

Landscape and Leisure: 19th-Century American Drawings from the Collection,
March 13, 2015-July 19, 2015

The practice of drawing in 19th-century America was defined by change and innovation. American artists went from learning in relative isolation to a time of expansive educational prospects, including drawing schools and teachers, instructional manuals, and opportunities for travel abroad. Resources expanded with the introduction of readily available tube paints, prepared watercolor cakes, graphite pencils, steel-nib pens, conté crayons, and new fixatives and papers.

Topographic, folk, and academic traditions dominated American drawing before 1850. Today, these precisely drawn topographical views provide valuable records of places full of potential, before industrialization. Folk drawings highlight the importance of local traditions, portraiture, and religious and historical subject matter to American patrons.

Artists working after 1850, whose drawings dominate this gallery, were significantly influenced by the English critic John Ruskin's manual *Elements of Drawing* (1857), which emphasized meticulous attention to the individual details of nature. A number of American artists traveled to Düsseldorf and Munich, Germany, where they too were trained in the close observation of nature via the practice of drawing.

Such emphases migrated naturally to the focus on landscape as a subject. Leisure pursuits, ranging from team sports to hunting to childhood amusements, many with landscape as a secondary theme, also dominated the scene. Artists showed their work in societies dedicated to drawing and especially to the medium of watercolor in New York, Philadelphia, and Providence. The evolution of watercolor as a versatile medium for reproducing the effects of nature—advocated by Ruskin, and others—stands as the most significant phenomenon in 19th-century American drawing of any subject. The fluid, transparent effects developed by artists working at the end of the century shaped a uniquely American style.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Winslow Homer
American, 1836-1910
Boy and Horse Plowing, 1880
Watercolor and graphite on paper
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.812

Homer's technical mastery is in full force on this sheet, to the extent that it proves difficult to discern with the naked eye just how he achieved this astounding array of atmospheric effects. He used wet-on-wet washes to cover large areas of the sheet. These freehand areas create positive shapes for clouds in the grayish-blue sky. Multiple washes in beige, brown, green, and russet form the foreground pasture. Two perfectly aligned layers of watercolor create



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the silhouetted gesturing plowman behind the main figure as he descends the hill.

Winslow Homer
American, 1836-1910
Girl and Sheep, 1880
Watercolor with scraping and graphite on paper
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.813

This image of a young shepherdess derives from Homer's time at Houghton Farm but also shows his interest in French artists whose works focused on peasant life, which Homer would have studied on a trip to Paris in 1867. Homer covered graphite underdrawing with transparent washes and used wet-on-wet layering to create overall softness with muted hues and a limited palette. Tiny specks in the foreground were achieved by lifting the paper off with a sharp tool.



Winslow Homer
American, 1836-1910
Fishin', 1879
Oil on canvas
Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.935

In this small picture of a girl and boy fishing, Homer captured the streaks of light along their slender poles, expressing its effects on their rose, blue, and yellow garments. The American writer and critic Henry James described Homer's children as "freckled, straight-haired Yankee urchins" with their "calico sunbonnets and flannel shirts." James continued: "He has taken the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization . . . has resolutely treated them as if they were pictorial . . . and he has uncontestedly succeeded."



Charles Willson Peale
American, 1741-1827
The English Church, New York, ca.1776
Pen and ink on paper
Gift of John Davis Hatch 1991.096.18

This drawing of the still-smoldering English Church, which burned in the Great New York Fire of 1776, was made by Charles Willson Peale. A portrait painter, scientist, and political radical, Peale drew the church during the Revolutionary War while serving in the Continental



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Army under George Washington. Peale's sketches were rarely preparatory, but instead often accompanied his diary or letters.

The church still stands in Lower Manhattan today in its third reconstruction, as Trinity Church.

William Trost Richards
American, 1833-1905
Field Study, 1889
Watercolor and graphite on paper
Anonymous gift 1992.001.115

William Trost Richards's close studies of nature reveal his belief, based on the writings of critic John Ruskin, that the way to truth was the study of nature in penetrating detail. On display here is Richards's precision and agility with watercolor and gouache in vertical format—his favorite for such studies. He may have found this meadow on one of his many long walks around his daughter's farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Before it came to the Museum the drawing suffered from sun exposure, leading to the fading of the sky's blue pigment, some of which is still visible where it pooled.



