popular. As immigration continued and accelerated throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, foreign-born artists continued in the footsteps of Cole and depicted American, rather than European scenes and events. And, even as the new styles were introduced here, American art seemed to utilize those styles in a somewhat different way. For example, it has become a truism that American followers of the French Barbizon painters and the Impressionists never completely dematerialized their people, buildings, or even landscape elements, in the way that the European practitioners did.³

The Centennial of the Revolution and of the founding of this country enforced a never absent sense of pride and chauvinism and that was expressed in

a desire to showcase our history and accomplishments through exhibitions and expositions, on the one hand, and the creation of new museums and historical societies on the other. Our histories of these institutions usually highlight the impact of the great collections of European and Asian art amassed by the leading industrialists and financiers of the period, and we forget how central the revivals of colonial architecture, furniture, and crafts were, and how American artists were showcased in both the great exhibitions and the new museums. The construction of new statehouses and other public buildings called for large scale paintings, and there was a period of return to historical subjects, though now with a much wider range of themes, including industrialization, the Civil War, and the growth of agriculture. There is no clear demarcation between the subjects or the styles of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, and a combination of genre and landscape painting continued to hold sway, still often in the same works, especially in the canvases of the American Impressionists and their broader circle.

We think of the Armory Show of 1913 as the watershed for the introduction of European styles, especially modernism, into the United States, but—as with the large Centennial exhibits and those that followed them—its important to remember that a major share of the work shown was art by American artists with American subjects. The conservative critics certainly lambasted the abstractions of the Europeans, but they were no more supportive of American artists who fell into that mold. As late as 1937, while critics like Thomas Craven were supporting American landscapes and genre paintings as the only suitable work for American artists, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held a widely publicized exhibition called “Paintings by Contemporary American Artists.” More liberal critics like Emily Genauer noted the abstraction by the now elderly Max Weber, the figurative work by Edward Hopper, and gave specific praise to the landscapes of the former expatriate, Sidney Laufman. Specifically, she praised the younger artist for adapting the style of the French Impressionists; “Light shimmers from every stroke of paint, but without dissolving the essential composition into so many segregated patches like grains of sand, as so many of the impressionists did.”⁴ Certainly, landscapes and depictions of the lives of everyday people in both the city and rural America remained the bedrock of American art, and both the so-called Regionalists and the structurally oriented Precisionists, Hopper, and others, pretty much kept to the here and now in their creations, while remaining under the broad umbrella of representationalism.

Looking back from the vantage point of half a century, a prominent scholar of American art history was able to ask why there was so much concern about the

"Americanness" of American art, and why such nationalistic passions were even raised. Her provocative answer is that, "By focusing on uniqueness and exclusivity, one could explain the visual and intellectual appeal of American art without having to apologize for the fact that it did not measure up to the innovation and originality of its European peers." She further suggested that the whole exercise in defining American art—what it was, is, and should be—became an exciting and scholarly stimulating experience, rather than an apologetic one (Corn 192).

But, all of that discussion started to break down with the ideas that began to take hold of the American artist's imagination during and right after World War II, as is quite evident if one visits the recent installations at some of our more important collections of American art. Indeed, when one examines the newly installed "contemporary" galleries at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, distinctions between "fine" and "decorative" art are obliterated, as are those between who is, or is not, an American artist. Much of this is the result of a new aesthetic, but that aesthetic developed because of changes in the world of art at the end of the Great Depression and as a result of a tremendous influx of major European artists to these shores.

Whether or not one accepts the thesis that American art became modern art after World War II, and whether one believes that Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art are American phenomena, it is obvious that a greater internationalism rules the art world in this post-war period. The collecting and museum public is not much concerned with what American art is anymore, nor with what, if any, the subjects should be that inspire the native-born artist. A broader public is still drawn to representational art, and to American subject matters, and has developed a greater appreciation for photographs of real-world subjects as a way to both interact with what they can understand as well as a way to engage with their national heritage. American museums are as likely to present a blockbuster exhibit of the "King Tut" variety as they are to offer a retrospective on Georgia O'Keefe, and segments of the broader public will either visit both or neither.

