



## Olana, Salon for Jamaican Journeyers

New York was experiencing a “frightfully hot” spell one summer day in 1881, when Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), on business in the city, heard that the British botanical artist Marianne North (1830–1890) was in town (fig. 31).<sup>1</sup> In her words, he “came off at once to see me at nine o’clock, making me promise to go home with him the next day to see his new house, and Mrs. Church, up the Hudson.” Although she had previously visited the Churches upstate, in the autumn of 1871, the family then was still nestled in *Cosy Cottage* (fig. 32). Church’s farm on the Hudson River, purchased in 1860, was expanded over the years with numerous land purchases and structures, including a “Persian Castle,” and given the name *Olana* in the late 1870s. In 1871, North was in her fortieth year and grieving the death of her father, whose substantial fortune then allowed her to fulfill her quest to “tour around the world to paint the distinctive wild flowers of each country,” as the *New York Times* reported.<sup>2</sup> Church told her about his own far-flung expeditions, often referencing pictures he had produced of each location as he spoke. The sight of these materials inspired her, as she recalled:

The studio was a detached building, with a picture in progress of Chimborazo, which seemed to me perfection in point of truth and workmanship. He showed me other tropical studies which made me more than ever anxious to go and see these countries.<sup>3</sup>

While she never went to Ecuador to see Chimborazo, she journeyed to the Chilean Andes and the jungles of Brazil as well as a dozen other countries, including Canada,



Fig. 32. Carri Manchester, *Cosy Cottage at Olana*, photograph, 2009

Fig. 31. Unknown photographer, *Marianne North Seated at Her Easel, South Africa*, c. 1882–83, albumen print, 20 × 25 in., Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England

Japan, Singapore, Borneo, Java, Ceylon (where she met photographer Julia Margaret Cameron), India, New Zealand, Australia, Tasmania, South Africa, Portugal, and Italy. Jamaica constituted her first experience of the tropics, and the one location both she and Church had been to. As she described it:

Little Negro huts nestled among the “bush” everywhere . . . the mango-trees were just then covered with pink and yellow flowers, and the daturas, with their long white bells, bordered every stream. I was in a state of ecstasy, and hardly knew what to paint first.<sup>4</sup>

North was one of a stream of visitors who made the pilgrimage up the Hudson to Olana. Over the years many painters and writers heading for the tropics called on Church to discuss their itineraries and seek advice. Among them were Horace Wolcott Robbins and the Danish artist Fritz Melbye, who accompanied the Churches on their journey to Jamaica in 1865, and Charles de Wolf Brownell, who had made frequent trips to Cuba and Mexico before he, too, went to Jamaica in 1894. Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904) made three expeditions to equinoctial regions, all linked to his friend Church, who encouraged his interests in that direction. For his maiden voyage, Heade went to Brazil in 1864 to study its magnificent hummingbirds. By the time he returned from a second Latin American adventure, this one to Nicaragua in 1866, he began sharing his friend’s studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building, where, he reported, “I am now snugly ensconced in Mr. Church’s den,” surrounded by Andean sketches and souvenirs.<sup>5</sup>

“ARE YOU PAINTING A JAMAICA PICTURE?”

—Church to Heade, May 26, 1870

At dawn of the new year in 1870, Heade departed for his third and last tropical trip, touring Colombia and Panama before he sailed for Jamaica. He recorded in his sketchbook, “Arrived at Kingston, Jamaica February 24th, 1870,” and then filled its pages with mountain views, flowers, and plants.<sup>6</sup> By mid-May he was back in New York. Almost immediately, even in the face of all the details that demanded attention after being away, he headed for Olana. While we do not know exactly what transpired between the two artists, the timing of his call suggests that Heade must have felt the need to report back to his friend without delay. Likely he brought his sketchbook with him, flipping through the pages as they compared notes. And they must have discussed ideas for finished canvases, since Church afterward prompted him with a written query: “Are you painting a Jamaica picture?”<sup>7</sup>

Heade was indeed doing just that. Church could take pride in the *New York Evening Post*’s report by early September that Heade was at work on *Mountains of Jamaica* (unlocated),



Fig. 33. Martin Johnson Heade, *Coast of Jamaica*, 1874, oil on canvas, 26 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 43 $\frac{3}{8}$  in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. Katharine H. Putnam and the John Pickering Lyman Collection, by exchange, in memory of Maxim Karolik, 1918.363

Fig. 34. Martin Johnson Heade, *View from Fern Tree Walk*, 1887, oil on canvas, 53 × 90 in., Manoogian Collection

“masterly as an exemplification of poetical feeling and technical skill on the part of the artist.”<sup>8</sup> He went on to create several full-scale works, including *Coast of Jamaica* of 1874 (fig. 33) and *View from Fern Tree Walk* (fig. 34), both of which contrast the vista of mountains and water with an exuberance of vegetation that frames and almost overpowers the foreground.

