**Art of the American West: The Haub Family Collection**

**A Cast of Characters**

From the banks of the Columbia River to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, the artists featured in the Haub Family Collection shape visions of the American West. They delve into storytelling and mythmaking, celebrate the land, and show how the West changed through time. Throughout these galleries you will see iconic characters of the West: Native American leaders, mountain men, vaqueros, immigrants, and a host of wild creatures. In exploring the art of the West, we can ponder how our own views of American identity are formed.

The sculptures in this gallery, spanning more than a century, show how concepts of the West have developed and changed. A proud bison stands firm with his head held high. An inquisitive bighorn sheep looks up to meet your gaze. These large animals became symbols of an abundant West—and also illustrated the importance of protecting and preserving the land. Native American figures are crafted in polished bronze and stone. The varying styles of these sculptures show how artists’ views of Native peoples changed throughout the 20th century. A rider and bucking bronco leap with explosive power. The sheer energy of a cowboy attempting to ride a wild horse represents strength and determination in the face of formidable challenges, for people in the West and beyond. By capturing the movement and mood of these distinct characters, artists inform our ideas of the American West.

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**The West Across Time**

Through artwork dating from the 1790s to the 2000s, this gallery explores how the western United States became an inspiration for artists from different time periods and disparate backgrounds. Across time and place, these artists shape perceptions of people and the land—and encourage us to question long-held myths and assumptions about the American West.

In the 1800s, artists turned to the people and landscapes of the West to distinguish the United States from its European roots. Images of the West—both real and imagined—became popular subjects in American art. At the dawn of the 20th century, artists responded to new industries and growing cities in various ways: some sought escape by celebrating the past, and others saw the unique locations in the West as inspiration for a new, modern approach to art. Today, contemporary artists challenge ingrained assumptions about the western United States, prompting new understandings of the “Old West.”

Within the larger American West, the Pacific Northwest has always been a place of transition. From land to water, the paths of canoes, ships, trails, railroads, and highways converge. In 1873, the Northern Pacific Railway proclaimed Tacoma, Washington as the western terminus for its new transcontinental railroad. The railroad—largely constructed by immigrants from China and Ireland—connected Puget Sound to the Great Lakes and forever altered the future of the West. The Northwest region also saw waves of immigration from both east and west, by land and sea. The Haub Family Collection provides a unique opportunity to experience these stories through the eyes of artists and to understand how the art of the Northwest fits into the larger American West.

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**Stories, Icons, and Legends**

By creating images of heroic figures in action, artists helped craft and present a mythic folklore of the American frontier. Rather than accurate recreations of history, these imaginative artworks reveal artists’ subjective views of the West. Here you can find a rugged cowboy bathed in golden light, a determined woman of Taos Pueblo standing strong with hands on hips, a dashing Mexican vaquero riding a spirited horse, and a proud Chinese urban entrepreneur posing for a portrait—among many others. Through these images, artists commemorate everyday people as iconic folk heroes.

Several of the painters shown here, including N.C. Wyeth and W. Herbert Dunton, worked as magazine and book illustrators. With a precise, almost photographic style of painting, they perfected the art of storytelling through images. Influenced by a European tradition of painting history scenes—and inspired by photography, popular fiction, and cinema—these artists created distinct narratives of the West and its people. Many of these artists researched details of the past to create a precise window into a bygone era. Whether they were working in the 19th century, the 20th century, or today, their images reflect individual views and biases of their time. These powerful stories enchant, inspire, and challenge us. Their artworks remind us that history and myth are constantly open to new interpretation.

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**Artists and the Land**

The landscapes in the West—with rolling hills, jagged mountains, and windswept plains—have long inspired a variety of artistic responses. But travelers did not always consider the western landscape in a favorable light. Some writers of the 19th century described the West as an appalling wasteland or barren desert, a “hellish place” best suited for resource extraction. By finding beauty in the outdoors, even in unexpected places, artists in the West helped change ideas about the nature of the American landscape.

To artists, the towering formations of the land in the American West matched the splendor of Europe’s grand cathedrals. When artists painted the cavernous canyons, shining waterfalls, and brilliantly hued deserts of the western United States, they encouraged viewers to appreciate the unique features of the landscape. Today, America’s national parks have become increasingly popular as ever-greater numbers of people seek out the spectacular natural features of the West.

