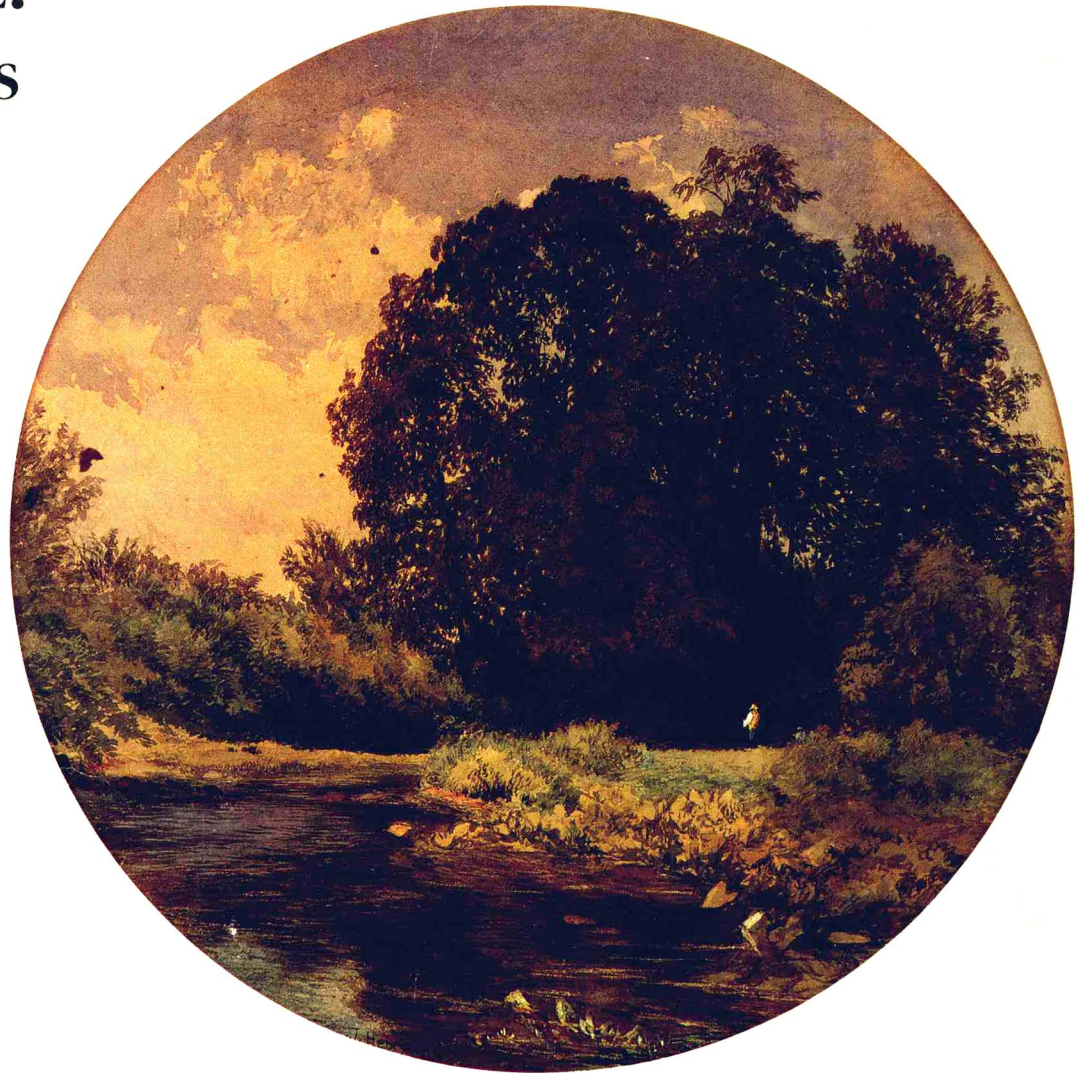


FOCUSING ON NATURE: LANDSCAPE DRAWINGS

FROM THE COLLECTION OF
E. MAURICE BLOCH



AN EXHIBITION IN THE
VIRGINIA STEELE SCOTT GALLERY
THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY
MAY THROUGH AUGUST, 1991

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Soon after the Virginia Steele Scott Gallery opened at the Huntington, in 1984, the curatorial staff began discussions with Dr. E. Maurice Bloch about organizing a series of exhibitions from his extraordinary collection of American drawings. These exhibitions were to be curated by Dr. Bloch, and were intended as examinations of American artistic interests from the colonial period through the early twentieth century—the same period covered by the Gallery’s holdings. The first of these shows, “Faces and Figures in American Drawings,” opened at the Scott Gallery in January of 1989. In the accompanying catalogue, Dr. Bloch explored various modes of expression, from figure study and caricature to narrative illustration and portraiture.

