

# *Go West! Art of the American Frontier*

## *from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West*

October 22, 2016 – February 20, 2017  
Palm Springs Art Museum, Claves III Exhibition Wing



*Go West! Art of the American Frontier* presents a century of art from an extraordinary era of exploration, ranging from paintings documenting early nineteenth-century expeditions to twentieth-century images that would solidify our popular understanding of the American West. Featuring 90 paintings and sculptures by artist-explorers and important objects by Plains Indian tribes, the exhibition is drawn from the collections of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.

*Go West!* chronicles a pivotal period in American history in which cultures were merging and clashing, great fortunes were amassing, demographic shifts were redefining the national outlook, and great scientific discoveries were occurring at an astounding pace. The years between 1830 and 1930 represent an exciting American century, but also a period darkened by brutal racial conflict. This layered history is told in the absence as much as in the presence of imagery depicting these conflicts. *Go West!* offers a broad and diverse presentation of works by artists who took part in shaping contemporary views of this history.

The exhibition begins with early nineteenth-century representations of the West by Anglo-American artist-explorers. Some, such as George Catlin and Alfred Jacob Miller, made their way on private expeditions or at their own expense to capitalize upon the rising interest in America's wild and distant regions. Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, two of the most prominent artists of this period, are represented in the exhibition with stunning paintings that awed audiences back East, and continue to retain their power today. In the years following the Civil War, artists traveled with government surveyors to map the continent's Western territories. Bierstadt painted the peaks of the Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountain ranges surveyed by the Lander Expedition, while Moran chronicled Yellowstone's strange geological formations with the Hayden Expedition. The exhibition features such



major works as Moran's *Golden Gate, Yellowstone National Park* (1893), one of several depictions of the National Park, which was then only two decades old. Also on view is Bierstadt's *The Last of the Buffalo* (ca. 1888)—a work that captured international attention for its poignant lamentation over the carelessness of westward expansion that led to the near-extinction of the American buffalo, and devastated the Native American cultures that depended upon the buffalo for their way of life.



Further codifying America's romance with the West at the turn of the twentieth century were entertainers such as Buffalo Bill Cody who attracted millions to his renowned *Wild West* traveling show. Artists played an important role in defining cowboys, Native Americans, cavalry, mountain men, scouts, pioneer women, and historic figures at a time when the Old West was quickly fading into the past. Prolific artists and illustrators such as Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, and N.C. Wyeth bore witness to the changing American West, and their images romanticized the heroic western characters we know today. The shifting environment is also captured in the exhibition with rare and beautiful late-life impressionistic landscape studies by Frederic Remington. Sporting, wildlife and conservation efforts are represented by wildlife paintings by Albert Bierstadt and Carl Rungius.

Contemporary with these accounts are objects made by members of Sioux, Cheyenne, and other Native American tribes who interacted with the earliest frontier settlers. Such objects have varying perspectives, but reflect the common belief that objects of life were objects of art. Dresses, shields, and war bonnets—exquisitely beaded, painted, stitched, and crafted—offer a sense of the rich cultural heritage of the Native peoples who struggled against the quickening pace of white encroachment into their lands. Sections featuring works from pre- and post- reservation eras underscore the cultural shifts that occurred over the course of a century, as well as the continuity and endurance of Native traditions and communities.

A 175-page illustrated catalogue, *Art of the American Frontier from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West*, accompanies this exhibition, with essays by Stephanie Mayer Heydt, Mindy N. Besaw, and Emma I. Hansen, and is published by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta in association with Yale University Press, 2013.

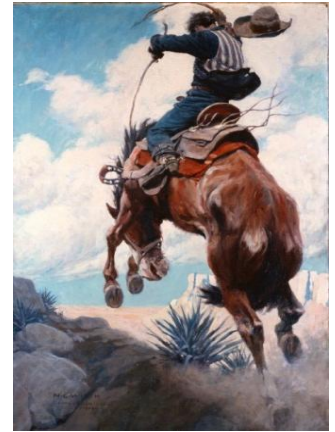
*This exhibition is organized by the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.*

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## Themes Represented in the Exhibition and Catalogue

1. Into the Wilderness
2. Objects of Life, Objects of Art (Native American)
3. The West as Landscape
4. “For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People”
5. Frontier Heroes and the Romance of the American West
6. Remington, the Cowboy, and the Shaping of an Artistic Vision
7. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West
8. Wildlife and the Sporting Man
9. Morning the Past: Symbolic Depictions of the Native American
10. The Art of Survival: Plains Indian Traditions in a Transitional Age



## Selection of Artists Represented

Plains Indians (Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, and other Native Americans)

George Catlin

Alfred Jacob Miller

William Ranney

Albert Bierstadt

Thomas Moran

Frederic Remington

Charles Russell

Charles Schreyvogel

Alexander Phimster Proctor

James Earl Fraser

N.C. Wyeth

William Herbert Dunton

W.H.D. Koerner



### Image credits:

Albert Bierstadt, *The Last of the Buffalo*, ca. 1888, oil on canvas. Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Trust Fund Purchase.

### Additional images:

*Oglala Teton Sioux Shirt*, ca. 1885, hide (deer, tanned), beads (seed), fringe (hair, human), cloth (trade), wool, feathers, quills (porcupine), ermine, tassels. Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Maxwell James.



Albert Bierstadt, *The Last of the Buffalo*, ca. 1888, oil on canvas, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Trust Fund Purchase.

Alfred Jacob Miller, *The Lost Greenhorn*, ca. 1860, oil on canvas, Gift of the Coe Foundation.

W. H. D. Koener, *Madonna of the Prairie*, 1921. oil on canvas, Museum purchase.

Alexander Phimster Proctor, *Indian Warrior*, 1896-1899, bronze, Gift of A. Phimster Proctor Museum with special thanks to Sandy and Sally Church.

Thomas Moran, *Golden Gate, Yellowstone National Park*, 1893, oil on canvas, museum purchase.

Frederic Remington, *Prospecting for Cattle Range*, 1889, oil on canvas, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney.

N. C. Wyeth, *Bucking*, 1904-1905, oil on canvas, Gift of John M. Schiff.  
*Sioux Storage Bag*, ca. 1890, deerskin, quills (porcupine), cones (tin), horsehair. Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Chandler-Pohrt Collection, Gift of Mr. William D. Weiss.