Beginning in the mountains of upstate New York in the mid-19th century, the Hudson River school painters celebrated the beauty of uncultivated wilderness in the eastern United States. Artists carried this school of thought from the East to the rugged landscapes of the American West. In the 20th century, artists applied modern ideas about design and abstraction to images of the western landscape, simplifying the land to basic elements of form, line, and color. Today, as we face the ever-tenuous balance between preserving and utilizing natural resources, artists invite us to pause and consider the fragile landscapes of the West. These artists encourage us to see the western land and wildlife through their eyes, with wonder and admiration.

Section Panels

**The 19th-Century West**

How does a new country create a distinct identity? In the 1800s, artists often accompanied expeditions west of the Mississippi River, creating images of the landscapes and people they encountered. As the United States sought to expand its borders, images of a plentiful, adventurous West shaped public perceptions of the frontier.

Many artists in the 19th century were drawn to Native American subjects, motivated by artistic inspiration and by a desire to record Indigenous cultures. Artists including Charles Bird King, Henry Inman, George Catlin, and John Mix Stanley created “Indian Galleries,” depicting hundreds of Native American individuals, some rendered from life and others highly imagined. These historic images—created by non-Native artists—celebrated Native people at a time when government policies such as the Indian Removal Act were taking a devastating toll on Native communities.

By the end of the 1800s, rapid developments in transportation and waves of new immigrants reshaped life in the West. Many individuals of the 19th century—Native American leaders, mountain men, and cowboys—became larger-than-life characters who symbolized a mythic past.

**The 20th-Century West**

At the dawn of the 20th century, early skyscrapers climbed to new heights in the eastern half of the United States while modern ideas about painting and sculpture transformed American art. In the western part of the country, artists showed various responses to these changes. Some sought to escape the strangeness of new technologies and the commotion of growing cities by plunging into a nostalgic, imagined history, celebrating the past. Other artists saw the unique locations in the West as a well of inspiration for a fresh approach to American art.

In particular, the landscapes and communities of New Mexico inspired a variety of artists in the early 20th century. In the remote town of Taos, a group of six painters including Joseph Henry Sharp, Ernest L. Blumenschein, E. Irving Couse, and Oscar E. Berninghaus formed the Taos Society of Artists in 1915. Their artwork included romantic scenes of Native Americans, frank depictions of contemporary New Mexico life, and modern interpretations of the landscape. Artists like Georgia O’Keeffe soon followed, cementing the Southwest as a major center for American art in the 20th century and today.

**The Contemporary West**

What remains novel and undiscovered in the art of the American West? Artists today raise fresh voices reacting to past and present concepts about the western United States.

Many contemporary artists working with western subjects are in the business of myth-busting, calling into question our assumptions, responding to and challenging historical imagery, and making bold statements about the wide variety of contemporary cultures that comprise the modern West. Artists such as Ed Mell and Bill Schenck take popular subjects of the 19th century and render them in various modern styles of the 20th century, inspired by cubism and pop art.

Today, artists prompt new ideas about the “Old West” and bring this vast region into the future.

**John Clymer: A Washington Son Comes Home**

Raised in Ellensburg, Washington, John Clymer developed a successful career as an illustrator on the East Coast in the decades following World War II. But memories of his childhood in the mountains of the Northwest never left him. In 1964, he left his work in commercial illustration to focus on painting the American West, and soon relocated to the Teton Mountains in Wyoming.

His wife Doris, an amateur historian, researched the frontier era. Together the Clymers visited historic landmarks and retraced famous 19th-century expedition routes. His resulting artworks imagine specific scenes with minute details, carrying a narrative as clearly as a western film still. Erivan and Helga Haub had the chance to meet Clymer, and he quickly became one of their favorite artists. Clymer’s paintings show his creative versions of historic events and give us a glimpse into his own opinions about the past.

“Going and seeing the actual places makes history come alive for me. I think it is the accumulation of all these experiences … that make it possible to do pictures that are real and believable.”

—John Clymer, 1976

**Horsing Around**

Horses are a favorite subject for artists of the American West, representing companionship, power, freedom, and grace. An animal with specific proportions and a wide range of motion, horses present a challenge for an artist’s brush. In the western United States, horses can still be found by the hundred at events such as the rodeo at the Pendleton Round-Up in Oregon, or the parade at the Crow Nation’s annual Crow Fair in Montana. Artists continue to find inspiration in this iconic animal of the American West.