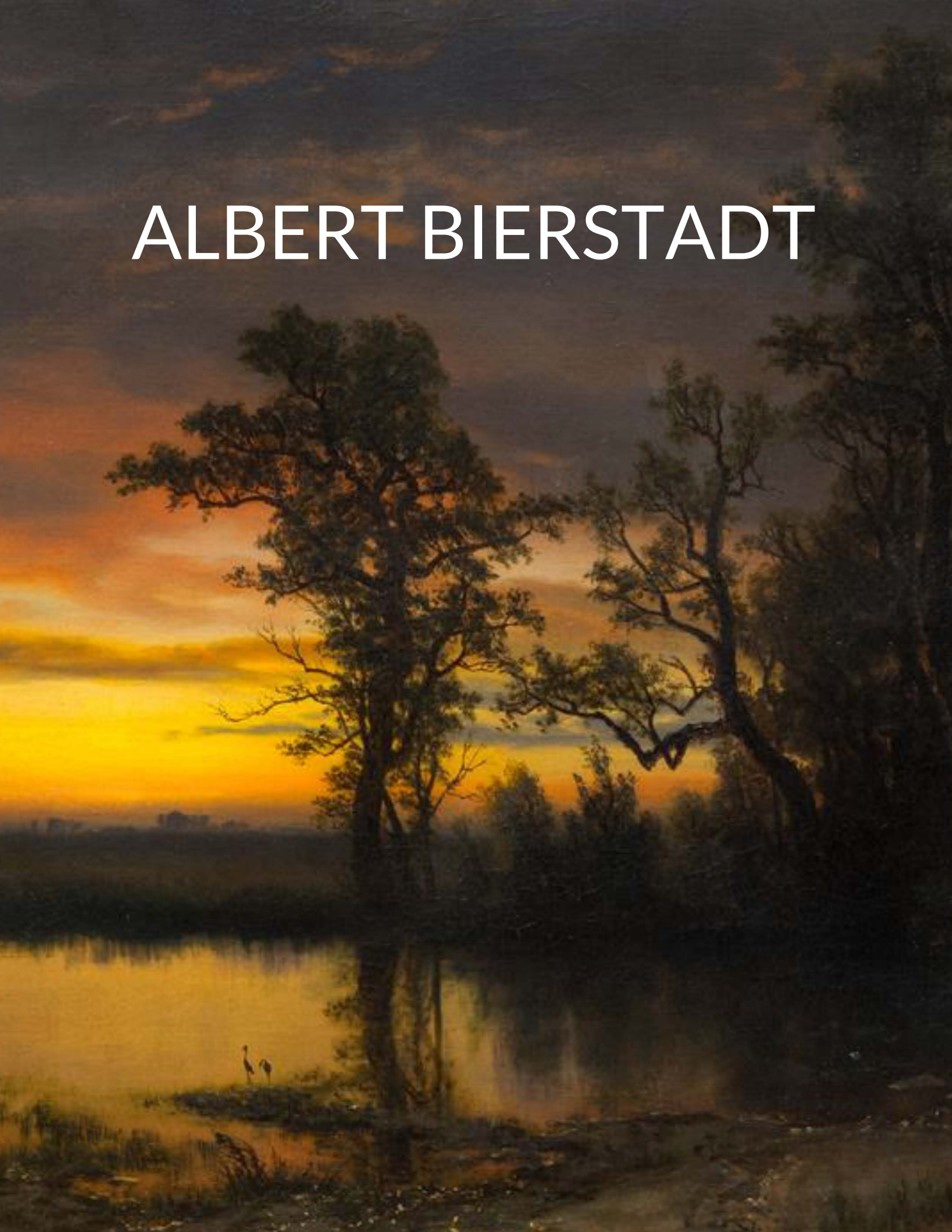


ALBERT BIERSTADT







ALBERT BIERSTADT (1830-1902)

Twilight on the San Joaquin

Signed, lower right, "Bierstadt"

oil on canvas

22 x 29 1/2 x 3/4 in. (34 3/4 x 42 1/4 x 4 1/4 in.) 55.88

x 74.93 x 1.91 cm (88.27 x 107.32 x 10.8 cm) c. 1873

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PROVENANCE:

Private Collection, Massachusetts, prior to 1970

Private Collection, Middleboro, Massachusetts, 1970

Private Collection, acquired from the above, 2024

"Twilight on the San Joaquin" (c. 1873) is a luminous oil painting that exemplifies Albert Bierstadt's mature engagement with the American landscape and his mastery of light effects. Executed in a refined Luminist style, the work emphasizes a tranquil, glowing atmosphere achieved through meticulous detail, subtle tonal transitions, and a carefully controlled palette. The fading light of dusk settles gently over the scene, transforming the San Joaquin River into a reflective plane that anchors the composition and enhances its meditative stillness.

