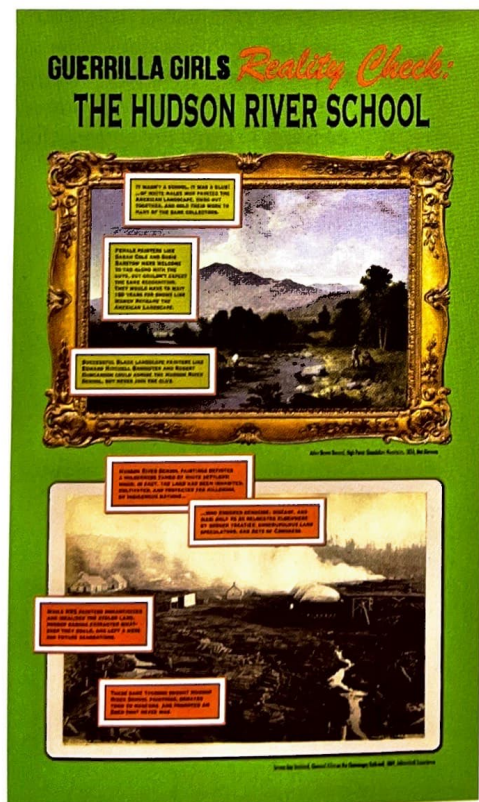


Women Reframe American Landscape

New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT • nbmaa.org • Through March 31, 2024

In this intergenerational, traveling group exhibition, the first room of its contemporary section includes a commissioned poster by the Guerrilla Girls. A “Reality Check” about the Hudson River School—a 19th-century group of artists who painted idyllic landscapes of New York’s Hudson River Valley—its first line reads: “It wasn’t a school, it was a club... of white men!” Through its placement and its critiques, the poster serves as a hinge between the historical Hudson River era works—*Susie Barstow and Her Circle*—and the present-day pieces—*Contemporary Practices*—on view at the New Britain Museum.

Thomas Cole is considered the “founder” of the Hudson River School, so it may surprise some visitors that the stewards of his work would decenter Cole’s “club” and “[recenter] women in the history of American art and [expand] how we see land and landscape”; however, this exhibition is part of a lineage of curators and artists interrogating dominant social and historical narratives—an approach that gained traction in the early 1990s with projects like artist Fred



Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992), which foregrounded racist histories in the Maryland Historical Society's collection; and Mary Jane Jacob's public art project *Places with a Past* (1991, Charleston, SC) where artists created site-specific installations that shone light on marginalized local histories. Similarly, since 2015 the Cole Site's curatorial programming has engaged in contemporary art projects that respond to the contexts of their own history and location.

At the New Britain Museum, this thoughtfully arranged exhibition begins with paintings by Susie Barstow and six women artists in her orbit. Barstow's paintings are skillful and often feature dense forest scenes that are moody and divinatory. The exhibition also includes sketches by Barstow, her painters box, and photographs of the artist. Through wall texts, the

Above: Ebony G. Patterson, *...the wailing...ushers us home...and there is a bellying on the land...*, 2021, mixed media on jacquard woven photo tapestry and custom vinyl wallpaper, approximately 96 x 104". Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, IL. Left: Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls Reality Check: The Hudson River School*, 2023, ink on vinyl, 88 x 52". © Guerrilla Girls. Opposite: Jaune Quick-to-see Smith, *Stolen Map / \$ Map*, 2021, beads, 8 1/4 x 12". Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York, NY.

viewer learns that Barstow traveled extensively, often with her life partner, Florence Nightingale Thallon; sold works at prominent New York galleries; and was “recognized continuously in the press as an important artist.” This is the “first solo show dedicated to a woman artist painting landscapes in the style of the Hudson River,” opening one hundred years after Barstow’s

death, which further highlights art history's erasure of her work.

The exhibition's contemporary works reframe the landscape genre itself, primarily using an intersectional feminist lens that considers gender, indigenous histories, environmentalism, and more. For example, Jean Shin's sculptures repurpose discarded crates made for traveling Cole's guitar, gem collection, etc., and fills them with her "artist's project remnants" (denim, pottery shards, cords) and dirt from the Cole house, continuing Shin's inquiry into how "industry and global economies change the land and its very make up." Here, she also is highlighting waste in the art world with its "traveling exhibitions that require cross-country shipping and robust wooden art crates, which are often disposed of afterwards," arguably implicating the traveling exhibition in which her own work appears. Considering power dynamics and landscape, Teresita Fernández and Ebony G. Patterson simultaneously recognize violent histories on U.S. soil while "illuminating the possibilities of a generative relationship with land." In other works, Indigenous artists Wendy Red Star and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith "examine land theft and displacement, and ask: Who owns the land and who has the power to name it?"



The New Britain Museum is the first stop after this exhibition's inaugural installation at Thomas Cole's house and studio. Having seen both iterations, the curators (from both venues) did a superb job of transitioning the show from a domestic space to the Museum's large-scale galleries. And while the historic site that

inspired this exhibition can't travel with it, the diverse and elucidating perspectives it inspired most certainly will. — Terri C Smith

All quotes in this article are curatorial texts excerpted from the exhibition's wall labels.