

# HUDSON HIGHLANDS

A SUITE OF ARCHIVAL DIGITAL PRINTS  
OF  
JOURNAL PAINTINGS  
BY

James Lancel McElhinney

NORTH RIVER SUITE, VOLUME ONE

NEEDLEWATCHER EDITIONS  
NEW YORK  
2017



For Joan

## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

This project was inspired by my extraordinary wife, Kathie Manthorne, and her passion for traveler artists.

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## A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Landscapes do not occur in nature. According to J. B. Jackson, they are created when people adapt terrain to their use. By extension, what we behold as a landscape is nothing more or less than a projection of personal desire. The visual echoes we receive, as pictures of terrain, are thus our own reflection.

Stricken with a mysterious pulmonary illness, I was admitted on Veteran's Day 2005 to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, where I remained for nearly a month. My future wife, Kathie Manthorne, brought me a set of watercolors and a New York Central linen sketchbook. A lounge at the end of the hall afforded spectacular views of the Jersey Palisades and the George Washington Bridge. Painting in the book for the first time, I suddenly realized that an open spread could replace a stretched canvas as the substratum for a fully developed painting. Following my discharge from the hospital, a newfound hypersensitivity to spirit vapors and oil paint caused me to shift my painting practice to aqueous media. Inspired by historic expeditionary art, my paintings migrated off the easel and into books during trips to Europe, Hawaii, Ecuador, Peru, California, the Rocky Mountains, and the American Southwest.

Following in the footsteps of Charles Willson Peale, William Guy Wall, Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, James Fennimore Cooper, Nathaniel Parker Willis, Washington Irving, and John Burroughs, I traveled up and down the Hudson Valley. Learning the names of its mountains, hills, and streams such as Anthony's Nose, Storm King, and Treason Creek, which flows behind my studio, I became absorbed in its history. *Muhbeahkunnuck* to the Lenni-Lenape, *North River* to the Dutch, the Hudson remains a major thoroughfare linking the port of New York to a chain of inland seas, the Saint Lawrence River, and the interior of North America.

Informed by historic narratives such as Robert Juet's 1609 journal about the journey of the *Half-Moon* and Benson J. Lossing's *The Hudson from the Wilderness to the Sea*, I completed roughly two hundred journal paintings in the Hudson River Valley. This suite of archival digital prints is the first in an ongoing series. This limited edition has been funded in part by subscription, following the Audubon model. The technology used to create these prints did not exist two centuries ago, but in other ways this project invokes historic precedents, as was always my intent.

James Lancel McElhinney, New York, New York, October 2017

## THE ART OF MOBILITY

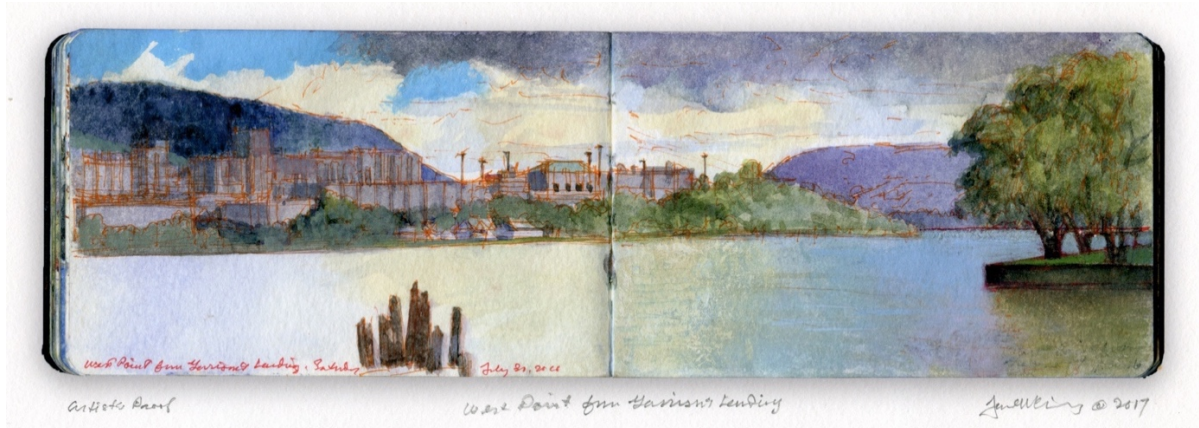
Beholding what is arguably one of America's most stunning, dramatic landscapes, the need to capture it in some long-term way becomes overwhelming. Almost two hundred years ago, the Hudson Highlands were immortalized by artists now identified as having founded (unofficially) America's first national art movement. It was here that the Hudson River School initially flourished. The painterly results of their efforts can be seen in private collections and museums nationwide and abroad.