Albert Bierstadt
American, 1830-1902
Landscape on the Rhine, 1854
Graphite and opaque watercolor on beige paper
Gift of Alfred T. Morris, Jr. 1993.106.1

Albert Bierstadt made this drawing of a cooperage (barrel maker) during a sketching trip along the Rhine in the spring of 1854. Emphasizing the foreground, he precisely rendered the costumes and phases of barrel-making, as well as a picturesque old stone structure, perhaps the forge. His future focus on landscape is suggested by the cliffs in the distance, depicted by leaving the tan paper blank and filling in the sky with opaque white wash.



Known for his majestic landscapes of the American West, Bierstadt was trained in Germany at the Düsseldorf Academy, where he learned accurate draftsmanship and the truthful rendering of natural forms.

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John La Farge
American, 1835-1910
The Island of Moorea from Tahiti: Early Morning Study, 1891
Watercolor on paper
Gift of Alfred T. Morris, Jr. 1995.049

The effects of different times of day on the landscape—as in this morning view across the water to the volcanic island of Moorea—captivated artist John La Farge. Known chiefly for his work in stained glass, La Farge took an extended journey to the South Pacific in 1890–1891. Using a palette of purples, blues, and greens, he conveyed the majesty of nature without human impact, emphasizing its epic proportions and potential for rapidly changing weather. La Farge’s watercolors from the trip explore the unusual light effects of the islands, and build upon his deep understanding of color theory and optics.



Edwin Austin Abbey
American, 1852-1911
Old Peasant Woman, 1881
Brush and ink and opaque watercolor on cardboard
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.370

Edwin Austin Abbey made this drawing of an old woman when he traveled to Munich and visited the studio of the artist and instructor Alois Erdtelt. Drawing directly from the model, Abbey gives prodigious attention to the woman’s costume. Her fingerless gloves, felt shoes, and white collar, and her ruddy, wizened face designate her social status. The curious wooden frame on her back indicates her arduous job gathering sticks from the field for fuel.



Abbey’s technique is typical of that of illustrators in the period who used monochrome washes of brown, black, and white to create designs for wood engravers.

Edwin Whitefield
American, 1816-1892
View of Providence, Rhode Island, ca. 1850
Graphite and wash on board
Gift of Susan R. and Theodore E. Stebbins in honor of Virginia Lynch 2000.78

Edwin Whitefield traveled throughout North America making topographical views of cities, many of which he published in 1855. This drawing is a bird’s-eye view from College Hill of Providence’s downtown riverfront. Whitefield privileged legibility and precision over accuracy; his general view from a high vantage point did not



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stop him from rendering façades, especially those of important landmarks, in great detail. Whitefield's use of graphite with a color wash aligns with the lithographs made for the series, which were printed in black with green highlights.

Edward Seager
American, 1809-1886
Smithfield, 1842
Graphite on paper
Gift of Stuart P. Feld 2007.130.1

Providence, RI shows a fenced pasture surrounded by trees that could be the Jeremiah Dexter Farm, near present day Camp Street and Rochambeau, the French army camp during the Revolutionary War and a popular spot for 19th-century tourists. *Smithfield* shows the Butterfly Mill, a textile-printing mill built in 1811. The building still stands in altered form today on Great Road in Lincoln. Visible is a "stone ender," an early form of architecture unique to Rhode Island, consisting of a large stone chimney making up one wall. In the foreground is the mill's water source, Butterfly Pond.

The first drawing instructor at the Naval Academy in Annapolis and later a resident of Boston, Edward Seager traveled extensively throughout the eastern states on sketching campaigns. His picturesque views of New England show the area before the extensive industrialization that occurred in the second half of the 19th century.

Edward Seager
American, 1809-1886
Providence, RI, 1842
Graphite on paper
Gift of Stuart P. Feld 2007.130.2

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Charles Walter Stetson
American, 1858-1911
A Road to the Sea, 1883
Watercolor over charcoal on paper
Gift of the Estate of Scott A. Smith 34.785

The Rhode Island painter Charles Stetson spent his early career in Providence, exhibiting at the Providence Art Club alongside other artists exploring watercolor painting with new emphasis. With Sydney Richmond Burleigh, Stetson designed the famed Fleur de Lys Studio at 7 Thomas Street. Stetson was admired by his contemporaries for his color sense, and artist George Whitaker described him as having a “quick . . . observation of things, especially fugitive effects like cloud shadows falling upon the landscape.” In this expansive work, he used translucent washes and layered emerald green and heavy blue washes into color masses to create a moody landscape in advance of a rainstorm.



