ABOUT THE ARTIST
American artist Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900) was known for his sublime, large-scale landscape paintings that feature expansive and detailed depictions of nature as well as subtle allegorical allusions. Church, who was associated with the Hudson River school, traveled extensively in the United States and internationally to such places as South America, the Arctic, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East. He typically created his paintings based on sketches made during these travels, with the final work being composed in his studio back home.

ABOUT SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA
As national conflicts and industrialization were rising in the United States, South America—which was perceived as being untainted by civilization—was often referred to as the New Eden and looked upon with great interest, both politically with the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and economically during the expansive era of Manifest Destiny. This late work is a composite based on memory from Church's visits to South America in 1853 and 1857. The artist used traditional landscape compositional techniques and framing devices of the picturesque style. The foreground consists of dense vegetation, the middle ground comprises a lake and waterfall, and the background features mountains. The entire composition is framed by trees and unified by golden light.

Paintings like Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta can be seen as pushing back against modernity—the transformation of the natural world by cities, industry, factories, and new technology—and reminding viewers of nature's beauty and bounty. Both the Industrial Revolution and new radical theories such as evolution, presented in Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species, were beginning to take hold. Often landscape paintings, whose popularity was waning by the late 19th century, harkened back to earlier times that were associated with Christian beliefs of divine order and unity.

Additionally, these paintings were of particular interest to the 19th-century scientific community who viewed landscapes as a way of describing and classifying exotic flora and fauna and geographical terrains.

Discussion Questions
How are humans depicted in this painting? How is nature depicted? What conclusions can be drawn from a comparison between the two? What are some adjectives that could be used to describe how nature is portrayed? What could the depiction of palm trees signify? What significance might the golden light have? What cycles in nature are depicted in this painting?

This guide was prepared by Allison Taylor, head of education and community engagement, and Amy Miller, assistant educator. To schedule a visit to the Kemper Art Museum, contact Amy Miller at amy.miller@wustl.edu or 314.935.5624.
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Create landscape collages out of construction paper.
Experiment with foreground, middle ground, background, framing devices, and scale.

Research the history of America’s national parks and conservation areas.
The US National Park Service celebrates 100 years in 2016. What role did 19th-century landscape paintings play in efforts to preserve wilderness areas in the United States?

Research South American vegetation and identify flora and fauna in the painting.
How could these paintings be used by the scientific community?

Research the Hudson River school.
What are its main tenets? In addition to Church, who were the major artists associated with the group?

VOCABULARY

allegory – a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically moral or political
Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* – published in 1859, introduces the theory that species evolve through the process of natural selection
Hudson River school – a group of American painters of the mid-19th century whose treatment of landscape, including scenes of the Hudson River region, was influenced by romanticism
Industrial Revolution – period of major industrialization brought about by the introduction of machinery in the late 1700s and early 1800s, characterized by the growth of factories and the mass production of manufactured goods
Manifest Destiny – the 19th-century doctrine or belief that the expansion of the US throughout the American continent was both justified and inevitable
Monroe Doctrine of 1823 – principle that any intervention by external powers in the politics of the Americas is a potentially hostile act against the US
sublime – of such excellence, grandeur, or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe; specific to landscape paintings, it can refer to the thrill and danger of untamed nature

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*
Matthew Bailey, “Frederic Edwin Church: *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*,” in *Spotlights: Collected by the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum*, by Sabine Eckmann et al. (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2016), 85–89.
www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/node/11268

Frederic Edwin Church
www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chur/hd_chur.htm

Hudson River School
www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm

Industrial Revolution in the United States