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The Business of 19th Century American Landscape Paintings: A Case Study of the Connection Between Art History and Economics

by

Claire Di Meglio

Submitted to Scripps College in partial fulfillment of the
Degree of the Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Economics

Professor Daniel Hackbarth, Scripps College
Professor Patrick Van Horn, Scripps College
Professor George Gorse, Pomona College

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Introduction

In a series of lectures offered between 1965 and 1973 at the University of London, the art historian Michael Baxandall expounded on the economic and social implications surrounding the historical production of art. Expanding on this initial discourse, Baxandall states in his book, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, both a succinct and pragmatic truth that is often overlooked by scholars of the field: “Money is very important in the History of Art.”¹ This assertion summarizes the importance of monetary transactions between artists and patrons of the European Renaissance that resulted in the production of art. Baxandall argues that the Renaissance portraits, frescoes, sculptures, and architectural feats that procured centuries of cultural influence were almost always made to order for wealthy patrons, and, as a result, presents a teleological analysis of the motives behind the creation of art. His argument about the innate role of economics in the production of art attests to money’s ultimate cultural and artistic impact that extends beyond the 15 and 16th centuries. Money – defined as a medium of exchange, a unit of account, and a store of value – not only functions as a means of payment for a finished painting, but also oftentimes impacts its composition’s entire form and content, which was made in accordance with the specifications of those who would finance it. This thesis develops upon Baxandall’s foundational assertion about the connection between money and art history by examining the monetary transactions between artists and patrons in the production of 19th century American landscape paintings and their role in furthering profits while also strengthening national identity.

¹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.

As the discipline of art history often overlooks the financial incentives that prompt artists to produce artworks, scholars of the field focus on the production of art as an aesthetic practice concerned most exclusively with culture, politics, and society. However, economics may rather be an essential and arguably more fundamental aspect to art's creation. Because the production of art inherently necessitates funding, investment, and profits, scholars often under-acknowledge this economic foundation which motivates artists to make enough money to maintain and grow their enterprise. As much as an aesthetic object, art must also be considered as a final good in the necessary transaction between the artist and their client. On one hand, patrons often stimulated the production of art as they recognized its utility as both a public and private good with the ability to solidify reputations, sanction authority, and stimulate profit. On the other hand, artists – too often regarded as autonomous creators merely producing art for its aesthetic or moral value – fulfilled these requests for art through collaborating with clients in the pursuit of their own profit. As a result, the aesthetic pursuit of producing art remains inextricably linked with the financial circumstances involved in the transaction between artists and patrons. By examining the mutual financial interests guiding the production of 19th century American landscape paintings, this thesis contends that the contemporary discourses of art history increasingly consider Baxandall's teleological explanation surrounding the production of art within a larger economic system.

A deeper relationship between the function of money and the function of a painting can also be discerned through these considerations. Because the production of art is often a result of financial transactions between artists and patrons, the dispersal of this art may also be seen a transaction between those involved in its production and its larger audience. The painting itself thus serves as both a commodity – that is, an economic good with the ability to be traded for a product of equivalent value or price – as well as a medium of economic and cultural exchange.

As money provides the means of exchanging goods and services through the process of bartering, a painting embodies a tangible medium for political, cultural, and social ideas to be exchanged through its dissemination. As money serves as a common standard for measuring a good's relative worth, a painting's valuation is measured relative to both its general impact and its fulfillment of the agendas of its patron. Finally, as money retains its value over time as a convenient store of wealth, a painting more or less remains valued and worthy of collecting well beyond the date of its creation. Therefore, one could argue that the definition of money may be extended to a painting upon examining its cultural impact as well as its role within the business of art.

This definition of painting diverges from the traditional discourses throughout the art history that attributes art to the physicality of its medium. While painting, sculpture, literature, and architecture are considered as artistic mediums which serve as means of communication, my thesis attempts to examine art as a medium of exchange within the discussion of economics. Comparatively, the business of art is often overshadowed by art history's separation between the economic incentives of producing a painting and its cultural impact. The production of art may rather be considered a fully integrated system of cause and effect in which patrons envisaged the success of their political, cultural, and economic agendas through commissioning art that tactfully ensured this outcome. Furthermore, art not only affected the interests of its patrons, but also affected both the nation's culture and its economic markets through its successive dissemination among large audiences. As wealthy and powerful patrons, who often obtained their fortune through business, invested in art to promote and accelerate their political and financial agendas, artistic culture and economics joined in an interconnected system of national progress and profit.

By the year 1800, the production and sale of American landscape paintings became a lucrative business venture. Landscape paintings subtly argued for the economic potential of the land by aligning the growing enterprise of industrial expansion and colonization throughout the West in the form of picturesque scenes depicting man and nature in harmony. In the first edition of his influential book, *Landscape and Power*, published in 1994, W. J. T. Mitchell notes, “Landscape... is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions.”² The landscape to which Mitchell refers to is both a physical site on the land as well as an artistic and cultural medium which harmonizes nature with a utilitarian vision of its potential. Mitchell defines landscapes as mediums of exchange, similar to the function of money, as he asks that “we think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed.”³ Mitchell’s concept of landscapes, as mediums of exchange which circulate throughout nations to instill a national vision of progress and profit, can be closely analyzed in reference to the consolidation of American identity. As a new nation, corporate and government interests benefited from the production of art that increasingly tied the ownership and industrial development of recently discovered territories to a developing nationalist ideology. American landscape paintings evidenced the supremacy of the United States relative to Europe’s established hegemony through its representation of nature’s productive potential, the vacancy of Western territories that were open to further human production, and the durability of natural wonders in the face of human and industrial expansion. Rather than celebrating its past, American landscapes in particular looked toward the productive future of nature, when the European settlers had successfully driven the Native American population from their land. As a

² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2.

³ Mitchell, 1.

result, landscapes represented a self-fulfilling prophecy of the future expansion and economic prosperity of the United States. Landscape paintings thus became a source of aesthetic evidence for the foresight of the nation's prosperous future connected to the vision of the West's plentitude of natural resources.

This thesis explores the economic incentives of both businessmen and artists who shared a mutual interest in the business of producing landscape paintings. Artists, who recognized the visual impression that landscapes of America's wilderness had on audiences, took advantage of the opportunity to generate higher profits by aligning landscape compositions with the business and political agendas of the nation's leading landscape patrons. Working in collaboration with wealthy business elites, artists were able to further their own enterprises as painters. By applying both a microeconomic focus – one concerned with the business decisions of individuals and firms – with a macroeconomic perspective – dealing with large-scale economic factors, such as national productivity - this thesis illuminates how the business of art developed as a lucrative market through the collusion between American landscape paintings and industrial expansion in the 19th century. American art institutions, artist-entrepreneurs, and wealthy business tycoons had one common incentive to participate in the production of landscape art: to maintain and grow their respective businesses. Albert Bierstadt, a German- American painter active in the mid-19th century, adopted this enterprise- and initiative-driven attitude towards collaborating with businessmen to mutually profit from each other's industries.

Best known for his large, picturesque landscape paintings of the untouched American West, Bierstadt studied painting in Düsseldorf, Germany before returning to the United States to join the second generation of Hudson River School landscape painters and partake in government-led exhibitions to the West. While Bierstadt was not the first artist to depict the

American nature through landscape paintings, he became one of the best-known artists in the second half of the century due his ability to appeal to both popular taste and commercial interests. As a result, Bierstadt's business acumen allowed him to secure high prices for his pictures and transform the production of art into a lucrative business with the ability to influence national identity. By addressing Bierstadt's career as a case study, this thesis considers the connection between art history and economics as it explores how business incentives fueled the production of American landscape painting between 1839 and 1873. As wealthy patrons invested in both America's landscape paintings and its productive future in the West, the distribution of these pictures across the country both inspired national pride and marketed industrial expansion.

Chapter one analyzes the economic agendas of the wealthy elite who managed the American Art-Union, a non-profit art institution and membership organization established in the 1840s. Through examining the Art Union's prolific patronage and dispersal of landscape paintings, this chapter addresses the creation of a market that was a direct result of the financial incentives of the institution's wealthy industrial elite. The second chapter examines the private business incentives of artists to meet the increased national demand for landscapes by analyzing Albert Bierstadt's painting, *The Rocky Mountains Lander's Peak*, (Figure 1) completed in 1863, and the promotion of his work through the massive distribution of print reproductions. Finally, the third chapter utilizes Bierstadt's painting, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, (Figure 2) completed in 1873, to explore how government and corporate industries with vested economic motives for the patronage of landscapes, promoted the image of Manifest Destiny by offering an image of industrial harmony with nature. These chapters illuminate how the distribution of images through new forms of technological advancement, such as mass media periodicals,

reproductive print technologies, and photographic mediums, allowed ideas about the American landscape to permeate national identity.

Neither the natural landscape itself nor the painting of the landscape could have inspired American nationalism during the 19th century without the contemporaneous technological advancements of print reproductions and photographic mediums. Such technologies both informed compositional techniques within painted images and allowed for the dissemination of landscapes – painted and printed images, as well as the land itself – among large audiences.

Mitchell's lectures offer a testimony to the importance of landscape images within the nation; he defines landscapes as "a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focus for the formation of identity."⁴ American landscapes embodied all three of these definitions as its image was taken by businessmen and painters for their own economic agendas, imprinted on paintings that exchanged national ideas throughout audiences, and, consequently, created a new symbol of the United States aligned with the profits of its patrons. Mitchell's interpretations of landscapes clarify an analogy which can be made concerning the use of landscapes, money, and art, as they all embody a medium of economic and cultural exchange. The coalescence of these functions into the lucrative enterprise of painting landscapes provides a crucial case study to build upon Baxandall's statement about the importance of money within the discipline of art history.

Through these definitions, I attempt to uncover, examine, and reassert the cultural significance of monetary transactions between artists, businessmen, and national audiences, which connected the notion of national progress to the economic potential of nature's abundance.

⁴ Mitchell, 2.

Chapter 1: The Role of the American Art Union in the Creation of a Market

I. Introduction

When considering the emergence of the American art market in the 19th century, one must think of the unfolding of a complex system of actors such as artists, critics, collectors, dealers, the public, and nonprofit exhibiting venues. The appearance of such positions, layered upon each other, necessitated the creation, interpretation, exhibition, sale, and public display of artworks. While it may be hard to discern who or what became the catalyst that incentivized and motivated these pieces of a complex art market to coalesce, the promotions of emerging institutions within the antebellum period necessary to foster the American art market generated the increased demand and dispersal of artworks. In this chapter I intend to examine how the American Art Union, a non-profit art institution and membership organization active between 1839 to 1852, not only engendered a market for landscape paintings through their generous sponsorship and distribution network, but also advanced the development of the American art market's complex system. As the most influential patron of the arts in the United States during the 1840s, the American Art Union had several economic objectives, such as creating initial demand by purchasing paintings by contemporary American artists and then promoting market demand by "elevating the artistic taste of the public."⁵ Despite such seemingly altruistic goals, the institution's leading members, businessmen, newspapermen, railroad directors, and shipping tycoons, purposefully favored artworks that could advance public patriotism, the ideology of Manifest Destiny, as well as their own business agendas. As a result of its core member's economic profit coinciding with the expansion of the nation's boundaries and the unity of the

⁵ Patricia Hills, "The American Art-Union as Patron for Expansionist Ideology in the 1840s." In *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790 – 1850*. Edited by Andrew Hemingway, 314-339. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 315.

nation, the American Art Union became a complicit force in promoting national ideological agendas. The creation of artworks and the development of public taste for a specific genre was complicity engineered by a handful powerful patrons who had an ideological stake⁶ in the promotion of specific artistic genres as well as shaping American culture. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the gifting and public display of purchases made by the AAU reflect the incentives of the handful of businessmen who operate as rational individuals seeking to maximize utility from their promotional efforts as well as make a profit. As a result, their widespread dispersal increased enthusiasm for landscape paintings and the continued development of the art market.

II. The History of the American Art Union

The American Art Union began in New York City by a portrait painter, named James Herring, who opened a gallery of contemporary art works, called the Apollo Gallery, in 1838. Herring's goal for starting the gallery was to facilitate a marketplace for less well-known artists by provide an exhibition space for these artists who had been increasingly ignored by established museums. Within that same year, Herring transformed his gallery into the Apollo Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts "to assist artists through purchases and to promote future patronage of arts in America."⁷ In 1843, the Apollo Association was renamed the American Art Union, which began to buy, exhibit, and distribute works of art by American artists across the nation. As a result, the Art Union became a membership organization in which members who paid an annual fee of 5 dollars (\$135 today) received an average of one to two fine-art engravings each year. Members also had the chance to win an original painting by a living American artist in their

⁶ Hill, 333.

⁷ Hill, 333.

annual Christmas lottery event in New York, which attracted thousands to the gallery to witness the spectacle. Additionally, the economic development of the United States, through increased population and technological growth, allowed the art market to deepen, because more potential costumers broadened the demand for new types of art. As the nation's population doubled in size during the lifespan of the Art Union and new technologies such as the telegraph and the railroad drove its expansion, the American- Art Union was able to extend its reach as well. Specifically, its membership reached nearly 19,000 members at the height of its success.

James Herring, aware of the powerful effect of mass-circulated newspapers, not only strove to publicize the Art Union in popular household journals, but also included powerful newspaperman on the AAU's Committee of managers, such as James Watson Webb, editor of the New York Courier and Enquirer. In addition to attracting attention through media outlets, Herring traveled throughout the states in 1840 to sign up subscribers, visit artists, and recruit secretaries to manage regional subscription lists. The Art Union's membership benefits attracted many subscribers of the developing entrepreneurial classes as they were able to obtain quality works and engravings of art for less than market prices, as well as to participate in an equal opportunity lottery system. This can be related to the idea of consumer surplus, in which the consumers are incentivized to join in on the benefits of goods which are relatively less expensive than the equilibrium condition that would match both demand and supply for paintings. Thus, as the American- Art Union increased the supply of paintings that were accessible to average Americans, it that created a consumer surplus that attracted more members to join. However, the reasons for the Art Union's prolific expansion became its downfall as it began to lose subscribers in 1850 due the growth of the art market in other competing institutions such as regional art unions and commercial galleries. This occurrence can also be linked to notion of consumer

surplus. As more institutions, like the American Art Union, met the market for supplying paintings that could be made more accessible to the public, the initial profit margins began to shrink as demand and supply equalized. The American Art Union officially disbanded after the final auction of its holdings in 1852.

III. State of the Field

Our understanding of the American Art Union in the connection between economic incentives of its managers and the increased demand for landscape paintings has been shaped by two scholars who have devised a theoretical analysis of the paintings purchased by the American Art Union between 1839 and 1852. These essays include “Unintended Consequences: The American Art-Union and the Rise of a National Landscape School,” by Kimberly Orcutt and “The American Art-Union as patron for expansionist ideology in the 1840s,” by Patricia Hills. Both essays discuss the impact the American Art Union had on the economic, political, and cultural climate in America in the 1840s. In Orcutt’s essay, she argues that while the American Art Union outwardly promoted history paintings by distributing engravings and publicly identifying the genre as the highest and most esteemed in art, “its most decisive impact can be seen through its strong encouragement and patronage of landscape paintings.”⁸ Orcutt proposes that the incentives which drove the Art-Union to purchase and employ artists to paint landscapes may be due to their affordability at the time, as well as their universal appeal to middle-class members who could display art within their homes. Landscape paintings were desirable as they were described as the most “pleasant” and “agreeable” images and the American Art Union

⁸ Kimberly Orcutt and Allan McLeod, “Unintended Consequences: The American Art-Union and the Rise of a National Landscape School.” *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, no. 1 (Spring 2019), <https://doi.org/10.29411/ncaw.2019.18.1.14>.

became dependent them to increase their roster of artworks without significantly increasing the average price paid for work.⁹ Orcutt describes a system in which, even at the height of its success, the American Art Union, a non-profit making institution, was conscious of its costs when purchasing new work that had the potential to attract more membership to their organization, a system of weighing marginal benefit and marginal cost. In the case of landscape paintings, it may be argued that the marginal benefit of purchasing a landscape painting during this time may have seemed greater than the marginal cost, as the actual cost of this genre remained far less than the traditionally respected history painting. Orcutt argues that the incentives driving the American Art Union to purchase more landscape paintings than any other genre created a series of unintended consequences, or outcomes. For instance, it fostered a new market for smaller, more inexpensive landscape images that could easily disseminated among members as well as showcased in the AAU'S public art galleries. Orcutt's essay offers a glimpse into the Union's synergistic abilities. Namely, the Union was able to launch careers of future luminaries, publicize the activities of prestige landscape artists, discourage untrained artists to attempt other subjects, and encourage the artists pursuit of the landscape genre. These tactics significantly contributed to the increased production of landscapes across the nation that generated to meet an established national taste for American landscape. As a classic example of supply and demand fluctuations that merge toward an equilibrium in the market, increased commissions and dispersal of landscapes across the nation consequently expanded the supply of landscape paintings to meet its growing demand, and consequently, creating a larger market for the genre in the long run.

⁹ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

The increase of both supply and demand of landscape paintings was a result of the managerial composition of the Art Union. Hills describes the American Art Union as an organization of business elites whose incentives for commissioning American landscapes drew from two major incentives. On one hand, they favored national pictures that would unify the North and South during the rising tensions that would eventually culminate in the Civil War. Conversely, they also endeavored to profit from their alternative business agendas that hinged on the prosperity of a united nation, rather than a segregated one. As the nation began to experience increased sectional strife over the issue of slavery, the American Art Union's purchases veered towards images that promoted a unified America as well as westward expansion. The Art Union and its profit-oriented managers were able to control the type of art produced by sponsoring only artists who were able to serve the nation's interests. Additionally, by instilling contemporary ideologies of expansionism and national unity that were specific to this historical moment, the Art Union also determined the culture of the country. Hill notes that, rather than conscious manipulations, the purchases and the promotions made by the American Art Union expose "the enthusiasms for art of men who have trained themselves in their business lives to operate for their own economic self-interests."¹⁰ In the June 1859 issue of the *Crayon*, an anonymous contributor wrote:

Exhibitions do not display the merits of particular works of Art and the individual progress of individual artists so much as they do the nature of public taste, or rather the character of artistic thought which the public chooses to manifest through its encouragement of art... it is a mistake to suppose that artists are free to paint what pleases them best... the truth is, that artists are compelled to meet the public by consulting its likes and dislikes.¹¹

¹⁰ Hill, 314.