Over time, Heade’s tropical pictures part company with those of Church, who never fully relinquished topographical specificity, sharing more with North’s treatment of Jamaican vegetation. Departing from standard botanical imagery that featured precise renderings of a single plant, both Heade and North conceived images of vegetal chaos simultaneously typical of the appearance of the region and expressive of a state of mind. Consider North’s painting *Valley behind the Artist’s House at Gordonstown, Jamaica* (fig. 35), where flowers seem to tumble out of the canvas, one overlapping another in its quest for space and light. Her backgrounds provide a glimpse of architecture, a riverbank, or, as here, a mountain as genius locus. But their ultimate



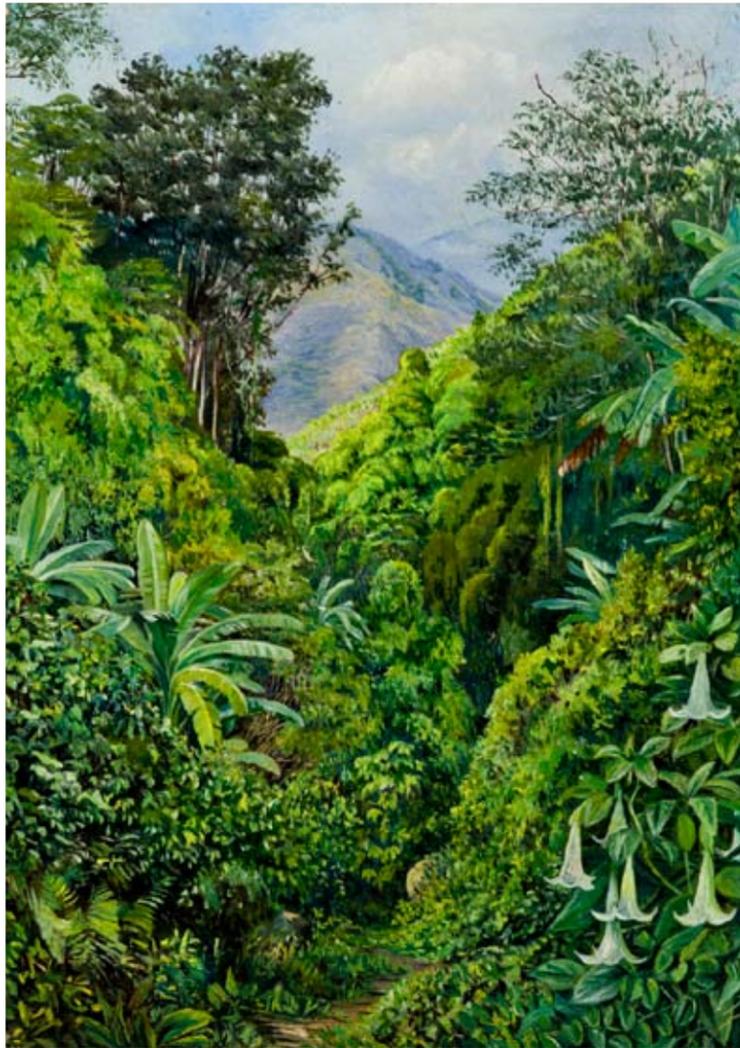


Fig. 35. Marianne North, *Valley behind the Artist's House at Gordonstown, Jamaica*, c. 1871–72, oil on paper, 13½ × 9¾ in., no. 132, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England

effect is as much psychological as informational. “The plants loom large in the foreground disrupting the viewer’s sense of the proportion of the world,” as one scholar describes their impact.<sup>9</sup> One such study, of a flowering Jamaican vine she saw “in the Bog Walk,” which she recognized as “a great aristolochia trailing over the trees,” was a gift to Church and remains in the collection at Olana (fig. 36).<sup>10</sup> Heade, too, discovered the sensuousness of the tropics in Jamaica. After this experience, he loosened his hold on site-specific renderings in favor of evocative syntheses of Brazilian hummingbirds and Jamaican orchids and vines suffused with misty atmospheric effects. Heade made a gift of one of these, *Tropical Orchid*, to Church, who displayed it at Olana (fig. 37).

Church was also friend and mentor to tropical traveler Charles de Wolf Brownell (1822–1909), who shared Church’s strong ties to Hartford, Connecticut. Suffering from congestion of the lungs, Brownell abandoned his law career and spent seven consecutive winters in Cuba (1854–61). Using the sugar plantations owned by his relatives the De Wolfs as a base of operation, he explored the island, sketching in oil and charcoal as he went. By 1860 he was convinced of his artistic calling; on November 7 he moved to New York, lunched the next day with Church, and began the life of a Hudson River painter.

Although marriage, children, and extensive European travel intervened, Brownell always gravitated back to Church as his artistic compass. A token of their friendship was a gift from Brownell to Church of the oil sketch *Royal Palm* (fig. 38). The latter gratefully accepted the work, declaring it “the most charming and truthful little picture. . . . I deem it one of your best works.”<sup>11</sup> After displaying it in his New York studio, he moved it to Olana. Brownell also gave Church a number of lithographs of his sketches. In the spring of 1888, Brownell traveled to the Hudson Valley, where he stayed at Olana and made a sketch of the house. On that occasion Church likely urged him to add Jamaica to his tropical sojourns. In any case, in November 1893, he wrote to Brownell:

I am greatly interested in your plans for visiting Jamaica—The scenery magnificent and the vegetation



Fig. 36. Attributed to Marianne North, *Study of Pelican Flower, Aristolochia grandiflora*, c. March–April 1872, oil on unstretched canvas, 16¾ × 19½ in., OL.1977.260

Fig. 37. Martin Johnson Heade, *Tropical Orchid*, c. 1871–74, oil on canvas, 21¼ × 17¼ in., OL.1981.39



Fig. 38. Charles de Wolf Brownell, *Royal Palm*, 1862, oil on canvas, 14¾ × 10¾ in., OL.1981.30



Fig. 39. Charles de Wolf Brownell, *Montego Bay*, 1894, oil on canvas, 7 × 10 in., Private Collection

next to that on the [blank] River—the finest I ever saw— The ferns, especially in the region known as Fern Walk—excelled every place— The carriage roads were always in fine order—<sup>12</sup>

