

*John Vanderlyn's
Panoramic View of the Palace
and Gardens of Versailles*



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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and Gardens of Versailles*



John Vanderlyn. *Portrait of the Artist*, ca. 1800. Oil on canvas, 25 1/4 x 20 7/8 in. (64.1 x 53 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Ann S. Stephens, in memory of her mother, Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, 1918.

*John Vanderlyn's
Panoramic View of the Palace
and Gardens of Versailles*

Kevin J. Avery
Peter L. Fodera

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York

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John P. O'Neill, Editor in Chief
Barbara Burn, Executive Editor
Lewis I. Sharp, Project Coordinator, Curator and Administrator of
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Mary-Alice Rogers, Editor, The William Cullen Bryant Fellows
Publications, The American Wing
Laura Lovett, Designer
Matthew Pimm, Production

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COVER: John Vanderlyn. *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* (detail), 1818-19. Oil on canvas, 12 x 165 ft. (3.7 x 50.3 m.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Senate House Association, Kingston, N.Y., 1952.

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Kevin J. Avery
Peter L. Fodera
New York, 1988

Foreword

AFTER MANY YEARS and uncertainties, John Vanderlyn's *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* is, happily, now on permanent view in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The immense and extremely imposing early-nineteenth-century canvas, hung in two continuing sections together stretching some hundred and sixty-five feet in length and rising twelve feet in height, is installed in a large elliptical gallery on the ground floor of the new American Wing, where it forms a vital element in the Museum's chronological display of American decorative and fine art of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. As with so many large-scale works of art that require major architectural treatment for proper display, the panorama has suffered through a difficult peripatetic existence, having been carted about from city to city, from space to space, for purposes of exhibition and storage ever since its first installation in New York City in 1819. That the monumental canvas survives at all is remarkable; that it remains in such good condition is almost miraculous and certainly a tribute to the sturdy craftsmanship of the artist. This publication records the panorama's vicissitudes and hardships during Vanderlyn's lifetime.

The panorama was bequeathed by Vanderlyn's niece, Catherine Vanderlyn, to the Kingston Senate House Association in 1892, but the overwhelming and persistent problems of installing the canvas caused the association to transfer its ownership to the Metropolitan Museum in 1952. That gift was accompanied by funds, provided by the late Emily Crane Chadbourne, sufficient to underwrite the restoration of the panorama and its installation in the Museum. Here, an initial restoration, requiring two years to complete, was

undertaken by Laurence J. Majewski, conservator and professor of conservation at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. In 1956, Vanderlyn's panorama was installed and opened to the public, accompanied by a brief catalog prepared by the late Albert T. Gardner. With the closing of the exhibition, the canvas returned to storage by 1958 to await the design and completion of larger facilities for the Museum's collections of American art. General discussions of a new American Wing continued until the late 1960s, when specific planning for extensive new galleries surrounding the existing American Wing began. From its inception, the planning phase envisioned a facility for the panorama, but it was not until a substantial grant was received from Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman that the final restoration and permanent installation of this monument of American art could be realized. The enormous labor required was carried out in 1982-83 with great skill and discretion by Gustav Berger, Peter Fodera, and a devoted team of assistants. It seems fitting that the Vanderlyn *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, once the focus of New York City's first museum of art, is now an important element in the presentation of the history of art in America within the Metropolitan. Finally, it is most appropriate that this handbook dedicated to relating the history of the panorama should be made possible by the William Cullen Bryant Fellows, who have underwritten so many scholarly publications for the American Wing.

John K. Howat

The Lawrence A. Fleischman Chairman of the
Departments of American Art

John Vanderlyn's Panorama

VANDERLYN'S PANORAMA is a rare survivor of a form of public art and amusement that flourished throughout most of the nineteenth century.¹ The original concept, patented in 1787 by Robert Barker, an Irish artist living in Edinburgh, was of a large-scale circular landscape painting illuminated by hidden skylights and displayed within the darkened interior of a cylindrical building. The viewer stood on an elevated central platform, his eyes level with the horizon line of the picture. A dark screen blocked the sight of both the skylight and the top of the canvas, and wood or cloth paling concealed the bottom. The frameless painting, seen in darkness with no visual distractions, gave the spectator the illusion of being completely surrounded by an actual landscape.

Barker's invention won almost immediate popularity. By 1794 he had built in London's Leicester Square the world's first panorama building (Fig. 1), which was to thrive under his and his successors' direction for nearly seventy years. The panorama was introduced into America in 1795 by William Winstanley, an English portraitist and landscape painter who while in this country copied Barker's *View of London from the Albion Mills* from prints he had obtained. By the end of the century the panoramic art had become known in France and Germany as well, and, within twenty years, had proliferated into more theatrical forms. Of those, one of the most important was the diorama, invented by Louis-Jacques M. J. M. Daguerre, later pioneer in photography. The diorama, by playing carefully modulated illumination on and behind a canvas having opaque

and transparent sections, created changing effects of light and atmosphere on large-scale landscape or architectural images. A second and even more popular form was the peristrepthic, or moving, panorama, consisting of painted scenery that passed before the viewer, producing the impression that he was traveling in a boat or on a train. Essential to the appeal of the panorama in all its forms was the increasing taste for travel among the public, for whom it could function as guide, reminder, or substitute.

Combining as it did the several features attractive to the viewer—optical illusion, geographic information, and a low admission price—the panorama seemed to represent a tempting opportunity to an ambitious young artist seeking financial independence or even wealth. Its enormous size (at the height of its development, ranging from eighty feet in circumference to over four hundred)² and special display requirements, however, precluded lasting fame for an artist working only in that form. Because maintaining the public's interest necessitated frequent changes of subject, used scenes were sold to touring entrepreneurs or, sometimes, painted over. Of the more than a hundred subjects executed by the once renowned Barker and his successors, not one is known to survive. The most apparent vestiges of the panorama are the cinema, in whose evolution it played a significant role, and the word itself (Greek for "all-sight"), which few today would associate with the art form to which it was once applied.³ The survival of John Vanderlyn's panoramic view of Versailles, the second oldest of some twenty

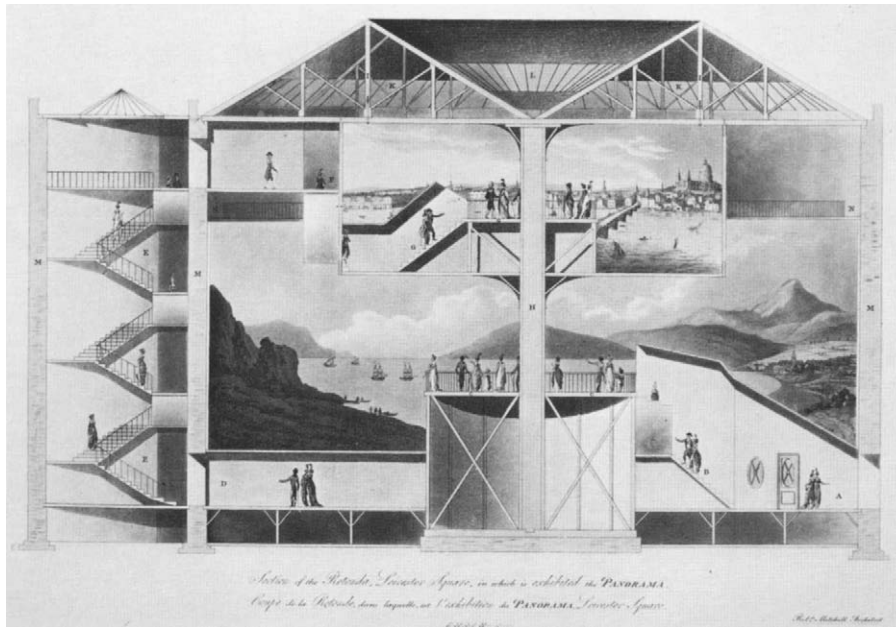


FIGURE 1. Robert Mitchell. "A Section of the Rotunda in Leicester Square," from *Plans and Views in Perspective of Buildings Erected in England and Scotland*, 1801. Colored aquatint with etching and engraving, 14 1/2 x 21 3/8 in. (36.8 x 54.3 cm.). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, New Haven, Connecticut.

extant panoramas in various parts of the world, is therefore extremely fortuitous.

In the early days of the American Republic, John Vanderlyn was a struggling artist. His career began promisingly.⁴ Born in Kingston, New York, in 1775, he became a protégé of Aaron Burr, then a United States senator from New York, under whose aegis he studied painting with Gilbert Stuart in Philadelphia and, in 1796, traveled to Paris. There he worked at the French Academy under Francois-André Vincent, from whom he learned the principles of historical painting—that is, the depiction of persons and events of the heroic past. In 1799, before Vanderlyn had completed his training, political reverses forced Burr to withdraw his patronage, though not his friendship. The next sixteen years of the artist's life, spent mostly in Europe striving to build a reputation, were marked by many ebbs and flows of fortune. For day-to-day subsistence he painted competent portraits, but it was a

practice he hated and he tested his sitters' patience by his slowness.

In 1800, he returned to America to visit his family and try to build a career. During the two year period of his stay, he sought portrait commissions and made sketches for a set of engravings of Niagara Falls, but he met with little success. When he was offered the opportunity to acquire antique casts for the drawing school of the fledgling American Academy of the Fine Arts, he went back to Europe. In Paris, Vanderlyn painted his first historical picture, *The Death of Jane McCrea* (1804; Wadsworth Atheneum). It was to have served as the model for an engraving to illustrate *The Columbiad*, an epic poem by Joel Barlow then being revised for publication, but when Vanderlyn complained about the terms of his contract, he lost the commission. In 1805, William Maclure, an American geologist and commissioner to France, made it possible for Vanderlyn to travel in Italy, where he spent two

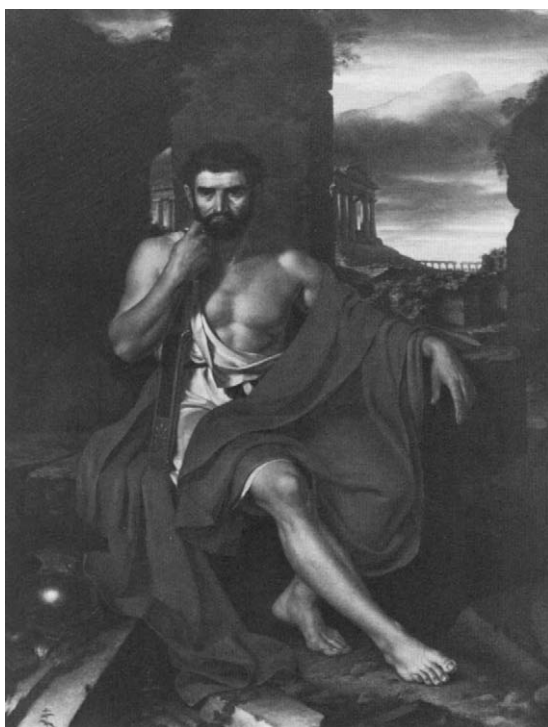


FIGURE 2 (left). John Vanderlyn. *Caius Marius amid the Ruins of Carthage*, 1807. Oil on canvas, 87 x 68 1/2 in. (221 x 174 cm.). By permission of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Gift of M. H. de Young.

FIGURE 3 (above). John Vanderlyn. *Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos*, 1809–14. Oil on canvas, 68 x 87 in. (172.7 x 221 cm.). The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Joseph and Sarah Harrison Collection.

years, mostly in Rome in the company of the American artist Washington Allston, who became a good friend. In Rome, he painted *Caius Marius amid the Ruins of Carthage* (Fig. 2), which won him a gold medal at the Paris Salon of 1808. In 1809, he began to execute what was to be his finest picture, *Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos* (Fig. 3), one of the most beautiful nudes painted by an American artist in the nineteenth century. He took five years to complete it. Neither painting gained him much financial reward.

Vanderlyn's enduring ambition was to go home to America to establish the high art of historical painting on his native soil. Recognizing in the magic realism of the panorama form a means of engaging public interest in the visual arts, he conceived the idea of executing and exhibiting panoramas himself. He was uniquely qualified. As a student in New York City in 1795, he may well have seen the first ever exhibited in

America, Winstanley's pirated version of Barker's *View of London*.⁵ He had been in Paris in 1799, the year the panorama was introduced into that city by Robert Fulton, a former student of Benjamin West's who had obtained the right to exhibit panoramas in France. In September of that year, Fulton presented a view of Paris painted by the landscapist Pierre Prevost, which he displayed in a cylindrical building he had erected in the Boulevard Montmartre (Fig. 4). A few months later, a panorama of Toulon under siege by the British fleet was shown in an identical building next door. With his panorama venture successfully established, Fulton sold his rights in December 1799 to James W. Thayer, another American (though he retained rights to a percentage of the profits), and turned his attention to improving the submarine and inventing the steamboat.⁶

Vanderlyn and Fulton were friends, having met in the spring of 1798, when Fulton arrived in

Paris. Vanderlyn, who had drawn Fulton's portrait (Fig. 5), was probably familiar with the logistics of Fulton's enterprise and was no doubt impressed not only with his friend's rapid success but also with his ability to cast off his responsibilities to the project while continuing to share in the profits.⁷ To be so liberated would in Vanderlyn's case end the tedium of portraiture and allow him to devote virtually all his time to historical painting. Moreover, the actual panorama form enchanted him.

The early panoramas enjoyed a considerable vogue among connoisseurs of art. The august Sir Joshua Reynolds was quoted as saying that they represented nature "in a manner far superior to the limited scale of pictures in general."⁸ Benjamin West, the expatriate American living in London, thought them nothing less than "the greatest improvement to the art of painting that has yet been discovered."⁹ In Paris, a commission appointed in 1800 by the Institut de France to appraise the merits of the form published a special report lauding the panorama as a "wonder-work [that demonstrates] the extraordinary progress man has made in this fine art."¹⁰ The commission, which included Vincent, Vanderlyn's former teacher, commended Fulton and Thayer for their roles in establishing the panorama in France and urged the public to patronize their enterprises. Promising young painters seriously considered panorama projects or actually engaged in them: in Britain, Thomas Girtin and Robert Ker Porter; in Germany, Caspar David Friedrich; in America, John Trumbull and, later, Thomas Cole.¹¹

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a curious interplay existed between panoramas and historical painting. In London, West and John Singleton Copley had expanded the scope and scale of historical art with such pictures as *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770; National Gallery of Canada) and *The Siege of Gibraltar* (1791; Guildhall Art Gallery). These depicted for the first time heroic events of the recent past instead of those of antiquity, thus converting the

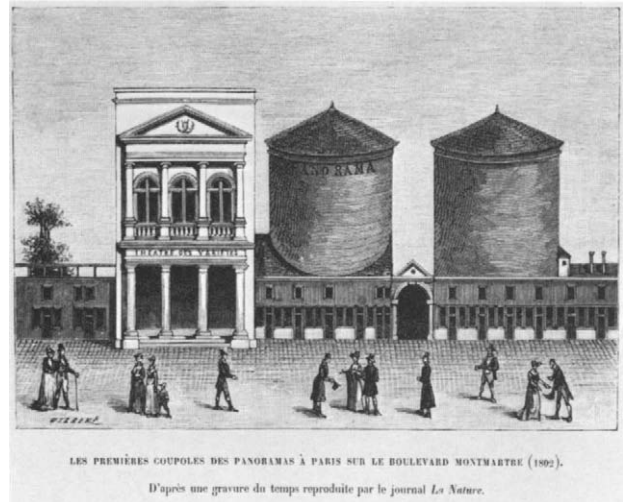


FIGURE 4. "The first panoramic rotundas in Paris on the Boulevard Montmartre," 1802. Engraving published in Germain Bapst, *Essai sur l'Histoire des Panoramas et des Dioramas* (1891). The New York Public Library.

genre into an early form of news reportage easily digested by the British public. The panorama was soon competing with historical painting for public favor, for through its ability to convey an illusion of the total environment it helped to impart a sense of immediacy to the subject portrayed. Representing a kind of hybrid of the historical art genre and the panoramic form were Ker Porter's huge semicircular canvases of *The Siege of Acre* and *The Battle of Lodi*.

Napoleon, visiting Thayer's theater in 1810 at the height of his power, recognized the panorama's unique value for the glorification of his achievements and purportedly ordered the construction along the Champs Elysées of seven rotundas, each to house a circular canvas illustrating one of his famous campaigns. Though the emperor's subsequent defeats terminated the project, the grandeur of its concept made a deep impression on Vanderlyn, who learned of it from Thayer.¹²

Vanderlyn first spoke of attempting a panorama shortly after he had completed the *Marius*

in Rome. As he confided to his father in a letter of 1809: "I thought I might enable me to procure either a Panorama or a sketch for painting one in America, & I am much attached to this project & hope I may carry it into execution."¹³ But, always slow and deliberate in his ways, he had still not embarked on his scheme two years later, possibly for want of the "Co-Partner" he sought in France to aid him in "establishing a Panorama in either N.Y. or Philad."¹⁴

It was not until September 1814, after finishing his *Ariadne* and resolving to return home after an absence of nearly ten years, that he began actual sketches for a panorama. Whether he had found a partner is not known, but he had at least fixed upon a subject, one to him most appealing: the palace and the gardens of Versailles, resplendent estate of French kings. His choice reflected his affection for the site, about which he had written enthusiastically as early as 1797:

... Here are a thousand statues at least of marble scattered about in groves, gardens, avenues, & labyrinths which are formed of boskets or thickets & the beauty & grandeur I cannot describe [to] you, the imagination cannot conceive any thing so Inchanting, surrounded by so many gods and goddesses though of marble that one expects nothing else but to see Nymphs sporting every minute.¹⁵

In November of 1814, when he had completed his sketches, he wrote more soberly to his friend Allston:

The celebrity of this garden or park which is allowed to be perhaps the first of the regular kind in the world, makes me think that it might excite as much curiosity as any place whatever. I have been rather confirmed in this opinion by the strangers that I have seen here whilst engaged with my sketches—particularly the English.



