

Sanford Robinson Gifford's *Gorge in the Mountains* Revived

GERALD L. CARR

Consulting Art Historian, Berry-Hill Galleries, New York

TODAY Sanford Robinson Gifford's painting of a sun-drenched, autumnal Catskill Mountains vista (Figure 1), the subject of this essay, ranks among his best-known, best-loved works. Dated 1862, and since 1914 in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, to which it was donated by the widow of its first owner, Morris K. Jesup of New York, the vertical canvas has been frequently eulogized, exhibited, and reproduced in color and black-and-white illustrations during the modern revival of interest in the Hudson River School. The painting will be featured in the Gifford retrospective co-curated by Kevin J. Avery and Franklin W. Kelly, to be held at the Metropolitan Museum; the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 2003–4.

Sanford Gifford (1823–1880; Figure 2), too, favored the picture, one of the largest of his oeuvre. Between 1862 and 1880, he painted several studio variants of sizable dimensions and numbers of smaller ones. Further, his extant works dating from the early to mid-1860s comprise more than a half-dozen oil studies as well as a handful of drawings of kindred scenic character, some partly or wholly executed in *plein air*. He publicly displayed three such small oils during 1862 and 1863.

Yet until now the Metropolitan Museum's painting by Gifford has remained elusive. Oddly, Gifford himself either omitted it or referred obliquely to it in a "List of Some of My Chief Pictures" that he compiled in 1874.¹ Current literature about the artist is devoid of conclusive contemporaneous or near-contemporaneous documentation for it.² The earliest title known to belong to the picture, "Kauterskill Falls," was bestowed on it during an exhibition held in New York City to celebrate the American Centennial, to which the painting was lent by Morris Jesup. That designation turns out to be neither the original one nor topographically accurate. Ninety years later, in

1966, Roland Van Zandt deduced that the depicted scene, a composition rather than a transcription, was based on the actual Haines Falls in the Catskills rather than on Kaaterskill Falls situated several miles away.³ Recent authors have believed that the painting was not publicly displayed prior to the Centennial, and that Jesup either commissioned it or acquired it directly from Gifford upon its completion.

At the same time, Hudson River School specialists have long recognized two factors complicating latter-day perceptions of Gifford. The first is the regrettable disappearance of many of his documented works of all sizes, among them major paintings shown at prominent venues and attested by journalists and colleagues during his lifetime. The second factor is the Civil War and Gifford's volunteer service, comprising three successive annual stints from 1861 to 1863, in the Union Army. His military duties inevitably both influenced and interrupted his professional travels and productivity. While the Metropolitan Museum canvas was under way in his New York studio, he began and soon exhibited a related but differing Catskills scene of matching vertical dimensions, while producing three somewhat smaller horizontal canvases of Union Army themes. Snapped up by a collector, that second upright Catskill composition, entitled *Kauterskill Clove*, was unveiled at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design held between April and June 1863 (no. 15; acquired by D. Willis James). Ironically, while all the war pictures are extant (as is a fourth, slightly later such work), *Kauterskill Clove*, widely discussed in press reviews of the National Academy show of 1863, has been untraced for decades.

My aim here is to roll back the mists that metaphorically have shrouded the Metropolitan Museum's painting, and to reestablish its historical identity and its centrality in the artist's development. Emphasizing early printed sources, I will retrace the picture's genesis and its early celebrity, while specifying its initial title and early exhibitions (in fact, there were at least two). By attempting also to reconstitute—visualize—the missing D. Willis James canvas of 1863 and adding

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Figure 1. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Gorge in the Mountains*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 48 x 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (121.9 x 101.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Maria DeWitt Jesup, from the collection of her husband, Morris K. Jesup, 1914 (15.30.62). See also Colorplate 4

correlative materials, I will provide insights into the painter's working methods and public persona from about 1860 to 1865, while introducing select individuals who verbalized his visual art during that period.

As will be discussed here, Gifford relied on field sketches and studio preparations made between the summer of 1861 and the following winter to compose the Metropolitan Museum picture. He worked (or had opportunities to work) on the canvas for most of the calendar year 1862. Then, between late December 1862 and early January 1863, three New York journalists—all using pseudonyms—who had authorized entrée to his quarters in the Tenth Street Studio Building on Broadway in New York, saw and wrote about the completed painting. Two of the writers are identifiable today, although the third, unfortunately, remains indefinite. Their texts, probing as well as descriptive, were published in two leading metropolitan newspapers; they are transcribed in the Appendix, below. All three reporters fervently praised the finished picture, one of them terming it Gifford's "greatest work of art," another characterizing it as "perhaps the very culmination of Mr. Gifford's genius" and "one of the most truly great pictures ever painted in this country," while the third nominated it "one of the few great landscapes of American art" and "a triumph of art." At that time, the artist conferred on it a generic, suggestive title, *A Gorge in the Mountains*. Subsequently, during 1863, Gifford twice presented the painting at prestigious group shows, in tandem with other works of his. The earlier event was an unusually lavish reception, for which no catalogue was issued, held at the Tenth Street Studio Building on the evening of February 3, 1863. The later one, for which a catalogue was printed, of which copies survive, took place at the fourth annual Artists' Fund exhibition staged at the Derby Institute on Broadway during November and December 1863. On each occasion Gifford entitled his picture *A Gorge in the Mountains*, as he had initially, and both times it attracted further press response. He also may have shown the picture at a Studio Building reception of April 2, 1863. Presumably he did not sell it before the end of 1863.

Among second-generation Hudson River School artists, only Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), Régis Gignoux (1816–1882), and perhaps John Frederick Kensett (1816–1872) presented their works, and themselves, to the American public as frequently and as readily as did Gifford. By early 1859, eighteen months after Gifford had returned to New York from a two-year European sojourn, East Coast reporters began charting his accomplishments and affability as they tried to distinguish him from his colleagues.



Figure 2. Photographer unknown, *Sanford Robinson Gifford*, 1868. Carte de visite from Mrs. Vincent Coyler's Album. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1952 (52.605)

"GIFFORD advances steadily," declared an appreciative New York reviewer of the Academy of Design show of 1859: "He gives strong impressions of space, sunshine and atmosphere, with definiteness of form, bones enough, solid ground and rocks—a corporeal body to sustain the spirit of light and air. If [Frederic Edwin] CHURCH is strong in statement of facts, in imitation of sensible and striking material qualities, GIFFORD has the lead in sentiment and depth of feeling. The perception of CHURCH is intellectual, not sympathetic. We admire his pictures, more than we enjoy them. They are literal, not imaginative. He gives us more of the body of Nature—Gifford more of her soul."⁴ This three-pronged assessment—that Gifford stood at the top of his profession; that he was a ruminative, sagacious poet with a brush; and that his painted aerial effects were magical—would be repeated many times through his death in 1880.

Approachability was another of Gifford's virtues. At Thanksgiving 1860, a former Brown University classmate and correspondent for the reputable Providence, Rhode Island, *Journal* visited the Tenth Street

Studio Building. He knocked on two doors, in order, so to speak, of national importance: Church's, then Gifford's. Church (1826–1900) received the writer graciously. Gifford welcomed his old friend:

. . . In New York he [Gifford] ranks high in the letter A of his profession, and none of his paintings fail to give the greatest pleasure by their warmth, their exquisite atmosphere, and their general fidelity to nature. During the past season Gifford sketched and studied in the Catskill, and his study [studio] is "fragrant" with dewy woods, sun-light falling on "rock and tree and river," and cloud-land reposing in the dreamiest fairy-like tranquility. . . . We had not met since 1843, when we were both members of the same class at Brown. I can see him as plainly as if it were but yesterday—with tall form, his peculiar cut of garment, his top piece of pointed black bear-skin cap—walking up and down Westminster street. But we cannot bring up all the memorabilia of the past. We adjourned from his studio to the [hotel] Albermarle, (a new, beautiful and most admirably kept white marble palace on Madison Square, just right for the night arriving train from Providence,) where we discussed one of [hotel proprietor] Mr. Ives's best dinners. There we recounted our wanderings. After leaving Brown, Gifford devoted himself to landscape art. In 1856 [*sic*] he went to Europe and spent two years roaming amid the glories of Switzerland or in that dreamy paradise of artists, "fair Italia." I felt proud of him as an old Brunonian, and prouder still, that he was an American who had reached so lofty a height in landscape art.⁵

Writing for *New Yorkers*, a contemporary commended "Gifford's refinement in his manner as well as in his pictures."⁶ But a New York correspondent for another respected New England journal, the *Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican*, discerned enigma in the artist. "Gifford, the gorgeous, lotos-loving Gifford," the commentator wrote, "was revealed to me on that evening [of February 1862, at the Tenth Street Studio Building]; a quiet, self-contained and gentle mannered man, with only a slight hint of his dangerous mania in his dark eyes."⁷ The writer then referred to the artist's *Winter Twilight* (1862; Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington), a painting on view that night, as "one of his happiest efforts, if that can be called an effort, which seems to me to have glided upon the canvas at the touch of an enchanter's wand. Just such a transfigured, sunset, snow scene as in my childhood—how far back it seems!—used to take my breath away with its still, dreamlike beauty. Snow, and ice, and crescent moon, and dismantled trees; but the rosy light, the *dolce far niente*, the Gifford spell, is over all." This appraisal, too—that while his pictures evoked sweet childhood memories, Gifford's

adult demeanor was at once intense and enervated—was reiterated by his contemporaries.