Contemporary American art spans the range of media and mediums, and it would be hard to find either an art critic, a museum, or an organization of artists who would try to define what contemporary American art should be. Only time and historical distance will show if the artistic skirmishes and intellectual battles of today will seem to situate themselves along national lines as much as the history of American art suggests they did in the past.

PART I

Nineteenth Century America in Print

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

The United States, as a new nation, defined itself by way of three written, printed and published documents; the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Literature and the popular press will continue to associate with these documents throughout the nineteenth century as a means of defining what it was to be American. The stories of Washington Irving and the poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for instance, contributed to the invention of an American mythology, as the country sought ways of distancing itself from its European heritage. The readiness to reject any reference to that heritage in the decades following the wars with England is clearly stated in such cultural histories as John Dunlop's *History of the Arts of Design in the United States*, published in 1834. Artists, like Thomas Cole, were still seeking inspiration in the "newness" of our native wilderness, which explains his bitter criticism of Turner's landscapes in the letters published by Dunlop. Both American art and literature of the era were dedicated to the particularly American notion that art and culture on these shores were linked to the rise of political freedom. Puritan respect for hard work and anti-materialism and transcendentalist reverence for nature somehow got incorporated into this view.

By mid-century, American philosophical discourse found itself stumbling along a narrow path between two extremes. First was the conflict over the perception of Nature. Should the material and spiritual be considered separate worlds as the Calvinists had viewed them, or were they somehow unified through the transcendental experience of the natural environment? And second, was the fear of materialism in general. Might not the mere optical recording of nature lead one away from intuition and natural imagination, which are the sources of spirituality? Americans were ready to listen to European voices.

The published writings of John Ruskin, an Englishman, seemed to speak a language Americans could understand. *Modern Painters III* was published in the United States in 1856.⁵ Ruskin suggests the imitation of nature should not be purely mechanical or optical but processed, as it were, through the artist's imagination. By decade's end, writers on and editors of Ruskin's works were labeling him a "Christian philosopher" and even an evangelist. The moral messages in his writings were taken far more seriously than the lengthy defenses of Turner or his vague discussions on artistic theory and truth to nature. In

short, by the beginning of the Civil War, and barely ten years after the first publication of Ruskin's work in the United States, Americans were finding a way of defining their own taste through his words. His works helped change the direction of domestic cultural thought and helped open Americans' eyes—perhaps for the first time—to the world of art beyond their shores. Ruskin's association of nature with a reference to God seemed to suggest to Americans a solution to the confusion between materialism and spiritualism.

The Gothic Revival movement of mid-century was also related to writing and the publishing industry. Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), a self-trained architect, published *Cottage Residences* in 1842, with picturesque house designs by Alexander Jackson Davis, in the new medium of wood engraving. In his 1850 publication, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, Downing went so far as to compare American democratic life to that of feudal England. The only difference, he asserted, lay in representative government as opposed to aristocratic totalitarianism and the middle class house as opposed to the English country estate. However, using Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* argument, Downing was able to justify advocating a domestic version of the feudal castle for his middle class American readers.⁶ The Gothic picturesque type had a place on these shores, accordingly, due to its Christian associations.

There is an intriguing double irony at work here. On the one side is America's fascination with its own "newness," as Thomas Cole had termed it, while still reflecting upon its European roots. On the other is the manner in which art and democracy had squared off on the intellectual field. For instance, the Classical revival had been consciously associated with the American revival of Greek democratic ideals and yet, by 1840, it had come to represent conformity rather than equality, mediocrity rather than unity. Romanticism—in particular, the idea of sublime experience, which was said to be subjective, highly individualistic and, contrary to Classical notions, therefore, irrational—was gaining popular support due to its basis in subjectivity. Such a notion must have helped strengthen one's sense of self-identity in an increasingly affluent society. More ironical is that Romanticism in Europe was closely allied to socialism, an idea anathema in the New Republic. Add to this complex paradox the fact that the various "revivals" were justified not in terms of a cultural history from which Americans felt excluded, but on the grounds of individual expression.

