

The Pastoral Landscape

November 6, 1988-January 22, 1989

The Legacy of Venice

National Gallery of Art
4th and Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20565

The Modern Vision

The Phillips Collection
1600 Twenty-first Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Press Preview
at both museums

Wednesday, November 2, 1988

The Pastoral Landscape -- Two-Part Exhibition at the National Gallery of Art and The Phillips Collection

Washington, D.C., September 12, 1988 - An unprecedented exhibition of 136 paintings and graphic works exploring the development of the pastoral theme through five centuries will be featured in Washington this fall when the National Gallery of Art and The Phillips Collection open the two-part survey The Pastoral Landscape on November 6, 1989. The Legacy of Venice, at the National Gallery, includes the work of Giorgione and his circle, Titian, the print-makers Giulio and Domenico Campagnola, Annibale Carracci, Claude Lorrain, Rembrandt, and Watteau. At The Phillips Collection, The Modern Vision examines the evolution of the genre beginning with the work of Claude, through the 19th and 20th centuries with the work of Gainsborough, Constable, Blake, Palmer, Corot, Inness, Eakins, Cezanne, Gauguin, and Matisse.

The exhibition is the first to be jointly organized and simultaneously shown by the National Gallery and another Washington museum. It has been made possible by grants from Ford Motor Company and The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support has been received from the L. J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.

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"The Pastoral Landscape will be the first exhibition ever to focus on the overarching cultural significance of the 16th-century Venetian pastorale, in which a humanistic view of man's link to nature first assumed enduring visual form," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery.

Referring to the special relevance of the exhibition to The Phillips Collection, Laughlin Phillips, its director, explained, "My father, Duncan Phillips, had a passionate interest in Giorgione, the founder of the pastoral tradition. He thought of him as a prophet of modern art and published a 1937 book, The Leadership of Giorgione, which traced the emergence of the pastoral aesthetic in early 16th-century Venice and emphasized how the lyrical strain of modernism descended from Giorgione's romantic landscape vision."

The National Gallery's section of the show includes 24 paintings, 33 drawings, and 23 prints. Beginning with the works of Giorgione and other 16th-century Venetian and north Italian artists, the exhibition highlights the first flowering of the Arcadian vision of landscape in High-Renaissance Venice under the leadership of Giorgione. The selection of graphic works is specifically designed to demonstrate the catalytic role of prints and drawings in the international diffusion of the pastoral landscape theme. Of special interest is the drawing in red chalk on paper, Castel San Zeno di Montagnana, on loan from the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam. This marks the first time that the work, a prime example of the pastoral genre and one of the few secure attributions to Giorgione, has been exhibited in the United States.

The 55 works in the section of the show at The Phillips Collection include 35 paintings, 9 drawings, and 11 prints ranging from Claude Lorrain in the 17th century through Matisse in the early part of this century, with a postscript containing works by Georges Braque, Milton Avery, and Howard Hodgkin. In its modern guises, the pastoral ideal gave rise to a rich new vocabulary of images. While preserving the essential utopian characteristics of the Venetian pastorelle, the concept in modern times has become broader in scope and often more sophisticated and problematic in tone. The transforming modern vision can be seen to retain the fundamental conceit of the pastoral landscape, the relationship of man to nature.

The Pastoral Landscape has been organized by The Phillips Collection and the National Gallery of Art. The show has been coordinated at The Phillips Collection by Robert C. Cafritz, curator of 19th-century art, and at the National Gallery by Beverly Louise Brown, guest curator of southern baroque painting. The Phillips Collection has published a major color-illustrated book entitled Places of Delight: The Pastoral Landscape to coincide with the opening of the exhibition. It contains essays by Mr. Cafritz, Sir Lawrence, and Mr. Rosand. Places of Delight will be co-published in hardcover in the United States by Clarkson N. Potter and in the United Kingdom by George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about the exhibition please contact Laura Lester, The Phillips Collection, (202) 387-2151 or Deborah Ziska, National Gallery of Art, (202) 842-6353. For information about Ford Motor Company and its support of the exhibition please contact Flo Taussig, Rogers and Cowan, Inc., (202) 466-2925.

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EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER*

The Pastoral Landscape

The Legacy of Venice, National Gallery of Art

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I. Overview

This two-part exhibition explores the tradition of the pastoral landscape from its origin in sixteenth-century Venice to the present day. A pastoral landscape is more than a bucolic setting or a mere depiction of trees. It is defined by the image it presents of man living in harmony with the natural world. Therefore, its meaning resides in its human reference, although not necessarily in the presence of figures.