The San Joaquin River, which flows through California's Central Valley before joining the Sacramento River at the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, was a subject well suited to Bierstadt's interest in expansive yet serene vistas. In this painting, the river becomes a conduit for light, capturing the delicate interplay between sky and water at twilight. The result is a harmonious balance between natural grandeur and intimate observation.

Bierstadt was a prominent painter associated with the Hudson River School, known for his large, gleaming depictions of the American West. His portrayals of beauty and plenty helped shape the popular image of the West and reassured Americans, still grappling with the aftermath of the Civil War, that their young democracy possessed a grandeur comparable to Europe and would endure. Between 1871 and 1873, Bierstadt lived in California, maintaining a studio in San Francisco, and traveled extensively through the region, producing works that capture its vastness and unique beauty.

A closely related twilight scene, "Owens Valley, California" (c. 1872) is in the collection of the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College. Twilight on the San Joaquin will be included in the forthcoming Albert Bierstadt catalogue raisonné database directed by Melissa Webster Speidel, President of the Bierstadt Foundation.

ARTIST BIO:

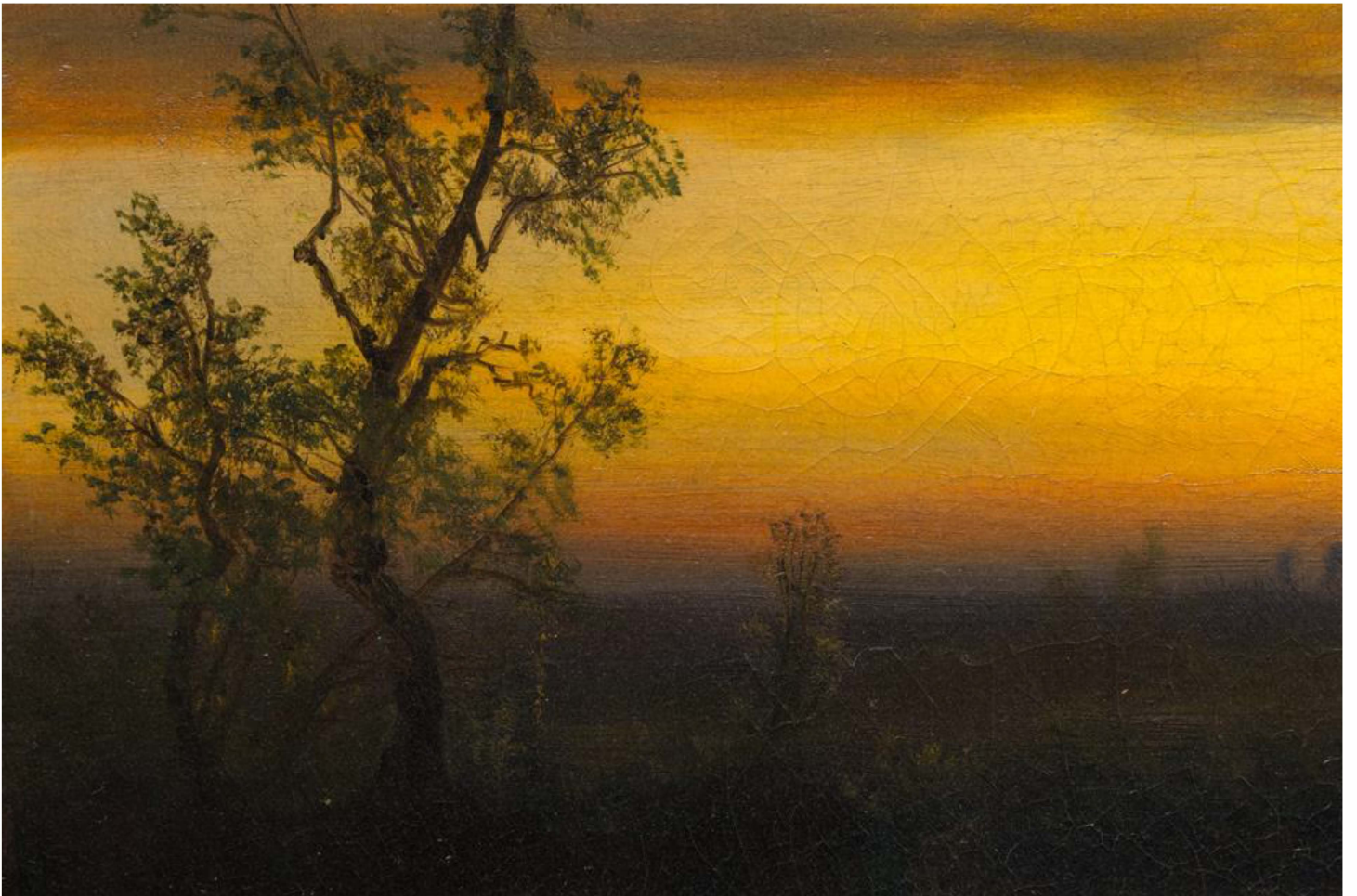
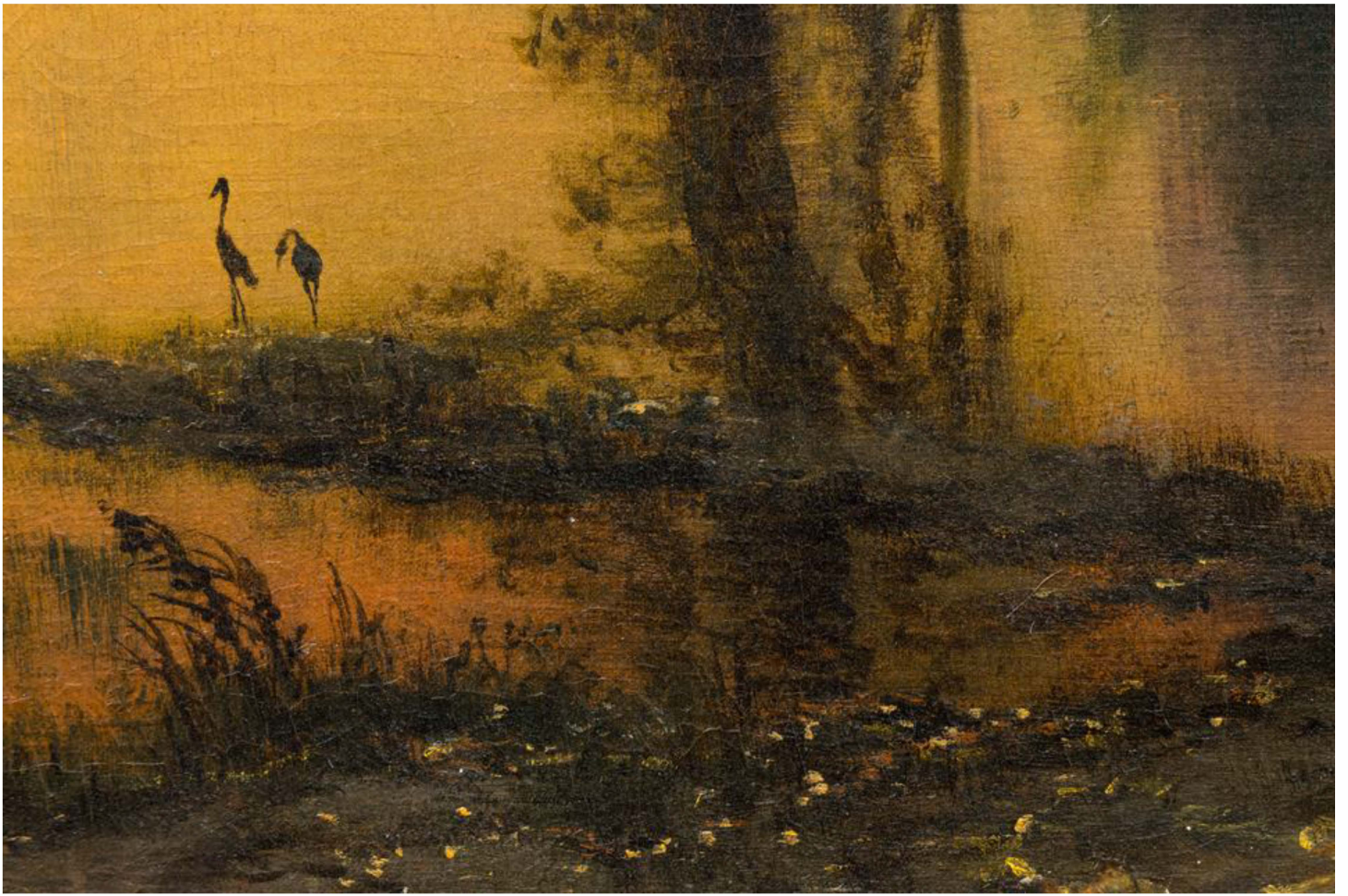
Albert Bierstadt was a German born American painter, who returned to his native Dusseldorf in his youth to learn painting. He is best known for his sweeping landscapes of the American West; however, he first began painting in upstate New York with the Hudson River School. The Hudson River School was known for painting romantic landscapes with almost glowing light, called luminism. His work in New York influenced Bierstadt's later works, which highlight the dramatic way sunlight illuminates the landscape.

