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THE LAST UNICORN OF THE RENAISSANCE

THE LUMINIST MOVEMENT OF PAINTING

Just as the Renaissance was an artistic expression of the directives prospered from the Age of Reason , after four centuries the Naturalist Movement of America with the Hudson River School is what remains of this heroic 'Age' ending in the clash of western ideology with a new world order. The then unrecognized Luminist Movement of Post Reconstruction America came to a close almost without notice as the Industrial Revolution took the stage consuming the Arts with Science and technology spitting out the beginnings of the new industrialized art form: Impressionism. Without dwelling on the glories of the Renaissance it is important to follow the migration of the

Renaissance as its inspiration traveled through Europe from the Low Land countries of the Netherlands to Italy, where it blossomed, then moving to Spain, north through France and ending with the workshops of Fragonard and Boucher at the end of the 17C,

Certain periods in history have been marked by an explosion of art, while others lay dormant. Artistic achievement is the marker of a heightened society; a historical footnote, making up the human tapestry -- the Humanities. The Renaissance -- new beginnings --the Age of Reason broke old barriers to create one of these periods. Renaissance belief effected religion, politics, science and the arts. Science developed innovations, discoveries; by which countries grew and the bourgeoisie were enriched. One of these inventions was oil painting in

1410 that lead to the greatest outburst of art spanning all of Europe for the next three plus centuries.

To understand the Luminist Movement it is important to follow the general migration of the Renaissance as it traveled through Europe beginning with the “Invention of Oil Painting” by Van Eyck in 1410 in Flanders. This invention transformed painting and was the equivalent of inventing a color copier. Overnight every court in Europe flaunted a Van Eyck. Uncontainable it migrated to Italy where it blossomed into the Golden Age, spread to Spain, north, through France ending in the workshops of Fragonard and Boucher. Briefly it appeared in the 18th C England with a select group of portrait and landscape painters: Gainsborough, Reynolds, Lawrence, Romney, Constable and Turner to name a few and finishing as far north as Scotland, with the master of the square brush, Sir

Henry Raeburn in the 19th Century.

By 1825 the last vestiges of this Renaissance experience traveled up stream like the great salmon to form the Hudson River School and quickly dying with the Luminist Movement before the end of the century. The Luminist Movement is the last arm of the Hudson River School and for arguments sake are interchangeable. It took a hundred years for Luminism to acquire the label, although many of the artists at one time or another touched on this style. Yet not until the dust had settled after two World Wars did art historians recognize a unique luminosity in a few ranks of the last generation of the Hudson River School. Discovering a movement within a movement and called it; Luminism ---the final descendant of the Renaissance art.

It is clear that the Hudson River School style evolved

from its origin in Europe principally England, as evidenced by the English writings and art manuals of John Ruskin, admirer of Turner. William Gilpin, modeled his ideas after Claude Lorraine; Fielding Lucas 'Progressive Drawing Book' based on the works of the English watercolorist, John Varley; Earl Alexander Powell, 'English Influences in the Art of Thomas Cole 1801-48. Almost without exceptions one by one these artists sojourned abroad and drank from the fountain, returning to try their hand on the vast American frontier.

The originator of this movement, Thomas Cole, born in England in 1801, migrated with his family when he was eighteen years old as a wood engraver to Philadelphia. A naturally gifted artist, he took a trip up the Hudson River exploring and painting the wooded area around the Catskill. The Hudson River School was founded in 1825.

Within a short time there amassed the largest fraternity of artists in America and yet it was so short lived. With post industrial America, Luminism with its highly elitist following began to wane and what was the last vestiges of the Renaissance faded away as if it had never existed.

Before indulging in the history of these Luminist painters there is a technical aspect that needs to be clarified. Curiously every facet of these painters lives was chronicled except one aspect which has been exclusively absent from the literature of the time; their painting practices. There is virtually no mention or record of painting technique for this school and so it must be assumed that since the Hudson River School took its influence from Europe, it must have inherited their technique or at best a variation of Flemish Technique.

It took the Dutch guilds two hundred years to develop Flemish Technique from the time of its invention in 1410. The innovations of oil mediums and paint binders that comprise this technique is what lead to the ease and superior quality of the Dutch Schools and latter translated to the Hudson Valley painters. For the multitude of art manuals written in the Renaissance period, there are no manuals on oil painting for the Hudson River School. Self taught painters could never achieve this level of mastery and only the painters introduced to this technique flourished. Note the number of primitive paintings in antique shops all over the country.

The Hudson River School flourished because of beautiful effects achieved by the resonate painting varnishes known at the time as 'painters butter' passed down from Flemish Technique. This innovation enabled an

explosion of art to happen in America and within a relatively short period of time. Also note the similarity of technique of these painters. These resonate varnishes are evident in the paintings; their chemical makeup and the characteristic patina of the age old varnish. Iron resonate, or what looks like umbiran shadows is in the ground work of these paintings. These mediums created effortless blending, fast drying, for painting on location, layering, glazing color, palpitating color and pointillists effects; but mostly the rich oily –resinous quality and superior luminosity of this school.

The intrinsic valuable of this technique may well be proportionate to the high level of secrecy surrounding this method of painting, the same secrecy that lead to the liquidation of the Dutch guilds in mid seventeenth century. Whatever the reason for the sudden death of Luminism,

whether secrecy of a lost technique, loss of patronage, or a burgeoning new movement, there is no denying the extreme level of beauty; physically, spiritually and technically of this movement that stands as great as any other movement in art history.

LUMINISM: The Movement as extension of the Hudson River School

The term Luminism was first recognized in 1948, with the publication of the Karolik Collection catalogue by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, exhibiting a collection of painters of 'Luminism'ⁱ. Fitz Henry Lane, Martin Heade, John Frederick Kensett, and Sanford Gifford were signaled out for their shared unique quality. This phenomenon was first noted by John H. Baur in the catalogue introduction, and other essays followed by

Barbara Novak, noted American art historian, claiming these works as 'significant because they are seen as part of the indigenous American cultural and artistic mainstream (the latter being conceived as tonal, linear, non painterly, lucid, and conceptual).ⁱⁱ During the time of 1855 to 1880 there was no delineation of the Hudson River School artists, only a natural progression.