Thomas Eakins
American, 1844-1916
Baseball Players Practicing, 1875
Watercolor over charcoal on paper
Jesse Metcalf Fund and Walter H. Kimball Fund 36.172

This detailed watercolor is Philadelphia artist Thomas Eakins’s only major work devoted to the developing professional sport of baseball. Eakins was eager to find modern American subjects that could enlarge the tradition of historical figure painting, and sculling, sailing, swimming, and boxing offered him the opportunity to showcase superbly defined bodies. In a letter of 1875 to artist Everett Shinn, Eakins pointed out that the ballplayers were portraits of the Athletics, a Philadelphia club, at practice. They were “very fine in their build,” he told Shinn, and the scene would “admit of fine figure painting.”



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Mary Ann Willson
American, active 1818-1829
General Washington on Horse, ca. 1800–1830
Ink and watercolor with stenciling on paper
Jesse Metcalf Fund 44.091

In this fanciful image, George Washington fires his gun atop a noble black steed. Artist Mary Ann Willson punctuated the background with a series of marks that create a surprisingly effective atmospheric space. The freehand decorations on the horse's saddle are typical of her approach to pattern and design.



Willson lived in upstate New York, where she and her female partner earned a living farming and selling pictures. Entirely self-taught, she created pigments from berries, bricks, and vegetables, only occasionally using store-bought paints. A contemporary of Willson's wrote that her paintings were purchased as far north as Canada and as far south as Alabama.

Mary Ann Willson
American, active 1818-1829
Pelican with Young, ca. 1800–1830
Ink and watercolor with stenciling on paper
Jesse Metcalf Fund 44.092

In *Pelican with Young*, Mary Ann Willson embellished the pelican—a symbol of Christ's sacrifice—with a patchwork pattern. Stencils were used for the feet and beak, suggesting Willson made several versions.



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Joseph H. Davis
American, active 1832-1837
Mary Elizabeth Furber (11 yrs.) and Martha Nelson Furber (3 yrs.),
1835
Watercolor, graphite, and ink on wove paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 45.034

All appears happy and calm in this portrait of the two Furber girls, who are posed like most of the families depicted by self-taught artist Joseph H. Davis between 1832 and 1838 during his travels through Maine and New Hampshire. Facing one another on an elaborate floor,



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each girl is shown with objects related to her interests and pursuits: a bouquet, a basket of flowers, an embroidered purse, and a book. The eldest girl's necklace holds a loved-one's silhouette. Portraits like this, noting the sitters' ages and full names, were not only family heirlooms but also records of lineage.

Seth Eastman

American, 1808-1875

Village of the Pimo Indians, River Gila, ca. 1853

Watercolor with scraping and graphite on paper

Gift of the Rhode Island School of Design Library 47.112.11

These topographical drawings by Seth Eastman show the Sonoran Desert against the backdrop of the Chiricahua Mountains, and are among the first views European settlers had of these remote areas of southern Arizona. The first drawing depicts a Pima (Akimel O'odham) village, with dwellings, a stockade, a man wearing a lozenge-shaped armature on his back, and another weaving at a loom staked to the ground.



These are two of the thirteen drawings by Eastman in the Museum's collection that were part of the government-sponsored project to survey the U.S.-Mexico border, led by Providence native John Russell Bartlett. Eastman did not accompany Bartlett but instead translated his field drawings, and those of the survey artist Henry Cheever Pratt, into watercolors for publication. Cuts in government funding meant that Eastman's drawings were never published in Bartlett's final volume. The original field sketch made by Pratt—now in the collection of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence—notes that it portrays Maricopa, the Pima winter village on the Gila River.

Seth Eastman

American, 1808-1875

Camping in a Storm on the Mexican Plateau, ca. 1853

Watercolor with scraping and graphite on paper

Gift of the Rhode Island School of Design Library 47.112.2

These topographical drawings by Seth Eastman show the Sonoran Desert against the backdrop of the Chiricahua Mountains, and are among the first views European settlers had of these remote areas of southern Arizona. The first drawing depicts a Pima (Akimel O'odham) village, with dwellings, a stockade, a man wearing a lozenge-shaped armature on his back, and another weaving at a loom staked to the ground.



