



Press Release

Drawn to Yellowstone: Artists in America's First National Park

LOS ANGELES, California—Seemingly a place apart from civilization, Yellowstone's exotic appeal has also lured generations of artists. *Drawn to Yellowstone: Artists in America's First National Park* invites visitors to explore the park's visual history, beginning with its status as an icon of preservation to the contested land that it has become. From the romantic to the commercial, from the sublime to the ironic, through Yellowstone's changing image we can better understand its cultural significance and ongoing relevance to our increasingly urban world. Consisting of more than 80 remarkable works of art, *Drawn to Yellowstone* opens at the Autry National Center's Museum of the American West in Griffith Park on September 4, 2004, and runs through January 23, 2005. This exhibition is made possible in part by Yellow Book.

Located primarily in Wyoming but also spanning parts of Montana and Idaho, Yellowstone National Park is among the world's best-known geological wonders. Originally home to Crow and Shoshone Indians, Yellowstone has, during the past 150 years, also played host to government expeditions, military troops, and tourists from around the world. Today, almost three million people visit Yellowstone annually.

Since the late 1860s, when a handful of artists accompanied early expeditions to the region, art has played an important role in articulating Yellowstone's otherworldly appeal. The rough artists' sketches of this region where mud boiled and geysers spewed superheated water into the air prompted a young painter named Thomas Moran to join the famous Hayden expedition of 1871. The delicate, gem-like watercolors Moran produced on this trip were not only crucial in persuading Congress to set Yellowstone aside as the world's first national park but also became the first works in a long legacy of the representing Yellowstone as an American icon. With competition for remarkable Western scenery on the rise, Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, and others soon came to envision Yellowstone as a vast art gallery. Their works reflect the words of John Muir, who wrote of its famous canyon in 1885 that

"the walls of the cañon from top to bottom burn in perfect glory of color, confounding and dazzling when the sun is shining—white, yellow, green, blue, vermillion, and other shades of red indefinitely blending."

As the heyday of grand landscape painting came to a close, modern and regional artists from John Henry Twachtman to William Robinson Leigh would continue to find inspiration in the spectacular



Press Release

array of colors as well as the more abstract qualities of its canyon walls, misty geysers, and mineral pools. Following the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916, the tension between the lure of unspoiled land and the impact of the crowds who came to enjoy it increasingly became a part of Yellowstone's image. While artists such as Birger Sandzén and Frederic Mizén of the 1920s and '30s applied fresh aesthetics to Yellowstone, interest in the Western landscape waned during the 1950s and '60s alongside the rise of abstraction. In more recent years, however, artistic interest in Yellowstone has been renewed with vigor as contemporary artists are lured by the challenge of representing this iconic American landscape in terms of its ongoing environmental worth, modern relevance, and its status as a cultural phenomenon.

From a remote spectacle of exotic wilderness to the mass destination it is today, Yellowstone continues to reinvent itself. Where early painters observed natural scenery seemingly unaltered by time, contemporary artists are working with a landscape irrevocably changed through decades of use. Today, tourist crowds and development, alongside automobiles, motorboats, trail bikes, and snowmobiles, make for a very different Yellowstone experience from the one envisioned by Thomas Moran and John Muir. Today's artists are drawn to Yellowstone by its shifting role within our collective imagination as much as by its famous scenery.

About the Museum of the American West

The Museum of the American West provides rich learning opportunities for all people by exploring the myths and realities of the American West and its diverse populations. The museum enhances our understanding of the present by collecting, preserving, and interpreting objects and art, making connections between people today and those who have shaped the past.

The museum receives approximately 374,000 visitors annually and each year provides free guided tours and educational activities for more than 40,000 area schoolchildren. It is located in Griffith Park at 4700 Western Heritage Way, across from the Los Angeles Zoo, where the 5 and 134 freeways meet. Admission is \$7.50 for adults, \$5.00 for seniors and students, and \$3.00 for children. The museum is open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, and on major holidays except Thanksgiving and Christmas. On Thursdays, the museum is open from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Find out more about *Drawn to Yellowstone: Artist's in America's First National Park* by visiting the Museum of the American West's website at www.autrynationalcenter.org.

NOTE: COLOR IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

Call 323.667.2000, ext. 329, or e-mail: jaldrich@autrynationalcenter.org

For downloadable images, visit the Press Room at www.autrynationalcenter.org



Autry National Center

Press Release

Contact:
Jay Aldrich
323.667.2000, ext. 329
jaldrich@autrynationalcenter.org

###