

Basic Detail Report



Title: The White Mountains

Date: c. 1871

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e379

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: This view of Mount Washington looking north from the Saco River is one of several that Gifford completed during the course of his career. Ila Weiss, in her 1987 monograph on the artist, pointed out the similarity in subject and size of this painting and a work in the 1881 catalogue raisonné called "The White Mountains", thus prompting a return to the less geographically specific title. (1) Gifford produced his landscapes in his New York studio from sketches drawn during his summer travels, and it was not uncommon for him to complete a series of similar subjects of various sizes. "The White Mountains" combines the sublimity of a snow-peaked mountain in the background with a tranquil foreground of cows drinking from the edge of the river. Artists began traveling to New Hampshire for subject matter as early as 1827, when Thomas Cole visited in the autumn of that year, and Mount Washington, the highest of the Presidential Peaks, often graced their canvases. Both writers and artists extolled the artistic possibilities of the White Mountains, and Asher B. Durand specifically noted the region's natural synthesis of the sublime and the beautiful in a letter to "The Crayon": "The region of the White Mountains is justly famed for its impressive scenery; passages of the sublime and beautiful are not infrequent," he wrote in 1855. (2) In "The White Mountains", Gifford effectively

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combined these two landscape formulas in a single canvas. The painting depicts the region during autumn, when temperatures are crisp, leaves turn orange, and sunny skies are almost cloudless. The canvas is evenly divided into three horizontal bands, and the cows in the foreground stand immediately below the centrally positioned summit of the mountain. A strong, reflective light fills the canvas, and a golden glow suffuses the composition. John F. Weir, in a eulogistic address delivered shortly after Gifford's untimely death, recalled that "Gifford loved the light. His finest impressions were those derived from the landscape when the air is charged with an effulgence of irruptive and glowing light." (3) Gifford's love of light, emphatically expressed in "The White Mountains", has led to his reputation as the most poetic of the luminist painters. MEB Bibliography: John F. Weir, "A Memorial Catalogue of the Paintings of Sanford Robinson Gifford, N.A"., exhib. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1881); Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880)", exhib. cat. (Austin: University of Texas Art Museum, 1970); Ila Weiss, "Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford" (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987). Notes: 1. Weiss, Poetic Landscape: p.215 2. Barbara J. MacAdam, "A Proper Distance from the Hills': Nineteenth-Century Landscape Painting in North Conway" in Robert L. McGrath and Barbara J. MacAdam, "A Sweet Foretaste of Heaven": "Artists in the White Mountains" 1830-1930, exhib. cat. (Hanover, N.H.: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1988), p. 26. 3. John F. Weir, "Sanford R. Gifford: His Life and Character as Artist and Man," "Gifford Memorial Meeting of the Century" (New York: William C. Martin, 1880), p. 23. Dimensions: 9 x 14 3/4 in.