

Art *Is* History

Albert Bierstadt, the Frontier, and the American Dream

Textbook: Henry Sayre. *The Humanities: Culture, Continuity and Change*, Vol. 2. REVEL Edition

Romantic Movement 1798-1850

- Emphasis of Feelings and the Imagination
- Love of and Respect for Nature
- Look to the Natural World as the source of truth, beauty, inspiration
- Interest in the effect of nature on the artist and the individual—particularly when one is alone, surrounded by nature and untouched wilderness
- Respect for the “noble savage”

“Man is naturally a wild animal, and . . . Taken from the woods, he is never happy . . . ‘til he returns to them again.”

--Dr. Benjamin Rush

“The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.”

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Go forth under the open sky and list to Nature’s teachings.”

--William Cullen Bryant

The 19th Century and The American Dream

- Optimism
- Limitless Opportunity
- Equality
- Dreams of the West
- Hopes for the future in a new land

“America is another name for opportunity.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thomas Cole and The Hudson River School

Figure 29.2 THOMAS COLE, *KAATERSKILL FALLS*



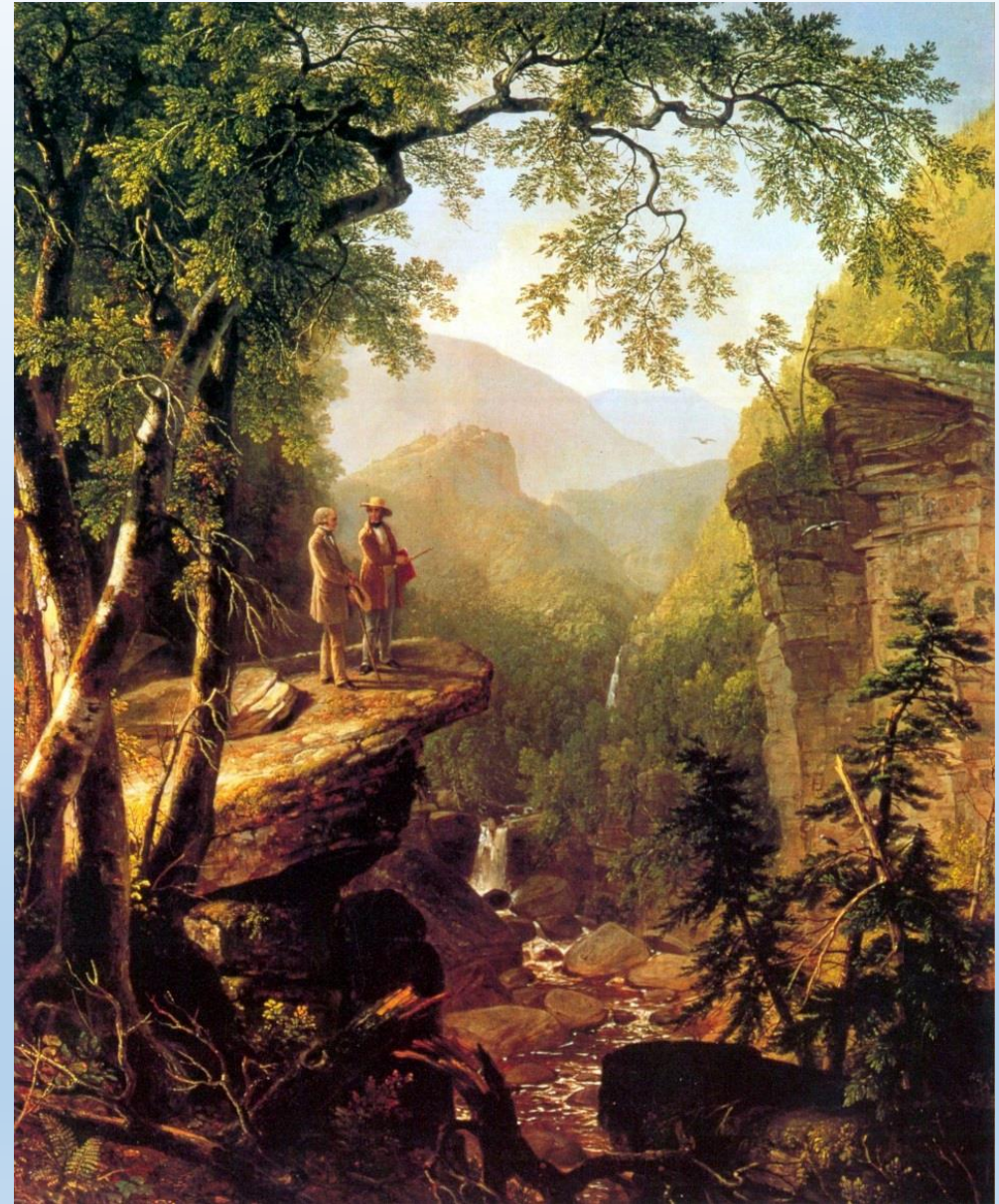
1826. Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ " \times 35 $\frac{5}{16}$ ".

