

RE-FRAMING THE AMERICAN WEST:
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS ENGAGE HISTORY

By

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Abstract

This study examines contemporary artists who revisit, revise, reimagine, reclaim, and otherwise engage directly with art of the American Frontier from 1820-1920. The revision of the historic images calls attention to the myth and ideologies imbedded in the imagery. Likewise, these contemporary images are essentially a framing of western imagery informed by a system of values and interpretive strategies of the present. The re-framing of the historic West opens a dialogue that expands beyond the frame, to look at images and history from different angles. This dissertation examines twentieth- and twenty-first century artists such as the Cowboy Artists of America, Mark Klett, Tony Foster, Byron Wolfe, Stephen Hannock, Bill Schenck, and Kent Monkman alongside historic western American artists such as Frederic Remington, Charles M. Russell, Timothy O'Sullivan, Thomas Moran, W.R. Leigh, and Albert Bierstadt. The goals of the contemporary artists vary greatly, but collectively they challenge the notion of a singular history and interpretation of the American West. They examine the way in which the American West was framed through history, contributing to our understanding of both the nineteenth-century images and the contemporary experience.

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Introduction: Myth, Ideology, and History

In 1991, the Smithsonian American Art Museum opened the exhibition *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*. The exhibition's curator, William H. Truettner, sought to "unearth a deeper, troubling story" behind images of westward expansion. Truettner and fellow authors of the accompanying catalogue (and exhibition labels) examined the myth and ideology imbedded in the images in an effort to reveal the historical agenda hidden within the art works.¹ From the beginning, the *West as America* exhibition met with criticism and controversy and enraged audiences. Influential U.S. senators, who interpreted the text as perverse and destructive, claimed that the exhibition undermined patriotism because it questioned American foundation myths. As Alan Trachtenberg observed in his review of the exhibition, "to dismantle the cherished belief in the 'winning of the West' as America's epic, and western art as its sublime portrayal" was a troubling notion.² It was so troubling for Republican Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska that he threatened to cut off government funding of the Smithsonian. Stevens and other conservative viewers identified themselves as guardians and keepers of America's past, and the exhibition seemed to turn their understanding of the West upside down. The controversy surrounding the reinterpretation of western images highlighted just how deeply imbedded these values were in the art works and in ideology of the late twentieth century.

¹ William H. Truettner ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington,

² Alan Trachtenberg, "Contesting the West" *Art in America* 79, no. 9 (September 1991): 118. There were many reviews of the exhibition. A review by Bryan J. Wolf reflected on the methodology used by the organizers and also summarized the political implications of the controversy. See Bryan J. Wolf, "How the West Was Hung, or, When I Hear the Word 'Culture' I Take Out My Checkbook," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 1992): 418-438. See also Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 105-117. Not all reactions to the exhibition were negative. Excerpts from the *West as America* visitor comment books were published in "Showdown at 'The West as America' Exhibition," *American Art* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 2-11.

The myth, ideology, and history of the West from 1820-1920 provide the framework for looking at art of the American West from the past and, importantly, in the twenty-first century. Western historian Richard Slotkin defines myth as “the primary language of historical memory: a body of traditional stories that have, over time, been used to summarize the course of our collective history and to assign ideological meaning to that history.”³ The myth of the frontier that the *West as America* exhibition critiqued was one that guaranteed progress and emphasized unlimited resources. The myth undermined the negative social and environmental impact of expansion and minimized the presence of Native peoples and societies already in the West. The national ideology embraced the myth, which authorized western expansion as beneficial. Further, the myth was sanctified by the mid-nineteenth-century ideology of Manifest Destiny, a term coined by newspaper editor John O’Sullivan in 1845 to describe America’s belief in its divine obligation to stretch the boundaries of the nation to the Pacific Ocean.

By the early nineteenth century, America’s expanding western frontier touted civilization over savagery and supported the spreading of democracy across the continent.⁴ In the 1890s, as America had expanded settlement and the so-called undeveloped wilderness was disappearing, the young historian Frederick Jackson Turner formalized the myth of the frontier.⁵ Turner defined the frontier not as a place or area but in ideological terms as a transformational aspect of society. In a speech at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition Turner discussed what he

³ Richard Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History,” in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 70.

⁴ Richard Slotkin, “Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt’s Myth of the Frontier,” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (Winter 1981): 609.

⁵ The 1890s were a decade marked by important historical events in the West: The Wounded Knee Massacre and new conservation movements to preserve dwindling herds are but two examples. The Wounded Knee Massacre occurred in South Dakota on December 29, 1890, and was the last battle of the American Indian Wars. More than three hundred Lakota men, women, and children were killed, and an additional fifty-one were wounded. Conservation movements from the time include the Boone & Crockett Club, a hunting group dedicated to protecting wildlife (founded in 1887 by Grinnell and Theodore Roosevelt, first meetings and publication, 1893-1895). John Muir’s Sierra Club was formed in 1892 and the preservation bill, “Act to Protect the Birds and Animals in Yellowstone National Park,” was signed in 1894.

believed to be elemental to the character and development of the West and, by extension, to America. Turner defined the frontier as “the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”⁶ The importance of the frontier for American history and character was twofold: the frontier forced men to develop individuality and strength to overcome difficult conditions; and as the frontier moved westward, it was farther from European influences, hence continually more American. Turner’s description of the American West as a region accompanied by “ideals of equality, of the exaltation of the common man, [and] of national expansion” resonated with readers and became the primary interpretation of the frontier for nearly a century.⁷

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed challenges to Turner’s myth of the frontier, and 1991 was a watershed year for reexamination of history, especially focused on the American West. The new assessment of familiar images of Conestoga wagons, pioneers, railroads, landscapes, cowboys, and American Indians (and the values and ideologies long associated with them) in the *West as America* exhibition was only one element of revisionist studies. The 1991 collection of essays *Trails: Toward a New Western History* likewise declared a reevaluation of western history. The book was significant because it was a collective statement of purpose for the “New Western Historians,” who sought a more balanced view of the western past. The “New Western Historians” challenged Turner’s frontier of heroism, triumph, and progress, and the picture of Anglo-Americans spreading democracy and civilization into untamed lands. Instead, they revealed a frontier full of complicated interactions, social and

⁶ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (1920; repr., Huntington, NY: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1976), 3.

⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Problem of the West” (1896), in Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson, eds., *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 403.

cultural pluralism, and failure mixed with success. They emphasized diversity, the role of women, the endurance of dynamic Native cultures, and the exploitation of the environment.⁸

History more broadly was also reconsidered. In his book, *Re-thinking History* (also published in 1991), Keith Jenkins insisted that history is not one simple and obvious thing, but rather a “multiplicity of types of history whose only common feature is that their ostensible object of inquiry is ‘the past.’”⁹ History, Jenkins reminds us, is an ideological construct that is constantly re-worked. The past is always contingent on the present and on the historian’s perspective as the narrator of the past.¹⁰ Timing was important for Jenkins, who characterized 1991 as a “postmodern world” where nothing was fixed or solid. Within the postmodern condition that Jenkins described, old organizing frameworks that privileged one central history and ideology were dead.¹¹

Jenkins, the New Western Historians, and the *West as America* curators all challenged a singular history, and they were not alone. On the eve of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of North America, historians, art historians, and cultural commentators questioned dominant historical narratives. In the Winter-Spring of 1991, for example, *American Art* dedicated a full issue to “a fresh approach to the present and the past” that would include minority cultures.¹² In the introductory essay to the volume, art historian and director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Elizabeth Broun, called for a rewriting of history to conform to an urgent new understanding of the past. She hoped the new understanding would

⁸ Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner, and Charles E. Rankin, eds. *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), x-xi. For a review and a concise summary see also Alan Brinkley, “The Western Historians: Don’t Fence Them In,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1992.

⁹ Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹² Elizabeth Broun, “Redefining National Culture,” *American Art* 5, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 1991): 5.

uncover and disperse old ideologies and make room for new ones.¹³ The same year, in the Fourth of July cover story for *Time* magazine titled “Whose America?” Paul Gray reported on changes in how history was taught. In classrooms across America, the dominant European-American view of American history was being cast aside in favor of an emerging multiculturalism.¹⁴ The following year, *Art Journal* devoted full issues to Latin American Art (Winter 1992) and Native American Art (Autumn 1992). Culturally, American history and art history was expanding.

The re-examination of the American West within the environment of revisionist American history in the early 1990s marked a turning point in the consideration of frontier images. The *West as America* exhibition highlighted the central role western art played in establishing a national ideology and fueled an interest in western imagery. In the years following, numerous exhibitions, monographs, and articles about nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists have contributed greatly to the research and understanding of an under-studied area of American art. Contemporary artists, too, began directing their attention to western history.

This dissertation examines late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century artists who appropriate, rework, or otherwise directly engage with frontier imagery created from the years around 1820 to 1920 (the parameters of the *West as America* examination). The artwork considered is united in its recognizable western subjects including landscapes, cowboys, and American Indians. Yet the approaches to the subject vary greatly. The shift away from a celebration of the myth of the frontier toward a postmodern skepticism is evident in the decades leading up to the 1990s. Parallel to the reconsideration of the American West in 1991, the desire for artists to see the West and its history with a fresh perspective after that time is evident. The artists’ motivations for revisiting pictorial traditions range from nostalgia, to personal experience

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ Paul Gray, “Whose America?” *Time*, July 8, 1991, 12-17.

and expression, to critical statements about colonialism in North America. Despite variations, however, the artwork collectively builds meaning through the relationship to and difference from historical imagery.

The re-vision of the historic images through art also calls attention to the myth and ideologies imbedded in the imagery. Likewise, the contemporary images are essentially a framing of western imagery informed by a system of values and interpretive strategies of the present. The re-framing of the West of the past opens a dialogue that expands beyond the frame, to look at images and history from different angles. Contemporary artists use and re-envision history to serve ideological needs of the present.

The first chapter, “Re-Imagining the West: From Memory to Postmodern Condition,” considers the Old West in three case studies from the decades prior to the revisionist examinations of the early 1990s. In 1965, four cowboy-painters formed the Cowboy Artists of America with the stated purpose to “perpetuate the memory and culture of the Old West as typified by the late Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, and others.” Examined first in the chapter, these artists perpetuated a romantic view of the Old West, bathed in sunsets, noble Indians, and rugged cowboys. Nostalgia for an imagined golden age of the West dominated the Cowboy Artists’ work. Next, Chapter One then moves to the 1970s and considers the Rephotographic Survey Project, members of which, from 1977 to 1979, re-photographed the sites of over 120 nineteenth-century views from government-sponsored surveys into the American West. Where the Cowboy Artists used historic western American imagery as an escape from contemporary pressures and art, the Rephotographic Survey Project applied their twentieth-century vision of the survey photography locations to modify and expand understanding of both the historic precedent and the contemporary image of the West. Their

photographic “before and after” pairs conveyed information about the physical changes to the land but also revealed manipulated elements of the nineteenth-century photographs made to serve ideologies of the time. The chapter concludes with Richard Prince’s appropriation of the western past by rephotographing images from contemporary Marlboro advertisements. With the Marlboro man, Prince highlighted the invention of an American identity based on the myth of the frontier and the characteristics of western men tied to rugged individualism and strength inherent in the myth. The artists considered use a variety of approaches to history in their work—from acceptance and celebration of the myth of the frontier to a postmodern rejection of the myth that draws attention to the fiction of the imagery—but collectively, they provide a benchmark in the consideration of lasting ideologies associated with the myth of the American West

Chapter Two examines the experience of three contemporary artist-explorers in the Grand Canyon. In their search for place, they explore circumstances of image making and changing attitudes toward land in the past as well as the present. “Re-Experiencing Representation in the Grand Canyon” focuses on Tony Foster, a British artist who in 2000 navigated the Grand Canyon in a raft and created a series of mixed media assemblages, *Sixteen Days Rafting the Colorado*; and the artistic partners of Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe, who worked together for five seasons to create *Reconstructing the View: The Grand Canyon Photographs*. Foster re-traced the 1869 expedition of John Wesley Powell and photographer Jack Hillers, who was the first to depict the Grand Canyon in 1871-1872. Foster bases his art on his immersion in a particular place important in the historical past, but his work also relates to the way we experience (and use/abuse) the grandeur of western landscape and wilderness today. Klett and Wolf used a variety of art from the past to guide their experience, including survey

photography and field sketches. Their work expands literally and figuratively beyond the frame of the historic imagery in an effort to incorporate more information and context on the past.

Chapter Three, “Reclaiming the West: Allegory and Western Vistas,” focuses on Stephen Hannock’s paintings of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Unlike Foster, Klett, and Wolfe, who emphasize direct experience in a place, Hannock’s landscapes are less about physical presence at the site and more about appropriating the idea of the iconic American landscape from art historical precedent. Hannock’s grand vistas of the West are painted in his studio thousands of miles from the site. His paintings contain layers of journal-like text and photographs imbedded into the landscape. Hannock appropriates the imagery of the western vista and lays claim to the associated cultural significance and meaning. Hannock frames the American West in personal references, using the national landscape to establish his own mythology.

Bill Schenck’s Pop Art western paintings are the subject of Chapter Four, “Re-playing the Myth of the West.” Schenck appropriates imagery from historic western art, film, and popular culture through the practice of pastiche. The result is an image that seems familiar and recognizable, even if the original sources remain elusive. A close examination of one painting, *Flight from Destiny*, reveals how Schenck re-frames the West by directing attention to projected stereotypes and myths while also exploring the ideologies hidden in the shadows.

The dissertation culminates with Chapter Five, “Re-painting History: Reversing Stereotypes in the West,” which addresses the work of Cree artist Kent Monkman. Monkman appropriates the beauty, authority, and meaning of nineteenth-century grand landscape paintings by Albert Bierstadt, re-painting the vistas leaf by leaf. The landscape, however, is only part of the story. Monkman disrupts our assumptions about the grand landscapes and historic art of the American West by populating the foreground with nude males and his cross-dressing alter ego

Miss Chief. With the aid of Miss Chief, Monkman draws attention to the way in which history and national myths have been created from a singular dominant vantage point. Monkman uses nineteenth-century art to highlight the construction of the images and stereotypes and to reinstate alternate narratives about history representing the indigenous perspective. Monkman re-frames the grand vistas with a new and more inclusive point of view.

Taken collectively, the artists represented in this dissertation explore the imagery of the American West as their “usable past.” In the early twentieth century, Van Wyck Brooks coined the term “usable past” in his urge for Americans to look to the traditions and heritage of their own country to forge a “national culture.”¹⁵ By the end of the twentieth century, responding to the seeming lack of a usable past, critic Peter Schjeldahl observed, “It is hard on artists, on the morale of the creative spirit, to do without the idea of a relevant past.”¹⁶ By looking to history and the past to find relevance today, these artists ultimately highlight the construction of history. The past is useful insofar as it serves the ideological needs of the present. These artists draw attention to imagery of the American West from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the myth of the frontier formed. They examine the way in which the past was framed through history, contributing to our understanding of both the nineteenth-century images and the contemporary experience. Artists who mine the “usable past” of the American West see history as complex and multifaceted and useful in a wide variety of ways. The artists certainly do not all look to the past in the same way. The Cowboy Artists approach the past with unabashed admiration and nostalgia, projecting the past as superior to the present. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Monkman criticizes the cultural assumptions of dominance intertwined within nineteenth-century images. Revision, looking back and seeing the past with fresh eyes, is at the

¹⁵ Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *Dial* 64, no. 764 (April 11, 1918): 341.

¹⁶ Peter Schjeldahl, *The Hydrogen Jukebox: Selected Writings of Peter Schjeldahl, 1978-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1.

heart of *The West as America* and guides the artists considered in the dissertation. The past is vital as a way to move forward, especially as art and images give rise to something new and different. These artists reiterate that art is important for telling history and that a continued examination of the past from all angles can be rewarding and enlightening. “One of history’s highest goals is to make the past usable,” claimed a manifesto for New Western History.¹⁷ And artists around the turn of the twenty-first century did just that.

¹⁷ Limerick, Milner, and Rankin, *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, xii.

Chapter 1

Reimagining the West: From Memory to Postmodern Condition

In the decades between the 1960s and the revisionist moment of the 1990s, several artist groups drew their inspiration from American frontier imagery made from 1820 to 1920. The interest in historic imagery dovetailed with a renewed market and museum focus on the American West in the 1960s and a search for America's usable past around the U.S. Bicentennial. Art and photography of the historic frontier West and the ideals they embodied were adopted, copied, and critiqued as exemplified by three important, yet very different, artists or groups of artists: the Cowboy Artists of America, the photographers of the Rephotographic Survey Project (RSP), and Richard Prince.

Paintings and sculptures by the Cowboy Artists in the 1960s through 1990s filled a cultural desire to celebrate the memory of and nostalgia for the Old West, which was imagined as a simpler time. Nostalgia, defined by literature professor Svetlana Boym, is a "sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy." Nostalgia, Boym continued, often appears as a "defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life."¹⁸ Nostalgia plays an important role in society, and the Cowboy Artists capitalize on it. The Cowboy Artists used imagery and ideologies associated with the myth of the American West as a rejection of contemporary artistic practices to look instead to western imagery from the nineteenth century. Further, they made it a primary objective "to insure authentic representations of the life of the West, as it was and is."¹⁹ Authenticity evokes a real, lived experience, as opposed to one that was mediated or fake. To convey something authentically means it is accurate, trustworthy, and authoritative. In the hierarchy of cultural values, authenticity assumes

¹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii, xiv.

¹⁹ The original objectives continue to guide the Cowboy Artists of America, fifty years after their founding. See "Objectives of the Cowboy Artists of America," accessed September 14, 2015, <http://cowboyartistsofamerica.com/objectives>.

longevity—durability, not change.²⁰ Within ideologies of nostalgia, authenticity is strongly associated with history and longevity. While the Cowboy Artists work was market-driven, the ideologies of the organization were highly influential and deserve consideration as a benchmark for one way in which images of the frontier (both historic and contemporary) were interpreted by artists and audiences.

The photographic pairs created by the RSP in the 1970s and early 1980s documented one hundred years of physical change to the landscape. The photographers located the vantage points of late nineteenth-century western survey photographs, and then took contemporary photographs from the same location. The before-and-after format often revealed development and the encroachment of man-made elements, but changes to the landscape were occasionally unexpected—undetected and minimal, or the complete disappearance of buildings and a return to wilderness. The RSP team looked to the nineteenth-century photographs as a starting point, but contemporary artistic movements such as conceptual art and land art, documentary photography, and cultural interests of their day also informed their approach. The before-and-after pairs rely on both the past and the present for meaning.

Finally, Richard Prince’s evocation of the myth and ideology of the American West in his *Cowboy* series, appropriated from Marlboro cigarette advertisements, undermines notions of authenticity and nostalgia in the American West. Instead, Prince’s series places the history of the American West squarely in the “postmodern world” where the old organizing frameworks (and myths) are no longer viewed as legitimate but rather are considered temporary fictions developed for a particular use.²¹ Prince intentionally questioned the very nature of what previously seemed

²⁰ William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis, “Introduction.” In *True West: Authenticity and the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 5.

²¹ Jenkins claimed in 1991 that we live with a post-modern condition defined by the “death of centers.” Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 60.

to be a stable notion of the West. This critical examination of the dominant myth and ideology by the 1980s shifted and broadened the interpretation of the American West of the past and paved the way for the revisionist perspective in the 1990s.

The Cowboy Artists of America and the Old West

In 1965 four cowboy-painters formed the Cowboy Artists of America to perpetuate the memory and culture of the Old West as portrayed in the art of Frederic Remington (1861-1909), Charles M. Russell (1864-1926), and their peers whose paintings and sculpture featured cavalry, cowboys, and American Indians placed in dramatic landscapes of the Rocky Mountain West. As an illustrator in the 1890s, Remington's images defined the American West for the readers of *Harper's Weekly*, *Collier's*, and other popular journals (figure 2). Russell is celebrated and beloved as America's "cowboy artist" and his paintings and sculpture, especially in his home state of Montana, continue to inspire many viewers and artists alike (figure 4). For the Cowboy Artists, the art of Remington, Russell, and their counterparts reinforced the myth of the Old West—a myth that the Cowboy Artists aimed to revive and perpetuate in the 1960s.

Myth is bound up in the historical memory and in stories drawn from history that have accumulated over many years and forms a symbolizing function central to the society that produced it.²² The myth of the frontier, as defined by Frederick Jackson Turner at the turn of the twentieth century, had remained nearly unchanged into 1965. The frontier West retained its importance in American history especially as the frontier was fixed in 1890, before what Turner called the "closing of a great historic moment."²³ Despite the development in the West after 1890—population growth of western cities, the increased availability of electricity throughout

²² Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History," 70.

²³ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 1.

the western states, and the numerous industries (besides cattle) that thrived in the region—there was a conscious decision to preserve what became known as the “Old West” in opposition to this modernity.

The Old West, like the frontier, evoked an image of the American West filled with wild and untamed wilderness, plentiful wildlife, free-roaming cowboys, and American Indians on the Great Plains. The term “Old West” designated an ideal time and place that existed somewhere West of the Mississippi and sometime before 1900. Characteristics and ideologies of the frontier apply to the Old West and often the terms and associated meanings are interchangeable. “Old West,” however, is more of a temporal term than “frontier.” With its close proximity to the recent past, the Old West served to separate the past from the present and was often constructed from dualities and opposites. The Old West did not have modern-day luxuries or amenities, and it was not confined to the polite society rules of the more refined eastern United States. For example, the unidentified author of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* article, “What has become of the Wild and Woolly West?” mourned the decline of the traditional West, as he had experienced on a recent trip to Cheyenne, Wyoming. The author laments that “[t]he West has reformed,” citing “[a]mong the most convincing evidences of the decadence of the west is the face massage. No pioneer civilization can stand its ground when the face message enters on the scene.”²⁴

The Old West existed before the Indian Wars and the establishment of the reservation system, did not have fences for cattle, and was sparsely populated. It could undergo historical verification and provide witness to the past, while at the same time, assign a timeless value to the meaning of recent events. In the process, the history of the Old West became eternal and

²⁴ “What has Become of the Wild and Woolly West?” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 25, 1903.

timeless.²⁵ The Old West has come to symbolize a mythic time and place where cowboys were rugged men who embodied national values of freedom and individuality; American Indians were picturesque symbols of America's wilderness past; and beautiful and sublime western landscapes reinforced the promises of American expansion articulated in the ideology of Manifest Destiny.

The founders of the Cowboy Artists developed an origin story that over time translated into a myth. As the story goes, several painters (who were also cowboys) hatched the idea of the organization while sitting around a fire on the open range following a cattle drive. They were frustrated with contemporary artistic trends of their times—conceptual and process art, for example. While drinking a few beers in a bar in Sedona, Arizona, a couple days after the cattle drive, the cowboy painters formalized their goals and objectives. Founding artists Charlie Dye, John Hampton, Joe Beeler, and George Phippen outlined the Cowboy Artists of America as an exhibition venue for showing and selling art created by its members as well as a social club to “fuse together the pure essences of cowboys and art” and have fun doing it. Their mission “to authentically preserve and perpetuate the culture of western life in fine art” remains the same today as it was fifty years ago.²⁶ Each year, the Cowboy Artists of America sponsors an annual trail ride and camp-out in destinations throughout the American West to “live their subject” and experience the life of the cowboy as it was during the cowboy's heyday.²⁷ They remain an

²⁵ Richard Slotkin discusses tensions in the modern myth—the simultaneous desire to root in facts of the past while also insisting that the meaning of the events are of timeless value. “Myth gives us history impacted in a metaphor whose referents are (or are asserted to be) eternal and timeless.” Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History,” 79-80.

²⁶ Opal Jones, “Cowboy Artists of America” flier, October 1967, binder titled “Cowboy Artists of America clippings and articles: 1980, 1981, 1982,” Cowboy Artists of America archives, Museum of Western Art Library Collection. See also Cowboy Artists of America website, “Objectives,” <http://cowboyartistsofamerica.com/objectives> and Don Hedgpath, “Cowboy Artists’ History,” 2002, <http://cowboyartistsofamerica.com/history>.

²⁷ One newspaper reporter described the annual trail ride at the Vermejo Park Ranch in northeastern New Mexico as a moment for the artists to “live their subject” of cowboys in the uncultivated western landscape. Hardy Price, “Cowboy Artists Live Their Subject: Annual Trail Ride is a Low-Key Gathering of the Clan for Suddenly-Chic Group,” *The Arizona Republic*, August 26, 1979. Vermejo Park Ranch, owned by the oil company Pennzoil in 1979 and now owned by billionaire Ted Turner, is a guest ranch complete with modern tourist conveniences. Although projected as cowboy experiences, these conditions are far from those faced on cattle drives in the 1870s. Still, for

invitation-only organization that hopes to ensure authentic representations and maintain standards of quality in contemporary western art, assisting each other and collectors in realizing the same.

The Cowboy Artists encouraged an approachable and realistic narrative style for the depiction of western imagery of cowboy, Indian, pioneer, and horse subjects. Ironically, by returning to traditional painting styles based on art from seventy-five years earlier, the artists adopted the reputation of maverick individuals forging a new path. The Cowboy Artists defined themselves as “renegades who bucked the establishment in order to promote a style and subject outside the mainstream.”²⁸ The combination of style and subject proved successful, and the Cowboy Artists gained national attention within a decade after the organization was established.²⁹ Articles in *U.S. News and World Report*, *Business Week*, *Art News*, and the *Washington Post*, among others, cited a “gold rush” for western art—both of the historic variety and the contemporary paintings and sculpture by the Cowboy Artists.³⁰ The patrons of this artwork “like real things,” explained art dealer Troy Murray, “Something you can relate to without turning it upside down.”³¹ Murray’s comment was disparaging toward stylistically abstract and non-objective art without a recognizable narrative—art that was presumably difficult for “regular people” to interpret. Murray was also specifically celebrating the Cowboy Artists over the more conceptual trends of the 1970s.

most in the group, sleeping outdoors, herding cattle, and eating from a mess tent fits the criteria of an authentic experience, as opposed to watching westerns on television or other mediated views of cowboy life.

²⁸ Susan Hallsten McGarry, introduction to *Cowboy Artists of America*, Catherine A. Reynolds (Dallas: Heritage Press, 1988), 4.

²⁹ Subject matter was carefully outlined in the Cowboy Artists of America’s Constitution and By-Laws. See James K. Howard, *Ten Years with the Cowboy Artists of America: A Complete History and Exhibition Record* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1976), 8.

³⁰ “The Boom in American Art,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 10, 1967; “The Bull Market in Western Art,” *Business Week*, June 13, 1970; Sheldon Reich, “A Genuine Longing for an Older, Simpler Time,” *Art News* 73, no. 10 (December 1974): 32; Cynthia Gorney, “Boom Time for the Cowboy Artists,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 1979.

³¹ Grace Lichtenstein, “Cowboy Art Finds Home on the Range,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1977.

Admittedly, the audience for western art was specialized, and for art critics who focused on the so-called mainstream of art (like conceptual art, earth art, and politically charged art of the 1960s and 1970s), the rise in western American art went virtually unnoticed. The separation of western art from other art movements led critic Sheldon Reich to categorize Cowboy Artists as “a school apart from all other American art” because the art did not address cultural and social issues of the twentieth century. Instead, Reich noticed, “They feed on a genuine longing for an older, simpler time.”³² Nostalgia for the past became the Cowboy Artists’ way of coping with the difficulties of the late twentieth century. The 1960s and early 1970s were riddled with social and political turmoil. Civil rights, women’s liberation, and the American Indian Movement of the 1960s and 1970s encouraged the reconsideration of the rights of underrepresented groups; the Watergate scandal led to the only resignation of a United States president in 1974; and the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War gripped the nation in demonstrations and violence at home and abroad.³³

The Cowboy Artists believed they were returning to a more authentic time and place when turning to the turn of the twentieth century in the works of Remington and Russell. But, as art historian Alexander Nemerov reminds readers in his essay for *The West as America* catalogue, Remington and other artists were not providing their audience with a documentary or immediate view of the Old West, but rather used western iconography developed in opposition to urban industrial culture.³⁴ The Old West was created through imagery, which was repeated in art,

³² Reich, "A Genuine Longing for an Older, Simpler Time," 32.

³³ Bruce J. Schulman evokes a grim image of the United States around 1974 with what he calls “decline everywhere,” including Watergate, Vietnam War, the Arab Oil Embargo, and a poor economy. Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 48-49.

³⁴ Alexander Nemerov, “Doing the ‘Old America’: The Image of the American West, 1880-1920,” in *The West As America*, 287.

and came to stand for the ideologies of the past. The Cowboy Artists copied and adopted the very same iconography for similar purposes—embracing the documentary look and feel of the work.

The Cowboy Artists' timing was excellent. They emulated and copied the Old West in art just as George Catlin (1796-1872), Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), Thomas Moran (1837-1926), Remington, and Russell were beginning to garner visibility and attention in the larger art world. A trail of new museums dedicated to western American art had opened by 1965 and a critical examination of western art was developing.³⁵ In the nascent years of study and presentation in museums, western American art was separated from American art as a whole and analyzed and valued more for its accurate rendering of historical events and details than its aesthetic merit.³⁶ The earliest book-length studies of Remington and Russell, for example, claimed that the artwork reflected a “pictorial history of the American West.”³⁷ Self-trained art historian Harold McCracken characterized Remington's art as a history lesson about the West—where actual events comingled with descriptions of landscape and western types of soldiers, cowboys, mountain men, and American Indians. McCracken's book about Russell emphasized the artist's jovial good nature and cowhand experience in Montana.

Using art as a documentary report, however, denies the very nature of history as a narrative—an *interpretation* of the past. History, Richard Slotkin urged, can only be understood by historicizing our myths, “that is, by treating them as human creations, produced in a specific

³⁵ The major art museums to open were the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma (1949); Whitney Gallery of Western Art in Cody, Wyoming (1959); Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (1961); and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City (1965).

³⁶ Peter H. Hassrick, "The Western Art Museum in 20th-Century America," *Gilcrease Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1999): 41-42.

³⁷ One of the prominent figures to write about western American art in the 1950s and 1960s was Harold McCracken, author, explorer, photographer, and self-taught historian and art historian. Less a critic than a storyteller, McCracken capitalized on a renewed interest in western American art and perpetuated the idea that the paintings were historically accurate. See Harold McCracken, *The Charles M. Russell Book: The Life and Work of the Cowboy Artist* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957) and Harold McCracken, *The Frederic Remington Book: A Pictorial History of the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966). McCracken also published monographs on artists George Catlin, Frank Tenney Johnson, and Nicolai Fechin, and a history of the American cowboy.

historical time and place, in response to the contingencies of social and personal life.”³⁸ Early scholarship about Remington, for example, gives the false impression that artists were unbiased recorders of people and topography. It negates subjectivity and the many factors that impacted their art, including social and cultural values, patronage, and formal concerns.

This early approach to western American art formed the way in which the Cowboy Artists thought about and interpreted Remington and Russell, which in turn, validated the approach with a broad number of collectors. Nemerov would later dispute the notion that Remington and his artistic counterparts provided documentary and immediate views of the Old West in *The West as America* catalogue. “Far from being realists,” Nemerov insisted, “the painters were products of a culture that led them to look backward and preserve the frontier myth.”³⁹ The tension between “truth” and “myth” becomes evident when comparing Nemerov’s understanding of Remington’s work to McCracken’s understanding of Remington as a historian who reported objectively on the past.

One of the central difficulties with the myth of the frontier and the idea of the Old West is reification, or the tendency to treat ideas, metaphors, and images as if they were the reality that they purport to describe. The uproar over labeling the artwork in the *West as America* exhibition as “myth” reflected the strength and conviction with which viewers believed the paintings, photographs, and prints to represent the past. “It just serves to demonstrate how deeply imbedded was the idea that these pictures were truthful,” commented Truettner in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*; “we are trying to suggest something else. . . . Consciously or unconsciously,

³⁸ Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History,” 80.

³⁹ Nemerov, “Doing the ‘Old America,’” 287-88.

these painters were propagandists. They were intent on persuading people that the settling of the West was a legitimate and noble effort.”⁴⁰

History is not the same thing as the past. For Keith Jenkins, this distinction deserves to be re-stated. The past has occurred and is gone, while history is “that which has been written/recorded about the past.”⁴¹ History is written from the point of view of the historian and remains an ideological construct that is constantly being re-worked and re-written. Paintings and sculptures about the Old West are also constructed images that bear the point of view of the artist and the interpretation is constantly changing into something useful for those who interpret the images in a particular way. Believing the images convey truth “blocks us from historical reality even as it implies access to that reality,” observed literary historians William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis.⁴² Remington and Russell were painting historical memory, or myth, not direct observations of events and people from the past.

Both Remington and Russell were purveyors of the myth of the frontier and were aware of the increasing ideological importance of the West for the nation as a whole. In a 1908 letter to fellow western painter Carl Rungius, Remington lamented, “we fellows who are doing the ‘old America’ which is so fast passing will have an audience in posterity whether we do at present or not.”⁴³ Remington was careful to differentiate the America of 1908 (the twentieth century) from that of the immediate past, the “Old West.” Russell similarly reflected that the West of the twentieth century was not “his” West. Wanting little to do with the twentieth century, he chose to celebrate and romanticize the traditions and virtues of the West as he envisioned them in the days

⁴⁰ William Truettner, quoted in James M. Perry, “Washington Art Exhibit is Criticized for Stance Taken on Western Frontier,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1991.

⁴¹ Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 6.

⁴² William R. Handley and Nathaniel Lewis, “Introduction.” In *True West: Authenticity and the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 3.

⁴³ Frederic Remington to Carl Rungius [1908], as quoted in Brian W. Dippie, *Remington and Russell: The Sid Richardson Collection*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 5.

of his childhood. In his memoir, published posthumously, Russell lamented, “Like all things that happen that’s worth while [*sic*], it’s a long time ago.”⁴⁴ The West that Remington and Russell portrayed in their art was a blend of first-hand experience and imagined ideals that existed in the past. It was, as one writer for a St. Louis newspaper said of Russell’s art, an “idealistic conception” of western life and not the mirror image of it.⁴⁵ Their realistic and documentary style included historic details of cowboy tack, American Indian clothing, and topographic features that were interpreted as direct witness to the people, places, and events depicted in their art.

Although closely identified with the American West, Remington lived most of his life in New York. He was born in Canton, New York in 1861 and briefly studied art at Yale College School of Fine Arts. Short of his degree, Remington left Yale to become a reporter. In 1881, Remington made his first trip west to the Montana Territory and shortly thereafter sold his first sketch of a cowboy to *Harper’s Weekly*. Two years later, Remington bought and operated a sheep ranch in Peabody, Kansas. Remington’s venture as a sheep rancher was short-lived and unsuccessful, so he settled back in New York by 1884 and started his career as an illustrator in earnest. By the mid-1890s, Remington became one of the most popular and successful illustrators of his age, and his drawings of cavalry troops, cowboys, and Indians filled popular magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly* and *Collier’s*. Even as an illustrator, Remington’s goal was twofold: both to report on the events and places in the West, and to entertain a popular audience. Remington regularly traveled throughout the American West, sketching and collecting artifacts to use as inspiration in his art. Remington died in 1909 from complications following an appendectomy. He was only 48 years old at his death, yet he left a legacy of 3,000 paintings and

⁴⁴ Charles M. Russell, *Trails Plowed Under* (New York: Doubleday, 1927), 15.

⁴⁵ “Cowboy Artist Who Has Lived Among the Indians for Twenty-Three Years Will Exhibit Studies at the World’s Fair,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch Sunday Magazine*, December 6, 1903.

drawings, 22 bronze sculptures cast in editions, two novels, and more than 100 magazine articles and stories.⁴⁶

Russell was an accomplished painter, sculptor, and storyteller who lived most of his life in Montana. He was born in St. Louis to an affluent family in 1864, but he left home to work on Montana ranches as a teenager and young man. Russell had no formal art training, but with an interest in art, he sketched ranch life and the outdoors in his free time. Eventually, Russell quit his job as a cowboy and settled in Great Falls, Montana to focus his attention on art full time. He made several drawings that appeared as illustrations but found most of his artistic success through sales of paintings and sculptures with the help of his wife, Nancy, who worked like an agent advancing her husband's career. Russell exhibited in venues from New York to Los Angeles and found admirers across the country. Russell downplayed his Midwestern roots to emphasize his lived experience in the West. For a Los Angeles exhibition in 1924, Russell wrote (in third person), "Born with a love of romance, the West drew him at an early age, where living with trappers, Indians and cowmen, he absorbed a knowledge of customs and detail that has enabled him to create an authentic record of that period of American history—the Old West."⁴⁷ Despite his focus on a romantic and imagined past, Russell even convinced his artistic contemporaries. Western painter Maynard Dixon (1875-1946) recalled of Russell, "Natural fact and historical accuracy were his aims; imagination, interpretation—a recreation of the subject matter—to him were nonsense. . . . I just try to tell the truth, [Russell said], about what I

⁴⁶ Melissa J. Webster, "The Frederic Remington Catalogue Raisonné," in Peter H. Hassrick and Melissa J. Webster, *Frederic Remington: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Watercolors, and Drawings*, Volume 1 (Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1996), 32.

⁴⁷ "The Autobiography of a Montana Man," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1924.

know.”⁴⁸ Russell died in Great Falls, Montana in 1926, and his name became synonymous with cowboy art.

Remington and Russell became visual and ideological benchmarks for the Cowboy Artists who emulated the subject matter and formal construction of the historic artwork. Fred Fellows’s (born 1934) sculpture *No Easy Way Out* is a modern-day version of Remington’s iconic sculpture *The Broncho Buster* (figures 1 and 2). In Fellows’s version, the cowboy rides atop an unruly horse that twists and turns and arches on one leg in an effort to buck the cowboy off his back. The horse’s mane and tail are agitated with the force of the movement while the cowboy struggles to stay on. Fellows was president of the Cowboy Artists from 1974 to 1975. He was born and raised in Oklahoma and is a rancher, saddle maker, and champion roper on the rodeo circuit. His experience legitimizes his membership in the Cowboy Artists organization. While his cowboy and bucking bronco may have been a subject he witnessed, Fellows connects to the Old West and the associated cultural values through his admiration of Remington’s sculpture. By copying Remington, Fellows connects his art to history, which bears more weight than Fellows’s twentieth-century rodeo and ranch experience (compared to the “Old West,” contemporary experience is not as authentic).

Remington’s cantilevered composition pushed the technical limits of American bronze sculpture in the late nineteenth century. It drew attention from critics who praised the “stirring action” and subject matter.⁴⁹ More than 100 casts of *The Broncho Buster* sold primarily at jewelry stores with large bronze departments, such as Tiffany & Company in New York or Lindsey & Company in Philadelphia. At the time of its creation, Remington’s *Broncho Buster* represents a uniquely American theme of the classic struggle between man and animal, as well as

⁴⁸ Maynard Dixon to James Rankin, 15 January 1937, as quoted in Alexander Nemerov, “Projecting the Future: Film and Race in the Art of Charles Russell,” *American Art* 8 no. 1 (Winter 1994): 72.

