

Rediscovering Women Painters of the Hudson

By Abby Luby

Artists have long been enamored with the Hudson River, an obsession that started some 200 years with the formation of the Hudson River School of Art. Famous artists connected to the school produced a plethora of rich and erudite landscapes now part of New York's art legacy. The current exhibit in Garrison at the Boscobel House & Gardens features numerous 19th century paintings depicting the river and its bucolic highlands.

The exhibit, "Home on the Hudson: Women and Men Painting Landscapes," includes women painters from the same era, women most of us have never heard of, women who were as talented but overshadowed by celebrated Hudson River painters Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, John Kensett, Sanford Gifford and Albert Bierstadt.

The four women artists in this show are truly a wonderful find. Stunning landscapes here are by women painters Eliza Pratt Greatorex, Julie Hart Beers and Julia McEntee Dillon. There are also lithographs by Fanny Palmer, famous for producing



Anonymous, View to Albany from Van Unsselaens Island, circa 1840s. Three-part screen, oil on canvas on wooden stretcher, each section measures 23" wide by 69" high. Courtesy Jenkinstown Antiques

more prints for Currier & Ives than any other artist in the successful printmaking firm.

An idyllic view of the river by Julie Hart Beers, "Hudson River at Croton Point," is executed in wonderful detail: two trees, whips of delicately brushed branches in the foreground, framing a woman and child ambling down a path to the great river that flows endlessly into the mountains.

The fact that Beers painted a woman with a child is a clue that the work is by a woman, according to the show's guest curator Katherine Manthorne, professor of art history at City University of New York. According to Manthorne, research showed that Beers often teamed up with Eliza Pratt Greatorex, another prominent female artist of the day. "The two woman artists were widowed and it was taboo for a woman to go off alone, especially to paint outdoors. Greatorex and Beers would gather their young children and go on sketching tours," she said.

Manthorne, together with 18 graduate students from her art history seminar, worked on the exhibition collecting work of both renowned and lesser-known artists, men and women alike. Collected paintings depict artists' homes and studios, as well as their daily activities living near the river. Manthorne and her class compiled an impressive catalogue of the show with each student writing an essay about one artist. The catalogue can be viewed online at www.homehudson.com, a site that offers a great overview of the show.

Fanny Palmer's 1857 hand colored lithograph "The Hudson Highlands, From the Peekskill and Cold Spring Road near Garrison's Landing," for Currier & Ives, is a testament to the slower life-style now long gone. In Palmer's work, two cows are lazy gatekeepers looking out at us, flanking a small stone wall. Just beyond, a farmhouse is perfectly nestled in a stand of trees with



Asher B. Durand, A Summer Afternoon, 1849, Oil on canvas, The Grey Collection.

the omnipresent river in the distance.

Julia McEntee Dillon lived on Pearl Street in Kingston near the Rondout River. Her work "The Artist's Home and Studio," c. 1900, has an impressionist touch with a small white house peeking through soft focus flowers, bushes and trees.

Male artists featured in this show include the Bierstadt Brothers, Asher Durand, Thomas Doughty, George Inness, Thosmas Rossiter, John Vanderlyn, John Weir and his father, Robert Weir, and Joseph Tubby, among others. John Falconer's "Thomas Cole's First Studio, Catskill, NY," depicts the famous Hudson River painter's first home, surprising the audience with the small, ramshackle structure. In great contrast, Thomas Rossiter's, "House on the Hudson," 1852, shows a fancy house with a mother and father romping with their two children outdoors, and the Hudson as the backdrop.

The gallery at Boscobel is a newly modernized, comfortable space on the bottom floor of the Boscobel House, which

overlooks the Hudson and is directly across from West Point. Boscobel Restoration Executive Director Geoffrey Platt Jr. said this is the second year the gallery is open. "It's not so huge that you get lost in it. You can go back to a painting, sit and view it. The beauty of it is you can go right outside and see the river view for real. It has such immediacy," he said.

"Home On The Hudson: Women and Men Painting Landscapes 1825—1875" runs through September 7, 2009.

Boscobel House & Gardens, 1601 Route 9D, Garrison, NY. 845-265-3638, www.boscobel.org. Hours, Wednesday - Monday, 9:30am-5pm. Admission for the house tour, grounds and the exhibition gallery is \$16 for adults; \$12 for seniors; \$7 for children. Admission for the grounds and the exhibition gallery only is \$12, children (6-14) \$5.

From June 16 through September 6, the Exhibition Gallery will remain open until a half hour before curtain time of the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival performances with a special fee of \$5.