FIGURE 5. John Vanderlyn. *Portrait of Robert Fulton*, 1798. Graphite on paper, 10 1/2 x 8 in. (26.7 x 20.3 cm.). Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York.

Further, he said, "It will be much sooner painted than a view of a town or city, and will be less tedious."¹⁶

Political factors must have also affected his choice. After the ill-fated Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had fled Versailles in 1789, the palace and park, though not completely desecrated, had been sadly neglected. The government had removed the treasures from the palace and converted the building first into an art and natural history museum and then into a sanitarium for invalid soldiers. The garden was either plowed under and planted with crops or left to the weeds. Now, however, there was evidence that Versailles was undergoing a renaissance of its pre-revolutionary glory. When Napoleon crowned himself emperor, he restored some of the grounds and, during the summer, stayed in the Grand Trianon situated southwest of the palace.

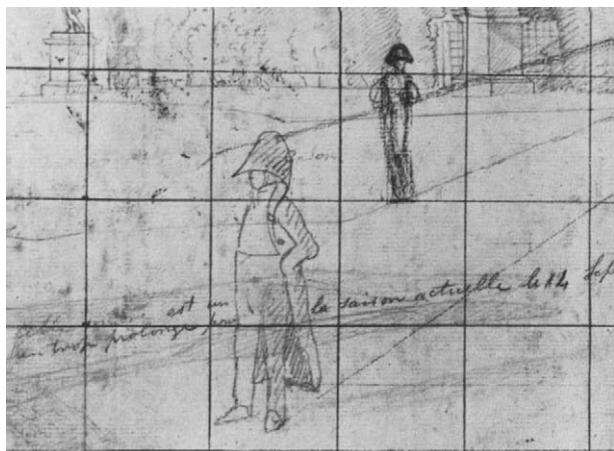


FIGURE 6. John Vanderlyn. *Detail of Garden of Versailles, View to the North*, 1814–15. Pencil, pen and ink on paper, mounted on linen, whole drawing 13 x 38 1/2 in. (33 x 97.8 cm.). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, New York.

After Napoleon's defeat, when the Bourbon comte de Provence was installed in 1814 as King Louis XVIII, one of that monarch's few directives was to have the palace refurbished, as he planned to reestablish it as the summer residence of his court.¹⁷ To Vanderlyn, the prospect of Versailles restored to its former beauty and eminence made it a subject of renewed visual and topical interest.

In *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, the only panorama Vanderlyn ever painted, he recorded the scene around him with extraordinary accuracy and fidelity to detail. In his November 1814 letter to Allston, he mentioned that he had just come from Versailles, where he had made drawings by the "Camera obscure."¹⁸ He was referring to the centuries-old camera obscura, a box pierced by a lens that transmitted an image of the subject onto the interior rear wall. When the camera was used for landscape sketching, a mirror fixed inside the box could refract the image onto a paper placed on the box's floor, which the artist could trace by

inserting his arms through openings in the sides.¹⁹ Vanderlyn would have used the camera obscura to record the view from one direction, then, turning by degrees, would have continued to sketch what he saw until he had completed a series of views, which, when placed next to one another, represented all the scenery that surrounded a central point. For his standpoint Vanderlyn chose the western perimeter of the Parterre d'Eau, at the head of the grand staircase leading down to the Basin of Latona. From there, in his own words, he could see "the whole of the west facade of the Palace, and the most general & comprehensive view of the garden."²⁰

Many original drawings for the *Versailles* survive, including the complete set of twelve done with the camera obscura (see gatefold), which can be attached to each other in sequence. Comparable in character to the drawings of such painters as Canaletto and Bellotto,²¹ they are chiefly outlines of objects in pencil, traced over in brown ink, and modeled only enough to indicate perfunctorily the direction of the light. To supplement those bare visual notes, Vanderlyn inscribed a number of reminders: he set down the time frame within which a drawing was taken ("between three and four o'clock"); alongside a shadow cast by one of the giant urns in the garden, he wrote, in French: "This shadow is a little too elongated for the actual season the 14th September" (Fig. 6). At least some of the figures, appearing over the topographical features in the drawings, were evidently added later, perhaps after he returned to America. In two of the drawings showing the view to the north, Vanderlyn plotted the relative height of near and distant figures with ruled orthogonal lines. For later reference, he marked the places at which the sheets should be joined, and he numbered the junctures in sequence. Probably at the time he began his actual painting, in 1818, he squared the joined drawings in red ink in order to facilitate transfer of their outlines in scale onto the canvas.

Vanderlyn was as conscientious about the accuracy of color as he was about proportion and

perspective. A single small oil sketch (Fig. 7), one of several he claimed to have made on the spot, shows how faithfully he laid down the conditions of light and atmosphere in the late summer afternoon on which he was working. Though the sketch has been hastily executed and is in poor condition, both in it and in the corresponding section of the panorama the same long cool shadows of the forest stretch across the lawn of the Grande Allée, the light has the same golden tone, and even such minute features as two boats in the far-off Grand Canal have been retained.

Both the camera obscura drawings and the oil sketch indicate that the grounds were almost deserted when Vanderlyn was working—not surprising, given the political climate and the transitional state of the palace at the time. There are certain discrepancies: the jets of water in the fountains, which appear in the panorama, are not present in the drawings, and the sculptural trophies and urns that once decorated the uppermost balustrade of the palace are absent (they were replaced early in the twentieth century). There is little evidence of any restoration in progress, though armed grenadiers are prominent in several places near the palace, part of which is blocked by a low wooden barricade complete with sentry box. Surviving French government documents reveal that the artist was initially hampered in his work by palace security. It required the intervention of Baron Vivant Denon, a former director of the Louvre, before Vanderlyn could obtain access to the grounds to complete his drawings.²²

Of the other extant drawings—eighteen of them—most record the statuary that infatuated the artist on his first visit to Versailles. Four drawings of the bronze groups of frolicking putti that surround the two basins of the Parterre d'Eau are executed on tinted paper either in pencil or in ink. One of the pencil drawings vividly records the shiny patina of the bronze by means of white chalk highlights (Fig. 8). The ink drawings (see Fig. 9) capture the animated spirit of the figures more spontaneously than do the penciled ones.

One large sheet carefully documents in pencil each one of a rank of allegorical statues that surmounts the second-story porches of the palace.²³ Most of the other drawings are pencil sketches of the marble figures that line the garden pathways (see Fig. 10).

A final sketch for the panorama is uncharacteristic in that it represents a group of men dressed in formal military attire.²⁴ Depicted to the north of the stairway that descends to the Basin of Latona in the panorama itself, the group includes members who can be identified as Czar Alexander I, King Frederick William III of Prussia, and, possibly, the czar's two brothers and the king's two sons, all of whom visited Versailles on 11 May 1814.²⁵ They are not endowed with facial features in the sketch, and their fuzzy, tentative contours suggest that Vanderlyn was not drawing from life but merely working out details of pose and composition. The decision to include those members of the Holy Alliance may well have been made sometime later, perhaps when the artist was working on his panorama.

Vanderlyn left France for America in the autumn of 1815, but possibly sketched again at

FIGURE 7. John Vanderlyn. *Gardens of Versailles, View to the West*, 1814–15. Oil on paper, mounted on cardboard, 11 5/8 x 16 1/4 in. (29.5 x 41.3 cm.). Collection of Fred J. Johnston, Kingston, New York.

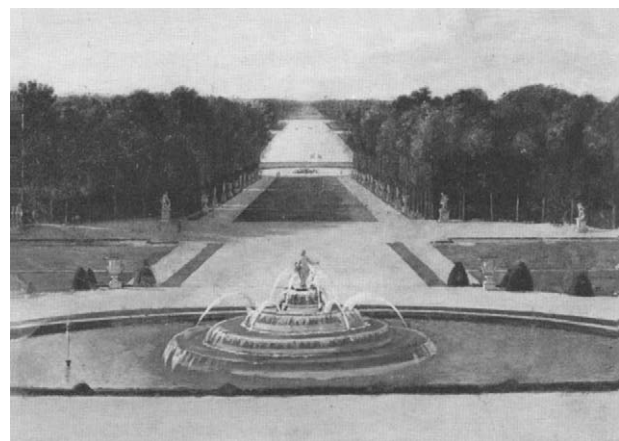




FIGURE 8. John Vanderlyn. *Study for Versailles Panorama: Right Basin, No. 2*, 1814–15. Charcoal heightened with white on dark gray paper, 5 3/8 x 8 3/8 in. (13.7 x 21.3 cm.). Collection of Fred J. Johnston, Kingston, New York.



FIGURE 9. John Vanderlyn. *Study for Versailles Panorama: Left Basin, No. 8*, 1814–15. Ink and wash on green paper, 4 1/4 x 6 1/8 in. (10.8 x 15.6 cm.). Collection of Fred J. Johnston, Kingston, New York.



FIGURE 10. John Vanderlyn. *Study for Versailles Panorama: Lyric Poetry*, 1814–15. Pencil on paper, 9 7/16 x 4 in. (24 x 10.2 cm.). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, New York.

Versailles just prior to his departure.²⁶ The actual painting of the panorama was to be delayed for more than two years while he sought various ways to finance the “Picture Gallery and Panorama” he began to promote to prospective patrons as soon as he arrived in New York.²⁷ Along with Louis-Antoine Collas, a French colleague whom he had persuaded to accompany him to America, he formed an Academy of Drawing and Painting during that two-year period. As always, he continued to paint portraits for his living. The school foundered after several months, but by that time Vanderlyn had mounted an exhibition of his pictures, including the *Ariadne*, in a room he rented at the American Academy of the Fine Arts. Again he was disappointed. By October

1816 several Academicians had forced him to leave. They claimed that the *Ariadne* offended public decency and that the rooms were needed for the Academy’s annual exhibition.²⁸ Vanderlyn, however, had reason to suspect that Trumbull, who, having established his reputation as a painter on both sides of the Atlantic, had returned to America in 1815 and was competing with him for painting commissions, was responsible for his eviction.²⁹ Matters worsened when Trumbull was elected president of the Academy the following January, then chosen over Vanderlyn to paint a series of historical paintings in Washington for the rotunda of the Capitol. Determined to stake out his personal domain in New York, Vanderlyn decided to build a rotunda of his own.

INITIALLY, Vanderlyn proposed to lease a sixty-square-foot area then occupied by the old Alms House in City Hall Park on which to build his rotunda. Three weeks later, the city's Committee on Arts and Sciences refused his request, saying that the use of public grounds around City Hall for such an enterprise would be "improper and inexpedient."³⁰ Subsequently, in 1817, after applying to the Common Council of the City of New York, he was granted a nine-year lease on a parcel of land at the token rate of one peppercorn per annum. He took that liberal contract as a sign of encouragement, and he was probably right, for relations between government and independent enterprise were unusually favorable at the time. The site, some distance from the center of town, was at the northeast corner of Park Square, at the intersection of Chambers and Cross streets, just behind City Hall. The council also approved his proposal to erect a circular building, designed for the exhibition of panoramas, which they felt would be "a highly ornamental edifice for that part of the city, and [would] encourage the Arts and Sciences, chasten the public taste and do honor to the Institutions of our City."³¹ The contract stipulated that the lot and the building (Figs. 11, 12) would revert back to the city at the expiration of the lease, which Mayor Jacob Radcliffe assured Vanderlyn would be renewed by the council if the institution "answered public expectation."³²

The building—a neoclassical structure based on the Pantheon and called simply "the Rotunda"—is thought to be the first public art museum in New York. Its purpose, one to which Vanderlyn remained deeply committed, was expressed in the inscription over its portal: "Dedicated to the Fine Arts." Though Vanderlyn himself was undoubtedly instrumental in the design of the building and perhaps responsible for the concept, the actual architect of the Rotunda remains unidentified.³³ Maximilian Godefroy, a leading architect of the period, was the recipient of a letter from Vanderlyn in which the artist discussed two allegorical figures possibly in-

tended to grace arched niches on either side of the main entrance, but whether that was an isolated communication or an indication of an existing collaboration between the two men has not been established.³⁴ Little is known about the interior of the Rotunda (and what is known has been pieced together from Vanderlyn's letters), but there are several contemporary views of the exterior, a compact, brick-faced cylindrical building fifty-six feet in diameter and forty-five feet in height. It was buttressed by four rectangular projections and had a severe Doric portico and a triangular pediment. A stringcourse divided its two stories and reinforced the upper level. The first story, having a central "round stairs,"³⁵ was divided into several rooms, most of them used as exhibition galleries. (Some of them later served as living quarters or studios.)

The greatest interior space was given over to the second-story panorama area, which, surmounted by a large zinc-covered dome supported by a system of fifteen to twenty ribs, rose to a height of at least thirty feet. The central stairs provided access to a concentric viewing platform some eighteen feet in diameter and probably of an adjustable level, since Vanderlyn was to exhibit panoramas that varied widely in height. In the dome, an oculus, or opening, covered by a skylight, encircled by a balustrade, and ornamented with a spherical finial, admitted the daylight, which was diverted from the viewing platform by a covering circular canopy about thirty feet in diameter.³⁶

Vanderlyn, setting out immediately to raise funds for the building's construction, soon found that it was no easy task. He did, however, manage to obtain pledges for \$8,000 from 142 subscribers, who were to have free admission to the Rotunda. The list included many illustrious names, including Vice-President Daniel B. Tompkins, DeWitt Clinton, governor of New York from 1817 to 1823, and John Jacob Astor.³⁷ On a recommendation from his friend Aaron Burr, Vanderlyn enlisted the help of a Dr. John Dix to attend to the financial affairs of the Ro-



FIGURE 11. Arthur J. Stansbury. *City Hall Park from the Northwest Corner of Broadway and Chambers Street*, ca. 1825. Watercolor, 9 1/2 x 14 1/2 in. (24.1 x 36.8 cm.). Museum of the City of New York. Bequest of J. Insley Blair in memory of Mr. and Mrs. J. Insley Blair. (Vanderlyn's Rotunda is the domed building at the left.)

tunda and to supervise its construction. Ground for the building was broken in April 1818 and the Rotunda was scheduled to open in October. In the early summer, realizing that the *Versailles* would not be ready in time, Vanderlyn obtained from the Philadelphia entrepreneur Daniel Bowen, Thomas Barker's *View of the Interior of the City of Paris* to show in its place. It was followed by *Attack of the Allied Forces on Paris March 30, 1814*, painted by and purchased from Henry Aston Barker, which opened in January 1819, to be replaced in April by Robert Ker Porter's *Battle of Lodi*.³⁸

With construction of the Rotunda begun at last, Vanderlyn was free to go home to Kingston to start work on the *Versailles*. No one knows how many assistants he had, but he evidently had the help of a Swiss landscape artist named Johann-Heinrich Jenny, who had been in Paris in 1814 and might well have been familiar with the panorama project from its inception.³⁹ Obtaining

the use of a large barn on the property of his neighbors the Hasbroucks, a prominent Kingston family, Vanderlyn constructed a curved wall forty feet in length to facilitate the painting of his panorama. For ease of handling and division of perspective, he sectioned his design into quadrants. He used forty-two-inch-wide canvas divided into strips eighteen feet long, which were sewn together vertically, and he based his finished measurements, eighteen feet by a hundred and sixty-five, on proportions and measurements of panoramas he had seen in Paris and London.⁴⁰

The sheer height of the canvas would have required a scaffolding by which Vanderlyn could gain access to all points of the work. By means of the grid drawings he had made at Versailles with his camera obscura (see gatefold), he painstakingly transferred his design to the large canvas, using a scale of an inch to a foot and possibly utilizing an anamorphic method similar to that used by baroque masters for painting on vaulted

church ceilings.⁴¹ It consisted of a series of strings extended across the length and breadth of the curved working surface, with a light projected from the presumed viewpoint. The shadows thus cast conformed to the squares of the grid and guided the artist in conveying the illusion of straight lines on a curved surface. Painting in such close proximity to the huge canvas, intended to be viewed from a distance, was a problem. Panoramas were usually executed with the help of several studio assistants, one of whom was stationed in the central area to direct the proceedings. Vanderlyn, painting his own details, would have had to scramble down from the scaffolding continuously in order to measure his progress. No one knows how much of an area he worked at one time, but by January 1819 the quadrants were as complete as they could be in their unattached state. They were rolled up and transported, probably by riverboat, to New York, where they were hung in a circular building on Broadway not far from the Rotunda that had been occupied during the summer months by a circus operated by a man named Pepin. Vanderlyn, arriving in April, could now assess the overall view of the canvas. Because all the figures are painted over the background, he probably added them in New York. At the beginning of June, the panorama was moved into the Rotunda, which was closed to the public until the *Versailles* went on view at the end of the month. Even after the exhibition had opened, the artist continued to work the figures, as he recorded in a letter of July 1819: “My panorama painting of Versailles has . . . been exhibited in the afternoons to the public for these three weeks past. I reserved some of the mornings to retouch and introduce some figures and it still wants some more.”⁴²

Vanderlyn clearly intended his *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* to captivate the American public with the varied splendors of its subject. To ensure that Rotunda visitors derived the full benefit from what they were seeing, a program containing a circular

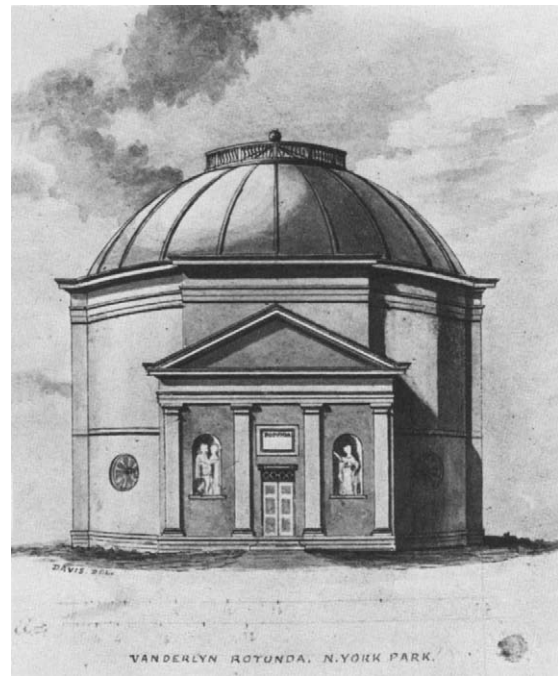


FIGURE 12. Alexander Jackson Davis. *Vanderlyn Rotunda, New York Park, 1828*. Ink and wash on paper, 10 3/4 x 8 1/2 in. (27.3 x 21.6 cm.). Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York.

plan (Fig. 13) and giving a historical background of Versailles could be had for a small fee. The program also listed all the sculptures in the panorama, gave the names of the sculptors and descriptions of the buildings and architectural elements, and identified the various trees. The Arcadian vision of Versailles is depicted as it appears in the late September afternoon, a time when the shadows are the most dramatic and the light warmest, fully illuminating the west facade of the palace. The viewer's first glimpse transports him to the middle of the terrace in front of the Parterre d'Eau. As he pivots, the front of the palace, a view of the town of Versailles, the magnificent gardens with their sculptures and fountains, the Basin of Latona, and the Grande Allée all come into view. The canvas is peopled with men, women, and children from all walks of life—some fashionably attired in the latest styles,



FIGURE 13. *Description of the City, Palace, and Gardens of Versailles*, 1833. Engraving, after the panorama by John Vanderlyn, 12 5/8 x 15 3/4 in. (32.1 x 40 cm.). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, New York.

which have been carefully observed—interspersed with members of the allied forces of Russia, England, Prussia, and Austria in their colorful uniforms. The military figures reflect the allied occupation of France following the Battle of Waterloo and suggest an international identity for the visitors on the grounds.

