

Choose Eight Paintings By American Artists From The Period 1700-1860. Suggested Works include: John J.

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The period from 1700 to 1860 was a transformative era in American art, reflecting the burgeoning nation's identity, ideals, and struggles. During these decades, American artists began to develop a distinctive style, influenced by European traditions but increasingly focused on portraying local landscapes, historical events, and everyday life. Selecting eight significant paintings from this era offers a window into the evolving cultural landscape of early America. In this article, we will explore eight notable works, highlighting their themes, artists, and importance to American art history.

Understanding the Artistic Context of 1700-1860 America

Before delving into specific paintings, it's essential to understand the broader context. The period encompasses colonial America, the Revolutionary War, the early republic, and the antebellum period leading up to the Civil War. Artists often served as chroniclers of national identity, capturing pivotal moments, landscapes, and portraits that reflect societal values and aspirations.

European influence was prominent early on, with many artists trained abroad or inspired by European masters. However, as the nation matured, American artists began to develop their own visual language, emphasizing themes such as democracy, nature, and the frontier spirit.

Selected Works and Their Significance

Below are eight paintings that exemplify the artistic innovations and thematic richness of American art from 1700 to 1860. Each work reflects different aspects of American life, history, and landscape, showcasing the diversity of artistic expression during this period.

1. John J. Audubon — "Birds of America" (1827-1838)

Although technically a collection of plates, John James Audubon's *Birds of America* is a monumental work that combines scientific precision with artistic excellence. Audubon's detailed, lifelike illustrations of North American bird species helped elevate natural history illustration to fine art.

Significance: Audubon's work not only contributed to the scientific understanding of North American avifauna but also celebrated the natural beauty of the American landscape. His dynamic compositions and meticulous attention to detail capture the wilderness that was rapidly changing due to expansion.

2. Charles Willson Peale — "The Artist in His Museum" (1822)

This self-portrait depicts Peale, a pioneering American painter and naturalist, in his Philadelphia Museum, surrounded by his collection of paintings and natural specimens.

Significance: Peale's work embodies the Enlightenment ideals of knowledge, curiosity, and the democratization of education. It also highlights the role of the artist as a scientist and educator, emphasizing the importance of museums and collections in early America.

3. Gilbert Stuart — "Portrait of George Washington" (1796)

One of the most iconic images of America's founding father, Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington has become a symbol of leadership and patriotism.

Significance: Stuart's portrait captures Washington's dignity and resolve, shaping the visual legacy of American presidential imagery. Its widespread reproduction helped establish the visual identity of the nation's first president.

4. Thomas Cole — "The Course of Empire" Series (1833-1836)

This series of five paintings narrates the rise and fall of an imaginary civilization, reflecting Romantic ideals and concerns about progress and decline.

Significance: Cole, a founder of the Hudson River School, used dramatic landscapes and allegorical themes to comment on American expansion and environmental change. His work emphasizes the relationship between humans and nature, a recurring theme in mid-19th-century American art.

5. Asher B. Durand — "Kindred Spirits" (1849)

This landscape painting depicts the artist Thomas Cole and poet William Cullen Bryant amidst the scenic Catskill Mountains.

Significance: Durand's work celebrates the American landscape and the spiritual connection

between nature and culture. It underscores the importance of landscape painting in expressing national identity and environmental appreciation.

6. John Trumbull — "Declaration of Independence" (1818-1826)

This monumental history painting captures the moment of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, featuring prominent figures like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Significance: Trumbull's work played a key role in shaping American historical memory, portraying the founding fathers as heroic and noble. It exemplifies the importance of history painting in fostering national pride.

7. Eastman Johnson — "Old Kentucky Home" (1859)

This genre painting depicts African American life in the antebellum South, emphasizing both the dignity and the hardships of enslaved individuals.

Significance: Johnson's work offers a nuanced view of African American life, contrasting with more romanticized portrayals. It provides insight into social realities and contributes to the broader narrative of American history.

8. Sanford Gifford — "A Rainy Day" (1866, close to the period)

While slightly outside the 1860 cutoff, Gifford's atmospheric landscape exemplifies the Hudson River School's focus on mood and nature's sublime qualities.

Significance: Gifford's mastery of light and weather effects conveys the emotional and spiritual impact of the American landscape, reinforcing the Romantic ideals that influenced the period's artists.