Bierstadt made his first trip westward with US government land surveyor, Colonel Frederick Lander. During this trip, Bierstadt sketched and photographed the landscape, people, and creatures he encountered. These sketches formed the basis for his large-scale landscape paintings. Though Bierstadt was not the first to artistically render the western landscape, he became one of the foremost artists of the Rocky Mountain School, and was invited on a number of westward expeditions throughout his career.

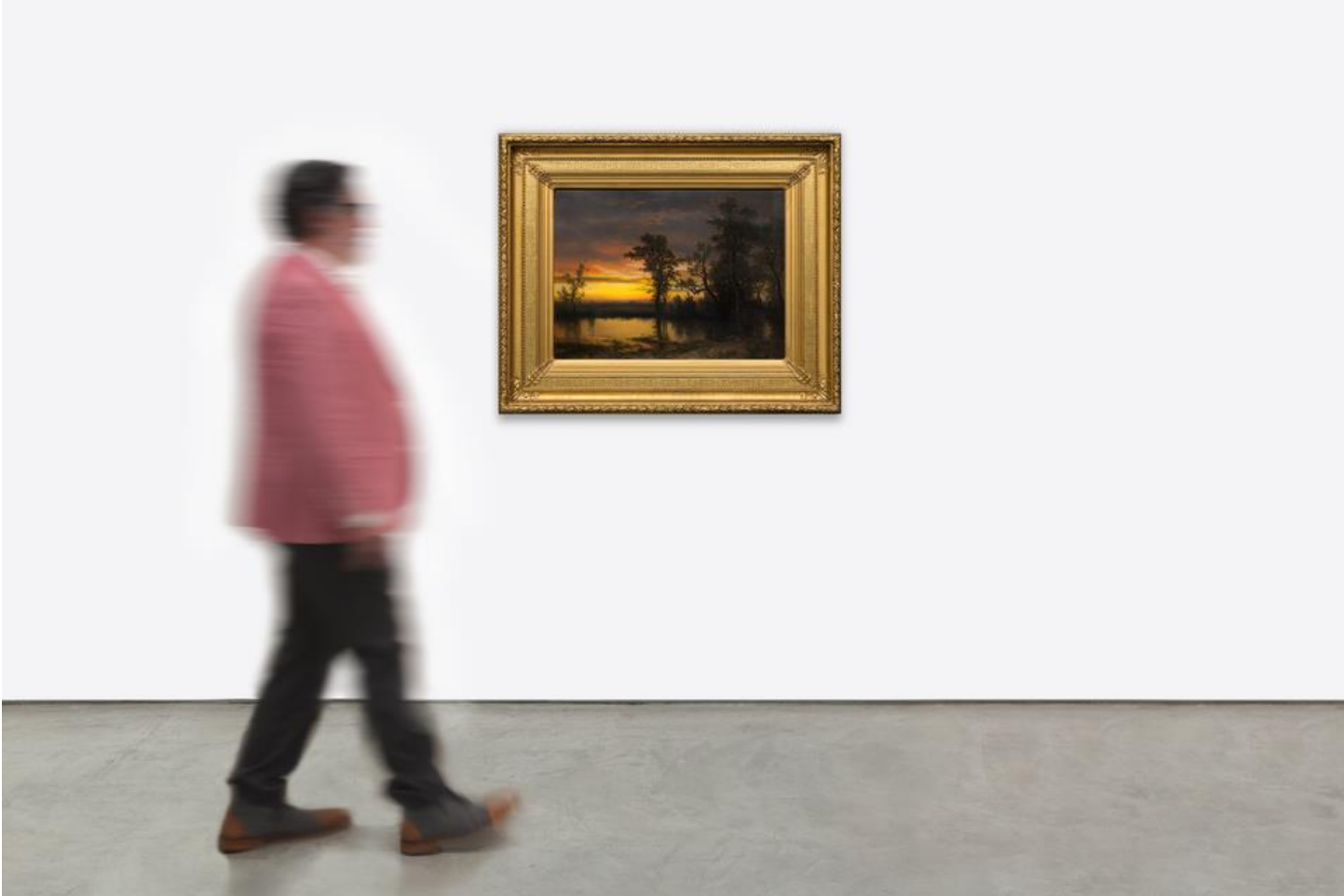
Favor of Bierstadt's artwork declined later in his career, however art critic John Howat has remarked, "the temptation (to criticize him) should be steadfastly resisted. Bierstadt's theatrical art, fervent sociability, international outlook, and unquenchable personal energy reflected the epic expansion in every facet of western civilization during the second half of the nineteenth century" (John K. Howat, *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, 284. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987). Since the mid-20th century, interest in Bierstadt's artwork has only increased.

