



# Romantic Spirits: Nineteenth Century Paintings of the South from the Johnson Collection

*Estill Curtis Pennington*

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The late, eminent scholar Clement Eaton once observed that the nineteenth-century romantic spirit, which "subtly permeated the society of the Old South," was borne out most vividly in the region's "arts and social manners." Having had its genesis in European literature and fine art, romanticism found its way into the cultural output of the young Republic, both North and South. The same ideals that imbued the canvases of the Hudson River School also colored the art of painters who found their inspiration and audience below the Mason-Dixon Line.

In this study of thirty-two artists represented in the Johnson Collection, noted art historian Estill Curtis Pennington delineates the historical, social, and cultural forces that profoundly influenced their aesthetic sensibilities. Author of the award-winning books *Lessons in Likeness* and *Kentucky: The Master Painters*, Pennington examines the core concepts of the romantic movement as it unfolded in the American South: the heroic individual, an idealized chivalric code of personal honor, the sublime quality of nature, and the inevitability of change in an imperfect world. Many of the artists under consideration in this lavishly illustrated volume created works of art that have achieved iconic status in the annals of painting in the South, including William Dickinson Washington, William Thompson Russell Smith, Gustave Henry Mosler, Thomas Addison Richards, Joseph Rusling Meeker, Robert Walter Weir, and Thomas Sully.

Spanning the years 1810-1896, *Romantic Spirits* includes insightful illustrated biographies of the featured artists, as well as extensive bibliographic resources. This inaugural publication underscores the Johnson Collection's commitment to advance interest in the dynamic role that the art of the South plays in the larger context of American art and to contribute to the canon of art historical literature.

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