Another related irony is that of the Romantic relationship of Gothic art to "savage nature." One can understand why Europeans, rebelling against the rational stance of Classicism as representing the totalitarian monarchies of the Age of Reason, might turn to its opposite, the Gothic—which Renaissance thinkers had denigrated to the level of barbarism. One can also understand why the Gothic would, therefore, be seen as *natural* rather than *rational*, to

nineteenth century Europeans. It is not so clear why the idea caught hold in the United States, but even the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper medievalized their homes, having found Gothic qualities in the local wilderness. In a way, the practice continued the domestic custom of associating God with the untamed land much as the Transcendentalists had done in the preceding decades.

Further, the Gothic, more than any other Western art style, is distinctively a Catholic art. America was—in the nineteenth century—a decidedly Protestant country. How could Gothicism have caught on here? One answer was offered by the Episcopalians, America's Anglican church. Though separated from the Church of England by the Atlantic Ocean and the Revolutionary War, it was still tied to Anglicanism and its own Gothic tradition. The American Episcopal believed, as did the Anglican, that his church was the descendant of Catholic tradition, cleansed of Romanism, and thus, rightful heir to the true Gothic style.⁷ Other American Christians disagreed with that claim by declaring that the Gothic style was appropriate for all Christian buildings since it represented, not an historical or genetic link with the pre-Reformation church, but a spiritual one. To them, the style expressed the continuity of a faith that transcended time and national boundaries. By lifting the Gothic out of its historical context, Americans were able to embrace art on the same terms as they did their beloved land; with a kind of love-hate relationship, at once reverend and practical.

America's answer to Ruskin was James Jackson Jarves (1818-88). In *Art Hints*, published in 1855, he offers a definition of taste that echoes Ruskin's *Modern Painters* almost word for word.⁸

In its best form it is the result of the cultivation of the imagination under the guidance of reason. In its common association, it is intuitive in nature...if it is formed before the intellect is disciplined it is liable to error...The Law of Taste is harmony [which relates to the virtue of temperance and] adds grace to religion.

Jarves published *The Art Idea* in 1865. It also follows the format of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, using a comparative approach to elevate the art of the United States above its European antecedents. Like his English counterpart, Jarves praises one artist above all others as an example of what he considered the highest achievement in art. Elihu Vedder became for Jarves a *cause célèbre* as Turner had been for Ruskin. "Vedder has shown himself to be an artist of rare mental caliber," he writes, describing him as "a painter of ideas...The character of his art is Turner-esque in largeness and variety of conception."⁹ Jarves's books and essays served as travel guides to an entire generation of Americans on the Grand Tour.

The Sunday School Union was established in 1824, a congressionally empowered system of assuring that only the “right” kind of literature got into the American school, library and home. The first public libraries opened in the 1840's and by 1864, railway postal service was available. These institutions, aided by an improved steam powered high-speed rotary press—patented by Richard Hoe in 1865—set the stage for a literary explosion in America. Illustrated news magazines and literary journals went from monthly to weekly schedules and the new postal service was so efficient that even frontier households could count on having their weeklies delivered on time. These journals provided a link between the widely spread communities of the Great American West and the cultural centers of the east coast. The significance of this connection between art and publishing during the nineteenth century cannot be overstated. One of the most popular of the journals that served in this capacity, many of which were intended for stay-at-home women, was *The Ladies Repository* of literature, religion and the arts, published as a monthly journal, and bound annually, by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Cincinnati and New York City between 1841 to 1876.