Fortunately, artists finding inspiration in this remarkable part of our country are not all long gone. The aesthetic allure continues. The region remains a popular place for painters. Trained as an artist, I occasionally do plein air pencil-and-watercolor sketches. The exercise is personally gratifying and optically alerting. The experience allows me to really appreciate what other artists have done. What for me is especially compelling about James McElhinney's journal paintings, many of which were produced at Boscobel House and Gardens, is that they work as stand-alone images. Often we think of art contained in sketchbooks as preparatory work for longer, more "finished" pictures or sculpture. Not for James. His definition sums up the difference: "Journal paintings treat the open page as equal to the canvas, a complete work in its own right that might be read as a pocket diptych, its halves divided by the binding."

Steven Miller, Executive Director Emeritus  
Boscobel House and Gardens, Garrison, New York



## WEST POINT FROM GARRISON'S LANDING



When the United States Military Academy at West Point was founded as an engineering school in 1802, the curriculum included topographical drawing and mapmaking. Sylvanus Thayer became superintendent in 1817, expanding the requirement to two hours of daily drawing instruction for second- and third-year cadets. The artwork that launched the Hudson River School was a view of Fort Putnam by Thomas Cole, painted in 1826. West Point quickly became a magnet for artists such as George Catlin, William Bartlett, Benson Lossing, William Guy Wall, John Frederick Kensett, and many others looking for picturesque subjects. Academy graduate and noted ethnographic artist Seth Eastman served as interim head of the drawing academy prior to the arrival in 1834 of painter Robert W. Weir, whose forty-two-year tenure transformed the program. One of Weir's cadets became the celebrated artist James McNeill Whistler.

In the foreground, Constitution Island anchors a row of trees lining the tracks of Metro North Railroad. Rising above the buildings to the right we find Crow's Nest Mountain, which served as a target range for cannon tubes produced at West Point Foundry in Cold Spring, a few miles to the north. A casual observer might fail to realize that what they behold is not just a scenic vista but a key location in American history—a center of science, technology, and art that was to the nineteenth century what Los Alamos was to the 1940s but traversed by a watery thoroughfare.



## LOOKING SOUTH FROM BOSCOBEL



On September 14, 1608, the ship *Half-Moon* dropped anchor in these waters. On September 14, 1609, writing in his journal, Robert Juet described the setting: "The Land grew very mountainous. The River is full of fish." On September 25, 1780, Benedict Arnold boarded the swan-class sloop of war *H.M.S. Vulture* in these same waters. Famed as one of America's scenic treasures, the Hudson Highlands were shaped by the river carving a path through an outcropping of basement rock extending northward from the Reading Prong of Pennsylvania and the Ramapo Mountains of northern New Jersey. The waterway variously known as Muhheahkunnuck, North River, and Hudson's River has been a thoroughfare since the dawn of human habitation. Rising in the Adirondack Mountains, the river flows more than three hundred miles (five hundred kilometers) to its confluence with the Atlantic. In the early nineteenth century, more than three hundred commercial vessels daily plied the waters between Troy and New York City. Traversing the foreground is the Hudson Line railway. The marshlands created when the railroad was built in 1851 were briefly converted to rice paddies, but the scheme failed. In the foreground to the right is Constitution Island, with West Point on the far shore of the river beyond. This vista from Boscobel House and Gardens in Garrison, New York, attracts thousands of visitors every year.

