



At Home and Abroad: The Transcendental Landscapes of Christopher Pearce Cranch (1813- 1892)

Nancy Stula, David M. Robinson

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Despite a fifty-year career as a landscape painter, Christopher Cranch's paintings are little known. Instead, he is best known for his poetry, his ties to the New England Transcendentalists, and, above all, his playful caricature of Ralph Waldo Emerson as an enormous "transparent" eyeball, perched atop a minuscule body in top hat and tails, optic nerve tied in a ponytail. From his first reading of Emerson's Nature essay (1836), Cranch was inspired to explore Transcendental concepts through visual means; although ultimately it was painting, not caricature, that provided the ideal vehicle for him. Transcribing nature onto canvas became an act of devotion. Like Thoreau writing of the daily trials of life on Walden Pond, Cranch also attempted, in his landscapes, to express the correspondence between nature and spiritual concepts. His brand of Transcendentalism bypasses the quiet, "transparent" aspect to celebrate a nature that is filled with the flux and continual shifting that Emerson and Thoreau also celebrated in their writings. C. P. Cranch was intimate with some of the most innovative thinkers in America and counted among his friends Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George William Curtis, and James Russell Lowell. This study considers Cranch not only as a Hudson River School artist, but also as a participant in the history of ideas, a multifaceted individual who merged intellectual and artistic life.

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