⁴⁹ Arthur Hoeber, “From Ink to Clay,” *Harper’s Weekly* 39, no. 2026 (October 19, 1895): 993.

the triumph of the hero. It was also the first sculpture to feature a cowboy in the fine-art medium of bronze. Until the 1890s, cowboys were considered noisy and uncouth nuisances who worked a tough job for low wages. Remington's artwork was instrumental in changing the image of the American cowboy from one of a vagabond to a romanticized figure who embodied the traits of individualism, inventiveness, optimism, self-respect, and reverence for freedom and democracy—the traits of a western man that translated into the “new national type,” according to Turner in 1896.⁵⁰

Owen Wister's influential *Harper's Monthly* article, “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” helped to form the cowboy as a national type (it was illustrated by Remington). In the article Wister went beyond a surface description of the cowboy to define his lineage, specifically, his Anglo-Saxon heritage. This history of the cowboy cleansed his negative reputation. In his opening paragraphs, Wister compared an English nobleman to a cowboy, coming to the conclusion that despite their outward differences, the two are “fundamentally kin.”⁵¹ Wister even accounted for the violent aspects of the cowboy's life by drawing parallels between the West and medieval Europe, likening the cowboy's personal daring and skill with a horse to the medieval knight's gallantry.⁵² By providing detailed information and delineating the cowboy's Anglo-Saxon heritage, Wister also invited the (white) *Harper's* reader to identify with the cowboy. Remington's *Broncho Buster* was completed the same year that Wister's article was published. The sculpture symbolized the taming of the Wild West—both a triumph of Manifest Destiny and a lament for the past that was no longer.

⁵⁰ Turner, “The Problem of the West,” in *The American 1890s*, 403.

⁵¹ Owen Wister, “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 91, no. 544 (September 1895): 603.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 606.

Nearly 100 years after Remington's *Broncho Buster*, Fellows's *No Easy Way Out* perpetuates the ideologies imbedded in Remington's sculpture. Fellows's sculpture is larger than Remington's, and details have changed, such as the position of horse's front legs and accouterments of the cowboy. Differences aside, Fellows's revival of Remington remains in both the formal aspects and his embrace of the symbolic meaning. Yet, these years later, meaning has also been lost. Artists have frequently sculpted cowboys on bucking broncos over the past century. Remington's original conception is arguably still superior, but meaning has also shifted and new myths formed through repetition. Less a quintessential American man, the cowboy and bucking bronco have become ubiquitous symbols more narrowly focused on the region of the West, and by extension, considered provincial. Rather than celebrating a masterful American sculpture and American ideal, Fellows's imitation of Remington's *Broncho Buster* serves instead to diminish both the contemporary and historic sculpture.

Paintings and sculpture by Russell also provide ample source material for the Cowboy Artists, who again embrace not only formal similarities, but also the ideologies of the promise of the Old West. Cowboy Artist Roy Andersen (born 1930) used Russell's *In the Enemy's Country* as the model for his painting *Great Bird Above is Kind* (figures 3 and 4). *In the Enemy's Country* portrays a scouting party making their way through another tribe's territory. The landscape stretching into the distance is based on Russell's home in Montana, but the colors reflect a romantic sensibility. In the late 1890s, Russell had moved away from the earthy colors that dominated earlier paintings and adopted instead what art historian Joan Troccoli described as an "evocative twilight palette."⁵³ The pinks and purples evoke sunsets, literally and figuratively to mark passing time. Similar in composition to Russell's painting, Andersen's *Great Bird Above is*

⁵³ Joan Carpenter Troccoli, *The Masterworks of Charles M. Russell: A Retrospective of Paintings and Sculpture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 85.

Kind depicts a group of mounted Native Americans cresting a ridge and walking toward the viewer. Behind the figures, warm sunlight colors the vast western landscape of sagebrush, buttes, and a river snaking into the distance. In composition, color palette, and subject, the similarities between the two paintings are unmistakable. Seventy-five years separate Andersen's painting from Russell's, yet each artist imagines his American Indian subjects frozen in an idealized past.

Collectors praise and desire Andersen's paintings for their accuracy in the details of clothing and accessories, mannerisms, and landscapes—all of which evokes the effect of historical reality. Andersen's interest and experience researching the Plains people he portrays began at the Field Museum while he lived in Chicago and studied illustration at the Chicago Academy for the Arts. Andersen frequently visited the Field Museum's anthropological displays, where the dioramas and objects preserved in cases reemphasized the notion that Plains peoples existed only as icons of the past, rather than living citizens. To enliven the objects and mannequins, Andersen looked to another source—Russell. Andersen interpreted Russell's idealized paintings of American Indians before European contact as a record of history and more authentic source for information about the Old West than living Crow, Cheyenne, and Apache peoples.

It is true that Russell gained his knowledge and interest in the Northern Plains Indians through his personal contact with several tribes who lived in Montana. Even in Russell's lifetime, however, conditions of American Indian life had changed drastically. By the time Russell moved west, the American Indian Wars were coming to a close and most Plains tribes had been relegated to reservations, where they lived in devastating conditions. In his paintings, Russell consciously chose not to paint life on the reservations, preferring instead to imagine life in the days of the buffalo before white settlement. The Indians that Russell painted were not

directly based on the people he met in Montana, and despite Russell's sympathy for the plight of the Native Americans, he was a man of his time and his paintings embodied whites' attitudes. Andersen's appropriation of Russell's paintings perpetuates the mythic ideal of American Indians preserved in an untouched and primitive state. Russell was not afraid to acknowledge his paintings as myth and memory. "If you don't do anything but tell the truth in stories and paintings, it's nothing but plain history," he told a reporter in 1921.⁵⁴ Yet, over the course of the decades of the twentieth century, the process of reification impacted the interpretation of Russell's images, which by Andersen's time were read as truth. Andersen's painting, like Fellows's sculpture, revives the dominant turn-of-the-century attitude that American Indians embody ideals of an untouched West.

By copying the art of the past so closely, and projecting a twentieth-century ideology (*perceived* to be the same as the ideology of the past), the Cowboy Artists have frozen Remington and Russell in time. The Cowboy Artists' interpretation of Remington and Russell projects such a narrow definition that it denies other possible meanings or contexts. In turn, the use of Remington and Russell by the Cowboy Artists contributed to the way in which these historic artists were received and interpreted (often poorly) in wider American art contexts. Perhaps the Cowboy Artists were responding to market interest, but they also met the needs of a group of collectors who idealized the past and valued ideologies associated with the American West.

Nostalgia for the Old West developed during the turn of the twentieth century as an "antimodernist escape valve from rising pressures of immigration, urbanization, and

⁵⁴ "Just Kinda Natural to Draw Pictures, I Guess," Says Cowboy Artist in Denver to Exhibit Works, *Rocky Mountain News*, November 27, 1921.

industrialization,” explained literary historian Richard Etulain.⁵⁵ Nostalgia and memory are intertwined and for western art enthusiasts in the 1960s and 1970s (and the Cowboy Artists) the myth of the frontier played the role of escape at the end of the twentieth century. As Cowboy Artist Charlie Dye explained, “People are groping for something that is not so damned mechanical or artificial as their own existence.”⁵⁶ And the Cowboy Artists provided that alternative in their images of the Old West, which answered American desire for the past, a past that was perceived by the artists and viewers as embodied in the art of Remington, Russell, and others. Providing a fantasy of the Old West was part of the self-acknowledged success of the Cowboy Artists. As member and three-time president of the Cowboy Artists William Moyers wrote in 1971, “there is a lot of nostalgia in it for me – a chance to recapture something I deeply loved, and of which I can no longer be a part.”⁵⁷ Moyers (1916-2010) worked on a Colorado ranch as a teenager, but like the other Cowboy Artists, his memories took him to a West that has long since passed.

Part of the power of nostalgia is the way in which the idealized world appears in opposition to the present. Social and political turmoil characterized the 1960s and 1970s, which largely resulting in more multicultural and inclusive movements. Minority groups re-worked history in order to legitimize the present situation. For example, the women’s liberation movement re-wrote history to be more inclusive, drawing attention to important and influential women who had been previously overlooked. Histories were multiple and messy in the late twentieth century. Histories were in flux, competing, and becoming de-centralized in that the

⁵⁵ Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 4.

⁵⁶ Charlie Dye, as published in *Newsweek*, quoted in Howard, *Ten Years with the Cowboy Artists of America*, 8.

⁵⁷ William Moyers, artist statement in Gordon Snidow, "The Cowboy Artists of America," *Persimmon Hill* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 26.

majority no longer dictated the story. The memory of the West (the myth), on the other hand, presented experiences that were simplified and compressed.

In his study of nostalgia, Fred Davis wrote that the contrast between the (perceived) past and the present is important. Compared to the past, the present is “invariably [was] felt to be, and often *reasoned* to be . . . more bleak, grim, wretched, ugly, deprivational, unfulfilling, frightening, and so forth.”⁵⁸ The Cowboy Artists catered to this desire for the past. In their hands, observed critic Sheldon Reich, the West is “an idealized world: no urban problems, no polluted environments. Rivers run clean, snow sparkles and no one ever really gets hurt.”⁵⁹

In their emulation of the compositions, styles, and subject matter of the historic American West, the Cowboy Artists revived a representation of the Old West that conformed to an already-defined image, one that through repetition was believed to be true. The Cowboy Artists also adopted additional signs of the Old West to further support and perpetuate a link to the authentic past. By the mid-1970s the “Cowboy Artists of America News,” for example, featured fonts reminiscent of “Wanted Dead or Alive” posters and graphics pulled from late-nineteenth-century classified advertisements for products such as Hood’s Sarsaparilla and Dr. Walker’s Vinegar Bitters. Inclusion of information about a performance of the Norris & Rowe’s Circus in Douglas, Arizona or the G.F. Spangenberg Gunsmith in Tombstone, Arizona added visual interest and a historic feel to the newsletter, and readers were left sorting through a conglomeration of history and the present to decipher information related to upcoming events (figure 5).⁶⁰ The Cowboy

⁵⁸ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 15.

⁵⁹ Reich, “A Genuine Longing for an Older, Simpler Time,” 32.

⁶⁰ While it was difficult to find exact sources for all the printed advertisements, those that were identified were tied to the western United States (Arizona and Texas primarily). The following information helps date the advertisements to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: The original G.F. Spangenberg gunsmith operated in the 1870 to early 1880s in Tombstone, Arizona and was destroyed in a fire in 1882. “The G.F. Spangenberg Story,” accessed July 19, 2012, www.gfspangenberg.com/gfspangenberg_019.htm. Norris & Rowe’s Circus operated from 1902-1910 and traveled especially in regions beyond the Rockies. C.E. Duble, “The End of the Norris & Rowe Circus,” *Bandwagon* 4, no. 3 (1945): 1-3. The town of Douglas, Arizona was first incorporated in

Artists also evoke the cattle culture of the Old West through their adopted “CA” cattle brand, added after the artists’ signature (see Dye’s signature in the lower right corner, figure 6). Cattle branding, while still used today, is synonymous with Old West cattle roundups and animal sorting that happened prior to the fencing of the American West.⁶¹ The “CA” brand aligns the Cowboy Artists with a practice (and an alphabet) specifically associated with cattlemen and cowboys, while simultaneously it marks the artists’ inclusion in, or ownership of, an exclusive group.

The Cowboy Artists have been so successful at evoking the Old West that high-profile westerners speak of the artwork as if it provides a literal window into the past. United States Senator Barry Goldwater expressed one such observation when he lamented, “we can’t go back . . . [but] there is nothing like sitting down and looking at a painting of a place you knew as a boy and seeing an artist’s work as an exact replica of a place you knew.”⁶² The Cowboy Artists transported Goldwater back in time, playing into his nostalgia for the Old West. Goldwater supports the wide-ranging belief that the myth of the West represents what actually was (reification). The West in art is so convincing, and nostalgia so powerful that the art even acts as a substitute for experience that seemed more real than if it was lived. “I know [the West] through the art of the Cowboy Artists of America,” said Susan Hallsten McGarry, editor-in-chief of *Southwest Art* magazine. “Their paintings have taken me to places whose virginity no longer exists; their sculptures have introduced me to people whom I would otherwise never know. My West may be built of vicarious experiences...but I’ve been there, I’ve felt it. The Cowboy Artists

1905. It is unclear when the bank first opened, but a 1907 photograph of Douglas includes First National Bank. Robert Lucas, “Douglas: ‘The Smelter City’ Cleaned Up To Become ‘The Premier Southwestern Border Community,’” *Arizona 100 – An Arizona History Blog* (2012), accessed July 19, 2012, arizona100.blogspot.com/2010/01/douglas-smelter-city-cleaned-up-to.html.

⁶¹ For a complete description of an 1886 roundup in Miles City, Montana Territory, see “Roundup Time” in *The Old West: The Cowboys*, William A. Forbis, ed. (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), 110-135.

⁶² Barry Goldwater, foreword to *Visions West: The Story of the Cowboy Artists of America Museum* by Don Dederá (Kerrville, TX: Cowboy Artists of America Museum, 1983), xii.

of America have enabled me . . . to commune with western spirits past, present and future.”⁶³

McGarry’s vicarious experience through art feeds into a nostalgia that, as scholar Susan Stewart explained, turns the idealized (and absent) past into a site of immediacy, presence, and authenticity.⁶⁴ There is no irony in the reflections of the Cowboy Artists and their admirers; rather, these declarations attest to the power of nostalgia and a willingness to believe the projected ideologies.

The Cowboy Artists’ dedication to authenticity is also problematic. Art, by its very nature, is artifice, just as history is not the same thing as the past but, rather, history is a story about the past. Remington and Russell constructed their views of the American West to assert the notion of authenticity and the Cowboy Artists claim to be heirs to this tradition, a “tradition that traced back to others, like Charlie Russell . . . who brought to their paintings and sculpture an air of authenticity achieved through a hands-on and horseback perspective.”⁶⁵ But their claims, like those of Remington and Russell, are inherently contradictory. Authenticity is used to evoke a real, lived experience, but also evokes a continuation of tradition. The signs of authenticity—like Remington’s props or Andersen’s experience at the Field Museum—replace the experience itself. Even the Cowboy Artists’ annual trail ride also conforms to an already-defined image of ranching and working from horseback while wearing Stetsons, for example, rather than riding motorized vehicles and wearing baseball caps. In 1990, Richard Nilsen, one of the most vocal critics of the Cowboy Artists, pointed out that despite claims of reality, the artists are “mighty selective about what they are willing to be real about.”⁶⁶ Their work lacks the presence of

⁶³ Susan Hallsten McGarry, *Cowboy Artists of America*, 7.

⁶⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 23.

⁶⁵ Don Hedgpeth, “Sonora, Sedona, and Since,” in *Cowboy Artists of America*, Michael Duty (Shelton, CT: Greenwich Workshop Press, 2002), ix.

⁶⁶ Richard Nilsen, in an interview by Rodney Barker, “Smelling the Fumes,” *Southwest Art* 20, no. 5 (October 1990): 82.

African-American or Mexican cowboys, old men, and women, for example. Of the artists' dedication to the past Nilsen says, "[i]t's silly to pretend people still think the way they did in the nineteenth century. And it's an inappropriate response to the complex social, political, environmental picture of today's West."⁶⁷ More recently, curator Thomas Smith characterized Howard Terpning (an Emeritus member of the Cowboy Artists) the "Western version of Thomas Kincaid" for his comforting and idyllic scenes of the past, devoid of contemporary issues.⁶⁸ Yet, artists like Terpning and the other Cowboy Artists fill a need for nostalgia and escape, and demand examination to better understand how their work revives and perpetuates the ideologies associated with the Old West well into the twenty-first century.

Then and Now: The Rephotographic Survey Project

The Rephotographic Survey Project (RSP) has a very different approach to historic imagery. In the wake of American bicentennial celebrations in the mid-1970s, the RSP team, guided by photographers Mark Klett (born 1952) and Joann Verburg (born 1950), and historian Ellen Manchester, re-created western expeditions as they searched for locations and vantage points of late nineteenth-century western survey photographs (figure 7).⁶⁹ From 1977 to 1979, the RSP team rephotographed over 120 expeditionary photographs. Klett, Manchester, and Verburg traced the paths of the survey photographers to remote (and not so remote) places in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, California, New Mexico, and Arizona. Once at the location, they looked for the exact vantage point from which the original photograph was taken. In the process, the team became intimately familiar with the challenges and visual choices that

⁶⁷ Ibid., 85.

⁶⁸ Thomas Smith, quoted in Mike Boehm, "Howard Terpning's Paintings Keep Old West Alive," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2012.

⁶⁹ Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, and JoAnn Verburg, *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

faced the nineteenth-century photographers. The resulting photographic pairs of before-and-after images created a dialogue between past and present.

The National Endowment for the Arts initially funded the RSP as a celebration of American life at the centennial, and the RSP photographers' approach to the subject was one of admiration and emulation of America's achievements. In the process of rephotography, however, the team uncovered photographic methods and framing devices used by the survey photographers to convey values ultimately informed by the myth of the West and landscape as a dramatic backdrop for resources and expansion. The twentieth-century photographs paired with the historic images served to modify and expand understanding of both the nineteenth-century and the contemporary image of the western land.

Klett's background in science, with an undergraduate degree in geology and experience working for the U.S. Geological Survey team before graduate school, informed the documentary methods of the project. To create the photographic pairs, the RSP team employed the technique of "rephotography," or matched photographs of the same subject made specifically to repeat an existing image. The team aimed to match as many conditions as possible with the original photograph, including the vantage point where the camera was placed, the time of year, time of day, and atmospheric conditions (figure 7). The RSP photographers often had to set up their equipment and then wait patiently for the sunlight and shadows to move into a similar position as their photographic precedent. The resulting photograph equalized many variables to encourage close examination of physical changes to the western landscapes, encapsulating 100 years through a simple comparison.

The RSP team's act of copying nineteenth-century photographs through rephotography was more than a documentary study of physical changes on the landscape. Like the Cowboy

Artists of America, the RSP photographers knowingly selected the West as a subject because of the meaningful symbolism held by the West in our cultural history and mythology. Like the Cowboy Artists, the RSP team admired their predecessors and aimed to emulate their compositions (quite literally copied by using the same vantage point as past photographers). But where the Cowboy Artists revived, emulated, and accepted the historic western imagery as a direct conduit to the Old West (without much critique), Klett and his team revealed a great deal of subjectivity. The methods of the RSP team brought the photographers so physically close to the original location that they uncovered the nineteenth-century photographer's relationship with his subject. Cultural ideologies, personal perspectives, professional interests, and aesthetics all played a part in the photographs of the past. The nineteenth-century photographers balanced the scientific goals of the expedition leaders with their own artistic sensibilities to meet the needs of multiple audiences.

The RSP photographers' approach to the past was motivated by the ideologies of the present. As photography students, Klett and his team had greatly admired the visual qualities of the survey photographs, which were experiencing a resurgence of study and exhibition, but they were also influenced by nostalgia for unmapped and untouched wilderness. The RSP team was shaped by 1970s bicentennial fervor for America's usable past as well as the burgeoning environmental movements of the time, marked by the first Earth Day in 1970. Landscape had reemerged in American art in the 1970s with artists such as Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, and Robert Smithson who were part of the Earth Art or Land Art movement, which focused on making art of the land itself. In 1969-1970, for example, Smithson created *Spiral Jetty* by moving 6,000 tons of earth into the Great Salt Lake to form a spiral that measures 160 feet in

diameter. For Smithson, the site and location in the American West dictated the art.⁷⁰ The RSP team responded to the physicality and site specificity of this art, which further encouraged the photographers' journeys to the survey sites. In the act of emulating, copying, and studying the past, the RSP photography team opened a dialogue between past and present unique to the medium and the methods employed.

Re-covering Landscape Photography: The Great Surveys

Photographs from the “great surveys” into the far West and southwestern United States in the 1860s and 1870s provided ample resource material for the RSP.⁷¹ Earlier in the nineteenth century, leaders of expeditions into the American West understood the power of visual images to promote the expeditions and secure continued government appropriations. In 1820, Major Stephen H. Long included two artists among the twenty-person party who explored the Platte River through the Great Plains. Titian Ramsay Peale and Samuel Seymour contributed valuable information and impressions of the flora, fauna, and landscape as illustrations in the expedition's final report. Once the photography medium had advanced enough to become portable (although no less cumbersome with hundreds of pounds of glass plate negatives and developing chemicals), photographers became valuable members of survey teams by the 1860s and 1870s. The photographers then fulfilled the role of the artist, using their medium to document expedition party members, rock formations and plants, or technology such as the railroads.

⁷⁰ Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” in *Arts of the Environment*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: G. Braziller, 1972), 222.

⁷¹ The four major surveys were Clarence King's Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel (1867-1873); George Wheeler's Geographic Survey West of the One Hundredth Meridian (1872-1879); Ferdinand Hayden's Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories under the Department of the Interior (1869-1878); and John Wesley Powell's Expeditions in the Rocky Mountain and Grand Canyon Regions (1869-1872). For more information on these surveys, see Richard A. Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962).

Photography was quickly preferred over drawings and watercolors as a document because it appeared to be more objective.

Most frequently, survey photographers turned their lens to the landscapes and scenery of the American West. The photographs and the surveys responded to and arguably fueled the enthusiasm for western expansion in the late nineteenth century. Survey leaders like John Wesley Powell and Clarence King were scientists who defined and mastered the geology of the American West, and the photographers documented and interpreted that landscape. Vivid pictures of natural wonders and astounding resources beckoned Americans westward or acted as substitutes for first-hand experience in the West.⁷² Survey photographers balanced the needs of their government employers and popular interest by making clear reports of the topography that, while emphasizing landscape views, were aesthetically pleasing. The resulting photographs served multiple purposes as records of scientific data and as important vehicles for how the public viewed the surveys and the landscape of the American West. The survey photographs were used and distributed in a variety of ways: as illustrations for the official expedition reports; as a collection of images bound in small editions for congressmen and government officials; as sources for engravings to be published in newspapers, periodicals, and books; or as stereographs sold directly to the public. The nineteenth-century photographs invested in the landscape a vision that coincided with the expansionist national agenda of the time. Along with the expeditionary leaders, the photographers helped to familiarize audiences with images of land that otherwise seemed inaccessible, which was an important step in gaining control of an area that would soon be settled. The ideology that the wilderness offered unlimited material and spiritual wealth was also at the heart of the reception of the images in the nineteenth century.

⁷² For a thoughtful and concise introduction to the role of photography in the American West and the medium's impact on broad cultural imagination, see Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 2-14.

Despite the initial flurry of interest in the survey photographs as evidence of beautiful and unique scenery, within decades the photographs became largely ignored. Interest was not rekindled until a 1963 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *The Photographer and the American Landscape* curated by John Szarkowski.⁷³ In the exhibition, frontier and exploration photography by Timothy O’Sullivan and William Henry Jackson was shown alongside works by Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz and the early twentieth-century American aesthetic movement of photography, as well as Ansel Adams and works by contemporary photographers. More landscape photography exhibitions followed and survey photography was included in the developing scholarship and criticism. Merry Foresta, former curator of photography at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, even claimed “photography came of age in America in the 1970s.”⁷⁴ Klett and Verburg also came of age in the 1970s as graduate students, and they came to know survey photographs in the museum setting and admired for their formal qualities.⁷⁵ O’Sullivan and the other survey photographers were celebrated as founding fathers of a “golden age of landscape photography” in America.⁷⁶

The political, social, and cultural context of the 1970s, as well as other artwork from the time, further fueled the RSP photographers’ interest in rediscovering western landscapes. The

⁷³ John Szarkowski. *The Photographer and the American Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963).

⁷⁴ Merry A. Foresta, *Exposed and Developed: Photography Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts* (Washington, DC: Published for the National Museum of American Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984), 11. Mark Rice summarizes photography’s popularity (in production of and in the photographic theory and criticism developed at the time) in Mark Rice, *Through the Lens of the City: NEA Photography Surveys of the 1970s* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), xii, xvii. Peter B. Hales also provides a historiography of the reception of survey and documentary photography as an art form in the 1960s and 1970s in Peter B. Hales, "Landscape and Documentary: Questions of Rephotography," *Afterimage* 15 (Summer 1987): 10.

⁷⁵ Holly Markovitz Goldstein traces Klett’s and Verburg’s direct experience with survey photography in museum collections in Holly Markovitz Goldstein, "American Landscapes as Revisionist History: The Frontier Photographs of Mark Klett, John Pfahl, Deborah Bright, and Robert Adams" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2010), 64.

⁷⁶ Weston J. Naef and James N. Wood, *Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860-1885* (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery; distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1975), 12. Barbara Novak responded to the *Era of Exploration* exhibition with an article comparing the qualities of landscape photographs to landscape painting in America. Barbara Novak, "Landscape Permuted: From Painting to Photography," *Artforum* 14 (October 1975): 40-45.

United States bicentennial celebrations commenced with an air of nostalgia amidst a myriad of economic and political uncertainties in 1976, encouraging Americans to seek out a “usable past,” a phrase reminiscent of Van Wyck Brooks 1915 urge for Americans to look to the traditions and heritage of their own country.⁷⁷ The concept was also evoked throughout the twentieth century in a variety of contexts to again look inward. With a goal to create a “portrait of American life in the 1970s,” the National Endowment for the Arts offered a variety of grants. The RSP was perfectly suited to the granting category of Photographic Surveys (1976-1981) and the NEA funded the first RSP photography survey in 1977.⁷⁸

The RSP’s method of retracing the steps of survey photographers from the late nineteenth century was conditioned by an interest in the past, but was also informed by other artwork of the time. Conceptual art movements of the late 1960s were influential in the organizing principles of the RSP. In conceptual art the idea guides the artwork (as opposed to meaning discovered in the act of creation). In some cases, such as the large-scale drawings of Sol Lewitt, the artwork is created not by the artist, but by others who simply follow instructions from the artist. The RSP had an overarching concept that guided the members of the team, individually and collectively. The before and after photographs, however, were also tied to specific sites. Like land art and other site-specific art of their time, immersion in the landscape was essential.⁷⁹

The RSP photographic pairs and catalogue text was conditioned by the nostalgic attitude of the 1970s and the appreciation for aesthetic and formal qualities of survey photography which treated the historic photographers as heroic, the landscape as more pristine, and the world as less corrupt in the past than in their present day. It is important to note that for Klett, nostalgia is not a

⁷⁷ Van Wyck Brooks first uses the term in Van Wyck Brooks, *America’s Coming-of-Age* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1915) and then expands upon the idea in Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” 341.

⁷⁸ Rice, *Through the Lens of the City*, xiii.

⁷⁹ Mark Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

negative sentimental value, but one equated with stability. “In a changing world, we tell ourselves stories that provide stability,” said Klett.⁸⁰ The then and now photographs, however, often disrupt the stability by showing change over time. For example, many of the side-by-side RSP pairs reflected the advance of urban development and corresponding shrinking wilderness. The photographic pair of the Green River Buttes in Wyoming reflects one dramatic example (figure 8). In the 1872 photograph, O’Sullivan used a high horizon to capture the dramatic rise in the landscape leading up to the rock formations in the upper portion. In the corresponding photograph captured by Klett and Gordon Bushaw more than 100 years later, a tree and a vehicle in the immediate foreground block the view of the rocks, a road and home occupy the middle ground, and electrical wires cross diagonally through the sky. What appears unspoiled in the nineteenth-century photograph has been completely transformed by a housing development. In the RSP photographic pairings, the more aesthetic photograph was almost always the historic image, as Verburg pointed out. Unlike O’Sullivan, who could more freely select his vantage point, the RSP photographers were confined to repeating the same vantage, no matter what changes had happened at the location.⁸¹

Klett and Bushaw’s selection of the Green River site, out of thousands of geological survey photographs, responded to the popularity and familiarity with the rock formations at that location. Andrew Joseph Russell photographed Green River and Citadel Rock (as the central square-topped formation was named) in 1868 as the Union Pacific railroad blazed a trail through the region and constructed a bridge over Green River. Jackson captured the view in 1869, O’Sullivan in 1872, and numerous others throughout the 1870s. The looming rock formations breaking the horizon were easily accessible on the railroad. Numerous paintings and a

⁸⁰ Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

⁸¹ JoAnn Verburg, “Between Exposures,” in *Second View*, 5-10.

chromolithograph by Thomas Moran served to mark the location as an icon of the American West. Moran first arrived in Green River, Wyoming in 1871 on his way to join Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden's U.S. government expedition through Yellowstone. The striated cliffs with bands of yellow, orange, and red inspired Moran repeatedly for the next forty years. Although civilization had firmly taken root in Green River before Moran's arrival in 1871, he ignored the railroad, hotel, and brewery, which never appeared in his compositions, and focused instead on the sublime nature of the landscape.⁸² Moran emphasized the grandeur of the landscape, freely inventing and editing to preserve the mythic scene (figure 9). Moran often inserted Native Americans winding their way through the imagined landscape, although he never saw Indians near Green River. Moran's paintings of Green River were popular and were among the artist's most commercially successful works, and in 1881 Prang and Company published a chromolithograph of the Green River cliffs based on one of his paintings.

Klett and Bushaw's 1979 photograph of Castle Rock seems jarring next to O'Sullivan's untouched views and Moran's romantic scenes. The viewer's preference for the untouched wilderness and picturesque views of the West has been culturally conditioned based on early paintings of the western landscape. The 1979 photograph juxtaposed with the historic photograph draws attention to the construction of the images and these conditioned preferences.

The contemporary images, despite the self-imposed limitations of copying a prescribed vantage point, respond to a new landscape aesthetic of the 1970s. The plain white tract house, electrical cables, and school bus in Klett and Bushaw's 1979 photograph is reminiscent of the *New Topographics* aesthetic of straight photography that had recently made a strong impact on American photography in the context of environmental and political concerns about western

⁸² Nancy K. Anderson discusses Moran's paintings of Green River, Wyoming in relationship to photographs and prints from the 1860s and 1870s. See Anderson, "'The Kiss of Enterprise': The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource," in *The West as America*, 243-251.

landscapes. In 1975, the George Eastman House organized the influential exhibition *New Topographics*, which featured photographers such as Robert Adams who turned his back on the picturesque mountains and instead focused his camera on the tract houses and suburban sprawl of Colorado's Front Range.⁸³ The photographs in *New Topographics* were stark and direct depictions of the landscape, stripped of romantic overtones and the exhibition prompted a resurgence of documentary-style photography and a "straight aesthetic" that was quickly considered "quintessentially modern" and specifically American.⁸⁴ The preference for the new aesthetic in photography (and Klett and Bushaw's response to it) highlights the way in which new points of view and standards of beauty also respond to aesthetics of the past and, specifically for the New Topographics, developed in opposition to the picturesque photographs of Ansel Adams. The straight photography or documentary approach also served to emphasize the perceived inherent qualities of the photography medium as a conduit for unbiased truth.

French literary critic Roland Barthes privileged the camera as a witness to an event or place because it was present at the moment the photograph was taken. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes discusses photography and its indexical connection to the "real" world. "The important thing," he states, "is that the photograph possesses an evidential force . . . in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation."⁸⁵ By its very nature, photography provides a direct connection to the past, more so than painting or sculpture ever can.

A photograph is the product of the camera as a witness, but photography is not objective, warns art historian Martha Sandweiss. Photography is not a transcription of fact, and although it

⁸³ Robert Adams, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975).

⁸⁴ Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in Robert Adams et al., *New Topographics: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, Henry Wessel, Jr*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY: Center for Creative Photography; George Eastman House, 2010), 37.

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 88-89.

describes events or places, it does so through the lens of the recorder's own experience, ambitions, and need to convey a particular point of view.⁸⁶ Of the RSP, historian Patricia Nelson Limerick observed that Klett learned that "we live in a relativistic universe, where an individual photographer can, by the choice of his vantage point, change what we think of as reality."⁸⁷ Rick Dingus, a graduate student who joined the second field season of the RSP, discovered just this when he rephotographed O'Sullivan's *Tertiary Conglomerates, Weber Valley, Utah*. To enhance the instability of Witches Rock in the photograph, O'Sullivan dramatically tilted his view—either through the camera angle or in the printing process (figures 10). Dingus credited the shift in vantage point not to O'Sullivan's desire to impose melodrama on his subject, but to "convey the power of the site as he experienced it," and to provide an equivalent to the dramatic landscape.⁸⁸ Szarkowski called this an "astonishing" discovery, reemphasizing the acceptance of survey photographs for their face value as aesthetically pleasing images of natural topography. (Szarkowski admitted he previously thought O'Sullivan was operating as a "simple record-maker."⁸⁹)

O'Sullivan's manipulation of the landscape was perceptibly noticed by Dingus in the comparison of images. Other photographic pairs showed little or no change and rarely revealed what could be found outside the picture frame—information that was, as Klett later revealed, "often contradictory to what the combined photo pair implied."⁹⁰ For example, wilderness areas often showed little change when the view was confined to the picture frame, but just outside the

⁸⁶ Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 8.

⁸⁷ Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Second Views & Second Thoughts: Mark Klett and the Re-exploration of the American West," in Klett, Southall, and Limerick, *Revealing Territory*, 108.

⁸⁸ Rick Dingus, quoted in Klett, "Rephotographing Nineteenth-Century Landscapes," in Klett, Manchester, and Verburg, *Second View*, 17.

⁸⁹ John Szarkowski, *American Landscapes: Photographs from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981), 9.

⁹⁰ Mark Klett, "View of the Grand Canyon in Homage to William Bell – Survey Photographers, 1867-1879," in *Myth of the West*, ed. Chris Bruce (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 81.

picture frame were campers in brightly colored tents listening to music from a car stereo and drinking beer. “One should also wonder what was at the edges of [the nineteenth-century photographer’s] picture,” said Klett.⁹¹

This revelation about survey photographers’ point of view encourages a more critical assessment of the other images. In her influential essay “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” critic Rosalind Krauss urged a more holistic view of survey photographs. For Krauss, these photographs did not belong in the same discursive space as pictorial photography and painting because this position negated the historically situated contexts of the photographs. To illustrate her point, Krauss discussed concepts of “landscape” and “view.” The landscape constitutes the objective representation—the science and the geology. The view represents the aesthetic act of creation, where reality gives way to the sensation of the place.⁹²

The success of O’Sullivan’s photographs, claims art historian Toby Jurovics, is the way in which O’Sullivan was able to meet the scientific needs of the geologists of the 1869 King Survey while also creating a visual record in the West that included physical and emotional experiences at the sites.⁹³ The RSP’s Witches Rock rephotographic pair emphasizes the medium’s unique ability to be witness to a place while also conveying and responding to cultural meaning. As the RSP learned, and Sandweiss reminds us, photographs “need to be understood as constructions of the human imagination, as the result of selective attention to a particular subject.”⁹⁴ The tilted angle view of Witches Rock simultaneously responded to and formed cultural expectations of the western landscape.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 311-19.

⁹³ Toby Jurovics, *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O’Sullivan* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress and Smithsonian American Art Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 23.

⁹⁴ Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 7-8.

The RSP's old and new photographic pairs imply the passage of time and development of history and encourage interpretations through comparison. The pairs illustrate Alan Trachtenberg's observation that *how* photographs are used and interpreted is as important as the technology of the medium. "Images become history, more than traces of a specific event of the past," Trachtenberg states, "when they are used to interpret the present in light of the past, when they are presented and received as explanatory accounts of collective reality."⁹⁵ The past and present photographic images of the RSP inform one another and are used to interpret the past in light of the present and vice versa. Together, the pictures may illustrate change and provide evidence of a place in time, but it is only through the narrative about those images that the photographs tell history. The images, then, become history. But the views of the past are not always what might be expected.

The RSP pairing of a Quartz Mill near Virginia City, Nevada reverses expectations of the before-and-after comparison (figure 11). O'Sullivan's 1868 industrial landscape includes many large factory buildings, some multiple stories tall, surrounding two central smoke stacks, nestled within a valley, viewable from the distance and high vantage point of the photograph. Smaller houses cluster around the cleared land, and roads radiate outwards. There is no horizon in the photograph, and sagebrush-speckled land extends in all directions. The 1979 photograph by Klett is stark by comparison. There is no visible record of the mill—not a single ruin or pile of rubble from the buildings; and trees and bushes have grown where there were none before. The distance to the past is strongly felt in the contrast of the silence and absence in the present with the perceived activity and bustle of the past.

⁹⁵ Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 6.

In the 1970s and 1980s, this pairing was unexpected and even celebrated because ideologies at that time deemed pure wilderness as the ideal state. The environmental movements of the 1970s called for preservation of nature (an ideology that continues today). As Klett later noted, landscape photography that avoided human impact on the land reflected the sentiment of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which defined “wilderness [as] a place where man was an intruder, ‘a visitor who does not remain.’”⁹⁶ Twentieth-century views of the landscape tend to overlook the evidence of exploitation in favor of those devoid of human presence. Through careful selection of romanticized images, exploration photographers are credited as recorders of a lost wilderness. That nature had seemingly re-claimed the land from industrial influence was viewed as a triumph for environmentalism in the 1970s, especially compared to the many RSP pairings that showed the opposite changes—“pure” landscapes now overrun with the human imprint. O’Sullivan’s 1868 photograph, by comparison, celebrated expansion and the land as a resource for economic use.

To illustrate the reexamination of history in the 1990s, it is worth looking at one more interpretation of the image pairs (from after 1991). Western historian Patricia Limerick proposed a different reflection on this changing landscape of the American West. Limerick pointed out that the elimination of the mill represents the anti-myth of the West. The myth of the frontier embraced western expansion and the presumed outcome of the myth was a success story of continental expansion. The complete absence of the mill in the 1979 photograph goes against the vision of expansion because the industry failed when a bust followed a boom. “Expansion, construction, and growth are certainly part of the region’s history,” wrote Limerick, “but so are

⁹⁶ Mark Klett, *Third Views, Second Sights: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2004), 6.

contraction, retreat, and abandonment.”⁹⁷ The multiple interpretations and ideologies in the pair of images serve to illustrate how the photographs can serve multiple histories, depending on the present view.

Photography’s unique relationship to the past is one that provides access to historic witness and to facts but is also one that opens a conversation about cultural beliefs and values associated with the subject and image. In the process of rephotographing sites from nineteenth century survey photographs, the RSP team uncovered important contextual information beyond the frame of the camera’s view that included the biases of the circumstances in which the photographs, both past and present, are created, disseminated, and viewed. The past and the present are tangled in the dialogue between the RSP photographs and the interpretation of the images, as they become history. Barthes still argues, however, that the details of photography carry truth that should overwhelm subjectivity. Denying photography’s ability to convey nostalgia and the wistful desire for what might have been, Barthes claims that the role of photography is to provide access to the past. In photography, Barthes says, “the past is as certain as the present.”⁹⁸ But the mere comparison of past and present in the western landscapes also can evoke nostalgia and a yearning for the past. One reviewer for the *New York Times* saw in Klett’s photographs the “quintessentially Western spirit . . . imbued with nostalgia for the past.”⁹⁹ Like history, meaning and ideologies in photography—whether nostalgia or anti-myth—are subject to the ideologies of the reader.

The RSP’s rephotographic pairs transcended singular moments in time to pull viewers back to the late nineteenth century and the survey photographs, bracket the time in between, and

⁹⁷ Patricia Nelson Limerick and Mark Klett, “Haunted by Rhyolite: Learning from the Landscape of Failure,” *American Art* 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 23.

⁹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

⁹⁹ Andy Grundberg, “Photography Review: He Records Nature With Humor and Reverence,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1984.

then draw attention to the present. In the back and forth viewing, a dialogue with the past takes place. Klett perhaps raises more questions than he presents answers, but we begin to see the complexity of western landscape. Presented without commentary, the pairings can be interpreted in a variety of ways: nostalgia for the Old West; a revelation of the late nineteenth-century industrial landscape; or as a call for environmental preservation. Rephotography is a way to sharpen the perception – not only in how things have changed, but how the photographs do and do not, can and cannot, reflect that change.

