

Frederic Edwin Church, **Our Banner in the Sky**, 1861

Oil on paper mounted on board, Terra Foundation for American Art

Frederic Church is known for his allegorical landscapes. In this patriotic painting Church paints a sunset scene manipulating the individual parts of the painting to make them resemble the American flag. He painted this scene shortly after the beginning of the Civil War when Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 1861. The flag played an important part in the actual battle and became a symbol of Northern resilience. Clouds streaking across the sky become the stripes of the flag and the setting sun turns the sky blood red. A patch of blue sky with stars twinkling is painted like the stars on the Fort Sumter flag. A dead tree becomes the flag pole, while an eagle flies above. The symbolism supports the idea that the Union will prevail even though the country is currently in tatters. Using a very traditional landscape painting, where nature communicates ideas and beliefs, Church conveyed the ideas of national identity, manifest destiny and hopeful progress.