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Bequest of Daniel Wadsworth, 1848.15. At 260 feet, the twin falls are among the tallest in the eastern United States.

Characteristics of Hudson River School

- Landscape
- Fidelity to nature
- Emphasis on the drama of light, “Luminist” Art
- Sunrise and sunset
- Oncoming storms
- Subjects lack human presence (or humans reduced to ant-like status)
- Nostalgia for the vanishing wilderness

Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits*. 1848 (44” x 36”)



“Go not abroad then in search of material for the exercise of your pencil while the virgin charms of our native land have claims on your deepest affections.” Asher B. Durand (1855)

Figure 29.5 FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH, *TWILIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS*



1860. Oil on canvas, 40" × 60".

The Cleveland Museum of Art. Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund. As was true of almost all Church's major paintings of the era, this one was exhibited by itself as a paid-entrance event in New York City, where it became enormously popular.

Beyond the Mississippi, to the wilderness of the Far West

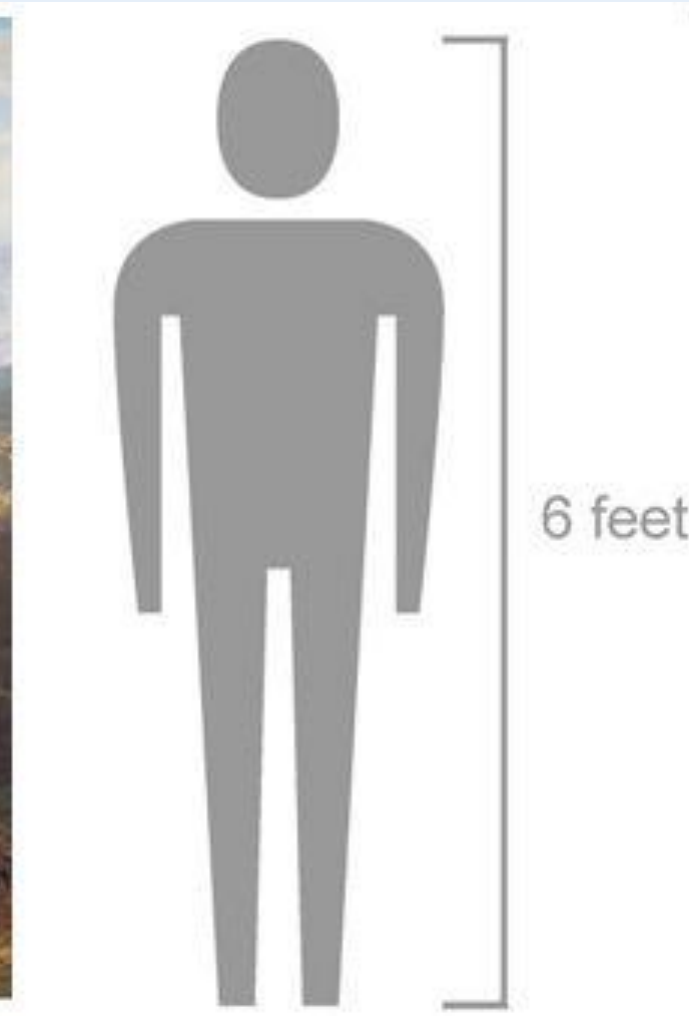
Figure 32.1 ALBERT BIERSTADT, *THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, LANDER'S PEAK* (DETAIL)



1863. Oil on panel, 73 ½" × 120 ¾". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.123).

This painting established a visual rhetoric that Bierstadt applied in painting after painting—the bucolic foreground with a clear lake at the base of a waterfall that drops from the heights of the mountains beyond. It presented a myth of landscape and of the Native American presence within it.

A canvas as large as the great outdoors . . .



“I am large, I contain multitudes.”