Despite minimal brushwork, the occasional detail—an extravagant plume here, the glint of a watchfob there, brightly patterned fabrics everywhere—enlivens the effect on the viewer, much as highlights on stage scenery give the audience a greater impression of reality. The relative sizes of the figures define the space and lead the eye around the expansive canvas. The figures themselves constitute the rhythmic elements of the composition: one person points something out to a companion; another introduces friends to one another; most display some kind of gesture that conveys a sense of participation to the viewer. Small tableaux—a marital dispute, a game of blindman's buff (Fig. 14), a boy chasing a butterfly (Fig. 15), a mother cautioning a child—all represent an experience with which an onlooker can identify; all present a recognizable slice of life. The festive spirit that pervades the panorama is reminiscent of work by the mid-eighteenth-century Italian *vedutisti*—Canaletto in particular—whose views of tourist landmarks taken from specific vantage points are animated by anonymous figures shown gesturing, posing, or caught in action. That illusionistic fidelity, in which Vanderlyn shares, resulted in works that are prephotographic visual records of the architecture of an era.

Vanderlyn carefully thought out the placement of his figures, which include scattered, strolling groups and individuals that culminate in a small crowd below the palace balcony. There, Louis XVIII, dressed in a ceremonial blue jacket with gold epaulets and a pale blue sash adorned with a royal medallion (Fig. 16), is accorded a prominent place. Many of the figures raise their heads to the monarch directly above them; some doff their hats. Vanderlyn's positioning of the

stout monarch, standing with several of his ministers in the “window of appearance,” is a reminder of the role Louis played in having Versailles restored to its former splendor (a process fully described in the program). Facing him and slightly to his right in the gardens is a group that has a historical precedent: a visit to Versailles made in May 1814 by Czar Alexander of Russia, King Frederick William of Prussia, and their entourages (Fig. 17). Strategically situated in front of them are two figures seen emerging from behind a hedge (Fig. 18). One, obviously Vanderlyn himself (his features and attire are similar to those in a self-portrait of 1802, now in the Metropolitan's collections), points out to the other the royal military personages. In turn, an officer in that group gestures toward King Louis. Vanderlyn is thus acknowledging the powers responsible for the restoration of Versailles, an exemplar of culture. By extension, he is symbolically advocating the relationship that should exist between government and the arts, an ideal he was trying to foster in America.

When the panorama of Versailles opened on 29 June 1819, it was well received by the press.⁴³ Vanderlyn's strategy of using it as a means of cultivating in the average American a taste for higher forms of art was not lost on one critic:

Although it was not to have been expected that Mr. Vanderlyn would have left the higher department of historical painting in which he is so eminent, to devote his time to the more humble, though more profitable, pursuit of painting cities and landscapes—yet, in a new country, taste for the arts must be graduated according to the scale of intellect and education, and where only the scientific connoisseur would admire his Marius and Ariadne, hundreds will flock to his panorama to visit Paris. . . . This is to “catch the manners living as they rise,” and with them catch the means to promote a taste for the fine arts.⁴⁴

But though the *Versailles* was generally praised by reviewers, the artist himself was criticized for choosing a subject that extolled the culture of Europe, thereby ignoring his own American heritage. As one editorial pointed out: "Panorama views of our battles, such as Chippewa, Erie, New Orleans, Lake Champlain, and so forth with the likeness of officers engaged on those occasions, would not only be highly national and popular, but exceedingly profitable."⁴⁵

Years later, Vanderlyn noted:

The taste of the public is not strong, and requires to be studied & courted in this community particularly. . . . Had I bestowed my time & attention to painting a view of N. York, instead of Versailles, I should I am now convinced have reaped more profits—but [I was not] aware of the general ignorance here respecting Versailles, and its former brilliant court etc.⁴⁶

Neither did he obtain the financial rewards he had counted on. The total income in the Rotunda's first year was only \$1,240 (the painting of the *Versailles* had cost \$2,000). Moreover, he was still \$4,000 in debt for the building, its final costs having greatly exceeded the initial estimates. By the time it opened to the public, Vanderlyn's own funds were exhausted; in August 1819, unable to put off his creditors any longer, he was forced to sign a declaration of insolvency. The *Versailles* had been open little more than a month. Though Vanderlyn was still nominally in charge of the Rotunda, his Board of Trustees, who had been appointed by the Common Council, assumed temporary administration of his affairs. They rented out rooms to four artists: Louis-Antoine Collas, Vanderlyn's miniature-painter friend from Paris; Ralph Earl, a son of the American portraitist; John R. Smith, a London-born painter who had emigrated to Brooklyn, where he established a drawing academy in 1818; and a Mr. James. All four resided there from 1819 to 1820.⁴⁷

Realizing that it would be some time before his investment in the Rotunda would bear fruit, Vanderlyn continued to seek portrait work. While he was otherwise occupied, he often left his nephew, always referred to as John Vanderlyn, Jr., in charge of his business affairs. Vanderlyn had great affection for his namesake, who had come to stay with him at the tender age of eleven, and he encouraged the boy to pursue a career in the arts. John junior was only in his teens in the 1820s when he had to shoulder a great deal of responsibility in his uncle's enterprises.

After the Rotunda had been in operation for two years, Vanderlyn realized the futility of keeping it open during the colder months, when travel was limited and attendance was poor. In the ensuing years, therefore, he kept the Rotunda running only in favorable weather, for seven or eight months, from spring to autumn. During the winter, he traveled south in search of portrait commissions.

In the fall of 1820, Vanderlyn took his panorama to Philadelphia. He wanted to show the *Versailles* in as many cities as possible, probably hoping that by emulating Barker's entrepreneurial methods he could achieve the same degree of profit. Some years earlier, Daniel Bowen had erected a building in Philadelphia in North Eleventh Street in which to exhibit panoramas and had enjoyed a measure of success ever since. After arranging with Bowen for the use of his building, Vanderlyn left his nephew in charge of the installation and exhibition and went off to Washington to seek a structure in which to show the panorama after its Philadelphia run. Unfortunately, the Philadelphia season proved singularly dull, with only meager receipts, and the Washington plans fell through. Undeterred, Vanderlyn planned to exhibit again in Philadelphia the following summer. Meanwhile, needing additional attractions to maintain attendance at the Rotunda, he managed to obtain Henry Aston Barker's *View of the Battle of Waterloo*. He also arranged for a second showing of Ker Porter's *Battle of Lodi*.

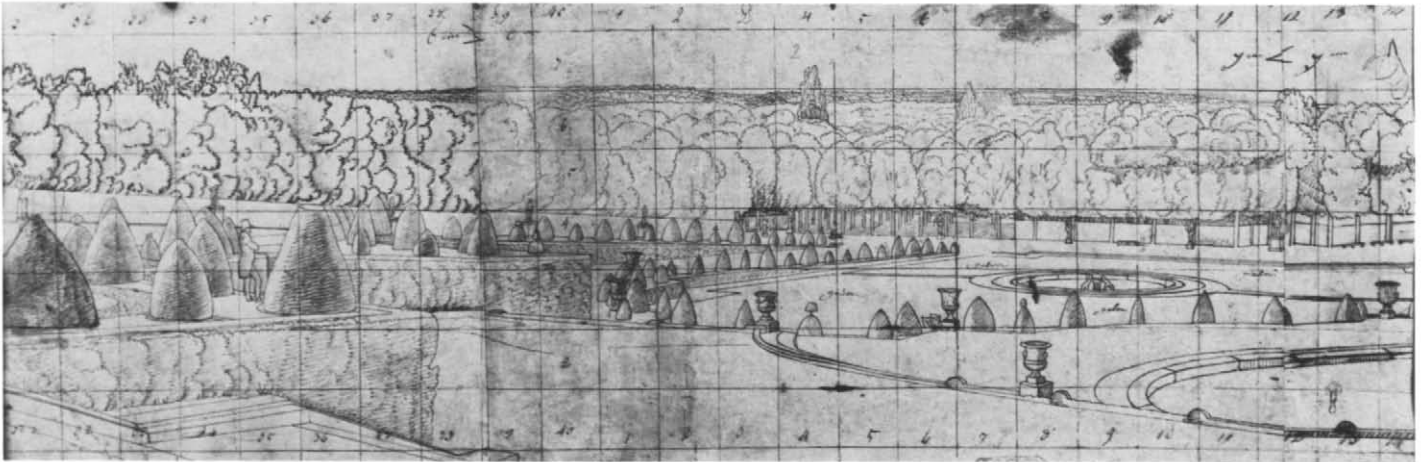
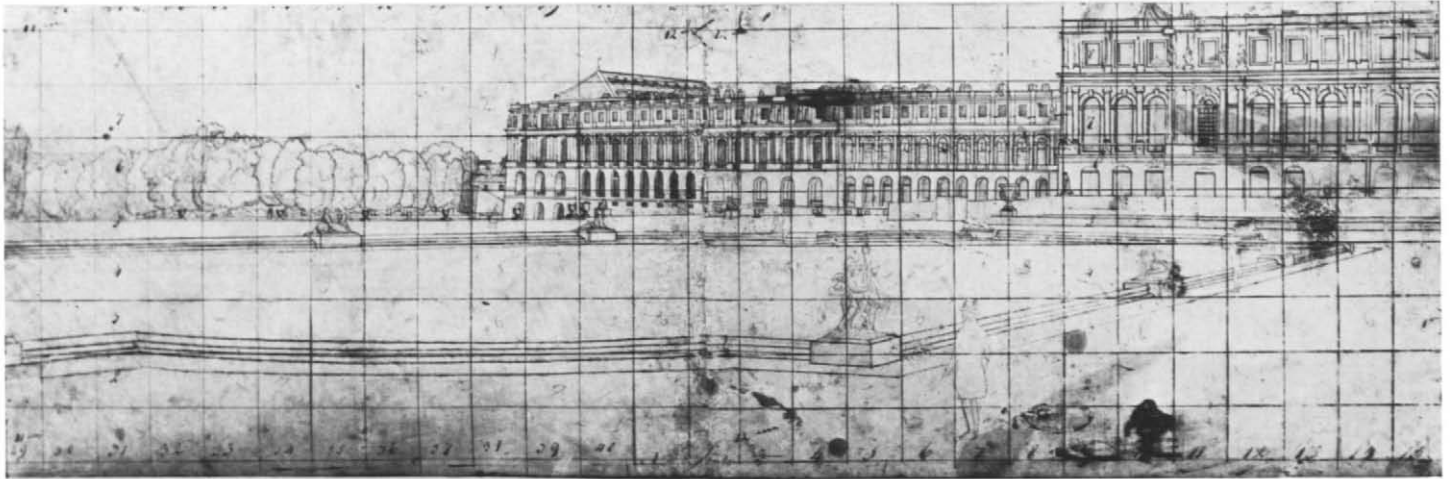
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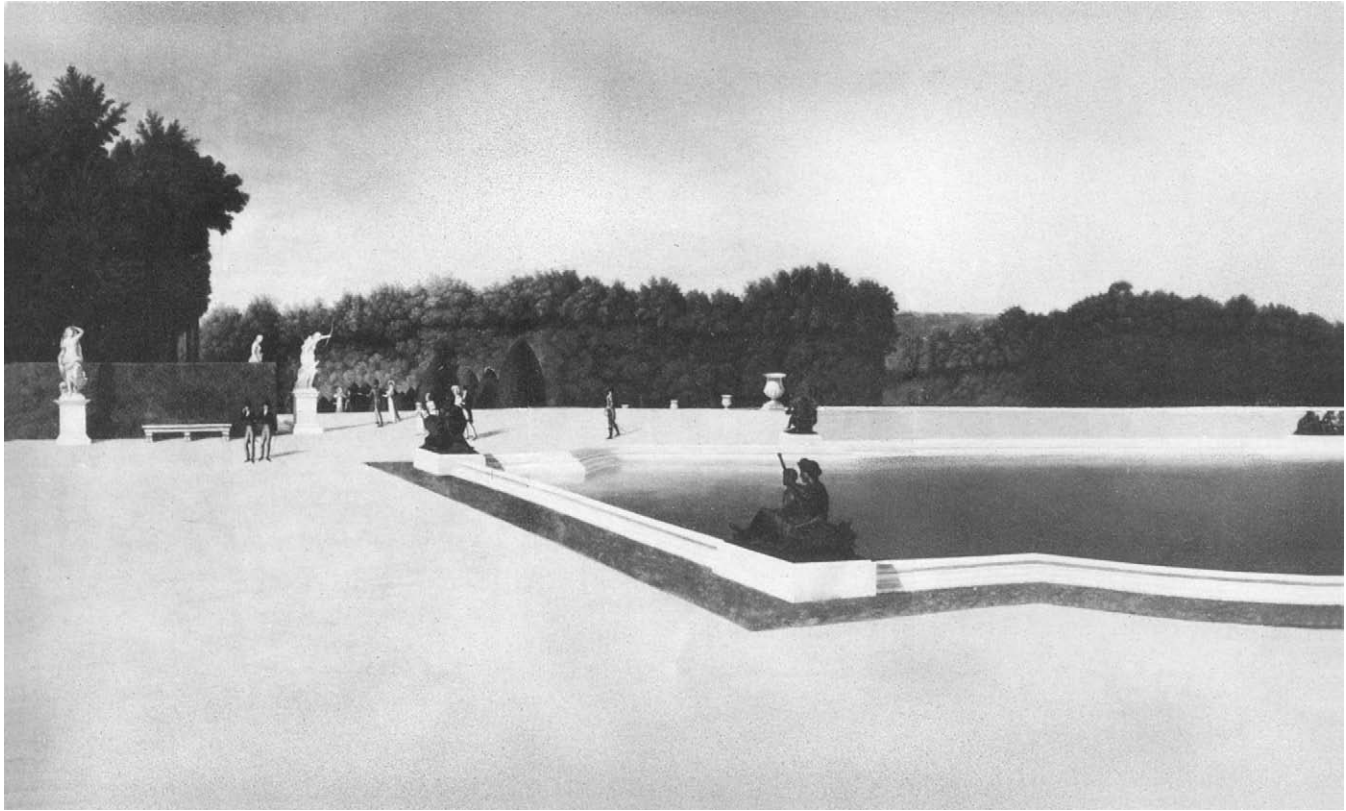
TOP. John Vanderlyn. *Palace of Versailles*, 1814–15. Pencil, pen and ink on paper, mounted on linen, 12 1/2 x 75 1/2 in. (21.8 x 191.8 cm.). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, New York.