Views of nature have always played a role in Western art, but during the Renaissance, landscape painting emerged as an independent genre in the form of pastoral scenes. The pictorial metaphor in early Venetian pastorals was derived from the literary tradition of classical antiquity in which the Arcadian ideal was described in terms of a "locus amoenus" or delightful place. Such natural places of delight were peopled by nymphs and shepherds composing music and reciting poetry. It was an idyllic world infused with emotional, amorous, and nostalgic longings of mankind. In this new genre, the landscape was both the setting and the subject of the work.

* - Text of exhibition brochure.

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While the modern pastoral has moved away from its foundation on classical texts, it has remained faithful to the poetic mood of antiquity. Human reference still lies at the core of the visual experience, but the individual voice of each artist has grown more distinct. Although often sharply varied in technique and employing a rich new vocabulary of images, modern works still capture the timeless appeal of the pastoral landscape's poetic enchantment. The artists of sixteenth-century Venice left a legacy that generations of succeeding artists transformed into a modern vision.

II. Legacy of Venice

Around 1500, renewed interest in the pastoral poetry of the antique world set the stage for a similar development in Venetian art. Giorgione (c. 1477/1478-1510) and a small circle of followers including Titian (c. 1488-1576) and the printmakers Giulio (c. 1482-after 1516) and Domenico (1500-1564) Campagnola introduced the "pictorial poetry" of the pastoral landscape. These new pastoral images were flexible enough to accommodate a variety of narrative themes, including allegorical tales, courtly romances, religious subjects, heroic myths, and even simple agricultural motifs. But no matter what their titular subject matter, their basic concern was with man's relationship to nature.

Prints and drawings became the principal agents through which the genre of the pastoral landscape spread beyond Venice. Easily

transported and relatively inexpensive, works on paper were eagerly sought by collectors and artists alike. They served as a ready compendium of ideas to be copied, quoted, and transformed. For example, Titian's pen and ink drawing Landscape with Milkmaid (no. 18), which celebrates the bounty of nature through the depiction of a farmer and milkmaid at work, served as the basis for a woodcut of the same subject (no. 22). Although few artists would have known the drawing firsthand, the print established a powerful repertory of motifs that became part of an international artistic vocabulary. Trees, figures, and even buildings were repeated verbatim by other artists as varied as Rubens (1577-1640), Van Dyck (1599-1641), and Watteau (1684-1721).

Just how easily and frequently such artistic transferences took place is born out by Rubens' Shepherds and Shepherdesses in a Rainbow Landscape, which is represented in the exhibition by a copy (no. 51) engraved by Schelte a Bolswert (c. 1581-1659). Rubens combined the imagery of two of Domenico Campagnola's woodcuts by superimposing the amorous couple from the Landscape with a Hurdy-gurdy Player and a Girl (no. 37) onto the background of another Campagnola print, Landscape with Pilgrims (no. 67). Rubens eventually absorbed the structure and imagery contained in Venetian landscape prints into his own paintings.

Around 1600, Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) rigorously intellectualized the Venetian pastoral tradition, creating a new type, the classical landscape. Annibale's Landscape (no. 42) retains much of the poetic mood, atmospheric effect of color, and open manner of the Venetians, but in it a stricter sense of order also has been imposed on the natural world. This tendency to systematize nature would become even more apparent in the work of Claude Lorrain (1600-1682). In

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landscapes such as the Judgment of Paris (no. 53), Claude exaggerated the grandeur of the Roman countryside to heroic proportions befitting their classical subject matter. He was, in essence, the heir to the sixteenth-century Venetian tradition, which had already been given a more classical bent by Annibale Carracci.

At the same time that Claude in Rome created his heroic interpretation of pastoral themes in painting, Rembrandt (1609-1669) was providing a new momentum for the tradition in northern Europe through his exploration of the pastoral in drawings and prints.

Rembrandt's direct knowledge of Venetian graphics is attested by his actual reworking of a landscape drawing by Domenico Campagnola. On Domenico's Mountainous Landscape (no. 58), Rembrandt's reed pen corrections and subtle ink washes are unmistakably clear. Rembrandt reinterpreted the emotional and sensual aspects of the Venetian pastoral in other instances. His rustic musician in The Flute Player (no. 59) is a motif adapted from Titian's Landscape with Flute-playing Shepherd (no. 19), which was probably known to Rembrandt through a print. Rembrandt magically transformed the scene into a moment of simple bucolic lovemaking by introducing the seated figure of a young woman and integrating the couple into the landscape setting.