In May 1894 Brownell showered details of his trip on Church, who responded, “Your best descriptions brought back to my memory the impressions I received while exploring its valleys, mountains, and coast.” Church’s respect for him as “an experienced traveler” who “will find ways to get into the more picturesque recesses” was justified.<sup>13</sup> Brownell produced several fine pictures of Montego Bay showing a view from above the town looking out to the sea, whose freshness and coloristic effects suggest a sketch done on the spot in the Caribbean sun (fig. 39). On June 6, 1895, Church wrote to his protégé, reliving his own experiences through him: “You must have had a most delightful trip since it included some many interesting places that were new to you— . . . Most of the places you mention I am familiar with and so I can appreciate your enthusiasm over scenes which only the artistic eye is capable of enjoying to the full. . . .”<sup>14</sup>

#### ROBBINS AND MELBYE IN JAMAICA WITH THE CHURCHES

Jamaica provided common ground between guests at Olana and their hostess as well as their host, for Isabel Church had lived with her husband on the island for four months. While he was galloping about on horseback, sketching atmospheric effects and mountain panoramas, Isabel Carnes Church (1836–1899) was occupied with plant collecting. “Jamaica presents the most rich and attractive display of tropical vegetation that I ever saw out of South America. . . .” Church informed Brownell.<sup>15</sup> Whereas the quest in South America had been for palm trees, in Jamaica the botanical holy grail was ferns. “Mrs. Church is insane on the Fern question and is making a large collection,” the artist wrote to his friend and patron Joseph B. Austin.<sup>16</sup> He further explained to Theodore Cole, who managed the farm while the Churches were away in Jamaica, that she “is fascinated with the occupation of fern collecting and has already an enormous collection—We have them of all sizes from ½ inch to 8 feet in length.” She shared the “great variety of Jamaica ferns” she had pressed for safekeeping (fig. 40) not only with North and Heade but also with Robbins (1842–1904), a member of their original traveling party to Jamaica in 1865.<sup>17</sup>

Invited to join the Church entourage, Robbins was undecided whether to go when President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination on April 14 gave him “the blues most dreadfully”; he wrote to his mother that “it seems to be best I should go to Jamaica.” Along with the Churches, whose two young children had died of diphtheria in late March, Robbins looked to a change of scenery, and to the Edenic tropics, as a place of healing and renewal. Even as he acknowledged to his mother that “this terrible shock—the whole nation has received—has I suppose affected everybody,” he still seemed to feel the blow rather more personally than most.<sup>18</sup> Why? Robbins was among a handful of New York-based artists who fought in the Civil War, as a member of the 22nd Regiment of the New York State Militia, which served at Harper’s Ferry for three months from May 28 to September 5, 1862. Born in Mobile, Alabama, and educated in Baltimore, Maryland, Robbins settled as an adult in the North, where he had strong family ties. His life thus straddled the Confederacy and the Union—circumstances that may have left him feeling especially conflicted. When his regiment was mustered out in September 1862, he headed back to New York and his studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building, where Church then kept his studio.<sup>19</sup> He likely was nearby when Church learned of the death of his son in March 1865, as he took over the arrangements with J. G. Brown to do a postmortem portrait of the little boy.<sup>20</sup> Only eight days after he lost his son, Church’s infant daughter died. Robbins put off his own preparations for the trip because he felt “I ought to be here as long as possible to see Mr. Church & do the last little things that he will find are necessary.”<sup>21</sup> The impact of the war and the



Fig. 40. Isabel Carnes Church, *Pressed Fern in an Herbarium*, OL.2001.366.3



Fig. 41. Horace Wolcott Robbins, [date TK], *Tropical Scene*, oil on canvas, [dimensions TK], Private Collection

family tragedy of his friend contributed to his strained emotions. It must have been a most melancholy party that departed from New York Harbor, headed for Kingston.

Once landed on the island, they submerged their sorrows in a frenzy of sketching, recording the wonders of their new surroundings. Up to this point, Robbins had had only minimal training, and the artistic novice received a crash course in outdoor sketching and painting at Church's side. His letters home describe their jaunts around the island, his profound admiration for Church's skill, and work they were producing (fig. 41). He wrote to his mother, "Every day of my life I am more & more convinced that he is the only great landscape painter we have, he is a giant among pigmies."<sup>22</sup>

When the Jamaican sojourn came to an end, Robbins headed for Europe. On his return to New York, he alternated Jamaican subjects with views from the Alps or the Adirondacks over the following decades. Although few of his Jamaican pictures have been identified, records of the National Academy of Design, New York, list *A Bamboo Grove in the Island of Jamaica* (1867), *Passing Shower, Island of Jamaica* (1874), and *Sunset, Island of Jamaica, W.I.* (1884). The following year, in mid-June, he made an overnight stay at Olana to pay respects to his old friends. We can assume that the conversation turned to reminiscences of their shared 1865 trip, including review of Mr. Church's pictures and a tour of Mrs. Church's fern bed and collection. Afterward, Robbins created a picture

based on the subject Church had made famous: *Rainy Season, Island of Jamaica*, a fitting homage to his old traveling companion.