Marleen Hoover's essay considers the influence of this widely distributed journal as aesthetic tastemaker in nineteenth century America. Its “art notes” included articles on art and architecture ranging from critiques of portraits, landscapes and religious pictures to descriptions of classical ruins and even practical building construction advice. The journal also raised an early voice for temperance, the abolition of slavery, and women's education. In this light, it offered opinions about art and architecture, which met with the approval of nineteenth century Protestant politics.

No significant artwork or artist of the mid to late nineteenth century escaped notice by the editors of *The Ladies Repository*. In 1848 they aired commentaries on the controversy over Hiram Powers's naked figure called the *Greek Slave* and throughout the 1850's, they reviewed John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. The *Repository* introduced its readers to the technology of daguerreotype, lithography, steel engraving and Louis Prang's chromolithographic innovations. It served as tastemaker and art educator to three generations of Americans. It played a major role in shaping visual culture during the nineteenth century and contributed to the popular aesthetic values of the early twentieth.

Jennifer Eimers considers the work of the American and English novelist Henry James, especially his stories about Americans. James can be described as both a critic of American culture and as one of the men who helped to define it. He often defines his characters, for instance, by equating their appreciation of art objects with class standing, and much has been made of the relationship he draws between painting and writing. But, what of the role of

architecture? Eimers contends that James uses architectural landmarks in his novels in much the same way as he uses paintings, not only to complement a scene and give it that tint of authenticity, but as a presence that quietly plays upon his characters' perceptions, influencing their subsequent actions.

In *The Bostonians*, for example, two significant scenes are set in historically and socially charged architectural monuments, Harvard's Gothic style *Memorial Hall* and the Boston Music Hall. James offers us a view into these sites through the perspective of the male antagonist, Basil Ransom. His experience of these spaces influences the attitudes he develops toward the two feminists, Verena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor. Eimers' essay offers insight into the ways in which American architecture has contributed to our understanding of what *is* American.

The third essay considers a group of drawings by ex-patriot painter Elihu Vedder inspired by the poetry of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Here, a Persian poet's words, as rendered by an Englishman, Edward Fitzgerald, are transfigured into images scratched on paper and representing as much an American attitude toward life and death as they do the painter's personal spiritualism. Published in 1884 as an accompaniment to the poem, Vedder's *Rubáiyát* drawings were reproduced in what was then the newly developing method of printing known as photogravure. These popular press editions therefore reflect not only the end of the Romantic era in America, prompted in part by the new technologies, but also a change in the way art and culture was to be defined in the next century, as the country moved toward modernism and a new identity as industrial leader of the world.

CHAPTER ONE

SHAPING AMERICAN AESTHETICS: ART NOTES FROM *THE LADIES REPOSITORY*

MARLEEN HOOVER



Figure 1-1

A. Sievert, "The Critic," Wood Engraving by W. Wellstood
The Ladies Repository,
Frontispiece for the February 1873 Issue
Collection of the Author

In 19th century America, popular journals published articles about art and artists, and about museum and gallery openings, along with engravings of both original and famous works of art and architecture. Journals like *Appleton's*, *The Ladies Repository*, *Scribner's* and *Harper's* commissioned engravers to reproduce works of art and architecture. These periodicals were often at the forefront of the technological advances in printmaking. Steam power plus the 1830s introduction of mechanical typesetting equipment made printing of weekly and monthly journals possible and available to the masses.

Aesthetic influence derived from nineteenth century print sources should not be underestimated. For the average person the journals were the only sources of visual imagery. Attitudes toward art and the development of "good taste" were shaped, in part, by the artistic and aesthetic decisions of the 19th century journal editors.