The Postmodern West: Richard Prince's *Cowboys*

In the mid-1980s, Marlboro cigarette advertisements became the basis for artist Richard Prince's *Cowboys* series, featuring Stetson-clad men riding, roping, and wrangling cattle under big clear skies and pristine mountain ranges (figures 12 and 13). Similar to the RSP photographers, Prince used rephotography, although rather than seeking out vantage points or traveling to specific locations, Prince photographed the advertisement directly from magazines. The grainy quality of the photographs is the result of the artist's technique of reprocessing the image through cropping, enlarging, and blurring, but the blurred nature also contributes to the impression that the images are old. The images are not old, but based on advertisements—twentieth-century myth-makers that evoke nostalgia for the Old West, representations that have been repeated so much that they have become the Old West. The advertisements were extensions of the ideologies of the western man as one who embodied individualism, strength, and a respect for freedom. The cowboys are tanned and weathered, muscular and handsome (and white)—characteristics tied to Owen Wister's version of the cowboy that surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century. Prince's copy of an advertisement that was already a visual projection (and

perfection) of a myth encourages an expanded critique of images of the West that had been adopted and repeated for nearly a century. Prince's *Cowboys* series provides a useful comparison and counterpoint to both the Cowboy Artists of America's and the RSP's use of historic images.¹⁰⁰

Prince's use of photography, a crucial tool of Postmodernism, questioned notions of subjectivity, originality, and authorship.¹⁰¹ As a postmodern artist, Prince deconstructs the stability of images and, in this case, the stability of the dominant myth of the frontier. Prince's rephotography draws attention to the myth of the American West and its proliferation based on popular and clichéd imagery. In his use of advertisements (more obviously constructed from a particular angle, such as a message to buy cigarettes because smoking is manly) Prince further reveals the American West as simulacrum. The simulacrum, according to Jean Baudrillard, is a copy without an original.¹⁰² The Old West, in its creation and continual repetition through images that have changed very little over centuries, is not reality but rather hyperreality. With the effects of mass culture (including advertising), when an object, event, or experience is repeatedly reproduced, it replaces, or is preferred, to the original. As Baudrillard would say, it is "more real than real." This does not imply that the West is unnecessary; on the contrary, Baudrillard explains, there is a cultural need for hyperreality. "We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us."¹⁰³ The implications of Prince's *Cowboys* and the Old West

¹⁰⁰ Marlboro advertisements and the art of the Cowboy Artists intertwine. In 1968, Marlboro purchased a painting from the Cowboy Artist of America exhibition, *Patching His Saddle*, for use in publicity. See Howard, *Ten Years with the Cowboy Artists*, 13. Howard also noted that a highlight of the 1973 Cowboy Artist trail ride on the Jack Schwabacher ranch in Wyoming was meeting Darrell Wingate, a Marlboro man. Howard, *Ten Years with the Cowboy Artists*, 19.

¹⁰¹ For further discussion of photography's relationship with Postmodernism, see Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1984), 75-86.

¹⁰² Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Art After Modernism*, 254.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 259.

as simulacrum inform a critical interpretation of the Cowboy Artists of America and the RSP, while also highlighting the cultural following and belief in the simulacrum.

In *Cowboys*, Prince exploits Barthes's notion of factuality in photography. "What interests me about photographs is that they have an aura of truth," explained Prince; "But at the moment, mass-media photographs tend to lie and most of what's passing for information right now is total fiction."¹⁰⁴ Prince embraces and blends the two opposing interpretations in his rephotography: photographs as messengers of truth, and advertising's inherent quality of fiction. As Prince explained, "Rephotography is a technique for stealing (pirating) already existing images, simulating rather than copying them . . . a rephotograph is essentially an appropriation of what's already real about an existing image and an attempt to add on or additionalize this reality into something more real, a virtuoso real—a reality that has the chances of looking real, but a reality that doesn't have any chances of being real."¹⁰⁵ (It is hyperreal.) Prince deconstructs photography's aura of authenticity and truthfulness by revealing its constructed nature through rephotography. Prince's cowboys are common, easily recognizable images that reveal ulterior motives behind advertising and call attention to American cultural values of male rugged individualism and can-do attitude. When re-purposed and contextualized as art, Prince's *Cowboys* refer as much to the cowboys of Remington's (or even the Cowboy Artists') paintings of the imagined Old West as they do to mass media and Hollywood films. Prince manipulated the Marlboro photographs by removing the glossy Marlboro taglines and "turned the

¹⁰⁴ Richard Prince, as quoted in Kristine McKenna, "On Photography: Looking for Truth Between the Lies," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1985.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Prince, 1977, "Practicing Without a License," accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.richardprince.com/writings/practicing-without-a-license-1977/>.

advertisements into icons of American mythology, combining pioneer spirit with unbridled masculinity.”¹⁰⁶

As a young man, Prince worked for the tear-sheet department of *Time Life*, where he clipped and filed articles. In the process, he started to focus on the leftovers, consisting primarily of product advertisements. He became interested in the repetition, similarities, and hyperreal nature of the photographs and in what they disguised and what they revealed. The cowboy is an icon in American culture and a symbol of virility, chivalry, and rugged freedom. As such, he has been celebrated in an ad campaign for Marlboro cigarettes that started in 1954 and continues today. As one *New York Times* writer observed, “in its sheer ubiquity, the most successful advertising campaign in history has insinuated that firm-featured, dusty cowpoke into the collective conscious.”¹⁰⁷ This “cowboy of the mind,” as Annie Proulx, a Wyoming-based author, described him, is a romantic figure who is heroic, tireless, honest, sentimental, bighearted, and tough—a “representation of America . . . embedded in our national character and ethos”—the very characteristics Marlboro sought to exemplify.¹⁰⁸ There is a disjunction between the romantic image and the daily life of the cowboy in the American West (although it is nearly impossible to differentiate because any mundane existence associated with cowboys has been subverted in contemporary culture). Prince’s *Cowboys* embrace and project the ideals of romance while they are also what one critic called “strangely beautiful” and full of tensions between the unreal male type and the seemingly real actions of roping or riding.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Pollack, "Richard Prince: Guggenheim Museum," *Art News* 106, no. 11 (December 2007): 148.

¹⁰⁷ John Marchese also briefly summarizes Phillip Morris’s advertising campaign in the 1954 to masculinize Marlboro cigarettes, which were previously sold primarily to women. John Marchese, “A Rough Ride,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1992.

¹⁰⁸ Annie Proulx, interviewed by Glenn O’Brien in *Richard Prince*, Nancy Spector (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2007), 284.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett Watten, "Richard Prince's Imitation of Life," *Artweek* 24 (July 8, 1993): 4.

The *Cowboy* series is a postmodern critique of the mythological American West, the structure of signification, and the revelation that under each picture is just another picture. It is a simulacrum and a copy without an original. Postmodernism denies a centralized source for images, narratives, or history and instead reinforces their fictive nature. In Prince, we experience the Old West through a “postmodern situation,” or the point when a situation is removed from a reality whose absence is not even felt.¹¹⁰ Since the nineteenth century, a mythic West became the primary image, replacing that which had just passed into history. Prince’s photographs of the cowboys are visual embodiments of Neil Campbell’s observation that, “[t]he American West has always been, by the very nature of its mythic representations . . . a simulation reproducing images conforming to some already defined, but possibly non-existent, sense of Westness.”¹¹¹ The ideologies associated with the American West had been copied and reproduced for nearly a century, embracing a dominant history. But the postmodern attitudes of art and history in the 1990s questioned the fixed nature of the image, despite its duplication over nearly a century. As Jenkins observed, in the postmodern world old organizing frameworks that privileged one central history and ideology are dead.¹¹² The ability of the cowboy to signify shared ideologies is impossible in the postmodern world.

Prince’s cowboys still provide layers of references, (such as Roland Barthes’ “tissues of quotations”) to be discovered and analyzed. The cowboy was an image exploited by more than advertisers. The cowboy also became coupled with politics, and especially President Ronald Reagan, in the decade of the 1980s. Reagan’s public persona, and entire presidency, was built on his Hollywood-actor days when he often played a cowboy. In a denim shirt, large belt buckle, and cowboy hat, Reagan dressed the part and exploited nostalgia for a lost, supposedly simpler

¹¹⁰ Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

¹¹¹ Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West*, 130.

¹¹² Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 60.

time. Although based on a Hollywood creation, Reagan was perceived as an authentic cowboy, not least because of his clothing, his ranch, his horse, and his California residence. As Proulx sarcastically observed, “it is the clothing that attracts us to the cowboy”; the clothes are a signifier that often carry more authority than actual ranch experience.¹¹³ (The Cowboy Artists of America, for example, all pose for their official portraits wearing cowboy hats.) Baudrillard equated Reagan’s identity with simulation in American culture: “in the image of Reagan, the whole of America has become Californian . . . he has worked up his euphoric, cinematic, extraverted, advertising vision of the artificial paradises of the West to all-American dimensions.”¹¹⁴ Prince began his series the same year Reagan was elected president, but the series proved popular and lucrative, and Prince continued to add to his *Cowboys* into the late 1990s. Over time, the context and critique changed. Initially a postmodern statement about the subject and of art history in general, the *Cowboys* turned into a great epic work about American politics, which often blend fiction and reality.

Projected images of the Old West, like advertisements, disguise as much as they reveal. In 1980, the year Reagan became president, the first recognizable “Marlboro Man” died of lung cancer. The cowboy was an image of virility, yet Marlboro models were diagnosed with lung cancer and very publicly blamed the company and the promotion of cigarettes for their demise.¹¹⁵ “The association of disease with America’s own mythic self-image of innocence is fertile ground” for Prince, wrote art historian Rosetta Brooks. “The Arcadian image of American origination has been transformed into a forbidden image of terminal danger, contaminated by a

¹¹³ Proulx, in *Richard Prince*, 285.

¹¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1989), 108.

¹¹⁵ Wayne McLaren, a cowboy and model, was an anti-smoking advocate before he died of lung cancer at the age 51. Marchese, “A Rough Ride.”

cultural pollutant in the form of the cigarette.”¹¹⁶ The disjuncture between cancer-causing cigarettes and the projected image of smoking as an element of masculinity again pointed to the fiction of the myth of the American West that had been long reified and believed as the truth. Death at the hands of a cigarette (as opposed to a stampede accident, raid to find horse thieves, or some other mythical cowboy drama) was anti-heroic and did not conform to the embraced myth.

Part of the effectiveness of Prince’s rephotographs of Marlboro advertisements is his ability to enter the realm of irony. In his appropriation of the cowboy, he adopts the image only and removes it from the intended message. Prince subverts the idealized Old West and instead exposes and deconstructs nostalgia of the original image, which draws attention to the falseness of the image and questions the viewer’s access to the past through history and nostalgia. The *Cowboys* evoke nostalgia, but Prince problematizes the authenticity of nostalgia through his link of the Old West to something as superficial and calculated as advertisements.

Prince’s *Cowboys* frustrate the very urge of privileging the past and looking backward for the authentic West (an urge at the core of the Cowboy Artists’ ideologies). Authenticity may be equated with experience, but, as Nancy Spector observed, it is a construct of “visual codes that appeal to cultural stereotypes, prejudices, desires, and fears,” that only gains validity the more it is copied.¹¹⁷ Authenticity is judged by “typicality,” or fidelity to expectations in look and style (cowboys wearing cowboy hats and cowboy boots and riding horses, not cowboys with baseball caps and sneakers riding four-wheelers). Eventually, through repetition, the signs of the real replace the real. When Baudrillard experienced America in 1986, he felt that the American West, especially, held the essence of America. America’s essence, though, “is neither dream nor

¹¹⁶ Rosetta Brooks, “A Prince of Light or Darkness?” in *Richard Prince* (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 61.

¹¹⁷ Spector, *Richard Prince*, 29.

reality,” he concluded. “It is a hyperreality.”¹¹⁸ Hyperreality fulfills a cultural need for a usable past. The Old West, perhaps unreal, populated with perfect cowboys and unspoiled wilderness, celebrates the western man that was so essential to the American identity from the early twentieth century. Nostalgia has had a strong role in our understanding as it shapes cultural interpretation. History frames the West.

Prince’s postmodern view of the American West plays an important role in our understanding of the West in culture today. Postmodernism fosters an awareness of the constructed nature of representations and of the ideological interests that they serve. Postmodernism frustrates one dominant interpretation of the myth of the West and instead points to a multifaceted history—histories—about the West of the past. In a postmodern consideration of the West, artists and viewers become more critical about how and what visual images are communicating. Postmodernism encourages a re-vision of the Old West, preparing the way for revisionist western history and the *West as America* exhibition.

Revision

Collectively, the Cowboy Artists of America, RSP, and Richard Prince address the American West with fundamentally different approaches, but there are common themes. In all the work, the historic West (alternately the Old West or the myth of the West) supports ideologies associated with western expansion, individualism and freedom associated with the western man; and values that saw national symbolism and opportunities in the landscape. Critique and reinterpretation of images shift throughout the three decades—moving from emulation and embrace of the art of the past that is believed to represent documentary reflections of the Old West (the myth that had been reified) to a critical examination of the images. The

¹¹⁸ Baudrillard, *America*, 28.

Cowboy Artists' paintings and sculpture place a higher value on the past, idealized through nostalgia, compared to difficult social and cultural conditions of the present. The RSP looks to the past, but places it directly with the present through the photographic pairs, but also by embracing, rather than ignoring, contemporary issues and art movements. Prince's appropriated images further move the imagery of the cowboy into twentieth-century styles and criticism.

The artists and photographers discussed in this chapter predated the watershed of 1990s revisionism, but changing ideologies and cultural attitudes toward multiculturalism and inclusion were already evident. The Cowboy Artists' embrace of Remington and Russell reflects a reverence for an old way of life that they projected onto their interpretation of history as portrayed in the art of the past. The Cowboy Artists worked within the American Cold War mentality and held on to simplified certainties about identity, race, and national order (that privileged white males) among a drastically changing society. These ideologies permeated the Cowboy Artists' Old West that was steeped in idyllic tones of nostalgia.

The RSP team documented changes to western landscapes, but their photographic pairs revealed that our interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new information and perspectives gained over time. Klett and his team showed that the past is not frozen within a single objective vantage point but is dynamic and ever changing depending on perspective.

Richard Prince's use of imagery of the American West illustrates a postmodern attitude toward the subject. By rephotographing cowboys in Marlboro advertisements, he points to the West as hyperreality and as a simulation that has come to stand in for reality. Prince's postmodern critique of the American West questions fixed meaning and disrupts the perceived relationship of the image to the original. His approach to appropriation provides valuable insights

for thinking about the ways in which appropriation can both embrace and critique original sources.

Revisionism in western history forced a conscious break with previous interpretations of the West that embraced a commonly accepted and narrow view that virtually eliminated women, people of color, and Native Americans from the conversation. For Patricia Nelson Limerick, the leading voice of New Western History group, the old ideologies of individualism and democracy needed to be overturned and instead the West should be examined in terms of conquest—in ethnic, cultural, and environmental terms.¹¹⁹ In this revisionist thinking, the West was understood in postmodern terms: an ever-changing and unfinished cultural construction. *The West as America* brought the examination of the Old West to a new level. Revisionist historical scholarship prompted scholars and artists to examine the artwork and culture of the past from an inquisitive, and even skeptical, vantage point. Truettner wrote of the ideological implications of myth in the relationship to the American West: “Myth functions to control history, to shape it in text or image as an ordained sequence of events.”¹²⁰ The exhibition’s intense examination of art of the American frontier from 1820 to 1920 reinterpreted images of the frontier to reveal that the art was an ideologically motivated pictorial rhetoric. Overall, the exhibition frustrated the reading of the paintings as an objective document of the real, and emphasized the role of the constructed images within particular histories.¹²¹ The American West is what Barthes would call a complex and layered “galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds,” and within the layers of references, multiple experiences and entry points remain penetrable and malleable.¹²²

¹¹⁹ One of the first books published from the wave of revisionist scholarship and New Western History was Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987).

¹²⁰ Truettner, *The West as America*, 40.

¹²¹ Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 107.

¹²² Barthes, as quoted in Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West*, 5.

Chapter 2

Re-experiencing Representation in the Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon presents a unique challenge for artists—partially because it is difficult to capture the vast distances and unique geological features on canvas and film but even more so because visual culture is over-saturated with Grand Canyon images. Before British watercolorist Tony Foster (born 1946) visited the Grand Canyon for the first time in 1987, he had no intention of painting the landscape. Foster thought the subject had been painted too often and that he could not contribute anything meaningful to the existing body of paintings.¹²³ Similarly, when Mark Klett visited the Grand Canyon in 1983, he recalled thinking, “What can I possibly do that hasn’t already been done before?”¹²⁴ Byron Wolfe, Klett’s collaborator added, “Art photographers have avoided the Grand Canyon because others have defined the territory and it became difficult to find new ways to respond.”¹²⁵ The sheer number of artists’ drawings, prints, paintings, and photographs of the Grand Canyon dating from the earliest days of European exploration through today overwhelmed these artists. They knew their experience of the Grand Canyon was mediated and shaped by visual imagery, nearly to the point where the multitude and repetition of images threatened to replace a first-hand experience with the Grand Canyon.

Yet, the Grand Canyon was such a compelling subject for Foster and the team of Klett and Wolfe that they each returned to the Canyon numerous times. Artists, photographers, and explorers from the turn of the twentieth century became their guides, and historic imagery was an essential element in Foster, Klett, and Wolfe’s methods. Klett explained, for example, that William Bell’s 1872 *Grand Canyon* photograph inspired him to revisit the Grand Canyon: “I had traveled to this spot to pursue my own expedition of a sort. I wanted to rediscover, as best one

¹²³ Tony Foster, “Painting a Slice of Time,” in *Painting at the Edge of the World: The Watercolours of Tony Foster* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 38.

¹²⁴ Mark Klett, “Response to History” (lecture, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ, November 8, 2013).

¹²⁵ Byron Wolfe, telephone interview with the author, November 13, 2013.

can today, what is perhaps our most monumental and sacred western landscape.” Klett continued, “rather than shun them, I decided to embrace photographs from the past as a way of comparing my own, contemporary, experience of the canyon.”¹²⁶ Klett’s rediscovery of the Grand Canyon and his contemporary experience is not only informed and inspired by the vantage points from nineteenth-century photographers but also by the ideologies embodied within the images. They aimed to rediscover and experience place, but along the way, they explore changing attitudes toward the land and the circumstances of image making, as much as the place itself.

Foster’s interest in conservation of the world’s wilderness led him back to the Grand Canyon in 1988, and several additional times for multi-day camping, hiking, and rafting journeys. Foster purposefully bypasses modern conveniences and the nearly five million annual visitors to attempt to experience the untouched wild places and isolation much as an artist explorer in the American West of the nineteenth-century Grand Canyon did, consciously connecting to the ideological impulses of the nineteenth-century explorer. In 2000, Foster navigated the canyon in a raft and created a series of mixed media assemblages based on his experience (*Sixteen Days Rafting the Colorado – 225.8 miles – Lee’s Ferry to Diamond Creek*, figure 14). Foster’s sixteen-day journey is akin to Major John Wesley Powell’s expeditions to map the Grand Canyon between 1869 and 1873. Faced with the same physical location and view from the river’s edge, Foster found inspiration in the photographers and artists who accompanied Powell.

Historic photographs, paintings, and postcards, as well as contemporary popular photography, dictated Klett and Wolfe’s art and experience in the Grand Canyon. The locations they visited, directions they faced, times of day, and seasons in which they experienced canyons

¹²⁶ Klett, “View of the Grand Canyon,” in *Myth of the West*, 79.

and rivers were guided by the photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan and William Bell, watercolors of Thomas Moran, drawings by William Henry Holmes (1846-1933), and countless anonymous postcards. From 2007 to 2011 Klett and Wolfe searched for locations and vantage points of the historic works and then built their own art from those experiences, incorporating historic imagery into a body of photographs and collages compiled in *Reconstructing the View: The Grand Canyon Photographs of Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe*.¹²⁷ Klett and Wolfe employed many different formats in *Reconstructing the View*, expanding limitations and building on techniques used in other projects, such as the RSP. They overlaid contemporary photographs on top of and next to historic images; used contemporary photography to fill in the panorama beyond the frame of historic photographs (figure 26); or condensed time by compiling photographs from a variety of photographers who addressed one view of the canyon. For the first time, Klett and Wolfe crossed boundaries of media and mixed photography with drawings and watercolors from the past (figure 28). Unlike the before-and-after pairings used by the RSP, *Reconstructing the View* expands the frame of the historic photographs and embraces the contexts of the images. Klett and Wolfe enliven the old in a new way.

Foster, Klett, and Wolfe's reliance on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visual culture as inspiration and guide in the Grand Canyon carries a postmodern attitude because they make representations based on representations. Although their medium and approach differs, the artists share an interest in the subject of the Grand Canyon: a natural wonder that is recognizable worldwide as an icon of the American landscape. They also engage with the cultural history of visual images of the Grand Canyon and how the images played an important role in the changing

¹²⁷ All the photographs were published in Rebecca Senf, Stephen Pyne, Mark Klett, and Byron Wolfe *Reconstructing the View: The Grand Canyon Photographs of Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) and a selection of photographs were exhibited at the Phoenix Art Museum in 2009 in an exhibition titled *Charting the Canyon*. See also www.klettandwolfe.com.

perception of the landscape. Drawings, paintings, and photographs contributed significantly to the understanding of one of the few unknown wilderness areas remaining in the United States in the late nineteenth century. These images contributed to the ideology of western expansion by claiming and naming the landscape and established symbolism associated with the place. The unique topographic features became “monumental” and “sacred” and supported a national identity based on the sublime wilderness. Foster, Klett, and Wolfe respond to and incorporate these cultural impressions and meanings into their contemporary work. As much as their work relies on visual representations they also immerse themselves in the landscape in an attempt to understand their own sense of being in the landscape. They build meaning through their relationship to the past and offer a unique and contemporary perspective on the way we experience the grandeur of an iconic western place today.

Art and Cultural History of the Grand Canyon

Today, even before visitors reach what is now called the Grand Canyon, they have likely viewed images and read descriptions that condition their expectations of awe and wonder at the geological formations. President Theodore Roosevelt’s often-quoted exclamation upon his first visit to the region is a common response. “The Grand Canyon fills me with awe,” said the president. “It is beyond comparison—beyond description; absolutely unparalleled throughout the wide world.”¹²⁸ By the time Roosevelt had visited the Grand Canyon in 1903, it had been charted, mapped, and described in text, pencil, watercolor, oil paint, and photography. In the first years of the twentieth century, journalists frequently used words that painted a picture. Artistic

¹²⁸ This is an often-used quote on websites and pamphlets about the Grand Canyon, although the primary source remains elusive and un-cited. Theodore Roosevelt is said to have made this statement during a visit to the Grand Canyon in 1903. See, for example, “Maps of Grand Canyon National Park,” *Library of Congress*, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/collection/national-parks-maps/articles-and-essays/maps-of-grand-canyon-national-park/>.

metaphors were often applied to the indescribable and inexpressible landscape. “It is old, old, this Grande Canyon, and yet so new it seems almost to smell of paint, red paint, pink, scarlet,” proclaimed Joaquin Miller in 1901.¹²⁹ Journalist William Allen White described the Canyon as if created by an artist: “the sun is plying his paint-brush on the peaks and hills below, while up Bright Angel Creek the blue shadows seem to be smudged into the canvas.”¹³⁰ The vast chasms, ever-changing light, prismatic color, and immense size of the Grand Canyon were often proclaimed by visitors to be unlike anything they had ever seen. Because Foster, Klett, and Wolf’s contemporary images rely on historic interpretations of the Grand Canyon, a brief cultural history of the Grand Canyon in visual images provides a useful grounding.

Hundreds of years prior to the turn of the twentieth century and American journalists’ colorful and admiring descriptions, Europeans viewed the area as a wasteland—useless for development and an obstacle that blocked access to natural resources and precious minerals. Spanish conquistadors attempted exploration of the Colorado River and the South Rim in 1540. Spanish reports of the explorations in the region described the gorge as a “barrier which nature had fixed,” further claiming “horrid mountains” prevented access to the river for hundreds of miles.¹³¹ The threat of Indian attack also figured into the consciousness of the European explorers. Although Indians are rarely depicted in historic images, there were, and still are, many tribes living in the areas surrounding the Canyon. For the ancient Pueblo peoples, the Canyon was home. They hunted and farmed near the rims of the canyons. Archeological evidence shows

¹²⁹ Joaquin Miller, "A New Wonder of the World," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, no. 3 (March 1901): 786.

¹³⁰ William Allen White, "On Bright Angel Trail," *McClure's Magazine* 25, no. 5 (September 1905): 504.

¹³¹ For a summary of the Spanish exploration, and the perception of the Grand Canyon as an inhospitable place, see Stephen J. Pyne, *How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History* (New York: Viking, 1998), 1-25, especially 18, 24.

that people lived in the Colorado Plateau for thousands of years prior to European arrival in the region, extending the human history of the Canyon far into the past.¹³²

When the United States acquired the region that included the Grand Canyon and surrounding areas in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the perceived image of the area began to change. Historian Stephen J. Pyne explained that the common perception of the Grand Canyon as an “indigestible geography” on the remote edges of Mexico was transformed through United States promotion into a “prominent natural feature of the . . . American Nile.”¹³³ Within a matter of decades at the end of the nineteenth century, the Canyon had become “Grand”—a term used not simply to describe the immense scale but also to convey characteristics of majesty, nobility, and monumentality. Art and images were instrumental in creating the Grand Canyon’s new reputation. Photography, drawings, and paintings from the late nineteenth century helped to conquer and tame the little-known terrain of the region, supporting notions of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny. Late nineteenth-century images that translated the vast chasms into readable and beautiful landscapes replaced early exploration images that emphasized towering and intimidating canyon walls. Art influenced and reflected these changing ideologies.

F.W. von Egloffstein (1824-1885) and Heinrich Balduin Möllhausen (1825-1905) produced the first American visual depictions of the Grand Canyon. They accompanied Lieutenant J.C. Ives, a U.S. government official, on an exploration of the canyon in 1857 and provided illustrations in Ives’s *Report Upon the Colorado River of the West*. Egloffstein’s and Möllhausen’s drawings provided eastern audiences with their first glimpse of the Grand Canyon. Egloffstein’s illustrations, in particular, were dark and foreboding, exaggerating the height and

¹³² There are many books about the native inhabitants of the Grand Canyon region. See Stephen Hirst, *I am the Grand Canyon: The Story of the Havasupai People* (Grand Canyon Village, AZ: Grand Canyon Association, 2006), and Barbara J. Morehouse, *A Place Called Grand Canyon: Contested Geographies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

¹³³ Pyne, *How the Canyon Became Grand*, 26.

narrowness of the canyons, which seemed to close in on the tiny figures and boats beneath (figure 15).¹³⁴ The suite of illustrations reflected the difficulty of the expedition, which had hoped to navigate all of the Colorado River by steamship, only to be blocked by rocks that forced the party to proceed overland. The expedition members viewed the region from the canyon rim and river's edge, yet never covered the length of the Colorado River in its entirety. Ives responded with mixed emotions to the Grand Canyon. When the party reached Big Cañon, for example, he reported, "for a long time we paused in wondering delight, surveying this stupendous formation through which the Colorado and its tributaries break their way." But despite his awe, he concluded that the canyon region was a "profitless locality."¹³⁵ Egloffstein's illustrations, which, as author Wallace Stegner observed, "look like the landscape of nightmares," support Ives's conclusion of its inaccessibility and fed the public's preconceptions of the dramatic and foreign place.¹³⁶

Within two decades, scientific information gained from surveys and photographs of the Grand Canyon served to counter Ives's and Egloffstein's sublime and ominous impressions of the Canyon. Through three campaigns between 1869 and 1873, Major John Wesley Powell mapped the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon after completing a full survey of the Grand Canyon and surrounding area.

In the late nineteenth century, it was a remarkable feat to navigate all the uncharted rapids and canyons of the Colorado River in its entirety. Powell was a one-armed Civil War veteran and

¹³⁴ The Ives expedition was not the first expedition of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the region. Others had come in search of locations to build roads or transcontinental railroad routes, but Ives is often most recognized because of the resulting volumes of information he gathered on the journey. See William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1966). For a detailed examination of Egloffstein, see Steven W. Rowan, *The Baron in the Grand Canyon: Friedrich Wilhelm von Egloffstein in the West* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 94-151.

¹³⁵ Lieutenant Joseph Christmas Ives, *Report Upon the Colorado River of the West, Explored in 1857 and 1858* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1861), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ADU2374>, 99.

¹³⁶ Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (Houghton Mifflin, 1954; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 51. Citations refer to the Penguin edition.

a professor of geology who gathered his team of ten men at Green River Station, Wyoming Territory, to begin the journey. With four boats, ten months' worth of supplies, scientific instruments, and considerable courage, Powell's Colorado River Expedition pushed off on May 24, 1869. On Powell's expedition, science and adventure were mixed—Powell's main objective was to collect scientific readings and measurements, but he and his crew were also attracted to the potential danger of the expedition. When most of the party emerged from the canyon in August of 1869, the expedition became legendary almost immediately—as much for its trials as for its scientific discoveries.¹³⁷

Within scientific, political, and artistic audiences as well as the general public, Powell's expedition had a tremendous impact on the perception of the Grand Canyon. Powell's expeditions aimed to demystify the dramatic and foreboding views of the canyon circulated by Egloffstein's illustrations and Ives's text and replaced the romantic and dramatic interpretations with one that Powell hoped to be more objective and scientific. Powell gathered geological data on his journeys but also produced a visual record of the Canyon. Although his first expedition in 1869 did not include an artist or photographer, in 1871-1872 Powell employed several photographers and artists. One of the most prolific was John K. (Jack) Hillers (1843-1925), who was initially hired as a boatman.¹³⁸ Hillers worked as a photography assistant, learning the rigorous wet-plate collodion photography process from James Fennemore.¹³⁹ He learned quickly,

¹³⁷ Four men abandoned the expedition along the route, fearing they would not survive the rapids of the river. Powell wrote a three-part article about his adventurous expedition in *Scribner's Monthly*, January, February, and March 1875. Thomas Moran completed most of the illustrations for that series, as well as two additional articles written by Powell.

¹³⁸ For a comprehensive survey of Hillers's photographs, see Don D. Fowler and John K. Hillers, *The Western Photographs of John K. Hillers: "Myself in the Water"* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989). In addition, Hillers's journals from the Powell expeditions are edited and reprinted in John K. Hillers, *"Photographed All the Best Scenery": Jack Hillers's Diary of the Powell Expeditions, 1871-1875* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1972).

¹³⁹ The first photographer hired was E.O. Beaman, a professional photographer from New York. But Beaman resigned after several months to go out on his own. James Fennemore, another professional photographer, filled in

and in his six years with Powell from 1872 to 1878 Hillers made over 3,000 negatives of the Colorado River, which greatly contributed to the popularization of the Grand Canyon. (Powell and Hillers later become an important starting point for Tony Foster.)

Hillers's photograph *Marble Pinnacle, Kanab Canyon, Arizona* provides an informative comparison to Egloffstein's *Black Cañon* (figure 16). Both images depict the canyon walls from a similar vantage at the river's edge. The rocky cliffs closest to the viewer appear dark and in the shadows while light illuminates the distance, creating white or gray space between the cliffs. The vertical orientation of the frame emphasizes the height of the canyon walls and the vantage point from below, looking up. Similarities aside, the differences convey different impressions of the canyon. In Egloffstein's *Black Cañon*, the dark verticals reach the top edge of the frame, implying a much greater extension to the height of the canyon walls. By comparison, Hillers's band of sky at the top of the composition defines the uppermost edge of the cliff walls. Hillers defined a finite space, while Egloffstein's canyon walls are limitless. Furthermore, Hillers creates a more welcoming image of the canyon through the bottom section of his composition. The rocky shore in *Marble Pinnacle* provides a sturdy place for the viewer to enter imaginatively into the landscape. Egloffstein also included a small rocky patch at the bottom, but proportionately to the rest of the composition, the landing spot is miniscule and crowded with large boulders that cause the scene to remain inaccessible to the view. The differences between the two images communicate the changing attitude toward the Grand Canyon in the late nineteenth century.

for a short time following Beaman's departure. Clement Powell and John K "Jack" Hillers were amateurs who had worked as assistants to Beaman and Fennemore. Clement Powell eventually quit making photographs because he never quite mastered the skills. For more information and biographies of the men, see William Culp Darrah, "Beaman, Fennemore, Hillers, Dellenbaugh, Johnson and Hattan," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 16-17 (1948-1949): 491-503.

Both images carry personal and cultural meaning and are subject to interpretation. Egloffstein's *Black Cañon* illustrated a passage from the report in which Ives described the canyon as "moulded from the cyclopean masses of rock . . . The solitude, the stillness, the subdued light, and the vastness of every surrounding object, produce [an] impression of awe that ultimately becomes almost painful."¹⁴⁰ The Black Cañon was the location where Ives's steamship struck a rock and nearly sank and represents the farthest point the expedition could navigate by boat. Further, at Black Cañon, circumstances were dire for the crew, who were very low on supplies and forced to survive on "disagreeable" cornmeal and boiled beans while waiting for food to be brought by train from Fort Yuma.¹⁴¹ Comparatively, Hillers conveyed his admiration for the scenery of the Grand Canyon in his journal on the day he photographed *Marble Pinnacle, Kanab Canyon, Arizona*. After a number of failed attempts with negatives on the Kaibab plateau, he found success and declared, "[I] photographed all the best scenery."¹⁴² By the time Hillers journeyed into the Grand Canyon, Powell had successfully mapped the river and his party had faith that Powell would once more get them safely through the canyon.

O'Sullivan's 1871 photograph of the same location serves another comparison. In O'Sullivan's *Black Cañon, Colorado River from Camp 8, Looking Above*, the smooth surfaces of the river, rocky walls ascending gradually to the top of the composition, and boat in the foreground convey deliberate calm (figure 17). O'Sullivan recorded topographical information for George Wheeler's Survey of the Hundredth Meridian in mid-September 1871. As Page Stegner observed, O'Sullivan was a master of conveying the topography, as well as "a sense of

¹⁴⁰ J.B. Krygier, "Envisioning the American West: Maps, the Representational Barrage of 19th century Expedition Reports, and the Production of Scientific Knowledge," *Cartography and Geographic Informational Systems* 24, no. 1 (1997): 86, accessed online, http://go.owu.edu/~jbkrygie/krygier_html/envision.html. Ives, *Report Upon the Colorado River of the West, Explored in 1857 and 1858*.

¹⁴¹ Rowan, *The Baron in the Grand Canyon*, 106-107.

¹⁴² Jack Hillers diary entry, March 7, 1872 in Hillers, *"Photographed All the Best Scenery,"* 98.

the *experience* of a given landscape . . . [that] speaks more to the *character* of place.”¹⁴³ The tranquil mood in O’Sullivan’s *Black Cañon* reflects Wheeler’s promotion of the West as easily managed, ripe with prospect, and visually appealing. Hillers’s and O’Sullivan’s photographs helped audiences perceive the Grand Canyon less like Egloffstein’s unknown “landscape of nightmares” and more as an accessible and beautiful place.

Photographic images of the Grand Canyon removed some of the mystery and helped to establish the Grand Canyon’s significance. Illustrations, watercolors, and oil paintings by Thomas Moran complemented the photographs and further shaped cultural perceptions. Powell arranged for Moran to join him at the Grand Canyon in 1873 (Powell used Moran’s woodcuts later in his official survey report). By that time, Moran was nationally known based on public reception of his artwork from Yellowstone, which he had created following his journey to the Yellowstone region with Powell’s rival, Ferdinand Vandeverer Hayden, in 1871.¹⁴⁴ Moran accepted Powell’s invitation and met him in Salt Lake City before they made their way by railroad and then stagecoach (stopping along the way to climb Mount Nebo) to the area now known as Zion National Park. With one of Powell’s guides, Moran made several excursions along the plateaus and rims that overlooked the canyons. Moran was particularly moved by his view of the Canyon from a spot known as Toroweap, which he described as “by far the most awfully grand and impressive scene that I have ever yet seen.”¹⁴⁵

Moran’s motivation for visiting the Grand Canyon was twofold. He went to satisfy his personal desire to see the Grand Canyon but also to fulfill illustration commissions. He had been offered commissions to illustrate the Grand Canyon for *Scribner’s Monthly* and for *Picturesque*

¹⁴³ Page Stegner, “Introduction” in *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O’Sullivan*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ In addition to the large painting, Moran was often recognized for his role in the creation of Yellowstone National Park through his watercolor studies that helped convince Congress of the beauty of the region.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Moran, in a letter to his wife, Mary Nimmo Moran (August 13, 1873), as quoted in Joni Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 105.

America, the monumental two-volume undertaking to celebrate the entire United States after the Civil War. Moran completed sketches while in northern Arizona and southern Utah and later used photographs by Hillers, whom he had befriended at the Grand Canyon, to complete his illustration commissions (figure 18, compared to figure 16). The six illustrations of the Grand Canyon in *Picturesque America* contributed to a positive image of the canyon region and to the symbolic role it would occupy in the national identity.¹⁴⁶ The sublime beauty and unique topographic elements of the landscape tied into national identity that had begun in the eastern United States with the Hudson River Valley and now extended across the continent. Within the context of *Picturesque America* especially, the Grand Canyon contributed to what William Cullen Bryant characterized in his preface as the “variety of scenery which no other single country can boast of . . . we have some of the most wild and beautiful scenery in the world.”¹⁴⁷

Further, Moran hoped that the Grand Canyon would inspire a grand oil painting. In 1874, Moran completed *The Chasm of the Colorado*, a large 7 x 12-foot canvas that overwhelmed all previous canyon images in ambition and size (figure 19). Moran’s masterpiece displays a sweeping vista of canyons and atmosphere. Rich colors and a wide range of darks and lights add to the drama of the scene. One early viewer described the “Titanic” painting in terms of awe and terror. The landscape was fantastic and weird, the critic exclaimed, as if it were “a glimpse of another planet.”¹⁴⁸ Clarence Cook, writing for *Atlantic Monthly*, was also uncomfortable with the strange subject, “Here there is no loveliness for hundreds of miles . . . and the scene is only the

¹⁴⁶ Sue Rainey, *Creating Picturesque America: Monument to the Natural and Cultural Landscape* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), xiv. It is remarkable that the last “unexplored” region, the Grand Canyon, was so well represented in the book because volume II of *Picturesque America* was published in 1874, only one year after Moran’s visit.

¹⁴⁷ William Cullen Bryant, preface to *Picturesque America; or the Land We Live In. A Delineation by Pen and Pencil of the Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, Forests, Water-Falls, Shores, Cañons, Valleys, Cities, and other Picturesque Features of Our Country*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1872), iii.