¹¹ Hill, 333.

This quote emphasizes the concept that art is not solely made for aesthetic taste but is rather part of a much larger economic transaction between the artist and the public's demand for and reception of an artwork. The very concept of 'the public' as all the citizens of the body politic becomes an idealistic assumption in the context of who is willing to finance transactions that fuel the creation of art. Hill identifies "the public" as a term "invented by a group of businessmen and their intellectual representatives, sometimes acting individually but often acting as an ostensibly public-spirited institution."¹² Thus, the promotion of nationalism as an institution complimented the business interests of the wealthy managers, encouraged profits for artists willing to adhere to the impositions of the art union, and finally shape consumer desires towards landscape paintings that met business agendas of the nation's wealthiest barons.

Hill and Orcutt provide a theoretical foundation as well a historical explanation for an analytical interpretation of the data recorded by the American Art Union concerning the amount of paintings purchased by genre each year and the price the art union paid for each painting. Utilizing the historical background of the American Art Union, my findings will effectively connect statistical occurrences within the record of the Art Union's history, beginning with its formation in 1839 to its eventual termination in 1852, as well as the theoretical incentives that explain the preference for acquiring the landscape genres over others. This chapter's objective is to demonstrate a shift in how cultural preferences for art is often determined by the underlying business incentives of American markets and the culminating dominance of landscapes throughout the mid-19th-century by providing a quantitative economic analysis of the genres of work purchased by the art union.

¹² Hill, 333.

IV. Data Sources

The data for this thesis, organized in 1953 from the existing historical index created by the American Art-Union, was updated by classifying genres and attributing prices that had been scattered through letters to and from artists and through lists of works purchased. In terms of genre classification, genres were based on the title, the context of the artist's other work, and the written descriptions for works purchased for distribution from 1849 to 1851. This assignment process without visual support showcases the difficulty of attributing nearly 2,500 out of the 4,400 distributed works that are unlocated and lack images to their correct genre classifications, highlighting a possible shortcoming of a historical dataset such as this one. However, the dataset contains 2,319 works that were purchased and distributed and consequently showcases the incomplete nature of the spreadsheet's ability to capture the full history of transactions made by the American Art Union. The incomplete information concerning the Art Union's transactions may be due to the lack or loss of records kept during the early 19th century. Nevertheless, the projected erroneous predictions in classifying genres seems to be a small percentage, allowing the dataset to be useful evidence for the purposes of this thesis. Paintings were classified into a subset set of 7 genre categories: figure study, history, still life, landscape, genre, marine, and other. These categories provide an empirical basis for analyzing the Art-Union's artistic preferences and influence in the art market as the most prolific and influential patron of the arts in 19th-century America.

Price information was originally compiled by the American Art Union's Management Committee, the Registrar of Works of Art established in 1848, and in correspondences to and from artists. Records of prices were not officially kept before 1848, resulting in sporadic coverage prior to that year. Additionally, the creator of the updated index on prices often had to

insert prices for single works of art that were purchased in groups from a single artist for one overall price. Therefore, she often took the total price of the artist's lot and divided it by the total number of paintings purchased to obtain each price for the individual piece. This process could have also led to erroneous data entries as it doesn't accurately account price differentials for individual works. Some samples are broken down to reflect the artist's asking price, which are generally larger than the price that the Art Union actually paid for the work. A minority of the samples collected include data for price offered as well as price paid. However, averages between this difference are based off of a minority of samples with both sets of information, rather than just one. In addition to the data on works purchased and distributed by the American Art Union, membership data was also collected pertaining to the Art Union's yearly progression in expanding its organization. These were drawn from two sources: the American Art Union's official annual count of members as well as a published account of members who offered their state addresses. While the American Art Union's records included the total number of members represented each subsequent year, the data published by the American Art Union demonstrated a sample of the total number of members residing in each state. Many of the Art Union's records are incomplete, producing difficulties in matching official membership numbers with the number of names and cities published by the Art Union. For example, in 1850 the Art Union published only the names of its first 7,501 members out of 16,310 total, less than half of its members.¹³

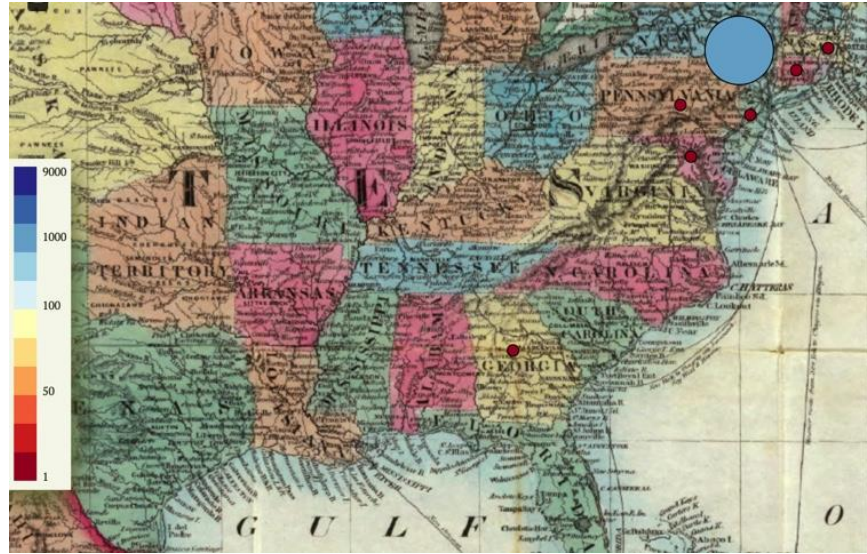
The data concerning the distribution of membership by state, rather than demonstrating exact numbers of members within the Art Union, provides a sample to analyze the breadth of the institution. The Art Union published the names of members who chose to provide their city and state residences. Thus, the points on the map encompass only those who provided a county or

¹³ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

state, rather than a town or city. Additionally, the Art-Union did not publish a list of its membership in 1851 and swiftly shut down the institution after its property sale in 1852. Nevertheless, the data that was collected during 1850 significantly demonstrates the Union's breadth at its peak size. The data reflects the increasingly diverse dispersal of its members' residences as well the organization's ability to influence the entire American nation by 1850.

V. Analysis of Data

The American Art Union's influence can first be attributed to the significant increase in membership from 814 members just after its formation in 1839 to 18,960 members at the peak of its prosperity in 1849. In only 10 years, the Art-Union gained over 18,000 members and an exceptional geographically diverse membership. Residency of its members extended from almost entirely within New York state in the Union's early stages to every state in America by 1850. In 1839, the membership map distribution showcases that 97.95% of the members names published by the American Art-Union resided in New York, whereas the majority of the remaining members still represented Northeastern states such as New Jersey, Massachusetts, District of Columbia, Connecticut, Maryland and Pennsylvania. This information is displayed in Figure 1, which showcases the membership distribution across the nation in 1839. The concentration of membership is showcased through the changing size and color of the circular map markers. The index to the left of the map indicates the amount of membership that each color represents. As the number of member's increase, the circular areas grow in size until the color changes to represent higher membership.

Figure 1¹⁴

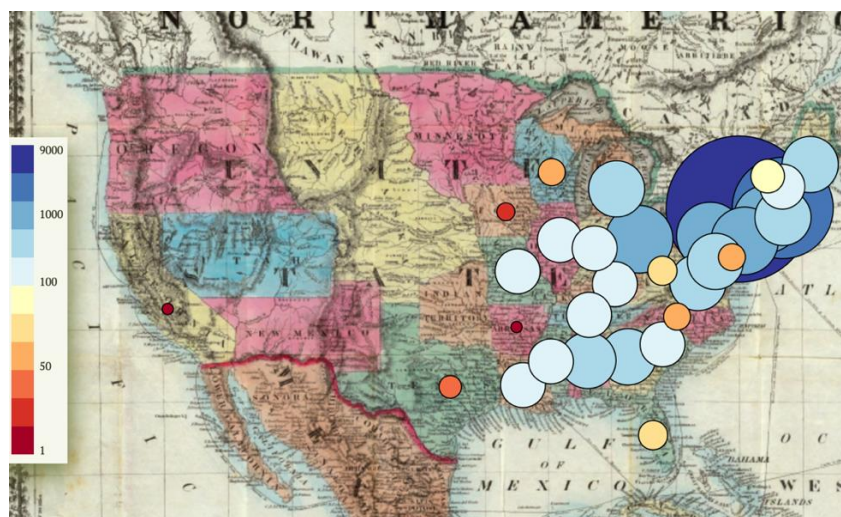
Within this diagram, the distribution of members is clearly skewed toward the State of New York as the American Art-Union published a list of 813 members who identified themselves as residents of New York. The data taken from published lists of members also shows that there were 17 other members located in states primarily in the Northeast as well as the state of Georgia. However, this number, 830, is inconsistent with the official count of Art Union members which was recorded as 813. These contradictory statistics showcase the Art Union's lack of organized recordkeeping during the first half of the 19th century. These irregularities in membership data also mirror the lack of complete records for prices of works purchased by the Art Union. Official business records of price offered and received did not commence until 1846, when only 9% of the data concerning price paid was missing whereas 57% percent of this data was missing in 1845. This dramatic increase in data on prices could be due to their continual rise in success and prominence, allowing them to purchase and distribute double the number of works in 1847 and triple by 1848, when their membership numbers began to peak. By the height

¹⁴ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

of the Art-Union's prestige in 1849, 10 years after the advent of the Art-Union, official reports counted 18,960 members and expanded from 7 states of representation in 1839 to 33 states by 1849. The American Art Union's continual growth can be interpreted as an economy of scale in which as the institution grew in membership number and influence throughout the United States, the cost of output – or, in this case, the cost of buying and commissioning paintings – decreased proportionally, allowing them to increase the amount of works purchased for less than market prices. Thus, as the American Art Union grew in scale as a non-profit firm, it both cultivated a developing market by being able to facilitate a wider range of demand and distribution.

According to the Art-Union's published list of members, 9,780 of its members lived within New York, meaning that 47.33% of 8,789 lived in the other 32 states represented. While more than half of its active members still resided within New York state, membership stretched to every state in the country by 1849, including California which did not join the United States until September 9, 1850. Figure 2 presents the American Art Union's maximum distribution of membership representation across the nation in 1849.

Figure 2¹⁵



¹⁵ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

This charted map, displaying the nationwide breadth and ultimate size of the Art-Union's membership, exemplifies its critical importance to the emerging art world in the United States during the 19th century. The American Art Union's reach is thus impossible to dismiss from the size and scope the organization was able to expand, causing it to be deemed as "the first institution to be able to influence US taste on a national scale."¹⁶ While the membership map displays the continued concentration of membership within New York at the start of the organization in 1839 and up until its eventual termination in the early 1850s, the large increase in distribution of smaller data points displaying the increase in members throughout the entirety of the United States signifies the Art-Union's ability to reach large audiences. According to the Organization's records, over 230,000 people visited the Apollo Gallery each year as a result of its free gallery space that was open to the public and its major lottery held in New York City annually. As a result, we can assume that the Art Union's concentration in New York was not only due its naissance within the state, but also due to its major annual event held within the city attracting an audience totaling hundreds of thousands. While the American Art Union was only able to secure almost 19,000 members nationwide, the Union was able to reach even larger audiences, becoming a well-known art institution by many Americans across state borders. A letter received by the American Art-Union in 1851 and kept in their record from a supporter of the membership organization writes about the astonishing range and impact of the Art Union on the artistic tastes of the public:

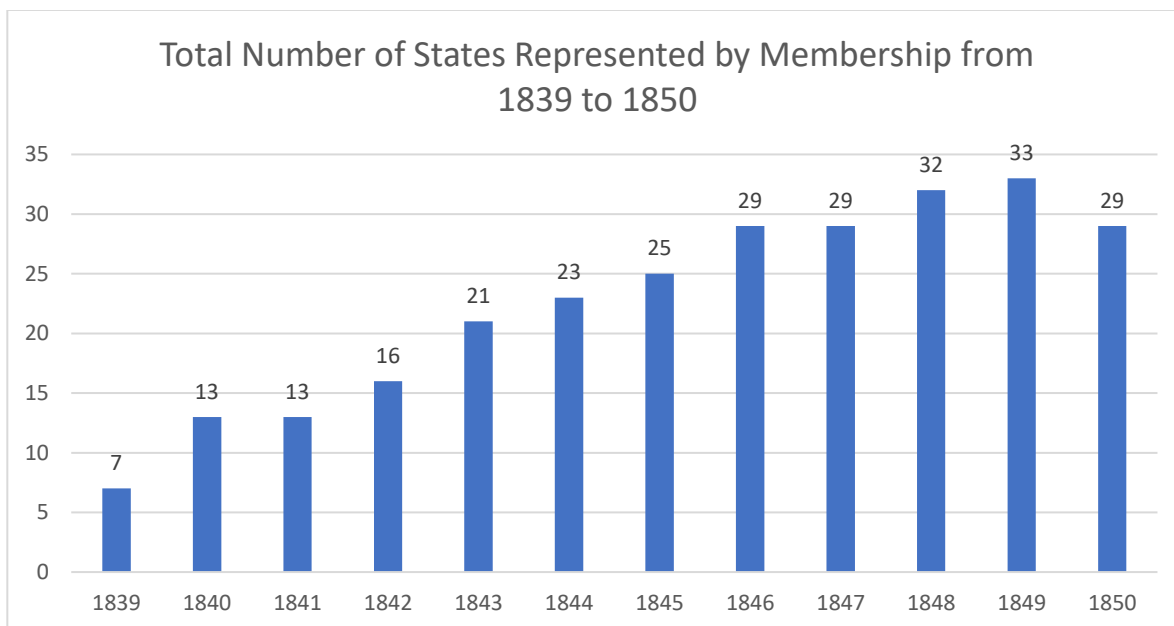
In every village which I have visited of late where the bulletins and engravings have been received, I find the inhabitants discussing not only their merits, but also those of other works of art and moreover, there appears also a very creditable willingness to patronize both the Art Union, and such artists as are deserving of

¹⁶ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

their patronage; and what makes this of more interest, is that this is true of places where the interests of art have never before been recognized.¹⁷

The conclusion that the art union could develop a market that stimulated substantial audiences to view the art they avidly promoted can also be supported analytically by the data, which displays the degree to which the art Union was able to spread across states as well as the rate at which membership numbers grew. Figure 3 provides the total number of states represented by the Art-Union's published membership listings between 1839 to 1850.

Figure 3



By the Art Union's eventual end in 1852, the membership organization was able to reach every U.S. state during the height of its success. In 1849, published listings recorded 33 states representing the American Art Union's nearly 19,000 members. The 1849 statistic of 33 state includes both West Virginia and California into its record as it records 8 residents of California and 70 residents of West Virginia, attesting to Orcutt's claim that the American-Art Union was

¹⁷ W. W. Clark to Andrew Warner, May 24, 1851, reel 35, Letters Received, American Art-Union Records, New-York Historical Society.

able to influence the American taste on a national scale as the organization bridged both coasts of the North American continent. However, membership ranks began to decline after the Union's peak in 1849. By 1850, the United States contained only 31 states as well as 4 organized territories, including Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah. Nevertheless, the ability to expand its influence throughout every state in the early nation parallels its overt promotion of the contemporary national agenda to unify the nation and to continue expanding Westward. As a result, the Art-Union proclaimed itself as a national institution bent on meeting the desires of the entire republic. In 1852 at the time of its termination, the President of the American Art-Union stressed that "one of the most promising features of the American Art-Union was its national character. It has no sectional views, no local interests. It seeks to encourage genius and talent wherever they may be found."¹⁸ As such, the Art Union proclaimed itself as created "for the greatest good of the greatest number."¹⁹ This proclamation was supported by its ability to distribute paintings to its middle-class membership, people who could not normally afford luxury items at full market prices. The affordability of these paintings was made possible through the American Art Union's ability to subsidize the production and distribution of landscape paintings by allowing larger audiences to obtain works of art for a fraction of their cost, distributing art through their annual lottery system, and displaying works at their free public gallery. This ability to subsidize the costs of works of art recalls the importance of economies of scale. As institutions, like the American Art Union, began to increase in scale, the fixed costs of production and distribution spreads evenly and minimizes the cost per unit of each good, or painting. Because the Art Union became large enough to experience the benefits of economies of

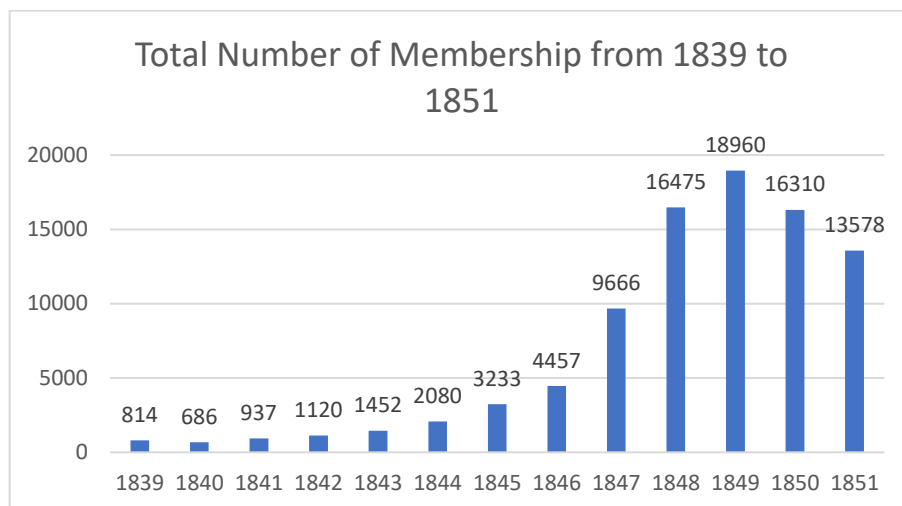
¹⁸ Charles E. Baker, "The American Art-Union," in *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union*, ed. Mary Bartlett Cowdrey 1816-1852, Vol. 1. (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953), 150-151.

