

*From the desk of Pierre Beaudry  
The Hudson River School Series.*



## **ALBERT BIERSTADT: THE ART OF MANIFEST DESTINY**

by Pierre Beaudry, 4/3/2008



**Figure 1.** Albert Bierstadt, *Looking up the Yosemite Valley*, 1865. “The struggle was always--colonize westward. Bring the best people from Europe, the best common people who believed in this idea; bring them to this land, develop this land, move westward, open the way to the west, keep moving westward.” (Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr., *The Issue of Manifest Destiny for Today*, EIR, January 28, 2000.)

## 1. THE “GREAT FUTURE” THROUGH THE YOSEMITE PASS.

The nineteenth century artist of the Hudson River School, Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), is, without a doubt, one of the greatest geniuses in history. His accomplishment is a true reflection of both European classical artistic composition in the tradition of Leonardo Da Vinci, and of the American pursuit of Manifest Destiny in the spirit of James Fenimore Cooper and John Quincy Adams. All of Bierstadt's western landscapes were composed with the idea of immortalizing crucial discoveries of principle that he had inserted judiciously within them. Like Leonardo and Rembrandt before him, Bierstadt succeeded in incorporating universal ideas into his paintings, and conveyed them through the grandiose sceneries of the American West. The principle of classical artistic composition, the idea of civilizing by making peace with the Indians, and the idea of immortalizing the culture of the Indian people, were all part of Bierstadt's universal contribution to mankind.

Bierstadt had one thing in mind: bring Western civilization to the entirety of the American continent, by way of implanting, in the American West, the richness of European principles of classical heritage, especially those that came from the Westphalian Dusseldorf Academy in Germany, which had been primarily famous as a historical painting school, but had also produced extraordinary landscape artists.

With respect to Indian culture, Bierstadt followed in the footsteps of James Fenimore Cooper with the vision of representing a true and passionate search for immortality. He mixed classical universal physical principles with the views of lofty mountains and gigantic trees that seem to be rising to the heavens, along with water sources that seem to be falling from them, as their source of life.

Like Cooper, Bierstadt understood the fear of the old Indian Chief who believed that photography or a painting was robbing people of their identity, and was killing their souls by means of reproducing their image! He succeeded in killing such Jesuitical superstitions by making the Indians understand that their culture was worth being immortalized as a crucial part of American Western Civilization.

Those were also the Godly intentions of John Quincy Adams' strategy of Manifest Destiny, the guiding light of the American republican spirit for the liberation of mankind that moved civilization always further, westward.

Enthusiastic about the vertical sublime, Bierstadt's work is comparable with the great civilizing work of the European cathedral movement. He elevates your mind to the challenge of the highest mountain, to the difficult path that draws you into the light of the western Sun, and makes you want to always challenge yourself to go beyond, that is upward and westward. This is what *Looking up the Yosemite Valley* does to the spectator. Ever since man has existed, it has always been his idea to go beyond the next boundary, the next frontier, and the next uncharted territory. However, *Looking up the Yosemite*

*Valley* was a call from the future, very moving and very powerful: “*Come, surprise your intelligence, the “Great Future” of mankind lies just beyond the Yosemite Pass!*” President Abraham Lincoln was so impressed by Bierstadt’s rendering of that newly discovered region of America that he signed a bill on June 30, 1864, which preserved and consecrated the Yosemite Valley of California as a state park. For Bierstadt, that gesture alone represented a sacred confirmation of his mission.

Bierstadt responded to this moment of history, as if some future force were pulling him toward a great task; and his toil was in response to his caring for the few moments of great inspiration that had made him a captive of the American West. As Percy B. Shelley wrote in *A Defense of Poetry*: “The most unfailing herald companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conception respecting man and nature.... Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpet which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” (Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*.)

In that sense, Bierstadt was the legislator of Manifest Destiny. He was not a particularly religious man, but he related man to God through the harmony of his paintings. He did not express his spirituality in a fundamentalist way as did his predecessor, Thomas Cole, for example, but, rather like a scientific mind brings a contribution to improve the future of mankind through his understanding of a universal physical principle that relates God, Man, and Nature. For him, replicating the caustic direction of the sun westward through the Yosemite Domes of California was his way of guiding mankind through the difficult passes towards what he had called, the “Great Future.” Bierstadt wrote to his wife, Rosalie about it. After reading from the 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthian, Bierstadt wrote to her: “How I wish I were able to use the beautiful language of St. Paul, and do as much good as he has done.” [...] At another time, he wrote: “I firmly believe in the Great Future which God has prepared for us and I trust each day I am coming nearer to the life that will be in harmony with his.” (Bierstadt letter to Rosalie, quoted by Gordon Hendricks, *ALBERT BIERSTADT, Painter of the American West*, Published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1974, p. 316.)

In March of 1759, Bierstadt went to Washington D.C. to confirm his commitment to the most important peace mission of that period with the Western Shoshone Indian Nation, and to join with the most important U.S. Department of Interior sponsored effort to realize the policy of Manifest Destiny. He was about to participate in Colonel Frederick West Lander’s “*Exploration and Survey to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.*” (Colonel Frederick West Lander, Executive Document 46, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (758) 1859.) From that moment on, Bierstadt began to open great fields of creativity, the fields of Elysium.

Thus, as in the final Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley transforms his creation into an example of Man's creativity which, in concert with God's creation of the Universe, as in Beethoven's Ode to Joy, in the final section of the 9th symphony, transports all of mankind into the realm of the sublime, where is heard the Music of the Spheres. The Chorus of Spirits dedicates the future to the youth, the potential of all mankind:

And our singing shall build  
In the voids loose field  
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield;  
We will take our plan  
From the new world of man,  
And our work shall be called Promethean.

IV, 153-158.