¹⁴⁸ “‘The Chasm of the Colorado,’” *Scribner’s Monthly* VIII, no. 3 (July 1874): 373.

concentrated ghastliness of a ghastly region.”¹⁴⁹ Such strong reactions from critics who had praised Moran’s large-scale painting *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* (1872, figure 34) reflect a lingering attitude about the Grand Canyon as a wild and remote wasteland.¹⁵⁰

The comments also speak to Moran’s ability to convey a convincing experience of standing at the precipice of the canyon and being overwhelmed. The same reviewer who thought the painting was fantastic and weird described the topography as if it were no longer a painted representation: “It is not paint that one sees; it is a description so accurate that a geologist need not go to Arizona to study the formation.”¹⁵¹ Powell was supportive of Moran and said of *The Chasm of the Colorado*, “It required a bold hand to wield the brush for such a subject. Mr. Moran has represented depths and magnitudes and distances and forms and color and clouds with the greatest fidelity. But his picture not only tells the truth, it displays the beauty of the truth.”¹⁵² It is telling that the one person who knew the Grand Canyon region better than anyone else in the nineteenth century was completely convinced of Moran’s truthful representation. *The Chasm of the Colorado* was a celebration of nature on a grand scale; a large painting that was believable in the details yet also had the ability to exert an overwhelming and powerful impact on the viewer. Despite reservations from some critics, the reception of *The Chasm of the Colorado* was positive. The United States Congress purchased the painting for \$10,000 as a companion painting to Moran’s *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* and installed it in the U.S. Senate lobby.

Moran’s paintings of the Grand Canyon were recognized as the definitive treatment of the subject. As art historian Truettner observed of the Grand Canyon painting, “there was something in it for everybody: Congress could prove the merits of its national park and survey

¹⁴⁹ Clarence Cook, “Art,” *Atlantic Monthly* 34, no. 203 (September 1874): 375.

¹⁵⁰ William H. Truettner, “‘Scenes of Majesty and Enduring Interest’: Thomas Moran Goes West,” *Art Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (June 1976): 250.

¹⁵¹ “‘The Chasm of the Colorado,’” 374.

¹⁵² Powell (1875), in Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 112.

legislation, the average citizen could point with pride to yet another majestic display of American scenery, and railroad and business interests had visions of untold profits.”¹⁵³ National awareness of the Grand Canyon started in the 1870s, and the Grand Canyon first received protection as a forest preserve and then a national monument in 1893 before finally earning National Park status in 1919. The Santa Fe Railroad extended into Arizona in the late 1880s and completed a spur to the Grand Canyon in 1901. Moran’s drawings and his paintings adorned countless advertisements for the Santa Fe Railroad beginning in 1892. This early promotion of the Grand Canyon by railroads (featuring Moran’s illustrations) was instrumental in creating the area’s widespread appeal, and the tourism boom that followed. By 1909, Moran had become so synonymous with the Grand Canyon, and his illustrations of the landscape so popular, that the Santa Fe Railroad featured only an image of the artist to advertise their route, omitting the landscape altogether (figure 20).¹⁵⁴ Through his paintings and illustrations Moran made the remote regions of the country accessible for the American public and greatly influenced how the country thought about the West. “Thomas Moran provided his viewers a visual sense of place,” wrote art historian Joni Kinsey, “thus contributing to making the West an indelible part of the American consciousness.”¹⁵⁵

By the time of Moran’s death in 1926, the Grand Canyon was no longer a profitless locale but a national park that attracted tourist dollars and a point of pride for the country. From the visual images of Moran and the survey photographers, the subject had become an icon of American art and had become a permanent feature of America’s cultural landscape. By the early

¹⁵³ Truettner, ““Scenes of Majesty and Enduring Interest,”” 250.

¹⁵⁴ The Santa Fe Railroad first commissioned Thomas Moran to create a painting of the Grand Canyon for advertisements in 1892. The company recognized the powerful appeal of pictures, and had a good working arrangement with a number of artists in the early twentieth century, sponsoring visits in exchange for paintings. See Keith L. Bryant, James T. Forrest, and Terry P. Wilson, *Standing Rainbows: Railroad Promotion of Art, the West and Its Native People: A Special Exhibition of Paintings from the Collection of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1981).

¹⁵⁵ Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 7.

twentieth century, it was preserved as a natural wonder—literally through conservation efforts and visually in traditional representational models. Present attitudes toward the land are informed by the evolving and fluid interpretations in the past. History is not static, but dynamic and open to interpretation. Tony Foster builds on the long history of the Grand Canyon in art, blending aspects of the history into his own ideologies and artwork.

Tony Foster: Watercolor Diaries

Foster is an explorer-artist. His art does not exist without exploration and the journey is essential to the finished picture. Foster was born in 1946 in Lincolnshire, England and today lives in Tywardreath, England. After his studies at Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts and Cardiff School of Art, he became a teacher and arts administrator. As a painter, Foster started as a Pop artist but soon realized that subjects from popular culture did not interest him. Determined that his art should be about something he truly believed in, he turned his attention to his passions: traveling, the environment, and the conservation of the great wilderness areas of the world—Honduras, Bolivia, Mount Everest, Costa Rica, Hawaii, and the Grand Canyon, to name only a few.¹⁵⁶ Foster immerses himself in the places where he travels, recording experiences and details in a watercolor landscape combined with written journal excerpts and in painted or collected souvenirs or mementos. Foster calls the finished artworks “watercolor diaries.”

In one of Foster’s first watercolor paintings of the Grand Canyon, he honors twentieth-century watercolorist Gunnar Widforss (figure 21). Widforss (1879-1934) was a Swedish emigrant who eventually moved permanently to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon to be closer to his favorite subject. From the early 1920s to Widforss’s sudden death of a heart attack in

¹⁵⁶ Tony Foster, interview by Barbara Wiener, BW Productions, October 19, 2004, interview video tape, Collection of Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO.

1934, he dominated Grand Canyon art (Moran's output had declined by that time and he died in 1926). Meticulous draftsmanship, skill with the watercolor medium, and nuances of tone and color give Widforss's paintings a strong sense of immediacy and freshness (figure 22). William Henry Holmes, retired survey artist and director of the National Gallery (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) said that Widforss's works "give a more satisfactory understanding of the Grand Canyon than any that have hitherto been attempted. It is well nigh impossible to convey the immensity and grandeur of these marvels of nature but Widforss has accomplished it."¹⁵⁷ Widforss's compositions typically condensed the vast spaces of the Grand Canyon into clear foreground, middle ground, and distance through variation in tones. Recognizably, he often framed his paintings with the craggy Piñon trees.

Foster had long admired Widforss's paintings and commented that he often recognized Widforss-type views while hiking in the Grand Canyon.¹⁵⁸ In *Widforss Point Looking South*, Foster searched for a viewpoint of the Canyon that would convey the best elements of a Widforss painting. In deference to Widforss, Foster selected the remote Widforss Point on the North Rim as his painting location. While he hiked the 9.2 miles from his campsite to the Point, Foster passed what he characterized in his journal as "a great view that Widforss would have undoubtedly painted." When he finally reached the Point, much to his disappointment, there was "no Widforss-type view to be seen."¹⁵⁹ The next day, however, Foster found a satisfactory view and painted for a full twelve-hour day, completing most of his painting in the field. *Widforss Point Looking South* features a panorama of the canyon with deep red hues in the center to

¹⁵⁷ William Henry Holmes (1924) from an unidentified source, quoted in Bill Belknap and Frances Spencer Belknap, *Gunnar Widforss: Painter of the Grand Canyon* (Flagstaff: Northland Press/Museum of Northern Arizona, 1969), 25. Despite such high praise and a very prolific career, Widforss remains little-known today. Alan Peterson, Curator of Fine Arts at the Museum of Northern Arizona is currently compiling data for a catalogue raisonné. See <http://www.gunnarwidforss.org/index.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Tony Foster, telephone interview with the author, August 27, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Tony Foster, "15 June 1989 – North Rim, Grand Canyon" journal, reproduced in Foster, *Painting at the Edge of the World*, 49.

convey the depth, striations of purple and blue for the distance, golden rocks with blue shadows in the foreground, and rocky spires speckled with pine bushes framing each side.

Foster titled the watercolor with large stenciled text along the left and bottom edge. Additional text describes Foster's painting location and vantage point, "from W. of Widforss Point looking S. to the colonnade & Indian Garden." In the lower left corner, journal excerpts record the date and the conditions of the journey: "9.2 miles . . . carrying 3 gallons of water . . . no sign or sound of humans . . . midday temp. 105 . . . weather clear/blustery." Small detailed paintings of rocks, leaves, driftwood, a pinecone, and a snail shell in the lower left are scientific studies of specimens found on location. Foster's painting is a record of his experience in the Grand Canyon with Widforss as his inspiration and guide.

Foster's *Tribute to Gunnar Widforss* is not a literal copy of a Widforss painting or his style, which could have been completed in Foster's studio thousands of miles from Arizona, but is a copy of the *experience* of painting. For Foster, that experience incorporated hiking to a little-visited location, finding the right view to capture the *feel* of a Widforss painting, and painting on site.¹⁶⁰ Foster is an explorer-artist searching for remote locations, but he also explores image making. Widforss was his inspiration, but, more specifically, Widforss's representations guided Foster's painting.

Foster's journeys may often originate through representations, but time and experience are essential for Foster and he immerses himself in the place he paints. The camping and hiking journey to "find Widforss" is one example. Foster travels slowly by foot or boat to experience

¹⁶⁰ In his journal for June 16, 1989, Foster wrote, "changed positions in order to draw a pine tree on the left foreground, I think a Widforss painting should have a tree in it." Foster, *Painting at the Edge of the World*, 49. In a telephone interview with the author on August 27, 2013, Foster said he does not know if that particular place was one Widforss visited; instead he aimed to have an experience where he consciously and purposefully looked for Widforss. When asked about similarities in their styles, Foster remarked, "I don't think my painting is a lot like [Widforss]. Painting is like a signature, and it's virtually impossible to change your style."

better the landscape (he even stops to make tea every few hours). The longer he stays in one place, the more he comes to terms with the environment and the more it becomes part of the picture. The end result is not a literal translation of the physical characteristics of the landscape but a record of the entire experience.¹⁶¹

Foster's experience rafting the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon in 2000 was also an immersion in place and in an experience. After waiting twelve years for a permit, Foster joined friend and fellow adventure-seeker Bill Vanderbilt for a private boat trip through the Grand Canyon. For sixteen days, Foster navigated the Grand Canyon in a raft, viewing the canyon walls from the relatively unusual vantage point of the river rather than from the rim. He vowed to do one painting every day, started on-location at the river's edge, and finished later in his studio in Cornwall, England. Some days were full of rafting for long periods of time, but Foster still had to paint, regardless of fatigue. In the end, however, Foster's hard work paid off with a tight, coherent series of pictures, *Sixteen Days Rafting the Colorado – 225.8 miles – Lee's Ferry to Diamond Creek* (figure 14).

The rafting trip through the Grand Canyon was a typical challenge for Foster, who begins his wilderness journeys with arduous travel. On his 1869 expedition, Powell and his men navigated about a thousand miles of river and nearly five hundred rapids in three months.¹⁶² Foster, by comparison, covered only about 226 miles, and his trip lasted sixteen days. However, both parties faced similar river challenges. Boat design and boating technique have vastly improved since Powell's time, but for the most part the Grand Canyon from the river looks the same today as it did in 1869. At Grand Canyon Village on the south rim, tourists congregate

¹⁶¹ Foster, interview by Barbara Wiener, BW Productions, October 19, 2004, interview videotape.

¹⁶² Edward Dolnick, *Down the Great Unknown: John Wesley Powell's 1869 Journey of Discovery and Tragedy Through the Grand Canyon* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 6.

around tour buses and restaurants; but at the river's edge, there are no buildings, signs, maps, or trashcans, and only a handful of human alterations to mar the view.

Each watercolor diary in this series includes a painting, hand-written journal excerpt, a souvenir or object collected along the way, and a map. The various elements are matted and framed together to represent one day—with the landscape painting on the top and the map piece, journal excerpt, and physical object framed below. Foster treated each day like an expedition, and gathered materials and sketches to include in his finished work of art, or report, of his findings. For example, the third painting of the series, “Mile 50,” includes a watercolor picture of the calm river snaking its way into the distance between the striated cliffs below a blue sky with wisps of white clouds (figure 23). Below the watercolor is a small segment of a map with one green arrow marking Foster's drawing site and one red ‘X’ recording the precise location of his subject. The journal text relays details of Foster's day: “Camp 4 – 20/21 June – looking upriver to Eminence Break – hunting for a painting site I fall off a boulder & crush the water bottle that I have carried for 20 years – see 3 mountain sheep – 2 deer & faun – heron – mergansers – am 21 – hike Nankoweap Canyon – learn the symptoms of dehydration in the fierce heat.” The souvenir in the picture is a piece of Foster's crushed water bottle. Not only does the souvenir relate directly to the text, but the texture and shape echoes the ripples of the water and adds visual interest to the assemblage. “What I'm trying to convey to people is the experience. As an artist, the chief experience is the visual, the painting. But you have other experiences too, which is why I describe to people the events of the journey – what the weather was like, what was going on at the same time, what impeded you, helped you, encounters with flora and fauna, people.”¹⁶³

Foster's mixed media assemblages extend the landscape painting beyond the frame. By adding

¹⁶³ Tony Foster, telephone interview with the author, August 27, 2013.

the map, souvenir, and journal to the watercolor painting, Foster records a moment in time, a piece of evidence.

Foster incorporates souvenirs into his work not only as a personal record and memento of his experience on the Colorado River but also as markers of authenticity, or lived experience. In a place like the Grand Canyon, where experiences are mediated and representations often overwhelm place, Foster provides proof of his journey through the object collected each day. “This capacity of objects to serve as traces of authentic experience,” noted scholar Susan Stewart, “is, in fact, exemplified by the souvenir.”¹⁶⁴ The souvenir then takes on the experience itself, an experience whose materiality is now in the past but which still exists in the narrative attached to the souvenir. The souvenirs are personally meaningful for Foster, but he believes that by presenting his souvenirs in his artwork he taps into the shared experience of collecting and connecting with objects, like an urge to pick up seashells on the beach or save a bus ticket from a trip to Paris as a reminder of a place and a special memento.¹⁶⁵ These souvenirs bring back memories of times or places and, as evidence of the past, become part of Foster’s history. Authenticity, then, is not only a link to a personal experience, but reflects a wider connection to tradition and, in the case of Foster’s souvenir, collective experience.

Despite the difference in medium, Foster’s watercolor paintings from the riverside vantage points carry similar formal characteristics when compared to Hillers’s photographs from 1872-1873. In one example, Foster and Hillers both focused on the swirling waters of the rapids within the canyon, which dominates the composition (figures 24 and 25). Foster reserves specks of white paper amidst his lively brushstrokes to show the foam arising from the water crashing on the rocks. The river rocks cut into the horizon line of the water against the backdrop of

¹⁶⁴ Stewart, *On Longing*, 135.

¹⁶⁵ Tony Foster, telephone interview with the author, August 27, 2013.

colorful striated canyon walls. Hillers's photograph, by comparison, focuses primarily on the rushing water, with only a hint to the rocks beneath the surface. Remarkably, given the length of exposure required by the photographic equipment, Hillers, with the assistance of fellow photographer James Fennemore, was able to capture the swirl and roar of the water. Foster did not seek out Hillers's sites and compositions directly; rather, he shares similar conditions for image making—rafting to the sites, and capturing views from the rivers' edges. Foster and his rafting companions were conscious of Powell's expeditions as they forged their modern-day expedition down the Colorado River, but the image similarities are more coincidental.

The compositions of the painting and photograph convey particular experiences for each artist. Lava Falls, the subject of Hillers and Fennemore's photograph, was so named by Powell because a basalt flow had once damned the canyon before water eventually carved a path.¹⁶⁶ This particular rapid was so intimidating to Powell, that each time he reached Lava Falls, he and his crew portaged around the river rather than risking their lives in the rapids. Hillers's photograph from the shore emphasizes the danger of the river by eliminating a foreground, which seems to place the viewer directly in the water. Further, the water dominates the photograph, covering nearly 80 percent of the composition.

For Foster, rapids were many things: the sites of difficulty (at mile 17, one boat flipped in House Rock Rapid); play (at mile 125.5, Foster "won a medal" for running Fossil Rapid in a Rubber Duck); and markers of progress and locations along the route. Foster's painting location at mile 143.4 looked toward Kanab Creek Rapid. (Foster had not yet run Lava Falls, which would be several days' journey from this point in the river.) The water in Foster's *Mile 143.4* painting is more prominent than in any other painting of the series, but it only covers half of the paper. The rapids may have been tiring, but running the rapids with technologically advanced

¹⁶⁶ Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, 100, 144.

rafts was more of a sport by the twenty-first century than a matter of life and death, and those differences were communicated in the Hillers photograph and Foster's watercolor. Once on the Colorado River today, it is easy to forget that the flow rate can be controlled with technology from the Glen Canyon Dam, sixteen miles upstream from Lee's Ferry. In fact, many aspects of Foster's river trip were highly regulated. The National Park Service issues only a small number of permits for private river trips (now distributed through a lottery) to limit the number of rafts on the river at any given moment. The strict regulations, ironically, give the impression of a wild and untouched wilderness.

Foster's goal for his art is to convey the experience of a place more than adhering to a strict topographic representation. Foster's attitude and aims parallel those of Moran, who, like Foster, was influenced by the nineteenth-century British critic and author of *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin.¹⁶⁷ Ruskin greatly admired the British landscape painter J. M. W. Turner and the way in which Turner attended to the details of nature in his work. But for Ruskin, details alone did not make a great painting. Rather, the details of nature had to be reconciled with the grandeur of impression to properly convey both the look and the feel of the landscape.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately for Ruskin, the artist achieved true greatness by using knowledge of the details of nature to compose the landscape from his imagination that would convey his impressions and interpretation of the subject.¹⁶⁹ Moran reflected Ruskin's teaching in 1879, just six years after his first visit to the Grand Canyon, when he stated,

I place no value upon literal transcripts from Nature. My general scope is not realistic; all my tendencies are toward idealization. Of course, all art must come through Nature; I do

¹⁶⁷ Foster especially agrees with Ruskin's aesthetic philosophy about the importance of conveying the experience of place in a painting. Tony Foster, e-mail correspondence with the author, December 5, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Rebecca Bailey Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 127.

¹⁶⁹ For further connections of Moran and Ruskin, see Truettner, "Scenes of Majesty and Enduring Interest" and Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 12-19.

not mean to deprecate Nature or naturalism; but I believe that a place, as a place, has...value in itself for the artist only so far as it furnishes the material from which to construct a picture.¹⁷⁰

Moran saw himself as an interpreter of nature, not an imitator. Even though details of his *The Chasm of the Colorado* were influenced by Powell's scientific observations, Moran's aim was not to be literal. An artist's business, Moran said, was "to produce for the spectator of his pictures the impression produced by nature on himself."¹⁷¹ Foster is also a fan of Ruskin and agrees with his philosophy, finding particular resonance in Ruskin's idea that within a fragment, there is a whole.¹⁷² Like Moran, Foster uses the small details of nature as a springboard for conveying the whole landscape, which, ultimately, is a combination of observations of nature and the experience tied together.

Foster admires Powell as an explorer but also as an environmentalist. It was clear to Powell in the 1870s that water in the Southwest would need to be closely regulated to sustain additional life. Powell's 1877 *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* offered an analysis and a solution to the difficulties of developing the region and called for regulations. Wallace Stegner, Powell's biographer, summarized Powell's belief that "Water is the true wealth in a dry land: without it, land is worthless or nearly so."¹⁷³ Although Powell fought to get his proposals recognized and implemented, he was largely ignored in the nineteenth century because of the political and economic problems his applications entailed. Powell opposed the rosy optimism of American expansionists and ultimately many of his proposals were not accepted—national ideologies contradicted Powell's theories. Residents in the Southwest only recently realized that Powell predicted the water issues that plague the area today. In one

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Moran, in George William Sheldon, *American Painters: With Eighty-three Examples of Their Work Engraved on Wood* (New York: D. Appleton, 1879), 125.

¹⁷¹ Thomas Moran, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 22 (New York: J.T. White, 1932), 24-25.

¹⁷² Tony Foster, e-mail correspondence with the author, December 9, 2013.

¹⁷³ Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, 226.

National Public Radio segment, for example, reporter Abraham Lustgarten concluded that it is not environmental change or drought but poor policy management that is causing water shortages in the Southwest.¹⁷⁴ As ideologies in the present have shifted to value environmental preservation, Powell's ideas, in retrospect, seem far more logical.

Foster shares Powell's concern about water in the Southwest and was conscious of water issues while on his journey in the Grand Canyon. From an artistic standpoint, Foster learned what water in the rapids looked like and how to depict it, but he also aimed to "discover . . . [water's] importance in the wider scheme – how it supports a community, carves a landscape, demonstrates physics, sustains biology, creates and destroys."¹⁷⁵ Foster's interest in water conservation is part of his larger concern for the preservation of the wilderness in which he travels. Through his pictures, he conveys the complexity and fragility of remote places. He suggests the vulnerability of nature and the need to protect it.¹⁷⁶ Foster is so dedicated to the conservation promoted through his art that he was recently involved in the establishment of a foundation dedicated to public awareness and appreciation of wilderness areas in which he paints, literally putting his artwork to work for conservation.¹⁷⁷

Foster's interest in wilderness preservation attracted him to the Grand Canyon. But it was Widforss, Powell, Hillers, and Moran that guided Foster's experience there. He draws inspiration from historic images and contemporary adventure to create personalized records in watercolor diaries of paintings, journals, and collected souvenirs. He re-frames the past, adopting history and combining it with contemporary experience.

¹⁷⁴ Dave Davies and Abraham Lustgarten, "How a Historical Blunder Helped Create a Water Crisis in the West," *National Public Radio*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/25/417430662/how-a-historical-blunder-helped-create-the-water-crisis-in-the-west>.

¹⁷⁵ Tony Foster, *Water Marks: Watercolour Diaries from Swamps to Icebergs* (Exeter, UK: Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2003), n.p.

¹⁷⁶ Tony Foster in Graham Hughes, "Ecology," *Arts Review* (London, England) 44 (November 1992): 521.

¹⁷⁷ Tony Foster, letter to the author and enclosed press release announcing the Foster Art & Wilderness Foundation, February 15, 2015.

Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe: Reconstructing the View

Historic images guided Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe through the Grand Canyon. Searching for vantage points led the team from the rim to the river's edge and to many locations in between. Klett and Wolfe used a broad range of historic artwork for inspiration in their series, *Reconstructing the View*, to embrace and collapse time and media into one collective whole and examine how more than a century of imagery has shaped the perception of the Grand Canyon. Nineteenth-century survey photography by Hilliers, Bell, and O'Sullivan and early twentieth-century photography by Frederick Sommer and Ansel Adams, for example, was mixed with non-photographic artworks including field sketches and watercolors by Moran, topographic drawing by William Henry Holmes, early twentieth-century postcards, and even twenty-first-century digital photographs posted online by tourists.¹⁷⁸ To “reconstruct the view,” Klett and Wolfe expanded upon the RSP methodology by first locating, as close as possible, the vantage point where the historic image was made. But with this project, Klett was less interested in physical change of the landscape (like he was with the RSP), and more interested in the perception of the subject and the methods of image making in the past. Klett and Wolfe looked beyond the viewfinder to include contextual information—literally by including the surrounding panorama—or more conceptually by combining their photographs with other materials that present a more collective interpretation of place. They believed that to gain the full experience of

¹⁷⁸ To expand the reach of their project into the present and address the thousands of photographs uploaded to websites daily, Klett and Wolfe began downloading photographs of the Grand Canyon from image-sharing websites and digitally overlaying or combining them – see *Fifty Sunrises at Mather Point Arranged by a Shared Horizon*, 2011, or *Reconstructing the View from a Popular Photo-Sharing Website*, 2011. As the photographs were “mashed” together, consistencies and similarities emerged. While this is an interesting way to see how the digital revolution is affecting collective ways of seeing and conveying experience, it is not germane to my dissertation. See Senf, *Reconstructing the View*, plates 63, 64, and 65.

a place, they needed to expand the view outside the frame and embrace information that may not have been immediately visible.

Like Foster's dedication to the physical experience of the Grand Canyon for his watercolor diaries, Klett and Wolfe felt it was essential to re-experience the physical location where the historic images originated. "For place-based interpretation," said Wolfe, "you need to go to the source, you can't just use one image as the embodiment of the whole."¹⁷⁹ Klett agreed, even if the experience is mediated or framed by all the other imagery, immersion is important: "The smells, wind, sounds, environment, and factors such as where you are that day, what is on your mind," these are all part of the experience of place.¹⁸⁰ The journey to find the locations, the broadening of the views, and the subsequent discoveries and dialogue that those experiences generated encouraged a unique experience for Klett and Wolfe.

Wolfe has a special interest in using an interdisciplinary approach to his photography projects. He holds a BA in Evolutionary Biology and Anthropology, and attended Arizona State University for his MFA in photography. As a graduate student, he worked directly with Klett and joined the team for *Third Views, Second Sights*, a collaborative project designed as a follow-up to the RSP. The two have collaborated on a number of projects since then, including *Yosemite in Time*.¹⁸¹ Both *Third Views* and *Yosemite in Time* were inspirational for the way in which Klett and Wolfe approached the Grand Canyon as a subject. As Holly Markovitz Goldstein observed, Klett realized the limits of the RSP, which denied a subjective viewpoint and cultural influence in favor of a straightforward scientific approach. *Third Views* worked to remedy omissions and

¹⁷⁹ Byron Wolfe, telephone interview with the author, November 13, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

¹⁸¹ The project was compiled as a book and companion DVD; with more information accessible on a website. The full team who worked on the project included Mark Klett, Kyle Bajakian, William L. Fox, Michael Marshall, Toshi Ueshina, and Byron Wolfe. Klett, *Third Views Second Sights* and www.thirdview.org. See also Mark Klett, Rebecca Solnit, and Byron Wolfe, *Yosemite in Time: Ice Ages, Tree Clocks, Ghost Rivers* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2005).

shortcomings of the RSP.¹⁸² Klett and his team expanded the side-by-side format of the RSP and produced video and audio, collected artifacts or souvenirs, and took photographs that looked beyond the original frame. The project changed how Klett thought about context and methods, especially providing new ways to record and share the experience of an image.¹⁸³ The expansion beyond the literal frame also incorporated an acknowledgment of ideologies that informed the nineteenth-century images, as well as Klett's and Wolfe's present views.

In the Grand Canyon project, Klett and Wolfe considered how the series could be more than a record of a location but rather a collaboration with history. The physical landscape in a protected place like the Grand Canyon remains largely unchanged, but there are new methods of documenting, presenting, and viewing the landscape, which influences meaning and functions through time. The Grand Canyon was the constant, the unifying element of the project, from which the examination of perception and views over time could revolve. Klett and Wolfe's reconstruction of nineteenth-century artists' and photographers' activities and methods uncovered a wealth of evidence about how the past artists and photographers worked, provided insight into their goals and intentions, and examined how their work might have been used and interpreted in their time and today. By adding to the images, manipulating them, and placing them in a new context, Klett and Wolfe re-framed history. "Responding to historic images and engaging in a dialogue is powerful," said Klett. "To reexamine and change your ideas of the past, it changes everything you think of the present and future."¹⁸⁴ Historian Keith Jenkins's view of the relationship between the past and the present places more weight on the vantage point from

¹⁸² Goldstein, "American Landscape as Revisionist History," 100. Other studies of the RSP's impact on landscape photography projects in the late twentieth century praised the methods of the RSP, but also called for more contextual information. See, for example, Thomas W. Southall, "Second View: A Search for the West That Exists Only in Photographs," in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, May Castleberry, ed. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 193-198.

¹⁸³ Mark Klett, "Response to History" (lecture, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ, November 8, 2013).

¹⁸⁴ Mark Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

the present looking to the past. “The past that we ‘know,’” wrote Jenkins, “is always contingent upon our views, our own ‘present.’ Just as we are ourselves products of the past so the known past (history) is an artifact of ours.”¹⁸⁵ Klett and Wolfe’s rediscoveries of the past came from their journey to where the original image was made, but their reconstructions and selected meanings are informed by present-day ideologies about the past.

Their method of retracing the steps of the photographer was what Klett called an “act of discovery about the dynamics of change and representation.”¹⁸⁶ In *Rock formations on the road to Lee’s Ferry, Arizona*, for example, Klett and Wolf used a photograph by Bell (1830-1910) as the inspiration (figure 26). The rock formations from Bell’s photograph acted as the starting point, although once at the location they discovered the vantage point of an additional photograph by Bell taken nearby. The two black-and-white photographs overlap in the center of a colored panorama view of the rocky cliffs, bright blue sky and red dirt foreground sprinkled with sagebrush. Klett and Wolfe’s panorama is a composite of twenty-five individual photographs merged with the aid of software that matches overlapping points into a seamless whole. Digitally, brightness, contrast and color were enhanced and improved and the historic images were slightly tilted and stretched to perfectly align with the geological features in the new photographs.¹⁸⁷ Through technological advancements in picture-production, Klett and Wolfe were able to manipulate past images, literally re-producing them.

Photographs of unique and interesting rock formations placed within pristine surroundings form our expectations of the western landscape. In Klett and Wolfe’s *Rock formations on the road to Lee’s Ferry, Arizona*, evidence of the twenty-first-century

¹⁸⁵ Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 12.

¹⁸⁶ Mark Klett, “Seeing What O’Sullivan Saw” in *Timothy H. O’Sullivan: The King Survey Photographs*, ed. Keith F. Davis (Kansas City, MO: Hall Family Foundation/Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2011. Distributed by Yale University Press), 196.

¹⁸⁷ Klett and Wolfe described this particular process in Rebecca Senf, *Reconstructing the View*, 25-26.

experience—power lines, a highway, and a recreational vehicle (a mere hint at the millions of annual tourists visiting the Grand Canyon)—surround the old photographs.¹⁸⁸ The presence of the RV parallels the presence of tiny figures in Bell’s 1910 photographs and similarly provides a sense of scale within the landscape, yet the RV still seems jarring to our expectations of untouched vistas. By stepping farther into the distance and expanding the view out from the single rock formations to incorporate the larger panorama, Klett and Wolfe included the surrounding landscape that seems remote and vacant in its monotony. Bell’s photographs center the viewer’s attention on monumental rock formations, further emphasized through a vertical format. Singularly, each of Bell’s photographs gives the impression of repeated geological interest in the region, especially without the knowledge that the two were side by side. Klett and Wolfe have expanded Bell’s view, rewriting the context for the images. Past and present are imbedded and rely on one another for the finished image. Klett and Wolfe manipulated the past image, much the same way history is continually re-written based on present interpretations.

The juxtaposition of old and new happens frequently in the *Reconstructing the View* series. In a conscious effort to convey the contemporary experience, Klett and Wolfe made no efforts to remove tourists, guardrails, and fences in their images, especially along the rim viewpoints and other popular destinations within the Grand Canyon. In the example of *Boat Launch at Lee’s Ferry: Crossing the Point of No Return on the Journey Down the Grand Canyon* (the very site where Foster began his journey on the Colorado River), Klett and Wolfe used an 1873 photograph by O’Sullivan, *Looking across the Colorado River to mouth of Paria Creek, Arizona*, as their starting point (figure 27). In the collage of old and new images, the difference

¹⁸⁸ Byron Wolfe mentioned that the only reason the team included items like roads and RVs was because the method of rephotography demanded it. By using existing vantage points, they could not fall back on more traditional unpopulated vistas, but had to be faithful to the position in which the original was created. Wolfe, telephone interview with the author, November 13, 2013.

between today's view and that of 1873 is jarring—the river's edge has shifted; a road runs between the river and the rocks in the foreground; and boats, trucks, street signs, and power lines populate the landscape. The composite photograph seems to highlight awareness of the impact of visitors and recreation on the landscape.

Klett acknowledges that images like *Boat Launch at Lee's Ferry* reinforce a preference for the past presented in images like O'Sullivan's that show an idyllic untouched wilderness. The photographs by O'Sullivan and other survey photographers have today become measures for preservation. Klett contributes this desire for preservation to cultural nostalgia for a past that was stable and fixed, an ideal wilderness.¹⁸⁹ The National Parks, like the Grand Canyon, were founded, and now persist, on the notion of stability and preservation. Visitors and viewers of the landscape invest in this ideology, which is why imagery of the past persists. In *Boat Launch at Lee's Ferry*, however, Klett and Wolfe help viewers see how intertwined the past and the present really are—our ideals of the past are informed by the present conditions and we cannot see one without the other.

In the *Reconstructing the View* series, Klett and Wolfe frequently used the nineteenth-century photographs by O'Sullivan and Bell from the Wheeler surveys of the Grand Canyon and surrounding area from 1871 to 1874. In their use of these photographs, Klett and Wolfe engage in the recent interpretations of the nineteenth-century photographs. O'Sullivan has been the subject of much recent scholarship, to which Klett has also contributed.¹⁹⁰ Twenty years after Rosalind Krauss's charge to consider survey photography in a different discursive space from fine art photography, Robin Kelsey re-examined O'Sullivan with concern for both the scientific attributes and the aesthetic reading of his photographs. Kelsey presents O'Sullivan's work as a

¹⁸⁹ Mark Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Mark Klett, "Seeing What O'Sullivan Saw," in *Timothy O'Sullivan: The King Survey Photographs*, Keith F. Davis, ed.

unique combination of strategies of pictorial conventions with values drawn from surveys.¹⁹¹

O'Sullivan's photographs were successful, in Kelsey's opinion, because they conveyed the information needed for the surveys but could also project an entire *image* of the American West.¹⁹² Through O'Sullivan's photographs, the West is approachable and relatable. Although dramatic, O'Sullivan's photographs also have access points, such as the calm of the river and the manned boat in *Black Cañon, Colorado River, from Camp 8, Looking Above*, which make an otherwise strange place feel familiar (figure 17).

By literally expanding the view, Klett and Wolfe remind twenty-first-century viewers that a photograph is open to interpretation. "No photographic image conveys a universal meaning or message," art historian Martha Sandweiss reminds us.¹⁹³ The photographer not only selects a view, but also frames it in a certain way based on his social and cultural contexts. Then, the viewer brings a twenty-first-century context and understanding shaped through social and cultural environment, personal experience, and memory of other images, further adding to and shifting the meaning.

Remarkably, Klett and Wolfe also incorporated other media in their Grand Canyon series, further reasserting the subjectivity of image making and consumption—a watercolor study by Moran and a drawing by Holmes (figures 28 and 29). Both Moran and Holmes accompanied expeditions into the Grand Canyon in the late nineteenth century, and the selected artworks were the result of fieldwork from those surveys. Moran completed his watercolor study, *Grand Cañon of the Colorado*, while visiting the Grand Canyon with Powell in 1873. Holmes originally

¹⁹¹ For Kelsey's full argument related to O'Sullivan's images, see Robin E. Kelsey, "Viewing the Archive: Timothy O'Sullivan's Photographs for the Wheeler Survey," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (December 2003). Kelsey's ideas are further presented in Robin E. Kelsey, *Archive Style: Photographs and Illustrations for U.S. Surveys, 1850-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁹² Kelsey, "Viewing the Archive," 710.

¹⁹³ Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 10.

created *Panorama of Point Sublime* as a drawing, and then reproduced it as a triptych foldout in Clarence Dutton's *Atlas to Accompany the Monograph on the Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District*, published in 1882. Dutton worked for the U.S. Geological Survey and led an expedition into the Grand Canyon in 1880 to study the geology of the rocky cliffs.¹⁹⁴ Both source images conveyed such specificity of location that Klett and Wolfe expected to find the vantage points easily, much like they did with photography sources.

Klett and Wolfe quickly discovered, however, that Moran's drawing was a composite of views and topographical features drawn from many different physical places around Dutton Point on the North Rim. Moran also shifted his gaze from a single vantage point, as if looking up and down simultaneously. Moran then pieced together all the locations and views in one single watercolor sketch, *Grand Cañon of the Colorado*. Klett and Wolfe's exploration of Moran's site was an immersion in the location but, more importantly, revealed Moran's approach to field studies. Art historian Joni Kinsey explained Moran's method: he "often rearrang[ed] proportions and relationships to create what he called his 'impression.'" The result was faithful to the original in its parts but was actually a composite of Moran's own making.¹⁹⁵ Moran would delight to know that the details of his painting were convincing enough to lead two twenty-first-century photographers into the Grand Canyon looking for his precise vantage point. Klett and Wolfe took many superimposed photographs to reconstruct Moran's view, which Klett later characterized as a "fictional reality."¹⁹⁶ In the finished collage of past and present, color photographs overlay points in the drawing that were more easily identified and the title hints to the many locations that served as inspiration to Moran and to Klett and Wolfe (figure 28).

¹⁹⁴ For more information about Holmes and Dutton, see Kevin J. Fernlund, *William Henry Holmes and the Rediscovery of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 102-114.

¹⁹⁵ Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 117. Moran later used his 1873 watercolor as one of the many studies in his construction of the large painting, *The Chasm of the Colorado* (1873, figure 19).

¹⁹⁶ Mark Klett, "Response to History" (lecture, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ, November 8, 2013).

Holmes, in comparison to the composite views of landscape by Moran, valued literal translations from nature. Holmes believed he was the best scientific illustrator of his age and was critical of Moran. As Wallace Stegner noted, Holmes “glorif[ied] the topography that Moran thought valueless in art.”¹⁹⁷ Holmes first traveled west as the artist on Ferdinand Vandeverer Hayden’s 1872 expedition to Yellowstone, a position vacated by Moran the season prior. His topographic drawings for Hayden and subsequent expedition leaders were rendered so accurately that geologists and topographers read them for the purposes of scientific study.¹⁹⁸ His work for Dutton in the Grand Canyon was just as detailed. In fact, Klett and Wolfe easily located Holmes’s vantage point and vistas for *Panorama of Point Sublime*, and their photographs aligned with the drawing almost seamlessly. The accuracy of the drawing along the edge and into the ravines was remarkable. Working closely with Holmes’s drawing increased Klett and Wolfe’s admiration of it and the drawing’s ability to surpass photography’s capacity to fully convey the *sense* of the canyon. Art historian Rebecca Senf summarized that Holmes’s drawing captured the Grand Canyon’s “vast size, its awesome sweep, and its massive depth—clearly evident when standing there but extremely difficult to convey in a reproduction.”¹⁹⁹

It was only after Klett and Wolfe photographed the views extensively (they took nearly 1,000 photographs) that they noticed where Holmes improved the rendering of topography by adding foreground elements such as shrubbery and extended rocky ledges to balance the composition and make the expansive view more accessible and approachable. Holmes even added a small self-portrait in the lower left of the composition (Holmes is seated at his drawing and Dutton looks over his shoulder). The figures contribute an understanding of scale and provide another entry point for the viewer. Klett and Wolfe also discovered that to allow for the

¹⁹⁷ Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, 185.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁹⁹ Rebecca Senf, *Reconstructing the View*, 24.

minutiae of detail to be legible, Holmes altered the sunlight to cast an even glow across the Canyon, thus denying the deep shadows normally cast by the rising and setting sun. To mimic this lighting, Klett and Wolfe had to photograph the view at multiple times of day.

In the finished collage, *Details from the view at Point Sublime*, Klett and Wolfe overlaid very few of the 1,000 photographs on top of Holmes's drawing, allowing the drawing to remain largely visible (figure 29). The added photographs collapse media and time through the juxtaposition of color photography and drawing. Unlike the jolting comparison of old and new conveyed at *Boat launch at Lee's Ferry* (figure 27), this comparison seems to celebrate the longevity of the Grand Canyon as a symbol, as well as the drawing medium.

