

# Homework notes 30.01.2020

## Romanticism

- American landscape was something new and somethings that set them apart from Europe
- the US had a ton of land and gave it away cheaply
- there were many trails established that connected the new lands to the east
- manifest destiny was coined and people generally accepted it as right
- together with reminiscence about how the land in the east used to look people began romanticizing nature
- after 1825 Americans wanted pictures of the land itself because of that
- rich folks often wanted to have pictures that posed a contrast to the cities and business that they were involved in and armchair travellers could enjoy themselves

## Thomas Cole

- 1801-1848
- called the founder of American landscape painting even though he was not the first
- some of his predecessors were painting too idyllic pictures that people did not like as they did not represent the America they knew anymore
- Cole was the first artist whose representations really struck a chord
- he grew up in England amidst the Industrial Revolution – many aspects of his art and life seem to be influenced by that
- 1818: he came to the US with his parents, was amazed by the scenery, 1825 visited Catskill Mountains
- Cole was selftaught, created his own version of landscape painting
- the pristine wilderness appealed to Americans, provided a sanctuary
- *Associationism*: getting to know God by appreciating his natural works
- a Romantic spirit would also find joy in Cole's pictures of forests, cliffs and storms
- American antiques were gnarled old treetrunks, while the European trunks were man-made – a sawed-off treetrunk was a symbol for this wilderness coming to an end
- he believed that history painting was the highest form of art, while landscape painting was low – it had to be ennobled
- he used legends, historical events or literary pieces for that, for example *Last of the Mohicans*
- 1829: he went to Europe to improve his art – he was moved by ruins that showed him human ambition, pride, and folly

## The Course of Empire

- return to NYC in 1832, began a 5 picture series called *The Course of Empire*
- stages:
  - *Savage*: too wild and chaotic
  - *Pastoral*: men, women, children living in harmony with nature
  - *Consummation of the Empire*: hedonism, destruction of the works of God (nature), religious ceremonies
  - *Destruction of the Empire*: destruction of the architecture, slaughter, burning, pillage
  - *Desolation*: ruins of the city in the moonlight, nature reclaims the scene (God triumphs)
- Cole believed that America was on a similar course
- these paintings were not so popular, patrons preferred the “real” America

## The Voyage of Life

- next series of 4 paintings – hero travels on the river of life, pictures show elements of fate and time
- stages:
  - *Infancy*: guardian angel watches over the boy from the barge

- *Youth*: angel now watches from riverbank, because the young boy wants to be in charge and pursue the castles in the sky
- *Manhood*
- *Old Age*
- this symbolism was easier to understand and Americans loved it
- prints of *Youth* in particular became very popular, was often interpreted as discovering the American future and Manifest Destiny

### The Architect's Dream

- visual fantasy and love for different historical architectural styles
- commissioned by Ithiel Town, who is in it and has some of his books strewn around him
- it shows all the great building styles of the past before the architects eyes

### Alfred Bierstadt

- 1830-1902
- brought to America as an infant, returned to Duesseldorf to study at the Rhineland art center
- spent a year in Italy, established a studio in NYC
- 1859: trip to the American West (Rocky Mountains) with army expedition
- on horseback, in perilous circumstances – Bierstadt made countless oil sketches of natives, animals, and the scenery
- this mostly – to white people – unknown scenery became the basis of his art and reputation
- 1863: paints his most famous picture *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*
- it was a huge canvas 3 meters across and showed a majestic mountain landscape
- he was also praised for his anthropological description of natives
- 1863: next trip to the west, to California and the Pacific Northwest
- many canvases, notably *Yosemite Valley* and the *Sierra Nevada Mountains*
- particular picture: *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* shows the massive scale by placing small natives, bears, deer in the picture
- *Emigrants Crossing the Plains* shows wagon trains going by native encampments – inhospitable, pristine, hope, ultimate success

### Lecture notes 30.01.2020

- 1804: Lewis and Clark went to explore the Louisiana Purchase
- they gathered a wealth of information on the land, wildlife, people and more