## WESTERN HIGHLANDS FROM BOSCOBEL



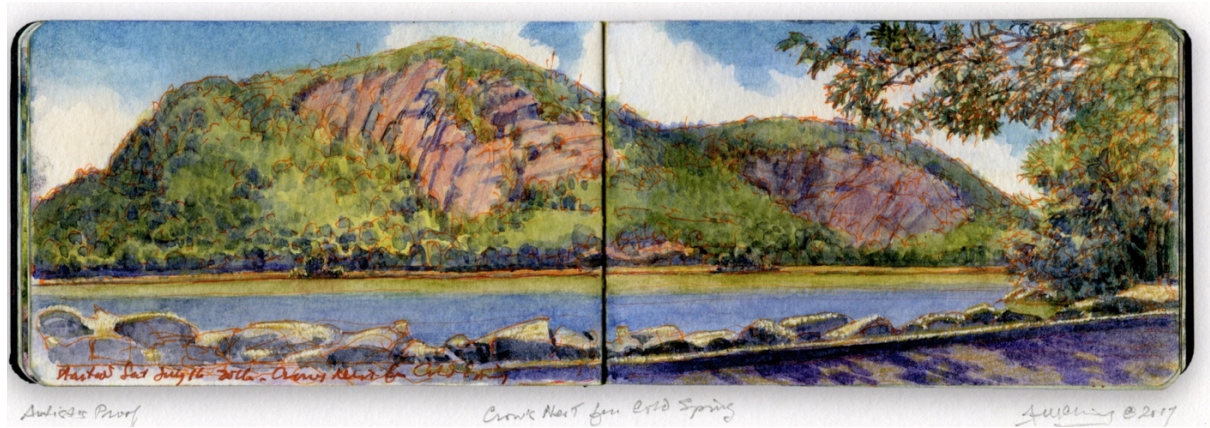
*Artists Proof*

*West Point and the Highlands from Bosobel*

*July 12, 1911*

To the southwest, the orderly divisions of Constitution Marsh become apparent. Channels were cut through the marshland during the second quarter of the nineteenth century for the cultivation of wild rice. The blue summit at left is Bear Mountain. The gray dashes in the foliage above the river are the stone buildings of West Point. Enclosed by the Hudson Line causeway to the right is Foundry Cove, which is fed by Indian Brook. By the late twentieth century, industrial waste had resulted in the Hudson having the greatest concentration of cadmium pollution on the planet. Folksinger and activist Pete Seeger conceived the idea of building a replica nineteenth-century gaff-rigged sloop and offering cruises and concerts to promote the rehabilitation of the Hudson Estuary. Public outcry led Consolidated Edison to abandon plans for a massive hydroelectric facility that would have cut into the north slope of Storm King Mountain, several miles upriver. The land is now a state park. Constitution Marsh is today a wildlife refuge, providing habitat for local waterfowl such as herons and egrets as well as a number of songbirds, migratory birds, and raptors, including Bald Eagles. Every June almost one thousand snapping turtles come out of the marsh to lay their eggs. More than forty years later, the sloop *Clearwater* continues to carry Seeger's message up and down the river.

## CROW'S NEST MOUNTAIN FROM COLD SPRING LANDING



The village of Cold Spring was given its name by George Washington after refreshing himself at a nearby spring. In colonial times, the village was nothing more than a cluster of buildings by a river landing on the estate of Adolphus Philipse. In 1817 Gouverneur Kemble established the West Point Foundry just south of the village. For nearly a century, as the foundry produced artillery pieces for the United States Army, the village grew into a town. Cannon tubes were finished, inspected, and tested by firing live rounds at Crow's Nest Mountain, across the river. The rocky slopes are said to be littered with thousands of cannonballs and unexploded ordnance. The infamous pirate William Kidd is said to have buried his loot at Kidd's Plug, the rocky escarpment at the base of the distant cliffs. Putnam County poet George Pope Morris praised the mountain in verse:

Where Hudson's waves o'er silvery sands  
Winds through the hills afar,  
And Cro' Nest like a monarch stands  
Crowned with a single star.