Immediately upon completing work on “Faces and Figures,” Dr. Bloch began to choose the pieces for “Focusing on Nature.” In this exhibition, he hoped to suggest the ways in which nineteenth-century American

artists forged a style by reacting to native scenery. It was Dr. Bloch’s intention to examine the visual results of sketching trips in the Adirondacks, excursions along the eastern seaboard, surveys across the great expanse of the trans-Mississippi west. He also wished to contrast these portrayals with depictions of sites in Europe.

Just as he was nearing the completion of the catalogue for “Focusing on Nature,” in the fall of 1989, Dr. Bloch died unexpectedly, leaving the fate of his collection uncertain and the future of the exhibition unclear. However, through the generosity of the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation, the Scott Gallery was able to purchase approximately half of Dr. Bloch’s American drawings. The Gallery is pleased to present “Focusing on Nature,” accompanied by a catalogue containing complete essays by Dr. Bloch on thirty-two of the drawings included in the exhibition. A checklist of the fifteen works not discussed by Dr. Bloch complements his entries.

When considered together, “Focusing on Nature” and its companion exhibition, “Faces and Figures in American Drawings,” reflect the rich possibilities provided by Dr. Bloch’s collection for research into the complex and compelling nature of American art. The drawings purchased by the Scott Gallery from Dr. Bloch’s estate now form the heart of an important study collection that will be of lasting interest to scholars and the general public.

Edward J. Nygren
Director of the Art Collections
Henry E. Huntington Library
and Art Gallery

I welcome the occasion which this exhibit provides to write a few words about my good friend and former colleague, the late Maurice Bloch. There are others who may have better credentials to do so—a longer acquaintance or greater professional competence. But I knew him well in his later years, and though my field was American literature and his American art, we shared a wide range of scholarly interests, with the result that Maurice and I frequently found ourselves on the same committees at UCLA, where we both worked. This led to our later association as members of the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation, for it was largely on Maurice's recommendation that I was invited to join the board. It was at this time, I might add, that the Scott collection of American art, now the basis for the Virginia Steele Scott Gallery at the Huntington, was being formed. Maurice had succeeded Millard Sheets as art adviser to the Scott Foundation. I have an indelible recollection of those monthly sessions in the early 1980s when the board met in the stunning private art gallery built by Mrs. Scott on the grounds of her estate shortly before her death. Maurice, always meticulously prepared, would bring out his slides, transparencies, provenances, and artists' resumé—would spread his wares, so

to speak—and rehearse the virtues of the paintings under consideration for purchase and their relation to the ongoing collection. What graced these sessions and made them memorable was his lambent wit and, depending on one's taste, his outrageous puns. Short, emphatic in manner, and with the most astonishing wardrobe of what seemed to be European suits and haberdashery of an earlier era, he always reminded me of Hercule Poirot.

In fact, Maurice Bloch was one of that vanishing breed of scholars trained to connoisseurship. Originally he had intended to do his graduate work in the art of the Quattrocento, but with the encouragement of Lloyd Goodrich he had turned to American art. His subsequent professional career coincided with the belated recognition and growth of the study of American art in the academy. As scholar, teacher, and collector he was among the pioneers. His student and early professional years in New York gave him an unrivaled opportunity to collect American drawings, so little regarded at the time that they sold for three or four dollars or came to the young collector as casual gifts from dealers. In Los Angeles, where he spent most of his career,

Maurice haunted the auctions, antique shows, flea markets, and dealers' premises, often with his good friend the artist Joyce Treiman, the two of them uncovering overlooked and neglected treasures.