Over three decades, Robbins's relationship with Church evolved from mentor-student into friendship, and he accompanied him on other trips, including one to Mount Katahdin, Maine, in 1877. Church's association with the other artist member of their party, Fritz Melbye (1826–1869), is more difficult to define (fig. 42). Born in Denmark, Melbye was one of three brothers who practiced marine painting, and the most restless among them. While his travels have yet to be fully documented, we know that in 1851 he went to St. Thomas, where he met the future Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), and together they headed for Venezuela, where they spent more than two years sketching and painting in the vicinity of Caracas before Pissarro left for Paris.<sup>23</sup> By 1860 Melbye arrived in New York, where, presumably having heard of Church's interest in South America, he sought him out. Their meeting could have been facilitated by a mutual acquaintance, Ramon Páez, artist, travel writer, and son of former Venezuelan president José Antonio Páez living in exile in New York. By 1865, in any case, they were sufficiently good friends that Church included Melbye in his travel party to Jamaica, probably counting on his extensive expertise in the Caribbean. Once there he struck out on his own, so his itinerary remained independent of theirs, and he painted sites such as *A Blue Hole, Jamaica* (fig. 43).

Back in New York, Melbye entrusted to Church a large cache of drawings and some oils from the Jamaica trip and others that he and Pissarro had created on their travels, convinced that Church was the most appropriate caretaker of these precious visual documents (fig. 44).<sup>24</sup> Eventually they were integrated into Olana's holdings alongside Church's own studies, his library, works he had acquired from other artists, and his collection of documentary photographs, including *Tropical Foliage, Jamaica* (fig. 45) and *Waterfall, Jamaica* (fig. 46), that would have served as aide-mémoire. Also at Olana are two paintings by Melbye, one of them acquired as a gift, the other possibly in trade, as landscapists often swapped works with one another. The gift, *Entrance to the City of St. Domingo, Columbus "Tower,"* is inscribed on the back with the title and "F.E. Church, Esq. from F.G. Melbye, N.Y. Feby. 1864" (fig. 47).

Two years after the trip to Jamaica, the press reported: "Melbye on a voyage around the world."<sup>25</sup> He was off again, but not before he had contributed to the increasingly international circle of artists and writers gathered in New York who faced south, with their attention focused on the American tropics.



Fig. 42. Camille Pissarro, *Sketch of Fritz Melbye*, 1852, graphite and watercolor on paper, 10½ × 13½ in., OL.1982.304, P-16



Fig. 43. Fritz Siegfried Georg Melbye, *A Blue Hole, Jamaica*, 1866, oil on canvas, 30 x 44 in., Image Courtesy Christie's



Fig. 44. Fritz Siegfried Georg Melbye, *Church in the Blue Hills, Jamaica*, 1865, oil on canvas, 13¼ x 17 in., OL.1982.668

Fig. 45. Unknown photographer, *Tropical Foliage, Jamaica*, c. 1870s, albumen print, 11¼ x 7⅞ in., OL.1982.1264



Fig. 46. Unknown photographer, *Waterfall, Jamaica*, c. 1865–70, albumen print, 11¼ x 7⅞ in., OL.1982.1265

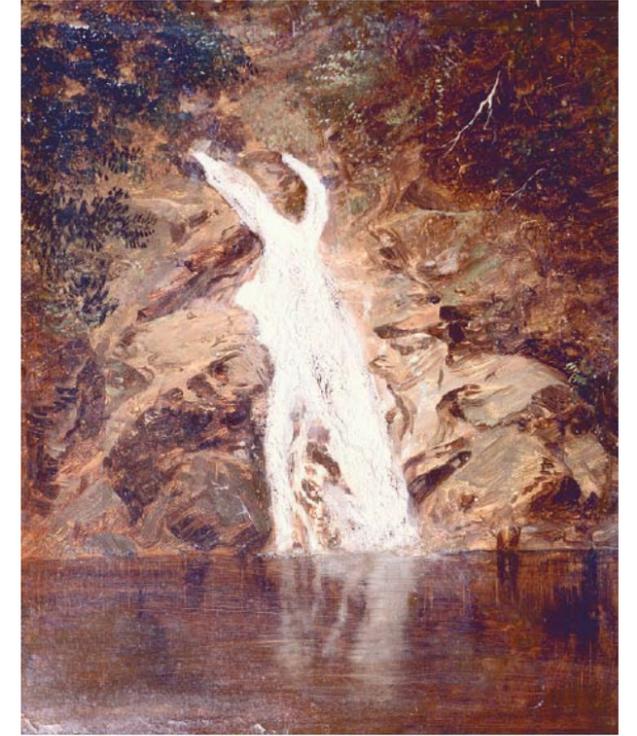


Fig. 47. Fritz Siegfried Georg Melbye, *Entrance to the City of St. Domingo, Columbus "Tower,"* 1864, oil on canvas, 8½ x 14¼ in., OL.1980.1907



## SALON

From North's first visit with Church in 1871 to the second in 1881, she noticed that he "was sadly altered and crippled by rheumatism, and could not use his right hand any more."<sup>26</sup> Unable to paint as he once had, Church rechanneled what was still a considerable store of energy into new initiatives at home. First, as scholars have discussed, Olana itself became an expressive outlet for his later years (fig. 48). He played a significant role in designing both the house and later the studio (fig. 49). And he came to regard the extensive grounds of his farm as his natural canvas, which he composed by digging out a stream-fed bog to make a lake, creating pastures, and constructing carriage drives (fig. 50). Another dimension of his activities, which has been less acknowledged, is that Church became an elder statesman of tropical travel, dispensing information and advice.

