

EXHIBIT REVIEW
THE MAKING OF AN ICONIC
AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

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Nancy Siegel, curator, *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery*. Juniata College Museum of Art, Apr. 4–Sept. 13, 2003, The Phillips Museum, Franklin & Marshall College, Jan. 20–Feb. 29, 2004, The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, Mar. 10–Apr. 17, 2004.

Nancy Siegel, *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery*, Exh. cat. (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College Museum of Art in association with the University of Washington Press, 2003), pp. 144, 42 illus. \$20.00.

Along the Juniata is an intimate exhibition. It occupies one room in the Juniata College Museum of Art, a small but handsome Beaux Arts building donated as the college's library by Andrew Carnegie, and consists of thirty-one items: one drawing, sixteen paintings, eleven engravings or prints, two Staffordshire transfer-printed soup bowls, and one archival photograph. For an exhibition focusing on nineteenth-century landscape, the scale of the paintings is unusually small: the largest, by Norton Bush, measures sixteen by thirty inches. Paintings by Cole, Durand,



FIGURE 1: After Thomas Cole, *Head Waters of the Juniata Alleghany Mountains, Pennsylvania*, 1831, color engraving, 4 3/8" x 6 3/8", Fenner Sears & Co., published February 1, 1831 by I.T. Hinton & Simpkin & Marshall, London. Courtesy of Juniata College Museum of Art.

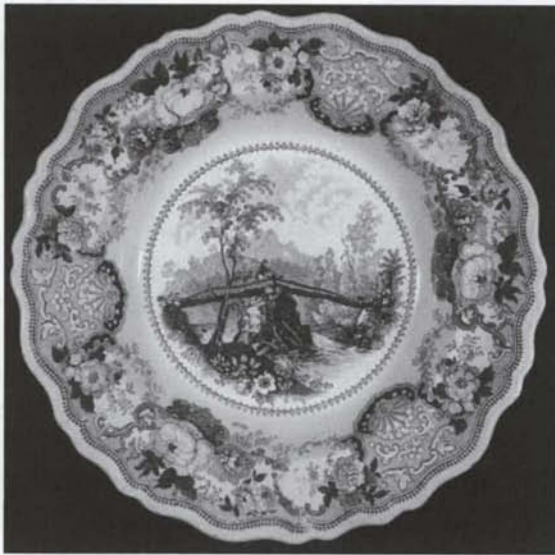


FIGURE 2: William Adams & Sons, *Head Waters of the Juniata*, after Thomas Cole, c 1831–1861, ceramic soup plate, 10 1/2", Staffordshire, England. Courtesy of Juniata College Museum of Art.

Bierstadt, Moran, McEntee, and Casilear, among others, are included, but the works are modest watercolor or oil studies, not the larger finished paintings that normally hang in museums. All of the objects exhibited are from the Juniata College museum's permanent collection. But if *Along the Juniata* is small in scale, it is ambitious in conception and intellectual content: as the subtitle of the exhibition and accompanying book demonstrate, *Along the Juniata* analyzes the taste for American landscape and explains how it spread in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In 1938, Homer B. Vanderblue gave Juniata College a Thomas Cole sketch, *Scene in the Alleghany Mountains*, that he had acquired from the artist's granddaughter, Florence Cole Vincent, two years earlier,¹ along with several engravings, an oil painting, and two soup bowls, all entitled *Head Waters of the Juniata*. The drawing came from what Cole described as his "Book of Sketches from the Pictures which I have painted since my return from the White Mountains 1827" (17). The engraving, *Head Waters of the Juniata, Alleghany Mountains, Pennsylvania*, based on a Cole painting that has not been located, was first published in John Howard Hinton's two volume *History and Topography of the United States* (1830–32 and subsequent editions), and was quickly copied by other engravers in England and the United States. Although Vanderblue believed that the small oil painting that he acquired, *Headwaters of the Juniata*, was by Cole, Siegel demonstrates convincingly that it is the work of another, less talented artist and was copied from a later version of the engraving. The bowls, transfer printed Staffordshire creamware produced by William Adams & Sons for the American market, incorporated Cole's engraving as the artistic centerpiece of the design. Together, the exhibition and book use these and other images to unravel a series of puzzles about the Cole sketch and its transformation into different media.