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Joseph Pennell

American, 1860-1926

The Cathedral of Canterbury from Christ's Church Gateway, 1885

Brush and ink and opaque watercolor on illustration board

Gift of Elizabeth Richardson 50.212

The prolific illustrator and printmaker Joseph Pennell completed this wash drawing to accompany the text of *English Cathedrals* by Mariana Griswold Schuyler van Rensselaer, a New York writer and socialite. The scene shows what Van Rensselaer thought to be the "most characteristically English" aspect of the church, namely the main entrance at the side of the façade that projects from the bottom of the southwest tower. Pennell's handling varies from tightly controlled delineation to the freely applied wet wash of the cobblestones and trees. He also emphasized the medieval character of the streets and buildings, which he described in his journal.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler

American, 1834-1903

Beaching the Boat, ca. 1883-1884

Watercolor on cream paper

Anonymous gift 70.118.59

Like many of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's paintings, this view of a beach is more suggestive than descriptive, and presents an exercise in color harmony. Working from the bottom of the composition up, Whistler layered thin veils of broadly brushed color to make up the sea, ranging from delicate greens to cobalt blue. He balanced the blues with the subtler colors of the sky and beach. The figures and boats were painted next, with each figure's shape carefully delineated. The heads were added last, when the paint was dry.



Whistler made this work while visiting the fishing village of St. Ives in Cornwall, England, in 1883–1884.

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Winslow Homer
American, 1836-1910
English Coastal Scene, 1883
Watercolor and graphite on paper
Gift of Minnie E. Kelley in memory of Sydney Clarke 75.058

Homer traveled to the North Sea village of Cullercoats, England, in the spring of 1881 and stayed there until November 1882. Living in semi-isolation, he painted coastal scenes and life in the fishing village. Here he depicts a woman—diminutive beside a boat—bracing herself against the wind and spray. Wet-on-wet layering, blotting, and some wet scraping suggest the damp atmosphere.

For all the immediacy of the work, the type of paper used suggests that Homer may have painted it from memory after returning to America.

Eastman Johnson
American, 1824-1906
Child in Bed, ca. 1873
Charcoal with erasing on paper
Museum purchase: gift of the Museum Associates 80.074

This intimate, almost melancholic scene set in a simple country house is unusual compared to other 19th-century American images of children, which tended instead toward the narrational, sentimental, or coy. The fine modeling of blended strokes on the child's face suggests that the work is a likeness of a child Eastman Johnson knew, rather than a genre type. Johnson's training in Düsseldorf and Paris influenced his confident handling of charcoal and vigorous use of line and shadow. In this drawing he employed overall tone, outlining with the edge of the charcoal as well as erasing to create contours.

George W. Brenneman
American, 1856-1906
Benjamin Russel Hanby, composer
American, late 19th century
Charles E. Brown & Co., publisher
MY DARLING NELLY GRAY, 1892
Bound book with half-tone illustrations
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.254

These atmospheric wash drawings by George Brenneman accompanied the song *My Darling Nelly Gray*, written more than 30 years earlier by Benjamin Hanby, a pastor and abolitionist in Ohio. Published in 1857, the song became popular among Union troops. It was based on the writer's experience as a boy, when his parents hid a



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runaway slave named Joseph Selby in their home. Selby died soon after arriving, but told the story of his sweetheart, Nelly Gray, who had been sold away from their Kentucky plantation to Georgia. Stricken with grief, Selby ran away and was headed to Canada to earn money to buy Nelly Gray's freedom when he died.

Brenneman's appropriately sentimental vignettes were published along with a number of other illustrated songs in 1892, in a book titled *Favorite Folk Ballads*. The book was a nostalgic compilation of popular favorites from the past.