¹⁹ "Proceedings at the Annual Meeting. 1848," *Transactions of the American Art-Union*, 1848, 44, www.jstor.org/stable/20568448.

scale, such as increased profits, they were able to minimize the prices for each painting. As a result, the Art Union created a new market for works of fine art by extending art patronage and viewership as well as attracting new members of society who were unable to participate in the art market's exceptionally high prices.

James Herring, founder of the American Art Union, understood the value of increasing both the number of people who were aware of the Art Union as well as its membership ranks, and explicitly took advantage of newspapers and developing technologies such as telegrams and railroads. Herring was able to significantly increase membership numbers by the mid-1840s, creating a system in which the number of people who visited their public galleries, read about the Art Union's patronage in contemporary newspapers, or joined as members correlated with the institution's impact on a national artistic preference. As a result, the American Art Union played a critical role in creating the demand for specific genres of art as it allowed more viewers to familiarize themselves with newly popular genres, such as American landscape paintings. The result of increased membership was thus a crucial aspect the Art Union's impact across the country as their dispersal of artistic images spread the enthusiasm for the genres that dominated their patronage. Figure 4 depicts the increase in total membership numbers throughout the American Art Union's active duration.

Figure 4



There was a significant increase in membership beginning in 1847 when membership numbers more than doubled from 4,457 members in 1846 to 9,666 in 1847, signifying an 116% increase in membership. In 1848, the total membership increased again by 70.4% from 9666 members to 16,4675. However, by 1848, the rate of increase in membership significantly slowed to 15% as its membership total reached its peak of 18,960 members. While it may be difficult to discern why membership numbers doubled and continued to rise tremendously between 1847 and 1849, this significant increase in membership was most likely due to the increased demand for landscape paintings, the genre that the American Art-Union most avidly promoted, purchased, and distributed. According to the data on artworks purchased and distributed by the American Art Union, 54.36% of the total recorded 2,318 paintings were classified as landscape paintings. These paintings included both prestigious artists from the famous Hudson River Landscape School as well as an even larger number of lesser-known artists whose works were also distributed throughout the country. The Union's strong encouragement and patronage of landscape paintings began well before 1847, as more than half of the paintings purchased by the Art-Union were landscapes after its first year and peaked at just over two-thirds, or 65.79%, by

1845. Table 1 displays the percent of artworks in each subject purchased and distributed by the Art Union.

| Year Created | Figure | | | | | | Still Life |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Study | Genre | History | Landscape | Marine | Other | |
| 1839 | 8.57% | 17.14% | 22.86% | 31.43% | 8.57% | 8.57% | 2.86% |
| 1840 | 0.00% | 35.71% | 7.14% | 50.00% | 7.14% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| 1841 | 0.00% | 14.29% | 0.00% | 42.86% | 28.57% | 14.29% | 0.00% |
| 1842 | 2.86% | 20.00% | 5.71% | 54.29% | 14.29% | 0.00% | 2.86% |
| 1843 | 6.00% | 24.00% | 6.00% | 42.00% | 6.00% | 14.00% | 2.00% |
| 1844 | 2.17% | 14.13% | 9.78% | 60.87% | 6.52% | 2.17% | 4.35% |
| 1845 | 2.63% | 15.79% | 4.39% | 65.79% | 4.39% | 0.00% | 7.02% |
| 1846 | 4.26% | 17.73% | 5.67% | 60.99% | 4.96% | 0.00% | 6.38% |
| 1847 | 4.09% | 16.73% | 9.29% | 56.51% | 5.95% | 1.86% | 5.58% |
| 1848 | 6.40% | 16.56% | 8.61% | 59.60% | 1.55% | 3.09% | 4.19% |
| 1849 | 9.81% | 19.83% | 5.64% | 55.74% | 3.55% | 3.13% | 2.30% |
| 1850 | 13.59% | 16.99% | 7.77% | 50.00% | 5.10% | 3.64% | 2.91% |
| 1852 | 24.42% | 0.00% | 17.51% | 40.09% | 6.91% | 6.91% | 4.15% |
| Total | 9.23% | 16.05% | 8.50% | 54.36% | 4.66% | 3.32% | 3.88% |

An overwhelming majority of artworks distributed by the American Art Union throughout its active duration were landscape paintings. Orcutt argues that the Art Union's preference for the landscape genre can be interpreted not only by the financial distribution of artworks purchased by subject, but also by their correspondences between artists and regular calls in published articles and newspapers encouraging artists to take on landscape genres.²⁰ In *The Bulletin*, a newspaper published in Philadelphia from 1847 to 1892 and considered as one of the most influential newspapers in the United States, published an article in two of its 1849 issues by the Art-Union discussing its praise for landscapes and directing artists to create "compositions that embody the striking effects of our scenery."²¹ Their initial preference for landscape painting

²⁰ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

²¹ G. W. P., "Some Remarks on the Landscape Art, as Illustrated by the Collection of the American Art-Union. No. II." *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, vol. 2, no. 9 (1849), 16, www.jstor.org/stable/20646695.

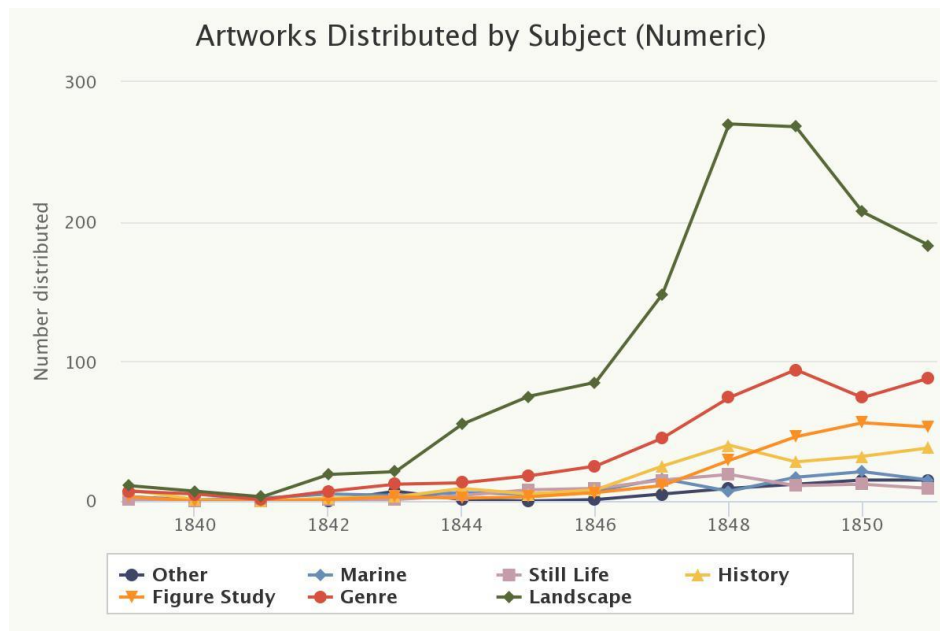
suggests their attention to finances as well as their awareness of the universal agreeability and facility of the landscape genre. Landscape genres were continuously seen as the most easily learned genre without the formal instruction needed for figure studies or the mastery of the epic scenes required for history paintings. The Art Union's encouragement of landscapes also stemmed from their need to fill annual rosters without increasing average costs of holding more paintings. Regular calls for additional landscape paintings by artists repeatedly informed readers of their need for low-cost works of art: "we have already purchased a great many high-priced paintings and desire to increase our list without increasing the average price."²² As a result, the Art Union depended on lesser-known artists to provide large quantities of acceptable work for lower prices. In return, these artists' works were promoted by the Art Union as it launched the careers of multiple future luminaries of the Hudson River School, such as Jasper Francis Cropsey, who sold 45 paintings to the Art Union valued at \$120,000 today, and John Frederick Kensett, whose earnings totaled an equivalent of \$95,000 today. It was these smaller works of landscape art, rather than large-canvas history paintings by prestigious artists, that were purchased in larger quantities and more widely disseminated throughout the nation.

Table 1 also showcases the growth of in the percent of landscape paintings purchased by the American Art Union over other genres. While landscapes remain the top subject purchased at the start of the institution's career, their distribution of works is more evenly dispersed relative to the skewness of the data towards landscapes starting in 1844. However, as the institution grew in numbers and influence, the Art-Union's ability to choose what kinds of paintings to purchase and distribute became more reflective of the Union's underlying political, cultural, and economic

²² Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

goals. Figure 4 represents the graphical distribution of the number of artworks purchased and distributed by the Art Union between 1839 and 1852.

Figure 4



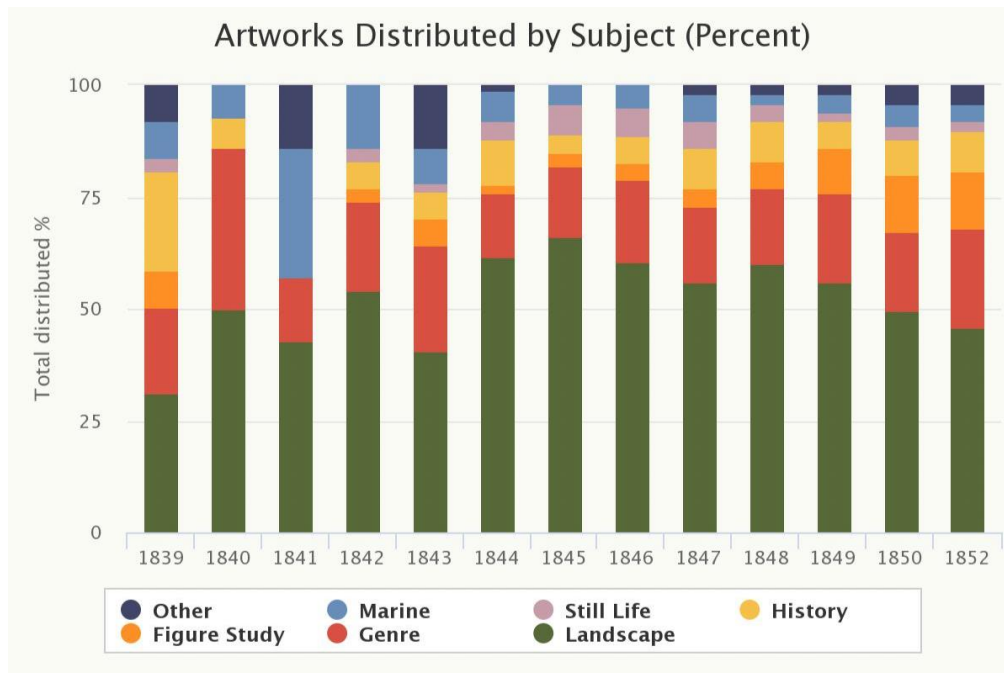
This graph demonstrates the proliferation of landscape images distributed by the Art Union between 1844 and 1848. Thus, once the Art Union began to increase in size, as membership numbers began to rise dramatically within these four years, the institution's ability to exercise control over the types of artworks the institution wanted to promote over all others became increasingly apparent. Another reason for their unequal purchasing of landscape paintings over other genres could also be due to the Art Union's political mission to promote national unity through the art it chose to distribute. As the contemporary nation became increasingly ideologically polarized between the North's increased industrialization and South's agricultural slave economy, the genres sponsored by the Art Union skewed towards images that would not only be pleasant and agreeable images of a unified national landscape, but also promoted the

expansion westward. Their distribution of landscape paintings and engravings over all other genres represented the Art Union's efforts to compromise on the political differences of the nation by promoting a cultural image that could appeal to both Northern and Southern interests, the American vision to expand the nation's borders farther West. This theory could also be supported by the positions of the American Art Union's leading managers, wealthy businessmen who were active participants in westward expansion as they invested in and controlled the major railroad and shipping industries that could profit from increased migration to the West. Thus, by patronizing artists who aligned their work with the interests of the nation, as well as those of the organization's managers, the Art Union was able to control both the type of art created for the country as well as the influence this art could have on public demand and national perception. These early efforts by the American Art Union not only increased individual private profits but also unified the nation towards the common ideology of Manifest Destiny. Their obvious preference towards landscapes thus demonstrates the institution's awareness of the link between public distribution of cultural images and the proportional economic and political influence on the nation.

The notion that the distribution of artistic images has an effect on both public demand and cultural ideologies is evidenced by the Art Union's active patronizing of landscapes rather than any other traditionally dominant subject. Orcutt's study notes that while the Art Union's public statements and distributed engravings reflect a preference for history paintings, landscape paintings represented a significantly higher proportion of paintings bought by the AAU than any other genre. History paintings represented only 8.9% of the total artworks that the Art Union distributed and displayed, whereas landscapes represent over 50% of the paintings purchased by

genre on average. Figure 5 showcases the distribution of artworks dispensed by the American Art Union categorized by subject between 1838 and 1852.

Figure 5



The Art Union's skewed preference for landscapes over every other subject is evident in Figure 5. Genre paintings became the second most distributed subject, representing 16.05% of the total data on paintings purchased by the Art Union while history paintings ranked 4th in the percent of artworks distributed by subject. This data provides evidence that despite public statements of their elevation of history paintings, the American Art Union's largest impact on American tastes and preferences for art came from their encouragement and patronage of landscape paintings. This conclusion parallels the known contemporary treatment of history paintings by the art market, which had been traditionally regarded the most prestigious form of Western painting within the hierarchy of genres. As a result, history paintings commanded the highest prices as they were argued to require a level of mastery above all others because of the difficulty in creating visual images of monumental historical scenes. Despite the majority of landscape

paintings distributed by the Art Union, the data on prices paid for artworks reflects the traditional valuation of history paintings as the dominant genre of fine art. Table 2 displays the figures of the average prices of each genre that were asked for by artists and paid for by the Art Union.

| Genre | Average Price Paid | Average Price Asked |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Figure Study | \$55.60 | \$56.85 |
| Genre | \$101.44 | \$133.55 |
| History | \$225.72 | \$315.76 |
| Landscape | \$66.35 | \$84.89 |
| Marine | \$62.07 | \$70.59 |
| Other | \$97.68 | \$130.50 |
| Still Life | \$49.41 | \$69.70 |
| Total | \$84.9 | \$111.76 |

The table showcases that the average price of a history painting bought by the American Art Union was \$ 225.72, representing the highest average price paid for an artwork among all 7-genre classification. Conversely, the average price paid for a landscape painting was only \$66.35. These low prices for landscape paintings may be attributed to their lack of acclaim in the contemporary 19th century art market, as they generally represented a subject easily taken on by untrained artists, and therefore seen as the most affordable artworks for their acceptable quality.²³ Additionally, before the 19th century, landscapes were traditionally categorized at the bottom of the academic hierarchy of genres by the French Academy of Fine Arts as early as 1669. Rather than appreciating the scenic beauties of nature, the pre-19th century art market attributed greater value to history paintings and works that followed the classical ideals of depicting the human body, especially the nude, in dynamic and epic events. However, the 19th century witnessed a rapid increase in demand for the pictorial genre of landscapes perhaps both in response and with the help of the efforts of the American Art Union. As technology advanced,

²³ Orcutt, "Unintended Consequences."

Americans in growing cities began to recognize the value of untouched nature as they were able to witness the beauty of the undeveloped West through traveling along the railroad. Additionally, the invention of the paint tube in 1841 and the portable collapsible easel made the outdoor study of nature more accessible to artists who ventured West. The data showcasing the increase in landscape paintings paid and distributed by the Art Union in Figure 4 exemplifies how this emerging genre, while unable to command the price ranges of history paintings, became avidly commissioned by the Art Union, who helped expand the demand and influence of landscape paintings further.

Despite the data's ability to showcase the increase in demand by analyzing the changing numbers of artworks commissioned by the Art Union, the data remains limited in showcasing how increased demand throughout the 1840s effected the average price of landscape paintings. Table 3 showcases the average price paid for Landscape paintings by the Art Union between 1839 and 1852.

| Year Created | Average of Amount Paid | Average of Amount Asked |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1839 | \$82.45 | N/A |
| 1840 | \$81.67 | N/A |
| 1841 | \$100.00 | N/A |
| 1842 | \$66.67 | N/A |
| 1843 | \$225.00 | N/A |
| 1844 | \$33.88 | \$54.00 |
| 1845 | \$54.61 | \$120.00 |
| 1846 | \$55.02 | \$225.00 |
| 1847 | \$72.27 | \$61.46 |
| 1848 | \$62.48 | \$67.67 |
| 1849 | \$66.01 | \$79.06 |
| 1850 | \$72.45 | \$93.82 |
| 1852 | \$76.078 | \$99.10 |
| Total | \$66.54 | \$84.89 |

The table showcases that the average price of landscapes bought by the American Art Union actually decreases over time. Rather than reflecting the demand for landscapes, this reduction in average price of the Art-Union's active lifespan can be explained by multiple other confounding variables. One of the reasons for the decrease in prices may be due to their initial purchase of higher quality works by prestige landscape artists rather than higher quantity of average-priced landscapes. In the first 3 years of the Art-Union's founding, the organization only purchased and distributed an average 7 landscape paintings by artists whose prestige and reputation commanded higher prices such as Thomas Doughty, Daniel Huntington, Asher Brown Durand, and Victor Gifford Audubon. These highly paid artists, the lack of additional samples in the data, as well as the lack of complete statistics for prices paid by Art Union skew these averages towards the higher prices paid for artworks. Additionally, artworks in latter half of the day represent the Art-Union's explicit and publicized intention to fill their rosters with lower-priced landscape paintings by amateur artists so as to minimize the transaction costs of increasing the quantity of artworks distributed annually. In addition to increasing the quantity of lower-priced artworks into their distribution list, the American Art Union also began to purchase smaller paintings which would both be more affordable for the organization as well as more easily disseminated across the nation. Nevertheless, by 1845 the art union began to distribute between 75 and 267 landscape paintings annually, allowing the data for average price per paintings to showcase a mild, yet fluctuating, increase in average price from \$55.02 in 1845 to \$76.07 in 1852. These increases in average prices paid for landscape paintings as well as the expanding in quantity of smaller works by lesser-known artists exemplifies the growing demand for landscapes caused by the Art-Union's dispersal of the genre across the country.