Siegel begins by locating the sketch in place and time. Cole had traveled across Pennsylvania in 1819 to join his family, which had moved from Philadelphia to Steubenville, Ohio. Using James Cole's account of his journey across Pennsylvania a year earlier as her guide, Siegel argues that Thomas followed his father's route, taking the Pennsylvania Road west from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. After more than three years in Ohio, Cole departed Steubenville for Pittsburgh and then left to return to Philadelphia in November 1823. It seems most likely that he visited the headwaters of the Juniata on this trip. The *Scene in the Alleghany Mountains* Cole sketched c.1827, Siegel believes, was along the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River in Bedford County. Certainly the geology and flora in the foreground are

consistent with the area, though she concedes that the drawing is "an idealized memory based upon scenery experienced and viewed years earlier" (29).

While in England J. H. Hinton commissioned from Cole a series of views to be engraved as illustrations for his *History and Topography of the United States*. Cole drew upon his "Book of Sketches" for the ten paintings and two sketches he provided Hinton, which included six scenes of upstate New York and five of New England as well as the lone image of the Juniata. In the absence of international copyright laws, Boston publisher Samuel Walker brought out an American edition of the book in 1834. Walker and other publishers continued to issue editions of Hinton's book, often with additional text and some new engravings, for two decades. For the American edition the engravings of Cole's works were reengraved by several individuals (*Head Waters of the Juniata* was done by a D. Kimberly), at a larger size and with some loss of quality. Even as Americans were pirating Cole's work, and sometimes dropping his name from the credits, Staffordshire potteries with a keen eye on the American market also reproduced it. In the case of Cole's *Head Waters of the Juniata*, the image reproduced on the creamware is generally true to artistic intent but exhibits a loss of detail and less specificity in the flora and geology.²

Together, the engravings and transfer printed Staffordshire brought reproductions of works of art into the homes of middle-class Americans, individuals and families that could never afford to own an original. Siegel demonstrates how individuals clipped engravings from Hinton's book, many of which were subsequently hand colored, framed, and hung on walls in American houses. Consumers could purchase sets of inexpensive Staffordshire, and choose from among a wide variety of patterns and scenes. Whether they displayed engravings or purchased tableware, the choice of landscape scenes is significant: middle-class Americans acquired aesthetically pleasing objects that "demonstrated a connection to a sense of place related to the American landscape" (98).

The transition from sketch to painting to engraving to tableware is more than an interesting narrative: in Siegel's hands it provides a window on a number of important cultural issues, including the role of reproductions of works of art in promoting taste, consumption and the use of objects as validations of social standing, and the contributions of landscape painting to the emergence of a national identity in nineteenth-century America. While Siegel's study is exploratory rather than definitive, *Along the Juniata*—and the fascinating exhibit it accompanies—adds a significant dimension to our

understanding of the influence of Thomas Cole and, more broadly, to nineteenth-century American landscape and culture.

NOTES

1. According to Julia D. Sophronia Snow, Cole's *Head Waters of the Juniata* was based upon an "original sketch—a signed and dated pencil drawing in the artist's portfolio at Catskill." Snow must have seen the sketch shortly before it was acquired by Vanderblue. Snow, "Delineators of the Adams-Jackson American Views. Part I. Thomas Cole, R. A.," *Antiques* 30 (Nov. 1936): 216.
2. For discussions of the significance of Adams's Staffordshire designs see Siegel, *Along the Juniata*: 73–96, and Snow, "Delineators of the Adams-Jackson American Views": 214–19, which also discusses the use of Cole's engravings in Hinton by Adams's competitors, Job and John Jackson. Kenneth Myers' *The Catskills* includes a catalogue entry devoted to William Adams's transfer printed Staffordshire and illustrates a plate bearing Cole's view of the Catskill Mountain House, but his text does not identify the source of the engraving, the other designs by Cole in the series, or the significance of the pottery to the dissemination of taste. See Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains 1820–1895*, ex. cat. (Yonkers, N.Y.: The Hudson River Museum of Westchester, 1987): 97.