Fig. 48. Nicholas Whitman, *View of the Main House from across the Lake, Olana*, photograph, 2008



Fig. 49. Kurt Dolnier, *The Studio at Olana*, photograph, 1997, © Kurt Dolnier

At the height of his popularity from 1850 to 1865, Church was completely preoccupied with his own expeditions and the artwork that resulted from them, leaving him little time to mentor younger, less seasoned artist travelers. After his return from Jamaica, however, he entered a new phase of his life. He began to function much as the great naturalist-explorers Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), in his Berlin apartment, or Charles Darwin (1809–1882), at Down House in the English countryside, who hosted armies of visitors. Some just wanted to shake hands with the great man, but others came to seek counsel on scientific matters, share data, consult the rich holdings of the library (fig. 51), study the photographs (fig. 52), and reminisce about wonders they had seen. Visual artists brought their pictures to Church, as North recalled: "He looked through all my paintings with real interest; which pleased me, for I still think him the greatest of living landscape painters."<sup>27</sup>

Olana facilitated Church's adaptation of this role (fig. 53). There, members of his intellectual, cultural, and artistic circles

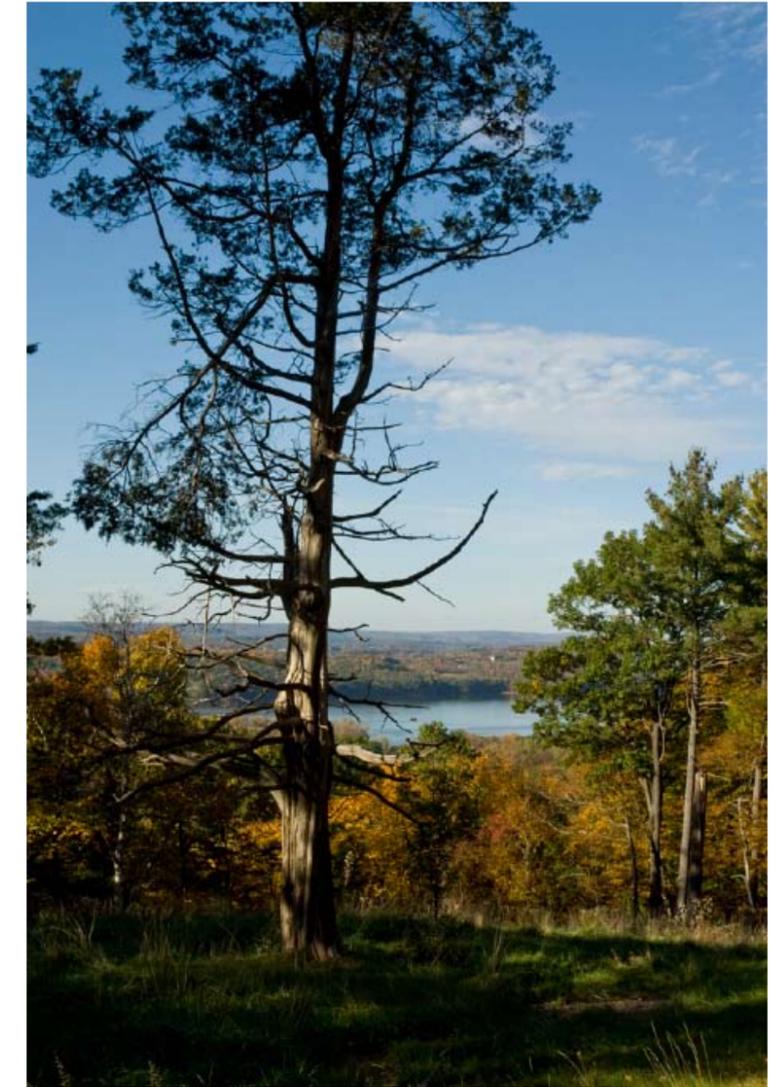


Fig. 50. Nicholas Whitman, *View across the Hudson River to the Catskill Mountains from Ridge Road, Olana*, photograph, 2008



Fig. 51. Nicholas Whitman, *Books from the Historic Library at Olana on Display in the Court Hall*, photograph, 2009



Fig. 53. Nicholas Whitman, *The Court Hall at Olana*, photograph, 2008



Fig. 52. Unknown photographer, *Shore with Isthmus, Jamaica*, c. 1860s, albumen print, 7 1/8 x 9 in., OL.1981.693

could gather under its roof to amuse and educate one another and to advance their knowledge through conversation, led by their stimulating hosts. This is the very definition of a salon, commonly associated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, transported to the banks of the Hudson. At their magnificent villa, Mr. and Mrs. Church welcomed visitors into their domestic sphere, including their children, which contrasted greatly with the artist's urban studio on Tenth Street. North described her enjoyment of these pleasant family interactions:

[Isabel Church] and her husband were quite ideal people, handsome and noble in their ways and manners. They had four children. The eldest, Fred, had a supernaturally wise look, and told long stories to his brothers with the greatest gravity. Sometimes Mr. C. made him spin yarns in the same way to us, interrupting him with questions, and trying to put him out and make him contradict himself; but the boy always had a ready answer and reason for everything.<sup>28</sup>

Church's spontaneous invitation to North raises the issue of gender politics at Olana and the artist's relationship with accomplished women generally. In an age when the majority of men would by today's standards be judged sexist, Church was relatively open to strong women, perhaps because his happy marriage to the handsome and gifted Isabel Carnes made him comfortable in their company. Egyptologist Amelia Edwards, talented pianist Isabel Fassette (daughter of sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer), as well as travel writer



Fig. 54. Robert and Emily de Forest, *Charles Dudley Warner Seated in the Court Hall at Olana*, October 11, 1884, photograph, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1986.378.16.A



Fig. 55. Nicholas Whitman, *View from the Piazza at Olana*, photograph, 2001?

and artist Susan Hale all found a welcome at Olana.<sup>29</sup> Consider the experiences of author Grace King (1851–1932). She mingled with fellow houseguests Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dudley Warner (fig. 54) and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Clemens, but when she wearied of society she took refuge in spectacular vistas from the house (fig. 55):

We were called down for coffee, served on one of the piazzas. Tiring of the talk I wandered around & got into a kind of verandah which commanded another beautiful view—I propped myself on the banister and looked until it disappeared in darkness.

