



John Frederick Kensett (Cheshire, CT, 1816–1872 New York City)

The Bash-Bish 1855

Oil on canvas

Bequest of James A. Suydam, 1865

Kensett's paintings of the Bash-Bish Falls, located on the border between New York and Massachusetts, are seemingly the noisiest paintings he ever made. We come upon the scene as if stumbling into a sacred place, but there are no faeries or nymphs, just nature itself, presenting a prospect that approaches the miraculous in its confluence of light and shadow; near and far; rocks, pool, waterfall, forest, and mountain; earth, air, fire (light), and water. Close to the picture plane, the "wide stance" contrapposto [alignment] of the falls closely evokes the human body, intensifying the viewer's sense that his own gaze, whether looking at a painting or at an actual landscape, is something embodied: to consciously look at something is to take one's own measure in relation to it. And I never forget that paintings are bodies, too.

—Stephen Westfall, NA

Founding an American School



Edward Harrison May (Croydon, England, 1824–1887 Paris, France)

Frederic Edwin Church not dated

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma presentation, May 7, 1849



Frederic Edwin Church (Hartford, CT, 1826–1900 New York City)

Scene among the Andes 1854

Oil on canvas

Bequest of James A. Suydam, 1865



Asher B. Durand (Maplewood, NJ, 1796–1886)

Landscape 1850

Oil on canvas

Bequest of James A. Suydam, 1865

Durand was only in his late twenties when he aided in the founding of the Academy, and this simple and sincere self-portrait was executed in the following decade. By the time he painted *Landscape*, the artist had been elected president of the National Academy of Design and become an important mentor for the generation of American landscapists after the death of the Academician Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School. In this work—painted just two years after Cole’s passing—Durand depicted two artists in a scene that evokes the upper Hudson River Valley in New York, looking south toward the Catskill Mountains. Painted in the act of contemplating their surroundings, the pair become a symbol of the importance of artists’ relationships, the power of artistic interpretation, and our place in the natural world.



Albert Bierstadt (Solingen, Germany, 1830–1902 New York City)

On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate 1860

Oil on millboard

NA diploma presentation, December 17, 1860

In 1860, when Bierstadt painted *On the Sweetwater near the Devil's Gate*, the world's largest genocide was taking place on the Native population. It's likely that my tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, once hunted buffalo in the area of the Devil's Gate in Wyoming, but we had to sign away the northwest section of that state, part of Idaho, a piece of Canada, and half of Montana in the Hellgate Treaty of 1855. My great-grandparents, grandparents, great-aunts, and great-uncles were all imprisoned at Fort Missoula, ravaged by smallpox and starved by the wormy beef and moldy flour rationed to my family. Bierstadt was painting the sublime while this tragedy was going on.

One more thing. Bierstadt was welcomed as an honorary member of the National Academy in 1858, yet no Native American artist was nominated until 153 years later, when I became the first Native Academician.

—Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, NA

Founding an American School



Asher B. Durand (Maplewood, NJ, 1796–1886)

Self-Portrait about 1835

Oil on canvas

Gift of the artist, between 1843 and 1852



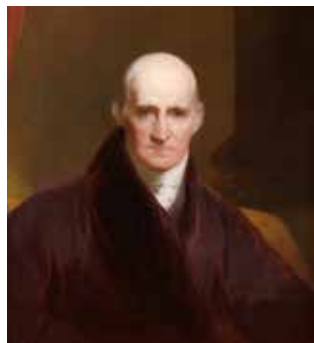
Samuel F. B. Morse (Charlestown, MA, 1791–1872 New York City)

Self-Portrait about 1809

Watercolor on ivory

Gift of Samuel P. Avery, John G. Bown, Thomas B. Clarke, Lockwood de Forest, Daniel Huntington, James C. Nicoll, and Harry W. Watrous, 1900

Morse likely painted this self-portrait miniature when he was studying at Yale College and not yet twenty years old. Although Morse has long been considered self-taught, research for this exhibition has uncovered the probable identity of his first art teacher: the miniaturist and engraver Thomas Gimbrede, a French émigré who offered private classes in New Haven during Morse's college years. The deft self-portrait likely served to display Morse's skill to prospective patrons. The artist had fully committed to oil painting by 1811, when he arrived in London to study with the American-born Benjamin West, second president of the Royal Academy of Arts. West's example and



the Royal Academy itself were decisive models for Morse's decision to found the National Academy in the following decade, and he executed this copy of West's head after a portrait by the English painter Sir Thomas Lawrence. The work hung in his library throughout his life.