At the time Fitz Henry Lane, the painter from Gloucester, died in 1865 virtually unknown. Martin Heade was noted for being obscure and recluse, painting stacked horizontal views of the Newbury marshes and tropical still life's with hummingbirds. Sanford Gifford is portrayed as photographic, bare and solitary, with unique color effects that were remarkably luminous. Only John Frederic Kensett was praised as a leader in landscape art, along with Frederic Church and Alfred Bierstadt.

The Hudson River School found fervor in the new religious and philosophical ideologies. Cole, Archer B. Durand, Church, and Bierstadt brought the movement to universal heights, displaying canvases from the North Pole and Alaska, to Central and South America. Thomas Cole saw the landscape as a spiritual backdrop, proclaiming, “The wilderness is yet a fitting place to speak of God” (Essay on American Scenery. 1835). Painting ‘The Cross in the Wilderness’, ‘The Pilgrim of the Cross’, and religious allegories, ‘Expulsion From the Garden of Eden’, Course of Empire series and the ‘Voyage of Life’, favored the wilderness as a religious backdrop using powerful luminist techniques. Cole’s pupil, Frederic Church a Calvinist is more subdued, despite his tentative pictorial titles: ‘Moses Viewing the Promised Land’, ‘The Deluge’, ‘Christians on the Borders of the Valley of the Shadow of

Death'. His tour de force, 'Heart of the Andes', Church moves in the direction of Luminism. John Frederic Kensett as David C. Huntington wrote in his essay 'Church and Luminism: Light for Americas Elect,' best categorizes this Hudson River School painter as Luminist. Starting with Church, "indeed the roots of F. Church's art do go back to seventeenth-century New England...latter-day Puritan baroque, the Protestant Reformation's delayed response to the art of the Counter-Reformation... were fit icons for the American Adam ... parables for God's Chosen People ... painted primarily for 'those who have eyes to see and a mind to understand.' ... paraphrased of Church's canvases, resonate with Scripture. Banner word of the would-be Elect...words which have more to do with John Calvin than Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau." Huntington writes of Cole 'Cole's God, Coles

Savior, has more to do with the next world than with this world. For him, life on earth was essentially a striving for purity of spirit, a preparation for the life after death.’ ‘ The eye of the classic luminist, of a Fitz Hugh Lane, a Kensett , looks not to interpret God’s handiwork, but to merge with a nature which is itself God.” On Heade, Huntington notes, ‘The unorthodox, somewhat alienated Heade seems to have had no inclination to picture the hopes of believers in the myths of the age... the drama that Heade would paint portrays a nature which would seem to concerned only with itself.’ Huntington describes Sanford Gifford, as probably the most naturally gifted of the Luminist’ painters but as talent does not make up for commitment, he was a part of the Movement without being a forerunner. “In 1880 the author of Sanford Gifford’s obituary in the ‘Art Journal’ complained, “It had been the wish of his admirers that he

would give the world some large and 'important' picture that would do for his reputation what the 'Heart of the Andes' did for Church's." Of Kensett he notes, " probably the champion of Luminism because of his constant development toward purism, proficiency and commanding paintings in the Movement". Here, Huntington compares Church to Kensett, without downplaying the achievement of Church's great canvases, "Heart of the Andes", or 'Cotopaxi' (much like Albert Bierstadt's 'Colorado Rockies' which in his time paralleled in greatness to the 'Creation' by Michelangelo and other religious based icons), he states that Kensett's works, although smaller, are not less significant because he transcends into the higher planes of the sublime. "With Kensett, Church shared a sense of geological-cosmic-time and space... But where Church and Kensett resemble one another the motivations differ.

Church was praised for 'the sublime repression of himself.'

The painter's hand did not intrude between the viewer and God's nature...so the nineteenth-century Puritan painter found himself morally bound to the type of nature. It would have been the concern to paint in the manner of the Elect that converted Church into a human camera. No such Calvinist discipline is intimated in Kensett's handling of his medium.... Kensett, like... Emerson, does not appear to conceive of himself as a fallen being,... Like Thoreau, Kensett seems never to have "quarreled" with his creator. He is indeed become "part and parcel of nature." As the "transparent eyeball" the self evaporates. Kensett does not stand before nature as protagonist. He is not God's agent; there is no sense of separation between seer and seen."

This is the pure essence of 'cause and effect' whereby Kensett places the viewer in God's realm by imitating his

sublime light and not by referencing God in symbols.

THE FOUR ARTISTS OF THE LUMINIST MOVEMENT

FITZ HUGH LANEⁱⁱⁱ 1804-1865 At 27 changed his name to Fitz Henry Lane

Born in Gloucester, on the North Shore of Boston, of five generations from 1653 on Lane's Cove. After 18 months he became paralyzed from the waist down where it is thought he contracted polio. He developed strong powers of observation choosing to draw in his native Gloucester while his classmates would take to fishing. After careful consideration, Lane enlisted as an apprentice in 'The Pendleton- Moore Shop' in 1835, Boston's premier lithography firm, developing a stiff architectural hand and refining his drawing style. An entry into this establishment

was the equivalent of joining an academy and being taught from the leading talent of the times. The connections that he fostered would endure the rest of his life and be an inspiration for his artistic sensibility and religious conviction. Leaving Boston's most prestigious drafting house, Fitz Henry Lane began doing oil paintings of the water front under the direction of Robert Solomon, Boston's premier marine painter.

Only after Robert Salmon returned to England did Fitz Henry Lane take his place as Boston's most prestigious maritime artist. Painting countless ships portraits, Lane was able to return to the North Shore, where he could afford a granite home of his own design. The new railroad to Boston kept him in contact with his shipping clients and the intellectual stimulus of the growing metropolis. His particular interest in the transcendental movement of the

Religious Union of Associations, expressed the concerns of phrenology, Spiritualism and mesmerism, and included reform minded liberals such as Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau. Venturing away from Gloucester, less and less, except for an occasional summer outing to Penobscot Bay, Maine, Lane continued his membership in the Gloucester Lyceum which hosted transcendentalists beliefs: 'the more mystical side of transcendentalism, as several transcendentalists saw these disciplines as being a means 'to attain a higher consciousness and become the 'Transparent Eyeball' to which Emerson refers,' and 'to access higher levels of awareness, and the transcendental insight that accompanies it'^{iv}.

