



Thomas Doughty, *Sublime Landscape*, n.d., oil on canvas mounted to board, 14" x 17".
Questroyal Fine Art.

'An Untamed Nation'

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The term "Hudson River School" conjures up the meticulously rendered, romantic landscapes of 19th-century painters such as Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, whose sun-strafted scenes celebrated an American wilderness that was disappearing even as they were painting. But this show, "An Untamed Nation: Paintings of the Hudson River School," admirably provided a broader look at the movement and shed some light on the artists who preceded, rubbed shoulders with, and followed these painters. Two canvases by Thomas Doughty prefigure the attention to detail and passion for dramatic scenery of the group. In his autumnal *River Landscape*, *The Hunt* (n.d.), the artist seems to have painted every leaf on each tree. The clouds over mountaintops in *Sublime Landscape* (n.d.) anticipated the high drama found in Church.

The pieces here by Albert Bierstadt, one of the stars of the Hudson River School, showed impressive range. With its burnt umbers and greens, *Landscape* (n.d.), depicting the sun setting between mountains, suggests the Old Masters, while the remarkably abstract *Sea and Sky* (n.d.), distinguished by intense blues and impulsive brushwork, could hold its own against a Monet. Several standouts were works by George Inness, who was

probably included here because his early paintings were influenced by the Hudson River style. However, most of his moody works are closer to Corot and the French Barbizon painters than to any Americans.

Perhaps the most surprising piece was *Barker's Brook* (ca.

1923), a stunning snow scene by Walter Launt Palmer. Palmer studied with Church before heading to Europe at age 19, where he became an Impressionist. In this canvas, the snow on the banks of a stream is revealed as abundant shades of blue, lavender, green, yellow, and pink.

This exhibition highlighted the extent to which the Hudson River tradition was integral to the changing 19th-century art movements.

—Mona Molarsky

Oskar Dawicki

Postmasters

Polish artist Oskar Dawicki made a big impression on viewers even before they entered his witty, sardonic exhibition. Greeting them was the silhouette of a man, cut out of the gallery's exterior wall, a work titled *Homage to Bruce Lee* (2003/2011). It looked as if the late Kung Fu hero had thrown his enemy so forcefully at the wall that his outline remained sharp and intact. It was the perfect introduction to this artist, who expresses nothing but disdain for artistic heroism, replacing any hint of it with an ironic suggestion of helplessness and a touch of silliness.

The exhibition featured a series of videos showing the artist in his emblematic Las Vegas-style: glittery blue brocade jacket and pur-

ple shirt. In *I'm Sorry* (2005), he stares at the ground against a soundtrack of sobbing while text appears on the screen, stating, "I'd like to apologize for this exhibition not being as good as it could be." In *Hanged Man* (2011), he appears to hover precariously with a noose around his neck, elevated only by white helium balloons that he holds in each hand. In both videos, he seems likely to fail the test—of his success as an artist and of his mortality—though we know in reality that he will survive.

Photographs and installations are also included in the exhibition, but the tour de force is the video *Tree of Knowledge* (2008), in which Dawicki attacks an apple tree in the middle of the night, taking and spitting out bites from every piece of fruit he can reach. At one point, the camera lingers on the destroyed apples browning in the night air while the artist continues his futile task. In the Bible, Adam only had to eat one apple to be thrown out of the Garden of Eden. Here, Dawicki achieves artistic redemption by trying to eat them all.

—Barbara Pollack



Oskar Dawicki, still from *Hanged Man*, 2011, single-channel HD video, 5 minutes, 26 seconds. Postmasters.