It was Church's art that knitted visitors and scenery together, as when she turned around and caught a glimpse of the Jamaican canvas *The After Glow* (fig. 56):

Turning my head I was caught by a mass of color— It was the lamp in a window burning just in front of one of Church's pictures. A sunset he had painted from nature on the Island of Jamaica. I came through the library after a while to hunt up the others and found Clemens reading some antique book. I showed him the beautiful picture—then found the others.<sup>30</sup>

Fig. 56. Nicholas Whitman, "The After Glow" on View in the Sitting Room at Olana, photograph, 2009



#### OLANA AND GLOBAL TRADE NETWORKS

Church's circle was aware, too, of growing trade networks with the Caribbean, as their fellow *salomiste* Fessenden Nott Otis (1825–1900) made apparent. Church's friend and sometime physician, and an art collector with a special focus on Central America and the Caribbean, Otis, with his eclectic interests and accomplished career, provides another window onto the tropical world. After earning his medical degree, Otis served between 1852 and 1861 as surgeon for the U.S. Mail Steamship and the Pacific Mail Steamship companies, which operated the route between New York and Panama. Otis wrote several travel accounts of the region, including *Tropical Journeyings* (1856) and *Illustrated History of the Panama Railroad; Together with a Traveler's Guide and a Business Man's Handbook for the Panama Railroad and Its Connections* (1861), which instructed readers how to get from New York to the Atlantic coast of Panama, catch the railroad that would take them across the isthmus, and proceed to the coast of California or South America (Church's route). The book proved to be so useful that it saw numerous editions, while Otis went on to become a pioneer in urology. His other passion was art, which found expression in both his authorship of various instructional manuals, such as *Lessons in*



Fig. 57. Frederic Edwin Church, *Catskill Mountains from the Home of the Artist*, 1871, oil on canvas, 22 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 36 $\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1981.13

*Drawing: Studies of Animals and Landscape* (1849–50), and his collecting. Among the paintings he owned could be found *A Tropical View* by Robbins; *La Guayra, South America*, a Venezuelan subject by Melbye; and *The Pacific (from the Ramparts of Panama)* by Charles Parsons. Curiously, he does not seem to have procured one of Church's tropical subjects, although he owned his *Catskill Mountains from the Home of the Artist* (fig. 57).<sup>31</sup> Otis's professional service to William H. Aspinwall's steamship line and his authorship of texts promoting it link the landscapes he acquired—pictures of locales made accessible via these routes—to commerce.<sup>32</sup>

The rise of coffee production in Jamaica is a case in point. Aspinwall's steamship lines had profited handsomely by transporting gold seekers to California, but once that frenzy died down they needed other cargo and began to forge links with regional coffee growers. Church was cognizant of the inroads they had made in Jamaica; he noted of one beautiful stretch of scenery, "These are all Coffee Estates." Avoiding any mention of the workers, he praised the plant: "Coffee is the most beautiful crop which can be raised—

when in bloom the fields look like snow and the most delicious fragrance fills the air," and he acquired a photograph of land being cleared in preparation for crop planting (fig. 58). He also kept abreast of market issues, reporting to a friend, "This coffee brings the highest price in England."<sup>33</sup> Surveying Heade's Mountains of Jamaica in 1870, a reviewer pointed out, "Isolated houses, coffee plantations, and the picturesque tall-growing fern, give character and varied effect to the view from valley to mountain top."<sup>34</sup> His words emphasize that Heade integrated the plantation into his tropical vision of Jamaica. Brownell, whose family owned extensive sugar plantations in Cuba (as did the father of American painter Elihu Vedder), surely interpreted these agricultural complexes as links between the island and the tables of the Western world.

Marianne North was similarly aware of the networks of politics and commerce that connected the places she toured in the United States and England. Her ports of call had been or were still part of the British Empire, where she routinely received assistance from local British authorities in securing housing and transport. Between visits to Church's Hudson Valley residence, she had arranged for the creation of the Marianne North Gallery at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. In the summer of 1879 she offered to donate to the garden her collected works and a building to house them. The installation of 832 of her paintings represents her personal attempt to embrace the botanical world and to delineate the global reach of empire and enterprise. Kew Gardens published a catalogue describing in detail the paintings that graced the gallery walls. Church, undoubtedly aware of the new gallery, acquired a copy of the volume for his library.<sup>35</sup> In the summer of 1927, when Church's daughter, Downie, went to see the Marianne North Gallery, it triggered fond personal memories of the artist's long-ago visit (fig. 59):

Today we went to Kew Gardens—a very marvelous place—gorgeous trees—vistas down greenswards, etc—Saw at last the truly wonderful collection of painting of "Nature" presented to the gardens by Marianne North. She visited at "Olana" when I was a little girl—and showed us some of her lovely painting in Borneo—also two live Kangaroo mice—that she was taking home to the zoo—she went three times around the world and took *her time*—painting hundred[s] of oil paintings of flowers, fruits, birds, insects and scenes—wherever she went—there were also painting of her home and its gardens at Alderly—<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 58. Unknown photographer, *Clearing in a Jungle, Jamaica*, c. 1855–65, salt print, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 16 $\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1982.1256