Engravings in popular monthly journals, as well as those engravings of works of art published in portfolio, were circulated widely from the early 1800s through the end of the 19th century. *The Ladies Repository of Literature, Art, and Religion* was one of those journals. Published monthly (and bound annually) by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Cincinnati and in New York from 1841 through 1876, it included articles on art and architecture that ranged from critiques of portraits, landscapes, and religious works, to descriptions of classical ruins and practical building construction advice. *The Ladies Repository* included reviews of current and new books and magazines, and reviews of art exhibits in the United States and in Europe. Steel and wood engravings of works of art well known at that time and engravings illustrating religious and moral themes were included, like the engraving that appeared in the February, 1873 frontispiece entitled "The Critic," (Fig. 1-1) engraved by W. Wellstood from a painting by A. Seigert.

Subject matter in journal engravings represented the overriding themes of middle class Christian values, moral lessons, and the importance of home and hearth. Subjects ranged from bucolic landscapes, Western expansion, pastoral and farm life, family and children activities, Christian religious and missionary subjects, as well as portraits of contemporary notables in literary, artistic, scientific and other fields. Mythological subjects were included as copies of famous works of art (the *Laocoön*, for example) and as illustrations depicting scenes from classical Greek and Roman literature.

Early articles in *The Ladies Repository* included exhibit reviews in the regular feature known as 'The Editor's Table' and in 'Art Notes,' a feature added in 1872. Art and architecture were often the topics of articles on travel, tours abroad (the grand tour), and exploration in the cause of missionary work. An early voice for temperance, the abolition of slavery, and women's education,

The Ladies Repository offered opinions about art and architecture in the nineteenth century that met with the approval and channeled the tastes of Protestant middle class America.

No significant art, artist or architecture of the mid to late nineteenth century escaped notice of the editors and writers of *The Ladies Repository*. The journal commented on important statues and monuments erected in New York and in Washington and in 1848 reported on the controversy over the *Greek Slave* created by Hiram Powers. The journal carried the opinions of several ministers appointed to evaluate the appropriateness of displaying the nude statue in Cincinnati. It was concluded, in Cincinnati and in *The Ladies Repository*, that nudity in Greek art, because its beauty (God's perfect creation) and its truth (in the case of the Greek Slave, the suffering of slavery), could be appreciated, and that view echoed leading art criticism and philosophy at that time. In the 1850s the journal discussed John Ruskin's view of Edmund Burke and his notion of the sublime, Ruskin's opinions of Turner, and in 1858, presented Ruskin's defense of the Pre-Raphaelites. In 1875 the journal congratulated Ruskin on his appointment as the Slade Professor of Art at Oxford.

Mary E. Neale, writing on "Popular Art" in *The Ladies Repository* in December of 1876 commented, "The reproductions of artwork have been carried to such high perfection and in such wonderful variety that every painting of celebrity in the world, either of the past or present, is brought to our firesides and homes" (Neale, 1876, 549). By June of 1851 *The Ladies Repository* had a readership of 40,000, a five-times increase since its inception in 1841. Other early illustrated journals in the mid to late 1800s included *The Aldine*, labeled "A Typographic Art Journal," *Ballou's Pictorial*, a weekly known for its wood engravings and its 103,000 subscriptions in the mid-1800s; *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, published in New York, with its extensive Civil War engravings, chromolithographic frontispieces, and in-text illustrations; and *The Delineator*, "A Journal of Fashion, Culture, and Fine Arts," well-illustrated with engravings and one of the most popular of the American women's magazines by 1873.

Neale continued, "It is of these reproductions...the real and true educators in art, that I desire to speak. They have done more to create and cultivate a refined taste for true art than could ever have been done by the original works alone; for they go to the homes of the masses, and genius as often springs up from the common classes as from any other," (*ibid.*)

While the works of art, wrote Neale, "...have made our beautiful scenery celebrated at home and abroad," the journal engravings "have taken the beautiful scenes into every home" (Neale, September 1873, 214). Neale wrote the highest praise for the Methodist journal: "...*The Ladies Repository* is the pioneer monthly teacher in American landscape paintings. For fourteen years it

has brought to me each month a copy of some fine painting, chiefly from American artists, and engraved in the highest style of art... in the *Aldine* and *Art Journal* our copies from paintings have constantly multiplied. But those of the *Repository* are peculiarly their own, and always beautiful,” (Neale, December 1876, 550). Serving as art educator and art taste-maker to middle America for thirty-six years, from 1841 through 1876, *The Ladies Repository* played a major role in shaping visual culture in the 19th century and in setting popular aesthetic values in the early 20th century.

