





scholars have asserted that the Hudson River School had fallen out of fashion in favor of avant-garde European influences.

Barstow, however, understood popular taste, and her painterly style evolved continually across the nineteenth century. While some people were purchasing works in the now conservative mode of the Hudson River School, critics and collectors alike were praising an emerging style in which artists reconsidered John Ruskin's truth-to-nature philosophies. Channeled through the influence of Barbizon artists Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Charles-François Daubigny, painters complemented direct observation with sentiment, softer lines, and more diffuse forms. Exploring changes in atmospheric conditions, these French artists produced immersive landscapes, moody and romantic compositions that capitalized on a spiritual communing with nature. Barstow was enormously influenced by their work (*Figure 3*), and by the paintings of Corot in particular.

She kept newspaper clippings explaining his studio methods in her paint box, which was filled with supplies that included camel-hair brushes, porcelain palettes, watercolors, and white flake pigment.

Barstow was ever curious to educate herself in both traditional and avant-garde artistic movements while always adhering to her passion for direct observation in nature. This outlook resulted in works that were praised, exhibited, and purchased throughout her extensive career, demonstrating her ability to commingle conservative and progressive styles popular with the American public. Her formal evolution is reflective of an artist who wished to remain relevant in the art world on both the East and West coasts, and her travels took her across the United States to capture the varied terrain.

TRAVELS AND EXPLORATIONS

As an artist of determination and determined independence with a passion for exploration, Barstow often left her traveling companions to hike and sketch on her own. She enjoyed bouts of wanderlust: using her Brooklyn home and studio as a place to unpack, paint, visit with family, and entertain friends; she would then take off for new adventures. Whether traveling alone, with friends, or sometimes with her students to places of immense beauty to sketch, Barstow would commonly hike eight, ten, or twelve miles, only then to sit down and commence the task at hand—to capture in detailed studies on paper or canvas the wondrous charm she encountered out of doors, inspired by the natural environment, especially the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Like many of the Hudson River School painters, she traveled the world looking for new landscapes to capture. In 1901, she embarked on a two-year trip around the world, visiting Japan, China, India, and Egypt with her partner, Florence Nightingale Thallon, a fellow artist with whom she frequently lived and traveled for nearly two decades.

LIVING IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES

Susie Barstow's lifetime spanned a vast array of political upheaval, scientific advances, cultural events, celebrations, and American progress defined broadly as part of a changing world. She lived through the Civil War and the First World War. She experienced the horse-and-carriage era into the automobile age. Born during the infancy of photography, she saw the many technological advances

