

The Nature of American Art From The Puritans To Jackson Pollock

A glance at the walls of a Puritan Colonial home shows no pictures, no decorations on the walls. Why is that? 18th century New England homes show largely portraits, possibly a Copley. Why is that? But a glance at the walls of a 19th century Boston or New York house may suddenly show large panoramic landscapes-of the Catskills, or the Andes, or the Rockies-“windows” to an ideal or far away world beyond the walls. What has happened to taste? How come landscapes have become not only acceptable wall decorations but are widely and wildly popular?

This course discusses these questions in detail as we pass our time with the art, and the artists who created this enthusiasm. We will look at The Hudson River “School”-from the Edenic Catskills of Thomas Cole, to the Andes of Frederic Church, to the “Western Alps” of Albert Bierstadt. How were their paintings religious and nationalistic at the same time? Winslow Homer doesn’t just look at nature, he interacts with it and paints the dramatic outdoors in the Adirondacks, and the Caribbean. We will visit his studio in Prout’s Neck, Maine, and study his *Gulf Stream*.

In the Brandywine Valley we will enjoy the quiet rural memory world of Andrew Wyeth’s nature, and in Maine we will visit *Christina’s World*. Georgia O’Keeffe creates brilliant abstracted landscape macrocosms and sexy floral microcosms. Her friend Ansel Adams shows the world the spectacular sights of the Yosemite Sierras and preaches their vulnerability. The urban landscape is the subject of Edward Hopper’s mysterious silences-more about human nature than nature. We will read some of the many poetic responses to his famous *Nighthawks*. And we will finish with the monumental swirling abstractions of Jackson Pollock-who famously declared “I am nature”. What did he mean by that? Through a variety of images and videos we will see what the artists saw and see what they did with it. Through interviews with the artists we will get a good idea of what they were up to in their art.

Leader: Dr. Richard Swain has just retired from 50 years as professor of art history in New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan, and Vermont.

Tuesdays: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 8 weeks: October 2 through November 27 (no class on October 9)

Location: PSRC