



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Landscape, City, and Identity in American Painting, ca. 1840–1930**

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Leo Marx long ago noted the “persistent habit of representing America with images of landscape.” It is my aim to provide an enhanced account of landscape in the important period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century by tracing the ways in which the representation of the organized urban life of towns and cities is linked to the representation of landscape. The project seeks to understand how the equivalence of identity and place, like the treatment of landscape as symbol of nationhood, became central to the painting of the newly important and powerful cities, and how new forms and meanings evolved. What was the impact of themes defined first in landscape representation on depictions of the city in the years between the 1840s and the early twentieth century? What did it mean to confront the imperative to represent the new urbanization of America when what was most powerfully available to depict the evolving nation was the landscape tradition? And what transformations did these themes undergo when they migrated to the new world of the cities? Tracing the transformation of these issues, the five chapters of the project build new connections between American landscape, city, and identity.