

Carlton Theodore Chapman

United States, 1860–1925

Engagement between the U.S. Frigate “Constitution” and HMS “Java,” 1896

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, The Naval History Society
Collection (John Sanford Barnes Foundation), 1925.114

Engagement between the U.S. Frigate “Constitution” and HMS “Java,” 1897

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, The Naval History Society
Collection (John Sanford Barnes Foundation), 1925.115

Chapman was known as the Gilded Age’s foremost painter of historic naval vessels and warfare. He was especially prolific in creating pictures that looked back to the nation’s historic victories with nostalgic pride. As part of the 1897 celebration of the centennial of the USS *Constitution*, Chapman vividly reimagined the engagement of the American frigate and the British *Java*. The first installment shows the two-hour battle well under way. The *Java* has already lost two masts, with one sail hanging and the other trailing in the water. Smoke rising from the British ship’s decks suggests that the *Java* is already aflame.

In the second painting, the battle is over. The defeated and destroyed *Java* burns in the foreground while the Americans pursue a rescue operation, taking the defeated British survivors to the *Constitution*. Chapman deepens the Romantic tone of the painting by silhouetting the frigate against a fiery sunset that reflects in the waves and finds a visual echo in the blazing bulk of the *Java*.



PMA Voices • Matthew Brenckle

Research Historian, USS Constitution Museum

To listen call (207) 228-0300



Unidentified Artist

Factories at Canton (from the Harbor), China, 1850

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Gift of
Miss Alice Temple Parkin, 1946.82

View of Hong Kong Island, Victoria Peak and the Harbor, Painted from Kowloon, 1850

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Gift of
Miss Alice Temple Parkin, 1946.80

The China trade created a vast commercial maritime network between the West and certain Chinese ports. The famous Canton factories seen here did not actually manufacture goods, instead serving as trading centers. The flags of five nations indicate Canton's importance in the global maritime commerce of the mid-19th century. Chinese vessels pass by on the Pearl River including, at the far right, one of the famous Canton floating brothels, or "flower boats."

A matching panoramic vista of Hong Kong harbor, viewed from Kowloon, features Western sailing ships and steamboats. By 1850 this busy port was already a colony of the British Crown.

Victor de Grailly

France, 1804–1889

Kosciuszko's Monument, West Point circa 1845

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Purchase, 1923.6

Victor de Grailly, a French artist who based his paintings on engravings published in *American Scenery*, a best-selling book of the 1840s, offers a spectacular vista of a land he never actually saw. This detailed rendering shows a section of the United States Military Academy at West Point, which was (and still is) a popular tourist destination for its rich history, architecture, and monuments. Here, de Grailly shows an expansive view of the Hudson River Valley, while prominently including the neoclassical memorial to the Polish patriot Thaddeus Kosciuszko, who had served in George Washington's army.



PMA Voices • Andrew Eschelbacher

Susan Donnell and Harry W. Konkel

Assistant Curator of European Art

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Howard Pyle

United States, 1853–1911

A Privateersman Ashore, 1893

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Gift of George A. Zabriski, 1948.28

A gifted and prolific artist-illustrator, Pyle created this striking painting as an illustration for an article about the history of New York in Harper's *New Monthly Magazine*. The limited gray palette—called *grisaille*—lent itself to black-and-white reproduction.

Pyle's audacious privateer boldly confronts the viewer before a historically accurate rendering of the 1812-era Battery and Castle Clinton area. Taking his cue from the article, Pyle portrays the swashbuckling freebooter in jaunty, quasi-naval attire. Other visitors observe him from a safe distance, suggesting their ambivalence to these raiders who operated on the margins of maritime law at sea and polite society ashore.

Unidentified Artist

A Southeast Prospect of the City of New York, circa 1756–61

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Gift of Cornelia LeRoy White, in the name of Goldsborough Banyer, 1904.1

The earliest painting in this exhibition, *A Southeast Prospect* charts New York City's 18th-century waterfront as well as the busy shipping trade on the East River. Landmarks include the Battery at the far left, Trinity Church in the center, and the peaked-roof Meal Market—a center of New York's early-18th-century slave trade—at the center-right foreground. Magnificent ships anchor in the East River, signaling international enterprise as well as the naval strength that secured the colonial outpost of New York as part of the British Empire.



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Thomas Buttersworth

England, 1768–1842

Escape of HMS “Belvidera” from the U.S. Frigate “President,” circa 1815

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Bequest of Irving S. Olds, 1963.58

Running Action between the U.S. Frigate “President” and HMS “Endymion,” 1815

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Bequest of Irving S. Olds, 1963.59

During the War of 1812, the English marine painter Thomas Buttersworth addressed both American and British audiences with his portrayals of key naval engagements on the high seas. The upper painting of this pair shows the American *President* (at right) and the British *Belvidera* exchanging broadsides on June 23, 1812—just five days into the war. The pendant work (below) records the British capture of the *President* two-and-a-half years later. Though the Americans would lose the battle, Buttersworth depicts the *President* bravely firing its cannons at the *Endymion* as smoke clouds illuminate the dusky sky.

Julian Oliver Davidson

United States, 1853–1894

Battle of Mobile Bay, 1886

Oil on linen

New-York Historical Society, Gift of the Naval History Society, 1936.802

Battle of Port Hudson, 1863, circa 1886

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society, Gift of the Naval History Society, 1936.801

Davidson painted two exciting reenactments of Civil War naval engagements as part of a project to produce a suite of 18 chromolithographs titled *Prang's War Pictures*. In the top image, he offers a panoramic view of the Gulf Coast at dawn, showing the battle formation of Union ships as they engaged the Confederate defenders of Fort Morgan. Davidson captures the Northern attackers in a moment of disarray just before the Union Admiral David Farragut issued his now-legendary command: "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead—full speed!"

Below, Davidson shows Confederate forces on the steep bluffs beside Port Hudson firing down on the Union ships that are attempting to run past the batteries. Artillery bursts and smoke obscures much of the river, highlighting the excitement, confusion, and visual drama of the battle.

Jasper Francis Cropsey

United States, 1823–1900

A Sketch of Castle Garden, 1851

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society,

Thomas Jefferson Bryan Fund, 1977.76

Castle Garden, New York, 1859

Oil on canvas

New-York Historical Society,

Thomas Jefferson Bryan Fund, 1972.13

Cropsey made a careful drawing of Castle Garden in 1851, keenly observing the intricacies of the site. He used that study for a series of works that exploited the picturesque possibilities of the old fort, which later became a theater. Above, his fluidly painted oil sketch shows the harbor busy with maritime traffic beneath a dramatic sky. Below he captures the theater under a cloudy night sky with a full moon illuminating the dark waters. The vivid contrast of the cold moonlight and the glowing lanterns lends an aura of Romantic mystery to the looming structure and its surrounding walkways.