Despite the Art Union's influence and success throughout the 1840s, artists began to criticize the Art Union for routinely paying prices for paintings below market value. From Table 2 and Table 4, it can be noted that the average price paid was roughly \$20 less than the average price asked by artists. Concerning Table 4's distribution of the prices paid and asked for landscape paintings, the average price paid for landscapes between 1845 and 1850 was \$66.54, whereas the average price asked for landscape paintings was \$84.89. As a result of these prices given to artists less than their initial asking prices, artists began to drop out of the Union. As membership subscribers began to dwindle by 1850 due to political circumstances involving the institution, the Art Union's ability to purchase and distribute more notable artworks declined as well. By 1852, the institution's lottery system was declared illegal because its dispersal of images that were seen as politically bias towards the Northern Union, and the Art-Union folded after its 1852 auction of its remaining holdings.

VI. Conclusion

The data concerning the distribution of the American Art Union's membership and its distributed artworks demonstrates the not only the institution's ability to reach the American public on a nationwide scale, but also its continued patronage and preferment of landscapes. The maps indicating the spread of the members across every contemporary state in country demonstrates that at the peak of the institution's influence, it had the ability to distribute landscape paintings and that allowed the Art Union to create a national taste for landscapes. The data showcasing the prices and genres of the artworks distributed reflects that landscapes remained the top genre of painting purchased by the Art Union as well as increased over the institution's active years. While this statistical analysis may not reflect the entirety of the

American public's initial demand for landscapes, it does reflect the increased demand for landscapes by the nation's leading patrons as well as societal elites who arguably had the ability to effect public demand throughout the United States. The Art Union's managers promotion of artworks tended toward landscapes that furthered their profits in emerging economic industries, offering them a clear incentive to commission and distribute works that inspired Manifest Destiny and America's drive to expand west. The numbers of landscape paintings distributed by the Art Union reflect their increased exposure to its members across the nation as well as those who visited their public galleries, creating greater potential for the American public to be influenced by the increased amount of Landscapes made to meet patronage demands. Additionally, as the Art Union increased its roster of landscapes, artists responded to the increased demands for landscapes by producing more of this genre. Thus, the American-Art Union's encouragement and patronage of landscapes in mid-19th century became a catalyst for the growing desire to view and patron larger amounts of landscapes of the nation's natural scenery that continued to increase until the end of the century. This study of the American-Art Union's impact on national artistic taste through promotion and patronage of a single genre demonstrates how the tastes of the Art Market are influenced by a handful of the nation's economic and political elites who are driven by private economic incentives and political ideologies. Thus, those with the power to influence what gets produced by artists through commissioning specific genres and distributed to wide audiences, also have the ability to influence the artistic tastes of the American nation. The actions and incentives driving the powerful elites thus attest to the American Art Market's growing demand for landscape paintings examined further throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Albert Bierstadt's Enterprising Career and Rocky Mountain Landscape

I. Introduction

This chapter shifts the focus away from the American Art Union's increased impact on the demand for landscape paintings and towards the business incentives that drove the cultural production of these paintings. Many scholars have already begun to argue that landscapes at this time represented an era of widespread change in the United States and became a cultural source of national pride, as they emblemized a vision of national progress and prosperity. Although Americans still collectively thought of the West as an exotic and unknown territory, the increased patronage and distribution of landscapes by the American Art Union as well as the newspaper articles, reports, travel accounts, and novels stirred the nation's desire to witness more visual images that would confirm the accuracy of such descriptions. Landscape's impact was thus due to the responses by the nation's audiences who deemed the invented scenes of nature's beauty to be accurate visual records of the geography that artists witnessed. Rather than a purely cultural movement, America's quest to understand its new territories and to configure a national identity in the midst of imperial expansion provided the foundation for businesses to emerge in both the production of art as well as in the industrialization of the contemporary United States. This chapter's goal is to enumerate the effects of art business on the nation, and the corresponding incentives prompting individuals to produce, publicize, and sell works of art for financial gain. Albert Bierstadt's profit-seeking career, as both an artist and entrepreneur, provides a case study to examine how, on a microeconomic scale, the production and promotion of his landscape painting, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, produced in 1863, encouraged the economic prosperity of the nation. His painting's ability to become both a source of national pride and a marketable asset is influenced by three distinct factors: The aesthetics of the sublime,

used to distinguish the United States from Europe's established dominance, created a prophetic vision national progress; the cultivation of Manifest Destiny stimulated commercial profits by popularizing the industrial expansion of the west; the use of the latest technologies in photo production and printing marketed and distributed his work to larger audiences to increase the influence his work was able to obtain.

With the help of art business, landscapes' impact on nationalism can be broken down into two categories of influences. On one hand, Bierstadt's painting of the Rocky Mountains set apart the American landscape from Europe's cultural past as it boasted the possibility of America's future prosperity. Americans took pride in the Rocky Mountain painting, believing that it had the potential to match the grandiose mountains of Europe, such as the Swiss Alps, and therefore establish America's prominence as separate from Europe's landscapes and artistic achievements. However, Europe's ostensible cultural superiority according to cultural critics stemmed from their celebration of the past. Unlike history paintings, meant to celebrate, idealize, and emulate the classical subject matters of their cultural past, American landscape paintings redirected contemporary viewers' attention to the importance of the future for culture and commerce. In addition, the American landscape depicted by Bierstadt "bespoke Americanness in itself" as it possessed the remarkable appearance of a truthful, naturalistic depiction of the West, distinguishing American art from that of European tradition as it neither exaggerated nor idealized the image of nature.²⁴ While American landscapes preceded the rise of Modernism in both Europe and the United States, they also rejected the reliance on the past in favor of subjects that reflected the present and future national objectives - such as industrialization and imperial expansion - of those who created them.

²⁴ Emily Halligan, "Art criticism in America before 'The Crayon,' Perceptions of Landscape Painting, 1825-1855," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Delaware, 2000), 21.

Thomas Cole, Bierstadt's contemporary, makes a similar point about American's landscapes in comparison to the Classical ruins of European landscapes. He argues, "American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and future."²⁵ *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* embraces Cole's argument by negotiating between the historical triumphs of European culture and the projections of American glory tied inextricably to its nature. However, Bierstadt's depiction of the Rocky Mountains concerns both the present, as it depicts the untouched natural abundance discovered by those who first ventured west, and the future, as it envisions the economic and productive potential of these landscapes. Additionally, his references to the past through his stereotypical depiction of Native Americans and to Classical European portraiture through his idealization of nature emphasize an alternative future in which its "vacant" or "unclaimed" natural landscapes became the key to future American wealth. While writers, architects, and artists generally struggled to catch up to the traditional dominance of European culture, landscape artists easily distinguished American nature's pristine quality and its economic capacities as superior to all other nations.

Secondly, Bierstadt was not just aware of the cultural impact of his landscapes but was also aware that the extent of his impact was a function of how many people were able to witness his paintings and was a factor in the profitability of his paintings. Every detail in his painting and every aspect of his promotion of it reflects Bierstadt's knowing ability to generate national pride and to profit from it. His paintings catalyzed the construction of nationalism by linking American values of progress and profit to the picturesque landscape, creating an even larger demand for more images of the West. The increased demand for landscapes incentivized artists, as the

²⁵ William Cronon, "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change," in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*, ed. the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and the Yale University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 42.

suppliers for images of the West, to create more paintings that would successively cause a feedback loop to form. Once more paintings circulated as artists' increased production, an even greater demand for landscapes, followed by their subsequent supply, heightened American nationalism and the drive to expand westward. The increased supply of landscapes to continually meet increased demand persisted until an equilibrium between supply and demand was reached. Once artists produced enough paintings to meet the expanded demand for landscapes, increased marginal profits – that is, the additional profit earned by a firm or individual when one additional product is produced and sold - began to stabilize. At this equilibrium point, artists produced no more than the sufficient quantity of landscapes demanded by their patrons, and this level of production persisted until their patrons' demand shifted towards other genres of art. During the mid-19th century, when the equilibrium condition for producing the greatest quantity of landscapes paintings peaked, patrons and audiences saw landscape paintings as the most exciting genre because of their ability to offer powerful information about America's unknown western territories. As painters began to profit by increasing their production of landscapes to fulfill patrons' demand, these economic transactions cemented the link between the aesthetic production of art and the financial incentives of individual artists. Phrased differently, landscapes epitomized an opportunity for artists to financially gain from producing and transacting their painting as a commodified good. Whereas patrons commissioned landscape paintings to further their business agendas that aligned with national pride in the American West, artists capitalized off their ability to affect audiences because of their interest in expanding their own business and generating larger incomes. This phenomenon demonstrates how the promotion of nationalism within landscapes was an act of self-interested, profit-seeking individuals, rather than an aesthetic choice or altruistic call for national unity.

The profit- oriented business of the American art market centralized in New York City during the 1820s. This decade allowed the city to transform into the largest and wealthiest cultural center in the nation, where unprecedented urban growth allowed for an upsurge in financial opportunities for artists, patrons, dealers, and critics. As a result, the emergence of a centralized art market in the city of New York during the 1820s played a key role to the developing economic incentives that issued throughout the remainder of the century. Within this time period, *The Crayon* emerged as the first art periodical published in the United States and played a critical role in the reception of landscapes as a new genre of painting. By creating a “crayonist”²⁶ landscape aesthetic to match the demand for naturalistic images of America’s untouched scenery, *The Crayon* solidified the link between landscape paintings and national pride. Emily Halligan argues that art criticism played an important role in the development of the American art market as well as the increased understanding and acceptance of landscape paintings by the public as writers and critics promoted and translated painter’s works to its wide readership.²⁷ Not only were wealthy institutions of patronage such as the American Art Union able to facilitate the demand for landscapes, but writers, journalists, and critics also heightened the public’s demand for landscapes as they argued that these paintings could provide a means of representing the nation. Critics and writers were able to influence national taste by praising landscapes with unembellished and naturalistic scenes of America’s nature as their published articles and reviews were able to spread throughout the nation, inviting the public to participate in the praise for landscapes. The importance of critical commentary in the art market not only stemmed from its ability to solidify the link between landscapes and national culture, but also from its ability to sway national attention towards particular artists by increasing the volume of

²⁶ Siegal, *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting*, 133.

²⁷ Halligan, 2.

published reviews to acquaint readers with specific artists that they desired to popularize. As a result, art criticisms became a function of the business of marketing and selling works of art as it increased private profits of the artists it promoted through reviews.

The production of landscape paintings had already begun to accelerate by 1825, when the acclaimed landscape painter Thomas Cole founded the Hudson River School of landscape painting and encouraged artists to adopt landscapes as a distinctly American genre.²⁸ As a result, even before Bierstadt's painting career, American critics of landscape painting solidified the link between national pride and the landscape paintings produced by the Hudson River School.

Nancy K. Anderson notes that while Bierstadt began his artistic career well after the increased production of American landscapes, he strategically painted *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* in 1863 when national demand for images of the West had peaked. After studying abroad in Germany, Switzerland, and Italy to perfect his compositional skills, Bierstadt joined Frederick W. Lander's government survey expedition to the Nebraska Territory in 1857. Although Bierstadt photographed landscapes, completed oil sketches, and gathered Indian artifacts to testify to the authenticity of his paintings, he actually completed *The Rocky Mountains* only after returning to his New York Studio at his famous 10th Street studio. This building represented the first venue in New York City where artists could conduct business transactions with patrons and directly connect their works to the surrounding public. Measuring six by ten feet, the painting intended to serve as what Bierstadt termed, a "great picture", or showpiece, to be exhibited on its own within his studio.²⁹ Recognizing the profits his painting could generate, Bierstadt created a spectacle, allowing public audiences to attend a theatrical event which unveiled the painting. By

²⁸ Halligan, 17.

²⁹ Nancy K. Anderson, "'Wondrously Full of Invention': The Western Landscapes of Albert Bierstadt," in *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, ed. Nancy K. Anderson (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 74.

capitalizing off the public's demand to see images of the West, charging admission fees for audiences, and fostering a venue in which he showcases his art to an emerging middle-class market, Bierstadt created a strategic business plan for marketing his work. Beyond his New York studio, Bierstadt quickly understood the value of increasing his viewership to promote his reputation as an artist and to secure the highest prices for his work. As a result, he allowed the painting to not only be exhibited in 1864 at New York's Metropolitan Fair, but also tour multiple cities in the United States and Europe. By 1865, James McHenry, an American art collector living in London, purchased the painting for \$25,000. As Bierstadt employed commercial galleries, exhibitions, and dealership, that had emerged between 1800 to 1865, by publicly advertising and dispersing his art as a commodity more than a cultural object, his effect on the nation's conception of the West and the corresponding drive towards expansion increased. Thus, Albert Bierstadt's painting exemplifies the inextricable link between the business of art and the cultural impact of landscape paintings in the mid-19th century. *The Rocky Mountains, Landers Peak* reflects the economic incentives that drove Bierstadt's promotion of Manifest Destiny to cultivate national pride and purpose, a project that tactfully employed the aesthetic of the sublime.

II. The Sublime

The concept of the sublime originated with Longinus, the first-century Greek critic, and concerns, as Timothy M. Costelloe, a philosopher and sociologist, defines it, "the relationship between human beings and those aspects of their world that excite in them particular emotions, powerful enough to evoke transcendence, shock, awe, and terror."³⁰ Under Longinus's definition,

³⁰ Timothy M. Costelloe, *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

the sublime is not a superficial visual characteristic, but an ability to inspire powerful emotions caused by a quality of inconceivable vastness. The sublime is both a visual characteristic that could be found within an artistic medium and a simultaneous reaction by those who witnessed “its greatness.”³¹ In this sense, the sublime may be thought of as an aesthetic experience with the intention to provoke an emotive reaction in the conceiver’s audience. While Longinus initially articulated the sublime as a literary style, by the 18th and early 19th century the sublime became a substantial discussion of aesthetic theory as well as American’s interpretation of and reaction to nature. In his *Critique of Judgement* of 1790, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant enumerates how the sublime could summon both splendid feelings as well as reactions of terror in its beholder by differentiating it from the concept of the beautiful. While the beautiful concerned the pleasantries within an aesthetic object’s form, the definition of the sublime expanded beyond the boundaries that humans could conceive. As a result, the sublime evoked a sense of awe because of its ability to extend beyond that which is easily perceived. Additionally, his explanation of the sublime extends to its ultimate purpose by considering its teleological aspects in comparison to what he describes as “the beautiful’s” purposeful lack of purpose.³² In contrast, the sublime’s purpose may be judged as a logical means to an end which aims to provoke a deep feeling that achieves an external outcome in its construction. Under this assessment, the sublime can be seen not only as an aesthetic within a composition but also as a utilitarian device to incite reactions in audiences that fulfilled an agreed upon purpose by artists and patrons.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Judgement,” in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 392.

³² Kant, 392.

Bierstadt's landscape paintings of the Far West may also be viewed under this teleological analysis that Kant constructs of the sublime as their creation also aims to provoke emotions to serve a greater purpose. Bierstadt's paintings employ the aesthetic of the sublime by exaggerating nature's grandness, boundlessness, and abundance which aims at producing a simultaneous reaction in its viewers to further the larger political, economic, and cultural purpose behind the painting's creation. Kant's philosophical interpretation of the sublime thus would eventually feed into the aesthetic discourses surrounding American nationalism. Americans in particular were well acquainted with the sublime through the discovery of new untouched territories and the images that heightened the Western territories' sheer magnitude. Descriptions of American nature from geological surveys of 19th century expeditions to newly acquired western territories often describe the reactive sensation of the sublime. Upon experiencing firsthand the vastness of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Thomas Jefferson remarked "The first glance of this scene hurries our senses into the opinion, that the earth has been created in time, that the mountains were formed first... It is placid and delightful as that is wild and tremendous."³³ Jefferson's account of both the wild and delightful harks back to Kant's definition of the sublime's ability to inspire the feelings of both splendor and terror when acquainted with nature's vastness. Jefferson even equates viewing the pristine quality and vast quantity of untouched nature to the experience of the sublime in his account: "If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme. It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here!"³⁴ Jefferson's recount of experiencing nature for the first time testifies to relational concept of the sublime which is not only present in the characteristics of the landscape but is also simultaneously expressed through

³³ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William D. Peden (New York: W.W.Norton,1972), 18.

³⁴Jefferson, 23.

the reactions of its spectators. The bewilderment described by Jefferson stems from the ability for the sublime to evoke both a painfully terrifying experience as well as spectacular sensation of wonder.

Thomas Cole's initial experience traveling West strengthened his unwavering opinion that the wonders of the American landscape set the United States apart from Europe. Bierstadt's construction of the sublime within *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* exemplifies the contemporary cultural impulse to attach nature to a sense of national supremacy, distinguishing the United States from other nations. Bierstadt's depiction of the Wind River Mountain range of Wyoming intentionally emphasized the aesthetic of the sublime as a means of capitalizing upon its profound effects on national identity. Bierstadt intentionally publicized the painting's location, attributing the waterfall streams within the image to the Colorado River, and identifying the figures in the foreground as members of the Shoshone tribe. While he was aware of the American demand for factual information about the West, Bierstadt tactfully included specific names of locations to feign the validity of his landscape. Anderson argues that Bierstadt strove to simulate a sense of accuracy to meet the demand of the nation of truthful evidence of America's West while also depicting his paintings with idealization and sublimity that could inspire national pride. Therefore, Bierstadt's construction of the sublime within his compositions was argued by scholars to be a tactical visual argument that the American landscape was superior to that of other nations.

