



Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America

Sarah Burns

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Voices from the dark, or "gothic," side of American life are well known through the work of writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville. But who were the Poes of American art? Until now, art historians have for the most part seen the gothic as the province of misfits and oddballs who rejected the bright landscapes and cheerful scenes of everyday life depicted by Hudson River School and other mainstream painters. In *Painting the Dark Side*, Sarah Burns counters this view, arguing that far from being marginal, the gothic was a pervasive and potent visual language used by recognized masters and eccentric outsiders alike to express the darker facets of history and the psyche. A deep gothic strain in the visual arts becomes evident in these beautifully written, richly illustrated pages, illuminating the entire spectrum of American art.

Weaving a complex tapestry of biography, psychology, and history, Sarah Burns exposes dark dimensions in the work of both romantic artists such as Albert Pinkham Ryder and Thomas Cole and realists like Thomas Eakins. She argues persuasively that works by artists who were generally considered outsiders, such as John Quidor, David Gilmour Blythe, and William Rimmer, belong to the mainstream of American art. She explores the borderlands where popular visual culture mingled with the elite medium of oil and delves into such topics as slave revolt, drugs, grave-robbing, vivisection, drunkenness, female monstrosity, and family secrets. Cutting deep across the grain of standard nationalistic accounts of nineteenth-century art, *Painting the Dark Side* provides a thrilling, radically alternative vision of American art and visual culture.

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