Fitz Henry Lane was the oldest and most isolated of the Luminist painters, whose technique was methodical and precise, with many thin layers and architectural

details. His method for transferring the drawing onto the canvas with such subtle transitions, tightness and extreme refinement as the rigging of ships and his almost primitive figures lead to the quiet reflective nature of his style. He was the forerunner and embodied the Luminist Movement.

STANFORD ROBINSON GIFFORD 1823-1880

Gifford was born in Greenfield, New York in 1823 and attended Brown University from 1842-1844, when he went to New York City to pursue his art training.

Gifford's early training was probably typical of many young students-- in a letter of 1874 he wrote: " I came to New York in 1845 and placed myself under the direction of John Rubens Smith, an accomplished drawing master, with whom I studied drawing , perspective and anatomy. At the

same time I drew from the Antique and the life at the National Academy of Design, and attended the lectures on anatomy at the Crosby St. Medical College.” The following year Gifford made the sketching expedition into the Catskills that opened his ‘eyes to the beauties of nature’ and determined him to forsake the antique, anatomy, and the portrait for the ‘absolute freedom’ of the landscape painter’s life. ‘Having once enjoyed the absolute freedom of the Landscapes painter’s life, I was unable to return to portrait painting. From this time my direction in art was determined.’^v

Gifford became a member of the National Academy of Design in 1854; sojourned abroad in 1855; British Isles, Paris, Belgium, 1856-7 Italy , winter in Rome, then returned to the New York City Studio at 15 Tenth Street. He was abroad in 1859 with Jervis McEntee, but enlisted

in 7th New York Regiment during the Civil War. He went again abroad to the Mediterranean, in 1868. By 1870 he traveled west to Colorado with Kensett and Whittredge. An adventurer never settling down, he died in New York City in 1880, at the close of the Luminist period.

In 'Luminist Light' Andrus writes, p 36, " More than anyone else's, Gifford's paintings describe the quality of atmosphere noted by Durand 'It is felt in the foreground, seen beyond that, and palpable in the distance. It spreads over all objects the color which it receives from the sky in sunlight or cloud light.'" Gifford used atmosphere as a vehicle for color and flooded the picture plan with a certain palpable light to distinguish the time of day. His canvases are spontaneous, fresh and lucid, as if they passed off his brush without reworking or correction.

Gifford appears to have been youthful, affluent and

talented, however, when considering his oeuvre, his paintings reach a certain proficiency, certainly one that would satisfy many artists, yet they never reach grandeur. They were clever little gems but not diamonds.

JOHN FREDERIC KENSETT 1816-1872

Kensett had a history of a cosmopolitan, philanthropic artist, an innovator in the Hudson River School movement, and leader in the cultural heritage of American art. As an artist, he was equal to Peter Paul Rubens in affairs of state.

He was born March 22, 1816 in Cheshire, Connecticut into a family of engravers. He was an apprentice in his father's shop, Shelton and Kensett, the first print-making firm in Connecticut. Little was Kensett aware that his birthright as an engraver would provide the

artistic training to open the doors to American Art by procuring him draftsmanship, independence, and contacts in the art world that would place him at the pinnacle of his profession.

Printmaking was thriving at the time and engraving was most in demand as innovations were quickly developing for cartography and steel plate bank notes. In 1829 the shop now in New Haven partnered by Alfred Daggett his uncle, found Kensett a mere thirteen years old then he went to work in New York at the shop of Peter Maverick, premier engraver. There he met John Casilear and Arthur B. Durand also fellow engravers, later to become landscape painters and lifelong friends. From 1838 to 1840 Kensett worked for Hall, Packard, and Cushman in Albany where they created the series of oval bank note dies; 'The intricacy and yet perfect accuracy of

the process by which this result is accomplished, by one continuous line, and the beauty and perfect finish of the work, reflect the highest credit on the mechanical skill and science of our fellow-citizen'^{vi}. At that time Casilear wrote to Kensett of his departure for England in the Spring of 1840 with the eminent Durand, and Thomas Rossiter. Kensett readily found himself at the start of a seven year sojourn throughout Europe absorbing the glories of antiquity on the Grand Tour: London, Paris and Rome . To the newly arrived Kensett on viewing the National Gallery in London, God was first revealed as Claude Lorrain with his formal compositions abutting a large umbrian mass against the smooth hues of a brilliant sunset glow: he remained his mentor for life.(Kensett copy of Claude Lorrain 'Seaport with the landing of Cleopatra at tarsus, 1642 , 46 x58 , Louvre).

Sustaining himself through the sale of engravings and small stipends from fellow artists and family he was able to study and copy from the national treasures eking out a meager subsistence with the kindred spirits of expats that communed in his art circles. It is here that he laid the foundation for his artistic decree and realized his indebtedness to art and his fellow artists. Kensett writes to his brother Thomas in New York and proclaims 'I have long set myself down as a confirmed old bachelor, beyond the hope of redemption- I am wedded to the arts and they must be my bride, and a more charming mistress I could not hope to win.'^{vii} Kensett never wed.

Two events played a part in setting Kensett's foundation in the latter period of his European stay. The death of his grandmother brought a small inheritance which finally ended his burdensome dependency on

having to sell engravings and allowing his complete indulgence in oil painting. Yet Kensett could not underestimate the solid foundation for oil painting that his skill with the burin had brought him in revealing fine delicate drawing and sepia under painting at the start of each composition. The second occurrence was the establishment of the long-standing friendship with Francis William Edmonds (1806-1863), characterized by Kensett as 'a distinguished member of the Banking fraternity of New York, now cashier of the Mechanics Bank, one of the finest Institutions in the Country,' an accomplished genre painter, Edmonds was a leader in New York art politics. Kensett by virtue of his membership in the National Academy of Design became a founder and officer of the committee of the Apollo Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in the United States, which was renamed and

reorganized as the American Art-Union. Between 1840, when he sent some 'specimens of engraving' to the Apollo Association, and 1852, when the Art-Union ceased operation, Kensett sold a total of forty-eight pictures to that organization, eleven of them while he was in Europe.^{viii}

These sales verified his independence as a genuine artist.