The composition of Bierstadt's painting also evidences one half the relational equation between the sublime subject and the sublime reaction. Bierstadt evokes the characteristics of the sublime in his landscape by exaggerating the vastness of the scene before the painting's viewers. Gradient colors emphasize the depth of his landscape as dark, earthy tones in the foreground

transition to lighter tones as they reach the middle of the composition, where the placid waterfront is delineated. The rays of sunlight that hit the rocky hills and the waterfall initially draw the viewers eye to this center point of the painting and emphasize the majestic quality of the natural landscape. The tranquil river beyond the peaceful tribe of Indians reflects the enormous mountain range seen in the background. In the case of the Indians, the use of the sublime evoked a paradoxical set of emotions from viewers by instilling terror based on the idea that Indians could be both a dangerous threat to the Anglo-Saxons as well as a sense of wonder in witnessing a peaceful group coexisting with the harmonious landscape. Because he chose to designate the horizon line towards the bottom half of the composition, Bierstadt's snow-capped Rocky Mountains spring up beyond the foreground emphasizing their grandeur and monumental size. Continuing the gradation of color from dark to light by using atmospheric perspective, Bierstadt's landscape evokes a sense of fantastical naturalism that visually immerses its viewers as they imagine experiencing the expansiveness and sublimity of an actual place. The clear foreground and misty background, emphasized by his use of perspective, demonstrates Bierstadt's awareness and use of photography as it echoes the effect of stereograph that envelops the viewer into a three-dimensional image similar to the experience of engaging with new phantasmagorical technologies such as stereoscopes and dioramas. Bierstadt additionally achieves the sublime by creating an immersive visual experience, instilling awe in his viewers by presenting a heroic landscape where the viewer could easily grasp "the full magnitude of the panoramic scene."³⁵ His enormous painting, similar to that of a panoramas, discussed further in the proceeding chapter, allows the viewer fully perceive the vastness of the landscape from a distance as well as the exceptional quantity of foreground detail in the figures, rocks, and foliage.

³⁵ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 94.

Thus, the landscape painting was “designed to draw viewers close to the surface of the canvas”³⁶ as if they had stepped into the scene. This combined with the incredible size of the image create a thrilling viewing experience for urban audiences as their valuation of nature intensified due to the unprecedented amounts of urban growth in densely populated Eastern cities. Bierstadt thus composes a scene that evokes the sublime through its ability to awaken strong emotions of awe and excitement in the audience. This fabrication of the West as a sublime experience in which one could partake in reflects landscape paintings’ dominant teleological, as opposed to aesthetic, purpose in promoting the progress of the nation and ensuring the profits of its creators. As a result, Bierstadt’s creation of this landscape capitalizes off the sublime vision of abundance to entice future settlers and investors.

Additionally, the painting’s idealistic depiction of the West draws on the sublime as it created a viewing spectacle that attracted larger audiences to pay to view Bierstadt’s painting. With limited information about the West’s unbounded nature, demand for visual records of Western geography reached its peak by the completion of Bierstadt’s painting in 1863. Early interpreters of Western art were eager to accept the available visual data created and compiled by artists who had accompanied expeditions as accurate sources of information. However, viewers were largely unaware that the visual records were created by artists whose interests paralleled the growing profits of the enterprise of colonization. Rather than an altruistic response to the public’s call for accurate data, artists tended to exploit the public’s reactions to their fabrication of landscape images by accepting commissions that would promote westward expansion and industrial prosperity as well as increase their own profits and visibility. *The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak* created a large excitement in the summer of 1864 from the public who had

³⁶ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 94.

believed Bierstadt's painting to be a seemingly accurate presentation of the written reports describing the West's alpine peaks, waterfalls, and exotic Indians. Bierstadt's composition was a conscious effort towards achieving greater success in his career as he was aware that more viewers would demand to see his work if they believed his images were accurate sources of information. Therefore, Bierstadt met the national needs of business barons and entrepreneurs who profited from expansion, rather than the public's demand for accuracy, by fabricating a sublime image of American prosperity. He used meticulous precision to depict the Indian scene in the foreground as well as the vegetation surrounding the entirety of the composition, crafting an illusion of accuracy in the painting of the Rocky Mountains. Nancy K Anderson argues that Bierstadt's seemingly faithful study of the landscape's details "encouraged viewers to believe in the 'truth' of the whole, for as one viewer wrote, Bierstadt's brush is too 'true and too powerful to be questioned.'"³⁷ Thus the realism of the details within *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* obscured its fictional creation and stirred the nation's viewers through his deception. Bierstadt's painting was uniquely both realistic and sublime, a powerful combination to entice more nationwide investment in the West and demand to view his painting.

As a result of Bierstadt's calculated employment of the sublime to advance profits, his paintings were neither accurate recordings of geology nor faithful portraits of landscapes, but rather a symbol of his own imagination for an idealized future. He also painted the sublime mountain range, rising up beyond the foreground of the Native American encampment, to establish America's prominence as separate from Europe's landscapes and artistic achievements. Bierstadt was conscious of the comparison he was making between the nature of the western

³⁷ Nancy K. Anderson, "Curious Historical Artistic Data: Art History and Western America," in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West* ed. the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Yale University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 9.

United States and Europe. Bierstadt sent letters for publication to capitalize upon the national pride felt by Americans when reading reports of the height of the Rockies. In a letter written to *The Crayon* on July 10, 1859, Bierstadt wrote, “The mountains... resemble the Bernese Alps very much, one of the finest ranges of mountains in Europe, if not in the world. They are of granite formation, the same as the Swiss mountains... present a scene which every lover of landscape would gaze upon with unqualified delight.”³⁸ The notion that the Rocky Mountains might have the potential to match the mountains of Europe gave audiences an even greater incentive to believe the picturesque beauty of Bierstadt’s landscapes as they were eager to establish a new national identity built upon the idea of greatness above all others. Once the nation became increasingly familiar with images of the West by the end of the 1860s, through photographs, engravings, and illustrations, some critics admonished Bierstadt’s false renditions of scenic nature, whereas others praised Bierstadt for pioneering landscapes seen as works of art rather than mere recordings of scientific images. One unnamed reviewer wrote, “The result is a scene which does not exist, and in fact hardly could exist, but yet is most imposing and fascinating. It is a perfect type of the American idea of what our country ought to be, if it is not so in reality.”³⁹ Bierstadt constructed an inventive scene which imagines the West as an impressive land incomparable to all others because of its sublime: its vastness as well as its pristine quality that was previously unimaginable to the vast majority Americans who looked upon these landscapes for the first time. While Europe’s land had already been traversed and proportionally allocated by landowners and imperialists, America’s untouched West provided a vision of bountiful opportunity that Europe could no longer match. The sumptuous landscape

³⁸Gordon Hendricks, and Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1974), 70.

³⁹Anderson, “Curious Historical Artistic Data: Art History and Western America,” 12.

filled with blooming vegetation matched with the impressiveness of the towering mountain ranges well beyond the foreground glorifies America's new territorial acquisitions and intensified the prophetic vision of future national progress. The use of the sublime allowed *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* to become an epic landscape, similar to the grandeur within a history painting, because of its ability to celebrate the American nation. However, whereas history paintings were meant to celebrate the past, landscape paintings presented a heroic representation of the hope for future economic opportunity. As a result, Americans were eager to embrace landscapes that symbolized a New World of the West dominated by economic productivity, rather than the Old World dominated by the prevailing culture of Europe's classical past. During the Civil War in particular, audiences searched for a genre that would reassure the longevity of the United States regardless of the issue of slavery. Bierstadt's inclusion of the sublime in his landscapes inspired Americans to see their advantageous geographical position in the vastness of western territories and the prospect of imperial expansion as a single nation. Thus, his landscapes became a representation of the historical present moment, one in which Americans were eager to look to the future as they hoped the abundance of nature could lead to economic prosperity and the progress of a newly united nation.

III. Manifest Destiny

Bierstadt's realization of his paintings' ability to inspire American nationalism during the Civil War incentivized him to consciously compose images of the West that could help unite the country towards a single goal. However, his intention to represent the nation, as what writer Henry T. Tuckerman suggests, "a new, unsullied America, reborn and reunited" after the Civil War, most directly concerned Bierstadt's motivations to increase his profits and the demand to

see more of his work as he understood that both patrons and audiences of this period would value this nationalistic rendering of American landscapes more than any other genre. This national identity that Bierstadt hoped to inspire was one that hinged on the ideology of Manifest Destiny, a phrase devised by newspaper editor, John O'Sullivan, in 1845 to describe the popular 19th century belief that the United States' ability to expand westward was both justified and inevitable. Nancy Siegel notes, "landscape painting was at least a complicit component of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, reinforcing a sense that the land was largely unoccupied, or at least, underutilized, and that the nation must fulfill its mission in settling West."⁴⁰ Thus, landscapes subtly argued for the nation's fated imperial expansion by depicting America's inheritance of "vacant" landscapes through a lens of economic disinterest which masked the collusive relationship between patrons and artists whose economic incentives aligned with the promotion of Manifest Destiny. By exaggerating the beauty of the western wilderness and the vast amounts of untouched land in which the Native American tribe in the foreground appear to occupy, Bierstadt's *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* created a new national landscape that represented what critics interpreted as "a new, unsullied America, reborn and reunited."⁴¹ As a result, its image received popular acclaim as it embodied the contemporary American belief that the West could offer Americans national growth and pride. Bierstadt also added a nationalist message into the name of his work by labeling the mountain range "Lander's Peak." Bierstadt initially titled the piece *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* in 1863 to commemorate the death of Frederick W. Lander. After leading the 1859 survey that Bierstadt had joined, Lander passed in 1862 after a successful military career as a general in the Union army.⁴² Rather than

⁴⁰ Nancy Siegel, *The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting* (Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 194.

⁴¹ Matthew Baigell, *Albert Bierstadt* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1981), 11.

⁴² Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 76.

showcasing an accurate depiction of the Rocky Mountains, Bierstadt's purpose for identifying the specific location of the fictionally constructed image pertained to his drive for connecting the scene of nature to the nation's identity during the time of the Civil War. By naming the picturesque landscape scene after a martyred union war hero, the landscape assumed a national connotation, helping to unite the nation in the act of expanding west. By correlating the sublimity of the Rocky Mountains to the Nation's war hero, Anderson has argued that Bierstadt created a distinctly American scene and linked the mountains, and the West, to a nationalistic sense of ownership. This possessiveness felt by Americans became the argument for the economic development and industrialization of the West by wealthy business tycoons. Bierstadt's cunning intuition that these separate markets, both the industrial and artistic, could mutually benefit each other incentivized him to cultivate an aesthetic emblem of Manifest Destiny. Acting out of self-interest, Bierstadt's subtle promotion of westward expansion in *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* was a conscious scheme to promote his own business of selling paintings.

Bierstadt's promotion of Manifest Destiny extended further to his depiction of the Native American encampment delineated in the foreground of his painting. In his landscape, he depicts the Shoshone tribe with their wild and primitive stereotype, emphasizing the notion that their culture distinctly belonging to the past. The Indian camp in the foreground showcases the Native American tribe unaware of the eavesdropping audience. Native Americans engage in seemingly unrelated, peaceful activities such as riding on horseback, playing with dogs, and enjoying each other's company near their temporary tepees. This simplicity of life depicted in the foreground consciously evokes a sense of nostalgia for a previous age in which humans peacefully coexisted with landscape. Their non-threatening representation as people living on the plains living in, as

the art magazine *The New Path* described in 1864, “pristine simplicity, hunting, fishing, and worshipping,” allows them to become accessories to the landscape itself.⁴³ Albert Bierstadt wrote in a letter to *The Crayon* on July 10, 1859 that Native American were “appropriate adjuncts to the scenery” and attributed their worthiness of being recorded to their enduring manners and customs which “are still as they are hundreds of years later.”⁴⁴ Baigell notes that the assumption that “Indians lived harmoniously in a state of nature”⁴⁵ is attributed to Americans’ “white washing” of Indigenous history and the creation of the American myth that romanticizes the American Indian as “a wild aborigine... the dignified Noble Savage, brave and honest.”⁴⁶ Bierstadt depicts Native Americans as unindividualized people and a supplemental addition to the landscape itself. The portrayal of Indians as peacefully coexisting on the land became visual evidence for their projected disappearance and their temporary position as occupants of the West. The lack of permanency with which they were depicted makes use of the racist ideology of the dying race, the contemporary belief that Indigenous tribes would eventually die off and disappear from existence in the face of a superior white settlement, and allowed Americans to justify both their right and ease in eradicating them from the landscape without a trace. While Americans were eager to view images of their nation’s Other, during these years Native Americans, rather than quickly dying off and disappearing, were systematically driven from their lands by the American government. Bierstadt’s image of the Native American depicted the destined vacancy of the West and symbolized its productive potential to further intensify the link between nature’s abundance and the economic path to America’s burgeoning future.

⁴³ Baigell, 1.

⁴⁴ *The Crayon* 6 (September 1859): 287.

⁴⁵ Albert Bierstadt, “Albert Bierstadt to Crayon,” July 10, 1859, *The Crayon*, vol. 6 (Sept. 1859), 287.

⁴⁶ Baigell, 10.

These exploitations of the image of American Indians further intensified contemporary imaginations of the West and solidified the idea that, despite their presence, this land was largely untouched or would soon be vacant. Bierstadt's letter to *The Crayon* in 1859 claims, "Now is the time to paint them for they are rapidly passing away and soon will be known only in history"⁴⁷ Although unaware of his blatant racism and stereotyping of Native American culture, his depiction of them within his landscape tactfully cultivated the visual identity of Manifest Destiny by creating a visual argument that the expansion of the United States was both justified and advantageous. Bierstadt's awareness of his capacity to affect massive numbers of viewers was not unfounded as he widely distributed his work through magazine and newspaper publications. A review in Harper's Weekly in 1864 discusses their opinion of Bierstadt's painting: "It is purely an American scene, and from the faithful and elaborate delineation of the American village, a form of life now rapidly disappearing from the earth, may be called a historical landscape."⁴⁸ This reaction was due to the Shoshone tribe's depiction as temporary occupants to the land, living in lightly constructed tepees and engaging in benign activities that were gentle on the lands they inhabited. Bierstadt's image thus insinuated that the unspoiled nature of the West was reserved for America's future glory. Because Bierstadt knew that obtaining public praise from his images correlated with his potential to increase demand and profits, his depiction of American Indians as people of the past successfully attempted to embody the contemporary American belief that the West was an open territory for American enterprise to grow nationally and patriotically.

⁴⁷ Hendricks, 73.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 75.

IV. The Business of Printmaking

The content and composition of Bierstadt's painting, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, received impressive popular acclaim and launched his career as one of the most prominent landscape artists in the United States. Capitalizing upon the painting's success, Bierstadt utilized both technological advancements in print reproduction and staging tactics to meet public demand for increased viewership and consumption of his painting. Bierstadt's initial marketing strategy involved not only sending the painting on tour around the United States and Europe, but also offering promotional flyers and a subscription box for people to sign up to receive engravings. Both Bierstadt and his dealer-publisher, Emil Steiz, were aware of the promotional value of reprinting his painting on more easily distributable and affordable mediums than his originals for the emerging middle-class. Sweeney notes that by the 1860s, opportunities expanded for normal people to view paintings at public exhibitions while also furthering the commodification of art: "the emergence of a class of self-made men who desired art for its cultural prestige, and a middle class with leisure to visit art exhibitions and the discretionary funds to acquire reproductions was another result of the strengthening of the field of cultural production (Sweeney 141). Aware of the novelty of stereographs, Bierstadt also updated newspapers of the painting's publication and reprinting process, which began with the use of engravings.

However, because the intrinsic delay of creating engravings after their initial order, the engraving of *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* took about two years to complete. In the meantime, Bierstadt developed alternative promotional strategies for securing public attention. Bierstadt, rather than relying on printmakers, attempted to showcase his painting as "a theatrical presentation... by stimulating imagination and satisfying curiosity."⁴⁹ As previously noted, the

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 75.

picture's enormous size and meticulous detail was comparable to a stereograph in its envelopment of the viewer within a sublime mountain scene. However, the theatricality of his presentation more closely resembled the panoramas - large circular painting that aimed to give viewers the experience of being physically present in the scene being depicted - that were popularized in Europe in the 1840s before reaching America by mid-century. These fantastical experiences of virtual reality became widely popular as they often vividly depicted both the technological growth as well as the feeling of traveling to the West. Bierstadt drew inspiration from panoramas as theatrical presentations, by creating both a six by ten foot painting as well as an elaborate theatrical scene in front that, as Anderson argues, "mimicked the experience of a western venture."⁵⁰ When showcasing *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* at the Metropolitan Fair in New York in 1864, Anderson notes that he "staged a tableau vivant before a painted backdrop in the nearby Indian Department, hiring Ondawagawa Indians to impersonate the Shoshone represented in his picture."⁵¹ By staging such a viewing experience, Bierstadt attempts to create a spectacle worthy of attention and praise. The combination of his visually immersive composition as well as his showmanship abilities created a large stir among audiences and testifies to Bierstadt's aptitude for creating a market for his work based off of the exploitation of Native Americans and the demand for more visual information about the West.

The ability to secure public support from his "great painting" spectacles prompted many commissions of paintings that launched his career. For instance, after the sale of *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* James McHenry in 1865, Thomas William Kennard commissioned a painting titled *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (Figure 3) which toured alongside *The*

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 89.

⁵¹ Linda S. Ferber, "The History of Reputation" in *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, ed. Nancy K. Anderson (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 25.