Not everyone who saw Gifford's works admired them, or admired them unreservedly. In the aforementioned write-up of February 1862, the *Springfield Republican* correspondent floated, then quitted, a critique of sorts by introducing Gifford's *Winter Twilight* as "proof that he is not so much of an Indian summer monomaniac as I supposed." A year later, the same commentator amplified that friendly disapproval: "Gifford . . . is growing out of his misty effects, coming down from his molten gold altitudes, and giving us something besides hasheesh visions and Indian Summer languors. Beautiful exceedingly are these picture-dreams of his, but they are picture-dreams only. No mortal man or even *woman* could exist for an hour in this sublimated atmosphere. It is said that Mr. Gifford is color-blind; that he cannot distinguish green from red. Perhaps this is why he has so reveled in the yellow and incarnadines. Yet whatever his pencil essays bespeaks artistic genius of an uncommon order; and if he labors under this disadvantage his pictures are a marvel."⁸

By the turn of the 1860s, the fine arts were so woven into the social fabric of greater New York City, as well as, increasingly, such American urban centers as Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Chicago, that local artists hardly could keep up. Besides the annual gatherings of the National Academy of Design (Gifford became a full Academician in 1854) and the Artists' Fund (instituted in 1859, of which Gifford was a board member), two major Manhattan artists' studio facilities—the Tenth Street Studio Building (into which Gifford moved in 1857, the year it opened) and Dodworth's Academy (home of the "Artists' Reception Association" starting in 1858)—held seasonal public receptions, as did the Brooklyn Art Association (founded in 1861), and the Cooper Union (founded in 1859), an educational institute for women that comprised an art school. A handful of further New York artists' facilities, such as the University Building, rarely held receptions. At the Tenth Street Studio Building, where Gifford lived and worked, he sometimes assisted in organizing exhibitions, and he customarily assigned one or more of his finished pictures to the communal display and, when he was in residence, opened the doors of his third-floor studio. Visitors stopping by at random could glimpse the entirety of his working environment, including paintings as yet unfinished. (Church, by contrast, seldom opened his quarters except to preferred guests, which practice of his became a recurring source of complaint.) In addition, two Manhattan clubs, the Century (Gifford became a member in 1859) and the Athenaeum



Figure 3. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Twilight in the Catskills—Kauterskill Clove*, 1861. Oil on canvas, 27 x 54 in. (68.6 x 137.2 cm). Private collection (photo: Williamstown Art Conservation Center)

(founded in 1858), mounted art displays up to eight times a year for their monthly meetings. From its inception the Brooklyn Art Association printed catalogues of its regular shows (its own monthly meetings, garnished by limited assemblages of members' art, were not accompanied by catalogues), as, eventually, did the Century and Union League Clubs (the latter founded in 1863, of which Gifford also became a member) in Manhattan. But those listings were not necessarily comprehensive, and no catalogues were issued for the receptions at the Manhattan studios.⁹

A few of Gifford's colleagues—Bierstadt, Church, and Gignoux conspicuously among them—chose to exhibit their (mostly) ambitious works as individual attractions, or "Great Pictures," at commercial and for-hire galleries. While Gifford did not follow suit, he gravitated to the other milieus as well as to charity shows such as those held at Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. Beecher organized one such benefit during the fall of 1861 and another about a year later; Gifford contributed works to both. The receptions and club meetings were diverting social occasions. Celebrities of the cultural, commercial, and political worlds jostled with one another. Speeches, refreshments, music provided by resident or hired bands, the din of conversation, and the sheer numbers of people—notably, attractive women wearing shimmering, rustling gowns—were systemic distractions. At times, exhibit rooms were transformed into impromptu dance halls. Over and over, well-meaning reporters sent to cover these gatherings ended up noting or protesting that the art on the walls could hardly be seen, much less scrutinized.¹⁰

The outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 abruptly changed those dynamics. Gifford, aged thirty-seven, quickly enlisted in the Seventh Regiment

of the New York State National Guard, attached to the Union Army. His New York colleagues, among them Bierstadt and Gifford's friend, Jervis McEntee (1828–1891), soon followed suit. The National Academy of Design was converted into an armory and resounded with the clatter of drill marches; the Tenth Street Studio Building's proprietor generously promised to maintain volunteer soldiers' accommodations and not to charge them rent until they returned; and William Wilson Corcoran's art gallery in Washington shortly became a military clothing depot.¹¹ When Gifford left the army by early June 1861 after service near Washington, he headed for his boyhood home in Hudson, New York, where his parents still lived. Extant manuscripts and drawings published by Ila Weiss and contemporary press reports reveal that he was soon trekking the nearby Catskills with fellow Tenth Street Studio Building tenant Thomas Worthington Whit-tredge (1820–1910). Together they sketched "the [Kaaterskill] Clove and other picturesque parts."¹² Those were familiar, congenial locales for Gifford. His major easel painting of 1861, developed (according to journalists) from a "study" of about 1860–61 (whereabouts unknown), and unveiled at a Studio Building reception in March 1861 and accorded fuller exposure a short time later at the National Academy of Design (no. 225), had been a sizable *Twilight in the Catskills* (Figure 3). Recently rediscovered, the canvas was eagerly previewed in early March 1861 by an anonymous local reporter, who designated it "Clove of the Kauterskill Sunset."¹³ When Eugene Benson (1839–1908), an aspiring artist and prolific art and literary critic who was commencing his writing career with the New York *Commercial Advertiser* newspaper, saw the picture in Gifford's studio about the same date, he, too, admired it—and then mistook it for a

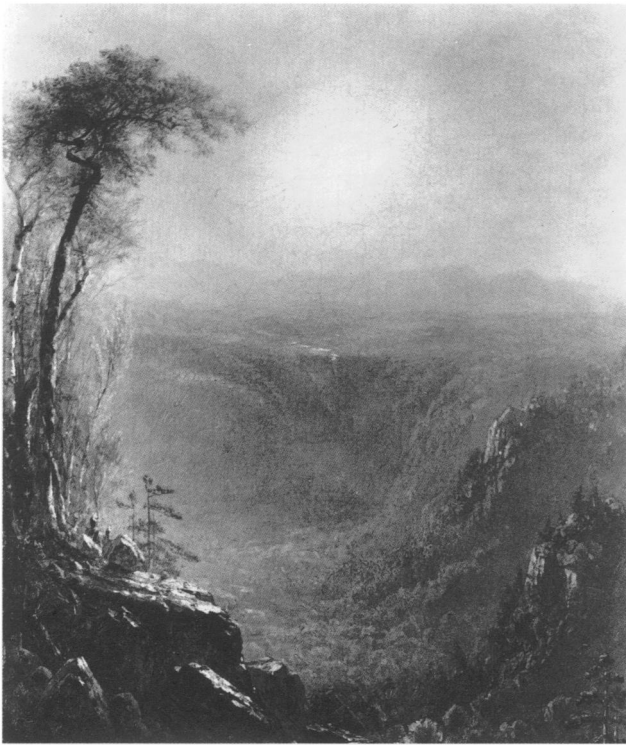


Figure 4. Sanford Robinson Gifford, study for *A Gorge in the Mountains*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 12¼ x 11 in. (32.7 x 27.9 cm). Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz Jr. (photo: Helga Photo Studio)

“Sunset in the Adirondacks.”¹⁴ Subsequently, Benson became closer to and, usually although not always, better informed about Gifford.