The sudden and unexpected death of Maurice Bloch, in December 1989, was not only a blow to his friends but a loss of incalculable significance to the potential resources for art education. His collection of American drawings, of books on American art history, and of artists' journals, letters, and memorabilia, patiently assembled over a period of half a century, are now sadly dispersed by sale and auction. That Maurice intended his collections to form the nucleus for an archive of nineteenth-century American art was clearly understood by his friends, to whom he often applied for advice about the proper disposition of his estate. His vision was of a teaching archive which would enable students to work with original materials and a library of many thousands of volumes. The splendid collections of UCLA's Grunwald Graphics Center, which he had been instrumental in forming, provided just such an archive for UCLA students and one which he exploited to the full. Since his particular interest (aside from his devotion to

George Caleb Bingham) was the unexplored field of nineteenth-century American illustration, he conducted seminars in which the students typically used both the Grunwald's resources and Maurice's own private collection to study a particular aspect of the subject and then combine their findings into a catalogue and exhibition. Such seminars were symptomatic of the thoroughness and practical orientation of Maurice's teaching. His students were rigorously prepared for the profession they hoped to enter, and the process extended over a longer period than was characteristic of most disciplines in the arts and humanities at UCLA. If his demands were severe, his students could be sure that his loyalty to them and his interest in their work would continue after graduation, for he was vigilant in his efforts to advance them professionally.

One result of Maurice Bloch's collecting adventures was an extraordinary cache of American drawings, some six hundred in all, whose quality and variety became apparent only after his death. A small portion of the collection had made its debut at the Scott Gallery in the exhibit "Faces and Figures in American Drawings," curated by Maurice in early 1989; but, as became clear once the

entire collection was brought to light, this was only the tip of the iceberg. Fortunately, when the drawings were auctioned by Christie's in two sessions, in October 1990 and January of this year, the Huntington was able to acquire, with funds provided by the Scott Foundation, a selection of about half of the total number of drawings for sale. Selected landscape drawings from this group appear in the current exhibition, planned before Maurice Bloch's death and therefore enhanced by the careful and informed annotations he made for many of the drawings. Hence, in a curious and roundabout way a substantial part of the collection has come home to the Huntington, where it will help form the cornerstone of an archive of colonial and nineteenth-century American art historical materials.

Blake Nevius
May 1991

Preface by Edward J. Nygren vii

Introduction by Blake Nevius ix

The Catalogue by E. Maurice Bloch

1. William Henry Bartlett	2
2. William Brenton Boggs	6
3. Felix Octavius Carr Darley	8
4. Arthur Bowen Davies	10
5. William H. Dougal	12
6. Seth Eastman	15
7. Harry Fenn	20
8. John Greenwood	22
9. Philip Harry	25
10. John Henry Hill	28
11. Charles Lanman	30
12. Henry Jackson Morton	34
13. Charles Christian Nahl	37

14. William Trost Richards	40
15. Aaron Draper Shattuck	45
16. Walter Shirlaw	48
17. James David Smillie	50
18. William Louis Sonntag, Jr.	52
19. Edmund Walenta	55
20. Benjamin West	60
21. Raphael Lamar West	63
22. Edwin Whitefield	66
23. August Will	70
24. Charles Wimar	72
Checklist of additional drawings exhibited	75

FOCUSING ON NATURE

**NO. 1 WILLIAM HENRY BARTLETT
(1809-1854)**

a. *On the Saguenay, probably 1841*

Sepia wash on cream paper; 4 1/2 x 7 1/4 in.

Acc. no: 91.114

Prov: Emily Driscoll, New York, 1967;
E. Maurice Bloch, Los Angeles; Christie's,
New York, January 9, 1991.

b. *European Cathedral Town*

Sepia wash over pencil on cream paper;
6 3/4 x 4 3/4 in.

Acc. no: 91.113

Prov: E. Maurice Bloch, Los Angeles;
Christie's, New York, January 9, 1991.

Bartlett was born in Kentish Town, London, and spent his boyhood years in a boarding school before he was apprenticed to the fine-art publisher John Britton (1771-1857) in 1822 at the age of thirteen.¹ The plan was to train him for a career in topographic illustration and Britton was known to take on pupils who could be taught to make the

drawings for the books on architecture he published. Britton apparently soon recognized Bartlett's natural talent and provided the groundwork and discipline that made it possible for him to take on work in the field by 1824 or 1825. His earliest drawings were for Britton's *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, which also included the contributions of such celebrated draftsmen as Samuel Prout, Frederick Nash, Thomas Hearne, John Sell Cotman, and J. M. W. Turner. Bartlett also produced drawings for several volumes of *Cathedral Antiquities*, which Britton published between 1821 and 1836, and sixty-seven of the eighty-three drawings for Britton's *Picturesque Antiquities of the English Cities*, published in 1830.