Rubens' and Rembrandt's interest in the Venetian pastoral tradition set the stage for the French revival of the genre during the eighteenth century. Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) gained an intimate knowledge of the Venetian pastoral by faithfully copying more than a hundred sixteenth-century works, as is illustrated by his drawings reproducing prints by

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Domenico Campagnola: Landscape with a Bear Attacking a Goat (no. 75), Two Figures in a Landscape (no. 76), and Musicians Seated under Trees (no. 73). He unabashedly incorporated motifs from such drawings into his fêtes galantes -- fanciful visions of well-dressed Parisians enjoying themselves in the open air. Watteau re-created the style, imagery, and effect of the Musicians Seated under Trees in his painting Country Amusements (no. 71). The gently rolling hills, architectural structures, and seated couple are borrowed literally from their Venetian source, as is the more intangible quality of poetic lyricism. The pastoral landscape, just as envisioned by the Venetians two hundred years before, had once again in eighteenth-century France become the full embodiment of a "delightful place."

III. The Modern Vision

In its more recent aspects, the pastoral ideal has given rise to a rich new vocabulary of images. A blend of the old masters' idealism and modern naturalism typifies the modern vision of a pastoral scene. Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) is a pivotal link between the old and the new approaches to landscape painting. He is often considered the principal inventor of the modern landscape. While he drew upon classical traditions to describe the natural beauty of the world, Claude also endowed his work with an infusion of light and color so extraordinary

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that it became an object of delectation in itself. Paintings such as the View of La Crescenza (no. 81) were among the first to show how the aesthetic merits of an Arcadian landscape were a worthy subject in their own right -- apart from any significant figural or narrative content. Claude's work gives the impression, whether correct or not, that he worked directly from nature. It is this quality that profoundly influenced the formation of a modern, more naturalistic style of landscape painting in England.

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) and John Constable (1776-1837) painted lyrical evocations of the English countryside based on their direct observation of nature. Constable's perceptive powers unveiled the splendors of color, light, and atmosphere found in even the humblest of settings. In the tradition of the Venetian pastoral, Constable's On the River Stour (no. 87) celebrates the harmonious relationship between man and the cultivated land.

The most surprising response to the pastoral in England came from William Blake (1751-1837), who in 1821 was commissioned to illustrate a schoolboys' edition of Robert Thornton's Pastorals of Virgil (nos. 83, 84, and 85). The seventeen wood engravings, which show the imagined conversation of two shepherds, were cut with a rough-hewn vigor that gives their diminutive scale an unexpected monumentality. Blake's images transferred Arcadia to the British Isles. A small circle of Blake's followers, including Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) and Edward Calvert (1799-1883), continued to interpret ancient pastoral themes within a contemporary context. The sentimentality of Palmer's The

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Sleeping Shepherd (no. 101) or The Rising Moon (no. 102) epitomizes nineteenth-century Britain's insistence on romanticizing the harsh realities of agrarian labor.

In the pastoral landscape from the sixteenth century onward, the purposes of everyday life were held in suspension. Direct observation was used to represent an imaginary way of life. But especially in nineteenth-century American art, the real world was to play an ever-increasing role in the pastoral. Thomas Eakins' (1844-1916) Arcadia (no. 134), which evokes the ancient ideal, is based on photographs of his young nephews. Artists such as George Inness (1825-1894) could not ignore the rapid changes brought about by the industrialization of the countryside. His Lackawanna Valley (no. 130) marks a prophetic meeting between man and machine. The breathtaking sweep of the expansive panorama is scarred by brutal deforestation and the steaming locomotive. Although Inness has bathed his landscape in a soft light worthy of Claude's pictorial poetry, the intrusion of contemporary concerns into the imaginary realm of Arcadian pleasures would change the pastoral for all time.

The Arcadian spirit continued as a modern fantasy in a tumultuous vein in Paul Cézanne's (1839-1906) The Battle of Love (no. 116). The erotic dance between nymphs and satyrs may recall earlier Venetian themes and compositions, but its psychological tensions are thoroughly contemporary. Cézanne's emphatic application of paint in parallel brushstrokes underlines the violence of the scene. His highly personal and subjective interpretation is indicative of the approach that

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twentieth-century artists would take toward the pastoral landscape.

The pastoral tradition inherited by twentieth-century artists was rich in its diversity, but also something puzzling. The options seemed to be almost too varied: classical, romantic, stylized, analytical. It is in the art of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) that the many strains were once again united. While Matisse would reaffirm the notion that Arcadia was a place of delight, a place of leisure or caprice, he would simultaneously assert that painting was primarily a theoretical analysis of visual means, that is to say the effect of line, color, and composition. Patches of hot, vibrant color in the study for Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, Calm and Delight, no. 122) and By the Sea (no. 123) ironically create an atmosphere of cool, tranquil beauty. In Nude in a Wood (no. 124) Matisse reunited man with nature in an inseparable bond of visual harmony. The soft undulating curves of body and landscape, the rich tonalities of flesh and foliage can no longer be recognized as separate entities, but only as one and the same.

The artistic interpretation of man's relationship to nature has continued to be an enduring theme. In accord with the plurality of interpretation in art of the twentieth century, the modern vision of a pastoral theme is a landscape where the artist's personal poetry provides the link between man and nature.