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Albert Bierstadt, *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie*

Dominic Carter: Take a few steps back and consider the enveloping panorama of this landscape. Just as we now go to the movies, Americans used to line up and pay to see dramatic landscape paintings like this one by Albert Bierstadt. There would be theatrical curtains, dramatic lighting—maybe even music—for these great picture exhibitions, which usually displayed only a single work.

The drama here is in the spectacular mountains and looming clouds, but a human story is also taking place down below. You'll notice some Native Americans in the central foreground hunting in the middle distance. If you look closely to the lower right, above the pond, you can just make out a bear in the shadow of the forest. The scale of the panorama is enormous, taking in everything from a worm's-eye view of the plants in the foreground to the snow-covered peaks above the clouds.

Albert Bierstadt completed this painting just after the Civil War, when the doctrine of Manifest Destiny had a firm grip on the country's imagination.

The idea was that Americans were destined to populate the continent from shore to shore and even beyond. Native Americans were usually regarded as just another part of nature, to be subdued and civilized. You have to wonder if this gigantic painting encouraged that view.

This painting has its own dramatic history. *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains* mysteriously disappeared in the late nineteenth century. Curator Linda Ferber says there were reports that the painting had burned, and it was given up for lost.

Linda Ferber: Until the mid-1970s, when believe it or not, it turned up in London. This is the kind of painting that you just don't find anymore. This to my mind is Bierstadt's masterwork, so part of my excitement is the fact that this painting came to Brooklyn.