

A river runs through it

American painting, photography and prints in the Civil War period



Courtesy of the Alumni Board of Trustees of the University of Virginia.

David Johnson, *On the James River, Virginia, 1860*

CHARLOTTESVILLE. Like Caesar's Gaul, this exhibition is divided into three parts. The first is a display of paintings by Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, David Johnson, Sanford Robinson Gifford, John Frederick Kensett and Aaron Draper Shattuck, all mainly New York-based, who composed the first and second (and final) generations of what art historians have named the Hudson River School. Strictly speaking, they did not form a school, but rather shared a commitment to the depiction of North, and later Latin, American pastoral and sublime landscapes (at first of the Hudson River valley north of the city). Cole led the way in the late 1820s and others followed in the 1850s and 60s. By 1870 the school was out of fashion, but the works have proved popular ever since in sales and shows.

The second part shows the photographs of Mathew Brady (1823-96), whose fame rests on the many images—battle scenes, portraits and related events—that he and his team of photographers took of the Civil War (1861-65). The third part is made up of prints by the American publishers Currier & Ives, which flourished

from 1852 until 1880. Their decorative and cheap lithographs of rural life, ships, trains, animal and sporting scenes and religious images were supplemented during the war with idealised pictures of battles and war heroes.

Like the parts of ancient Gaul, these three differ from each other in fundamental ways, but Jill Baskin, the former Lindner-Luzak Fellow of the university and curator of the show, imposes, Caesar-like, a unity (of sorts) on them. While Brady and Currier & Ives are linked by depictions of the war, the painters stand apart. Nevertheless, Baskin maintains that the show will demonstrate that American mid-19th-century landscape painting is "as notable for what it did not depict as for what it showed". It is sponsored by an anonymous donor, Ted Cooper, the Eugene and Clare Thaw Charitable Trust, *Albemarle* magazine, Ivy Publications and The Hook. ■ D.L.

The Valley of the Shadow: American Landscape Painting in the Time of the Civil War

University of Virginia Art Museum, Charlottesville

24 August-16 December