The Art-Union represented the same kind of fraternity of the Flemish and Dutch Guilds formed hundreds of years

prior. The Art-Union 'brought into notice a considerable number of men of decided ability, who would have

remained entirely unknown or, at any rate, advanced with much less rapidity excepting for the assistance.' Leutze,

Deas, Bingham, Cropsey, Inness, Stearns, Casilear,

Baker, Church, and Kensett' were to name a few of the

beneficiaries of this Union, (the Art-Union Bulletin of

October 1849). Also reminiscent of the Dutch Guilds, the

members were required to conform to the articles of the charter in order to practice for profit or be ousted from the Union and forced to practice their art in another region.

Kensett used this European passage as a trial run testing the waters on foreign soil before plunging into a career that might expose him as a failure. He worked at establishing not only an artistic base but a social one so that on returning to New York he could move to the top of the American cultural elite, and wasting no time in doing so, as Lane did in Boston.

Kensett's arrived in New York in 1847, exactly seven and half years from when he left, but unlike the solitary Lane, his gregarious and generous nature attracted him to the epicenter of the New York art scene and as his paintings gained in fame his personality opened doors.

He became one of the first fifty members of the National

Academy of Design, and the exclusive Sketch Club, President of the Union League Club, and when, after organizing the immensely successful New York Metropolitan Fair of 1863 it became apparent that a permanent picture gallery was needed in the metropolis. He became a founding member and Trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; presided over the Artists' Fund Society – a life insurance society to benefit the families of deceased painters, and entered the national scene as one of three members of the Art Commission approved and appointed by President James Buchanan to review all designs for sculpture and painting for the United States Capitol. Ironically, the Commission was abolished because of the critical nature of the artists involved.

Kensett's mature style was uniquely his own and gained favor among the public and critics, procuring him a

codified niche in the art community. His fame grew with his departure from the old forms of the Hudson River School as he defined his poetry of light, of serenity, and of creating harmony with silence.

Kensett, who had traveled as extensively as any painter in the realm, from the White Mountains sketching at various times with Durand, Rossiter, Casilear, Champney, to the Catskills up the Hudson River , with Gifford, and with Worthington Whittredge to the Colorado Rockies (1870). From 1841 until 1872 he would set out in June and return in late October, oftentimes tracking several distant destinations in one season, always searching for the perfect vista. He travelled often with Vincent Colyer along the coast of Newport and Connecticut and would bring all this material back to his New York studio. It wasn't until Colyer, looking for a

summer retreat, took a boat up Long Island Sound and found a remote inlet off the coast of Darien, Connecticut, where in 1866 he bought a thirty-five acre island called Ox Island or Contention Island, which he then renamed Contentment Island. That next year, Kensett bought a parcel from Colyer and, after he built his house, he erected a studio overlooking Long Island Sound.

The fall of 1872 brought tragedy and death, when Mrs. Colyer's carriage overturned on the causeway to Contentment Island and she drowned. In a failed attempt, Kensett tried hopelessly to save the limp body in the cold autumn water and later that fall, he died of complications with pneumonia and a persistent weak heart. The word of Kensett's death reverberated throughout the New York papers with a series of articles over the tragic loss of this selfless hero.

It was in this final period of his life that he spent on Contentment Island that he produced the 'Last Summer's Work' and ironically found poetry in the quiet tranquil vistas of Long Island Sound only a stone's throw from the Isle of Manhattan. His last painting 'Sunset on the Sea' approaches a tonal abstraction of hues that could have been any sunset. Most of these 'Last Works' were given back to the Metropolitan Museum, of which Kensett was a trustee. These captivating views of Darien caught the eye of the late Theodore Rousseau, the great Curator of European Art for the Metropolitan Museum, who a century later also purchased Contentment Island for his own summer abode.

MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE 1819-1904

Born on a farm in Lambertville, Pennsylvania, Heade

started painting at the age of eighteen while studying with his neighbor Edward Hicks, and achieved a modest skill towards portraiture. Heade first moved to New York in 1843. As an unsettled itinerant painter he traveled the country for the next fifteen years after which his father provided him with a two year stipend to Europe, where he mostly studied in Rome. In 1857, exploring landscape painting in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, he met John F. Kensett and Benjamin Champney. Finding landscape painting more difficult than he anticipated, he took up a studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building in New York the following year, the center of the now relevant Hudson River School. He soon befriended Frederick Church and Sanford Gifford. Heade, a querulous nonconformist, never considered the many art societies available to him. He admired Church and the two became

lifelong friends. Heade at this moment must have realized his calling and wishing to align himself with this movement, although only from a distance. Within a year, he began toiling and rejecting the rudimentary Hudson River School formats to assimilate his own stylistic conception of rendering the 'light effect,' which guided his oeuvre for the next half century. 1859 marks the start of Heade's mature period with 'Approaching Thunder Storm', along with his iconographic marsh scenes and uniquely botanical still-life. He painted over six hundred pictures, of which half were marsh scenes, with the other two quarters split between seascapes and mountain valleys, wooded pastures and still life. Industrious as he may have been, Heade managed to move around with almost restless unease, still maintaining a constant dialogue between his chosen themes. He took three trips to Central and South

America - Rio de Janeiro in 1864, and Nicaragua in 1866 - to paint hummingbirds in their natural habitat after James Audubon. After a trip to London to market his paintings, he returned to paint the New England coastline.

Heade had earned a modest reputation over the course of sixty-five years exhibiting and selling in numerous galleries and cities, from Philadelphia to Boston; Derby Gallery in New York, O'Brien's Gallery in Chicago; Gill's Gallery in Springfield, selling between fifteen and twenty-five paintings a year for a modest price of between 100 to 200 dollars^{ix} with little recognition and minor standing. Where Lane and Kensett died in the heyday of the Movement, Heade lived through the dying Hudson River School until harsh criticism caused him to relocate to St. Augustine, Florida in 1883. At eighty he married and by 1886 stopped sending paintings to

northern galleries. At the time of his death in 1904, he had vanished from history as if he had never existed only to be plucked out as one of American's uniquely original landscape visionaries fifty years later.

