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American Landscapes

A Little Exhibition

By PAUL HORGAN

CATALOGUE

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(*Water color*)
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(*Motion picture*)

I. HUDSON RIVER VALLEY (*oil*)

THE RIVER looks white in the opal lights of afternoon. The banks are dark with the musky life of moss. Like shadow on the ground the rich rot of leaf and fern lies brown, and the gray tree trunks arise like the pipes of an organ through which we can see light, like white pages tipped end-to. In to the sky slowly drifts the green smoke of foliage, and at its edges, against the afternoon streaks of light, leaves show. The leaves are the scalloped sky-lying lace of trees, and each leaf is painted carefully, in a scale of color from brown to green. On the ground little ferns stand articulate like the leaves themselves; exactly traced and veined. The sunlight of late day enchants the loamy exuberance of growth into golden peace; no leaf stirs, only the current runs downstream in silent mimicry of sky. And across the river against the dark palisade dramatising the scene with the fury of life a train goes pulling a white scarf of steam above black cars and escaping the shadow.

II. KANSAS (*Water color*)

The feeling of an eternal Sunday simmers in the pale atmosphere. Far across the bleached wheat fields there is a low red barn like a furnace ashing to idleness. A silver silo stands beside it blue with the heat of the sky. Like a conduction into that heat, a line of telegraph poles leads in rapid curve and diminishing perspective across the fields and past the distant farm. It is a noble sight in the simple colors of home-weaving, flax, crushed berries for dye, the fluff of combed worsted in natural shades. A road with a speeding car on it throws dust a little way into the air. But it is Christian dust, settling over an eternal Sunday. The sky is white where it meets the imagined fields of distance, and a little cloud, strangely whiter still, dwells alone and unreal in another country beyond the horizon.

III. INTO CLEVELAND (*woodcut*)

Looking down from the railroad embankment to the industrial river, the river curves in a great black scything past the furnaces. We are looking against the light and the steel mills rise skyward in their dark domed towers. They unpleat downward in the river and dwell in the mysterious current where fumes linger, hazing the course of the river with dusky veils. Three tug boats are moored to a barrier of piles, gorgeous with the beaten beauty of use. One tug lets smoke idly from her leaning funnel, and this smoke, richly dazzling against the facing light, weds river to ashy land, land to furnace, and domed furnace to the sky stepping toward night in deepening black.

IV. BRANDYWINE VALLEY (*tempera*)

Winter lies along the stone walls whiter than the white barn's blue on their shadowed cheeks. Trees with bayonets stand regimentally along the white crests of hills, and march into the distance like hedges and fade into the sweet-sad violet sky where no sun lives. It is impossible to escape the Revolutionary War in the scene. Red brick houses and barns and mills occur in every curving junction of hill with valley. The river is black and secret between its snowy banks where yellow weeds linger. In the sky like dream-changed echoes of hunting horn and freedom's bugle, the pale blue silk is streaked with the pearly long clouds of winter, smoke of forgotten battle hushing the birds.

V. THE CATTLE PLAINS (*pastel*)

Intimate in the endless plain stands the windmill and its dirt-rimmed water tank. It is noon. The light brings back a memory of the scent of summer noon on the desert . . . a dry sweetness that is herblike, somehow including the dry musk of snakes and the flake rot from bones. The water in the tank is the color of pale lilacs and it rings with the sky in a chord of the white horizon and the bay-blue of the

zenith. Little clouds shot through with the gold light drift rainless and hardly shadowed over the plain. Warmth falls from the sky and warmth is given back by the earth, the straw colored plain, the charred low hills, the silver wind-mill, and one cow colored like white velvet shading to spilled sherry wine and rubbed coal.

VI. NEW ENGLAND LAKE (*oil*)

Like little pagodas the black pines cut the summer night sky, across the lake, which is grey except in reflection. There is much sky, wherever sky is there is lake, doubling the heavens. It is an American place full of pine board summer shacks and undergraduate motor boats. But for the moment they are out of the picture, leaving the lake and the sky to a miracle of exchange; for low on the dark, Mars is rising, and his mystery is taken by the lake in a long trembling fall of ruby light into the hazing grey of inland water.

VII. HELL AT PHILADELPHIA (*pastel*)

From a train. A blue sky with the unnatural gray clouds of industry blowing wanly upward. There is water beyond. There are tracks in the foreground. Mounting in stacks, towers, iron sheds and exhaust pipes is an industrial plant colored with the most extraordinary tones of black, now dull, now worn to rust-red, now ashed with blue dust, yet all reading black, like the clinkers left from a once-active hell. And in front of it, by the white steel tracks, is a dump of sulphur; a mountain of the devil's own yellow, gorgeous to the eye, sharp to the thought, meanings of acid and blast, the blench of furnaces, the spew of celery yellow waste on the cindery earth.

VIII. BUFFALO HARBOR (*lithograph*)

Printed over and over on the stone-blank sky are the hulls of the freight boats, chained and steamless for the long

hibernation. They have plied their summer, and have come through before the ice time of the lakes. All winter the water at their rusting hulls will be black, and the sky above their white wheelhouses, forward, and their white cabins, aft, will be pale and stormy. The great arm of the breakwater will bash the lake back in fans of spray. There will be gulls black and despairing against the light in the sky. Sometimes out of the tug basin will come a motor boat with a fisherman who will pass the silent freighters and in his black sou'wester clamber to the breakwater and remotely cast his line too thin to see.

IX. DIVIDE IN THE ROCKIES (*tempera on gesso*)

Three feelings and no form take the beholder of those horizons where time after time the world falls away. First is the feeling of universal light, light as a part of air, light from over and under the world both. Second is the feeling of starry bleakness, wonderful and not habitable, bare rock and wind driven gray wood. Third is the roll of land on the known earth; and there feeling takes color, and is recognized in its green of timber, its blue of valleys, its tawny plains, and its silver vein of running river bearing the wonder of the look outward forever.

X. GENERAL PULASKI SKYWAY (*motion picture*)

The ribboned movement, like low airplane flight rises and curves and dips and soars across the blighted meadows of New Jersey, land of a simple sweetness in soil and grass, now hushed and turned back with blankets of gases which you can see as well as smell. The canals and rivers that wander to the factories below us are motionless with the heavy sprawl of oil. Towering chimneys in chords of three gasp softly toward the movie sky, gray and white. The Skyway banks and swoops. It is lined with cement barriers at its edges. These barriers are pierced in a regular pattern. We can see through them as we fly in the car. At

the proper speed the effect is that of a motion picture projector, with the shutter speed perfectly synchronized with the film travel. So with a faint stone-gray flicker we observe one life killing another kind of life. Newark smoking like a map of a battle spreads wide and shallow below; trains, moved by the insect-like and mysterious vigor of electricity, thread the gaseous pall on the meadows; deeply American, amiable meadow withered, river sky stetched, traffic as triumph, the abstractness of beauty, the picture that to be a likeness must be told with speed and motion, the stuff and the art of machinery, both life and death to man.

Futile Spring

By ETHEL B. CHENEY

I can endure it that the house is still,
Dark shuttered to the sunlight, that the doors
That knew no keys are fast to April's call
And only silence creaks across the floors.

I can endure it that the narrow path,
Winding through orchard ways, beneath the grass
Holds all unknown pale violets and stars
Of wild strawberries where no footsteps pass.

I can endure that petals drift unseen
On hidden streams, that swallows dip and wing
Thrice circling round; but grief too great is this:
The wide barn doors are closed against the spring.