

Basic Detail Report



Title: The Clove, Catskills

Date: c. 1826

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e0d9

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: The first and most influential artist to do so, Cole visited the Catskill area to sketch in 1826, spending the summer and early fall there, and may have returned the following summer. (1) He reported to his friend and patron Daniel Wadsworth that he was "enjoying & I hope improving myself amidst the beautiful scenery of Lake George & the wild magnificence of the Catskill mountains-I have made many sketches." (2) Cole captured that "wild magnificence" in *The Clove, Catskills*, including the Sublime iconography of the bare branches at the lower right and the stormy clouds overhead. These elements, traditionally associated with the passage of time and the power of nature over human civilization, became stock features of Cole's Romantic depictions of the American landscape and were drawn from the European tradition of the Sublime, perhaps best exemplified by the work of Salvator Rosa. The vantage point of the composition, overlooking the clove from the top of a rocky precipice, contributes to the Sublime effect. (3) The composition of "*The Clove, Catskills*", is Picturesque. As defined by English theorist William Gilpin, the Picturesque was characterized by "unimproved" nature. A reflection of the

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nostalgia for the pre-industrial English landscape, the Picturesque was particularly suited to depicting the American wilderness. (4) By the time Cole arrived in the Catskills, Kaaterskill Clove was developing into an international center for the leather trade, with a number of tanneries already in operation. Tourists began arriving in large numbers, as a result of the developing taste for landscape and also because of improved transportation and accommodations. The Native American population in the area had been decimated by disease and warfare. (5) Cole's view of the Clove—a depiction of wilderness reinforced by the inclusion of the figure of a Native American—is probably idealized. (6) A symbolic view of the Clove, the work qualifies as a history painting, a nostalgic image of American wilderness and the first stage of Cole's allegorical history of the United States. (7) A 1964 cleaning of the painting revealed the figure of the Native American as well as what appears to be the vestiges of another figure found just to his left. (8) Age cracks overlaying the surface of the painting are uniform, and if Cole had introduced another figure into the composition at some point, he probably made the decision to paint it out and perhaps the first figure as well. (9) Cole's seeming ambivalence about including the figures may be illuminated in part by a letter to the artist from Robert Gilmore, another important early patron: "I differ however with you in approving the omission of figures, which always give character & spirit even to solitariness itself, but it depends upon their propriety—an Indian Hunter judiciously introduced (even in shadow behind a tree, with a catching light on a red plume or mantle) with his rifle levelled & one or two deer crossing an open space would not defeat your object but rather assist the idea of solitude." (10) As there is no hard evidence that Cole returned to the Catskills in the summer of 1827, it may be assumed that he developed his composition for *The Clove* from the group of sketches he made in the area the previous year. As the work is undated, however, it may be that Cole painted it prior to 1827, when, as far as is known, it was first exhibited. In 1826 the artist compiled a list of pictures painted in New York from 1825 to 1826; number 24 on the list is "View down the Clove." (11) While no owner is mentioned and no price is given, it may be that this reference is to the New Britain painting. (12) AE

Bibliography: Cole Papers, Detroit Institute of Arts; Cole Papers, New York State Library, Albany; Louis L. Noble, "The Life and Works of Thomas Cole", ed. Elliot S. Vesell (1853; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Howard S. Merritt, *Thomas Cole*, exhib. cat. (Rochester, N.Y.: Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, 1969); Ellwood C. Parry III, "The Art of Thomas Cole: Ambition and Imagination" (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1988); William Truettner and Alan Wallach, eds., "Thomas Cole: Landscape Into History", exhib. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Notes: 1. Kenneth Myers, "The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains", 1820-1895 (Yonkers, N.Y.: Hudson River Museum, 1987), pp. 40, 117. 2. Thomas Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, July 6, 1826, in quoted J. Bard McNulty, ed., "The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth: Letters in the Watkinson

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Library, Trinity College, Hartford, and in the New York State Library, Albany, New York" (Hartford, Conn.: Connecticut State Historical Society), p. 1. 3. For more on the Sublime in Cole's work, see Bryan Jay Wolf, "Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature" (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chap. 5. 4. See Earl A. Powell III, "Thomas Cole and the American Landscape Tradition: The Picturesque, Arts Magazine" 52 (March 1978): 110-17. 5. Myers, "The Catskills", pp. 30-31, 22-23. 6. Cole "edited out" evidence of settlement and tourism in other early paintings of the Catskills, such as "Lake with Dead Trees (Catskill Lake)" (1825; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College) and "The Falls of the Kaaterskill" (1826; Warner Collection of Gulf States Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa); see Myers, "Catskills", pp. 40-46. Matthew Baigell ("Thomas Cole" [New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1987], p. 34) has identified "The Clove" as a view east toward the Berkshires in Massachusetts. 7. See Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire," in Truettner and Wallach, "Thomas Cole", esp. pp. 64-66. 8. Sanford Low, director of the NBMAA, to Robert Vose Jr., Vose Galleries, Boston, April 1 and 6, 1964, and correspondence between Low and Fine Arts Conservation Laboratories, April 1964, NBMAA files. 9. The painting was examined by Patricia Garland, Painting Conservator, in the conservation studio at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, November 21, 1994; report, NBMAA files. 10. Robert Gilmore to Thomas Cole, December 13, 1826, quoted in Baltimore Museum of Art, "Annual II: Studies on Thomas Cole, an American Romanticist" (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1967), pp. 44-45. 11. This list, in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, is reproduced in Parry, "Art of Thomas Cole", p. 22. 12. Parry agrees that this is a possibility and has suggested that the New Britain picture may have been painted in the Catskills in 1826 prior to Cole's return to New York that fall (Parry to author, June 19, 1996, NBMAA files).
Dimensions: 25 1/4 x 35 1/8 in. (64.1 x 89.2 cm) Frame Dimension: 35 1/2 x 44 7/8 x 3 3/4 in. (90.2 x 114 x 9.5 cm)