The Ladies Repository reviewed other journals for its readers. Included were *Little's Living Age*, the *Southern Ladies Companion*, the *Ladies Cabinet Magazine*, the *Ladies Garland*, the *Knickerbocker*, *Graham's Magazine*, the *Magnolia* (or *Southern Monthly*), the *Classic* (or *College Monthly*), the *Ladies World of Fashion*, *Boston Miscellany*, and the *Atlantic*. *Harper's Monthly and Weekly* were described in the 1864 *Ladies Repository* as “welcome to our table... None know better than the *Harper's* how to meet the wants of ‘the million,’” (Wiley, May 1862, 318).

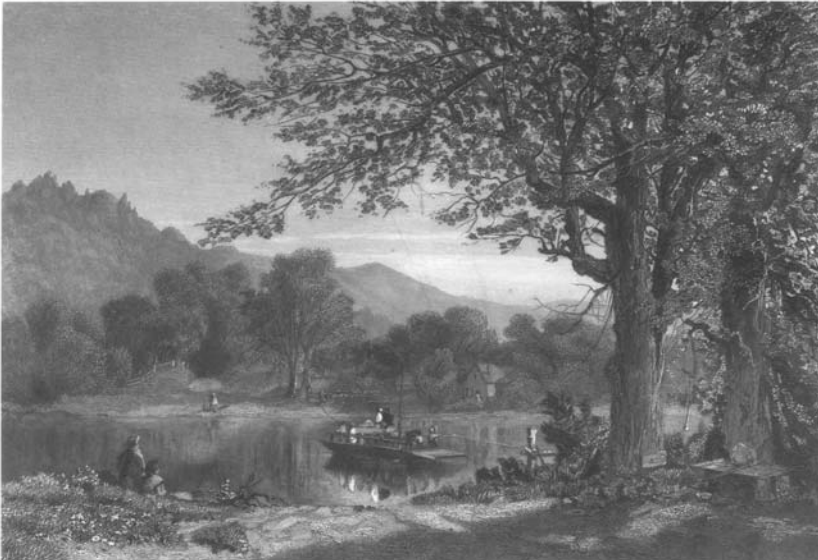


Figure 1-2

"The Ferry on the Androsoggen," From a Painting by A. B. Bellows
 Wood Engraving by W. Wellstood, *The Ladies Repository*
 Frontispiece to the Bound Volume XXIV, January 1864
 Collection of the Author

The Ladies Repository introduced its readers to the technology of daguerreotype, lithography, steel and wood engravings, and Louis Prang's chromos (or chromolithography) as the best up-to-date means of reproducing images. Frequent contributor Neale described the various popular means of art reproductions. "Steel engravings," she wrote, "will never lose their hold upon the public taste. They are so rich and delicate in touch, so chaste in effect, that they are never out of place in the richest room, or the plainest," (Neale, December 1876, 549).

Folio-sized engravings of landscapes, originals and copies of paintings, filled the art collections of the upper middle class and the elite, but everyone could own steel engravings of landscapes through journal subscriptions which ranged from \$2.00 per year in the 1840s to \$3.50 or \$4.00 in the 1870s. The 1864 annual edition of *The Ladies Repository* carried twenty-five engravings of which 12 were copies of landscape paintings and 13 were original portraits. The frontispiece to the bound volume (XXIV) carried an engraving of a painting by A. B. Bellows entitled "The Ferry on the Androsoggen," (Fig. 1-2) engraved by W. Wellstood, expressly for *The Ladies Repository*, from the painting collection of G.F. Daniels, Esq. The January 1864 issue carried another work engraved as well as designed by W. Wellstood, "The Signers of the Declaration of Independence," with each portrait numbered and identified. Despite the number of other reproductive processes available by 1876, Ms. Neale asserted that steel engravings "seem to increase in popularity" and "still find ready sale among all the lovely chromos," (*ibid.*).