George W. Brenneman
American, 1856-1906
Sitting by the River, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892
Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.12



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George W. Brenneman
American, 1856-1906
Awakened by an Angel, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892
Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.14



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George W. Brenneman

American, 1856-1906

Farm scene with banjo player, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892

Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.2

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George W. Brenneman

American, 1856-1906

Banjo Player, Seated, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892

Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.3

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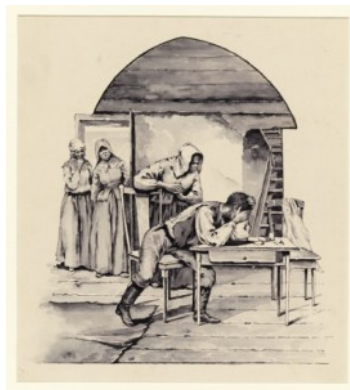
George W. Brenneman
American, 1856-1906
Lovers in Rowboat, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892
Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.5



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George W. Brenneman
American, 1856-1906
Crying, at a Desk, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892
Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.6



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George W. Brenneman

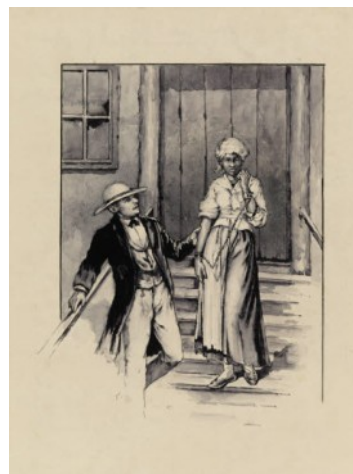
American, 1856-1906

Bound in Chains, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892

Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.7

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George W. Brenneman

American, 1856-1906

Carrying Bales of Cotton, Illustration to My Darling Nelly Gray, 1892

Pen and brush and ink over graphite on illustration board

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chase 81.255.9

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Childe Hassam

American, 1859-1935

Woman and Mastiff in the Boston Public Garden, 1885

Watercolor, opaque watercolor, and graphite on paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.1173

Hassam traveled extensively in Europe, and his encounters with art by the European avant-garde informed the subject matter of his works from the 1880s, including this drawing depicting an urban scene. A woman in fashionable attire strolls with a large dog in the Boston Public Garden, which was near Hassam's home. A narrative is suggested by the upward gaze of the woman and the dog, who fix upon something outside of the composition. A hint of Hassam's later Impressionist style is evident in the generalized descriptive drawing of the foliage on Beacon Hill behind the garden, in contrast to the careful modeling of the figure.



John Henry Twachtman

American, 1853-1902

München, 1878

Opaque watercolor over graphite on handmade paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.1174

This watercolor presents a forceful new style inspired by the bold brushwork and rich chiaroscuro palettes of 17th-century Dutch painters such as Frans Hals and Rembrandt van Rijn, whom John Henry Twachtman had studied in Europe. It may depict the outskirts of Polling, a small town in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps that was a favorite with American artists for its dense forests, open fields, and farmland.



Twachtman joined several fellow American artists to study in Munich in the mid-1870s. Classes at the Royal Academy there emphasized painting skills over traditional drawing techniques, signifying a break from the careful topographical drawings predominant in the United States.

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Winslow Homer

American, 1836-1910

Hunting Dogs in Boat (Waiting for the Start), 1889

Watercolor with sponging and scraping over graphite on paper

Gift of Jesse H. Metcalf 94.005



Homer made numerous compositions inspired by the outdoor recreation and scenery surrounding the North Woods Club in the Adirondacks. Dogs, here shown waiting in a boat, were trained to locate deer and drive them into the water where they would eventually tire, and drown.

Homer used multiple layers of russets, browns, and greens to describe the autumn trees, and thinner layers to suggest light reflecting on the boat. A masterful reflection on the water was made by scraping and repainting. He marked the coats of the dogs with wet puddling, and sponged out one figure—probably a person—on the far side of the boat.

Winslow Homer

American, 1836-1910

Girl and Daisies, 1878

Watercolor and opaque watercolor on beige paper

Bequest of Isaac C. Bates 13.811



In this Houghton Farm subject, Homer combined some of his watercolor paint with zinc white to create opaque watercolor, applying it in layers atop the background field to create the effect of sun reflecting off the grass. Blue mixed with white suggests the sky shining through the trees, while specks of white and color make up the profusion of daisies dancing in the sunlight.

Homer's friendship with Lawson Valentine in the 1870s led to repeated visits to the latter's expansive rural property, Houghton Farm, in upstate New York. Homer's works from the farm—four of which are on this wall—evoke a rural childhood idyll.