Representations of the Grand Canyon are abundant, and Klett and Wolfe incorporated popular imagery and postcards into the series. In one example of a collage based on anonymous stereoviews from the early twentieth century, Klett responded to what he called "high image density" (*People on the Edge*, figure 30). The horizon line links the twenty-five views together. To make this collage, Klett and Wolfe compiled existing images but did not add their own photographs. The repetition of a rim view, poses of people, and positions at the edge of the cliff rocks is a study in behavior and image making. Grand Canyon experiences and expectations are shaped and framed by visual images, which in turn inform how and where visitors take their photographs. *People on the Edge* shows how behaviors are repeated—not only the action of inching closer and closer to the edge of the rocky cliff but also the act of capturing that behavior in a photograph. The act of taking photographs to remember an event or place and sharing the photograph, and by extension the experience, with loved ones reflects a universal desire.²⁰⁰

The volumes of images of the Grand Canyon certainly provide rich and varied source material for Klett and Wolfe. Despite the variety of media they used to "reconstruct the view" of

²⁰⁰ Klett, interview with the author, November 7, 2013.

the Grand Canyon, their selected material still reflects the dominant history and represents the Euro-American view of the landscape. The photographs, paintings, and other survey imagery (even postcards of white tourists enjoying the scenery) convey ideals of the survey and the claiming of the land—appropriation of the landscape into our national story and myth. While *Reconstructing the View* is to be applauded for the way in which Klett and Wolfe ask viewers to think more about perceptions and how our views and attitudes have been shaped through images, there is still work to be done to encourage multiple interpretations and perspectives that include alternate views, such as the Native voice.

Embracing the past for a contemporary experience:

“No one can stand on the canyon rim and be unaffected by 130 years of cultural mediation, directing us where and how to look and how to understand the ensemble of the disparate parts,” proclaimed historian Stephen Payne.²⁰¹ It is possible, however, for artists to embrace these images and incorporate powerful personal experiences that encourage new interpretations of history. Tony Foster, Mark Klett, and Byron Wolfe used photographs and paintings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as starting points for their experience and artwork in the Grand Canyon.

In 1867, Henry Tuckerman praised adventure as “an element in American artist-life which gives it singular zest and interest.”²⁰² Part of Tuckerman’s proclamation related to the way in which the experience then translated into the finished painting. Foster, Klett, and Wolfe are contemporary artist-explorers. As such, the three artists explored the Grand Canyon and the

²⁰¹ Stephen Pyne, “The Shock of the Old,” in *Reconstructing the View*, 52.

²⁰² Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life, Comprising Biographical and Critical Sketches of American Artists, Preceded by an Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of Art in America* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1870), 389.

circumstances of image making throughout history—not only its physical conditions but also its associated ideological meanings. Foster’s use of souvenirs, journaling, and maps provides the viewer with a larger context from which to view the watercolor painting. Klett and Wolfe incorporate images of the past into their views of the landscape, again providing a rich context, visually and conceptually, in which to view the past as well as the experience in the present.

Chapter 3: Re-claiming the West: Allegory and Western Vistas

Massachusetts-based artist Stephen Hannock (born 1951) painted three large canvases of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone between 1997 and 2010 (figures 31, 32, and 33). Each painting has its own mood and color palette, but the compositions are nearly identical to one another: a sweeping panorama of the canyon walls in a V-shape, framing the waterfall just off-center in the distance. In these works, Hannock claims a subject, scale, and point of view comparable to Thomas Moran's monumental canvas, *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* painted in 1872 (figure 34). When first displayed, only months after Yellowstone was designated America's first national park, Moran's seven-by-twelve-foot *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* was immediately praised as "the most remarkable work of art that has been exhibited in this country."²⁰³ Moran's painting was the first American landscape by an American artist to be purchased by the United States government, and its prominent display on public view in the Capitol emphasized the painting's national significance. (Two years later, Moran's *Chasm of the Colorado* would join *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*; see Chapter Two in this dissertation.) In his approach to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Hannock could have addressed his subject from any number of vantage points or angles and ignored Moran's dominant presence, but instead, he purposefully faced Moran head-on. When asked why, Hannock answered matter-of-factly, "I'm going to do a better painting."²⁰⁴

In his challenge to Moran, Hannock self-consciously quotes from an American landscape tradition that developed in the early nineteenth century in the northeast with Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School and extended west in the late nineteenth century with Moran. Hannock

²⁰³ "Thomas Moran's 'Grand Canon of the Yellowstone'," *Scribner's Monthly* IV, no. 2 (June 1872): 251.

²⁰⁴ Stephen Hannock, interview with the author, April 1, 2014.

claims his roots in the nineteenth-century landscape tradition, often listing artists in his titles to insist on the connection. Hannock both acknowledges the nineteenth-century traditions and simultaneously dismisses them by appropriating and claiming iconic landscape subjects from the past in order to rewrite the meaning with his personal narrative. In postmodern fashion, Hannock made a new painting based on a nineteenth-century representation, in a sense, a picture of a picture. A closer examination of *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn (Mass MoCA #131)* shows where Hannock uses postmodern strategies, especially taking advantage of the fluidity of identity and symbols, and narrative disjuncture.

In Hannock's eight-by-twelve foot triptych, *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn (Mass MoCA #131)*, purple striated cliffs guide the viewers' eye diagonally down through the canyon to the river below, and to Yellowstone Falls slightly right of center in the distance. Dark green pine trees dot the upper edges of the cliffs and fill layers of rolling hills above the canyon and into the distance. The pink light of dawn highlights the rocks near the top of the waterfall like a spotlight. Black clouds with salmon-colored undersides and vertical rain showers dominate the sky. Brush strokes and drips of paint are visible throughout the canvas; although the surface is smooth and glossy, the texture is encased in resin. The cool colors and dark values convey a mysterious and primordial mood. The unsettling nature is further heightened by the panoramic aerial point of view in which the viewer is placed high into the sky without a foreground or framing devices as grounding.²⁰⁵

From a distance, the large canvas and recognizable landscape subject convey the impression of a nineteenth-century American landscape painting. Close inspection, however,

²⁰⁵ Alan Wallach discusses the nineteenth-century artist's use of a panoramic aerial point of view in Frederic Church's *Niagara* painting, but it aptly describes Hannock's point of view as well. Wallach, "Some Further Thoughts on the Panoramic Mode," in *Within the Landscape: Essays on Nineteenth-century American Art and Culture*, Phillip Earenfight and Nancy Siegel, eds. (Carlisle, PA: Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, 2005), 124-125.

reveals neatly printed words, photographs, and newspaper clippings imbedded in the patterns and textures of the cliff walls and tree-covered vista (figure 35a-f). The text and photographs, partially obscured by the layers of paint, are what curator Mara Williams called “rich veins of art historical and personal references, associations, and ideas to be discovered, mined, processed.”²⁰⁶ Upon detection, viewers slow down, get closer, and strain to read the writing and make sense of the images.

Memories, current events, scientific observations, and references to art history are randomly intertwined in the pictures and text. The writing consists of a series of anecdotes, notes, descriptions, and diary entries concerning incidents and people that came to mind while Hannock worked on the painting. His nod to Moran appears in the bottom center of the canvas where Hannock imbedded a postage stamp-sized image of Moran’s *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* into the topography, identified nearby in light blue handwriting as “Moran’s 1872 masterpiece,” an acknowledgement of Moran’s important place in the history of American art and of Yellowstone (figure 35b).²⁰⁷ In the lower right, Hannock writes about the “Cody Museum,” which had been inquiring about borrowing a painting for its galleries, where this painting would eventually hang. In the center of the painting, Hannock included nude photographs of a male and female torso (figure 35c). Text nearby identifies the images as Hannock and his wife posing as Adam and Eve for the photographer Chuck Close. A diary-like entry dated “April 8th, 2010” marks the day that would have been Hannock’s tenth wedding anniversary. Here, Hannock recalled the story of his wife’s tragic death of complications from a

²⁰⁶ Mara Williams, “Gathering Light: The Art of Stephen Hannock,” *Brattleboro Museum*, May 31, 2013, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.brattleboromuseum.org/2012/05/31/stephen-hannock-gathering-light/>.

²⁰⁷ All text quoted from the painting was copied by the author. *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn (Mass MoCA #131)* is, at the time of this writing, on loan to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

brain tumor when their daughter was only three years old. Hannock's biography is inseparable from the painting.

Hannock has claimed the representation of the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone as his own, scratching his life in the surface like graffiti. Through his claim on historical imagery, Hannock exercises what critic Craig Owens defines as an allegorical impulse: "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, [and] poses as its interpreter."²⁰⁸ The appropriated image is often from the past, but allegorical impulses, according to Owens, are "a conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present."²⁰⁹ Allegory takes place when "one text is doubled by another," when one text is read through another, as if reading through a palimpsest. Further, allegory often proposes a relationship between the visual and the verbal and then confuses the two; "the allegorical work is synthetic; it crosses aesthetic boundaries."²¹⁰ Hannock's *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn* makes use of Yellowstone as a cultural icon of the past within the context of Hannock's own personal life, the meaning of Yellowstone today, and the contemporary everyday life that becomes the backdrop or stage set of the appropriated landscape.

Biography and Studies of Light

Hannock came of age in the 1980s and 1990s in New York when Postmodernism was prevalent among artists and critics. He was informed by postmodern strategies, but also retained a strong interest in the ideals of nineteenth-century landscape painting of the Hudson River School and the luminist painters. The Hudson River School painters were a loose-knit group of

²⁰⁸ Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art After Modernism*, 205.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

landscape painters active in the American Northeast in the early and mid nineteenth century and celebrated for their homegrown American genre of fine art. The Hudson River School painters, especially Cole, emphasized the sublime in nature, which echoed a growing appreciation of the wildness of American scenery. Hannock was born in Albany, New York and was raised in the Hudson River Valley. Hannock is drawn to the subject matter and the rich art history of the region.

Despite his upbringing in the artistically fertile area, painting was not initially at the forefront of Hannock's life. Throughout his youth, and into adulthood, Hannock focused more on playing sports than he did on art. A strong ice hockey program led him to Deerfield Academy in western Massachusetts, where he spent one post-graduate high school year. Although he went to Deerfield for hockey, it was there that he took his first art class since grade school. Hannock then attended Bowdoin College, again primarily for hockey. While at Bowdoin, he participated in an exchange program with Smith College. His short time at Bowdoin and Smith sealed his interest in art. At Smith College, Hannock took classes from sculptor and printmaker Leonard Baskin, who was a featured artist in residence. Hannock left hockey and Bowdoin to work as Baskin's apprentice for several years, learning the fundamentals of drawing, printmaking, painting, and sculpture in the process. Hannock eventually earned a bachelor's degree from Hampshire College in 1976. At Hampshire College, he continued art classes and played sports. Hampshire College had started a team that played competitive Ultimate Frisbee; Hannock joined the team, and they went on to national finals.

In the 1970s, Hannock's desire to capture reflected qualities of light in his art led him to experiment with phosphorescent pigments and paints that glowed in the dark. Hannock eventually developed a wide range of subtle hues, but it became increasingly difficult to paint

and exhibit his paintings in the dark. He slowly moved from phosphorescent paints to painting with oil, acrylic, and layers of resin in between. Hannock continued to experiment with many types of media, pigments, and techniques. One experiment with painting and digital media earned Hannock an Academy Award for designing the visual effects for the 1998 film *What Dreams May Come*, starring Robin Williams. In the early years, Hannock's subjects were varied and included figures, cityscapes, and landscapes.

Hannock's interest in capturing light continues in his mature paintings of large-scale landscapes with underlying text and images. Hannock's process is labor-intensive and physical, putting his athletic background to good use. First, Hannock prepares his canvas with modeling paste worked smooth with an industrial-powered sander. He then uses acrylic and oil paint, waxy pencils, and collaged photographs to build the body of the image. The text, photographs and other collaged clippings form the armature for the landscape composition. In between paint and text layers, Hannock applies a thick clear acrylic gel resin to both preserve the texture of the paint and provide a glassy-smooth surface that adds a desired reflective layer that captures and refracts light. The topmost layer is then polished, heightening the tension between the layers of depth visible in the painting and the flatness of the surface.

The landscape subject is important to Hannock, who welcomes a comparison of his work to that of nineteenth-century landscape artists, especially the luminists. However, Hannock's landscapes are not records of a particular topography or place. Hannock sees the landscapes as vehicles for his study of light and atmosphere. "Landscape," said Hannock, provides a "simple composition that light can be hung on. It's an excuse to make a lightscape. . . . The landforms themselves are just devices that break the conceptual surface of the painting and allow us to go

through and essentially be drawn in by the light.”²¹¹ The many layers of color and resin on the surface of Hannock’s paintings create a depth in which to capture light and hold it in the painting.

In interviews, Hannock often focuses on the surfaces of his paintings, especially the technique and formal elements, yet his landscapes are far from “simple compositions” for light. Landscape in American art and culture references rich histories and carries complex meaning and ideologies. In the postmodern sense, Hannock confiscates a landscapes based on representation and symbolic meaning and then poses as the interpreter of the landscape, re-writing the meaning to include his personal narrative. He embraces the destabilized nature of history and identity in the twenty-first century and writes his personal mythology by telling stories associated with the landscape and merging his memories with the ideologies of the landscape. Hannock’s paintings draw from both nineteenth-century American landscape painting subjects and traditions but also re-write history as it is useful to Hannock in the present.

Landscape as Icon

Thomas Cole (1801-1848) was an early champion of landscape painting in America. In his well-known painting, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, After a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, Cole painted the Oxbow, a place where the Connecticut River bends in a horseshoe shape (figure 36). In the painting, Cole rendered the view from the top of the mountain (a closer look also reveals a small self-portrait of the artist at work, nestled among the trees on the hillside), but he also used the painting to tell a story. Art historian Barbara Novak noted that for Cole “idea and story took precedence over form,” and the real and ideal merged in

²¹¹ Hannock, as quoted in Duncan Christy, *Luminosity: The Paintings of Stephen Hannock* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2000), 16-17.

landscape.²¹² Cole used gnarled tree trunks to represent the sublime power of nature, while the cultivated fields in the distant right show agricultural development of the land. Cole's *Oxbow* juxtaposes wilderness with pastoral settlement to celebrate a national landscape. In an attitude that dominated mid-nineteenth-century landscape painting, Cole praised America's wilderness as "the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive characteristic of American scenery."²¹³ For Cole, wilderness imbued the young nation with a history that rivaled Europe's classical ruins. In the early nineteenth century, the American landscape had been imbued with ideologies that validated the young nation's history and culture. The vast, untamed wilderness with boundless natural resources defined the characteristics of the country.

The Oxbow as both a place and painted image has become an icon of the American landscape. As early as the 1830s, Mount Holyoke was featured as a necessary stop on any North American tour.²¹⁴ The Oxbow has played a role as a defining motif for Hannock, who painted a similar view to Cole's starting in the early 1990s. In the title for his 2000 canvas *The Oxbow: After Church, After Cole, Flooded (Flooded River for the Matriarchs E. & A. Mongan), Green Light*, Hannock acknowledges his artistic debt to nineteenth-century American artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church (Cole's student) as well as his artistic mentors Elizabeth (Betty) and Agnes Mongan (figure 37). He salutes Cole and Church as the founding fathers of the American landscape tradition to encourage a direct comparison with the Hudson River School artists. His reference to "E. & A. Mongan" is a tribute to two women who made a lasting impact during Hannock's formative years of art education: Betty taught art history at Smith College and Agnes was briefly the director of Harvard's Fogg Museum.

²¹² Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 61-63.

²¹³ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" (1835), in *American Art, 1700-1960: Sources and Documents*, ed. John W. McCoubrey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 102.

²¹⁴ Wallach, "Some Further Thoughts on the Panoramic Mode," in *Within the Landscape*, 118.

In *The Oxbow: After Church, After Cole, Flooded*, Hannock used a similar vantage point to Cole's, looking down on the bend in the river. He relies on the viewer's familiarity with Cole's *Oxbow* as the entry point into his painting and takes great pride that this painting is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection (as is Cole's *Oxbow*). Hannock modified the composition, choosing to include evidence of the twenty-first century in the form of railroad track and an interstate highway that had been built over the curve of the river, although the structures look more like Roman aqueducts than modern-day bridges. Fields extend on both riverbanks, and glowing light illuminates the dawn skies behind the hills in the distance. The glassy surface of the river is highlighted in shades of pink and light blue. The horizon line is repeated in the roads and edge of the fields, creating a static and calm scene. Hannock presents what art historian Martha Hoppin calls "a silent, mysterious world, its light resembling fireflies at dusk, more poetic than real."²¹⁵

Stillness and light permeate Hannock's painting. The bridges, fields, and river provide horizontal axes throughout. Hannock's emphasis on the qualities of light, emphasis on the horizontal, and quietude have led critics to compare his painting to the work of the so-called luminist painters of the late nineteenth century, such as Martin Johnson Heade (figure 38). Novak described the specific quality of light that characterizes luminism as a cool, palpable, planar light that radiates from the surface, uninterrupted by brushstrokes.²¹⁶ The horizontal structure, simplified and orderly arrangement of the natural elements, and silence that defines luminism could describe Hannock's paintings.

²¹⁵ Martha Hoppin, "Variations on a Theme: The Oxbow," in *Stephen Hannock*, ed. Jason Rosenfeld (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2009), 17.

²¹⁶ Barbara Novak, "On Defining Luminism," in *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875: Paintings, Drawings, Photographs*, John Wilmerding and Lisa Fellows Andrus (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 25; 23-27.

The light draws the viewer into the painting, but the text keeps the viewer hovering on the surface of the painting. From a distance, the text provides a textured surface in the fields on the riverbank and appears to delineate rows of carefully planted crops. But from close up, the writing is legible. Text identifies Hannock's vantage point, "100 yards off the hang-gliding launch" near the Summit House; recalls events that happened here, "Gordo the wacko almost blew Jimmy's head off"; and expresses feelings about his artistic contemporaries, such as a reference to Alfred Leslie's large view of the Oxbow from Mount Holyoke, which was a "nice piece" that "didn't do it for me."²¹⁷

Hannock figuratively superimposes his personal and cultural narrative over the top of Cole's landscape. Cole told stories symbolically in his landscape, where Hannock more literally uses the landscape as a "stage for his stories," an integral setting upon which the narratives unfold.²¹⁸ Hannock has painted more than twenty canvases of the Oxbow since the late 1990s (see figure 39 for another example). Hannock claims he was drawn to the Oxbow because he felt a close connection with the landscape as a resident of the area and that he began painting the Oxbow as an "attempt to re-claim this vista for the local art community."²¹⁹ Hannock attempts to revive narratives and history of the Oxbow and its significance within American culture to then justify and build his new mythology. The myth then explains and justifies the way in which Hannock sees himself, further legitimizing his claims as an American artist. In the influential book, *Landscape and Power*, W. J. T. Mitchell reminds readers that the landscape "is not simply raw material to be represented in paint but is always already a symbolic form in its own right."²²⁰

²¹⁷ Text written in the painting. Quoted in Hoppin, "Variations on a Theme," 22.

²¹⁸ Jason Rosenfeld, "New England/New York," in *Stephen Hannock* (2009), 42.

²¹⁹ Hannock, interview with Loren Diblasi, "Beyond the Borders of Landscape: An Interview with Stephen Hannock," *New York Art Beat*, May 14, 2013, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.nyartbeat.com/nyablog/2013/05/beyond-the-borders-of-landscape-an-interview-with-stephen-hannock/>.

²²⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.

Hannock claims the subject of the Oxbow, acknowledges cultural meaning, and then mediates and re-directs the viewer's experience through text. Over time, and with repeated use of one image, Hannock assigns ideological meaning that includes his own narrative, resulting in a new myth.

As American exploration and settlement moved west, so too did the interest in pristine wilderness and grand views of the landscape. "The West," observed art historian Joni Kinsey, "was seen . . . as mysterious, a wild and exotic place of unfamiliar peoples and customs," that remained a powerful part of American national identity.²²¹ Dramatic paintings of the American West, such as the views of Yellowstone, had a powerful presence in American imagination and fueled further interest in the West. When Yellowstone was set aside as the country's first national park in 1872, it became another icon of America. The remarkable scenery and natural forms, one reporter recalled, "surpass the wildest efforts of the imagination in their grotesqueness, and the coloring of its rocks and cliffs . . . is represented by observers as baffling all descriptions and almost defying credibility."²²² These unique features eventually became further proof of American exceptionalism. In 1867, Tuckerman praised artists who painted western themes as essentially American. These "subjects are novel," he wrote. "Tales of frontier and Indian life . . . the adventures of the hunter and the emigrant—correct pictures of what is truly remarkable in our scenery, will awaken instant attention in Europe. If our artists or authors, therefore, wish to earn trophies abroad, let them seize upon themes essentially American."²²³ Tuckerman measured the success of his "essentially American" themes with European recognition, believing, like others in the mid nineteenth century, that the West was the place that could represent the country's uniqueness, and even superiority, over Europe. The continual

²²¹ Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 4-5.

²²² "The Yellowstone Park," *Harper's Weekly* 27, no. 1392 (August 25, 1883): 535.

²²³ Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 425.

comparisons and competition between America and Europe are manifest in Tuckerman's comments. Many artists took Tuckerman's advice and their landscapes especially garnered attention in the eastern United States and eventually in world's fairs and international exhibitions.

In *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, Moran conveyed the grandeur and uniqueness of the site but also aimed to convince his viewers that such a remarkable place actually existed. Stylistically, Moran's clarity of line, color, and detail contributed to the perceived veracity of the scene. "My aim was to bring before the public the character of that region. The rocks in the foreground are so carefully drawn that a geologist could determine their precise nature," he wrote.²²⁴ Moran also made the landscape approachable by including two tiny figures on a precipice in the center foreground. Those figures, and another two people holding horses hidden in the shadows of the rocky foreground, serve as surrogate viewers while also conveying the scale and grandeur of nature. The painting was a celebration of American wilderness and wildness; it was "purely American." In Moran's words, "America is richer in material . . . than any country in the world," he wrote, "We have the most wonderful, prolific country in the variety of subjects known to civilization."²²⁵

The perception and interpretation of Yellowstone changed quickly in the late nineteenth century, as evinced in the reception of Moran's second large-scale painting of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone (figure 40). By 1893, when Moran's painting debuted at the World's Columbian Exposition, Yellowstone had become a well-known tourist attraction, and images of the canyon had been widely distributed through advertisements, photographs, and prints.²²⁶ For

²²⁴ Moran in Sheldon, *American Painters*, 126.

²²⁵ Thomas Moran, "Knowledge A Prime Requisite in Art," *Brush and Pencil* 12, no. 1 (April 1903): 15.

²²⁶ Louis Prang produced a portfolio of chromolithographs based on Moran's watercolors of Yellowstone in 1876 titled, *The Yellowstone National Park and the Mountain Regions of Portions of Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah*.

Moran this meant more artistic liberty. “No longer fearful of disbelief,” wrote curator Nancy Anderson, “Moran was free to celebrate the luminous colors of the canyon with paint that is remarkably thin and transparent.”²²⁷ His brilliant color and expressive brushstrokes convey emotions a viewer might experience if standing at the canyon, more than they delineate details of the geology. Moran recognized that within a twenty-year span, the landscape of Yellowstone had become culturally well known.

In 2010, when Hannock completed *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn*, Yellowstone still retained its allure as a landscape with unique and interesting features and an embodiment of national pride. As a must-see destination for both national and international audiences, Yellowstone attracts nearly three million visitors per year. Preservation of the wilderness and wildlife in Yellowstone are topics of constant debate and national policy. Like images of the Grand Canyon in Arizona discussed in the previous chapter, Yellowstone is recognizable worldwide through a seemingly endless supply of images in a variety of media.

Hannock characterized the image of the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone as “virtually cliché” because of the repetition of images that have nearly come to stand in for the Grand Canyon itself.²²⁸ The visitors’ experiences in Yellowstone have been framed in a particular way, limiting access to sites and locations throughout the park. Park Service roads and trails guide people to lookouts, such as Artist’s Point, that frame the view of nature from a similar vantage as that of Moran, for instance (figure 41). Guide books to Yellowstone National Park “frame” the popular sites with photographs and captions that direct visitors. For example, it is not uncommon

See Joni Kinsey, *Thomas Moran's West: Chromolithography, High Art, and Popular Taste* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006). For more about the promotion of Yellowstone and Thomas Moran, see “The Northern Pacific Railroad,” in Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 68-78.

²²⁷ Nancy K. Anderson et al., *Thomas Moran* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 126.

²²⁸ Stephen Hannock, interview with the author, April 1, 2014.

to see people poised with easels and sketchpads at Artist's Point, as if visitors are taking the National Park Service's advice: this is where artists view the canyon and make art. One 1938 guidebook directed visitors to Artist's Point to view the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and highlighted the location as "world famous" for beauty of form and delicacy of color. A 1991 guidebook echoes the sentiments and characterized the attractions within Yellowstone as "scenic wonders."²²⁹ The guidebooks not only lead viewers to the sites but also convey meaning and significance through the accompanying text.

Yellowstone is framed within what art historian Julia Czerniak defines as the "pictorial" tradition: "pictorialism biases how a landscape appears as a *picture*, a retinal image, over how it works as a *process*, a continuing activity and set of relations that change over time."²³⁰

Yellowstone views are simultaneously frozen in time yet experienced in the present as if they were static unchanging images. Historic photographs and accompanying texts guide the experience for today's visitors, who also take similar photographs with the aim of framing their view in the same way, thus perpetuating the image frozen in time with no contemporary markers to distinguish the image, such as the numerous tourists who are likely standing nearby viewing the same scene (for example, the photograph in figure 41 shows no evidence of human presence, even though on the day the photograph was taken, the parking lot was busy and dozens of people were milling around on the short trail to Artist's Point). Hannock's postmodern consideration of the landscape begins with a pictorial image, or picture, but his addition of collage, text, and

²²⁹ Jack Ellis Haynes, *Haynes Souvenir Album of Yellowstone National Park: A Collection of Scenic and Wild Life Photographs with Descriptions* (Haynes: Yellowstone Park Wyoming, ca. 1938), n.p., Yellowstone Park Collection, MS 21, box 2, folder 2, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West. "Yellowstone," complimentary guidebook, 1991, 41, Yellowstone Park Collection, MS 21, box 2, folder 32, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

²³⁰ Julia Czerniak, "Challenging the Pictorial: Recent Landscape Practice," *Assemblage* 34 (December 1997): 110.

narratives on the surface of the picture draw attention to the process of landscape, the activities and related meanings that are fluid and constantly changing.

Hannock first visited Yellowstone National Park in 1991 with the attitude of a tourist. Hannock accompanied the interdisciplinary Snake River Institute, led by his friend Michelle Sullivan, on a journey to find locations depicted by Moran's drawings and William Henry Jackson's photographs from the 1871 U.S. Geological Survey. The 1871 expedition, guided by Ferdinand Vanderveer Hayden was the first government-sponsored expedition in Yellowstone and the resulting images were instrumental in convincing Congress to protect the region as a National Park. Although his journey through Yellowstone involved searching for scenery captured by Moran and Jackson, Hannock's visit to Yellowstone did not stem from a desire to rediscover the conditions that informed past image making in the same way Tony Foster, Mark Klett, and Byron Wolfe approached the Grand Canyon. Hannock joined the group trip at the encouragement of his friends Sullivan and Sue Simpson Gallagher who lived in Jackson, Wyoming at the time.

The trip was memorable, nonetheless—both because he was impressed with the geological features and because of his interesting travel companions. The group visited the standard highlights: Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Old Faithful and the springs and pools surrounding Old Faithful, and Mammoth Hot Springs. Of Yellowstone Canyon, Hannock recalled, "I can immediately relate to why artists were taken with this [place], . . . it's a spectacular geological event."²³¹

In each location, the group searched for vantage points of Moran and Jackson. Hannock remembers lively discussions as the group debated exact locations of Moran's watercolors and the degrees of artistic license and interpretation he may have taken. Hannock later wrote about

²³¹ Stephen Hannock, interview with the author, April 1, 2014.

one particular debate in the surface of his painting: “It cracked me up how stubborn Barbara was to embrace artist’s likeness. She just wouldn’t buy a spot from where Moran drew cuz [*sic*] a rock was out of place at Mammoth Hot Springs.”²³² In this text, “Barbara” refers to Barbara Novak, the influential scholar of nineteenth-century American landscape painting and one of Hannock’s traveling companions. Hannock was less interested in matching exact vantage points and vistas with those of the past, especially compared to Klett’s goals of exploring conditions of image making in a place. On his visit to Yellowstone in 2000, Klett compared an image of Moran’s 1872 *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* to the view itself (figure 42). Klett did not expect to find an exact replica, but rather to show the relationship and context between the reproduction and the original view. Klett’s photograph of the comparison is also a tongue-in-cheek replica of a picture within a picture.

Hannock’s experience with Novak no doubt informed his interpretation of the Yellowstone landscape. The journey through Yellowstone National Park influenced Hannock’s perception of the landscape and he gathered sketches of the topography to use later in the studio (figure 43), but his trip primarily legitimized his use of the Yellowstone subject. Just as Moran validated his claims to the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone subjects by seeing the landscape first-hand, Hannock could add one more layer of stories to the painting, based on his experience.

Employing methods not unlike Moran’s, Hannock returned to his studio, thousands of miles from the site. Hannock’s journey into the wilderness, the West, provided field sketches and experience with the place and, even more so, authority to address the subject. It was not until several years after his 1991 trip that Hannock developed his sketches into a painting. In his studio in North Adams, Massachusetts, Hannock first made small painted studies of Yellowstone to experiment with the color and light (figure 44). Hannock chose to represent a dawn moment

²³² Text written on the surface of *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn*, transcribed by the author.

just before sunrise in his Yellowstone painting, recalling an experience he had while in the national park. Intending to capture the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone at dawn, Hannock told a story about first getting lost in the dark on the way to his intended lookout and then fastening his foot to a tree to lean out over the canyon to sketch Yellowstone at dawn (this specific location is also identified on the surface of *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn*).²³³ The on-site sketches act as mnemonic devices to help Hannock recall his memories and stories. The oil studies then help him layer in the effects of light on the scene.

Like the Oxbow paintings, Hannock's Yellowstone paintings are part of a series. The first large-scale painting was completed in 1997 and the second just one year later (figures 31 and 32). In the second version, Hannock enlarged the painting by about twenty inches horizontally and vertically and added a stormy sky. He enlarged it again in 2010, but the compositions in all three paintings are nearly identical (figure 33). The multiples are not reliant on repeat visits to Yellowstone; rather, the composition derives from a template, which contributes to the dreamlike and imagined feel of the paintings. A traced template, said Hannock, "gives me a chance to balance the composition, do the drawing, and find out where the composition is weakest, then correct the composition."²³⁴ As Hannock moves farther from the location, both physically as well as in time, the landscape becomes more conceptual. Nearly twenty years after his visit, Hannock is less influenced by his first-hand view of the canyon and more susceptible to cultural and art historical references.

Changes Hannock made to his Yellowstone paintings reflect his interest in continual experimentation with lighting and weather patterns (the inclusion of the storm, for example) and with color schemes. Again, this is not unlike Moran revisiting his subject many years later when

²³³ Stephen Hannock, interview with the author, April 1, 2014.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Moran's approach was more dramatic with heightened colors and less minute detail (see figures 34 and 40). Novak characterized landscape painters' interest "in light, climate, atmosphere, and time of day" as an "American interest."²³⁵ Novak's comments referred to nineteenth-century luminist and Impressionist painters, but Hannock shares this interest and bears comparison. Hannock's stormy sky, for example, begs comparison to the stormy seascapes by Heade (figure 38). In Heade's *Approaching Storm, Beach Near Newport*, the sky is nearly black with the impending storm, while the foreground beach is strongly lit and the details of rocks and waves are rendered with precision. In Hannock's *Flooded Canyon (Storm Approaching)*, the storm is rendered as the black clouds in the sky, while the canyon and falls are brightly lit.

Hannock's repetition of the Yellowstone subject provides a template for experimentation, but the repetition over time helps to re-write and re-construct the landscape and associated meaning. Mitchell observed a similar phenomenon in his study of landscapes as symbols of power. The repeated images "erase the signs of our own constructive activity in the formation of landscape as meaning or value," wrote Mitchell, and "produce an art that conceals its own artifice."²³⁶ Eventually, the landscape images are connected with the associated ideologies and transformed into national myth. With the founding of Yellowstone Park in 1872, nationalist rhetoric emphasized America's wealth of natural attractions. One reporter for the *New York Herald* praised American scenery, and especially Yellowstone, for its "beauty . . . splendor . . . extraordinary and sometimes terrible manifestations of nature . . . possessed by no other nation."²³⁷ Over time, the combination of text and image "constructed" the meaning of Yellowstone.

²³⁵ Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, 128.

²³⁶ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 16.

²³⁷ "Splendors of the West," *New York Herald*, March 16, 1872, as quoted in Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*, 23.

Deconstruction: The Postmodern Landscape

Mitchell's important reexamination of the construction of meaning in landscape painting was published in 1994, in the midst of revisionist western history and what Jenkins characterized as a postmodern world. To appreciate Hannock's landscape paintings within this 1990s revisionist context, it is useful to compare Hannock's work to paintings by Mark Tansey (born 1949), a New York painter who often explores the nature of representation, history, and interpretation in art.

Tansey reflects and expresses an era of art in which meaning has been perceived as unstable and negotiable. *Close Reading* is one example of the visual and intellectual richness of Tansey's work (figure 45). Initially, the painting looks like a realistic rendering of a rock climber on the side of a cliff. Viewers see the back and limbs of the climber, muscles taut with the strain of holding on to the rock face. The cliff is pushed to the surface of the painting and covers the entirety of the canvas, with no sense of the depth or scale beyond. Upon closer investigation, as encouraged by the title, viewers notice the rock face is constructed of text—typewritten and fractured sentences pasted in multiple directions, which invites a closer reading. The text offers some legible passages, but most words and sentences start and stop and are ultimately indecipherable.

Tansey's painting is an illustration of complex deconstruction theory of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction in literary terms concerns textual interpretation and specifically looking for hidden alternative meaning in the text. Translated into painting, deconstruction closely examines the relationship of text and image, focusing on the way in which language manipulates conceptions of reality. In *Close Reading*, Tansey intermixes the text and

the image—they are reliant on one another because the canyon is constructed from the writing; but at the same time, the text disguises the surface. Tansey’s text, however, is fragmented and illegible. Unlike Hannock, who carefully journals on the surface of the painting, Tansey takes published writings, crumples them, then silkscreens them onto his canvas. By breaking up the text, Tansey illustrates the imprecision of words as representations, or signs, of tangible and intangible ideas. Tansey said he puts “text into play literally and figuratively” to question the dichotomy of text and representation.²³⁸

The Grand Canyon is the subject of another painting “constructed/deconstructed” of text, *Constructing the Grand Canyon* (figure 46). Men and women with picks, jackhammers, and shovels chip away at the rocky canyon that encloses a gathered group of men in the center gulch. Cranes are poised on the rim of the canyon in the distant right, while two silhouetted bison are perched on the top of the canyon on the left. The striations of the canyon are constructed of text, albeit illegible except for a few letters here and there. The men in the foreground are the designers overseeing the absurd work of building the Grand Canyon and are identified as theorists from the Yale school of deconstruction—Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, and Geoffrey Hartman—along with Jacques Derrida. The creation of the canyon (as it is carved and built in the painting) is also the theoretical deconstruction of the canyon. The construction workers tease out the meaning that has been imbedded in the construction of the landscape painting.

Art history and theory are Tansey’s primary subjects. He makes pictures about pictures, strongly asserting his representational style and playing with the boundaries of conceptualism. The appropriation of art-historical and popular imagery combined with Tansey’s naturalistic and

²³⁸ Mark Tansey, “Notes and Comments,” in *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*, Arthur Coleman Danto and Christopher Sweet (New York: Abrams, 1992), 132.

“deceptively legible” style makes the scenes seem plausible.²³⁹ His representational style and monochromatic sepia-toned palette, which evokes an old photograph, seemingly reference the past. “[Tansey’s] realities,” Arthur Danto observed, “look not only as if they could have happened but that they did happen, as a matter of historical truth.”²⁴⁰ Tansey’s reference to nineteenth-century landscape painting is a reminder to the viewer that the compositions do not reflect an objective rendering of the topography; as critic Liz Wells observed, while land is a natural phenomenon, landscape is a cultural construct that encompasses both nature and the meaning or changes that humans have added to the natural world.²⁴¹

Hannock uses text on his paintings to build personal meaning into the landscape and the overlay of text in Hannock’s *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn* is an integral aspect of the painting, formally and conceptually. The text draws attention to the flatness of the surface and negates the idea of landscape painting as a window on the world. Incorporating text into paintings was a postmodern strategy in art, and its inclusion draws attention to the constructed nature of the image.²⁴² The writing in Hannock’s painting is an example of what art historian Simon Morley categorized as a “mixed media relationship,” or one in which word and image “are only minimally separated from one another, having been enfolded, decanted or scrambled into each other’s customary domain.”²⁴³

²³⁹ Thomas Moran comes to mind because of his monumental painting of the subject, although Freeman references Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church. Judi Freeman, “Metaphor and Inquiry in Mark Tansey’s ‘Chain of Solutions,’” *Mark Tansey*, ed. Judi Freeman (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 16, 32.

²⁴⁰ Danto, *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*, 16.

²⁴¹ Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 2.

²⁴² Russell Bowman identifies six categories of intention for the use of language in paintings: “words as formal devices, words as signs, words employed as juxtaposition or association, narrative, exploration of language structure, and finally, language as direct sociopolitical commentary.” Russell Bowman, “Words and Images: A Persistent Paradox,” *Art Journal* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 336.

²⁴³ Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 12.

Like symbolic elements included in portraits, the text and images form an impression of Hannock; and like a self-portrait, Hannock retains control over what information he shares openly and what he hides from a viewer. Reading the words in Hannock's painting takes time, and Hannock invites the viewer to slow down his or her experience to become involved with the painting. Hannock lets people into his memories and his life through personal anecdotes and recollections. In the sky of *Flooded Cascade, Yellowstone Dawn*, Hannock included an x-ray image of the tumor in his left eye and, in another moment, a more mundane description of his nine-year-old daughter's excitement about Easter: "you can't underestimate the anticipation of a good sugar buzz," writes Hannock. Hannock replaces the standard history painting with his own life. Rather than biblical or classical stories, local lore and the contemporary experience are recorded on a monumental scale.²⁴⁴

The use of nineteenth-century landscapes as a reference point for both Tansey and Hannock draws attention back to the landscape paintings of the past. Tansey, especially, reveals the underlying construction of meaning built into the Grand Canyon, from many years of text and imagery that shaped reactions and perceptions of the place. Moran's images (both of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, see figures 19, 34, and 40) form a significant part of that vocabulary. The dialogue of construction and deconstruction across more than a century of art is revealing, especially in the ways in which so much meaning and importance has been placed on landscape painting. With the layering and construction of the landscape revealed, Tansey and Hannock remind viewers "that painting, even when realistic, is about more than what meets the eye."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Jason Rosenfeld, *Stephen Hannock: Recent Paintings: Vistas with Text* (New York: Marlborough, 2012), 20.