## 2. THE FIELDS OF ELYSIUM: A FIELD-PERSPECTIVE OF CHANGE

Bierstadt's dramatic landscapes with the light source in the background and the shadows in the foreground are excellent examples of the Leonardo da Vinci method of field- perspective of shadows that had been adopted by the Dusseldorf Academy of Painting. Properly understood, such a field-perspective of shadows is akin to a poetic field of Elysium. In such a setting, your sight is always oriented properly towards the future of the northwestern sky, in order to capture the best shadows, that is to say, the field of dark rays of *derived shadows*, which portend great changes. Leonardo da Vinci described them as recommendations in his *Notebooks*:

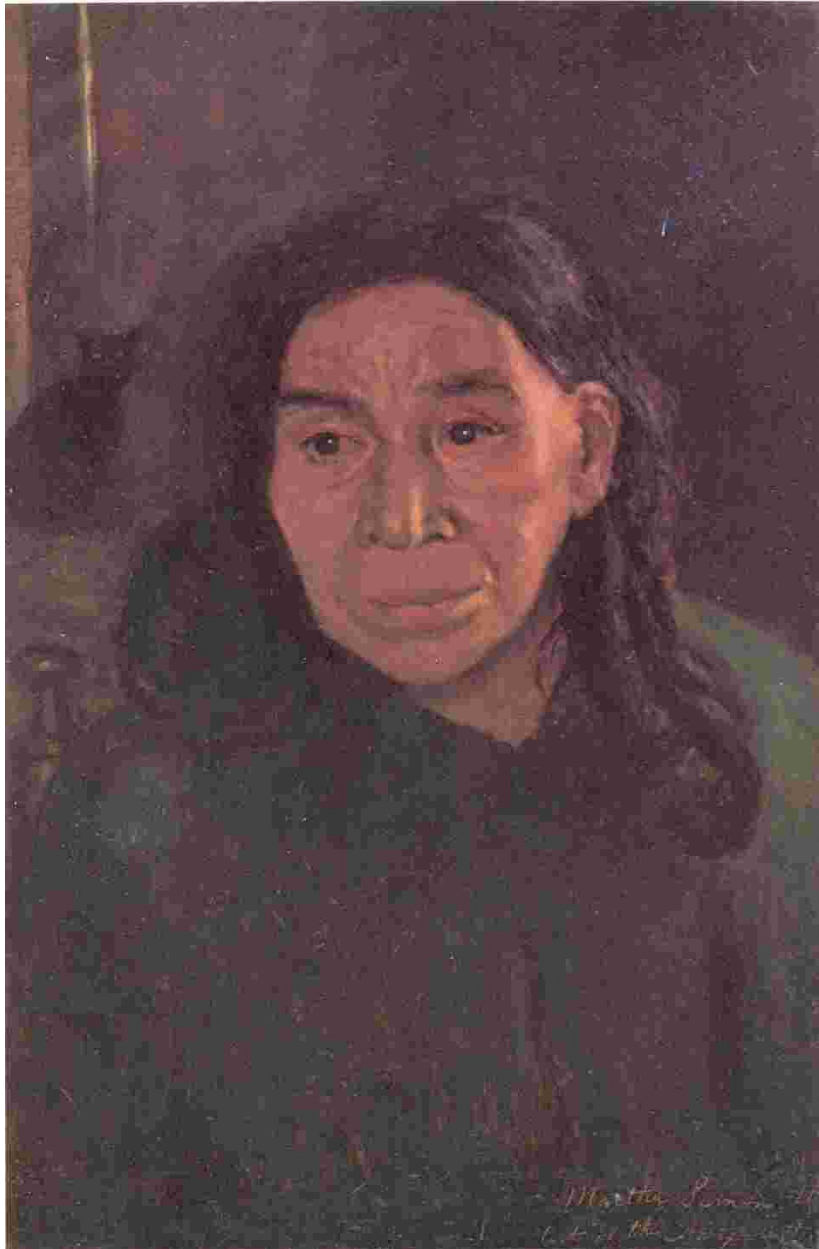
"From these primary shadows there issue certain dark rays, which are diffused through the air and vary in intensity according to the density of the primary shadows from which they are derived..."

"Moreover, those derived shadows in striking upon anything create as many different effects as there are different places where they strike..."

"And since where the derived shadow strikes, it is always surrounded by the striking of luminous rays, it leaps back with these in a reflex stream towards its source and mingles with and becomes changed into it altering thereby somewhat of its nature..." (*The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 130.)

The works of Bierstadt are the dramatization of such a method of casting shadows, mastered layer after layer, in a wide field-perspective, reflecting, pedagogically speaking, the masterful setting of Leonardo's method of "*reflex stream*" of derived light and dark rays. Best exemplified in the *Virgin of the Rocks*, Leonardo's method was aimed at engaging the spectator into the truthful process of change, through the discovery of the transformation of light and darkness into his science of expressing human emotions with shadows. That Leonardo *reflex stream* of light and dark rays could properly be called the

fields of Elysium that Shelley, Schiller, and Beethoven had developed in their greatest works. As in Leonardo, Bierstadt's science of aerial perspective did not reside in central point perspective, but in the shadowy intervals of action changing the relationships between objects. In other words, the distance between objects is no longer an opening of empty space determined by a central vanishing point on the horizon, but the non-linear changing dynamics of light and dark rays in a field-perspective, which reflect a drama in which the spectator becomes an active participant.



**Figure 2.** Albert Bierstadt, *Martha Simon*, 1857. The last of the Narragansett Indian.

As Leonardo recommended the artist should do in his *Notebooks*: "A picture, or rather the figures therein, should be represented in such a way that the spectator may easily recognize the purpose in the minds by their attitudes... Represent your figures in such action as may be fitted to express what purpose [is] in their minds..." (Leonardo, Op. Cit., pp. 176-77.) Now, look at the sublime quality of emotion that Bierstadt expressed in the portrait of the Narragansett Indian woman, Martha Simon. According to Fenimore Cooper, Narragansett was the name of the oldest Indian tribe living originally on the coast of Rhode Island.

For Bierstadt, this picture represented a profound question of human justice with respect to the future of the indigenous population of America. Did the U.S. Government have the right to claim complete and unconditional control over the native lands of Indians and occupy them by force? The answer to the first part of the question is yes, but the answer to the second part is no. This is the question that split the United States into two opposite camps, with both staking a claim to the idea of Manifest Destiny during the nineteenth century. President Andrew Jackson answered both parts of the question affirmatively; President Abraham Lincoln answered the second part of the question negatively.

It was John Quincy Adams who had first established in his Monroe Doctrine that the United States represented a community of moral and political principle among all of the peoples of the world. This principle was established against all forms of imperialism and colonialism, and was based on the *advantage of the other*, the principle of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The principle became the unshakable principle that linked the destiny between the Indian Nations of America and the government of the people of the United States. That was the issue of principle that John Quincy had expressed in a letter to his mother from Saint Petersburg, on August 30, 1811, in which he wrote: "A nation, coextensive with the North American Continent, destined by God and nature to be the most populous and most powerful people ever combined under one social compact." (J. Q. Adams to Abigail Adams, St Petersburg, August 30, 1811.)

