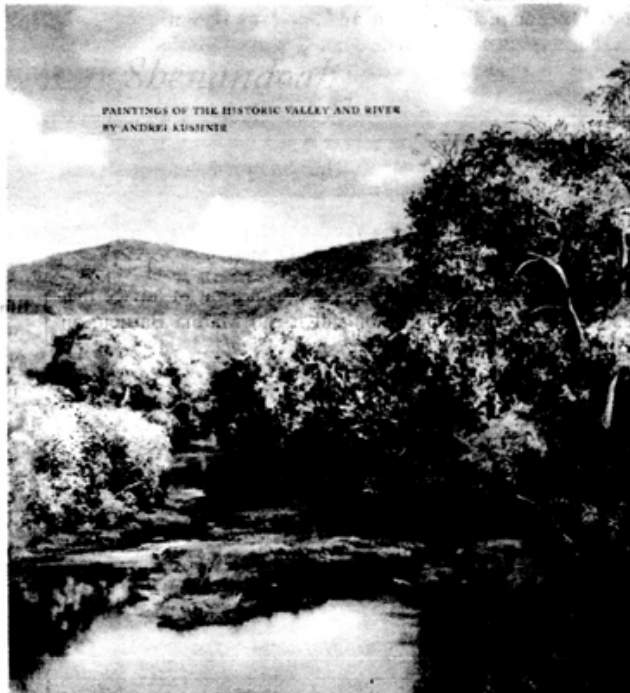


Oh, Shenandoah: Paintings of the Historic Valley and River by Andrei Kushnir (George F. Thompson Publishing, in association with the American Land Publishing Project, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, and Shenandoah University, 2016, 400 pp., hardbound, \$59.95 plus S/H from University of Virginia Press, Inc. [www.upress.virginia.edu] or [800] 848-6224).

This book was produced by publisher George F. Thompson and the artist in partnership with the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester, Virginia, and with the Duke Hall Gallery of Fine Art at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The two museums presented solo exhibitions of art by Andrei Kushnir, who is a well-respected plein-air painter in oils on panels and on canvases. Kushnir, with inspiration of his own and from the historians and conservationists who wrote the essays, set out to capture the essences of the Shenandoah



Valley along certain travel routes. He documented the natural splendor of the river and hills, as well as the towns and rural dwellings of people who live there. This book catalogs the paintings in full color, and it includes an interview with the artist about his life's work and his charming "Artist's Acknowledgments" for us to savor. Admirably, the directness of plein-air painting yields undeniable freshness when compared to paintings done from photographs, even if the artist's palette may not always be the viewer's preference.

Warren R. Hofstra introduces the reader to the task with his insightful and appreciative essay, "The Shenandoah Valley: Legendary American Landscape," and we enter or reenter the history of the region. He tells the tale with succinct grace and his own experience. I was struck with his citing A.B. Jackson's assertion that "...to read the landscape is to experience the deeper life of a people's culture." Hofstra sees that Kushnir fills his paintings with such understanding.

In "Land and Life in the Shenandoah Valley," author Jeffrey C. Everett gives verbal underpinnings to specific areas, stating, "With my roots in the Valley, I have incorporated local perspective into the narratives. Since the ever-pragmatic Valley folk rarely concern themselves with the aesthete, there was a concerted effort to include in this book utilitarian landscapes along with the scenic ones...." I enjoyed gazing into the reproductions of Kushnir's artworks and imagined standing alongside him, in all the seasons and varied weather, drinking in the air of the places and standing on what seems to be

hallowed ground. This section of the book is clearly delineated and bridges a gap between visual and verbal descriptions. One standout is Everett's presentation of "The Blue Ridge Mountains and National Parks" and "...its own physiographic province," where we learn about the displacement of 2317 mountaineers (465 families) who were removed, mostly against their will, to create the national park. Everett's thoughtful analysis of long-running reverberations concerning land use is poignant and timely. And this is just one on his list, all well worth exploring fully.

The essay "Andrei Kushnir's Vision of the Picturesque Virginia Landscape" is a masterful placement of this artist into the art historical pantheon. William M.S. Rasmussen draws on vast knowledge and brings into play well-chosen philosophical and historical commentary. It is a pithy accomplishment of art history and fine tribute to his appreciation of Kushnir's ten-year (or more) task.

Naturally, the bulk of the book consists of the plates depicting the art and with commentary on them by the artist. Many are arranged into three portfolios: I. Harpers Ferry to Lexington along U.S. 340; II. Williamsport to Lexington along U.S. 11; and III. Woodstock to Lexington along VA 42 and 252. The other illustrations are tied to the essays and arranged by the publisher with a deft hand. This journey along the Shenandoah Valley is enchanting and educating and deserves a place in our art history libraries for its erudition and for future reference.

A.C.V.