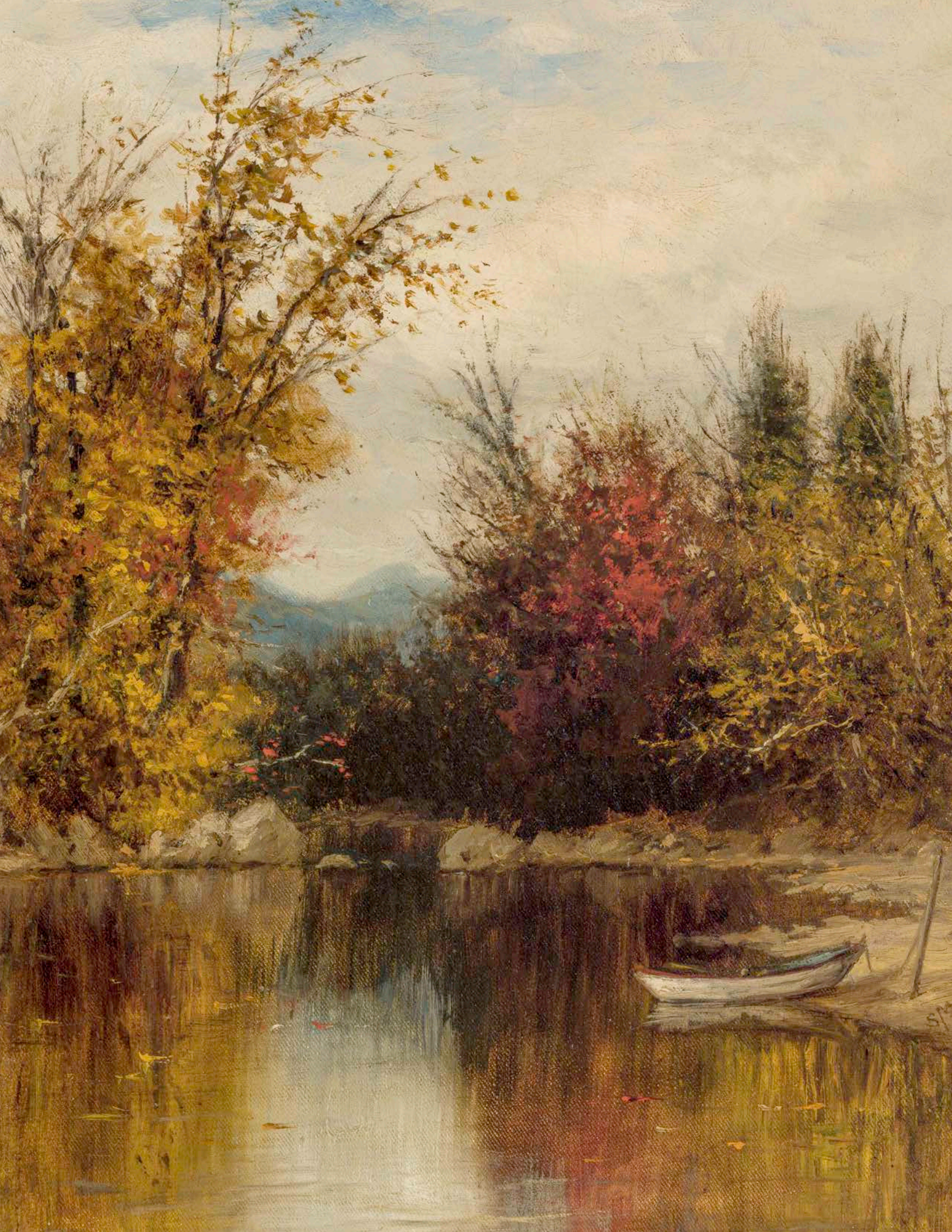
that gave rise to a redefinition of realism—optical, social, and emotional. The photographic exposés of Jacob Riis, for example, were in line with her own commitment to social justice and charitable causes. Her works were exhibited on both sides of the East River, just as John A. Roebling was spanning the divide between Brooklyn and Manhattan with his Brooklyn Bridge (1869–83), making for easier travel between the two boroughs. She observed the birth of the skyscraper—an American architectural invention that rivaled the height of mountaintops, forever changing urban skylines.

She witnessed the shift from the telegraph to the telephone and the invention of the phonograph and the electric light bulb. She attended Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893, making watercolor sketches (*Figure 6*) and saving her entrance tickets as souvenirs. During her lifetime, motion and sound advanced in exciting ways: the roller coaster at nearby Coney Island, the airplane, motion pictures, and radio. The Museum of Natural History (1869), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870), the New York Public Library (1895), and the Brooklyn Museum of Art (1897) were all built during her lifetime and easily accessible from her home. And, of great importance to her, Barstow lived long enough to celebrate the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 18, 1920, which gave women the constitutional right to vote. What an incredible time in which to live and paint!

Throughout her 87 years, Susie Barstow was committed to expressing the majesty she found in nature.

FIGURE 2 (PREVIOUS SPREAD). Susie M. Barstow, *Mountain Lake in Autumn*, 1873, oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

FIGURE 3 (OPPOSITE). Susie M. Barstow, *Early October near Lake Squam*, 1886, oil on canvas on board, 14½ x 12 in. Lebanon Valley College Fine Art Collection.





