“A Wilderness of Oil Pictures”: Reframing Nature in A Tramp Abroad

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“You Cannot Banish the Picture”
Frederic Edwin Church *Heart of the Andes* (1859) 167.9 cm × 302.9 cm (66.1 in × 119.3 in)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, online collection (The Met object ID 10481)
Heart of the Andes "represents a lovely valley with its rich vegetation in all the bloom and glory of a tropical summer—dotted with birds and flowers of all colors and shades of color, and sunny slopes, and shady corners, and twilight groves, and cool cascades—all grandly set off with a majestic mountain in the background with its gleaming summit clothed in everlasting ice and snow! I have seen it several times, but it is always a new picture—totally new—you seem to see nothing the second time which you saw the first."

"There is no slurring of perspective effect about it—the most distant—the minutest object in it has a marked and distinct personality—so that you may count the very leaves on the trees."

"you cannot banish the picture—It remains with you still. It is in my mind now—and the smallest feature could not be removed without my detecting it."
Frederic Edwin Church *Heart of the Andes* (1859) 167.9 cm × 302.9 cm (66.1 in × 119.3 in)

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“A Wilderness of Oil Pictures”
from A Tramp Abroad
“In the midst of a wilderness of oil paintings”
Drawn Photographs and the Touristic Eye
“My Picture of the Matterhorn”

Note — I had the very unusual luck to catch one little momentary glimpse of the Matterhorn wholly unencumbered by clouds. I leveled my photographic apparatus at it without the loss of an instant, and should have got an elegant picture if my donkey had not interfered. It was my purpose to draw this photograph all by myself for my book, but was obliged to put the mountain part of it into the hands of the professional artist because I found I could not do landscape well.
“Painting My Great Picture”
Reasserting the Sublime Through Non-Human Time
“For instance, it was the end of August at the level of the sea; in the Kandersteg valley at the base of the pass, we found flowers which would not be due at the sea-level for two or three weeks; higher up, we entered October, and gathered fringed gentians” (367-68).

“I made no notes, and have forgotten the details, but the construction of the floral calendar was very entertaining while it lasted” (368).
“It is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede the ground to the thing that stands before us” (Elaine Scarry 112).

“Seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism" (James Elkins 11-12).
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