

We galloped through the Louvre, the Pitti, the Uffizi, the Vatican--all the galleries--and through the pictured and frescoed churches of Venice, Naples, and the cathedrals of Spain; some of us said that certain of the great works of the old masters were glorious creations of genius. . . . and the others said they were disgraceful old daubs. We examined ancient and modern statuary with a critical eye in Florence, Rome, or any where we found it, and praised it if we saw fit, and if we didn't we said we preferred the wooden Indians in front of the cigar stores of America.

—Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 1869, pp. 517-18

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one signing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat,
the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
. . . .
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to no one else. . . .

—Walt Whitman, "I Hear America Singing," from *Leaves of Grass*, 1855

We frankly confess that we detest his subjects--his barren plank fences, his glaring, bold, blue skies, his big, dreary, vacant lots of meadows, his freckled, straighthaired Yankee urchins, his flatbreasted maidens, suggestive of a dish of rural doughnuts and pie, his calico sunbonnets, his flannel shirts, his cowhide boots. He has chosen the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization; he has resolutely treated them as if they *were* pictorial, as if they were every inch as good as Capri or Tangiers; and to reward his audacity, he has incontestably succeeded.

—Henry James, *Galaxy*, July 1875 (review of a Winslow Homer painting, *Milking Time*)

“America” was female, young, pretty, Protestant, and northern European. . . . Her features were “regular” and Caucasian. Her bloodline was pure and vigorous. That she might have “nerves” and that her will was at time inconveniently strong, was, after all, to be expected of any physical or psychical type that represented the nation’s own restlessness and independence of spirit. Whether too selfless or too selfish, whatever the Girl was, her various images had power over the public imagination. She was problematic, just as the country was.

—Martha Banting, in *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1987)

I saw a show of a new school which call themselves ‘Impressionists.’ I never in my life saw more horrible things. . . . They do not observe drawing nor form but give you an impression of what they call nature. It was worse than the Chamber of Horrors.

—J. Alden Weir, member of “The Ten”