A few weeks later, he also wrote to his father: "The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs. For the common happiness of them all, for their peace and posterity, I believe it indispensable that they should be associated in one Federal Union." (J. Q. Adams to John Adams, Saint Petersburg, August 31, 1811.) This is the crux of the whole matter of economic principle that Bierstadt had to take into account in his paintings. This raised a related question of decisive importance, which was: "What is the difference between colonization and colonialism?" That question reflected the irreconcilable difference between the two factions of Manifest Destiny. <Footnote 1>

Bierstadt had also taken to heart what George Washington had reported to the US Congress on the same subject: "I cannot dismiss the subject of Indian affairs without again recommending to your consideration the expediency of more adequate provisions

for giving energy to the laws throughout our interior frontier and for restraining the commission of outrages upon the Indians, without which all pacific plans must prove nugatory. To enable, by competent rewards the employment of qualified and trusty persons to reside among them as agents would also contribute to the preservation of peace and good neighborhood. If in addition to these expedients an eligible plan could be devised for promoting civilization among the friendly tribes and for carrying on trade with them upon a scale equal to their wants and under regulations calculated to protect them from imposition and extortion, its influence in cementing their interest with ours could not but be considerable.” (President George Washington, address to Congress, November 6, 1792.) <Footnote 2>

Now, how do you apply the Leonardo method of *reflex stream* of shadows coupled with the Cooper method of “inroads of civilization” to these principled requirements? And, furthermore, how do you transform the American landscape in order to incorporate those points of method and principles? How do you replicate in an art form the purpose in the mind of nature? The genius of Bierstadt was precisely to be able to incite his observer into discovering the purpose and the intention of bringing civilization to the wilderness. In a sense, Bierstadt accomplished in pictorial form the sublime that Cooper had generated in written narrative form. The key was to use the Leonardo method of provoking the observer into taking part of the creative process of artistic composition. Thus, American art became an art form for the citizenry as opposed to European oligarchical art for subjects. That was the heart of the American Cultural Revolution.

This revolutionary aspect of the new Bierstadt method was aimed at replicating in the Hudson River School what Leonardo and Raphael had produced during the Italian Renaissance: as in a theatrical drama by Aeschylus, Shakespeare, or Schiller, the idea was to determine the artistic parameters by means of which the spectator would become a better human being after having gone to an exhibition of their *great pictures*. The intention of artistic composition was no longer to entertain, distract, or “cast a veil of tender beauty over the asperities of life,” as Cole had put it. The new form of art was to bring change and cause a cultural revolution by means of raising paradoxes, anomalies, and ironies into the minds of the general population. In one word, the idea was to intervene, and go against the pricks by confronting public opinion.

The spectator, therefore, cannot be indifferent before a Bierstadt or a Church *great picture*. The spectator is magnetically attracted into a grandiose mission. Bierstadt’s landscapes have the ability to carry the spectator into a drama as if nature had arranged, by chance, his welcoming to the West. Moreover, this magnetic attraction by nature is task oriented because the scene is not only dressed in its outstanding natural beauty, but is also warning against an impending tragedy. Therefore, the spectator is incited to change his passive attitude and is being mobilized into becoming active through the beauty of such a dramatic change. This is when the viewer discovers that the Bierstadt landscapes were composed like classical artistic compositions with the force of a moral purpose oriented toward the future.

Much as LaRouche does today, Bierstadt's *great pictures* were forecasting the future state of the American system with respect to the Indian people. For Bierstadt, this was like an experiment in final causality, a new teleological form of art where the spectator is brought into the picture as if from the future. Thus, the spectator is mobilized into experimenting with the most intricate interplays of light and shadows that the monuments of the Rocky Mountains could be made to reflect, as if sunlight itself had carved the succession of its flanking cliffs from their insides. The spectator becomes elevated to such distant and high levels that the mountain summits are easily mistaken for cloud formations in the sky.

Moreover, Bierstadt had calculated that he could civilize the wilderness by marrying the nobility of nature with the noble presence of the Indians. Bierstadt did not paint the Indians as they were, but as they should be, in their ideal state of historical figures with their ancestral culture. In a letter to *The Crayon* Bierstadt wrote: "*The manners and customs of the Indians are still as they were hundreds of years ago, and now is the time to paint them, for they are rapidly passing away; and soon will be known only to history. I think that the artist ought to tell his portion of their history as well as the writer; a combination of both will assuredly render it more complete.*" (*The Crayon*, September 1859, p. 287.)

During his first trip to the Rocky Mountains in 1859, Bierstadt had also expressed his enthusiasm to the press at seeing the masses of emigrants going west. He never considered Americans and Indians as being in conflict. He wrote: "*Hundreds of families of what we call the West, are all bound still further West, truly a progressive people and a progressive country.*" (St. Joseph, Missouri, *Weekly West*, August 27, 1859; *New Bedford Daily Mercury*, August 10, 1859.)

The intention of Bierstadt was clear: he was inviting the spectator to go beyond his mere sense perception experience of nature's wilderness in itself, and was provoking him to elevate himself by bringing the natural landscape to a historical level in attunement with the new civilizing mission. This is the kind of systemic change that corresponds to the changes that LaRouche has indicated in the higher domain of the Noosphere with respect to the Biosphere. Thus, the treatments of a mountain or a water hole is no longer simply a non-living granite mass or a living organic scenery, but an integrated cognitive receptacle under the higher control of the creative mental powers of the Noosphere. The picture is meant to reflect something of the soul of America, some hidden living intention that the spectator has the task to discover about his destiny. Cooper had called this the "inroads of civilization." By means of harmony and proportion of the human mind, therefore, the artistic composition of a western mountain range and its living environment became a function of expressing the Noosphere. In 1794, the great Lazare Carnot identified this same intellectual task of a moral and political intention of artistic composition in the introduction to his class on industrial designing for the *Ecole Polytechnique*.

"{Linear perspective...is calculated mathematically, [but] aerial perspective...can only be grasped by the sentiment. By comparing these two sciences, where one is



sensual, the other ideal, the methodical course of one will help penetrate the mysteries of the other... [Aerial Perspective] is the art of generating ideas by means of the senses, of acting on the soul by the organ of vision. It is in this way that it acquires its importance that it competes with poetry; that it can, like poetry, enlighten the mind, warm the heart, excite and nourish higher emotions. We shall emphasize the contribution that it can bring to morality and to government; and how, in the hands of the skillful legislator, it will be a powerful means of instilling horror of slavery, and love of the fatherland, and will lead man to virtue.}" (Lazare Carnot, from the "Drawing" section of the Public Works curriculum, Ecole Polytechnique, 1794.)

