

Nature and city are closely linked in 19th century rhetoric, as the nature of urban spaces is inherently fragmented. Due to this, many citizens, especially the new emerging working-class, had noticed the disparity between their urban spaces and the natural wilderness and landscape around them. Many 19th century upper-middle class homes had if not just one, but a collection of landscape of paintings on display for viewing as the notion many upheld was that if you were an urban dweller you need landscape art in order to preserve its natural beauty and had a sense of “anti-urban” magic that many sought to have. Nature can be a common force to what a city needs to heal, so oil paintings during 19th century New York City were centered around landscape art. The power dynamic slowly shifts from the older, aristocratic elite (mainly wealthy Dutch families) to a new powerful mercantile class (families who owned warehouses and shipping agencies). As a result, this phenomenon allows for the new mercantile middle class to take over the cultural world and businessmen become the main consumers and purchasers of art. Many of these working men were landowners, so they often viewed the landscape as a property - a commodity - a sense of ownership over the raw space itself. The landscape paintings were composed through a filter of a pastoral dream of elegance and raw aesthetics. The mercantile class was dictating the taste in paintings and their taste for landscapes is how they defined themselves. There is a moral quality to nature, so many painters tried to capture this characteristic in their landscape paintings, along with expressing it as a scene of divinity, inviting the viewer to not be a worker but to truly relax and make it become yours. Because of how powerful these landscape paintings were as a therapeutic and escapism medium, there is a boom of production, starting in New York. The New York school of landscape painters composed their paintings through “topographical literalism” as on page 348 it mentions “Topographical literalism, in which labour is actively represented, was typically absent from the mid-century landscape art of the national, or more precisely the New York, School”. Scenery that they typically portrayed was unspoiled and untouched nature, in order to highlight the sublime and picturesque qualities of a natural landscape - omitting urbanization and industrialization, as it clashed with many idealized visions of nature. Ultimately, the style of how these painters depicted landscapes appealed to the urban middle-class because it honored a space of avoiding the gritty realism that New York was full of, especially after a series of riots that caused mass casualties to the population.