



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Claude Lorrain and America**

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For much of the nineteenth century, Americans hailed Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) as the “prince of landscape painting,” yet only a handful of this nation’s citizens had ever seen an authentic painting by the Old Master. As had occurred in England, his artistic legacy came to occupy a prime place in this country’s visual and artistic cultures. Moreover, it served as a critical reference point for American landscape painters from Thomas Cole to George Inness—a fact recognized by the artists themselves and their contemporaries, and also acknowledged by today’s art historians.

Answering the need for a general study of Claude’s art in nineteenth-century America, my investigation takes a twofold approach to the topic. First, I am establishing the means by which Americans constructed their conceptions of Claude’s art (whether through knowledge of the original paintings or through copies, prints, and verbal descriptions); second, I am documenting the cultural and ideological associations that filtered their appreciation of his art and his place in history. To determine what Americans knew of Claude’s art and to understand what it meant to them, I will analyze a variety of historical sources, including exhibition records and reviews, auction sales, travel literature, inventories of early American art collections, art criticism, painting manuals, artists’ writings, popular novels and poetry, landscape gardening treatises, and nineteenth-century monographs on the Old Master.

The study of the changing fortune of Claude’s legacy can serve as a means of approaching larger issues in American intellectual history. By pinpointing those circumstances that successively excited and diminished enthusiasm for Claude’s art, I hope to shed new light on the changing sociopolitical climate in the United States over the course of the nineteenth century.

The results of this research will be published as an article or book and will serve as the basis for an exhibition to be held at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. In this exhibition, the original paintings of Claude Lorrain will be displayed alongside the works of American landscape painters who looked to his art as a model.