With his apprenticeship over in 1830, Bartlett married and settled down to earning a livelihood for his growing family. It was at this time that he began a long relationship with the London publisher George Virtue and embarked on the extensive sketching tours we have come to associate with his life and achievement. Bartlett was regarded in his time as an "experienced traveller and accomplished artist," and his work satisfied a popular taste for illustrated travel books. His

sketching tours included not only England, Scotland, and Ireland but also Switzerland, Holland and Belgium, Italy, Greece, Spain, the Rhine, the Danube, and the Bosphorus; and he also traveled frequently to Syria and the Holy Land as well as to Canada and the United States. He died off the coast of Malta on board a ship returning from the Middle East.

Bartlett was a prolific writer and a poet as well as an artist, and he found time to write and illustrate some twelve books on travel between 1844 and 1854, including two that reflected his fascination with American history, *The Pilgrim Fathers; or the Founders of New England* and *The History of the United States of America*. He was also, from 1849 to 1852, editor of Sharpe's *London Magazine*.

Bartlett's reputation today owes more to the sketches he produced for the volumes entitled *American Scenery* and *Canadian Scenery* than to any other of his works. The literary sections of the books were contributed by the young American author and journalist Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806-67), who may have initiated one or both of the projects with George Virtue even before Willis was introduced to Bartlett in London in 1835. The sketches for both volumes were made during three visits Bartlett made to



WILLIAM HENRY BARTLETT

(Continued)

North America: the first lasted from July or August 1836 to July 1837; the second, from early summer until December 1838, was spent chiefly in Canada; and the third, from March until December 1841, was devoted to the Northern and Southern states and to sketching along the Canadian rivers. It is more than conceivable that he used some of the many available tourist or traveler's manuals in the selection of his sites, along with the more convenient means of transportation they recommended—rail, steamboat, stagecoach—to reach them. Willis, who is said to have accompanied Bartlett in 1837, was himself a seasoned traveler, and would presumably have been able to give him valuable help and advice.

As to Bartlett's procedure, we know that he sketched rapidly on the spot and sent the finished sepia wash drawings and occasional detailed watercolors to Virtue in London, who in turn sent them to the engravers.

Bartlett evidently did not have a close relationship with his engravers at any time and was often concerned with the quality of the reproductions of his work.

Although thoroughly trained by Britton as an architectural draftsman, Bartlett's obvious taste for the picturesque in art was already evident in his early drawings, and his even greater fascination for the sublime was soon to become clearly visible as well. The theory of the picturesque in art was well understood by Bartlett, who must have read such works as Alison's, Gilpin's, and Price's in particular.² The sublime, with its implications of the terrible and grand, undoubtedly held special appeal to the young artist-traveler. He may well have read Burke on the sublime,³ and inspired descriptions of wild and untamed nature written by members of Bartlett's intellectual circle were also readily available to him.

In his drawing of the Saguenay River, which was undoubtedly intended for *Canadian Scenery* but apparently not used, his treatment of the subject fits the definition of the sublime to the last detail: the group of men huddled around the bonfire and the others on the boat-landing are intended, when seen against the mountainous shores of the river, to stir a sense of dark foreboding. In his *Tour of the River*