Rocky Mountains. Although both were already privately owned, Bierstadt paired these two sublime landscape paintings on tour for promotional purposes, exhibiting them at both a London gallery owned by their chromolithographer, Thomas Mclean, and the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris.⁵² However his ability to distribute his painting extended much farther than the painting's multiple exhibitions across Europe. In the US, Bierstadt's work first appeared in mass media, soon after the Lander expedition, in an article of Harper's Weekly. Within the article, Bierstadt published three wood engravings of sketches he made during his trip.⁵³ Bierstadt's business tact made him increasingly aware that the content and composition of his paintings could only go so far in fueling profits and visibility, whereas the ability to mass-print his landscapes would offer him both the most visibility and profits. As a result, Bierstadt began ordering engravings after his most successful paintings, such as *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. He had hired both James Smilie, known as America's first landscape engraver, to complete the engraving. Additionally, Bierstadt's artistic career became more and more business-minded when his brother, Edward Bierstadt, acted as both agent and publisher of Bierstadt's prints. While Bierstadt traveled in Europe between 1867 and 1869, Edward not only arranged exhibitions of his pictures, but also the publication of prints, entering his prints for copyright claims in 1866.⁵⁴ By copyrighting the image, Bierstadt made sure that others seeking to profit off his work could not reproduce or make money from his image. Additionally, Bierstadt sold copyright claims of less successful paintings to publishers as he realized that he could obtain higher profits from the initial sale, rather than claiming the work for himself. The value of having both an agent, publisher, and a copyright protection as an artist in the 19th century demonstrates

⁵² Helena E. Wright, "Bierstadt and the Business of Printmaking," in *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, ed. Nancy K. Anderson (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 273.

⁵³ Wright, 273.

⁵⁴ Wright, 273.

the growing commodification of art as well as Bierstadt's business incentive to secure profits by either declaring or selling the ownership of his work.

The ability to reproduce his paintings was made possible by the series of technological innovations in photography and color printing. As chromolithography and engravings developed into a lucrative market for reproducing art, the invention of photography allowed images to easily transfer to an engraving plate or a lithographic stone for printing in permanent ink.⁵⁵ Sending his paintings to be engraved and chromolithographed, Bierstadt became one of the first American artists to capitalize off these technological advancements. Throughout his career, Bierstadt had utilized a number of different printmaking methods such as wood engraving, steel engraving, chromolithography, and newer photomechanical advancements of collotype, photengraving, and photogravure. Chromolithographs received especial attention for resembling original paintings by accurately reprinting color and carvings that mimicked the texture of the original canvas. Bierstadt also began to send his paintings to Berlin to be chromolithographed for both a European and American market. By the 1880s, critics eventually began to reject the exactness of chromolithography, believing it to detract from the attention of the original work through its cheap reproduction and easy distribution. Nevertheless, by creating reproductive prints of his most famous paintings, Bierstadt helped to transform American lithographic and reprinting businesses from solely producing commercial images to the production of artistic prints of original paintings. By employing these reproductive mechanisms to promote his paintings, Bierstadt became the first artist of his generation to realize the potential of reproductions and apply them to expand both viewership and profits. Anderson argues, "Periodicals aimed at the growing market of middle-class homes began to include steel

⁵⁵ Wright, 267.

engravings by the late 1830s. These periodicals brought art reproductions into many homes around the country at a time when few opportunities existed to see original paintings firsthand.”⁵⁶ Thus, as American middle-class markets expanded to view and consume affordable images of the West, Bierstadt’s ingeniously began providing diverse sources of media that allowed his work to distribute among wider audiences, increasing the possible opportunities to further his influence and reputation as an artist. Wright also notes that, “While only one wealthy individual could purchase a canvas, multiple copies through printmaking allowed the public to not only view the painting, but buy the painting as well”⁵⁷ Instead of selling a single work of art to one affluent collector, Bierstadt took advantage of print reproduction that expanded patronage and drew from his initial interest in visual technologies, such as stereoscopes and panoramas, that had transformed his paintings into a viewing spectacle. As a result, Bierstadt set the precedent for intensifying the commodification of art as the production fine-art quickly became a profit-oriented business as much as an aesthetic endeavor.

V. Conclusion

Albert Bierstadt’s career and his painting, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak*, not only affected the identity of the nation but also intensified the link between cultural influence and economic profit that was historically present with the fine-art market. On one hand, the composition of his painting showcases an overt awareness of both the future economic and cultural possibilities of the untouched natural landscape. The use of the sublime distinguished America’s Rocky Mountains from the grandeur of Europe as it emphasizes the opportunity for America’s productive economic future. Additionally, the depiction of the abundance of pristine

⁵⁶ Wright, 273.

⁵⁷ Wright, 269.

nature and Native Americans as a dying race helped establish the visual identity of Manifest Destiny and justified the westward expansion of the United States. As industrialization and technological advancements increased the nation's wealth, American culture became increasingly associated with economic prosperity. Thus, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* transformed into an emblem of a new emerging national culture superior to the grandeur of Europe's classical past as it boasted the future opportunity to inhabit, produce, and prosper economically from America's West. On the other hand, Bierstadt's painting also procured astounding influence on the American nation because of Bierstadt's promotional methods that reproduced and distributed his painting to wider audiences, increasing profits by selling his prints as well as transforming the method of marketing and showcasing a single work. Bierstadt showcases how the production of art became a business as he networked with patrons, dealers, publishers, engravers, and lithographers to exhibit his work, print it in numerous formats and among mass media, and profit off the sale of his prints. Thus, Bierstadt, incentivized to increase his own profits and viewership of his paintings to further his career as an artist, consciously created a lasting impact on the nation through fabricating a powerful symbol of the contemporary nation and distributing his work to an unprecedented number of people. As a result, Albert Bierstadt cemented the inseparable bond between the cultural impacts of the production of fine art and the economic incentives driving the lucrative art market.

Chapter 3: Landscape Images and their Context in the Emerging American Economy

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss how macroeconomic forces, specifically political, economic, and social, influenced the production, demand, and distribution of landscape images and the public's perception of America's claim to these seemingly unoccupied territories. As discussed in the previous chapter, Bierstadt, incentivized by his ability to reach larger audiences, employed reproductive printing techniques to enhance the distribution of landscape images across the nation. As an enterprising artist who was successful in marketing paintings and distributing reproductions, Bierstadt received higher profits from his promotional techniques and growing audience. However, corporate industries, government commissioners, and even preservationists all had specific aims for financing the production of landscape paintings. Entrepreneurial artists worked alongside these vested interests, each with individual stakes in the production of landscape paintings. There are two important arguments that must be contended regarding landscape images and their convergence with the economic markets of 19th century America, one being that landscape images continually were used to further the profits of their patrons. However, between the mid- to late 19th century, landscapes transformed from being used as a means of asserting the relative vacancy of Western territories to easing American's worries about the durability of natural wonders in the face of human expansion and industrial development. While landscape images inherently offer a projection of the nation's changing landscape, paintings shift from rendering a romanticized view of the past to illustrating how such nostalgia related to the potential economic productivity of the lands they depict.

The second important point argues that it was the reproductions of artist's visual images of the West, rather than the paintings themselves, that allowed landscape paintings to "circulate

as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focused for the formation of identity.”⁵⁸ As noted earlier, Mitchell’s definition of a landscape may be extended to the image of American nature depicted by 19th century landscape artists as the depiction of western territories was increasingly utilized by businessmen to exchange national ideas throughout the nation and, consequently, make a profit from their solidification of the American nationalism. While landscape paintings’ original compositions reinforced the contemporary visual identity of Manifest Destiny and nostalgia for unspoiled landscapes, the prints that were published in guidebooks, magazines, and advertisements allowed a significant proportion of the population to view and, thus, be influenced by them. As reproductive prints began circulating throughout the public, making the images of artists’ original paintings more accessible, collective imaginations of America’s wilderness, as well as ambitions for future national prosperity, developed the minds of Americans, fulfilling landscape paintings’ potential to influence public discourse, perception, and identity. As such, the production of nationalism and Manifest Destiny as ideological incentives for westward expansion was directly related to the distributed quality—that is, the characteristics of an object that make it easily shared and dealt out—of landscape images because of the large numbers who developed a collective vision for future change in the American landscape.

The rapid technological and social change occurring in the 19th century catalyzed the growing popularity and demand for landscape genres. By the 1850s, the United States had begun the process of industrialization, economic growth, and westward expansion. New reproductive technologies allowed paintings to easily distribute among a growing number of viewers through reproductive prints, illustrated publications, and costly government guidebooks of American

⁵⁸ Mitchell, 2.

landscapes, incentivizing the growing middle class to further national progress and westward migration. Through the establishment of a feedback loop, economic growth increased the distributional quality of promotional images, which then increased the demand for more images, raised the profits of industries, and finally resulted in more gains in the American economy as well as more production of landscape images. This circular relationship between economic growth, the production of landscape paintings, and their influence on public perception and demand can be broken up in a series of steps. Initially, economic development from emerging markets and factory systems allowed the wages and leisurely hours of working people to rise. Increased growth in the economy incentivized the public to visit and resettle in the new territories of the United States with the expansion of incomes and welfare. As transportation routes emerged through the invention of steamboats and railroads, these new territories became more accessible to working people. Additionally, the increased distribution of landscape paintings, which consciously edited, romanticized, and embellished the perceptions of America's West, prompted migration and the booming tourist industry to expand even further as they fueled audience's curiosity for these elaborately unveiled natural environments. Not only did artists, such as Bierstadt, recognize this lucrative opportunity to distribute their work, but also corporate and commercial business owners realized the financial incentive to commission landscapes that would expand and promote their industries. Conversely, government reports, published and financed by congress, also became a major source of visual information about new territorial regions for the American population. These images were continually fed to American audiences to evoke a romanticized idea of the frontier and of nature's ability to thrive despite humans' mechanical intervention.

II. Government Reproductions

The most widely distributed images of the west in the mid 19th century came from reproductions made for the government's expedition reports, rather than private patrons and preservationists seeking to profit. Starting in 1843, artists were involved in the initial efforts to create visual data and geographical records while accompanying government led expeditions.⁵⁹ Artists involved in making illustrations for government reports encountered intermediaries in the production and distribution process as well. For instance, artists' images greatly relied on the writer who was employed to write their accompanying text. As these texts had the ability to shape the public's understanding and reception of an image, the combination of artist and writer powerfully "introduced Americans to the physical appearance of the Far West and provided them with a common visual vocabulary for understanding the importance of the West in national life."⁶⁰ Even in terms of profits, although individual paintings generally sold for significantly larger prices, some artists were also able to make similar amounts of money "selling reproductive rights to his pictures as by selling the images themselves."⁶¹ By their selling copyright claims to a painting, artists actively allowed for the use of intermediaries in print-making and publishing industries to further their profits and expand their audience. While those involved in the process of creating government reports, such as publishers, engravers, and lithographers, reproduced original works of art more faithfully than commercial printing industries, many of these factors of production had political agendas that reflected their versions. This can be exemplified in an engraving made after a watercolor painting, *View of the Chasm*, by Samuel Seymour, one of the first artists to

⁵⁹ Martha A. Sandweiss, "The Public Life of Western Art," in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*, ed. the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and the Yale University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 121.

⁶⁰ Sandweiss, 133.

⁶¹ Sandweiss, 131.

accompany expeditions to the West. The engraver's image altered Seymour's scene of a possible friendly encounter between Indian and white hunter by removing all human presence from the landscape. In doing so, the engraver emphasizes the natural landscape's sublime quality and creates the impression of a vacant landscape awaiting white's conquest.⁶² Consequently, the collaborative nature of print making, rather than the process of painting by a single artist, significantly impacted the reception of these images that were published by the federal government and seen amongst Americans.

While landscape paintings revealed the hopes and concerns of a single artist, prints reflected "the various interests of field artists, expeditions leaders, and craftspeople who translated original works of art into easily reproduced printed images."⁶³ However, the ability to shape public reception stemmed most directly from the massive amount of reprinting made from over seven hundred different landscape illustrations made from eyewitness views.⁶⁴ The government reports made within this time period constituted twelve full volumes ranging in size and issuing multiple editions some of which printed more than 53,000 copies.⁶⁵ Altogether, the number of western images that were printed and published "can be estimated at 6,660,000 copies, or roughly one for every five Americans."⁶⁶ The ability to produce this astonishing number of prints for public view was made possible through the extraordinarily large amount government patronage in the mid-19th century. Congress's federal subsidy for the arts compromised "between a quarter and a third of the federal budget... a ratio unmatched since in American History."⁶⁷ Congress not only financed the actual expeditions, but also published

⁶² Sandweiss, 121.

⁶³ Sandweiss, 123.

⁶⁴ Sandweiss, 121.

⁶⁵ Sandweiss, 119.

⁶⁶ Sandweiss, 120.

⁶⁷ Sandweiss, 120.

costly and elaborate illustrated reports, evidencing the government's awareness of the immense impact that landscape images had on the American public. Consequently, the emerging art market in the 19th century was both a result of artist entrepreneurs and corporate business owners endeavoring to jointly profit, as well as the government's intention to expose Americans to the West, an effort to influence westward expansion and the identity of the nation. The scale of Congress's publications as well as twelve volume series were largely focused on the Pacific Railroad, which was intended to document the studies that were charged with finding "the most practical way of linking the East by rail to the quickly growing settlements of the West."⁶⁸ This intention made by Congress to link the railroad to national expansion was not only a practical means of increasing migration and tourism, but also evidence of their recognition that migration meant further profits for industrial and commercial industries. In other words, the visual promotion of the railroad by the government became of a method of furthering the national economy, rather than just private profits of corporate business barons. Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship in which artists, barons of business, and government officials furthered one another's profits and promoted their goals for themselves and for their nation.

I. The Preservation Movement

While landscapes marketed the expansion of both the nation and the industrial firms that sought to exploit new American territories for profit, they also argued for the preservation of America's scenic wonders. However, even preservationists understood that there was an economic gain in setting aside land for recreational or conservational purposes. For instance, the emergence of natural parks and reservations throughout the United States actually boosted profits

⁶⁸ Sandweiss, 130.

of commentary tourist industries, raised relative property value, and promoted development opportunities for businesses outside the reservations. Preservationists cooperated with industrial tycoons who sought to advance seemingly oppositional agendas, as both understood their complementary nature in promoting commercial profits as well as conserving untouched territories. Artists were thus commissioned to produce landscape images not only for the benefit of corporations and businesses who sought to develop upon natural landscape and to encourage the public to follow, but also for the support of conservation movements of the time. As a result, many artists, such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, and Winslow Homer, not only painted landscapes that developed commercial and tourist industries, but also projected their own anxieties about the preservation of nature as well. The internal conflict of many artists about human resettlements onto unspoiled natural regions demonstrates their consciousness of, as Gail S. Davidson defines it, “the paradox between human settlement and scenic preservation.”⁶⁹ Beyond Davidson’s claim, artists began to perceive the economic opportunity in imploring audiences to rethink the destruction of wilderness. Their landscapes, which often embodied a romanticized vision of the peaceful coexistence between nature and economic development, not only eased the public’s, as well as their own, anxieties about the foreboding future of the western nature, but also aligned with the industrial profit agendas of wealthy patrons. Davidson argues, artists were seen as entitled to both interpret and evaluate the landscape as well as teach Americans how to appreciate it. As such, “it was the artist’s job to focus the untrained eye on the moral lesson to be drawn from the landscape.”⁷⁰ The public’s perceptions of landscape paintings thus drew from artists’ perceived moral obligation to their landscape subjects, rather than from

⁶⁹ Gail S. Davidson, “Landscape Icons, Tourism, and Land Development in the Northeast,” in *Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape*, 1st ed. (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 36.

⁷⁰ Davidson, 37.

their financial incentives. Because of their righteous reputations, artists' images were successfully able to influence public opinion to help further the conservation movement and endorse the value of nature's preservation, even while they too participated in the promotion of rapid industrialization and migration.

Landscape artists were also keenly aware of their impact on the conservation movement as they depicted natural wonders that became increasingly overrun by tourism. The best example of an artist's role concerning the preservation movement can be seen at Niagara Falls, which quickly transformed "from a sublime experience of natural beauty to an object of commerce parceled out and consumed by acquisitive visitors, whose numbers reached close to one million annually by 1900."⁷¹ As a result of the shift from a natural wonder to a consumer-run tourist destination, Frederic Church's "great picture" titled, *Niagara*, (Figure 4) subsequently became another major symbol of America by the time of its completion in 1857. The painting was distributed widely as it was both displayed in public exhibitions and reproduced through chromolithographs and engravings, allowing it to be received by thousands of viewers. The image itself provided a powerful endorsement for the sublime quality of the landscape shaped by the dramatic perspective that Church utilized. Creating a panoramic view of the eleven-by-eighteen-inch canvas, Church positions the viewer right behind the waterfall and level to the cataract itself, creating the illusion that the viewer, rather than on steady ground, is floating above the waterfall's immense drop. The image offered an unmediated encounter with the sublime experience of Niagara by providing this disorienting sensation of being positioned right along the water's edge. By constructing this angle, Church consciously excludes the thousands of tourists visiting the site, romanticizing the view of the cataract and intensifying the viewer's

⁷¹ Davidson, 8.

relationship with the physical power of the landscape. At the time of its creation, Church, like Bierstadt, was aware of his ability to promote Niagara's real estate and the developing hotel industry. As a result, Church cleverly allowed his sketches to be viewed by the public in his studio in the Tenth Street Studio building in December 1856 to accelerate press coverage and attract potential buyers willing to pay higher prices.⁷² Once his painting was completed, Church and his dealer allowed the picture to tour commercial galleries and eventually sold the painting along with its publication rights directly to New York dealers who also reproduced chromolithographs for sale of the painting. Church's success was contingent on his ability to recognize the demand for an image that embodied an unmediated encounter with nature during a time where arguments of preservation persisted. Church's marketing techniques of his painting and the mass distribution of its reproductions also allowed for the landscape's magnificent view to be witnessed by a significant proportion of the American population. Increased dissemination of Church's images created a powerful collective visual experience for American audiences who felt that the image gave them a participatory role in reception of an image so closely linked to national agendas.