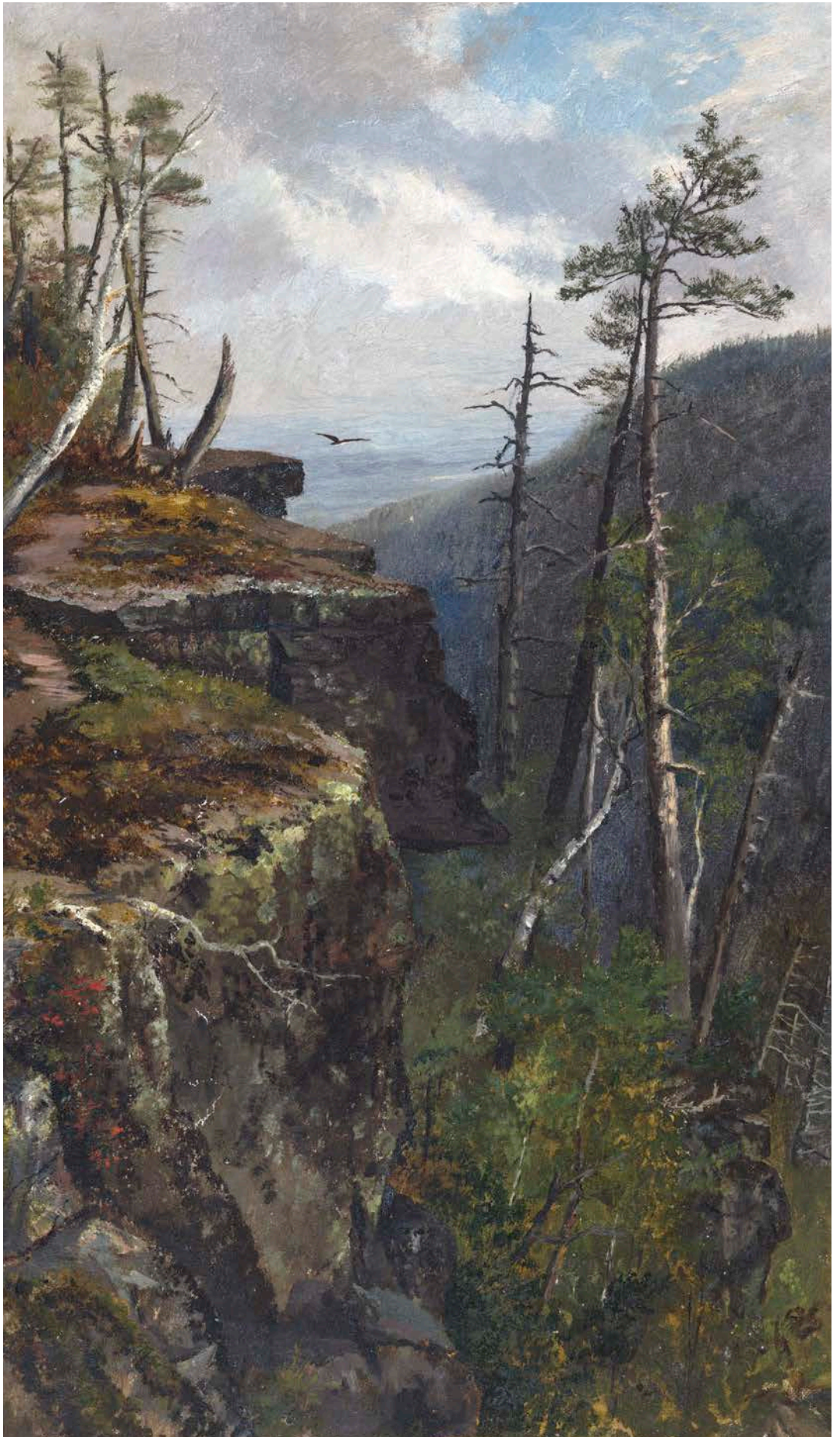


FIGURE 4 (OPPOSITE).
Susie M. Barstow,
Fall, White Mountains,
ca. 1870s, oil on canvas,
13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Albany
Institute of History & Art.

FIGURE 5 (RIGHT).
Susie M. Barstow.
Untitled, ca. 1880, oil on
canvas removed from
stretcher, 21 x 13 in.
Collection of the Barstow
Family Trust.



a ferny corner in Horticultural Building



Barstow kept newspaper clippings explaining other artists' studio methods in her paint box. Susie M. Barstow, Paint Box, ca. 1860, wood and assorted artist's supplies, 5¼ x 11 x 9¾ in. Private Collection.

In her “dainty little studio,” she captured the larger American landscape experience as it evolved across the nineteenth century.

Landscape paintings of exceptional quality by nineteenth-century women artists are now coming to light and to market while the work of scholars, gallerists, collectors, and museum professionals moves our knowledge and appreciation forward. The Baltimore Museum of Art, the Albany

Institute of History & Art, and the New Britain (Connecticut) Museum of American Art, to name just a few of the museums that are acquiring and exhibiting works by previously unrepresented women artists, reflect the reprioritizing of paintings, watercolors, and drawings by Susie Barstow and her fellow female artists to illuminate an expanded, fulsome, and more-complete history of the Hudson River School.

*Nancy Siegel is Professor of Art History and Culinary History at Towson University; she specializes in American landscape studies, print culture, and culinary history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This essay is adapted from an article originally published by Art Herstory at <https://artherstory.net/susie-m-barstow-redefining-the-hudson-river-school>. All quotations can be found in her book, *Susie M. Barstow: Redefining the Hudson River School* (Lund Humphries Publishers, 2023).*

FIGURE 6 (OPPOSITE). Susie M. Barstow, *A Ferny Corner in Horticultural Building at the Columbian Exposition*, 1893, watercolor on paper, 10 x 8¾ in. Private collection.