Fig. 59. Andrew McRobb, *The Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens, Showing the North and Northwest Walls of the Main Gallery with the Entrance to the Inner Gallery*, photograph, 1998, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England



So Olana, too, served as a vessel of remembrance. Jamaican journeyers who rendezvoused at Olana stayed overnight and enjoyed several meals together, allowing ample time for touring the house and grounds and for studying Church's pictures. Guest bedrooms served as minigalleries, as North described: "In my own tiny bedroom were three pictures in oils—one of the Horse-Shoe Falls of Niagara, a study of magnolia flowers, and one of some tropical trees covered with parasites" (fig. 11).<sup>37</sup> The Churches integrated the memorabilia of travel, from decorative arts to tourist souvenirs, into the fabric of their home. Again, North tells us, "[Mrs. Church] had contrived to make the whole collection of curiosities look like the natural parts of a comfortable living house: exquisite Persian rugs, bronzes, carvings, porcelain etc."<sup>38</sup> A gray South American donkey, exotic plants, a "Butterfly from the Emerald mines of Muzo near Bogota New (G)ranada" (fig. 60),<sup>39</sup> and marvelous Mexican birds all contributed to recollections of the look and feel of the tropics that permeated life at Olana. As Charles Brownell waited at the pier for his boat at the conclusion of his stay, he looked back up at the mansion and made a sketch (fig. 61) that resonates with nostalgia for the Salon where Caribbean experiences could be relived in sympathetic company on the banks of the Hudson.



Fig. 60. Nicholas Whitman, *Colombian Butterfly and Persian, Mexican, and Chinese Ceramics on Display in the Court Hall, Olana*, photograph, 2009

Fig. 61. Charles de Wolf Brownell, *A Parting Look*, 1888, brown ink on paper, 3 3/4 x 5 in., OL.1982.1137

## NOTES

1. Downie Church Howe, Frederic's daughter, recalled the visit in her July 3, 1927, diary entry on the occasion of her own visit to Kew Gardens: “. . . Saw at last the truly wonderful collection of painting of ‘Nature’ presented to the gardens by Marianne North. She visited at ‘Olana’ when I was a little girl—and showed us some of her lovely painting in Borneo—also two live Kangaroo mice—. . .” (OL.1987.10). According to former Olana curator Karen Zukowski, the visit that Downie remembered was probably in May or June 1881.

2. “Art Notes,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1881.

3. Marianne North, *Recollections of a Happy Life, Being the Autobiography of Marianne North*, ed. Mrs. John Addington Symonds, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1892), vol. 1, p. 68.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 83.

5. Martin Johnson Heade to John Russell Bartlett, August 10, 1866, John Russell Bartlett Papers, John Crater Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, R.I., quoted in Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 80.

6. Martin Johnson Heade, *The Jamaica Sketchbook*, inscribed cover, verso, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Susan and Richard Nash, 1997.297.

7. Frederic Church to Martin Johnson Heade, May 26, 1870, Martin Johnson Heade Papers, 1853–1904, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

8. *New York Evening Post*, September 10, 1870, quoted in Stebbins, *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade*, p. 174, cat. no. 190.

9. Antonia Losano, “A Preference for Vegetables: The Travel Writings and Botanical Art of Marianne North,” *Women's Studies* 26 (1997): p. 443.

10. North, *Recollections of a Happy Life*, vol. 1, p. 52. This oil study by Marianne North and a second

study of a bird-of-paradise in Olana's collection were identified by Olana's Curatorial Department.

11. Frederic Church to Charles de Wolf Brownell, August 1, 1862, copy from an unknown source, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

12. Frederic Church to Brownell, November 6, 1893, copy from an unknown source, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

13. Frederic Church to Brownell, May 30, 1894, copy from an unknown source, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

14. Frederic Church to Brownell, June 6, 1895, copy from an unknown source, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

15. Frederic Church to Brownell, May 30, 1894.

16. Frederic Church to [Joseph B.] Austin, August 14, 1865, OL.1985.63.

17. Frederic Church to Theodore Cole, July 28, 1865, OL.1981.863.

18. Horace Wolcott Robbins to his mother, Mary Eldrege Hyde Robbins, April 16, 1865, from the collection of the late Mary Rintoul, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

19. Frederick Phisterer, *New York in the War of the Rebellion* (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon, 1912), provides general background on the regiment; the Website of Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System—<http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/>—includes a citation to Robbins.

20. Robbins was residing in the Tenth Street Studio building from 1862 to 1868 and from 1882 to 1888.

21. Horace Robbins to Mary Robbins, April 16, 1865.

22. Horace Robbins to Mary Robbins, June 30, 1865, from Jamaica, p. 4, from the collection of the late Mary Rintoul, transcript in the Olana Research Collection.

23. See Katherine E. Manthorne, “Caribbean Beginnings: Camille Pissarro,” *Latin American*

2 (Summer 1990): pp. 30–35.

24. For the most recent assessment, see Richard R. Brettell, *Camille Pissarro in the Caribbean, 1850–1855: Drawings from the Collection at Olana* (St. Thomas, USVI: Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas; New York: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, 1996).

25. “Topics of the Day,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 28, 1867, p. 2.

26. North, *Recollections of a Happy Life*, vol. 1, p. 208.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 67–68, writing about her 1871 visit.

29. While space for discussion of gender politics at Olana is limited here, it does bear further examination.

30. Grace King to her sister May King McDowell, June 7, 1887, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. During Grace King's stay at Olana, a Mr. Twitchell was also there, and Church's patrons Mr. and Mrs. William H. Osborn dropped in for the day.

