

National Gallery of Art News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 25, 1991

CONTACT: Tina Coplan
Liz Kimball
(202) 842-6353

MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF ALBERT BIERSTADT PAINTINGS
FEATURES REDISCOVERED EARLY WORK, AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY
OPENING ON NOVEMBER 3, 1991

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The most comprehensive exhibition ever assembled of works by Albert Bierstadt, one of the most prominent American landscape painters of the nineteenth century, opens at the National Gallery of Art on November 3, 1991, and extends until February 17, 1992. Celebrated as the preeminent painter of the Rocky Mountains, the Sierra Nevada, and Yosemite, Bierstadt was the first to capture the powerful visual impact of the American West on a monumental scale.

Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise, organized by The Brooklyn Museum in association with the National Gallery, includes more than seventy of the artist's finest works. The exhibition is made possible by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

Bierstadt's pivotal early painting, Lake Lucerne, joins the exhibition at the National Gallery, its third and final stop. Completed in 1858, Lake Lucerne served as the prototype for the artist's dramatic western landscapes of the 1860s and 1870s. Missing for over a century and considered lost, the painting was rediscovered last year in Rhode Island. The work came to the National Gallery as a 50th anniversary gift of Richard M. Scaife and Margaret R. Battle.

-more-

bierstadt exhibition . . . page two

Newly cleaned, Lake Lucerne will be shown for the first time with the finest works from the artist's middle and late periods, including major paintings from other Washington museums: Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California (1868) from The National Museum of American Art, and The Last of the Buffalo (1888) from the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

"The miraculous reappearance of Lake Lucerne in time for this exhibition at last enables the public to view the full sweep of Bierstadt's productive career," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art. "Lake Lucerne was a stunning debut for the young painter, and it established him as a brilliant new talent in the field of American landscape painting. We are delighted to have acquired this important masterpiece for the nation's collection and to be able to reunite it with Bierstadt's other great achievements in this exhibition."

Highlighted in the retrospective are those monumental western landscapes that brought Bierstadt his greatest fame. The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak (1863), Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie (1866), and Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California (1865) are among the epic panoramas depicting spectacular mountain ranges suffused with brilliant, theatrical light. Also displayed are works reflecting the artist's extensive travels in Europe, the Caribbean, Canada, and Alaska. A selection of the spontaneous, plein-air oil sketches that sparked a revival of interest in Bierstadt's work during the 1960s is also included.

The son of German immigrants, Bierstadt grew up in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he taught himself to draw, became an instructor, and eventually saved enough money to travel to Düsseldorf, a center for artistic training. In 1859, shortly after his return, Bierstadt headed west on horseback to the Rocky Mountains and four years later to California.

"He was the right person in the right place at the right time, tapping into public curiosity and excitement about these remote territories," said Nancy K. Anderson, assistant curator of American Art at the National Gallery and co-curator of the show. "By the time Bierstadt journeyed west, he had at his command a near-perfect combination of technical expertise, European experience, and national enthusiasm -- everything required to turn the western landscape into an iconic image of national definition."

During the 1860s and 1870s, Americans and Europeans lined up to view his panoramic landscapes, exhibited in European capitals and cities throughout America. Less expensive prints of his paintings were widely reproduced and sold. Yet even at the height of his popularity and success, Bierstadt came under critical attack, which became increasingly strident as his 52-year career drew to a close. By the time of his death in 1902, he had been nearly forgotten. Now, a century after the last of his great western panoramas was completed, Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise, a major retrospective, offers an exceptional opportunity to reassess his remarkable career.

bierstadt exhibition . . . page four

Accompanying the exhibit is a fully illustrated catalogue, incorporating interpretive essays, contemporary critical reaction, an extensive chronology, newly discovered photographs, and key primary documents reprinted for the first time. Principal authors and co-curators of the exhibit are Nancy K. Anderson of the National Gallery and Linda S. Ferber, chief curator and curator of American painting and sculpture at the Brooklyn Museum. Also included is an essay by Helena E. Wright, curator in the division of graphic arts at the National Museum of American History.

Philip Morris Companies Inc. began support of the arts in 1959. Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise is the fourth exhibition supported by Philip Morris at the National Gallery, including The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in 1987, Treasures from the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1989, and Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935 in 1990.

Critical support was also provided by The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc. Additional funds were provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts, federal agencies, by the New York State Council on the Arts, and by Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.

#

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about the exhibition, please contact Tina Coplan or Liz Kimball, National Gallery of Art (202) 842-6353. For information about Philip Morris Companies Inc. and its support of the exhibition, please contact Pam Johnson, Rogers & Cowan, Inc. (212) 490-8200.