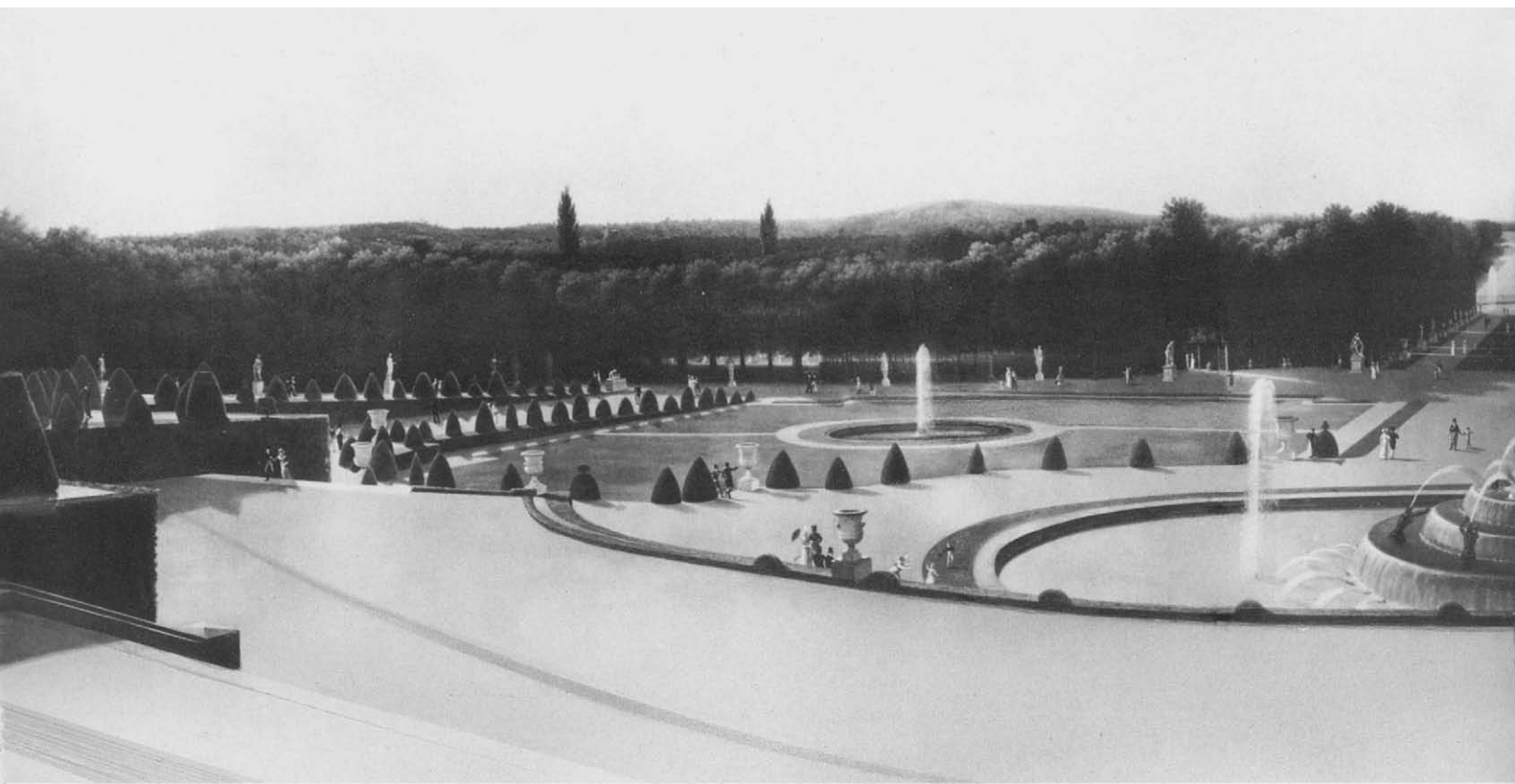
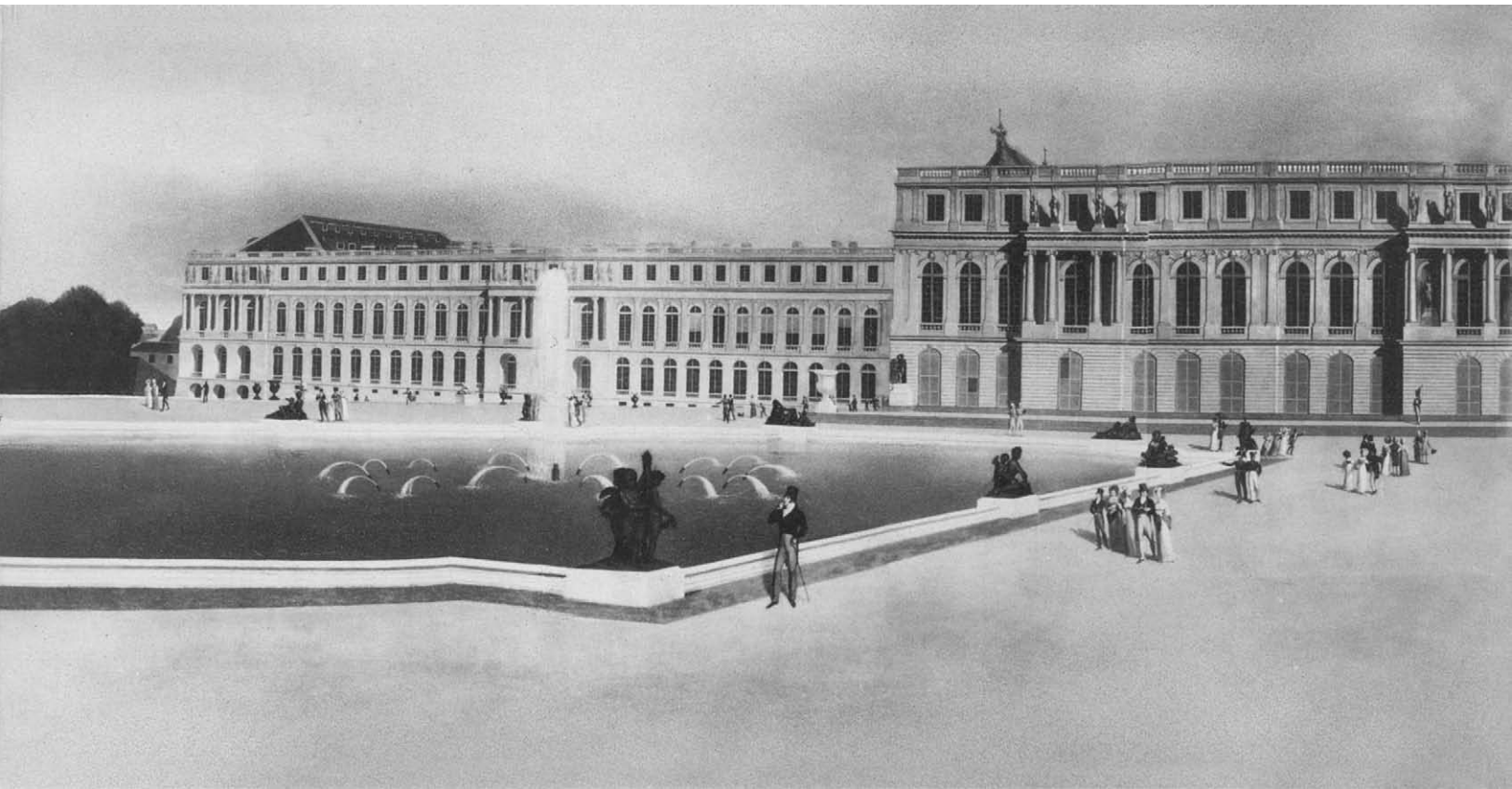
BOTTOM. John Vanderlyn. *Gardens of Versailles*, 1814–15. Pencil, pen and ink on paper, mounted on linen, 13 x 67 1/2 in. (33 x 171.5 cm.). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, New York.

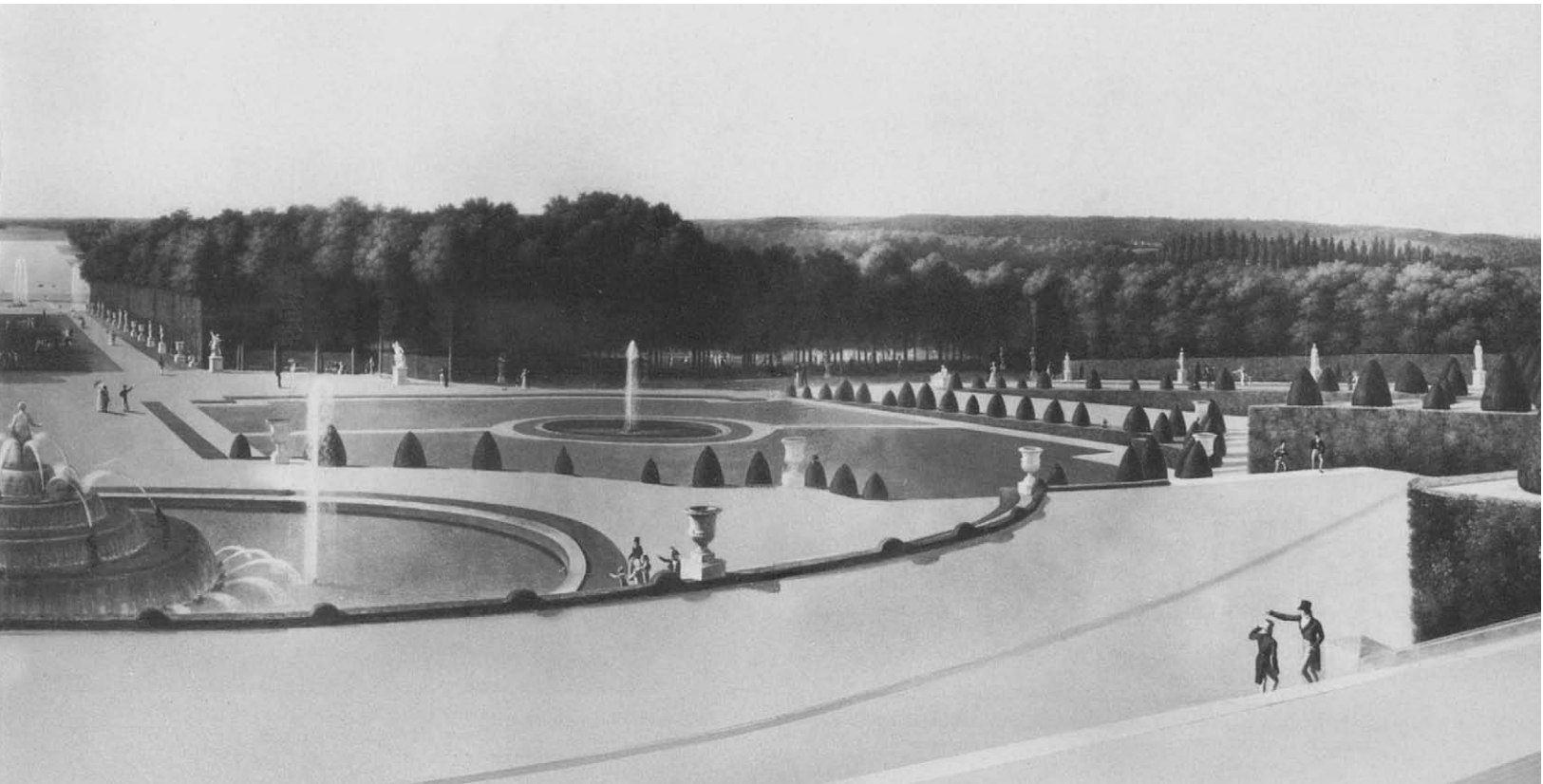
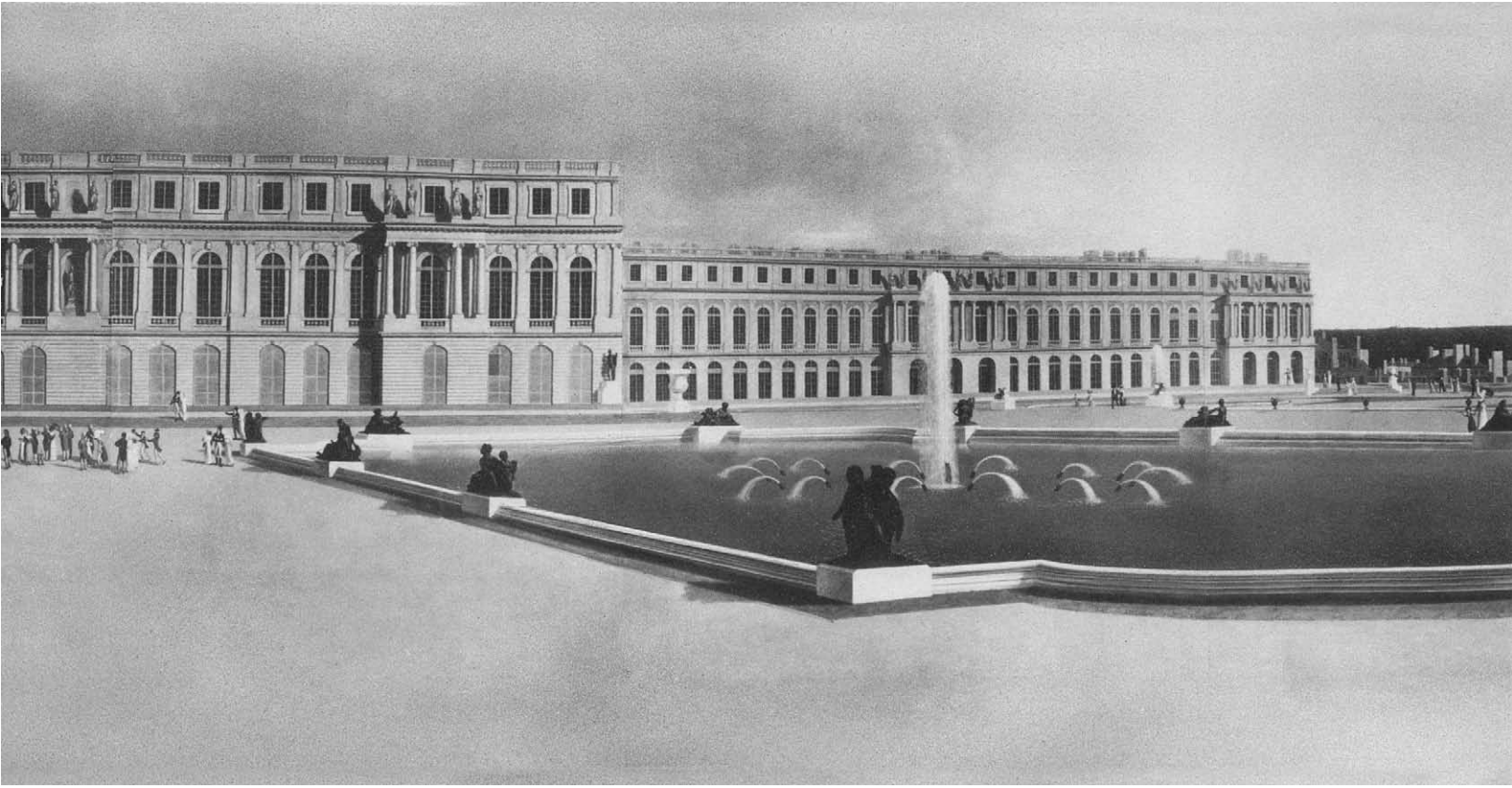
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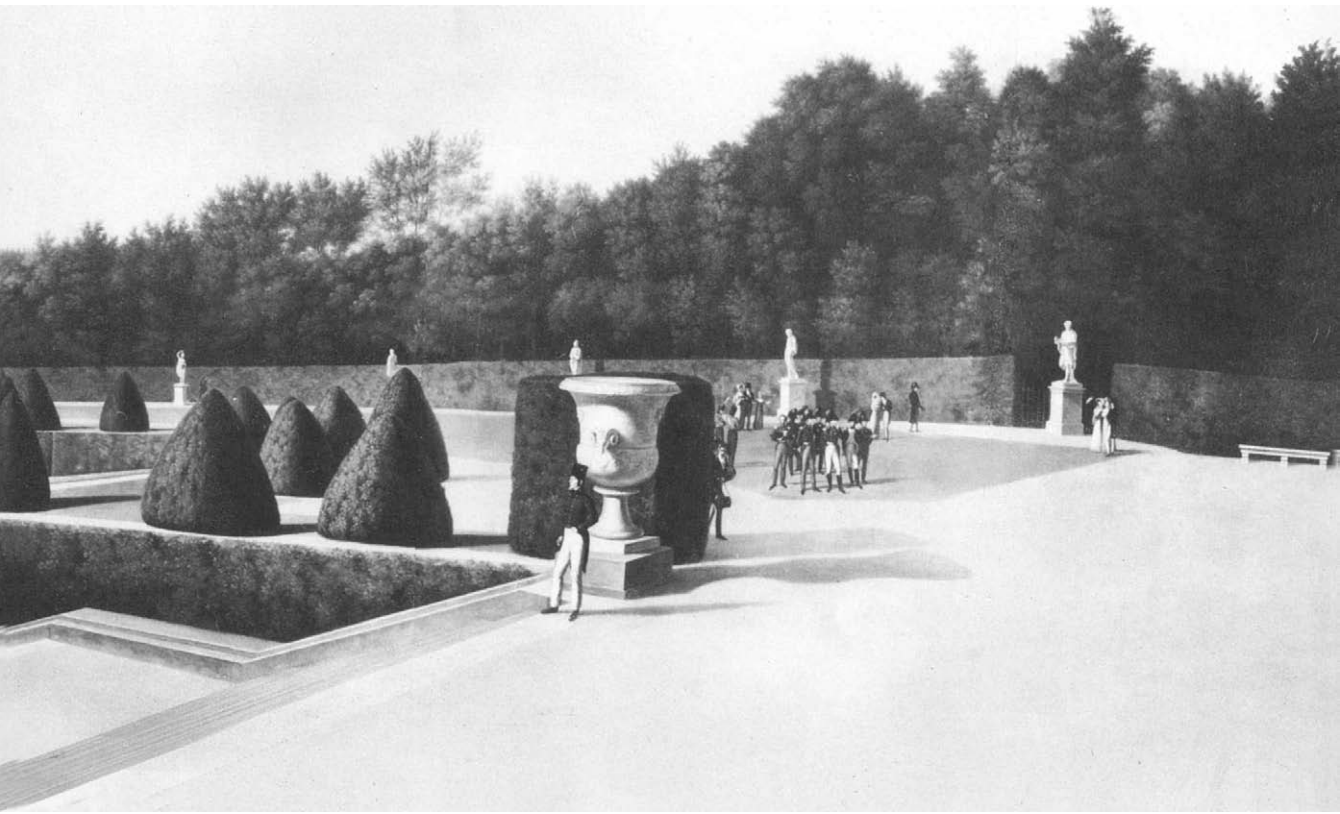
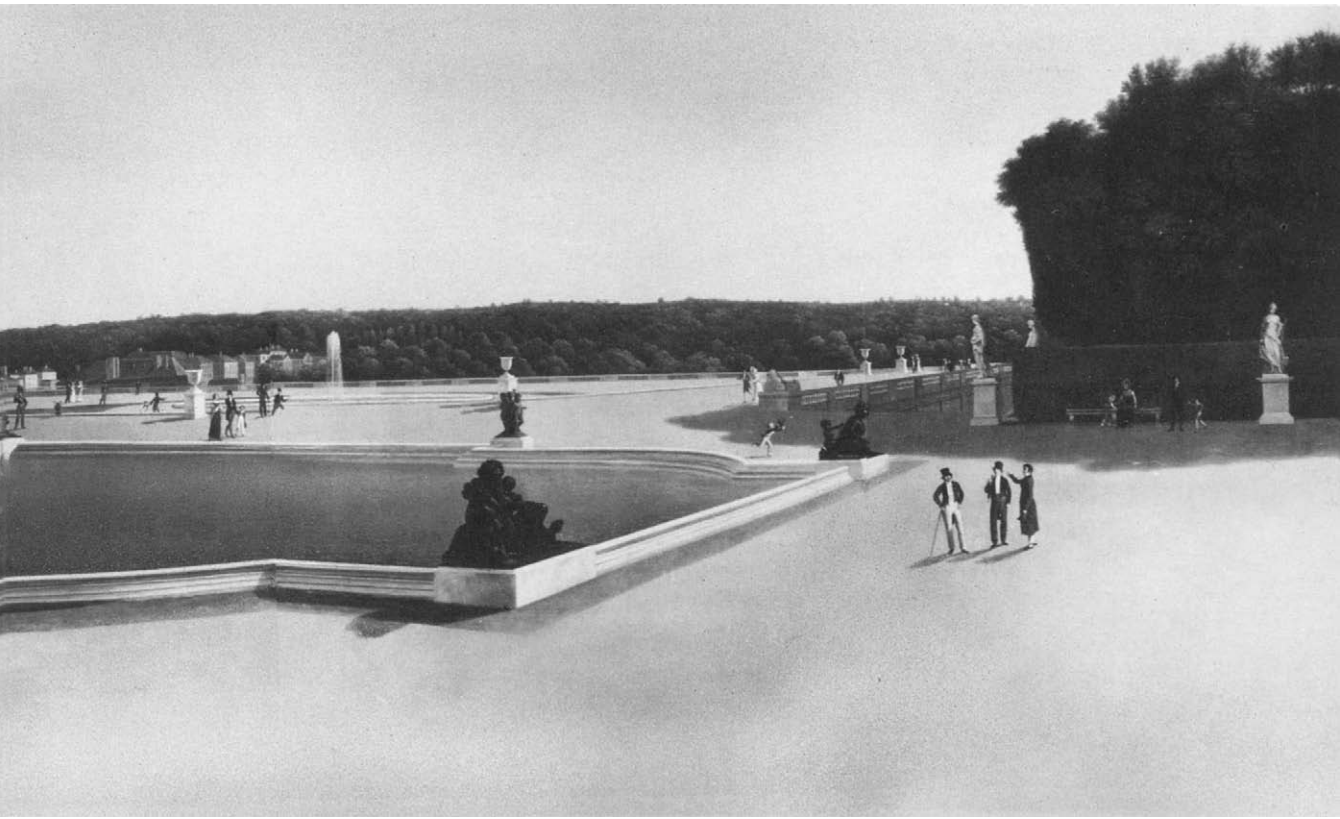
John Vanderlyn. *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, 1818–19. Oil on canvas, 12 x 165 ft. (3.7 x 50.3 m.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Senate House Association, Kingston, New York, 1952.

