

SOME KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER ABOUT 19TH CENTURY LANDSCAPE PAINTING

GENERAL:

- How does this work relate to others of the same type or period?
- What is the theme? E.g., nature worship, myth, literature, etc.?
- Does the scene represent wilderness, suburbia, urban areas, etc.?
- Are there historical, social, or other connotations to the site (e.g., the Rocky Mts. or Niagara Falls?)

SPACE:

- Does the scene encompass an open panorama or sweeping vista vs. a closed, confined space?
- Does the depth seem limited or limitless in appearance?
- How does the eye gauge movement back into space? E.g., by bands of color, a body of water, light, paths/roadways, etc.?
- Where is the imaginary viewer placed? E.g., on a path, ledge, somewhere in mid-air?
- How are the forms arranged? E.g., via overlapping recessional planes?
- What is the central focus--e.g., a ruin, tree, sky, figure, etc?
- Are there framing elements such as trees on each side?
- Are there foreground elements such as blasted trees/tree trunks?
- Are there human figures? What is their comparative scale within this environment? Are they overwhelmed, embedded, terrified?
- What is the proportion of sky to land? What type of sky?

PLACE:

- Is this a real place, an imaginary one, or an artful fiction?
- Is this wilderness, paradise, cultivated or uncultivated land?
- Are there any signs of habitation or encroachment?
- What is the time of day, season, or weather?

STYLE:

- Is the style predominantly realistic or sketchy in certain areas?
- How are natural forms treated/reinvented by the brush?
- How is light articulated--e.g., is it soft or harsh in effect?
- What colors predominate? Are these, e.g., vibrant or muted?
- What interpenetrating forms, spaces, angles, or directional movement are sustained in the composition?

FIGURES:

- What social classes are depicted? E.g., farmer, trapper, artist, Native Americans, women and children, frontiersmen?
- What are the figures doing; how do they relate to their setting?
- Are these people depicted oppressed/conquered or are they triumphant settlers? If so, how is power conveyed?
- Are the figures seen as heroes, villains, or neutral forces?

MOOD:

- Is the site suggestive of solitude or "civilization"?
- Does the sun shine or is there a stormy, darker undertone? E.g., is the effect melodramatic, frightening, serene, disturbing, etc.?