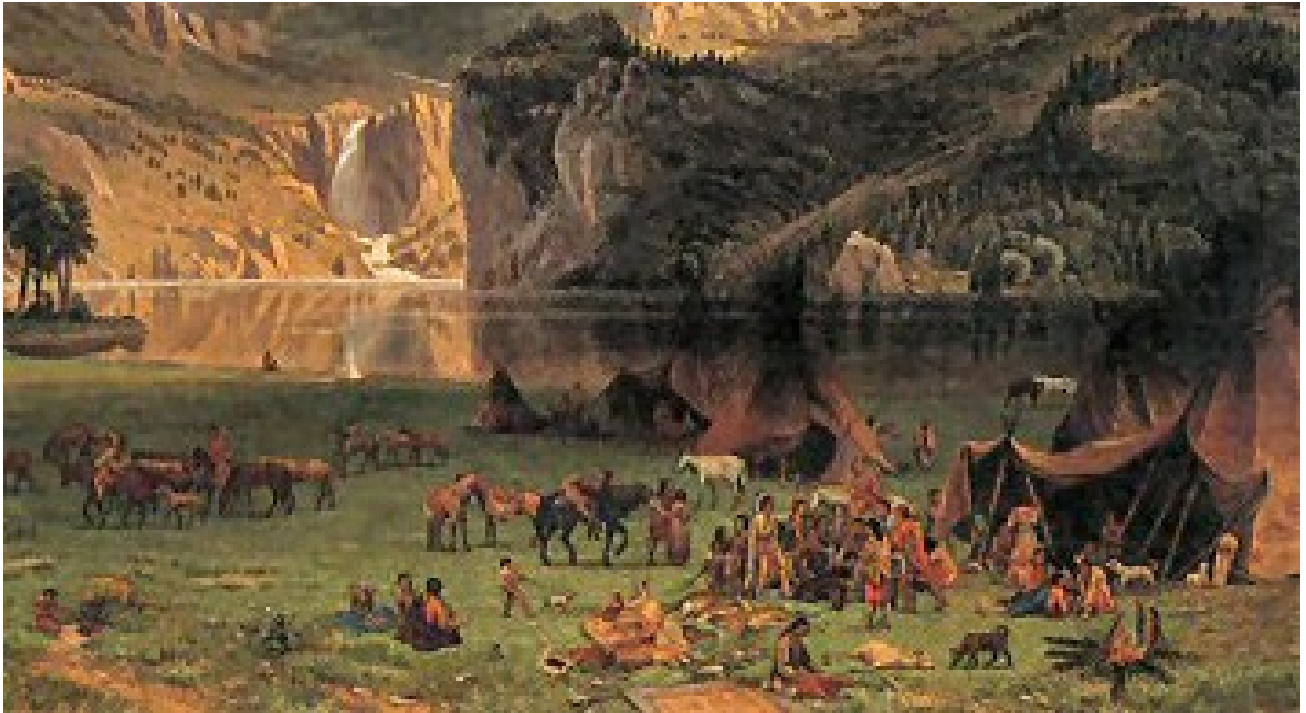


**Figure 3.** Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863.

For example, think of this scene of *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's peak* of 1863, as embracing, in a moment of simultaneity of eternity, the centuries old Indian customs of hunting that is captured in the shadowed foreground with the apparently unchanging stillness of a luminous mountain range in the background. This has the effect of linking them both to the idea of immortality. But, what is the anomaly? Both invisible, the eternal necessity of mankind to change is in the foreground shadow, and the eternity of the unchanging Rocky Mountain in the background light become visible. Their unity of effect is immortality through the irony of Heraclites' paradox, "everything must change except change." Bierstadt even considered that one day, this Indian camping site would be transformed into a lively town. Such a grandiose moment as *Lander's Peak* brings

together, in a unique contraction of timelessness and life, of stillness and motion, a non-visible unity of ambiguous agreement between God's nature and man.

This lofty impression left by Bierstadt on your mind by this field-perspective of a light-shadow process, lies just beyond the gate of your sight and forces you to discover, in his mind, how the successive fields of perspective he replicated in this landscape can be made to reflect such a vast expanse of contrasting light and dark rays that play on the paradox of change and no-change. What are those successive fields of perspective? How do they intersect this paradox?