Heade's assimilative style, like Kensett's, depends on the refinement of certain stylistic ideas. By painting certain themes in variations, they were able to formulate their personal concepts of this new style. Heade's repetitive linear compositions of iconographic haystacks not only becomes his signature but a journal of weather patterns, time of day, light effects, a tableaux of moods, feelings and sentiments. So brilliantly conceived that upon seeing a multitude of haystack paintings, the viewer is convinced, noting the subtle variations of the haystacks, the unique genius of this monogram artist. Few artists reach the depth of theater and a repertoire of nature's sublime

moments as the Ipswich Marshes. This repetition recalls the numerous self portraits of Rembrandt. The marshes are instruments for autobiographical story telling similar to Thomas Wolfe's voluminous collection; 'You Can't Go Home Again', 'Look Homeward Angel' . Each story repeats itself where the subtlest nuances can be embellished again and again.

TECHNICAL ORIGINS OF LUMINISM

Records only show that Kensett traveled with Gifford to Colorado in 1870. Gifford was a favorite student of Church, and Church of Cole, and Kensett of Church. Heade maintained an intimate lifelong friendship with Church. It is not possible that they did not exchange painting techniques yet there is no mention of their painting practices.

All the painters made one if not many sojourns abroad, with the exception of Lane who took his instruction from the English born, Robert Solomon. Heade and Lane were certainly aware of each other's work at the time if not in company of one another as they painted and lived in such close proximity. Lane was in Gloucester and Heade in Newburyport both painting on the North shore in the 1860's till Lane's death in 1865. Their paintings shared stylistic and compositional components and it is very possible they shared techniques.

Before Luminism was conceived, there was no distinction between the two schools and artist of both schools interacted extensively in galleries, coops, exhibitions, and travel, sharing and experimenting with every aspect of painting. Of the four painters; Lane, Kensett, Heade and Gifford that were singled out for

Luminism, it is difficult not to include other artists of the Hudson River School and elsewhere, who more than on occasion painted luminist effects, such as Bierstadt, Cole, Church, Silva, Whittredge, Durand, Cropsey, Moran, Bricher, Bradford, Coleman, Richards, Moran, and Doughty.

Nothing resembles more than the photographs of the Art-Union members of the Hudson River School as the group portraits of the Dutch Guild members in the Golden Age. These different schools were very similar in that the guilds of the past performed the functions of modern unions, for organizing, fraternizing, selling art, pensions, housing. Yet the Dutch guilds went as far as to prohibit painting over already painted canvases, selling paint materials to non members, and provided severance pay to families of deceased painters. The Art-Union members

fraternized by exchanging studio visits, travel abroad and summer painting excursions.

Novak points out the strong Dutch tradition in Luminism; ‘Yet one of the founders of the Hudson River style, Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), had copied a Ruysdael, and Robert Gilmor, a major collector, had acquired quite a few Dutch paintings and had tried to shift Cole, it will be remembered, from the ideal to the real by suggesting that he study Ruysdael. Gilmor even went to Holland and sketched there himself. It seems certain that further research will unearth more evidence of the direct connection of the Dutch school to the American painters gravitating to the serene horizontal compositions in the works of Dutch artists like Van de Velde and Van Goyen’^x

The Dutch Guild painters of the Golden Age also included David Teniers, Albert Cuyp, Paulus Potter, Jacob van

Ruisdael, Jan Vermeer, and Meindert Hobbema, which lead to the brilliance of the English, Turner and Constable.^{xi}

Under Novak's direction, Lois Engelson wrote 'The Influence of Dutch Landscape Painting on the American Landscape Tradition' (unpublished Master's Essay, Columbia University, 1966). The appendix offers a germinal listing of Dutch seventeenth-century collections, auctions, and exhibitions that could possibly have been seen through private American collectors like Gilmor, Michael Paff, and Thomas Bryan, whose collection make up the New- York Historical Society, and publicly at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, The American Academy of Fine Arts, The Apollo Gallery, the American Art- Union, the Boston Athenaeum, which featured these Dutch artists most notably Cuyp for the handling of

luminist light and Van Velde, and Van Goyen for the low compositional layout of luminist painting. The Dutch had canons of aesthetic design derived from Vitruvius, where in landscape painting the horizon lay at one fifth creating a proportional relation between sky and land. Rembrandt started his landscapes at fifty yards and figures were drawn in the shadows of the foreground plane to enhance perspective .

Questionably Luminist technique has been overlooked, whether because of its absence in literature or because of the fluidness and direct handling that made this painting style look so easy however it is far from it. The clean execution of luminist paintings reveals the extreme difficulty and precise achievement of these painters in mastering their technique. This is a direct result of Flemish Technique and the resonate varnishes .

Without this technology the art of the Hudson River School would be hard pressed to have had any distinction what so ever.

STYLISTIC QUALITIES OF LUMINISM

Many of the stylistic qualities of the Hudson River School resemble Dutch paint innovations. These painters played between smooth and rough painting, transparency and opacity, blended effects and layered, cool and warm tones. The Luminist, however, made a point to tone down their brushwork so as not to make the paint quality an object for interpretation, transcending the illusion of the physical qualities of paint.

Smooth paint, as noted by Barbara Novak p.25 of 'The Luminist Movement', 'Smooth Luminist Surface' is

the most noted quality by authorities of the painting style in Luminism. Smoothness in painting creates stillness, quiet, timelessness.

Paint stroke; or the absence of paint strokes, is the obvious surface quality found in Luminist painting from small studies to the larger compositions, where only some rough paint can be found in the foreground. These horizontal motifs were comprised mostly of sky in an atmospheric effect, a swim: 'Luminist light' as Miss Novak notes, 'cool light not hot, hard not soft, palpable rather than fluid,' or 'Luminist Radiance,' a somewhat puzzling description that lends itself to smooth paint stroke. What a contrast to Impressionistic dabs of thick paint.

Kensett has been criticized as boring because of the overall smoothness of his technique. The significance of 'Smoothness' in Luminist painting is similar to the effect in

Dutch Guild painting called 'Houding'.^{xii} where Paul Taylor, Dutch art historian, reveals this innovation of 'houding' from Goeree (1670): 'houding' is "... that which binds everything together in a drawing or painting, which makes things move to the front or back, and which causes everything from the foreground to the middle ground and thence to the background to stand in its proper place without appearing further away or closer, and without seeming lighter or darker than its distance warrants; so that everything stands out, without confusion, from the things that adjoin and surround it, and has an unambiguous position through the proper use of size and colour, and light and shadow: and so that the eye can naturally perceive the intervening space, that distance between the bodies which is left open and empty, both near and far, as though one might go there on foot, and

everything stands in its proper place therein.^{xiii}”

To contrast with ‘smoothness’ there is ‘rough manner,’^{xiv} a phenomenon used by the Dutch Masters, notably Rembrandt who went from smooth to rough to create a high sense of illusion. Similarly Thomas Cole and Frederic Church painted smooth backgrounds that receded and rough foregrounds that came forward. Smoothness also creates a plasticity, a veil, that can be glazed over the surface, which enhances introspection.

