

# TACOMA ART MUSEUM

MEDIA RELEASE

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## JOHN MIX STANLEY REDISCOVERED: AN ARTIST'S LEGACY RISES FROM THE ASHES

**Tacoma, WA** — Today, 150 years after the Smithsonian gallery housing his paintings burned to the ground, premier painter of the American West John Mix Stanley is receiving a long overdue retrospective. The traveling exhibition opens January 30 at [Tacoma Art Museum](http://TacomaArtMuseum.org). Stanley led a fascinating life as an artist-explorer, journeying over 8,000

miles, crisscrossing the western territories in the pre-civil war mid-1800s. He even ventured as far as the kingdom of Hawaii. Learn more about this unstoppable artist, his rugged expeditions through the Pacific Northwest, and his role in bringing the railroad to Tacoma, in [\*Painted Journeys: The Art of John Mix Stanley\*](#), on view through May 1.

"It is truly fitting that John Mix Stanley will be featured at Tacoma Art Museum. Stanley's exploration of our region, and specifically his work with Isaac Stevens, was pivotal to the development of the Pacific Northwest and Tacoma," says Stephanie Stebich, TAM's Executive Director. "In 1853, Stanley was the official artist for Isaac Stevens' expedition to survey a northern railroad route from the Great Lakes to Puget Sound. In fact he made the highest wage of any of Stevens' employees, at \$125 per month, a substantial wage at that time. When the railroad was built, it terminated in Tacoma, adjacent to where TAM stands today." Stebich adds, "In a sense, Stanley has come full circle, with his beautifully rendered scenes of the early West on view in Tacoma."

*Painted Journeys* opens the door to discovery of this American artist, his historic adventures, and his paintings. It will encourage visitors to think about their own sense of exploration and life journey. It also presents the occasion to ponder how we overcome challenges, considering Stanley's ability to rise above devastating disasters.

Stanley's career was dotted with ruinous events. Nearly 200 of his works perished in two notorious 1865 fires, at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, and Barnum's American Museum in New York, NY. A slew of American Indian artifacts he had collected during his western travels, bound for museums back east, went down with the ship in transport. His studio caught

fire during his later career. The repeated destruction of his work explains why he is not more widely-known today, and why he began exploring chromolithographs as a method of duplicating his works. However, the warehouse storing his unsold published chromolithographs burned down in 1927, so there are relatively few remaining.

The prolific Stanley is best known for portraits of American Indians created for his [Indian Gallery](#). This first-ever Stanley retrospective features sixty of his key surviving works, including his famous Indian portraits and scenes from military and government survey expeditions in the West. The exhibition was organized by the [Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming](#).

“In his day, Stanley was viewed as the premier painter of American Indians,” says exhibition co-curator, [Peter H. Hassrick](#), Senior Scholar and Director Emeritus at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. “His motivation was to give America’s Native people a face as the subjects of fine art—unlike artists George Catlin and Karl Bodmer who were driven more by the restraints of science and the desire to record the moment. Without Stanley, we would be hard pressed to find artistically well-considered images of Native Americans that span the entirety of the western United States.”

Hassrick continues, “His adventuresome spirit and his quest to be exposed to the broadest possible spectrum of Native cultures and western scenes is quite remarkable. This outstanding exhibition provides a rare opportunity to look more closely at this complex artist.”

Don’t miss Hassrick’s dynamic curator talk about John Mix Stanley at TAM on Sunday, January 31, 2 pm. Related programming at TAM includes:

January 30 – May 1: Check out TAM’s fun Choose Your Own Adventure Gallery Guide with 12 family-friendly activity cards to get you looking, seeing, and moving through the exhibition.

January 30: Members’ Opening Celebration, *Painted Journeys: The Art of John Mix Stanley*. Enjoy a lively evening of music, a themed photo booth, and cash bar. Be among the first to see Stanley’s wonderful paintings. 7 – 10 pm.

January 31: Curator Talk and Book Signing: [Peter H. Hassrick](#), Senior Scholar and Director Emeritus at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, will give a talk on the art and adventures of John Mix Stanley. Lecture followed by book signing. 2 pm.

February 18: Third Thursday, free admission from 5 – 8 pm.

February 28: Western Fest Free Community Festival. TAM tips its hat to all things western! Saddle up to a leatherworking demonstration, test your skill at a cowboy card game, and make art inspired by the American West. 10 am – 4 pm.