By 1881, Niagara's image as a national icon of progress was spoiled by the amount of tourist buildings and factories that developed to profit from public demand to visit the site. This allowed the preservation movement to take shape by 1883, when conservationists argued that a public park would serve in everyone's best interests: "For the working classes... the reservation would offer a health-giving oasis; for business, it would bring visitors back to Niagara and thus boost tourism earnings; and for industry it would raise property values and still allow the use of energy from the river and development of areas outside the reservation."⁷³ As a result,

⁷² Davidson, 16.

⁷³ Davidson, 21.

conservation movements gained enough momentum by their ability to parallel industrial and commercial growth elsewhere. Government's policies to create reservations also allowed for industries to accommodate visitors without destroying natural landscapes. Artists like Bierstadt, Homer, and Church promoted the coexistence between nature and tourist industries by depicting the sublime quality of America's untouched landscapes through developing an unmediated visual encounter with nature, which motivated viewers to travel west to experience the visceral reactions caused by the sublime. Artists, exploring new profit venues and further public attention, began promoting the benefit of Americans' peaceful coexistence on these landscapes in the form of adventurous outdoor activities and tourist destinations as they realized the alluring paradox between conservation and development. These illustrations by landscape artists furthered both their picture-making business, the profits of industries, and, conversely, the preservationist movement.

III. The Tourism Industry

Images produced by landscape painters during the 19th century conveyed the sublime spectacle of nature on paper and canvas, inspiring vacationers and travelers to travel to these previously untouched landscapes. Between 1840 and 1896, over 190,000 miles of new rail lines emerged throughout the US, helping to stimulate tourism by also increasing the accessibility of these natural destinations.⁷⁴ The combination of increased leisure, income, and accessibility to picturesque destinations stimulated a nation-wide obsession with health, sports, and spending time outdoors in the year after the civil war. Media outlets and popular press played a large role in the shaping of this national theme during the 1860s and 1870s, enumerating the benefits of

⁷⁴ Davidson, 72.

tourism, promoting the accessibility of camping, and introducing new sports such as tennis, bicycling, and golf.⁷⁵ In 1891, *The Century Magazine* published an essay by Edward Hungerford who openly promoted tourism not only as means of growing national spirit for vacationers, but also providing revenue to major industries and supporting the national economy.⁷⁶ As a result, artists and writers played an active role in both the increased popularity of popular outdoor pastimes as well as the development of the tourist industry.

Davidson has elucidated how artists played a direct role in tourist industry not only by creating the images that fed viewer's excitement to travel to these destinations, but also by being the first to travel to these destinations themselves. She described a progression of phases in which the exploring artists lodged with locals who created boarding services to them. Eventually, boarding homes became rustic hotels filled with wealthy and cultured visitors, which later became engulfed by vacationers of all classes once traveling became more accessible. The development process outlined by Davidson exemplifies the direct influence that artists, seeking landscapes to depict, had on the tourist industry through prompting the development of hotels in the West as well as their indirect influence as they catalyzed the demand to travel through their images. This thesis draws from Davidson's essay, "Landscape Icons, Tourism, and Land Development in the Northeast", to enumerate the context of the growing demand for landscape paintings by emerging industries, as well as their effect on promoting and expanding their businesses, in the 19th century. Upon this analysis, it can be argued that artists began to realize their own ability to profit by indirectly endorsing and advertising hotels, boarding homes, and resorts as well as the pleasures of the wilderness that surrounded these profiting industries.

Davidson's analysis describes how the interaction of artists and business entrepreneurs became a

⁷⁵ Davidson, 65.

⁷⁶ Davidson, 68.

large factor in the development of tourism as mass circulation of their images created a visual incentive for the increased demand to visit the disseminated landscape scenes. Popular hotels, such as the Mountain House and the Laurel House within the Catskills, offered literary accounts accompanied by visual images to be published in newspapers, magazines, literary annuals, and travel books, inducing the demand for more travelers. Thomas Cole was one of the first to depict tourism in natural landscapes to promote the hotel industry. His 1831 painting of the Mountain House was quickly converted into one of the most popular engravings of the hotel, becoming widely purchased and distributed as tourist souvenir by visitors during the mid- 19th century.⁷⁷ Following in Cole's footsteps, other artists, such as William Henry Bartlett, continued to produce images depicting the experience of hotels to intensify the eagerness of future visitors. Bartlett's 1840 engraving, *View from the Mountain House, on the Catskills*, (Figure 5) depicted the classicized architectural hotel and its visitors standing on the edge of a cliff looking at the expansive view. Bartlett's image offered a new depiction of the sublime, one in which people became directly involved in the wondrous and potentially dangerous experience of nature, purposely utilized to entice viewers to the hotel. While some landscape artists, like Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Church, and Thomas Moran, preferred to depict untouched and pristine scenes of America's wilderness to emphasize its potential, many artists commissioned by the hotel and tourist industries preferred images that showcased tourists partaking in recreational activities in the wilderness.

The valuation of landscapes and outdoors activities during the second half of the 19th century coincides with the rapid industrial development occurring after the Civil War that tarnished America's previously unsullied landscapes and left city-dwellers craving more

⁷⁷ Davidson, 24.

experiences with nature. Artists such as Albert Bierstadt and Winslow Homer realized the increased valuation of landscapes by the public as well as the inability of the nation to continue taking pride in landscapes that had been already tainted by humans' footprint. As American recognized the abundance of the nation's untouched territories, which helped establish a Nationalist identity, within a few years, these lands were increasingly traversed as more people began to migrate and develop on top of them, tainting the initial image of abundance that had inspired nationalism in the first place. As artists turned to new ways of elevating landscapes despite their continual development, their subsequent efforts in helped to establish a new national identity, which envisioned benign human activity in harmony with nature's preservation, rather than an identity centered around Nature's previous abundance. Davidson argues that artists sought "to improve nature with human activity, purpose, individuality, and democratic values."⁷⁸ Davidson's assertion evidences how artists became incentivized to change the character of their landscapes to serve a transforming vision of American nationalism because it allowed them to continue profiting of their production of landscapes and maintain their increased quantities of commissions.

Homer's production of landscapes, often for magazine journals, such as *Harper's Weekly*, consciously included humans in the depiction of nature as a means of establishing a new identity as well as furthering the industries of his commissioners. Homer was conscious of his ability to represent the human experience within wilderness as a method of providing inspiration to his viewers. Rather than viewing nature as a pristine landscape that was too virtuous for human development, Homer perceived nature as a positive place where humans inhabited and interacted with the landscape. Nicolai Civosky, a landscape artist and one of Homer's contemporaries,

⁷⁸ Davidson, 68.

commented on Homer's addition of human figures within his paintings as tourist destinations became more accessible:

The landscape Homer experienced and the one he depicted, unlike the unpopulated wilderness landscape that once had served the idealized version of American nationality, was intensely populated and socialized... It was also a thoroughly democratized landscape, one accessible no longer to privileged admission and private communion but one... easily available to large numbers of visitors of a wide social variety.⁷⁹

Homer chose to depict landscape scenes as he saw them positively interacting with visitors, rather than idealizing the myth of untouched nature for the purposes of inspiring manifest destiny. Instead, Homer's depictions of men working, children playing, and women recreating outdoors offers a new depiction of nature's ability to emblemize the nation as a productive landscape representative of the people. As a result, Homer spent much of his career as both a painter and illustrator providing images of fashionably dressed men and women partaking in the wonders of nature to capture the imaginations of the readers of the periodicals, guidebooks, and journals that reprinted his images. Homer, like Bierstadt, was aware that allowing his images to be reproduced as engravings for mass circulation would not only increase the profits of tourism and hotel industries, but would also function as advertisements for his own paintings, providing a dual incentive for continuing to create illustrations for the profits of business owners.

Hotel entrepreneurs, also aware of the power that landscape images had in influencing popular demand, repeatedly employed and offered exclusive benefits to artists who could promote their business through art. For instance, Samuel Thompson, who ran a grand hotel established in 1872 named Thompson's Tavern located in New Hampshire, sought out artists to stay at his inn for incredibly low discount prices (\$3.50 per week rather than \$2.50 per day) with additional amenities so that they would create sketches of the tourist experience.⁸⁰ Thompson's

⁷⁹ Davidson, 48.

⁸⁰ Davidson, 41.

solicitation of artists exemplifies hotel operators' increased awareness of how collaboration with artists could advance their individual goals and further develop the tourism industry. In the 1850s, popular media outlets, such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Appleton's, Every Saturday*, and *Scribner's Monthly* (also known as *The Century*), also commissioned designs for wood engravings and illustrations as they too understood the increased demand from the American public to provide a steady stream of these images. For instance, Homer was employed by magazines and newspapers, rather than hotel owners, to create illustrations that would appeal to fashionable female readers. As a result, Homer created images for *Harper's Weekly* of women who were both active and independent as they engage in outdoor activities like hiking or horseback riding. These images were intended to capture the imaginations of women readers and inspire them to join others who were already partaking in the benefits of America's nature. Rather than capturing the sublime quality of uninhabited lands and enticing viewers to be the first to travel there, the images employed for tourist advertisements intended to entice people to follow the established trends of women and men partaking in outdoor activities by that time. While images that removed people from the landscape intensified the connection between the viewer and the untouched, idealized depiction of wilderness, as in Frederic Church's *Niagara*, the inclusion of people in landscape's like Winslow Homer's provided the impression that these lands were easily accessible, safe to travel to, and a worthwhile place to visit and vacation. Artists, clearly aware of the popularity of their geographical subjects, enticed vacationers to visit these areas both influencing the success of their own careers and also paralleling the rapidly growing tourist and land-development industries.

IV. Bierstadt's Commission of the Transcontinental Railroad

Bierstadt became increasingly aware of the transformed national identity that shifted away from depicting nature's untouched abundance towards the inclusion of people producing on the land, while also maintaining its magnificent beauty. By 1870s, he also endeavored to maintain the high demand for his landscape paintings that satisfied this new national vision. Bierstadt's painting, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, commissioned in 1873 exemplifies the use of landscape paintings as a means of promoting profit for private industries as well as furthering artists' careers. Commissioned by Collis P. Huntington, president of the Central Pacific Railroad, the painting was intended to promote and celebrate the newly constructed transcontinental line.⁸¹ By commissioning an image of the picturesque terrain over which he built the Central Pacific railroad, Huntington intentionally sought to exploit the ideological framework of Manifest Destiny to advance the expanding railroad industry, which inherently meant the promotion of Westward migration. While the image was commissioned initially to show the railroad itself, Huntington was disappointed with Bierstadt's rendition of the railroad, expecting that the railroad would be the focal point of the painting.⁸² Bierstadt's painting is instead dominated by the majestically depicted wilderness surrounding the industrial innovation, a view that we glimpse looking downward upon a valley which consists of a glistening lake and a distant range of mountains. Bierstadt employs traditional compositional techniques within his painting of the lake such as the use of atmospheric and linear perspective to evoke the vastness of the sublime. For instance, Bierstadt's use of perspective is emphasized through atmospheric gradations as they transform from the twisted trees and rocky topography in focus in the foreground to the haziness evoked from the rising sun over the far-off mountains. Bierstadt cleverly frames the

⁸¹ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 95.

⁸² Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 97.

image of the lake with the use of shadow from the diagonal slopes of the mountainsides. The ominous shadows conjured on the right of the image balance the dark trees to the left, which also provide a contrast to the cliffs holding up the railway on the opposite side. Beyond the foreboding foreground of dead trees and dark shadows lies the sparkling lake, brightly lit and saturated by the morning sun. Untamed wilderness dominates almost the entirety of Bierstadt's composition, while the only mention of human presence is the miniscule addition of the railroad tracks traversing the right hillside above the lake.

By eliminating almost all reference to human development, Bierstadt creates a compelling endorsement of Manifest Destiny, furthering both national agendas and Huntington's profit-oriented industry ambitions. The promotion of Manifest Destiny, the belief that the United States held an inevitable and advantageous position of expanding West, became a complicit component of landscape paintings, and conversely, these paintings reinforced the ideology of Manifest Destiny in the minds of the American public. By minimizing the role of industrialization within these newly traversed regions, these images bolstered the idea that the natural landscapes of the West were still largely unoccupied, underutilized, and contained the potential for America to capture its glory. Bierstadt's aesthetic choice to evoke the sublime when depicting the lake not only emphasizes the challenges faced when building the Central Pacific line along the highest pass, but also asserts the majestic quality of the American landscape as well as its productive potential. The exclusion of human presence also highlights a stylistic shift in Bierstadt's paintings that occurred after the late 1860s. As expansion and industrialization began to alter the landscapes of the West, Bierstadt opted to eliminate the mention of human settlement and rather focus on the beauty of nature in its purest and untouched state. Whereas before the 1860s, Bierstadt chose to include human figures into his depictions of nature to invite

his audiences to feel comfortable with expansion westward and moving closer to nature, his elimination of such forms showcases his continued promotion of expansion westward, utilizing a new argument to persuade the rapidly transforming American nation to continue venturing West.

By 1871, Bierstadt's promotional incentive hinged on his ability to boost corporate expansion and mutually benefit through economic profit. Bierstadt, aware of his ability to meet the demand for images that would ease public anxieties, responded to the latest apprehensions that feared industrial expansion may spoil the beauty of America's untouched nature. His reduction of human development to the minuscule train tracks depicted in the distance shifted audience's attention away from their self-consciousness about national progress and the transformation of the American landscape towards a focus on the beauty of nature. This intensification process, stimulated by the exclusion of human figures and reduction of industrial evidence, removes the visual reference points that would allow viewers to detach themselves from the painting in front of them. Instead, the viewer feels that they themselves are stepping into a new unknown territory and forced to personally envision the sublimity of nature in the West and the challenges faced in the construction of the railroad due to nature's configuration. Additionally, the scale of nature's depiction in proportion to the inclusion the railroad creates a literal comparison between nature's permanence versus the innovation of humans on the landscape. By almost entirely valuing the scenery around the railroad, Bierstadt subtly suggests that nature's grandiose will always outmatch the development of mankind.

As a result, Bierstadt created what Anderson argued to be "a powerful endorsement of the transcontinental enterprise, for if the artist's evidence was to be believed, the beauty of the Sierra had not been compromised by the arrival of the railroad."⁸³ Upon this conclusion, this thesis

⁸³ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 228

argues that Bierstadt's construction of this powerful visual argument to boost the profits of his patron was also, most importantly, a result of his own incentive to profit as well. Bierstadt's collaboration with Huntington in the commission and production of *Donner Lake from the Summit* represents a financial transaction between artist and patron who conspired to advance their complementary profit-seeking agendas. The conscious exclusion of people within a visual advertisement exemplifies Bierstadt's ability to discreetly and strategically promote corporate expansion. While Bierstadt understood the potential fortune that he could gain by overtly supporting the newly competitive market economy, his elimination of people from the foreground subtly diverted the image's focus almost entirely towards the sublimity of nature rather than on the railroad's technological innovation. As a result, this diversion intensified the influence Bierstadt's painting had over its many viewers as he compelled audiences to travel west to visit the natural landscapes being depicted while also subtly mentioning the innovation of railroads that allowed the public to get there.

This action represents a key understanding which has been previously noted in the chapter, where artists of the late 19th century understood that their reputable role as righteous producers of art depended upon appearing entirely disinterested in personal gain and worldly ambition, and rather labor for the aesthetic purposes of the commonly supported notion, "art for art's sake."⁸⁴ By creating, what J. Gray Sweeney notes as, the illusion of a "'disinterested' artist who loyally labored for society's moral agenda, always working for 'truth' and detaching art from 'mere' financial concerns,"⁸⁵ artists were able to influence the public by producing, what audiences believed to be, reliable sources of visual information uncorrupted by commercial

⁸⁴ J. Gray Sweeney, "An 'Indomitable Explorative Enterprise': Inventing National Parks." in *Inventing Acadia: Artists and Tourists at Mount Desert* (Rockland, Me: Farnsworth Art Museum, 1999), 148.

⁸⁵ Sweeney, 148.

interests. While outwardly depicting a landscape seemingly devoted to capturing the sublimity of the landscape, Bierstadt was complicit in promoting profit through the subtleness of his argument: on the surface of the painting, Bierstadt appears to prioritize the depiction of Donner Lake's beauty. In actuality, Bierstadt's prioritization of nature and careful limitation of industrial evidence is actually a propagandist message meant to instill on the viewer that nature's beauty will not only endure with the introduction of human expansion, but that both will prosper in tandem. Bierstadt thus crafts a calculated suggestion, that both industrial expansion and nature's preservation can be idealistic compliments of each other, rather than a bittersweet tradeoff.

Bierstadt's powerful argument for industrial expansion both marketed and promoted the business of his patron. Like many artists and commercial patrons who collaborated with one another to mutually benefit from each other's industries, Bierstadt and Huntington traveled together to the Sierra Summit in order to select the exact point at which the picture, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, was painted. Bierstadt, knowing the importance of media's promotional techniques, chose to document the entire process of the painting's creation and distribution through newspapers, magazines, studio visits, and critical reviews. Bierstadt's awareness of the "the story behind the picture,"⁸⁶ prompted him to craft a narrative that would further entice the public to view the painting once it was completed. In 1872, the reporter D.O.C. Townley gave an account stating, "Bierstadt rose morning after morning at four o'clock until he had secured the desired effect of light and shade and color."⁸⁷ Bierstadt thus not only worked with paintings' commissioners but also with the press to further both the profits of industrial corporations as well as his own career. Collaborating with media reporters, he skillfully advertised the impending completion of his Sierra Summit painting just as he did during the production of *The Rocky*

⁸⁶ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 233.

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 233.