By late 1861, having returned to a rejuvenating New York City, Gifford busied himself inside and outside of his studio. His career paths had been smoothed by a congratulatory biographical assessment, the second in a series headed “Our Artists,” authored by Benson for the *Commercial Advertiser* and published in mid-October.¹⁵ Gifford soon sent recent paintings to the Artists’ Fund, Plymouth Church, and the Brooklyn Art Association. One of those pictures, entitled *Autumnal Sunset* at the Brooklyn Art Association, Benson vaguely characterized as “a most powerful piece of effect . . . which, in addition to its strength, possesses what we term fine *quality* of color.”¹⁶

In January 1862, Gifford contributed works to receptions held at Dodworth’s and at the Tenth Street Studio Building. Evidently at the latter venue, daylight and moonlit Civil War subjects by him as well as the aforementioned *Winter Twilight* were all available for viewing.¹⁷ Then in mid-March he sent to Dodworth’s a small picture that Benson described as an “Italian Landscape” but that a *New York Times* reporter termed

a “gorge all ablaze with sunlight.”¹⁸ Assuming that the latter was correct, that work, probably identifiable as one of three oil studies now in private collections (see, for example, Figure 4), would have been a precursor to *A Gorge in the Mountains*. Benson seems to have recognized his reporting error at Dodworth’s, for he soon wrote that Gifford, who “like all opulent men, is lavish in his endowments,” would send “three of his most consummate works” to the forthcoming Academy of Design exhibition: “like amber,—they hold imprisoned in everlasting glory pure sunlight and immortal beauty. One is a mountain gorge steeped in sunshine; another the Roman Campagna, washed by everlasting currents of air; and the third the ‘Winter Twilight,’ with a sky flushed ruby red like the wine in Belshazzar’s cups. It will be remembered these last two mentioned works are those which attracted so much attention, the second in the Tenth Street Reception, the first in that of the Brooklyn Art Association at the Academy of Music.”¹⁹

But Gifford’s Academy entries of 1862 turned out differently. *Winter Twilight* and the Italian picture (whereabouts unknown) appeared as foretold, but instead of a “mountain gorge,” he sent the two aforementioned military scenes. While Benson’s reporting conceivably could have erred again, a more likely scenario is that the “mountain gorge” wasn’t ready. In any event, a few weeks after the Academy of Design exhibition opening on March 19, Gifford rejoined the Seventh New York Regiment and was soon stationed near Baltimore, “leaving,” according to Benson, “some unfinished works on his easel, characterized by the genius which ever seems to direct his brush.”²⁰ Logically, the “mountain gorge” would have been among them. By late August 1862, having again mustered out of the military, Gifford proceeded to upstate New York, then to western Massachusetts. Back in New York City by late October, he was reported to have had added 150 new sketches to his portfolio.²¹ Numbers of these recorded his regimental experiences,²² but others captured scenes from the Catskills and Berkshires. One of the latter stood out. Benson saw it, and wrote enthusiastically about it: “. . . He [Gifford] has one little sketch—an Autumnal impression of the Catskills—representing a gorge in the mountains, darkened here and there by the fleeting shadow of a moving cloud, while the matured and golden splendor of the changed [tree] leaves clothe their sides as a costly robe, sparkling with gems on the shoulders of a sleeping god. Though but a sketch, it suggests to us a picture with all the *affecting* sentiment which lush color and excessive beauty generally arouses [*sic*] in certain temperaments. Imagine the mountains thickly wooded; the trees arrayed in their many-hued robes,

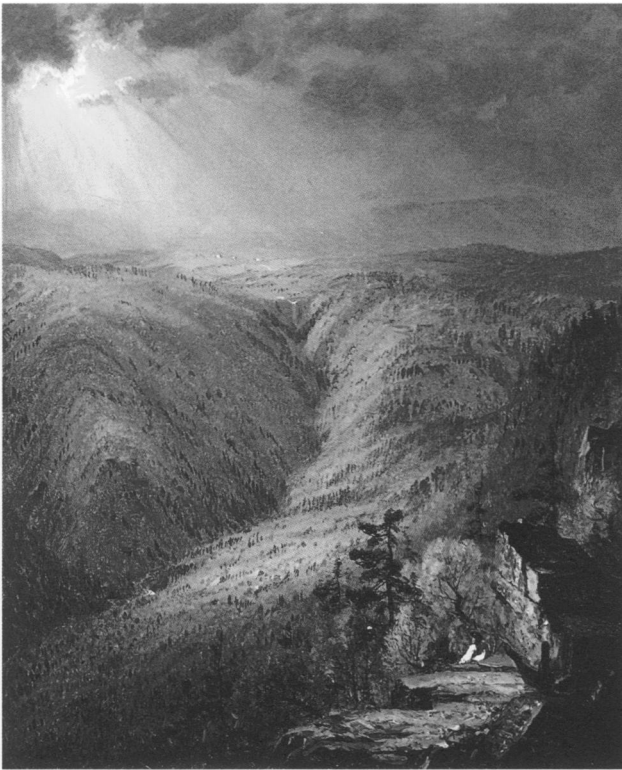


Figure 5. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Kauterskill Clove, in the Catskills*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 10¼ x 8¾ in. (27.3 x 22.5 cm). Warner Collection of the Gulf States Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Ala. (photo: courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)



Figure 6. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Kauterskill Clove, a Study*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 15 x 12 in. (38.1 x 30.5 cm). Private collection (photo: Sotheby's, New York)

that sends back the caressing sunlight that slants down upon them, that steepens them in warmth, that enfolds them with splendor—this is the reality of Mr. Gifford's sketch. . . ."²³

The "sketch" in question was a new one, descended from his unfinished "gorge" and its studio and *plein air* antecedents but distinct from them. Hence, while the "gorge" canvas was still under way in his Manhattan studio, Gifford, freshly inspired by the Catskills, initiated a more stirring variant. First to the Century Association, then to Dodworth's in mid-January 1863, he sent the new "gorge" sketch or another developed from it²⁴—presumably, either the vibrant vertical scene now in the Warner Collection (Figure 5), or a slightly larger sibling (Figure 6), about both of which more will be said below. Seven weeks later, in early March, he contributed a related work to the Brooklyn Art Association. Benson succinctly termed it "a very fine study of a mountain-top full of feeling and nature,"²⁵ while a reporter for the New York *Evening Post* discussed it as "a study from nature of a mountain summit whose subtle gradations of light and shade, especially along the niched and channeled precipice which formed its nearer side, and the eddying ridges

which fell from it toward the background, were admirably managed. Though a small and unpretending picture, it was a good specimen of his mastery over the distances of mountain scenery—a rare excellence, because a most difficult one, where inches mean miles not only of breadth, but height and depth, and where not to be masterly is to make a pitiful jumble of mole-hills."²⁶ At least four paintings by Gifford of that character are extant.

Meanwhile the artist was concluding the "mountain gorge," the Metropolitan Museum painting, presumably commenced months earlier. A writer for the New York *Herald* learned of it by the second week of December 1862: "Gifford is occupied upon a large picture—a composition—which promises to be one of his most successful efforts. It is an effect of sunrise [*sic*] in a mountain gorge, and is rich in all the resplendent effects in which he loves to luxuriate."²⁷

Shortly before Christmas the completed canvas was fit for public announcement. We may assume that Gifford solicited or encouraged three local writers whose talents he valued to publicize the painting. One of those individuals was Eugene Benson; another, Hudson, New York, native Robert Barry Coffin (1826–



Figure 7. Frederic Edwin Church, *Coast Scene, Mt. Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48¼ in. (91.4 x 122.6 cm). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1948.178 (photo: E. Irving Blomstrann)

1886), whose literary byline was “Barry Gray,” was freelance critic and editor of the *Home Journal*, a local weekly. The third reporter, an employee of the *Leader*, a rival New York weekly, used the pseudonym “Atticus.” At that juncture, Coffin had just left the *Home Journal* to become a customs officer, but he continued to write for diverse in- and out-of-town journals, among them the *Leader*. That fall, the *Leader* had begun its own series of articles, mostly authored by “Atticus,” on living American artists, but Coffin handled the final three such essays, starting with one about Gifford.²⁸ The *Leader* printed Coffin’s two-column “Gifford, the Artist” on December 27, 1862, the same day that the *Commercial Advertiser* published Benson’s column headed “Art. Concerning Two Great and Representative Works.” Both comprised extended, eloquent explications of Gifford’s new painting.

Coffin’s Columbia County, New York, birthplace positioned him ideally to appraise Gifford and the painter’s *A Gorge in the Mountains*. For contemporaries, Coffin helped inaugurate the completed canvas. For us, he fixes its identity. Defining its vertical dimensions of 48 by 40 inches, he conscientiously narrated the scene: He detected the hunter, gun, and dog, all almost imperceptible amid the foreground ledges; he mentioned the tall birches atop the escarpment at the near left; he discerned the clearing with a log house in the right distance, the central waterfall, the winding stream and the lake below, and he noted the hazy ridges in the far distance. He was especially enchanted by the cloudless sky, through which “the

afternoon sun, hanging in the atmosphere tremulous with vitality and glowing with misty particles of golden light . . . radiates a halo of almost supernatural glory.” Coffin’s capsule biography of the artist (not transcribed in the Appendix, below), recounting the Gifford family’s long-term residency in upstate New York, the painter’s two-year studentship at Brown University, and his transatlantic acquaintances with the Anglo-American painter Charles Robert Leslie and with descendants of the English painter John Constable, among other matters, is important testimony in itself.

