



109. THE OXBOW (VIEW FROM MOUNT HOLYOKE, NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AFTER A THUNDERSTORM). THOMAS COLE. 1836 C.E. OIL ON CANVAS.

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THOMAS COLE



## FORM

- ▶ ROMANTICISM (emotional)
- ▶ 51 1/2 x 76 inches
- ▶ Realistic but in an exaggerated way; like a caricature
- ▶ Warm hues (yellows and greens) for nature, dark, cool colors for weather (grey, blue)





## FUNCTION

- ▶ References the bend in the Connecticut River
- ▶ Reminder of humanity's insignificance in the grand scheme of things (as applies to many works created during the Romantic movement), but also God's favor.
- ▶ nineteenth-century political ideology: this painting is about the widely discussed topic of westward expansion. Manifest Destiny
- ▶ This part of the painting depicts a virginal, sublime landscape, nature created by God and untouched by man. It is wild, unruly, and untamed.





## CONTEXT

- ▶ Thomas Cole (1801 - 1848) was the founder of the Hudson River School (a group of painters in NYC).
- ▶ Cole has chosen a dramatic vantage point from which to view the twisting Connecticut River.
- ▶ In Europe, landscapes were considered a lower form of painting, while historical paintings and portraits were more valued. In the US, landscapes were very popular.





## TERMS TO KNOW

- ▶ Sublime = In aesthetics, the sublime is the quality of greatness, whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual, or artistic. The term especially refers to a greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation.
- ▶ Pastoral = belonging to the countryside and farming. It lends its name to a genre of literature, art, and music that depicts such life in an idealized manner, typically for urban audiences.





## CONTENT

- ▶ On the left is the sublime: nature is wild and uncontrolled. There are storm clouds and overgrown foliage with trees cracked by lightning.





## CONTENT

- ▶ On the right is a pastoral scene: here we have people bringing order to the chaos. There are fields and farms with people and livestock. A warm light bathes the scene as if God has cleared the storm and given favor to the exploits of humanity. Here is where the idea of Manifest Destiny comes into play.





## CONTENT

- ▶ At the bottom we have Cole himself looking back at us.
- ▶ Hebrew hidden in hillside: reads as "Almighty"

