

Changing Frontiers: Thomas Cole and Laura McPhee in Gallery 212

Upstairs in Gallery 212, amid the Chrysler's fine American landscape paintings, two special loans examine the evolving image of the frontier—before and after our keynote show.

The first is *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827), an early triumph by Hudson River School master Thomas Cole. Inspired by James Fenimore Cooper's hot-off-the-press novel, Cole invented a breathtaking Adirondack mountainscape of rocks and ravines. This wild terrain mirrors the imagined character traits of its Native American inhabitants: beautiful but dangerous. Compare this painting, a rarely lent highlight from the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y., with the Chrysler's marble *Pocahontas* (1870s) by Joseph Mozier, in which an Indian maiden adopts Anglo-European ways. How did earlier Americans imagine the frontier and its Native inhabitants? How did these stories change as the frontier moved from the Appalachians across the Plains and into the mountains and deserts beyond?

Nearby, the Chrysler's giant Albert Bierstadt landscape *The Emerald Pool* (1870) is absent—currently on loan to an exhibition about New Hampshire's White Mountains. In its place is an expansive view of Idaho's Sawtooth Valley by contemporary photographer Laura McPhee. In her high-resolution large-scale print, signs of human presence—fences and a bright blue plastic tarp—interrupt our view of the rugged natural terrain. Hung within the Bierstadt-style curtains, the photo becomes part of the ongoing saga in which wilderness is tamed and transformed, a frequent theme in the work of Cole, Frederic Remington, and Maynard Dixon. In the end, all frontier paintings, films, and photos, from New York to New Mexico, are shaped by myth and tradition, and we encourage you to explore the layers of history and fiction in *Branding the American West* and throughout our galleries.



also reveals the artist's interest in local culture and everyday life—these are Latino workmen, members of the large Hispanic population of the Southwest that popular culture typically overlooked. Among the paintings and films in this exhibition, some repeat romanticized fictions, but others show the artists' respect for the West's cultural diversity.

The distinctive costumes and customs of the Native Americans were often the most iconic and appealing brand of Western art, as seen in the radiant tones of Joseph Henry Sharp's *Council Call of Crows, Montana* (ca. 1908). Sharp and his colleagues recognized the injustices suffered by the Native Americans and often used their works to foster admiration for Indian traditions in pottery, basket-weaving, music, and dance. This sunset scene, however, suggests the artist's awareness that the Indians' way of life was evolving and vanishing. Ironically, the same paintings that praised the West also attracted tourists and new development, increasing the pace of change.

Today images of the West are largely mediated by Hollywood. Within the exhibition, a series of movie clips will be on view to explore the early dialogue between paintings and cinema. How did the work of artists like Dixon and Blumenschein influence film producers? Which brands, myths, and realities of the West guide John Ford's epic *Stagecoach* (1939), starring John Wayne? The big-screen legacy of this region is powerful and complex, much like this exhibition's paintings of Indian dance ceremonies and of sweeping mountain vistas. Come tour this show and compare your knowledge and ideas about the American West with these radiant depictions of its histories, cultures, and natural beauties.

—Crawford Alexander Mann III,
Brock Curator of American Art

Branding the American West: Paintings and Films, 1900–1950, an exhibition jointly organized by the Brigham Young University Museum of Art and the Stark Museum of Art, is made possible in part by a generous grant from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies and through the generous support of the Nelda C. and H.J. Litcher Stark Foundation.