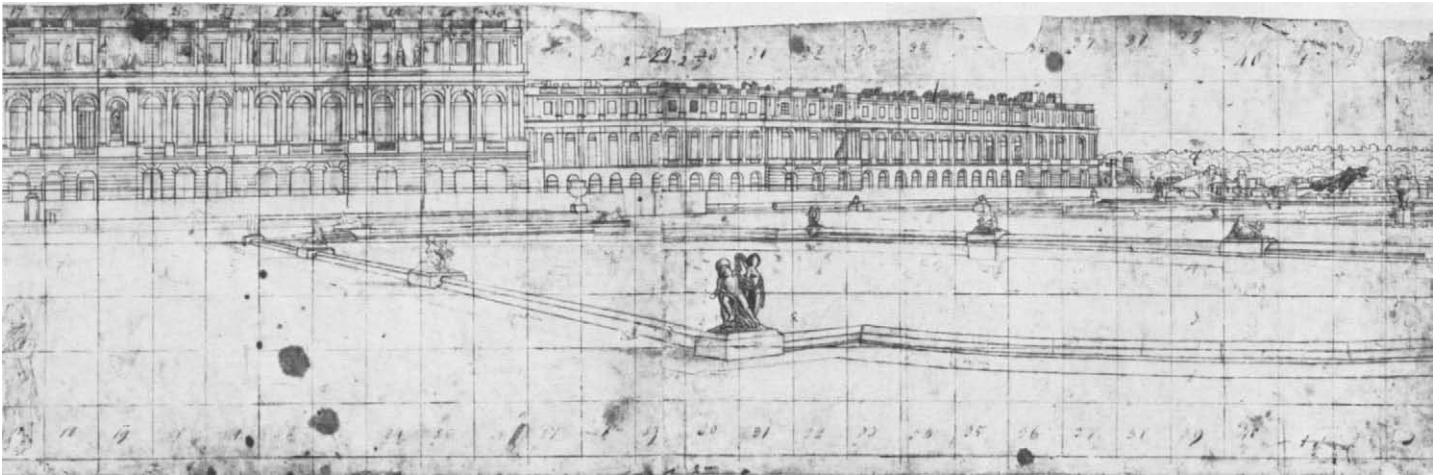
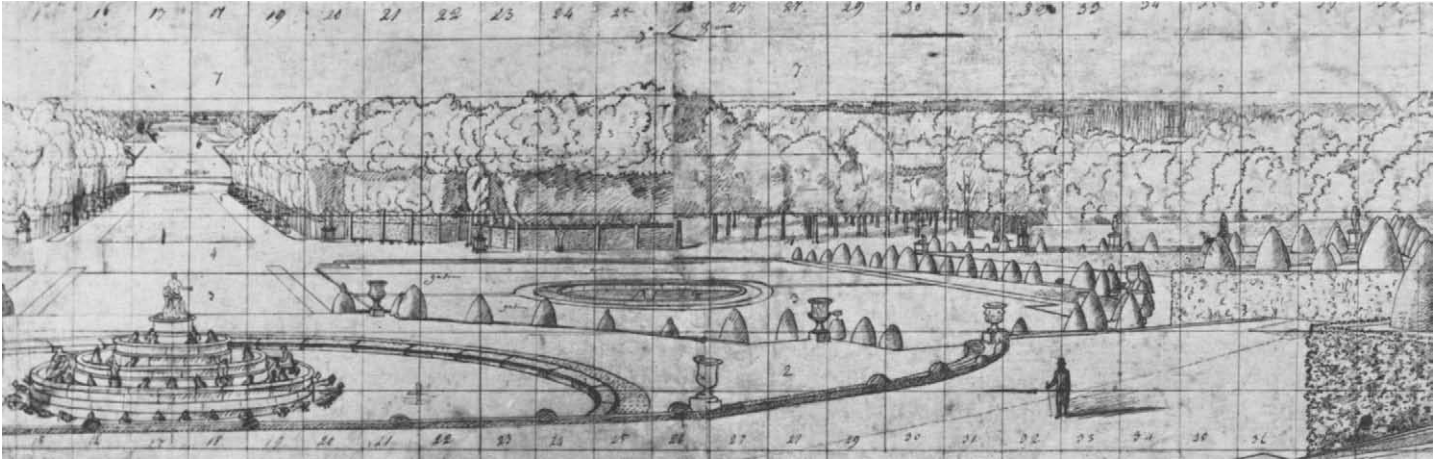












When Vanderlyn returned to Philadelphia the following June, he found that the roof of Bowen's building had caved in and had to be repaired before the *Versailles* could be shown. He had intended to stay in the city for only a short time, but having to supervise the renovations delayed him. By the time the repairs were finished he had vanished, leaving John junior to see to the details of the exhibition. That irresponsible behavior was typical of him, as was his unwillingness or inability to court public favor. When influential people visited his exhibitions, he was seldom there to receive them, a discourtesy a young friend of his remarked on in a letter of 1821:

I have never comprehended the prudence of your having quitted yourself & confided such an Exhibition to mere chance success—I should never myself have been satisfied not to have attended myself to the care and circumspection necessary in receiving visitors, and supplying attention and explanation calculated to engage their influence in extending the Celebrity of the Painting—& even securing their regard & friendship as much as possible for the artist.⁴⁸

Though Vanderlyn considered it his obligation to elevate and educate public taste, he lacked a persuasive personal approach. His diffidence is demonstrated in a communication to his nephew in which he suggested that the drawings he had made at Versailles should be pasted on boards and presented to the public as “such particular statues seen in the picture and in the distance.” He showed his true colors by adding that the presentation “is only for some persons of taste, and more curiosity than ordinary, that they will be worth attending to.”⁴⁹

The Philadelphia summer season of 1821 was no improvement on the previous one. Receipts were again low and expenses were higher. In September, Vanderlyn's run of bad luck con-

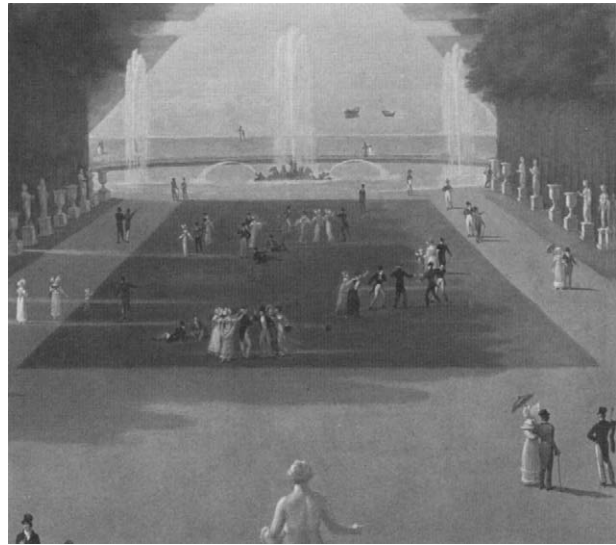


FIGURE 14. *Versailles Panorama* (detail): Grande Allée with visitors playing a game of blindman's buff.

tinued: during a storm in Philadelphia, one of the skylights on top of Bowen's building blew off and the panorama was soaked through.⁵⁰ Since the structure could no longer be used, the exhibition had to be closed.

In the two-year period of his insolvency, Vanderlyn was awarded portrait commissions in Washington, Savannah, and Charleston. These brought him a small but steady income. Their execution often coincided with exhibitions of his paintings, including the *Marius* and the *Ariadne*, which he had arranged in the same cities. Nevertheless, his travels and the hiring of workmen to pack and crate his canvases were expensive and time-consuming. Those costs, added to his other obligations, created a financial burden from which he was never able to extricate himself.

Vanderlyn's first success—albeit a marginal one—came in the winter of 1822, when he and his nephew went to Charleston to exhibit the *Versailles*. Vanderlyn chose Charleston, then coming into full flower as a social and cultural center, on the advice of a friend who had pointed out that with the racing season beginning in February, the

city would be attracting hordes of visitors. Among the attractions and spectacles that awaited them were two great historical paintings, Thomas Sully's *Interior of a Capuchin Chapel* (1821; private collection) and Rembrandt Peale's *Court of Death* (1820; Detroit Institute of Arts). The exhibition of the *Versailles* opened in late January and continued for three months, praised by the press and the public alike. But again Vanderlyn left his nephew in charge while he traveled to Savannah and Augusta in quest of more portrait work. On his return to Charleston in May, he replaced the *Versailles* with Barker's *Battle of Waterloo*. His own paintings were well received, but the *Waterloo*, which had won a measure of popular acclaim at the Rotunda the previous summer, was only a marginal success. Though the receipts he realized were small, Vanderlyn returned to Charleston in February of the following year, once more showing the *Versailles*.

In an effort to attract favorable notice for his exhibitions, the artist often used them in support of one charity or another, donating a percentage of his take for a specified period of time. He did so at the Rotunda in New York in 1819, in aid of the victims of a disastrous fire; in Philadelphia in 1820, in support of the Institute of the Deaf and Dumb; and in Charleston in 1823, for the New York Apprentice's Library.⁵¹ As he might have expected, his attempts to appeal to

the social conscience did not substantially increase his audience.

Vanderlyn headed north to Canada in the summer of 1823, hoping to find in the French population of Montreal an audience sympathetic to his *Versailles*. Owing to a misunderstanding about the sort of structure needed to accommodate the panorama, adversity struck again. There followed a lengthy delay that increased his costs.

As a result, Vanderlyn returned to New York after two months with a profit of \$80. He was still undiscouraged. The more stunning his defeats, it seems, the more resolved he became to succeed.

In 1824, the initial debt on the Rotunda had still not been paid off. Hoping to lessen his financial indebtedness and turn the tide of his fortunes, Vanderlyn suggested in a letter to the Common Council and his other creditors that they reduce their claims by a half as a token of their continued support. His plea fell on deaf ears. Several council members had already lost faith in him and had begun to

fear that any project in which he had a hand was doomed to failure. Vanderlyn's constant absence from the Rotunda did nothing to dispel their understandable qualms.

On one of his travels that year, Vanderlyn learned that several groups were already professing an interest in the Rotunda: "The trustees of the N.Y.C. Dispensary have applied to the corporation for grant of the Rotunda. The Philharmonic

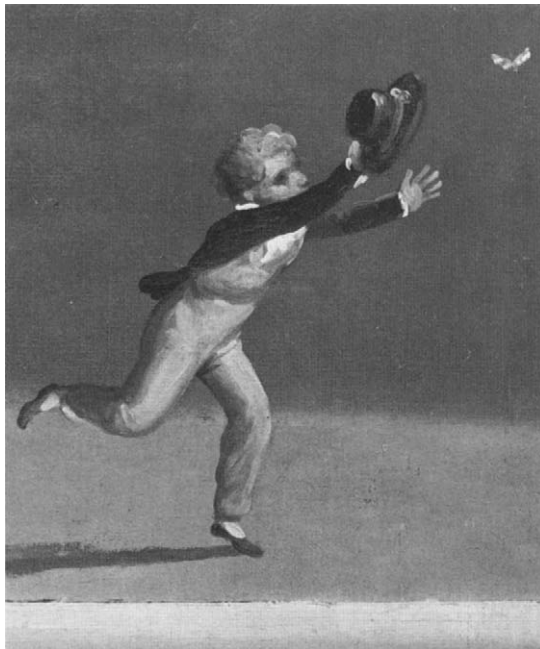


FIGURE 15. *Versailles Panorama* (detail): Boy chasing a butterfly.

Society offers to pay off incumbrances for the privilege of occupying it for a few years and return it afterwards, free from embarrassment to the original proprietors.”⁵² Even the National Academy of Design was inquiring about its possible use. The city, though it looked upon the rental of the building as a means of recouping its losses, took no immediate action against Vanderlyn, and he proceeded undismayed. His constant, if peripheral, interest in the Rotunda is recorded in a letter he wrote in 1825 to Philip Hone, then a New York City alderman and later, as mayor, the subject of one of Vanderlyn’s portraits. The tone of the letter and its date illustrate that the artist was totally oblivious to the trouble he was in with the city:

... The ground in rear of the [City Hall] Park could not, in my opinion, be better improved both as to ornament as well as use, than in being planted with trees, forming a grove extending over the whole ground from Broadway to the opposite & eastern extremity & present fence. This grove made, say, of the horse chestnut & linden, or any good shady tree, would form a beautiful background to the Hall when viewed in front . . . and would also serve to mask the unhappy discordancy in colour of the Hall itself (very unmonumental).⁵³

Vanderlyn arranged with Harvard College in 1825 to borrow their *View of Athens* panorama to exhibit in the Rotunda that spring, the receipts to be shared with the college. The canvas did not arrive until late summer and, as a consequence, was not the success it might have been earlier in the season. It was the largest painting ever shown there, and Vanderlyn was obliged to lower the level of the second floor to accommodate its twenty-five-foot height. That arrangement worked well enough that three years later Vanderlyn agreed to allow William Bullock, English antiquarian and traveler, to use the Ro-

tunda to exhibit the *View of the City of Mexico* painted by John and Robert Burford from a series of drawings Bullock had made when he visited Mexico in the summer of 1823. Bullock also rented adjacent space to show his collection of Mexican artifacts and curios. Perhaps because the people of New York were greatly interested in Latin America at the time (by the previous autumn, after many hard campaigns, Mexico and Central and South America had won independence from Spain), the exhibition proved to be one of the most successful ever to appear at the Rotunda. In just sixteen days the admission fees amounted to \$365, a third of which went to Vanderlyn.