Benson prefaced his discussion of *A Gorge in the Mountains* with an appreciative assessment of a contemporaneous large landscape by McEntee, *Virginia* (alternately, *Virginia in 1863* [whereabouts unknown]), in which McEntee mourned the destructiveness of the ongoing war. For Benson, the two paintings were effective, representative opposites: *Virginia* was a dirge; *A Gorge in the Mountains* was a rhapsody. His analysis of Gifford’s *Gorge* hinged on the elusive concept of artistic “genius.” Although reluctant to regard it as a symptom of quality, Benson surrendered to Gifford’s technical mastery: “There are passages of color and execution so delicate and tender, as almost to mock the sense.” Like Coffin, Benson was mesmerized by the painted “sun, which shines in mellow glory down and over their [the mountains’] towering and russet sides, swims over the gorge, over the lake in the hills, and inundates every nook and cranny of nature with its light.”

A week later, on January 3, 1863, the *Leader*’s “Atticus” weighed in. That journal therefore previewed the

painting in successive issues. At times hard to satisfy, "Atticus" found unalloyed superlative and alluring sensuality in *A Gorge in the Mountains*—"one of the most truly great pictures ever painted in this country; remarkable for the tenderness and richness of its color, for the affluence of its beauty, and for the floods of mellow light which inundate the mountain tops, and rain over and in the gorge, down which tumbles a stream, and at whose base a lake lies full open to the crowning splendor of the afternoon sun, which it receives as the eyes of an opulent natured woman receives, in indolent repose, the full tenderness and glory of her lover's passion-veiled eyes."

Nor was Benson's ardor assuaged. On January 7, 1863, the *Commercial Advertiser* published another of his disquisitions about "Our Artists," this one on the history and portrait painter Daniel Huntington (whose work Benson did not endorse). Taking what was, for the period, an exceptional aesthetic stance, Benson digressed to re-evoke Gifford's new painting as a paradigm:

... In truth, only that which is *necessary* lives. Not that which is done for art's sake, but for truth's sake. Art as art is not permanent; but art as an expression of the soul is enduring. "The White Captive" [1857-58; MMA 94.9.3] of [Erastus Dow] Palmer, "The Gorge in the Mountains" of Gifford, grew not into being because those men desired to make something to please and charm, and show the sweetness of their sense of color or the fascinations of their skill in representing form; but because beauty and color solicited them, haunted them, and demanded expression. Not because they wished to make something *like* that which *had* won the applause of the world, but because they wished to deliver themselves of the burden of beauty and light that had sunk into their beings, and agitated them with the painfully delicious unrest of the birth-giving spirit. They were necessities; they were realities; they were inspirations of the present. And as such they stand, immortal examples of the best that American art can offer.²⁹

The next step for Gifford was public display. Anticipation of a Tenth Street Studio Building reception slated for early February 1863 was already intensifying; Benson "expect[ed] some of the best works by American artists executed within the past six months."³⁰ Had he wished to do so, Church could have flaunted two masterworks there, then: *Cotopaxi* (1862; Detroit Institute of Arts); and *Coast Scene, Mt. Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)* (1863; Figure 7), the former already seen and glowingly described by Benson.³¹ As does Gifford's *Gorge*, both canvases by Church pivot on veiled solar disks. But Church was not prepared for full disclosure of either work. How-

ever, Bierstadt, concluding the second ten-foot canvas of his career, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (1863; Figure 8), decided to expose his new chef d'oeuvre at the reception, thus—as Gordon Hendricks surmised thirty years ago—sidestepping confrontation with Church's *Cotopaxi*.³² Bierstadt's strategy would have energized colleagues throughout the Studio Building. According to one journalist, the evening gala of February 3, 1863, was "one of the pleasantest occasions of the kind we have ever attended." Distinguished persons thronged the interiors, hampering viewing conditions. *The Rocky Mountains* dominated the communal gallery on the ground floor, while visitors to Bierstadt's studio, also on the ground floor, were regaled by his sketches and his collected Native American artifacts. Gifford's moody *Baltimore, 1862—Twilight* (Figure 9), McEntee's solemn *Virginia*, both touted by a reporter as "embodiments of the times," McEntee's subdued *Autumn Twilight* (whereabouts unknown), and the animal painter/humorist William Holbrook Beard's buoyant *Santa Claus* (1862; Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence) represented those artists downstairs. One and two levels above, in their respective studios, a winter scene (whereabouts unknown or unidentified) by McEntee, and *A Gorge in the Mountains* and related works by Gifford, along with a painting by University Building tenant Eastman Johnson, were available for inspection. Régis Gignoux, the genre painter John G. Brown, Gifford's friend the landscapist Worthington Whittredge, and Church's friends the animal painter William Jacob Hays Sr. (1830-1875) and the sculptor Launt Thompson were among the residents who also opened their quarters. Shutting his second-story studio, Church added "a small sunset . . . sketchy and vigorous" (whereabouts unknown or unidentified) to the downstairs array.³³

Gifford's works galvanized two reporters among the attendees. A writer for the New York *Evening Post* hailed the artist's "very strong, original pictures. That which exhibited the finest audacity was the portrait of a Kaaterskill gorge. Portrait, we rightly call it, because he made no show of introducing accessories, and merely depended on the sheer native capabilities of a great chasm, which did not disappoint his trust. It is long since we have seen such powerful effect produced by as simple means. The light, distance, and deep suggestions of the picture are remarkable, even for Gifford. . . ."³⁴ In his summation of the reception for the Boston *Evening Transcript*, Robert Barry Coffin augmented his previous praises: "Gifford's 'Gorge in the Mountains' is a pleasing subject nobly treated. The atmosphere is full of warmth and vitality, and possesses just that mellowness which one invariably



Figure 8. Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 73¼ x 120¼ in. (186.7 x 306.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.123)

observes when on a dreamy afternoon in September [sic], he looks toward the setting sun; misty particles of light fill his sight; and a halo surrounds the sun like a glory.”³⁵

That was pretty much that. No other local or out-of-town journalists went beyond mentioning Gifford’s “two remarkable pictures,” and the fact that “Gifford was at home in his brilliantly lighted studio in the midst of his mountain gorges and purple sunsets.”³⁶ Doubtless part of the problem was the blanket coverage accorded the painting one month earlier. Another part may well have stemmed from the approaching National Academy of Design exhibition, scheduled for mid-April. On the evening of April 2, 1863, days before the Academy exhibition opening, Tenth Street Studio Building tenants devised a “supplementary” reception, at which works by Beard, Bierstadt, Church (!), Gifford, Gignoux, Thompson, and Emanuel Leutze, among others, were said to be plentiful. This time, though, press summaries were diffuse; Bierstadt’s *Rocky Mountains* (Figure 8), not designated for the Academy, was one of the few works cited by name.³⁷ Another work on view received reproach not for presumed quality or lack thereof, but because of the creator’s future plans. Commending a version

of William Jacob Hays’s oblong *Herd of Bison Crossing the Missouri River* (1863; see Figure 10) as “by far the best achievement of Hays,” the *Evening Post* critic regretted the painter’s decision to withhold it from the Academy display.³⁸ The solar radiance suffusing Hays’s Missouri valley panorama is so like that of Gifford’s Hudson valley declivity that each artist must have examined the other’s picture.

