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In Asher B. Durand's *Dover Plains, Dutchess County, New York*, the figures enjoy the natural beauty of "a more domestic sort of Eden."

Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), *DOVER PLAINS, DUTCHESS COUNTY, NEW YORK* (1848). Oil on canvas. 42 ½" x 60 ½". Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Photo: © Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

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# A Mirror to Nature

BY HEIDI J. HORNİK

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The landscape depicted in Asher B. Durand's *Dover Plains, Dutchess County, New York* has been called a "more domestic sort of Eden" than that of Thomas Cole's paintings. The natural beauty of Dutchess County in the eastern part of the state is conveyed through its rich grasses (on which the cows lazily graze in the right foreground) and berry trees (being picked by three people on the left). Durand is revered for holding a mirror to nature; his meticulous attention to the details of the landscape enables viewers today to locate the exact position from which he painted this scene.<sup>1</sup>

Durand visited Dover Plains, NY, in the mid-Hudson valley in 1847, a few years after it had become the last station on the railroad from New York City. The town is located near the Connecticut border, eighty miles north of the City and twenty miles east of Poughkeepsie.<sup>2</sup> From the topography of the land today, the work is mostly accurate; it seems Durand may have slightly exaggerated the mountain in the background.

Durand was a central member of the Hudson River School. Although he was five years older than Thomas Cole, Durand is often mistaken as a younger artist because he did not take up landscape painting until his mid-30s. When *Dover Plains* was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1848 (a dozen years after Thomas Cole exhibited *The Oxbow* in the same annual show) it received the following praise: "It is full of truth as well as beauty, and so invested with the characteristics of the natural scenery of certain portions of our land, that almost every visitor who looks upon it could localize the scene."<sup>3</sup> The artist was able to render a recognizable depiction of God's creation that viewers can appreciate for centuries.

## NOTES

1 Carol Troyen, "Retreat to Arcadia: American Landscape and The American Art-Union," *American Art Journal*, 23:1 (1991), 31. For a color image of the painting, see the Smithsonian webpage <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=7642> (accessed June 6, 2012).

2 *Following in the Footsteps of Asher B. Durand: A Walker's Guide* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum of Art, July 29, 2007), 4. This pamphlet from the exhibition "Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape" is available free at [www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/kindred\\_spirits/uploads/Durand\\_resources.pdf](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/kindred_spirits/uploads/Durand_resources.pdf) (accessed June 6, 2012).

3 Troyen, "Retreat to Arcadia," 31.