



Thomas Birch

Title

A Winter Sleigh Ride

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

ca. 1840

Dimensions

17 x 26 in. (43.2 x 66 cm)

Accession number

77.9

Credit Line

Gift of Hampton C. Randolph, Sr., 1977

Web Description

Thomas Birch contributed to the development of the winter landscape as a serious subject for American painters. This painting is one of his many similar sleigh scenes depicting southeastern Pennsylvania. Scenes such as this would become popular nineteenth-century lithographic subjects that held a wide appeal for the American public. English by birth, Birch became the earliest marine painter specialist in America and was also recognized for landscapes. He was the son of William Russell Birch, an engraver and painter of enamel miniatures, who immigrated to the United States in 1794, settling in Philadelphia. Thomas Birch, with his father, opened William Birch and Son, offering design, engraving and publishing of topographic views of the city, which proved to be so popular that they also created city views of New York and Baltimore. Birch painted both large and miniature portraits in oil and watercolor but soon excelled in marine scenes. In the 1830s, he began painting landscapes and developed a reputation for snow scenes that recall Dutch seventeenth-century art, which he esteemed. He also designed coins for the U.S. Mint and became highly influential at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he served as keeper of the collection from 1812-1817.