Samuel F.B. Morse, *Benjamin West*, about 1811. Oil on canvas. National Academy of Design, New York



George Henry Hall (Boston, MA, 1825–1913 New York City)

A Dead Rabbit 1858

Oil on canvas

NA diploma exchange presentation, April 3, 1882Original NA diploma presentation, 1868

The Dead Rabbits were a notorious street gang in New York during the nineteenth century. Looking at this work, I think of the wintry days of my Ohio youth, in the basement watching old movies about the Bowery Boys—accents thick with masculinity and fearless desire—as well as the ever-present kind priest who leads the boys out of becoming thugs. It is the tenderness and vulnerability of flesh that the artist portrays in this painting, which allows a question to be raised as to the subject’s identity and character. If he, the subject, looked back at us with eyes on fire and brick posed to be thrown, we, the audience, would read “thug,” easy and descriptive. Instead, we gaze upon the flesh and the sideways look of the subject with empathy. That is the quality I appreciate and the attraction I have to this particular portrait.

—Catherine Opie, NA



Eastman Johnson (Lovell, ME, 1824–1906 New York City)

Negro Boy about 1860–61

Oil on canvas

NA diploma presentation, May 6, 1861

This is likely the earliest of Johnson's extant self-portraits. He depicted himself as a self-assured man, aged approximately thirty-five, during the period when he first gained the attention of the art world and various American publics. His picture of a boy playing a homemade flute ranks as one of the most intimate and engaging paintings in his series devoted to life in the American South. Johnson's works are an important link between the genre scenes of midcentury and the realism of the later century. In the words of the Johnson scholar Patricia Hills, "Johnson depicted the myth—and myth is the collective fantasy of a nation. ... To a young nation struggling to become a major power this idealization ... was, we can see now, a national necessity."



Daniel Huntington (New York City, 1816–1906)

Self-Portrait 1891

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma exchange presentation, March 13, 1893

Huntington exchanged this self-portrait for his original diploma portrait, a likeness of himself painted nearly sixty years earlier by his close friend and brother-in-law, Cornelius Ver Bryck. It was natural for the Academy's venerable former president—elected twice to the role, Huntington served the longest tenure ever—to donate to the collection a mature self-image. A firm adherent to traditional artistic ideals, he pictured himself as a student and lover of historical art rather than as a successful professional artist. His direct gaze invites the viewer to share in his study and appreciation of an engraving after Titian's *The Penitent Magdalen*. The self-portrait is a remarkable reworking of the themes of reading and beholding explored in Huntington's earlier work, *The Fair Student*, which the Academician James Augustus Suydam donated to the collection during Huntington's first presidency.



Eastman Johnson (Lovell, ME, 1824–1906 New York City)

Self-Portrait about 1859–60

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma presentation, date unknown



Daniel Huntington (New York City, 1816–1906)

The Fair Student [or] ***Girl Reading*** 1858

Oil on canvas

Bequest of James A. Suydam, 1865



Emanuel Leutze (Gmünd, Württemberg, Germany, 1816–1868 Washington, D.C.)

George Washington, study for ***Washington Crossing the Delaware*** about 1850

Oil on canvas

NA diploma presentation, May 6, 1861



Emanuel Leutze (Gmünd, Württemberg, Germany 1816–1868 Washington, D.C.)

Worthington Whittredge 1861

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma presentation, April 7, 1861

Leutze emigrated with his family from Germany to the United States when he was nine years old. After establishing himself as a talented portraitist, he traveled to Düsseldorf to study and, later, became a noted teacher there. Thanks to his strong network of patrons and peers, Leutze's studio was a hub for American artists abroad. Among these artists, Worthington Whittredge became his closest friend. As Whittredge recounted in his autobiography, Leutze asked him to pose as the model for General Washington in the artist's masterwork, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Although it was not customary for Academicians to submit sketches as diploma works, Leutze's towering reputation and the ambition of the monumental canvas allowed for this exception.



Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851. Oil on canvas.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Elihu Vedder (New York City, 1836–1923 Rome, Italy)

Jane Jackson 1865

Oil on canvas

NA diploma presentation, May 7, 1866

The Civil War ended only a few weeks prior to the opening of the Academy's annual exhibition of 1865. There, Vedder exhibited eight paintings, including this work. The sitter was Jane Jackson, formerly an enslaved woman in the Confederacy, who had traveled north sometime before 1864 and ended up selling peanuts outside the building where Vedder kept his studio in New York City. After passing her frequently on the corner, the artist persuaded her to pose for him, had her photograph taken, drew her, painted her in this portrait, and, eventually, used her face for a series of works devoted to the subject of the Cumaean Sibyl, an ancient Roman priestess, culminating in the large-scale work reproduced below.



Elihu Vedder, *The Cumaean Sibyl*, 1876. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts



Ferdinand Thomas Lee Boyle (Ringwood, England, 1820–1906 New York City)

Eliza Greator 1869

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma portrait, date unknown



Winslow Homer (Boston, MA, 1836–1910 Prouts Neck, ME)

Croquet Player about 1865

Oil on canvas

NA diploma presentation, May 7, 1866

Founding an American School



Oliver Ingraham Lay (New York City, 1845–1890 Stratford, CT)

Winslow Homer 1865

Oil on canvas

ANA diploma presentation, May 7, 1866