The information and material herein represents Gallery's best efforts and understanding of the current history and scholarship with respect to the provenance of the Work(s) of Art described and is not part of any warranty.











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Twilight on the San Joaquin, ca. 1873

Oil on canvas

22 x 29.5 in.

Signed lower right: *ABierstadt*

Provenance

Private collection, Massachusetts, prior to 1970;
Private collection, Middleboro, Massachusetts, 1970;
to Private collection, Great Neck, New York, 2024



December 8, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

Twilight on the San Joaquin is included in the Albert Bierstadt database being compiled in preparation for a catalogue raisonné of the artist's paintings. The composition, palette, subject matter and brushwork are consistent with this artist's oil paintings.

Twilight on the San Joaquin depicts a riverbank and river in the foreground, trees in the midground and a horizon dotted by trees in the distance. Given the composition's similarity to *Mount Diablo from the San Joaquin River, California* (fig. 1), the painting is probably a scene of the same area, that is east of San Francisco and west of Stockton in the San Joaquin River Valley. The artist passed through this area in May and August 1872 and again in April 1873 when traveling to and from the southern Sierra Mountains on sketching trips. In both compositions the artist depicted the flat terrain of the valley, the tule grass along the river bank, the scraggly oak trees in the mid distance and a pair of egret-like birds near the foreground, all hallmarks of California's Central Valley and home of the San Joaquin River.



Figure 1 *Mount Diablo from the San Joaquin River, California*, oil on paper, 13.5 x 19.75, photo courtesy M. Knoedler Galleries

Throughout his career, Bierstadt was interested in capturing the light at varying times of day and its effects on the sky, clouds and landscape. In *Twilight on the San Joaquin*, the sun has slipped below the horizon and the last of its light illuminates the scene. The clouds alternate coral, yellow and grey while the sky is that seemingly undefinable blue before it turns black.

That the painting is larger than his oil sketches of 14 x 19 inches and is on canvas rather than paper as so many of his paintings are, indicates that it was intended for exhibition. Bierstadt lived in San Francisco from 1871-1873, using the city as a base for his explorations of the state's many scenic wonders. The San Francisco Art Association was founded in 1871 to promote the art of California artists. That same year, they elected Bierstadt as their first honorary member. They held two exhibitions a year, and in 1873, Bierstadt contributed a San Joaquin River scene to their April show. It is an unlocated painting that measured 48 x 72 inches. The following year, he exhibited another San Joaquin landscape titled *Evening on the San Joaquin*. Although I have been unable to find images of it to identify it, the title certainly describes the subject painting and it is possible they are the same artwork. Nevertheless, the fact that Bierstadt painted two exhibition-quality pictures of this region in as many years to show with the San Francisco Art Association underscores the notion that the artist was drawn to its compelling beauty that he so adeptly captures on canvas in the subject painting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'M. Webster Speidel'.

Melissa Webster Speidel, Director

Albert Bierstadt Catalogue Raisonné Project