

Creating the American West in Art

Upper-Level Galleries • March 5–June 27, 2021

Organized by the Petrie Institute of Western American Art, Denver Art Museum



Maynard Dixon. *Wide Lands of the Navajo*, 1945.
Oil on canvas, 24 x 38 in. Denver Art Museum:
Roath Collection, 2013.100

The American West is an idea and a process as much as it is a location. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, depictions of the people, landscapes, and wildlife of the West fostered a sense of American identity rooted in a pioneering spirit of adventure and opportunity. The artworks presented in this exhibition organized by the Denver Art Museum explore the nuances of a complex American West, including its often-challenging history and its vibrant cultural and artistic diversity. Progressing chronologically from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, each section presents themes relevant to national and artistic concerns.

The first section focuses on curiosity about the customs of Indigenous peoples during the age of artist-explorers. The second section analyzes how sublime western landscapes presented hope for national unification after the horrors of the American Civil War (1861–65). The third section considers the memorialization of a seemingly nobler Old West after the open range had been crisscrossed by barbed wire fences and railroads. The final two sections present meditations on American landscape and culture and consider how the West motivated the development of American modernism during an era marked by rapid technological change and international conflict.

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College of Arts and Science
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Tennessee State Standards

Fine Arts Standards

By analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating artworks, students fulfill the Respond domain of the Tennessee Fine Arts Standards. Synthesizing information and contextualizing the works applies to the Connect domain. The Create domain includes the generation, conceptualization, development, and refinement of artistic work.

Fourth Grade Social Studies

4.16 Map the exploration of the Louisiana Territory, and describe the events, struggles, and successes of the purchase, including the significance of: Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and Sacagawea.

4.18 Analyze the impact of Andrew Jackson's presidency, including: the Indian Removal Act, Trail of Tears, and preservation of the union.

4.22 Describe the experiences of settlers on the overland trails to the West, including the purpose of the journeys and influence of geography.

4.23 Examine the impact of President James K. Polk's view of Manifest Destiny on westward expansion.

4.24 Explain the significance of the California Gold Rush in westward expansion.

Eighth Grade Social Studies

8.28 Identify how westward expansion led to the statehood of Tennessee and the importance of the first state constitution (1796).

8.40 Analyze the development of roads, canals, railroads, and steamboats throughout the U.S., including the Erie Canal and the National Road.

8.49 Analyze the concept of Manifest Destiny and its impact on the development of the nation, and describe the economic incentives for westward expansion.

United States History and Geography

US.01 Explain how the Homestead Act and the Transcontinental Railroad impacted the settlement of the West.

US.02 Examine federal policies toward American Indians, including: the movement to reservations, assimilation, boarding schools, and the Dawes Act.

Frist resources (details at FristArtMuseum.org/AmWest)

Availability varies; details subject to change

- Art Trunk video and activity
- Educator Guide
- FristKids videos and activities
- Gallery guides in English and Spanish
- Martin ArtQuest® Gallery stations (reservations required)
- Online interpretation
- Storytime video and activity

Selected programs

Registration required; visit FristArtMuseum.org/events to sign up.

Curator's Perspective

with Thomas Brent Smith, director and curator, Petrie Institute of Western American Art at the Denver Art Museum

Friday, March 5, 5:30–6:30 p.m.

Free • Presented on Zoom

Educator Workshops

Thursday, April 1, or Saturday, April 3 (select one), 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

\$30 members; \$35 not-yet-members (all materials, gallery admission, lunch, and parking validation included)

Studio and Upper-Level Galleries