March 17: Third Thursday, free admission from 5 – 8 pm.

April 23: TAM Symposium of Western American Art – *Artists Drawn West*. Listen to notable artists, scholars, and historians. Discover how travel through the American West captivated artists, changed the direction of film in the 1950s, and launched a new style of “parkitecture” in our national parks. 9 am – 5 pm.

For details on events, see [www.TacomaArtMuseum.org/events](http://www.TacomaArtMuseum.org/events).

*Painted Journeys: The Art of John Mix Stanley* is organized by the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming. Funding support generously provided by private donations, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Wyoming Arts Council. *Painted Journeys: The Art of John Mix Stanley* is generously supported by ArtsFund and the Tacoma Arts Commission.

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#### Image Credits:

**John Mix Stanley (American, 1814 - 1872)** *Chain of Spires along the Gila*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 30¾ × 42¾ inches. Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, Museum purchase, 1968.L.399.2015.1 (68.20).

**John Mix Stanley (American, 1814–1872)** *Young Chief*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 20 × 16 inches. Tacoma Art Museum, Haub Family Collection, Gift of Erivan and Helga Haub, 2014.6.128.

**John Mix Stanley (American, 1814 - 1872)** *Self-Portrait*, c. 1860. Oil on canvas, 29 × 24¼ inches. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma, L.394.2015.6 (0126.1139).

**John Mix Stanley (American, 1814 - 1872)** *Oregon City on the Willamette River*, ca. 1852. Oil on canvas, 26½ × 40 inches. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, L.381.2015.2 (1979.17).

#### Additional information about John Mix Stanley:

After being reared in upstate New York, John Mix Stanley (1814 – 1872) began his fine art career as an itinerant [portrait painter](#) in Detroit. His initial travels through Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois inspired him to create an Indian Gallery of portraits and scenes of Native people and their life ways in order to preserve and enrich their legacy.

Over the course of eleven years, Stanley pursued opportunities to explore the American West. He spent time in Indian Territory in modern-day Oklahoma. He traveled the Santa Fe Trail, joining General Stephen Kearny's Army of the West as they marched toward California. He wandered between Oregon and Washington Territory as a member of Isaac Stevens' Pacific Railroad survey expedition. He even sailed as far west as Hawaii, where he painted the portraits of the King and Queen.

In 1852, Stanley entrusted his [Indian Gallery](#) to the Smithsonian Institution. The gallery grew to in excess of 150 paintings, and scholars and art aficionados praised it for its superior artistic merit and historical value to the nation. It remained on loan and on display in the nation's capital for thirteen years until 1865, when a fire at the Smithsonian destroyed all but seven of Stanley's paintings. Despite this tragic loss, he continued his quest to paint the West and its inhabitants, and attempted to rebuild his gallery in various formats, including pursuing chromolithography as a way of duplicating his works.

Stanley painted during a contentious time of competing regional interests in America. The burgeoning national desire for westward expansion ultimately resulted in several major American wars. With his art, Stanley navigated the prickly history of the pre-Civil War American West, uniting the forces of civilization and unconstrained nature. In so doing, he reconciled a receding Native America with one of aggressive Anglo expansion by idealizing both, but privileging neither. He hoped to bridge the gap between the contrasting American perceptions of the West, both as a static natural paradise and a theater of progress.

#### **About Tacoma Art Museum**

Celebrating 80 years, Tacoma Art Museum has become an anchor in the city's downtown and a gathering space for connecting people through art. TAM's collection contains more than 4,500 works, with an emphasis on the art and artists of the Northwest and broader western region. The collection includes the world's largest retrospective museum collection of glass art by Tacoma native Dale Chihuly on continued view; the world's largest collection of jewelry by Northwest artists; key holdings in 19th century European and 20th century American art; and one of the finest collections of Japanese woodblock prints on the West Coast. TAM recently welcomed a promised gift of 295 works of western American art in the Haub Family Collection, one of the premier collections in the nation and the first major western American art museum collection in the Northwest.

**HOURS** – Tuesdays–Sundays 10 am – 5 pm

**ADMISSION** – Adult \$14; Student age 6-17, Military, Senior (65+) \$12; Family \$35 (2 adults and up to 4 children under 18). Children 5 and under free. **Third Thursdays free from 5–8 pm.** Members always free.

**CONTACT** – 253-272-4258, <http://www.TacomaArtMuseum.org>