

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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JASPER FRANCIS CROPSEY'S PENDANTS OF WAR AND PEACE
PRESENTED TOGETHER FOR FIRST TIME IN MORE THAN A CENTURY
AT NATIONAL GALLERY, MARCH 6, 1994 - APRIL 16, 1995

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The devastation of war contrasts with the pleasures and bounties of peace in two powerful paintings created as pendants in 1851 by American artist Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823-1900). For the first time in more than a century, The Spirit of War, acquired by the National Gallery of Art through the Avalon Fund, and The Spirit of Peace, from the Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, will appear together in public in the National Gallery's West Building, gallery 60, March 6, 1994, through April 16, 1995. The exhibition booklet has been made possible through the generosity of Mrs. John C. Newington.

"This focus exhibition may be a revelation to many of our visitors. As a member of the Hudson River School, Jasper Francis Cropsey is best known for paintings such as his masterpiece Autumn--On the Hudson River (1860), which is in the Gallery's collection," said Earl A. Powell III, director,

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National Gallery of Art. "However, The Spirit of War and The Spirit of Peace are imaginary pictures in which Cropsey has eloquently presented the complex ideas of war and peace, and they are among his highest artistic achievements."

The Spirit of War depicts a rocky, stormy mountain landscape with a heavily fortified castle, knights on horseback, and a burning village, while The Spirit of Peace shows a sunny, semi-tropical coastal scene with classical architecture, a bustling harbor town, and men and women walking, dancing, and conversing peacefully. The paintings are worlds away from the Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountains, common subjects in Cropsey's work.

The Spirit of War and The Spirit of Peace were created during the period following the Mexican-American War and the national debate over whether or not slavery should expand into new territories. Many Americans hoped that the Compromise of 1850, which attempted to reconcile regional antagonisms, would pave the way for national peace, a hope perhaps reflected in these pendants.

Exhibited seven times between 1852 and 1857 in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, the paintings were discussed and praised in leading journals and newspapers. They dropped out of public view when they entered the collection of Philadelphian Joseph Harrison, Jr. When his estate was sold in 1912, The Spirit of Peace entered the collection of another Philadelphian

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Charles Knox Smith, in his grand Chestnut Hill house, which is now the Woodmere Art Museum. The Spirit of War slipped into obscurity and was rediscovered in 1978 in a barn in the Adirondack region of New York State.

Jasper Francis Cropsey was born in Rossville, on Staten Island, New York, on February 18, 1823. In 1843 he established his own architectural practice in New York and also began exhibiting paintings. Probably inspired by American artist Thomas Cole, Cropsey turned his attention from architecture to landscape painting in 1843. Following his marriage in 1847, he traveled extensively in Europe. While in Rome he used the same studio that Cole had occupied when he painted the replica set of his famous four-part series The Voyage of Life (1842), which is currently on long-term loan from the National Gallery's collection. The exhibition will be mounted in the same gallery where The Voyage of Life normally hangs.

Cole, who died in 1848, is largely credited with the rise of American landscape painting from relative obscurity to prominence in the 1850s. It was during this period, after Cropsey returned to America in 1849, that he began to establish his reputation as a landscape painter. The greatest examples of Cole's influence on Cropsey are The Spirit of War and The Spirit of Peace.

After a lengthy stay in England with his wife from 1856 to 1863, Cropsey returned to the United States and built a

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twenty-nine room mansion in Warwick, New York. He sold this home but soon purchased a house at Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, to which he added a studio. Called Ever Rest, the site is now maintained as a museum by the Newington-Cropsey Foundation. Cropsey was a founder of the American Society of Painters in Watercolor (now known as the American Watercolor Society) and turned increasingly to this medium after suffering a stroke in 1893. He died on June 22, 1900.

The exhibition is organized by Franklin Kelly, National Gallery curator of American and British painting. He also wrote the booklet that accompanies the exhibition.

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