## STORM KING FROM COLD SPRING



The Dutch named the mountain on the right Boterberg (Butter Hill) because it resembled a butter loaf. Rising more than 1,300 feet above the river, Butter Hill is formed of Proterozoic granite and gneiss distorted by plate tectonics. Its present form was sculpted between 100,000 and 120,000 years ago by glaciation that sheared off its southern slope to expose the rock face visible today. The Hudson Highlands ranks as one of America's two fjords. The other, Somes Sound at Mount Desert Island in Maine, is where I first witnessed similar evidence of glacial activity smoothing one side of a geological uplift and tumbling down the other. Taking up residence on a hilltop north of Butter Hill, poet and critic Nathaniel Parker Willis named his estate Idlewild. In an age when explorers crisscrossed the globe naming every rock, tree, and puddle, Butter Hill did not sit well with Willis, who gave it, in today's parlance, a better brand:

Standing aloft before other mountains in the chain, this sign is peculiar to him. He seems the monarch, and this seems his stately ordering of a change in the weather. Should not STORM-KING, then, be his proper title?

## NORTH GATE FROM COLD SPRING PARK



*Artist's Proof*

*The North Gate from Cold Spring Landing*

*September 1820*

The North, or Wind, Gate of the Hudson Highlands is formed by Storm King (Butter Hill) to the west (left) and Breakneck Mountain to the right, behind Bull Hill. In the middle distance is Little Stony Point. On the far shore is the city of Newburgh, where George Washington made his home and headquarters from May 1782 to August 1783. The tranquil cove just north of the landing, juxtaposed against the rugged majesty of these upward-thrusting hills, never fails to surprise and inspire. One can easily imagine Hudson and his crew passing this place, wondering where the river might lead them. In the words of Robert Juet, writing on September 15, 1609, "The morning was misty until the sunne arose: then it cleared. Se wee weighed with the wind at South, and ran up the River twentie leagues, passing by High Mountaines. Wee had a very good depth . . . and great store of Salmon in the River." Hudson did not know that at the same time Sieur Samuel de Champlain was exploring the lake that today bears his name and what is now Lake George. Had either party pressed on a little farther, they might have met near Glens Falls.

## THE ARTIST

**James Lancel McElhinney** (American/Irish, b. 1952) is a visual artist, author, oral historian, art appraiser, and publisher. McElhinney attended Tyler School of Art, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and Yale University, where he earned an M.F.A. in painting. In 1987 McElhinney received a visual artist fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and is a recipient of a 2017 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. He is listed on the Master Artist Council of the Arthur Miller Foundation. He has conducted numerous oral history interviews for the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Columbia University Center for Oral History, Frick Center for the History of Collecting, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, South Carolina Center for Jewish History, Vermont Studio Center, and VoCA: Voices in Contemporary Art. He is the author of numerous articles, essays, and books, including *Classical Life Drawing Studio* (2010), *The Visual Language of Drawing* (2012), and *Art Students League of New York on Painting* (2015). From 1991 to 2003 McElhinney created a series of artworks exploring historic battlefields as flashpoints in new conflicts between historic preservation and commercial development. Since 2006 McElhinney has painted in book form, affording him greater mobility. Identifying with expeditionary artists such as John James Audubon, George Catlin, and Seth Eastman, McElhinney regards his paintings as interventions, encountering the *landschaft* as a palimpsest of simultaneous narratives—as terrain organized by memory and desire and human activity and conditioned by climate and the movement of water.

[www.mcelhinneyart.com](http://www.mcelhinneyart.com)

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