

On the Land:

Landscapes as Americana for 175 Years at the St. Louis Mercantile Library

Early in the history of landscape painting, both artists and their patrons realized the expressive potential of artwork that depicted a nation's geography. Thus, landscape painting became a powerful tool employed to represent the social and political aspirations of entire nations. In the United States, the story of landscape painting encompasses a broad range of topics that reflect every aspect of the country's development. In their efforts to depict the expanding landscape of the growing nation, artists created works that reflect the narrative that inspired them and thus become as much a document of Americana as any book or map.

This focused exhibition presents eight paintings and one lithograph that depict the American landscape from the 19th to the 21st centuries. While the styles vary greatly, the works are united by the narrative references they each contain and the way these narratives document the American story.

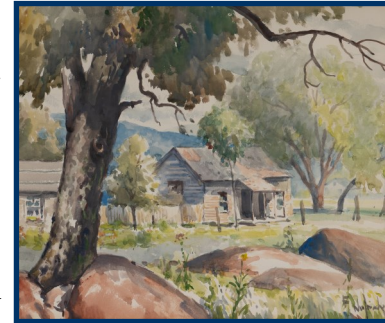
List of Works

1. Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), *Sunset, California Scenery*, 1868, chromolithograph on board, produced by Prang & Co.

Bierstadt was among the nation's best-known artists documenting American westward expansion. His wall-sized paintings were awe-inspiring recreations of the grandeur of the western canyons, but even in smaller compositions like this one he conveyed the monumentality of lands not previously recorded by Euro-Americans. Bierstadt's artwork preserved these scenes and presented a narrative of westward expansion that read positively for the explorers, while the glowing colors of the sunset can be seen as symbolic of the decline of Native American populations brought on by the relentless pursuit of Manifest Destiny.

2. Frank Nuderscher (1880–1959), *The Rock Garden, Grantsville, Missouri*, n.d., watercolor

Nuderscher painted in many parts of Missouri, capturing a wide variety of urban, rural, agricultural, and industrial landscapes. Although he is better known for his oil paintings, this watercolor conveys the rich, saturated colors found in this rural scene. The title implies a traditional rock garden, but the large boulders in the foreground hint at a different narrative, especially if they were the kind of stone that had to be cleared from the home site and agricultural fields in order for this idyllic scene to eventually become a reality.



3. Mary Hallett Gronemeyer (1893–1985), *Winter Trees*, n.d., watercolor

Many of Gronemeyer's works focus on trees that are frequently depicted with strong, black lines that create a dramatic graphic effect. Here the trees are seemingly removed from a recognizable landscape and instead stand before areas of bright primary colors. The narrative here is one of an individualistic interpretation of the modern landscape, and the viewer left to question where is this place? What is its story?

4. James Godwin Scott (1931–2015), *Winter, Oak Creek*, 1991, acrylic on canvas

Although he is best known for his river and urban scenes in watercolor, Scott was also adept at capturing the energy and light of other scenes in both oil and acrylic. This work is a transitional piece created when Scott had moved from St. Louis to Scottsdale, Arizona and began painting in acrylic. He used the paint effectively to depict the blinding whiteness of snow juxtaposed with the intense colors of the trees, showing the landscape at a time of seasonal transition, just as he was also transitioning in both physical location and artistic style.

5. F. R. Nauman (1891–1994), *Winter Bluffs*, n.d., oil on canvas

Fred Robert Nauman was an architect and artist active in St. Louis in the 1970s whose paintings often feature the height of each season's color. Nauman's winter scene depicts bright snow and bare trees around the type of river bluffs so familiar to Missouri residents. Depicting seasons as a framework for a landscape element that itself reflects the changes that occur naturally as rivers ebb, flow, and even