Drawing: (Ruskin on Symmetry, pg 257- 258 Elements of Drawing) (footnote). “ When you are drawing shallow or muddy water, you will see shadows on the bottom, or on the surface, continually modifying the reflections... The more you look down into the water, the better you see

objects through till the more you look along it, the eye being low, the more you see the reflection of objects above it.” (Ruskin on Drawing pp 248 Luminist Drawing Linda S Ferber American Light--- “Elements of Drawing” (footnote) “The chief aim and bent of the following system, “ he wrote, ‘is to obtain... a perfectly patient and ... delicate method of work, such as may ensure... seeing truly. For I am nearly convinced, that when once we see keenly enough, there is very little difficulty in drawing what we see.” (Ruskin’s “Modern Painters” -’Articles of Organization” on draftsmanship pp 249 (footnote) On the subject of draftsmanship, Ruskin states, “the right course for young Artists is faithful and loving representation on natural ‘ selecting nothing and rejecting nothing, : seeking only to express the greatest amount of fact. It is moreover, their duty to strive for the greatest

attainable power of drawing.”

Durand also stressed this importance: “Drawing is the business of a true artist’s life; it is the foundation of everything good in Art without it there nothing, and with a thorough knowledge of it everything I possible. No man can ever give too much time and effort to its study, or do too much work in simple light and shade.” (footnote)

Fielding Lucas’s ‘Progressive Drawing Book’ 1826-27 incorporates the writings of John Varley: “ He describes juxtaposing an irregular shape such as a rock or a tree with the smooth surface of a body of water in the middle distance The alternation of dark and light tones was useful for leading the eye into the picture especially if a light object were placed against a dark ground and a dark object against a light ground; example Lane’s ‘Norman’s Woe’” . The principle of ‘ partially intercepting one object

by another, in order to subdue it, for the sake of elevating a third object” and the avocation of a little red to alleviate the prevailing grays and greens of seascapes was met by Lane through the expediency of a sailor’s shirt.” Varley wrote: “ All the leading lines, ascending or descending, should so balance each other from the different sides of a picture, that a ball, rolling down one of them, should be impelled up on the other side, and so on in succession, till it settled near the centre of the picture.”

It has been said that drawing is the foundation of art and painting is nothing more than drawing with a brush.

Composition in Luminism:

Parallels: as parallel lines diminish in size, the distance increases, and the same is true of zig-zags and railroad tracks in painting. These are all perspective

components which make objects in the distance appear further away. Stacked horizon plane also creates distance; as does the 'compressed horizontal waterline' seen on Fitz Hugh Lane's painting 'Approaching Storm' (by Powell ,pp.80 'Luminist Light') . Contrary to common sense, the sharper the horizontal line the further it appears, almost to the point of being chiseled with a blade.

Foreground Repousiores: the color red was used as a repousiore in majority of Fitz Henry Lane's canvases to draw the viewer closer, Constable and Homer never missed a chance to use a red note in the foreground.

During landscape classes of my youth, my teacher would always impress upon me the power of a repousiore to accent the foreground. Inevitably my teacher would hasten to paint it into the foreground a red- winged

blackbird when it would appear in the Vermont landscape. Confused, I would shout 'repousiore' as a red-winged blackbird flew by. Rocks, fallen trees, stumps, animals, even painters at their easels were common repousiores.

Distances: Heade's use of haystacks in his compositional design served a dual purpose, first as a signature, and the other to develop a personal system of measurement setting up a proportional relationship to the distant horizon. To emphasize this dimension, Heade would place a figure next to his haystack to further qualify this measurement .

Proportion: Small figures in the foreground were used as a register to suggest the grandness of the landscape and sets up the scale of the picture. Larger figures were used for historical paintings and when the

figure is singled out it becomes a portrait.

Composition, detail, and light effects are tools used by painters to keep the viewer absorbed in the painting; the longer one is held captive the more successful the painting. Luminist light cascades down from the top in smooth tonal hues as it palpitates to the horizon, and then from the foreground, rich transparent shadows and rough paint slowly traverses in a zigzag pattern back to the horizon. The object, to slow the experience, to take as much time as possible for the light to navigate through the painting, creating time for the mind to observe with all the senses.

Albumen photography: was used in designing Luminist painting. Large scale 8x 13 , 15x 20 and 7x10 sepia brown prints with long exposures that subdued

details, were valuable references for the painters that used them. However, most Hudson School painters relied on drawings and outdoor thumbnail color sketches.

Reflections: reflectivity, or echo, is a principle stylistic device in Luminist painting. Reflection is by definition a mirror image of the subject which allows the viewer to look at the same subject from another view. There is certainty, quiet, stillness, associated with reflection, as well as a, meditative quality.

Thomas Cole says “ Another form of scenery, without which every landscape is defective -- it is water. Like the eye in the human countenance, it is a most expressive feature: in the unrippled lake, which mirrors all surrounding objects, we have the expression of tranquility and peace.”(footnote) Ruskin’s adds in ‘Modern Painters’ (

Elements of Drawing pg 178) (footnote); “A piece of calm water always contains a picture in itself, an exquisite reflection of the objects about it. If you give the time necessary to draw these reflections, disturbing them here and there and as you see the breeze or current disturb them, you will get the effect of water...The picture in the pool needs nearly as much delicate drawing as the picture above the pool.” An example is Fitz Henry Lane’s, “Entrance to Somes Sound from Southwest Harbor 1852”.