Meantime Gifford readied *Kauterskill Clove* and another sizable scene with reported strong chiaroscuro, *Mansfield Mountain—Sunset* (no. 90; acquired by Robert Gordon; whereabouts unknown), as well as his *Baltimore, 1862—Twilight* (Figure 9), for the National Academy of Design. Those goals attained, the newer Catskills picture accordingly was seen by many more people than was the slightly older *Gorge*. “Attract[ing] much attention” at the Academy, *Kauterskill Clove* must have resembled the aforementioned oil studies, both dated 1862 (Figures 5, 6). “Atticus,” for instance, summarized the Academy canvas as “a ravine wrapped in a passing rain cloud, with the sun breaking through the half obscuring mist to illumine one side with an almost royal radiance . . . [which] shows a slight repetition of the rounded forms on each side of the ravine.”³⁹ That

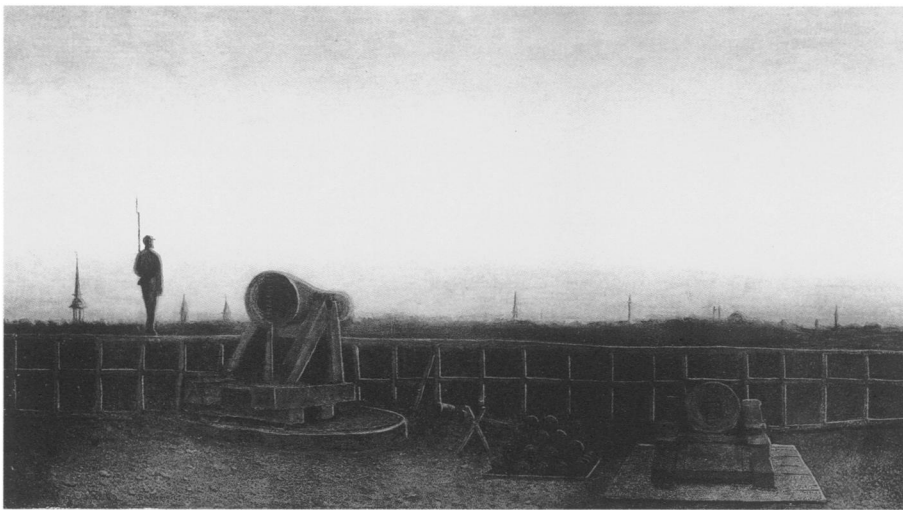


Figure 9. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Baltimore, 1862—Twilight*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 18 x 32 in. (45.7 x 81.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Lent by the Seventh Regiment Fund, Inc., L.1989.71.4

synopsis was echoed by other reviewers, among them the art critic for the *New York World*, who added that the foreground included a “bear”⁴⁰—as, indeed, does Gifford’s larger oil study of the subject (Figure 6). Bears were *au courant* just then: William H. Beard’s *Bears on a Bender* (whereabouts unknown), on view at the National Academy (no. 489), and three canvases by Bierstadt—his imperious *Rocky Mountains*, not shown at the Academy; a small *Swiss Lake* that he consigned to the Artists’ Fund in late 1862 (no. 30; whereabouts unknown); and a medium-size, vertical Western composition dated 1863, nowadays deceptively known as *Rocky Mountains, Lander’s Peak* (Figure 11)—also featured the

animals.⁴¹ With the last-named painting, depicting an alpine Shangri-la seen through a shadowed ravine where a black bear has savaged a deer, Bierstadt in effect dueled Gifford’s Hudson Valley gorges, asserting the supremacy of the West over the East. With his painting, Gifford’s bearskin cap in effect came back to life to prowl the Catskills and to bask in their hallowed sunlight. One writer considered *Kauterskill Clove* “a true companion-piece of Church’s *Coast Scene*” (see Figure 7), a rugged but “dreamy” Atlantic marine, likewise on view at the Academy.⁴² Another reporter became bewildered, however. After discussing *Kauterskill Clove* in terms similar to “Atticus’s,” the *Evening Post*’s writer concluded that the



Figure 10. William Jacob Hays Sr., *A Herd of Bison Crossing the Missouri River*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 72 in. (91.7 x 182.9 cm). Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo.; Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Trust Fund Purchase, 3.60 (photo: Buffalo Bill Historical Center)



Figure 11. Albert Bierstadt, *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Oil on linen, 43 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (110.8 x 90.1 cm). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Mass.; Gift of Mrs. William Hayes Fogg, 1895.698 (photo: Fogg Art Museum)

canvas was the same one that had been shown in February, but that it had since been repainted. That misjudgment, in turn, has tempted confusion in recent times.⁴³ *Kauterskill Clove* latterly represented Gifford at the Great North-Western Fair held at Chicago in June 1865, after the Civil War ended.⁴⁴

Between the closing of the Academy display of 1863 and the advent of the next Artists' Fund exhibition, Gifford again rejoined the Seventh New York Regiment. Reportedly having read about the unit's call-up in a newspaper, he dropped everything and hastened to reunite with it. He and his comrades avoided action near Gettysburg, but events soon took turns for the worse, first with the draft riots in New York City, then with the death of one of his brothers following the latter's imprisonment by the Confederates.⁴⁵ After his discharge, Gifford roamed southern New England and, as usual, the Catskills and Kaaterskill Clove before resettling in his New York studio to begin a depiction of a thunderstorm brewing over a lake in the Catskills.⁴⁶ Eventually entitled *A Coming Storm* (ca. 1863–65; retouched and redated 1880; Figure 12) and purchased by the actor Edwin Booth, the tragic brother of John Wilkes Booth, by 1865, the year Gifford presented it at the National Academy of Design (no. 85), the painting was said in June 1865 to epitomize “the coming storm under which he [Edwin Booth, the owner], together with the whole country, is bent in mourning.”⁴⁷

In short, during 1863 Gifford was shedding the sensuous serenity of *A Gorge in the Mountains* in favor of heightened dramas. But he had one roll of the dice left. Listing no owner for *A Gorge in the Mountains* in



Figure 13. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Coming Storm*, ca. 1863–65, repainted 1880. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 50 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (91.7 x 127.9 cm). Promised gift to the Philadelphia Museum of Art from an anonymous donor, 213-1986-001 (photo: Graydon Wood, 1995)

the catalogue (no. 86), he offered the painting and a somewhat smaller *Riva-Lago di Garga*, dated 1863, by then owned by Henry G. Marquand (no. 95; private collection), to the loan section of the Artists' Fund exhibition of 1863, while consigning a lesser work, *Calverack Creek* (no. 51; whereabouts unknown) to the exhibition's sale section. The show's buzz was formidable: the star attraction of the loan section, Rosa Bonheur's world-renowned *Horse Fair* (1853, 1855; MMA 87.25), accompanied esteemed works by Church, Leutze, Washington Allston, and Thomas Cole, among others. In that setting Gifford's nearly year-old Kaaterskill painting garnered modest press response, but what there was, was flattering. The New York *Tribune* cited "a mountain gorge by Gifford, No. 86, [which] lies steeped in the golden hazes that delight that artist as well as the public."⁴⁸ The New York *Times* praised the "superb Autumn scene, by GIFFORD . . . a vast mountain gorge, enveloped and beautifully obscured by the golden haze of an Autumn day, which in nature, as it does here, enraptures the beholder."⁴⁹ Two of the work's staunchest advocates stayed steadfast. Writing again for the Boston *Evening Transcript*, Robert Barry Coffin dilated on current critical discourse:

. . . In the hands of a master like Gifford, who may be said to stand at the head of this [*dolce far niente*] school, and who first showed how much might be done with only yellows and grays on his palette, this poetical and somewhat ideal treatment of nature is recognized as truthful because it is the expression of a certain peculiar phase or mood which, though rarely visible, does, after all, exist. It does not, however, belong to all seasons or scenes, and therefore is not applicable to them; but this fact the followers of this school either fail to perceive or else wittingly ignore; and the result is that they are painting pictures which lack character and naturalness, and though they please the eye, utterly fail of commending themselves to the judgments of the judicious. The best example of this style, and the one which critics will recognize as a genuine work of art, and true to nature, is Gifford's "Gorge in the Mountains."⁵⁰

Eugene Benson penned this personalized reaffirmation for the New York *Commercial Advertiser*: ". . . It is Mr. Gifford's happiness, in my judgment, to be represented by the *greatest* landscape in the [Artists' Fund] exhibition. So much has been written about this picture (No. 86) that it is not necessary for me to express at length my sense of its supreme beauty and masterly execution. It is the most subtle piece of painting that I have ever seen, and expresses the truth of atmosphere and light and space in a way not to be excelled. I cannot imagine art going beyond this. The

picture is a dream of beauty to me and has that *oneness*, that simplicity which is generally the mark of a great work of art."⁵¹

APPENDIX

The following three texts on Gifford's *A Gorge in the Mountains* are transcribed from articles published in, respectively, the *Leader* (New York), December 27, 1862, p. 1; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, December 27, 1862, p. 1; *Leader* (New York), January 3, 1863, p. 1.

(For the *Leader*.)

GIFFORD, THE ARTIST

. . . That many of Mr. Gifford's pictures exert a power akin to this [stimulants to memory and sentiment], few who have carefully studied them will fail to perceive. This feeling was never more fully experienced by me than when, a few days ago, I stood before his last, and I think his greatest, work of art. It is entitled "A Gorge in the Mountains," and is an upright, measuring forty by forty-eight inches. From beside a rocky eminence in the left foreground the spectator gazes toward the afternoon sun, hanging in the atmosphere tremulous with vitality and glowing with misty particles of golden light, down through a slightly winding vista, miles in extent, broken in its regularity by tree-clad spurs of mountains which advance into it on either hand, their near sides in shadow, their fronts bathed in sunshine and their summits scarred by centuries of storms. In the far distance a range of mountains, faintly limned against the horizon, crosses the gorge, its bluish tint fading gradually into the hazy atmosphere above it. A water-fall, with its silvery sheen, gleams amidst the far-off landscape, and its stream is traceable here and there through the autumnal foliage, as it leaps from rock to rock, or glides quickly along the valley, until its waters commingle in a lake slumbering at the foot of the precipice forming the foreground. Very effectively introduced, as a contrast to the wilderness and solitude of the scene, is the hill side clearing at the right, with its log-house in the midst, the only evidence in the picture that the hand of man had attempted to bring this wilderness into subjugation.