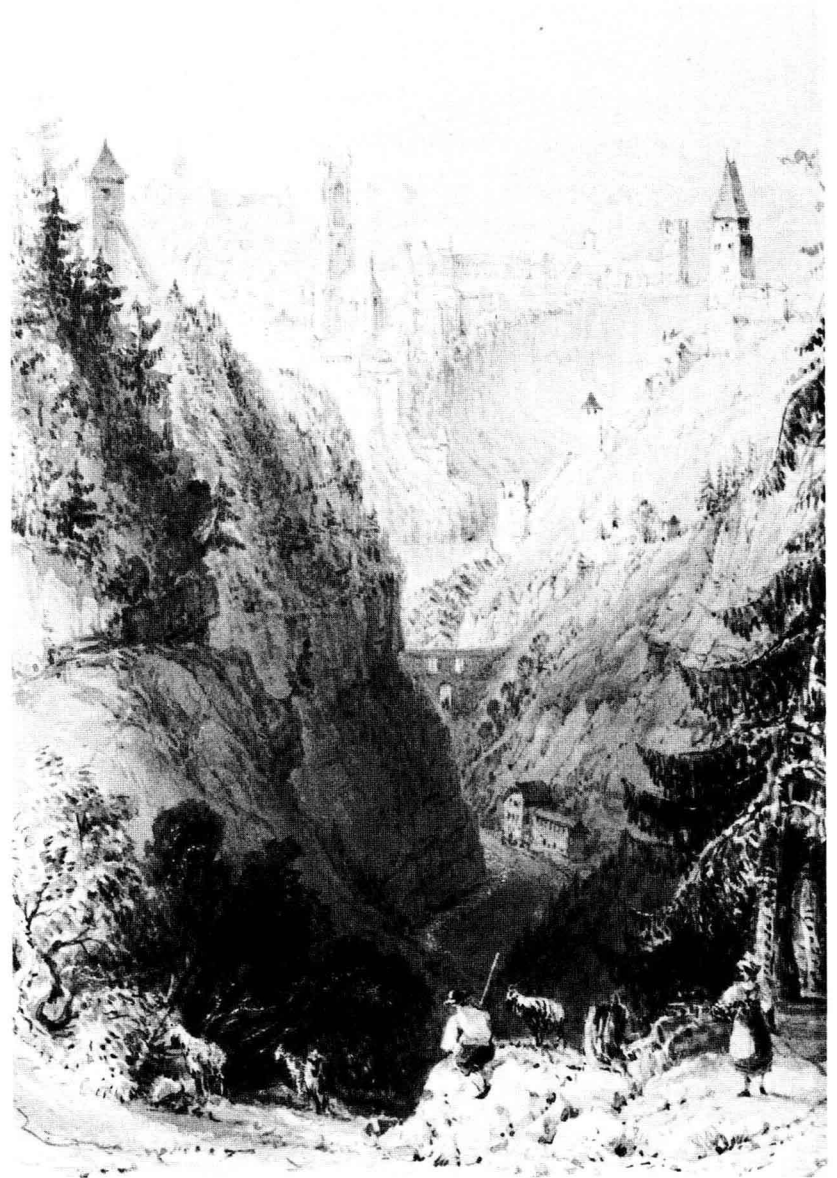
Saguenay, written some years later, Charles Lanman, who must have been familiar with Bartlett's views, thrilled to very similar emotions at the sight of the towering cliffs of the Saguenay: "Terrible and sublime, beyond the imagery of the most daring poet, are these cliffs: and while they proclaim the omnipotent power of God, at the same time, whisper into the ear of man that he is but the moth which flutters in the noontide air."⁴

1. Most of these details about Bartlett's life are based on Alexander M. Ross's *William Henry Bartlett: Artist, Author, and Traveller*, Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1973.

2. Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, Edinburgh, 1790; William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty*, London, 1776; Sir Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque as compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, London, 1794.

3. Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London, 1757.

4. Charles Lanman, *A Tour to the River Saguenay in Lower Canada*, Philadelphia, Carey and Hart, 1848, p. 134.



**NO. 2 WILLIAM BRENTON BOGGS
(1809-1875)**

A Woodland Stream

Pencil on buff paper; 6⁵/₈ x 9¹/₈ in.

Acc. no: 91.116

Prov: The artist; presented to Charles Lanman; E. Maurice Bloch, Los Angeles; Christie's, New York, January 9, 1991.

Boggs was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and educated in a military academy in Middletown, Connecticut, where he probably received his first instruction in drawing. About his training as a painter we can speculate even less, but the exhibition of his landscapes of scenes in New York, New Jersey, and New Hampshire at the National Academy of Design between 1839 and 1841 easily earned him an associate membership in the Academy in 1842, the year he also became a civilian clerk in the U.S. Navy Department in Washington and took up residence in nearby Georgetown, D.C. Although three of his landscapes of the Catskills and New Hampshire were

distributed by the American Art-Union between 1849 and 1850, Boggs's career with the Navy assumed somewhat larger proportions in 1852 when he accepted a four-year commission as purser with the Pacific Surveying Expedition on the *USS Vincennes* under Commodore Cadwalader Ringgold and Commander John Rogers. At this time he seems to have had a dual career since, as well as purser, he was said to be an artist of the expedition. Boggs was on special duty in Washington in 1856, but from 1857 to 1864 he was again assigned to duties on naval vessels at sea. Stationed in Washington from 1864 to 1873 he was afterward retired from service.