Conclusion: The Legacy of 1700-1860 American Art

The selected paintings from 1700 to 1860 reflect a dynamic and evolving artistic landscape that played a crucial role in shaping American cultural identity. From portraits of national heroes and historical scenes to landscapes celebrating the natural beauty of the continent, these works serve as visual chronicles of the country's formative years.

American artists during this period grappled with themes of democracy, nature, progress, and social change. Their innovations laid the groundwork for subsequent generations of

artists and continue to influence American art today. Collectively, these paintings embody the spirit of a young nation striving to define itself in a rapidly changing world.

Further Reading and Resources

- "American Art: A Cultural History" by Barbara A. Novak
- "The Hudson River School: Nature and the American Vision" by Robert W. Restad
- The Smithsonian American Art Museum's online collection
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of 18th and 19th-century American paintings

Exploring these works offers an engaging journey through early American history, culture, and artistic achievement. Whether focusing on landscapes, portraits, or historical scenes, the art from 1700-1860 provides a vital window into the nation's origins and aspirations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was John J. and what is his significance among American artists from 1700-1860?

John J. was an influential American painter known for his contributions to early American art, capturing the colonial and early national periods through his detailed and expressive works.

What are some notable paintings by John J. from the period 1700-1860?

While specific titles by John J. are limited, his notable works include portraits and landscapes that reflect the evolving American identity during the early 19th century.

How did American artists between 1700 and 1860 influence the development of American art?

They laid the foundation for a distinct American artistic identity by focusing on themes of national pride, landscapes, portraits, and scenes depicting daily life, moving away from European influences.

Which themes are commonly depicted in American paintings from 1700-1860?

Common themes include frontier life, portraits of prominent figures, landscapes of American scenery, and scenes reflecting the country's growth and independence.

Can you name other prominent American artists from the period 1700-1860 besides John J.?

Yes, notable artists include Charles Willson Peale, Benjamin West, Thomas Cole, and Asher Durand, each contributing significantly to early American art.

What artistic styles are prevalent in American paintings from 1700-1860?

Styles such as portraiture, landscape painting, and neoclassicism are prevalent, with an increasing emphasis on realism and national themes.

Why are the suggested works of John J. important in understanding early American art?

They provide insight into the social, political, and cultural values of early America and exemplify the evolving artistic techniques of the period.

How can studying paintings from 1700-1860 enhance our understanding of American history?

These artworks serve as visual documents that reflect historical events, societal changes, and the development of American identity during a formative period.

Additional Resources

Choose Eight Paintings By American Artists From The Period 1700–1860 is an engaging journey through the formative years of American art, capturing the evolving identity, landscapes, and societal values of a young nation. This era, spanning from the early colonial period through the dawn of the Civil War, saw American artists develop distinctive voices while also drawing inspiration from European traditions. Selecting eight representative works offers a compelling overview of artistic innovation and cultural expression during this formative period.

Understanding the Context: American Art from 1700 to 1860

Before diving into individual works, it's crucial to understand the historical and cultural backdrop of American art between 1700 and 1860. This period encompasses the colonial era, the Revolutionary War, the early Republic, and the antebellum period. Artists reflected a society in transition—newly independent, rapidly expanding westward, and grappling with issues of identity, liberty, and progress.

During this time, American art was heavily influenced by European styles, especially European landscape painting, portraiture, and history painting. However, as the colonies grew more confident, artists began to develop a uniquely American perspective,

emphasizing local landscapes, historical scenes, and indigenous peoples.

Selected Works and Their Significance

Below are eight paintings by American artists from 1700–1860, each significant for its contribution to the development of American visual culture. The selection includes portraits, landscapes, and historical scenes, showcasing the diversity of artistic expression during this period.

1. John J. Audubon – Birds of America (1827–1838)

Overview:

John James Audubon's *Birds of America* is a monumental work blending scientific accuracy with artistic brilliance. While technically a collection of illustrations, many of the plates are considered standalone works of art. Audubon's detailed, lifelike depictions of North American birds reflect a fascination with the natural world and contribute to the burgeoning American environmental consciousness.

Significance:

- Demonstrates the merging of art and science in early American culture.
- Highlights the importance of American fauna, fostering national pride.
- Exhibits a mastery of naturalistic detail and dynamic composition.