At the time of the founding of *The Ladies Repository*, Cincinnati, Ohio marked the western extent of civilization on the American continent. Nicknamed the "Queen City" and the "Jewel of the West," Cincinnati was the place of departure for far western exploration, until that point was moved further west to St. Louis, Missouri. The Methodist Episcopal Church understood their mission as spreading Christianity to the uncivilized lands beyond Cincinnati and engaged in training female teachers and missionaries for such work.

John Lloyd Stephen's famous 1843 *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, with 120 engravings by Frederick Catherwood, was reviewed in *The Ladies Repository* and conveyed some of the earliest art historical and archaeological information on Maya art and architecture to the western world. Articles that same year reported on fabulous treasures from Mesopotamia and Assyria. In 1851 the art and architecture of "Indian mounds" in North and South America were discussed, and in all the explorations of ancient cultures observations, inquiry, record keeping and scholarship were described as keenly important. Reports were intended to inform future teachers and missionaries, as well as to

educate women as future wives. The glories of conversation with an educated wife were often mentioned in *The Ladies Repository*.

A popular minister, traveler and writer, J.P. Durbin, D.D., wrote about his visits to the grand churches and monuments of Europe in the mid 1840s. His critique of the art and architecture echoed the views of Pugin and Ruskin, noting the symmetry and beauty of Gothic art. Durbin wrote admiringly of the Catholic edifices in Rome, praising its art:

A visit to the second [St. Peters] derives its pleasure from what one sees – from those immortal works of art which the ancients and the moderns have executed to represent their patriotism, their pleasures, and their piety. They are the ever-during forms of beauty, of pleasure, of praiseworthy actions, and of ennobling and purifying sentiments fixed in marble, brass, bronze, and mosaic as models for the study and imitation of posterity, (Durbin, January 1847, 1)

He also urged the preservation and conservation of ancient art and architecture on the basis of its value to the human race. In April 1847 Durbin provided a detailed description of the *Laocoon*, and quoted the *Aeneid's* telling of the event and Byron's poem reflecting on the statue. It is important to remember that, in 1847, his reader was the pioneer woman whom we might have previously considered indifferent to such exotic subjects.

In February 1847 Durbin wrote about the *Colosseum*, expertly describing its Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns, and poetically eulogizing upon those who had lost their lives there, the “Dacian, or Jewish captives...[T]radition, fairly made probable by history, declares that many Christians also perished here during the imperial persecutions.” Durbin's article was illustrated by an engraving of the Greek *Dying Gallic Warrior* and was followed by Byron's poem to the fallen “gladiator” which ends, “...Arise, ye Goths, and glut your ire.”¹⁰

Armed with Gibbon and Byron, Durbin continued across Italy, offering a very thoughtful and reasonable view of ancient and Renaissance art and architecture. He described and commented on the bronze *Marcus Aurelius*, the *She Wolf of the Capitol* (complete with bronze Romulus and Remus), the *Laocoon*, the *Niobe*, the *Column of Trajan*, and the *Arches of Titus* and *Constantine*. The *Venus de Medici* and the *Apollo Belvedere* were described as “the triumph of the ideal over the positive,” which according to Durbin is a higher expression of beauty not yet “manifested in living forms,” (Durbin, March 1847, 66).

In the footsteps of Pugin, Durbin lamented that, “there is no specimen of Gothic architecture in the churches of Rome,” (Durbin, May 1847, 161). He admired the genuine Greek and Roman styles, but criticized their revival in the Renaissance. “Yet you can see the elements of the simple and sublime