The atmosphere surrounding the artist and his enterprises was decidedly ominous in the year 1826. The nine-year lease on the Rotunda was expiring; Vanderlyn’s petition to the city to renew it was to be refused on the ground that such a procedure would be “inexpedient and impolitic.” Though he was allowed to use the building until 1829, he was never again to enjoy the city government’s confidence or support.

As his difficulties multiplied, Vanderlyn became increasingly intolerant and critical. He was well aware that Trumbull, along with Samuel Finley Breese Morse, felt that the panorama belonged to an inferior order of painting and therefore cheapened their art. His distrust of Trumbull increased in direct ratio to the artist’s success, and Trumbull, after receiving for his Capitol commission a fee of \$32,000 (in those days an unheard-of sum), was riding the crest of the wave. Vanderlyn even rejected those who could have helped him. His response to being elected to the National Academy of Design in 1826, during one of his absences from the city, is an example of his irrational attitude. When he returned to New York four months later, he published in the *New York American* of 26 May 1826 a scathing letter in which he refused membership, alleging that the Academy was presumptuous and unceremonious and imputing to its members ulterior motives (he was referring

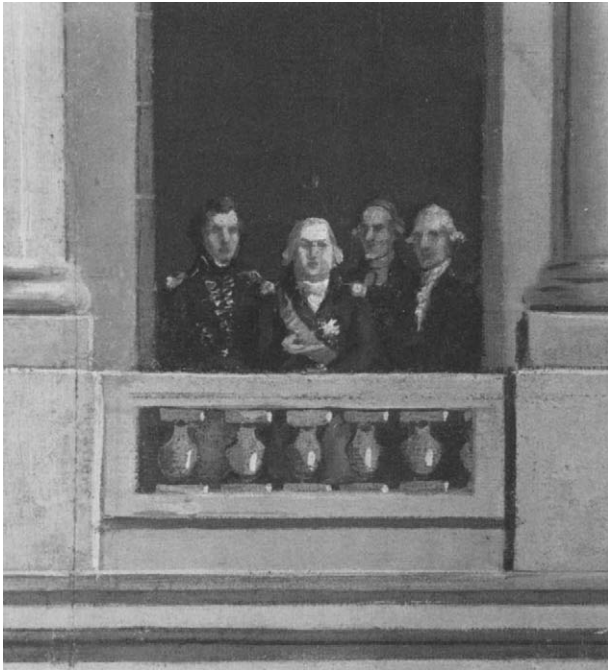


FIGURE 16. *Versailles Panorama* (detail): Louis XVIII and attendants in the west porch of the palace.

to their desire to obtain his Rotunda for their own use). In addition to his resentment of the Academy's tactics in general, he held it against the Academicians that they had never supported or even attended his exhibitions. He later summed up the reasons for his hostility in a pamphlet he published: "The plans of our Academies of the Arts I never could conscientiously approve, believing them, by their regulations, not calculated materially to benefit the Art, and still less the Artist, to whose advantage and pecuniary profit it is important and essential that such public institution should tend."⁵⁴ His poor taste in choosing a public forum for his complaints alienated his fellow artists and lost him the support of his patrons.

Throughout most of the decade, no matter what catastrophe he found himself in, Vanderlyn continued to travel to Washington to win government support for a national picture gallery. As he

observed in 1825: "My main object is to make interest with the Government for a National establishment or Gallery of pictures. To make the attempt, I think a duty I owe to myself, and if I fail in the application I don't see that it can injure me any."⁵⁵ His idea was sound, but his superior manner and condescending approach gained him few sponsors in the halls of Congress.

Vanderlyn was to endure another stunning defeat, that time in New Orleans, where in 1828 he committed a large sum of money he did not possess to a building in which to exhibit panoramas. As usual, he left the responsibility for the project to someone else. In 1833, he learned that the city had repossessed and demolished the structure. He had lost not only his investment but also the two panoramas he had left in New Orleans, one of them the *Battle of Waterloo*.

Vanderlyn was now powerless to stem the tide running against him. Instead of remaining in New York and trying to protect his institution and the years he had invested in it, he abdicated his responsibilities and continued to travel and exhibit in the South. At the end of December 1828, he turned up in Cuba. His friends Jenny and Earl had traveled to South America sometime before and may have recommended Latin Americans as an audience temperamentally attuned to his grandiose panorama exhibitions. Vanderlyn had been considering a trip to Havana as early as 1820, for he had heard of a circular building there that a group of comedians was using as a theater. He expected to exhibit his *Marius* and *Ariadne*, but as Jacob Masten, a friend of his, reported to John junior, he "experienced some difficulty at the custom house . . . respecting the latter picture on account of nakedry." As Masten put it, "Who would ever have dreamt of such a thing in a place where the negroes go around stark naked?"⁵⁶ Vanderlyn, his hopes once again dashed, returned to New York, where a move to evict him from his Rotunda was already under way.

BY THE SUMMER of 1829, all Vanderlyn's efforts to retain use of the Rotunda had been frustrated. In January, several aldermen had been observed nosing about the building and taking measurements; mutterings to the effect that the Rotunda "would serve a good purpose" had been overheard.⁵⁷ In March, the Common Council of the City of New York had resolved to take possession of the building, evict the occupants by 1 August, and begin alterations that would convert it into a courthouse.⁵⁸ In June, several of Vanderlyn's subscribers petitioned the council to renew Vanderlyn's lease, but their request served only to delay the inevitable.⁵⁹ In mid-September, the artist received a letter from the council's Committee of Repairs notifying him that the city had repossessed the building and that alterations were to begin immediately.⁶⁰ Though he surely had expected the news, he was devastated. As he wrote to an unidentified recipient, "The Rotunda is lost to me & the work of destruction is going on it. I feel I am located too near to it to forget the grievous subject."⁶¹ He never did forget it; almost to the end of his life he made repeated attempts to recover the building or to receive compensation for the losses he had sustained in its erection and operation.

He was left owing the builders \$3,500; he also owed \$600 on Robert Burford's *View of the City and Lake of Geneva* (see Fig. 19), which he had recently purchased to exhibit in the Rotunda.⁶² In November 1830, Vanderlyn persuaded his subscribers to petition again for the renewal of his lease, but again the council rejected them, citing the artist's past failures and pointing out that the use of the building as a courthouse was of much greater benefit to the community.⁶³ A few months later, the council nevertheless agreed to pay the contractors the \$3,500 that Vanderlyn owed them.⁶⁴ Though that action must have been a relief to the artist and his patrons, it was nothing but a de facto notice that the building had been reclaimed, and at a bargain price. Vanderlyn and his patrons, however, had lost their investment. In view of the council's high-handed

action, it was perhaps only just that the Rotunda was to prove less than ideal as a courthouse. What had been a theater designed for optical illusion was an acoustical nightmare: the echo in the cylindrical chamber reduced any legal argument to gibberish.⁶⁵

By 1835, the court was planning to move. Vanderlyn applied for a new lease in November. That time the council approved his petition, and even voted him \$1,000 for alterations.⁶⁶ Before he had a chance to take possession of the building, however, fate intervened (as it so often did in Vanderlyn's endeavors) in the form of a great fire on 16 December 1835 in which the post office building burned to the ground. The council, passing a resolution that nullified their approval of Vanderlyn's lease, offered the Rotunda as a replacement. In recognition of its peremptory treatment, the council granted the artist \$3,000, in "remuneration for the losses he sustained."⁶⁷ In 1847, Vanderlyn formally petitioned the city for additional compensation; as late as 1850, thirty-three years after his first application for city land, he was still hectoring the officials to rectify the sins of their predecessors.⁶⁸ The issue was virtually never to die until he did.

As for the Rotunda, it became an art museum again briefly, though not under Vanderlyn's aegis. In 1844, when the federal government finally found new quarters for the post office, thus freeing the Rotunda, Vanderlyn was in Paris, barely aware of what was going on in New York and unable to take action when he found out. To a group of civic-minded merchants, however, the building's vacancy represented an opportunity to establish the New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, in which they could house the art collection of the late New York merchant Luman Reed. In January 1845, Jonathan Sturgis, James Gordon Bennett, and several other prominent New Yorkers applied for permission to convert the Rotunda to that purpose, pointing to its former use by "an artist" as evidence of its suitability to their plan and vowing devotion to the public weal, just as Vanderlyn had. Despite the



FIGURE 17. *Versailles Panorama* (detail): Sovereign allies King Frederick William III of Prussia and Czar Alexander I of Russia (in profile) with attendants.

opposition of Mayor James Harper, their petition was granted. For the next three years the Rotunda was the repository of masterpieces by such American artists as Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, and William Sydney Mount, which could be enjoyed by anyone who could afford a dollar for life membership in the gallery or twenty-five cents for single admission. School children were admitted free on Saturdays.⁶⁹

The gallery was short-lived; its tenure at the Rotunda, even shorter. By 1848 the building had reverted to the city, which used it temporarily as office space. In 1870, it was demolished during the renovation of the city's parks.⁷⁰ Today, only a bronze plaque commemorating the Rotunda and its builder marks the ground behind City Hall where it stood.

Vanderlyn's obduracy where the Rotunda was concerned was matched by his faith in the panorama form, which he continued to see not only as a means of support but also as a form of art that was at once worthy of respect and attractive to a wide audience. As early as 1829, defending his Rotunda scheme in a pamphlet addressed to "Subscribers, Patrons, and Friends of the Late Panoramic Institution," he had written:

Panoramic exhibitions possess so much of the magic deception of the art, as irresistably to captivate all classes of Spectators, and to give them a decided advantage over every other description of pictures; for no study nor a cultivated taste is required fully to appreciate the

merits of such representations. They have further the power of conveying much practical and topographical information, such as can in no other manner be supplied, and if instruction and mental gratification be the aim and object of painting no class of pictures have a fairer claim to the public estimation than panoramas.⁷¹

Though he was forced to endure many slights by so-called connoisseurs, he persisted in his panorama enterprises, determined to “demolish all such prejudice.”⁷²

Saddled as he was with huge paintings he could not sell and no longer having a base of operations in New York, the artist again flung himself into a number of rash and ill-planned schemes for installing panoramas in other cities. Returning in the spring of 1833 to the American South, where he had enjoyed a measure of success a decade earlier, he rented an octagonal building in Savannah in which to exhibit the *Versailles*. The small circumference of the interior of the structure required the canvas to be overlapped seven feet at the juncture. The ten-week showing resulted in a net loss of \$83.⁷³

The following spring, Vanderlyn used his payment for a portrait of Washington, commissioned by the House of Representatives, to erect a wooden building at Saratoga Springs, New York, where the mineral waters attracted a large number of summer visitors. His initial expenses were nearly \$900. After a premier exhibition of Burford’s *Geneva* he was \$70 in the red.⁷⁴ Undaunted, he put out \$685 in the winter of 1834/35 for the construction of an elevated building in Charleston, complete with space beneath for carriages.⁷⁵ When it opened, he showed the *Geneva*, which netted him a modest profit. In 1839, at the cost of a lost season and at great expense, he was forced to have the Saratoga building moved to a different site, where it continued to lose money until 1850.⁷⁶ Most of his projects, including exhibitions in Boston in 1838, in Phila-



FIGURE 18. *Versailles Panorama* (detail): Portrait of Vanderlyn with an unidentified companion.

delphia and, probably, in Georgetown a year later, yielded him little more than pocket money and constant anxiety.

The reasons for Vanderlyn’s constant losses were manifold. Never comprehending that his impulsive travels in the 1820s had contributed to his losing the Rotunda, never achieving success with any one project before starting in on another, he continued to overextend himself financially. Owning too few panoramas to keep all his buildings in operation at the same time (in the 1830s he scraped together the funds to buy Burford’s *View of Amsterdam*, adding another panorama to only two he already had), he could not produce enough changes of bill to engage the public’s fickle interest.⁷⁷ Other failures resulted from his hasty and ill-conceived preparation for

The Vanderlyn Panorama

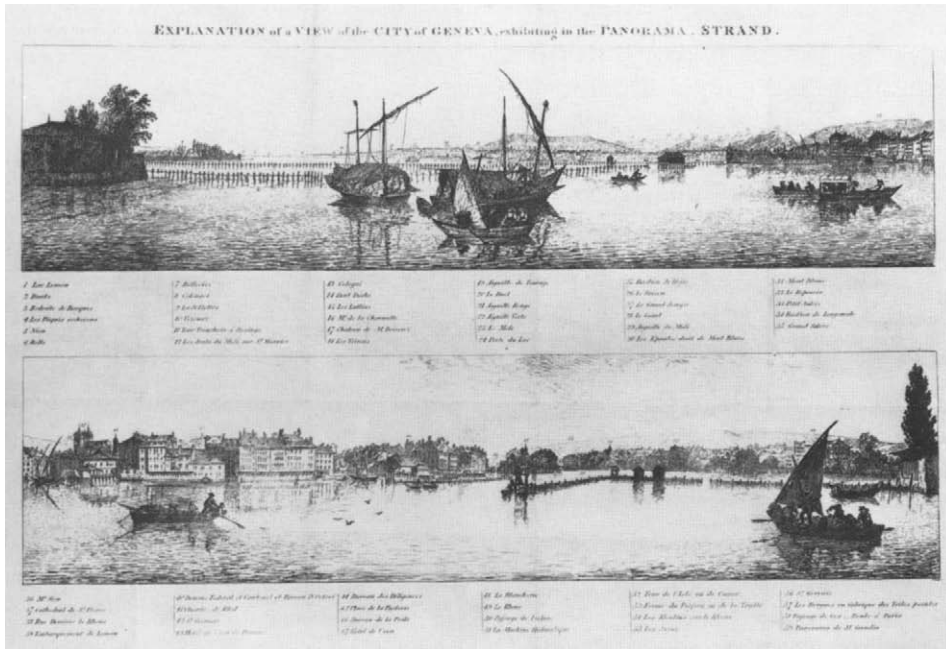


FIGURE 19. *View of the City and Lake of Geneva*, 1827. Engraving, after the panorama by Robert Burford, 12 1/4 x 17 1/2 in. (31.1 x 44.5 cm.). Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York.



FIGURE 20. John Vanderlyn. *The Landing of Columbus*, 1839–46. Oil on canvas, 11 ft. 10 1/2 in. x 18 ft. (3.6 x 5.5 m.). Architect of the Capitol, United States Capitol Art Collection, Washington, D.C.

and only haphazard promotion of his various exhibitions. His innumerable problems had one root cause: his persistent refusal to commit himself personally to the essentially commercial nature of his enterprises. As his young Philadelphia friend had charged in 1821, he was too often the absent proprietor.

The artist looked on with scorn and only poorly disguised envy at other “panoramists,” including Johann Maelzel, an Austrian immigrant whose mechanical panorama Vanderlyn called a “puppet show,” and the American John Banvard, a phenomenal showman whose moving panorama of the Mississippi River earned \$200,000 in America alone.⁷⁸ He could neither recognize nor appreciate that their success was the result of the single-minded effort they devoted to their projects. By contrast, he preferred to delegate responsibility either to his nephew or to virtual strangers, whom he would reward only with constant complaints via the mails. Unwilling to relinquish his perception of himself as a painter of historical subjects, he dissipated his energies between struggling for government commissions and managing his panoramas by proxy, ensuring the failure of both efforts.

That division of purpose, which Vanderlyn so stubbornly maintained, took its toll on the last important commission he ever received: the execution of *The Landing of Columbus* (Fig. 20) for one of the remaining empty panels in the Capitol rotunda. In 1839, seeking an environment conducive to the task, he traveled for the last time to Paris, where he remained for seven years. Sixty-four years old at the outset and with few surviving acquaintances in the city, he endured the term in loneliness and misery, haunted by memories of his youthful experiences and ambitions. As he recorded in a journal he kept during his Paris sojourn:

We think with Dante there is no greater pain of feeling experienced, than to be reminded by some circumstance or situation, of once happy days, when we find

ourselves bereaved and in affliction. Versailles, now in 1840 calls such recollections to mind; when engaged here in the summers of 1814 and 15, with my sketches of this fairy scenery for the object of a panoramic picture; buoyed up with hope and enthusiasm in the undertaking of bringing a correct representation of so enchanting a scene to the door of New Yorkers—Alas! how miserably have my fond anticipations been realised, and how ill has my zeal and exertions been rewarded.⁷⁹

Perhaps because of those recollections, he could not lay his panorama enterprise to rest. He kept his nephew running the Saratoga Springs building each season, plaguing him with instructions for its improvement and regularly bemoaning its steadily declining receipts.⁸⁰ In a letter of 1844, he confided to a loyal patron: “With my little affairs in New York, which are suffering in my absence...I have almost become a Scribbler instead of being a painter.”⁸¹ He was only partly jesting.

The distractions of his panoramas surely contributed to his delay in finishing the *Columbus*; what was worse, they affected its quality. When he returned to America in 1846, his new picture aroused in its viewers only respectful indifference, and it was installed in the Capitol with little ceremony.