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 1855

Lander's Peak, Detail



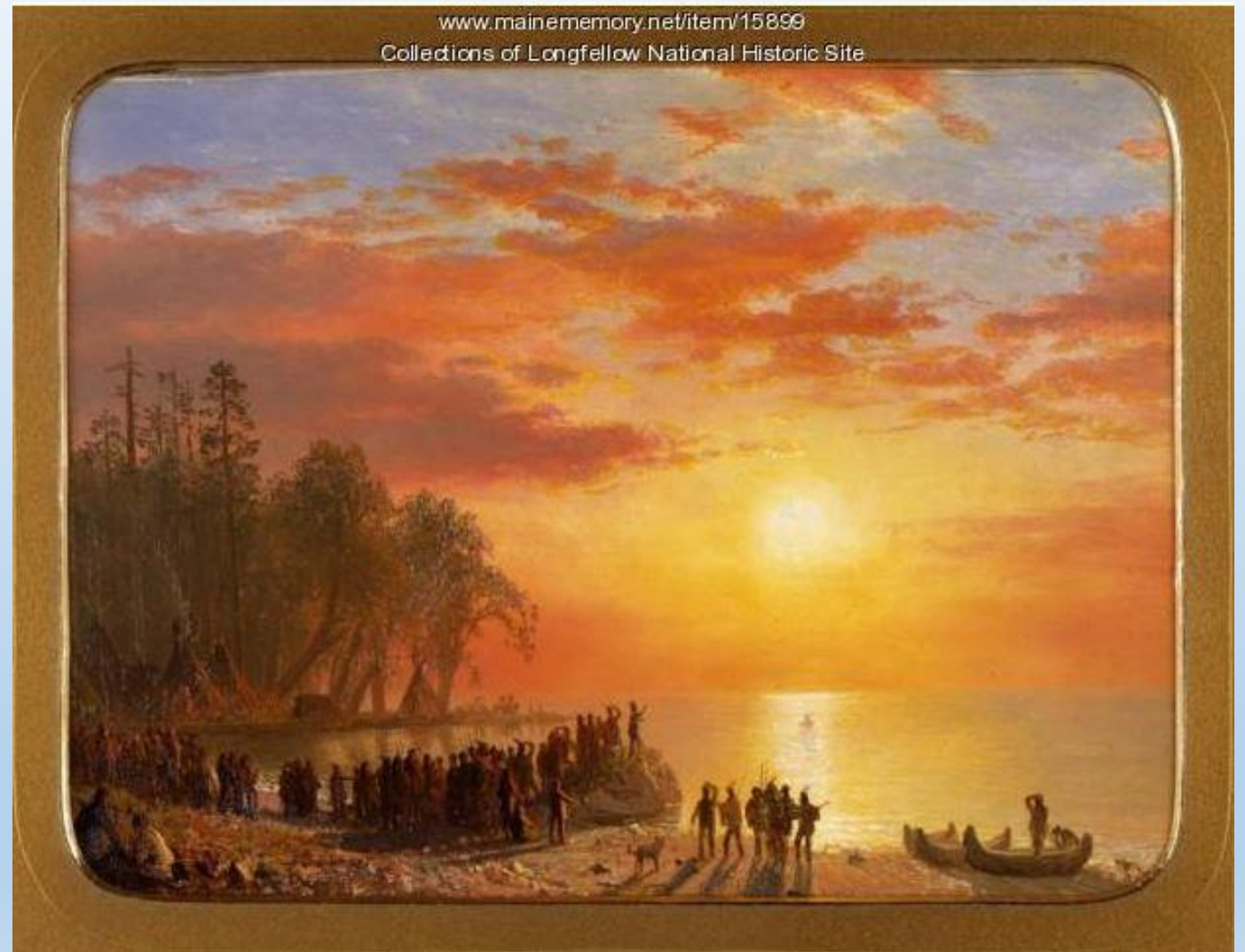
Departure of Hiawatha

ca. 1868

“Westward, westward Hiawatha
Sailed into the fiery sunset,
Sailed into the purple vapors,
Sailed into the dusk of evening.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

1855



The Last of the Buffalo

1888 (6 x 10 ft.)

“I have, for many years past, contemplated the noble races of red men who are now spread over these trackless forests and boundless prairies, melting away at the approach of civilization.”

