

Basic Detail Report



Title: A View in Vermont

Date: c.1874

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@29084

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: "A View in Vermont" is a marvelous example of Sonntag's panoramic views of the American wilderness. A central body of water leads the eye diagonally into a mountainous, forested, brilliantly colored landscape. The foreground is highly detailed, showing a variety of trees and shrubbery; the distant mountain peaks are suffused with light and dissolve in pale yellow and purple mists. Representative of Sonntag's "classic" period--roughly 1855 to 1875, when he and the Hudson River School were at the height of their popularity--the painting is characteristic of the artist in its subject and composition. (1) Sonntag preferred the edge of the wilderness--often only a few figures inhabit his scenery. In the New Britain painting, they are a pair of fisherman who are distinguished by their long poles and brightly colored vests. Sitting on the shore, leisurely enjoying the beautiful day, they provide a sense of scale and an entrée into the scene. Nearby, the chopped-off tree stumps show evidence of human settlement, the first steps in the inevitable march of progress whereby the valley will eventually be populated. While the topographic detail and basic format of the picture have much in common with the formulas

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developed by Sonntag's Hudson River School contemporaries, Sonntag was often singled out for his striking, almost hyperrealistic, use of color. His canvases are accentuated by lush greens and blues brighter and bolder than those actually found in nature: note, for example, the bright aquamarine column of smoke emanating from the log cabin on the far river bank in "View in Vermont". Sonntag was well known for his autumn scenes, in which he harmonized the cool greens with the russets and browns of autumn and the reds of bare rock surfaces. Noting the artist's "system of coloring and his way of producing effects," the "Cosmopolitan Art Journal" found "much that is fresh, original, and decidedly pleasing"; in contrast, critic James Jackson Jarves decried Sonntag's "wildly picturesque" views as a "absolutely disagreeable." (2) During the 1870s Sonntag exhibited a number of canvases depicting Vermont scenes, though it is not known exactly when he visited the state. (3) By 1875, when Sonntag exhibited the New Britain painting at the National Academy of Design, the Hudson River landscape was considered "traditional and obsolescent"; a critic for "Scribner's Monthly" sarcastically commented: "Mr. Sonntag favors us with what might pass for a rude design for an Indian shawl, but is stated to be a view in Vermont." (4) MAS BIBLIOGRAPHY: "William Louis Sonntag," "Cosmopolitan Art Journal" 3 (December 1858): 26-28; William Sonntag Miles, "William L. Sonntag", 1822-1899; "William L. Sonntag, Jr.", 1869-1898, exhib. Cat. (Boston: Vose Galleries), 1970; Nancy Dustin Wall Moure, "William Louis Sonntag: Artist of the Ideal", 1822-1900 (Los Angeles: Goldfield Galleries, 1980). Notes: 1 . Moure, "William Louis Sonntag", pp. 49-50. 2. "William Louis Sonntag," p. 28; James Jackson Jarves, "The Art-Idea" (1864; reprint, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1960), p. 193. 3. Moure, "William Louis Sonntag", p. 30. 4. "Culture and Progress: The Academy of Design," "Scribner's Monthly" 10 (June 1875): 251. Other than this writer, critics seem to have been indifferent to "View in Vermont" in 1875, though only a few years later several others listed the canvas among Sonntag's most famous; see John Denison Champlin Jr., ed., "Cyclopedia of Painters and Paintings", 4 vols. (1885-87; reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969), vol. 4, p. 204; Clara Erskine Clement Waters and Laurence Hutton, "Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works", 7th ed., 2 vols. in 1 (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), vol. 2, p. 264).
Dimensions: 27 1/8 x 40 1/8 x 1 1/8 in. (68.9 x 101.9 x 2.9 cm) Frame: 32 1/8 x 45 3/8 x 2 3/4 in. (81.6 x 115.3 x 7 cm)