Lane’s later period taps into this cord of ‘the calm, tranquil, placid, waters found within’ and can appear more a mirror than a sea or river. To the transcendental mind, these mirror-like surfaces are mirrors inviting introspection. Mirrors figure prominently in the transcendental literature, both as tools of contemplative inward thought and as windows into the state of one’s soul. Nathaniel Hawthorne

would declare, 'I am half convinced that the reflection is indeed the reality- the real thing which Nature imperfectly images to our grosser sense.'^{xv}

Technique of Pointillism:

Pointillist technique is common to both Kensett and Vermeer. This stippling treatment in Kensett's work is particularly evident in the transition area from light into shade, where the use of stippling is in the form of abstracted patterns in the treatment of rocks and on the crest of waves. Where Lane and Heade use of pointillism appears more mechanical as if manually the dots were painted in. It is evident in Bellini's foliage of trees, and Vermeer's treatment of the 'The Milkmaid'. Like many Flemish examples, Vermeer epitomizes the sublime in

Dutch light. The pointillist stippling of these advanced Masters suggests a Thixotrophy gel solution; a 'painters butter'.

LIGHT EFFECT PAINTERS

Luminism derives itself from light. These painters began as observers of nature, then recorders and ultimately designers, whose focus depends on the different qualities of light. Their observations are the direct result of the cause and effect of the sun's rays on objects in the landscape with its many nuanced moods and effects. As light emanates from the sun, it creates the relationship of cause and effect. 'Cause' being the light which 'effects' the objects illuminated. In defining this light, the shadow plane must first be articulated. Playing on this natural phenomenon of light and shade as virtually all painters in

the past had done, is the object of 'light effect painters'.

Luminism was the school of light effect painters.

'Goethe's Color Theory' on the optics of colored rays of light makes it clear that painters are relegated to imitating the effect of the light on objects or an the illusion of light. It is impossible to paint light; light is composed of colored rays where paint is made up of chemical pigments that can only imitate light. Luminist painted strong contrasting values for a more a powerful illusion of light, and used complementary transparent glazes of color to imitate more closely nature's effects.

The great effects of luminist painters juxtapose a large transparent foreground shadow mass, ('massing is a painter's term for pulling large areas together without disruption,) against the illuminated opaque light effect.

The shadow area functions as negative space', a quiet area where the brain does not assimilate detailed information, this allows for the illuminated passages to be the narrative. For this reason, when an art teacher explains 'you have broken the mass' precisely stated, the effect has been weakened at the expense of too much detail in the mass, becoming illustration.

Color also shares in this effect; when too many bright colors compete at once, the color is confused. Where as a primary color placed on a muted field can be brilliant, and interestingly to note that the brightest effects are not in paintings that use the brightest color or whites, but ones that rely on strong color relationships.

DEFINITION OF LUMINISM

John Baur popularized the term Luminism in a series

of articles written in 1948^{xvi}; quotes Novak on Baur, 'It is because Baur's definition is so all-inclusive that it is important. He sees Luminism as an attitude not only to light but to things in nature; he reminds us of the artist's anonymous role as an Emersonian transparent eyeball and, mainly, that luminism is a mode of expression through a subjectivity so powerful that the artist's feeling is transferred directly to the object, with no sense of the artist as intermediary. It is thus a realism that goes far beyond 'mere' realism, to be touched, in some instances with super-real overtones, and in others, to register that magnified intensity that turns realism into a form of impersonal expressionism.'

Luminism defines its subject by the quality of light, not as an object but as the subject bathed in one of nature's multitudes of effects. It is a painted mood

transformed by light often in sunset hues, juxtaposed with transparent murky shadows with bodies of water laden with heavy reflections. Luminism hides behind a uniform plastic veil in order to maintain its profound illusion like viewing the landscape through a mirror, using smooth strokes or 'houding' where the jarring of a mere brush stroke can disturb the illusion of the quiet stillness of this classical design. Absolute control is needed in this harmony; because any imperfection breaks the plastic surface; color out of key, disproportional detail or perspective imbalance immediately destroys the illusion. This is not a subjective interpretation of objects in light, a time for experimentation or intellectual exercise. On the contrary, the artist must have refined his tools, set free of his technique and let fly his inspiration as if in meditation where the Master transcends paint directing God's grace

to become the vehicle of his creation.

Sublime in Luminism; A religious experience

Emersonian transcendentalism; Majesty had to do with scale and size, exemplified particularly by mountain scenery. The sublime was primarily an aesthetic reaction or experience. This reaction provoked an intimation of infinity and thus the Deity and the divine.^{xvii} “Only in luminist quietism does the presence of the artist, his ‘labor trail,’ disappear. Such paintings, in eliminating any reminders of the artist’s intermediary; presence, remove him even from his role of interpreter.” In their quiet tranquility, they reach to a mystical oneness above time and outside of space. In this new concept of sublimity, oneness with Godhead is complete, and the influx of the

divine mind is no longer mediated by the theatrical trappings of the late-eighteenth-century Gothic.” quoting Novak.

Just as Albert Einstein’s ‘determinist’ belief in the world, its planets, atoms, and structure are all part of a divine construction in a preconceived motion untouchable by a God who picks and chooses, where man is not the controller of his universe. In luminist painting the image of God is not depicted and yet by magnificence order and structure, light and composition there is a sense of divine presence. John Wilberding (p. 114, *American Light*) ‘witnessing that luminist process of fusing observation with meditation.’

American Light p. 78 Earl A. Powell writes in ‘Luminism and the American Sublime’

‘In luminist painting the viewer does not experience nature

from outside the picture but from within as an intuitive phenomenon: the plane of a luminist canvas extends toward the viewer to encompass his presence in the conceptualized space of the landscape itself. This aspect of Luminism has drawn extended discussions from other scholars, who have explored its affinities with Emersonian transcendentalism, explained its emergence of light, realistic mode of expression derived from Ruskin's 'Modern Painters.' "The unifying characteristics of style in the art of Kensett, Lane, Heade, and Gifford conspired to recreate an experience of nature that was associated with God and in which, as Novak remarked, "oneness with Godhead is complete." Thomas Cole wrote " The wilderness is yet a filling place to speak of God." In the 'Essay on American Scenery' 1835 , Cole's approach to his subject matter was in a romantic religious vocabulary

of symbols and symbolism, unlike the “ Luminist landscape and explains the special concern for eradicating evidence of expressive style in this art. This resulted in interpretations of nature that most closely approximate an intuited spiritual experience of the sublime^{xviii} .”