²⁴⁵ Danto, *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*, 18.

Toward a New Myth: Appropriation and Allegory in Hannock's Yellowstone

Hannock's claim to iconic landscape images and his use of images in the surface of his painting make literal Douglas Crimp's claim that "underneath each picture there is always another picture." In his seminal 1977 essay, Crimp outlines processes that uncover the strata of representation: quotation, excerption, framing, and staging.²⁴⁶ Hannock, like Tansey, uses these processes to build and deconstruct meaning in Yellowstone through *Flooded Cascade*, *Yellowstone Dawn*. In the literal sense, Hannock builds layers with text and image, acknowledging the origins of Yellowstone's designation as a national park in the surface of the painting. Toward the bottom left of the painting, Hannock references the role of Moran's watercolor paintings and Jackson's photographs in influencing Congress that such a place was worth preserving. Hannock wrote near a small reproduction of Jackson's 1871 photograph of Mammoth Hot Springs, "As terrific as TM's [Thomas Moran's] painting are, and as big as their impact was on the culture of the 1800s, Jackson rattled their cages. It's pretty tough to ignore a photo . . . no matter how much it looks like Mars" (figure 35d).

Hannock's Yellowstone paintings are constructed with personal narratives, contemporary life, experiences and friendships, and cultural history. By appropriating and re-framing Yellowstone, Hannock validates the image of Yellowstone while also connecting himself with a usable past. Hannock, in fact, by aiming to out-do Moran, also gained the heroic status of an artist who mastered the landscape. Novak had observed of nineteenth-century artist-adventurers that the heroic aspects of the paintings transferred to the persona of the artists when they ventured into unexplored territories of the United States.²⁴⁷ Compared to Moran's 1871 journey to an unknown region, Hannock's car travel and ranger-led tour through Yellowstone is

²⁴⁶ Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," in *Art After Modernism*, 186.

²⁴⁷ Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 137.

considerably milder, yet his personal mastery of the meaning associated with the site was necessary for the journey.

Hannock uses the shifting nature of appropriation and meaning to create a new personal mythology in his art. When appropriating Yellowstone from Moran, Hannock's associations and memories on the surface of Yellowstone transform the iconic landscape into something new while retaining the symbolic importance of the place. In his explanation of appropriation, art historian Robert S. Nelson conflates Roland Barthes's concept of "myth" with appropriation.²⁴⁸ For Barthes, a myth develops when meaning conveyed by a sign that had been stable and complete is used in another context, with new meaning added. The original has therefore been altered. Appropriation is a distortion of the previous meaning, but does not negate prior meaning. "When successful," observes Nelson, "it maintains but shifts the former connotations to create the new sign and accomplishes all this covertly, making the process appear ordinary or natural."²⁴⁹ In his appropriation of Moran, Hannock adopted more than just the composition and scale; he also took over the meaning associated with the iconic landscape of Yellowstone. Hannock's twenty-first century text and images project his contemporary life enfolded and scrambled with that of the past. The new myth is formed by the conflation and adaptation of meaning—for Hannock, but also in the reflection back, in the recasting of tradition. Hannock also creates an allegory by claiming and confiscating the image of a historically important icon, Yellowstone, and redeeming the past for purposes in the present. Like the palimpsest, reading the text through another text, Hannock re-positions and shapes our views.

²⁴⁸ Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2003), 162-163. See also Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Granada, 1957).

²⁴⁹ Nelson, "Appropriation," 164.

Chapter 4 Re-playing the Myth of the West

Santa Fe artist Bill Schenck (born 1947) paints western icons in a paint-by-number style of flattened shapes and vivid color to create a playful, yet critical, image of the American West. Western film stills, photographs of rodeos, magazines, consumer products, and historic western American art provide endless inspiration for Schenck, whose paintings often blur the line between high and low art. Schenck practices pastiche in his method of combining images from a variety of sources for his finished paintings. Critic Fredric Jameson and others invoke the idea of pastiche as a postmodern strategy: an imitation without a clear reference.²⁵⁰ With pastiche, Schenck creates cowboys, American Indians, and landscapes that seem familiar, colorful, and fun on the surface but through their imitation and appropriation prompt a closer examination. Beneath the recognizable western iconography Schenck packs in messages about ideologies in the art and culture of the past and how it continues to impact interpretation of the West today.

Schenck's career began in New York in the early 1970s where he was influenced by Pop Art and loosely associated with Photorealist painters. During that time, Schenck began painting western subjects by copying film stills from 1960s spaghetti Westerns—Italian-produced western films directed by Sergio Leone and others. Schenck was addressing cowboys even prior to Richard Prince's consideration of the subject in his *Cowboy* series from the 1980s. Eventually Schenck's interest in the West permeated more than his art, and he changed his lifestyle completely, participating in Wyoming rodeos during the summers and returning to New York in the winter to focus on his art. Today, Schenck is steeped in the art and life of the West. He actively collects western American art, prehistoric southwestern pottery, and Molesworth

²⁵⁰ For an in-depth discussion of pastiche, see Fredric Jameson, "Excerpts from *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," in *A Postmodern Reader*, Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 312-332.

cowboy-style furniture. He also and regularly hosts rodeo events at his ranch—where, at the age of sixty-seven, he still competes in (and wins) ranch sorting competitions.²⁵¹ Critics often credit Schenck's lifestyle as an essential factor in his paintings of western subjects. As one gallery director proclaimed, "Bill eats, drinks, and sleeps the lifestyle depicted in his work."²⁵² Yet, Schenck's paintings are not meant to be a direct reflection of his experience in the West. Rather, in postmodern fashion and with pastiche, Schenck's narratives are based on remembered pasts, memories, and myths. He appropriates images of western subjects to critique our culture's undying fascination with traditional and romantic notions of the American West.

A Flight from Destiny, painted in 1994, features a mounted cowboy galloping toward the viewer in the setting of an expansive southwestern landscape (figure 47). As the horse runs, suspended over the sagebrush, the cowboy twists to look back over his shoulder with his pistol drawn. Colorful mesas line the horizon and the figure's shadow is projected on the vast cloudy sky. The subject has been reduced to hard-edged shapes of vivid oranges, reds, purples, and blues rendered in Schenck's signature flattened style. Schenck found his source imagery for this painting in early twentieth-century art, not his own life experiences or the surrounding landscape near his home in Jackson, Wyoming, where he lived at the time of the painting's completion. He appropriated the mounted cowboy from W.R. Leigh's *Fleeing Bandit* and the expansive cloudscape and horizon from Edgar Payne's *Desert Nomads* (figures 48 and 49). From each painting, Schenck plucked the elements that he wanted then combined them, editing and simplifying for the best composition. For example, he reversed Leigh's bandit, eliminated the figures from Payne's desert landscape, and then projected the bandit over top. *A Flight from*

²⁵¹ Schenck held the title of world champion of the Ranch Sorting Masters Division in 2009, which he won at the age of sixty-two, and he continues to compete in state and national competitions.

²⁵² Beau Alexander of Maxwell Alexander Gallery in Culver City, California, quoted in "Bill Schenck: All Things Western," *Western Art Collector*, no. 69 (May 2013): 90.

Destiny, a provocative title that evokes ideas of escape and Manifest Destiny, restates and transforms the historic paintings into a new statement and work of art that acknowledges how much our impressions of the American West are constituted from previously communicated images and ideas.²⁵³

Schenck employs pastiche in his paintings. Pastiche, explained film-studies scholar Richard Dyer, is an “imitation of an imitation,” a copy of “other art, not of reality itself,” closely tied to the concept of the simulacrum.²⁵⁴ Pastiche is recognizable as an imitation; yet, the sources remain only vaguely familiar and hard to pinpoint. It is not a mockery, as Jameson clarified, but is a neutral practice, copying without ulterior motives.²⁵⁵ In *A Flight from Destiny*, for example, the cowboy, the horse, and the southwestern landscape are familiar, evoking many other images of the subject; however, the exact source could easily remain elusive. The imagery is almost so ubiquitous that the source seems to be everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. In using many different sources for his paintings, Schenck draws attention to the “West as it never was,” revealing the traditional West in historic western American art as a copy without an original, or simulacrum.²⁵⁶ However, Schenck does not judge this revelation as positive or negative. He embraces the myth and legend of the West in a self-aware fashion and even adopts an attitude steeped in myth for his own image and story. Where the Cowboy Artists of America revived and perpetuated a myth they had come to believe was truth through reification, Schenck takes a tongue-in-cheek playful attitude toward the myth.

²⁵³ The appropriation and restating of art historical images in contemporary art was the theme for an exhibition hosted by the Nassau County Museum of Art in 1994 titled “Art after Art.” See Constance Schwartz and Franklin Hill Perrell, *Art After Art* (Roslyn Harbor, NY: Nassau County Museum of Art, 1994), 5-6. However, the artists included in this exhibition primarily used more widely recognizable images from the mainstream art historical canon—by Leonardo da Vinci, for example.

²⁵⁴ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

²⁵⁵ Jameson, “Excerpts from *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,” 320-321.

²⁵⁶ “The West as it never was” comes from a title of an exhibition of Schenck’s work in 1996-1997. “Ten Year Retrospective: The West that Never Was,” Albrecht Kemper Museum of Art, St. Joseph, MO, December 8, 1996 to February 16, 1997.

Billy Famous

True to the storied and elusive West, Schenck actively constructs his own legend. He is evasive about details of his biography. In the introductory pages of Schenck's recent autobiography, *The Chronology of Billy Famous: An Authentic Story*, he presents dueling accounts. One page proclaims, "August 19, 1947-Born 3:10 am. in Columbus, Ohio;" and the next reads, "August 19, 1947-Born 4:12 am. Two Guns, Arizona."²⁵⁷ The conflicting facts cast a veil of mystery over each subsequent page of information—did a friend's father really shoot at him with a shotgun when he was a teenager? Was he really diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic with homicidal tendencies at twenty-two years of age? Or are these also fabricated tales employed by Schenck to build a "bad boy, cowboy" public persona?²⁵⁸

Truthfully, Schenck did grow up in rural Ohio with little access to art as a child. His first art experience occurred in high school when he viewed Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup can paintings in an exhibition in Columbus. The impact this had on Schenck cannot be overstated. Because his art education did not start with an appreciation of Old Masters or French Impressionism, Schenck had no context in which to frame Pop Art. "Warhol was the first art exhibition I ever attended," recalled Schenck "I was an eighteen-year-old kid with a blank slate, no prejudice, so I just thought that's what art looked like."²⁵⁹ At Columbus College of Art and Design, where he later studied, Schenck was enamored with Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein and felt a connection to the way in which they found viable subjects for their art in everyday life. During spring break in 1966, Schenck traveled to New York City and, through a coincidence,

²⁵⁷ Bill Schenck, *The Chronology of Billy Famous: An Authentic Story* (Santa Fe: Western Skies Press, 2013), n.p. (2-3).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, (October 1964-shotgun story; "May 1969-Schenck becomes a resident of Mount Carmel Psychiatric Ward of Columbus...").

²⁵⁹ Bill Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014.

worked as a stage and lighting crewmember for “Exploding Plastic Inevitable,” a multi-media show produced by Warhol and the showcase for the Velvet Underground. Subsequently, Schenck worked for Warhol in the Factory assisting with art production and adopted the nickname “Billy Famous,” a play on “Billy Name” of Warhol’s factory entourage, and a projected alter-ego. Schenck’s Warhol experience altered the way he thought about art and art production. “Everything [Warhol] was doing had a tremendous impact on me,” Schenck later recalled. “Not just his art, but the entire mystique that he built around himself fascinated me.”²⁶⁰ Schenck did eventually make his way back to the Midwest and to art school, but a disagreement with Columbus College administrators led him to transfer to the Kansas City Art Institute, where he graduated with a BFA in 1969. After graduating, he moved back to New York City.

Schenck explored different painting styles in college, mimicking the tortured and expressive works of Francis Bacon, Chaim Soutine, and Edward Munch, before adopting the flattened style of Pop Art. With his new style, he created paintings about other paintings—primarily large-scale works on shaped canvases patterned after ceiling paintings by Renaissance and Rococo masters (figure 50). The series featured the pastel hues of the original painting’s palette, but the figures were stylized and painted in hard-edged flattened shapes. Schenck recalled being interested in the scale and the angle of Tiepolo paintings, always making the viewer look up at the work, whether it was placed on the ceiling or not.²⁶¹

Artist John Clem Clarke (born 1937) influenced Schenck’s new methods of appropriating and simplifying historic paintings. In the early 1970s, Clarke had been working on paintings based on famous art-historical sources, such as Dutch seventeenth-century portraiture, Rococo

²⁶⁰ Schenck, in Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels, *Contemporary Western Artists* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1985), 462.

²⁶¹ Lynn Rigberg, *Bill Schenck 1968-1983: Paintings and Serigraphs* (Scottsdale, AZ: Scottsdale Center for the Arts, 1983), n.p.

garden love scenes (figure 51), and nineteenth-century American genre pictures by George Caleb Bingham. For his working method, Clarke transcribed the subjects from a projected image, and then used stencils in his paint application, which flattened the surface and increased the contrast of lights and darks.²⁶² “What I was doing was making reproductions” of famous paintings, said Clarke of the art-historical sources he was copying. The subject was not important and remained abstract for Clarke, who said “I was transmitting . . . my art wasn’t creating a new subject, it was transmitting and creating a new visual code for it.”²⁶³ Clarke encouraged viewers to see the recognizable images in a new way.

By the mid-1970s, Schenck transitioned away from European art history subjects to a topic that became his primary theme for decades—the American West. For Americans in the mid-twentieth century, exposure to the West came primarily through television and film, and Schenck’s experience was no different. “It was the only way I knew western subject matter,” said Schenck, “from the movies.”²⁶⁴ Schenck watched many television Westerns as a child of the 1950s and early 1960s, such as *Lone Ranger* and *Bonanza*, which were filled with wild action but also predictable storylines and easily identified good guys and bad guys.

Hollywood Westerns of the 1950s and 1960s, on the other hand, departed from the classic and formulaic Westerns of clear-cut right and wrong and happy endings where good triumphs over evil. Westerns, in this transitional time, became more ironic and subversive. For example, the Western *Shane* (released in 1953 and filmed in Jackson, Wyoming) was immediately recognized as a revision of western folklore. The title character, Shane (played by Alan Ladd),

²⁶² April Kingsley and Peter F. Blume, *John Clem Clarke: Comforts, Near Disasters, and Penitenti* (Allentown, PA: Allentown Art Museum, 1998), and Schwartz, *Art After Art*, 18-21.

²⁶³ Oral history interview with John Clem Clarke, July 13, 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-john-clem-clarke-13251>.

²⁶⁴ Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014.

was not the typical macho cowboy of the previous decades, but an atypical gunslinger, characterized by softer features, plain clothes, and avoidance of violence. *New York Times* film critic Jack Goodman commented on the way director George Stevens transformed the typically glamorized western vista into something “positively foreboding.” Stevens “violates the canons, precepts, and folk-lore of your popular western in practically every way,” observed Goodman during the filming.²⁶⁵ By 1955, new Westerns were released so frequently that French critic André Bazin was led to delineate the Westerns that departed from the simple formulas of previous eras as “superwesterns.”²⁶⁶ These “superwesterns,” in Bazin’s opinion, enriched the traditional themes with originality in characters and a psychological flavor that coalesces in engaging individuality (*Shane* was an example of a superwestern). The added complexity and darker messages of the alternative Westerns would eventually appeal to Schenck, but in his college years he purposefully ignored the films and everything to do with western subjects in his art. “I was this hip, progressive guy, and I wasn’t enamored with cowboy culture,” recalled Schenck. “To me, cowboys were redneck guys who were a direct threat to my lifestyle.”²⁶⁷

In the early 1970s, while Schenck was still appropriating ceiling paintings in his art, a friend encouraged him to go see a Western by Sergio Leone, which he grudgingly did. Spaghetti Westerns, as the Italian-made Westerns were called, departed enough from traditional Westerns, that the films surprisingly captivated Schenck. “I was very attracted to the moral ambiguity, the Catholic-ness, the anti-heroism that at times was indistinguishable from one character to another in Leone’s work,” said Schenck. “[Leone’s] work seemed to fit exactly with the social upheaval, the sense of revolution that permeated the air worldwide throughout the middle and late

²⁶⁵ Jack Goodman, “Wrinkles and Realism Rife in New Western Film,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1951.

²⁶⁶ Andre Bazin, “The Evolution of the Western,” in *The Western Reader*, Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman, eds. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1998), 51.

²⁶⁷ Bill Schenck, quoted in Norman Koplak, “Pop Maverick,” *Southwest Art* 42, no. 3 (August 2012): 94.

1960s.”²⁶⁸ Visually, Schenck was attracted to the camera angles, especially the way Leone forced the observer to look up into the action, “a kind of perspective that is equivalent in Western films to that [of the] Rococo,” Schenck observed.²⁶⁹ In Westerns, Schenck found new inspiration that took him away from eighteenth-century Europe and back to his own time.

Leone’s first Western, *A Fist Full of Dollars*, was a box office success in the United States, turning the Western into a new kind of film that was, as film critic Christopher Frayling wrote, “brutal and realistic on the surface but mythic at the core, with a distinctive blend of grungy close-ups and exaggerated spectacle.”²⁷⁰ Leone celebrated and deconstructed traditional Hollywood codes (and western myth) and adapted elements with self-awareness and reflection on the genre into something new. Leone’s spaghetti Westerns are exceptional examples of pastiche. Even though some critics use the term disparagingly, dismissing the films as “astonishingly popular and lucrative pastiches of the hallowed American Western,” Leone’s attitude toward the Western is not mocking.²⁷¹ Dyer celebrates pastiche in the spaghetti Westerns because it is the very quality that claims legitimacy. Pastiche “contributes to bringing the genre more firmly into existence by indicating that it already exists.”²⁷² Spaghetti Westerns are homages to the American Western, borrowing stereotypical characters and scenes for inspiration and admiration. Leone’s references to Hollywood Westerns were meant to add up to a kaleidoscope of all American Westerns put together, wherein the viewers of the films would recognize citations. Leone’s goal was to make audiences think they were watching a film they

²⁶⁸ Bill Schenck, “Artist Statement,” ca. 2004, Schenck Southwest brochure, Bill Schenck curatorial file, Whitney Western Art Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

²⁶⁹ Bill Schenck quoted in Rigberg, *Bill Schenck 1968-1983*, n.p.

²⁷⁰ Christopher Frayling, *Once Upon a Time in Italy: The Westerns of Sergio Leone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams; Los Angeles, CA: Autry National Center, 2005), 17.

²⁷¹ Michael Parkinson and Clyde Jeavons, quoted in *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*, Christopher Frayling (London: Routledge, 1981), 124.

²⁷² Dyer, *Pastiche*, 118.

had seen before, and then jolt them when they realized they had not seen the story told in quite that way.²⁷³

The distorted perspectives, extreme close-ups, and artfully framed scenes of the spaghetti Westerns motivated Schenck to take a radical contemporary approach to western subjects. Schenck began to use promotional photographs and film stills from Westerns (both American-made and Italian-made) as the source for his paintings. In one example, Schenck appropriated a scene from *High Noon*, a 1952 Western directed by Fred Zimmerman and starring Gary Cooper (and a film that Bazin characterized as a “superwestern” for the way in which the plot questioned the effectiveness of community in the face of evil). *High Noon* was structurally innovative because the action took place in “real time,” with one minute of screen time equaling one minute within the story.²⁷⁴ For *Winchester*, Schenck selected a climactic moment in the final scenes of the shootout where an indistinguishable figure lies on the ground firing at an unseen enemy (figure 52). In Schenck’s stylistic flattening of shadows, dust, smoke, and architecture into outlined shapes and solid color (the film was in black and white), the fast action of the film is frozen and static, adding to the tension in the painting. Beneath the window, a Winchester sign (that was part of the film set) hints toward Schenck’s interest in brand names and Pop Art.

Top dealers in New York quickly took note of Schenck’s paintings that featured western subjects, and his first couple of solo shows at Warren Benedek Gallery sold out in 1972. Ivan Karp, the New York dealer who first championed Lichtenstein and Warhol in the early 1960s, became a collector of Schenck’s cowboy paintings and helped launch his career.²⁷⁵ Because of

²⁷³ Frayling, *Once Upon a Time in Italy*, 33.

²⁷⁴ Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57-58.

²⁷⁵ Karp has also been credited for identifying the art movement, “Photorealism.” Richard Polsky, *The Art Prophets: The Artists, Dealers, and Tastemakers Who Shook the Art World* (New York: Other Press, 2011), 8-16. Louis K. Meisel is also credited for coining the term “Photorealism” in the late 1960s. See “They Were Really Nice Guys:

his translation of photographs into paintings, Schenck also became associated with the Photorealism painters in New York and exhibited alongside Richard Estes and Tom Blackwell at Louis K. Meisel's gallery. Meisel was, at the time, the primary supporter and champion of Photorealism. Schenck's Photorealism connection was reinforced when art historian Gregory Battcock included Schenck in his 1975 anthology titled *Super-Realism*.²⁷⁶ Schenck's mature style and technique bears similarities to Pop Art and Photorealism. His cool detachment from his subject is reminiscent of attitudes projected by Warhol; and his Photorealism qualities are evident in Schenck's general "avoidance of 'self expression,'" a characteristic that Karp used to define Super Realism.²⁷⁷

Schenck's technique further emphasizes his detachment from the subject, and, like Warhol had in the Factory, Schenck employs assistants to help him paint. Once Schenck has selected his subject, he creates his composition by combining fragments from multiple sources projected on the canvas and traced into simplified shapes. For color, Schenck assigns a number to each shape in the drawing that corresponds to numbers on paint containers. Assistants merely match the paint to the numbers and brush in the areas accordingly. "Paint-by-number is the easiest way to describe it," Schenck summarized.²⁷⁸ Evidence of the paintbrush is minimized, and the result is a kind of surface impersonality that at first glance disguises the artist's real involvement. Schenck's flattened style translated easily to serigraphs (again, similar to Warhol's screen printing methods), which he produced from his paintings through the 1980s.

Louis K. Meisel Talks to David Lubin about Photorealism's Beginnings," 2008, accessed May 25, 2015, https://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/51396253?access_key=key-u8iuj14jtirocvwkv3a.

²⁷⁶ Gregory Battcock, ed. *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 306.

²⁷⁷ Ivan Karp, "Rent is the Only Reality, or The Hotel Instead of the Hymns," in *Super Realism*, Battcock, ed., 24.

²⁷⁸ Schenck, quoted in Barbara Perlman, "Schenck's Brand," *Arizona Arts and Lifestyles*, 1982, 37, Schenck curatorial files, Whitney Western Art Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

Schenck had found a unique niche in the New York art scene, rooted in celebrated styles of Pop Art and Super Realism, but distinct because of the western American subject matter. His subjects were distinct compared to other artists who might stray into western themes. Unlike Warhol's *Double Elvis*, for example, a depiction of Elvis Presley from the film *Flaming Star*, Schenck avoided celebrities. He looked to more obscure sources because he felt that the viewers would get too involved with the subject matter to properly see the painting (even Gary Cooper is unrecognizable in *Winchester*).²⁷⁹

Schenck's success in New York, however, faded almost as fast as it had risen, and after only a few years he failed to sell paintings. Schenck likes to blame a downturn in the art market for his misfortune, but it could have been attributed to his infatuation with his western subject matter. Karp, for one, celebrated artists who remained neutral and dismissed artists when they were attached to their subjects, which is what happened to Schenck and the American West.²⁸⁰ In 1975, Schenck left New York City to live permanently in the West, dividing his time between summers in Jackson, Wyoming and winters in Apache Junction, Arizona.

Schenck seamlessly abandoned his New York City life for the wild west of Jackson, Wyoming, where he started attending rodeos and then participating in the rodeo events. At this time, Schenck began to use his own photography for reference in his paintings. *County 22 H62*, for example, is based on a slide photograph that Schenck took at a rodeo in Jackson in 1975 (County 22 refers to the number on the Wyoming license plates for residents of Teton County, figure 53). The dirt in the foreground looks like an abstract camouflage pattern of blue and

²⁷⁹ Bill Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014. Schenck did once appropriate Andy Warhol's *Double Elvis* in a 1982 painting called *Daze of Heaven*, featuring a smiling cowgirl in the foreground while the two Elvis figures hover over her in the background. Note: Schenck appropriated Warhol in this instance, not the movie still that provided the source material for Warhol's image.

²⁸⁰ Karp, for example, places Chuck Close in a different category of Super Realism because he paints "interesting" people. Karp, "Rent is the Only Reality," in *Super Realism*, Battcock, ed., 34.

orange rounded irregular shapes. “The purpose for [abstraction],” explained Schenck, “is to force the viewer beyond the image itself to the actual structure of the painting, to its formal considerations.”²⁸¹ In Schenck’s rodeo series that he called *Silent Violence*, he used pastel colors and frozen poses to contrast the dangerous action of the rodeo.

Schenck’s move to the American West, in some ways, was a continuation of his childhood experiences. Schenck’s father died in a car accident when young Billy was only five years old and his mother re-married a local television personality known as “The Wrangler.” Posters of cowboys and American Indians based on paintings by Charles M. Russell and Frederic Remington hung in his home, and the family vacationed in Lander, Wyoming. Even while in school and while living in New York City in the early 1970s, Schenck continued to summer in Wyoming. “I felt this real affinity for the high desert there. I’ve always loved the long, long vistas, the silence, the harshness,” he said.²⁸² Schenck purchased his first western property in Grand Teton National Park in 1972 and built what he called the “Rubber Snake Ranch.” By 1974, Schenck began his short-lived career riding bareback and saddle broncs in the rodeos in Jackson, Wyoming (a career he abandoned after only a few years when he was knocked unconscious in the arena and saw double for a week). In 1996, Schenck purchased property in Santa Fe from the renowned landscape architect and writer John Brinkerhoff Jackson. Schenck’s “Double Standard Ranch” in Santa Fe is now on the national register of historic places. The Double Standard Ranch houses Schenck’s home, studio, art gallery, six horses, forty-six head of cattle, and an arena that is large enough to host local rodeos.

²⁸¹ In this statement, Schenck’s comments echo those of John Clem Clarke. Bill Schenck, in Deborah Goppert, *Twelve Contemporary Western Artists: Selections from the Whitney Gallery of Western Art Collection* (Cody, WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1978), 24.

²⁸² Bill Schenck, quoted in Koplak, “Pop Maverick,” 92.

The “End of Painting” and the Persistence of the Myth of the West

As Schenck navigated between the Eastern and Western art circles, his combination of western subject matter and flattened Pop Art style placed him in an awkward position. After Schenck moved west in 1975, he observed, “In New York they said I was too romantic, yet out here my style is seen as a threat. I don’t quite fit in anywhere.”²⁸³ His inability to find a comfortable position is also reflected in the critical dialogue about the place of painting in the 1980s.

Mark Tansey’s work provides a useful context from which to examine Schenck’s artwork. In Tansey’s *End of Painting*, a cowboy in an empty room with his back to the viewer has his pistols drawn, blasting away at his reflection in a large golden-framed mirror (figure 54). As the title suggests, the cowboy shoots holes in his reflection, metaphorically shattering representation. Tansey painted the monochromatic blue-green image not on a traditional canvas support but directly on a movie screen, inferring that film has played a role in the end of painting. As critic Mark Taylor proposes, the painting addresses concerns of artists and critics in the 1970s and 1980s: what is representation, what is painting, and is it possible to paint after the end of painting?²⁸⁴ In the environment of performance art, conceptual art, earth art, and photography, painting seemed retrograde in critical circles, especially if it addressed recognizable subject matter. In his seminal essay “The End of Art,” written in 1984, the same

²⁸³ Grace Lichtenstein, “Cowboy Art Finds Home on the Range,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1977.

²⁸⁴ Mark C. Taylor and Mark Tansey, *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1-21.

year of Tansey's painting, Arthur C. Danto stated that art "as a progressive discipline" had come to an end.²⁸⁵

Tansey and other artists and critics embraced the so-called end of painting as liberating. "The formalists' prohibition against representation seemed no longer to have authority," proclaimed Tansey, "and anything was possible."²⁸⁶ Painting, in Tansey's opinion, could therefore be open to both representation and conceptual meaning. While representational images are the basis for his paintings, Tansey subtly tells the viewer not to be fooled by the realistic style of the painting. He reminds viewers that the innocent eye does not exist and mediation is always present. "Painting," he insists, "is inescapably rhetorical. Far from representing reality, pictures probe multiple realities by fabricating narratives of events that never occurred."²⁸⁷

The cowboy is significant when considering representation and the painted image in *End of Painting*. If representation had seemed retrograde in the 1980s, western representation seemed especially outmoded. As described elsewhere in this dissertation, in the 1980s cowboys sold cigarettes while roping and riding in the timeless Rocky Mountains; Ronald Reagan posed with a cowboy hat for publicity photographs; and art by the Cowboy Artists of America was panned by New York critics, despite popularity with collectors searching for nostalgia. Richard Prince, a contemporary of Tansey, reacted by appropriating Marlboro advertisements in his own photography, a postmodern statement on the end of new subjects in art. Tansey's cowboy relies on a film screen as his support. The film cowboy is a projection—actors pretending to be cowboys. These actors, however, for many Americans, became real cowboys and real indicators of the American West. Paintings are also fabrications that were perceived as documentary truths.

²⁸⁵ Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art," in *The Death of Art* (New York: Haven, 1984), 19, 35. Danto claimed the death of art in the age of pluralism of the 1970s, and especially the death of art within "the constraints of history."

²⁸⁶ Tansey, *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation*, 3-4.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

Schenck's initial western paintings also relied on western films (on the still images). Schenck once called his interpretation of the filmmakers' interpretation of the West "myths of myths," new projections of the subjects based on past images.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, Western films were nearly defunct and dying out in the late 1970s and 1980s. The cowboy, it seemed, was merely a constructed romantic image, a chimera in the mirror.

Tansey's *End of Painting* seems to predict the critical examination of western imagery and myth that would come in the 1990s with revisionist western history and the 1991 exhibition *The West as America*. As Alexander Nemerov reminds viewers in his essay for the *West as America* catalogue, artists from the turn of the twentieth century were not providing their audience with a documentary or immediate view of the Old West, but rather western iconography developed in opposition to urban industrial culture.²⁸⁹ Artists were very effective in providing an escape from modern society, and Nemerov encouraged a more critical examination of the imagery as a construction, not as documentation. The perceived myth, however, was so strong that by the late twentieth century, viewers still maintained that the paintings were a witness to the scenes depicted. Viewers wanted to believe in the cowboys and that the cowboy still persists. Even in *End of Painting*, despite the showering of bullets, which should have shattered the mirror, the cowboy remains visible. But, as a closer examination of *A Flight from Destiny* will show, painting can critique the myth of the West while celebrating it. Schenck's appropriation and editing of historic art of the American West, twisted in a contemporary style, bridges old and new and suggests stories through juxtapositions and references. Schenck plays with the subject matter, altering and re-framing history.

²⁸⁸ Bill Schenck in Lynn Pyne, "Bill Schenck," *Southwest Art* 20 (October 1990): 133.

²⁸⁹ Nemerov, "Doing the 'Old America,'" 287.

A Flight from Destiny

Schenck's appropriation is playful. He embraces the stereotypes of the American West and freely combines multiple sources for his cowboys, American Indians, and landscapes. Of his approach, Schenck commented, "I began exploring Western iconography—undermining it as much as I respected it. It's no wonder no one takes me seriously!"²⁹⁰ Schenck's western iconography is layered within humorous juxtapositions and a Pop Art style that at first invites viewers into the paintings and then proves to be questioning and revealing about our past and present attitudes about the West. *A Flight from Destiny* is exemplary of Schenck's ability to use iconography and references to tease out meanings imbedded within his paintings.

Schenck finds endless inspiration for his paintings in historic western American art, through reproductions in the numerous books he purchases for his extensive library and from his own art collection. Schenck started collecting historic western American art in 1983. He calls collecting a "gamble" and jokes that he took up the hobby to replace his career as a high stakes poker player.²⁹¹ In a short amount of time, he amassed a significant collection of early- and mid-twentieth-century western American art. Schenck clarified that his motivation for collecting is different than what inspires him to appropriate an image. He explained, "I target images that are really iconic [for my paintings]."²⁹² Different characteristics draw him to collect, and for the collection he is attracted to romantic imagery, sensuality of the paint, and what he calls the

²⁹⁰ Bill Schenck, interviewed by KMD, "Billy Schenck's New West," *Santa Fean*, June 2007, 67.

²⁹¹ Schenck, *The Chronology of Billy Famous*, n.p. (August 1983 entry).

²⁹² Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014.

emotional authenticity in the work.²⁹³ Schenck's choice of "iconic" and recognizable images for his paintings contributes to the effectiveness of pastiche.

In the constant imitation of images from other sources, pastiche prompts an analysis of the references and potential meaning. Schenck is a self-proclaimed amateur historian who researches art and history pertinent to his collection and financially supports publications about western artists.²⁹⁴ While his dismissive Pop Art attitude downplays the importance of his sources (akin to Warhol's avoidance of assigning meaning to his Campbell's soup can paintings), Schenck's original sources are worth considering in more depth.²⁹⁵ Paintings by Leigh and Payne may be familiar to collectors and enthusiasts of western American art, but these artists are little known to a wider audience (compared to Frederic Remington or Thomas Moran, for example). Schenck's use of minor artists as the sources is similar to his avoidance of his favorite movie stars. Schenck aims to evoke a familiar West without letting viewers get caught up in a recognizable image.

Schenck discovered W. R. Leigh's *Fleeing Bandit* in the illustrated biography of the artist by June DuBois (figure 48). He photographed the image from the book and then projected the horse and rider (flip-flopped) onto his canvas. William Robinson Leigh (1866-1955) was born in Virginia, completed artistic training in Munich as a young man, and eventually settled in New York City to pursue a career in art. He visited the American West for the first time in 1906, returning often to locations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming during the summer months to gather sketches and ideas for his art. Leigh's western subjects met a cold reception in New

²⁹³ Bill Schenck, foreword to *Serenading the Light: Painters of the Desert Southwest* by David Clemmer (Santa Fe: Schenck Southwest Pub., 2003), 6-7. Schenck's collection was exhibited at the Fine Art Museum of New Mexico in 2005, accompanied by a catalogue. Schenck sold Payne's *Desert Nomads* to a private collector about 2009.

²⁹⁴ Schenck, telephone interview with the author August 29, 2014.

²⁹⁵ In thinking about his choices of artwork as sources, Schenck says that the biography of the artist has nothing to do with appropriating images, explaining, "It's about being a Pop artist and appropriating from anywhere and everywhere." Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014.

York (not unlike Schenck's poor reception with his western subjects many years later). Leigh was constantly frustrated with the National Academy of Design for its favoring of the Paris-trained artists over those with Munich training, but also for what DuBois characterized as the "prejudice [that] had developed among a few members against western paintings."²⁹⁶

For the landscape in *A Flight from Destiny*, Schenck used Edgar Payne's *Desert Nomads*, a painting he owned at the time (figure 49). Schenck simplified Payne's expressive brushwork into hard outlines of shapes in the foreground sagebrush, buttes in the middle distance, and immense clouds in the sky. Payne (1883-1947) studied for a short time at the Chicago Art Institute and first visited the southwest in 1916 under contract to paint for the Santa Fe Railroad (coincidentally, Leigh also spent the summer in Arizona in 1916, likely close to where Payne was painting in Navajo country).²⁹⁷ Payne eventually settled in Southern California, but he made frequent trips to Arizona and New Mexico to paint and sketch.²⁹⁸ *Desert Nomads* was likely based on landscapes Payne had sketched on the Navajo Indian reservation in Arizona in the 1930s.²⁹⁹

Notably, both Leigh and Payne were painting subjects of the American West in the early twentieth century, well past the date of Turner's "end of the frontier." Each artist lived in a metropolitan area most of his life, but an interest and romance with images that recalled earlier days persisted and their paintings reflected a longing and nostalgia for that time. Evoking the

²⁹⁶ June DuBois, *W.R. Leigh: The Definitive Illustrated Biography* (Kansas City, MO: The Lowell Press, 1977), 112.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁹⁸ Clemmer, *Serenading the Light*, 66-67. See also Patricia Trenton and Scott A. Shields, *Edgar Payne: The Scenic Journey* (Petaluma, CA: Pomegranate Communications, Inc.; Pasadena: Pasadena Museum of California Art, 2012), 177-219.

²⁹⁹ The date of *Desert Nomads* to 1930s is based on the date of the sketch, *Three Navajo Riders*, c. 1930, which is the basis for the mounted figures in the painting. See Peter H. Hassrick, "Edgar Payne's Southwest," in *Edgar Payne: The Scenic Journey*, 200.

past and the Old West was a powerful tool for painters in the early twentieth century as an escape, or flight, from modern life.

In the late nineteenth century, antimodernist sentiments spread in reaction to what was perceived to be an “overcivilized” modern existence. In his study of antimodernism at the turn of the twentieth century, T.J. Jackson Lears observed several characteristics of antimodernism that defined American culture in the decades leading up to 1920. Americans of the middle and upper classes longed for intense experiences of real life. These experiences, they believed, were outside the bounds of Victorian respectability.³⁰⁰ The American West and the (perceived) life of a cowboy seemed to offer an antidote to “‘overcivilized’ modern existence.” Men, especially, could select characteristics of cowboy life that seemed most opposite their own existence and embrace ideologies of gritty hard work, uncouth and lawless behavior, uncomplicated existence, and hands-on experiences.³⁰¹ By the turn of the twentieth century, the image of the cowboy had become more refined through the writing of Wister and illustrations by Remington (see Chapter One), but the myth of the cowboy retained romanticized freedoms. These conditions encouraged a longing for an Old West and for a “simple life” opposite what seemed to be complicated in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century conditions. These sentiments and interest in the Old West continued well into the early twentieth century when Leigh and Payne were painting.

Antimodern sentiments, arguably, continue today. But like the sentiments of the past, contemporary desires are complicated. Antimodernism is not a simple escapism but a yearning

³⁰⁰ For a study of the environment in which antimodernism started, and a thorough description of the characteristics of anti-modernism: T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-58.

³⁰¹ While Lears does not reference cowboys directly, there are many ways in which the antimodern sentiments align with the ways cowboys and the West are described at the time. Owen Wister claims the cowboy comes from a similar lineage as a medieval knight in his 1895 article, “The Evolution of the Cow Puncher,” and Theodore Roosevelt forever linked the Dakotas with manliness after a lengthy stay in the 1880s as a cure for neurasthenia. See Owen Wister, “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 91, no. 544 (September 1895): 602-617 and Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1903).

for the coexistence of a simple life along with progress. This tension between old and new, and the complexity of the dueling desires, was the central theme of one Schenck's all-time favorite films: *Hud*. Derived from Larry McMurtry's novel *Horseman, Pass By* (1961), the 1963 film takes its name from a main character, Hud, played by Paul Newman. *Horseman, Pass By* was an early and important example of a new approach to the West in American literature in which traditional values of the old and new were blurred and sometimes reversed.³⁰² The old rancher, Homer, represents the Old West and the passing of a way of life, while the younger Hud is a symbol of modernity. Lonnie, the teenage narrator, is torn between his grandfather's way of life (reflecting the powerful myth of the cowboy) and the lure of modernity. Through Lonnie's eyes, the tension between old and new is heightened.³⁰³ *Horseman, Pass By* adopts the familiar stereotypes of the Western but undercuts the readers' expectations by blurring the roles of old and new, un-romanticizing the cowboy lifestyle, and presenting complex relationships between the past and the present. While Schenck never appropriated a film still from *Hud* (Paul Newman was too famous), Schenck adopted aspects of Hud's lifestyle for his own. For example, Schenck purchased a Cadillac similar to the one Hud drove in the film, which appeared in many of his paintings and prints from the 1980s (figure 55).

