

Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait

Known as one of America's earliest sporting artists, Arthur Fitzwilliam (A.F.) Tait was born near Liverpool, England and trained as a lithographer for Agnews, an art dealer in Manchester. While in their employ, he was exposed to the works of Edwin Landseer and John Frederick Herring, and taught himself to paint by copying works at the Royal Institute. Although self-taught, Tait was also a teacher of drawing and lithography in Liverpool before he came to the United States.

Tait became interested in frontier life when he assisted George Catlin with his traveling Indian Gallery in France and England in the 1840s. In 1850, Tait traveled to the United States, where he pursued his interest in wildlife and hunting. He worked from a studio in New York City, but spent a great deal of time in the forests of the Adirondack region, where he acquired excellent first-hand knowledge of hunting and fishing.

His realistic hunting scenes, with their strong narrative qualities, were made into prints and distributed by Currier and Ives. In 1858, Tait became an Academician at the National Academy of Design in New York City. By the late 1860s, he was renowned for painting fowl, game and domestic animals placed in natural settings. People loved the warm camaraderie of Tait's hunting and fishing, cabin and campfire depictions, and he did much to focus public attention on natural scenery and wildlife.

Tait strictly adhered to the "truth to nature" theory advocated by John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that came into being in 1848. In his later years, unable to make the sojourns to the Adirondacks, Tait focused his attention on more domestic scenes. Even the tame scenes of farm animals such as chickens, roosters, and sheep found a favorable audience. His exquisite attention to detail and dramatic use of light granted him a permanent place in the hearts of art connoisseurs and the general public alike.

His work influenced the next generation of artists, such as Michael Harnett. Tait is known to have collaborated on paintings with Jon Hart, as well as doing a series of paintings of Indians and western life with Louis Maurer. Neither had any knowledge of Indians. Their research was done in the Astor Library, on illustrations by Bodmer and prints by Catlin. Tait never did go farther West than Chicago.

Tait's work is represented in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum in Denver, Colorado, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, and the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, as well as the Brooklyn Museum in New York, the Yale University Art Gallery in Connecticut and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

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