

= The Rocky Mountains , Lander 's Peak =

The Rocky Mountains , Lander 's Peak is an 1863 landscape oil painting by the German @-@ American painter Albert Bierstadt . It is based on sketches made during Bierstadt 's travels with Frederick W. Lander 's Honey Road Survey Party in 1859 . The painting shows Lander 's Peak in the Wyoming Range of the Rocky Mountains , with an encampment of Native Americans in the foreground . It has been compared to , and exhibited with , The Heart of the Andes by Frederic Edwin Church . Lander 's Peak immediately became a critical and popular success and sold in 1865 for \$ 25 @,@ 000 .

= = Background = =

Hudson River School landscape painter Albert Bierstadt ( 1830 ? 1902 ) was born in Germany , and , though his family moved to New Bedford , Massachusetts , when he was two , he spent many of his formative years in Europe . He made his debut in an 1858 exhibition , but his breakthrough came in the aftermath of a journey he made the following year . In the spring of 1859 , Bierstadt joined the Honey Road Survey Party led by then @-@ colonel Frederick W. Lander . He traveled as far as the Wind River Range in the Rocky Mountains , and made studies for numerous paintings along the way . Bierstadt was greatly impressed by the landscape he encountered , and described the Rocky Mountains as " the best material for the artist in the world . " He had a habit of doing extensive preparation for his work , on occasion making as many as fifty sketches for a single painting . In 1860 , he exhibited Base of the Rocky Mountains , Laramie Peak at the National Academy of Design . His greatest success , however , came with The Rocky Mountains , Lander 's Peak , which he exhibited in 1863 at the Tenth Street Studio Building , where he also had a studio .

= = Composition and theme = =

The painting shows Lander 's Peak , a mountain with a summit of 10 @,@ 456 feet ( 3 @,@ 187 m ) in the Wyoming Range in modern @-@ day Wyoming . The peak was named after Frederick W. Lander on Bierstadt 's initiative , after Lander 's death in the Civil War . In one description of the painting , " Sharply pointed granite peaks and fantastically illuminated clouds float above a tranquil , wooded genre scene . " The foreground is dominated by the campsite of a tribe of Native Americans . The landscape in the painting is not the actual landscape as it appears at Lander 's Peak , but rather an ideal landscape based on nature , altered by Bierstadt for dramatic effect .

Bierstadt 's painting hit a nerve with contemporary Americans , by portraying the grandeur and pristine beauty of the nation 's western wilderness . It was a reference to the idea of Manifest Destiny , where the Rocky Mountains represented both natural beauty , and an obstacle to westward expansion . In the words of historian Anne F. Hyde : " Bierstadt painted the West as Americans hoped it would be , which made his paintings vastly popular and reinforced the perception of the West as either Europe or sublime Eden . " At the same time , the Native Americans in the foreground gave the scene authenticity , and presented it as a timeless place , untouched by European hands .

= = Reception = =

Lander 's Peak was an immediate success ; twelve hundred people were invited for the exhibition , and almost a thousand showed up . Bierstadt was a shrewd self @-@ promoter as well as a gifted artist , and this was the first of his paintings to be widely promoted with a single @-@ picture exhibition , accompanied by a pamphlet , engravings and a tour . The painting , with its ten @-@ foot width , was intended both for exhibition halls and the homes of America 's emergent millionaire class . In 1865 it was purchased by British railway entrepreneur James McHenry for the ( at the time ) high price of \$ 25 @,@ 000 . Bierstadt later bought it back , and gave or sold it to his brother Edward , before it was eventually acquired for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1907 .

Comparisons were made between Lander 's Peak and The Heart of the Andes , a contemporary painting by one of Bierstadt 's main rivals in the landscape genre , Frederic Edwin Church . The two works represented the two great mountain ranges spanning North and South America . At the New York Metropolitan Fair in 1864 , held by the United States Sanitary Commission to raise money for the Union war effort , the two paintings were exhibited opposite each other . Lander 's Peak and The Heart of the Andes are still exhibited on opposite walls at their current location at the Metropolitan .

Most reviews of the painting were positive ; one review called it " beyond question one of the finest landscapes ever painted in this country " , adding , " Its artistic merits are in some respects unrivalled : and added to these it has the advantage of being a representative painting of a portion of the most sublime and beautiful scenery on the American Continent . " The painting won a prize at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 . At the same time , there were also critical voices ; in particular , some American Pre - Raphaelites found his brushwork wanting . One such critic complained that it would have been better " if the marks of the brush had , by dexterous handling , been made to stand for scrap and fissure , crag and cranny , but as it is , we have only too little geology and too much bristle . "