It is with this object in mind that one is disposed to accept as a proper adjunct to the picture, and which may be said to invest it with life-like interest, the insertion of the figure of a hunter, with dog and gun, clambering up the rugged and steep cliffs in the left foreground; but even this would seem objectionable

in a painting of this character, were it not that the artist has very properly made both figures so unobtrusive, blending them, as it were, with the dark rocks which form their background, that the eye fails at first sight to perceive them at all. The birches, which spring from the summit of the rocks on the left hand, are skillfully drawn, and are exceedingly vigorous and graceful. The rocks themselves are pleasing in tone and general effect, and are stamped with strength and great freedom of expression. The picture is remarkable for its excellent gradations, both as regards proportion and perspective, color and light. The air is aglow with the warmth and brightness of a mellow October afternoon, and from the descending sun radiates a halo of almost supernatural glory.

BARRY GRAY

S. R. GIFFORD'S "GORGE IN THE MOUNTAINS."

From Mr. McEntee's studio [in the Tenth Street Studio Building, New York] we pass to that of S. R. Gifford, and are privileged to see upon his easel, the largest, latest, and ripest product of his affluent genius. Mr. Gifford's picture represents nature, opulent and triumphant, as McEntee's [*Virginia*] depicts it sad and devastated. Mr. Gifford's picture is nature in the full radiance of her beauty, bathed in the light of an afternoon sun, steeped in golden splendor, and mellow with the ripe luxuriance of Autumn color. It is entitled "A Gorge in the Mountains." Every way worthy of the genius of the painter, it yet surprises us as being greater in some respects, than any previous work. There are passages of color and execution so delicate and tender, as almost to mock the sense. But the technical part of a work of genius is the least part except as the result is dependent upon the perfection of particulars. In the presence of the work of a man of talent, we studiously observe the manipulation and rendering of parts; in the presence of the work of a man of genius, we yield ourselves, whether we will or no, to the currents of thought and emotion which flow from it and become one with the picture, accept it as the representation of an idea, and forget the man and the artist to do homage to a work into which he has crowded and packed the best elements of his nature.

This picture is a picture of the poet. None more so. And sitting before it, bathed in the affluence and warmth of its light, luxuriating in its color, having our thought steeped in the delicious indolence of its atmosphere, and aroused by the magnitude and wealth of its spirit, we have no care, but, sun-steeped at noon, ask that every pore of our body may become a gate through which sensation may flow, and every nerve an avenue along which may course the subtle messengers

charged with the secret of its beauty. We readily confess to the most unbounded admiration for this work—"A Gorge in the Mountains"—crowned by the sun, which shines in mellow glory down and over their towering and russet sides, swims over the gorge, over the lake in the hills, and inundates every nook and cranny of nature with its light. This is one of the most difficult effects of nature to represent, and Mr. Gifford stands alone in giving its richness and affluent beauty.

There are those of our artists who have given us the tenderness and delicacy of the waves of light flowing from the sun, but none the opulence and magnificence, the mellow richness, such as we find in Mr. Gifford's work. The picture is a dream of beauty—a poem of light. Do you ask for splendor, for opulence of spirit, for mellowness of color, for space, for air?—you have all here. It is one of the few great landscapes of American art. It is a perfect marvel of color. The sense of paint is never present, the idea of a picture is foreign to us when before this matchless expression of artistic genius. What words have we to utter in the presence of such a triumph of art? No combinations of language can picture its opulent beauty; no succession of sentences can so wrap our senses in delight, and make us reel with the intoxication of sensuous beauty, as is done by Mr. Gifford's "Gorge in the Mountains." Words must swim in color, and be steeped in warmth,—they must be saturated with expression and light, to convey to the reader, anything of this "Gorge in the Mountains." To fail to see, nay, to *feel*, all that it is, is to be stupid—is to be dead to the mellow glory of an afternoon sun, unresponsive to the delicious harmonies of Autumn color.

PROTEUS.

Art Feuilleton. BY ATTICUS. ART IN NEW YORK.

... From Mr. [Richard William] Hubbard's room [in the Tenth Street Studio Building] we pass to that of

S. R. GIFFORD,

where we find a large picture, which shows perhaps the very culmination of Mr. Gifford's genius, entitled "A Gorge in the Mountains," one of the most truly great pictures ever painted in this country; remarkable for the tenderness and richness of its color, for the affluence of its beauty, and for the floods of mellow light which inundate the mountain tops, and rain over and in the gorge, down which tumbles a stream, and at whose base a lake lies full open to the crowning splendor of the afternoon sun, which it receives as the eyes of an opulent natured woman receives, in indolent repose, the full tenderness and glory of her lover's passion-veiled eyes. Mr. Gifford expresses space

and air on every square inch of his canvas, and by simple but indescribable means pores [*sic*] over his picture shafts of glorious and transfiguring light.

The impression of this picture, of which we now speak, is so great and satisfactory, that it were an insult to its matchless beauty and affluence to stop and question the truthfulness of its detail or the completeness of its realization of particulars. It would be like estimating the humanity and greatness of *Hamlet* by the particulars of his physical being, and we should say he was a *reality* to us, because the sword exercise with *Laertes* made him scant of breath, and drew from the *Queen* the remark, "He's fat!" It is the impression and not the particulars for which a picture is painted; and only so far as that impression is dependent on the management and presentation of accessories are these of importance to us.

NOTES

I would like to thank Kevin Avery for his encouragement and assistance with several factual matters, and Franklin Kelly and Merl M. Moore Jr. for their ready responsiveness to my numerous questions.

- Gifford enclosed his "List of Some of My Chief Pictures" with a letter to the Reverend O. B. Frothingham, written from Hudson, N.Y., November 6, 1874 (Sanford Robinson Gifford and Gifford Family Papers, 1845–1966, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., reel D10, frames 1220–22). The list itself, updated in 1880, is transcribed with annotations in Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark, Del., 1987), pp. 327–30.
- Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, is the most comprehensive treatment to date. In addition, see especially James Thomas Flexner, *That Wilder Image: The Painting of America's Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer* (New York, 1962); Ila Weiss, *Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880)* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968; published New York and London, 1977); Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., *Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880)*, exh. cat., University of Texas Art Museum, Austin (Austin, 1970); Kynaston McShine, ed., *The Natural Paradise: Painting in America, 1800–1950*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York (New York, 1976); Natalie Spassky et al., *American Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 2, *A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born between 1816 and 1845* (New York, 1985) (biography and catalogue entries by Natalie Spassky); Ila Weiss, *Sanford R. Gifford*, exh. cat., Alexander Gallery, New York (New York, 1986); John K. Howat et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, exh. cat., MMA (New York, 1987) (biography and catalogue entries by Kevin J. Avery); Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds., *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861*, exh. cat., MMA (New York, 2000); Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880*, exh. cat., Tate Britain, London (Princeton, N.J., 2002).
- Roland Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1966; reprint, Cornwallville, N.Y., 1979), p. 362 n. 41; noted in Spassky et al., *American Paintings*, p. 170.
- "The National Academy," *Century* (New York), April 16, 1859, p. 5.
- Bruno, "Correspondence of the Journal. Art and Artists of New York. New York, November 29, 1860," *Providence (R.I.) Daily Journal*, December 4, 1860, p. 2. The writer's lengthy discussions of Church, Gifford, and American art in general were soon reprised in New York journals.
- "(Written for the New York Leader.) Studies of Life. The Studio Building," *Leader* (New York), March 9, 1861, p. 1.
- Periwinckle, "From New York. Fresh Gossip of Books, Authors, Art and Artists. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, February 12, 1862," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, February 15, 1862, p. 1.
A fuller, cognate description of Gifford of later date appears in "Art Articles. S. R. Gifford," *Citizen* (New York), March 16, 1867, p. 8. The writer, signing him- or herself "Bayles," was escorted by Worthington Whittredge through "worse than labyrinthine passage ways" to Gifford's quarters at the Tenth Street Studio Building. Whittredge then "left me to make my peace with the very amiable lion whom I had dared to beard in his den. . . ." "Bayles" found Gifford "very different" in person than his works suggested: "He is tall, slim, about forty years old (though seemingly at least ten years younger), somewhat unprepossessing in appearance, and looking as though patient and devoted labor had impaired his health and weakened his constitution. There is nothing in his appearance to indicate much physical or mental vigor; but when once you engage in conversation with him, you forget everything else in the interest created by the fresh and original ideas he somehow manages to weave into a discussion on the most commonplace topics. He is evidently a critical student of human nature, and more of a philosopher than any one I have yet seen in his profession."
- Periwinckle, "From New York. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, March 24, 1863. The Last Artists' Reception," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, March 28, 1863, p. 2.
- The principal modern discussions of New York art exhibitions and studios of the period are found in Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist-Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists*, exh. cat., Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, N.Y. (Southampton, N.Y., 1997); and Carrie Rebora Barratt, "Mapping the Venues: New York City Art Exhibitions," in *Art and the Empire City*, ed. Voorsanger and Howat, pp. 47–81.
- My data for this paragraph and the previous one derive from numerous press reports of the period, some of them cited in the notes below. The phenomenon of New York art receptions in general, with particular reference to Dodworth's, was discussed by "Nor'Wester," a Manhattan-based writer, in "Letter from New York. Correspondence of the Boston Post. New York, Feb. 5, 1859," *Boston Post*, February 7, 1859, p. 2. For the Cooper Union and its receptions, another account by Nor'Wester, "Letter from New York. Correspondence of the Boston Post. New York, April 21, 1860," *Boston Post*, April 23, 1860, p. 1, is indicative. The Plymouth Church charity exhibits were advertised and chronicled in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 14–19, 1861, and November 10 and 12, 1862; see also the report "Art Gossip," *New York Evening Post*, October 12, 1861, p. 1. A New York correspondent for the *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, February 13, 1867, p. 1, reported spontaneous dancing at a National Academy of Design reception.