The few achievements of Vanderlyn’s remaining years were some portraits and one or two pedestrian subject pictures, which he referred to as “pot-boilers.”⁸² His ambition, originally conceived in 1825 and now surviving his moribund Saratoga Springs project, was to create an “Academy or Gallery of Art” on public ground in Washington, D.C.⁸³ It was just a reincarnation of the Rotunda project, but this time proposed not to the municipal government but the federal. Panoramas were again to be the principal attraction, of course, with easel paintings an auxiliary feature. An official petition to Congress in March

1851 emphasized the didactic value of Vanderlyn's project:

The institution [Mr. Vanderlyn] proposes will serve as a school and means of instruction to the students of art, such as are now drawn to France and Italy, and at the same time for a new source of attraction and instruction to the public and visitors to the Capitol. He also states that he is in possession of some paintings of large dimensions, of a high order of merit.⁸⁴

That time, the use of the word "panorama" was avoided. As Vanderlyn related to a friend in Philadelphia, "The word . . . has been prostituted to so many worthless exhibitions as to have lost all its original import & meaning."⁸⁵ Letters he wrote to other friends at the time suggest that the "worthless exhibitions" were what he later spoke of as "wretched daubs, such as Banvard's [moving panorama] of the Mississippi . . . such is the triumph of quackery or in other words of imposition & falsehood."⁸⁶ Indeed, the arts at mid-century had been affected by the influence of that master showman, P. T. Barnum, and Vanderlyn was determined to protect the original panorama form from that evil trend. But as a biographer acknowledged shortly after Vanderlyn's death, the circular panorama had become "obsolete."⁸⁷ Vanderlyn's petition to Congress was ignored. As he expressed it somewhat bitterly: "I fear it is too late for me to expect any decision on my memorial this season—to think that there is not one member in either house of Congress that takes interest enough in Art . . . to become its champion, is a sorry circumstance for the age and country."⁸⁸

A month after he wrote those words, Vanderlyn was dead. He died alone, in a rented room in his birthplace of Kingston, New York, on 26 September 1852, in his seventy-seventh year. The room he had painted in at the Capitol was empty, but as the Commissioner of Public Build-

ings informed one of the artist's loyal Kingston friends: "In the crypt there is one large Box containing a panoramic view of some place believed to be Versailles."⁸⁹

Though inquiries for the purchase of panoramas Vanderlyn had imported from England were soon being made, there is no indication that any were sold.⁹⁰ They disappeared without a trace, sharing the fate of all the other renowned Barker and Burford canvases.⁹¹ John Vanderlyn, Jr., retrieved the *Versailles* from Washington in December 1853 and took it back to Kingston.⁹² At his death in 1876 it passed to his sister, Catherine, who kept it in a barn on her Kingston property until 1892, the year she died. It was probably in her possession when for some unknown reason it was cut up into irregular sections, several of which vanished. Fortunately, the segments containing its chief features were preserved, and they—twenty-four of them—entered the collection of Catherine's executors, the trustees of the Senate House Association. Since the association had no money to spend on restoring such a huge painting, the pieces were transferred from Catherine's barn to the attic of the Ulster County Courthouse. Not until 1938, when the Senate House Association mounted a special exhibition devoted to Vanderlyn, did the panorama again come to public notice. Almost a century after its previous showing it still aroused interest, but though efforts were made to have it restored and displayed, the problems of financing and housing it could not be solved. In 1952, the association generously offered the *Versailles* to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which accepted it.

Except for an initial restoration before a temporary exhibition at the Museum in 1956–57, the *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* waited thirty years to be suitably and permanently displayed. In the new American Wing, opened to the public in 1980, the prime attraction of the city's first true art museum found an appropriate home.

Conservation

FEW PAINTINGS subjected to the extensive travels, destructive conditions, and physical abuse that the *Versailles* has endured have survived. Even in their heyday panoramas did not enjoy the same consideration afforded easel paintings, for many artists and critics believed them to be of an inferior order, more akin to the theater than to the fine arts. Vanderlyn himself treated those he owned less than circumspectly, allowing inexperienced workmen to hang them and remove them on tour and permitting them to be displayed under the worst possible conditions. From the time he began painting the panorama in a makeshift studio in Kingston and over the course of several decades of travel, the *Versailles* was continually being hung up and taken down, no doubt each time with attendant small losses to the edges; each crew of workmen would have had to improvise their manner of handling the canvas in buildings of varying proportions. Working in haste and ignorance, they probably ripped and nailed it at will.

Sometime around 1840, the *Versailles* was on loan to Madame Jumel, just divorced from Aaron Burr, who used it as a backdrop in the theater she operated in Saratoga Springs. Vanderlyn's instructions to John junior, who was as usual overseeing the installation, included the following notes: "Should you hang up Versailles at once it will be well because I don't know how it was rolled up the last time when that half-crazy fellow Bernard had it hung up for a spell in the old playhouse of Mrs. Jumel. . . . It will be of service to the picture to have it hang up in order to get rid of some of the wrinkles."⁹³

The manner in which the painting was transported remains a mystery. What provision was made in the Rotunda plans for the installation and removal of the canvas is lost, and no original drawings of the interior have yet come to light. A possible means of egress was a trapdoor, but even that is uncertain. The manipulation of such a broad expanse of painted fabric, not to mention its massive weight, would have presented almost insolvable difficulties. Constant rolling and unrolling imprecisely and hastily executed would have caused wrinkling, which, impacted by subsequent layers, could account for the dense craquelure present when restoration was begun.

The panorama originally measured eighteen feet by a hundred and sixty-five. While most of its integral part—the third of the circumference at the horizon line—is intact, approximately six feet in height has been lost, more at the top than at the bottom. The loss was to the neutral ground and the sky, those expanses of canvas extended beyond the spectator's viewpoint to enhance his illusion of an unlimited surrounding landscape.

The structures in which the *Versailles* was exhibited proved often hostile environments. In those days, controlling the temperature in a large area such as the Rotunda was all but impossible. Consequently, the painting suffered great extremes of heat and cold. (While Vanderlyn was working on the panorama, he himself complained of both.) When the *Versailles* was transported to New York, it was to a makeshift building in the bitter cold of winter; when it was moved into the Rotunda, the weather was unbearably hot. At the Rotunda, the only known

aperture was at the dome, and since the canvas would have acted as impenetrable insulation, the heat must have been intolerable. The fabric, first contracting in the cold and then expanding in the heat, would have been damaged by each.

Even apart from the temperature, most of the buildings that housed the traveling panorama were at best unsuitable; within the structure in Montreal, a ditch three feet deep had to be dug around the perimeter to accommodate the bottom of the painting. With subsequent exposure to the underground damp, the canvas was subjected to mildew, which attacked the fibers of the reverse, and to insect and rodent excrement, which ate into the paint layer. In Saratoga Springs, the paint surface was scratched and abraded by bricks that were stacked around the bottom of the fabric to hold it taut.

In most of those buildings, few of which were designed for a panorama, the viewers' entrance had to be created by unstitching one of the vertical seams to form a passageway. Owing to leaky and inadequate roofs, the painting was soaked through by rain and snow on several occasions; when it was being transported from one city to another, improper crating caused additional harm. In its first winter in the Rotunda, during a severe storm on 20 February 1820, snow entered through the oculus and accumulated on the floor. How much water damage the *Versailles* suffered is not known, but the falling snow would have mingled with dirt on the surface, causing disfiguring stains. Evening viewings too took their toll: the crude oil burned in the lamps that provided artificial illumination produced a residue that attacked the painting and darkened the image; clumsy attempts at cleaning resulted in streaks and abrasions.

Whether Vanderlyn ever altered the composition is not known, but that he himself recorded having frequently set aside time to "retouch" it suggests that even in his own time the painting was showing signs of wear and tear.⁹⁴ Twenty years after he had completed the panorama, Vanderlyn revisited Versailles and commented

in a letter to his nephew: "I wish the canvas was better preserved for the picture might undergo some retouching and some of the trees or groves on either side of the central alley might be made a little taller as they have become so in nature. I notice also that there are flowers now planted around the two basins."⁹⁵

When the *Versailles* came to the Museum, visual inspection did not suggest that the design itself was changed, but old touch-ups of the paint from Vanderlyn's time were evident. Moreover, the trees that line the left side of the Grande Allée, considerably taller than those on the right, caused speculation that they were reworked after the original subjects had grown from their initial pictured height.

In preparing the canvas, sewing together and sizing approximately thirty strips eighteen feet long and forty-two inches wide, Vanderlyn finished some of the seams in flat stitching and roughly overcast others. The center seams of each quadrant and in other compositional areas where the artist needed a smooth, uninterrupted expanse have carefully worked seams; over them, the paint surface remains in moderately good condition. The overcast seams, usually in a vaguely defined area, were probably opened up on occasion to accommodate to the specifications of makeshift exhibition structures, usually buildings of different circumferences. Those paint surfaces, which would have required touching up when the seams were closed, appear to have suffered.

Before the *Versailles* was returned to Kingston after Vanderlyn's death, the canvas was undoubtedly trimmed at top and bottom to some degree to remove borders frayed by the rigors of installation, but how or why the panorama was subsequently cut into several unequal segments is hard to interpret. Specific scenes would have been easier to display or to utilize than the entire composition. Missing elements, including an allegorical statue of Air and a representation of three bronze putti, may therefore have been disposed of as separate paintings. Large uniden-

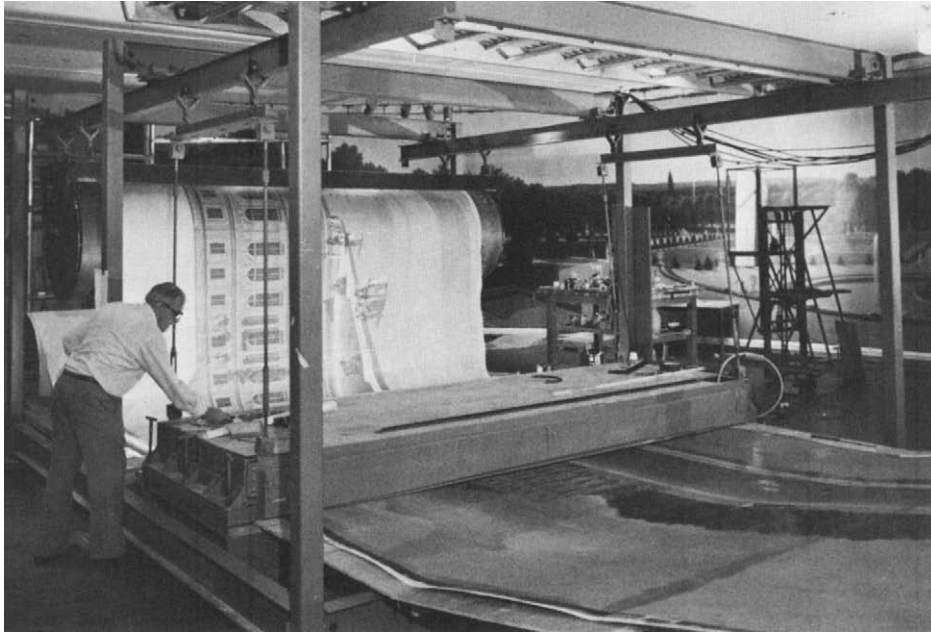


FIGURE 21. Panorama conservator Gustav Berger adjusting the lining apparatus, 1982. Photograph, courtesy Berger Art Conservation, Inc.

tified expanses perhaps contained figural groupings that would have stood on their own as subject matter.

In 1952, when the Museum received the painting from the Senate House State Historic Site, after it had been stored for half a century in the Ulster County Courthouse, what remained of it was in twenty-four pieces of varying sizes that had been rolled haphazardly onto linoleum tubes only five inches in diameter. Small wonder that when the fragments were unrolled they were greatly distorted by waves and other irregularities. In addition, no single section went all the way from the bottom edge to the top, and many sections were irregular in shape. To assist in the piecing together of what was virtually an enormous puzzle, each section was carefully recorded and photographed, and the photographs were then assembled.

The overall condition of the paint surface was good, though loose patches on several areas

required consolidation. The panorama was arranged as accurately as possible in two hemispheres on the floor, and the missing parts were filled in with canvas inserts similar to the original in texture and thickness. The two hemispheres were laid face down, and the back surfaces were bonded to twelve-foot-wide Belgian linen, with wax used as the adhesive. When the lining was complete, the canvas was turned right-side up, the surface was cleaned with organic solvents, and the inserts were painted so as to blend with the original adjacent sections. For the panorama's first exhibition at the Museum, in 1956–57, the formidable task of restoration, achieved by Laurence J. Majewski, conservator and professor of conservation at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, required two years' time, two thousand square feet of linen canvas, and four hundred pounds of wax adhesive. After the exhibition, the painting was rolled onto two specially designed reels, each thirty inches in

diameter, and returned to storage for twenty-five years.

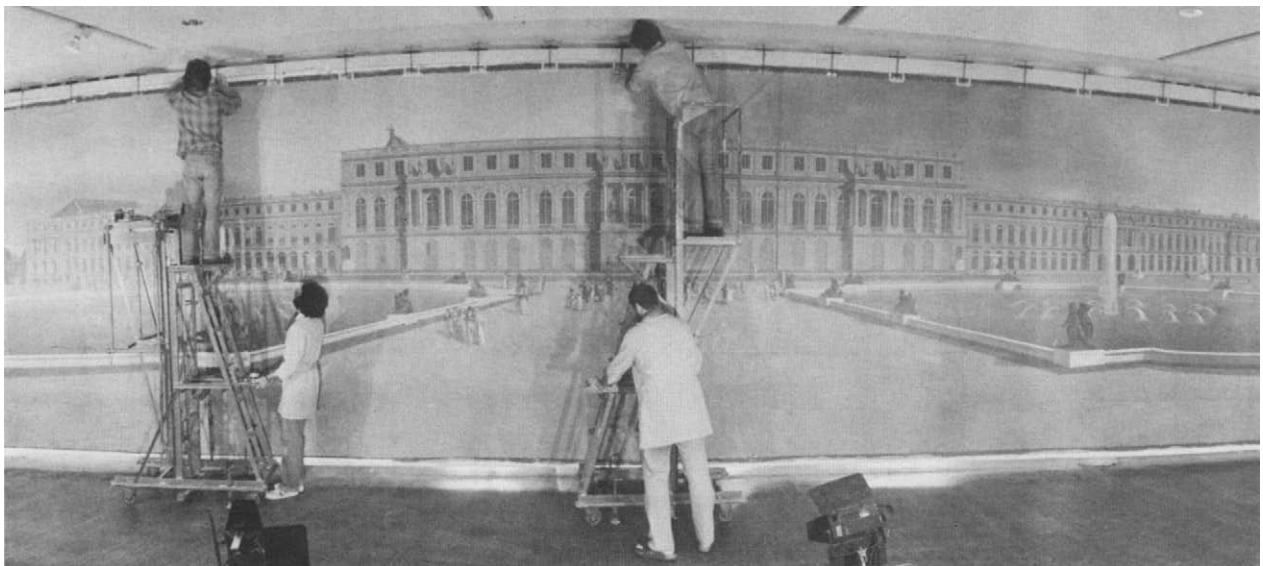
When the panorama's permanent installation in the new American Wing was being planned, the *Versailles* was taken out of storage and examined, and the distortions and surface irregularities noted when it came to the Museum were found to have returned. The wax infusion introduced during the previous restoration had been too soft an adhesive to prevent the flaws and deformations of the old canvas from reasserting themselves.

The Museum solicited the help of Gustav Berger, an American conservator whose professional credentials uniquely qualified him to accept the challenge. Mr. Berger was then completing restoration of the cyclorama in Atlanta, Georgia, a painting three times the size of the *Versailles*. His experiments had resulted in the successful development of a new material called Fiberplate, a fiberglass fabric impregnated with a polyester resin, which could be produced in one continuous, seamless piece flexible enough to

conform to the curve of the panorama but strong enough to prevent distortions from recurring when the canvas was hanging on permanent display.

A specially designed apparatus was constructed to facilitate the handling of the unwieldy mass. It consisted of an overhead track from which was suspended a reel that could move forward and backward. With the fabric supported on the reel, easy access to both sides of the painting was provided. Below the tracks was an area comprising a work table four feet long by twelve feet wide (its width slightly greater than the height of the panorama) flanked on one side with a reel from which the Fiberplate could be played out along the table and on the other with a take-up ramp and a reel onto which the treated canvas could be rolled. A section adjacent to the work table was fitted with a kind of blanket containing a heating element, as well as sensors and thermostats for adjusting and monitoring the temperature. A control panel at the side governed the heat and the machinery. Hanging

FIGURE 22. Hanging the *Versailles Panorama*, 1983. Photograph, courtesy Berger Art Conservation, Inc.



directly over the hot table from the tracks was a soft, seamless polyethylene airbag encased in a rigid housing that resembled an upside-down trough, which could be moved into position over the segment to be lined and then securely bolted.

The canvas was treated section by section. As it rolled over the reel and down on the Fiberplate already in place on the table, its back surface was inspected and irregularities in the fabric and old wax or foreign matter such as dust and hair were scraped down and removed. With the panorama face up on the table, the overlapping inserts made during the first restoration were cut, the excess removed, and the inserts butt-jointed to ensure proper alignment. A superficial cleaning was then administered, and the prepared segment, together with its length of Fiberplate, was moved onto the hot table. The airbag within its rigid housing was positioned, secured, and inflated, causing the airbag to press gently and evenly over the painting segment, preserving the topography of the painted surface (Fig. 21). The heating element was activated to the degree at which the wax resin adhesive still present in the canvas became pliable, thus bonding the canvas and the Fiberplate together. The section was then allowed to cool under pressure. The painting was lined in that manner three and a half linear feet at a time. Because the Fiberplate was not porous, the wax residue oozed onto the painted surface during the process and had to be removed, at which time most of the previous restoration came off with the wax and had to be reconstructed.

The lined, finished segment moved to the takeup ramp, where it was again superficially cleaned and protected with Styrofoam sheeting before being rolled onto the reel. The reel was then raised vertically and positioned at the wall. With its new lining, the painting now weighed about a ton. To provide additional support to the installation, the top edge of the original lining and the Fiberplate were riveted together, and the painting was suspended from brackets fixed to the wall by means of turn-bolts and reinforcing

plates. In that fashion, it could hang free but could also be easily lifted and lowered until its proper alignment was established (Fig. 22).

