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THE CORNELL FARM

by Edward Hicks  
American, 1780-1849

Canvas, height 36-3/4 in., width 49 in.  
(Signed and dated 1848)

National Gallery of Art

Gift of Edgar William and  
Bernice Chrysler Garbisch

"An Indian summer view of the Farm & Stock of James C. Cornell of Northampton Bucks county Pennsylvania. That took the Premium in the Agricultural Society, october the 12, 1848 Painted by E. Hicks in the 69th year of his age." This inscription written across the bottom of the picture identifies the subject as the celebrated farm and livestock belonging to James Cornell. According to the October 17, 1848 issue of the Doylestown Democrat and Bucks County Republican, Cornell carried away many of the honors granted at the Agricultural Society exhibition which was held five days earlier in Newtown, Pennsylvania. He won first premium of \$5.00 for the best cultivated farm over one hundred acres "regard being had to the quality of produce, mode of cultivation, and general appearance." He was also awarded first prizes for the best blood mares, the best six ewes, the best six suckling pigs of Bedford breed, and the best six milch cows.

In painting the farm, Hicks provided a visual account of Cornell's success at the competition. Horses, sheep, pigs, and cows--all of the animals which were awarded premiums--pose self-consciously across the foreground of the picture, suggesting that they are still up for review. Behind them, wearing a gray belted outfit, is a figure who has been identified as James Cornell; he appears to be drawing attention to his prize-winning livestock. The well-manicured fields on the right attest to the neat appearance for which the farm was granted a prize, while the distant rolling hills indicate the large acreage Cornell held.



Edward Hicks, a self-taught artist, was an American primitive painter. Because he had little artistic training, one would expect to find the rather direct approach to subject matter which appears in The Cornell Farm. The alignment of the animals across the foreground reflects an almost childlike simplicity, as does the bold outlining of the buildings further back in the picture. Hicks's handling of space is also quite naive. The lines of the architectural structures do not conform to the laws of linear perspective and the reduction in size of the figures is not consistent. In treating the distant landscape, however, Hicks achieved a fairly convincing sense of depth, for the diffuse forms and soft tonality give the impression of land existing well beyond what the eye can see.

Edward Hicks, like many other American primitives, did not rely upon his paintings as the sole source of livelihood. His profession was, in fact, that of a coach and sign painter; his pictures were, for the most part, created during moments of leisure for friends and relatives. Hicks was not averse, however, to bartering his pictures or painting them on commission. It is likely that he painted The Cornell Farm for a proud farmer as a record of his awards at a local agricultural fair. The canvas, enjoyed by James Cornell and two successive generations of his family, hung, until recently, in the parlor of the house shown on the left.

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A.W.