11. M.C.A., "From New York. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, Thursday, May 2," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, May 4, 1861, p. 1; *Leader* (New York), May 4, 1861, p. 4; Enoch Easel, "Art at Washington. Correspondence of the Commercial Advertiser. Washington, February 17," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, February 18, 1862, p. 2.
12. "Personal," *Home Journal* (New York), August 3, 1861, p. 3; Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art Intelligence," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, September 28, 1861, p. 1; Weiss, *Sanford R. Gifford*, 1986, n.p.; Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, pp. 92–93. Whittredge himself essayed the Clove several times. Anthony F. Janson, *Whittredge* (New York, 1989), illustrates three of Whittredge's more or less contemporaneous studio paintings that generally resemble Gifford's *A Gorge in the Mountains*.
13. "Fine Arts," *New York Herald*, March 2, 1861, p. 7.
14. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art Intelligence," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, March 9, 1861, p. 2. Benson principally used the pseudonyms "Proteus" and "Sordello." The résumé of current artists' activities, "The Artists: Where They Are, and What They Are Doing," *Independent* (New York), August 13, 1863, p. 8, identified "Proteus," the writer, as Eugene Benson, the artist (also mentioned elsewhere in the column as a painter).
While Benson's career is beyond the scope of this essay, his tenure as chief art commentator for the *New York Commercial Advertiser* between the summer of 1860 and December 1863, and his resumption of the position from late 1864 into 1866, will be new to modern scholarship. The hiatus, as Robert Scholnick astutely surmised, is explained by Benson's having worked for the New York weekly the *Round Table* from its founding in December 1863 until its suspension in mid-1864. Benson's literary pursuits are otherwise summarized in James S. Parry, "Baudelaire's First American Critic: Eugene Benson," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 2 (1957), pp. 65–71; and Robert Scholnick, "Between Realism and Romanticism: The Curious Career of Eugene Benson," *American Literary Realism* 4 (autumn 1981), pp. 242–61.
15. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Our Artists. II. S. R. Gifford," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, October 17, 1861, p. 1. Four clippings of this article have descended through Gifford's family (Gifford Papers, reel D33).
16. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Artists' Reception—Brooklyn Academy of Music," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, December 27, 1861, p. 2. Gifford also sent a *Windsor Castle* (no. 30), and Bierstadt sent *Picket Duty in Virginia* (also called *Picket Duty near Fall's Church*; no. 70; Century Association, New York) to the same exhibition.
17. Journalists attending the reception referred to three works by Gifford in their reviews, though none named more than two in a single article. Hence, in 1862 Gifford's paintings probably were divided between the downstairs gallery and his upstairs studio, as was more clearly the case at the Tenth Street Studio Building reception of one year later.
18. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Artists' Reception at 'Dodworth's,'" *New York Commercial Advertiser*, March 14, 1862, p. 2; "Artists' Reception," *New-York Times*, March 14, 1862, p. 5. Benson's poetic but elliptical discussion of Gifford's picture could have resulted from insufficient attention to it. Reporting a prior gathering at Dodworth's (Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art. Artists' Reception—Dodworth's Studio Building," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, February 14, 1862, p. 1), Benson was uncertain that a contribution by Gifford that evening represented the "Bronx River."
19. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art in New York. National Academy of Design," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, April 4, 1862, p. 1.
20. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art Intelligence," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, June 12, 1862, p. 1.; Proteus [Eugene Benson], "(Correspondence of the Transcript). New York, July 16th, 1862. Artistic Matters in New York," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, July 17, 1862, p. 1.
21. "Art Items," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, October 20, 1862, p. 2.
22. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art Intelligence. Recent Works in the Studios of Albany and New York, Piloty's Nero, &c.," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, October 29, 1862, p. 1; "Art Items in New York," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, November 18, 1862, p. 1.
23. Proteus, "Art Intelligence," October 29, 1862 (see note 22 above).
24. Barry Gray [Robert Barry Coffin], "New York, Jan. 14th, 1863. An Evening at the Century Club," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, January 16, 1863, p. 1; "Artists' Reception," *New York Daily Tribune*, January 17, 1863, p. 4; "The Artists' Reception," *New-York Times*, January 19, 1863, p. 2; "(For the Leader.) Art Feuilleton. Artists' Reception at Dodworth's," *Leader* (New York), January 24, 1863, p. 1. In his report for the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* just cited, Robert Barry Coffin ("Barry Gray") described one of the two works Gifford displayed at the Century Association as "a finished study for a large picture just marked out on his canvas, a 'Ravine in the Mountains' [D. Willis James's painting], somewhat similar to his 'Gorge,' [the Metropolitan Museum picture] just finished."
The Warner Collection study is illustrated in Tom Armstrong et al., *An American Odyssey: The Warner Collection of American Fine and Decorative Arts*, Gulf States Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (New York, 2001), p. 85. The related study was sold at Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, October 17, 1980, lot 122. Kevin Avery located the latter reference for me.
25. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Sixth Reception of the Brooklyn Art Association," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, March 4, 1863, p. 1.
26. "Fine Arts. The Brooklyn Artists' Reception," *New York Evening Post*, March 5, 1863, p. 1.
27. "Fine Arts," *New York Herald*, December 14, 1862, p. 5. The reporter also announced Bierstadt's forthcoming *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (1863; see Figure 9). At least two clippings of this article were retained by the Gifford family (Gifford Papers, reel D33).
28. Periwinkle, "From New York. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, December 24, 1862," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, December 25, 1862, p. 1, noted Coffin's change of career. Having also previously worked for the *New York Evening Post*, Coffin continued to do so intermittently. His monographic articles for the *Leader*, "Bierstadt, the Artist," January 17, 1863, p. 2 (cited in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, with a contribution by Helena S. Wright, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, exh. cat., Brooklyn Museum [Brooklyn, 1991], p. 177), and "McEntee, the Artist," January 24, 1863, p. 1, followed in quick succession the one on Gifford.
29. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Our Artists. Number XIII. T. [sic] Huntington," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, January 7, 1863, p. 1.
30. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Art Intelligence. Artists' Reception at Dodworth's," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, January 21, 1863, p. 1. Ironically, either Benson did not attend the Studio Building reception of February 3 or his editors at the *Commercial Advertiser* decided not to print a report about it.