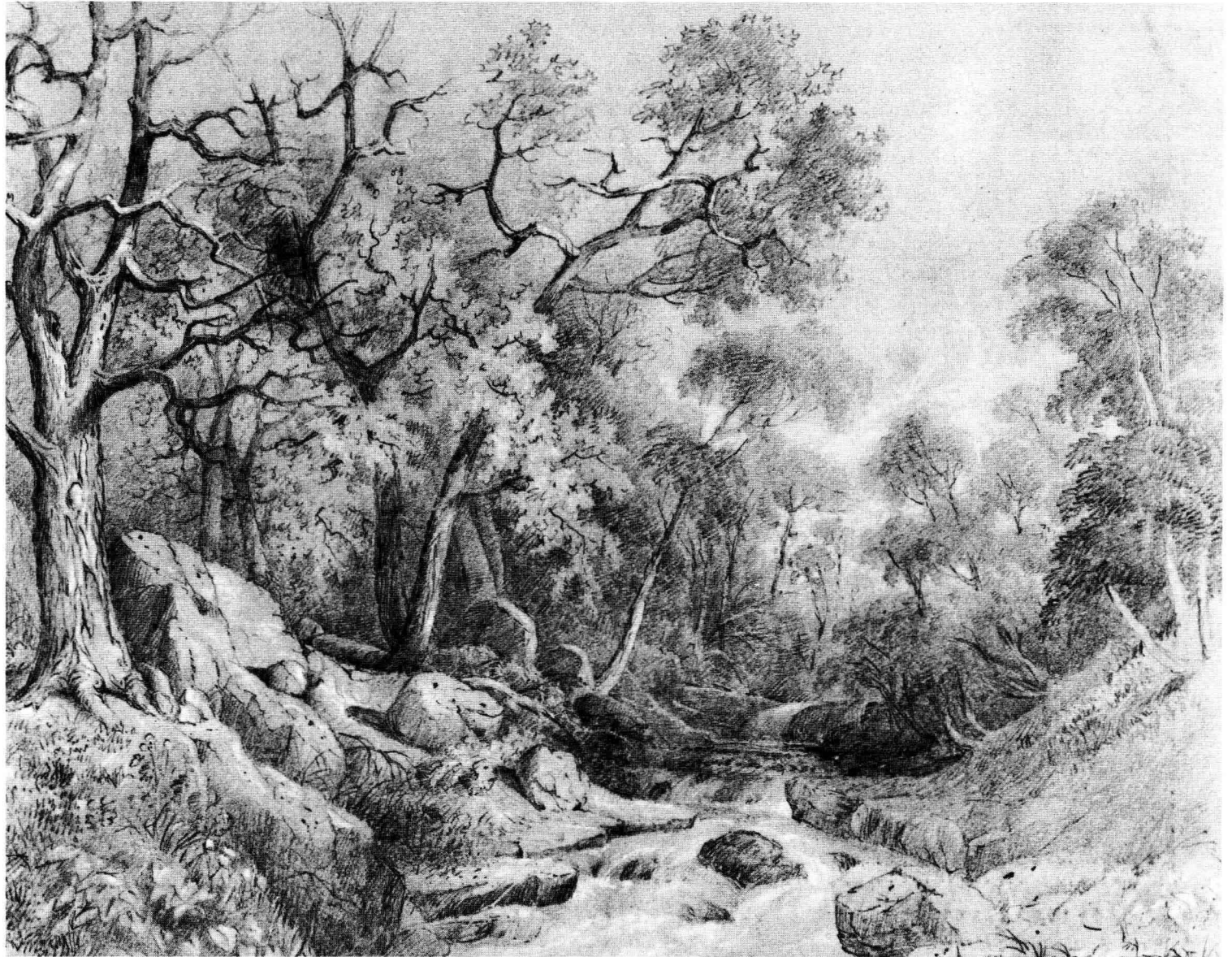
Although Boggs felt encouraged to exhibit at the first annual exhibition of the Washington Art Association in 1857, his life in painting was clearly dominated by his career in government. Comments about Boggs made by Charles Lanman in an unpublished letter to William Sidney Mount dated April 25, 1850, lead one to suspect that he may also have had good reason to feel discouraged about his possibilities in painting at that time:

A very clever fellow, residing in Georgetown, by the name of Boggs sent on some months ago two very good pictures to the Art-Union, and the other day was informed that the pictures were

not wanted, the Committee not condescending to give a reason. His means are ample, but this shabby treatment has disgusted him, and he will prevent hundreds from subscribing to the miserable concern again.