William Wordsworth, in ‘The Prelude’ ‘commented on the struggle,’ Schiller likewise discussed a similar conception of the poet/artist and his relationship to nature, in which nature became a unit of idea through a sensibility seeking to unify itself with divine authority. “On the Aesthetic Education of Man” he commented on ‘the potential for divinity which man carried within himself, and which could be realized through a union of absolute ‘reality’ and absolute ‘formality’ which involved an imaginative fusion of the sensibilities with nature”. ‘Standing on bare ground,-- my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite

space -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson “The Transcendentalist” Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Stephen E. Whicher (Boston, 1960) p. 198)

The pristine light of the Luminist evokes the vibration of the rainbow, touching a cord deep in the human experience communicating on a sublime spiritual level. Luminism captures that moment in time where edges are subdued to prismatic harmonies of light which define our vibration in the universe and dwell in the beauty of sublime light. Thomas Cole , Arthur B. Durand and predecessors have been exalted on their creations in the development of the sublime with relation to the glory of godliness in the profundity of the majestic vistas portrayed in grand

crescendos. Yet a quieter period of sublime is understood in the later Luminists period where the glory of God is not demanding or driving his force upon the viewer; instead an inverse effect is taking place. It is one of peace and contemplative introspection, a sublime communion with the force that unites us all as one. The strength to forego the ego and moral servitude, exaggerated artistry, brushwork and abundance, that of Church and Bierstadt possibly with excessive detail, to put it in only to take it away and subdue the effect by simple recognition of the object, not by name but planes of light and shade. This is the solitary daily ritual, the church of the painter who pays homage to the creator by endeavoring to imitate his work. The idea that excess is vanity whether in the painters hand or in the viewers realization of sentimentality or ego, blocking the entry into bliss. The moment where stillness

denies the mind's chatter and a valley opens where all light and sound are in harmony. The highest moment of communion, a unique realm, an individual experience where friends are not invited yet everyone is there: the glory and the bliss.

It is difficult to say what cause the death of this Movement with its core rooted in Renaissance tradition. Was the art too difficult to perform, too much discipline, or the artist too old or their technique was lost; yet within the shortest time the majority of these painters faded away as if history had never heard of them. It took over a hundred years for this truly sublime artistic expression to be revered.

Although this pointillist treatment is more common to

Dutch Masters, the fact that it appears in Luminist painting makes the connection of parallel techniques valid and that there is no evidence of other paintings of similar quality leaves the Luminists painters as the last painters of the Renaissance.

The last four Americans standing left their sword symbolizing the end of the reign of hundreds of years of Renaissance thought, man as a collective force for the Humanities leaving the Four Horsemen on the Apocalypse to point the new direction of modern man.

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ii 'American Light-' 'On Defining Luminism' pp 23-30

iii 'Fitz H. Lane An Artist's Voyage through Nineteenth-Century America',

Craig, James A. History Press Charleston, SC 2006

^{iv} ‘Fitz H. Lane An Artist’s Voyage through Nineteenth-Century America’,

Craig, James A. History Press Charleston, SC 2006 ‘Fitz H. Lane’ Craig, James A,
pp 11

^v S. R. Gifford to O.B Frothnham, Husson, No. 6, 1874, quoted in Ila Weiss,
Sanford Robinson Gifford , New York, 1977, pp. 26

^{vi} John Frederick Kensett An American Master, Kensett’s World; Howat, John K.
Worcester Art Museum 1985 pp 19. Published Daily Albany Argus June, 21 1838

^{vii} John Frederick Kensett An American Master, Kensett’s World; Howat, John
K. Worcester Art Museum 1985 pp29

^{viii} John Frederick Kensett An American Master, Kensett’s World; Howat, John
K. Worcester Art Museum 1985 pp26 published: Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, ed.,
American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union: Exhibition Record,
1818-1852 (New York, 1953) pp. 212-1

^{ix} ‘Martin Johnson Heade’ Stebbins Jr., Theodore E. Museum Fine Arts, Boston,
1999 pp7

^x ‘American Painting of the 19th Century, Novak, Barbara, Preager Publishers
New York 1969 pp. 115 footnotes pp 303 #16 E. Maurice Bloch, in George Caleb
Bingham, The Evolution of an Artist, A Catalogue Raisonne, 2 vols. (Berkeley

and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), has called attention to Bingham's possible recourse to instruction books such as J. Burnet's 'A Practical Treatise on Painting. In Three Parts. Consisting of Hints on composition, Chiaroscuro and Colouring, The Whole Illustrated by Examples form the Italian, Venetian, Flemish and Dutch Schools....'(1826; London: James Carpenter & Sons, 1828). Such books were filled with engravings of compositions by Cuyp, Potter, Van de Velde, and Rembrandt.'

#17 As to influences and continuities within the American tradition, there is an excellent possibility that Washington Allston's 'Coast Scene on the Mediterranean' and 'Moonlit Landscape were more than simple artistic predecessors for Lane and Heade, but may well have been direct progenitors of the luminist vision. Both paintings might have been seen by Lane when they were on exhibit in Chester Harding's studio in Boston in 1839, or at the Athenaeum in 1850, in the same year that Lane himself exhibited there. Heade, too, might have seen the two paintings in 1857, when he exhibited for the first time at the Athenaeum, where they were shown again in that year.'

^{xi} John Frederick Kensett An American Master, From Burin To Brush: The Development of a Painter, Driscoll, John Paul; Worcester Art Museum 1985 pp52 from Kensett, Journal, 1: 19 June 1840

^{xii} 'The Concept of Houding In Dutch Art Theory, Taylor, Paul, 'Journal of

Warburg and Courtauld Institute IV 1992 pp 210-32

xiii 'Inleyding tot d'Algemeene Tryckenkonst, Goeree, William Middleburg 1670

translated by Paul Taylor

xiv 'Rembrandt The Painter at Work' Wetering, Ernst van de, University of

California Press, Berkeley, pp160

xv 'Fitz H. Lane' Craig, James A, pp 154-5

xvi 'American Luminism' Baur, John I. H., Perspectives USA, No. 9, 1954 pp.

90-98 American Painting of the 19thC, Novak, Barbara, Praeger Publishers,

New York 1969 pp.96

xvii Nature and Culture American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875, Novak,

Barbara Oxford University Press New York 1980 pp. 44

xviii American Light the Luminist Movement 1850-1875 National Gallery of Art

1980 John Wilmerding pp