31. Proteus, "Artistic Matters in New York" (see note 20 above). Benson's lengthy review of the completed painting, "Art. Mr. Church and His Painting of the Volcano of Cotopaxi," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, March 21, 1863, p. 1, was less enthusiastic.
32. Gordon Hendricks, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* (New York, 1973), p. 140. The debut exhibition of Church's *Cotopaxi* took place at the Goupil/Knoedler Gallery on Broadway between mid-March and mid-May 1863. After the Studio Building reception Bierstadt sent *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* to Boston and thence on a tour of Northeastern cities and towns; he did not attempt a sustained New York City engagement for it until February 1864.
33. Barry Gray [Robert Barry Coffin], "New York, Feb. 4, 1863. Artists' Reception," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, February 7, 1863, p. 1, listed the names of several well-known attendees. Besides the review just cited and those referred to below (see notes 34, 36), the principal accounts of the reception were those in the *New York Herald*, February 4, 1863, p. 4; *New York Evening Post*, February 4, 1863, p. 3; *Leader* (New York), February 7, 1863, p. 1; *Boston Post*, February 9, 1863, p. 1; *New York Illustrated News*, February 21, 1863, p. 242; and *Knickerbocker* (New York) 33 (March 1863), p. 265.
34. [Parke Godwin?], "Fine Arts. The Studio Pictures," *New York Evening Post*, February 5, 1863, p. 2. Parke Godwin was an art critic for the *Evening Post* at or about that time.
35. Barry Gray, "Artists' Reception" (see note 33 above).
36. Periwinkle, "From New York. From Our Own Correspondent. New York, February 10, 1863. The Last Artists' Reception," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, February 14, 1863, p. 1; "Reception at the Studios in Tenth Street," *New York Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1863, p. 8.
37. "Another Artists' Reception," *New York Daily Tribune*, April 4, 1863, p. 2.
38. "Reception at the Tenth Street Studio," *New York Evening Post*, April 3, 1863, p. 2. According to a follow-up report on Hays's work in general, published by the same paper five months later ("Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post*, September 25, 1863, p. 1), however, Hays's halcyon Missouri River scene, which completed his trilogy of scenes of American bison and the American prairies, was still "very far yet from completion." The picture seen in April 1863 therefore may have been a preparatory study (in that case, its whereabouts are now unknown). The finished, full-size trilogy, now divided among three museum collections, is illustrated in Joni L. Kinsey, *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie*, exh. cat., University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City (Washington, D.C., and London, 1996), pp. 62–63.
39. Atticus, "Art Feuilleton," *Leader* (New York), May 2, 1863, p. 1. *Harper's Weekly's* reporter ("The Lounger. The National Academy of Design," May 2, 1863, p. 274) noted that the picture "attracts much attention."
40. "National Academy of Design. First Gallery," *New York World*, April 24, 1863, p. 4.
41. *Swiss Lake* was sympathetically discussed by Bierstadt's future traveling companion to the West in 1863, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, in the latter's signed article, "The Artists' Fund Exhibition," *Leader* (New York), December 20, 1862, p. 2.
An ambitious work, the Fogg Museum picture (see Wilton and Barringer, *American Sublime*, pp. 230–31) is thus far unsupported by early documentation. It is tempting to equate it with the more ambitious of two finished paintings he presented at a Tenth Street Studio Building reception on February 4, 1864. At least three press reports summarized the picture in question, none offering a title for it. The article entitled "Fine Arts," *New York Times*, February 5, 1864, p. 4, noted that "in the large saloon [on the ground floor], Mr. BIERSTADT exhibited a remarkably fine landscape, with great tumultuous mountains, and wild flashes of aerial light, and distant visions of feathery waterfalls and streaming masses of clouds hurtling through it"; the review, "The Artists' Reception," *New York Evening Post*, February 5, 1864, p. 2, described it as "one of Rocky Mountain scenery, with frowning rocks, dashing waterfalls and wild, flying clouds"; and "Fine Arts," *New York World*, February 6, 1864, p. 2, referred to "a remarkably grand and beautiful landscape of mountain, lake, waterfall, forest, and sunlight." The lone painting Bierstadt sent to the National Academy of Design in 1864, laconically entitled *Landscape* (no. 259), was not the one he had shown earlier at the Studio Building reception.
42. "The National Academy of Design," *New York Journal of Commerce*, April 14, 1863, p. 2.
43. [Parke Godwin?], "The National Academy of Design. Its Thirty-Eighth Annual Exhibition. Second Article," *New York Evening Post*, May 16, 1863, p. 1; Rev. Charles Rockwell, *The Catskill Mountains and the Region Around* (New York, 1867; reprint, Cornwallville, N.Y., 1973), p. 321; Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, p. 231. Interestingly, at the end of the year, the *Evening Post's* unsigned reviews of the Artists' Fund exhibition made no mention of Gifford's *A Gorge in the Mountains*.
44. *Catalogue of Paintings, Statuary, etc., in the Art Department of the Great North-Western Fair, Held in Chicago, Ill., June 1865, for the Benefit of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and Soldiers' Home*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1865) (copy in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., courtesy William H. Gerdt); "The Art Gallery," *Chicago Tribune*, June 7, 1865, p. 2. James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerdt, comps., *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues from the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year* (Boston, 1986), vol. 2, p. 1410, cites the exhibited work under "L. R. Gifford," acknowledging the original typesetting error of the artist's name.
45. Periwinkle, "From New York. From Our Special Correspondent. New York, July 8, 1863. What the Artists Are About," *Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican*, July 11, 1863, p. 4; Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, pp. 97–98.
46. Having seen the unfinished canvas at Gifford's studio, Coffin, without referring to the work's size, previewed what he termed "probably the most powerfully painted picture Gifford has yet produced" as a Catskill scene in his article, signed Barry Gray and dated December 1, 1863, "Artists' Fund Society, of New York," *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, December 5, 1863, p. 5. A contemporaneous, unsigned review, "Fine Arts. A New Picture by Gifford," *New York Evening Post*, December 1, 1863, p. 2, discussed the picture in much the same terms. Describing it as finished but also failing to mention its size, the *Post* reporter praised the "thunder storm . . . in the Catskills" and guessed that it might appeal to those who didn't usually admire the artist's work. A third unsigned write-up, probably by Eugene Benson, "Artists' Studios," *Round Table* (New York), December 26, 1863, p. 28, characterized the picture as unfinished. Several weeks later, on February 4, 1864, when Gifford showed *A Storm in the Catskills*, doubtless the same painting, at a New York Studio Building reception (*New York Evening Post*, February 5, 1864; see note 41 above), he therefore may have placed his newest work

within sight of Bierstadt's tempestuous Rocky Mountain scene, our Figure 11.

47. "Another Woman's View of the National Academy of Design," *Leader* (New York), June 3, 1865, p. 2. The correspondent's description of the painting by Gifford shown at the Academy, which she termed "the gem of the whole collection," coincides with our Figure 13: "... Close on the shores of a lake a single, huge, mossy boulder rises on a level with the tops of the trees. A drowsy heat pervades the storm-weighed atmosphere. A wild gathering of dark, vaporous thunder-clouds, with their solemn hush before the black clouds break, / 'Hang i' the air.' / One lone, stray sunbeam pierces the dark masses of vapor, and falls aslant a clump of trees, of a vivid, intensely warm crimson and gold, that melt and flow into a liquid of daring intensity of color, seemingly transforming the darkness of the storm-laden, brooding clouds into passionate hope and fitful gleams of light. A broad sheet of water, reflecting in its ruffled bosom the coming tempest that blackens all the sky with wrath, surges restlessly on, though stirred by no rough wind. The awful silence of the picture can be *felt*—ay, *felt*—in all its mingled grandeur and wild, unearthly mournfulness."
48. "The Fine Arts. Artists' Fund Exhibition," *New York Daily Tribune*, November 13, 1863, p. 8. Another report, "New York Artists'

Fund Society," *New York Weekly Journal of Commerce*, November 19, 1863, p. 1, mentioned "a gorgeous landscape by Gifford": *A Gorge in the Mountains*. The painting's presence at the Artists' Fund is recorded in Yarnall and Gerdtz, *American Art Exhibition Catalogues*, vol. 2, p. 1417.

49. "The Artists' Fund," *New-York Times*, November 21, 1863, p. 5.
50. Barry Gray, "Artists' Fund Society" (see note 46 above).
51. Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Fine Arts. Pictures at the Fourth Annual Exhibition of the Artists' Fund Society," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, December 17, 1863, p. 1. Four months earlier, Benson had favorably compared Gifford's work in general with that of the poet James Russell Lowell (Proteus [Eugene Benson], "Our Poets and Our Artists: A Vindication of the Latter," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, August 28, 1863, p. 1). Benson's column on the Artists' Fund exhibition was his last with the *Commercial Advertiser* for almost a year (see note 14 above). However, his unsigned disquisition, "American Genius as Expressed in Art," *Round Table* (New York), December 26, 1863, pp. 21–22, swiftly reprised his esteem for Gifford. There the critic commended Gifford's supposed unique ability among his compatriots to depict "something approaching the magnificent, the opulent, and the intense in nature," and specified *A Gorge in the Mountains* as representative "of the opulent in nature."