Lanman, his acquaintance and Georgetown neighbor for over thirty years, apparently encouraged Boggs to continue painting. It is more than conceivable that Lanman, as confidant to Washington's foremost private collector, William W. Corcoran, was also behind Corcoran's purchase of a Boggs landscape in the 1850s, and the guiding hand that nudged the painter to enter a picture in the first annual exhibition held by the Washington Art Association in 1857.

As a painter Boggs did not rank with the landscape artists who achieved recognition in his day, and even Lanman, who was a well-known art critic as well as a supporter, did not include him in his artists' hall of fame. He was, at best, a talented draftsman. While he could often equal his better-known contemporaries in the use of line and tone to attain luminous pictorial effects, he could not achieve these same effects on canvas. A *Woodland Stream*, which seems to be related to the painting *The Catskill Creek* in the Corcoran collection, is one of three examples by Boggs in the Lanman holdings.



**NO. 3 FELIX OCTAVIUS CARR DARLEY
(1822-1888)**

Thousand Islands, 1886

Watercolor over pencil, heightened with white, on tan paper; 9^{13/16} x 13^{7/8} in.

Inscribed, signed, and dated lower left:
Thousand Islands/ F. O. C. Darley - 1886
Acc. no: 91.137

Prov: E. Maurice Bloch, Los Angeles;
Christie's, New York, January 9, 1991.

Darley was regarded in his time as the quintessential illustrator of American life. Distinctive designs that ranged from book illustrations to banknote vignettes made his work instantly recognizable wherever it appeared, and the credit line "illustrated by Darley" assured the demand for elaborate editions of the works of Irving, Cooper, Dickens, and Longfellow. The quality of his drawings and the breadth of his imagination never appeared to wane over the more than forty-five years of his active professional life. Darley's career was a remarkable success story. Although strictly a draftsman, he was universally admired and respected by painters. He exhibited regularly at the National Academy of Design from 1845 to

1874 and was elected an academician at the age of thirty-one. In 1867 his place in American art was further assured when Henry T. Tuckerman accorded him a six-page biographical account in his *Book of the Artists* (Winslow Homer, a relative newcomer, received four lines).

For some years Darley had customarily promoted his reproductive work by exhibiting the originals at the Academy. The landscape drawings of the last fifteen or more years of his life, which have yet to be collected, suggest a possible reassessment of Darley's role in the field of landscape art, as well as in portraiture.



**NO. 4 ARTHUR BOWEN DAVIES
(1862-1928)**

Old Castle, Massa (Lucca, Italy), 1927

Watercolor over pencil, heightened with white, on gray paper; 9³/₈ x 12³/₈ in.

Signed and dated in pencil lower left:

A.B. Davies 1927

Acc. no: 90.73

Prov: M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1927;
Morse Antiques, Pasadena, California, 1988;
Joyce Treiman, Los Angeles, 1989; E. Maurice
Bloch, Los Angeles; Christie's, New York,
June 19, 1990.

Although Davies is perhaps rightly called a “poet of the imagination” in the line of American painters like Vedder, La Farge, and Ryder, he is a more complex artistic personality than this designation suggests. His large production in various media is uneven and repetitious, and often reflects unresolved intellectual and technical experiments. In his last finished watercolors, however, he achieved a serenity of mood and a coordination of line, tone, and color based on an understanding of the language of abstraction which we have in the past credited to Whistler alone.

The relative significance of Davies's last years in Italy was realized by contemporaries like Bryson Burroughs:

These landscapes, though founded in views of particular places, are entirely ideal and romantic in their expression. He made over the landscape before him, changing it into the landscape of his imagination where dryads might wander or unicorns graze. . . . With an arbitrariness which is like his youthful intuition he eliminated from the landscape before him such details of form and of color as might frustrate his artistic impulse. The artist has passed through his storms of curiosity and intellectual strivings, one would say, and settled down at last with contentment in his own natural home.¹

1. Introduction, *Catalogue of a Memorial Exhibition of the Works of Arthur B. Davies*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1930.