The desire for the Old West *and* modern conveniences simultaneously is constantly mixed, even in the late decades of the twentieth century. When Schenck relocated to Jackson, Wyoming in the 1970s, Jackson was advertised as the "Last of the Old West," an unchanging remnant of the Anglo-American West of cattle ranches and cowboys. Jackson's "Old West" was, in fact, a created identity to attract tourists. Jackson, along with other rural Wyoming towns,

³⁰² Pauline Sarll, "Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers: A Revisionary Reading of Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 100.

³⁰³ Andrew Macdonald, "The Passing Frontier in McMurtry's *Hud/Horseman Pass By*," in *Larry McMurtry, Unredeemed Dreams: A Collection of Bibliography, Essays, and Interviews*, ed. Dorey Schmidt (Edinburg, TX: School of Humanities, Pan American University, 1978), 7.

participated in a “wilding up” of the West. City leaders and tourist boosters celebrated its inaccessibility (“off the beaten path”) as a virtue, recreated shootouts and cattle drives, and encouraged residents—Anglo and American Indian alike—to wear traditional “Old West” clothing to appear more picturesque (or authentic) for tourist’s photographs.³⁰⁴ The promotion was successful, and the Teton County population multiplied more than three times between 1970 and 2000, growing from fewer than 5,000 residents in 1970 to more than 18,000 by the turn of the twenty-first century.³⁰⁵ Historian Donald Worster called this condition the “Western Paradox,” or a desire and devotion to two different dreams of the West: one is a life of nature and personal freedoms, a life of the past; and the other is technology and responsibilities, the life of the future.³⁰⁶ This “western paradox” explained what residents of Jackson, Wyoming faced as they transitioned to a tourist destination: how could they preserve the “Last of the Old West,” yet attract people to a world-class ski resort, accessible through a fully serviced airport?

Schenck’s protagonist in *A Flight from Destiny* embodies both old and new. Schenck’s appropriation of Leigh and Payne represents the “old,” while the “new” is Schenck’s flattened painting style. Schenck presents both past and present, but there is some ambiguity in the presentation; once again, as in *Hud*, there is a complex relationship between old and new, good and bad. Looking back to Schenck’s source, Leigh’s *Fleeing Bandit* is galloping through a narrow canyon, likely running from the law. Leigh employed a similar composition and theme in other paintings of the time, again with a mounted cowboy fleeing (see, for example, *An Argument with the Sheriff*, 1919, Gilcrease Museum). From the title, the viewer learns that the

³⁰⁴ Lawrence Culver, "From 'Last of the Old West' to 'First of the New West': Tourism and Transformation in Jackson Hole, Wyoming," in *Imagining the Big Open: Nature, Identity, and Play in the New West*, ed. Elain M. Bapis, Liza Nicholas, Thomas J. Harvey (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 164, 70.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁰⁶ Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81, 84, 90.

mounted cowboy is the bad guy—a bandit. But from the narrative and viewer’s perspective of the action, it is unclear if the viewer is meant to identify with the running bandit or the chasing lawmen. Leigh places the viewer on the side of the cowboy, or bandit, sharing his point of view, looking back at the unseen pursuer. Soon, if the horse’s gallop continues at a frantic pace, the viewer will also be caught up in the action of running away. Leigh blurs the traditional roles of good and bad by placing the viewer in the bandit’s perspective.

Another western painting from the early twentieth century similarly confuses good and bad in the Old West. Russell’s *When Law Dulls the Edge of Chance* depicts Canadian mounted police capturing horse thieves (figure 56). The good guys are identified as the Mounties, whom Russell admired. But, it is unclear if the heroes of Russell’s painting are the police or the horse thieves. As the pose in Russell’s self-portrait suggests, he may have identified with the thieves and even painted the cowboy at the right as a self-portrait (figure 57).³⁰⁷ Russell, like others at the time, perceived activities outside the constraints of Victorian life (and rules) to be a perfect antidote to an over-civilized modern existence, and he glorified the ideologies of lawlessness and freedom associated with times past.

In *A Flight from Destiny*, the bandit may represent a more personal running from the law. On a biographical note, when asked about the title, Schenck conveyed a story about a time when the FBI searched his property to look for illegally acquired Native pottery.³⁰⁸ Schenck reflected that this happened right around the time of this painting, so the “fleeing from destiny” reflects running from the law and the possibility of jail time.

³⁰⁷ This interpretation of the right middleground figure has been suggested by historian and Charles M. Russell expert, Brian Dippie, and supported by art historian Peter H. Hassrick. Charles M. Russell curatorial files, Whitney Western Art Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

³⁰⁸ Schenck, telephone interview with the author, August 29, 2014. An undated clipping from the Schenck curatorial files in the Whitney Western Art Museum, Buffalo Bill Center of the West titled, “Artists indicted for Looting Indian Site,” further explains the incident. Ultimately, the FBI did not find illegally acquired pottery, and Schenck was not arrested.

Old and new collide in other paintings by Schenck from the 1980s. *Up in Smoke* depicts an Indian seated on a bluff with mortgage figures for a land deal sprawled and scribbled across the canvas (figure 58). The combination of word and image seems to relate to graffiti artists of the 1980s, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, but even Schenck's scrawled handwriting is calculated, projected on the canvas and painted in his standard paint-by-number technique. The mix of romantic images of the Old West with superimposed graffiti seems to show a disjointed relationship between past and present and draws attention to the interpretation of history. The ideologies of western expansion prioritized Anglo settlement. "According to this myth-historiography," historian Richard Slotkin wrote, "the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and 'progressive' civilization."³⁰⁹

Instead of accepting the myth, Schenck draws attention to rich and complex social and political implications of the combination of a lone Indian sitting hunched over a small fire with land deal notes over the top. Schenck's source for the Indian figure points to the early twentieth century and the scrawled text could reference conflict over Indian lands from around the same time. Specifically, it may reference the Pueblo land issues of the 1920s. In 1922, New Mexico Senator Olaf Bursum proposed a bill in Congress that would legitimize land claims of non-Indians who had resided on Pueblo lands. The bill would have significantly reduced the size of the Pueblo reservation, but Pueblo leaders heard about the controversial bill that would essentially give Pueblo lands to white squatters. After the leaders testified against the bill, it was

³⁰⁹ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992. Paperback edition. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 10.

defeated.³¹⁰ In 1924, the Pueblo Lands Act finally recognized the land rights of the Pueblo peoples and provided compensation for their property. American Indian land rights and land deals with the U.S. Government have been especially contentious throughout our nation's history, beginning with the ideology of Manifest Destiny.

The “destiny” in *A Flight from Destiny* may refer to Manifest Destiny. Schenck's bandit running to the left of the canvas (opposite the original) also runs to the West, if the canvas aligns to the cardinal points. At the heart of Manifest Destiny was a belief in cultural and racial superiority, which encouraged and sanctified occupying land set aside for Native tribes and using extremes to subdue Native people. Schenck's own act of editing Payne's *Desert Nomads* removed the Navajo Indians from the landscape and replaced them with the cowboy, or bandit. Schenck appropriated, or took, the landscape, and his cowboy is a thief (a bandit) that took the Navajo land. Yet, the interpretation is still ambiguous. As the cowboy moves over the landscape, the shadow looms large. Is the cowboy running from his destiny to be transformed into a myth?

Projections and Shadows: The West as it Never Was

The large shadow in *A Flight from Destiny* further contributes to the meaning of the painting. Formally, the shadow serves to flatten the painting and emphasizes the cloudscape as a flattened backdrop. Like Tansey's painting on a movie screen, Schenck's “screen” contributes to the cinematic characteristics of *A Flight from Destiny*. Schenck's shadow functions more symbolically as a projection of the myth of the American West, magnified and looming, ever-present, but also shallow and flat. The projection comes to the foreground, but we should also be mindful of what is hidden in the shadows.

³¹⁰ Joseph P. Sánchez, Robert L. Spude, and Art Gómez, *New Mexico: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 211.

The shadow builds upon the interpretation of the painting as a rider fleeing his destiny of modernization and civilization because the shadow evokes the literary tale of *Peter Pan*. Although *Peter Pan* is a British tale, the reference to a boy who does not want to grow up is an appropriate analogy for the American West. In his survey of American literature, literary critic Leslie Fielder characterizes the American novel as juvenile. To support his argument, he cites the tendency for authors of the early and mid-nineteenth century to avoid sex, marriage, responsibility, and civilization in general.³¹¹ The Old West fulfills this juvenile fantasy as a “never land”—a lawless place with no rules, few women, and no expectations to “settle down,” which instead celebrates the roaming lifestyle of a cowboy. Schenck’s cowboy gallops away from his shadow and marriage, a family, and responsibility in a flight toward freedom and the Old West.

The West, for over 100 years, has been a place for (Anglo) boys and men to play out their fantasies. Film and television fulfilled and perpetuated the American West as playground. Leone reiterated this notion when he once called his films “fairy tales for grown-ups.”³¹² Leone aimed to create convincing tales, primarily geared to male audiences, where the viewer suspends disbelief and buys into the enchantment. Art historian Lynn Rigberg once characterized Schenck’s world of western art as “a psychological locker room . . . [where] the men were men.”³¹³ Men can play and imagine with the cowboys, pistols, horses, and wide-open spaces of the landscape. Women are less-often represented in Schenck’s art, and, when he does include them, they are often portrayed as sexy counterparts to his cowboys (often appearing nude except for the requisite cowgirl hat).

³¹¹ Leslie A. Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), xvii-xxi.

³¹² Frayling, *Once Upon a Time in Italy*, 15.

³¹³ Rigberg, *Bill Schenck 1968-1983: Paintings and Serigraphs*, n.p.

The shadowed images projected onto the sky-plane also reference a movie-like projection on the “screen.” A 1915 painting by Charles M. Russell, *When Shadows Hint Death*, adds to the interpretation of shadows in *A Flight from Destiny* (figure 59). In the darkened foreground of *When Shadows Hint Death*, two white men calm their horses while watching shadows of Indians, recognizable by their headdresses, projected by the setting sun on the rocky canyon opposite the chasm. The actual Indians presumably ride along the cliffs above the two men. In his analysis of *When Shadows Hint Death*, Alexander Nemerov describes the shadows as “cinematic” and connects Russell’s projected shadows with the artist’s interest in film.³¹⁴ The shadows of Indians in Russell’s painting were a sign of an earlier America. They stand on the edge of a cliff, against a setting sun that implies imminent disappearance. Russell’s title, *When Shadows Hint Death*, could be read two different ways: as a feared encounter when cattlemen are outnumbered by Indians, or as the pending death or demise of the Native tribes. The “death” in Russell’s painting, linked with western films, prefigures Tansey’s *End of Painting*. The demise of American Indians, western subjects, and painting all seem to relate directly to film.

The projection of shadows on the sky and Russell’s reference to the demise of Native peoples also brings to mind another painting from the early twentieth century that would provide a useful comparison to Schenck’s *A Flight from Destiny*: Remington’s *With the Eye of the Mind* (1909, figure 60). In the foreground of *With the Eye of the Mind*, three mounted American Indians pause on a ridge. Their horses face to the right of the canvas, but all three figures turn to look behind them, to the clouds in the center left. The most pronounced cloud outlines the shape of a horse and rider. One Indian raises his right arm, as if to beckon the cloud or figure to follow. The shadows cast by the setting sun rise from the bottom of the canvas, covering the foreground landscape and creeping up the legs and bellies of the horses, even reaching the Indian’s

³¹⁴ Nemerov, “Projecting the Future: Film and Race in the Art of Charles Russell,” 74-75.

moccasins and leggings. Remington communicates a sense of foreboding with the use of the shadow, which is starting to swallow the figures. Nemerov interprets *With the Eye of the Mind* as Remington's own reflection on the past and his task of interpreting and copying an Old West that appears unclear in hindsight.³¹⁵

Imbedded within the lament for the Old West around the turn of the twentieth century was a complicated attitude toward American Indians. Once American Indians no longer posed a violent threat to settlement, and they seemed to be disappearing, an interest and desire to understand and recover the traditional Indian emerged.³¹⁶ The conflicting view around the turn of the twentieth century reflected the desire to both assimilate Indians into modern life but also to preserve the picturesque Indian of the past—another “western paradox.” *With the Eye of the Mind* is an example of Remington's late paintings that often included metaphors for loss and distance.³¹⁷ These paintings tended to be more symbolic and mysterious than Remington's previous illustration-based paintings. Remington lamented the passing of the Old West, but seemed to also accept the fate of the Indians as a disappearing race in the face of progress.

Santa Fe artist Michael Scott (born 1952) also uses art history to criticize the way in which the American West is presented. For Scott, art is performance and drama, and in a recent series entitled *Buffalo Bulb's Wild West*, he imagines western American art as stage for

³¹⁵ Alexander Nemerov, “Frederic Remington: Within and Without the Past,” *American Art* 5, no 1/2 (Winter/Spring 1991): 54.

³¹⁶ See, for example, Simon Pokagon, “The Future of the Red Man,” in *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader*, 210-220 and George Bird Grinnell, “The Wild Indian,” *Atlantic Monthly* 83, no. 495 (January 1899): 20-29.

³¹⁷ Critics also took note of Remington's late works and called them a success. Of this painting, a critic for the *New-York Tribune* observed, “There is not a false note anywhere. The picture is full of air and wind and light, and these elements seem in some subtle way to justify the high key.” Of the full exhibition at Knoedler Gallery, *With the Eye of the Mind* was singled out as the best painting. C.R., “American Art: New Paintings by Mr. Remington and Mr. Dewey,” *New-York Tribune*, December 6, 1908.

illusion.³¹⁸ In his painting “*Curley*” *General Custer’s Scout*, Scott uses the projected shadow in much the same way as Schenck does (figure 61). He appropriated the image of the Crow Scout, Curley, from an early twentieth-century postcard (figure 62). Curley had become something of a celebrity following the defeat of George Armstrong Custer and his troops at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Curley was one of the few who survived the battle on the side of the American soldiers. By 1884, he lived at the Crow Reservation on the bank of the Little Bighorn River. The postcard presents a conflicted view of the Indian. On the one hand, Curley was Crow, one of the tribes who fought valiantly against the troops during the Indian Wars. Yet, on the other hand, because Curley served as a scout with Custer, a “good guy,” he was celebrated. His picturesque image graces a collectible postcard as an example of a “good Indian,” one who still looked traditional (with eagle feathers in his hair and braids), but one who was also assimilated and employed by the United States army.

A shadow of Curley’s silhouette is projected on the backdrop landscape, which is based on a painting by William Jacob Hays, Sr. (1830-1875, figure 63). Hays completed *A Herd of Bison Crossing the Missouri River* in 1863 as a celebration of the great herds of bison that once filled the Plains. *A Herd of Bison Crossing the Missouri River* was part of a series that warned of the future demise of the bison herds. This scene is peaceful and serene, yet the sun is setting on the era of the bison. The sunset and the shadow hint death, which nearly came to fruition by the 1880s when bison were near extinction. Scott’s landscape, notably with bison removed in the translation, was a mere backdrop, a thing of the past.

Shadows hide what remains behind the projected image. If Schenck projects the romantic view of the cowboy as lawless, independent, and free in the foreground, what might be hidden in

³¹⁸ Michael Scott conveyed details about this series of paintings to the author in many conversations in June 2012-September 2012; and again in July and August 2014. See also Michael Scott, Elizabeth Hutton Turner, and Richen Lhamo, *Buffalo Bulb’s Wild West* (Santa Fe: Gerald Peters Gallery, 2010).

the shadows? In another series of paintings from the 1980s, Schenck suggests a western subculture riddled with sex and drugs might be obscured in the shadow cast by the western myth. *Flamingo Flakes* is a portrait of the artist wearing a leather jacket, flamingo t-shirt, reflector glasses, and a cowboy hat, framed within the border of a Kellogg's Corn Flakes cereal box (figure 64). He stares at the viewer, posed with one hand on his hip while a cigarette dangles from his lips.

Schenck's painting relates to a 1980 Kellogg's Corn Flakes box that featured model, athlete, and women's track coach Dee Todd in the center (figure 65). Todd was the first African-American woman to appear on a Kellogg's box. Celebrities chosen for the box covers were role models and athletes used to promote good values to Americans while they ate breakfast. Any hint of negative publicity, such as sex or drugs, was grounds for removal from the box cover (Miss America winner Vanessa Williams was removed from a Kellogg's box in 1984 after nude photographs of her surfaced). Schenck replaced the wholesome model with his macho cowboy, whose nefarious behavior is signified by the banner advertising "Fortified with 8 Essential Drugs," rather than the original "Eight Essential Vitamins." Schenck's image of a "desperate living" cowboy superimposed on a product meant to celebrate American heroes further draws attention to the difference between the projected image and the hidden version. The cowboy as an iconic figure representing ideologies of freedom and rugged individualism usurps the hidden, derelict version of the cowboy. Schenck's cowboy is confrontational and full of attitude. He has no horse nearby, only a trailer home and cheap plastic flamingos, which are visible in the reflection in his sunglasses. *Flamingo Flakes* criticizes the cowboy as American role model and questions our culture's undying fascination with the western myth.

Print the Myth

As Schenck's *A Flight from Destiny* demonstrates, art history can be a powerful source for a dialogue about the way in which visual images inform our perceptions of the American West. In the way he layers references, Schenck uses postmodern strategies of appropriation, pastiche, and humor to reveal the construction of stereotypes and myth about the American West. Schenck looks to the past and appropriates the fiction, the memory, and the myth of the West. In postmodern fashion, as Jameson explained, "the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture."³¹⁹ As Schenck said, "I'm not that interested in Western history, I'm drawn to the Western myth."³²⁰ The western myth is a rich subject for Schenck, and one that is complex and revealing in his hand. He appropriates iconic subject matter and associated ideologies and transforms them into flattened, Pop Art style paintings with vivid colors and hard-edged shapes. The layers provide access points for pleasure and enjoyment or for a deeper criticism. At the end of the movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a newspaperman interviews the main character, Ransom Stoddard (Jimmy Stewart). In a concluding line, the newspaperman says to Jimmy, "You know, when the myth is better than the story, print the myth." Schenck claims this is one of his greatest philosophies.³²¹

³¹⁹ Jameson, "Excerpts from *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," 321.

³²⁰ Schenck, in Johnny D. Boggs, "The Return of Bill Schenck," *Western Art and Architecture* (Summer/Fall 2011), accessed June 13, 2014, <http://www.westernartandarchitecture.com/articles/western-art-and-architecture/summer-fall-2011/149/the-return-of-bill-schenck.html>.

³²¹ Schenck, in Michael Abatemarco, "Pop Goes the West: Bill Schenck's Varicolored Take on Cowboys & Indians," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, July 26, 2013, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.santafenewmexican.com/pasatiempo/art/gallery_openings/article_198b034a-f55c-11e2-9a2a-0019bb30f31a.html.

Chapter 5: Re-painting History: Reversing Stereotypes in the West

In *History is Painted by the Victors* by Kent Monkman (born 1965), towering snow-covered peaks pierce through the clouds in the distance (figure 66). A crystal clear aquamarine lake occupies most of the middle ground, and the landscape is pristine and untouched, evoking a view of wilderness as an American cultural symbol. The drama of nature is matched by dozens of small figures: along the shore, standing and reclining male nudes gather in clumps, boxing, lounging, and swimming in carefree reverie amidst discarded clothes and weapons. The figures commune with nature, uninhibited by clothing and the corruption of civilization. In the bottom center of the canvas, a figure stands at an easel with her back to the viewer. She has browned skin and long black hair blowing glamorously in the breeze and is nude except for thigh-high pink platform boots. She glances over her right shoulder to meet the viewer's gaze while her paintbrush is poised above her canvas.

The subject matter, meticulous painting style, large scale, and decorative gold frame suggest a nineteenth-century grand landscape. Yet, the figure with her neon pink boots disrupts the temporal understanding of the painting, as if she wandered into the frame from another time period. The figure is Miss Chief Eagle Testickle (a play on the words “mischief,” “egotistical,” and, of course, “testicles”), Monkman's drag queen alter ego. “Miss Chief is a time traveller,” observed art historian Gerald McMaster, “moving in and out of history as a self-inserting corrective.”³²² What Monkman hopes to correct by appropriating nineteenth-century paintings are the assumptions and ideologies embodied within the landscape paintings. Miss Chief is going to re-write, or re-paint, the scene before her, taking control over the image of Native peoples by

³²² Gerald McMaster, “The Geography of Hope,” in *Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief*, ed. David Liss and Shirley Madill (Victoria, B.C.: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2008), 100.

giving the Indians agency and reversing the paradigm of cavalry dominance over Indians. Miss Chief meets the gaze of viewers and beckons them into the scene. Importantly, the viewer is asked to see the landscape and the figures from her point of view.

Monkman seduces viewers into *History is Painted by the Victors* with beautiful surfaces and familiar scenery. For the landscape in the painting, Monkman meticulously copied Albert Bierstadt's *Mount Corcoran* (figure 67). In the tradition of learning from historic masterpieces, Monkman emulates Bierstadt's painting stroke by loving brushstroke. Through his mastery and admiration of Bierstadt's style, Monkman reclaims the landscape by copying the painting.³²³ The addition of Miss Chief and the nude men insert a subversive twist into the romanticized landscape of the original. Where there were previously no figures, Monkman populates the wilderness with men, appropriating poses from Thomas Eakins's photographs and paintings of nude males (figures 68 and 69).

The figures in *History is Painted by the Victors* represent George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh Cavalry, who were defeated by Plains Indian tribes in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. The "history" portrayed in the painting is a relaxing and enjoyable moment a couple days or hours before the soldiers' demise.³²⁴ As the "victor" of the battle, an American Indian, Miss Chief literally creates the narrative as the viewer watches, rewriting (re-painting) history. Rather than paint the scene in a style of Euro-American naturalism, Miss Chief's canvas is filled with simplified figures and horses rendered in a pictograph style typical of Plains Indian hide painting—further emphasizing the point of view (figure 70). In Monkman's hands, roles are

³²³ Art historian Kate Morris has been careful to point out that Monkman's methods are not intended to deconstruct Bierstadt's landscape paintings, but rather, his attitude is one of admiration. Through Monkman's appropriation of the landscape, he adds his voice to that of Bierstadt. Kate Morris, "Stepping Out: Kent Monkman's Performative Landscape" (lecture, College Art Association, New York, February 12, 2015), and Kate Morris, conversation with the author, February 12, 2015. Morris is also currently working on a book about Kent Monkman.

³²⁴ Kent Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015.

reversed and the traditionally dominant white culture has become the passive subject and object of the gaze, painted and controlled by the traditionally subordinate culture of Native peoples. Further, through the transgendered nature of Miss Chief, Monkman adds another layer to this exploration of cultural role reversals and traditional projections of masculinity in the West.

Draped in the authority of the nineteenth-century art, Monkman playfully proposes an alternate mythology of America, shifting traditional power structures, and empowering Native peoples to participate in a dialogue with the traditionally Euro-American narrative. Through a close examination of *History is Painted by the Victors* and Monkman's sources for appropriation, this chapter will examine Monkman's use of the authority of western landscape painting and American art history to comment on cultural assumptions of dominance and perceptions of authenticity. Instead, Monkman suggests an alternate narrative about history representing the indigenous perspective. Monkman's paintings rely on the audience's knowledge of and familiarity with the nineteenth-century paintings as a starting point. As Monkman's narrative unfolds on the surface of the painting, it invites a reassessment of those sources, revealing hidden meanings that not only enhance the reading of Monkman's painting but also encourage a reconsideration of the past. History is never fixed, Monkman reminds us, but is constantly being written and re-written.

Kent Monkman: Biography and Early Career

Kent Monkman is a member of the Fisher River Cree Nation of northern Manitoba.³²⁵ He was born in St. Mary's, Ontario, his mother's hometown. His parents were devout Christians and had met during missionary work. His father is a Cree minister, and his mother is of Irish-English

³²⁵ Gerald Hannon provides a thorough biography of Kent Monkman's childhood in Gerald Hannon, "The Pink Indian," *Toronto Life*, September 2011.

descent. For the first two years of his life, Monkman's family of seven (he has four siblings) lived in Shamattawa, in northern Manitoba. Then the family moved to Winnipeg, where his father's family still lived at the time. In Winnipeg, Monkman was greatly influenced by his great-grandmother, who was Monkman's primary connection to his Native heritage (she spoke mostly Cree). Later as an adult, Monkman came to realize that his great-grandmother, who was born in 1875, was also his direct connection to the forced relocation of Native peoples in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This link to his tribe's history was an important motivator for Monkman to make his audience aware of the hidden histories of indigenous peoples in the landscape—hidden in the way that they are not even present in the landscape paintings. Colonization and dispossession, related to his personal family history as well as to the broader indigenous history in Canada, are issues that often trigger ideas for paintings.³²⁶

Monkman maintained a close relationship with his Cree relatives, even though his family lived in a largely Anglo neighborhood in Winnipeg. Monkman's father purposefully assimilated his family into white Canadian society, believing that his children would benefit from the non-Native public schools. Monkman recalled that neighbors sometimes harassed his father because he was Cree. Monkman, however, got along with fellow students and neighborhood children and did well in school.

Monkman's interest in art led him to Ontario's Sheridan College at the age of seventeen. He graduated with a degree as an illustrator and worked with theater and set design both while at school and after. In one of his first jobs, Monkman rendered storyboards for television commercials. Drawing dozens of storyboards a week helped Monkman refine his skills as a

³²⁶ Kent Monkman, "Q & A: Kent Monkman," *8th Fire*, November 2011, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/2011/11/kent-monkman-1.html>.

draftsman. In efforts to separate his job from his art, Monkman specifically avoided illustration and narrative in his early paintings and instead experimented with an abstract painting style blended with underlying texts and images that explored his Cree heritage and identity as a homosexual man. However, Monkman soon realized that the most effective way of communicating his ideas about what he called “colonized sexuality,” or the impact of the Church’s repression of Aboriginal two-spirited sexuality, was to embrace his training and use a representational style. For his source material, Monkman looked to American and Canadian painters from the early nineteenth century such as George Catlin and Paul Kane (1810-1871), who painted native peoples and subsequently defined the image of Indians for white audiences.³²⁷

As a young man, Catlin saw a group of Plains Indians in Philadelphia on a tour of eastern cities following treaty negotiations in Washington, DC. This chance meeting prompted Catlin to abandon his law career and start what would become a lifelong obsession to record the “manners, customs, and conditions of the North American Indians” before what was believed to be their inevitable demise.³²⁸ His self-proclaimed mission was to “rescue from oblivion . . . their primitive looks and customs” with his brush and pen.³²⁹ He felt they were disappearing so he set out to preserve their image. Catlin aimed to visit every tribe of Indians on the continent and he was the first artist to travel beyond the Mississippi River to paint native peoples in their home. In

³²⁷ Hannon, "The Pink Indian," 60. A note about terminology: Indigenous peoples of North America have held many labels over the last 200 years. In the United States, the terms “American Indian” or “Native American” are primarily used. Canadians call their indigenous population “First Nations.” Monkman commented that the histories of indigenous people in North America are all related—they did not recognize borders because they did not have borders. Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015.

³²⁸ Catlin published a two-volume report in 1844 based on several years traveling among the Plains Indians. See George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, vol. I and II, reprint (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973). Several good monographs have been published about George Catlin. Most recently, the Smithsonian American Art Museum hosted an exhibition of Catlin’s Indian Gallery. See George Gurney and Therese Thau Heyman, *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2002).

³²⁹ Catlin, ca. 1842, as quoted in Marjorie Halpin, introduction to *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, by George Catlin, vol. I, vii.

1832 he took his first extensive trip, traveling more than 1800 miles up the Missouri River from St. Louis by steamship. Catlin's many journeys provided ample material for his books and more than five hundred portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings that would comprise his Indian Gallery. Catlin's images made a lasting impression on American and European audiences in the artist's lifetime and still resonate today. Catlin exhibited his Indian Gallery in cities throughout the eastern United States and Europe, lecturing as an authority on the Native Americans and everyday activities depicted in his paintings. Sometimes Catlin brought Native people with him to perform for the audiences.

Canadian artist Paul Kane, Catlin's contemporary, similarly devoted his career to painting Native peoples of Canada. Kane grew up in the city of York (which would become Toronto in 1834). With ambitions to become an artist, he studied in Europe for a few years in the early 1840s, where he encountered Catlin's Indian Gallery exhibition in London. Catlin's exhibition had a profound impression on Kane, who, after returning to Canada in 1845, vowed to "devote whatever talent and proficiency I possessed to the painting of a series of pictures illustrative of the North American Indian and scenery."³³⁰ From 1845 to 1848, Kane traveled through Canada in search of subjects for his art. The scope of his project and the tone and information in his resulting publications are remarkably similar to Catlin's work. Kane, for example, echoed Catlin's sentiments about time and the inevitable disappearance of Canada's First Peoples; "All traces of his footsteps are fast being obliterated from his once favorite haunts, and those who seek to study his native manners and customs must travel far through the pathless forest to find them," wrote Kane in 1859.³³¹

³³⁰ Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America from Canada to Vancouver's Island and Oregon Through the Hudson's Bay Company Territory and Back Again*, originally published in London 1859. Reprinted in J. Russell Harper, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 51.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

Catlin and Kane had a profound impact on the image and understanding of Native peoples and in the development of an ideology supporting the conquest of North America. Both artists claimed to be documenting the tribes and rendering faithful portrayals of the people and their ways of life. Certainly, the two artists journeyed throughout North America capturing likenesses of their sitters, which contributed an air of authenticity to their work. But, this interpretation of Catlin and Kane denies the subjectivity in their depictions, which was a strong motivator for Monkman. “For many, these Romantic visions of the New World and its Aboriginal people were assumed to be literal depictions, a kind of reportage photography of the wild landscape and the ‘romantic savage.’ . . . [Catlin and Kane] took a significant license in their paintings,” Monkman points out. Catlin and Kane were influenced by the ideologies of the “Noble Savage,” or one who lives in nature beyond civilization’s corrupt influence. In their portraits and genre scenes, neither Catlin nor Kane included evidence of modern civilization, such as European-style clothing or tools, maintaining the idea of isolation and primitiveness. Further, they preferred to paint their sitters in clothing reserved for special occasions because they thought it to be more picturesque. Catlin and Kane were influenced by, and helped shape, expectations of Native peoples.

“My work, in many ways, challenges their vision of the world,” said Monkman, “I’m reimagining their world and I’m bringing my own perspective, my own values and prejudices, to it.”³³² By emphasizing his personal and cultural biases, Monkman hopes to turn the tables and highlight the biases inherent in nineteenth-century depictions of Indians. Even though Catlin valued American Indian people and their culture, he carried a very particular perspective as a Euro-American. Richard West, scholar and member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, observed that pictorial representations of Native peoples in the nineteenth century were framed

³³² Kevin Browne, "Kent Monkman: Re-imagining History," *Royal Ontario Museum*, Winter 2007, 56.

against a “backdrop of limited understanding, misunderstanding, and outright stereotype.”³³³ The Noble Savage is one such stereotype. It is romantic in the vision of an untouched and picturesque people, but it also supports violence to counter the assumed savagery and threat of American Indians. Stereotypes like this helped to support the ideologies associated with Manifest Destiny, which included the idea that Native peoples had to be defeated in order for the country to advance. Their disappearance in this ideology was simply inevitable.

Introducing Miss Chief

Miss Chief first appeared in Monkman’s paintings in the early 2000s, inspired by an image by Catlin (figure 71). Catlin’s “The Author painting a Chief at the base of the Rocky Mountains,” featured a self-portrait of the artist in the act of painting and it was illustrated as a frontispiece to the first volume of Catlin’s *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*. A closer look at the drawing reveals the farce of the constructed scene. Catlin is poised at his easel while a group of men, women, and children gather to watch. The subject of the portrait is Mah-to-toh-pa, a Mandan chief. Yet, a painted tipi appears in the background, not the earth lodges that were home to the Mandan. Catlin included the image for his Euro-American audience as evidence of Catlin’s experience, but not for its accuracy. Given the great lengths that Catlin went through to validate his work, the mix-up is surprising, although revealing of the constructed nature of the image.³³⁴ Monkman created Miss Chief as an artistic persona to rival Catlin’s showmanship and to challenge the subjectivity and authority of the European gaze. Catlin projected himself as a kind of magician able to capture the likeness of

³³³ Richard West, introduction to *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, by George Gurney, 18.

³³⁴ Nancy K. Anderson discusses Catlin’s efforts to gather proof of the authenticity of his portraits in Nancy K. Anderson, “‘Curious Historical Artistic Data’: Art History and Western American Art,” in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*, ed. Jules David Prown (New Haven: Yale University Press/Yale University Art Gallery, 1992), 5-8.

his sitters. “I liked the idea of Miss Chief as an artistic shaman,” said Monkman “so I gave her the power to conjure and create these images.”³³⁵

Miss Chief eventually morphed from a character in paintings into a performance persona, coming alive to star in videos and photographs and to appear at museum events. In one of his first performances, Monkman transformed into Miss Chief by wearing a feather bonnet and floor-length trailer, platform high heel shoes, long black hair, a buckskin bikini bottom, and a breastplate for his debut in *Group of Seven Inches*, a 2004 performance at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (figure 72). The McMichael houses an extensive collection of paintings by Canada’s “Group of Seven” painters from the early twentieth century, who were celebrated for their nationalistic paintings of Canada’s landscapes (notably devoid of Indigenous people). Monkman’s title for the performance references this artistic history, with an effort to rewrite the history of “Seven” from Miss Chief’s perspective.

In the performance, Miss Chief staged an occupation where she enlisted naked white men as her models. Monkman relied on diaries and journals by Kane and Catlin for inspiration. Kane, especially, in his writing was perplexed when the “manners and characteristics” of Native Americans did not meet his expectations. To act out Kane’s observations in *Group of Seven Inches*, Miss Chief dressed the bewildered white men in more “authentic” European dress so they would better fit the expectations of what a European man should look like.³³⁶ Through the performance, Monkman reversed the dominant historical narrative and draws attention to the stereotypes.

Monkman often imaginatively travels back in time to rewrite history and insert his native identity and sexuality, “using humor to remind viewers of the fallibility of accepting notions of

³³⁵ Kent Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015.

³³⁶ For more information on this and other performances by Monkman, see the artist’s website: “Kent Monkman—Multidisciplinary Artist,” <http://www.kentmonkman.com/works.php?page=performance&start=1#>.

truth.”³³⁷ For example, Monkman’s *Duel After the Masquerade*, using Jean-Léon Gérôme’s painting of the same title, responded to Kane’s *Medicine Mask Dance* (figures 73, 74, and 75). In an artist’s statement about the painting (written by Miss Chief), Miss Chief explained that she suffered humiliation when Kane publicly declined to paint her likeness because her “‘authenticity’ was questionable, as was evidenced by the ‘contamination’ of European influence in my style of dress. [Kane] much preferred my buckskinned brethren who lived far north in the wilderness.”³³⁸ Miss Chief therefore challenged Kane to a painting duel, in which she, of course, triumphed. Always glamorous, in *Duel After the Masquerade*, Miss Chief wears a full-length white fur coat, a fur hat, and glass slippers; and carries a Louis Vuitton bag. In the painting, Monkman directs attention to the artistic choices and biases of Kane, and then turns Kane’s art (and his words) against him. By reversing the roles and the gaze, Monkman aimed to draw attention to the one-sided perspective present in the nineteenth-century examination of Native people.

Miss Chief is a glamorous character who flounces around in brightly colored eagle-feather bonnets and spiked-heeled pink shoes (figure 76). In his creation of Miss Chief, Monkman playfully combined Native stereotypes and pop culture. One direct inspiration came from Cher’s “half-breed” persona, created in the 1970s around the time of her hit song, “Half-Breed” (figure 77). In the music video, Cher wears a feather bonnet with a glittering beaded headband, a loincloth, and breastplate; she has bare feet and sings the song while seated on an Indian pony. The video is a potpourri of symbols and characteristics of multiple unrelated tribes: feather bonnets from Plains Indians and totem poles associated with the Northwest coast. Cher mixes and matches “Indian” characteristics and also confuses gender categories by wearing

³³⁷ Candice Hopkins and Kerry Swanson, *Shapeshifters, Time Travellers and Storytellers* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 2008), 6.

³³⁸ Monkman/Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, “artist statement,” reproduced in *ibid.*, 30.

items, such as the feather bonnet, reserved for the male warriors of the Plains tribes. Rumors in the 1970s about Cher's identity—that she really was part Native American—further added to the popularity of the song, which was the number one hit on the Billboard charts in 1973. The single sold more than one million copies and reached the top ten in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden.

A notable art-historical precedent for Monkman's cross-dressing alter ego is Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's transformation into Rose Sélavy, a name that playfully sounds like a French phrase, "Eros, c'est la vie" (eros, that's life!). Duchamp's friend and photographer, Man Ray, captured Rose Sélavy on film several times in 1921. Rose penned letters to friends, and Duchamp ultimately attributed paintings and readymades to this persona. By creating a female persona with attributes of beauty and eroticism, Duchamp complicated further the meaning and intentions of his work. Monkman's creation of, and conflation with, Miss Chief similarly opens the artwork to a more complex reading. Likewise, Monkman's introduction of a feminine persona challenges the masculine dominance and presence in the American West through rugged cowboys as well as the (male) noble savage.

Miss Chief is a trickster. In Native American mythology (including that of the Cree tribe, where the trickster is called Wisákechahk), the trickster takes on many guises, and is portrayed as both animal and human. Tricksters are amoral prank-playing characters who travel between worlds, between genders, and even surpass time. The prankster, however, is not all bad. "It is through his interrogation of the world around him, the way that he teases, taunts, and ridicules, that this shape-shifter has taught our people the importance of being humorously critical of our surroundings, others, and ourselves," explained Mique'l Icesis Askren, an art historian and

member of the Tsimshian Nation (Alaska).³³⁹ As a trickster, Monkman exists in a liminal space—what global studies thinker Jan Nederveen Pieterse claims requires a collective awareness of the space across and between boundaries. Pieterse calls this “Trickster knowledge, in which the Trickster is the joker in the pack, the jester, the fool, the shape-shifter who does not take seriously what society regards as sacred rules.”³⁴⁰

Monkman’s mixed heritage gives him a fluid identity. His identity can be characterized as contradictory—both adopting and rejecting traditions of Native cultures or European cultures at will. “To be thus both inside and outside the binary construction of the social norm,” observed art historian Jonathan D. Katz, “is a kind of privileged social position, one that opens the social norm itself to examination and results, as in Monkman’s best works, in the capacity to see, understand and even dismantle ideological structures from, as it were, the inside.”³⁴¹ As Katz noted, Monkman has used this dual heritage to his advantage. He further takes on an identity in perpetual destabilization by moving between a male and female persona, again harnessing the ability to see and convey information from multiple perspectives.