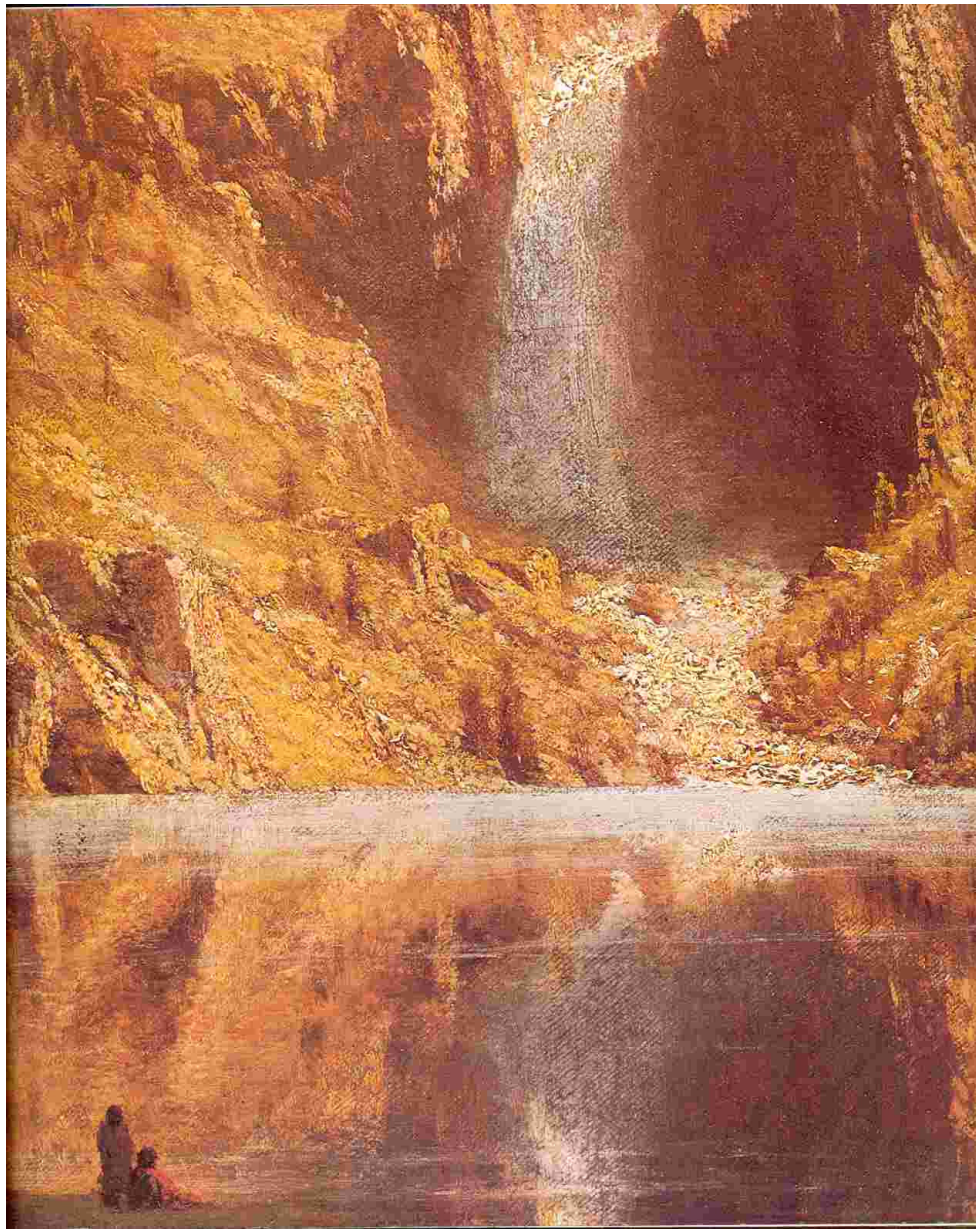


**Figure 4.** Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. Detail right

The very large painting, 73 ½ x 120 ¾ inches, represents one long wave of a unity of effect between nature and civilization that is partitioned into four levels of overlapping fields of perspective progressing in a zigzag manner, starting from the right foreground to the left, in accordance with the location of the Indian camp. Let that series of waves of your ideal perspective move you from right to left in the foreground and toward the center of the whole scene, that is, from shadow to light to shadow to light. And, then, halfway across, this motion meets an inversed wave that started from the background, also from right to left to right, but this time from light to shadow to light to shadow, as in a mirror image projected in the center of the picture. Thus, the whole picture in depth is divided into four quarter sections, of two zigs and two zags; 1) the foreground of the Indian camp and lake (shadow), 2) the foothills and water fall (light), 3) the first range of mountains (shadow), and 4) the high range of *Lander's Peak* (light).



These reproductions are a little bit too dark to show all of the interplays of shadows, but the main idea is that the further you penetrate the painting, the further you have to climb, and the more you climb the more you are penetrating into the intensity of light. As Leonardo had recommended, if the artist chooses natural sunlight for his picture, late afternoon sunlight, from the North West, is the most appropriate. The question then becomes: under what conditions can the late afternoon “*fields of reflex streams*” best express change in the state of mind of the subject?



**Figure 5.** Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. Detail center.

First of all, historically speaking, *Lander's Peak* represented the establishment of a new home for the Shoshone tribe. Colonel Lander had been commissioned in 1858 by

the United States Interior Department as a “*Special Agent to Shoshonees, Eastern and Western, and the Pannachs.*” The primary intention of Bierstadt’s painting was to show that historical specificity of change in the condition of life of the Shoshonees Indians introduced as early as the Lander Mission of 1859. The Shoshonees had been one of the most peaceful tribes of the Great Plains, even though they had lost all of their prairie territory during the settlement of the new comers. It was at Colonel Lander’s recommendation that the Shoshonees were later provided by the US government the very same Wind River Mountain range area north of the Lander Cutoff where Bierstadt had sketched most of his sceneries in 1859 for this *great picture*.

Therefore, Bierstadt made use of the source of light much in the way that Leonardo had done in the setting for the *Virgin of the Rocks*. It was an experiment into the future. He made a very free and fine use of the Wind River Country to which he added rocky peaks, glaciers, waterfalls, and Indian encampments wherever he felt it was required to create ironies, a harmony of proportion, and a unity of effect that he wished to create for the purpose of replicating that change in the mind of the spectator.

The method of creating shadows in the foreground with a light source in the background is not only the best way to treat landscapes in general, but it is also entirely coherent with the underlying idea of expressing Manifest Destiny by setting the sights of the spectator in the direction of the setting sun. Thus, as it was with Cooper, Bierstadt’s paintings of Manifest Destiny had become the ironic means of discovering how to elevate humanity by blending the western landscape with Indian Civilization.

### **3. “THE GIGANTIC SHADOWS WHICH FUTURITY CASTS UPON THE PRESENT”**

Some people may ask you: why go to all of this trouble to generate a painting from such uncharted territories? The reason is quite simple. Man is created in the Image of God, and classical artistic composition has always been at war against liberalism in order to protect that privilege and propagate it. This is a war against the British oligarchical outlook that claims there is no such a thing as truth; that you can paint whatever you feel like painting; and that is the expression of your fundamental freedom. Are you free to shit on a piece of canvas and expose this to the public by calling it art? The British liberals said yes. The Hudson River School said no. That is the nature of the fight and that is the nature of the difference between the British system and the American system.

The American system of artistic composition, as the American Revolution, itself, was prosecuting a war against all forms of subjecting the citizenry to instincts and animalistic behavior, as British Liberalism and French Impressionism does. This is why an American citizen had to be different than a European subject, by the very fact that he was committed to fight against the hereditary principle of the oligarchy and its manipulation of public opinion. However, this involved dangers and Bierstadt’s passion

for change meant that he was willing to face those dangers, and even risk death. There were days when, in the Rocky Mountains, Bierstadt had to face renegade Indian parties who were not the most friendly. Some of the members of the Hudson River School were not people who compromised on such matters of truth and their role in history. As I will go through later, Robert S. Duncanson of Cincinnati was probably the best example of the artist-fighter for political truthfulness. That is how in the domain of painting, Bierstadt probably represented the most truthful quality of the Lincoln republicans.