31. *Catalogue of the Private Collection of Modern Paintings and Bronzes Belonging to Dr. F. N. Otis of This City* (New York: Ortgies, 1890). Church bought his picture back at the sale held at the “Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, Auction, Dec. 1890.”

32. These links between art, trade, and tourism require further investigation. For a biography of Otis, see the entry in James Grant Wilson et al., eds., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton's, 1887–89), available at [www.famousamericans.net/fessendennottotis/](http://www.famousamericans.net/fessendennottotis/); and John Haskell Kemble, “The Panama Route to the Pacific Coast, 1848–1869,” *Pacific Historical Review* 7 (March 1938): pp. 1–13.

33. Frederic Church to Theodore Cole, July 28, 1865, OL.1981.863.

34. *New York Evening Post*, September 10, 1870, quoted in Stebbins, *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade*, p. 250.

35. *The Gallery of Marianne North's Paintings of Plants and Their Homes, Royal Garden Kew, Descriptive Catalog Compiled by W. Botting Hemsley, A.L.S.* (London: Spottiswoods, 1882), OL.1986.115.

36. Howe, diary entry of July 3, 1927, OL.1987.10.

37. North, *Recollections of a Happy Life*, vol. 1, p. 68. Her description of the bedroom at Cosy Cottage applies to the “Persian Castle” as well.

38. North, *Recollections of a Happy Life*, vol. 1, p. 209.

39. This is the inscription on the back of the frame, in Frederic Church's hand.

## Works in the Exhibition

*Fern Hunting among These Picturesque Mountains:*  
Frederic Edwin Church in Jamaica

The second exhibition in The Evelyn  
and Maurice Sharp Gallery at Olana  
June 5–October 31, 2010

Curated by Evelyn D. Trebilcock and  
Valerie A. Balint with research by Ida Brier



Attributed to Louis Palmer Church, *The Front Entrance at Olana, East Facade*, c. 1890s, photograph,  $3\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{5}{8}$  in., OL.1986.378.9.A

Frederic Edwin Church, *Ridges in the Blue Mountains, Jamaica*, July 1865, oil on paper,  $10\frac{3}{8} \times 12\frac{1}{6}$  [should this be  $1/16$ ?] in., OL.1976.3 (fig. 2)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Storm in the Blue Mountains*, August 1865, oil on academy board,  $10 \times 12\frac{1}{16}$  in., OL.1976.16 (fig. 10)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Tropical Vines and Trees, Jamaica*, c. May–July 1865, oil on paper mounted on canvas,  $18\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$  in., OL.1980.1948 (fig. 11)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Coconut Palms, Kingston, Jamaica*, July 7, 1865, ink on paper,  $9\frac{7}{8} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1977.119 (fig. 12)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Fern Walk Jamaica*, July 1865, oil on paper mounted on canvas,  $12\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{3}{4}$  in., OL.1981.73 (fig. 14)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Scene in the Blue Mountains, Jamaica*, August 1865, oil on paper mounted on academy board,  $10\frac{3}{8} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$  in., OL.1981.69 (fig. 22)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Blue Mountains, Jamaica*, c. July–August 1865, oil and graphite on paper,  $8\frac{1}{16} \times 12$  in., OL.1976.2 (fig. 23)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Clouds in the Blue Mountains*, July 1865, oil on paper mounted on academy board,  $11\frac{1}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$  in., OL.1976.15 (fig. 24)

Frederic Edwin Church, *The After Glow*, November 1867, oil on canvas,  $31\frac{1}{4} \times 48\frac{3}{4}$  in., OL.1981.48 (fig. 27)

Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunset, Jamaica*, oil on paper mounted on canvas,  $12\frac{1}{8} \times 18\frac{1}{8}$  in., OL.1981.26 (fig. 28)

Attributed to Marianne North, *Study of Pelican Flower, Aristolochia grandiflora*, c. March–April 1872, oil on unstretched canvas,  $16\frac{3}{8} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$  in., OL.1977.260 (fig. 36)

Martin Johnson Heade, *Tropical Orchid*, c. 1871–74, oil on canvas,  $21\frac{1}{4} \times 17\frac{1}{4}$  in., OL.1981.39 (fig. 37)

Charles de Wolf Brownell, *Royal Palm*, 1862, oil on canvas,  $14\frac{3}{8} \times 10\frac{3}{8}$  in., OL.1981.30 (fig. 38)

Fritz Siegfried Georg Melbye, *Church in the Blue Hills, Jamaica*, 1865, oil on canvas,  $13\frac{3}{4} \times 17$  in., OL.1982.668 (fig. 44)

Unknown photographer, *Tropical Foliage, Jamaica*, c. 1870s, albumen print,  $11\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1982.1264 (fig. 45)

Unknown photographer, *Waterfall, Jamaica*, c. 1865–70, albumen print,  $11\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{7}{8}$  in., OL.1982.1265 (fig. 46)

Fritz Siegfried Georg Melbye, *Entrance to the City of St. Domingo, Columbus "Tower,"* 1864, oil on canvas,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{4}$  in., OL.1980.1907 (fig. 47)

Unknown photographer, *Shore with Isthmus, Jamaica*, c. 1860s, albumen print,  $7\frac{1}{8} \times 9$  in., OL.1981.693 (fig. 52)

Unknown photographer, *Clearing in a Jungle, Jamaica*, c. 1855–65, salt print,  $12\frac{3}{8} \times 16\frac{3}{8}$  in., OL.1982.1256 (fig. 58)

Shirley Hibberd, *The Fern Garden, London: Groombridge and Sons*, 1869, OL.1984.107 (fig. 51)



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