In Monkman’s created identity of Miss Chief, he expands beyond characteristics associated with his Cree heritage to include Canadian First Nations and American Indians more broadly. Swampy Cree, or Woods Cree, use horses, tipis, and birch-bark canoes; and they wear long hair, and shirts and dresses made from tanned leather. But, like Cher’s appropriation of attributes from multiple tribes to create “half-breed,” Monkman responds to popular stereotypes that define “Indian” more than adhering to characteristics or items associated with the Cree,

³³⁹ Mique’l Icesis Askren, “Larry Tee Harbor Jackson McNeil: Visual Mythmaker,” *Diversity and Dialogue: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2007*, ed. James H. Nottage (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 81.

³⁴⁰ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Hybridity, So What?: The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition,” *Theory Culture Society* 18, nos. 2-3 (2001): 239.

³⁴¹ Jonathan D. Katz, “Miss Chief is always interested in the latest European fashions,” in *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, ed. Michele Theriault (Montreal: Galerie Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2012), 22.

although knowledgeable viewers will recognize certain items, such as beadwork, that carry details and patterns associated with the Cree.

Miss Chief is a performer who plays “Indian” more than a reflection of Monkman’s cultural heritage. The performative aspect of “playing Indian” for Monkman was also influenced by another historic figure, Molly Spotted Elk, a Penobscot Indian who was a successful dancer in Paris in the early 1930s (figure 78). Mary Alice Nelson performed as an Indian when she adopted her stage name of Molly Spotted Elk, and in her costumes and dances she conformed to stereotypes of Indians that had very little to do with her own cultural heritage. “She had a long feathered headdress way before Cher,” observed Monkman. “Here was an actual Native American woman wearing the long headdress as part of her performance act in Paris. When I created Miss Chief, I was also thinking specifically about Native people performing for European audiences.”³⁴² Monkman’s performances as Miss Chief (in person and in his paintings) meet expectations and then criticize the expectations and definitions of “Indian” that have been created by the dominant culture. Catlin and Kane are powerful subjects for Monkman’s art because they had such a profound impact on defining Indians in the nineteenth century.

Euro-American artists since the nineteenth century have adopted the characteristics, clothing, and objects most used by the Plains tribes, such as eagle-feather bonnets, moccasins, hide shirts, and leggings, to symbolize all American Indians.³⁴³ As artist (and Comanche tribe member) Paul Chaat Smith caustically observed, all Indians are assumed to be Oglala Sioux, the “most famous, most studied, most photographed, most feared, most heroic Indians of them all. . .

³⁴² Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015. See also, “Molly Spotted Elk, From Poverty in Old Town, Maine, to Fame in Paris – and Back,” *New England Historical Society*, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/molly-spotted-elk-poverty-old-town-maine-fame-paris-back/>.

³⁴³ John C. Ewers, “The Emergence of the Plains Indian as Symbol of the North American Indian,” in *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1964* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 530-544.

. Best. Indians. Ever.”³⁴⁴ Smith’s comment is loaded with sarcasm, but it recognizes one of the challenges inherent in over 150 years of visual images—individual identity and tribal identity are amalgamated into one singular and generic definition. In paintings and performances, Monkman embraces assumptions and misunderstandings as a way to address stereotypes from the inside; he draws attention not to specifics but to the *perception* of cultural identities. These perceptions shaped by art, popular culture, movies, literature, historical clichés, and advertisements further contribute to Miss Chief’s shape-shifting persona.

Landscape and Meaning: Bierstadt and Manifest Destiny

The grand landscape is an essential part of the interpretation and meaning in Monkman’s paintings. Monkman said recently that he paints the Bierstadt landscape as a form of seduction: “When people see a beautiful landscape, they are drawn to it, because they are drawn to something beautiful.”³⁴⁵ Monkman was able to perfect the lush surfaces and depictions of sparkling lakes and towering mountains of Bierstadt during a 2004 visiting artist fellowship at the Smithsonian. In Washington, DC, he was able to see many Bierstadt paintings first-hand, which affirmed his technique.³⁴⁶ Once drawn in, Monkman asks the viewer to look beyond the surface, however. Like the way in which Miss Chief represents multiplicity and the fluidity of roles and identity, Monkman questions and builds upon assumptions about landscape. Upon closer inspection, the landscape also refuses a fixed meaning.

³⁴⁴ Paul Chaat Smith, “No Fixed Destination,” *Art Quantum: The Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art, 2009*, ed. James H. Nottage (Indianapolis: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 18-19.

³⁴⁵ Kent Monkman, “Stealing Landscapes,” Denver Art Museum, 2013, accessed November 27, 2014, <http://www.denverartmuseum.org/exhibitions/sovereign-independent-voices>.

³⁴⁶ Monkman especially admired the Bierstadt paintings at the Corcoran: *Mount Corcoran* and *The Last of the Buffalo*; as well as the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada, California*. Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015.

Volumes have been written about the importance of landscape in shaping the cultural identity for early American audiences looking to validate themselves in the face of Europe's rich cultural history. As the young nation established art and culture, the landscape became a defining feature for America, especially in art. Nineteenth-century landscape painter Thomas Cole believed "the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wilderness."³⁴⁷ Frequently, Cole included (very small) Indians in his landscape paintings to further emphasize the wildness of the wilderness, while also conveying an ideal of American Indians close to nature, untouched by the corruption of civilization (see, for example, *Falls of the Kaaterskill*, 1826, Westervelt-Warner Museum of Art Collection). As Americans expanded settlement westward, the landscape and the environment continued to play an important role.³⁴⁸ One of the earliest chroniclers of American art, Henry Tuckerman, advocated paintings with western subjects as the basis for a national art and praised Albert Bierstadt's *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* as "the American work of art which . . . afforded the greatest promise and pleasure" (figure 79).³⁴⁹

Monkman most frequently appropriates grand landscapes by Bierstadt (1830-1902). Bierstadt was born in Germany and emigrated to the United States with his family when he was just two years old, settling in New Bedford, Massachusetts. As a young man, Bierstadt trained in Düsseldorf, Germany for three years, learning the technical strengths of, as one American student said, "good composition, accurate drawing, and faithful and elaborate finish."³⁵⁰

Bierstadt built his reputation as an artist-explorer and preeminent painter of the American West

³⁴⁷ Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Art, 1700-1960*, 102.

³⁴⁸ Visual representations of landscape are closely tied to politics, history, and literature of the American West. Western historian Donald Worster's writing is especially insightful on this topic. See Donald Worster, *An Unsettled Country: Changing Landscapes of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

³⁴⁹ Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 389.

³⁵⁰ George Henry Hall to the American Art Union, October 28, 1850, as quoted in Linda S. Ferber, "Albert Bierstadt: The History of a Reputation," in *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, ed. Nancy K. Anderson (New York: Hudson Hills Press; Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1990), 23.

following his first journey to the Rocky Mountains in the spring of 1859 with a survey team of Colonel Frederick West Lander. Bierstadt subsequently supplemented this first experience with many inspirational trips to the Rocky Mountains, quickly establishing himself as a painter of western landscapes on a grand scale.

In the 1860s, Bierstadt's large-scale paintings of the American West "represented a brilliant orchestration of the landscape vocabulary of the Romantic sublime and capitalized upon public curiosity about the geography of the New World," observed art historian Linda Ferber.³⁵¹ Eastern audiences craved information about the American West and Bierstadt's paintings were interpreted as official reports from a distant land.³⁵² The primary purpose of Bierstadt's travels was to provide the weight of authenticity in renderings of the landscape; only secondary was his gathering of topographic detail. For the finished compositions, completed in his New York studio, Bierstadt relied more on the idea of the West born of European models than the physical mapping of the land. "Bierstadt invented the western American landscape," summarized art historian Nancy Anderson, "by skillfully joining passages of carefully observed and meticulously rendered detail with freely configured compositions that met national needs."³⁵³ This balance in his paintings met with great success. (Bierstadt's approach was not unlike that of the younger Thomas Moran, who also combined rendering of details with his impression of the scene in paintings of the American West; see previous chapters.)

The most powerful idea directing national expectations and impressions in Bierstadt's time was Manifest Destiny. The conquering of the wilderness for the sake of Manifest Destiny also guided attitudes toward Native peoples as inferior and therefore doomed to vanish in the

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁵² Nancy K. Anderson, "'Wondrously Full of Invention': The Western Landscapes of Albert Bierstadt," in *Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise*, 76.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 74.

face of American progress. The direct correlation of Manifest Destiny with Bierstadt's paintings can be demonstrated by the rhetoric that Bierstadt and his boosters used to describe *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* in an exhibition pamphlet. The text directed attention to details in the scene by emphasizing the potential and promise it afforded. In the painted foreground, for example, was a place where "a city, populated by our descendants, may rise."³⁵⁴ Although not directly mentioned, the message was clear: the small American Indian encampment was inconsequential and would simply be replaced. This great potential for development in the American West was not lost on critics who interpreted a similar future. A review in *Harper's Weekly* called the painting a "purely American scene." It contained both America's past in "the faithful and elaborate delineation of the Indian village, a form of life now rapidly disappearing from the earth," and America's future: "the promise of the region it depicts . . . as the possible seat of supreme civilization."³⁵⁵ As interests changed from discovery to development, untouched landscapes conveyed a dual message about the American West in the late nineteenth century: the wilderness landscape Americans had used to define themselves could endure both as a cultural icon and could be converted to economic use.³⁵⁶

The American Indian encampment in *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* served to emphasize the American nature of the scene and to illustrate that the landscape was inhabitable for European settlers. With few exceptions, Bierstadt did not include scenes of Indians in his other grand pictures from the 1860s and 1870s. A herd of deer grazes in the foreground of *Mount Hood, Oregon* (1865), but *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California* (1865) contains no

³⁵⁴ "A. Bierstadt's Great Picture. The Rocky Mountains," pamphlet, 186[4], New-York Historical Society, as quoted in *ibid.*, 25.

³⁵⁵ "The New Pictures," *Harper's Weekly* 8, no. 378 (March 26, 1864): 194-195.

³⁵⁶ Nancy Anderson explores these landscape meanings with four case studies in her essay, "'The Kiss of Enterprise': The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource," in *The West as America*, 237-283.

humans or animals.³⁵⁷ Indians had been, for Bierstadt and for his audience, conveniently removed.

This symbolic removal practiced in the second half of the nineteenth century by other artists as well. According to historian William Cronan, wilderness images universally more often suppressed “any sign of human presence.”³⁵⁸ These landscapes carry us backward, not to a landscape prior to European migration but to a pre-human wilderness, before history. In the willful removal of humans “we see the historical invention of the depopulated sacred places” that would later be protected as national parks. The removal of Indians played into American ideology from the time. As Cronan added,

It is no accident that paintings like these became increasingly common just as American Indians were losing control of their land. With their forced removal onto reservations, it began to be possible to visit western landscapes without observing the daily use American Indians had once made of them. Then, too, American Indian removal made it easier to forget the threat of violence that had earlier characterized frontier areas for Indians and whites alike.³⁵⁹

Euro-American audiences could not be held accountable for their actions against American Indians when it was out of sight.

The alarming absence of humans in many nineteenth-century landscapes has also been the subject for contemporary artist Peter Edlund (born 1959). In one series, Edlund re-visited scenes based on nineteenth-century landscape paintings and reinterpreted them with a political overlay. The finished work was a monochromatic copy of the original painting with a descriptive title explaining an event that took place in the landscape depicted. The titles draw attention to actions and contexts erased from the original painting. In *Rape of the Miwok in Yosemite*, for

³⁵⁷ Bierstadt included a small Indian hunting party racing down the hill in advance of the storm in *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866). While Indians do appear in smaller paintings from the 1860s and 1870s Bierstadt did not include Indian subjects in another grand picture until about 1888 in *The Last of the Buffalo*.

³⁵⁸ William Cronan, “Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscape of Frontier Change,” in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*, 81.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

example, Edlund used Bierstadt's *Yosemite* as his source. Through the title, Edlund referenced the relocation of the Modoc peoples in California, who were often raped or murdered by the U.S. Cavalry for submission to their fate (figure 80).³⁶⁰ Edlund responded by highlighting events from the past through added words, while maintaining the absence of figures on his canvas. Edlund's text encourages a reinterpretation of the historic landscape. Monkman, however, finds it more effective to re-populate the landscapes.

Re-populating the Landscape: Miss Chief and George Custer

Reintroducing figures works against the perception that landscapes of the American West were vacant and ready for settling. "Bierstadt's paintings, which were void of people, erased the presence of Aboriginal culture," said Monkman, who instead reminds viewers that the landscapes were not empty but populated by many different nations of people.³⁶¹ Further, the narratives told by Monkman's figures are also important in revealing and altering accepted perceptions. "The past belongs to the victors," insisted art historian Jules Prown. "The history of the conquest and settlement of the American West has been written and pictured by whites . . . Little survives of the view from the other side, the Indian perspective on retreat or forcible removal to the West."³⁶² Monkman works to correct this one-sided perspective, rewriting the malleable history, and his inclusion of humans is essential to the narrative. Unlike Bierstadt's narratives where humans played a secondary role to the vast power of nature, Monkman's people

³⁶⁰ Edlund's paintings in response to Bierstadt's landscapes were included in the exhibition, *Primal Visions: Albert Bierstadt Discovers America*, organized by the Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey, in 2002. See Diane Fischer, *Primal Visions: Albert Bierstadt Discovers America* (Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 2001).

³⁶¹ Monkman in Jenn Ruddy, "Meet Kent Monkman's flamboyant, two-spirited alter-ego: Miss Chief Eagle Testickle," *Daily Xtra*, February 25, 2010, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://dailyxtra.com/print/52256>.

³⁶² Jules David Prown, "Introduction," in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*, xiii.

triumph over the landscape, recasting the wilderness into a stage set for a more compelling human drama that draws part of its power from a refusal to blend into nature.³⁶³

In *History is Painted by the Victors*, Monkman selected a subject that has been depicted numerous times in art and visual culture: Custer and his men from the Battle of Little Bighorn. Monkman's depiction is unusual in comparison to other images, however, because Custer's men appear alone, without their Plains Indian enemies. Symbolically, Miss Chief is the "Indian" presence, although she lacks the savage expression and violent actions. The subject of Custer works particularly well for Monkman in his re-examination of the past because even though the Plains Indians were technically the "victors" in the battle, history has largely been painted (and written) by the defeated Euro-Americans, who re-write the narrative to glorify the defeated Custer and vilify the Plains Indians.

For two days, June 25-26, 1876, George Armstrong Custer led about seven hundred U.S. Cavalrymen into battle with the Lakota Sioux, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapahoe tribes near the Little Bighorn River in present-day Montana. The Native tribes greatly outnumbered Custer and his troops, and the Seventh Cavalry suffered severe defeat with no survivors. In Euro-American accounts, what was soon dubbed "Custer's Last Stand" immediately entered into the national mythology. In Frederick Whittaker's *Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, published the same year of the battle, Custer was valorized as a heroic martyr, a valiant defender of civilization against savage hordes.³⁶⁴

Euro-American artists clamored to paint their version of the battle. In one example, Edgar S. Paxson relocated to Montana in 1877 for the express purpose of painting the scene. He dedicated the next twenty years to researching the battle and creating figure studies, and in 1899

³⁶³ Katz, "Miss Chief is always interested in the latest European fashions," 17.

³⁶⁴ Frederick Whittaker, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer* (1876; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

completed *Custer's Last Stand*, a massive painting measuring nearly six by nine feet (figure 81). Paxson toured the painting in eastern cities, charging twenty-five cents to view the single picture. A booklet accompanying the tour provided a history of the battle and a key identifying important figures. The chaotic scene with Custer in the center clearly reflected the ideology of the time: defeat of American Indians was essential for westward expansion. Custer stands heroically at the apex of the triangle, represented as brave to the end. Indian warriors outfitted in eagle feather bonnets with grimacing faces charge the troops from all directions. The distinction between fine art and history was blurred in Paxson's presentation of the painting and accompanying information, further contributing to the myth surrounding the Battle of Little Bighorn. Paxson's tour was successful, and the painting continues to draw interest today.³⁶⁵

As Paxson's story attests, the myth of the battle quickly became larger than life. Americans generally know about the Battle of Little Bighorn and George Custer, although the details are often hazy. In historical context, however, the Battle of Little Bighorn was not a decisive battle and, according to some military standards, does not even qualify as a battle but should instead be characterized as a "fight." It had no lasting effect on the Indian wars; and although the Indians won, they gained nothing from their victory.³⁶⁶ By 1968, curators working on an exhibition about Custer images uncovered 848 pictures—"a lot of picture making for a happening of so little importance," appraised historian Don Russell.³⁶⁷ The victors in the literal sense were the Native tribes, but through the power of visual imagery, the battle was transformed

³⁶⁵ *Custer's Last Stand* is one of the most-requested reproductions in the Buffalo Bill Center of the West's collection. Frequent visitor questions and comment cards further attest to its popularity, as witnessed first-hand by the author during her tenure as curator of the collection.

³⁶⁶ Don Russell, *Custer's Last, or, The Battle of the Little Big Horn In Picturesque Perspective Being a Pictorial Representation of the Late and Unfortunate Incident in Montana as Portrayed by Custer's Friends and Foes, Admirers and Iconoclasts of His Day and After* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1968), 4.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

in the national imagination into one of the most important events of the Indian Wars and it served as a rallying cry for the triumph of the “brave cavaliers over savages.”³⁶⁸

In re-telling history from the perspective of the “victor,” Monkman re-claims control over the depiction of the Battle of Little Bighorn by painting history. *History is Painted by the Victors* is similar in scale to Paxson’s *Custer’s Last Stand*, but in Monkman’s version, the men are relaxed and vulnerable, only identified by their discarded clothing and weapons (and Custer by his long yellow hair). The reclining nudes are antithetical to the violent and masculine soldiers so typically populating depictions of Custer and his men. Chaos and action are subverted in Monkman’s version of history.

Monkman also renders the battle in a small picture within a picture. Miss Chief’s small “canvas” propped on the easel in front of her depicts Custer and his men as a row of mounted cavalymen rendered in a pictograph style. The image on Miss Chief’s canvas is a copy of “Soldiers Charging Indian Camp” by Teton Sioux Chief Red Horse (figure 82). In 1881, while living on the Cheyenne River Reservation, Chief Red Horse recounted his eyewitness account of the battle for ethnologist Garrick Mallery. Red Horse communicated his account through gestured-signs and forty-one drawings on 24 x 26-inch manila-colored paper, which Mallery then “closely translated into simple English.” Red Horse’s account and several drawings were later published in 1894 as part of the Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology.³⁶⁹ Red Horse described Indian camps, incidents in battles, fighting tactics of Sioux, and tactics of soldiers, including those of an officer with long yellowish hair (Custer). With his appropriation

³⁶⁸ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 622-623. For a comprehensive analysis of Custer’s Last Stand in art, literature, and popular culture from the nineteenth century through the twentieth, see Brian W. Dippie, *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

³⁶⁹ Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians: Extract from the Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 563-566; plates 39-48.

of Red Horse, Monkman reminds viewers that it is important to be mindful of the cultural values and perspectives hidden in the images. Although Red Horse described the battle from his Native perspective, it was retold seven years later and still filtered through Mallery's prompting and translation into English after the establishment of the mythic status of the battle (and while Red Horse was living on a reservation).

Further, the small size of Miss Chief's picture, as compared to the grand scale of Bierstadt's landscapes, proportionately reflects the Native perspective on the importance of the event. The impact of The Battle of Little Bighorn in Plains Indian history was very minor. Winter counts, or picture writing on buffalo hide, provide an insight into the historic visual record keeping of the Plains tribes. One winter count held multiple years of the history of a tribe with each year represented by one image. The "Lone Dog Winter Count" is a well-studied example (Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian). The Lone Dog Winter Count illustrates the history of the Yanktonais Nakota (Sioux) community from 1800 to 1871. "There's [nearly] a hundred years of history on that count," said Monkman, "And what's interesting is that for the year that Custer was defeated by the Lakota people, it didn't factor into their tribal history as an important event. . . . They chose instead for that year to talk about the theft of some ponies."³⁷⁰ Other winter counts similarly record other events of note. If the battle is mentioned at all, it figures with other records of inter-tribal fights but never is given the magnitude of importance that Euro-Americans assigned the event.³⁷¹ The Sioux were the victors, but even they did not emphasize this battle in their history in 1876. With acute hindsight into

³⁷⁰ Monkman, quoted in Jordan Timm, "Landscape with Sexy Transvestite," *MacLean's*, December 31, 2007, 94. For an analysis and interpretation of Lone Dog's Winter Count, see Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, 273-287.

³⁷¹ A good reference and introduction to the Lone Dog Winter Count and others from the same era can be found in an online exhibition: Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and National Anthropological Archives, "Lakota Winter Counts: An Online Exhibition," accessed November 27, 2014, wintercounts.si.edu.

history, and twenty-first-century cultural needs and interpretation, Monkman re-claims the victory for American Indians.

Reversing the Roles: Thomas Eakins's Nudes

Monkman layers an additional perspective onto the narrative in *History is Painted by the Victors* by appropriating photographs and paintings by Thomas Eakins (1844-1916). Eighteen seventy-six was not only the year of the Battle of Little Bighorn, but also the United States Centennial. To celebrate, the country hosted the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia (the Battle of Little Bighorn actually took place during the run of the exhibition). Eakins exhibited five paintings in the Centennial's ambitious art display. In the decade that followed, Eakins painted pastoral themes based on photographs of his students as models (see, for example, *Arcadia*, c. 1883, The Metropolitan Museum of Art).³⁷² Eakins was profoundly interested in anatomy and the human body in motion and he made numerous photographs of himself and his students posing nude to use as painting aids. Eakins's photographs of students boxing, playing instruments, and lounging explored a variety of poses and movements of the human body. Monkman used many of these photographs for the poses of the men along the lakeshore.

Monkman appropriated Eakins's photograph and painting of young men swimming for the group of figures on the rocky outcropping in the lake (figures 68 and 69). By using Eakins images, Monkman embraces the meaning and controversy tied to the originals. In the early 1880s, Eakins received complaints about the use of nude models in figure drawing classes. In one incident in an anatomy class, Eakins removed the loincloth from a male model in front of female students. By 1886, Eakins was forced to resign from the Pennsylvania Academy of the

³⁷² Darrel Sewell and Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xxix.

Fine Arts at the request of the board. Only one year prior, *Swimming* likely contributed to the tense relationship with the Academy. Edward Coates, the head of the Pennsylvania Academy's Committee on Instruction, had commissioned *Swimming*, but when *Swimming* was met with criticism, Coates rejected the painting for purchase. In Eakins's lifetime, the controversy over nude models in classes and in photographs caused a flurry of allegations of his indecency and seduction of women. By the late twentieth century, however, *Swimming* and the related photographs served to question Eakins's sexuality. Many interpreters of *Swimming* assumed that the picture was evidence of Eakins's deep-seated homosexual urges, a reading that has been difficult to undo, even in recent scholarship.³⁷³ Monkman thought it would be natural to appropriate Eakins's images for his painting. "I felt that Miss Chief and [Eakins] would have a kind of kinship," he explained. "Miss Chief, of course, she loves painting male nudes as well."³⁷⁴

Eakins's *Swimming* conveys an idyllic and pastoral scene, and, as art historian Marc Simpson observed, it "plays clear homage to the natural life, featuring six men, swimming, sunning, naked, and at ease with themselves."³⁷⁵ *Swimming* was unconventional in that the male nudes were not veiled in a setting of classical mythology but were simply part of contemporary life. Monkman's use of Eakins's painting is another indication that this painting is unconventional. In the nineteenth century, the "noble savage" signified an escape from the confines and corruption of modern life, but here the white men are removed from civilization; their bodily freedom "projects a heady sense of escape from social constraints," as Linda Nochlin wrote of the figures in Eakins's *Swimming*.³⁷⁶ In *History is Painted by the Victors*

³⁷³ Simpson, "Swimming Through Time," in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Pictures*, eds. Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1996), 7-8.

³⁷⁴ Monkman, telephone interview with the author, March 17, 2015.

³⁷⁵ Simpson, "Swimming Through Time," 7-8.

³⁷⁶ Linda Nochlin, "Issues of Gender in Cassatt and Eakins," in *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, ed. Stephen Eisenman, 4th ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 373.

Monkman takes another cue from Eakins and rather than painting the Indians communing with nature (as in Cole's *Falls of the Kaaterskill* or Bierstadt's *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*), the white men are the "natural men."

In his selection of the Battle of Little Bighorn as the historical narrative, Monkman added a new perspective to a familiar story. "The whole idea all along," said Monkman, "was basically to be a history painter, and to talk about these missing narratives and these obliterated histories."³⁷⁷ The many sources bring different types of voices and perspectives to history beyond a simple binary division of native and non-native. Gender roles and sexual orientation; winners and losers; and truth and myth all contribute to interpretation and meaning. Monkman presents a conglomeration of perspectives on history that prompts viewers to see their own culture more clearly—the usable past servicing the present.

Shifting Meaning: The Corcoran Affair

One of Monkman's goals is to highlight the one-sided perspective conveyed in nineteenth-century paintings, which then becomes embodied in our national myth. The paintings are constructions based on personal and cultural perspectives, but ultimately they translate to encompass a larger meaning and have a profound impact on the way American audiences continue to view their history. Catlin, Kane, and Bierstadt each represented themselves in certain ways in order to sell their art. Looking back to nineteenth-century artwork from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, those perspectives are not always immediately evident. Audiences today are too far removed from the historical perspective, and they interpret the images differently, often accepting them at face value. Monkman's brash inclusion of Miss Chief in his

³⁷⁷ Monkman, quoted in Sholem Krishtalka, "Camp Magic: Reconquering the West," *Xtra Magazine*, June 7, 2007, 40.

canvas is his way of announcing a twist on the perspective. But the landscape is not merely a backdrop to the drama that unfolds on the surface; rather, the landscape plays an active role in the narrative. Monkman's selection and appropriation of Bierstadt, for example, prompts a deeper examination of Bierstadt's messages and hidden agendas.

At the Philadelphia 1876 Centennial Exhibition, critics considered American landscape paintings in the art display "second to none."³⁷⁸ Bierstadt's landscapes, however, were losing popularity and the critics were starting to turn against his huge panoramas, with one calling them "sensational and meretricious."³⁷⁹ When Bierstadt displayed *Mountain Lake* at the National Academy of Design one year later, the painting was panned. The negative critical attention was unusual for Bierstadt, whose detailed naturalism and smooth surface had met with praise and garnered top sale prices only a few years earlier.

Perhaps to revive the painting and remove it from the associated bad reviews, Bierstadt re-named *Mountain Lake* following the display at the National Academy. When Bierstadt offered the painting to William T. Walters, on the Board of Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery in 1878, the painting was conveniently titled *Mount Corcoran*.³⁸⁰ Suspecting blatant flattery, the curator of the Corcoran questioned the existence of a mountain with that name. When pressed, Bierstadt produced a map with a peak labeled properly, "Mt. Corcoran." After much back and forth, the painting did eventually enter into the Corcoran's collection based on Mr. William Wilson Corcoran's recommendation. Mount Corcoran is a mountain peak located in the Sierra Nevada range in California, but it had not always been named after the banker and art collector. As it

³⁷⁸ Susan Hobbs, *1876: American Art of the Centennial* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 12.

³⁷⁹ John Ferguson Weir, "Plastic and Graphic Art, Painting and Sculpture," *Reports and Awards* (1880), quoted in *ibid.*, 13.

³⁸⁰ For a detailed account of the transaction and interchange between Bierstadt and the Corcoran Gallery curators, Board members, and Mr. Corcoran, see Lisa Strong, "Mount Corcoran," in *Corcoran Gallery of Art: American Paintings to 1945*, ed. Sarah Cash (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art; New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2011), 140. See also "The Corcoran Affair" in Anderson and Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise*, 54-57.

turns out, while Bierstadt was angling to place his painting in the Corcoran collection, he had persuaded the War Department to officially name a mountain peak Mt. Corcoran. Bierstadt had visited the Sierra Nevada in 1872, but the naming took place after he had worked up the composition for *Mountain Lake* and decided to pursue the banker as a patron.³⁸¹ Initially for Bierstadt, the specific location of the scene was not important.

When his style and composition alone were not strong enough to warrant positive attention from the critics, Bierstadt added meaning to the landscape through the title. It was not the first time Bierstadt had adopted such a naming tactic. He named a summit in honor of Colonel Frederick Lander, the government survey leader, in *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*; and another for Rosalie Ludlow, whom he would later marry, in *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866, Brooklyn Museum). The naming and claiming of mountain peaks by Bierstadt worked for art sales, but the practice also points to Manifest Destiny and the way in which Euro-American explorers conquered the land. In Colorado alone, a number of the state's 14,000-foot mountains are named after explorers or politicians: Longs Peak, Pikes Peak, Mount Evans, Kit Carson Peak, and Mount of the Holy Cross, perhaps the ultimate message of Manifest Destiny. Monkman characterizes his appropriation and copying of Bierstadt's landscapes as stealing: "Stealing these landscapes back is a kind of metaphorical way of re-claiming the land, reclaiming the landscape."³⁸² Monkman faithfully copies Bierstadt's *Mount Corcoran*, but purposefully erases the title. Naming is a powerful tool, and typically one used by the "victors," as Monkman points out.

³⁸¹ Sarah Cash, *Corcoran Gallery of Art: American Paintings to 1945*, 140.

³⁸² Kent Monkman, "Stealing Landscapes," ca. 2013, Denver Art Museum, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.denverartmuseum.org/exhibitions/sovereign-independent-voices>.

Re-painting History

History and myth are impossibly tangled in the art of the American West. At the height of a revisionist examination of the American West in the early 1990s, Prown considered the role of myth and history. “A scrim of myth,” wrote Prown, “veils our view of the past, misleading by pleasing.” He continued, “The art of the West often purported to depict its subjects realistically, but perhaps it depicted more accurately the needs, values, and aspirations of its viewing audience.”³⁸³ For Prown, *both* history and myth are essential to the study and understanding of art and culture of the past and the present.

The necessity for including myth in the analysis of the art of the American West is evident in the storm of criticism that befell the *West as America* exhibition. The myth had grown so much in power and importance that, for the public, it became impossible to disentangle them, especially in the art that had played a central role in the formation of national myths.³⁸⁴ As curator William Truettner further explained, myths help to justify and explain the way a group perceives itself. “Myth functions to control history, to shape it in text or image as an ordained sequence of events,” he wrote.³⁸⁵ The danger comes, perhaps, when myth completely replaces truths, and collectively we forget who constructed the myth and to whom it was directed. As literary critic Michael Johnson observed about the *West as America* criticism, it is the white males who “don’t want anyone fiddling with those images, which have to do with who they are or like to think they are.”³⁸⁶ The image of the Old West reflects a very narrow perspective and was directed very pointedly at a specific audience. By including a different view outside of this narrow perspective, Monkman reveals histories that have been omitted, and brings a more

³⁸³ Prown, *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*, xi.

³⁸⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, “Contesting the West,” *Art in America* 79, no. 9 (September 1991): 118.

³⁸⁵ Truettner, *The West as America*, 40.

³⁸⁶ Michael L. Johnson, *New Westers: The West in Contemporary American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 201.

critical eye to art that has had such a strong influence on shaping our perception of the past. In the wake of the criticism of the *West as America* exhibition, Elizabeth Broun, director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, explained that the exhibition was difficult for audiences because the curators “asked Americans to look hard at their own past and to confront the whole story—not just the upbeat version.”³⁸⁷

Despite the veil of myth coloring our past, generations of viewers see western American paintings as conveyors of history and facts.³⁸⁸ Monkman builds upon this conditioned perception by appropriating the subject and style of nineteenth-century paintings but also the assumption of the painting as witness to the real West. The repetition of images of American Indians, grand landscapes, and the perpetuation of the heroic myth of Custer for over one hundred years has made these familiar aspects of the American myth, which also contributes to the success of Monkman’s paintings and his use of satire. “Satire,” explained art historian Richard Hill, “is a form of mimesis that involves the introduction of a destabilizing difference, one that often disrupts our ability to treat the original seriously thereafter. It depends, fundamentally, on a deep and convincing knowledge of the original.”³⁸⁹ Monkman’s deep connection to the past images destabilizes the presumed meaning and interpretation of the nineteenth-century images and encourages viewers to reconsider history. After looking closely at *History is Painted by the Victors*, it will be hard to think about the heroic depictions of Custer and his men in the same ultra-masculine heroic guise of the nineteenth century.

Monkman has effectively blurred boundaries between fact and myth, male and female, native and non-native, and past and present, destabilizing assumptions. As a trickster, Miss

³⁸⁷ Elizabeth Broun, "The Story Behind the Story of The West as America," *Museum News* 70, no. 5 (September-October 1991): 78.

³⁸⁸ Anderson, “‘Curious Historical Artistic Data’,” in *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*, 1-35.

³⁸⁹ Richard W. Hill, "Kent Monkman's Constitutional Amendments: Time and Uncanny Objects," in *Interpellations: Three Essays on Kent Monkman*, 51.

Chief/Monkman easily navigates through the boundaries and leads viewers through. She invites the viewer into her story in *History is Painted by the Victors*. “History is not simply our ‘other’—an elsewhere to re-narrate, a story to correct,” says Hill, “but rather, constantly both continuous and discontinuous with our present.”³⁹⁰ In other words, we have the ability to re-tell the stories and influence history despite the often one-sided perspective painted by the victors.

As the painting reiterates, history is always in process and, as critic Tina Majkowski observed, “subject to alternative and divergent readings and in need of constant critical vigilance and reinterpretation.”³⁹¹ *History is Painted by the Victors* is a retelling of a seemingly familiar tale but from a new perspective. As Monkman seems to say, “the story of the past belongs not to those who lived it but to those who tell it.”³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 52.

³⁹¹ Tina Majkowski, “Gypsies, Tramps, Half-Indian, All Queer, and Cher: Kent Monkman Defining Indigeneity Through Indian Simulation and Accumulation,” in *Action and Agency: Advancing the Dialogue on Native Performance Art*, ed. Nancy J. Blomberg (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2010), 104.

³⁹² Katz, “‘Miss Chief is always interested in the latest European fashions!’,” 24.

Epilogue

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Critical response to the *West as America* exhibition highlighted the fluidity of history, especially to a conservative audience that was taken aback at the reexamination of the frontier myth. “‘The West as America’ is about how history is simultaneously written and read,” said art historian Bryan Wolf. “It requires us to understand history as an encrypted drama, a series of cultural actions that contain within themselves codes and subtexts.”³⁹³ The artists presented in this study are borne ceaselessly into the western past. They reexamine and reframe history and the American West through art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They highlight the malleability of history and the ways in which history includes and reflects cultural ideologies and serves the needs of the present.

Within the multiplicity of history, the myth of the Old West as a symbol of individualism, freedom, and conservative values remains intact in the early twenty-first century. Paintings and sculptures depicting the image of the West as an idealized place with picturesque American Indians, cowboys, and cavalry in pristine landscape continue to draw the attention of collectors. A steady number of artists address the myth of the frontier, as evidenced by museums hosting western art exhibitions and sales nearly every month and in almost all regions of the United States.³⁹⁴ As a case in point, the Cowboy Artists of America opened their Fiftieth Annual Sale

³⁹³ Wolf, “How the West Was Hung,” 428.

³⁹⁴ For example: The Autry Museum of the American West (Los Angeles) hosts the Masters of the American West sale in February; The C.M. Russell Museum (Great Falls, Montana) sponsors “The Russell” auction in March; The Gilcrease Museum (Tulsa) hosts the Rendezvous Artists’ Retrospective and Art Sale in April; The Cowboy Hall of Fame (Oklahoma City) hosts Prix de West each June; and the Eiteljorg (Indianapolis) hosts Quest for the West Art Show and Sale in September.

and Exhibition on October 10, 2015. The Cowboy Artists have managed to retain such a narrow interpretation of the American West that they still have not admitted a female artist to their group, and they continue to adhere to their original mission.

There is evidence, however, that the dominant myth of the American West, as celebrated by the Cowboy Artists, is losing ground. After thirty-seven years of exhibitions and sales at the Phoenix Art Museum, the Cowboy Artists and Phoenix parted ways in 2011. Jim Ballinger, long-time director of the Phoenix Art Museum had asked the Cowboy Artists to think about expanding their approach to reflect diversity and appeal to new generations of collectors. Ballinger wanted to “crank it up . . . do something different,” and ultimately, “change in a positive way, bring more breadth to the exhibit.”³⁹⁵ Rather than compromise their goals, however, the Cowboy Artists looked for a different exhibition venue, returning once again to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. Gallery owner Maryvonnell Lech observed the change, “They have only themselves to blame. The guys have stayed entrenched in the style they had 40 years ago. They haven’t grown.”³⁹⁶

Cultural changes in the United States, and the decentralizing of history encourage, and practically demand, new approaches. Artists considered in this dissertation practice re-vision. “Re-vision,” as Neil Campbell defines it, “is the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction . . . Until we can know the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.”³⁹⁷ The dominant myth of the frontier was the “old text” and the artists rephotographed, appropriated, confiscated, rediscovered, and

³⁹⁵ Jim Ballinger, quoted in Richard Nilsen, “Cowboy Artists Loses its Phoenix Home: Changing Tastes, Stubborn Traditions Send Organization Riding into the Sunset,” *The Arizona Republic*, April 17, 2011, <http://www.azcentral.com/thingstodo/galleriesmuseums/articles/20110417cowboy-artists-america-phoenix-art-museum.html>.

³⁹⁶ Maryvonne Lech, owner of the western-themed Trailside Galleries, in Richard Nilsen, “Cowboy Artists Group, Phoenix Art Museum Part Ways,” *Arizona Republic*, April 9, 2011, <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2011/04/09/20110409cowboy-artists-phoenix-art-museum-part.html>.

³⁹⁷ Neil Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 9.

represented the myth to re-frame the American West. Postmodern consideration of old texts and of history took Foster, Klett, and Wolfe on a journey to discover image making; led Hannock to use appropriation as allegory to write a personal mythology; encouraged Schenck to address the myth through pastiche and humor; and gave Monkman free rein to re-write history. Each artist approaches the old text from a new critical direction.

I had initially considered the different approaches and re-vision methods used by the artists in this dissertation as a linear progression away from the Cowboy Artists' nostalgic and escapist examination of the western past—finally evolving to Monkman's scrutinizing and critical study of nineteenth-century imagery. I have come to realize, however, that there is not a linear progression in the re-framing of history, but a series of responses that represent the fluid nature of interpretation. Within this postmodern consideration of history, the old organizing frameworks that privilege the centers are no longer considered legitimate, but "temporary fictions" created not for the universal interests, but for very particular interests.³⁹⁸ With the centers dispersed, other narratives are encouraged and validated and artists are free to re-frame western American history and art. Their paintings, photographs, and sculpture are representations of representations, bringing to mind French literary critic Roland Barthes's influential claim that a text (or artwork) is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."³⁹⁹ The Cowboy Artists, although arguably declining in popularity, still fill a present need for the myth of the Old West as exemplified by Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, just as Monkman fills a need for the role reversals in his reexamination of Albert Bierstadt and the myth of the Custer battle. The Cowboy Artists and Monkman appropriate the images and ideologies to

³⁹⁸ Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 60.

³⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

different end results, but they have the source material in common—history and art of the frontier made from 1820 to 1920.

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