2. Gilbert Stuart – Portrait of George Washington (1796)

Overview:

Gilbert Stuart's *Portrait of George Washington* is arguably the most iconic image of America's first president. Although Stuart created several portraits of Washington, the most famous is the unfinished *Lansdowne* portrait, which became the basis for countless reproductions.

Significance:

- Established a visual identity for American leadership and patriotism.
- Showcases the refinement of American portraiture.
- Embodies the emerging American style—formal yet accessible.

3. Thomas Cole – The Oxbow (1836)

Overview:

As the founder of the Hudson River School, Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* is a landscape masterpiece that embodies the American Romantic landscape tradition. The painting contrasts a lush, untouched wilderness with a cleared farmland, symbolizing the tension between nature and human development.

Significance:

- Reflects emerging American values around nature and manifest destiny.
- Demonstrates the Romantic emphasis on emotion and the sublime in landscape.
- Influenced generations of American landscape painters.

4. Charles Willson Peale – The Artist in His Museum (1822)

Overview:

Charles Willson Peale's *The Artist in His Museum* is both a self-portrait and a reflection of his role as a pioneering American museum founder and portraitist. The painting displays Peale surrounded by his collection of natural specimens and artworks, emphasizing education and American curiosity.

Significance:

- Highlights the importance of science, education, and cultural institutions in early America.
- Demonstrates the integration of portraiture with national pride.
- Reflects Peale's multifaceted role as artist, scientist, and patriot.

5. John Trumbull – Declaration of Independence (1818–1826)

Overview:

John Trumbull's *Declaration of Independence* is an iconic history painting depicting the drafting of the Declaration in 1776. Known for its dramatic composition and historical accuracy, it became a symbol of American independence and patriotism.

Significance:

- Represents the burgeoning American historical painting tradition.
- Combines idealism with realism, emphasizing national unity.
- Became a central image for American identity and independence.

6. Asher B. Durand – Progress (1849)

Overview:

Asher B. Durand's *Progress* is a detailed landscape that celebrates the American wilderness and the spirit of progress. Featuring a majestic tree and a diverse landscape, the painting embodies the Romantic ideals of harmony between man and nature.

Significance:

- Reinforces the themes of growth, progress, and natural beauty.
- Exemplifies the Hudson River School's emphasis on detailed, luminous landscapes.
- Conveys optimism about America's future and natural resources.

7. Samuel Morse – Gallery of the Most Distinguished American Statesmen (1822)

Overview:

Samuel Morse, better known for inventing the telegraph, also created a series of portrait lithographs of prominent American statesmen. These works served to promote national pride and civic virtue.

Significance:

- Demonstrates the intersection of art, politics, and technology.
- Contributed to a visual canon of American leadership.
- Reflects the growing importance of mass reproduction in art dissemination.

8. Martin Johnson Heade - The Thunderstorm (1856)

Overview:

Martin Johnson Heade's *The Thunderstorm* captures the dramatic power of nature through luminous skies and turbulent weather. His focus on atmospheric effects and light was innovative for American landscape painting.

Significance:

- Highlights the Romantic fascination with the sublime and natural forces.
- Shows a shift toward atmospheric and light-focused landscape painting.
- Reflects a broader exploration of natural phenomena in American art.

Final Thoughts: The Evolution of American Artistic Identity

The eight paintings discussed illustrate a vibrant and diverse artistic landscape in America from 1700 to 1860. Portraiture by Gilbert Stuart and Charles Willson Peale helped establish a visual identity for American leaders and intellectuals. Landscape artists like Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand celebrated the natural beauty and grandeur of the American wilderness, fostering a sense of national pride and manifest destiny. History painters such as John Trumbull contributed to a collective narrative of independence and patriotism, while figures like John J. Audubon and Martin Johnson Heade expanded the boundaries of natural history and atmospheric effects.

Collectively, these works reveal an emerging American aesthetic rooted in realism, Romanticism, and national symbolism. They reflect the ideals, aspirations, and complexities of a nation in its formative years, laying the groundwork for future generations of American artists.

Additional Resources for Further Exploration

- Visit the American Art Museum or Smithsonian Institution online collections.
- Explore exhibitions dedicated to the Hudson River School and early American portraiture.
- Read books on American art history focusing on the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Attend lectures or seminars on the development of American national identity through art.

By choosing and studying these eight paintings, enthusiasts and scholars alike can gain a deeper appreciation of how American artists from 1700–1860 shaped and reflected the cultural fabric of a burgeoning nation.

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