Mountains. Similar to his campaign in the 1860s, Bierstadt not only invited reporters into his studio to write about his progress, but he also published initial sketches made for the painting in magazine articles. Once the painting was completed and exhibited, Bierstadt welcomed critic's reviews that published their appraisal of the painting. Even in 1873, critics were consciously aware of Bierstadt's ability to evoke the sublime. The Chronicle commented, "It is a sublime painting of a sublime landscape."⁸⁸ Bierstadt's critics even furthered the notion that his paintings provided a realistic documentation of America's nature, further solidifying the public's trust in both the artist and the sublime image. After its debut in the San Francisco Public Art Association Gallery, one review declared,

Its chief charm is its realism, its careful faithful portraiture of, not only the great features of a California landscape, but all the minor distinctions... I am happy to offer my testimony as to the fidelity of his reproduction of one of the most charming and grand landscapes in the State.⁸⁹

By insisting on the fidelity of Bierstadt's image, readers of these reviews were easily deceived by Bierstadt's discreet embellishment of his 'truthful' depictions of American nature, such as his impressive mountain ranges looming in the background of his *Rocky Mountains* painting or his choice of the idyllic time of day depicted within this landscape discussed below. As a result, critics reviews not only furthered the collective perception that artist were merely reproducing what they saw "for art's sake," but also aided in the understanding and acceptance of these landscape images by audiences.

Bierstadt cleverly disseminated the painting through media sources as well as recognized the promotional value of the even painting's title. Initially reports published that the name of this painting was to be titled "Sunrise on the Sierras;"⁹⁰ however, at its initial exhibition in January

⁸⁸ Hendricks, 225.

⁸⁹ Hendricks, 225.

⁹⁰ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 96.

1873, Bierstadt offered a new and final title for the image, *Donner Lake from the Summit*. While this initial title could have been to instill the importance of this location – one that offered the greatest engineering and constructional challenges – in the minds of the public, the final title may actually be attributed to Bierstadt’s realization there was more to this site than technological achievement. Understanding the potential that the public’s association can have on their demand, Bierstadt decidedly chose to rename the painting in reference to the Donner Tragedy, which had become a well-known disaster story throughout this decade. According to this report, a group of migrating settlers, known as the Donner party, became trapped in the high Sierras, dying of starvation while having resorted to cannibalism. By utilizing this story as a powerful anecdote to heighten the viewer’s imagination, Bierstadt reemphasized not only the painting’s evocation of the sublime, embodied by the darkness exuded in his landscape, but also the industrial feats of the company that he intended to advertise. Simultaneously instilling both wonder in America’s dangerous, untamed wilderness and national pride for man’s ability to control it, Bierstadt’s image evoked a powerful combination of natural beauty and technological safety imperative for shaping the public’s demand to travel Westward.

Until the late 19th century, viewers took images of western landscapes as face value, believing them to be as accurate as scientific topographical studies and reports.⁹¹ Exploiting this assumption that early audiences made of western art, Bierstadt cleverly created images to be as convincingly naturalistic as a photograph. Already well-acquainted with photographic media⁹², one may contend that Bierstadt cleverly based his painting of Donner Lake on the techniques of stereoscopic photography. Stereoscopes, known for their ability to capture the three-

⁹¹ Jules David Prown, “Introduction,” in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*, ed. the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and the Yale University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), xiv.

⁹² Wright, 267.

dimensionality of geographical space, became an effective medium of inspiration for Bierstadt to tempt his audience to visit the Western landscapes that he seemed to veraciously depict.

Stereoscopes, invented in 1832, served as an immersive optical instrument through which dual images taken of the same object or scene are held at a distance from the viewer's eyes allowing one to perceive each image at slightly different points of view - one by each eye. As a result of its design, a unified picture appears before the viewer who perceives depth and movement within the three-dimensional scene. Through the use of its viewing device, the viewer of a stereograph is confronted with a deep recession of space that appears to be physically in front of one's eye. As a result, the viewer almost believes that they have been pulled into the landscape before them, seeing the scene as if it were physically in front of them. For instance, the black borders of the stereoscope – the device used to view a stereograph from a distance – around the three-dimensional picture produce an immersive effect that blocks out the viewer's own ambient space, allowing one to imagine oneself actually walking around within the landscape in front of their vision.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the inventor of the stereoscope and an advocate for stereography, remarks, “The shutting out of surrounding objects, the concentration of the whole attention, which is a consequence of this, produce a dream-like exaltation in which we seem to leave the body behind as we sail away into one strange scene.”⁹³ This notion relates to Anderson's description of Bierstadt's attention to naturalistic details within his composition, allowing viewers to image that they “are seeing a real mountain and real river that are worth exploring in their own right.”⁹⁴ Bierstadt's painting as a composition similar to the visual effect

⁹³ Rosalind E. Krauss, “Photography's Discursive Spaces” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 138.

⁹⁴ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 41.

of a stereoscope may be taken one step further. Bierstadt, interested in its spectacular effects, found the stereograph to be a technological photographic device analogous to his use of panoramas and theater in displaying and evoking an image, discussed in Chapter 2. Within his painting, *Donner Lake from the Summit*, Bierstadt's firm control of special recession and use of heavy contrast along the periphery of the scene evoke a similar cinematic experience of being drawn into the image as if passing through real space. This sensation is organized by his use of atmospheric gradations and the dark slopes of the mountains that point toward a well-lit lake, producing a tunnel vision effect similar to that of stereographic space. These perspectival techniques of Bierstadt draw the viewer into the painting, just as viewers are drawn into a stereograph.

The appearance of reality found in Bierstadt's paintings is significant not just in his ability to recreate stereoscopic effects, but also in his ability to gratify the desires of his American audience to view and one day visit these western landscapes. Like stereographs, viewers are able to test real life through Bierstadt's image as the viewing experience provided by his use of perspective creates the imaginative sensation of physically moving through the scene. Essentially, there is a dissonance between the imagined tangibility in the scene and its denial of physicality offered by the two-dimensional image. When viewing Bierstadt's painting, the observer attempts to "feel its way into the very depths of the picture"⁹⁵ as he produces the desire for his audience to experience the solidity of the depicted mountain formations. Unlike objects photographed by a stereoscope which lost their value once their form was extracted and made easily accessible to view, photographed or painted landscapes appreciated in value as their perceived tangibility enticed viewers into wanting to visit and fully experience the image in front

⁹⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 77.

of them. The reproduction of an actual landscape onto a flattened surface through painting, print, or photograph became a powerful marketing tool not only because of its ability to present viewers with a taste of what they could experience, but also because it made the substance within these landscapes easily distributable. In his essay, *The Stereoscope and the Stereograph*, Holmes argues, “Form is henceforth divorced from matter... Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable.”⁹⁶ The ability to extract a landscape’s form from its reality and transfer it onto an easily transportable, reproduceable surface allowed it to become disseminated throughout large audiences, enticing its viewers to visit the actual land masses captured within the visual image. Thus, the valuation of Bierstadt’s landscape necessitates not only an immersive and convincing image of America’s west, but also the ability to easily distribute it among a transportable surface, sharing the landscape’s inherent value to others.

Bierstadt, aware that his viewers became inspired to visit the landscapes of the West through his realistic representations of idyllic views, carefully crafted the impression that he was veristically and faithfully painting the landscapes that he witnessed. Critics even celebrated Bierstadt’s ability to combine naturalism with an embellished sense of the sublime in his landscape, noting how Bierstadt possessed ““the poetic imagination and feel, which, as well as or even more than the technical skill of an artist, is necessary to constitute a great landscape painter.””⁹⁷ Like other landscape painters of the time, Bierstadt preferred his paintings to be viewed as comparable to a photograph, which, at the time of its creation, belonged to discourse of science, survey, and undertaken for the purposes of topographical exploration.⁹⁸ This was due to the high demand by the public for factual images of the West, for if these images were

⁹⁶ Holmes, 80-81.

⁹⁷ Anderson, *Albert Bierstadt*, 93.

⁹⁸ Krauss, 134.

truthfully depicted, the public was more likely to venture to them and the corporations were more likely to profit. Bierstadt, rather than completely shunning aesthetic discourse that that painting usually belongs to, consciously decided to merge both the topographical realism that a photograph exudes with the aesthetic visual experience of paintings. While *Donner Lake from the Summit* depicted a specific location, this painting and a large number of Bierstadt's later landscapes represented a type of landscape rather than an accurate portrayal of a specified place. As such, Bierstadt presents his viewers with partial truths and incomplete stories throughout his landscapes and news reports conjured for both aesthetic appeal and his own publicity.

However, Bierstadt's invention of a picturesque natural landscape was not only inspired by his ability to produce a sense of awe for his audience, but also by the mere fact that it most often didn't actually exist. Ironically, Bierstadt's adherence to stereography stems from his ambition to recreate for the eye the tangibility and physical existence of America's untouched wilderness from intangible imaginations. While *Donner Lake from the Summit* was inspired from an actual landscape, Bierstadt's naturalistic enhancements and generalizations characteristic of his picturesque scenes are difficult to discern within details of his composition but likely still present. In his painting, Bierstadt offers benign evidence of human progress that is both incomplete and miniscule next to the majestic quality of landscape surrounding it. This interpretive framing of an embellished landscape – one that is barely touched, perfectly lit, and well composed – serves as effective propaganda for the impending industrial exploitation of the land. Therefore, while the landscape being depicted may be nonexistent and rather a product of multiple inspirations and interpretations, Bierstadt allows his viewers to connect with the ideas that the landscape represents as well as contemporary desires that it fulfills, such as the collective expectations of national prosperity through westward expansion and for the promise of harmony

between nature and technological innovation. As artists, like Bierstadt, manipulated non-existent landscapes to provoke a desired reaction amongst their audiences, the cultural myth of the wilderness as signifier of American identity is devised. This myth, rather than offering an identity of America's past, provides a prophetic illustration of America's present ambitions and future transformations. As William Cronon notes in his essay, *Telling Tales on Canvas*, "landscapes tell a narrative by those who held a national vision of progress, and a self-consciousness of its effects."⁹⁹ Rather than the production of nostalgia for a past wilderness that may be lost, Bierstadt's *Donner Lake from the Summit* focuses on the production of hope, ambition, and the ideology of Manifest Destiny. As a result, Bierstadt successfully advertises the railroad by inextricably linking the vision of landscapes with America's contemporary collective consciousness, creating an emblem for the Nation based off of a single moment in history – the present – as well as its imagined future, one of progress and prosperity.

V. Conclusion

By the 19th century, the contemporary cliché of an artist creating art independently and purely for aesthetic purposes was increasingly undermined by the commodification of art due to the rising art market. As previously noted, Albert Bierstadt and Collis P. Huntington, the president of the Central Pacific Railroad, ventured together to the location at which Bierstadt was meant to depict. This cooperative effort to travel long distances together in order to capture the right visual impression of the selected place exemplifies their desire to influence audiences with an orchestrated image of a landscape. However, it also showcases the collusive art industry of the time, which most often produced art as a means of creating profits for both the artist and the

⁹⁹ Cronon, 44.

patron. Artists of this time were not merely “artists,” but also entrepreneurs as they transformed the making of aesthetic objects into a profit- focused industry. As in the development of any market, the production of art meant that entrepreneurial artists’ successful production of output and profit necessitated the collaboration with intermediaries to help distribute their work. Artists who chose to produce prints of their original work often relied on “draftsmen, lithographers, engravers, and publishers, any one of whom could dramatically alter the appearance of an image.”¹⁰⁰ While the help of these intermediaries often allowed for increased exposure of the artist’s work, these agents in the factors of production had just as much agency as the artist themselves to accentuate their own illustrative intent, either by enhancing the graphical appeal of the work or exaggerating details to produce a new suggestive meaning. Even artists who didn’t reproduce their work, but rather exhibited their work more generally, often still relied on financial backers, hall managers, or the writers who wrote descriptive pamphlets that were often distributed during a gallery exhibition.¹⁰¹ The use of intermediaries in the production and distribution process of art demonstrates the art market’s emerging propensity to allow for other factors of production. More importantly, collaboration with intermediaries to bring their work to broad audiences also evinces artists’ and businessmen’s awareness that profit maximization necessitated a correlation with the amount of people who were exposed and effected by the outputs – paintings and prints - of artistic production.

The massive number of printed images published and distributed in the mid 19th century provides evidence that it was the prints, as opposed to singular paintings, that became the primary subjects of public discourse. Martha A. Sandweiss offers two reasons for this phenomenon: “the original works of art were seen only by limited audiences, and the cost of

¹⁰⁰ Sandweiss, 118.

¹⁰¹ Sandweiss, 118.

producing the prints inevitably led to congressional debate.”¹⁰² While individual paintings by artist’s like Bierstadt had large impacts on the minority of audiences able to visit studios and exhibitions, it was rather the reproductions of these images in the forms of prints that offered the most impact to the majority of Americans. While reproductions in government reports became the most viewed images of the West, a large number of images were also published in books and popular journals, such as Harper’s Bazaar.¹⁰³ Because of their ability to be spread more easily, printed images began to overshadow their original works of art in importance. As paintings provide the first step to divorcing a landscape’s form from its matter, reproductions thus offer an even further step towards this end. As a reproductive print separates the painting’s composition from the canvas itself, the printed version becomes even easier to transport and distribute as its allowed to be reprinted and reproduced. The divorcing of form from matter in this case is not an aesthetic decision made by the artist, but rather a result of industrialization and technological advancement. These innovations in the 19th century economy allowed for art to become more accessible to the public, both through the mass-production of visual images as well as the demand for them by the working-class public whose leisure hours and wages began to expand as a result of economic expansion. The result is the cementation of the feedback loop in which economic growth led to increased dissemination of visual images made by artists, patrons, and government officials all colluding to further profits, consequently producing large effects on the ways in which Americans began to decipher their relationship with nature and the West.

¹⁰² Sandweiss, 125.

¹⁰³ Sandweiss, 130.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the discussion of American landscape paintings between 1839 and 1873 serves as an important case study for the inextricable link between economics and the history of art. By examining the network of financial interests, such as the American Art Union, the wealthy barons of business, and the painter Albert Bierstadt, this thesis demonstrates how the production and distribution of landscape paintings simultaneously aligned the commercial agendas of those who commissioned art with the nation's progress and prosperity. Seeking to advance privately owned industrial concerns, such as shipping or railroad profits, the Art Union's core members sponsored landscape images that promoted national unity and industrial expansion. Because of the American Union's wide reach through membership ranks and state diversity, their distribution of landscape images stimulated demand and grew their potential to impact audiences on a national scale.

Motivated by the increased patronage of American landscapes by major art institutions and wealthy businessmen, Bierstadt's drive to profit incentivized him to tactfully compose and market his art. Upon the traditional incentives prompting the commissions and productions of paintings, print reproductions amplified the effects of artists original compositions. The advancements in photography and printing during the 19th century allowed artists' landscape images to become easily transportable and distributable throughout the United States, increasing the public's accessibility of art and the nation's powerful association with the West and the future prosperity of the American nation. By employing new print and reproductive technologies to increase the dispersal of his images, Bierstadt fabricated a lucrative market supported by Americans' demand to view more images of America's untouched nature. Bierstadt's recognition that landscapes – the physical lands themselves – were inherently connected to the economic

concepts of ownership, productivity, and wealth, prompted him to monetize their image to grow his own enterprise of painting. Through his collaboration with business tycoons to create paintings intended to advertise America's flourishing industrialization and expansion, Bierstadt aligned the correlative profit-making schemes of both artists and patrons whose expanding businesses necessitated their alliance, engineering this relationship by courting business interests through the promise of expected profit. By carefully composing the visual identity of Manifest Destiny and evoking the sublime in the reactions of his audiences, Bierstadt incited American's demand to expand westward through his paintings, *The Rocky Mountains*, *Lander's Peak* and *Donner Lake from the Summit*, which tactfully united the landscape's prophetic symbol of economic productivity and profit with the apparition of a prosperous united nation.

This study of Bierstadt's compositional and marketing strategies demonstrates how 19th century artists became complicit in the business of producing and selling their art as well as in the business profits of their industrial patrons. This relationship between landscape artists and patrons demonstrates the degree to which the emerging art market of the mid- to late-19th century was bent on fulfilling the mutual economic interests of both artists and patrons. Landscape artists understood their ability to increase profit margins by accepting commissions that advanced profit-making industries, provide geographical data of newly explored territories, and popularize the nation's political expansion to the West. The combination of artists' compositional skills, patrons' finances, and the distribution of their collaborative paintings throughout the United States allowed landscapes to become a symbol for the developing American identity. As a result, the collaborative production of paintings between artists and patrons predestined its effect on national culture, politics, and society. American landscape paintings thus function as a medium

of financial and cultural exchange, indicating the relevancy of economics in the formation of nationalism, which associated the image of the American landscape with its economic potential.

By integrating economics and art history into the study of 19th century American landscape paintings, this thesis identifies the necessity of aligning the study of these two disciplines in the discourse surrounding the production of art. Through the analysis of the motives that guided the artistic transactions between artists and patrons, scholars may better understand how and why art is produced. The study of economic incentives, leading to the creation of an aesthetic medium, allows scholars to gain a better understanding of how art affects the cultural, political, and social circumstances that the discipline of art history seeks to interrogate. Baxandall's assertion that money plays an important role in the history of art becomes a practical foundation for studying the impact that financial transactions, resulting in the production of art, had on national culture. By analyzing the business relationship between 19th century landscape artists and patrons, as well as its profound effect on American identity, the powerful link between landscapes, money, and art as mediums of exchange underscores the importance of economics in both the production of art as well as national culture.

Images



Figure 1: *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863, Albert Bierstadt



Figure 2: *Donner Lake from the Summit*, 1873, Albert Bierstadt



Figure 3: *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie*, 1866, Albert Bierstadt



Figure 4: *Niagara*, 1857, Frederic Church



Figure 4: *View from the Mountain House, on the Catskills*, 1840, engraving, William Henry Bartlett

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