Bierstadt's mastery of the field perspective of light and darkness was so powerful that it would not be an exaggeration to identify him as the Leonardo of America. Two years after painting *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, Bierstadt pursued the same idea of the Leonardo method of *reflex stream*, but by dramatizing even more the process of intersecting the universal physical principle of *reciprocity between civilization and nature*. His mastery of shadows reflected such a degree of perfection that the willing mind of the spectator was moved, as if by destiny itself, step by step, to a higher level of resolution of difficulty in participating in his creative process of tempering and mastering the grandiose harshness and wilderness of the landscape.

I can see how young Americans would be fascinated by Bierstadt's paintings in a New York exhibition, and would be filled with the desire to go west, as many did. The West became fully opened to Americans with the continental railroad that finally linked the United States together just three years later, in 1869. In this new *great picture*, the message of Bierstadt was clear: all of the natural elements of his landscapes are made proportional to the purpose of bringing civilization to the Pacific.

The far-reaching and elevated purpose of *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains – Mount Rosalie* (1866) is one of the best examples of this civilizing process of proportionality between the Noosphere and the Biosphere. Far from meaning the taming and colonializing of so-called savage Indians, Bierstadt portrayed the Indian Nation of that land as having self-ennobled itself through these great and passionate heights as deployed by the mountains and the western skies of America. It took a genius like Bierstadt to recognize that historical fact, and to make us discover how such an elevated character of the scenery blended so well with the nobility of the Indian people.

This time, Bierstadt has replaced the double light-shadow alternating wave by a double light -storm alternating wave. The choice of the site is almost the same as *Lander's Peak*, but a dramatic change has occurred in the treatment of the historically specific Indian situation. The Indian population had reached a point of no return as to their survival as a national group. Furthermore, as I will show, *Mount Rosalie* was also a major turning point in Bierstadt's life.

The spectator can only become transformed before such a grandiose spectacle of light and darkness. The painting itself gives the impression of being live size, 7 x 12 feet. The steps you must take to investigate this *great picture* are the same as in *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. You must raise your sight, from right to left, in a zigzag fashion, higher and higher, until you discover the anomaly: Is it a cloud? Is it a hope? Is it



destiny? The spectator's heart is pounding. The sudden chill in the air overwhelms him with the Great Spirit that protects the discoverer walking through the shadows of audacity and courage. The echo of the mountain-thunder reaches the spectator a few moments after the lightning has struck the foot of Mount Rosalie. Open wide the gates of your sight and listen to the spirit of the mountain speak:



**Figure 6.** Albert Bierstadt, *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains – Mount Rosalie*, 1866.

*“Look up,”* rumbles the spirit of the mountain, *“elevate your sight, and notice my aged covered thought, pointing beyond the wilderness, to the Pacific. You cannot see all the dangers that circumvent you from below. The pass is difficult and treacherous. After leading your civilizing enthusiasm through and beyond this region, you will have conquered your sovereignty and you will no longer have to fear the bruises of injustice coming from the selfish imperials of the other continent.”*

This moment of Bierstadt's enthusiasm was recorded for history by his friend William Byers, the editor of *Rocky Mountain News*, who took him to the site for some sketches on that stormy morning and who described his state of mind on the day he captured what is now known as Bierstadt's famous storm. Byers wrote:

*“He said nothing, but his face was a picture of intense life and excitement. Taking in the view for the moment, he slid off his mule, glanced quickly to see where the hack was that carried his paint outfit, walked sideways to it and began fumbling at the lash-ropes, all the time keeping his eyes on the scene up the valley.... As he went to work he*

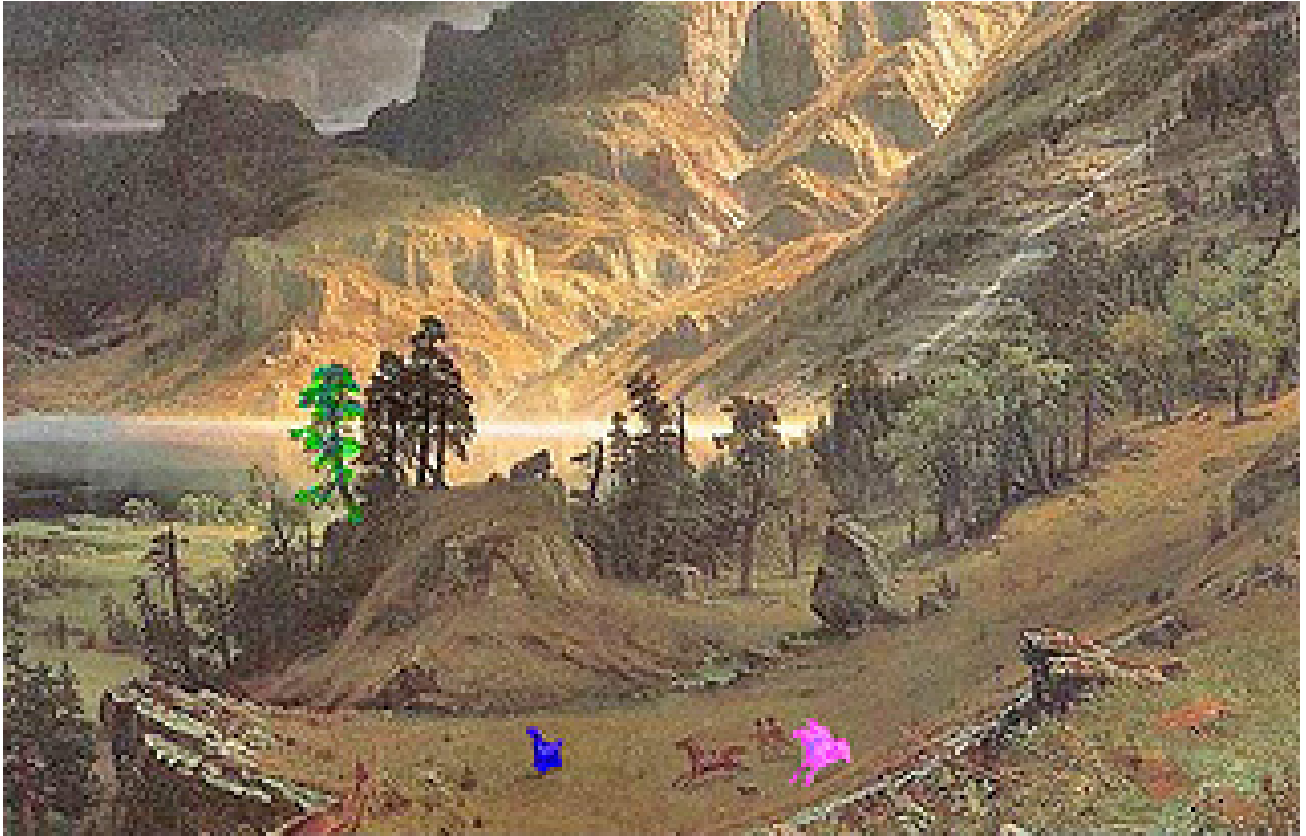
said, "I must get a study in colors; it will take me fifteen minutes!" He said nothing more. It was indeed a notable, a wonderful view. In addition to the natural topographic features of the scene, storm-clouds were sweeping across the great chasm from north-west to south-east. The north-west wall is serrated – a saw-tooth edge with sharp pinnacles and spires and masses of broken granite – and the clouds were so low that they were being torn and riven by these points. Eddies of wind from the great chasm following up the face of the cliff were again caught in the air-current at its crest and drove the broken clouds in rolling masses through the storm-drift. From the clouds sweeping across the gorge, rain, and large, soft hailstones were falling. Rays of sunlight were breaking through the broken, ragged clouds and lighting up in moving streaks the falling storm.... Bierstadt worked as though inspired. Nothing was said by either of us. At length the sketch was finished to his satisfaction. The glorious scene was fading as he packed up his traps. He asked: "There, was I more than fifteen minutes?" I answered: "Yes, you were at work forty-five minutes by the watch!" (William Newton Byers, "Bierstadt's Visit to Colorado," *Magazine of Western History* 11 (Jan. 1890), pp. 237-38.)