When the *Versailles* was finally in place, the painting was thoroughly cleaned, and the last vestiges of wax residue were removed. A stabilizing coat of varnish was then applied. Because new sections had to be added at either end of the hemispheres to compensate for what had been lost from the original circumference and to accommodate to the dimensions of the permanent exhibition space, Vanderlyn's grid drawings were once again pressed into service after more than a hundred and fifty years. The broader expanses of sky and foreground were blended into the adjacent passages and minor scenic elements, such as sections of fountain, garden, or statuary, were replaced. These were reconstructed in artist's pure pigments mixed with a stable medium, an approximation of Vanderlyn's original technique. No figures were added, though the missing sections had probably contained some, and unless some configuration on the original canvas needed completion, no attempt was made to add any compositional elements. As the last step, the canvas received its final coat of varnish.

The restoration, two years in the planning and execution, was now complete. The imposition of twentieth-century considerations of space and logistics prevented the duplication of the Rotunda plan in the area assigned to the panorama in the new American Wing. Consequently, two entranceways for the viewers had to be provided and the room itself elongated, slightly affecting the circularity of the canvas. Nonetheless, the *Versailles* has been preserved, enabling viewers today and in the future to witness and enjoy one of the spectacles that captivated their nineteenth-century predecessors.

Notes

Except where otherwise specified, the Vanderlyn correspondence referred to in the notes is at the Senate House Historic Site, Kingston, New York, whose staff provided the authors generous access to typewritten transcripts of the material.

The full publication data of a work cited by an author's surname in the notes are to be found under his name in the Bibliography, p. 47.

For *Minutes* quoted in the notes, see *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784–1831* (New York: City of New York, 1917); for *Proceedings*, see *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen* (New York: New York Common Council, 1836–45).

1. The best account of the origins and development of the panorama in England is given in Altick, chaps. 10–15. For the history of the panorama throughout Europe and America, see Oettermann.

2. C. M. Kauffmann, *Catalogue of Foreign Paintings* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1973) 2:17–18; Oettermann, 49, 275. The smallest surviving circular panorama is L. Caracciolo's *Panorama of Rome* (1824; Victoria and Albert Museum). Panoramas produced in the late nineteenth century, termed "cycloramas," were 400 feet or more in circumference. Paul Philippoteaux's *Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg* (1883; Gettysburg National Historic Site) originally measured 50 x 400 feet.

3. For the panorama's role in the history of film, see C. W. Ceram, *The Archaeology of the Cinema* (London: Thames Hudson, 1965). Altick, 132, notes that the word "panorama" was originally coined by one of Robert Barker's "classical friends" in London, Barker having first termed his invention "La Nature à Coup d'Oeil."

4. The best secondary sources for Vanderlyn's life and career are Averill and Oedel, the latter covering Vanderlyn's career only up to 1819. Primary sources,

mainly Vanderlyn's correspondence, are housed at the Senate House Historic Site, Kingston, N.Y.; The New-York Historical Society; the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Detroit Institute of Art; and Duke University Library, Durham, N. C.

5. Dunlap, 2:77–78. Advertisement for Winstanley's panorama, *American Minerva; and Evening Advertiser*, 21 August 1795, quoted in Rita Susswein Gottesman, *The Arts and Crafts in New York* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1954), 2:29.

6. Oettermann, 113–16.

7. Oedel, 96–97.

8. "The Panorama, with Memoirs of its Inventor, Robert Barker, and his Son, the late Henry Aston Barker," *Art Journal*, 19 (1857):46.

9. From an advertisement in *The World* (London), 19 April 1790, in Daniel Lysons, comp., *Collectanea*, scrapbook, British Library, London, 2:171.

10. Published in *Magasin Encyclopedique*, 1800, quoted in Oettermann, 115.

11. For Girtin and Porter, see Altick, 115; for Friedrich's unrealized plan for a panorama, see Oettermann, 39–40. For Trumbull and Cole, see Lee Parry, "Landscape Theater in America," *Art in America* 59 (Nov.–Dec. 1971):53–56.

12. Oettermann, 120; John Vanderlyn to unknown correspondent, November 1841.

13. John Vanderlyn to Nicholas Vanderlyn, 4 September 1808.

14. John Vanderlyn to Roger Strong, 6 April 1810.

15. John Vanderlyn to his brother Peter, 14 August 1797.

16. John Vanderlyn to Washington Allston, 26 November 1814, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

17. For Louis's plans for the palace and a history of Versailles during the period, see L. Dussieux, *Le Château de Versailles* (Paris: L. Bernard, 1881), 2:54–75. Louis began reconstruction of the palace, but never actually resided there.
18. John Vanderlyn to Washington Allston, 26 November 1814, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
19. For an explanation and illustrated examples of the camera obscura, see John H. Hammond, *The Camera Obscura* (Bristol: Adam Hilger, 1981), 40–68.
20. John Vanderlyn to Washington Allston, 26 November 1814, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
21. See Stejan Kozakiewicz, *Bernardo Bellotto* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1972) 1:58–59; for illustrations, 2:46, 58, 75, 81, and passim.
22. M. Blacas, Minister of Household, to Baron Monnier, Superintendent of Crown Buildings, 17 September 1814, Archives Nationales, Paris, doss. O 347, 4:139.
23. Collection of Fred J. Johnston, Kingston, N.Y.
24. Senate House State Historic Site, Kingston, N.Y.
25. Dussieux, 74, records the visit of the czar and the king. See also Marius Schoonmaker, *John Vanderlyn, Artist, 1775–1852* (Kingston, N.Y.: Senate House Association, 1950), 39. Schoonmaker suggests that the sovereigns are portrayed in August and September 1815 at the time of the allied formulation of the new government in France.
26. See [John Vanderlyn], *Description of the Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* (Philadelphia, 1821), where title page states that Vanderlyn sketched at Versailles in the autumn of 1815. See also an entry of 1840 in a journal or diary, signed "V.D.L." [Vanderlyn], kept by the artist in Paris in the early 1840s (quoted on p. 33 in this text), where he recalls that he sketched at Versailles in the summers of 1814 and 181, Senate House.
27. William D. Lawrence to Samuel D. Lawrence, 15 April 1816.
28. Dunlap, 2:163. American Academy of the Fine Arts, "Minutes of Meetings, 1802–1839," microfilm, New-York Historical Society, 84 (19 September 1816), 88 (3 October 1816).
29. Dunlap, 2:163-65.
30. *Minutes* 8:596-97 (6 August 1816), 618 (26 August 1816).
31. *Minutes* 9:20 (24 February 1817), 79–80 (31 March 1817), 99–100 (14 April 1817).
32. Dunlap, 2:166-67.
33. Oedel, 454, names three architects—James O'Donnell, Benjamin Latrobe, and Maximilian Godefroy—who either corresponded with Vanderlyn or were referred to by him in his letters. Recently, on the reverse of a Vanderlyn sketch (Kennedy Galleries) for the allegorical figures of Painting and Sculpture planned for niches on the front of the building, the authors discovered part of a pencil drawing of what appears to be an early design for the Rotunda. While the artist of the drawing cannot be determined, it could well have been Vanderlyn, which would strengthen the case for his having designed the building.
34. John Vanderlyn to Maximilian Godefroy, 18 August 1819.
35. Dimensions of the Rotunda given in *Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioners for the Year 1848* (New York: McSpedon and Baker, 1849), 40. For the reference to the "round stairs" in the Rotunda, see John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 15 February 1820.
36. The Rotunda is further described in John Vanderlyn to Henry Vanderlyn, 28 June 1818, New-York Historical Society, and John Vanderlyn to Henry Purviance, 26 July 1818, Duke University Library. The dimensions of the interior of the Rotunda and its elements are estimates based on known specifications of panorama theaters erected or modified by Vanderlyn for the presentation of *Versailles* in Savannah and Charleston in the 1830s. See John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 1 April 1833, New-York Historical Society; John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 3 April 1833, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040; ledger of specifications for the construction of a panoramic theater in Charleston, Senate House.
37. Averill, 112–13; Oedel, 423, 453–54.

38. For Bowen, see Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopaedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, Pa.: National History Association, 1932), s.v. "panoramas." For Barker's *Attack of the Allied Forces on Paris*, see I. N. Phelps Stokes, comp., *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498–1909* (New York: Richard H. Dodd, 1926), 5:1601–3. For Porter's *Battle of Lodi* at the Rotunda, see George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 2:542–43.
39. For Jenny, see John Vanderlyn to Henry Vanderlyn, 28 June 1818, New-York Historical Society; John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 20 February 1820; John Vanderlyn to Aaron Burr, 28 June 1821; E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire Critique et Documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs* (Paris: Ernest Grund, 1924), s.v. "Jenny, Johann Heinrich"; George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564–1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), 349.
40. See John Vanderlyn to Henry Vanderlyn, 28 June 1818, New-York Historical Society, for Vanderlyn's description of his working procedure.
41. For description and illustration of the method, see Andrea Pozzo, *Perspectiva Pictorum, et Architectorum* (Rome: Antonii de Rubeis, 1723).
42. John Vanderlyn to Charles Bird King, 26 July 1819, New-York Historical Society.
43. For reviews, see "Rotunda," *National Advocate*, 30 June 1819; Apollo (pseud.), "The Rotunda," *New York Daily Advertiser*, 5 July 1819; "Panoramic Painting," *New York Evening Post*, 7 July 1819.
44. *National Advocate*, 21 April 1818, quoted in William Kelby, comp., *Notes on American Artists, 1754–1820, Copied from Advertisements Appearing in Newspapers of the Day* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1922), 54.
45. Ibid.
46. John Vanderlyn to D. B. Warden, 2 August 1824.
47. John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 2, 26 February 1820. The use of the Rotunda as living and working quarters for artists is consonant with Vanderlyn's desire to establish it as a center for the arts.
- Though it is not certain that Vanderlyn lived there himself, he frequently used the Rotunda as his New York mailing address. The correspondence indicates that John Vanderlyn, Jr., eldest child of the artist's brother Nicholas, lived in the Rotunda and supervised its operations when his uncle was out of town.
48. B. Powell to John Vanderlyn, 8 September 1821.
49. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 31 October 1831.
50. B. Powell to John Vanderlyn, 8 September 1821.
51. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., and Louis-Antoine Collas, 28 June 1820, New-York Historical Society; John L. Marsh, "John Vanderlyn, Charleston, and Panoram[an]ia," *Journal of American Culture* 3 (Fall 1980):422; John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 2 May 1835, 13 June 1835.
52. John L. Broome to John Vanderlyn, 15 February 1824; A. F. Maybie to John Vanderlyn, 22 February 1824; *Minutes* 13:721 (24 May 1824); 762 (21 June 1824).
53. John Vanderlyn to Philip Hone, 1 February 1825, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
54. [John Vanderlyn], "The Following Communication is Respectfully Addressed to the Subscribers, Patrons, and Friends of the Late Panoramic Institution of the New York Rotunda," manuscript dated November 1829 and published as a pamphlet in 1830, Senate House.
55. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 9 September 1825.
56. Jacob Masten to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 9 February 1829.
57. Ibid.
58. *Minutes* 17:712 (16 March 1829); 713 (23 March 1829).
59. *Minutes* 18:149 (29 June 1829).
60. W. Emmet to John Vanderlyn, 10 September 1829.
61. John Vanderlyn to unknown correspondent, 20 October 1829, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040.

62. Jacob Masten to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 9 February 1829, notes that “the picture . . . which [Vanderlyn] has sent for to England” had arrived in January, undoubtedly an allusion to Burford’s *Geneva*. The panorama is also mentioned in John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 27 October 1829, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040.
63. *Minutes* 19:324 (1 November 1830); 427–29 (10 January 1831).
64. *Minutes* 19:574–76 (21 March 1831).
65. Averill, 137.
66. *Proceedings* 10:54–55 (14 December 1835).
67. *Proceedings* 10:81 (30 December 1835); 503 (7 November 1836); 509 (14 November 1836).
68. *Proceedings* 34:25 (22 November 1847); John Vanderlyn to Alderman Chapman of Fifth Ward, 13 April 1850.
69. Winifred E. Howe, *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913), 62–67, 83; *Proceedings* 28:147–48 (6 January 1845); 213 (27 January 1845); 272 (10 February 1845); Stokes 5:1789 (3 March 1845).
70. Stokes 5:1812 (25 July, 5 August 1848); *Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioner for 1848*, 40–41; Stokes 5:1936 (1870). “The Rotunda. Its Demolition—Sketch of its History,” *New York Tribune*, 20 October 1870.
71. [Vanderlyn], “To the Subscribers, Patrons, and Friends of the New York Rotunda,” November 1829.
72. John Vanderlyn to H. Jones, noted at bottom of letter from Jones to Vanderlyn, 22 May 1829, probably a draft of his reply.
73. John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 1 April 1833, 3 April 1833, 28 May 1833, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040.
74. See [John Vanderlyn], “Saratoga Papers 1834–1835,” receipts and expenditures, Senate House. Actual expenses of the building, freighting, labor, etc., totaled \$876. Vanderlyn paid in advance \$310 from his fee for the Washington portrait. His receipts in the summer of 1834 were \$497.32 1/2.
75. See undated agreement between Vanderlyn and Samuel Seyles for lease of a lot in Meeting Street, Charleston, Senate House; John Vanderlyn to Leonard Jarvis (undated, probably January 1835), in which Vanderlyn states that he spent \$1300 for the Charleston building plus \$300 rent for the lot; John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 22 May 1835.
76. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 13 December 1838, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040; H. Walton to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 10 July 1839; J. H. Shegogue to John Vanderlyn, 4 September 1839; Vanderlyn to Shegogue, 29 October 1840, 15 November 1840.
77. Vanderlyn added Burford’s panorama to his own *Versailles* and Burford’s *View of Geneva*, which he had purchased in 1829. See John Vanderlyn to Robert Burford, 18 June 1835; Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 22 September 1835.
78. For references to Maelzel’s *Conflagration of Moscow*, see Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 16 September 1834, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040; John Vanderlyn, Jr., to John Vanderlyn, 22 November 1834. For Maelzel, see Joseph Earl Arrington, “Johann Maelzel, Master Showman of Automata and Panoramas,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 84 (1960):56–92. For Banvard, see John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 18–46.
79. Fragment of journal or diary kept by Vanderlyn in Paris in the early 1840s, signed “V.D.L.” [Vanderlyn], Senate House.
80. Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 20 April, 26 April 1840, Vanderlyn to Levi Vanderlyn, 20 December 1842, 20 April 1843, Vanderlyn to J. H. Shegogue, 25 April 1840, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040; Vanderlyn to Levi Vanderlyn, 27 February 1844.
81. Vanderlyn to J. S. Cogdell, 4 May 1844.
82. John Vanderlyn to C. H. van Gaasbeck, 18 September 1850, New-York Historical Society.
83. John Vanderlyn to Emil B. Gardette, 6 March 1849, 16 May 1849, one undated (probably June 1850), and 1 March 1851, New-York Historical Society; John Vanderlyn to Levi Vanderlyn, February 1847, John

- Vanderlyn to Levi Vanderlyn, February 1847, John Vanderlyn to C. Edward Leister, 11 May 1849, John Vanderlyn to C. H. van Gaasbeck, 16 December 1848, 1 March, 22 March 1851, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040; Vanderlyn to C. H. Leister, 22 March 1849, John Vanderlyn to C. H. van Gaasbeck, 2 December 1850, 29 March 1851, and draft of a petition, dated March 1851, introduced by Mr. Badger to U.S. Congress seeking permission for Vanderlyn to build his gallery on public land, Senate House.
84. Draft of petition to Congress, March 1851, Senate House.
85. John Vanderlyn to Emil B. Gardette, 16 May 1849, New-York Historical Society.
86. Vanderlyn to Robert Gosman, 24 February 1851; see also Vanderlyn to Gardette, 6 March 1849, 8 July 1849, New-York Historical Society.
87. Robert Gosman to B. B. French, 10 November 1853.
88. Vanderlyn to C. H. van Gaasbeck, 26 August 1852, Archives of American Art, microfilm roll 1040.
89. U.S. Commissioner of Public Buildings to Robert Gosman, 13 October 1852.
90. J. G. Taggart to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 28 July 1853, 17 January 1854.
91. See *Kingston Argus*, 29 November 1893, for report that Vanderlyn's other panoramas "had been destroyed by fire when in a warehouse at Wilbur [New York] thirty or more years ago." Clipping on microfilm at the New-York Historical Society.
92. Receipt, dated December 1853, signed by John Vanderlyn, Jr., for John Vanderlyn's remaining effects, including the *Panorama of Versailles*, left in the U.S. Capitol at his death, Senate House.
93. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 26 April 1840.
94. John Vanderlyn to J. H. Purviance, 6 July 1820; John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 26 April 1840.
95. John Vanderlyn to John Vanderlyn, Jr., 26 April 1840.

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KEVIN J. AVERY is an assistant curator in the Department of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum. As a Chester Dale Fellow and later as a research assistant at the Museum, he worked on the exhibition *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*. He also contributed an essay and discussions of several paintings to the book of the same title that accompanied the exhibition. Mr. Avery is adjunct instructor in the art department at Hunter College of The City University of New York.

PETER L. FODERA, who received the degree of master of science from Queen's College of The City University of New York, was the recipient of a Kress Foundation grant to study with the master conservator Gustav Berger. He was subsequently chosen by Mr. Berger to work on the Vanderlyn panorama prior to its installation in the new American Wing in 1983. Mr. Fodera has been associated with the Department of American Decorative Arts at the Museum for several conservation commissions.

