

THE FINE ARTS

[AUTHOR UNKNOWN]

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A new picture by Chapman¹ has been exhibited at the rooms of the Art Union in Broadway, the last fortnight, representing Rachel, mourning for her first born and refusing to be comforted.² To our perceptions, it is the best of Chapman's paintings; and we were pleased to learn that it found a private purchaser at a liberal price. When such works can find purchasers other artists need not despair of finding a market for their paintings. We do not allude to it for the purpose of criticism, for we are sure that it is within the circumference of propriety to make a public criticism on private property; but to chronicle the fact of a historical painting being bought as soon as it was exhibited. A gentleman well-known for his liberality to artists was the purchaser.

We have recently inspected the portraits of a horse and a Shetland poney, painted by Mr. T. Hicks³, for John H. Hicks, Esq. of this city, which struck us as the finest specimen of animal portraiture that we have ever seen from an American artist. The animals, though in high keeping, had nothing of the unnatural glossiness of hide which is so disagreeable in the majority of pictures of this class. The interior of the stable would do credit to any American artist with whose works we are acquainted. Mr. Hicks adheres to the integrity of nature in his portraits, and we should judge from the few pictures of his execution that we have seen that he is a hard student and a close observer of nature. If he do not in a few years stand at the head of his profession in this country, we shall be disappointed in our expectations.

¹ John Gadsby Chapman, 1808-89. Born in Alexandria, Virginia, Chapman was famous for his historical paintings, namely *The Baptism of Pocahontas*. He moved to New York City in 1834 to study at the National Academy of Design.

² In the Bible, Rachel is the second wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. From Jeremiah 31:15 of the King James Bible: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." From Matthew 2:18: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

³ Thomas Hicks, 1816-90. He was best known for his portrait of Abraham Lincoln.

The granite buildings at the corner of Chambers-street and Broadway⁴, is a huge eccaleiobion⁵, for hatching artists. On every floor of that capacious building may be found a half dozen of painters or sculptors, who are just bursting from the chrysalis of obscurity and preparing to spread their butterfly wings and soar into the summer sky of Fame. The best of them will be found highest up. There is Elliot⁶, the most promising of our young portrait painters, in the room which Page used to occupy, and opposite to him are Cropsey⁷, Gignoux⁸ and Cafferty⁹, the most promising among our landscape painters. They are, in truth, more than promising, for they have already fulfilled the promises which they gave when they first made themselves known to the public.

MONS. EDOUART'S¹⁰ SILHOUETTES—The works of this gentleman deserve to be classed among works of fine-art. His mere profile cuttings, perhaps, do not; although even his scissored portraits better deserve it than many portraits on canvass, which have that distinction awarded to them¹¹. He has lately adopted an ingenious plan of grouping his subjects, after cutting them, and re-producing them in miniature by the Daguerrotype. So that a gentleman may have his whole family put into a convenient shape to carry in his vest pocket. A visit to his room is worth more than his charge for a portrait.



⁴ The National Academy of Design, which today is located on 5th Avenue, was begun in 1825 with a mission to “promote the fine arts in America through instruction and exhibition...its founders believed that “the practice and exhibition of fine art could flourish outside of the aristocratic patronage system.” The origins of the Academy are inextricably linked with the Hudson River School art movement, “America’s first true artistic fraternity,” known for its romanticized, pastoral view of nature, particularly with its exaggerated use of light effects, known as luminism (History of National Academy of Design).\

⁵ *Eccaleobion*. An egg-hatching apparatus, using artificial heat, invented by W. Bucknell in about 1839.

⁶ Charles Loring Elliot, a portrait painter who was elected to the Academy in 1845.

⁷ Jasper Francis Cropsey, a landscape painter of the Hudson River School.

⁸ Regis Francious Gignoux, a French painter who was active in the U.S. from 1840-70 and painted snow scenes in the Hudson River School fashion.

⁹ James Henry Cafferty was an American painter noted for both landscapes and portraits.

¹⁰ Auguste Edouart, a silhouette artist born in France and visited the U.S. from 1839-49.

¹¹ Silhouettes, particularly those of Edouart, were becoming an increasingly popular cheap substitute for those who could not afford to have their likenesses painted in oils.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The preceding article, which is not so much a collection of art reviews for the issue as much as it is general notes on the goings-on of the art scene at the time, nonetheless feature positive reception to the art and artists discussed, somewhat unusual for the *Broadway Journal*. In regards to the unknown author's analysis of the aesthetics of the art, it is impossible to ignore a note of contradiction; the author celebrates the realism and "integrity" of Thomas Hicks's painting, yet also praises the work of National Academy of Design students Jasper Francis Cropsey and Regis Francious Gignoux, both of whom belong to the Hudson River School movement, known for its romanticized view of nature. There is a tension between the expensiveness of art—the author's pointedness concerning the private purchase of the Chapman painting—and its seemingly increasing public access—the relative cheapness of the Edouart silhouettes. Over all of this hangs the mission statement of the National Academy of Design, which, at its founding in 1825, purported to show that the "practice and exhibition of fine art could flourish outside of the aristocratic patronage system." By a reading of this article, one can conjecture that the American art aesthetic and politic of the time had one hopeful foot in the direction of a distinctly American—that is, non-European—somewhat democratized, middle-class and grounded view, and one foot set back in history and across the pond.

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