The point to be made, here, is that when he painted and exhibited this painting at the New York Tenth Street Studio Building where he worked, Bierstadt was putting before the American viewer the drama of the Indian people. Look at the scene as if it were the setting of an Aeschylus, Shakespeare, or Schiller tragedy. Bierstadt's intention was to have the spectator come out of his studio a better human being than he was when he walked in. In his studio exhibition, Bierstadt even had added special lighting effects to recreate a more intense *wave of light and shadows* effect than he had produced in *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. The drama was completely changed. The scene as a whole was obviously made to shock the spectator. A New York critic described how Bierstadt created the setting for this particular dramatization.

"The light is most carefully excluded from that part of the room occupied by the spectators, both by day and night. The walls about the end of the room where the picture are carefully and gracefully draped with dark stuff, which absorbs most of the light that does not fall directly upon the picture. As the painting represents a view of an extensive valley from a considerable eminence, two galleries have been constructed from which a down view can be obtained, thus heightening the illusion. In the night time, this deceptive effect is stronger than can be obtained from a day view, and is not unlike that of a set in a theater." (New York Post, May 7, 1867.)

Inside of the picture, the same two reciprocal waves of light and darkness have trapped the Indian people inside of a scene similar to *Lander's Peak*, but this time, in a gruesome shadow. The Indian village, on the lower left, is almost invisible and seems to be entirely swallowed by the event of the storm. This Shoshonee village, in the distance, resembles an abandoned camp, in the far distance, reflecting some strange event that is in the process of unfolding. The spectator should not leave the room before discovering the intention of that painting. What is going on? Why are the Indians trapped within that setting? What is the drama? There is no written script for anyone to read and the spectator is left to his own device to study and decipher the scene. But what is this device that he is seeking? What the spectator is witnessing is something that he is very much a part of; that

is, the drama of the American System. The drama is the genocide of the Indian people, which was occurring during that very same period. Everyone who visited the Bierstadt exhibition of *The Storm* in 1866 remembered the serene future of the Shoshones of *Lander's Peak* in 1863. But, three years later, the world had completely changed.



**Figure 7.** Albert Bierstadt, *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains – Mount Rosalie*, 1866. The details of two horses and a tree are highlighted artificially.

A closer look reveals that, in the lower right foreground of the painting, there is the slain body of a young deer, which had been freshly killed in that day's hunt. Then, one glance down the steep hill toward the left reveals the presence of two Indians on foot and a third on horseback running after two horses, which have apparently been frightened away by the storm overhead. That may appear to be a reasonable scene, but why are they all heading blindly toward a precipice? This anomaly is the device that Bierstadt chose to provoke the spectator into thinking about the condition of the Indian people, and to make him act on an urgent political change in history. As Lyn put it, recently, as history itself does during a moment of great change, "it's a process which controls the wills of the participants." (Morning Briefing, April 2, 2008.)

Thus, Bierstadt created a narrative whereby the Indians had been hunting peacefully until the storm came; and they were, then, forced to leave everything behind, the deer they had captured, their bows and arrows, a blanket, and a hunting saddle. And,



in their desperate action of attempting to retrieve their horses, the hunters are pushing them toward a suicidal course. Did Bierstadt have some sort of premonition? Was he forecasting the danger that Indians were confronted by, with the coming political changes in the United States?



**Figure 2.** Cartes de visite of Albert Bierstadt and Colonel Frederick West Lander.

This Bierstadt masterpiece also reflects the deepest echoes of the retired voice of James Fenimore Cooper that still resonated through the darkened air of the second half of the nineteenth century, as if through the mid-summer mellowed rays of the sun, limbering up the cliffs in a brief glimmer of apparent respite, another storm was about to thunder the valley below. Bierstadt executed this painting during the year that Lincoln had been assassinated and when his own father had died. April 9, 1866, was also the time when the Civil Right's Act was passed against the veto of racist and Indian killer President, Andrew Jackson. The act declared: "all persons born in the United States were now citizens, without regard to race, color, or previous condition." If this was policy, then, why did the Indian Nation not get a fair treatment? All of these events must have weighed on Bierstadt's mind in determining the treatment of his subject. Moreover, during the same year, Frederick Church, had also painted a *great picture* entitled *Rainy Season in the tropics*, (1866), which was intended as a dialogue with Bierstadt's *Mount Rosalie*. I will discuss this Church composition in a following installment.

