



Grand Themes: Emanuel Leutze, Washington Crossing the Delaware, and American History Painting

Jochen Wierich

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First exhibited at the Stuyvesant Hall in New York in 1851, Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* captured the imagination of many Americans searching for national symbols in a time of sectionalism and disunity. Despite Leutze's aspirations, the exhibition became an opportunity for critics of history painting to stake their positions. As suggested by the book's title, Leutze's epic painting is a touchstone in the evolution of American history painting. It represents a triumphant climax of the American adoption of the Grand Manner, inherited from eighteenth-century English painting, and portends its seemingly inevitable demise. From the painting's gargantuan size, which fitted it only for a grand, public setting, to its focus on an already deified public hero, Leutze's painting presumed a cultural as well as a political consensus—a consensus that proved illusory at best. Emanuel Leutze was arguably the most prominent American history painter of his time, and Jochen Wierich argues that Leutze's work became the locus of contemporary debates surrounding the nature of history painting and its future.

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