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Talk title: The Reach of Desire: Figures and Structures Of Predatory Looking in Early American and Australian Landscape

Abstract:
It might seem strange, given the relative lack of explicit hunting images included, to argue that the current exhibition (and indeed nineteenth-century, British-derived landscape representation more generally) features works informed by what I will term “predatory looking” in organization of space and thematic concerns alike. Such images, though underrepresented here, comprised an important subset of period pictorial production in both America and Australia, occupying a congenial intersection of genres from picturesque landscape proper to putative documentations of “everyday life” to portraits, most notably self-portraits. Because over-determined by contemporary interest in natural history and ethnography on the one hand and a taste for narratives of conquest and extraction on the other, subject matter in each case fully naturalized by the conditions of colonial occupation, these patterns in iconography and reception have been widely recognized. Yet the degree to which a much broader array of period landscapes produced on both continents relied, however implicitly, on cognate pictorial structures and designs that served to invite vicarious desire in viewers predisposed to read the landscape as a hunter might has not – despite the fact that arguably many, perhaps most makers, patrons, and original viewers involved were hunters themselves. The perhaps unexpected characteristic reticence of these works to represent bloodshed explicitly with a marked preference for penultimate or retrospective moments may help to explain the translatability of this way of seeing to the modes of landscape representation that do predominate in the current exhibition in which desire has been either dematerialized as a reach for the divine or oneness with nature, aestheticized as transcendental vision, or conflated with other, more material hegemonic or territorial leanings with literal hunts for fish, fowl, deer, bear, bison, ostrich and kangaroo, always at least implicitly violent expressions of the quest to overpower wildness, having yielded to projections into picture space more metaphysical or allegorical in nature. The figures of predatory looking that inform (or indeed haunt) these works provide an important key to their historical understanding.

Biographical Note:

Kenneth Haltman received his Ph.D. from Yale University in American Studies and is now H. Russell Pitman Professor of Art History at the University of Oklahoma. In addition to critical translations of works by French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard and scholarly essays on the history of pictorial representation in the United States ranging from antipastoralism in early Winslow Homer to the art of the early American West, his publications include *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*, co-edited with Jules David Prown (Michigan State, 2000), *Looking Close and Seeing Far: Samuel Seymour, Titian Ramsay Peale, and the Art of the Long Expedition, 1818-1823* (Penn State, 2008), *Titian Peale's Butterflies of North America* (Abrams, 2015), and a critical edition and translation of *L'évolution du goût aux États-Unis, d'après l'histoire des collections* by René Brimo, first published in Paris in 1938, as *The Evolution of Taste in American Collecting* (Penn State, forthcoming). He's currently completing a volume of essays, *Artists and Hunters: Figures of Predatory Looking in Nineteenth-Century American Art*.

Painting for discussion: to be advised