## NOTES

<Footnote 1. > On the other hand, the British imperial faction, inside and outside of the United States, considered that the Indians should have their independent territory at the expense of the United States and that, therefore, the United States should have their own

separate territory at the expense of the Indian people. This had always been the British imperial policy of dividing and conquering the United States based on the principle of taking advantage of the other. That was also the principle behind the expression of “Manifest Destiny” that was coined by the British agent, John L. O’Sullivan. From that moment on, it became the term used to express “diabolically” that the United States was “divinely inspired” to spread democracy as George Bush and Dick Cheney do today, and was used to justify the genocide of the Indian population of America during the territorial expansion of the United States to the Pacific. The meaning of “Manifest Destiny” that was coined in 1854 and the significance of what had been stamped on its original metal by J. Q. Adams in 1811 were completely opposed. Their irreconcilable positions were the primary cause behind the War of 1812 and were settled at the Peace of Ghent in 1814 in favor of the J.Q. Adams faction. (See Samuel Flagg Bemis, {*John Quincy Adams and the Foundation of the American Foreign Policy*}, New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1949.)

However, in 1823, the Supreme Court overturned the J. Q. Adams Westphalian orientation of Manifest Destiny in the Johnson versus McIntosh decision that established in the Justice System of the United States, from that moment on, the imperialist Ultramontane right of “Christian Discovery” of 1452. That right to claim any non-Christian “discovered territory” had been given to the Portuguese King Alfonso V by Ultramontane Pope Nicholas V.

The pope’s Bull, *Dum Diversa*, essentially served as the basis for justifying “Christian Discovery” and encouraged the king of Portugal to loot and enslave the Muslim people.

“We weighing all and singular the premises with due meditation, and noting that since we had formerly by other letters of ours granted among other things free and ample faculty to the aforesaid King Alfonso -- to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit...” (Pope Nicholas V Bull, “Dum Diversa”, June 18, 1452.)

In the United States, the Supreme Court decision stated that, “As a result of European discovery, the Native Americans had a right to occupancy and possession.” In the 1823 Supreme Court decision, Justice John Marshal further stated that Americans had “*ultimate dominion*” and that upon discovery, the Indians lost “their rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations.” To this day, this has been the prevailing law in the United States.

That was the official judicial way to kill the true purpose of Manifest Destiny. So, the question became, what sort of “inroads of civilization” were capable of meeting the requirements of wilderness in such a manner that untamed nature itself would be able to

accept the intervention of the human mind as the guide to its own pathway of progress? It is from the standpoint of this strategic understanding of the role of civilization that the question of Art and the Indian question must both be seen as a matter of the same universal physical principle of economic *agape*. The question can only be resolved based on the dynamics of the principle of the Peace of Westphalia; the principle of the “*advantage of the other*,” which had rejected the implications of the Ultramontane rights of “Christian Discovery” and had put an end to this type of savagery on the European continent by stopping the Thirty Years War, in 1648. Thus, the objective of John Quincy Adams’s Manifest Destiny was anti-imperialist and anti-free-trade from its inception. The decision was made to the effect that the civilizing mission to the Indians had to be made with true economic gifts, and not just handouts of blankets, booze, and trinkets.

<Footnote 2> Manifest Destiny was a long-standing project. The planification and architectonic purpose of such a colonizing least action strategy had been in the making ever since Solon of Athens, but in the more recent American period, since Thomas Jefferson had written to Washington from France during his visit to the great economic project of Pierre Paul Riquet and his great project of the French Canal du Midi. Fermat’s economic principle of the path of least time, which was used quite efficiently in this French Colbertian design of European infrastructure, became a model for American canal building and for the American transcontinental railroad. Note, for example, how Fermat’s principle of natural law by which “nature always acts by the shortest paths” corresponded to the American notion of the pathway of “Providence.”

As the American missionary, Calvin Colton, had stated about the railroad project of Asa Whitney, in 1850: “As the human family at a very remote period of antiquity was scattered abroad over the face of the earth, from the base of the Tower of Babel, by the confusion of tongues, so the people of all languages, thus created, are now coming together again, to erect another and a perpetual monument not of human pride against heaven, but of freedom against despotism; and to perfect this work, they require to be chained to us by a band of iron across this continent.[...] We see, then that God in his providence, by the operation of the stupendous machinery of man’s collective power, as organized by himself in the succession of ages, has precipitated these great and startling events at the same moment that we find a pathway marked out by the same divine superintendence, to connect not only the great east with the great west of this continent, but also to connect America with Asia and Europe and Europe with Asia across this continent by most intimate and neighborhood ties. There too, is our public domain, a legacy of Providence, and of little value but for this object; and there is the path, altogether as straight as a bird can fly through the air, and in the shortest possible line over the terrestrial sphere, for Eastern America and Western Europe, to establish intercourse, commercial, social, political, and religious, with the islands of the vast Pacific, and with all Asia. Events have pointed out, events demand, and events will sustain the enterprise with the strong hand on interest; and that interest is nothing else than the united interest of all nations and therefore powerful.” (Calvin Colton, *A Lecture on the Railroad to the Pacific*, Ed. Paul Royster, 1850, p. 4.)

The New York businessman, Asa Whitney, had proposed this project to Congress in 1845 as an explicit means to bring together the nations of the world in harmony with the American principle of the *pursuit of happiness*. Colton had the same purpose. In his vision of the future of America that he counterposed to the designs of the British-Dutch imperial forms of free trade looting in Asia, Colton added the following interesting insight. He said: “A people invaded and subjugated by arms, and held in subjection by arms, as in the British and Dutch East Indies, and as in Hindustan, will never love their subduers; nor can it be expected that they will readily entertain the gospel in that way. And this, undoubtedly, is the reason why the gospel has produced no greater effect in those quarters. But, the way in which we expect Christianity will go to the heathen on the railroad across this continent is not by the sword, not by force of arms, but in the path of a peaceful and voluntary commercial traffic. The weapons of this warfare will be those of ‘peace on earth and good will towards man,’ ‘mighty through God,’ to the pulling down of the strongholds of paganism, and not by the hostile array of man’s power.” (Op. Cit.)

This Peace of Westphalia principle was also the fire that was burning at the heart of the lifework of Albert Bierstadt; not merely because he was a native of the Westphalia region of Germany, but also because the very future of America, as a sovereign Republic, was entirely dependent on whether the “*artistic inroads of civilization*” were to succeed with respect to the Indian populations of America. Manifest destiny became, for him, the sublime mission of civilizing the Indian people. The writings of James Fenimore Cooper were, and still are, the indispensable means to develop this artistic strategy of Manifest Destiny, as it was expressed primarily in the Hudson River School of painting.

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