



The Civil War and American Art (Metropolitan Museum, New York: Exhibition Catalogues)

Eleanor Jones Harvey

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The Civil War redefined America and forever changed American art. Its grim reality, captured through the new medium of photography, was laid bare. American artists could not approach the conflict with the conventions of European history painting, which glamorized the hero on the battlefield. Instead, many artists found ways to weave the war into works of art that considered the human narrative—the daily experiences of soldiers, slaves, and families left behind. Artists and writers wrestled with the ambiguity and anxiety of the Civil War and used landscape imagery to give voice to their misgivings as well as their hopes for themselves and the nation.

This important book looks at the range of artwork created before, during, and following the war, in the years between 1852 and 1877. Author Eleanor Jones Harvey surveys paintings made by some of America's finest artists, including Frederic Church, Sanford Gifford, Winslow Homer, and Eastman Johnson, and photographs taken by George Barnard, Alexander Gardner, and Timothy H. O'Sullivan.

Harvey examines American landscape and genre painting and the new medium of photography to understand both how artists made sense of the war and how they portrayed what was a deeply painful, complex period in American history. Enriched by firsthand accounts of the war by soldiers, former slaves, abolitionists, and statesmen, Harvey's research demonstrates how these artists used painting and photography to reshape American culture. Alongside the artworks, period voices (notably those of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman) amplify the anxiety and dilemmas of wartime America.

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