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ART

MUSEUM

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Milwaukee Art Museum is gateway to adventure with feature exhibition *Nature and the American Vision*

Epic early landscapes of America's natural wonders on view Feb. 26–May 8



Milwaukee, Wis.—This February, the Milwaukee Art Museum invites visitors to explore the American landscape in *Nature and the American Vision: The Hudson River School*, a landmark exhibition of iconic 19th-century paintings from the acclaimed collection of the New-York Historical Society. On view Feb. 26–May 8, 2016, the exhibition includes some of the most important artworks of the first half of American history—powerful, breathtaking vistas that capture the beauty and drama of a young nation.



The exhibition's nearly 50 masterpieces—many monumental in scale—are among the most revered in the United States and include works from 23 luminaries, including Thomas Cole, Asher Brown Durand and Frederick Edwin Church. Visitors can see the earliest views of now-legendary destinations—Niagara Falls, Sierra Nevada Mountains, Yosemite Valley—that inspired settlers and sightseers, and

discover stories of the politics and personalities that shaped the country.



The exhibition culminates in a rare presentation of Thomas Cole's epic *The Course of Empire*, considered the first great artwork to ever emerge from the United States. This five-painting series depicts the rise and fall of civilization and will make its Milwaukee debut after a six-month presentation at the Louvre in Paris.



Nature and the American Vision also charts the rise of the Hudson River School, the nation's first original artistic movement. The New York-based poets, painters and writers who formed this loosely knit group undertook arduous expeditions to see sites firsthand, looking to nature for spiritual inspiration and national pride—a uniquely American vision.

“These extraordinary paintings overwhelmed 19th-century audiences with both their beauty and their razor-sharp commentary on culture and politics. Seeing them today, nearly 200 years later, visitors will be amazed by their ability to inspire a sense of

adventure and wonder, as well as their significance to current events,” said Brandon Ruud, Abert Family Curator of American Art at the Milwaukee Art Museum. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the art that helped shape America and its identity.”

Special Events

Kohl's Art Generation Family Sundays: Back to Nature on Sunday, March 13, is a full day of nature-inspired art adventure for kids and families. Visitors can “hike” through the exhibition, tell stories around a “campfire” and paint Milwaukee's magnificent landscape. Other special events include curator-led tours of the exhibition, lectures with noted art historians and gallery talks (a full schedule is [\[link\]online.](#))

Exhibition Overview

Nature and the American Vision is organized thematically, spotlighting locations that attracted artists and travelers, from New York to California, and from Italy to Ecuador.

Originating high in the Adirondack Mountains, the Hudson River was a vital waterway for the growing nation, and its magnificent scenery and rich history inspired early 19th-century painters and writers. The Hudson River School artists emerged from this tradition, thrilling early sightseers with picturesque images of the Adirondacks, the Catskills and the surrounding region. They frequently joined the arduous early expeditions to see sites firsthand, making copious sketches that they would later use to create paintings in their studios. A second generation of artist-adventurers ventured even further afield, electrifying audiences back home with images of the American frontier, as well as South America and other exotic locales.

Painters of the Hudson River School created large, scenic landscapes that evoked a sense of adventure, while documenting a vast new territory—dense forests, commanding mountain ranges, roaring rivers and rich agricultural plains. By the 1850s, landscape was the dominant artistic subject

in the United States, as many saw in them not only the country's native beauty but also the abundance and diversity that made the nation itself exceptional.

Highlights of the exhibition include *Niagara Falls* (1818) by Louisa Davis Minot, who painted one of the earliest depictions of the Falls; *Cayambe* (1858) by Frederic Edwin Church, whose portrayal of the imposing, Ecuadorian volcano became an iconic symbol of Central and South America and the Mayan culture; *Donner Lake from the Summit* (1873) by Albert Bierstadt, who commemorated two national memories in one grand vista of the Sierra Nevada Mountains—the ill-fated Donner party of 1846 and the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

The exhibition culminates with *The Course of Empire* (ca. 1834–36) by Thomas Cole, the father of the Hudson River School. This cinematic five-painting cycle shows the rise and fall of a mythical civilization, from savagery, to imperialism, to destruction and desolation. Cole conceived the work as a cautionary narrative for the new nation, capturing the tension between wilderness and progress.

Nature and the American Vision is organized by the New-York Historical Society. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, with additional support provided by the Milwaukee Art Museum's Friends of Art and American Arts Society. It is accompanied by an award-winning full-color catalogue, available in the Museum Store and online.

Hours and Admission

The Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Fridays until 8 p.m. Admission is \$17 for adults; \$15 for students, seniors and active military; and free for Members and children age 12 and under. The first Friday of each month is Meijer Free First Friday and Museum admission is free.

About the Milwaukee Art Museum

Home to a rich collection of over 30,000 works of art, the Milwaukee Art Museum is located on the shores of Lake Michigan. Its campus includes the Santiago Calatrava–designed Quadracci Pavilion, annually showcasing three feature exhibitions, and the Eero Saarinen–designed Milwaukee County War Memorial Center and David Kahler–designed addition. The Museum recently reopened its Collection Galleries, debuting nearly 2,500 world-class works of art within dramatically transformed galleries and a new lakefront addition.

More information about the exhibition can be found at www.mam.org/american-vision.

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Images from top: Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), *Donner Lake from the Summit*, 1873. Oil on canvas. The New-York Historical Society, Gift of Archer Milton Huntington; Louisa Davis Minot (1788–1858), *Niagara Falls*, 1818. Oil on canvas. The New-York Historical Society, Gift of Mrs. Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Sr., to the Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr., Collection; Thomas Cole (1801–1848), *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836. Oil on canvas. The New-York Historical Society, Gift of The New-York Gallery of Fine Arts; Thomas Cole (1801–1848), *Catskill Creek, N.Y.*, 1845. Oil on canvas. The New-York Historical Society, The Robert L. Stuart Collection, the gift of his widow, Mrs. Mary Stuart.