



View on the Hudson, 1865
John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816-72)

This 19th-century landscape artist knew all the traditional tricks to make it seem as though you could travel deep into his painting.



Oil on canvas; 28 x 45 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art; Gift of Mrs. Paul H. Miller, BMA 1942.4

During warm summer months, John Frederick Kensett left his New York City studio to enjoy sketching in the Hudson River Valley upstate. His traditional 19th-century landscape shows a hilly area around West Point where the Hudson River is very placid. The Catskill Mountains rise in the distance. Unlike other landscape artists who painted rugged scenes with craggy mountains and rushing waterfalls, Kensett presented nature as calm and serene. With nearly invisible brushstrokes, he conveyed the dramatic effects of light.

How did Kensett make some sailboats look close and other sailboats look far away?

- The closer sailboats are bigger than the distant boats.
- The closer sailboats are farther “down” in the picture.
- The details of the closer boats are clearer.

How do the colors and details change from foreground to background?

- The deep green foliage on Kensett’s foreground hill fades to gray on his distant mountains.
- The haze in the atmosphere between the viewer’s eye and the distant trees causes each tree to lose its distinct color and form.

How many separate mountains can you see in the distance? How can you tell them apart?

- The overlapping of distant mountains makes one mountain appear to be in front of another.
- The gray tone shifts ever so slightly from one mountain to the next.
- Kensett has been called a “master of close colors” because he could keep the mountains visually “together” while at the same time moving them miles into the distance.

What size brush do you think the artist used on the foreground foliage, mountain, sky, or river?

- Kensett used the smallest of brushes to build up his solid rocks, leafy trees, glassy water, and luminous sky.