George Catlin 1832



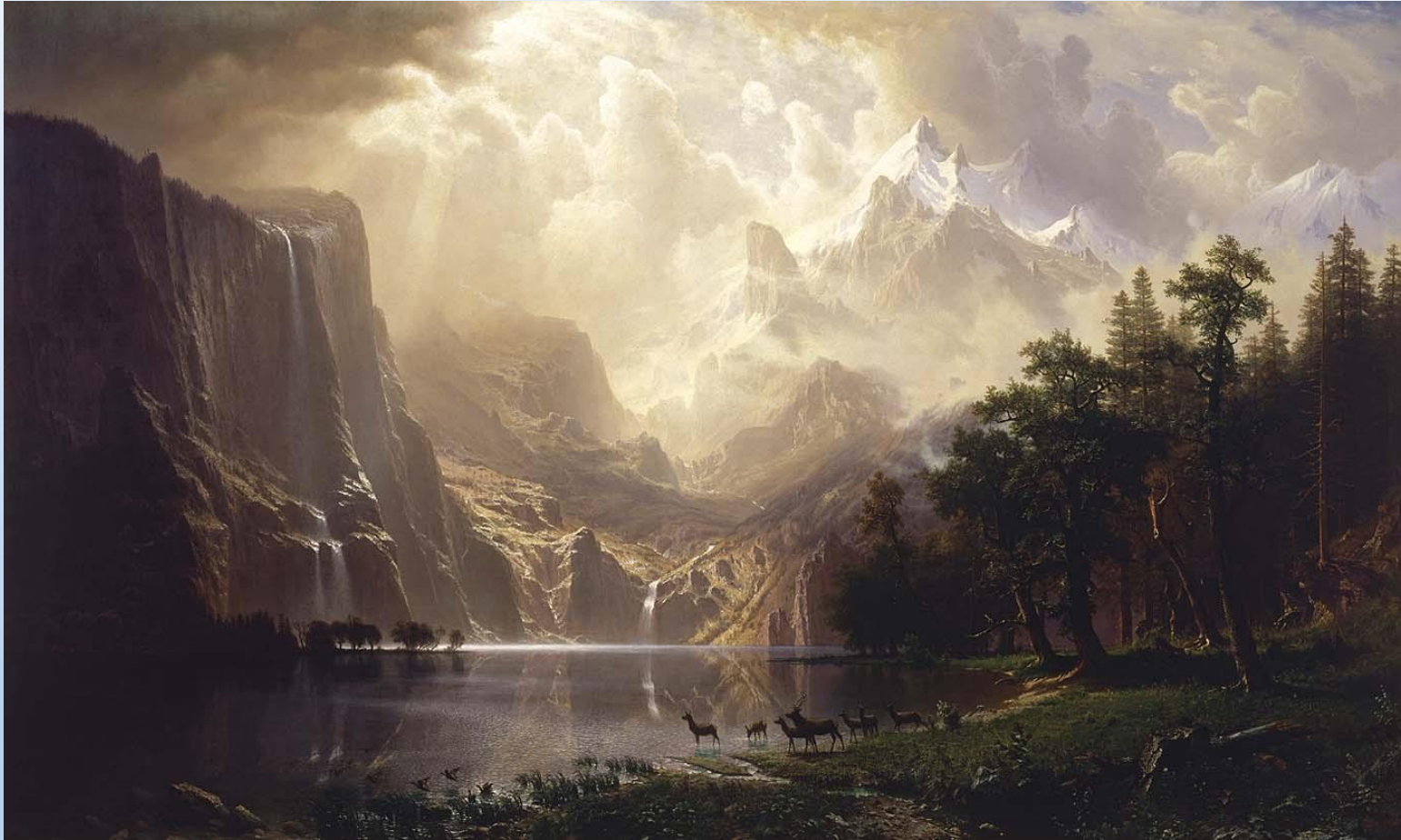
Rocky Mountain Landscape 1870 (36.6 x 54.8 in.)



“Be . . . the Lewis and Clark and Frobisher of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes.”
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854

Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains

1868 (6 x 10 ft.)



“In wilderness is the preservation of the world.”
Henry David Thoreau, “Walking”

*Donner Lake From the
Summit* 1873 (6 x 10 ft.)

“I will confess that I take more intense delight from reading the power and goodness of God from ‘the things which are made’ than from the Bible.”

“The mountains are calling and I must go.”

--John Muir 1873



*Emigrants Crossing the
Plains,
or The Oregon Trail*
1869



"We have good roads comparatively. We mean good roads if the sloughs are not belly deep and the hills not right straight up and down and not rock enough to turn the wagon over." -Henry Allyn, August 11, 1852

The Grand Tetons, 1881?

“But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s gonna adopt me and sivilize me and I can’t stand it. I been there before.”

From Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 1884



Looking Down Yosemite Valley 1865 (5 x 8 ft.)



“What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve . . . A *nation’s Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wildness and freshness of their nature’s beauty!” George Catlin, ca. 1830

Looking Up Yosemite Valley, 1865-1867

Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias should be set aside “for public use, resort, and recreation,” that “shall be inalienable for all time.” President Abraham Lincoln June 30, 1864



"An Act to set apart a certain Tract of Land lying near the Head-waters of the Yellowstone River as a public Park." [S. 392]

President Ulysses S. Grant, March 1, 1872

Yellowstone Falls
1881



Old Faithful



Albert Bierstadt 1830-1902

The story of us—

- Immigrant
- Unlimited possibilities
- Reverence for nature, the west, and the wilderness
- Westward Migration
- Preservation and America's National Parks



To Consider and Discuss

Look at the art and architecture shown in Chapters 27, 28, 29, or 32. Choose one or two examples and discuss how these works tell the story of their time and of their place.

- How does the artist see his (or her) world?
- What is the artist's message/theme?
- What is significant about the subject of the painting?
- In what ways does the composition of the work (or style of the building) convey the artist's message or theme?
- What does the work tell you about the people or the culture at the time it was created?
- How does this work reflect similar ideas in other works (music, literature, philosophy) of its time?

Be very specific in your discussion and support your thoughts by referring to specific details within the work.